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**California Youth  
Transitions to Adulthood  
Study (CalYOUTH):  
Early Findings from  
the Child Welfare  
Worker Survey**

**Mark E. Courtney  
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Katherine Halsted**

**2015**

**Child  
Welfare  
Worker  
Survey**

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# Introduction

Recently there has been a fundamental shift toward greater federal responsibility for supporting foster youth during the transition to adulthood. The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (“Fostering Connections Act”) amended Title IV-E of the Social Security Act to extend the age of Title IV-E eligibility from 18 to 21 years old. States now may claim federal reimbursement for the costs of foster care maintenance payments made on behalf of Title IV-E-eligible foster youth until the youth are 21 years old. Crucially, states have the *option* to extend care under the new provisions of the Fostering Connections Act, but are not required to do so. Given the fiscal and programmatic demands associated with extending care to a new population, it is certain that many states will take a wait-and-see approach, electing to delay changing state law until lessons can be learned from states that move more quickly to extend care.

Although several states have adopted legislation to take up the Fostering Connections option of extending care past age 18 and others are considering doing so, California is arguably the most important early adopter of the new policy. The California Fostering Connections to Success Act, known as AB 12, extends foster care to age 21 for eligible youth, while also making a wide range of changes in state law.<sup>1</sup> California has the largest state foster care population in the US, making what happens in California’s child welfare system of national significance. Also, California’s human services, including child welfare services, are county administered; nearly half of all foster children in the US live in states that operate county-administered human services systems. Put simply, many other states will be required to implement, in some form, most of the changes in state law and regulation now being implemented in California. In essence, implementing the older youth provisions of extended foster care means that county child welfare agencies and allied institutions in California are entering a brave new world of “corporate

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<sup>1</sup> The legislation calls for extending care to age 21, but doing so will require an additional budget appropriation by the California state legislature.

parenting” of young adults (Courtney, 2009). Child welfare agencies, courts, other public institutions, and private sector service providers will need to come to grips with their collective responsibility for providing care and supervision to adults (in addition to minors), something with which most of these institutions have limited experience. For a variety of reasons (e.g., the structure of child welfare service delivery, county-level budget pressures, the political clout of private providers, and the level of interest of the juvenile court bench), counties are likely to vary widely in their approach to the implementation of extended foster care. Policymakers, program developers and administrators, and advocates have much to learn from how California implements extended foster care and how the new policy regime influences adult outcomes for foster youth making the transition to adulthood (Courtney, Dworsky, & Napolitano, 2013; Mosley & Courtney, 2012).

This report presents findings from the Child Welfare Worker Survey of the California Youth Transitions to Adulthood Study (CalYOUTH). CalYOUTH is an evaluation of the impact of the California Fostering Connections to Success Act on outcomes during the transition to adulthood for foster youth. CalYOUTH includes collection and analysis of information from three sources: (1) transition-age youth; (2) child welfare workers; and (3) government program data. The study, directed by Dr. Mark Courtney at the University of Chicago and conducted in collaboration with the California Department of Social Services and California County Welfare Directors Association, is being carried out over a 5-year period from 2012–17.

The study addresses three research questions:

- Does extending foster care past age 18 influence youths’ outcomes during the transition to adulthood (e.g., education, employment, health, housing, parenting, and general well-being outcomes)?
- What factors influence the types of support youth receive during the transition to adulthood in the context of extended foster care?
- How do living arrangements and other services that result from extending foster care influence the relationship between extending care and youth outcomes?

To answer these questions, CalYOUTH is following youth ages 16–17 years old through 21 years old using in-person interviews. Results from the first survey of 727 youth completed in 2013 are described separately from this report (see Courtney, Charles, Okpych, Napolitano, & Halsted, 2014). To help answer the study’s research questions, CalYOUTH also conducted an online survey of 235 California child welfare workers to obtain their perceptions of key characteristics of the service delivery context of extended foster care (e.g., availability of transitional living services; coordination of services with other service systems and county court personnel; and youth attitudes toward extended care). Results from that survey are summarized in this report.



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# Overview and Background

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## Method

This section provides an overview of the procedures used in the creation, administration, and analysis of the CalYOUTH Child Welfare Worker Survey. The responses provided by the 235 caseworkers who completed the online survey are representative of the full child welfare workforce serving older youth in the California foster care system.

## Survey Design

The CalYOUTH Child Welfare Worker Survey was intended to solicit the views and attitudes of caseworkers at the early stages of implementation of extended foster care. Given the breadth of topics covered in the survey and the variation between counties in the number of older youth in care, as well as their approach to and resources available for serving older youth, a critical part of the survey design process was incorporating recommendations from a broad range of stakeholders. Members of the CalYOUTH research team created an initial draft of the survey and sent it to state and county child welfare administrators and supervisors. The feedback from these stakeholders proved to be critical in ensuring that the questions included in the survey reflected current developments in implementation, covered key domains of interest, and were worded in a way that was meaningful and relevant to caseworkers practicing in diverse contexts across the state. For example, the survey was adapted to take into account the variation that exists between counties in how they structure the services that are provided

to youth approaching the age of majority.<sup>2</sup> Following the vetting and revision stage, the final version of the survey included 136 items and was designed to be completed in approximately 20 minutes. The electronic version of the survey was then programmed into Qualtrics Research Suite survey software, a platform used for online administration of surveys.

### **Sample Selection**

Caseworkers were eligible to participate in the CalYOUTH Child Welfare Worker Survey if they had at least one youth on their caseload who turned 18 in the six months prior to the time of the sample selection. In September 2013, the California Department of Social Services provided a list of 891 caseworkers who met the eligibility criteria. Shortly after receiving the list, a sample of these caseworkers was selected to participate in the study. Rather than simply randomly selecting caseworkers, which may have failed to include counties with few caseworkers, a sampling strategy was used that balanced maximum representation from as many counties as possible (including counties with few caseworkers) with adequate representation from counties with many caseworkers. In counties with ten or fewer individuals meeting the eligibility criteria, all of the caseworkers were selected into the sample. For counties with more than ten eligible caseworkers, ten caseworkers were randomly selected into the study. Recognizing that the Los Angeles County child welfare workforce is substantially larger than the workforce in other counties, the county agreed to include a total of 20 of its caseworkers in the survey sample. Six counties had zero caseworkers who met the study criteria, leaving 52 counties with at least one worker in the initial sample draw of 296 caseworkers.

### **Survey Administration**

Prior to the launch of the survey, and with the assistance of the California County Welfare Directors Association, the CalYOUTH team established contact with an administrator in 94 percent of participating counties. The administrator served as a point of contact throughout the survey administration. These individuals played an important role in reinforcing the legitimacy of the survey, encouraging their staff to participate, and troubleshooting complications as they arose. An e-mail notification was also sent to caseworkers one week prior to distribution of the survey. Survey administration began in late September 2013 and continued through late November 2013. Caseworkers selected into the study received an e-mail providing a description of the study, a unique link that gave them access to the online survey administered

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<sup>2</sup> Foster care services in some counties are structured so that caseworkers serving youth who are 17 continue working with these youth after they turn 18. It is caseworkers who provide services in this way who are included in the present report ( $N = 235$ ). A second common service arrangement involves counties assigning specialized units or caseworkers to work with nonminor dependents. In these counties, a youth is transferred from one caseworker to a specialized caseworker upon turning 18. Since caseworkers in these counties would not have had a youth on their caseload who turned from 17 to 18, these caseworkers are not represented in this report. However, a modified version of the CalYOUTH Child Welfare Worker Survey was completed by 21 caseworkers employed in counties that have specialized units or caseworkers serving nonminor dependents.

through Qualtrics, and contact information for the CalYOUTH project director in case they had questions or encountered complications. The unique link ensured that caseworkers could only complete the survey once. Participants had the option of completing the entire survey in one sitting or completing part of the survey and then picking up where they left off at a later time. Responses to the survey were anonymous; there was no identifying information made available to the research team linking survey responses to individual caseworkers. During the 60-day period in which the survey was active, Qualtrics was programmed to send out automatic reminder e-mails on a weekly basis to participants who had not yet completed the survey. However, to ensure anonymity, details concerning which respondents had (or had not) participated were completely inaccessible to the research team.

As an alternative to taking the survey online, caseworkers had the option of completing an electronic or paper version of the questionnaire. This was an important alternative because not all eligible caseworkers received the initial e-mail with the survey link, while other caseworkers simply expressed a preference for completing it in a different format. Although Qualtrics uses several features that reduce the likelihood of e-mails being flagged as spam, firewall protection systems in some counties prevented eligible participants from receiving the survey, resulting in the need for an alternative format. This was initially brought to the attention of the CalYOUTH research team by county contact persons who noticed that none of their workers had received the survey e-mails. As alternatives to the online version, the survey could be completed in Microsoft Word and returned via e-mail, or completed by hand and faxed to the CalYOUTH project director. In total, 31 surveys were completed. To protect the anonymity of the respondent, the CalYOUTH project director fielded the electronic and paper surveys, removed identifying information, and then transferred the surveys to another research team member who was responsible for data entry.

A group incentive was offered to counties that attained a response rate of 85 percent or higher. If this benchmark was met, a Visa gift card in the amount of fifteen dollars per completed survey was sent to the county's contact person. The incentives could be used by the child welfare office in any way it deemed appropriate, such as for an office sunshine fund or to make a contribution to a youth-serving charity or service provider. Survey completion rates were reported to county administrators on a weekly basis. In order to preserve the anonymity of caseworkers in small counties, response rates were reported in aggregate for counties with three or fewer participants. For counties with more than three participating caseworkers, response rates were reported at the individual county level.

### **Response Rate**

From the original sample of 296 participants, nine caseworkers were identified as ineligible prior to the start of the survey (e.g., they were no longer employed by the county) and an additional 25 caseworkers

were determined to be ineligible through a screening question at the start of the survey. The screening question asked the caseworker to confirm that he or she had a youth on their caseload who had turned 18 years old in the past six months. Excluding the 34 ineligible caseworkers reduced the sample size to 262. The final number of completed surveys was 235 (204 completed in Qualtrics and 31 completed electronically or by hand), yielding a response rate of 89.8 percent. Of the 52 counties included in the survey, three counties had no respondents while 49 counties had one or more completed surveys. By the end of survey administration, 42 counties had achieved a response rate of 85 percent or higher and 35 of those counties had a response rate of 100 percent.

### **Survey Weights**

Sample weights were created, which allowed the responses of the participants to be generalized to California caseworkers who met the study criteria. A distinct sample weight was created for each county that had at least one survey respondent. The weight takes into account (1) nonresponse and survey ineligibility of the county and (2) the number of caseworkers serving older youth in that county relative to the overall number of caseworkers in the state who serve older youth. The smallest weight is 1.0, which means that in a small county that has only one caseworker meeting the survey eligibility, this caseworker was selected into the sample, and the worker completed the survey. The response of that caseworker counts as one response in the weighted estimate. The largest weight is 30.5, in Los Angeles County. Each single Los Angeles caseworker response counts as 30.5 responses in the weighted estimate. After the weight is applied to each respondent, the total number of weighted responses equals the population of California caseworkers that made up the initial sample frame ( $N = 891$ ). Throughout this report, the estimates (means and percentages) that are provided represent weighted averages of the population of California caseworkers who recently served youth on their caseload who reached the age of majority.

### **Comparisons by County Groups**

In addition to analyzing responses provided by individual caseworkers, another task was to determine whether significant differences exist between counties grouped by population size and urbanicity. Three county groups were created: rural/largely rural, urban, and large urban. The rural/largely rural group includes counties in which all of the municipalities within the county had fewer than 50,000 individuals. Eighteen counties, with a total of 43 survey respondents, fell into the rural/largely rural county group. The urban group includes counties that had at least one municipality with a population of 50,000 to 250,000 individuals, but no municipalities with a population greater than 250,000. Nineteen counties, with a total of 95 respondents, fell into the urban group. The large urban group includes counties that had at least one municipality with a population of more than 250,000 individuals. Twelve counties, with a total of 97 respondents, fell into the large urban group. The sample weights described above were used for the

analysis of between-group differences. Only statistically significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) between county groups are reported.

### **Study Limitations**

The study's sampling strategy, high response rate, and weighting of survey responses means that the descriptive statistics reported below are representative of what we would have found had we obtained responses from all eligible caseworkers in California. Nevertheless, several study limitations should be kept in mind when interpreting the findings of the CalYOUTH Child Welfare Worker Survey. First, about 10 percent of eligible caseworkers did not respond to the survey. While that is not a large percentage of those eligible to participate, we do not know the extent to which their responses to survey items would differ from those of survey participants. Second, the sample size does not provide adequate statistical power to reliably identify small between-group differences in caseworker responses. This is relevant to the comparisons we make below between responses from caseworkers in large urban, urban, and rural counties. While we do identify some differences in responses between these groups of counties, had our sample size been larger we might have identified additional differences. Third, while child welfare workers supervising the care of young people in extended foster care are central players in the implementation of extended care, their perspective is not the only one that should inform implementation efforts. The view of other observers might differ significantly from those reported here. Lastly, implementation of extended foster care in California remains a work in progress; this report represents a snapshot of implementation efforts less than two years after young people first started remaining in care past their 18th birthday under the new law.

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# Results

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## Caseworkers' Characteristics and Relationship with Young Person

Caseworkers were asked to report on a single youth on their caseload who had reached the age of 18 in the previous six-month period. Forty-six percent of caseworkers reported that the young person had been on their caseload less than one year, while 28 percent had carried the youth on their caseload for over two years (see Table 1). The number of times caseworkers met with the young person during the six-month period prior to their 18th birthday varied, with 37 percent of caseworkers meeting with the youth approximately once per month and 14 percent two times per month or more. Approximately one-fifth of caseworkers met with the youth less than one time per month. Analyses not shown indicate that 60 percent of caseworkers reporting in-person meetings less than once per month during the six-month window had the youth on their caseload for four months or less. As such, it would not have been feasible for these caseworkers to have met with the youth each month during the six-month period.

**Table 1. Caseworkers' Relationship with Young Person**

	#	%
Number of months that youth was on caseload prior to 18th birthday ( <i>N</i> = 235)		
12 months or less	121	45.6
Between 13 and 24 months	54	26.7
More than 24 months	60	27.8
Number of times caseworker met in person with youth during 6 months prior to 18th birthday ( <i>N</i> = 234)		
Between 0 and 4 times (or less than once per month)	64	19.3
Between 5 and 7 times (or approximately once per month)	72	36.9
Between 8 and 10 times (or more than once per month)	59	29.9
More than 10 times (or approximately twice per month or more)	39	13.9

*Note:* Unweighted frequencies and weighted percentages.

## **Caseworker Characteristics**

Table 2 presents demographic characteristics of the 235 child welfare caseworkers who completed surveys. The caseworkers were diverse in age with the largest percentage (59%) of workers falling between 36 and 50 years old. Racially, the three largest groups reported were white (45%), African American (23%), and other (21%), and 38 percent of caseworkers characterized themselves as having a Hispanic/Latino/Spanish ethnic background. Ninety percent of the workers were female and just over 60 percent of workers had completed their Master's degree, while 34 percent of workers had a bachelor's degree.

Caseworkers reported working in multiple areas within the foster care system, with the three most common areas being permanent placement (76%), specialized services (74%), and family reunification (71%). The caseworkers interviewed had a wide disparity in the amount of time they had worked in the child welfare field. Thirty-four percent of workers had been in child welfare for six to ten years, 25 percent had been working for eleven to fifteen years and one-fifth had been working for between one and five years. Caseworkers also reported that they worked with youth from multiple age groups. The most commonly reported ages of youth on their caseload were between 13 and 17 years old (96%) and over 18 years of age (96%). However, a large number of caseworkers also reported that they had younger children on their caseloads. Specifically, 83 percent reported that they had children ages 6 to 12 years old on their caseload and 71 percent reported working with very young children, ages 0 to 5 years old.

Additional analyses indicate that some caseworker characteristics vary by whether the county is classified as rural, urban, or large urban. Specifically, rural counties have more white caseworkers, while urban and large urban counties tend to have fewer white caseworkers and more minority caseworkers. There are also more female caseworkers in large urban counties, compared to urban and rural counties. Caseworker educational characteristics also vary by county size. A higher number of caseworkers in rural counties report having their bachelor's degree in social work, while those in large urban counties have far fewer BSW degrees and higher numbers of caseworkers with bachelor's degrees in other areas. Additionally, large urban and urban county caseworkers are more likely to have a master of Social Work than caseworkers in rural counties. Finally, caseworkers in large urban counties are more likely than caseworkers in other counties to have children between the ages of 0 and 5 years old on their caseload.

**Table 2. Caseworker Characteristics**

	#	%
Age ( <i>N</i> = 234)		
22–35	65	21.4
36–50	115	59.0
51–61+	54	19.6
Race ( <i>N</i> = 235)		
White	133	45.0
African American	40	22.8
American Indian/Alaskan	3	1.3
Asian/Pacific Islander	16	7.6
Other	31	20.8
Multiracial	12	2.5
Hispanic/Latino/Spanish ( <i>N</i> = 231)	70	37.5
Gender (Female) ( <i>N</i> = 235)	195	90.2
Education ( <i>N</i> = 233)		
Bachelor of Social Work	21	5.1
Bachelor's in other discipline	62	29.2
Master of Social Work	99	41.9
Master's in other discipline	41	20.6
Other	10	3.2
Ages on caseload ( <i>N</i> = 235)		
0 to 5 years old	131	70.5
6 to 12 years old	184	83.0
13 to 17 years old	220	96.4
At least 18 years old	219	96.0
Area of work ( <i>N</i> = 235)		
Emergency response	32	10.9
Family maintenance	109	57.0
Family reunification	136	70.8
Permanent placement	185	76.3
Specialized services	168	73.5
Years in child welfare ( <i>N</i> = 235)		
1 to 5	58	19.5
6 to 10	81	33.9
11 to 15	57	24.7
16 to 21 or more	39	21.9
Years in current agency ( <i>N</i> = 235)		
1 to 5	69	26.0
6 to 10	80	33.9
11 to 15	56	25.6
16 to 21 or more	30	14.6

*Note:* Unweighted frequencies and weighted percentages.



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# Youth Characteristics

Table 3 presents demographic characteristics of youth described by the 235 child welfare caseworkers who completed surveys (information reported in this section is based on caseworkers' perceptions of youth in foster care). In selecting a single youth on their caseload to consider as a "sample" case for the survey questions, caseworkers reported on slightly more females (57%) than males (43%), and characterized youths' race and ethnicity in similar ways as they did for themselves. The three largest groups consisted of white, African American and "other" youth; caseworkers reported that about half of the youth had a Hispanic/Latino/Spanish ethnic background.

Descriptions of youth race and ethnicity demographics varied by county size. Caseworkers in rural counties reported a higher percentage of white youth on their caseloads while caseworkers in urban and large urban counties reported a higher percentage of African American youth. Rural counties had a higher number of American Indian/Alaskan and Asian/Pacific Islander youth. In large urban counties, caseworkers were more likely to describe youth as having a Hispanic/Latino/Spanish ethnic background.

Table 3 also displays caseworkers' reports on family members visited by youth. Youth most frequently visited with siblings (87%), followed by mothers or stepmothers (58%) and aunts and/or uncles (49%). Seventy-two percent of caseworkers reported that they thought the youth felt very close to the person or people they had visited.

Finally, caseworkers reported that almost half of youth were unemployed and not looking for work (45%), and 40 percent of youth were unemployed, but seeking work. The high number of unemployed young adults may be due to the fact that many were reported to be in some type of educational setting.

**Table 3. Youth Demographic Characteristics**

	#	%
Gender ( <i>N</i> = 234)		
Male	103	43.2
Female	130	56.7
Transgender/queer	1	0.1
Race ( <i>N</i> = 226)		
White	108	36.0
African American	50	31.7
American Indian/Alaskan	11	3.5
Asian/Pacific Islander	5	1.2
Other	39	24.7
Multiracial	13	2.9
Hispanic/Latino/Spanish ( <i>N</i> = 224)	78	50.2
Family Member(s) Visited by Youth		
Mother/Stepmother ( <i>N</i> = 202)	121	58.4
Father/Stepfather ( <i>N</i> =202)	91	47.8
Aunt/Uncle ( <i>N</i> =176)	103	49.4
Sibling ( <i>N</i> =205)	167	86.8
Grandparent ( <i>N</i> =173)	86	42.6
Youth felt very close to person visited (Yes) ( <i>N</i> =190)	145	71.7
Employment ( <i>N</i> =234)		
Unemployed and not looking for work	109	45.1
Unemployed and looking for work	71	39.9
Part time	49	13.7
Full time or other	5	1.3

*Note:* Unweighted frequencies and weighted percentages.

Table 4 shows the educational characteristics of youth as described by caseworkers. About two-fifths had completed high school or obtained a GED. However, the vast majority of youth who did not have a degree (93%) were pursuing education through high school, a GED or certificate program, or vocational training. Although many youth were enrolled in educational programs, Table 5 shows that only 40 percent of caseworkers believed that youth in general are prepared or very prepared to continue with their education, and a significant portion of caseworkers believed that youth needed a high level of services to complete high school, a GED or certificate program, or postsecondary education.

Youth in large urban counties were more likely to be receiving special education services than youth in rural and urban counties.

**Table 4. Youth Educational Characteristics**

	#	%
Special education ( <i>N</i> = 227)	89	50.3
HS/GED/Certificate of completion ( <i>N</i> = 234)	100	40.4
Enrollment of youth <i>with</i> HS/GED/Certificate ( <i>N</i> = 93)		
Vocational training	4	2.4
2-year college	46	53.2
4-year college	10	8.7
Other arrangement	6	6.0
Not enrolled	27	29.7
Enrollment of youth <i>without</i> HS/GED/Certificate program ( <i>N</i> = 133)		
Vocational training	1	0.2
HS/GED/Certificate program	117	92.4
Not enrolled	15	7.4

*Note:* Unweighted frequencies and weighted percentages.

**Table 5. Youth Educational Preparedness and Need for Services**

	#	%
Level of Preparedness ( <i>N</i> = 234)		
Prepared or very prepared	112	40.4
Services Needed (1 = no need; 5 = high need)		
To complete HS/GED/Certificate (4 or 5)	77	71.1
To complete postsecondary education (4 or 5)	130	62.6

*Note:* Unweighted frequencies and weighted percentages.

**Table 6. Youth Placement Arrangements at Age 18**

	#	%
Placement Arrangement (N=234)		
Foster family agency (FFA)	49	25
Supervised Independent Living Placement (SILP)	29	15
Group home	39	13
Nonrelative foster home	39	13
Other	18	12
Kinship foster home	11	7
Guardian other	15	4
Transitional housing	16	3
Court-specified home	1	3
Guardian dependent	8	2
Runaway	8	2
Preadoptive home	1	0.5

*Note:* Unweighted frequencies and weighted percentages.

Table 6 shows that the most common placement type for the young adults was a home operated by a foster family agency (FFA),<sup>3</sup> with the remainder of youth at this age in a wide range of other living arrangements. Three percent of the youth were in transitional housing, suggesting that they moved out of their foster care placement very close to their 18th birthday.

Additional analyses showed that there was a difference in FFA placements between rural, urban, and large urban counties. Youth were more likely to be placed in an FFA in rural and large urban counties than in urban counties.

As seen in Table 7, approximately half of youth were described by caseworkers as having very good or excellent physical health, whereas slightly over one-quarter of youth were reported to have very good or excellent mental health. Caseworkers reported almost one-third of youth had a diagnosed mental health disorder, the most common being depressive disorder, followed by anxiety disorders other than PTSD. Over three-fifths of caseworkers reported that youth did not use substances or alcohol and that of the youth that did use alcohol or other substances, a little over one-fifth did so without negative impact while almost one-fifth experienced negative consequences. Less than 10 percent of caseworkers reported that the youth on their caseload had a diagnosed substance or alcohol dependence or abuse disorder.

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<sup>3</sup> In California, therapeutic foster care is generally provided by private agencies contracted by counties to provide care. These agencies are called foster family agencies or FFAs.

The vast majority of youth (over 95%) were not yet parents or pregnant, according to caseworkers' reports. In addition, almost one-third of caseworkers reported that youth have had safety issues including being a victim of physical violence, stalking or harassment, sexual assault, gang or neighborhood violence, and LGBTQ violence.

Additional analyses determined that differences in mental health diagnoses existed between counties of different sizes. Caseworkers in urban counties reported a higher rate of occurrences of depressive disorder and PTSD, while caseworkers in rural counties reported more externalizing and attention disorders.

**Table 7. Youth Health Characteristics**

	#	%
Health status (very good or excellent)		
Physical health ( <i>N</i> = 229)	122	53.0
Mental health ( <i>N</i> = 229)	54	28.3
Disability status		
Difficulty using hands/arms/legs/feet ( <i>N</i> = 233)	6	7.9
Mental health status* ( <i>N</i> = 226)		
Diagnosed mental health disorder (Yes)	87	32.2
Depressive disorder	46	12.1
PTSD	25	5.3
Anxiety disorder other than PTSD	30	9.6
Externalizing disorder	12	2.5
Attention disorder	30	6.6
Another disorder	16	10.3
Substance/alcohol use ( <i>N</i> = 209)		
Did not use	114	61.4
Used without negative impact	64	21.6
Used with negative impact	31	17.0
Diagnosed substance/alcohol abuse/dependence disorder (Yes) ( <i>N</i> = 222)	13	9.3
Pregnancy status		
Pregnant/partner is pregnant ( <i>N</i> = 227)	14	5.1
Parental status ( <i>N</i> = 230)		
Not a parent	211	96.2
Child resides with youth	8	1.4
Child does not reside with youth	8	2.0
Safety issues		
Youth has had safety issues (Yes) ( <i>N</i> = 229)	61	30.9

*Note:* Unweighted frequencies and weighted percentages.

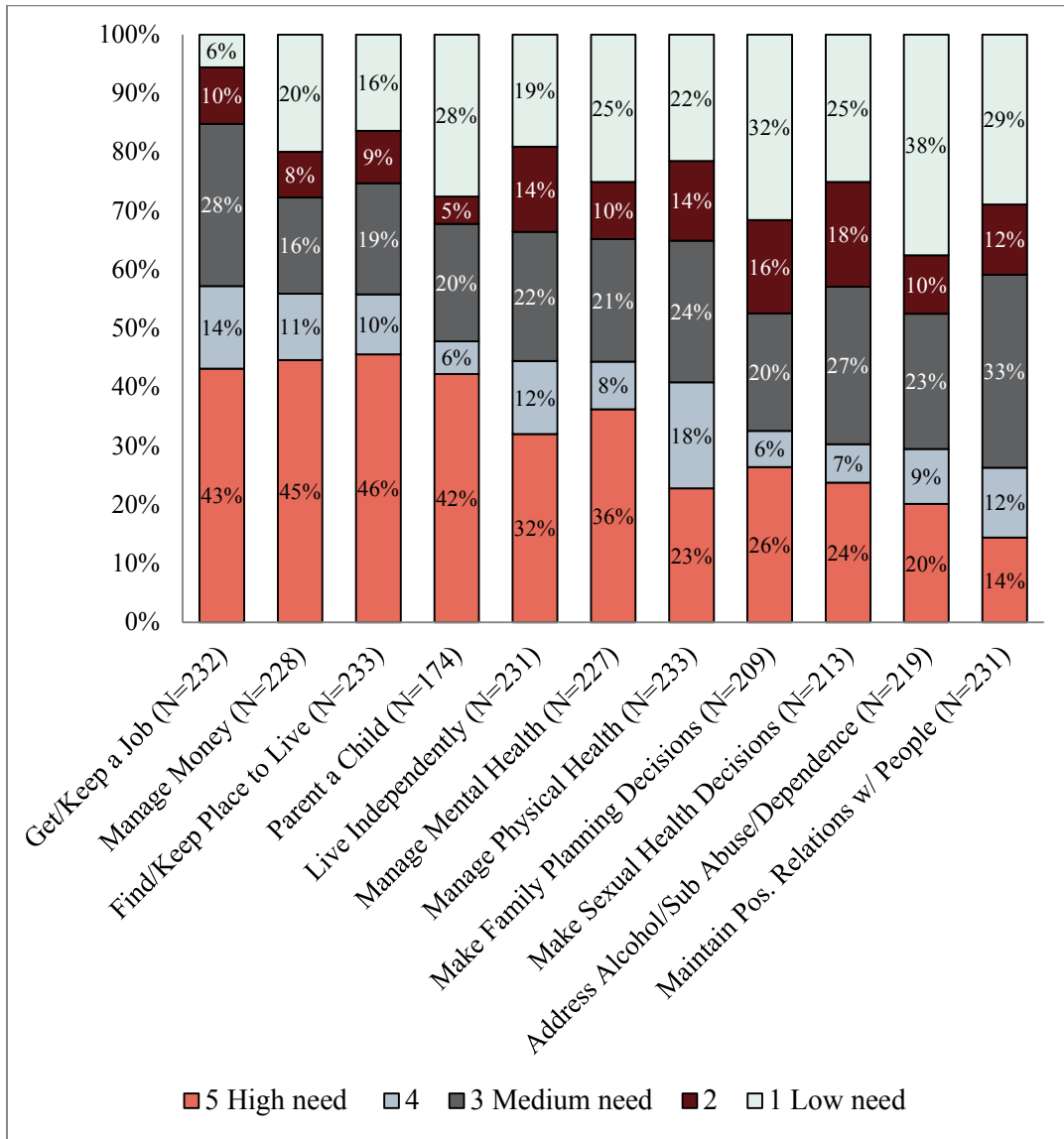
\*Multiple responses could be selected

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# Need for Services

Caseworkers were asked about youths' level of preparedness in various life areas and the extent to which they need services in these areas. Caseworkers rated the extent to which youth needed services on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being a low need and 5 being a high need. Over half of youth were reported to have a high need for services in the areas of finding and keeping a job, managing money, and finding and maintaining housing (see Figure 1). Notably, the domains with the highest level of need are critical to maintaining basic economic subsistence. Less than thirty percent of caseworkers identified youth as having a high need for services in the following areas: making sexual health decisions, addressing alcohol and substance abuse or dependence issues, and maintaining positive relationships with people.

**Figure 1. Caseworkers' Perceptions of Youths' Need for Services**



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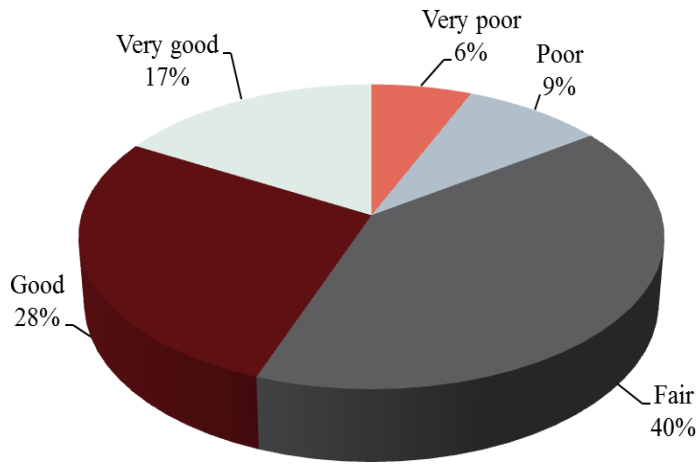
# Knowledge of and Attitudes about Remaining in Care

Figure 2 shows that caseworkers perceived youth's knowledge of the process of remaining in care as mixed; for example, while 45 percent of youth were perceived to have good or very good knowledge of the process, 15 percent still had poor or very poor knowledge of the process of remaining in care past age 18. Figure 3 shows that youth generally tended to be quite favorable towards the idea of remaining in foster care, with the majority of youth (85%) reported as having favorable or very favorable attitudes about remaining in care.

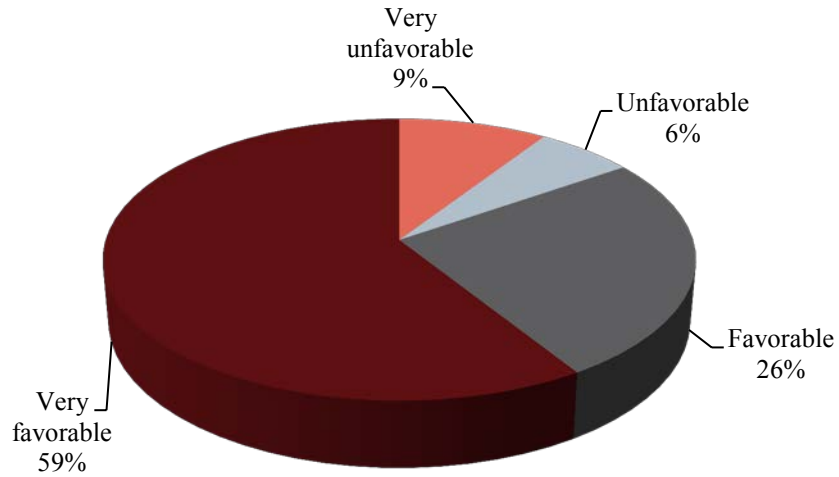
Caseworkers in large urban counties were more likely than their peers in other counties to report that youth had "poor" or "very poor" knowledge about remaining in care.



**Figure 2. Caseworkers' Perceptions of Youths' Knowledge of Process of Remaining in Care (N = 230)**



**Figure 3. Caseworkers' Perceptions of Youths' Attitude about Process of Remaining in Care (N = 230)**



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# Motivation to Remain in Care and to Leave Care

Caseworkers were asked to rate items about youths' motivations for staying in care and leaving care on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 was "not a motivation" and 5 was "a strong motivation." Table 8 details how often caseworkers responded to an item about remaining in care with ratings of 4 and 5. According to caseworkers, the most prominent reason for young people to stay in care was to continue receiving housing and other material support. Over half of caseworkers also thought youth were highly motivated to remain in care because of help they received in reaching their educational goals and because they had no other options in lieu of foster care. Table 9 shows the reasons youth were motivated to leave care. The most common motivations included wanting more freedom and not wanting to deal with foster parents or group home staff anymore. Less than 30 percent of caseworkers thought that youth were strongly motivated to leave care because they did not want to deal with the court system or social workers anymore. Twenty-one percent of caseworkers reported that youth were highly motivated to leave care in order to live with a boyfriend or girlfriend and fifteen percent reported youth left care in order to live with a biological parent.

Caseworkers in rural counties were more likely than caseworkers in large urban communities to report that youth were motivated to stay in care to continue receiving housing and other material support.

**Table 8. Caseworkers' Perceptions of Youths' Motivation to Remain in Care**

Reasons for remaining in care (rated on a 5-point scale with 1 being “not a motivation” and 5 being “strong motivation”)	# rating 4 or 5	% rating 4 or 5
Continued receiving housing and other material support ( <i>N</i> = 227)	203	83.0
Received help achieving educational goals ( <i>N</i> = 229)	132	59.1
Had no other options ( <i>N</i> = 220)	114	54.2
Was happy in current placement ( <i>N</i> = 226)	90	48.3
Felt was too young to be on own ( <i>N</i> = 220)	70	39.8
Continued meeting with county social worker ( <i>N</i> = 222)	51	25.8
Lived with a relative/friend who needs the payment ( <i>N</i> = 221)	50	23.3
Continued having an attorney representing his/her legal interests ( <i>N</i> = 216)	25	17.2

*Note:* Unweighted frequencies and weighted percentages.

**Table 9. Caseworkers' Perceptions of Youths' Motivation to Leave Care**

Reasons for leaving care (rated on a 5-point scale with 1 being “not a motivation” and 5 being “a strong motivation”)	# rating 4 or 5	% rating 4 or 5
Wanted to be on own or wanted more freedom ( <i>N</i> = 213)	118	55.2
Did not want to deal with foster parents/group home staff anymore ( <i>N</i> = 208)	95	46.3
Did not want to deal with the court system anymore ( <i>N</i> = 209)	62	29.3
Did not want to deal with social workers anymore ( <i>N</i> = 207)	55	27.2
Wanted to live with boyfriend or girlfriend ( <i>N</i> = 203)	40	20.6
Wanted to live with biological parents ( <i>N</i> = 207)	22	14.9

*Note:* Unweighted frequencies and weighted percentages.

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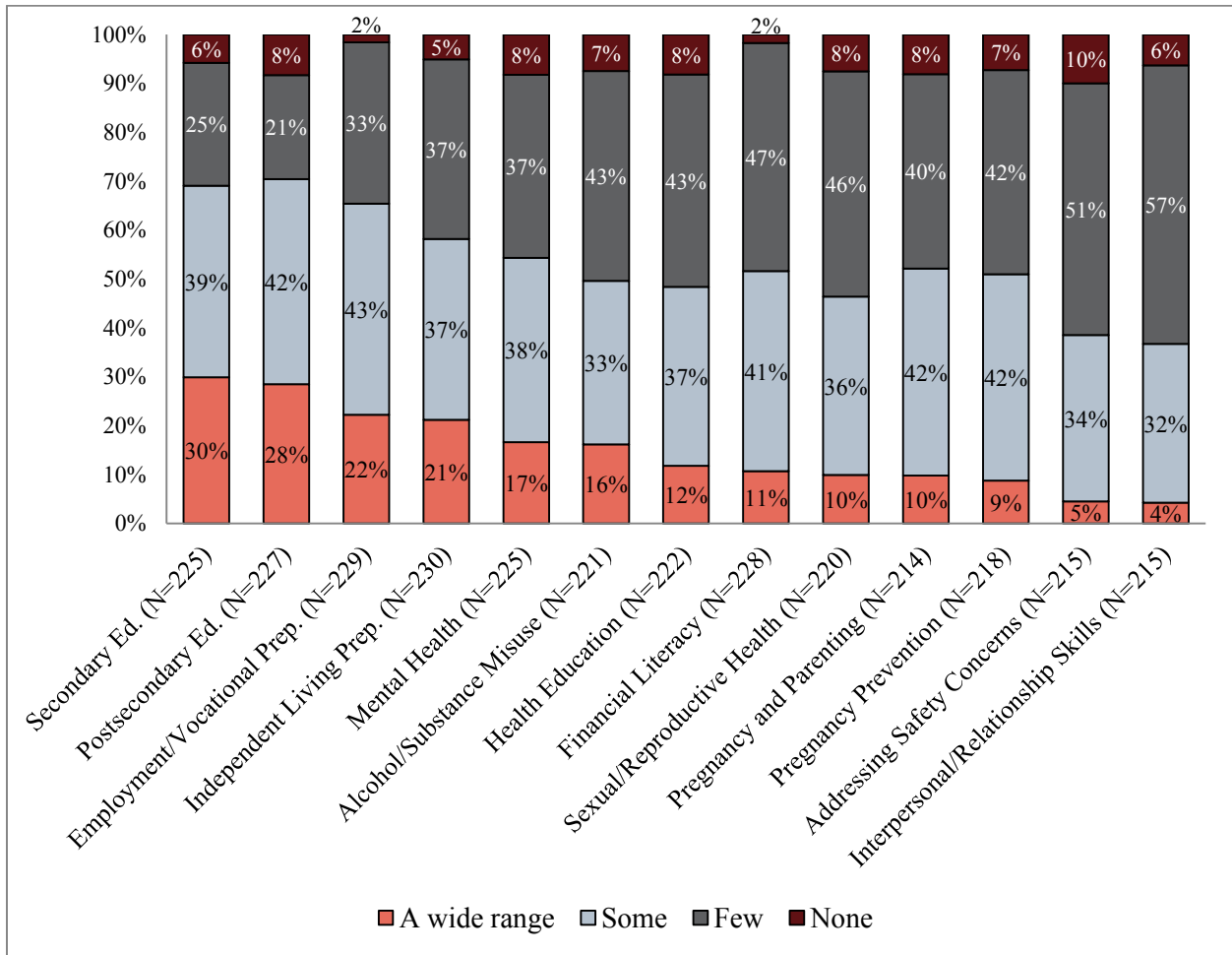
# Availability and Helpfulness of Trainings and Services

In the next section of the survey, caseworkers were asked to think about trainings and services in their county for nonminor dependents or youth who remained in foster care past the age of 18. In this case, we were referring to youth generally, and not to a specific young person on their caseload. We asked caseworkers about their perception of how available and helpful services were across a number of domains, including education, independent living, health and mental health, finances, safety, and relationships. For each question, caseworkers rated the availability of trainings and services in their county using four response categories ranging from no trainings or services to a wide range of trainings or services.

As seen in Figure 4, caseworkers reported the greatest availability (i.e., a wide range of trainings and services) in the areas of secondary education, postsecondary education, and employment/vocational preparation. Areas where services were least likely to be seen as being readily available included those focused on addressing safety concerns and interpersonal skills development.

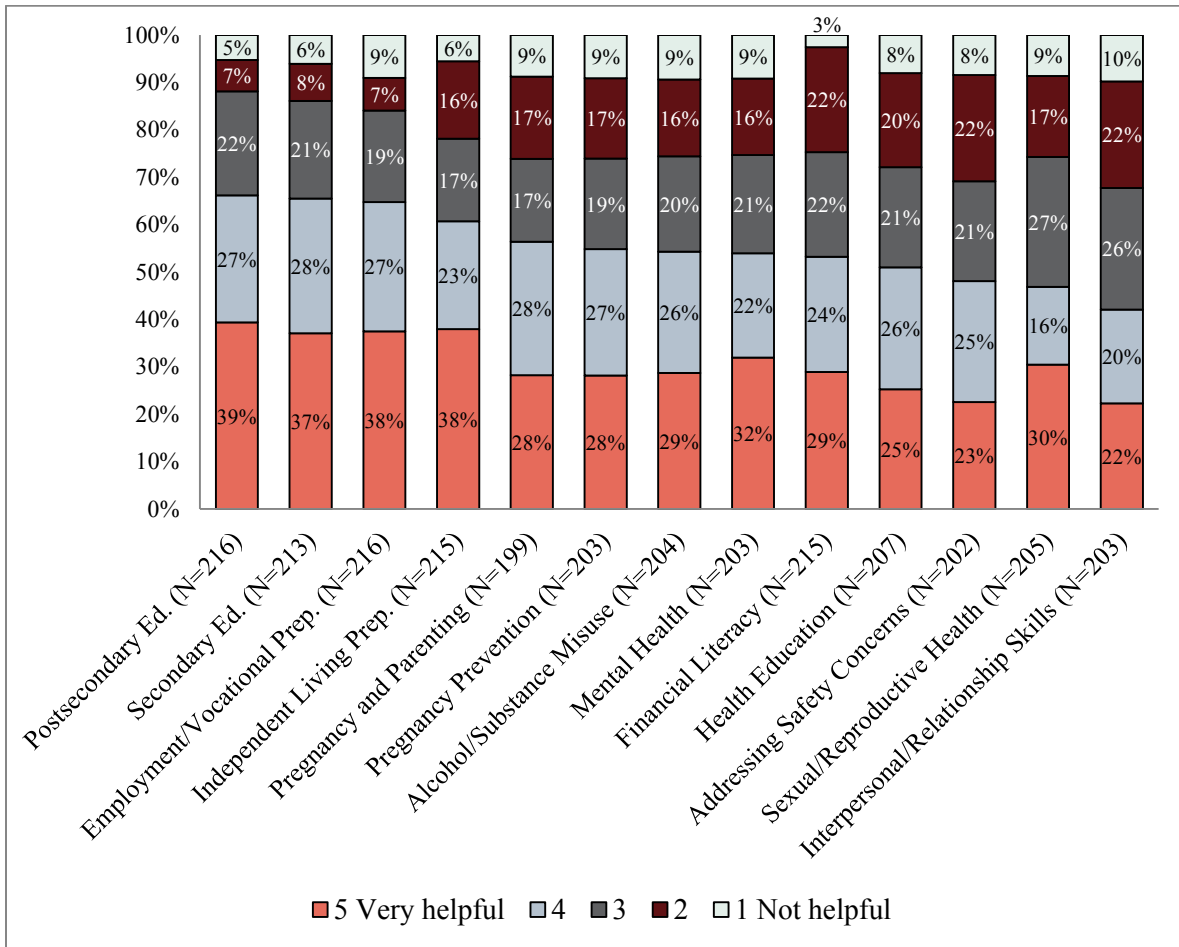
Caseworkers in large urban counties were more likely than those in other counties to perceive there to be few trainings on financial literacy. Caseworkers from rural counties were more likely than those in other counties to report inadequate trainings on development of interpersonal skills.

**Figure 4. Caseworkers' Perceptions of Availability of Trainings and Services for Youth**



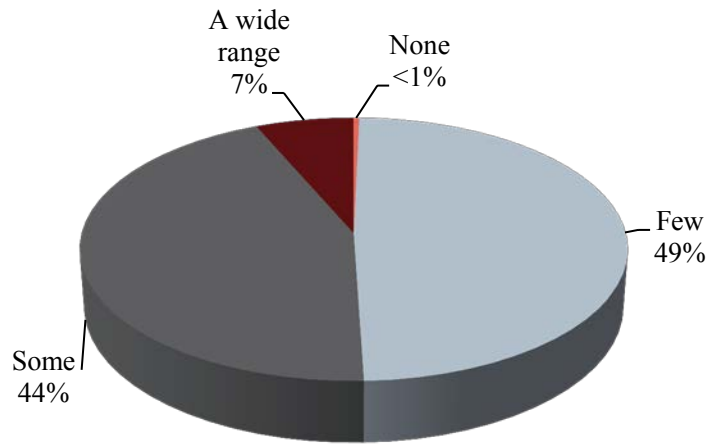
Following questions about availability, we then asked caseworkers about the extent to which they thought that these various services were helpful. Caseworkers rated the helpfulness of trainings and services in their county using a 5-point scale ranging from 1, “not at all helpful,” to 5, “very helpful.” As seen in Figure 5, similar to their responses about availability, caseworkers reported education-related trainings and services and independent living preparation services as being very helpful, in addition to independent living preparation services.

**Figure 5. Caseworkers' Perceptions about Helpfulness of Trainings and Services for Youth**

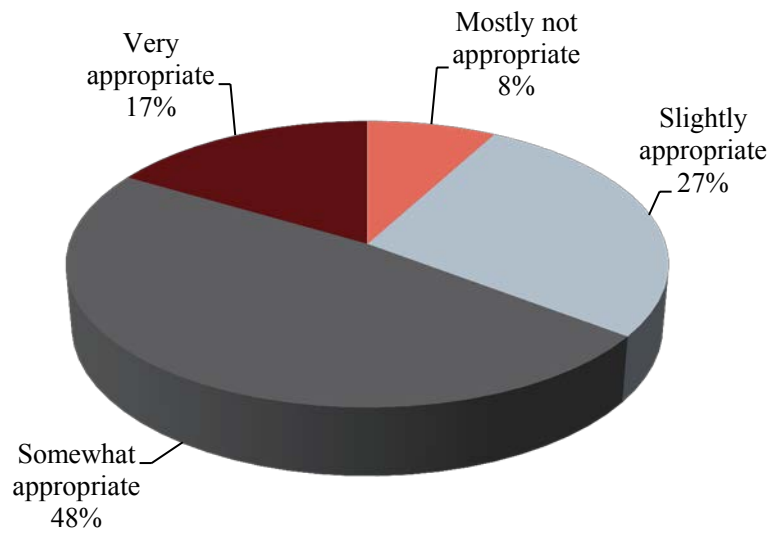


Finally, caseworkers were asked about the availability and appropriateness of housing options for nonminor dependents. Figures 6 and 7 display the responses to those questions. Nearly half of all workers reported only having few housing options for nonminor dependents in their county and another 44 percent reported having just some options. Of the available housing options, only 1 in 6 caseworkers believed the options were very appropriate and almost half (48%) believed the options were somewhat appropriate.

**Figure 6. Caseworkers' Perceptions of Availability of Housing Options (N = 226)**



**Figure 7. Caseworkers' Perceptions of Appropriateness of Housing Options (N = 219)**



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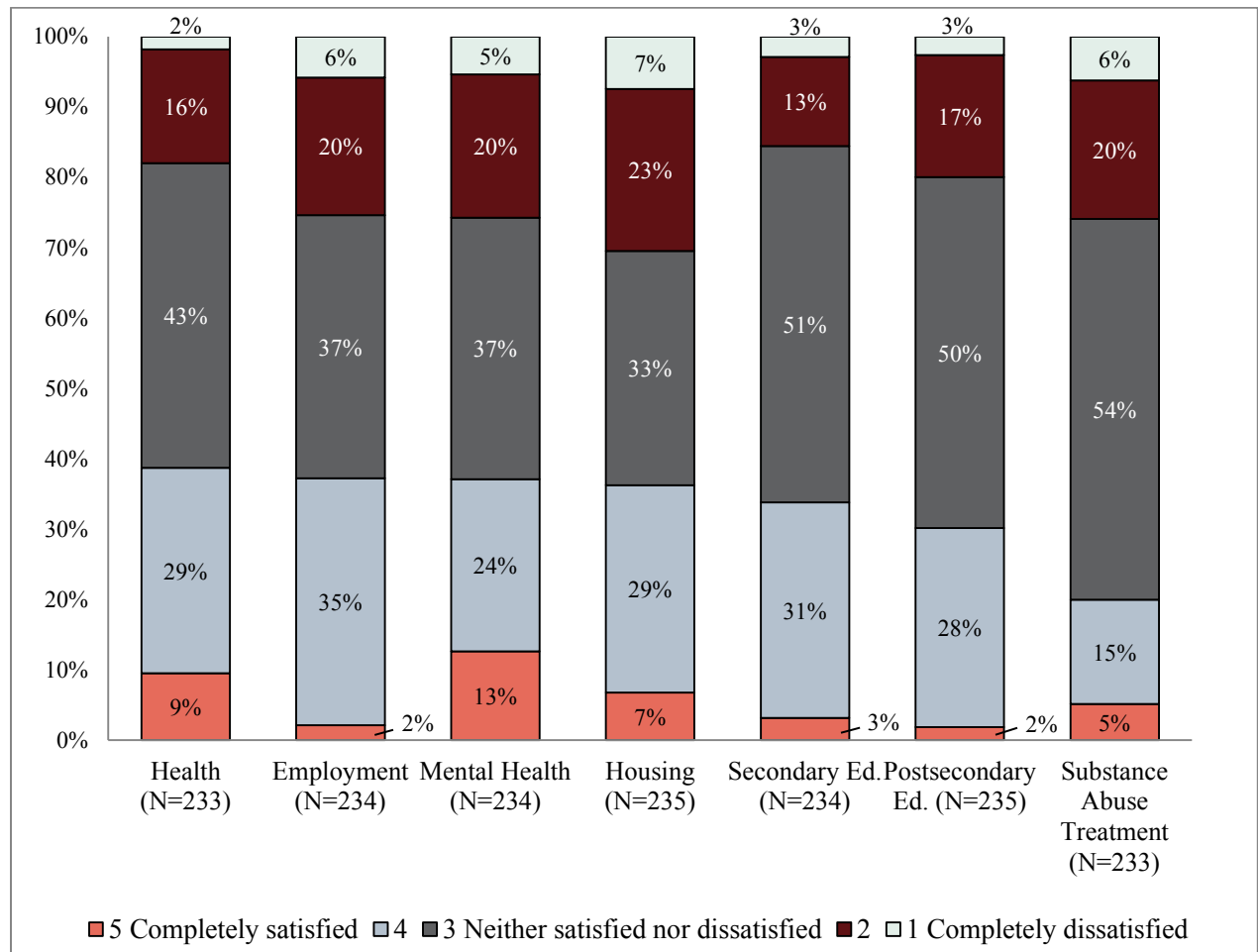
# Satisfaction with Collaboration with Other Systems

We then asked caseworkers how satisfied they were with the collaboration they had with individuals and organizations in other service settings with respect to assisting nonminor dependents in extended foster care (see Figure 8). Caseworkers most commonly reported being neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the collaboration they experienced. However, a third or more of caseworkers reported high levels of satisfaction (by selecting 4 or 5 on a rating scale of 1 to 5 where 5 represented “completely satisfied”) in the areas of health, employment, mental health, housing, and secondary education support services.

Caseworkers from urban counties are more likely than those from other counties to be completely dissatisfied with the collaboration they had with organizations providing employment services to youth. With regard to collaboration between individuals and organizations providing mental health services, workers from rural and urban counties are more likely than those from large urban counties to be dissatisfied.



**Figure 8. Caseworkers' Satisfaction with Collaboration with Other Systems**



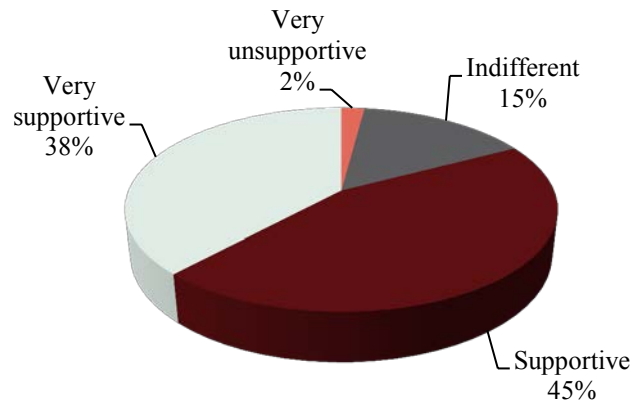
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# Supportiveness of Court Personnel

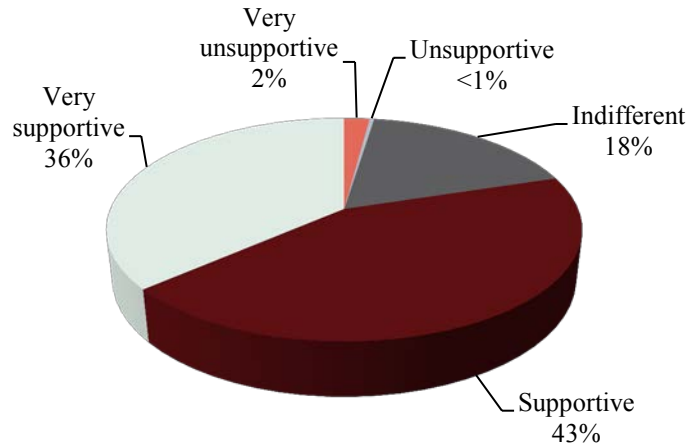
Caseworkers were also asked about their perception of court personnel's attitudes toward extending foster care beyond age 18. Their responses are detailed in Figures 9 through 11. Specifically, we asked the caseworkers about three groups: county counsel(s), youths' attorneys, and county judges. Participants selected one answer on a 5-category response scale ranging from 1, "very unsupportive," to 5, "very supportive." Caseworkers' perception of supportiveness is similar across the three groups, with the vast majority of respondents indicating that court personnel are mostly or very supportive of extended foster care.

Caseworkers from large urban counties are more likely than those from rural counties to describe county judges as being unsupportive of extended foster care. Caseworkers from rural counties are more likely overall than other caseworkers to think that county counsel are very supportive of extended foster care.

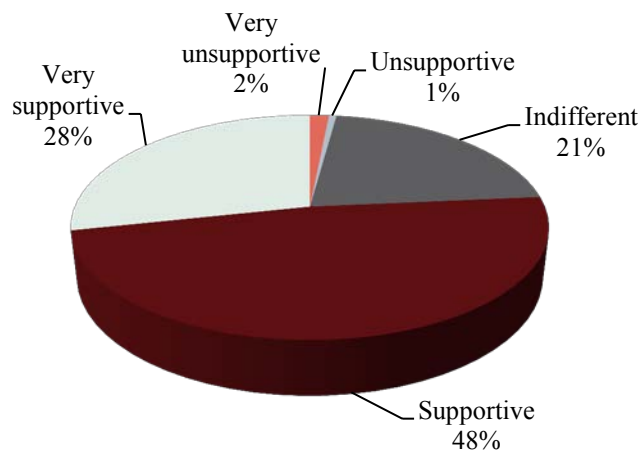
**Figure 9. Caseworkers' View of Supportiveness of Court Judges (N=221)**



**Figure 10. Caseworkers' View of Supportiveness of Court Attorney (N=222)**



**Figure 11. Caseworkers' View of Supportiveness of Court Counsel (N=220)**

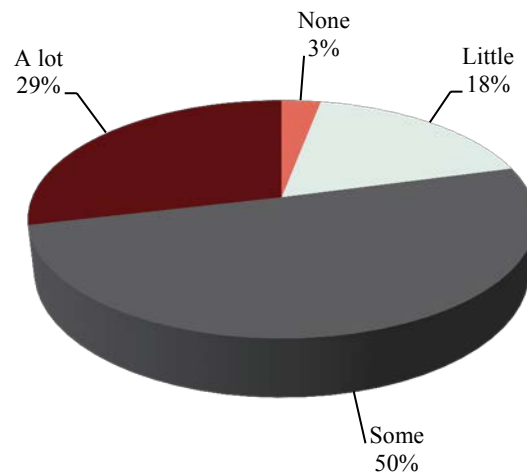


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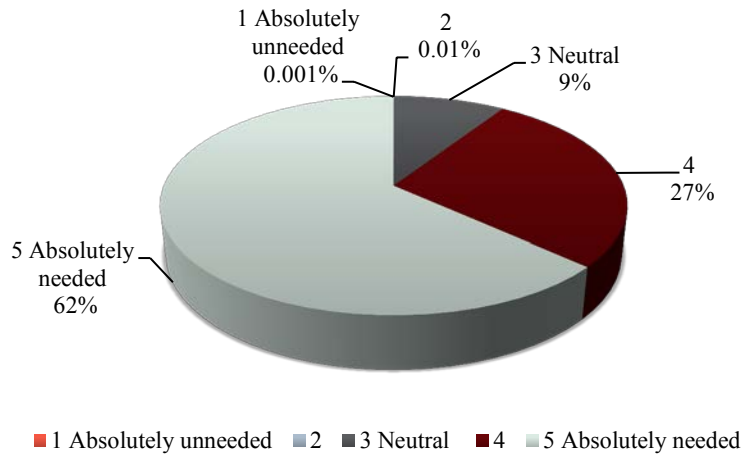
# Attitudes toward Extending Care

Caseworkers also reported on their own views about extending foster care. Four-fifths of caseworkers reported that the extension of foster care might increase dependency on the system. Nevertheless, three-fifths also indicated that they believed such services beyond age 18 were absolutely needed. Finally, we asked at what age young people could be expected to live on their own. Although the vast majority of caseworkers reported that extended foster care might foster dependency, only 27 percent of caseworkers indicated that youth could be expected to live on their own before the age of 21.

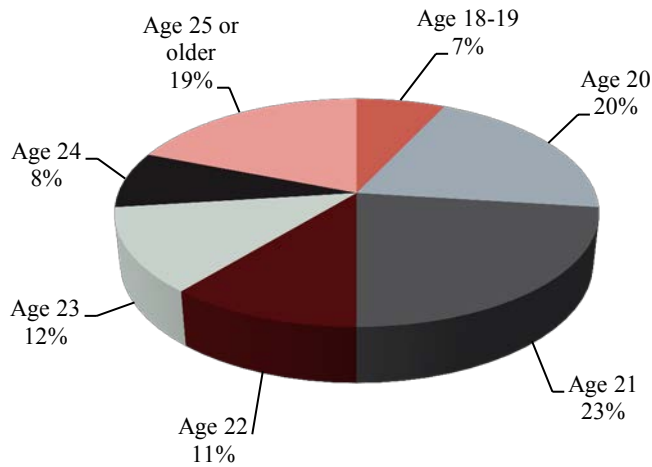
**Figure 12. Caseworkers' Perceptions that Extending Foster Care to 21 will Foster Dependency on the System (N = 235)**



**Figure 13. Caseworkers' Perceptions of Foster Youths' Needs for Services and Support Beyond Age 18 (N = 235)**



**Figure 14. Caseworkers' Perceptions of the Age Young People can be Expected to Live on Their Own (N = 226)**



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# Views of Challenges to Effective Implementation of Extended Foster Care

We were also interested in learning from caseworkers what they perceived as being challenges to the effective implementation of extended foster care. As shown in Table 10, we asked about a range of potential challenges and caseworkers were asked to answer on a 5-point scale ranging from 1, “not a challenge,” to 5, “a great challenge.” Challenges that at least 50 percent of caseworkers selected as being problematic included: “not enough placement options,” “not enough services,” “lack of clarity in policies and procedures of extended care,” and “lack of coordination between county child welfare agencies and other systems.”

Caseworkers from different county sizes differed in their evaluations of the challenges to effective implementation of extended foster care for several survey questions. Caseworkers in large urban counties were more likely than those in other counties to cite “lack of support by county caseworkers” and “lack of interest from youth” as challenges to implementation. Caseworkers in urban counties named “not enough services” as a challenge more often than workers in other counties.

**Table 10. Caseworkers' Views of Challenges to Effective Implementation of Extended Foster Care**

Extent to which each is a challenge (rated on a 5-point scale with 1 being “not a challenge” and 5 being “a great challenge”)	#	% rating 4 or 5
Not enough placement options ( <i>N</i> = 230)	186	71.8
Not enough services ( <i>N</i> = 230)	152	57.4
Lack of clarity in policies and procedures of extended care ( <i>N</i> = 232)	136	57.1
Lack of coordination between county child welfare agencies and other systems (e.g., education, housing, employment, health) ( <i>N</i> = 230)	110	50.7
Available services are not appropriate to needs of county's youth ( <i>N</i> = 231)	107	41.5
Lack of support by foster care providers ( <i>N</i> = 226)	85	36.4
Lack of support by county administrators ( <i>N</i> = 225)	57	31.5
Lack of interest from youth approaching age 18 ( <i>N</i> = 230)	58	29.7
Lack of support by court personnel ( <i>N</i> = 227)	33	19.6
Lack of support by county caseworkers ( <i>N</i> = 231)	27	13.8

*Note:* Unweighted frequencies and weighted percentages.

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# Views of Nonminor Dependents after Age 18

Finally, we asked caseworkers about their own views of nonminor dependents beyond the age of 18 and the likelihood of youth achieving certain milestones. A bit more than one-third of caseworkers reported that youth were very unlikely or unlikely to move out of the county after reaching age 18, similar to the percentage of caseworkers that expected youth to be likely or very likely to move (see Table 11). Over forty percent of caseworkers reported being neutral on the question of whether youth would find employment after reaching age 18. Lastly, most caseworkers indicated that it was very unlikely or unlikely for youth to find safe and affordable housing in a county.

**Table 11. Caseworkers' Views of Nonminor Dependents after Age 18**

Likelihood of Nonminor Dependents to...	Very Unlikely (%)	Unlikely (%)	Neutral (%)	Likely (%)	Very Likely (%)
Move outside of the county after age 18 ( <i>N</i> = 227)	14.8	20.7	26.9	30.0	7.6
Find employment within county after age 18 ( <i>N</i> = 233)	6.8	26.1	40.6	26.0	0.6
Find safe/affordable housing within county after age 18 ( <i>N</i> = 232)	17.9	34.7	35.3	10.7	1.3

*Note:* Weighted percentages.



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# Summary and Next Steps for CalYOUTH

The CalYOUTH Child Welfare Worker Survey provides a snapshot of how youths' caseworkers, who are central players in the implementation of extended foster care, perceive young people making the transition out of care to adulthood and the service context for that transition. The exceptional level of participation in the survey by county public employees across California illustrates their commitment to providing effective services to the young adults they now serve. The caseworkers are a diverse lot in terms of their backgrounds, working conditions, and perceptions of the new law, though the overwhelming majority appears, at least in principle, to be very supportive of extended care. Importantly, given how recently the law changed in California, most of them have relatively limited experience supporting young adults in care beyond age 18. Most have worked in the foster care system for many years, so it may take them a while to get used to the idea that adolescents don't simply exit the system around their 18th birthday. Moreover, our survey findings show that many child welfare workers in California supervise foster care caseloads that include a wide range of ages of children and youth, potentially limiting their ability to become experts on services and community resources most useful to young adults. This raises important questions about how best to organize case management for young adults in care; perhaps not surprisingly, some counties have moved to create positions that allow a subset of caseworkers to work exclusively with young adults.

The federal Fostering Connections Act calls for young adults, unless they have medical conditions that get in the way, to be engaged in either education or employment if they are to remain eligible for extended care. This is consistent with normative expectations for young adults these days. In going beyond the traditional emphasis of child welfare policy on achieving legal permanency for children in state care (i.e., family reunification, adoption, or guardianship), the new federal law and its counterpart in

California both focus on enhancing the overall well-being of young adults in extended care. Maximizing the well-being of these young adults arguably requires the active engagement of a variety of public institutions (e.g., education, employment, health and mental health, and housing institutions), lest the child welfare system be expected to reinvent the wheel in the areas where these other institutions typically claim expertise and jurisdiction (Courtney, 2009). Although there is some variability across public institutions in the amount of cross-system collaboration our survey respondents report, for the most part they appear not to have formed strong opinions about their potential partners in these other institutions. Perhaps this reflects the fact that extended care is still relatively new and many caseworkers have yet to decide what kind of help to expect from other professionals and systems. Interestingly, child welfare workers in California generally perceive court personnel to be supportive of extended care.

According to the child welfare worker reports, the young people remaining in care past their 18th birthday in California are also a varied group. Workers generally report that the youth want to remain in care past age 18, but what extended care will look like for them is likely to depend on their needs and aspirations. Some of these youth are at least nominally ready to pursue higher education in that they have a high school diploma or GED, though workers frequently believe that these youth will need lots of help along the way. Those who have not yet obtained a diploma or GED are also generally seen as needing help to achieve this. Workers appear to be most commonly concerned about the ability of nonminor dependents to meet their own basic needs (e.g., manage their own money, have a job, and find a place to live). Workers are also concerned about the mental and behavioral health of many youth and their ability to create and maintain safe and healthy relationships. They perceive a lack of available and appropriate services for young people who have these kinds of challenges. Troublingly, few workers believe there to be locally available and appropriate housing options for these young people.

This report is descriptive in nature. Going forward, we will be examining workers' responses in more depth. For example, do characteristics of workers' backgrounds help explain variation in the likelihood they are concerned about youth "dependency" on extended care? Does perceived availability of services in particular areas of need influence workers' perceptions of collaboration with other systems? Answers to these and similar questions can help inform training of child welfare workers and other professionals who could provide support to nonminor dependents.

We will also be comparing and contrasting workers' perceptions of the needs of youth and the availability of services at the county level with those of the youth participating in the CalYOUTH study. This can potentially help identify areas of youths' needs that are not yet fully appreciated by child welfare workers and administrators. By sharing the perceptions of the professionals involved in implementing California's Fostering Connections Act, and the experiences of the young people the new law is intended to help,

CalYOUTH promises to provide timely information over the next several years about California's ambitious implementation of extended foster care.

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### **About Chapin Hall**

Established in 1985, Chapin Hall is an independent policy research center whose mission is to build knowledge that improves policies and programs for children and youth, families, and their communities.

Chapin Hall's areas of research include child maltreatment prevention, child welfare systems and foster care, youth justice, schools and their connections with social services and community organizations, early childhood initiatives, community change initiatives, workforce development, out-of-school time initiatives, economic supports for families, and child well-being indicators.

