

# Children and Youth at Risk



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In what are often troublesome areas, Illinois has cast a glimmer of hope. The state has assumed a leadership role by implementing policies that promote the well-being of at-risk children and youth, especially those in substitute care and those involved with the juvenile justice system.

With respect to child welfare, the number of youths placed through adoptions or subsidized guardianships now far outpaces the number of youths placed in foster care. Only a decade ago, the reverse was true; there were tens of thousands more foster care placements than permanent placements. In fact, in 1996, Illinois had the highest rate of kinship foster care in the country. Several reforms were implemented throughout the 1990s, including subsidized guardianships in 1997, and these reforms stand as testaments to the ability of policies to bring about social change.

Permanent homes, a category which encompasses both adoption and subsidized guardianship, offer outcome-related as well as cost-effective advantages. First, these permanent place-

ments have proven to be stable. According to 2006 data from the Children and Family Research Center, 98 percent of permanent placements from two years prior remained stable. Second, many of these permanent placements are with extended kin, and children benefit from the maintenance of family ties and traditions. Finally, permanent placements require lower overhead and fewer administrative costs because there is diminished need for ongoing case management.

In addition to the reduction of foster care placements, the proportion of African-American children in foster care has decreased. In 1997, a high of 78 percent of children in foster care were African American; in 2006, this proportion had fallen to 61 percent. The reduction is significant, yet there is still work to be done. In spite of the decline, African-American children are still disproportionately represented in the foster care system. They constitute 19 percent of the general child population, and yet their representation among children in substitute care is more than three times that percentage.

With respect to the juvenile justice system, Illinois' policies have also been changing. The population of incarcerated juveniles in state facilities decreased between 1999 and 2005 by 35 percent. In an effort to continue this downward trend, the state has coordinated efforts to rehabilitate rather than to incarcerate, as scientific evidence suggests that rehabilitative efforts reduce recidivism. Through Redeploy Illinois, a project created in 2004, the state offers community-based services as an alternative to detainment for at-risk youth. These services, such as case management, counseling and educational assistance, help participants confront some of the challenges that vulnerable youth face, including mental illness, learning disabilities and substance use.

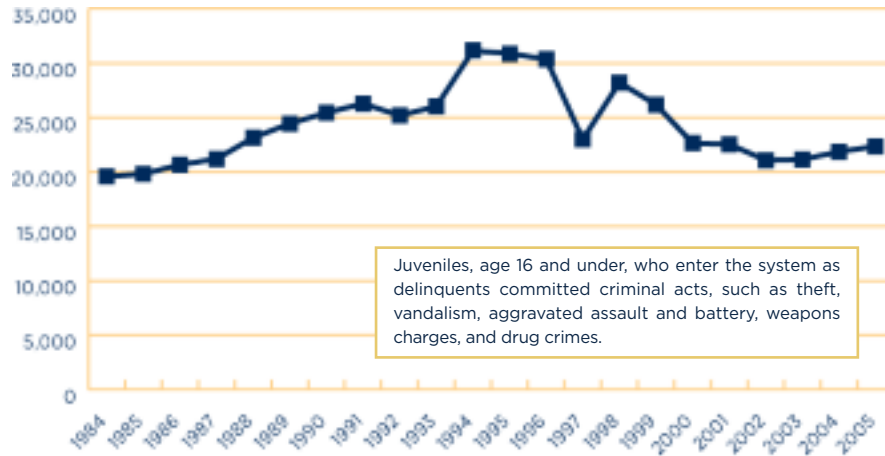
As well as yielding positive outcomes, the program also fares better than the traditional state-facility paradigm in terms of cost. Prior to Redeploy Illinois, counties paid for community-based services, whereas the state paid for detainment in correctional facilities. Weighing the costs, many counties opted to send youths in the juvenile system to state correctional facil-

ities. Redeploy Illinois provides counties with the necessary funds and incentives to offer community-based services. Service provision through the program is less costly for the state than detainment. In the four Redeploy Illinois pilot sites, fewer juveniles were committed to state facilities in 2005, and instead were being served in their communities.

In 2006, Illinois created a new Department of Juvenile Justice, separate from the Department of Corrections. It is evolving away from the corrections model and establishing a more age-appropriate rehabilitation approach.

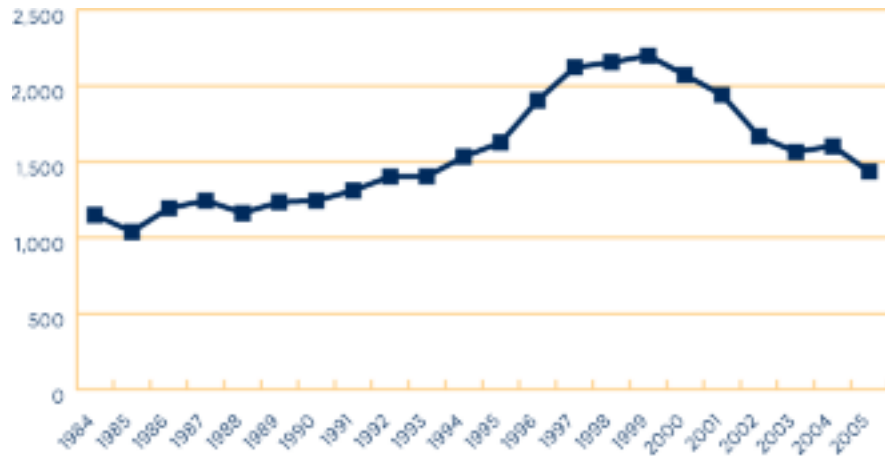
In the areas of both child welfare and juvenile justice, Illinois has pursued policies that produce hopeful outcomes while remaining fiscally responsible. The promise of effective polices at reasonable costs has caught the attention of other states, as they have looked to replicate Illinois' innovative alternatives.

## Juvenile Delinquency Petitions in Illinois



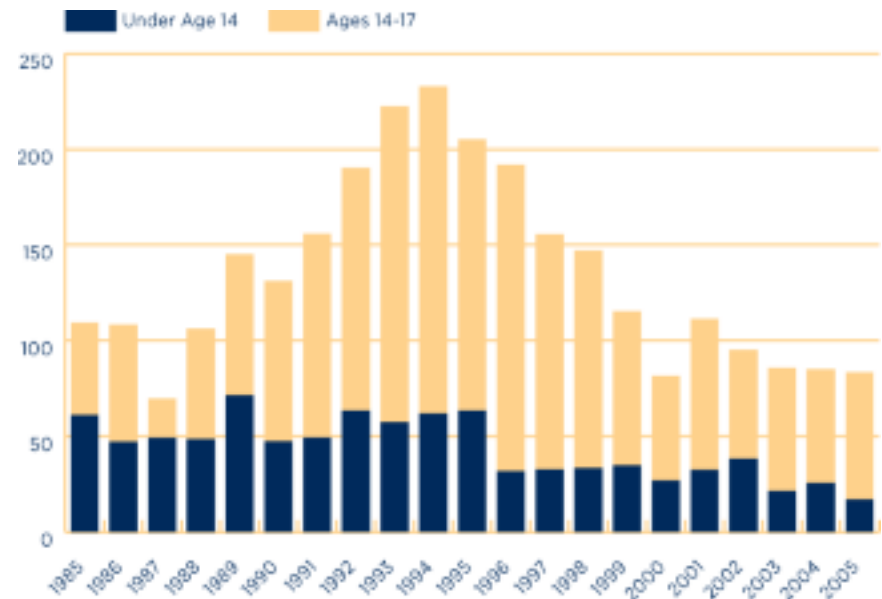
Source: Chicago Metropolis 2020, based on petition data from Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts and Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority

## Juveniles in Illinois State Correctional Facilities



Source: Chicago Metropolis 2020, based on data from Illinois Department of Corrections

## Number of Homicide Victims in Illinois, Ages 17 and Under



Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics

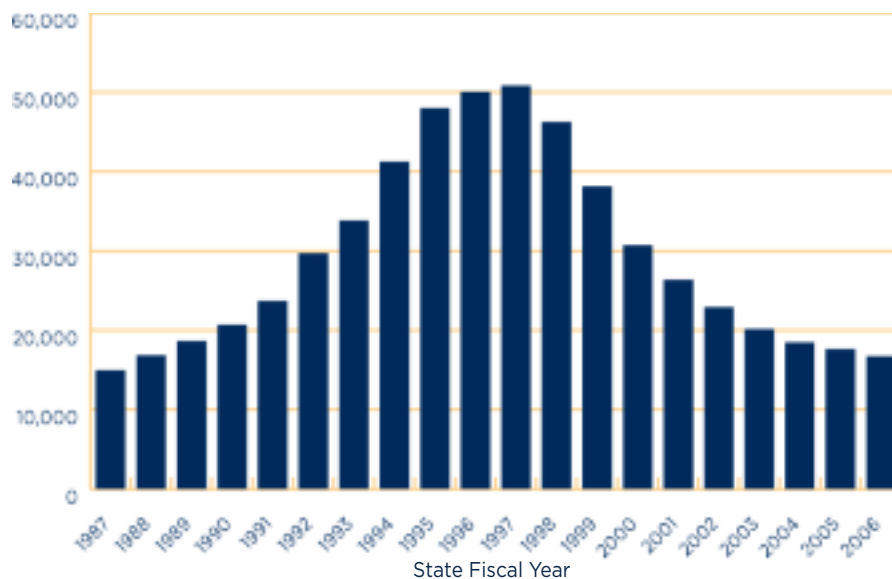
## Disconnected Teens, Ages 16 to 19, Not in School and Not Working

	Illinois	U.S.
1990	9.8%	9.9%
2000	9.1%	8.9%
Average 2004-2006	8.0%	8.2%

Source: Population Reference Bureau, analysis of data from U.S. Census Bureau Decennial Census 1990, 2000, American Community Survey 2004-2006

# Children and Youth At Risk

## Children in Substitute Care in Illinois



Source: Children and Family Research Center at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, analysis of data from Illinois Department of Children and Family Services

**Since its peak in 1997, the number of Illinois children in substitute care has dropped 67 percent.**

## Percentage of Children in Substitute Care in Illinois by Age Group

SFY	Under Age 3	Age 3 to 5	Age 6 to 8	Age 9 to 11	Age 12 to 14	Age 15 and Older
1987	14.1%	16.8%	15.3%	13.0%	15.3%	25.5%
1988	15.4%	17.7%	16.2%	13.7%	14.1%	22.9%
1989	16.6%	17.9%	16.6%	14.1%	13.7%	21.1%
1990	16.8%	18.2%	16.3%	14.9%	14.0%	19.8%
1991	16.8%	18.9%	16.6%	15.3%	14.2%	18.2%
1992	17.4%	20.0%	16.9%	15.1%	13.9%	16.7%
1993	17.4%	20.4%	17.2%	14.7%	14.2%	16.2%
1994	17.6%	20.7%	17.7%	14.6%	13.9%	15.5%
1995	17.4%	21.2%	18.2%	14.7%	13.8%	14.8%
1996	16.0%	21.1%	19.0%	15.2%	13.6%	15.1%
1997	14.5%	20.6%	19.7%	16.1%	14.0%	15.2%
1998	13.6%	19.3%	19.4%	16.6%	14.4%	16.7%
1999	14.2%	17.3%	18.2%	16.8%	14.7%	18.9%
2000	14.7%	15.4%	16.4%	16.1%	15.4%	22.1%
2001	14.9%	14.8%	15.0%	15.2%	15.6%	24.4%
2002	15.5%	15.2%	13.8%	14.5%	15.6%	25.4%
2003	16.8%	15.3%	13.3%	13.6%	15.7%	25.2%
2004	17.4%	16.2%	13.2%	13.2%	15.0%	25.1%
2005	18.6%	16.7%	12.9%	12.4%	14.8%	24.6%
2006	19.3%	17.6%	13.2%	11.7%	13.7%	24.4%

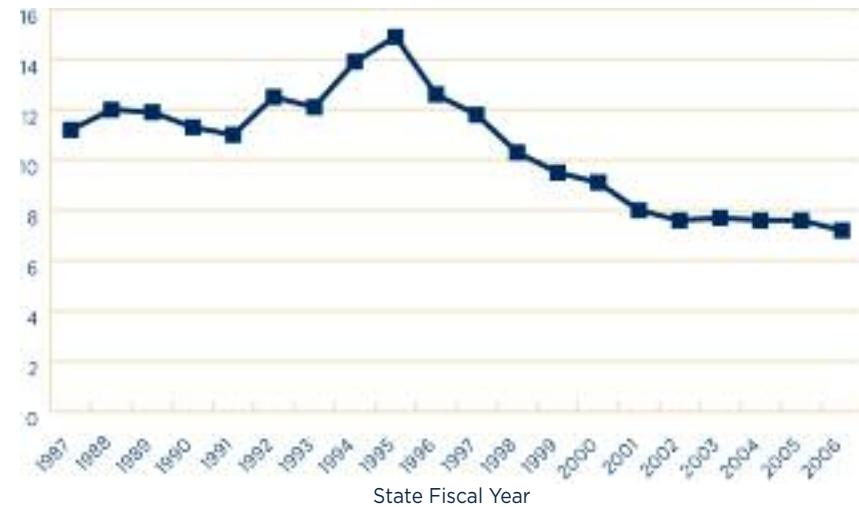
Source: Children and Family Research Center at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, analysis of data from Illinois Department of Children and Family Services

## Children in Substitute Care in Illinois by Race/Ethnicity

SFY	African American		Latino		White	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
1987	8,320	55.6%	825	5.5%	5,380	36.0%
1988	9,941	59.0%	870	5.2%	5,552	33.0%
1989	11,736	63.0%	904	4.9%	5,549	29.8%
1990	13,613	65.8%	899	4.3%	5,715	27.6%
1991	16,348	69.0%	989	4.2%	5,925	25.0%
1992	21,566	72.7%	1,231	4.2%	6,385	21.5%
1993	25,556	75.5%	1,358	4.0%	6,487	19.2%
1994	31,756	76.9%	1,646	4.0%	7,330	17.7%
1995	37,437	78.0%	1,979	4.1%	7,999	16.7%
1996	39,153	78.2%	2,193	4.4%	8,092	16.2%
1997	39,871	78.4%	2,281	4.5%	7,974	15.7%
1998	36,029	77.9%	2,190	4.7%	7,345	15.9%
1999	29,050	76.2%	1,913	5.0%	6,523	17.1%
2000	22,739	74.1%	1,534	5.0%	5,870	19.1%
2001	18,937	71.9%	1,382	5.2%	5,498	20.9%
2002	15,910	69.5%	1,270	5.6%	5,181	22.6%
2003	13,616	67.6%	1,121	5.6%	4,947	24.6%
2004	11,953	64.7%	1,045	5.7%	5,079	27.5%
2005	11,079	62.9%	1,001	5.7%	5,139	29.2%
2006	10,189	60.9%	958	5.7%	5,202	31.1%

Source: Children and Family Research Center at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, analysis of data from Illinois Department of Children and Family Services

## Rate of Illinois Children (per 1,000) with Indicated Reports of Abuse and Neglect



Source: Children and Family Research Center at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, analysis of data from Illinois Department of Children and Family Services

## Percentage of Children in Foster Care Achieving Permanency in Illinois by Age Group

SFY	Illinois Total	Under Age 3	Age 3 to 5	Age 6 to 8	Age 9 to 11	Age 12 to 14	15 and Older
1988	19.9%	26.5%	23.6%	22.1%	20.2%	20.0%	11.6%
1990	17.8%	24.3%	20.7%	19.5%	16.3%	16.6%	10.7%
1992	13.0%	16.5%	13.8%	12.2%	13.4%	13.5%	9.1%
1994	9.2%	10.7%	10.7%	9.2%	8.4%	9.1%	6.8%
1996	10.2%	10.6%	11.7%	11.0%	10.1%	10.1%	7.6%
1998	17.9%	16.4%	22.4%	21.5%	20.4%	17.4%	8.6%
2000	25.7%	21.5%	36.9%	34.7%	31.5%	24.8%	9.4%
2002	22.7%	23.4%	31.4%	30.7%	29.6%	23.8%	8.9%
2004	19.7%	21.3%	27.7%	26.8%	24.5%	22.2%	7.7%
2006	19.0%	19.4%	26.9%	26.3%	26.4%	20.6%	6.5%

Source: Children and Family Research Center at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, analysis of data from Illinois Department of Children and Family Services

**In Illinois, African-American children are over-represented in the child welfare system. They comprise about 18 percent of the overall child population but about 61 percent of the substitute care population.**

# Child Welfare in Illinois: From ‘Calcutta’ to the ‘Gold Standard’

By Nancy Rolock

Research Specialist at the Children and Family Research Center, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

The Illinois child population in substitute care was roughly the same in 2007 as it was in 1987—approximately 15,000. But the state’s story of child welfare—the transformation from a system that *Time* magazine dubbed “Calcutta, Illinois,” to what was ultimately called the “gold standard” in the *CQ Researcher*—provides a fascinating look into the enormous changes that occurred during these 20 years and a glimpse into the future.

## Kinship Care Growth (1987–1997)

The foster care population expanded from 15,000 to 51,000 in 10 years, an increase primarily attributed to the growth of kinship foster care. During this time, Chicago and other large cities struggled with a crack cocaine epidemic and, as a result, many aunts and grandparents informally cared for kin. Their attempts to enroll children in school or access medical care often led to formal placements into foster care. Before 1995, children left by a parent in the care of kin could be brought into state custody on a neglect petition. Whether the child was safe or in need of protection was not the top consideration. By the late 1990s, Illinois had the largest foster care population in the nation.

## Time for Reform (1997–2007)

At that time, local newspapers painted a picture of a system out of control. Lawsuits and consent decrees demanded change in Department of Children and Family Services policy and practice. The definition of neglect changed first; a child would no longer be considered neglected if left safely in a responsible relative’s care. This alone diverted thousands of children from formal foster care and into supportive arrangements at home. Follow-up showed that children were just as safe when left at home and given the family support services they needed.

These changes, however, did little to help the 30,000 children living in kinship foster care with no foreseeable exit plan. In some states, these children were formally discharged from the child welfare rolls, but not in Illinois. Research conducted with kin caregivers revealed that the vast majority of families expected to raise these children to adulthood and were eager to move beyond state custody but were reluctant to terminate parental rights.<sup>1</sup>

In response, the state developed the subsidized guardianship program, creating an option in which parental rights remain intact but families leave state custody and oversight. This program intensified dis-

cussions with foster families around permanence, resulting in 81,000 children exiting foster care to permanent homes between 1997 and 2007. In fact, 32,000 were reunified with their birth families, 39,000 were adopted, and 10,000 were placed under the permanent guardianship of relatives and former foster parents.

## The Future of Child Welfare

In 2007, the foster care population returned to 1987 levels, but there were 43,000 children in publicly assisted permanent homes—two and one-half times the number of children in substitute care. As Illinois contemplates child welfare’s future, the state must balance serving children in foster care and serving those who have exited care to permanent homes. Although the shift from foster care to permanent family care bodes well for children and families, the transfer of legal responsibilities does not mean that the work of supporting and strengthening these new families ends. Since 1997, an estimated 3 percent (1,200 children) of this population face difficulties that may necessitate re-entry into substitute care. Preventing breakdowns so that families can receive preservation services without coming back into substitute care is a new focus.

<sup>1</sup> Mark Testa, et al., “Permanency Planning Options for Children in Kinship Care,” *Child Welfare*, Sept.-Oct. 1996, pp. 451-470.

# The Next Hundred Years of Illinois Juvenile Justice

By Jeffrey A. Butts, Ph.D.

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The contemporary notion of juvenile justice was born in Illinois with the 1899 passage of the nation's first law establishing a separate legal system for children and youth. In its second century, the Illinois juvenile justice system is engaged in another era of innovation and reform.

The nationally recognized Redeploy Illinois initiative, for example, is helping the state to correct harmful financial incentives that led counties to commit youth to correctional institutions. Instead, the program encourages communities to rely on local solutions for youthful offenders rather than instinctively turning to state-funded confinement.

Illinois communities are successfully leveraging the resources of national foundations to improve juvenile justice programs and policies. Detention officials in Cook, LaSalle, Lake, Peoria and a number of other counties are working with the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative to focus costly detention resources on youth who truly need to be securely confined.

Cook County officials are participating in the Reclaiming Futures initiative, funded by the Robert Wood

Johnson Foundation, to enhance the impact of substance abuse interventions for court-involved youth.

Policymakers throughout Illinois are working with Models for Change, a national program of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation to improve state and local practices related to the scope of the juvenile court's jurisdiction, community-based alternatives, and disproportionate minority contact with the justice system.

Juvenile justice practitioners in Illinois are benefiting from an explosion of new research findings as well. Due to significant national investments in research and evaluation studies during the 1990s, Illinois communities can draw on a range of new evidence-based programs, including multisystemic therapy (MST) and family functional therapy (FFT). Rigorous evaluation studies have shown that these program models can reduce serious and violent offenses among youth with family problems, emotional troubles and mental health disorders.

Much work remains to be done, however. Developing strong research findings is expensive and complex, and past investment has tended to focus on serious offenders

and those with mental health disorders. There are other valuable program models in juvenile justice that have not attracted the research investment required to generate sound evidence of program impact.

The juvenile justice system needs to develop high-quality evidence for the intervention programs that are used to serve the majority of youthful offenders—those not charged with serious crimes and those not diagnosed with serious drug problems or mental health disorders. These youth make up more than half of all juvenile offenders. Juvenile justice officials in Illinois and the nation must continue to search for new program models that are suitable for all types of youthful offenders and to test the effectiveness of those models using evaluation designs that produce valid and actionable evidence.

