THE ONE HOME INITIATIVE
THE CHALLENGE

Thirty-five percent of Virginia youth in foster care experienced two or more placements (2017, Kids Count). Additionally, disruptions of the adoptive placements of children range from about 10-to-25 percent (2012, Child Welfare Information Gateway). When the adoptive placement of youth is disrupted, children are returned to the custody of the foster care system and placed in a home. Youth who experience multiple placements are more likely to experience homelessness, school dropout, poor self-image, and inconsistent relationships in adulthood (Pecora, et al, 2007). This problem and the need to generate solutions lie not only with the Department of Social Services, but also the entire youth-serving community.

OUR TARGET

Two or more placements

The focus of our work is to make sure every youth in care experiences only one placement in a family setting before returning to their family or being adopted.

To measure our success, we have created a target: By the end of 2020, the percentage of children who experience two or more placements will drop from 35% (1662 youth) to 30% (1462 youth), ensuring 200 fewer children will endure a disruptive move.
THE REASON FOR OUR WORK

The One Home Initiative (OHI) was created when multiple organizations met to discuss the outcomes of youth in care, specifically those who are at risk of being moved around to several foster homes. This initiative is the result of training and coaching provided by Lutheran Services in America to teach skills in Results Based Leadership. It will dramatically improve the trajectory of the lives of 20,000 vulnerable youth in America by 2024.

OUR PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

Bethany Christian Services (treatment foster care and/or adoption)
Amanda Bishop (foster and adoptive parent)
C2Adopt (treatment foster care and/or adoption)
Chesterfield Department of Social Services (public child welfare)
Children’s Home Society (treatment foster care and/or adoption)
Commonwealth Catholic Charities (treatment foster care and/or adoption)
Extra Special Parents (treatment foster care and/or adoption)
Gayton Baptist Church (faith-based community)
Amire Harvin (foster youth in care)
Impact Living Services (treatment foster care and/or adoption)
Jewish Family Services / Connecting Hearts of Virginia (treatment foster care and/or adoption)
Lutheran Family Services of Virginia (treatment foster care and/or adoption)
Strong Training and Consulting in America (foster care consultant)
Tidewater Friends of Foster Care (outreach and advocacy)
United Methodist Family Services (treatment foster care and/or adoption)
Virginia Home for Boys and Girls (transitional living)

The One Home Initiative is a collective of organizations and individuals who support youth in care, each bringing unique perspectives. Currently, OHI has representation from treatment foster care (TFC), adoption, residential services, advocacy and outreach organizations, statewide mental health organizations, the public youth welfare system, and the faith community. Importantly, OHI includes youth who have formerly been in care.
WHAT WE NEED FROM YOU

Additional partners are needed to provide the best resources and insight to address youth in care. We need insight, experience, and guidance as we develop strategies to reduce the number of children who experience moves while in care. Those partners include:

- Former or current foster parents
- Parents who have adopted children from the foster care system
- Local Department of Social Services case workers and/or supervisors
- Members of the Foster Care Caucus
- Organizations who work with youth aging out of care
- Residential care providers
- Local and/or statewide school system representatives

JOIN THE INITIATIVE

Be a part of the solution. Help us eliminate disruption for 200 youth in care and increase their opportunities for successful adulthood. To inquire about the One Home Initiative or to join our efforts, contact Jeanne Hollingshead at jhollingshead@lfsva.org or 312-391-9619 (cell).
Research demonstrates that minimizing placement moves for youth in foster care yields positive outcomes. According to the article, “Why Should the Child Welfare Field Focus on Minimizing Placement Change as Part of Permanency Planning for Children?” there are five key benefits to focusing on minimizing placement moves:

1. Maximize Continuity in Services, Decrease Foster Parent Stress, and Lower Program Costs: Placement disruptions increase work time for social workers and emotional distress for foster parents, which can impact retention for both. Placement moves can also create breaks with other service professionals important to that youth’s treatment.

2. Increase the Likelihood that a Youth will Establish an Enduring, Positive Relationship with a Caring Adult: The longer youth stay in a placement, the higher chance they will develop lifelong relationships to support them into adulthood. Research shows that this is the number one factor in predicting a youth’s lifelong success.

3. Minimize Youth Pain and Trauma: Coming into foster care is already a disruption for youth. Having multiple placements can be confusing and create further breaks in relationships.

4. Lessen Youth Attachment, Behavior, and Mental Health Disorders: Multiple placement moves have been shown to produce increased behavior and emotional problems, as well as unhealthy attachment patterns.

5. Decrease School Mobility and Increase Academic Achievement: Multiple moves to different school districts often cause academic inconsistency. This is a risk factor for dropout and poor academic performance.
WHY DO YOUTH DISRUPT FROM A HOME?

We did a factor analysis to understand why youth disrupt from foster/adoptive homes. This identified several areas of focus. For each area, we asked why and determined:

1. **Youth have expectations that are not met.**
   Youth in care have expectations based on experiences of living in different family settings. Cultural differences and norms influence the youth’s understanding of what to expect from a new family. Youth frequently do not have time to get to know caregivers prior to moving into their family due to system factors. Youth are fearful of connecting with new parents and may feel guilty about betraying their biological families. They often expect abuse and neglect.

2. **Parents have expectations that are not met.**
   Unrealistic expectations are premeditated resentments. Parental beliefs can interfere with learning new information. Problematic beliefs may include that youth will get better (but not worse) after placement in the home, that time is all it will take to get better, that challenging behavior is willful, that youth should be grateful, and that all the youth needs are love and prayer to heal. Parental expectations of the system are influenced by the media, which often show the success of the journey but not the pain of those involved.

3. **Typical parenting strategies frequently don’t meet the youth’s complex needs.**
   Traumatized youth require specialized parenting strategies to build trusting relationships and create a healing home environment. Learning a new style of parenting is challenging, especially if it conflicts with long-held beliefs and values.

4. **Parents are unprepared for the youth’s needs.**
   Without previous experience parenting a traumatized youth, many are unprepared for the reality of a youth’s needs. We need specialized supports to help shift parental expectations of behaviors and emotional needs. Additionally, parents do not lean on their support system or may lack one to help them weather the challenges of parenting a youth in care. Youth from different cultural or racial backgrounds may be uneasy in the home, challenging parents to manage their needs. Many parents enter transracial adoption ill-equipped to deal with the racial realities their children will face.

5. **Youth’s past trauma often manifests as behaviors that are difficult to manage.**
   In addition to abuse and neglect, a youth’s trauma history may include moving homes and schools and living with strangers. Youth have difficulty expressing their needs, which is further impacted by neurological or biological challenges.
There are two populations of youth in care who experience disruptions at a higher than average rate; Youth of color and male youth.

1. We suspect male youth are also perceived to have more behavioral than emotional challenges, which can often go ignored. There is also a fear of male youth doing more physical harm, as well as prevalent cultural expectations that boys are “tough” and “aggressive.” Parents fear the presence of harmful youth in their family, especially if there are females in the home.

2. We suspect placements for youth of color are often impacted because their challenges are more likely to be perceived as behavioral and not emotional, which results in more involvement with the juvenile justice system. Male youth of color are more likely to be perceived to be older, more powerful, volatile, or dangerous.
OUR GOALS

We are working to:

1. Develop a standardized tool to help agencies match children with foster and adoptive homes. Matching a child in the home is a critical process that can lead to success or failure.

2. Collect and gather current research about why youth disrupt from homes, the characteristics of the youth and families who experience a disruption, and the perspectives of those involved. We will find a state that has a lower rate of disruptions and examine what has worked to improve youth stability.

3. Collaborate with residential facilities that transition youth in care to foster and adoptive homes upon completion of their programs to develop strategies to minimize the risk of a future disruption. Research indicates youth who are transitioned from a residential or group home into a foster home are more likely to experience a disruption.

SOURCES

RESULTS-BASED LEADERSHIP


RESEARCH AND DATA ABOUT DISRUPTIONS

