

# Serving Older Youth in Foster Care

## South Carolina State Profile

BY JERARD BROWN

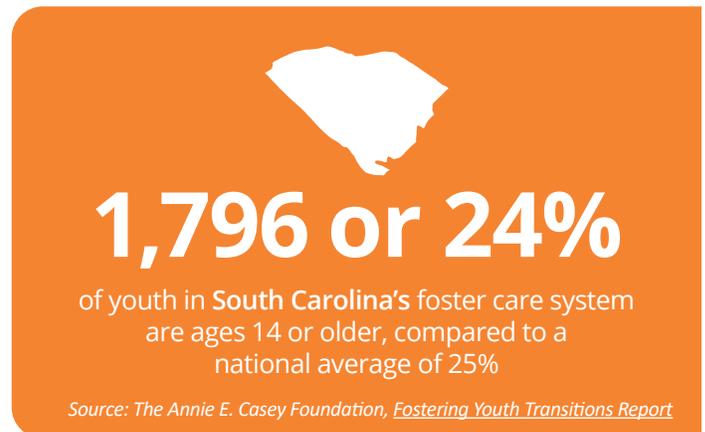
According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation's [Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative](#), 20% of children exiting foster care will become homeless when they turn 18 and only half will attain gainful employment before age 24. Of females who age out of foster care, 71% will become pregnant before age 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 South Carolina has adopted to better serve older youth in care, as well as additional strategies other states have implemented.

### Foster Care in South Carolina

Nearly 1,800 youth over the age of 14 were in foster care in South Carolina in 2018. According to the National Center for Youth Law's [Foster Care Docket](#), at least 12 states are engaged in a class-action lawsuit involving their child welfare system and an additional seven jurisdictions are being monitored after reaching a settlement or agreement. South Carolina is one of the jurisdictions being monitored as a result of the [Michelle H.](#) class-action lawsuit. As part of its final settlement agreement, South Carolina is required to improve the state child welfare system with a number of reforms. They include reducing child welfare caseworker caseloads, increasing the number of foster homes, improving placement stability, improving children's contact with family and siblings, and providing medical, dental and mental health treatment.

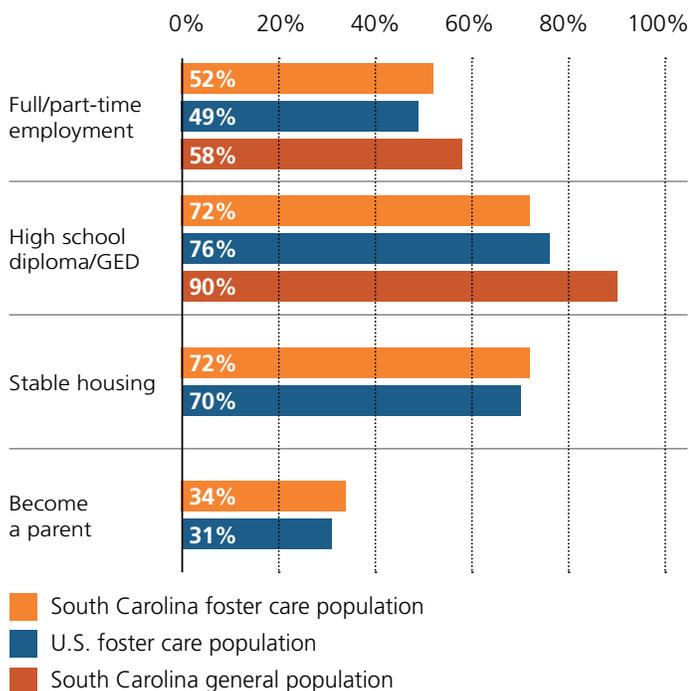
#### PROMOTING NORMALCY FOR YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

The Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act ([HR 4980](#)) became federal law in 2014. The law establishes the "reasonable and prudent parent standard," which, according to the



## 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.



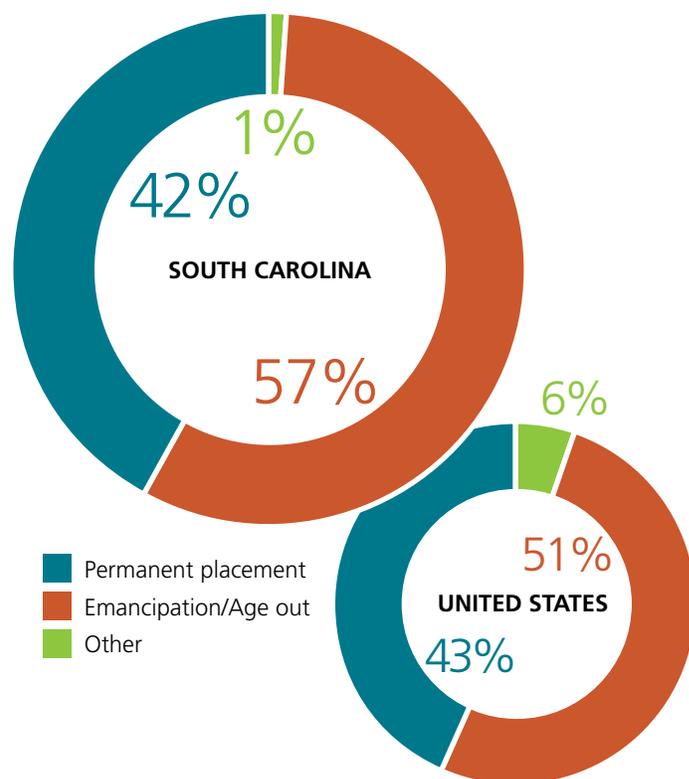
Source: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Fostering Youth Transitions Report*

Capacity Building Center for States, “allows foster parents and caregivers greater discretion in making decisions regarding the typical daily activities of the children and youth in their care.” It also promotes normalcy—allowing youth in foster care to experience the same opportunities as youth outside of the foster care system. This includes (but is not limited to) having a summer job, getting a driver’s license and participating in school activities. Research shows that supporting normalcy furthers healthy development and the well-being of youth in foster care. South Carolina statute requires the Department of Social Services to pursue “its best efforts to normalize the lives of children in foster care” and allows foster parents to sign driver’s license applications.

### EXTENDING FOSTER CARE BEYOND AGE 18

Twenty-eight states, the District of Columbia and nine Native American tribes have federally approved and reimbursable Title

## Reasons for Leaving Foster Care



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

IV-E extended foster care programs. These programs extend foster care up to age 21, providing the youth meet at least one of the following requirements: complete their secondary, postsecondary or vocational education, are employed for at least 80 hours a month, or are medically incapable of fulfilling any of the previous conditions. South Carolina’s Independent Living Program provides some supports to youth beyond age 18, but it is state-initiated and does not meet all requirements for full Title IV-E funding. 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.



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