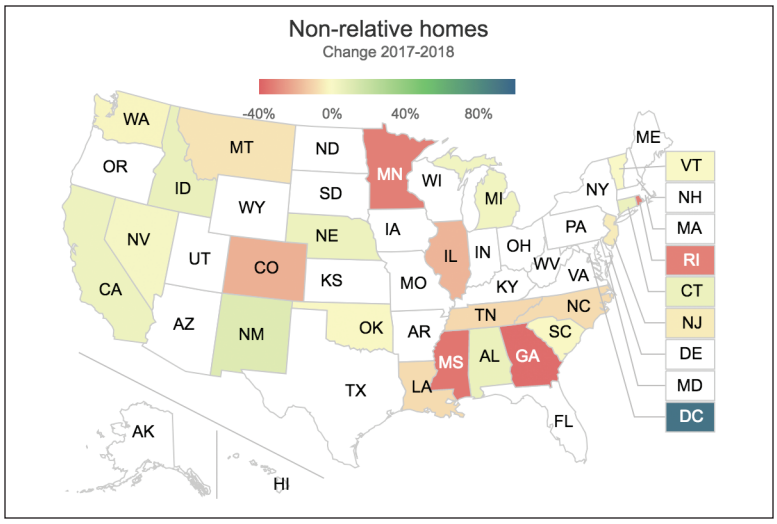
WHO CARES

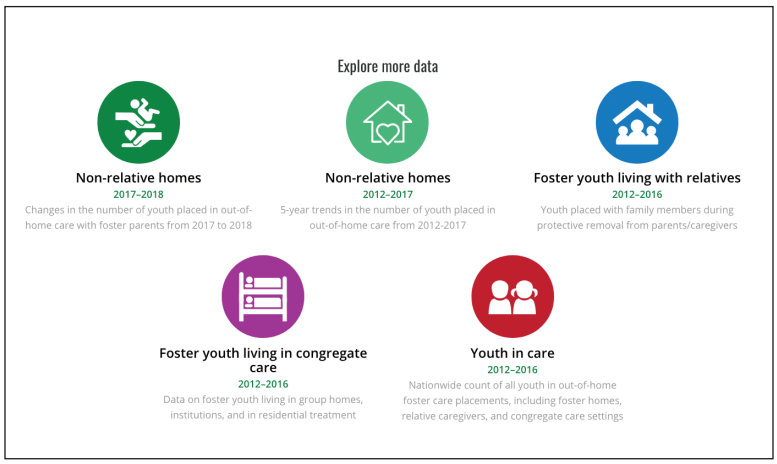
A National Count of Foster Homes and Families

The Chronicle of Social Change, a national news site focused on children, youth and families, just released an ambitious data and reporting project looking at where kids go when they're removed from home.



"Who Cares: A National Count of Foster Homes and Families" yielded significant findings about states' struggles to recruit and retain foster homes, and their increased reliance on relatives and group homes. A few highlights:

- The five-year trend upward in national foster care numbers may be declining. Using 2018 data from every state excluding Maine, The Chronicle projects a total of 439,020 youth in foster care this year, which is 1,555 more than the 2016 total calculated by the federal Children's Bureau. This year's estimate represents 3,980 fewer children than *The Chronicle's* 2017 projection of 443,000 children in care.
- At least 15 states lost foster homes between 2017 to 2018. Five of those states saw a 20 percent decline in one year alone, including Georgia (37 percent) and Minnesota (32 percent).
- The Rise of Relatives: Systems are increasingly reliant on relatives to care for foster children, but often are not compensating them to do so. Forty-four states saw an increase in relative placements from 2012 to 2016. In 23 of those states, more than half of all relative caregiver's receive no assistance.
- Persistent Reliance on Group Homes: In the face of a new federal law calling for reduced use of so-called "congregate care" facilities, 31 states have placed a higher percent of foster youth in these types of placements in 2016 than they did in 2012.



The foster care capacity of states has never been more critical. The opioid epidemic has helped to swell the number of foster youth in many states, which has challenged states to supply more placements. Meanwhile, a new federal law called the Family First Prevention Services Act will soon limit funding for group homes and incentivize states to lean more heavily on kin and foster parents.

These findings are not available through any other source. *The Chronicle* sent data requests to every state-level public child welfare agency in the nation, pored over specially-obtained federal data, and sent reporters to examine these findings in key states.

The full findings, state-by-state analyses and on-ground news stories can be found at www.fostercarecapacity.org.

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