

# Coalition of Foster and Family Advocates: Hennepin Foster COVID Relief Fund Preliminary Results POST-Survey

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## BACKGROUND

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

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

Rainbow Research, an independent evaluation consultant nonprofit, advised on the survey design and supported analysis. Below is a summary of key findings from the post-survey in March 2021 following the receipt of funding and the pre-survey in December 2020.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

Of the 128 recipients of the Relief Fund, 91 (71%) completed the post-survey. It is expected that post-survey data skews positive, based on the recipients who researchers and partner organizations were not able to reach to complete the post-survey.

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<sup>†</sup>Early leaders in the Foster Advocates network stated foster care creates a significant, immutable cultural identity, that is often unrecognized once they are reunited with family, adopted, or age out. The term Foster is used to name and claim this unique identity.

### Race and Ethnicity as Identified by Participants

- Participants self-identified their race and ethnicity in addition to selecting categories used by the state and federal government.

Race & Ethnicity	Frequency	Percent
African American/Black	35	43%
Somali	2	2%
Latinx/Hispanic	2	2%
Asian American	5	5%
White	13	14%
Native American	11	12%
Biracial	16	18%
More than two races	4	4%
Other	3	3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Gender and Sexual Orientation as Identified by Participants

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Female	63	69%
Male	24	26%
Non-binary	2	2%
Other	2	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>100%</b>

Sexual Orientation	Frequency	Percent
Straight	67	74%
Gay or Lesbian	5	5%
Bisexual	13	14%
Queer	3	3%
Asexual	1	1%
Questioning/not sure	1	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>100%</b>

## KEY FINDINGS

### **Use of Relief Fund – Fosters used funds primarily for rent, food, and utilities, the expense areas they anticipated in the pre-survey.**

- While most Fosters indicated that the Relief Fund had major impacts on all aspects of their lives, the most severe impacts were reported on their living situation (68.1%), food security (48.4%) and overall wellbeing (45.1%).
- However, Fosters also shared that they still had unmet needs with their financial stability & savings (49.5%), living situation (37.4%) and basic need (34.1%).
- Fosters reported they utilized the relief fund to pay for expenses: rent (current and past), food and utilities. Additionally, paying for car maintenance or loan, transportation, childcare and getting household supplies were reported.
- Fosters used the relief fund for meeting their biggest needs. While this fund supported those, it didn't take away those ongoing needs.

### **Financial Situation – Most Fosters are still in a financial crisis, without any emergency funds nor people who could financially support them in an emergency.**

- 84% reported if they had an emergency this week and needed \$500, they do NOT have funds available right now.
- Likewise, 95% reported that they did not have someone who would loan them or gift them \$500 to pay for an emergency.
- Participants agreed most strongly with the statement: I am in a money crisis (76% agree or strongly agree) and: Money is a significant source of worry or hassle for me (84% agree or strongly agree).

### **Housing – The Relief Fund prevented homelessness by supporting rent payments (future and backpay).**

- 90.1% report their living situation has not been safe since December.
- 71.4% report that their living situation has not been stable since December.
- Similar to December, 51% reported living on their own.
- 26.4% reported being behind on rent payments since December, compared to 51% reporting this in the pre-survey.

### **Food Security –The Relief Fund had a huge impact on food security, which comments noted also impacted their mental health and well-being.**

- 30.8% worried wouldn't have enough to eat in the past month, compared to 51% in December.
- 33% unable to eat healthy and nutritious food in the past month, compared to 52% in December.
- 40% reported skipping a meal or eating less than they thought they should in the past month, compared to 50% in December.
- 30.8% gone a whole day without eating over the past month, compared to 45% in December.
- 47.3% shared that they are doing okay with food access; approximately 40% reported using SNAP in the past month.

## Physical & Emotional Health

- Fosters expressed concerns over unmet health needs since December- unmet dental health need (52%), mental health need (43%), physical health need (37%). Unmet medication needs (33%) and substance or alcohol use needs (23%) were also reported.
- When asked to indicate barriers they ran into in getting their medical needs met, Fosters most commonly reported concerns about cost and that they didn't know where to go.
- 40% are most likely experiencing major depression (according to PHQ-2 depression screener).
- 55% are most likely experiencing generalized anxiety (according to GAD-2 anxiety screener).
- 42% are experiencing below average mental wellbeing while 23% are experiencing probable depression according to SWEMWBS wellbeing scale.<sup>1</sup>
- 32% shared they are using therapy (in-person or telehealth) currently to support their mental health and wellbeing
- 24% use medication, 57% use music or art and almost 40% use connection with family and friend to support their mental health and wellbeing.

## Educational Progress

- 23% reported pursuing some form of education or career pathway training currently
- 31% shared wanting to attend college.
- More than half of the Fosters expressed not being aware of the different college financial support resources available.
- When asked about barriers for pursuing a college degree, Fosters most commonly reported being worried about the financial support, housing needs, transportation needs and challenge balancing work and school.
- When asked to indicate barriers that most impacted their ability to complete a college degree, Fosters reported challenge balancing work and school, lack of financial support and lack of mental health support.

## Social Network

- 25% of respondents do not have one or more people in their life who connected them to resources or provided support during pandemic.
- 46% of the respondents do not have one or more people in their life whom they could call on in an emergency for tangible support (housing, food, money, etc).
- 81.3% of the Fosters expressed that they wished they had connections with more people to help them through this pandemic. 64% shared that they have been on their own or almost entirely alone.

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<sup>1</sup> The equivalent cut points for SWEMWBS are 17 or less for probable depression, 18-20 for possible depression, 21-27 for average mental wellbeing and 28-35 high mental wellbeing.

## Wellbeing & Optimism

- 55% of respondents describe themselves overall as doing good or very good, while 12% describe themselves as doing very poor.
- 18% of the participants strongly agree with the statement “I am excited for the future.”
- 22% of the participants strongly agree they “have a sense of purpose and future for my life;” 8% strongly agree they “think my future is not entirely up to me.”
- 20% strongly agree they have clear goals for their future, 25% strongly agree with being motivated to meet their goals.
- 27% strongly agree they have the ability to meet their goals and 9% strongly agree they have or know how to get resources to meet their goals.