

PLACEMENT AND DELINQUENCY TRAJECTORIES OF YOUTH WITH ACTIVE JUVENILE COURT DEPENDENCY CASES

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Data sources for all of the data charts and tables in this report are based on the author's analysis of statewide juvenile court (JCS), superior court (SCOMIS) and child welfare (FAMLINK) data provided by the Washington State Center for Court Research and Puzanchera, C., Sladky, A. and Kang, W. (2014). Easy Access to Juvenile Populations: 1990-2013. Online. Available: <http://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/ezapop/>.

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Introduction and Background

This research brief examines a cohort of adolescent youth twelve years of age and older who were active with the King County Juvenile Court (Seattle) on a dependency matter in calendar year 2006 to better understand how the trajectories of delinquent offending vary for youth with different placement experiences.

This effort is one of a series of analyses conducted as part of the King County Prevalence Study undertaken by the National Center for Juvenile Justice (NCJJ) and funded by the MacArthur Foundation's Model for Change Juvenile Justice Reform Initiative.

The primary product of this overall effort, *Doorways to Delinquency* (Halemba and Siegel, 2011) examined the history of child welfare and status offender involvement among youth referred to the King County Juvenile Court on a delinquency matter in 2006. The *Doorways* study found that 67% of youth referred to the King County Juvenile Court in 2006 on a delinquency matter had some history of involvement with the state's child welfare system. Overall, 37% of the 2006 delinquent cohort had child welfare histories that included one or more moderate-to-high-risk child protection referrals and/or a history of child welfare agency-initiated legal activity and some period of out-of-home placement.

Additionally, the *Doorways* study found that youth with no history of child welfare involvement were far less likely to be referred on a subsequent delinquency charge within 6 months than youth with a history of child welfare agency legal activity or out-of-home placement (17% versus 42%). At the 2-year mark, 34% of youth with no history of CA involvement had been referred on at least one new offender referral compared to 70% of youth with a history of CA legal activity/placement.

Lastly, a more detailed analysis of the placement histories of a subset of the 2006 delinquent cohort of youth who had some history of out-of-home placement, found that most of these youth spent extended periods of time in temporary placements (often in group homes

or other congregate care), experienced multiple placement changes (12 on average), and spent a considerable amount of time on AWOL status. These youth were also the most likely to reoffend and were disproportionately African-American and Native American.

Current Analysis—Adolescents Active with the Court on a Dependency Matter in 2006

The last set of findings—dual system youth with extensive histories of out-of-home placement, disproportionality and increased likelihood of juvenile justice system involvement—provides a good segue to the current analysis. This study focuses specifically on delinquency histories and trajectories of youth involved with the King County Juvenile Court on a dependency matter in 2006 and how delinquency trajectories vary for youth with different placement experiences.

Study Cohort

To be included in the study cohort, a youth must have been at least 12 years of age at the start of the 2006 calendar year and had at least one hearing on a dependency matter in 2006. The vast majority of these youth had histories of dependency court involvement that began years prior to 2006 and a number of them continued their dependency court involvement well past 2006. Age 12 was chosen as the cutoff because this is the age at which youth in general are beginning to enter the period of adolescence in which a referral on a delinquency charge is most likely. Although in Washington youth can be referred to juvenile court as young as age 8, in 2006, nearly 98% of all delinquency referrals received by the King County Juvenile Court involved age youth 12 or older.

As was the case in in the *Doorways* study cohort, placement trajectories and history of court involvement on delinquency matters were tracked for a minimum of two years—through the end of calendar year 2008.

In all there were 809 youth age 12 or older included in this dependency study cohort. Males accounted for slightly more than half of youth in the cohort (54%). As with the

Key terms

Delinquency offense: Behavior that is a crime for adults. The Washington State juvenile justice system refers to delinquent behavior as offender matters.

Status offense: Behavior that is only an offense because of the youth's juvenile status. In 1995, in response to the deaths of three runaway children, the State Legislature passed SB5439 what became known as the Becca Bill, named after one of the deceased children. This law provides guidance on how three types of status offender proceedings (Children in Need of Services, At-Risk Youth and Truancy) are initiated in juvenile court. While each of these categories of status offenders is considered a different type of case filing and the court process in each differs, these are all commonly referred to as Becca matters.

Dependency matter: Case that is referred to court involving child maltreatment (i.e., caretaker abuse or neglect).

Dual system youth: Youth with dual involvement in both the child welfare system and the juvenile justice system.

Child welfare agency: The agency responsible for handling matters related to maltreated children. In Washington State the child welfare agency is the Children's Administration in Department of Social and Health Services.

Types of living arrangements: Placements supervised by the child welfare agency included *foster homes, relative/kinship homes, group homes* and other congregate care settings. Youth may also have been placed in *secure facilities* such as crisis residential centers or detention centers and state correctional facilities for juvenile offenders. Some youth spent time on Absent Without Leave (AWOL) status from a placement. Youth may have remained with *parents* and a small number resided in *supervised independent living arrangements*.

Doorways delinquency cohort, both African-American and Native American youth were overrepresented in this dependency cohort. African-American youth represented 41% of the overall dependency cohort. In comparison African-American youth were 9% of the overall 2006 King County 12–17 youth population (Figure 1). Although Native American youth were a much smaller proportion of the current study cohort (7%), they were also disproportionately represented in the study cohort. Native American youth were 1% of the general King County youth population ages 12–17 in 2006.

Age at First Contact with Child Welfare and First Placement

For most youth in our study cohort, their first contact with child welfare occurred at an early age—well before age 12 (Figure 2). Typically, a youth’s first child welfare contact (first child welfare investigation, first placement, or first dependency court filing) occurred by age 9 (70%) and often at age 4 or earlier (29%). The remaining 30% of youth in the study cohort had their first child welfare contact occurred after they had reached the age of 10.

African-American (41%) and Native American (34%) youth were considerably more likely to have experienced their first child welfare contact by age 4 than white (18%) youth (Figure 2). Similarly, 76% of African-American youth and 70% of Native American youth experienced their first child welfare contact by age 9 compared with 67% for white youth.

A similar pattern is revealed when examining age at first out-of-home placement (Figure 3). The majority of youth in the 2006 dependency cohort were first placed outside of the home by age 9 (52%) with 25% experiencing their first placement by age 4. The remaining 48% youth were not placed out of home until they were at least 10. As with age at first child welfare contact, African-American (35%) and Native American (30%) youth were considerably more likely to have experienced their first out-of-home placement at age 4 or younger than white (15%) youth.

Figure 1: Race/ethnicity profile of 2006 dependency cohort and the King County youth 12-17 population 2006 census estimates

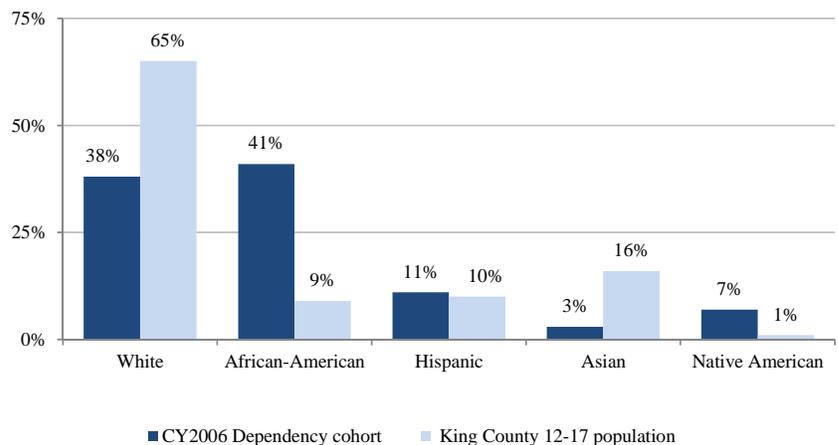


Figure 2: Age at first child welfare contact by race/ethnicity

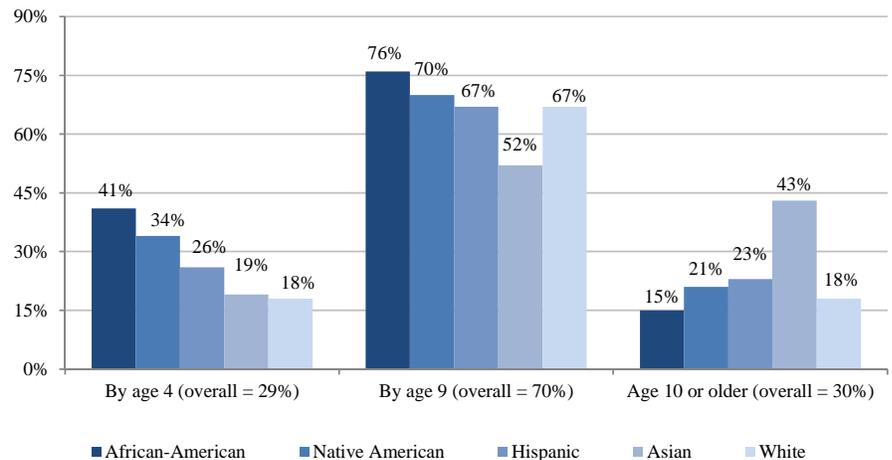


Figure 3: Age at first out-of-home placement by race/ethnicity

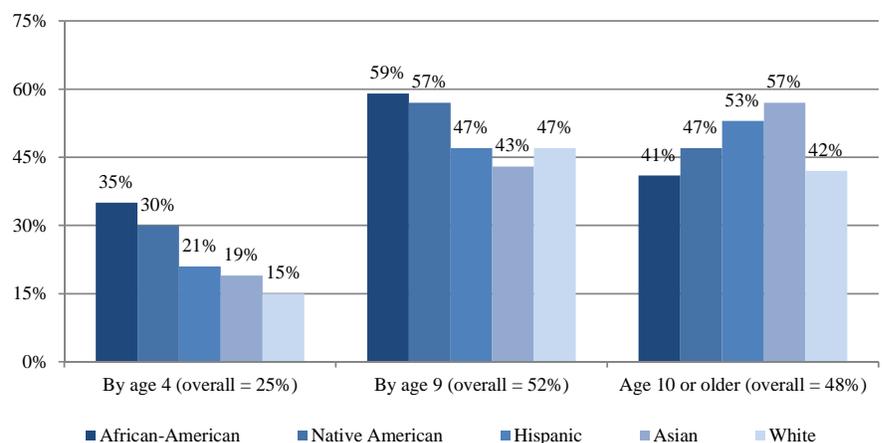


Figure 4: Average time spent in out-of-home placement by race/ethnicity

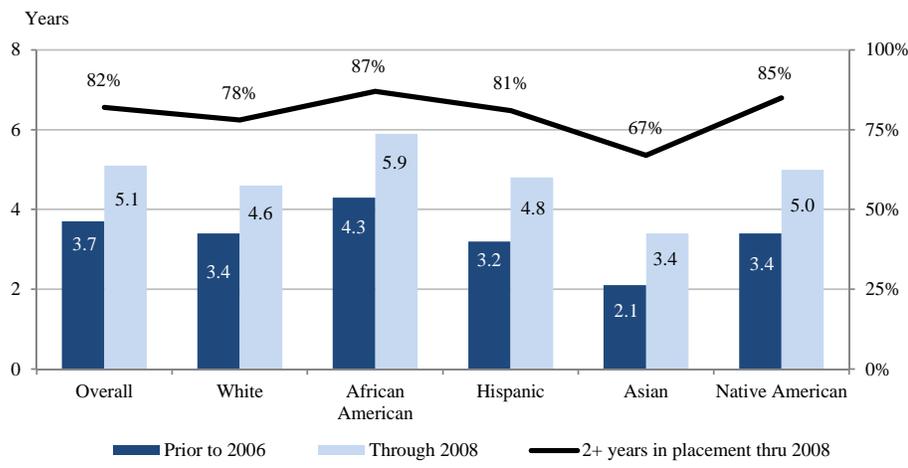
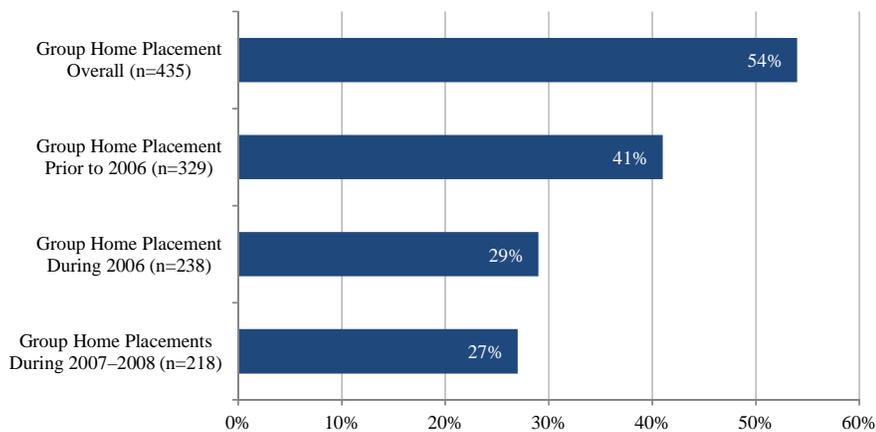


Figure 5: Percent of youth placed in group homes overall and by time period



Permanency and time-in-placement goals in federal legislation

Landmark federal legislation, the Adoptions and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997, provides specific guidance to child welfare agencies regarding the length of time dependent youth should remain in temporary placement. ASFA requires child welfare agencies and the courts to track the amount of time needed to place a youth in a permanent home and essentially sets an aspiration goal of 1 year in temporary placement and 2 years at the outside. These goals were not achieved for more than 8 out of 10 adolescent youth in this dependency study cohort.

Extent of Out-of-Home Placements

All dependent youth included in this study spent at least some time in an out-of-home placement and the vast majority spent multiple years in such placements in years prior to 2006 or overall through 2008 (Figure 4).

The average amount of time youth in the study cohort spent in various foster home, kinship (relative) care and/or group home placements in the years prior to 2006 was 3.7 years and the average time in placement overall through 2008 was 5.1 years (not controlling for youth who aged out during the study period).

For African-American youth, the average time spent in out-of-home placements prior to 2006 and overall increases to 4.3 years and 5.9 years, respectively.

To put this in perspective, 82% of all youth in the 2006 dependency cohort spent more than 2 years in child welfare out-of-home placements through 2008 and 87% of African-American youth and 85% of Native American youth spent more than two years in out-of-home placements, respectively.

Group Home Placements

More than half of all youth in the study cohort spent at least some time in group home placements (54%) either prior to 2006, during 2006, and/or in 2007-08.

Data indicates that 41% of youth in the study cohort spent time in a group home prior to 2006 (Figure 5), 29% were placed in group homes during at least part of 2006, and 27% were similarly placed for at least part of the following 2 years (2007-08).

The vast majority of the 435 youth placed in group homes spent an extended amount of time in such placements—an average of 523 days, (1.4 years) overall.

Approximately 26% of all youth with group home histories spent more than 2 years in such placements through the end of the study tracking period (through 2008).

The length of time youth spent in group home placements varied somewhat by race and ethnicity but not as one might expect. A greater proportion of white youth than other groups spent more than 1 year in group home placements.

The majority of white youth with group home placement histories (56%) spent more than 1 year in group home placements (Figure 6).

For African-American youth with group home placement histories slightly fewer than half (47%) spent more than 1 year in group home placements.

For other race/ethnicity groups the proportions of youth with more than 1 year of group home experience were smaller (38% for Hispanics, 37% for Native Americans, and 20% for Asians).

There were also considerable gender differences in the share of youth with more than a year in group home care. Among youth with group home placement histories, males (53%) were considerably more likely than females (38%) to spend more than one year in group homes overall.

Offender Referral History

Over half of all youth in the study cohort (53%) were referred to the juvenile, magisterial and/or superior court for a delinquency offense at some point prior to the end of 2008. This includes any criminal court referrals youth may have incurred after turning 18 (Figure 7).

Of youth in the study cohort, 35% were referred prior to 2006, 21% during 2006, and 35% during the 2-year period, 2007–2008.

On average, youth had 2.3 offender referrals overall and 11% were referred at least once in each of the three time periods (that is, prior to 2006, during 2006, and during 2007–2008).

Figure 6: Percent of youth placed in group homes who spent more than 1 year in such placements by race/ethnicity and gender (through 2008)

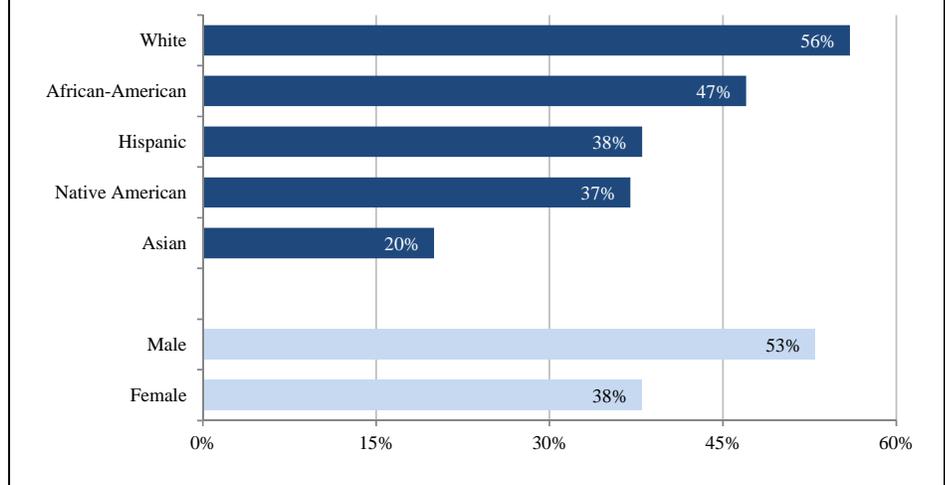
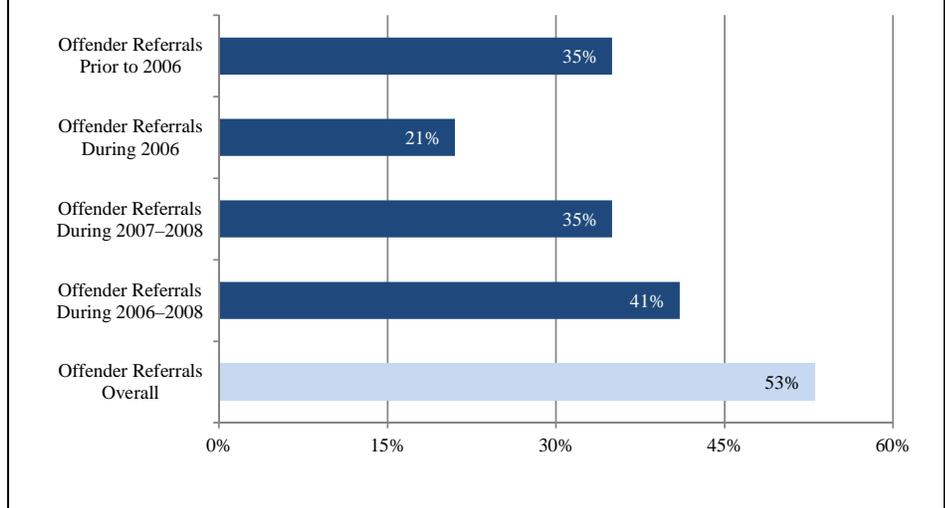


Figure 7: Percent of youth in dependency cohort referred on offender referrals by time period



Overall, 41% of youth in the 2006 dependency cohort had one or more delinquency referrals during a 3-year period from 2006 through 2008. Three background characteristics were strongly correlated with the likelihood of a youth being referred on a delinquency referral during calendar years 2006 thru 2008: some history of a prior group home placement, one or more prior AWOL incidents and/or one or prior delinquency referrals.

Examined individually, the presence of each of these three background characteristics substantially increased the likelihood of a youth active with the juvenile court on a dependency matter being referred for a delinquency offense in 2006 and/or the subsequent 2 years. The data show (Figure 8):

- 56% of youth who spent time at least some time in a group home placement in the years prior to 2006 were referred on one or more delinquency referrals compared to 31% who had no pre-prior group home experience.
- 67% of youth who went AWOL from an out-of-home placement (often, AWOL from a group home placement) were referred on one or more offender referrals during the 3-year period under consideration compared to 34% of youth with no pre-2006 AWOL history.
- Also, 67% of dependent youth with some prior history of prior delinquency referrals were referred on one or more subsequent offender referrals compared to 28% of dependent youth with no such juvenile justice history.

When examined collectively, the presence of one or more of these three background characteristics, further increase the likelihood of subsequent offender justice involvement (Figure 9).

Only 22% of dependent youth with no prior history of group home placement, AWOL and offender referrals were subsequently referred on an offender referral in the 3-year period 2006–2008. In sharp contrast, 74% of dependent youth with some prior history in each of these domains were again referred in subsequent years—a more than three-fold increase.

Figure 8: Delinquency referral between 2006 and 2008 by prior group home, AWOL or juvenile justice history

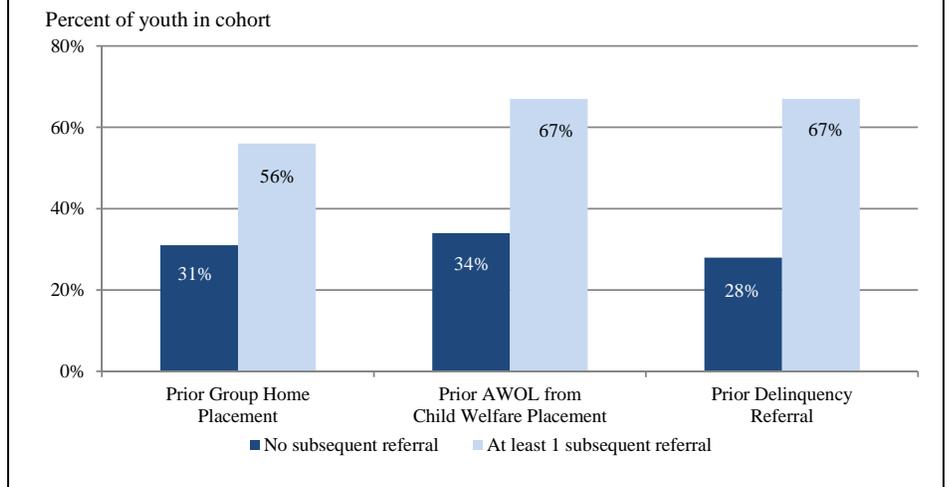
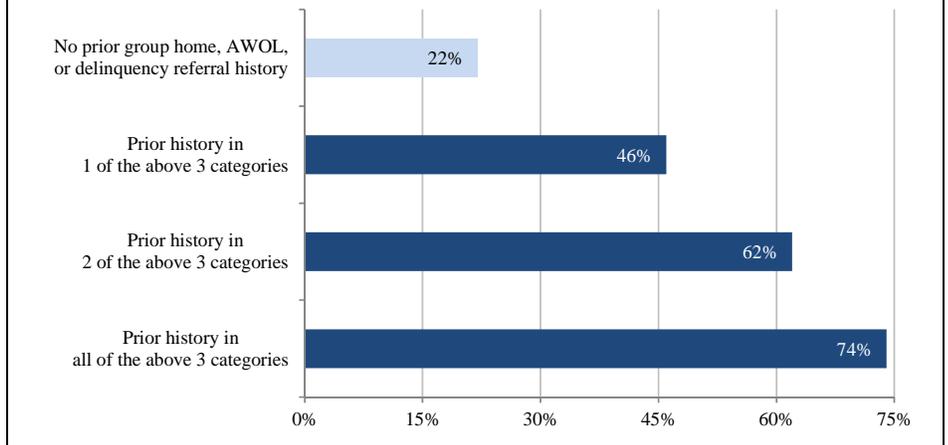


Figure 9: Percent of youth in the cohort referred for a subsequent delinquency referral between 2006 and 2008 by extent of prior history



Likelihood of Delinquency Referrals by Placement Type

By linking placement and offender histories, the following analysis examines the timing of all delinquency referrals amassed by the 809 youth in the dependency study cohort for 2005–2008 (see page 7 for more detail).

The analysis builds on the work of Ryan et al. (2008), a study that found that “... the relative risk of delinquency is approximately two and one half times greater for adolescents with at least one group home placement as compared with youth in foster care settings.”

All study cohort youth spent at least some time in out-of-home placements over the 4-year period and typically spent time in multiple placements. In the aggregate, youth spent 60% of the 4-year period—approximately 29 months—in child welfare placements, juvenile justice placements, and/or AWOL (Figure 10).

The amount of time youth spent in placements or AWOL is higher than one might expect given that more than half of youth in the study cohort turned 18 prior to the end of the study, in essence, “aging out” of state custody/custodial care. That is, for more than 40% of the cohort, the last foster care, congregate care or juvenile justice placement ended within one month of their 18th birthday. Additionally, 75% of youth were 17 or older at the time of their last such placement.

Overall, study youth were referred on delinquency/criminal matters a total of 1,261 times during the 4-year period.

Youth were most likely to incur delinquency referrals while on AWOL status. That is, youth on AWOL status were referred for 166 delinquency matters out of a total of 1,261 such referrals during the 4-year period. Thus, we can say that, overall, 13% of all delinquency referrals occurred while youth were on AWOL status ($166/1,261 = 13\%$).

This is more than two and a half times what one would expect if placement type didn’t matter. In that time, study cohort youth spent approximately 5% of the 2005–2008 period on AWOL status (as reflected in Figure 10). Calculating the number of days per delinquency referral provides a metric for comparing the rate of referral across different types of placement. Using this metric, study cohort

Figure 10: Time spent in various placements by type, 2005–2008

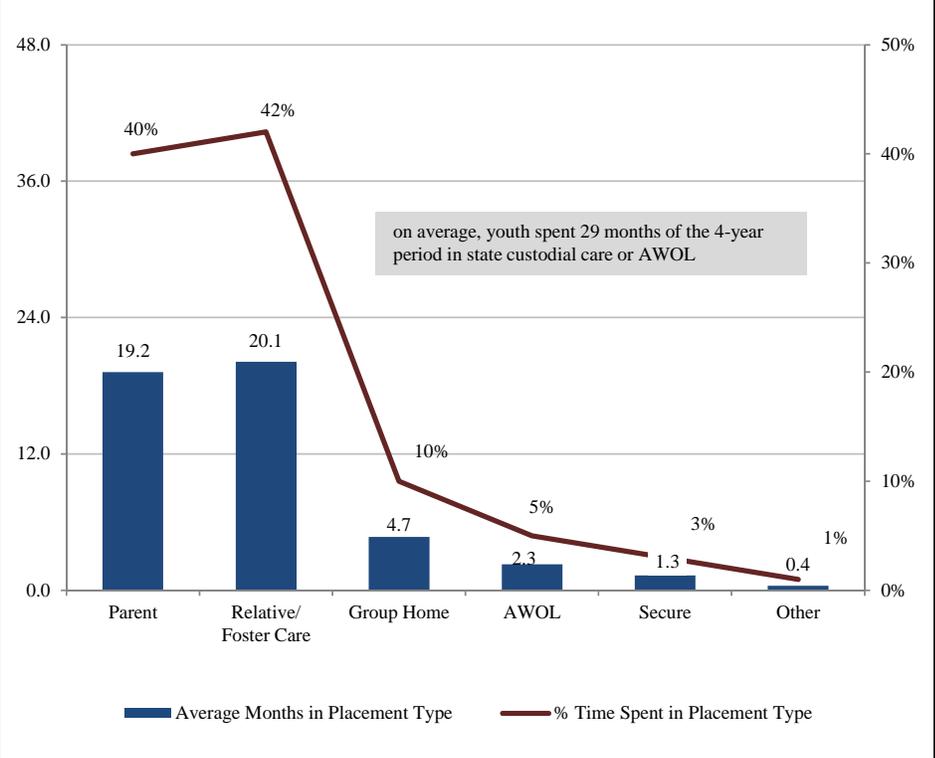
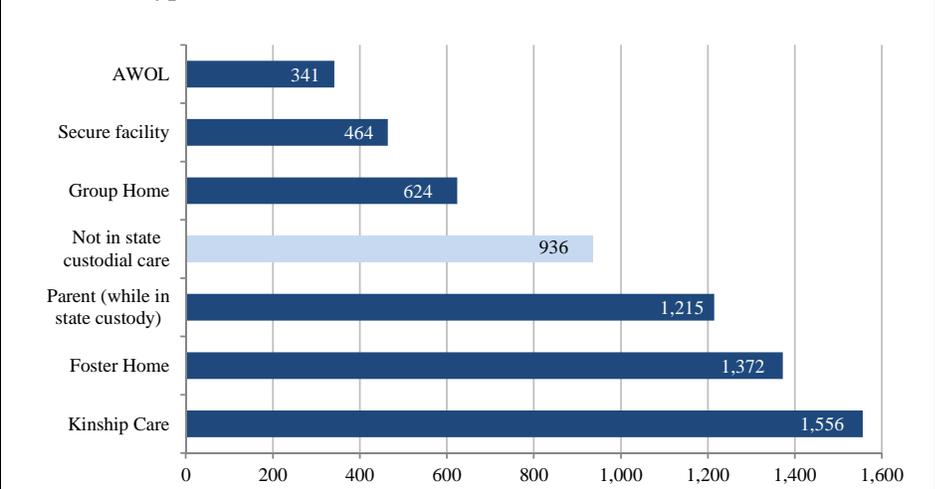


Figure 11: Average placement days per delinquency referral by placement type, 2005–2008



youth were referred on delinquency matters once per 341 days they were on AWOL status (Figure 11). This rate is more frequent than the 464 days per referral during time spent in various types of juvenile justice placement including detention, JRA secure care or in Crisis Residential Centers (CRC).

Youth residing in group homes were referred more than twice as frequently (624 days per referral) as youth residing in foster or kinship

care (1,372 and 1,556 days per referral, respectively).

Felony offenses accounted for about 30% of the delinquency referrals in the study cohort (Fig. 12). By comparison for 70% of youth a misdemeanor offense was their most serious charge referred. This varied by type of placement. Youth in group homes were least likely to be referred for felony charges (23%) compared to youth on AWOL status (42%).

Linking placement histories to delinquency referrals

Placement history and delinquency referral information were linked for all youth in the dependency cohort for 2005–2008. Data provided by the Washington State Department of Social and Human Services (DSHS), included all child welfare and juvenile justice placements and any AWOL episodes occurring while a youth was in state custody.

Placement histories were compiled for all 809 youth in the study cohort. Any time not spent in child welfare/juvenile justice placement or on AWOL status were assumed to be a period of time the youth was residing with family (parents or non-child welfare supervised kinship placements) or independently.

Multiple charges occurring on the same day were counted as one referral and were categorized by the most serious offense. Offense dates were matched with placement begin and end dates to pinpoint the type of placement at the time of the offense that precipitated the youth being referred to juvenile, magisterial or criminal court.

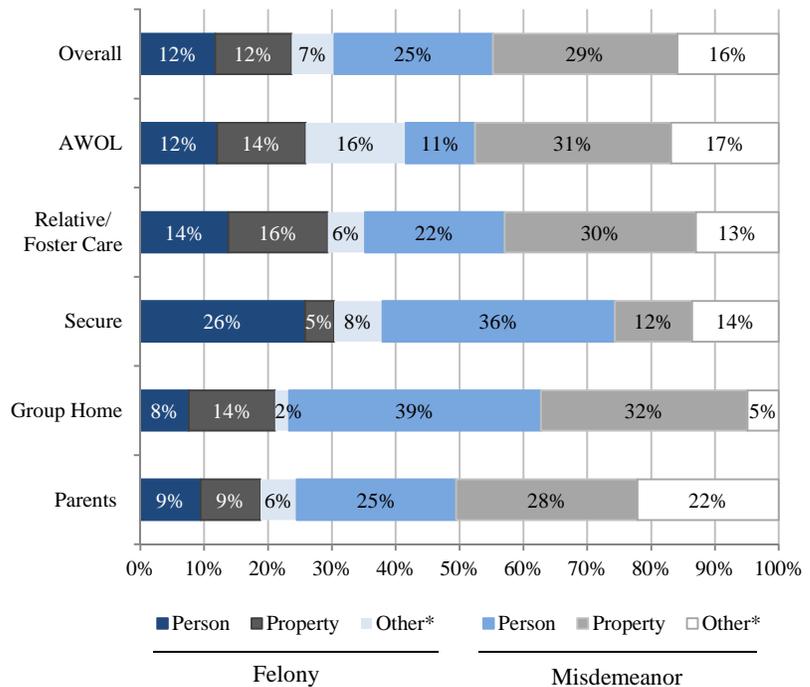
The most common type of charge varied substantially by type of placement. Youth residing in group home (39%) and in juvenile justice placements 36% were often referred on misdemeanor person charges. Youth in the remaining types of placements were most frequently referred on misdemeanor property charges.

Summary of Key Findings

In this last phase of the King County Prevalence Study effort, the placement and delinquency trajectories of youth active with the King County Juvenile Court (Seattle, WA) on a dependency matter in 2006 were examined. In general, the study found that:

- The vast majority of youth in the study cohort had histories of dependency court involvement that began much earlier than 2006 and often well past 2006 as well.
- African-American and Native American youth were disproportionately represented in the study cohort—a magnitude of four times higher for African-American youth and to seven times higher for Native American youth—than what would have been expected based on their proportion in the overall youth population ages 12–17 in King County.
- A considerably higher proportion of African-American and Native American youth also experienced their first child welfare contact and first out-of-home placement at age 4 or earlier compared to white youth (approximately double the proportion).
- More than 80% of youth in the study cohort spent 2 years or more in out-of-home placements by the end of 2008. On average, youth spent a total of 5.1 years in out-of-home placement. African-

Figure 12: Types of offender referrals by type of placement, 2005–2008



* Other includes include drug, weapons, alcohol-related and solicitation charges.

** Totals do not always add to 100% due to rounding error.

American youth had the highest average time in placement—5.9 years.

- More than half of youth in the study cohort spent time in group home placements often more than 1 year in such placements by the end of 2008. Somewhat unexpectedly, 56% of White youth with group home placements histories, spent more than 1 year in such placements compared with 47% of African-American youth.
- Slightly more than 40% all youth in the study cohort were referred on an offender matter between 2006 and 2008.

- Three characteristics of youths' prior histories substantially increased the likelihood of a dependent youth being referred on an offender referral during this three-year period: 1) prior group home placement, 2) a prior AWOL episode, and 3) a prior delinquency referral.
- The majority of youth (74%) with some prior history in each of these domains were referred on a delinquency matter in subsequent years. In contrast, less than a quarter (22%) of dependent youth with no prior history of group home placement, AWOL and offender referrals were referred on a subsequent offender referral.

These findings are also consistent with prior research which indicates that group home placement is associated with an increased risk of subsequent juvenile/criminal justice involvement. The current study provides an added specific temporal component to this pattern. That is, dependent youth are more than twice as likely to be referred on a delinquency referral while residing in a group home (624 days per referral) than when residing in a foster home or in kinship care (1,372 and 1,556 days per referral, respectively). Additionally, dependent youth were most likely to incur a delinquency referral while on AWOL status—341 days per referral (including AWOL events associated with running away from a group home).

Consistent with prior research conducted in Arizona and King County (Halemba and Siegel, 2011; Halemba et al., 2004), dual system youth—while often chronic offenders—are not frequently referred on felony offenses. Dependent youth in the study cohort were typically referred for a misdemeanor or offense rather than for a felony—70% compared with 30%, respectively. Youth residing in group homes were even less likely to be referred for felony charges—23% of the time.

Youth residing in group homes were most frequently referred for misdemeanor offense against person charges. Youth residing in kinship care or foster home or living with parents tend to be most frequently referred for misdemeanor property charges.

The findings in this research brief provide a solid baseline for King County and its Uniting for Youth partnership to examine progress made in addressing the needs of adolescent youth active with the court on a dependency matter. Youth who are often also concurrently referred on a delinquency matter. Three issues jump out from this analysis:

- Disproportionality as evidenced by the fact that African-American and Native American youth are significantly overrepresented.
- The need for continued emphasis on providing older dependent youth more permanent and stable living environments. The vast majority of youth in our study cohort spent extended amounts of time in temporary, out-of-home placements and most eventually seemed to merely “age out” of the system.
- The extent to which group homes/ congregate care is used as a temporary placement option for older dependent youth and the increased risk of delinquency involvement associated with such placements.

Acknowledgements

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