Parenting and Pregnant Youth in Foster Care: Exploring the Challenges and Solutions
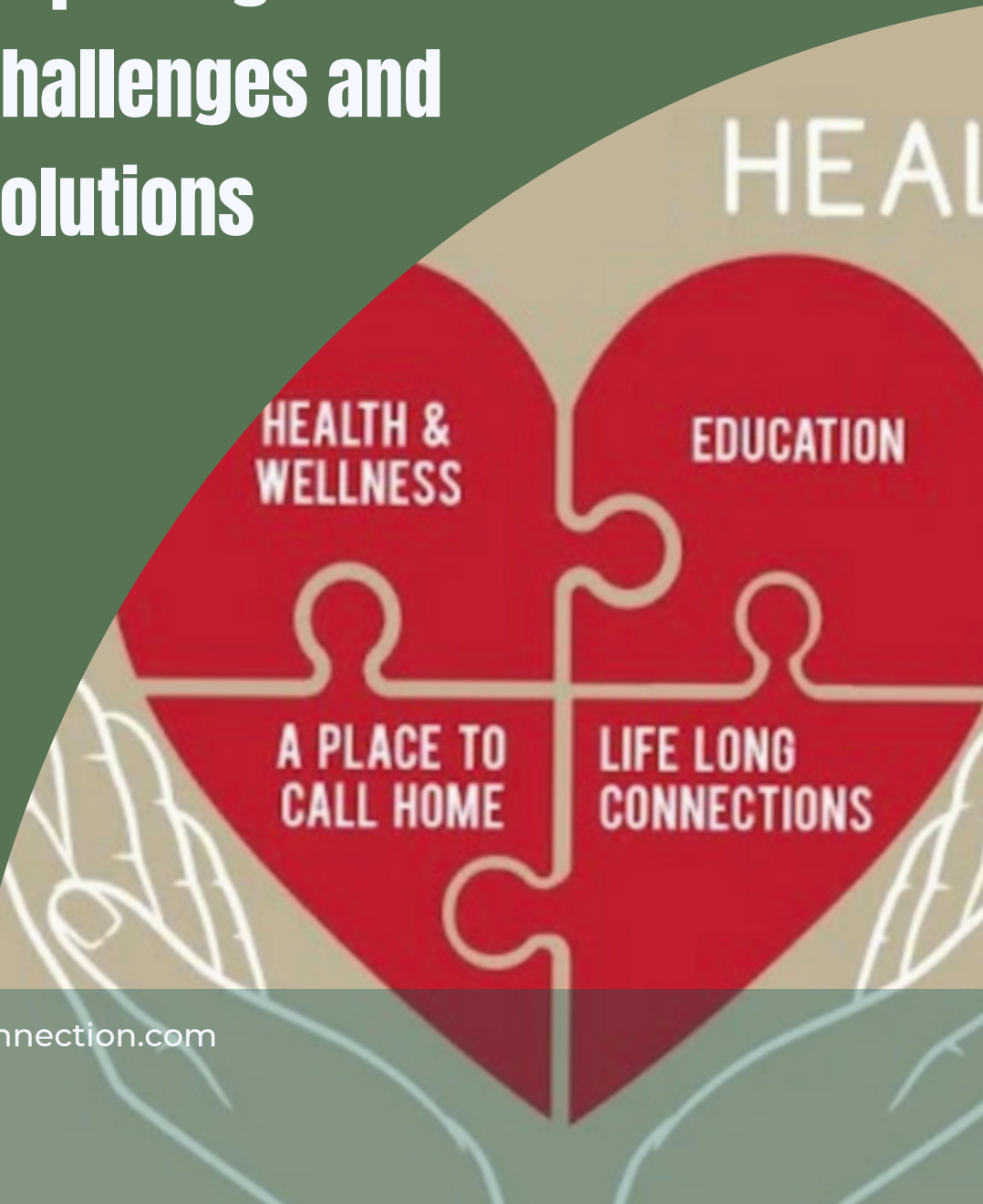
A collaborative YPAR Project

April 2023

HEAL

HEALTH & WELLNESS

EDUCATION

A PLACE TO CALL HOME

LIFE LONG CONNECTIONS

This research is dedicated to all the young parents with experience in the foster care system who have persevered through immense challenges and overcame difficult obstacles. It is for those who had to navigate complex systems and overcome societal stigmas to provide the best possible future for their children. Your resilience, strength, and determination inspire us to strive for a world where all system-impacted young parents can access the resources and support they need to thrive in complex systems and overcome societal stigmas to provide the best possible future for their children. Your resilience, strength, and determination inspire us to strive for a world where all system-impacted young parents can access the resources and support they need. Your experiences and insights are invaluable in shaping policies and practices that can better serve young families in the foster care system.

This research is dedicated to amplifying your voices and advocating for change that uplifts you and your families.

Quijai Johnson : Project Manager

ABOUT

CALIFORNIA YOUTH CONNECTION

California Youth Connection (CYC) is committed to empowering system-impacted pregnant and parenting youth in California. Through research-based advocacy, CYC aims to bring awareness to issues faced by the niche of young system-impacted parents. This project intends to create a platform where young parents can be heard and recognized for their experiences and to provide them with the necessary support to become agents of change in their communities.

Through empowering advocates with lived experience, this research looks deeper into the root causes and challenges of systemic inequalities contributing to trends following poor-quality experiences in the foster care system. By uplifting the narratives and experiences of system-impacted pregnant and parenting youth, more awareness and accountability for improved support systems are made possible.

Meet the team

**Christina Torrez:
Lead Researcher**

Christina Torrez, a 26-year-old mother of three, faced many challenges growing up in the foster care system. As a pregnant teenager, it was hard to find foster homes, but she was able to get prenatal care. Christina had to balance work, school, and caring for her child while being moved between different foster homes and eventually a group home. The transition out of the system was hard, and she ended up homeless. Christina believes that parenting youth need more resources to break the cycle of abuse and trauma, and she is advocating for programs to be accessible starting at age 16. She hopes her experiences and research will give parenting youth a chance at stability.

Sabrina Catherine Abong is a 26-year-old single mother, homeowner, foster youth advocate, homeless advocate, and Tesla worker. In her free time, she enjoys playing video games, watching TV, going on adventures, and spending time with her son. As a former foster youth and a mother to a 4-year-old child with autism, Sabrina is deeply passionate about the parenting and research cohort. She believes that having more resources and support would have helped her better care for her son with special needs. Sabrina aspires to become a foster youth and human trafficking survivor activist, advocating for the rights and needs of these vulnerable populations.

Sabrina Abong

**Galilea
Carrasco**

Galilea is a 21-year-old former foster youth with 15 years of system involvement who is pursuing dual degrees in Political Science and Clinical Psychology at San Francisco State University. Over the past six years, she has been involved in child welfare and juvenile justice advocacy work. Galilea is most passionate about transforming the Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice system to provide stability and resources for every person who has been impacted by these systems to heal, thrive, and succeed. She makes solution-based recommendations using her voice and knowledge, and is honored to work alongside passionate individuals impacted by these systems who are also fighting for change.

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Meet the team

Elizabeth Villa is a senior intern at The National Foster Youth Institute's Los Angeles chapter. She is a passionate advocate for parenting youths in foster care and has been impacted by the child welfare system herself. Elizabeth is a member of the California Youth Connection and is currently contributing to a research study aimed at making policy recommendations for parenting youth involved in the child welfare system. Her goal is to build a supportive community with equitable resources for young adults and to uplift youth to be part of the larger movement. Elizabeth's future plans involve staying connected to policy and legislative work as she continues her advocacy journey.

Elizabeth Vila

Aramis Anderson comes from Compton, California, and is a graduating senior at the University of California Berkeley, enrolled in The College of Letters and Science. Pursuing an Interdisciplinary Studies Degree with a focus on Political Economy, Legal Studies, and Social Welfare, Aramis is also actively pursuing the Jacob's Institute Design Innovation Certificate program offered by UC Berkeley's Engineering School and Haas School of Business. In his free time, Aramis enjoys playing basketball, singing/songwriting, practicing mixed martial arts, acting, and volunteering. He is a dedicated individual, committed to perseverance, achievement, family, and community.

Aramis Anderson

Briasia Bolton has experienced being in foster care in various locations throughout the Bay Area, having gone through 15 different placements. Witnessing failures within the system and procedures, Briasia has become an advocate for policy change, hoping to make a positive impact on the lives of youth who will be entering the system in the future. Briasia's ultimate goal is to be an agent of change in the child welfare system.

Briasia Bolton

As the Manager of this project, It was a blessed opportunity to empower young parents to conduct such necessary research . As with all of my endeavors in life my goal and purpose is to usher in divine healing and remembrance through community conversation and creative action. Through this project we not only generate important insights but also foster a sense of agency amongst our cohort.

Quijai Johnson: Manager

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Parenting and pregnancy can be challenging experiences for anyone, but they can be even more complicated for youth in the foster care system. This area remains relatively under-researched despite many foster youth facing unique obstacles to raising children. Therefore, this research study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the experiences and needs of parenting and pregnant youth in foster care as this group can often be marginalized and ignored.

There is a growing consensus in society that youth in foster care need specialized and tailored support to help them navigate the challenges they face. According to the National Foster Youth Institute, almost 60% of girls in foster care become pregnant by the age of 19, and minors in foster care are twice as likely to become pregnant than those not in foster care. Despite these alarming statistics, most research on foster care has focused on younger children or those without parenting responsibilities, leaving the group behind. Lack of support and information for parenting and pregnant youth in foster care can lead to adverse outcomes, such as high rates of homelessness, low levels of education, and increased risk of being involved with the child welfare system as a parent.

Understanding the challenges facing parenting and pregnant youth in foster care can help to identify gaps in the current system and lead to the development of targeted interventions and support programs. By conducting research in this area, we can better understand the unique challenges that youth in foster care with children face and how best to address these challenges. This research could enhance the long-term outcomes for children and the parents in this group, including ensuring healthy and stable homes for children, promoting positive family relationships, and improving the chance of a successful transition to adulthood for young parents.

Overall, the lack of research in this area highlights the need for further investigation into the experiences and needs of parenting and pregnant youth in foster care. The importance of this research lies in its potential to improve outcomes for this marginalized group, better inform support programs, and promote the development of policies and programs tailored to the unique needs of parenting and pregnant youth in foster care. Therefore, it is crucial to prioritize research and support initiatives for this group to ensure their well-being and success.

METHODOLOGY

This research project utilized Youth Participatory Research (YPAR) methods. For eight months, CYC participant researchers learned about community-rooted research practices and were able to design the research process from start to finish. Ceres Policy Research supported the research education and instrument development process for CYC's learning cohort. Ceres' approach was rooted in a participatory development approach. We started with a community assessment to understand the lived experiences of Pregnant and Parenting Foster Youth (PPFY).

The first phase of the research process consisted of designing an interview protocol to ask PPFY about their experiences in foster care. From there, the participant researchers recruited over 20 people to conduct in-depth one-on-one interviews. Those interviews became the basis for designing the statewide survey questions.CYC researchers conducted a qualitative data analysis of the interview results to determine what additional information they needed to complete the full picture of PPFY's resource needs. The interviews aimed to better understand the lived experience of PPFY and how the system does not support these youth to thrive as parents.

The survey's primary goal was to gather a statewide snapshot of other people's experiences and identify the resources critical to their ability to thrive as a PPFY. The participant researchers recruited over 65 people to take the survey. In addition, they presented to various service providers to inform other PPFY about the importance of the research to recruit respondents. Once all the surveys were completed, we conducted a demographic analysis to understand who took the survey and their outcomes. In addition, we studied responses for frequencies and commonalities that point to larger patterns in quality of life outcomes for PPFY.

PROJECT TIMELINE
2022

June

California Youth Connection and Ceres Policy Research collaborate to create a ten-month quantitative and qualitative data collection process.

July

Recruitment of Research Fellows. A total of 7 are selected.

August

Seminars related to community-based research take place. Topics such as Policy Research and Analysis; Trauma-Informed Research Methods; Lobbying 101; Survey Coding are discussed

September

Seminars related to community-based research take place. Topics such as Policy Research and Analysis; Trauma-Informed Research Methods; Lobbying 101; Survey Coding are discussed

October

Researchers develop a research protocol to interview PPFY. Over 20 interviews are completed.

November

Researchers learn about Qualitative Data Analysis and code interviews for top themes.

December

Researchers utilize top themes from interviews and design a statewide survey to capture the resource needs for PPFY.

PROJECT TIMELINE
2023

January

The survey is distributed to community partners, and presentations are given to explain the research process.

February

Researchers attended CYC's Day at the Capital and shared preliminary findings with lawmakers.

March

Researchers have a total of 65 completed surveys and begin data analysis to understand the realities of PPFY better.

April

Researchers write up findings and prepare for the next phase of community share-outs.

May

Research will continue to investigate more topics related to the lived experience of PPFY.

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WHO TOOK THE SURVEY?

> We need better transitions out of the system.

Among the 65 survey participants, 83% (n=54) identified as Women. Of all the participants, 47% (n=29) identified as Latinx, while 29% (n=19) identified as Black, making the majority of the survey respondents as People of Color. The respondents came from all over California, with 40% (n=24) of the participants coming from the Los Angeles area, 32% (n=19) coming from Northern California, and 23% (n=14) from the Central Valley.

Many of the respondents have experienced or are experiencing homelessness or housing instability (45%) and have had a mental health diagnosis (38%). Most respondents have Medi-Cal health insurance (75%), and more than half have their daily life impacted by a mental health condition (53.6%).

Additionally, 67.19% (n=43) of the participants identified as former foster youth, and the majority (54%) had an immediate family member who had been in foster care. Additionally, on average, participants made between $1,000 - $3,000 a month before taxes (43%) as 46% were employed. Only 17.3% had access to licensed daycare when asked about child care. The majority of respondents identify as single parents (58%).

Please look at the appendix for a full breakdown of the survey results.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

FINDINGS THEME 1: ACCESS TO CHILDCARE

BACKGROUND

According to a survey by the National Women's Law Center (NWLC), access to child care is crucial for parents. The survey found that 86% of parents agreed that access to affordable child care is essential. In addition, 91% of parents stated that when making employment decisions, childcare accessibility plays a significant role. Additionally, 70% of parents indicated they had experienced challenges finding reliable and affordable child care.

This research also highlighted the impact of inadequate childcare on parents. For example, 65% of parents reported experiencing financial strain due to the cost of child care, which can be as high as a mortgage or rent. Furthermore, 31% of parents have had to quit their job due to childcare issues. This highlights the importance of childcare for economic stability, not only for individual families but for the overall significance of the functioning economy. With that, our research aims to investigate further the accessibility of child care for those who are system impacted and its relation to service providers' support.

According to our survey, most respondents (56.5%) do not currently have access to child care. However, only 33.3% of respondents answered in the affirmative. Additionally, 10.1% answered "other," implying that unique circumstances may impact their access to child care.

THE CHALLENGES WITH ACCESS

Various options were reported among the respondents who have access to child care. The most common type of child care was having a friend or family member watch their children (32.1%), followed by choosing "other" (37.5%), indicating a level of diversity in the available options outside of licensed child care. Licensed daycare was reported by 16.1% of the respondents. In comparison, 5.4% and 1.8% of respondents chose licensed family care and babysitters.

The survey found that only 20.6% of respondents received support from their service provider to find child care. In contrast, 75% received no help, while 4.4% provided an "other" response. This lack of support could make it more challenging for parents to navigate the childcare services and make informed decisions about the best childcare option for their family's needs.

Many respondents had experiences with homelessness or housing instability, involvement in the juvenile justice system, and mental health diagnoses. These experiences make accessing the resources and services they need challenging. There is a strong theme around the need to provide education on navigating resources such as housing, legal services, financial assistance, medical care, and child care. In addition, this education can help foster youth and former foster youth who may lack support systems to access and navigate the resources they need to thrive.

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"YOU HAVE TO BASICALLY BE MAKING NOTHING TO HAVE YOUR CHILD CARE PAID FOR"

SOME CHALLENGES [I FACE WITH TRANSITIONING OUT THE SYSTEM] IS MY ACCESS TO RESOURCES... ACCESS TO RESOURCES IS STILL HARD, FOR EXAMPLE WITH CHILD CARE. I MEAN, BY THE GRACE OF GOD, I AM ON SECTION EIGHT...BUT IT'S ALSO YOU KNOW IT'S NOT ENOUGH

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FINDINGS THEME 2: RELATING WITH SERVICE PROVIDERS

BACKGROUND

Studies have consistently shown that foster youth of color benefit from having service providers with lived experience. One study found that African American foster youth with mentors of the same race reported a greater sense of belonging, trust, and support than those with mentors of a different race (Greeson et al., 2008). Similarly, another study showed that Latinx youth in foster care who received services from providers who shared their cultural background reported feeling more understood and supported (Barrera & Ainlay, 1983). A systematic review of the literature on mentoring in foster care also found that mentorship programs prioritizing cultural matching and the recruitment of mentors from underrepresented groups can positively affect youth outcomes (Haddock et al., 2017)

CULTIVATING A SAFE ENVIRONMENT IS KEY

According to the survey, we assess the importance of service providers sharing specific characteristics with system-impacted parents and parenting youth. For example, 38.6% of respondents found it extremely important for their service provider to share their ethnic and racial backgrounds. This highlights the importance of representation and diversity in service providers, as it can make their clients feel more comfortable, safe, and understood.

In contrast, only 13.6% of respondents believed it was essential for their service provider to share their gender identity. In comparison, an even smaller 7.9% found it vital for their service provider to share their religious and spiritual background. This suggests that while representation is essential for some aspects of identity, more is needed for a quality relationship between a service provider and the youth. However, due to the insufficient representation of participants who do not have a primary language outside of English, it can't be said that the low percentage of people who responded that speaking the native language was important reflects insignificance.

Interestingly, 26 % of respondents believed their service provider needed to have lived experience with being system impacted. This highlights the value of empathy and understanding in service providers, as those with similar experiences may be better equipped to provide support and guidance to the youth they are working with who are navigating similar challenges as they may have. Overall, this data provides insight into the importance of diversity and empathy in service providers and the various aspects of identity that clients may prioritize when seeking support.

"SO I FEEL LIKE THAT SERVICE PROVIDERS NEED TO UNDERSTAND THAT WHILE YOUNG PEOPLE MAKE ADULT DECISIONS SOMETIMES, THAT DOESN'T MEAN IT'S THE END OF THE WORLD AND IT DOESN'T MEAN THAT THEY STILL CAN'T BE SUCCESSFUL. BEING A YOUNG PARENT IS HARD, BUT THEN ALSO BEING SYSTEM INVOLVED IS HARDER, AND THEY DON'T NEED TO COMPLICATE EACH OTHER AND YES, THEY DO SOMETIMES COMPLICATE EACH OTHER. BUT I THINK AS A SERVICE PROVIDER, YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE TO MAKE THAT ANY HARDER THAN IT ALREADY IS GOING TO BE FOR THAT YOUNG PERSON."

"MY SOCIAL WORKER HELPED ME OUT A LITTLE BIT, BUT I HAD TO DO THINGS ON MY OWN."

"SOCIAL WORKERS THAT SERVE OUR POPULATION SHOULD HAVE LIVED EXPERIENCE AND NOT JUST COLLEGE STUDIES."

"DON'T COME AS A SOCIAL WORKER, COME LIKE A REGULAR PERSON."

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FINDINGS THEME 3: PREPARATION VS PREVENTION

A NEED FOR BALANCE

Research has shown that foster youth are at a higher risk of early pregnancy than their non-foster peers (Courtney et al., 2011). This highlights the importance of providing comprehensive sex education that covers pregnancy prevention and emphasizes the importance of personal agency and healthy relationships. By providing foster youth with accurate and complete information, they are better equipped to make informed decisions about their reproductive health and prevent unintended pregnancies. Moreover, interrupting generational cycles of instability means ensuring that foster youth have access to the necessary resources, including healthcare, contraception, and education, to help them thrive and break the cycle of instability and trauma.

ADDRESSING THE DISPARITY

The findings suggest a significant disparity in the type of information and guidance provided to youth in foster care. Most respondents reported that they were not informed about safe sex practices, STD prevention, and birth control in foster care. This highlights an urgent need for comprehensive sexual education programs for youth in care.

On the other hand, even fewer respondents reported receiving guidance on preparing for parenthood. The data suggest that the focus of care programs may be reactive rather than proactive. The lack of preparation and education for parenting skills could contribute to the high rates of teenage pregnancy and the likelihood of their children being placed into foster care. Providing youth with the necessary tools and knowledge to prepare for parenthood could break this (generational) cycle.

The results highlight the importance of effective communication and support for youth in foster care. Foster care programs should/need to prioritize prevention and preparation strategies to empower youth to make informed decisions about their reproductive health and parenting. Education and support should center around prevention methods such as safe sex practices while not neglecting the importance of preparation for parenthood. Ultimately, these efforts can help build a foundation for a healthier and more prosperous future for youth in foster care.

"I FEEL LIKE MY WHOLE TIME IN CARE ALL WE EVER HEARD ABOUT WAS IUD'S AND ABORTIONS... BUT IF THEY WOULD HAVE SOME SORT OF TRAINING FOR THOSE WHO WANTED TO KEEP THEM THEY COULD GIVE THEM A 101 OF WHAT'S COMING"

"I WENT FROM A FOSTER HOME TO A GROUP HOME AND FROM THAT GROUP HOME, I ENDED UP GOING TO ANOTHER GROUP HOME. SO I WAS BOUNCING AROUND A LOT OF TIMES BECAUSE THERE WASN'T REALLY A LOT OF PROGRAMS FOR MOMS AND THERE STILL ISN'T. THERE'S NOT A LOT OF HOUSING PROGRAMS FOR MOTHERS, FOR EXAMPLE, LIKE THERE'S ONLY SO MANY SHELTERS, AND THEY'RE CATHOLIC BASED. SO A LOT OF THEIR STUFF IS VERY RELIGION BASED WHICH IS HARD BECAUSE NOT EVERYONE BELIEVES IN THE SAME THINGS AND THAT'S WHERE I HAD TO LIVE AND THAT'S WHERE I HAD PROBLEMS WITH THEM BECAUSE THEY WERE TELLING ME YOU CAN'T HAVE ACCESS TO ABORTIONS OR YOU CAN'T HAVE ACCESS TO BIRTH CONTROL, WHICH WAS VERY, VERY HARD FOR ME BECAUSE I DIDN'T WANT TO BE A PARENT TO BEGIN WITH AND I WAS GOING TO DO ANYTHING THAT I COULD TO PREVENT PREGNANCY FROM HAPPENING AGAIN."

FINDINGS THEME 4: TRANSITIONING OUT OF THE SYSTEM

Transitioning out of the foster care system is a challenging experience for many youths, especially for parenting or pregnant foster youth. The survey responses of foster youth who have transitioned out of the system revealed that social workers were not always helpful in planning their next steps.

TRANSITIONS NEED INTENTIONAL SUPPORT

The research shows that many youth need help finding their social workers helpful in planning transitions out of care, with 39.7% reporting that their social workers could have been more beneficial. This is concerning since social workers are supposed to help youth transition out. However, it suggests there may be an issue with social worker training or burnout, as many social workers may need more support for foster youth transitioning out of care.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that many youth experience homelessness, with 56.9% reporting this as their experience. This highlights the need for stable housing and resources such as financial support and mental health services, essential components of a successful transition out of care. Additionally, the research reveals that many youth need to prepare to access crucial resources such as childcare, employment, and further education. This suggests that there may be a need for better preparation by social workers and caregivers to ensure that youth are equipped with the necessary skills and resources to succeed in their transitions.

ADDRESSING THE DISPARITY

Counties should work on mirroring resources so that youth who move can maintain their services and programs. Furthermore, social workers should receive support to prevent burnout, which can lead to inadequate support for transitioning youth. Our research shows the need for a better system of transition that prepares youth in advance and ensures they have access to necessary resources and support.

To interrupt generational cycles and improve outcomes for foster youth, it is essential to ensure that social workers are equipped with the necessary tools and support to provide adequate guidance and preparation for transitioning youth. Moreover, addressing mental health issues and trauma, giving access to higher education and childcare while mirroring resources across counties can also contribute to a smoother transition for foster youth.

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THEY SHOWED ME HOW TO DO CERTAIN THINGS BUT WHEN IT CAME TO THE TRANSITIONAL ASPECTS OF GETTING HOUSING, AND ENROLLING INN SCHOOL..I WASN'T PREPARED FOR THAT

MY SOCIAL WORKER ASKED IF I STILL WANTED TO GRADUATE HIGH SCHOOL AND ASKED ME 'WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO AFTER?' I SAID JOB CORP, BUT THERE WAS NOTHING PROVIDED FOR ME.

I FELT LIKE I DIDN'T QUALIFY FOR ANYTHING OR I DIDN'T HAVE ANY KNOWLEDGE OF ANYTHING BECAUSE WE (MY CHILDREN AND I) STOPPED HAVING A SOCIAL WORKER.

THE YOUTH ARE NOT PREPARED TO TRANSITION OUT OF AB12. WHEN IT COMES TO YOU HAVING A CHILD THEY EXPECT YOU TO KNOW EVERYTHING

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FINDINGS THEME 5: FOCUSING ON MENTAL HEALTH

HEALING IS NECESSARY TO SUPPORT

The findings suggest that mental health support is crucial in preparing parenting foster youth for independent living. With 79% of respondents agreeing, increasing awareness among parenting foster youth about the benefits of seeking support when facing stress, emotional pain, post-partum, and other mental health challenges is essential. This highlighted the need for parenting foster youth to be educated about the importance of mental health support and encouraged to seek help when necessary.

Furthermore, 58.1% of respondents answered yes to needing support working on healing from past traumatic experiences. In addition, respondents listed several types of mental health support that would be helpful, including therapy, support groups, and mentoring programs. This emphasizes the need for mental health interventions to be made available for parenting foster youth who have experienced past trauma.

TRAINING TO INCREASE QUALITY OF CARE

The responses highlight the need for training service providers to be sensitive to the diverse mental health needs of parenting foster youth. With 61% of respondents agreeing, this emphasizes the importance of ensuring service providers are equipped to meet parenting foster youth's unique mental health needs.

In conclusion, the data underscores the importance of mental health support in preparing parenting foster youth for independent living. The identified resources, such as mental health education, therapy, support groups, mentoring programs, and training for service providers, should be implemented to ensure parenting foster youth receive the mental health support they need to navigate the challenges of parenting and independent living.

"I FEEL THE NEED TO FIND A MORE SUPPORTIVE WAY TO HELP MOMS WITH THEIR MENTAL HEALTH. I FEEL OFTENTIMES PEOPLE, SOCIAL WORKERS AND STAFF BELIEVE THAT JUST BECAUSE A MOTHER IS DEPRESSED, THAT THEY'RE UNFIT, WHICH IS VERY WRONG. I FEEL LIKE THAT PREVENTS THE MOTHER FROM SEEKING SERVICES THAT ARE BENEFICIAL, LIKE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES. IF I DIDN'T FEEL LIKE SOMEBODY WAS GOING TO TAKE MY DAUGHTER, I PROBABLY WOULD HAVE GOTTEN MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES."

"HAVING ACCESS AND THE RIGHT TO HEAL IN THE MOST AUTHENTIC WAY POSSIBLE BECAUSE THE PROCESS OF HEALING IS SUCH A SACRED JOURNEY. THE SYSTEM NEEDS TO TRANSITION INTO A SYSTEM THAT DOESN'T HAVE SUCH TUNNEL VISION OF WHAT MENTAL HEALTH AND HEALING SHOULD LOOK LIKE"

"I DO NEED A BREAK, BUT AT THE END OF THE DAY, THEY'RE GOING TO TELL MY SOCIAL WORKER AND THEN THEY'RE GOING TO TELL THE COURTS AND THE COURTS ARE GOING TO TELL THE SOCIAL WORKERS TO TAKE AWAY MY BABY. SO MY FEELINGS ARE ALWAYS ON THE BACK-BURNER. AND YOU KNOW, AS WITH MY MENTAL HEALTH, I DID SUFFER AS A CHILD. I SUFFERED CHILDHOOD TRAUMA AND EVERYTHING. SO IT'S LIKE, I DIDN'T REALLY HAVE A POSITIVE OUTLET TO TAKE IT ALL IN. I JUST STUFFED IT DOWN. I DIDN'T HAVE THE TIME TO DIFFERENTIATE IT."

"YOU WANT TO HEAL SO THAT YOU BREAK THOSE GENERATIONAL CYCLES OF ABUSE, NEGLECT, AND ENTRY INTO THE SYSTEM
WE HAVE TO HEAL FROM IT TO CREATE STABILITY IN OUR LIVES
YOUTH OFTEN WON'T ASK FOR HELP BECAUSE PEOPLE HAVE PROJECTED THAT AS BEING AN UNFIT PARENT. OUR YOUTH NEED SOMEONE WHO UNDERSTANDS WHAT THEY ARE GOING THROUGH AND CAN ADVOCATE ON THEIR BEHALF. 'WE NEED A SENSE OF HUMANITY IN THE SYSTEM' INSTEAD OF DISCONNECTION'

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POLICY RECOMENDATIONS

1 **Increase Accountability amongst stakeholders**

Recommendations: It is imperative to develop a detailed accountability breakdown for each stakeholder involved in the Child and Family Team (CFT) process, including the resource parent, social workers, attorneys, and CFT members.

Rationale: One of the critical challenges in the foster care system is ensuring that all stakeholders are accountable for their actions and responsibilities. Developing a detailed accountability breakdown for each stakeholder involved in the CFT process will clarify who is responsible for what tasks and activities, which will help improve communication, coordination, and collaboration among stakeholders. This will ultimately lead to more effective and efficient transition plans for children in the foster care system.

2 **Prioritize Mental Health**

Recommendations: Support systems and training should emphasize the importance of mental health support in the transition process and ensure that it is a priority for all stakeholders.

Rationale: Mental health support is critical for children and families in the foster care system, as they may have experienced trauma and other challenges that can affect their mental health. By emphasizing the importance of mental health support in the transition process, stakeholders will be more likely to prioritize this aspect of care. This will lead to better outcomes for parents and families in the foster care system, as they will have access to the mental health support they need to thrive.

> In my previous housing, when they take in mothers and children, there is a high amount of domestic violence, and for most of the recurring issues, they are kicked out and not given the support/resources they need to receive help with these issues. They need help to break these patterns, learn how to navigate and de-escalate situations like that and deal with the situation without involving law enforcement.

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POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

3 Improve transition plans

Recommendations: Ensure that transition plans are rooted in supporting the parent's mental health, housing, and education and go beyond the usual paperwork contracts signed that often go skipped over in detail.

Rationale: Transition plans are critical for ensuring that children in the foster care system can transition successfully to a new home or situation. By ensuring that transition plans are rooted in supporting the parent's mental health, housing, and education, stakeholders can provide more comprehensive support to children and families in the foster care system. This will increase help for parenting and pregnant foster youth as they transition out of the foster care system and into stability.

4 Increase Awareness of Resources

Recommendations: Increase awareness among stakeholders about available mental health resources and establish new partnerships with organizations that can provide housing and mental health support.

Rationale: Many stakeholders in the foster care system may not be aware of the available mental health resources or may not have access to them. By increasing awareness among stakeholders about available mental health resources and establishing new partnerships with organizations that can provide housing and mental health support, children and families in the foster care system will have better access to the resources they need to succeed.

> I'm so proud of myself for interrupting the cycle with my kids not being in the system. Still, so many others aren't able to break the cycle because of the trauma they hold from being in the system, with people talking down on them and judging them.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

5 **Ensure that Parents are Housed**

Recommendations: Implement a transitional housing program that prioritizes placing all youth in housing before exiting the independent living program (ILP). The assigned social worker or THP Plus counselor will locate housing options, including voucher-based possibilities, and ensure they know how to navigate available services before their last year in care.

Rationale: Nearly 40% of foster youth report social workers not helping plan transitions out of care, which is concerning. By providing a preeminent transitional housing program, foster youth can have access to the housing and resources they need to thrive outside of the system. However, given the high rates of homelessness among foster youth, such housing programs should be complemented with financial support and mental health services.

6 **Improve Accessibility to Child Care**

Recommendations: Develop a priority system in collaboration between social services and HSA to streamline the application and placement process for parenting foster youth to access child care services. Categorize parenting foster youth as a high priority to ensure they receive prompt and efficient service delivery, including priority placement on waitlists.

Rationale: Parenting foster youth face unique challenges that make accessing childcare services critical to their success. We can ensure they receive the necessary support to thrive by prioritizing their needs. This priority system would alleviate the burden of paying out of pocket and experiencing other hardships related to lack of access to childcare services. Establishing accountability for informing parenting foster youth of their position on waitlists and the availability of services would enable them to plan accordingly.

> Sometimes the waitlist is so long it's like, what's the point? I've been on the waitlist for two years; that's a long time in my life.. my kids are four now. I was like, what's the point? I give up; I'll figure it out on my own

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the research shows that several challenges need to be addressed in the foster care system to improve the transition process for PPFY. One of the issues identified is the adultification of parenting foster youth, which gives stakeholders an excuse not to provide resources or support to parents in healthy, stable transitions. Incentivizing family members to become licensed childcare providers and improving interactions with support providers can address this issue. It is also vital to prioritize mental health services and support for parents. This can directly impact the child's mental health and break the cycle of instability and generational foster care.

To address these challenges, stakeholders must be held accountable, mental health support should be prioritized, and transition plans should be rooted in supporting the parent's mental health, housing, and education. Establishing a detailed accountability breakdown for each stakeholder, emphasizing the importance of mental health support, and increasing awareness about available mental health resources are some ways that stakeholders can work towards improving the transition process for children in foster care. By implementing these policy recommendations, we can help interrupt foundational issues of instability and intergenerational foster care and ultimately improve the lives of children in the foster care system.

A LETTER TO THE PARENTS

I am writing this letter to remind you of how amazing you are. You grew up in a system that is incredibly challenging, with complex environments that not everyone can easily overcome. Despite all the odds, you became a parent and are now raising your children. That in itself is an achievement worth celebrating. We want you to know that We are fighting alongside you to improve the system. You are seen, and your voices are heard. We hope to further our advocacy to bring to light the issues they face.

It's important to keep in mind the different ways the system's very construct aims to put you at a disadvantage. You may not have had access to the same resources and opportunities as other parents. And yet, you have persevered and exceeded expectations. You have shown your children resilience, strength, and dedication, and that is a gift in itself.

You deserve to have support without judgment. It is crucial that you have people in your life who can help guide you on this journey and help you navigate any challenges that may arise. Whether it's finding affordable childcare, dealing with custody battles, or managing your mental health, you shouldn't have to do it alone. Let's continue to seek out support and hold stakeholders accountable to being genuine and having your best interest at heart.

Remember that your past does not define your future. You have control over your own life and the ability to create a better future for yourself and your children. Set goals, prioritize self-care and believe in yourself. You are capable of accomplishing anything you set your mind to.

In conclusion, I want to congratulate you on all that you have accomplished. You are incredible parents who have overcome so much. You deserve all the love, support, and respect in the world. We hope to further our advocacy to bring to light the issues you face.
Keep pushing and never give up on your Dreams,

With love,

CYC

APPENDIX

SURVEY RESULTS

Below is a summary of the complete findings from the CYC Youth Survey. Following each question, we provide the % of respondents who answered each question.

SECTION I: WHO ANSWERED THE SURVEY?

These are all important descriptors of who answered your survey. It also provides a sample of who is currently parenting or pregnant in foster care.

2. Do you identify with the following (Choose all that apply.)

Current foster youth | 7%
Former foster youth | 62%
Involved in the juvenile justice system | 25%
Have had mental health diagnosis | 38%
Experienced or are experiencing homelessness or housing instability | 45%
Experience with the immigration system | 4%
None of the Above | 7%
Other | 3%

3. How old are you?

12 - 17 | 7.5%
18 - 23 | 35.8%
24 - 29 | 52.2%
30 - 35 | 1.5%
36 - 41 | 0%
42 - 47 | 0%
48 - 53 | 0%
54 - 59 | 1.5%
60+ | 1.5%

4. Has anyone in your immediate family (biological parents, grandparents, siblings, etc) been in foster care?

No | 36.8%
Yes | 51.5%
Don't know | 8.8%
Other | 0%
None of the above | 2.9%
N/a | 0%

5. How do you identify racially? (Choose all that apply.)

Black or African American | 28%
Latinx/Latino/Latina | 42%
Mixed/Bi-Racial and identifies as Black | 20%
Mixed/Bi-Racial and Identifies as Latinx | 6%
Afro-Latinx | 3%
Asian-American | 3%
Pacific Islander | 3%
South Asian | 0%
Indigenous | 4%
Native American | 7%
Other |12%

6. What is your gender? How do you identify? (Choose all that apply.)

Woman/Girl | 78%
Man/Boy | 17%
Nonbinary | 7%
Transgender | 0%
Genderqueer | 3%
Other | 0%

7. Who do you like to date? (Choose all that apply.)

No | 36.8%
Yes | 51.5%
Don't know | 8.8%
Other | 0%
None of the above | 2.9%
N/a | 0%

**8. What Zip code do you currently live in?**

Northern California | 37.7%
Southern California | 40.6%
Central Valley | 13%
Central Coast |
East Coast | 1.4%
U.S. Territory | 0%
Other | 1.4%

9. If applicable, what county do you currently receive services from?

Northern California | 36.4%
Southern California | 30.2%
Central Valley | 3.0%
Central Coast |
East Coast |
U.S. Territory |
Other | 12.1%
N/a | 10.6%

10. If applicable, what counties have you received services from in the past?

Northern California | 20.6%
Southern California | 33.3%
Central Valley | 7.9%
Central Coast |
East Coast | 1.6%
U.S. Territory |
Other | 17.5%
N/a | 12.7%

11. What best describes the region in which you experienced the foster care system?

Los Angeles | 35%
San Francisco Bay Area | 7%
Inland Empire | 7%
Other SoCal | 13%
Northern California | 28%
Central Valley | 20%
Central Coast | 0%
Other | 17%

12. What type of Health Insurance do you and your children have?

Private (Kaiser, Blue Shield, etc.) | 19%
Uninsured | 0%
Medi-Cal | 75%
Some form of other insurance | 6%
Other | 3%
None of the above | 0%
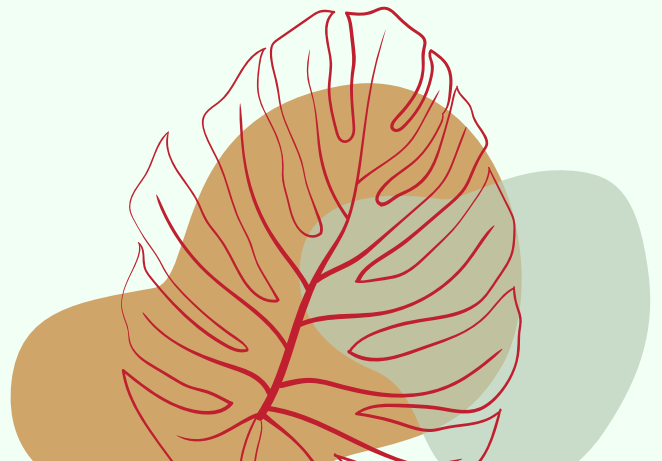
13. Are currently in school, and if yes, in what type (i.e., high school, community college, 4-year college)?

No | 34.4%
Some High School/less | 4.9%
High School | 1.6%
Some College/less | 31.1 %
College | 9.8%
Graduate | 0%
Other | 6.6%
N/A | 11.5%

14. What is your highest level of education?

No | 5.8%
Some High School/less | 10.1%
High School | 15.9%
Some College/less | 50.7%
College | 17.4%
Graduate
Other
N/A

15. How much would you say you make a month before taxes?

More than $5,000 | 11.9%
Between $4,000-$5,000| 9.0%
Between $1,000-$3,000 | 40.3%
Less than $1,000 | 28.4%
Other | 4.5%
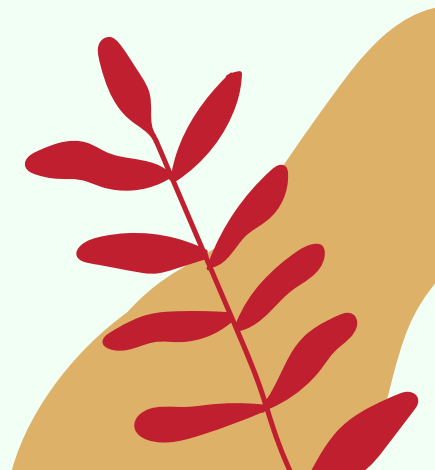
16. Have you ever received a stipend to support your family (e.g. Child-Infant Supplement, etc.)? If so, how much?

No | 55.4%
Yes | 30.8%
N/A | 13.8%

17. Are you currently employed?

Yes | 43%
 Yes, self-employed/entrepreneur | 7%
 Yes, my child's other parent and I are employed | 6%
 No, however, someone in my household is employed | 3%
 No | 23%
 Currently receiving public assistance for my basic needs | 17%
Other | 3%

18. If so, what do you do for work?

*Reach out if you would like the raw findings for this question.

19. If applicable, how old were you when you became a parent within the system?

12 - 17 | 25.4%
 18 - 23 | 55.6%
 24 - 29 | 4.8%
 30 - 35 | 0%
 36 - 41| 0%
 42 - 47| 0%
 48 - 53| 0%
 54 - 59| 0%
 60+ | 0%
N/A | 14.3%

20. How many children do you have?

0 | 14.5%
1 | 44.9%
2 | 21.7%
3 | 13%
4 | 1.4%
5 | 0%
6 | 0%
Other | 4.3%

21. What are their ages?

0-4 | 67%
5-10 | 33%
11-18 | 6%
19+ | 0%
Other | 12%

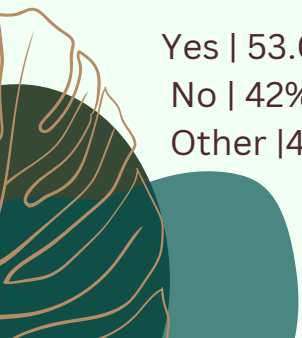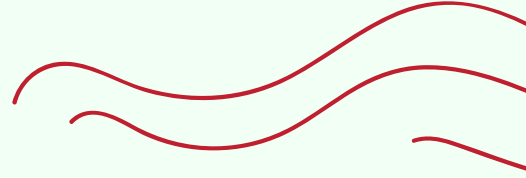**22. Do you identify as a single parent?**

Yes | 58%
No | 39.1%
Other | 2.9%

23. Do you have any disabilities that impact your daily living?

Yes | 27.5%
No | 71%
Other | 1.4%

24. Is your daily life impacted by a mental health condition?

Yes | 53.6%
No | 42%
Other |4.3%

SECTION II: Policy Considerations

These questions were created to inform policy recommendations and understand the lived experience of our participants.

25. Currently, do you have access to child care?

Yes | 33.3%
No | 56.5%
Other | 10.1%

26. If yes, what type?

Licensed daycare | 16.1%
Licensed family care | 5.4%
Baby-sitter |1.8%
Friend/family watches children | 32.1%
Other | 37.5%

27. Did you receive support to find child care from your service provider?

Yes | 20.6%
No | 75%
Other | 4.4%

28. While in foster care, how would you describe your quality of life?

Excellent |6.8%
Good | 3.4%
Fair | 25.4%
Poor | 47.5%
Other | 0%
N/a | 10.2%

29. While in the foster care system, were you ever assigned to a social worker/service provider that shared your values or came from a similar cultural background?

No | 57.6%
Yes | 30.5%
Other | 0%
None of the above | 11.9%

30. How important is it that your service provider share the following characteristics? The following percentages were found EXTREMELY/VERY important

Shares your ethnic and racial background | 34 (38.6%)
Shares your gender identity | 12 (13.6%)
Shares your religious and spiritual background | 7 (7.9%)
Shares the lived experience of being system impacted |23 (26%)
Speaks your native language (if English is not your primary language) | 12 (13.6%)

31. While in foster care, did anyone talk to you about birth control, safe sex, STDs, or preventing pregnancy?

No | 55.2%
Yes | 44.8%
Other | 0%

32. While in foster care, did anyone talk to you about preparing for parenthood (i.e. quality parenting, discipline, sleeping habits, co-parenting, etc.)?

No | 78%
Yes |20.3%
Other |1.7%

33. Have you ever taken a parenting or life skills class?

No | 45.9%
Yes | 54.1%
Other | 0%

34. Were the parenting/life skills classes you took helpful? If so, how? If not, why not?
*Reach out if you would like the raw findings for this question.

35. While in foster care, have you ever felt judged due to being a parenting/pregnant youth?

No | 39.7%
Yes | 50%
Other | 10.3%

36. If comfortable sharing, what was your experience?
*Reach out if you would like the raw findings for this question.

37. Have these experiences negatively impacted your feelings about being a parent?

Yes, a lot | 18.6%
Yes, somewhat | 18.6%
Yes, a little | 11.9%
No, not really | 15.3%
No, not at all | 8.5%
Don't know | 16.9%
Other | 3.4%

38. Have you ever lived in a shared living spaces (e.g. group home, youth home, shelters, etc.) for parenting youth?

No | 49.2%
Yes | 49.2%
Don't Know | 1.6%

39. If yes, how was the experience?
*Reach out if you would like the raw findings for this question.

40. Thinking about your experiences while transitioning out of the system, how helpful was your social worker in helping you plan your next steps as a parenting/pregnant foster youth?

Very helpful | 13.8%
Somewhat helpful | 24.1%
Helpful | 6.9%
Not helpful | 39.7%
Other | 8.6%

41. When thinking about developing your transition plan with your social worker, WERE YOU NOT PREPARED TO ACCESS ANY OF THE FOLLOWING RESOURCES?

Housing - 17 (11.9%)
Mental Health - 12 (8.3%)
Transportation - 11 (7.7%)
Employment - 12 (8.3%)
Childcare - 20 (13.9%)
Further Education - 13 (9%)
Job Training - 16 (11.2%)
Banking - 19 (13.3%)
Public Benefits - 12 (8.3%)
AB12 - 11 (7.7%)

42. At any point during your transition out of foster care, did you experience any periods of homelessness?

No | 37.9%
Yes | 56.9%
Other | 0%
None of the above | 5.2%

43. If comfortable sharing, were you ever denied benefits or had a delay in enrollment into AB12/THP?

Reach out if you would like the raw findings for this question.

44. How important is it to expand the age of eligibility for resources for parenting foster youth to receive more support as they transition into independent living?

Extremely important | 76.7%
Very Important | 3.3%
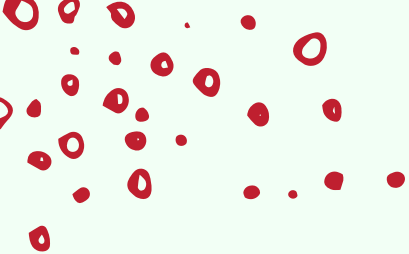Somewhat Important | 3.3%
Don't Know | 10%
Not Important | 0%

45. Why do you or don't you think the age should be expanded?

*Reach out if you would like the raw findings for this question.*

46. What do you think is an appropriate age to end services for parenting foster youth?

Reach out if you would like the raw findings for this question.

47. Which of the following resources need to be a part of preparing parenting foster youth for independent living?

- Increasing awareness among parenting foster youth about the benefits of seeking support when facing stress, emotional pain, post-partum, and other mental health challenges | 79%

- Expanding mentoring programs for parenting foster youth | 65%

- Expanding access to online, telephone, and virtual appointments with service providers | 56%

- Training for service providers to be sensitive to the diverse needs of the community they are serving | 61%

- Training for parenting foster youth to serve as peer mentor advocates and receive compensation for their services | 62%

- Establishing anonymous hotlines or online chat rooms where parenting foster youth can speak to someone and receive support with the challenges they may be facing | 48%

- Classes that teach about the development stages of children and how to practice conscious parenting | 67%

- Activities such as playdates for your child to establish social connections | 64%

- A pantry that has access to diapers, formula, strollers, and other parenting needs 71%

- Transitional housing to practice independent living in a supportive environment | 71%

- Other | 2%

- None of the above | 1%
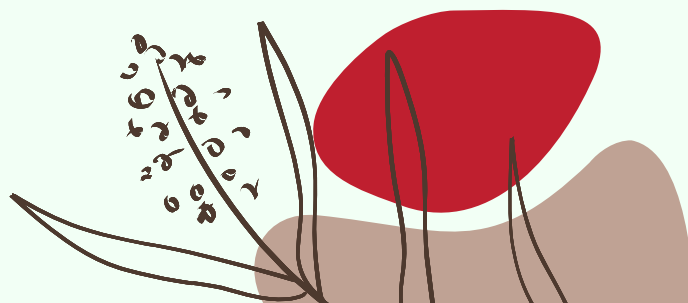
48. In the past 12 months, have you sought support from a service provider related to the following?

Custody Battle | 10%
CPS (Child Protective Services) Involvement | 7%
Child Support Claims | 10%
Mental Health Crises | 30%
Homelessness | 23%
Basic Needs Access | 42%
Employment Opportunities | 26%
Public Benefits Enrollment (Ex. WIC, EBT, General Assistance) | 45%
Other | 3%
None of the above | 17%

49. How helpful was the service provider in helping you address the situation above?
*Reach out if you would like the raw findings for this question.

50. Do you need support working on healing from past traumatic experiences?

No | 35.5%
Yes | 58.1%
Other | 6.5%

51. If yes, what would support look like?

*Reach out if you would like the raw findings for this question.

52. What would you say is your most significant barrier in terms of seeking support from a service provider?

- Length of time it may take to get to a service provider | 31.1%
- You would not be able to take time off of work to get a service provider | 6.6%
- You would not feel comfortable talking to a service provider | 3.3%
- Not trusting or believing that you will get the help you are looking for | 9.8%
- Embarrassment, shame, or stigma associated with seeking support | 11.5%
- Language barriers | 0%
- Fear of CPS (Child Protective Services) being called | 9.8%
- N/A or Don't know | 13.1%
- Other | 3.3%
- None of the above | 4.9%

53. What would you say is an example of the most helpful resource you have utilized as a parenting foster youth?

Reach out if you would like the raw findings for this question.

54. Are you interested in being entered into a $50 Visa Gift Card raffle as a token of appreciation for filling out the survey? (Winners will be announced January 2023)

No | 12%
Yes | 88%

55. Are you interested in a follow up from California Youth Connection about additional resources that could support your parenting journey? If so, please leave the best contact phone number to reach you at.

No | 9 people
Yes/left contact | 31 people

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CYC
IFORNIA YOUTH CONNECT

Parenting and Pregnant Youth in Foster Care: Exploring the Challenges and Solutions

SMC Special Session Presentation of the research findings

May 16 2023
3pm-5pm

Zoom link is on our link tree

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