



News Release

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PRESS RELEASE

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New Report Highlights the Importance of Placement Stability, Limiting Placement Changes for Foster Youth

NEW HAVEN – For any child, moving to a new place can evoke uncertainty and anxiety. For foster children, a placement change – moving to a new foster home or congregate care facility – can be a significant source of upheaval. In a new report, Connecticut Voices for Children examines the experiences of placement stability for foster children, provides an overview of best practices from other states, and offers a list of policy changes that could help increase stability for children and youth in state care.

Although a move to a new placement can bring foster children fresh opportunities such as new teachers, new friends, new neighborhoods, and a new place to call home, the associated losses can also disrupt these children's lives. Starting over in a new home, in a family with new routines and expectations, can disrupt a child's education, connections to their community, and sense of stability. Research shows that youth who have experienced repeated placement changes are more likely to show maladaptive behavior, in turn making additional moves more likely. In contrast, children that experience fewer placements are more likely to graduate high school; in adulthood, they have higher life satisfaction, higher self-efficacy and are less likely to face criminal convictions.

“Increasing stability for foster children has immediate, substantial impacts on their welfare and educational attainment,” says Stephanie Luczak, one of the study's authors. “To increase stability, we have to ensure that the transition goes smoothly. Ideally, older children and youth should know well in advance that they will be moving, visit their new home before moving in, and be involved in decision-making about their own lives. Taking these steps can help make sure that a placement will start off strong and last long-term.”

Connecticut's foster children experience, on average, 2.92 moves for every 1,000 days they spend in care. This figure is considerably lower than the national average of 4.12 moves every 1,000 days. Still, on average, children move at least once per year, which can add up for youth who remain in care for many years. Survey data from Connecticut's foster children shows considerable variation regarding placements, with some undergoing dozens of placements while others remaining in the same foster home for years. Children and youth report often receiving little to no prior notice before they are removed from a home, sometimes learning that they are moving to a new placement in the car on the way there.

The report concludes that, although Connecticut has a comparatively good placement stability rate, there is room for improvement in maintaining connections between children and their relatives, providing adequate support to foster parents, and policy reforms to lessen the impacts of transitions. To increase stability and limit upheaval for children who must move to a new placement, the report recommends ensuring that children receive at least 10 days' notice before a move, convening their support teams to plan for and process impending moves, ensuring that children's belongings follow them to new homes, and engaging older youth to help propose policy reforms.

“As we learn more about the importance of stability and reducing upheaval in new placements, we also need to build more data collection and accountability into the process,” says Nicole Updegrove, Associate Policy Fellow at Connecticut Voices for Children. “Some of the youth we spoke with had been moved into new homes with no information about where they were going and no advance notice. We need to make sure that the experiences youth are having when they're moved are better recorded and tracked so that it's clear what parts of the process need to be improved. Also, when policies are being advised, the Department of Children and Families should call youth together to share what they've experienced and make recommendations. At the end of the day, it's these young people who have grown up in the foster care system have critical insights about how to fix that system.”

About Connecticut Voices for Children: Connecticut Voices for Children is a research-based child advocacy organization working to ensure that all Connecticut children have an equitable opportunity to achieve their full potential. In furtherance of its mission, Connecticut Voices for Children produces high-quality research and analysis, promotes citizen education, advocates for policy change at the state and local level, and works to develop the next generation of leaders.