



Voices of Youth in Care:
Responses to the DCFS Youth
Experiences Survey
(September 1, 2020 – September 15, 2021)

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INTRODUCTION

In 2019, the Illinois State Legislature enacted SB1743 (P.A. 101-166) which requires the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services “to develop and process a standardized survey to gather feedback from children who are aging out of foster care and from children who have transitioned out of the foster care system.”¹ The legislation instructs the Department to “develop and process” this “foster care survey” in coordination with the Foster Care Alumni of America Illinois Chapter, the Department’s Statewide Youth Advisory Board, and the School of Social Work at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

According to the legislation, the survey should include questions about “the children’s experience with and opinion of State foster care services, the children’s recommendations for improvement of such services, the amount of time the children spent in the foster care system, and any other information deemed relevant by the Department.” The legislation also specifies that the survey be administered to “all youth participating in transitional living programs, independent living programs, or Youth in College and to all youth receiving scholarships or tuition waivers under the DCFS Scholarship Program” every 5 years.

This survey will complement the other surveys that the Department administers to transition-age youth in care, including the federally-mandated National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) outcome survey. The NYTD outcome survey is administered to a new cohort of 17-year-olds every three years. A subset of the youth who complete the survey at age 17 is surveyed again at ages 19 and 21. The NYTD outcome survey includes questions about educational attainment, employment, homelessness, benefit receipt, childbirth, and incarceration but does not ask about the services and supports young people received while they were in care.

The Department is required to submit a report based on the results of the foster care survey to the Governor and the General Assembly, with the first report due no later than December 1, 2021. This is the first report. It begins with a description of the methods that were used to develop and administer the survey, analyze the survey data, and gather feedback on the results. Next, it describes the results of the survey and provides relevant contextual information. The report concludes with a discussion of the findings and recommendations for next steps.

¹ <https://www.ilga.gov/legislation/publicacts/fulltext.asp?Name=101-0166>

METHOD

Survey Development and Administration

The survey was developed by a group that included representatives from the Department, the Foster Care Alumni of America Illinois Chapter, the School of Social Work at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. Members of the Department's Statewide Youth Advisory Board provided feedback on the survey questions.²

The survey questions covered a range of topics including education, employment, housing, social support, healthcare, and juvenile records. An open-ended question at the end of the survey provided young people with an opportunity to share any additional feedback they might have about the services and supports they received while in care.

The survey was administered to 19- and 20-year-olds who attended Countdown to 21 meetings between September 1, 2020, and September 15, 2021. Countdown to 21 facilitators encouraged youth to complete the survey before their meetings. The survey was also administered to young people participating in DCFS postsecondary education programs (i.e., Education and Training Voucher recipients; DCFS Youth in College and DCFS Youth in Scholarship recipients, tuition waiver recipients), regional and statewide youth advisory board members, members of the Illinois Chapter of Foster Care Alumni Association, young people in TLP and ILO placements, and young people receiving pandemic relief funds from the Department.

The survey data were collected using Survey Monkey. Young people could access the survey using a link provided in an email by Countdown to 21 facilitators, postsecondary education specialists, and TLP/ILO providers. Once young people completed the survey, they were directed to an online form that asked for their name and address. This information was used to send them a \$10 gift card.

Data Analysis and Report Preparation

The Department contracted with Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago to analyze the survey data and draft a report. Members of the statewide youth advisory board and foster care alumni provided feedback on the survey results and made recommendations for policy and practice changes. These recommendations were incorporated into the final version of the report. See Figure 1 for a timeline.

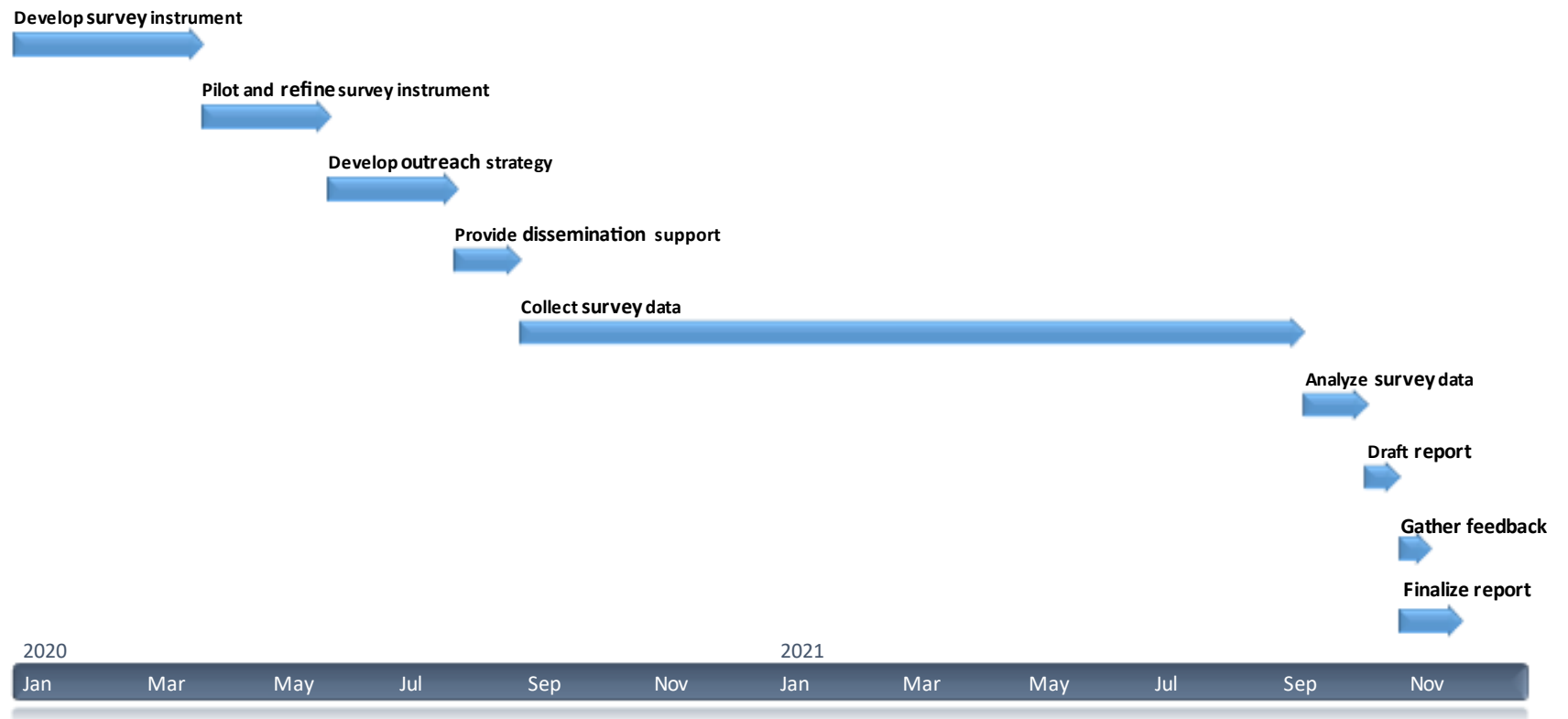
Limitations

Before presenting the survey results, it is important to acknowledge their limitations. First, the 260 young people who completed the survey are not representative of the population of young people who were eligible to complete the survey. Second, because the survey link was sent to so many different groups of young people, and some young people may have been members of

² A copy of the survey can be found in Appendix A.

more than one of those groups, we don't know how many young people had an opportunity to complete the survey. This, in turn, means that we cannot estimate the response rate. Third, young people were not required to respond to any of the questions. Consequently, the percentage of survey respondents for whom data are missing is quite high for some questions. Finally, the survey included questions about some of the services and supports young people might have received while they were in care and their satisfaction with those services and supports, additional qualitative data will need to be collected to better understand how young people experienced those services and supports and to identify needs for services and supports that are not currently being addressed.

Figure 1. Survey Timeline



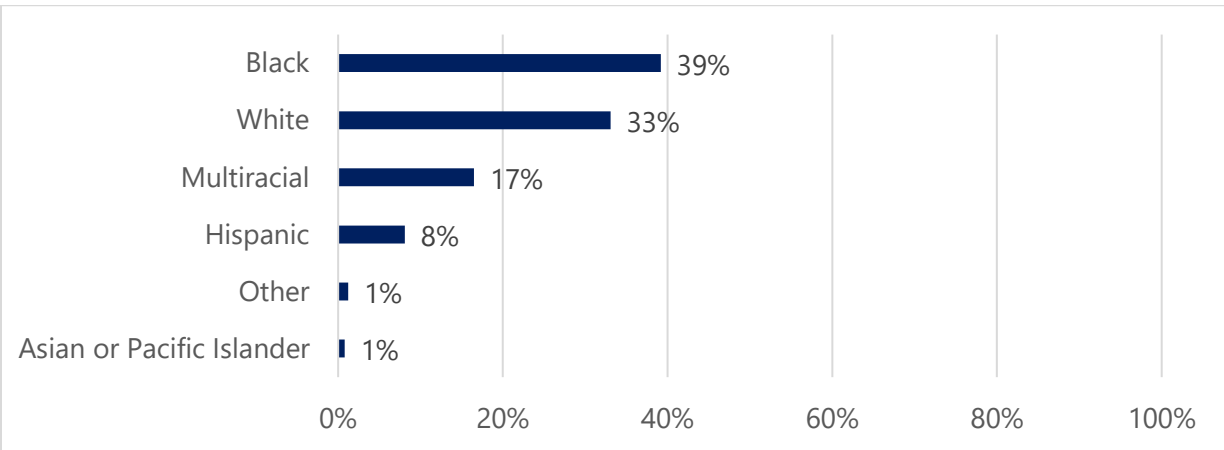
DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

The Youth Experiences survey included a series of questions that asked young people about their demographic characteristics.

Race/Ethnicity

Nearly three-quarters of the young people who responded to the survey identified themselves as White (33%) or Black (39%), 8 percent identified themselves as Hispanic, and 17 percent identified themselves as multiracial (Figure 2).³

Figure 2. Race/ethnicity (N=260)



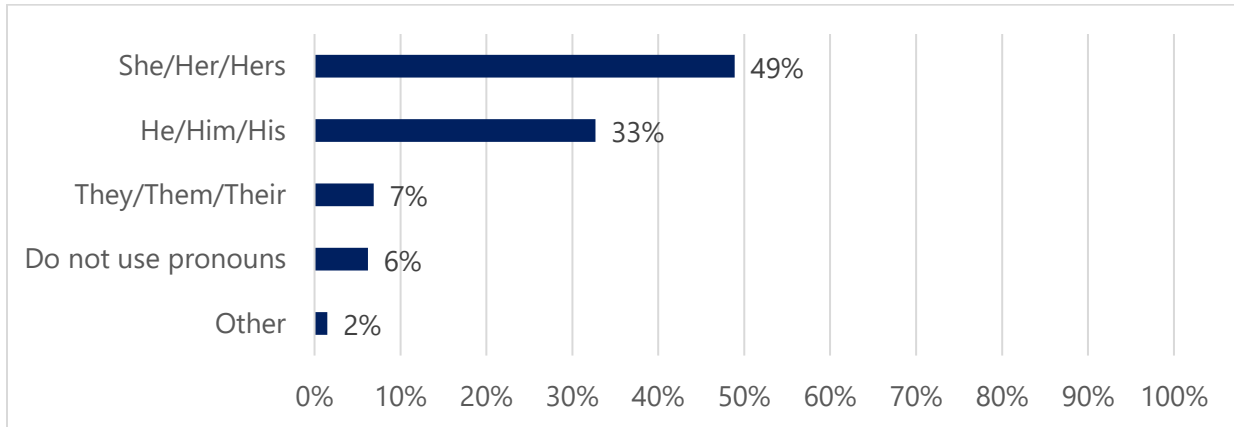
*1% of the survey respondents declined to answer the question (not shown).

Preferred Pronouns

Nearly half of the survey respondents preferred female-identifying pronouns, one-third preferred male-identifying pronouns, 7 percent preferred non-binary pronouns, and 6 percent preferred not to use pronouns (Figure 3).

³ We cannot compare the racial and ethnic composition of our sample to the racial and ethnic composition of the population of youth aged 18 or older in care because the data publicly available from DCFS report race and ethnicity separately. See <https://www2.illinois.gov/dcf/aboutus/newsandreports/Documents/subdemogr.pdf>

Figure 3. Preferred pronouns (N=260)



* 4% of the survey respondents declined to answer the question (not shown).

Pregnant or Parenting

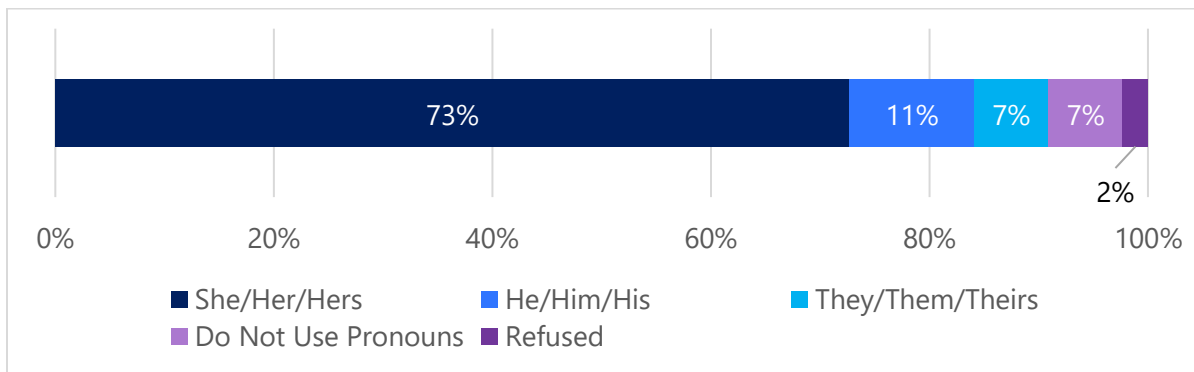
About 17 percent of the young people who responded to the survey were currently pregnant or parenting (Table 1). They represent about 10 percent of the DCFS pregnant or parenting population.

Table 1. Pregnant or parenting (N = 260)

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	44	17%
No	210	81%
Don't know	3	1%
Refused	3	1%

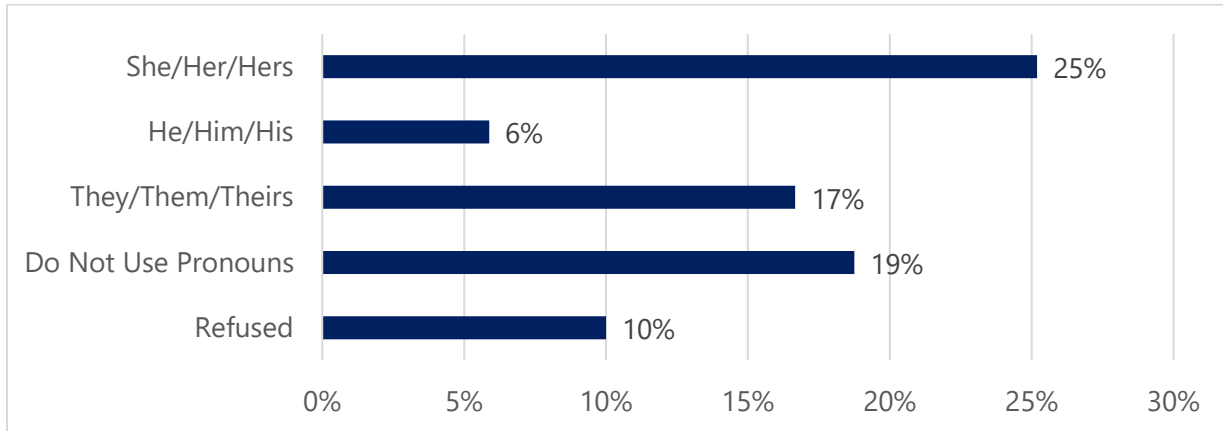
Nearly three-quarters of the pregnant or parenting survey respondents preferred female-identifying pronouns. (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Preferred pronouns of pregnant or parenting youth (n=44)



Young people who preferred non-binary pronouns were nearly three times more likely to be parenting or pregnant than young people who preferred male-identifying pronouns (Figure 5).

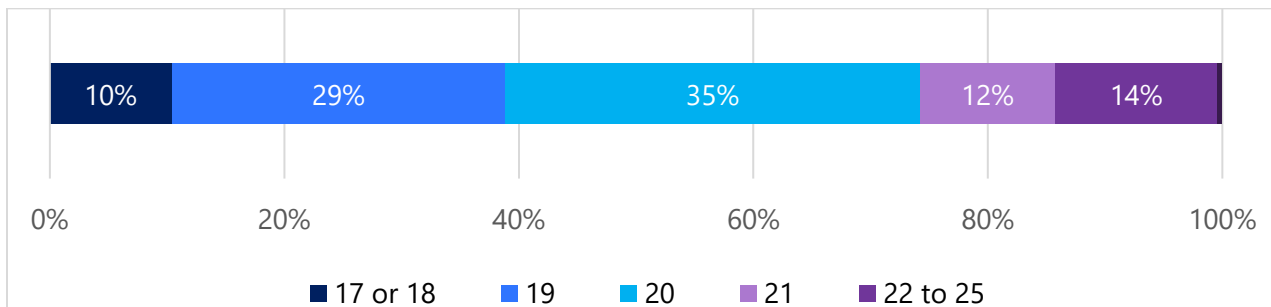
Figure 5. Pregnant or parenting by preferred pronouns (N = 260) ⁴



Age

Nearly two-thirds (64%) of the young people who responded to the survey were 19 or 20 years old (Figure 6). This reflects the fact that many of the young people completed the survey in conjunction with the Countdown to 21 meetings that occur at age 19 and age 20 and 9 months.

Figure 6. Age (n=260)



* <1% of the survey respondents declined to answer the question.

⁴ None of the youth who selected "other" as their preferred pronoun reported being pregnant or a parent.

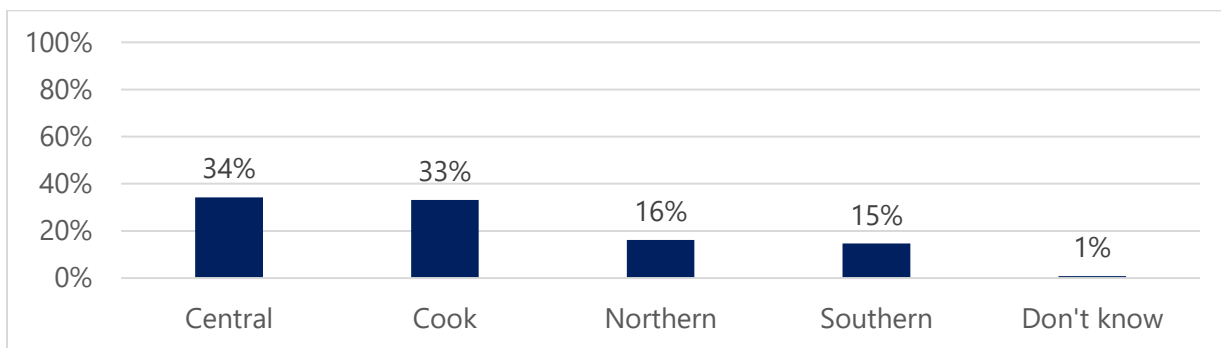
FOSTER CARE EXPERIENCES

The Youth Experiences survey included a series of questions about young people’s experiences in foster care.

DCFS Region

Just over one-third of the survey respondents resided in Cook County. Another third resided in the Central region. Sixteen percent resided in the Northern region and 15 percent resided in the Southern region (Figure 7).

Figure 7. DCFS region (N=260)

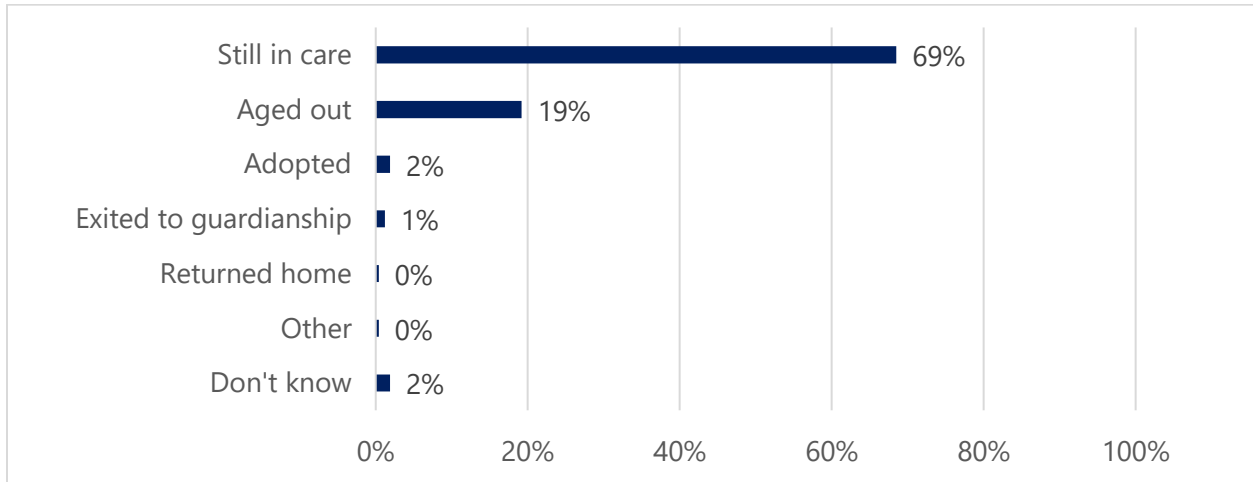


*1% of the survey respondents declined to answer the question (not shown).

Current Care Status

Sixty-nine percent of the young people who responded to the survey were still in care (Figure 8). This reflects the fact that many young people completed the survey in conjunction with the Countdown to 21 meetings that occur at age 19 and a few months before aging out. Others were encouraged to complete the survey by their TLP provider. Another 19 percent had already aged out when they completed the survey.

Figure 8. Current care status (N=260)

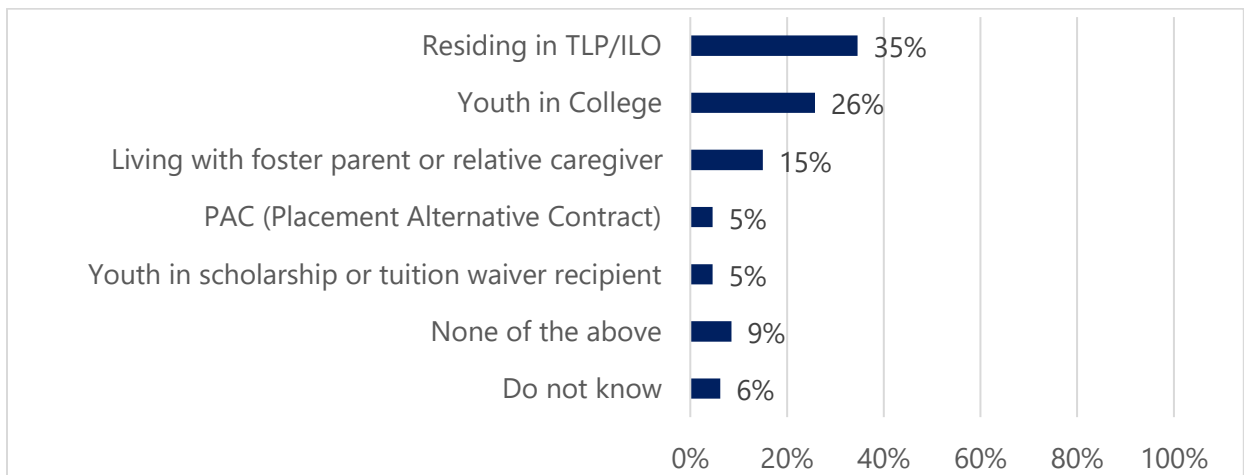


*6% of the survey respondents skipped the question and 1% declined to answer it (not shown).

Placement Type

Young people residing in a TLP or ILO placement comprised the largest group of survey respondents (35%). The next largest group identified as Youth in College (26%). Another 15 percent of the youth were living with foster parents or relative caregivers (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Placement type (N=260)

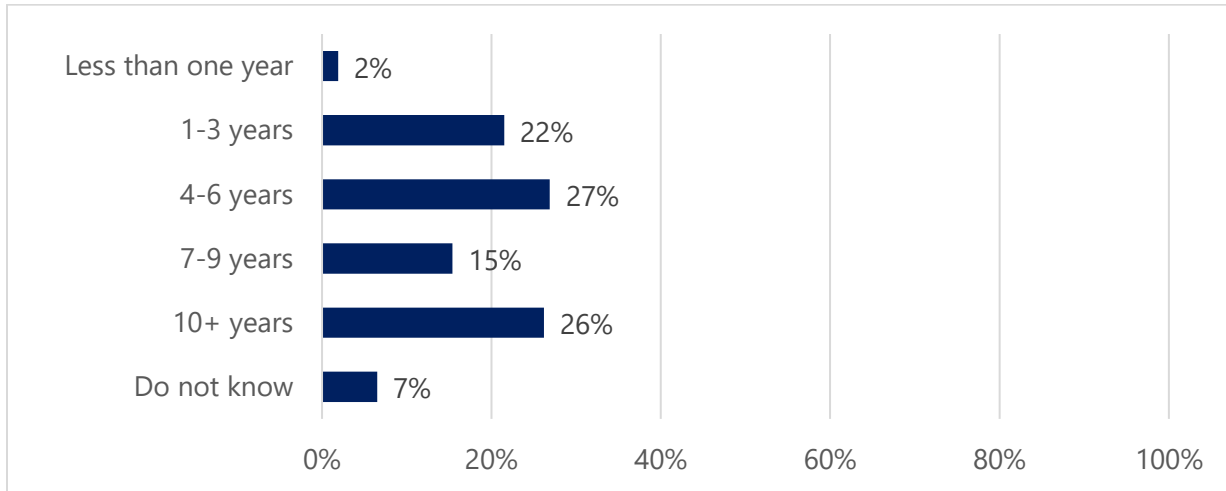


*1% of the survey respondents declined to answer the question (not shown).

Length of Time in Care

The two largest groups of survey respondents were young people who were in care for 4 to 6 years (27%) and young people who were in care for 10 years or more (26%). Nearly one-quarter of the young people were in care for 3 years or less (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Years in care (N=260)



*2% of survey respondents declined to answer the question (not shown).

Twenty-seven percent of the survey respondents who were still in care had been in care for no more than three years compared to just 11 percent of those who were no longer in care. Conversely, 42 percent of the survey respondents who were no longer in care had been in care for at least 10 years compared to 22 percent of those who were still in care (Table 2). The difference between these two groups may shrink over time, depending on when the young people who were still in care exit.

Table 2. Years in care by care status

Time in care	Still in Care (n = 178)		Exited Care (n = 59)*	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Less than one year	3	2%	2	3%
1-3 years	45	25%	5	9%
4-6 years	49	28%	15	25%
7-9 years	29	16%	7	12%
10+ years	39	22%	25	42%
Do not know	10	6%	4	7%
Refused	3	2%	1	2%

*Includes youth who reported they had aged out, returned home, been adopted, or exited to guardianship.

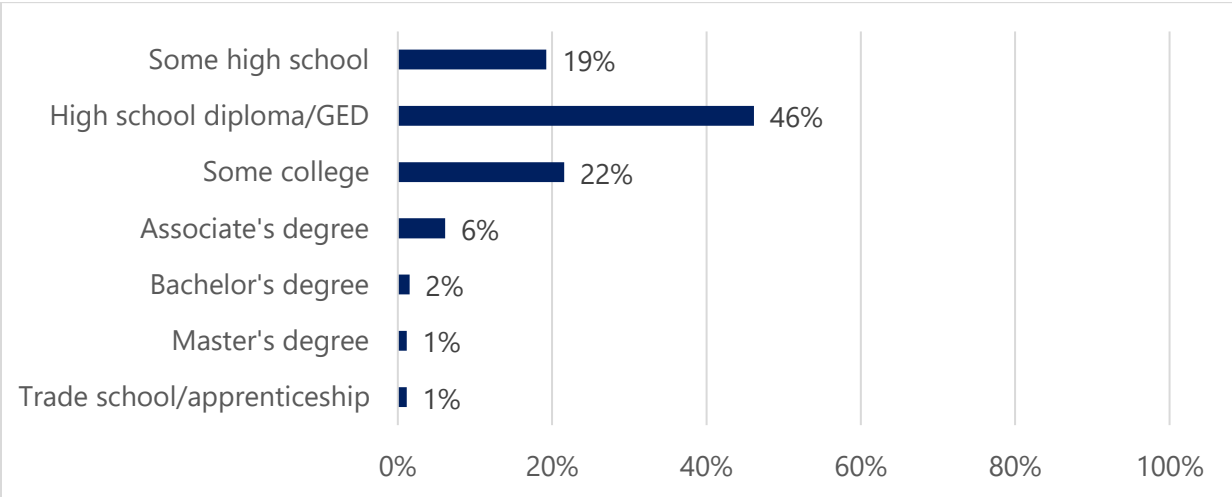
EDUCATION

The Youth Experiences Survey included several questions related to education.

Highest Level of Education Completed

Nearly half of the young people who responded to the survey had a high school diploma or GED, but one in five had not completed high school. Another 22 percent had completed some college and 8 percent had a two-or four-year college degree (Figure 11).

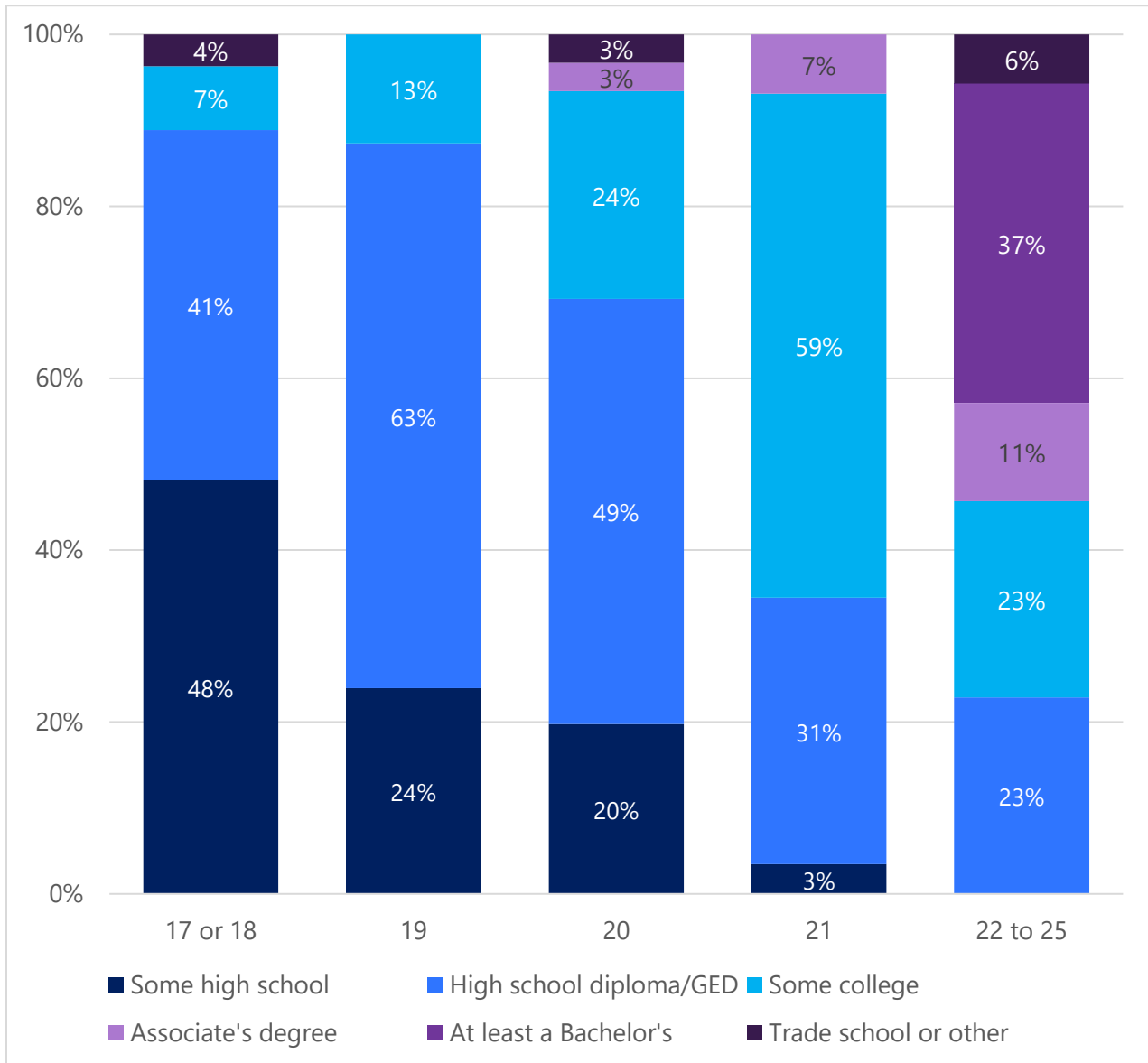
Figure 11. Highest level of education completed (N=260)



*2% of the survey respondents skipped the question, 1% declined to answer it, and <1% responded "other" (not shown).

Not surprisingly, the percentage of survey respondents who reported not having a high school diploma or GED declined with age (Figure 12). Conversely, the percentage of survey respondents with at least some postsecondary education or training increased with age.

Figure 12. Highest level of education completed by age (N = 260)



*2% of the survey respondents skipped one of the questions and 1% declined to answer one of the questions (not shown).

Two-thirds of the survey respondents who were receiving postsecondary educational (PSE) assistance (i.e., Youth in College, Youth in Scholarship, and tuition waivers) had completed at least some college compared to 15% of the survey respondents who were not receiving any postsecondary educational assistance (Table 3).⁵ It is not clear why one-third of the young people receiving postsecondary educational assistance reported that they had not completed any college. One possibility is that they had not yet finished their first semester.

⁵ One youth who identified as a Youth in College reported having completed "some high school."

Table 3. Highest level of education completed by receipt of PSE assistance (N=260)

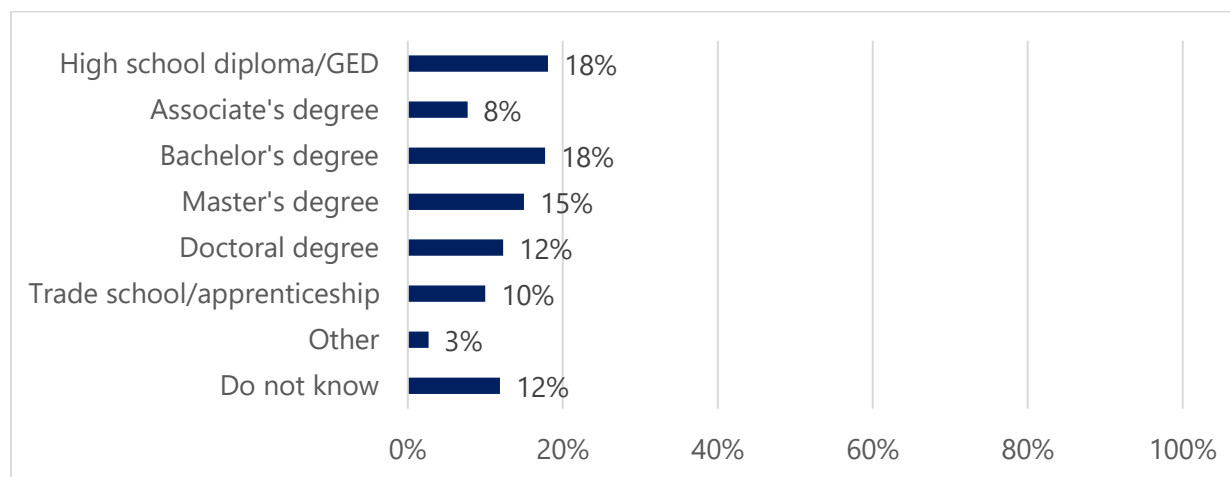
	No PSE Assistance		PSE Assistance*	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Some high school	49	28%	1	1%
High school diploma/GED	96	54%	24	31%
Some college	25	14%	31	40%
Associate's degree	2	1%	14	18%
Bachelor's degree	0	0%	4	5%
Master's degree	0	0%	3	4%
Trade school/apprenticeship	2	1%	1	1%
Other	1	1%	0	0%
Refused	3	2%	0	0%

*Includes Youth in College, Youth in Scholarship, and tuition waiver.

Educational Aspirations

Forty-five percent of the young people who responded to the survey aspired to earn at least a bachelor's degree. Conversely, nearly one in five did not aspire to earn more than a high school diploma or GED (Figure 13).

Figure 13. Educational aspirations (N=260)



*2% of the survey respondents skipped the question and 3% declined to answer it (not shown).

Eighty-five percent of the survey respondents who were receiving postsecondary educational assistance aspired to earn at least a bachelor's degree compared to 29 percent of the survey respondents who were not receiving postsecondary educational assistance (Table 4).⁶

⁶ One youth who identified as a Youth in College reported aspiring to earn only a high school diploma/GED.

Table 4. Educational aspirations by receipt of PSE assistance (N=256)*

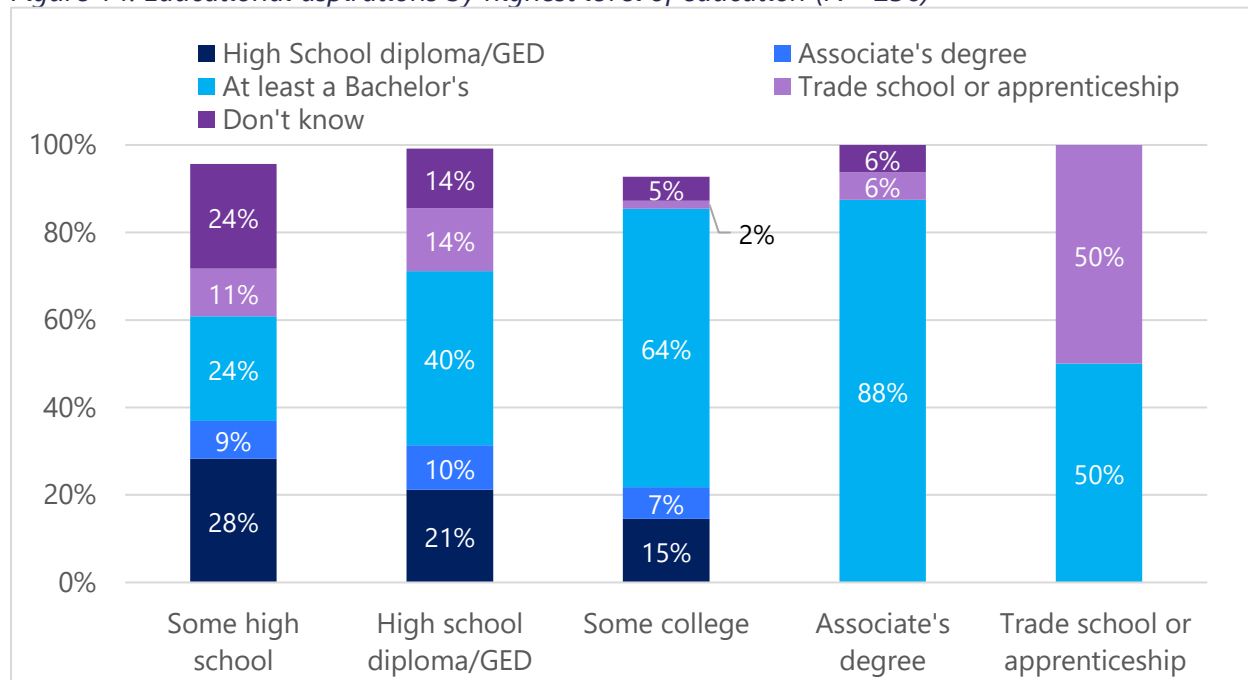
	No PSE Assistance		PSE Assistance+	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
High school diploma/GED	46	26%	1	1%
Associate's degree	16	9%	4	5%
Bachelor's degree	22	12%	24	31%
Master's degree	19	11%	20	26%
Doctoral degree	10	6%	22	28%
Trade school/apprenticeship	24	13%	2	3%
Do not know	28	16%	3	4%
Refused	7	4%	1	1%
Other	6	3%	1	1%

*Data are missing for 4 survey respondents who skipped the question about educational aspirations. One was receiving PSE assistance and three who were not.

+Includes Youth in College, Youth in Scholarship, and tuition waiver.

Thirty percent of the survey respondents who had not yet completed high school aspired to earn at least an associate's degree compared to nearly 50 percent of the survey respondents who had a high school diploma or GED but had not completed any college (Figure 14).

Figure 14. Educational aspirations by highest level of education (N =256)

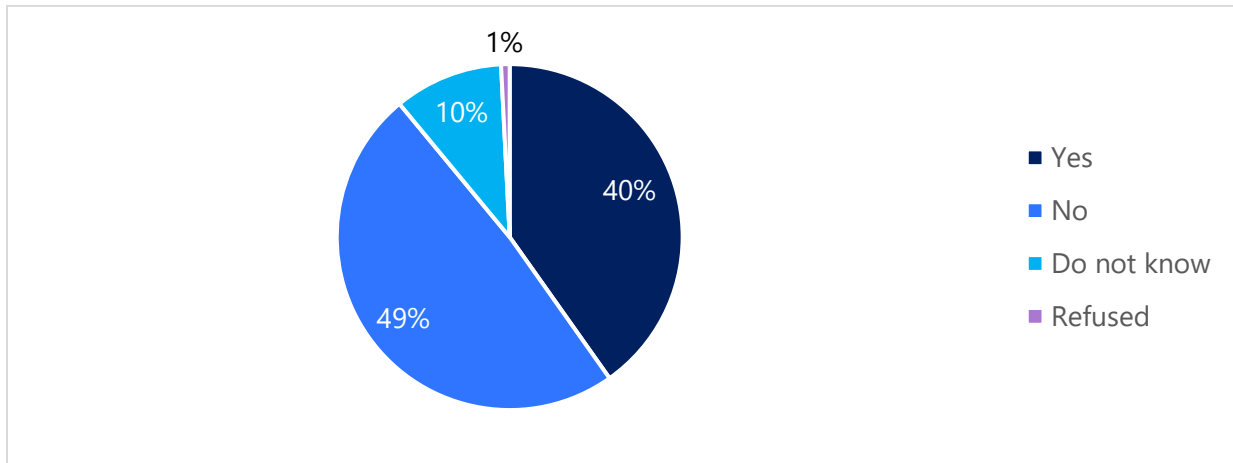


* Data are missing for 4 survey respondents who skipped or declined to answer the question about the highest level of education they had completed and/or the question about their educational aspirations (not shown).

Missed School

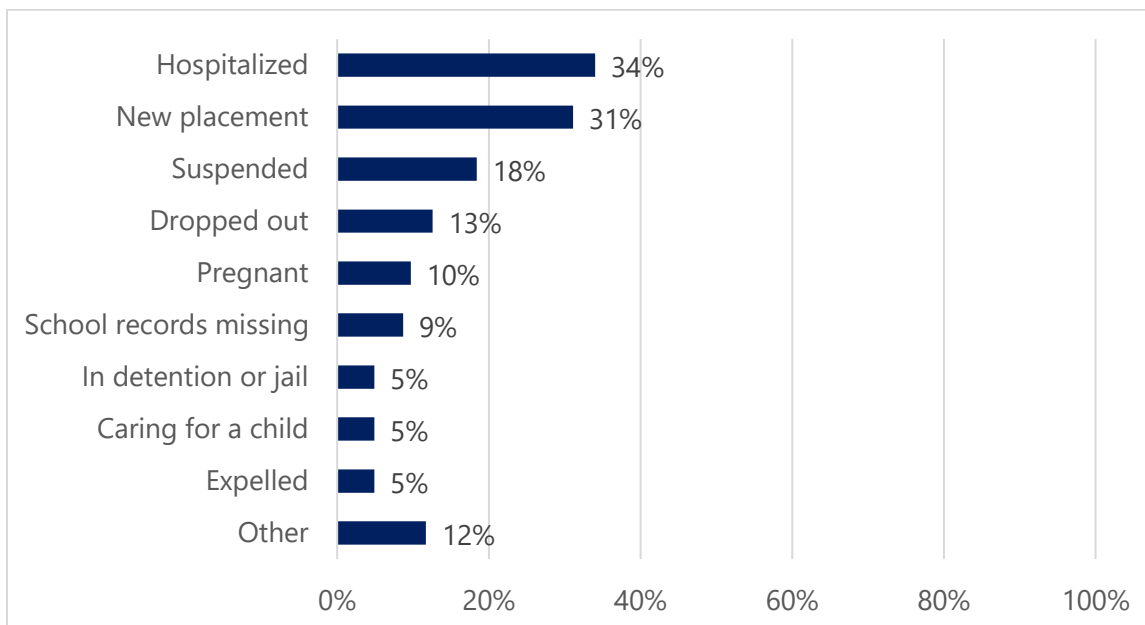
Forty percent of the young people who responded to the survey reported missing at least a week of school while in foster care (Figure 15).

Figure 15. Ever missed a week of school (N=260)



The two most common reasons these young people cited for missing a week or more of school were placement changes (31%) and hospitalizations (34%) (Figure 16).

Figure 16. Reasons for missing at least one week of school (n=103)



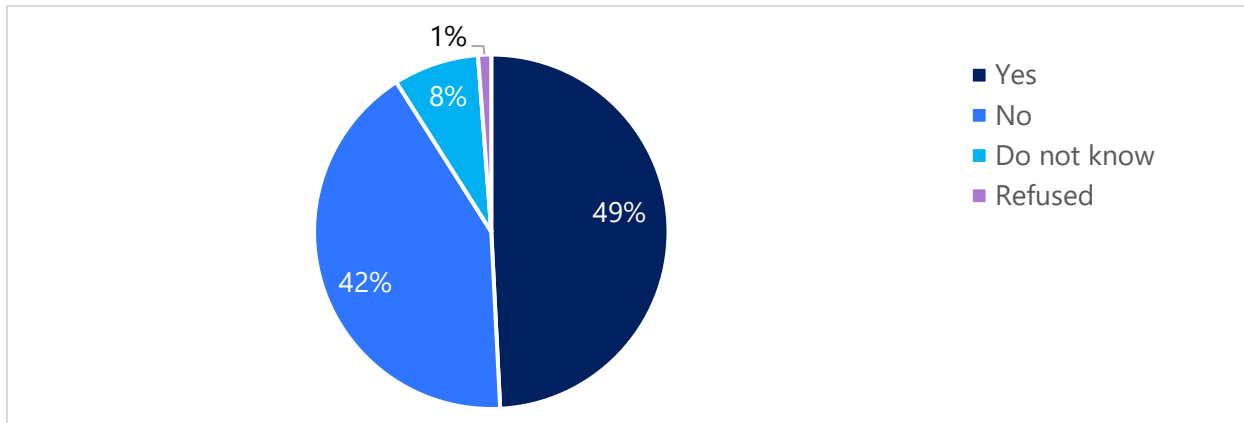
+ Survey respondents could choose more than one response option.

*21% of the survey respondents declined to answer the question (not shown).

Individual Education Plans (IEP)

Nearly half of the young people who responded to the survey reported having or having had an IEP (Figure 17).

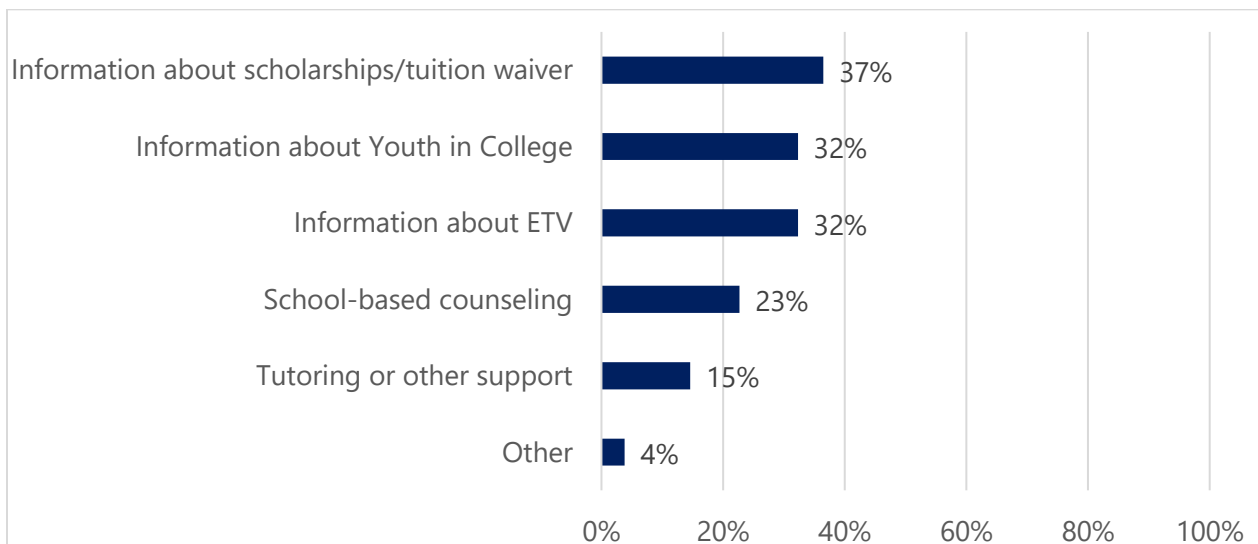
Figure 17. Individual Education Plan (N=260)



Educational Supports

Survey respondents were asked about five types of educational supports they might have received while in care (Figure 18). Sixty-seven percent of the young people reported receiving at least one of these supports. They were most likely to report receiving information about scholarships/the tuition waiver (37%). About one-third received information about Education and Training Vouchers (ETVs) (32%) or Youth in College (32%). See Appendix E for information about the educational supports provided to young people in care.

Figure 18. Educational supports received while in care (N=260)

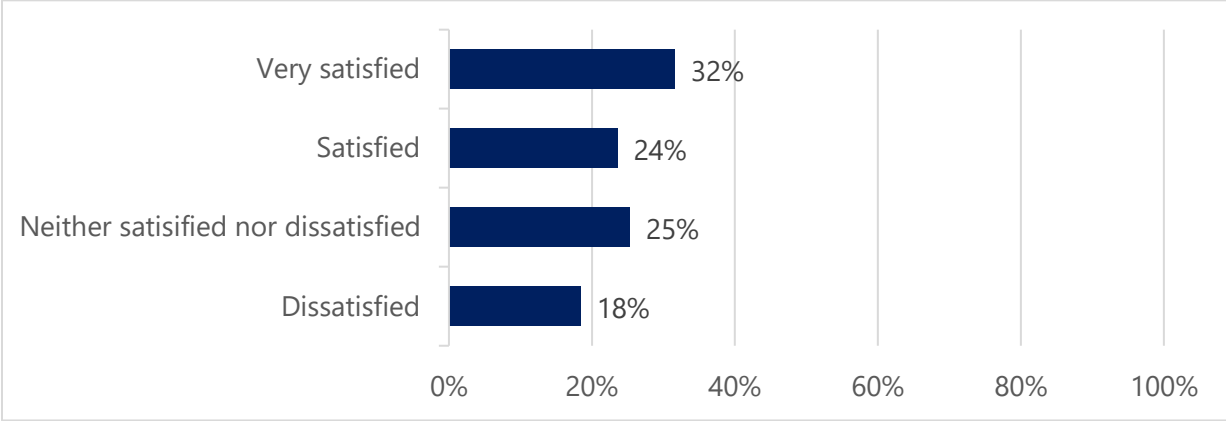


+Survey respondents could choose more than one response option.

* 23% of the survey respondents skipped the question and 12% reported not receiving any of the educational supports (not shown).

A majority (56%) of the young people who reported receiving at least one type of educational support were satisfied or very satisfied with the support they received. However, 18 percent of those who received at least one educational support were dissatisfied (Figure 19).

Figure 19. Satisfaction with education supports (n=175)



*1% of the survey respondents skipped the question (not shown).

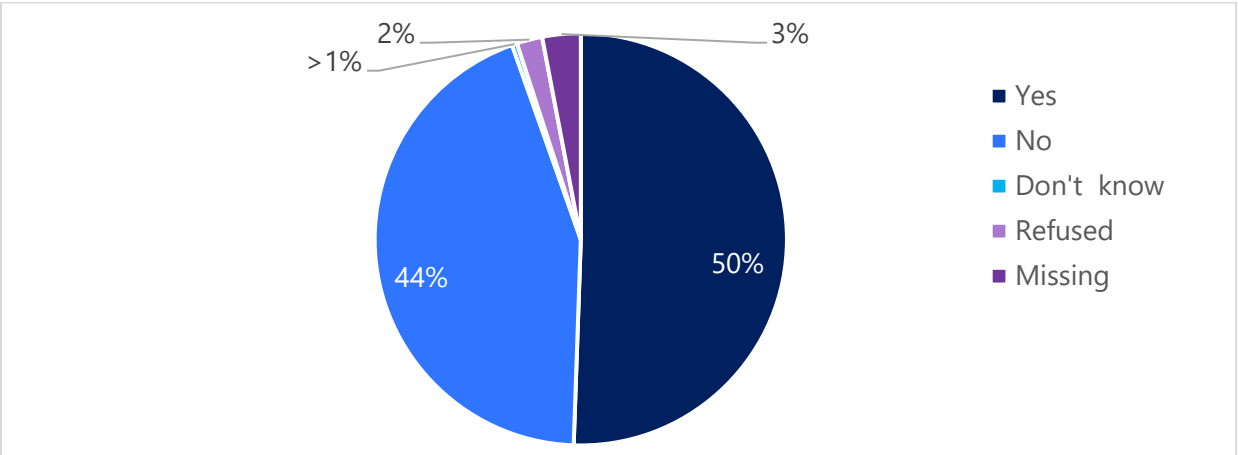
EMPLOYMENT

The Youth Experiences Survey included several questions related to employment.

Current Employment

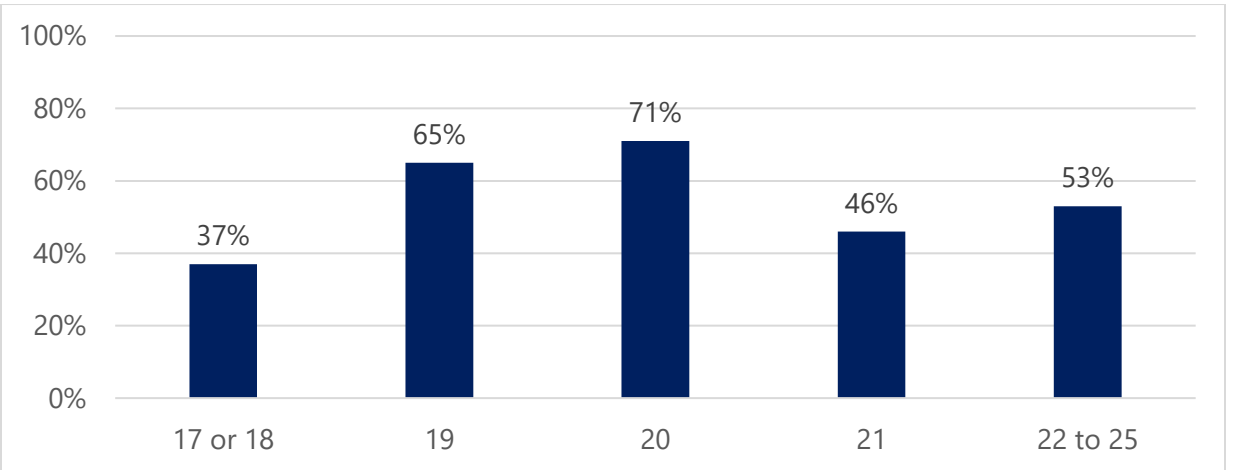
Half of the young people who responded to the survey were currently employed (Figure 20).

Figure 20. Current employment status (N=260)



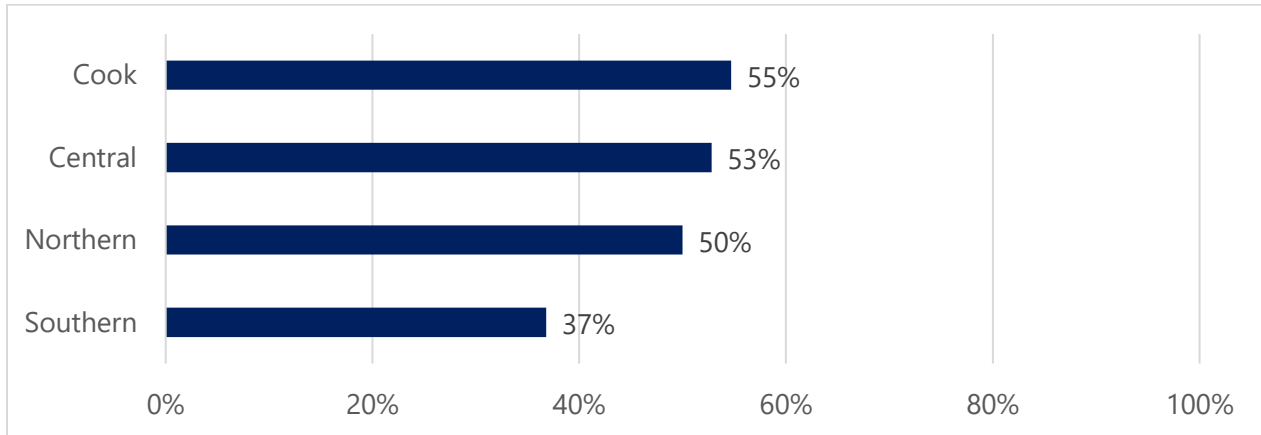
The 19 and 20-year old survey respondents were the most likely to be employed. (Figure 21).

Figure 21. Employment status by age (n=131)



Employment rates varied by DCFS Region. A majority of the survey respondents residing in the Cook County (55%), Central (53%), and Northern (50%) regions were currently employed compared to 37 percent of survey respondents living in the Southern region (Figure 22).

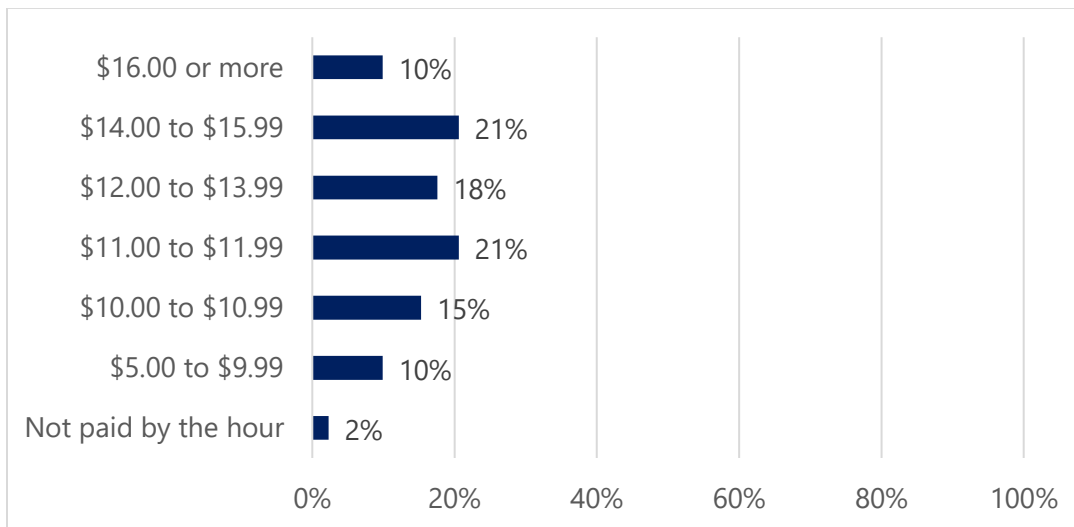
Figure 22. Employment status by region (n=257)*



* Three youth did not know which county they lived in. They are not included in these data.

Survey respondents who were employed reported a mean hourly wage of \$12.42. Nearly half of these young people report earning less than \$12 per hour (Figure 23).⁷

Figure 23. Hourly wage (n=131)

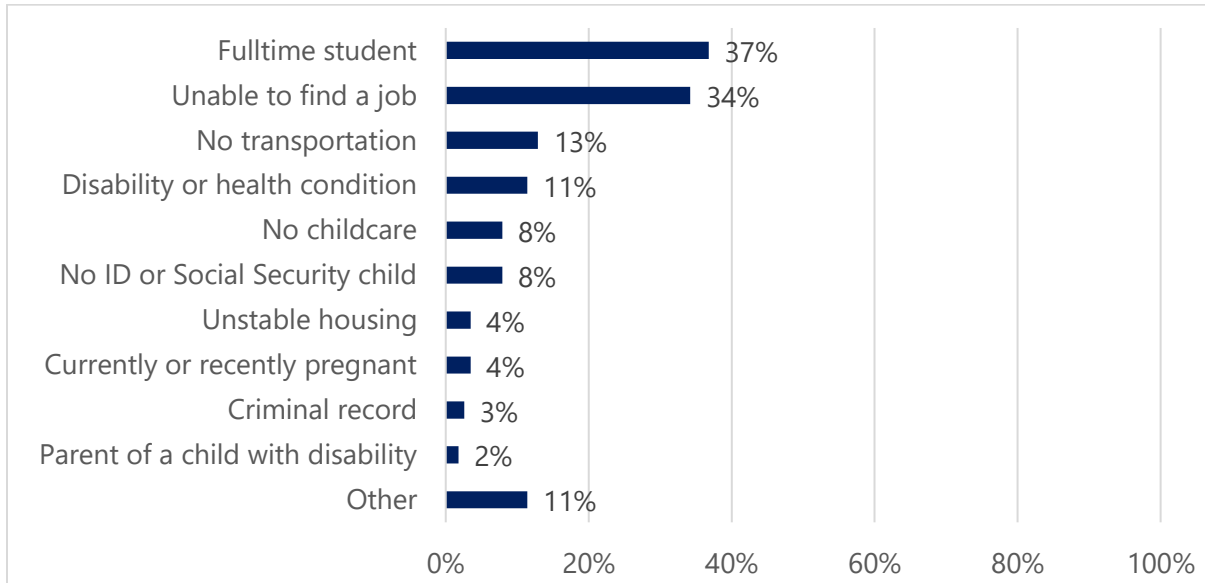


* Five employed youth did not answer the question (not shown).

By far, the most common reasons young people who were not employed cited for not working were being a full-time student (37%) and being unable to find a job (34%) (Figure 24).

⁷ The minimum hourly wage in Illinois rose from \$9.25 on January 1, 2020, to \$10.00 on July 1, 2020, to \$11.00 on January 1, 2021. However, Cook County and Chicago have a higher minimum wage.

Figure 24. Reasons not employed (n=114)



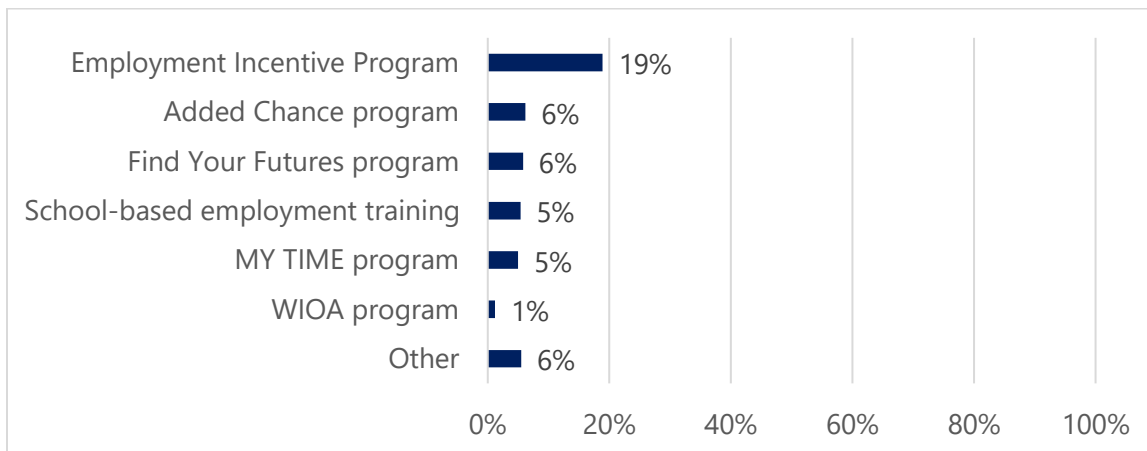
*Survey respondents could choose more than one response option.

*4% of the survey respondents skipped the question (not shown).

Employment Supports

Survey respondents were asked about six types of employment supports they might have received while in care (Figure 25). Thirty-eight percent of the young people reported receiving at least one employment support, and most of those young people reported receiving support from the Employment Incentive Program. See Appendix E for information about the employment supports provided to young people in care.

Figure 25. Employment supports received while in care (N=260)

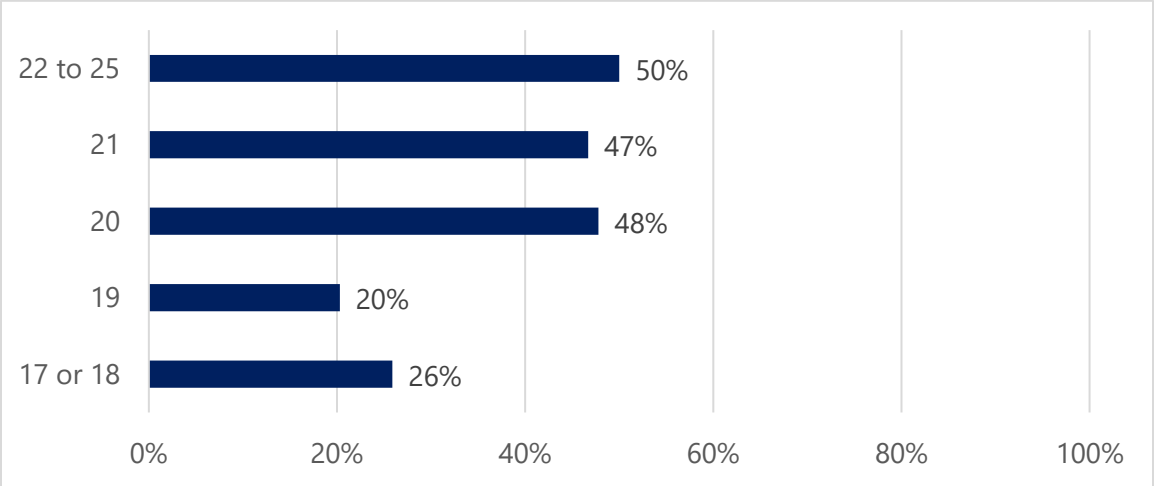


*Survey respondents could choose more than one response option.

*35% of the survey respondents skipped the question and 27% reported not receiving any of the employment supports (not shown).

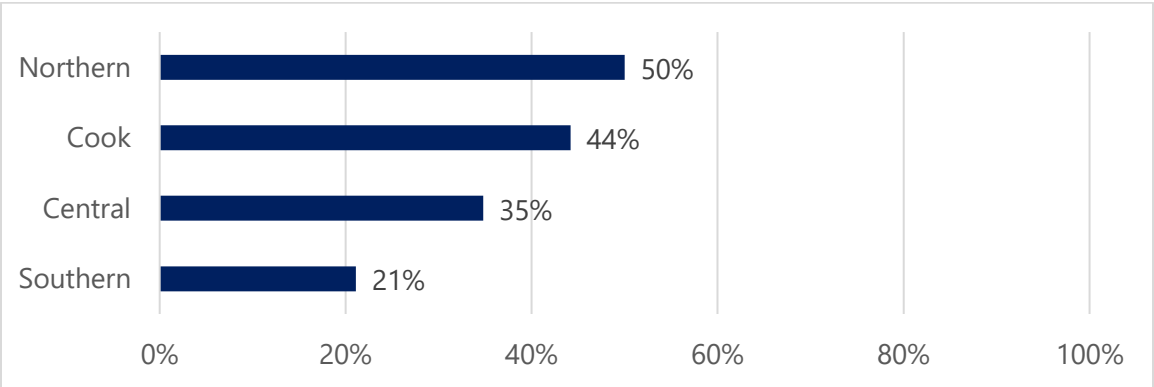
Receipt of employment supports varied widely by age. Survey respondents aged 20 and older were about twice as likely to report receiving at least one employment support than survey respondents aged 19 and younger (Figure 26). This could indicate that young people are not being referred to employment programs until they are close to aging out. Alternatively, it could also indicate that young people wait until they are close to aging out before they decide to participate in an employment program.

Figure 26. Receipt of employment supports by age (n=259)



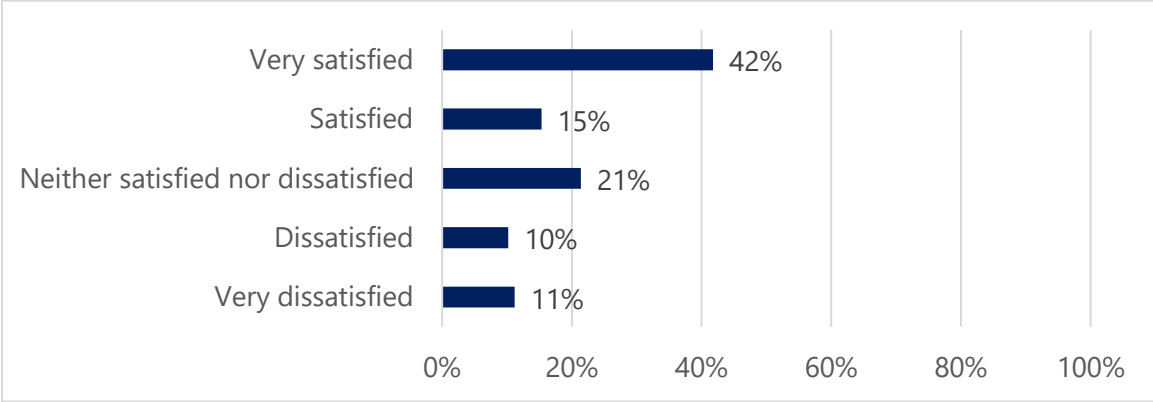
Receipt of employment supports also varied widely by region. Young people living in the Northern region were the most likely and young people living in the Southern region were the least likely to report receiving at least one employment support (50% and 21%, respectively) (Figure 27).

Figure 27. Receipt of employment supports by region (n=258)



Two-thirds of the young people who received at least one employment support reported being satisfied or very satisfied with the support that they received (Figure 28). However, 21 percent reported being dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

Figure 28. Satisfaction with employment supports (n=98)



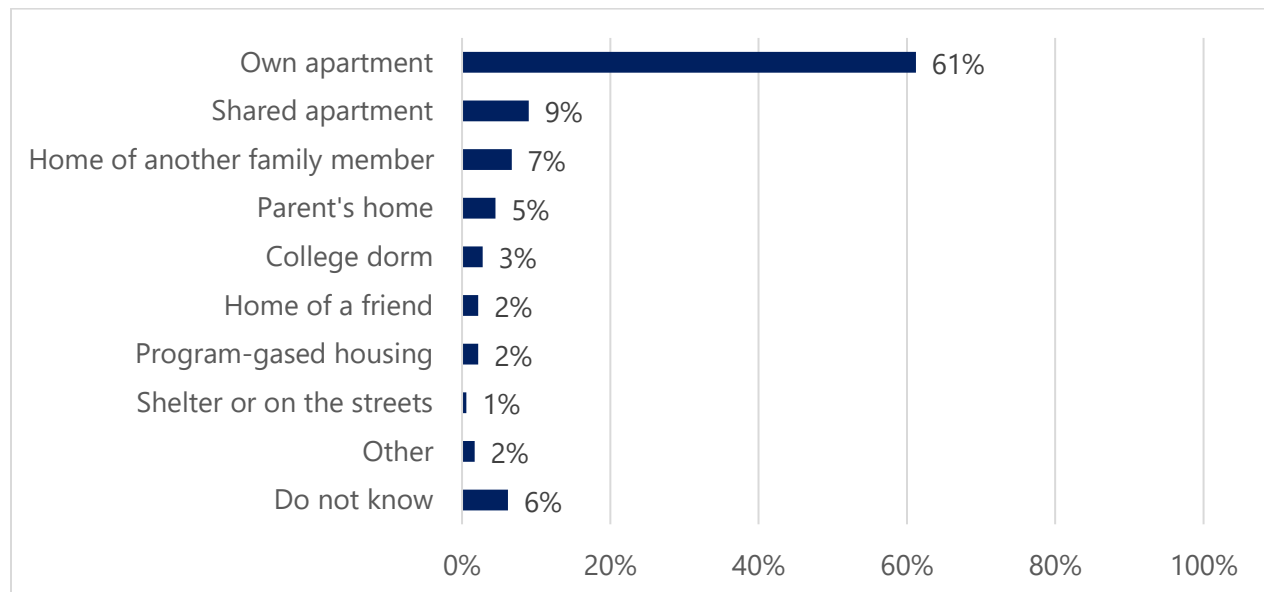
HOUSING

The Youth Experiences Survey included several questions related to housing.

Plans for Housing After Leaving Care

Survey respondents who were still in care were asked where they plan to live once they exit. By far, the most common response was their own apartment (Figure 29).

Figure 29. Plan for living arrangements after leaving care (n=178)



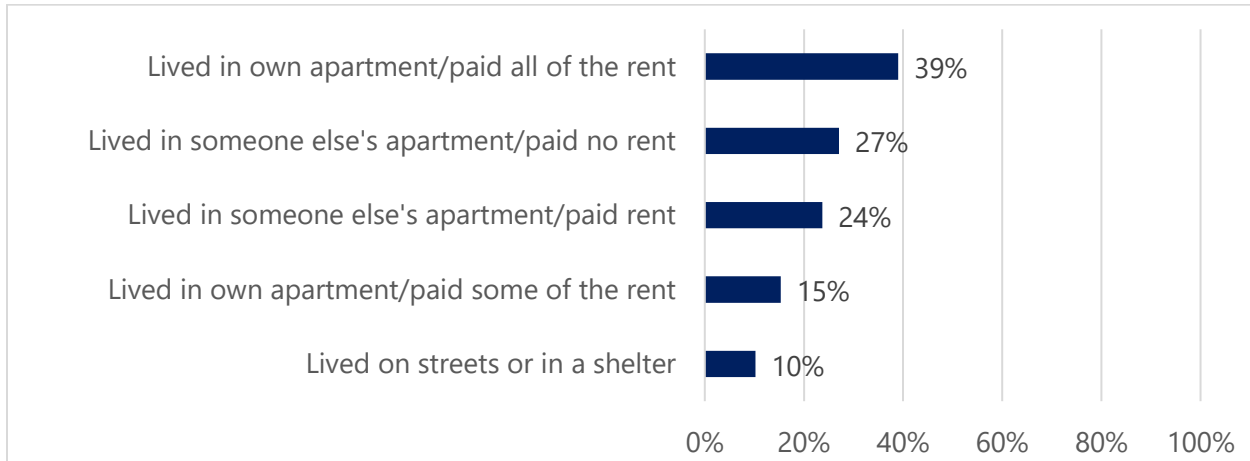
*2% of the survey respondents declined to answer the question and 1% skipped the question (not shown).

Living Arrangements Since Leaving Care

Survey respondents who were no longer in care were asked about living arrangements they may have experienced since they exited (Figure 30).⁸ Fifty-one percent of these young people reported ever living in someone else's apartment -- either while paying rent (24%) or while not paying rent (27%). Fifty-three percent reported ever living in their own apartment while paying all of the rent (39%) or some of the rent (15%). Ten percent reported ever living on the streets or in a shelter.

⁸ Includes youth who reported they had aged out, returned home, been adopted, or exited to guardianship.

Figure 30. Living arrangements since leaving care (n=59)



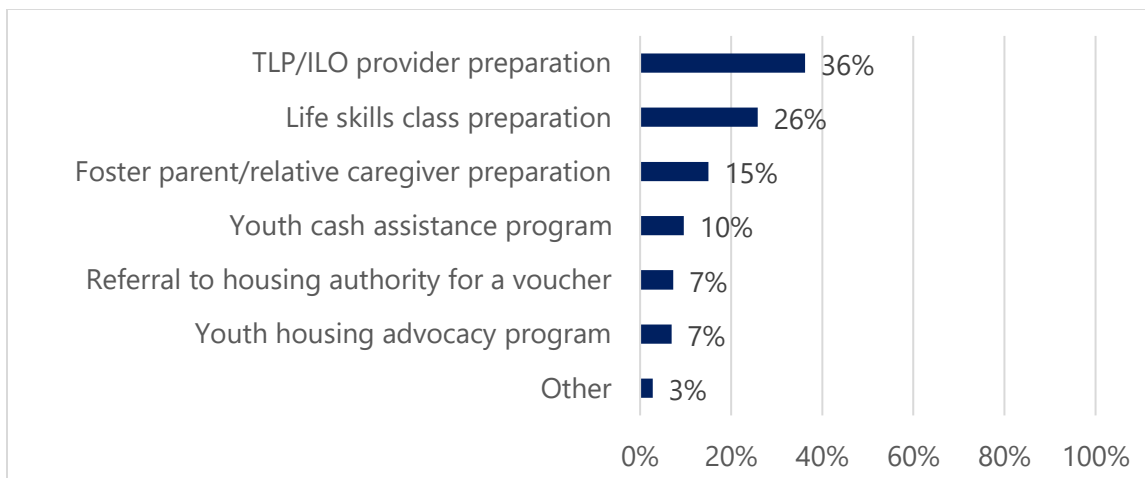
*Survey respondents could choose more than one response option.

**15% of the survey respondents skipped the question and 7% reported not experiencing any of the living arrangements (not shown).

Housing Supports

Survey respondents were asked about six types of housing supports they might have received while in care (Figure 31). Fifty-seven percent reported receiving at least housing support. These young people were most likely to report that a TLP or ILO provider (36%) or a life skills class (26%) had prepared them to address their housing needs. See Appendix E for information about the housing supports provided to young people in care.

Figure 31. Housing supports received while in care (n=260)

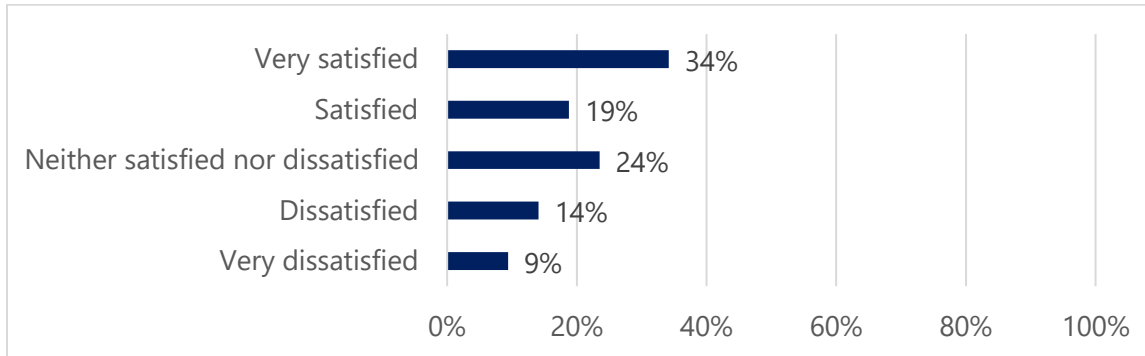


*Survey respondents could choose more than one response option.

*24% of the survey respondents skipped the question and 19% reported not receiving any of the housing supports (not shown).

Fifty-three percent of the young people who received at least one housing support reported being satisfied or very satisfied with the support that they received compared to 24 percent who reported being dissatisfied or very dissatisfied (Figure 32).

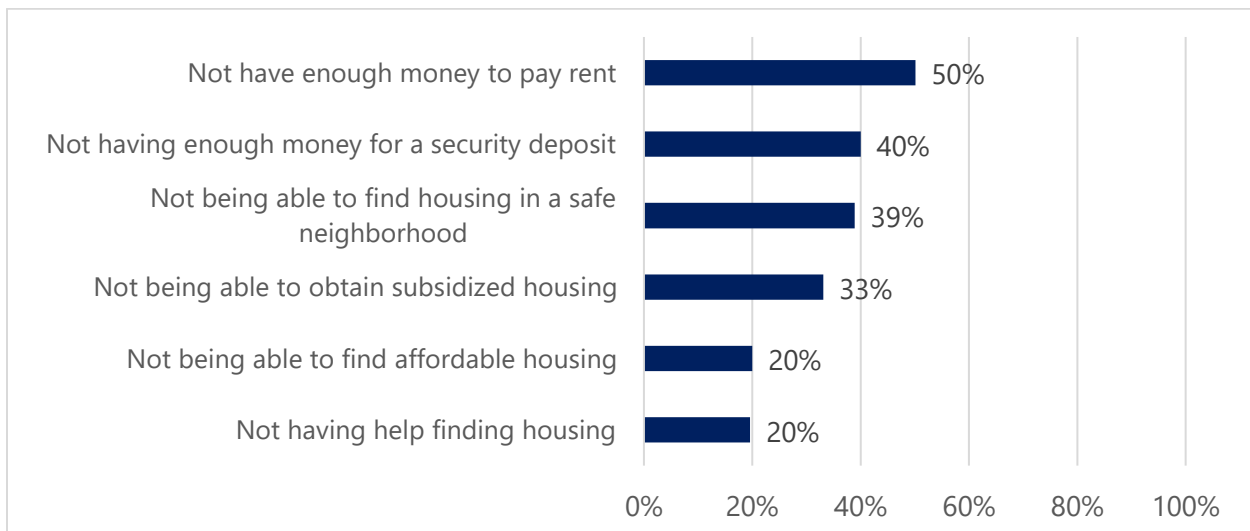
Figure 32. Satisfaction with housing supports (n=149)



Housing Concerns

Young people who responded to the survey were asked about several housing-related concerns they might have (Figure 33). They were most likely to report being somewhat or very concerned about not having enough money to pay rent (50%) and least likely to be somewhat or very concerned about not being able to find affordable housing (20%) and not having help finding housing (20%).

Figure 33. Housing challenges somewhat or very concerning (n=260)



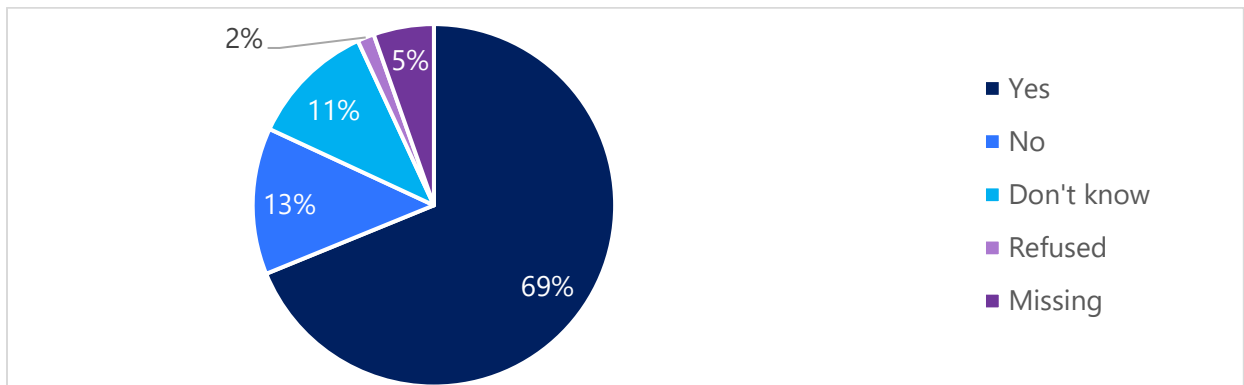
HEALTHCARE

The Youth Experiences Survey included a couple questions related to health care.

Primary Health Care Provider

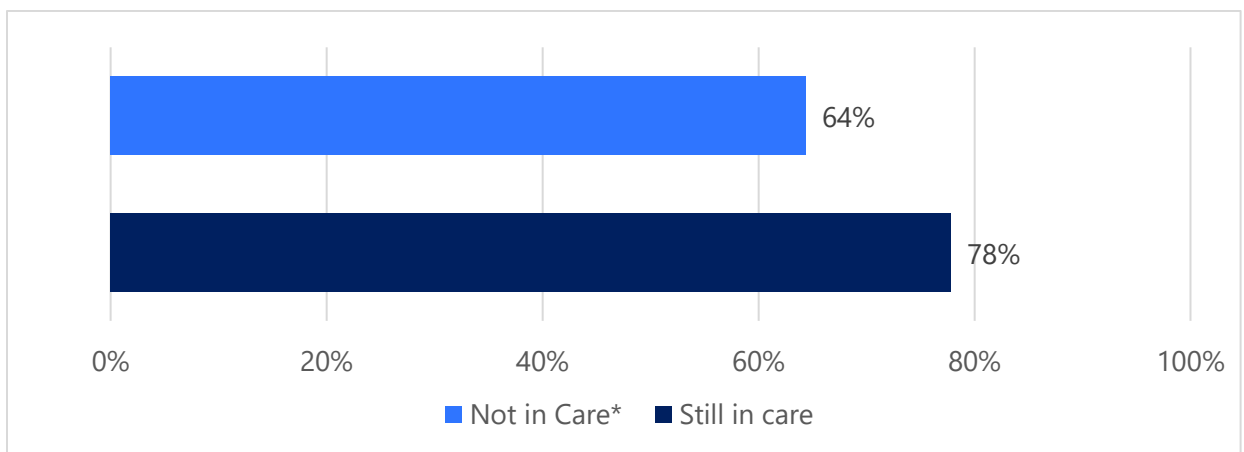
Over two-thirds of young people who responded to the survey reported having a primary healthcare provider (Figure 34).

Figure 34. Primary healthcare provider (N=260)



Survey respondents who were still in care were more likely to report having a primary healthcare provider than survey respondents who were no longer in care (Figure 35). It is worth noting that 22 percent of the young people who were still in care reported not having a primary healthcare provider.

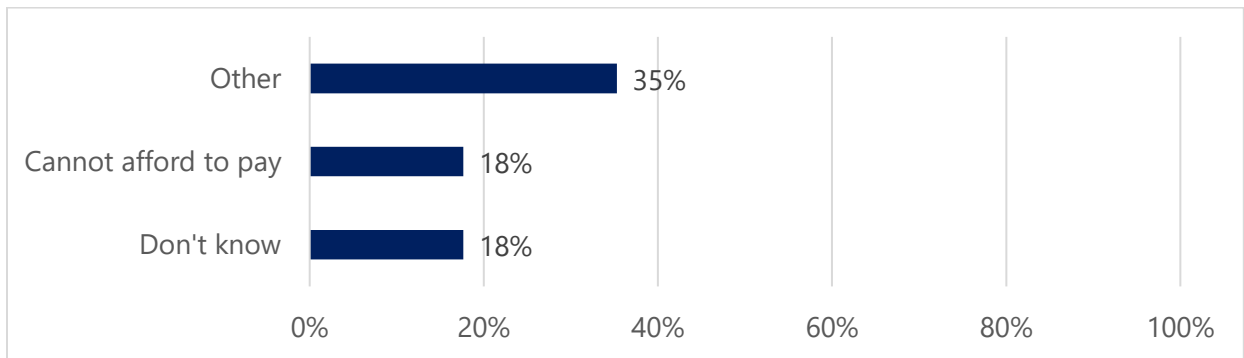
Figure 35. Primary healthcare provider by care status



*Includes youth who reported they had aged out, returned home, been adopted, or exited to guardianship.

The most common reason young people cited for not having a primary healthcare provider was not being able to afford healthcare (Figure 36), although over half of the young people without a primary healthcare provider did not cite a reason. No one cited not having health insurance, which may be because young people who age out of care are categorically eligible for Medicaid until age 26.

Figure 36. Reasons for not having a primary healthcare provider (n=34)



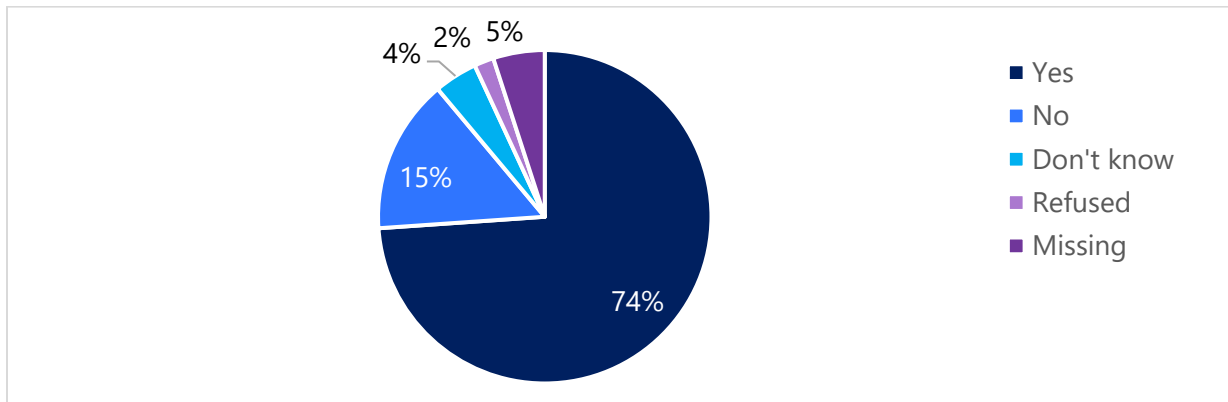
SOCIAL SUPPORT

The Youth Experiences Survey included a couple of questions related to social support.

Supportive Person

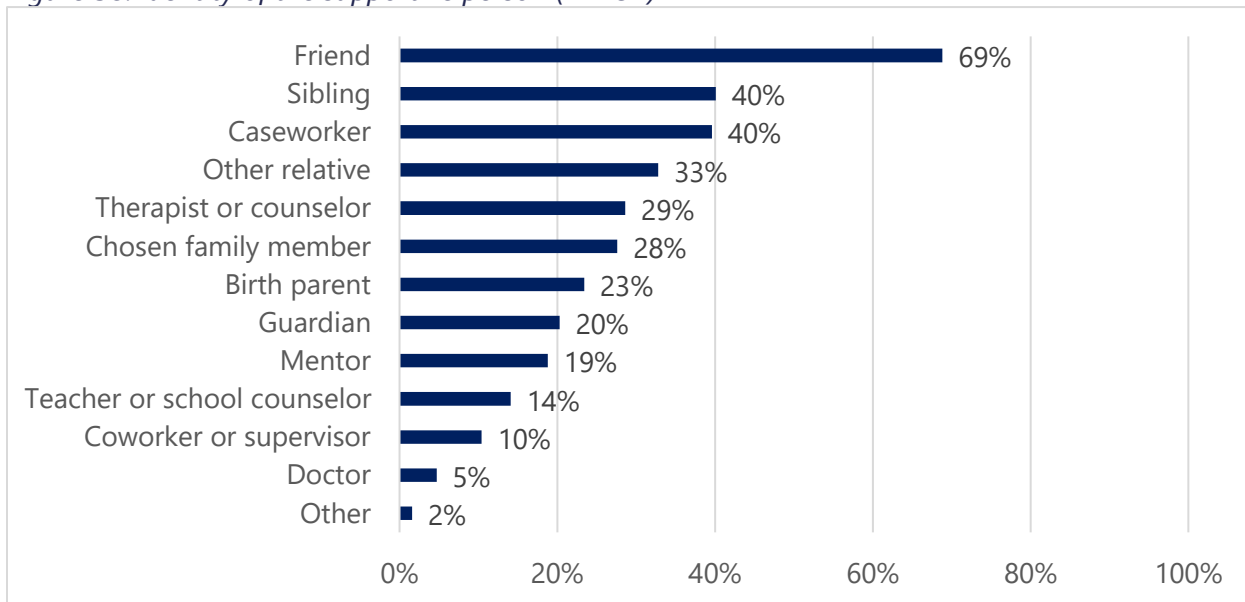
Nearly three-quarters of the young people who responded to the survey reported having at least one supportive person to turn to when feeling stressed, anxious, or depressed (Figure 37).

Figure 37. Supportive person to turn to (N=260)



The young people were most likely to identify that supportive person as a friend (69%), a sibling (40%), or a caseworker (40%) (Figure 38).

Figure 38. Identity of the supportive person (n=192)



*Survey respondents could choose more than one response option.

* < 1% of the survey respondents reported not knowing the identity of the support person and < 1% declined to answer the question (not shown).

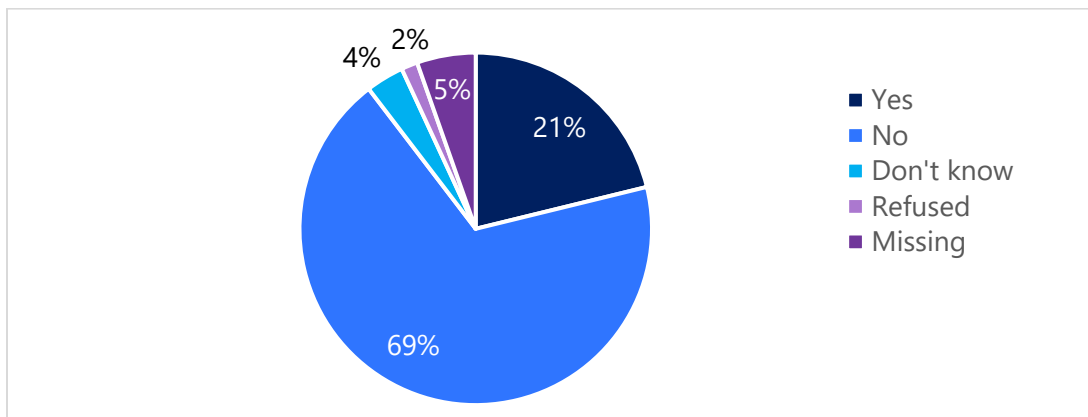
JUVENILE RECORDS

The Youth Experiences Survey included a couple of questions related to juvenile records.

Juvenile Records

Twenty-one percent of the young people who responded to the survey reported having a juvenile record (Figure 39).

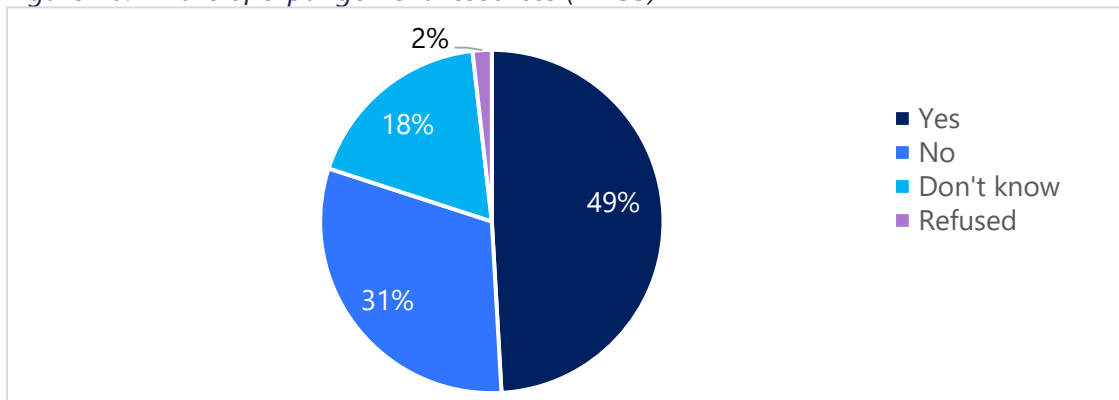
Figure 39. Juvenile record (N=260)



Awareness of Expungement Resources

Nearly half of the young people who report having a juvenile record were aware of expungement resources (Figure 40).

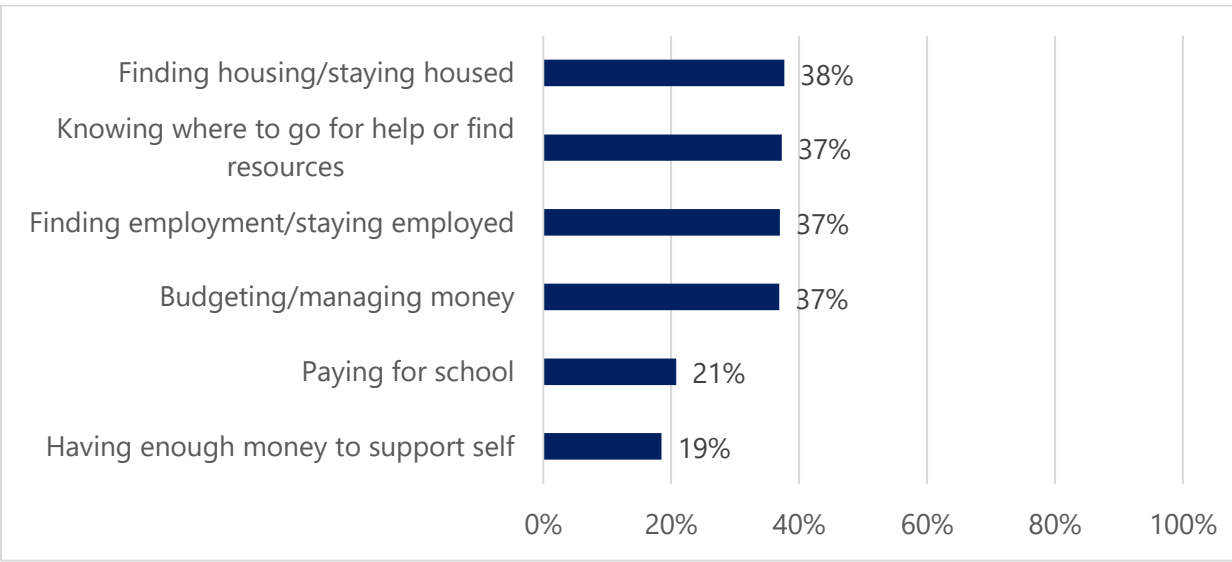
Figure 40. Aware of expungement resources (N=55)



FUTURE CONCERNS

At the end of the survey, young people were asked how concerned they are about six specific challenges they might face in the future. A little more than one-third of the young people reported being somewhat or very concerned about four of those challenges (Figure 41): finding housing and staying housed (38%), knowing where to go for help or finding resources (37%), finding employment and staying employed (37%), and budgeting or managing money (37%). Comparatively fewer young people reported being somewhat or very concerned about having enough money to support themselves (19%) or paying for school (21%).

Figure 41. Concerns about future challenges (n=260)



OPEN-ENDED RESPONSES

The final survey question asked young people if they had anything else they would like to share about the services and supports they received while in care. Forty-six young people responded to this open-ended question. Comments from eleven of those young people were quite positive. They praised their caseworker (n = 4), expressed gratitude for the services they received (n = 4), or noted that their needs had been met (n = 3). Some examples of their comments include:

I am extremely grateful for all of the programs that I participated in like the "Youth in College" program. Without them, I wouldn't have gotten as far as I have. I plan to graduate with my bachelor's degree in social work May 2021 and after I will be applying to graduate school to receive my master's in social work.

I am a Youth in College...I have nobody, no dad, no mother, nobody.... I want to be able to build the skills that I need so I can leave as successful as possible. I have worked VERY hard to... get what I need from DCFS before it's too late knowing that I have no one., I thank DCFS every second I can due to them being there when I was lost and confused .. in a way DCFS is my hero

I would say that I am very appreciative of the services DCFS gave me and now that it's almost time for me to graduate college. I feel like I will always have a sense of worry about my life but I do know that I have resources.

Comments from the other 35 young people were less positive and centered around six main themes: the lack of information provided by DCFS, particularly information about life "after care" (n = 15); complaints about treatment by caseworkers or staff (n = 10); complaints about placements (n = 4); the lack of concern on the part of DCFS about young people in care (n = 5); and the need for more supports (n = 6). Some examples of their comments include:

I feel that DCFS is a failure to many children. We spend most our lives being bounced around from home to home, school to school, separated from our siblings, abused and mistreated. I don't feel that DCFS genuinely cares about the youth. Caseworkers and staff are rude, manipulative and ultimately have no regard towards the youth's feelings or rights. While in care, I have been abused, mistreated, and left to my own defenses multiple times...The best thing about my life at this point is that I will no longer have to deal with being mistreated under the care of the government...Sometimes all we need is for someone to show us they're not giving up on us. Sometimes, all we need is love.

I haven't had much help in the past 6 months I'm not even sure who my caseworker is. I am not satisfied at all. It got to the point where I went out on my own and got an apartment

I just really feel like I should be getting more information for my future and how to go about getting in these different programs that can assist me when I have to age out.

I think there could be more support in showing [in] detail the help that youth in care can expect.

Neither the foster parents nor caseworkers have in ANY circumstances I've experienced been sufficiently trained on how to assist a transgender youth in care. Discrimination was one of my biggest adversaries and I felt that there was little to nothing done to help me in this regard. !!

The ETV and YIC programs a fantastic but can be egregiously difficult to coordinate with---especially on one's own behalf. [I] receiv[ed] the run-around when utilizing the very resources I was told to. Quite disheartening.

I been in the system for 6 years and I had a lot of different caseworkers...who don't do nothing, don't help me out and try to find resources I didn't know none of these programs even existed. My casework don't even tell me nothing. She tell me she gone find something out and never get back to me so I really didn't know.

DISCUSSION

Pursuant to the requirements of SB1743, the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services and its partners developed and administered a web-based survey to gather information about the experiences of young people who transitioned out of care or were preparing to age out. Between September 1, 2020, and September 15, 2021, 260 people who were currently or formerly in care responded to the survey.

Because the link to the web-based survey was distributed to multiple overlapping groups at different points throughout the year, we do not know how representative this sample of 260 young people is of the larger population of young people who were eligible to complete the survey. What we can say, however, is that the sample is demographically diverse and includes young people who have experienced different types of placements and spent varying amounts of time in care.

Here we briefly summarize the major findings related to education, employment, and housing as well as the other topics covered by the survey. We also suggest some potential next steps for addressing some of the gaps in services and supports that the survey findings revealed.

Education

Educational attainment was highly correlated with age. Most of the young people age 19 or older had completed high school and a substantial minority had completed at least some postsecondary education, although relatively few had a college degree. About half of the young people had missed at least a week of school while they were in care, largely due to placement changes or hospitalizations. Approximately two-thirds had received at least one educational support. Information about DCFS programs that could help them pay for college was the most common type of support young people received.

Next Steps

To increase the percentage of young people in care who benefit from educational supports and the percentage who pursue postsecondary education, the Department has agreed to take the following actions:

- Continue to partner with the Illinois State Board of Education and local school districts to ensure that young people in care have access to tutoring and other academic supports.
- Continue to encourage young people in care to discuss postsecondary educational options with high school counselors and child welfare caseworkers.
- Increase awareness of postsecondary educational supports available to young people through the Department.
- Gather additional information from young people in care during the transition planning process about barriers to accessing the postsecondary educational supports available through the Department and develop a plan to address those barriers.

Employment

About half of the young people were currently employed. This is consistent with the results of prior studies of young people aging out of care in Illinois.^{9 10} The average hourly wage of those who were employed was \$12.42. Most young people who were not working were either full-time students or unable to find a job. Only 38 percent of the young people had received at least one employment support, with the Employment Incentive Program being the most common.

Next Steps

To increase the percentage of young people in care who benefit from employment supports and the percentage of young people who report that they are employed, the Department has agreed to take the following actions:

- Increase awareness of employment programs for young people in care that are funded by the Department and for young people in the general population and promote participation in those programs, including the soon-to-be-launched virtual job readiness program for young people ages 16 to 21.
- Gather additional information from young people in care during the transition planning process about the types of employment supports they need as well as barriers to accessing those supports and develop a plan to address those barriers.

Housing

About six in ten of the young people who were still in care planned to live in their own apartment when they exit. Just over half of the young people who were no longer in care had lived in their own apartment since exiting. About the same share had lived in an apartment that belonged to someone else. Ten percent of these young people had spent at least some time living on the streets or in a shelter. Fifty-seven percent of the young people had received at least housing support, with help from a TLP or ILO provider being the most common.

Next Steps

To increase the percentage of young people in care who benefit from housing supports and reduce the percentage of young people who are at risk for homelessness after leaving care, the Department has agreed to take the following actions:

- Increase awareness of the Department's Youth Housing Advocacy and Youth Cash Assistance programs.

⁹ Courtney, M., **Dworsky, A.**, Ruth, G., Tom Keller, Havlicek, J., & Bost, N. (2005). *Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Age 19*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children. https://www.chapinhall.org/wp-content/uploads/Courtney_Midwest-Evaluation-Adult-Functioning_Report_2005.pdf

¹⁰ Courtney, M., **Dworsky, A.**, Ruth, G., Havlicek, J., Perez, A., & Keller, T. (2007). *Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Age 21*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children. <https://www.chapinhall.org/wp-content/uploads/Midwest-Eval-Outcomes-at-Age-21.pdf>

- Refer more eligible young people to local housing authorities for Family Unification Program and Foster Youth Independence vouchers.
- Increase the number of young people with federally funded Family Unification Program (FUP) or Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) vouchers who can be served by the Youth Housing Advocacy program.
- Expand eligibility for the Youth Housing Advocacy program to all young people who age out of care until they are 23 years old.
- Gather additional information from young people in care during the transition planning process about the types of housing supports they need.

Healthcare

About seven in ten young people reported having a primary healthcare provider.

Next Steps

To increase the percentage of young people in care who can identify their primary healthcare provider, the Department has agreed to take the following actions:

- Gather more information to better understand why some young people currently or formerly in care do not have a primary healthcare provider.
- Develop and implement a plan to ensure that all young people in care have a primary healthcare provider.
- Ensure that all young people leaving care have a plan for accessing primary healthcare once they exit.
- Educate young people currently or formerly in care about YouthCare HealthChoice Illinois, a specialized healthcare program designed to address the needs of young people, currently or formerly in care. Young people can use the YouthCare HealthChoice Illinois website (<https://www.ilyouthcare.com/>) to find a primary healthcare provider.

Social Support

About three-quarters of the young people reported having at least one supportive person to turn to when feeling stressed, anxious, or depressed. Friends, siblings, and caseworkers were identified as their most common supports.

Next Steps

To increase the percentage of young people in care who can identify a person to whom they can turn for support, the Department has agreed to take the following actions:

- Continue to train child welfare caseworkers to help young people build their network of social supports and engage with young people in ways that are perceived as supportive.

Juvenile Records

About one in five young people reported having a juvenile record but only half of those young people knew about expungement.

Next Steps

To increase the percentage of young people in care who know about having their records expunged, the Department has agreed to take the following actions:

- Increase awareness among youth people who have experienced justice system involvement about record expungement resources.

Future Concerns

A little over one-third of the young people reported being somewhat or very concerned about each of the following: finding housing and staying housed; finding employment and staying employed; budgeting and money management; and knowing where to go for help or finding resources.

Next Steps

To reduce the percentage of young people in care who are somewhat or very concerned about housing, employment, budgeting/money management, and resources, the Department has agreed to take the following actions in addition to the actions noted above:

- Encourage young people to complete the financial literacy training as part of Countdown to 21.
- Provide young people with a list of state and local resources in both the public and private sectors that they can turn to for assistance after they leave care.

CONCLUSION

Young people in care require a variety of services and supports to make a successful transition into adulthood. Those services and supports should be available to young people regardless of their characteristics, the type of placement they are in, or the part of the state in which they live. The results of this survey suggest that some young people are receiving the services and supports they need while other young people are not receiving those services and supports. The Department has already identified several steps that it will take to ensure that more young people in care are aware of and receiving the service and supports they need.

Although SB 1743 only mandates that the foster care survey be administered every five years, the Department has decided to administer the survey annually. The Department will also collaborate with its partners to revise the survey that was administered this past year to include some additional topics including services and supports for young people who identify as LGBTQ+ young people who are pregnant or parenting, and young people who have other specialized needs.

APPENDICES

- Appendix A. Youth Experiences Survey
- Appendix B. Notice to DCFS and POS Caseworkers, Administrators, and Supervisors; and Countdown to 21 Facilitators
- Appendix C. Notice to TLP/ILO Caseworkers, Administrators, and Supervisors; and TLP/ILO DCFS-Monitoring Staff
- Appendix D. SB 1743 Youth Survey FAQ
- Appendix E. Office of Education and Transition Services' Getting There Tip Sheets

APPENDIX A. YOUTH EXPERIENCES SURVEY



Youth Experiences Survey

Demographics

This was developed by DCFS with input from Foster Care Alumni of America, Statewide Youth Advisory Board, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign School of Social Work, and Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. The survey is designed to give young people an opportunity to provide feedback to DCFS about the services and supports they received. Your participation in the survey will

* 1. Which of the following best describes you?

Check all that apply.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Residing in a TLP/ILO | <input type="checkbox"/> PAC (Placement Alternative Contract) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Youth in College | <input type="checkbox"/> None of the above |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Youth in Scholarship | <input type="checkbox"/> Do not know |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tuition Waiver recipient | <input type="checkbox"/> Decline to answer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Living with foster parent or relative caregivers | |

* 2. How old are you?

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 17 | <input type="checkbox"/> 21 | <input type="checkbox"/> 25 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 18 | <input type="checkbox"/> 22 | <input type="checkbox"/> 26 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 19 | <input type="checkbox"/> 23 | <input type="checkbox"/> Decline to answer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 20 | <input type="checkbox"/> 24 | |

* 3. What pronouns do you currently use?

He/Him/His

I do not use pronouns

She/Her/Hers

Decline to answer

They/Them/Their

Other (please specify)

* 4. What is your race or ethnicity?

Check all that apply

White or Caucasian

Black or African American

Hispanic or Latino

Native American or American Indian

Asian or Pacific Islander

Decline to answer

Other (please specify)

* 5. Are you currently pregnant or a parent?

Yes

No

Do not know

Decline to answer

* 6. Altogether, how long were or have you been in foster care?

Less than 1 year

10+ years

1-3 years

Do not know

4-6 years

Decline to answer

7-9 years

* 7. In what Illinois county do you live?



Youth Experiences Survey

Education 1

* 8. What is the highest level of education you have COMPLETED?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Some high school | <input type="radio"/> Master's degree |
| <input type="radio"/> High school diploma/GED | <input type="radio"/> Trade school/apprenticeship |
| <input type="radio"/> Some college | <input type="radio"/> Do not know |
| <input type="radio"/> Associate's degree | <input type="radio"/> Decline to answer |
| <input type="radio"/> Bachelor's degree | |
| <input type="radio"/> Other (please specify) | |

* 9. What is the highest level of education you hope to complete?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> High school diploma/GED | <input type="checkbox"/> Doctoral degree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Associate's degree | <input type="checkbox"/> Trade school or apprenticeship |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bachelor's degree | <input type="checkbox"/> Do not know |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Master's degree | <input type="checkbox"/> Decline to answer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) | |

* 10. Do/did you have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) that allowed you to receive special education services in school?

- Yes
- No
- Do not know
- Decline to answer

* 11. Did you ever miss at least ONE WEEK of school WHILE YOU WERE IN CARE?

- Yes
- No
- Do not know
- Decline to answer



Youth Experiences Survey

Education 2

* 12. Why did miss at least ONE WEEK of school WHILE YOU WERE IN CARE?

Check all that apply.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I moved to a new placement. | <input type="checkbox"/> I could not enroll in school because I did not have my school records. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I was pregnant. | <input type="checkbox"/> I dropped out of school. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I was caring for my child/children. | <input type="checkbox"/> I was in detention, jail or prison. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I was hospitalized. | <input type="checkbox"/> Do not know |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I was suspended. | <input type="checkbox"/> Decline to answer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I was expelled. | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) | |



Youth Experiences Survey

Education 3

* 13. Which of the following educational services or supports have you received/did you receive WHILE YOU WERE IN CARE?

- I received guidance from DCFS Youth in College or Office of Education staff.
- I received information about college scholarships or the tuition waiver.
- I received information about the Education and Training Voucher (ETV) program.
- I received tutoring or other academic support.
- I received an education service or support not listed. Please specify.
- I received school-based counseling.
- I did not receive any educational services or supports.
- Do not know
- Decline to answer



Youth Experiences Survey

Education 4

14. On a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is very dissatisfied and 5 is very satisfied, **how satisfied are you with the educational services and supports that you received WHILE YOU WERE IN CARE?**

1	2	3	4	5
Š	Š	Š	Š	Š



Youth Experiences Survey

Employment 1

* 15. Do you currently have a job for which you are paid?

- Yes
- No
- Do not know
- Decline to answer



Youth Experiences Survey

Employment 2

* 16. Why do you believe you do not have a job?

Check all that apply.

- I have been unable to find a job.
 - I don't have stable housing.
 - I have a criminal record.
 - I don't have access to transportation.
 - I don't have a current State ID or Social Security Card.
 - I am a full-time student.
 - Other (please specify)
- I don't have childcare.
 - I have a disability or health condition.
 - I am the parent of a child with a disability or health condition.
 - Do not know
 - Decline to answer



Youth Experiences Survey

Employment 3

17. What is your hourly wage? (Example: \$9.25)



Youth Experiences Survey

Employment 4

* 18. Which of the following employment services or supports have you received/did you receive WHILE YOU WERE IN CARE?

Check all that apply.

- I participated in the Employment Incentive Program.
- I participated in the Find Your Futures program.
- I participated in a Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) program.
- I did not receive any employment services or supports.
- I participated in an employment training program through my school.
- Do not know
- I participated in the MY TIME program.
- Decline to answer
- I participated in the Added Chance program.
- I received an employment service or support not listed. Please specify.



Youth Experiences Survey

Employment 5

19. On a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is very dissatisfied and 5 is very satisfied, **how satisfied were you with the employment services and supports you received WHILE YOU WERE IN CARE?**

1	2	3	4	5
§	§	§	§	§



Youth Experiences Survey

Social Support 1

* 20. Do you have someone you can turn to for support when you are feeling stressed, anxious, or depressed?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know
- Decline to answer



Youth Experiences Survey

Social Support 2

* 21. Which of the following people can you turn to for support when you are feeling stressed, anxious, or depressed?

Check all that apply.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Birth Parent | <input type="checkbox"/> Doctor |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sibling | <input type="checkbox"/> Coworker/Supervisor |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other Relative | <input type="checkbox"/> Mentor |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Friend | <input type="checkbox"/> Guardian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Caseworker | <input type="checkbox"/> Chosen family member |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher/School Counselor | <input type="checkbox"/> Do not know |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Therapist/Counselor | <input type="checkbox"/> Decline to answer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) | |



Youth Experiences Survey

Healthcare 1

* 22. Do you have a primary healthcare provider?

- Yes
- No
- Do not know
- Decline to answer



Youth Experiences Survey

Healthcare 2

* 23. Why do you believe you do not have a primary healthcare provider?

Check all that apply:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I don't live near any healthcare providers. | <input type="checkbox"/> I don't think I need a primary healthcare provider. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I don't have health insurance. | <input type="checkbox"/> Do not know |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I cannot afford to pay for health care. | <input type="checkbox"/> Decline to answer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) | |



Youth Experiences Survey

Criminal Justice 1

* 24. Do you have a juvenile record?

- Yes
- No
- Do not know
- Decline to answer



Youth Experiences Survey

Criminal Justice 2

* 25. Are you aware of the resources that are available to help you expunge or seal your juvenile records?

- Yes
- No
- Do not know
- Decline to answer



Youth Experiences Survey

Housing 1

26. Which of the following best describes you?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am still in care. | <input type="checkbox"/> I exited care to guardianship. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I aged out of care. | <input type="checkbox"/> Do not know |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I was returned home. | <input type="checkbox"/> Decline to answer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I was adopted. | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) | |



Youth Experiences Survey

Housing 2

* 27. Where do you plan to live after you leave care?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="radio"/> In my own apartment | <input type="radio"/> In a college dorm |
| <input type="radio"/> In a shared apartment | <input type="radio"/> In program-based housing (e.g., Job Corps) |
| <input type="radio"/> In my parent's home | <input type="radio"/> On the streets or in a shelter |
| <input type="radio"/> In the home of another family member | <input type="radio"/> Do not know |
| <input type="radio"/> In the home of a friend | <input type="radio"/> Decline to answer |
| <input type="radio"/> Other (please specify) | |



Youth Experiences Survey

Housing 3

* 28. Which of the following have you done SINCE LEAVING CARE?

Check all that apply.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I paid all the rent for my own apartment/house. | <input type="checkbox"/> I lived on the streets or in a homeless shelter. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I paid a portion of the rent for my own apartment/house. | <input type="checkbox"/> None of the above |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I paid rent to someone whose apartment/house I was living in. | <input type="checkbox"/> Do not know |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I lived with someone but did not pay rent. | <input type="checkbox"/> Decline to answer |

* 29. Below is a list of concerns you may have about housing. Please rate how concerned you are about each on a scale from 1 to 4 where 1 is not at all concerned and 4 very concerned.

	Not at all concerned	A little concerned	Somewhat concerned	Very concerned	Decline to answer
Not having enough money to pay rent	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Not having enough money for a security deposit	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Not having help finding housing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Not being able to find affordable housing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Not being able to find housing in a safe neighborhood	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Not being able to obtain subsidized housing (e.g., Section 8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 30. Which of the following types of housing-related services or supports have you received/did you receive WHILE YOU WERE IN CARE?

- Youth Cash Assistance Program helped me obtain housing or kept me housed.
 - Youth Housing Advocacy Program helped me find housing or kept me housed.
 - TLP or ILO provider helped prepare me to address my future housing needs.
 - Foster parent or relative caregiver helped prepare me to address my future housing needs.
 - Life skills classes helped prepare me to address my future housing needs.
 - I received a housing-related employment service or support not listed.
- Caseworker referred me to a housing authority to obtain a housing voucher.
 - I did not receive any housing-related services or supports.
 - Do not know
 - Decline to answer



Youth Experiences Survey

Housing 4

31. On a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is very dissatisfied and 5 is very satisfied, **how satisfied were you with housing-related services and supports you received?**

1

2

3

4

5

§

§

§

§

§



Youth Experiences Survey

Future Concerns

* 32. Below is a list of concerns you may have about your future. Please rate how concerned you are about each with 1 being not at all concerned and 4 being very concerned.

	Not at all concerned	A little concerned	Somewhat concerned	Very concerned	Decline to answer
Find housing or staying housed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Finding employment or staying employed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Paying for school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Having enough money to support myself	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Being able to budget or manage my money	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Knowing where to go for help or where to find resources	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Youth Experiences Survey

Additional Comments

33. Please share anything else you would like us to know about the services and supports you received while in care that we have not asked about?



Youth Experiences Survey

Please click on the link below. It will take you to a new webpage where you will be asked to provide the address to which you want your gift card sent.

34. <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/J7XQRHJ>

APPENDIX B. NOTICE TO DCFS AND POS
CASEWORKERS, ADMINISTRATORS, AND
SUPERVISORS; AND COUNTDOWN TO 21
FACILITATORS



To: All DCFS and POS Caseworkers, Administrators, and Supervisors; and Countdown to 21 Facilitators

In 2019, the Illinois State legislature enacted S.B. 1743¹¹ This law requires the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) to gather feedback via a survey from transition-age youth about the services and supports they have received. The survey was created by DCFS in partnership with the Illinois Statewide Youth Advisory Board, the Foster Care Association of America-Illinois Chapter, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign School of Social Work, and Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

The survey questions cover a number of domains including education, employment, social support, healthcare, criminal justice, and housing. At the end of the survey is an open-ended question which asks youth to share any additional feedback they might have. The survey is expected to take about 20 minutes to complete and response will be anonymous.

Once youth complete the survey, they will be directed to a separate webpage where they will be asked to provide information needed to send them a \$10 universal gift card. Gift card deliveries will be batched monthly and may take a few weeks to process.

The survey will be administered to young people attending Countdown to 21 meetings at ages 19 and 20 from September 1, 2020 to August 31, 2021. It will also be administered to youth participating in DCFS postsecondary education programs (e.g., Youth in College, Education and Training Voucher recipients). The survey results will be summarized in a report for the state legislature no later than December 1, 2021.

Please encourage youth to participate in the survey. In cases where a youth would benefit from special assistance with this type of task, please provide appropriate support as you normally would. This survey offers an opportunity for our youth to help improve the services and supports that are provided to young people in DCFS care.

Survey link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/YouthExperiencesSurvey>

¹¹<http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/BillStatus.asp?DocTypeID=SB&DocNum=1743&GAID=15&SessionID=108&LegID=119064>

If you have any questions about the survey, please contact Evanee Neville at evanee.neville2@illinois.gov

Thank you very much for your support of this effort!

Survey Script with Youth

Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) is interested in improving the services and supports it provides to youth who are transitioning out of care. You are invited to complete a short survey that asks about your experiences while in care and the services and supports that you received. Your responses to the questions will be anonymous, so **please be honest**. The results of the survey will be summarized in a report for the Illinois state legislature.

Upon completing the survey, you will be directed to a separate website that will ask you for your contact information. This information will only be used to send you a \$10 universal gift card. Please allow up to a few weeks to receive your incentive for participating.

Please take this opportunity to complete the survey, so that DCFS can improve the services and supports it provides to youth like you who will be transitioning out of care. Your feedback matters! With your help, we can improve services to other transition-age youth, just like you.

The survey link is here:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/YouthExperiencesSurvey>

APPENDIX C. NOTICE TO TLP/ILO
CASEWORKERS, ADMINISTRATORS, AND
SUPERVISORS; AND TLP/ILO DCFS-
MONITORING STAFF



To: All TLP/ILO Caseworkers, Administrators, and Supervisors; and TLP/ILO DCFS-Monitoring Staff

In 2019, the Illinois State legislature enacted S.B. 1743 1 This law requires the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) to gather feedback via a survey from transition-age youth about the services and supports they have received. The survey was created by DCFS in partnership with the Illinois Statewide Youth Advisory Board, the Foster Care Association of America-Illinois Chapter, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign School of Social Work, and Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

The survey questions cover a number of domains including education, employment, social support, healthcare, criminal justice, and housing. At the end of the survey is an open-ended question which asks youth to share any additional feedback they might have. The survey is expected to take about 20 minutes to complete and response will be anonymous. Once youth complete the survey, they will be directed to a separate webpage where they will be asked to provide information needed to send them a \$10 universal gift card. Gift card deliveries will be batched monthly and may take a few weeks to process.

The survey will be administered to young people in ILO/TLP placements starting 08/03/21 through 09/15/21. Our goal is to complete data collection for this year's report by September 15, 2021. The first-year survey results will be summarized in a report for the state legislature no later than **December 1, 2021**. Even though we are summarizing results by September 15th, the survey will continue every year. We will summarize responses each year and produce a summative report in another five years.

Please encourage youth to participate in the survey. In cases where a youth would benefit from special assistance with this type of task, please provide appropriate support as you normally would. This survey offers an opportunity for our youth to help improve the services and supports that are provided to young people in DCFS care.

Survey link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/YouthExperiencesSurvey>
[1http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/BillStatus.asp?DocTypeID=SB&DocNum=1743&GAID=15&SessionID=108&LegID=119064](http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/BillStatus.asp?DocTypeID=SB&DocNum=1743&GAID=15&SessionID=108&LegID=119064)

If you have any questions about the survey, please contact Evanee Neville at evanee.neville2@illinois.gov

Thank you very much for your support of this effort!

Survey Script with Youth

Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) is interested in improving the services and supports it provides to youth who are transitioning out of care. You are invited to complete a short survey that asks about your experiences while in care and the services and supports that you received. Your responses to the questions will be anonymous, so **please be honest**. The results of the survey will be summarized in a report for the Illinois state legislature.

Upon completing the survey, you will be directed to a separate website that will ask you for your contact information. This information will only be used to send you a \$10 universal gift card. Please allow up to a few weeks to receive your incentive for participating. Please take this opportunity to complete the survey, so that DCFS can improve the services and supports it provides to youth like you who will be transitioning out of care. Your feedback matters! With your help, we can improve services to other transition-age youth, just like you.

The survey link is here:
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/YouthExperiencesSurvey>

APPENDIX D. SB 1743 YOUTH SURVEY FAQ

SB 1743 Youth Survey FAQ

1. When should Countdown to 21 (C21) facilitators first introduce the survey to youth?

Facilitators should introduce the survey during the scheduling of the youth's next C21 meeting.

2. How many times should youth complete the survey?

Youth should only complete the survey once between September 1, 2020 and August 31, 2021. Youth will only receive one gift card regardless how many times they complete it.

3. When should youth complete the survey?

Youth should complete the survey prior to their C21 meeting this year.

4. How long does the survey take to complete?

The survey should take about 15-20 minutes to complete.

5. What should facilitators or caseworkers do if you need assistance completing the survey?

Facilitators and caseworkers should encourage youth to ask a trusted adult for help completing the survey if they need it. An adult youth would feel comfortable inviting to their C21 meeting would be a good choice.

6. What should youth do if there is a problem with the survey link?

Youth should contact Evanee Neville at Evanee.Neville2@illinois.gov if there is a problem with the survey link.

7. When should youth be reminded to complete the survey?

Youth should be reminded to complete the survey at the beginning and end of their C21 meeting (if they have not already completed it).

8. How will youth receive the gift card?

The gift card will be mailed to address provided by the youth at the end of the survey.

9. How long will it take for youth to receive the gift card?

It will take at least three weeks for youth to receive the gift card.

10. Who should youth contact regarding issues or concerns regarding gift cards?

Youth should contact Evanee Neville at Evanee.Neville2@illinois.gov with gift card questions.

11. What is the time period for survey data collections?

Survey data will be collected from September 1, 2020 to August 31, 2021.

12. How often will the survey be administered?

State law requires DCFS to administer the survey every five years.

13. How is this survey different from other surveys of transition-age youth in DCFS care?

This survey was created in response to a new state law that requires DCFS to gather feedback via a survey from transition-age youth about the services and supports they have received.

14. Who created this survey?

This survey was created by a group that include representatives from DCFS, researchers, and current and former youth in care.

15. How will the survey results be used?

The survey results could help **improve services and supports for transition-age youth**. They could lead to changes in practice within DCFS and contracting agencies. Because the survey results will be reported to the Illinois legislature, they could also inform changes in the state’s child welfare policies.

16. How has policy been informed or driven by youth voice in the past?

Examples of policies that have been informed or driven by youth voice include:

- *Foster Children’s Bill of Rights Act*, which provides foster youth with basic rights such as to live in a safe, healthy, and comfortable home where they are treated with respect
- *Illinois Normalcy Act*, which directs agencies and placements to facilitate age-appropriate experiences for youth in care to support normalcy and promote permanency
- *Keeping Sibling Connected Initiative*, which encourages siblings to be placed in the same home and mandates that youth in care be told where their siblings live and how to contact them.

17. When will findings become available to C21 facilitators?

DCFS is required to provide the state legislature with a report based on the survey results by December 1, 2021. The findings will be available to facilitators after that date.

APPENDIX E. OFFICE OF EDUCATION AND TRANSITION SERVICES GETTING THERE TIP SHEETS



The Decision to Leave DCFS Care: Are You Ready?

Available programs to assist with attaining self-sufficiency

DCFS will provide the following programs to aid in the transitioning process.

YOUTH IN COLLEGE (YIC)/VOCATIONAL TRAINING PROGRAM

- Ages 16-21 AND youth in care only
- Monthly grant
- Books (not covered by financial aid)
- Possible assistance with tutoring

YOUTH IN SCHOLARSHIP (YIS)

- Ages 16-21; youth in care, aged out at 18+, adopted or in guardianship placement
- 53 merit-based awards per year
- Medical card & monthly grant
- Books (not covered by financial aid)
- Possible assistance with tutoring for youth in care

EMPLOYMENT/JOB TRAINING/APPRENTICESHIP INCENTIVE PROGRAM

- Ages 17-21; youth in care only
- \$168 monthly grant with documentation of Employment, Job Training Program, Apprenticeship
- Benefits available also to youth who aged out of care at age 18+, adopted or in guardianship placement, for approved Apprenticeships only

EDUCATION & TRAINING VOUCHER (ETV)

(Maximum \$5,000 annual award to youth meeting eligibility)

- Possible uses of vouchers: tuition payment, books, housing, uniforms, supplies, transportation, and trade school
- School must be listed as accredited at www.ope.ed.gov/accreditation/Search.aspx

TUITION AND FEE WAIVER

- Youth in care, aged out at 18+, adopted or in guardianship placement.
- Tuition and fee waiver at an Illinois community college or public university

Caseworkers assist all eligible youth in care with preparation for the following

- Transitional Living Program (TLP)
- Independent Living Options (ILO)
- YIC, Scholarship Program, EIP, ETV

For more info call DCFS Office of Education and Transition Services at 217-557-2689

Illinois Department of

DCFS
Child Care & Family Services



Annual High School Academic Plan Meeting

WHAT: The **Annual High School Academic Plan (CFS 407 HS)** is completed by the caseworker during the Annual High School Academic Plan Meeting at the start of each school year, August through October. Caseworkers are to convene a meeting where the student's academic progress is reviewed, problems/issues are discussed, and post-secondary planning is begun. The form is to be brought to the youth's next Administrative Case Review.

WHY: To ensure that all DCFS youth are prepared for post-secondary education, vocational training, or employment, and that they learn about the department's programs that support their plans. Academic problems or issues that are identified during this meeting will be addressed, and communication with school counselors, other relevant school staff is encouraged.

WHO: Caseworkers, youth, caregivers, school counselors and other relevant school staff should be included in order to fully address each youth's individual situation and plans. If youth has an IEP, is lacking credits, or has other specific educational issues, a NIU education advisor may be invited to participate in the meeting.

THE ANNUAL HIGH SCHOOL ACADEMIC PLAN • YEAR BY YEAR

Freshman Year	Sophomore Year
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review academic progress from elementary school/middle school & identify strengths Identify possible future goals related to career options and/or academic interests Review DCFS transitional services for youth 14 and older Use the Casey Life Skill Assessment in the discussion Discuss study habits, and any study/support groups or other supports/resources that may be needed, i.e. tutoring Identify possible extra-curricular activities Complete the Education Profile (CFS 407-4) Complete the AHSAP, including goals for current year, and distribute copies to student, caregiver, counselor, and education advisor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review progress from freshman year: is this youth on track academically? Acknowledge accomplishments Identify any educational problems or issues Review discussion from Freshman year regarding academic and/or vocational interests Student visit www.careercounseling.com if needed to clarify career interests Discuss opportunities for internships, dual credit programs, mentors, volunteer experiences as appropriate Begin to explore possible post-secondary colleges and vocational programs Register for PSAT if appropriate Communicate with school counselor as needed Complete the AHSAP, including goals for current year, and distribute copies to student, caregiver, counselor, and education advisor
<p style="text-align: center;">Junior Year</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review progress from sophomore year: is this youth on track academically? Acknowledge accomplishments Discuss graduation requirements Identify any educational problems or issues Focus on post-secondary goals Involve the school counselor to identify colleges, universities, or vocational programs of interest; take tours Notify youth re: www.collegezone.com to gather information related to school options, financial aid, college costs, scholarships Arrange for youth to register and prepare for ACT/SAT Complete the AHSAP, including goals for current year, and distribute copies to student, caregiver, counselor, and education advisor 	<p style="text-align: center;">Senior Year</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review academic progress, graduation requirements and post secondary options Discuss graduation requirements Review post-secondary options available to DCFS youth, decide which apply for their situation Outline youth's responsibilities in applying for DCFS programs Finalize list of colleges, universities, or vocational training options and note application deadlines List out tasks for youth related to college or vocational program admission Assist youth in completing FAFSA in October of the graduation year Apply for DCFS Scholarship in January Complete the AHSAP, including goals for current year, and distribute copies to student, caregiver, counselor, and education advisor



DCFS Office of Education and Transition Services Life Skills Program

The Life Skills Program is designed to enhance youth independent living skills while promoting economic and social self-sufficiency. Caseworkers utilize the Casey Life Skills Assessment to establish an individual base line for the life skills needs of each youth. Individualized transition plans, goals and timelines are developed to include youth, caregiver and caseworker involvement. Life skills training can consist of group and/or individual instructions, and may include hands-on training. Youth will receive a \$168 stipend for completing the entire life skills course.

- DCFS must have a legal relationship with the youth.
- Youth must be ages 14 through 20.

Youth must reside in substitute care. Placements include, but not limited to, situations such as Foster Home Private (FHP), Home of Relative (HMR), Foster Home Adoptive (FHA), Foster Home Boarding (FHB), or Youth in College (YIC), etc.

Referral Process:

DCFS or POS Child Welfare Specialist send referral packets to the OETS. Referral packets should include a completed CFS 912 (Life Skills Referral) form and all required documentation listed.

- Child portion of the Integrated Assessment report.
- Face sheet and child specific section of current SACWIS service plan.
- A completed and scored Casey Life Skills Assessment and the Life Skills Individual Plan.
- Consent for Release of Information (CFS 600-3) that allows OETS to share youth's information with the life skills provider.

For more information, contact:

DCFS.OfficeOfEducationandTransitionServices@illinois.gov



Education & Training Vouchers

Resource for Lifetime Achievement

The Education and Training Voucher (ETV) program assists youth with Cost of Attendance* post-secondary education related expenses not covered by financial aid grants or the DCFS Tuition & Fee Waiver.

Eligibility:

- Youth for whom DCFS is legally responsible or who aged out of care at age 18 or older
- OR**
- Achieved permanency at age 16 or older through either guardianship or adoption

Benefits:

- Payment of up to \$12,000** annually of education related expenses such as tuition, fees, books, supplies, uniforms, equipment and/or transportation not covered by other grants or scholarships
- Youth remain eligible until they attain age 27**, but may not participate in the ETV program for more than 5 years (whether or not consecutive).

Requirements

- Attend post-secondary school listed as accredited by US Department of Education and make satisfactory academic progress
- File FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) annually Complete
- any additional financial paperwork required by the school Submit completed application with requested documentation each term

Approval decisions and actual voucher award amounts are determined by the Office of Education and Transition Services (OETS).

Complete applications (CFS 449-3) or questions to: DCFS.ETVCoordinator@illinois.gov.

* The cost of attendance (COA) is not the bill that you may get from your college; it is the total amount it will cost you to go to college each year. The COA includes tuition and fees; on-campus room and board (or a housing and food allowance for off-campus students); and allowances for books, supplies, transportation, loan fees, and, if applicable, dependent care. It can also include other expenses like an allowance for the rental or purchase of a personal computer, costs related to a disability, or costs for eligible study-abroad programs.

** Will revert back to \$5,000 annually and up to age 26 on 10/1/2022



Employment/Job Training/Apprenticeship Incentive Program

The Employment/Job Training/Apprenticeship Incentive Program (EJTAIP) is designed to provide financial and supplemental services to help youth gain marketable skills through on-the-job work experience, job training programs, or approved apprenticeships.

Eligibility Requirements:

- Youth for whom DCFS is legally responsible, between the ages of 17 and 21. Youth age 16 participating in a Job Corps program are also eligible.
- Be involved in job training through a certified job skills training program (e.g., Job Corps, internship), be employed for at least one month prior to applying for the EJTAIP and working a minimum of 20 hours per week or 80 hours a month, or be participating in an apprenticeship training program approved or recognized by the Illinois Department of Employment Security or by the United States Department of Labor.

Youth enrolled in an approved apprenticeship are eligible if in care of the Department, aged out of care of the Department at age 18 or older, or achieved adoption or guardianship directly from the Department's care. Youth must be under the age of 26 before enrolling in a qualified apprenticeship program and must document active participation.

Benefits:

- Monthly payment of \$168.00 with documentation
- Start-up funding for work-related items (e.g., tools, work clothing, etc.). Funding is need-based and limited to a one-time disbursement of up to \$224.00 with required documentation. Requests for larger amounts may be approved by exception.

Referral Information Requirements:

- EJTAIP Application (Form CFS 449-2)
- Service Agreement signed by youth and caseworker (if applicable)
- Verification of employment, job training program participation, or approved apprenticeship.

For more information, contact: 217-557-2689



Youth Housing Assistance Program

DCFS may provide Youth Housing Assistance to help attain or maintain housing stability for youth that the department currently has or previously had legal responsibility. There are two parts to Youth Housing Assistance: *Housing Advocacy* and *Cash Assistance*, each of which is explained below.

Housing Advocacy

Housing advocacy services assist clients in obtaining and/or maintaining stable housing. Services include:

- Assistance in securing affordable housing
- Consumer education
- Budget counseling
- Linkages to community-based resources (i.e. assistance with utilities, clothing and food)
- Follow-up services for a minimum of three months after the client secures appropriate housing

Note: Housing Advocacy does not include any money.

Eligibility:

1. Be at least 17 ½ and less than 21 years of age; (Youth referred for a Family Unification Program or Fostering Youth Initiative housing subsidy can receive services after they turn 21.)
2. Be legally the responsibility of DCFS, **or** have aged out of DCFS care; (Note: Youth that entered adoption or subsidized guardianship after their 14th birthday are also eligible.); **and**
3. Have an income that is sufficient to meet rent and utility costs; **or** be working on obtaining that income. (While housing advocacy can begin before income is in place, it is extremely unlikely that youth will be able to secure housing without sufficient income. Housing advocates can often help with employment.)

Cash Assistance

Assistance will vary depending on a client's situation. Cash assistance may be authorized for the following reasons:

- Housing security deposit
- Rent (limited circumstances)
- Limited furniture and household items on an as-needed basis.
- Current utility bills or utility deposits
- Appliances
- Partial housing subsidy for a period of one year following case closure (housing costs must exceed 30% of income and assistance cannot continue past the client's 21st birthday)
- Other items required by the client to avoid or manage a crisis

Eligibility:

Youth receiving Cash Assistance must meet all four of the following

1. Be at least 17.5 and less than 21 years of age; (Youth referred for a Family Unification Program or Fostering Youth Initiative housing subsidy can receive services after they turn 21.)
2. Be legally the responsibility of DCFS in an approved placement **or** have aged out of DCFS care. (Note: Youth that moved to adoption or subsidized guardianship **after age 16 may be** eligible for cash assistance); Have completed a budget statement (Form CFS 370-5Y) that demonstrates that with any subsidy and all other income they will be able to cover all remaining living expenses (e.g. housing, utilities, clothing, food); and
3. Need cash assistance in order to attain or maintain stable housing
- 4.

Referral Process or Questions

For more information, contact the Youth Housing Assistance Coordinator at 312-328-2159 or e-mail DCFS.YHAP.Coordinator@illinois.gov



Youth Housing Assistance Program Frequently Asked Questions

Q. Am I entitled to this money?

A. No. This program is based on need, not entitlement.

Q. Will you pay for my housing?

A. No, the idea of housing advocacy is to help you find housing that you can afford. For those eligible for cash assistance, we can also help with certain housing start-up expenses, such as a security deposit.

Q. I need a job. What can I do?

A. Any education and transition coordinator can assist you in attaining employment by referring you to employment and training programs and services. Housing advocates also provide assistance with looking for employment and connecting to public benefits.

Q. I was adopted or entered subsidized guardianship. Am I eligible for housing advocacy?

A. Yes, you are eligible for housing advocacy if you were adopted or moved to subsidized guardianship after your 14th birthday. (Note: Housing Advocacy does not entitle you to money.)

Q. I was adopted or entered subsidized guardianship. Am I eligible for cash assistance?

A. Yes, you may be eligible if you were adopted or moved to subsidized guardianship after age 16.

Q. Can my husband/wife/boyfriend/girlfriend/partner live with me? What about children?

A. If anyone in your household is eligible for services, we can serve your household, however you define it. We will look at your household income to determine if housing you find is affordable for you.

Q. What about roommates?

A. Sometimes having one or more roommates is the best way to make your housing affordable. You may want to consider this option. We will ask some questions about your roommates' income to make sure this housing situation is affordable for all of you.

Q. Do you have an apartment I can move into right now?

A. No, we do not have any apartments. Our housing advocates will provide assistance with finding housing on the open market, anywhere in Illinois.

Q. What if I don't live in Illinois?

A. First, call your local child welfare office (where you are) and ask for Chafee services. Tell them you aged out of the Illinois child welfare system. If you need help accessing these services, call the number below and we will try to help. If you still need help, but can find your own housing and can afford the monthly rent, we may be able to help you by mailing a check for the security deposit to your landlord. Call to see if this is possible.

Referral Process or Questions

For more information, contact

the Youth Housing Assistance Coordinator at 312-328-2159 (Phone) or 312-328-2166 (Fax).





Scholarship

Eligibility Requirements:

- The department must have court-ordered legal guardianship for the applicant, the applicant must have aged out of DCFS care at age 18 or older, or the department must have had legal guardianship for the applicant immediately prior to an adoption or guardianship being finalized.
- The applicant must be at least 16 years old, but not yet 21, on the scholarship application deadline of March 31 each year
- Successfully compete for a DCFS college scholarship (submit complete scholarship application packet, CFS 438, by 3/31 of respective year)
- Maintain at least a "C" average each semester
- Maintain full-time status (12 hours Fall & Spring, 6 hours or an approved internship in Summer). Enrollment will be verified through the National Student Clearinghouse.
- Submit class schedule at the start of each semester and grades at the end of the semester.
- Report changes to any contact information promptly to the DCFS scholarship administrator

Benefits:

- A monthly board payment in the amount of \$1,273. These funds are to assist the student with campus based room and board costs or off campus rent and utilities, and personal expenses. Direct deposit is strongly recommended.
- Medicaid card provided to Illinois students.
- Tuition and mandatory fee waiver to an Illinois public university or in-district community college.
- Reimbursement of the cost of books not covered by financial aid
- Benefits available for up to five consecutive years.

Important Plans To

- Arranging transportation to the school location
- Planning for housing when school is closed for breaks and holidays
- Devising a backup plan for finances if your monthly board payment is lost or stolen.
- Seeking tutorial assistance through the school, and meeting with OETS staff if your grades are low, if you are having problems in a particular course, or if you must withdraw from any classes
- Youth who withdraw from classes must notify the OETS scholarship administrator
- Apply for financial aid annually.

What the Scholarship DOES NOT Cover:

- Orientation fees
- Computers or Internet services
- Room/board costs
- Repayment of student loans
- Tuition to private or out-of-state schools
- Study abroad
- Phone bills
- Dorm room damages
- Laboratory fees
- Transportation to and from school
- Study enhancement programs
- Supplies
- Library fines



Youth In College/Vocational Training Program

Eligibility Requirements:

- DCFS must have court ordered legal responsibility for youth.
- Youth must be enrolled as a full-time student in an accredited university, college, or a vocational training program.
- Must complete the CFS 449 (Youth in College/Vocational Training Program application).
- Must be at least 16 years old and not yet 21, at time of application. Maintain at least "C" average each semester.
- Maintain full-time status (12 hours Fall & Spring, 6 hours in Summer, or an approved summer internship). Enrollment will be verified through the National Student Clearinghouse.
- Submit class schedule at the start of each semester and grades at the end of each semester
- Report any change of address promptly to your YIC Coordinator.
- Apply for financial aid every year to cover tuition or room and board costs.
- Youth transitioning to the YIC program at age 21 must have completed at least one semester of a post secondary program at full time status with a 2.0 GPA or higher.

Benefits:

- Youth may choose to attend an accredited vocational school, four-year college or community college.
- A monthly board payment in the amount of \$1,273. These funds are to assist the student with campus based room and board costs or off campus rent and utilities, and personal expenses. Direct deposit is strongly recommended.
- Reimbursement available for books not covered by financial aid.
- OETS Post-Secondary Education Specialists are available for assistance.
- Benefits available for 5 consecutive years or through age 25 whichever occurs first.
- Youth are eligible for a one-time start-up payment to be used for initial living expenses
- If attending an Illinois public university or community college (in-district), a tuition and fee waiver letter will be sent on the student's behalf.

Important Plans To Consider:

- Arranging transportation to the school location
- Planning for housing when school is closed for breaks and holidays
- Devising a backup plan for finances if your monthly board payment is lost or stolen.
- Seeking tutorial assistance through the school, and meeting with OETS staff if your grades are low, if you are having problems in a particular course, or if you must withdraw from any classes. Education and Training Voucher Program for expenses not covered by YIC/VT Program.

What the Youth In College/Vocational Training Program DOES NOT Cover:

- Orientation fees
- Computers or Internet services
- Room/board costs
- Laboratory fees
- Supplies
- Study abroad
- Study enhancement programs
- Phone bills
- Library fines
- Dorm room damages
- Repayment of student loans
- Transportation to and from school
- Tuition



Promoting Academic Excellence

- ✓ Get involved by attending school activities, parent/teacher conferences and parent board meetings
- ✓ Communicate often with youth's teacher(s) and counselor
- ✓ Assist youth with identifying academic interests, goals, strengths and areas needing improvement
- ✓ Show interest in your child's academic world by assisting him/her with getting organized, inquiring about his day and designating a distraction-free study area
- ✓ Assist with developing time management skills and prioritizing assignments
- ✓ Review completed assignments and assist with test preparation
- ✓ Encourage daily reading to assist with improving reading and comprehension skills
- ✓ Encourage youth to perform his/her best and congratulate all accomplishments
- ✓ Explain standardized exams, support and encourage youth's best performance
- ✓ During the month of March, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 7th, and 8th graders will take the Illinois Standardized Achievement Test (ISAT)
- ✓ Discuss high schools of interest during 5th grade, explain that 7th grade reading and math scores from the ISAT will determine high school eligibility
- ✓ During sophomore year of high school, encourage youth to begin identifying colleges or universities of interest
- ✓ During junior year of high school, encourage youth to attend college tours
- ✓ Ensure that students register to take the ACT during their junior year of high school
- ✓ All high school juniors must take the Prairie State Achievement Exam (PSAE) or its equivalent during the Spring
- ✓ During the months of October and November, 12th graders should begin sending out applications to college(s) of interest
- ✓ Ensure that seniors complete the Free Application For Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form in October
- ✓ 12th grade students should apply for DCFS Scholarship January through March
- ✓ 12th grade students should apply for self-identified college scholarships, noting application deadlines
- ✓ Complete all financial aid paperwork at school
- ✓ Attend college orientations once accepted
- ✓ Enroll into the DCFS Youth in College placement at least 2 months prior to attending college of choice



Department of Children and Family Services Department of Healthcare and Family Services Medical Card

Qualifications and Procedures

- A child/youth who is in the legal custody of DCFS and placed in substitute care.
- A child/youth in the legal custody of DCFS, who is placed in certain living arrangements on the last day in substitute care may receive a medical extension for a year when returning to the home of parent or upon case closure of the child/youth case.
- Youth who are age 18 when returned to the home of a parent or upon case closure are eligible for a medical card extension up to age 26. Please discuss the details for enrollment with your case worker before case closure.
- Parenting youth in the legal custody of DCFS, and live in substitute care, will receive a medical card for their children who reside with them.
- The medical card is mailed to the same address as the financial assistance for the child/youth. Keep those addresses current.
- The medical card goes with the child/youth if a change in placement occurs.

HFS Medical Card Usage

- The medical card serves as a health insurance card for the child/youth. The card pays for many health care services, including medical and dental exams, immunizations, prescriptions, hospital care, etc. Keep it readily available at all times.
- The medical card can be used only with providers who are enrolled with the HFS and who **accept** the medical card and HFS payment as payment in full.
- **Out-of-state providers must be enrolled in HFS and accept the medical card and HFS payment as payment in full.**
- Some uses of the medical card may require prior approval. Examples are: prescriptions that are "non-preferred" drugs and some durable medical equipment and supplies (bath lifts, wheelchairs, oxygen, etc.). Contact your physician or pharmacist with questions.
- Non-emergency medical transportation requires prior approval and should be approved through the DCFS regional medical liaison. Service may only be furnished by providers enrolled with HFS who accept the medical card and HFS payment as payment in full.
- If the medical card is lost, immediately contact your caseworker to request a replacement card and/or Recipient Verification Letter.

DCFS Medical Card Hotline (1-800-228-6533: Monday through Friday - - 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.)

- You should contact the Medical Card Hotline directly if you do not receive a medical card for a child/youth in your care.
- You should contact the Medical Card Hotline directly regarding medical extension eligibility requirements.
- You should notify your caseworker to contact the Medical Card Hotline if the address on the medical card needs to be changed or the child/youth's name and/or birth date is incorrect.
- Providers may call the Medical Card Hotline to verify the correct recipient number and periods of eligibility for a child/youth they are serving.
- A child/youth in DCFS custody should not be charged a co-pay. If this occurs, call the Medical Card Hotline for assistance.



Countdown to 21

The Countdown to 21 program is designed to support the successful transition of older youth to independence. The Program ensures that youth are involved in long term planning activities regarding their final living arrangement prior to leaving the Department's care, connections are established with family and community supports, realistic educational and vocational goals are established and in process, and participation in financial literacy training to promote financial stability.

Youth who successfully complete the eligibility criteria below can earn a one-time payment of \$1,363 in transition funds. The purpose of the transition funds is to provide financial support as they leave the child welfare system and become self-sufficient.

Eligibility Criteria:

1. Youth must be in a Department approved placement.
2. Youth must participate in a Countdown to 21(C21) Meeting at age 19 and develop a plan and are referred to Financial Literacy Course.
3. Youth must complete the CFS-2032-1 Youth Driven Transition Plan or CFS-375-2-ILO TLP Quarterly Discharge Transition Launch Plan.
4. Description and address of living situation upon exit from care.
5. Youth must identify a supportive resources person to work with the youth and participate in C21 Meeting.
6. Successful completion of the Department approved Financial Literacy Course.
7. Youth must participate in a C21 Meeting 90-days prior to 21 y/o, or case closure, to review plan, Transition Funds Application and Budget

**For more information or to schedule a C21 Meeting,
please call 312-814-6800 and ask to speak to a C21 intake staff**



Tuition and Fee

Eligibility Requirements:

- The department must have court-ordered legal guardianship for the applicant, the applicant must have aged out of DCFS guardianship at age 18 or older, or the department must have had legal guardianship for the applicant immediately prior to the adoption or guardianship being finalized.
- An applicant must have earned a high school diploma from an accredited institution or a high school equivalency certificate or have met the State criteria for high school graduation before the start of the school year for which the applicant is applying for the waiver.
- An applicant must be enrolled in a qualifying post-secondary education program before the applicant reaches the age of 26.
- An applicant must apply for federal and state grant assistance by completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) on October 1 each year or as soon after as possible.

Benefits:

- Tuition and mandatory fee waiver available to Illinois public universities or in-district community college. If student is awarded the Illinois MAP grant and/or federal Pell grants, these funds may be applied first.
- Benefits available for up to 5 consecutive years.

Important Plans to Consider

- Seek tutorial assistance through the school and/or request assistance locating academic resources through OETS if your grades are low or if you are having problems in a course.
- Arranging transportation to school.
- Planning for housing, when school is closed for breaks and holidays.

What the Waiver DOES NOT Cover:

- | | | |
|----------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| • Orientation fee | • Tuition to private, out-of- state, or for-profit schools or programs | • Laboratory fees |
| • Computers or Internet Services | • Study abroad costs | • Transportation to and from school |
| • Room/board costs | • (other than for tuition) | • Supplies |
| • Repayment of Student Loans | | • Library fines |

To Apply:

- Submit a complete DCFS Form 438A to DCFS.TuitionWaiver@illinois.gov
The student schedule must be included with the application form and contain the student's name, school name, term, and student ID number.
- Once approved for the Tuition and Fee Waiver Program, the student remains in the program. A subsequent waiver letter will be sent if the student submits a grade report ~~for~~ the term ending and a new schedule for upcoming term.
- The application and/or grade report and schedules are due by the following dates OR as soon as possible as they are processed on a first come, first serve basis. Fall Term: Aug. 15; Spring Term: Jan. 15; Summer Term: June 15
- https://www2.illinois.gov/dcf/aboutus/notices/Documents/CFS_438-A_Tuition_And_Mandatory_Fee_Waiver_Program_%28Fillable%29.pdf

