

A decorative graphic on the right side of the page features three concentric blue circles of varying sizes. Two thin blue lines intersect at a point between the top and middle circles, extending towards the top-left corner. A third thin blue line extends from the bottom-right corner towards the intersection point.

Children in Foster Care

Societal and Financial Costs

A Family For Every Child (AFFEC) is dedicated to find loving, permanent families for every waiting foster child. While the heart understands the importance of family, a clear calculation of the societal and financial costs incurred when children languish in foster care adds to the sense of urgency and the importance of success in realizing our mission. This report aims to highlight the costs to the foster child and to society when children are not adopted or reunited with family members.

The analysis in this report shows that A Family For Every Child (AFFEC) works as an effective investment in promoting the team effort it takes to place children into permanent families.

Amanda Fixsen M.S.

Interested Parties,

While it is intuitive that finding permanent families for waiting foster children results in financial savings to the public, to define those saving is much more difficult. It was clear that in order for A Family For Every Child (AFFEC) to make meaningful appeal for operational funding, we would need to present credible, valid measures of the savings we help facilitate. No such measures currently exist, and so we set about creating them.

After considerable investigation and outreach, we struck a conversation with Dr. Katharine Cahn, Ph.D., Executive Director of the Center for Improvement of Child and Family Services at Portland State University's School of Social Work. Dr. Cahn immediately grasped the need for and complexity of the task we framed. She referred us to the research consultation services of Mrs. Amanda Fixsen, M.S., Social Work and Social Research Doctoral Candidate at Portland State University. In the spring of 2011, Mrs. Fixsen and we set about that task, and several months later Mrs. Fixsen delivered the report which follows.

This is a developing, iterative process. We fully expect levels of precision with the data to improve over time, as many of the measures make sense only after forward-going-basis data collection points and systems are created, compiled, vetted and placed into meaningful context.

Literally everything A Family For Every Child (AFFEC) does is geared toward moving foster children into life-long permanency with adoptive families. All our programs were designed to fill in cracks in the pavement on the roadway toward permanency. It is reasonable to expect us to develop new programs and to expand or amend existing programs as new or changed conditions present. Accordingly, we anticipate an accompanying need for us to expand and refine our data collection, processing and publication as conditions dictate in the future.

The Board of Directors
A Family For Every Child

November, 2011

The Cost of One Child for One Year in Foster Care

The financial cost for one child to remain in foster care in Oregon for just one year is, at minimum, \$26,600¹. This cost includes room and board, enhanced supervision, personal care services, one-time payments and staff time. It excludes the cost of residential treatment services. The estimated Oregon figure is close to one reported national average of \$25,782 (Zill, 2011).

When a child is adopted from foster care by a loving and supportive adoptive family, that family for the most part assumes private responsibility for the cost of the various supports all children need to grow and thrive. As the next paragraph shows, there are still public costs associated with that child. However, the adopted child will incur lower public costs as adoptive parents are more likely to be working full-time and are less likely to be heavily reliant on public services (Zill, 2011).

As in many other states, Oregon families who adopt children from foster care are able to access adoption subsidy funding. This funding, on average (for monthly payment as well as a \$1,500 one-time payment) results in a public cost of about \$7,464 per year. Additional public costs may also be incurred in the form of subsidized guardianship and residential treatment not covered through Medicaid. The total annual public cost for a child who has been adopted from care in Oregon is \$8,964. This is close to one reported national average of \$10,302 (Zill, 2011).

The average annual net savings for one child being adopted out of foster care is \$17,636 in Oregon, and it is \$15,480 nationally.

In 2010, AFFEC contributed to the work of getting approximately 132 children and siblings out of foster care and into homes with permanent and loving families. The public costs of caring for 132 youth in foster care for just one year are over \$3.5 million. But the cost to AFFEC of participating in this process was approximately the annual cost of caring for nine foster youth in Oregon.

How Many Children are Waiting to be Adopted?

While definitions of a child 'waiting to be adopted' vary, most researchers use the conservative definition of "the number of foster children who have a goal of adoption and/or whose parental rights have been terminated."

As of September 30, 2010, across the United States there were 52,340 children adopted from foster care, and 107,011 youth were still waiting to be adopted. Nationally, this 2:1 proportion of waiting versus adopted children has been sustained over many years. Many states, including, Oregon, have made progress in timely finalization of adoptions. As of September 20, 2009, there were 1,101 children adopted in Oregon, and 1,840 children under 16 years of age were waiting to be adopted.

¹ This figure is based on multiplying an average daily cost to care for a foster child in Oregon (\$72.89) – as described by a source within the Oregon Department of Human Services – by 365 days.

What Can Be Done to Get Waiting Children Adopted?

It is critical to increase awareness of the plight of foster children and the financial and societal costs associated with foster children languishing in foster care. It is also critical for foster children and qualified prospective adoptive parents to be educated, supported and to have their participation in the process nurtured and enhanced. Innovative programs and public-private partnerships are needed to find permanent, loving families for children who are waiting to be adopted and to expedite the adoption process. These innovative programs are found at A Family For Every Child.

The Public Costs of Foster Care

The foster care system has annual federal and state costs of more than \$9 billion (Title IV-E of the Social Security Act). Children in foster care have costs associated with medical care, food stamps, cash welfare, and child care payments to foster families (Zill, 2011).

Beyond these immediate public costs there are also other longer term costs to the child and to society (Zill, 2011).

Costs to the Child and Social Costs when Children Remain in Foster Care

A disproportionate number of foster youth who “age out” of the system (meaning a youth leaves foster care because he or she has reached the age at which he or she is not longer legally in the care of the state) go on to have problems in school, to be unemployed or homeless, and/or to use drugs or commit crimes. In a sample of male and female foster youth who were **not adopted**, but who “aged out” of care Zill (2011) found the following:

	General population		Foster children who aged out	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Arrests (at any time)	17%	4%	81%	57%
Convictions (at least 1)	10%	2%	59%	28%

Benefits of Adoption

Children adopted out of foster care “...have home environments that are more favorable for child development and well being than children who remain in care.” (Zill, 2011). Additionally, adoption can improve many other outcomes. Hansen (2006) describes that children adopted from foster care, as opposed to those who remain in foster care, may experience a host of benefits.

Domain of benefit	Adopted from foster care as compared to children who remain in the system
Educational	Educational progress improves by 50%
Referrals to special education	Referred half as often
Suspensions or expulsions	21% less likely to be suspended or expelled
Completion of GED or high school education	23% more likely to complete a GED or high school education
Self-report of health	4% more likely to report being healthy
Teen parent	20% less likely to be a teen parent
Use and/or abuse alcohol and substances	15% less likely to use and/or abuse alcohol and substances
Mental health services	200% <i>more</i> likely to receive mental health services (adoptive parents may expect that problems will occur, or be more able to advocate for a child to receive services)
Arrests	50% less likely to be arrested
Incarcerated	32% less likely to be incarcerated
Working as a young adult	22% more likely to be working
Unemployment	24% less likely to be unemployed

A recent study focused on understanding the developmental outcomes of children in foster care as compared to those who were adopted and those who returned to their home of origin. Overall, children who returned home or who were adopted had similar and positive developmental outcomes as compared to those who remained in foster care (Lloyd and Barth, 2011).

Outcomes: A Family For Every Child

	Single children	Children part of a sibling group	TOTAL CHILDREN
Number of new children to AFFEC in 2010	809	455	1,264
Number of these children who have since been placed (2010-current)	127	154	281
Savings for one year to the public for children who have been placed since 2010**	\$1.97 million	\$2.38 million	\$4.35 million
Number of children placed since AFFEC began in 2006	519	635	1,154
Savings for one year to the public for children who have been placed since AFFEC began **	\$8.03 million	\$9.83 million	\$17.86 million

** These numbers reflect national net average savings for one year. AFFEC is one of many agencies and passionate and interested parties who focus their efforts on finding loving and permanent families for foster children. Although not all of the children and sibling groups noted above were placed solely as a result of AFFEC's programs, the figures above reflect AFFEC's role as one of many participating parties contributing to the placements.



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A Family For Every Child (AFFEC) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to finding loving, permanent families for waiting foster children.



Thank you for helping us help waiting foster children.

We help find loving, permanent families for waiting foster children.

Since 2006, we have helped find “forever families” for over 700 children. Our focus is on the hardest-to-place foster children, those with special needs, those who are minorities, those with physical or psychological challenges, and those who are older. AFFEC is dedicated to connecting qualified prospective parents with waiting foster children and their caseworkers. We have developed ten programs to address the three basic things we do: We advocate for the plight of foster children, we educate all involved parties about the process of adoption, and we connect qualified prospective parents, foster children and their caseworkers. All of our programs were developed to address cracks in the pavement on the road toward permanency for foster children. Our programs are shown on the back side of this sheet. Our small staff and large team of volunteers focus on helping underserved families and children.

Long-term foster care is inefficient, expensive and often cruel.

Despite best intentions, foster care has devolved from being a temporary arrangement into a permanent “solution” for many of the 13,000 foster children in Oregon. The result of long-term foster care may be seen in the faces of the children who are bounced from one temporary home to another; it can be seen in the astonishing cost to maintain a far-less-than-ideal foster care system; and it can be seen in homelessness, incarceration, substance abuse and cultural failure far too many long-term foster children experience after aging out of the system. The children deserve better, and our communities deserve better. Every day we allow this situation to continue further extends and magnifies the costs, both human and financial.

We save the public millions of dollars.

Our communities are already paying the high cost of maintaining the foster care system, but few of us know how high that price is. Just the direct costs of foster care in Oregon are about \$330 million (that's nearly one-third *billion* dollars) each year. AFFEC has helped save the public over \$17 million since 2006. For each dollar AFFEC spends to operate, we save the public nine dollars. Even if one is unmoved by the emotional plight of foster children, it is difficult to not be moved by the staggering financial weight of the system which allows children to languish in long-term foster care. What we do at AFFEC is good for the children and it is good for our communities. Imagine the better things our communities could do with money saved by foster children joining their forever families. Imagine the vastly improved possibilities for the children finding their forever families.

We utilize high-tech tools to connect, to educate and to advocate.

We are blessed to live in the age of high-speed Internet communications. We leverage to great advantage our web sites, database, email outreach and social media to connect qualified prospective parents with waiting foster children and their caseworkers. For example, we can respond immediately to urgent-need and difficult placement situations by sending out email announcements to all potential matches detected in our extensive database. We are able to facilitate nearly instantaneous matches in situations which just a few years ago would have taken months or more to discover. Our goals include always looking for ways to shorten the length of time children spend in foster care, and these tools invite a fresh approach. High-tech solutions play an increasing role in improving the plight of children languishing in long-term foster care, and we are at the forefront of that revolution. Our intent is to share these tools with other organizations and agencies, cultivating their successes.

We appreciate your helping us help waiting foster children. Thank you.

Every child deserves a family and a safe home.



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Total number of
children served in
2011: **2,735**

Total number of
families served in
2011: **5000**

The only true way to save money and lives is to get children out of foster care, but there are obstacles we must address.

WITH SOME CHANGES IN THE SYSTEM, AFFEC COULD:

1. Become Foster Certified and build a long-term foster-to-adopt program for those children who are growing up in foster care, those deemed “unadoptable,” and those everyone has given up on. The goal is for those children to leave foster care. We want to create a long-term foster-to-adopt program to get children out of care.

Why can't we? We can be licensed to be Foster Certified and Behavior Rehabilitation Services (BRS) Certified if we want to render these services for free and for short-term placements. However, contracts with others already in place are rarely interrupted, even in cases of poor performance. Existing foster contracts do not focus on foster-to-adopt, but, rather, on short-term placements. The focus needs to be on foster-to-adopt and long-term placement.

2. Provide Family Finding/Family Reunification to more children in care. We provide this service for free to our county and to any county which calls us, yet we spend as much time recruiting cases and educating caseworkers as we do working cases.

Why? Family reconnection is mandated by law, yet it is fair to say Oregon does not do a good job of family finding or family reunification. This is an area in which we excel, and the action required is basic: allow us to do what is difficult for the state to do. No child deserves to grow up in foster care when family is an option.

3. Decrease disproportionality in care, serve more diverse families, and allow children to remain connected to their cultures and heritages.

Why can't the state do this? Most families of color and non-traditional families have a distrust of the system. It has always been so. DHS needs a partner to reach out to these families. Most counties offer very few “Foundations Training” (the mandatory training to be a foster or adoptive parent), and most counties either are not currently doing adoption studies or tell their families it is a two-year wait. As a private agency we have cut our rate to make sure financial challenges are not an obstacle. We also have developed a diversity outreach plan. However, while this is extremely successful and we have 80-plus families in the foster care adoption process, it is very hard to break even. If the state is not going to offer these services, they should contract them with nonprofits like AFFEC. Families need better customer service and support than the state's current case load delivers, for we lose too many families in the process.

4. We would like to offer Foundation Training.

Why can't we? We have been trained and certified, we have the materials and we have offered to do the trainings for free. However, we have been told that no more trainings are needed, and yet we see most families still wait for month to get into a Foundation Training session.

5. We would like to offer 30 Days To Family.

Why can't we? Our offer to Lane County was summarily declined. We offered the services for free. The effort is to prevent children from coming into care and/or to work intensely in the first 30 days to return them to family members.

6. Update the system's recruitment efforts.

How can we help? We use low-cost, high-volume tools. With advanced technology, such as web and targeted outreach via email, recruitment for children on the adoption track is not difficult for us. The barrier is with the case worker having to read the studies, respond to families and do what is needed to match families and children. The families are there! We offer web services, email, on-line matching events, assistance to families ---all for free. We now mainly work with other states, as Oregon on an operational level is not generally receptive to new ways of doing this work.

we are an under-utilized resource, and we often we feel dismissed and unappreciated. Too often the focus is on the system and the adults in it rather than on the children. DHS also doesn't access the millions of dollars it could in federal adoption incentive funding. While some states receive \$1 to \$2 million from the federal government (based on how many children they get out of care or who are adopted), Oregon has not received any money at all in 2010 or 2011. AFFEC wants to help find permanent, safe placement for Oregon children who are languishing in long-term foster care, but we need DHS help to allow us to do what we do best. These savings in financial and human terms represent low-hanging fruit in the common ground of the missions both DHS and AFFEC are charged to engage. The more DHS allows AFFEC to help, the more successful we are both going to be, and that is good for the children, the families, Oregon and taxpayers alike.

Thank you for your time and consideration.