



SEPTEMBER 2020



# Colorado Pathways to Success

Formative Evaluation Final Report

**PREPARED BY**

**Lanae Davis, MPA**

**Nancy Thoennes, PhD**

**Savahanna Matyasic, MSW**



1570 Emerson Street | Denver, Colorado 80218  
303.837.1555 | [www.centerforpolicyresearch.org](http://www.centerforpolicyresearch.org)

## Acknowledgments

---

The authors would like to thank the many people and organizations that were involved in Colorado's Pathways to Success. The following list represents a statewide collaborative effort of key stakeholders that played a critical role in the effort to build the evidence base for programs that prevent homelessness among youth aging out of the foster care system.

### **Colorado Department of Human Services/Division of Child Welfare**

Trevor Williams, Pathways Project Director

Derek Blake,

Minna Castillo-Cohen

Kristin Melton

Jeff Romero

### **Colorado Department of Local Affairs/Division of Housing**

Zac Schaffner

Cheryl Secorski, formerly with the Colorado Department of Local Affairs/Division of Housing

Kristin Toombs

Paul Vong

### **Spark Community Foundation**

Denise McHugh, Pathways Project Manager, Executive Director

Erin McHugh, Pathways Project Coordinator

### **Youth Consultants**

Diego Conde

Tai Mason

Gabriel Van Norman

### **Boulder County Department of Housing and Human Services**

Nicole Kuzma

Kit Thompson

### **Attention Homes**

Elly Johnson

Chris Nelson

### **Denver County Department of Human Services**

Georgina Becerril

Heather Powell

### **Urban Peak**

Ramsey Cox

Clayton Gonzales

### **Shiloh House**

Steven Ramirez

Kippi Clausen, Unfolding Directions/Shiloh House

And a special thank you to the Navigators Kristy Townsend, Candice Dow, Tamisha Macklin, Will Ellwood, Stephanie Horton, and James Berg who worked to help refine the intervention and serve the youth represented in this report.

*This report shares findings from Colorado’s Youth At-risk of Homelessness (YARH) Phase II formative evaluation. The final formative evaluation report shares implementation and outcomes from Colorado’s Pathways to Success program that serves youth and young adults who have been involved in the foster care system and are at risk of homelessness. Collecting and sharing these lessons with organizations that have similar missions is one step in developing evidence on how to meet the needs of this population.*

*This report is funded under a cooperative agreement from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children’s Bureau to the State of Colorado Division of Child Welfare. The views expressed in this report are those solely of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Children’s Bureau or the Colorado Department of Human Services, Division of Child Welfare.*

“Everyone starts somewhere—though no one chooses where they start, every person chooses where they go.

Fears open the possibility for courage—hardships make way for triumphs!”

— Pathways youth



# Table of Contents

---

Executive Summary.....	i
Overview of the Evaluation .....	iii
Profile of Pathways Youth .....	iv
Summary of Findings and Lessons Learned.....	v
Background.....	1
Colorado Pathways to Success.....	2
History.....	2
Overview of the Model.....	3
The Sites and Partner Agencies .....	6
Staffing and Training.....	6
Referrals and Screening.....	8
Overview of the Evaluation.....	9
Research Questions .....	9
Data Sources and Data Collection .....	11
Findings from the Formative Evaluation.....	12
Profile of Enrolled Youth.....	13
Child Welfare History.....	15
Entry into Pathways.....	16
Project Activities.....	18
Program Completion .....	22
Outcomes.....	24
Lessons Learned and Implications for Future Research .....	31

## Executive Summary

In September 2013, the Children’s Bureau, within the Administration for Children and Families (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services), began funding a multi-phase program designed to build the evidence base on what works to prevent homelessness among youth and young adults who have been involved in the foster care system. This program is referred to as Youth At-Risk of Homelessness (YARH).

YARH was developed in response to a growing body of literature suggesting that many former foster youth who “age out” of the system spend some period of time unstably housed or homeless. Evidence suggests that these youth are also likely to have limited education and work skills and may be at risk of substance abuse or mental health needs due to past histories of trauma.

In response to this problem, the YARH program focused the development of their interventions on three target populations:

- 1** Adolescents who enter foster care between ages 14–17
- 2** Young adults aging/transitioning out of foster care
- 3** Homeless youth/young adults with foster care histories up to age 21

YARH has two major goals:

- 1** The development of comprehensive service models to prevent homelessness among youth and young adults involved in the child welfare system
- 2** To test the models in order to build the evidence base on promising strategies

YARH has four key areas of focus:

- 1** Safe and stable housing
- 2** Permanent connections
- 3** Education and employment
- 4** Health and well-being

“[Pathways] is a program that helps me achieve what I want to achieve in my life . . . [it’s] super focused around what I want and need, instead of what the system wants me to do.”

— Pathways youth



Colorado Department of Human Services, Division of Child Welfare (CDHS/DCW) was one of the initial 18 agencies awarded a YARH Phase I planning grant. During Phase I, CDHS/DCW convened a steering committee that included youth leaders, cross-systems providers, state and local public agencies, advocates, and community members representing the different outcome areas or pathways (housing, education, employment, well-being, and permanent connections). This committee met to identify the needs of transition-age youth and brainstorm strategies for meeting those needs. Youth leaders then helped to prioritize the different strategies that ultimately led to development of the model intervention—Colorado Pathways to Success: Youth-Shared Practices Model (Pathways). CDHS/DCW was subsequently awarded one of six YARH Phase II Implementation

grants to refine, implement, and test the Pathways model intervention through a formative evaluation. This report provides an overview of the Pathways model intervention, the research questions developed and tested through the formative evaluation and short-term outcomes and lessons learned from YARH Phase II.

## Overview

The primary focus of the Pathways intervention is on preventing homelessness among youth ages 14 to 21 who are currently in or transitioning out of foster care placement, with added emphasis on serving youth up to age 23 who have foster care histories but are no longer in care and are experiencing homelessness.

To assist in this, each youth in Pathways is assigned a Navigator, who engages youth in a coach-like way to develop and achieve goals and provide services. In essence, Pathways is unique in that youth direct the intervention, while Navigators act as supports to deploy strategies and an array of individualized services that may include mentoring, transitional living/housing supports, sexual and relationship health training, and other supports. Within Pathways, all services and intervention strategies are tailored specifically to each youth's unique needs, strengths, and goals.

The Pathways model is designed to be short term and intensive; it is intended to continue until youth are ready to graduate to a less intensive care management model, or until they feel the intervention is complete.

The following are key components of the Pathways intervention.

**(Core) Engaging youth in a coach-like way:** Each Navigator carries a small caseload (up to 10 youth for a full-time Navigator), which allows them to provide intensive and consistent support to the youth in their caseload. The key feature that sets coach-like engagement apart from typical intensive case management models is that it is youth driven and future focused. When Navigators act as coaches, they build a supportive relationship with the youth that encourages them to set their own individual goals, plan, and pace.

**Crisis stabilization:** Some youth, especially those who are experiencing homelessness, enroll in Pathways during a period of crisis. When this occurs, the primary focus of the Navigator is crisis stabilization. This involves using all other components of the intervention to address immediate safety and/or housing needs before setting a path to developing and achieving their goals.

**Establishing goals:** Youth work with the Navigator to develop two goals during the intervention. These relate to one or more of the outcome areas and guide the work the Navigator and youth do together.

**Securing and maintaining safe and stable housing:** This can take many forms depending on the state of housing the youth are experiencing. In some cases, a young person has a plan to live with a friend or family member, in which case the Navigator acts as a facilitator for building and maintaining supportive relationships. More directly, Navigators can provide assistance by helping youth to acquire housing vouchers and by building connections with landlords or developments that will rent to youth with challenges (such as juvenile records, no rental history, low income, or special needs).

**Case planning and assessment tools:** To assess youth's needs and opportunities for growth, Navigators are equipped with a variety of evidence-informed tools.

**Small-scale financial assistance:** Access to supports is key to helping youth stay on track in achieving goals. Therefore, Navigators must be able to provide immediate resources for youth in need. For this purpose, each collaborative site is set up with flex funds (which are described in greater detail in the Resources section). These funds can be used to provide immediate assistance to youth when all other resources have been tapped and they have an unmet need.

**Referrals:** No agency or organization is a one-stop shop for helping foster care youth overcome the many challenges necessary to be equipped for independence. Therefore, Navigators must be tapped into a wide referral network of partners in the human services field and in the community.

Pathways was implemented across three demonstration sites consisting of urban (Denver County), suburban/second city (Boulder County), and rural counties in the northeast region of Colorado. Pathways selected these counties mainly because they represent the different types of communities in Colorado. CDHS/DCW's intent early on was to develop a model intervention that could be replicated statewide to improve child welfare and, in particular, Chafee programming. Therefore, the model needed to be tested in these different types of settings. Each site represents a collaborative made up of county department of human services and runaway and homeless youth (RHY) service providers.

## Overview of the Evaluation

The formative evaluation was designed to address the primary research questions outlined below.

- How well does the Pathways recruitment and enrollment process identify, refer, and enroll members of the target populations into the intervention?
- Was the model intervention implemented as intended across sites?
- Were there differences in implementation between sites and/or between populations?
- What services and activities did Navigators provide, and how did they connect to youth goals established?
- To what extent did youth complete the intervention, and to what extent were youth goals achieved?
- To what extent are expected short-term outcomes related to permanency, housing, health and well-being, education, and employment being achieved?
- How successful was coach-like engagement in increasing youths' ability to manage independence?

To answer the research questions, the research team designed data collection instruments and tools and used a variety of methods to collect information on the youth served in Pathways. The following data collection points were used to gather information for the evaluation.

- **Screening Assessment** completed with all youth who met the target population criteria, documented risk factors associated with youth homelessness.
- **Baseline Survey** completed upon enrollment in Pathways and collects baseline demographic data, and housing and child welfare history.
- **Youth Connections Scale (YCS) and Empowerment and Engagement Scale (EES)** evidence-based tools used to measure permanency, and youth's perceptions of their engagement and feelings of empowerment.
- **Pathways Management Information System (PMIS)** the research team developed a secure online management information system that served to collect detailed information for the evaluation and used as a case management system to aide Navigators in providing services to youth. PMIS allows for the documentation of a youth's progress in the program and serves as a record of how often and for what purpose Navigators were in contact by phone, email, text, or in person. These records include information about the topics discussed and the outcome, including services or funds provided.
- **Follow-Up Telephone Survey** conducted 12 months post-program enrollment with all enrolled youth.
- **Interviews and Focus Groups** with key stakeholders, project staff, and youth.

- **Administrative Data Systems** Youth records were downloaded, cleaned, and analyzed from PMIS. Information stored and analyzed from PMIS included the detailed case management records, youth status in the Pathways program, the YCS and EES scales, screening assessment, and baseline survey. This information was merged with the administrative data and follow-up telephone survey for analysis and reporting.

Descriptive statistics were used to generate a profile of the youth enrolled in Pathways, their risk factors, foster care history, past and current living situation, services received, goals set, and program status. Information from the baseline and follow-up telephone survey was analyzed and compared to determine short-term outcomes achieved. Administrative data was extracted from the state's child welfare automated system to add detailed information on the youth's child welfare history and to provide information on short-term outcomes achieved. Pre- and post-enrollment measures were developed around the four key outcomes and reported for all youth where data was available.

## Profile of Pathways Youth

The Pathways model intervention, once implemented to fidelity, served 128 youth in the target population from July 2016 through September 2019. Findings from those youth served are presented in this report and summarized below. Key demographic and background characteristics of those youth who enrolled in the program include:

- Pathways served a geographically diverse group of youth from across the State of Colorado. The intervention was successfully implemented in urban, suburban, and rural settings. Denver (urban) youth account for nearly half of the enrollments, the rural collaborative accounts for 31%, and Boulder (suburban) for 26% of enrollees.
- The average age of youth enrolled and served in the Pathways intervention were aged 18 years old, with a range in age from 14 to 21.
- Youth were primarily divided between those who describe themselves as male (44%) and female (52%), with only 2% describing themselves as non-binary and 4% as trans.
- Just less than three-quarters of the youth chose "straight" to describe their sexual orientation. However, 27% said "gay or lesbian," "bisexual or pansexual," or "other."
- Half of the youth self-identify as white, non-Hispanic. Nearly 20% of youth reported being Hispanic, and a similar percentage chose African-American.
- English was the primary language for all but 3% of the youth.
- At the time of enrollment, 14% of the youth said they either had a child or were expecting a child.
- Over one-quarter (28%) reported some type of disability, most commonly a mental health issue.
- Fifteen percent of youth reported having been labor or sex trafficked.
- Just under half (42%) of youth reported prior involvement with youth corrections.

The goal of the Pathways formative evaluation was to implement, refine, and test a model intervention designed to prevent homelessness among youth aging out of the foster care system. The effort resulted in building evidence to support the Pathways model in ensuring better outcomes for foster youth, with the primary goal of preventing homelessness. This project resulted in the development of the Pathways intervention manual, which other agencies can use in implementing evidence-informed programs to address homelessness among youth aging out of the foster care system. The Pathways formative evaluation begins to build evidence to support the implementation of the intervention and found many promising short-term

outcomes in the five key outcome areas of education, employment, permanency, housing, and health and well-being. We can draw the following lessons from this formative evaluation.

## Summary of Findings and Lessons Learned

The goal of the Pathways formative evaluation was to implement, refine, and test a model intervention designed to prevent homelessness among youth aging out of the foster care system. This project resulted in the development of the Pathways intervention manual, which other agencies can use in implementing evidence-informed programs to address homelessness among youth aging out of the foster care system. The Pathways formative evaluation begins to build evidence to support the implementation of the intervention and found many promising short-term outcomes in the five key outcome areas of education, employment, permanency, housing, and health and well-being. We can draw the following lessons from this formative evaluation.

### Systems-Level Lessons

- Collaboration between county agencies and runaway and homeless youth service providing agencies is critical to identifying, serving, and achieving targeted outcomes.
- When developing an intervention that serves youth, youth must have a seat at the table. It is not enough to conduct focus groups or talk to a few youths to get their input on programming. To truly incorporate youth voice, youth must be interwoven into all aspects of program development, from sitting on project management to providing input and feedback on service delivery, program staff qualifications, criteria for program graduation to recommendations on needed adjustments to program services. A youth-driven intervention must be youth-designed for youth to fully engage in the program.
- Systemic change takes time, commitment, and buy-in from cross-system agencies. The child welfare agency alone is not able to make significant change in how services are provided without RHY providers and other government agency administrators at the table providing input and feedback on how the program works.
- It is possible to identify and serve youth at risk of homelessness in a variety of settings including rural, urban, and suburban locations. Colorado intentionally recruited sites for Pathways participation from a geographically diverse setting to test the intervention in small (rural), medium (suburban), and large (urban) counties.
- Implementing a continuous quality improvement process (CQI) allows monitoring of enrollment and engagement levels of youth to ensure the program is operating as designed. Beyond ensuring that youth are receiving the services to fidelity, the process allows programs to ensure that youth are on track to achieve the goals they have set and short- and medium-term outcomes as designed.

### Intervention-Level Lessons

- The Pathways screening tool successfully identifies youth who are at an increased risk of becoming homeless. During Phase I of the YARH project, a screening tool was developed to identify youth aging out of foster care and are at an increased risk of becoming homeless.
- Pathways successfully engages high-risk youth in intervention services. The process of coach-like engagement necessitates a higher level of engagement than traditional case management. The intervention shows promise for all youth who enroll and achieve some level of engagement with their Navigator.

- Youth reported feeling empowered and more resilient and developed self-advocacy skills following participation in Pathways.
- Education outcomes improve for youth participating in Pathways. Between enrollment and the 12-month follow-up interview, younger youth reported graduating high school at significantly higher rates, older youth returned to school at higher rates, and there was an increase in the percentage of youth graduating from high school.
- Pathways reduces homelessness and increases safe and stable housing for youth participants. A primary goal of Pathways is to reduce or prevent homelessness and create long-term, safe, and stable housing for youth aging out of foster care.
- Pathways increases youth connections to supportive adults. After participating in Pathways, youth report an increase in the number of permanent supportive adults in their lives. They also report an increase in the frequency of monthly contact with the supportive adults.
- Pathways improves economic security and employment for youth participants. The percentage of youth unemployed fell 14% at the 12-month follow-up interview. The percentage of youth employed either full- or part-time at the 12-month follow-up interview stood at 59%. While still very low, the average monthly earnings reported by youth also saw a significant increase following participation in Pathways, jumping from an average of \$627 per month to \$1,052 per month at 12 months post-. “Getting banked,” or opening a checking or savings account, saw a significant increase as well.
- Pathways improves youth’s health and well-being. Youth report feeling better prepared to arrange for their own health care following participation in Pathways. There was also a significant increase in the proportion of youth who have medical coverage, encompassing 90% of youth who were interviewed during the follow-up survey.
- According to Pathways youth who participated in researcher-led focus groups, youth overwhelmingly respond favorably to the Pathways intervention. Youth reported that Pathways encourages them to reach their full potential. Youth reported that the program is a stepping stone that helps them “get to a better place in their lives.”

This formative evaluation begins to build the evidence-base to support programs that lead to successful outcomes for older youth aging out of the foster care system. Short-term outcomes in this evaluation centered around the five core areas outlined by the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH): education, employment, permanency, housing, and health and well-being. Research from the Pathways formative evaluation saw improvements in all five of these key outcome areas.

## Background

In September 2013, the Children’s Bureau, within the Administration for Children and Families (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services), began funding a program designed to build the evidence base on what works to prevent homelessness among youth and young adults who have been involved in the child welfare system. This program is referred to as Youth At-Risk of Homelessness (YARH).

The program was developed in response to a growing body of literature suggesting that many former foster youth who “age out” of the system spend some period of time without stable housing. Evidence suggests that these youth are also likely to have limited education and work skills and may be at risk of substance abuse or mental health needs due to past histories of trauma.

A document published by the Office on Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE)<sup>1</sup> explained the need for the research:

*Evidence on “what works” for youth in foster care or youth who were formerly in foster care is limited . . . . To expand the evidence base and to inform policies and programs for these individuals, the Children’s Bureau developed a multi-phase grant program called Grants to Develop a Model Intervention for Youth/Young Adults with Child Welfare Involvement At-Risk of Homelessness (YARH).*

In response to this problem, the YARH programs focused the development of their interventions on three target populations:

- 1** Adolescents who enter foster care between ages 14–17
- 2** Young adults aging/transitioning out of foster care
- 3** Homeless youth/young adults with foster care histories up to age 21

YARH has two major goals:

- 1** The development of comprehensive service models to prevent homelessness among youth and young adults involved in the foster care system
- 2** To test the models in order to build the evidence base on promising strategies

YARH has four key areas of focus:

- 1** Safe and stable housing
- 2** Permanent connections<sup>2</sup>
- 3** Education and employment
- 4** Health and well-being

A review of research published between 1990 and 2011 has suggested that between 11% and 36% of the youths who age out of foster care become homeless during the transition to adulthood. By comparison, approximately 4% of the nationally representative sample of youths aged 18 to 26 years who participated in the third wave of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health reported ever being homeless.

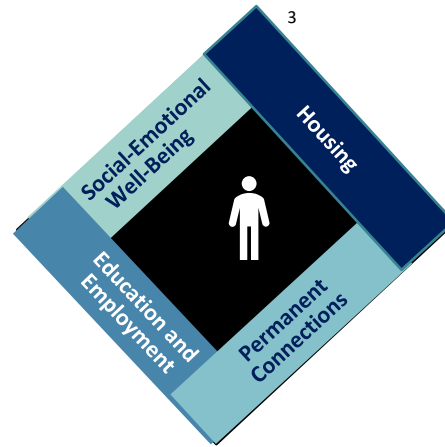
Dworsky, A., L. Napolitano, and M. Courtney. *American Journal of Public Health*, 2013 December. Homelessness During the Transition from Foster Care to Adulthood

<sup>1</sup> Federal and Local Efforts to Support Youth At-Risk of Homelessness. OPRE Report # 2018-97, December 2018. Emily Knas, Matthew Stagner, and M.C. Bradley.

<sup>2</sup> Permanent connections are sometimes referred to as permanency throughout this manual and its materials. Permanent connections (or permanency) refers to lasting relational supports in a young person’s life.

The Children’s Bureau, with the Administration for Children and Families (a division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services), is funding a multi-phase grant program referred to as Youth At-Risk of Homelessness (YARH) to build the evidence base on what works to prevent homelessness among youth and young adults who have been involved in the foster care system. YARH focuses on three populations: (1) adolescents who enter foster care from ages 14 to 17, (2) young adults aging out of foster care, and (3) homeless youth/young adults with foster care histories up to age 21.

Eighteen organizations received funding for the first phase of YARH, a two-year planning grant (2013–2015). Six of those organizations received funding for the second phase of YARH, a four-year initial implementation grant (2015–2019). These organizations refined and tested comprehensive services models to improve outcomes for youth in housing, education and training, social well-being, and permanent connections.



The Children’s Bureau awarded YARH planning grants in Phase I for a two-year period to 18 organizations across the country. During this phase of the project, the focus was on identifying risk factors and services to fill these gaps. Grantees identified or developed comprehensive service models to address the gaps in services and supports to better meet the needs of youth within the target populations.

In September 2015, the Children’s Bureau awarded a second round of YARH grants for a three-year period to six of the original 18 grantees. The goals of YARH Phase II were to fine-tune, implement, and test the comprehensive service models developed in Phase I. In addition, grantees were to focus on evaluating the implementation process and on preparing for a rigorous impact evaluation. This report describes the work conducted by Colorado in YARH Phase II and the results of the formative evaluation.

## Colorado Pathways to Success

### History

Prior to the YARH award, the Colorado Department of Human Services/Division of Child Welfare (CDHS/DCW) had been working on the issue of homelessness among youth with current and prior foster care involvement for several years. These efforts included:

- Collecting and analyzing administrative data to identify risk factors and those most at risk of becoming homeless
- Implementing policy changes to support the successful transition of youth to adulthood

<sup>3</sup> Source: *Strengthening Grantee Capacity Through Evaluation Technical Assistance*. Elizabeth Cleary and M. C. Bradley December 2018. OPRE Report # 2018-99, Mathematica Policy Research.

- Strengthening partnerships with other state and local agencies to address the foster-care-to-homelessness pipeline

These efforts ultimately culminated in CDHS/DCW applying for and being awarded a YARH Phase I planning grant. During Phase I, CDHS/DCW convened a steering committee that included youth leaders, cross-systems providers, state and local public agencies, advocates, and community members representing the different outcome areas or pathways (housing, education, employment, well-being, and permanent connections). This committee met to identify the needs of transition-age youth and brainstorm strategies for meeting those needs. Youth leaders then helped to prioritize the different strategies that ultimately led to development of the model intervention—Colorado Pathways to Success: Youth-Shared Practices Model (Pathways).

## Overview of the Model

The primary focus of the Pathways intervention is on preventing homelessness among youth ages 14 to 21 who are currently in or transitioning out of foster care placement, with added emphasis on serving youth up to age 23 who have foster care histories but are no longer in care and are homeless.

To assist in this, each youth in Pathways is assigned a Navigator, who engages youth in a coach-like way to develop and achieve goals and provide services. In essence, Pathways is unique in that youth direct the intervention, while Navigators act as supports to deploy strategies and an array of individualized services that may include mentoring, transitional living/housing supports, sexual and relationship health training, and other supports. Within Pathways, all services and intervention strategies are tailored specifically to each youth’s unique needs, strengths, and goals.

Providing services through coach-like engagement promotes the strengths and self-advocacy of youth. As coaches, Navigators meet regularly with youth to provide crisis stabilization support and help youth connect to resources related to achieving their goals. In addition to coach-like engagement, Navigators use a variety of tools and resources to support youth, such as flex funds and direct referrals to relevant resources.

The Pathways model is designed to be short term and intensive; it is intended to continue until youth are ready to graduate to a less intensive care management model, or until they feel the intervention is complete.

The following are key components of the Pathways intervention.

**(Core) Engaging youth in a coach-like way:** Each Navigator carries a small caseload (up to 10 youth for a full-time Navigator), which allows them to provide intensive and consistent support to the youth in their caseload. The key feature that sets coach-like engagement apart from typical intensive case management models is that it is youth driven and future focused. When Navigators act as coaches, they build a supportive relationship with the youth that encourages them to set their own individual goals, plan, and pace. While regular case management may focus on achieving

## Pathways Model

The Pathways model is built around Navigators, who engage youth in a coach-like way to develop and achieve goals and provide services.

Youth direct the intervention, while Navigators deploy strategies and an array of individualized services that may include mentoring, transitional living/housing, sexual and relationship health training, and other supports tailored to each youth’s needs and strengths.

The primary focus of the intervention is on preventing homelessness among youth ages 14 to 21 who are currently in or transitioning out of foster care placement, with added emphasis on serving youth up to age 23 who have foster care histories but are no longer in care and are homeless.

The Pathways model is designed to be short term and intensive; it is intended to continue until youth are ready to graduate to a less intensive care management model, or until they feel the intervention is complete.

the same outcomes by providing services, coach-like engagement empowers youth to be their own advocates. As one youth summarized:

---

“Pathways had me in this mindset that I’m trying to prove something and that I don’t want to let [my Navigator] down because of that relationship we developed.”

— Pathways youth



Youth are responsible for setting goals, while the Navigator focuses on helping youth develop the skills and capacities to achieve those goals. Providing case management is not an approach unique to Pathways; what *is* unique is how the classifications of case management change when Navigators act as coaches. For example, spending multiple hours helping a young person clean their apartment might not be a traditional form of case management, but within Pathways, this service might be vital to improving the young person’s health and well-being, making them feel secure and safe in their housing, and showing them how to “set up” their apartment.

**Crisis stabilization:** Some youth, especially those who are experiencing homelessness, enroll in Pathways during a period of crisis. When this occurs, the primary focus of the Navigator is crisis stabilization. This involves using all other components of the intervention to address immediate safety and/or housing needs before setting a path to developing and achieving their goals.

**Establishing goals:** Youth work with the Navigator to develop two goals during the intervention. These relate to one or more of the outcome areas and guide the work the Navigator and youth do together. The process of setting goals might include the use of a worksheet, or it might be structured more as an informal interview with youth about what they would like to achieve to be ready to transition to independent living. Youth may set as many goals as desired and are free to add goals throughout the program. Progress toward these goals is tracked by the Navigator, who maintains regular contact with youth and guides them through next steps. During the formative evaluation, the progress of goals was tracked through the primary data collection tool, Pathways Management Information System [PMIS].

---

“[Pathways] is a program that helps me achieve what I want to achieve in my life. . . [it’s] super focused around what I want and need, instead of what the system wants me to do.”

— Pathways youth

**Securing and maintaining safe and stable housing:** This can take many forms depending on

the state of housing the youth are experiencing. In some cases, a young person has a plan to live with a friend or family member, in which case the Navigator acts as a facilitator for building and maintaining supportive relationships. More directly, Navigators can provide assistance by helping youth to acquire housing vouchers and by building connections with landlords or developments that will rent to youth with challenges (such as juvenile records, no rental history, low income, or special needs). Also, as there are many barriers to obtaining housing for the first time, Navigators can provide support by helping youth understand and acquire the necessary documentation to become a renter (such as letters of reference) and making calls for youth.

The logic model for the Pathways intervention is shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1. Pathways Logic Model**

Inputs	Activities	Outputs		Short-Term Outcomes	Medium-Term Outcomes	Long-term Impacts
Caseworker, Chafee worker, or client manager refers youth for screening of homelessness risk	Navigator administers screening tool, baseline survey, Youth Connections Scale to assess and track youth needs	Appropriate assessment tools completed and entered in PMIS: Screening	Permanency	Youth can identify an adult, close friend, or mentor who can provide support	Youth are in a mentoring program or meeting regularly with a supportive adult	Youth report increased permanent supportive connections with family and community
	Navigator meets with youth to build rapport, discuss needs and interests to map a service delivery plan	Assessment, Baseline Survey, Youth Connections Scale, Empowerment and Engagement Survey				
Pathways Navigators trained to deliver youth-driven services to provide an individualized services array, and to engage youth in a coach-like manner	Navigator connects youth to individualized array of existing services, distributes flex funds as needed	Contact with Navigator at least weekly, starting at enrollment	Well-Being	The majority of youth have health insurance	Youth know name and contact for doctor Youth know where and how to access medical care	Youth report improved physical and mental health, and positive outlook on life
	Navigator prepares and advocates for youth in youth-led Permanency Roundtable (PRT) or Community Roundtable (CRT), debriefs youth following all Roundtables	Individual Services Array, Referral to at least one new service/organization within the first month post-enrollment	Housing	Youth learn about safe, stable housing options	Access safe and stable housing options such as kinship and independent living arrangements	Youth report living in safe, stable housing
	Navigator facilitates development of Independent Living Plan (ILP) and convenes meetings with youth-selected team	Minimum of one supportive adult following each PRT/CRT or permanency pact	Education	80% of school-aged youth enrolled in school; 65% of youth use education supports	Youth use education supports like ICAP; youth enroll or re-enroll in school	Youth report increased academic achievement; school-aged youth are enrolled in school; graduated youth report post-secondary enrollment
	Navigator documents activities, contact, and youth progress in PMIS	ILP developed with two goals or barriers to independence identified following enrollment and reviewed annually. Navigator works with youth to achieve goals	Employment	Youth talk with Navigator about careers or job opportunities of interest to them	Youth participate in career shadowing, training, internship, volunteering	Youth identify goals to achieve career training, secondary education, or full-time employment
Pathways Management Information System (PMIS) to track and collect data on youth outcomes and intervention activities	Navigator facilitates Local Interagency Team (LIAT) meetings to address systemic barriers					

**External Factors:** Foster care and child welfare services could be changed or impacted by state and local policy-level changes

**Case planning and assessment tools:** To assess youth’s needs and opportunities for growth, Navigators are equipped with a variety of evidence-informed tools. These tools are described in greater detail in the Assessment Tools section and are designed to help Navigators and youth understand what they most need to focus on to be ready to transition to self-sufficiency after graduation.

**Small-scale financial assistance:** Access to supports is key to helping youth stay on track in achieving goals. Therefore, Navigators must be able to provide immediate resources for youth in need. For this purpose, each collaborative site is set up with flex funds (which are described in greater detail in the Resources section). These funds can be used to provide immediate assistance to youth when all other resources have been tapped and they have an unmet need.

**Referrals:** No agency or organization is a one-stop shop for helping foster care youth overcome the many challenges necessary to be equipped for independence. Therefore, Navigators must be tapped into a wide referral network of partners in the human services field and in the community. When youth have a problem or goal, a primary responsibility of the Navigator is to help the youth find solutions and connect them to the appropriate service agencies.



### Examples of Flex Fund Uses

- **Fees for:** housing applications, program or educational applications, acquiring vital documents, driver's tests
- **Transportation solutions:** bikes, car insurance, gas money, bus passes, rideshare, car repairs
- **School supplies:** laptop, books, prom dress
- **Bills:** phone, car insurance, utilities
- **Other:** work clothes, meals for meetings, graduation ceremonies, moving costs

## The Sites and Partner Agencies

Pathways was implemented across three demonstration sites consisting of urban (Denver County), suburban/second city (Boulder County), and rural counties in the northeast region of Colorado. Pathways selected these counties mainly because they represent the different types of communities in Colorado. CDHS/DCW's intent early on was to develop a model intervention that could be replicated statewide to improve child welfare and, in particular, Chafee programming. Therefore, the model needed to be tested in these different types of settings. Each site represents a collaborative made up of county department of human services and runaway and homeless youth (RHY) service providers.

Partnerships were sometimes formal and created memoranda of understanding (MOUs) that explicitly spelled out how the organizations would interact with each other; however, in rural or more resource-scarce areas, many partnerships were informal "handshake agreements." Ultimately, Navigators had contacts for more than 100 referral partners to use in securing supports and services for youth related to housing, physical and mental health, workforce development, and educational assistance.

## Staffing and Training

The Colorado Pathways to Success program used several existing locations and agencies to carry out the work for this project. Within each of the collaboratives for this project was a county agency and an RHY provider. Most of the sites created brand-new positions for the role of Navigator, though some shifted the responsibilities of existing workers to cover engaging youth in a coach-like way. As such, each demonstration site had a lot of leeway over how they would staff the Navigator position and who would supervise it. Through counsel from the steering committee and learning collaborative, the decision was made early on to let sites determine how best to staff positions within the intervention.

The Navigator job description was developed based on input from youth, steering committee members, demonstration sites, and project management. Youth articulated the skills, attributes, and experience that should be included in the job description. Youth and Navigators both felt very strongly that Navigators must be passionate about working with older youth and should “appreciate working with transition-age youth and young adults” who are at risk of homelessness or who are homeless.

Youth and program staff articulated the need for Navigators to have experience with foster care, homelessness, and affiliated service agencies, and felt these qualities should be considered at least as important as educational criteria. Navigators and program staff identified several other attributes that should be considered

ideal for Navigators. Youth in Pathways often come from difficult backgrounds, and Navigators considered knowledge of trauma-informed care to be extremely helpful in building connections with youth. Similarly, Navigators repeatedly stressed the importance of knowing about and being well-connected with community resource providers with whom they can establish referral relationships. Demonstration sites were encouraged to have youth participate in a meaningful way during the interview process and to have youth participate in interviews with outside candidates and new hires.

Navigators go through an intensive and customized onboarding process driven by the agency who hired them. Broadly, the Pathways onboarding process dedicated the first week of training to familiarizing Navigators with staff and agency procedures, the goal of Pathways, coach-like engagement, and the Pathways intervention manual. Each site had its own slightly different onboarding process for getting staff familiar with the agency.

---

“We are not there to tell our clients what to do. We are there to hear their goals and just help them reach them . . . to match the energy of a client.

Coaching is a mentality that youth are creative, resourceful, and whole. It's solution-focused, the idea that a client has everything they need.”

— Navigators

---

**Ideal Qualities for Navigators**

- ✓ **Appreciate working with youth**
- ✓ **Experience or knowledge of foster care or homelessness**
- ✓ **Flexible and solutions-oriented**
- ✓ **Knowledge of trauma-informed care**
- ✓ **Connected to or knowledgeable about community resources**

Sites within the Pathways model are responsible for training their Navigators on their own site-specific policies, procedures, and culture. This may look very different between agencies. For example, an RHY provider that has trained one of its regular case managers as a Navigator may have to familiarize the Navigator with shelter and other housing protocols, as well as facilities, before training them in Pathways-specific curriculum. However, a collaborative that provides services for homeless youth in rural or frontier counties may not operate out of a physical location and will instead focus more heavily on how Navigators will connect with various other agencies to identify and engage homeless youth.

Navigators and supervisors must annually undergo training on engaging youth in a coach-like way. Trainings on coach-like engagement are conducted by Colorado’s Child Welfare Training System and involve several activities and breakout groups designed to familiarize participants with applied coaching techniques. It is equally important to train supervisors in coach-like engagement and other aspects of the Pathways model, as supervisors are responsible for managing Pathways at the agency level, troubleshooting challenges arising for youth, and generally providing support to the Navigator. Supervisor’s and Navigator’s participate in regularly scheduled, ongoing coaching training.

Additionally, intervention staff are also encouraged to participate in supplemental trainings on topics such as trauma-informed care positive youth development, and special topics such as human trafficking, substance use, immigration, and renter's rights. These trainings are often provided by the state, the city, and local nonprofits.

### What Navigators are Saying:

"Pathways changes relationships, and relationships cause change for the better. I think [Pathways] is the most fundamental and necessary way to impact improved outcomes for youth in Colorado."

### Referrals and Screening

The Pathways intervention broadly classifies eligible youth as youth with either current or former foster care experience who are eligible to receive Chafee services and are at increased risk of or actively experiencing homelessness. Potentially eligible youth may be identified in several different ways:

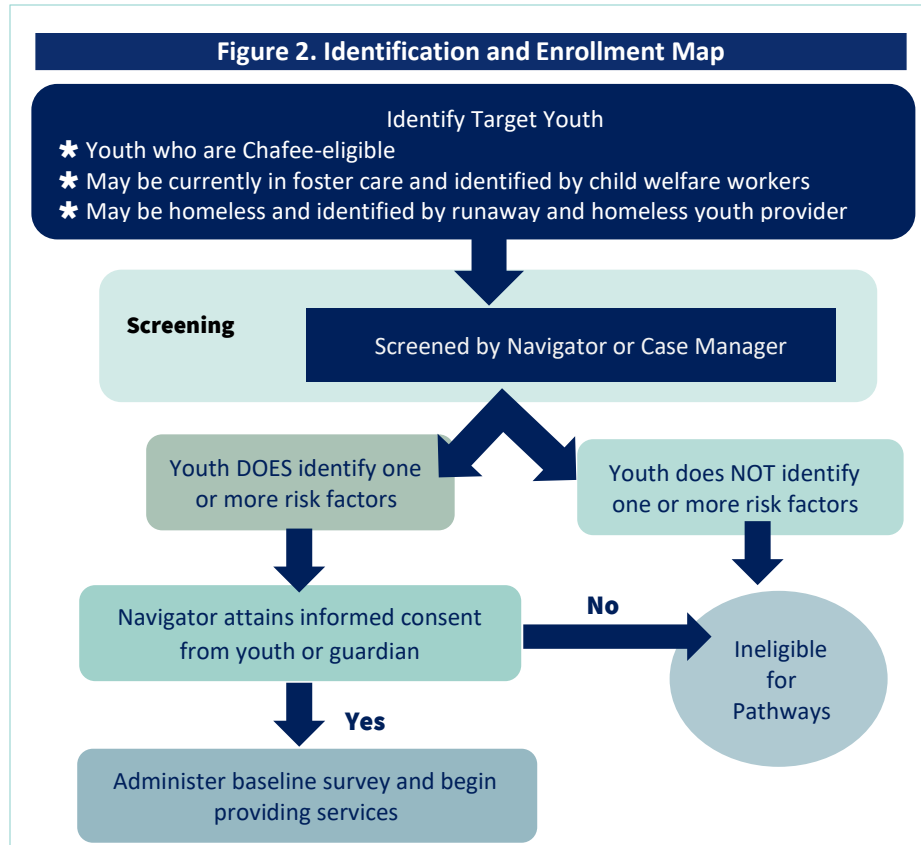
- A county child welfare case worker
- An RHY case manager
- Referrals from other service providers that work with the target population, or
- A review of administrative records.

Once youth are identified as potentially eligible, they are referred to the appropriate Navigator, who completes the screening assessment. This evidence-informed screening tool was developed and pilot-tested by the project evaluator (CPR) for youth with foster care histories during Phase I. The screening assessment identifies youth most at risk of homelessness by identifying risk factors associated with youth homelessness, including:

- Parents' incarceration and foster care histories
- Number of out-of-home placements
- Use of marijuana prior to age 12
- Presence of factors known to contribute to running away, such as conflict or abuse in the home
- Pregnancy
- Human trafficking

Youth with previous foster care involvement who identified one or more risk factors on the screening assessment were deemed eligible and referred for enrollment in Pathways.

If the screening was completed by someone other than a Pathways Navigator, eligible youth are referred to a Navigator and presented with the opportunity to enroll in Pathways. The Navigator explained the Pathways project and provided the youth with the opportunity to participate by gaining informed consent/assent.



## Overview of the Evaluation

### Research Questions

The formative evaluation was designed to address the research questions outlined below. Within each of the key questions are more detailed questions, as is shown in Figure 3.

#### Key Research Questions

- How well does the Pathways recruitment and enrollment process identify, refer, and enroll members of the target populations into the intervention?
- Was the model intervention implemented as intended across sites?
- Were there differences in implementation between sites and/or between populations?
- What services and activities did Navigators provide, and how did they connect to youth goals?
- To what extent did youth complete the intervention, and to what extent were goals achieved?
- To what extent are expected short-term outcomes related to permanency, housing, health and well-being, education, and employment being achieved?
- How successful was coach-like engagement in increasing youths' ability to manage independence?

**Figure 3. Pathways Research Questions**

**1. Does the Pathways recruitment and enrollment process successfully identify members of the target populations and provide an appropriate mechanism for referral and enrollment into the intervention?**

- a. Does the number of youths screened generate the necessary volume to conduct the intervention and report on outcomes for each target population?
- b. How long are youth retained following enrollment?

**2. Was the model intervention implemented as intended across sites?**

- a. Did Navigators engage youth in a coach-like way?
- b. Did Navigators work with youth to develop two goals?
- c. Was the approach youth-driven?

**3. Were there differences in implementation between sites and/or between populations?**

- a. How did the implementation between the Prevention Population and the Intervention Population differ?
- b. Were there differences in implementation across sites? Why?
- c. How were flex funds used?

**4. What services and activities did Navigators provide, and how did they connect to goals?**

- a. What goals were identified by youth?
- b. What services were most commonly used to achieve goals?

**5. To what extent did youth complete the intervention, and to what extent were goals achieved?**

- a. What percentage of youth “completed” the intervention?
- b. What percentage of youth reported achieving their goals?

**6. To what extent are expected short-term outcomes related to permanency, housing, health and well-being, education, and employment being achieved?**

- a. **Housing:** What were participants’ living arrangements at follow-up compared to program entry?
- b. **Education:** Was there an increase in school enrollment of high school-age youth? What were youth’s educational attainment levels, compared to program entry?
- c. **Employment:** Do youth report increased preparedness for managing finances and planning for and attaining employment at follow-up compared to program entry?
- d. **Health and well-being:** Do youth report increased ability to take care of their own health and well-being?
- e. **Permanency:** Do youth experience a decrease in placement changes or moves within a year of enrolling in the Pathways program?

**7. How successful was coach-like engagement in increasing youth’s self-efficacy and ability to manage independence?**

- a. Do youth report having increased self-efficacy in navigating services and in setting and achieving goals at follow-up compared to entry?
- b. How do youth describe the impact Pathways has had on preparing them for the future?

## Data Sources and Data Collection

The research team designed data collection instruments and tools and used a variety of methods to collect information on the youth served in Pathways. The following data collection points were used to gather information for the evaluation.

### Screening Assessment

The screening assessment was developed using items adapted from the evidence-based TAY Triage Tool, which was used to identify transition-age foster youth who were most in need of permanent supportive housing.<sup>4</sup> In addition, questions were added based on an analysis of administrative data from Colorado’s child welfare system and from the Vera Institute’s Human Trafficking tool. This instrument is completed before enrollment in Pathways and is used to determine eligibility for the program.

### Baseline Assessment

All youth enrolled in the project complete a baseline assessment, which collects information about the youth’s experiences with foster care and how well it has prepared them for independent living. The assessment contains more than 50 questions designed to create a picture of the youth’s overall status upon entry to the program, including basic demographics and measures on educational attainment, employment, readiness for independence, ties to parents and extended family, ties to non-family adults, and the types of assistance received from their family and adult connections. The baseline assessment also collects information on homelessness episodes experienced by the youth, including age at the time, reasons for homelessness, duration of the episode, how it was resolved, and resources utilized.

### Youth Connections Scale (YCS) and Empowerment and Engagement Scale (EES)

Navigators completed two assessment tools with youth as part of Pathways programming.

- Youth Connections Scale (YCS)
  - ✓ The YCS quantifies the number and nature of supportive adult connections in a young person’s life. At least two are completed over the course of the intervention—the first within 30 days of enrollment in Pathways and the second near completion of the intervention.
- Empowerment and Engagement Scale (EES).
  - ✓ The EES measures youth’s perceptions regarding the extent to which the Navigator has engaged and empowered them to achieve their goals. It is administered within 14 days of identifying goals, and again as part of the follow-up survey, one year after enrollment.

### Case Management Data

- During Phase I, CPR developed the PMIS, an online management information system to collect key data necessary for the evaluation and to provide an online case management system for Navigators to use in tracking intervention services to youth. This system allows the evaluation team to access data entered in real time, and to analyze and report on program activities and outcomes using a CQI process.
- PMIS allows for the documentation of a youth’s progress in the program and serves as a record of how often and for what purpose Navigators were in contact by phone, email, text, or in person.
- These records include information about the topics discussed and the outcome, including services or funds provided.

---

<sup>4</sup> Rice, E. (2013). The TAY triage tool: A tool to identify homeless transition age youth most in need of permanent supportive housing. Corporation for Supporting Housing. [http://www.csh.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/TAY\\_TriageTool\\_2014.pdf](http://www.csh.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/TAY_TriageTool_2014.pdf). Accessed April 24, 2015.

- Case management records help the evaluation team determine if the model has been implemented to fidelity, if Navigators are in regular contact with youth, when tools are completed, what topics youth discuss most, and how flex funds are being used.
- PMIS data are also used to keep track of enrollment, graduation, and length and intensity of intervention services provided to youth by their Navigator.

### **Qualitative Data Sources—Interviews and Focus Groups**

- Interviews with youth, project administrators, Navigators, child welfare administrators and workers, and administrators and staff at RHY providers helped to paint a more complete picture of the implementation of Pathways.
- Youth focus groups were conducted midway through Phase II to provide the evaluation team with a chance to hear from youth about their perceptions of and experiences with the program. Youth were asked to name helpful activities they did with their Navigators, if and how the program helped them, what they think their life would be like without their Navigator, and what advice or thoughts they think would be important to consider in expanding the program.

### **Follow-Up Survey**

- A 45- to 60-minute survey was administered by the evaluation team by phone 12-months after the youth’s enrollment date. The survey duplicates many of the questions from the baseline survey and other assessments and asks about the youth’s experiences with Pathways and goal progress.

### **Administrative Data Systems**

- Basic demographic information and information related to foster care history was extracted from the Statewide Automatic Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) to help evaluators understand foster care experiences and measures related to case outcomes.
- Data from that SACWIS system provided the evaluation team with information about a youth’s history with the foster care system including when youth entered foster care; the number of placements they have had; experiences with and reasons for becoming homeless; and in-depth demographic data regarding education, income, disability, and involvement with various state services.

## **Findings from the Formative Evaluation**

A key component to the formative evaluation phase involved the development of a continuous quality improvement (CQI) approach to conduct a series of usability tests to refine the intervention and to monitor fidelity of program implementation. The formative evaluation plan called for usability testing of key intervention components to ensure short-term outcomes were trending in the right direction and if not, allowed for the evaluation team to adjust core components of the model along the way. Through the CQI approach, the evaluators analyzed and reported on key metrics each month that supported the fidelity of implementation. Key findings from the usability tests allowed for the refinement of the intervention and included:

- ✓ Adjustment to the screening tool by reducing the number of risk factors which allowed for an increase in youth served.

**A discussion of the CQI approach used in Colorado’s formative evaluation can be found in “Using Continuous Quality Improvement to Refine Interventions for Youth at Risk of Homelessness.” This YARH: Lessons from the field research brief can be downloaded from the Office of Planning Research and Evaluation (OPRE) website here.**

- ✓ Defined the phases of the model intervention, intensity of service delivery, goal development and achievement, and length of the Pathways intervention.
- ✓ Creation of program status including Pathways completion criteria.

The Pathways model intervention, once implemented to fidelity, served 128 youth in the target population from July 2016 through September 2019. Findings from those youth served are presented below.

## Profile of Enrolled Youth

Table 1 shows selected demographic and background characteristics of those youth who enrolled in the program. Key characteristics taken from the screening tool and baseline survey administered at program intake include:

- Pathways served a geographically diverse group of youth from across the State of Colorado. The intervention was successfully implemented in urban, suburban, and rural settings. Denver (urban) youth account for nearly half of the enrollments, the rural collaborative accounts for 31%, and Boulder (suburban) for 26% of enrollees.
- The average age of youth enrolled and served in the Pathways intervention were aged 18 years old, with a range in age from 14 to 21.
- Youth were primarily divided between those who describe themselves as male (44%) and female (52%), with only 2% describing themselves as non-binary and 4% as trans.
- Just less than three-quarters of the youth chose “straight” to describe their sexual orientation. However, 27% said “gay or lesbian,” “bisexual or pansexual,” or “other.”
- Half of the youth self-identify as white, non-Hispanic. Nearly 20% of youth reported being Hispanic, and a similar percentage chose African-American.
- English was the primary language for all but 3% of the youth.
- At the time of enrollment, 14% of the youth said they either had a child or were expecting a child.
- Over one-quarter (28%) reported some type of disability, most commonly a mental health issue.
- Fifteen percent of youth reported having been labor or sex trafficked.
- Just under half (42%) of youth reported prior involvement with youth corrections.



Table 1. Demographic Profile of Youth Enrolled in Pathways	
	Total (N=128)
<b>Collaborative Site</b>	
Boulder Collaborative	26%
Denver Collaborative	43%
Rural Collaborative	31%
<b>Average Age at Enrollment</b>	
Range	14–21
<b>Gender Identity</b>	
Man	44%
Woman	52%
Non-Binary	2%
Trans Male or Female	4%
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	
Gay or Lesbian	7%
Bisexual or Pansexual	18%
Straight	73%
Other	2%
<b>Ethnicity</b>	
White, Non-Hispanic	50%
African American or Black	17%
Hispanic or Latino	22%
Native American or Alaska Native	1%
Multi-Racial	11%
<b>Children, Pregnant, Expecting</b>	
No	83%
Parent	9%
Pregnant or expecting	5%
<b>Primary Language</b>	
English	97%
Spanish	2%
Other	1%
<b>Disability (Any)</b>	
Any type	28%
Physical	2%
Mental	24%
Behavioral	4%
Trafficked (Labor or Sex)	15%
Department of Youth Services Involvement	42%



## Child Welfare History

The baseline survey administered at enrollment collected information on the youth’s history with child welfare. In addition, an extract of administrative data was generated to provide a profile of Pathways-enrolled youth and their history with the child welfare system. Of the 128 youth enrolled in Pathways, 93% were located within the state’s child welfare system known as TRAILS. Cases that were not in the TRAILS system may still have had child welfare experiences. TRAILS data only captures child welfare involvement within the State of Colorado and only for cases in which the youth was identified as the primary subject of the case; that is, the data would not show youth who had cases in other states or who were a sibling on a child welfare case.

Table 2 provides a description of Pathways youth and their history of child welfare involvement. Some key points include:

<b>Table 2. Child Welfare History and Status (Administrative Data)</b>	
<b>Age at First Assessment by DCFS</b>	<b>(N=105)</b>
1–3 years	18%
4–6 years	21%
7–9 years	14%
10–12 years	14%
13–15 years	25%
16–18 years	8%
Average	8.8
<b>Age at First Removal</b>	<b>(N=93)</b>
1–3 years	5%
4–6 years	3%
7–9 years	67%
10–12 years	9%
13–15 years	46%
16–18 years	30%
Average	13.3
<b>Reason for Last Removal</b>	<b>(N=119)</b>
Child’s Behavior	42%
Neglect	25%
Parent Unable to Cope	22%
Drug Abuse by Parent	12%
Abandonment	11%
Inadequate Housing	9%
Physical Abuse	8%
Sexual Abuse	8%
Alcohol Abuse by Parent	5%
Drug Abuse by Youth	5%
Parent Incarcerated	4%
Alcohol Abuse by youth	3%
Child’s Disability	3%
Death of Parent	1%

- (1) The average age at which the youth were first assessed by DCFS was 8 years old.
- (2) Nearly a third (32%) were first assessed by DCFS at age 13 years or older.
- (3) The average age for the first removal from the home was 13.3 years and over three-quarters (76%) were first removed at age 13 or older.
- (4) The most common reason for the last removal was the child’s behavior (42%), followed by neglect (25%) or a parent who was unable to cope (22%).

---

“I wasn’t doing things—just smoking and drinking and giving up on life . . . . I felt helpless . . . . It’s the support and there’s someone there reaching out to me instead, [who] has belief in me, and sees something in me. That’s what helped me to move things along and get out of that.”

— Pathways youth



Table 3 describes youth’s placement history and status in the child welfare system.

<b>Table 3. Child Welfare History and Status (Administrative Data)</b>	
<b>Days of Child Welfare Involvement Pre</b>	<b>(N=119)</b>
Average	822.2
<b>Length of Out-of-Home Placement Last Case Span</b>	<b>(N=97)</b>
Average Months	33.9
<b>How Last Removal Ended</b>	<b>(N=97)</b>
Still in Placement	6%
DYC Discharge	1%
Emancipation	49%
Living with Relatives	10%
Placed for Adoption	5%
Post-Commitment Parole	2%
Reunification with Parents	22%
Runaway	5%
<b>Months from First Removal to First ILP</b>	<b>(N=25)</b>
Average	34.4

- The average amount of time the youth was involved with child welfare was 822 days, or just over two years.
- The average length of out-of-home placement was nearly 34 months.
- At the time the data extract was completed, 6% of the youth were still in placement. About half (48%) were emancipated and 22% had been reunified with parents.
- The average number of months elapsing between removal from the home and the development of a first Independent Living Plan was 34 months.

### Entry into Pathways

All youth who met the target population criteria completed the Pathways screening tool. This was administered by their caseworker or case manager or upon referral by the Navigator. The screening tool is a 12-item, yes-or-no survey that gauges risk factors for homelessness. A total of 216 youths were screened across the three Collaborative sites. Over half, or 59%, identified one or more risk factors on the screening tool and were enrolled in Pathways. Most youth were identified and referred by their county child welfare caseworkers (42%) or Chafee workers (23%).

<b>Table 4. Referral and Enrollment Data</b>	
	<b>Total</b>
<b>Screenings</b>	
Number Screened	216
Percentage Enrolled	59%
<b>Referral Source</b>	
Caseworker	42%
Chafee Worker	23%
Client Manager	4%
Community Worker	15%
Shelter Staff	16%
<b>Enrollment</b>	
Number of Youths Enrolled	128

Youth identified on average 4.9 risk factors on the screening form, with a median of 5 and range from 1 to 10 risk factors. Table 5 below shows the breakdown of risk factors identified by youth who screened in and enrolled in Pathways. Most strikingly, over half of youth enrolled in Pathways reported the following risk factors:

- Using marijuana before age 12 years
- Using a shelter or housing assistance in the past
- Having a biological father with a history of incarceration
- Having a biological mother with a history of incarceration
- Experiencing homelessness after running away

<b>Table 5. Pathways Youth Screening Tool</b>	
	<b>Total (N=128)</b>
<b>Number of Risk Factors Identified</b>	
Average	4.9
Median	5
Range	1–10
<b>Percentage responding “yes” to the following:</b>	
Used marijuana before age 12	85%
Used a shelter/housing assistance	66%
Biological dad spent time in jail	63%
Biological mom spent time in jail	59%
Experienced homelessness from running away	56%
Spent time in jail before age 18	49%
Experienced homelessness because of family violence	45%
Been pregnant or impregnated someone	27%
Experienced homelessness due to religion	16%
Biological mother had been in foster care	14%
Traded sex acts for money, food, housing, etc.	11%
Biological father had been in foster care	9%

Of the 128 enrollees, 121 noted a risk factor on the screening form noting the experiences that led to their homelessness. Some youth provided more than a single cause. Most common (54%) was becoming homeless after running away. Nearly as many youth (45%) said it was due to violence in the home, and 17% cited religious conflicts in the home as a cause.

<b>Table 6. Reason(s) for Homelessness</b>	
	<b>Total (N=121)</b>
Percentage who became homeless after running away	54%
Percentage who became homeless due to violence in the home	45%
Percentage who became homeless due to religious conflicts in the home	17%

## Project Activities

Information related to a youth’s service receipt and outcomes is tracked and entered by the Navigator into the online Pathways Management Information System, known as PMIS. PMIS records information on a youth’s demographic characteristics, contact information, the completed baseline survey as well as details related to intervention delivery, goals set by the youth, and referrals. This section of the report provides details on intervention delivery, services received, goal setting, and Pathways program completion.

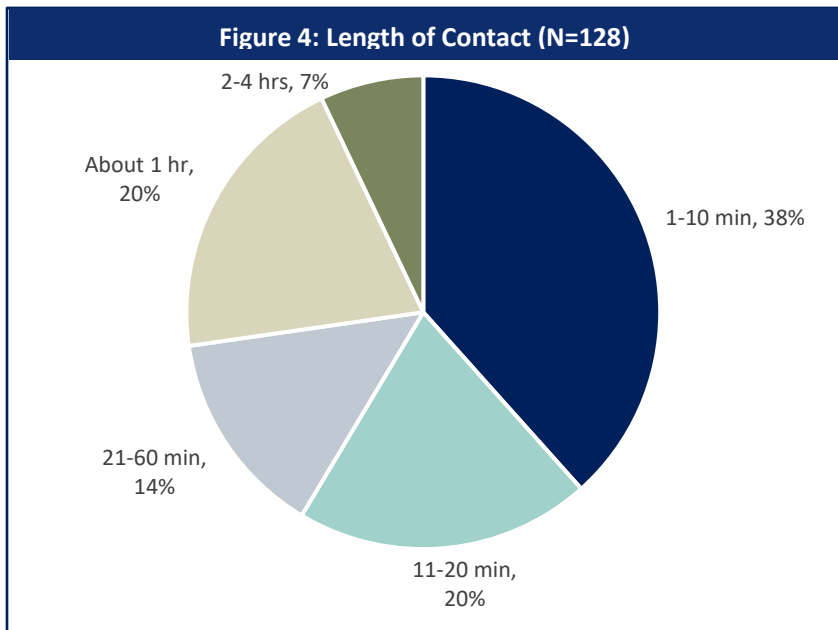
## NAVIGATORS

Table 7 shows the total number of contacts that the 128 Pathways enrollees had with their Navigator as well as the average number of contacts per youth.

Table 7. Contacts with Navigators	
	<b>Total (N=128)</b>
<b>Contacts</b>	
Total	7,920
Average (Per Youth)	68
Weekly Average per Youth	1.1
Range (Per Youth)	1–351

The 128 youth who were enrolled in the program had a total of 7,920 contacts with Navigators, averaging 68 contacts per youth, and 1.1 contacts per week per youth.

Figure 4 shows the length of the youth’s contacts with the Navigator. It is based on 7,231 contacts with information on duration of the contact.



As shown, most contacts are relatively brief. Nearly 60% lasted 20 minutes or less. However, 27% of the contacts lasted an hour or more.

Figure 5 shows the type of contact youth had with their Navigators. Nearly half of the contacts with the Navigator were in-person meetings (47%). Texts were the next most common contact method, accounting for 34% of all contacts.

Regular contact between youth and their Navigators results in building the relationship between the two and results in other positive impacts. Youth reported in their interviews and focus groups that they felt routinely supported, leading to feeling greater self-confidence and independence, and fewer acute mental health episodes.

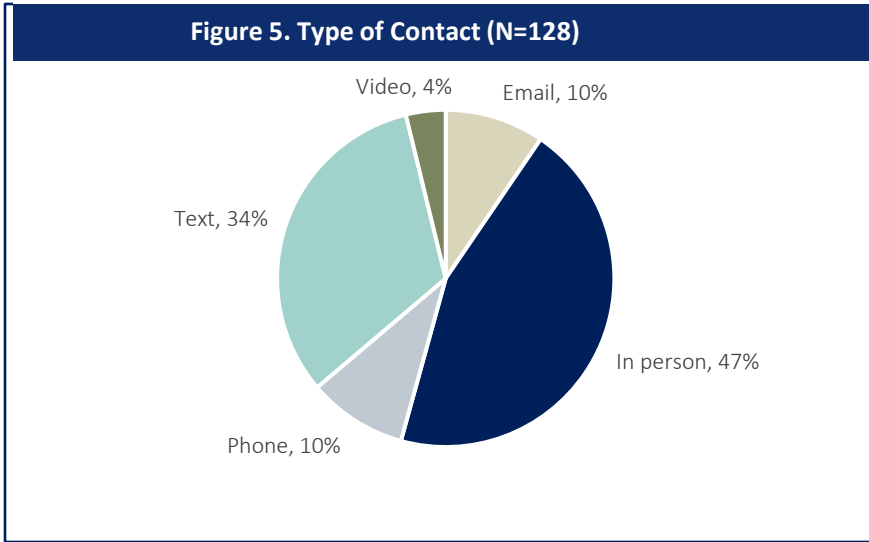
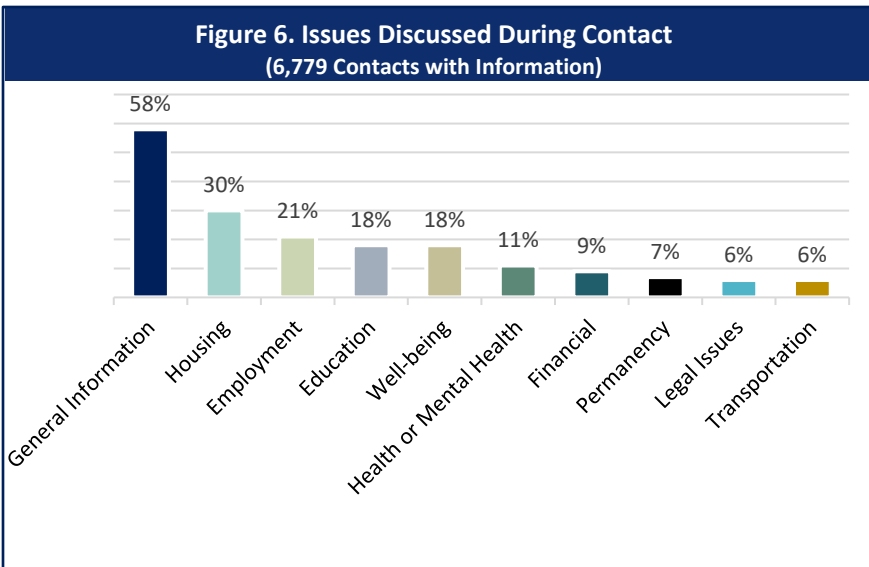


Figure 6 shows the topics discussed with Navigators during the 6,779 contacts with information.

Most of the contacts between youth and Navigator were designed as relationship building and support; these contacts were described as covering general information. The next most common topics discussed were related to addressing:

- Housing (30%)
- Employment (21%)
- Education (18%)
- Well-being (18%)

Additional topics that were discussed included health or mental health issues, financial or money management, relational permanency, legal issues, or transportation problems.



"Pathways is *'let me show you'* so later on down the line when the Navigator isn't there, you still know. All our lives we're looking for someone to walk us through it."

— Pathways youth



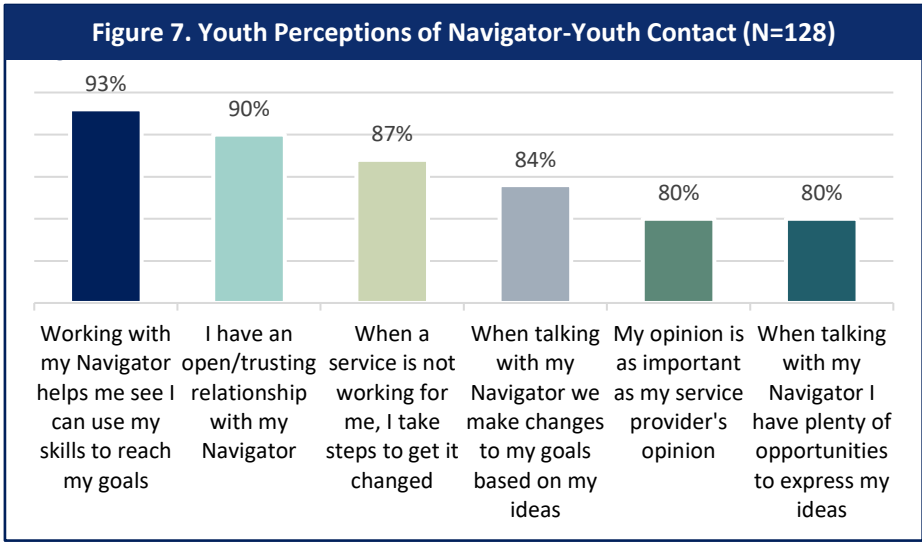


Figure 7 shows the degree to which youth believe that Navigators:

- Worked with the youth to develop goals
- Can be trusted
- Helped youth use their skills to reach goals
- Fostered a willingness to express their ideas and preferences
- Empower them to make changes when services or supports are not helping

### Goal Setting

One of the core components of the Pathways intervention is to have the youth set goals aligned with one of the key outcomes, with their Navigator and set a path to achieve those goals. Within the first 90 days, Navigators and youth meet to discuss what they want to work on within the program; the Navigators then listen to and work with the youth to set two goals. As shown in Table eight, 80% of the youth had at least one goal-setting session and, on average, youth developed just over two goals during the intervention.

**Table 8. Goal Setting for Youth Enrolled in Pathways**

	Total (N=128)
<b>Goals Identified</b>	
Total Goal-Setting Sessions	103
Total Goals Set	264
Average Goals Set (Per Youth)	2.06
Range of Goals Set (Per Youth)	0–13
<b>Goal Type (% of total)</b>	
Education	25%
Housing	28%
Employment	28%
Permanency	6%
Well-Being	13%



“It gave me hope . . . I was ready to give up. But because of Pathways, I was able to get stability and get my life back on track for me and my baby . . . I really didn't think there could be a person who could help me because everyone turned their backs on me and it was really nice to have that person to be there for [me] . . . It means a lot.”

— Pathways youth

**SERVICES**

Another core component of the Pathways intervention is to provide flex funds to youth when necessary to cover an immediate expense after all other sources have been exhausted. Tables 9 and 10 summarize some of the services and support provided through Pathways. As the table shows:

- Over half of youth enrolled in Pathways received some assistance through flex funds. The average amount of funds spent per youth was \$320.
- On average, youth received 28.1 services and 5.1 referrals for additional assistance.

<b>Table 9. Flex Funds Provided Through Pathways</b>	
<b>Flex Fund Usage</b> (% of Youth Utilizing Flex Funds)	<b>55%</b>
Total Funds Used	\$22,094
Average (Per Youth)	\$320.20
Average (Per Use)	\$46.75
Range (Per Youth)	\$1–\$2,298

A primary role of the Navigator was to connect youth to existing community services and make referrals to other organizations when needed. Most youth who participated in Pathways received additional services (on average, 28) and received outside referrals (on average, 5).

<b>Table 10. Support and Services Provided Through Pathways</b>	
<b>Services</b> (% of Youth with at Least One Recorded Service)	<b>77%</b>
Total	2,778
Average (Per Youth)	28.1
Range (Per Youth)	1–222
<b>Referrals</b> (% with at Least One Referral)	<b>31%</b>
Total	203
Average (Per Youth)	5.1
Range (Per Youth)	1–22

Some of the assistance Pathways’ youth received was provided through Chafee funds. Information on Chafee services was available for 86 youth prior to Pathways enrollment and 64 youth post-enrollment, meaning that of the 128 youth enrolled in Pathways, 67% received Chafee services sometime prior to joining Pathways, and 50% received Chafee services at some time after enrollment in Pathways. Table 11 shows the percentage of youth receiving various types of Chafee services prior to and following enrollment in Pathways.

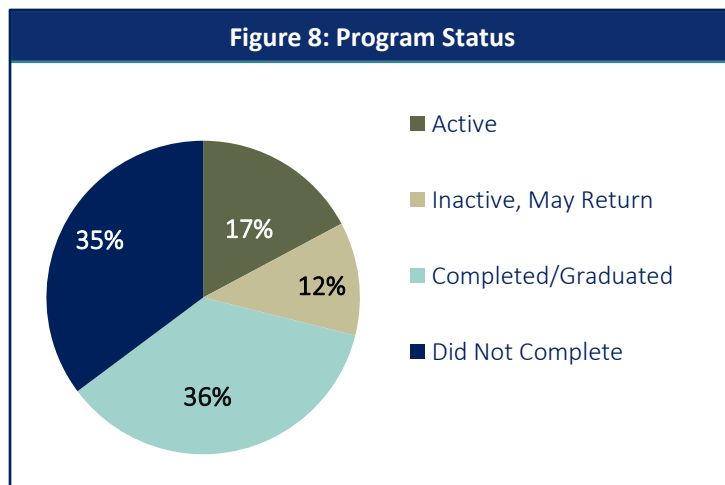
This table shows increased use of the following services post-enrollment:

- Health services
- Housing services
- Post-secondary education
- Financial support
- Career support
- Healthy relationships

Table 11. Chafee Services Pre- and Post-Enrollment		
	Pre-Pathways (N=86)	Post-Pathways (N=64)
<b>Percent Receiving the Following Types of Chafee Assistance</b>		
Educational Financial	12%	11%
Health	42%	58%
Housing	48%	67%
Academic	14%	0%
Post-Secondary Education	31%	48%
Employment/Vocation Training	0%	0%
Financial Support	45%	70%
Career Support	48%	69%
Direct Funding	5%	0%
Healthy Relationship	41%	66%

### Program Completion

Program completion criteria was developed early on during YARH2, with input from key stakeholders and youth participants in Pathways. Based on the criteria developed, youth were categorized upon program exit into one of the program statuses. Figure 8 shows the final case status of youth as they exited the program, or at the final data collection point. Some youth were still actively participating in Pathways and continued to receive services past the end of the evaluation.



- Over one-third of the youth had completed the program.
- Another 17% were still actively engaged.
- About one-third had their case close without graduation, often through a referral to another agency.
- A few individuals were not actively participating in the program, but their cases had not yet been closed.

CPR looked at characteristics of youth who completed versus those who did not complete the program to see if there were any factors associated with program completers. Table 12 excludes those youth who were still enrolled or inactive at the time of data collection and compares demographic information only for those youth who completed the program and those who did not. As shown, age at enrollment did not appear to be a factor in whether the youth completed the program. Those who completed Pathways were, on average, 18.1 years at enrollment, while those who did not complete the program were 18.3 years at enrollment. Nor was completion of the program related to the number of risk factors on the intake form, as both those who completed Pathways and those who did not had an average of 4.9 risk factors at intake. Further, those who were living on the street or in a homeless shelter at intake were not significantly less likely to complete Pathways than were youth in more stable living situations.

There is however some evidence that females were more likely to complete Pathways relative to males. Among all Pathways males, 43% graduated from the program, whereas 60% of Pathways females graduated from Pathways. Youth who graduated from Pathways were also more likely to have been employed at the time of enrollment than those who did not complete. Among those employed full- or part-time, 74% graduated from Pathways. By contrast, 39% of those unemployed at baseline graduated.

**Table 12. Comparing Youth Who Graduated and Those Who Had a Case Closed**

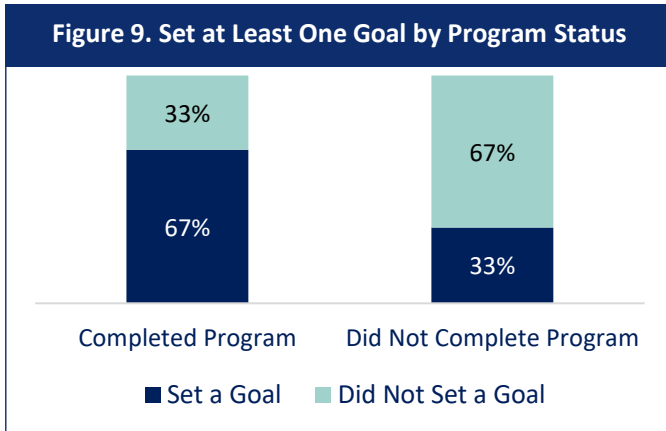
	<b>Graduated (N=46)</b>	<b>Case Closed (N=45)</b>
<b>Average Age at Intake</b>	18.1 years	18.3 years
<b>Average Risk Factors at Intake</b>	4.9	4.9
<b>Living in a Shelter or Street at Intake</b>	46%	53%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	43%	58%
Female	57%	40%
Other	-	2%
<b>Employment at Intake*</b>		
Unemployed	50%	82%
Employed Full- or Part-Time	50%	18%

\*  $p < 0.05$

Other factors related to graduation are shown in Table 13 and Figure 9. As shown in Table 13, youth who enroll in the program tended to stay. The average length of stay for those who completed the program is 14.6 months, compared to non-completers who stayed 11.7 months on average. Lastly, setting goals seems to have a strong relationship to program completion. As shown in Figure 9, a third of those who did not complete the program set at least one goal, compared to 67% for those who completed programming—indicating that youth who set goals (a significant metric for program participation) were more likely to graduate Pathways.

**Table 13. Length of Time in the Program**

	<b>Total (N=128)</b>
<b>Length of Time Enrolled, Months</b>	
Average (Per Youth)	14.3
Range (Per Youth)	1–39
<b>Average Months Enrolled, By Status</b>	
Active	14.4
Inactive	21.1
Completed	14.6
Did Not Complete	11.7



“We appreciate your guys’ program . . . . You’ve helped us so much. I would be in a lot of hell without you guys.”

— Pathways youth



## Outcomes

### COMPARING YOUTH WHO COMPLETED THE FOLLOW-UP SURVEY WITH THOSE WHO DID NOT

The following sections of the report compares pre- and post-test outcomes data for Pathways youth who completed the one-year, follow-up telephone survey. Nearly half of all Pathways youth completed the follow-up survey. Outcomes identified and tracked for Pathways are aligned with the five key outcome areas identified by the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH): education, employment, housing stability, permanency, and health and well-being.

In order to examine potential bias between those who completed the 12-month follow-up survey, this section first compares demographic and other baseline data of those youth who completed the follow-up with those who did not. The following table shows there were no statistically significant differences between the youth who completed the follow-up survey and those who did not. As Table 14 shows, although fewer Hispanic youth completed a follow-up survey relative to White/Non-Hispanics and African-Americans, the small numbers of minority youth mean the percentages are subject to change with the addition or subtraction of only a few youth. The same is true when comparing response rates by different categories of sexual orientation or living arrangement.

**Table 14. Demographics and Enrollment Data by Completion of Follow-Up Survey**

	Completed Follow-Up (N=61)	Did Not Complete Follow-Up (N=67)
<b>Average Risk Factors on Screening</b>	5.1	4.7
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	41%	46%
Female	54%	49%
Trans-Identifying or Non-Binary	6%	3%
<b>Average Age at Intake</b>	20.3	19.8

**Table 14. Demographics and Enrollment Data by Completion of Follow-Up Survey**

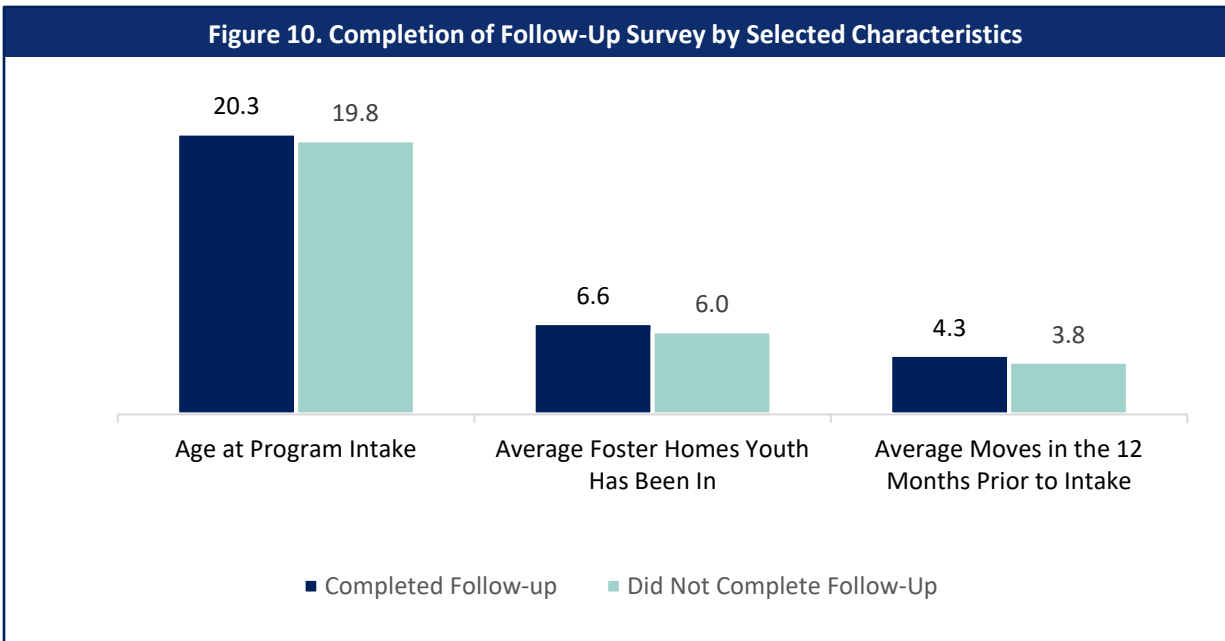
	<b>Completed Follow-Up (N=61)</b>	<b>Did Not Complete Follow-Up (N=67)</b>
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		
Hispanic	16%	27%
White, Non-Hispanic	53%	47%
Black or African-American	19%	15%
Multi-Racial or Other	12%	12%
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>		
Straight	65%	80%
Gay or Lesbian	10%	5%
Bisexual or Pansexual	19%	14%
Other	2%	2%
<b>Have Children or Expecting at Intake</b>	14%	14%
<b>Marital Status at Intake</b>		
Never Married	98%	98%
Previously or Currently Married	2%	2%
<b>Ever Engaged in Sexual Act for Something of Value</b>	15%	13%
<b>Living Arrangement at Intake</b>		
With Family Member or Supportive Adult	10%	15%
Foster Parent or ILA	20%	18%
Group Home or Group Living	12%	7%
With a Roommate or Friend	12%	12%
By Myself or in Own Apartment	10%	-
Homeless or in a Shelter	30%	43%
Other	7%	4%
<b>Average Number of Foster Home Placements</b>	6.6	6.0
<b>Average Moves in 12 Months Prior to Intake</b>	4.3	3.8

Figure 10 provides a comparison of selected characteristics of youth at baseline for those who completed and did not complete the follow up interview. There are no significant differences between the two groups on age at program intake, number of foster care placements, and average moves in the 12 months prior to program entry.



“The way she lays things out and helps us get them done, not only is it just getting done, but I’m seeing what she’s doing and how to do it, so I can do this on my own, and in turn that gives me self-confidence.”

— Pathways youth



### EDUCATION (PRE- AND POST-PROGRAM)

Education outcomes were tracked pre- and post-program participation. Table 15 shows:

- For youth age 18 or younger, there was a decrease in high school enrollment and a significant increase in the percentage of youth who graduated high school. There was no increase in the percentage who left high school without a degree.
- For youth older than 18 years, there was an increase in the percentage enrolled in school and a reduction in the percentage of youth who were not enrolled or did not complete high school.

Table 15. Education Status (Pre-Post Youth Only, N=61)		
	Baseline	Follow-Up
<b>Youth 18 or Younger (N=40)</b>		
Currently Enrolled in School*	68%	49%
Not Enrolled, Did Not Complete High School	18%	17%
Graduated High School*	15%	35%
<b>Youth Over 18 (N=21)</b>		
Currently Enrolled in School	29%	37%
Not Enrolled, Did Not Complete High School	33%	26%
Graduated High School	38%	37%
* $p < 0.05$		

### EMPLOYMENT AND FINANCES (PRE- AND POST-PROGRAM)

The following table summarizes employment patterns and financial data for youth at intake and at the follow-up interview. Key employment findings include:

- There was an increase in employment from intake to follow-up. Youth reported a 4% increase in part-time employment, and a 10% increase in full-time employment.

- The average earnings for youth who reported their income increased between intake and follow-up ( $p < .05$ ).
- There was a significant increase in youth getting “banked” or opening a bank account. There was a 26% increase in the number of youths who opened up a checking account, and an additional 15% of youths opened a savings account.
- Youth reported greater confidence in their ability to manage their money at follow-up.

**Table 16. Employment Status (Pre-Post Youth Only, N=61)**

	Baseline	Follow-Up
<b>Employment</b>		
Employed Part-Time/Multiple Jobs	30%	34%
Employed Full-Time	15%	25%
Unemployed	55%	41%
<b>Monthly Income (For Those Reporting)*</b>		
Average	\$627	\$1,052
Median	\$540	\$1,000
Range	\$16–\$1,750	\$300–\$3,200
<b>Banking</b>		
Have a Checking Account*	44%	70%
Have a Savings Account*	43%	58%
Feel “Very Prepared” to Manage Their Money	49%	53%

\*  $p < 0.05$

## HOUSING (PRE- AND POST-PROGRAM)

Securing safe and stable housing was a primary goal for most youth in the program. Table 17 shows significant improvements in Pathways youth housing arrangements 12 months post-program participation. Just under half of all youth participants (40%) secured housing and were living in a place of their own such as an apartment. There was a significant decrease in homelessness, as shown by the percentage of youth reporting they live in a shelter, a hotel room, or the street, falling from 37 percent at enrollment to 10 percent 12 months post-enrollment.

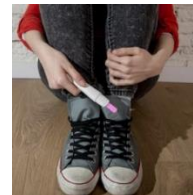
**Table 17. Housing Arrangement (Pre-Post Youth Only, N=61)**

	Baseline	Follow-Up
<b>Current Living Arrangement*</b>		
With Family or Friend, Foster Home, or Group Home	54%	34%
Live in Their Own Place	10%	51%
Homeless or in a Shelter, Hotel, Other	37%	10%

\*  $p < 0.05$

“[Without my Navigator,] I would've been homeless and pregnant in the wintertime.”

— Pathway youth



“[Without my Navigator,] I I’d be sleeping on the side of the streets.”

— Pathway youth



Pathways shows promise in improving housing stability among youth. There was a significant reduction in the average number of times a youth reported moving in the 12 months following program enrollment compared to 12 months prior to enrollment in Pathways.

**Table 18. Number of Moves Reported (Pre-Post Youth Only, N=61)**

	Baseline	Follow-Up
<b>Number of Moves in the Past Year*</b>		
Average	3.4	2.1
Median	3.0	1.0
Range	0–10	0–10

\*  $p < 0.05$

### CONNECTIONS TO SUPPORTIVE ADULTS (PRE- AND POST-PROGRAM)

Relational permanency for youth served by Pathways is another primary outcome. Ensuring youth have strong connections and healthy relationships with supportive adults (who are not the professionals) in their lives is an important safety net. At both the intake and follow-up interview, youth were asked how often they were in touch with their parents or other relatives such as grandparents or aunts and uncles. While Pathways did not seem to help youth identify more supportive adults in their lives, it did seem to help increase the number and frequency of contacts with relatives.

- Youth who had no contact with relatives prior to entering Pathways (33%) generally reported no contact at the time of the follow-up interview (30%).
- Similarly, the program does not appear to have had a significant impact on those youth who were in touch with one or two relatives when they completed the baseline interview.
- However, the program did increase the number of youths with contact with three or more relatives.

**Table 19. Number of Relatives Youth Reports Seeing at Least Once a Month (Pre-Post Youth Only, N=61)**

	Baseline	Follow-Up
<b>Number of Relatives Youth Reports Seeing Once a Month</b>		
None	33%	30%
One Relative	30%	26%
Two Relatives	31%	28%
Three or More Relatives	6%	16%

## READINESS FOR INDEPENDENCE (PRE- AND POST-PROGRAM)

Youth were asked a series of questions at baseline and again at the 12-month follow-up related to their perceptions of how ready they felt for independence. Table 20 shows the percent of youth who have obtained key documents they will need as an independent adult. Youth reported a significant increase in obtaining important documents.

- There was a 33% increase in the percentage of youth who have a copy of their birth certificates from pre- to post-program enrollment.
- For drivers' licenses, there was over a 130% increase from pre- to post-program enrollment.
- There was a 22% increase in those with a state-issued ID (other than a drivers' license) from pre- to post-program enrollment.

**Table 20. Documents in Youths' Possession (Pre-Post Youth Only, N=61)**

	Baseline	Follow-Up
<b>Percentage Who Have the Following:</b>		
A Copy of Birth Certificate*	70%	93%
A Driver's License*	16%	38%
A State-Issued ID	73%	89%

\*  $p < 0.05$

During the follow-up interview youth were asked how prepared they felt to complete a variety of tasks that are required of living independently. Table 21 show the percentage who say they feel "very prepared" to handle various items.

The area of greatest confidence is "finding housing." At the baseline interview, 23% said they felt very prepared to find housing. By the time of the follow-up survey, this figure was 58%—a 152% increase. There were also sizeable gains in the percentage who felt "very prepared" to arrange health care and handle an emergency, should one arise.

A few items showed little change from baseline to follow-up. In the case of finding a job, this was because a high percentage felt "very prepared" at baseline. For other items (planning for the future, managing money, completing education, and living independently), about 50% to 60% said they were "very prepared" at baseline and at follow-up.

**Table 21. Reports of Feeling Prepared at Baseline and Follow-up (Pre-Post Youth Only, N=61)**

	Baseline	Follow-Up
<b>Percentage Reporting They Feel "Very Prepared" to:</b>		
Find Housing*	23%	58%
Arrange Health Care*	37%	59%
Handle an Emergency if It Comes*	46%	65%
Get a Job	71%	79%
Plan for Your Future	55%	60%
Manage Your Money	50%	53%
Complete Your Education	61%	61%
Live on Your Own	54%	49%

\*  $p < 0.05$

Pathways was designed to encourage a sense of self-sufficiency among participants. Despite having concerns about their abilities to live independently, Figure 11 shows that youth report at follow-up that they are able to express their opinions, make decisions, have things under control, and advocate for themselves based on their needs

“[Without my Navigator,] I'd have a nervous breakdown. The support she's given me has been amazing. If I didn't have those when I got out of the system, I don't know where I'd be.”

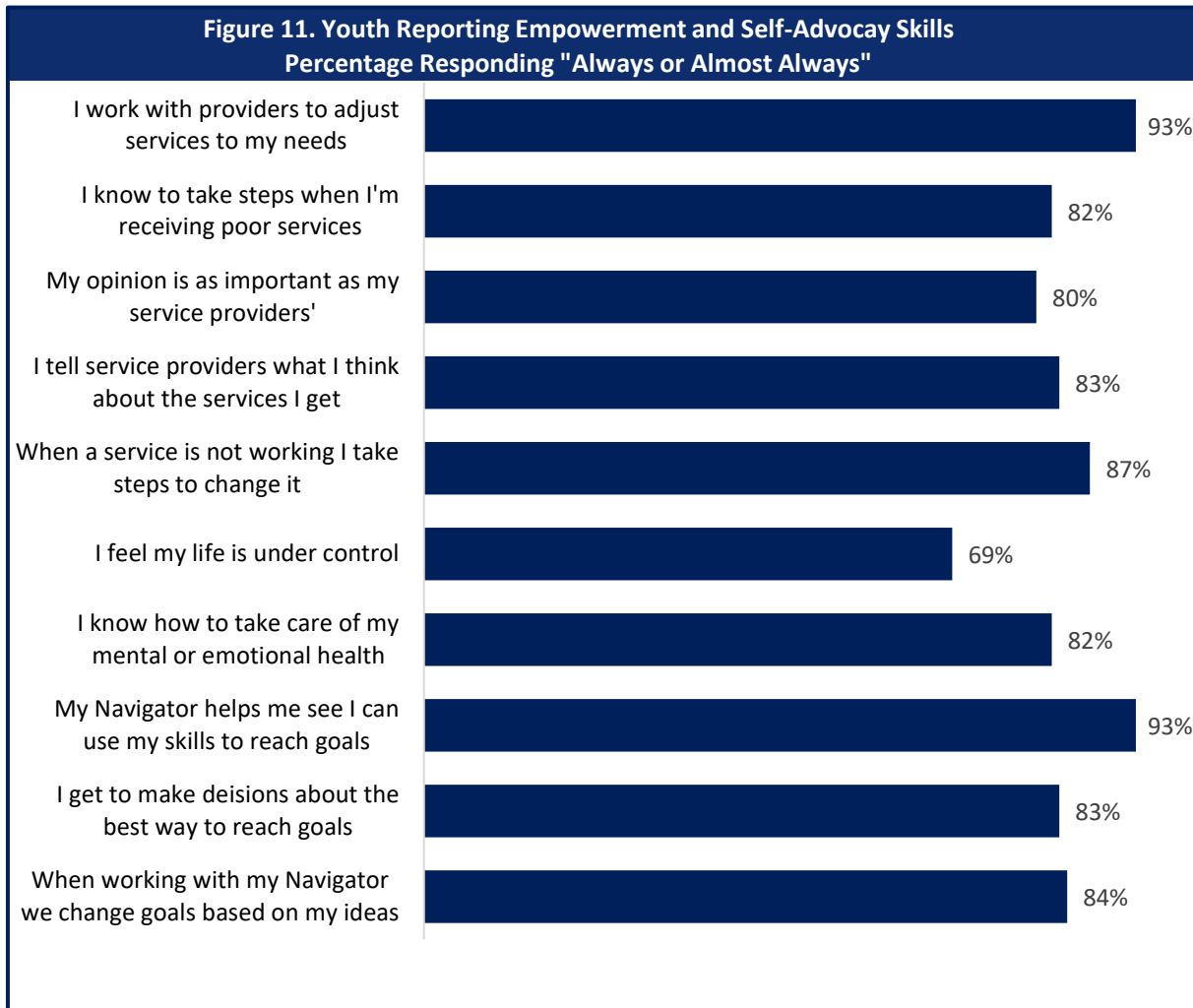


— Pathways youth



“I'm a visual learner, you have to really show me for me to catch on. Pathways is not just like “here's your resources,” it's “let me show you how to do this,” so later on down the line when [the Navigator] isn't there, you still know.”

— Pathways youth



## LIFE SATISFACTION (PRE- AND POST-PROGRAM)

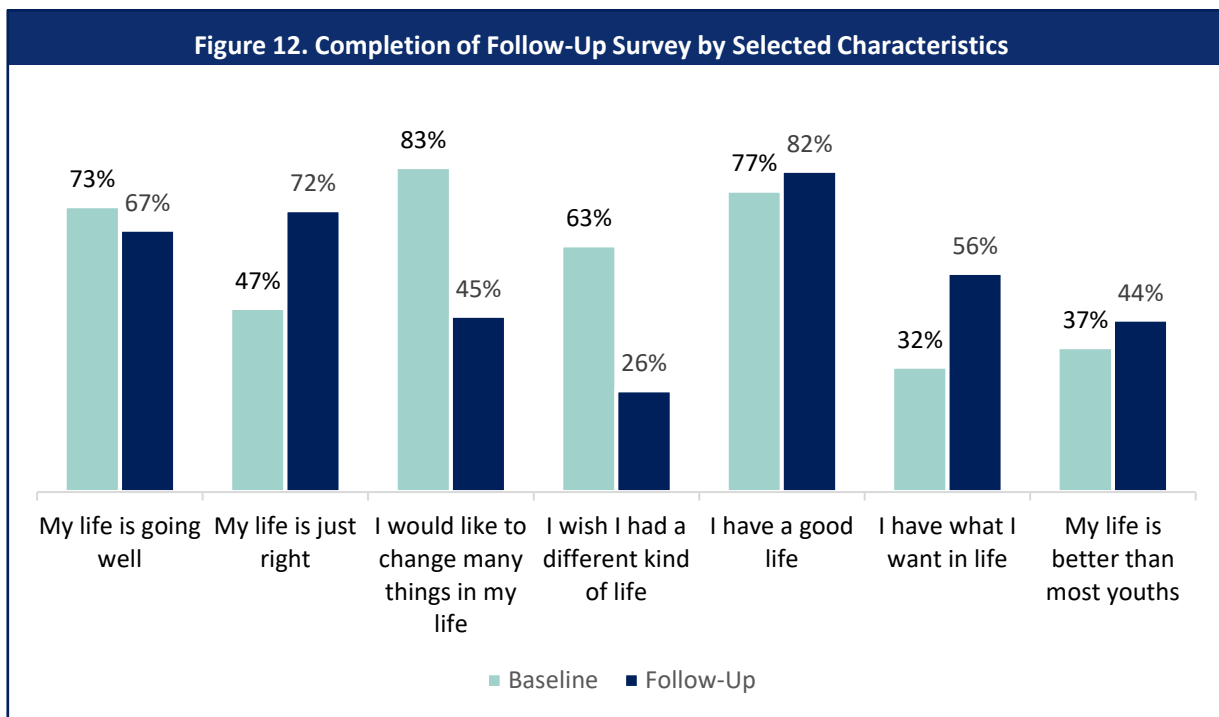
Youth were asked a series of questions related to their level of satisfaction with how things were going in their life. Figure 12 shows responses to a series of statements related to life satisfaction at baseline and follow up.

It shows sizable declines in the percentage of youth who respond to indicators of low life satisfaction, such as:

- “I would like to change many things in my life.”
- “I wish I had a different kind of life.”

And shows sizeable increases in the percentage of youth who respond to positive indicators, such as:

- “My life is just right.”
- “I have what I want in life.”



## Lessons Learned and Implications for Future Research

The goal of the Pathways formative evaluation was to implement, refine, and test a model intervention designed to prevent homelessness among youth aging out of the foster care system. The effort resulted in building evidence to support the Pathways model in ensuring better outcomes for foster youth, with the primary goal of preventing homelessness. This project resulted in the development of the Pathways intervention manual, which other agencies can use in implementing evidence-informed programs to address homelessness among youth aging out of the foster care system. The Pathways formative evaluation begins to build evidence to support the implementation of the intervention and found many promising short-term outcomes in the five key outcome areas of education, employment, permanency, housing, and health and well-being. We can draw the following lessons from this formative evaluation.

## Systems-Level Lessons

- Collaboration between county agencies and runaway and homeless youth service providing agencies is critical to identifying, serving, and achieving targeted outcomes.
- When developing an intervention that serves youth, youth must have a seat at the table. It is not enough to conduct focus groups or talk to a few youths to get their input on programming. To truly incorporate youth voice and ensure high levels of program engagement, youth must be interwoven into all aspects of program development. This includes having youth sit on key groups and meetings such as the project management team, providing input and feedback on key aspects of service delivery, program staff qualifications, criteria for program graduation, and ongoing input on recommendations for needed adjustments to program services. A youth-driven intervention must be youth-designed for youth to fully engage in the program.
- Systemic change takes time, commitment, and buy-in from cross-system agencies. The child welfare agency alone is not able to make significant adjustments in how services are provided without RHY providers and other key agency administrators at the table providing input and feedback on how the program works.
- It is possible to identify and serve youth at risk of homelessness in a variety of settings including rural, urban, and suburban locations. Colorado intentionally and successfully recruited sites for Pathways participation from a geographically diverse setting to test the intervention in small (rural), medium (suburban), and large (urban) counties.
- Implementing a continuous quality improvement process (CQI) allows monitoring of enrollment and engagement levels of youth to ensure the program is operating as designed. Beyond ensuring that youth are receiving the services to fidelity, the process allows programs to ensure that youth are on track to achieve the goals they have set and short- and medium-term outcomes as designed.

## Intervention-Level Lessons

- The Pathways screening tool successfully identifies youth who are at an increased risk of becoming homeless. During Phase I of the YARH project, a screening tool was developed to identify youth aging out of foster care and are at an increased risk of becoming homeless. During Phase II of the YARH project, the screening tool was successfully implemented across all participating sites, and with youth who fit within the target population and met the risk factor criteria. These youth were enrolled in Pathways and provided intervention services.
- Pathways successfully engages high-risk youth in intervention services. The process of coach-like engagement necessitates a higher level of engagement than traditional case management. The intervention shows promise for all youth who enroll and achieve some level of engagement with their Navigator. Typical youth engagement with Pathways Navigators is defined by meeting with their Navigator in person weekly (for many youth it is greater than weekly contact); setting one or more goals; accessing flex funds; and receiving and following up with referrals, typically with Navigator by their side. This level of engagement results in the achievement of their goals and leads youth on a path to achieving outcomes in the areas of housing, education, employment, permanency, and health and well-being.
- Youth reported feeling empowered and more resilient and developed self-advocacy skills following participation in Pathways. Graduation criteria was established midway through YARH-2. A checklist of graduation criteria was developed with youth participants, navigators, research team, and project management. While goals were an established criterion later in implementation, they became an

important component to the intervention that helped move forward the work the Navigator did with the youth. To graduate, youth are required to meet a minimum of five of eight criteria, with at least one of the criteria met related to coach-like engagement (resiliency, self-advocacy). Based on these criteria, over half of youth graduated from Pathways. Nearly all the youth interviewed at follow-up reported setting goals and achieving them.

- Education outcomes improve for youth participating in Pathways. Between enrollment and the 12-month follow-up interview, younger youth reported graduating high school at significantly higher rates, older youth returned to school at higher rates, and there was an increase in the percentage of youth graduating from high school.
- Pathways reduces homelessness and increases safe and stable housing for youth participants. A primary goal of Pathways is to reduce or prevent homelessness and create long-term, safe, and stable housing for youth aging out of foster care. The evaluation team had several measures of safe stable housing: living arrangements, number of moves in the previous 12 months, and reducing homelessness. Short-term outcomes show Pathways achieved these goals by reducing unstable housing and homelessness from 37% at enrollment to 10% at 12 months post-enrollment. For the 10% who were unstably housed, only one youth was literally homeless; the remaining were in a shelter/hotel or couch-surfing. There was a reduction in the proportion of youth who are living with family or friends, or in foster or group homes, and there was a large increase in the number of youth who are living in their own apartment—jumping from 10% at baseline to 51% 12 months following enrollment.
- Pathways increases youth connections to supportive adults. After participating in Pathways, youth report an increase in the number of permanent supportive adults in their lives. They also report an increase in the frequency of monthly contact with the supportive adults. These supportive adult connections that the youth develop are with adults other than professionals in their lives and does not include their Navigator.
- Pathways improves economic security and employment for youth participants. The percentage of youth unemployed fell 14% at the 12-month follow-up interview. The percentage of youth employed either full- or part-time at the 12-month follow-up interview stood at 59%. While still very low, the average monthly earnings reported by youth also saw a significant increase following participation in Pathways, jumping from an average of \$627 per month to \$1,052 per month at 12 months post-. “Getting banked,” or opening a checking or savings account, saw a significant increase as well. Only 44% of youth at baseline had a checking account, while 70% had an account 12 months post-enrollment. A similar increase in savings account openings was also seen, rising from 43 percent at enrollment to 58 percent at 12 months post-.
- Pathways improves youth’s health and well-being. Youth report feeling better prepared to arrange for their own health care following participation in Pathways. There was also a significant increase in the proportion of youth who have medical coverage, encompassing 90% of youth who were interviewed during the follow-up survey.
- According to Pathways youth who participated in researcher-led focus groups, youth overwhelmingly respond favorably to the Pathways intervention. Youth reported that Pathways encourages them to reach their full potential. Youth reported that the program is a stepping-stone that helps them “get to a better place in their lives.” Youth emphasized that the intervention is self-directed, and youth focused. Youth reported they have better access to resources, housing, support, and safety, and improved mental health after participating in Pathways.

This formative evaluation begins to build the evidence-base to support programs that lead to successful outcomes for older youth aging out of the foster care system. Short-term outcomes in this evaluation centered around the five core areas outlined by the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH): education, employment, permanency, housing, health and well-being. Research from the Pathways formative evaluation saw improvements in all five of these key outcome areas. While the formative evaluation found very promising results, more research is needed to measure outcomes against a comparison group of similar youth over a longer period of time (24 months and beyond).

---

“The way [my Navigator] lays things out and helps us get them done, not only is it just getting done, but I’m seeing what she’s doing and how to do it. It’s like ‘oh, I can do this on my own’ . . . that gives me self-confidence, because it’s like everything is not as hard.”

— Pathways youth

---