

How can individuals with direct experience of child welfare help to reform the system?

IFOSTER. (2022). *VOICE OF THE FOSTER CARE COMMUNITY: CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE, CAREGIVERS AND FRONT-LINE CHILD WELFARE WORKERS SPEAK OUT*. RETRIEVED FROM [THIS REPORT](#)

What can we learn from this study?

There are many systemic and financial barriers to providing permanency to youth in foster care. To supplement the substantial body of qualitative, journal-based research about the needs of transition-age youth, [iFoster](#) conducted a national survey to better understand the perspectives of young adults with experience of foster care, caregivers, and front-line child welfare workers.

Study details:

- **Population:** 2,411 participants comprised of current and former youth in foster care, caregivers, and front-line workers from 49 states and the District of Columbia
- **Data source:** Survey via email of members of the iFoster portal
- **Methodology:** thematic qualitative coding; inductive coding
- **Dates:** 2021

What are the critical findings?

There was consensus across the three respondent groups that the child welfare system is failing young people, noting that the COVID-19 pandemic amplified some of these failures. Several key themes emerged:

- Despite the trauma children experience as a result of both maltreatment and foster care, the **system is not focused on prioritizing well-being** and instead is focused on administrative tasks (policies, paperwork, procedures).
- Children of color and LGBTQ+ youth are overrepresented in foster care and face **racism and discrimination in the system**, which impacts their outcomes. Respondents reported concerns about disparities in removal decisions and reunification, and a lack of information and support regarding both cultural training and working with LGBTQ+ youth.
- Children remain in foster placements for too long, and **not enough priority is placed on supporting parents** to maintain a relationship with their children and work toward permanency as quickly as possible.
- Youth need **equitable access to resources** to help them transition to adulthood, including rental assistance, employment, cash assistance, and support for achieving educational goals.
- **Young people impacted by the child welfare system must be actively and authentically engaged** in how the child welfare system operates and the type of support it provides.

Why is this important for our work?

People directly involved with the child welfare system — including current and former youth in foster care, caregivers, and front-line child welfare staff — have the best understanding of what changes are needed to better support children and families. The failures of the current system must be addressed, including tackling the systemic inequities that persist, the lack of support to youth in achieving permanency, and the inadequate allocation of resources and supports.

This summary synthesizes the findings from a single research report. To learn more about authentically engaging with young people, please review: [What does it mean to value youth partners as assets?](#)

For additional information, [access the research report directly](#) or email KMResources@casey.org.