

Serving Older Youth in Foster Care

Georgia State Profile

BY JERARD BROWN

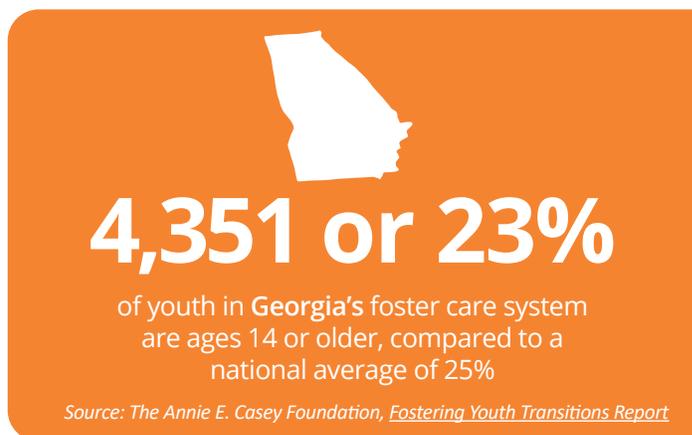
According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation's [Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative](#), 20% of children exiting foster care will become homeless when they turn 18 and only half will attain gainful employment before age 24. Of females who age out of foster care, 71% will become pregnant before age 21. These statistics highlight the significant challenges many older youth face as they transition out of foster care. States have developed strategies to address these challenges, and NCSL has compiled a [50-state data map](#) that looks at eight policy areas related to older youth in foster care. Below is a summary of strategies Georgia has adopted to better serve older youth in care, as well as additional strategies other states have implemented.

Foster Care in Georgia

More than 4,300 Georgia youth in foster care were over the age of 14 in 2018, accounting for 23% of the state's foster care population. The [Special Council on Criminal Justice Reform for Georgians](#) released a report in 2012 that recommended the state focus its use of out-of-home facilities on "higher-risk youth" and reallocate those resources to evidence-based programs that reduce youth recidivism rates. The Georgia General Assembly passed [HB 242](#) based on the special council's recommendations in 2013. Georgia's [Child Welfare Reform Council](#) was formed in 2014 by the governor and aimed to improve the state's outcomes related to child safety, permanency and overall well-being. The child welfare council's [final report](#) in 2016 made 41 recommendations in the areas of caseworker supports, foster family recruitment and retention, and children's mental health. The [State of Georgia 2019 Annual Progress and Services Report](#) describes the efforts taken in Georgia on at least eight of these recommendations.

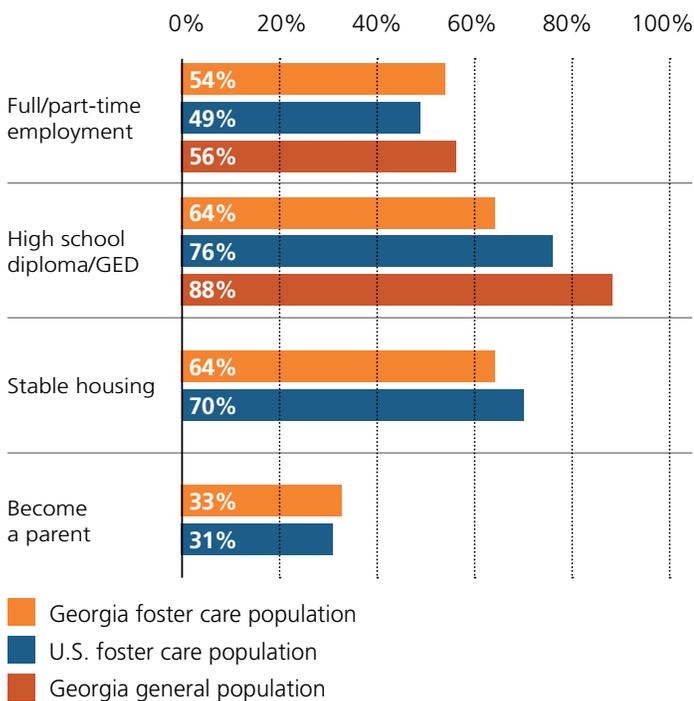
YOUTH INVOLVED WITH THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM

Crossover youth are [defined](#) as youth who were maltreated and involved with the juvenile justice system at some point. According to



Young Adult Outcomes by Age 21

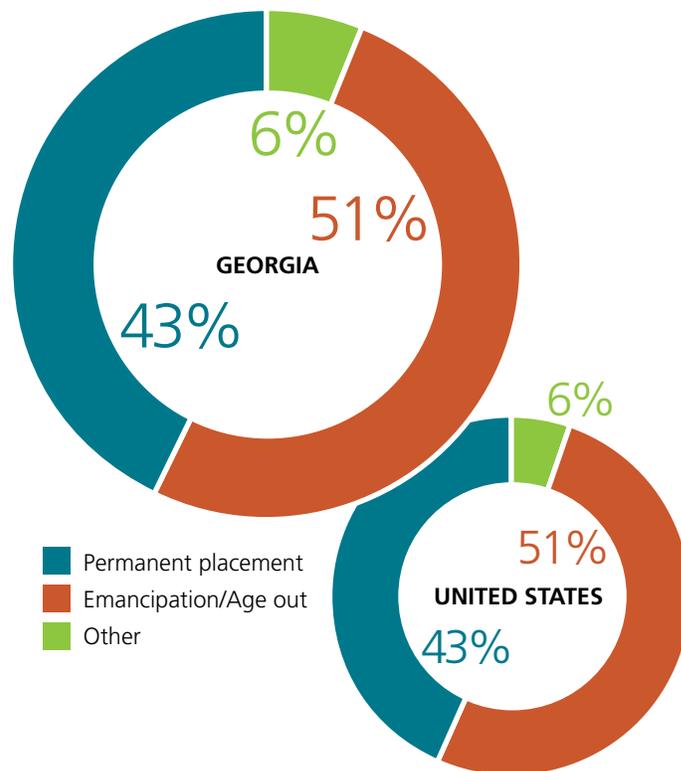
Young adults who experience foster care tend to have worse outcomes than their peers in the general population across a variety of measures.



Source: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Fostering Youth Transitions Report*

Casey Family Programs, youth who experience maltreatment are 47% more likely to become involved in delinquency than youth from the general population. Multiple Georgia statutes address youth involved with the foster care and juvenile justice system. According to Georgia statute, if a “child in need of services” is unable to be released to a parent, guardian or legal custodian, they are released to Georgia’s Division of Family and Children Services, which arranges a foster care placement. According to the [University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration](#), crossover youth face harsher court outcomes than the general population. Even when controlling for race, gender and offense, crossover youth are more likely to be removed from their homes or detained. Multisystem collaboration can help mitigate these challenges. As long as due process is observed, Georgia allows dependency proceedings to be consolidated with delinquency or “children in need of services” proceedings. Georgia’s [juvenile code](#) also requires courts and the Division of Family and Children Services to exchange nonconfidential information to coordinate assessment, treatment, intervention or rehabilitation services for foster care youth. In addition, [state law](#) prevents information ac-

Reasons for Leaving Foster Care



Source: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Fostering Youth Transitions Report*

quired from the division from being used against the youth in court during a juvenile court proceeding.

INCREASING PLACEMENT STABILITY

Georgia’s Child Welfare Reform Council sought to make increasing placement stability a priority throughout the state. Focusing on kinship care placements is a strategy used in other states to improve placement stability. A 2014 [review](#) of over 100 studies involving 600,000 children concluded that “children in kinship foster care experience ... less placement disruption” than children in traditional placements with non-relatives. [Georgia’s courts](#) are required to first attempt to place youth with an adult relative or “fictive kin”—individuals known to a child as a relative but are not related by blood or marriage. The [Title IV-E Guardianship Assistance Program \(GAP\)](#) is available to all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and Native American tribes. Currently, 35 states, the District of Columbia and 11 tribes have been given final approval for the use of GAP. States are eligible to receive additional federal funds for their GAP programs.



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