

2024

# Foster Care in Southwest Indiana White Paper

*Welborn Baptist Foundation*



Welborn Baptist  
Foundation



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



### *What is Foster Care?*

Foster care provides a temporary home and support service “for children who can no longer remain in their homes due to the risk of abuse or neglect.”<sup>1</sup>

### *Why is Foster Care Important?*

Foster care has the potential to heal individuals and communities from disruptive situations. When foster children are in stable, healthy environments, they can better grow in both social and intellectual abilities. Getting the support they need during foster care can then make them better able to contribute to society, while simultaneously avoiding community costs related to jail time, physical and mental health conditions, etc.

### *Preventing the Need for Foster Care*

While foster care will always be necessary, there are opportunities to prevent the need for it. Since poverty is a key driver of child neglect, alleviating poverty will decrease the need for foster care. All families also need concrete support, such as food, medical help, education, and employment. Concrete Support gives people what they need when they need it. That reduces a parent’s stress level, and may ultimately prevent neglect. According to research by Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, “concrete supports have been associated with reductions in subsequent reports for neglect, as well as reductions in foster care entries.”<sup>2</sup>

### *Southwest Indiana Children in Foster Care*

As of September 30, 2022, there were 13,239 children in foster care in Indiana. A disproportionate amount of children in foster care are young children. Children under 5 years old represent the highest percentage of individuals in foster care (39%).

There are also racial disparities. Gibson, Posey, and Warrick counties are mainly racially homogenous, while Vanderburgh County’s population is more racially diverse and more closely resembles the state’s composition. The percentage of Black or African American children in foster care (18%) is disproportionately high compared to this segment of the overall population in Indiana (9%). The racial disparity in Vanderburgh County is three times worse than the state.

The circumstances associated with a child’s removal from their family are often complex with multiple reasons for removal. Neglect is the predominant factor for a child’s removal, contributing to 91% of Indiana cases. Other major drivers of removal include substance use by a parent, parental incarceration, housing instability, physical abuse, and caretaker inability to cope.

<sup>1</sup> Indiana Foster Care. (IFC, n.d.). Foster Care Common Terms. Retrieved January 25, 2024, from <https://www.indianafostercare.org/s/article/Foster-Care-Common-Terms>

<sup>2</sup> Anderson, C., Thomas, K., Weiner, D., (2021, July). System Transformation to Support Child & Family Well-Being: The Central Role of Economic & Concrete Supports. Chapin Hall Policy Brief. <https://www.chapinhall.org/wp-content/uploads/Economic-and-Concrete-Supports.pdf>

# Recommendations for Foster Care in Gibson, Posey, Vanderburgh, and Warrick Counties

## **Convene Faith Communities for Collaboration**

1. Local churches are working in various ways to support foster care. By convening a group of representatives from the faith community, these efforts can be coordinated. SWIFT: Southwest Indiana Foster Team is already convening four organizations and is willing to expand.
2. SWIFT may act as a backbone collaboration among the faith community and other nonprofit organizations serving children in foster care and foster and kinship care families. As a backbone collaboration, SWIFT can be the convener, ensuring regular meetings with agendas and consistent communication. If SWIFT is not able to serve as a backbone collaboration, another organization should be identified.
  - Over time, the organizations can all pay into the backbone organization to hire a facilitator to oversee the group and move the needle on foster care efforts.
3. Create a strategic plan with goals and strategies so the faith community and other nonprofit organizations can move foster care efforts forward together. Include a regular meeting cadence that allows members to address and monitor action steps in the plan.

## **Alleviate Poverty and Inequity**

1. Child neglect is overwhelmingly the biggest cause of children entering the foster care system. Alleviating family and child poverty can decrease cases of child neglect. Adopt universal strategies that target all community members, not just those already at risk of entering the foster care system. Ensure all counties have a minimum wage that is a living wage, sufficient affordable housing, and affordable child care.
2. Request the Removal by Race Report from Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS). Work with DCS to decrease the disparity between the number of Children of Color and White children being placed in foster care.

## **Create and Expand Programming That Offers Families Support**

1. Programs that strengthen families can decrease the cases of neglect. Providing programming such as Strengthening Indiana Families Family Resource Centers can help provide families the resources they need to get through the tough times in life, decrease stress, and prevent neglect.
2. Help create a village for a family through programming like Safe Families for Children. Wraparound care for families who do not have others to turn to can mean the difference between a successful or a struggling family.
3. Support foster and kinship care families through training and community. Giving foster families the network they need to foster children successfully, may lead to retaining foster parents.



# Recommendations for Foster Care in Gibson, Posey, Vanderburgh, and Warrick Counties

## **Create and Expand Concrete Supports in Southwest Indiana**

1. Assist Hands of Hope's efforts with CarePortal. Work to increase the number of churches and business partnerships, and explore adding this service in Gibson and Posey counties.
2. Identify and support nonprofit organizations and churches that offer concrete supports to families. Concrete support has the potential of preventing a child from foster care placement.

## **Identify strategies to address barriers such as limited service availability and staffing shortages**

1. Community feedback shows that limited services are a barrier, which may be caused by staffing shortages, and that constant workforce turnover prevents progress. Mentoring, coaching, and professional development are all strategies to help improve retention. The workforce issue may also be alleviated by community programs working to share the load.
2. The community may find ways to support and encourage child welfare staff, which can help them feel less burdened and increase retention.
3. Explore funding to increase wages, forgive student loans, and improve mental health supports for case workers and others working with children in foster care and foster and kinship families.



# INTRODUCTION



## Introduction

Welborn Baptist Foundation (WBF) contacted Transform Consulting Group (TCG) to develop a white paper on foster care to understand the landscape and needs in Gibson, Posey, Vanderburgh, and Warrick counties. For the purpose of this report, when discussing the four counties collectively, they are referred to as Southwest Indiana. WBF and TCG convened a steering committee to guide the research and development of the white paper.

### The white paper focuses on the following guiding questions:

1. What is foster care?
2. How does foster care impact the community?
3. Who are the children in the Southwest Indiana counties?
4. How is the community meeting the needs of children in foster care?
5. How are other communities addressing foster care needs?
6. What improvements can be made in the foster care system?

## Acknowledgements

WBF and TCG would like to thank the steering committee for their help and guidance in completing this white paper. The steering committee members include:

Martha Barnett | Billyee Beckham | Jonathan Boettcher | Julie Burton | Kelly Cody | Jara Dillingham | Kathleen Elliott | Samantha Freeman | Casey Getzin | John Heflick | Sarah Inman | Allison Keen | Staci Krueger | Laura Keys | Marcia Lambert | Larry May | Erica Rasler | Traci Robinson | Tearee West

## Purpose

In recent years, WBF has granted over \$500,000 to foster care projects, and funding requests for foster care have increased. Through the development of this paper, WBF hopes to understand more about who the local and regional foster care partners are and how foster care impacts families and children. WBF will distribute this white paper so the community can be informed about how foster care impacts the region. **For the purpose of this white paper, foster care is defined as children in need of services (CHINS) outside of their home.**



# Methodology

The steering committee identified key community stakeholders to solicit feedback from and other essential information to gather for the white paper. TCG collected the following information:

1. Data from public sources on the number of children in foster care, their reason for being there, how long they are in foster care, and whether or not they stay within their county or are transported to another location in Indiana.

2. Community feedback through surveys with providers, foster families, and community partners, and an interview with a woman who grew up in foster care. TCG received feedback from these groups, which included the following:

- Community Partners Survey, representing religious and nonprofit organizations, government and education institutions, and health and mental health services - 41 responses
- Foster Care Placement Services Survey - 6 responses
- Foster and Kinship Care Parents Survey - 9 responses
- Interview with one woman who aged out of foster care

## Barriers and Limitations to Collecting Community Feedback

The steering committee, WBF, and TCG dedicated considerable time to collecting community feedback. TCG worked with the steering committee and WBF to develop the surveys and create a distribution plan. The distribution plan encouraged the steering committee to reach out to their colleagues, foster and kinship parents they work with, community partners, and other contacts through one-to-one emails and e-newsletters. TCG also supplied a flier with a QR code, for placement services to hang in their offices.

After the surveys were open for a month, TCG began reaching out to placement services, community organizations, and foster parent associations to ask them to take and distribute the surveys to their networks. These efforts did not increase survey numbers, and neither the Foster Care Placement Services Survey nor the Foster and Kinship Care Parents Survey received enough complete responses to analyze. Quotes from these surveys, which offer insight and support other research in this paper, are used throughout the paper.

# Glossary

The glossary below is provided to help define terms used throughout this white paper or provide context that may help the reader understand foster care more thoroughly. Most of these definitions, as well as others, can be found in Indiana's Department of Child Services (DCS) Glossary of Common Terms, linked in the footnotes.<sup>3</sup>

**Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs):** Per the Centers for Disease Control, ACEs are all potential traumatic experiences that occur to people under the age of 18, including all types of Child Abuse and/or Neglect (CA/N) and growing up in an environment of violence, substance abuse, or with a caregiver who is experiencing mental health issues. The more adverse experiences a child faces, the higher the likelihood the child will encounter issues with development, mental health, self-regulation, and chronic health conditions.

**Case Management:** Services that include the assessment and identification of client needs, the identification of available resources to meet client needs, the development of an individualized service plan; the coordination, monitoring and evaluation of services for each client, and advocacy for a client to assure that services and resources are accessible and provided.

**Child-Placing Agency:** Any person, association, or corporation advertising as:

- Placing or finding homes for children
- Placing or assisting in placing children in homes of persons other than relatives
- Causing or assisting in causing the placement of children for adoption or in another planned permanent living arrangement

**Child Welfare Services:** A continuum of services, ranging from prevention to intervention to treatment, for the purpose of:

- Protecting and promoting the welfare of all children
- Preventing the neglect, abuse, or exploitation of children
- Supporting at-risk families through services which allow children, where appropriate, to remain safely with their families or return to their families in a timely manner
- Promoting the safety, permanency, and well-being of children in care and adoptive homes
- Providing training, professional development, and support to ensure a well-qualified child welfare workforce

**Emancipation:** Release of a child fully or partially by a juvenile court from the control of the person or agency having legal responsibility for the child. The court will specify the terms of the emancipation.

**Foster Care:** The temporary care of a child by individuals who have no legal or custodial rights to the child. Foster care is generally supervised by the State or a licensed child placing agency that has legal custody of the child. Should the placement become more long-term because it is in the best interest of the child, it is deemed to be a planned, permanent living arrangement.

**Foster Child:** A child who has been placed in the State's legal custody because the child's custodial parent or guardian is unable to provide a safe family home due to abuse, neglect, or an inability to care for the child.

**Foster Parent:** An adult who is licensed to provide a temporary home and everyday nurturing and support for children who have been removed from their homes.

<sup>3</sup> Indiana Department of Child Services. (n.d.). Glossary of Common Terms. <https://www.in.gov/dcs/files/Common-Terms.pdf>



# Glossary

**Foster Family Home:** A place where an individual resides and provides licensed care and supervision on a 24-hour basis to a child.

**Kinship Diagram:** Pictorial representation of a family's connections to their extended family, kinship families, persons, and/or systems in their environment.

**Licensed Child Placing Agency (LCPA):** A private agency that is licensed by the State of Indiana through DCS. LCPAs provide training and recommend individuals for special needs and therapeutic foster home licenses. LCPAs also conduct adoption home studies and make recommendations regarding the readiness of the child and adoptive family in the preparation for adoption. DCS Central Office licenses the child placing agencies, but DCS does not manage or operate the LCPAs.

**Neglect:** The inability or refusal by those responsible for the care, custody, and control of a child to provide necessary food, clothing, shelter, medical care, education, or supervision necessary for the child's well-being.

**Non-Relative Kin:** Any individual with whom a child has an established and significant relationship.

**Older Youth:** An individual who is at least 18 years of age but less than 21 years of age.

**Older Youth Services:** Services that are available to eligible Child in Need of Services (CHINS) and Juvenile Delinquent/Juvenile Status (JD/JS) youth to assist the youth in preparing to successfully transition to adulthood.

**Out-of-Home Care:** An array of services, including family foster care, kinship care, and residential group care, for children who have been placed in the custody of the State and who must reside temporarily away from their families.

**Permanency Planning:** A plan made for a child in out-of-home care. The goal of the plan is to see that the child is placed in a permanent home under circumstances that will ultimately eliminate the need for DCS supervision. Permanency options available to the court include:

- Reunification
- Adoption
- Legal Guardianship
- Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA)
- Fit and Willing Relative

**Relative Placement:** A placement, licensed or unlicensed, in which a qualified adult (e.g., a grandparent, aunt, uncle, or adult sibling) provides care for a related child. By law, a court must consider placement in the home of any willing relative of a child in need of out-of-home care before considering placement elsewhere.

**Trauma-Informed Care:** Takes into account the whole person (physical, emotional, and mental), and recognizes the symptoms of trauma and acknowledges the role the trauma has played in the person's life.



**Foster care provides a temporary home and support service “for children who can no longer remain in their homes due to the risk of abuse or neglect.”<sup>4</sup>**

## WHAT IS FOSTER CARE?



Indiana’s Department of Child Services (DCS), funded by both state and federal dollars,<sup>5</sup> states that, “Indiana’s Foster Care Program provides 24-hour placement of children and youth when they can no longer safely remain in their own homes due to the risk of abuse or neglect, or due to behaviors which may result in danger to themselves or others. When possible, a child is placed in close proximity to the child’s family, particularly when reunification with the family is the case plan goal. Placement may occur until reunification with the child’s family takes place or another permanent placement is established. The goal is to provide substitute family life in a safe, stable, and nurturing environment.”<sup>6</sup>

The Indiana Child Welfare Policy Manual provides information on individual policies, such as case management, in-home and out-of-home services, foster family licensing, eligibility, etc. Links to specific policies are on the DCS Child Welfare Policies webpage.<sup>7</sup> Indiana Foster Care (IFC), the foster care information service of DCS, provides complementary, public-facing information. There, they explain the child placement process: “The matching process is used to place foster children with licensed foster parents. Placement decisions are based upon the needs of foster children, and the skill set, resources, location, etc. of the foster parent.”<sup>8</sup> The IFC Foster Parent Frequently Asked Questions page includes key terms and definitions.

Definitions of common terms encountered on foster care pathways provide support to foster parents or potential foster parents. For example, the American Society for the Positive Care of Children (American SPCC) defines foster care as “substitute care for babies, children, and youth, placed away from their parents or guardians and for whom the State agency has placement and care responsibility.”<sup>9</sup> DCS/IFC defines “Child in Need of Services” (CHINS) as “Any child in the care of DCS has been determined to be CHINS under at least one of the 11 CHINS statutes. This determination is made by a judge, not directly by DCS”<sup>10</sup> Additional information on this and related topics can be found through the Children’s Law Center of Indiana (2015)<sup>11</sup> and Indiana DCS.<sup>12</sup>

4 Indiana Foster Care. (IFC, n.d.). Foster Care Common Terms. Retrieved January 25, 2024, from <https://www.indianafostercare.org/s/article/Foster-Care-Common-Terms>

5 In 2022, Indiana DCS funding included 39.43% federal and 60.57% state sources of revenue. Indiana Department of Child Services. (2022). DCS State Budget Committee Presentation. Retrieved January 30, from <https://www.in.gov/sba/files/1.-Dept-of-Child-Services-Budget-Committee-Presentation.pdf>. Federal funding brings with it key standards for quality of foster care, as described in Foster Care | The Administration for Children and Families. (n.d.). Retrieved January 30, 2024, from <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/focus-areas/foster-care>.

6 Indiana Department of Child Services. (DCS, n.d.). What is Foster Care? Retrieved January 30, 2024, from [https://www.in.gov/dcs/files/What\\_is\\_foster\\_care2.pdf](https://www.in.gov/dcs/files/What_is_foster_care2.pdf).

7 DCS. (2024, January 3). Child Welfare Policies. DCS. <https://www.in.gov/dcs/policies/child-welfare-policies/>

8 IFC. (n.d.). Foster Parent Frequently Asked Questions. <https://www.indianafostercare.org/s/article/Foster-Parent-FAQs>

9 American SPCC. (2024). What is Foster Care? <https://americanspcc.org/foster-care-adoption/>.

10 IFC. (n.d.). Foster Parent Frequently Asked Questions. <https://www.indianafostercare.org/s/article/Foster-Parent-FAQs>

11 Watson-Duvall, D. (n.d.). Children’s Law Center of Indiana. <https://www.kidsvoicein.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/CHINS-Frequently-Asked-Questions-2015.pdf>

12 Freiman, C. (n.d.). Indiana Department of Child Services. <https://www.in.gov/dcs/files/6.B-Tool-Statutory-Definition-of-CHINS.pdf>

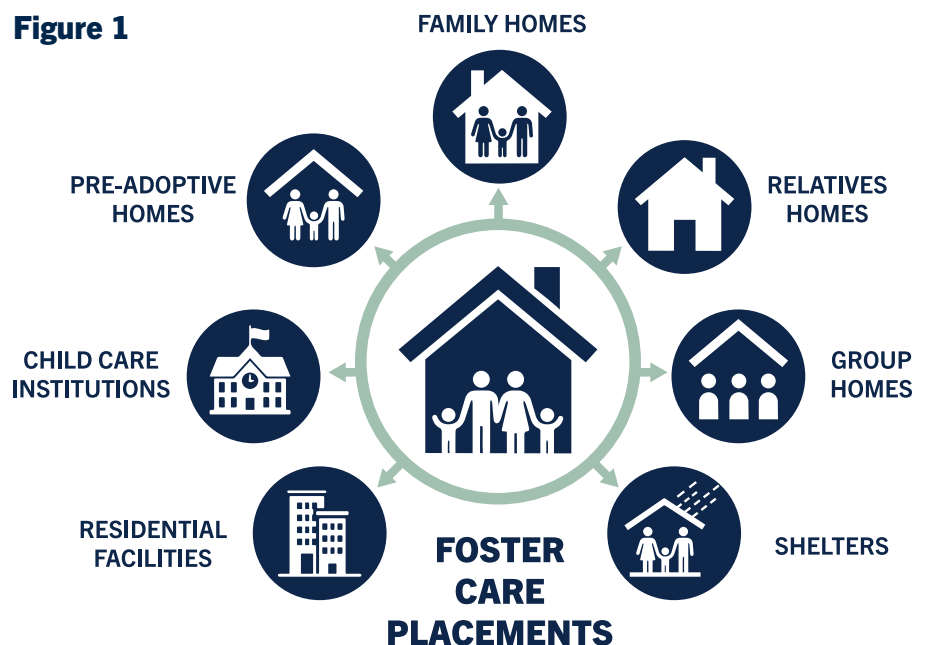


# Reasons a Judge May Determine a Child to be CHINS:

- Neglect
- Abuse
- Sexual Abuse
- The child's parent, guardian, or custodian allows the child to participate in obscene performance.
- The child's parent, guardian, or custodian allows the child to commit a prohibited sex offense.
- The child substantially endangers his or her own health or the health of another individual.
- The child's parent, guardian, or custodian fails to participate in a school disciplinary proceeding.
- The child is a "missing child," the subject of a missing persons report and has been found in Indiana.
- The child is disabled and deprived of necessary nutrition or medical intervention.
- The child is born with fetal alcohol syndrome, neonatal abstinence syndrome or with any amount of controlled substance or legend drug in the child's body, including the child's blood, urine, umbilical cord tissue, or meconium.
- The child has an injury, abnormal physical, or psychological development; symptoms of neonatal intoxication or withdrawal; or experiences risks of injuries from the mother's use of alcohol, controlled substance or legend drug during pregnancy.

Children may be placed in "foster family homes, foster homes of relatives, group homes, emergency shelters, residential facilities, childcare institutions, and pre-adoptive homes," as illustrated in Figure 1.<sup>13</sup>

**Figure 1**



<sup>13</sup> American SPCC. (2024). What is Foster Care? <https://americanspcc.org/foster-care-adoption/>

## FOSTER CARE IN THE COMMUNITY



### *Why is Foster Care Important?*

Foster care has the potential to heal individuals and communities from disruptive situations. When foster children are in stable, healthy environments, they can better grow in both social and intellectual abilities. Getting the support they need during foster care can then make them better able to contribute to society, while simultaneously avoiding community costs related to jail time, physical and mental health conditions, etc.





**“I feel like I was not prepared for the challenge of helping children from trauma.”**

- Foster and Kinship Care Parent Survey Respondent

Individual children in foster care often need to heal from trauma they experienced with their family of origin. While some children must leave their families of origin due to death or serious illness of a parent, often abuse or neglect precipitate a child’s transition to foster care. As a result, these children have often experienced traumatic events called “Adverse Childhood Experiences” (ACEs), which include violence or abuse, witnessing violence, or a family attempt or death by suicide. Other factors that may disrupt children’s feeling of safety, stability, and bonding may involve living in households impacted by substance use, mental health challenges, parental conflict, or their departure to jail/prison.<sup>14</sup> Experiencing ACEs can influence a person’s health and well-being throughout their life as depicted in Figure 2.<sup>15</sup> Such impacts can be long lasting and far reaching (see Figure 3).<sup>15</sup>

**Figure 2**

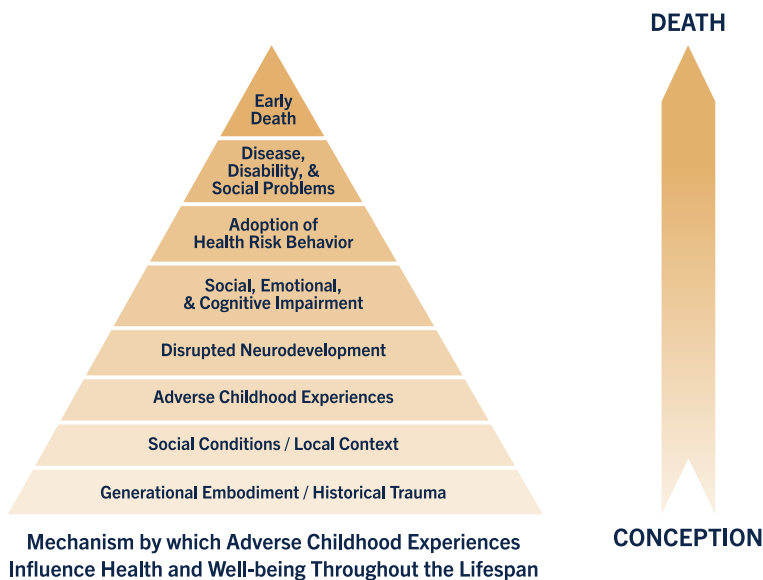


Image Source: This material is from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK578299/figure/ch3.fig1/>)

**Figure 3**



Image Source: This material is from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/about.html>)

14 Felitti, V. J., Anda, R. F., Nordenberg, D., Williamson, D. F., Spitz, A. M., Edwards, V., Koss, M. P., & Marks, J. S. (1998). Relationship of Childhood Abuse and Household Dysfunction to Many of the Leading Causes of Death in Adults: The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 14(4), 245–258. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0749-3797\(98\)00017-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0749-3797(98)00017-8)

15 About the CDC-Kaiser ACE Study | Violence Prevention | Injury Center | CDC. (2022, March 17). <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/about.html>

16 Ibid.



## FOSTER CARE IN THE COMMUNITY

### *Community Awareness and Understanding of Foster Care*

Evidence shows that a child's experience of ACEs increases the risks for traumatic injury, depression, anxiety, suicide, unwanted pregnancy, pregnancy complications, STIs, cancer, diabetes, alcohol and drug use, unsafe sex, and other adverse outcomes in education, employment, and incomes. These adverse outcomes for individuals also impact the community through disruption of wider social relationships, fewer contributions to the workforce and tax base, and increased costs of addressing physical and mental health challenges, crime, jails and prisons, etc.<sup>17 18</sup>

For example, a study by the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities initiative “shows that, on average, for every young person who ages out of foster care, taxpayers and communities pay \$300,000 in social costs like public assistance, incarceration, and lost wages to a community over that person's lifetime. Do the math and you can conservatively estimate that this problem incurs almost \$8 billion in social costs to the United States every year.”<sup>19</sup> Additional findings on transition-age youth in foster care are similarly compelling (see 2023 Indiana Profile: Transition-Age Youth in Foster Care by the Annie E. Casey Foundation).<sup>20</sup>

### *Preventing the Need for Foster Care*

Foster care will always be necessary, but there are opportunities to prevent the need for it. Nine in 10 (91%) of foster care placements in Indiana are due to neglect.<sup>21</sup> Neglect happens in the following cases:

- The child's basic needs, like food, clothing, and shelter, are not met
- The child is unsafe
- The child is not given an education
- The child suffers emotional neglect, perhaps through being ignored or isolated
- The child is not given proper health care<sup>22</sup>

17 Felitti, V. J., Anda, R. F., Nordenberg, D., Williamson, D. F., Spitz, A. M., Edwards, V., Koss, M. P., & Marks, J. S. (1998). Relationship of Childhood Abuse and Household Dysfunction to Many of the Leading Causes of Death in Adults: The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 14(4), 245–258. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0749-3797\(98\)00017-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0749-3797(98)00017-8)

18 Webster, E. M. (2022). The Impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences on Health and Development in Young Children. *Global Pediatric Health*, 9, 2333794X221078708. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2333794X221078708>

19 Strangler, G. (2013). Aging Out of Foster Care: The Costs of Doing Nothing Affect Us All. (2013, July 28). *HuffPost*. [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/aging-out-of-foster-care-\\_b\\_3658694](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/aging-out-of-foster-care-_b_3658694)

20 See the following link, then select “Indiana”: Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2023, May 8). *Fostering Youth Transitions 2023*. The Annie E. Casey Foundation. <https://www.aecf.org/resources/fostering-youth-transitions-2023>

21 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau. (2022). *Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS)*.

22 NSPCC. (n.d.). Neglect. NSPCC Website. <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/neglect>

Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) says the “root cause” of neglect is poverty.<sup>23</sup> Instances of neglect can decrease when parents and families have the support they need to get through the tough times in life. The Protective Factors: Keep Your Family Strong framework can educate families and caregivers on supports that have been proven to strengthen families. The six protective factors are:

# 6

## PROTECTIVE FACTORS

### 1. Nurturing and Attachment

Infants and young children need love and encouragement for their brains to develop appropriately.

### 2. Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

Parents with an understanding of child development can give their child what they need.

### 3. Parental Resilience

Parents who have strength to get through hard times can be the support their children need.

### 4. Social Connections

A social network of family and friends make it easier for families to have the support they need.

### 5. Concrete Support for Families

Food, medical help, education, and employment are all examples of concrete support. When families have these basic needs met, they have more time and energy for other things in life.

### 6. Social-Emotional Competence of Children

When children can control their emotions and behaviors, it helps them relate better with others.<sup>24</sup>



Indiana’s Framework for the Prevention of Child Abuse & Neglect is another resource to help state and local communities support families. The toolkit helps communities prevent maltreatment before it happens.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> CASA GAL. (2022, October 27). The Common Thread in Child Removal - Neglect Not Abuse. <https://nationalcasagal.org/the-common-thread-in-child-removal-neglect-not-abuse/>

<sup>24</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families Administration on Children, Youth and Families Children’s Bureau (n.d). The Protective Factors: Keep Your Family Strong.

<sup>25</sup> Indiana’s Framework for the Prevention of Child Abuse & Neglect. <https://www.in.gov/children/files/DCS-Toolkit-Framework-final.pdf>

## FOSTER CARE IN THE COMMUNITY

### Reducing the Stigma Around Foster Care

Movies and television shows often portray children in foster care in a negative light, leading to stigma associated with children in foster care.<sup>26</sup> It is important for the community to understand the common misconceptions around foster care so children in foster care are treated with dignity and respect.

Best practices for reducing stigma include:

- Educate yourself and others
- Choose your words carefully and avoid stereotypes
- Focus on strengths
- Support people who are struggling
- Include everyone
- Challenge stereotypes in the media
- Advocate for change



### Common Misconceptions about Children in Foster Care

- They are troubled
- They are only there due to abuse or neglect
- They are “bad,” juvenile delinquents, or runaways
- They are waiting to be adopted
- They cannot achieve the same level of success as their peers

26 O'Donnell, Poppi. (n.d.). Stigma Associated with Youth in the Foster Care System. The Imprint: Youth & Family News. <https://imprintnews.org/child-welfare-2/stigma-associated-youth-foster-care-system/20086>



## Statewide Demographics

WBF provides support to a 14-county region in Indiana, Kentucky, and Illinois. For the purpose of this work, WBF focused on the four-county region in Southwest Indiana including Gibson, Posey, Vanderburgh, and Warrick counties. These southwestern counties have over 302,000 residents, representing 4.5% of Indiana's total population. Vanderburgh County (179,900) has the largest population compared to the surrounding counties, followed by Warrick County (64,065) and then Gibson County (33,006). Posey County (25,226) has the smallest population of the four counties.<sup>27</sup>

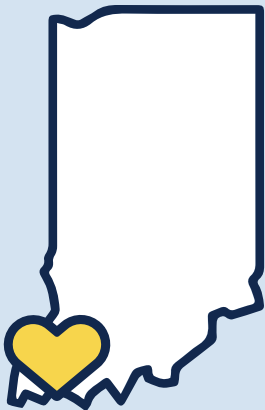
Youth under 18 comprise over one fifth (22%) of the total population in the Southwest Indiana counties, similar to the state's percentage (23%).<sup>28</sup>

Although not available at the county level, the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) publishes demographic information of children in foster care by state. As of September 30, 2022, there were 13,239 children in foster care in Indiana.

The percentage of children in foster care gradually decreases as individuals grow older. Children under 5 years old in Indiana represent the highest percentage of individuals in foster care (39%), followed by children ages 5 to 9 (26%) and 10 to 14 years old (21%). Youth ages 15 to 17 and those 18 or older represent the smallest percentage of foster children (13% and 2%, respectively).<sup>29</sup>

However, an opposite pattern appears when comparing the age of children in foster care with the total population. When looking at individuals under age 20, children under 5 years represent the smallest percentage in this age range, but have the highest representation of those in foster care.

## Southwest Indiana Children in Foster Care



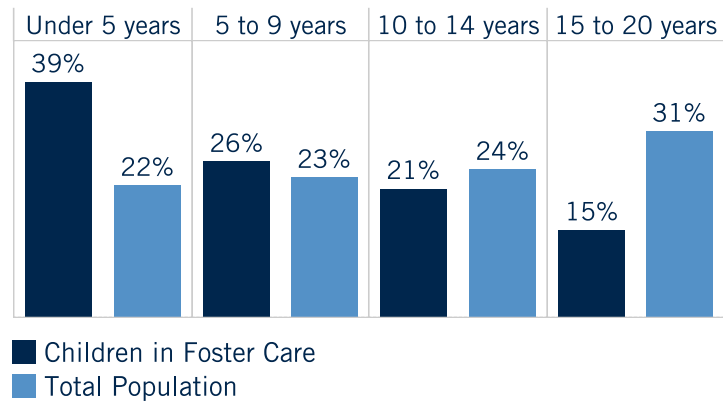
<sup>27</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2018-2022.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau. (2022). Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS).

# Southwest Indiana Children in Foster Care

**Percentage of Total Hoosier Children and Children in Foster Care by Age Group**



Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau. (2022). *Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS)*.

U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2018-2022.

Percentages total more than 100% due to rounding.

Gibson, Posey, and Warrick counties are mainly racially homogenous, with the majority of the population being White (91%, 95%, and 91%, respectively). Black or African American individuals represent the second highest portion of the Gibson, Posey, and Warrick county populations (2%, 1%, and 2%, respectively). The range of the population other than Black or African American or White is 6% in Warrick County, 7% in Gibson County, and 4% in Posey County.

Vanderburgh County's population is less racially homogenous and more closely resembles the state's composition. More than four fifths (83%) of the population is White, compared to 80% of the state. Vanderburgh County residents identifying as races other than White represent 17%, with Black or African American individuals comprising 10% of this total.<sup>30</sup> The remaining 7% of children identified as American Indian/Alaska Native (0.1%), Asian (1.4%), Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander (0.2%), and individuals of two or more races (4%).

Almost two thirds (64%) of Hoosier children in foster care are White, followed by nearly one in five (18%) who are Black or African American. One tenth of children in foster care identify as two or more races and less than one percent are of another race (American Indian and Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, or other/unknown). Less than one tenth (8%) are of Hispanic origin.<sup>31</sup> **The percentage of Black or African American children in foster care (18%) is disproportionately high compared to the representation of this population in Indiana (9%).**

<sup>30</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2018-2022.

<sup>31</sup> The AFCARS report categorizes "Hispanic (of any race)" as a portion of enrollment with the other races. All races exclude children of Hispanic origin. Children of Hispanic ethnicity may be any race.

# Percentage of Hoosier Children by Race and Ethnicity

	Children in Foster Care	Total Population
American Indian/ Alaska Native	0.03%	0.2%
Asian	0.4%	2%
Black or African American	18%	9%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	0.1%	0.04%
Two or More Races	10%	5%
White	64%	80%
Some Other Race	0.1%	3%
Hispanic (of any race)*	8%	8%

\* The AFCARs report categorizes "Hispanic (of any race)" as a portion of enrollment with the other races. All races exclude children of Hispanic origin. Children of Hispanic ethnicity may be any race. The U.S. Census Bureau categorizes Hispanic origin outside of race.

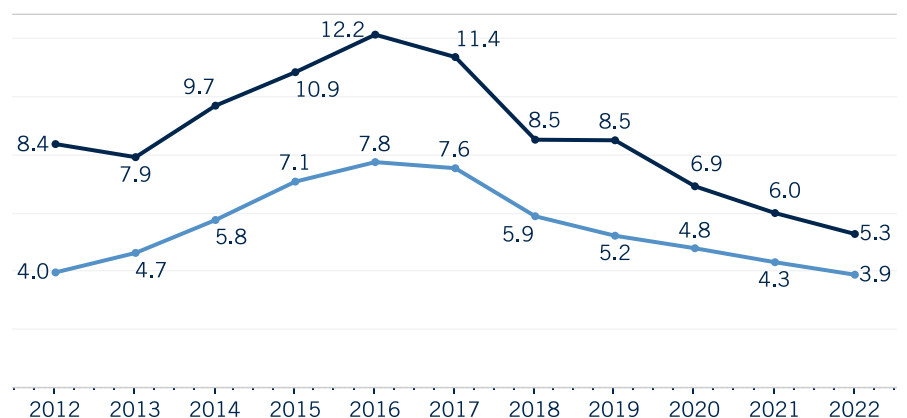
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2018-2022; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau. (2022). Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS).

Percentages may total more or less than 100% due to rounding.

In an interview with David Reed, Deputy Director of Child Welfare Services in Indiana, he reported that Indiana is working to decrease the disparity between the number of Children of Color and White children placed in foster care. The efforts have worked to reduce the disparity on average across the state, but **in Vanderburgh County the rate of disparity is still three times greater than the state average.**<sup>32</sup>

The disparity between the removal of Black children from their homes compared to White children has decreased over the past several years in Indiana. In 2012, there were 4.4 more Black children removed from their homes compared to White children per 1,000 children. In 2022, the gap closed to 1.4 more Black children than White children removed per 1,000.<sup>33</sup>

Number of Hoosier Children Removed from Homes by Race per 1,000



■ Black Child Removals (per 1000)  
 ■ White Child Removals (per 1000)

Source: Indiana Department of Child Services, 2022 Removal by Race Report.

<sup>32</sup> Indiana Department of Child Services. [Unpublished raw data].

<sup>33</sup> Indiana Department of Child Services, 2022 Removal by Race Report.

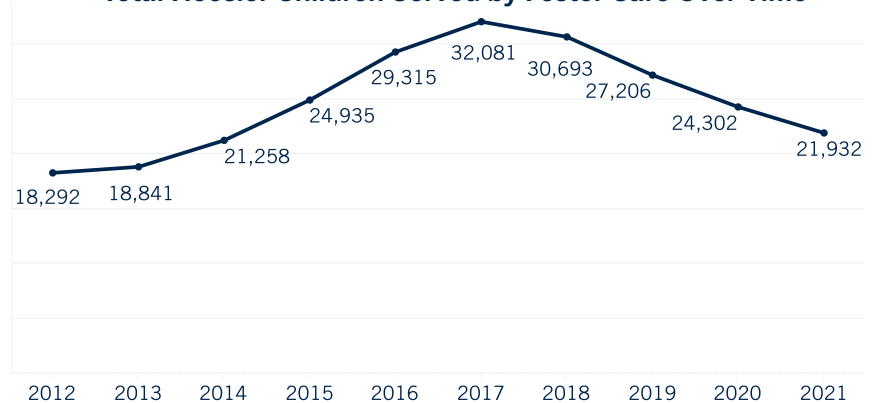


# Southwest Indiana Children in Foster Care

## Children in Foster Care

In 2021, Indiana served 21,932 children in foster care, marking a decline by one third (32%) from its peak of 32,081 in 2017. This trend aligns with national figures, which peaked in 2017 and 2018 but decreased at a lesser rate (12%) compared to Indiana by 2021.<sup>34</sup>

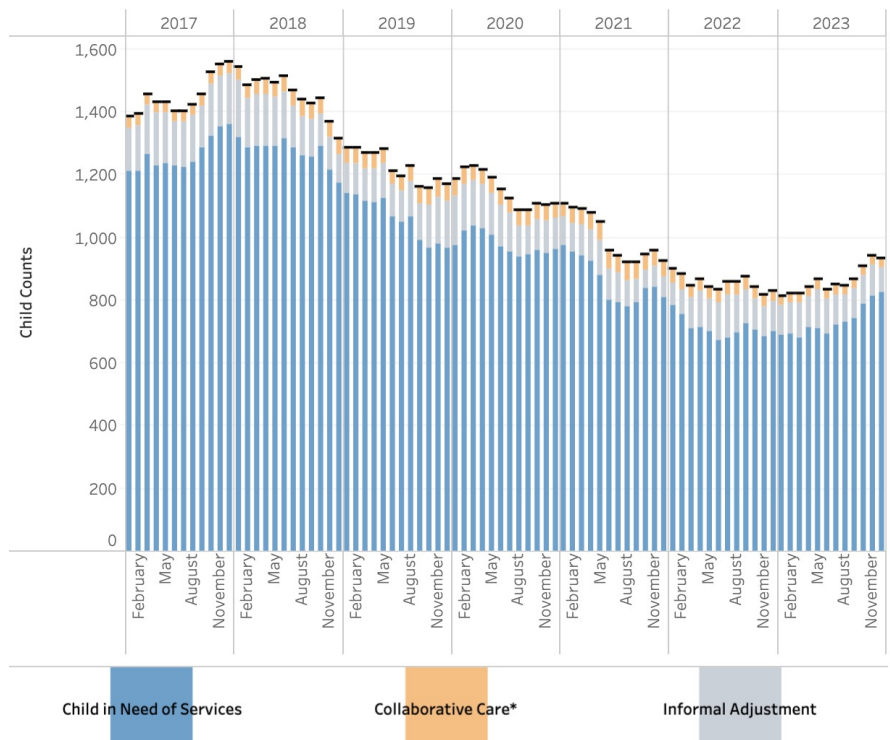
**Total Hoosier Children Served by Foster Care Over Time**



Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau. (2022). Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS).

Southwest Indiana CHINS demonstrate a similar downward trend from 2017 to 2023. The number of CHINS in the region overall decreases from year to year with some fluctuations from month to month.

**Number of Department of Child Services Cases between 2017 and 2023 in Southwest Indiana Counties<sup>35</sup>**



<sup>34</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau. (2022). Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS).

<sup>35</sup> \*Collaborative care serves youth 16 to 21 who receive focused independent living case management to transition successfully to adulthood. For youth 18 to 21, this service is voluntary and can include a reentry/remain in foster care with services. Informal adjustment is a voluntary program of care, treatment, and rehabilitation that requires court approval and oversight.

Data and Image Source: Indiana Department of Child Services (n.d.) Performance Measures Dashboard.

Indiana is one of the ten worst states for the percentage of children served by foster care. Indiana's rank for the percentage of children served by foster care, at 1.39%, places it 42<sup>nd</sup> among states, with percentages in other states ranging from 0.26% to 3.36%.



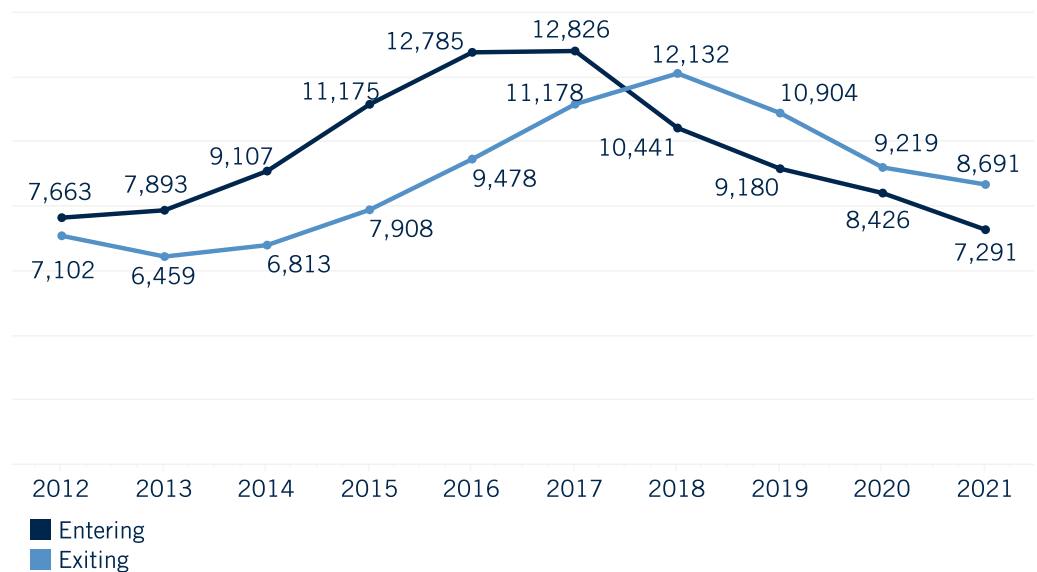
Rank	State	Percentage of Children Served by Foster Care
<b>Best Five States</b>		
1	New Jersey	0.26%
2	Delaware	0.35%
3	Virginia	0.40%
4	Maryland	0.41%
5	Utah	0.41%
<b>Worst Five States</b>		
46	Missouri	1.41%
47	Kansas	1.48%
48	Montana	2.17%
49	Alaska	2.32%
50	West Virginia	3.36%

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau. (2022). State Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS).

U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2018-2022.

Between 2012 and 2017, more Hoosier children entered the foster care system than exited it. Since 2018, that trend flipped, with more children exiting foster care than entering the system. Most recently, in 2021, 7,291 children entered foster care, while 8,691 exited the system.

**Number of Hoosier Children Entering and Exiting Foster Care Over Time**

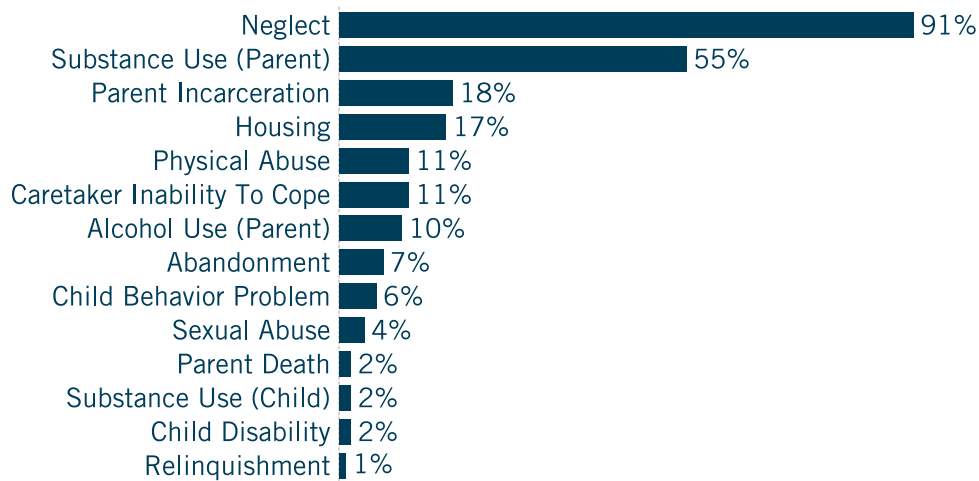


Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau. (2022). Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS).

The circumstances associated with a child's removal from their family are often complex and multifaceted, representing multiple reasons for removal. Neglect is the predominant factor for a child's removal, contributing to 91% of Indiana cases. Substance use by a parent was the second most frequent circumstance of a child's removal, representing over half (55%) of cases. Parental incarceration and housing instability were also more prevalent among cases, affecting 18% and 17% of cases, respectively. Instances of physical abuse and caretaker inability to cope each contribute to 11% of removals. Additionally, alcohol use by parents, abandonment, and child behavior problems are cited in 10%, 7%, and 6% of cases, respectively.

Other factors, such as abandonment, sexual abuse, parent death, and child disability, though less prevalent, underscore the range of circumstances experienced by children within the child welfare system.

#### Percentage of Cases by Circumstances Associated with Child's Removal

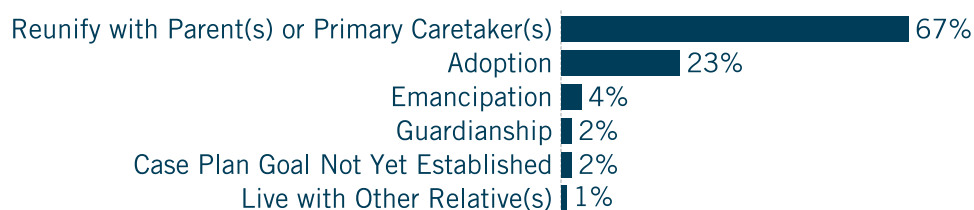


*These categories are not mutually exclusive, therefore, percentages will total more than 100% and counts will be more than the total number of entries.*

*Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau. (2022). Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS).*

For children in foster care, various potential pathways to exit foster care are identified in their case plan goals. When a case plan begins, the initial goal is reunification. At the time of data collection, 67% of cases retained a reunification goal, while other plans had been adjusted as needed. Adoption is another common avenue, with 23% aiming to find permanency within adoptive families.

#### Children in Foster Care by Case Plan Goal



*Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau. (2022). Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS).*

*Percentages total more than 100% due to rounding.*

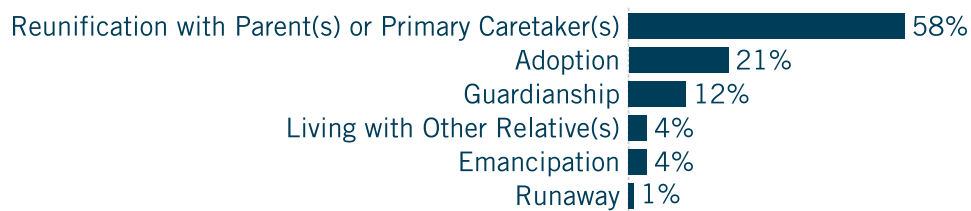


Emancipation accounts for 4% of case plan goals, reflecting the transition to independent living for older youth in foster care. In addition, guardianship arrangements encompass 2% of cases, providing a sense of belonging and security within extended family networks. A small percentage (1%) aim to find support living with other relatives.

Notably, 2% of cases are still navigating toward establishing a clear case plan goal, emphasizing the complexity and individualized nature of children's circumstances within the foster care system.

There are various pathways for children to achieve permanency and transition after exiting the foster care system. Over half (58%) of these cases involve the successful reunification of children with their parent(s) or primary caregiver(s), representing the most common case plan goal to preserve familial bonds. Adoption emerged as another substantial outcome for exiting the system, with 21% of children finding permanent homes through the process. Guardianship arrangements account for 12% of exits, providing stability and continuity within extended family networks. A smaller yet noteworthy percentage, 4%, represents cases of emancipation where youth transition into independent living.

#### Percentage of Cases by Reason for Discharge



*Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau. (2022). Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS).*

## Children in Need of Services (CHINS)

Indiana defines a Child in Need of Services (CHINS), as a child, prior to their 18th birthday, who is experiencing one or more conditions, such as neglect or abuse, that is unlikely to be remedied without the coercive intervention of the court. Children in foster care represent a subset of CHINS. While some data for children in foster care is not available at the county level (such as demographics), data is available for the CHINS population as a whole. CHINS data provides insights, including county breakdowns, and represents children in foster care as well as other children receiving DCS support.

In 2023, Southwest Indiana, encompassing Gibson, Posey, Vanderburgh, and Warrick counties, had an average of 733 CHINS, constituting 6% of Indiana's total CHINS. Figures fluctuated from 689 in January 2023 to 826 in December 2023.

From December 2019 to December 2023, the count of CHINS has consistently declined across all four counties, though fluctuations occurred within the 5-year time frame. Notably, there was a significant decrease in Gibson County, dropping from 119 CHINS in 2019 to 60 in 2020. Subsequently, the county saw marginal declines in 2021 and 2022 before a slight uptick to 66 in 2023. Posey County experienced a downward trend each year, beginning at 128 CHINS in 2019 and concluding with 75 in 2023. In contrast, there was an initial increase in CHINS in Vanderburgh County from 609 in 2019 to 660 in 2020, followed by declines in subsequent years, only to again increase closer to the initial count at 601. Warrick County mirrored this pattern with an increase in CHINS from 108 in 2019 to 138 in 2020, followed by 2 years of decline before going back up to 84 CHINS. Statewide, the number of CHINS has decreased by nearly one third (31%) between the ends of 2019 to 2023.

Number of Children in Need of Services (CHINS) Over Time					
County	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Gibson	119	(↓) 60	(↓) 57	(↓) 54	(↑) 66
Posey	128	(↓) 102	(↓) 96	(↓) 78	(↓) 75
Vanderburgh	609	(↑) 660	(↓) 548	(↓) 499	(↑) 601
Warrick	108	(↑) 138	(↓) 106	(↓) 71	(↑) 84
Southwest IN	964	(↓) 960	(↓) 807	(↓) 702	(↑) 826
Indiana	17,097	(↓) 16,193	(↓) 13,902	(↓) 11,727	(↑) 11,874

↓↑ Indicates change from the previous year. Data represent December from each year.

Source: Indiana Department of Child Services (n.d.) Performance Measures Dashboard.

Placement types for CHINS offer insight into the various care-giving arrangements for these children. In Indiana, less than three quarters (72%) of CHINS receive out-of-home placement. More than one fourth (28%) of CHINS receive in-home services, signifying efforts to maintain family cohesion and address challenges within a setting familiar to the child.

The southwest region is similar to the state in that out-of-home placements (64%) are more common than in-home placements (36%), but in-home placements are utilized at a higher rate compared to the state. Gibson County utilizes the highest rate of in-home placements with nearly half (49%). Warrick and Posey counties report less than half as in-home placements (44% and 43% respectively), while Vanderburgh County reports one third (33%) of placements as in-home.

Of the Hoosier children in out-of-home placements, non-relative placements (41%) represent alternative care-giving arrangements outside immediate family circles. A small yet notable percentage, 5%, of children receive support in residential facilities, suggesting specialized care for those with more complex needs. Finally, 2% of CHINS are placed in other arrangements, including nursing homes, hospitals, juvenile justice centers, out-of-state locations or other placements yet to be categorized.

Of the Southwest Indiana CHINS in out-of-home placements, less than two thirds (62%) receive relative home care and less than one third (31%) receive non-relative foster home care.

Location	CHINS			Out-of-Home Placement			
	Total	In-Home Placement	Out-of-Home Placement	Relative Home	Non-Relative Home	Residential	Other
Gibson	66	32 (49%)	34 (52%)	20 (59%)	11 (32%)	2 (6%)	1 (3%)
Posey	75	32 (43%)	43 (57%)	29 (67%)	11 (26%)	3 (7%)	0 (0%)
Vanderburgh	601	196 (33%)	405 (67%)	244 (60%)	132 (33%)	17 (4%)	12 (3%)
Warrick	84	37 (44%)	47 (56%)	33 (70%)	10 (21%)	2 (4%)	2 (4%)
Southwest IN	826	297 (36%)	529 (64%)	326 (62%)	164 (31%)	24 (5%)	15 (3%)
Indiana	11,874	3,349 (28%)	8,525 (72%)	4,428 (52%)	3,511 (41%)	423 (5%)	163 (2%)

Source: Indiana Department of Child Services (2023). Practice Indicator Report, CHINS Placement by County. Percentages may total more or less than 100% due to rounding.

Foster family capacity and the location of relatives and caregivers play a crucial role in determining the placement of CHINS in Southwest Indiana. Approximately half (52%) of CHINS in the region are placed outside their home county, a proportion almost the same as the state (53%).<sup>36</sup> This relocation stems from limitations in foster family availability or the proximity of suitable placement options. These factors also impact sibling placement, with over one quarter (29%) experiencing separation, below the statewide average (34%).<sup>37</sup>

The foster care placement services survey that TCG administered asked, **“What are the trends in foster care you have seen over the last 5 years?”** The responses are below:



**“Children aren’t placed in homes based on their needs or the skills of the foster parents but based on availability since there is a high need for foster homes.”**

**“Not enough financial support.”**

<sup>36</sup> Indiana Department of Child Services, Practice Indicator, Locally Placed CHINS (2023).

<sup>37</sup> Indiana Department of Child Services, Practice Indicator, Sibling Placement Report (2023).

## Meeting the Needs of Children in Foster Care



To gain insight into how the Southwest Indiana counties address the needs of children in foster care, WBF and TCG conducted surveys among foster care placement service agencies, foster and kinship care parents, and community partners in the region. TCG also completed one interview with a woman who grew up in foster care in the region, and parts of her story are told throughout this paper through quotes.

Despite efforts to promote the survey, TCG only received six incomplete responses from foster care placement services, indicating challenges in engaging direct service providers. Nine people completed the foster and kinship care parents survey. The low number of responses to these two surveys did not provide enough data to analyze, but quotes from these respondents are included throughout this paper. These quotes provide insight and also support other data collected through research.

TCG received 41 responses from community partners, and this survey is analyzed in detail below.

### Community Partners Survey

Among the community partners, representation varied across religious (32%), nonprofit (32%), health care (15%), government (15%), education (5%), and mental health services (2%) sectors. Nearly three quarters (72%) of respondents were smaller organizations with 0 to 25 employees.

The survey aimed to assess participants' understanding of the foster care system, and it revealed that all partners possessed at least some knowledge, with over half (56%) indicating either moderate or extensive knowledge of the system.

#### How knowledgeable are you about the foster care system? (n=40)

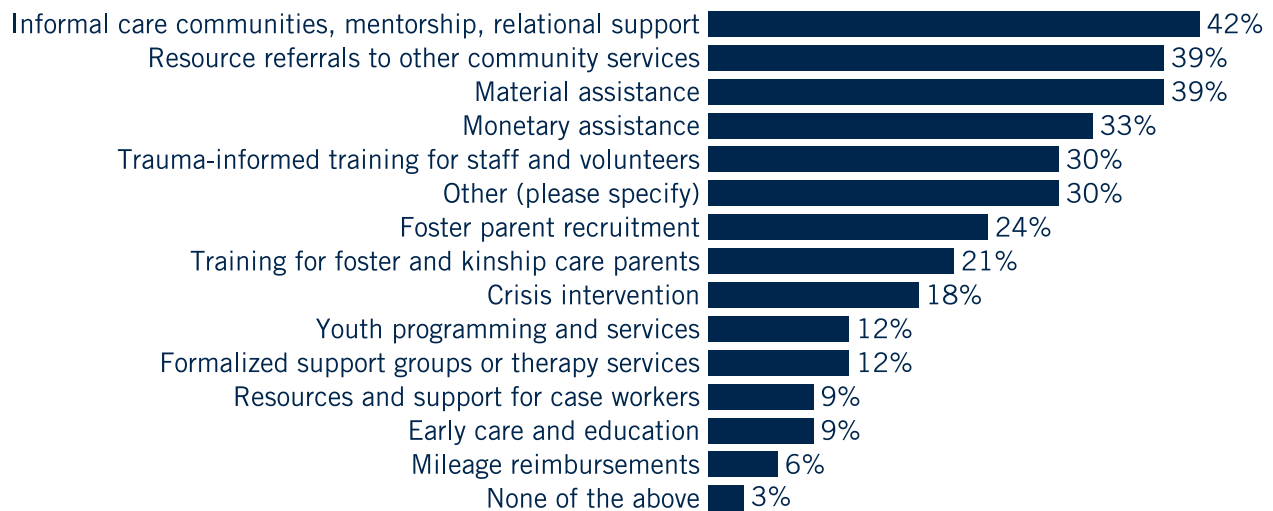


*Source: Welborn Baptist Foundation. (December 2023). Community Partners Survey. [Unpublished raw data.]*



Most partners (85%) reported offering services to children in foster care or foster and kinship care families. The most common services provided by these organizations included informal care communities, mentorship, and relational support (42%), followed by resource referrals to other community services (39%), material assistance (39%), monetary assistance (33%), and trauma-informed training for staff and volunteers (30%). Other common ways not included in the choices that partners reported they provide support include medical care, providing meals, and as Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA).

**Which of the following supports or services does your organization provide to children in foster care and/or foster and kinship care families? (Select all that apply.) (n=33)**



*Source: Welborn Baptist Foundation. (December 2023). Community Partner Survey. [Unpublished raw data.]*

**What organizations (i.e., nonprofits, government agencies, schools, etc.) in your community supported you as a foster child and your foster family? In what ways did they provide support?**

“

**“CASA. Prevented kids from having to go to court, so they wouldn’t have to ‘testify’ in front of their parents. They were our friend. It wasn’t about where money was saved or other things, but being an advocate for the kids.**

**There was a clothing drive specifically for foster children - Borrowed Hearts Foundation - they were awesome too.**

**Independent Living Program - helped when I turned 18.”**

- Interview with a woman who grew up in foster care

The vast majority of community partners (90%) also possess knowledge of whom to contact within their community for information regarding foster and kinship care families and children.

Furthermore, nearly half (46%) of the partners believe that organizations in Southwest Indiana meet the needs of children in foster care quite a bit. The remaining partners perceive that organizations are meeting these needs to varying degrees: somewhat (46%) or a little bit (7%).

### What are the gaps in services for children in foster care in your community?

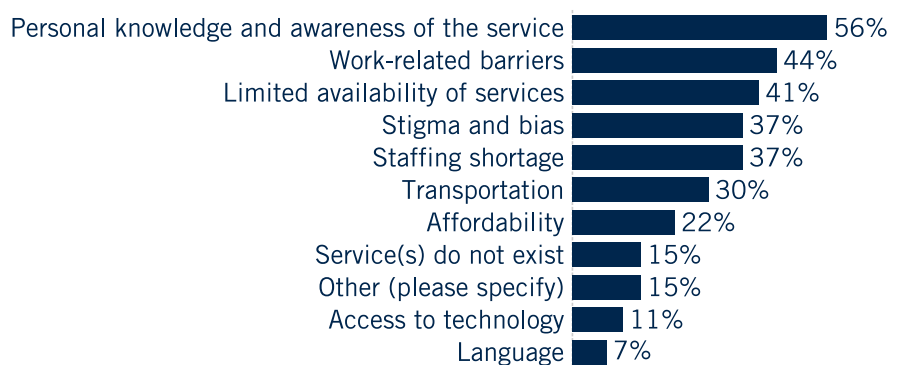
## Meeting the Needs of Children in Foster Care

**“Availability for services has decreased drastically. We need more providers who are trained in a variety of evidence based trauma therapies for all ages.”**

- Foster Care Placement Services Provider  
Survey Respondent

In identifying the primary barriers hindering foster and kinship care families from accessing resources in Southwest Indiana, community partners highlighted personal knowledge and awareness of the service (56%), work-related obstacles (44%), limited availability of services (41%), stigma and bias (37%), and staffing shortages (37%).

### What barriers, if any, prevent foster and kinship care families from accessing resources in these counties? (Select the top three) (n=27)



Source: Welborn Baptist Foundation. (December 2023). Community Partner Survey. [Unpublished raw data.]

Overall, community partners provided valuable insight into the landscape of services and supports for children in foster care within Southwest Indiana. The survey revealed community partners' general understanding of the foster care system, with a majority offering various services to foster and kinship care children and families.



**What are the gaps in services for children in foster care and foster and kinship families in your community?**

**“Staffing shortages at therapeutic service providers.”**

-Foster Care Placement Services  
Provider Survey Respondent

While many partners perceive organizations to effectively meet the needs of foster care children, there are still areas for improvement and refinement. **Barriers identified by partners, such as limited service availability and staffing shortages,** are supported by quotes from the foster care placement provider survey. These barriers highlight ongoing challenges that must be addressed to ensure comprehensive support for foster and kinship care families in the region.

# Foster and Kinship Care Parent Survey

The foster and kinship care parent survey asked about the **gaps in services for both children in foster care and for foster and kinship families**. A couple respondents mentioned mental health services are lacking for children and that community and concrete supports are needed for foster and kinship families. These themes are echoed throughout this survey, and other quotes echo gaps and barriers identified through the other surveys.

## What are the gaps in services for children in foster care in your community?

- “Services take a long time to get into, especially assessments for mental health issues.”
- “Mental health/counseling”
- “CPS only cares about the parents that fail the children.”
- “Not enough support for the foster parents especially when kids leave our home.”
- “Financial ability”

## What are the gaps in services for foster and kinship families in your community?

- “People are unaware of what is available and very lonely.”
- “Also not enough events or times for foster parents to get together with other foster parents.”
- “Childcare, babysitting, respite, clothing, vouchers for childcare, counseling without reports being sent to DCS.”

## Were there any services provided in your transition out of foster care?

- “Independent Living - Foster care opens doors for scholarships, but I really wish we got to learn life skills.
- Church supported me - Potter’s Wheel church - they provided an ample amount of classes. Boxing, dancing, cooking, that got my mind off of a bad home situation. They provided services for children in the community.
- The Dream Center is also an amazing organization. I went there when they opened a new building, they were awesome. Whenever my biological family needed help with a bill, they helped, they helped with Christmas for my family, and meals.”

- Interview with a woman who grew up in foster care

“

**“We would love some counseling for our family, marriage counseling, and individual, but are embarrassed to ask. And we don’t want to have reports being sent back to DCS. Paid childcare available would help me be able to take care of my mental health and my family’s needs on top of the many needs of foster children. Please hear me when I say that there is not enough financial assistance!”**

-Foster and Kinship Care Parent Survey Respondent



Organizations in Southwest Indiana are working to meet the needs of children in foster care, foster families, and families of origin in a variety of ways. This section will break down the various programs and services available.

The chart below is an overview of current agencies with active residential licenses reporting to serve Southwest Indiana. Note that Licensed Child Placing Agencies (LCPAs) that only focus on adoption are not included on this list. The types of LCPC licenses in Indiana include the following:

- Licensed Child Placing Agencies are private organizations approved by DCS to place children in foster homes or potential adoptive homes.
- Child Caring Institutions are residential facilities that provide child care 24 hours per day for more than 10 children.
- Group Homes are licensed for 10 or fewer children ages 6 and older who have demonstrated the ability to follow direction and take appropriate action for self-preservation.

## COMMUNITY PREVENTING AND ADDRESSING FOSTER CARE NEEDS



Agency Name	Type of License		
	Licensed Child Placing Agency	Child Caring Institution	Group Home
Benchmark Family Services www.benchmarkfamilyservices.org	X		
Choices Foster Care Solutions www.choicesccs.org	X		
Debra Corn www.debracornfostercare.com	X		
Family Ark www.regionalyouthservices.com	X		
Hillcrest Washington Youth Home www.hillcrestevv.org		X	
National Youth Advocate Program, Inc. www.nyap.org	X		
Open Arms Family & Educational Services www.openarmschristian.com	X		X
United Methodist Youth Home - Holder Home Program www.umyh.org			X
The Villages of Indiana, Inc. www.villages.org	X		
Josiah White's www.whiteskids.org		X	

*This list is compiled from the following DCS resources, and includes LCPAs explicitly listing Gibson, Posey, Vanderburgh, and Warrick Counties or "All Counties." Organizations serving only adoption were removed. <https://www.in.gov/dcs/files/Licensed-Child-Placing-Agencies-April-2020.pdf>, accessed November 2023 <https://www.in.gov/dcs/placement/> "Agencies currently licensed," accessed February 2024*

A host of organizations help foster families and children in foster care in Southwest Indiana. These organizations range from offering mental health and social work support, to providing concrete support, such as items and care, to foster families and children in foster care.

Name	Description
Borrowed Hearts <a href="http://www.borrowedheartsfoundation.org">www.borrowedheartsfoundation.org</a>	Assists children in foster care and foster families with necessities and a foster parent support group. Located in Evansville.
CASA <a href="http://www.in.gov/courts/iocs/galcasa">www.in.gov/courts/iocs/galcasa</a>	Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) is a national association that promotes court-appointed advocates for abused or neglected children. State Certified CASA programs are located in Gibson, Vanderburgh, and Warrick counties.
Christian Fellowship Church <a href="http://www.onlinecfc.com/serve-love-local-luke-1029">www.onlinecfc.com/serve-love-local-luke-1029</a>	Located in Evansville, Christian Fellowship Church provides resources on their website about becoming a foster parent. Engages the Care Communities model through Hands of Hope, and encourages volunteering and/or donating to a variety of foster care nonprofits in the area.
Crossroads Christian Church <a href="http://www.cccgo.com/LEFosterFamilies">www.cccgo.com/LEFosterFamilies</a>	Located in Evansville, Crossroads Christian Church engages the Care Communities model through Hands of Hope.
Every Child Indiana <a href="http://www.everychildindiana.org">www.everychildindiana.org</a>	A collaboration of DCS, licensing agencies, advocates, and other organizations that “fills the biggest gaps in caring for children and families before, during, and beyond foster care” in Indiana.
For Evansville <a href="http://www.forevansville.org/fostercare">www.forevansville.org/fostercare</a>	For Evansville’s mission is: We inspire, align, and empower Christians to pursue common good in our city. The organization connects people, churches, businesses, and organizations around foster care, and provides videos, podcasts, and other resources related to foster care.
Foster Care in the US <a href="http://www.fostercareintheus.org">www.fostercareintheus.org</a>	Foster Care in the US makes a meaningful impact in the lives of homeless, foster care, and at-risk youth and young adults, age 16-24 in the Tri-State. Gibson, Posey, Vanderburgh, and Warrick counties are included in their service area.
Hands of Hope <a href="http://www.handsofhopein.org">www.handsofhopein.org</a>	Seeks to mobilize churches in Indiana to impact the trajectory of kids’ lives. Hands of Hope provides church coaching and engagement opportunities, such as connecting with the real-time needs of children and families through CarePortal or supporting foster families through wrap-around support through the Care Community model.
Indiana Kids Belong <a href="http://www.americaskidsbelong.org/states/in">www.americaskidsbelong.org/states/in</a>	Part of America’s Kids Belong, Indiana Kids Belong works to dramatically improve the experiences and outcomes for kids in foster care. Indiana Kids Belong works to recruit and support foster families.
Isaiah 117 House <a href="http://www.isaiah117house.com/vanderburgh-county-in">www.isaiah117house.com/vanderburgh-county-in</a>	Isaiah 117 House provides a cheerful, comfortable home with loving volunteers for children who are waiting for their foster home placement. The house is appointed with kids’ bedrooms, books, art supplies, food, and toiletries. Homes are located throughout 11 states, with one location in Evansville.
The Isaiah 1:17 Project <a href="http://www.theisaiah117project.org">www.theisaiah117project.org</a>	Supports children in foster care through mentorship and scholarships, and by providing a luggage bag full of necessities and comforting things to children entering foster care. The Isaiah 1:17 Project also supports foster families and empowers churches to support families and children.
Julie Burton <a href="mailto:juliemarieburton@gmail.com">juliemarieburton@gmail.com</a>	Julie is a Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI®) Practitioner and a Foster/Adopt Advocate who offers trauma-informed care training.
Lampion Center <a href="http://www.lampioncenter.com">www.lampioncenter.com</a>	Offers assistance through life transitions and trauma with counseling services for children, adults, and families. Located in Evansville.
Youth First <a href="http://www.youthfirstinc.org">www.youthfirstinc.org</a>	Based in Evansville, Youth First provides master’s level social workers in local schools and prevention programs for youth and families. Social workers are available in 12 counties, including Gibson, Posey, Vanderburgh, and Warrick.

## Aspirational Organizations

The aspirational organizations below can offer insight and inspiration into potential strategies to adopt or strengthen existing programs in Southwest Indiana. Examples include how to support families, preventing and decreasing the need for foster care, and best practices in foster care.

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**CarePortal**  **CarePortal**  
[www.careportal.org](http://www.careportal.org)

CarePortal is connecting technology that drives action for local children and families in crisis. A child-serving professional uses CarePortal to connect the real-time, tangible needs of families with churches and individuals in the area who want to help. Local businesses and other community organizations can further assist by supporting the churches with items and funding, when needed. Church members are trained to deliver the items and make connections with the families they are serving.

CarePortal is currently active in 18 Indiana counties with over 120 churches enrolled to assist families. CarePortal is active in Vanderburgh and Warrick Counties and implemented by Hands of Hope.

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 **FIRST things FIRST** **First Things First**  
[www.firstthings.org](http://www.firstthings.org)

First Things First offers research-based resources to engaged couples, married couples, and parents and families to provide a deep connection in relationships. Founded in Chattanooga, Tennessee, First Things First offers events and classes in their community, and also offers online resources. The organization's strategic objectives are to increase the marriage rate, increase marital health, and increase positive parental involvement. Their vision is for healthy relationship skills to be passed down by every family from generation to generation.

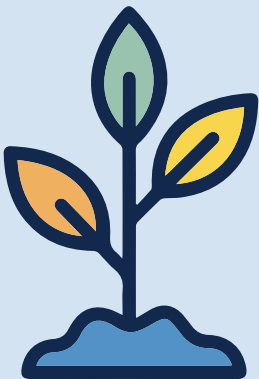
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**generations united**  
 Because we're stronger together®

**Generations United's Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network**  
[www.gu.org/projects/ntac-on-grandfamilies-and-kinship-families](http://www.gu.org/projects/ntac-on-grandfamilies-and-kinship-families)

The network offers support to kinship families by connecting them with government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and faith-based institutions that can provide them information and assistance.

## What Improvements Can be Made in the Foster Care System?





## **National Family Support Network** [www.nationalfamilysupportnetwork.org](http://www.nationalfamilysupportnetwork.org)

The mission of the National Family Support Network is to “promote positive outcomes for all children, families, and communities by leveraging the collective impact of state networks and championing quality family support and strengthening practices and policies.” The membership-based organization supports state networks of Family Resource Centers, and promotes family support through best practices and evaluation with their nationally-adopted Standards of Quality for Family Strengthening & Support. Strengthening Indiana Families (see below) is an Indiana chapter.

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## **New Jersey’s Mobile Response and Stabilization Services (MRSS)** [www.nj.gov/njfofosteradopt/services/mrss.html](http://www.nj.gov/njfofosteradopt/services/mrss.html)

New Jersey’s 24/7 Mobile Response and Stabilization Service (MRSS), provides increased support to children and foster and kinship families as the child transitions into the home. Families are able to call MRSS when children are experiencing an emotional or behavioral health crisis, and MRSS works to deescalate the behaviors and develop a plan with strategies to address behaviors and the desired outcomes.

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## **Project AWARE** [www.projectawarein.org](http://www.projectawarein.org)

Project AWARE increases awareness of youth mental health, provides mental health training to school personnel, connects youth and their families with mental health services, reduces stigma associated with mental health, and advocates for sustainable mental health awareness practices for educators, youth, and their families.

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## **Safe Families for Children** [www.safe-families.org](http://www.safe-families.org)

**Mission:** Safe Families for Children seeks to keep children safe and families together. Safe Families for Children is rooted in faith, fueled by radical hospitality, disruptive generosity, and intentional compassion, to build a network of caring and compassionate volunteers to support families facing social isolation. Our goals are to prevent child abuse and neglect, reduce the number of children entering the child welfare system, and support and stabilize families.

Safe Families is an evidence-based program, headquartered in Chicago and has 11 chapters throughout Illinois. Michigan has seven chapters, and Ohio has three chapters. Currently one chapter is serving the following Indiana counties: Boone, Hamilton, Johnson, Marion, Shelby, Tipton, Delaware, Hendricks, Madison, Monroe, and Tippecanoe.

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## **Strengthening Indiana Families** [www.strengtheninginfamilies.org](http://www.strengtheninginfamilies.org)

Part of the National Family Support Network (see above), Strengthening Indiana Families Family Resource Center is a 5-year program funded primarily by the FIREFLY Children and Family Alliance and the federal Administration for Children and Families; it is overseen by the Indiana University School of Social Work. Using a campaign of “Kids Don’t Come with Instructions. We are here to help,” the program supports parenting skills. The project is working to address risk factors, including poverty and legal problems, domestic violence, and substance use. Currently, Family Resource Centers are located in the following counties: Delaware, Grant, Madison, Tipton, LaPorte, Wayne, Tippecanoe, and Elkhart.





## Other Resources

These collections and clearinghouses are excellent pathways to search and learn more about services, programs, and resources:



**California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare**  
[www.cebc4cw.org](http://www.cebc4cw.org)

A collection of information related to child welfare provided by the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare.



**Child Welfare Information Gateway**  
[www.childwelfare.gov/topics/casework-practice/evidence-based-practice](http://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/casework-practice/evidence-based-practice)

The Child Welfare Information Gateway is a collection of resources for child welfare professionals and community members alike. A service of the Children's Bureau, the resources offer information on a variety of topics, including casework practice; courts; data systems, evaluation, and technology; equitable practice; parents and caregivers; permanency; prevention, safety, and risk; social determinants of health; tribal child welfare; well-being; workforce; and youth.



**Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse**  
[www.preventionservices.acf.hhs.gov](http://www.preventionservices.acf.hhs.gov)

A collection of information related to child welfare provided by the California Evidence-Based The Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse is a tool to search programs and services that support children and families and prevent foster care placements. The clearinghouse rates the programs and services as "well-supported," "supported," "promising," or "does not currently meet criteria." The Administration for Children and Families (ACF), which is part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) provides the clearinghouse to conduct research and provide reviews on programs and services.

The following recommendations are based on the research that is shared in this white paper. The recommendations may be considered for future strategies to assist in decreasing the need for foster care and supporting children in foster care and foster and kinship care families in Southwest Indiana.

### **Convene Faith Communities for Collaboration**

1. Local churches are working in various ways to support foster care. By convening a group of representatives from the faith community, these efforts can be coordinated. SWIFT: Southwest Indiana Foster Team is already convening four organizations and is willing to expand.
2. SWIFT may act as a backbone collaboration among the faith community and other nonprofit organizations serving children in foster care and foster and kinship care families. As a backbone collaboration, SWIFT can be the convener, ensuring regular meetings with agendas and consistent communication. If SWIFT is not able to serve as a backbone collaboration, another organization should be identified.
  - Over time, the organizations can all pay into the backbone organization to hire a facilitator to oversee the group and move the needle on foster care efforts.
3. Create a strategic plan with goals and strategies so the faith community and other nonprofit organizations can move foster care efforts forward together. Include a regular meeting cadence that allows members to address and monitor action steps in the plan.

### **Alleviate Poverty and Inequity**

1. Child neglect is overwhelmingly the biggest cause of children entering the foster care system. Alleviating family and child poverty can decrease cases of child neglect. Adopt universal strategies that target all community members, not just those already at risk of entering the foster care system. Ensure all counties have a minimum wage that is a living wage, sufficient affordable housing, and affordable child care.
2. Request the Removal by Race Report from Indiana Department of Child Services. Work with DCS to decrease the disparity between the number of Children of Color and White children being placed in foster care.

## **Recommendations**



## Recommendations

### **Create and Expand Programming That Offers Families Support**

1. Programs that strengthen families can decrease the cases of neglect. Providing programming such as Strengthening Indiana Families Family Resource Centers can help provide families the resources they need to get through the tough times in life, decrease stress, and prevent neglect.
2. Help create a village for a family through programming like Safe Families for Children. Wraparound care for families who do not have others to turn to can mean the difference between a successful or a struggling family.
3. Support foster and kinship care families through training and community. Giving foster families the network they need to foster children successfully, may lead to retaining foster parents.

### **Create and Expand Concrete Supports in Southwest Indiana**

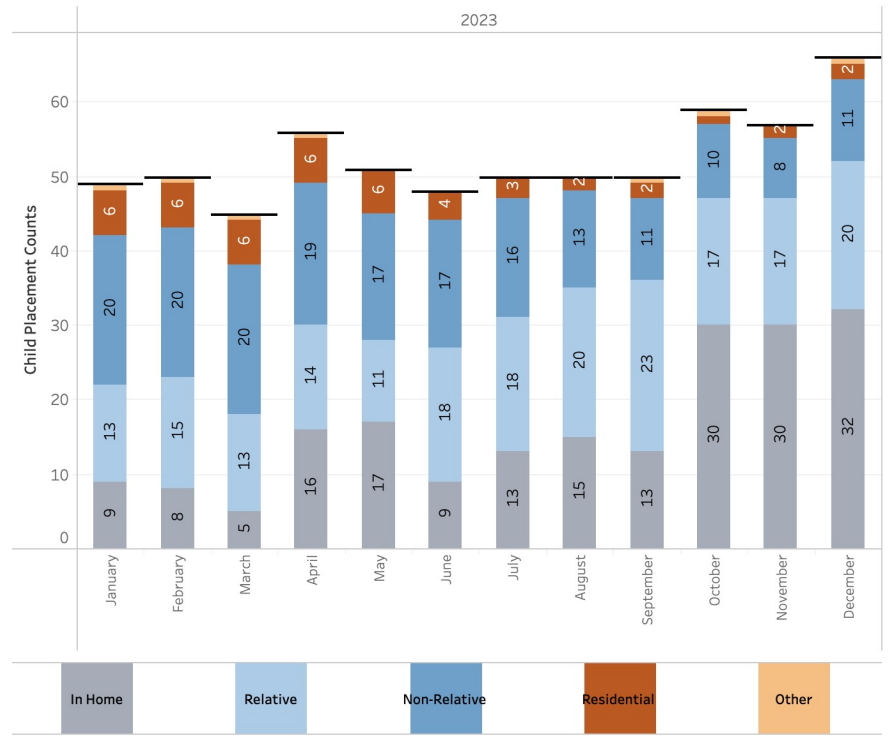
1. Assist Hands of Hope's efforts with CarePortal. Work to increase the number of churches and business partnerships, and explore adding this service in Gibson and Posey counties.
2. Identify and support nonprofit organizations and churches that offer concrete supports to families. Concrete support has the potential of preventing a child from foster care placement.

### **Identify strategies to address barriers such as limited service availability and staffing shortages**

1. Community feedback shows that limited services are a barrier, which may be caused by staffing shortages, and that constant workforce turnover prevents progress. Mentoring, coaching, and professional development are all strategies to help improve retention. The workforce issue may also be alleviated by community programs working to share the load.
2. The community may find ways to support and encourage child welfare staff, which can help them feel less burdened and increase retention.
3. Explore funding to increase wages, forgive student loans, and improve mental health supports for case workers and others working with children in foster care and foster and kinship families.

# Gibson County Visuals

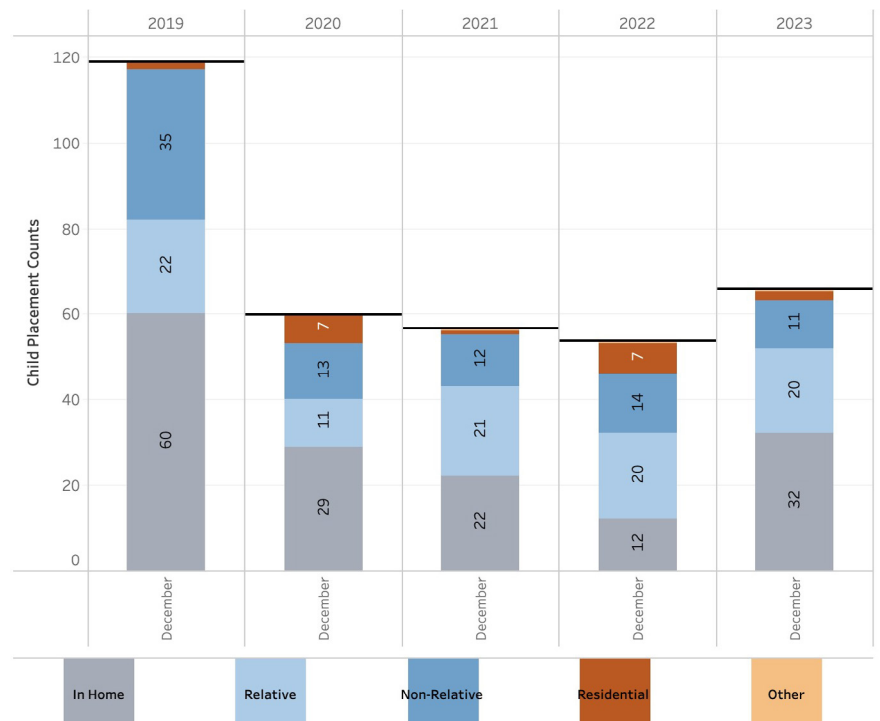
**Children in Need of Services (CHINS) by Placement Type in Gibson County (Jan. 2023 - Dec. 2023)**



Source: Indiana Department of Child Services (n.d.) Performance Measures Dashboard.

## APPENDIX

**Children in Need of Services (CHINS) by Placement Type in Gibson County  
Point-in-Time Count Completed Annually in December**

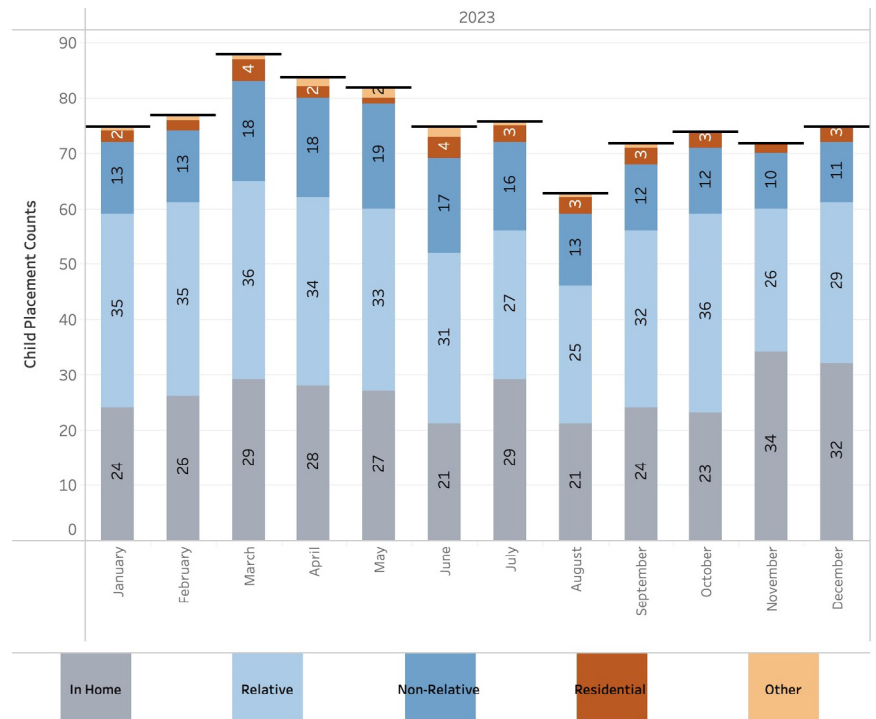


Source: Indiana Department of Child Services (n.d.) Performance Measures Dashboard.



# Posey County Visuals

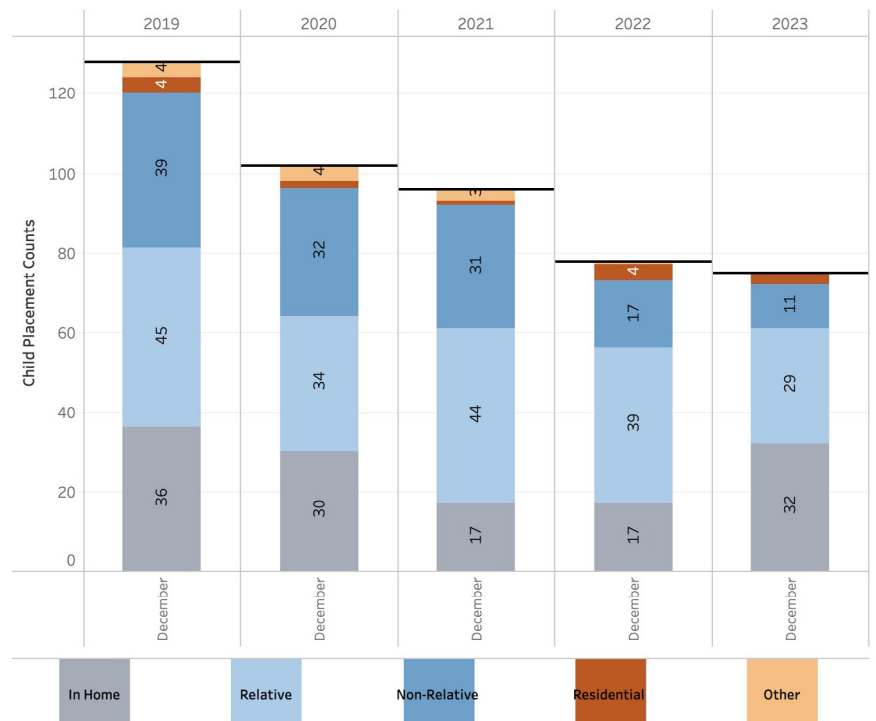
**Children in Need of Services (CHINS) by Placement Type in Posey County (Jan. 2023 - Dec. 2023)**



Source: Indiana Department of Child Services (n.d.) Performance Measures Dashboard.

## APPENDIX

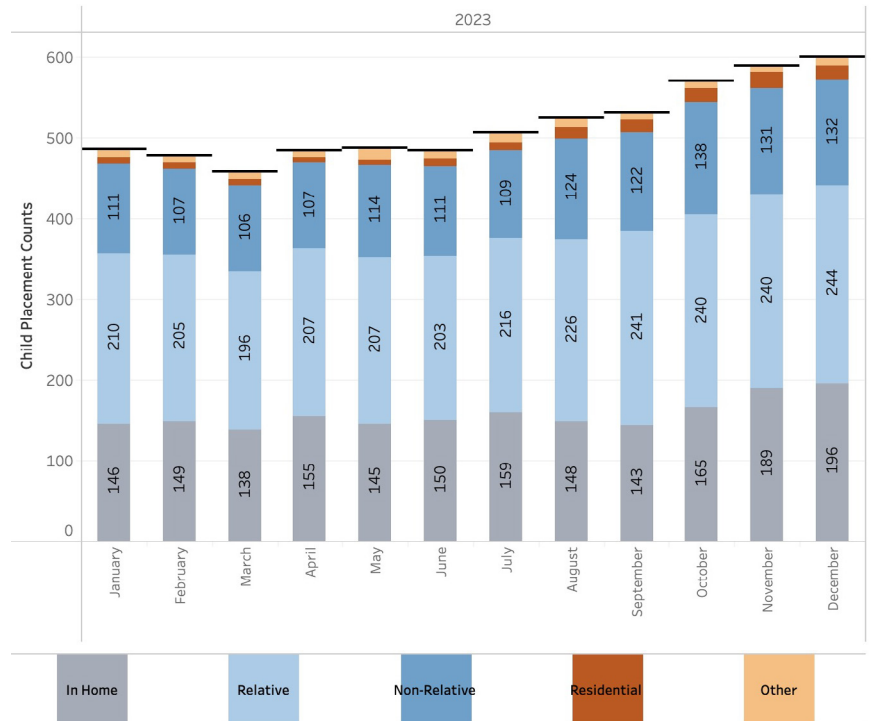
**Children in Need of Services (CHINS) by Placement Type in Posey County  
Point-in-Time Count Completed Annually in December**



Source: Indiana Department of Child Services (n.d.) Performance Measures Dashboard.

# Vanderburgh County Visuals

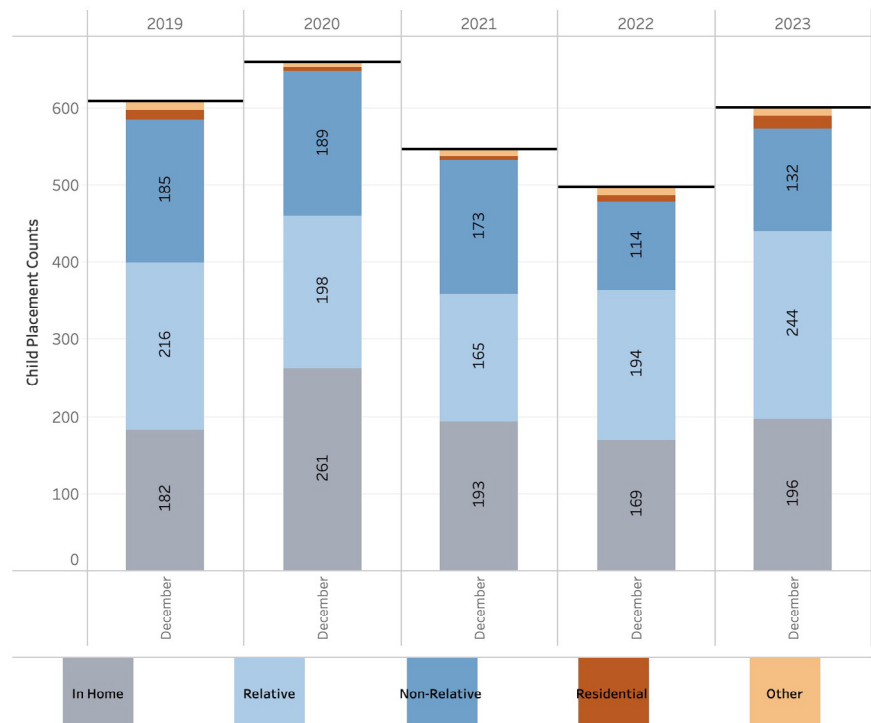
**Children in Need of Services (CHINS) by Placement Type in Vanderburgh County (Jan. 2023 - Dec. 2023)**



Source: Indiana Department of Child Services (n.d.) Performance Measures Dashboard.

## APPENDIX

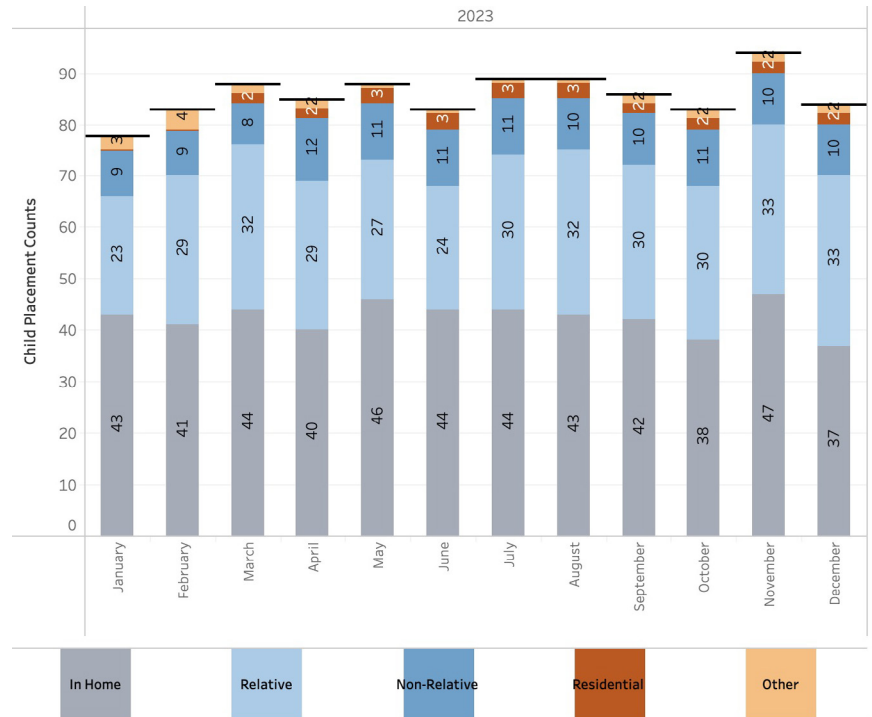
**Children in Need of Services (CHINS) by Placement Type in Vanderburgh County  
Point-in-Time Count Completed Annually in December**



Source: Indiana Department of Child Services (n.d.) Performance Measures Dashboard.

# Warrick County Visuals

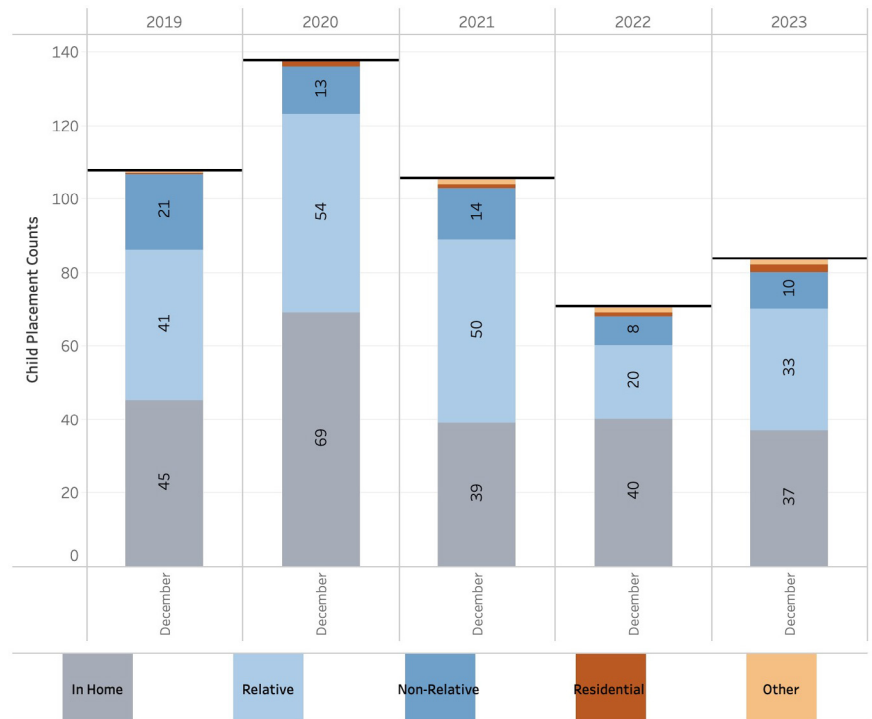
**Children in Need of Services (CHINS) by Placement Type in Warrick County (Jan. 2023 - Dec. 2023)**



Source: Indiana Department of Child Services (n.d.) Performance Measures Dashboard.

## APPENDIX

**Children in Need of Services (CHINS) by Placement Type in Warrick County  
Point-in-Time Count Completed Annually in December**



Source: Indiana Department of Child Services (n.d.) Performance Measures Dashboard.