



Foster Care Statistics 2009

This factsheet provides the most recent national statistical estimates for children and youth in foster care from fiscal year (FY) 2009 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, 2009, there were an estimated 423,773 children in foster care. (See Exhibit 1.)
- Almost a quarter (24 percent) were in relative homes, and nearly half (48 percent) were in nonrelative foster family homes. (See Exhibit 2.)
- Almost half (49 percent) had a case goal of reunification with their families.
- The majority of children left the system to be reunited with their parents or primary caretakers (51 percent) (See Exhibit 3.)
- Close to half of the children (46 percent) who left foster care in FY 2009 were in care for less than 1 year. (See Exhibit 4.)



Introduction

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 FY 2009 were current on September 30, 2009, and are from *The AFCARS Report: Preliminary FY 2009 Estimates as of July 2010 (17)* (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). The data presented for FY 2000 are from *The AFCARS Report: Final Estimate for FY 1998 Through FY 2002 (12)* (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 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 fiscal year.
- **Entries** refer to information about children entering foster care during a given timeframe: October 1 through September 30 of the Federal fiscal year.
- **Exits** refer to information about children exiting foster care during a given timeframe: October 1 through September 30 of the Federal fiscal year.

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.

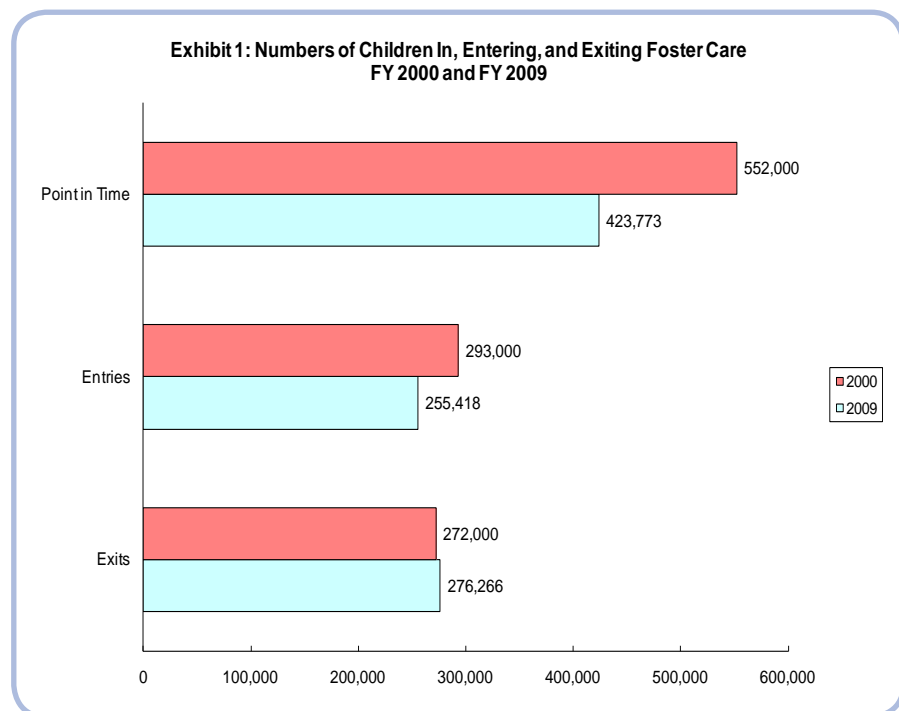
¹ Title 45, Volume 4, Part 1355, Section 57. The CFR citation can be accessed online: <http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/get-cfr.cgi?YEAR=1996&TITLE=45&PART=1355&SECTION=57&SUBPART=&TYPE=TEXT>.

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 2009.

- **Point in Time.** On September 30, 2009, there were an estimated 423,773 children in foster care.
- **Entries.** During FY 2009, 255,418 children entered foster care.
- **Exits.** During FY 2009, 276,266 children exited foster care.
- **Trends.** From FY 2000 to FY 2009, both the number of children in care on September 30 and entries into foster care decreased, while exits from foster care increased. (See Exhibit 1.)



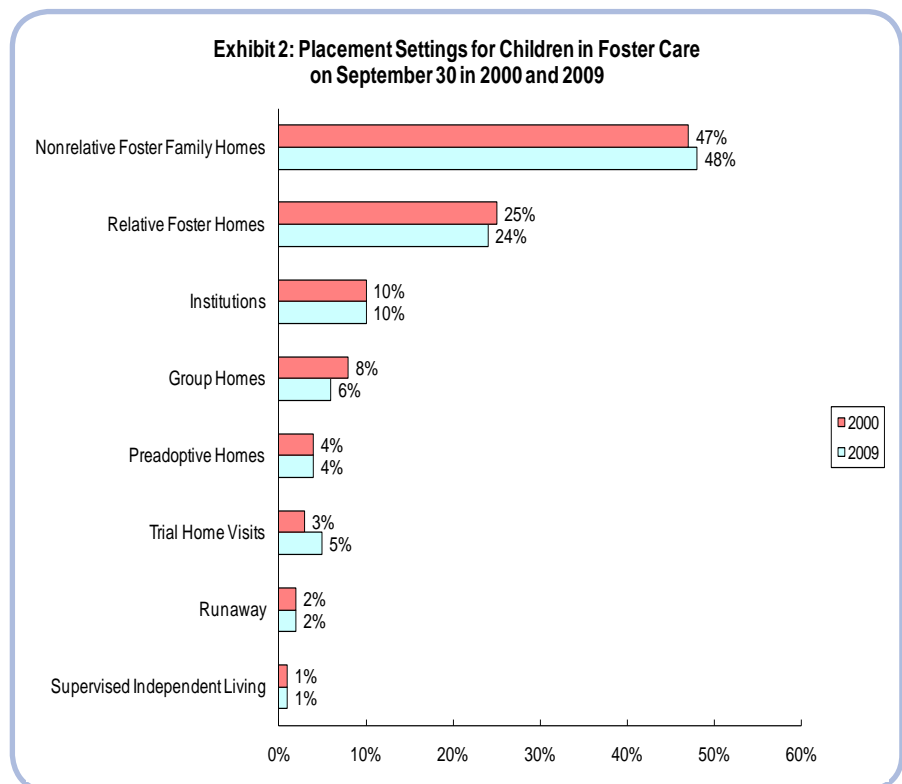
Placement Settings

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 423,773 children in foster care on September 30, 2009, were in the following types of placements:

- 48 percent in nonrelative foster family homes
- 24 percent in relative foster homes
- 10 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, are considered a discharge from foster care after 6 months.)
- 4 percent in preadoptive homes
- 2 percent had run away
- 1 percent in supervised independent living

Trends. Placement type on September 30 remained relatively unchanged between FY 2000 and FY 2009. (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 423,773 children in foster care on September 30, 2009:

- 49 percent had a goal of reunification with parent(s) or principal caretaker(s)
- 25 percent had a goal of adoption
- 8 percent had a goal of long-term foster care
- 6 percent had a goal of emancipation⁴
- 4 percent had a goal of living with other relative(s)
- 4 percent had a goal of guardianship
- 4 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 are somewhat reflective of the percentages for the permanency goals (see above), especially for reunification and adoption.

Exits. Of the estimated 276,266 children who exited foster care during FY 2009:

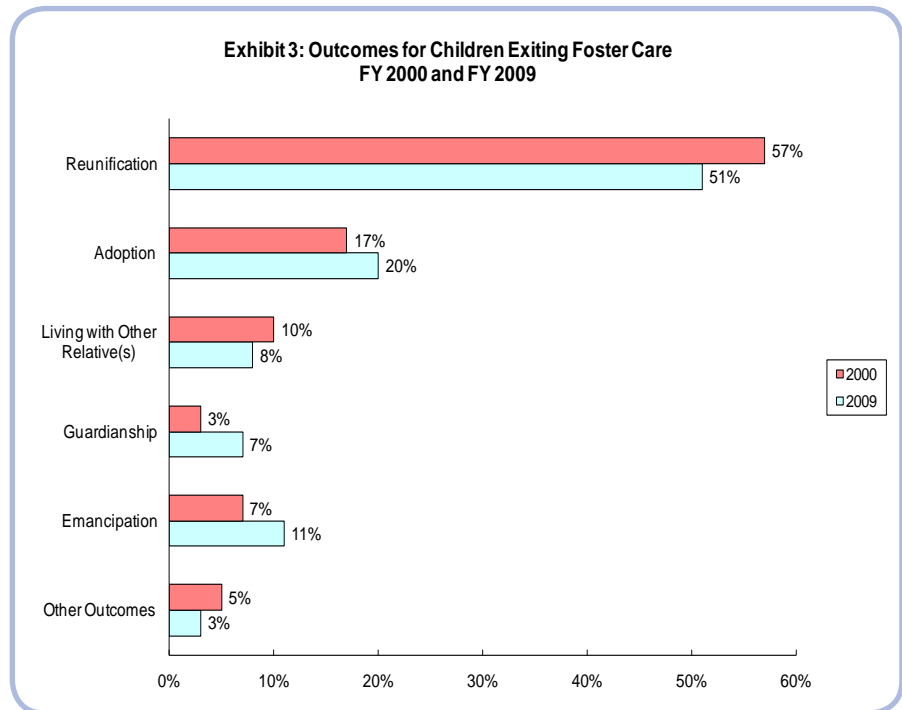
- 51 percent were reunited with parent(s) or primary caretaker(s)
- 20 percent were adopted
- 11 percent were emancipated
- 8 percent went to live with another relative
- 7 percent went to live with a guardian

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: Summary of State Laws*: 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.

- 3 percent had other outcomes⁵

Trends. From FY 2000 to FY 2009, there were increases in the percentage 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 caretakers 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.

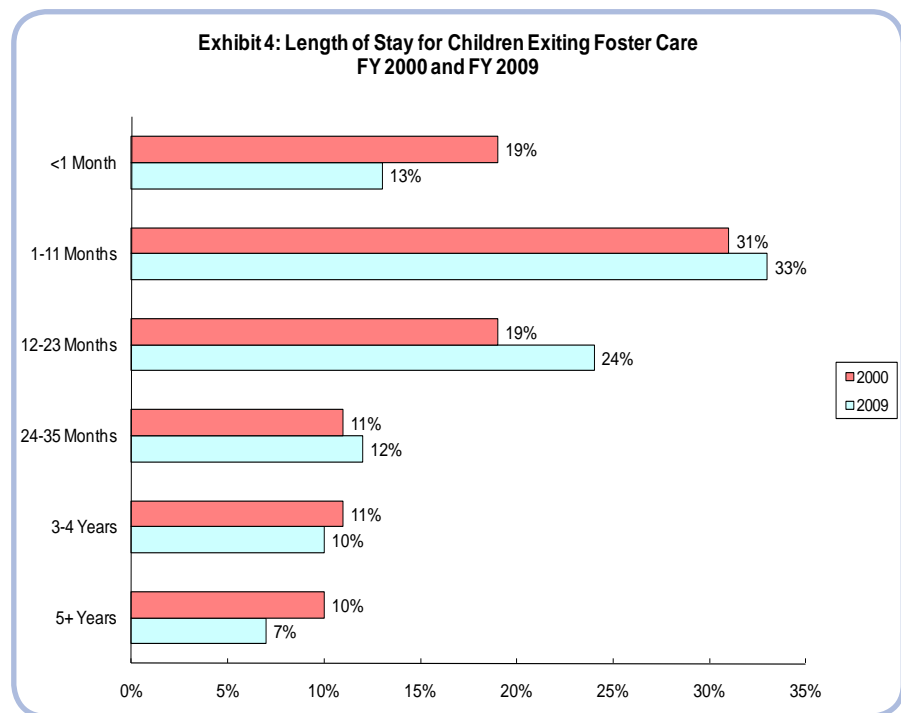
Exits. Of the estimated 276,266 children who exited foster care during FY 2009, the median amount of time spent in care was 13.7 months, with:

- 13 percent in care less than 1 month
- 33 percent in care for 1 to 11 months
- 24 percent in care for 12 to 23 months

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

- 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

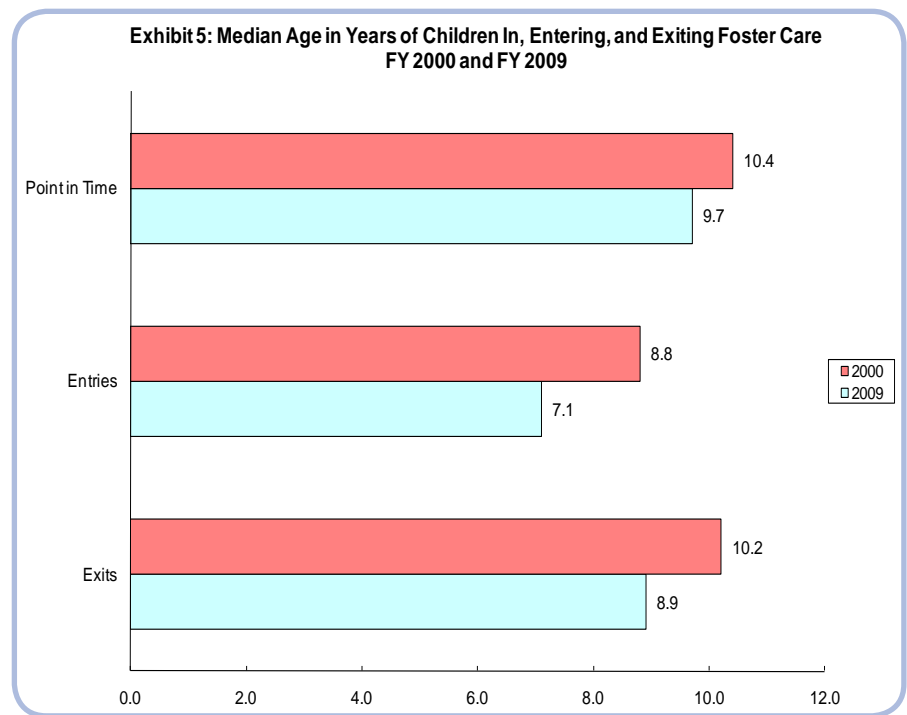
Trends. For children exiting foster care, the median amount of time spent in care increased from FY 2000 (12.0 months) to FY 2009 (13.7 months). Additionally, when comparing those two periods, the number of children in foster care for less than 1 month and the number of children in care for 5 years or more both decreased, while the number of children in foster care for 12 to 23 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, 2009, was 9.7 years.⁷
- **Entries.** The median age of children entering foster care during FY 2009 was 7.1 years.
- **Exits.** The median age of children exiting foster care during FY 2009 was 8.9 years.
- **Trends.** From FY 2000 to FY 2009, the median age decreased for each of the three timeframes. (See Exhibit 5.)



Race and Ethnicity

AFCARS tracks children’s race or ethnicity. Using U.S. Census Bureau standards, children of Hispanic origin may be of any

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 aged 18-21, with certain stipulations. For more information, see Information Gateway’s web section on Major Federal Legislation: www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/federal/index.cfm?event=federalLegislation.viewLegis&id=121

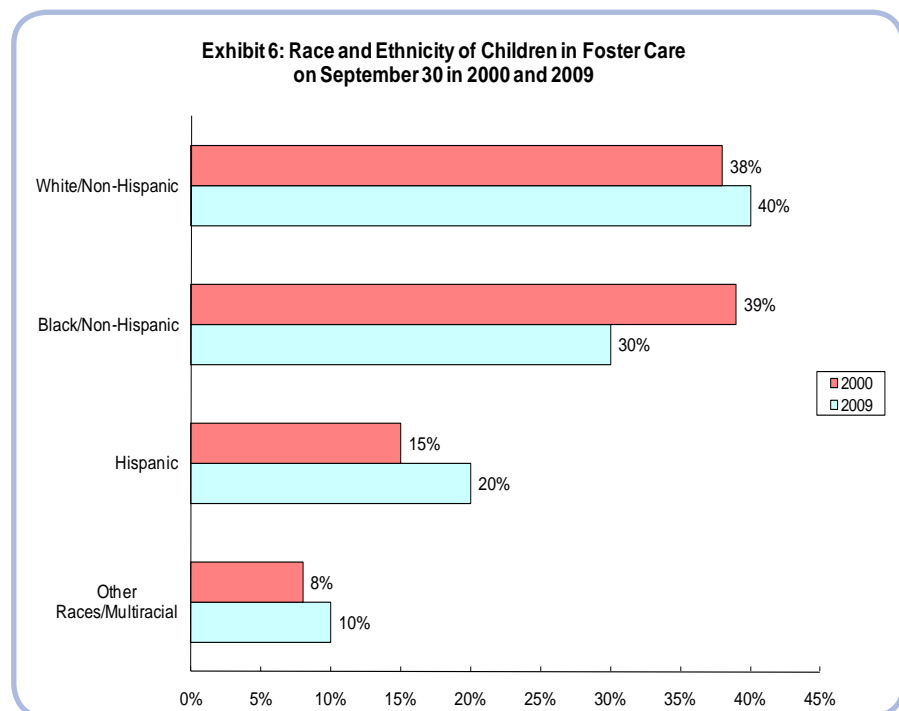
⁷ The median refers to the number in the middle when all numbers are placed in order. In this case, it means that an equal number of children are older and younger than this age.

race. Beginning in FY 2000, children could be identified with more than one race designation.

Point in Time. Of the estimated 423,773 children in foster care on September 30, 2009:

- 40 percent were White/Non-Hispanic
- 30 percent were Black/Non-Hispanic
- 20 percent were Hispanic
- 10 percent were other races or multiracial⁸

Trends. The percentage of Black/Non-Hispanic children in care on September 30 decreased between FY 2000 and FY 2009, while there were increases in the percentage of both White/Non-Hispanic children and Hispanic children. (See Exhibit 6.)



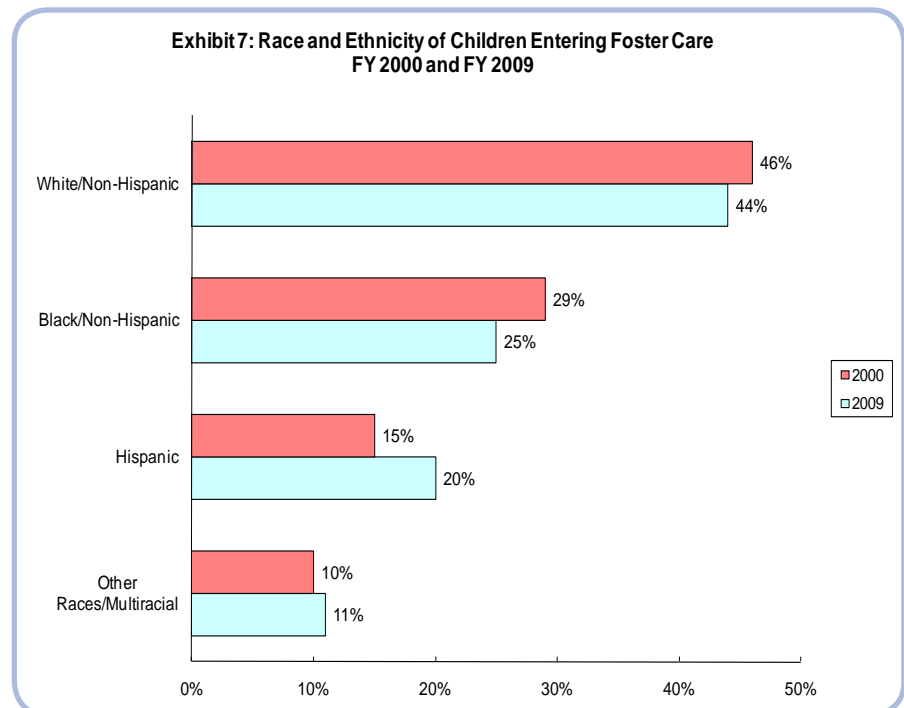
Entries. Of the estimated 255,418 children who entered foster care during FY 2009:

- 44 percent were White/Non-Hispanic

⁸ Other races or multiracial includes Alaska Native/American Indian, Asian, Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, two or more races, or unknown/unable to determine.

- 25 percent were Black/Non-Hispanic
- 20 percent were Hispanic
- 11 percent were other races or multiracial

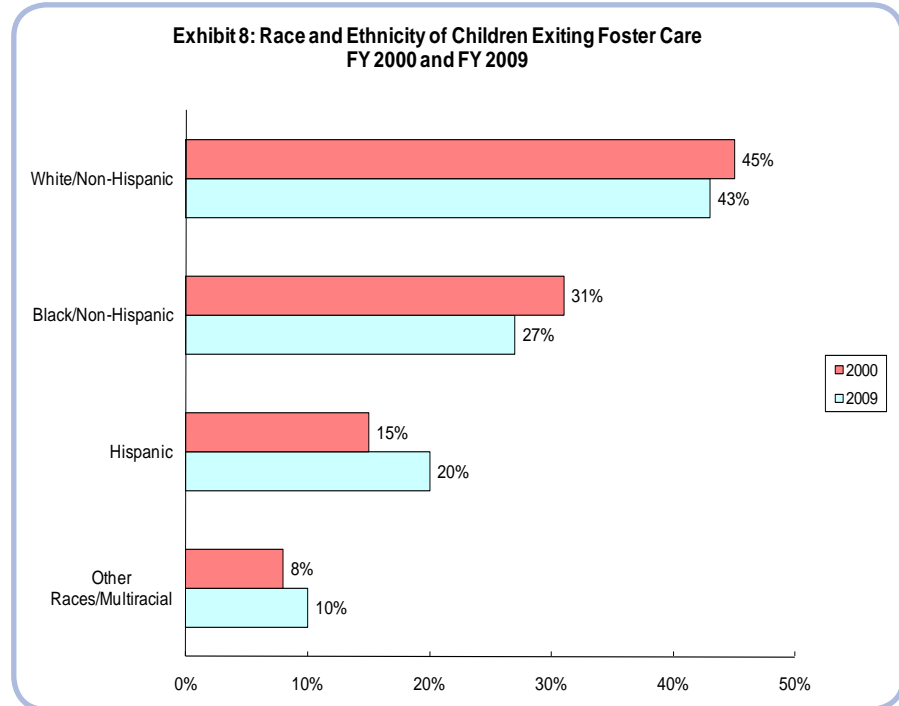
Trends. From FY 2000 to FY 2009, the percentages of White/Non-Hispanic and Black/Non-Hispanic children entering foster care decreased, while the percentage of Hispanic children increased over this period. (See Exhibit 7.)



Exits. Of the estimated 276,266 children who exited foster care during FY 2009:

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

Trends. From FY 2000 to FY 2009, the percentages of White/Non-Hispanic and Black/Non-Hispanic children exiting foster care decreased, while the percentage of Hispanic children increased over this period. (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 423,773 children in foster care on September 30, 2009, 53 percent were male and 47 percent were female.
- **Trends.** The proportion of males to females in foster care on September 30 changed from 52 percent male/48 percent female in FY 2000 to 53 percent male/47 percent female in FY 2009.

Additional Information

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

www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/systems/afcars/about.htm

AFCARS Reports are available online:

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 online from the Children's Bureau:
www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/index.htm#cw
- 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:
www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/index.htm#can

References

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2006). *The AFCARS Report: Final Estimate for FY 1998 Through FY 2002 (12)*. Retrieved October 12, 2010, from www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/afcars/tar/report12.htm

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2010). *The AFCARS Report: Preliminary FY 2009 Estimates as of July 2010 (17)*. Retrieved October 12, 2010 from www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/afcars/tar/report17.htm

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