

Serving Older Youth in Foster Care

New Mexico 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 New Mexico has adopted to better serve older youth in care, as well as additional strategies other states have implemented.

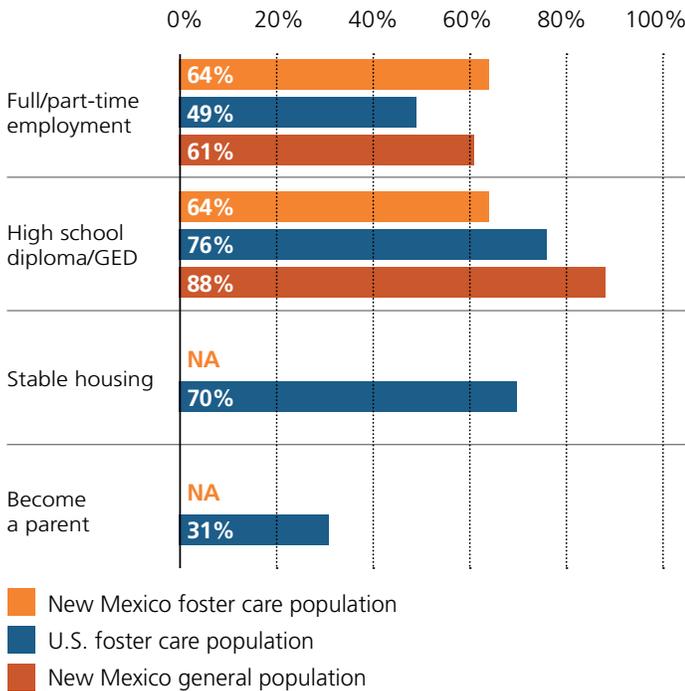
Foster Care in New Mexico

A [report](#) presented to New Mexico's Legislative Finance Committee in 2017 stated that nearly half the state's children's behavioral health funding was allocated to residential treatment centers and therapeutic foster care. This came after events starting in 2013 changed the mental health landscape in the state. [New Mexico launched a criminal investigation](#) into 15 of its largest mental health care providers. Two years later, [the investigation concluded with no findings of fraud](#). Due to the investigation, New Mexico froze all Medicaid payments to the 15 providers, and five Arizona providers were brought in to fill the void. In 2018, 13 children in state foster care, Disability Rights New Mexico and the Native American Disability Law Center filed a [class-action lawsuit](#) alleging the state's Children, Youth and Families Department was failing to adequately meet the needs of youth in foster care. The lawsuit is still pending resolution; however, in response, New Mexico's Children, Youth and Families Department pointed to an increase of foster parents and field workers to demonstrate they are addressing the problem. According to the National Center for Youth Law's [Foster Care Docket](#), at least 12 states are engaged in class-action lawsuits involving their child welfare system and an additional



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.



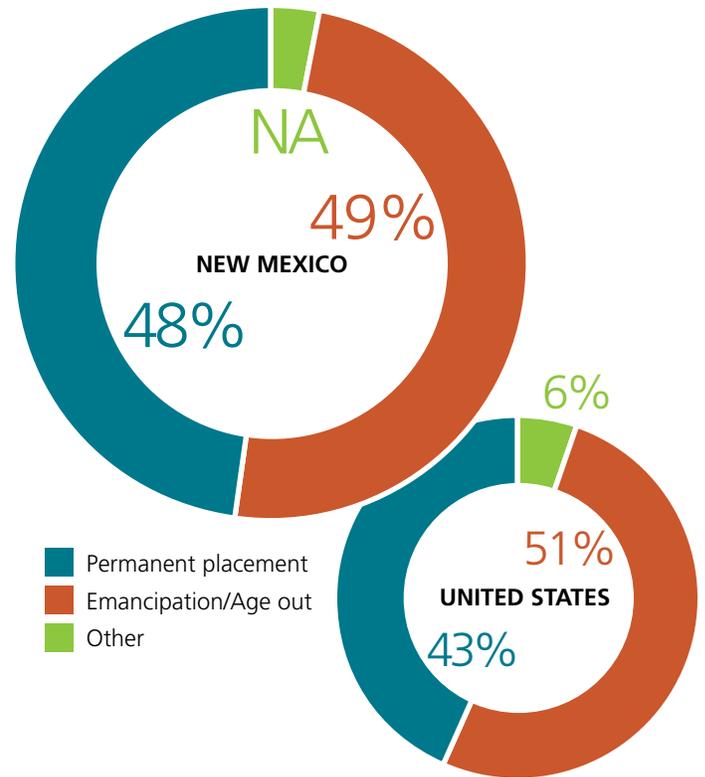
Source: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Fostering Youth Transitions Report*

seven jurisdictions are being monitored after reaching a settlement or agreement.

EXTENDING FOSTER CARE BEYOND AGE 18

In 2018, more than 650 New Mexico youth in foster care were over the age of 14, and only 12% of those youth were involved with employment programs or vocational training services. That's 11 percentage points below the national average. In 2019, New Mexico passed SB 23 to extend foster care to age 21 starting in 2020. This extension has the potential to raise the number of youth involved with housing, employment and other services. Child Trends examined national data, finding that youth in states that have extended foster care past age 18 generally have access to independent living services, such as housing assistance and financial management. They also experience better outcomes related to employment, high school diploma and GED completion, educational aid and homelessness.

Reasons for Leaving Foster Care



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

INCREASING PLACEMENT STABILITY

According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation, 60% of youth in foster care in New Mexico experienced three or more placements during their most recent involvement with the foster care system. A study from the University of Michigan found that emotional and behavioral issues in childhood are reduced with stable placements. According to numerous studies, including a review published by the Campbell Collaboration, guardianship assistance is a way some states provide financial assistance for kinship placements, which have been shown to increase placement stability. In addition, the federal Title IV-E Guardianship Assistance Program is available to all 50 states, Puerto Rico, the District of Columbia and Native American tribes. Currently 35 states, the District of Columbia and 11 tribes have received approval to use guardianship assistance. Children are eligible to receive the assistance after six months of residing with a licensed and approved legal guardian who is a relative.



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