

VDSS Research Brief: Age at Exit for 18 Year Olds in Foster Care in Virginia

- Context:** The federal Fostering Connections Act includes substantial reforms for older youth in foster care. The Act provides a state option for Title IV-E foster care, adoption, and guardianship assistance payments for youth after they turn 18.¹ Virginia foster care policy allows youth in foster care to receive independent living services up to age 21 as a way to transition to self-sufficiency (Foster Care Policy Manual, Section 11). However, current federal foster care data such as the Adoption and Foster Care Reporting System (AFCARS) do not include information about youth who remain in foster care after age 18. State-level reports on youth who remain in foster care after age 18 are also limited.
- Objective:** To describe the age at which youth in foster care as of their 18th birthday exit foster care and to determine how many youth stay in care until age 21.
- Data Source:** The population for this analysis was youth in foster care who reached their 18th birthday during calendar year 2008. The population was identified from Virginia Child Welfare Outcome Reports (VCWOR) OASIS Rolling Year raw data files for calendar year 2008. Discharge dates are from ROASIS – a monthly extract of the Online Automated Services Information System (OASIS). Data were current as of December 1, 2011.
- Methods:** The VCWOR file for 2008 was used to identify all youth in foster care who reached their 18th birthday during 2008. These youth were linked to discharge dates and case involvement end dates in ROASIS to determine the actual foster care end date for each youth. Youth who did not yet have a discharge date or case involvement end date were assumed to leave foster care at age 21.
- Caveats:** The number of children and youth in foster care has declined substantially in recent years during Virginia’s Child Welfare Transformation. Because of increased efforts towards permanency, a higher proportion of youth may attain permanency prior to their 18th birthday.
- Results:** During calendar year 2008, a total of 883 youth were in foster care on their 18th birthday. Table 1 shows the distribution of the 18 year olds by their age at discharge.² Twelve percent (103 youth) exited foster care on their 18th birthday. However, the majority (88%) stayed in foster care for some time after their 18th birthday. Over half (58%) of the youth exited care before age 19; however, about one quarter (21%) of the youth remained in care until age 21. Placement data indicate that most youth were in non-relative foster family homes (36%) or institutional or group care (39%) with only 5 percent living with relatives. Over one-third (34%) of the youth were eligible for Title IV-E foster care assistance just prior to their 18th birthday.

¹ <http://www.fosteringconnections.org/resources/topic?id=0005>

² Five percent (45 youth) did not have a discharge date or case involvement end date in OASIS – 19 of those youth had reached age 21 before November 1, 2011. The 19 youth with missing dates were individuals whose records had not been updated by workers during the last year. For the youths with missing discharge dates, the date of the youth’s 21st birthday was substituted for the discharge date.

Age at Discharge	Number	Percent
18 (Discharged on birthday)	103	12%
After 18 th birthday, < 19	402	46%
19 to < 20	118	13%
20 to < 21	72	8%
21*	188	21%
Total	883	100%

Sources: ROASIS extract as of December 1, 2011; VCWOR OASIS Rolling Year Data "Children in Foster Care (raw data)" report
Note: Discharge information is as of December 1, 2011; *Includes 45 youth with missing discharge or case involvement end dates

Figure 1 shows exit times for youth who left foster care after age 18. The graph shows that one quarter of youth leave on or around their 18th birthday and by age 19 nearly three-fifths (58%) have left foster care. After age 19, the rate of exit slows considerably, and about one-fourth remain in care until age 21. The overall time to exit did not vary by gender of the youth.

Figure 1: Time to Exit for Youth Age 18 during Calendar Year 2008

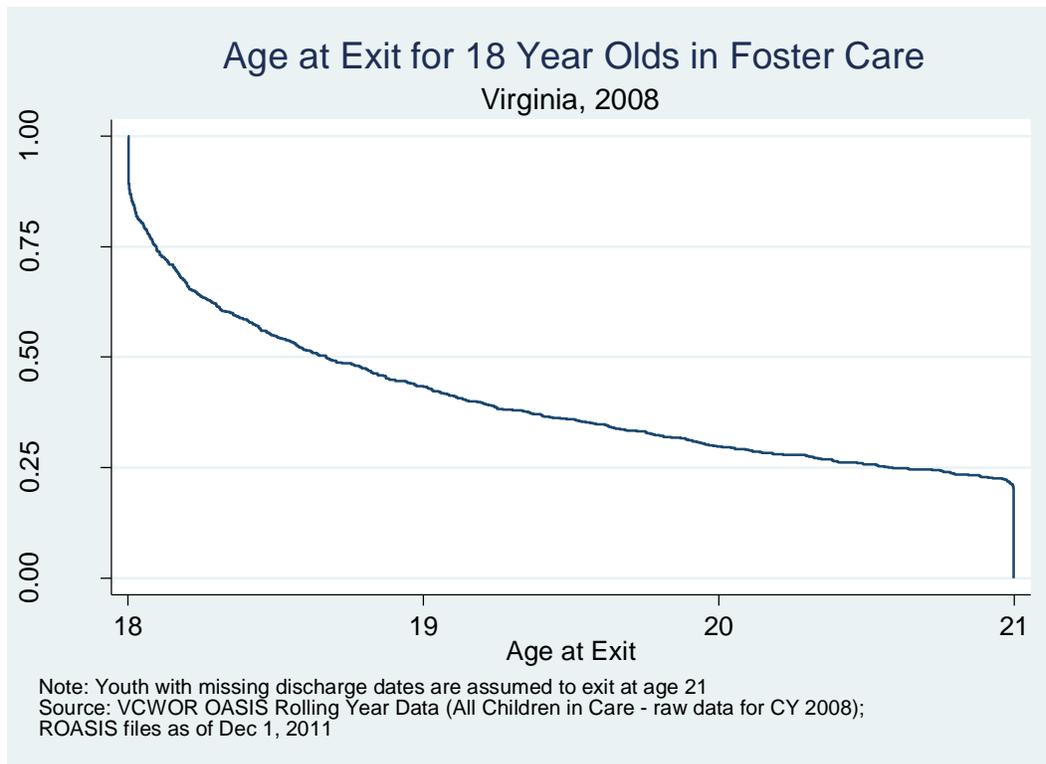


Table 2 shows that over one-third (36%) of youth were in a foster family home (non-relative) at age 18, and nearly 40 percent of youth were in either an institution or group home. Few youth were living with relatives (4%) or had been reunited with their families on a trial home visit (1%).

Table 2: Most Recent Placement for Youth in Foster Care as of their 18th Birthday, Calendar Year 2008

Placement Setting	Number	Percent
Foster Family Home (non-relative)	314	36%
Institution	181	21%
Group Home	157	18%
Supervised Independent Living	139	16%
Runaway	45	5%
Foster Family Home (relative)	31	4%
Unknown	9	1%
Trial Home Visit	7	1%
Total	883	100%

Source: VCWOR OASIS 2008 Rolling Year Data "Children in Foster Care (raw data)" report

Note: Placement information is as of December 31, 2008; Percentages may add up to more than 100% due to rounding

According to the Adoption and Foster Care Reporting System (AFCARS) data, over one-third (34%) of the youth were eligible for Title IV-E foster care assistance just prior to their 18th birthday.