

**Division of Children and Family Services
Foster Youth Survey 2008**

*Program Excellence
Planning Unit*

Foster Youth 2008 Satisfaction Survey

Introduction

The mission of the Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS) is to provide quality services to protect children and to preserve families. Best practices in child welfare services encourage a partnership between recipients and providers in determining needs and services. The Partnership also should extend to an assessment of the usefulness of services in meeting the needs of clients, and the customers.

Purpose

The Division holds a unique and dual role with our client foster children. In that role, DCFS legally is entrusted with responsibility for their custody, support and well being. The design for the survey questionnaire was structured response format with 15 statements, 3 open-ended questions, and a comments/suggestions section.

Methodology

The Division Planning Unit developed the foster youth survey instrument after researching similar questionnaires used in other states. The draft questionnaire was presented to the DCFS Youth Advisory Board for the review and comments. Surveys were conducted by planning specialist visiting the ILP coordinators and scheduling Youth Advisory Board meeting and conducted the survey to this group.

The design for the survey questionnaire was a structured response format with 15 statements, 3 open-ended questions, and a comments/suggestions section. A 5-point Lickert response scale was used which allowed for various degrees of responses of agreement or disagreement. Survey statements covered topics related to services, well-being, and staff responsiveness.

At present, the Division has 1147 foster children ages 14-19 years in care. Not all of our foster children reside in a foster home. Many of our children (1510) are placed in other licensed facilities such as residential, emergency shelters, therapeutic foster homes and pre-adoptive homes. One hundred and forty-eight foster children ages 14-19 completed the Foster Youth Survey questionnaire for 2008.

Respondents Demographics

One hundred and forty-eight foster children ages 14-19 years completed the Foster Youth Survey questionnaire for 2008.

The age range of the respondents was 14 years to 19 years:

- 34 percent were age 14-15 years
- 53 percent were age 16-17 years
- 12 percent were age 18-19 years

The average age of the teens that responded to the survey was 17 years of age.

Results

The survey responses of **Strongly Agree/ Agree** were combined to determine the level of satisfaction for the foster teen respondent and served as the primary determinant of positive satisfaction. The summary report also includes the **Strongly Disagree/ Disagree** and **Undecided** responses.

Services

The survey form contained statements pertaining to the delivery of services.

- 75% agree--*I am satisfied with the services I have received.*
- 60% agree--*I believe that the services provided are right for me.*
- 59% agree--*I believe that I have been helped by the services, I have received.*
- 53% agree--*I have been able to get all the help I need.*

Well-Being

The survey contained statements pertaining to the respondent's sense of well-being.

- 52% agree--*I am hopeful about my future.*
- 63% agree--*I feel safe in my present living arrangement.*
- 62% agree--*I feel DCFS staff care about me and my future.*
- 56% agree--*I feel my foster parents care about me and my future.*
- 35% agree--*I helped plan my services and set my goals.*
- 58% agree--*I feel that I have someone to talk to when I am troubled.*

Staff Responsiveness

Five statements in the questionnaire concerned the responsiveness of DCFS staff.

- 41% agree--*I know what to do if I have a complaint or problem with my worker, someone else at DCFS, or my foster parents.*
- 61% agree--*I believe that DCFS staff has treated me with respect and dignity.*
- 72% agree--*I would consider contacting DCFS if I needed assistance in the future.*
- 47% agree--*I can contact my worker whenever I want.*
- 56% agree--*My worker has been available to me when I needed her/him.*

Foster Youth Survey Responses

1. I am satisfied with the services that my I have received.

Disagree 9%	Undecided 15%	Agree 76%	No Answer
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2. I believe that the services provided are right for me.

Disagree 14%	Undecided 26%	Agree 60%	No Answer
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3. I believe that I have been helped by the services, I have received.

Disagree 21%	Undecided 20%	Agree 59%	No Answer
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4. I have been able to get all the help I need.

Disagree 24%	Undecided 22%	Agree 53%	No Answer
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5. I helped plan my services and set my goals.

Disagree 40%	Undecided 25%	Agree 35%	No Answer
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6. I feel safe in my present living arrangement.

Disagree 16%	Undecided 22%	Agree 63%	No Answer
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7. I feel DCFS staff care about me and my future.

Disagree 28%	Undecided 26%	Agree 61%	No Answer
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8. I feel my foster parents care about me and my future.

Disagree 16%	Undecided 28%	Agree 56%	No Answer
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9. I am hopeful about my future.

Disagree 18%	Undecided 30%	Agree 52%	No Answer
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10. I feel that I have someone to talk to when I am troubled.

Disagree 26%	Undecided 17%	Agree 57%	No Answer
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11. I believe that DCFS staff has treated me with respect and dignity.

Disagree 19%	Undecided 21%	Agree 60%	No Answer
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12. My worker has been available to me when I needed her/him.

Disagree 26%	Undecided 18%	Agree 56%	No Answer
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13. I can contact my worker whenever I want.

Disagree 28%	Undecided 24%	Agree 47%	No Answer
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14. I know what to do, if I have a complaint or problem with my worker, someone else at DCFS, or my foster parent.

Disagree 26%	Undecided 15%	Agree 41%	No Answer
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15. I would consider contacting DCFS if I needed assistance in the future.

Disagree 10%	Undecided 18%	Agree 72%	No Answer
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What services have been the most helpful to you while in foster care?

- *Being able to visit my family.
- *My worker answers the phone when I call.
- *ETV and my foster mother.
- *Methodist system.
- *The independent living service.
- *Placement in a nearby.
- *DHS.
- *Independent living.
- *Medicaid.
- *Everything.
- *When ever I need my caseworker.
- *Having people to help me through all the time.
- *School.
- *Tutoring an ILP.
- *Social Worker.
- *CASA.
- *Medical Services.
- *Counseling.
- *ILP.
- *Less group homes.
- *Going to school.
- * Helping me with my future.
- *My school being paid for.
- *Everyone I came in contact with.
- *College Support.
- *Safe homes.
- *My counselor at school.
- *Meeting new people and having a future.
- *My caseworker.
- *Plans about college.
- *When I have a problem, I need some-one to talk to.
- *Clothes when needed.
- *Help with college.
- *Rivendell.
- *Me finding what I want to do.
- *Getting back with my family.
- *Fast result.
- *GED and Job.
- *More workers who listen.
- *I need more help.
- *The hospitals and the shelters.
- *Transportation to the doctor's appt, visitation, court dates and ILP.
- *Being able to live in the same household as my sister.

What services have been the least helpful to you while in foster care?

- *The staff.
- *Facilities.
- *Doing what rights for me.
- *My therapist.
- *DHS.
- *Where I am staying and where I should stay.
- * Not talking to her.
- *Caseworker to return your call.
- *Two many restriction on mature adults.
- *Not seeing my ex-boyfriend.
- *Centers for youth and family.
- *Casa, Court, DHS.
- *Foster Parents.
- *Getting permit to drive.
- *DHS and court systems.
- *Being able to drive.
- *I need a better place to live and someone to listen to me.
- *Putting me in harmful foster homes.
- *Not being treated like their real children.
- *Campus and youth home.
- *Getting the proper clothing that I need.
- *Mental Hospitals.
- *My past foster home neglected my medical needs and abused my little sister, never gave her a bath.
- *My Aunt.
- *Thing that have not been getting done.
- *Not able to receive my trust fund, my money going to other people than me.
- *I hate being in foster home, I feel safer and better at my house with my mom.

What do you think would improve foster care services at DHS?

- *Get a new car.
- *If all the children would be respectful to their foster parents.
- *Attention to the foster kids and feed them when they are hungry.
- *Visit my family and friends.
- *Bike riding and games.
- *Getting what I need on a daily basis...
- *More child involvement.
- *Getting me back with my family.
- *Fast result.
- *More workers who listen.
- *More choices for placement.
- *Contact with me.
- *For my case worker to call.
- *More money for kids.
- *New clothes every 6 months.

- *Call their worker at anytime.
- *Getting what I need on a daily basis.
- *Give more opportunity to those who deserve.
- *Pay for insurance.
- *If you could go partying.
- *Own decisions.
- *Listening to the children and parents.
- *Attention to the foster kids and feed them when they are hungry.

Comments Youth Survey 2008

Positives Responses

- *I'm grateful for DHS they have helped me and keep me out of trouble
- *DHS is okay
- *We need to have a summer camp
- *It's GREAT
- *I feel like I really learn how to live my life the right way.

Negatives Responses

- *My foster parent has threaten to pee on a towel and make us foster kids sleep with one, just because there were a pee smelling towel left in the bathroom.
- *I think my foster home is really stupid. I dislike my foster parents with a passion, she's angry with me because I visit my mom between school time—my mother works at the.
- *She tears down my self-esteem and fined negative things to say
- *Treat us like other kids and not have all the rules for foster kids only.
- *Have not seen my caseworker or talk in a month.
- *DHS and CASA they don't care about us foster kids, they just tear family apart.
- *Foster care really sucks and being put in a verbally, emotional and abusive is not cool.
- *No one has really helped me, parents try, but there's nothing they can do.
- *Have not seen my caseworker or talk to her in a month.
- *DHS and CASA they don't care about us foster kids, they just tear family apart.
- *I would love to receive an allowance, I am a teenager, its things I need.
- *I would like to know, how much money I have in my account.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The teens' high level of satisfaction (76%) that they are satisfied with the services they have received from Dept of Human Services. The additional services that these foster teens receive through the Independent Living Program may contribute to this high level of satisfaction. The low level (35%) they helped plan their services and set their goals. Many of the following recommendation are already required in policy. DCFS need to monitor compliance with some of this recommendation to ensure that our foster youth are receiving appropriate services. The following recommendation is based on DCFS policy, training guidance, review of literature and input/observation from staff:

Training

- Ensure that training about working with the teens is available to all DCFS workers including Independent Living Program (ILP) Coordinators.
- Ensure that the training about working with the teens and helping youth acquire basic life skills is available to foster parents who care for children age 14 and older.

Coordination between Caseworker and Independent Living Coordinator

- Ensure that ILP Coordinators are included in foster youth staffing.
- Ensure communication and coordination between the foster teen's worker and the ILP Coordinator.

Assessment and Re-assessment

- Increase the number of DCFS foster children assessed for Independent Living Services.
- Reassess on a regular basis those children who are eligible for the ILP. Reassess interest in being referred for ILP services for those teens that did not voluntarily agree to be referred initially.
- Ensure that every foster child who reaches majority while in care obtains a high school education, technical school education or a GED.

Life Skills Training

- Ensure that Life Skills Training meets the need of different youth age group 14-15 and 16-18 years old and is geared toward the foster teen's interests.

After-care Services

- Ensure that all foster children "aging out" of foster care participate in the Age of Majority Staffing to be conducted at age 17-17 ½.
- Ensure that all foster children are informed about ETV funds and after-care services.
- Plan for contact with foster youth after leaving foster care- one month, three months.

Youth Advisory Board

- Ensure that each DCFS Area has at least one youth advisory board committee.
- Ensure that each DCFS Area has one youth representative on the State Youth Advisory Board.

Dissemination of Report

- Share the report with youth advisory board member and the Independent Living Program coordinator and seek input on recommendations.
- Distribute this report to all DCFS staff involved with working with foster youth.
- Share this report with the Five Year Plan work group for consideration of incorporating some of these recommendations into the Five Year Plan and developing action steps to accomplish some of these recommendations.