



Findings from the 2023 Annual Iowa Aftercare Participant Satisfaction Survey

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“I am thankful for this chance to learn to live independently. And to pursue a career I might enjoy ...” — Aftercare Participant

Introduction

The [Iowa Aftercare Services Network \(IASN\)](#) provides services and support to help young adults who exit foster care near the age of 18 make a successful transition to adulthood, supporting them up to age 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. 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. The present survey was developed by the Child Welfare Research and Training Project at Iowa State University in consultation with the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services and YSS, the lead agency for the IASN.

In April 2023, 328 active Aftercare participants across the state fully or almost fully completed the online, confidential survey, which was 82.6% of the 397 eligible youth who engaged with their Advocate in that month. Young people receiving services from all eight agencies in the Network participated, as determined by the agency that the youth identified in their survey responses. Participants in the Cedar Rapids area accounted for approximately 26% and in Council Bluffs for 18% of all survey responses in the analysis. The participation rate varied across the eight agencies, from 62% to 100%, averaging 82.6%. 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 were distributed after the survey closed.

Of all respondents, 264 young people (ages 18 to 21) were receiving Core Aftercare services at the time of the survey, and 61 participants (those age 21 and 22), were receiving Extended Aftercare services. Three (3) 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 an opportunity to share their feedback by completing a survey during the month the survey is administered, but doing so is voluntary on the part of the participants. Of all continuing¹ Core Aftercare participants who met with an advocate at least once during the month of April, 86.5% completed a survey (n=305). Similarly, of 92 Extended Aftercare participants who met with an advocate in April, 66% completed a survey.

This report shows survey results for both Core and Extended Aftercare 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 Aftercare responses. Survey respondents were not required to answer every question, and some discontinued the survey before reaching the end.

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

Therefore, the number of total responses for each question varies. Typically, the survey link was provided to advocates, and it is suggested that they provide the survey link to participants when they meet. The intent is for participants to complete the survey during their meeting with their advocate, who should provide privacy during survey completion.

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 by 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 Aftercare services to youth ages 21 and 22 years old who had participated in Aftercare before their 21st birthday. Extended Aftercare 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 2023. As shown below in [Table 1](#), of all 2023 survey responders, just under one-fifth (18.8%) fell into the Extended Aftercare category, reflecting the increasing participation of this older age group.

Table 1: Age Distribution by Survey Year

	2020 (n=354)	2021 (n=370)	2022 (n=316)	2023 (n=325)
18	28.8%	21.6%	20.9%	24.9%
19	38.1%	27.8%	26.6%	33.5%
20	33.0%	35.4%	32.9%	22.8%
21	--	7.6%	13.0%	10.5%
22	--	7.6%	6.6%	8.3%

Across all 2023 respondents (see [Table 2](#)), almost half (48.5%) identified as female; 47.9% identified as male; 2.4% identified as transgender or other. Older respondents receiving Extended services were more likely to be female (54.1%) than male (45.9%), and none of these respondents identified as transgender or another gender.

Table 2: Gender Identity

	Core (n=264)	Extended (n=61)	Total (n=328)
Female	47.7%	54.1%	48.5 %
Male	48.9%	45.9%	47.9%
Transgender	0.8%	0.0%	0.6%
Other	2.3%	0.0%	1.8%
Prefer Not to Answer	0.4%	0.0%	0.3%

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 Aftercare, identified as White (see Table 3). 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.

Table 3: Race/Ethnicity “Most Closely Identified With.”

	Core (n=264)	Extended (n=61)	Total (n=328)
African American or Black	17.0%	11.5%	15.9%
Asian American	0.8%	0.0%	0.6%
Hispanic or Latino	8.7%	1.6%	7.3%
Native American or American Indian	3.0%	3.3%	3.0%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.4%	0.0%	0.3%
White	61.0%	73.8%	62.8%
Multiracial	7.2%	8.2%	7.3%
Other	1.1%	1.6%	1.2%
Prefer Not to Answer	0.8%	0.0%	0.6%

Participant Outcomes and Satisfaction

The Aftercare contract includes performance measures in three key areas that are monitored, in part, using three questions with yes/no response options 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 Aftercare respondents reported that they had stable housing and supportive relationships. As shown in Table 4, just over three-fourths of all Aftercare respondents (78.4%) reported that they had sufficient resources to meet their expenses. However, the rate was lower for Extended (68.9%) than for Core (80.7%). These responses indicate that most 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.

Table 4: Self-Sufficiency Performance Measures

% Responding “Yes”	Core (n=264)	Extended (n=61)	Total (n=328)
Sufficient Resources	80.7%	68.9%	78.4%
Stable Housing	95.5%	96.7%	95.7%
Supportive Relationships	97.7%	100.0%	97.9%

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 Table 5 below, responses to statements about how participants feel their advocates treat them were overwhelmingly positive.

Table 5: “Please tell us how often each of the following statements about your experience in Aftercare is true.” (n=328)

	Always True	Most of the time	Just Sometimes	Rarely or Never True ^a
I am treated fairly.	80.5%	17.1%	1.8%	0.6%
My race and cultural heritage are respected.	90.5%	8.5%	0.6%	0.3%
My gender and gender identity are respected.	93.0%	7.0%	0.0%	0.0%
My sexual orientation is respected.	93.3%	6.7%	0.0%	0.0%
My advocate is someone I can count on and trust.	90.9%	7.6%	1.2%	0.3%

^a For reporting purposes, responses to the options “rarely” and “never true” were combined.

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, with most of the participants responding with “Always True” to each item listed in Table 6 below.

Table 6: “Please tell us how often each of the following statements about your experience in Aftercare is true.” (n=328)

	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.	82.0%	14.9%	2.7%	0.3%

	Always True	Most of the time	Just Sometimes	Rarely or Never True
My advocate helps me connect with people and resources that will help me succeed.	87.2%	11.6%	1.2%	0.0%
My advocate helps me feel hopeful about my future.	86.9%	10.7%	1.8%	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 (see [Table 7](#)).

Table 7: "Please tell us how often each of the following statements about your experience in Aftercare is true."

	Always True	Most of the time	Just Sometimes	Rarely or Never True
I am confident I will achieve my goals.	68.0%	24.7%	6.7%	0.6%
I have a plan for my long-term education and/or employment that is helpful.	67.1%	25.3%	6.4%	1.2%
I have <u>reliable</u> transportation to get to school and/or work.	64.9%	23.2%	7.6%	4.2%

To assess participants' general satisfaction with the Aftercare services they have received, the survey invited respondents to rate Aftercare's overall helpfulness on a five-point scale. The average rating by all respondents in the 2023 survey was 4.7, with just under three-quarters of respondents (72.0%) offering a five-star rating. Fewer than 6% gave Aftercare less than a four-rating, as shown in [Table 8](#).

Table 8: "How helpful is Aftercare/PAL to you overall?"

Five-point rating where "1" is not at all helpful and "5" is very helpful.

	Core (n=264)	Extended (n=61)	Total (n=328)
5	70.5%	80.3%	72.0%
4	23.9%	14.8%	22.6%
3	5.3%	4.9%	5.2%
2	0.4%	0.0%	0.3%
1	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Participants were also prompted to retrospectively identify when they first heard about Aftercare services. Youth are eligible for Pre-Aftercare services at age 17 and Core Aftercare when they turn 18. Ultimately, the goal is to engage with eligible youth as early as possible, so

they have access to Aftercare services for a longer time. Table 9 shows that although most participants (72.9%) first heard of Aftercare before they turned 18 years of age, just under 20% of participants heard about Aftercare services before they turned 17 years old. This implies that about 1 in 5 youth are hearing of Aftercare services prior to being eligible for Pre-Aftercare services and are more likely to hear of Aftercare before they are eligible for Core Aftercare services.

Table 9: “About how old were you when you first heard about Pre-Aftercare or Aftercare services?”

	Core (n=264)	Extended (n=61)	Total (n=328)
Under 17	19.3%	21.3%	19.5%
17	31.4%	24.6%	29.9%
17.5	23.5%	24.6%	23.5%
18 or over	17.4%	14.8%	16.8%
I don’t remember	8.3%	14.8%	9.5%

Unique to the 2023 survey, participants were asked if there was an Aftercare advocate or representative at their transition meeting. Results shown in Table 10 indicate that it was clear for about 60% of respondents that there was an advocate or representative at their meeting, while one-fourth of respondents were not sure if there was an advocate or representative. Additionally, about 10% of all respondents did not think they ever participated in a transition meeting, although transition meetings are a requirement of HHS. These results indicate that for about 40% of participants, it was not clear enough that the transition meeting was occurring and that their Aftercare advocate was present.

Table 10: “Was there an Aftercare advocate/person at your transition meeting (YTDM/YCPM)?”

	Core (n=264)	Extended (n=61)	Total (n=328)
Yes	59.8%	63.9%	60.1%
No	4.2%	3.3%	4.0%
Not sure/don’t remember	25.0%	26.2%	25.0%
I don’t think I ever had one of those types of meetings	11.0%	6.6%	10.1%

^b Note: For reporting purposes, responses to the options “not sure” and “don’t remember” were combined.

Participants were also asked to identify what they wish they had more help with prior to aging out. There were 14 options for participants to choose from, and they were able to respond with as many options as they would like. As shown in Table 11, 130 participants chose only one option, while 198 identified multiple options they would have liked more help with. The most

identified choices participants would have liked more help with were “more information about services that would be available to me like Aftercare” and “information on how much things are really going to cost (housing, food, transportation, education, etc.).” Of the 328 total participants, only three did not provide any response to the item below.

Table 11: “What do you wish you had help with prior to aging out?” Click all that apply.

	Number and rate of participants that identified this singular option (n=130)	Number and rate of participants that identified multiple options and included this response (n=198)	Total number and rate of responses (n=328)
More information about services that would be available to me like Aftercare	28 (21.5%)	95 (48.0%)	123 (37.5%)
Finding a place to live/deciding where I was going to live	8 (6.2%)	75 (37.9%)	83 (25.3%)
Information on how much things are really going to cost (housing, food, transportation, education, etc.)	13 (10.0%)	96 (48.5%)	109 (33.2%)
Identifying my interests and skills	11 (8.5%)	64 (32.3%)	75 (22.9%)
Deciding if I should or am ready to go to college	11 (8.5%)	66 (33.3%)	77 (23.5%)
Exploring different colleges/technical and trade schools, classes	2 (1.5%)	49 (24.7%)	51 (15.5%)
Exploring military options	2 (1.5%)	11 (5.6%)	13 (4.0%)
Completing applications for financial aid	2 (1.5%)	45 (22.7%)	47 (14.3%)
Finding a job/completing job applications	1 (0.8%)	53 (26.8%)	54 (16.5%)
Help getting my driver’s license	12 (9.2%)	61 (30.8%)	73 (22.3%)
Connecting with family	5 (3.8%)	33 (16.7%)	38 (11.6%)
Setting up bank accounts	6 (4.6%)	31 (15.7%)	37 (11.3%)
Someone to talk to about my fears or things I was stressed about	9 (6.9%)	68 (34.3%)	77 (23.5%)

Other (specify below)	17 (13.1%) ^c	11 (5.6%) ^d	28 (8.5%)
Missing (no response)	-	-	3 (0.9%)

^c Note: All 17 participants that identified only “Other (specify below)” provided a written response.

^d Note: 8 out of 11 participants that identified “Other (specify below)” with other options provided a written response.

If participants picked “Other (specify below),” they were able to provide a brief written response. Although there were some suggestions (for example: “Taxes and credit cards” or “home ownership”), some participants took the opportunity to praise the program or their advocate for providing them with information about each possible response.

Comments from Young People

In each year’s survey, participants are invited to share additional comments about their experience in Aftercare in response to the question, **“Is there anything else you would like to share with us about your experience in Aftercare?”** Typically, most 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 2023 survey, 83 respondents provided substantive comments, 86% of which were positive. Sixty-seven comments acknowledged the help and support they have received from the program and the relationship participants had with their advocate, including twenty-two who praised their advocate by name in their comments. Nine participants specifically mentioned Aftercare’s role in helping them set and achieve their own goals, such as: **“Aftercare has benefited me in so many more ways than just one. I am confident I will reach all my short-term and long-term goals and [I] know [I] am capable of achieving anything I would desire to do in life.”**

Less positive comments related to slow responsiveness and the desire for more financial support. Two participants expressed concern about the timeliness of responses while in Aftercare and the importance of the relationship that youth build with their advocates. Additionally, three participants suggested that the program should provide further financial support or **“... emergency money for us that don’t get stipends [because] we make too much”**

A few participants offered longer comments about the impact of Aftercare (*see below*).

Impact of Aftercare

- “I appreciate all the help. I was homeless and Aftercare helped me get back up off the streets and into a great job and a home. Thanks for the boost and inspiration.”
- “Iowa Aftercare is a very helpful resource in my experience. Iowa Aftercare had [helped] me in my daily needs, also help entering adulthood. I really do appreciate everything Iowa Aftercare [has] done for me.”
- “[Aftercare] gives me more support and a lot of help by talking about my problems and goals that I want to reach. I really enjoy being in this program. [I] hope other kids like me find this program for more support.”

Impact of Aftercare

“I feel like [I’m] receiving help in so many aspects of life with Aftercare. I really appreciate having an adult I can count on to guide [me] and discuss my issues with. I really appreciate having help financially and I don’t think I could have managed my bills without help from Aftercare.”

Praise for Advocates

- “[My advocate] is one of the kindest and most outgoing and thoughtful people I know. If anything, I say she deserves the best. She is always looking after us and is always finding time in her day to check up on me.”
- “Without a person like [my advocate] as an advocate in my life I wouldn’t be as far in life as I am today. I’m very thankful for the opportunity in this program.”
- “[My advocate] is very helpful and has done above and beyond at his job. It is much appreciated.”
- “[My advocate] is always more [than] helpful, supportive, and understanding. [I] couldn’t ask for a better worker. She’s my biggest support person outside of my home.”
- “My advocate is very respectful of my decisions to further my educational goals and my future plans.”

Additional Support

“I want to know more about any help with home ownership. My goal is to own my home when I move out of my foster home.”

“I wish it lasted forever because it helps me so much with adult issues I wouldn’t know how to answer on my own.”

Appreciation for the Help

- “I am thankful for this chance to learn to live independently. And to pursue a career I might enjoy.”
- “I appreciate my [advocate] a lot. I just wish there were more programs she could use to help me.”
- “I have enjoyed the extra support. They have helped me lots with PAL and gifts.”
- “It’s given me an adult in my life that I can rely on and that has helped me work towards and make steps towards moving forward and improving myself.”

Preparing for the Future

“It helped me out a lot with [building] my plans and my budgets. My advocate has been pretty awesome throughout the whole experience.”

Survey Limitations

Young adults participating in Aftercare do so on a voluntary basis. All Core and Extended Care youth who met with their Aftercare Advocate during the survey period had an opportunity to complete the survey. This means that some youth did not have an opportunity to respond despite attempts by the Advocate to contact each youth being served. 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. Further, the 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.

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About the Child Welfare Research and Training Project

The [Child Welfare Research and Training Project](#) (CWRTP), at [Iowa State University](#) (ISU), facilitates and evaluates programs and training for human services professionals and community providers to advance best practices for children, youth, families, and communities. Beginning in July 2023, CWRTP has provided coordination, quality assurance, marketing, and

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For more information

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