

Perspectives of Current and Former Foster Youth During COVID-19: Preliminary Report

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This national survey assessed the needs, concerns, and strengths of young adults (ages 18-26) with a history of foster care in response to COVID-19. Participants (n = 127) completed the survey in May and June, reporting their physical, financial, social, psychological, relational level of concern, as well as their confidence in existing professional goals and pride in strengths and accomplishments. Participants were asked to assess all domains before, during, and in the year following Shelter in Place (SIP) due to COVID-19, to identify the immediate impact and perceived impact over time. Participants offered recommendations for present and future resources.

OVERVIEW

- » Participants reported increases in concern across all domains due to SIP and anticipated maintained concern in the year following SIP.
- » The majority of participants maintained a sense of pride in self before, during, and after SIP.
- » Many participants identified their experience as current and former foster youth to be different during SIP from the experience of those not in foster care.
- » Participants proposed improved resources for themselves and for professionals, both during SIP and long-term.

Professional Goals (academic and both short- and long-term career goals)

- » 52% reported moderate or extreme confidence in their ability to reach their professional goals prior to COVID-19. This decreased to 34% during COVID-19, and 40% in the year following.

“Luckily, I have been pretty self-sufficient in achieving my professional goals even through all of this. If anything, COVID-19 made me more motivated to get stuff done.”

Professional Resources sought include remote internships, academic advising, and coaching.

“Help with making class schedules would be nice since one of my majors has a lot of hands-on classes I need to take which are physically impossible.”

“I think just having the people around me still with me and knowing that we are there for each other is one of the most important things people need during this time.”

Physical Health (illness, symptoms, fatigue, physical activity, sleep, overall health)

- » 13% of participants were tested for COVID-19; 1 tested positive; 25% knew someone who tested positive for COVID-19.
- » 21% reported moderate or extreme concern about their physical wellbeing prior to SIP, which increased to 31% following SIP, and 26% sustain concern over the upcoming year.

“Many people I know have tested positive. I also know people who have passed.”

Physical Health Resources sought include medication delivery, insurance continuity, benefit description, at-home COVID tests, nutritional services, and strategies for sleep.

“So far, my health is ok, but I have gained a ton of weight during COVID-19. I don’t have the money to buy groceries so I eat whatever is cheap.”

“The physical impacts I have had are my sleeping patterns, exercise, and stress eating. I think resources helping overcome these would be helpful.”

“Someone to teach me how to use my insurance.”

Pride in Strengths and Accomplishments

(resilience, successes, positive personal characteristics)

- » 37% reported being extremely proud of themselves before COVID-19, 34% during, and 35% expected to be extremely proud of themselves after COVID-19.
- » 53% reported no change in pride in the transition to SIP; 28% reported decreased pride, 18% reported increased pride.

“I will always be proud of what I’ve done to get to where I am. I am a survivor. That does not mean I am happy. That does not mean I am safe. That does not mean I will ignore the abuse child protective systems facilitate.”

Financial Stability (month-to-month expenses, housing, transportation, food, and clothing)

- » 34% reported being unemployed due to COVID-19; 30% were employed, but concerned about changes due to COVID-19
- » 36% had a living situation change due to COVID-19
- » 46% reported moderate or extreme concern about their financial wellbeing before COVID-19; 61% reported moderate or extreme concern about their financial wellbeing during COVID-19; 60% reported concern for the year following SIP, due to COVID-19

“I don’t believe I’m currently in an insecure position as it relates to these areas, but with the changing landscapes it is a growing concern.”

Financial Resources sought include help finding jobs, rent/utility assistance, gift cards, cleaning supplies, financial scholarship/aid, loans.

“A website or anything to help me make sure the job websites aren’t scams.”

“Literally any financial support would help.”

“Paying for basic bills such as rent. Since one of my roommates has COVID she cannot go to work so I’m not sure if she can cover her portion.”

Social, Relational, and Psychological Wellbeing

Reporting Moderate or Extreme Concern			
	Social	Relational	Psychological
Before	21%	23%	26%
During	35%	30%	38%
After	36%	30%	37%

Social Resources sought include online support groups, training on foster care for professionals, and mentors.

Relational Resources sought include telehealth, group therapy, family therapy, and couples therapy.

Psychological Resources sought include therapy, self-care strategies, medication management and refill.

“I cannot stress this enough with therapy at the forefront of resources needed.”

“A community who actually knows how to care for people in my position.”

“Healthier news reporting. It’s toxic to many people I care about.”

“I want you guys to know that we are worried and scared for ourselves and loved ones even if we don’t have that many.”

General Resources Needed Not Just to Be OK, But to Thrive and Be Happy.

“For other people to receive the same amount of blessings as I do. For more than just a few foster kids to obtain the resources they need.”

“I hope that we can learn from this situation and become resilient and hopefully we can prepare ourselves for future events that occur.”

“I want a chance to have connections and meaningful conversations with my peers. As well as the opportunity to meet new professional connections.”

“I want to help people around me, show them someone is here for them if they are going through dark times or not. I want to make them smile and show people they are loved always.”

“I want to be able to celebrate my accomplishments of graduating from college with my caseworkers, friends, and chosen family.”

“If this is going to anyone or whoever is reading my response: Never give up.”

Do you think as someone who has been in the foster care system, SIP due to COVID-19 has had a unique impact on you?

SELECTED RESPONSES

I think that everyone who has been in foster care has had a sense of distance for however long they were in foster care and during this time of COVID-19 it might hit them as hard as it did when they were in foster care. Also if they are in foster care and they are unable to have their visits and meetings with family they will most likely feel even more excluded.

Yes, because when it comes down to it, people will worry for their own families which is completely understandable, but I'm afraid people will most likely forget about those without one. Especially during this crisis.

Not particularly. At most, being in the foster care system has made it plausible to be in quarantine.

No, I think when you're in foster care nothing else can scare you more.

I think so. The uncertainty and isolation are very familiar to me which makes coping somewhat easier, although it also brings up a lot of older coping strategies and thought patterns that I need to consciously fight against. Also being in foster care taught me how to survive, which makes living through a pandemic a little easier.

Yes I do. Knowing the experience I had of being in foster care, when I heard of young freshmen college students who were in foster care before their entry being told they had to leave their dorm rooms, quite possibly the only home they have, it upset me. I wondered where they would go and I thought of the time I left foster care to go into a college dorm, my only home at that time. This makes me realize even more why advocacy work is so important but also realizing the challenge of finding those in need while social distancing.

Not me personally. However, I can't stop thinking/worrying about the kids that are stuck in foster homes they do not like/are unfit. I also empathize with the ones who are placed in homes away from siblings and are unsure of their health conditions at this time. When I lived in foster homes I was uncomfortable in, school and social events were a way to escape and feel somewhat normal. I could not imagine being stuck in one of those homes for months on end. You start to feel hopeless and like the world is out to get you.

Yes because I have no family and small friendships so it's hard because I'm doing everything on my own.

Yes, it can put you homeless in a matter of days. There is not a familial safety net and those in foster care rely heavily on the governmental assistance. In essence, our livelihoods are tied to assistance from the government.

In situations like these I'm envious of people having family to go home to. The home I go home to is my friends. They do treat me like family but it's just a different feeling.

Honestly yes, because with being quarantined it makes me feel like I'm in placements all over again because we had no freedom and we felt like we were in prison.

It makes me realize there is a lot of kids across the country due to this lockdown that are getting abused mentally and physically, and it makes me wish I could help.

As a foster child I moved a lot. Consequently, moving is a HUGE stressor. Having been told I had 5 days to pack up my life ... was triggering.