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National Foster Care Month Celebrates 25 Years

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Categories: Adoption, Foster care

This May, we mark **National Foster Care Month** for the 25th time in our country's history. In the quarter-century since this observance was established, the child welfare system in the United States has undergone dramatic shifts. Most strikingly, the number of children in foster care has decreased steadily since its peak in the 80s and early 90s; today there are **27 percent fewer children** in foster care than in 1996.

Certainly this reduction is the result of positive changes in the child welfare system: more children are able to stay safely in their homes, and those who do come into foster care are moving more quickly to permanency. During National Foster Care Month, we can celebrate the progress the child welfare system has made, but we must also recommit ourselves to improving outcomes for the approximately **400,000 children who are in foster care** on any given day.



For nearly four years, the **Administration on Children, Youth and Families'** (<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/acyf>) priority has been integrating a focus on improving social and emotional well-being into the child welfare system's work to ensure safety and permanency for young people. In order to truly improve outcomes for the children and families we serve, we must help them to heal and recover from trauma and build the skills and capacities they need to be successful in school, in the workforce, and in their relationships.

We have advanced a three-part strategy to integrate well-being with safety and permanency:

1. Use data to drive decision-making;
2. Provide trauma screening and functional assessment;
3. Implement evidence-based psychosocial interventions to improve behavioral health, mental health, and caregivers' parenting skills.

For more information about this strategy, see last year's information memorandum, **Promoting Social and Emotional Well-Being for Children and Youth Receiving Child Welfare Services** (<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/resource/im1204>).

This work requires the dedicated efforts of committed partners. In particular, collaboration across child welfare, mental health, and Medicaid are essential to provide effective, evidence-based interventions to children and youth in foster care. At the federal level, we have been working across agencies – with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) – to support coordination in the states.

Some of the most exciting work testing strategies for promoting well-being is taking place in states with **Child Welfare Demonstration Projects** (<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/programs/child-welfare-waivers>). Many are working closely with their state Medicaid agencies to support the delivery of evidence-based interventions that address trauma and improve well-being outcomes for children and youth. Nine new demonstration projects are underway, and ACYF has the authority to grant up to 10 more in this fiscal year and another 10 in the next.

Today there are so many promising programs and projects explicitly targeting the social and emotional well-being of children and youth in foster care. As I think ahead 25 years to the 50th National Foster Care Month, I envision a child welfare system that will have made great strides in achieving fundamentally better outcomes for the children and families it serves. The work we are doing today to better integrate safety, permanency, and well-being is laying the foundation for that future.

Read Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius' message marking National Foster Care Month (<http://www.hhs.gov/news/press/2013pres/05/20130506b.html>).

Find resources for National Foster Care Month on the **Child Welfare Information Gateway** (<https://www.childwelfare.gov/fostercaremonth/>).

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