



FOSTER CARE

Foster Care

The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services develops rules and guidelines to aid counties in implementing programs for children who can not safely remain in their own homes. Foster (substitute) care for children is one of the major program components of Ohio's child welfare system and is provided through public and private agencies. The program's main purpose is to reunify children with their families and/or, find other permanent living arrangements when children can not safely return home. Foster or substitute care includes kinship care, foster care, residential substitute care in group homes and treatment facilities, the independent living program, and the Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children.

When it is determined that a child must be removed from the home, and a court grants temporary custody of the child to the public children services agency, the caseworker attempts to find a placement with a suitable relative to help maintain familial bonds. When a suitable relative is not available, the worker attempts to find a placement with a suitable non-relative with whom the child or family has a relationship. Suitable relatives and non-relatives are either licensed by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services or approved by the local public children services agency. If the agency is unable to place the child with a relative or a non-relative who has a relationship with the family, the child is placed into a licensed foster care setting.

Licensing Adoption and Substitute Care Providers

The goal of children's services licensing is to determine the fitness of agencies to provide foster care, residential care, adoption and independent living. Placement settings such as foster homes, group homes and residential centers are routinely monitored to assure compliance with ODJFS rules. ODJFS staff provide technical assistance to improve agency compliance with regulations, and can take action to revoke licensure for noncompliance.

Case Planning

Each public children services worker strives to achieve a placement that is culturally sensitive and based in the neighborhood and community where the child was removed to preserve relationships, and to minimize disruption to the child's life. A case plan for the family is developed to promote permanence for the child and is designed to meet the child's emotional and physical needs in the least restrictive, most family-like setting. For a child to enter substitute care, there is either a voluntary agreement between the public children services agency or a private child placing agency and the parent; or there is an award of custody by the juvenile court. Substitute care is intended to be temporary, and consists of services provided to the child, the family, and the substitute care giver.

The number of children placed in group homes and residential centers has decreased, while the number of children placed in kinship care and foster homes has increased. This may be attributed to a conscious effort statewide, to develop and use kinship and family foster homes that are located in the neighborhoods where the children lived with their parents.

If a court determines that it is not in a child's best interest to return home, the agency takes steps to find a permanent placement. Good case practice supports concurrent planning for family reunification and an alternative permanent living arrangement, such as adoption or legal guardianship when family reunification is not in the child's best interest. Concurrent planning supports engaging the family in developing an alternative plan during the case planning process to prevent children from lingering unnecessarily in substitute care.

Independent Living Program

For youth ages 16 - 18, who are in substitute care, the public children services agency is required to provide independent living services to help them successfully transition into adulthood and become self-sufficient. Children ages 18-21, who have already been emancipated from substitute care are also eligible to receive independent living services upon request. Services include life-skills development training, education and vocational training,

preventive health activities, financial assistance, housing, employment and education, self-esteem counseling and assistance with developing positive relationships and support systems. Public children services agencies may also use a portion of their allocation to assist young, emancipated adults ages 18 - 21 with rent and other costs.

Education and Training Voucher Program

The Education and Training Voucher Program was made available to states in order to provide assistance to youths who have emancipated from foster care or who were adopted from foster care at age 16 or older. Up to \$45,000 per year, per youth is available to help cover the cost of participation in post-secondary education. Aside from the traditional colleges and universities, these funds may also be used for post-secondary vocational and proprietary schools. The Orphan Foundation of America serves as the conduit for the application process and the disbursement of assistance. The Foundation also provides mentors and monitors the youths progress in the program. Youth enrolled in the Education and Training Voucher Program on their 21st birthday may remain eligible until they are 23 years old, provided they continue to be enrolled in a full-time post-secondary education or training program and make satisfactory progress. The award money may not exceed the cost of attendance. The cost of attendance includes tuition and fees, room and board, rental or purchase of required equipment, materials or supplies, books and transportation, residential training and special student projects. Young people may apply directly to the Orphans Foundation through Ohio's link for the state voucher program at: <https://www.statevoucher.org/>

Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children

The Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children authorizes the placement of any child into or from Ohio. Out-of-state and Ohio agencies must have placements approved before the child enters or leaves Ohio for placement in a foster, adoptive family, group home or institution. Ohio Department of Job and Family Services is committed to the following outcomes and goals:

- Increasing the usage of kinship homes
- Providing for culturally responsive, neighborhood-based substitute care programs
- Reducing the number of children placed in hospitals, residential treatment centers, nursing homes, group homes and other institutional or congregate care facilities
- Decreasing the percentage of families whose cases have been closed, but reenter the system and require child placement services
- Decreasing the time a child waits for a permanent home
- Increasing the number and quality of substitute caregivers
- Increasing supportive services to enable children to safely return to their families