

Checking in on Young People from Foster Care as COVID-19 Continues A National Poll

December 22, 2020

SUMMARY

Since the beginning of the pandemic, FosterClub has conducted several polls¹ to monitor how the pandemic is affecting young people in and from foster care. In this most recent poll, conducted November 24 - December 5, we heard from 474 young people with lived experience in foster care who shared how they are faring during this pandemic.

Like our earlier polls, we asked young people about their needs in light of the pandemic, specifically related to access to stimulus aid, employment, education, unemployment benefits, housing, food security, health and connections. Again, similar to earlier findings, this poll continues to reveal how COVID-19 has caused young people with lived foster care experience to lose employment and housing, to face food insecurity, to struggle to get health care needs met, and become increasingly isolated as many do not have significant relationships they can rely on for financial or emotional support. Not surprisingly, young people between the ages of 18 and 24 who were still in foster care reported having more information, greater access to resources, and better housing stability than those no longer in care. This underscores the growing understanding in the field of child welfare about the critical importance of providing federal and state assistance to young adults during this final developmental period in adolescence, particularly during a crisis like COVID-19.

Approximately 63 percent of the 474 poll respondents had been tested for COVID-19, with 13% reported they had tested positive for COVID-19. Of those who had not tested positive, 32 percent reported being extremely worried they would catch the virus, 49 percent reported being somewhat worried and 19 percent reported not being worried they would catch it. Approximately 57 percent of the respondents reported being extremely worried that someone they care about would catch COVID-19.

Key Findings

- **Housing Stability:** Forty-three percent of respondents were forced to move because of COVID-19; 29 percent reported they have found stable housing now and 14 percent have still

¹ FosterClub conducted a poll in late March ([results here](#)) and an additional [poll](#) in early May to gain a better sense of how young people in and from foster care are doing.

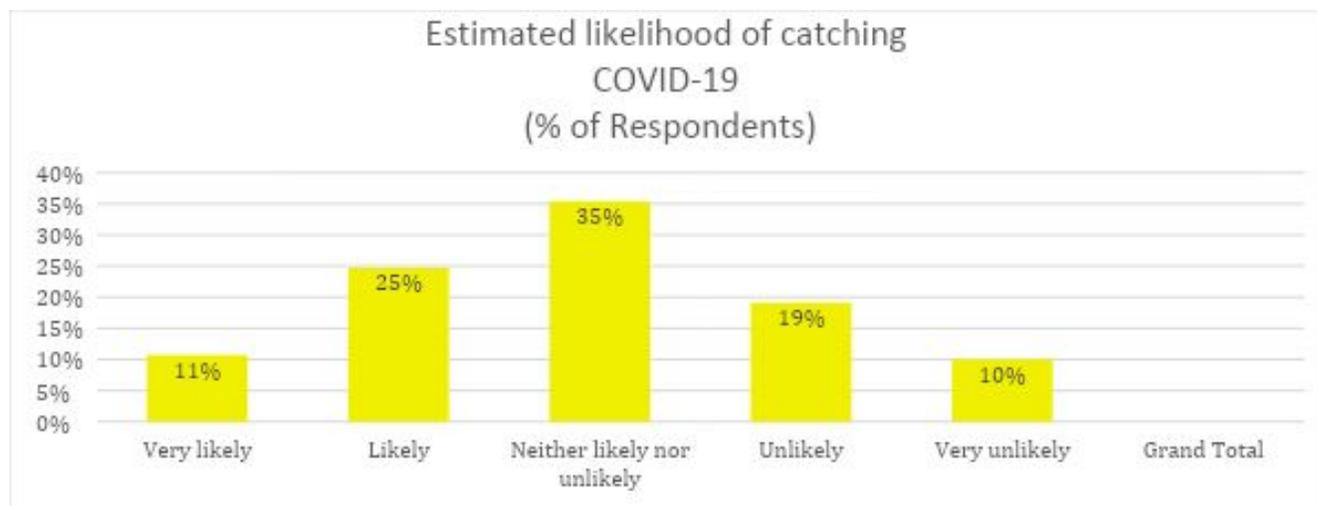
not found stable housing. Several young people noted that they were able to return to a previous foster home, although they recognized that was a temporary solution. Many young people in this age group indicated that their housing was tied to their schooling, and worried where they will go if school shuts down again.

- **Foster Care stabilizes housing:** Approximately 31 percent of those still in foster care were told they can stay in their current placement compared with 3 percent of those no longer in care.
- **COVID-19 Status and Perceived Risks:** Approximately 67 percent of the 474 poll respondents had been tested for COVID-19, with 13% reported they had tested positive for COVID-19 since the pandemic began. Approximately 57 percent of the respondents reported being extremely worried that someone they care about would catch COVID-19.
- **Employment:** Approximately 66 percent reported that they were employed before the virus, compared with 45 percent having employment (full or parttime) now. Only half of those who applied for unemployment received it.
- **Education:** While education and schooling seems to have stabilized since our last poll, young people reported having difficulty focusing, the challenges with virtual learning, and lack of access to computers or reliable WiFi. Some reported they needed to suspend their education plans in order to make money for necessities.
- **Stimulus Checks:** Just over half of the respondents said they received the stimulus check.
- **Food Insecurity:** Consistent with our earlier polls, nearly 1 in 5 young people, or 19% of those questioned, reported they have run out of food.
- **Guidance from Adults:** Similar to our other polls, nearly one in 5 youth reported that they are entirely on their own, lacking connections that might help them endure this pandemic.

DETAILED FINDINGS

COVID-19 Incidence and Perceived Risk

Approximately 67 percent of the 474 poll respondents had been tested for COVID-19, with 13% reported they had tested positive for COVID-19 since the pandemic began. Of those who had not tested positive, 32 percent reported being extremely worried they would catch the virus, 48 percent reported being somewhat worried and 20 percent reported not being worried they would catch it. Approximately 57 percent of the respondents reported being extremely worried that someone they care about would catch COVID-19. In addition to worrying about catching COVID-19, the poll asked respondents to estimate how likely it was that they would contract the virus. Approximately 36 percent felt it was likely or very likely they would catch the Coronavirus while 29 percent felt it was unlikely or very unlikely they would become ill with COVID-19.



Employment

When looking at employment trends among young people in foster care, the pandemic has had some negative effects on young people from foster care. Approximately 66 percent reported that they were employed before the virus, compared with 45 percent having employment (full or parttime) now. Before the pandemic, 36 percent reported having full time employment compared with 17 percent now. About 11 percent of respondents noted they had been looking for a job before the pandemic, compared with 21 percent who are looking for work today.

**“I am currently unemployed and
in need of a job ASAP!”**

– 19-year-old from Illinois

Of the 305 respondents who had been working before the pandemic, 36 percent report they have been laid off because of the pandemic and 41 percent they have had their hours cut, they have lost employment, gig work, or have been laid off because of the pandemic. About 23 percent reported they were not yet sure of the impact of the pandemic on their work.

Table 2 - COVID-19 Impact on Unemployment for Young People with Lived Foster Care Experience

| How has COVID impacted your employment (for those who were employed) | # | % |
|---|----------|----------|
| I am not sure yet of the impact | 71 | 23 |
| I was laid off because of the crisis | 109 | 36 |
| My employment status has not been impacted | 124 | 10 |
| My gig work has decreased | 24 | 8 |
| My hours have been severely cut | 30 | 41 |

I was on unemployment for the summer. We shut down our location for a week and I should've gotten unemployment but I got confused and didn't get funding.

- 19-year-old from Missouri

Unemployment benefits

Of those whose work has been affected by COVID-19, 41 percent applied for unemployment, and half of those who applied received it. Some of the young people reported that while they received unemployment it was inadequate to meet their needs, or that they only received it for a short time. A few young people reported they received unemployment briefly, only to find a new job, and then when the new job ended, they were unable to get unemployment again.

Table 3 - Young People with Lived Foster Care Experience Applying for Unemployment

| Did you apply for unemployment? | # Responses | % Total |
|--|--------------------|----------------|
| No | 200 | 59% |
| Yes | 138 | 41% |
| Grand Total | 338 | 100% |

“I only got \$46 a week which isn't enough to feed someone for a week.”

– 20-year-old in Indiana

Of those who applied but did not get benefits, respondents reported they had trouble getting through the forms, getting the information they needed, not understanding how to apply and that they were told they were ineligible. For those who have been able to find or maintain jobs, multiple respondents mentioned they were concerned about their potential exposure to COVID-19 because of their entry-level positions.

I am employed at the same place but no longer a server due to COVID. I am still constantly exposed to it

as I work in a restaurant and I am forced to take to go bags to customers who won't wear their masks.

– 19-year-old in Illinois

Stimulus Support

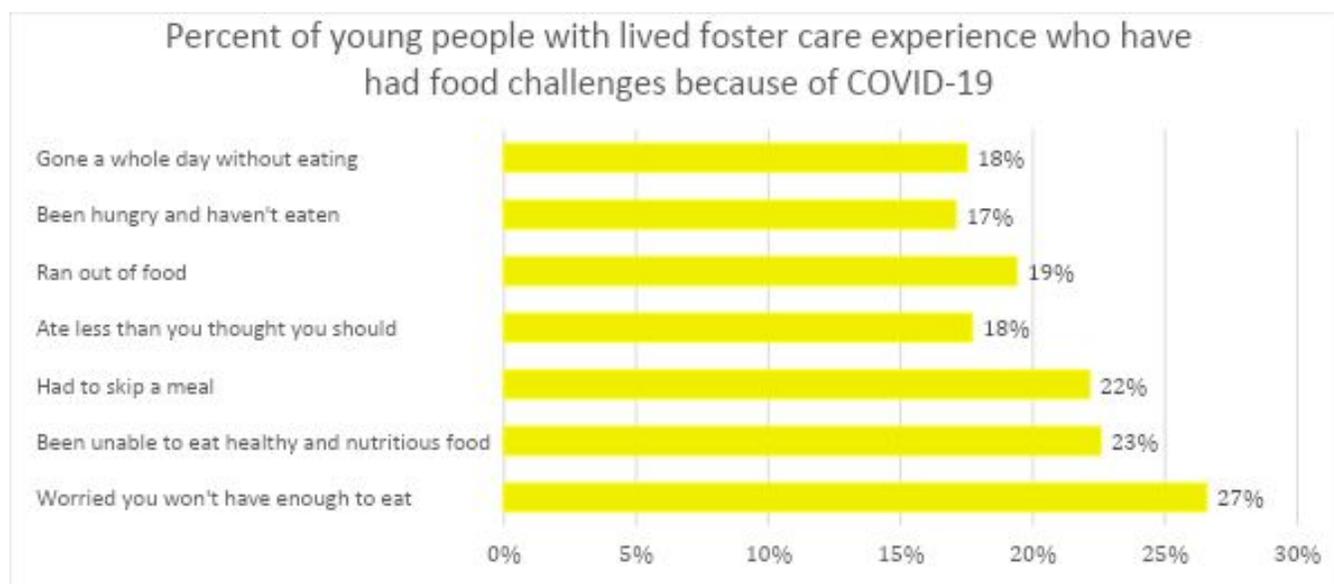
Approximately 65 percent of the respondents reported they had tried to get the stimulus check provided by the federal government early in the pandemic; just over half of the respondents said they received the support. For those who did not receive it, they reported not knowing how to tell if they are eligible, that someone else claimed them as a dependent or that they didn't file in 2018 or 2019 so believed they were not eligible.

Food

Similar to our earlier polls, nearly 1 in 5 young people, or 19% of those who responded, reported they have run out of food. Of the 474 respondents, 46% reported they were doing okay with food, while others reported some challenges. Forty percent of the young people who responded to the poll reported that they had applied for SNAP benefits, and 75 percent of those who applied received it.

I've been going to food banks weekly.

– 20-year-old in Texas



I am currently getting by okay but have struggled with affording food during the pandemic.

– 21-year-old in Massachusetts

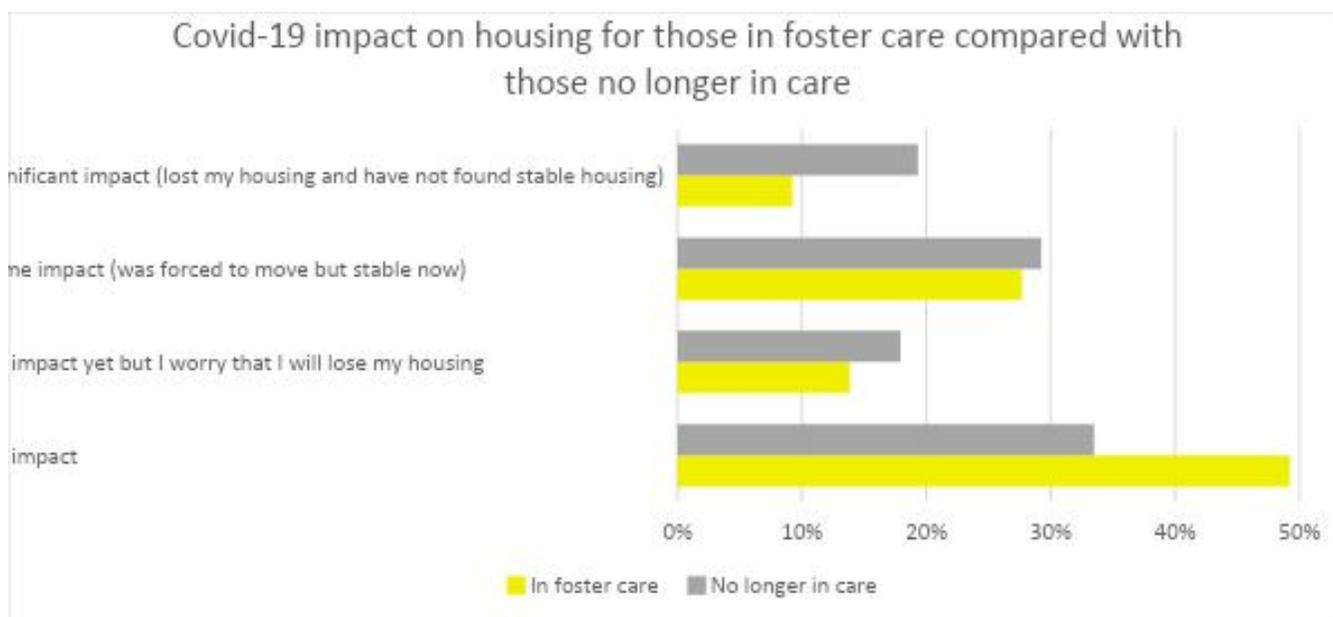
Housing

Housing continues to be a challenge for the young people responding to our polls. Approximately 41 percent said that there has been no impact, but 16 percent worry that they will lose their housing. Forty-three percent of respondents were forced to move because of COVID-19; 29 percent reported they have found stable housing now and 14 percent have still not found stable housing.

Of the young people still in foster care, 49 percent reported that COVID-19 has not affected their housing situation, while of those no longer in care, 34 percent reported their housing was unaffected, suggesting more instability for those no longer in care. Nine (9) percent of those in foster care reported a significant negative impact on their housing and that they have not yet found a stable place to live, compared with 19 percent of those not in foster care. Six young people who are no longer in care reported they moved back home with their former foster family.

I'm living with a previous foster family that I consider my family

–21-year-old with lived experience in foster care from Oregon



Education

Education is an area that seems to have stabilized for most of the young people who completed our poll. Only 4 percent reported that their school had been cancelled, and 46 percent reported their school had moved online. Six percent expressed uncertainty about what their school plans will be now because of the pandemic. One in five noted they are having difficulty focusing. Five percent noted they don't have a laptop or computer to complete their work, and three percent reported they don't have internet or Wi-Fi access. Some students continue to struggle because of the pandemic. One student said he had to withdraw from college in order to focus on making money. Many students wrote that they were struggling with focus, poor virtual environments, and some opted to not return to school this year at all while they waited for the pandemic to end.

School is currently online, but the internet I have is slow, and doesn't allow for me to stay connected all the time.

–18-year-old with lived experience in foster care from Missouri

Connections & Support

In this latest poll, about a third of the young people (34 percent) responded that they have family members (legal or chosen) to rely on during the crisis. Thirty-five (36) percent noted that they had connections to caseworkers or Independent Living Providers they could call for help or support, 22 percent of those with connections were young people in care compared with 14 percent having a case worker/ILP they could call for young people no longer in care. Sadly, nearly 1 in 5 young people from care reported that they are entirely on their own.

I have family but they don't care if I'm homeless.

–21-year-old with lived experience in foster care from Pennsylvania

Health care

Approximately 80 percent of the poll respondents reported that they have health insurance, however, 15 percent did not have health care or were unsure whether they had it. About 12 percent say they are having trouble getting medical care, 12 percent are having trouble accessing mental health care, 5 percent said they are without needed medication, 11 percent don't know how to use their health care insurance; and 5% don't have technology or internet to do telehealth visits.

I'm having a very hard time finding a therapist at this time

–24-year-old with lived experience in foster care from Iowa

Demographics

Of the 474 respondents, 52 percent reported no longer being in foster care, 46 percent reported still being in care, and 2 percent were unsure if they were still in care. Of those in foster care, 64 percent reported being told what supports are available to the, while only 36 percent of those not in care received information about available supports. Approximately 31 percent of those still in foster care were told they can stay in their current placement compared with 3 percent of those not in care. Over 41 percent of those young people not in care reported that they had not received any information about supports available to them, compared with 8 percent of those in care. See Table 1.

Table 1 - Receipt of Information during Pandemic by Foster Care Status

| | In Care | | Not in Care | |
|---|---------|-----|-------------|-----|
| | % | # | % | # |
| I've been told what supports are available to me. | 64 | 139 | 36 | 87 |
| I have info about re-entering foster care. | 12 | 26 | 3 | 8 |
| I've been told I can stay in my placement. | 31 | 68 | 3 | 7 |
| I haven't received any info. | 8 | 18 | 41 | 100 |

METHODOLOGY

Between Nov 24 and December 5, FosterClub conducted a national poll of youth who were in foster care to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their employment, housing, food security, health and connections. A call through FosterClub’s networks, emails and social media was made to identify respondents, and a convenience sample was obtained. FosterClub received 474 valid responses from young people who completed the questions. Each young person who provided a valid response received \$25 for their participation. Respondents who did not complete the questionnaire completely, those who had duplicate entries or payment information and those who were not from foster care were excluded from the final analysis. The poll included respondents living in 43 states.

Survey respondents were from 43 states, including:

| | |
|---------------------------|----------------|
| Alabama | Mississippi |
| Alaska | Missouri |
| Arizona | Montana |
| Arkansas | Nevada |
| California | New Hampshire |
| Colorado | New Jersey |
| Connecticut | New Mexico |
| Delaware | New York |
| District of Columbia (DC) | North Carolina |
| Florida | Oklahoma |
| Hawaii | Oregon |
| Idaho | Pennsylvania |
| Illinois | Rhode Island |
| Indiana | South Carolina |
| Iowa | Tennessee |
| Kansas | Texas |
| Kentucky | Utah |
| Louisiana | Vermont |
| Maryland | Virginia |
| Massachusetts | Washington |
| Michigan | Wisconsin |
| Minnesota | |

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