

**Invest state dollars in programs working to reduce the number of children entering state custody and the trauma associated when custody is necessary.**

**Recommendations**

- Increase available placements at all levels to ensure that children are placed in an environment appropriate to their needs.
- Use federal Title IV-E funds to increase programs aimed at preventing children from entering custody.
- Reduce trauma associated with removal by increasing the number of Relative Caregiver placements and Court Appointed Special Advocates.
- Support effective treatment and rehabilitation of youth by increasing level four mental health placement availability.

Children need **safe, stable and nurturing environments** to support their development.



1 in 3 Tennessee children in custody had **3 or more placements in their first year.**<sup>2</sup>

Placement instability can have negative academic, social, health and behavioral outcomes for children in custody. Studies have shown that **the risk for these negative outcomes increases with multiple placement disruptions, regardless of previous behavioral history or maltreatment.**<sup>3</sup>

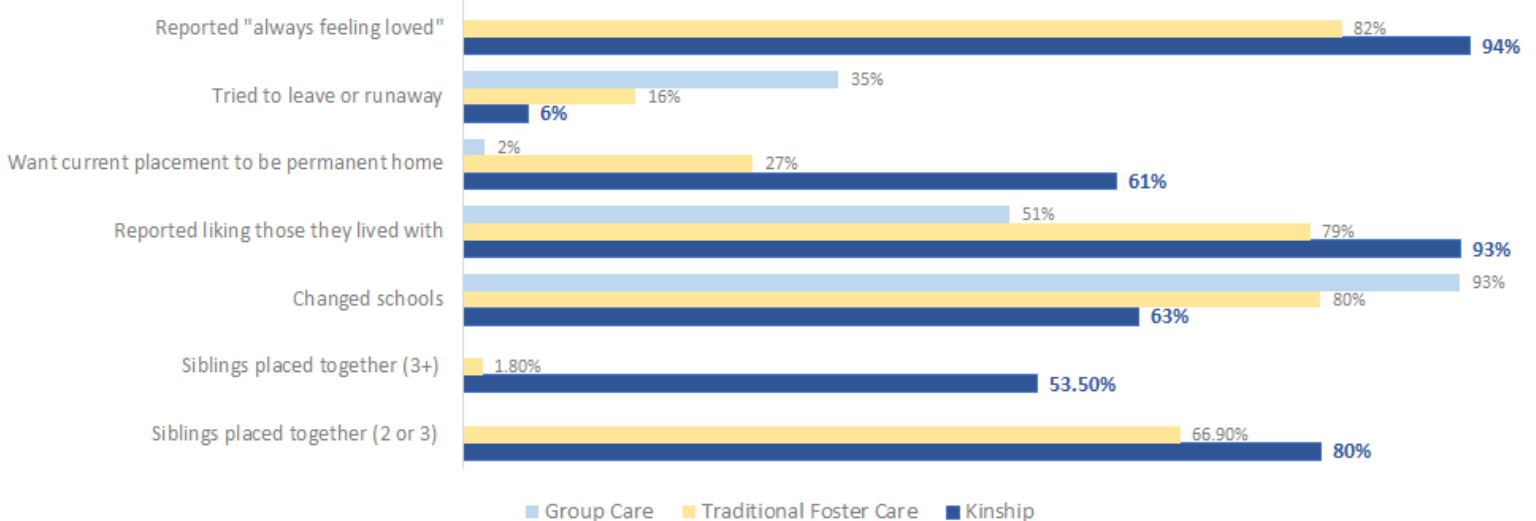
Increasing available placements will ensure that children are initially matched with the best environment to meet their individual needs, reducing instances of placement disruption.

**1 in 3**

children in foster care were placed with a relative.\*<sup>1</sup>

"Our state now has fewer appropriate treatment beds than what is needed to address the serious and varied problems experienced by our children. We feel this reduction in treatment facilities has reached crisis stage and that such reduction has a direct impact upon public safety and child welfare." - Tennessee Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, Resolution January 2020<sup>4</sup>

**Children placed with kin have reduced trauma, increased community and familial connections and greater placement stability.\*<sup>5</sup>**



\*Although Tennessee differentiates between Relative Caregivers and Kinship Care, the majority of national data does not and may reflect both.

## Invest state dollars in programs working to reduce the number of children entering state custody and the trauma associated when custody is necessary.

Frequently, potential relative caregivers face financial challenges to becoming a placement and without financial support simply cannot afford to care for a child, despite their willingness.

Poverty rates among grandparent caregivers are twice that of general population.

A study of these formal and informal "grandfamilies" found:<sup>6</sup>

- 20% lived in poverty;
- 25% of caregivers had a disability; and
- 40% of caregivers were over 60.

When GAP payments were **equal to regular foster care payments the number of kinship placements doubled or tripled** without any additional intervention.<sup>7</sup>

In FY2020-21, **Tennessee Department of Children's Services served 1661 Relative Caregiver Program caretakers and 2426 children.**<sup>8</sup>

The FY2023 budget expands the resources allocated to Relative Caregiver Program caretakers by **providing 50% of the daily foster care rate.**

This expanded support is critical to supporting family connections and fostering hope during a traumatic time for children.

To fully understand the impact of this historic investment and ensure cost-efficient use of funds, evaluations of the program should include:

- Rates at which children in the custody of relative caregivers who receive payment enter state custody as compared to the rates of other at-risk children;
- The number of children that remained out of state custody as a result of the Relative Caregiver Program; and
- The annual cost savings associated with children remaining out of state custody.

### Expanding Level Four Mental Health Placements

"Many young people with mental illnesses are unable to respond to the traditional juvenile justice model, either because their mental illnesses make it difficult to make appropriate decisions or to conform their behavior to required norms, or because traditional punishments may be counterproductive to their needs or treatment goals." - American Bar Association<sup>9</sup>

## 50% - 70%

of youth in juvenile detention and correctional facilities have diagnosable mental disorders.<sup>10</sup>

Adolescents in correctional facilities are

## 10x more likely

to suffer from psychosis than the general population<sup>11</sup>

Youth in jails are

## 19x more likely to die by suicide

than the general population<sup>12</sup>

and those in adult jails are

## 36x more likely to die by suicide

than those in juvenile detention<sup>12</sup>