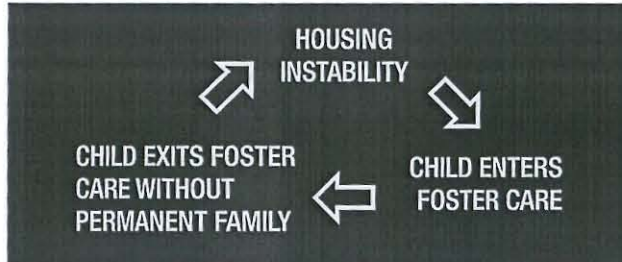


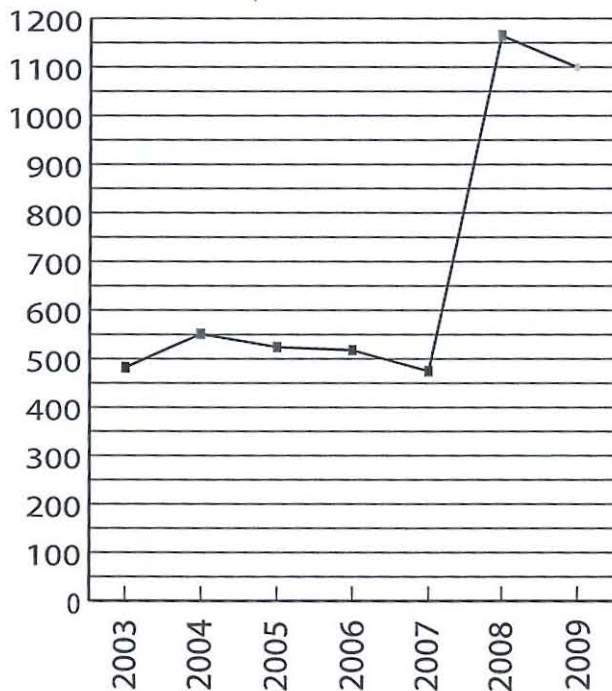
Homelessness, Housing and Foster Care Involvement

The Facts

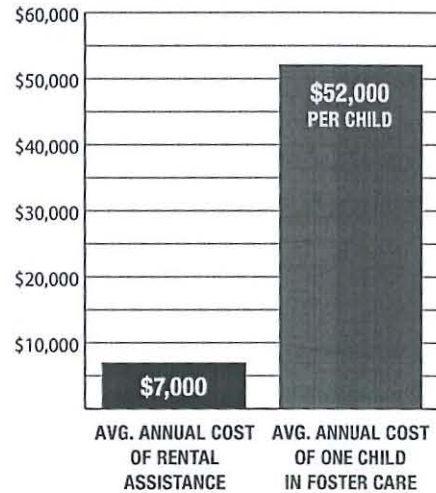


Inadequate housing is one of the most common reasons that children in Virginia enter foster care. The number of children placed in foster care in Virginia due to inadequate housing increased more than 100 percent from 2007 to 2008.¹

NUMBER OF CHILDREN PLACED IN FOSTER CARE IN VIRGINIA DUE TO INADEQUATE HOUSING



COST OF RENTAL ASSISTANCE VS. FOSTER CARE PLACEMENT



Anecdotal evidence from service providers indicates that a large proportion of those living in emergency shelter and transitional housing have children in foster care.

A cost comparison shows that it is less expensive to keep families together through rent assistance than to place or keep children in foster care. The average annual cost of foster care in Virginia for one child is \$52,000² while the average annual cost of keeping the family together by helping them pay rent is \$7,000.³

Housing instability may precipitate a child's foster care placement and this instability can continue if the child "ages out of the system" (exits foster care without a permanent family and the support system that often comes with it). The combined cost of rental assistance and support services remain much less

(continued on next page)

expensive than foster care placement.

Over one fifth of youth who age out of foster care will experience homelessness at some time after age 18.⁴ These youth often slip into destructive patterns that carry serious consequences and can contribute to homelessness in adulthood or sooner. One in four youth aging out of foster care will be incarcerated within the first two years after they leave the system.⁵

Virginia has the largest percentage (of all the states) of youth aging out of foster care without a permanent family.⁶ Virginia's youth, then, may very well be at higher risk of homelessness.

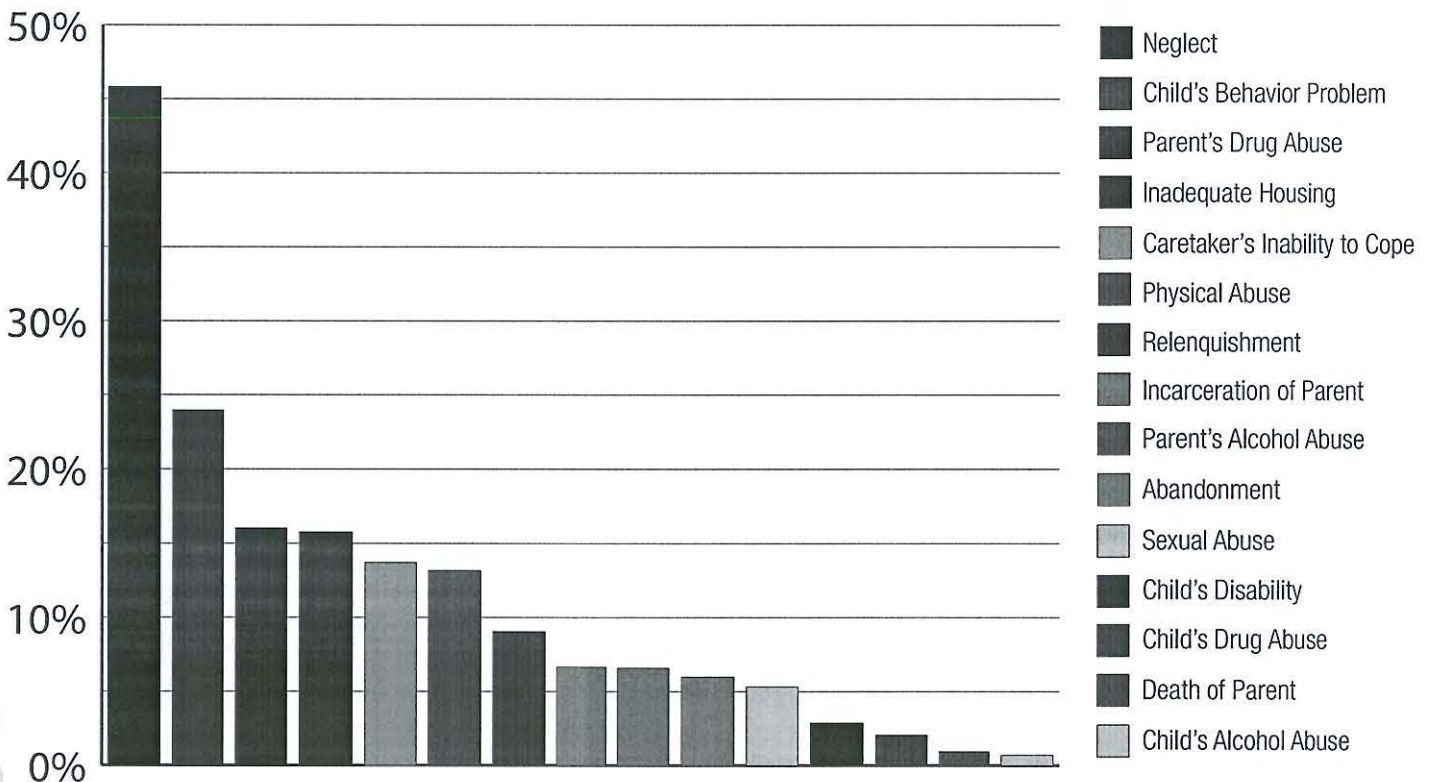
According to James Weber, the Chief Social Work Supervisor for the City of Roanoke Department of Social Services, "youth seldom, if ever, age out of care with no plan for where they will go. However, more often their plans fall through." It is often difficult to track young people after they exit the system, and this presents many challenges to ensuring a safe and successful transition.

Opportunities and Recommendations

With a focused effort, we can devise effective interventions to preserve and reunify families, divert foster care involvement, and reduce costs to the child welfare system -- all of which prevent homelessness and improve outcomes for children. Early intervention is key.

Some new funding opportunities have arisen in response to this situation. Fairfax County and Harrisonburg received awards of Family Unification Program (FUP) vouchers announced by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in July 2009. FUP vouchers are federally-funded Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers to help families and youth aging out of the foster care system afford housing and pay rent. FUP vouchers are an important resource to unite families with their children who would otherwise languish needlessly in foster care and for youth aging out of the foster care system. The Fairfax County and Harrisonburg Redevelopment & Housing Authorities received 100 and 50 vouchers, respectively.

REASONS CHILDREN ENTER FOSTER CASE IN VIRGINIA: CONDITIONS OF LAST REMOVAL, JULY 2009



1. **Make it a local and state priority** that children will not enter foster care if inadequate housing is the primary barrier.
2. **Make use of every available current resource for addressing this issue.** This includes, for example, Family Unification Program vouchers, a federally funded Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program applied for via a partnership between the local redevelopment and housing authority and the local department of social services, human services or family services.
3. **Create and fund a state “rapid re-housing” program** to provide rental assistance and case management services to families who experience or are at risk of homelessness and whose children are either at risk of foster care involvement or are in foster care.
4. **Develop a system to monitor the transition plans** for youth aging out of foster care to ensure they do not fall into homelessness.
5. **Strengthen and increase funding** for family unification programs. ■

After losing her daughter, Bryanna, to the foster care system, Rebecca didn't give up.

She set specific, time-related goals, such as obtaining permanent employment, gaining positive parenting skills, and maintaining housing in which Bryanna could have her own room. With the help of the United Way of Roanoke Valley and its array of programs, Rebecca was able to meet her goals and regain custody of her daughter.



Photo courtesy of United Way of Roanoke Valley

1 Virginia Department of Social Services. Foster Care Reports - Monthly Snapshots. <http://www.dss.virginia.gov/geninfo/reports/children/fc/>

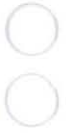
2 Virginia Department of Social Services Office of Research Division of Strategy Management and Research. 2009 Annual Statistical Report. http://www.dss.virginia.gov/geninfo/reports/agency_wide/annual_statistical.cgi

3 Congressional Budget Office. *Cost Estimate: HR 1851 - Section 8 Voucher Reform Act of 2007*. June 2007. www.cbo.gov/doc.cfm?index=8257

4 Casey Family Programs. "Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study", 1998.

5 Courtney, Mark E., Amy Dworsky, Sherri Terao, Noel Bost, Gretchen Ruth Cusick, Thomas Keller, and Judy Havlicek. "Midwest Evaluation of the Adults Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Age 19," Chapin Hall, 2005.

6 The Pew Charitable Trusts. *Time for Reform: Aging Out and On Their Own - More Teens Leaving Foster Care Without a Permanent Family*. Washington, DC, 2007.



Virginia Coalition to End Homelessness

VCEH

www.vceh.org

The Virginia Coalition to End Homelessness is the statewide nonprofit organization dedicated to preventing and ending homelessness in the Commonwealth of Virginia through community collaboration, capacity building, education and advocacy.