

Student Financial Wellness of Youth Formerly in Foster Care

Aaron Niznik, PhD, Carla Fletcher, MS, and Sandra Barone, MS
December 2022

Recommended Citation: Niznik, A., Fletcher, C. & S. Barone. (2022). *Student Financial Wellness of Youth Formerly in Foster Care*. Trellis Company.

Key Findings

Youth formerly in foster care (YFFC) are more likely to report facing financial struggles while in college and may lack resources, marketable skills, and have limited networks/support to rely on. These students may not have access to the same kind of family support as their peers.

To address these challenges, this population relies more heavily on their institutions and government assistance. Additionally, while federal, state and institutional programs exist to provide aid to these students, many respondents in this sample were unaware of these supports.

As a result, institutions must find ways to connect these students to the resources needed to ensure postsecondary success.

Research indicates that postsecondary credential completion among youth formerly in foster care (YFFC) is far below national rates. For example, while approximately 80 percent of YFFC indicate they wish to pursue higher education,¹ only forty-six percent earn a high school diploma, and three percent will earn a bachelor's degree.² Among those that do attend postsecondary institutions, YFFC students are generally less academically prepared and have lower academic self-concept (self-perceptions about academic ability, drive, and academic self-confidence).³ These individuals are less likely to engage with adults that encourage seeking higher education or may themselves have limited knowledge about how to navigate higher education.⁴ As a result, YFFC that do enroll in postsecondary education are likely to have limited knowledge and tools to succeed in higher education.⁵ Understanding the experiences, perspectives, and behaviors of these students will help guide strategies to improve outcomes for this disadvantaged population.



¹ Dworsky, A. & Perez, A. (2009). Helping former foster youth graduate from college: Campus support programs in California and Washington State. Chicago: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago

² Burt, S., Barnow, A.B., O'Brien, K., Pecora, P., Ellis, M.L., Steiner, E. (2013). Effective Services for Improving Outcomes for Education and Employment for Children and Alumni of Foster Care Service: Correlates and Employment Outcomes. *Child & Family Social Work*: 159

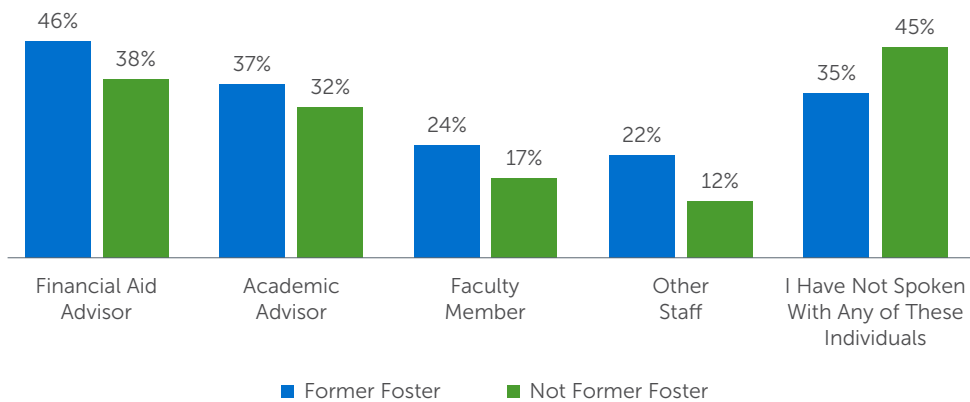
³ Gross, J.P., Stolzenberg, E., Williams, A. (2020). "Choice and Enrollment among Youth Formerly in Foster Care," *Journal of College Access*: vol. 5, issue 2, article 2.

⁴ Davis, R.J. (2006). College access, financial aid, and college success for undergraduates from foster care. Washington, D.C.: National Association of Student Financial Aid Directors

⁵ Davis, R.J. (2006). College access, financial aid, and college success for undergraduates from foster care. Washington, D.C.: National Association of Student Financial Aid Directors



Q11-15: Institutional representatives spoken to about financial struggles*



*Percentage indicate respondents who chose at least one of the above choices

Financial Wellness and Support-Seeking Behaviors

Eighty-three percent of YFFC in the survey indicated that they experienced financial difficulties or challenges while in school, compared to 73 percent of all others. Without family resources and support, YFFC are more likely to seek assistance and advice from institutional representatives than their peers. For example, nearly half of YFFC had spoken to their financial aid advisor about their struggles, compared to 38 percent of non-YFFC. Forty-five percent of non-YFFC respondents did not speak with any institutional representatives, while 35 percent of YFFC indicated the same.

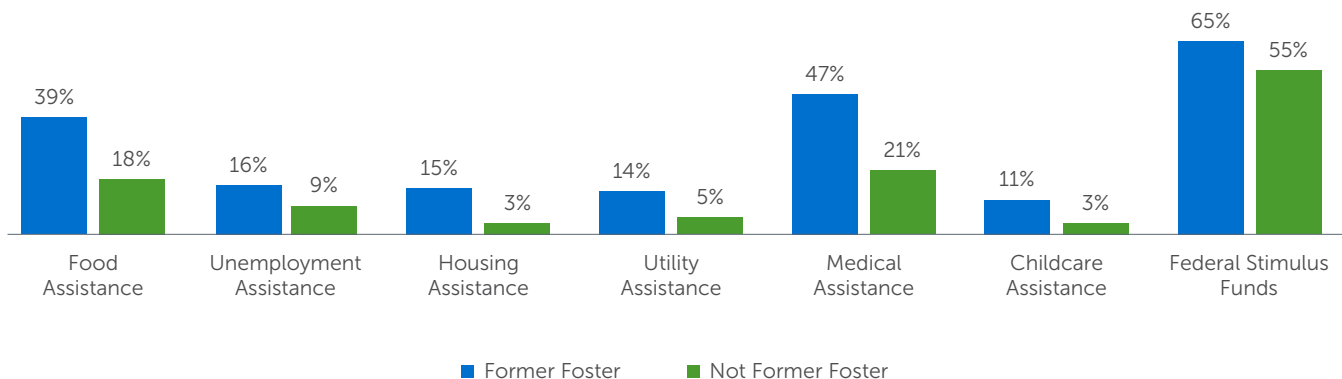
YFFC rely more on public assistance than their peers. For example, 39 percent of YFFC used food assistance compared to only 18 percent of non-YFFC. Similarly, nearly half (47 percent) of YFFC used medical assistance, while only 21 percent of non-YFFC did so. YFFC express high need and require additional support from government programs and their institutions.

Awareness and Usage of Foster Youth-Specific Aid, Policies, & Programs

Former foster youth can indicate their status on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) to be considered independent for the purpose of aid determination. This is likely to help them receive additional aid including grants. Some states and institutions of higher education offer additional resources to these individuals including tuition waivers and grants. While these resources may be available for YFFC, many respondents in the survey indicated they were unaware or did not use them. Additionally, YFFC that did not speak to an institutional representative were less likely to be aware of whether they received these resources.

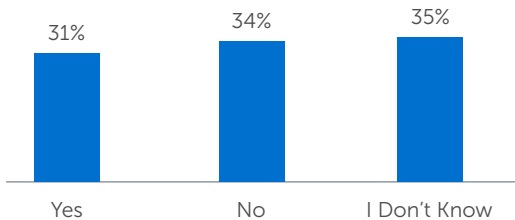
Sixty-three percent of former foster youth that filled out the FAFSA indicated their status on their application, while 26 percent did not, and 10 percent were unsure. Of those that indicated their status, slightly under a third responded that they received additional funding, while over two-thirds indicated they either did not receive

Q54-60: Use of Public Assistance by Assistance Type





Q121: Did you receive increased funding/support as a result of identifying yourself as a former foster youth on FAFSA?



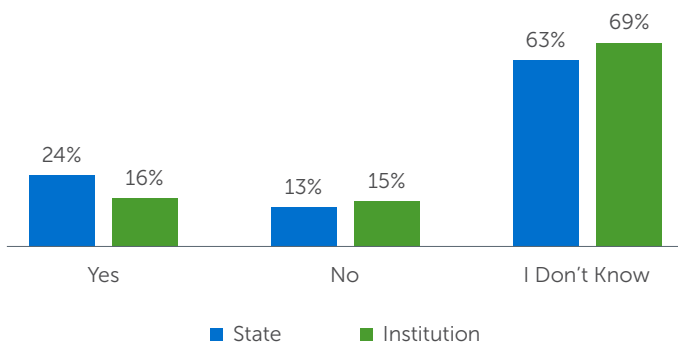
additional funding, or were unsure. YFFC that did not speak to an institutional representative were less aware of whether they received increased funding as a result of identifying on FAFSA. This suggests that information about FAFSA and YFFC status may be poorly communicated and understood by those not engaging with institutional representatives.

Knowledge among YFFC about state-level financial aid programs was also limited. While 24 percent of respondents indicated their state had specific aid

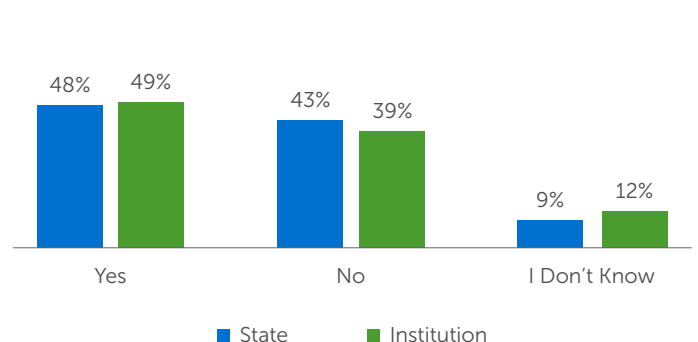
programs, 63 percent indicated they did not know. Similarly, 16 percent of YFFC indicated their institution had foster youth-specific programs/policies, while 69 percent did not know. Overall, the high level of uncertainty about YFFC programs/policies may suggest that some students that could benefit are not aware of the resources available to them.

Of those YFFC that were aware of state-level programs/policies, slightly under half (48 percent) participated in the program, while 43 percent had not. An additional nine percent were unsure of their participation. Similarly, of those aware of institution-level, 49 percent participated, while 39 percent did not, and 12 percent were unsure. These rates of participation may suggest a need for schools to promote their programs more actively to better reach the large number of students not seeking this assistance. As a disadvantaged population, YFFC rely more on the government and their institutions to get through college and may require additional outreach to connect these students with the resources available to them.

Q122 & 124: Awareness of state and institution foster youth-specific financial aid programs/policies for college



Q123 & 125: Participation in state and institution foster youth-specific financial aid programs/policies for college*



*Includes only YFFC indicating their state/institution had these programs



About the Data/Methodology

The Student Financial Wellness Survey (SFWS) is a self-reported, online survey that seeks to document the well-being and student success indicators of post-secondary students across the nation. While not nationally representative, responses were weighted to reflect the total student composition at participating institutions. The survey opened on October 25, 2021 and closed on November 15, 2021. One hundred four (104) institutions participated in the survey—71 two-year colleges, 20 public four-years, and 13 private not-for-profit four-years. A total of 715,545 undergraduate students were invited to take the survey, of whom 63,751 responded, yielding a 9.0 percent response rate.

Recent Trellis Research publications

No food for thought: Insights on basic needs insecurities and mental health challenges from Trellis' Fall 2020 Student Financial Wellness Survey

Cornett, A., & Fletcher, C. (2022). No food for thought: Insights on basic needs insecurities and mental health challenges from Trellis' Fall 2020 Student Financial Wellness Survey. Trellis Company. Retrieved from: <https://www.trelliscompany.org/portfolio-items/no-food-for-thought-insights-on-basic-needs-insecurities-and-mental-health-challenges/>

Student Financial Wellness Survey Report: Fall 2021

Fletcher, C., Webster, J., Cornett, A., Niznik, A., Gardner, T., & Knaff, C. (2022). *Student Financial Wellness Survey report: Fall 2021*. Trellis Company. Retrieved from: <https://www.trelliscompany.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/SFWS-Report-Fall-2021.pdf>

State of student aid and higher education in Texas

Fletcher, C., Cornett, A., & Webster, J. (2022). State of student aid and higher education in Texas. Trellis Company. Retrieved from: <https://www.trelliscompany.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/SOSA-2022.pdf>

Studying on empty: A qualitative study of low food security among college students

Fernandez, C., Webster, J., & Cornett, A. (2019). Studying on empty: A qualitative study of low food security among college students. Trellis Company. Retrieved from: <https://www.trelliscompany.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Studying-on-Empty.pdf>

Longitudinal fluidity in collegiate food security: Disruptions, restorations, and its drivers

Cornett, A., & Webster, J. (2020). Longitudinal fluidity in collegiate food security: Disruptions, restorations, and its drivers. Trellis Company. Retrieved from: https://www.trelliscompany.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Research-Brief_FSS_Longitudinal-Fluidity.pdf

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Interested in collaborations or need research expertise? Trellis Research welcomes opportunities to inform policymakers and help organizations address their analytical needs. For more information, please contact Trellis Research at Trellisresearch@trelliscompany.org or visit us on Twitter ([@TrellisResearch](https://twitter.com/TrellisResearch)).

The Student Financial Wellness Survey is a free national survey offered by Trellis Company that explores the connections between student finances, academic success, and more. Interested in participating in the Fall 2023 implementation of SFWS? Learn more here: www.trelliscompany.org/SFWS-get-started

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