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# 8 graphics that show the shape of the foster care system

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By **Matt Rocheleau**

GLOBE STAFF OCTOBER 18, 2016

The number of children in the state foster care system has risen in recent months, prompting state officials to recruit more foster parents.



There were 6,118 children in the state Department of Children and Families foster care system at the end of July, about 9 percent more than the 5,618 a year earlier, according to the agency.

At least part of the increase has been attributed to the [opioid crisis](#), which has led to more children being removed from drug-addicted parents, the [Globe has reported](#).

The department has also been placing more children in foster care following a string of tragedies in recent years, including the case of Jeremiah Oliver, a Fitchburg boy who went missing in 2013 while under DCF supervision and was later found dead.



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Statewide, the number of petitions filed by DCF to have children removed from their homes jumped by 38 percent, from 2,459 to 3,383, between 2011 and 2015, the Globe reported in May.

The influx of abused children also prompted the state to grant more “[overcapacity waivers](#),” which generally allow more than four foster children in a single home.

Officials say efforts to bring more foster parents into the mix, including several large-scale recruitment events this past spring, have paid off. There were 4,793 foster homes as of the end of July, an increase of 11 percent, since November 2015.

The department is also bolstering foster parent recruitment staff in its field offices and recently hired two more statewide recruitment coordinators and a new assistant commissioner for foster care, adoption and adolescent Services.

The department’s goal is to “build a large, diverse community of foster parents so there are always safe homes for children in the cities and towns where they live and go to school,” the department said.

“DCF foster parents are true heroes, opening their hearts and their homes to children enduring the most traumatic of life circumstances. They provide them with a nurturing environment, where they are safe and can begin to heal,” DCF Commissioner Linda S. Spears said in a statement in [May](#) when the department was announcing recruitment efforts.

So who are the foster parents and children of Massachusetts?

- They live in communities scattered around the state. There was at least one foster home in 314 of the state’s 351 cities and towns, as of July, the most recent period for which data was available.



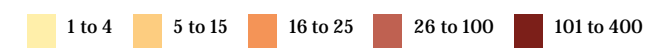
- In 55 percent of the foster homes, the parents had no other children living there besides the foster children.
- Children in foster care range in age but tend to be young. More than half were 5 years old or younger.
- Married couples make up the majority of foster parents. They accounted for about 54 percent of all parents. The next largest group was single adults, who accounted for 29 percent, and divorced adults, 11 percent. (The most recent data on marital status was as of September 2014.)
- As of July, most foster parents were between 46 and 55 years old. But ages overall covered a wide range, from adults younger than 25 to others over age 76.

State officials said that the vast majority of the youngest and oldest foster parents — about 90 percent in the 18-25 year-old age range and 65 percent in the 76-and-older range — were relatives or other adults with close ties to the child.

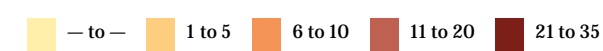
Officials said the agency aims to identify kinship and child-specific placements when possible, because such arrangements often minimize the trauma children can experience when entering foster care.

## Key stats on foster homes

This map shows the number of foster homes in each city and town across Massachusetts as of July. An exact number was not available in communities that had at least one foster home, but less than 5; those areas are shaded in light yellow. Municipalities colored in light gray did not have an approved foster home.



This map shows the number of foster homes per 10,000 residents in each city and town across Massachusetts as of July. Communities shaded in light yellow had at least one foster home, but less than 5; because no exact figure was available, per capita rates could not be calculated for these places. Municipalities colored in light gray did not currently have an approved foster home.



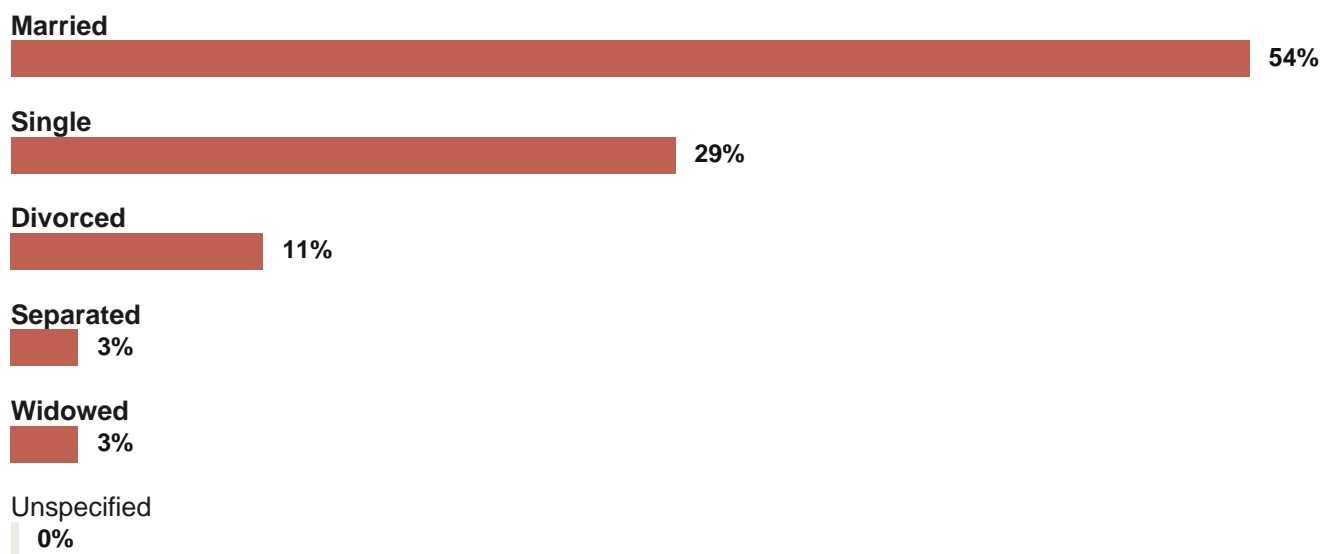
This table shows the number of "other children," or children 17 and under who were not foster children, that were living in each foster home, as of July.

Other non-foster children in household	Homes	% of homes
None	2627	54.8%
1 child	1041	21.7%
2 children	666	13.9%
3 children	305	6.4%
4 children	121	2.5%

5 children	24	0.5%
6 children	5	0.1%
7 children	3	0.1%
8 children	1	0.02%

## Demographics of foster parents

This graphic shows the marital status of foster home parents. Data below is as of Sept. 2014, the most recent figures available.



This graphic shows the racial breakdown of primary foster parents as of July. For foster parents, the data the department provided did not include the Hispanic/Latino ethnicity as a category.

Created with Highcharts 4.0.4 This graphic shows the age breakdown of primary foster parents. 71654119315339673215418-2526-3536-4546-5556-6566-7576+

## Demographics of children in foster care

This graphic shows the racial and ethnic breakdown of children in foster care as of July.

Created with Highcharts 4.0.4 This graphic shows the age breakdown of children in foster care, as of July. 541657635577501418345319293260266211163180178196175203<1 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17

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