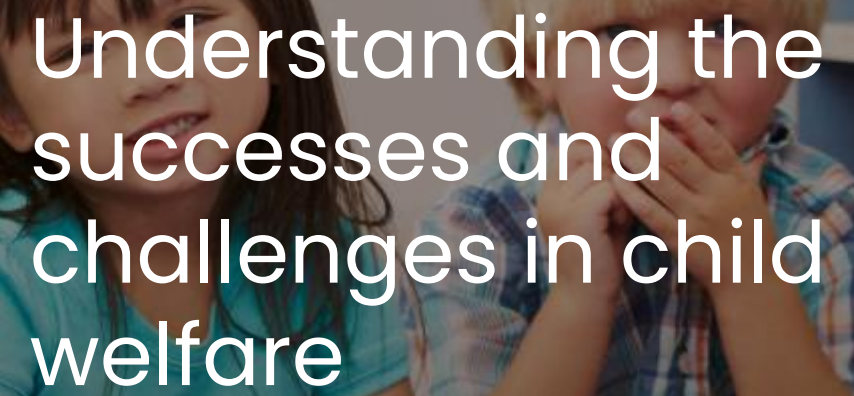
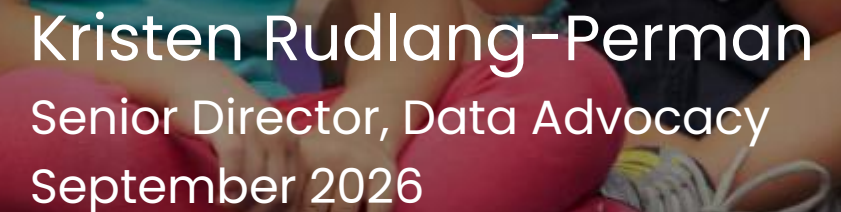




Understanding the successes and challenges in child welfare



Kristen Rudlang-Perman
Senior Director, Data Advocacy
September 2026

A group of diverse young people are sitting together, smiling and looking towards the camera. Overlaid on the image in large, bold, white capital letters is the text "SAFE STRONG SUPPORTIVE". The background is slightly blurred, focusing attention on the people and the text.

safe children | strong families | supportive communities

safe children | **strong** families | **supportive** communities





Focus

- Data as a guide
- Opportunities for change
- Key outcomes to consider
- Next steps

SAFE **STRONG** SUPPORTIVE

What the data tell us

DATA AS A GUIDE

“We look at data, but behind every data point is a young person’s life.”

– LUPE FINCKWARD (ORTIZ-TOVAR), FOSTER CARE ALUMNI, CHILD WELFARE TECHNICAL EXPERT,
AND 2018 CASEY EXCELLENCE FOR CHILDREN AWARDS ALUMNI HONOREE





Is the child welfare system in your state performing well?

...and how do you know?

A place to start...

CSG South: 10 Core Outcomes for Child Safety & Well-being

A Guide for Legislative Oversight & Inquiry

August 31 – September 2, 2026

The legislative lens: 3 principles for effective oversight

1. Listen to people with lived experience: Engage directly with children and families to understand the real-world experiences behind these numbers.
2. Look below the surface: Ask for data disaggregated by county, age, and race/ethnicity to ensure policies and resources effectively reach every group.
3. Trace system dynamics & trade-offs: Treat changing trends as the start of an inquiry – evaluate how policy, funding, or practice shifts impact adjacent outcomes (e.g. rapid reunification vs. re-entry rates).

“Behind every data point is a young person’s life.” – Lupe Tovar, Casey Excellence for Children Awards Alumni

Data alone doesn’t give answers – it points to the right questions. Use these 10 core outcomes to evaluate agency performance, track multi-year trends, and focus legislative inquiry.

Strategic goals & oversight questions

Goal	Core outcomes	Key oversight question
Reduce family separation as a primary strategy for government intervention for families in crisis	1. Screen-in rate 2. Substantiation rate 3. Entry rate	Are we intervening with community support early, or are we using child protection investigations to address issues that may not require that type of intervention?
Reduce time in care and time spent away from family	4. Kinship & group placement 5. Timely permanency 6. Permanency for children in care 2+ years	Where are the systemic bottlenecks – licensing barriers for relatives, court delays, or shortages of family-based foster homes?
Increase safety in the context of children living with and within their family	7. Recurrence of maltreatment 8. Re-entry rate 9. Child maltreatment fatality rate	What post-permanency and family stabilization supports are provided to ensure children remain safe long after an agency case closes?

Navigating this data handout

Each outcome is organized into 3 containers:

1. 5-year trendline: shows directionality over time (improving, worsening, or flat) relative to the national trend
2. Demographic breakdown: highlights where outcomes are different for different age groups and racial/ethnic groups
3. Oversight context: explains why the metric matters and offers specific questions for discussion



casey family programs

safe children | strong families | supportive communities
casey.org

Key
federal
initiative:
A Home
for Every
Child

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{1:1} \\ \text{foster} \\ \text{home} \\ \text{-to-} \\ \text{child} \\ \text{ratio} \end{array} = \frac{\text{\# of foster homes}}{\text{\# of children in} \\ \text{foster care}}$$

<https://acf.gov/a-home-for-every-child>

SAFE **STRONG** SUPPORTIVE

What the data tell us

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHANGE



System continuum

Before:

prevention & early
support

During:

placement &
permanency

Before, during & after:

holistic safety &
Support



System continuum

Opportunity

What this could look like

Before:
prevention & early
support

Reduce family separation as a
primary strategy for
government intervention for
families in crisis

Ensure community supports before a
family crisis leads to separation

During:
placement &
permanency

Before, during & after:
holistic safety &
Support



System continuum

Opportunity

What this could look like

Before:
prevention & early
support

Reduce family separation as a
primary strategy for
government intervention for
families in crisis

Ensure community supports before a
family crisis leads to separation

During:
placement &
permanency

Reduce time in care and time
spent away from family

Keep children connected to family,
culture, and community while moving
quickly toward safe permanency

Before, during & after:
holistic safety &
Support



System continuum

Opportunity

What this could look like

Before:
prevention & early
support

Reduce family separation as a
primary strategy for
government intervention for
families in crisis

Ensure community supports before a
family crisis leads to separation

During:
placement &
permanency

Reduce time in care and time
spent away from family

Keep children connected to family,
culture, and community while moving
quickly toward safe permanency

Before, during & after:
holistic safety &
Support

Increase safety in the context
of children living with and
within their family

Ensure ongoing family stability and safety
so children thrive with and within their
families before and after case closure

SAFE **STRONG** SUPPORTIVE

What the data tell us

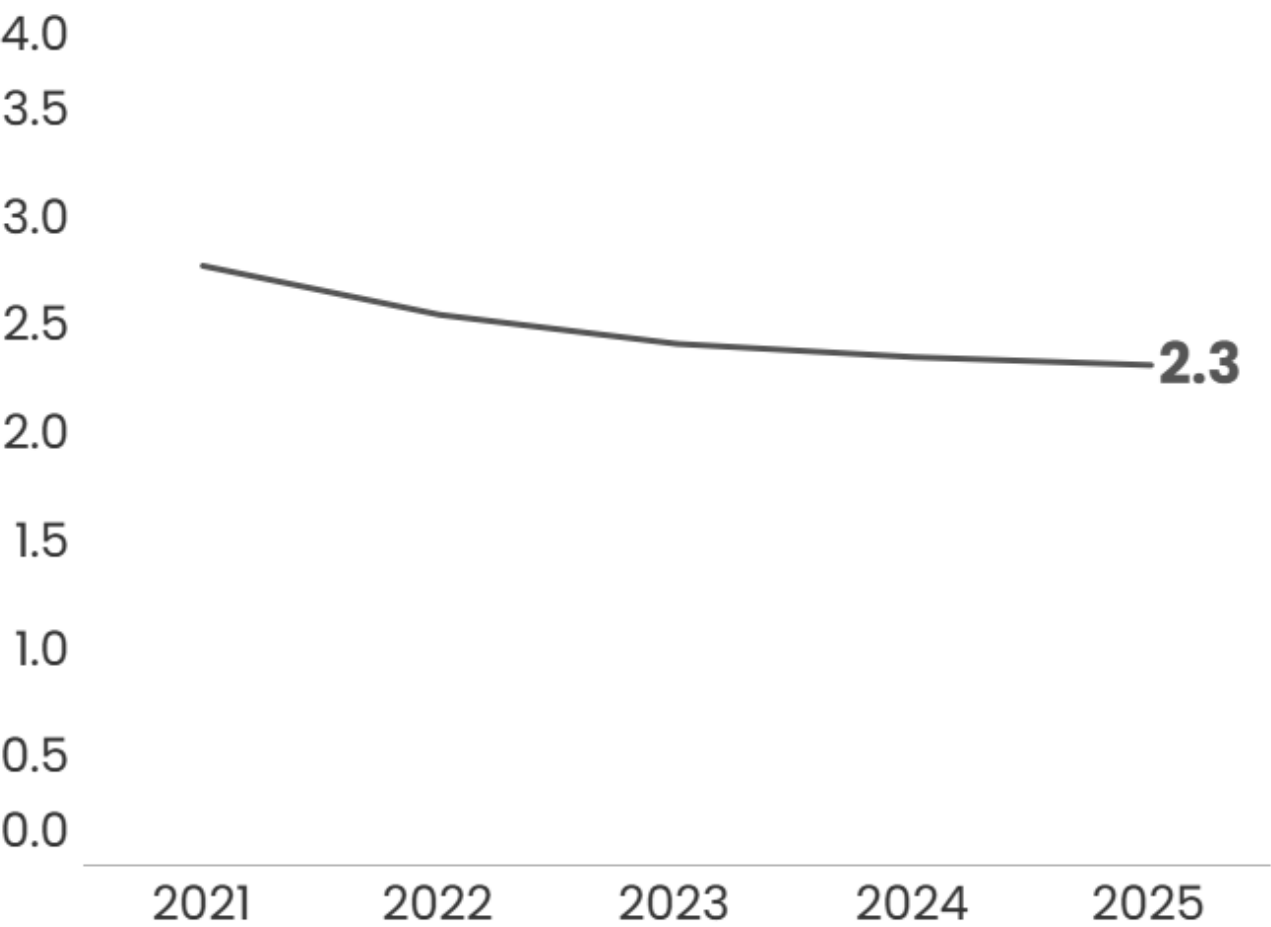
KEY OUTCOMES TO CONSIDER



BEFORE

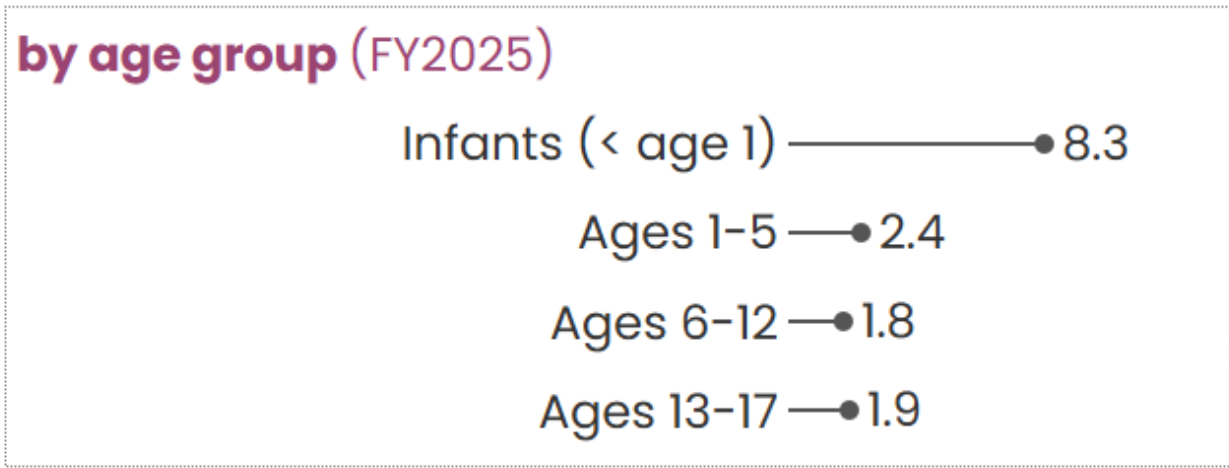
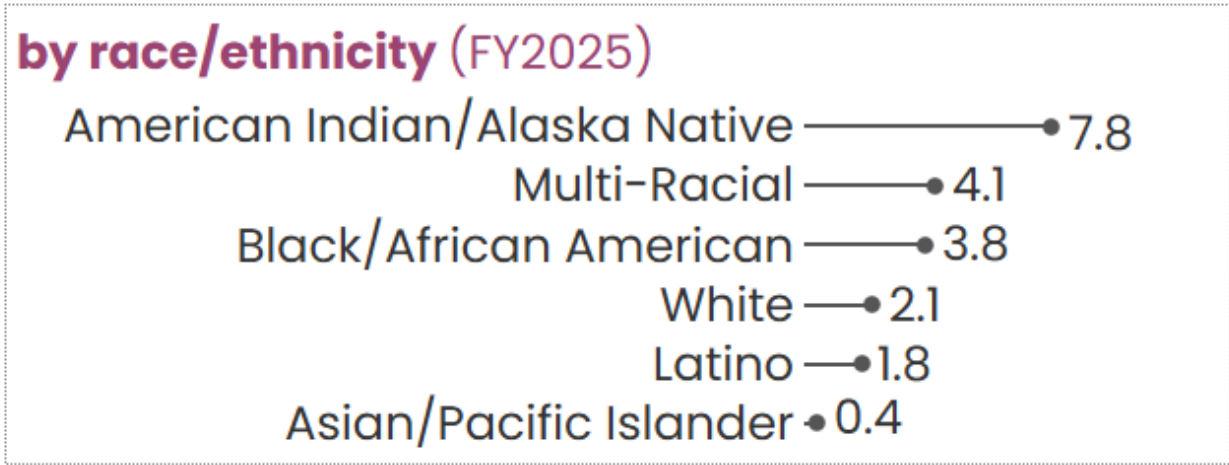
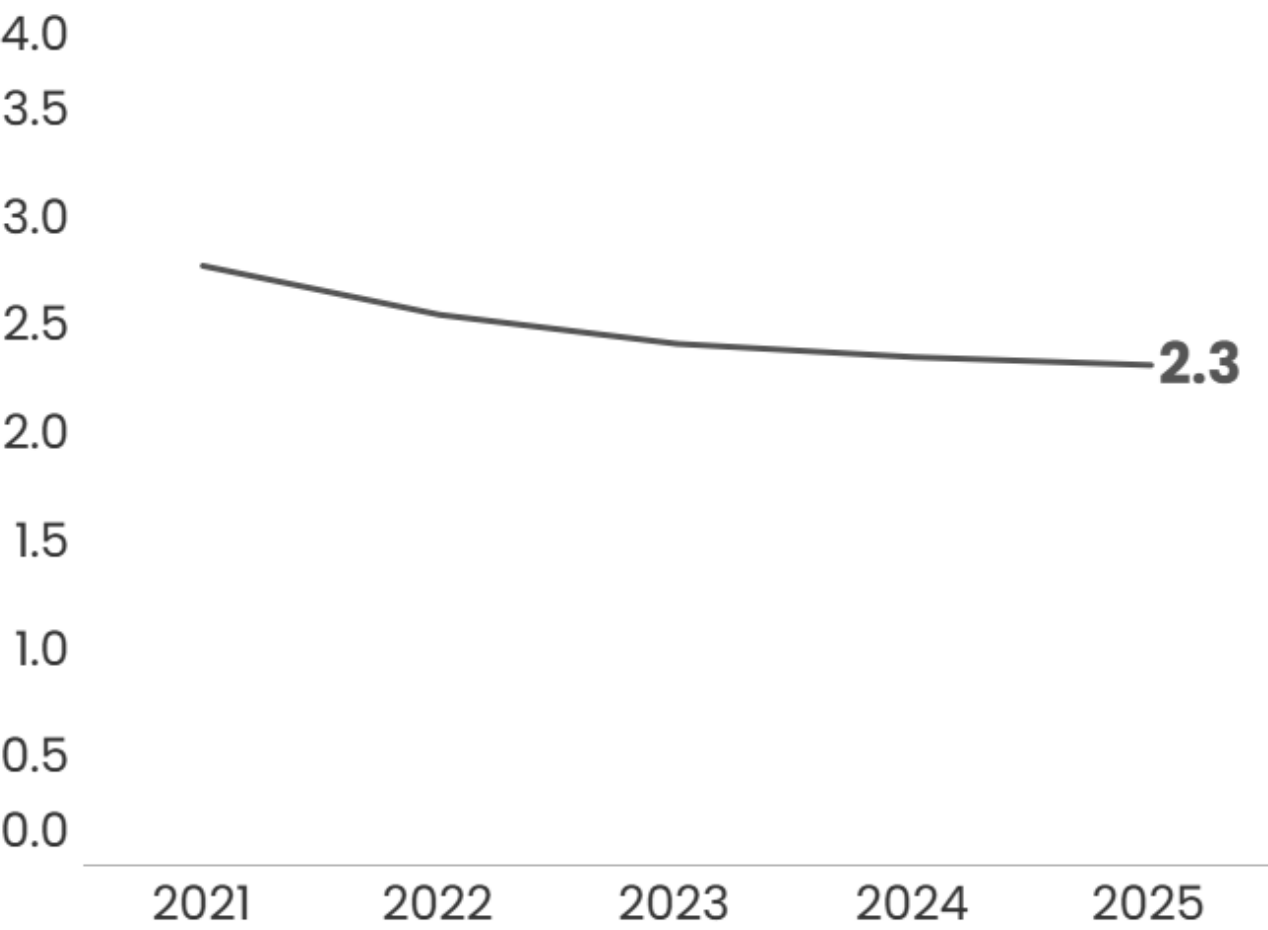
example
Rate of children entering care

Nationally the **rate of children entering care** has declined



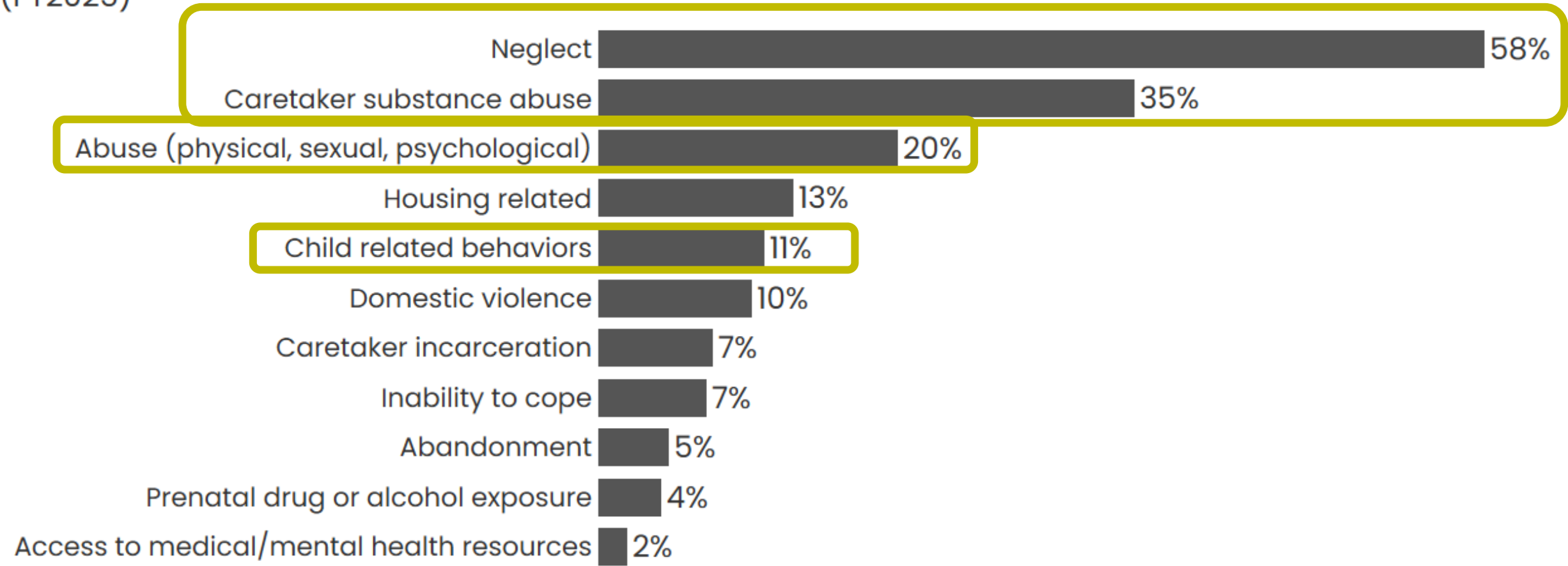
Calculation: number of children entering out-of-home care per 1,000 children in the population
Source: AFCARS

Nationally the **rate of children entering care** has declined, although there is **variation by age group and race/ethnicity**



Children entering care have **a number of different family circumstances** identified as contributing to the removal

(FY2025)



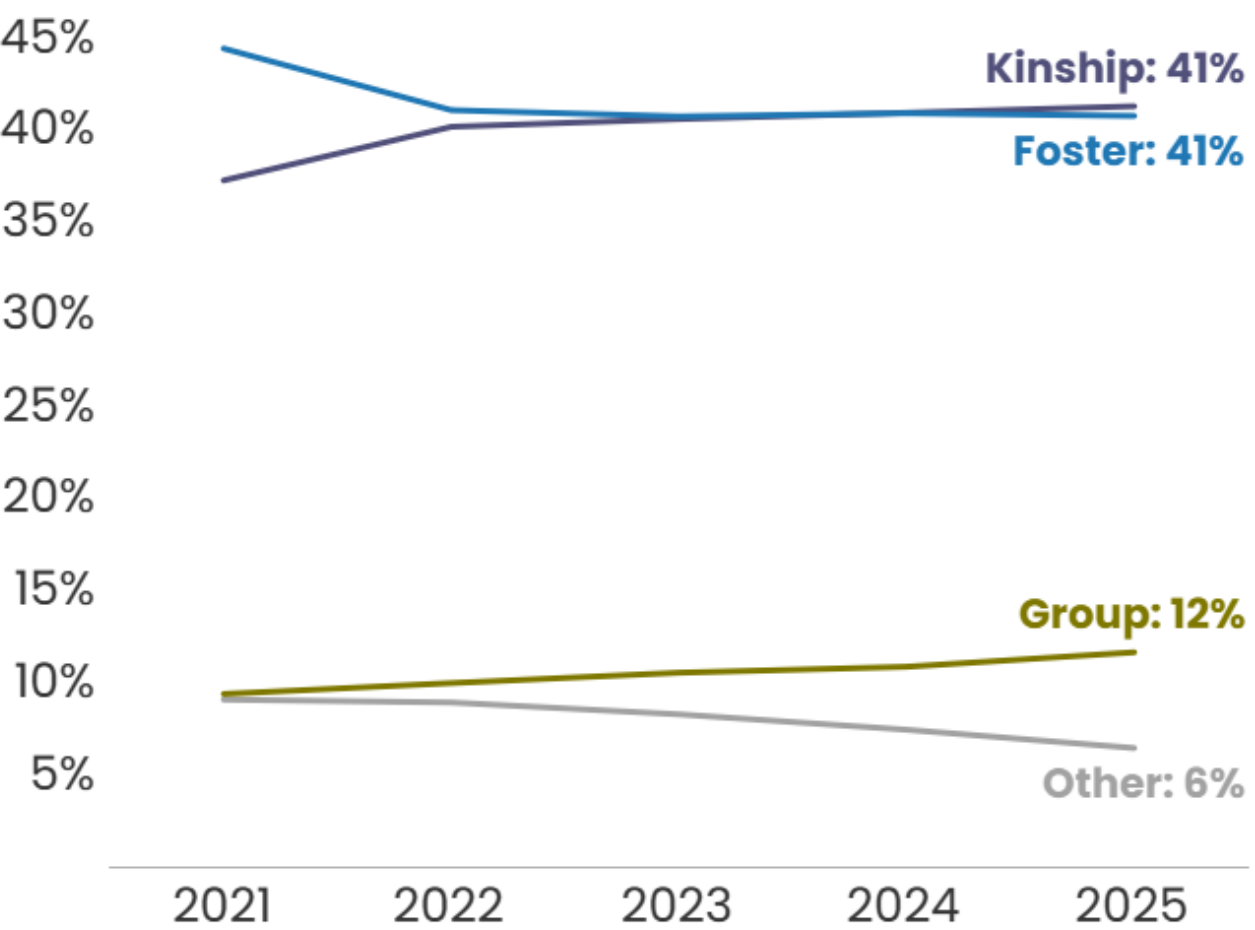


DURING

example

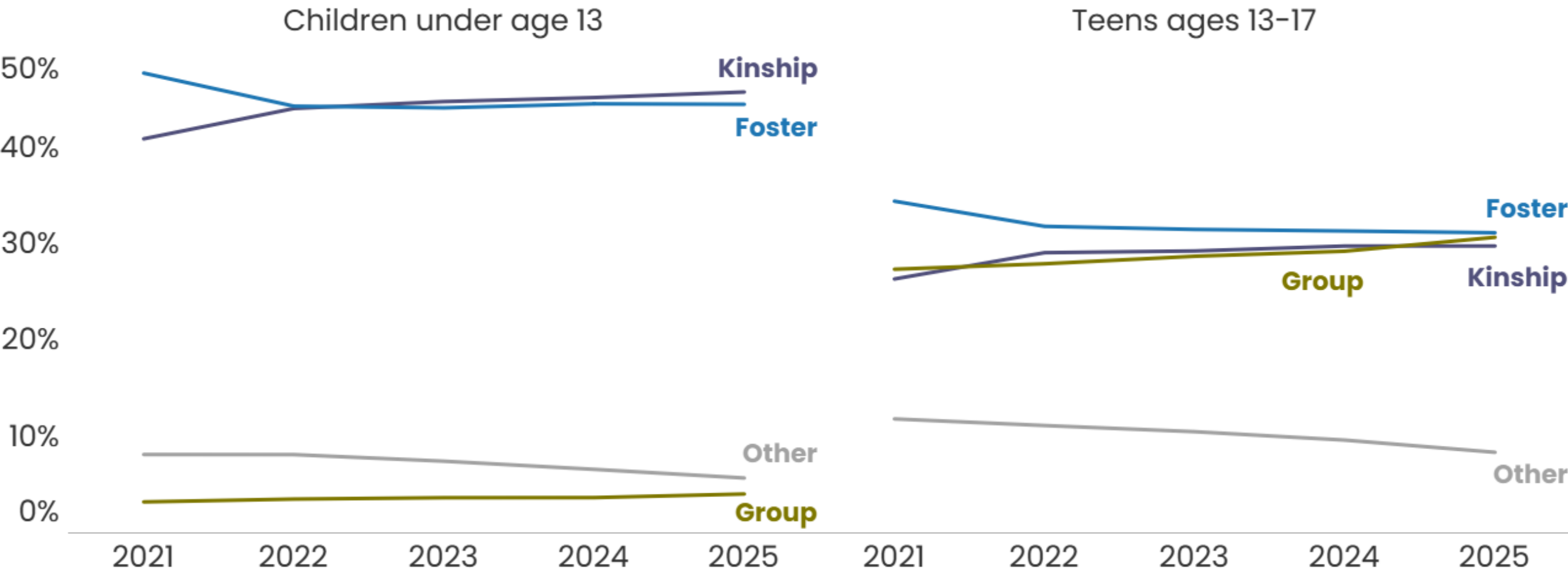
Percent of children placed with
kin vs. group settings

Children are **most likely to be placed with kin or in a family-based setting with strangers**



Calculation: Children in care for each placement type by the total number of children in care; Source: AFCARS

But the **percent of children in care by placement type varies by age group**



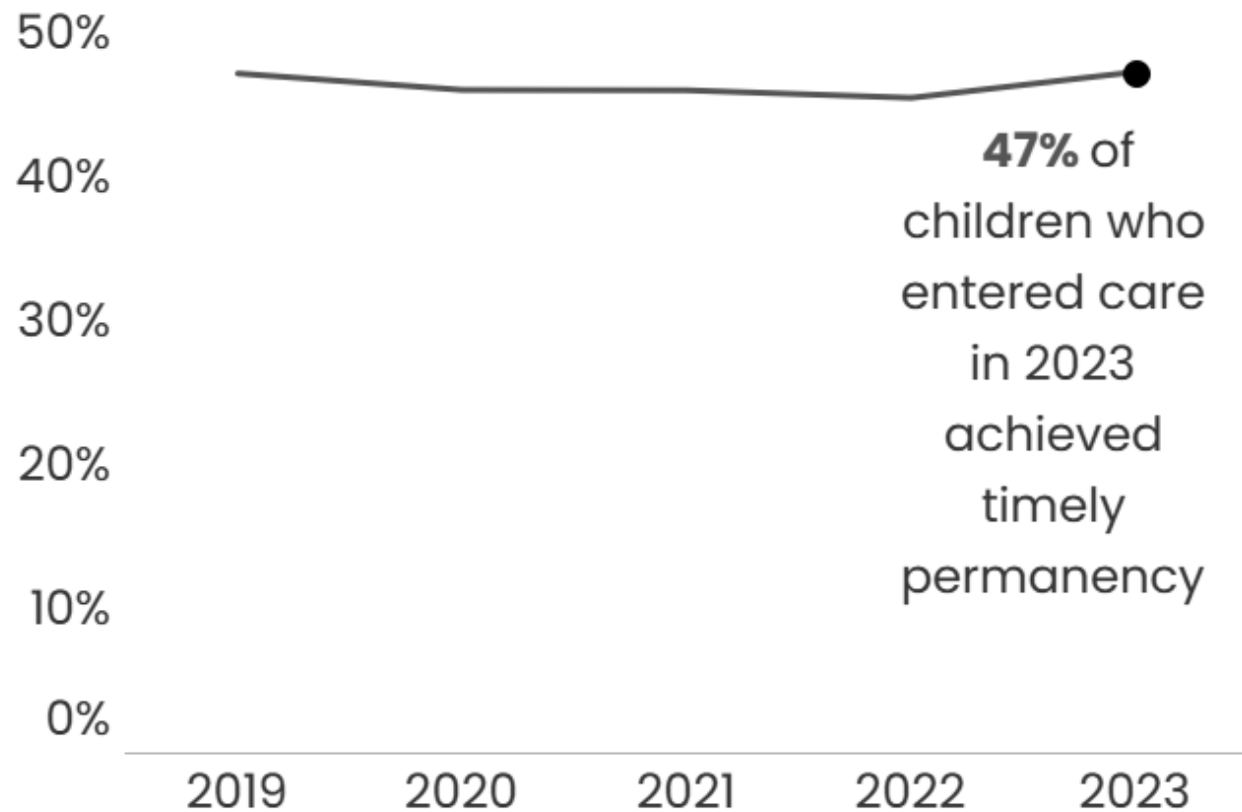


BEFORE,
DURING, &
AFTER

example

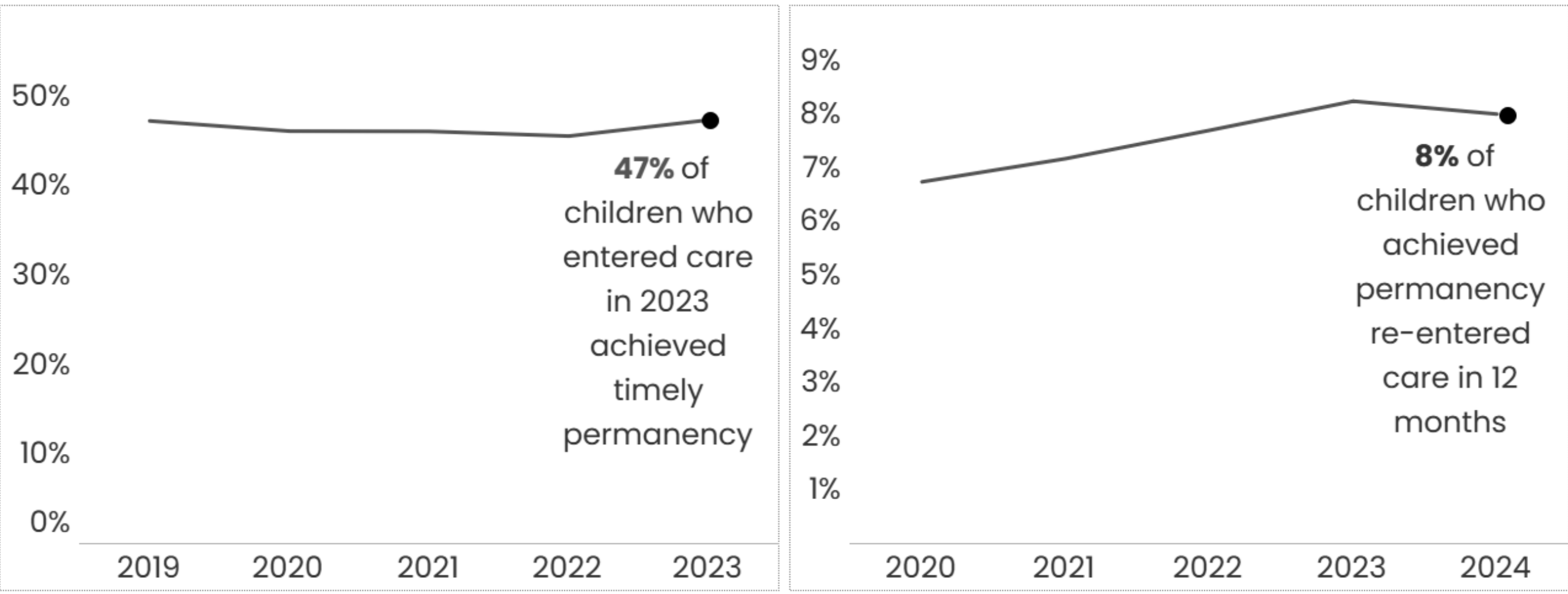
Percent of children exiting care to
a timely and permanent setting
and not re-entering care

The **percent of children who achieved timely permanency** has remained relatively flat over time



Calculation: number of children that exited to any permanency within 12 months or adoption/guardianship within 12-24 months as a percent of all children who entered care; Source: AFCARS

...although the **percent of children re-entering care within 12 months** has increased a bit.



SAFE **STRONG** SUPPORTIVE

What the data tell us

NEXT STEPS

Putting your guidebook to work

- Schedule a 1:1 briefing for data deep-dive
- Engage the data lead in your state
- Review your state data sheets (handout)
- Leverage other resources:
 - Community opportunity map:
<https://www.casey.org/community-opportunity-map/>
 - Portfolio of briefs & other resources on a range of topics:
<https://www.casey.org/resources/field-questions/>
- **Listen to community voice & those who've been impacted by child welfare**



Let's
continue the
conversation!

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