



NEBRASKA

FOSTER CARE REVIEW OFFICE

Good Life, Great Outcomes



**September 2025
Annual Report**

Submitted pursuant to Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-1303(4) Issued: September 1, 2025



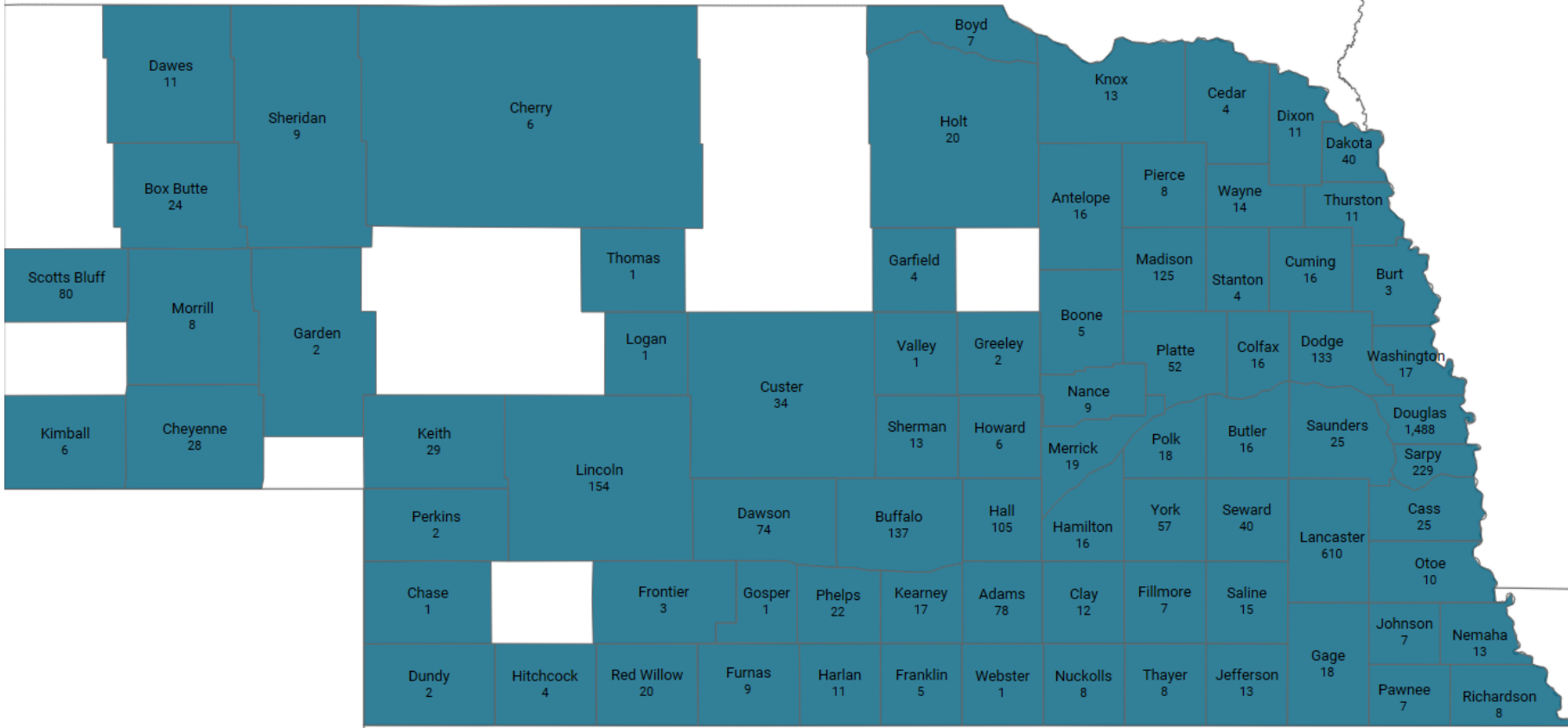
NEBRASKA
FOSTER CARE REVIEW OFFICE
Good Life, Great Outcomes

Foster Care Review Office September 2025 Annual Report

Nebraska Children's Commission
Presentation

November 18th, 2025

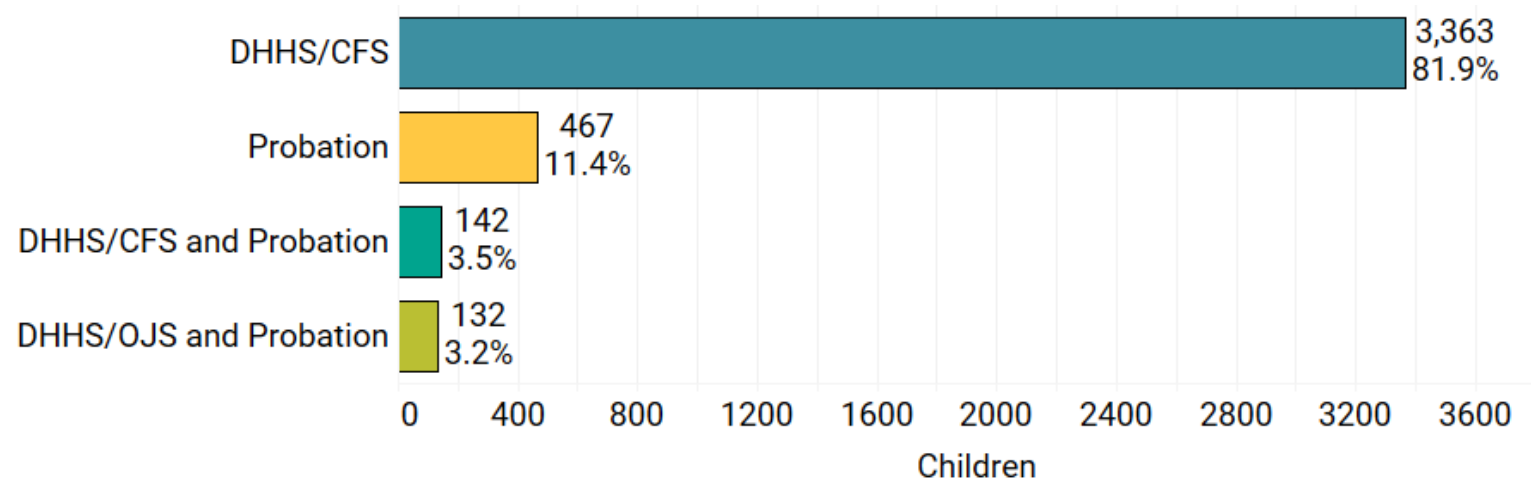
Number of Nebraska Children in Out-of-Home or Trial Home Visit Placements by
County of Court Involvement on 6/30/2025, n=4,104*



The 4,104 shown above is a **1.1% decrease** compared to 6/30/2024 when 4,151 court-involved children were in out-of-home care.

*Excludes Approved Informal Living Arrangements (AILAs)

All Court-Involved Children in Out-of-Home Care or Trial Home Visit by Agency Involved on 6/30/2025, n=4,104



On 6/30/2025 there were:

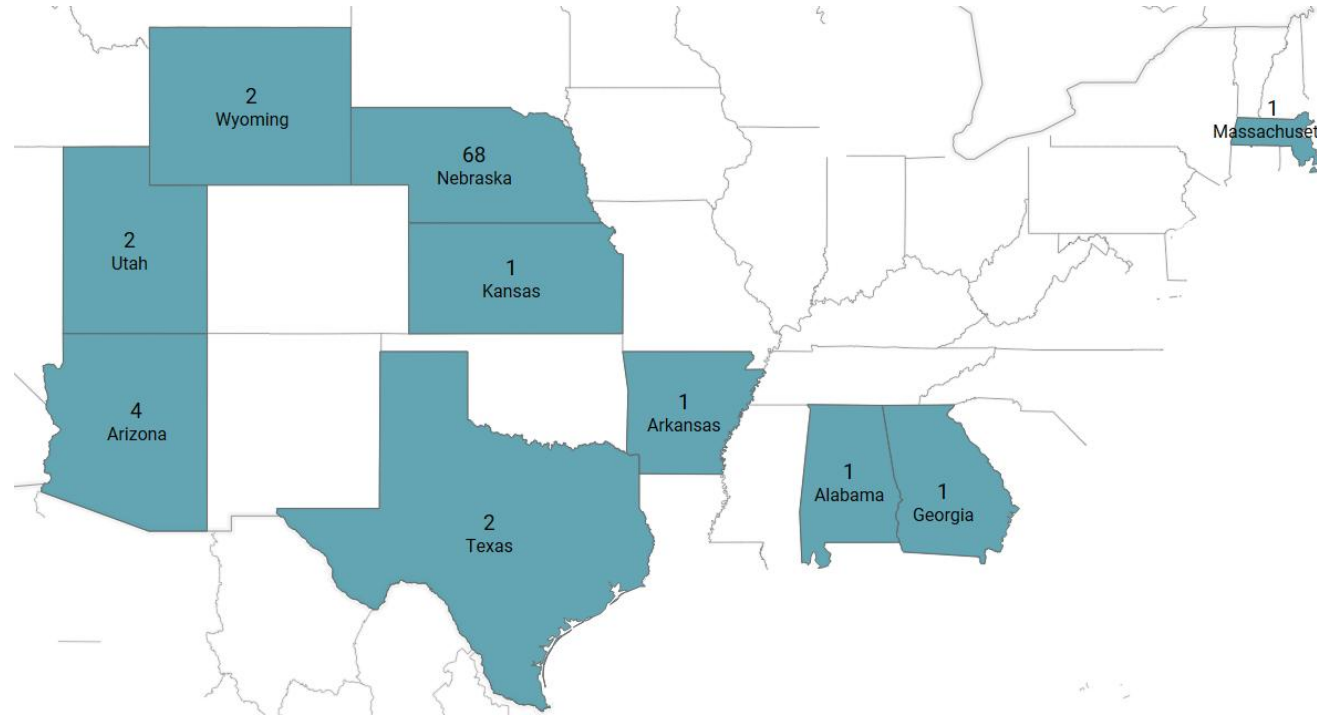
- 3,363 children that were DHHS/CFS wards; a **2.4% decrease** compared to the 3,446 children on 6/30/2024.
- 467 youth that were in out-of-home care while supervised by Probation; a **3.9% decrease** compared to the 486 such youth on 6/30/2024.
- 142 youth in out-of-home care involved with DHHS/CFS and Probation simultaneously; a **19.3% increase** compared to the 119 such youth on 6/30/2024.
- 132 youth in out-of-home care involved with DHHS/OJS and Probation simultaneously; a **33.3% increase** compared to the 99 such youth on 6/30/2024.
 - 128 of these youth were placed at a YRTC, 3 were in a detention/corrections-type setting, and 1 was in a foster family home.
- No youth were in out-of-home care served only by DHHS/OJS; a **decrease** from the 1 youth on 6/30/2024.

Recommendation to the Legislature

Although more children in congregate care are placed in Nebraska, there continues to be a reliance on out-of-state residential placements so **the state of Nebraska must keep investing in infrastructure and capacity to support community-based services**, including treatment foster care and residential care facilities so children can receive necessary treatment and support close to home.

DHHS/CFS & Dual Out-of-State Congregate Care Placements

DHHS/CFS Wards in Congregate Care on 6/30/2025 by State of Placement, n=83



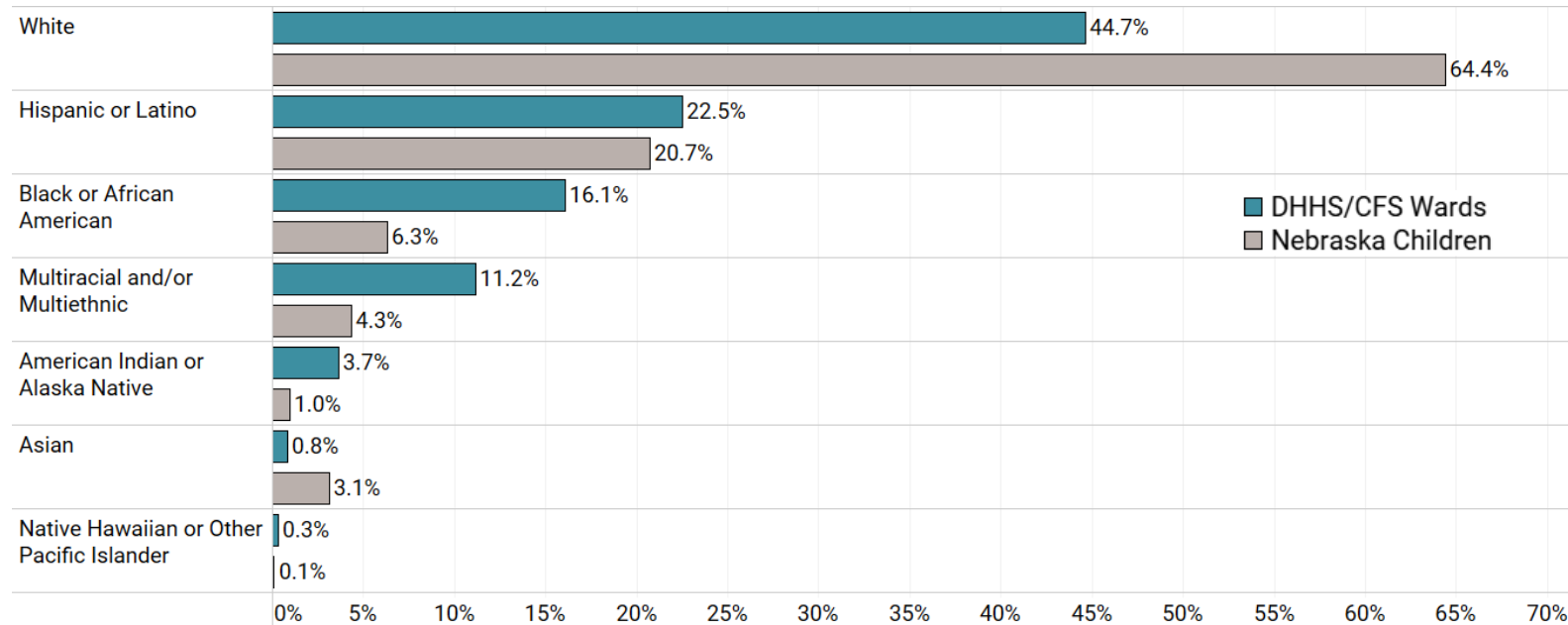
- A majority (81.9%) of DHHS/CFS wards in congregate care facilities were placed in Nebraska.
- DHHS/CFS had 83 children in congregate care, resulting in **an increase** from 69 on 6/30/2024.

Recommendation to Multiple Agencies

The child welfare and juvenile justice systems impact children, families, and communities of color at disproportionate rates. **Disproportionality in child welfare and juvenile justice out-of-home populations has gotten worse in Nebraska.** DHHS/CFS, Probation, courts, and stakeholders must do more to address racial and ethnic disparities. **A critical step to address disproportionate rates is to shift focus from reactive, punitive interventions to proactive, community-based support that addresses the root causes of system involvement.** By investing in families and communities, we can reduce the need for child welfare and juvenile justice interventions in the first place. **State and local governments and charitable organizations should allocate significant funding directly to community organizations, especially those led by and serving people of color.** These organizations can provide culturally responsive services, such as housing and financial assistance, behavioral health supports and treatment, parenting and family support programs to name a few.

DHHS/CFS & Dual Racial Disparities

**Race and Ethnicity of DHHS/CFS Wards in Out-of-Home Care and Trial Home Visits on 6/30/2025
Compared to Nebraska Children, n=3,363**



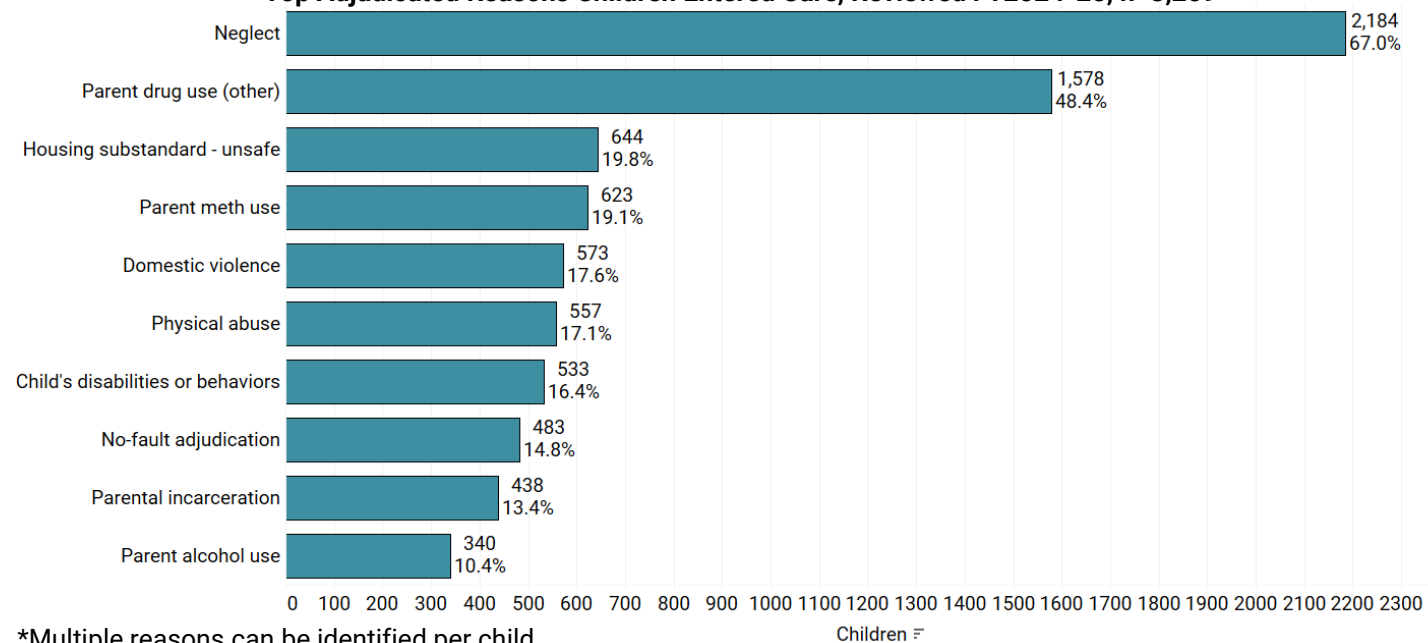
- Children of color continue to be overrepresented in the out-of-home population.
- This overrepresentation is very similar to the data presented last year.

Recommendation to Multiple Agencies

Nearly half of all children in out-of-home care in the child welfare system were removed from their homes due to parental drug abuse (other than methamphetamine). 19.1% were removed due to parental methamphetamine use (multiple reasons can be identified per child.) **More must be done to address substance misuse and addiction in our communities, including harm reduction strategies and treatment services.** Other issues leading to the removal of children from their homes include substandard/unsafe housing and domestic violence, social problems that require investments in families and communities.

Reasons for Removal

Top Adjudicated Reasons Children Entered Care, Reviewed FY2024-25, n=3,259



Home of origin child was removed from:

- 60.0% lived with only their mother.
- 27.2% lived with both parents.
- 7.1% lived with only their father.
- 5.7% lived with a non-parent at removal (often a relative such as a grandparent).
- 0.1% were unable to be determined.

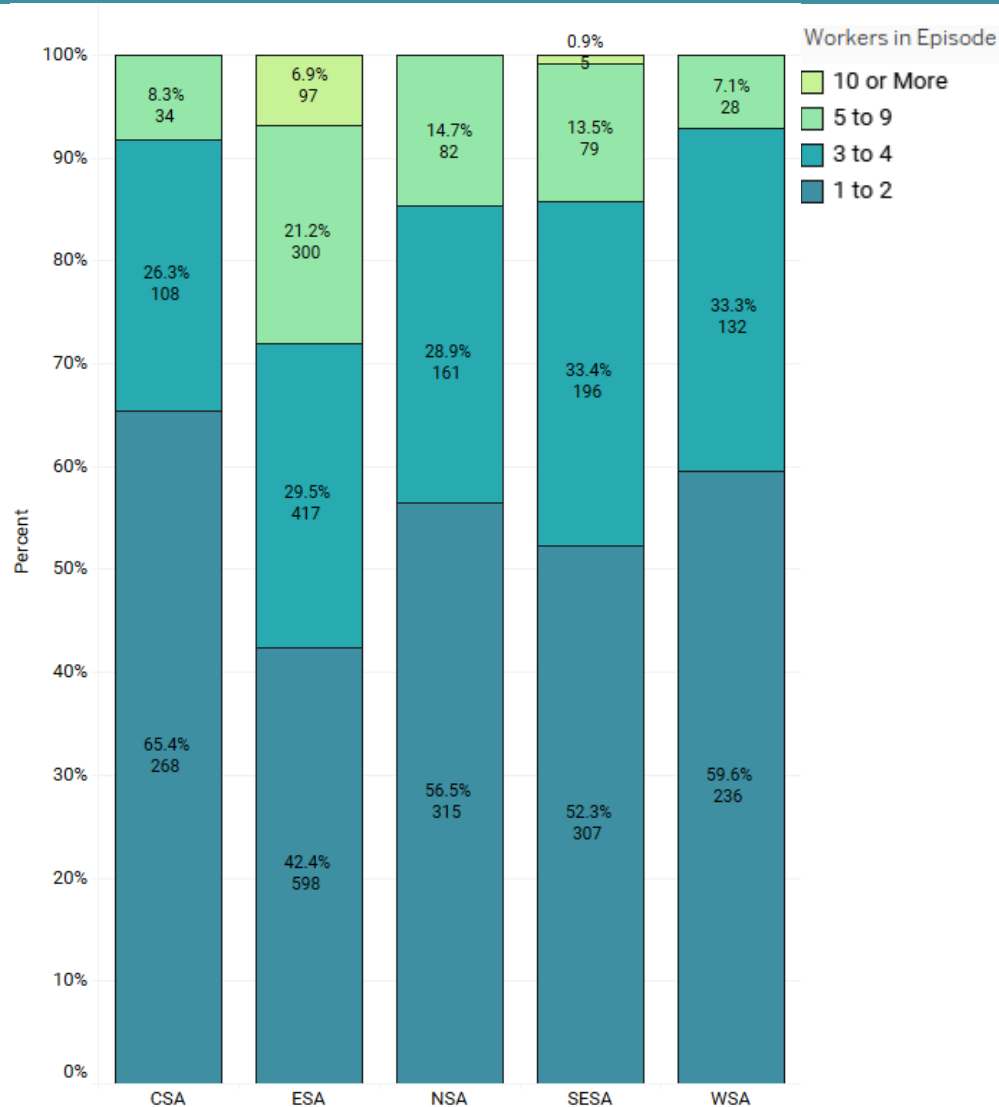
The most frequently identified non-adjudicated reasons were:

- Parent drug use (other) (15.0%)
- Neglect (10.8%)
- Child's disabilities or behaviors (10.2%)
- Parent mental health (8.3%)
- Domestic violence (7.9%)
- Housing substandard - unsafe (7.7%)
- Parental incarceration (5.7%)

Recommendation to DHHS

While some progress has been reported, **CFS must continue to proactively address case manager turnover across the state.** To address turnover and other staffing challenges, **create and implement a long-term plan to recruit individuals, including those from diverse backgrounds and with lived experience, who might consider pursuing a career in social work, psychology, mental health practice, and related professions.** This may include activities such as speaking to students and teachers in middle schools and high schools, participating in career fairs, partnering with post-secondary education institutions, offering job-shadowing, volunteer, and internship opportunities, and other efforts designed to elevate human services career choices. **Additionally, DHHS should focus on working environment and promoting a culture of recognition and support, enhancing compensation and benefits, and prioritizing the health and well-being of caseworkers by providing wellness programs, such as access to mental health counseling and stress management resources.**

Caseworker Changes for DHHS/CFS Wards in Out-of-Home Care on 6/30/2025



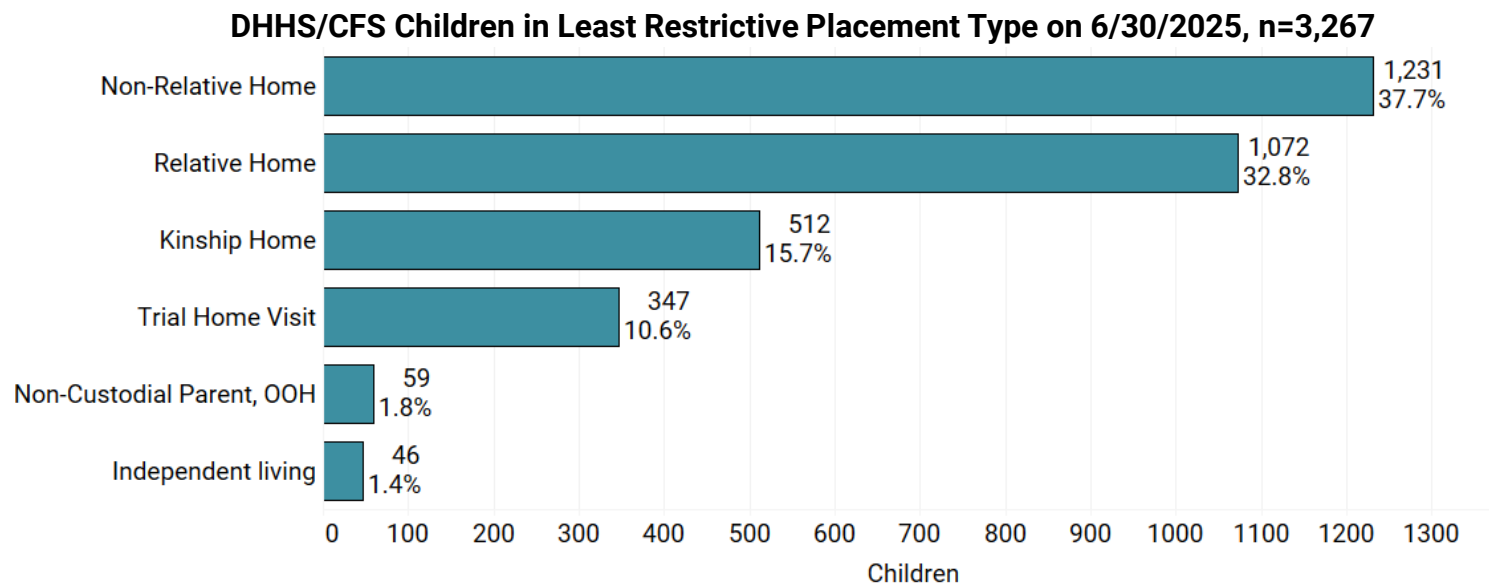
- Nearly a fifth (18.6%) of children had five or more caseworkers during their current episode in care. The Eastern Service Area had the most children with five or more caseworkers at 28.1%, and of those, 6.9% had 10 or more workers in their current episode.
- This resulted in a **decrease of 10.2%** from 6/30/2024 when 38.3% had five or more caseworkers in the Eastern Service Area.
- Additionally, there was a **1.3% decrease** from the 8.2% of children with 10 or more caseworkers in the Eastern Service Area on 6/30/2024.

Recommendations to DHHS

Collaborate with child placing agencies and system partners to recruit, train, support, and retain foster family homes able to meet the needs of children and youth with high needs, especially those with complex mental and/or behavioral health needs so that youth can remain safely in the least restrictive environments in their own communities. It is unclear whether and to what extent the additional tiers of foster care rates have been effective in meeting the complex and unique needs of certain children in foster care. **Licensed foster family homes are needed in every community across the state.**

Provide additional training and in-home supports and resources for foster parents, especially relatives/kin, whether licensed or not. Prioritize the needs and experiences of children and families throughout the transition of bringing relative and kinship support in-house. **The focus must be on making the process of becoming a relative or kinship foster home as accessible and supportive as possible, rather than simply replicating bureaucratic processes.** This can be done by simplifying the process, offering immediate financial and material support to homes, insuring culturally informed home studies, maintaining dedicated and knowledgeable staff to help foster families navigate the process and system, creating a centralized support hub as a single point of contact for families to access 24/7 for questions and crises, offering regular communication with caseworkers to establish trust with families, and gathering relevant data to evaluate the program for continuous improvement of policies and practices.

Relative/Kinship Placements & Licensure

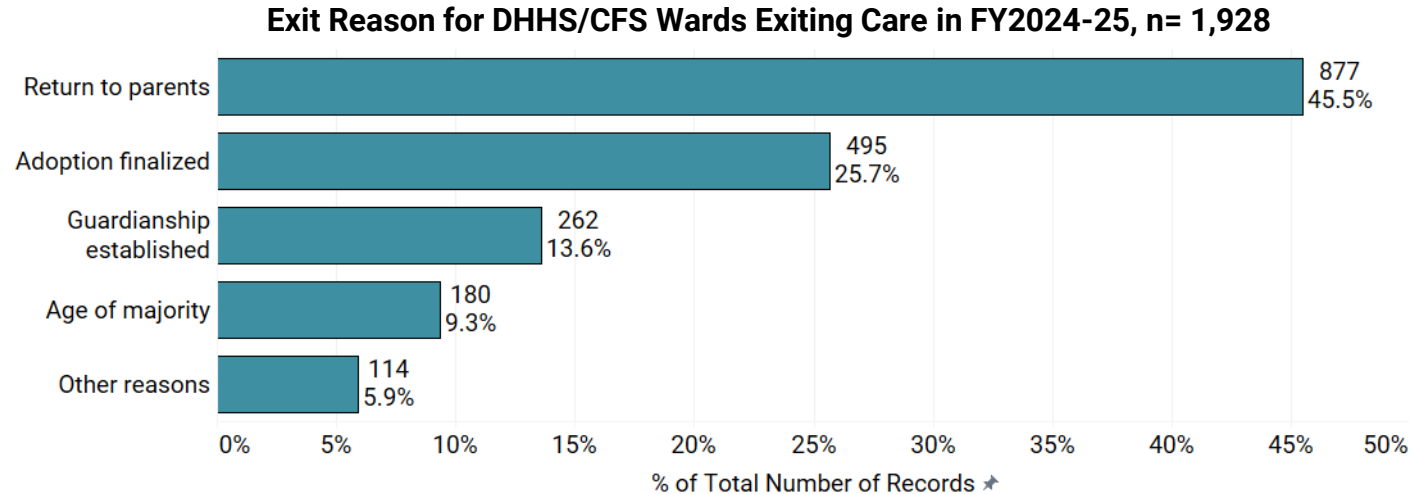


- As of 6/30/2025, DHHS/CFS has reported 94.1% of current relative and 89.8% of kinship homes are approved, rather than licensed.

Recommendation to DHHS

Adoption is the second most common (25.7%) reason for exit from the child welfare system but had the longest median days in care of 987 days. DHHS must be intentional about **identifying adoptive homes for eligible children earlier in the life of the child's case.** In addition, **DHHS should streamline the administrative process** required to finalize adoptions to reduce the time children spend in foster care waiting for permanency.

Exits from Child Welfare



The median consecutive days in care based on exit reason are:

- 987 days for children who were adopted.
- 925 days for children who reached the age of majority while in foster care.
- 670 days for children who exited to a guardianship.
- 383 days for children who returned to their parents' care.
- 352 days for children who exited for other reasons.

Recommendation to DHHS

Statewide, the Ansell Casey Assessment was completed in only 30.3% of reviews. **Ensure that Ansell Casey Assessments are completed for each youth ages 14 and over in out-of-home care, and document case files accordingly.** Additionally, more work is also needed to ensure youth have a current transitional living plan in which they have had an active role in developing so they can be better prepared for adult living. **DHHS should work to improve efforts to ensure current transitional living plans are developed and maintained, along with youth being more involved in developing their own transitional living plan.** This is particularly true in the Eastern Service Area, which lags far behind the other service areas when working with older youth.

Ansell Casey & Transitional Living Plans

| Ansell Casey Assessment | CSA | ESA | NSA | SESA | WSA |
|-------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Assessment complete | 17.9% | 30.7% | 33.1% | 34.4% | 32.6% |
| Assessment NOT complete | 37.7% | 39.1% | 33.1% | 54.8% | 25.8% |
| Unable to determine | 44.3% | 30.2% | 33.9% | 10.8% | 41.6% |

- Statewide, the Ansell Casey was completed in only 30.3% of reviews.

| Transitional Living Plan | CSA | ESA | NSA | SESA | WSA |
|--------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Plan created and current | 87.7% | 55.7% | 85.5% | 86.6% | 69.7% |
| Created but not current | 8.5% | 18.2% | 4.0% | 8.3% | 19.1% |

- Statewide, 70.1% had a current Transitional Living Plan, a slight increase from 69.4% the previous year.

FCRO Data Dashboards



- Start Here
- By County
- Demographics
- Placements
- Child Welfare
- Probation
- Definitions

Children and Youth in Out-of-Home Care in Nebraska

Use the filters on the right to narrow your search to specific populations by Agency, Service Area, Probation District, or County.

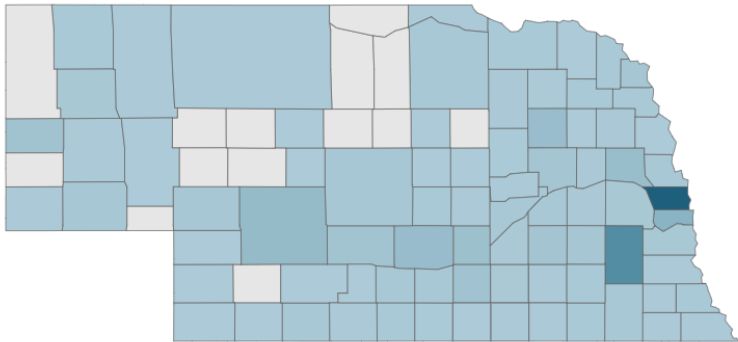
To reset filters, simply unclick selection(s) or press the refresh arrow.



Refresh Filters

Number and Percent of Children by County, DHHS Service Area and Probation District

You can hover over a county to obtain its total children, percent of total, DHHS Service Area and Probation District. Counties shaded in grey have no associated records.



Counties in grey have no associated records for children and youth in out-of-home placements.

4,104

in Out-of-Home Care or Trial Home Visit

Children in Out-of-Home Care on
06/30/2025

PLEASE NOTE: Unless filters are in use, this is the total number of children in all out-of-home placements. It includes children who are wards of the Department of Health and Human Services as well as youth who are placed out of their homes under the supervision of Juvenile Probation and the Office of Juvenile Services.

| County | DHHS Service Area | Probation District | # of Children | % of Children |
|--------------|-------------------|--------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Douglas | Eastern | District 4J | 1,488 | 36.26% |
| Lancaster | Southeast | District 3J | 610 | 14.86% |
| Sarpy | Eastern | District 2 | 229 | 5.58% |
| Lincoln | Western | District 11 | 154 | 3.75% |
| Buffalo | Central | District 9 | 137 | 3.34% |
| Dodge | Northern | District 6 | 133 | 3.24% |
| Madison | Northern | District 7 | 125 | 3.05% |
| Hall | Central | District 9 | 105 | 2.56% |
| Scotts Bluff | Western | District 12 | 80 | 1.95% |
| Adams | Central | District 10 | 78 | 1.90% |
| Dawson | Western | District 11 | 74 | 1.80% |
| York | Northern | District 5 | 57 | 1.39% |
| Platte | Northern | District 5 | 52 | 1.27% |
| Dakota | Northern | District 6 | 40 | 0.97% |
| Seward | Northern | District 5 | 40 | 0.97% |
| Custer | Central | District 8 | 34 | 0.83% |
| Keith | Western | District 11 | 29 | 0.71% |
| Cheyenne | Western | District 12 | 28 | 0.68% |
| Cass | Southeast | District 2 | 25 | 0.61% |
| Saunders | Northern | District 5 | 25 | 0.61% |
| Box Butte | Western | District 12 | 24 | 0.58% |
| Phelps | Central | District 10 | 22 | 0.54% |
| Holt | Central | District 8 | 20 | 0.49% |
| Red Willow | Western | District 11 | 20 | 0.49% |
| Merrick | Northern | District 5 | 19 | 0.46% |
| Total | | | 4,104 | 100.00% |

- Agency
- ☐ DHHS/CFS
- ☐ DHHS/CFS and Probation
- ☐ DHHS/OJS and Probation
- ☐ Probation

- DHHS Service Area
- ☐ Central
- ☐ Eastern
- ☐ Northern
- ☐ Southeast
- ☐ Western

- Probation District
- ☐ District 1
- ☐ District 2
- ☐ District 3J
- ☐ District 4J
- ☐ District 5
- ☐ District 6
- ☐ District 7
- ☐ District 8

- County
-
- ☐ Adams
- ☐ Antelope
- ☐ Boone
- ☐ Box Butte
- ☐ Boyd
- ☐ Buffalo
- ☐ Burt
- ☐ ...

Data Source: FCRO's Foster Care Tracking System (FCTS)

The dashboard is available to the public. Access via the FCRO's website, fcro.nebraska.gov/data_dashboards.html

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