Arizona Makes Slow Strides in Placing Teens in Foster Care with Families

(Phoenix, AZ) – A new data snapshot from the Annie E. Casey Foundation finds more children are being placed with foster families nationwide, as opposed to group homes, but that placement of teens with families is slower to catch up to the trend. Being part of a family is essential to children’s quality of life, whether they are younger or teens. Research confirms that children in the foster care system have better outcomes when they live with families.

The report, Keeping Kids in Families: Trends in U.S. Foster Care Placement, reviews data from the 50 states and the District of Columbia over a ten-year period. The percentage of teens placed in group homes dropped only incrementally in Arizona. Our use of group homes for teenagers remains well above the national average – 43 percent vs. 34 percent nationwide. This leaves Arizona youth at higher risk for poor life outcomes, such as homelessness and unemployment.

All racial and ethnic groups in Arizona experienced fewer children being placed in group homes over the ten years. However, the rate of African American children in group settings in Arizona is disproportionately high. In 2017, 22 percent of African American children in foster care were placed in group homes, compared with 15 percent of all children.

In Arizona, the number of kinship family placements is rising. Children here are being placed with grandparents or other relatives at a higher rate than their national counterparts, with 45 percent of kids in kinship families, compared to 32 percent nationwide. This increase is prompting the need for public policy changes designed for children who are placed with relatives who are not licensed as foster homes. (See our policy brief: Safe is Safe: How a Double Standard of Safety Can Hurt Children in Kinship Foster Care.)

“Arizona is slow to make progress – more children are being placed with families, including with relatives – but there is still a long way to connect teenagers with families,” said Beth Rosenberg, Director of Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Policy. “There is an opportunity for Arizona to do better with the new federal Family First Prevention Services Act, which gives states the tools and financial incentives to make significant improvements.”

The full report can be found online here.