

The Foster Care System: How to Address the Mental Health of Thousands of Children Across The US

Molly Mattison, State University of New York at Geneseo
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Eunju Kang - American Social Welfare Policy

Target Population

80% of foster children in the US (Graphic 1) (552,438 of 690,548 total) suffer from some form of mental health issue. This trend can be attributed to the complex trauma many foster children encounter. The Child Welfare System (CWS) removes these children from their homes and puts them into the system because of the dangerous living conditions that can cause these traumas. Because of this, it is the CWS's responsibility to provide these children with the care they need overcome these difficulties.

Examples of Existing Policies

- **National Traumatic Stress Network-** Part of the Children's Health Act (2000). Increases access to services for children and families who have experienced traumatic events
- **Medicaid-** Children in Foster Care qualify for Medicaid. This can help pay for the mental health treatments the child may need.
- **National Adoption Competency Mental Health Training Initiative-** Trains child welfare and mental health professionals to be more

equipped for addressing mental health issues in foster children

- **Project BEST-** An Initiative throughout the state of SC. Provides evidence-supported mental health treatments to abused and/or traumatized children who needs them.

Policy Proposal

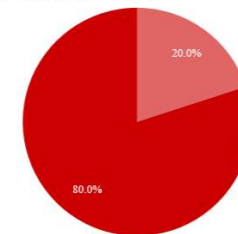
The goal of my proposal is to provide effective and accessible mental health help to the children in the foster care system that need it.

- **Medicaid-** One of the issues with foster children and Medicaid is the over-saturation of children using the mental health services Medicaid provides. There are initiatives to get mental health screenings as a child enters foster care, but that can lead to this over-saturation. Instead of fixing this by cutting back on screenings, being more exclusive with the treatments (more advanced cases first) until there is a way to expand the abilities of the Medicaid system is a plan that gets the most children treated, while also leaving room for improvement.
- **Increase accountability-** Both for foster care professionals to perform quality mental health screenings, and for the foster parents to help their children

Find the help they need.

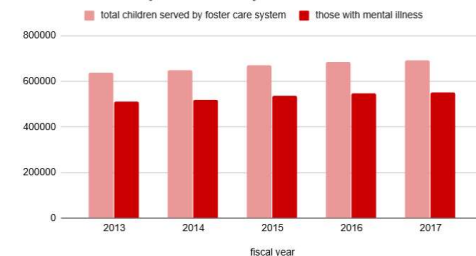
This could be done with the National Adoption Competency Mental Health Training Initiative

Foster Children With Mental Illness
with mental illness (red)-without mental illness (pink)



Graphic 1- This chart shows the amount of foster children that have a mental illness. Since 80% of children in the CWS with mental illness, it is important to make changes that will better their lives.

children served by foster care system and with mental illness



Graphic 2- This chart shows the growing amount of children in the CWS. With this growing number, the number of mental health cases grow too.