

Disproportionality Among Youth Living in Kinship & Foster Care in Washington State



What is Kinship Care?

Kinship care refers to the full-time care of a minor by a relative or another adult who has a close relationship with the youth and their family.¹ When a child is removed from home due to abuse or neglect and placed in out-of-home care, federal law requires that they are placed in the least restrictive (family-like) setting.² On the continuum of least restrictive placement settings, kinship care is preferred to foster care because it helps maintain a youth's family ties.³ Kinship care can be either formal or informal, depending on the level of child welfare services involvement.⁵ Formal kinship care is organized by child welfare services (CWS). 137,000 youth (approximately 34% of children involved in CWS) live in formal relative placements nationwide.⁶ Most kinship care arrangements, however, are informal and arranged without CWS involvement.⁷ Over seven million children in the United States live in households headed by kinship caregivers,⁹ and over 2.6 million (approximately 4% of US children) are living in relative households apart from their parents.¹² Most kinship care arrangements (approximately 60%) involve youth living with grandparents and about 20% involve youth living with aunts and uncles.¹³ In Washington State, 40,000 youth, roughly 2% of all youth in the state, live in kinship care,¹⁵ and for every one youth living in a formal CWS kinship care arrangement, ten children are living in informal kinship care outside of foster care system.¹⁶

Benefits of Kinship Care

Kinship care arrangements help prevent youth from entering foster care.¹¹ Kinship care offers an important opportunity to keep youth with their families and in their communities. Kinship care helps maintain family relationships and culture and helps foster a sense of belonging that promotes healthy psychosocial development.⁴ Kinship care also has been shown to minimize the trauma of being removed from parental care.⁵ Being placed with family members improves well-being, increases permanency,¹⁸ improves behavioral and mental health outcomes, and preserves cultural identity and community connections.⁵ Kinship care arrangements are particularly important for youth of color and LGBTQ+ youth.

The Healthy Youth Survey (HYS)

This fact sheet used data from the 2021 Washington State Healthy Youth Survey to provide an overview of the overrepresentation of youth of color and LGBTQ+ youth living in kinship care and foster care in comparison to youth living with their parents. The data highlight critical disproportionalities among young people living apart from their families in Washington State. The HYS is a biannual survey that includes 8th, 10th, and 12th-grade public school students. The survey offers a representative sample of young people in Washington State and provides important details about their health and well-being.²¹

The COVID-19 Pandemic and Student Population Changes

From the 2018-19 academic year to 2021-22, the Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) reported a 31.7% decrease in enrollment among 8th, 10th, and 12th grade students who were living in foster care.²² The COVID-19 pandemic intensified school disconnection among youth involved in the foster care system,²³ and HYS participation among youth living in kinship care and foster care dropped dramatically. Compared to their peers living with their parents, the COVID-19 pandemic had a disproportionately negative impact on youth living in foster care or kinship care. Many youth living in foster care and kinship care and their caregivers experienced difficulties accessing needed services and support throughout the pandemic.²⁵

Living with Parents

- 95.8% (142,296 Youth)
- 14.2% decrease in HYS participation from the 2018-19 academic year.

Living in Kinship Care

- 2.7% (3,469 Youth)
- 35.9% decrease in HYS participation from the 2018-19 academic year.

Living in Foster Care

- 0.4% (463 Youth)
- 41.7% decrease in HYS participation from the 2018-19 academic year.

Note: Sample size N=125,996. Based upon the HYS Question: Who did you live with most of the time in the last 30 days? 15.2% decrease in HYS participation from the 2018-19 academic year.

Racial Disproportionality

In Washington State, students of color are significantly more likely than their White peers to be living apart from their parents.²¹

- **American Indian or Alaskan Native** students are **3.4** times more likely to be living in foster care and **3.0** times more likely to be living in kinship care.
- **Black or African American** students are **2.1** times more likely to be living in foster care and **1.5** times more likely to be living in kinship care.
- **Latina, Latino, and Latine** students are **1.8** times more likely to be living in foster care and **1.3** times more likely to be living in kinship care.

Youth of color are also more likely to experience multiple out-of-home placements, are less likely to be reunited with their birth families, and are more likely to experience congregate care.⁶ Prioritizing kinship care for youth of color is important for establishing permanency, reducing entrance into foster care, and ensuring that cultural and community ties are maintained.

	Living with Parents	Living in Kinship Care	Living in Foster Care
American Indian or Alaskan Native	1.5%	4.3%	5.1%
Asian or Asian American	9.6%	6.2%	3.0%
Black or African American	4.0%	5.7%	7.5%
Latino, Latina, Latine	23.9%	28.5%	37.0%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1.1%	3.3%	*
Multiracial	9.4%	12.4%	9.1%
Unknown Racial or Ethnic Identity	3.9%	5.6%	8.4%
White or European American	46.6%	34.1%	29.0%

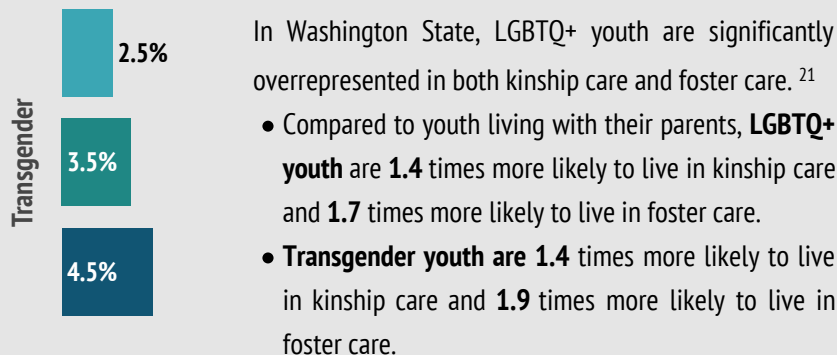
* The % of Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander Youth living in foster care is not listed due to sample size restrictions.

Kinship Care Among Indigenous and Black Communities

- Many communities, particularly American Indian or Alaskan Native²⁶ and Black or African American^{27 28 29 30} communities, have traditionally utilized kinship care practices to help support cultural continuity for youth living apart from their parents. The Black community has long traditions of kinship care,^{28 29 30} and Black youth comprise 14% of the U.S. under 18 population but make up over a quarter of the youth living in kinship care arrangements.²⁹
- Due to COVID-19, over 160,000 youth nationwide lost at least one of their caregivers. More than 70,000 lost a parent, and approximately 13,000 lost their sole caregiver.^{31 32} These youth were typically from socially and economically marginalized groups. American Indian and Alaska Native youth lost their caregivers due to COVID-19 at four times the rate of White children. Black youth lost their caregivers at two and a half times the rate of White youth.³² Youth of color have a higher comparative risk of being negatively impacted by the pandemic.³³

Importance of Kinship Care Among LGBTQ+ Youth

LGBTQ+ youth also have a comparatively higher risk of being negatively impacted by the pandemic.³³ Among the LGBTQ+ community, supporting kinship care helps facilitate placements in which youth's identities are affirmed and supported. The concept of "chosen family" is particularly important and supports the development of fictive kin relationships that can positively impact LGBTQ+ young people's healthy development.²⁸ LGBTQ+ youth are significantly overrepresented in both kinship care and foster care. Many LGBTQ+ youth involved in the child welfare system have experienced rejection from family members or other care providers and have often faced substantial discrimination.³⁴ Family rejection often poses barriers to permanency for LGBTQ+ youth and decreases their well-being.^{34 35} Caring for LGBTQ+ youth and working with their families requires an understanding of their unique health and wellness needs.³⁶ Specialized training and resources for kinship caregivers are crucial to supportively addressing the needs of LGBTQ+ youth and strengthening their health and wellness.³⁶



● Living with Parents ● Living in Kinship Care ● Living in Foster Care

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