



# **YOUTH EXPERIENCE SURVEY 2025**

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## I. Acknowledgments

ACS is pleased to acknowledge and thank the many individuals who contributed to the eighth annual Foster Care Youth Experience Survey.

First, we thank all the young people who completed the survey and shared their insights on their experiences in foster care. We are also grateful to the foster care provider agencies for their partnership and work to ensure that the voices of young people were heard.

I thank my team at ACS, including Deputy Commissioner for Family Permanency Services, Ina Mendez, and Deputy Commissioner for Policy, Planning, and Measurement, Andrew White, for their leadership on this survey and for their ongoing work to improve the foster care system. Special thanks to the many ACS staff who contributed to the survey development, dissemination, analysis, and writing of this report - including the ACS Youth Leadership Council, Fouad Yared, Polly Mygatt, Wesley Santos, Lorna Guthrie, Myra Soto-Aponte, Lucy Antoine, Neil Freedman, Sabine Chery, Sophonie Taylor, Raymond Singleton, Christopher Tan, Sonia Gonzalez, Stephanie Gendell, and staff of the Office of Permanency Consultation, Office of Shared Response, Office of Older Youth Development Services, and Office of Youth Success Services. I also want to thank the ACS marketing and design team that designed this report, John Taylor and Ryan Moritz.

I want to thank Mayor Adams for his commitment to the children and families of New York City and for supporting ACS' efforts to improve experiences and opportunities for youth in foster care. We are using the information gathered from this report and collaborating with our partners to continue to strengthen the foster care system and improve outcomes for children, youth, and families. As we celebrate areas of progress and reflect on areas where we can make additional strides, I want to acknowledge and thank all who continue to work tirelessly to ensure that youth are supported and successful.

Jess Dannhauser

Commissioner, NYC Administration for Children's Services

## II. Executive Summary

The New York City Administration for Children's Services (ACS), in partnership with our foster care provider agencies, conducted the eighth annual Foster Care Youth Experience Survey in accordance with Local law 146. The legislation requires ACS to conduct an annual survey of all youth in foster care age 13 and older. The purpose of the survey is to better understand the experiences of youth in care and identify any unmet needs that may impact their safety, permanency, and well-being.

The survey questions focused on youths' experiences related to their education, employment, health care, connections to family and friends, and permanency planning. This year's survey also continued to cover these additional topic areas: experiences with depression, and sexual orientation and gender identity and expression (SOGIE). Across the survey themes, responses reflect youth's perception of their needs and the support they receive in a variety of areas.

The survey launched on November 19, 2024 and closed on January 24, 2025. The response rate for the FY 2025 survey was 55.3%; 1,105 out of 1,999 eligible youth completed the survey. This is an excellent response rate for a survey of this type, which typically have a response rate of 30% - 40%.<sup>1</sup>

Youth in 24-hour foster care<sup>2</sup> for at least 90 days between the ages of 13-20 were eligible to complete the survey. Of those responding, 55% were female; 65% were age 16 years or older; 46% identified as Hispanic, Latino or of Spanish origin; 63% identified as Black, African American, or African, and 9% identified as White.

At the time they were surveyed, most respondents resided in family foster care (80%), with 35% in kinship foster homes and 45% in non-kinship foster homes. Just over half of respondents (53%) had spent fewer than three years in foster care, including 20% having spent less than a year in foster care. Less than half of respondents (47%) had spent three or more years in foster care. For 69% of respondents, their current placement was their first time in foster care.

The survey was voluntary and confidential; however, it was not anonymous. ACS staff could identify the youth completing each survey to follow up on any health or safety concern. Youth were informed that such follow-up would be conducted if their responses indicated a concern. ACS staff monitored responses daily and contacted individual youth and/or foster care agencies to address any critical issues or basic needs that youth reported as unmet.

As with all surveys, the findings are subject to nonresponse bias that stems from youth choosing not to complete the survey. Findings are also subject to response bias from those who may over-report

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<sup>1</sup> Hart, N., Dykema, J., Schaeffer, N., & Stevenson, J., University of Wisconsin Survey Center. Survey Fundamentals: A Guide to Designing and Implementing Surveys. 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Twenty-four hour foster care means the youth is residing in a foster care placement; they are not on trial discharge, hospitalized, incarcerated, AWOC, or otherwise temporarily out of placement.

“socially desirable” answers and underreport or over-report negative feedback, which may lead to a deviation of answers from their true value.

#### **EDUCATION:**

**The majority (86%) of the youth who completed the survey were in school.** Among the 1,105 youth currently in school, 70% were in high school, 15% were in middle school, 10% were in college, and 5% were in a high school equivalency program. Among the 156 youth not currently enrolled in school, 35% had completed at least one high school grade but had not received a high school diploma. Fifty-four percent have a high school diploma or equivalency degree, and 5% had completed some college.

#### **Youth were interested in continuing their education and were receiving academic and other support.**

Among youth in high school or who left high school without graduating, 93% plan to finish high school and 91% of youth who have started college plan to finish their degree. Help paying for needed school supplies/activities, guidance/mental health counseling, tutoring, and help preparing for the high school equivalency test were the educational services that respondents in grades 9 and above most frequently said they needed. At least three quarters of the youth who needed these services also reported receiving them. For youth in middle school, guidance/mental health counseling and tutoring were the most common needs, and 93% and 89% of youth, respectively, who needed it were receiving it.

#### **EMPLOYMENT:**

**Most of the youth in foster care want to work.** Fifty-seven percent of respondents reported interest in obtaining employment, and 21% of youth currently have a job/paid internship. Many unemployed youth reported that they were receiving help to find a job; most frequently received supports were help with getting proper clothing (81%), help with getting dependable transportation (81%) and help with improving math or reading skills (79%). The most common unmet needs for youth seeking employment were learning what jobs to apply for (40%), learning interviewing skills (32%), and learning how to deal with customers, co-workers, and bosses (30%).

#### **EMOTIONAL SUPPORT:**

#### **Most youth reported that they feel very supported by their foster parents or residential facility staff.**

Over 70% of youth living with a foster family (including kin and non-kin) said they felt very supported by their foster parents and 19% felt somewhat supported. Just over half (55%) of youth in residential care said they felt very supported by their residential staff and 30% felt somewhat supported. Youth ages 13-15 were more likely to feel supported by their foster parents or residential staff compared to older youth. Nearly the same percent of heterosexual youth and bisexual, gay, or lesbian youth reported feeling very supported by their foster parent, 74% and 72% respectively. Heterosexual youth in

residential care were more likely to feel supported by their residential staff (61%) compared to bisexual, gay, or lesbian youth in residential care (38%).

Youth were asked how often, over the last 30 days, they have had a friend, family member, or a significant other they enjoy spending time with, who makes them feel wanted, who makes them feel included as part of a community, who will listen to them, whom they can talk to when feeling lonely, and with whom they can share their private worries and fears. Over 70% of youth reported having someone who meets these needs “almost all” or “most” of the time. Youth ages 13-15 and heterosexual youth were more likely than their older and/or bisexual, gay or lesbian peers to report that they have someone “almost all” of the time. Seventy percent of bisexual, gay, and/or lesbian youth reported that they have someone “almost all” or “most” of the time. Six percent of youth noted they had someone to meet their needs “none of the time” for any of the six items. ACS followed up with these youth and contacted their foster care agencies as necessary to follow up on their emotional well-being.

#### **SOCIAL INTERACTIONS:**

**Most youth reported spending time with friends, using social media, and engaging in outdoor activities as their primary activities during their free time.** The most common activities youth did in their free time were spending time with friends (85%), using social media (84%), doing outdoor activities (76%), and playing video games (70%).

#### **HEALTHCARE**

**The majority of youth reported that their needs for health care were met.** Among all survey respondents, 93% reported having their needs met for physical health care and for their mental/emotional health, respectively. Respondents reported receiving needed vision (89%) and dental (86%) care. Nearly one quarter of respondents stated that they need and receive care for alcohol or drug use. Forty-two percent of respondents stated that they need and receive care for sexual health/family planning. For any youth who reported an unmet health need, ACS conducted outreach to address the concern.

#### **SUPPORTIVE SERVICES AND PERMANENCY PLANNING:**

**When asked whether they receive various types of support from their foster care agencies, over 70% of youth reported they received help in each of the following areas: education, job readiness, independent living workshops, housing support, and connecting with attorneys.** Helping youth reach their educational goals and connecting with their attorney were the top two needs foster care agencies supported youth with (92% and 85%, respectively). Youth were supported to engage in permanency planning most frequently by their foster care case worker (71%), foster parent (69%), and residential program staff (54%).

Youth were also asked if they have a Fair Futures Coach and how satisfied they were with the services and support received from them. Fifty-five percent of youth reported they were assigned a Fair Futures Coach. Over 70% of these youth reported that they were completely satisfied with the coaching, social and emotional support, and academic planning and support received from their Fair Futures Coach.

#### **DEPRESSION:**

Youth were asked to report frequency of feeling down, depressed, or hopeless within the last two weeks. Fifty-nine percent of male youth and 41% of female youth reported that they did not feel down, depressed, or hopeless during the last two weeks. Twenty-seven percent of male youth and 42% of female youth reported that they felt down, depressed, or hopeless “sometimes” (1-5 days in the past two weeks). Among youth who identify as heterosexual, 55% did not feel depressed in the last two weeks and 32% felt depressed 1 or more days. Among youth who identify as bisexual, gay, or lesbian, 35% did not feel depressed in the last two weeks and 43% felt depressed 1 or more days. All youth who indicated that they would like someone to follow up with them were contacted by ACS staff. ACS staff automatically contacted all youth who had indicated feeling depressed every day.

#### **SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY AND EXPRESSION**

Youth were asked about their gender identity, and 50% of youth identified as a girl/woman while 43% identified as a boy/man. Two percent of youth checked the option “use another word for my gender.” One percent of respondents identified as trans or transgender. The remaining respondents indicated that they did not know, did not understand the question, did not want to answer this question, or left this question blank.

Youth were also asked a question about their sexual identity, and 66% see themselves as straight or heterosexual. Thirteen percent of respondents identify as bisexual, 3% see themselves as lesbian, and 1% identify as gay. Three percent of youth stated that they did not know, while another 3% stated that they use another word (for example, pansexual, asexual, or queer) to describe their sexuality and 9% said they preferred not to answer this question.

#### **HOUSING**

Youth ages 18 and older were asked if they were aware of the various housing supports available for youth who are exiting foster care. Over 50% of youth reported that they know about supportive housing, New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), housing vouchers, and Housing Connect affordable housing lotteries.

## BASIC FOOD/CLOTHING NEEDS

The majority of youth reported that their basic food and clothing needs were met. Youth were asked if they had three meals a day, appropriate clothing and shoes that fit. Ninety-four percent of youth stated they are currently getting three meals a day, 94% reported having appropriate clothing, and 94% stated they have shoes that fit. For every youth who answered no to any of these questions, ACS conducted outreach to address the concerns.

## III. Introduction

### A. Background and Purpose of the Survey

The New York City Administration for Children's Services (ACS) disseminated and analyzed the responses from the FY25 Foster Care Experience Survey to comply with Local Law 166 of 2016. The law requires ACS to provide all youth in foster care, ages 13 and older, an annual survey regarding their experiences in foster care. The purpose of the survey is to better understand the experiences of youth while in foster care, especially as it pertains to their safety, permanency, and well-being. The law requires that the survey cover the following topics:

- Access to food and clothing.
- Religious practices.
- Social connectedness (i.e., relationships with foster families, biological families, and friends).
- Personal allowances (i.e., money received on a regular basis from the caregiver, or stipends for participating in agency program).
- Access to technology (i.e., internet and phone).
- Educational needs and progress; and
- Participation in extracurricular activities.

ACS collaborated with its contracted foster care agencies to disseminate the survey to all eligible youth residing in 24-hour foster care status, in all types of foster care placements (foster homes, group homes and residential treatment programs).<sup>3</sup> ACS worked closely with foster care agencies to implement a range of strategies to ensure that all eligible youth were aware of the survey, knew how to access it, and encouraged to complete it. Youth who completed the survey received a \$15 gift card. The survey launched on November 19, 2024, and closed on January 24, 2025. The overall response rate was 55%.

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<sup>3</sup> This does not include Close to Home juvenile justice placements.



## B. Survey Methodology

### Survey development and analysis

For the annual survey conducted in FY25, ACS added new questions related to Fair Future Coaches and knowledge of housing supports: all other questions that were asked were the same as the fiscal year 2024 Youth Experience Survey. Findings from these additional topics have been added to this report.

### Survey dissemination

ACS launched the online survey on November 19, 2024. Foster care provider agencies were instructed to enter email addresses for all older youth in care into the New York State database, Connections. ACS sent an electronic notification of the survey to all eligible youth with an email address available in Connections. The notice explained the purpose of the survey and included instructions for youth to access the survey. ACS also sent the relevant information to each provider agency, including the youth names and their unique PINs<sup>4</sup> to help support further engagement of youth to complete the survey. All communications included ACS staff contact information in case the youth had any questions. To encourage survey participation, youth received an electronic \$15 gift card upon completion of the survey.

ACS and the provider agencies used a wide range of strategies to follow up with non-respondents. For example, ACS provided weekly updates to the agencies showing overall response rates, along with a list of youth who had not yet completed the survey. ACS staff worked with foster care agencies to identify and resolve any completion barriers and reiterate the importance of completing the survey. Additionally, ACS responded to any questions from youth and foster care agencies through a survey help desk and offered translation services for youth who requested to complete the survey in another language.

### Survey population and response rate

The survey population was comprised of all youth aged 13 or older who had been in foster care for at least 90 days as of November 8, 2024. Of the 1,999-youth eligible for the survey, 1,105 completed it, for a response rate of 55%. The response rate decreased from 60% responding in FY24 to 55% responding in FY25.

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<sup>4</sup> Each eligible young person was given a unique identification number (PIN) with which to access the survey.

## C. Survey Respondent Placement Types & Demographics

This section provides an overview of the demographic characteristics and placement types of the youth responding to the survey and the total population of foster care youth eligible to participate in the survey, based on ACS administrative data.<sup>5</sup>

**Placement Type** Of the 1,105 youth who responded to the survey, 80% were living either in foster homes or in kinship foster homes (Table 1). Forty-five percent resided in non-relative foster homes and 35% were placed in kinship family homes. Twenty percent of youth were living in a congregate residential setting.

**Length of time in foster care.** Based on information available in ACS administrative records, slightly more than half of the survey respondents had been in care for fewer than three years, including 20% in care for less than one year at the time of the survey distribution and 33% in care for one to under three years. Slightly less than half were in care for three years or more.

**Number of foster care spells (placement episodes).** Consistent with the population of youth aged 13 or older in foster care overall, 69% of the survey respondents were experiencing foster care placement for the first time, or their first spell. An additional 23% of respondents were in their second spell of foster care, meaning they had previously been discharged from care and then reentered care. The remaining 8% had been placed into foster care three or more times.

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<sup>5</sup> Youth were eligible to participate in the survey if they were age 13 or older and had spent at least 90 days in foster care.

**Table 1. Indicators of placement in foster care: Survey respondents and population eligible to respond to the survey.**

Placement Indicator	Foster Care Youth Responding to Survey		Foster Care Youth In Population Eligible to Participate In Survey	
	Percent	Number	Percent	Number
<b>All Youth</b>	100%	1,105	100%	1,999
<b>Current Placement Type</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Number</b>
(FBH) Foster Home	45%	496	42%	844
(Kinship) Kinship Family Home	35%	386	35%	704
Residential/ Group Home	20%	223	23%	450
Other / Unknown	0%	0	*	*
<b>Length of Time in Foster Care</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Number</b>
Under 1 year	20%	222	21%	423
Between 1 and 3 years	33%	366	34%	689
Between 3 and 5 years	19%	212	18%	367
Between 5 and 8 years	17%	190	16%	325
Over 8 years	10%	115	10%	194
Other / Unknown	0%	0	*	*
<b>Number of Foster Care Spells</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Number</b>
One Spell	69%	762	69%	1,382
Two Spells	23%	253	22%	444
Three or More Spells	8%	90	9%	172
Unknown Number of Spells	0%	0	*	*

NOTE: Findings in which the N is between 1 and 5 are not reported, these are represented by an asterisk (\*). SOURCES: Youth Experience Survey FY25 and ACS Administrative Records

## Demographics

**Sex and Age.** Information on the sex and age of respondents was analyzed from ACS administrative records.<sup>6</sup> Of the 1,105 youth who responded to the survey, over half (55%) are female and 45% are male. Almost 50% of the youth aged 13 to 15 responded to the survey, 56% of youth aged 16 to 17 responded, and 61.5% of youth aged 18 to 20 responded (Table 2).

**Table 2. Response Rate: Overall and by Sex and Age.**

	Youth Responding to Survey	Foster Youth Care In Population Eligible to Participate in Survey	Response Rate
<b>All youth</b>	1,105	1,999	55.3%
<b>Sex</b>			
Female	604	1,092	55.3%
Male	501	907	55.2%
<b>Age</b>			
13 to 15	391	786	49.7%
16 to 17	338	602	56.1%
18 to 20	376	611	61.5%

SOURCES: Youth Experience Survey FY25 and ACS Administrative Records

The survey gathered information on the race and ethnicity of youth in foster care (Table 3).<sup>7</sup> Ethnicity is reported separately from race. Youth who identified themselves as Hispanic, Latino or of Spanish Origin accounted for a substantial share of the youth responding to the survey (46%), while 6% identified as Middle Eastern or North African. Thirty-seven percent said they were neither Hispanic nor Middle Eastern. Eleven percent preferred not to answer the question.

Regarding their race, the largest group of youth self-identified as Black, African American, or African (63%). Seventeen percent preferred not to answer, 9% reported their race as White and 8% reported that they don't identify. Small percentages of youth self-identified as Asian, American Indian or Alaskan Native, and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. The rest did not report their race.

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<sup>6</sup> Gender information was pulled from the New York State CONNECTIONS system. This data does not reflect youth's self-reported gender identities.

<sup>7</sup> ACS' administrative records do not distinguish between race and ethnicity (Hispanic is reported as a race in New York State CONNECTIONS, the system of record, so data are not available, for example, about the number of youth in care who are Black/African American and Hispanic).

It was not possible to compare the racial or ethnic background of survey respondents with the total eligible population of youth in foster care because the survey requested that the information be reported in a different format than that used in ACS' administrative records.

**Table 3. Race/ethnicity of survey respondents.**

Demographic indicator	Youth responding to the survey	
Ethnicity	Percent	Number
Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin	46%	505
Middle Eastern or North African	6%	65
None of the above	37%	412
Prefer not to answer	11%	118
Did not answer	*	*
Race	Percent	Number
Black, African American, or African	63%	691
White	9%	96
American Indian or Alaskan Native	4%	45
Asian	4%	48
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	2%	22
I don't identify	8%	92
Prefer not to answer	17%	184
Did not answer	1%	9

NOTE: For race, the sum of percentages is greater than 100% because youth could select more than one race. They could only select one ethnicity.

SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY25

### *Sexual orientation and gender identity/ expression*

The LGBTQAI+ Action Plan<sup>8</sup> reflects ACS' renewed commitment to identifying and addressing the unique needs of youth whose sexual orientations differ from cisgender or "gender conforming" that refer to roles and behaviors reflecting "binary" or "male/female" norms.

The survey asked youth to identify their "Sex at Birth" (SAB) to be more respectful of youth gender identity and provide inclusive language. The data in Figures 1-4 reflect the responses of respondents based on their reported SAB. Fifty-three percent of the youth who responded reported their SAB as female, 44% reported their SAB as male, and 2% did not want to answer (Figure 1).

Youth were asked "When you think about yourself, do you see yourself as a boy/man or girl/woman? Or do you use another word to identify your gender?". Of the 1,105 youth who responded to this survey, 43% identified as a boy/man, 50% identified as a girl/woman (Figure 2). Two percent responded that they use another word for their gender. One percent responded they identify as trans or transgender. One percent stated they did not know (yet). The remaining 3% of youth did not understand the question, or did not want to answer this question.

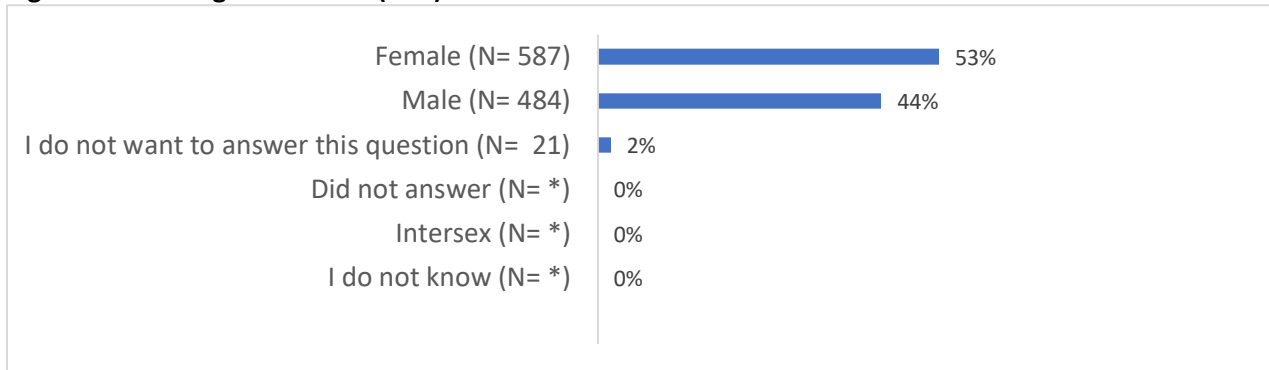
Youth were asked "To whom do you feel romantically or sexually attracted?" The majority of male SAB respondents (85%) are attracted to girls/women and slightly over half of female SAB respondents (53%) are attracted to boys/men. Three percent of male SAB youth reported that they are attracted to both girls/women and boys/men, compared to 23% of female SAB youth (Figure 3).

All 1,105 youth who completed the survey responded to the question regarding sexuality. The majority of youth (66%) see themselves as straight or heterosexual (Figure 4). Thirteen percent of respondents identify as bisexual, 3% see themselves as lesbian and 1% identify as gay (Figure 4). Three percent of youth stated that they did not know while another 3% stated that they use another word to describe their sexuality. The remaining 10% of youth did not understand this question or preferred not to answer this question.

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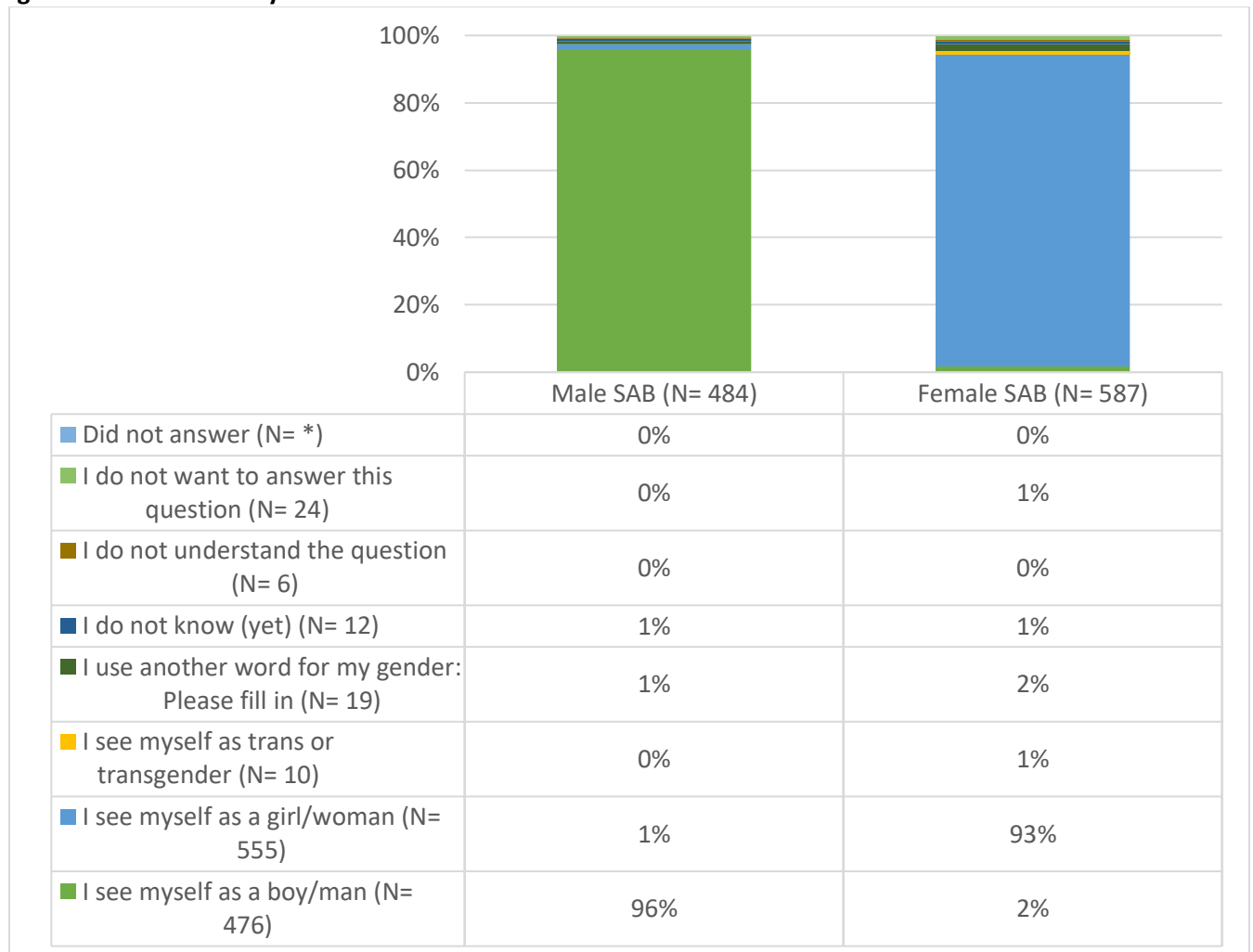
<sup>8</sup> ACS LGBTQAI+ Action Plan can be found at <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/about/2020/LGBTQActionPlan.pdf>

**Figure 1. Sex assigned at birth (SAB).**



SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY25

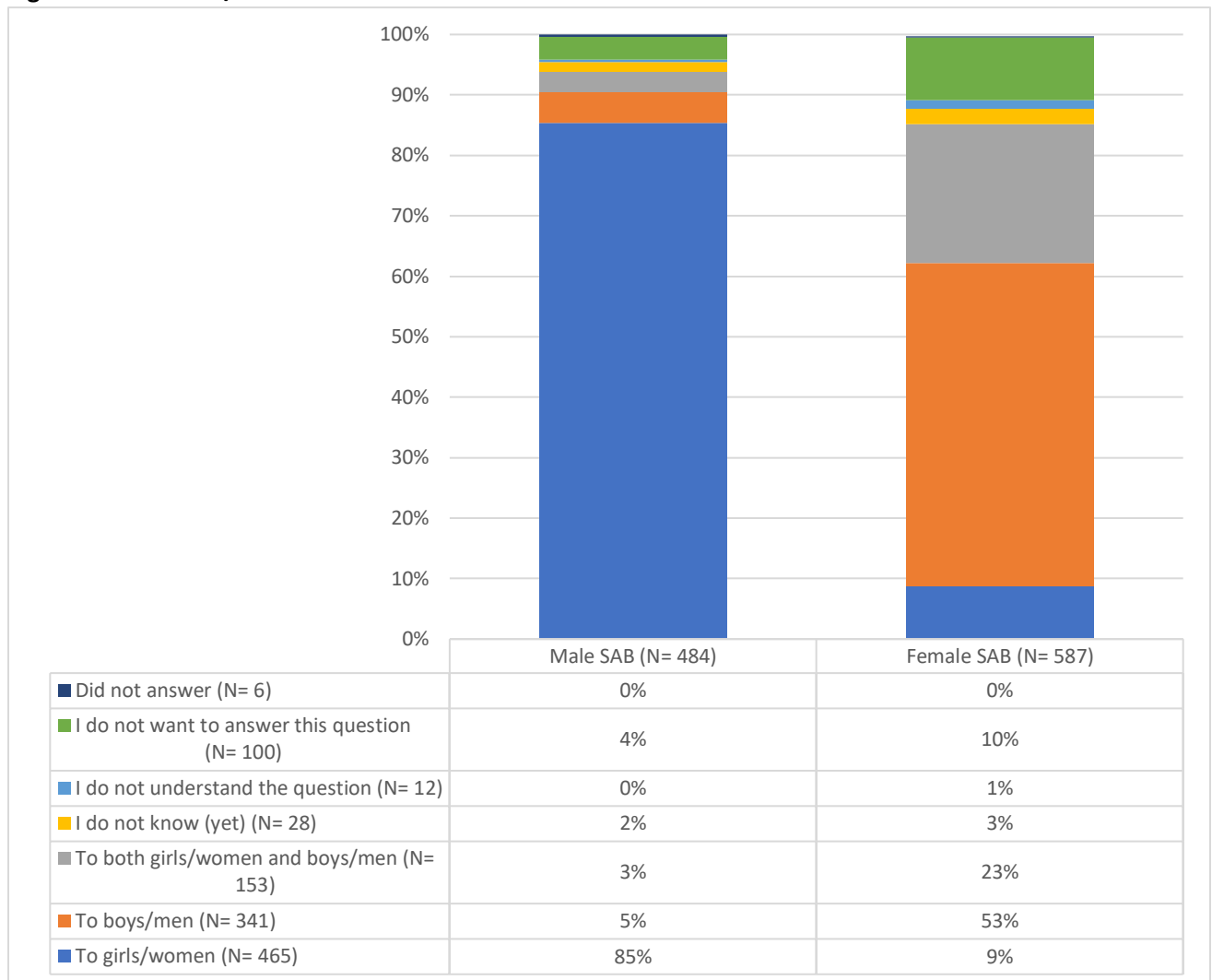
**Figure 2. Gender identity.**



NOTE: Findings in which the N is between 1 and 5 are not reported, these are represented by an asterisk (\*) and 0% in this chart. SAB is defined as "Sex at Birth"

SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY25

**Figure 3. Romantic / sexual attraction.**

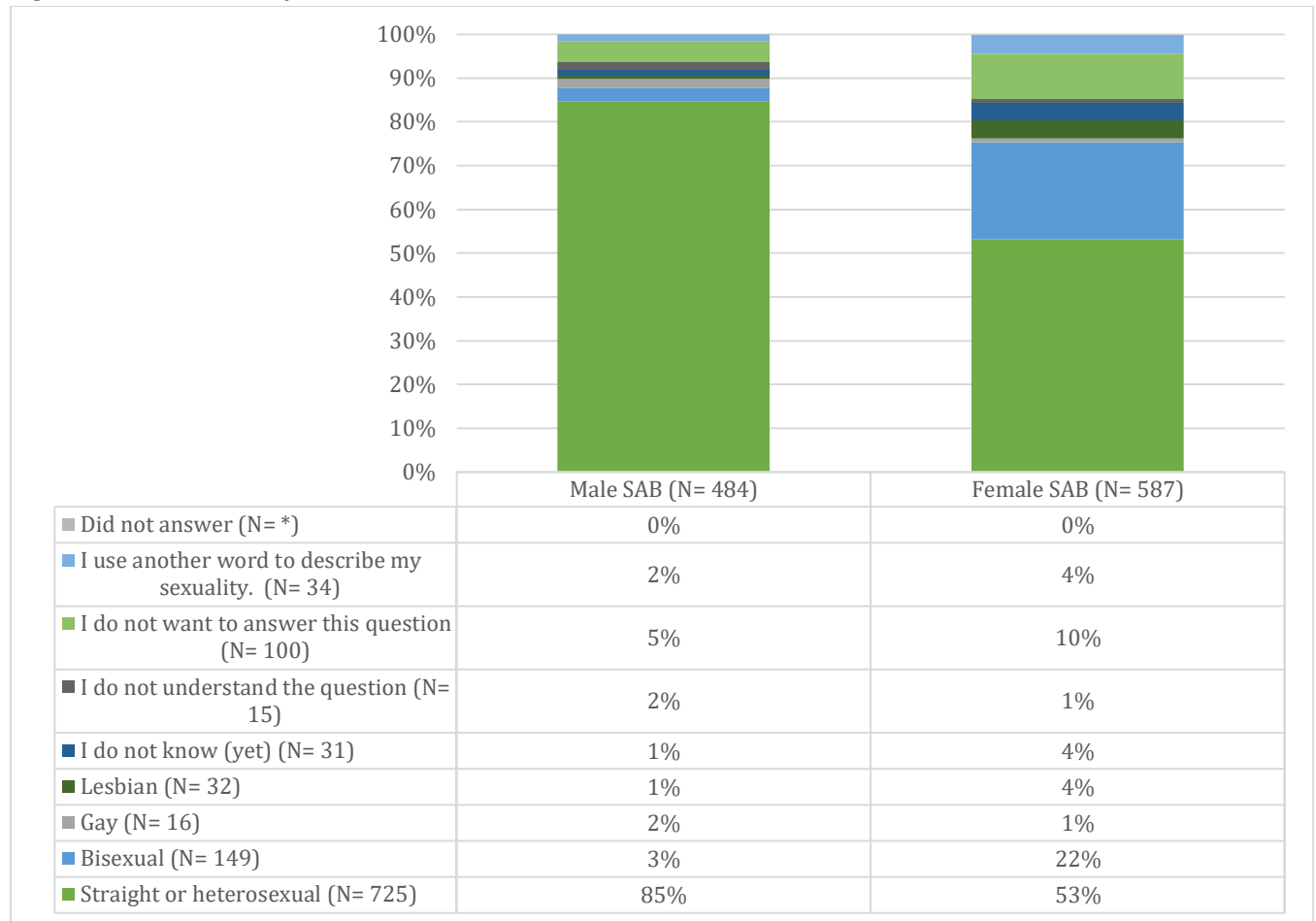


NOTE: SAB is defined as “Sex at Birth”

SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY25



**Figure 4. Sexual identity.**



NOTE: Findings in which the N is between 1 and 5 are not reported, these are represented by an asterisk (\*) and 0% in this chart. SAB is defined as “Sex at Birth”

SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY25

### **Data processing and analysis**

Analysis of the survey was completed utilizing the same methodology as the previous year’s survey, allowing for a comparison of the findings. This report highlights any areas where the finding from this year’s survey 10 percentage points was above or below last year’s finding. For some of the questions, a comparative analysis could not be completed due to the question being revised with new or updated response options. These instances are noted in the applicable sections of this report.

## D. Limitations of the Survey

This survey was disseminated to a NYC population of youth ages 13 and older who had been in foster care for at least 90 days as of November 8, 2024. The survey was confidential; and no individual youth are identified in this report or in any survey data analysis shared with provider agencies. However, the survey was not anonymous; ACS followed up with the youth, or foster care provider, if necessary, if there were concerns about a youth’s health, safety, or overall well-being. As with all surveys, the findings are subject to nonresponse bias that stems from youth choosing not to complete the survey. Findings are also subject to response bias from those who may over report “socially desirable” answers and underreport or over report negative feedback, which may lead to a deviation of answers from their true value.

## IV. Survey Findings

### A. Help with Education

#### A.1 What is the educational background of youth in foster care?

The majority of respondents (86%) were in school (Table 4). Of those enrolled, 15% were in middle school, 70% were in high school, 5% were in a high school equivalency program, and 10% were in college (Figure 5).

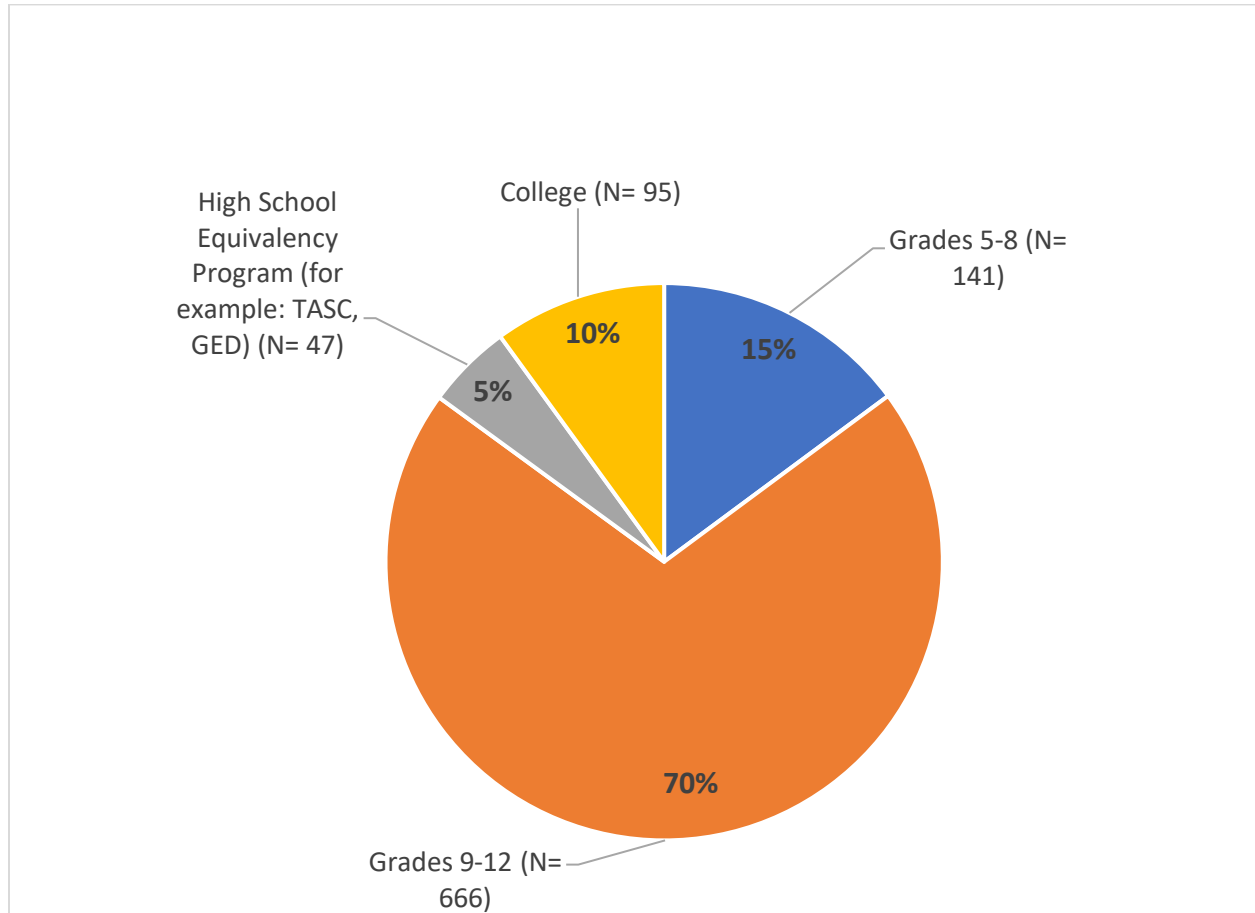
**Table 4. Current school enrollment status of youth in foster care.**

	Yes, I am currently in school.	No, I am not currently in school.
Age	% of Total	% of Total
13 to 15 years (N = 391)	98%	2%
16 to 17 years (N = 338)	97%	3%
18 to 20 years (N = 376)	64%	36%

Note: This question was mandatory, so all 1,105-youth answered it.

SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY25

**Figure 5. Level of education for youth currently enrolled in school (N=949).**

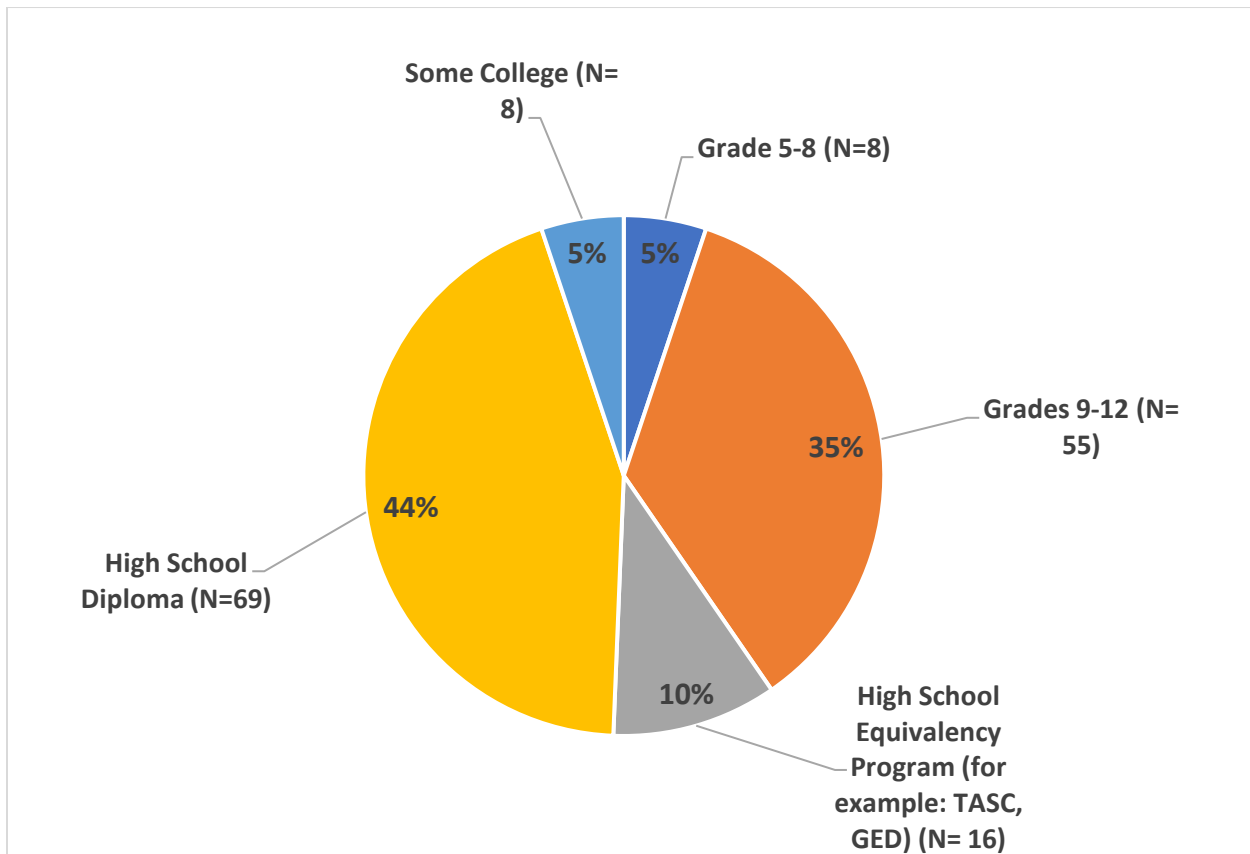


NOTE: This question was mandatory, so all 949 youth currently enrolled in school answered it.

SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY25

Of the 156 youth not currently enrolled in school, 44% reported receiving a high school diploma, 35% stated that their highest level of education completed was a high school grade level, 10% had completed a high school equivalency program, 5% had attended some college, and 5% were in grades 5-8 (Figure 6).

**Figure 6. Highest level of education completed by youth not currently enrolled in school or a training program (N=156).**



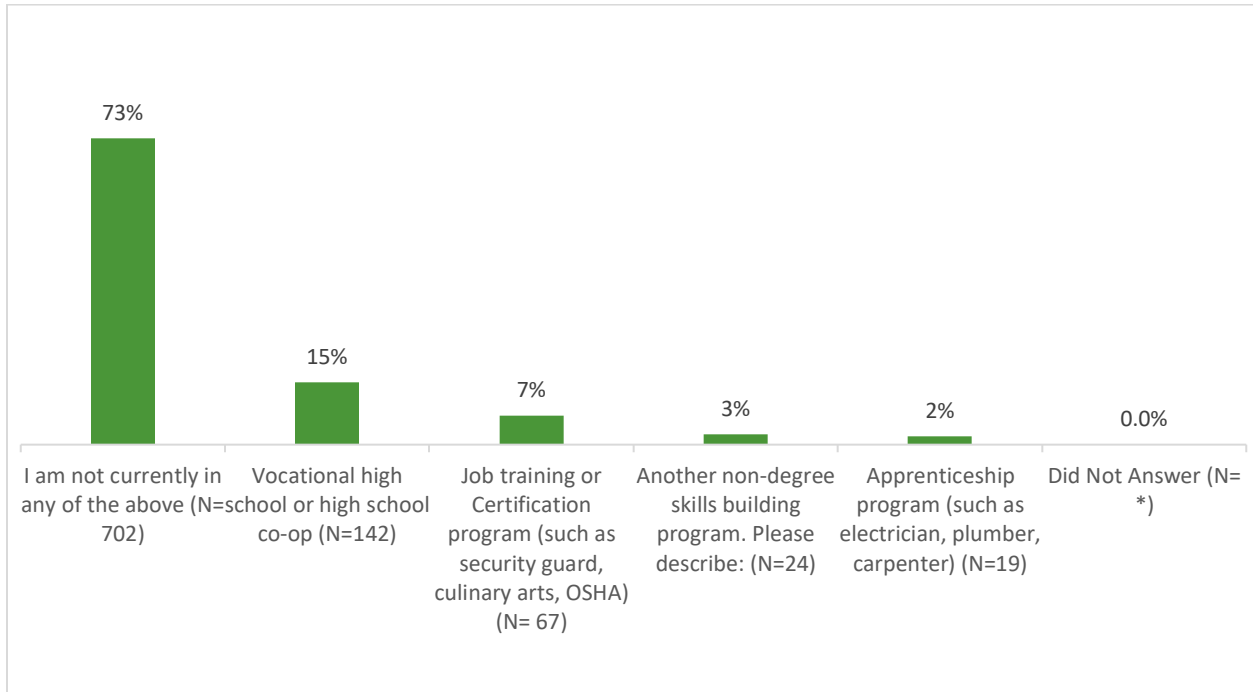
NOTE: Findings in which the N is between 1 and 5 are not reported, these are represented by an asterisk (\*) and 0% in this chart.

This question was mandatory, so all 156 youth not currently enrolled in school answered it.

SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY25

Youth enrolled in high school, a high school equivalency program, in college, and not enrolled in school were also asked if they were enrolled in a vocational high school or high school coop, job training or certification program, another non-degree skills building program, or apprenticeship program (Figure 7). Many respondents (73%) indicated they were not in any of these programs or trainings.

**Figure 7. Whether youth are enrolled in a vocational school or job training program.**

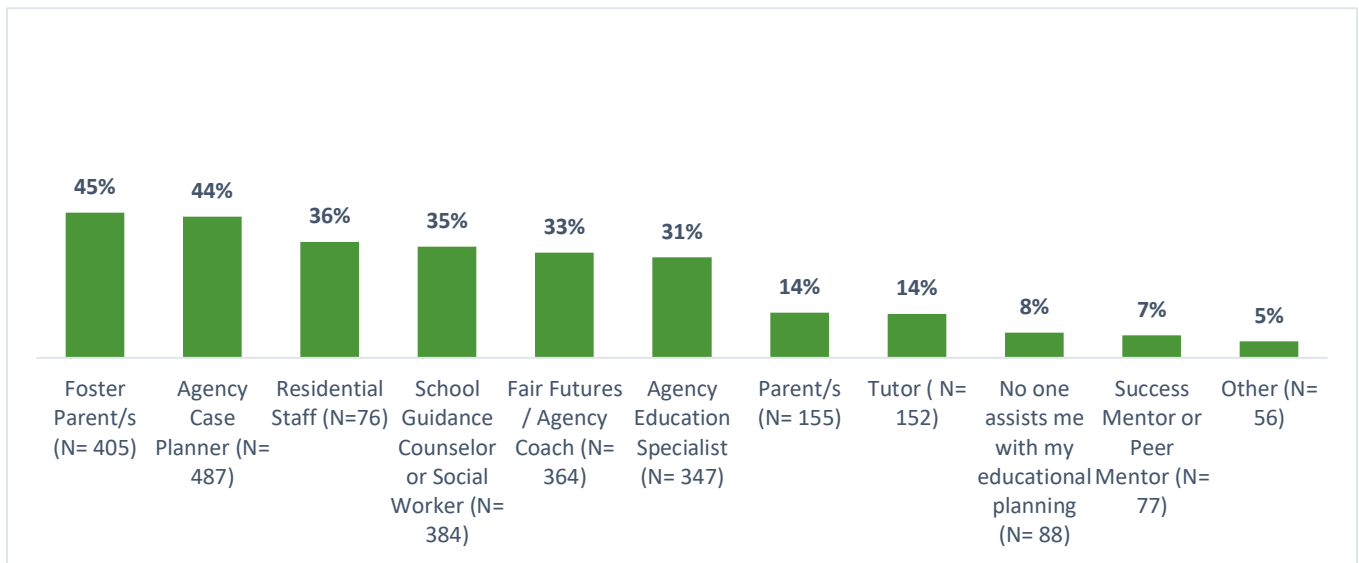


SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY25

## A.2 What support do youth need to continue with their education?

Youth were asked who assists them with their educational planning. Forty five percent of the respondents indicated their foster parent helped them with their educational planning (Figure 8), followed by their case planner (44%), the school guidance counselor or social worker (35%), Fair Futures/Agency Coach (33%), and agency education specialist (31%). A small percent of youth indicated their parent(s) (14%), a success mentor or peer mentor (7%), and others (5%) assisted them with their educational planning. Eight percent of youth report that no one assisted them.

**Figure 8. Who assists youth with educational planning?**



SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY25

The survey asked youth in grades 9 and above whether they plan to continue with their education and the type of support needed. Response options were tailored to the youth based on their answers to previous questions. Due to this, the N's differ for plans to continue with education. For example, those indicating they were currently in grades 9 – 12 were shown the option, “I plan on finishing high school,” while those stating that they were in a vocational school or college had the option to select, “I plan on finishing my degree.”

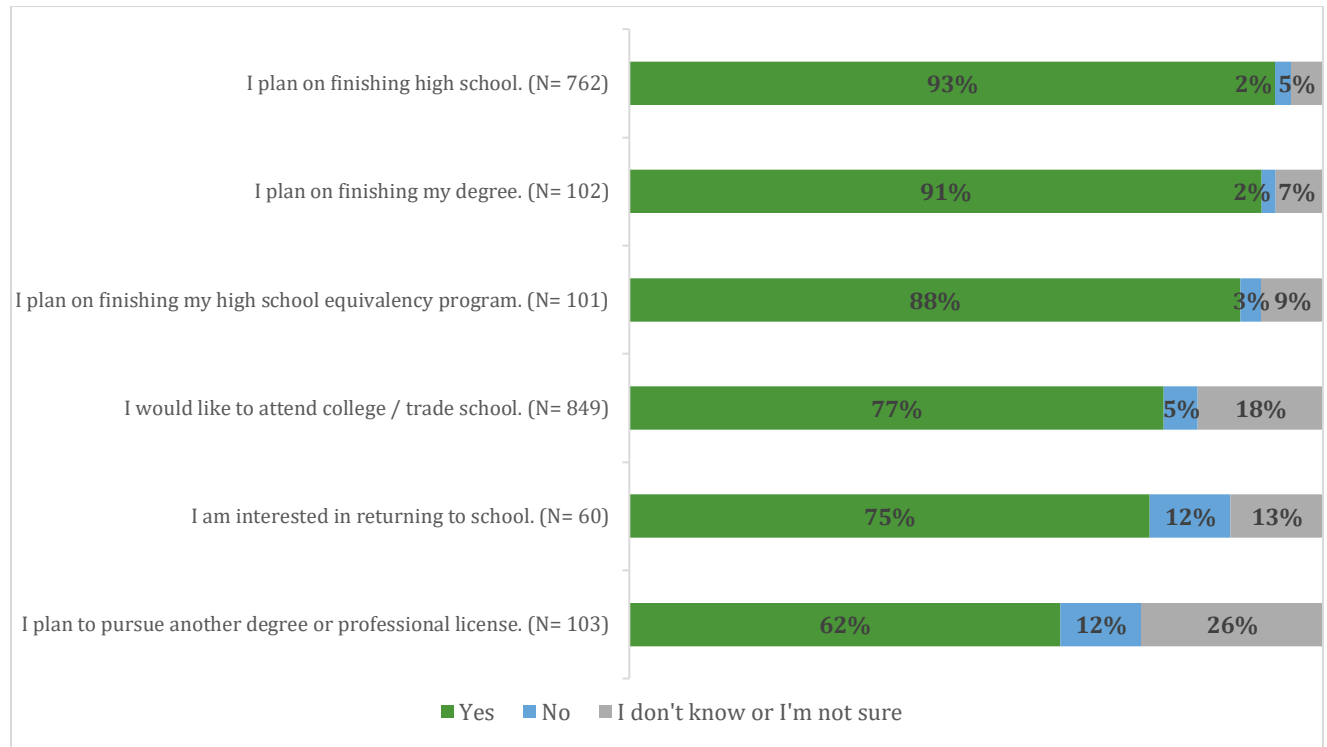
Youth shared the following regarding their desires to continue their education:

- 91% of youth who have started college or a vocational school plan to finish their degree
- 93% of youth in high school or who left high school without graduating plan to finish high school
- 88% of youth current in high school equivalency (HSE) program or who left high school without graduating plan to finish a high school equivalency program
- 77% of youth in high school or HSE program, or who whose highest level of education completed is at least 9<sup>th</sup> grade, would like to attend college/trade school.
- 75% said they were interested in returning to school.
- 62% of youth in college or vocational school plan to pursue another degree or professional license

Figure 9 shows detailed findings for each of these answer choices.

ACS' Office of Youth Success Services provides information and technical assistance to foster care agencies to ensure that they are providing support and resources to help all youth advance their education. See Section V for additional details.

**Figure 9. Whether youth in grades 9 and above plan to continue with education.**



SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY25

NOTE: Findings in which the N is between 1 and 5 are not reported, these are represented by 0% in this chart.

### A.3 What education services did the youth need and receive?

The survey asked youth in grades 9 and above whether they needed and received each of thirteen types of education services in the past year. Youth in grades 5 through 8 were asked whether they needed and received each of six types of education services.

#### Education services needed and received: Grades 9 and above

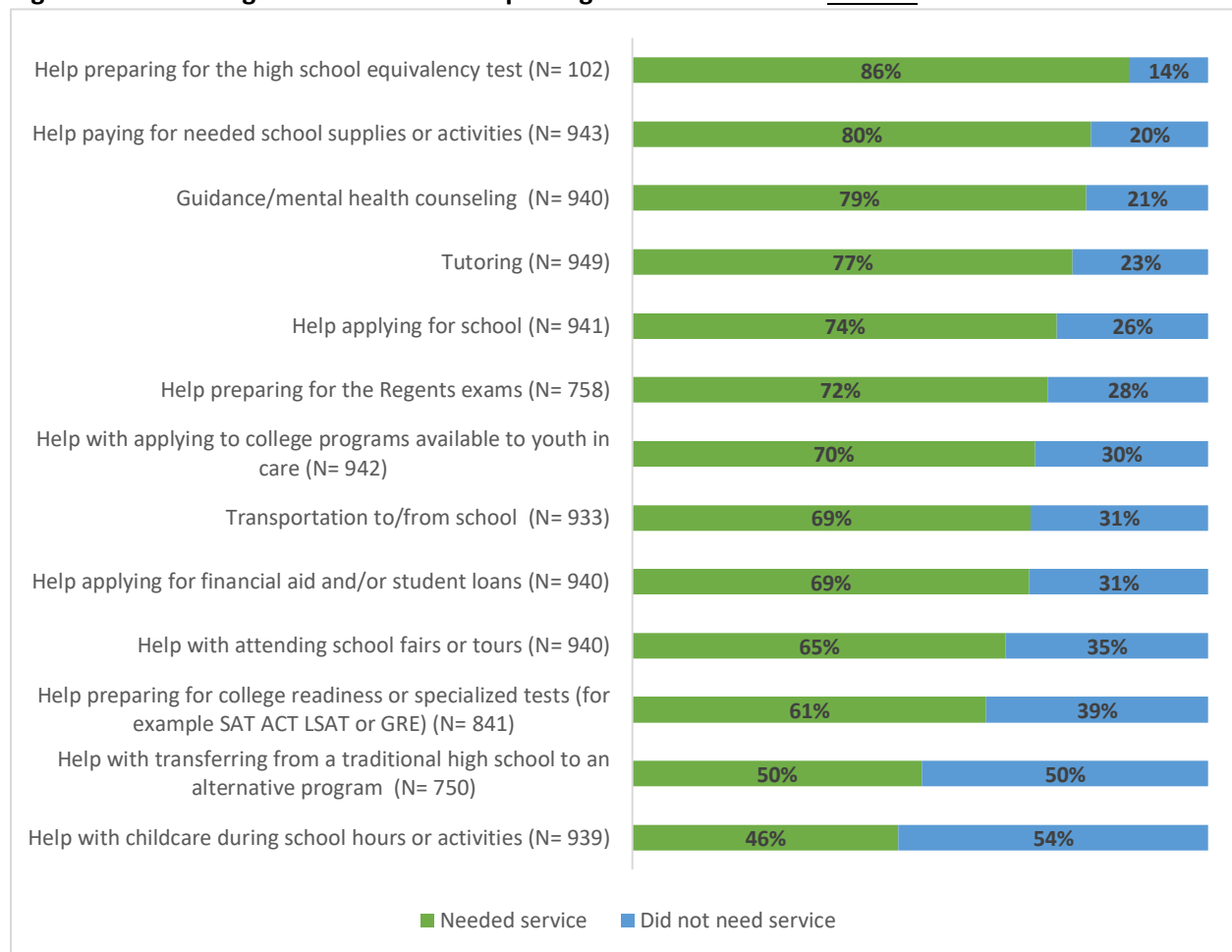
To explore whether current educational needs were met, youth in grades 9 and above were asked whether they needed and received each of the following services: help preparing for the high school equivalency test, guidance/mental health counseling, help paying for needed school supplies or activities, tutoring, help applying for school, help with applying to college programs available to youth in care, help preparing for Regents exams, transportation to/from school, help applying for financial aid and/or student loans, help preparing for college readiness tests, help attending school fairs or tours,

help with transferring from a traditional high school to an alternative program, and help with children during school hours or activities.

**Need for services:** Among youth in grades 9 and above, the most frequently reported needs were help paying for needed school supplies or activities (80%), guidance/mental health counseling (79%), tutoring (77%), help applying for schools (74%), help preparing for the Regents exam (72%), and help applying to college programs available to youth in care (70%) (Figure 10). Youth also reported needing help applying for financial aid and/or student loans (69%), transportation to/from school (69%), and help with attending school fairs or tours (65%) and help with the Regents exam (67%). Of the youth enrolled in a GED/TASC program or those who are not currently in school, and their last grade completed was in high school, 86% needed help with preparing for the high school equivalency test.

Figure 10 shows detailed findings for each of these answer choices.

**Figure 10. Youth in grades 9 and above reporting education services needed.**



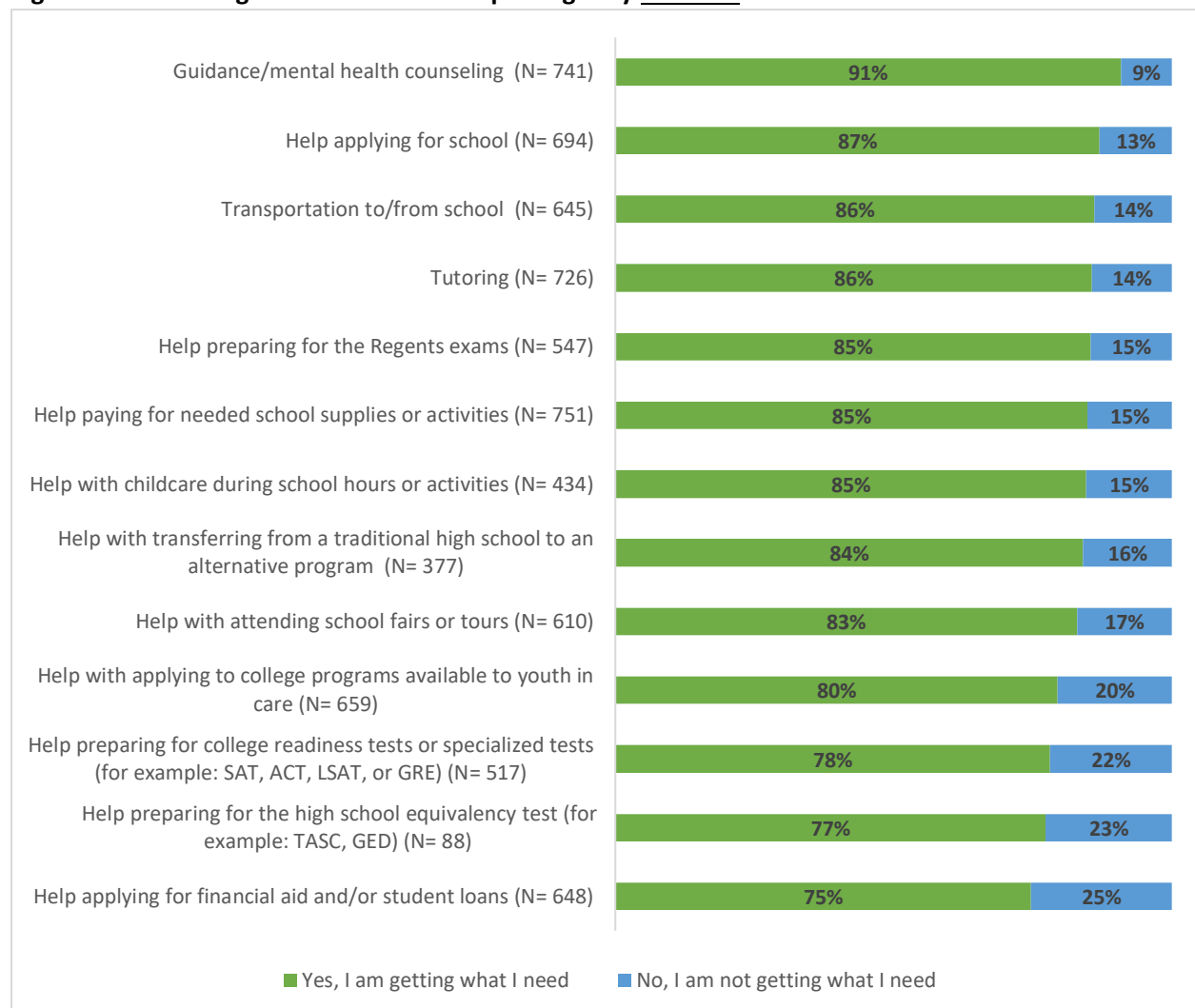
SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY25



**Extent to which needs were met:** The information presented in Figure 11 reflects the extent to which a youth's need for specific education services. The following results indicate the extent to which the needs of youth in grades 9 and above were met for each of the thirteen services examined from the survey.

- **Guidance /mental health counseling:** 91% of the 741 youth who needed this education service reported that they received it, while 9% did not.
- **Help applying for school:** 87% of the 694 youth who reported needing this support received it (i.e., the need was met), while 13% did not (i.e., the need was unmet).
- **Transportation to/from school:** 86% of the 645 youth who reported needing transportation received it, while 14% did not.
- **Tutoring:** 86% of the 726 students who needing tutoring received it, while 14% did not.
- **Help preparing for the Regents exams:** 85% of the 547 youth who needed help preparing for Regents exams received it, while 15% did not.
- **Help paying for needed school supplies and activities:** 85% of the 751 youth who needed help paying for needed school supplies and activities received it, while 15% did not.
- **Help with childcare during school hours or activities:** 85% of the 434 youth who needed assistance with childcare received it, while 15% did not.
- **Help with transferring from a traditional high school to another:** 84% of the 377 youth who needed help transferring schools received it, while 16% did not.
- **Help with attending school fairs or tours:** 83% of the 610 youth who needed assistance with attending school fairs or tours received it, while 17% did not.
- **Help with applying to college programs available to youth in care:** 80% of the 659 youth who needed help with applying to college programs received it, while 20% did not.
- **Preparing for college readiness/specialized tests:** 78% of the 517 youth who reported needing help with preparing for tests received it, while 22% did not.
- **Preparing for the high school equivalency test:** 77% of the youth in a GED/TASC program who needed help preparing for the high school equivalency test received it, while 23% did not.
- **Help applying for financial aid/student loans:** 75% of the 648 youth who needed this educational service reported receiving it, while 25% did not.

**Figure 11. Youth in grades 9 and above reporting they received the education services needed.**



NOTE: Ns for this chart are slightly lower than the total number of youth asked. This is because a small number of youth left the question blank. “Received service needed” was calculated as youth who said “Yes, I am getting what I need” divided by the sum of youth who said either “Yes, I am getting what I need” or “No, I am not getting what I need,” Blanks were not included in this calculation.

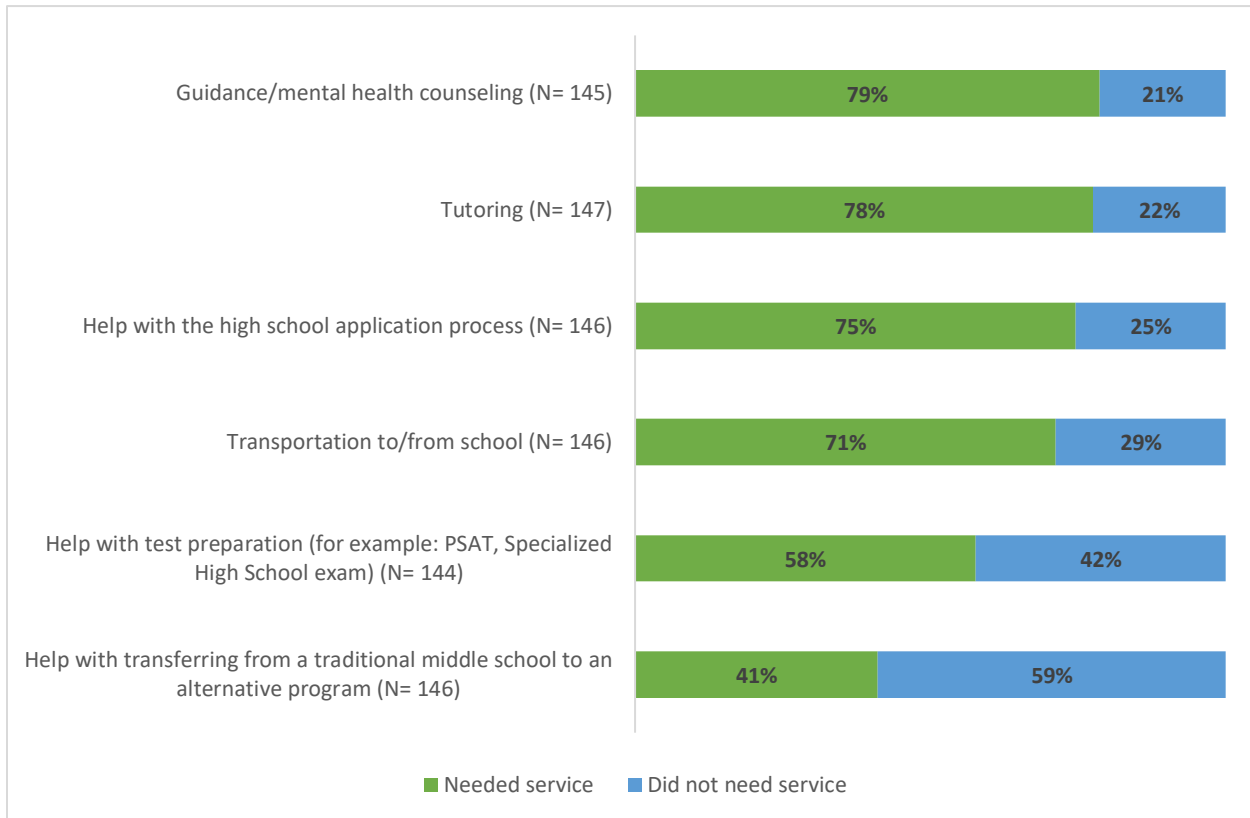
SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY25

### Educational services needed and received: Grades 5 through 8

Youth in grades 5 through 8 reported whether they needed and received each of six services over the past year: guidance/mental health counseling, tutoring, help with the high school application process, transportation to/from school, test preparation (PSAT, specialized high school exam), and help with transferring from a traditional middle school to an alternative program.

**Need for services:** Seventy-nine percent of middle school youth responded that they need guidance/mental health counseling (Figure 12). Seventy-eight percent of youth reported needing tutoring services. Seventy-five percent of youth reported needing help with the high school application process. Seventy-one percent reported needing help with transportation to/from school. Fifty-eight percent reported needing help with test preparation and 41% reported needing help with transferring from a traditional middle school to an alternative program.

**Figure 12. Youth in grades 5 through 8 reporting education service needed.**



Note: “Needed Service” was calculated as the sum of youth who said “Yes, I am getting what I need” or “no, I am not getting what I need” over youth who said “Yes, I am getting what I need,” “No, I am not getting what I need,” and “I don’t need this.” The number of youth who did not answer a particular item ranged from 1 to 16.

Note: The N for services needed also includes youth not in school who reported their highest grade completed as grade 5-8.

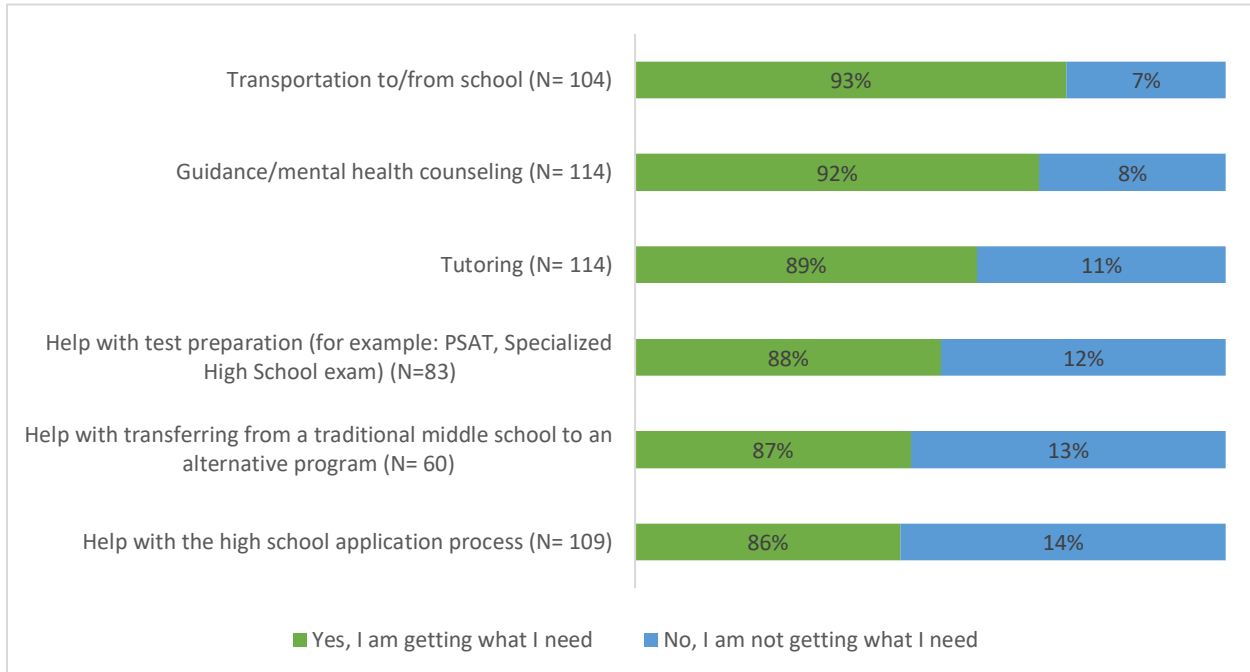
SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY25

**Extent to which needs were met.** Figure 13 reflects the extent to which youth’s needs for specific education services were met or unmet. Overall, most education service needs were met as reported by youth in grades 5 through 8.

- **Transportation:** 93% of the 104 youth who reported needing transportation to and from school received it, while 7% did not.

- **Guidance/ Mental Health Counseling:** 92% of the 114 of the youth who reported needing guidance/mental health counseling received it, while 8% did not.
- **Tutoring:** 89% of the 114 youth who needed tutoring services received it, while 11% did not.
- **Test preparation:** 88% of the 83 students who needed test preparation services received it, while 12% did not.
- **Help with transferring from a traditional middle school to an alternative program:** 87% of the 60 youth who responded received the services, while 13% did not.
- **Help with the high school application process:** 86% of the 109 youth who needed help with the high school application process received it, while 14% did not.

**Figure 13. Youth in grades 5 through 8 reporting they received the education service they needed.**



Note: “Received service” was calculated as youth who say “Yes, I am getting what I need” divided by the sum of youth who said either “Yes, I am getting what I need” or “No, I am not getting what I need.”

NOTE: Findings in which the N is between 1 and 5 are not reported, these are represented by 0% in this chart.

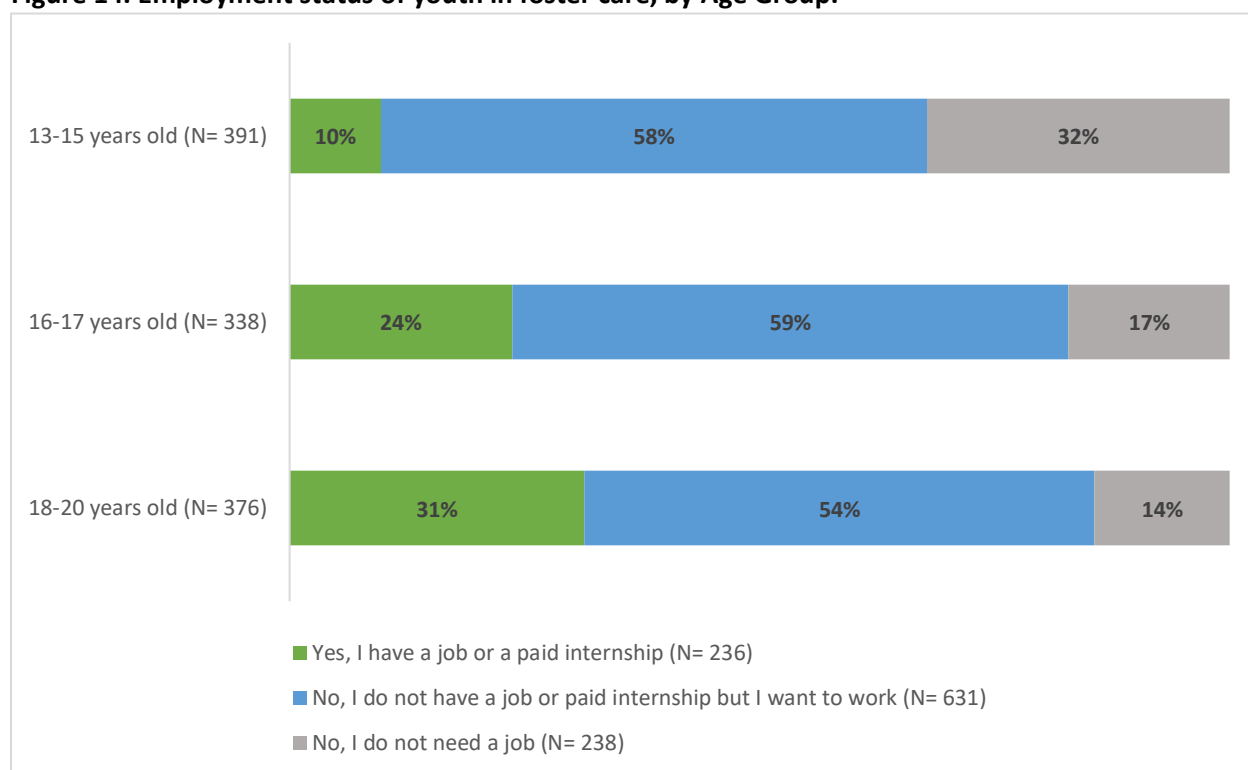
SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY25

## B. Help with Employment

### B.1 What is the employment status of youth in foster care?

Figure 14 shows the distribution of youth in foster care by age group who are actively employed or would like to be employed. The majority of youth across all age groups did not have a job or paid internship but would like to work. Thirty one percent of youth ages 18-20 years, 24% of youth ages 16-17 years, and 10% of youth ages 13-15 years reported having a job or paid internship. Fourteen percent of youth ages 18-20 years, 17% of youth ages 16-17 years, and 32% of youth ages 13-15 years reported that they do not need a job.

**Figure 14. Employment status of youth in foster care, by Age Group.**



SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY25

### B.2 What help did youth need and receive to find a job?

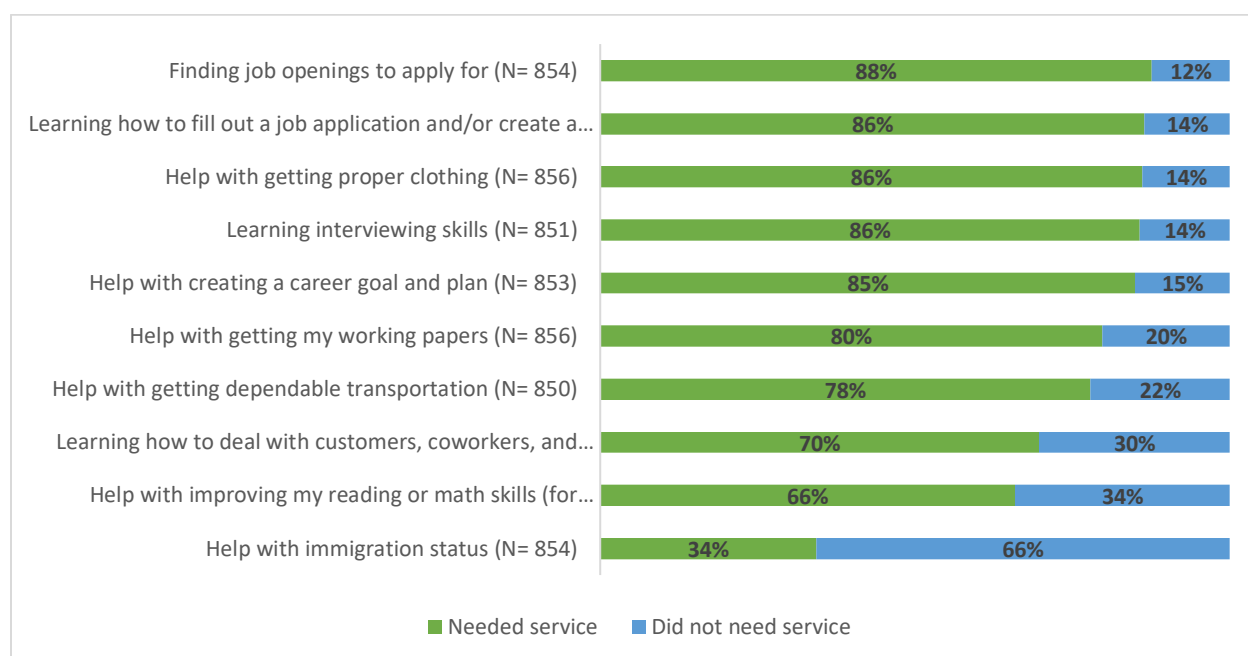
**Help needed in finding a job.** The top five employment-related needs were: help with finding job openings to apply for (88%), help with getting proper clothing (86%), creating a career goal and plan (85%), learning how to fill out a job application and/or create a resume (86%), and learning interviewing skills (86%). Seventy-eight percent of youth reported that they need help with transportation. Eighty

percent of youth also reported needing help with getting working papers. Seventy percent of youth reported needing help with learning how to deal with customers, coworkers, and bosses. Sixty-six percent reported needing help with improving their reading and math skills. Thirty-four percent of youth reported needing help with their immigration status.

See Figure 15 for details.

ACS's Office of Immigrant Services and Language Affairs (ISLA) is dedicated to assisting all youth in foster care who have immigration needs. Please see Section V for more information.

**Figure 15. Youth reporting the help they needed to find a job.**

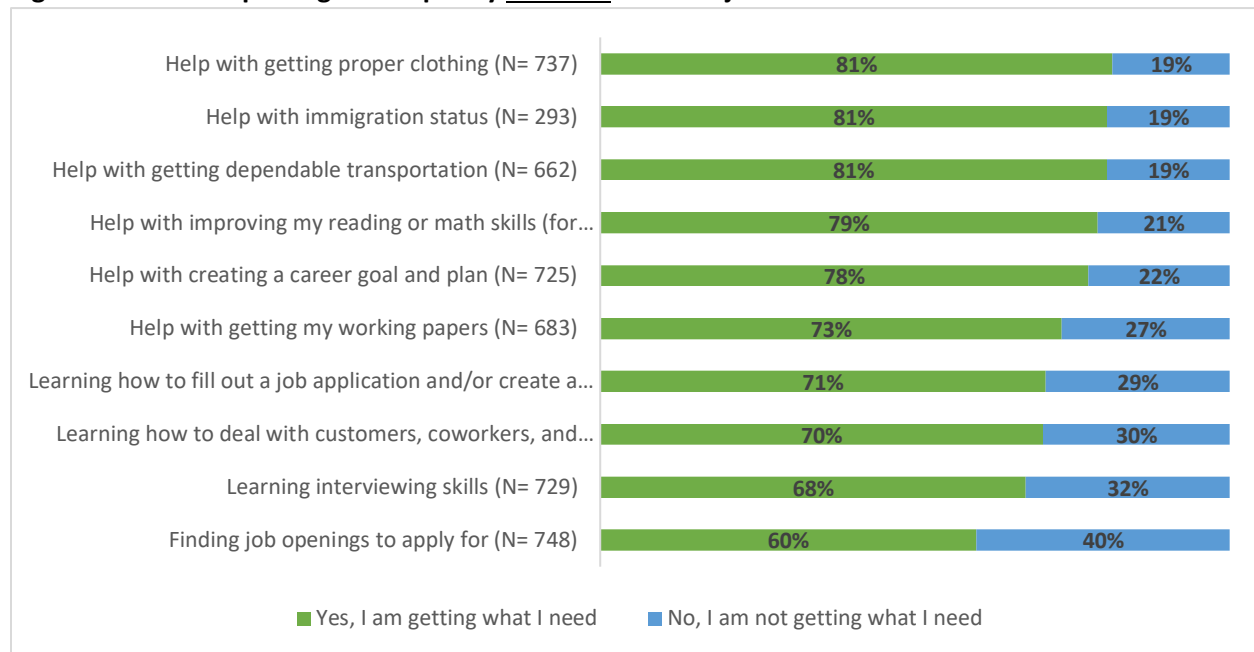


NOTE: Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY25

**Help received in finding a job.** For every type of job support, most of the youth who needed specific job support received it (Figure 16). By percentage, the best-met needs were for help with getting proper clothing, help with transportation and help with their immigration status, each at eighty-one percent. These were followed by help to improve reading or math skills (79%). Seventy eight percent received help with creating a career goal and plan. Seventy-three percent received help with getting working papers. Seventy-one percent of youth reported they received help with learning how to fill out a job application/create a resume. Seventy percent of youth received help with learning how to deal with customers, coworkers, and bosses. Sixty percent of youth received help with finding job openings to apply for.

**Figure 16. Youth reporting the help they received to find a job.**



NOTE: Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

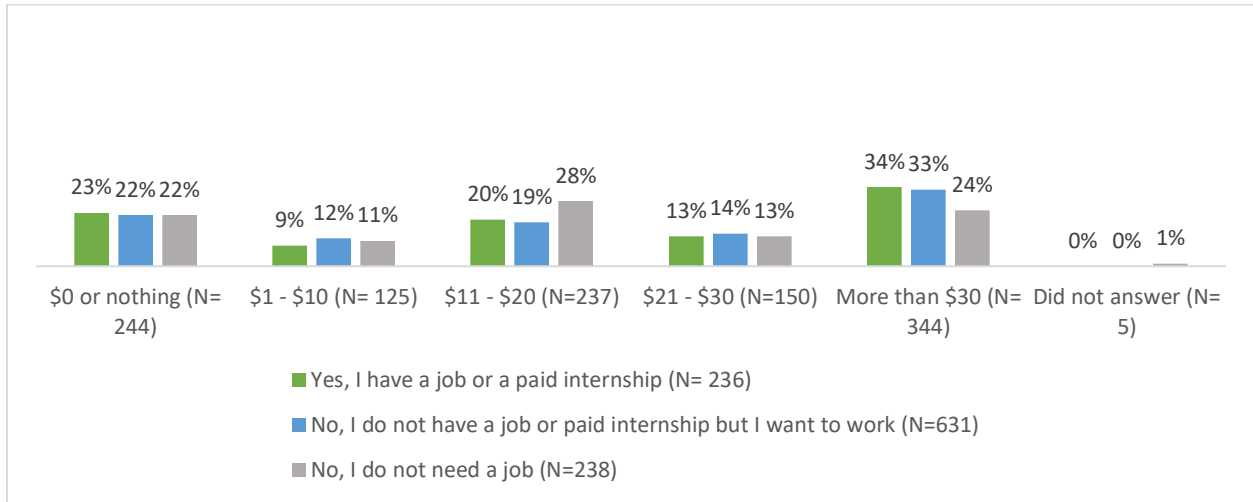
SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY25

### **B.3 How much weekly allowance do youth receive? Do youth have bank accounts?**

The survey asked youth about the allowance they receive weekly. Approximately 78% of youth reported receiving an allowance. Figure 17 shows the amount of allowance for all youth by youth with a job or paid internship, those without a job or paid internship, and those who do not need a job.

Over one-third of youth with a paid job or paid internship (34%) receive a weekly allowance of more than \$30; 13% receive \$21-\$30; 20% receive \$11-\$20; 9% receive \$1-\$10; and 23% do not receive an allowance. Of those without a paid job or paid internship, 33% reported they receive an allowance of more than \$30; 14% receive \$21-\$30; 19% receive \$11-\$20; 12% receive \$1-\$10; and 22% do not receive an allowance (Figure 17).

**Figure 17. Weekly allowance by employment status of youth in foster care.**

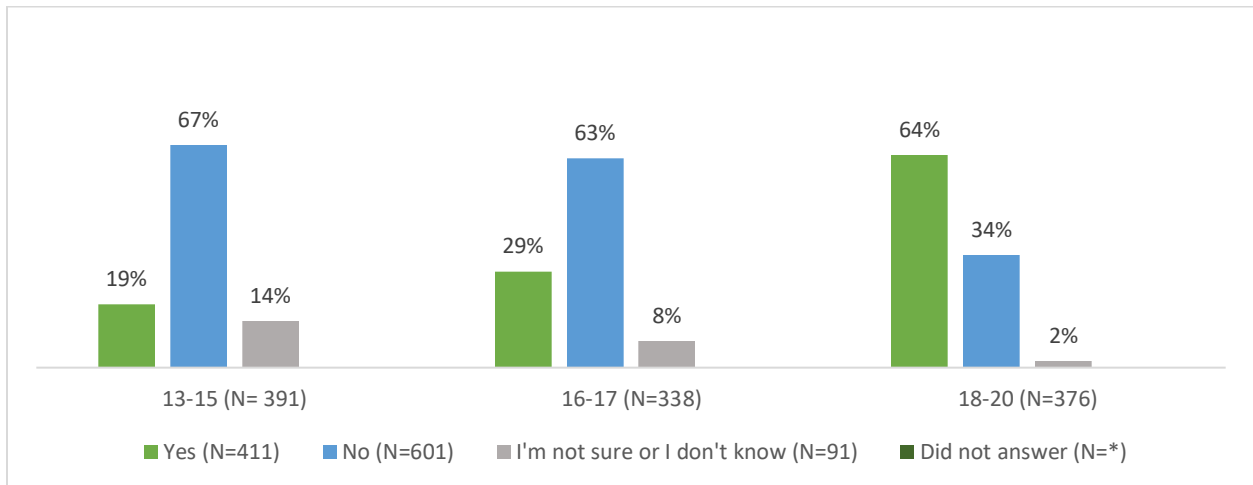


NOTE: Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY25

The survey asked youth to indicate if they have a bank account. Reflected in Figure 18 are youth responses broken down by age. Almost two-thirds of youth ages 18 and older (64%) stated that they have a bank account, while 29% of youth between the ages of 16-17 and 19% of youth between the ages of 13-15 stated that they have a bank account.

**Figure 18. Youth reporting that they have a bank account.**



NOTE: A total of 1,105 youth were asked this question; Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY25

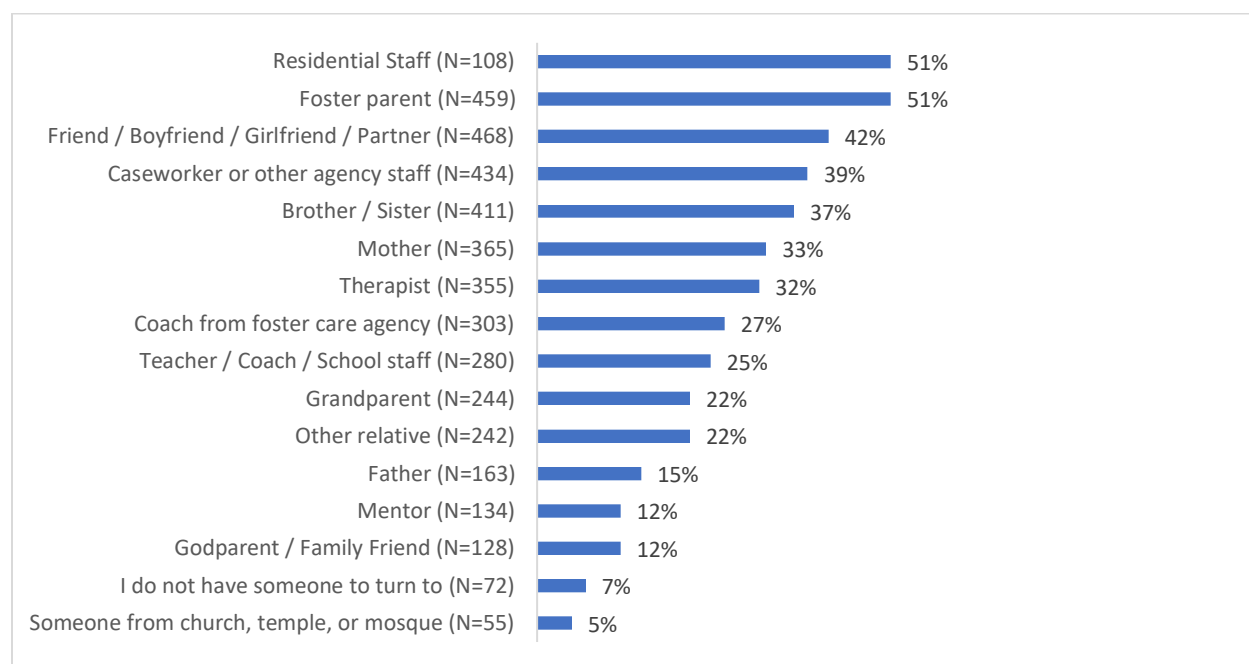


## C. Support from Family and Friends

### C1. To what extent do youth feel supported by foster/kinship parents and residential facility staff?

The survey asked youth to indicate which individuals in their lives they could turn to when they needed help (Figure 19). More than half of the youth (51%) in a family-based setting reported turning to their foster parent. Fifty-one percent of youth in residential care or a group home reported turning to residential staff. Forty-two percent of youth turn to a friend/boyfriend/girlfriend/partner. Thirty-nine percent of youth turn to their caseworker or other agency staff and 37% turn to their brother/sister.

**Figure 19. Youth reporting having people to turn to for help when needed.**



SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY25

Youth in foster or kinship homes were asked if they felt supported by their foster parents. Of the 895-youth responding, over two thirds (73%) said they felt “very supported,” and another 19% felt “somewhat supported.”

Youth in residential care and group homes were asked if they felt supported by program staff, and the majority said yes; 55% felt “very supported” and 30% felt “somewhat supported.” The remaining 15% of youth in residential care did not feel supported by staff.

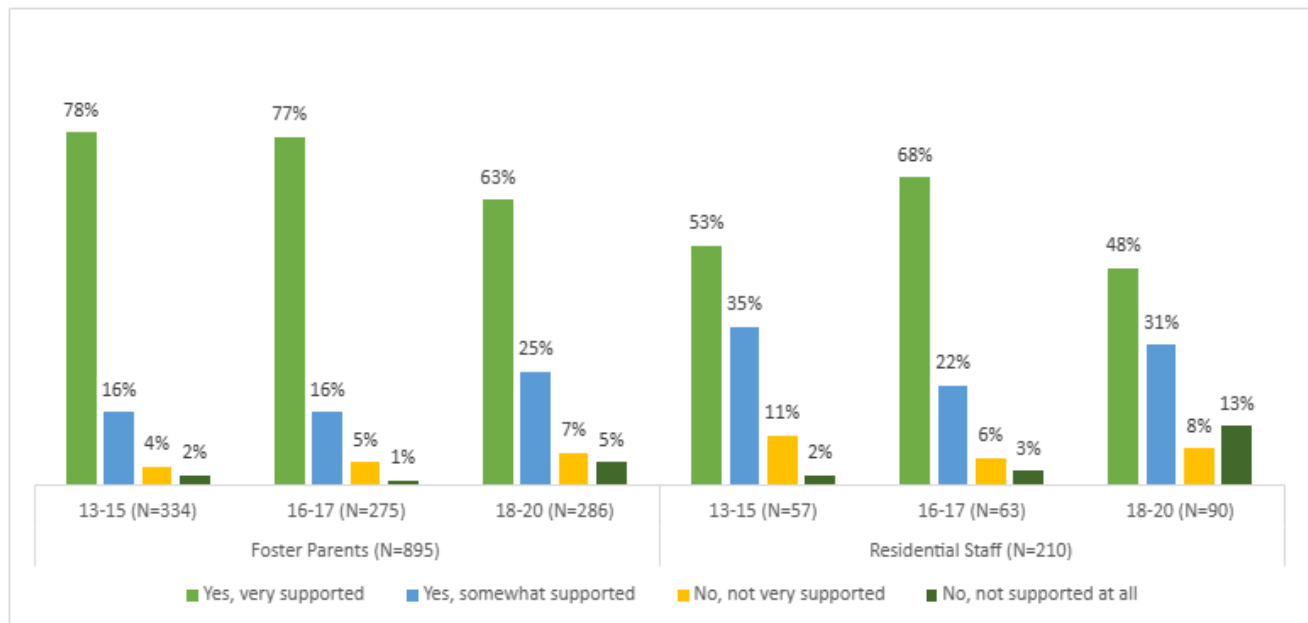
**Table 5. Youth reporting the extent to which they feel supported by foster parents or residential facility staff.**

In general, do you feel supported by your foster parents or residential facility staff? (Total N = 1,105)		
	Foster Parent (N= 895)	Residential Staff (N= 210)
Yes, very supported	73%	55%
Yes, somewhat supported	19%	30%
No, not very supported	5%	8%
No, not supported at all	3%	7%

SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY25

The majority of youth by age group reported feeling very supported (Figure 20). More youth reported feeling very supported by their foster parent as compared to youth in residential care or a group home. Seventy-eight percent of youth ages 13 to 15 reported feeling very supported by their foster parent, 77% of youth ages 16 to 17, and 63% of youth ages 18 to 20. Fifty-three percent of youth ages 13 to 15 in residential care or a group home reported they felt very supported by residential care staff, 68% of youth ages 16 to 17, and 48% of youth ages 18-20.

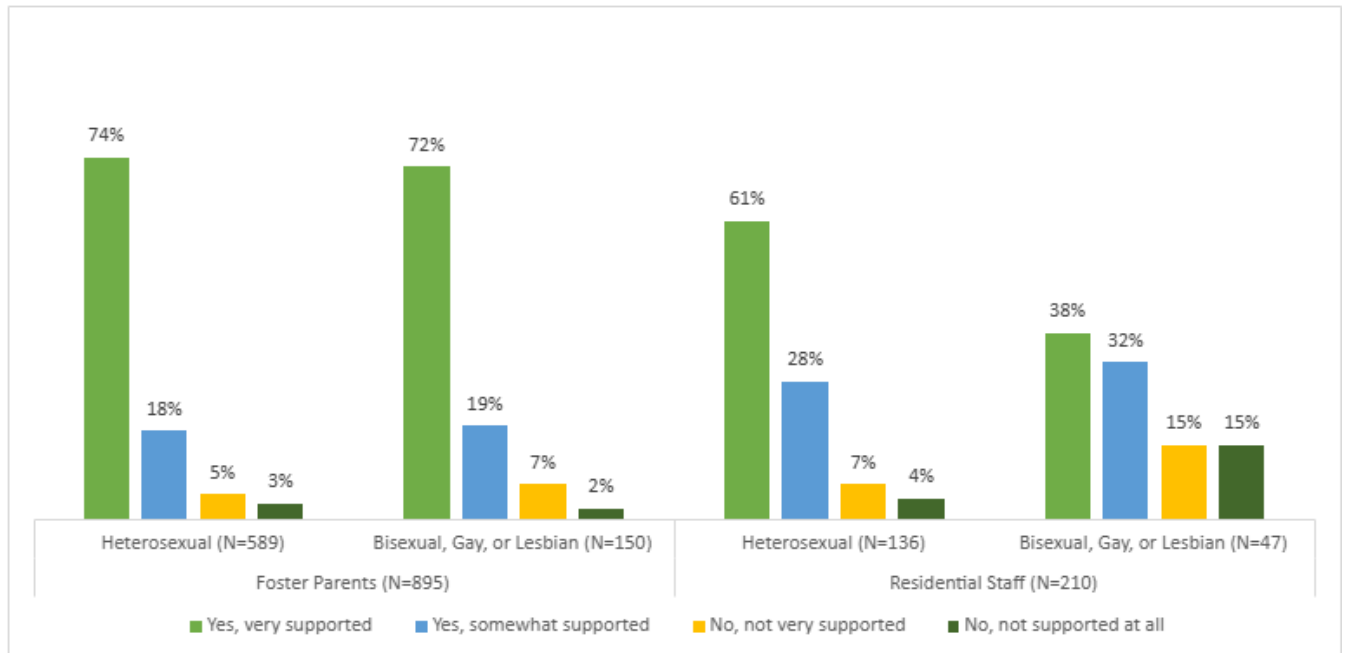
**Figure 20. Youth reporting feeling supported, by Age Group.**



SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY25

A higher percentage of youth who identify as straight or heterosexual, and bisexual, gay or lesbian report feeling very support by their foster parent as compared to youth in residential care or a group home (Figure 21). Seventy-four percent of straight or heterosexual youth and 72% of bisexual, gay, or lesbian youth reported feeling very supported by their foster parent. Sixty-one percent of straight or heterosexual youth and 38% of bisexual, gay, or lesbian youth feel very supported by residential care staff.

**Figure 21. Youth reporting feeling supported, by Sexuality.**

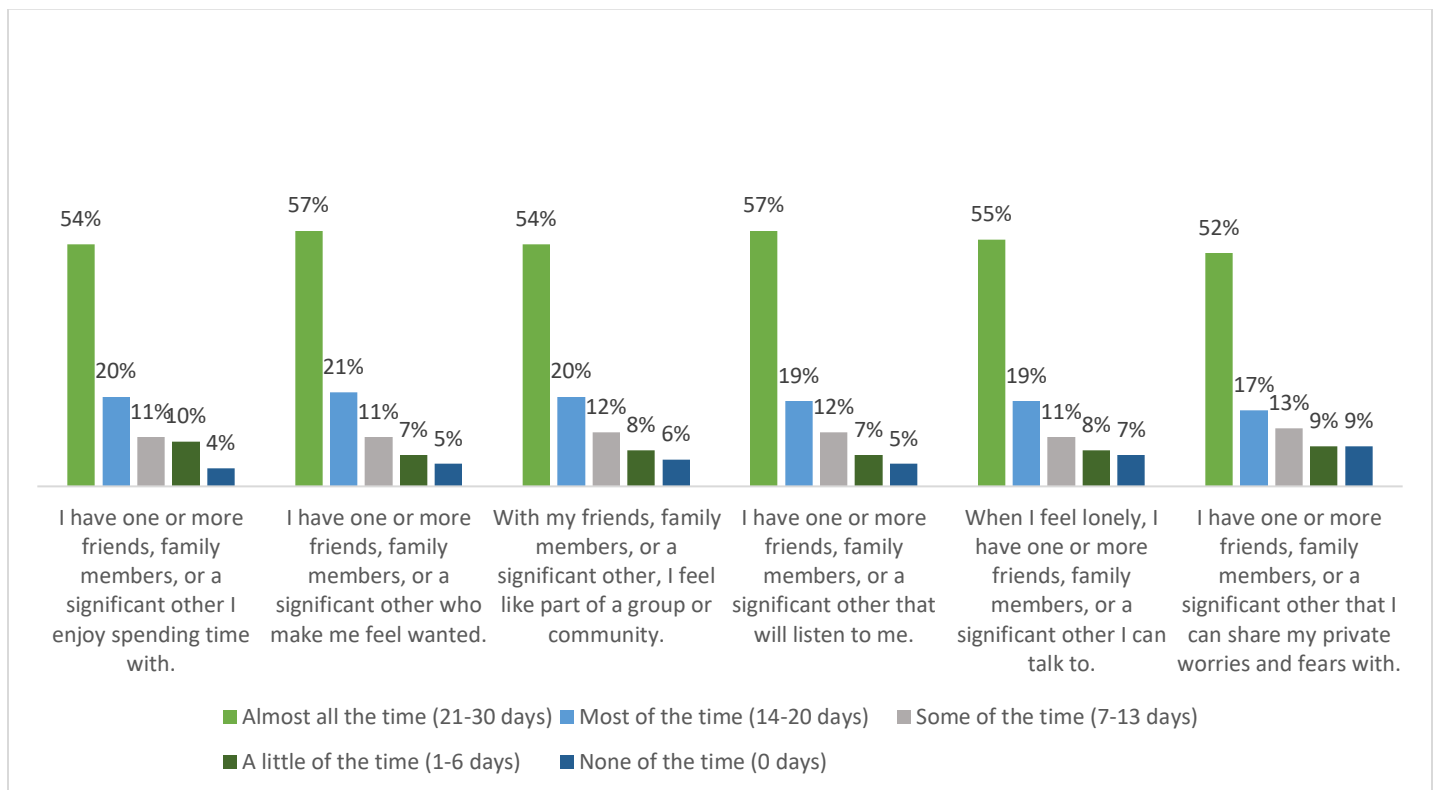


SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY25

## C.2 To what extent do youth receive emotional support?

Youth were asked about their relationships with friends and family. The majority of youth reported they have someone almost all of the time (Figure 22). Fifty-four percent of youth reported they have one or more friends, family members, or significant other they enjoy spending time with almost all the time (21-30 days); 57% reported they have someone who makes them feel wanted; 54% reported that with their friends, family members, or a significant other they feel part of a group or community; 57% reported they have someone that will listen to them; 55% reported that when they feel lonely they have someone they can talk to; and 52% reported they have someone to share their private worries and fears with.

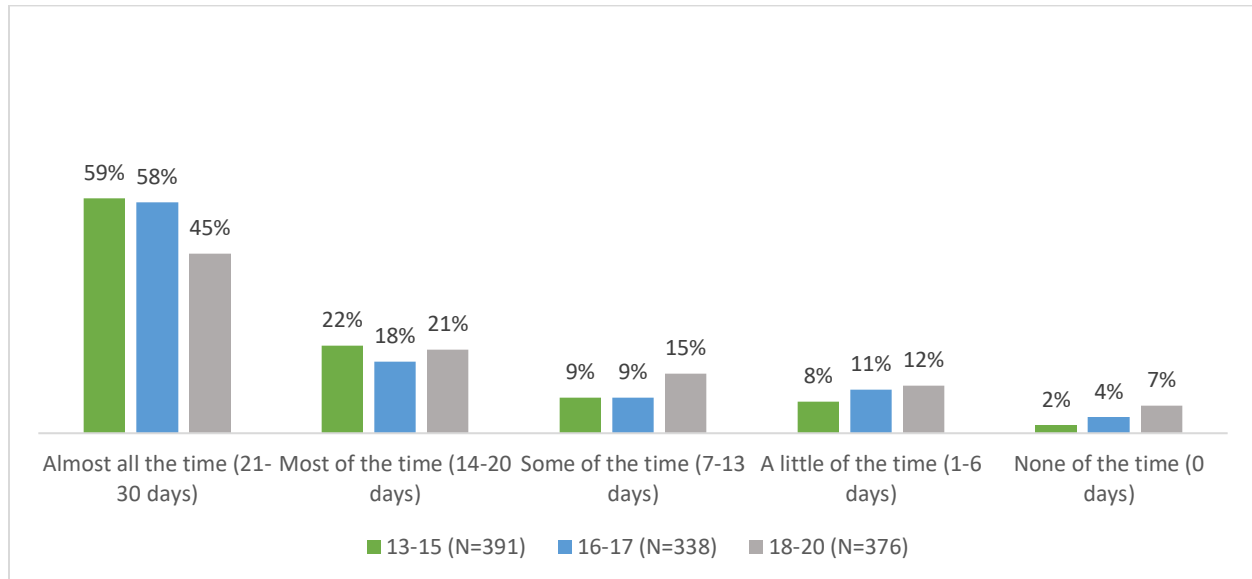
**Figure 22. Youth reporting various situations that are true for them (N = 1,105).**



This question was mandatory, all 1,105 youth answered it.  
SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY25

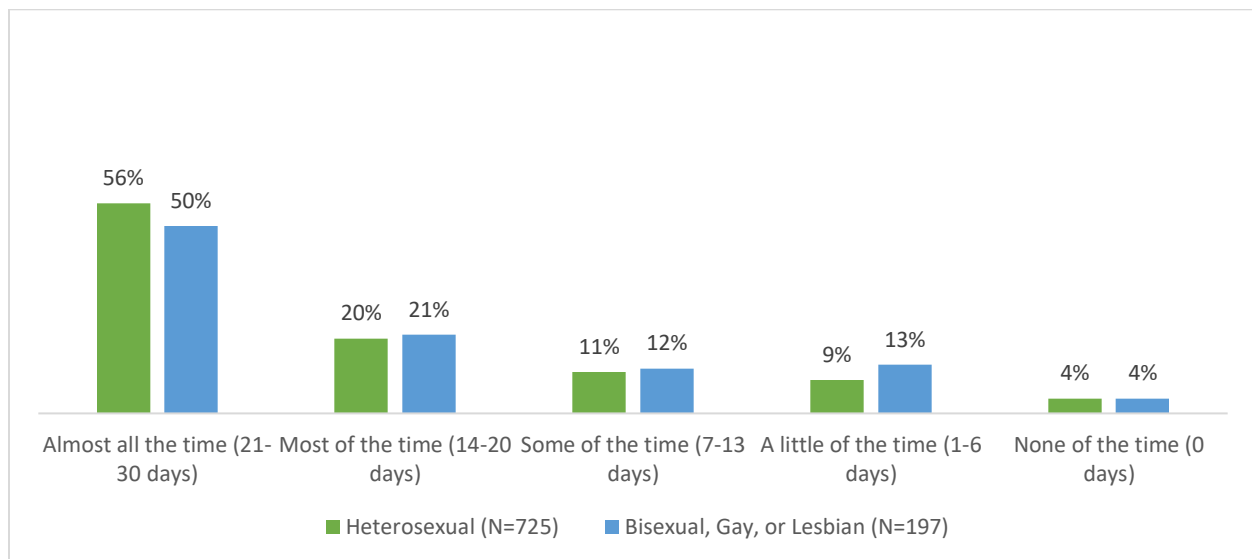
The majority of youth reported they have someone who makes them feel wanted (Figure 23). Fifty-nine percent of youth ages 13 to 15 reported they have someone who makes them feel wanted almost all of the time (21-30 days); 58% of youth ages 16 to 17; and 45% of youth ages 18-20. The majority of youth who identify as straight or heterosexual (56%) and half of youth who identify as bisexual, gay, or lesbian (50%) reported feeling wanted almost all of the time (Figure 24).

**Figure 23. Youth reporting I have one or more friends, family members, or a significant other who make me feel wanted, by Age Group (N = 1,105).**



SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY25

**Figure 24. Youth reporting I have one or more friends, family members, or a significant other who make me feel wanted, by Sexuality (N = 1,105).**



SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY25

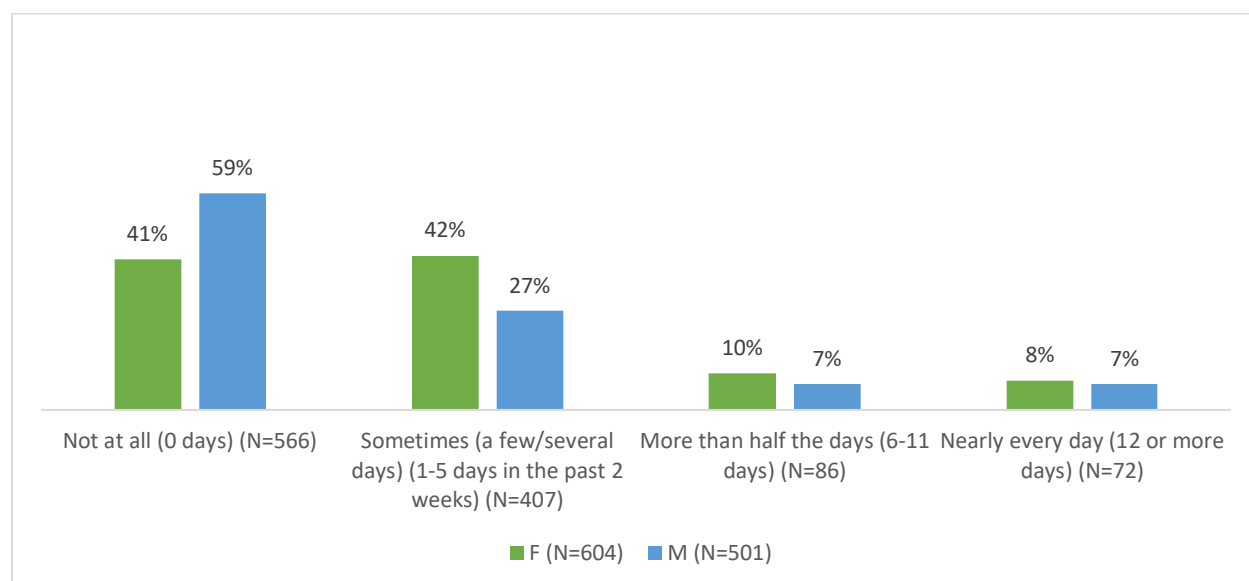
## D. Youth Reporting of Feeling Down, Depressed or Hopeless

The findings from the question “How often have you been bothered by feeling down, depressed, or hopeless over the past two weeks” has been disaggregated by sex, age, and sexuality and is included in Figures 25, 26, and 27. This question was mandatory, so all 1,105-youth answered it.

Male and female youth reported the following frequency of feeling down, depressed, or hopeless within the last two weeks (Figure 19):

- 41% of female youth reported “Not at all” (0 days).
- 59% of male youth reported “Not at all” (0 days).
- 42% of females reported “Sometimes” (1-5 days).
- 27% of males reported “sometimes” (1-5 days).
- 10% of females report “More than half of the days” (6-9 days).
- 7% of males report “More than half of the days” (6-9 days).
- 8% of females reported “nearly every day” (12 or more days).
- 7% of males reported “Nearly every day” (12 or more days).

**Figure 25. Youth reporting feeling down, depressed, or hopeless over the last 2 weeks, by Sex.**



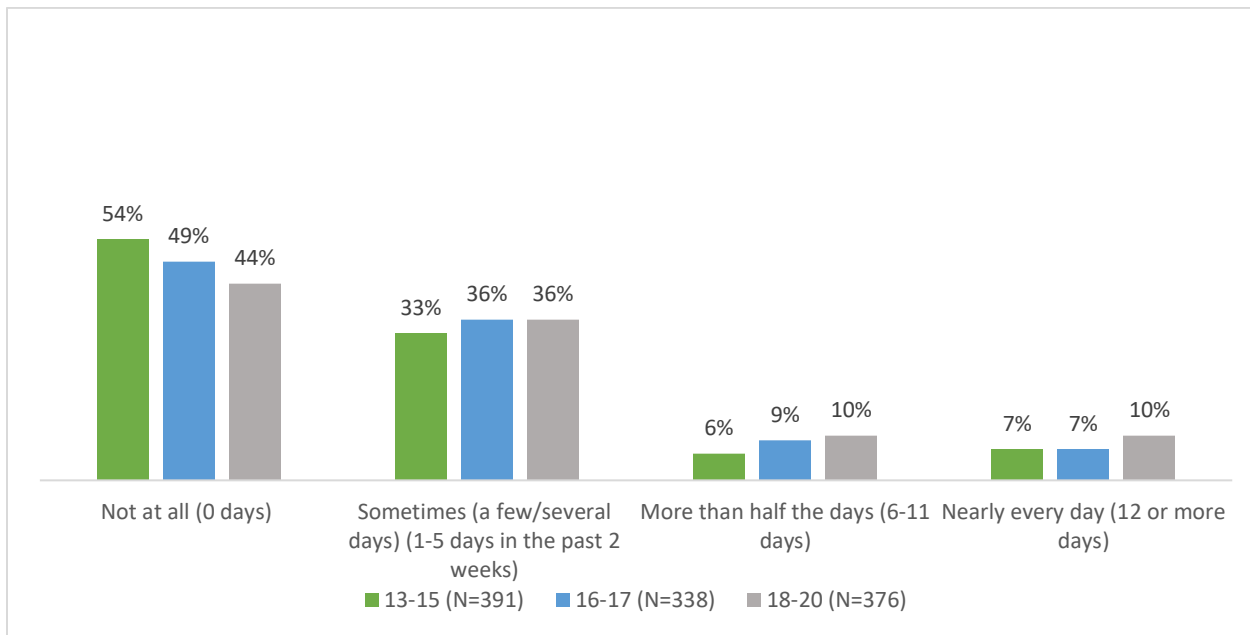
SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY25

The findings by age group indicated the following frequency of feeling down, depressed, or hopeless within the last two weeks (Figure 26):

- 54% of youth ages 13-15, 49% of youth ages 16-17, and 44% of youth ages 18-20 reported “Not at all” (0 days).

- 33% of youth ages 13-15, 36% of youth ages 16-17, and 36% of youth ages 18-20 reported “Sometimes” (1-5 days).
- 6% of youth ages 13-15, 9% of youth ages 16-17, and 10% of youth ages 18-20 reported “More than half of the days” (6-9 days).
- 7% of youth ages 13-15, 7% of youth ages 16-17, and 10% of youth ages 18-20 reported “Nearly every day” (12 or more days).

**Figure 26. Youth reporting feeling down, depressed, or hopeless over the last 2 weeks, by Age Group.**



SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY25

All youth who responded feeling down nearly every day were contacted by ACS for a follow up. For youth who checked “sometimes” or “more than half the days”, an automatic follow up question was prompted asking if youth would like someone from ACS to reach out.

There were 95 distinct youth who were contacted by ACS senior staff for depression-related follow-up. Results of the follow up are such:

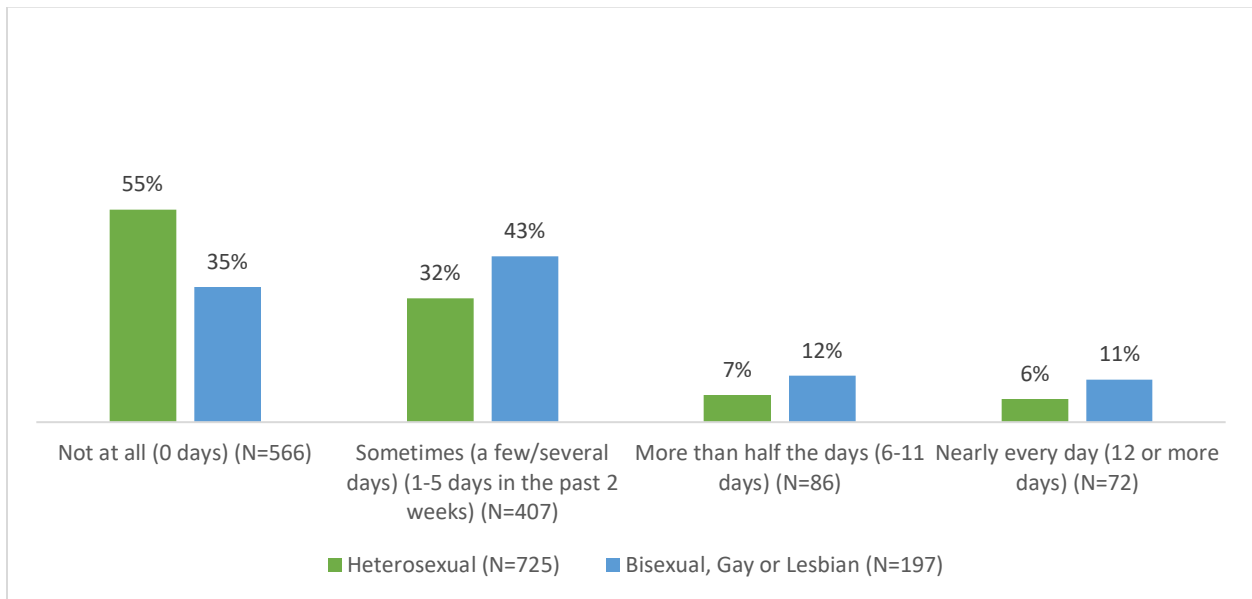
- 41 youth were already getting their needs met
- 23 youth indicated their provider agency is now addressing the concern
- 14 youth don’t have any concerns

- 17Updated youth have other outcomes <sup>9</sup>

The findings by sexuality indicated the following frequency of feeling down, depressed, or hopeless within the last two weeks (Figure 27):

- 55% of youth who identify as heterosexual and 35% of youth who identify as bisexual, gay, or lesbian reported “Not at all” (0 days).
- 32% of heterosexual youth and 43% of bisexual, gay, or lesbian youth reported “Sometimes” (1-5 days).
- 7% of heterosexual youth and 12% of bisexual, gay, or lesbian youth reported “More than half of the days” (6-11 days).
- 6% of heterosexual youth and 11% bisexual, gay, or lesbian youth reported “Nearly every day” (12 or more days).

**Figure 27. Youth reporting feeling down, depressed or hopeless over the last 2 weeks, by Sexuality.**



SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY25

All youth who responded that they felt down, depressed, or hopeless for 12 or more days were contacted by ACS for follow up.

<sup>9</sup> Other outcomes include refusal for follow-up, discharge from care, temporarily felt depressed but no longer feeling depressed, receiving mental health services but wanting additional support, and youth declining mental health services.

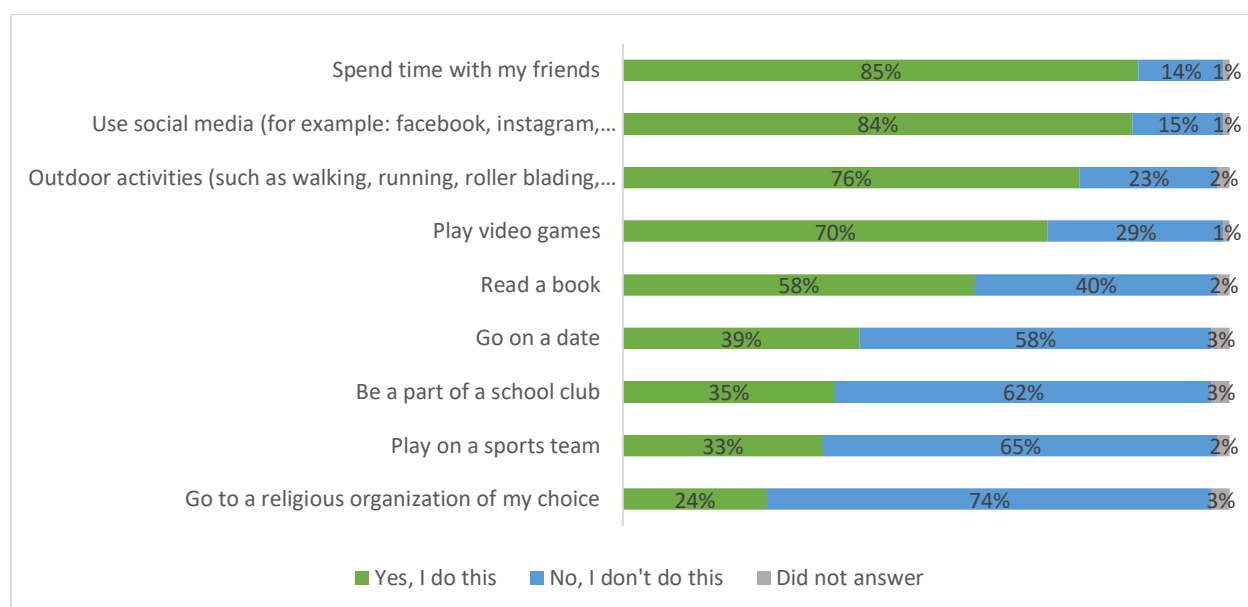


## E. Social Interaction and Communication

### E.1 What do you do in your free time?

Spending time with friends and using social media were the two most popular activities identified by the respondents (Figure 28). Other activities youth frequently reported participating in were outdoor activities, playing video games, and reading books. Thirty-nine percent of the youth stated that they go on dates. The least common activities were being part of a school club (35%), playing on a sports team (33%), and going to a religious organization (24%).

**Figure 28. Youth reporting the activities in which they participated during their free time.**

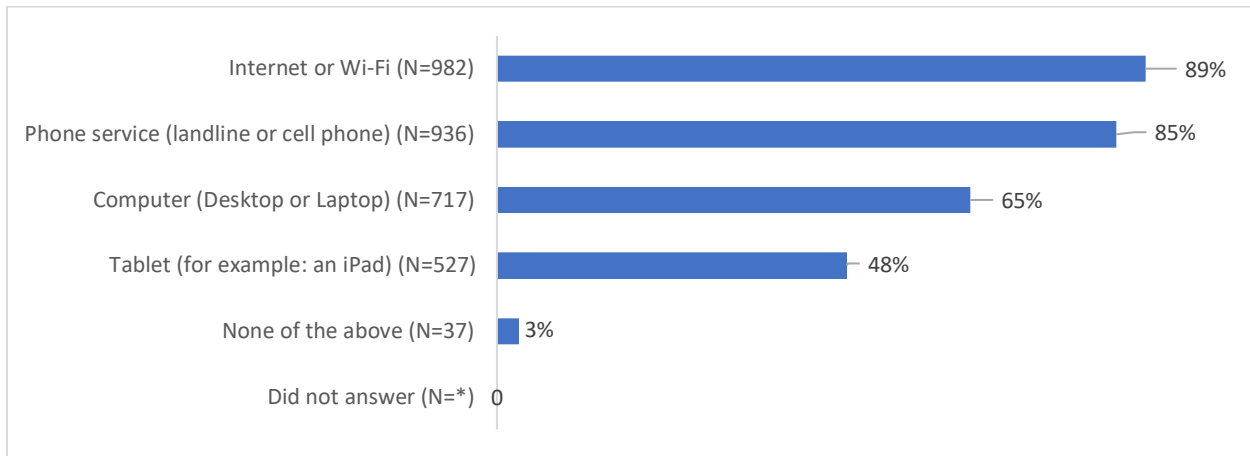


NOTE: All 1,105 youth were asked this question; SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY25

### E.2 Do youth have access to communication technology?

Most youth in foster care reported they have access to internet and phone service, 89% and 85% respectively (Figure 29). In addition, most youth (65%) reported they have access to a computer (desktop or laptop), and half of youth (48%) indicated that they have access to a tablet.

**Figure 29. Youth access to communication technology (N=1,105)**



SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY25.

## F. Access to Healthcare, Hygiene Information, Basic Needs and Religious Practices

### F.1 What healthcare services do youth need and receive?

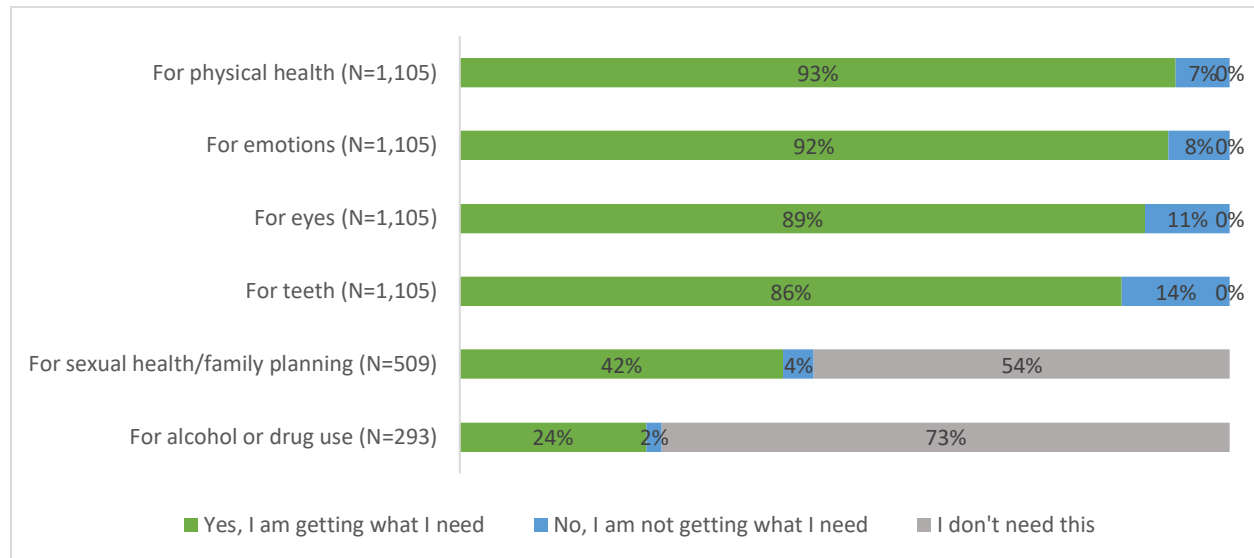
The survey asked youth whether they are getting the healthcare they need for physical, dental, emotional, vision, sexual health, and alcohol or drug use. For each of the healthcare services examined, responses from the youth were used to create two indicators: whether the youth needed the service and whether they received what they needed.

The information presented in Figure 30 reflects the extent to which health care services were received in six health areas. Almost all youth (93%) reported having their physical health met, and 92% reported having their emotional and mental health needs met. Eighty-nine percent of youth had their eye needs met, and 86% of youth reported their dental care needs were met. Forty-two percent of youth reported having their sexual health/family planning needs met, while 54% reported not needing this service. Twenty-four percent of youth reported having their alcohol/drug use service needs met, while 73% reported not needing this service.

In-depth follow-up was conducted in each case where a basic need was reported as unmet. ACS senior-level staff spoke to youth directly and/or to provider agency staff. For the 498 follow-up items related to Health Care (Emotion/Mental Health, Vision, Physical, Sexual Health, Dental, and Alcohol/Drug Use), the follow-up conversations indicated that the need had already been met for 30% of the youth

contacted. Thirty-three percent of the youth contacted reported their provider agency is now addressing the concern; 15% of the youth reported no concerns; 21% reported other reasons<sup>10</sup>; and less than 1% (did not require follow-up) were already discharged from care.

**Figure 30. Youth in foster care reporting whether they received various types of health care.**



This question was mandatory, all 1,105-youth answered it.

SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY25

## F.2 Do youth need more information regarding self-care and hygiene?

The question: “Currently, do you receive support in learning about self-care (for example, putting on deodorant, using feminine products, health and wellness)?” was included based on the advice of the ACS Youth Leadership Council, who reviewed the survey questions and provided feedback. Table 6 provides the details of youth responses.

**Table 6. Youth responses regarding information on self-care and hygiene.**

Response	Percent	Total
Yes, I am getting what I need	75%	832
No, I am not getting what I need	3%	33
I don't need this	22%	240

This question was mandatory, so 1,105 youth answered it.

SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY25

<sup>10</sup>Other reasons include incorrectly answered the question, youth declined follow up, youth missed scheduled appointments, appointments have been scheduled, unable to reach the youth.

For the 33 youth who reported an unmet need, the survey asked if they would like ACS to contact them regarding information on self-care and hygiene. Eleven youth said yes and were contacted.

Results from the follow-up with the 11 youth who were contacted:

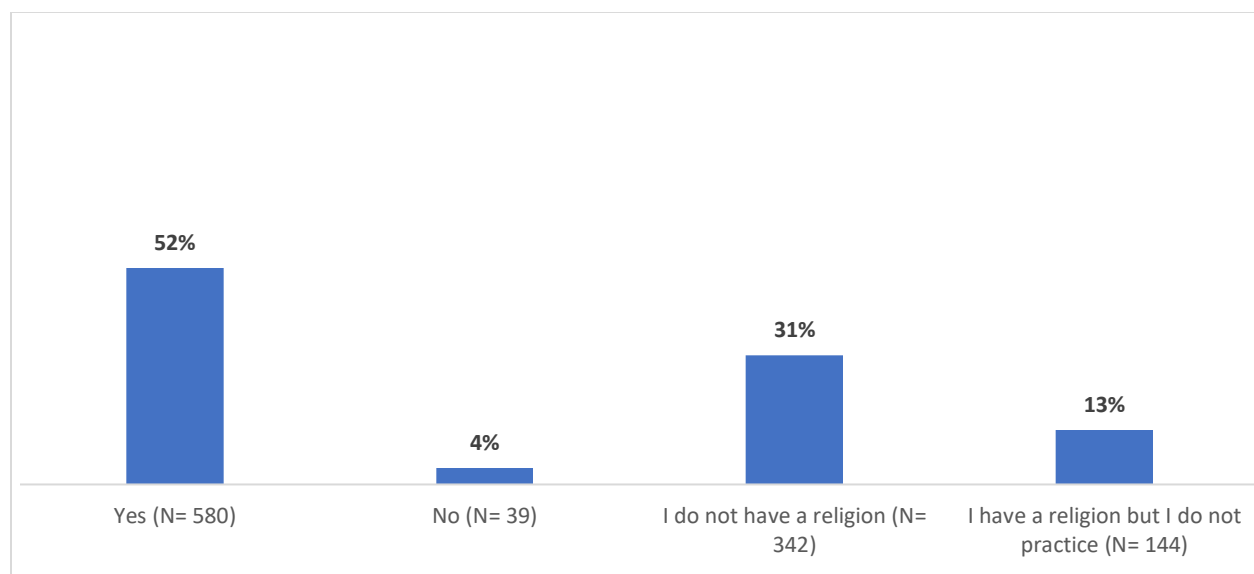
- 4 youth - ACS/provider agency is now addressing the concern
- 3 youth - reported “other” (e.g., misunderstanding the question)
- 3 youth – indicated no concerns
- 1 youth - indicated their needs were already met

### F.3 Can youth practice their religion where they live?

To assess if youth can stay connected to their faith traditions, the survey asked if youth could practice their religion where they live. Fifty-two percent responded yes; 4% responded no; 13% stated that they have a religion but do not practice; and 31% said that they do not have a religion (Figure 31). Youth who answered that they were not able to practice their religion where they lived (N=39) were asked if they would like someone from ACS to follow up with them. Seven youth stated that they would like someone to follow up with them. Responses to follow up with the seven youth were as such:

- 3 youth - reported no concern
- 2 youth - reported other (e.g., didn’t understand the question)
- 1 youth - indicated their needs are already being met
- 1 youth – indicated provider agency now addressing this concern

**Figure 31. Youth responses regarding ability to practice their religion where they live right now (N=1,105)**



SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY25

## F.4 Are basic needs for food and clothes being met?

The survey included questions regarding basic needs for food, clothing, and shoes. ACS monitored youth's responses to these questions daily during data collection. When a youth reported that any of these basic needs was unmet, ACS immediately contacted the youth to assess their well-being and any necessary action steps. Additional follow up was conducted with foster care agencies, youth, and foster parents as appropriate.

Ninety-four percent<sup>11</sup> of youth in foster homes reported they were provided with three meals per day; 94% stated that they have appropriate clothing (which means the clothing is clean, fits and has no holes), and 94% reported they have shoes that fit (Figure 32). ACS followed up with the youth who reported that they had fewer than three meals per day, did not have appropriate clothing and did not have shoes that fit:

Below are the results from the follow up with the youth:

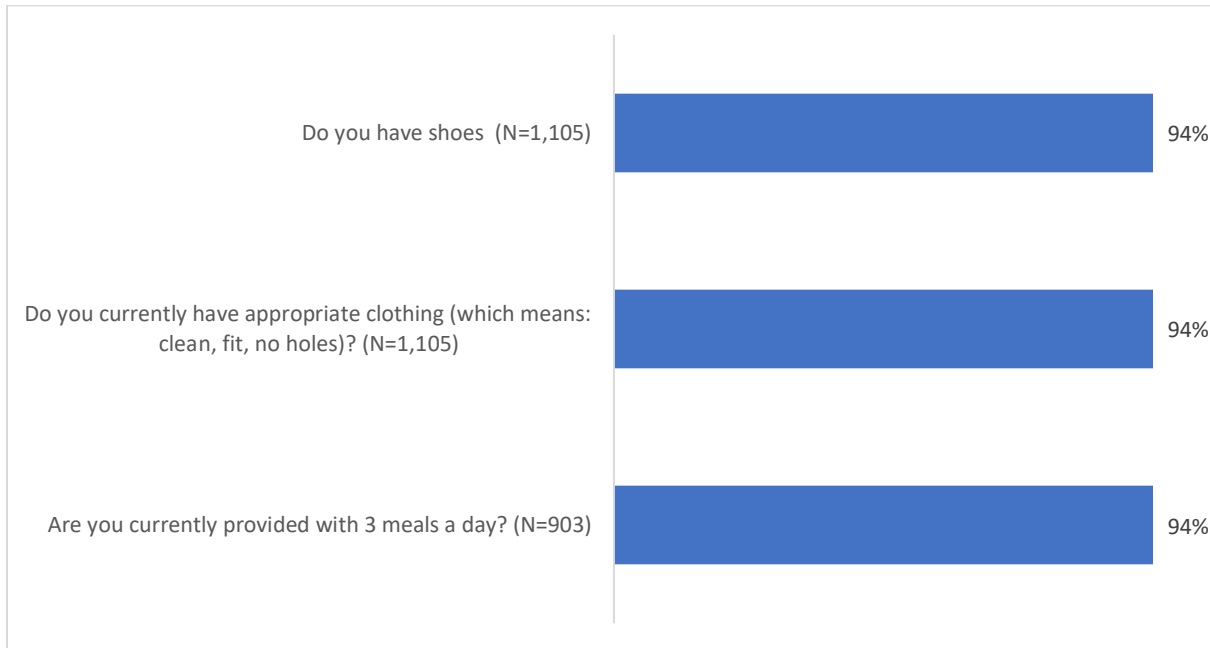
- Meals: 18 youth indicated concerns about receiving 3 meals a day, the follow up conversations indicated:
  - 7 youth already had their needs met
  - 6 reported other
  - 2 of youth indicated no concerns
  - 2 youth reported not needing follow up
  - 1 youth indicated their provider agency is addressing the concern
- Clothing: 65 youth indicated concerns around clothing, the follow up conversations indicated:
  - 19 youth indicated provider agency is addressing the concern
  - 17 youth stated that needs already met
  - 15 youth indicated no concerns
  - 14 youth reported other
- Shoes: 65 youth indicated concerns around shoes, the follow up conversations indicated:
  - 20 youth reported other
  - 19 youth indicated their provider agency is addressing the concern
  - 14 youth indicated no concern
  - 11 youth already had their needs met
  - 1 youth reported not needing follow-up

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<sup>11</sup> In FY23, the survey did not include this question for youth in residential care.

Examples of “other” include: misunderstanding the question, youth declining follow up, youth could not be reached due to unrelated hospitalizations and clothes/shoes that were ill-fitting.

**Figure 32. Youth reporting provision of basic needs.**



NOTE: This question was mandatory, all 1,105 youth answered it.

SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY25

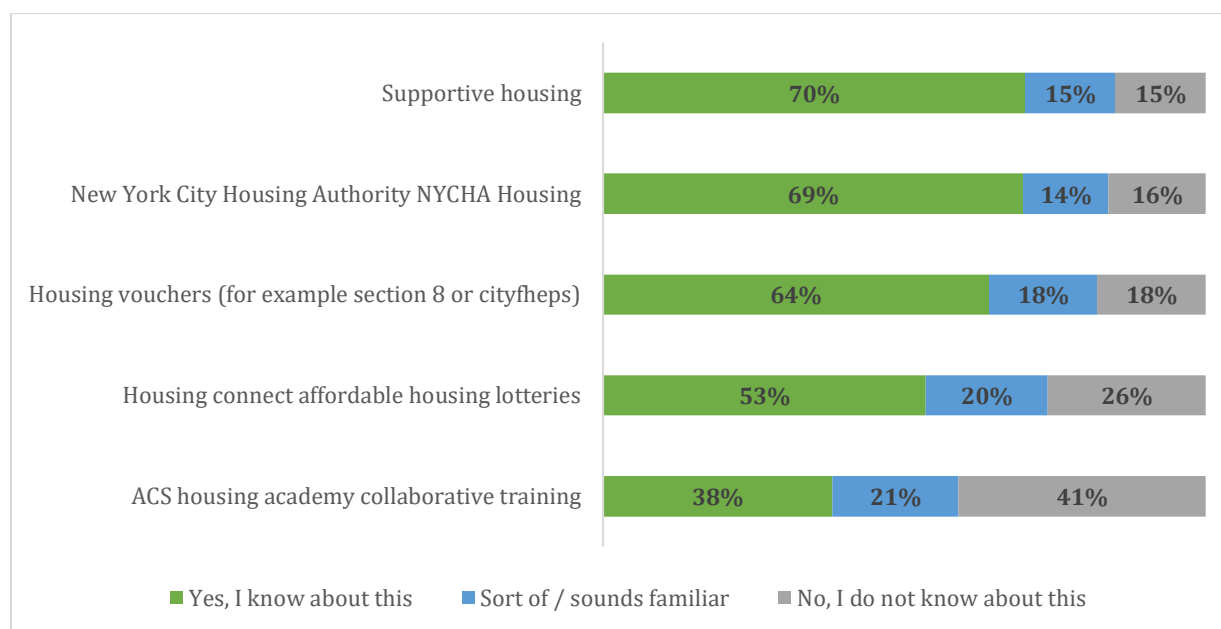
### F.5 What housing services are youth aware of?

Youth ages 18 and older were asked if they know about various housing services. The following indicates youth awareness about housing:

- 70% of youth ages 18-20 reported knowing about Supportive housing.
- 69% of youth ages 18-20 reported knowing about New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) housing.
- 64% of youth ages 18-20 reported knowing about Housing Vouchers (e.g., Section 8 or CityFHEPS).
- 53% of youth ages 18-20 reported knowing about Housing Connect affordable housing lotteries.
- 38% of youth ages 18-20 reported knowing about ACS Housing Academy Collaborative Training.

ACS continues to provide TA to the foster care agencies and collaborates with multiple housing partners to identify and make available various housing supports for young people transitioning out of foster care.

**Figure 33: Youth ages 18+ reporting knowing about housing options.**



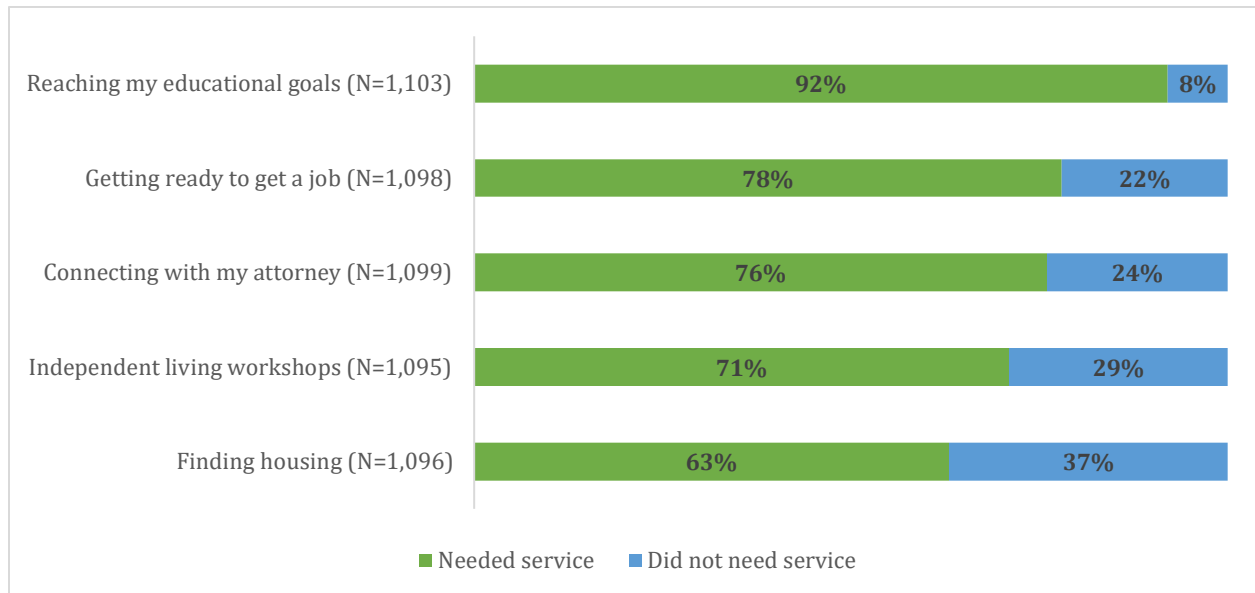
SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY25

## G. Support from Foster Care Agencies

### G.1 What support services do youth need and receive from foster care agencies?

Youth were asked what types of support they receive from their foster care agencies. Among those who said they needed each type of support, Figure 34 shows how many reported receiving it (the N shown in the figure is the number of youth stating that they need this type of support). The most needed and most often received type of support was helping to reach educational goals; of the 1,110-youth stating they needed this, 92% reported receiving help from their foster care agency. Eighty-five percent of youth who reported needing support to connect with their attorney received it and 76% of youth who needed support with getting ready to get a job received it. Seventy-four percent of youth who needed independent living workshops received it, and 73% of youth who reported needed help with finding housing received it.

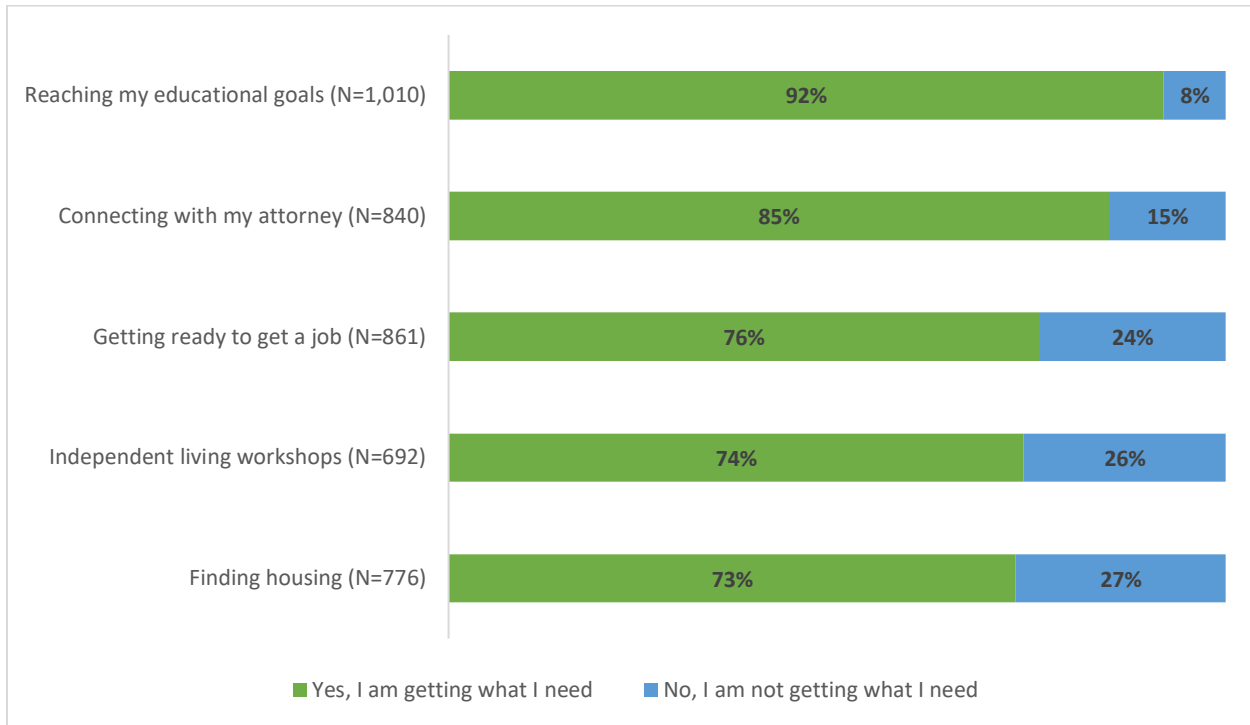
**Figure 34. Youth reporting types of support they need from foster care agencies.**



SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY25



**Figure 35. Youth reporting types of support they receive from foster care agencies.**



SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY25

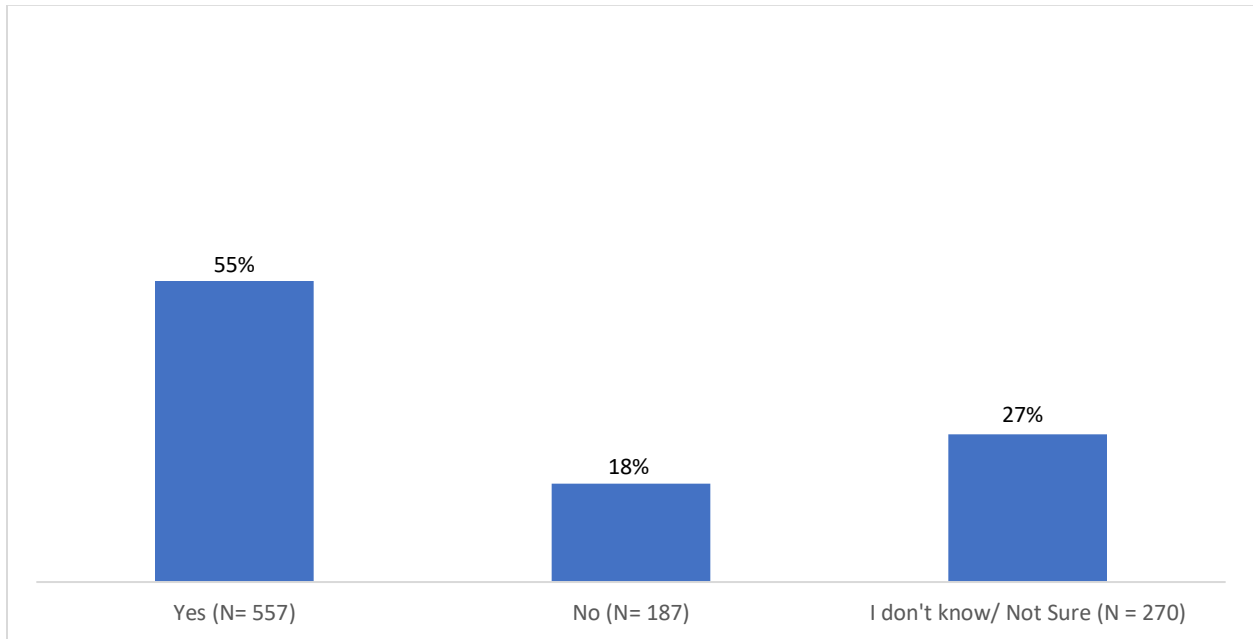
## G.2 Do youth have a Fair Future Coach and what services are they receiving?

Youth were asked if they had been assigned a Fair Futures Coach. Recognizing that foster care agencies have different programmatic names for their Fair Futures program, the survey question reflected each agency's unique program name when referring to the Fair Futures Coach, such as Graham Slam Coach and Youth Journey Coach. Over half of the respondents (55%) reported that they have been assigned a Fair Future Coach, 18% reported they do not have a Fair Future Coach, and 27% reported that they did not know/not sure.

Youth who reported having a coach were also asked how satisfied they are with the support they receive from their Fair Future Coach. Many of the respondents reported feeling completely satisfied with the support they received from their coach:

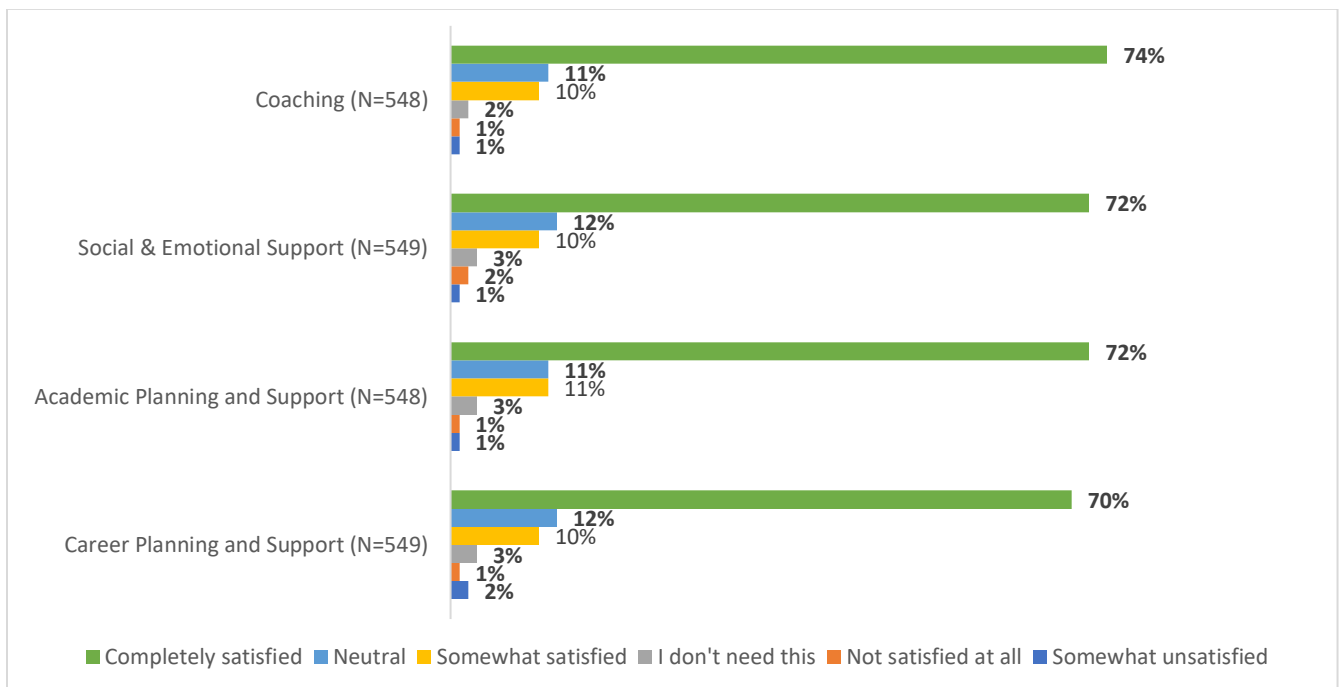
- 74% reported feeling completely satisfied with the coaching they received.
- 72% of youth reported feeling completely satisfied with the social and emotional support and academic planning and support they received, respectively.
- 70% reported feeling completely satisfied with their case planning and support.
- 65% reported feeling completely satisfied with the connections to services.
- 57% reported feeling completely satisfied with their housing planning and support.

**Figure 36: Have you been assigned a Fair Futures coach?**



SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY25

**Figure 37: What do you think about the type of support your Fair Futures coach provides? (N=557)**

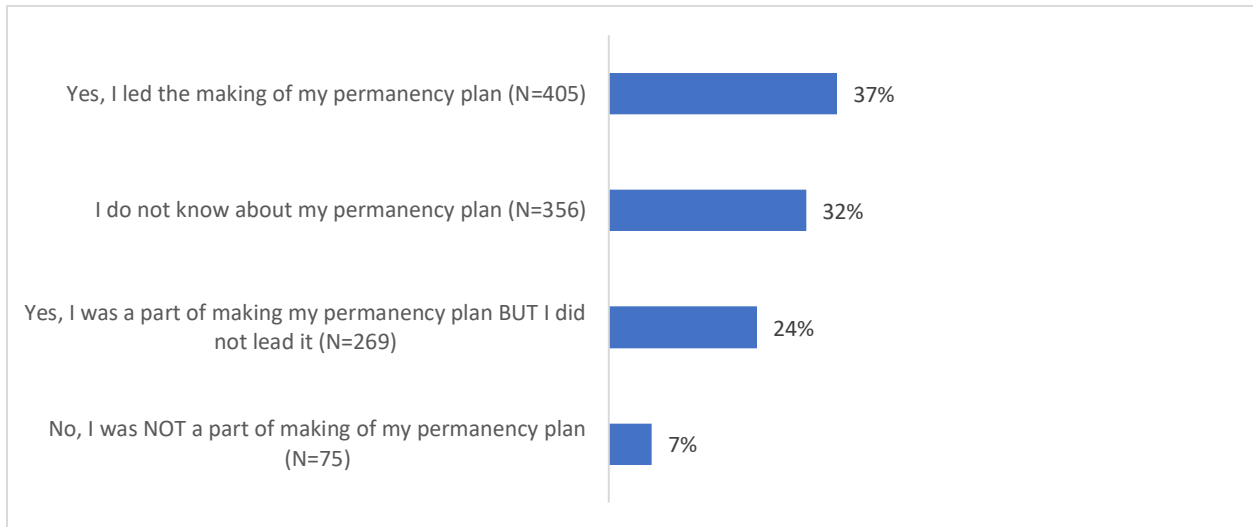


SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY25

### G.3 To what extent is youth involved in permanency planning?

Figure 38 shows the distribution for various levels of youth involvement in their permanency planning. Forty percent of youth reported that they led the making of their permanency plan. Another 26% were involved in planning. Twenty eight percent of youth reported they did not know about their permanency plan and 6% of youth had not been a part of creating it.

**Figure 38. Youth reporting on their involvement in their permanency plan.**



SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY25

### G.4 Who supports the youth in their permanency planning?

The 749 youth who were involved in the making of their permanency plans also noted who specifically supported them in permanency planning. The most frequent supporters were foster care case workers, followed by foster parents and residential staff. Table 6 shows the detailed findings.

**Table 6. Youth reporting whether various individuals supported them in their permanency planning.**

Response	Percent	Total
Case worker at my foster care agency	71%	532
Foster parent	69%	398
Residential staff	54%	90
My lawyer	42%	316
Coach	37%	280
Parent	30%	221
Friend	15%	112
Teacher	7%	50
No one supports me in my permanency planning	4%	33

NOTE: The total N (number of people asked) was 749 for most items, 581 for foster parents, and 168 for residential staff).

Table 7 does not include youth who reported "I do not know about my permanency plan."

SOURCE: Youth Experience Survey FY25

## V. ACS Initiatives Supporting Older Youth

ACS is currently implementing a range of programs and initiatives to improve youth experiences, outcomes, and well-being through the Foster Care Core Collective Priorities and new foster care contracts. While the survey reflects that many youth are progressing well in terms of their educational achievements and social connections, more work must be done to support the mental health, school and work readiness, and other ongoing needs of youth in care.

### Youth Voice

To further engage youth and ensure their voices inform practice change, ACS formed a **Youth Leadership Council (YLC) to bring youth and adult leaders together to work in partnership on youth-related areas of policy and practice**. The ACS YLC launched in March 2019 and includes both youth currently and previously in foster care and/or the juvenile justice system. The goals of the Youth Leadership Council are to develop the leadership skills of youth, advocate for changes and improvements in policies and areas of mutual concern, establish a youth voice in the foster care community, and build a positive social network. The YLC has developed a strategic plan focused on system improvement and its goals include identifying potential paid and internship opportunities for

youth at ACS; recruiting additional youth for the YLC and developing materials to train staff on building healthy relationships and respectful, supportive communication with youth in care.

### **Improving Permanency Outcomes**

ACS continues to work aggressively to improve permanency outcomes for youth in foster care. One of the **ACS Core Collective Priorities is a focus on family** in support of timely permanency. ACS continues to identify strategies that improve reunification, adoption, and kinship guardianship outcomes for children and youth in foster care. These include the implementation of the new Enhanced Family Foster Care (EFFC) program, increased therapeutic resources, partnership with Parent Advocates with lived experience and increased resources for Family Time (a.k.a. visiting), and increased resources to support kinship care, among other efforts. Simultaneously, ACS continues to partner closely with the Family Court to achieve safe and timely Reunification, Adoption, and Kinship Guardianship.

### **High Quality Placements for Youth**

**ACS has been highly successful in increasing foster home recruitment while simultaneously improving kinship placement and support for caregivers in recent years.** This citywide effort emphasizes effective recruitment practices and strong customer service to support kinship and foster families so that children are safe and receive the highest quality of care. From FY 2017 to FY 2024, ACS and its foster care agency partners increased the proportion of children in foster care placed with kin from 31% to 45%. Simultaneously, ACS continues to actively partner with the foster care agencies to implement strategies for recruiting foster parents who are committed to caring for youth in foster care.

### **Supporting the Well Being of LGBTQAI+ Youth in Foster Care**

In January of 2021, ACS began to implement its LGBTQAI+ Action Plan. The goal of the plan is to improve the experiences and outcomes of LGBTQAI+ youth in foster care. Key parts of the plan include:

- Revised the ACS Foundational LGBTQAI+ Staff training, *Include, Empower, Affirm: Policy, Best Practices, and Guidance for Serving LGBTQAI+ Children and Youth Involved in the Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice System*, which was launched in 2021. This learning program prepares learners to apply the policies and best practices that promote the safety, permanency, and well-being of LGBTQAI+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, Asexual, Intersex, and many more) youths involved with ACS and contracted providers.
- In the Spring of 2025, ACS will launch *Improving Outcomes for LGBTQAI+ Youth Who are ACS Involved*, a training that builds upon knowledge and skills learned in the Foundational LGBTQAI+ training.
- The Office of Equity Strategies has partnered with the Office of Child Trafficking Prevention and Policy on a new training titled *Working with LGBTQ+ Youth Who have Experienced or Are*

*At-Risk for Trafficking.* This training is being offered to foster care and ACS staff at least twice a year.

- The ACS Office of Equity Strategies has partnered with The Office of Domestic Violence Policy and Planning have developed a training that educates the ACS workforce and ACS providers on best practices for working with LGBTQAI+ youth and families that have experienced DV/IPV. The training is offered multiple times a year.
- The ACS Office of Equity Strategies, in Partnership with the ACS Office of Child and Family Health and the NYC DOHMH, will be providing a WPATH training for foster care agency medical and health staff that will happen in the Fall of 2025.
- ACS will continue to provide a LGBTQAI+ mandated training to foster parents. With the support of Planned Parenthood of Greater NY and the ACS Workforce Institute, foster care agencies rolled out a new version of this training in the fall of 2024.
- ACS funds the Ackerman Institute and The LGBTQ Center to train clinicians that work with ACS involved families on best practices for engaging LGBTQAI+ families. Through this program, youth in foster care and parents/caregivers are directly referred to family therapy and trans youth group therapy services.
- Family Permanency Services is utilizing the Office of Equity Strategies expertise in the placement of LGBTQAI+ youth. The Office of Equity Strategies has been participating in placement conferencing and case planning for the population in care.
- The Office of Equity Strategies disseminates an updated comprehensive LGBTQAI+ Resource Guide to all foster care agencies twice a year.
- The Youth Leadership Council's LGBTQAI+ Sub-Committee has been active since February of 2021.
- Family Permanency Services works with the Office of Equity Strategies to advocate on behalf of LGBTQAI+ youth when issues of sexual orientation and gender identity are reported.

Additionally, throughout FY26 the Office of Equity Strategies will be providing trainings to residential care workers focused on creating safe spaces, affirming LGBTQAI+ youth, ACS policies, and resources for LGBTQAI+ youth.

### **Health Services for Youth**

**Health Care:** ACS partners with foster care providers to ensure that children and youth in foster care have access to the full array of health care services. While in foster care, children and youth will receive preventive, screening, diagnostic, and treatment services necessary to keep them healthy and well.

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This includes Health Homes and Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) waiver services. A Health Home is a program that helps support the child/youth and their family by providing care management services. Children in foster care with chronic health, medical, complex trauma and/or mental health conditions requiring a doctor's care are eligible for a Health Home. By enrolling in a Health Home, children/youth can receive HCBS waiver services if they are found to be eligible. HCBS services are designed to offer support and services to children/youth in non-institutionalized settings that enable them to remain at home and in the community or for children/youth being discharged from an institutional setting who require these services to safely return to their home and community.

**Mental Health Services.** ACS is working closely with its contracted foster care providers to ensure that children and youth in foster care have access to the full array of mental health services. This includes accessing all mental health and other services available through Medicaid programs, including Child and Family Treatment and Support Services (CFTSS). Children and Family Treatment and Support Services (CFTSS) are standalone mental health and substance use services that support children/families. CFTSS services can be provided at home or in the community. CFTSS services include:

- Other Licensed Practitioner (OLP)
- Crisis intervention
- Community Psychiatric Supports and Treatment (CPST)
- Psychosocial rehabilitation
- Family peer support services
- Youth peer support and training

### **Sexual and Reproductive Health**

ACS has created a Sexual and Reproductive Health Policy for Youth in Foster Care that ensures young people have the right to access confidential sexual and reproductive health services without the knowledge or consent of parents, foster parents, caseworker or anyone else. Caseworkers and foster parents must provide access to sexual and reproductive health education and to provide support like a referral to a doctor.

Youth in foster care have the right to access health services including:

- Wellness exams
- Testing and treatment for sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- Pregnancy testing
- Options counseling if you are pregnant
- Birth control and emergency contraception (Plan B)
- Prenatal care (care that supports you when you are pregnant) and postpartum care (care that supports you after giving birth)
- Abortion services
- HIV testing, treatment, and prevention like PrEP and PEP

ACS has advocated for youth who are placed out of state and need access to any sexual or reproductive healthcare not available in the residing state, including abortion and gender affirming care. Youth needing assistance in accessing this care can contact their foster care agency or NYC ACS to return to NYS to receive these needed services.

### **DOHMH and ACS have collaborated to facilitate access to the Nurse-Family Partnership**

DOHMH and ACS have implemented strategies to increase the utilization of the Nurse-Family Partnership Program for expectant and parenting youth, children and families involved in the child welfare systems. These included partnering to conduct virtual outreach and provide marketing materials to all ACS Divisions, Foster Care and Preventive agencies to increase awareness of the Nurse-Family Partnership; sharing data to track pregnant youth in foster care being referred and enrolled with Nurse-Family Partnership; and ongoing meetings to identify trends and opportunities for additional outreach. Nurse-Family Partnership has adapted their practices to virtual tele-health due to the challenges of the pandemic.

## **Education and Employment Initiatives**

### **Fair Futures**

The ACS Fair Futures Program is the only citywide, comprehensive coaching program supporting youth in foster care to independent living. To date, over 4,300 youth ages 11- to 26-years-old have been served and over 520 Fair Futures staff have been on-boarded and trained across 35 programs. Fair Futures is funded at \$30.7 M with additional funding allocated for the outgoing years totaling \$53.5M by FY27, and the model has expanded to serve youth 21- to 26-years-old as well as youth served in ACS juvenile justice programs.



- In FY2024, Fair Futures was able to serve over 4,300 youth ages 11-26, up from 3,000 youth in FY12. Of the youth who participated, 2,563 of whom were coached, 81% were coached for 90+ days.
- 92% of the 2,000-youth coached achieved at least three positive outcome goals, including the following:
  - Reconnecting to high school
  - Grade promotion
  - Graduation
  - Enrolling in college or vocational training
  - Successfully engaging in a job or internship.
- In FY2024, 580 young people ages 21- to 26-years-old, discharged from care, were served through the expansion program.

The ACS Education Team has been collaborating with foster care education teams, case planners, and Fair Futures coaches on attendance support strategies. The unit is also sharing education resources with the agencies on education-related supports for older youth, such as transfer schools, Young Adult Borough Centers (YABC), community-based GED programs, and district level support managers.

The ACS Education Team has been collaborating with the New York City Public School (NYCPS) Office of Community Supports and Wellness, the ACS College Unit, Fair Futures, and NY Foundling to recognize and celebrate foster students who graduate from high school or earn their GED and continue with the post-secondary planning goals. The team has been collaborating with over a dozen NYCPS offices on initiatives and protocol development to strengthen education supports for youth in care.

**The NYCPS's Office of Foster Care (OFC) has been working closely with the ACS Education Team and foster care agencies throughout the 2024-2025 school year to provide education support for children and youth in foster care.** They have assisted with resolving school transportation challenges for students newly entering foster care or changing foster care placements, have helped foster care agencies identify students who are experiencing education challenges and collaborated with agency staff to reach out to schools to obtain the services and assistance that are needed for those students. They are also training social workers, school counselors, parent coordinators, and district level staff to become more familiar with the experiences and challenges faced by students in foster care, in order to facilitate more appropriate services for students at schools across the NYCPS.

**Through data-sharing arrangements with DOE and DYCD, ACS and foster care agencies continue to identify students in foster care who would benefit from targeted educational services and**

**programs.** Every month, ACS coordinates with the NYCPS to send detailed education-related data reports to individual foster care agencies for the students in their care. The ACS Education Team meets with agencies and also convenes professional development forums on important education issues for foster care agency staff and provides trainings and technical assistance on how to use education data to provide appropriate, targeted supports. ACS has also been partnering with the NYCPS Foster Care Education Office to identify students who should be prioritized for enrollment in Summer Rising and providing enrollment assistance where needed.

Launched in 2022, the **College Choice** Program makes significant enhancements to several college initiatives such as, Fostering College Success Initiative, The Fostering College Success Stipend Program (FCS), and College Room and Board (CRB). Participants enrolled in the College Choice Program can access, coaching advisement, tutoring, career counseling, and related services. Youth attending a college/university in New York City can choose to live in housing sponsored by that college or university, or in one of six housing options offered by the College Choice Program. Youth attending a college or university outside of New York City can live in housing sponsored by that college or university, or in safe and appropriate private housing. ACS will pay for tuition after application of grants, financial aid and scholarships and mandatory fees that are not covered by financial aid awards. In addition, youth can receive daily direct cash assistance, to cover food and other living and college-related expenses, while they attend school and up to six months after graduation. The College Choice Program initially supported 200 youth and today that number has increased to over 400 college youth.

Based on the lessons learned and success of College Choice, ACS is launching **Career Choice** in FY 2026. Career Choice (CC) is designed to help youth interested in vocational, trade or training programs. Youth will have access to similar supports offered to youth in College Choice, including a daily stipend and coaching. A Career Choice pilot is currently in development with New Yorkers for Children.

**ACS continues to partner with SCO Family of Services (SCO), New York Foundling Hospital (NYFH), Children's Aid Society (CAS), Good Shepherd Services (GSS), and Youth Villages (YV) to implement LifeSet**, an evidence-based program for young adults ages 17-22 who have been involved in the foster care, juvenile justice and/or mental health systems as young adults. The LifeSet model uses specialists to provide youth with intensive community-based support consisting of both clinical and skill-building interventions. The goals of LifeSet are to support youth to maintain stable and suitable housing, participate in educational/vocational programs, find, and sustain employment, remain free from court involvement, develop healthy relationships, build a strong and permanent support system, engage with youth's families and social supports, strengthen mental health stability, and develop fundamental life skills.

**ACS continues to implement key strategies to improve employment outcomes for youth.** The **Office of Youth Success Services** develops services, initiatives and partnerships that build capacity within the

foster care system to connect youth to college support and workforce development programs throughout New York City. Opportunities made available by the Office include paid internships, career readiness programming, mentoring, vocational training, and employment. The Office's initiatives support youth development for educational and career planning, mentoring, work-based learning, employment, and career advancement.

Programs include:

- The **Young Adult Work Opportunities for Rewarding Careers** (YA WORC) curriculum. YA WORC is an evidenced informed career readiness program that provides professional development training to foster care agency staff to provide comprehensive, developmentally appropriate career readiness programming to youth in foster care ages 14 – 21. In addition, the agencies receive technical assistance and training to develop an on-site career club that provides peer-to-peer experiential learning and instruction on how to develop educational and career plans, resumes and cover letters, and decisions based on labor market information.
- In partnership with DYCD, the **Advance and Earn Plus** was revamped to offer a paid internship program for young adults ages 16-24 with foster care experience who are not in school and not working. **This program built upon the** former YAIP+ initiative. The program's career pathways approach offers a continuum of education and employment services, aiming to accommodate youth at different stages of skill development and provide them the skills and tools necessary to achieve long-term career success.
- **Summer Youth Employment Program.** ACS partners with DYCD to support the City's SYEP. 1,500 youth were supported during the application process and 1200 enrolled. ACS also continues to provide vocational training and apprenticeship programs that offer professional opportunities to youth, ages 16 to 24, in foster care and with juvenile justice experience. As part of the program, youth participate in training for professional certification through courses offered by Kingsborough Community College, participate in paid internships/apprenticeships, and have opportunities for employment with the employer hosting the internship. V-CRED focuses on five career pathways: 1) Information Technology, 2) Electrician's Helper, 3) Allied Health (e.g. Certified Nursing Assistants, EKG Technician), 4) Pharmacy Technicians, and 5) Building Trades.
- ACS continues to partner with the Pinkerton Foundation to support a **Mentored-Internship Program** (MIP) across twelve foster care agencies. The MIP program provides technical assistance and training to foster care agency staff through the Workforce Professional Training Institute (WPTI) at Columbia University to agency staff. Through the community-based styled training, staff learn to develop on-site internships within the infrastructure of their agencies. With supervision and mentoring provided by agency leadership and staff, youth participate in

paid internships that offer 10 hours of work per week, over a six-month period, during the academic year. The program targets youth in foster care between the ages of 16 - 21 years old. Since FY18, MIP has provided funding to train over 200 foster care staff who coordinated paid internships for over 900 youth.

- Over the past 18 months, ACS has held a series of **Virtual Career Fairs and smaller recruiting events**. The purpose of the fairs and events is to offer youth an opportunity to connect to jobs with career pathways and a safe, supportive work environment. In total, 300 youth have benefitted from the fairs and events.

### **Immigration Services**

**ACS's Office of Immigrant Services and Language Affairs (ISLA)** is dedicated to assisting all youth in foster care who have immigration needs, including those eligible for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status. Through the Immigration Services for Youth in Care Program, ISLA oversees and coordinates collaboration between foster care providers, approved immigration legal services providers, and ACS divisions to identify immigrant youth in ACS care and assist them to obtain immigration relief.

## **VI. Conclusion**

ACS has multiple initiatives specifically geared towards improving the safety, permanency, and well-being of youth in foster care that align closely with ACS' Core Collective Priorities:

1. **Meet the Present Need: Creating the capacity to accept and care for children and youth with complex needs entering care.**
2. **Focus on Family: Provide respectful and responsive practice leading to timely permanency**
3. **Create Safety and Stability**
4. **Ensure Success and Improve Well-Being: Increasing access to therapeutic supports, educational opportunities, Fair Futures and other services.**

The FY25 ACS Youth Experience Survey provides valuable information regarding the experiences of youth between the ages of 13 - 20 in foster care. The findings from this survey are used by ACS to inform ongoing service planning and programming for older youth in the areas of permanency, education, employment, health, housing, emotional support, child welfare staff training, and other key identified areas.

ACS recognizes the valuable information gathered from this survey and utilizes the results to identify and prioritize approaches for supporting older youth. As in past years, these findings are reviewed with

provider agency leaders and other stakeholders to align opportunities and efforts that support the success and well-being of older youth.