

moving **forward**

A Post-Pandemic Blueprint for
New York's Foster Youth

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table of **contents**

Executive
Summary

Study
Background

About
FYSA

Policy Brief



Housing

Policy Brief



Education

Policy Brief



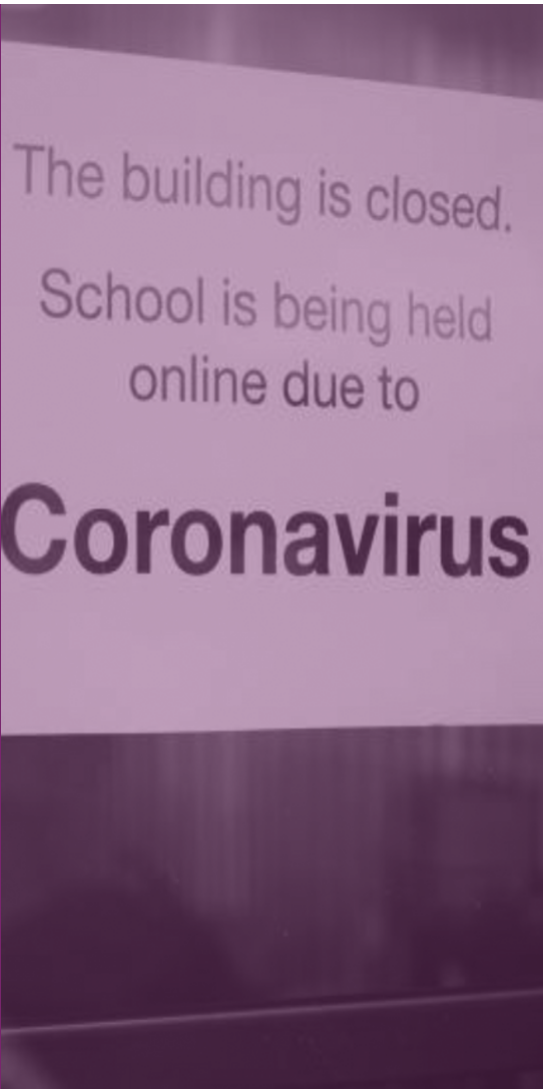
Health Care

executive **summary**

introduction

Youth in foster care understand the consequences of life interruptions. Long before the COVID-19 outbreak, foster youth across New York struggled to regain lost ground in the aftermath of traumatic experiences. Young people with a foster care background often do not have a family to turn to during turbulent times. Instead, they are left to navigate chaotic situations for the most part on their own.

introduction



In 2020, a mysterious, deadly virus ushered in a worldwide wave of distressing uncertainty and unpredictable challenges, especially for vulnerable populations.

For some youth in foster care, the pandemic lockdown cut them off from essential, stabilizing services. School closures forced students online, and in some cases, took away their place to live. It became harder for them to reach their caseworkers, academic advisors, and therapists. Some lost jobs and were unsure if they qualified for unemployment benefits or stimulus checks.

As a result of an unprecedented public health emergency, bills piled up, anxiety levels spiked, and young people across the state put their dreams on hold.



introduction

Our goal is to improve their stability and expand support to ensure every young person from foster care is ready to move forward in a positive direction.

Without intervention and additional resources, the instability and disconnection magnified during the pandemic will persist and prevent growth and achievement for New York's foster youth. Many were already grappling with a host of precarious issues such as:

- **falling behind or abandoning their education**
- **unmet medical and behavioral health needs**
- **unstable and substandard living situations**
- **food insecurity**
- **under-employment and low-wage jobs and,**
- **the emotional and physical repercussions of enduring chronic stress.**

As the country begins to recover and reopen, the **Fostering Youth Success Alliance (FYSA)** presents this report as a blueprint for how New York can respond to the post-pandemic needs of young people in care.

report **organization**

The report summarizes key findings from a January 2021 survey, which examined the impact of COVID-19 on older foster youth (ages 18-26) across New York State. Although FYSA and its partners disseminated the survey statewide, most responses (87%) came from youth affiliated with child welfare agencies located in NYC and downstate regions, where most youth in foster care reside.



Click to read more about the STUDY BACKGROUND

report **organization**

FYSA Policy Briefs



This post-pandemic blueprint focuses squarely on three priority areas requiring greater attention and investment – Housing, Education, and Health Care.

The report features three policy briefs that detail significant pre-and-post pandemic issues to overcome, as well as priorities and recommended actions.

Finally, the report provides a snapshot of the authentic voices and concerns of some of the state's older youth from foster care. The survey asked young people to share their experiences, reflect on their overall wellbeing, and describe their support systems. Their comments reveal the fragility of their circumstances and their remarkable resiliency as young people growing up without a traditional family safety net.

key findings

housing

Older youth require stable, year-round housing before they leave foster care.

Housing topped the list of priority concerns.

Nearly

25%

of the survey respondents were facing or fearing housing instability.

priorities and **recommendations**

housing

Improve and increase direct assistance to help former foster youth secure and maintain supportive housing in New York City.

Expand access to housing subsidies for all NYS youth with a foster care background.



Click to read the HOUSING Policy Brief for detailed findings and recommendations

key findings

education

During the pandemic, health and safety concerns led to an abrupt shift to distance learning for K-12 and college students across the state. Despite these challenges, many youth from foster care continued to persevere and persist with their education.

77% of the youth respondents previously enrolled in school continued their studies during the pandemic.

22% completely paused their studies due to school closures or for other reasons.

63% of the students that stayed in school experienced a remote learning environment. Students living alone were twice as likely to report issues related to a lack of equipment (i.e., laptops/computers) or WiFi access than their peers living in foster homes.

priorities and **recommendations**

education



K-12 Education

Ensure educational attainment and stability for students from foster care of all ages.

Resolve digital divide and other remote learning issues for K-12 students in foster care.

Develop strategies to reverse pre-and post-pandemic learning loss for K-12 students in foster care.

Promote and replicate effective college readiness models for youth in foster care.

Commit to timely data sharing to help child welfare education specialists prepare K-12 foster youth for college.

Collaborate with Family Court judges and legal advocates to make educational attainment a priority focus for youth in foster care.

priorities and **recommendations**

education

College and Postsecondary Programs

Remove barriers to higher education success for youth in care.

Improve student identification to give youth from foster care every opportunity to benefit from programs and resources that support their educational goals.

Designate and support Foster Youth Campus Liaisons to promote accountability, support matriculation, and improve educational outcomes for college students from foster care.

Prepare for potential school disruptions by making distance learning easier for students from foster care.

Track academic outcomes for students enrolled in the **Foster Youth College Success Initiative (FYCSI)**.



Click to read the EDUCATION Policy Brief for detailed findings and recommendations

key findings

health care

As COVID-19 cases overloaded New York's health care systems, most survey respondents weathered the storm. However, some youth from foster care reported unmet medical and behavioral health needs, access issues, and a lack of clarity about their insurance status.

Nearly

66%

of respondents suffered from heightened anxiety.

64%

of the respondents who reported unmet medical or mental health needs are living independently.

priorities and **recommendations**

health care

Create educational materials to provide information regarding health insurance coverage to current and transition-age foster youth.

Increase transitional supports to help older youth leaving foster care better manage their health care on their own.

Extend eligibility for the Medicaid Health Homes program to include current and former foster youth up to age 26.

Advocate for Medicaid reimbursement rate increases to maintain and expand telehealth services.

Change the Medicaid Threshold Rule to make it easier for providers to deliver comprehensive and convenient care to patients.

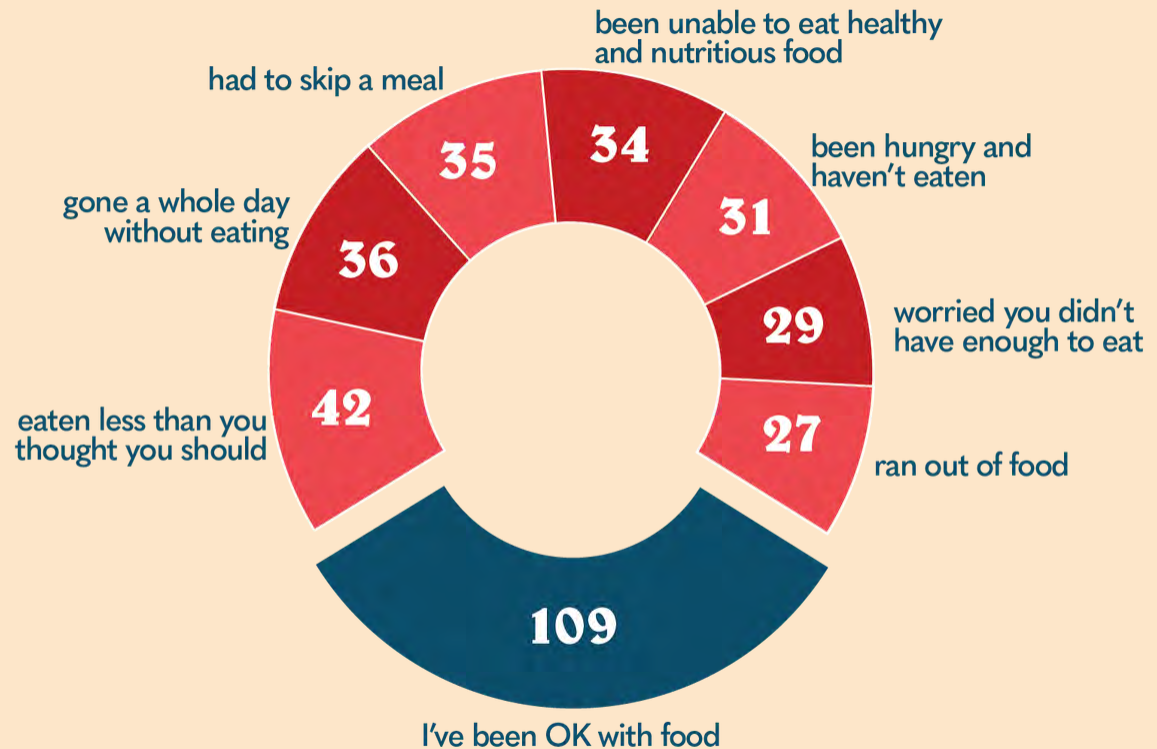


**Click to read the HEALTH CARE Policy Brief
for detailed findings and recommendations**

other concerns

82 survey respondents reported some level of food insecurity as a result of the COVID-19 health crisis.

During the last month was there a time when you have...? (select all that apply)

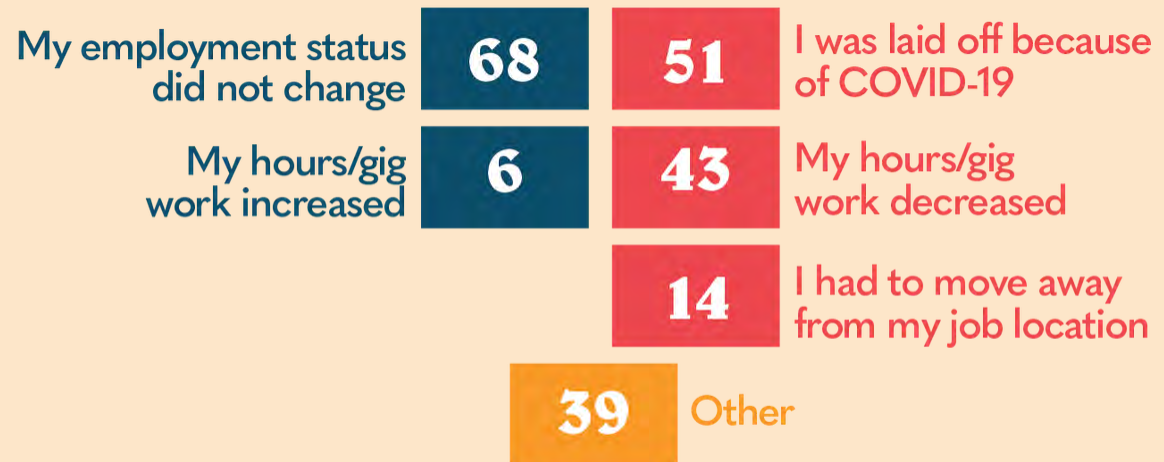


n=191 (Multiple responses allowed)

other concerns

Like many Americans, the pandemic had a negative effect on the employment status of 93 survey respondents.

How has COVID-19 impacted your employment? (select all that apply)



n=163 (Multiple responses allowed)

other **concerns**

A blue-tinted image of an 'Unemployment Benefits Application Form' with a pen resting on it. The form includes sections for 'Personal Information' (Given Name, Middle, City, State, Postcode, Phone, Other Telephone, Mobile Telephone) and 'Employer' (Duration (yrs), Contact, Employer).

79 survey respondents applied for government economic stimulus checks and 63 applied for unemployment benefits.

A lack of clarity about eligibility and application requirements was the most common reason for why youth did not receive a stimulus payment.

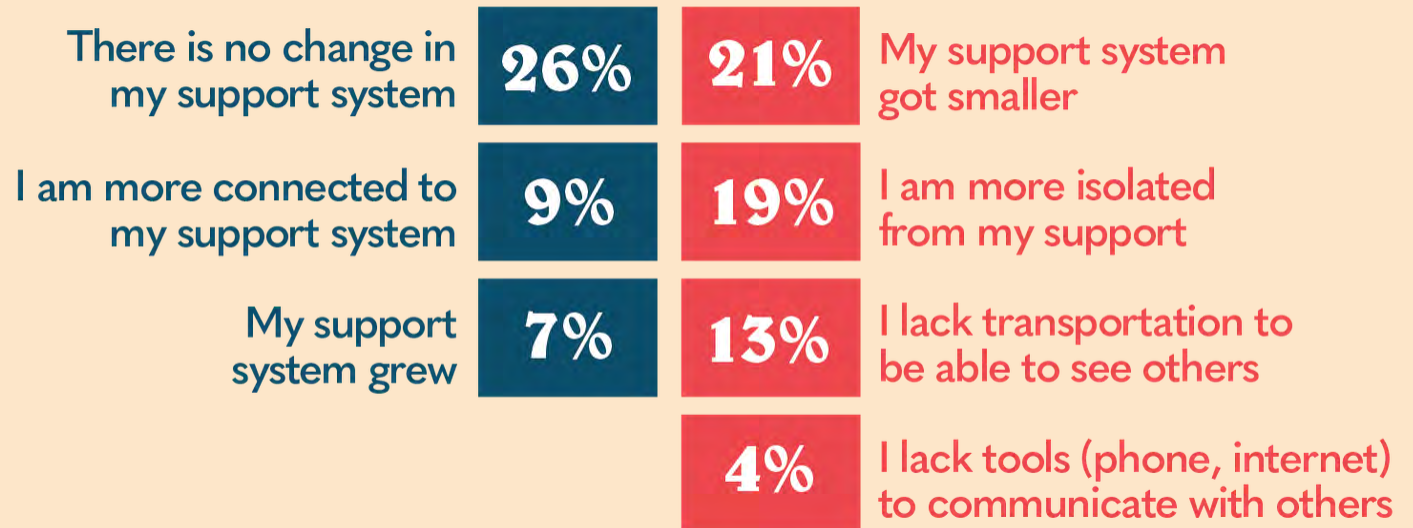
***“I don’t understand why I never received anything.
I need a stimulus, but nobody is helping me.
Please help.”***

youth **support** systems

The survey asked foster youth to share reflections about how COVID-19 affected their ability to cope with daily life and navigate difficult situations during the pandemic.

Housing displacement and the shift from in-person to virtual interactions left some youth feeling more vulnerable and disconnected from their usual support systems.

How has COVID-19 affected your support system?



youth **support** systems

What is
your
support
situation?

*“If I fail in school,
I can end up in a
homeless shelter.”*

*“Some of my friends have
gone upstate to stay with
their parents so I have been
feeling a bit alone.”*

*“I have no friends,
no family, I’m alone.”*

*“Nobody is around
to help me.”*

youth **support** systems

What type of support has made a positive difference for you during COVID-19 over the past 10 months?

“My neighbor supported me and taught me to save money.”

“My friend letting me stay with her family.”

“[Through] ETV, I was able to connect with a long distance coach who has been extremely helpful. She is aiding in connecting me with NYC providers for my health and educational concerns.”

“Mental health supports made a huge difference for me.”

youth **support** systems

What type of support would make a positive difference for you over the next six months?

“A support system to guide me and prepare me to be able to get my own place.”

“Just having someone to consistently talk to.”

“Reassurance of my living situation and a backup plan.”

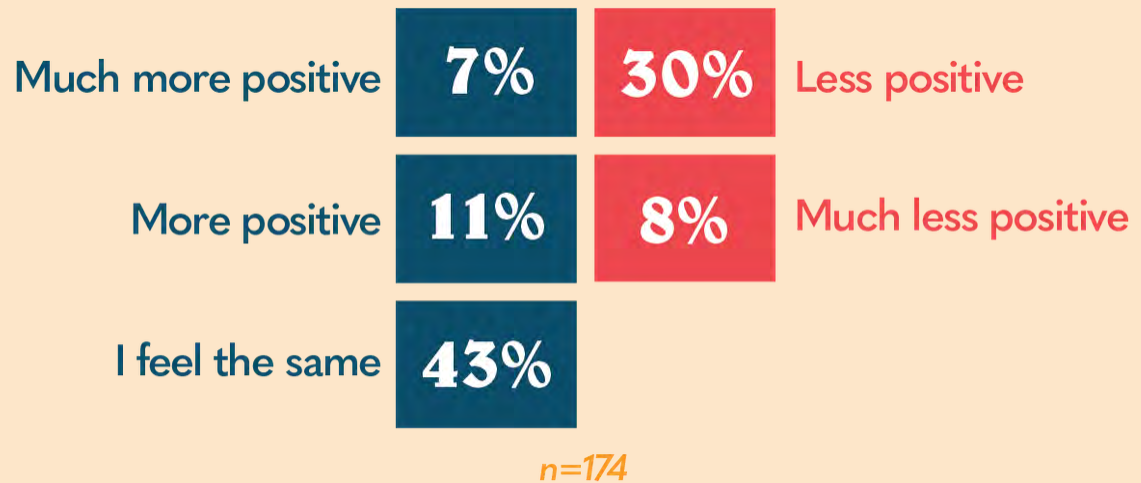
“Get information on different resources available for me.”

“Support from career counselors to find a new job so I can get more income to support myself during these chaotic times.”

moving **forward**

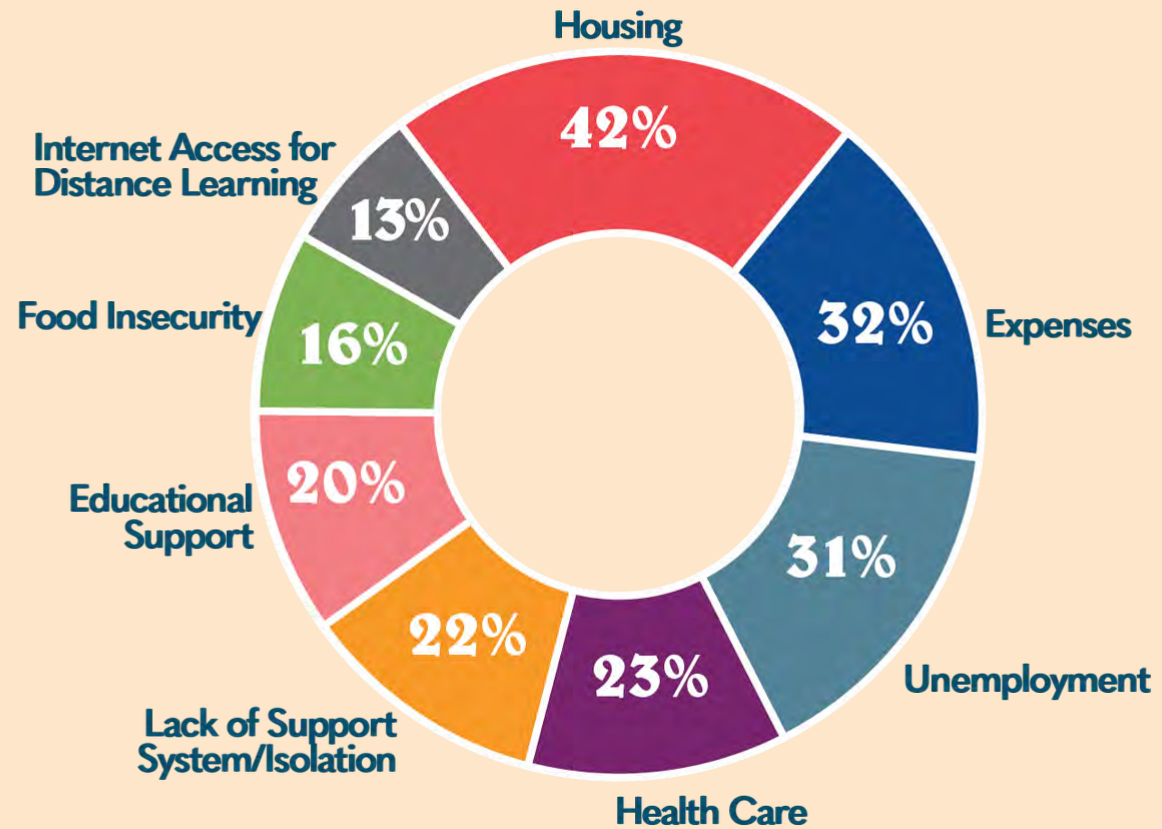
In terms of positivity about the future, 38% of respondents reported feeling less or much less positive about their futures.

Compared to before COVID-19, do you feel more or less positive about your future?



moving **forward**

What are your
biggest concerns
for the next
six months?



N = 174

conclusion

Findings from the COVID-19 impact study reinforce FYSA's call for community leaders and legislators to address the urgent and chronic needs of thousands of young people striving for future success.

study background

study **background**



In November 2020, the **Fostering Youth Success Alliance (FYSA)** engaged the Children's Aid Office of Performance Management (OPM) to replicate a **national survey** conducted by **FosterClub** during the initial phase (March 2020) of the COVID-19 pandemic in America. The purpose was to measure the subsequent impact of the public health crisis on New York's youth from foster care.

FYSA partnered with Children's Aid, the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy , and the Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies to develop participant outreach strategies, survey content, and response time frames. In exchange for completing the survey, FYSA gave qualified youth a \$25 gift card.

study **background**

Method

Survey Design

OPM analysts created and tested the online instrument in SurveyMonkey. The survey featured a mix of multiple-choice and open-ended questions. It was largely structured to be similar to the original FosterClub survey. Modifications included:

- **Revisions to the response options for select questions;**
- **New questions related to New York-specific educational funding; and,**
- **Inquiries related to what was helpful to youth during the pandemic, what would be helpful for them going forward, and identifying their top concerns for the immediate future (next six months).**

study **background**

Method

Survey Distribution

In December 2020, FYSA emailed a study recruitment message along with the secure survey link to regional and statewide service providers and child welfare advocates. The goal was to capture a representative response from New York youth with prior foster care experiences.

In turn, FYSA encouraged each distribution partner to share the survey link directly with their system-involved youth clients and their network of stakeholders, advocates, attorneys, social workers, and college support program coordinators. Due to the link distribution method described above, it is not possible to confirm the actual number of survey recipients, and therefore the response rate is unknown.

study **background**

Method

Survey Responses

FYSA began receiving responses during the second week of January 2021. The survey closed on February 1, 2021. After cleaning the data, OPM analysts from Children's Aid verified there were **209 valid survey respondents** in the sample.

Note that survey participants were able to select multiple responses for some questions. Virtually all results are considered statistically significant.

study **background**

Respondent Profile and Demographics

This section describes the composition of the respondent pool, including information about their foster care experiences.

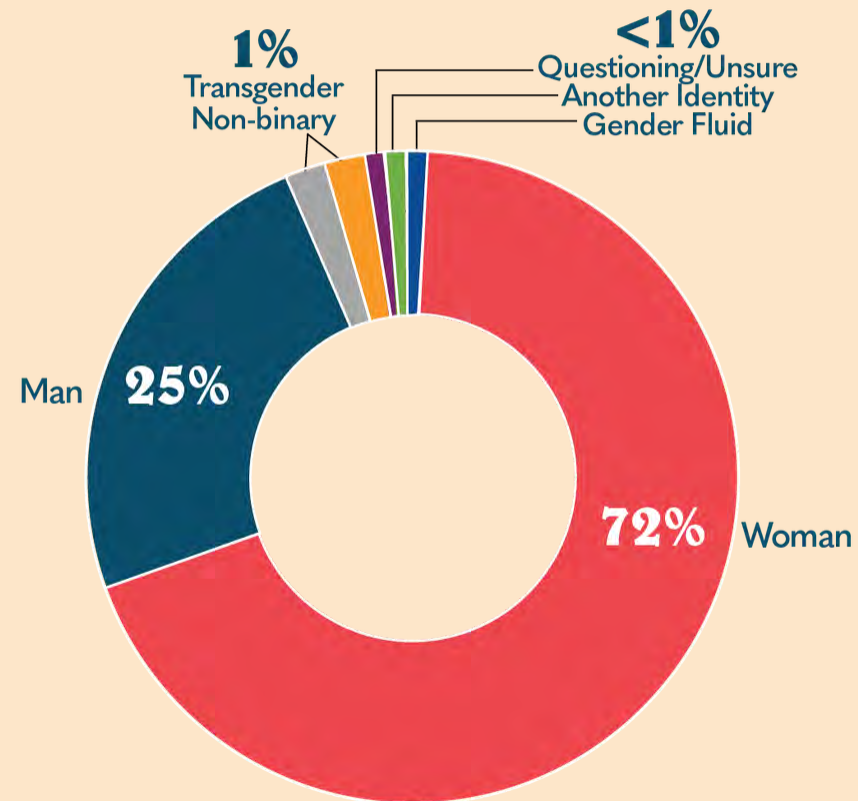
AGE

The study specifically targeted young people in NYS with a foster care background from **age 18 to 26**. All participants were required to answer a qualifying question to confirm their eligibility before accessing the survey.

study **background**

Respondent Profile and Demographics

GENDER IDENTITY

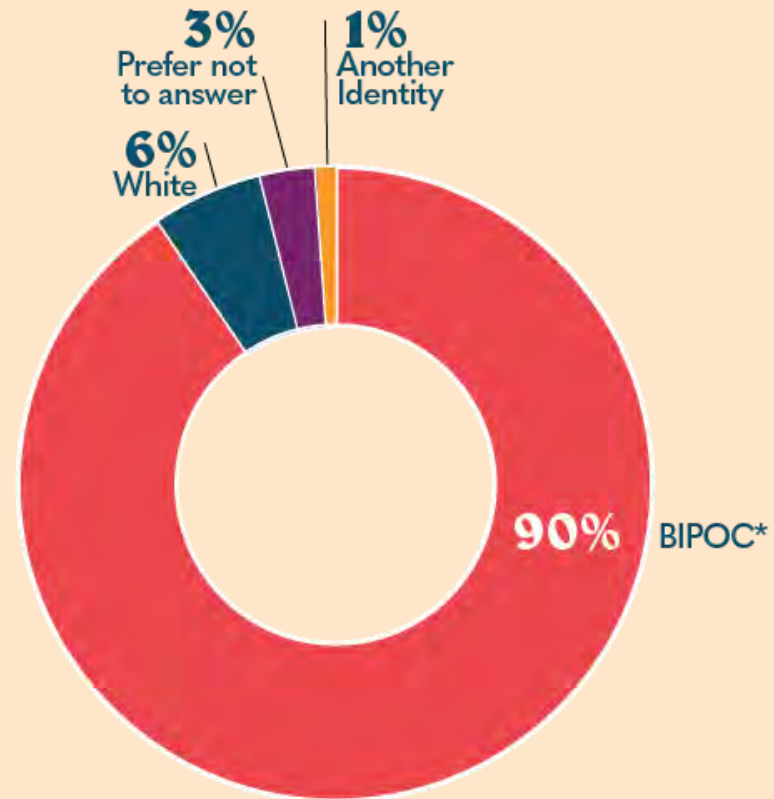


study background

Respondent Profile and Demographics

RACE/ETHNICITY

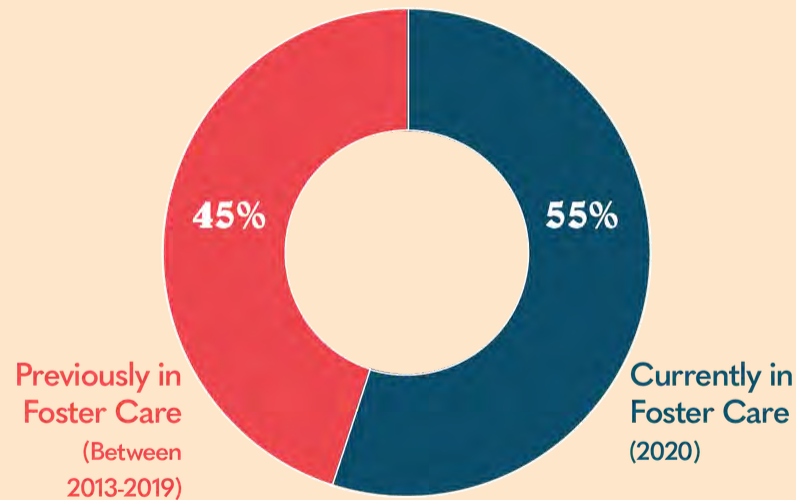
Note that some of the survey's 209 total participants selected multiple responses to this question or skipped it entirely.



***BIPOC designation includes:**
African American, Black/ Black American, Caribbean, Latinx/Latino/Latina/Hispanic American, Asian Americans, Middle Eastern, Native American/American Indian/Indigenous

Respondent Profile and Demographics

FOSTER CARE EXPERIENCE



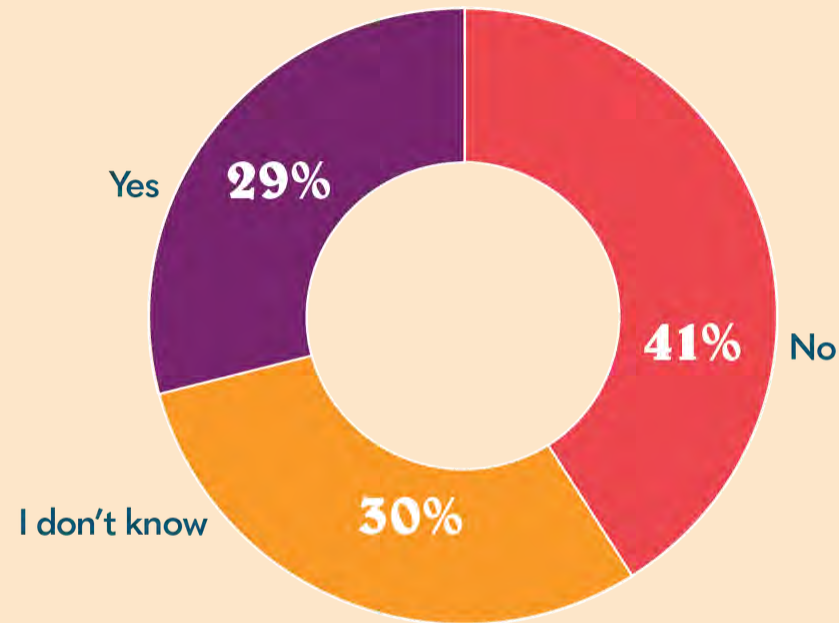
79% of respondents were in foster care for less than eight years. The average time in foster care was slightly over six years.

study **background**

Respondent Profile and Demographics

FOSTER CARE EXPERIENCE

Will you be transitioning out from or aging out of foster care within the next 5 months?



study **background**

Findings

The study looked at the pandemic's impact on the following areas:

- **Housing Stability**
- **Health Care**
- **Education** (*K-12 and Postsecondary*)
- **Financial Status**
(*Employment, Stimulus Payments, and Unemployment Benefits*)
- **Food Security**

Youth from foster care also were asked to describe how COVID-19 affected their mindsets (attitudes and anxiety levels) and their support systems. In addition, survey participants ranked their top concerns for the next six months.

study **background**

Context and Limitations

This impact study offers an informative snapshot of NYS foster youth experiences during the pandemic. However, some of the more “positive” responses may reflect the limitations of reaching the target population for this type of research.

Although it is not definitively known, it appears that survey respondents were more likely to be young people with connections to child welfare professionals. This assumption is based on the survey distribution strategies reported by FYSA’s partners. As such, these findings may be less likely to convey the full scope of challenges faced by disconnected youth during the COVID-19 shutdown.

about **FYSA**

mission **statement**

The Fostering Youth Success Alliance is a statewide advocacy group that promotes responsive policies and programs that offer young people with a foster care background every opportunity to set higher expectations and achieve their goals. We are dedicated to data-driven systems reform, raising public awareness, and securing stabilizing supports that empower youth across New York to overcome barriers and excel in life.

information

FOSTERING YOUTH SUCCESS ALLIANCE

Improving policy. Uplifting lives.

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policy brief **housing**



introduction

Older youth require stable, year-round housing before they leave foster care.

New York must expand access to reliable, affordable housing to protect young adults after they exit the state's foster care system. Many of these young people will be living independently for the first time, and often can't depend on family support to withstand emergencies, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nationally, 1 in 5 youth who age out of foster care will become homeless. Housing disruptions are especially precarious for former foster youth living in New York City, where rents are higher and safe living spaces are harder to find.



COVID-19 impact on **housing stability**



What does it mean to be “homebound” when you don’t have a home?

As public health officials urged all New Yorkers to stay home to stop the spread of the coronavirus, nearly

25%

of the survey respondents were facing or fearing housing instability.

Of the foster youth identified as being most at risk for housing loss,

71%

are living in college dorms or in their own residences.



COVID-19 impact on **housing stability**



Who Was Most Affected?

BIPOC* | NYC | Former Foster Youth Living Independently

Housing topped the list of priority concerns for

41% of survey respondents.

*Black, Indigenous, and People of Color



foster youth and **housing stability**



The threat of housing disruption was

10% higher for young people that are no longer in foster care than for current foster youth.

Even before COVID-19 surfaced in New York, housing was frequently cited as the number one concern of older youth preparing to transition from foster care. The pandemic simply amplified the urgent need for greater investment in a diversified portfolio of quality, affordable housing options for these young adults, many of whom have never known the comfort and security of a safe, dependable place to call home.



foster youth and **housing stability**



Sudden housing disruptions (such as college dorm closures that occurred during the pandemic) elevate the risk of homelessness for displaced youth.

As often happens when they don't have family to fall back on, some students are forced to resort to “couch-surfing” with friends, while others end up in emergency shelters, or living on the streets as they search for better options.



foster youth and **housing stability**



A temporary housing crisis can have a lasting negative impact on youth from foster care in several ways. For example, college-enrolled students may struggle to stay in school if they have to devote most of their time and attention toward resolving unstable living situations.

As a consequence, students from foster care sometimes suffer significant educational and financial setbacks by pausing their studies, delaying their return to school, or dropping out entirely. These life disruptions are incredibly stressful for young adults and can limit future employment opportunities and earning potential for years to come.



COVID-19 impact on **housing stability**

What is
your
living
situation?

*“I'm staying with
a friend. Basically
homeless.”*

*“I live in a foster home
and I'm currently
struggling to get
supportive housing.”*

*“I was in college,
until I couldn't stay
on campus anymore.”*

*“Currently, I'm living
from couch to couch.”*



COVID-19 impact on **housing stability**

What is
your
living
situation?

*“I might have to
move out because
I’m currently
pregnant.”*

*“I was relocated due to
the COVID-19 outbreak.
I currently reside with
relatives temporarily.”*

*“I’m in a shelter in
Manhattan. I was
kicked out by my mom
in North Carolina.”*

*“I live in NYCHA.
My crib is horrible.
However, I have a
roof over my head.”*



priorities and **recommendations**



priorities and **recommendations**

housing

Improve and increase direct assistance to help former foster youth maintain and secure varied housing options in New York City.

Work with the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) to eliminate access barriers, minimize wait times, and improve communication to applicants from foster care to avoid unnecessary discharges.

Form a Youth in Care Housing Work Group to encourage collaborative problem-solving on behalf of young people with a foster care background.

Develop and distribute a youth-friendly housing guide that would combine information from several agencies from across the state, including a directory of all brokers and landlords that accept Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers and other available rental subsidies.



priorities and **recommendations**

housing

Expand access to housing subsidies for all NYS youth with a foster care background.

Grant a priority designation for Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers.

Support Int. 148 Local Law which will give youth with a foster care background priority access to CityFHEPS, a rental assistance voucher administered by the NYC Department of Social Services (DSS).

Connect youth from foster care to the *Foster Youth to Independence (FYI)* program (federal support available from Housing and Urban Development/HUD). Seek more federal funding to expand FYI housing vouchers in New York.

Expand federal Rapid Rehousing programs that include supportive services for youth in care across the state.



priorities and **recommendations**

housing

Expand access to housing subsidies for all NYS youth with a foster care background (*continued*).

Explore opportunities for statewide replication of effective supportive housing models for college students from foster care, such as the *CUNY Dorm Project*.

Advocate for priority (automatic) Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers for *CUNY Dorm Project* students to ensure they have stable housing once they graduate college, or leave the program for other reasons.

Support the passing of A.2476 and S.5419, which would increase the NYS housing subsidy from \$300 to \$600 per month for older youth in care and eligible foster families.



additional **resources**

housing

- **Housing Resources for NY Youth Aging Out of Foster Care**
- **Supportive Housing Network of New York**
- **City Living NY**
- **CUNY/ACS Fostering College Success Initiative/Dorm Project**
- **The Bridge - Residential Services**
- **Center for Urban Community Services (CUCS)**



policy brief **education**



introduction

During the pandemic, health and safety concerns led to an abrupt shift to distance learning for K-12 and college students across the state. Despite these challenges, many youth from foster care continued to persevere and persist with their education.

Educators focused on minimizing learning loss for students amid the uncertainty and constraints of a global health crisis. Unfortunately, students with a foster care background were already working from a deficit position.

For many years, child welfare advocates have called for increased support to address the well-documented educational achievement gap within this population. Poor academic performance, alarming dropout rates, and low postsecondary enrollment are tell-tale signs of young people struggling in the aftermath of family instability and trauma.



COVID 19 impact on **education**



What happens when learning moves from the classroom to a computer screen?

Although remote learning was highly disruptive for some students,

84% of survey respondents said they had the tools they needed to do their school work online.

Students living alone were twice as likely to report issues related to a lack of equipment (i.e., laptops/computers) or WiFi access than their peers living in foster homes.



COVID 19 impact on **education**



How was your education affected by remote access? (Select all that apply)

I have the internet/
wifi access I need

48%

7%

I do not have the
internet/wifi access I need

I have a laptop/computer
to do school work

36%

10%

I do not have a laptop/
computer to do school work



COVID 19 impact on **education**



Who Was Most Affected?

BIPOC* | NYC | Former Foster Youth Living Independently

20% of survey respondents ranked educational support as their biggest concern for the next six months.

Before the pandemic, 49% of survey respondents were in post-secondary education, and 22% were in high school.

77% of foster youth previously enrolled in school continued their studies during the pandemic.

*Black, Indigenous, and People of Color



COVID 19 impact on **education**



How did Covid-19 impact your education?

I continued school online
or partially online/in-person

63%

5%

I stopped attending because
school was cancelled

I continued school
with no change

14%

17%

I stopped attending
for other reasons

N = 194



COVID 19 impact on **education**



While many students from foster care showed remarkable resilience during the lockdown, under-educated youth will continue to face a rocky road after COVID-19 subsides.

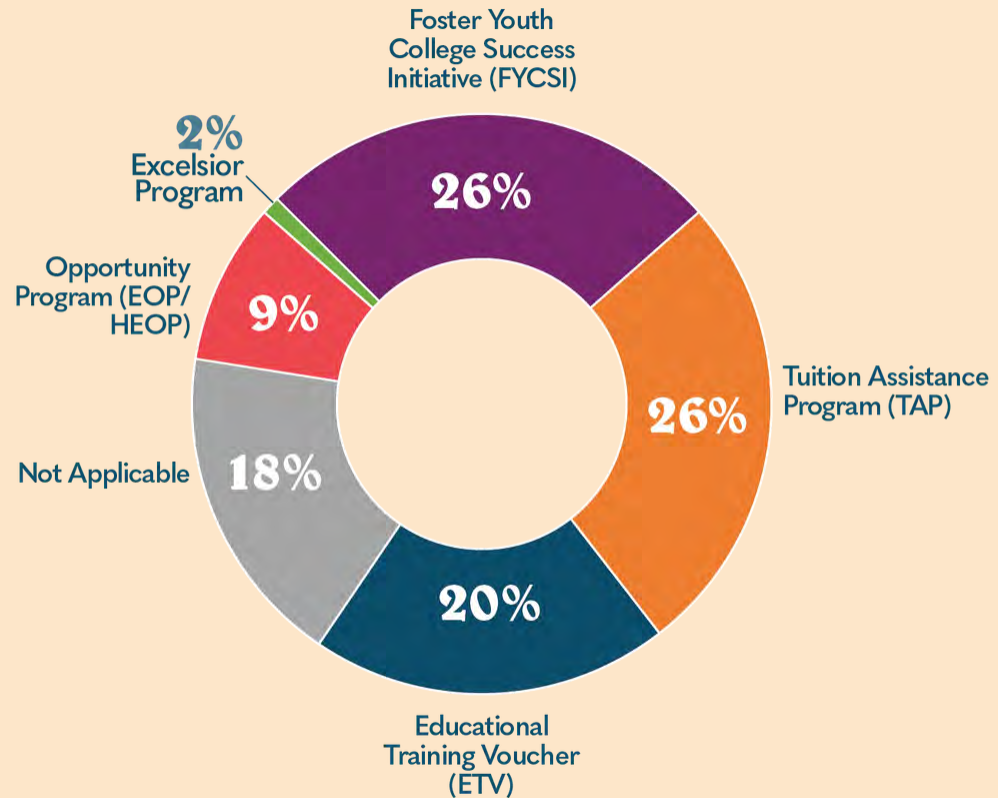
Without intervention, there will be long-term consequences if foster youth fail to receive a quality education that allows them to compete for jobs and succeed as independent young adults.



COVID 19 impact on **education**

Of the 89 college students who took the survey, 83% were actively participating in an academic support program during the pandemic.

Respondents Enrolled in College Support Programs During the Pandemic:



COVID 19 impact on **education**

How did
COVID-19
affect
your
education?

“I was unable to finish school.”

“I lost TAP and PELL due to my loss of financial aid because doing online classes through COVID was a huge struggle.”

“I need support with my tuition fees. I'm not eligible to apply for grants because I'm not yet documented.”

“I desperately needed in-person math tutoring last semester.”



COVID 19 impact on **education**

How did
COVID-19
affect
your
education?

“This last semester was a complete fluke. I had to withdraw medically for my mental health because this semester just made me so sad.”

“There are issues accessing and getting financial support in a timely manner due to COVID and being a Foster Youth. I wish it was easier.”

“For college, online learning was not effective for me. I need face to face.”



priorities and **recommendations**



priorities and **recommendations**

K-12 Education

Ensure educational attainment and stability for students from foster care of all ages.

Give students the access and ability to receive a high-quality education under all circumstances, in the least restrictive environments, and with necessary support.

Offer trauma-informed training and education advocacy guidance to help faculty, administrators, guidance counselors, and other school staff better understand and serve youth from foster care.

Prepare all children for higher education, including providing information that helps them maximize their academic and economic potential. Share available post-secondary options, such as college, trade schools, and career training programs.

Encourage K-12 educators and administrators to understand the stigma often associated with being in foster care and how this may hinder self-identification by youth attending their schools.



priorities and **recommendations**

K-12 Education

Resolve digital divide and other remote learning issues for K-12 students in foster care.

Ensure policymakers understand that students in foster care lacked equipment, WiFi access, and data plans long before the pandemic shifted schools to online learning. Other factors, such as household structure/stability, can limit access to the tools, support, and environments students need to focus and succeed academically.

Minimize tech-related learning disruptions by giving every student in care their own data-enabled device. This low-cost solution is preferable for students versus loaned equipment because youth in care sometimes lose equipment and internet access when they move to different homes or schools.



priorities and **recommendations**

K-12 Education

Resolve digital divide and other remote learning issues (*continued*).

Expedite the distribution of technology/devices to NYC students by giving process oversight to the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) instead of the Department of Education (DOE). ACS knows which K-12 students are in foster care and their locations. Process oversight for youth in care upstate should be handled by the County Division of Social Services in collaboration with each county's Department of Education.

Support online learning by increasing technical support (i.e., IT hotline, video tutorials) for older foster youth and foster parents caring for younger students.



priorities and **recommendations**

K-12 Education

Develop strategies to reverse pre-and post-pandemic learning loss for K-12 students in foster care.

Strengthen relationships between child welfare agencies and statewide Departments of Education to prepare students for the return to in-person education.

Continue to monitor school bus capacity and close transportation gaps to help students in foster care stay at their schools of origin.

Train and deploy peer advisors to offer middle and high school students in foster care emotional support, admissions assistance, and more exposure to college and career options.



priorities and **recommendations**

K-12 Education

Promote and replicate effective college readiness models for youth in foster care.

Share information about the statewide *Foster Youth College Success Initiative* (FYCSI), Educational Opportunity Programs, and other college prep resources with middle and high school educators, administrators, guidance counselors, and students. Host workshops to review program eligibility, application processes, and deadlines.

Promote the [Making College Success a Reality for New York's Youth in Care Resource Guide](#) and webinar series to high school guidance counselors and academic advisors working with graduating seniors to navigate college enrollment and financial aid.

Expand effective college prep programs (such as summer boot camp orientations) designed to support students from foster care as they make the transition from high school to college.



priorities and **recommendations**

K-12 Education

Commit to timely data sharing to help child welfare education specialists prepare K-12 foster youth for college.

Work with government partners to open access to academic data for tracking student progress and tailoring support for youth in foster care.

Collaborate with Family Court judges and legal advocates to make educational attainment a priority focus for youth in foster care.

Identify information gaps, intervention strategies, and oversight opportunities to improve monitoring of education milestones beyond student attendance.



priorities and **recommendations**

College and Postsecondary Programs

Remove barriers to higher education success for youth in care.

Increase enrollment and support persistence to ensure young people from foster care earn their degrees (or vocational/trade certifications).

Treat students from foster care with dignity and respect.

Empower the student voice and agency in policymaking and implementation plans.

Share information about available resources directly with students.

Continue to advocate for the sustainability and expansion of the statewide *Foster Youth College Success Initiative* to keep pace with growth and the provision of new student cohorts.



priorities and **recommendations**

College and Postsecondary Programs

Improve student identification to give youth from foster care every opportunity to benefit from programs and resources that support their educational goals.

Streamline the youth consent process to make it easier for students to self-identify, such as offering a secure online form.

Explore how to address student name changes (i.e., for orphans) on consent forms and financial aid applications.

Improve student identification for the statewide *Foster Youth College Success Initiative* to give youth from foster care every opportunity to benefit from programs and resources that support their educational goals.



priorities and **recommendations**

College and Postsecondary Programs

Designate and support Foster Youth Campus Liaisons to promote accountability, support matriculation, and improve educational outcomes for college students from foster care.

Coordinate services (similar to a concierge) to ensure students with a foster care background receive helpful assistance from each department they encounter on campus.

Establish a “team” of campus liaisons rather than assigning one person to identify students from foster care and provide ongoing support throughout the academic year.

Encourage liaisons to share information about the statewide *Foster Youth College Success Initiative* and other academic support programs. Issue reminders to students about application and program deadlines.



priorities and **recommendations**

College and Postsecondary Programs

Designate and support Foster Youth Campus Liaisons *(continued)*.

Share student identification strategies with campus liaisons and provide lists of eligible foster youth on campus.

Create sample job descriptions, outreach activity checklists, and other tools to help liaisons support students from foster care.

Convene a virtual meeting of current campus liaisons from public and private colleges to collect and document best practices and lessons learned.

Determine how to support students from foster care at schools that currently do not have campus liaisons.



priorities and **recommendations**

College and Postsecondary Programs

Prepare for potential school disruptions by making distance learning easier for students from foster care.

Secure and distribute necessary equipment and supplies (i.e., computers/laptops, WiFi hotspots, printers, ink) to help students continue their studies online.

Offer online tutoring, advising, and wellness checks to college students living away from campus due to unexpected shutdowns.

Collaborate with youth advocates, case planners, and education specialists at child welfare agencies to identify future remote learning needs for students.

Replicate and expand peer-to-peer learning support models, including online tutoring, virtual study groups, student help forums, and group chat sessions.



priorities and **recommendations**

College and Postsecondary Programs

Track academic outcomes for students enrolled in the statewide *Foster Youth College Success Initiative (FYCSI)*.

Develop a plan for collecting and analyzing data related to college enrollment, persistence, and graduation rates since the program's inception.

Share examples of student success, including how FYCSI made a positive difference for students during the COVID-19 pandemic.



additional **resources**

Education



- **RESOURCE GUIDE: Making College Success a Reality for New York's Youth in Care**
- **WEBINAR: Foster Youth College Success Initiative**
- **Foster Youth College Success Initiative FAQs**
- **WEBINAR: Distance Learning Policy Recommendations**
- **Distance Learning Tip Sheet for Advocates**



policy brief **health care**



introduction

As COVID-19 cases overloaded New York's health care systems, most survey respondents weathered the storm. However, some youth from foster care reported unmet medical and behavioral health needs, access issues, and a lack of clarity about their insurance status.

Gaps in health care can intensify pre-existing conditions for youth with a foster care background. Many have suffered prior trauma that has compromised their physical and emotional well-being. Although some of these young people may know about available health care resources, they often need more support navigating eligibility requirements, arranging appointments, and securing the pre-authorizations they need to resolve their health issues.



COVID-19 impact on **health care**



Who Was Most Affected?

BIPOC* | NYC | Former Foster Youth Living Independently

83% of youth who took the survey said they did not have any unmet health needs.

11% of respondents, however, reported issues seeking medical attention.

*Black, Indigenous, and People of Color



COVID-19 impact on **health care**



Where do you turn when the healthcare system is on pause?

As coronavirus cases surged, clinical practices across New York shut down.

Many health care providers and hospitals would only accept patients with life-threatening conditions, making it hard to book in-person appointments for preventive and non-emergency health services, such as dental care.

During this time, the expansion of telehealth services connected some patients to behavioral and medical providers when in-person visits were no longer safe or available.



COVID-19 impact on **health care**



11%

of respondents had trouble accessing mental health services. Even before the pandemic hit, young people with a foster care background often required ongoing behavioral health support to assist their recovery from acute childhood trauma. While some youth benefited from online therapy during the pandemic, others found it more difficult to seek professional help during an emotionally vulnerable time.

63%

of respondents (nearly two-thirds) suffered from heightened anxiety. This elevated stress likely relates to fears of catching the virus, increased social isolation, job loss, remote learning pressures, food insecurity, and housing instability.



COVID-19 impact on **health care**



64% of the respondents who reported unmet medical or mental health needs are living on their own. Independent young adults were more likely to have trouble accessing care than those residing in college dorms, with foster families, in group homes, or in residential treatment centers where wraparound health services and care coordination are more accessible.

73% of those who reported unmet health needs identified as women.

23% of respondents said health care is a priority concern for the next six months.



COVID-19 impact on **health care**



Nearly **20%** of survey respondents said they were either unsure about their insurance status or mistakenly thought they didn't have coverage. This misconception is troubling as it may cause delays in seeking medical attention.

In New York, all current and former foster youth are eligible for Medicaid. Child welfare agencies typically coordinate health insurance matters for youth in the system. After they leave foster care, young people are issued their own Medicaid card, which provides coverage until they reach age 26.



COVID-19 impact on **health care**

How did
COVID-19
affect your
health care?

“I can’t always afford the co-pays with my insurance.”

“I am supposed to have health insurance from my job, but I didn't meet the deadline.”

“I am experiencing an increase in health problems. It has been stressful to not know entirely what the insurance we are given covers until it’s too late.”



COVID-19 impact on **health care**

How did
COVID-19
affect your
health care?

“I have transitional Medicaid...many places don't accept it, and if they do, the service is terrible.”

“I was kicked off insurance under my old guardian's name and have been without insurance for almost a year now.”

“Remote therapy has been a lifesaver for me... it should be available to all foster youth, not just those with a job who can afford it.”



priorities and **recommendations**



priorities and **recommendations**

Health Care

Create educational materials to provide information regarding health insurance coverage to current and transition-age foster youth.

New York State is in the midst of reforming health care delivery for foster youth, including a shift to Medicaid Managed Care. All foster youth will automatically be enrolled in this plan and receive a new insurance card. The state should work to develop educational materials to help current and transition-age foster youth understand their insurance coverage.



priorities and **recommendations**

Health Care

Increase transitional supports to help older youth leaving foster care better manage their health care on their own.

As young people prepare to exit foster care, they may be preoccupied with other priorities, such as securing housing, finding employment, and focusing on school. The state should offer at least 12 months of transitional support (*e.g., check-ins, workshops, navigation assistance*) to help older youth manage their medical and behavioral health needs.



priorities and **recommendations**

Health Care

Extend eligibility for the Medicaid Health Homes program to include current and former foster youth up to age 26.

The Health Homes program was created to improve health care coordination for Medicaid enrollees with chronic conditions. All youth up to age 21 are currently eligible for this program. At age 21, the criteria for Adult Health Homes become more stringent and does not account for the unique needs of young people with a foster care background.



priorities and **recommendations**

Health Care

Advocate for Medicaid reimbursement rate increases to maintain and expand telehealth services.

Currently, Medicaid reimburses providers at a reduced rate for video and phone appointments covering a wide array of services, including behavioral health. Telehealth options are essential for many foster youth, as they typically face significant access barriers with seeking in-person care. Rate parity for remote services would have a meaningful impact by protecting the emotional and physical health for this population.



priorities and **recommendations**

Health Care

Change the Medicaid Threshold Rule to make it easier for providers to deliver comprehensive and convenient care to patients.

Currently, Medicaid pays for a *single service per visit*. For example, when a patient comes to a clinic planning to see multiple health practitioners during the same visit (i.e., dental, behavioral health, medical), the clinic can only bill Medicaid for one service. A carve out or waiver from the Medicaid Threshold Rule would help minimize common health care access issues experienced by foster youth, and ensure they receive the care they need in a timely manner.



FOSTERING YOUTH SUCCESS ALLIANCE

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