

Foster care: Temporary out-of-home care for children

Children who cannot safely remain in their homes may be placed temporarily in family foster care or a group residential facility. In Minnesota, approximately 10,475 children and youth experienced out-of-home care during 2023. On an average day, there were approximately 6,150 children and youth in out-of-home care, based on preliminary 2023 data.

Children enter foster care for a variety of reasons

During 2023, approximately 4,225 children and youth entered out-of-home placement. The most common reasons for removal from their homes were:

- Caretaker drug abuse (27%)
- Allegations of neglect (14%)
- Allegations of physical abuse (11%)
- Child mental health (9%); these were largely voluntary placements for children 12 years and older.

Placement options available for children

As part of an effort to preserve family connections while children are in foster care, 63% of those in family foster care on any given day were placed with relatives in 2023. Removing children from people they love and environments that are familiar to them can be traumatizing. When children must leave their homes, placement with relatives is considered first. Whenever possible, children are placed in their community and continue to attend their home school. Children may be placed in:

- Emergency foster care when removed from their homes by law enforcement. This immediate care may be provided through emergency relative placement, a nonrelative foster home, or a shelter facility.
- Foster homes licensed by county, Tribal or private agencies. Family foster homes, including relatives working to become licensed, offer a temporary substitute home until children can be safely reunified with their families.
- Programs in home settings where supportive services are provided by staff.
- Residential programs that offer intensive treatment for children with serious mental health and behavioral needs, often as a result of trauma.
- Permanent homes, preferably with a relative, through adoption or transfer of permanent legal and physical custody when reunification is not possible.

Family foster homes are urgently needed

Many Tribal Nations, counties, and private agencies have a shortage of family foster homes and are urgently seeking additional families to be licensed to care for Minnesota's children. Specific needs vary by agency, but in general, there is a particular need for homes:

- Able to keep sibling groups together
- Interested in caring for youth ages 14-21, who make up more than one-quarter of children in foster care
- With expertise in or willing to learn to support children with trauma and other mental health needs
- Able to meet the needs of youth in terms of culture, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and family languages spoken
- Reflective of the ethnic and racial diversity of children in foster care, who in 2023 were:
 - 39% white
 - 26% two or more races
 - 19% American Indian/Alaska Native
 - 14% African American/Black
 - 2% Asian/Pacific Islander
 - 10% Hispanic/Latino ethnicity, of any race
 - From homes that speak a variety of languages. English, Spanish, Somali and Hmong are the most frequently listed primary languages.
- Supportive of LGBTQ2S+ youth
- Able to mentor minor parents and support them in caring for their children.

Foster families provide critical temporary care and nurturing to children in crisis. They come from all walks of life and may be single, married, partnered, with or without children, renters or homeowners. Foster parents play a role in recognizing the trauma children may have experienced and help give them the structure, nurturing and stability they need.

The Minnesota Department of Human Services website outlines the [steps to becoming a foster parent](#). Those interested can contact their Tribal or county social service agency, or a private agency, for more information about their needs for homes.

Supports available to meet children's needs

Foster parents receive initial training prior to placement and ongoing training while licensed to help prepare them to meet the needs of children in their care.

All foster parents receive the same supports, including foster care maintenance payments and other services to help meet the needs of children in their care. Agency staff arranges for Medical Assistance or other coverage for medical, dental, mental health and vision care for children in foster care. If a child in foster care needs additional services, agency staff help determine options and eligibility for services.

The Minnesota Department of Human Services provides funding for training and support services statewide. For more information, visit [Foster Adopt Minnesota](#) and refer to [Permanency support services for adoptive, foster and kinship families DHS-4925 \(PDF\)](#).

Most children reunited with parents or achieve permanency with relatives

For children who left out-of-home placement during 2023:

- 55% resided with a parent or legal guardian
 - 51% were reunited with their parent or guardian from whom they were removed
 - 5% resided with a parent who was not the caregiver from whom they were removed
- 27% achieved permanency living with relatives
 - 14% through transfer of permanent legal and physical custody
 - 10% through adoption or Tribal customary adoption
 - 3% were living with other relatives
- 8% achieved permanency through adoption or Tribal customary adoption with unrelated individuals
- 8% reached the age of majority
- The remaining children left foster care for reasons such as transfer to another agency (1%), running away from placement (1%) and death (0.1%).

Disproportionality in Minnesota's foster care system

Younger children, children from rural counties, and children of color and American Indian descent are disproportionality represented in the foster care system. Of the children in foster care during 2023:

- Approximately 65% were living in Greater Minnesota (outside the seven-county metro area)
- Approximately 22% were under 3 years old
- American Indian children were approximately 16 times more likely than their white counterparts to experience out-of-home care; those of two or more races were eight times more likely; Black children were approximately twice as likely; and Hispanic/Latino children were twice as likely.

Resources

Below is a list of available resources.

- [Foster Adopt Minnesota Fostering Network webpage](#)
- The department's [Foster care webpage](#)
- The department's [Child welfare data dashboard webpage](#)



For accessible formats of this information or assistance with additional equal access to human services, write to dhs.info@state.mn.us, call 651-431-4671, or use your preferred relay service. ADA1 (2-18)