

DRIVING QUESTION:

HOW DO THE CHANGES THAT FOSTER KIDS  
FACE IMPACT THEIR MENTAL HEALTH?

## **Student-led Research Results:**

**We conducted an Interview with Senior Social Worker Andrea Guillen, who has worked for child and family services for 9 years and specializes in child welfare.**

***Do you believe the children received enough medical attention in the system?***

I do believe children received adequate medical attention once brought into the system. When the children are detained by the department of Social Services they will initially be screened by a doctor and they will receive a physical exam. Once the child is declared a dependent of the court the assigned social worker follows up with medical records such as immunizations and well visits and ensures that the child is seen when necessary. The child is also monitored for any mental health issues and if necessary provided a referral for counseling.

***What are some common troubles that the children in the foster care system face throughout their experiences? Do you believe that these children are given enough attention? If no, what are the systems or issues that may get in the way of giving these kids enough attention?***

Often times, children are placed in Foster Homes instead of a family setting because of the lack of foster homes. It can be very difficult for a child to receive enough attention because they are usually placed with many other children. These children lose their ability to connect with a permanent family. Without a family connection, many children age out of foster care.

***What would be some reasons that foster kids might develop a type of mental health issue such as anxiety, depression, or other problem?***

When the department of Social Services needs to detain a child from their parents this can often cause trauma for the child. The child may develop separation anxiety from a parent and often times depression. The child may also feel a sense of abandonment. Other issues arise in line with the trauma a child may experience such as the child may have a hard time concentrating in school which can result in lower academic grades. A child may also develop behavioral problems in effort to disclose their frustrations.

***How do the experiences that foster kids face affect what their future will be like once they get out of the system?***

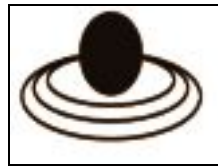
Foster children face roadblocks that can hinder a successful future. As mentioned before, foster children are more likely to have behavioral problems and may have difficulty concentrating in school. They may fall behind academically. Without the proper education/ grades the foster children may not have as many opportunities in obtaining a career as someone who has not been in the system. For those who age out of the system they may not have family support to help them transition into adulthood. The youth might not have housing causing them to be homeless.

***Do you think kids in foster care are more at risk for mental health issues than other children that are not in the system?***

I definitely think there is a higher correlation in mental health issues with foster children than those who are not in the system. Not only can they experience trauma at their home (being the reason why

they came to the attention of the department of Social Services), but also the trauma they experience in the removal and the in and out of foster care can hinder their mental status.

**Change generates additional change.**



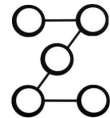
**IMPACT**

- Foster kids, while they face the big change of moving into another home, causes even more change throughout their life. Logan Nakyanzi states in an article, “Having thousands of kids in foster care is a cause for concern because it's at an enormous financial and human cost,” (p. 1).
- The conditions that foster kids face throughout their lifetime, and the consistent change in foster homes, **generates additional change**, specifically financially.
- In an interview with social worker Andrea Guillen, she notes, “Foster children face roadblocks that can hinder a successful future. As mentioned before, foster children are more likely to have behavioral problems and may have difficulty concentrating in school. They may fall behind academically. Without the proper education/ grades the foster children may not have as many opportunities in obtaining a career as someone who has not been in the system. For those who age out of the system they may not have family support to help them transition into adulthood. The youth might not have housing causing them to be homeless.” This can bring up the rates for unemployment and homelessness in the future if foster care numbers increase over time, **generating additional changes**.

## Change can be either positive or negative.



MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES



PATTERNS



CHANGES OVER TIME

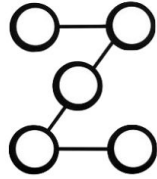
### **NEGATIVE CHANGE:**

- The changes that foster kids face can be negative like having more mental issues, behavioral issues, physical issues, or they can be positive and achieve their life goals.
- According to Norton (2016), “They were five to seven times more likely to have behavioral issues or symptoms of depression or anxiety” (p. 1).
- Compared to the rest of the population, foster kids are always more vulnerable to mental health issues. This can be due to the consistent change in homes and families, affecting their ability to form any connections with others.
- Norton additionally states, “Children in foster care face increased risks of physical and mental health issues, from asthma to ADHD to depression, a new study finds.” (p. 1, 2016) This shows how change can negatively impact the child since they become more vulnerable to medical issues. This can also represent the types of children that are in the home, and how they are taken care of by the foster parents. Although, maybe a certain amount of these conditions existed before they entered the system, and maybe the more changes they face, the more intense their issues will be.

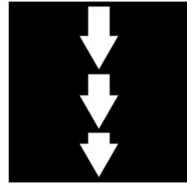
### **POSITIVE CHANGE:**

- Sometimes though, the foster care system, along with its drastic changes, can end up positively impacting the child's life. According to Logan Nakyanzi (2017), “Despite difficult circumstances, foster kids can be great achievers, advocates say. As well as Fisher, basketball star Alonzo Mourning and actor Victoria Rowell were both foster children” (p. 2). The changes that they face might help them recover from the experiences they faced in their original home. Foster care could help them aspire careers and college, and many great achievers can prove this is true.

## Change is inevitable.



PATTERNS

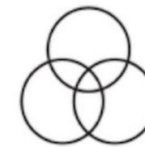


CONTRIBUTION

- The National Adoption Center states, “It is where children go when their parents cannot, for a variety of reasons, care for them” (p. 1).
- No matter if the child’s life is affected positively or negatively through foster care, they still face change either way and **change is inevitable**. The reason they are in foster care is because they originally faced intolerable conditions or some sort of trauma in their home. This shows how changes that foster kids face are inevitable because just the transitioning into the system is a big change itself.
- According to an interview with Andrea Guillen, “Often times, children are placed in Foster Homes instead of a family setting because of the lack of foster homes. It can be very difficult for a child to receive enough attention because they are usually placed with many other children.” Since the children are facing these changes, being in a foster home with multiple other children and not a family that would focus specifically on that child, they commonly don’t receive enough attention to help them in school, or aren’t really taught how to support themselves once they exit the system. Lack of attention and guidance could also take a toll on their mental health, perhaps they feel as if they are helpless and they won’t achieve anything either way.

## Change is necessary for growth.

- In an article written by NYU Professor Hazen (2014), she adds, “After examining the social, mental, and physical risks of adolescents in foster care, the relationships that youth in foster care create among their peers, caregivers, and sexual partners appear to be crucial in terms of both external and internal outcomes.”
- While in the system, their mental health is greatly affected by the way they communicate and connect with others. In order for the children to positively take away from the experience of the foster system, they should maintain healthy connections with those around them, such as foster parents, counselors, etc.
- According to social worker, Andrea Guillen, she states, “For those who age out of the system they may not have family support to help them transition into adulthood. The youth might not have housing causing them to be homeless.” Although the change to a foster family or home may be difficult and a traumatic experience for the child, it is necessary to ensure the child will be safe in a caring home. For them to succeed and achieve goals such as college degrees, the need to reach out to those that offer assistance to them to help them transition into adulthood and teach them how to support themselves.

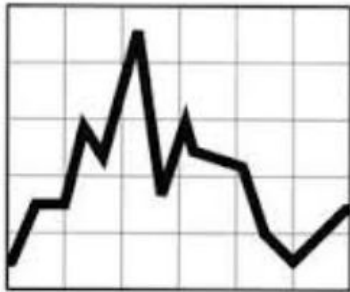


### CONTEXT

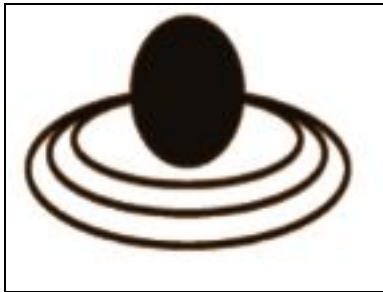
The environment or context that surrounds a foster child is very important for a child’s mental and social health. The stronger the community and peer connections are, the healthier the child will grow both mentally and socially in the future. In fact, when a child is in a safe and caring home, they are more likely to achieve goals like higher education and independence. In this way, a foster home **may be necessary for** a child to be in a safe environment that will support their **growth**.



# Change can be evolutionary or revolutionary.



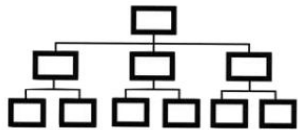
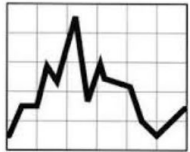
TRENDS



IMPACT

- Foster children make up a large number of children these days, and they leave an impact on our society in many ways. Statistically, they leave behind many concerning outcomes after they leave the system. According to Cabrera (Huffington Post, 2014), “3-11% of former foster children complete a bachelor’s degree in comparison with 28% of the general public.
- Foster children are also less likely to graduate high school, they experience more school changes and are more likely to become homeless, unemployed or go to jail within one year of turning 19.” These are the children of our future and if the foster children rates go up, the outcomes they face become more common as well. Perhaps it is because they don’t receive enough support or motivation to pursue a career or attend college.
- Andrea Guillen notes in an interview, “Other issues arise in line with the trauma a child may experience such as the child may have a hard time concentrating in school which can result in lower academic grades.” This shows that past experiences that brought the children into the system affect the way that they act and communicate, which could eventually impact their future. Even though foster children is a small population compared to other children, it still greatly affects the community. If foster children are having a hard time concentrating on their future and goals, it only negatively affects them even more in the long run.
- Therefore, change can be evolutionary or revolutionary because it can greatly impact the community on a large scale over time.

# FOSTER CARE IN AMERICA - FACTS AND STATISTICS



TRENDS

LANGUAGE OF THE DISCIPLINE

DETAILS

RULES

A child is placed in the foster care system when the child is no longer able to live in the conditions of their own home where their birthparents are not able to properly care for them. Foster care can be arranged legally through courts or through a social service agency. The common goal in the foster care system is to eventually reunify the child with their birth parent, but in some cases this is not possible. Foster care families can adopt the child, the main difference being that foster care is temporary while adoption is permanent.

The foster care system was an idea that started up around the mid 19th century in New York City. Many homeless kids suffered on the streets, with nobody to care for them. Soon, most of those kids were sent to live and work on farms, starting a new life. Today, hundreds of thousands of children are part of the foster care system, where they suffer through many difficulties that come along with it, one of those being mental health issues.

- 3-11% of former foster children complete a bachelor's degree
- In 2015, there were nearly 670,000 children in foster homes in the United States
- The average length a child stays in the foster care system is 22.4 months
- There only about 3,000 foster homes, so there aren't enough for all the children
- 1 in every 5 foster children will become homeless
- Once they're 18 they must to live on their own
- Organizations like *Together We Rise*, Foster Care Coalition, adoptUSkids, and Westside Children's Center, all support foster care
- In Santa Ana, local resources for foster care are OrangeWood Foundation, OC4 Kids, Regional Center of OC, Olive Crest, Abc Foster Family Agency, and many more
- More than 20,000 of the children in foster care stay in the system until they age out
- 25% of people in prison where once in the foster system
- 16% of foster homes are maltreating the children
- 80% of children in foster care have significant mental health issues

## **Ending Question:**

What can I do in my local community to contribute to positive outcomes for foster kids?

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<https://consumer.healthday.com/kids-health-information-23/kids-ailments-health-news-434/foster-kids-face-higher-risk-of-health-problems-study-715896.html>

University of California, Irvine (2016, Oct. 17) "Foster care children at much greater risk of physical, mental health problems"  
<https://news.uci.edu/research/foster-care-children-at-much-greater-risk-of-physical-mental-health-problems/>

OUR DRIVING  
QUESTION:

How do the changes that  
foster kids face impact their  
mental health ?

- Change generate additional change

-Change can be either positive or negative

- Change is inevitable

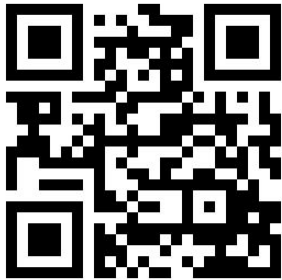
-Change is necessary for growth

-Change can be evolutionary or revolutionary

What can I do in my local community to contribute to positive  
outcomes for foster kids?

## Check out our blogs for symposium!

Sofia Barrows' website-



Emily Guillen's Website-



Nidia Tapia's Website-





**Driving Question:**

**How do the changes that foster kids face impact their mental health?**

**Names of student researchers:**

**Nidia Tapia, Emily Guillen, Sofia Barrows**

**Grade level:**

**8**

**Mentor teacher:**

**Ms. Park, Mr. Radford, Mrs. Surya**

**Special notes about handling and or placement or presentation space needed: N/A**