



Annual Participant Survey Report

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Introduction

The Iowa Aftercare Services Network ([IASN](#)) provides services and support to help youth and young adults who exit foster care (near the age of 18) make a successful transition to adulthood. The IASN (“the Network”) supports youth between the ages of 17 and 23 as they pursue self-sufficiency through education, employment, housing, health, life skills, and relationships. Aftercare Self-Sufficiency Advocates (“Advocates”) provide case management and direct service to participating youth.

The Network administers an annual survey to solicit feedback from Aftercare participants and assess their satisfaction with the services they are receiving. The annual survey is also used to provide a snapshot of the status of participants in terms of three primary outcomes: sufficient resources, stable housing, and supportive relationships. Survey results are used to inform policy and program decisions as part of the Network’s ongoing quality assurance efforts.

In April 2020, 359 active participants completed the voluntary and confidential survey. This represents 91.8% of the 391 core participants (ages 18-21) that met with an Advocate at least once during the month.¹ The 2020 survey was administered through an online survey platform.

This report outlines participant demographics and program satisfaction levels among 2020 participants and, in certain cases, variation across recent program years.

Participant Demographics

The Network received 359 survey responses from Aftercare participants throughout Iowa. This includes young people receiving services from all eight agencies in the Network, including 40 or more responses each from four agencies. Response rates were roughly proportionate to Agencies’ caseloads.

Just over half (54%) of 2020 respondents identified as female. This is a reversal from the prior two years, when just under half (48%) of respondents were female.

Gender Identity by Survey Year (N=354)			
	2018 (N=366)	2019 (N=373)	2020 (N=354)
Female	48.1%	48.0%	54.2%
Male	51.1%	51.2%	44.4%
Other	0.6%	0.0%	0.3%
Prefer Not to Answer	0.3%	0.8%	1.1%

¹ Although Aftercare services were extended to age 23 on January 1, 2020, extended service participants (ages 21-23) were not included in the administration of this year’s survey.

The 2020 survey respondents also trended younger than those in 2019. Whereas 40% of respondents in 2019 were 20 or 21 years old at the time they completed the survey, 33% were 20 or 21 this year. This represents a return to the age distribution among 2018 respondents.

Age Distribution by Survey Year			
	2018 (N=368)	2019 (N=371)	2020 (N=354)
18	25.0%	31.0%	28.8%
19	41.3%	29.4%	38.1%
20/21*	33.7%	39.6%	33.0%

Aftercare participants are more racially and ethnically diverse than Iowans overall. When asked which race/ethnicity they “most closely identify with”, roughly two-in-five respondents identified as youth of color. This is consistent with 2019 survey respondents, and with the overall population of those who have recently aged out of out-of-home placement in Iowa ([Youth Policy Institute of Iowa](#)).

Race/Ethnicity “Most Closely Identified With” (N=354)	
<i>African American or Black</i>	17.0%
<i>Asian American</i>	0.6%
<i>Hispanic or Latino</i>	6.8%
<i>Native American or American Indian</i>	1.1%
<i>Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander</i>	0.6%
<i>White</i>	62.7%
<i>Multiracial</i>	8.8%
<i>Other</i>	0.9%
<i>Prefer Not to Answer</i>	1.7%

Participant Outcomes & Satisfaction

The Aftercare contract includes performance measures in three key areas which are monitored, part, using questions in the annual satisfaction survey:

1. **Sufficient Resources:** “Last month, did you have enough money or other resources to cover your expenses? (include your income, money from PAL/vendor payments, and any other assistance)?”
2. **Stable Housing:** “Do you currently have a safe and stable place to live?”
3. **Supportive Relationships:** “Do you have a positive relationship with at least one adult in your community?”

A large majority of survey respondents affirmed their access to the three self-sufficiency indicators. Notably, the proportion of participants reporting access did not decrease amid the COVID-19 pandemic. By these measures it appears that the combination of Aftercare services and broader COVID-19 response efforts (*e.g.* expanded unemployment benefits, economic impact assistance) has allowed for stability among participants, at least in the short-term.

Self-Sufficiency Performance Measures (N=354)			
	<i>Sufficient Resources</i>	<i>Stable Housing</i>	<i>Supportive Relationships</i>
Yes	78.3%	98.0%	96.9%
No	21.8%	2.0%	3.1%

Aftercare participants were asked to assess how helpful the program has been in terms of six areas, all of which are concrete actions that relate back to the Network’s focus areas (education, employment, housing, health, life skills, and relationships). For all six areas, at least 93% of respondents described the program as “somewhat helpful” or “very helpful” to them as they work towards self-sufficiency. Given that participants and Advocates begin their work together by developing detailed Self-Sufficiency Plans (SSPs), it is encouraging that “Setting and pursuing personal goals” is the most highly-rated program area on the helpfulness scale (85% “very helpful”).

"Please share how helpful Aftercare/PAL has been to you in the following areas" (N=354)				
	<i>Very helpful</i>	<i>Somewhat helpful</i>	<i>Not at all helpful</i>	<i>Too soon to tell</i>
<i>Setting & pursuing personal goals</i>	84.5%	12.2%	1.1%	2.3%
<i>Improving my ability to solve problems</i>	78.5%	17.0%	1.4%	3.1%
<i>Building positive relationships with others</i>	72.9%	20.6%	3.1%	3.4%
<i>Accessing community resources</i>	83.6%	12.7%	2.3%	1.4%
<i>Holding me accountable</i>	83.1%	13.8%	1.1%	2.0%
<i>Managing my money</i>	75.1%	18.9%	2.0%	4.0%

Advocates strive to establish positive relationships with young people participating in the program and to help them become more confident and hopeful about their futures – an important indicator of long-term success. Seven-in-eight respondents (88%) reported their Advocate “almost always” or “always” helps them “feel more hopeful about [their] future.”

"Does your current Advocate help you feel more hopeful about your future?" (N=354)	
<i>Not Really</i>	1.1%
<i>Sometimes</i>	6.5%
<i>Almost Always</i>	21.8%
<i>Always</i>	65.8%
<i>Too Soon to Tell</i>	4.8%

As a culminating question, the survey invites respondents to rate Aftercare’s overall helpfulness on a five-star scale. This rating averaged 4.59 with a significant majority (69.5%) offering a five-star rating. Most remaining respondents (22.3%) gave four-star ratings.

"How helpful is Aftercare/PAL to you overall?" (Five-star rating [N=354])	
1	0.8%
2	0.6%
3	6.8%
4	22.3%
5	69.5%

Youth Comments

In the interest of youth voice, participants are invited to share their remaining thoughts on Aftercare via an open-ended question at the end of the annual survey. As seen below, the majority of comments convey a positive view of Aftercare services generally, and many participants praised their Advocate specifically. Participants also offered valuable constructive criticism. Examples of comments by respondents are shown on the following page.

“Is there anything else you would like to share with us about your experience in Aftercare?” (N=112)	
<p>My [Advocate] is the greatest! She really has helped me stay in a great place in life. I really appreciate how hard working... kind... and helpful [she is]!</p>	<p>[My agency] is helping me achieve my dream of going to college and my [Advocate] has been instrumental in helping me achieve my goals.</p>
<p>[My Advocate has] been an amazing friend/worker. She has helped me so much and I'm so grateful to have her in not only my life but my kids' as well.</p>	<p>[My Advocate] did a great job helping with my needs and being a support system when I needed one. She always had hope in me when I didn't even in myself at times.</p>
<p>[T]his is a great program but it does have some flaws. Mainly the amount we get per month... The unemployment rates in Iowa [have spiked] and there are almost no job opportunities in [my city]... So with all do respect the ages when our stipends go down need to be slightly adjusted to the current economic crisis that the younger generation has to deal with. Other than that I love this program for giving me a chance to start... a better life so thank you for that with all the respect I have.</p>	<p>Ever since I've been in [Aftercare] I feel like I have an extra support. Someone who I can talk to about how I feel and how to help me work through my problems. I've learned how to file taxes and save money. I've learned how to work on my anger in different ways. [My advocate] helps me with something new every time we meet and I appreciate her very much for it.</p>
<p>My [Advocate] has pushed me to reach my goals even when I didn't want to.</p>	<p>[I] would like to be eligible to get the [PAL] stipend without having a GED [and being] under 20.</p>
<p>They accept me for who I am, despite my flaws.</p>	<p>[My advocate] has been there for me. She checks up on me and we have regular meetings. I am about to turn 21 but [my Advocate] has explained Extended Aftercare and I will keep in touch with her.</p>

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing public health guidelines, the 2020 survey was the first to be administered completely online. Under normal circumstances, participants meet in person with their Advocates twice each month. With this in mind, it is notable that the 2020 online-only response rate (91.8%) approached 2019's rate (93.7%). Network staff are to be commended for their commitment to youth voice, and participants are to be commended for sharing that voice.

About the Youth Policy Institute of Iowa

The Youth Policy Institute of Iowa is a non-profit intermediary organization with expertise in policies, programs and practices that affect young people transitioning from adolescence to adulthood, especially those with experience in Iowa’s child welfare or juvenile justice systems. Since 2002, YPII has provided policy development, coordination, quality assurance, and evaluation support for the [Iowa Aftercare Services Network](#) under a subcontract with YSS, the lead agency of the Network.

For More Information:

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