



Lifting up the Priorities of the Nation's Foster Youth

Results of Foster Youth in Action's 2016 Poll of Issues

If we asked the Nation's current and former foster youth about their foster care priorities, what would they say? What would they want changed? Which issues would they tell us need more attention, more action, and more results?

To answer this question, youth leaders with Foster Youth in Action polled **525** current and former foster in more than 25 states, plus an additional **176** adult professionals, foster parents, social workers, and others who work with foster youth. This is what they told us.

The Highest Priorities

- **SEEING SIBLINGS** - 52% said this was a top priority
- **PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS** - 47% said this was a top priority
- **COLLEGE ACCESS & SUCCESS** - 46% said this was a top priority
- **LIVING INDEPENDENTLY** - 44% said this was a top priority

The results of this poll highlight the importance of directly hearing young people's voices. While much of the focus at the federal level over the past year has been on "reducing reliance on group homes" or other congregate care, the youth considered that a comparatively low priority, ranking it 15th out of the 18 issues. Meanwhile, though "seeing siblings" was chosen as the highest priority of the youth, that issue has received relatively little focus and discussion in federal policymaking circles in recent years. Better efforts should be made at the federal level to authentically engage today's foster youth so that their priorities and the priorities of policymakers are more closely aligned.

About the poll: The poll was designed by Leaders United, a council of youth and young adult representatives of Foster Youth in Action (FYA). FYA is a grassroots network of foster youth-led groups across the US. Drawing on the range of priorities determined through personal experience and peer-to-peer conversations, Leaders United selected 18 different issues and asked their peers to select their top five. Polling took place over the summer and fall of 2016. Leaders United members and FYA staff did ongoing outreach across our respective networks to encourage youth and young adults to complete the poll. Paper and electronic versions were both available.

Comparing Priorities Across States

We found important similarities and distinctions in priorities across states. All states shared at least two priorities that were in the top 4 overall. (priorities listed in blue below are those that are also in the top 4 overall) Most strikingly, in six of the eight states where the largest groups of respondents resided, *Seeing Siblings* was the #1 priority. Interestingly, California, the state the the largest number of respondents, *Seeing Siblings* did not make the top four.¹ Reducing Reliance on Group Homes, an issue that is 15th overall, is clearly a more significant issue in Georgia, as it is #3 for respondents in that state.

California (159)		Iowa (134)	
Living Independently after care	56%	Seeing Siblings	54%
Preventing Homelessness	55%	College Access and Success	45%
Healing from Trauma	49%	Equal Access to Activities	40%
College Access and Success	47%	Living Independently after Care	39%

Georgia (89)		Florida (61)	
Seeing Siblings	56%	Seeing Siblings	67%
Equal Access to Activities	51%	Preventing Homelessness	48%
Group Homes	45%	Living Independently after care	43%
College Access and Success	39%	College Access and Success	43%

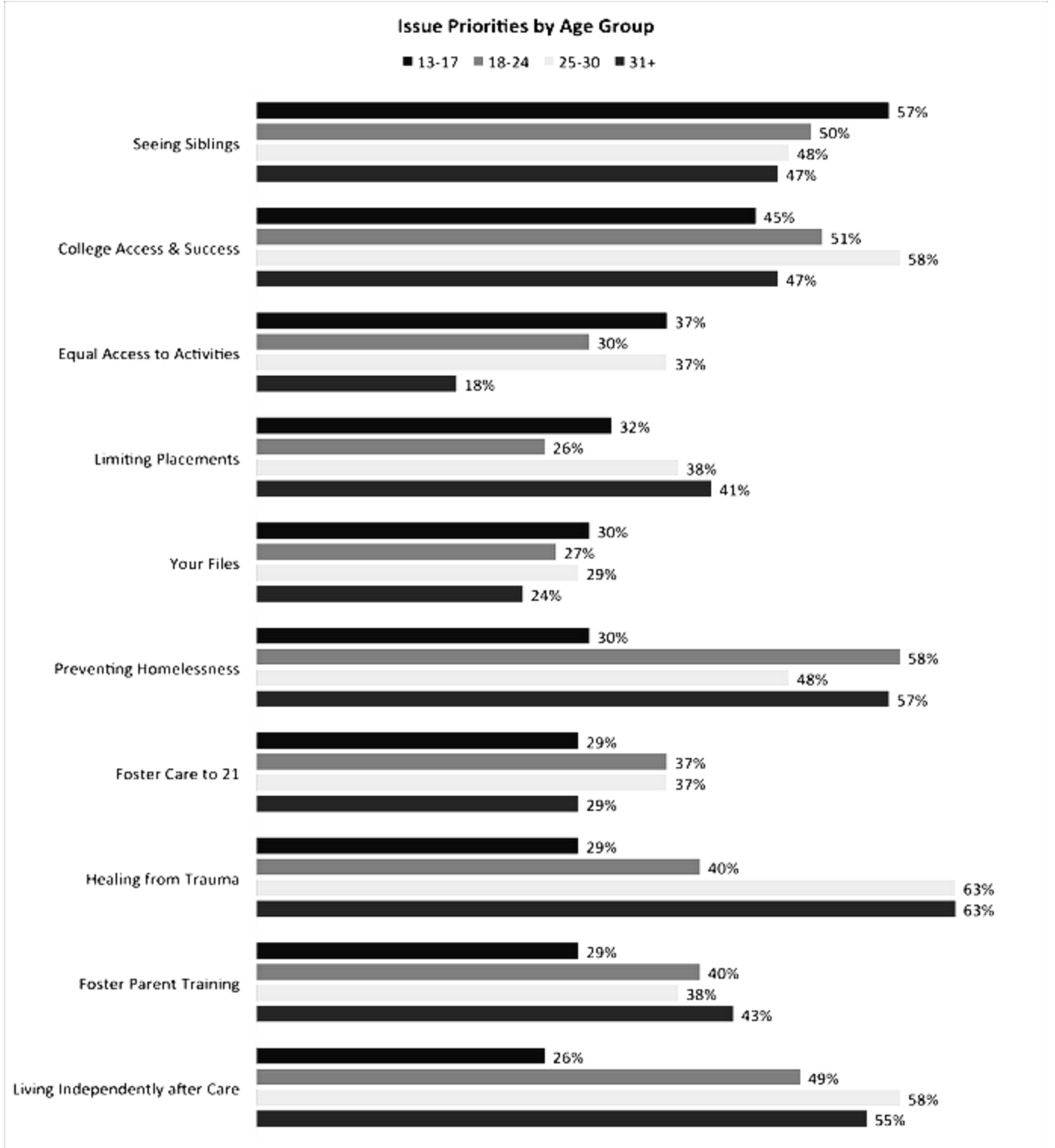
Oregon (N=48)		Hawaii (N=39)	
Seeing Siblings	60%	Seeing Siblings	67%
Preventing Homelessness	60%	College Access and Success	67%
Foster Parent Training	44%	Cultural Connections	49%
Limiting Placements	42%	Healing from Trauma	46%

Massachusetts (N=37)		Maine (N=16)	
Seeing Siblings	65%	Healing from Trauma	69%
Healing from Trauma	54%	Living Independently after Care	69%
Foster Parent Training	41%	Foster Care to 21	63%
Preventing Homelessness	43%	College Access and Success	56%

¹ It should be noted that this issue is indeed a priority for many of California's foster youth. The best evidence is the recent organizing by California Youth Connection (CYC) on this specific issue. CYC recently secured a legislative victory to change laws strengthening sibling visitation rights.

Comparing Priorities Across the lifespan

Not surprisingly, priorities of foster youth change over time. The chart below lists the top 10 issues that were highest priority for the 13-17 year old group, and compares the ranking of those issues to older age groups. *Seeing siblings* - the #1 priority for the 13-17 year old group, declined from 57% at the youngest age group to 47% for alumni who are 31 or older. In contrast, *healing from trauma*, which was relatively low priority for the 13-17 old group, rose to 63% (and the #1 priority) for the 31+ alumni of care.



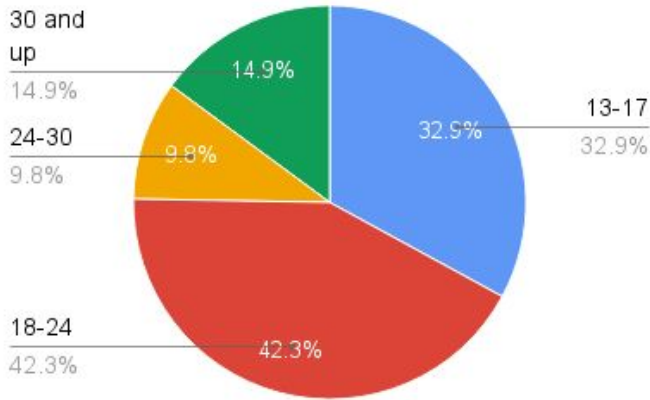
Comprehensive Poll Results

The chart below describes the full results of the poll of 701 respondents.

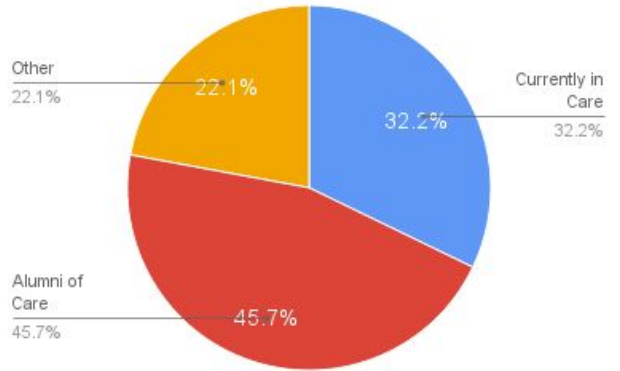
1.	52%	SEEING SIBLINGS. Strengthen rights for foster youth to see their siblings.
2.	47%	PREVENTING FOSTER YOUTH HOMELESSNESS: Increase the amount of safe and affordable housing for youth leaving care
3.	46%	COLLEGE ACCESS AND SUCCESS. Help more foster youth get to and succeed in college or other higher ed.
4	44%	LIVING INDEPENDENTLY AFTER CARE. Improve services & supports for youth to help them be successful & independent as adults.
5.	41%	HEALING FROM TRAUMA. Ensure that foster care services help foster youth heal from their trauma
6.	37%	FOSTER PARENT TRAINING: Provide better training for new foster parents
6.	33%	EQUAL ACCESS TO ACTIVITIES: Make it easier for foster youth to participate in after-school, sports and other teen activities
8.	33%	FOSTER CARE TO 21. Extend foster care until 21 in states that don't currently allow it.
9.	32%	LIMIT PLACEMENTS. Reduce the number of times a foster youth switches placements.
10.	32%	SOCIAL WORKER TRAINING. Provide better training for case managers, social workers and group home staff.
11.	28%	MEDICAL INSURANCE. Ensure that all foster youth are signed up for Medicaid till age 26.
12.	27%	TOO MANY MEDS. Reduce the over-medication of foster youth.
13.	26%	YOUR FILES. Get access to your foster care case files.
14.	25%	HUMAN TRAFFICKING. Prevent human trafficking in the foster care and improve support for youth who experience it.
15.	24%	GROUP HOMES. Reduce reliance on group homes for foster care placements.
16.	21%	CULTURAL CONNECTIONS. Help more foster youth connect to cultural or ethnic communities they identify with.
17.	19%	RIGHTS FOR LGBTQI YOUTH. Improve rights of foster youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, or intersex.
18.	12%	Juvenile Records: Ensure that foster youth will have their records clear before they turn 18.

Poll Demographics

AGE OF RESPONDENTS



CARE STATUS



Race and Ethnicity of Respondents

Native American	8%
Asian	5%
Caucasian	47%
African American	28%
Latino/a	17%
Pacific Islander	4%
Did not answer	4%
other	6%
Note: Does not total 100% as some respondents checked multiple boxes	

Gender Identity

