

# Impact Justice

## **FosterClub's All-Star Program: An Evaluation**

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## ALICIA'S STORY

My biological mother suffered from depression and alcoholism for a period of time. My mother had nine children. I am number six. I entered kinship care at the age of three with my grandparents and then officially entered the child welfare system at age six. When asked why I was removed from my grandparents' house, I say that it was because they had too many of us in their care. They had to choose who stayed and who went. My sister and I were the unlucky ones; we had to leave.

School has always been my escape. Although I always felt out of place, people around me always made me feel "normal" even when I felt like I wasn't. I remember in junior high school hanging around a group of girls that were pretty cool and helped me stay focused in class instead of acting out. I was a magnet for attention and a lot of teachers treated me like their "school daughter". They made sure I stayed on track. One of my teachers took me school shopping every summer until I started to work. By the time I was in my senior year of high school it seemed that every one of my classmates was applying to college. Even though none of my siblings were there to help me, I got help from my guidance counselor and teachers. My social worker was also a great motivation. My social worker really invested in me and made sure I knew all of the services I was eligible for. Services that I took advantage of were Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP), New York Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program, New Yorkers for Children (NYFC) Guardian Scholars Program, and the Foster Care to Success (FC2S) Aim Higher Fellows Program.

My greatest accomplishment was being a founder of Fostering Advocacy Change and Empowerment (FACE). Four other youth in care and I came together to create a safe place for youth in care to become a catalyst for change and to change the face of foster care, hence our name.

As I matured into a young woman I realized that my foster care trauma wasn't rare. I spoke with several people regarding my experience in care and they directed me to services that deal with advocates like myself. Entering a room full of ambitious leaders whose goal is to reform the child welfare system is moving for me. Speaking about my experience and listening to others' testimony of their survival gives me a sense of healing, hope and happiness all in one. I joined FosterClub because that was my calling. As I explained, I

was a founder for FACE, my colleague had participated in the All-Stars program years prior. He had great spirits about me applying; he even wrote my letter of recommendation. He always told me that my voice will lead me to great opportunities and FosterClub was one of them.

FosterClub has provided me with so many healthy tools to help with challenges that youth face and still face within this system. Before FosterClub, I struggled with balancing my growth and struggling with my past. As I develop healthy tools to become a vibrant adult, FosterClub has given me a clear perspective of what advocacy can do. Being a part of the FosterClub Family, I am always given opportunities to interact with youth as well as organizations and join bigger conversations that challenge the child welfare system to improve.

## BACKGROUND: THE US FOSTER CARE SYSTEM

The 400,000 youth in the United States foster care system have overcome many challenges regarding education, family and social support, and physical and mental health (United States, White House, Improving Outcomes for Our Nation's Foster Youth 2014; Harden, 2004). Yet significant hurdles remain limiting long term educational achievement and financial sustainability. Only 10% of foster youth attend college and, of that 10%, only 3% graduate (Promises2Kids, Foster Care Facts, 2016). Without the supports needed to get into college and graduate, many foster youth struggle to earn a livable wage. Up to 33% of former foster youth end up on public assistance (National Center for Youth Law, Foster Youth Education Initiative pamphlet, 2015). A number of programs have formed to support foster youth as they transition from the child welfare system into adulthood in order to amplify the survival and leadership skills that these youth already possess.

Over the last several years, the child welfare system, community-based organizations (CBOs) and foundations have made efforts to better collaborate and implement strategies to improve post-care outcomes for foster youth. These efforts have led to new funding streams for research, the emergence of new organizations nationally, and the opening of legislative doors for young people to affect change at the state and federal levels.

The most significant federal legislation was the 2008 Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act. This act created an option to

extend Title-IV E payments from the age of 18 to 21 in an acknowledgement that foster youth are not adequately prepared at age 18 for absolute independence and adulthood, particularly financially. This legislative move extended eligibility for resources like Chafee and other independent living programming and, anecdotally, has relieved some anxiety amongst foster youth anticipating or already experiencing the challenges of adulthood.

Even with this extension in services, foster youth still struggle to maintain their services when relocating, services in rural areas are scarce, and the usefulness of independent living programs is remarkably varied. Moreover, the quality and continuity of those services is widely debated.

While it is assumed that both leadership development programs and advocacy boards have a greater impact on foster youth than traditional independent living programs, very little rigorous research exists regarding the benefits and challenges of both leadership development programs for youth in foster care and advocacy boards. We describe each of these programs in more detail below.

#### *Independent Living Programs*

Findings on the effectiveness of independent living programs (ILPs) are conflicting—due largely to their variation across counties and states. Previous studies conducted on the success of ILPs at preparing foster youth for their transition from care to independence reinforce this variation. The Urban Institute’s “Preparing for a ‘Next Generation’ Evaluation of Independent Living Programs for Youth in Foster Care” notes the compartmentalized nature of services; finding that ILP services fall into 10 different categories, ranging from educational to financial, with a tenth category for multicomponent “one-stop-shop”. The inconsistency of service provision across ILPs is not ideal, particularly for a population that is frequently uprooted between placements, cities, counties and even states. Without a centralized model, seamless youth transitions between ILP programs are rare, leaving youth without needed safety nets.

In this evaluation, youths’ reports of their experiences with their ILPs varied widely, with the majority of respondents describing their ILPs as insignificant, inconsistent and irrelevant. Some youth reported successfully securing housing, cultivating family-like relationships and maintaining contact with their ILP after transitioning out of care. However, the majority of youth reported only having had one interaction

with their independent living worker that did not result in a connection to any resource. To mitigate the lack of support, youth sought out alternative programming, like advocacy boards where services were not offered, but connecting with those who might be well-resourced was.

### *Advocacy Boards*

Advocacy boards are an avenue for foster youth to develop leadership skills. A content analysis of public child welfare agency programs found that every state and Washington, D.C. had a Youth Advisory Board (Forenza and Happonen, 2015). Advisory boards give foster youth the opportunity to “learn and practice leadership and advocacy skills” (Zemler, 2010). In addition, they provide a way for participants to connect with other foster youth and form relationships with adult volunteers. (Zemler, 2010). Batista (2014) found that youth involved in advocacy forums about the mental health system had higher levels of psychological empowerment than their peers. Through speaking engagements and supporting services and outreach for other youth, participants became change agents and saw themselves as such. Youth Advisory Boards not only benefit the participants, they are an avenue for policymakers to seek the input and expertise of youth (Forenza and Happonen, 2015). While advocacy boards provide excellent opportunities to learn new leadership skills, there are very few seats available to youth. There are 66,420 foster youth between the age of 16 to 20 (FosterClub statistics, 2016) but only 50 to 100 openings on advocacy boards each year.

### *Leadership Development Programs*

Few studies have evaluated the impact of foster youth leadership programs on the youth they engage, but those that have document a number of benefits of these programs for participants. The Annie E. Casey Foundation found that a two-day training in leadership and advocacy skills resulted in youth having a better understanding of the foster care system. The Casey Family Services Youth Advocacy Leadership Academy also resulted in the development of leadership and public speaking skills and an increased interest in civic engagement (The Annie E. Casey Foundation/Casey Family Services, 2010). An evaluation of training models offered by two other foster youth leadership programs, Foster Youth in Action and California Youth Connection, found similar results. Youth that received trainings reported “a strong sense of pride, belonging, and positive visions for their future” (Naccarato, and Knipe,

2014). Researchers also reported that youth benefit academically from leadership programs (Braning, 2012).

In addition to the specific research that has been conducted on these programs, our own interviews with service providers found that these programs are rarely intentionally designed to prioritize the leadership and experiences of youth of color; lesbian, gay, bisexual, questioning, transgender and gender nonconforming (LGBQ/GNCT) youth; or juvenile justice-involved youth—all groups that the federal government has highlighted as high priority populations.

Researchers have found that African American and Native American youth are disproportionately represented among foster youth. In some states, Latinx<sup>1</sup> youth are also overrepresented in the child welfare system (Padilla and Summers, 2011). Similarly, researchers have found that LGBQ/GNCT youth are also overrepresented in the child welfare system (Wilson et al, 2014; Irvine and Cipolla-Stickles, 2015).

Child welfare involvement interacts with race, sexual orientation, and gender identity to shape juvenile justice involvement. A recent study found that juvenile justice involved LGBQ youth—83% of whom are African American, Latinx, or Native American—are three times more likely than straight youth to have been removed from their homes by a social worker. Gender nonconforming youth—83% of whom are also of color—are five times more likely to have been removed from their homes (Irvine and Canfield, 2016).

These intersecting racial/ethnic identities and sexual orientation, gender identities and expressions along with system involvement still prove to be blind spots and barriers to current reform efforts and services.

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<sup>1</sup> Latinx is a term used by some members who identify as Latin American and whose gender identities do not fit into the male/female binary as employed by the terms Latino or Latina.

## FOSTERCLUB ALL-STARS: AN EVALUATION

This report shares the findings from our evaluation of the FosterClub All-Star program. The All-Star internship is an intensive, seven-week leadership development program for current and former foster youth between the ages of 18-24 across the country. Applicants who are accepted into the program move to Seaside, Oregon during the summer to live onsite with 12 to 15 other interns.

Over the course of the internship, All-Stars receive leadership, facilitation, public speaking and training-for-trainers training. In preparation for conferences, All-Stars are trained to facilitate workshops on a variety of topics including sexuality, identity and relationships, permanency (achieving a long-term or permanent living situation), and advocacy to child welfare stakeholders, advocates, and other foster youth.

All-Stars spend the summer traveling across the country speaking and tabling at large conferences, volunteering at camps for younger foster youth and their siblings, facilitating workshops about healthy romantic relationships and partnering with legislators on improving child welfare policy.

At the end of the seven weeks, All-Stars remain active interns for the subsequent year, during which FosterClub may call them at any time to present at a conference or lead a workshop. In addition, All-Stars are often engaged within their state to speak publicly or conduct trainings they've learned at FosterClub. All-Stars may also move on to become Level 2s ("L2s") and return for a second-year internship where they serve in a staff-like position, overseeing a large portion of the All-Stars' internship during the summer.

## PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION

The purpose of FosterClub's All-Stars evaluation was to determine how participation in the All-Stars internship shaped: (1) youths' understanding of federal policy and their ability to advocate for local and federal foster care reform; (2) youths' ability to educate and inform stakeholders about child welfare through sharing of personal narratives and facilitating workshops; and (3) participants' self efficacy, perceptions of their relationships and support networks, and identities as foster youth and leaders. The evaluators were also



interested in determining differences in outcomes across race and sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression amongst the All-Stars.

## METHODOLOGY

The evaluators conducted a mixed-method evaluation of the All-Star program. We describe our process in more detail below.

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### LOGIC MODEL

Impact Justice worked with FosterClub staff to develop a logic model for the All-Stars program. Developing the logic model prior to launching the evaluation served four critical purposes. First, it built rapport amongst the evaluators and the program staff and set the tone for open communication, which is important to collaborative evaluations. Second, the logic model acquainted the evaluators with the desired goals/outcomes and activities of the All-Stars program. Third, it encouraged staff to hone in on the program's strengths and prioritize desired outcomes. Last, the logic model informed the evaluation tools; the short and long term outcomes identified in the logic model largely drove the development of survey and interview protocols. Evaluators were able to link survey and interview respondents' answers directly to the program outcomes on the logic model and identify successes and opportunities for improvement.

The logic model can be found in Appendix A.

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### SURVEYS

Impact Justice developed and administered a two-page survey constructed in collaboration with FosterClub staff (Appendix B).

Impact Justice developed questions that required respondents to strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree and included a standardized and widely used self efficacy scale to assess changes in internal sense of agency over emotions and behaviors.

The survey was administered to four cohorts of All-Stars over two years. Participants completed surveys upon their arrival to Seaside, prior to any program activities, and once again on the last day of their seven week session. A total of 39 matched pre and post All-Star surveys were collected.

A control group was also identified to take the survey. Evaluators recruited young people through FosterClub's online network, an independent living program in Philadelphia, and through FosterClub's FirstStar program, a six-week program for emerging high school leaders. Youth were eligible to take the survey as long as they had child welfare involvement, were not older than 24, and had not been an All-Star. Similar to the All-Stars, pre and post surveys were administered within a six to seven week time frame. A total of 7 matched pre and post participation surveys were collected from FosterClub members, 7 matched surveys were collected from Philadelphia, and 28 matched pre and post participation surveys were collected from the FirstStar program.

Survey data were entered into a database, cleaned, and analyzed. Combining the All-Star and control group surveys, there were 81 matched pairs of pre and post participation surveys.

Impact Justice staff completed paired t-tests on the All-Star surveys to determine if there were significant improvements over time. We also completed analyses of variance tests to determine if there were significant differences between the All-Stars and the control groups. These findings are discussed in detail below.

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## YOUTH INTERVIEWS

The evaluators conducted interviews with four cohorts of All-Stars during their last week of programming and again after six months post programming to gain their insights into their experiences after a period of reflection. Initial interviews were conducted one-on-one in private rooms by Impact Justice staff onsite at FosterClub. Follow up interviews were conducted over the phone. Youth were selected across race/ethnicity and sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression (SOGIE) in order to ensure the experiences of Black, Latinx, Asian and LGBTQ/GNCT youth were included. Not every All-Star was asked to be interviewed. A total of 28 post and follow up interviews with All-Stars were completed.

The evaluators requested that each All-Star provide a list of friends or siblings in foster care to be interviewed as part of the interview control group. Friends that were in the same age range as the interns and had never been All-Stars were contacted for a phone interview. Youth that agreed to an interview received a \$50 Visa gift card for their time. The remainder of the control group were young people identified by other organizations and programs serving foster youth within the same age group. Impact Justice completed a total of 22 interviews with members of the control group.

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## INTERVIEWS WITH LEADERSHIP PROGRAM STAFF

In order to understand the All-Star program in the context of other leadership programs across the country, Impact Justice conducted interviews with FosterClub staff and representatives from nine other organizations. Two of these programs were national, and the remaining seven were state-based. The majority of the state groups were chapter-based foster youth leadership and advocacy groups, while two groups filled primarily service provider/drop-in center roles with less prominent leadership components. Interviewees were program staff, with the exception of one Executive Director and one operations/administrative staff member. Evaluators also interviewed three FosterClub staff members using the same interview protocol. Each interview took an average of one hour. They were audio-taped, transcribed, coded, and summarized.

## FINDINGS

Findings from interviews with other foster youth leadership programs, youth surveys, and youth interviews show that FosterClub's All-Star program uniquely strengthens relationships between peers as well as relationships between foster youth and older mentors. It also exposes participants to national policy advocacy and public speaking experiences that are difficult to find in other youth leadership programs. Interns have the opportunity as All-Stars to speak nationally and inform policy to shape the systems that they were a part of. At the same time, FosterClub could make key changes to improve and expand its All-Star program. We report each of the findings below.

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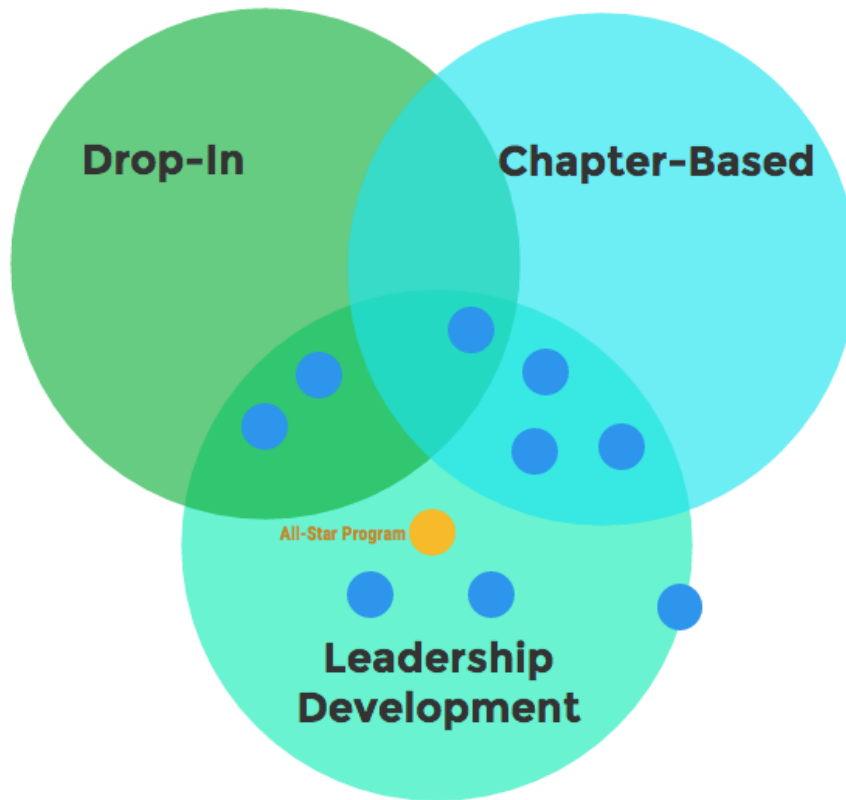
## INTERVIEWS WITH LEADERSHIP PROGRAM STAFF

Interviews with other foster youth leadership programs show that FosterClub's All-Star program is unique in a variety of ways.

One way to compare the existing organizations serving foster youth is to think about the type of programming offered to participants. We considered three aspects of programming. First, we looked at the degree to which programs have drop-in services that focus on social activities, provide connections to local support services like housing and employment programs, and provide their own life-skills training. Secondly, we considered the degree to which programs are chapter-based. These programs are decentralized, focus on planning local projects, and engage in local and state advocacy. Finally, we considered the degree to which programs focused on the development of leadership skills through intensive trainings for participating young people, attendance at summits and conferences, public speaking including testimony in front of state and national legislatures, organizational governance roles, and long-term relationships with older mentors.

Chart 1 locates each program in a Venn Diagram that shows the degree to which each organization exhibits each of the three characteristics. Those programs that best typify each characteristic are located closest to the center of each circle. Those that least typify each characteristic are located furthest from the center of each circle. In this diagram, the All-Star program is only one of four programs that is mostly focused on leadership development and not the other aspects of programming. They are also the closest to the center, suggesting that they best typify leadership development as we have defined it.

## Chart 1: Program Characteristics



Another way to compare the organizations is to think of the way they recruit participants. FosterClub has a highly structured application process. They set aside twelve to fifteen spots per cohort and two cohorts each summer. They disseminate applications to 20,000 online members as well as through state-level child welfare agencies. Applications are reviewed and the participants that exhibit the greatest leadership potential are selected.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, control group programs have less selective and less intentional recruitment models—most accept all interested youth into their programs. Many staff expressed a “meet youth where they’re at” philosophy, and a determination to support youth to engage and succeed in the activities that most interested them, regardless of past experience or existing skills.

A third way to compare organizations is to think about whether the participants and staff represent the larger child welfare population. Through

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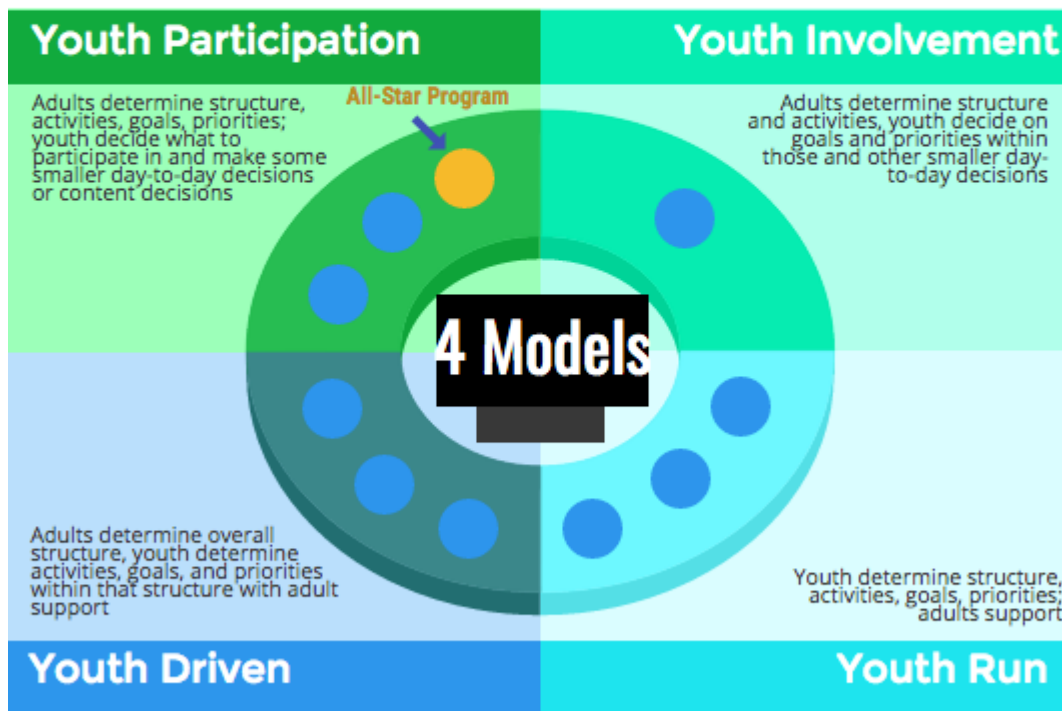
<sup>2</sup> Notably, there are some slots that are chosen by FosterClub and others that are chosen by partner state agencies. As such, selection isn’t entirely controlled by FosterClub.

their application and selection process, FosterClub selects cohorts of youth that closely mirror the general foster youth population. There are significant numbers of youth of color, LGBTQ/GNCT youth—including LGBTQ/GNCT youth of color—, and a few youth who have experience with the justice system. In contrast, several of the control group interviewees expressed that the youth engaging in their programs were not representative of the broader foster youth population along race and gender lines—specifically, some groups noted an overrepresentation of white young women in their programs. Focusing on staff, FosterClub and the other organizations were led and staffed by mostly straight, white women. More than half of the control groups interviewed expressed ongoing efforts to improve equity and diversity among youth participants through targeted recruitment efforts and organization-wide conversations about equity, though few control group organizations shared specific efforts to diversify staff recruitment.

A fourth way to compare the organizations is to consider the way they are structured. Impact Justice considered the degree to which programming was led by youth versus the adults on staff. Chart 2 places each program into a youth leadership model type, showing the degree to which program decision-making is youth-controlled. The blue dots represent control group programs, and the orange dot represents the All-Star program. The categories represented in this diagram are not hierarchical; they are descriptive of the findings from Impact Justice’s interviews. Research indicates that there are likely benefits and drawbacks to different levels of youth control over program content, and that different levels and forms of youth leadership and youth-adult partnership can serve different purposes (Wong, Zimmerman, and Parker; 2010). On this diagram, there are six programs that prioritize youth control in their program models. In these programs, youth leaders make meaningful decisions about program content, structure, and advocacy goals. While not all youth who participate in these programs serve in leadership capacities, governance structures are built around youth leadership and youth decision-making. In contrast, there are four programs, including the All-Stars, that are directed more by adults in consultation with youth participants. Adult FosterClub staff determine All-Star program structure, goals, and the events interns attend during the summer. In this way, the All-Star program stood out as more adult-directed in the field of staff interviews. Half of the control programs that are youth-driven or youth-run also offer youth participants a high degree of scaffolding—support and guidance that adults or more experienced youth leaders provide on how to complete tasks. Some may view this aspect of program structure as contradictory to a youth-

directed model, but in the more youth-led organizations scaffolding seems to strengthen rather than undermine the youth-led structure.

## Chart 2: Youth Leadership Models



Source: Model titles adapted from the Young Wisdom Project of the Movement Strategy Center, 2004. Descriptions represent themes that emerged in Impact Justice's interviews with organization staff.

Finally, while these programs vary in their approaches to advocacy, youth engagement, and movement building, all have parallel goals to: 1) positively impact the youth who participate, and 2) change policy and systems through advocacy and youth voice. They represent pieces of a network of organizations mobilizing youth affected by the child welfare system to change the system. To varying degrees and with a range of structures and approaches, these programs view themselves as changing the lives of youth participants, while youth participants in turn change the child welfare system in a way that impacts the many more youth affected by it. One control

program staff member referred to this as the “double bottom line.” The underlying principle that these organizations share is that youth affected by the system are experts in their experiences, and need to be heard to improve or transform the system. FosterClub’s All-Star program is no exception—staff view All-Star interns simultaneously as program recipients and as changemakers, and emphasize the importance and effectiveness of youth voice in affecting policy change.

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## SURVEYS FROM YOUNG PEOPLE

Impact Justice staff conducted statistical analysis of the surveys collected from All-Stars, a control group of FosterClub members who were never All-Stars, a control group of ILP participants in Pennsylvania, and a control group of emerging high-school-aged foster youth leaders in the FosterClub First Star program.

Impact Justice staff first ran descriptive statistics tests to see if the three groups, All-Stars, First Stars, and the control group, differ in any way.

Findings are discussed below.

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## FOSTERCLUB DEMOGRAPHICS

Impact Justice collected information on a range of demographic details and risk factors to determine whether All-Star participants are more or less privileged compared with different control groups. The findings are mixed, showing that on some measures All-Stars have more privilege and on other measures they have less.

- *Age:* The average age of All-Stars is 20 years old. The average age of FirstStars is 15 years old. The average age of the control groups is 19.5 years old.
- *Current Gender Identity:* 64% of All-Stars currently identify as girls compared with 50% of FirstStars and 47% of the control group.
- *Race and Ethnic Identity:* 23% of All-Stars identify as White, 5% as Asian, 18% as Latinx, 28% as African American/Black, and 20% have more than one racial or ethnic identity. There are no FirstStars that identify as White or Asian, 33% identify as Latinx, 30% identify as African American/Black, and 33% have more than one racial or ethnic identity. Similarly, there are no control group members that identify as White or Asian, 20% identify as Latinx, 53% identify as African American/Black, and 7% have more than one racial or ethnic identity.



- *LGBT Youth*: 40% of All-Stars identify as being lesbian, gay, bisexual, gender nonconforming or transgender compared with 20% of FirstStars and 27% of the control group.
- *Years in Foster Care*: On average, the All-Stars were in foster care for 7.8 years compared with 6.9 years for the FirstStars and 5.8 years for the control group.
- *Currently has Health Insurance*: 93% of All-Stars currently have health insurance compared with 74% of FirstStars and 67% of the control group.
- *Ever Had to Change Schools*: 77% of All-Stars report having to change schools compared with 78% of the FirstStars and 60% of the control group.
- *Ever Been Homeless*: In order to measure whether participants had ever been homeless, we asked if they had to couch surf or sleep outside because they had nowhere else to go. 51% of the All-Stars said yes compared with 39% of the FirstStars and 41% of the control group.
- *Ever Arrested or Brought to Juvenile Detention or Jail*: 23% of All-Stars had been arrested or brought to juvenile detention or jail compared with 27% of the FirstStars and the control group.
- *Ever Suspended*: 36% of All-Stars have been suspended from school compared with 48% of FirstStars and 60% of the control group.
- *Ever Expelled*: 13% of All-Stars have been expelled from school compared with 7% of the FirstStars and 13% of the control group.

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#### PAIRED SAMPLE T-TESTS

Impact Justice next completed paired sample t-tests to determine whether the All-Star participants showed improvements during programming. This test takes the score for each person at the beginning and the score for the same person at the end and tells us if there was, on average, a statistically significant change in the right direction. We analyzed the 39 surveys from All-Stars and found that answers to the following questions improved significantly. Table 1 lists the statement that respondents strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed, or strongly disagreed with, and the p value (gauge of statistical significance) for the difference. The smaller the p value, the more significant the result is. So in the table below, the second and fourth lines show stronger effects of the program than the first and third lines. Normally only results below 0.05 are considered significant but in cases like this where there is a small number of respondents, it is reasonable to consider anything at 0.10 or below as significant. Therefore we report all changes with a p value between .00 and .10.

Table 1: Matched Pair T-Tests Results

Survey Question	P Value
I understand how foster care is impacted by local child welfare policies, the court, and the federal government.	.08
I am confident I can advise a peer how to access resources such as Chafee, Independent Living Support, ACA medicaid, and ETV.	.02
I am healing from my past.	.10
My work has influenced child welfare programs and policy.	.03

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### ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE TESTS

Impact Justice staff next completed analysis of variance tests to study whether the All-Stars changed more than the First Stars and the combined control group of FosterClub members and Pennsylvania ILP participants.<sup>3</sup> This created a dataset of 81 respondents. Table 2 lists the statement that respondents strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed, or strongly disagreed with and the p value for the difference in change across the three groups. Again, we report all changes with a p value between .000 and .10 because the number of respondents is small.

Table 2: Analysis of Variance Results

Survey Question	P Value
I understand what resources are available to me as someone who has been in the child welfare system.	.10
I am confident I can advise a peer how to access resources such as Chafee, Independent Living Support, ACA medicaid, and ETV.	.03
I know how to manage my stress.	.06

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<sup>3</sup> We conducted an analysis of variance test on a variable that was calculated by subtracting the pre-participation score from the post-participation score.

Reviewing the combined findings from the statistical analysis, we see that FosterClub was most successful in improving All-Star participants' understanding of how foster care is shaped by local, state, and national policy, participants' understanding of how their work shapes these policies, participants' ability to guide other foster youth as they seek support services and resources, and participants' sense that they are healing from the past. The All-Star program is also better than other programs in helping participants understand what resources are available to them, helping participants share resources with other foster youth, and how to manage stress.

Notably, there were a dozen other survey items that did not show a significant improvement. The survey generally provided a statement that respondents could strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with. Examples of items that did NOT show an improvement were:

- I know how to maintain relationships after a conflict.
- I have a network that helps me achieve my career goals.

Analysis of findings found that the problem was NOT that respondents disagreed with these statements and then did not improve. Rather, the primary problem was that participants strongly agreed with almost every statement at the beginning of the program, making improvement almost impossible. This suggests that FosterClub unintentionally selects many participants who are already skilled in many of the areas the program hopes to influence.

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## OBSERVATIONS AND INTERVIEWS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

Interviews with All-Stars and youth in other programs support the survey findings and provide some additional detail about how the program is successful as well as how the program might improve.

Interviews showed that All-Stars appreciated the following benefits of participating in the All-Star program:

*a) Positive peer relationships and permanency with other All-Stars.*

Many programs for foster youth are designed with a “drop-in” center either as formal drop-in/one-stop centers or as chapter-based groups that hold monthly meetings that do not mandate attendance. Youth can come and go

as they are able or desire. This structure is beneficial to foster youth as it allows organizations to remain available and to enable youth to determine what their needs are and decide when and how they need to be met without much adult intervention and imposition. However, the drop-in nature makes cultivating strong relationships amongst youth and adults challenging.

Many All-Stars reported that they were culminating the internship with friendships that lend to the potential of establishing Permanency Pacts with that All-Stars network of supportive adults back home. <sup>4</sup> Almost all of the All-Stars were leaving Seaside with at least one phone number from another intern with the intention of staying in contact. At the post internship interviews, a few All-Stars reported having already visited interns in various states, made plans to celebrate upcoming holidays together, and intended to move in together as roommates. These relationships will be invaluable to the long-term personal, academic and professional well-being of the All-Stars.

*b) Relationships with L2's.*

The L2s had a significant impact on the experience of the internship on the All-Stars. The interviews revealed numerous instances where L2s were instrumental in the All-Stars feeling successful in the internship. Examples included support on difficult assignments given to All-Stars, such as last minute presentation preparation, emotional support when familial crisis was occurring back at home, and encouragement to remain in the internship when challenges arose. For the All-Stars, the L2s provided friendship, mentorship, and a necessary liaison between FosterClub staff and the interns. When asked what some of their favorite aspects of the internship were, All-Stars repeatedly named the L2s.

*c) Better understanding of emotional health.*

The All-Star curriculum the interns are trained to deliver to youth at conferences focuses significantly on emotional health. Topics like healthy relationships and strategic storytelling<sup>5</sup> help foster youth address and sort through the strikes that system-involvement has dealt to their emotional health while using resilience as a starting point. In learning the curriculum to

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<sup>4</sup> FosterClub defines "Permanency Pact" as a pledge by a supportive adult to provide specific supports to a young person in foster care with a goal of establishing a lifelong, kin-like relationship. They have copyrighted the term and the associated toolkit that they developed.

<sup>5</sup> The objective of strategic storytelling is to learn how to reframe foster care experiences as expertise, how to safely tell stories by retaining boundaries, and understanding the purpose for which one might share a personal story.

be able to train on it, All-Stars reported that the healthy relationships and strategic sharing modules had profound effects on how they perceived relationships that they had at home and the new ones they were forming in the internship. During the interviews the All-Stars also discussed how adopting strategic sharing as a communication style led them to more intimate relationships than did sharing aspects of their lives in a less intentional way.

Moreover, strategic sharing strengthened All-Stars public speaking skills by inviting them to connect with the audience in ways that render them less vulnerable, e.g. leading with experiences other than their foster care story. While All-Stars can successfully share their lived child welfare experiences with audiences, All-Stars suggested that strategic sharing encouraged them to highlight some of their many other skills and experiences, whether they were academic or professional. Interestingly, this was not a survey item that moved in a positive direction on the post surveys. The evaluators believe that to be a reflection of the way the survey item was constructed.

*d) Experience presenting All-Star curriculum.*

As mentioned, the All-Stars spend much of their summer internship preparing to present and give workshops at conferences all over the country. Many of the All-Stars were comfortable with public speaking as they came to the internship with a fair amount of experience advocating to child welfare stakeholders and representing other youth organizations in public spaces.

The All-Stars noted what made the presentations they gave during the internship unique was the opportunity to connect with and inspire younger foster youth, largely because of the reputation of the All-Star program. The All-Stars received notable feedback from young people after the conferences asking about their trajectory to become an All-Star, looking for expertise on overcoming personal/familial challenges, and honoring them for successfully transitioning into adulthood from care. These moments were monumental for All-Stars because they could see the immediate impact their work had on younger foster youth.

In addition to connecting with youth, the workshops provided an opportunity for All-Stars to highlight their strengths to a network of professionals. A few of the All-Stars reported that they established professional contacts from different states and were connecting with them after the internship to potentially partner in some capacity.

*e) Inspiration to continue the FosterClub work at home.*

All-Stars reported leaving the internship with a new set of advocacy skills and a renewed desire to implement some of the strategies they learned during the internship into their efforts at home, particularly elements from the curriculum.

Youth outreach and scaling were also mentioned during the interviews. All-Stars admired the national reach that FosterClub has and were motivated to scale up their advocacy boards and youth groups upon their returns home.

At the same time, when asked what the All-Stars program could improve upon, respondents consistently cited the following:

*e) Housing.*

Housing is an important part of the internship and was noted in almost all of the interviews. There were several challenges with the house, particularly around boundary setting and safety. During the interviews, many of the interns suggested that the house was too small to hold the number of interns in each cohort and that the layout of the house did not allow for privacy, which triggered previous trauma. For example, one cohort mentioned that the girls had to walk through the boys' room if they wanted to use the restroom, and that this was particularly uncomfortable for both groups at night.

The close and crowded living quarters also made it challenging to take space if conflict arose in the house. Several interns mentioned that arguments often escalated to physical threats to safety and that with each room serving as a bedroom for multiple interns, those who needed a cooling off period rarely had a space for solitude that would not impose upon roommates.

All of the All-Stars have substantial histories involving trauma in their childhood homes. Even with the recognition that working through that trauma and understanding their own triggers as they relate to others was part of the development process, feeling unsafe in the All-Star home outweighed the benefits to their development at the time of the interviews.

*f) Organization.*

The most often mentioned critique of the internship was interns' perceptions of how activities were organized, especially around travel and schedules. During the two-year evaluation, each cohort relayed frustration with the lack of structure, communication and planning; as well as how discussions of frustration were reportedly dismissed.

The All-Stars specified that the majority of organizational challenges surrounded travel to and preparation for conferences. Interns were notified last minute that they were presenting with little time to prepare. When not at a conference, there was a substantial amount of downtime with menial work and an expectation to sit in the office despite having few tasks to complete. Interns reported that they did not feel this was a good use of their time or their skills.

Additionally, All-Stars found it challenging to get clarification from FosterClub staff around travel schedules and conferences they would be attending. Some of the All-Stars shared that the lack of communication curbed some sense of agency they had in their internship and left them feeling devalued.

*g) Speaking to staff about issues linked to race/SOGIE.*

While FosterClub is exceptional at giving the internship opportunity to youth of color and who identify as LGBTQ/GNCT, the location of the internship may present negative experiences for these youth.

A few of the All-Stars who identify as racial/ethnic minorities and/or part of the LGBT community indicated that there were instances of Seaside residents or other All-Stars disparaging and/or ostracizing them because of their identities. When they elevated the issue to FosterClub, staff did not have the skills or the experiences to address the issues, or did not reflect a level of concern that suggested that they were an ally and open to strategizing solutions to the matter.

Negative racial/SOGIE incidents that were linked to fellow interns also reinforced the All-Stars' discomfort with the inability to create space in the house.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

We structured the recommendations that emerged from the evaluation as roadmaps for two possible trajectories for the All-Star program's future. Discussions between Impact Justice and FosterClub staff drove the decision to make recommendations along these two pathways. Early in the project, FosterClub staff shared interest in replicating the All-Star internship based on its current model and on findings that might emerge from the evaluation. The first set of recommendations apply more narrowly to strengthening FosterClub's existing All-Star program model. The second set of

recommendations chart how FosterClub might best apply the findings from the evaluation to an expansion and replication project.

## TRAJECTORY 1—STRENGTHENING THE CURRENT MODEL

The evaluators drafted recommendations to refine the current All-Star internship model. The recommendations are structured as immediate considerations and long term considerations. Recommendations that overlapped both of the trajectories were mentioned below in trajectory two.

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### IMMEDIATE CONSIDERATIONS

The recommendations specific for trajectory one are discussed in further detail below.

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### SAFETY

As previously noted, All-Stars had safety concerns: they discussed feeling immobile and displaced in the All-Star house, particularly during times of crisis. All-Stars do not have cars during the internship and public transportation is limited. Permanent staff do not live on site and L2s live next door to the All-Stars, who reported a lack of clarity as to when staff and L2s could be contacted to intervene during emergencies.

All-Stars are unfamiliar with the town of Seaside and without reliable transportation, getting to essential services and resources such as a pharmacy may be challenging. To increase the sense of safety for All-Stars during the summer, the evaluators recommend that All-Stars be supplied with a detailed list of services such as phone numbers and addresses to local pharmacies, emergency rooms, and taxi companies, as well as bus routes and schedules, upon arriving at the internship.

Additionally, staff and L2s should communicate with the All-Stars regarding their expectations for intervening when a crisis occurs in the house or neighborhood. This conversation should also be used to facilitate a discussion amongst the All-Stars about boundaries within the house, utilizing a buddy system, etc.



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## STAFF TRAINING ON DIVERSITY AND WORKING ACROSS DIFFERENCES

The diversity of lived experiences and perspectives of the All-Stars enriches the experiences of the internship for both the youth and staff. However, personal and political differences deeply embedded into these identities sometimes create misunderstandings with staff and amongst interns.

The evaluators recommend that staff receive ongoing training or coaching to build skills around working with young people across racial and SOGIE differences. The organization should be cognizant of the impact that a majority white, straight and female identifying staff will have on the All-Stars—most of whom identify as a minority in at least one aspect. Staff should also be aware of the treatment of All-Stars by Seaside residents and be cautious not to dismiss claims of racism or homophobia as hypersensitivity or as a learning opportunity for the All-Stars to navigate on their own. It is important that staff have the wherewithal, language, and time to listen to All-Stars when giving feedback about their experiences as minorities in the All-Star program and incorporate that feedback into the internship.

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## LONG TERM CONSIDERATIONS

Over time, FosterClub might also consider the following:

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### DIVERSIFY STAFF AND BOARD

Organizations with staff and board members that reflect the racial and SOGIE identities and lived experiences of the youth being served by the organization have the greatest positive impact on youth. As previously mentioned, the current FosterClub staff and board are mostly white and straight. Moving forward, the organization would benefit by actively recruiting and hiring staff and board members who are people from the LGBTQ communities, individuals who have been directly impacted by the foster care system and men.

## TRAJECTORY 2—PROGRAM EXPANSION

### REPLICATING THE ALL-STAR PROGRAM IN LOS ANGELES, WASHINGTON D.C. AND PORTLAND.

Impact Justice recommends that FosterClub replicate the All-Star internship in urban hubs such as Los Angeles, Washington D.C., and Portland while maintaining its headquarters in Seaside, Oregon.

This recommendation stems from three recurring themes from the All-Star youth interviews: 1) concern and discomfort with overcrowding in the All-Star house; 2) desire to include youth from more regions of the country in the program; and 3) the negative impact of the cultural climate of Seaside on LGBTQ and Black and Latinx/Hispanic youth.

### HOUSING

While the current housing model is a valuable part of the internship, overcrowding presents physical and emotional safety concerns for some of the interns, many of whom have already experienced significant trauma in a variety of housing placements .

Impact Justice recommends that as FosterClub expands the All-Star program, it think about different ways to provide housing options that do not require crowding, provide more privacy and control over living space, but still maintain a sense of community. One option is to partner with universities in Los Angeles, Washington D.C. and Portland that have on campus housing— family housing, fraternity houses, dorm rooms or apartments—that All-Stars could live in during each region’s internship. Another option is to expand housing in Seaside beyond the current house to one or two additional houses. Expanding housing as well as the number of All-Star sites during the summer would allow FosterClub to include more youth in the program, and promote the safety and well-being of the interns.

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## EXPANDING THE REACH OF FOSTERCLUB AND THE ALL-STARS PROGRAM

During the interviews, Impact Justice asked All-Stars to make a recommendation that would improve the quality of the internship. Almost all of the All-Stars suggested that FosterClub offer the internship in additional sites to 1) geographically diversify the states represented in the internship; and 2) increase the reach of the internship to a greater number of foster youth.

If FosterClub expands the All-Star program to sites in Los Angeles, Washington D.C. or Portland, interns accepted to those sites will have more opportunities to interact with and present workshops to young people in care in those regions. Site expansion will also build awareness of the All-Star program among state and county agencies in those regions, bolstering new fiscal relationships and diversifying the regions that are represented in the internship.

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## DIVERSIFYING FISCAL RELATIONSHIPS

Under the current model, ongoing state sponsorships and fiscal relationships limit who FosterClub selects into the internship. While this provides some key fiscal predictability and stability for FosterClub, it also reinforces the lack of regional diversity that All-Stars highlighted during the interviews.

The evaluators recommend that FosterClub seek alternative fiscal relationships that allow FosterClub staff to have more agency over who is accepted into the All-Star internship. As previously mentioned, FosterClub should develop relationships with additional sites that would allow for recruitment from those regions.

Furthermore, because interview findings suggested that the All-Star program engages cross-over/dual jurisdiction youth, FosterClub may want to consider leveraging the evaluation findings to pursue funding opportunities designated for organizations serving juvenile justice involved youth.

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## STANDARDIZING RECRUITMENT

FosterClub currently partners with a number of state agencies to recruit All-Stars. The states complete their own decision process for selecting their representatives to Seaside each summer. This creates a recruitment process that differs depending on what state youth live in. Fortunately, the All-Star program is diverse across race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, and other identities like justice involvement. This could change, however, unless FosterClub begins to create a standardized application process for all participants.

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## CREATING LINKS IN THE LADDER

As discussed above, many of the All-Stars did not show improvements on the youth survey because they already exhibited strong communication and conflict resolution skills at the beginning of the internship. This makes sense: all of the All-Stars had previous leadership experience either through state/county advocacy boards or previous organizations, were enrolled in college and employed, and were well connected to supportive adults. These measures of success are invaluable to youth, particularly in child welfare, but also make it difficult to determine the added value of experiences like the All-Star internship on their lives. All-Stars scored high on most of the pre survey items, which prevented any upwards movement in the post survey that would indicate a positive change as a result from the internship.

The evaluators recommend that part of the internship expansion include an extended “graduation system”. The current model has two levels: the All-Stars and Level 2s. Under a new model, FosterClub would create a “junior” All-Star level with a younger demographic group with less previous leadership and educational experience. This group would participate in an age-relevant, truncated version of the current internship. Once completed, they would have the opportunity to graduate to the current All-Star program, then on to the L2, and potentially beyond to a permanent staff member either in Seaside or Los Angeles, Washington D.C., or Portland.

There are three primary benefits of an extended graduation system.

The first benefit is the ability to support and track change over time. By implementing a junior All-Star level with younger foster youth, young people

who may not otherwise have access to leadership skills development in their communities will benefit from the All-Star curriculum and program model. FosterClub will also be able to gather baseline data of participants prior to having substantial leadership, relationship and educational experience using the pre-survey. FosterClub can then control for prior experience and speak to the impact of the internship on youth. This is particularly helpful when testing FosterClub's hypothesis that outcomes of the internship are often detected up to a year after participation. If youth continue to stay engaged in the program and graduate to become All-Stars and L2s, the benefits of the internship will accrue for youth moving through this trajectory, and FosterClub will have a significant amount of data that speaks to the All-Star program's success.

The second benefit is program organization. Feedback from the All-Star interviews suggested that the internship has some challenges organizing travel, schedules and conference preparation. While some of the lack of organization is due to unforeseeable requests for All-Stars to speak at conferences, the evaluators believe that creating additional levels in the internship and giving greater responsibility to the higher level interns would add some capacity to the internship. High level interns could rotate with assisting with scheduling, flight arrangements, and conference planning.

The third benefit to creating a graduation system is reducing crowding in the All-Star house. Adding levels to internship would allow FosterClub to reserve the Seaside All-Star house solely for a specific level of interns, such as those training to become L2s. This would be particularly feasible if FosterClub cultivates relationships with colleges that would permit dorms to be used for the other level All-Stars.

## CONCLUSION

FosterClub has developed a uniquely effective leadership program. They

- Have a well-developed curriculum
- Choose diverse All-Stars (across race and SOGIE)
- Reach a national audience
- Foster long-term relationships between All-Stars (Permanency Pacts and national networks)
- Meet youths' expectations of program

Whether or not FosterClub chooses to strengthen the current model or expand the program, young foster youth will continue to benefit from the opportunity to learn about national child welfare policy and to strengthen their personal and professional networks.

Impact Justice would prefer, however, to see FosterClub expand their program geographically as well as to foster youth who have not previously had leadership opportunities so a larger number of participants could experience a more dramatic improvement in skill development.

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APPENDIX A: LOGIC MODEL

Inputs/Activities	Content Knowledge	Outcomes
FosterClub Staff	System Knowledge	I understand what resources are available to me as someone who has been in the child welfare system.
L2's		I understand how foster care is impacted by local child welfare policies, the court and the federal government.
FosterClub All-Stars Curriculum		I am confident I can advise a peer how to access resources such as Chafee, Independent Living Support, ACA Medicaid, and ETV.
All-Stars house	Self Concept & Personal Narrative	I know how to tell parts of my story to protect myself.
		I know how to tell parts of my story to protect others.
		I know how to tell parts of my story to connect with others.
		I know how to tell parts of my story to influence foster care policy.
		I was treated fairly while I was in the child welfare system.
		I am healing from my past.
		I am happy to identify as a foster youth.
	Processing & Self Regulation	I know how to maintain relationships after a conflict.
		I know how to manage my stress.
	Connectedness	I have a network that helps me achieve my career goals.
		I have a network that helps me achieve my education goals.
		I am willing to put my trust in other people, when appropriate.
		I know how to keep from being taken advantage of in relationships.
		I have the skills to establish healthy boundaries in relationships.
		I need adults that care about and love me like family.
	Meaningful Contribution & Purpose	My work has influenced child welfare programs and policy.
		I know of several organizations in my state and nationally through which I can advocate for child welfare reform.
		I understand how I can use my lived experience to support others.

APPENDIX B: YOUTH SURVEY

<b>FosterClub Survey</b>	<b>Initials:</b>	<b>Date of Birth:</b> / /	<b>Today's Date:</b> / /
A1. How old are you?	_____years		
A2. What city and state do you live in?			
A3. Are you an AllStar?	yes    no    formerly		
A4. What is your gender? (Circle all that apply.)	boy/man                  girl/woman                  other _____		
A5. What sex were you assigned at birth?	female                  male                  intersex		
A6. What is your sexual orientation? (Circle all that apply.)	straight    lesbian or gay    bisexual    questioning    other_____		
A7. Who are you attracted to? (Circle all that apply.)	boys or men    girls or women    both    neither    other _____		
A8. What is your race or ethnicity? (Circle all that apply.)	White    Asian    Latino/Hispanic    African American    Native American    other_____		
A9. Who is your most recent guardian?	birth mother    birth father    other family    foster parent    group home    adoptive parent(s)    other _____		
A10. What types of placements have you experienced? (Circle all that apply.)	foster home    relative/kinship home    adoptive home    group home    residential treatment    jail/prison/detention		
B1. If you are currently in school, what type of school do you attend?	High School    Community College    4-year University    Graduate School    Trade School    Other_____		
B2. What is the highest level of school you completed?	High School    Community College    4-year University    Graduate School    Trade School    Other_____		
B3. Have you been suspended from school? If no, circle "0." If yes, how many times?	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8+		
B4. Have you been expelled from school? If no, circle "0." If yes, how many times?	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8+		
B5. How many times have you had to change schools because you changed placements?	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8+		
B6. Do you plan on continuing your education?	yes    no    not sure		
B7. Are you employed full-time or part-time?	yes    no    looking		
B8. How many years did you spend in foster care? (A guess is okay.)			
B9. Are you currently part of an Independent Living Program?	yes    no    not sure		
B10. Do you have health insurance?	yes    no    not sure		
B11. Have you ever had to couch surf or sleep outside because you didn't have anywhere else to go?	yes    no    not sure		
B12. Have you ever been arrested, or brought to jail/juvenile detention?	yes    no    not sure		
B13. Are you a parent?	yes    no    not sure		

<b>Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?</b>	strongly disagree	disagree	agree	strongly agree	does not apply
C1. I understand what resources are available to me as someone who has been in the child welfare system.	1	2	3	4	99
C2. I understand how foster care is impacted by local child welfare policies, the court, and the federal government.	1	2	3	4	99
C3. I am confident I can advise a peer how to access resources such as Chafee, Independent Living Support, ACA medicaid, and ETV.	1	2	3	4	99
C4. I know how to tell parts of my story to protect myself.	1	2	3	4	99
C5. I know how to tell parts of my story to protect others.	1	2	3	4	99
C6. I know how to tell parts of my story to connect with others.	1	2	3	4	99
C7. I know how to tell parts of my story to influence foster care policy.	1	2	3	4	99
C8. I was treated fairly while I was in the child welfare system.	1	2	3	4	99
C9. I am healing from my past.	1	2	3	4	99
C10. I am happy to identify as a foster youth.	1	2	3	4	99
C11. I know how to maintain relationships after a conflict.	1	2	3	4	99
C12. I know how to manage my stress.	1	2	3	4	99
C13. I have a network that helps me achieve my <i>career</i> goals.	1	2	3	4	99
C14. I have a network that helps me achieve my <i>education</i> goals.	1	2	3	4	99
C15. I am willing to put my trust in other people, when appropriate.	1	2	3	4	99
C16. I know how to keep from being taken advantage of in relationships.	1	2	3	4	99
C17. I have the skills to establish healthy boundaries in relationships.	1	2	3	4	99
C18. I need adults that care about and love me like family.	1	2	3	4	99
C19. My work has influenced child welfare programs and policy.	1	2	3	4	99
C20. I know of several organizations in my state and nationally through which I can advocate for child welfare reform.	1	2	3	4	99
C21. I understand how I can use my lived experience to support others.	1	2	3	4	99

## APPENDIX C: DATA TABLES

We provide tables with additional details for all of the findings below:

### Age

All-Stars average age was 20

FirstStars average age was 15

Control group average age was 19.5

### Current Gender Identity

	Boys	Girls
All-Stars	36	64
FirstStars	50	50
Control	53	47

### Current Race or Ethnic Identity

	White	Asian	Latinx	Black	Native American	Other	Mixed
All-Stars	23	5	18	28	0	5	20
FirstStars	0	0	33	30	0	4	33
Control	0	0	20	53	13	7	7

### LGBT

	Yes	No
All-Stars	40	60
FirstStars	20	80
Control	27	73

### Years in Foster Care

All-Stars average years in foster care was 7.8

FirstStars average years in foster care was 6.9

Control average years in foster care was 5.6

### Currently Has Health Insurance

	Yes	No	Not Sure
All-Stars	93	7	0
FirstStars	74	7	19
Control	67	20	13

### Ever Had to Couch Surf

	Yes	No	Not Sure
All-Stars	51	49	0
FirstStars	39	58	3
Control	40	60	0

### Ever Arrested

	Yes	No	Not Sure
All-Stars	24	76	0
FirstStars	27	65	8
Control	27	73	0

**Ever Suspended**

	Yes	No
All-Stars	36	64
FirstStars	48	52
Control	60	40

**Ever Expelled**

	Yes	No
All-Stars	13	87
FirstStars	7	93
Control	13	87

**Ever Change Schools**

	Yes	No
All-Stars	77	23
FirstStars	78	22
Control	60	40