



Participant Experiences in Aftercare

Annual Participant Survey Report, April 2022

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“Aftercare has been a lifesaver to me and offered many resources that have helped so much ...” –Aftercare Participant

Introduction

The [Iowa Aftercare Services Network](#) provides services and support to help young adults who exit foster care near the age of 18 make a successful transition to adulthood, supporting young people up to the age of 23 as they pursue self-sufficiency. Aftercare Self-Sufficiency Advocates (“Advocates”) meet with young people regularly to set goals, develop individual action plans, build skills, and connect to resources. Assistance is provided to participants in the areas of education, employment, housing, health, life skills, and relationships.

The Network administers an annual survey to solicit feedback from Aftercare participants and assess their satisfaction with the services they are receiving. The survey is developed by the Youth Policy Institute of Iowa in consultation with DHS and YSS. Survey results are used to inform policy and program decisions as part of the Network’s ongoing quality assurance efforts. 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.

In March and early April 2022, 320 active Aftercare participants across the state completed the online, confidential survey. Young people receiving services from all eight agencies in the Network participated, with response rates proportional to agencies’ caseloads. Participants in the Des Moines and Cedar Rapids areas accounted for approximately 40% of all survey responses. As an incentive to complete the survey, respondents were given the opportunity to provide their name and contact information to be entered into a drawing for one of five \$50 gift cards. Those names were selected and gift cards distributed after the survey closed.

Of all respondents, 254 young people (ages 18 to 21) were receiving core services at the time of the survey, and 62 participants (those age 21 and 22), were receiving Extended Services. Four (4) respondents did not provide their age or other demographic information that is requested at the end of the survey. All respondents completed the survey electronically.

Aftercare Advocates strive to give every active participant in the month the survey is administered an opportunity to share their feedback by completing a survey, but doing so is voluntary on the part of the participants. Of all continuing¹ core participants who met with an Advocate at least once during the month of March, 84% completed a survey (n=303). Similarly, of 75 extended participants who met with an Advocate at least once in March, 83% completed a survey.

This report shows survey results for both Core and Extended recipients separately and combined. Respondents who did not provide their age are included in the total data, but not in the disaggregated Core or Extended Services responses. Survey respondents were not required to answer every question and some discontinued the survey before reaching the end. Therefore the total number of responses for each question varies.

¹ Because the survey results are used to assess the quality of services participants receive over time, young people completing intakes during the month the survey is administered are not asked to complete a survey.

Participant Characteristics

Characteristics of the participants are collected through three demographic questions that are included at the end of the survey. This information allows us to analyze responses across age, gender, and race variables. Given the high response rate, those completing the survey are generally representative of all young people served by the Network during the year.

Beginning in January 2020, IASN was authorized to provide Extended Services to 21 and 22 year olds who had participated in Aftercare before their 21st birthday. Extended Services are more flexible and do not require monthly participation to remain eligible. Rather these services are available when young people need assistance. IASN first included these older participants in the annual survey in 2021, and continued that practice in 2022. Of all 2022 survey responders, one-fifth fell into the Extended Services category, reflecting the increasing participation of this older age group.

	Age Distribution by Survey Year		
	2020 (n=354)	2021 (n=370)	2022 (n=316)
18	28.8%	21.6%	20.9%
19	38.1%	27.8%	26.6%
20	33.0%	35.4%	32.9%
21	--	7.6%	13.0%
22	--	7.6%	6.6%

Similar to the SFY 2020 and 2021 surveys, just over half (52%) of all 2022 respondents identified as female; 44.6% identified as male; 2.3% identified as transgender or other. Older respondents receiving extended services were more likely to be female (73%) than male (27%). Male participants, particularly those receiving extended services, are somewhat under-represented among survey respondents relative to their proportion of total youth served by the Network in the months leading up to the survey.

	Gender Identity		
	Core (n=254)	Extended (n=62)	Total (n=316)
Female	47.2%	72.6%	52.2%
Male	48.8%	27.4%	44.6%
Transgender	1.2%	0.0%	1.0%
Other	1.6%	0.0%	1.3%
Prefer Not to Answer	1.2%	0.0%	1.0%

Aftercare participants are racially and ethnically diverse. When asked which race/ethnicity they “most closely identify with,” about one-third of the respondents identified as people of color, while two-thirds of participants, including those in both core and extended services, identify as White. This is consistent with the racial and ethnic composition of Aftercare participants in prior years and with the overall population of those who have recently aged out of court-ordered, out-of-home placements in Iowa.

Race/Ethnicity “Most Closely Identified With”			
	Core (n=253)	Extended (n=62)	Total (n=315)
African American or Black	12.3%	11.3%	12.1%
Asian American	0.4%	0.0%	0.3%
Hispanic or Latino	6.3%	1.6%	5.4%
Native American or American Indian	2.8%	3.2%	2.9%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.0%	1.6%	0.3%
White	67.2%	67.7%	67.3%
Multiracial	8.3%	14.5%	9.5%
Prefer Not to Answer	0.8%	0.0%	1.6%

Participant Outcomes & Satisfaction

The Aftercare contract includes performance measures in three key areas which are monitored, in 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?”

Nearly all (95% or more) of both Core and Extended Services respondents reported that they had stable housing and supportive relationships. Four out of five also reported that they had sufficient resources to meet their expenses. These responses indicate that the majority of young people are navigating the transition to adulthood successfully while participating in Aftercare and taking advantage of the support and financial assistance available to them through the program.

Self-Sufficiency Performance Measures			
% Responding "Yes"	Core (n=254)	Extended (n=62)	Total (n=320)
Sufficient Resources	79.1%	80.7%	79.4%
Stable Housing	96.9%	100.0%	97.5%
Supportive Relationships	95.7%	98.4%	96.3%

The Aftercare Network strives to treat each participant fairly and to respect each young person's individual race, culture, and identity. Establishing a positive relationship with participants is critical to keeping young people engaged and making progress. As shown in the table below, responses to statements related to how participants feel they treated by their Advocates were overwhelmingly positive.

"Please tell us how often each of the following statements about your experience in Aftercare is true. (n=320)				
	Always True	Most of the time	Just Sometimes	Rarely or Never True
I am treated fairly.	86.8%	12.9%	0.3%	0.0%
My race and cultural heritage is respected.	93.4%	5.6%	0.6%	0.3%
My gender and gender identity is respected.	95.3%	4.4%	0.0%	0.3%
My sexual orientation is respected.	94.7%	5.4%	0.0%	0.0%
My Advocate is someone I can count on and trust.	90.2%	7.9%	1.9%	0.0%

Additional questions in the survey asked how often the program helps participants achieve their goals, how they feel about their future, and if they have the tools needed to be successful. Again, answers reflect high levels of satisfaction with the services provided by the program.

"Please tell us how often each of the following statements about your experience in Aftercare is true. (n=320)				
	Always True	Most of the time	Just Sometimes	Rarely or Never True
Financial support from Aftercare (PAL stipend, vendor payment, etc.) helps keep me working toward my goals.	85.3%	11.3%	3.1%	0.3%
My Advocate helps me connect with people and resources that will help me succeed.	88.8%	10.3%	0.0%	0.9%
My Advocate helps me feel hopeful about my future.	86.8%	11.6%	0.9%	0.6%

Survey responses also revealed that young people were somewhat less confident about achieving their goals, having a long-term plan for education and/or employment, and having reliable transportation.

"Please tell us how often each of the following statements about your experience in Aftercare is true. (n=320)				
	<i>Always True</i>	<i>Most of the time</i>	<i>Just Sometimes</i>	<i>Rarely or Never True</i>
I am confident I will achieve my goals.	73.0%	22.9%	3.5%	0.6%
I have a plan for my long-term education and/or employment that is helpful.	75.3%	17.5%	5.3%	1.9%
I have <u>reliable</u> transportation to get to school and/or work.	70.7%	17.4%	8.8%	3.2%

To assess participants' general satisfaction with the Aftercare services they have received, the survey invites respondents to rate Aftercare's overall helpfulness on a five-point scale. The average rating by all respondents in the 2022 survey was 4.7, with three-quarters (76.25%) offering a five-star rating. Fewer than 6% gave Aftercare less than a four-star rating.

"How helpful is Aftercare/PAL to you overall?"			
Five-star rating where "1" is not at all helpful and "5" is very helpful (n=384)			
	<i>Core (n=254)</i>	<i>Extended (n=62)</i>	<i>Total (n=320)</i>
5	74.4%	85.5%	76.25%
4	20.1%	8.1%	18.13%
3	3.9%	4.8%	4.06%
2	0.4%	1.6%	0.63%
1	1.2%	0.0%	0.94%

Pandemic Relief

Beginning in May 2021, many Aftercare participants were eligible to receive a pandemic relief payment of \$750 under the Pandemic Relief for Iowa Foster Care Alumni initiative. Some participants may have also received a second payment of \$500 if certain conditions were met. Finally, Aftercare was able to provide up to \$600 to participating youth to address an unmet need specifically related to the pandemic. To assess the reach and impact of the pandemic assistance among Aftercare participants, the Network took advantage of the 2022 annual survey to include questions related to these payments.

Not all Aftercare participants met the eligibility requirements for the pandemic assistance. Of 320 participants who completed the survey, 237 (74.1%) indicated that they had received one

or more of the Foster Care pandemic relief payments or assistance. Thirty-seven (11.6%) reported that they had not received the assistance, and 46 (14.4%) were unsure. Of those that reported they had received a pandemic relief payment, 88% indicated that the assistance was “very helpful.”

“How helpful was the pandemic relief assistance you received?”			
	Core (n=186)	Extended (n=48)	Total (n=234)
Very helpful	88.2%	87.5%	88.0%
Somewhat helpful	11.3%	10.4%	11.1%
Didn’t really need it, but it was nice anyway	0.5%	2.1%	0.9%

The survey went on to ask how young people had used the financial assistance they had received (respondents could select multiple answers). Paying for basic needs, including food and housing, as well as transportation expenses, were the most prevalent uses of pandemic payments. In addition, forty-five respondents (21.5%) indicated that they were able to save at least some of the financial assistance for a future need or emergency.

“How did you use the money from the pandemic relief assistance?” (Respondents could select all that applied)			
	Core (n=186)	Extended (n=48)	Total (n=234)
Paid for food	56.5%	47.9%	54.7%
Paid rent, utilities, or other housing costs	71.5%	79.2%	73.1%
Paid down debt or repaid money I owed	15.6%	22.9%	17.1%
Put toward transportation costs	43.6%	29.2%	40.6%
Paid for child care or other parenting expenses	4.3%	14.6%	6.4%
Saved for a future need or emergency	21.5%	8.3%	18.8%
Paid for medical or health related expenses	2.2%	2.1%	2.1%
Bought something special for myself or someone else	16.7%	8.3%	15.0%
Something else*	5.4%	4.2%	5.1%

*Examples shared included: clothing, baby supplies, car payments or insurance, and phone bill.

Several young people expressed gratitude for the extra help and how valuable it was when they were struggling financially during the pandemic. Typical comments shared by those surveyed include:

- *Beyond grateful, it was so helpful thank you*
- *It helped a lot especially since I was in a tight situation with money.*
- *Nice when a lot of work was not available*
- *Helped me when I needed it most*
- *The pandemic relief assistance helped me out tremendously!*
- *It caught me up with my bills during a very rough financial patch*

Comments from Young People

In each year's survey, participants are invited to share additional comments about their experience in Aftercare. Typically, the majority of comments convey an extremely positive view of Aftercare services in general, and many participants take the opportunity to praise their Advocate specifically. Participants also offer valuable constructive criticism.

In the 2022 survey, sixty-eight respondents provided substantive comments, 90% of which were positive. Thirty-two comments acknowledged the help and support they have received from the program and the relationship participants had with their Advocate, including twenty-three who praised their Advocate by name in their comments. Six young people specifically mentioned Aftercare's role in helping them set and achieve their own goals, such as the following comment from a core services participant: *My worker helps me set long term goals that will help even when I age out of after care.*

Less positive comments related to staff turnover and the desire for more financial support. Three participants expressed concern about having multiple Advocates while in Aftercare and the importance of the relationship that youth build with their Advocate. Two core services participants suggested that the program should provide *"more money"* and an extended services participant lamented the toll of inflation: *"As prices of literally everything are rising I feel like I am on a downhill slope financially, but so is everyone else around me."*

A few participants offered longer comments about their lived experience in foster care and the impact of Aftercare (*see sidebar*).

Additional examples of comments from this year's survey are shown below.

Lived Experience

Being a single mom before my daughter was here was something I didn't plan on having to go through but in the end its always worth it. I just want to take the time to really genuinely say I appreciate my [Aftercare] worker as she always reminds me that I'm a good mommy, I didn't have the best life myself as a kid. I was in and out of foster care being months old to aging out but she always makes me feel good about myself whether I'm broke and have nothing, I know I can do it and I will always push myself to figure it out no matter what, thank you to aftercare!

“Is there anything else you would like to share with us about your experience in Aftercare?”

Praise for Advocates

- Vicky is amazing. I have never received this kind of help in my life. Gives me confidence to live on out on my own in the city.
- Jacinda never hesitates to help me discuss my life problems, and I couldn't thank her enough for it.
- Peri is an excellent person to have counseling me and checks in on me often and cares about me. She makes sure I have a good budget, checks on my mental health which is outstanding. She really cares about me as a person
- I want to say how much I appreciate Belinda and all the hard work and support she's giving me!
- Matt has been working with me since I was 18. I'm almost 21 now. He's helped show me how to be successful. . .

Constructive Criticism

I am very happy with the quality and friendliness of the workers assigned to me. However, I will have had 4 different people in the last 3 years due to circumstances out of my control. I truly hope you reinstate [Advocate's] position so that I can continue my established rapport with my current aftercare worker. I enjoy the time I have spent with her, and I trust her with my personal information and my enrollment in your program. I truly hope that you consider these anecdotes and actually value my personal take on this program.

Impact of Aftercare

- I just want to say if i didn't have aftercare in my life i would have been jobless, no home no food and no experience with daily tasks but its aftercare it self it speaks for us kids struggling in life trying to get by and fhere there to help us get there and strive for our goal i really appreciate the help and services it gives to us
- Aftercare has been a lifesaver to me & offered many resources that have helped so much my workers are very communicative & supportive they are the best so thank you for everything.
- I've been in the aftercare program for 2 years and I can honestly say it has been one of the most helpful things in my adult life.

Goal Orientation

It's been helping me towards my goals in life and I am almost there!

Appreciation for the help

- Has helped me through a lot and will always be thankful
 - Wish aftercare helped buying cars even if just the first car.
 - Aftercare has helped me out with many things and I appreciate those who I work with from aftercare
- Truthfully. Thank you for the aftercare experience after leaving foster care at 18. It is a wonderful thing you guys do for us kids whose family's couldn't do for us. I'm very proud and happy to have been in this program and I really couldn't thank you guys enough!

Final Note

Young adults participating in Aftercare do so on a voluntary basis. While the annual participant survey historically has shown very high levels of satisfaction with the services provided, it could be that those who are dissatisfied simply do not stay involved in the program long enough to be surveyed for their feedback. Although only a sample of all youth served during the year complete the survey, respondents are generally representative of Aftercare participants at any given time. Further, typical duration of involvement in Aftercare consistently averages two or more years (including temporary interruptions in services), suggesting that young people find value from their participation and are highly satisfied with the services and support they receive.

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.

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