

PROCESSES FOR LOCATING MISSING YOUTH:

If a youth is missing, our priority is their safety. There is an entire division at Illinois DCFS dedicated to assisting caseworkers in locating missing children/youth, called the **Child Intake Recovery Unit (CIRU)**. DCFS follows Procedure 329, a brief description is below:

When a child is reported to be missing, runaway, or abducted:

- We report the Youth missing to local law enforcement and file a missing person's report which includes giving the police a photograph of the child and their demographics (height, sex, ethnicity, race, weight, eye color, hair color)
- The caseworker provides as much identifying information about the youth as possible, include fingerprints if the agency has them.
- Contact National Center of Missing and Exploited Children: An organization whose mission is to help find missing children, reduce child sexual exploitation, and prevent child victimization.
- The caseworker files a report
- The child's birth parents are notified as well as the juvenile court of jurisdiction

Efforts to locate the youth continues. The caseworker speaks to past placements, friends, relatives, neighbors, teachers etc. anyone who may know the youth's whereabouts.

- We review several public records searching for the youth for possible arrests, incarcerations and medical emergencies
- We search local shelters and detention centers

When a child returns from run or is located, we offer medical exams, mental health counseling, and replace clothing or personal items the child may need. We conduct a thorough follow up interview with the youth to determine the circumstances behind the youth's disappearance and provide all supports needed to attempt to stabilize the youth in their placement to prevent further disruptions or elopements.

About Missing Youth:

A youth may go missing and return multiple times during a calendar year. The most common occurrence is when a youth at a residential facility goes back to their family. Youth may also leave for a short time and return on their own. Very few youth that go missing stay missing, and the numbers change on a daily basis.

Key Definitions:

- **Youth:** This applies to children and youth with the status of “Youth in Care,” which is bestowed by the court. This **does not** broadly include youth who has ever had involvement with DCFS or youth within the general public.
- **Missing:** A Youth in Care is considered missing from their placement, meaning they have left their foster care family, or their family member with whom they live, or from a group setting. It is not accurate to call missing youth foster kids, orphans, or similar verbiage because they are placed in a variety of settings.
- **Duration:** Youth can be missing for any length of time – it is still recorded as an instance of a youth missing even if it’s a couple of hours.

Information about the data:

- For the chart labeled “**Missing Youth and Located/Recovered Youth by Calendar Year**” each occurrence is counted as a separate instance, meaning, the numbers **do not** reflect a unique count of children who have gone missing. Rather, they reflect an **instance(s)** of a youth going missing.
- The chart labeled “**Youth that Remain Missing at the End of Each Calendar Year and Their Status**” represents the number of unique youth missing at the end of the calendar year.
 - The 2025 data represents the number of unique youth went missing and have not been recovered/located within calendar year 2025 as of 10/9/2025.
- Instances of youth missing over the span of different calendar years are rolled over until the youth has been recovered/located
- Fictitious examples are included below for illustrative purposes of how data is presented:

John: John went missing on December 24, 2023 and returned on January 2, 2024.

- John would be counted as 1 missing instance in 2023, 1 missing instance in 2024, and 1 recovered instance in 2024. Here’s how it would be reflected in the data:

	Missing	Return
2023	1	
2024	1	1

Maggie:

- Missing February 3, 2022; Returned March 4, 2022;
- Missing September 15, 2022; Returned September 16, 2022;
- Missing August 4, 2024; Returned on September 8, 2024;

- Missing December 4, 2024; Returned on January 14, 2025.

	Missing	Return
2022	2	2
2023		
2024	2	1
2025	1	1

Missing Youth and Located/Recovered Youth by Calendar Year (Instances):

CY	Instances of Youth Missing	Instances of Youth Located/Recovered
2019	5,503	5,277
2020	5,864	5,607
2021	5,095	4,797
2022	5,272	4,995
2023	4,768	4,540
2024	4,187	4,007
2025 (through 10/9/25)	3,146	2,945

Youth that Remain Missing at the End of Each Calendar Year and Their Status (unique youth):

The data below represents the number of youth who remain missing as of the end of each calendar year by category. If a youth remains missing over the span of multiple years, they will show as missing at the end of every year they ended in missing status.

Key**ABD** – Abducted (e.g., taken by a non-custodial parent)**WCC** – Whereabouts Unknown, Continuing Contact (child/youth has contacted their caseworker but will not disclose their location)**WUK** – Whereabouts Unknown (child/youth has not contacted their caseworker and their whereabouts are unknown)

CY	ABD	WCC	WUK
2019	4	22	200
2020	9	23	225
2021	14	23	261
2022	20	36	221
2023	7	23	198
2024	11	22	147
2025 (through 10/9/25)	8	26	167

Duration of Absence:

Duration of Absence (for Instances of Recovered Youth)			
CY	<30 Days	30–90 Days	90+ Days
2019	4,712	352	213
2020	4,957	425	225
2021	4,225	341	232
2022	4,371	374	250
2023	3,986	322	232
2024	3,509	291	207
2025 (through 10/9/25)	2,625	191	129