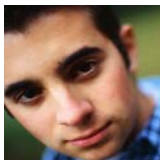


2010 Foster Care Annual Report



National Capital Region



Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments
Child Welfare Program

Executive Summary

Each year the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) queries the national capital region's child welfare systems to collect data, analyze findings, and discover trends occurring in the region's foster care systems. For more information about the findings, please call Kamilah Bunn, COG's Child Welfare Program Manager at 202-962-3264 or email, kbunn@mwcog.org.



A third of children in foster care were placed in foster homes within their jurisdiction of origin in 2010.

The number of children in foster care continues to decline.



The majority of children in foster care are African American.

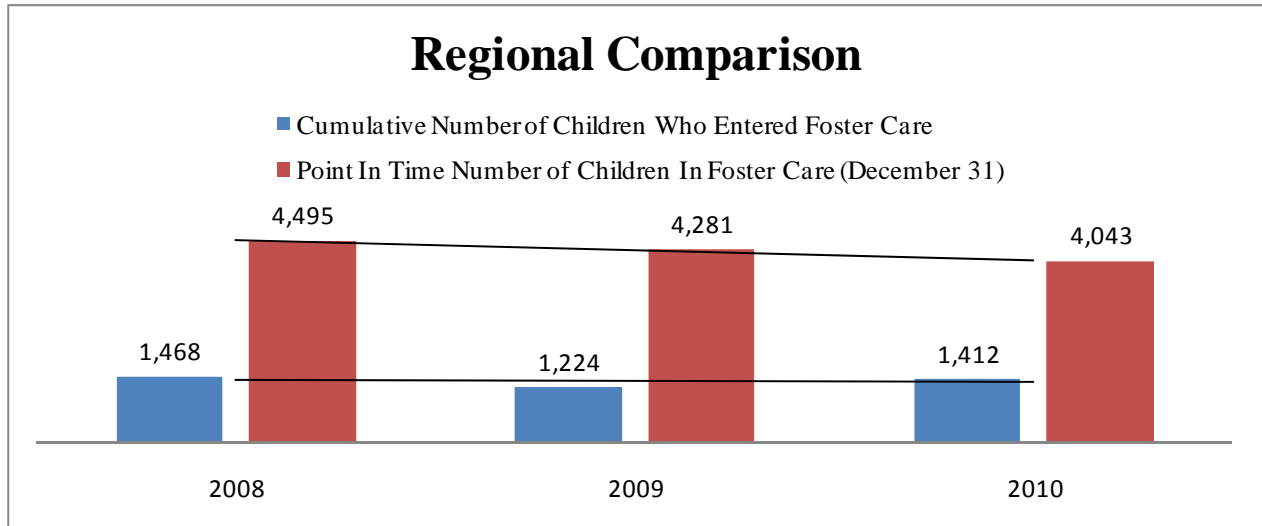
Almost a third more youth left the foster care system without permanency in 2010 compared to 2008.



Introduction



During 2010, 1,412 children entered foster care in the National Capital Region. As of December 31, 2010, there were 4,043 children in the region's foster care systems.



Due to the complexities of each family's situation, it is difficult to pinpoint the exact reason why each child entered the foster care system in 2010, or why there were several thousand children in foster care on the last day of that year. However, the region's child welfare systems report that children usually enter the foster care system due to one or more of the following factors:

- 1- abuse—such as: physical abuse or sexual abuse;
- 2- neglect — such as: unaccompanied minors, medical neglect, parental capacity issues;
- 3- abandonment — such as: voluntary release of custody, death of a parent or incarceration.



Children in Foster Care



The number of children in foster care in the National Capital Region has decreased by 10% since 2008. This decreasing trend is occurring across the U.S.

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (P.L. 110-351) has helped to bolster existing diversion tactics allowing children to safely stay in their homes of origin, rather than entering into foster care (see Successful Diversion– pg 5.)

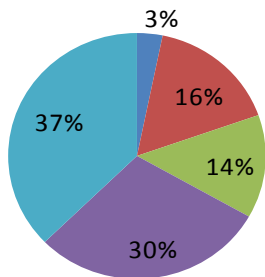
Although we have seen a reduction of children in foster care, the composition of children in care has not changed. Regionally, teenagers and children of color (Black/African American and Hispanic children) make up the majority of youth in foster care. Sixty-seven percent of foster youth are 11 years old or older, and there are three times as many children of color (African American or Hispanic) than Caucasian children in foster care in the region.

Children in foster care	2008	2009	2010
District of Columbia	2264	2103	2007
Frederick County	140	175	157
Montgomery County	575	546	516
Prince George's County	608	599	592
City of Alexandria	181	167	126
Arlington County	147	133	115
Fairfax County	394	370	337
Loudoun County	87	97	83
Prince William County	99	91	110
Total	4,495	4,281	4,043

Note: Count as of December 31

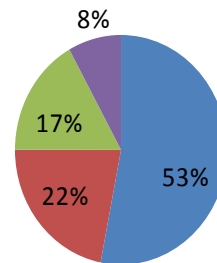
Children in Foster Care, By Age

■ under 1 year old
 ■ 1 - 5 years old
 ■ 6 - 10 years old
■ 11 - 15 years old
 ■ 16 and above



Children in Foster Care, By Race

■ Black/African American
 ■ Caucasian/Non-Hispanic
■ Hispanic
 ■ Other



Successful Diversion



The strain of the poor economy has caused undue stress on many already delicate families in our region. The stress these families experience is sometimes compounded by a legacy of unaddressed mental health issues, homelessness, and domestic violence. Certainly, more families are coming to the attention of social services needing interventions; however, these interventions need not disrupt the family unnecessarily. If the situation at home is deemed safe enough, children are able to remain in the home or with nearby relatives, while community services are put in place to stabilize their family. The consideration of linking families to community-based services as an intervention technique is referred to as differential response.

The stories below are representative of the work that is being done in the region to address the unique needs of families who require community interventions. The stories illustrate the creative problem solving and ingenuity employed by social workers to stabilize families and divert children from having to enter the foster care system.

“A 14 year-old African American female who lives with her mother and stepfather had been skipping school and not taking her medication. By convening a meeting with the family, myself, my supervisor, the social workers at school and the school psychiatrist, we worked with the family, which had almost given up on continuing to care for their daughter because they felt like they had lost control of her. Through this collective meeting, we were able to identify some of her strengths such as: her love of basketball, doing hair and computers. A plan was developed which addressed the concerns the parents had and follow-up responsibilities were shared among the parents and social workers. Follow-up meetings continue and have been very favorable; the family is benefiting from the services and remains intact.”

-Social Worker

“A family that came to my attention had resorted to living in their van after their house had become unlivable due to the mother’s issue with hoarding. The living situation caused health problems for the mother, father, and their two children. The children also had recurring issues with head lice and the father developed a blood disease due to an infection. Besides the physical problems, there were no other issues occurring among members of the family. I worked with the family to devise a nine month plan to help them restore order. Within nine months of the plan implementation, the family was able to clean the home, the mother engaged in mental health treatment, the father and children were provided proper health care treatment, resulting in the improvement of the family’s overall health. Currently, one year after implementation, this family continues to excel and thrive.”

- Social Worker



Placement Settings

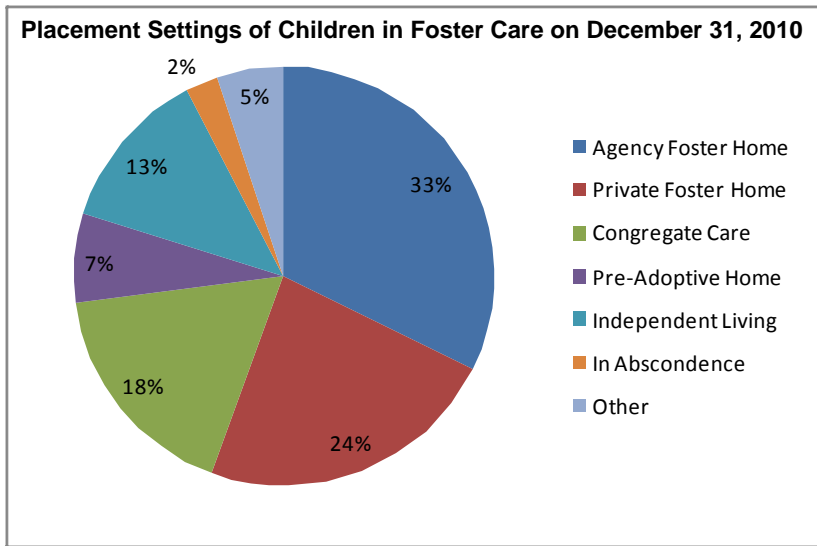


Jurisdictions have taken great strides to ensure that the children who must enter foster care maintain some semblance of a normal life. Maryland jurisdictions in our region institute “Place Matters,” a state-wide initiative to ensure foster children are placed within their jurisdiction of origin, whenever possible. By keeping children in their communities of origin, children maintain positive connections from home, such as: their school, church, and kin, i.e. adult siblings, aunts, uncles and grandparents. Through the Fostering Connections Act, jurisdictions, like Montgomery County, subsidize bus transportation so children can continue to attend their school of origin regardless of where they are placed.

When it is deemed necessary, foster children are placed outside of their jurisdiction of origin. Typically this occurs when:

- 1- a foster child’s level of special needs warrants a more restrictive or therapeutic placement setting.
- 2- a foster child has an appropriate relative placement outside of the jurisdiction of origin.
- 3- there is a shortage of qualified resource homes (i.e. foster homes) within the jurisdiction of origin.

Where are youth placed on December 31, 2010		
Jurisdiction	Inside Jurisdiction	Outside Jurisdiction
District of Columbia	39%	61%
Frederick County	62%	38%
Montgomery County	75%	25%
Prince George's County	75%	25%
City of Alexandria	14%	87% ⁺
Arlington County	38%	62%
Fairfax County	25%	75%
Loudoun County	43%	57%
Prince William County	77%	23%



On December 31, 2010, a third of all foster children in our region were placed in an Agency Foster Home—these are resource homes within the jurisdiction of origin. Twenty-four percent of foster children were placed in Private Foster Homes — these are privately contracted resource homes often outside the jurisdiction of origin with providers who are especially trained to care for foster children with special needs. Eighteen percent of foster children were placed in congregate care settings — these are residential placements, institutions or group homes.

⁺ City of Alexandria’s percentage exceeds 100% due to rounding.

Resource Home Recruitment



Children who enter the foster care system need a place to stay. Our region’s resource parent recruiters educate the public about the importance of opening their home and taking loving care of a foster child from their county or city. Jurisdictions in our region understand that the more resource homes they have, the more likely children will be placed within their jurisdictions of origin. Sometimes, resource homes become the final safety net for the foster child they were caring for. In fact, on average about two thirds of the adoptions in 2010 were by resource home providers who were initially fostering the child.⁺

Several tactics are employed by our region’s recruiters to attract more resource homes within their jurisdictions:

- Presentations and outreach at community events and to faith-based communities
- Features on Wednesday’s Child, coordinated by COG
- Neighborhood specific advertising and outreach
- Focus groups and events specifically to attract families for teenagers
- Outreach tables at large events: Black Family Reunion, Health Expos and The Adoption Expo
- Articles and announcement about successful resource parents in local publications
- Social media outreach, coordinated by COG
- Lunch and Learns at Federal Offices, coordinated through COG
- Encouraging word of mouth/referrals by existing resource parents
- Child-specific recruitment through heart galleries.

On the last day of the year, there were 1,383 approved resource homes in our region. During 2010 recruiters attracted 1,070 new home providers to attend an orientation/information meeting at the agency. Although diligent efforts were made, a shortage of resource homes remains, especially for teens, large sibling groups, and children with special medical needs.

Recruited Resource Homes (As of December 31st)	
Jurisdiction	Number
District of Columbia	231
Frederick County	59
Montgomery County	153
Prince George's County	155
City of Alexandria	61
Arlington County	58
Fairfax County	235
Loudoun County	90
Prince William County	28
Total	1070

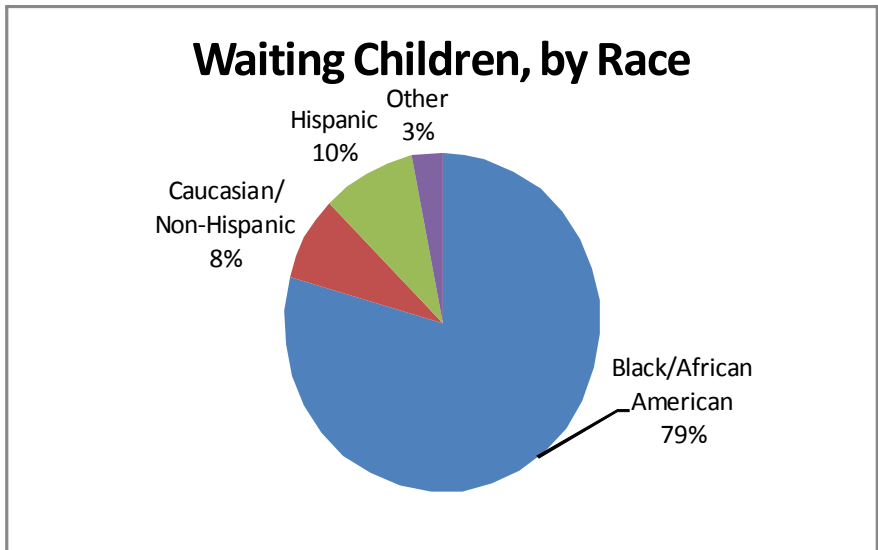
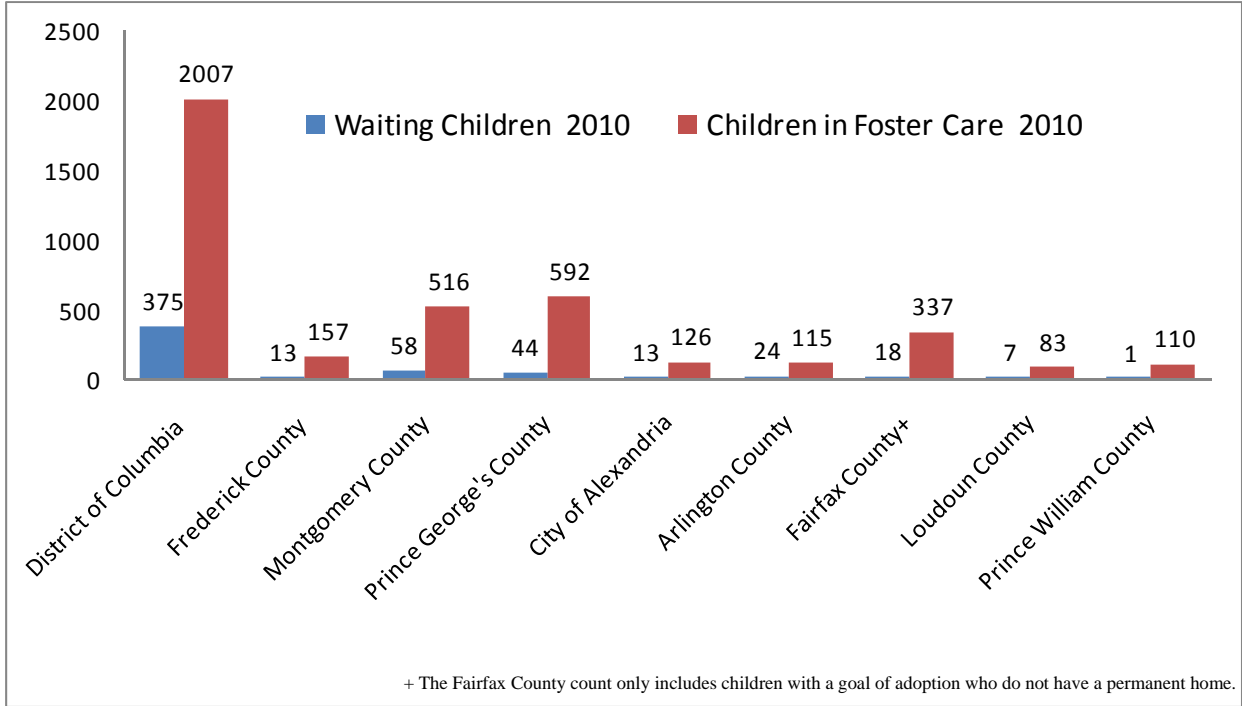
Approved Resource Homes (As of December 31st)	
Jurisdiction	Number
District of Columbia	359
Frederick County	93
Montgomery County	301
Prince George's County	154
City of Alexandria	76
Arlington County	43
Fairfax County	208
Loudoun County	69
Prince William County	80
Total	1383

⁺ eight of the nine jurisdictions in our region reported. This average computation excludes data from Prince William County.

Waiting Children



In our region, the Freddie Mac Foundation Wednesday's Child program brings the stories of area waiting children into focus three times a week on NBC4 news. Children who are featured on Wednesday's Child tend to be teenagers, large sibling groups or children with special medical needs. A total of 553 children were waiting to be adopted in our region on December 31, 2010- a 20% reduction as compared to 2008. The District of Columbia continues to have the largest number of waiting children in the region. Sixty-five percent of the waiting children in region are District of Columbia children.



According to the 2010 US Census, 27% of the metropolitan area's population were Black/African American, yet 53% of the foster care population in 2010 were Black/African American. Furthermore, Black/African American youth make up 79% of the waiting children population. Hence, there is an overrepresentation of African American youth in foster care in our region.

Permanency



By definition, foster care is temporary. Therefore, once a child enters the system, the immediate and consistent goal is to identify and arrange a permanent placement setting for the child.

Permanency planning is a priority at all stages of a child’s stay in foster care. Reunification or guardianship with a relative, and adoption are all considered to be permanency plans. Jurisdictions in the National Capital Region implement concurrent planning to ensure permanency remains a priority, and is constantly being considered.

Jurisdiction	Reunified	Adopted	Permanency Achieved	Permanency Unachieved (Emancipation)
District of Columbia	430	114	544	249
Frederick County	65	13	78	4
Montgomery County	94	31	125	37
Prince George's County	104	28	132	45
City of Alexandria	25	35	60	17
Arlington County	24	6	30	0
Fairfax County	84	35	119	39
Loudoun County	21	21	42	4
Prince William County	59	8	67	10
Regional Totals	906	291	1197	405

Although efforts are made to ensure youth receive permanency before they exit foster care, youth may decide at the age of 10 years old in Maryland, and at the age 14 years old in Virginia and the District of Columbia that they do not wish to pursue adoption nor guardianship. When this occurs, the youth may have a plan called Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA). While children are able to make this decision, it is incumbent upon the case worker to concurrently work towards permanency and life-long connections. In the case when a child does not achieve permanency, the child may emancipate or “age out” of the system at the age of 18, even though they are encouraged to stay in the system until they reach age of 21. While youth are in foster care, efforts are made to prepare youth for independence, especially once they reach the age of 16.

Youth emancipation is trending upward in our region and across the country. According to the Jim Casey Initiative, more than 230,000 young people have aged out of foster care across the country since 1999, ranging from 19,000 young people in 1999 to nearly 30,000 in 2008. In our region, 405 youth emancipated from the foster care system without a legal permanent family during 2010. This is a 14% increase from those who exited the system without permanency in 2009, and a 27% increase compared to 2008.

Without legal parents, youth sometimes have trouble navigating through the next phase of life on their own. Aging out of foster care can adversely impact a young person’s quality of life leading to homelessness, incarceration and unplanned pregnancies. Foster children, especially those who leave the system without legal parents, should receive, and desperately need, added support. After-all, the age-out population are the same children who were young victims and needed protection them from their abusive or neglectful parents; now they need all of our support to make it through life on their own.



**Metropolitan Washington
Council of Governments**