

Government & Regulations

## **My View: Foster care in Arizona is a mission still not accomplished**

By Luis De La Cruz – Contributing writer  
May 29, 2024

Governor Hobbs recently issued a proclamation declaring the month of May as foster care awareness month – a recognition that takes place every year across the country to publicly acknowledge those impacted by foster care.

Many Arizonans might remember the crisis that began almost 15 years ago, with the number of children in foster care peaking at 19,000. I remember because I was one of those kids. Today, we are at less than 10,000 children and youth in foster care. Along the way, Arizona also activated the foster care tax credit which enabled community organizations to scale more services across the state for children and youth experiencing foster care. These positive changes might make us feel like we are past the crisis point but these accomplishments, as the governor's proclamation seems to signal, should not allow us to conclude that our work here is anywhere near done.

The truth is that we continue to have a severe deficit in our ability to ensure that children who do not achieve a planned permanent living arrangement (usually reunified or adopted), have the services and support they require to thrive. For example, according to the most recent federal child and family services review for Arizona, only about half of the kids in foster care receive timely and appropriate services to address the child's mental health needs. This is only one of the several ways children and families are under-resourced by the system for many of their basic needs.

Despite the changes in the number of kids in foster care, there are other challenging trendlines. The most recent data from the Arizona Department of Child Safety (AZDCS) shows that spending more than two years in foster care means moving on average of six times. In addition to placement stability, placing kids with families, instead of group homes, is one of the most important events that can happen for a child in foster care – yet for every four children in foster care, there is only one licensed foster home.

There are no signs of this changing soon, data from AZDCS also indicates more foster home licenses are being closed than are being opened. It is no wonder the rate of group home placement in Arizona has remained relatively unchanged.

Another trendline that has not changed much is the number of children in foster care that "age-out" and are underemployed, under educated, inadequately housed and without the proper services and support to achieve self-sufficiency.

So, as we continue to reflect on the positive changes that Arizona has achieved, it is critically important that we keep sight of the work that remains to be done. As we shift away from a numbers crisis, let's remember that there is still an outcomes crisis and 10,000 children. The future of these kids will be limited by their experience in foster care. We need to change that.

*Luis De La Cruz is president and CEO of the Arizona Friends of Foster Children Foundation.*



Luis De La Cruz