



Foster Care Statistics 2010

This factsheet provides the most recent national statistical estimates for children and youth in foster care from fiscal year (FY) 2010 and also provides earlier data from FY 2000 to allow for some estimate of trends over time. Data were obtained from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS). AFCARS collects information on all children in foster care for whom State child welfare agencies have responsibility for placement, care, or supervision and on children who are adopted with public child welfare agency involvement.

Key Findings

- On September 30, 2010, there were an estimated 408,425 children in foster care (Exhibit 1).
- More than a quarter (26 percent) were in relative homes, and nearly half (48 percent) were in nonrelative foster family homes (Exhibit 2).
- About half (51 percent) had a case goal of reunification with their families.
- About half (51 percent) of the children left the system to be reunited with their parents or primary caretakers (Exhibit 3).
- Close to half of the children (46 percent) who left foster care in FY 2010 were in care for less than 1 year (Exhibit 4).



Use your smartphone to access these numbers and trends online.



Child Welfare Information Gateway
Children's Bureau/ACYF
1250 Maryland Avenue, SW
Eighth Floor
Washington, DC 20024
800.394.3366
Email: info@childwelfare.gov
<http://www.childwelfare.gov>

Introduction

The Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) uses the definition of foster care found in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), where it is defined as “24-hour substitute care for children outside their own homes.”¹ Foster care settings include, but are not limited to, nonrelative foster family homes, relative foster homes (whether payments are being made or not), group homes, emergency shelters, residential facilities, and preadoptive homes.

The data presented for fiscal year (FY) 2010 were current on September 30, 2010, and are from *The AFCARS Report: Preliminary FY 2010 Estimates as of June 2011 (18)* (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [HHS], 2011). The data presented for FY 2000 are from *The AFCARS Report: Final Estimate for FY 1998 Through FY 2002 (12)* (HHS, 2006).²

Within each section of this report, appropriate data estimates are presented for three timeframes detailed below:

- **Point in Time** refers to information about the population of children in foster care on a given day: September 30, the end of the Federal FY.
- **Entries** refer to information about children entering foster care during a given timeframe: October 1 through September 30 of the Federal FY.
- **Exits** refer to information about children exiting foster care during a given timeframe: October 1 through September 30 of the Federal FY.

Children who exit and reenter multiple times in a year are counted only once. Some percentages do not add up to 100 percent or the estimated numbers do not add up to the total number in the category due to rounding of the original AFCARS source data and to missing data.

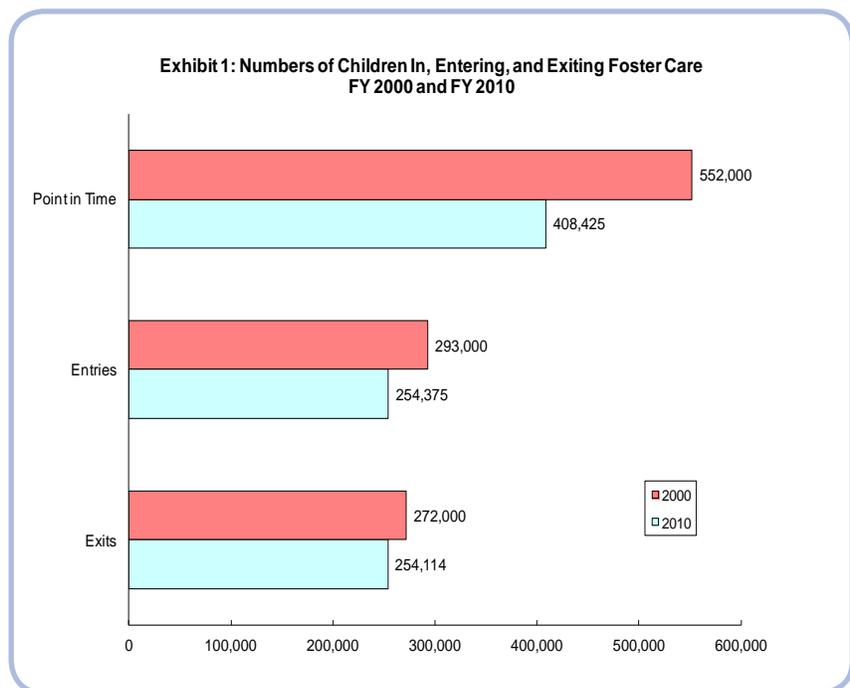
¹ Title 45, Volume 4, Part 1355, Section 57. The CFR citation can be accessed online: <http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/get-cfr.cgi?YEAR=1996&TITLE=45&PART=1355&SECTION=57&SUBPART=&TYPE=TEXT>

² Beginning in FY 1998, the majority of States/jurisdictions provided extensive, reliable data to AFCARS. Two major changes were made to AFCARS in FY 2000 to make it consistent with data collected for Census 2000. The categories for reporting race were revised, and multiple race designations were permitted. For these reasons, the comparison year used here is FY 2000.

Children In, Entering, and Exiting Care

These numbers give a broad picture of the number of children in the foster care system during FY 2010.

- **Point in Time.** On September 30, 2010, there were an estimated 408,425 children in foster care.
- **Entries.** During FY 2010, 254,375 children entered foster care.
- **Exits.** During FY 2010, 254,114 children exited foster care.
- **Trends.** From FY 2000 to FY 2010, the numbers of children in foster care on September 30 and the numbers of children who entered and who exited care during the year decreased (see Exhibit 1).



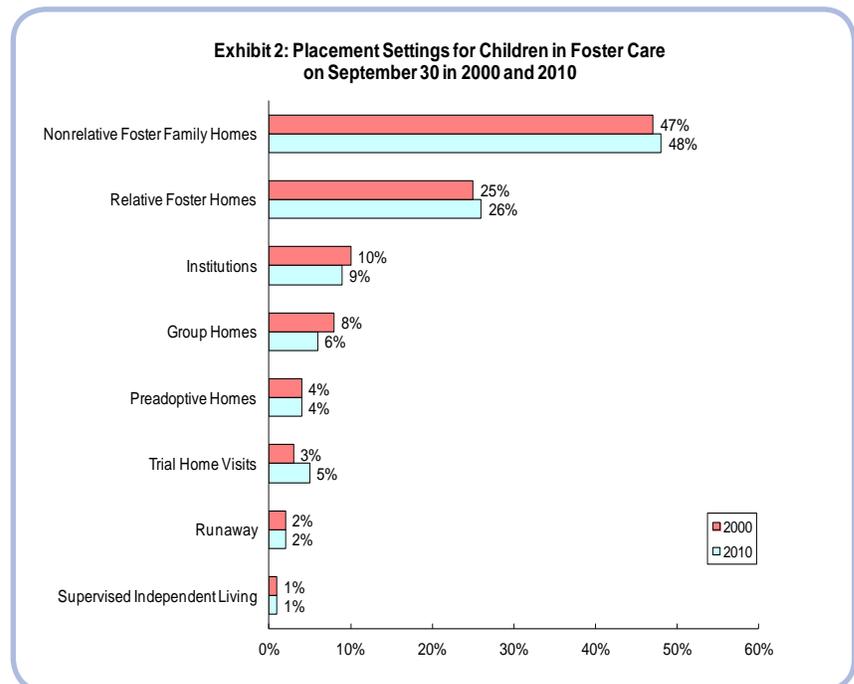
Placement Settings

Children in foster care live in a variety of placement settings and may move among or between settings while in care. For example, a child may move from a group home to a relative foster home.

Point in Time. The estimated 408,425 children in foster care on September 30, 2010, were in the following types of placements:

- 48 percent in nonrelative foster family homes
- 26 percent in relative foster homes
- 9 percent in institutions
- 6 percent in group homes
- 5 percent on trial home visits (situations in which the State retains supervision of a child and the child returns home on a trial basis for an unspecified period of time and after 6 months are considered a discharge from foster care)
- 4 percent in preadoptive homes
- 2 percent had run away
- 1 percent in supervised independent living

Trends. Rates for placement settings on September 30 remained relatively unchanged between FY 2000 and FY 2010 (see Exhibit 2).



Permanency Goals

The preferred goal for children in care is permanency with caring parents. Permanency goals refer to the goals for permanent placement that are reported to AFCARS.³

Point in Time. Of the estimated 408,425 children in foster care on September 30, 2010:

- 51 percent had a goal of reunification with parent(s) or principal caretaker(s).
- 25 percent had a goal of adoption.
- 6 percent had a goal of long-term foster care.
- 6 percent had a goal of emancipation.⁴
- 4 percent had a goal of living with other relative(s).
- 4 percent had a goal of guardianship.
- 5 percent had not yet had a case plan goal established

Trends. Due to a significant improvement in the quality of data on permanency goals since FY 2000, a comparison between the 2 years is not provided.

Outcomes

The outcome statistics for children leaving foster care reflect the percentages for the permanency goals (see above), especially for reunification and adoption.

Exits. Of the estimated 254,114 children who exited foster care during FY 2010:

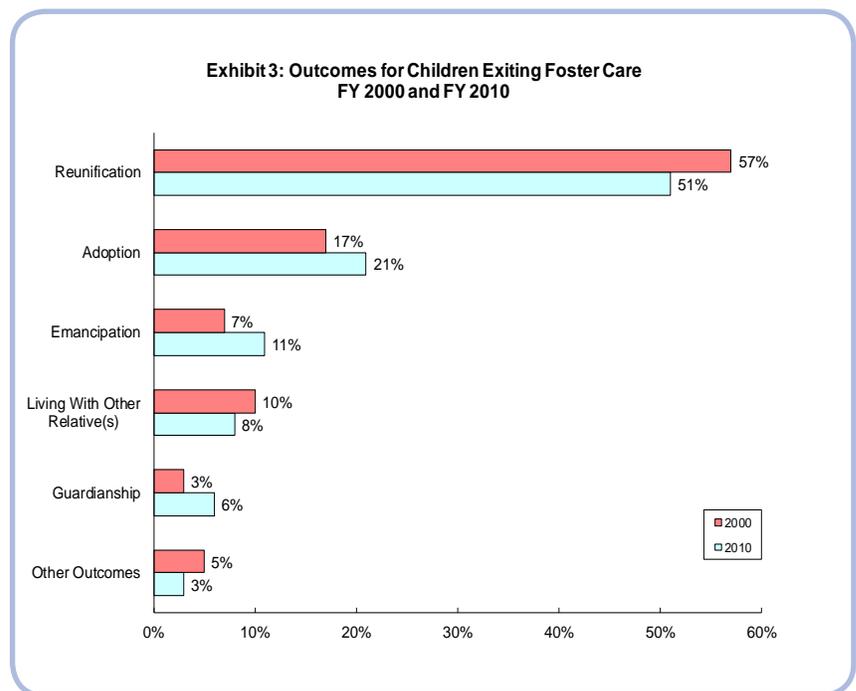
- 51 percent were reunited with parent(s) or primary caretaker(s).
- 21 percent were adopted.
- 11 percent were emancipated.
- 8 percent went to live with another relative.

³ For more information about State requirements for children's permanency goals, see Child Welfare Information Gateway's *Case Planning for Families Involved With Child Welfare Agencies*: http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/caseplanning.cfm

⁴ Emancipation refers to both the emancipation of minors (i.e., youth below the age of majority) and youth who age out of foster care between 18 and 21, depending on State policy.

- 6 percent went to live with a guardian.
- 3 percent had other outcomes.⁵

Trends. From FY 2000 to FY 2010, there were increases in the percentages of children who left the system for adoption, exited to guardianship, and emancipated. The percentage of children who left the system to reunite with their parents or primary caregivers or to live with other relatives decreased (see Exhibit 3).



Length of Stay

Length of stay in foster care refers to the amount of time between entering and exiting foster care.

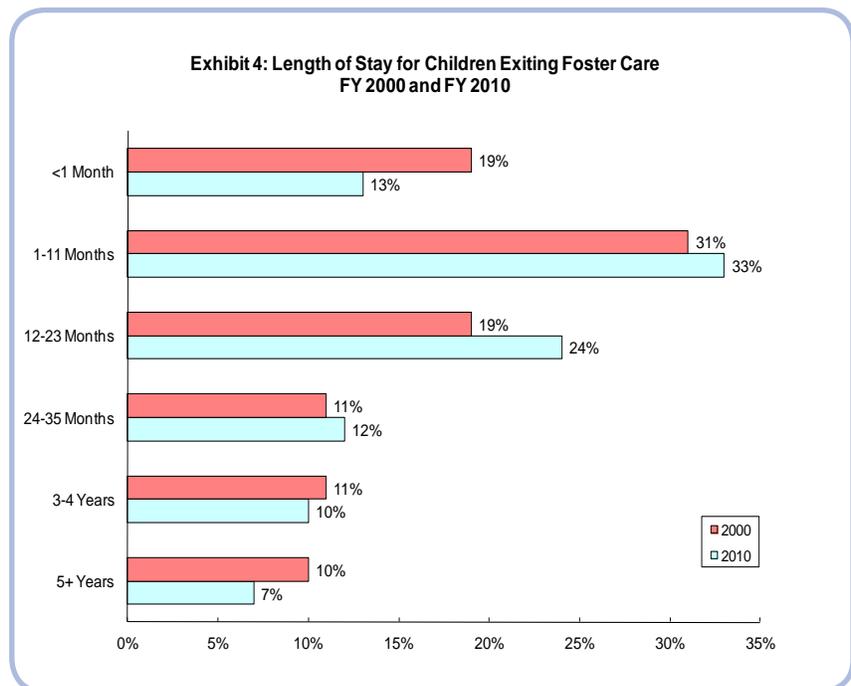
Exits. Of the estimated 254,114 children who exited foster care during FY 2010, the median amount of time spent in care was 13.5 months, with:

- 13 percent in care less than 1 month
- 33 percent in care for 1 to 11 months

⁵ Other outcomes include being transferred to another agency, running away, and death.

- 24 percent in care for 12 to 23 months
- 12 percent in care for 24 to 35 months
- 10 percent in care for 3 to 4 years
- 7 percent in care for 5 or more years

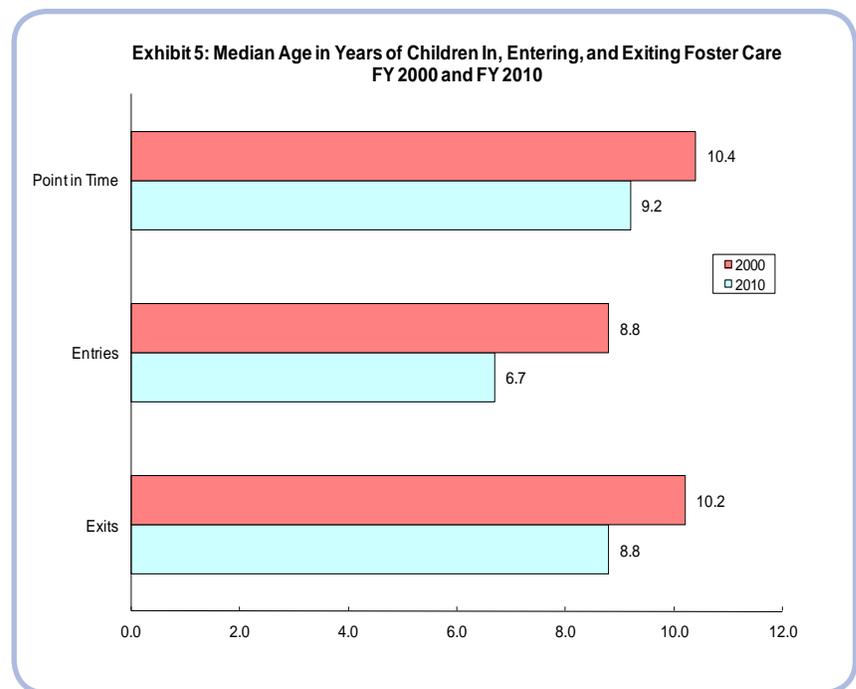
Trends. For children exiting foster care, the median amount of time spent in care increased from FY 2000 (12.0 months) to FY 2010 (13.5 months). Additionally, when comparing those two periods, the percentage of children in foster care for less than 1 month and the percentage of children in care for 3 years or more both decreased, while the percentage of children in foster care for 1 to 35 months increased (see Exhibit 4).



Age

Children can enter foster care from infancy up to age 18 years (and sometimes older).⁶

- **Point in Time.** The median age of the children in foster care on September 30, 2010, was 9.2 years.⁷
- **Entries.** The median age of children entering foster care during FY 2010 was 6.7 years.
- **Exits.** The median age of children exiting foster care during FY 2010 was 8.8 years.
- **Trends.** From FY 2000 to FY 2010, the median age decreased for each of the three timeframes (see Exhibit 5).



⁶ Some States allow children to remain in foster care to age 19, 20, or 21. The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 gave States the option to extend title IV-E assistance to youth ages 18 to 21, with certain stipulations. For more information, see Information Gateway's web section on Major Federal Legislation: http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/federal/index.cfm?event=federalLegislation.viewLegis&id=121

⁷ The median refers to the number in the middle when all numbers are placed in order. In this case, it means that an equal number of children are older and younger than this age.

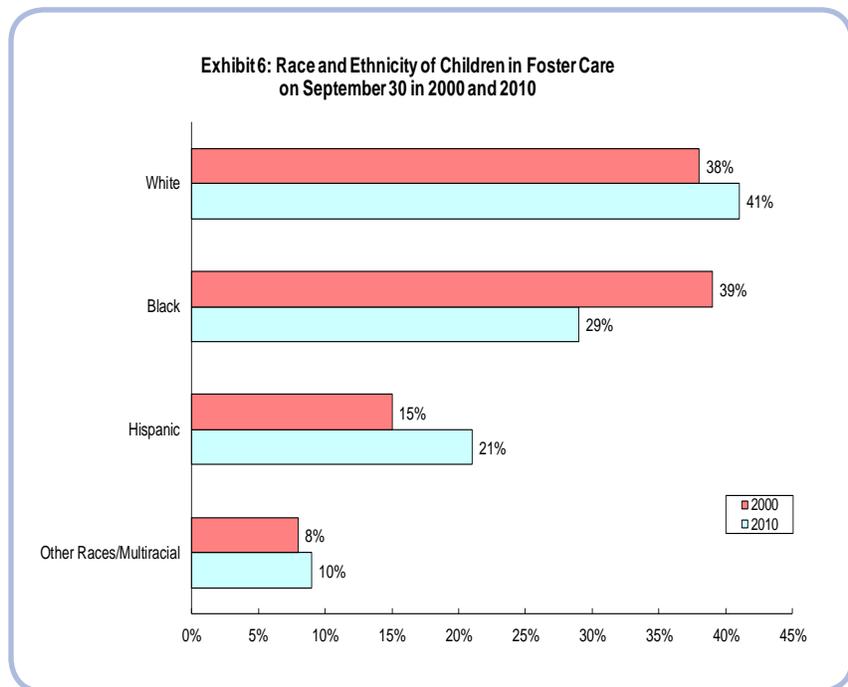
Race and Ethnicity

AFCARS tracks children's race or ethnicity. All races exclude children of Hispanic origin. Beginning in FY 2000, children could be identified with more than one race designation.

Point in Time. Of the estimated 408,425 children in foster care on September 30, 2010:

- 41 percent were White.
- 29 percent were Black.
- 21 percent were Hispanic (of any race).
- 10 percent were other races or multiracial.⁸

Trends. The percentage of Black children in care on September 30 decreased between FY 2000 and FY 2010, while there were increases in the percentages of White children, Hispanic children, and children of other races/multiracial (see Exhibit 6).

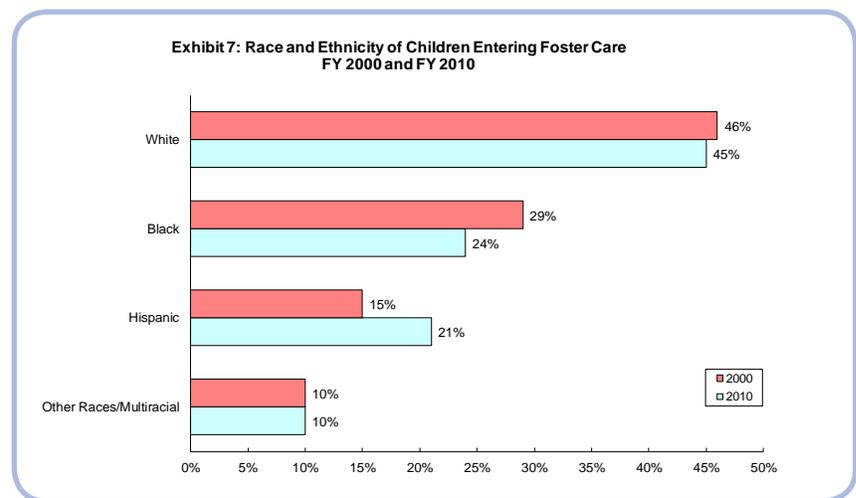


⁸ "Other races or multiracial" includes Alaska Native/American Indian, Asian, Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, two or more races, or unknown/unable to determine. Totals may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

Entries. Of the estimated 254,375 children who entered foster care during FY 2010:

- 45 percent were White.
- 24 percent were Black.
- 21 percent were Hispanic.
- 10 percent were other races or multiracial.

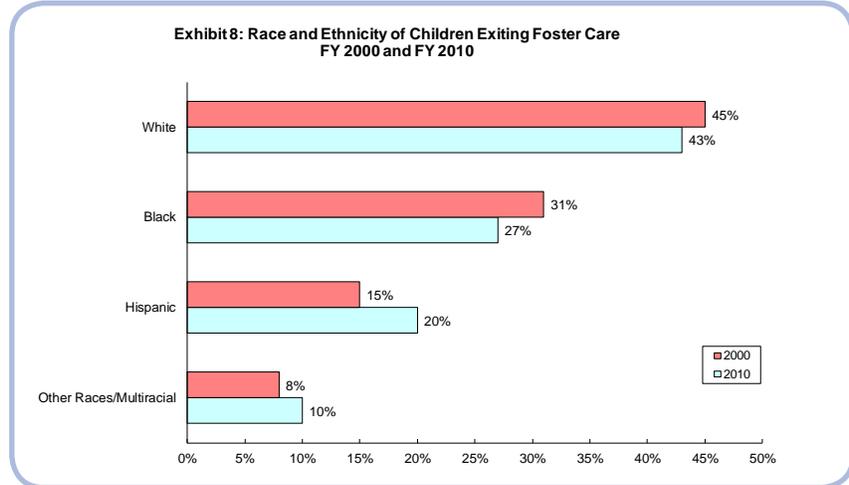
Trends. From FY 2000 to FY 2010, the percentages of Black children entering foster care decreased, while the percentage of Hispanic children increased (see Exhibit 7).



Exits. Of the estimated 254,114 children who exited foster care during FY 2010:

- 43 percent were White.
- 27 percent were Black.
- 20 percent were Hispanic.
- 10 percent were other races or multiracial.

Trends. From FY 2000 to FY 2010, the percentages of White and Black children exiting foster care decreased, while the percentages of Hispanic children and children of other races/multiracial increased (see Exhibit 8).



Gender

AFCARS numbers have consistently shown a slightly greater percentage of boys than girls in foster care.

- **Point in Time.** Of the estimated 408,425 children in foster care on September 30, 2010, 52 percent were male and 48 percent were female.
- **Trends.** The proportion of males to females in foster care on September 30, 2010, returned to the rate it was in FY 2000: 52 percent male/48 percent female.

Additional Information

For more detailed information on AFCARS, visit the Children's Bureau website:

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/systems/afcars/about.htm>

AFCARS Reports are available online: http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/index.htm#afcars

Some additional resources for information about children in the child welfare system include the following:

- To find out more about the safety, permanency, and well-being of children in foster care in your State, refer to *Child Welfare Outcomes*, an annual report published by the Children's Bureau. The most recent version of this report is available from the Children's Bureau website: http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/index.htm#cw

References

- To find out more about child maltreatment, including information about victims and perpetrators, read *Child Maltreatment*, an annual report based on States' reports to the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System. Access the report through the Children's Bureau website: http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/index.htm#can

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2006). *The AFCARS report: Final estimate for FY 1998 through FY 2002 (12)*. Retrieved from http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/afcars/tar/report12.htm

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2011). *The AFCARS report: Preliminary FY 2010 estimates as of June 2011 (18)*. Retrieved from http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/afcars/tar/report18.htm

Suggested Citation:

Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2012). *Foster care statistics 2010*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau.



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
Children's Bureau

