



San Francisco Child Welfare Dashboard 2021

Prepared by
Family and Children's Services
San Francisco Human Services Agency

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SAN FRANCISCO
HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY



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Introduction

Purpose of This Dashboard

The overrepresentation of Black/African American and Latinx children in the foster care system is a long-standing national, state and local issue that requires ongoing attention and efforts to address.

To help maintain focus on this problem, and encourage a spirit of transparency and collaboration, Family and Children's Services (FCS) has developed the following disproportionality dashboard. This dashboard will be released to the public annually.

Key Findings

- The amount of children in San Francisco foster care has steadily declined.
- The largest driver of disproportionality is the initial report to our FCS Hotline. At later junctures, Black/African American children are amongst those more likely to experience deeper child welfare involvement, but disparities are not as stark as the initial report.
- The amount and rate of Black/African American children in foster care has dropped dramatically, but Black/African American children remain much more likely than children of other races to be in foster care.
- Over the last 5 years, there has been a slight uptick in the amount and rate of Latinx children in foster care.

Background

San Francisco child population demographic changes

Between 1990 and 2020, the total amount of children residing in San Francisco has remained fairly stable, ranging from roughly 106,000 to 118,000 children. The most notable demographic shift has been the sharp decrease in the Black/African population, which has declined from 16% to 6% of the child population since 1990. Please see the Child Welfare Referrals section of this document for more information on the demographic makeup of San Francisco children.

Factors Contributing to Disproportionality

Some of these factors are external to the child welfare system and speak to broader inequities in our society. For example, poverty and child welfare involvement are strongly related, and Black/African American children are much more likely to be impoverished in San Francisco.

Other factors may be internal to the child welfare system and demand our accountability. In particular, with the pervasiveness of explicit and implicit biases in our society, racially biased decision making is a real risk we take seriously.

SFHSA Strategies to Address Disproportionality

Partnering with other organizations and advocating for policy change at the federal, state and local level are some of the strategies we pursue to address these broader inequities and assure families of all races and backgrounds are able to meet their basic needs and flourish in our city.

Recruiting a diverse workforce, education on implicit bias, and incorporating cultural humility and respect in our casework, are some of the ways that we try to assure all families connected to the child welfare system are treated consistently and fairly.

For more details on what we are doing to advance racial equity in our agency, please see our [Advancing Racial Equity webpage](#).

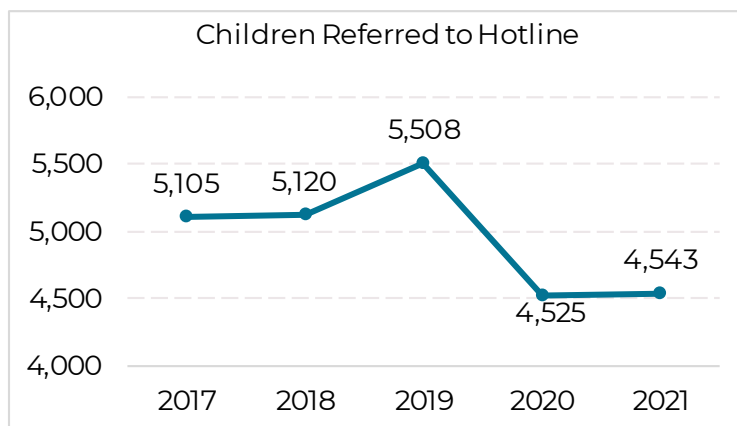
Data Notes

- Throughout the dashboard we report on racial differences at critical junctures in the child welfare process. Unfortunately, we do not have definitive data on whether observed differences are driven by biased decision-making or other causes.
- The overall Native American child population in San Francisco is relatively low (<500), so small changes in the total amount of child welfare involvement could appear as dramatic year-over-year changes for this group. We provide a 5-year average for Native American children in some of the following graphs to give a better overall sense of this population's child welfare involvement.
- **Data source:** Webster, D., Lee, S., Dawson, W., Magruder, J., Exel, M., Cuccaro-Alamin, S., Putnam-Hornstein, E., Wiegmann, W., Saika, G., Chambers, J., Hammond, I., Williams, C., Miramontes, A., Ayat, N., Sandoval, A., Benton, C., Hoerl, C., McMillen, B., Wade, B., Yee, H., Flamson, T., Hunt, J., Carpenter, W., Casillas, E., & Gonzalez, A. (2020). CCWIP reports. Retrieved 7/21/2022, from University of California at Berkeley California Child Welfare Indicators Project website. URL: <https://ccwip.berkeley.edu/>
- Primary ethnicity, secondary ethnicity and a Latinx indicator are collected in our child welfare data system. If Latinx indicator= 'Yes', then race is Latinx in following graphs. Otherwise, race is categorized based on Primary ethnicity. See [CCWIP](#) for full methodology. URL: <https://ccwip.berkeley.edu/cwscmsreports/methodologies/>

1. Child Welfare Referrals

If a community member is concerned a child is being abused or neglected, we encourage them to call our Family and Children Services Hotline, where referrals are screened to determine if an in-person investigation is warranted.

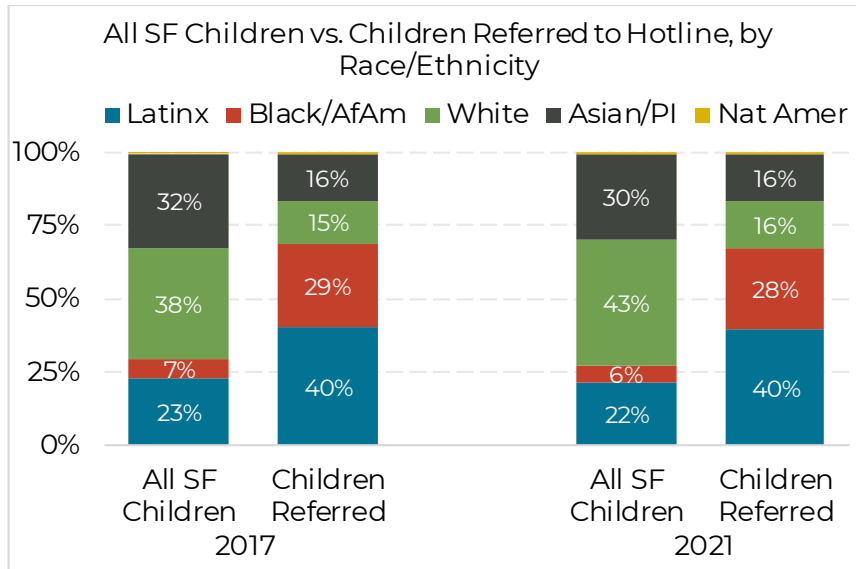
Over the last 5 years, 4,525 to 5,508 children have been referred to our Hotline per year. 2020 and 2021 represent the lowest amount of children referred to our Hotline since at least 1998 (when the current child welfare data system was implemented). We expect that this decline is partially explained by fewer professionals interacting face-to-face with children during the COVID-19 pandemic.



All SF Children vs. Children Referred to Hotline, by Race/Ethnicity

The distribution of children referred to our Hotline by race/ethnicity, and the broader demographic makeup of children in San Francisco, have remained fairly stable over the last 5 years. Black/African American and Latinx children continue to comprise a disproportionate amount of referrals to our Hotline relative to their total population in San Francisco.

In 2021, Latinx children were the group with the most total referrals (40%), followed by Black/African American children (28%). White (16%) and Asian/PI children (16%) each represented a significant minority of total child welfare referrals. Very few of the total referrals were for Native American children (<1%), as the total Native American population in San Francisco is relatively low.

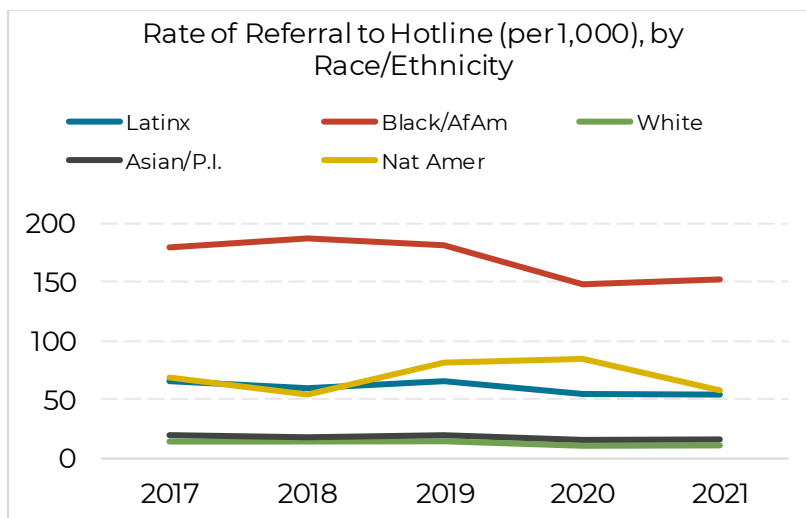


Rate of Referral to Hotline (per 1,000), By Race/Ethnicity

Since the total child population in San Francisco varies by race/ethnicity, comparing how many children are referred to our Hotline *relative to their total population* is one way to assess disproportionality in referrals. Differences in the rate of referral to the Hotline (per 1,000 in population) by race/ethnicity has remained fairly stable over the last 5 years.

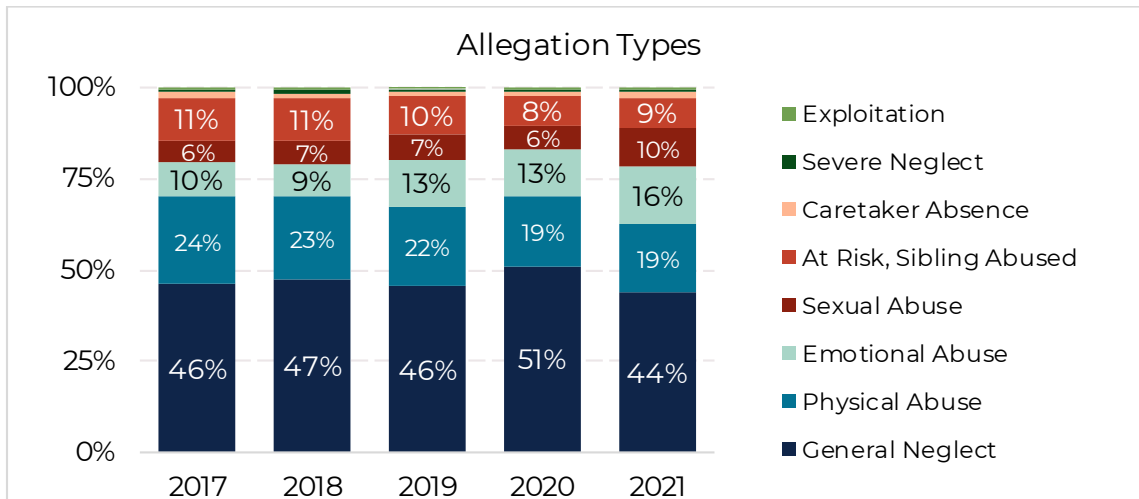
2021 Referral Rate by Race/Ethnicity

- Black/African American (152 per 1,000)
- Native American (58 per 1,000)
- Latinx children (55 per 1,000)
- Asian/PI (17 per 1,000)
- White children (11 per 1,000)



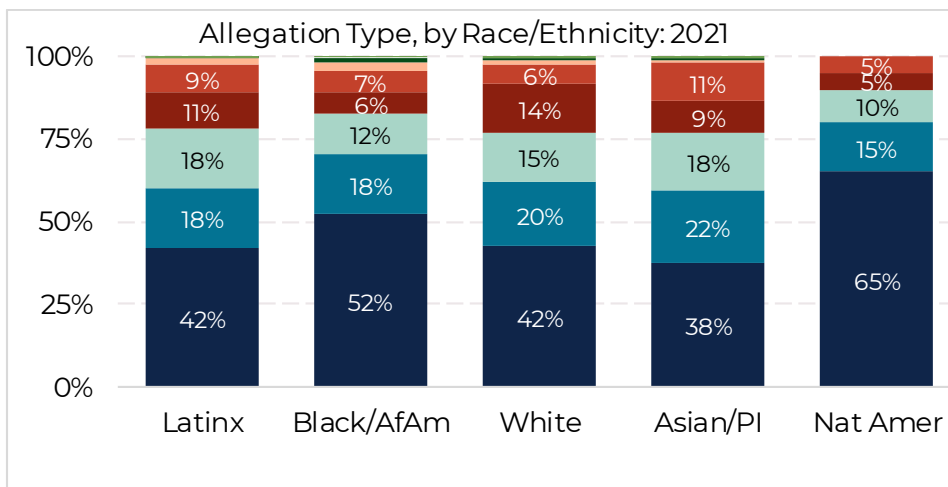
2. Child Welfare Referrals - Allegation Types

The distribution of allegation types has shifted in recent years. General neglect has remained the most common allegation type, but an increasing proportion of referrals have been for emotional abuse, and a declining proportion have been for physical abuse. In 2021, the most common allegation type was general neglect (44%), followed by physical abuse (19%), emotional abuse (16%), sexual abuse (10%), at risk sibling abused (9%), caretaker absence/incapacity (1%), severe neglect (1%) and exploitation (<1%).



Allegation Type, by Race/Ethnicity: 2021

There is some slight variation in the allegation types received by race/ethnicity. General neglect is the most common allegation type received for children of all races, but Black/African American and Native American children have the highest proportion of neglect allegations. We only display data for calendar year 2021 here, but this trend has been consistent over the last 5 years.



Methodology note

Children are counted once per year. If multiple allegation types in same year, most severe allegation type counted (sexual abuse>physical abuse>severe neglect>general neglect>exploitation>emotional abuse>caretaker absence/incapacity>at-risk, sibling abused).

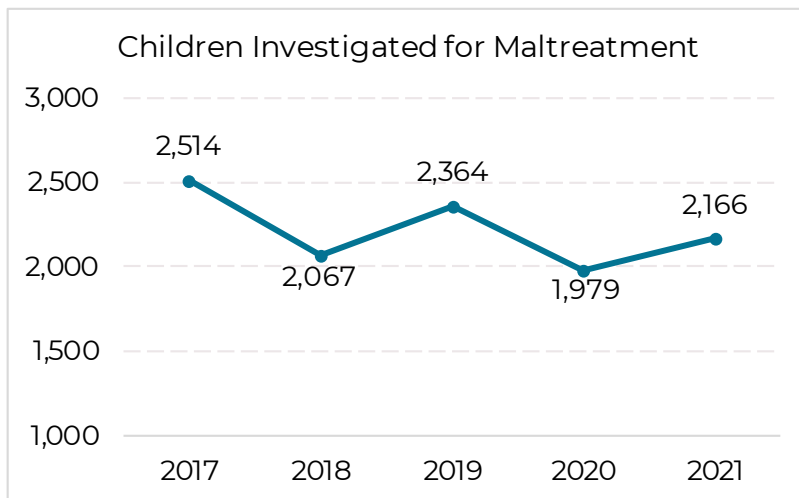
Allegation type definitions

- **General Neglect:** Inadequate food; inadequate clothing/hygiene; inadequate/hazardous shelter; inadequate supervision; inadequate medical/mental health care; involving child in criminal activity; or failure to protect
- **Physical Abuse:** Non-accidental or suspicious injury; caregiver action that likely caused or will cause injury; prior death of a child due to abuse and there is a new child in the home
- **Emotional Abuse:** Caregiver actions have led or are likely to lead to child's severe anxiety, depression, withdrawal, or aggressive behavior toward self or others; exposure to domestic violence
- **Sexual Abuse:** Any sexual act on a child by an adult caregiver or adult in the household or unable to rule out household member as alleged perpetrator; physical, behavioral, or suspicious indicators consistent with sexual abuse; sexual acts among siblings or other children living in the home; known or highly suspected sexual abuse perpetrator lives with child; severely inappropriate sexual boundaries
- **At Risk, Sibling Abused:** Another child in home reported for physical or sexual abuse
- **Caretaker Absence/Incapacity:** Caregiver is unable to care for the child due to incarceration, hospitalization, or unavoidable absence AND there is no safe adult to care for the child; caregiver has deserted the child with no apparent plans for return; caregiver refuses child entry to the home
- **Severe Neglect:** Diagnosed malnutrition; non-organic failure to thrive; child's health/safety is endangered; death of a child due to neglect
- **Exploitation:** Caregiver actively involved child/youth in acts of exploitation or trafficking; child/youth is exploited or trafficked by someone other than a caregiver

3. Child Welfare Investigations

Children Investigated for Maltreatment

After a call is made to our Hotline, a Screener determines if an in-person investigation is warranted based on the information provided. Over the last 5 years, 1,979 to 2,514 children were investigated for maltreatment per year. The amount of children with maltreatment investigations over the last 5 years has been low by historical standards. Between 2000 and 2015, there were no calendar years with fewer than 3,100 children investigated for maltreatment.



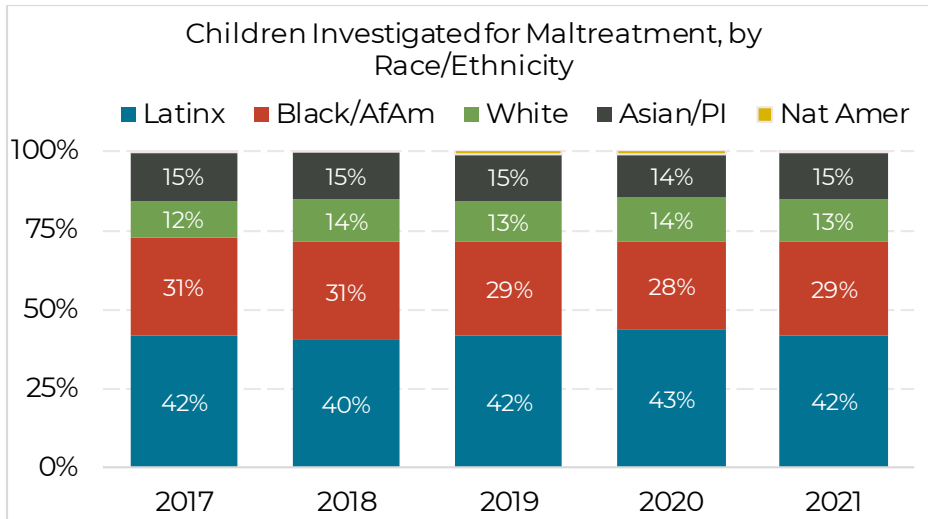
Children Investigated for Maltreatment, by Race/Ethnicity

The distribution of children investigated for maltreatment by race/ethnicity has remained fairly stable over the last 5 years.

In 2021, Latinx children were the group with the most maltreatment investigations (42%), followed by Black/African American children (29%).

White (13%) and Asian/PI children (15%) each represented a significant minority of total maltreatment investigations.

Very few of the total maltreatment investigations were for Native American children (<1%), as the total Native American population in San Francisco is relatively low.

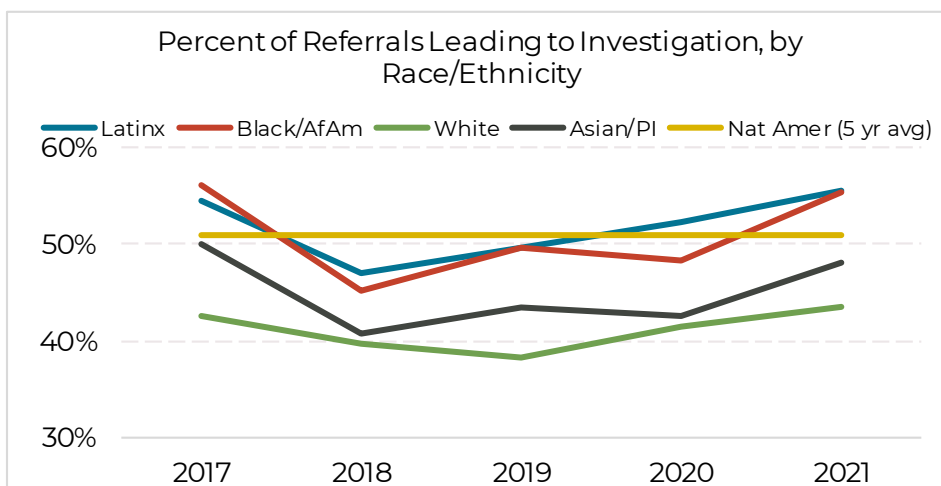


Percent of Referrals Leading to Investigation, by Race/Ethnicity

Since the amount of children referred to our Hotline varies by race/ethnicity, comparing the *percent of referrals* that lead to an investigation is a better way to assess disproportionality in investigation decisions.

Differences in the percent of referrals leading to investigations by race/ethnicity have remained fairly stable over the last 5 years. In 2021, Latinx (56%), Black/African American (55%) and Native American children (51% 5yr avg.) were most likely to have their Hotline referral lead to an investigation. Asian/PI (48%) and white children (44%) were somewhat less likely.

In general, San Francisco children are amongst the least likely in the state to be investigated for child maltreatment. Across the state, 71% to 76% of children referred to a maltreatment Hotline have been investigated for maltreatment per year since 2017, which is higher than any single race/ethnicity group in San Francisco over the same time period.



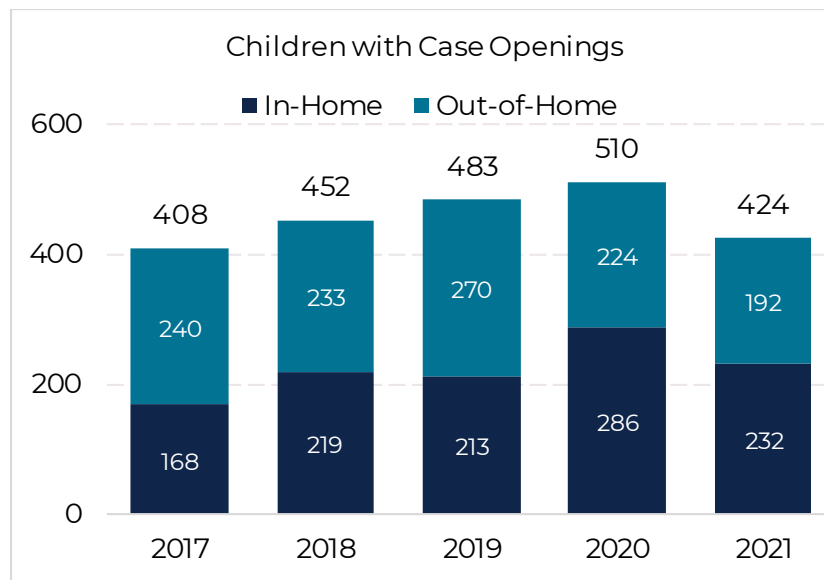
4. Child Welfare Case Openings

Children with Case Openings

When conducting investigations, we strive to support families and connect them to supportive services so that children can remain safely in their homes without further child welfare involvement. Most families investigated for child maltreatment do not have child welfare cases opened.

When further involvement is needed to address safety concerns, we may open an "in-home" case, where we provide supportive services to families while children remain in their home, or an "out-of-home" case, where we remove a child from their home and place them in foster care.

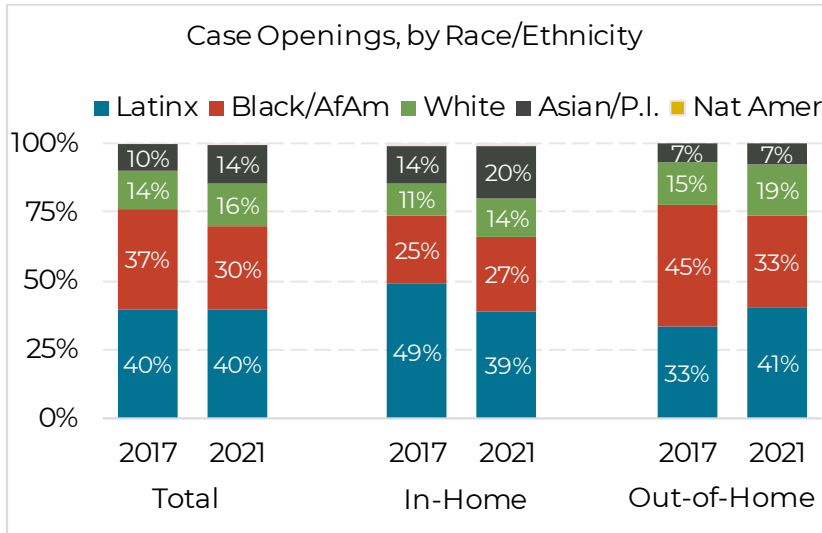
Over the last 5 years, roughly 400 to 500 children have had child welfare cases opened per year, and a declining proportion have begun as out-of-home cases in the last few years.



Children with Case Openings, by Race/Ethnicity

The distribution of children with case openings by race/ethnicity has shifted slightly since 2017, with Black/African American children comprising a declining amount of total case openings. Also, the proportion of case openings that begin as out-of-home have declined for children of all races, but not as dramatically for Latinx children. As a result, Latinx children have comprised a declining proportion of in-home cases, and an increasing proportion of out-of-home cases.

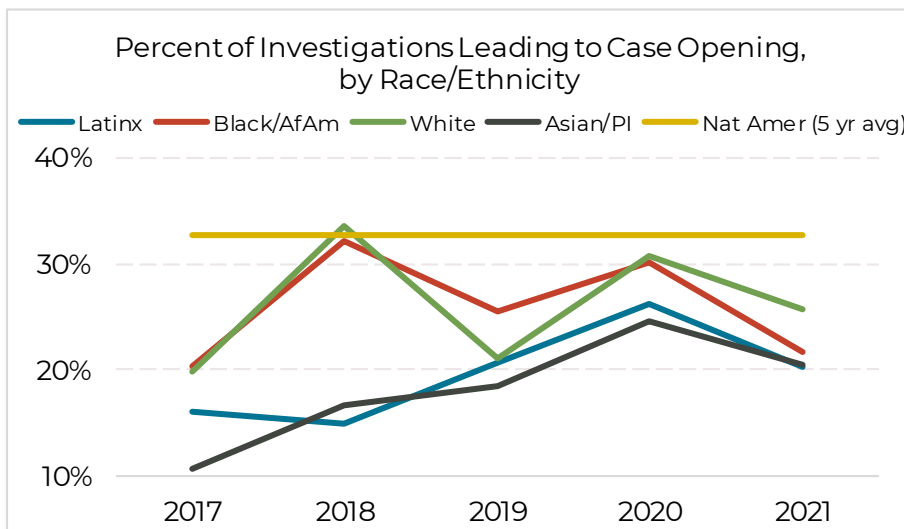
In 2021, Latinx (40%) and Black/African American children (30%) were the groups with the most case openings, followed by white (16%), Asian/PI (14%) and Native American children (<1%).



Percent of Investigations Leading to Case Opening, by Race/Ethnicity

Since the amount of children investigated for maltreatment varies by race/ethnicity, comparing the *percent of investigations* that lead to a case opening is a better way to assess disproportionality in case opening decisions.

The percent of investigations leading to a case opening have increased in recent years for Latinx and Asian/PI children, but they remain lower than children of other races. In 2021, Native American (33% 5yr avg.), white (26%) and Black/African American children (22%) were most likely to have their investigation lead to a case opening, followed by Asian/PI (20%) and Latinx children (20%).

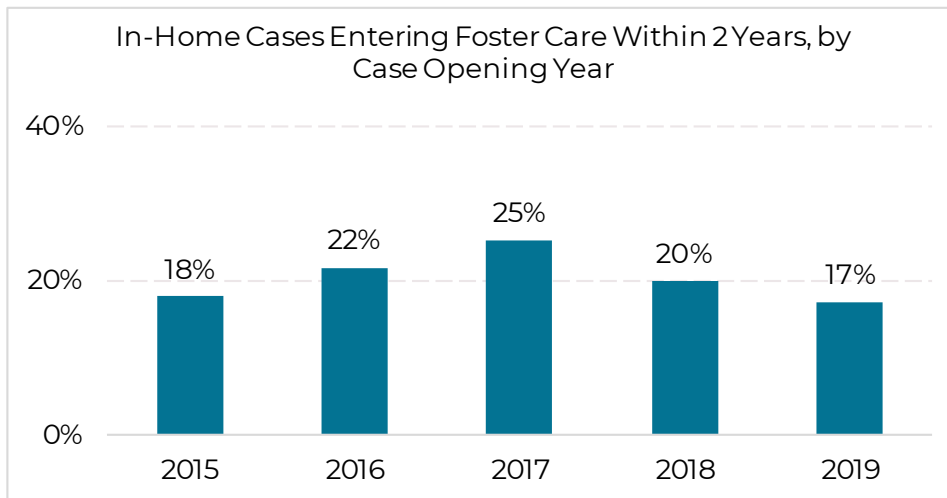


5. In-Home Case Outcomes

In-Home Cases Entering Foster Care within 2 Years, by Case Opening Year

For in-home cases, our primary goal is to support families so that children can safely remain in their homes. One way we can assess success with this goal is by tracking how many children who have an in-home case opened subsequently enter foster care.

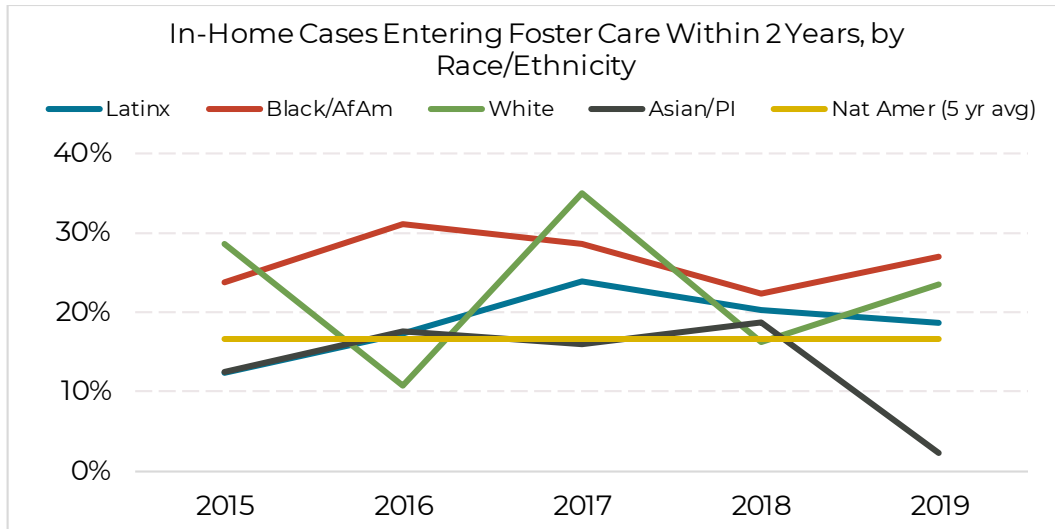
Over the last 5 years, between 17% and 25% of children have entered foster care within 2 years of having an in-home case opened.



In-Home Cases Entering Foster Care within 2 Years, by Race/Ethnicity

While there is significant year over year variation due to the relatively small denominator (children with in-home case opening in a given year, by race/ethnicity), in general, Black/African American children have been more likely than other children to enter foster care within 2 years of having an in-home case opened.

Among children with an in-home case opening in 2019, Black/African American (27%) and white children (24%) were most likely to enter foster care within 2 years, followed by Latinx (19%), Native American (17% 5yr avg.) and Asian/PI children (2%).

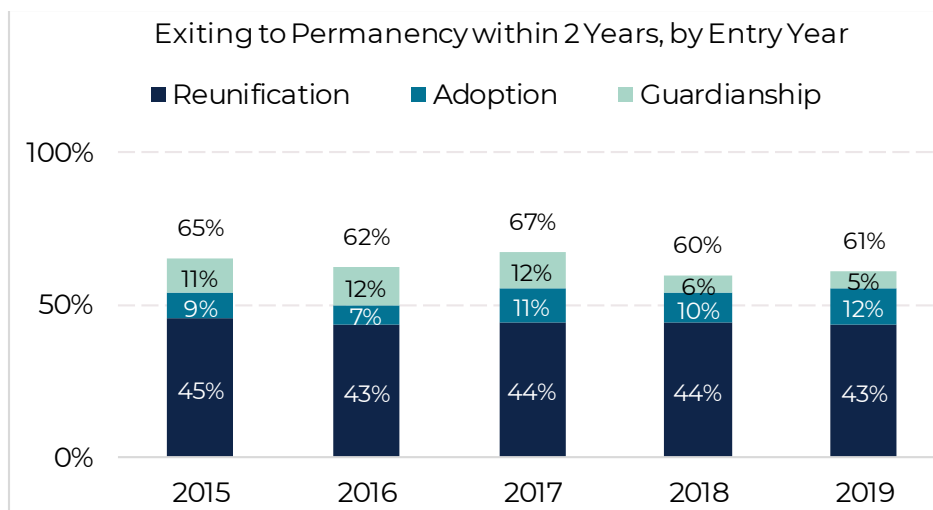


6. Foster Care Exits to Permanency

Exiting to Permanency within 2 Years, by Entry Year

We want children to live in loving and stable homes outside of the foster care system. For children in foster care, our first goal is a safe reunification with their parents.

When that is not possible, the next options are adoption and guardianship. We collectively refer to these types of exits from foster care as "permanency". Over the last 5 years, between 60% and 67% of children have exited to permanency within 2 years of entering foster care.

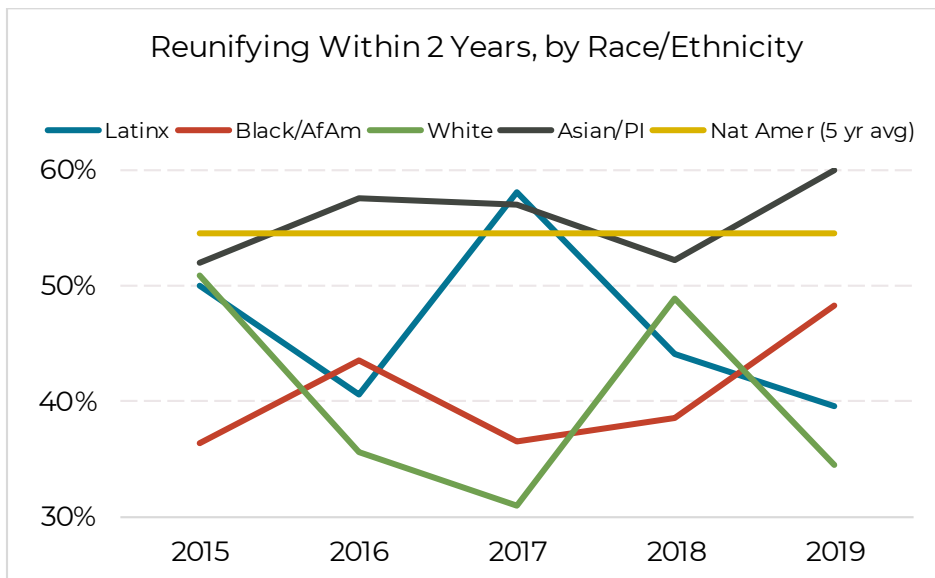


Reunifying within 2 Years, by Race/Ethnicity

Since reunification is the primary permanency goal, it is important to assess disproportionality in reunifications.

While there is significant year over year variation due to the relatively small denominator (children that entered foster care in a given year, by race/ethnicity), in general, Asian/PI and Native American children have experienced better reunification outcomes than children of other races/ethnicities over the last 5 years.

Among children entering foster care in 2019, Asian/PI (60%) and Native American children (55% 5yr avg.) were most likely to reunify within 2 years, followed by Black/African American (48%), Latinx (40%) and white children (35%).

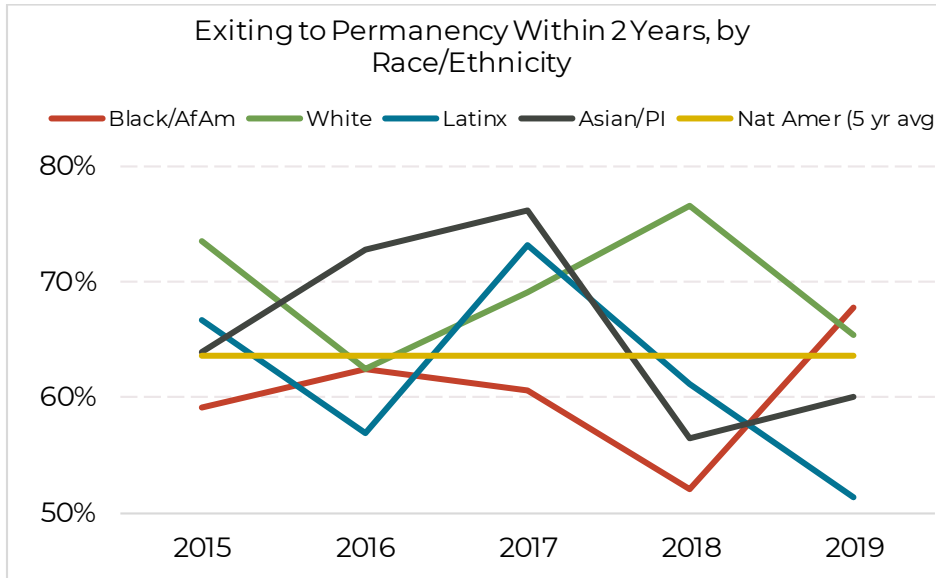


Exiting to Permanency within 2 Years, by Race/Ethnicity

It is also important to assess disproportionality in exits to permanency more broadly. There is significant year over year variation in this outcome due to the relatively small denominator.

Black/African American children have generally had slightly lower permanency rates than other children over this time period, but had the highest permanency rate in the most recent entry year we can observe.

Among children entering foster care in 2019, Black/African American children (68%) were most likely to exit to permanency within 2 years, followed by white (66%), Native American (64% 5yr avg.), Asian/PI (60%) and Latinx children (51%).

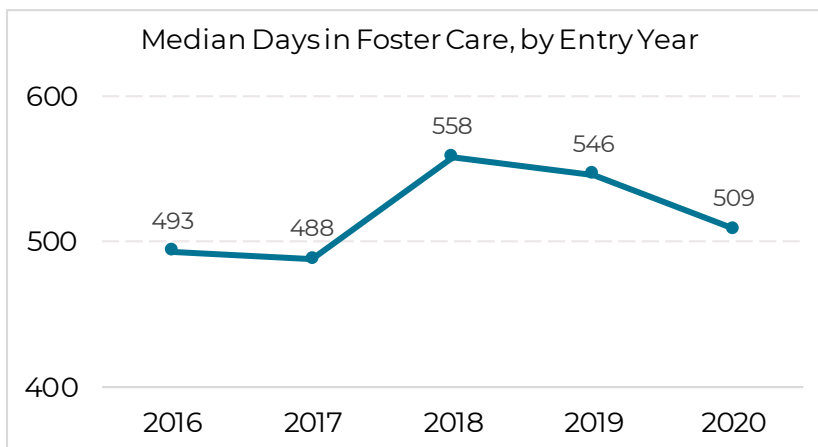


7. Time in Foster Care

Median Days in Foster Care, by Entry Year

We want to connect children to permanency as quickly as possible once they enter the foster care system.

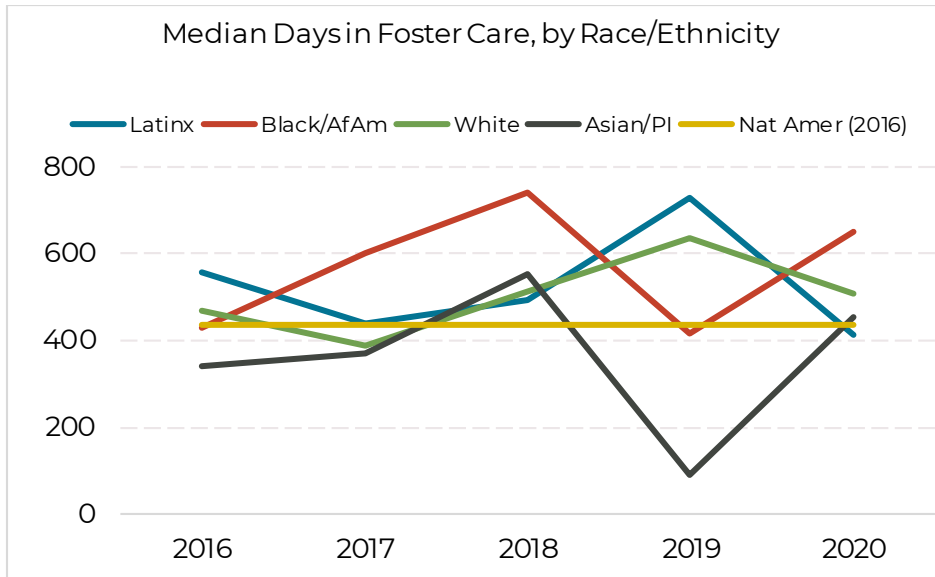
Over the last 5 years, the median timespent in foster care has ranged from 488 to 558 days. The median duration was 509 days among children entering foster care in 2020.



Median Days in Foster Care, by Race/Ethnicity

There is significant year-over-year variation in median duration in foster care by race/ethnicity, without any consistent patterns emerging.

Among children entering foster care in 2020, Black/African American children (650 days) had the highest median days in care, followed by white (636), Asian/PI (456) and Latinx children (413). (Due to low number of total foster care entries, median duration is only available for 2016 entries for Native American children).



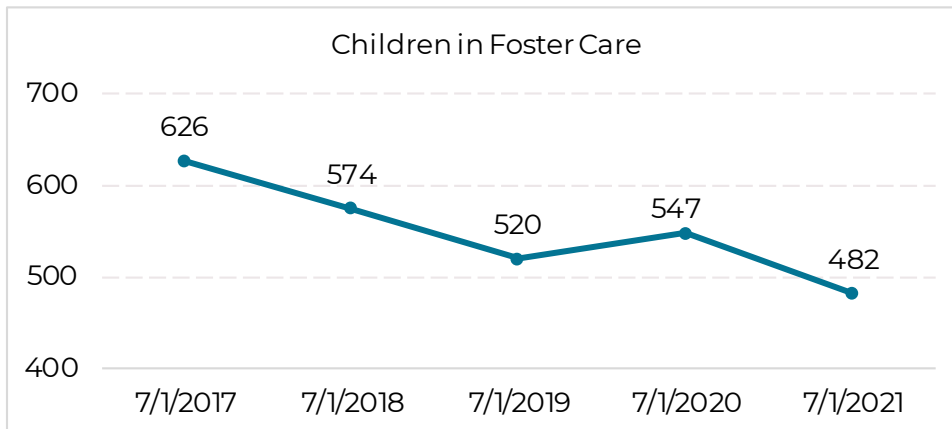
Methodology Note

Median durations calculated using Kaplan-Meier method. Most recent time period available is for foster care entries in 2020, because not enough children had exited foster care in the 2021 entry cohort to estimate median duration at the time data was pulled from CCWIP. Please see [CCWIP](https://ccwip.berkeley.edu/cwscmsreports/methodologies/) for full details on methodology. URL: <https://ccwip.berkeley.edu/cwscmsreports/methodologies/>

8. Children in Foster Care

Referrals from the community, decisions about investigations and removals into foster care, and our success at connecting children to permanency, drive how many children are in foster care at a given point in time.

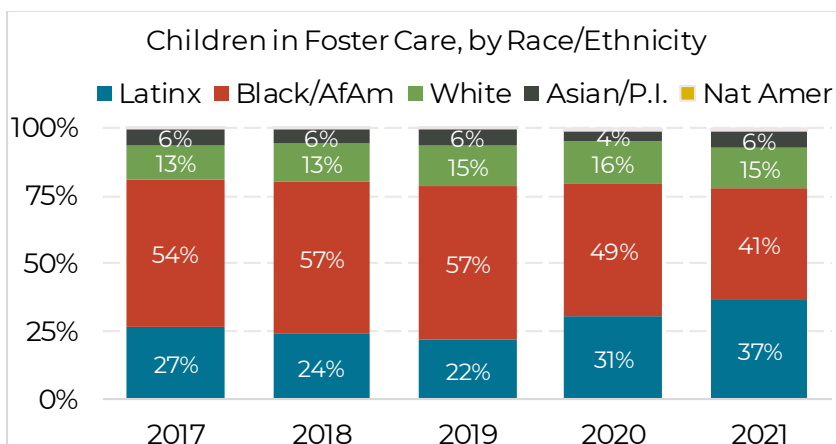
Over the last 5 years, we have been increasingly successful at supporting families and children in their homes and reducing the need for foster care. The amount of children in foster care at a point in time has declined from 626 to 482 between 2017 and 2021.



Children in Foster Care, by Race/Ethnicity

The distribution of children in foster care by race/ethnicity has shifted in recent years, with Black/African American children comprising a declining proportion and Latinx children comprising an increasing proportion.

However, in 2021, Black/African American children still comprised the largest proportion of the foster care population (41%), followed by Latinx (37%), white (15%), Asian/PI (6%), and Native American children (1%).



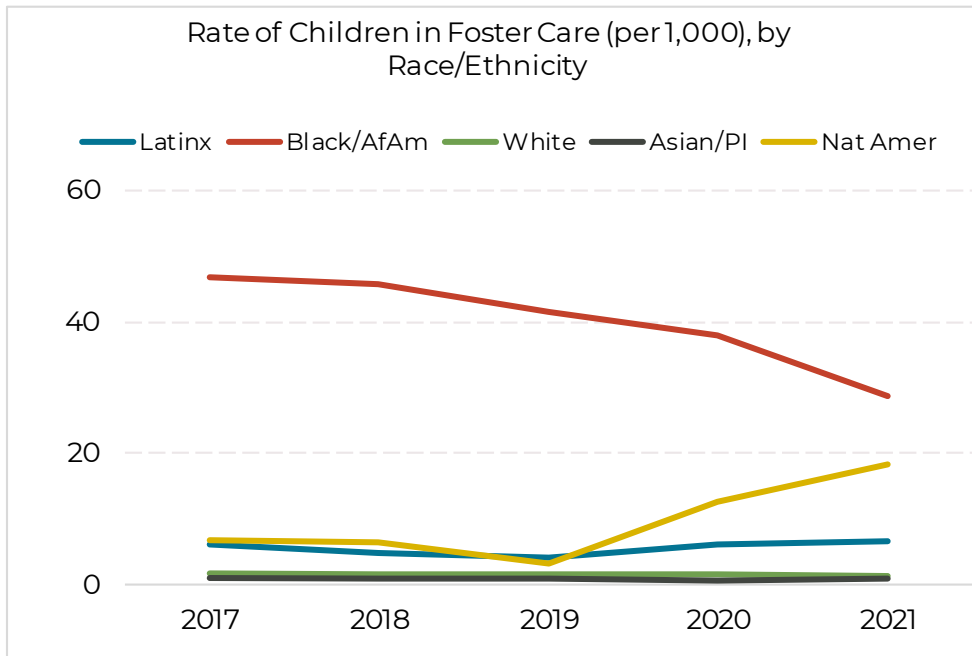
Rate of Children in Foster Care (per 1,000), by Race/Ethnicity

Since the total child population in San Francisco varies by race/ethnicity, comparing how many children are in foster care *relative to their total population* is a better way to assess disproportionality in the foster care population

Changes in rate of children in foster care (per 1,000) between 2017 and 2021

- Black/African American (46.8 to 28.7 per 1,000)
- White (1.7 to 1.3 per 1,000)
- Asian/PI (1.0 to 0.8 per 1,000)
- Native American (6.9 to 18.3 per 1,000)
- Latinx (6.1 to 6.6 per 1,000)

Recall that the Native American child population in San Francisco is relatively low, so small changes in the foster care population are represented as large rate increases.



9. Foster Care Placement Types

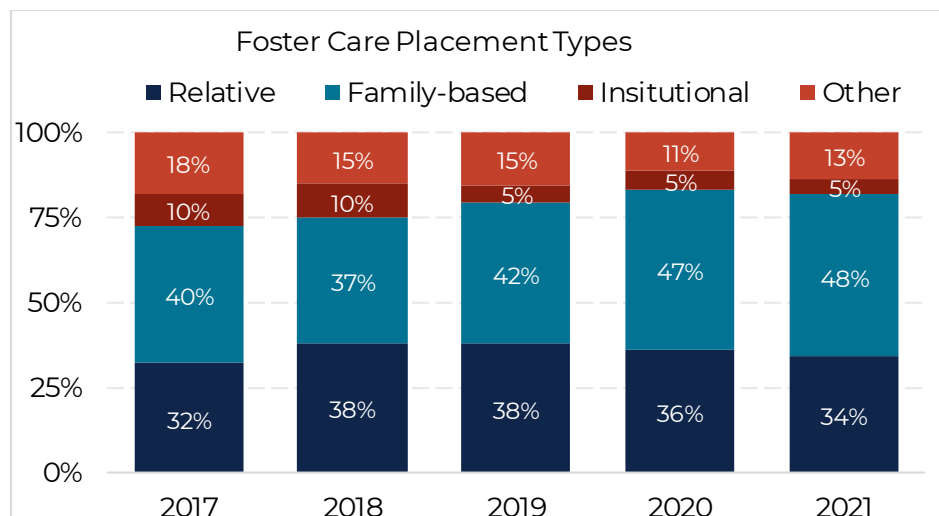
Placement Type Definitions

- **Relative:** Relative/NREFM placement home; county-approved resource family approval home with relative relationship type; foster family agency resource family approval home with relative relationship type
- **Family-based:** County or foster family agency approved resource family home where relationship type is not relative
- **Institutional:** Group; short-term residential therapeutic program
- **Other**
 - **Guardian placements:** Some children placed with non-relative legal guardians who reside in San Francisco technically remain in foster care so they may continue receiving child welfare support
 - **Non-foster care placements:** Temporarily in hospital, etc.
 - **Trial home visit, transitional housing,** and any instance where the child is a dependent of the court but a placement type is not defined in our data system (runaway status, etc.)

Foster Care Placement Types, by Year

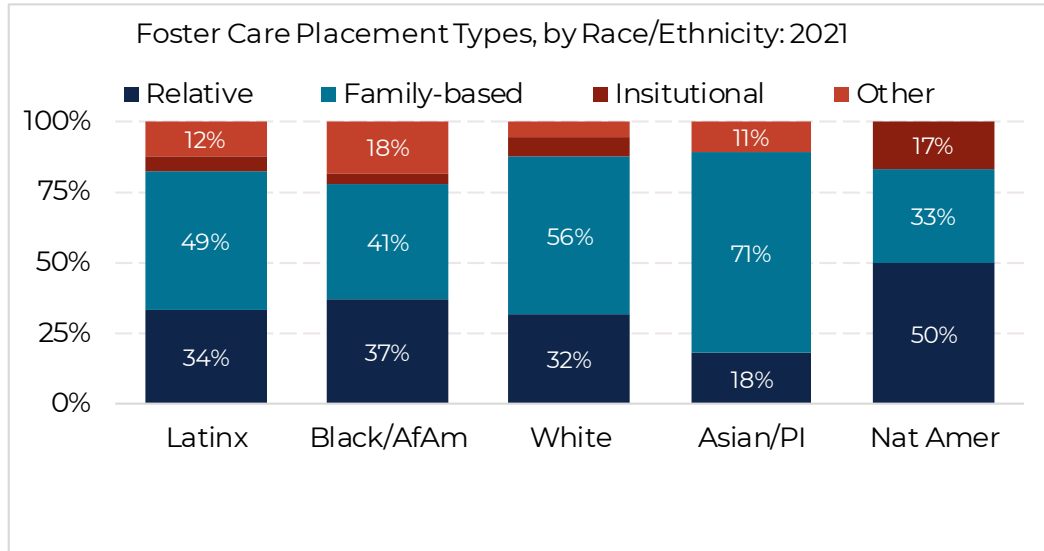
When children are placed in foster care, our first placement option is with a relative. If that is not possible, our next preference is a family-based setting with a licensed resource family. If a child is experiencing severe emotional challenges, they may temporarily be placed in an institutional setting, such a short-term residential therapeutic program.

Over the last 5 years, the percent of children in a relative or other family-based setting has increased from 72% to 82%.



Foster Care Placement Types, by Race/Ethnicity: 2021

There is some slight variation in placement types by race/ethnicity. In 2021, fewer Asian/PI children were in relative placements compared to children of other races.

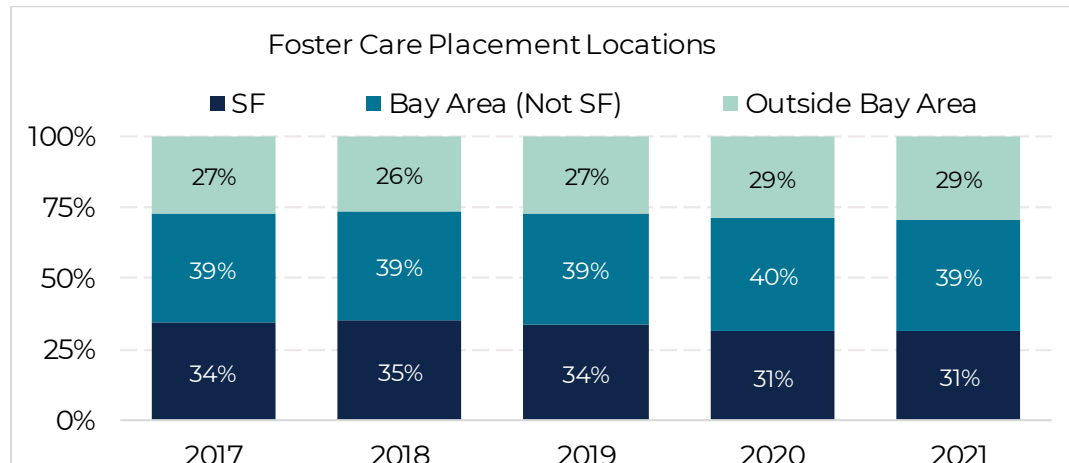


10. Foster Care Placement Locations

Foster Care Placement Location, by Year

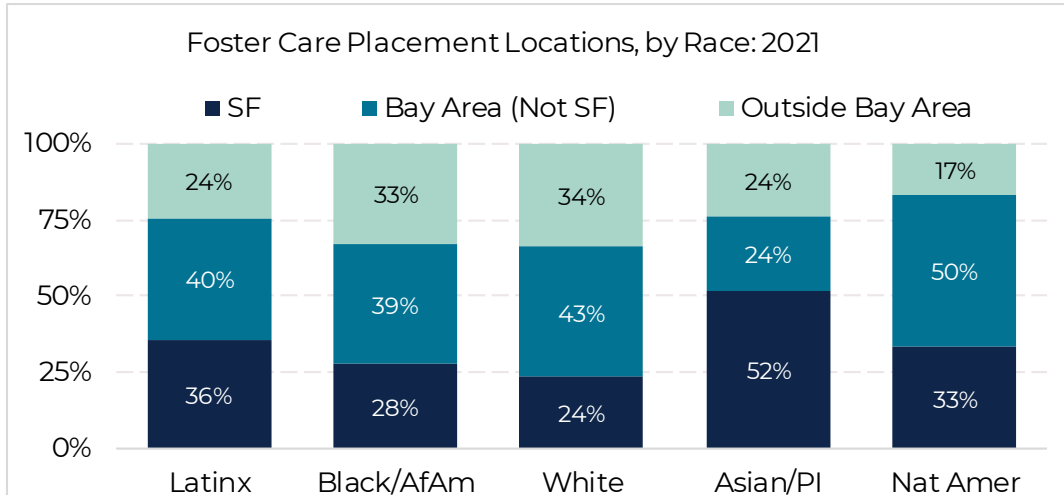
We want children to maintain connections with their community and social supports while in foster care. To that end, we prioritize placing children San Francisco or other nearby Bay Area counties.

Over the last 5 years, the placement location of children has remained fairly stable. On 7/1/2021, 31% of placements were in San Francisco, 39% were in another Bay Area county, and 29% were outside of the Bay Area. If you are a San Francisco resident and interested in becoming a resource family/foster parent, please visit www.foster-sf.org



Foster Care Placement Location, by Race: 2021

There is some slight variation in placement types by race/ethnicity. On 7/1/2021, Asian/PI children were more likely to be placed in San Francisco, and Black/African American and white children were slightly more likely than other children to be placed outside of the Bay Area.



For more information, please contact Doug Thompson, douglas.thompson@sfgov.org, Program Support Analyst, Policy and Planning Unit, San Francisco Human Services Agency.