



Executive Summary
Survey on Adoption History of Children in Out-of-Home Care and Other Services
 Wisconsin Association of Family & Children’s Agencies - October 2014

Background: In October 2014, WAFCA sent a brief 10-question survey to all member agencies. The survey asked providers to look at their current clients and identify any children or youth in their care with an adoption history.

31 programs operating in 19 agencies across the state responded. While a small sample, the data reported below paints a picture of the prevalence of needs and demonstrates the importance of further data and research on these post-adoptive families.

Data Overview

The 31 programs that responded were **servicing a total of 1805 children.**

The program services represented included:

- Foster Care (9 programs)
- Residential Care (7)
- Group Home (7)
- Outpatient Mental Health (3)
- In-home services (3)
- Alt. Education/Day School (3)
- Day Treatment (2)
- Respite Services (2)
- Safety Services (1)
- Intensive Case Management and Coordination (1)

Agencies were asked to identify the number of children in their programs with a **known adoption history.** While a few agencies responded that they did not track this information, respondents identified **134** children in their programs who were adopted. Given the 1805 children in services identified in the sample this means one in thirteen children in services was adopted.

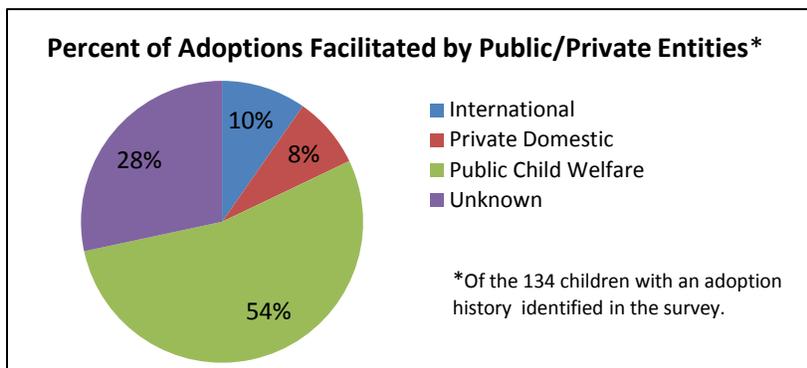


Based on WAFCA Survey 10/14

Tracking Adoption Status

16 programs reported that they collect adoption history as part of their intake process for new clients.

11 programs document the information in the client file when the information is learned by the clinician/team. 4 programs reported that they do not document adoption history.

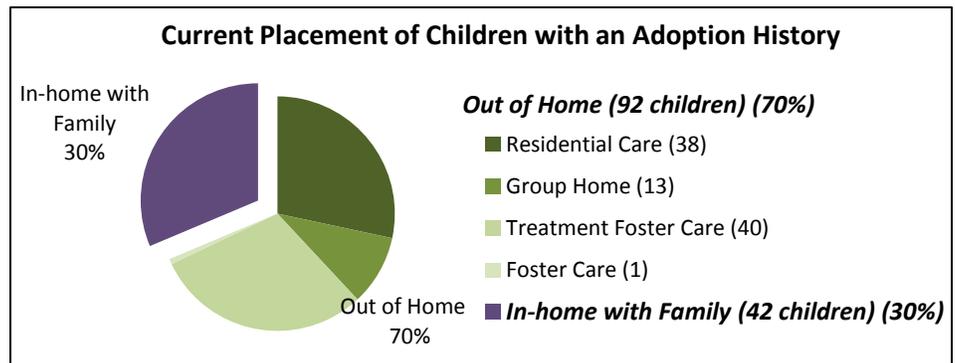


Of the 134 children in services with an adoption history, **more than 50% were adopted through the public child welfare system.** For 28% of the children, the source of the adoption was unknown.

Ages , Placement and Risk of Permanent Disruption

88% of the children in services with an adoption history were **between the ages of 11-20 years**. This is consistent with national data showing an increase in behavioral and mental health needs in adolescence and sharp increase in re-entry of children into the child welfare system beginning at age 11.

Of the 134 children with an adoption history identified in the survey, **92 were in an out-of-home placement.**



60%

Of children with an adoption history are at risk of not reunifying with their adoptive families

Based on WAFCA Survey 10/14

Programs were asked to identify the number of adopted children in their care who were at-risk of not reunifying with their families. The survey respondents identified **80 children (60%) who were at risk of not reunifying.**

Discussion

The data shared in this summary are the result of a brief, voluntary survey. The survey asked programs to respond based on known information about children currently in care. Therefore, the information reflects the “point in time” experience of a few dozen programs in the state. Given the survey design, it would be imprudent to extrapolate this information beyond the reporting entities.

In spite of the limitations, the data aligns with national findings regarding the re-entry of adopted children into out-of-home care and the prevalence of mental health needs among adopted adolescents.

In addition, while this data sample is small, it is noteworthy that a handful of programs are currently serving more than 80 adopted youth who are at risk of not reunifying with their families. National data tells us that in the absence of reunification these youth are far more likely to “age out” of foster care.

This survey was intended to generate a picture beyond the anecdotal reports of the challenges that children and families face after adoption. Universal data collection efforts are needed to develop a comprehensive understanding of the needs and the gaps in the support systems for post-adoptive families.

However small in scale, this survey identifies nearly 100 adopted children in Wisconsin who are currently in an out-of-home placement. Many of these children were formerly in foster care, were adopted and are now at-risk of losing a second family. The financial costs to the state are significant; the long-term social and emotional costs for these children are immeasurable.

Voices from the Field

Survey respondents were invited to share any additional comments or observations that they had regarding the children with an adoption history in their care. The following is a sampling of comments.

“Adoptive parents often comment that if they had really good family therapy services available to them in their region of the state, the failed adoption might have been prevented. I continue to hear that adoptive families do not have the resources and support they need post adoption.”

“It seems that the intensive, specialized needs related to attachment are not as much of a struggle for adoptive families until years after adoption [is finalized], which is often times when any aid and support has been long terminated.”

“This is a snapshot of who we have in care today. At any given time we have four or more youth [in our program] who have been adopted. The adopted families that we have served often talk about feeling like they were left on their own to deal with problems of children they adopted.”

“Most of the children currently in placement came to us at 15+ years of age. The permanency plan for these youth is long-term foster care. Parental rights have not been terminated on the adoptive parents, but the parents seem unwilling to work towards reunification. “Failed” adoptions appear to have extreme emotions of bitterness, betrayal, and rejection more so than children removed from biological families.”

“We often serve youth with sexual, acting-out issues against a sibling in their adoptive home. The adoptive parents rarely accept these youth back if/when treatment is successful. The adoptive parents also often do not terminate their parental rights and counties rarely do an involuntary TPR so these kids do not become available for another adoption.”

“There is a greater need for wraparound supportive services for adoptive families, especially with at-risk youth.”

WAFCA is a member association that works to improve the lives of families and children in Wisconsin. Representing over 50 child and family serving agencies and leaders in the field, WAFCA advocates for our members and the more than 225,000 individuals and families that they serve each year.