



COVID-19 Impacts on the Kentucky Child Welfare Community

A Public Health Crisis Meets a Vulnerable System



Thank You!

- Casey Family Programs
- The Department for Community Based Services
- Administrative Office of the Courts
- Voices of the Commonwealth
- True Up Louisville
- Focus groups and survey participants

Kentucky Child Welfare System: Pre-Pandemic

- **Implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Act**
- **Child Welfare Transformation**
- **Focus on collaboration with community partners**



A photograph of a smiling woman with glasses holding a young child with blonde hair. The woman is wearing a purple shirt and the child is wearing a yellow shirt with a blue and white striped collar. They are outdoors with green foliage in the background.

The Voices

- Young people who have experienced kinship care or foster care
- Biological parents
- Kinship caregivers (including fictive kin)
- Foster parents
- Providers—including courts, CASAs, private child caring agencies, and MCOs
- 43 counties (both rural and urban)

The Process

- 7 Virtual Focus Groups with targeted stakeholders including:
 - Kinship and foster care alumni
 - Kinship caregivers
 - Foster parents
 - Biological parents
 - Child welfare service providers
- Two audience-specific surveys



Survey Questions

My average daily level of **stress** is higher than it was before the pandemic.

My average daily level of **anxiety** is higher than it was before the pandemic.

I need more **financial** support than I did before the pandemic.

I need more **emotional** support than I did before the pandemic.

I seek out help from a **friend or family** member more frequently than I did before the pandemic.

I seek out help from a **caseworker** more frequently than I did before the pandemic.

I worry about the stability of my own or my child's **placement** more than I did before the pandemic.



I need more **emotional support**
than I did before the pandemic.

Stakeholder Group	Agree or Strongly Agree
Foster or Kinship Alumni	95%
Foster Parent	33%
Kinship Caregiver	43%
Biological Parent	25%



I need more **financial support**
than I did before the pandemic.

Stakeholder Group	Agree or Strongly Agree
Foster or Kinship Alumni	95%
Foster Parent	42%
Kinship Caregiver	57%
Biological Parent	25%

The Findings

- Four major themes from the focus group and survey data
 - Difficulty with Non-Traditional Instruction
 - Mental and Behavioral Health Challenges
 - Barriers to Basic Needs, Including Safety
 - Navigating Complex Systems
- Each section also included findings on “What Worked”





Difficulty with Non-Traditional Instruction

- Internet connectivity issues
- Lack of access to equipment for students
- Inadequate supports related to schoolwork deliverables
- Realization of the student's performance level
- Increased stress related to dual roles
- Concerns related to absenteeism or truancy



Kentucky **youth** Advocates

Non-Traditional Instruction

Silver Linings & Solutions

Silver Linings

- One-on-one instruction improved reading
- Virtual class meetings helped with socialization

Identified Solutions

- Co-ops, “hubs” or “pods”
- Peer support
- Stipend for internet services



Kentucky youth Advocates

Mental and Behavioral Health Challenges

- Stress, frustration, anxiety, and depression
- Isolation and anxiety was particularly present with foster and kinship alumni
- Inadequate access for some to mental health services like tele-therapy
- Lack of respite
- Increase in behavior issues

**“We feel trapped
in a prison in our
own home.”**

--Foster Parent



Mental and Behavioral Health Silver Linings & Solutions

Silver Linings

- Telehealth: better than nothing
- Virtual social supports

Identified Solutions

- Increase access to peer support
- Increase communication related to available mental health services
- Communicate through various mediums, frequently in times of crisis
- Increase access to information through hotlines, websites, and social media for specific groups





Barriers to Basic Needs, Including Safety

- Placement instability
- Fear of falling ill
- Financial hardships

Barriers to Basic Needs Silver Linings & Solutions

Silver Linings (safety nets that worked)

- Food pantries
- Increase in Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP)

Identified Solutions

- Increase accessibility to caseworkers or “navigators”
- Communicate through various mediums, frequently in times of crisis
- Reduce utilization of residential treatment to only those who cannot be served in the community

Navigating Complex Systems

- **Inconsistent or problematic guidance related to visitation**
- **Limited court hearings created delays**
- **Lack of follow-through**
- **Caseworkers and providers fear for safety of children**

Navigating Complex Systems

Silver Linings & Solutions

Silver Linings

- High quality and more consistent visitation
- More contact between caseworkers and children

Identified Solutions

- Keep some meetings virtual
- Communicate through various mediums, frequently
- Increase tools and guidance related to relationship-building with biological parents
- Recruit and retain DCBS workers





Questions?

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