



**Washington State Supreme Court
Commission on Children
in Foster Care**

**12/13/2021
1:00-3:00 p.m.**
<https://wacourts.zoom.us/j/94549256825>
Meeting ID: 945 4925 6825
Dial by your location:
+ 1 253 215 8782

Agenda

<p>1:00 pm 10 min</p>	<p>1. Welcome and Introductions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land and Forced Labor Acknowledgment • Please type your name and agency in the chat in lieu of roll call • If you have suggested agenda items for the next meeting, please type them into the chat or email Kelly Warner-King or the Co-Chairs • Introduction of New Co-Chair Ross Hunter 	<p>Justice Barbara Madsen, <i>Co-Chair</i></p> <p>Secretary Ross Hunter, <i>DCYF; Co-Chair</i></p>
<p>1:10 pm 3 min</p>	<p>2. Approval of September 2021 Minutes</p>	<p>Justice Barbara Madsen, <i>Co-Chair</i></p>
<p>1:13 pm 2 min</p>	<p>3. Written Reports from the following Commission Workgroups are included in the meeting materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COVID Rapid Response Work Group • IDCC Re-Vision Work and Priorities • State Team • Normalcy Work Group 	<p>Justice Barbara Madsen, <i>Co-Chair</i></p>
<p>1:15 pm 45 min</p>	<p>4. Children’s Legal Representation Update:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation on Evaluation of the Dependent Child Legal Representation Program • Children’s Representation Standards Work Group 	<p>Jill Malat, <i>OCLA</i></p> <p>Dr. Carl McCurley, <i>AOC WSSCR</i></p> <p>Emily Stochel, <i>Mockingbird Society</i></p> <p>Lisa Kelly, <i>UW School of Law</i></p>
<p>2:00 pm 45 min</p>	<p>5. Racial & SOGIE Equity Discussion: Equity Issues in Foster Placements</p>	<p>Dae Shogren, <i>DCYF</i></p> <p>Liz Trautman, <i>Mockingbird Society</i></p> <p>Jill May, <i>Washington Association for Children and Families (WACF)</i></p> <p>Mike Canfield, <i>FPAWS</i></p>

New Business		
2:45 pm <i>10 min</i>	6. Request for Support of the FPAWS Parent Mentoring Program	Mike Canfield, <i>FPAWS</i>
2:55 pm <i>5 min</i>	7. 2022 Commission Meeting Schedule	Justice Barbara Madsen, <i>Co-Chair</i> Secretary Ross Hunter, <i>Co-Chair</i> Kelly Warner-King, <i>AOC</i>
3:00 pm	Adjournment	
	<u>2022 Meetings:</u> March 7, 2022 May 9, 2022 September 12, 2022 December 12, 2022	



**Washington State Supreme Court
Commission on Children in Foster Care
September 27, 2021
Meeting Minutes**

Members Present:

Justice Barbara Madsen, Washington State Supreme Court, Commission Co-Chair
Steven Grilli, representing Ross Hunter, Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF),
Commission Co-Chair
Jim Bamberger, Office of Civil Legal Aid (OCLA)
Judge Alicia Burton, Superior Court Judges' Association (SCJA)
Jolie Bwiza, Tacoma Chapter Leader, Mockingbird Youth Network
Mike Canfield, Foster Parent Allies of Washington State
Senator Jeannie Darneille, Washington State Senate
Larry Jefferson, Washington State Office of Public Defense (OPD)
Jeannie Kee, Foster Youth Alumni Representative
Carrie Wayno, Attorney General's Office (Designee for Bob Ferguson)
Laurie Lippold, Partners for Our Children
Jill May, Washington Children & Families
Ryan Murrey, Washington Association of Child Advocate Programs
Rachel Sottile, Center for Children & Youth Justice (CCYJ)
Emily Stochel, Youth who has Reunified; Mockingbird Society (Tacoma)

Members Not Present:

Raven Arroway-Healing, Northwest Intertribal Council
Beth Canfield, Foster Parent Allies of Washington State
Tory Gildred, Coordinated Care
Jill Malat, OCLA
Tonia McClanahan, Parent Advocate Representative
Martin Mueller, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (Designee for Chris Reykdal)
Representative Tana Senn, Washington House of Representatives

Guests Present:

Ezra Alem, Mockingbird Society
Sarah Burns, Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC)
Angela Bishop (formerly Murray), Washington CASA Association
Peggy Carlson, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI)
Kevin Cottingham, AOC
Tom Creekpau, AOC
Sydney Doherty, Coordinated Care of Washington
Patrick Dowd, Office of the Family and Children's Ombuds
Brianna Fenske, Mockingbird Society
KC Chiu, Mockingbird Society
Scotty Jackson, AOC
Charlotte Jensen, AOC
Katie LeBret, Mockingbird Society
Erin Shea McCann, Legal Counsel for Youth & Children

Joy Moore, AOC
Jorene Reiber, Washington Association of Juvenile Court Administrators
Dawn Marie Rubio, State Court Administrator, AOC
Liz Trautman, Mockingbird Society
Felice Upton, DCYF Juvenile Rehabilitation
Laura Vogel, AOC
Bailey Zydek, OCLA

Staff Present:

Kelly Warner-King, AOC
Moriah Freed, AOC
Susan Goulet, AOC

Call to Order

Justice Madsen called the meeting to order at 1:01 p.m. Introductions and roll call were conducted virtually through the Zoom meeting chat box. In addition, new Commission members were introduced and welcomed, and departing Commission members were recognized, as follows:

- DCYF Secretary Ross Hunter is the new Commission Co-Chair in place of Jody Becker who changed jobs at DCYF, and Steve Grilli filled in for Secretary Hunter today.
- Judge Alicia Burton, Pierce County Superior Court, is the new Designee for the Superior Court Judges' Association President in place of Judge Kitty Ann van Doorninck. Justice Madsen recognized Judge van Doorninck's many years of service to the Commission, and an e-card was set up for members to thank Judge van Doorninck for her service to the Commission since she was unable to attend today's meeting.
- Sydney Doherty, Manager of Clinical Operations for Foster Care Program at Apple Coordinated Care, is the new Foster Care Physical/Mental Health System Rep in place of Tory Gildred.
- Larry Jefferson is the new Director of the Office of Public Defense in place of Joanne Moore.
- Senator Jeannie Darnielle, Chair of the Senate Human Services, Reentry & Rehabilitation Committee, will retire from the Legislature in a couple weeks to head up the new Women's Prisons Division at the Department of Corrections, which has been a passion of hers for years. Justice Madsen and the Commission recognized and thanked Senator Darnielle for her many years of service and collaboration with the Commission. Her position on the Commission will be filled by the new Chair of the Senate Human Services, Reentry & Rehabilitation Committee.

Approval of the Minutes

Justice Madsen invited a motion to approve the May 2021 meeting minutes. The motion to approve the minutes passed.

Update on Children's Representation Standards Work Group

Jill Malat was unable to attend the meeting; therefore, a report will be given at the December meeting. Laurie Lippold and Rachel Sottile requested that there be some kind of update on what is going on with the workgroup before December. Bailey Zydek will follow up with Jill on that.

IDCC and COVID Rapid Response Work Group Updates

Steve Grilli gave a brief update on recent changes at DCYF, which included the following.

- Kwesi Booker will no longer lead Field Operations.

- Secretary Hunter is creating a new leadership Team, which includes:
 - Natalie Green as Interim Assistant Secretary of Field Operations (in Kwesi's place)
 - Felice Upton as Assistant Secretary of Juvenile Rehabilitation
 - Luba Bezborodnikova as Assistant Secretary of Licensing
 - Two new Assistant Secretary positions:
 - Assistant Secretary of Early Learning (Nicole Rose)
 - Assistant Secretary of Prevention and Client Services (Steve Grilli has stepped into this role, which includes more focus on prevention and integrating services DCYF provides.)

Steve reported that the IDCC is in the midst of a reboot. Focus is shifting to include:

- Prevention (reducing the number of families coming into care and court)
- Increasing equity and addressing disproportionality
- Working on discrete projects and initiatives, including implementation of HB 1227.

The COVID Rapid Response Workgroup may become part of the IDCC. Recent topics included approval of vaccinations for children under age 12, and what it will take for the system to be prepared. The COVID Rapid Response Workgroup will continue to meet, as COVID continues to be a public health challenge.

Mockingbird Youth Leadership Summit Follow Up

Justice Madsen thanked the Mockingbird Society for another great summit this year, and she explained that, like last year, the primary purpose of the September Commission on Children in Foster Care (Commission) meeting is to review and further discuss the proposals submitted by the Mockingbird Society at the Youth Leadership Summit. Commission members were provided a copy of the Youth Leadership Summit proposals to review prior to the meeting. Steve Grilli facilitated the discussions. Ezra Alem provided Group Agreements for the discussions, which included:

- If you are not talking, please mute yourself
- Know and respect people's pronouns
- Be present, be mindful
- Assume best intentions
- Address impact.

1. Support for youth ages 12 and up who are involved with CPS – Tacoma-Yakima Chapter

Liz Trautman and Ezra provided a summary of this topic. Many Tacoma Chapter members were failed by Child Protective Services (CPS), especially when involved with CPS at the age of 12 or older. Some suffered through years of severe abuse before being removed from their abusive homes. The Chapter has also seen the disproportionate rates of Black and Native American youth coming into care for non-issues. They feel that equitable protection of children's safety and well-being can improve through youth engagement and expertise, as well as an improved risk assessment process. They are calling on DCYF for a designated person who is not the assigned social worker or supervisor to review all safety framework paperwork. They are also asking to implement a youth-created extension of the safety framework that explicitly addresses equity and safety for youth ages 12-18.

Emily Stochel, Brianna Fenske, Jolie Bwiza provided an update on action taken since the Summit. Mockingbird has met with Laura Vogel and Kelly Warner-King at AOC to talk about safety

summits. They also plan to meet with Laura again, and with Melissa Krouse and Kelly Boyle of DCYF, to discuss safety framework. Kelly Warner-King reported that the safety summit process has been a very productive collaboration, with a focus of increasing safety conversations in the court setting. The next step is to figure out how to engage young people in the safety assessment process, to include their perspectives. Mockingbird members are signed up to attend upcoming safety summits.

Questions and Comments from Commission Members included:

- Laurie said she thought at some point they talked about having a separate safety assessment for older youth, and asked if that is something that is being explored? Brianna said, yes, that still is something they want to explore, but right now they are working on what will be the most effective thing (i.e. updating the current framework, safety assessment tools, etc.).
- Jill May asked for more information about what the safety summits cover, and Laura provided a quick overview of the safety summit process and the counties participating (PIP Counties and Skagit County). The goal is to help systems develop common language to talk about child safety. They are planning to make this a very practical training, with resources and information about how to apply the safety framework in dependency cases. The training is a partnership through DCYF, AOC, and Casey Family Programs. Rob Wyman, from Casey, and Kelly Boyle, from DCYF, will deliver the trainings. Laura explained that the last hour of the event will include creating an action plan, and they will continue to work with sites after the training.

2. Expunging juvenile records – Spokane Chapter

Ezra provided a summary of this topic. The Spokane Chapter is advocating for the expungement of all juvenile records at the age of 18 for youth in Washington State. Juvenile records have significant consequences for young people, and can cause youth to be denied for school, jobs, and homes, so they struggle to get on their feet as young adults. The only way to ensure records are not able to be released is through expunging (destroying) the record permanently. Black, Indigenous, and other youth of color are overrepresented in the juvenile legal system, facing higher rates of referrals to court and adjudications for criminal offenses than their white counterparts. Despite the existence of automatic sealing for some juvenile records, a number of offenses are not eligible for automatic sealing, or sealing is dependent on full restitution to victims. Many young adults aren't aware of the process and don't have someone who can help them through it. As a result, many juvenile records aren't sealed, or state agencies, the media, and others are able to obtain copies of sealed records, making the sealing process meaningless.

The Chapter has met with the ACLU, Team Child, and Columbia Legal Services, and they will also be presenting at OPD Advisory Board. Also Juvenile Court Administrators are still working on proposed SB 5339, and the Chapter is meeting with them soon to discuss whether they can partner.

Questions and Comments from Commission Members included:

- How can the Commission help?
- If DCYF and AOC may be opposed? Steve said he does not think DCYF is opposed, and he personally would love to see this. Justice Madsen said she thinks the AOC's issue with it is just their ability to do it. Kevin Cottingham, AOC Data Dissemination Administrator, reported that the AOC met recently to discuss this, and some of their concerns include that Washington State is a non-unified court system, that systems change over time, and that some superior courts manage their own case management system, as well as the volume of cases. Kevin said the

main thing is that AOC needs clarity of what is being asked and what is needed, if the AOC is going to be able to implement something successfully.

- Is there a way to focus on foster youth only (for example: when youth has a dependency and a youth offender case at the same time)? Kevin said he does not think AOC has the ability to tell whether or not children are in the foster care system, plus there are other criteria that make that a little more difficult. Charlotte Jensen, AOC Court Business Information Supervisor, said another thing AOC talked about is that, when they receive a bill that is being proposed, AOC has a process where they send it to their stakeholders, so they are able to look at it from a state perspective as well as from the perspective of their applications. Thus if Mockingbird could send AOC a proposed bill, they can share it with everyone at AOC to determine what all the impacts to AOC and the courts would be, and work with them to get their feedback. Further, the more specific the bill is, the easier it is for AOC to assess impacts and determine if it can be done automatically, or if that is not possible to determine if there an alternative.
- Justice Madsen asked for clarity on what foster care focused means/looks like, and how they can be helpful on the court end. Ezra said when they speak of at risk youth in foster care, they are referring to the vulnerable youth (for example: youth with disabilities, mental health, etc.), and he explained how extra support for them would be helpful. Liz Trautman further explained that the Chapter is still proposing a universal bill, because youth experiencing foster care and homelessness increases likelihood of being criminalized, and they are looking at how they can make this more equitable across the board.
- Laurie asked if they have met with Superior Court Administrators and Juvenile Court Administrators. Liz said they have not met with the Juvenile Court Administrators yet, but they are scheduled to meet with the Superior Court Administrators soon.
- Larry Jefferson said the Chapter plans to speak with the OPD Advisory Committee soon and offered the assistance of his office if they need to do some writing; he said OPD wants to be there to support them and put them in a position where their voices can be heard.
- Judge Burton said she is the Superior Court Judges' Association contact, and she is available if the Chapter wants to reach out to her.

3. Financial education and bank accounts for youth in foster care ages 12 and up – Seattle Chapter

Ezra provided a summary of this topic. Young people in Washington state who are in foster care and Extended Foster Care need access to independent living skills at an earlier age to help them be successful when they leave care, including financial literacy skills and the ability to set up their own bank account. As some Seattle Chapter members have experienced, when youth do not have financial education and a bank account, they can become trapped in a cycle of poverty. The Seattle Chapter is advocating for financial education for all youth in foster care starting at age 12, including a bank account and monthly allowance, so that youth have a hands-on way to learn about money management.

Mockingbird had an initial conversation with Washington Asset Building Coalition, where financial education for all K-12 students was discussed. One option was creating a course that would be offered as an extra-curricular with an incentive.

Questions and Comments from Commission Members included:

- What are federal requirements for allocating funds to foster youth?
IV-E Funding is designated for support of youth in their foster care placement. Is there any flexibility to use funds for an allowance for foster youth?

- Public-private partnerships are also an option. OSPI has already developed a curriculum with the Financial Education Public Private Partnership (FEPPP). Tracy Godat is the Executive Director of FEPPP; tracy.godat@k12.wa.us. It might also be helpful to provide opportunities for foster parents to take the course.
 - Peggy Carlson of OSPI provided the following links:
 - <https://www.k12.wa.us/student-success/resources-subject-area/financial-education>
 - <https://www.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/public/fePPP/docs/FAQsFinancialEducation.pdf>
 - <https://www.k12.wa.us/student-success/resources-subject-area/financial-education/reviewed-financial-education-curriculum>
- Felice offered to connect Mockingbird with a JRA project that teaches financial literacy and includes people with lived experience. The federal Trio Program serves first generation and low income students. Felice also provided the following links:
 - <https://www.genderjusticeleague.org/>
 - <https://www.genderjusticeleague.org/category/resources/>
- Steve said he will check with Shannon Matheson at DCYF regarding Title IV-E funding for bank accounts and also check with Jess Lewis about options for utilizing independent living resources.

4. Supportive foster care placements for LGBTQ+ young people in care – Youth Advocates Ending Homelessness Chapter (YAEH)

KC Chiu provided a summary of this topic. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning (LGBTQ+) youth in foster care face a variety of challenges at increased rates compared to their peers. Approximately 22.8% of youth in out-of-home care identify as LGBTQ+, compared to roughly 3.8% of the general population. The Family Acceptance Project (FAP) found that LGBTQ+ young people who were rejected by their families engaged in more risky behaviors compared to LGBTQ+ young people with no family rejection. Conversely, 92% of the young people who felt comfortable in their placement believed that they would grow into a happy, healthy adult. The YAEH Chapter proposes requiring LGBTQ+ sensitivity training for foster parents in the licensing process, beginning with regional implementation.

Liz reported that Mockingbird has had some great conversations post summit, but they are still trying to figure out next steps. Briana Fenske said they have been meeting with Michael Tires from the Alliance. They have discussed existing training and creating a youth advisory board to include youth voice in all trainings.

Brianna reported they have met with DCYF regarding the home study tool, including Tyler McGee, and Holly Holstead. Mockingbird has also met with Jill May.

Questions and Comments from Commission Members included:

- What are next steps? First, need to nail down the specifics for a pilot project—one east and one west. Second, update the existing training, including assessing what is already available and what needs to be created.
- Kelly asked who this training is for. Katie LeBret responded that it is for all foster parents, since children tend to know very early what is really right for them, starting at age 9 or even sometimes younger. Informing foster parents will help prevent trauma.
- Secretary Hunter’s question (provided via email): Is training sufficient or do we need to match foster parents with foster youth who identify as LGBTQ+ youth? Katie responded that she

prefers that all foster parents be prepared to support young people, and if parents do not feel comfortable, they can reach out for help. Accountability for applying what they learned in training is a challenge. How would we know if foster parents are using it?

- Carrie Wayno shared that two recent federal lawsuits have been brought by foster parent applicants (not already licensed foster parents) asserting their rights to religious beliefs, as follows.
 1. *Blais v. Hunter*, where great grandparents applied to be foster parents. DCYF rules require that the home support the child's culture, sexual orientation, and gender identity. After a home study was conducted, DCYF denied grandparents' application, saying they would not support the child who might identify as LGBTQ+. The case resulted in a permanent injunction, requiring applicants to comply with the child's case plan, including respecting their sexual identity. The state must try to accommodate religious beliefs. Case was settled.
 2. *Hawk et al. v. Hunter* (Tacoma Western District of Washington) is still pending with the same legal argument.

Closing & Adjournment

Justice Madsen thanked everyone for their time and presentations. The next Commission meeting is on December 13, 2021.

Adjourned at 2:59 p.m. by Justice Barbara Madsen.

Commission on Children in Foster Care Work Group Updates

December 9, 2021

Innovative Dependency Court Collaborative

The Innovative Dependency Court Collaborative (IDCC) was designated a subcommittee of the Commission in May 2021. The group serves as the required multidisciplinary task force for AOC's federal Court Improvement Program grant and is co-chaired by Steve Grilli (DCYF) and Kelly Warner-King (AOC). The collaborative is charged with employing data and implementing strategies focused on improving the child welfare court system, including priorities identified in the Washington CIP Strategic Plan and the State Plan focused on reducing disproportionality in the child welfare and dependency court system.

Since August, the group has been working to re-design the mission and structure of task force. The group's mission is now:

Collaborate to keep families safety together and supported in their communities and to radically reduce inequities within the child welfare system.

We will do this by:

- Working upstream to avoid entry into the system by addressing the impacts of poverty and trauma on families.
- Ensuring that families who require the oversight of court receive effective, culturally-relevant services in a system that is equitable, accountable and hope-centered.

The group will focus on developing cross-system projects that support effective implementation of recent legislation, HB 1227 (Keeping Families Together Act) and HB 1194 (Strengthening Parent-Child Visits). Work will be performed by small, nimble workgroups that create explicit goals, metrics and timelines for completing and assessing the impact of their efforts. The larger group will provide accountability for completing work, as well as support, connection and sharing with other systems and agencies.

The next meeting will be held virtually on January 10, 2022, 12-1:30pm, where project priorities will be identified and workgroups created. The group will also select a new name for the task force.

State Team Action Plan

The State Team Action Plan includes strategies aimed to address the following:

- Reduce racial injustice in the child welfare system
- Reduce unnecessary removals of children from parents
- Improve high quality legal representation

The group meets twice a month and the first project it has undertaken is focused on improving legal practice at the 72 Hour Shelter Care Hearing. Applying the requirements of RCW 13.34.090 to the earliest stages of a dependency case, the project will seek to ensure that parents are afforded their rights to representation, access to evidence and the opportunity to be heard by a judicial officer in a contested shelter care hearing within 72 hours of a child's removal. Current practice varies greatly across local courts.

The project plan includes:

- Identify counties that meet the requirements of the law and provide timely and prepared representation to parents and sufficient court time and judicial resources to ensure due process.
 - Determine what strategies, structures, and resources enable these jurisdictions to meet the requirements of the law
- Identify counties that do not meet the legal requirements and the barriers to due process at the 72 Hour Shelter Care hearing.
- Offer support to several jurisdictions that are not meeting the requirements and work with them to create new structures, strategies and resources to improve practice.
- Evaluate progress and share lessons learned.

Additionally, the State Team is developing tools to explicitly integrate racial equity into system improvement efforts and policy and practice changes. A key component of this work is ensuring that people with lived experience in the child welfare system are actively engaged and supported to participate in system improvement projects. This includes developing guidelines for compensating, preparing and debriefing individuals, as well as creating a respectful and safe environment in which professionals and people with lived experience work together.

COVID Rapid Response Work Group

The COVID Rapid Response Work Group meets monthly to share information related to vaccination requirements and COVID-related Family Time issues. The next meeting is scheduled on December 20th.

Vaccination requirements - At the November meeting, DCYF provided an update on the vaccination rates of children in care ages 12 and up. These children and youth are getting vaccinated at similar rates to the general Medicaid population. DCYF did not have data available for children under 12, but will provide information from Coordinated Care at the December meeting. The group also discussed DCYF policies regarding consent for vaccination of a child in care, and DCYF shared that case workers are supposed to obtain consent from parents and youth over 13. If either objects, a court order could be obtained to require vaccination, but no one was aware of this occurring.

Family Time issues – DCYF policy continues to require parents and children to wear masks during a visit, even when all parties have been vaccinated. DCYF is following Department of Health recommendations for masking when people from different households interact. Work group members requested an opportunity to discuss the policy and possible exceptions with DOH staff. That discussion will take place at the December meeting.

	State Team Strategies	Descriptions
Reducing racial injustice in child welfare system	Review statutory definition of neglect and how it is currently used and by whom as a standard for removal, including substance abuse, which is currently given great weight in the decision to remove.	Data shows that more children of color are removed due to neglect allegations than their white peers. This strategy reviews statutory definition to make changes to reduce the removal of children due to neglect, including substance abuse. Successful implementation of SB 1227 will assist with that effort along with current safety framework training that is happening as part of the PIP work. In addition, in-home dependencies could also reduce harm for families where neglect/substance abuse is a concern. To implement this strategy well, more services will need to be available in communities, including in-home services, in place of the services families would receive through a dependency.
	Draft legislative proposal to require active efforts for all children pre and post removal, including a definition/description of active efforts.	Active efforts go beyond the current requirement of the state’s requirement of reasonable efforts activities that aim to provide assistance and services needed to preserve and/or reunify families. Active efforts are the “gold standard” because the social workers must utilize social and cultural conditions in a trauma responsive manner when connecting families to services. For example, rather than giving provider’s phone number to a parent for follow up, the caseworker would ask the parent if they would like assistance scheduling the appointment. This is a big shift for our system because it requires better definition for what active efforts looks like, training, and staff resources. The Keeping Families Together group is working on this initiative. The Court Improvement Plan five year plan includes a strategy for increasing the knowledge and implementation of active efforts for ICWA cases.
	Research case law and definitions of neglect and active efforts that other states are using. Form a multidisciplinary workgroup to draft legislative proposals.	Successful implementation of SB 1227 will help with this strategy.
	Remove barriers to placement with family—criminal history, prior founded allegations	Dependent children cannot be placed with relatives or kinship caregivers if they have a criminal history that excludes them as options, even if the crimes are not against children or the incidents are dated. Judges have the option to overruling the department and placing the child with that caregiver, but they are reluctant to do that because the department is not able to share the details of the FBI criminal history. This is a part of the Blue Ribbon Commission’s work, so there could be some readiness for this strategy.

Reducing Unnecessary Removals

Provide meaningful parent representation PRIOR to shelter care hearing by enforcing [RCW 13.34.090](#) regarding the provision of counsel and discovery prior to shelter care.
 Research how/when counsel is being appointed and how discovery is occurring in each county.
 Develop best practices and possibly court rule to implement practice standards statewide. AOC/CITA to include these expectations in annual judicial training and other training venues

WA state is not a unified court system, meaning that each court has free will to operate in a way that works best for their jurisdiction with some guidance and requirements from the state. Due to that variability, each court has a different process for assigning parent/youth representation. In some counties a parent/youth will not get appointed an attorney until the morning of their shelter care hearing. In addition, there is not a consistent process utilized by all counties to ensure that discovery is provided to counsel in a timely manner. Often, 72 Hour Shelter Care hearings have to be continued to allow attorneys to meet with their client and to review case/discovery materials, or the hearing takes place and the attorney is at a disadvantage for representing their client.

Improve practice at shelter care hearings by emphasizing safety planning to reduce removals and support more in-home dependencies. Require specific findings regarding reasonable efforts - not just a checked box. In order to make accurate reasonable efforts findings, AOC work with DCYF on providing information regarding available resources in each community to courts and court partners.

AOC and DCYF are working together to deliver cross-system Safety Summits in six communities during Fall/Winter 2021. Safety Summits revolve around a half-day training event that focuses on helping local dependency court systems develop a shared understanding of how safety is assessed. Within the context of a crosswalk of the [American Bar Association's Child Safety Guide](#) and the DCYF Child Safety Framework, this training will help systems to effectively apply the safety framework to crucial aspects of cases in tangible ways that ultimately result in a more effective dependency system and better outcomes for families. Due to new Family Time safety analysis required by [SB 1194](#), more dependency courts and stakeholders are requesting training on the safety framework.
 Nationally, in-home dependencies are more commonly used than they are in Washington State. Safety Summit counties are considering ways to increase the number of in-home dependencies through robust in-home safety planning.
 It is difficult for a judicial officer to make a reasonable efforts finding because they are unaware of the resources in the community available to the parents.

Support further development of Family Intervention Response to Stop Trauma (F.I.R.S.T.) Clinic in Snohomish County. This is a medical-legal partnership that provides pregnant women with legal

Monitor implementation of FIRST Clinic program and provide support to expand and replicate the program. Currently, the FIRST Clinic is busy implementing and evaluating the effectiveness of the model, so State Team support is not needed.

	<p>advocacy and connection to services to prevent not only a removal now and future involvement with CPS as well. The team includes volunteer attorney, parent ally, community resource navigator and hospital staff</p>	
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Improving High Quality Legal Representation</p>	<p>Utilize IV-E reimbursement to support multidisciplinary parent representation to include social workers and parent allies in order to engage parents earlier</p>	<p>Washington state has created a multi-disciplinary parent representation model with the FIRST clinic, but our state has yet to create the path for the utilization of IV-E funding to fully reimburse that work. The State Team will continue to explore IV-E options for supporting multidisciplinary legal representation prior to the filing of a dependency, with the goal reducing the number of families who enter the dependency court system.</p>
	<p>Utilize IV-E reimbursement to expand provision of representation for all dependency youth.</p>	<p>SB 1219 passed in 2021 to provide legal representation to children 8-17 years of age, and representation for children 0-7 years upon the filing of a termination of parental rights petition. Counsel for children will be phased-in county-by-county over a six year period starting in July 2022.</p>
	<p>Monitor Family Advocacy Center (CCYJ/King County) using upstream legal services to prevent or reduce removal. The team of civil legal aid attorney and parent ally receive referrals from child welfare, defense attorneys and community partners. They include racial justice at key points in system.</p>	<p>While the King County Family Advocacy Center is no longer in operation, the State Team will work with legal service providers to identify opportunities to connect families at-risk of child welfare involvement to civil legal aid and peer supports. The goals will be to ameliorate challenges posed by poverty and trauma and to increase community connections and support for families in need.</p>

Year End Report for 2021 Normalcy Workgroup

December 6, 2021

Due to all the covid restrictions, the normalcy workgroup has not met since February 2020.

At that time we were still waiting for the outcome of SB5395 (sex Ed bill), and the next steps. This task has been completed, but the workgroup will continue to monitor and create recommendations as needed.

In the interim I've continued to advocate.

In March 2021, I requested DCYF update the normalcy workgroup on;

- 1) **Status of Normalcy workshop through Alliance** - The Working with Dependent Adolescents course (6 hours) offered both in-person and by webinar now, includes Prudent Parenting/Normalcy. There is an activity for learners to practice documenting this in their court reports and also includes group activity that uses the DCYF document: Caregiver Guidelines For Foster Childhood Activities (DCYF 22-533). Throughout this course are embedded eight different video clips of various Passion to Action Youth talking about their experiences.
- 2) **If the Alliance has updated their training to include the documents previously created by the workgroup** - There is the Caregiver Guidelines for Foster Childhood Activities used in trainings. However, the myth buster document isn't currently being used by the Alliance.
- 3) **How is the department ensuring Normalcy during the pandemic.** Kwesi was to report in this.

The goal is in early 2022 to get everyone back together to continue our work. I will work with Susan to arrange zoom meeting with the members.

In 2022 we will focus on:

Reviewing our recommendations from 2013 to the CCFC, and update as needed.

Identifying any barriers children or youth might have to normalcy experiences.

Creating recommendations, to develop "normal life experience" guidelines for youth in group homes to ensure opportunities while in care.

Creating recommendations, to develop "normal life experience" guidelines for youth in extended foster care to ensure opportunities while in care, and as they transition into adulthood.



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Jill Malat, Program Manager
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To: Supreme Court Commission on Children in Foster Care

From: Children's Representation Standards Workgroup

Re: Status Update

Date: October 29, 2021

Dear Commission Members,

It has been a while since we've had an opportunity to give some updates on what the Legal Representation Standards Workgroup is up to.

We greatly appreciate your patience as we get things up and running. As of right now we have a few updates.

For those who are unaware the group is composed of 16 individuals bringing a variety of experience including, lived expertise, judicial experience, and legal ethics expertise.

We are still on track to generate training standards, caseload standards, recommendations regarding representation for children under 8, and updating the standards of practice. We have broken into 4 sub-committees to address each of our direct mandates from the legislation. These groups are meeting regularly and are working through the issues.

The structure we have decided on as a group is to defer to young people with lived expertise when the group cannot reach consensus. This comes from an effort to adequately power share in an intentional way.

Aside from this we don't have many other updates. But as we push out deliverables we will share with the group when appropriate. Thank you for your patience as we've taken the time to stand this group up.

List of members of workgroup to update the standards of practice for attorneys representing children in dependency proceedings

1. Emily Stochel, Dre Thornock, ~~Zematra Bacon~~, Dorian Brajkovich, Jolie Bwiza (Alumni of foster care), Esther Taylor
2. Annie Chung (children's attorney, Legal Center for Youth and Children)
3. ~~Shrouda Selivonoff~~ (Director of Public Policy, Children's Home Society of Washington), Tonia Maclanahan
4. Chori Folkman (Tribal representative/children's attorney)
5. Natalece Washington (Policy Counsel, National Association of Counsel for Children)
6. Professor Lisa Kelly (Bobbe and Jonathan Bridge Professor of Children and Family Advocacy, University of Washington School of Law)
7. Carl McCurley (Data Expert, Manager, Washington Center for Court Research)
8. Megan Valentine (Children's attorney)
9. D'Adre Cunningham (Washington Defender Association)
10. Judge Sharonda Amamilo (Thurston County Superior Court)
11. Erin McKinney LICSW, CMHS (Expert on child development and trauma)
12. Sarah Burns (Family and Youth Justice Program/Administrative Office of Courts)
13. Professor Suparna Malempati (Director of Advocacy Programs, Atlanta's John Marshall Law School, legal ethics expert)

Evaluation of the Washington State Dependent Child Legal Representation Program 2021



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2021 Evaluation of the Washington State Dependent Child Legal Representation Program

Prepared by the Washington State Center for Court Research

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Executive Summary

In 2016 the Washington State Legislature instructed the Washington State Office of Civil Legal Aid (OCLA) and the Washington State Center for Court Research (WSCCR) to work together to implement and evaluate a program that offered Standards-Based Legal Representation (SBLR) to all dependent youth in Grant and Lewis counties. The study was named the Dependent Child Legal Representation (DCLR) Program. OCLA implemented the program from September 2017 through August 2019. Due to internal staffing issues at the time, WSCCR hired outside contractors to complete the evaluation project. There were five components of the evaluation, and each component has a designated section in the full report below. We highlight the main findings in this Executive Summary.

Outcome Evaluation

Cases involving a total of 434 children were served by the DCLR study and included in the evaluation. Using two counties (Douglas and Whatcom) as comparison, and a difference-in-difference analytic approach to account for both changing trends over time and baseline differences between jurisdictions, we found statistically significant associations between DCLR program participation and permanency outcomes, placement stability, and school stability. First, the likelihood of achieving reunification was approximately 45% higher in the DCLR group than the comparison group. Second, the DCLR program was associated with a 30% reduction in the rate of placement moves. Finally, the DCLR program was associated with a 65% reduction in the rate of non-normative school transitions.

Benefit-Cost Analysis

We completed an analysis of the potential cost savings of the DCLR program based on the permanency outcome. Using a simulation of 50,000 children in each group, we estimate the cumulative child welfare costs for the DCLR group to be \$5,228,802, compared to a cost of \$6,519,115 for the business as usual (BAU) group. This represents a hypothetical cost savings of over 1.2 million dollars, after taking into account the cost of providing SBLR. These conservative calculations do not take into account potential cost savings outside of the child welfare system, such as in the educational, employment, health, or criminal justice domains.

Youth Voice

An important component of the evaluation project was soliciting feedback from the youth regarding their experience with the DCLR program. This component of the evaluation proved to be the most difficult, mainly due to issues regarding guardian consent for participation in the study. Our original plan to recruit current DCLR program participants was modified to attempt to interview former participants. Despite much time and effort, we completed only one valid interview. We treat the interviewee's responses as a helpful case study, finding that the participant was very satisfied with the communication, preparation, and advocacy of his appointed attorney throughout his dependency case. We offer several suggestions for how to adjust future studies' protocols to potentially increase participation.

Program Implementation

We assessed DCLR program implementation by interviewing stakeholders, including attorneys, caseworkers, and Guardians Ad Litem (GALs) in Grant and Lewis counties. Through these discussions, we found that, despite initial challenges, such as a lack of clarity around roles, having trained attorneys often resulted in increased communication among stakeholders and better advocacy for children.

Attorney Behaviors

The final component of the evaluation involved study attorneys recording their actions during the life of the case, so as to document the potential advocacy that can be provided by children's attorneys. We collected 205 tracking sheets, and found that attorneys frequently reported such actions as: advocating against unwanted school moves; helping to enforce the youth's individualized education plan; and advocating for the child's desired placement. We also provide recommendations for how the tracking sheet can be improved for future studies.

Conclusion

This five-part evaluation of the DCLR pilot program offers evidence that providing standards-based legal representation to dependent youth on a large scale could improve the court experiences of dependent youth, reduce disruption in their lives, and shorten the dependency process. Based on early preliminary findings from this study, the legislature passed SSHB 1219 in 2021, which expands the DCLR program to all Washington State counties over a six-year period, beginning in 2022. The bill also provides funding for ongoing quality assurance and evaluation. Thus, future reports will provide results from larger scale evaluations.

Introduction

The 2017 Washington State Legislature established a new program to support children and youth involved in the Washington State juvenile dependency courts. The program is intended to provide young people involved in the child welfare system with access to universal legal representation from the point of “shelter care” through the completion of the dependency process. The Legislature directed the Office of Civil Legal Aid (OCLA) to implement the program and the Administrative Office of the Courts’ (AOC) Washington State Center for Court Research (WSCCR) to evaluate the program. The legislature specifically directed that the evaluation examine:

[t]he time to achieve permanency and permanency outcomes; [e]ducational, social, or other relevant child welfare indicators as determined relevant by the center including, but not limited to, relevant child welfare indicators identified through consultation with foster children, youth, and other stakeholders involved in the research assessment. The assessment must also identify and project cost savings to the state, if any, as a result of providing legal representation for children at the shelter care hearing.¹

The legislation requires WSCCR to complete two reports. The first, an interim report, was submitted to the legislature in March 2020 and described the program and initial program implementation, presented descriptive information regarding outcomes of children represented under the program, outlined broad plans for WSCCR’s final evaluation, and identified potential limitations based on available data and funding. This document is the final report. To help carry out the evaluation, WSCCR contracted with a senior research scientist and lecturer at the University of Washington School of Social Work and an independent qualitative researcher.

Background

For over half a century, juvenile delinquency courts in the United States have recognized a child’s right to due process within the juvenile justice system. Beginning with *In re Gault* (1967), the United States Supreme Court ruled that children within the juvenile justice system have many of the same rights as adults, including a right to counsel. Federal guidance related to children’s due process rights within dependency proceedings (those proceedings in which courts are petitioned to find the child a legal dependent of the state, and to place the child in the legal custody of the state) is somewhat less clear. Although federal statute requires that states develop procedures for the appointment of a Guardian ad Litem (GAL) in dependency cases, there is no requirement that the GAL be an attorney. In many jurisdictions, this requirement is frequently met with a volunteer non-attorney Court Appointed Special Advocate. Furthermore, GALs are appointed to represent the best interests of the child as compared to delinquency cases where counsel typically represents the child’s stated interest.²

¹ 2nd Engrossed Substitute Bill 5890

² 42 U.S.C. §5106a(b)(2)(A)(xiii)

In response to continuing concerns over whether the voice of children should be more fully heard in dependency cases in Washington State and whether the appointment of attorneys to represent the stated and legal interests of children might markedly affect the trajectory of the lives of dependent children, the 2017 Washington State Legislature enacted Second Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 5890. Among other things, this law appropriated funds to OCLA to oversee universal legal representation for dependent children in two counties. In addition to funding universal appointment in two counties, the legislature also appropriated funds to support an evaluation of the universal appointment focused on the experiences of children in these two counties (Grant and Lewis) who are served by trained attorneys representing their stated and legal interests, and those in two other counties (Douglas and Whatcom) that continued to operate “business as usual”. Thus, this project is part of a deliberate effort by the legislature to develop evidence that will inform consideration of whether to expand the right of dependent children to legal representation by assessing and quantifying the impact that such an expansion might have across multiple domains.

Program Implementation

Program Logic

There is a paucity of published studies examining the legal representation of dependent children, and until recently, the field lacked consensus regarding legal practice standards for child representation in dependency proceedings. In 2009, in an effort to establish such standards, the Children’s Bureau (CB) established a National Quality Improvement Center on the Representation of Children in the Child Welfare System (QIC-ChildRep). Housed at the University of Michigan Law School, QIC-ChildRep formalized a best-practice model for stated-interest legal representation in dependency proceedings. This model was evaluated using randomized controlled trials in Washington State and Georgia.

Results of the Washington QIC-ChildRep evaluation suggest that, relative to children who were represented by lawyers with no specialized training, children receiving representation under the best-practice model had a higher rate of early exits from foster care (Orlebeke et al., 2016). Additionally, best-practice attorneys were found to have more contact with foster parents and other substitute caregivers. Cases in which best-practice attorneys were assigned were also more likely to have utilized non-adversarial case resolution options, including family team decision-making meetings (FTDMs). The American Bar Association (ABA) has since adopted this model as the recommended standard in juvenile dependency proceedings (Lehrmann, 2010).

While the QIC-ChildRep evaluation demonstrated some benefits from the use of the best-practice attorneys as compared to untrained attorneys, the study did not answer a more basic question: does the presence of stated-interest attorneys benefit children compared to the condition of no attorney? While the literature is similarly silent on this question, Zinn and Peters (2015) published findings of the Foster Children’s Project (FCP) of the Legal Aid Society of Palm Beach County, Florida, a project in which children placed in foster care from July 2001 to December of 2004 were provided stated-interest counsel for the duration of their dependency cases. While this study predates the establishment of the QIC-ChildRep model (i.e. there was no specific practice model utilized by attorneys in the FCP pilot), the findings of the study suggest that children with stated-interest legal representation achieve permanency more quickly than children without representation.

Similar to the QIC-ChildRep evaluation, the underlying hypothesis of the current study evaluating the Dependent Child Legal Representation (DCLR) pilot is that dependent children who receive timely legal representation from trained and effective attorneys will obtain permanency sooner than those who do not and will experience more positive outcomes, along a range of relevant indicators, than those who do not. The QIC-ChildRep pilot assessed the efficacy of the type of standards-based legal representation involved in the DCLR pilot relative to other forms of legal representation. Unlike the QIC-ChildRep study, this pilot is not focused on whether the type of legal representation provided in the pilot is preferable to another model of representation. Rather, the overarching research question under consideration in this study is whether the presence of DCLR is beneficial to dependent children, as compared to no legal representation.

The comparison to no legal representation is an important consideration. Washington currently has no universal requirements for the appointment of attorneys prior to terminating the parent-child relationship. Some Washington jurisdictions voluntarily appoint counsel at public expense to children once they reach a particular age. This discretion is allowed under 13.34.100 RCW, which also permits a child in any jurisdiction to request appointment of counsel and requires that dependent children be regularly notified of their right to request counsel after the age of 12. Starting in 2014, 13.34.100 RCW also requires the appointment of counsel to all dependent children who remain in care with “. . . no remaining parent with parental rights for six months or longer. . . .” Since 2014, the provision of post-termination legal counsel has been implemented by OCLA. All attorneys appointed under this program are also trained under Washington’s standards-based legal representation framework (SBLRF), which is based on the QIC-ChildRep model.

Thus, the DCLR pilot can be seen as an expansion of Washington’s due-process protections for dependent youth. While the DCLR pilot is not permanent and not universal, it does represent a clear effort by the state legislature to explore changes in the legal process that will facilitate better outcomes for children involved in Washington’s dependency courts. As with the post-termination legal counsel program described above, OCLA is also utilizing the SBLRF within the DCLR pilot. That is, all attorneys hired to represent youth in the DCLR pilot will be trained and required to operate within the SBLRF.

This project involved multiple sub-studies, and each project is summarized in a separate part of this report. Part 1 presents the results from the quantitative evaluation of the DCLR pilot, examining the program’s effects on case processing timelines and child outcomes. Part 2 examines the potential cost savings of the program based on the results of the outcome evaluation. Part 3 describes the efforts we made to qualitatively capture the “youth voice” in this pilot. Part 4 summarizes the results of our qualitative assessment of program implementation issues captured through interviews with court staff and partners. Finally, Part 5 descriptively explores some attorney advocacy behaviors over the course of the study using attorney tracking sheets and attorney case notes.

Methods

Data Sources and Procedures

Data for this study were drawn from three sources: Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF's) Transitional Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS); AOC's Court Contact and Recidivism Database (CCRD); and data from the Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). Data share agreements and confidentiality agreements were completed by all parties, data were shared across agencies and matched, and a final de-identified data set containing all study variables was provided to the lead research team for analysis. All study procedures were approved by the Washington State Institutional Review Board (WSIRB).

Sample

Our sample includes children entering a period of shelter care. In Washington State, shelter care begins by one of two mechanisms:³

1. A law enforcement officer takes a child into custody, finding "...probable cause to believe that the child is abused or neglected and that the child would be injured or could not be taken into custody if it were necessary to first obtain a court order."⁴
2. A court orders the child into custody, finding that there are "...reasonable grounds to believe the child is dependent and that the child's health, safety, and welfare will be seriously endangered if not taken into custody."⁵

As noted above, the Legislature required that the evaluation team compare the pilot counties, Lewis and Grant, in which DCLR was offered universally to all children entering shelter care, with two explicitly identified comparison counties, Whatcom and Douglas. In order to be both responsive to the Legislature and rigorous in our evaluation, we attempted four different approaches to define our BAU condition. Depending on the outcome, we refined the sample for practical reasons (e.g., only a subset of dependent children, i.e., school-aged children, are at risk of non-normative school transitions) or for sensitivity analysis to confirm the validity of the legislatively chosen comparison groups. Our four approaches included:

1. **Pre-Post:** We compared children in the DCLR condition (Lewis and Grant county shelter care events from September 1, 2017, through August 31, 2019- hereafter, our "treatment period") with children entering care in Lewis and Grant in the preceding two-year period (September 1, 2015, through August 31, 2017 - hereafter, our "control period").
2. **Approximate Difference-in-Differences (aDID) (Legislatively Required):** We compared children in the DCLR condition with children entering shelter care in Lewis, Grant, Douglas, and Whatcom in the control period or Douglas and Whatcom in the treatment period. Our approach is similar to the Difference-in-Differences (DID) approach made famous by Card and Krueger (1994). There are, however, critical statistical differences between the models used to develop DID (i.e., ordinary least squares) and the models and samples we use in this evaluation. We thus do not claim that this approach will necessarily yield an average treatment effect of the treated (ATT) and note that our method yields an aDID estimator.

³ RCW 13.34.060

⁴ RCW 26.44.050

⁵ RCW 13.34.050

3. **Approximate Difference-in-Differences (aDID) (University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute (UWPHI)):** One potential shortcoming of the aDID approach is the choice of the comparison group. Improperly matched control groups can bias the results of classical DID models (Basu & Small, 2020) and would likely bias the results of aDID models as well. We identified alternatives to Douglas and Whatcom as control counties using the UWPHI county health rankings tool to address this possibility (UWPHI, 2020). The health rankings tool uses various metrics to identify Washington counties closely resembling the DCLR counties in health and well-being measures. The UWPHI tool identified Adams, Clallam, Grays, and Mason counties as the closest match to the DCLR counties. We thus developed an additional business as usual (BAU) approach comparing children in the DCLR condition with children entering shelter care in Lewis, Grant, Adams, Clallam, Grays Harbor, and Mason in the control period or Adams, Clallam, Grays Harbor, and Mason in the treatment period.
4. **Approximate Difference-in-Differences (aDID) with IPTW:** Simply choosing better counties for comparison helps the match issues identified above. However, this approach does not address the bias that may result from mismatched children between the DCLR and BAU counties. For example, Grays Harbor and Grant counties may fare similarly on county-level health and well-being measures, but the children in shelter care within each county may look very different. To address this issue, we weighted our estimated models developed from the aDID-UWPHI approach using the inverse probability of treatment weighting (IPTW) technique proposed by Williamson et al. (2013).

We find similar results across all four approaches to defining our BAU condition. In most analyses, the aDID-Legislative (Option 2) and aDID-UWPHI (Option 3) represent the average of all estimated treatment effects. Additionally, while helpful for sensitivity analyses, the propensity score model from which we derived weights for the aDID-IPTW approach is not stable. Specifically, we have a limited number of confounding variables available to specify the propensity model, and the weights are sensitive to the choice of confounding variables. Taking all of the BAU approaches into account, along with the legislative mandate to report on aDID-Legislative (Option 2), we limit the remaining discussion to this BAU approach. This sampling approach will allow us to compare outcomes in the DCLR pilot with outcomes in the same jurisdictions before the pilot while simultaneously comparing the DCLR pilot with Douglas and Whatcom counties over the same period. A total of 1,451 children were included in our quantitative sample:

- 434 children who entered shelter care in Lewis and Grant in the treatment period,
- 322 children who entered shelter care in Lewis and Grant in the control period,
- 265 children who entered shelter care in Douglas and Whatcom in the treatment period, and
- 430 children who entered shelter care in Douglas and Whatcom in the control period.

Measures

Treatment

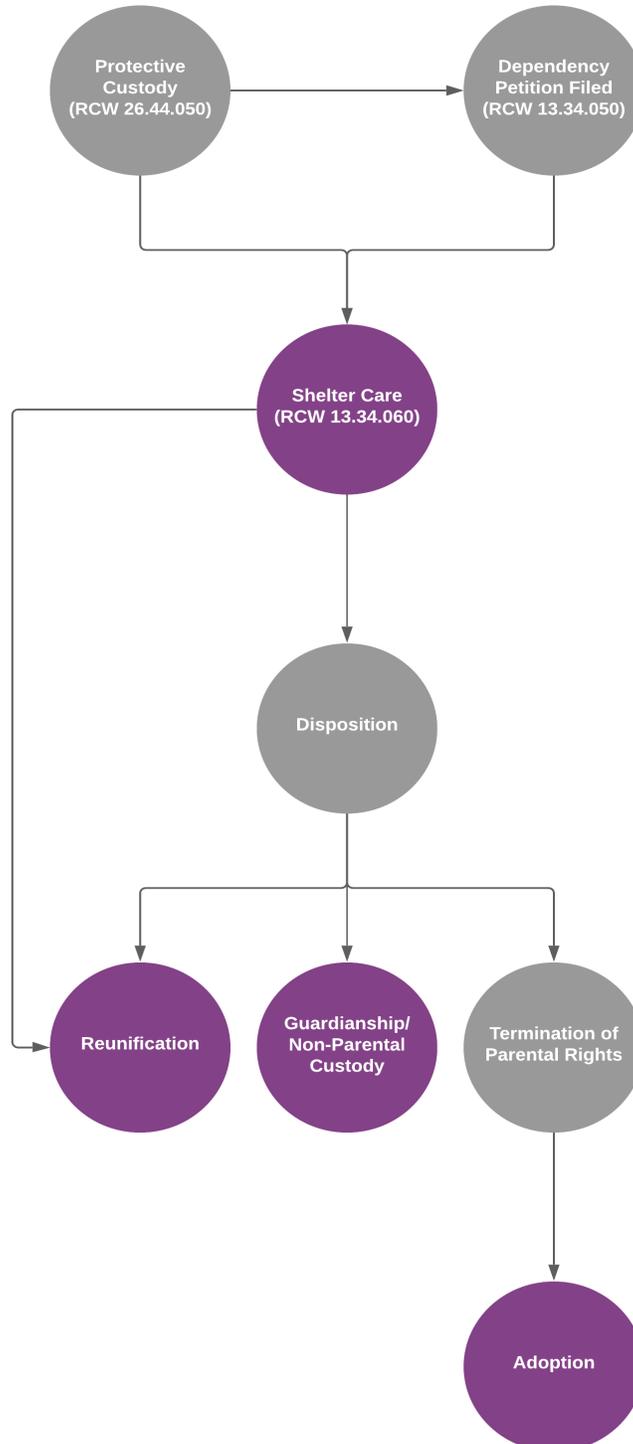
The treatment or intervention for this study was participation in the DCLR pilot program. Thus, the treatment group consisted of all youth who had a new dependency case in Grant or Lewis counties between September 1, 2017 and August 31, 2019. Each youth was appointed an OCLA-contracted attorney to provide SBLR starting at the initial shelter care hearing.

Outcomes

With guidance from the legislature and child welfare stakeholders, we identified three legal and extra-legal child outcomes to assess.

Permanency. Analysis of child outcomes in dependency courts must account for the various legal milestones in a dependency case. For example, a child reunified with their parents may experience a disposition of their case (through adjudication of the dependency petition), or the court may simply exit the child from the system because the child does not meet the legal requirements for shelter care. Understanding how children transition through these various milestones is critical to understanding the impact of DCLR. To examine these transitions, we estimate a simplified multi-state transition model exploring the states outlined in purple in Figure 1: reunification, guardianship, and adoption.

Figure 1. Dependency Transition States



Placement Stability. We operationalize placement stability as a count of the number of placements per days in care, from shelter care hearing to dismissal. Thus, a negative effect of the DCLR program would indicate a reduction in placement instability.

School Stability. We also examined the program's effect on school stability, measured as the number of non-normative school transitions per days in care. That is, we counted the total number of transitions from one school to another, for reasons other than grade promotion. Again, a negative effect of the DCLR program would indicate a reduction in school instability.

Control Variables

In the models presented below we control for age and race/ethnicity. Age was calculated at the time of shelter care. Race/ethnicity was recorded in the CCRD, and we coded the data to create the following categories: African American, Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic/Latinx, Native American, Unknown, and White. When demographic information was missing in the CCRD, data from the CCWIS was used. For the models predicting outcomes, race/ethnicity was dichotomized into minority and non-minority (White).

Analysis

Predicting Permanency

To assess permanency, we initially estimate two models - a Cox proportional hazards model and a Gompertz proportional hazards model. We estimate the Cox model as the typical choice for examining variance in the rate of permanency outcomes across groups of children in foster care. We separately estimate a fully parametric Gompertz model that will allow us to easily make the predictions necessary to perform the cost analysis, a required evaluation component. For the Cox model, we utilize the survival package in R for estimation. This model included a clustered sandwich estimator to avoid bias due to autocorrelation among sibling groups. We also parametrized the Cox model to allow the baseline hazard to vary by strata defined by time and jurisdiction. Parameter estimates from the Gompertz model provided similar conclusions to the results of the Cox model. For the sake of simplicity, since we require the Gompertz model for the cost analysis below, we report only the Gompertz model in this report.

Predicting Placement Stability and School Stability

For the remaining two outcomes, given that our dependent variables were counts of events (placement moves and non-normative school transitions), we estimated multivariate generalized linear models, assuming a Poisson distribution and log link. Models controlled for age at shelter care hearing and racial minority status. The model predicting placement stability used the full treatment and comparison samples. The model predicting school stability included only children who were age six or older at the time of shelter care (n=549). As noted above, a negative effect of the DCLR program in these models indicated a reduction in instability (i.e., an increase in stability).

Results

Sample Descriptive Statistics

We list the characteristics of the sample in Table 1. The median age at shelter care is 3.8 years. Just over half of the sample is female (n= 727). The two largest racial categories are White (51.1%) and Hispanic/Latinx (21.8%). We see no statistically significant differences between the BAU and DCLR groups except for race. Most notably, 21.3% of the BAU sample is identified as Native American (compared with 10.8% in the DCLR sample) and 18.1% of the BAU sample is identified as Hispanic/Latinx (compared with 30.4% of the DCLR sample).

Table 1. Sample Characteristics

Variable	Representation Condition			Sig ²
	Overall, N = 1,451 ¹	BAU, N = 1,017 ¹	DCLR, N = 434 ¹	
Age at Shelter Care	3.8 (0.7, 8.5)	3.5 (0.6, 8.1)	4.5 (0.9, 9.1)	p=0.069
Race				p<0.001
<i>African American</i>	102 (7.0%)	73 (7.2%)	29 (6.7%)	
<i>Asian/PI</i>	26 (1.8%)	21 (2.1%)	5 (1.2%)	
<i>Hispanic/Latinx</i>	316 (21.8%)	184 (18.1%)	132 (30.4%)	
<i>Native American</i>	264 (18.2%)	217 (21.3%)	47 (10.8%)	
<i>Unknown</i>	2 (0.1%)	1 (0.1%)	1 (0.2%)	
<i>White</i>	741 (51.1%)	521 (51.2%)	220 (50.7%)	
Gender				p=0.39
<i>Female</i>	727 (50.1%)	502 (49.4%)	225 (51.8%)	
<i>Male</i>	724 (49.9%)	515 (50.6%)	209 (48.2%)	

¹Median (IQR); n (%)

²p-value associated with Wilcoxon rank sum test (for Age); Fisher's Exact Test with simulated p-value (for Race); or Fisher's Exact Test (for Gender)

Permanency

The estimated effects on exit to reunification, guardianship, or adoption for children represented are presented in the Table 2 (DCLR Period * DCLR County). Children in the treatment group were significantly more likely to achieve permanency through reunification than children in the comparison group (b=0.37, p=.02). Specifically, the likelihood of experiencing reunification was about 45% higher for the treatment group (Hazard Ratio [HR]=1.45).

Table 2. Effect of DCLR on Permanency

Variable	Reunification		Guardianship		Adoption	
	b	p ¹	b	p ¹	b	p ¹
Age at Shelter Care	0.01	0.27	-0.01	0.41	0.84	<0.01
Minority Child	-0.14	0.05	0.76	0.01	1.09	0.25
DCLR Period	0.10	0.21	0.79	0.07	0.74	0.16
DCLR County	-0.12	0.13	-0.10	0.40	0.92	0.26
DCLR Period * DCLR County	0.37	0.02	0.58	0.18	1.23	0.29

¹p-value associated a two-sided t-test of the HR

Placement Stability

The estimated effects of treatment on the number of placement moves are presented in Table 3 (DCLR Period * DCLR County). Children in the treatment group, on average experienced fewer placement moves than children in the comparison group (b= -0.35, p<0.001). When we convert this to an Incident Rate Ratio (IRR=0.70), we find that, accounting for shared trends across time and county-level differences, as well as individual demographic factors, implementing the DCLR program decreased the placement rate by 30%. The lack of a significant effect for the three-way interaction term suggests that the effect does not appear to be impacted by age. That is, the effect appears to be consistent across age groups.

Table 3. Effect of DCLR on Placement Stability

Variable	Beta	Sig.
DCLR Period	0.11	p<0.001
DCLR County	0.26	p<0.001
Age at Shelter Care	0.09	p<0.001
Minority Child	0.07	p<0.001
DCLR Period * DCLR County	-0.35	p<0.001
DCLR Period * Age at Shelter Care	-0.02	p<0.001
DCLR County * Age at Shelter Care	-0.02	p<0.001
DCLR Period * DCLR County * Age at Shelter Care	0.01	p=0.210

Predicting School Stability

The estimated effects of treatment on non-normative school transitions are presented in Table 4 (DCLR Period * DCLR County). Most notably, the results indicate that, on average, children in the treatment group experienced significantly fewer non-normative school transitions during their dependency than the comparison group ($b=-1.053$, $p<0.001$). The IRR (0.35) indicates that implementing the DCLR program decreased the rate of non-normative school transitions by 65%. There is some indication that these results may vary by age and race, but additional analyses will be completed in future evaluations to examine this possibility.

Table 4. Effect of DCLR on School Stability

Variable	Beta	Sig.
Age at Shelter Care	0.00	$p<0.001$
DCLR County	1.31	$p<0.001$
DCLR Period	0.14	$p<0.001$
Minority Child	0.18	$p<0.001$
Age at Shelter Care * DCLR County	-0.00	$p<0.001$
Age at Shelter Care * DCLR Period	-0.00	$p<0.001$
DCLR Period * DCLR County	-1.05	$p<0.001$
Age at Shelter Care * Minority Child	0.00	$p<0.001$
DCLR County * Minority Child	-1.01	$p<0.001$
DCLR Period * Minority Child	-0.20	$p<0.001$
Age at Shelter Care * DCLR County * DCLR Period	0.00	$p<0.001$
Age at Shelter Care * DCLR County * Minority Child	0.00	$p<0.001$
Age at Shelter Care * DCLR Period * Minority Child	-0.00	$p<0.001$
DCLR County * DCLR Period * Minority Child	-0.38	$p<0.001$
Age at Shelter Care * DCLR County * DCLR Period * Minority	0.00	$p=0.004$

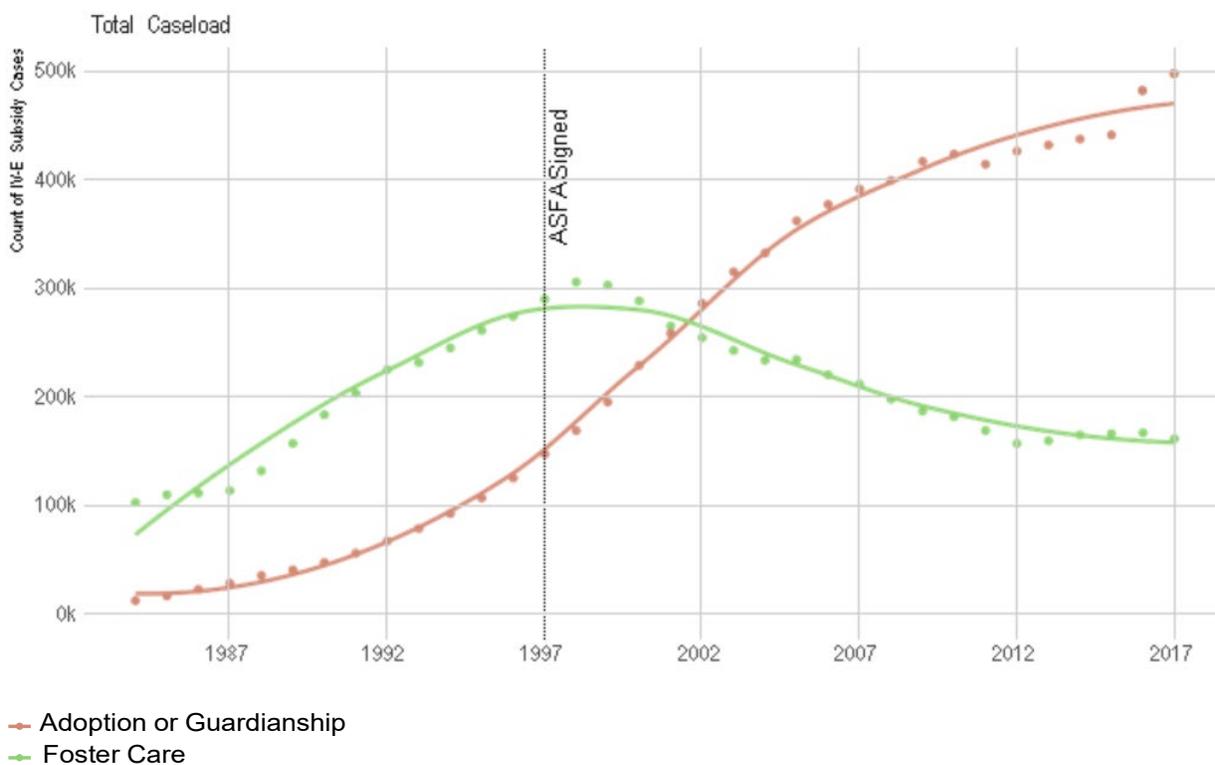
Results

The results of this outcome evaluation provide evidence that the DCLR program was beneficial to youth. Specifically, youth in the program were more likely to exit foster care through reunification, had lower out-of-home placement rates, and lower rates of non-normative school transitions. Unforeseen barriers relating to data acquisitions and subsequent time constraints prevented us from fully exploring the interaction between program participation and demographic variables to determine if the program is equally effective for all youth, but we are confident that future studies will investigate this research question.

Background

When trying to understand the total cost of the child welfare system in the US, it is essential to consider all expenditures. Figure 2 illustrates that, on average, foster care does not drive the child welfare system's total costs; adoption subsidies account for most of the government's costs. In 2017, for example, 76 percent of all IV-E cases were adoption or guardianship cases. The difference between foster care and adoption cases results from the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA). Among other things, ASFA significantly incentivized adoptions compared to other forms of permanency or care. Specific costs associated with these caseloads are not currently available nationally or from Washington State. However, under current practices in Washington and most other states, on average, adoption will yield higher costs to the child welfare system than other forms of permanency. The cost difference is due to the state's adoption subsidy obligations (and guardianship subsidy obligations). Typically, the state makes adoption subsidy payments (and provides other support) for adopted children until adulthood. As such, cost savings for any program can come both from reducing time spent in out-of-home care and from increasing the likelihood of reunification as compared to adoption or subsidized guardianship. For DCLR, cost savings come from decreasing length of stay and increasing the likelihood of reunification relative to adoption or guardianship. Most of the savings are from the latter.

Figure 2. National IV-E Caseloads, Federal Fiscal Years 1984-2017



Source: 2018 House Ways and Means Committee Green Book

Method

The cost modeling portion of the DCLR evaluation adopted a health economics approach to assessing savings. Our work proceeded in three distinct phases.

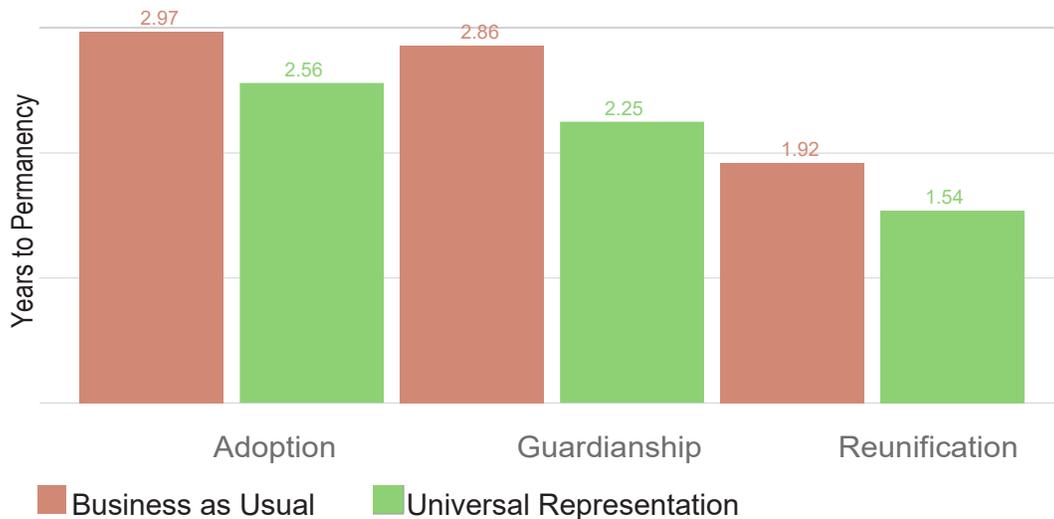
- Phase 1 - We estimate an individual-level continuous-time state transition model to predict permanency outcomes based on our observations to date.
- Phase 2 - We use the models in Phase 1 to simulate what would happen to a typical child with two different policy strategies - the DCLR program and BAU.
- Phase 3 - We estimate costs associated with the outcomes assessed in Phase 2 and summarize those costs to make it easier for policymakers to digest.

Results

Phases 1 and 2

As noted above, we estimated four different outcome models predicting permanency. Because all models produced similar results, in this report we present the model that best represents the legislature’s original intent of comparing outcomes in the DCLR pilot counties, Lewis and Grant, with two selected comparison counties, Douglas and Whatcom. After controlling for race and age, children in the DCLR counties are expected to experience permanency more quickly than children who did not participate in the DCLR program. The expected time to each permanency outcome is displayed in Figure 3. This graph is based on 100,000 simulated permanency outcomes based on the model we developed in Phase 1.

Figure 3. Expected Time to Permanency



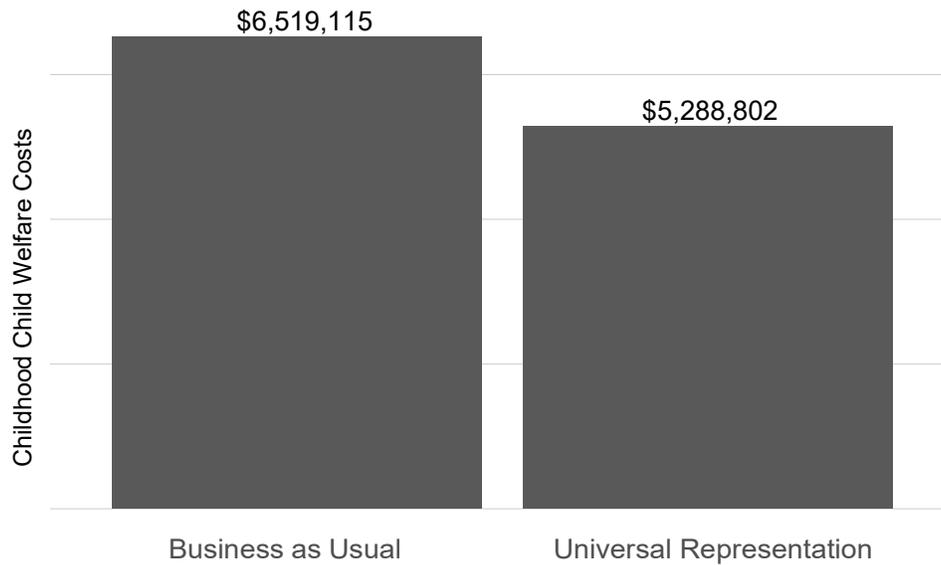
Phase 3

Phases 1 and 2 provided us with key information that allows us to estimate the cumulative child welfare cost of a theoretical expansion of DCLR to a cohort of 50,000 children. We then compare these costs to caring for a cohort of 50,000 children under BAU. Of course, Washington never has 50,000 children in care. There are, however, tens of thousands of children on Washington's IV-E caseload on any given day. Thus, we choose 50,000 children as a good order of magnitude to demonstrate the type of costs or savings attributable to DCLR. Additionally, we make the following assumptions about the costs associated with time in care and each permanency outcome.

- Care day costs: Following the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) approach to cost-benefit analysis, we adopt a low estimate of the cost of a care day focused on the direct variable costs related to foster care subsidies. Excluded from this number are staffing costs, facilities costs, etc. DCYF estimates this value at \$56.67 per day. We add \$5.00 per day for those care days associated with the DCLR program. We base this number on total program costs as reported by the OCLA.
- Adoption day costs: Also following values from WSIPP cost-benefit analysis model, we adopt an estimate of adoption day costs based solely on adoption subsidies. With inflation adjustment to numbers reported by WSIPP, we estimate an adoptive day cost to be \$22.40 per day.
- Likelihood of guardianship subsidy: The analysis presented here relies solely on information from court records. These data do not provide information as to whether or not a particular guardianship outcome contains subsidy. Using information from the congressional "Green Book" cited above, we estimate the probability of guardianship subsidy (across all guardianship and non-parental custody outcomes in our sample) to be 5%.

Using the numbers described above, we estimate the cumulative costs over our simulation – both in care and out of care in various predicted permanency outcomes – to be \$5,288,802 for the DCLR program and \$6,519,115 for BAU. These results are shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Expected Cumulative Child Welfare Costs



Costs include time in foster care and ongoing costs after care

Discussion

Results of the DCLR program presented in Part 1 of this report show that the program was associated with positive outcomes. Results from the benefit-cost analysis show that expanding DCLR to a larger cohort of Washington State youth could potentially save the state a substantial amount of money. We consider these preliminary benefit-cost analyses to be conservative, given that we only examined child welfare costs. The outcome analyses presented above showed that the DCLR program was also associated with lower rates of school instability. Future evaluations should also examine potential cost savings due to better outcomes for program participants in other domains, including education, court involvement, and employment.

Study Overview

An additional goal of this study was to gain a better understanding of the young people's experiences with their attorney. The youth perspective is important because the program was specifically designed to give a voice to youth in the dependency system and ensure their expressed interests are heard in court. Specifically, we were interested in the youths' experiences with representation in three main areas: communication, advocacy, and overall perceived benefit. We designed the Youth Experience Survey (YES), and the original study protocol included plans to interview young people age 12 and above, using the YES. DCYF required that we obtain assent from the youth as well as consent from the legal guardian. Recruitment for this qualitative portion of the study began in spring of 2019. Unfortunately, despite extensive efforts on the part of the research team, the requirements for consent as laid out by DCYF proved extremely difficult and only four surveys were completed.

In early 2020, the research team altered the study protocol to focus on recruiting young people who had experienced the program first-hand, but were over the age of 18 and thus, able to provide consent on their own behalf. This portion of the study also adopted a purely qualitative design, and we planned to conduct focus groups or individual interviews (depending on the preferences of the young people) using a semi-structured interview format. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, interviews were designed to be conducted via video conferencing. All study procedures were approved by the WSIRB. Unfortunately, despite the considerable recruitment efforts of the attorneys and the consistent follow-up of the researchers, only one valid interview was completed. Although findings from this one interview are clearly not generalizable to all youth experiences, they do provide a valuable first-person "case study" narrative of a youth's experience of having an attorney in his foster care case. The study methods and results are presented below.

Methods

Target Sample Description and Recruitment

Because the young people already had established relationships with their attorneys, initial recruitment was conducted by the attorney. We identified all program participants who had turned 18 and sent the list to OCLA staff, who distributed it to the DCLR study attorneys. After verifying that the young people to be recruited into interviews had reached age 18, attorneys contacted the potential participants and invited them to participate in the qualitative interviews. Attorneys were asked to first attempt contact via text message and/or email using a script provided by researchers. In the event that potential participants did not respond to written communication, attorneys were asked to follow up with a phone call. Attorneys told individuals who were interested that their phone number and/or email address would be given to a researcher and the researcher would be reaching out to them to complete a consent form and schedule the interview. Participants were offered a \$60 gift card as a token of appreciation for their time.

We identified 21 study participants over the age of 18. Attorneys reported that they had no valid contact information for four of these individuals. Attorneys attempted to contact eight individuals (up to three times), but received no answers. Four individuals expressed interest in participating in the study to attorneys, but did not respond to researchers' attempts (up to three) to schedule an interview.

In these instances we also asked the attorneys to schedule directly with the young people, but that strategy was also unsuccessful. Three individuals scheduled interviews with the researchers, but did not attend or respond to follow-up attempts to reschedule. Two young people completed the consent form and participated in the interview. However, it became apparent during one of the interviews that the information collected should not be used, as the interviewee gave conflicting accounts, at one point saying they had no recollection of ever having an attorney. Thus, responses from that interview are not included in this report. The responses from the sole completed interview are summarized in the Results section below and are organized around the primary interview topics.

Data Collection Instrument and Procedures

A semi-structured interview was used to elicit narratives describing youth experiences with having an attorney in their foster care cases. The semi-structured questioning format allowed the interviewer to pursue emergent, unexpected directions in participants' answers. Questions were open-ended to facilitate flexibility and probes were used to facilitate depth in responses. Interviews were conducted via a web-based video conferencing platform, and covered: 1) attorney communication (e.g., frequency, nature, quality); 2) attorney preparation and advocacy (e.g., advocating for youth's wishes, preparing for court hearings); 3) attorney treatment (e.g., interactions, fairness); 4) value of having an attorney (e.g., opinions about having an attorney, whether or not all children should have an attorney); and 5) any suggestions for change (e.g., what worked well and what could be improved). To establish rapport, youth were asked an ice-breaker question about their hobbies or interests. For context, youth were also asked a few questions about their background and experience in foster care (e.g., placement history, including number of placement and school moves).

Results - One Youth's Experience

J is over 18 and is in extended foster care. J loves hiking and camping and really appreciates living close to the woods where he has an opportunity to do both. J was 14 when he first went to live with someone besides his parents. He says that he experienced "*about 5-6 different placements*" and two school moves. J had an attorney from the onset of his foster care case at age 14.

Attorney Contact and Communication

J first learned about having an attorney from his social worker and he first met his attorney at the end of a court hearing when he was 14. When asked how he felt about that first meeting, he said his reaction was fairly neutral, sharing that he "*honestly didn't care because of the situation*" he was in – "*I was just young, wasn't having it, irritated, mad, I mean I sat there and didn't say a word really.*" J explained that at that time of his initial meeting with his attorney he also didn't fully understand what his attorney was going to do for him in the case – "*I knew she was my lawyer, but I didn't know what she was doing for me ...*" When asked if his attorney was able to talk with him and explain her role in his case in a way that he could understand, J said that yes, his attorney had been able to do that. As a result, he did come to understand that "*she was there to protect me and express my opinion in the whole thing ...*"

J described having the "*right amount*" of communication with his attorney. J knew how to contact his attorney (he had her card and email) and felt that he could contact her anytime he thought he needed to. He shared, though, that he "*never really got a hold of her [because] I haven't needed her.*" Instead, his attorney "*gets a hold of me when she needs to, checking up and all that.*" When contact with his attorney happened, it was mostly over the phone. Overall, J was satisfied with the level and quality of communication with his attorney, noting that "*the contact was there when needed. She informed me of things or asked me questions if she needed.*" J also noted that he appreciated

knowing that someone was there if he needed to raise any issues. J, who is in extended foster care, still has contact with his attorney. He's unaware, however, if the plan is to have her remain his attorney until his extended foster care ends.

Attorney Preparation and Advocacy

J felt his attorney "*helped him a lot*" to prepare for court hearings because "*I didn't understand the whole court thing.*" Before J attended court hearings, his attorney would speak with him to prepare him. J described this interaction as his attorney "*informing me about the hearing saying, if you want to go, you can come. And is there anything you want me to say?*" J shared that his attorney would:

"Generally inform me of what the main basis of what [the hearing] was going to be about ... And, you know, she would tell me a couple of things that were going to happen. She would also check in with me to see if I needed anything else; you know, if [there was] anything I needed stated or not."

J believed his attorney fought for what he wanted in the case. J said his attorney asked about his specific wishes in the case and how he wanted the case to proceed. When he needed something "*she was right on it,*" "*kept all the information straight,*" and "*she really got my points straight through to everyone.*" Asked to recall a specific example of witnessing his attorney speaking up for him, J brought up an instance where his attorney advocated for visits with his mother to take place closer to J's placement location (as the distance needed for J to travel to visit was interfering with his progress at school).

"I was falling down in grades a lot, and because of that, and mom's visits being so far away, we had to shorten the visits with her. We had to pretty much bring her closer to us, so I could get more time to visit and to work on school. And she [my attorney] pretty much got right on it to make sure that was done."

After court hearings, J's attorney would speak with him about what had happened in the hearing and explain any next steps.

Value of Having an Attorney

J believes that if he had an attorney "*everyone in foster care should have a lawyer because it really helps a lot.*" He saw value in having an attorney who would speak up for you and "*handle issues*" as they came up. Although he didn't feel he needed to access his lawyer much because he "*really didn't need much help,*" he mentioned that he appreciated knowing that someone was there to advocate for him if and when he needed.

"If you could give everyone a lawyer, give everybody a lawyer... It helps a lot! I didn't really care much about the case thing, but it was really good to have someone handle things for me and she handled it very well. She always checked to see if I needed something and was right on it. If I needed it, and when I needed it, she was there to help right away. Having a lawyer was great!"

Discussion

Although based on just one youth's experience, J's interview highlights some strengths of attorney practice and suggests some areas that might be enhanced. J's experience with his attorney was clearly positive. He knew how to contact her and felt comfortable reaching out to her if he needed. J reported that the amount of contact was appropriate for his situation and that the quality of communication with his attorney was good. J's attorney played a clear role in helping him understand the case process, prepare him for court hearings, and facilitated his understanding of what would happen moving forward at the conclusion of hearings. While J believed that he "*didn't need much help*" from an attorney, he reported that his attorney would proactively reach out to him to keep him informed, ask if he needed anything or if there was something he wanted brought up. J's attorney asked about his wishes in the case and he directly witnessed her advocacy on his behalf.

Although overwhelmingly positive, J's experience with his attorney does provide some insight into areas for possible attorney program implementation and practice improvements. J remembered, for example, not fully understanding why he was getting an attorney and what her role would be in his case ("*I knew she was my lawyer, but I didn't know what she was doing for me...*"). In J's case, his social worker was the first person to tell him he was getting an attorney. Perhaps more guidance could be given to those first point-of-contact individuals (if they are not the attorneys themselves) regarding how best to communicate with youth about the role and responsibilities of attorneys assigned to them in foster care cases. A sample script could be developed to help facilitate that initial conversation, with examples tailored to the age of the child. In addition, a brochure about "what your attorney does for you" could be designed and handed out to youth to help explain the role of their attorneys in a dependency case. J indicated that he was unsure whether his attorney would remain his attorney through to the end of his time in extended foster care. This suggests that attorneys should be clear not only about how their role or responsibilities might adapt or change depending on the stage of the case, but also about when their representation of the youth will ultimately end.

Recommendations for Including the Voice of Youth in Future Evaluation Efforts

Sampling Youth Aged 18 and Older

As noted above, the research team attempted to survey/interview foster youth aged 12 and above. However, response rates were low, mainly because obtaining consent from legal guardians or caretakers proved an insurmountable obstacle. Consequently, the current study limited the interview sample to young adults ages 18 or older who, because they are legal adults, were capable of consenting to participation. While the advantage is that those who had reached the age of majority could provide consent, the drawback to this approach is that opinions and experiences of younger children with their attorneys, which may be qualitatively different than those of older youth, are missing from the study. Despite this concern, given past problems with obtaining consent and low response rates, the recommendations for different recruitment strategies offered below are based upon having youth ages 18 or older participate, so that sample sizes might be increased, and more youth voices included in evaluation findings (albeit older youth voices).⁶

⁶ Interview instruments in this study were designed to ask older youth to retrospectively reflect on earlier stages of their case (when they were younger but still had an attorney), to provide some perspectives on what that experience was like for them at younger ages. nd Engrossed Substitute Bill 5890

Content of Recruitment Scripts

To facilitate participation, perhaps a stronger case should be made during recruitment for why youth input into the program design of DCLR is important. While the current study presented a rationale for obtaining their observations to the youth, and did stress the value of their participation, future recruitment scripts/materials should clearly emphasize the important role a youth could play in helping to improve the attorney program and possibly to provide evidence favoring expansion of the program to provide attorneys to all children and youth in foster care. This emphasis should be made with the youth themselves and also recruitment allies (e.g., social workers, attorneys, others) if they are the first point of contact with the youth about the study. Offering to circle back with the youth to share findings of the study or allowing them an opportunity to provide input into draft reports of interview findings before they are finalized, may alleviate any concerns youth have about what might be done with the information they provide, making their participation more likely and may also engender a sense of purpose and meaning related to expressing the youth's perspective. In addition, interview protocol questions could be sent beforehand so the youth have a better understanding of what questions will be asked during the interview, and how the conversation will be structured, enhancing comfort with the interview process.

Enlisting Recruitment Allies

In the current iteration of the study, we received contact information for eligible and interested youth from the attorneys and then a member of the research team directly contacted the youth. When youth failed to get back with us using this method, we then recruited the attorneys to reach out to their clients and, if the youth was willing to participate, to schedule a date and time for the interview. This approach failed to increase our sample size. Future evaluation efforts might consider involving other individuals with a connection to the youth as recruitment allies in addition to the attorney. Social workers, biological parents, foster parents, and CASAs, for example, could be asked to reach out to eligible youth (i.e., those who meet the study parameters), to explain the study, inquire about participation, obtain informed consent and schedule interviews with the research team. Youth who are alumni of foster care, as credible messengers, might also be offered a role in recruitment and scheduling of interviews. Trained on proper recruitment for the study and informed consent protocols, youth who are alumni of care might be especially successful recruiters as our interview subjects can easily connect with and relate to them. In sum, determining who has the most interactions with and relationship to the youth, and considering ways to include these individuals in efforts to recruit eligible youth for the study, may increase the response rate. In some instances, this may not be the attorney, but perhaps the social worker, CASA, the independent living program specialist/coordinator, or someone from the foster youth association.

Consider Different Points of Contact/Opportunities for Recruitment

There may be additional opportunities to access eligible youth (those who have had attorneys in their dependency case), as well as youth who have experienced the system without an attorney, for comparison. Court hearings, family team meetings, permanency planning/independent living conferences for youth, or programs for youth who are involved in, or recently aged out of the foster care system and are transitioning to independent living may all be possible venues for youth contact and study recruitment.

- Court hearing recruitment: Researchers could ask judges/commissioners to make an announcement at the conclusion of hearings when eligible youth are present to inform them of the study and ask if they would like to participate. A carefully crafted recruitment script would be written for the judges/commissioners that outlines the purpose of the study and the value of participation but does not appear to unduly pressure the youth (a possible concern when recruitment is coming from an authority figure such as a judge). If the youth expressed interest, contact information for the researchers would then be provided. This process would work well for both in-person and remote/online hearings. For the latter, contact information for the research team could be given verbally and in text via the chat feature of the web-based conferencing platform.
- Youth meeting recruitment: Each month, a designated staff member from DCYF could email the research team a list of meetings involving eligible youth (e.g., permanency planning/independent living conferences) that are scheduled to take place. The list would include the date, time and location of the meeting, including if it will take place remotely/online due to COVID-19 pandemic safety restrictions. For confidentiality purposes, information about the meeting would not include identifying case information.
 - o In-person meetings: A researcher would not observe the meeting but would be available at its conclusion to directly recruit youth for participation in the study. If youth consented to be interviewed, the interviews could then be held face-to-face immediately following the conference (in a private room) or scheduled for a date, time and location more convenient for the youth. Alternatively, the meeting facilitator could be asked to read a recruitment script at the conclusion of the meeting and ask youth if they would be interested in participating in the study. Contact information for follow-up with the research team to schedule an interview, as well as more information about the study and consent forms, would then be handed-out to interested youth.
 - o Remote/online meeting recruitment: A researcher would not observe the meeting but would be “linked in” at its conclusion to recruit youth for the study. The meeting facilitator would introduce the researcher, who would then explain the study. If youth consented to be interviewed, the researcher would share contact information to schedule an interview (or provide the youth with some possible pre-determined dates and times and have them select an interview time). If it is not possible for the researcher to link into the remote meeting, the meeting facilitator could read a recruitment script at the conclusion of the meeting and ask the youth if they would be interested in participating in the study. Contact information for follow-up with the research team to schedule an interview could be provided verbally and in the chat feature of the web-based conferencing platform.

Offer a Menu of Options that Match Youth’s Participation Preferences

COVID19 has affected the way child welfare data are collected. Our evaluation plans developed pre-pandemic, which relied on in-person data collection via focus group methods, had to be revised in light of travel restrictions and safety precautions. Specifically, the current study was adjusted to require youth to call in (at a minimum) but ideally to also share video in a web-based conferencing platform to be interviewed. While we assumed this approach would allow youth the flexibility to participate from a location and time most convenient for them, we learned that access to the internet and technology were unequal among the youth we were trying to reach. In one instance, after a young woman failed to participate in three separate scheduled interviews, we learned from her attorney that she does not have access to reliable Wi-Fi and may have been too embarrassed to share this with us. Future recruitment efforts should explore possible access challenges in advance,

and ascertain if the youth can, and wants to, go online for an interview. If they do not, other options for participating in the interview should be offered, such as via a telephone call only, via email or text only (these options are described further below), or via an in-person interview (but socially distanced) in a place selected by the youth. Given COVID-19 pandemic safety protocols, the ability to conduct face-to-face interviews is restricted. To overcome these restrictions, the current study used a remote/virtual interview format. However, to increase participation in future research, a menu of “participation options” might be offered to youth.

Caseworkers and/or youth attorneys, for example, could make initial contact with youth to let them know about the study and ask if they would be willing to be contacted by a member of the research team. Youth would then be offered a selection of different ways they could be contacted (i.e., by phone call, email or text), and also which mode of interview they would prefer (e.g., which method they are most comfortable with or best suits their schedule). In addition to the web-based video conference interview method used in the current study, alternative options for the interview that might be offered to youth moving forward include:

- An asynchronous email-based interview. Asynchronous email interviewing is a qualitative research method where questions and answers to interview questions are exchanged online (e.g., Brondani and Marino, 2017; Richards et. al, 2020). Asynchronous email interviewing does not require people to be present at the same time to communicate. Researchers email interviewees one or two interview questions at a time and ask the participant to respond. The process differs from a web-based survey in that interviewers can react to the participant’s answers, follow-up with probes, and modify questions based on the responses given. In this way, the process mimics an in-person or telephone interview. An overall time limit can be imposed on the interview exchange (e.g., researchers can require the exchange be completed within one week) but breaks between questioning and responses may last a few seconds to minutes or days because the interviewee would not have to provide an immediate answer to the questions. The advantage to this approach is that there is no need to find a time when both researcher and participant are ready and available for the interview, nor to ensure that the participant has enough time to think their answer through. Participants can describe their experiences in the comfort of their home environment, whenever they feel ready. The information will lack some spontaneity, but the responses provided may be more detailed as participants have more time to think before responding.

There are limitations to email interviewing. The fact that the email interview lacks nonverbal cues is one of the main disadvantages of this method. Of course, the use of email interviews is also limited by the youth’s ability to use a computer and access the internet. Additionally, a problem might arise for youth who are less able to explain themselves in writing than in speech. These are all important limitations to consider, but given the difficulty encountered in gaining participation from youth for our study, email interviewing may be a viable option to increase sample sizes.

- A synchronous text/chat-based interview. Synchronous interactions are “live” communications that take place simultaneously over text or chat applications or apps (e.g., Richards et., al 2020). A synchronous “texting” interview option may appeal to youth who routinely communicate by texting or via chat apps. The synchronous format has an advantage over the email interviewing format as interviewing via text or chat apps more directly mimics in-person discussion. Like the email interview, the anonymity of the online text/chat communication may also encourage participants to disclose more information. Virtual focus groups are also possible using smart phone chat apps and would involve a small group of participants who can reflect on and react to responses of others to interview questions posed in the chat.
- An online survey. The current interview protocol could be adapted and offered in an online survey format as another option for participation. Although the survey method was tried before for this study and obtained low response rates, perhaps offering it as one of a few response options may increase the likelihood that someone who selects the survey option will complete it.
- An in-person or web-based (“zoom”) focus group. Originally, we intended to travel to conduct in-person focus group interviews with youth. Because of pandemic safety and travel restrictions we modified our focus group interview and implemented a web-based (e.g., “zoom” conferencing) interview instead. Perhaps, if we had continued to offer the focus group option, either in-person or as a “zoom” focus group, we may have had more willing participants. Youth may have been more interested in an opportunity to share their thoughts about having an attorney in a group setting of their peers– even if the group was convened over the web and not in-person.

Conclusion

The challenges to including the voice of youth faced by this study are certainly not unique and reflect the challenges faced by the field as a whole when trying to include the perspective of vulnerable populations in study methods. Securing participation proved difficult even when restricting the study sample to youth who were of legal age to consent. To address these challenges, future evaluation efforts might consider enhancing the existing recruitment process by updating the recruitment scripts/protocols, identifying and including additional recruitment allies who have relationships to the youth, exploring different venues that could serve as recruitment opportunities, and by offering youth different options for how they participate in the study. In addition, it could be helpful for DCYF to re-evaluate the assent/consent procedures to strike a better balance between protecting vulnerable youth populations and incorporating their invaluable perspectives into program evaluations. Just one completed interview for this study provided an informative first-person narrative about the youth-attorney relationship and suggested areas for possible practice improvement. Continuing research efforts to include more voices of youth would have a meaningful impact on understanding the effectiveness of attorney representation for youth in foster care cases in Washington State.

Study Overview and Methods

Issues concerning the program implementation in the pilot sites were assessed with interviews with child welfare stakeholder groups. A focus group was held in Lewis County and included: two caseworkers, two children's attorneys, two GALs, and an assistant attorney general. The group interview was held over two hours at the local library. Telephone interviews were completed with GALs and a children's attorney from Grant County. The interview questions posed by the facilitator asked participants about their understanding of the pilot program, how attorneys are assigned to cases, the effectiveness and efficiency of the service delivery, the clarity of the program model and stakeholders' roles relative to the program, and program strengths, benefits, and challenges. Interviews were confidential and no identifiers were recorded or maintained. Notes and recordings of the interviews were analyzed for key themes.

Results

The major themes garnered from interviews with child welfare stakeholders in the two pilot counties are summarized below.

- The program created to study children's representation was met with skepticism at first, but the children's attorneys in both counties became valuable members of the team of professionals working on dependency cases, establishing trust and collegiality among stakeholders.
- There were some issues with program rollout, such as lack of orderly preparation or training for the court-based stakeholders as well as early miscommunication or lack of information about the purpose and approach of SBLR for dependent children.
- Greater clarity is needed about the overlapping but distinct roles of children's attorneys and GALs, especially in cases involving nonverbal children.
- Benefits from the use of children's attorneys, perhaps unrelated to time to permanency, arise from the attorney's ability to advocate for a child's desires, increased communication among stakeholders, additional insight for the court, and the attorney's potential mediating role.
- Standardized training for attorneys has proved beneficial, as the children's attorneys present as consistent and reliable, though some participants noted that different children's attorneys vary in their level of involvement with cases.

Discussion

The results indicate that there are lessons to be learned about how to prepare site-based stakeholders for the local implementation of SBLR for dependent children. The immediate goals of the program, its intended effects, and its structure and operation relative to the roles of other participants in the court process, such as GALs and court-appointed advocates, should be the objects of education and outreach before the local program start date. Further, the focus group discussion points to a shifting conception of the benefit of the program, from an initial idea centered on speedy process and case resolution to a more nuanced view of the impact, over time, of advocacy for the child's interest, whether stated or legal, especially for pre-verbal children.

Study Overview

As part of the SBLRF, OCLA created tracking sheets for attorneys to complete at the close of each study case. These sheets were designed to track challenges faced by the young person in the family and school domains, significant changes, and the subsequent actions of the attorney. The tracking sheets were completed by attorneys, the hard copies were scanned, and then the data were inputted into a data base for analysis. A total of 205 tracking sheets were completed and analyzed by February 2021. In addition, attorneys kept notes on their activities that they deemed especially impactful.

Results

School Issues

Of the 205 youth for whom a tracking sheet was completed, 110 (53.7%) were school aged. Over 98% of these school aged youth were enrolled in school at the close of the case. One potentially impactful consequence of child welfare involvement is often a change in school. Around two thirds (64.5%) of school aged youth with a tracking sheet experienced at least one school move during the life of the case (range: one to five total school moves). Attorneys reported engaging in multiple school-related advocacy activities, including working to enforce an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), bringing it to the attention of the court when a school move resulted in negative consequences, preventing school moves, and expediting enrollment in a new school when a placement change necessitated a school move. Notes from a study attorney illustrates this advocacy work.

My 11 and 9 year old clients have been placed with their grandparents in [a town] for almost 9 months. Fortunately, grandma agreed to, and has transported the kids to their schools in [another town] for the past 9 months. This drive takes 20-30 minutes each way on a rural road. Mother hasn't made great progress and Dad is not in the picture. Grandparents now want the children immediately removed. At the [Family Team Decision Making meeting] today, [it was announced] that the only foster home they can find for the kids is in [another town], which is at least 35 minute drive...[The kids will be moved] Tuesday following an urgent change of placement motion. I just called the 11 year old's school counselor/principal who I have met before. I asked if they could help me find a family where these children could stay. The School personnel was very sympathetic and agreed with me that my 11 year old client is very shy and would be destabilized if forced to move to [new town]. They will have a meeting and brainstorm potential options and seemed glad to be asked. Tomorrow I will drive to [town] and continue knocking on doors looking for an option for the kids to remain there...This particular service seems to be a critical one for lawyers given the limited foster homes.

Placement Issues

Over 90% of children with a tracking sheet experienced at least one out-of-home placement during the life of the case (range: one to four total placements). In 85.5% of the cases, the attorney reported visiting their client in each placement. Attorneys reported engaging in important activities related the child's placement, including working to prevent a change of placement that was not suitable and advocating in court for the child's desired placement or placement with a relative.

One attorney relayed a story about a 17 year old Latinx student who identifies as male and gay who had experienced multiple placements. He was placed with a distant relative, and this placement resulted in a school change from his small, predominantly Latinx high school to a larger, much less diverse school. He endured teasing from students at his new school. Due to mental health and substance use issues, the young man was admitted to an in-patient treatment facility. The study attorney wrote:

When I attempted to call my client at the treatment facility, I was told he was not allowed phone calls due to his behaviors. I obtained a court order the next day to allow phone contact. When I finally reached him by phone, it was clear he was upset and did not want to return to his former placement. I immediately got on the road to visit him at the facility...After reminding my client that our conversation was confidential, he unloaded months of unhappiness. Although I had visited him in every placement, this was the first time he talked at any length. He wanted to return to his hometown high school and family. He missed his sisters and friends. I asked him again if he could come up with anybody in [his hometown] who could be a placement. He mentioned a paternal aunt...I asked if there was anyone who could write a supporting declaration on his behalf. He mentioned a former teacher...I later informed the parties that I would be filing a motion for a return home or placement with the paternal aunt...The aunt very much wanted her nephew in her home...I also contacted my client's teacher...The teacher was willing to write a declaration supporting a return home...During the hearing, the commissioner considered a return home, but ultimately placed with the aunt...I immediately called my client who was overjoyed to be returning to his community and school. His 17th birthday was the next day – he said it was the best present he ever received.

Discussion

The attorney tracking sheets are a useful tool, not only for attorneys to document their work, but to provide supplemental information to researchers evaluating the effects of the SBLR program. The tracking sheets completed by the attorneys in the current study provided helpful information highlighting some of the work that goes into SBLR that may go unseen, such as advocating for or against placement and/or school changes. Attorneys should continue to use these tracking sheets for all cases.

The tracking sheets were created specifically for this study, and this is the first time they have been used. Thus, we were able to gain insights on how they can be improved. First, the focus of the questions was split between circumstances of the child's case and actions of the attorneys. Because we have access to administrative records that will provide information on the case specifics and youth outcomes, the tracking sheet should focus primarily on the behaviors of the attorney, as this information is not available elsewhere. Second, the sheets should be modified to include "gating" questions for each section so that it is apparent whether each activity is applicable to the case or not. For example, attorneys report whether they successfully prevented a school move, but it is not clear if that specific situation was relevant to each case. So if an attorneys says no, we do not know if it was not applicable or if the attorney did not advocate. Finally, the tracking sheets can be expanded to include additional areas of advocacy beyond the home and school domains. It is evident from the attorney notes that they can play an important role in many areas of the child's life.

Conclusion

This five-part mixed methods process and outcomes evaluation of the DCLR pilot program was valuable for several reasons. First, the quantitative evaluation piece showed that program participants had a higher likelihood of reunification and lower rates of both out-of-home placements and non-normative school transitions. Second, the benefit-cost analysis showed that taking the DCLR program statewide could result in substantial cost savings. Third, we learned important lessons regarding incorporating youth voice into the evaluation and, specifically, how our approach can be improved for future studies. Fourth, the process evaluation revealed areas in which program implementation can be improved as the program scales up. Finally, we learned that the attorney tracking sheets are valuable, but need to be edited for clarity to improve the quality of analyses. Overall, this report supports the legislature's decision to expand the DCLR program to other counties across the state. Future studies can draw from the lessons we learned in our evaluation of the pilot program.

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Jill Malat, Program Manager
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To: Supreme Court Commission on Children in Foster Care

From: Jill Malat, Children's Representation Program Manager
Bailey Zydek, Children's Representation Program Counsel

Re: Implementation of SHB1219

Date: December 8, 2021

This memo is in response to some questions that have been asked by Laurie Lippold regarding the implementation of SHB1219. I have included Laurie's questions along with responses below.

Q1: We've heard that the implementation process is separate from the standards workgroup, but can you share a little bit about what you are thinking regarding stakeholder engagement for the implementation process? What is OCLA's plan to talk with diverse groups of stakeholders to inform its program rollout?

A1: The legislation formalizes the separate Children's Representation Program (CRP) within the Office of Civil Legal Aid (OCLA) and assigns implementation of the program providing counsel to children and youth from ages 8-21 to the agency. RCW 2.53.025. While the legislation contemplates stakeholder engagement, no specific direction is provided, thereby leaving it to the agency to determine the most appropriate means.

As we shared in our many conversations regarding the bill's language prior to and during the legislative session, we embrace a children and youth-informed and centered approach to implementation of the expanded CRP consistent with applicable practice standards, race and other equity objectives, and relevant performance measures. To that end, we will establish a permanent CRP Advisory Council. The Advisory Council will include youth in care (if possible), alumni, equity professionals, experienced CRP attorneys, and others. We will compensate members with lived experience for their time and contributions.

While the Advisory Council will provide high level strategic guidance to help inform our implementation efforts, it will not have a direct role in operational decision making. Starting in January when our implementation efforts begin, we will consult with many people and organizations, including the stakeholders who worked so hard to secure passage of this historical legislation.

Re: HB 1219 Implementation

12/8/2021

Page 2 of 2

Q2: Are there other states you are looking to consult with regarding contracting and staffing models for legal rep? And how to ensure the attorney pool is diverse?

A2: We are consistently engaged with [NACC](#) and colleagues in other states. Not surprisingly, each state has its own approach to representation of children, including the standard applicable to such representation (e.g., best interest or stated interest). The contracting model will likely follow the same approach that we have used for the current legally free program and that OPD employs for its statewide Parents Representation Program, which the Legislature directed we follow in 2015 (See [sec. 116\(2\), ch. 4, laws of 2015](#)). We are consistently reviewing compensation levels, and recently made a transitional upward adjustment in the compensation rate for CRP attorneys.

Diversity of the attorney pool is but one of many considerations relating to race-equity informed operation of this program. While we aggressively work on an ongoing basis to identify and engage attorneys of color and those with lived experience, we recognize that these attorneys are woefully underrepresented in the children's representation bar and the organized bar itself. Consequently, just as we are doing in the context of our Eviction Defense Program, we will be looking for one or more law schools in the state with which we might partner to build a system that intentionally recruits, trains, provides experiential learning opportunities, and places attorneys of color and those with lived experience and a passion for this work into the practice of children's representation. In the eviction defense space, OCLA and SU Law have just announced a Housing Justice Collective that does just this (See attached). The goal is to develop a permanent pipeline to identify, seed, train, and place attorneys into this practice over time.

Q3: It would be great to get a general sense/outline of what your process will be (not necessarily the substance that will come from the process).

For the eviction defense right to counsel bill OCLA was required to develop an implementation plan per the legislation, right?! That outward facing plan provided a helpful guide to the community about what OCLA will do. And it was informed by stakeholders. Is something like this going to happen with respect to 1219?

A3: The eviction defense program presents a very different situation. Prior to passage of SB 5160, there was no right to counsel program for tenants in Washington State. The Legislature expressly directed the agency to submit an implementation plan within 90 days of the legislation's effective date.

There is no such mandate in HB 1219 as we are not starting from scratch in the children's representation space. OCLA established and has been running a nationally recognized Children's Representation Program for legally free children here in WA since 2014. We will build on the systems and strategies that have served us well (and produced the great outcomes reflected in the [DCLR Study Report](#)) and the lessons we have and continue to learn. We outlined our implementation approach in the [fiscal note](#) that we submitted to and which served as the basis of the Legislature's appropriation of funding for implementation of the program. We will consult with and be guided, informed, and supported by the Advisory Council. And we will keep the Commission fully informed during the process.

TO: President Eduardo M. Peñalver

FROM: Annette E. Clark, Dean and Professor of Law
Cindy Yeung, Assistant Dean, Access to Justice Institute
James Bamberger, Director, Office of Civil Legal Aid
Philippe Knab, OCLA Eviction Defense Program Manager

DATE: November 1, 2021

SUBJECT: Seattle University School of Law and the Office of Civil Legal Aid
Housing Justice Collective

Announcing the Housing Justice Collective at Seattle University School of Law

In order to build a sustainable community of practice in housing eviction defense and to address the housing inequities that have plagued this country for over a century, Seattle University School of Law and the Office of Civil Legal Aid (OCLA) are pleased to announce a partnership, the ***Housing Justice Collective***, with the goal of creating a sustainable pipeline of diverse, highly competent, and committed lawyer-advocates to represent tenants in unlawful detainer actions in Washington State. Together with OCLA, Seattle U Law recognizes the expanding job market in this practice area and the need for deeper, more specialized substantive and skills instruction for students who wish to serve individuals and families experiencing rental housing instability and risk of eviction.

Civil Gideon and the Need for Highly Qualified and Trained Students/Attorneys

On April 22, 2021, Washington State Governor Jay Inslee signed 2ESSB 5160, which made Washington the first state in the nation to require that courts appoint attorneys for indigent tenants in eviction cases. Establishing the right to appointed counsel (RTC) in all thirty-seven of Washington's counties has created a significant number of opportunities for both lawyers and law students. Attorneys are needed to fill the RTC positions and administrators are needed to ensure quality, consistency of service, and develop and deliver training.

We believe that Washington's law schools have a duty to educate and train the next generation of lawyers to be knowledgeable and prepared in this practice area. Given its commitment to social justice, Seattle University School of Law, in partnership with the Office of Civil Legal Aid (OCLA), is leading the way in fostering RTC implementation and educating powerful advocates for justice for this critically important work.

Seattle University School of Law is the Pacific Northwest's most diverse law school; the entering class of 2024 is comprised of 37 percent Black, Indigenous, and People of



Color and 64 percent women. These students have diverse and powerful lived experiences and chose Seattle U Law in part because of its demonstrated commitment to social justice. They are eager to use their legal skills to identify and dismantle the systems that cause renters of color to be evicted at disproportionate rates as compared to white renters.

Seattle U Law is committed to being proactive and responsive to the needs of the legal community. As a Jesuit institution, social justice and educating the whole person run through the veins of our community. It is our priority to creating lasting partnerships with advocacy partners in order to educate and train passionate and competent attorneys who are prepared to serve the public good.

OCLA is an independent judicial branch established to administer and oversee expenditure of state appropriations for civil legal aid services to low-income Washingtonians. It is institutionally committed to equity, inclusion, and diversity in the assessment of legal needs and the delivery of legal aid services. OCLA is a founding member of and embraces the race equity and justice commitments articulated by the Washington State Race Equity and Justice Initiative. OCLA works to ensure and support early identification, recruitment, and training of diverse attorneys, as well as support for attorneys and those interested in a public justice legal career.

OCLA operates a number of distinct civil legal aid projects, including, effective July 1, 2021, the nation's first statewide program for appointed attorneys representing low-income tenants in eviction cases. After the legislature passed and Governor Inslee signed 2ESSB 5160 into law, OCLA was assigned responsibility to implement and administer the RTC program in Washington. OCLA was required to submit an implementation plan to the legislature within 90 days of its effective date and for full implementation to be accomplished within 12 months after its effective date (April 22, 2022). Roughly 65 attorneys will be hired initially to provide right to counsel services to eligible tenants.

Priming the Pump for the Housing Justice Collective: Initial Seattle U Law Steps

Since 2015, Seattle U Law has housed the [Homeless Rights Advocacy Project](#) (HRAP), led by Professor Sara Rankin, that offers students the opportunity to do policy research, analysis, and advocacy on behalf of unhoused people. HRAP builds partnerships across a range of disciplines with community members, advocates, academic institutions, and other stakeholders to advance the rights of homeless people. HRAP also advocates for the repeal of laws that criminalize homelessness and poverty and for the pursuit of alternatives that address the root problems of homelessness and poverty.

In October 2020, the Seattle U Law Access to Justice Institute, in partnership with students and the King County Bar Association's Housing Justice Project (HJP), sponsored an eviction defense clinic as part of the ABA's Celebrate Pro Bono Week. The clinic introduced students to eviction defense, and in that one day, assisted more clients than would ordinarily be served by HJP in a week. Given the clinic's success, it



was replicated again with great success on October 29, 2021, in celebration of Pro Bono Week.

In the Spring 2021 semester, Seattle U Law launched its Housing Justice Clinic course, bringing together law school faculty and the staff at HJP. The clinic was both fully enrolled (10 students) and highly successful, with two students who participated in the clinic being hired by HJP immediately upon graduation in May. The Housing Justice Clinic is again being offered in the Fall 2021 semester and is fully enrolled.

In August 2021, Seattle U Law made housing inequity the theme of 1L Orientation, a multi-day program that introduces new students to the law school and the legal profession. All 230 1Ls read *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*, by Richard Rothstein, and engaged in small group discussions of the relevance of the book's findings to the escalating eviction crisis, particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. They also listened to a timely presentation by Edmund Witter of the KCBA's Housing Justice Project on racial justice and the important role of lawyers in challenging housing inequities.

Housing Justice Collective: Seattle University School of Law Commitments

- Undertake a review of the law school's curriculum, revising and adding courses/components as necessary to ensure provision of comprehensive education and training for students to become competent housing defense lawyers:
 - Substantive law, including increasing the availability of our current landlord/tenant course and/or offering additional courses on subsidized housing, the Fair Housing Amendments Act, and trauma informed lawyering,
 - Skills training in specialized practices and procedures for eviction defense, including mediation and conflict resolution
 - Training in anti-racist lawyering, emphasizing an understanding of the racialization and bias inherent in the housing system
 - Relevant externship opportunities
- Explore opportunities for broader collaboration with Seattle University, particularly relevant undergraduate departments and majors and the Center for Community Engagement, in the hopes of creating an even deeper pipeline of students committed to this practice area
- Promote the Housing Justice Collective through social media and a story in the Lawyer magazine
- Educate students about the Housing Justice Collective through an annual Social Justice Monday presentation (inaugural presentation scheduled for January 10, 2022)



- Add appropriate components to the Center for Professional Development's (career services) programming so that students are fully aware of the practice opportunities in eviction defense
- Invite Matthew Desmond, author of *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*, to speak at Seattle University

Housing Justice Collective: Office of Civil Legal Aid Commitments

- Fund two Public Interest Law Foundation (PILF) grants for Seattle U Law students at the KCBA Housing Justice Project annually for the next 3 years (inaugural OCLA funding already approved for two Summer 2022 PILF grants)¹
- Support Seattle U Law efforts to obtain additional PILF grant funding (e.g., inaugural Northwest Justice Project funding of one PILF grant, at OCLA's suggestion)
- Collaborate with and support Seattle U Law efforts to seek additional grant funding to grow the Housing Justice Collective
- Promote the Housing Justice Collective through appropriate means, including recommending graduates of the Seattle U Law curriculum to RTC employers

Conclusion

Together, Seattle University School of Law and the Office of Civil Legal Aid, through the Housing Justice Collective, will provide students with meaningful exposure to unlawful detainer practice and create a permanent pipeline of qualified and justice-minded advocates for the state of Washington.

¹ The underwriting PILF grants guarantees that each summer our students will be exposed to unlawful detainer defense and develop an understanding of the opportunities that exist in this practice area. Post-graduation, PILF grantees are more likely to pursue public interest careers and, in some cases, are hired by their host organizations. Several PILF grantees are now access to justice leaders in the community, and grantees can be found at almost every public interest entity in Washington, both civil and criminal.



Statewide Survey of Young Adults with Experience in Foster Care

Executive Summary

This study provides a perspective on the Washington child welfare system from the viewpoint of those who have been served by the system. The study was developed with Mockingbird Society program participants with lived experience. It consists of 219 online surveys of young adults who had experienced foster care, where respondents graded the services they had received. The reasons for the grades were explained in 63 follow-up one-on-one interviews.

Participants were recruited via multiple nonprofit agencies and a weblink promoted by other partners. The racial/ethnic mix and ratio of those identifying as LGBTQ+ were representative of the State child welfare system. However, the participants do not represent all foster care alumni; the majority entered the system as pre-teens or teenagers. They were therefore less apt than most children/youth in foster care to have been reunited with family or adopted. Most were entering adulthood without family support and still using nonprofit services;

half were in Extended Foster Care. As most were connected to nonprofit services, they may exhibit better outcomes than others without family support who are not served by nonprofits.

This study confirms many known issues, including concerns that have been raised over the years by Mockingbird's direct participants. However, the findings give even more voice to the impact of the system's deficits on those receiving services and codify the ineffectiveness of many programs.

Service Grades

Almost all the services queried received "C" average grades (2.3 on a 0 to 4 scale). Around a third of respondents gave "B" average grades and a quarter gave services an average grade of "C-". Sub-groups who gave the lowest average scores included those:

- ◆ Who identified as LGBTQ+ (1.9 average)
- ◆ With eight+ placements (1.9)
- ◆ Who termed their mental health as "poor" (1.7)

"A" and "B" grades went most often to services provided by non-profit agencies – both "Education Supports" and "Non-profit Services" (in general) received an "A" or "B" from the majority. This was true regardless of the nonprofit through which the respondent was contacted.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
Full Findings	3
Introduction	3
Methodology	4
Respondent Profile	5
Sibling Placement	8
Adoption, Reunification and Kinship Care	9
Homelessness	10
Grades for Services	10
Grade Averages and Sub-Group Analysis	12
Grade Explanations	16
Importance of Services	23
Additional Services	25
Discussion	27
Acknowledgements	29
Endnotes	29
Case Studies	30



Transforming foster care & Ending youth homelessness

“ It kinda helps when people listen.”

“ Foster kids need more voice in their decisions about what they participate in.

“Diane” describes herself as having been relatively lucky in foster care, although she acknowledges, “Being a foster child is not easy ... it is not a walk in the park.” She credits an early social worker, whom Diane calls “amazing ... She listened to every concern I had.” The social worker always took her out of the house during visits, for pizza or ice cream, and spent as much time as necessary.

Diane needed the social worker’s help initially, as she was first placed, as a pre-teen, across the state from home with a family that did not accept her LGBTQ identity. The parents tried to “counsel the gay out of me.” “My self-esteem was in the shitter ... I was suicidal,” she continues.

Her social worker then found an LGBTQ friendly placement, where Diane flourished for years. However, after two years she was given a new social worker, whom she was told specialized in Native American youth such as her. That social worker, and most of the four that followed, were not as successful as the original assignment.

For more on Diane, see page 33

“Keeping the Same Social Worker” received the most “D”/“F” grades overall, and significant numbers (40% or more) checked “D”, “F” or “did not have” as grades for “Training on Finances,” “Sex Education,” “Driver’s License Help,” and “Job Training.”

Questions related to the respondents’ placements (“Being Treated like Family” and “Placements that were a good match for you”) earned the most “C” grades—from around a third of respondents. Interviewees often explained that these “C” grades were an average of good and bad.

Respondents who identified as either LGBTQ+ or BIPOC also gave “C” average grades to services that might have helped them with any challenges related to those identities. Almost half of those who identified as LGBTQ+ rated any additional support from their social worker and/or foster parents as “D/F/Did not have.”

LGBTQ+ young adults also reported less desirable outcomes than others. They were:

- ◆ 50% more likely to have been homeless at some point
- ◆ Four times as likely to still be working on their GED
- ◆ Twice as likely to call their mental health “poor”

On the other hand, respondents who identified as BIPOC (some race or ethnicity other than “white”) reported similar outcomes to those who identified as “white.” They tended to explain that their foster parents tried to keep them connected to their culture, although not always successfully. “I was the whitest

black person I knew,” said one.

Grade Explanations and Importance

“A” and “B” grades were generally explained as being for services that were flexible and attentive to the individual. Regardless of the nature of the connection – with a social worker, non-profit, foster parent or attorney– the most successful relationships were described as conveying genuine concern: “like they were not being paid to talk to me.”

Similarly, when asked which services were most important to them, respondents affirmed the nature of the relationship; they most often named “being treated like family” within the top three. “Treated like Family” was described as inclusion in all activities, such as trips and family meals, unlimited access to food and all areas of the home, and not being introduced as a “foster” child.

In general, respondents tended to equate “most important” with “successful.” For example, only 10% named a “consistent social worker” as one of their most important factors, in contrast to how they discussed the impact of social worker turn-over in the interviews. They seemed to have given up, like one who said: “My social workers weren’t a main part of my case; I didn’t care to see them because they weren’t the people helping me.” Another who called “treated as family” least important explained: “Hoping to be treated like family when you are in foster care really only sets you up for disappointment.”

Statewide Survey of Young Adults with Experience in Foster Care: Full Findings

Introduction

This study provides a perspective on child welfare systems in Washington from the viewpoint of young adults who receive services.

It incorporates elements of Participatory Action Research (PAR) in the design, development, and testing of the instruments. This report will not sit on a shelf—the PAR process will move forward to identify changes informed by these voices and improve outcomes for children, youth and young adults statewide who come into foster care.

Transforming foster care is key to addressing many current society challenges. Currently, half of those with foster care experience drop out of high school,¹ about half experience homelessness² and, nationwide, 25% are involved with the justice system within two years of leaving care. Furthermore, systemic racism is rampant; African American/Black and Native American children are two to three times more likely to be placed in foster care than are white children.³

Current available data presents child welfare through an adult lens—the viewpoint of the youth is excluded. In addition, State data measures outputs only, e.g. numbers adopted or reunified with

family, but does not follow up to gauge longer term results, particularly in terms of the recipients' sense of the service.

The Mockingbird Society

Mockingbird provides a platform for the voice of youth who experience foster care and/or homelessness. Working in partnership with youth and young adults with lived experience, we change policies and perceptions so all children, youth and young adults can have a supportive home and thrive into adulthood.

Our process empowers the youth and young adults and adds authenticity to the discussion. Mockingbird's direct program participants have been instrumental in the passage of more than 50 major reforms in the Washington State child welfare system, including the enactment of Extended Foster Care and outlawing the incarceration of minors who commit non-criminal acts, such as truancy. With this study, we are expanding to include the voices to those who cannot as easily take part in our direct programs.

“Chara” entered foster care while in high school and stayed with her first foster family. They provided free access within the home and included her in all family events, including trips. They never pressured her to do or attend anything where she was uncomfortable.

Chara's foster parents regularly “check in,” and her foster mother adjusted her work schedule to provide transportation to Chara's counseling. Most notably, they accepted Chara's sexuality. “They said, ‘It doesn't change how we feel about you.’”

Continued on page 64

“ You learn pretty quickly that foster care isn't designed to give you love and belonging – if your basic needs are met and you are safe and not being sent back to your abusive parents, you are lucky

“Evan” first entered foster care as a pre-teen. He was placed with an aunt and uncle, who provided structure and expectations for the first time.

“I’m thankful for foster care,” he says, “because I got in a better place.” But there was a lack of “understanding of who I am,” and within a few years his aunt and uncle decided they could no longer take care of him.

Evan went to a second home that “seemed like a money factory ... [there were] a lot of children ... They gave me my basics.” He remembers alarms on doors and a lock on the pantry.

For more of Evan’s story, see page 50

“ My current social worker is awesome ... She answers me right away, which is amazing.

Methodology

This study contains two parts:

- ◆ 219 online surveys, completed August through December 2020 by Washington-based young adults with experience in foster care. The survey asked them to “grade” various services.

- ◆ 63 one-on-one interviews completed October 2020–January 2021 with online respondents who agreed to further contact. The interviews explored the reasons behind survey “grades”.

The survey and interview design were developed by Mockingbird staff and participants with lived experience in foster care and/or homelessness. The instruments and process were pretested with Mockingbird participants.

The interviews were conducted by two trained senior staff, were recorded when there was consent, and were randomly reviewed. Qualitative coding was checked by youth staff with experience in foster care.

Those surveyed and interviewed were not a random sample of young adults with experience in foster care; we therefore cannot

legitimately project these results to that population.

Qualified participants were recruited through multiple direct service agencies in Washington whose clientele include those with experience in foster care. Survey respondents were sent \$15 e-gift cards. Interviewees were sent \$25 e-gift cards.

Almost half of participants were contacted through Treehouse for Kids, Washington’s leading organization providing support to those in foster care. The remainder were contacted through regional agencies and young adult shelters. Several organizations elected to receive results from a custom link where participants were able to rate their agency specifically. These are noted in Table 1. Others promoted a general survey link, including A Way Home Washington (AWHW) and members of the Washington Coalition for Homeless Youth Advocacy (WACHYA).

Most apt to be missing are those who exited foster care at younger ages, and were less likely to be still receiving support services. Rural county residents are also underrepresented.

The counties shown in Table 2 are the current residence reported; some might have moved from rural settings to population centers as they entered adulthood. The State data used for comparison includes all ages in foster care in 2015 so is not a direct equivalent; it is meant to give a general sense of the under-representation of rural counties.

Table 1: Respondent Sources

Source	% of Online Responses	# of Interviews
Treehouse, statewide	49	42
Mix of survey links statewide (WACHYA, AHW, etc.)	25	5
Youthnet, Mt. Vernon	9	8
Volunteers of America, Spokane	9	3
Community Youth Services, Olympia	8	5

Respondent Profile

Demographics

With any study, it is important to understand the characteristics of those included (see Table 3). This profile includes all online surveys.

◆ Just over half (61%) identified as a race/ethnicity other than only white. This is in line with State records for those who entered the State child welfare system from 2009 to 2018.⁵

◆ Just over a quarter (28%) self-identified as LGBTQ+. This is on par with a 2019 national study on LGBTQ youth/young adults with experience in foster care.⁶

◆ About half were still in school (41%) or working on their GED (11%), while 26% had dropped out, including 10% who subsequently finished their GED.

◆ More identified as female than male (58% vs. 38%). This is typical of survey respondents.⁷

◆ Almost a third (29%) had experience with the justice system. More males reported justice system experience than females (39% vs. 25%).

◆ Almost a quarter (24%) called their mental health “poor”. Fewer than half (42%) called it “good” or “excellent.”

◆ Most (60%) reported “good” or “excellent” physical health.

◆ The majority (65%) were age 18 to 20—just entering adulthood.

◆ Over a quarter (29%) reported some disability. This was usually an Intellectual/Developmental

Disability (13%) or Delay (10%). Several volunteered their ADHD and/or PTSD diagnoses.

Foster Care Experience

The respondents are not typical of all those with experience in foster care (see Table 4).

◆ Most (63%) entered the system after age 10. Usually children enter foster care before age five (such as the 51% of those who entered State foster care in 2016⁸)

◆ Half (50%) had been in foster care for 5+ years. The state median is under two years.⁹

◆ Half (52%) had been in a group home at some point. Group home placements recently peaked in the state at 12% in January 2009 and have since declined to 6%.¹⁰

◆ Three-quarters (73%) had been in a foster home setting with strangers at some point.

◆ Half (53%) experienced four or more placements. The national goal is two or fewer placements.

◆ Half (50%) were still in Extended Foster Care at the time of the survey.

◆ Few had either returned to their birth family (7%) or were adopted (7%). So most were transitioning to adulthood without family support.

It is not surprising that most did not know if they had been in State or Tribal Care. The proportion acknowledging that they were in the federal system is in line with federal placements in our state.

Table 2: County Distribution

	% in Study	% In Foster Care 2016 ⁴
King	33	13
Spokane	20	12
Pierce	19	15
Snohomish	10	8
Lewis	4	2
Clark	3	6
Whatcom	3	3
Thurston	3	4
Yakima	2	6
Skagit	2	2
Other	3	28

“Eric” was an older teen when he and his siblings came into foster care. After a short stay in a group home, he and one brother settled into a three-year placement; the family is now adopting both.

Eric explains the family’s success as largely due to shared interests and, more so, to the attitude of the foster parent. They did not treat Eric and his brother “any differently than their own kids,” including taking them on trips. He continues, “They introduced us as ‘their kids’ ... We feel extremely safe and loved.”

The foster parents were transparent about expectations and gave guidelines but allowed ongoing conversation on how things would work in the home.

For more of Eric’s story, see page 36

“Malika” entered foster care as a young teen, after “bouncing around” among family members and homelessness. Her instability continued through multiple foster placements, until she finally found a “good” one, and stayed three years. Malika explains, though, that she “didn’t know what good care is” and was so used to being independent that she strained against the rules. She eventually asked for another home, where she stayed until she aged out of foster care.

For more on Malika, see page 47

“ It made everything easier having a social worker that really cared for me ... They would talk to me like a human, not some poor oppressed child. They always took time to ask how I was.

Table 3: Demographic Profile

Race/ Ethnicity	%	Race/Ethnicity Net	%
Multiples Allowed		BIPOC	61
White/Caucasian	51	White Only	39
Black/African American	24	Immigrant or Refugee	
Hispanic/Latinx	20	Yes	9
Asian/Asian-American	9	No	88
Multi-Cultural	9	Did not say	3
Native Hawaiian/PI	5	Age	
Identify as LGBTQ+		<18	5
LGBTQ+	28	18	29
Not LBGQTQ+	66	19	17
No Response	7	20	18
Gender		21	11
Female	58	22	10
Male	36	23	7
Non-binary/Genderfluid	3	24	1
Transgender	1	25	2
Current Education Level		Justice System Experience	
Still in High School	23	Juvenile Only	24
High School Drop Out	5	Adult Only	1
Working on GED	11	Both	4
Completed GED	10	Neither	71
High School Degree	12	Physical Health	
Some College	12	Excellent	17
2 Year Degree	5	Good	43
Still in College	18	Fair	33
4-year Degree+	4	Poor	7
Personal Annual Income		Other	1
<\$25K	65	Mental Health	
\$25--<40K	9	Excellent	8
\$40K--<\$60K	6	Good	34
Do not know	20	Fair	34
		Poor	24

Table 4: Foster Care History

Age Entered	%	Care System	%	
<1 year	5	Tribal	4	
		Federal	6	
		Neither/State	56	
		Don't know	38	
1-5 years	16			
6-10 years	16			
11-15 years	43	Ran from Foster Care		
16-17 years	21	Never	60	
		Once	18	
		2-3 Times	9	
Years in Foster Care		4-5 Times	3	
		6+ Times	9	
		Don't know	2	
		Placement Types		
		Home with Strangers	73	
Number of Placements		With Family/Friends	62	
		Group Home	52	
		Their Own Home	37	
		Siblings also in Foster Care		
		No Siblings in Care	53	
		Siblings in Same Home	11	
		Separated, enough contact	14	
Age at Exit		Separated, not enough contact	21	
		Siblings in Care Varied/ Other	7	
		Where Exited		
		Birth Family	7	
		Adopted	7	
Extended Foster Care		Homelessness	8	
		Friends/Extended Family	13	
		Own Housing	13	
		Other	4	
Still in EFC	50			
Previously in EFC	18			
Never in EFC	33			

“It’s hard to find a bed for a 17-year-old girl.

“Brady” entered foster care as a baby. He was with his first family for six years; although he was not happy there, he did not realize there were any alternatives.

No one had told him that the couple raising him were not his birth parents, and that he was in foster care. There were visits from social workers, but Brady did not realize that was not typical for all families.

Shortly after entering grade school, Brady began visiting another couple on weekends. After a few visits, all his clothes and belongings were packed and sent with him; his new foster mother explained that he would now live with them.

For more on Brady, see page 27

“Skylar” entered foster care as a pre-teen, with a family that was “ok at first.” However, as Skylar grew to be a teenager, she did not behave like the daughter her foster parents had imagined. They excluded her from outings with their two biological children, and the rift deepened.

Skylar tolerated the home for six years, until she came out to her foster mother about her bisexuality. Within a week, the foster mother packed Skylar’s belongings, told Skylar she was picking her up early from school for a doctor’s appointment, and then dropped her off at the child welfare office.

For more of Skylar’s story see page 34

“ I felt like she was trying to force me to get adopted.

Sibling Placement

Almost half (47%) of respondents had siblings in foster care; many of them (44% of those with siblings, or 21% of the total) reported that there was not enough contact. However, the issue is more complex than those statistics.

The interviewees described their/ siblings’ placements as shifting—siblings initially together were later parted, and siblings were sometimes reunited after temporary separate placements, when a home with more capacity could be found.

The data supports the importance of sibling contact. Those with poor mental health were more apt to report not enough contact (50% vs. 26% of those who said their mental health was good). Those who were in the same home with siblings more often said their mental health was good (24% vs. 13% of those not placed with siblings).

However, we do not know the causal relationship; children with better mental health may have been easier to keep together. Several interviewees split from siblings after initial co-placements said that it was “too much” for the foster parents. Others were moved to special treatment centers or group homes at the request of the foster parents.

In interviews, unsatisfactory sibling visitation was often explained as due to one or the other of the foster parents/guardians resisting visitation. Many times, relatives would accept

only certain siblings, and discourage contact between siblings. Also, in many cases the siblings would not share both parents, so one would be placed with relatives from the other parent. Finally, older siblings who went in and out of rehab and/or group homes had particularly hard times arranging sibling visits. A few were even barred from seeing siblings after being termed “unsafe”.

Some were able to keep/establish a relationship with siblings, if only via social media. Others were not.

- ◆ “[We were separated] because my aunt and uncle did not like me ... They stopped all communication and visits ... The state didn't really help ... they sat and watched it all happen.”
- ◆ “The social worker said, ‘It’s not up to us.’ ... I said, ‘Don’t I have rights?’ and she said, ‘We can’t control her.’”
- ◆ “It definitely damaged our relationship not being able to see each other through those really sensitive years. She is twelve now and got placed in the system when she was four. So, I missed those important years where bonding is best cause she is small.”
- ◆ “I don’t have a good biological connection. I want to be included in my family, but it’s not possible. We’re so broken.”

Adoption, Reunification and Kinship Care

Several interviewees spoke of being “pressured” into placements with family and/or adoption, which in some cases were later reversed. One said they acquiesced to reunification because “there was no other opportunity to be close to my school and friends.” Another preferred it to explaining their foster care status. A few weren’t consulted: “My social worker just said, ‘It’s time to go home.’”

In addition, many interviewees mentioned unsuccessful turns in and out of relatives’ houses. Intra-family arguments continued to play out, and/or the relatives were unprepared. However, this sample probably excludes young people successfully placed with family, as they are less apt to continue to need services. Interviewees said:

- ◆ “I hadn’t said anything because when I spoke to a relative about how I felt and how they were treating me poorly, they went back and told them and they ripped me a new one and made me feel guilty and I was the one in the wrong. So, I never spoke up about it.”
- ◆ “Family is not always a good fit. They need to ask more questions, especially for teenagers ... There need to be more questions and more training before any child gets placed anywhere.”

Interviewees who were adopted were divided as to its success. Some were educated as to the tradeoffs between adoption and transitioning to Extended Foster Care (EFC). One said, “It was really nice because we did a meeting with everyone who was helping me out ... they explained all the benefits, the pros and cons, which really helped.”

Adoptions after a lengthy foster period seemed more successful than those after a “trial period.” That did work out for one (“We just clicked”) but was a disaster for another. This second interviewee explained that, although she was uncomfortable with the woman offering to adopt her, it was “better than the group home.” She was kicked out of the house at age 18. Other comments included:

- ◆ “My case worker was like ‘We found someone who wants to adopt you.’”
- ◆ “The adoption social worker was pressuring me, and I felt like she was trying to force me to get adopted. It made me really stressed out.”
- ◆ “I really regret [my adoption] because if I had waited it out, I could be getting a lot more help ... I am twenty and I am taking care of myself. When I think about it, there are so many services that are wonderful and amazing that I could have but I can’t use because I was adopted.”

“Family is not always a good fit. They need to ask more questions, especially for teenagers.”

“Dorothea” was born with a medical condition that required several surgeries and transplants in her first few months. Her mother was unable to care for her; she was sent to a care home for medically fragile children and became a ward of the state. Dorothea was there several years before moving in with a foster family with the goal of adoption. But she returned to the facility after a year.

Even with this difficult start to life, Dorothea awarded mostly “A” grades to the services, including her social worker—the same social worker throughout her time in state care.

For more on Dorothea, see page 54

“ Youth lawyers are dope, man! ... She’s not there for the money ... She was the first person in my life that made me realize I was worth living.”

“Jasmine” entered foster care twice, first at a young age then again as a teen. The first time was “very confusing” and she has few clear memories. She does remember being told by her Jehovah’s Witness foster parents that there would be “no Christmas,” and that it was overall “traumatic.” Jasmine says now, “They were probably one of the ones who did it just for the money because they treated us like a job.”

Jasmine’s second placement was much more positive; she was able to be with all her siblings in a home with a couple they already knew.

As a teen, Jasmine has been happy with her social workers, saying they were supportive and provided her with needed information. One would ‘go the extra mile’ by bringing her coffee and checking in on her well-being—not just the “basic safety checklist.”

Continued on page 60

Homelessness

Most (60%) participants had experienced homelessness at some point, including 9% who were homeless at the time of the survey (see Table 5). Some teens had been housed in shelters after entering care. Notably, 50% experienced homelessness before age 18 and a 32% before age 16.

Many interviewees described this homelessness as while still in the care of their biological parents. They stayed in camps, adult shelters, with friends, with “my mother’s hookups,” and in vehicles. This accounts for the high occurrence of these locations among where respondents stayed while without a home.

Relatively few (10%) “couch surfed”, which is often associated with this age group. And the 40% that had been in Transitional Housing reinforces how well this group was connected to resources.

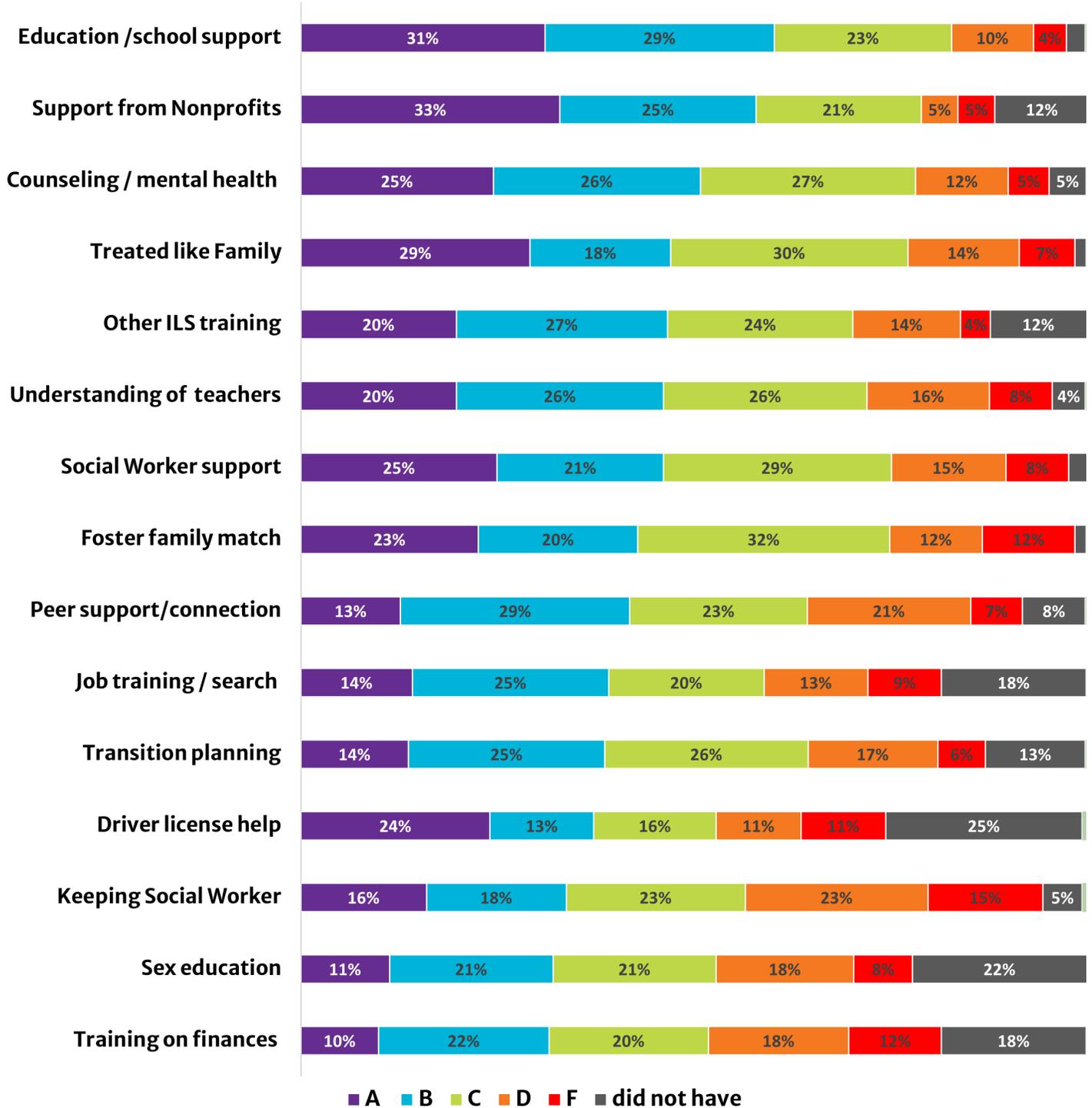
Table 5: Experience with Homelessness	%
Currently Experiencing Homelessness	9
Previously	51
Never	37
Rather not say	4
Age First Experienced	
<1 Year	1
1–5 Years Old	6
6–10 Years Old	9
11–15 Years Old	16
16–18 Years Old	18
19–21 Years Old	6
21–25 Years Old	0
Where Stayed	
Transitional Housing	40
Street	28
RV	24
Camp	14
Youth Shelter	14
Vehicle	14
Adult Shelter	13
Couch Surfing	10

Grades for General Services

The full “grades” for services received show that none were predominantly high or low. See Figure 1:

- ◆ The most positive grades (“A/B”) went to “Education/School Support” (60% positive), “Support from Nonprofits” (58%), and “Mental Health” (51%).
 - ◆ Several services were lacking for many, including “Help getting a Driver’s License” (25% did not have), “Sex education” (22%), and “Training on finances” and “Job training” (18% each).
 - ◆ “Keeping the same social worker” received the most “D” and “F” grades (38%).
- “Education Support” and “Support from Nonprofits” grades varied depending on the respondents’ nonprofit agency connections. That is, those who were linked to the survey through a nonprofit

Figure 1: Full Grades for General Services



were far more likely to give high grades than were those contacted through a weblink, which reached more young adults living in shelters. The various nonprofits all scored similarly; the “Education/school support” grades were not related to the number of respondents from Treehouse.

- ◆ 67% of respondents with a nonprofit agency contact gave an “A” or “B” to Education Supports and 71% gave the same grades to their nonprofit contact.¹¹
- ◆ This compares to 40% and 21% of others.

“ I never received that genuine concern for my wellbeing.”

Grade Averages and Sub-Group Analysis

“Abby” went into foster care as a teen but says “I should have been in foster care from the time I was about eight.” She was raised by strict Catholic parents, where “there was always an open CPS case.”

Her parents barred the social workers from speaking with the kids and “talked themselves out of it.” She was homeschooled and did not feel there was another adult to whom she could confide.

On her 16th birthday Abby ran to a shelter for young adults and told them to call the police; she was placed in a temporary safe house, then entered the foster care system.

For more of Abby’s story, see page 37

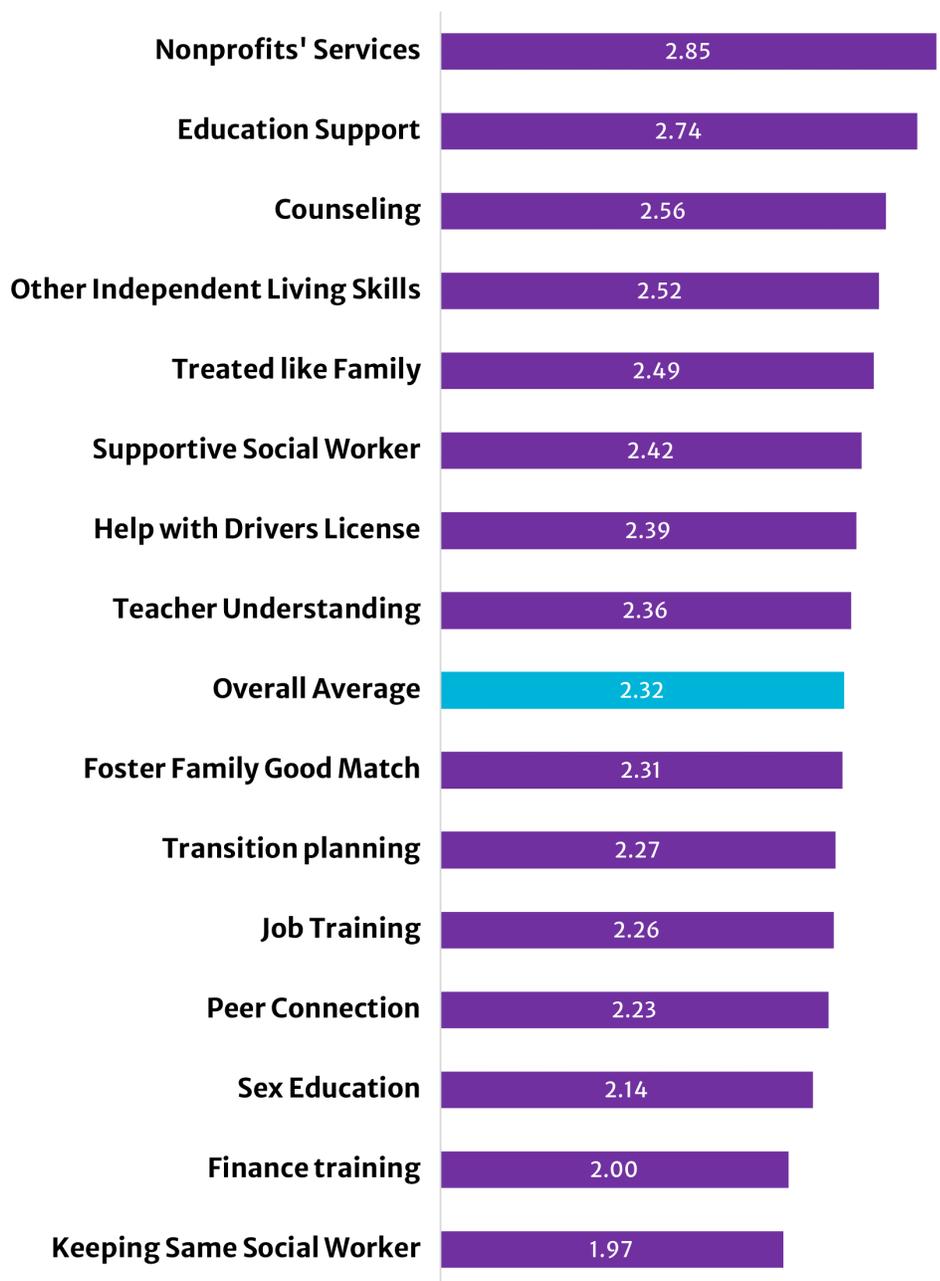
“ Every time I had a question of Youthnet, they were responsive and had an answer.

The average (mean) grades given by those who received each service were around a “C” (1.5 to 2.5, assigning “A” grades 4 points and “F” grades zero points). Education Support and Counseling were again among the highest, followed by “Other Independent Living Skills.”¹² “Keeping the Same Social

Worker” was still at the bottom of the list, followed by “Finance Training.” See Figure 2.

Averaging all the grades for these services together, among those who received each, results in an overall average of 2.32. This overall average is useful when comparing sub-groups.

Figure 2: Average Grades for General Services



Respondents tended to not vary much in their responses; that is, few would give some “A”s and some “F”s. Averaging all their general service grades into one “overall service grade” resulted in:

- ◆ 25% who gave services an average grade of “C-” or below (1.5 or lower)
- ◆ 41% who gave services an average grade of “C” (above 1.5 but below 2.5), and
- ◆ 34% who gave services an average grade of a “B-” or better (2.5 or above)

Those giving the highest average grades were:

- ◆ Less apt to have run away (30% compared to 50% of others)
- ◆ Less likely to have experienced homelessness (48% vs. 76%)
- ◆ Mentally healthier (62% said their mental health was excellent or good, compared to 16% of those who gave the lowest grades)
- ◆ Less apt to identify as LGBTQ+ (17%, vs. 44%).

When comparing sub-group overall means, two groups stand out, between which there is a great deal of over-lap.

- ◆ Those who identified as LGBTQ+ gave the lowest overall service grades—an average of 1.97, vs. 2.46 for non-LGBTQ+.
- ◆ Those with self-described “poor” mental health gave average grades of 1.74. This compares to 2.17 and 2.8 for those who said their mental health was “fair” and “excellent/good”.

Overall average scores did not vary by other demographic factors, including gender, education level, experience with the justice system or race/ethnicity. They also did not vary much among those with different histories in foster care (years in care, age entered) except for the number of placements: in general, the more placements, the lower the average grade the respondent gave to services:

- ◆ Those with eight or more placements gave overall average grades or 1.85, compared to
- ◆ 2.28 among those with four to seven placements, and
- ◆ 2.54 among those with fewer than four placements.

We cannot know from the data the direction of the causal relationship; that is, those with better services may have not needed to be moved as often, or vice versa. Or a separate, unmeasured factor could be related to both service success and the number of placements.

Support for LGBTQ+ and Racial/ Ethnic Identities

Besides the general list of services addressed by all, those who identified as LGBTQ+ and /or a race/ ethnicity other than “white” were asked about specific challenges they faced and the services that might have assisted them with those challenges. See Figure 3.

Most did not report more than “minor” challenges in foster care due to their self-identities; in particular, almost half (48%) of those who identified as BIPOC

***“ Treehouse workers have been great ... They are a no-barrier service to young people, and you don’t see that very often ... If you have a question and they don’t know the answer, they’ll figure it out.*”**

“Felix” has stayed with the same foster family since he entered the system while in grade school. He attributes this success to his foster family treating him and the rest of their foster children “like we were a part of the family ... They included us in everything we did. If they took a trip, they would take us with them instead of putting us in respite care.”

Felix says his foster parents helped many foster children with worse behavioral concerns because they had rules, routines, and a strong church community to support the whole family. “They really cared for all the children they took in,” he summarizes.

To read more about Felix, see page 62

“ I was self-sabotaging ... When I went to juvie, I had a hot meal every night. My doors locked and I felt safe.

“Journey”—who uses they/ them pronouns—was removed from an abusive biological family while in grade school. Now a young adult and in EFC, they experienced 15 placements and nine school changes during the past decade.

Several of the failed placements were due to being placed with very religious families that, among other issues, did not accept Journey’s complex PTSD diagnoses. According to Journey, “They thought it was a sin that needed to be treated by biblical counselors”

Another religious family made them leave a therapist and see a church counselor instead, threatening to kick Journey out of the house otherwise.

For more of Journey’s story, see page 39

chose “none”. However, more LGBTQ+ said the challenges were “serious” or “overwhelming.”

When asked about services that might have helped with the challenges, many said “did not have,” particularly in terms of supports for challenges related to LGBTQ+ identities. These may be interpreted more like an “F.” Otherwise, the grades were widely spread, and again averaged as “C”s. See Figure 4.

Around half of those identifying as LGBTQ+ said that the following were a “D”, “F”, or non-existent:

- ◆ Foster parents’ support (52% “D”, “F” or nonexistent)
- ◆ Social worker support (48%)
- ◆ Support for bullying (53%)

In addition, respondents who identified as LGBTQ+ were:

- ◆ More apt than others to have experienced homelessness (74% compared to 53%)
- ◆ Four times as likely to still be working on a GED (22% vs. 5%)

- ◆ Less likely to describe their physical health as “excellent” or “good” (42% vs. 70%)

- ◆ Almost three times as likely to describe their mental health as “poor” (40% vs. 15%).

LGBTQ+ identifying interviewees spoke of blatant disdain and maltreatment, such as:

- ◆ “I went to a parent at age 17 that didn’t ‘believe’ in gay people.”
- ◆ “They [foster parents] put me down a lot.”
- ◆ “They wanted me to go to a counselor who would ‘counsel the gay out of me.’”
- ◆ “My adopted mom threw a bible at me when I told her I was bi.”

Those who identified as BIPOC gave relatively few “D/F” grades. Around half gave an “A” or “B” to:

- ◆ Foster Parent Support (51% graded this an “A” or “B”)
- ◆ Social Worker Support (50%)

BIPOC respondents also did not

Figure 3: Challenges in Foster Care Related to Self-Identity

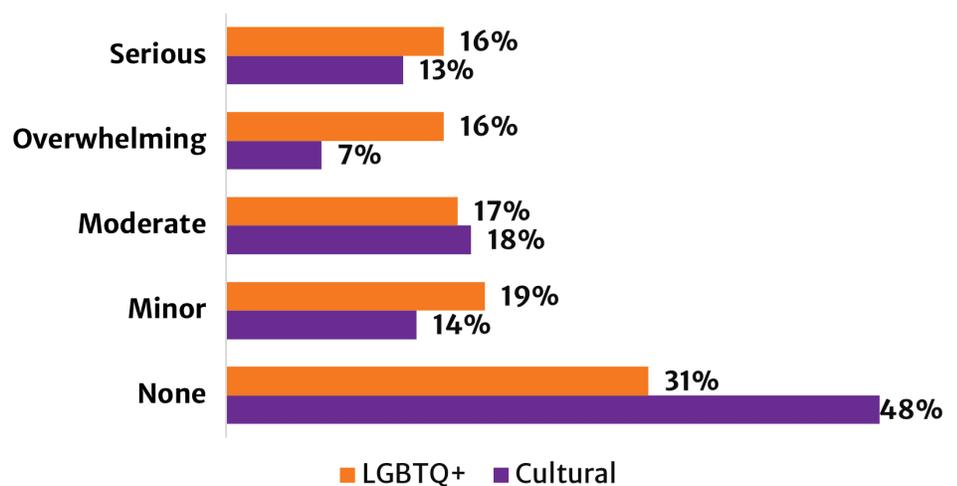
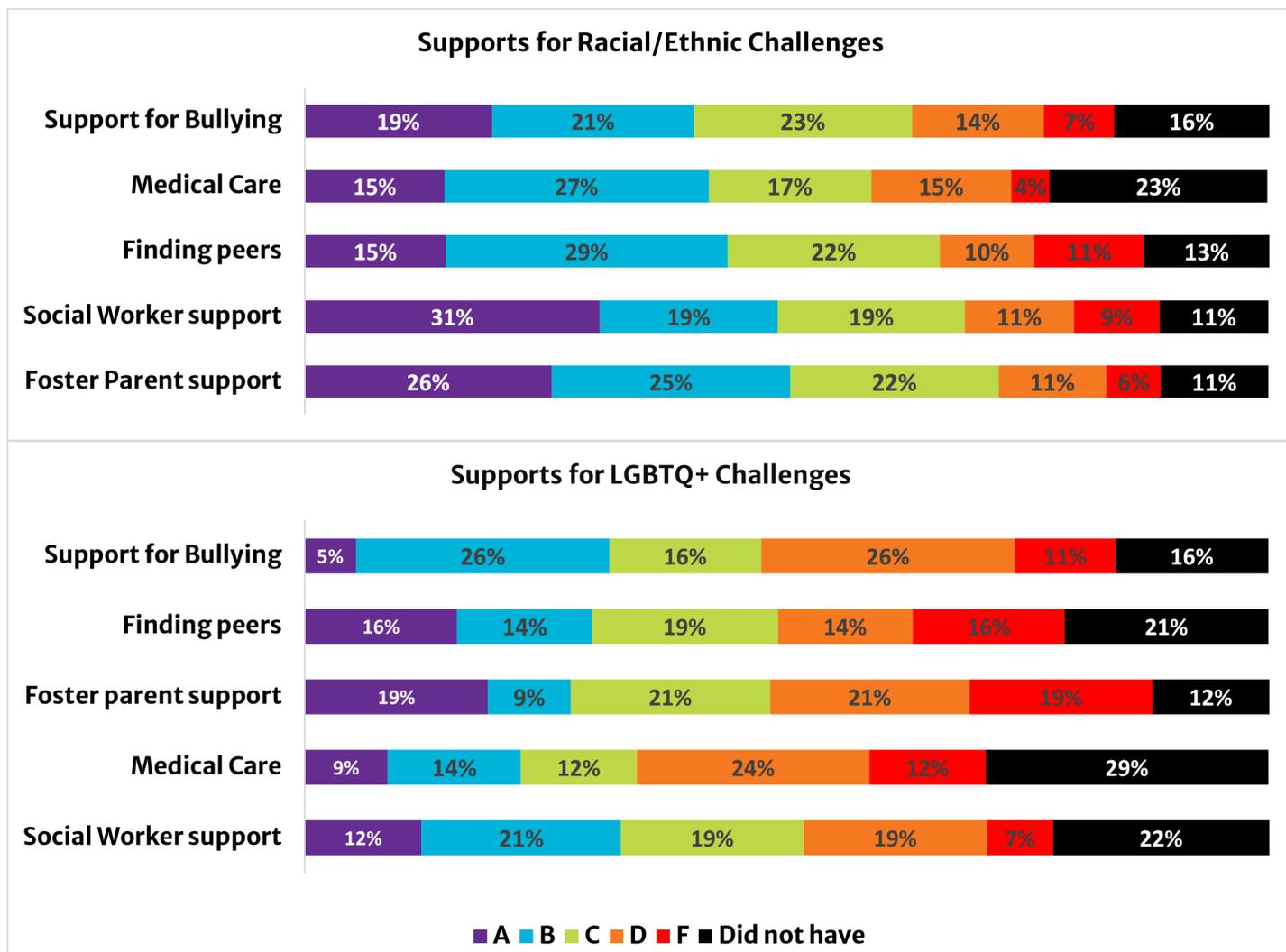


Figure 4: Grades for Services to Help with Challenges Related to Racial/Ethnic and LGBTQ+ Identity



vary significantly from others in terms of their outcomes (health, education level, or foster care history). In the interviews, many said foster parents “tried” to keep them connected to their culture, e.g. driving them to community events, or connecting them with others who shared their customs.

However, losing their cultural ties did compound the trauma of going into foster care. It was especially difficult when they were placed far from home, where the race/ethnicity mix, landscape and community were unfamiliar. At the worst, they were purposely “cut

off” from their biological family’s culture and even language.

- ◆ “Our parents are very understanding but they are not educated in our [country of origin] culture.”
- ◆ “It wasn’t bad, but it wasn’t good.”
- ◆ “I felt like the whitest black person anybody knew ... I felt so out of place.”
- ◆ “When I was younger, I was fluent in (primary language), but I had to speak English and now I don’t speak it at all.”

“ They didn’t feel like someone who was being paid to talk to me.

“Jesse” ran away from home while still in grade school and showed the police her bruises. They returned her to her mother, who threatened her so she would not reveal the truth to the CPS social worker.

Jesse resents the social workers’ lack of action because it was “pretty dang obvious that something wasn’t right.” Eventually her mother lost her home; the family lived for several years in their car, a tent encampment, and with various “hookups” of her mother’s.

Finally, Jesse’s stepfather convinced her mother to let Jesse stay with him, and she and her brother were well cared for. “I think of him as my father,” she says.

When he was diagnosed with terminal cancer, though, Jesse’s mother swore to take Jesse back, and Jesse called CPS directly. They placed her in foster care with a relative, after asking for her opinion and preferences.

For more of Jesse’s story, see page 41

“ Every time I needed [Community Youth Services] they were there to pick me up. They were amazing.

Grade Explanations

The one-on-one interviews specifically probed into the reasons for grades; that is, what prompted an “A” grade versus an “F”. Interviewees explained that many grades were a compromise among many instances, i.e., respondents with bad and good social workers might give social workers overall a “C”. Others said the grade given was based on one example.

It was striking overall that most interviewees seemed generous with their grades. For example, a young man with several horrific placements who ended up with a good family gave his placements overall a “B”. Another woman gave a “B” to “treated like family” after seven placements.

Nonprofit Agencies, including Education Support

“A” and “B” grades were generally explained as being for services that were flexible/ attentive to the individual’s needs, responsive, and included the service provider listening to the child/youth/young adult. Interviewees were impressed when anyone “went out of their way,” and/or reached out to them rather than responding after the young person initiated the contact.

Because of the number of positive scores overall, there were many comments that profiled successful nonprofit services. These included nonprofit support overall, from their specific contact agency,

education support, and Independent Living Skills (ILS) services. Service providers at such agencies sole purpose is to support the youth/young adult, without the multiple “masters” served by social workers. They also seemed to have easier access to resources and did not have to go through as many “hoops”.

- ◆ “My Youthnet worker is always there to help ... She gets it done.”
- ◆ “Every time I had a question of Youthnet they were responsive and had an answer.”
- ◆ “Treehouse workers have been great ... They are a no-barrier service to young people, and you don’t see that very often ... If you have a question and they don’t know the answer, they’ll figure it out.”
- ◆ “She didn’t feel like someone who was paid to talk to me.”
- ◆ (Of Community Youth Services) “Every time I needed them, they were there to pick me up. They were amazing.”
- ◆ (Of staff at the Y Social Impact Center) “[He] saved my life.”
- ◆ “It kinda helps when people listen.”

Besides being responsive, “A” grade education supports included easily obtained tutors, equipment (laptops in particular), extra-curricular fees, clothing allowances, and assistance with college applications and financial aid forms. Some representatives

would also help communicate with the school, having more success as an adult.

- ◆ "Treehouse was a big thing in graduating year ... I feel like without them, I would've not been able to graduate."
- ◆ "Youthnet ... helped me to get a laptop, printer, dishes, essentials."
- ◆ "I felt very confident going into college, knowing that I have support, if I need something it is okay to ask."
- ◆ "They really went out of their way to get me what I needed to be successful at school."
- ◆ "They have just been amazing when it comes to school."

Foster Parent Treatment and Matching

Two questions addressed foster parents: whether the placement was a "good match" and whether the participant was "treated like family". There were slightly more good grades (47% "A" or "B") for "treated like family" than for "good match" (43%).

Good grades for "treated like family" included when foster parents did more than provide a bed and food. They would teach life skills, include the foster child on family outings, play games, be understanding of the child's birth parents, and even refer to them as their son or daughter, instead of their "foster child" (which was especially appreciate.)

Interviewees from these types of placements expressed that they felt loved. It included some who

had family-like relationships in group homes as well as private families:

- ◆ "[Group home case manager] would greet me with a big smile and shout "Mi hijo!"
- ◆ (After being bullied at school) "He sat there and listened to me and it really made me feel like he was a parent to me."
- ◆ "She didn't let me give up on myself."
- ◆ "We did family things together, like cooking meals."
- ◆ "They included us in everything we did, if they took a trip, they would take us instead of putting us in respite care."
- ◆ "She never talked ill about my parents once."
- ◆ "They put the same amount of effort as their biological kids."
- ◆ "They wouldn't tell people that I was their foster kid, so that made me feel good."
- ◆ "I wasn't explicitly treated like someone else's kid. I wasn't a package put in their care. I wasn't a human being in their care that had a bedroom."

On the other hand, there were many painful stories prompted by negative grades in this area. These included placements where the rules were felt to be excessive—i.e., not being able to see friends, having limited access to food, being kept in their bedroom, and being forced to attend the foster parents' church. Several spoke of the biological children in the house enjoying privileges such as outings that excluded the foster child.

“ I felt very confident going into college, knowing that I have support. If I need something it is okay to ask

"Bailee" and her two sisters were raised in a home where the mother was addicted; both parents were eventually imprisoned.

Bailee acted out early and often, was "suspended 1000 times," and gave up on school while in middle school.

She was "in and out of juvie at least 20 times," explaining, "I felt like I was self-sabotaging ... when I went to juvie, I had a hot meal every night. My doors locked and I felt safe."

For more of Bailee's story, see page 33

“John” entered foster care as a pre-teen and primarily had one family placement. His foster parents were approachable; they did not judge or shame him but tried to understand. He also had good relationships with teachers—he was open about being in foster care and problems he faced outside of the classroom.

Even though John was involved in addiction treatment and spent time in juvenile detention, his foster parents advocated for him and he was able to be included in sports and school activities.

To read more about John, see page 53

***“ It was hard to connect to people I didn’t trust, and when I acted out, they pushed me away ... Nobody was really interested in dealing with a broken teenager.*”**

Others asserted that the foster parent were just “in it for the money.”

- ◆ “Everything else was a bed until I could get to the next one.”
- ◆ “I’ve never been treated like family in a foster home, ever. I’ve always felt like I was another paycheck. I never felt like I was truly part of a family until I started to find my own foster homes.”
- ◆ “I’ve never felt so low and so discredited as a human as when you are in a foster home ... You feel like you are an object.”
- ◆ “[My] foster parent said, ‘I give you a roof over your head, food, and water. What else do you expect of me?’”

Comments about why foster placements were or were not a “good match” covered some of the same issues, but also dealt with problems due to religious differences, LGBTQ+ youth being placed with families that were intolerant of their gender/sexual identities, and houses with rules that were hard adjustments.

Many interviewees felt the foster parents were not prepared for the reality of caring for a teenager and/or those who had experienced trauma.

- ◆ “They were more into punishing me than rewarding and the taking things away from me and holding them played into my fears of having things stolen from me.”
- ◆ “It was hard to connect to people I didn’t trust, and when I

acted out, they pushed me away ... Nobody was really interested in dealing with a broken teenager.”

- ◆ “There was a lack of understanding of who I am.”
- ◆ “I feel like any foster home you get put in, especially if you are a teenager, you get treated like a prisoner and you are not one of their own.”

Mental Health Services

Participants’ reactions to mental health services were fairly evenly distributed. Interviewees said it was usually offered but varied in effectiveness.

At times, the young person was not ready for the service, the type offered was inappropriate, or the foster family was not supportive, which made transportation difficult. Some interviewees spoke of their mental health issues being belittled and being blamed for not more quickly recovering from trauma.

Several suggested that those experiencing foster care be given more choice/say in what type of therapy they are offered, and at what point. The most positive comments came from those who found the right counselor on their own or through a foster parent.

- ◆ “I was almost bullied into taking part by my State social worker ... They thought they knew better than I did what I needed.”
- ◆ “My mental health was not [social workers’] biggest concern. Their concern was ‘am I in a safe place’ not ‘am I safe in

my head.’ ... These kids are in foster care for a reason ... these reasons are not little. It’s not like ‘They didn’t get what they wanted for Christmas.’”

- ◆ “[My foster parents] told me to ‘just pray.’”
- ◆ “I was grilled 24/7 on whether I needed counseling ... It felt like it was a priority rather than choice ... It was something that I did not have a say in. I wanted to be able to make that decision for myself ... It was kind of like ‘You are a foster kid, so you have to be in counseling.’”
- ◆ “It was useless. Most visits were tests of ‘what’s wrong with me?’”
- ◆ “You just have to find it. Your case worker is going to be no help to you.”

Understanding by Teachers

“Teachers’ understanding” also garnered varied grades. At the best, teachers brought in extra food for the youth, let them sleep on the couch, passed along gift cards, took them shopping and/or did their laundry. At worst, teachers were inflexible with deadlines, even when the student was traumatized.

Several interviewees spoke of advocating for themselves with teachers, who were suspicious of what might be excuses to avoid assignments. This included one girl who was forced to complete homework on her “family tree,” even after she explained the trauma associated with family memories. Others preferred not to

bring attention to their foster care status, and thus did not advocate for themselves with teachers.

- ◆ “They seemed to not work with me, either I was being targeted or I was a really bad kid.”
- ◆ “I asked to see the counselor five times today because I’m really having a bad day and there is something going on in my foster home, not because I am trying to get out of class.”
- ◆ “I never received that genuine concern for my wellbeing.”
- ◆ “I had one science teacher that I could talk to about anything ... She’s basically a counselor.”

Transition Planning

Since so many participants were still in EFC, their comments about “transitions” concerned various points in their lives, including when they entered the system, moves from one placement to another, reunification with their biological family, and the move to EFC.

Most shifts to EFC were smooth, but some interviewees were so frustrated with foster care by age 18 that they would not consider more State involvement. A couple were kept out of EFC by what they reported were wrong assumptions about the requirements and/ or conditions.

- ◆ “All the supports I had, did what they could to explain the resources that I had in Extended Foster Care.”
- ◆ “I didn’t want to sign into Extended Foster Care, because every single social worker screwed me over.”

“These kids are in foster care for a reason ... These reasons are not little. It’s not like ‘They didn’t get what they wanted for Christmas.’”

“Mai” first entered foster care in grade school, after “continuous CPS cases.” She was reunited with her biological family after one year, although she resisted.

She attributes the problem to her mother’s culture undervaluing girls; required family therapy did not seem helpful.

Mai stayed with her biological family, because she was parenting her younger brother. But there were “fights every day ... the police were called.”

After several years, a social worker “forced her” back into foster care. She entered Tribal Child Welfare due to a bureaucratic mix-up; her younger brother’s father is a tribal member, not hers.

For more of Mai’s story, see page 37

Amira entered foster care while in high school, after being molested by her biological father. She told a counselor at her school, then stayed at a shelter and on a friend's couch until a foster care placement was arranged. The "F"s she gave to school support reflect how her teachers treated her during that time—she cried through class with no intervention, and was told by one, "Just because you're going through stuff doesn't mean you don't have to do your homework."

Luckily for Amira, her social worker recognized her anxiety about moving into a strange home and let her interview potential foster parents. She has been so happy with the resultant foster family that, even though she is now 21, they are adopting her. "They are my family," she says.

Even with that successful result, Amira gave almost all "D" and "F" grades to the supports she received during her years in foster care.

For more of Amira's story, see page 74

“ Sometimes foster care just really sucked.

- ◆ "I wish I would have known about the health insurance because that would be a deal breaker for me."
- ◆ "It's frustrating ... I feel like things would be different if Extended Foster Care had not routed that way ... but what's unfortunate is there's no appeal process."
- ◆ "I only found out about Extended Foster Care the day I was in court with a judge having to decide."
- ◆ "If you don't go [into EFC] they don't know what to do with you."

Some who had already transitioned out of foster care felt entirely prepared, but many didn't:

- ◆ "When I turn 21, what do I do? What is my support system and what is not..? No one talked to me about that."
- ◆ "There is not enough time to plan ... I'm going to lose my housing in a year, and I don't know what I am going to do."
- ◆ "It's just they don't really prepare you to go out and live in real world without ... I don't have anybody to turn to when I am in trouble. And they don't give resources to turn to. Because when you are once out care, they drop you like a fly ... I had to learn all of that on my own ... That is pretty much every foster kid does ... We already have to grow up without parents, we shouldn't have to grow up learning everything on our own."

Peer Support

Most interviewees explained that their grades for peer support referred to informal groups, not formal programs; only a few spoke positively about special events/connections for youth in foster care.

Several wished that there had been systems in place to make peer connections more easily:

- ◆ "I would talk about how I felt and they would understand ... they wouldn't be rude and laugh."
- ◆ "I got to be around other people my age in similar situations, which was nice."
- ◆ "It was nice to see how many kids actually go through things that I went through ... I always felt like nobody gets it and no other kids my age understands, so it was really nice to be in a setting where there was kids who understood."

Social/Case Workers

Two survey questions addressed social workers, including their consistency and their support. In the one-on-one interviews, the issues often overlapped.

Most interviewees spoke of multiple social workers (generally five or more) or which one was helpful, at best. Interviewees were especially appreciative of social workers who initiated check-ins or, at least, responded quickly when the interviewee initiated contact.

Support varied widely; at the worst, interviewees did not know who

their social worker was. At the other end of the spectrum, several interviewees described social workers going out of their way, often on their own, unpaid time.

- ◆ “My current social worker is awesome. I absolutely adore her ... She answers me right away, which is amazing.”
- ◆ “He’s always there for me ... He checked in a lot; he came every month. If I had any problem, he was always there.”
- ◆ “It made everything easier having a social worker that really cared for me ... They would talk to me like a human not some poor oppressed child. They always took time to ask how I was.”

Many times, those helpful social workers were transferred or promoted, with little or no warning; such changes became part of ongoing turnover among social workers. The damage caused by turnover was compounded by most social workers’ apparently excessive workload, and, for some, perhaps degradation of their attitude toward the children/youth they were supposed to serve. Many interviewees spoke of not seeing their social worker for long stretches of time. Even when visitations were steady, many social workers were said to have pre-set priorities for the case and to not “listen” to the child/youth preferences.

The interviewee’s complaints started with CPS workers who failed to remove them quickly from situations of abuse. They continued with social workers not

being sure the caregivers were out of hearing when they checked in with the child, so the child was not free to be truthful.

Many social workers were said to ignore the interviewees’ reports of abuse in foster homes, and to downplay various other issues. There were also dozens of laments about slow social worker responses to requests for more minor needs, such as clothing vouchers, other resources, and simple information.

- ◆ “I probably had seven social workers from time I was 17 ... When I finally did feel comfortable talking to my social worker, they would be switched ... Every time just felt so impersonal, I was just a case number.”
- ◆ “They don’t take the kids side.”
- ◆ “[Social worker] was very mean to me. She didn’t listen.”
- ◆ “For a long time, at a critical point when I was trying to find out that I was being shipped back to my family, I didn’t even know who my case worker was.”
- ◆ “They were all just awful ... it was terrifying.”
- ◆ “I went through a lot of social workers and I did not see them that often ... I didn’t have the same social worker for a long time. They are always overwhelmed so they can’t do much anyway.”
- ◆ “I don’t want to feel like just another case ... I’m just a piece of paper, you’re just doing your job and checking me off and leaving.”

“ I wish I would have known about the health insurance because that would be a deal breaker for me.

“Cynthia” entered foster care while in high school after she, her mother and her younger sister were in and out of homelessness.

Her first placement failed, with “too many rules” and foster parents that expected her to attend their church “almost all week.”

“I’m sorry, I’m not religious,” she explained.

Cynthia’s first social worker was responsive to her request for a new placement, moving Cynthia quickly to a temporary home that was successful and discussing options. Cynthia said, “She actually listened to my opinion.”

After moving her to another home, the social worker even drove Cynthia to her old high school every morning to maintain stability.

For hear more about Cynthia, see page 35

“Heaven” entered foster care as a young teen. She move through several placements and shelters — “just a bed until I could get to the next one.”

She immediately felt the difference at her present home because, “They made me feel welcome ... [they] told me I could eat ‘anytime.’ It just felt like a family instead of a foster home.”

Heaven chose adoption into the family over Extended Foster Care because, “I could restart and not feel like I had to live in the past.”

For more of Heaven’s story, see page 65

“ I went through a lot of social workers and I did not see them that often ... They are always overwhelmed so they can’t do much anyway

- ◆ “They didn’t listen to me at all. They didn’t listen to me about abuse. I documented bruises and awful things family members said to me.”
- ◆ “Make sure the social workers actually care.”
- ◆ “My case worker has been more detrimental than helpful.”
- ◆ “They need more empathy. All they want to do is get rid of those cases instead of what is best for the kids.”
- ◆ “I could tell they had other things to deal with ... When I had a question it would take three months to get an answer.”
- ◆ “Social workers are not emotionally invested. I never had a good experience with any social worker. They’ve been inappropriate in many ways.”

A few interviewees blamed the structure, or the social worker’s supervisor

- ◆ “I really blame the system because they have to go through the system, they have to wait for other systems. Their job is hard too, they don’t have the resources. Most of my female workers really did try, just didn’t get the help that they needed.”
- ◆ “I’ve always had good experiences with social workers ... [But] the ‘higher ups’ are more interested in the money. They put little effort into helping foster kids.”

It was notable that very few interviewees mentioned reaching out to a social worker’s supervisor

to give feedback. Instead, the young people seemed to feel powerless to affect any change in the situation with their social worker, either by complaining, reporting their social worker, or going around them.

None mentioned the existence of the Office of the Family and Child Ombuds, about which they are supposed to be informed, and only a handful spoke of contacting their social worker’s supervisor:

- ◆ “When it’s a dire situation and you need to talk to your social worker, immediately or you need to know where to go, they are M.I.A.”

Attorneys

The online survey did not ask about attorneys but many interviewees mentioned theirs (16 out of the 63). The comments were almost all positive—even superlative. The accolades centered on youth being “heard” and included the attorneys having time to support the youth in multiple realms: talking to teachers, pressuring social workers, providing rides, advising on colleges and EFC, etc.:

- ◆ “Your attorney is always for you, they are always putting their foot out, one step ahead of yours to make sure you are covered.”
- ◆ “She got to know me. She actually listened to what I wanted and took the time to understand.”
- ◆ “You need to have an attorney who wants your voice to be heard... It was key that I had good legal representation.”

Importance of Services

To get a sense of the relative importance of the services, participants were asked to name the three most important for them, as well as the least important (see Table 6).¹³ At the top of the lists were:

- ◆ “Having foster parents/caregivers that treated you like family” (44% named this as one of the three most important, and only 2% as least important)
- ◆ “Education/school support” (39% and 5%), and;
- ◆ “Your placement within foster home that were a good match for you” (36%, and 3%).

There was also strong consensus on the relative lack of importance for sex education: only 3% named it as one of the three most important services, and 30% called it the “least important.”

Perhaps most surprising are the low importance scores for “Keeping the Same Social Worker”— only 16% named it as one of the three most important factors for them. This belies the sense one gets from interview comments.

It seems that those experiencing high social worker turnover had given up on social workers as useful supports or had just not experienced what might result from better/more consistent social workers. One interviewee said:

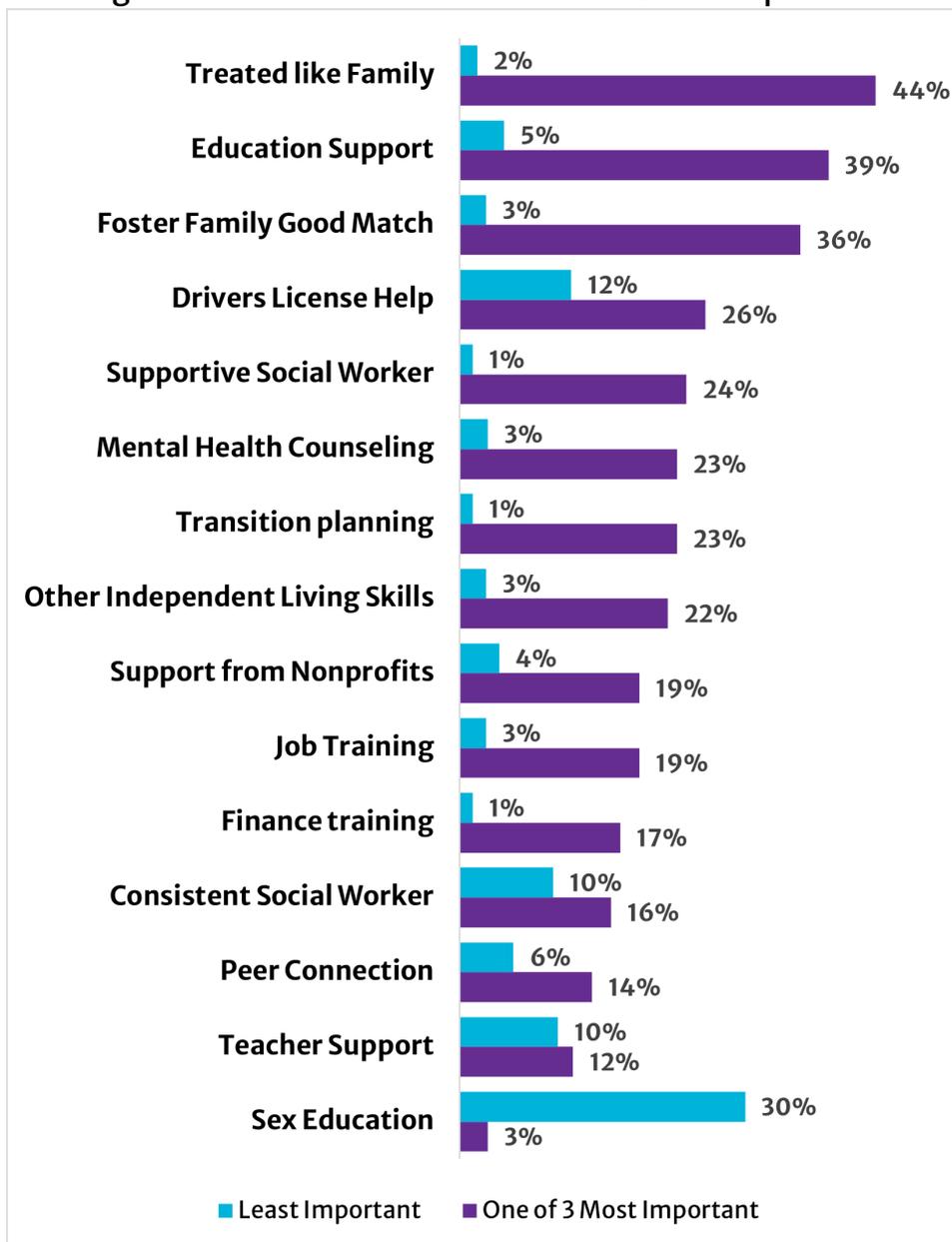
- ◆ “My social workers weren’t a main part of my case; I didn’t care to see them because they

weren’t the people helping me.”

However, among those who gave “Keeping the Same Social Worker” an “A”, 34% included it in the three most important services. This compares to only 6% of those who graded the service and “F.”

“ There need to be more questions and more training before any child gets placed anywhere.

Figure 5: Services Named Most and Least Important



“Angelica” and her siblings were in and out of foster care from the time she was a toddler. Her mother was addicted, and they were often homeless. Her younger brother was placed in a family that stayed in touch when the siblings were back with their biological mother.

When Angelica was six, the kids were permanently moved to foster care. Her brother was adopted by his earlier foster family; Angelica and her sister were periodically together but did not get along well. Her sister was also adopted. Angelica “just bounced from home to home to home to home.”

For more of Angelica’s story, see page 76

Similarly, one of the two respondents who named “treated as family” as “least important” explained:

- ◆ “You learn pretty quickly that foster care isn’t designed to give you love and belonging – if your basic needs are met and you are safe and not being sent back to your abusive parents, you are lucky. Hoping or looking for being treated like family when you are in foster care or really only sets yourself up for disappointment.”

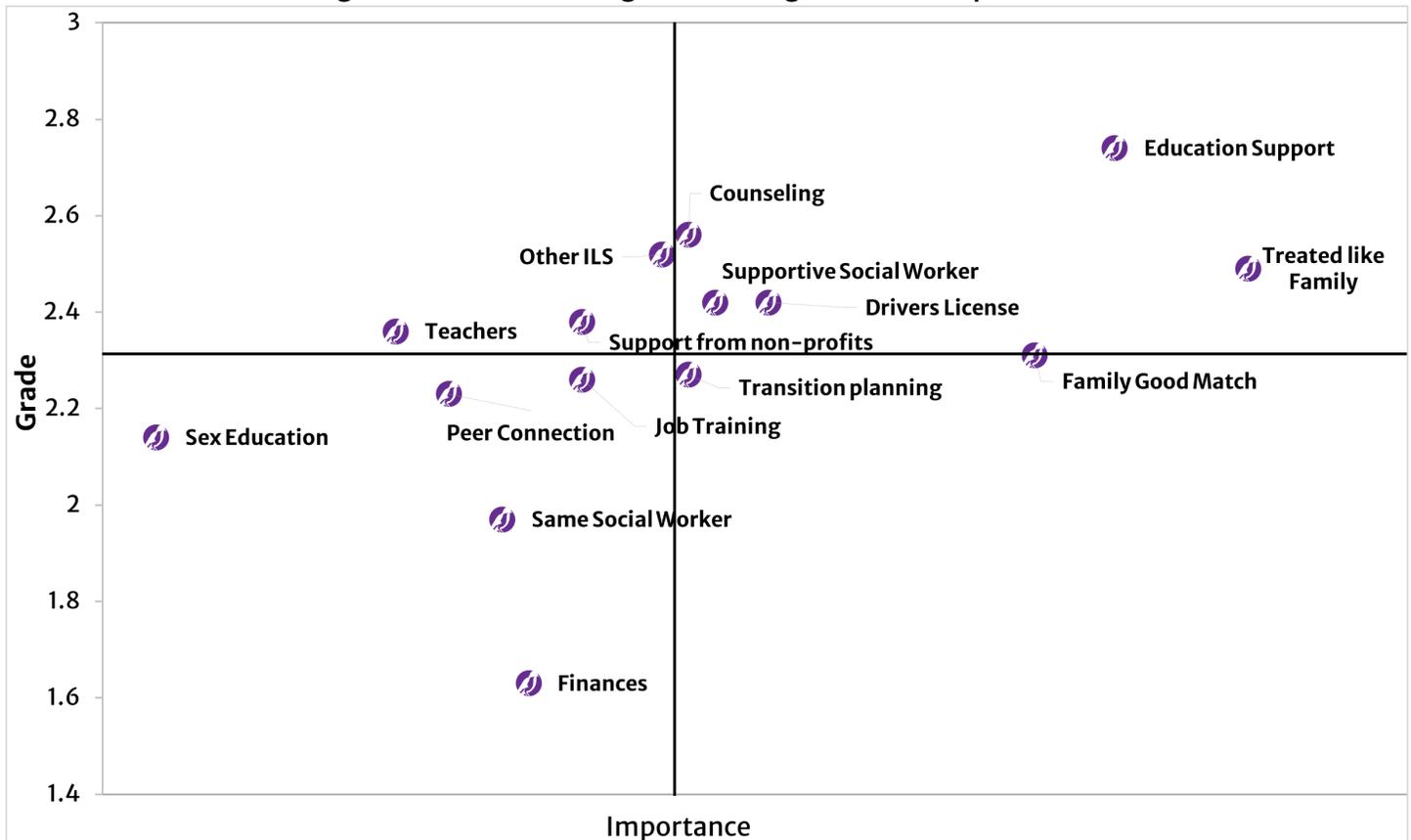
It seems that there is a strong correlation between services that received higher grades and those that were thought more important. That is, the respondents thought of “importance” more as what helped them, discounting what might have been detrimental.

This correlation is evident from scatterplots that chart the average services grades against the percentage that deemed the service as one of the three most important (see Figure 6.)

The upper right quadrant of Figure 6 shows the services that were above average in importance; for the most part, they also received above average grades. Similarly, the lower left quadrant includes services that were least apt to be termed important; they also earned the lowest average grades.

One notable outlier is “Training on finances” for which the average grade was quite a bit lower than would be expected— that is, the average grade did not follow the amount of agreement seen between importance and grades that was seen for other services.

Figure 6: Plot of Average Grades Against Net Importance



Importance of Additional Services

BIPOC (e.g., some race/ethnicity other than only “white”) and LGBTQ+ identifying respondents rated the importance of services that might help with challenges related to their identities.

Because of the short list of services addressed, they chose the single most important service and the least important. See Table 6.

Both groups reinforced the significance of foster parents:

- ◆ 37% of the BIPOC respondents named “foster parent support” as most important when dealing with cultural challenges.
- ◆ 33% of those identifying as

LGBTQ+ said the same of support related to their sexual/ gender identities.

Plots of these service grades against net importance again show a strong relationship between successful services and what is important to the respondent (see Figures 7 & 8). In this case the slight outliers were:

- ◆ “Help with Bullying” was more important for those identifying as LGBTQ+ than the average grades the service was awarded.
- ◆ “Finding Peers” was similarly out of alignment for those identifying as BIPOC.

“Sofia” entered the foster care system as a teenager. She was originally placed with her 26-year-old sister, who “kicked her out” of the house a year later.

Sofia was shuttled between various youth shelters while her social worker tried to reunite the sisters. Sofia felt discriminated against in the shelters because of her ethnicity, saying she unfairly “had the cops called” on her several times.

Sofia reports that she most needed mental health care at that point, but there was no transportation and her initial social worker did not help her with those services. Sofia stayed in school but says her IEP teacher just had her watch movies.

Sofia concludes, “I wish I could have felt they cared about me and not just their pay or another kid in their file.” Luckily, she was finally matched in a home where she says, “To me they are my parents.”

For more on Sofia, see page 47

Table 6: Importance of Supports for Specific Challenges

	Most Important	Least Important
Among those self-identifying as a race or ethnicity other than white: N= 87	%	%
Foster Parent Support	37	14
Finding Peers	25	16
Social Worker Support	17	14
Support for Bullying	11	15
Culturally Specific Medical Care	6	34
Among those self-identifying as LGBTQ+: N= 58		
Foster Parent Support	33	10
Support for Bullying	22	14
Social Worker Support	14	14
Finding Peers	9	19
LGBTQ Specific Medical Care	9	29

“ I’m thankful for foster care because I got in a better place.

“Case” went into foster care at pre-school age. He was kept with two older brothers; a younger sister was in a separate placement.

Case’s first several placements were not successful, but he does not remember those clearly. His brothers tell him of mistreatment and a lack of acceptance. Case does remember that the disruptions were sudden and not explained. He says, “They would just load us up from one place to the next without any information about where we were going.”

Fortunately, Case and his brothers were finally placed with a foster family so successful that they adopted the three brothers by the time Case was five. The family ultimately also housed and adopted the younger sister.

Case says, “I know I am fortunate.”

For more of Case’s story, see page 74

“What it really comes down to is your resilience and willingness to come back at it.”

Figure 7: Plot of Average Grades for LGBTQ+ Supports Against Importance

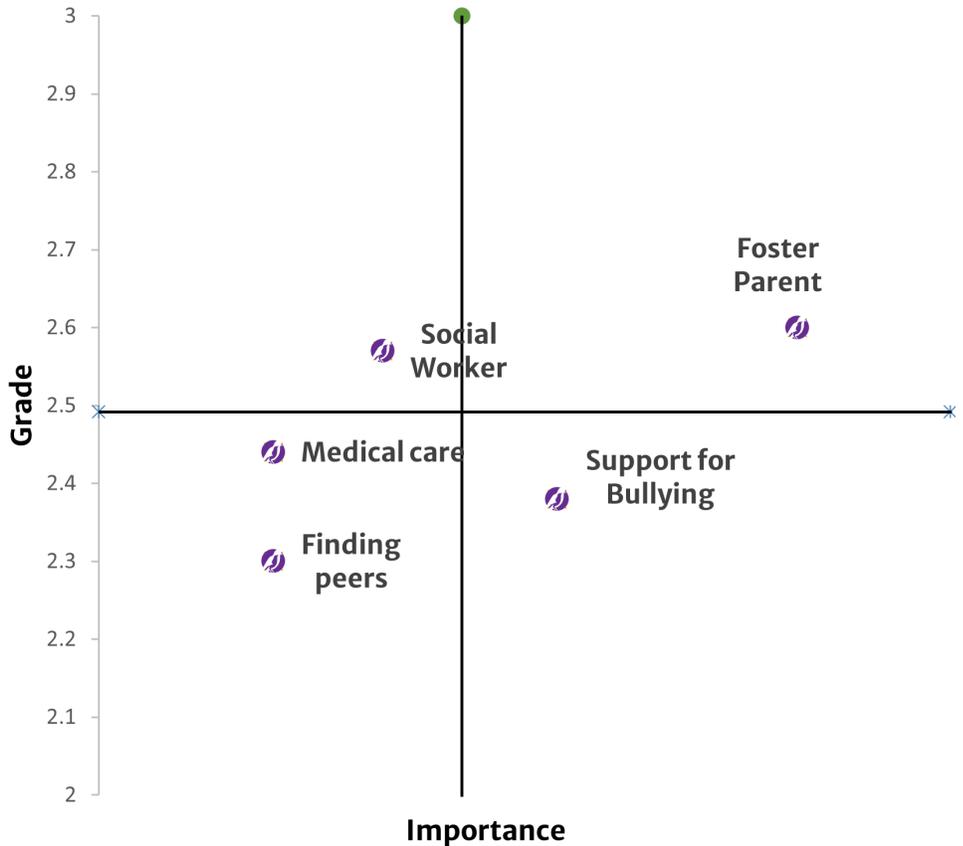
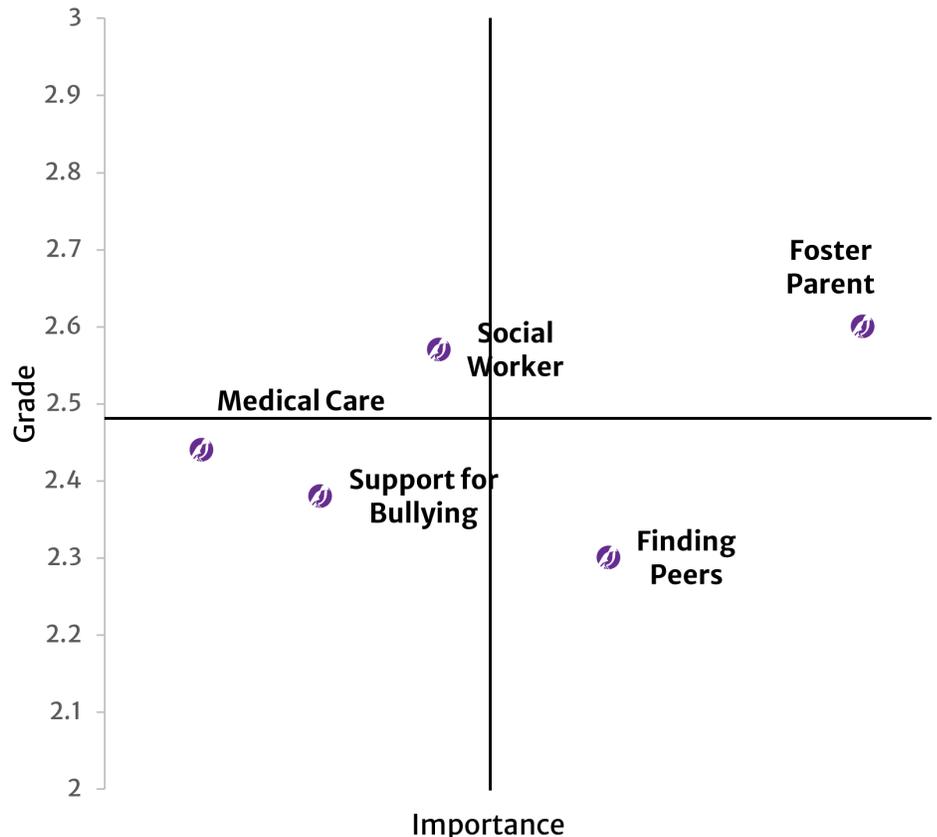


Figure 8: Plot of Average Grades for Racial/Ethnic Identity Supports Against Importance



Discussion

The issues raised here are not new. It is well-documented that the State struggles for resources and staff to successfully support those in foster care. There are insufficient foster parents, making it difficult to match cultural identities, geography, language, the needs of older children, etc.¹⁴ And excessive social worker turnover has been recognized nationwide for years.¹⁵

What is added here is an increased awareness of what it feels like to be subjected to the Child Welfare system's deficits. The legitimacy of the concerns raised is supported by the fact that most have been recognized over the years by Mockingbird's thousands of direct program through our annual issue development process and legislative advocacy efforts.

Many of the resultant Mockingbird advocacy goals have been successful, including the adoption and expansion of Extended Foster Care, more inclusive eligibility for college scholarships, help with driver's training and car insurance expenses, phasing out the use of detention of minors for non-criminal acts, and the 2021's legislation mandating attorney appointments for children in foster care starting at age eight, to be phased in by 2027.

Other issues have been raised—sometimes repeatedly—but not addressed through legislation or practice change. These include:

- ◆ Improved support for those in foster care who identify as LGBTQ+, such as efforts in 2015 and 2019 to add sensitivity

training for potential foster parents, and 2018's unsuccessful advocacy to expand recruitment of LGBTQ+ foster parents and include explicit anti-discrimination language in the Washington Administrative Code (WAC).

- ◆ 2017's attempt to improve social worker retention
- ◆ Unresolved efforts to launch a mobile-friendly website/app for more easily accessible information on foster child/youth rights and resources
- ◆ 2019's request that all foster parents receive a core curriculum and continued training on trauma-informed care, cultural responsiveness, disciplinary practices, crisis de-escalation, and casefile interpretation.

Considering both the results of this report and the known history of the issues, Mockingbird staff and partners have identified several areas of concerns that the State, lawmakers and advocates should prioritize.

Investigation Needs

There needs to be more clarity in how the State monitors adherence to existing policy. This includes the frequency and privacy of case worker visits with children/youth in foster care and mandates around freedom of religious practices for those in foster care. Additionally, more transparency in the State's data collection would be useful; published reports of federal government mandates include long-term outcome tracking, such

“Kiana” was among the respondents who gave grades ranging only “F” to a high of “C”. After entering the system as a young teen, she was first sent to a juvenile detention facility as there was no other space. Her autistic younger brother went to a foster family specifically for his special needs; they eventually dropped him off at his school with his belongings to be picked up by his social worker.

At the detention facility, Kiana reports being threatened and abused by other youth. She was transferred to a foster home that initially seemed fine, but their Christian beliefs and church community began clashing with Kiana's non-Christian faith background. She reports being “forced” to attend their church and being told that her beliefs were “nonexistent.” Kiana summarizes, “I am all about accepting different religions and different cultures, but it's a different thing if they are forcing that on you.”

The church also believed that “gay people were going to hell.” When they learned that Kiana was interested in girls, the pastor church quoted bible verses as he sprinkled holy water on her so she could “pray it away.”

Continued on page 73

“ Make sure the social workers actually care.

“Brandi” was “found in a tent” when she was a toddler and removed from her birth family. She then lived primarily with one foster family for over 10 years, although she reports being abused and was sent several times to group homes as “punishment.” After leaving that home, she experienced several foster families and group homes, as well as juvenile detention.

During all this, she recounts one positive experience in a home that felt like a family—they went camping, had chores, and she even got a dog. Because of this one home, she graded “having a foster family that was a good match for you” as a “B”.

Brandi gave an “A” to her mental health counseling, saying her counselor was someone she was “able to talk to and they actually cared and wanted to hear it, somebody that I trusted.”

She felt pressured to go, but says, “Looking back, it was a good thing, and now I know how to get the help I need today.”

To read more of Brandi’s story, see page 67

“ I only found out about Extended Foster Care the day I was in court with a judge having to decide.

as time in foster care, rate of reunification, etc. However, many interim outcomes —e.g. social worker turnover—impact the youth who are less apt to be reunified or adopted, such as those in this report.

The interviewees in this study very rarely recognized avenues of recourse , such as contacting a supervisor of the Office of Ombuds. They would be better served by an automated, regular feedback loop to track the success of services. This could be a simple, semi-annual check-in, 10-question survey that, when compiled, would illuminate consistent issues and successes.

In addition, a State-sponsored youth-informed study of this population’s opinions is advised, including follow-up subsequent to exiting. With access to full records, the State could structure a sample that was more inclusive of all those with foster care experience.”

Training/ Specialized Staffing

This study also indicates a lack of understanding of trauma-informed care. Study participants repeatedly reported being met with impatience when exhibiting the normal stresses of adolescence coupled with the impact of over a decade of trauma — before and after entering foster care.

The findings also demonstrates the specific issues faced by adolescents in care; we believe it’s necessary to institutionalize specialized social worker support. Such social workers would be better informed on adolescents’ issues such as addressing emerging sexual identities, job and finance training, and driver’s license obtainment. In addition, such social workers would be more accustomed to partnering with youth in planning their own care and promoting their self-advocacy.

Mental Health

Mental health issues related to time in foster care are also well-documented. The “C” grades reported here for mental health counseling are not sufficient to address the long-term impacts of these mental health concerns. In particular, these data illustrate the compounded mental health stresses on those who identify as LGBTQ+. Although previous efforts to improve the system have not met with success, we must continue to work toward improvement in placements and supports for this population.

The study also reconfirms what works, including the “one committed adult” described by Harvard’s Center on the Developing Child in 2015.¹⁶ It is the nature of relationships with adults that is highlighted by these voices, with any service provider or foster parent. Successful relationships were described as not “a paycheck,” and “like family” or “a friend.”

This committed style may be easier to achieve for nonprofit employees, as their scope is smaller than State case managers’ and their resources more ample. The challenge is for all those in contact with these young people to work toward that approach, and for the State to add the necessary capacity.

It is too many that a single service recipient is compelled to say: “I’ve always felt alone in the foster care system.”

Acknowledgments

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Endnotes

1. <https://fostersuccess.org/education-outcomes-for-foster-youth-are-going-in-the-wrong-direction/>
2. <https://www.fosterfocusmag.com/articles/foster-care-and-homelessness>
3. <https://partnersforourchildren.org/data/quickfacts>
4. <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/5223-children-in-foster-care-placement?loc=49&loct=5#detailed/5/6947-6985/false/871,870,573,869,36,868,867,133,38,35/any/11702,11703>. The comparison data is not a precise match; i.e. children of all ages were included in the Kidscount data. However, it does give a sense of probable geographic bias in our data.
5. <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/6246-children-in-foster-care-by-race-and-hispanic-origin>
6. <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/143/3/e20174211>
7. American Psychological Association: <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2007-05931-004>
8. <http://www.vis.pocdata.org/national-trends/entry-rates>
9. <https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/news/foster-youth-and-hotel-stays>
10. <http://www.vis.pocdata.org/graphs/family-settings>
11. Respondents contacted through a specific agency were asked to grade that agency by name, and the results shared with the nonprofit directly. Respondents contacted through a widely posted weblink were asked to grade “nonprofit services” in general. VOA in Spokane did not include this question for their respondents.
12. Asked after the query about finance training, “other” is meant to be apart from financial knowledge.
13. Asking respondents to rank the services was too cumbersome in pretests, and rating each service resulted in almost all being termed “very important,” and thus not differentiated.
14. <https://www.newamerica.org/weekly/four-ways-fix-washington-states-foster-care-system/>
15. <https://www.invw.org/2016/12/08/social-worker-churn-undercuts-washingtons-foster-care-system/>
16. <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/15/03/science-resilience>

“ It’s frustrating that you have to go through so much, just to see your family or even talk to them.

“Kaylie” entered foster care while in high school and aged out at 18 without entering EFC. She is one of the participants that did not graduate, and still faces strong challenges. She generally gave services “C” grades, which she explained as being an average of “some good, some bad.” Kaylie was assaulted in one foster home, but another made her feel she was “part of the family.” She explains, “They wouldn’t tell people that I was their foster kid, so that made me feel good.”

Kaylie switched schools twice, which contributed to her lack of a degree; she has been diagnosed with a learning disability and had an IEP. At one high school, Kaylie found some of her teachers to be willing to help and make time for her, even meeting over lunch. She also felt supported by her school and her foster parents when she was being bullied online because of her sexual identity. Finally, she had a good relationship with her therapist, with whom she worked for three years—a valuable consistency. Unfortunately, she lost the connection when she left the foster care system.

Continued on page 62

Case Studies

This section is comprised of short narratives that profile each of the one-on-one interviews that were conducted. The names and some details have been changed/excluded to protect the participants' identities.

Sierra

“Sierra” and her two younger sisters entered foster care together when Sierra was in her early teens, escaping an abusive stepfather. They were placed with relatives of the stepfather, which was not Sierra’s choice. Sierra described this first foster family as treating the sisters as though they were “born evil” and had to have the evil “raised out of them.” When another family member across the state offered to take them in, Sierra moved; her sisters initially did not want to leave their community or proximity to their mother, feeling it would make a reunion with her even more difficult.

Her sisters did eventually join Sierra, but Sierra exited the second home as well. She felt that, as an older youth, the family did not take the time to allow her to adjust to their family habits and did not sympathize with what she had been through. They pointedly referred to the sisters as their “foster children” in public, and barred Sierra from her friends, driver’s license training, and even available training in finances. “You don’t need that,” she quoted her foster father.

Sierra’s third home has been a more successful match, in terms of parenting a teenager. She does have to help care for younger children in the house, but says the foster parent is “Good at being a mom.” Unfortunately, her previous foster home, where her sisters remain, does not allow the required visits between the siblings.

Sierra is especially negative when discussing her social workers, especially what she calls her primary caregiver, who is still across the state where she entered foster care—she is more positive the local “courtesy worker” who conducts home visits. Sierra reports that the primary social worker “never followed up,” especially when alerted that she was being kept from her sisters. She even suspects that the social worker purposely sent clothing vouchers to her past foster parents’ home, without alerting her. She adds, “Courtesy workers try to get her to do stuff for me, but she just blows it off.”

Sierra is disdainful of the schools she attended, finding the teachers unsympathetic. One school also sent notices to the wrong foster home, resulting in unexcused absences. The bright spots for Sierra were a couple of teachers and Youthnet, a local nonprofit support agency.

“ It’s really hard to find a safe foster home when you are Trans and queer, and it really sucks.

She explained “Every time I had a question for Youthnet they were responsive and had an answer, so they always helped out” with school, taxes, work questions and drivers ed—“Things that your Mom & Dad were supposed to show you.” She continues, “They were the best at getting back to me.”

Sierra is now living on her own with Extended Foster Care support, working part-time and attending college. Her take away from her years in the system is that all foster families should have to attend family therapy. She thinks this is especially true of older foster children, who are used to different parenting styles and rules, and are apt to have more trauma in their history. “They would be happier and healthier if they went into some therapy,” she finishes.

Brady

“Brady” entered foster care at eight months old. He was with his first family for six years; although he was not happy there, he did not realize there were any alternatives. No one had told him that the couple raising him were not his birth parents, and that he was in foster care. There were visits from social workers, but Brady did not know that did not happen for all families.

Shortly after entering grade school, Brady began visiting another couple on weekends. After a few such visits, all his clothes and belongings were packed and sent with him; his new foster mother explained that he would now live with them.

Luckily, Brady loved his new foster home. He calls his foster parents “Mom” and “Dad,” they teach him practical skills, keep the fridge stocked, and host family meals. “[It’s] not just some foster-type home,” he explains. “They don’t have outside care-givers; no strangers come for respite. When they are away somewhere some of their family members come. They teach us stuff, like how to fix things, [and] all about animals on the farm.”

It was not an issue for him that his foster family does not share his Native American heritage; whenever he expressed an interest in that culture, his foster parents were able to connect him with resources. In his grading, Brady gave almost all services an “A”, but it became clear that was because his foster mother advocated for him and arranged services. She organized his IEP at his school to help with his ADD diagnosis. She also realized right away that he needed counseling and knew how arrange it.

Brady is now finishing high school remotely while working full-time and will enter college in the fall. He knows that he got lucky with his second foster placement. His strongest message is for more transparency, even with young children. He feels he should have been more informed, even as a young child, or what his situation and options were, and what plans were being put into place for him.

“I don’t want to feel like just another case... I’m just a piece of paper, you’re just doing your job and checking me off and leaving.”

“ I had so many different social workers ... Always having to tell your story, having them read your folder and having preconceived ideas of who you are ... It’s a lot to deal with.

Helen

“Helen” is a young Native American woman who entered foster care as a pre-teen. She was placed in tribal foster care but later moved to a non-Native family to join her sister. Helen reported that she did not see her social worker enough while she was in care. In addition, the social worker was not responsive to Helen’s concerns about her foster placement. She said, “My experience with tribal care it was hard to get anything done quickly ... My social worker had too many cases.”

Helen felt that her second foster parents supported connecting her with the tribe and attending cultural events and activities. But she was not provided the opportunity to meet other tribal youth in foster care. Thankfully, Helen was able to access a counselor that made her feel like she was truly cared for and not just another case or patient. “It felt more like a supportive friendship than a mental health check,” Helen explains.

When she transitioned out of foster care Helen felt like she did not have a clear plan of what she was going to do or what resources she could access. She also was not confident in asking for help. She ended up being homeless, “couch surfing.”

Helen gave a particularly low grade to financial training. She eventually got connected to Youthnet and has been able to get job support and financial guidance. She feels she would have been in a better situation if she had more support and responsiveness while she was in foster care.

Rain

“Rain” lived with her grandparents for much of her early life; she entered foster care as a pre-teen after a failed reunion with her biological mother. After a few brief unsuccessful placements, Rain stayed for seven years with a veteran foster parent, along with “eight or nine” other foster children.

Rain describes her long-term foster mother as treating her like “her real daughter,” “pushing” her, and “not letting her give up on herself.” She advocates that children with issues as serious as hers be placed immediately with the more experienced foster parents, to save them passing through several unsuccessful placements before finding stability.

With a strong foster mother, Rain did not need much other support, especially at school. She also appreciated her community of extended foster brothers and sisters.

Rain’s greatest complaint was with a social worker who failed to pass on letters to and from her grandparents. It was only when her grandparents attended her high school graduation that Rain found they had been trying to reach her, and that her unanswered letters to them were never forwarded. Rain is now in Extended Foster Care, living with her boyfriend and their dog, and is enrolled in a post-high school program.

Diane

“Diane” describes herself as having been relatively lucky in foster care, although she acknowledges, “Being a foster child is not easy ... it is not a walk in the park.” She credits an early social worker, whom Diane calls “amazing ... She listened to every concern I had.” The social worker always took her out of the house during visits, for pizza or ice cream, and spent as much time as necessary.

Diane needed the social worker’s help initially, as she was first placed, as a pre-teen, across the state from her home with a family that did not accept her LGBTQ identity. She was called a “slut” by the family’s biological daughter, and the parents tried to “counsel the gay out of me.” “My self-esteem was in the shitter ... I was suicidal,” she continued. The social worker found an LGBTQ-friendly placement, where Diane flourished for years. However, after two years she was given a new social worker, whom she was told specialized in Native American youth such as her. That social worker, and most of the four that followed, were not as successful as the original assignment.

Diane is one of the survey participants that gave a “F” grade to “Keeping the same social worker”. “I had so many different social workers while in care,” she explained. “Like, over five to six years in care, I had six or seven social workers.” She continues, “A social worker is kind of the only constant in a kid’s life in foster care.” She details the impact as, “Always having to tell your story, having them read your folder and having preconceived ideas of who you are ... It’s a lot to deal with.”

Bailee

“Bailee” and her two sisters were raised in a home where the mother was addicted, and both parents were eventually imprisoned. She acted out early and often, was “suspended 1000 times,” and gave up on school while in middle school. She was “in and out of juvie at least 20 times,” explaining, “I felt like I was self-sabotaging ... when I went to juvie, I had a hot meal every night. My doors locked and I felt safe.”

After too many missed parole visits and a charge of stealing her mother’s car, Bailee was placed in a series of group homes. She chafed against the rigid rules and restrictions and kept running back home. She says of one group setting, “It was the most inhumane thing I have ever seen anyone do to a child.” She further explains, “I needed guidance from someone who wanted to help; of course, I’m going to act out ... No one wanted to just make sure I was ok.” Bailee was moved across the state to make it harder to reach home, and finally, as a teen, out of state.

She was there when her parole officer called to say, “Both your parents are going to jail. You’re a foster kid now.”

“ It felt more like a supportive friendship than a mental health check

“ I didn’t want to sign into Extended Foster Care, because every single social worker screwed me over ... People read my case file and read all this stuff about juvie and running away ... but I was a hurting kid from the time I got into foster care.

One lucky break came when Bailee’s younger sister was placed in a supportive foster home; her sister’s foster parents went to bat for Bailee many times, taking her sister to visit her, and then getting Bailee back to Washington.

Bailee was placed in a new home and went back to school. She was intimidated and overwhelmed after missing so much education. “They expected me to go to school and get good grades, but would penalize me when I didn’t,” she explained. “No one asked, ‘Why aren’t you doing well in school.’ ... No one wanted to work with me to help me succeed they just threatened me with juvie.” Just before she turned 18, Bailee moved in with relatives. Her social worker at the time, one of five in a two-year period, was no help before the transition. He did not return calls or emails and did not discuss Extended Foster Care. With little good information on EFC, she says, “I didn’t want to sign into Extended Foster Care, because every single social worker screwed me over ... People read my case file and read all this stuff about juvie and running away ... but I was a hurting kid from the time I got into foster care.”

After a series of bad decisions, bad luck and untreated trauma, Bailee was pregnant and homeless as a young adult. But her sister’s foster parents came to her aid again and signed her into EFC, getting her placed in their home and added to the case load of her sister’s social worker.

Bailee was able to form a strong bond with her sister and get her “head straight.” She finished high school, with support from Treehouse and a handful of teachers who went out of their way—even picking her up for school and bringing breakfast.

Her Treehouse support person helped her with financial aid and college applications and was “genuine.” “She didn’t feel like someone who was being paid to talk to me,” Bailee says. Bailee gave birth to a healthy baby and had just moved into her own apartment at the time of the interview.

Bailee advocates for more Family Team Decision Making (FTDM) meetings, instead of decisions being made “on the fly,” saying, “Those are vital in making sure everyone’s voice is being heard, including the child.” She also calls for more behavioral health services.

Bailee said, “[Foster children] need someone to direct them in healthy manner in how to get past resentment and frustration ... No one wanted a better life for me besides me. It’s so difficult to get by when you feel like you are all on your own. I wouldn’t wish it on anyone. That is a terrible way to grow up.”

Skylar

“Skylar” entered foster care at the start as a pre-teen, with a family that was “ok at first.” However, as Skylar moved into her teenage years, she did not behave like the daughter her foster parents had imagined.

They excluded her from outings with their two biological children, and the rift deepened.

Skylar appealed to her social worker for a new family, who just insisted “they are good people.” Skylar now says of social workers in general, “They don’t take the kids side. I was really depressed, and she didn’t do anything about it.” Skylar stayed in the unhappy home for six years in total, until she came out to her foster mother about her bisexuality. Within a week, the foster mother packed Skylar’s belongings, told Skylar she was picking her up early from school for a doctor’s appointment, and then dropped her off at the DSHS office.

Skylar’s second placement seemed to be an improvement, with the foster family even discussing adoption, but Skylar was apprehensive when the family forbade her from visiting her biological aunt. She ended up moving again to live with the aunt, which was also not ideal.

The bright spot in Skylar’s story is a teacher; Skylar says, “I could go to for anything.” The teacher even sought to become a foster parent herself to take in Skylar but was told that she could not be guaranteed her choice of placements. She and Skylar remain close; Skylar refers to the teacher as “My soul Mom.”

Skylar has struggled to pass college classes to maintain the scholarship for which she qualifies and is hesitant to risk her own funds on college when she finds the classes so difficult. She is living with her boyfriend now and looking for work, perhaps in a daycare again, which she enjoys.

Cynthia

“Cynthia” entered foster care while in high school after she, her mother and her younger sister were in and out of homelessness. Her first placement failed, with “too many rules” and foster parents that expected her to attend their church “almost all week“. “I’m sorry, I’m not religious,” she explained.

Cynthia’s first social worker was responsive to her request for a new placement, moving Cynthia quickly to a temporary home that was successful and discussing options. Cynthia said, “She actually listened to my opinion.” After moving her to another home, the social worker even drove Cynthia to her old high school every morning to maintain stability.

Unfortunately, Cynthia was not able to keep that relationship; her second social worker was also described as “amazing,” but having three social workers in one and a half years made it difficult for Cynthia to trust.

Cynthia’s current placement has worked well for her, with a foster mom and foster sisters that refer to her as their “daughter” and “sister.” Her sisters made her feel welcomed and introduced her to others at her new school. The household meets for family meals, and the foster mother is advocating for Cynthia’s wishes to stay in Extended Foster Care.

**“(Of Treehouse)
They were really on
top of it and made
sure I got exactly
what I needed for
support.**

Cynthia has a job, a car, and plans for college. However, she feels that her current social worker is pressuring her to reunite with her bio mother against her will. Cynthia attributes this to the social worker's workload "I think she just wants me off her case load."

Cynthia's advice was: "If you are trying to find a great home for children, there should always be more of an overview of who the parents are ... are they going to have outrageous rules ... Otherwise, you get thrown into someone's home and suddenly it's like 'You have to follow our rules now.'"

Eric

"Eric" was an older teen when he and his younger siblings entered the foster care system. After a short stay in a group home, he and one brother settled into a three-year placement; the family is now adopting both. Eric attributes the family's success to shared interests and the attitude of the parent. They did not treat Eric and his brother "any differently than their own kids," including taking them on trips.

He continues, "They quickly introduced us as 'their kids' to their family and friends ... We feel extremely safe, cared for and loved." The parents were transparent about expectations and gave guidelines, but allowed ongoing conversation on how things would work in the home.

Although they do not share Eric and his brother's cultural background, the foster parents have connected the two with others who share the same food, customs, and celebrations. They also have been very supportive of Eric keeping in close touch with his aunt and cousins. Eric also credits his success on several sympathetic high school teachers, who were flexible about deadlines when Eric was transitioning, and even supplied gift cards for food when Eric was in the group home.

The only "F" and "D" grades Eric gave were for the consistency and support of his social workers. He is on his 5th social worker in two and a half years. Some changes were for structural reasons – after it was clear the family could not be reunited, which was the first social worker's specialty, he and his brother were reassigned to another contact to help them through Terminating Parental Rights (TPR). Then, Eric was reassigned when he turned 18. However, in the two years since turning 18, Eric has had three more social workers, and has no idea why.

He also describes his social workers as "rushed" and "dismissive." "I never built a personal relationship with any of my social workers," he explains. "I could tell they had other things to deal with ... When I had a question it would take three months to get an answer."

Eric now has a full ride scholarship in college, and his brother has been reassured that he will be able to also get special supports even after adoption. Eric's wish for the foster care system would be that every child experiencing foster care could have as good of a placement. "My brother and I are very aware of how lucky we are," he sums.

***“ [I had] ten social workers in ten years ... They never read the file, and I had to keep telling my story over and over.*”**

Abby

“Abby” went into foster care as a teen but says “I should have been in foster care from the time I was about eight.” She was raised by strict Catholic parents, where “there was always an open CPS case.” Her parents barred the social workers from speaking with the kids and “talked themselves out of it.” She was homeschooled and did not feel there was another adult in her life in which she could confide.

On her 16th birthday Abby ran to a shelter for young adults and told them to call the police; she was placed in a temporary safe house. Unfortunately, her first placement was with friends of her parents, which she does not understand. “I said over and over where I wanted to go but no one listened to me.” When the family found out she was trans/queer, they kicked her out, saying “This is above our pay grade, we don’t want you to be transexual in our house.”

Abby moved in with relatives. She documented further abuse (bruises and quotes of their verbal violence), but her social worker did not believe her, and even made her apologize to the abusive cousins. When she turned 18, the relatives put her out of the house. She sums up, “It’s really hard to find a safe foster home when you are Trans and queer, and it really sucks.”

Fortunately, Abby had some good teachers along the way, and found a wonderful case manager at Youthnet. She advocated for herself to receive good mental health counseling; “I was adamant as soon as I got into foster care that I needed therapy and I told every single adult that ever talked to me ... I worked through a lot of my issues and I really connected.”

Abby also lauds the support from her attorney. She says, “I freaking love her ... she fostered the idea that I do something important with my life.” Abby now has accepted a full scholarship to college and plans to herself become an attorney and support children and youth experiencing foster care. She said about turning 21 the next day, “I’m really psyched.”

Mai

“Mai” first entered foster care in her early years in grade school, after “continuous CPS cases.” She was reunited with her biological family after one year, although she resisted. She attributes the problem to her mother being “old fashioned Asian,” and undervaluing girls. Required family therapy did not seem to help; Mai was afraid to be honest, in case her mother found out what was said. Mai feels that her mother convinced CPS that Mai was “the bad guy” and that no one listened to her side of the story.

After the reunification, Mai stayed with her biological family, because she had taken on the primary role of parenting her younger brother. But there were “fights every day ... the police were called.”

“(Speaking about an attorney) “I freaking love her ... She fostered the idea that I do something important with my life.”

“ [The attorney] read my case file and got to know me. She actually listened to what I wanted and took the time to understand.

When Mai reached 16, though, a social worker “forced her” back into foster care. She entered Tribal Child Welfare due to a bureaucratic mix-up; her younger brother’s father is a tribal member, not hers.

Being placed with a family from the tribe was not the cause of her culture shock, however. She was not accustomed to healthy parenting: “Wanting to eat dinner together was so new to me; my family NEVER ate dinner together.” She was used to taking care of herself, but eventually was able to bond with her foster parents—an “old lady” whom she now calls “Nana” and her daughter, who Mai calls “Mom.” They share a love of music and gardening, although when Mai came out to them as being gay, they “just laughed and said, ‘No you’re not.’”

Mai had little positive to say about social workers. Part of that stems from the years before foster care, when CPS workers failed to protect her from her abusive mother. Once in foster care, she had “ten social workers in ten years ... they never read the file, and I had to keep telling my story over and over.”

Mai also says the social workers “pushed her” to again reunite with her biological family, which she avoided with the help of an appointed attorney. Mai said, “[The attorney] read my case file and got to know me. She actually listened to what I wanted and took the time to understand.”

Mai bussed three hours a day to stay at her old high school and benefitted from Treehouse’s services. She credits Treehouse with getting her through school, as they paid for a laptop and software, which saved time. They also encouraged her to apply college. She says, “I was thinking ‘it’s just foster care and that’s it.’” Mai has just recently graduated with a 4-year college degree in social work.

Eva

When “Eva” was asked how many times she experienced homelessness, she said, “I was homeless on and off for years so it’s hard to count.”

Her mother left her in various houses when she was young; she did not know if some were foster care. By the time she entered her teens, however, CPS discovered her and two siblings living with their grandfather, and they officially entered the Child Welfare System.

Although their grandfather treated them well enough, she and her younger sister eventually agreed to transfer to the care of family friends, who were more financially stable. They were assisted by an appointed attorney, and CPS encouraged the move, because of the grandfather’s previous criminal record. Their brother stayed with their grandfather.

Eva gave her only “A” grade to her subsequent foster parents, most of the other grades she gave were “F”s. This included training in finances and other independent living skills, job and/or job search training, connecting with peers, and supports from nonprofit agencies.

“I’ve always felt alone in the foster care system,” she says.

Eva was especially harsh on her social workers, saying “I never had a good experience with a social worker ... they’ve been inappropriate in many ways.” She continues, “They are not emotionally invested ... they need more empathy.” Among other problems, she says they “downplayed” her PTSD from the years before foster care. “They said, ‘Everyone’s depressed.’” Eva found her own mental health counseling eventually, covered by her medical insurance.

Even with the lack of school and other support, Eva is taking AP classes, about to graduate from high school and applying to colleges. She transitioned to EFC and is optimistic about her future. Her main concern now is that the family’s social worker is trying to force her younger sister to be adopted by their foster parents, threatening to move the sister into another home otherwise. Eva is calling on the assistance of her attorney to support her sister.

Zacarius

“Zacarius” was living in a group home with behavioral support services at the time of the interview. He had entered the foster care system when he was a teenager along with his siblings, who were placed in separate homes. He has maintained contact with his siblings via visits coordinated by foster parents and unrestricted phone access to older siblings.

Zacarius reports that he was well supported by his social worker, counselor, and foster family. “They were just really there for me,” he explains. “It was a chaotic time. I couldn’t visit my family.” He knew they cared because they “listened” and helped him better understand what was going on. They also helped him think through decisions and arrive at different choices or options that would get him closer to the outcomes he wanted. He particularly remembers one time he was “really irritated ... [My foster dad] sat there and listened to me and it really made me feel like he was a parent to me.”

An accident and traumatic brain injury led to Zacarius’s move to the group home. He reports that staff at the home still treat him like family – one worker always greets him with a smile, and they call each other “mijo” and “Dad.” He also benefits from a transition program that helps with financial planning, cooking, and job experiences.

Journey

“Journey”—who uses they/them pronouns—was removed from an abusive family home while in grade school. Now a young adult and in EFC, they experienced 15 placements and nine school changes during the past decade.

“ I’ve never been treated like family in a foster home, ever. I’ve always felt like I was another paycheck

“(Of a social worker) He checked in a lot; he came every month. If I had any problem he was always there to support me.

Several of the failed placements were due to being placed in very religious families, that, among other issues, did not believe in the validity of Journey’s complex PTSD diagnoses. “They thought it was a sin that needed to be treated by biblical counselors,” they explain about one of the worst. Another religious family made them leave a therapist and see a church counselor instead, or Journey would be kicked from the house.

Journey gave failing grades to their foster families but marked “Foster families treating you like family” as unimportant because “you learn pretty quickly that foster care isn’t designed to give you love and belonging – if your basic needs are met and you are safe and not being sent back to your abusive parents, you are lucky. Hoping or looking for being treated like family when you are in foster care or homeless really only sets yourself up for disappointment.” They quote one foster parent as saying, “I give you a roof over your head, food and water. What else do you expect of me?”

Journey was particularly negative about their social workers, saying “My case worker has been more detrimental than helpful.” Months would go by, when Journey was waiting to see if they would be returned to their birth family and have no idea who their social worker was. Otherwise, Journey’s report of their social workers includes a long list of grievances, starting with the social worker being condescending and making no effort to remember their pronouns. At the other extreme, Journey’s social worker failed to reach out when told of Journey being sexually assaulted and needing a new place to live while their apartment was cordoned off as a crime scene.

The only “A” grade Journey awarded for various services was for Treehouse. “They are a no barrier service to young people, and you don’t see that very often,” they explain. “If you have a question and they don’t know the answer, they’ll figure it out.” Because of Treehouse, Journey graduated from high school and is now a junior in college. Undoubtedly, Journey would have graded their attorney an “A” had legal services been on the list. They did write legal services in as one of the most important needs for those experiencing foster care.

Journey also spoke of the importance of self-advocacy and resilience. “What it really comes down to is your resilience and willingness to come back at it,” they explained. “If you learn how to advocate for yourself in the right way, you can take yourself a long way.” And, although they are worried about how they will get by in a year when EFC ends, they plan to go on to law school to help other youth in the foster care system.

Stephanie

“Stephanie” entered foster care while in high school, along with several younger siblings. She was initially placed with a family member, which she calls her “worst experience in foster care.” Luckily, a neighbor was also getting a foster care license, and asked to take Stephanie and her sister. They have stayed with that family for several years, and Stephanie credits them, her support from Treehouse, and her natural resiliency for her subsequent success.

Stephanie gives no credit to her social worker. She laments that her initial social worker wrongly assumed that a placement with family would be the best option, saying, “Family is not always a good fit. They need to ask more questions, especially for teenagers ... There need to be more questions and more training before any child gets placed anywhere.”

She continues, “It’s like ‘Here’s an empty bed, you’re going here.’” Stephanie goes on to describe the social worker assigned when she turned 18 as being unresponsive—to the extent that on her online form, Stephanie entered that she had no social workers.

Stephanie feels that the lack of care in placements was especially hard on a younger brother, who is on the autism spectrum. He was pre-school age when he entered foster care, and she feels the foster families were not prepared for his needs.

She explains, “He was thrown in and a couple of days later they couldn’t handle it. He was moved from place to place ... You take a child away from the home they know as normal and move them from place to place. How is he supposed to understand and react to that?”

Stephanie herself has overcome her situation for the most part. After being two years behind in school, she caught up with classes, enrolled in Running Start and graduated from high school on time. Her Treehouse contact became “like a friend,” helped her set goals, apply to college, and navigate FAFSA. However, a new Treehouse contact was assigned when she reached 18, which she laments.

Jesse

“Jesse” ran away from home while still in grade school and showed the police her bruises. They returned her to her mother, who threatened her and her younger brother so they would not disclose the truth when the CPS social worker visited. She resents the social worker’s lack of action because it was “pretty dang obvious that something wasn’t right.” Eventually, her mother lost her home; the family lived for several years in their car, a tent encampment, and with various “hookups” of her mother’s.

***“ No one asked, ‘Why aren’t you doing well in school?’ ... No one wanted to work with me to help me succeed they just threatened me with juvie.*”**

“ You take a child away from the home they know as normal and move them from place to place. How is he supposed to understand and react to that?”

Finally, Jesse’s stepfather convinced her mother to let Jesse stay with him, and she and her brother were well cared for. “I think of him as my father,” she says. When he was diagnosed with terminal cancer, though, Jesse’s mother swore to take Jesse back and Jesse called CPS directly. They placed her in foster care with a relative, after asking for her opinion and preferences.

Jesse says she still suffers from PTSD. She was assigned counseling when she entered foster care to address grief from the death of her stepfather, but not for the trauma from years living with an abusive mother. She since has had a hard time finding the right type of therapy that is also covered by her insurance.

Jesse says of her social workers, “My mental health was not their biggest concern. Their concern was ‘am I in a safe place’ not ‘am I safe in my head.’” She thinks social workers should be better trained to recognize trauma and provide access to specialized therapy. She continues, “These kids are in foster care for a reason ... these reasons are not little. It’s not like ‘they didn’t get what they want for Christmas.’”

Jesse is now in Extended Foster Care and a junior in college; she credits most of her academic success to Treehouse.

Ezekial

“Ezekial” struggled with chronic PTSD and anger management before and after entering foster care as a teenager. They went through multiple placements, including one they felt was biased against them because of their cultural heritage. Ezekial was one of the interviewees most vitriolic about social workers, railing about their delays in supplying clothing vouchers, other assistance, and responses to questions. Ezekial reports that only “two or three” of their 11 social workers were helpful to them. At the worst, at the time of Ezekial’s transition to Extended Foster Care, the delays left Ezekial homeless for a month with no access to refills for a psychotropic prescription.

However, Ezekial did end up with a foster parent who “treats me like a human being,” including being accepting of Ezekial’s LGBTQ identity. Ezekial has also benefitted from an appointed attorney who “called out” their social workers and from consistent assistance from Treehouse. “They were really on top of it and made sure I got exactly what I needed for support,” he says of Treehouse. Ezekial graduated from an alternative high school, and started college, but was unable to stay in college due to “family issues.”

Ezekial is still living with their successful foster placement, even while on Extended Foster Care, and they feel they can now manage their PTSD and anger management issues.

Annie

“Annie” entered foster care while in high school and had five different social workers before she transitioned to EFC. She struggled to make up schoolwork, even with good support from Treehouse. Annie reports that her high school guidance counselor—whom she terms “not a good person”—did not spend enough time with her to understand that she was not independent enough to manage online courses to replace missing credits. She graduated a year late because of her online course failure. For this reason, Annie gave “support from teachers” an “F.”

Annie also gave a low grade (“D”) to job training and job search support. She reports reaching out several times to an independent living program and not getting responses. However, even with the school and job search struggles, Annie reports that “The biggest lack of support I felt was not really feeling a connection with my social worker.”

She continues, “It was only when I turned 18 that I felt the social workers were speaking to me. They were always talking to my foster parents.” In addition, Annie says she got very little information about Extended Foster Care. She says, “No one ever really explained to me what it was ... My social worker never had a training or information ... like ‘this is the benefits.’”

Once in EFC, Annie ended up with a successful foster family that adopted her at age 21. She admits, “I had a good ending.” At the conclusion of the interview, her advice was, “Really make sure high school seniors have the information they need on Extended Foster Care, and what that program looks like.”

Harriet

“Harriet” was homeless several times and missed months of school before entering foster care as a young teen. She was placed in a home with several other foster children; the home seemed adequate, and her foster parents found her counseling. She says she had no help with school, however, other than a sympathetic middle school IEP teacher.

When old enough to work, Harriet also reports that no one helped her find employment. “My old foster family was not supportive of that AT ALL,” she explains. “They just said ‘go ahead and try’ but I had no [driver’s] license.” She concludes, “I find it odd that nobody tried to help to me.”

Harriet stayed in her first foster home for several years, until her social worker set her up to meet families that were interested in adopting.

She “clicked” with one, visited them several times, then moved to their household and was adopted. Harriet says that the social worker did not discuss any relative advantages of EFC instead; at any rate, Harriet says she “wasn’t interested.”

***“ It was only when I turned 18 that I felt the social workers were speaking to me. They were always talking to my foster parents.*”**

“(Of adopted parents) They are so understanding about everything; I don’t feel judged at all.”

Harriet feels the adoption was handled well, including the social worker assuaging Harriet’s biological family. She is still in contact with her grandmother and her biological father, and says of her adopted family, “They are so understanding about everything; I don’t feel judged at all.”

Even though she is happy with her adoption and the process, Harriet is still quite negative regarding social workers. She recalls, “I got switched to so many social workers when I was in foster care. I had six social workers in two years. Half the time they wouldn’t do their monthly visits. There was only one time that my social worker came out to the house.” She summarizes, “They were never around ... I had to do everything myself ... I wouldn’t have known who to call.”

Harriet is still seeing her first mental health counselor five years later. And even with “no support” in school she caught up her classes by attending extra sessions after school and in the summer. She will be graduating from high school on time this year.

Blake

“Blake” entered foster care as a teen, and went through five placements, including shelters and group homes, before returning to live with her mother two years later. Her school-based social group was a strong support, so any placement that limited access to that group was problematic. This included kinship care and shelters and group homes with restricted hours. One extended family member was a good fit but required a change in schools; Blake opted to return to her original school and friends, even though that living situation was less satisfactory.

Blake gave her social worker a relatively positive grade (“B”). She termed the social worker “nice,” and said that she was always kept informed, if not always given choices. “It kinda helps when people listen,” Blake explains. The social worker did not get a “A” grade because of the many moves; Blake says, “I wish I had a more stable placement and did not have to worry so much about a new environment.”

Blake eventually decided that her best option was to return to her mother’s home, since it was in her school district and close to friends. Family counseling made the reconciliation possible. She finished high school and is now attending a vocational program to be a veterinarian’s assistant.

Asha

“Asha” immigrated to the United States when she while in high school and entered Federal Care as an Unaccompanied Refugee Minor. She had moved through three different countries previously. Upon reaching Washington, Asha was placed with a successful foster family, with whom she still stays four years later. “They are my family,” she says.

The foster parents found her a church that matches her beliefs and drive her to services weekly. They welcome her friends from that community, and often order food typical of her home country. The foster family even sends funds back to her birth family.

Asha has benefitted from having the same social worker for her four years in foster care, including when she transitioned from traditional foster care to Extended Foster Care. “He’s really helpful,” she raves. The social worker’s helpfulness includes being consistent in his visits, being supportive about schooling, and going out of his way to take on special favors such as helping her replace a lost green card. “He’s always there for me,” she concludes.

Asha found learning English difficult, especially as her first high school did not offer English as a Second Language (ESL) courses. Although the teachers were helpful there—“They always had to hug me”—she ultimately switched to another school with an ESL program.

Asha is now a freshman in college. Her foster parents help her with class registration and are generally encouraging when she is “stressed” about school. Asha concludes, “If you have someone to support you when you’re down, that makes you want to work hard to make them happy.”

Serah

Now a young adult and in Extended Foster Care, “Serah” has been in foster care for 10 years. She and her younger brother were originally sent 50 miles and a ferry ride away from their home to a family and neighborhood that did not match their ethnicity. Even the building environment was strange; Serah was used to density and apartments and found herself in a big house distanced from services.

The foster parents could not keep her challenging younger brother, and after he left, although she acknowledges that the foster parents tried, Serah “shut down.” She moved in with a family she knew and stayed there until her older brother reached 21 and was able to be officially responsible for her.

Serah never told her social worker that her brother quickly lost his apartment. She was homeless for several years, sleeping on friends’ couches, in a tent and in a car. She and her older brother “took care of ourselves,” although she knew she could reach him if needed. She kept her part time job and stayed in school, where she would meet up with her social worker.

Serah credits nonprofit agencies with keeping her afloat, supplying clothing vouchers and independent living skills (ILS) training.

She elaborated, “If it weren’t for Treehouse, I don’t know where I’d be ... [they] never said ‘no.’ If they didn’t have what I needed, they found other resources.”

***“ If it weren’t for Treehouse, I don’t know where I’d be ... [they] never said ‘no.’ If they didn’t have what I needed, they found other resources.*”**

“ [Foster care] made me grow up faster ... Some of my old friends ended up in jail or pregnant, but jail is not for me.

Her high school teachers and principal were also very supportive, keeping food for her in their offices, giving her rides, and even letting her stay at their homes occasionally.

Of her estimated six social worker, Serah said there was one that she “loved,” explaining, “She would even help me on her day off.” Others were said to not respond to calls, take months to get back on requests, and sometimes be just “rude ... They talk like you had no common sense ... They never wanted me to succeed.”

However, she says, “I really blame the system because they have to go through the system, they have to wait for other systems. Their job is hard too, they don’t have the resources. Most of my female workers really did try, just didn’t get the help that they needed.”

Serah has now graduated from high school and continues to work. She is not bitter about her experiences but said it all “made me grow up faster.” She continued, “Some of my old friends ended up in jail or pregnant, but jail is not for me.”

Mateo

“Mateo” immigrated to the United States mid-high school age. After transferring from California to Washington State, he was placed in the UFM program at Friends of Youth. They were able to assign him a foster family where he stayed two years, until aging out at 18. Mateo describes the Friends of Youth staff, his local school, and the foster family as “awesome.” “They didn’t judge me [and] they were very respectful of my culture and my country,” he explains.

Unfortunately, a three-year delay in Mateo’s visa meant he could not continue in EFC, even though he was assigned “great” legal help. And, although generally appreciative of his social workers, he did not find them helpful as he transitioned out. “If you don’t go into EFC, they don’t know what to do with you,” he explains. Mateo received a green card just before his 18th birthday, and, with a temporary free place to stay in the trailer of his foster family’s neighbor, was able to work two jobs and start saving.

With Mateo’s hard work, assistance from Treehouse for college and scholarship applications, and ultimately, the Passport Program, Mateo is now attending a State college. He is struggling with his finances again since his work in the restaurant industry was impacted by the COVID shutdown. Mateo is pragmatic, but still thinks wistfully of others in his foster family who had the help of Extended Foster Care and did not have to work as exhaustingly to better their situation.

Malika

When “Malika” entered foster care as a young teen, she had already “bounced around” among family members and homelessness. Her instability continued through multiple foster placements, until she finally found a “good” one and stayed three years. Malika explains, though, that she “didn’t know what good care is” and was so used to being independent that she strained against the rules. She eventually asked for another home, where she stayed until she aged out of foster care.

Malika gave good scores to many supports, including at school, getting a driver’s license, getting clothing and hair vouchers, and finding therapy. She credits Treehouse, the YMCA, and her social worker. She says, “Being a troubled teen, they were helpful.” She also explains she knew how to follow up, remind social workers of their promises, and generally be her own advocate. But it was harder as the social workers changed often and abruptly; “It was always, ‘I’m tired of this ... I’ve got to find a different job.’”

Malika continued her independent nature and left high school early to make money and prepare to support herself. She explains, “It took me years to straighten up my act. But I had to focus on myself and worry about surviving. I just worried about being independent and put school second. I had to ready myself to take care of myself.” She now works two jobs, is earning certificates in various cosmetology skills, and going through a high school completion program. She plans to run her own cosmetology business eventually.

Malika’s advocates for more transparency to foster parents who consider accepting teen age foster youth—the families should know the teenager’s background and appreciate the challenges of youth with long histories of instability. “I hate to see both parties set up,” she explains. “Know your age group and know what you can deal with.”

Sofia

“Sofia” entered the foster care system as a teenager. She was originally placed with her 26-year-old sister, who “kicked her out” of the house a year later. Sofia was shuttled between various youth shelters while her social worker tried to re-unite her with the sister.

Sofia felt discriminated against in the shelters because of her ethnicity. She “had the cops called on her” several times, including when she resisted after being “tricked” into being driven out of town to a different shelter.

Sofia reports that she most needed mental health care at that point, but there was no transportation and her initial social worker, whom she terms “super mean” did not help her get those services. Sofia stayed in school but reports that her IEP teacher just had her watch movies.

“ My mental health was not their biggest concern. Their concern was ‘am I in a safe place’ not ‘am I safe in my head.’

“ (Of prospective foster parents) Know your age group and know what you can deal with.

Sofia says, “I wish I could have felt they cared about me and not just their pay or another kid in their file.”

Luckily, Sofia was finally matched in a home where she says, “To me they are my parents.” Her new family found an education program where Sofia can earn an associate degree and finish high school. The parents were pursuing official foster parent status, but dropped the application when Sofia turned 18. They have “have never gotten any money,” she says.

Sofia’s biggest problem at this time is outstanding medical bills from DBT treatment that finally helped her with her anxiety and depression. She went into DBT after two hospitalizations earlier this year, but although her foster parents paid out of pocket initially, a confusion about what type of insurance would cover the expenses left her in debt. She has been assigned an attorney, but she says she is always relegated to the paralegal, and does not get responses. “I’m running out of resources,” she sighs.

Asher

“Asher” was in high school when he and his four other siblings entered foster care due to their biological parents’ substance abuse. The siblings were placed into different foster homes, with Asher and his brother in a home specifically for older boys. They stayed in contact with the younger siblings initially.

Asher and his brother chafed in the home, unused to the many rules and chores. Asher’s brother moved out, and the challenge of home demands and schoolwork took a toll on Asher’s mental health. Rather than receiving compassion and support, Asher describes his foster parents as, “incompatible with understanding the mental anguish I was experiencing.” They dismissed his suffering as minimal compared to their experiences growing up and punished him by withholding allowance.

The “last straw” for Asher was when his roommate began stealing his cash and personal items and the foster parents did little to intervene. Asher summarizes, “They were more into punishing me than rewarding and the taking things away from me and holding them played into my fears of having things stolen from me.” He thinks they were too much from an older generation that could not understand the current challenges of being an adolescent.

Asher ran back to his biological mother. He was almost 18 and his mother’s current residence was deemed safe by his social worker; there were also no other placements available. Eventually his mother was able to get a bigger space and many of her children returned. She helped Asher get mental health support. He says, “I was so mentally taxed, I was in a bad state of mind.”

Even though Asher struggled in foster care he did feel supported by his social worker; he was able to work with the same one for a year and a half and built trust. “It gets easier the longer you work with the same person,” he commented.

Asher also appreciated getting school supplies from Treehouse but was not aware of tutoring.

He explains that he turned down EFC because “foster care was too stressful.” Fortunately, he has been able to continue building for his future and is attending a four-year university.

Deborah

When she was in grade school and her father was arrested, “Deborah” and her four siblings went into short term care at their “Auntie and Uncle’s” house. They were soon split up, and Deborah decided to end contact with her “toxic” older siblings. She eventually moved through 15 placements, enduring abuse and sexual assault—the latter by “someone else in the house,” not her foster parents. And, although she was otherwise content with the foster parents, when they did not believe her story, she moved again to another placement. “I felt so alone,” she says.

Fortunately, Deborah ultimately received helpful services, including counseling, school supplies—from the Y Social Impact organization and Treehouse—and an attorney assigned to her when she testified at her father’s trial. And she reports that, of her many social workers, she did get “really close” to one. “But she got promoted, and I had to say goodbye,” she explains. Her attorney also became “like a friend,” even taking Deborah to her driving test. They are still in touch.

Deborah graded her social workers a “B”; she explains, “I’ve had to be more independent and reach out to the social worker ... They are good mentors, but I always have to be the one to put initiative in.” This compares to Treehouse, who “Gave me what I needed without asking.”

Deborah is now attending a State college branch, and credits all the supports she received. “Growing up in foster care wasn’t fun, but all the support they gave me helped a lot,” she says. She also appreciates that foster care removed her from a “super horrible” home situation. “All the resources and mentors I’ve had in my life have been a huge factor,” she continues.

Deborah’s advice for the system is to ensure minors in foster care are always able to speak freely and confidentially to their social workers. She describes withholding reports of abuse because foster parents were listening in, either in person or on the phone. She also says the foster care system “has to know the signs [of abuse] ... Even if you think that they are safe, you need to know that they are safe.”

***“ [Foster children] need someone to direct them in healthy manner in how to get past resentment and frustration ... It’s so difficult to get by when you feel like you are all on your own. I wouldn’t wish it on anyone. That is a terrible way to grow up.*”**

“ I’ve had to be more independent and reach out to the social worker ... They are good mentors, but I always have to be the one to put initiative in.

Evan

“Evan” entered foster care as a pre-teen. He was placed with an aunt and uncle, who provided structure for the first time in his life. “I’m thankful for foster care,” he says, “because I got in a better place.” Still, though, there was a lack of “understanding of who I am,” and his aunt and uncle decided within a few years that they were no longer able to care for him.

Evan then went to a second home that “seemed like a money factory ... [there were] a lot of children, and a bit colder than you expected ... They gave me my basics.” He remembers alarms on doors and a lock on the pantry. That placement also did not last long.

Evan’s third placement was completely successful. “They were family immediately,” he explains. “Not only did I have structure, but I had love.” He was given parties and gifts for his birthday, and support for his interests. Evan’s grades improved and he prospered. “I wasn’t explicitly treated like someone else’s kid,” he explains. “I wasn’t a package put in their care.”

Still, Evan felt an expectation to return to his biological mother. The court approved such a move, though Evan says, “The counselor knew there were problems.” He felt guilty at the thought of hurting his mother, so agreed to reunification, going to live with her and a stepfather that he called “a hoarder.” After a couple of years, and a move to a different county, he was desperate. He confided in his former foster family, who took him back immediately.

After several tense days of sleeping with a fully packed bag, and threats that he might be placed elsewhere, he was legally placed back with the old foster family. Although now in EFC and living on his own at college, he maintains contact. “They’re family,” he says.

Throughout the interview, Evan had very few positive comments about other supports, such as school support, financial training, or, especially, help from social workers. He gave an “F” grade to “Being able to keep the same social worker”—one that he liked was promoted, and others changed too often for him to form a relationship. “Throughout foster care I just had so many social workers ... you could never connect to one person and have them understand who you were,” he explains.

Evan’s situation was especially problematic as his biological mother had moved to another county so, when he returned to his previous foster family, his official social worker did not travel to see him, but a “courtesy worker” would check in perfunctorily. Evan’s transition to Extended Foster Care and college applications were all handled by himself and his foster family. “It was a pivotal point in my life and I had the newest social worker,” Evan laments.

At the end of the interview Evan concluded that what is needed for foster care is that “The child needs to be more important.”

He continued, “They are safe now’ is not enough ... you could put them in a cell, and they would be safe.” He advocates for better vetting of foster parents, and better matching between parents and children, especially as teenagers.

Susannah

Susannah entered foster care when she was 11 years old. Her younger brother was placed with an aunt and uncle, who would not accept Susannah or let her keep contact with her brother. “My aunt and uncle did not like me,” she says. “They stopped all communication and visits ... The State didn’t really help with that ... They sat and watched it happen.”

Susannah moved 19 times over a 19-month period, including group homes that left her “feeling like a prisoner,” locked in her room and needing to press a buzzer to get out. Susannah’s one stable foster family with whom she lived for four years ended with an assault. She believes the investigation and follow up were not well resolved and that the instability, trauma, and lack of transparency in the foster care system has led to her trust issues and an inability to develop nurturing relationships.

She explains, “No one views foster kids as actual children who need parents and a childhood. I never got a childhood. I was always taking care of myself and foster care has put a lot of trust issues on me because of the placement problems and always being lied to ... Foster parents say, 'We want you', then a week later, they call your caseworker [and you come home] after school with all your stuff in garbage bags.”

Susannah graduated from high school with support from Treehouse. They helped negotiate her needs in school due to her anxiety and learning disabilities. She says, "Treehouse was a big thing in graduating year ... I feel like without them, I would've not been able to graduate."

She also has been able to move out on her own with the help of EFC and was able to access household goods, along with a computer and a printer from Youthnet.

Susannah is anxious about aging out of EFC soon, saying "It's just they don't really prepare you to go out and live in the real world without having that parental support. I don't have anybody to turn to when I am in trouble. And they don't give resources to turn to. Because once you are out of care, they drop you like a fly ... I had to learn all of that on my own ... that is pretty much every foster kid does ... we've already grown up without parents, we shouldn't have to grow up to learning everything on our own."

“ Growing up in foster care wasn’t fun, but all the support they gave me helped a lot.

“No one views foster kids as actual children who need parents and a childhood. I never got a childhood.”

Ellery

“Ellery” spent three years in foster care, starting as a pre-teen. During that time, they moved from a very unsuccessful placement to one very successful, and then group homes.

Of the first home, they said, “They were just there for the money ... our beds were in the garage and there was a bad infestation.” The second, however, treated them like family, discussed consequences instead of pushing punishment, and were warm and loving. “It was the first model of a healthy relationship I had ever seen,” explained Ellery. They still stay in touch with the family eight years later.

Ellery benefited from ongoing, weekly counseling. Although Ellery appreciated their second set of foster parents, there were multiple children in the house, and counseling was a place that was “meant specifically for me ... I felt valued and understood.” Ellery continued, “I like being listened to ... I don’t always feel heard, but at least once a week I knew someone would listen to me.”

Ellery was unusual in their high grades for their social workers, explaining that the first “always listened when I called ... and not everyone listens to 12-year-olds.” A second social worker was also termed “kind” and very patient in explaining decisions and legal proceedings.

Unfortunately, even with regular counseling and a supportive social worker, Ellery became suicidal and the foster home could not provide enough supervision; Ellery moved to group care. Although the living situation was not the best, Ellery appreciated the onsite school, with individualized and small group instruction. They flourished academically.

After several years, Ellery was told by their social worker that a possible adoptive parent had been found. They met, which went well, then Ellery went to live with the single woman for six months. The match was not successful, as the adoptive parent was seldom home, showed no warmth, and was not prepared for typical teenager behavior.

In addition, the woman’s strict religious views clashed with Ellery’s open bisexuality. The parent threatened to stop the adoption but relented. Ellery felt that, although far from perfect, the adoption was better than going back to a group home. They also doubted that another adoption would be possible.

Ellery moved to a large public high school, where their grades fell. They did graduate, though, and were kicked out of the home of their adopted mother at age 18. Ellery now is employed and self-supporting.

Veronica

“Veronica” and her five siblings entered foster care when she was a pre-teen. The family had been homeless for a year; Veronica reports that her current PTSD stems from that time with her biological family.

Three of the siblings started out in the same group home and then the same foster home, but the young host parents found the demand too great.

Upon returning to the group home, two of Veronica's younger siblings were adopted together and moved to Arizona; their family help them keep in contact.

Another sister was placed with her biological father, who did not follow through with visits. Veronica just saw that sister after five years' separation. She says, "It was really hard ... I'm grateful for my counselor for walking me through that."

Veronica moved on her own through two successful foster care placements; the second set of foster parents then adopted her after a two-year process. She feels there was excessive "protocol," checking with relatives and tribal authorities and that she should have had more power in the process. Veronica feared being taken away from the family, saying she "walked on eggshells for nine months."

Veronica was lucky not only in a successful adoption, but also with her social workers. She gave them both "A" grades, explaining "They took time to listen to my voice, and you could tell they were leading with love." She continued, "It made everything easier having a social worker that really cared for me ... They would talk to me like a human not some poor oppressed child. They always took time to ask how I was."

She particularly appreciated that, when first assessed by CPS, the social worker would notice that she was uncomfortable speaking about her situation in front of her biological mom and would take her outside to talk in confidence.

Veronica also appreciated her mostly "awesome" teachers, but not the administrators who stymied her and her foster mother's 504 requests. She does lament that certain teachers would not excuse her from assignments related to family trees, or when asking the class to bring in baby pictures.

Veronica is now a junior in college, talks regularly with two siblings, and still is in contact with some of her old social workers. Her conclusion as to what is most needed in foster care is that "people in foster care have to learn that this isn't your fault."

John

"John" entered foster care as a pre-teen and primarily had one family placement. His foster parents were approachable; they did not judge or shame him but took an approach of trying to understand. He also had good relationships with his teachers—he was open about being in foster care and problems outside of the classroom.

***“(Of successful counseling)
I like being listened to ... I don't always feel heard, but at least once a week I knew someone would listen to me.***

“ (Of a successful placement)

They were family immediately ... Not only did I have structure, but I had love.

Even though John was involved in addiction treatment and spent time in juvenile detention, his foster parents advocated for him and he was able to be included in sports and school activities.

Another significant support was a consistent social worker, a relationship he still has today. John explains, "From around the age of [young teen] I had one social worker and she stuck with me until I aged out. It really allows you to connect and adapt to the social worker so they can better prep you cause they kind of familiarize themselves with your behaviors and stuff like that and your actions, your likes and dislikes, so it was really cool to stay with the same social worker ... My foster parents made a statement in court, and then when I got transferred to a different side of the state, I specifically requested, regardless of me being in a different county, I want the same social worker, period. I guess it was more of the court's decision."

The most difficult part of John's journey was his transition out of foster care. He gave an "F" to job training; he had few job options because of his involvement with the justice system. He explains, "It was difficult because they're like this child has a label you know that's who he is ... It's also a barrier so you have to figure out a way to get, work experience, life experience, where you're not like looked at as a liability the whole time."

John reports he was kept from Extended Foster Care because, due to his earlier substance abuse, the only option offered was an in-patient residential treatment facility. John felt his substance issues had been under control for years, and that an in-patient facility would be detrimental, so he declined EFC.

John directly attributes the lack of EFC to the homelessness he experienced for the next several years. He made desperate choices, such as sleeping under bridges and in abandoned homes. When he tried to reapply for EFC his homelessness made the process more challenging. He says now, "It's frustrating ... I feel like things would be different if Extended Foster Care had not routed that way ... but what's unfortunate is there's no appeal process."

Currently, John is enrolled in college and living with his partner and young child. His foster parents helped prepare him to navigate the challenges he faced, but he hopes that others are provided with more resources, such as job assistance for youth involved in the justice system and help after foster care to prevent homelessness.

Dorothea

"Dorothea" was born with a medical condition that required several surgeries and transplants in her first few months. Her birth mother was not able to take care of her; she was moved to a care home for medically fragile children and became a ward of the state.

Dorothea lived there for several years before moving in with a foster family with the goal of adoption. Unfortunately, the family was not a good fit and she returned to the care facility after a year.

Even with this difficult start to life, Dorothea awarded mostly “A” grades to services, including her social worker—the same social worker throughout her time in state care. Dorothea also cherished the nurses and other medical facility staff. They became her family, treating her like a “normal child,” arranging activities like board game and trips to the park and the mall, arranging her school IEP and coordinating a transfer to a school with a better special needs program. One made her “feel like a little sister.” Dorothea also appreciated teachers that helped her make up missed school.

After the first failure, Dorothea tried more foster families, but trips to the hospital made it difficult to bond. Finally, she knew she had found a good family when the Dad came to the hospital and played games. She moved in and was adopted after several years; many of the facility staff attended the celebration. Dorothea is now finishing her high school education.

Hope

“Hope,” who identifies as Black/Latinx, entered foster care with two siblings as a young teen, due to her mother’s substance abuse issues. She was first placed with a series of relatives; her most successful with a grandmother who ultimately could not take care of all three siblings. The grandmother adopted only Hope’s brother.

Other placements with aunts suffered because of family squabbles. Family members cut her off from her younger sister, with whom she is still trying to reconnect. Hope says now, “It definitely damaged our relationship not being able to see each other through those really sensitive years. She is twelve now and got placed in the system when she was four. So, I missed those important years.”

Hope ultimately was placed outside the family. As a biracial foster girl, she felt bullied at school. Her Catholic foster parents were not helpful, telling her to “just pray.” They also discouraged her cultural identity, making fun of the Black and Latinx student unions when Hope expressed interest. Social workers (four in total) were inconsistent with assistance; one talked to her alone only in her bedroom, where her foster parents could overhear. Another did help establish mental health counseling. However, Hope’s foster parents were not supportive and did not facilitate transportation.

Hope did get help at school when she reached out. She explains, “If I was like, ‘Hey I’m struggling, and I need help in this area.’ They would be like ‘There are these tools to help you get that support and extra study time.’ That was really helpful for me, just because from moving home to home and processing my own problems and trauma, it was hard to want to go to school and stay focused in school.

***“ ‘They are safe now’ is not enough ... You could put them in a cell, and they would be safe.*”**

“ People in foster care have to learn that this isn’t your fault.

I definitely had the potential; I just didn’t have the motivation.”

Hope was pressured to accept an adoption after several years in care. She felt she was only offered an option when standing with her adoptive parents in a public court. Her adopted parents subsequently were unrealistic about parenting a teenager and Hope reversed the adoption at age 18.

She says, “I wish they would have said that sooner ‘cause I would have been more comfortable in private saying, ‘I don’t want to sign it’ ... I really regret it because if I had waited it out because I could be getting a lot more help that I need now that I am not receiving ‘cause I am [over 18] and I am taking care of myself. When I think about it, there are so many services that are wonderful and amazing that I could have but I can’t use because I was adopted ... I wish I would have known about the health insurance because that would be a deal breaker for me.”

Hope finally connected with a local nonprofit that checked in often and introduced her to others with experience in foster care, including attending a weekend camp. She says, “It was nice to see how many kids actually go through things that I went through ... I always felt like nobody gets it and no other kids my age understands, so it was really nice to be in a setting where there was kids who understood.”

Hope is currently subsisting at a low-paying job, without health care.

Liza

“Liza” entered the foster care system as a young child and moved through multiple placements. One of the first was with bullying teenagers. She never was placed in a foster home that was a good match, saying “I’ve never been treated like family in a foster home, ever. I’ve always felt like I was another paycheck ... I’ve never felt so low and so discredited as a human as when in a foster home.”

None of Liza’s social workers stayed with her for more than two years. She felt the inconsistency of social workers in her life compounded the trauma of being removed from her parents, explaining, “Growing up, it was really hard for me ... that was one stable thing I had in my life ... After my first social worker switch, it was a big shock to me. It was kind of I am not a part of a family and I don’t have that stableness, that was hard for me as a kid ... You can’t just disappear from a kid’s life once you have taken them from their parents.”

Fortunately, Liza learned how to speak up for herself; “I am not shy to say that I am in foster care ... I did not want pity. I will work on it ... Something that really helped me get through high school [was] to be honest.” Liza’s self-advocacy finally led her to finding her own foster homes. A teacher and then a job supervisor allowed her to live with them to finish high school, and she “finally felt cared for.”

Liza's Independent Living Skill worker has been one of her consistent (six years!) supports while in foster care.

She has connected Liza with fun activities and introduced her to others in the same situation. Liza says, "She made me feel like I was not a foster kid, I just had support ... I feel like that they really do a really good job at their job ... I think it really helps that most [ILS workers] are younger, so it is like you have better connection with them."

Liza's transition out of traditional foster care was abrupt, but she was savvy enough to accept the option of Extended Foster Care when it was explained for the first time by the judge in court. She also gives credit to CASA for helping her with the paperwork to get into college and arrange financial aid—they even attended meetings with college counselors to make sure Liza was taking the right classes. At the time of the interview, Liza was a sophomore in college.

Jack

"Jack" himself asked a judge to remove him from his biological home, and, especially, his stepfather. His parents had often called the police, for what they termed vandalism and property damage. Jack was placed into a group home and then with a life-changing foster family.

Jack's foster mother woke him up at 4 a.m. so he could finish the year at his existing school. He transferred the next year, and initially felt unfairly treated by teachers because of his arrest record. He details, "There was one teacher who was nice, but other targeted me or I was a bad kid. They searched my backpack a lot ... One time I tried to stop a fight and the cops were called on me and I even got suspended." After the COVID shutdown he more easily finished high school online and felt more supported by the teachers.

Jack fully appreciated his social workers. He experienced little turnover (two) and keeps in touch with both. He reports being well prepared for the transition into Extended Foster Care, saying "They gave a huge book and folders. I got provided everything I needed ... I just need to find out what I want to do with it." He has benefitted from good job support with resume assistance and mock interviews. He did get hired, but unfortunately laid off at the start of the pandemic.

Jack's transition to EFC was greatly assisted when his foster mother bought a house to rent cheaply to him and a few roommates. He spent the holidays with her and the other foster children this past year.

Karina

"Karina" is a young woman who identifies as African American, though she was raised by a white aunt after being abused by her biological parents.

“(Of two social workers) They took time to listen to my voice, and you could tell they were leading with love.

“(Of an ILS contact) She made me feel like I was not a foster kid, I just had support.”

She has no relationship with her siblings, who were born later, immediately put into foster care then adopted. She says, “It’s better they not know about me.”

Karina reports that the aunt, “culturally shielded me from my black side of the family. I felt so out of place ... like the whitest Black person anybody knew.” She reports that as “the only Black person at my school,” other students would say racially ignorant or cruel things. The adults did not believe Karina’s interpretation. She comments, “You try to talk to someone about it and no one understands.”

Karina left her aunt’s house to live in several foster homes, including one where she suspected that another foster youth was being abused by the father. Karina recognized the signs but did not feel she could say anything for fear of reprisal. She also was in juvenile detention several times.

Karina gave an “F” to “keeping the same social worker,” saying she went through too many, did not see many of them, and did not have a relationship with most. “I didn’t have the same social worker for a long time. They are always overwhelmed so they can’t do much anyway”, she explains. She continues, “They never really helped. Treehouse, the YMCA, CASA, and GAL were actually concerned if I was alive and got any help. I didn’t care to see [the social workers] because they weren’t the people helping me.”

Karina gave an “A” grade to “having a supportive social worker” solely because of a strong relationship with her current contact. Karina says, “She is like my mom.” This social worker helped when Karina with school, going to her IEP meetings and advocating. The social worker also smoothed the transition to Extended Foster Care and Karina’s move into a new home. Karina was six months pregnant at the time and overwhelmed with the process.

Karina’s mental health support has also been positive. She has attended counseling since first entering foster care and has always found it easily available. “I still go to counseling and I have stayed in the parenting class because it helps me know how to help my child,” she explains. She now lives with her two children, her partner and her partner’s mother.

Karina’s take away from her foster care experience is that adults should more often listen to children: “When a kid mentions something, they don’t take it seriously ... Pay attention to the red flags.”

Cedar

“Cedar” was removed from her home when in high school. She opposed living with her grandparents because of a complicated relationship and went instead to live with a step-aunt. The step-aunt was also detrimental; one cousin stole from her, the aunt was “manic” and there was no assistance with school transportation. During this time, Cedar was

assigned multiple social workers (she estimates six or seven in a year) before she met one in person. She did not trust their judgement and kept her home life secret to avoid being moved to her grandparents. But she hoped that a social worker would “pick up clues.”

Cedar had been a good student before but entering foster care, but the turmoil took a toll on her academic success. She missed many days of school, even though she stayed with friends to get to classes more easily and to escape the stress at home. Eventually, her step-aunt kicked her out when another family member committed suicide and Cedar was blamed; Cedar asked a judge to live with her boyfriend’s family even though her social worker was not supportive of the plan.

Feeling ashamed, Cedar did not share what she was going through and received few accommodations from her teachers. However, she still passed. She also benefitted from the introduction of a tribal social worker; Cedar had been unaware of her biological mother’s tribal affiliation because her mother died when she was young. The tribal social worker connected her to tribal events and linked her to her maternal heritage.

In addition, her Youthnet case manager helped with resume building, searching for a job, getting healthcare, setting up a household and even buying her own home. Cedar appreciates that her connection at Youthnet continues to check in on her.

Iris

“Iris” entered foster care when she was 14 and was reunited with her birth parents several years later. The reunification ultimately failed.

While in foster care, Iris moved through several foster and group homes, good and bad. Her first foster mother became a cornerstone of her support system; Iris says, “She made me feel like her daughter right away” by showing affection, giving hugs, brushing her hair, telling her she was beautiful and, “never once talked ill about my parents.” Iris is still in touch.

Iris’s second placement was unsuccessful, because of religious differences and the foster mother’s negative comments about Iris’s birth parents. The placement ended with the foster mother driving erratically while yelling at Iris. Iris was able to return to the first foster family, but could not stay.

Having to switch schools was especially hard. Iris was anxious, did not easily make friends, and the curriculum was more challenging than her previous school. The only assistance offered was after school, when Iris was busy with visitations, case management appointments and counseling. Iris felt the teachers thought she was trying to slack off when she asked for help mid-day, saying, “I asked to see the counselor five times because I’m really having a bad day and there is something going on in my foster home, not because I am trying to get out of class.”

“ Something that really helped me get through high school [was] to be honest.”

Iris was finally able to transfer back to her old school but faced aggression from her previous friends who thought she had abandoned them without saying goodbye. Iris was not allowed a phone in foster care, which made it hard to stay in touch with them and her little sister.

She says, “I couldn’t call her when I missed her, it was really hard for me and her and everyone.”

There was inconsistency in Iris’s mental health care, which made counseling less effective. She reports that every time a new issue arose in her history of abuse and trauma, she was made to switch to a new “specialty” therapist without discussion or notice.

Finally, Iris’s progress was hampered by rotating social workers. She comments, “When they changed social workers it was hard for me to make a new connection.” She also thought her second social worker was too focused on reunification with her biological parents. Iris did not believe her parents’ promises to change but was returned to their care by a social worker who “just read the case file.” She adds, “The social worker believed my parents too much, and not me.”

After Iris was moved back to her biological family, she did benefit from her Community Youth Services (CYS) workers, saying “Every time I needed them, they were there to pick me up. They were amazing ... They helped me grow and cope with the decisions my parents were making. They worked with my parents as much as me and showed my parents different ways to deal with situations.”

But when the family’s case was closed and follow up services ended, the old family dynamics returned, and Iris ran away. After being put in group homes and juvenile detention, she eventually moved with her new baby to live with her grandmother in another part of the state.

When asked at the end of the interview what was the most crucial to improve in foster care services, Iris summarized, “Consistency with everything. I just wanted consistency after being removed from my house.”

Andrew

“Andrew” entered foster care as a young teen. He and his brother ran away from their first joint placement after seeing the foster parent physically abuse his biological son. Andrew felt that his social worker overemphasized her disappointment that they had run away over whether they felt safe—which is why he gave a “D” grade to social worker support. Luckily, an aunt and uncle were able to take the brothers. The couple was expecting their second baby soon, which Andrew thought not optimal, but the aunt was a teacher and was able to provide the brothers with educational support and structure.

***“ It gets easier
the longer you
work with the same
person.***

Andrew kept the same social worker for over two years, giving “Keeping the Same Social Worker” a “B” grade. He says it “made it a bit easier, not being switched between different people so often.” Andrew also had a consistent Treehouse support worker who checked in regularly.

Andrew eventually was reunited with his birth family. He reports just being told that, “it was time to go back home” (the rationale behind the “D” grade he gave to “Transition Planning”). Unfortunately, his mother was assaulted a year later, and Andrew dropped out of school to support the family. Andrew eventually finished school and moved out on his own at age 18.

Jasmine

“Jasmine” entered foster care twice: initially at a young age, then again as a teen. The first time was “very confusing.” She was unsure of what was going on and does not have clear memories of her placements. She does remember not being able to visit a younger brother, being told by her Jehovah’s Witness foster parents that there would be “no Christmas,” and that it was overall “traumatic.” She says now, “[The first foster parents] were probably one of the ones who did it just for the money because they treated us like a job.” Her second placement was a much more positive experience; she was able to be with all her siblings in a home where they already had a relationship.

As a teen, Jasmine has been happy with her social workers, saying they have been supportive and provided her with needed information. One would ‘go the extra mile’ by bringing her coffee and checking in on her life and well-being—not just the basic safety checklist that was required. Jasmine’s current social worker has also been helpful in providing resources, connecting her to an Independent Living program and being generally responsive.

Jasmine has also felt well backed by her Independent Living Program, where she learned how to budget and find housing. Treehouse also helped immensely during high school, including getting her a laptop when classes went online and helping her figure out a new schedule. Support was not as strong for her job search; she reports her Treehouse contact simply said, “better keep looking, you’ll find one.”

Jasmine struggled with the transition into Extended Foster Care, saying “It was confusing, the whole transitional time, and an inconvenient time to have to switch over social workers.”

She adds, “I did not get a lot of warning.” Jasmine remembers being notified six months prior to transition, but then no follow up until a week prior to turning 18. She then “just signed the paperwork” because there would be a stipend, but felt like the rest of the options were unclear.

Jasmine is now attending college, but wishes she had more help with the financial aid process and had as much Treehouse support as she did while

**“ Foster kids
need more voice in
their decisions
about what they
participate in.**

in high school. She also says, “Car insurance support should get more funding. The wait list is insanely full.”

Jasmine finished the interview by saying “It would be cool if there was a youth center just for foster youth, they could go and hang out and meet other foster kids ... If their foster home is bad, they have people to talk to to get them out of that situation ... It’s an opportunity to get out of the house and go hang out with people who don’t treat you like a job.”

Felix

“Felix” has stayed with the same foster family since he entered the system while in grade school. He attributes this success to his foster family treating him and the rest of the foster children there “Like we were a part of the family ... They included us in everything we did. If they took a trip, they would take us with them instead of putting us in respite care.” He says his foster parents helped many foster children with worse behavioral concerns because they had rules, routines, and a strong church community to support the whole family. “They really cared for all the children they took in,” he summarizes.

Felix also credits Treehouse, who “Really went out of their way to get me what I needed to be successful at school.” The agency provided for extracurricular expenses and checked in often. His commitment to educational was the main reason he decided to go into Extended Foster Care instead of being adopted as his foster parents offered. He explains, “If I was adopted, I would have lost a lot of scholarships for college, so I decided to stay in EFC so I could go to school.”

Felix describes a real team experience for his transition meeting where everyone with input (his foster parents, Social Worker, IL worker and his attorney) attended. He says, “It was really nice because we did a meeting with everyone who was helping me out... They explained all the benefits, the pros and cons, which really helped me to decide between extended foster care and adoption.”

Felix’s history with social workers was not generally positive though: During his years in foster care, he estimated having six to seven. “I could never make a relationship with my case worker because they kept switching. Once I got used to one case worker, I would be given a new one and it was rough.” He was also “stressed” by his social worker at the time of his transition to EFC. He says, “The adoption social worker was pressuring me, and I felt like she was trying to force me to get adopted.”

Currently, Felix is attending a four-year private university, living in the dorms, and focused on his future goals. Overall, he feels that more consistency with social workers would have improved his experience in the foster care system, but he was paired with a good family that helped him arrive where he is today.

***“ Having another person is like having a friend. If I didn’t have her, I would still be struggling.*”**

Kaylie

“Kaylie” entered foster care at while in high school and aged out at 18 without entering EFC. She is one of the participants that did not graduate, and still faces strong challenges. She generally gave services “C” grades, which she explained as being an average of “some good, some bad.” Kaylie was assaulted in one foster home, but another made her feel she was “part of the family.” She explains, “They wouldn’t tell people that I was their foster kid, so that made me feel good.”

Kaylie switched schools twice, which contributed to her lack of a degree; she has been diagnosed with a learning disability and had an IEP. At one high school, Kaylie found some of her teachers to be willing to help and make time for her, even meeting over lunch. She also felt supported by her school and her foster parents when she was being bullied online because of her sexual identity. Finally, she had a good relationship with her therapist, with whom she worked for three years—a valuable consistency. Unfortunately, she lost the connection when she left the foster care system.

Kaylie went through five different social workers in three years; she called it “wearying” to get to know and inform each one. She was most positive about her final social worker, who checked in frequently and made sure her home was safe. However, when it came time for Kaylie to transition out of traditional foster care, she was unsure of what to do and how she was going to live on her own. She does not recall any planning for transition, she just knows she wanted “to be free of the foster care system.”

In summary, Kaylie wishes the foster care system provided better preparation for the real world with financial guidance and hopes that future foster children can be better matched in good foster homes.

Reese

“Reese” has been in and out of foster care since pre-school age. Thankfully, they have now been in the same foster home for over 10 years. Reese says this foster mother has always “treated me like family” and has “not given up on me.”

The foster mother has helped with financial planning, explained transition options, and accepted Reese’s gender identity, even though there has been “awkwardness” at times. Reese says, “I feel like I’m doing so good because I have been with the same family.”

Reese also appreciates their current social worker, saying, “We talk once a month on the phone and have a great relationship. I feel like she has been one of the most helpful social workers I’ve had ... She knows how to help me. She doesn’t push me into doing things—she just asks and gives advice.”

“ Treehouse, the YMCA, CASA, and GAL were actually concerned if I was alive and got any help.

“ They included us in everything. If they took a trip, they would take us with them instead of putting us in respite care.

This is an improvement from the previous social workers who were “constantly changing” and often not responsive. Reese estimates they have had six to ten social workers during their time in care saying, “There was a lack of stability that I wish I had while in foster care.”

Reese was pleased with the help they had transitioning into Extended Foster Care, by their social worker and foster mother. They say, “I got a lot of information. We talked about it for weeks, heading into 18. The monthly visits were 90% [transition] information and questions we had. My social worker told us everything and didn’t rush it. It was nice.” They only wish there had been more training on finances—they got information and packets, but little explanation and not enough time to digest the information.

At the interview conclusion, Reese acknowledged that they were lucky with their placement. Their wish for others is for more therapeutic supports to improve relationships and family dynamics.

Chara

“Chara” entered foster care while in high school; she is still with her original foster family. They have made her feel welcome by providing free access in the home, taking her on trips, and including her in all family events. They have also never pressured her to do or attend anything where she is not comfortable and supported her culturally. “After they saw my country flag on my Facebook, they bought me my own flag to have in the home the first week I lived here,” Chara illustrates. They also try to provide familiar foods and respect her religious beliefs.

Her foster parents have regularly “checked in” with Chara, and her foster mother adjusted her work schedule to provide transportation to Chara’s counseling appointments. Most notably, they have accepted Chara’s sexuality. Chara says, “When I came out as bi-sexual, they were really supportive of that. They said, ‘It doesn’t change how we feel about you. You are still the same person.’”

Chara has appreciated consistent support from her social worker, who has also been with her since she entered foster care. Chara describes her social worker as responsive, saying, “Whenever an issue would come up, I would text her and she would get back to me in one or two days.

And it was always helpful, she had my back and was never judgmental about anything.”

Chara has had opportunities to engage with other foster children found it hard to connect because many are guarded and do not want to share some of the harsh realities they face. “It’s kind of hard to talk with other foster kids about why they are in foster care,” Chara adds.

Chara’s greatest issue has involved her biological family’s legal situation. She would like better access to information; most information comes third hand from CASA to her social worker and then to her.

Chara has just transitioned to Extended Foster Care, while staying with the same family. She felt that “all the supports I had did what they could to explain the resources that I had in Extended Foster Care.” At the time of the interview, Chara was just finishing her high school, working two jobs, and applying to colleges.

Heaven

“Heaven” entered foster care as a young teen. She moved through several 14-day placements and shelters before her current home. She describes her previous placements as “just a bed until I could get to the next one.” She immediately felt the difference at her present home because, “They made me feel welcome ... [they] told me I could eat ‘anytime’ it just felt like a family instead of a foster home.”

Heaven chose adoption into the family over Extended Foster Care even though the option was explained. She explains, “I could restart and not feel like I had to live in the past.” The adoption process was drawn out and stressful mostly because of her birth parents, whom she called “toxic.”

The consistency of Heaven’s social worker has been key; they worked together entire time she was in care. “I had abandonment issues, obviously, so it was beneficial to me because I didn’t have to get to know another person. I felt kind of safe around her which was great,” Heaven says. However, Heaven felt the social worker more focused on a safety checklist than Heaven’s well-being. Heaven says, “When she would come for a home visit, it wasn’t for very long. There were no personal discussions. It was, ‘Are you being beaten, are you okay?’ and then leave.”

Heaven did report that, “My mental health was put first, and they always made sure if I needed therapy, I could get that. If I needed help going to it, like having rides, someone would provide it for me, whether it was a social worker or just a friend to take me there.” She could not say the same about academic services; she became aware of Treehouse only as she was being adopted and no longer eligible. However, with family support, Heaven ended up in honors classes by her senior year. She now lives with her adopted family and plans to go to school to become a nail technician.

Arianna

“Arianna” entered the system first as a young child and was in “on and off my whole life.” The placements were “too many to count,” in settings from kinship care and foster homes to group homes. She gave nothing higher than a “C” grade to any of the supports she received while in foster care.

Throughout Arianna felt there were only two families concerned with her well-being; others treated her “as a paycheck.”

***“ They wouldn’t tell people that I was their foster kid, so that made me feel good.*”**

She reported foster homes where she was not allowed to have toys, was only allowed to sit on her bed and had her personal things taken away from her and given to the foster parent's children. Arianna also had younger siblings in foster care and was allowed contact only during visitation; she and her siblings could not have cell phones or electronic devices to communicate. Even when Arianna turned 18, she was denied access to her siblings by the siblings' foster parents. Arianna's shifting social workers would promise to "look into that," but not manage any change.

Arianna also found significant hardship around acceptance for her cultural and sexual identity. She was disconnected from her ethnic culture— offered only "foreign food," not allowed to celebrate her holidays and pressured to speak English. She explained, "When I was younger, I was fluent [in my native language] ... Now I don't speak it at all ... We were lucky when we were placed with family, but other than that there was no [cultural] support."

When Arianna came out as a lesbian, she felt pressured to suppress her identity, remembering that it was frowned upon and "not okay" for some families. The social worker advised, "Just do what they say and there is no issue," but she felt that "that just made it a bigger issue."

Arianna also wished there could have been more follow up around her educational needs. When she was in a technical school, she sought out tutoring help from her local support agency but got no response. She found her own tutor through her school and eventually became a tutor herself.

Arianna was able to find some assistance as she got older and transitioned into Extended Foster Care, but wishes she had more guidance around "real life common sense" things like knowing about renter's insurance, job training and financial management. A lot of information was provided, but not explained. She says, "They just sent me a link on affordable housing, but I do not know what to do with this information, and it was a link to just more links ... They have a lot of resources but ... there are so many steps to be able to get it."

Arianna's final advice is to provide more stability in the social worker role. She also wants the system to "try placing children with their ethnicity or culture so they are not kept from it" because "when you are kept from your own culture, you don't want to learn about another one."

***“ I feel like I’m
doing so good
because I have been
with the same
family***

Clara

"Clara" entered foster care as an older teen and moved multiple times to different group homes before turning 18; she found the homes had "a lot of rules." She also struggled with the behavior of other youth and staff and had a hard time at school.

“ It just felt like a family instead of a foster home.

“I was always going to different group homes and I would be out of school for a long time because I was trying to figure out a way to get to school because the place I was living was far from my school. My grades were bad because I was not in school, I got caught up but it was hard when you are gone from school a long time.”

Some teachers were helpful, and Clara did have one supportive social worker who would understand and try to get her moved somewhere safe. They shared a race/culture connection, and the social worker checked in regularly and even attended Clara’s high school graduation. Unfortunately, “They told me I had to switch because her case was full.” Subsequent social workers have not been as understanding. Clara says, “The group homes, there were bad things happening there and I would run and she [previous social worker] would understand why, but this social worker would yell at me.”

Clara has also found little follow up from her current social worker when she tries to access other supports, including counseling. Clara says, “They always talked about it to me, and I agreed to do it, but they never sent me to the counselor. And I didn’t know what to do.” In addition, the social worker has not responded to Clara’s Treehouse contact’s inquiry about Clara’s stipend money.

Now that Clara is over 18, her current group home allows more freedom. She says, “I can get a job here. The other foster home, I could not go anywhere.” Her attorney was able to explain Extended Foster Care option and helped her complete her housing application. She is taking a driver’s education course that was paid for by Treehouse and plans to apply for cosmetology school.

Brandi

“Brandi” was “found in a tent” when she was a toddler and removed from her birth family. She then lived primarily with one foster family for over 10 years, although she reports being abused and was sent several times to group homes as a “punishment.” After leaving that home, she experienced several foster families and group homes, as well as juvenile detention. During all this, she recounts one positive experience in a home that felt like a family—they went camping, had chores, and she even got a dog. Because of this one home, she graded “having a foster family that was a good match for you” as a “B”.

Brandi gave an “A” to her mental health counseling, saying her counselor was someone she was “able to talk to and they actually cared and wanted to hear it, somebody that I trusted.”

She felt pressured to go, but says, “Looking back, it was a good thing, and now I know how to get the help I need today.”

“ When she would come for a home visit, it wasn’t for very long. There were no personal discussions. It was, ‘Are you being beaten, are you okay?’ and then leave.

Brandi’s contact at Community Youth Services (CYS) has also been critical for her. She says, “Every time I had a problem, I was able to call her, and she would answer. It almost didn’t feel like she was a worker, [but] more like a mom or a sister.” The CYS contact would drive Britney an hour away to visit her father in the hospital, would take her shopping or out to eat and was always available. CYS also allowed her to connect with peers via support and social groups.

Brandi’s social workers are a different story. She gave their consistency a “D”, saying, “My social worker always changes. I have literally been through five this year ... The one I have right now, she doesn’t reply. It’s so hard to get a hold of her.” Her courtesy worker has been more consistent and visits monthly.

Brandi is worried about her eminent transition out of Extended Foster Care. She says, “Nobody’s really talked to me. I don’t have a goal. If my boyfriend and I were to get into a fight I don’t know where I would go from here.” She has recently connected with the Disabilities office in her region and plans to work with them to get more services.

Dawn

“Dawn” says she “grew up at the age of six. I had no family, and I was pretty much on my own ... I felt like I had everything and did not need anyone.” When threatened with foster care as a young teen, she opted to live with an older sibling as she “could handle it on her own.” She ended up in the foster care system by the end of the year.

Thankfully, Dawn was placed with a foster family that matched her needs and personality. She and her foster mother relate well, and Dawn appreciates having both a mother and father in the home. She even values the church community, which is rare among the interviewees. Dawn’s foster mother has supplemented the social worker by assisting with education, employment, and financial training.

When Dawn was hearing comments about “Being sent back to the border” from other high school students, her foster mother assured her of her citizenship and that she belonged in this country.

The lowest grade Dawn gave was for “keeping the same social worker.” In the four years Dawn has been in foster care she has estimates having six, but still gave the consistency a “C”. She says, “Mainly my social workers were never permanent, they were just fillers, so I never really had a connection with them.”

Dawn did find one social worker supportive, trustworthy, and responsive to her needs, including meeting outside of her work hours.

The social worker would check that her needs were being met, including helping with Dawn’s resume, conducting mock interviews, checking grades, and advising how to stay on top of school.

Dawn was heartbroken when her social worker was promoted, saying “I remember just crying no one is going to treat me the way you do.” She reports that other social workers, “just wanted to do their job.”

Dawn also benefitted from Treehouse services, including their staff explaining Extended Foster Care. Dawn says, “I didn’t go to the court date, I just signed a paper.” Dawn sums up Treehouse by saying, “Everyone is always there to make sure I am continuing and doing well in my education and in the work force.”

Dawn is currently she is taking a year off from school and then plans to study cosmetology. When asked what most needed to change in the foster care system, she spoke again about the instability of her social workers, saying, “It’s the first connection you meet when you are broken down and you just feel like you have no one. That’s going to be the only person that you are going to trust ... I feel like the first person you get, you should at least get a three year period.”

She continues “If I still had [her favorite social worker], I would probably be in a totally different mindset and vision of life.”

Axel

“Axel” was an unusual participant in this study in that he benefited from both a consistent (five years!) supportive foster family and social worker—he awarded “A” grades to all questions about both.

Axel says of his foster family, “They treated me like a normal person in the family. I got to do everything with them. I did not feel excluded from anything.” This included camping trips, spending Christmas with their extended family, and participating in household chores. But he says the key was that “I mostly felt like a family member because of how long I stayed.”

The family was also crucial to his mental health management, advocating for him when he was on “12 medications at one time; they did not mix well.” Axel explains, “I felt like I was on too many medications and it made everything more difficult. There were too many doctors in the process ... I could not focus on school because they kept switching medications.”

The only downside to his family placement was his distance from his sisters. He says, “We saw each other once a month. Because of that I don’t know my sister really, her favorite color or thing to do.” Axel wishes that visitations would have been more of a priority and more frequent.

Axel’s social worker helped him with a range of issues, from attaining a State identification and a driver’s license to quickly getting him moved to a program for minors when he was mistakenly sent to an adult behavioral health inpatient facility.

But even with an involved social worker, Axel wishes his transition into Extended Foster Care had been handled better.

***“ My mental health was put first, and they always made sure if I needed therapy, I could get that.*”**

Before the move, he knew nothing about financial matters like budgeting, housing, and job support. “They did not teach me anything,” he sums up.

Since entering EFC, Axel has received ILS services from the Y, but the switch to EFC has left him out of contact with his new social worker. He says, “Right now I am really confused. Since I turned into an adult so many things have switched.” Thankfully, Axel’s former foster family is still in contact and helped manage his transition to his own apartment. He is now living there with his girlfriend, looking for a job and expecting a baby in this coming year. He is also taking only one medication regularly.

In summary, Axel says “Put a focus on therapy and figure out how to better yourself.” He also hopes that youth who are having a hard time in foster care can avoid the medications he experienced.

Kiana

“Kiana” was among the respondents giving grades ranging only from “F” to a high of “C”. After entering the system as a young teen, she was first sent to a juvenile detention facility as there was no other space. Her autistic younger brother went to a foster family specifically for his special needs; they eventually dropped him off at his school with his belongings to be picked up by his social worker.

At the detention facility, Kiana reports being threatened and abused by other youth. She was transferred to a foster home that initially seemed fine, but their Christian beliefs and church community began clashing with Kiana’s non-Christian faith background. She reports being “forced” to attend their church and being told that her beliefs were “nonexistent.” Kiana summarizes, “I am all about accepting different religions and different cultures, but it’s a different thing if they are forcing that on you.”

The church also believed that “gay people were going to hell.” When they learned that Kiana was interested in girls, the pastor church quoted bible verses as he sprinkled holy water on her so she could “pray it away.” The foster parents also undermined her sexual identity by telling her about boys she might like and how she could eventually find a husband. Finally, other aspects of her ethnic background were ridiculed; the foster mother called Kiana’s behaviors “typical for your people. They are super abusive.” Her foster sister called Kiana her “slave.”

During this time, Kiana reports that she “never even saw” her social worker. When social workers were involved, they were not helpful, such as responding to a request for job search help with the comment, “You don’t know how to build a resume?” Kiana was also one of the few who did not find their attorney supportive. Her attorney did not agree with Kiana’s preference to move closer to her mother’s family and demanded quick and uninformed decisions of Kiana.

***“ I just always
felt like I was being
attacked.***

Kiana says of the attorney, “She antagonized me and made me cry ... I was a kid put in these adult situations and I had to make a choice which was not the best. I had to answer questions that I did not know the answer to, like where I wanted to live, if I wanted to see my dad, what services I had to do.” She summarizes, “I feel like kids in the foster care system need a lawyer that is suitable for their age group and what they are going through.”

Kiana was offered support from Treehouse and at school, but say, “I never really like talking about it because it’s embarrassing to me. Sometimes I would talk about it, but I didn’t like using it as an excuse. I buried myself in schoolwork, but I still struggled because I was not mentally there.”

Eventually, Kiana and her brother went into separate kinship care with different sides of their family. Kiana was adopted as a teenager, explaining that Extended Foster Care was “not a good option.” She feels now that more stable adults in her life and better mental health support would have helped her not feel so alone making life choices.

At the end of the online survey she wrote, “Families that take in foster kids need to be evaluated better, if they are only doing it for the check, they were not being caring towards foster children and supportive of their culture. Foster children need to be listened to better when they are having difficulties in a foster home.”

Krystal

“Krystal” is the oldest of four siblings who entered foster care when she was 12. No one could take all the siblings, so Krystal moved several times – to overnight stays, group homes and foster families, some of which she found on her own. Her younger brothers were able to remain primarily with one foster family, but Krystal could stay with them only occasionally.

Krystal ended up having limited then no contact with her siblings because their social worker felt like she had too much influence over them—that she played the “mom” role and undermined their foster parents. Krystal thinks the lack of connection was detrimental for all of them and that their social worker and foster parents should have listened to her insights about her sibling’s needs and behaviors. She says, “It’s frustrating that you have to go through so much, just to see your family or even talk to them.”

After “six to eight” placements, Krystal never found a foster family that was a good fit—in the online survey, she gave “foster family was a good match” and “F”. In the interview, she explained that most were in it for themselves. She would last about a year with each foster family and then something would make the foster parents uncomfortable; often it was Krystal’s contact with her parents. Krystal says that most of foster families wanted her cut contact with her parents, which she would not do.

“(Of her first social worker) It’s the first connection you meet when you are broken down and you just feel like you have no one. That’s going to be the only person that you are going to trust ... I feel like the first person you get, you should at least get a three year period.

“ I really regret it because if I had waited it out I could be getting a lot more help that I need now that I am not receiving cause I am twenty and I am taking care of myself. When I think about it, there are so many services that are wonderful and amazing that I could have but I can't use because I was adopted.

She sums up, “I don’t really want to forget that I have them [my own] as parents, and a lot of placements wanted that.” As the eldest, Krystal was sent back to live with father several times as “trial runs” but after the third time Krystal insisted that she not to be put in that situation again.

Mental health counseling was mandated, but after trying three different agencies she found the trauma of retelling her experiences too overwhelming to be therapeutic. She also describes the counseling as “tests of ‘what’s wrong with me?’” Krystal would have enjoyed being able to connect with other peers in foster care but found most others too guarded to share or be honest about their experiences. She also wishes she had more training in finances—she was one of the few that names “financial training” as one of the “most important” services for those in foster care but could not grade the services because she “had none.”

Krystal was able to get the support she needed at school and gave “education support” an “A” grade. She found it most effective to have her Youthnet contact or social worker come with her to talk to teachers, otherwise, “If you’re in care, they kind of push you off.” Youthnet was also “always willing to help,” including with job support, including resumes, job searches and other resources. They checked in on her work status and school progress. Youthnet in particular “gets it done” instead of redirecting.

Krystal is now in Extended Foster Care and taking college classes. Her recommendation for changes in the foster care system is “include family visits no matter what. That’s all we have in the system.” She also believes that support services (particularly counseling) should not be mandatory, adding, “Foster kids need more voice in their decisions about what they participate in.”

Evelyn

“Evelyn” entered foster care when she was 17. After two “emergency” placements, she and her four younger siblings were placed together with a single foster mother. She is now in Extended Foster Care and on her own, but visits her siblings in the home when she has transportation.

Evelyn gave multiple “B” grades in the online survey, making her one of the higher scorers. This includes social workers; she has had two during her time in care and found them both helpful. Her first social worker supported her through her court appearance when she was having a panic attack about seeing her parents. Her current social worker has helped navigate resources and connecting her to other programs. She also has an independent living worker who checks in regularly; Evelyn finds this contact reassuring even if no specific resources are needed.

Evelyn’s “B” grade to “the availability of mental health care” was due to the accessibility and the success of her current counselor.

“They put it out there for me,” she explains. “Even saying if I ever felt the need to take medicine, I could be evaluated for that ... It was really helpful to know that I had that stuff.” Her foster mom ultimately found her a counselor; Evelyn calls the counselor “a good listener. But she also gives good feedback.”

The lowest grade Evelyn gave on the survey was a “D” for her transition to EFC. But her “rushed” sense of the process may be due to her situation at the time. She explains, “It was difficult for me, at the time I was struggling with other stuff. I was getting overly stressed out about a lot of things. It was a lot of pressure. I wasn’t mentally prepared to take it all in.”

Other relatively low grades (“C”) were for finding peers and for support for her gender identity. Most of these issues occurred before she entered foster care, due to the reactions of her friends and extended family. Her only complaint while in foster care was that her foster mother shared her sexual identity with others without Evelyn’s permission.

Evelyn switched to a new high school upon entering foster care and has found school staff helpful in terms of academics. The new social setting is more problematic. She says, “I never found people on my own. At my old school there was a [ethnic] group.” She will graduate on time this year.

Matthew

“Matthew” is young adult man who lives in a group home with behavioral support services. He has been diagnosed with an Intellectual and Developmental Disability and reports suffering from anxiety and depression. Matthew entered foster care as a young child and has experienced over 20 placements.

Matthew described several instances of abuse and neglect by foster parents and other foster children. He would report abuse to school staff, or they would notice marks on his body. He switched schools too often to stabilize and summarizes, “It messed up my education completely ... I still think about it to this day. I wish I never moved a lot, then I would be in a school that I can actually do good.”

With Matthew’s current living situation and services, he is doing better at academics and working on his behavior. He also recounts a very positive relationship with his social worker. She does “more than her job,” by recognizing his hard work and accomplishments, and he appreciates the rewards, such as her taking him out to activities and meals. He says, “that recognition for when you're trying to do really well ... It feels like I'm always being noticed it's kind of a good feeling inside.”

At the time of the interview, Matthew’s Independent Living Skills worker and his mental health counselor were virtually inaccessible during the Covid-19 pandemic situation, which left him very frustrated. However, the staff at the group home helped him work on his feelings and he is focusing on completing his education.

***“ If I still had [her favorite social worker], I would probably be in a totally different mindset and vision of life.*”**

Amira

“Amira” entered foster care while in high school, after being molested by her biological father. She told a counselor at her school, then stayed at a shelter and on a friend’s couch until a foster care placement was arranged. The “F”s she gave to school support reflect how her teachers treated her during that time—she cried through class with no intervention, and was told by one, “Just because you’re going through stuff doesn’t mean you don’t have to do your homework.” Luckily for Amira, her social worker recognized her anxiety about moving into a strange home and let her interview potential foster parents. She has been so happy with the resultant foster family that, at age 21, they are adopting her. “They are my family,” she says.

Even with that successful result, Amira gave the supports she received during her years in foster care almost all “D” and “F” grades, including learning training on finances, other independent living skills, job training and transition planning. She did have a healthy placement, but, because she was relatively old when she moved to foster care, and her foster parents had young children in the house that were more time consuming, the family could not meet all of Amira’s needs.

Although Amira is of Muslim heritage, she describes sharing the challenges of not sharing a culture with her foster family as only “minor”. The difference in their skin color did make strangers question the family’s relationship, as they would not have done with a foster child with lighter skin. Amira was able to talk to her foster parents to be assured that they loved her no less because she didn’t look like she could be their biological daughter. Amira does not wish for more contact with her biological culture, “I’m just American,” she explains.

When summing up what is needed most in foster care, Amira said, “Make sure the social workers actually care.”

Case

“Case” went into foster care at pre-school age. He was kept with two older brothers; a younger sister was in a separate placement. Case’s first several placements were not successful, but he does not remember those clearly. His brothers tell him of mistreatment and a lack of acceptance. Case does remember that the disruptions were sudden and not explained. He says, “They would just load us up from one place to the next without any information about where we were going.”

Fortunately, Case and his brothers were finally placed with a foster family so successful that they adopted the three brothers by the time Case was five. The family ultimately also housed and adopted the younger sister.

Case says, “I know I am fortunate.” He graduated from the University of Washington last year and found a good job with advancement potential.

“ Right now I am really confused. Since I turned into an adult so many things have switched.

Case credits the fact that he was so young during the roughest years, and that he was kept with his older brothers. His other siblings struggle more now with mental health. “They remember more,” he explains.

Case advocates for more mental health services and “actually understanding people’s needs.” He concludes, “Behavioral health is a very important factor ... They need to address trauma from a young age.”

Angelica

“Angelica” and her siblings were in and out of foster care from the time she was pre-school age. Her mother struggled with heroin addiction, and they were often homeless. During this period, her younger brother was placed successfully placed in a family that stayed in touch when the siblings were back with their biological mother. When Angelica was six, the siblings were permanently moved to foster care. Her brother was adopted by his earlier foster family; Angelica and her sister were periodically together but did not get along well. Eventually, her sister was also adopted.

Angelica says “I just bounced from home to home to home to home.” She further explains, “It was hard to connect to people I didn’t trust, and when I acted out, they pushed me away ... I’ve never had a foster home that was very invested in me. Not more than a bed.” She describes homes that clearly favored younger biological children, taking the younger children out to dinner and leaving Angelica locked out of the house till they returned. She feels that the foster parents were not committed to fostering, but “They wanted to look good in their friend’s eyes.” Angelica says that her social workers did not believe her but treated her “like a criminal ... Nobody wanted to know what really happened.”

During this time, Angelica often traveled hours a day to stay at the same school. She reports, “They were super helpful ... I had one science teacher that I could talk to about anything ... She’s basically a counselor to me.” The teachers allowed Angelica a safe retreat in their classroom when she was bullied and allowed extra time on assignments when her home situation was particularly volatile. She received tutoring from Treehouse and the school.

And after one bad experience with a mental health counselor who betrayed her trust and “scared away a couple of potential adoptive parents,” Angelica has benefited from one steady counselor. She gives no credit to her social workers, about whom she says, “I’ve had so many social workers I can’t count them on my fingers and toes.”

Eventually, Angelica got close to her boyfriend’s family, who believed her accounts of mental abuse from her foster family. After a suicide attempt, her boyfriend’s grandmother provided a home, which she says has been an adjustment “in a good way.” Angelica graduated on time from high school and is now attending community college.

“ I feel like kids in the foster care system need a lawyer that is suitable for their age group and what they are going through.

The FPAWS Parent Mentoring Program is a program focused on the reunification of children with their families. This program is currently in practice in the Clark County Family Treatment Court. For many families it means shorter stays for children in out of home placements, means higher rate of reunification with their birth family and greater job satisfaction for social workers and greater satisfaction with parents and Mentors.

The Parent mentoring program is designed to utilize specifically trained and supervised foster parents that are partnered with birth parents to work towards reunification.

In 2019 the Clark County Family Treatment Court received a grant which allowed this program to be re-implemented on a limited basis.

The data collected from the 2008 study and the implementation of the Parent Mentoring Program in 2019 from Clark County Family Treatment Court supports the positive impact of the Parent Mentoring Program.

Data

- The original Study In 2005-2008 was conducted by the University of Washington School of Social Work with a grant from the Stuart Foundation.
- The study focused on four main objectives and included a control group and a study group of 97 parents and 157 children. These parents and children received Parent Mentoring services.
- The study found that 85% of the children in the mentoring group were reunified compared to 44% of the comparison group. **Additionally, the children in the mentoring group stayed in foster care 244 fewer days than the comparison group.**
- The study indicated that there is a high satisfaction on the part of social workers, mentors and parents.
- Anecdotal numbers from Clark County Family Treatment Court show that results are the same with only 4 failures in the 2 ½ years the program has been running.

Unanticipated results from the study

- Six babies were born to families in the PMP Group during the time they were working with a mentor or after the mentoring period was over and none were placed in foster care.
- While the original goal of the program was to increase reunification, other permanent plans were achieved for children whose parents worked with mentors at a greater rate than those in the Comparison Group. Of these permanent plans, which included the relinquishment of parental rights, changes of custody and guardianships, 13 were achieved by agreement and without contested court action. Parents in the PMP Group

were better able to understand the needs of their children and participate in making alternate parenting plans for their children.

- Most of the parents in the Program had abused drugs and alcohol and had fractured relationships with their extended families. As a result, their family members were distrustful of them and not available to provide the more natural supports that parents need. Mentors worked with the parents' relatives to help the families rebuild trust and come together to support reunification.
- Foster parent retention was enhanced by the foster parents' involvement with PMP. Foster parent mentors reported increased satisfaction with foster parenting and often remained licensed to provide care after adopting children or when they may have otherwise chosen to leave the program. Consequently, the wisdom and skill of experienced foster parents was not lost to the agency or to the families.
- Mentors continued their relationships with the parents they worked with long after the structured mentoring period was over. As a result, they were able to support parents beyond the official mentoring program

Design:

- The Parent Mentoring Program includes positive mentoring support to families with children in foster care, to foster families and social workers.
- Currently in Clark Co the referral process is initiated through from the Social Worker, we hope to expand its referrals coming from programs such as Family Connections, Parent 4 Parent, DCYF Social Workers and through the Office of Public Defense. (We do not want this to be a court ordered service, it needs to be a voluntary service in order for parents to gain the greatest benefit of the program.)
- Each office throughout Washington State will have a state employee to act as an advocate and a liaison between the DCYF office staff and the FPAWS Parent Mentor staff member.
- Each DCYF office will have a FPAWS Parent Mentor supervisor that will manage each case, train and supervise the foster parent mentors.
- Parent mentors will be experienced foster parents that will work closely with the birth parents, caregivers and the social workers to help facilitate the education and learning of the skills necessary for the families to stay on track for reunification.
- Parent Mentors will work with each birth family 20 hours per month to build relationships and build skills through mentoring.
- The Parent Mentoring Program will work alongside programs such as Family Connections which is designed for all families within the foster care system. Not all Foster parents are suited to mentor and not all Birth parents choose this level of engagement.
- When the Parent 4 Parent program is involved we would work in cooperation and in conjunction with their program.

Quotes from the Stuart Foundation Report:

“Evaluation Conclusions The Parent Mentoring Program has proven to be a promising child welfare program. Parents who participated in the PMP were more likely to reunify with their children than comparison group parents. Furthermore, children in the PMP group spent fewer days in foster care. These are important findings because they go to the heart of the goal of child welfare intervention – to reunify parents and children whenever safely possible.”

“An additional benefit of the program is its grounding in every day child welfare practice. Most evidence-based models have been developed outside of child welfare and imported with uneven success. The fact that this program was developed by line public child welfare social workers increases the likelihood that it will be taken up and implemented within the system, creating systemic change.”

Legislators that have supported this program historically:

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The Parent Mentoring Program was funded for several years after the study was completed. The plan was to take it region wide when the economy recessed in 2008 the program continued using Regional reunification monies.

The original objectives of the grant and progress towards each objective are reported below.

Objective #1:

To implement the Parent Mentoring Program in Vancouver and Olympia, serving 110 families. Progress Toward Meeting Objective # 1: Ninety-seven parents with a total of 157 children in care received PMP services

Objective #2:

To measure the efficacy of the program through an independent evaluation. Progress Toward Meeting Objective # 2: An evaluation was conducted by Maureen Marcenko at the University of Washington. The results are reported in the next section of this report. A full evaluation report is attached to this document.

Objective #3:

To use the evaluation outcomes to refine the model and accompanying program materials so that the program can be replicated in other public child welfare offices. Progress Toward Meeting Objective # 3: Feedback from birth parents and mentors led to extension of the program to a maximum of 6 months. Furthermore, the PMP staff have developed materials that have been used to replicate the program in additional DCFS offices. ‘

Objective #4:

To disseminate the program and supporting materials statewide. Progress Toward Meeting Objective # 4: The project staff and evaluator have presented at several statewide meetings and one national meeting. The list includes: Local and Statewide Presentations:

- 6 CASA trainings
- 3 Reasonable Efforts Symposia
- 2 Foster Parent Conferences
- 2 Newspaper Articles
- 1 Statewide Parent Engagement Conference
- 1 University of Washington publication
- 1 Statewide DCFS Conference
- 1 Region-wide DCFS Supervisors meeting
- 2 “good news” stories on DCFS intranet
- Governor Gregoire site visit
- Presentations to MSW students at UW

National Presentation:

(2005). The Birth Parent/Foster Parent Mentoring Program: From Program Design to Program Evidence. Building on Family Strengths: Research and Services in Support of Children

and their Families, Research and Training Center on Family Support and Children's Mental Health, Portland State University.

In addition to the presentations reported above, the program developed a video which will be sent under separate cover by the Program Coordinator.

What did the project accomplish? Please summarize the evaluation results as well as your own views.

Accomplishments:

(1) Reunification: 85% of children in the mentoring group were reunified compared to 44% of the comparison group children.

(2) Length of Stay: Children in the mentoring group stayed in foster care 224 fewer days than comparison group children.

The qualitative analysis indicated high satisfaction with the program on the part both of mentors and parents. Mentors established supportive, non-judgmental relationships with birth parents and provided highly valued assistance with parenting skills, organization, and practical help.

Evaluation Conclusions

The Parent Mentoring Program has proven to be a promising child welfare program. Parents who participated in the PMP were more likely to reunify with their children than comparison group parents. Furthermore, children in the PMP group spent fewer days in foster care. These are important findings because they go to the heart of the goal of child welfare intervention - to reunify parents and children whenever safely possible. There was no significant difference between the two groups in re-entry to care post-reunification, although there was a trend for children in the PMP group to return to care more frequently. Anecdotal data support the theory that a surveillance effect was operating for PMP families due to the ongoing involvement of mentors.

An additional benefit of the program is its grounding in every day child welfare practice. Most evidence-based models have been developed outside of child welfare and imported with uneven success. The fact that this program was developed by line public child welfare social workers increases the likelihood that it will be taken up and implemented within the system, creating systemic change.

This evaluation points to the potentially positive outcomes of the program. To test whether or not the positive findings are a result of the program, it is necessary to conduct a randomized controlled trial. This design would also allow for a benefit cost analysis. Therefore, the primary recommendation emerging from this evaluation is that the PMP be tested against a similar intervention utilizing random assignment to conditions. Only under these conditions can we test whether or not the positive findings are attributable to the PMP.

Were there any disappointments or aspects of the project left incomplete?

Initially the program staff experienced challenges in implementation related to paying mentors for the work they did with families. The DCFS business functions were not structured to pay non-employee, non-contracted service providers. The requirements of contracting were cost prohibitive for mentors, primarily due to insurance issues. Ultimately, the DCFS administration intervened and a new payment stream was created specifically for the mentors. The experienced mentors remained loyal to the program through many months without compensation, but the program staff was reluctant to aggressively recruit cases or train additional mentors until the payment process was established. As a result, fewer families were served than would have been had the program been able to implement fully in July 2005. Nonetheless, the PMP only fell short of its goal by thirteen families (97 of 110 families).

Were there unanticipated benefits or successes as a result of the work?

At least five unanticipated and positive outcomes were observed.

1) Six babies were born to families in the PMP Group during the time they were working with a mentor or after the mentoring period was over and none were placed in foster care.

2) While the original goal of the program was to increase reunification, other permanent plans were achieved for children whose parents worked with mentors at a greater rate than those in the Comparison Group. Of these permanent plans, which included the relinquishment of parental rights, changes of custody and guardianships, 13 were achieved by agreement and without contested court action. Parents in the PMP Group were better able to understand the needs of their children and participate in making alternate parenting plans for their children.

3) Most of the parents in the Program had abused drugs and alcohol and had fractured relationships with their extended families. As a result, their family members were distrustful of them and not available to provide the more natural supports that parents need. Mentors worked with the parents' relatives to help the families rebuild trust and come together to support reunification.

4) Foster parent retention was enhanced by the foster parents' involvement with PMP. Foster parent mentors reported increased satisfaction with foster parenting and often remained licensed to provide care after adopting children or when they may have otherwise chosen to leave the program. Consequently, the wisdom and skill of experienced foster parents was not lost to the agency or to the families.

5) Mentors continued their relationships with the parents they worked with long after the structured mentoring period was over. As a result, they were able to support parents beyond the official mentoring program.

What has been learned from the project that would be helpful to others working on similar issues in the future?

Systemic change has occurred in the ways that foster parents and DCFS staff work together. The culture in the offices which were offered PMP has been changed in terms of the way birth parents are included in developing case plans and in team meetings. Social workers

report that their enthusiasm for the work they do has been enhanced by the success of the parents they've referred to PMP. They indicate that their respect for foster parents has increased and that they are relating differently to all foster parents, not just those who are mentors. The mentors have served as ambassadors to the foster parent community as well and the Division of Licensed Resources reports that foster parents are more willing to engage birth parents at visits and to team with them around parenting their children. Prior to the implementation of PMP it was thought that a DCFS office had to be culturally "ready" to support this level of foster parent/social worker/birth parent engagement. This experience indicates that the activity impacts the culture and benefits foster parents and social workers whether or not they directly participate in the program.

How did lessons learned from this project inform/influence the organization's structure, practice, and/or capacity?

The project has had a positive influence on social work practice in the offices it has served as well as other offices within Region 6 and the State. Region 6 has adopted the PMP model as the model it intends to utilize in other offices wishing to engage the intervention. At this point, the Regional Administrator has selected two additional offices to receive the program. The Region has committed to continued funding for the Vancouver and Tumwater offices and expanded program implementation in two additional offices.

The Regional Administrator in Region 5 has embraced the program as an effective intervention and has implemented the PMP program in the Bellingham office. It is the intention of Region 5 to add additional offices as the budget allows.

Additionally, the administrator in Region 6 and the statewide Director of Program Operations have discussed the program and support the agency participating in a more rigorous evaluation of the program to bring it to an evidence-based level. This represents implementation in more offices in the region and elsewhere. Clearly the State realizes the value of the program and wishes to expand the capacity of the program to serve additional clients. Planning is underway to determine the organizational structure that will be required to support the expanded efforts.

Has the grant stimulated other work or projects?

As a result of the PMP's success, parents who reunified with their children and who may otherwise have lost contact with the Department remained connected through the relationships they had with their mentors. They continued to do well and reached a point where they wanted to give back to the system that had helped their families and to offer support to parents who were where they had once been. In June 2007 a work group was convened to develop a program that would meet the needs of parents in Clark County. Child welfare professionals and successful birth parents came together and designed a program with three main components:

- An Advisory Group of successfully reunited birth parents would meet regularly to offer assistance and information on parents' issues to the Department and the community.

- A monthly course called “Here’s The Deal” would be presented to parents currently working toward reunification which would introduce the relevant child welfare professionals and explain their roles, feature a birth parents telling the story of their experience with DCFS and their reunification and offer a skill-building workshop on topics selected by the Advisory Group and felt to be of importance to parents in the system.

- Experienced birth parents would offer education, support and self-advocacy skills to parents involved with the child welfare system.

In January 2008 a successfully reunified birth parent was hired by the Department and housed in the DCFS office in Vancouver. The impact the Program has had on the culture of DCFS, the families involved, and the community has been far-reaching. While some of the benefits of the Program may be difficult to quantify the following data has been collected:

- The Parent Advisory Group has continued to meet monthly. They have presented at the Reasonable Efforts Symposium, the monthly PRIDE training for new foster parents, quarterly trainings for new CASA volunteers, the DCFS staff, the foster parents in Cowlitz County, Washington and supported parents at Family Team Decision Making (FTDM) meetings. They served an important role in selecting the Area Administrator for the Vancouver DCFS Office.

- Monthly “Here’s The Deal” classes have been conducted. Attendance, which is voluntary but encouraged by social workers, parents’ attorneys and CASA’s, has grown steadily with the most recent class drawing 30 parents. Entrance-Exit surveys indicate that parents feel better informed and more hopeful after attending the classes. The Juvenile Court has requested that “Here’s The Deal” begin offering a twice monthly Professional Panel at the courthouse during the lunch break between court sessions in addition to the evening class. These noontime sessions are to begin in December 2008. Also, the Parent Partner Lead and a foster parent member of the Work Group teach a parenting class together weekly. Nurturing Families in Substance Abuse Treatment and Recovery serves over 20 families a month and is the only parenting class many social workers refer parents to at this time.

- The one paid staff member and two active volunteers assist over 100 families each month. They meet parents at the initial Shelter Care hearings or are referred by social workers, parents’ attorneys and CASA volunteers. A recent survey of the parents and referring agents indicated nearly 100% satisfaction with the Program. Both parents and professionals surveyed indicated that the Parent Partners’ involvement with a family had promoted their engagement in services and improved their ability to work cooperatively with their DCFS social worker. A Parent Partner is now present at almost all FTDM and they have been instrumental in resolving many cases without costly court actions. Parent Partners are members of the Family Treatment Court’s team and are active on the Meth Action Team.



WASHINGTON
COURTS

Washington State Supreme Court Commission on Children in Foster Care 2022 Meeting Dates

DATE	TIME	LOCATION
Monday, March 7 th	1:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Zoom Videoconference
Monday, May 9 rd	1:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Zoom Videoconference
Monday, September 12 th	1:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Zoom Videoconference
Monday, December 12 th	1:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Zoom Videoconference

Updated: November 18, 2021

Please contact Susan.Goulet@courts.wa.gov if you have any questions.