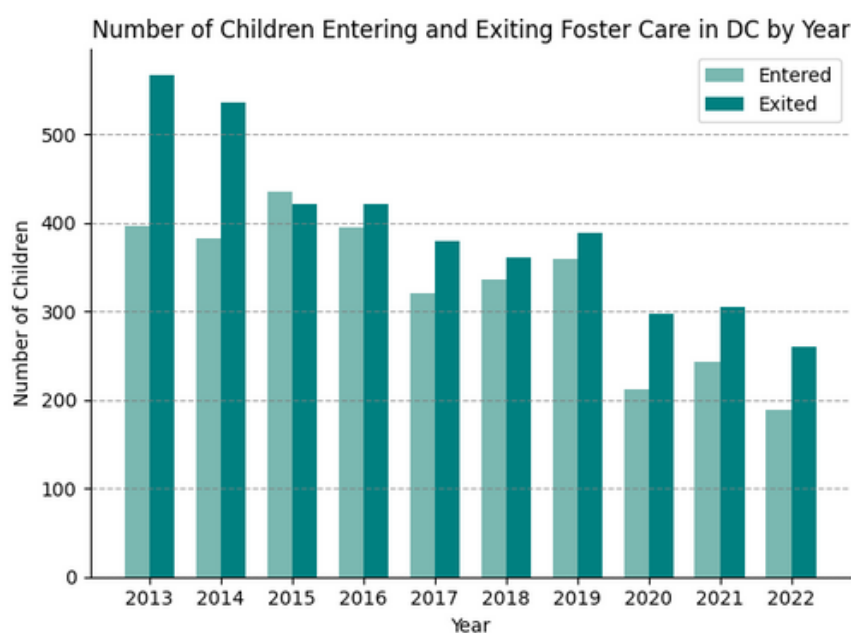


District of Columbia Foster Care Trend Analysis

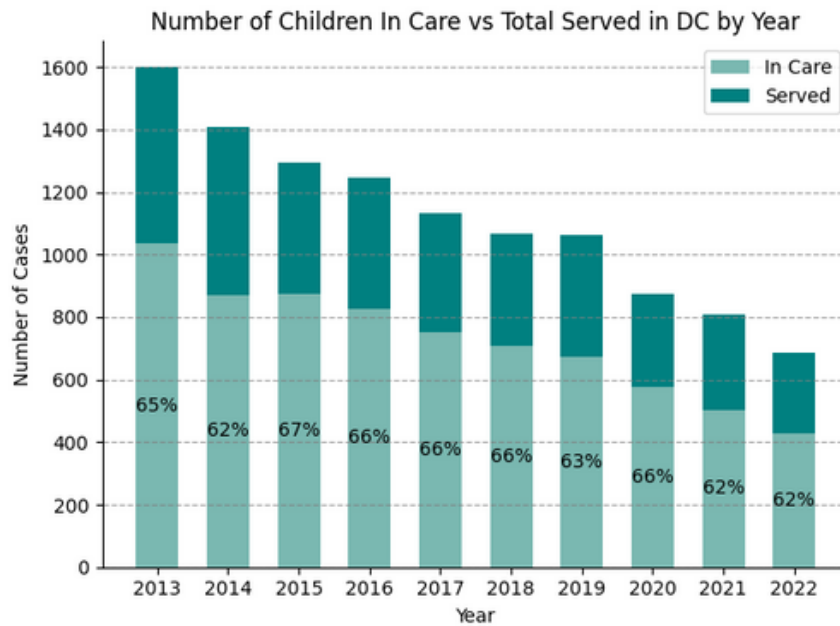
Over the past decade, the foster care system in the District of Columbia has undergone significant transformations. Through a detailed analysis of data sourced from federal and local government agencies, this report aims to elucidate the changes and trends in foster care service provision from 2013 to 2022. The initial section of the report focuses on a decade-long overview, highlighting shifts in the number of children entering and exiting the system, the reduction in children served, and adoption trends, reflecting broader dynamics within child welfare. Subsequently, the report narrows its focus to the years 2021 to 2023, examining the lengths of stay in foster care before permanency goals—specifically reunification, guardianship, and adoption—are achieved. This dual approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the system's evolution, spotlighting both overarching trends and the intricacies of permanency processes. By dissecting these elements, the report aims to provide stakeholders with actionable insights into fostering timely and stable permanency outcomes for children under the care of the District.

Overview 2013-2022



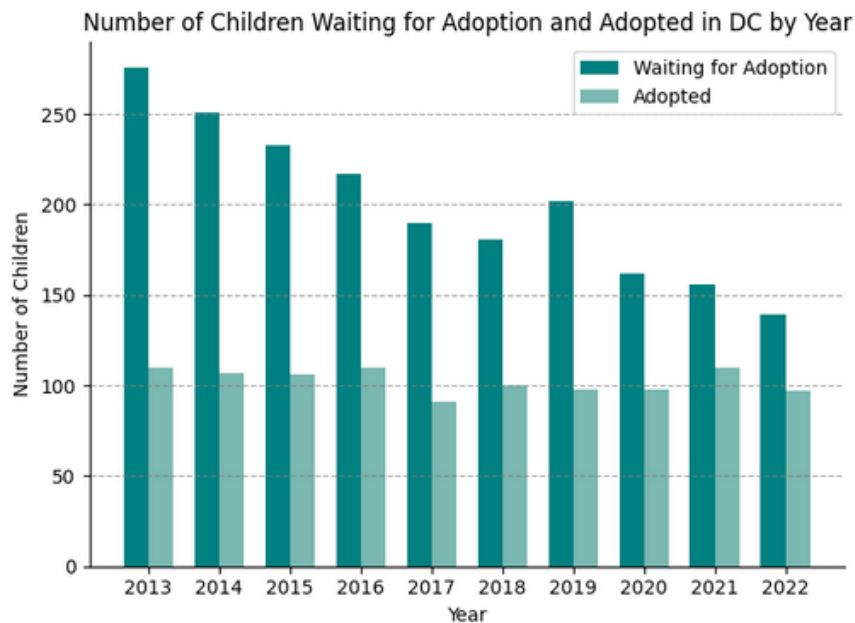
Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration of Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau. Adoption Foster Care Analysis Reporting System (AFCARS), FY 2013-2022. *State Dataset*.

There is a notable decrease in the number of children entering the foster care system, from a peak of 435 in 2015 to a low of 189 in 2022. It is noteworthy that there is a consistent pattern, except for 2013, of more children exiting the system than entering. Initially, the gap between entries and exits was significant, with over 100 more children exiting than entering in 2013 and 2014. However, this gap narrowed from 2015 to 2018.



Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration of Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau. Adoption Foster Care Analysis Reporting System (AFCARS), FY 2013-2022. *State Dataset*.

There is a significant reduction in the number of children served, decreasing by 57% from 1602 to 687. Despite this overall decrease, the proportion of children in foster care relative to the total served has remained stable, averaging 64.5% throughout the decade.

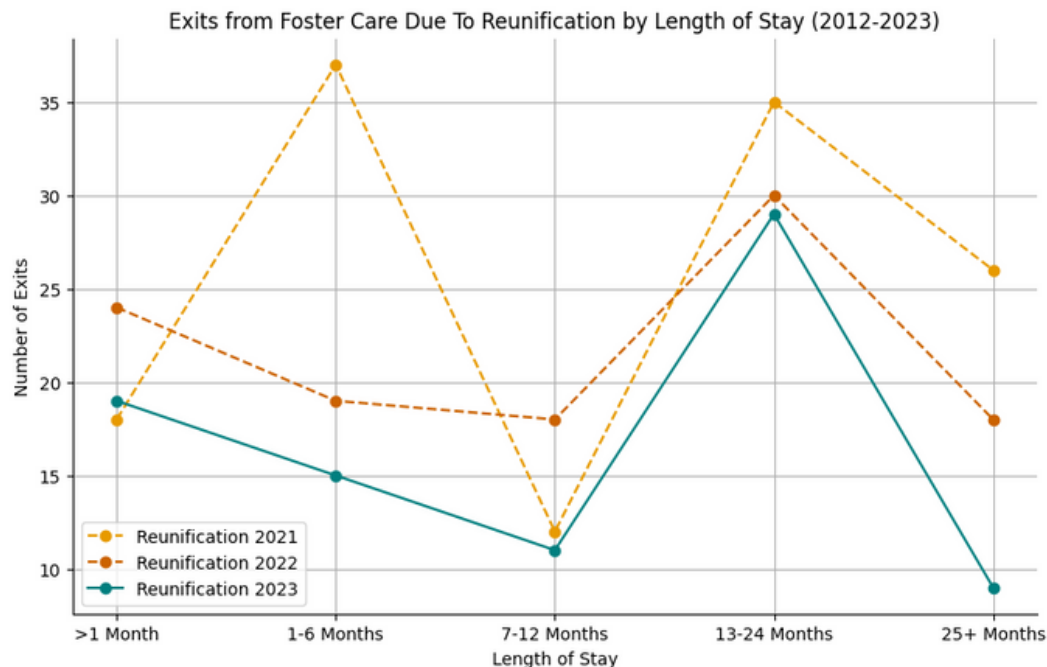


Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration of Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau. Adoption Foster Care Analysis Reporting System (AFCARS), FY 2013-2022. *State Dataset*.

The adoption trends from 2013 to 2022 shown here uncover several notable patterns, which mirror broader child welfare dynamics. A significant decrease in the number of children waiting for adoption, from 276 to 139, aligns with a similar downward trajectory observed in other aspects of the foster care system. Importantly, the figures for children adopted annually—exclusively those with public child welfare agency involvement—show a stability, fluctuating slightly between 91 and 110 children per year, with an average of approximately 102.7 adoptions. This indicates an increasing adoption rate in proportion to those waiting for adoption.

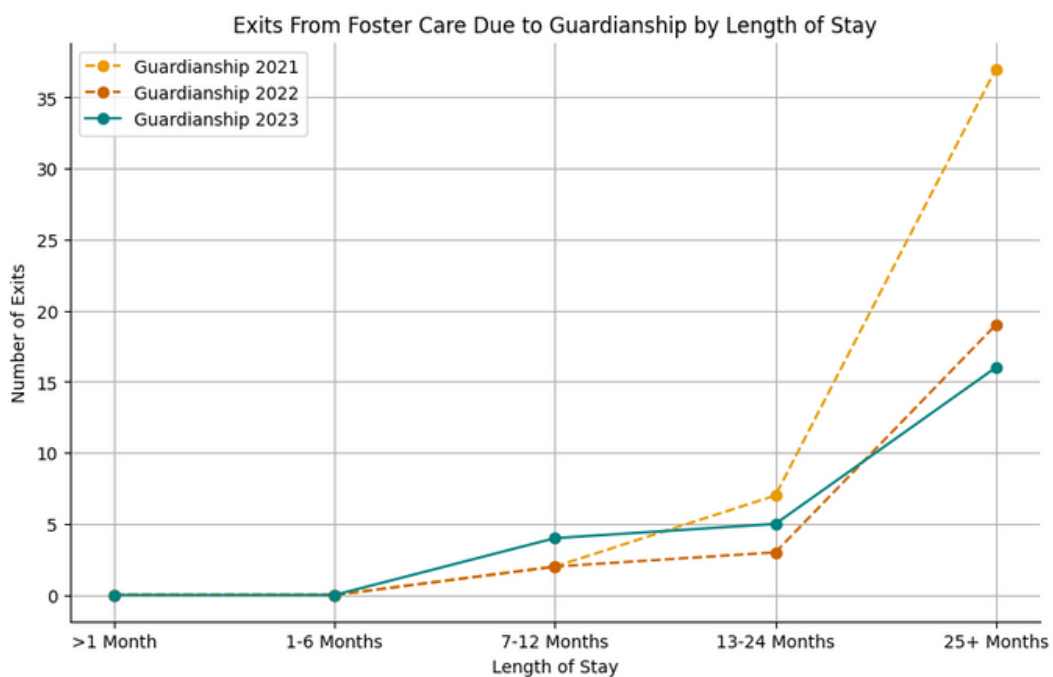
Exits From Foster Care By Permanency Goal

When examining how long children stay in foster care before reaching their permanency goals, it's important to remember the overall trend shown earlier— a decrease in the number of children in the system. This broader trend sets the stage for the detailed look at specific permanency goals. Of note, children categorized under "Alternative Planned Permanent Living Arrangement" (APPLA) or those with "No Goal" are not included in this analysis, in order to focus more on the three most common goals —reunification, guardianship, and adoption.



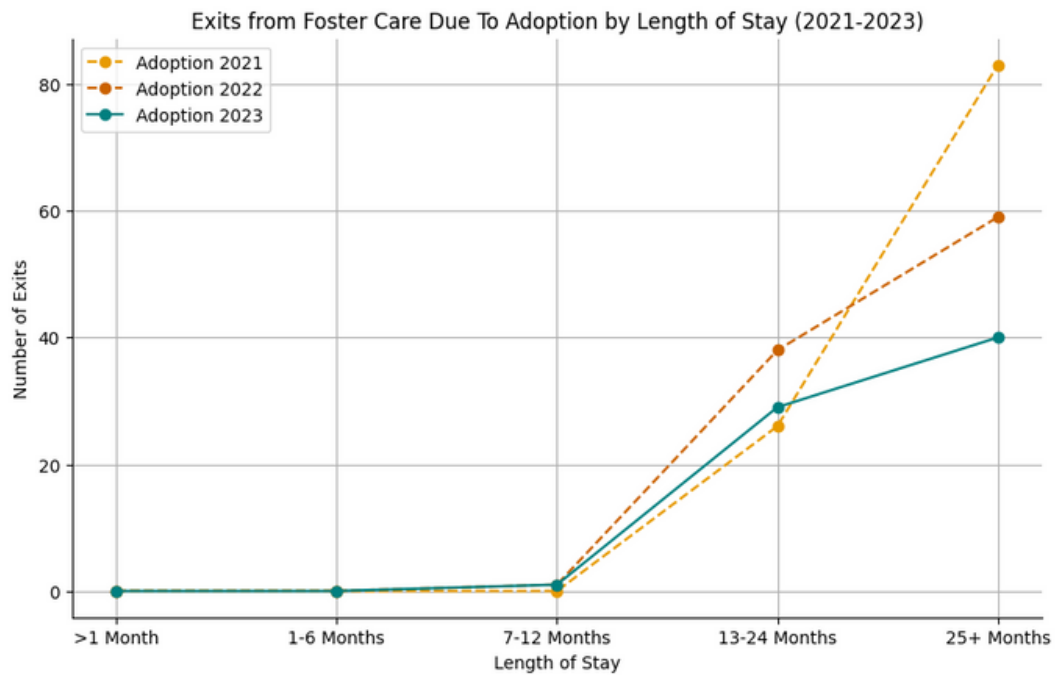
Source: Government of the District of Columbia, Child and Family Services Agency, *Annual Public Reports FY 2021, 2022, & 2023*.

There is a noticeable variation in the reunification exits across different lengths of stay, suggesting shifts in the processes or criteria influencing reunification timing. In particular, the number of reunifications occurring in less than one month notably spiked in 2022 to 24 cases, before reducing in 2023 back to levels observed in 2021, highlighting a temporary increase in expedited reunifications. The year 2021 witnessed a significant surge in cases within the "1-6 Months" range, peaking at 37, which then dramatically declined by 59% to 15 by 2023, indicating a shift away from quicker reunifications over the years. A consistent trend emerged in 2022 and 2023, where the most common timeframe for reunification shifted towards "13-24 Months". Furthermore, the reunification cases requiring over 25 months experienced a steep 65% decrease from 26 in 2021 to just 9 in 2023, underscoring a marked reduction in long-term cases reaching reunification.



Source: Government of the District of Columbia, Child and Family Services Agency, *Annual Public Reports FY 2021, 2022, & 2023*.

Here one can see a detailed look at the evolving trends in the lengths of stay preceding guardianship. Notably, in 2023, there was a modest uptick in guardianship cases resolved within the "7-12 Months" category. Conversely, there was a marked decline in the duration of stays exceeding 25 months, with the number of guardianship cases in this category decreasing by 56.8% from 37 cases in 2021 to 16 cases by 2023. Moreover, throughout this period, guardianship cases with a duration of "13-24 Months" remained consistent, ranging from 3 to 7 cases.



Source: Government of the District of Columbia, Child and Family Services Agency, *Annual Public Reports FY 2021, 2022, & 2023*.

This chart shows key trends in the lengths of stay prior to adoption. Notably, a striking 99.2% of adoption cases take more than 13 months to resolve. Over the three-year period, there's a discernible shift in the distribution of cases between those taking "13-24 Months" and those extending beyond "25+ Months." Initially, in 2021, only 31% of the cases fell into the shorter, 13-24 month range. However, by 2022, this proportion increased significantly to 64%, and further to 72.5% in 2023. Concurrently, the number of adoption cases requiring more than 25 months saw a dramatic reduction of 51.8%, decreasing from 83 cases in 2021 to 40 cases by 2023.

Conclusion

This report has illuminated the nuanced shifts and trends within the District of Columbia's foster care system over an extensive period. The decade-long perspective reveals a decrease in the number of children entering foster care, along with a stable proportion of children in care. The detailed examination of permanency goals from 2021 to 2023 further highlights the system's strategic adjustments. This trend analysis aims to provide deeper insights into the data, shedding light on the pathways to permanency for children in foster care and guiding future efforts to enhance their well-being and outcomes.