



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

National Institute  
of Food  
and Agriculture

4-H National  
Headquarters

# Vulnerable Population: Youth in Foster Care

*The purpose of this document is to provide background information on Youth in Foster Care.*

## **Defining Foster Care**

**Foster care** is a temporary service provided by states for youth (up until eighteen years of age) that cannot live with their families. Youth in foster care may live with relatives or with unrelated foster parents. Foster care can also refer to placement settings such as group homes, residential care facilities, emergency shelters, and supervised independent living.<sup>1</sup>

The goal of foster care is to find a permanent home for a child either through reunification with their birth family, legal guardianship, adoption or OPPLA (other planned living arrangement), which is when all other options are ruled out and the youth stays in the child welfare agency's custody until adulthood.<sup>2</sup>

## **Fast Facts on Youth in Foster Care**

In the U.S. today, approximately 400,000 children and youth are in foster care at any given time and each year about 20,000 of these students age out of foster care.<sup>3</sup>

About half (51 percent) of the children who left foster care in 2015 were discharged to be reunited with their parents or primary caretakers.

Forty-three percent of youth in the foster care system were White in 2015. Twenty-four percent were Black or African American. Twenty-one percent were Hispanic of any race.<sup>4</sup>

Youth in foster care are more likely to drop out of school, become homeless after aging out and have difficulty finding a job.<sup>5</sup>

## **Federal Laws Regarding Disconnected Youth**

[Adoptions and Safe Families Act of 1997](#)

[Fostering Connections to Success Act](#)

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## References

<sup>1</sup> [Foster Care](#)

<sup>2</sup> [OPPLA/APPLA](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Students in Foster Care](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Foster Care Statistics 2015](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Introduction to Foster Care](#)