



# New Jersey's Child Welfare Outcomes Report

2017

New Jersey's Child Welfare Outcomes Report provides a detailed summary of child welfare outcomes across a variety of safety, stability, and permanency measures for children in their own home and children in out-of-home placement.

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## Executive Summary

The New Jersey Department of Children and Families (DCF), Division of Child Protection and Permanency (CP&P) is committed to its mission to ensure the safety, permanency and well-being of children and to support vulnerable families. The department relies on quantitative and qualitative data to inform our decision making, service array, and case practice. This report focuses on longitudinal, quantitative data measuring outcomes of children served by CP&P.

This report focuses on (1) safety of children in their own home; (2) safety, siblings, and stability for children in out-of-home placement; (3) timely permanency; and (4) post-reunification and re-entry.

- ***Safety of Children in their own Home*** provides an analysis of findings related to the recurrence of maltreatment after an initial report/finding of child abuse and/or neglect, while in the child remains in their own home.
  - ***Key Chapter Findings:***
    - The percentage of children to experience a recurrence of maltreatment increased between 2011 and 2013, but has since stabilized.
    - As of December 31, 2016 a substantial majority (86 percent) of children served by CP&P were served in their own homes
- ***Safety, Siblings & Stability for Children in Out of Home Placement*** examines maltreatment of children in out-of-home placements, the practice of placing sibling groups together and ensuring placement stability for children in out-of-home placement.
  - ***Key Chapter Findings:***
    - There was a significant decrease in CP&P's out-of-home placement population from over 12,000 children in 2004 to 6,700 children in 2016.

- CP&P has maintained a steady performance in placing siblings together from 2007-2016.
  - DCF has met the performance target for placement stability for the first time with 84 percent of children experiencing two or fewer placements within the first year of placement.
  - Children being placed in a kinship home upon entry into out-of-home has increased almost 30 percent from 2010 to 2016.
  - From 2007 (9.1 percent) to 2016 (4.8 percent) New Jersey has reduced initial placements into a congregate care setting by almost 50 percent.
- *Timely Permanency* focuses on the time it takes for a child to be discharged from out-of-home placement to a permanent setting such as reunification, live with relative, adoption or kinship legal guardianship.
  - *Key Chapter Findings:*
    - The median length of stay for children served by CP&P in out-of-home placement was about 10 months in 2015.
    - Almost 40 percent of the children who entered out-of-home placement in 2012 were reunified with their parents within the first 12 months.
- The final chapter reviews *Post Reunification Maltreatment & Re-Entry*, and provides an analysis of children’s long term success after returning home from out-of-home placement.
  - *Key Chapter Findings:*
    - CP&P met the performance target for post-reunification maltreatment.
    - Re-entries into out-of-home placement remain a challenge.

## Introduction

The New Jersey Department of Children and Families (DCF), created in 2006, is the state's first comprehensive cabinet-level department dedicated to serving and safeguarding New Jersey's most vulnerable children and families. In partnership with New Jersey's communities, DCF ensures the safety, well-being, and success of the state's children and families.

The State of New Jersey and Children's Rights, Inc. reached agreement on a Modified Settlement in July 2006 regarding a class-action lawsuit brought against the state (Charlie and Nadine H. v. Corzine). The Modified Settlement Agreement (MSA) appointed the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) to monitor New Jersey's compliance with goals set forth to improve the state's child welfare system. The MSA was implemented in two phases. Phase I (July 2006 through December 2008) focused on building infrastructure and a case practice model within DCF. Phase II (January 2009 through November 2015) focused on reaching and sustaining a variety of process, quality, and outcome measures. The Sustainability and Exit Plan (Exit Plan) ushered a new phase in DCF's reform effort in November 2015. Replacing the MSA, the Exit Plan modified oversight of the DCF and created a pathway to transition the state from federal oversight. The Exit Plan acknowledges DCF's progress, particularly in infrastructure, and puts a sharp focus on certain outcome measures for further improvement.

To manage and integrate its multiple priorities, DCF consists of several divisions and offices, including Adolescent Services, child abuse and neglect State Central Registry (SCR also known as the Child Abuse Hotline), Child Protection and Permanency (CP&P), Children's System of Care, Child Welfare Training Academy, Family and Community Partnerships, Institutional Abuse Investigation Unit, Licensing, Specialized Education Services, and community based services for Women.

DCF's Division of Child Protection and Permanency (CP&P) is New Jersey's child welfare agency, responsible for investigating allegations of child abuse and neglect and providing supportive services to children and families in need. CP&P contracts with community-based agencies to provide services to children and families, including but not limited to counseling,

parenting skills, and substance abuse treatment. If a child has been abused or neglected, or is at imminent risk of abuse or neglect, CP&P may ask the local family court to remove the child from the parent's custody and place the child in an out-of-home placement, commonly known as foster care. Whenever possible, the child is placed in a family setting, preferably with a relative caregiver. Both relative and non-relative foster homes in New Jersey are licensed and regulated by DCF's Office of Licensing.

DCF is guided by a multi-year strategic planning process, which builds on agency strengths and develops solutions to areas needing improvement. The Department promotes excellence in child welfare practice through a commitment to Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI), which is deeply embedded in the daily work and existing structure of DCF's divisions and offices<sup>1</sup>. In addition, DCF has many systems that support the Department function as a self-analyzing and self-correcting learning organization.

DCF created the Office of Performance Management and Accountability (PMA) in 2010. PMA administers DCF's internal Qualitative Review process, ChildStat, child fatality reviews, executive directed case reviews, the federal Child and Family Services Review process, including Program Improvement Plan development and monitoring. Additionally, PMA oversees quantitative data collection, management and analytics, and produces and ensures quality data for federal AFCARS<sup>2</sup>, NCANDS<sup>3</sup>, and NYTD<sup>4</sup> reporting. PMA also oversees the implementation of the DCF Manage by Data Fellows program<sup>5</sup>, providing DCF the capacity to collect, analyze, and

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<sup>1</sup> New Jersey Department of Children and Families (2016). Continuous Quality Improvement.

<http://www.nj.gov/dcf/about/divisions/opma/cqi.html> (accessed April 3, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> The United States Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Administration for Children and Families' (ACF) Children's Bureau's Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) collects case-level information from state and tribal title IV-E agencies on all children in foster care and those who have been adopted with title IV-E agency involvement.

<sup>3</sup> The Children's Bureau's National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) is a voluntary data collection system that gathers information from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico about reports of child abuse and neglect.

<sup>4</sup> The Children's Bureau's National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) collects information about youth in foster care, including outcomes for those who have aged out of foster care.

<sup>5</sup> NJ DCF's Manage by Data Fellows Program is a nationally-recognized program designed to develop the capacity of agency staff to utilize data to improve outcomes for children and families. The DCF Data Fellows program has been celebrated as changing the technical skills, attitudes and practice of a diverse group of workers.

integrate qualitative and quantitative data into decision making at all organizational levels. As a data-driven agency, DCF focuses on publishing the results of administrative data analysis and structured case reviews, allowing the agency to be transparent and accountable to the public.

DCF made a significant investment in data transparency and accountability in 2016 through development of the New Jersey Child Welfare Data Hub<sup>6</sup>, a collaboration between DCF and the Institute for Families at the Rutgers University School of Social Work. The Data Hub makes New Jersey's administrative child welfare data more accessible to the public. In addition to data transparency, the department published a series of reports on child welfare system improvement and sustainability. Reports focus on child welfare outcomes, adoption, DCF's work with children, youth, and families, and the health of children in out-of-home placement.

New Jersey's Child Welfare Outcomes Report provides a detailed summary of child welfare outcomes across a variety of safety, stability, and permanency measures for children in their own home and children in out-of-home placement. This report describes the range of experiences of children and identifies trends, strengths, and areas needing improvement.

In alignment with federal guidelines outlined in the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, DCF monitors a common set of measures for state and local child welfare agencies. These measures mirror the Child and Family Services Review<sup>7</sup> (CFSR) outcome measures. Other measures have been adapted in consultation with national experts to help DCF understand its performance across a variety of outcomes measures assessing safety, stability and permanency. These outcome measures are used to understand the impact of CP&P's case practice model<sup>8</sup>, which is a strength-

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<sup>6</sup> The NJ Child Welfare Data Hub (<https://njchilddata.rutgers.edu/>) has two components: the Data Portal and Data Map. The Data Portal allows users to explore key indicators of child well-being through data visualization and query tools, with the ability to select variables to customize data. The Data Map allows users to explore key child welfare measures, population characteristics, and socioeconomic variables at the state- and county-level. The Data Map provides social and economic context, helping users explore the complex interaction between social environments and the children and families involved with New Jersey's child welfare system.

<sup>7</sup> Children's Bureau, Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/monitoring/child-family-services-reviews/round3>

<sup>8</sup> The Case Practice Model guides DCFs work with children and families. This is a strength-based, solution-focused, and family-centered approach to help support New Jersey's most vulnerable families and help them achieve the core values of safety, permanency, and well-being for children. Engagement and building family teams are key

based and grounded in the foundations of teaming, accountability, and identifying solutions for children and families.

The report's chapters include:

- 1) Safety of Children in Their Own Home;
- 2) Safety, Siblings and Stability for Children in Out-of-Home Placement;
- 3) Timely Permanency; and
- 4) Post Reunification Maltreatment and Re-Entry.

This report is organized to help readers understand the common measures that provide insight into the child welfare system's functioning and how children in the child welfare system and under CP&P supervision fare. *Safety of Children in their own Home* focuses on the recurrence of maltreatment after an initial finding of child abuse or neglect, while the child remains in their own home. *Safety, Siblings & Stability for Children in Out-of-Home Placement* focuses on assessing maltreatment while in out-of-home placement, the practice of placing siblings together, and ensuring placement stability while in out-of-home placement. The chapter on *Timely Permanency* focuses on the time it takes a child to exit out-of-home placement and into a permanent setting, such as reunification, living with relatives, adoption, or kinship legal guardianship. The final chapter reviews *Post Reunification Maltreatment & Re-Entry*, looking at children's long term success after returning home from out-of-home placement.

## About the Data

This report reflects the most current data available. In some instances, data is as late as calendar year 2016, while other data may be earlier. This results from outcome measures that builds off a qualifying historical event, such as entry into out-of-home placement, and follows the child as they move through the child welfare system over time. For example, to understand *Timely Permanency*

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tenets of the model. DCF works to build trust and mutually beneficial relationships among children, youth, family members, and DCF staff. The four core conditions of the Case Practice Model are genuineness, respect, empathy, and competence. The model was first implemented in four immersion sites in 2007. All 46 local offices were trained by 2012.

within 48 months of entry into out-of-home placement, the most recent data available for analysis is the 2012 entry cohort. Each child that entered out-of-home placement in calendar year 2012 is followed for four years, which requires following these children through calendar year 2016. The reporting years vary based on the specific criteria and the identified target population for each measure.

The use of entry *cohort* data provides the opportunity to follow a group of children from the time of a qualifying event, such as entry into out-of-home placement, and see the outcomes for those children over time. The use of entry cohorts will continue to be important in this and future reports to measure changes in the experiences of children being served by CP&P over time.<sup>9</sup> Utilizing an entry cohort provides the State the opportunity to measure individual experiences during a fixed time in the child welfare system. It also allows CP&P to assess the circumstances leading to and around a child re-entering care.

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<sup>9</sup> Chapin Hall Center for State Child Welfare Data. (2012). What is longitudinal data, and why do we need it? <https://fcda.chapinhall.org> (accessed April 10, 2017).

# Chapter 1

## Safety of Children in Their Own Home

The Division of Child Protection and Permanency (CP&P) is New Jersey's child welfare agency. It is a division of the New Jersey Department of Children and Families (DCF). CP&P is responsible for investigating allegations of child abuse and neglect reported to New Jersey's centralized child abuse and neglect hotline. Ensuring safety for children and families is DCF's core mission. Not all children who have been abused or neglected suffer long-term effects, but the impact for some can be pervasive.<sup>10</sup> Maltreatment can impact physical, psychological, behavioral, and societal outcomes for children. These can be immediate and apparent, such as injuries from physical abuse, or present latently, like cognitive or social difficulties later in life.

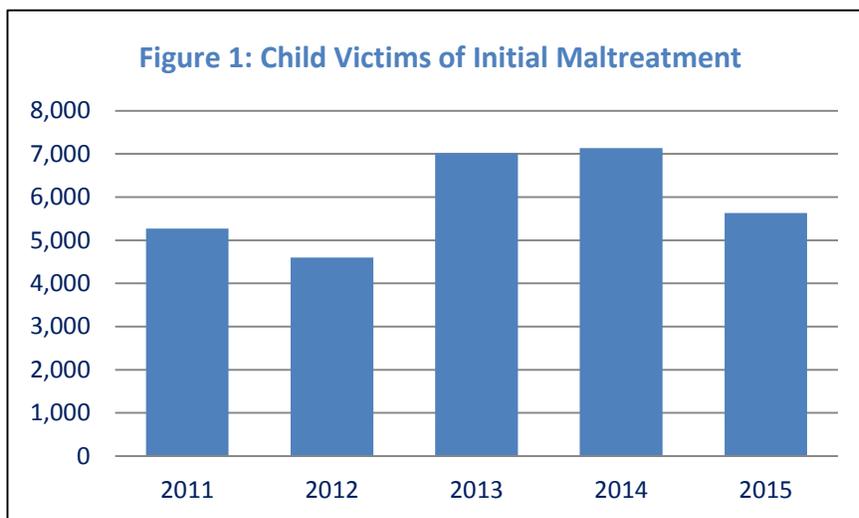
The first contact a family or child has with CP&P is typically through a Child Protective Services (CPS) Investigation. Investigators make several decisions regarding a child's safety, including whether there is imminent risk of abuse or neglect, whether there is credible evidence that maltreatment occurred, whether to remove the child from the home and take the child into protective custody, and/or whether the family's needs indicate that they would benefit from services. Regardless of the investigation's outcome, CP&P has a partial responsibility to keep children free from additional maltreatment once they become known to the system.

New regulations took effect on April 1, 2013 that modified DCF's dispositions following child abuse and neglect investigations<sup>11</sup>. Previously, DCF there were two disposition categories, Unfounded and Substantiated. The new system is based on a Four Tier System of findings: *Substantiated*, *Established*, *Not Established*, and *Unfounded*. A finding of either *Substantiated* or *Established* indicates a preponderance of the evidence establishes that a child has been abused or neglected as defined by statute. These two of the new four tiers measure child maltreatment.

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<sup>10</sup> Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2013). Long-term consequences of child abuse and neglect. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau.

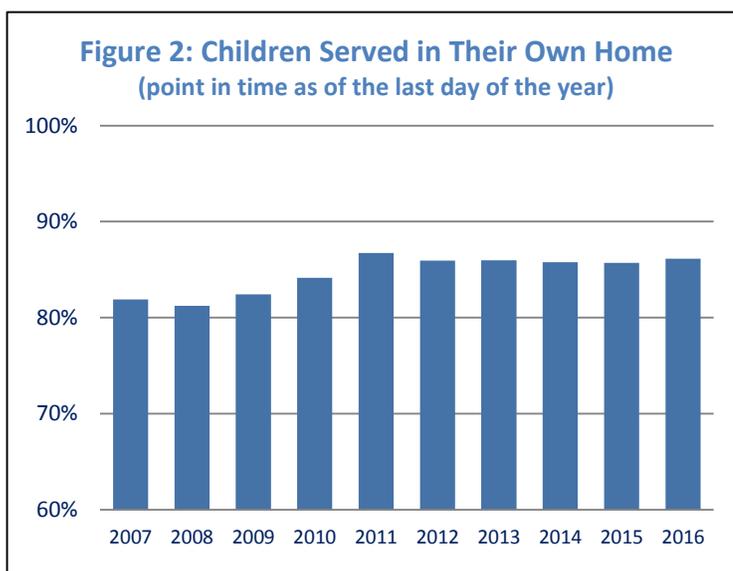
<sup>11</sup> DCF adopted a Four-Tier Finding system on April 1, 2013, with the adoption of a new regulation, N.J.A.C. 10:129. See DCF Policy Manual [CP&P-II-C-6-100](#)



The new system provides more specific investigation disposition categories to more appropriately reflect the circumstances present in each investigation, allowing for better partnership with families and better outcomes for children. This change also provides

fairness in Child Abuse Record Information system operations, allowing DCF to better protect children by requiring maintenance of all records documenting that children were harmed or exposed to risk of harm, even when the statutory definition of child abuse or neglect could not be met. This change in definition led to an increase in the number of child victims of maltreatment during the initial implementation of the Four Tier Findings during 2013 and 2014 (see Figure 1). That increase has since leveled off, but not to levels seen prior to 2013.

Regardless of the disposition of the investigation, CP&P uses Structured Decision Making<sup>12</sup> (SDM) tools to inform safety and risk decision making during CPS investigations. For children deemed safe in the home or unsafe and in need of a safety protection plan, CP&P will work with the family to stabilize and maintain the child in their own home. CP&P



<sup>12</sup> Structured Decision Making (SDM) is a uniform process for decision-making regarding critical aspects of the agency intervention with a child and family. SDM assessment tools are research and evidence-based, designed to assist field staff to make important decisions, based on the facts of a case, rather than relying solely on individual judgment.

contracts with community-based agencies to provide services to children and families in their own home, prevent a recurrence of maltreatment, and ensure the child’s safety and stability. Over the last 10 years, CP&P has shifted its practice and decision making, favoring maintaining children safely in their own home, when possible. As a result, fewer children now enter out-of-home placement (see Figure 2). Research shows maintaining children in their own home, when possible, even after a finding of maltreatment, improves long-term outcomes for children and reduces the additional trauma children experience from being removed from their family and entering out-of-home placement.<sup>13</sup>

## At a Glance: Child Safety

Nationally, most children who are subjects of a report of maltreatment with their state or local child protective services agency are involved just once with CPS during their lives.<sup>14</sup> However, some children are at risk for a recurrence of maltreatment and must be monitored to ensure that CP&P decision making and community services are sufficient to ensure the safety and stability of the child in their own home.

New Jersey assesses child safety mirrored after the Federal Child and Family Services Review<sup>15</sup> and in consultation with national experts<sup>16</sup> to measure the *Recurrence of maltreatment within 12 months for children that remain in their own home*. This measure is designed to identify all children who experience maltreatment after an initial finding of abuse or neglect *and remain in their own home*. This is different than the federal measure that looks at all children who experience maltreatment, not specific to children that remain in their own home. All children who experience a substantiated or established finding of abuse or neglect during the calendar year and remain in their own home for at least 30 days are part of the population to be monitored under this measure, regardless if the family is receiving in-home services. Each child is then followed for 12 months

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<sup>13</sup> Doyle, J.J. Child Protection and Child Outcomes: Measuring the Effects of Foster Care. *American Economic Review*. 97(5). December 2007: 1583-1610.

<sup>14</sup> Fluke, J.D., Shusterman, G.R., Hollinshead, D., & Yuan, Y.T. Rereporting and Recurrence of Child Maltreatment: Findings from NCANDS. (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, 2005).

<sup>15</sup> New Jersey Department of Children and Families (2016). Continuous Quality Improvement. <http://www.nj.gov/dcf/about/divisions/opma/cqi.html> (accessed April 3, 2017).

<sup>16</sup> Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago; Hornby Zeller and Associates, Inc.

to determine if maltreatment reoccurs while remaining in their own home. DCF monitors recurrence 6, 12, and 24 months after the initial maltreatment, and has a set performance target of no more than 7.2 percent of children experiencing a recurrence of maltreatment within the 12-month follow-up period.

This chapter will provide an analysis of the safety of children that remain in their own home after an initial incident of maltreatment. Performance on this measure is reported over time, by age, by race and ethnicity and by county.

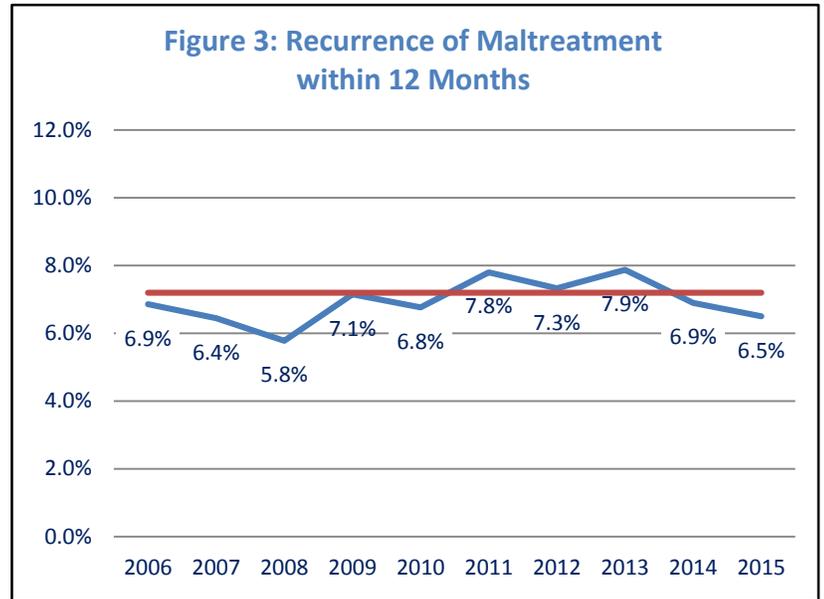
### Measuring Child Safety:

<p>Recurrence of Maltreatment within 12 months for children that remain in their own home<sup>17</sup></p>	<p>Of all the children who were victims of maltreatment in a calendar year and remained in their own home for at least 30 days, the percentage of children who were victims of maltreatment in the following 12 months.</p>	<p><b>Performance Target:</b> 7.2%</p> <p><b>Observed Performance:</b> 6.5% (CY2015)</p>
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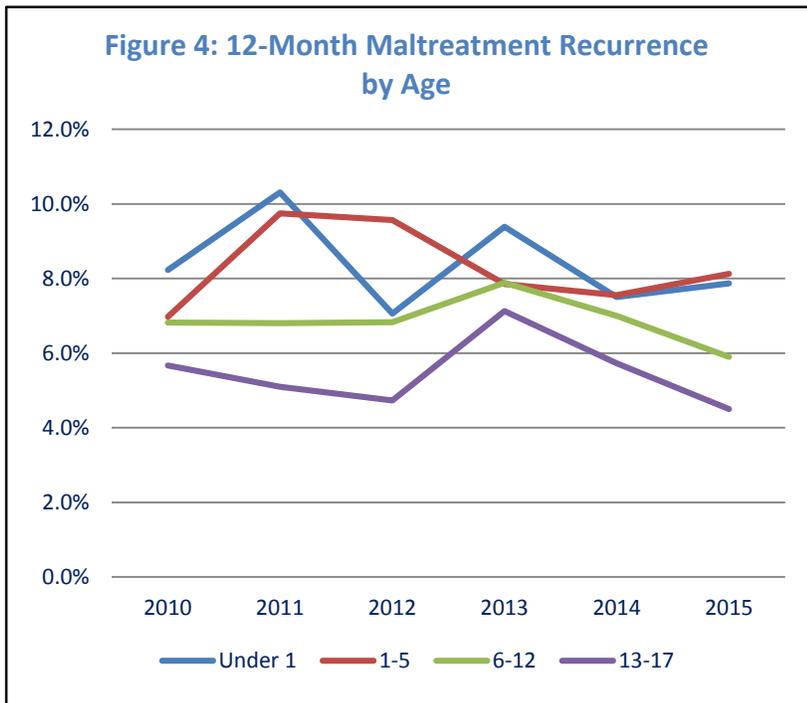
<sup>17</sup> SEP Measure 37, target = 7.2%

## A Closer Look: Child Safety

As of December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2016, CP&P was serving a total of 48,049 children. Most children (41,386) were served in home, while 14 percent (6,663 children) were served out-of-home. Figure 3 shows the percentage of children who remained in their own home and experienced a recurrence of maltreatment within 12 months over a 10-year period from 2006-2015. Performance on this



measure has been stable over time with a range in performance from 5.8 percent in 2008 to 7.9 percent in 2013. From 2011 to 2013, DCF saw an increase in the number of children experiencing a recurrence of maltreatment. During a similar time period from 2010 to 2012, New Jersey also

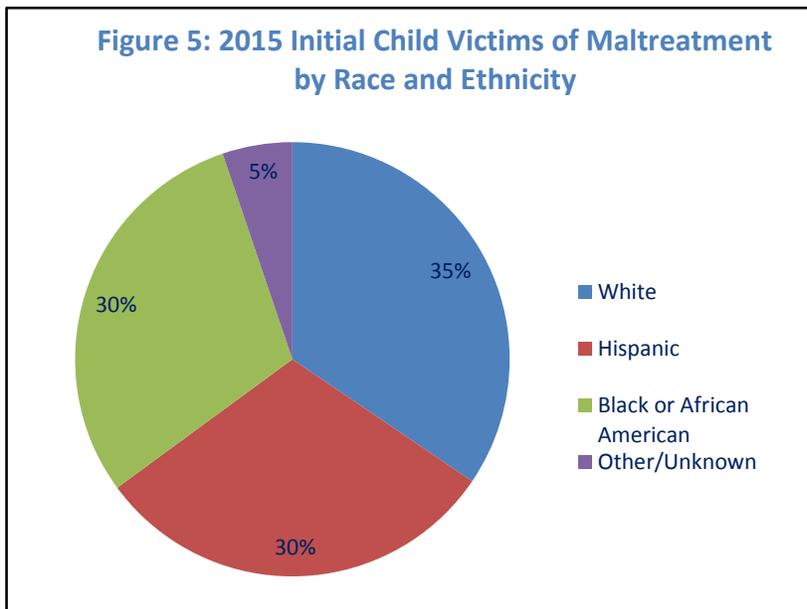


saw an almost 20 percent surge in the number of children entering out-of-home placement after many years of significant reduction (4,671 vs. 5,527 respectively). However, this was time limited and, in 2016, CP&P is back to maintaining children in their own home at similar rates prior to the surge.

For the last two calendar years, CP&P has observed performance below the designated target of

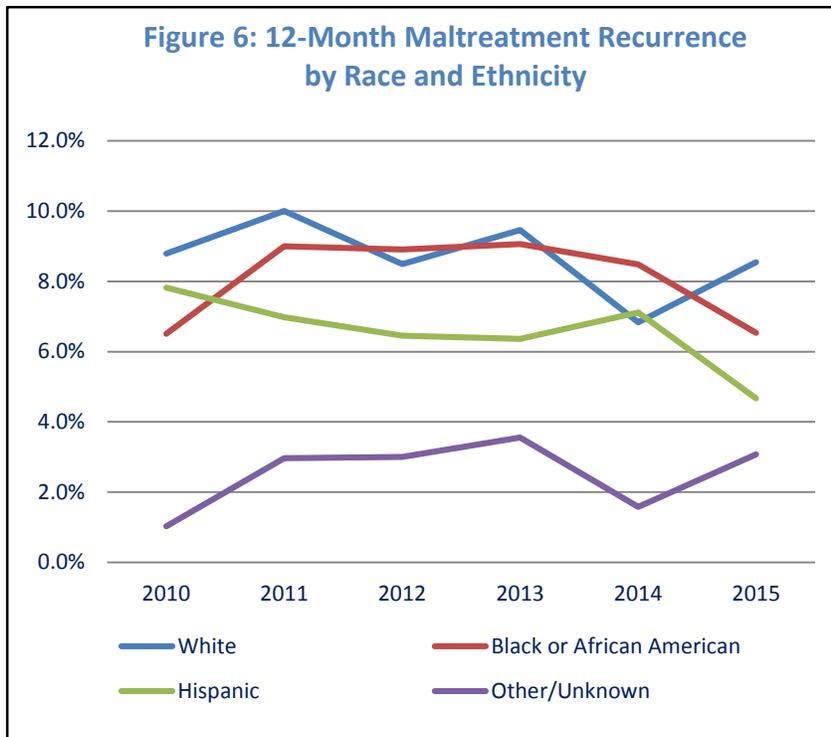
fewer than 7.2 percent of children experiencing a recurrence of maltreatment. Of the 5,630 children who were victims of maltreatment in 2015, 365 (6.5 percent) had a recurrence of maltreatment within 12 months, the lowest rate since 2008.

Research has shown that age is an important fact across many child welfare outcomes, including the recurrence of maltreatment.<sup>18</sup> Younger children tend to experience higher rates of maltreatment and maltreatment recurrence than older children. An analysis of DCF’s data revealed findings similar to national trends (see Figure 4), with a recurrence of maltreatment highest among children five years of age and younger. In 2015, there were 2,295 child victims of maltreatment five years of age and younger and 8.1 percent (n=185) experienced a recurrence of maltreatment within 12 months. Two thirds of the recurrences occurred within the first six months. Older youth between 13 and 17 years of age have the lowest rate of recurrence of maltreatment across all years.



<sup>18</sup> Shaw, T.V. Reentry into the foster care system after reunification. Children and Youth Services Review. (28). February 2006: 1375-1390.

In 2015, there were similar proportions of White, Black or African American, and Hispanic children who were initial victims of maltreatment and part of the population monitored for recurrence of maltreatment (see Figure 5). Figure 6 examines 12-month maltreatment recurrence by race and ethnicity<sup>19</sup>. Both White and Black or African American children have similarly higher rates of recurrence of maltreatment within 12 months followed by Hispanic children. In 2015, White children had the highest rate of recurrence of maltreatment at 8.5 percent, followed by Black or African American children



or African American children at 6.5 percent, and Hispanic children at a 6-year low rate of 4.7 percent. Only the group of white children had an observed performance exceeding the 7.2 percent statewide performance target.

<sup>19</sup> Race and Ethnicity are broken down into four categories: Hispanic; Black or African American; *White* and *Other/Unknown*. A person’s race is Hispanic if their ethnicity is Hispanic or Latino; otherwise, they fall under the other race categories. “*Other*” includes Asian non-Hispanic, Multiple Races non-Hispanic, American Indian or Alaska Native, non-Hispanic, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander non-Hispanic. “*Unknown*” is when the person’s race/ethnicity is unable to determine or missing.

**Table 1: 3-Year Average Performance of Maltreatment Recurrence by County**

County	Observed Performance
Atlantic	6.4%
Bergen	6.8%
Burlington	8.3%
Camden	6.6%
Cape May	5.1%
Cumberland	8.3%
Essex	6.8%
Gloucester	9.4%
Hudson	7.6%
Hunterdon	6.4%
Mercer	8.5%
Middlesex	3.7%
Monmouth	5.0%
Morris	8.0%
Ocean	5.5%
Passaic	9.9%
Salem	7.0%
Somerset	5.9%
Sussex	5.8%
Union	7.0%
Warren	7.8%

In addition to some variation in performance by age and race and ethnicity, there continues to be some variation in performance on the recurrence of maltreatment within 12 months across New Jersey’s twenty-one counties.

Table 1 shows a three-year average from 2013 to 2015 in observed performance on this measure for each county. Some small counties may show some significant variation in performance from year to year due to the small number of children served in such counties. Multiple years of data are combined to provide a stable view of county level performance.

There is a range in county level performance on the recurrence of maltreatment from 3.7 percent in Middlesex County to 9.9 percent in Passaic County. Thirteen counties have a three-year average observed performance below the 7.2 percent statewide performance target.

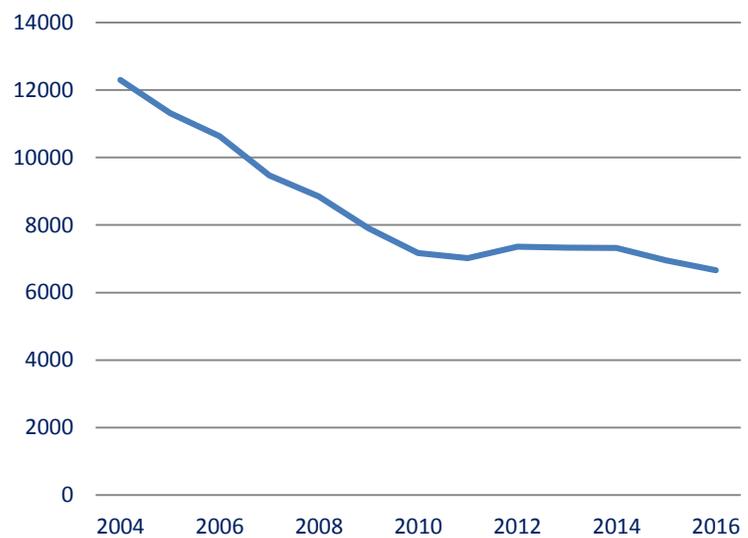
## Chapter 2

# Safety, Siblings & Stability in Out-of-Home Placement

CP&P strives to keep children home whenever possible. Since emphasizing in-home-care, New Jersey’s out-of-home child placement population has decreased, from over 12,000 in 2004 to fewer than 6,700 in 2016 (see Figure 7).

Removing a child from their home can have significant impact on, and create additional trauma for, the child and parent.<sup>20</sup> Once CP&P and the local family court agree that out-of-home placement is required, efforts are made to identify a relative or kin<sup>21</sup> to care for the child. When that is not possible, CP&P relies on its pool of licensed resource parents. To further minimize trauma and maintain family connections, CP&P attempts to place siblings together.

**Figure 7: Children in Out-of-Home Placement**  
(point in time on the last day of the year)

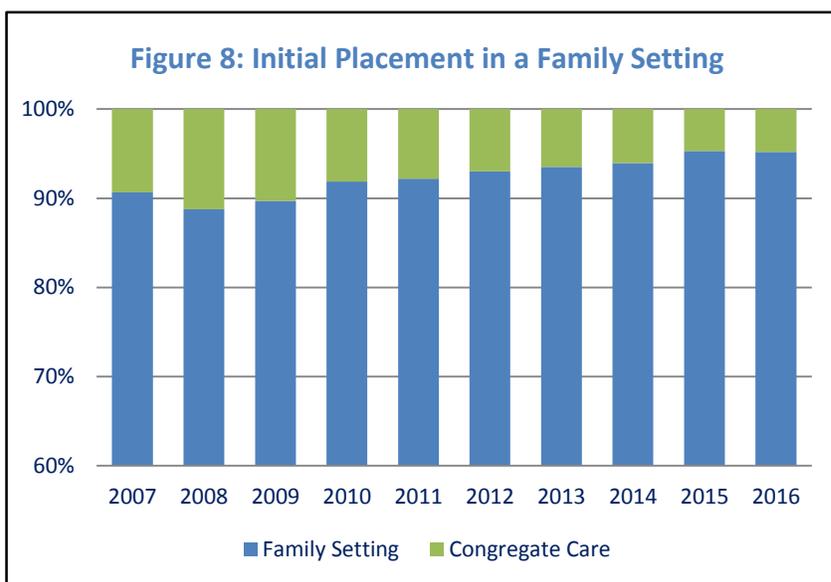


<sup>20</sup> Doyle, J.J. Child Protection and Child Outcomes: Measuring the Effects of Foster Care. American Economic Review. 97(5). December 2007: 1583-1610.

<sup>21</sup> “Kinship” caregiver a person with a biological or legal relationship to the child, or a person who is connected to a child or the child’s parent by an established positive psychological or emotional relationship.

Best practice dictates that CP&P place children in a family setting, or the least restrictive environment based on the best interest of the child. The goal is “first placement, best placement,” with a family willing to commit to the child if reunification efforts fail.<sup>22</sup> Some children and youth do have unique needs (e.g., medically fragile, developmental delays, behavioral concerns, etc.) that may require a higher level of care. CP&P may place some youth in a shelter facility because an appropriate placement has not been identified at the time of a youth’s removal. CP&P policy dictates that children less than 13 years of age are not permitted to be placed in a shelter, and youth ages 13 years and older are permitted to be placed in a shelter for no more than 30 days<sup>23</sup> while staff identifies a more appropriate placement.

National data from 2013 shows use of non-family placements (group homes or institutional placements) ranges from 4 to 35 percent for children in out-of-home placement.<sup>24</sup> Since reform began, DCF has made great strides placing children in a family setting upon initial entry into out-of-home placement. Figure 8 shows that



from 2007 to 2016, New Jersey has reduced initial placements into a congregate care setting<sup>25</sup> by almost 50 percent (9.1 percent in 2007 to 4.8 percent in 2016). Older youth between 13 and 17 years old are still the most likely to be placed in a congregate care setting. However, children and youth in this age group have made the largest gains over time, with 51 percent in 2009 and 68 percent in 2016 placed in an initial family setting upon entry into out-of-home placement.

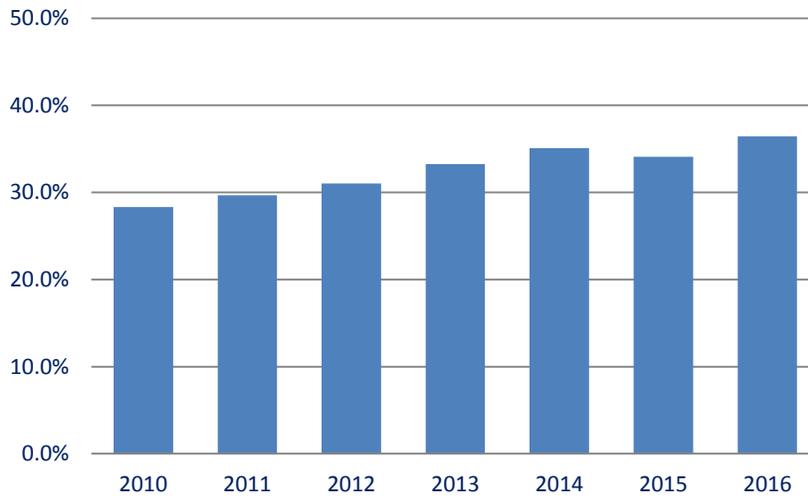
<sup>22</sup> See DCF Policy Manual: CPP-IV-A-11-100

<sup>23</sup> See DCF Policy Manual: [CPP-IV-E-5-200](#)

<sup>24</sup> The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2015). *Every Kid Needs a Family*.

<sup>25</sup> Congregate care includes placement in treatment homes, group homes, residential and shelter settings.

**Figure 9: Initial Placement with a Relative or Kinship Caregiver**



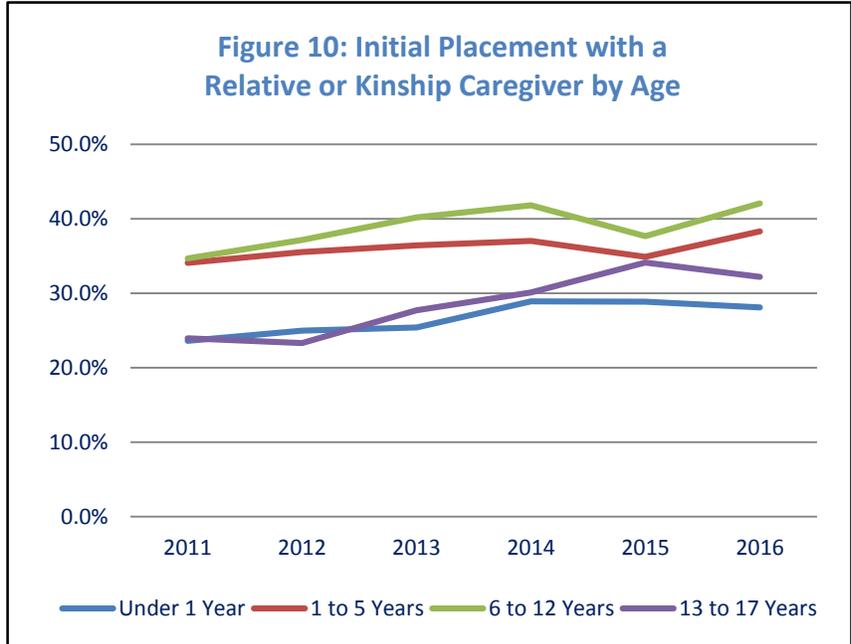
In addition placing children in a family setting, the literature strongly supports placing children and youth with a relative or kinship caregiver whenever possible. Research suggests children have better short and long term outcomes when placed with kin because kinship caregivers provide children familiar connections. Additionally, children placed with kin tend to have better

placement stability, fewer behavior problems, and lower rates of maltreatment, reflective of a less stressful and more predictable environment than a non-relative resource home.<sup>26</sup>

CP&P has made steady improvements in placing children with a kinship caregiver over the past several years. Figure 9 shows that from 2010 to 2016 there has been an almost 30 percent increase in children placed in a relative or kinship home upon entering out-of-home placement (28 percent vs. 36 percent respectively).

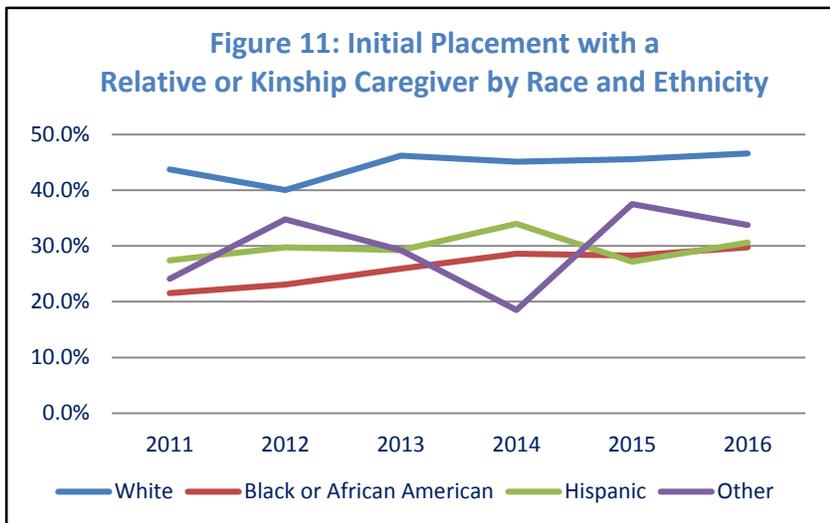
<sup>26</sup> National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being Research Brief No. 15: Kinship Caregivers in the Child Welfare System.

While infants and adolescents are the least likely to be placed with a relative caregiver, significant progress has been made placing older youth with relatives over the last 6 years (see Figure 10). Relatives and family friends are generally bonded with pre-school or school age children, and are therefore often willing to provide care. Though there are



established relationships between adolescents and kin, behavioral or social-emotional issues are sometimes a barrier for prospective kin resource parents.

Improvements in placing children with a relative caregiver are occurring across all racial and ethnic groups. However, White children are placed with a relative caregiver more often than other racial or ethnic groups (see Figure 11). The greatest improvements have been made among Black or African American families with 22 percent in 2011 and 30 percent in 2016.



This chapter provides a detailed analysis of safety, sibling placement, and stability for children in out-of-home placement.

Few children experience maltreatment in out-of-home placement (n=12 in CY2016), which limits further analysis of

the administrative data. Analysis of performance on placing siblings together is limited to performance over time and by county since children in the same sibling group will vary by age

and may also vary by race and ethnicity. Performance on each stability measure is reported over time, by age, by race and ethnicity and by county.

## **At a Glance: Safety, Siblings & Stability**

New Jersey monitors five measures that assess the safety and stability of children in out-of-home placement to understand children's experiences in the child welfare system. Some measures were developed to align with the Federal Child and Family Services Review Others were developed in consultation with national experts<sup>27</sup> to assess 1) *Child maltreatment in out-of-home placement*, 2) *Placing sibling groups of 2 or 3 children together*, 3) *Placing sibling groups of 4 or more children together*, 4) *Placement stability in the first year of out-of-home placement*, and 5) *Placement stability in the second year of out of home placement*.

## **Safety in Out-of-Home Placement**

CP&P is responsible for ensuring that children in out-of-home placement live in a safe and stable environment and not subjected to further abuse or neglect. Nationally, fewer than one half of one percent of children in out-of-home placement are maltreated.<sup>28</sup> A body of research exists suggesting that children who have been victimized in the past are more likely to be victimized again.<sup>29</sup> Children previously victimized by abuse and/or neglect can react to their separation from their family in ways that can make positive interaction between the child and their substitute caregiver difficult.

The *Child maltreatment in out-of-home placement* measure identifies all children who experience maltreatment in out-of-home placement by a resource parent or facility staff member. All children

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<sup>27</sup> Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago; Hornby Zeller and Associates, Inc.

<sup>28</sup> Children's Bureau, retrieved 2017.

<sup>29</sup> National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being Research Brief No. 15: Kinship Caregivers in the Child Welfare System. [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/rb\\_15\\_2col.pdf](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/rb_15_2col.pdf)

in an out-of-home placement during the calendar year one day or more are monitored under this measure. Any instance of substantiated maltreatment or established finding of maltreatment of a child in an out-of-home placement during the calendar year is counted toward this measure. The performance target is no more than 0.49 percent of children experiencing maltreatment in out-of-home placement during a calendar year.

## **Placing Siblings Together**

It is important for children removed from their homes to maintain their relationships and community and cultural ties. It helps provide stability for children and mitigates the trauma inherent in entering out-of-home placement. Sometimes multiple children from the same family, or siblings, require out-of-home placement at the same time. CP&P teams around these children and their families to identify homes that will allow them to be placed together, circumstances permitting.<sup>30</sup> Placing siblings together enables them to support each other and maintain their relationship.

Some circumstances prevent siblings from being placed together. These circumstances include individual child developmental or emotional needs; availability of kinship or resource homes to take multiple children; and different biological parents with kinship caregivers willing to care for some of the children. Despite the challenges that can arise, CP&P caseworkers exhaust all possibilities to place siblings together, whenever possible.

It can be difficult to place large sibling groups together. The availability of kinship and resource homes and the age and needs of the children in the family can pose challenges. This does not deter CP&P from working to place large sibling groups together in one setting. CP&P's Office of Resource Families' Siblings in Best Settings (SIBS) program recruits and retains resource families willing and able to accommodate large sibling groups of four or more children. These families are offering a higher board rate and monthly retainer to preserve their home for large sibling groups.

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<sup>30</sup> See DCF Policy Manual: CPP-IV-B-2-200

Two measures assess the State’s performance placing siblings together as they initially enter out-of-home placement in the calendar year. Some children that remain in out-of-home placement for a short period may re-enter out-of-home placement later the same year. However, each child is assessed for these measures once, on the first or “initial” entry into out-of-home placement during the calendar year.

The first measure monitors performance *Placing sibling groups of 2 or 3 children together*. The second monitors *Placing sibling groups of 4 or more children together*. Each measure has a unique approach to understanding performance based on the practical realities of placing very large sibling groups together in a single resource home. For these measures, New Jersey’s child welfare case management system defines *Siblings* as all children who are involved with the same family case.

For families with 2 to 3 children, a child initially removed during the calendar year and the child’s sibling initially removed no more than 30 days later are monitored. This measure assesses the percentage of *sibling groups* that had all children placed together in the same setting within seven days following the last sibling’s entry into out-of-home placement. The unit of analysis for this measure is the *sibling group*. The performance target set for this measure is 80 percent or greater of *sibling groups* of 2 to 3 children entering out-of-home placement placed together.

For families with 4 or more children, a child initially removed during the calendar year and one of the child’s siblings initially removed no more than 30 days later are monitored. This measure assesses the percentage of *children* placed with *at least one other sibling* within seven days following the last sibling’s entry into out-of-home placement. The unit of analysis for this measure is the *child*. This approach is a new methodology implemented after the 2015 renegotiation of the Sustainability and Exit Plan. Through that process DCF learned that in 2013 there were 3 sibling groups of 10 children, 1 group of 8 children and 2 groups of 7 children. None of these children were placed *all* together as an entire sibling group. However, children were placed in smaller sibling groups, so *no child was alone*, accomplishing New Jersey’s case practice model goals. The performance target for this measure is 80 percent of all *children* in sibling groups of 4 or more are placed with *at least one other sibling*.

## Stability in Out-of-Home Placement

Placement stability is an indicator of a child’s well-being. Placement stability can contribute to positive child behavior, healthy attachments and relationships, and favorable outcomes, including permanency. Multiple placements within a short time period can lead to poor safety, health, psychological, and educational outcomes.<sup>31</sup> CP&P seeks placement stability (two or fewer placements within 12 months) through its “first placement, best placement” policy. Early in the case planning process, CP&P caseworkers team with children and families to gather crucial information about a child’s needs early in the case planning process to assist with identifying an appropriate resource caregiver for a child.

Designed in consultation with national experts, two measures assess the State’s performance on placement stability<sup>32</sup>. All children entering out-of-home placement for the first time in the calendar year are part of the population monitored for placement stability.

For *Placement stability in the first 12 months of out-of-home placement*, each child is followed to determine the total number of placements during the first 12 months in out-of-home placement. Performance is then determined based on the percentage of children that had two or fewer placements during that follow up period. The performance target for this measure is no less than 84 percent of children will have two or fewer placements in the first year of out-of-home placement.

For *Placement stability between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> month in out-of-home placement*, each child is followed into the second year of placement. Performance is determined based on the percentage of children with two or fewer placements between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> month of placement. The performance target for this measure is no less than 88 percent of children with two or fewer placements in the second year of out-of-home placement.

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<sup>31</sup> Noonan et al. Securing Child Welfare Safety, Well-Being and Permanency through Placement Stability in Foster Care. Policy Lab Evidence to Action No. 1 (Fall 2009).

<sup>32</sup> Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago; Hornby Zeller and Associates, Inc.

## Measuring Safety, Siblings & Stability:

<p>Maltreatment of Children in out-of-home Placement<sup>33</sup></p>	<p>Of all the children in out-of-home placement for at least one day during the calendar year, the percentage who are victims of maltreatment by a resource parent or facility staff member.</p>	<p><b>Performance Target:</b> 0.49%</p> <p><b>Observed Performance:</b> 0.11% (CY2016)</p>
<p>Placing Sibling Groups of 2-3 children together<sup>34</sup></p>	<p>Of cases with two or three siblings removed for the first time during the calendar year within 30 days of each other, the percentage of these sibling groups placed together in the same setting within seven days following the final removal in the sibling group.</p>	<p><b>Performance Target:</b> 80%</p> <p><b>Observed Performance:</b> 78% (CY2016)</p>
<p>Placing Sibling Groups of four or more children together<sup>35</sup></p>	<p>Of children with four or more siblings removed for the first time during the calendar year within 30 days of each other, the percentage of children were placed with at least one other sibling within seven days following the final removal in the sibling group.</p>	<p><b>Performance Target:</b> 80%</p> <p><b>Observed Performance:</b> 84% (CY2016)</p>

<sup>33</sup> SEP Measure 12

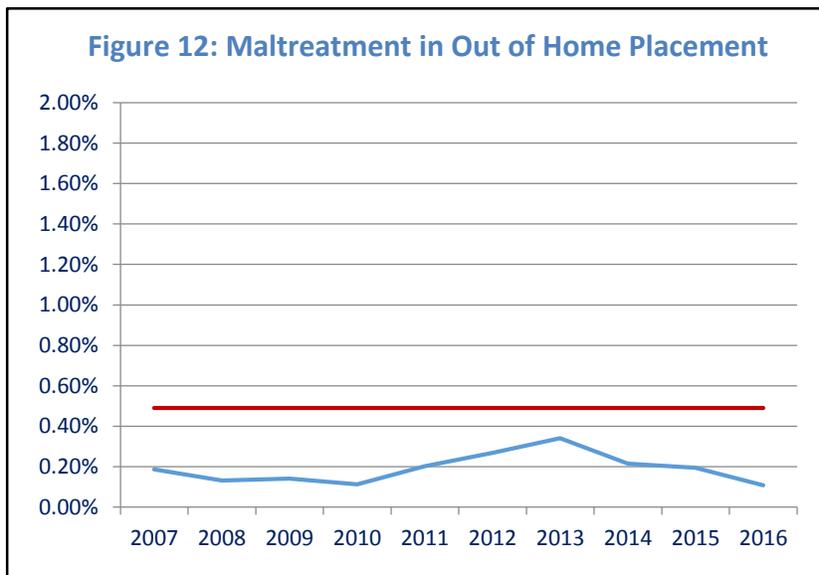
<sup>34</sup> SEP Measure 32

<sup>35</sup> SEP Measure 33

<p>Placement Stability in the First 12 months of out-of-home placement<sup>36</sup></p>	<p>Of children entering placement for the first time during the calendar year, the percentage that had two or fewer placements within the first 12 months of the removal episode.</p>	<p><b>Performance Target:</b> 84%</p> <p><b>Observed Performance:</b> 84% (CY2015)</p>
<p>Placement Stability 13-24 months in out-of-home placement<sup>37</sup></p>	<p>Of children entering placement for the first time during the calendar year and who spent at least one year in placement, the percentage that had two or fewer placements within the second year of the removal episode.</p>	<p><b>Performance Target:</b> 88%</p> <p><b>Observed Performance:</b> 95% (CY2014)</p>

## A Closer Look: Safety in Out-of-Home Placement

Figure 12 provides a 10-year overview of children who experience maltreatment in out-of-home placement, in which the perpetrator was a resource parent or a facility staff member. CP&P has maintained exceptional performance in this area for many years with observed yearly performance well



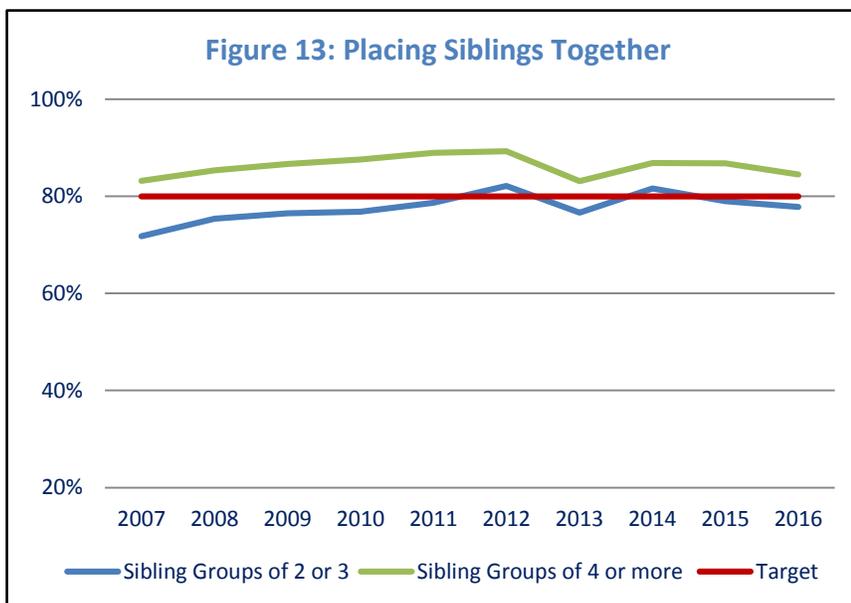
<sup>36</sup> SEP Measure 35

<sup>37</sup> SEP Measure 36

below the target 0.49 percent target. Only 12 of more than 11,000 children (0.11 percent) experienced maltreatment while in out-of-home placement in New Jersey in 2016. The age, race, ethnicity, and state region of these children varied.

## A Closer Look: Placing Siblings Together

For more than 10 years, CP&P has had steady performance placing siblings together as they enter out-of-home placement. Figure 13 shows the percentage of sibling groups and children placed together in out-of-home placement by calendar year. In 2016, of 393 children entering placement with 4 or more siblings, 84 percent were placed together with at least one sibling, meeting the desired target of at least 80 percent. Performance for placing sibling groups of 2 to 3 children together is near the 80 percent target. In 2016, of 644 sibling groups of 2 or 3 children, 78 percent were placed together. Children in smaller sibling groups are most likely to be placed together as a group. Over two-thirds of sibling groups entering placement in 2016 had only 2 children. These small sibling groups were more likely than sibling groups of 3 children to be placed all together



(85 percent vs. 59 percent respectively).

Like other outcome measures, there is variation in performance on placing siblings together across counties (see Table 2). Nearly all counties are meeting the measure for placing siblings with 4 or more children together. The exception is Hunterdon County, one of New Jersey's

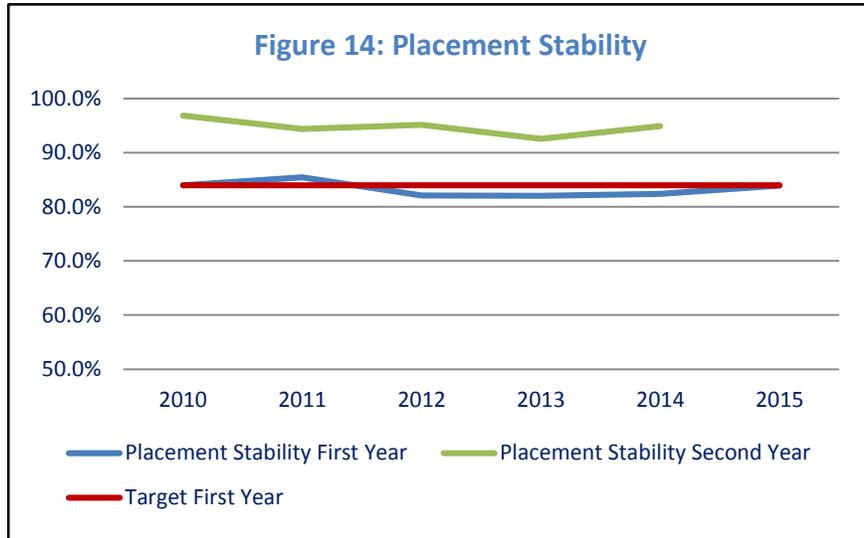
smallest counties with only 8 children in this population over 3 years. Twelve of New Jersey's 21 counties are meeting or exceeding the performance target for sibling groups with 2 to 3 children together 80 percent of the time. All counties are placing siblings together at least 70 percent of the time.

**Table 2: Siblings Placed Together**

<b>County</b>	<b>2 to 3 children</b>	<b>4 or more children</b>
Atlantic	73%	83%
Bergen	86%	100%
Burlington	83%	86%
Camden	73%	81%
Cape May	70%	88%
Cumberland	77%	85%
Essex	75%	81%
Gloucester	79%	92%
Hudson	81%	88%
Hunterdon	87%	63%
Mercer	75%	94%
Middlesex	88%	100%
Monmouth	84%	92%
Morris	74%	100%
Ocean	93%	86%
Passaic	85%	81%
Salem	86%	86%
Somerset	91%	90%
Sussex	86%	100%
Union	80%	91%
Warren	78%	87%

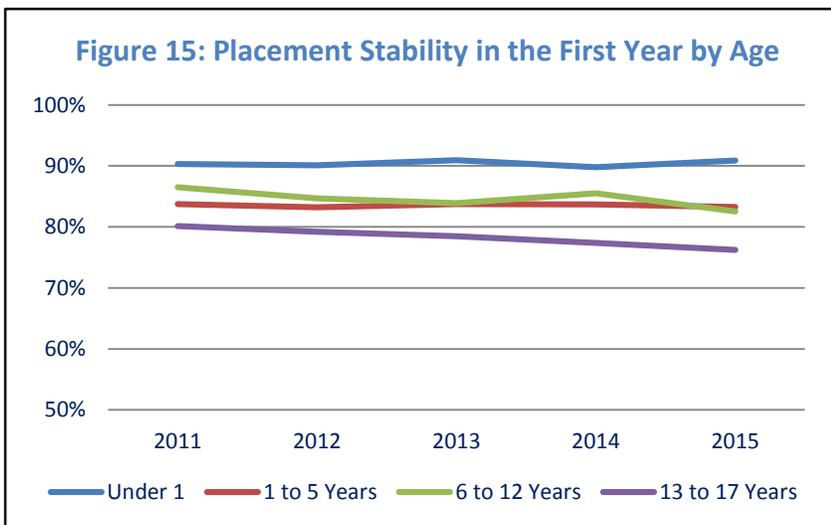
## A Closer Look: Stability in Out-of-Home Placement

Figure 14 shows the State’s steady performance stabilizing children entering out-of-home placement in both first and second years of placement from 2010 to 2015. Placement stability in the first year is often just below the 84 percent performance



target. Over a 6-year period, average performance was 83 percent (std ± 1.2 percent) of children with two or fewer placements in the first year. DCF is meeting the performance target in 2015, with 84 percent (n=3,120) of children with two or fewer placements in the first year.

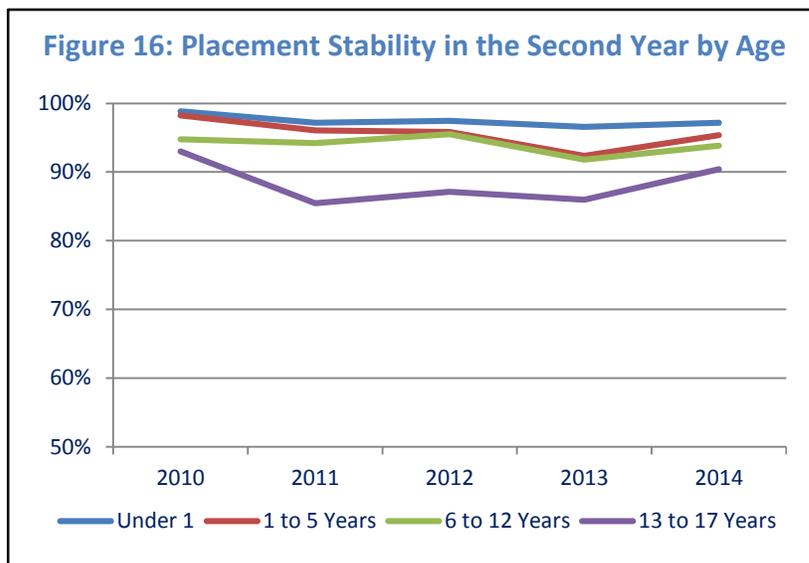
DCF exceeded the target every year for keeping children stable in the second year of placement. In 2014, the most recent year that data is available for this measure, 95 percent of children and



youth achieved placement stability in the second year (n=1,810). Nearly 90 percent of children are not moved during their second year of placement (see Figure 14). Those that are moved are likely being placed in an adoptive home, stepping down from a treatment setting, or being reunified with siblings.

Data on the first year of placement found infants, or children less than 1 year old, are most likely to have two or fewer placements, especially compared to adolescents between 13 and 17 years old (see Figure 15). Ninety-one percent of infants and 76 percent of adolescents achieved placement stability in the first year of out-of-home placement in 2015 (see Figure 16).

Even though system performance during the second year in placement far exceeds the performance target, similar trends emerge as during the first year of placement with adolescents having much lower placement stability than all other age groups (see Figure 16). However, in 2014, adolescents exceed the performance target with 90% having two or fewer placements during the second year of placement, an improvement from the prior year.



Stability during the first year of placement did not vary significantly by race and ethnicity in 2016. White children achieved permanency at slightly higher rates (87 percent) than Black or African American children (83 percent) or Hispanic children (81 percent). Placement stability in the second year did not vary across race and ethnicity.

Placement stability by county shows 13 counties are at or above the performance target for two or fewer placements in the first year of placement (see Table 3 below). The remaining counties are near the target with performance at or above 80% of children achieving placement stability in the first year of placement. All counties exceed the target for placement stability in the second year of out-of-home placement.

**Table 3: Placement Stability by County**

<b>County</b>	<b>First Year</b>	<b>Second Year</b>
Atlantic	82%	94%
Bergen	87%	94%
Burlington	81%	96%
Camden	87%	94%
Cape May	88%	93%
Cumberland	91%	96%
Essex	80%	93%
Gloucester	84%	97%
Hudson	83%	92%
Hunterdon	81%	96%
Mercer	84%	95%
Middlesex	86%	95%
Monmouth	88%	96%
Morris	80%	95%
Ocean	89%	97%
Passaic	82%	95%
Salem	88%	97%
Somerset	86%	90%
Sussex	84%	92%
Union	86%	95%
Warren	80%	94%

## Chapter 3

# Timely Permanency: Reunification, Adoption and Guardianship

Child welfare agencies are responsible for ensuring children who enter out-of-home placement are discharged to safe and permanent homes in a timely manner. Reunifying a child with the parent or caregiver is nearly always the primary case goal, and most children who enter a CP&P out-of-home placement are reunified with their families. Reunification is more likely when CP&P can engage and support parents to participate in and complete required services and make necessary lifestyle changes. This is to ensure parents can sustain the overall safety and well-being of their children when they return home.

Best practice dictates that CP&P plan and team around children and their families, providing reunification services when a child enters out-of-home placement. This helps ensure timely reunification. But CP&P concurrently plans alternate permanency options if a child is unable to return home, providing a back-up permanency plan if reunification isn't possible. Concurrent planning moves children from the uncertainty of resource care to the security of a permanent family. Concurrent planning is required for all children in out-of-home placement with a primary case goal of reunification. This minimizes the negative impact separation, loss, and unresolved grief can have on a child, and reduces the relationship disruptions a child experiences, even if the child must be placed in resource care for protection from abuse or neglect.

Alternate permanency plans for children in an out-of-home placement include adoption, kinship legal guardianship, and living with relatives. CP&P seeks to identify a committed kinship caregiver or unrelated resource caregiver willing to assume full legal custody and adopt the child once parental rights has been terminated. Kinship legal guardianship involves a relative or a family friend who is awarded custody by the court, and willing to assume care of a child and raise the

child to adulthood. In this form of permanency, the caregiver receives financial support and resources from the state and parental rights are typically not terminated.<sup>38</sup>

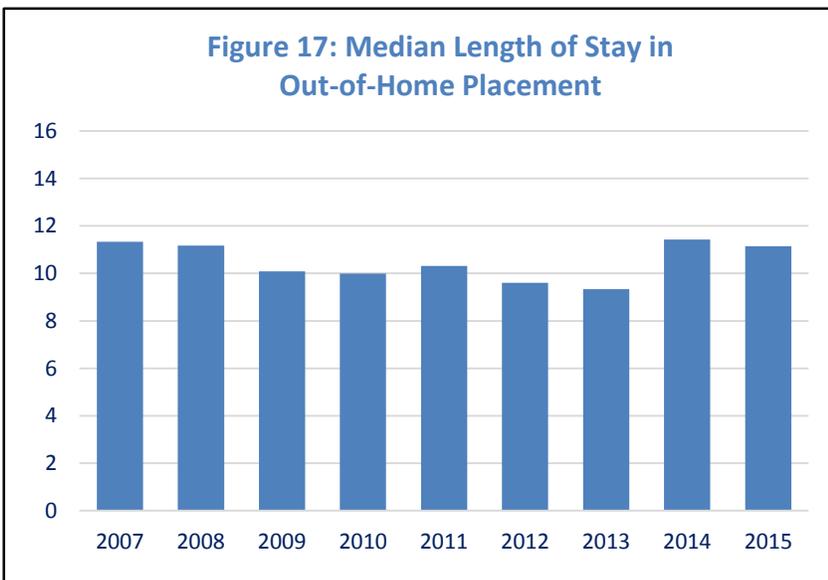
Like kinship legal guardianship, living with relatives is a permanency option that doesn't necessarily disturb parental rights. A child leaves placement and enter physical custody of a relative. CP&P may place the child with a relative or a judge may issue a court order that the child live with a particular relative.

Once the permanency goal is determined, efforts are made to ensure its timely achievement while ensuring the child's safety and overall well-being. The median length of stay<sup>39</sup> (50<sup>th</sup> percentile) for

a child entering out-of-home placement in a calendar year is about 10 months (see Figure 17).

This chapter provides an overview of timely permanency, which may include discharges to reunification, adoption, kinship legal guardian, or

living with relatives. The analysis includes an in-depth look at the time it takes children to achieve permanency, up to 48 months after the child's entry into out-of-home placement. Further analysis looks at performance over time as well as variation in performance across subpopulations by age, race and ethnicity, and county.



<sup>38</sup> See N.J.S.A 3B:12A-1-6 *et seq.*; N.J.S.A. 30:4C-84.

<sup>39</sup> Using first time entries

## At a Glance: Timely Permanency

New Jersey assesses timely permanency, mirrored after the Federal Child and Family Services Review<sup>40</sup> and in consultation with national experts<sup>41</sup>, with four measures, including *Permanency within 12, 24, 36 and 48 months*. These measures present the State with the longest view of outcomes for children in out-of-home placement.

All children under 18 years old who enter out-of-home placement in the calendar year and stay in placement for at least 8 days are part of the population to be monitored under these measures. Each child is then followed for up to 48 months to determine if and when they achieve permanency. Permanency is defined as a discharge to reunification, kinship legal guardianship, living with relatives, or adoption prior to 21 years of age<sup>42</sup>. Performance targets for the percentage of children that achieve permanency at each interval are 42 percent within 12 months, 66 percent within 24 months, 80 percent within 36 months, and 86 percent within 48 months.

Since these measures use entry cohorts of children that enter out-of-home placement within a calendar year, it takes five full years to present a long-term view of permanency. For the child that entered placement on December 31<sup>st</sup> 2012, the full 48-month follow up period to achieve permanency ends December 31<sup>st</sup> 2016. Therefore, 2012 is the most recent cohort for which complete permanency data is available for all four measures. However, performance as recent as 2015 is available for *Permanency within 12 months*.

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<sup>40</sup> Children’s Bureau, Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/monitoring/child-family-services-reviews/round3>

<sup>41</sup> Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago; Hornby Zeller and Associates, Inc.

<sup>42</sup> The Sustainability and Exit Plan target setting methodology for permanency outcome measures mirrored the CFSR methodology, which requires the youth to achieve permanency prior to turning 18 years old. However, NJ continues to serve youth until 21 years of age, so permanency may occur after the youth’s 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. NJ tracks permanency on all youth in placement through 21 years of age, which increases performance slightly on these measures compared to the SEP methodology.

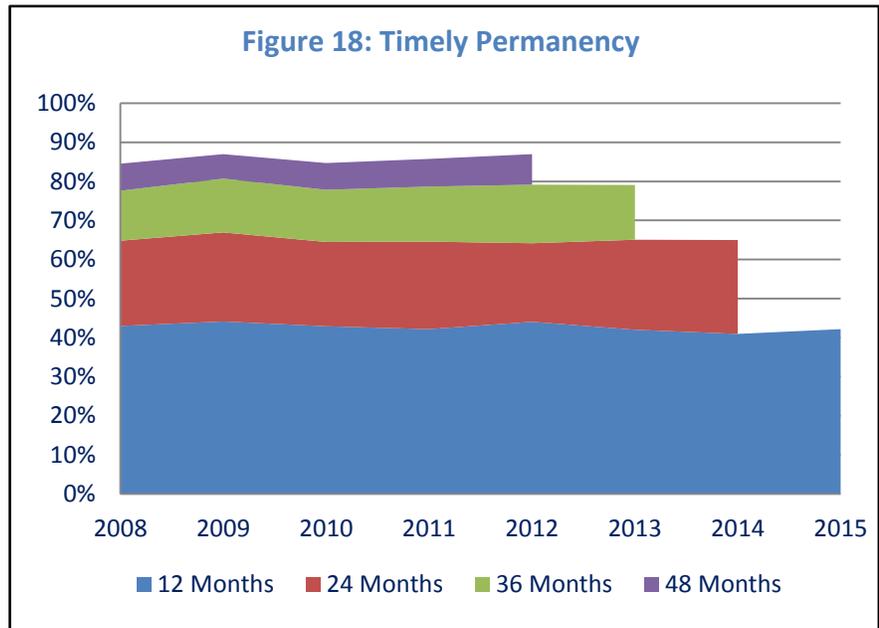
## Measuring Timely Permanency:

<p>Permanency within 12 months of entry into out-of-home placement</p>	<p>Of all children who enter out-of-home placement in a calendar year, the percentage discharged to permanency (reunification, living with relatives, guardianship or adoption) within 12 months.</p>	<p><b>Performance Target:</b> 42%</p> <p><b>Observed Performance:</b> 42% (CY2015) up to 21 years 42% (CY2015) up to 18 years</p>
<p>Permanency within 24 months of entry into out-of-home placement</p>	<p>Of all children who enter out-of-home placement in a calendar year, the percentage discharged to permanency (reunification, living with relatives, guardianship or adoption) within 24 months.</p>	<p><b>Performance Target:</b> 66%</p> <p><b>Observed Performance:</b> 65% (CY2014) up to 21 years 65% (CY2014) up to 18 years</p>
<p>Permanency within 36 months of entry into out-of-home placement</p>	<p>Of all children who enter out-of-home placement in a calendar year, the percentage discharged to permanency (reunification, living with relatives, guardianship or adoption) within 36 months.</p>	<p><b>Performance Target:</b> 80%</p> <p><b>Observed Performance:</b> 80% (CY2013) up to 21 years 78% (CY2013) up to 18 years</p>
<p>Permanency within 48 months of entry into out-of-home placement</p>	<p>Of all children who enter out-of-home placement in a calendar year, the percentage discharged to permanency (reunification, living with relatives, guardianship or adoption) within 48 months.</p>	<p><b>Performance Target:</b> 86%</p> <p><b>Observed Performance:</b> 88% (CY2012) up to 21 years 85% (CY2012) up to 18 years</p>

## A Closer Look: Timely Permanency

Figure 18 shows performance for Permanency within 12, 24, 36, and 48 months for four cohorts of children that entered out-of-home placement between 2008 and 2015. The data highlights the time-lag for each of the permanency measures with the last year of performance available for permanency within 48

months for calendar year 2012. The data shows the percentage of children who achieved permanency within 12, 24, 36, and 48 months has been stable over several years. In 2012, the last year complete data is available, of 4,701 children that entered out-



of-home placement: 45 percent (n=2,099) achieved permanency within 12 months; 65 percent (n=3,045) achieved permanency within 24 months; 80 percent (n=3,749) achieved permanency within 36 months; and 88 percent (n=4,117) achieved permanency within 48 months (see Table 4).

**Table 4: Timely Permanency<sup>43</sup>**

	2012		2013		2014		2015	
Total Entries	<b>4,701</b>		<b>4,611</b>		<b>4,378</b>		<b>4,034</b>	
12 Months	2,099	45%	1,972	43%	1,811	41%	1,701	42% <sup>44</sup>
24 Months	3,045	65%	3,034	66%	2,863	65% <sup>45</sup>	n/a	
36 Months	3,749	80%	3,681	80% <sup>46</sup>	n/a		n/a	
48 Months	4,117	88% <sup>47</sup>	n/a		n/a		n/a	

<sup>43</sup> This table includes youth that achieve permanency after their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.

<sup>44</sup> SEP Performance on permanency within 12 months: 2015 - 42 percent (n=1,686)

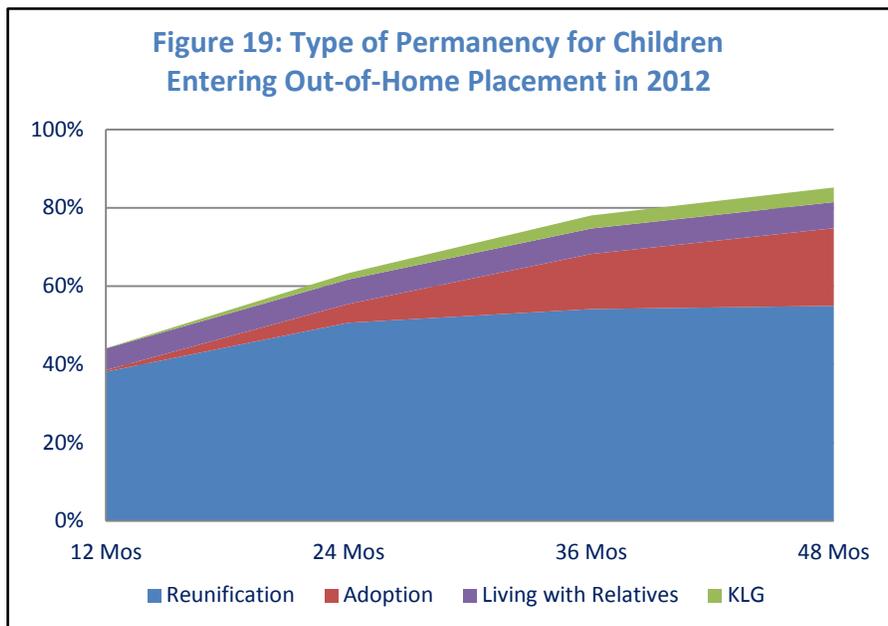
<sup>45</sup> SEP Performance on permanency within 24 months: 2014 - 65 percent (n=2,829)

<sup>46</sup> SEP Performance on permanency within 36 months: 2013 - 78 percent (n=3,591)

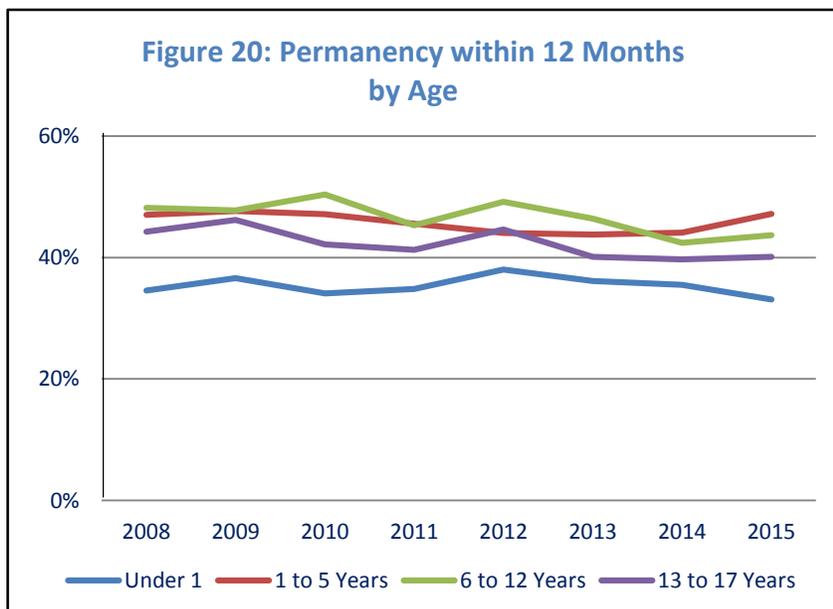
<sup>47</sup> SEP Performance on permanency within 48 months: 2012 - 85 percent (n=4,010)

Most children who enter out-of-home placement are reunified with their parents. The data shows that almost 40 percent of children reunify within the first 12 months, and reunification is the most common discharge type in the first year (see Figure 19). For children in placement longer than a year, a trend emerges away from reunification and toward adoption. There's a substantial increase in adoptions by the 24<sup>th</sup> and 36<sup>th</sup> month.

The second highest permanency exit in the first year is living with relatives, which involves a non-custodial parent or relative seeking custody in court upon the child's initial placement. Adoptions typically increase in frequency after the second year, reflecting



the time to exhaust efforts to reunite children with their families and the time it takes to obtain guardianship in court.

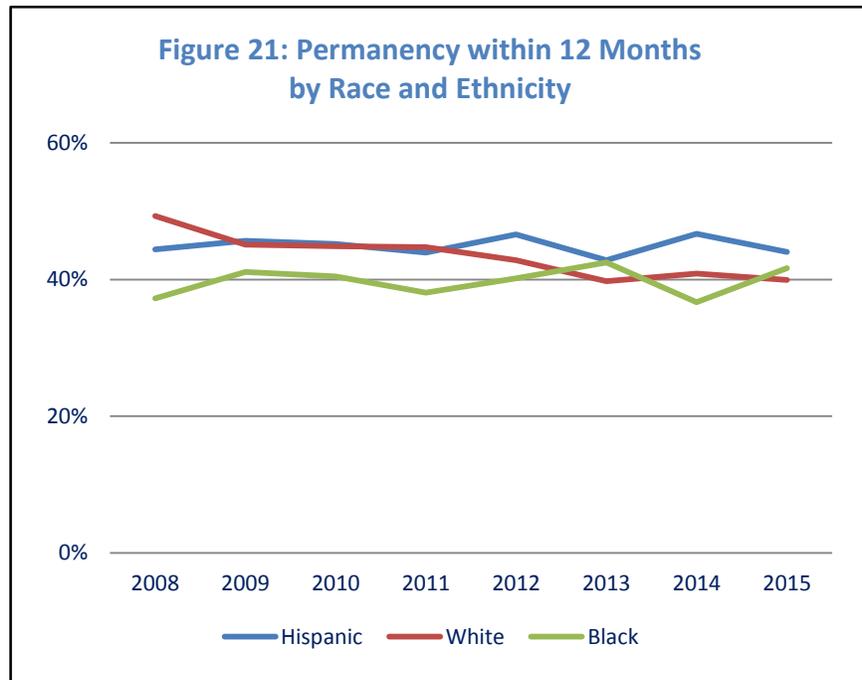


There is significant and important variation on timely permanency within 12 months, specifically reunification, by child age. Children one year old or less are less likely than other age groups to achieve permanency within 12 months of entering out-of-home placement. This group is followed by adolescents (see

Figure 20). Examining the cohort of children who entered out-of-home placement in 2015, only 33 percent of children under 1 year of age achieved permanency compared to 47 percent of 1 to 5 year olds.

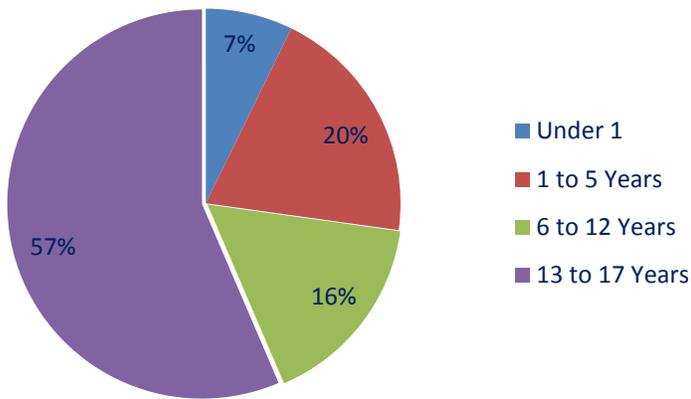
There are some differences in permanency by race and ethnicity. Black or African American children have the lowest rates of permanency within 12 months over an eight-year period (see Figure 21). The data also show that over time White children have declining 12-month permanency rates. In 2015, Hispanic children had the highest rates of 12-month permanency (44 percent) compared to Black or African American children (42 percent) or White children (40 percent).

By the end of the 48 month follow up period for the 2012 cohort of children entering out-of-home placement (n=4,701), 85 percent had



achieved permanency. However, 15 percent of children remain in out-of-home placement into a fifth year. These children tend to be adolescents (57 percent) and children with significant developmental, medical, or behavioral challenges (see Figure 22). DCF continues to monitor the number of children and youth in out-of-home placement longer than five years. Supplemental analyses indicate that more than half of these youth are in specialized care or independent living. DCF saw a decline in the number of these youth by 41 percent between 2012 and 2016.

**Figure 22: Children Who Entered Out-of-Home Placement in 2012 and Remain Beyond 48 Months (n=691)**



A county level analysis of Permanency within 12 months found eight counties at or above the performance target for Permanency within 12 months (see Table 3 below). Performance in other counties range between 29 and 41 percent. For Permanency within 48 months, fourteen counties are at or above the

performance target of 86 percent. The remaining counties are near the target and range between 78 and 85 percent.

**Table 5: Permanency Outcomes by County**

County	Permanency w/in 12 Months	Permanency w/in 48 Months	County	Permanency w/in 12 Months	Permanency w/in 48 Months
Atlantic	42%	86%	Middlesex	49%	87%
Bergen	41%	88%	Monmouth	48%	88%
Burlington	50%	89%	Morris	32%	83%
Camden	59%	89%	Ocean	34%	90%
Cape May	33%	90%	Passaic	41%	85%
Cumberland	48%	89%	Salem	51%	89%
Essex	32%	85%	Somerset	37%	85%
Gloucester	37%	87%	Sussex	42%	93%
Hudson	35%	84%	Union	29%	78%
Hunterdon	38%	91%	Warren	38%	84%
Mercer	39%	86%			

## Chapter 4

# Post Reunification: Maltreatment & Re-Entry

After a child enters out-of-home placement, CP&P strives to get the child to a safe, stable, and permanent home quickly without placing the child at risk of a repeat maltreatment and re-entry into out-of-home placement. Safe and stable relationships based on strong attachment are important for children's healthy development and ongoing well-being.<sup>48</sup> Re-entry and repeated separation from primary caregivers impacts attachment.<sup>49</sup> It is disruptive to a child's stability and sense of security. The impact on children can be seen in higher rates of criminal activity and alcohol and other drug problems as they grow into adulthood.<sup>50</sup> Children who re-enter out-of-home placement are more likely than other children to have families with severe or co-occurring challenges,<sup>51</sup> including substance use, unmet mental health needs, domestic violence, criminal history, and parents' capacity to maintain supportive and stable relationships with their children.<sup>52</sup>

Concurrent planning efforts begin when a child enters out-of-home placement and continues until the child is discharged. Tools help assess the likelihood of reunification and certain indicators suggest a poor prognosis for reunification.<sup>53</sup> CP&P uses Structured Decision Making (SDM) tools to assess risk of future maltreatment at the time of reunification. These assessments inform decisions related to reunification and services to support families as children return home. The tools consider parent-child relationships, parental history and functioning, support systems, original risk level, and progress toward case goals to assess readiness for reunification. Within days of out-of-home placement, families are offered Family Team Meetings to identify their support system and goals. Formal internal conferences are held within three days, thirty days,

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<sup>48</sup> National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being Research Brief No. 18: Instability and Early Life Changes among Children in the Child Welfare System.

<sup>49</sup> *ibid*

<sup>50</sup> Hatton, H. & Brooks, S. (2008). Re-entry into the Child Welfare System: A Literature Review of Promising Practices. Northern California Training Academy at the Center for Human Services.

<sup>51</sup> *ibid*

<sup>52</sup> *ibid*

<sup>53</sup> See DCF Policy Manual: CPP-X-A-1

ninety days, five months, and ten months to assess the child and family’s progress with case goals. As CP&P plans for reunification, both formal community-based supports and informal supports are identified and prepared to prevent service delivery interruption during the transition. After reunification, casework continues to assist with the transition home.

Federal and internal data cite substance abuse as a key factor for child welfare involvement. Substance abuse also impacts post-reunification outcomes and impedes timely reunification.<sup>54,55</sup> Barriers to substance abuse treatment include limited service scope to meet needs, difficulty engaging and retaining parents in the recovery process, knowledge gaps and lack of coordination among workers, attorneys, and courts to meet the comprehensive and complex needs of families with substance abuse issues. Further, challenges around relapse and differing philosophies between child welfare and substance abuse treatment systems can impact decision-making.<sup>56</sup> For families to achieve long-term success, whatever safety and risk situation led to the removal need mitigation through collaboration, supports, and service provision.

## **At a Glance: Post Reunification Maltreatment & Re-Entry**

New Jersey assesses post reunification outcomes such as *Post reunification maltreatment* and *Re-entry into out-of-home placement within 12 months* using measures developed in consultation with national experts<sup>57</sup> or as part of the Federal Child and Family Services Review<sup>58</sup>. These measures help understand the long-term outcomes of children who entered out-of-home placement in each calendar year and achieve permanency either within 12 or 24 months. The definition of permanency is slightly different for each measure. Both measures include reunification (return to the caregiver from which the child was removed) and living with relatives as permanent

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<sup>54</sup> NJDCF Needs Assessment.

[http://www.nj.gov/dcf/childdata/protection/DCF.Needs.Assessment.Interim.Report\\_3.16.pdf](http://www.nj.gov/dcf/childdata/protection/DCF.Needs.Assessment.Interim.Report_3.16.pdf)

<sup>55</sup> Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2011). Family reunification: What the evidence shows. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children’s Bureau.

<sup>56</sup> Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2014). Parental substance use and the child welfare system. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children’s Bureau.

<sup>57</sup> Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago; Hornby Zeller and Associates, Inc.

<sup>58</sup> Children’s Bureau, Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/monitoring/child-family-services-reviews/round3>

discharges. A third type of permanency, discharge to kinship legal guardianship, is included only for the population under assessment for *Re-entry into out-of-home placement within 12 month*.

The population monitored for *Post reunification maltreatment* is a cohort of children who entered out-of-home placement for the first time in a calendar year, stayed at least eight days, and discharged to permanency within 24 months of entry. These children are then monitored for a 12-month follow-up period to determine if the child is a victim of maltreatment after achieving permanency. DCF assesses performance at 6 and 12 months after the child's permanency discharge, and has a set performance target of no more than 6.9 percent of children experiencing post reunification maltreatment. Since this measure assesses long-term performance of the child welfare system, the most recent data available is for children that entered out-of-home placement in calendar year 2013<sup>59</sup>.

The population monitored for *Re-entry into out-of-home placement within 12 month* is a similar cohort of children who entered an out-of-home placement for the first time in a calendar year, stayed at least 8 days, but discharged to permanency within 12 months of entry. All children are then monitored for a 12-month follow-up period to determine if the child re-entered out-of-home placement after achieving permanency. DCF assesses performance at 6 and 12 months after the child's permanency discharge, and has a set performance target of no more than 9 percent of children re-entering out-of-home placement. Since this measure assesses long-term performance of the child welfare system, the most recent data available is for children that entered out-of-home placement in calendar year 2014<sup>60</sup>.

This chapter provides an analysis of the safety and stability of children after they reunite with their parents or relatives. Performance on this measure is reported over time, by age, by race and

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<sup>59</sup> Timeline for *Post Reunification Maltreatment*: For a cohort of children entering out-of-home placement in calendar year 2013, data will be available for the last child in the cohort who entered placement on December 31<sup>st</sup> 2013 after allowing 24 months (December 31<sup>st</sup> 2015) for permanency, and then allowing an additional 12 months (December 31<sup>st</sup> 2016) after discharge to determine if the child was maltreated.

<sup>60</sup> Timeline for *Re-Entry into out-of-home placement within 12 months*: For a cohort of children entering out-of-home placement in calendar year 2014, data will be available for the last child in the cohort who entered placement on December 31<sup>st</sup> 2014 after allowing 12 months (December 31<sup>st</sup> 2015) for permanency, and then allowing an additional 12 months (December 31<sup>st</sup> 2016) after discharge to determine if the child re-entered out-of-home placement.

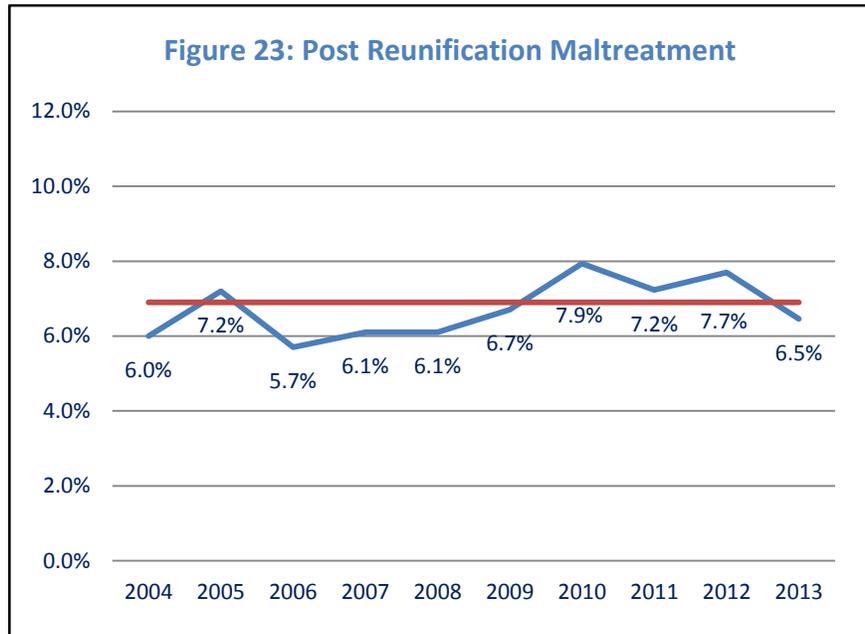
ethnicity and by county to understand trends in performance and subpopulations at highest risk or poor long-term outcomes.

### Measuring Post Reunification Outcomes:

<p>Post Reunification Maltreatment</p>	<p>Of all children who enter out-of-home placement in the calendar year for the first time and who are discharged within 24 months to reunification or living with a relative(s), the percentage who are victims of maltreatment within 12 months of discharge.</p>	<p><b>Performance Target:</b> 6.9%</p> <p><b>Observed Performance:</b> 6.5 % (CY2013)</p>
<p>Re-Entry into out-of-home placement</p>	<p>Of all children who enter out-of-home placement in the calendar year for the first time, and who are discharged within 12 months to permanency (reunification, living with relatives, or guardianship) before their 18th birthday, the percentage that re-enter out-of-home placement within 12 months of discharge.</p>	<p><b>Performance Target:</b> 9%</p> <p><b>Observed Performance:</b> 12.0% (CY2014)</p>

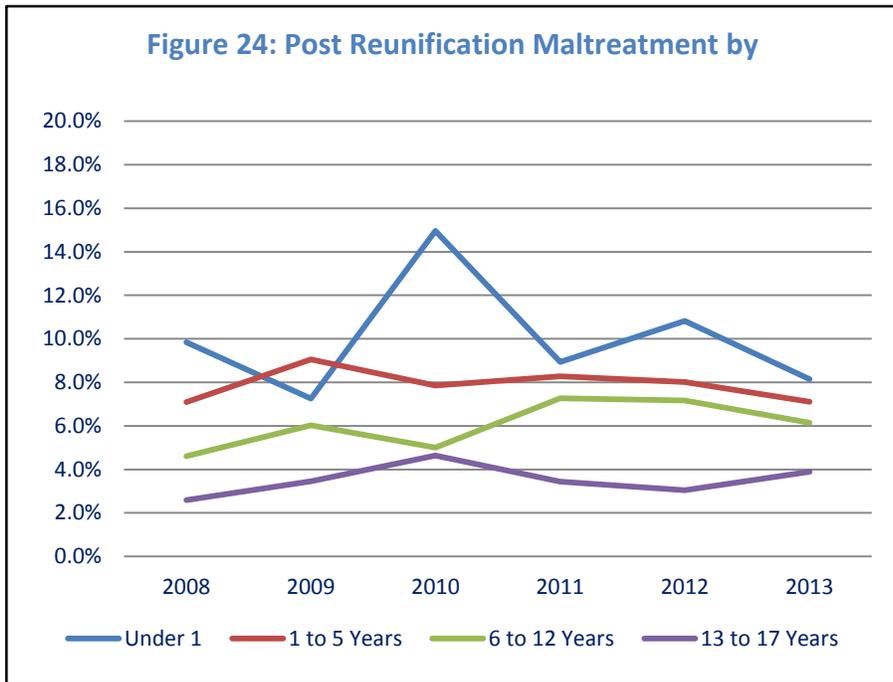
## A Closer Look: Post Reunification Maltreatment

Figure 23 shows the percentage of children who experienced maltreatment after discharging to permanency between 2005 and 2013. Performance on this measure has been steady over time with a 10-year average performance of 6.7 percent (std  $\pm$  0.7 percent).



There was a slight increase in the percentage of children experiencing post reunification maltreatment between 2010 and 2013. This mirrors a larger trend of maltreatment across the State during that time with increases in children experiencing a recurrence of maltreatment (see Figure 3) and more children entering out-of-home placement (see Figure 7).

In calendar year 2013, 3,585 children entered out-of-home placement for the first time; of these, 2,153 (60 percent) were discharged to permanency within 24 months. Of the population monitored



for post reunification maltreatment, 139 children (6.5 percent) experienced maltreatment after they returned home.

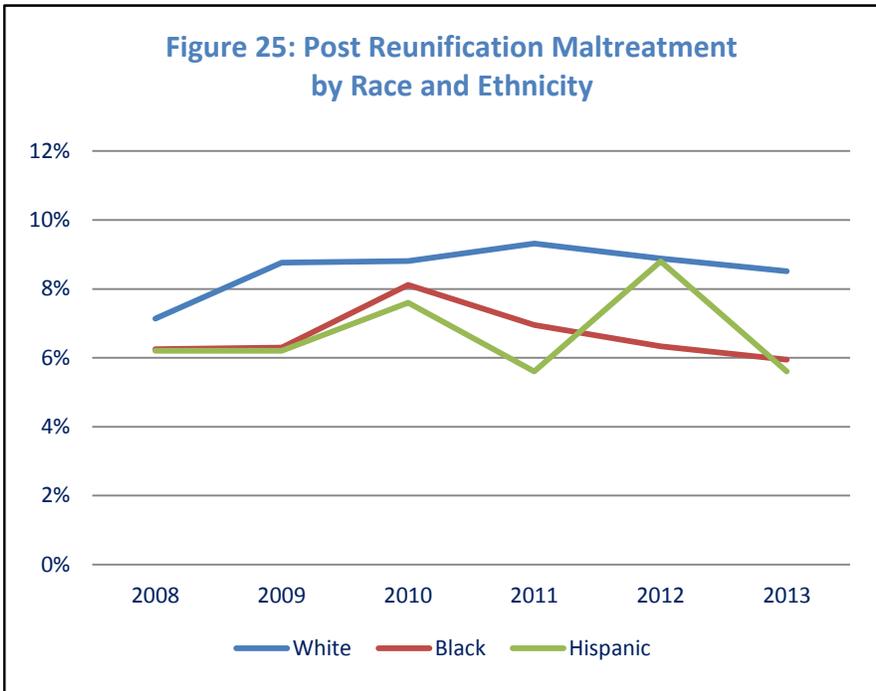
National research suggests that the youngest children are at the highest risk of post reunification maltreatment.<sup>61</sup> An analysis of New Jersey's data confirms the same

findings as seen in Figure 24. Children less than 1 year of age are more likely to experience post reunification maltreatment, followed by children age 1 to 5 years. Adolescents (13 to 17 years of age) have the lowest rates of post reunification maltreatment. In 2010, there was an increase in the number of infants that experienced post reunification maltreatment (15 percent in 2010 compared to 8 percent in 2013), driving up the statewide average.

<sup>61</sup> National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being Research Brief No. 15: Kinship Caregivers in the Child Welfare System. [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/rb\\_15\\_2col.pdf](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/rb_15_2col.pdf)

Further analysis of the data examining variation in post reunification maltreatment found similar trends across racial and ethnic groups. In 2013, White children had slightly higher rates (8.5 percent) of post reunification maltreatment than either Black or African American children (5.9 percent) or Hispanic children (5.6 percent). The rate of maltreatment post reunification for White children has been stable over five years. However, the rate of maltreatment post reunification for Black or African American children increased in 2010, which corresponds to the overall increase

in children experiencing post reunification maltreatment.



In addition to some variation in performance by age, race and ethnicity, there continues to be some variation in performance in post reunification maltreatment across New Jersey’s twenty-one counties.

Table 5 below shows a three-year average from 2011 to 2013 in observed performance on this measure for each county. Some small counties may show some significant variation in performance from year to year due to the small number of children served in the county. Multiple years of data are combined to provide a stable view of county level performance.

**Table 5: 3-Year Average Post Reunification Maltreatment by County**

County	Observed Performance
Atlantic	7.7%
Bergen	2.9%
Burlington	9.3%
Camden	7.2%
Cape May	3.4%
Cumberland	7.3%
Essex	6.4%
Gloucester	10.8%
Hudson	8.2%
Hunterdon	11.1%
Mercer	8.5%
Middlesex	5.2%
Monmouth	5.8%
Morris	12.9%
Ocean	7.0%
Passaic	9.0%
Salem	8.0%
Somerset	2.1%
Sussex	0.0%
Union	3.8%
Warren	6.3%

County level performance on post reunification maltreatment ranges from zero percent in Sussex County to 12.9 percent in Morris County. Nine counties have a three year average observed performance below the 6.9 percent statewide performance target.

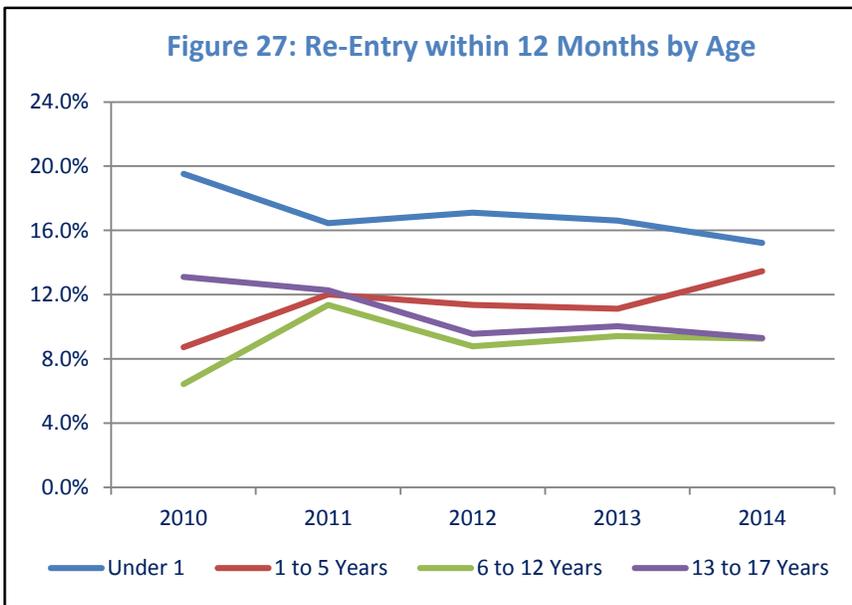
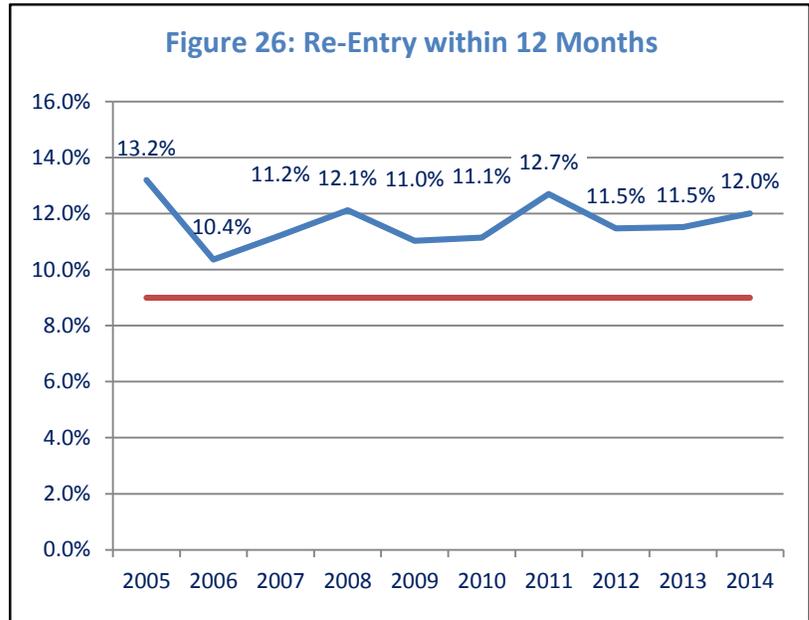
## A Closer Look: Re-Entry into Out-of-Home Placement

The overwhelming majority of children who achieve permanency do not re-enter out-of-home placement within 12 months of discharge. Close to 90 percent of the children remain home after they are discharged from care. However, New Jersey continues to have high rates of re-entry into out-of-home placement.

Figure 26 shows re-entry to out-of-home placement in New Jersey is relatively stable and has not changed significantly over several years. The 10-year average performance for re-entry is 11.7 percent (std  $\pm$  0.8 percent).

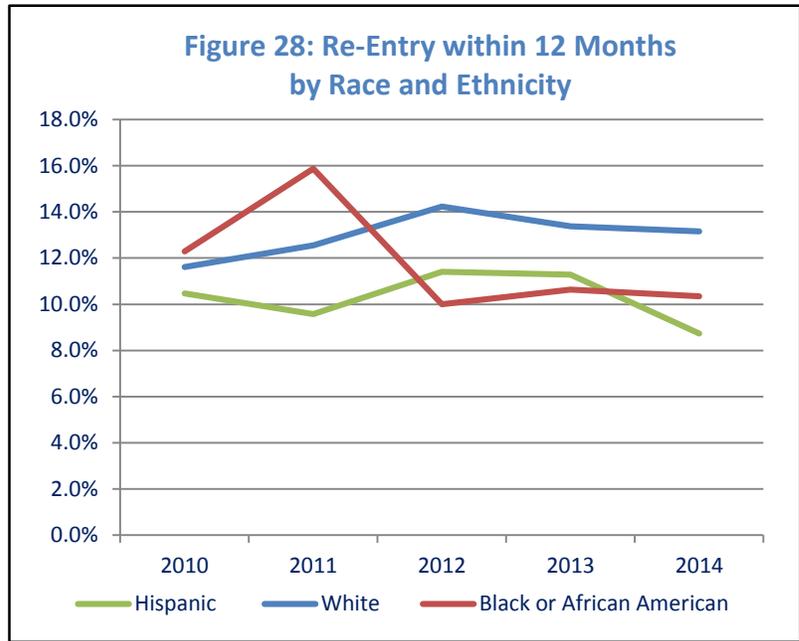
In 2014, 3,410 children entered out-of-home placement for the

first time; 1,433 were discharged to permanency within 12 months of removal; and 172 (12.0 percent) re-entered out-of-home placement within 12 months of being discharged to permanency.



Further analysis of re-entry shows, like post reunification maltreatment, infants are the most likely to re-enter out-of-home placement after returning home (see Figure 27). Small gains have been made in reducing re-entry for young children, from 19.5 percent in 2010 to 16.5 percent in 2014.

In addition to variation in performance across age groups, there are noteworthy differences across racial and ethnic groups. White and Hispanic children have consistent re-entry over time with White children re-entering at the highest rate (13.2 percent in 2014). Black or African American children re-entered care at the highest rates in 2010 (12.3 percent) and 2011 (15.9 percent).



However, re-entry among Black or African American children decreased in 2012 to 10 percent and remained stable over the subsequent three years.

County-level performance varies on re-entry into out-of-home placement within 12 months. Table 6 shows the three-year average from 2012 to 2014 in observed performance for each county. Some small counties may show some significant variation in performance from year to year due to the small number of children served in the county. Multiple years of data are combined to provide a stable view of county level performance.

County-level performance ranges between 4.9 percent in Morris County to 21.1 percent in Warren County. Only 9 children re-entered placement in Warren County over three years. Five counties – Atlantic, Middlesex, Morris, Somerset and Union – have a three-year average performance below the 9 percent statewide target.

**Table 6: 3-Year Average Re-Entry within 12 Months**

<b>County</b>	<b>Observed Performance</b>
Atlantic	8.5%
Bergen	10.6%
Burlington	11.5%
Camden	13.8%
Cape May	14.2%
Cumberland	14.6%
Essex	12.8%
Gloucester	11.7%
Hudson	9.7%
Hunterdon	14.0%
Mercer	11.9%
Middlesex	9.0%
Monmouth	9.3%
Morris	4.9%
Ocean	15.6%
Passaic	12.8%
Salem	16.8%
Somerset	8.9%
Sussex	14.7%
Union	7.1%
Warren	21.1%

# Conclusion

New Jersey has made significant progress over the last ten years reducing the number of children entering out-of-home placement by safely serving children that become involved with the child welfare system in their own homes. Children who must enter out-of-home placement are more likely than ever to be placed in a family setting, with a relative, and with their siblings. The rate of maltreatment for children in out-of-home placement in New Jersey who live with a relative or non-relative caregiver is among the lowest rates of maltreatment in the country<sup>62</sup>.

While New Jersey has extremely high rates of placement stability in the second year of placement, efforts are underway to improve placement stability early in the child's placement experience. Among these efforts is Mobile Response and Stabilization Services. Piloted in 2015 and active in all counties, the service provides further support for children ages 3 to 17 entering out-of-home placement. Working with parents, the program helps children develop skills to cope with entering placement and addresses their underlying behavioral issues. DCF continues to monitor placement stability in the first year of out-of-home placement to ensure continued progress.

By focusing on the foundational elements (engaging, assessing, planning, and teaming with children and families) of New Jersey's case practice model, CP&P has consistently ensured that children can safely return home in a timely manner. Through concurrent planning efforts and a robust Office of Adoption Operations<sup>63</sup>, New Jersey continues to make progress on achieving timely permanency for children who cannot return home. Efforts are underway to ensure the timely adoption of children. The Office of Adoption Operations received a federal grant in 2014 to support New Jersey Collaborative Adoption Recruitment Education and Support (NJCARES). Thanks to this support, Adoption Operations enhanced its Child Specific Recruitment efforts and developed a training program to help adoptive parents parent and address the needs and challenges of some of CP&P's legally free children. The grant allowed Adoption Operations to create individualized recruitment teams for a number of youth seeking permanency.

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<sup>62</sup> Children's Bureau, Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/monitoring/child-family-services-reviews/round3>

<sup>63</sup> New Jersey Department of Children and Families. (2016). Adoption Report 2016.

New Jersey continues efforts to improve post reunification outcomes for children after they exit out-of-home placement to return home or live with a relative. Recent improvements include reducing post reunification maltreatment across all age groups and particularly for Black or African American children. CP&P seeks to reunite children with their family quickly, but must ensure such a reunification doesn't expose the child to further maltreatment and trauma. This means parents must develop coping and parenting skills to keep their children free from future abuse or neglect.

Preventing the need for a child's re-entry into out-of-home placement after having previously been discharged to permanency poses ongoing challenges. New Jersey is among several states with high rates of re-entry<sup>64</sup>. DCF's continuous quality improvement efforts seek to better understand and address this issue. Among these efforts is ChildStat, which has re-focused its work to gain sharper insight on supporting families after reunification. It is examining cases of children that have recently re-entered placement, identifying overlooked opportunities to stabilize the family. For the second consecutive year, the DCF Manage by Data Fellows program is focused on understanding re-entry. With insight gained from examining quantitative and qualitative data, Fellows suggest locally-applied solutions to reduce re-entry. DCF's Office of Research, Evaluation and Reporting is analyzing administrative data further, identifying risk and protective factors related to post reunification outcomes. These efforts seek to identify high risk subpopulations or areas for targeted interventions.

New Jersey's commitment to improving child welfare outcomes continues and is underscored by the launch of a new statewide continuous quality improvement plan. This plan outlines a rigorous scientific framework to identify challenges and strengths, explore solutions, develop initiatives, implement and evaluate these initiatives, and to continuously learn and plan. This will strengthen CP&P's case practice and further concentrate efforts to improve child welfare outcomes for New Jersey's children and families.

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<sup>64</sup> Children's Bureau, Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/monitoring/child-family-services-reviews/round3>

## Appendix A:

### Measuring Child Safety:

Recurrence of Maltreatment within 12 months for children that remain in their own home <sup>65</sup>	Of children who were victims of maltreatment in a calendar year and remained in their own home for at least 30 days, the percentage who were victims of maltreatment in the following 12 months.	<b>Performance Target:</b> 7.2%  <b>Observed Performance:</b> 6.9% (CY2014) 6.5% (CY2015)
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### Measuring Safety, Siblings & Stability:

Maltreatment of Children in Out-of-Home Placement <sup>66</sup>	Of children who are in out-of-home placement during the calendar year for at least one day, the percentage who are victims of maltreatment by a resource parent or facility staff member.	<b>Performance Target:</b> 0.49%  <b>Observed Performance:</b> 0.11% (CY2016)
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<sup>65</sup> SEP Measure 37, target = 7.2%

<sup>66</sup> SEP Measure 12

<p>Placing Sibling Groups of 2-3 children together<sup>67</sup></p>	<p>Of cases with two or three siblings removed for the first time during the calendar year within 30 days of each other, the percentage that had all siblings placed together in the same setting within seven days following the final removal in the sibling group.</p>	<p><b>Performance Target:</b> 80%</p> <p><b>Observed Performance:</b> 79% (CY2015) 78% (CY2016)</p>
<p>Placing Sibling Groups of four or more children together<sup>68</sup></p>	<p>Of children in sibling groups of four or more removed for the first time during the calendar year within 30 days of each other, the percentage of children that were placed with at least one other sibling within seven days following the final removal in the sibling group.</p>	<p><b>Performance Target:</b> 80%</p> <p><b>Observed Performance:</b> 87% (CY2015) 84% (CY2016)</p>

<sup>67</sup> SEP Measure 32

<sup>68</sup> SEP Measure 33

<p>Placement Stability in the First 12 months of out-of-home placement<sup>69</sup></p>	<p>Of children entering placement for the first time during the calendar year, the percentage that had two or fewer placements within the first 12 months of the removal episode.</p>	<p><b>Performance Target:</b> 84%</p> <p><b>Observed Performance:</b> 82% (CY2014) 84% (CY2015)</p>
<p>Placement Stability 13-24 months in out-of-home placement<sup>70</sup></p>	<p>Of children entering placement for the first time during the calendar year and who spent at least one year in placement, the percentage that had two or fewer placements within the second year of the removal episode.</p>	<p><b>Performance Target:</b> 88%</p> <p><b>Observed Performance:</b> 97% (CY2013) 95% (CY2014)</p>

**Measuring Timely Permanency:**

<p>Permanency within 12 months of entry into out-of-home placement</p>	<p>Of children who enter out-of-home placement in a calendar year, the percentage discharged to permanency (reunification, living with relatives, guardianship or adoption) within 12 months.</p>	<p><b>Performance Target:</b> 42%</p> <p><b>Observed Performance:</b> 41% (CY2014) up to 18 years 42% (CY2015) up to 18 years 42% (CY2015) up to 21 years</p>
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<sup>69</sup> SEP Measure 35  
<sup>70</sup> SEP Measure 36

<p>Permanency within 24 months of entry into out-of-home placement</p>	<p>Of children who enter out-of-home placement in a calendar year, the percentage discharged to permanency (reunification, living with relatives, guardianship or adoption) within 24 months.</p>	<p><b>Performance Target:</b> 66%</p> <p><b>Observed Performance:</b> 64% (CY2013) up to 18 years 65% (CY2014) up to 18 years 65% (CY2014) up to 21 years</p>
<p>Permanency within 36 months of entry into out-of-home placement</p>	<p>Of children who enter out-of-home placement in a calendar year, the percentage discharged to permanency (reunification, living with relatives, guardianship or adoption) within 36 months.</p>	<p><b>Performance Target:</b> 80%</p> <p><b>Observed Performance:</b> 78% (CY2012) up to 18 years 78% (CY2013) up to 18 years 80% (CY2013) up to 21 years</p>
<p>Permanency within 48 months of entry into out-of-home placement</p>	<p>Of children who enter out-of-home placement in a calendar year, the percentage discharged to permanency (reunification, living with relatives, guardianship or adoption) within 48 months.</p>	<p><b>Performance Target:</b> 86%</p> <p><b>Observed Performance:</b> 85% (CY2011) up to 18 years 85% (CY2012) up to 18 years 88% (CY2012) up to 21 years</p>

## Measuring Post Reunification Outcomes:

<p>Post Reunification Maltreatment</p>	<p>Of children who enter out-of-home placement in the calendar year for the first time and who are discharged within 24 months to reunification or living with a relative(s), the percentage who are victims of maltreatment within 12 months of discharge.</p>	<p><b>Performance Target:</b> 6.9%</p> <p><b>Observed Performance:</b> 7.7% (CY2012) 6.5 % (CY2013)</p>
<p>Re-Entry into Out-of-Home Placement</p>	<p>Of children who enter out-of-home placement in the calendar year for the first time and are discharged within 12 months to permanency (reunification, living with relatives, or guardianship) before their 18th birthday, the percentage that re-enter out-of-home placement within 12 months of discharge.</p>	<p><b>Performance Target:</b> 9%</p> <p><b>Observed Performance:</b> 11.5% (CY2013) 12.0% (CY2014)</p>