

TENNESSEE ADOPTION FACTS

1,622 foster children in Tennessee are waiting to be adopted

Adoption provides children with a lifetime of emotional and legal connections to a family. Foster children who cannot return home risk reaching adulthood without a permanent family of their own. In 2008, Congress passed the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act, which will help more children find permanent families. Despite this progress, thousands of children—especially older children and children of color—still wait for families. And many families who have adopted lack critical post-adoption support that is essential to their children’s long-term stability and well-being.

Foster care was intended to be temporary, but many Tennessee children remain in care for years.

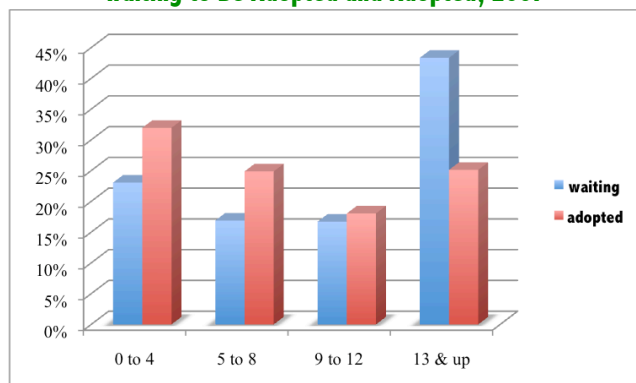
For children waiting to be adopted in Tennessee, the average length of stay in care is almost three years (35.6 months). On average, children who were adopted in 2007 spent about 37.8 months in care before the adoption was finalized.

To shorten the time children spend in care, child welfare agencies must employ the best recruitment tools possible to find families.

Older children in Tennessee are not as likely to be adopted as younger children.

The average age of Tennessee’s adopted children is about 8.5 years, while waiting children are, on average, roughly 10.6 years old. Research shows that for youth over the age of 9, the likelihood of being adopted drops significantly.

Age of Tennessee Children Waiting to Be Adopted and Adopted, 2007



Special strategies must be employed to ensure that older children are adopted, and that their newly formed families have the support they need.

A higher proportion of African American children are waiting to be adopted than are adopted in Tennessee.

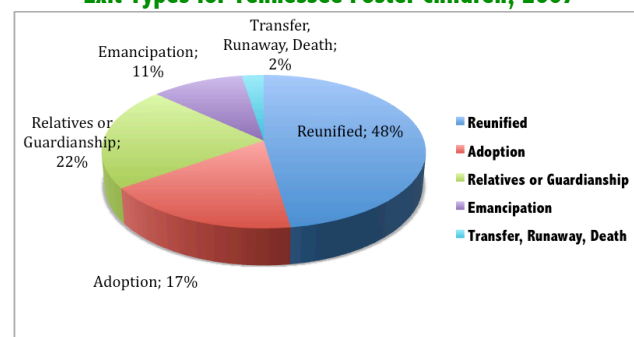
	Children Waiting	Children Adopted
African American	34%	30%
Caucasian	56%	60%
Hispanic	5%	5%
Multiple Races	3%	3%

Disproportionate outcomes for children of color can be addressed by investing in services to keep children safely at home. For children who enter care, agencies must create programs to address the unique racial and cultural needs of children of color, including seeking families who reflect the background of children in care, as required by law.

In 2007, most Tennessee children left foster care to return home (48%) or live with relatives or in guardianship (22%). 1,214 children (17% of all exits) were adopted.

Children who found permanent families need support to help them recover from the trauma of abuse and neglect and the experience of being in care.

Exit Types for Tennessee Foster Children, 2007



Post-permanency services should be available to families who adopt, accept guardianship, or are reunified with their children to help make permanent families as strong as possible.

In 2007, 739 youth in Tennessee aged out of foster care without a permanent, legal family.

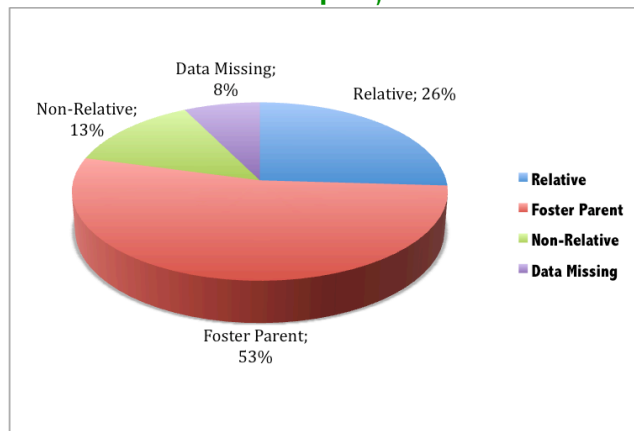
Research shows that many of these youth will face significant obstacles in the future, including homelessness, unemployment, depression and substance abuse.

The best way to improve these outcomes is to ensure that youth do not age out of care without a family. For those youth who do not find a family, states and counties must provide support to help them make the transition to independent living with the help and support of caring adults.

Most children adopted from foster care in the U.S. are adopted by foster parents and relatives.

Nationally, 53 percent of children adopted in 2007 were adopted by their foster parents. Another 26 percent were adopted by relatives.

U.S. Adopting Parents' Relationship to Child Prior to Adoption, 2007*



(*Tennessee data was incomplete so we have chosen to present national data.)

If foster parents and relatives are provided with adequate support from the beginning of a child's experience in care, they will be in a better position to provide children with the permanency they need if they can't return home. By setting adoption assistance rates equal to foster care rates, agencies can help ensure that foster parents have an incentive to adopt.

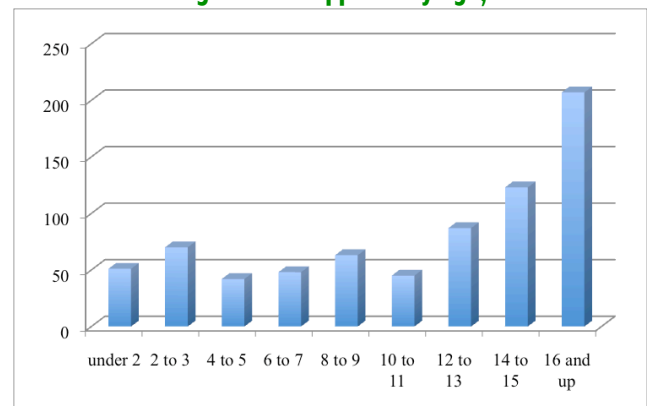
As a result of the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, many more children with special needs adopted from foster care will be eligible for federal adoption assistance by 2018.

Only about 49 percent of Tennessee children adopted in 2006 were receiving Title IV-E federal adoption assistance. Many of the children who were not IV-E eligible did not qualify due to their birth parents' income. Some children who do not qualify for federal assistance receive no adoption subsidies at all.

The new law eliminates birth parent income as an eligibility factor. As a result, many more Tennessee children will qualify for and receive federal assistance. Beginning with adoptions finalized on or after October 1, 2009, all children 16 and older and children who have been in care for five years or longer—and their siblings—will receive federal support, as long as they have special needs and meet other eligibility requirements. Each year, younger children will be phased in for federal support (14 and older in 2011, 12 and older in 2012, and so on) until 2018 when federal support will be given to all children with special needs who meet other eligibility criteria.

In 2007, 189 (12%) of Tennessee's waiting children had been in care for five years or more. Of those, 78 were not receiving IV-E payments. Also in 2007, about 330 of the waiting children who were not receiving IV-E payments (45%) were 14 or older.

Tennessee Waiting Children Who Are Not Receiving Federal Support—by Age, 2007



Tennessee has an important opportunity to promote adoption for many children who can now receive federal adoption assistance for the first time. The state can make significant progress on its permanency outcomes by targeting intensive recruitment efforts for these children.