

# Privatizing the Foster Care System to Improve Outcomes for Foster Care Children

Christie Fleming

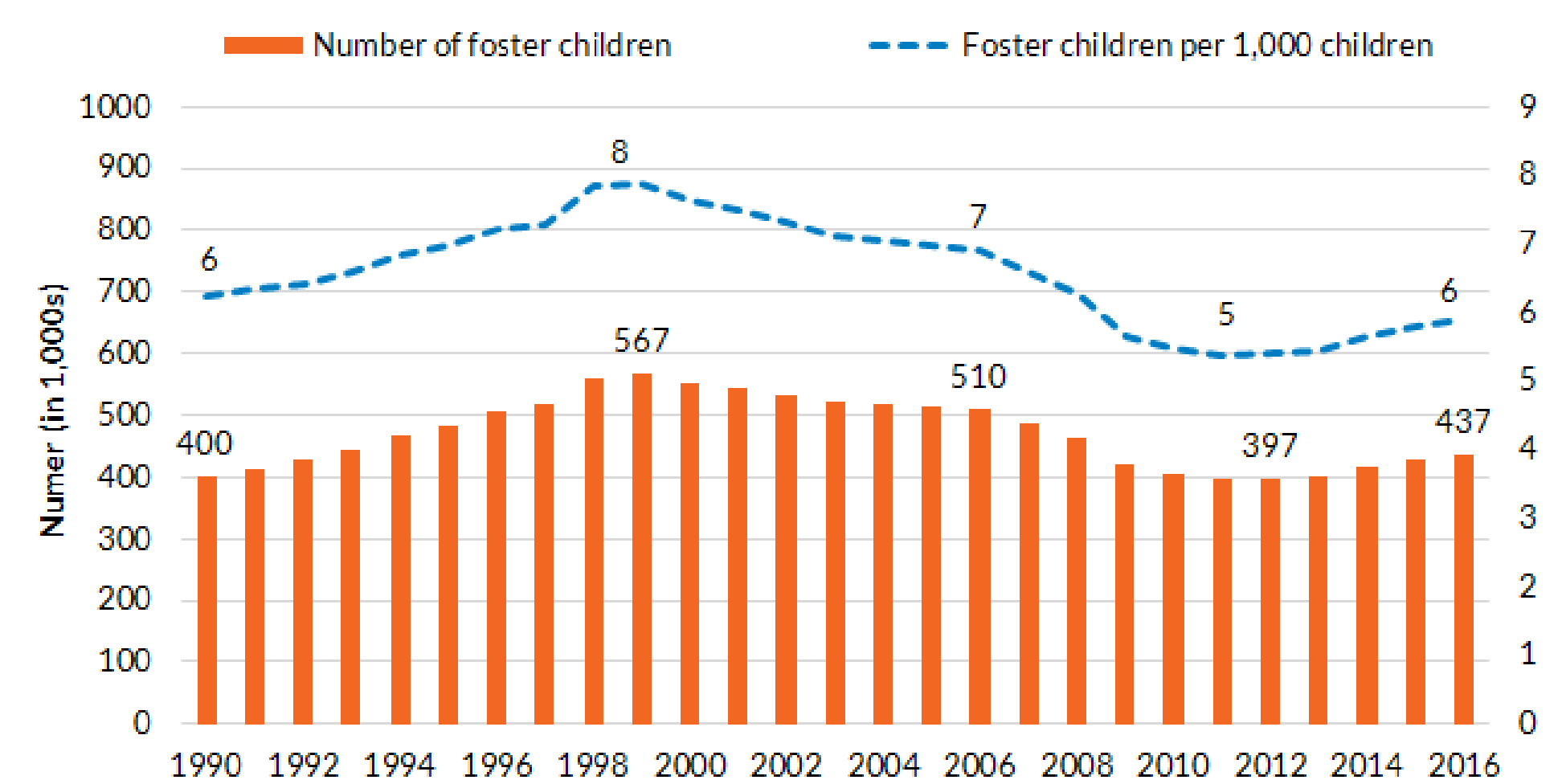
## Introduction

- ❖ Foster care youth between the ages of 17 and 21 are more likely to become homeless, incarcerated, live in poverty, and suffer from untreated mental health issues.
- ❖ These outcomes are essential to social work because foster care youth represent a very vulnerable population deprived of resources and case management services needed to improve their lives.
- ❖ The privatization of the foster care system has been a growing trend in the delivery of child welfare services over the past decade as an option to improve the outcomes for children in the foster care system (Hatch & Wyden, 2017).

## Research Question

- ❖ Is privatizing the foster care system an effective way to improve the well-being of children in foster care?

The Number and Rate of Children in Foster Care, Ages 17 and Under: 1990-2016\*



\*Data for 2004 through 2016 are preliminary estimates. Revised estimates may be forthcoming.  
Source: Data for 1990-1997: Brown, B., Vandivere, S., Lindberg, L. D., Boggess, S., Porter, L., & Williams, S. (1999). Trends in the Well-Being of America's Children & Youth, 1999. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. Retrieved from <https://aspe.hhs.gov/report/trends-well-being-america-children-and-youth-1999>. Data for 1998-2002: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau. (2006). The AFCARS report: Final estimates for FY 1998 through FY 2002 (12). Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats\\_research/afcars/reports/12.htm](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/afcars/reports/12.htm). Data for 2009-2016: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau. (2006-2017). The AFCARS Report [2003-2016]. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/research-data-technology/statistics-research/afcars>. Population estimates for 2007-2016: KIDS COUNT Data Center. (2017). Child population by age group [Data table]. Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation. Retrieved from <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data-tables/101-child-population-by-age-group#detailed/1/any/false/870,573,869,36,868,867,133,38,35,18/4693/419>.

- ❖ The number of children in foster care has gradually increased since 2012. (childtrends.org)
- ❖ These statistics are important because it emphasizes the importance of improving the well-being of children in foster care.

## Recommended Interventions

- ❖ The public and private foster care systems should work as a partnership to concurrently provide case management services to foster care children (Haslag, Matt & Neal, 2012).
- ❖ A strong accountability system should be developed to monitor and evaluate the performance of private foster care contracts (Barillas, 2011).
- ❖ Fiscal and program strategies that balance accountability with the flexibility required to address the changing needs of families and children (Wulczyn, 2000).

## Methods

### Search Engines:

- ❖ PsycINFO
- ❖ Social Work Abstracts
- ❖ SocIndex With Full Text
- ❖ EBSCOhost

### Search Terms Used:

- ❖ Foster Care System and Privatization
- ❖ Child Welfare System and Privatization
- ❖ Managed Care and Foster Care
- ❖ Foster Children and Privatization
- ❖ Well-Being and Privatization

### Articles Excluded:

- ❖ Research conducted out of the country

### Articles Included:

- ❖ 15 Articles were reviewed, but only 8 articles met the criteria for the research question.

## Results

- ❖ A systematic review that examined whether private foster care agencies were superior to public foster care agencies did not support one agency type preferred over the other (Steen & Smith, 2012).
- ❖ A quantitative study that was completed on a Community Based Care Initiative in Florida, using a sample set of three comparison groups in different counties, did not result in improvements in the well-being of children in foster care (Yampolskaga, Paulson, Armstrong, Neil & Amy, 2004).
- ❖ A qualitative study showed both positive and negative aspects of privatization and its impact on access to services for children. The sample size included 58 interviews with 33 participants over an eight month period (Humphrey, Turnbull & Turnbull, 2006).

## Conclusion & Recommendations for practice and research

- ❖ Privatizing the foster care system is not the only effective way to improve the well-being of children in foster care.
- ❖ The Private and State Public welfare systems should expand upon the positive attributes of their system and come together to improve the well-being of children in the foster care system.
- ❖ There needs to be further research that involves longitudinal studies to evaluate the effectiveness of privatization of the foster care system (Collins-Camargo, Flaherty & Lee, 2008).
- ❖ Further research should determine if States that follow the Federal outcome guidelines for children in foster care have better outcomes than States penalized for not following the guidelines.