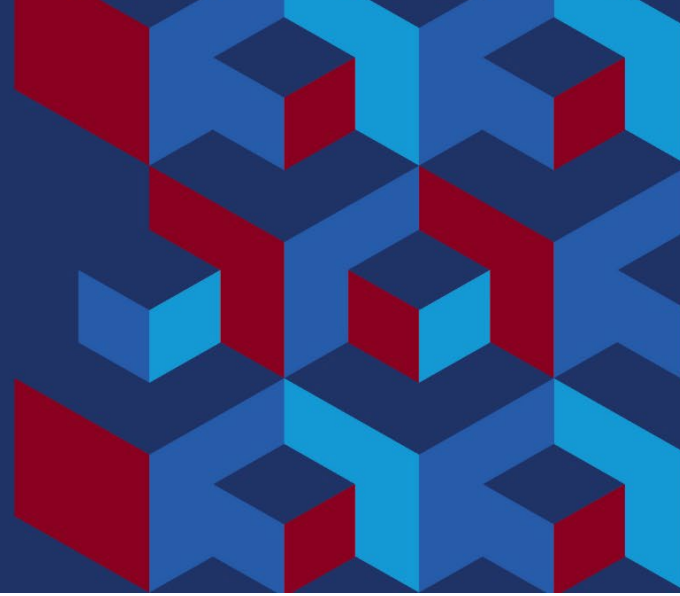


Chapin Hall Research Brief



A Distance-from-Home Study of the Therapeutic Foster Care (TFC) Pilot

This research brief summarizes findings from an analysis of youth's placement types and placement distance from youth's home community in the 5-year TFC Pilot to evaluate efforts by the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services in maintaining youth in the least restrictive, family-based settings, near the youth's home community.

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Introduction

The Illinois Children and Family Services Act (Illinois Public Act 099-0350) requires that the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) arrange for an independent evaluation of a 5-year pilot program of multidimensional treatment foster care (MTFC) “to determine whether it is meeting the goal of maintaining children in the least restrictive, most appropriate family-like setting, near the child's home community, while they are in the Department's care.” Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago (Chapin Hall) is the independent evaluator of the 5-year DCFS Therapeutic Foster Care (TFC) Pilot, implemented between July 1, 2016, and June 30, 2021.

The TFC Pilot provided therapeutic home-based settings serving youth with a history of trauma or severe behavioral challenges who would otherwise enter or remain in residential care or be discharged from residential care to other non-TFC, community-based settings. Over the five years Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) became the primary community-based provider that fully implemented Therapeutic Foster Care Oregon (TFCO), the current name of MTFC (Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development, 2022), to serve youth ages 6–14 in the Cook County, Aurora, and Rockford regions. Because LSSI implemented the evidence-based TFCO model and because LSSI youth comprised 80% of all youth in the TFC Pilot, Chapin Hall focused on the LSSI TFCO model, referred to as TFC in this distance-from-home study, in response to the state legislation.

Chapin Hall addressed the state legislation requirement by focusing the evaluation on two research questions: (1) What were the post-initial TFC placement types while youth in the TFC Pilot remained in DCFS legal custody? and (2) What was the distance of the initial TFC placement, first post-initial TFC placement, and all post-initial TFC placements from youth's home community?

Methods

Sample

In the 5-year TFC Pilot period, 74 youth received LSSI's TFCO intervention between February 1, 2017, and June 30, 2021, in three sites or subregions: Cook County (n=39), Aurora (n=21), and Rockford (n=14).

Post-initial TFC Placement Types

LSSI youth's post-initial TFC placements were observed over time while they remained in DCFS legal custody. Chapin Hall used data from the Child and Youth Centered Information System (CYCIS) and Residential Treatment and Outcomes System (RTOS) to track placements. All LSSI youth's placements through May 2022, or until the youth was no longer in DCFS legal custody, were used in this analysis. LSSI youth had, on average, 873 days in DCFS care post-initial TFC placement for which Chapin Hall was able to track their living arrangements.

Chapin Hall used CYCIS living arrangement codes to define four categories of "community placement": (1) Home of parent/relative/fictive kin¹; (2) Specialized foster care²; (3) Other home-based settings³; and (4) Independent/transitional living.⁴ Chapin Hall also used CYCIS living arrangement codes to define three categories of "non-community placement": (1) Residential or group home care⁵; (2) Psychiatric hospital⁶; and (3) All other.⁷

¹ HMP=Home of Parent; HMR=Home of Relative; HFK=Home of Fictive Kin.

² FHS=Foster Home Specialized; FHT=Foster Home Therapeutic; AFC=Adolescent Foster Care; TFH=Therapeutic Foster Home.

³ FHA=Foster Home Adoption; FHB=Foster Home Boarding - DCFS; FHG=Foster Home Guardianship; FHI=Foster Home Indian; FHP=Foster Home Boarding - Private Agency; HRA=Home of Relative Application; SGH=Subsidized Guardian Home; GDN=Guardian Successor; EFC=Emergency Foster Care; PGH=Private Guardianship; DRA= Delegated Relative Authority; FOS=Foster Home; HRL=Home of Relative Licensed; HAP=Home of Adoptive Parent.

⁴ ILO=Independent Living Only; TLP=Transitional Living Program.

⁵ GRH=Group Home; IPA=Institution-Private Child Care Facility; QRT=Qualified Residential Treatment; HFP=Hospital Facility – Psychiatric; All other includes HFM=Hospital Facility – Medical; UAH=Unauthorized Home of Parent; UAP=Unauthorized Placement; WUK=Whereabouts Unknown; YES=Youth Emergency Shelters.

⁶ HFP=Hospital Facility – Psychiatric; All other includes HFM=Hospital Facility – Medical; UAH=Unauthorized Home of Parent; UAP=Unauthorized Placement; WUK=Whereabouts Unknown; YES=Youth Emergency Shelters.

⁷ HFM=Hospital Facility – Medical; UAH=Unauthorized Home of Parent; UAP=Unauthorized Placement; WUK=Whereabouts Unknown; YES=Youth Emergency Shelters.

TFC and Post-initial TFC Placement Distance from Home Community

Chapin Hall defined “home community” as TFC Pilot youth’s address at the time of case opening. Distance was defined in miles between any two addresses. Addresses of TFC and post-initial TFC placements were examined to calculate their distances from youth’s home community in three ways: (1) distance between TFC placement and home community; (2) distance between the first post-initial TFC placement and home community; and (3) distance between all post-initial TFC placements and home community.

Chapin Hall used four distance thresholds—within 5, 10, 20, or 50 miles of youth’s home community—to define a placement as being in the youth’s home community.

All analyses were conducted using R 4.1.2 (The R Foundation for Statistical Computing, 2021).

Findings

What were the post-initial TFC placement types while youth in the TFC Pilot remained in DCFS legal custody?

To examine the extent to which TFC Pilot youth were maintained in the least restrictive, most appropriate family-like setting, Chapin Hall examined youth’s first placement immediately after the initial TFC placement as well as youth’s full placement trajectories that consisted of all post-initial TFC placements through May 2022.

First Post-Initial TFC Placement

In the first placement after the initial TFC placement:

- 51% of the TFC Pilot youth moved to a psychiatric hospital, though most of them returned immediately to the same TFC home after the hospitalization.
- 45% of the TFC Pilot youth moved to specialized foster care or home of parent/relative/kin, or other home-based settings.
- None of the TFC Pilot youth moved to residential care.
- TFC Pilot youth stayed, on average, for 5 months in a community placement (for example, specialized foster care) after the initial TFC placement, compared to an average of 3 weeks if they moved to a non-community placement (such as a residential or group care).

None of the TFC Pilot youth moved to a residential care immediately after the initial TFC placement.

Across the three sites, TFC Pilot youth in the Rockford site were more likely to move to specialized foster care after the initial TFC placement. Those in the Aurora site remained in the community placement for shorter periods of time (3 months) compared to youth in the Cook County site (6 months) and the Rockford site (5 months).

All Post-Initial TFC Placements

After the initial TFC placement, the TFC Pilot youth experienced relatively infrequent placement moves—on average, less than one move per 100 days in DCFS legal custody. In all placements after the initial TFC placement:

The average length of stay among all post-initial TFC placements **was about 4 months in either community placements or non-community placements.**

- 59% of the post-initial TFC placements were specialized foster care, home of parent/relative/kin, or other home-based settings.
- 25% of the post-initial TFC placements were at psychiatric hospitals.
- 10% of the post-initial TFC placements were in residential care.
- The average length of stay among all post-initial TFC placements was about 4 months in either community placements or non-community placements.

Although no major differences in post-initial TFC placement types were observed across the three sites, community placements associated with TFC Pilot youth in the Cook County site had a longer average duration (a little over 5 months) than their counterparts in the Aurora and Rockford sites (a little over 3 months).

What was the distance of the initial TFC placement, first post-initial TFC placement, and all post-initial TFC placements from youth’s home community?

To examine the extent to which TFC Pilot youth were placed near youth’s “home community” (defined as youth’s address at the time of case opening), Chapin Hall analyzed distance from youth’s home community in three ways: (1) distance from youth’s initial TFC placement; (2) distance from youth’s first post-initial TFC placement; and (3) distance from all post-initial TFC placements. Analyzing these three aspects provided a comprehensive understanding of youth’s movement.

Distance between Initial TFC Placement and Home Community

Youth's initial TFC placements were in the three pilot sites or subregions, Cook County, Aurora, and Rockford:

- Youth's initial TFC placements were, on average, 25 miles from youth's home community.
- On average, the average distance between the initial TFC placement and youth's home community was 23 miles for youth in the Cook County site, 24 miles for youth in the Rockford site, and 29 miles for youth in the Aurora site.
- Only 22% of youth's initial TFC placements were within 10 miles of youth's home community, and no placements within 10 miles were associated with youth in the Aurora site.

Distance between First Post-Initial TFC Placement and Home Community

Youth's first post-initial TFC placement was not necessarily restricted to the three pilot sites or subregions, Cook County, Aurora, and Rockford:

- Youth's first post-initial TFC placement was, on average, 30 miles from youth's home community.
- On average, youth in the Cook County site were placed closer to home (20 miles) than youth in the Aurora and Rockford sites (both 39 miles).
- Overall, 25% of youth's first post-initial TFC placements were within 10 miles of youth's home community; a greater percentage of youth in the Cook County site (39%) were placed within 10 miles of their home community, compared to youth in the Rockford site (14%) and the Aurora site (10%).
- Youth placed in a community placement immediately post-initial TFC were, on average, placed closer to their home community (24 miles) than youth in a non-community placement (34 miles); this distance difference by placement type was particularly more pronounced for youth in the Aurora and Rockford sites than for youth in the Cook County site.
- Overall, 31% and 46% of youth placed in home of parent/relative/kin placements were placed within 5 miles and 10 miles, respectively, of youth's home community.

Immediately after the initial TFC placement, **31% and 46%** of youth placed in home of parent/relative/kin placements were placed **within five miles and 10 miles**, respectively, of youth's home community.

Distance between First Post-Initial TFC Placement and Home Community

Across all youth's placements after the initial TFC placement:

- The average distance from youth's home community was 44 miles. The shortest average distance was for youth in the Cook County site (28 miles) and longest for youth in the Rockford site (60 miles).
- Overall, 27% of all post-initial TFC placements were within 10 miles of youth's home community. A greater percentage of youth in the Cook County site (38%) were placed within 10 miles of their home community, compared to youth in the Rockford site (18%) and youth in the Aurora site (16%).
- Youth whose post-initial TFC placements were community placements were, on average, closer to their home community (36 miles) than youth in a non-community placement (56 miles). This distance difference by placement type was particularly more pronounced for youth in the Rockford site than for youth in the Cook County site and the Aurora site.
- Post-initial TFC placements in residential care were, on average, furthest from youth's home community (73 miles).
- 39% and 54% of post-initial TFC placements in home of parent/relative/kin placements were within 5 miles and 10 miles, respectively, of youth's home community, compared to only 7% and 15% of post-initial TFC placements in psychiatric hospitals.

Among all post-initial TFC placements, **39% and 54%** of post-initial TFC placements in home of parent/relative/kin placements were **within five miles and 10 miles**, respectively, of youth's home community, compared to only **7% and 15%** of post-initial TFC placements in psychiatric hospitals.

Implications

After the initial TFC placement, over half of the LSSI TFC Pilot youth immediately moved to a non-community placement, mainly to a psychiatric hospital (though the majority would return to a TFC placement post-psychiatric hospitalization). For the other TFC Pilot youth who moved to a community placement, the majority moved to specialized foster care or the home of parent/relative/kin. Youth's length of stay in the first post-initial TFC placement tended to be longer in a community placement, approximately 5 months, than in a non-community placement. Most non-community placements were psychiatric hospitalizations with brief 2- to 3-week stays. Looking at all post-initial TFC placements, TFC Pilot youth experienced relatively infrequent placement moves and generally remained in a community placement, mostly specialized foster care or home of

parent/relative/kin. When the TFC Pilot youth did move to non-community placements, the placements were mainly at psychiatric hospitals. Taken together, these findings suggest that TFC youth can be maintained in less restrictive, home-based settings, though subsequent placement instability or placements in psychiatric hospitals can be expected.

TFC youth can be maintained in **less restrictive, home-based settings**, though subsequent **placement instability** or placements in psychiatric hospitals can be expected.

Distance from youth's home community of origin might be **less relevant for youth placed at the home of a parent/relative/kin** as potential permanency settings than for youth placed in non-community placements who are trying to return to their home community.

Regarding placement distance from youth's home community, TFC homes were, on average, closest to youth's home community (25 miles), followed by the first post-initial TFC placement (30 miles), and across all post-initial TFC placements more generally (44 miles). Less than 20% of TFC Pilot youth were placed within 5 miles of their home community at any point. However, youth in the Cook County site were placed consistently closer to their home community, regardless of placement type, than youth in the Aurora and Rockford sites. Across placement types, community placements, especially specialized foster care or home of parent/relative/kin, were closer to youth's home community than non-community placements, namely psychiatric hospitals or residential care. In summary, these findings suggest that the stabilization of TFC youth in

community placements is also bolstered by their closer proximity to youth's home community. The magnitude of placements being an average distance of at least 20 miles from the home community poses practical concerns about youth's ability to maintain meaningful family and social connections in their home community. At the same time, distance from youth's home community of origin might be less relevant for youth placed at the home of parent/relative/kin as potential permanency settings, than for youth placed in non-community placements and who are trying to return to their home community.

This study has several limitations. First, by defining a youth's address at their DCFS case opening as "home community," we could have overlooked a more nuanced understanding of "home community." For instance, this community might be defined by youth's social networks or by youth's most current home community. In addition, while quantifying the distance between a DCFS placement and youth's home community provides numerical benchmarks for defining near or far from home, we did not consider factors such as the difficulty or ease of transportation, population density, or home community characteristics. For instance, a 10-mile commute in Cook County could be more challenging than a 20-mile car ride in Aurora or Rockford. Further, it is possible that youth's home community lacks certain community placements such as specialized foster care homes, which could mean tradeoffs have to be made between finding the "right" placement versus a close placement. These tradeoffs might reflect resource constraints in youth's home community, as evidenced by cross-site differences in the percentages and distances of home-based settings between Cook County, Rockford, and Aurora. Finally, because this study focused on the placement types and their distance from home community solely among youth in the LSSI TFC Pilot in response to the state legislation, it did not compare findings with state trends in standard care. Thus, we cannot draw conclusions about the impact of TFC on youth's placement trajectories and distance from home compared to standard care.

Statement of Independence and Integrity

Chapin Hall adheres to the values of science, meeting the highest standards of ethics, integrity, rigor, and objectivity in its research, analyses, and reporting. Learn more about the principles that drive our work in our [Statement of Independence](#).

Chapin Hall partners with policymakers, practitioners, and philanthropists at the forefront of research and policy development by applying a unique blend of scientific research, real-world experience, and policy expertise to construct actionable information, practical tools, and, ultimately, positive change for children and families.

Established in 1985, Chapin Hall's areas of research include child welfare systems, community capacity to support children and families, and youth homelessness. For more information about Chapin Hall, visit www.chapinhall.org or @Chapin_Hall.

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