

Serving Older Youth in Foster Care

North Carolina State Profile

BY JERARD BROWN

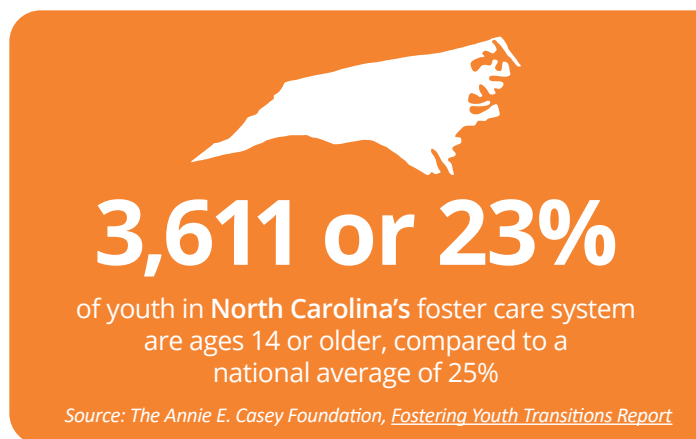
According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation's [Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative](#), 20% of children exiting foster care will become homeless when they turn 18 and only half will attain gainful employment before age 24. Of females who age out of foster care, 71% will become pregnant before age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

Foster Care in North Carolina

More than 3,600 youth over the age of 14 were in foster care in North Carolina in 2018. The North Carolina General Assembly has passed legislation addressing the needs and circumstances of older youth in the child welfare system every session since 2011. For example, the legislature adopted a [foster children's bill of rights](#) in 2013, [extended foster care beyond age 18](#) in 2015 and enacted the [Juvenile Justice Reinvestment Act](#) (HB 280), which places youth below the age of 18 under the jurisdiction of juvenile courts, in 2017. These topics are more fully discussed below.

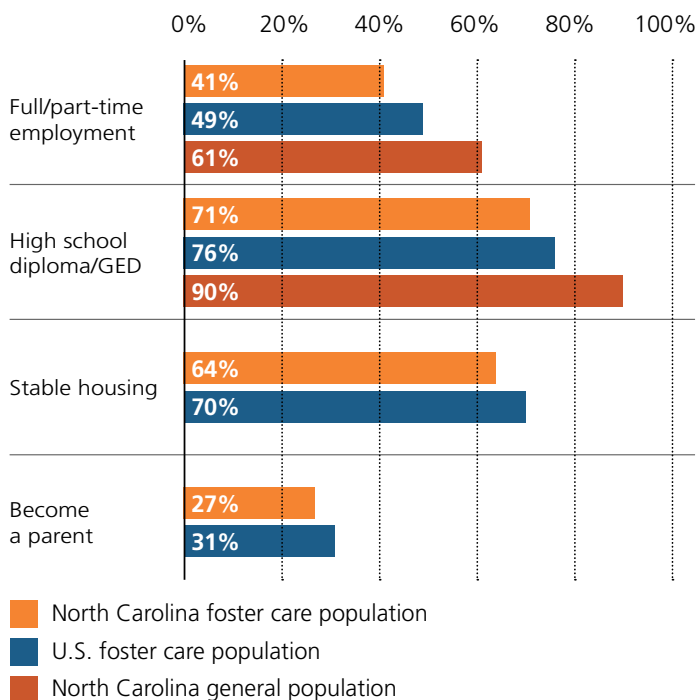
FOSTER CHILDREN'S BILL OF RIGHTS

North Carolina's Foster Care Bill of Rights enumerates 11 rights intended to protect the health, safety and well-being of children in foster care. The legislation requires a child's social worker to identify any adult relatives who may be able to assume guardianship. Kinship care placements are generally more stable than non-relative foster care placements. The Campbell Collaboration published a [review](#) of kinship care placements and concluded that "children in kin-



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.



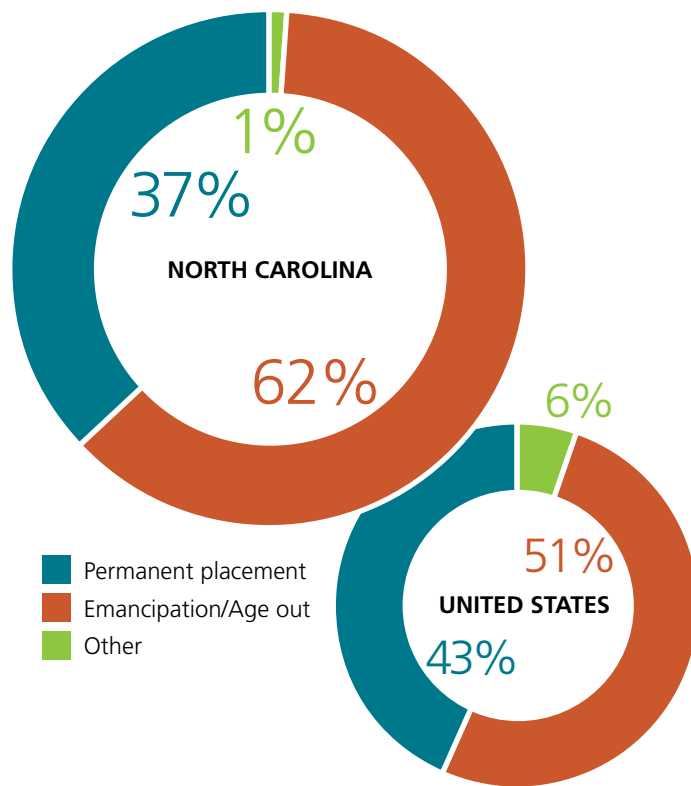
Source: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Fostering Youth Transitions Report*

ship care experience fewer placement disruptions and incidents of institutional abuse.” Numerous studies also show that older youth in particular are more susceptible to unstable placements.

EXTENDING FOSTER CARE TO AGE 21

In North Carolina, 62% of youth who exited foster care in 2018 did so without attaining a permanent home. That is in comparison to the 51% national average during the same year. The legislation extending foster care to age 21 in 2015 provided assistance to youth who are unlikely to attain permanency before age 18 by allowing them continued access to foster care services, such as maintenance payments. The same year, North Carolina passed HB 933, which established transitional living services based on the Youth Villages Transitional Living Model. Results from this model indicate positive outcomes, including housing stability, higher earnings, a lower rate of economic hardship and improved mental health. These services are also available to age 21 and provide an additional layer of sup-

Reasons for Leaving Foster Care



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

port for youth transitioning out of care.

YOUTH INVOLVED WITH THE JUVENILE JUSTICE AND FOSTER CARE SYSTEMS

Crossover youth are defined as youth who were maltreated and involved with the juvenile justice system at some point. North Carolina’s HB 280 raised the age of juvenile jurisdiction to include 16- and 17-year-olds, except in the case of certain felonies. This change affects older youth in foster care because a quarter of foster care alumni become involved with the criminal justice system within two years of exiting foster care. Some states have adopted strategies related to cross-system collaboration and data sharing to address issues facing crossover youth. For example, Indiana passed HB 1196 in 2015 requiring services to be coordinated between the child welfare agency and the corrections department when a crossover youth is identified. South Dakota passed HB 1059 in 2007 to incorporate child protective services records into the juvenile justice case process.



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