# FOSTERING CONNECTIONS:

## Actions Needed to Prevent Homelessness Among Foster Care Alumni

Featuring Interviews and Surveys with Young Adults with Lived Experience, Staff Members who Assist with Housing Needs, and Recommendations for Louisville, KY

*YOUNG ADULT RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS*

**TyMisha Carter, Tia Humphrey, Damareus Jackson-Martin, Chanley Nair, Trevor Piercy, Miracl Swain**

*STAFF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS*

**Carey Addison, Meredith Baxter, Demitria Collins-Love, Kristy Flippins-Bartlett, Michele Isham, Pretoria Lawson, Ali Massengill**

# Table of Contents

# Introduction

Following a national housing crisis, young people in Louisville, Kentucky have been facing unprecedented rates of homelessness, especially between the ages of 18 and 28. There have been many programs implemented to help address this crisis, yet homeless rates have not gone down. Rather, Louisville has seen an overall increase in people experiencing homelessness of 41% from 2018 to 2021,[1] and local data tracking also shows an increase among young adults in the city. [2]

Foster care alumni experience homelessness at higher rates than peers, and this happens regardless of how youth exit care. Youth who have aged out of care without permanent family connections are vulnerable to homelessness, yet many foster care alumni who have experienced homelessness left care through reunification or adoption.[3] Young adults who are LGBTQ+, Black, and male face increased risk of homelessness.[4] Foster care alumni, in theory, have the most access to social services and community resources due to their foster care experience. However, input from foster care alumni revealed that while there are systems in place to provide support, those systems are riddled with barriers that deeply hamper young adults' ability to get the most out of these resources.

In recent years, several national and local groups have elevated the conversation regarding homelessness among foster care alumni. In Louisville, True Up's community collaborations have raised awareness of the unique issues that foster care alumni face with housing stability.

The following report was developed by Kentucky Youth Advocates (KYA), and funded by the Jewish Heritage Fund (JHF), to further the conversation in Louisville, Kentucky as it relates to homelessness among foster care alumni. This study and subsequent report was supported by our various community partners including YouthBuild Louisville, Department for Community Based Services (DCBS), Family Scholar House, Orphan Care Alliance (OCA), and more.
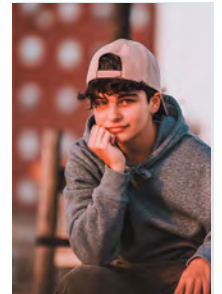
This study references foster care, which is defined as "out-of-home living situation (such as kinship care, a foster home, group home, or residential care facility) for abused or neglected children who need a safe place to live when their parents or relatives can not take care of them." [5] This study also references foster care alumni, which is defined as individuals who have been in the foster care system and either aged-out or left care.

# Background

True Up has identified a concerning increase in foster care alumni experiencing homelessness. Despite young people being removed from family as children and taken into state custody, they have not received the ongoing support so many young people rely on from supportive adults as they transition to adulthood. Kentucky youth aging out of care face significant challenges, with 31% experiencing homelessness by age 21. [6]

During the first year of the project, True Up has connected with more than 110 young adults in Louisville who were in foster care in Kentucky and have experienced homelessness, despite many resources (i.e., designated housing and vouchers), being available. With support from JHF, KYA partnered with YouthBuild Louisville to provide emergency hotel stays and case management to 21 foster care alumni, 12 of whom have already secured long-term stable housing, during the first year.

The team has worked with 55 young adults to build connections with community resources that can support them staying on the path to stable housing.

The question to consider is, how many more alumni are disconnected to support and in need of an emergency placement? Although True Up and partners are successfully connecting youth to housing programs, additional foster care alumni continue to become homeless at an alarming rate. Each year, approximately 650 youth across Kentucky leave foster care without a permanent family connection.[7] Additionally, Black children have been overrepresented among youth aging out and youth in foster care, due to factors such as the limited availability of preventative resources for families and a lack of evidence-based programs designed for families of color. In state fiscal year 2022, of youth leaving foster care in Kentucky, 20% of Black youth left due to aging out, compared to 12% of White youth.[8] Furthermore, a prior study with data by race showed 38% of Black youth in Kentucky transitioning out of care experienced homelessness by age 19 compared to 25% of White youth.[9]

From 2019 to 2021, 54,837 Kentucky youth were placed into foster care.[10] The Fostering Youth Transitions report on youth of transition age (defined as ages 14 to 21) found that in Kentucky, 37% of youth experienced 4 or more placements in their last foster care episode and 37% have experienced multiple episodes in foster care.[11] These high rates of multiple placements while in care have been identified as a direct contributor to homelessness youth may experience later in life.



In Kentucky

1 IN 3 YOUNG ADULTS WHO HAVE FOSTER CARE EXPERIENCE WILL FACE HOUSING INSECURITY
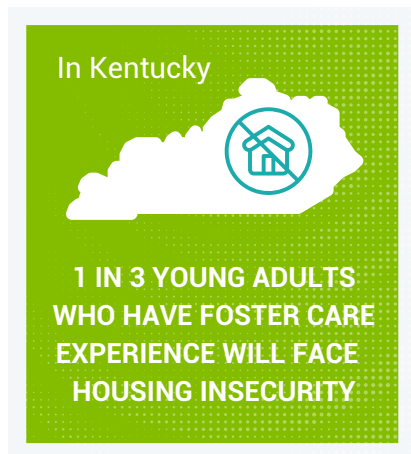
Homelessness, while experienced by many, disproportionately affects those with a foster care experience. Approximately 1 in 3 young adults who leave foster care in Kentucky will experience housing insecurity as a young adult.[12] The purpose of foster care is to reunify families or establish a permanent placement for children in care; foster care exists to ensure youth have forever families that are safe and loving.[13] Yet, this is not the outcome many youth face as 50% of youth will leave foster care lacking permanent, legal connections to family or a guardian. Placement instability is one of the direct root causes of foster care alumni homelessness and it must be addressed.[14]

Fortunately, effective solutions to decrease homelessness risk have been identified in recent years, including extended care participation,[15] direct cash transfer programs,[16] rental assistance, and supportive housing projects.[17]

This project will impact the problem by taking a dual approach of supporting currently homeless youth and working with Kentucky's child welfare system to prevent foster care alumni from becoming homeless in the first place. Through a partnership with YouthBuild Louisville, we are addressing the immediate needs of individual young people experiencing homelessness by providing emergency hotel stays, transportation to hotels, and case management to connect to and maintain stable housing. In addition, True Up has provided an active safety net role in supporting foster care alumni who are homeless by connecting them with services that support safe and stable housing.

On a broader scale, we are working to identify and pursue changes in practice and policy at the state level to address the gaps in support for youth who age out of care. This work has begun with research conducted by and with foster care alumni who have experienced homelessness to understand what factors contribute to the problem and what solutions would be most helpful. True Up and Kentucky Youth Advocates will educate community partners on the causes, engage community partners in promoting policy change to implement solutions, and partner with DCBS to implement changes that ensure youth leave foster care with the appropriate support and guidance to maintain a safe and stable place to live.

## Method

The overall goal of this project is to bridge the gap between foster care alumni who are facing homelessness, to build and nurture connections, and ultimately to understand why these young adults are facing homelessness when there are a variety of resources that are available to them. Through this research, Kentucky Youth Advocates worked alongside partner organizations that serve foster care youth and young adults to find both the tangible and intangible solutions to meet immediate needs and to secure systems change for foster care alumni that are experiencing homelessness.

True Up and Kentucky Youth Advocates began the research process by conducting surveys and focus groups with verified foster care alumni, as well as in-person and video interviews with staff who work with this population daily. We began outreach by sending information to organizations who work with youth and young adults and checking the monthly Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) that contains a master-list of those seeking homeless services in Louisville, Kentucky. Young adults ages 18 to 28 with foster care history specific to Kentucky were then verified through DCBS and were able to participate.

Seven focus groups were conducted by and with foster care alumni with a total of 36 participants. These were hosted with organizations that assist foster care alumni throughout Louisville, such as TAYLRD, The Spot, YMCA Safe Place, Family Scholar House. Additionally, ten staff members who work with foster care alumni were interviewed from Boys and Girls Haven, YMCA Safe Place, Project Life, Metro Government, Options to Success, Family Scholar House, Phoenix Family Health Center, Seven Counties, Orphan Care Alliance, and Youth Villages.

The questions used during focus groups and interviews were determined by young adults with foster care experience and focused on the experiences young adults had within the child welfare system, their experiences with homelessness, and programmatic and systemic changes that are needed to prevent and mitigate homelessness among foster alumni.

In addition to the focus groups and staff interviews, a survey was also distributed to gather information from foster care alumni who had experienced homelessness, with the goal of identifying barriers that prevent young adults from reaching housing and sustainable goals, as well as supports that would help to maintain housing. Eligible respondents were people who had experienced both foster care in Kentucky and homelessness, defined as not having a regular, stable, and safe place to call home. Kentucky Youth Advocates used an online survey tool to collect responses, and recruited respondents through the True Up Peer Network, flyers, and links distributed to partner organizations that work with this population, on social media, and through direct contacts.

Sixty responses were received for the survey, and 28 responses were excluded for not meeting the criteria (14), not living in Jefferson County (4), being a duplicate response (3), or not completing required sections of the survey (7). KYA confirmed foster care history with the Kentucky Department of Community Based Services. Survey respondents ranged in age from 18 to 28, and 75% of respondents were female. Of all respondents, 19% identified as LGBTQIA+. Respondents reported the following race or ethnicity: Black, Latinx, White, and people who identified two or more races, and the majority of respondents (63%) were Black.

Qualitative data was collected from each interview, survey, and focus group and were analyzed by coding interview transcripts. These codes were then grouped into common themes, such as lack of appropriate housing options and/or services, mental health challenges, and lack of connection and/or support. By identifying the most common themes, our research team was able to determine programmatic and systemic recommendations to address these issues. Additional themes that were observed during interviews with staff, focus groups, and surveys with young adults are identified in the following sections.

# Survey Insights

The survey asked respondents about information on their experiences with homelessness, and experiences varied. While the majority first experienced homelessness between the ages of 15 to 18, some first experienced not having a safe place of their own when they were younger than 10. Their situations at the time they first experienced homelessness also varied with 1 in 3 respondents first experiencing homelessness after leaving the foster care system, slightly more first experiencing with their biological family, and slightly fewer first experiencing while in foster care. Most respondents also reported experiencing homelessness on more than one occasion, with many experiencing it six times or more.

### First experience with homelessness (n=24)

| Category | Value |
|---|---|
| 10 years old or younger | * |
| 11-14 years old | 25% |
| 15-18 years old | 58% |
| 19-21 years old | * |
| After leaving the foster care system | 33% |
| While I was in foster care | 29% |
| With my biological family | 38% |
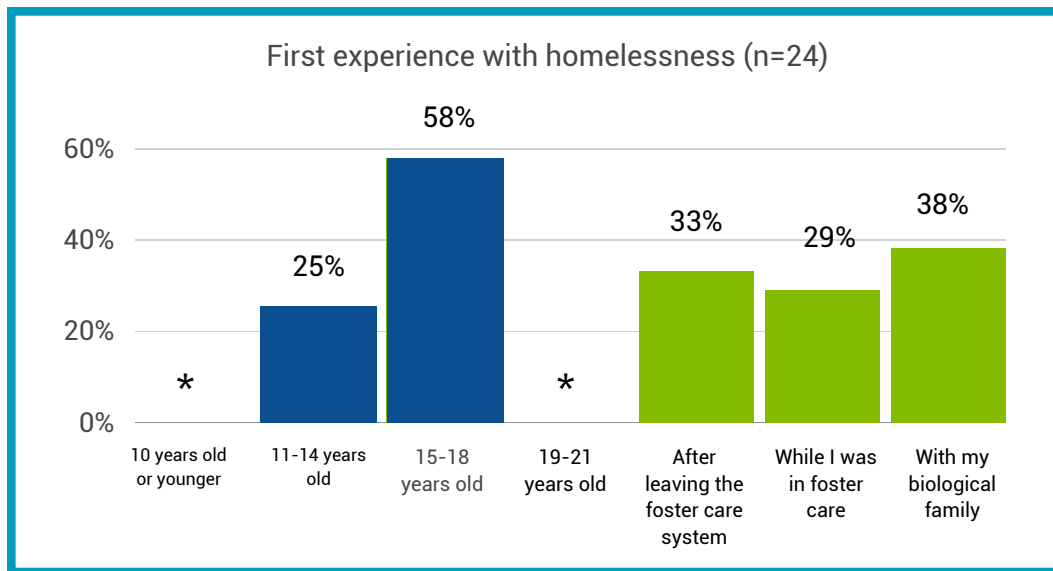
**\*** Percentage not shown for fewer than 6 responses

Foster care alumni reported experiencing homelessness at various points in their lives. While some instances occurred with birth parents, other instances occurred at points when it would seem that stability should have been in place for the young adult, such as after a disrupted DCBS adoption, after reunification, or immediately after aging out when plans should have been put in place through transition planning meetings.

1 in 3 respondents had 6 or more experiences with homelessness

## Points at which experienced homelessness (n=24)

| Category | Percentage |
|---|---|
| With birth partents, before foster care | 46% |
| With birth parents, after reunification | 25% |
| After 18, after reunification | 29% |
| After 18, after adoption | * |
| After exiting foster care | 38% |
| Immediately after aging out | 42% |
| During or after college | 25% |

**\*** Percentage not shown for fewer than 6 responses
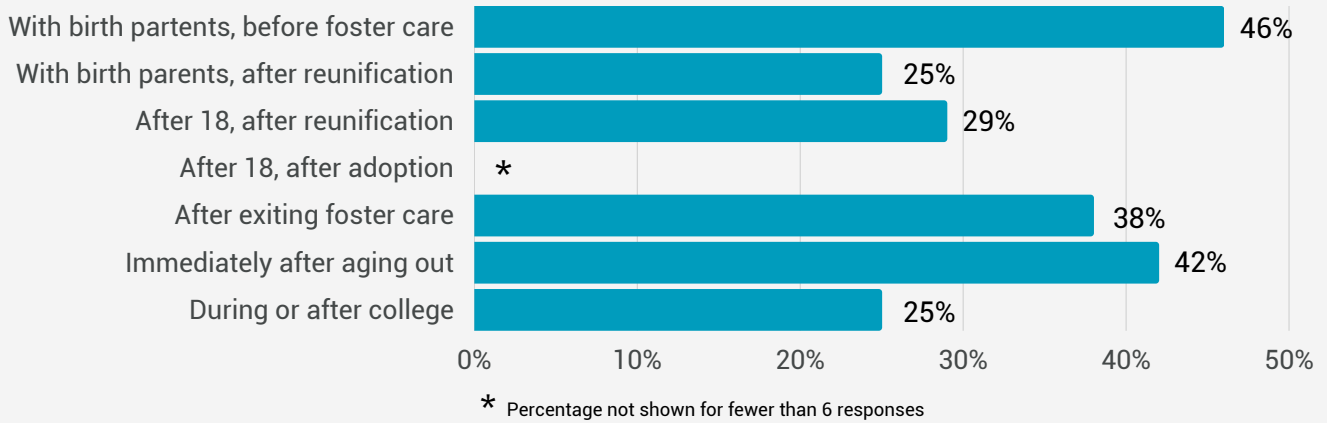
While all respondents included in this report lived in Jefferson County when completing the survey, 25% first entered foster care in a different county in Kentucky. Additionally, 50% reported moving to a different county when they first entered foster care. The age at which respondents first entered foster care ranged from less than 1 year old to 17; 25% were age 5 or younger, while 44% were teens between the ages of 14 and 17.

### Age at entry into foster care (n=32)

| Age | Percentage |
|---|---|
| 5 or younger | 25% |
| 6-13 | 31% |
| 14-17 | 44% |
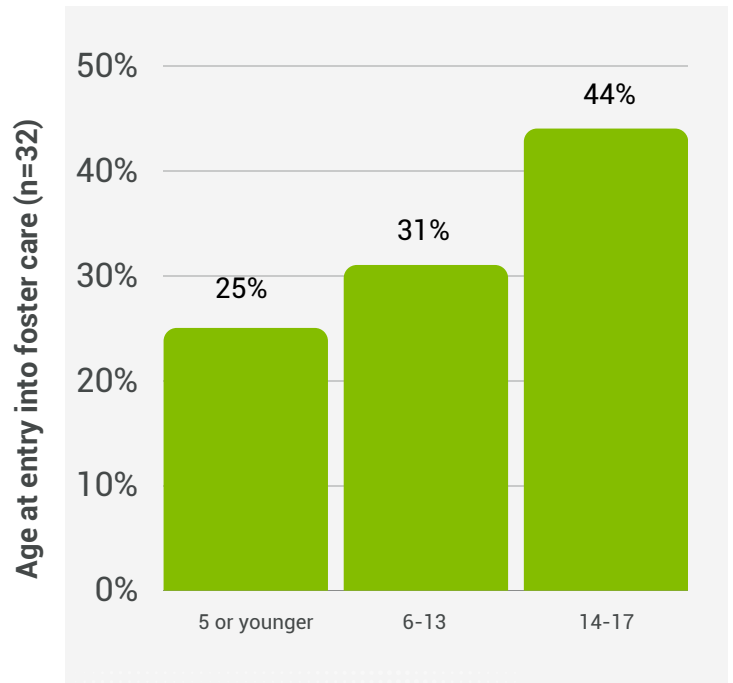
91% of respondents reported that they were not financially stable when they left care, meaning they could not cover basic needs.

Nearly half of respondents left foster care at age 18 (47%), but 19% remained in care until age 21. Respondents left foster care a number of different ways, with some reunifying with family (19%), being adopted, or aging out at 21 (28%). Regardless of how or when they left care, the vast majority of respondents reported that they weren't able to meet basic needs, such as rent, groceries, clothing, and participation in recreational activities, when they left care.

**Age left care (n=32)**

| Category | Percentage |
|---|---|
| 18 | 47% |
| 19 | * |
| 21 | 19% |
| Not applicable | 25% |

* Percentage not shown for fewer than 6 responses
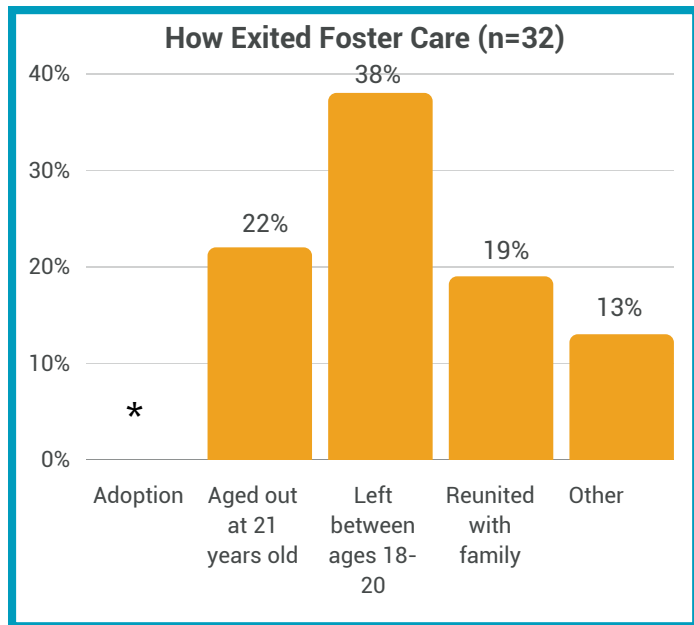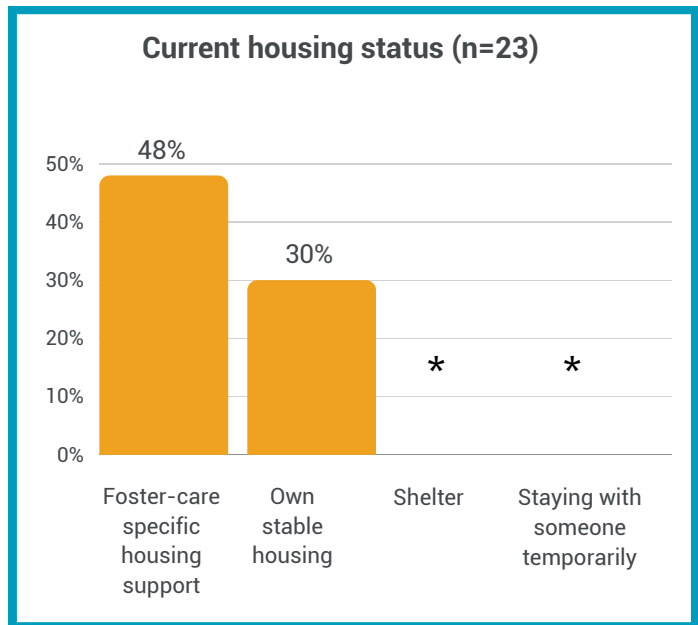
*Data Note: Not applicable refers to youth who were adopted, reunited with family, ran away, or are currently in an Independent Living program.*
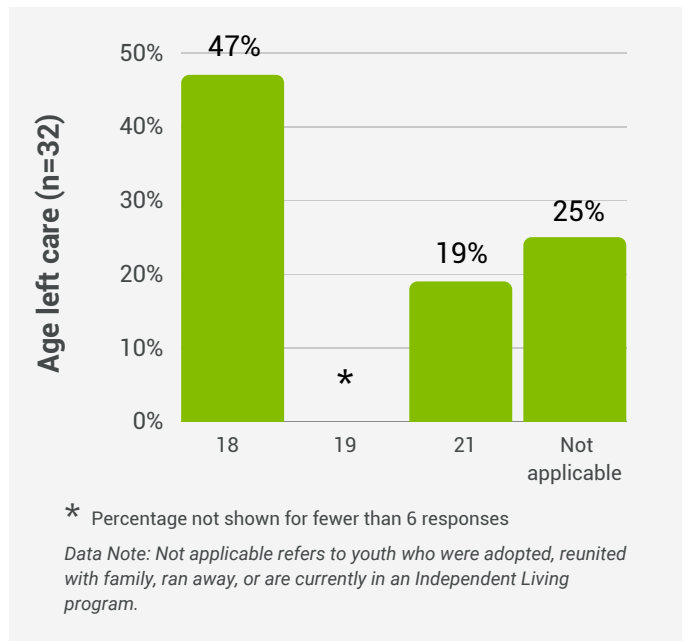
## The vast majority of respondents reported that they were not able to meet basic needs, such as rent, groceries, or clothing when they left care.

**How Exited Foster Care (n=32)**

| Category | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Adoption | * |
| Aged out at 21 years old | 22% |
| Left between ages 18-20 | 38% |
| Reunited with family | 19% |
| Other | 13% |

* Percentage not shown for fewer than 6 responses

**Current housing status (n=23)**

| Category | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Foster-care specific housing support | 48% |
| Own stable housing | 30% |
| Shelter | * |
| Staying with someone temporarily | * |

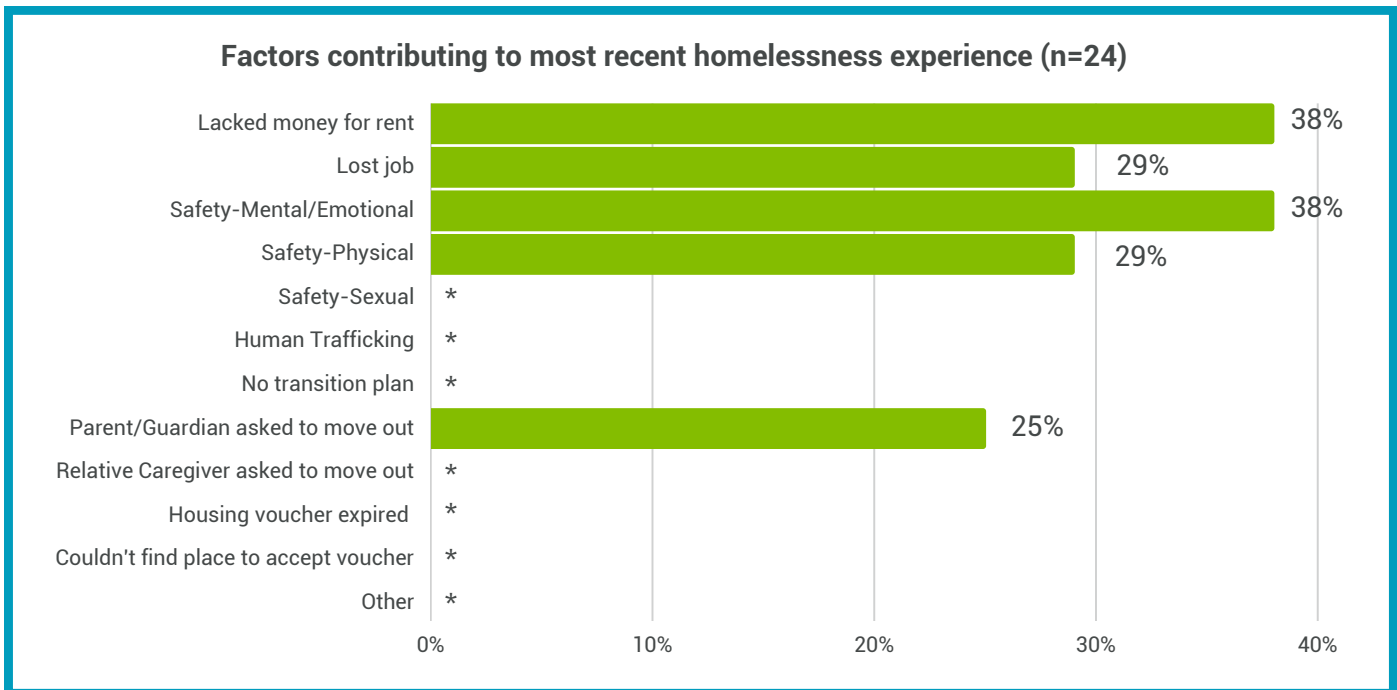* Percentage not shown for fewer than 6 responses

The current housing situations for survey respondents ranged from some having their own stable housing, such as having their name on a lease, to staying at a shelter. Foster-care-specific housing supports include Family Scholar House, Project Life, Family Unification Program, and Independent Living.

We also asked foster care alumni about their last stable housing experience prior to their current housing situation. Many respondents had housing through programs specifically for foster care and foster care alumni. Still, many reported housing situations that do not promote stability, such as staying with someone with housing, temporarily living with family, or staying at a hotel.

**Last stable housing before current housing situation (n=24)**

| Category | Value |
|---|---|
| Foster care placement | * |
| Foster-care-specific community resource | * |
| Housing for those who extend time in care | 29% |
| Own stable housing | * |
| Staying with someone | 25% |
| Other (hotel, homeless) | * |
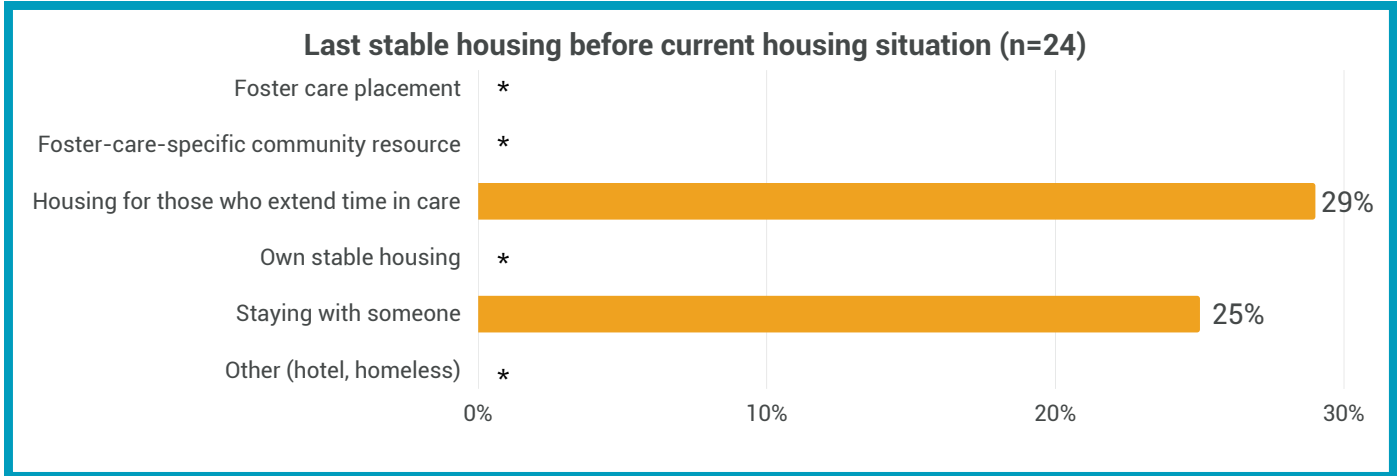
* Percentage not shown for fewer than 6 responses

Different factors contributed to the most recent experience with homelessness. Economic factors were significant, with many respondents reporting simply lacking the money needed to pay rent or losing their job. Safety factors were also significant, with half of respondents reporting they had concerns about their physical, emotional/mental, or sexual safety (see chart for responses to each type of safety concern). One third of respondents shared that their parent, guardian, or relative caregiver asked them to leave, which prompted their homelessness.

**Factors contributing to most recent homelessness experience (n=24)**

| Category | Value |
|---|---|
| Lacked money for rent | 38% |
| Lost job | 29% |
| Safety-Mental/Emotional | 38% |
| Safety-Physical | 29% |
| Safety-Sexual | * |
| Human Trafficking | * |
| No transition plan | * |
| Parent/Guardian asked to move out | 25% |
| Relative Caregiver asked to move out | * |
| Housing voucher expired | * |
| Couldn't find place to accept voucher | * |
| Other | * |

* Percentage not shown for fewer than 6 responses

*Data Note: No respondents identified being asked to do sexual favors or being asked to participate in drug trafficking as a factor that contributed to their most recent experience with homelessness.*

# Findings

## Theme 1: Lack of Appropriate Housing Options and Services

### Lack of Options and Long Wait Times

In Louisville, housing options that are specified for young adults with a foster care history include Project Life, Family Unification Program (FUP), and Family Scholar House. However, there are extremely long wait times before alumni are able to move into housing. The minimum amount of time has varied from two months to six months. Some reasons for the delays are alumni needing help finding housing that will accept Section 8 vouchers, previous eviction or criminal background, vouchers expiring, bottleneck with deposit and rental payment assistance, not having a specified timeframe for Section 8 housing inspections to occur, and limited one bedroom apartments. There is a critical need to reduce these wait times because staff reported that young adults become complacent the longer they experience homelessness. We also need all staff who work with foster care alumni to connect them to DCBS Independent Living Specialists (ILS) to ensure they are being referred to these specified housing options and other applicable resources.
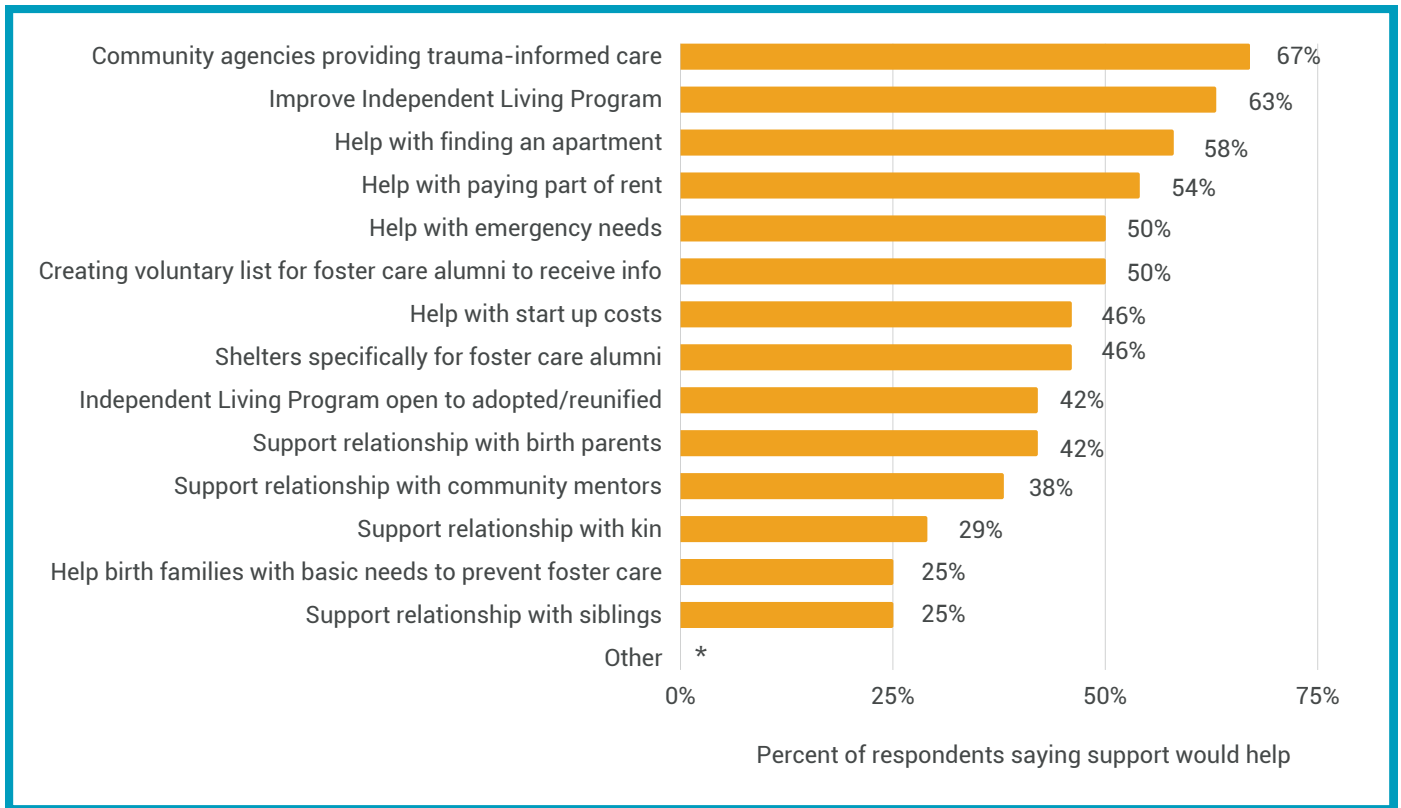
**54% of survey respondents experienced homelessness while waiting on an apartment or stable housing to become available.**

In regard to FUP eligibility, DCBS has communicated that alumni must have either aged out of care at age 18 or older or been in care 90 days from their 18th birthday. Unfortunately, FUP has not been available in Louisville since the end of September 2022. DCBS staff have communicated a possibility of getting twenty-five more vouchers but need to get people on a waiting list before they can request the vouchers. However, it is widely known that foster care homelessness exists because DCBS staff shared they have sent 15 or so referrals to Louisville Metro Housing Authority since April of 2023. Therefore, federal advocacy is needed to support the vouchers being readily available for young adults in need of housing.

Throughout the duration of this project, emergency hotel stays have been offered in limited quantities. However, there is currently a waiting list for stays due to the expense being $2,000 a month per alumni. In terms of services needed, there have been several reports of domestic violence while in hotel stays and through relationship and connections building and of resources needed for single parents. This indicates the need for upstream and continuous support and education regarding safe and healthy relationships, as well as parental planning and support.

In regards to transitional housing, for young adults, there is only one option that is specified and it is closing in 2023 without a replacement. Therefore, more transitional housing is needed in Louisville.

**Supports identified by foster care alumni that would help avoid homelessness (n=24)**

| Support | Percent |
|---|---|
| Community agencies providing trauma-informed care | 67% |
| Improve Independent Living Program | 63% |
| Help with finding an apartment | 58% |
| Help with paying part of rent | 54% |
| Help with emergency needs | 50% |
| Creating voluntary list for foster care alumni to receive info | 50% |
| Help with start up costs | 46% |
| Shelters specifically for foster care alumni | 46% |
| Independent Living Program open to adopted/reunified | 42% |
| Support relationship with birth parents | 42% |
| Support relationship with community mentors | 38% |
| Support relationship with kin | 29% |
| Help birth families with basic needs to prevent foster care | 25% |
| Support relationship with siblings | 25% |
| Other | * |

Percent of respondents saying support would help

* Percentage not shown for fewer than 6 responses

## Fear and Avoidance of Shelters

Another barrier in services to support foster alumni while they are experiencing homelessness is the fear and avoidance of staying in homeless shelters. One alumni shared the following, "I always heard bad things, always been scared and I'm pregnant." Another shared that the experience was "terrifying."

Shelters are the only consistent and immediate housing service Louisville offers to those who are experiencing homelessness. Yet, shelters are reported as often being full and at capacity even if an alumni would like to have the option to stay in them.[18] Therefore, in community housing meetings, specifically the monthly Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program and subcommittee, discussions continue to arise about the need for a young adult homeless shelter. Through this project, it has also become apparent that a female specific shelter would be beneficial.

Among foster care alumni who responded to the survey, nearly half (48%) said they had never stayed in a shelter in Louisville before. The primary reasons people gave for not having utilized a shelter were choosing not to stay in one and having someone that they could stay with temporarily. Another 39% of respondents had used a shelter and found it "very" or "somewhat" helpful, while others did not find their shelter experience helpful.

*"I always heard bad things, always been scared and I'm pregnant."*

⊕ **DCBS should actively be part of more community housing meetings to address homelessness among foster care alumni. DCBS staff having access to HMIS would significantly streamline the process and time it takes for alumni to receive stable housing.**

⊕ **Family Unification Program housing should extend its coverage** to young adults who exited care at age 16 and 17.

⊕ **DCBS should hire and train housing navigators to help alumni find apartments that fit housing requirements.**

⊕ **DCBS should continue to pursue plans for guaranteed housing of young adults leaving foster care for one year.**

⊕ **Seek funding to re-open the emergency rental assistance program.**

⊕ **Create homeless shelters specific to young adults ages 18 and older experiencing homelessness.**

⊕ **Encourage drop-in centers to have evening and weekend hours** to address the amount of young adults who are currently living in unstable housing, such as if their name isn't on the lease or they are couchsurfing.

## Theme 2: Mental Health Challenges

A common theme across foster care alumni who experience homelessness, is their challenges with mental health and wellness. From the beginning of their time in the state's care to post aging-out or adoption, many young adults identified their mental health as one of the biggest barriers to permanent stable housing.

### Mental Health Challenges as a Cause and Effect

Mental health for foster care alumni experiencing homelessness or housing instability has been characterized as both a cause and effect of their homelessness. More specifically, young adults have identified the trauma that they have endured while in the foster care system as being one of the biggest contributors and roadblocks to them reaching stable, permanent housing. One participant stated, "The foster care system looks pretty and glamorous to some people but the people who've actually been through it…know it's not as shiny as it looks."

When asked why they didn't choose to recommit, one respondent stated: "The things I experienced in foster care, I don't think I will ever fully be able to heal from. It was one of the most scariest and most dangerous times of my life.. years of my life. I suffer from PTSD from the things I experienced in foster care. I even tried to kill myself multiple times while [in] foster care, and once had to be resuscitated"

The constant movement that many foster alumni experience while in state's care was also identified by many as a contributor to their experiences of homelessness, claiming that because they have become so accustomed to instability, they have no sense of belonging and thus struggle greatly with reaching and maintaining stable housing. One staff member interviewed stated, "[Young adults] are uncomfortable being somewhere too long. More movements and more homes feed into this, it is continuous and often stimulates this mindset."

Following this, many young adults identified that constant movement as a teenager while working has contributed to their overall inability to maintain their jobs as they were often forced to quit due to moving to a new placement in a different area. This employment instability experienced by foster care alumni in their teenage years has impacted their adult experiences with employment and has been identified as a contributor to their experiences of financial instability.

Young adults have also identified the mental health challenges they have endured due to their homelessness. Many young adults have specifically identified their experiences with interpersonal violence as a direct effect and, in many instances, the cause of their homelessness. In the survey, 50% of alumni

reported that they were concerned for their physical, emotional, or sexual safety as a cause for their most recent experience with homelessness. When young adults are experiencing homelessness, they have stated that they tolerate abuse as a means to have somewhere to sleep at night; furthermore, many young adults stated that they lost their housing due to an abusive relationship when the landlord had concerns about general disturbances.

**50%**

Foster care alumni who reported a concern for their safety (physical, emotional, or sexual) as a cause for their most recent experience with homelessness (n=24)

Mental health and its challenges has also been identified as a cause and effect of employment instability. Foster care alumni have identified that their experiences with depression have negatively impacted their willingness and motivation to continue working and go to work. This can lead to loss of employment, decreased pay, and general financial instability, which in turn greatly reduces young adult's ability to acquire and maintain permanent stable housing.

**57%**

Foster care alumni who reported experiencing mental health challenges as a youth or young adult (n=14)
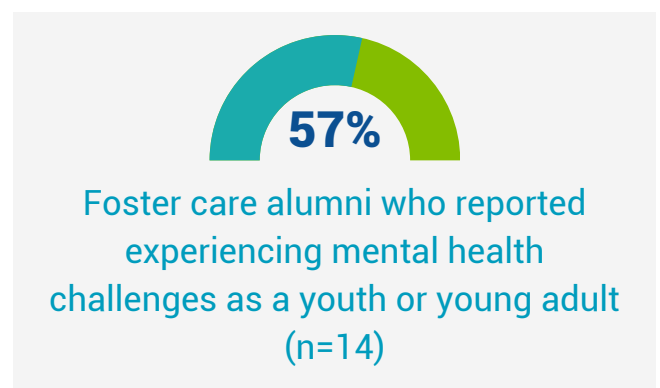
## Trauma and Healing

When disclosing information related to the resources available while in care for their mental wellbeing, participants referred to their experiences with over-medication instead of teaching these young adults how to cope and heal from the trauma they have endured. One participant stated that, "[I] ended up addicted to substances at 18 after being prescribed many, many medications that didn't help." Although therapy services were being offered throughout care, participants cited that, especially when placed in residential placements, they were put on "a lot of unnecessary medications" and were "diagnosed with a multitude of mental illnesses." Drug misuse and use has been characterized by participants as one of the root causes of their homelessness, which began for many while in care.

**86%** of survey respondents reported experiencing at least five adverse events.

Participants also described that their therapy while in care did not center what they characterized as being the most pressing for them, leading them to not engage fully or get the most out of their therapy. One participant stated, "I didn't see the use of therapy because I was forced into it. [That] made it a lot harder to make bonds with people because what's the point in making connections if it's not going to last." Another participant stated, "Therapy is fazed out and tired" after being asked what they think a root cause to homelessness in this population is. Without being equipped with the tools necessary to regulate emotions and triggers related to their trauma, participants identified that it becomes hard to ask for help or to have the drive to go seek help.

## Institutionalization of Youth in Foster Care

While in foster care, many participants shared that they became institutionalized due to their lack of autonomy while in care. One participant stated, "A lot of us come out with a prison mindset. [We] are easily institutionalized and get used to just having little to nothing in foster care…It's not just the walls that confine you." Another participant stated, "I did not extend my time because I felt as if I wouldn't be treated as [an] adult and more like a prisoner." When speaking about residential and group home placements, participants identified the structure of these placements contributed heavily to their idea that they have to ask for everything; that they don't have the power over their own lives.

"Young adults become institutionalized in group homes. [They're] used to being told what to do or not having the freedom to make their own decisions."

Many young adults discussed how their lack of involvement in their own care while in the state's custody contributed heavily to their inability to accomplish tasks that were necessary for them to acquire and maintain permanent stable housing upon exiting care. One staff member stated, "We provide a lot for them while they are in care, then they turn 18 and are left to themselves."

> "[I] was just taught how to go to work or go to school but wasn't taught how to keep a house. [I] wasn't taught anything outside of living with [the state]."

Repeatedly, young adults and staff pointed to the lack of preparation for young adults as a reasoning for why this population is disproportionately experiencing homelessness. Young adults have stated that they lacked the empowerment and autonomy to take initiative in acquiring housing and the knowledge of how to maintain housing.

## Stigma of Homelessness

A contributing factor to mental health issues in foster care alumni is the stigma associated with experiencing homelessness. This stigma is one factor that prevents young adults from reaching out for help and from trying to build connections. Not only are young adults on their own as they transition to adulthood, but they tend to isolate themselves further for a few reasons: they do not want anyone to know they are experiencing homelessness, they do not want to hear "no" if they do ask or try for help, and they do not want to feel like a charity case. In each of these scenarios, young adults fight to do this on their own, feeling like they can only count on themselves

### Recommendations:

- ⊕ **DCBS should strengthen the vetting process and oversight of foster care placement** to ensure that youth are being placed in placements that are safe and nurturing to their development, as trauma endured while in care has significantly contributed to foster care alumna's experiences of homelessness.
- ⊕ **Permit youth to choose their own therapist**, including specialists within the community, that they believe can help and support them.
- ⊕ **DCBS should increase the number of Pre-Independent Living programs** that give youth some autonomy and opportunities for independent experiential learning to occur in the community.

# Theme 3: Lack of Connections and Supports

Another recurring theme from the foster care alumni who experience homelessness was the lack of support and connection. During their time in the state's care, many young adults miss out on critical intangible supports, like love and a sense of belonging, while also not receiving the support they need in their crisis situations or as they transition into adulthood.
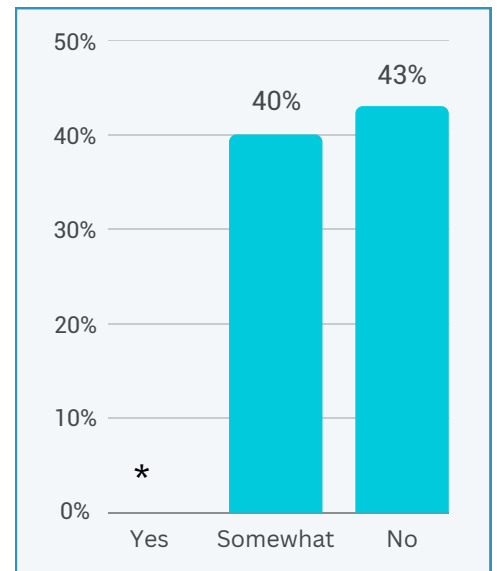
## Lack of Natural Supports

Whether it's biological family, found family, or foster families, foster care alumni have mixed experiences and feelings regarding support in their lives. Natural supports vary by definition as does the meaning of family based on a young adult's experiences and cultural beliefs.[19] Family and other forms of natural support can be protective factors for foster care alumni. Young adults may have professional support in programs for foster care alumni, but these relationships are overshadowed by the fact that these are paid staff members. Not only are there boundary issues between staff and young adults, there is no guaranteed, long-term support once a young adult leaves the program. It's also important to note the difference between communication and actual support. During the focus groups and staff interviews, it was noted that the missing elements were intangible—love, connection, and belonging. "The key is to feel like they are a part of something."

### Connections with family (n=30)
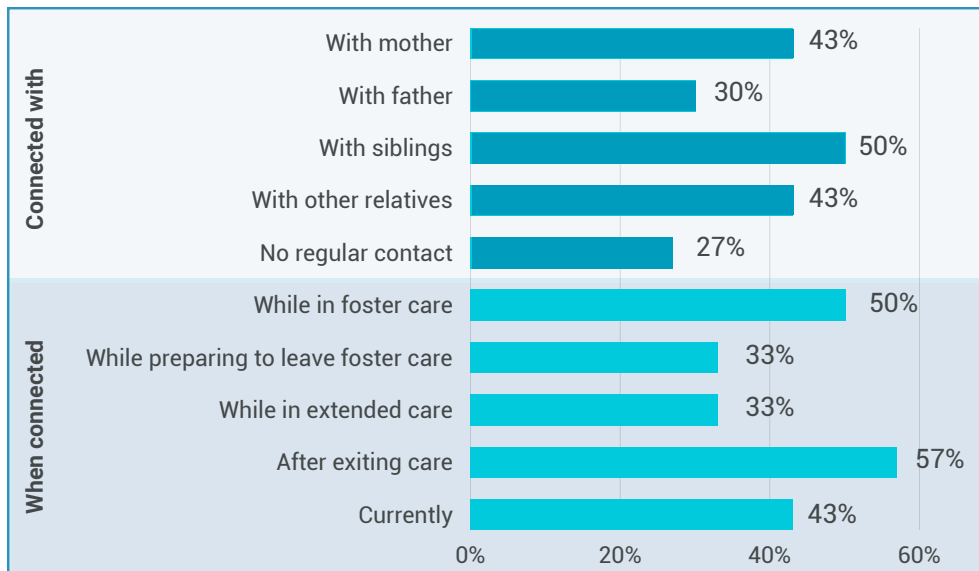


### Experienced support for healthy relationships with siblings, birth parents, or other relatives while in foster care (n=30)



* Percentage not shown for fewer than 6 responses

## Family Dynamics and Peer Groups

While natural supports are considered a protective factor, many foster care alumni have limited or no experience of positive family relationships or friend/peer groups. Some young adults have stayed in communication with their biological family, but communication is not the same as receiving support. Unfortunately, there is no way to stop all contact between foster youth and unhealthy or negative connections, but there is space to teach them how to establish boundaries and what healthy relationships look like.

Where peer groups could be beneficial to these young adults, not all have that option and not all peer relationships are positive, especially in friendships built from a trauma-bond over similar experiences and circumstances. Some young adults were not encouraged or even allowed to make friends in their community.

**57%**

Experienced having someone in their life from the community that was a mentor (n=30)

During the focus groups, foster care alumni reported that they received support from their foster families but it was contingent on their behavior and compliance. For example, choosing to contact their biological family could result in arguments and criticism from their foster families, with the possibility of losing support altogether. In situations where foster parents had ulterior motives for supporting youth, failure to comply with demands (e.g., free manual labor), or even turning 18 meant the end of all support from the family.

> *"My foster parents were grooming me and manipulating me. They made me do manual labor for free and were mentally and psychologically abusive and on my 18th birthday I was raped and impregnated and they kicked me out."*

## Transition Support into Adulthood

For young adults experiencing homelessness, a major source of support includes help making the transition into adulthood. At age 18, foster alumni may have to learn how to fend for themselves as a result of their choosing to not retransition with the state (commonly referred to as recommitting), not being allowed to extend commitment, and having no outside support. Without close ties to supportive family or positive peer relationships, these young adults feel like they are on their own with no understanding of how to find housing or stable employment. Those that do figure out how to navigate these systems are not always successful. For one young adult in the focus groups, their application for Section 8 Housing did not work out, and they were not supported afterwards. A long-term, supportive relationship for youth and young adults in foster care and alumni can be beneficial, such as a mentorship or life coach relationship with someone outside of their foster family, group home, or program.

## Pregnancy and Parenting Issues

In the case of foster care alumni and experiences of homelessness, there is a cycle of foster care and unplanned pregnancy. Factors such as, "biological parent psychosocial functioning and foster care alumni mental health, economic status, and social support" contribute to children of these foster care alumni also spending time in foster care.[20] According to staff interviews, programs are serving more young adults that are pregnant and parenting since the COVID-19 pandemic. These foster care alumni make decisions not just for their safety, but to keep their children in their care. In the focus groups, young adults with children explained their fear of asking for help or staying in shelters because they did not want Child Protective Services called. In some cases, youth formerly in foster care said they chose not to retransition with the state and go into Independent Living housing because they believed their children would be automatically placed in state custody. However, DCBS no longer automatically takes custody of the children of those under 18 in foster care or of those who are over 18 and have extended care.



Among foster care alumni who responded to the survey, many had children – or non-biological children that they helped care for – in their home, representing 41% of respondents. Of those with children, 38% were under 18 when they became a parent.

While there is a focus on the lack of connections that lead young adults to homelessness, it is important to mention the positive impacts of young adults having connections with other alumni observed through this project. Young adults who received case management services as well as peer support positively benefited from their interactions with staff. Young adults felt comfortable to regularly report issues with peer support. Young adults benefited from intangible services, such as a listening ear to vent

and positive appropriate physical touch like a hug or high five. One young adult in particular went from zero friends and support, to almost the entire community supporting him and ensuring he develops achievable goals. This alumni began with nothing because of the lack of support he has had previously in life, but after just a few weeks of being supported by the team, he has found a roof over his head, a way to earn his GED and a career path that will lead him to stable housing. Now, this young adult will have a brighter future than he could have imagined for himself, due to peer and community support.

## Recommendations:

⊕ **DCBS should begin implementing family finding practices into their case management processes.** Family finding aims to "identify individuals who can provide long-term connections, supports, stable relationships, and permanent homes."[21] It has been proven that family finding practices improve youth permanency and stability, which is a key function of the child welfare system at large. [22]

⊕ **DCBS should strengthen its communications with alumni in order for young adults to be as best connected to their resources as possible.** Many young adults mentioned that they knew of resources, but did not know who to get in contact with to get connected, or that they did not know that resources were available because they do not have the connections necessary to find out what resources are available to them.

⊕ **DCBS should consistently provide targeted and specific case management for young adults transitioning out of foster care and refer clients to services prior to the age of 18.**

## Theme 4: Foster Care and Adoption Experience

Undeniably, young adults' experiences while in foster care contribute to circumstances of homelessness and housing instability in adulthood. Through the research, young people shared over and over about not being prepared for independence upon leaving the state's care for a number of reasons, including lack of proper transition planning, lack of access to vital documents, and the results of an overburdened child welfare system.

### Permanency (adoption) is not always the solution we think it is

Youth who enter foster care are given a goal, including adoption, reunification with family, or independent living. Unfortunately, young people are often not given a say in what that goal is or the steps taken to reach that goal. In one focus group, a young adult said, "Adoption was pushed on me because someone was willing to adopt me, then the adoption fell through." Additionally, as shown in a chart in the Survey Insights section of this report, some survey respondents reported experiencing homelessness after being adopted and after turning 18.

*"15 days before I turned 18 I was adopted. I came down [to Louisville] to reunite with my…biological family when I turned 18 and my [adoptive] mom got mad at me because I wanted to reunite with my [biological] family… [and now] my adoptive mom doesn't want to talk to me."*

Once an adoption falls through, it depends on the age the adoption occurred regarding whether the youth can continue to receive services from the state, since sometimes adoption status disqualifies them from certain resources. In May of 2023, KYA staff were informed about Kentucky Resources for Independence Success & Empowerment (KY RISE) funds that are available for young adults, ages 18-26, who were adopted at age 16 or older. It is important for this information to continue to be communicated broadly. One youth who was served through the project became homeless the day he turned 18 because he was adopted, and the adoptive parents decided he would be on his own once he was an "adult." If he had never been adopted, and was in foster care on his 18th birthday, he would be eligible for an Independent Living program which assists foster alumni with housing and many other resources. There were many similar stories from focus group discussions of foster and adoptive homes not providing support into adulthood. One young adult said it was one fight between him and his foster mom that led her to kick him out since he was now 18.

## Lack of Oversight in Foster/Adoptive Parents

Some participants in the focus group mentioned that if they could wave a magic wand, they would increase the quality of workers and parents who encounter foster youth and alumni. One youth told us when she was 12, she was asked if she would rather stay there or go to juvenile detention when bringing up complaints about her current placement. Some young adults were restricted from contacting their biological or chosen families, and when they did, calls were monitored by abusive foster parents. One staff member interviewed mentioned, "There is not one young adult who has a foster care history that has said their experience was a good one."

While improving the quality of workers and foster parents' is a long-term solution, there can be a current focus on properly equipping youth in foster care to appropriately achieve self-sufficiency and increase their confidence and self-efficacy. This starts with transition planning meetings – making sure every applicable youth and young adult not only has one, but also completely understands each choice they are given in the meetings. This could be done by including peer support and/or mentors joining these meetings to help advocate for realistic options for that youth or young adult. It is also important that in each step of their journey towards independence, youth are given as much responsibility as they can handle.

Some young adults shared that institutional settings like hospitals and residential facilities have such rigid structure that it is hard to adapt in the real world once they leave, especially if it is a case where the youth spent most (or a lot) of their time in these settings while in foster care. Youth in care are often not given adequate responsibilities, other than sometimes basic chores and maintaining hygiene, which can make it really difficult to understand what is expected of them once they leave care and begin adulthood. The youth and young adults need to practice life skills that work for all kinds of learners, in every setting, to help prepare them for paying bills, being professional at work, etc., so they do not need to rely on limited resources like emergency hotel stays. To quote one participant, it is important to be "proactive rather than reactive" when it comes to addressing stable housing.

## Access to Vital Documents

In order for young adults to be successful with their independence they must also have access to all of their vital documents, including social security card, birth certificate, ID/drivers license, and sometimes proof of citizenship papers. Because of the instability that comes with the foster care experience, many young adults either lose their vital documents or never receive them when they leave foster care. This can be a barrier to many adult expectations, including getting a job and finding a stable place to live. One young adult could not get his social security card because his citizenship paperwork was lost, and he does not have the money to pay for replacements. There must be accountability within DCBS to secure vital documents and give them to young adults when they exit foster care.

⊕ **DCBS should conduct appropriate transition planning meetings with every applicable youth** encouraging multiple plans of action after aging out of care, planning for challenges youth may endure, and education around all housing options (foster care specific and community-based) including wait times, leasing requirements, and ways to retain housing.

⊕ **Regulate adoptions after age 16 and 17** to ensure foster youth can maximize their benefits post-exiting care.

⊕ **Ensure every young adult has physical copies of vital documents prior** to them exiting care.
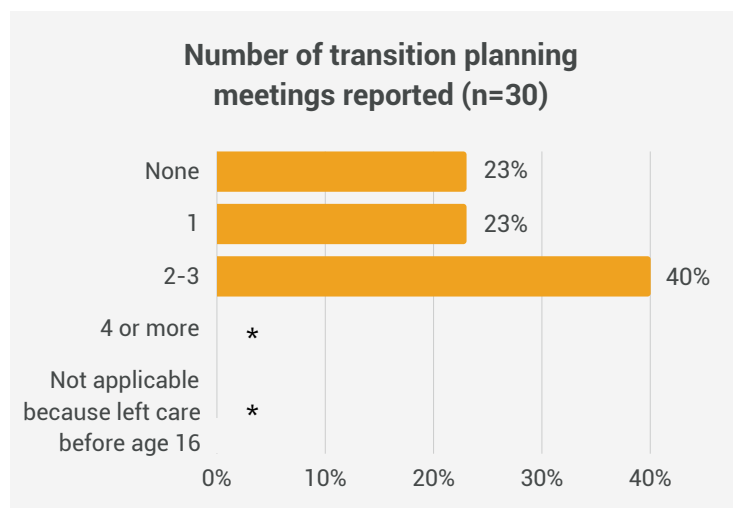
## Theme 5: Gaps in Service and the Foster Care System

Gaps in services and information being made available to young people with foster care experience was a recurring theme discussed in focus groups. "Everyone is dipping their toes in the water but there is no one diving deep to solve the problem."

Participants shared a need for reliable transportation and safe options when homeless shelters are full, funding for emergency hotels is limited, and transitional housing is no longer available. The young adults spoke at length about lacking a feeling of belonging and authentic connection in families and in their lives. When discussing their experiences in foster care and with homelessness, overwhelmingly, participants cited a lack of knowledge about the services available to them and a lack of community collaboration as the most concerning and pressing issues.
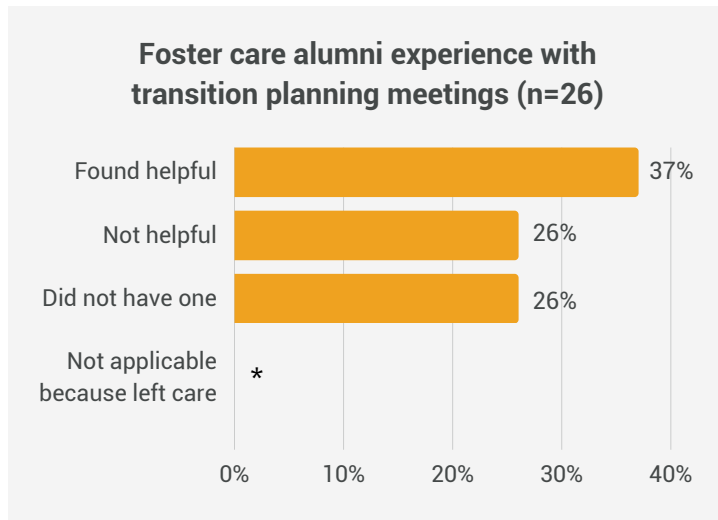
### Insufficient Support to Transition

Federal law requires the case plan, for youth ages fourteen and older, to include a written description of the programs and services which will help the child prepare for the transition from foster care to a successful adulthood. The formal transition planning meetings are required to occur with youth and young adults at various points as they approach the time to leave care (age 17, 90 days before age 18, age 19, age 20, and within 90 calendar days prior to their 21st birthday, as applicable for those who extend their time in foster care). [23]

**Number of transition planning meetings reported (n=30)**

| Category | Percentage |
|---|---|
| None | 23% |
| 1 | 23% |
| 2-3 | 40% |
| 4 or more | * |
| Not applicable because left care before age 16 | * |

* Percentage not shown for fewer than 6 responses

However, a significant number of alumni reported not previously having transition planning meetings. Additionally, despite these required meetings, the transition planning meetings alone are not enough for youth to be adequately equipped to transition into adulthood. However, it has been identified that when youth have transition planning meetings and resources, such as mentor support and knowledge on how to fill out housing voucher applications, they end up having higher rates of acquiring permanent, stable housing post aging-out of care.

**Foster care alumni experience with transition planning meetings (n=26)**

| | |
|---|---|
| Found helpful | 37% |
| Not helpful | 26% |
| Did not have one | 26% |
| Not applicable because left care | * |

0%   10%   20%   30%   40%

\* Percentage not shown for fewer than 6 responses

Among survey respondents, while more than a third found the transition planning meetings helpful, 26% did not find them helpful, and 26% reported they did not have such a meeting. It was also noted that many respondents (42%) were in residential placements or group home settings during the time when transition planning meetings would have occurred.

**42%** were in residential placements or group home settings during the time when transition planning meetings would have occurred.
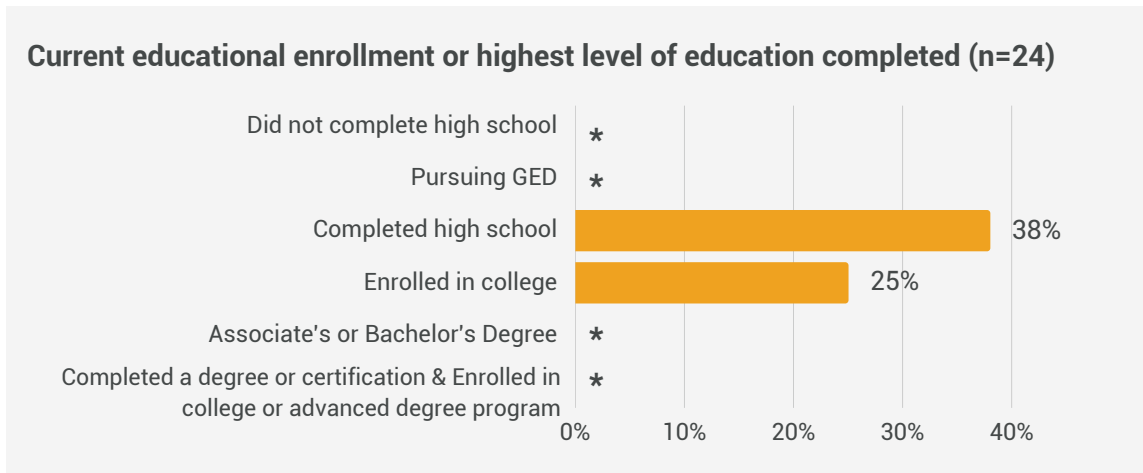
## Knowledge About Services

Several participants shared that staff did not give or inform them about the resources needed after aging out of foster care. Things like an ID and other vital documents were challenging for some to obtain. When participants were made aware of resources and services, they often did not know how to access them, or they did not qualify due to not aging out of foster care. They also expressed frustration with having to meet a significant number of requirements to access only a small number of known resources. More urgently, participants spoke about the need for immediate access to safe places to stay.

*"Unless you get lucky, you're set up for failure once you're in the system."*

Survey respondents were asked about whether they felt like they received information about being responsible for housing, including things like signing a lease, cleanliness, safety precautions, convenient location for work/school, maintaining housing, etc. Fewer than half of respondents said they learned that type of information.

**Learned about finding and managing housing while in foster care (n=24)**
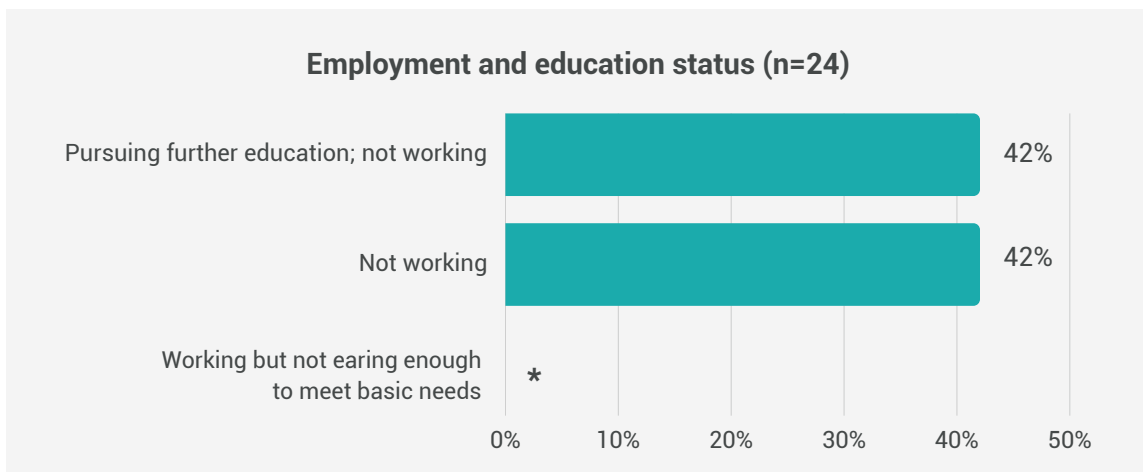
Yes 46%

No 54%
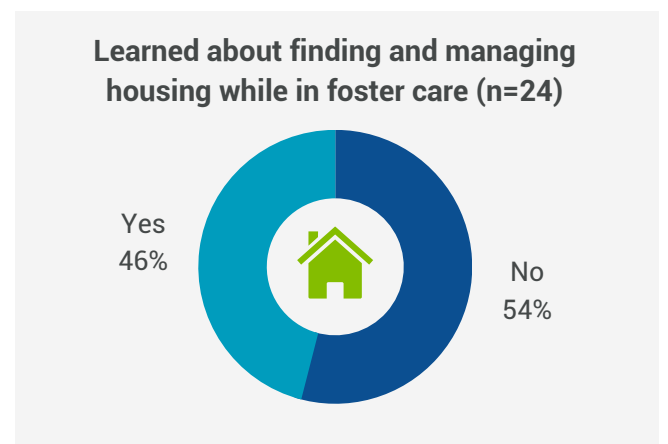
Education was another area where resources did not seem to be fully utilized. In our survey responses, it was identified that few participants obtained any post-secondary education, despite the fact that there are plenty of resources available for alumni to receive a free college education. Through interviews and focus groups it has been identified that a key reason for this is due to many young adults not made aware of the fact that various resources outside of FAFSA exist for some alumni, such as Education Training Vouchers (ETVs) and state tuition waivers.

**Current educational enrollment or highest level of education completed (n=24)**

| Category | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Did not complete high school | * |
| Pursuing GED | * |
| Completed high school | 38% |
| Enrolled in college | 25% |
| Associate's or Bachelor's Degree | * |
| Completed a degree or certification & Enrolled in college or advanced degree program | * |

*Percentage not shown for fewer than 6 responses

Though supports exist to help youth leaving foster care to become independent and self-sufficient, many youth had not been connected to the intended support to achieve those goals. Among youth who responded to the survey, 42% were not working and not attending school. Those that were working reported not earning enough to cover basic expenses, such as food, rent, and transportation.

**Employment and education status (n=24)**

| Category | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Pursuing further education; not working | 42% |
| Not working | 42% |
| Working but not earing enough to meet basic needs | * |

*Percentage not shown for fewer than 6 responses

## Community Collaboration

When discussing services, several participants mentioned that, "there are resources available, but they are very fragmented." There were service providers who helped the participants address some of their needs, like "finding a family," but intensive case management was not offered in conjunction. One participant noted the lack of support for young adults who have been incarcerated, stating that youth are released without the support they need to gain stability and access resources. Another talked about the impact of resources not being available 24-hours a day — "if you don't work or have anywhere to go, what are you supposed to do?"

Another barrier participants experienced was the requirement that they work independently to obtain resources. Agencies that required young adults to reach out to service providers themselves and did not allow others to provide support with that process interfered with their ability to successfully get connected. "[Agencies] have to help so many people that you end up neglected sometimes; end up on a wait list unless you're in someone's face about it."

## Recommendations:

⊕ **More rapid use of aftercare and KY RISE funds that provide discretionary use for alumni's immediate housing needs,** such as eviction prevention.

⊕ **Creation of an after-hours crisis hotline for alumni.**

⊕ **Host a Stand Down event** that is specifically for alumni who are experiencing homelessness.[24]

⊕ **Keep contact information for foster care alumni up to date and accessible in HMIS** in order for staff to better communicate with homeless foster care alumni and provide support.

⊕ **Advocate for foster care alumni to have cell phone and transportation resources.**

## SYSTEM IMPROVEMENTS

The child welfare system is "a group of services designed to promote the well-being of children by ensuring safety, achieving permanency, and strengthening families." [25] However, through interviews, many alumni involved in the Kentucky child welfare system shared that they have greatly faced increased risks for homelessness and housing instability. This has been seen through placement instability, lack of connections with biological and/or non-biological families, and youth being placed in unsafe settings.

## Services Specifically for Young People

While there are several programs and services for foster care alumni in Louisville, research showed a lack of homeless shelters specified for young adults experiencing homelessness and a need to expand services specific to young adults. One shelter has limited space designated for young adults. However, the need for more space is dire. There are also some services in place that have proven to be helpful, such as some access to TARC passes to support young adults needing transportation to work, school, etc. However, there is still advocacy needed in regards to making sure foster care alumni do not experience homelessness.

## Training

Continued training opportunities would be helpful for foster care staff, community members who work with or support alumni, foster parents, kinship families, fictive kin, and adoptive parents to better understand trauma-informed care, race-based trauma, resilience-building, coping skills, and healthy relationships. Foster alumni could also benefit and better understand themselves by participating in these training sessions. A description of each training can be found in the links below.

Trauma-Informed Care and Resilience Building:
- www.traumainformedcare.chcs.org/what-is-trauma-informed-care/
- bouncecoalition.org/trainings/

Race-Based Trauma
- childwellbeingandtrauma.org/toolkits/racial-trauma-and-equity-training/

Resilience Building and Coping Skills
- www.dibbleinstitute.org/our-programs/mind-matters-overcoming-adversity-and-building-resilience/

Healthy Relationships
- www.dibbleinstitute.org/our-programs/love-notes/

## Helping to Create Connections

According to staff interviews, the key to helping foster care alumni is to help them create genuine connections. Young adults are looking to create and/or expand their support networks with people "to actually meet up and help us, check on us, and make it feel like you actually care about us and our situation."

Recommendations:

- **DCBS and programs serving young adults should take a Family and Natural Supports (FNS) approach** in which "relationships are as essential as physical needs, such as food, shelter, and clothing." [26]
- **Creation of more mentor/life coaches programs** (e.g. mentors/life coaches from Orphan Care Alliance and Big Brothers Big Sisters) to help create a sense of belonging and help young adults feel less alone.
- **Cross-collaboration of community programs to streamline the connection of services including the use of kiosks, such as MyKY.info**.
- **Continue expanding the True Up Peer Network** as a safe space and as an opportunity for alumni to connect with others in a positive way.
- **Require trainings and provide information to support youth and young adults in learning skills for establishing and rebuilding healthy relationships**

## Compassionate Accountability of Young People

Child welfare system stakeholders should approach engagement with young adults in a way that supports the young person's healthy development and autonomy. Co-regulation has been identified as a way to nurture youth development through "caring, consistent, responsive relationships, supportive environments, and intentional and developmentally-informed day-to-day interactions." [27] This approach allows for those who are working with youth to be able to hold them accountable for their actions and also encourage them to continue making the best decisions possible to get themselves out of tough situations, such as homelessness.

This can be accomplished many ways:

- **Implement a positive youth development framework in programs that support foster alumni,** which is "an intentional, prosocial approach that engages youth within their communities, schools, organizations, peer groups, and families in a manner that is productive and constructive; recognizes, utilizes, and enhances young people's strengths; and promotes positive outcomes for young people by providing opportunities, fostering positive relationships, and furnishing the support needed to build on their leadership strength." [28]
- **Ensure that staff and foster parents who work closely with this population empower young adults** to become self-starters and self-sufficient with the implementation of tangible goals to accomplish in order to help push young adults not to be complacent in their homelessness.
- **Training and educating young people how to live independently** by promoting financial literacy skills, such as budgeting, how to pay bills and taxes, etc.
- **Empower youth, young adults, and alumni to make their own decisions regarding housing** by giving them all of their options, as well as emphasizing the priority of their own choices.

Through compassionate accountability, those who work closely with young people who have a foster care history will be able to keep them accountable for achieving their goals towards stable housing, while also discouraging engagement in behaviors that would hamper their ability to achieve such.

## Refurbishing Abandoned Homes

A recommendation to help prevent homelessness amongst foster care alumni is to refurbish abandoned homes that can become housing that is affordable. In 2021, YouthBuild Louisville students renovated a historic home for the purpose of providing job training and housing for some of the students. [29]

Transitional housing is also needed for alumni, especially those with serious mental health or medical concerns that require a high-level of supervision, until stable housing can be secured.

Another recommendation is for hotel vouchers to be provided to alumni while they are waiting for safe housing to be obtained. DCBS utilized funding from the first round of federal pandemic aid for hotel stays, throughout the state, to those in need. A young adult stated the following in regards to the importance for this suggested resource, "Hotel stays have been extremely helpful because shelters are hard; especially being 18 sleeping next to a random 70 year old man."

> *"Hotel stays have been extremely helpful because shelters are hard; especially being 18 sleeping next to a random 70 year old man."*

# Conclusion

Navigating the child welfare system comes with many challenges and tribulations, such as lack of appropriate housing options and/or services, mental health challenges, lack of connections and supports, foster care and adoption experiences, and gaps in services. High rates of young adults who have experienced homelessness after aging out of foster care are reported, despite the abundance of resources that are available to them.

The overall goal of the child welfare system is to "protect children and vulnerable adults to promote self-sufficiency and permanency by providing the best regulatory framework and state plan structure possible."[30] Currently, needs are not being adequately met leading to extreme gaps in youth development, increased exposure to trauma, lack of safety and sense of self, and many other challenges that have been previously identified. Seemingly, youth and young adults in the system have simply been trying to survive, when they also deserve quality experiences and opportunities to do more than just to survive and get by – but to thrive as well.

Kentucky Youth Advocates and True Up will be utilizing the information from this study to educate and engage with community partners, promote policy change, and partner with the Kentucky Department for Community Based Services to implement changes that ensure youth leave foster care with the appropriate support and guidance to maintain a safe and stable place to live. Community collaboration will play a significant role in reducing the amount of young adults who exit foster care and experience homelessness, reduce the burden of cost for homelessness,[31] and feel supported throughout and beyond their journey in the child welfare system.

# References

1. Coalition for the Homeless (2022). Addressing Urgent Needs: A 2022 Analysis of Homelessness in Louisville. Available at https://louhomeless.org/homelessness22/.
2. Data shared with community partners at monthly Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP) meetings from Louisville's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) that tracks information on everyone who contacts one of the participating agencies for homelessness support.
3. Dworsky, A., Gitlow, E., Horwitz, B., & Samuels, G.M. (2019). Missed opportunities: Pathways from foster care to youth homelessness in America. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. Available at https://voicesofyouthcount.org/brief/missed-opportunities-pathways-from-foster-care-to-youth-homelessness-in-america/
4. Morton, M.H., Dworsky, A., & Samuels, G.M. (2017). Missed opportunities: Youth homelessness in America. National estimates. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. Available at https://voicesofyouthcount.org/brief/national-estimates-of-youth-homelessness/
5. Foster Care Alumni of America. "Frequently Asked Questions." Available at https://fostercarealumni.org/frequently-asked-questions/
6. The Annie E. Casey Foundation, "Data Tables." Fostering Youth Transitions 2023: State and National Data to Drive Foster Care Advocacy. Available at https://assets.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-fosteringyouth-data-2023.pdf
7. The Annie E. Casey Foundation, KIDS COUNT Data Center. Available at https://www.google.com/url?q=https://datacenter.aecf.org/data/tables/6277-children-exiting-foster-care-by-exit-reason?loc%3D19%26loct%3D2%23detailed/2/19/false/2048,574,1729,37,871,870,573,869,36,868/2632/13050,13051&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1693509964133880&usg=AOvVaw1uAfD74z3Di1EqbG-8TO2u
8. Kentucky Citizen Foster Care Review Board (2023). 2022 Annual Report. Available at https://kycourts.gov/Court-Programs/Family-and-Juvenile-Services/Documents/2022CFCRBAnnualReport.pdf
9. The Annie E. Casey Foundation, KIDS COUNT Data Center. Available at https://datacenter.aecf.org/data/tables/10203-youth-transitioning-out-of-foster-care-experienced-homelessness-in-the-past-two-years-by-race-ethnicity?loc=1&loct=2#detailed/2/19/true/1698,1697/|6259,6260/19742,19743
10. Kentucky Youth Advocates (2022). 2022 Kentucky KIDS COUNT County Data Book Available at https://kyyouth.org/kentucky-kids-count/county-data-books/
11. The Annie E. Casey Foundation, "2023 Kentucky Profile." Fostering Youth Transitions 2023: State and National Data to Drive Foster Care Advocacy. Available at https://assets.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-fosteringyouth-stateprofile-KY.pdf.
12. The Annie E. Casey Foundation, "Data Tables." Fostering Youth Transitions 2023: State and National Data to Drive Foster Care Advocacy. Available at https://assets.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-fosteringyouth-data-2023.pdf
13. The Annie E. Casey Foundation. "Foster Care Explained: What It Is, How It Works and How It Can Be Improved." Web blog post. Casey Connects. Updated May 20, 2022. Available at https://www.aecf.org/blog/what-is-foster-care
14. The Annie E. Casey Foundation, "2023 Kentucky Profile." Fostering Youth Transitions 2023: State and National Data to Drive Foster Care Advocacy. Available at https://assets.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-fosteringyouth-stateprofile-KY.pdf
15. Feng, H., Harty, J., Okpych, N., & Courtney, M. (2020). Memo from CalYOUTH: Predictors of Homelessness at Age 21. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. Available at https://www.chapinhall.org/research/calyouth-efc-homelessness/
16. Morton, M. H., Chávez, R., Kull, M. A., Carreon, E. D, Bishop, J., Daferede, S., Wood, E., Cohen, L.,& Barreyro, P. (2020). Developing a direct cash transfer program for youth experiencing homelessness: Results of a mixed methods, multi-stakeholder design process. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. Available at https://www.chapinhall.org/research/direct-cash-transfers-program-can-help-youth-sustainably-exit-homelessness/

# References

17. Morton, M. H., Kugley, S., Epstein, R. A., & Farrell, A. F. (2019). Missed opportunities: Evidence on interventions for addressing youth homelessness. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. Available at https://www.chapinhall.org/wp-content/uploads/Evidence-Review-Brief.pdf

18. Leavell, J. "Homeless crisis, full shelters in Louisville pushing more families to live on the streets." WDRB.com Updated June 5, 2023. Available at https://www.wdrb.com/news/homeless-crisis-full-shelters-in-louisville-pushing-more-families-to-live-on-the-streets/article_b79c6012-0184-11ee-b69e-f30e47efc94f.html

19. Leavell, J. "Homeless crisis, full shelters in Louisville pushing more families to live on the streets." WDRB.com Updated June 5, 2023. Available at https://www.wdrb.com/news/homeless-crisis-full-shelters-in-louisville-pushing-more-families-to-live-on-the-streets/article_b79c6012-0184-11ee-b69e-f30e47efc94f.html

20. Jackson Foster, L., Beadnell, B., and Pecora, P. (2015), "Intergenerational pathways leading to foster care placement of foster care alumni's children," Child & Family Social Work. Available at https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4340584/pdf/nihms423980.pdf

21. Casey Family Programs (2018). "What are some examples of effective family search and engagement?" Strong Families: Strategy Brief. Available at https://www.casey.org/family-search-engagement/

22. Casey Family Programs (2018). "How can we ensure a child's first placement is with a family?" Strong Families: Jurisdictional Scan. Available at https://www.casey.org/first-placement-family-placement/

23. Department for Community Based Services. Effective August 1, 2023. Standards of Practice Online Manual. Available at https://manuals-sp-chfs.ky.gov/chapter4/Pages/4-29-2.aspx

24. Grace, C. "Salvation Army 'Stand Down' event caters to hundreds of the city's homeless." WLKY. Updated October 2, 2019. Available at https://www.wlky.com/article/salvation-army-stand-down-event-caters-to-hundreds-of-the-citys-homeless/29340907

25. Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2020). How the child welfare system works. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau. Available at https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/cpswork/

26. Borato, M., Gaetz, S., and McMillan, L. (2020). Family and Natural Supports: A Program Framework. Toronto, ON: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press. Available at https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/FNS%7Breport1%7D1.5.pdf

27. Murray, D., Rackers, H., Sepulveda, K., and Malm, K. (2021). "Child Welfare Professionals Guide: How to Support Older Youth with Foster Care Experience Through Co-Regulation," OPRE Report #2021-247, Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Available at https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/child-welfare-professionals-guide-how-support-older-youth-foster-care-experience

28. Lantos, H., Allen, T., Abdi, F., Franco, F., Moore, K., Snell, J., Bruce, B., Redd, Z., Robuck, R., and Miller, J. (2022). Integrating Positive Youth Development and Racial Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Approaches Across the Child Welfare and Justice Systems. Child Trends. Available at https://www.childtrends.org/publications/integrating-positive-youth-development-and-racial-equity-inclusion-and-belonging-approaches-across-the-child-welfare-and-justice-systems.

29. Johnson, S. "YouthBuild Louisville students renovate historic, 120-year-old home" WDRB.com Updated October 26, 2021. Available at https://www.wdrb.com/news/youthbuild-louisville-students-renovate-historic-120-year-old-home/article_2e9ad026-36ad-11ec-bc90-e72f3f61cbff.html

30. Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services, Retrieved July 18, 2023. Division of Protection and Permanency. Available at https://www.chfs.ky.gov/agencies/dcbs/dpp/Pages/default.aspx

31. Coalition for the Homeless. Retrieved July 18, 2023. The Cost of Housing the Homeless. Available at https://louhomeless.org/what-we-do/education/the-cost-of-housing-the-homeless/