

Coalition of Foster Advocates: Hennepin Foster COVID Relief Fund Preliminary Results

Rainbow Research

Background

The Coalition of Foster Advocates (CFA) was created in June 2020, comprised of Connections to Independence (C2i), Foster Advocates, Project for Pride in Living (PPL), and YMCA of the North. Together, our coalition received \$200,000 in CARES Act funding from Hennepin County to distribute relief fund payments of \$1,500 to 128 former Hennepin Fosters¹ in December 2020.

Applicants were recruited through direct services members of the coalition and through broad social media communication to reach Fosters unaffiliated with partners. Eligible applicants were those impacted by COVID-19, Hennepin County residents between ages 18-26 years old, and screened in by priority levels based on recent transition out of Minnesota foster care. All applicants were asked to participate in a survey that asked questions related to various facets of well-being and the interrelated effects of COVID-19 on these sectors of their lives: mental and physical health, economic and financial wellbeing, social connections, housing, access to basic needs, educational attainment progress, and future outlook.

Rainbow Research, an independent evaluation consultant nonprofit, advised on the survey design and supported analysis. Below is a summary of key findings. All participants who received funding will also be invited to participate in a follow up survey in March 2021 to ascertain impact of relief fund payments and sustained needs.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Age

Age	Frequency	Percent
18-20	19	14.9
21-23	86	67.2
24-26	23	17.9
Total	128	100.0

- 93% of the participants mentioned they were in Hennepin Foster care at the age of 18.

¹ At Foster Advocates, we recognize the experience of being in foster care creates a significant cultural identity. We use the term Foster to encompass this unique identity, akin to other immutable characteristics, and helps recognize the impact of the foster care system never ends, even if individuals are adopted or age out.

Foster Care Status

	Frequency	Percent
Adoption or reunification from Hennepin before age 18	4	3.1
Teen Parent; foster care disrupted before age 18	2	1.6
Aged out other MN county; currently live in Hennepin	4	3.1
Aged out Hennepin age 18	22	17.2
Left Hennepin EFC early	16	12.5
Aged out Hennepin age 21	76	59.4
Aged out Hennepin age 21 in January 2021	4	3.1
Total	128	100.0

Race and Ethnicity as Identified by Participants

- Participants self-identified their race and ethnicity in addition to selecting categories used by the state and federal government. In this table, we reported how participants chose to identify as opposed to using compressed state/federal categories.

Race & ethnicity	Frequency	Percent
African American/Black	55	43%
Somali	3	2%
Latinx/Hispanic	3	2%
Hmong	4	3%
Asian American	5	4%
White	15	12%
Native American	17	13%
Bi-racial	14	11%
More than two races	8	6%
Other	4	3%
Total	128	100%

Gender and Sexual Orientation as Identified by Participants

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Female	81	63%
Male	40	31%
Non-binary	3	2%
Other	4	3%
Total	128	100%

Sexual Orientation	Frequency	Percent
Straight	96	75%
Gay or Lesbian	7	5%
Bisexual	15	12%
Queer	5	4%
Questioning/not sure	4	3%
Asexual	1	1%
Total	128	100%

KEY FINDINGS

The COVID-19 Pandemic is hitting fosters especially hard. 74% of Fosters surveyed described themselves as overall doing poor or very poor. While the majority of fosters indicated that COVID-19 had major impacts on all aspects of their lives, the most severe impacts were reported on their financial security, employment, and overall well-being. Additionally, over 80% of respondents indicated that COVID-19 had a major impact on their mental wellbeing, educational progress, living situation, social support network, basic needs, and options for the future.

Percentage of fosters reporting COVID-19 had a major impact on:	% Agree or Strongly Agree	Mean
Well-being	91%	3.2734
Options for the future	88%	3.1875
Social support network	85%	3.1563
Living Situation	84%	3.2578
Food Security	72%	2.9688
Basic Needs	88%	3.2578
Educational Progress or Attainment	86%	3.1163
Employment	88%	3.4141
Financial Security	92%	3.5313
Physical Health	57%	2.7188
Mental Wellbeing	81%	3.2266

Financial Situation – The vast majority of Fosters are in a financial crisis, without any emergency funds nor people who could financially support them in an emergency. Fosters anticipated using the money distributed on basic needs: food, rent, and utilities.

- 95% reported if they had an emergency this week and needed \$500, they do NOT have funds available right now.
- Likewise, 93% reported that they did not have someone who would loan them or gift them \$500 to pay for an emergency.
- Participants agreed most strongly with the statement: I am in a money crisis (87% agree or strongly agree) and: Money is a significant source of worry or hassle for me (88% agree or strongly agree)
- 86% anticipated using funds to pay for expenses; food, rent (both past due and current/future rent) and utilities were the most common uses for the funds distributed.

Social Network— Few Fosters reported having strong social networks.

- Respondents on average reported having only 4 people who make up their close social network. Friends and siblings were the most commonly reported relationships, however only approximately 50% of fosters reported having close social support relationships with friends (52%) or siblings (51%). While a trend in society at large is for young adults to return to nuclear family living, fosters reported low connections to birth family (18%) and extended biological family (12%). Likewise, most fosters were disconnected from system supports with only 29% reporting mentor relationships, 23% reporting social worker, and 20% reporting foster family relationships.

Housing – Fosters report unsafe living conditions and homelessness in 2020.

- 86% report their living situation has not been safe since March
- 52% (highest single answer) reported they are living on their own since March
- 51% reported being behind on rent payments
- 79% had ever experienced homelessness; 14% actively homeless; 35% had been homeless for a year or more
- 35% experienced homelessness between the ages of 18-20
- 23% experienced homelessness after age 21
- 25% experienced homelessness in 2020 and 20% were currently couch surfing, or sleeping in a car or on the street at the time of the survey in December.
- On average, participants reported living with 2 additional people (1.7)

Educational Progress

- Of those who were pursuing school or vocational training, 54% of participants reported their educational progress as delayed due to COVID-19. (N=43)
- 40% reported struggling with online/hybrid learning
- 33% reported that they have abandoned or fear having to abandon their education due to costs and other reasons

Physical & Emotional Health—Fosters expressed concerns over unmet health needs.

- Despite being automatically eligible, only 77% of fosters reported having health insurance.
- Approximately half of the fosters reported unmet dental (50%) and mental health needs (45%) respectively. A third of fosters reported unmet physical medical health needs. Unmet medication needs (18%) and substance abuse support (12%) was also reported.
- When asked to indicate barriers they ran into in getting their medical needs met, youth most commonly reported concerns about cost and that they didn't know where to go.
- 44% are most likely experiencing major depression (PHQ-2 depression screener).
- 61% are most likely experiencing generalized anxiety (GAD-2 anxiety screener).
- 84% are experiencing below average mental wellbeing; 38% with probable depression (SWEMWBS wellbeing scale²).

Experience with COVID-19

- Only 38% reported having experienced COVID-19 symptoms; of those the vast majority sought medical care (81%) or were tested for COVID-19 (71%).
- 61% overall were tested for COVID-19; of those 18% reported testing positive for COVID-19.
- This survey did not demonstrate that people couldn't get testing or didn't know about testing. However, of those who tested positive, 78% reported they were NOT able to isolate.
- Generally high levels of reporting practicing COVID-19 prevention measures. (95% reported wearing a mask; 86% reported social distancing.)

Food Security – Half of Fosters lack sufficient access to healthy food and are going hungry

- 52% unable to eat healthy and nutritious food over the past month
- 51% worried wouldn't have enough to eat in the past month
- 50% Ate less than they thought they should or skipped a meal over the past month
- 45% Gone a whole day without eating over the past month
 - Comparatively—25% of adults overall experiencing food insecurity during COVID-19; 11% of adults overall reporting they sometimes or often don't have enough to eat.³

Parenting

- 35% reporting being pregnant or parenting
- Of those who had children, 64% reported rarely having access to childcare.

² The equivalent cut points for SWEMWBS are 17 or less for probable depression, 18-20 for possible depression, 21-27 for average mental wellbeing and 28-35 high mental wellbeing.

³ https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/Not-Enough-to-Eat_Hunger-and-COVID.pdf

Transportation & Access

- Participants reported most reliable access to clean water and cell phones; participants reported least reliable access to computers/tablets, followed by cleaning products, toiletries, transportation, and internet.
- 28% indicated lack of transportation as a barrier to healthcare.

Wellbeing & Optimism

- 15% of the participants expressed that they are often excited for the future, while 17% said that they experienced excitement for the future none of the time.
- 29% of the participants shared that they often have a sense of purpose
- 36% felt that they have clear goals for their future, 37% felt motivated to meet their goals and 27% felt they have the ability to meet their goals
- 13% of these participants shared that they either have or know how to get resources to meet their goals