

In 2012, 820 children were adopted from foster care in Tennessee.
Another 2,517 children in Tennessee foster care were waiting to be adopted.

Adoption provides children with a lifetime of emotional and legal connections to a family. Recent years have brought new attention to children’s need for adoptive families, and the risks facing foster children who age out of care without a family. Despite considerable progress, more than 100,000 children across the country—especially older children and children of color—still wait for families. And many families who have adopted lack critical post-adoption support essential to their children’s stability and well-being.

Foster care was intended to be temporary, but many Tennessee children remain in care for years.

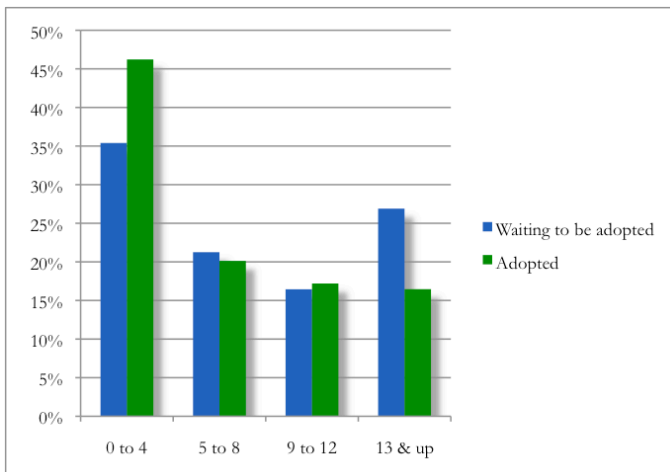
For children waiting to be adopted in Tennessee in 2012, the average stay in care was 2.0 years (24.3 months). On average, children who were adopted in 2012 spent 2.3 years (27.8 months) in care before the adoption was finalized.

To shorten the time children spend in care, child welfare agencies must first work to ensure that any children who can return safely home, do so. For those children who cannot, agencies must employ the best recruitment tools available to find a permanent family as quickly as possible.

Older children in Tennessee are not as likely to be adopted as younger children.

The average age of Tennessee’s adopted children was about 7.0 years in 2012, while waiting children were, on average, roughly 8.3. For youth age 9 and older, the likelihood of being adopted drops significantly.

Age of Tennessee Children Waiting to Be Adopted and Adopted, 2012



States must employ special strategies to ensure that older children are adopted, and that their newly formed families have support to meet the children’s needs.

A higher proportion of African American children are waiting to be adopted than are adopted in Tennessee.

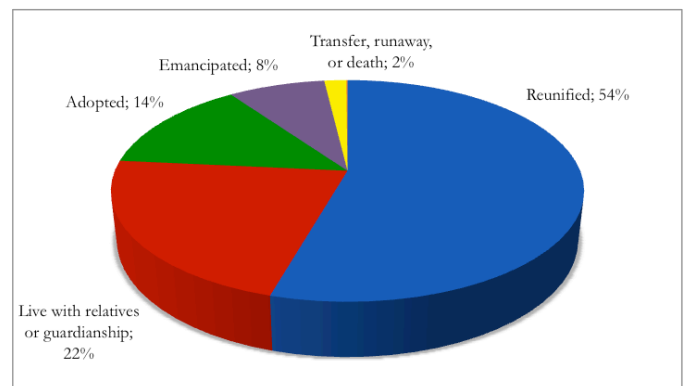
	Children Waiting	Children Adopted
Caucasian	65.6%	78.2%
African American	15.7%	12.6%
Multiple Races	0.0%	0.0%
Hispanic	7.1%	6.0%
American Indian	0.2%	0.0%
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.1%	0.0%

Agencies must address the unique racial and cultural needs of children of color in care, including seeking families who reflect the children’s race and ethnicity, as required by law.

In 2012, most Tennessee children left foster care to return home (54.4%) or live with relatives or in guardianship (22.1%). 820 children (13.7% of all exits) were adopted.

Children who leave care for permanent families need support to help them address the trauma of abuse and neglect and the experience of being in care.

Exit Types for Tennessee Foster Children, 2012



Post-permanency services should be available to families who adopt, accept guardianship, or reunify with their children. These services help children heal and make families as strong as possible.

In 2012, 472 youth in Tennessee aged out of foster care without a permanent, legal family.

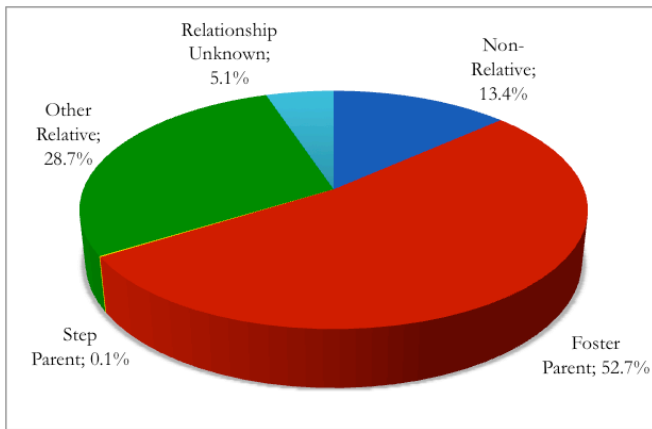
Research shows many of these youth will face obstacles such as homelessness, unemployment, early parenting, and substance abuse. 3.0% of the youth who aged out in 2012 entered care when they were younger than 13, which means the system had at least five years to help them achieve permanency. In 2012, 37 (0.9%) Tennessee children in care age 9 and older had case goals of long-term foster care or emancipation.

The best way to support youth is to ensure they do not age out of care without a family. For those youth who do not find a family, however, states and counties must provide services that ensure a successful transition to independent living with the help and support of caring adults.

Most children adopted from foster care in the United States are adopted by foster parents and relatives.

In the U.S., about 52.7% of children adopted from care in 2012 were adopted by their foster parents. Another 28.7% were adopted by relatives.

U. S. Adopting Parents' Relationship to Child Prior to Adoption, 2012



If foster parents and relative caregivers are provided with adequate support, they will be in a better position to provide children with permanency. By making adoption assistance rates equal to foster care rates, agencies can help ensure foster parents have an incentive to adopt and adoptive families have the support they need.

Some children in Tennessee foster care are adopted transracially.

In 2012, 8.6% of the children adopted in Tennessee were children of color adopted by white parents. About 2.7% of adoptions were white children adopted by parents of color, and 1.2% were children of color adopted by parents of color who were a different race than the child.

Families who adopt transracially may need extra support and training to help them meet their children's cultural needs.

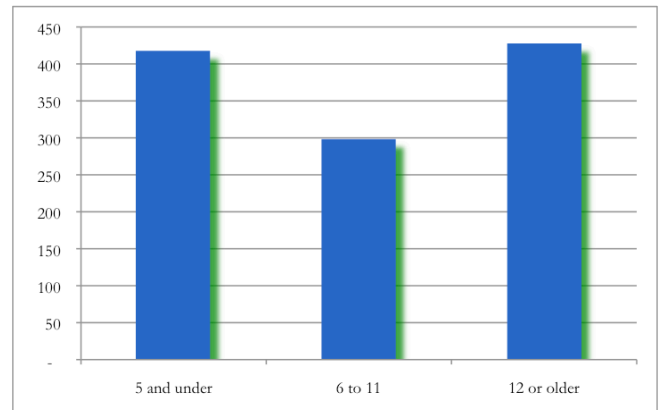
As a result of the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, many more children will be eligible for federal adoption assistance.

About 60.0% of Tennessee children adopted from foster care in 2012 were receiving Title IV-E federal adoption assistance. Many children who are not IV-E eligible did not qualify due to their birth parents' income. When children are not IV-E eligible in Tennessee, they may not receive the same benefits as IV-E eligible children do.

As a result of Fostering Connections, many more children will receive federal assistance. When additional children are IV-E eligible, the state receives more federal funds to help children and families. As of October 1, 2014, children 6 and older and children who have been in care for five years or longer—and their siblings—will no longer be denied federal adoption assistance based on their birth parents' income. Each year, younger adopted children will be phased in until 2018 when federal support will be given to all adopted children who meet other eligibility criteria.

In 2012, 102 (4.1%) of Tennessee's waiting children had been in care five years or more. Of those, 58 were not receiving IV-E payments. Also in 2012, about 612 waiting children who were not receiving IV-E payments (24.3%) were 6 or older. If adopted, these children are much more likely to receive federal adoption assistance due to Fostering Connections.

Tennessee Waiting Children Who Are Not Receiving Federal Support—by Age, 2012



We encourage Tennessee to spend funds saved as a result of Fostering Connections' expanded IV-E eligibility on post-permanency support. The Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act of 2014 requires states to invest at least 20% of these saved funds into post-adoption and post-guardianship services.