

Girls and Gender-Expansive Young People and Parents Speak on the Impact of Child Welfare and Legal System Involvement



Authors

K. Shakira Washington, Ph.D., M.P.A.
Vice President, Research
Justice + Joy National Collaborative

Lola D. Adebara, M.A.
Founder and CEO
Partnership for Permanence (P4P) Inc.

Disclaimer

The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of Ramsey County Social Services Department, Ramsey County Community Corrections Department, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, and the Public Welfare Foundation.

These data represent a point in time for specific programs and activities and do not reflect Ramsey County Social Services Department's entire breadth of services.

Acknowledgments and Special Thanks

We want to thank the P4P youth facilitators and community stakeholder working group participants for the time and energy they put into producing this report.

P4P Youth Facilitators and Researchers

Mackenzie C., Brittany P., Gabrielle P., Crystal V., Lisa V., and Youa X.

Stakeholder Working Group

Robyn Bata, Kristi Cobbs, David Giddings, Alix Herzing, Falon Huynh, Melissa R. Simpson, Angela Moore Smith, Rebecca Underhill, and Natalie Uzong

About

Justice + Joy National Collaborative

Justice + Joy National Collaborative (Justice + Joy) is an intergenerational, gender, and racial justice organization engaged in advocacy, organizing, and research with and for girls, young women, and gender-expansive young people of color.

Partnerships for Permanence

Partnerships for Permanence (P4P) is a nonprofit organization that bridges opportunity gaps for young people entering adulthood from the child welfare system. We are a community of professionals and youth with lived experience in foster care and adoption, creating systems change through support services, advocacy, and personal development training. P4P's vision is focused on filling opportunity gaps that exist for former foster youth/adults and adoptees and developing the next generation of young leaders who will transform the child welfare system.

Suggested Citation

Washington, K.S., Adebara, L. (2025). Girls and Gender-Expansive Young People and Parents Speak on the Impact of Child Welfare and Legal System Involvement. Justice and Joy National Collaborative. www.justiceandjoynatl.org

This report was made possible by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs (Grant #: 15PJDP-22-GK-04862-GJSK), Ramsey County Social Services Department (Contract #: SSD 22-077), and the Public Welfare Foundation (Grant #: 20-088 and 22-156).

Table of Contents

Opening Comments	6
Introduction	9
Purpose	10
Methods	11
Findings	14
Conversation Findings - Girls and Gender-Expansive Young People	14
Section I: System Impact	16
Section II: Safety	20
Section III: System Engagement and Relational Approach	22
Section IV: Transition Planning	29
Conversation Findings - Parents	32
Section I: System Impact	33
Section II: Safety	41
Section III: System Engagement and Relational Approach	45
Section IV: System Services and Programs	49
Conclusion	60
Limitations	65
Appendices	66
Appendix I: Advice from System Impacted Young People and Parents	66
Appendix II: Helpful Programs and Resources	68
Appendix III: Girls and Gender-Expansive Young People Discussion Guide	69
Appendix IV: Parent Discussion Guide	73
Appendix V: References	76

Opening Comments

Partnerships for Permanence (P4P)

Partnerships for Permanence (P4P) is honored to partner with Ramsey County on the Girls Project, an effort that reflects our shared commitment to listening to girls and families and using their experiences to guide meaningful systems change. For more than 15 years, P4P's mission and vision have been rooted in centering the voices, input, and expertise of individuals with lived experience in foster care, adoption, juvenile justice, and other systems of care. Our community includes youth, adults, and families who are learning, growing, and leading together to build more responsive, accountable, and healing-centered systems.

We are grateful to Ramsey County for making a meaningful investment in listening to the needs of girls and their families, and for its continued commitment to partnering with lived experts to improve systems of care. The P4P team developed and conducted the qualitative research for the Girls Project in collaboration with young leaders with lived experience in Ramsey County. Throughout this process, we prioritized trust-building by creating safe spaces, listening deeply, and supporting the emotional and mental wellness of all participants with lived experience. Centering voices in this way created opportunities for healing, reflection, and shared learning.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to the girls and families who entrusted us with their powerful stories and insights. Your experiences continue to inspire change and inform how Ramsey County is improving service delivery, customer service, and transition planning for youth and families. Over the past four years, Partnerships for Permanence has partnered with Ramsey County to implement this feedback and strengthen youth and family engagement. Together, our teams have developed the P4P and Ramsey County Youth and Parent Resource Fair, skills-development training for staff and parents, and a youth engagement advisory group—all of which have continued to grow and thrive over the past three years.

This is just the beginning of what we can achieve together. When the voices of girls and families guide our decisions, we move from listening to meaningful action. Together, as lived experts, families, system partners, and advocates, we can build more responsive, healing-centered systems where youth and families feel seen, supported, and empowered to thrive.

Sincerely,

Lola D. Adebara, MA

Opening Comments

Justice + Joy National Collaborative

Gender has always mattered – if it didn’t, women would have always had the right to vote, own property, have a credit card in their own name, and compete in athletics. We know it matters because the stark reality of gender inequality first enshrined by the founding “fathers” is alive and well. Still, oftentimes, it is the invisibility or absence of data about the impacts of gender differences on the lives of girls, young women, and gender-expansive young people that is most harmful and telling.

This report series^A offers important insight into the impact of gender on pathways, programs, and services needed by children, parents, and families involved in the child welfare and youth legal or juvenile justice systems. From a mixed methods approach, scant research exists that analyzes, by gender, the needs and drivers of children and their families into these systems. This is not about “girls” versus “boys” but about ensuring that all children and parents have the programs and services needed to heal and thrive.

In 2015, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention issued its policy guidance on system-impacted girls, **Policy Guidance on Girls and the Juvenile Justice System**, recognizing “young women’s” diverse pathways into and across systems to reduce their involvement. It is past time for child welfare to prioritize doing a gendered analysis of the drivers and support needs of girls, young women, and gender-expansive young people who encounter these systems. This analysis also requires us to look at the cumulative impact of intersecting factors such as race/ethnicity and gender if we are to effectively and compassionately meet children and families in the context of their lives. Furthermore, both systems must work hand in hand to create an ecosystem of care and support designed to address root causes and break intergenerational cycles of system involvement.

The experiences, wisdom, insight, and challenges shared by girls, gender-expansive young people, and parents in this report call us to do better – to dramatically rethink and reimagine how systems work with children and families. We must do better.

Sincerely,



Jeannette Pai-Espinosa, M.Ed.
President

Justice + Joy National Collaborative

A The Ramsey County girls' study used a mixed-methods approach to understanding the needs of girls, gender-expansive young people, and parents who have experienced either the Ramsey County child welfare system, youth legal or juvenile justice system, or both. This is one of two reports from this study.

Introduction

Much has been written about the child welfare and youth corrections systems. While both aim to reduce harm and increase safety, numerous studies highlight the challenges and adverse short- and long-term outcomes experienced by system-involved children and families. Furthermore, these systems are known for their overreach and the disproportionate targeting of vulnerable communities, particularly communities of color, individuals living in poverty, and families with limited access to resources, social support, and social capital.^{1,2}

Children involved in child welfare, as well as those who cross over into the corrections system, often face unique challenges and stressors. Some of the most frequently reported negative experiences include uncertainty and instability,³ separations from family and friends,⁴ stigma and isolation,⁵ lack of control and voice,⁶ emotional and psychological stressors,⁷ unfamiliar environments,⁸ and inconsistent and unmet supports.⁹ Similarly, system-involved parents, many of whom often face judgment, stigmatization, and systems that can be difficult to navigate. In some cases, these systems can be coercive, and, at worst, punitive in the form of child removal and termination of parental rights.¹⁰

Both systems also operate at a significant financial cost. Child welfare expenditures are estimated to cost federal, state, and local governments over \$30 billion annually.¹¹ Meanwhile, the cost to states for confining a young person is approximately \$588 per day or more than \$214,000 annually.¹²

Given these realities, the past few decades have seen a rise in policy and system reforms. These efforts have led to a notable reduction in the number of children and families involved in these systems, alongside ongoing initiatives to implement policies and practices that are more responsive to the needs of children and families.

\$30B

Estimated cost of child-welfare expenditures for federal, state, and local governments **annually**.

\$588

Cost to states for confining a young person **per day**.

\$214k

Cost to states for confining a young person **annually**.

Purpose

In line with existing system reform efforts, in 2020, the Ramsey County Social Services (Ramsey County SSD)^B and Ramsey County Community Corrections Department (RCCC)^C partnered with Justice and Joy National Collaborative (formerly National Crittenton) to better understand the system-related experiences of girls, gender-expansive young people, and parents with a history of involvement in one or both youth focused systems. Quantitative and qualitative data were gathered, resulting in a two-part report series.

These reports aim to help Ramsey County implement strategies to enhance services and support for children and families who engage with the county's social services and community corrections systems, with a particular focus on girls, gender-expansive young people, and their families. Additionally, the reports provide Ramsey County leadership and community-based advocates with a resource to galvanize support and foster collaboration among systems and stakeholders. The goal is to promote upstream approaches that better support the young people and families they serve.

This report specifically highlights qualitative findings from individual and group discussions with girls,^D gender-expansive young people, and parents who have direct experience with Ramsey County's child welfare and community corrections systems. It offers valuable insights into their experiences with one or both systems. The qualitative study was designed to raise awareness about the impact of these systems on young people and their families, explore how young people and families define and experience safety, gather feedback on the services and programs provided by these systems, and identify what works well and what needs improvement for young people and parents.



- B Ramsey County Social Services (Ramsey County SSD) is the largest county department that provides critical social service supports, including child protection, licensing, foster care connections, pre-petition screening for civil commitment, adult protection, mental health, detox, case management, prevention, and chemical dependency services. DSS is the local authority for mental health services and adult protection and is responsible for helping individuals, families, and communities in Ramsey County survive and thrive.
- C Ramsey County Community Corrections Department (CCC) paves the way for safe and healthy communities through interventions that promote personal change and accountability.
- D Justice and Joy National Collaborative acknowledges that gender norms are a social construct built on a false binary. We recognize that gender and how we claim our identities are evolving. In response, our language to describe ourselves continues to transform and grow. For this report, we use “girls and gender-expansive young people” to emphasize that gender identity continues to evolve.

Methods

To ensure the inclusion of voices from those most impacted, Ramsey County leadership enlisted Partnerships for Permanence (P4P), a local nonprofit organization, to conduct focus groups and interviews with girls, gender-expansive young people, and parents who had direct experiences with Ramsey County child welfare or had become dually involved with Ramsey County Community Corrections.

P4P was tasked with several key responsibilities, including hiring and training girls and gender-expansive young people with lived experience to participate in the youth participatory action research (YPAR) study, organizing and managing the study's stakeholder workgroup, recruiting participants for the study, and contributing to the analysis process.



Stakeholder Workgroup

A stakeholder working group was formed to guide the qualitative study process, meeting monthly or as needed by the research team. The group included five former foster youth, three social workers and planners from Ramsey County Social Services, three staff members and supervisors from Ramsey County Community Corrections, and two foster and adoptive parents. The Stakeholder Workgroup played a critical role in reviewing the study design, refining the study questions, developing participant recruitment strategies, and providing ongoing feedback throughout the study. Additionally, the group reviewed and offered input on both early drafts and the final version of the qualitative report narrative.



YPAR Facilitators

P4P hired and trained five young women and gender-expansive individuals with foster care and adoption lived experiences to serve as YPAR (youth participatory action research) facilitators. These facilitators actively participated in the study's design, implementation, and analysis. P4P's training and supervision efforts included developing



a comprehensive training curriculum for the YPAR facilitators and conducting individual and group training sessions prior to the study's launch. Additionally, P4P created an analysis training curriculum and plan to ensure the full integration of YPAR facilitators into the analysis process. Throughout the study, P4P staff provided ongoing support, coaching, and training for all YPAR facilitators and project staff.

Data Collection

To ensure consistency across conversations, two discussion guides were created to guide YPAR facilitators through the focus groups and individual interviews (see appendices III and IV). Each guide included introductory talking points, discussion questions, and suggested prompts to help engage participants in the conversations.

Community Engagement Strategy

Using a convenience sampling approach, P4P employed several strategies to engage participants from organizations and agencies in Ramsey County that provide services and programs to families involved in the child welfare and correctional systems. These strategies included developing and distributing study outreach materials, contacting individual providers by phone and email, scheduling meetings and presentations to introduce the study to providers to elicit their assistance in contacting potential participants.

Once a potential participant was identified, they completed an eligibility survey that included demographic questions and a few questions about their experiences with the systems. To be eligible, youth had to identify as a girl or gender-expansive between the ages of 14-25; parents were required to have

been or were currently caring for at least one child that identified as a girl or gender-expansive; and young people and parents had to indicate a history of Ramsey County child welfare involvement at a minimum.

Once the eligibility survey was completed, P4P staff reviewed survey responses to determine who was eligible to participate. If a person was deemed eligible, P4P staff contacted the potential participant to assess their interest in participating in either a focus group or interview. If an individual was interested, they were assigned to a focus group or scheduled to complete a one-on-one interview with P4P staff.

Data Collection Process

Focus groups and interviews were conducted from November 2022 through May 2023. At least two P4P staff participated in each focus group or interview using the Zoom meeting platform. To ensure accuracy during the analysis phase of the project, all discussions were recorded. Once completed, all recordings were forwarded to J+J where they were transcribed, deidentified (removal of all identifying information), and reviewed for transcription accuracy by comparing the audio recording of each discussion to the corresponding transcript. Errors were corrected before distributing the transcripts for analysis. Seven young people and eight parent transcripts (60 to 90 minutes each) were reviewed and de-identified.

Participant Incentives

Participants in the study were compensated for completing the eligibility survey (\$20 electronic gift card) and for participating in either a focus group or individual interview (\$50 electronic gift card).

Analysis Process

The analysis of focus groups and individual interviews underwent extensive review. P4P and J+J staff individually coded each transcript, generated analytic memos summarizing the findings from each focus group or interview, and included supporting quotes from participants. Consensus calls, including P4P staff, P4P YPAR facilitators, and J+J staff, were used to confirm each reviewer's understanding of issues raised in the conversations and address discordant views. Findings were then summarized and drafted into a report narrative by J+J staff. Versions of the narrative were reviewed by P4P staff and the Stakeholder Workgroup. Edits and feedback were then incorporated by J+J staff.

Internal Review Board

The Ramsey County Social Services Department internal review board reviewed and approved the study design and materials.

Findings



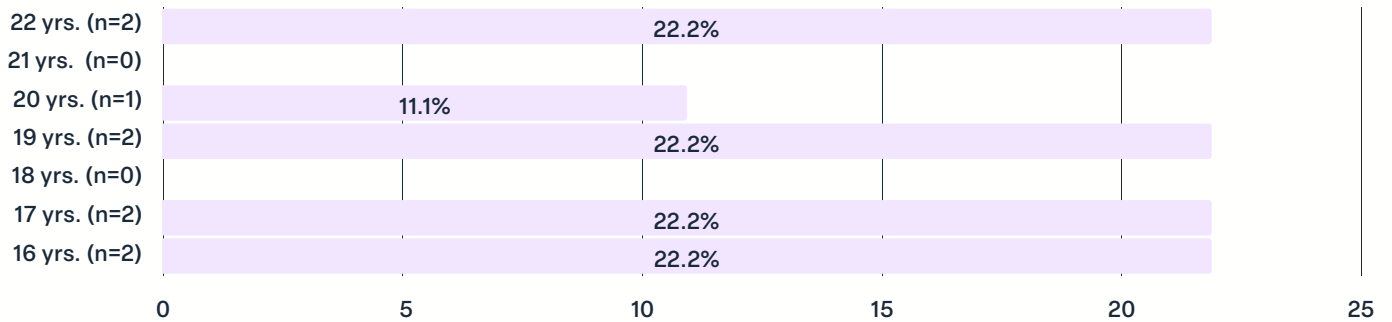
The following section presents findings from discussions with girls, gender-expansive young people, and parents with histories of involvement in Ramsey County systems. While there is some overlap, the findings are organized and presented separately for each group. Each section of the findings begins with a summary of the questions asked of participants. The most salient findings where overlap was identified are presented, along with supporting quotes from participants. Finally, while some participants may have been involved with more than one system, participants were not asked to respond to each question for each system they experienced due to time constraints and concerns about participant burden and fatigue. Therefore, unless otherwise noted, the experiences of girls, gender-expansive young people, and parents are generalized across Ramsey County child welfare and corrections systems.

Conversation Findings - Girls and Gender-Expansive Young People

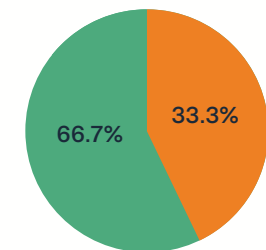
Nine girls and gender-expansive young people participated in the focus groups and individual conversations, and the ages of participants ranged between 16 and 22 (mean = 18.7). Most participants identified as young people of color ($n = 6$), had a preferred language of English ($n = 8$), had an education level of high school graduate or less ($n = 7$), and identified their sexual orientation as bisexual, pansexual or other ($n = 6$). A few participants indicated they were immigrants or refugees ($n = 3$); one participant ($n = 1$) had a disability, and another ($n = 1$) was a parent.

TABLE X: DEMOGRAPHICS – GIRLS AND GENDER EXPANSIVE YOUNG PEOPLE (N = 9)

Age (n = 9)

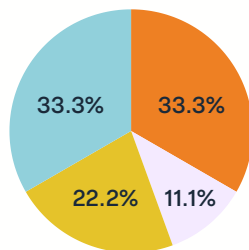


Hispanic/Latina/e/x (n=9)



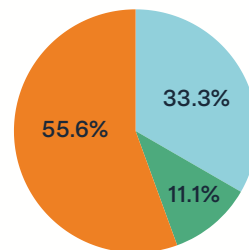
Yes (n=3)
No (n=6)

Race (n=9)
check all that apply option



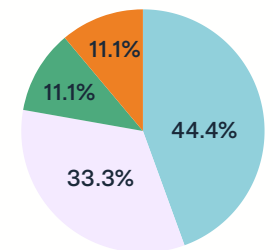
African American/Black (n= 3)
White (n=3)
Hispanic/Latina/Latinx (n=2)
Asian/Asian American (n=1)

Immigrant/refugee (n=9)



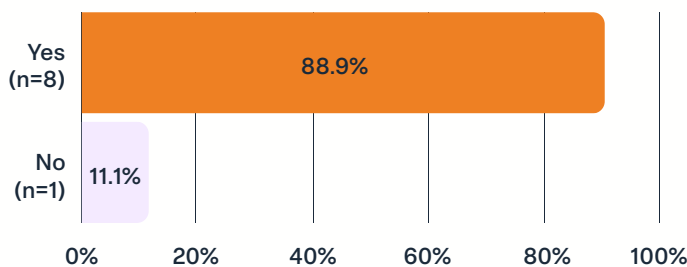
Yes (n=3)
No (n=5)
Maybe/Not Sure (n=1)

Sexual Orientation (n=9)

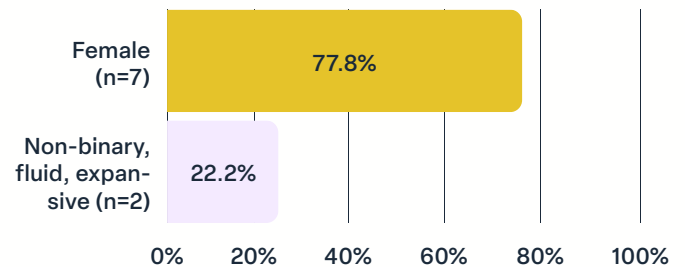


Bisexual (n=4)
Heterosexual/Straight (n=3)
Pansexual (n=1)
Other (n=1)

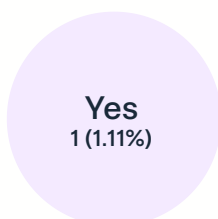
English preferred language (n=9)



Gender Identity (n=9)

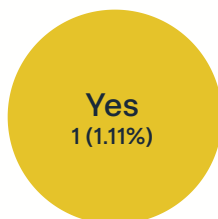


Disability (n=9)



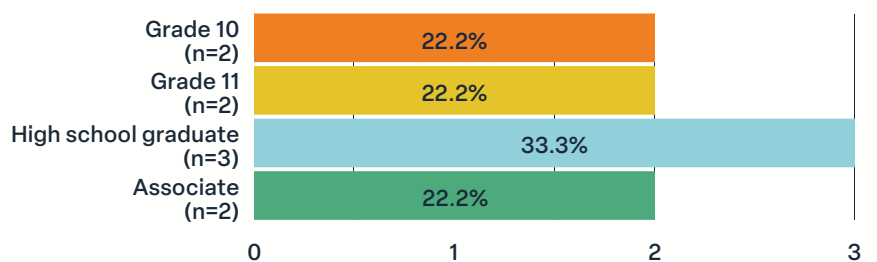
Yes
1 (11.1%)

Parent (n=9)



Yes
1 (11.1%)

Education (highest) (n=9)



Section I: System Impact

Section I of the conversations with girls and gender-expansive young people included a series of questions about the impact of being involved in any Ramsey County system on various aspects of their lives. These questions asked about the effect of either system on their relationships with family members and peers, their sense of belonging in their communities and ability to build a support system, and their ability to engage in school activities.

Family Relationships

The impact of system involvement on family connections among the young people in our discussions varied and was often complicated. Responses differed depending on whether they reflected on their relationship to their biological, foster, or adoptive parent(s) or families. Many of our participants described their relationships with their biological parent(s) as contentious or strained. Many noted they no longer had a relationship with their biological parent(s), with many losing connections very early in life.

“ ... my situation I think was kind of hard... I was not able to see my parents and even my siblings... nowadays I still don't talk with them.

I am an only child, so it didn't affect a sibling relationship whatsoever. I no longer am in contact with my mom. I think a big part of that has to do with the system. I don't necessarily think that's a bad thing, but it's still, at the end of the day, I wish I would have a mom to go to. Growing up, it was just my mom and I. I never knew my dad. I knew who he was, but I didn't personally know him.

I don't really have a good relationship with my family even before child protection was ever involved... But about a year ago, I had gotten a new caseworker, and that caseworker had decided for me that it would be best for me if I had gone back to live with my parents. That didn't really help because we were still recovering at the time from what had happened. We were not exactly better, but we were getting better. Everything was going good up until that point, and then all of a sudden, I had to move back in with them and live with them. That didn't really help it out. Things could have gone differently, but they didn't. It didn't really help how they just forced that on us.

For one young participant, system involvement complicated or strained their relationship with their siblings because of differing interests in their want or need to maintain a relationship with their biological family. As noted by this young person,

“ I was pretty young when I was getting adopted, so it's a very big thing. But now as I'm getting older...I really have no want or need to meet anyone from my birth side of the family. But my siblings, they're all older than me [provided the age of siblings]. They all are in some sort

of contact with someone from my birth side of the family, which I think, in their ways, they want to keep that from me, because they know that I don't really want to. And then it breaks a bridge that they know that I don't want to, and then it ends up being a secret.

Some young participants described improvements with their family members once CPS became involved. For some, this created safer spaces for family interactions that did not exist before system involvement.

“ Well, I don't live with my parents at all. I never lived with my dad and my mom. My mom was always going through something, so I moved in with my aunt, and she's always been really good to me. My mom has her own mental health problems, and so do I. We don't work well together. So, I feel like now we're fine that we're not living together. But it was always like any problem she had; it was my fault. Being detached from that really helped.

For me, I think personally the program that I was in really strengthened my relationship, especially with my sisters because after our time with Child Protective Services, we felt a lot safer from our father. We felt a lot closer to each other because we knew that because of CPS, we were able to rely on each other, and we didn't have to worry about our father coming after us or anything. I think that it strengthened my relationship with my mother as well just because she didn't have that extra stress on her worrying about our father. So, we were able to communicate a lot more openly with each other as well.

Peer and Community Relationships and Supports

When asked about the impact of system involvement on essential social supports such as peers and connection with their community, most young people described losing friendships and being leery of trusting others, ultimately impacting their ability to form deep friendships or community connections.

“ Especially because of the schools I go to. People are very good at being fake friends with people. So, it feels like if I tell somebody my own age, they're just gonna go back and tell somebody else something that I said, and people are gonna make things harder for me. So, it's always been really hard for me to talk to people my own age or I will overshare and then feel really, really bad about myself because people have a habit of saying things that I've said just in a more disrespectful way...

I don't let people know about my family issues because it's not their business.

Being in the system, I never really had... it's hard for me to get close to people. Just my lifestyle. I really don't connect with people well. So, I won't even say that I've had this thing. Even with right now at my age, it's hard for me to even have friends or get close to people or family. So, I really, I don't know.

Yes. I think what it does is it makes me have a lot more trust issues... Also, I find myself because I guess I didn't have that much control over my life when I was younger, and all of this was happening, I think it makes me a little more controlling, just because I want my life to go how I want it to be. But I do definitely think that because of the things that happened when I was younger, it does make me be a little more controlling. But my friends also know now that it's not anything that they should take personally; it's just how I've been, and we still are really close.

Several participants identified one or two individuals they trusted or felt were their support systems. Examples included foster or adopting parents, a specific friend, a friend's supportive parent, an extended family member such as an aunt, and a caring case or social worker who took extra steps to build a relationship and provide needed services. But many young people described these circles of support as being very limited, with very few people they felt comfortable sharing their life experiences with.

Education

Participants in our discussions often described experiencing school disruption, but many did not view these disruptions as a byproduct of system policies or practices. Several young participants described the negative impact of system involvement on their schooling as primarily caused by the added stressors associated with their situations, even when those added stressors were due to navigating difficulties in their lives related to their families and changes related explicitly to system involvement.

“ When I was going to school and involved with it, I wasn't in class because I was too stressed out over it [CPS involvement] and I just couldn't pay attention in class.

That all happened with my parents and me, that situation... From the house, I went to a shelter, and then from the shelter, it took me to a foster care home, something like that. So that kind of impacted my school a little bit, but it was just my situation. It was not child protection, about rules or nothing.

... I think it wasn't necessarily more or less the system, but it was just the stuff I was going through at the time where grades were not my first priority. I didn't care about school. I was just happy that I could

get up and brush my teeth, and get to school at that point. It was just a very large task to get myself out of bed most days... that was more or less just what I was going through. And then a big thing too that I've realized is now that I'm getting older and just developing more of an independence and stuff, I have been doing better at school because that is now my only and main priority. Where beforehand, there was always so much more I had to remember and just little tasks and things that the system needed me to do or just things that were going on that kind of interfered, but nothing, I would never have to leave school to go meet someone or something like that. It was never like that.

At least two participants specifically identified school disconnection experiences as a direct result of system involvement.

“ Yes, a lot. I've been to maybe over seven schools since I've been in foster care or different foster homes. Not only that, just being bullied, people picking on you for certain things. Getting schools changed. Maybe the reason being in foster care or just not being able to settle down in school.

I mean when I was involved with CPS and going to JDC and all, I wasn't in school at the time. I had left school in around October or November, and I recently just started going back to school because I had got on house arrest.



Section II: Safety

Section II questions focused on understanding what “safety” meant to young participants and how their experiences with the system impacted their sense of safety.

Defining Safety

To understand how Ramsey County systems impacted young people’s sense of safety, we first asked participants to define “safety” or describe what safety means to them. Participating girls and gender-expansive young people described safety from a personal viewpoint. Comments reflected participants' desires to feel safe, to be able to relax a little bit, to know what will happen, to feel secure, to be safe all around [meaning physically and mentally], and to be heard and that they could be themselves. Below are a few select responses from participants.

I think feeling secure and knowing what's going to happen. And then being able to come home and just do whatever and feel like safe.

To me it means to be physically and emotionally safe. Even if it's, it's not getting harmed physically. You could be getting harmed emotionally and mentally and stuff like that. So, you need to be safe all around.

I personally think that it's also just not having to constantly worry about who's around me and what might happen around me that could affect me as well.

A place where I don't feel like I'm unheard is a place where I feel safe. A place where the things I think, and feel are taken into consideration.

I also think it's just being at peace with what's happening in the moment and not worrying about what's happening in the future or what's gonna happen and just knowing that I have my support system around me, my sisters and everyone and having people that I can rely on.

Structure. Safety. Just having more resources and people to just hear your story so that you can feel a family and everything.

Impact of Systems on Sense of Safety

When asked to reflect on the impact of the systems on their sense of safety, some participants reflected on how system workers and guardians treated them. For these girls and gender-expansive young people, being forcibly removed from where they were staying with no clear explanation and being placed in a setting where basic needs were not being met did not provide feelings of safety or well-being.

Okay, so first off, they be talking to you all, rude. I don't know who they be. They be thinking they can talk to you any type of way. I don't know, that right there makes me mad. Then what else? They be trying to put

you in and shove you in the car and take you. Then, you [system workers] didn't even tell me where I'm going. Come on now. I don't know. All that just irritates me and it makes me want to start running. So that makes you be like, why? Yeah, now it's like I'm gonna dip on you.

It was a foster home that my foster parents took me because they went on vacation, and I couldn't be by myself. So, they took me to this home. I don't remember the lady's name, but I don't know, I didn't feel safe in there. And I think I was there for two weeks. And even though she doesn't give me food, nothing, and I just eat the food at the school. And then when I come back home, she said, "Don't touch the food." And she always has the fridge full of food, but she doesn't give me food. And I was like, okay. But during that time, I lose some weight because it was two weeks. I was like, oh my gosh... I didn't have money to buy anything. So, during that time I didn't start working, so I didn't have money. But that was the only one, I think.

Participants were also asked to reflect on their experiences with out-of-home placements and whether they considered some settings safer. For the young people who responded, placements that felt more like caring family settings were considered safer than others.

“ For me when I was in a foster home, it was more of a home. It felt like you were around more of a family and that felt better than being in a facility to me.

I guess I feel really safe at my best friend's house. Her siblings call me their sister and their family call me their kid. I haven't known her that long, but I'm always over there and I feel really comfortable, and it's a place I know really well in a good neighborhood. And I didn't live in a good neighborhood so it's nice not being scared.



Section III: Engagement/Relational Approach

Section III included questions focused on how well the system was listening and advocating for young people, helping them problem-solve and stay informed about their case process, and whether systems are responsive to their intersectional needs (i.e., gender identity, sexual orientation, and race and ethnicity) and actively working to build trust and confidence.

Inclusive Communication and Decision Making

Overwhelmingly, open and honest communication was mentioned by young participants when they reflected on how system workers could do better when engaging and working with young people. Participants also felt system workers and adults often made decisions about their lives with little to no explanation.

“ I think for me, just more communication would've made me feel better and more safe. Because at the time that I was in CPS I know a lot of the information went through my mother, and I would always have to rely on her to get information. And that just was very uncomfortable for me because I didn't always feel the most comfortable asking my mom. And I just felt like if they had communicated more with me, I would've felt better physically and emotionally just knowing where I was in CPS and how they were actually helping me rather than my mom just telling me what she wanted to tell me.

... when my parents go to court, I remember that they never told me nothing about it, like what happened in court. My social worker supposedly needs to tell me what happened in court, but I don't know if they have permission to do it. I don't know... nobody told me this is the next step, or this is what happened in court or nothing. Nothing. I didn't know nothing about it.

I don't know if this sounds crazy or not, but before you do whatever, even if it was a small change or anything like that, I feel like it would be best if the worker talks to the child. I hate when people are making decisions for me, especially when I don't know anything about it because I like to feel secure and safe at my spot.

I would just say that I think that they could have just done a little more breaking it down for me because it was my first time in the system, and a lot of times they were just like, here's what's happening. But I never really understood the full concept of what was actually happening. They were just like, you're getting taken out of this home but they wouldn't explain why. And I just think that if they were like, here's why we're taking you out of the home, here's like why we're doing this, I think it would've been a lot more beneficial for me to understand what

was happening, and for me to feel physically and emotionally safer. Just because I was like, okay, well I'm leaving but I don't know why I'm leaving. They're just telling me little things like that where they could have broken it down more so I could have actually understood what was happening.

I didn't get informed of anything. I went home from school a couple of times, and she told me. And I was like, what? She was like, yeah, CPS is coming to look at you guys. I remember one time they came, and there was a whole CPS case. And then they came in the house, literally just looked at us, looked at all of my siblings, and said maybe two words, and left.

... one of the things is when I had a caseworker, that caseworker was very much in communication with my parents, and it was like, oh, I've got to go with the stranger for a little bit. I think maybe in some way being in more communication with the actual child or whoever they're going to be with... because the meetings were mostly... I'm sitting at a table with my parents, maybe at a coffee shop if we're wanting to go out and about, and they're talking to my parents, and I'm just sitting here on my phone playing a game or watching a show. Then every once in a while, she might ask me questions about how I'm doing and then go back to talking to my mom. So, maybe have more times where it's more one-on-one with the person that they're meeting with so that they can get to know them. Then it's not as much of a random person coming in and taking you away for a little bit.

I think when I specifically was first put into it and just being 14, it was very hush hush about my situation. And they would tell me more or less what I wanted to hear, not the actual truth. They kind of kept saying, reunification with your mom is very possible and this and this and whatever. And they put a lot of blame onto my mom. And maybe that is the truth, and I wouldn't put it past it. But at the same time, too, I know that they weren't being 100% truthful and transparent with me, which I get looking at a 14-year-old. But at the same time, I know that I was mature enough and understood enough for them to have a conversation with me like I was an adult because what I felt like was my hopes were put up so high, and then it never happened. And so, it was just kind of back to that safety of the unknowing. I just didn't know what was going to happen. I couldn't predict my life. And I like to know. I'm a planner if you haven't, they haven't been able to notice... I wish they would've just been upfront with me from the start.

Other participants felt better communication and inclusion of their perspectives would have improved their responses and created situations where systems could have provided services that would have addressed their problems or concerns.

“ For me, I think that it would've been more helpful if they gave me more tools and they gave me more resources. Because I think a lot of my time in CPS, they were just telling me what I was gonna be doing and they were just giving me things that they were gonna do for me, but they weren't actually, here's how this is gonna help you and here's how you can help yourself. But they were like, we're doing this for you and that was the end of the problem. So, I never really understood how that fixed my problem because they were telling me that it was going to fix my problem.

They could have reasoned with me instead of just making a decision. Cause they tried. [they] were supposed to put me on house arrest in the beginning, but they just automatically sent me to a group home because they said I was going to cut it [ankle monitor] off when I'd never been on [the] band before. So, they just tried to charge me with something that's never been done.

I think that it would've just been more helpful if they came and asked me questions personally. Because again, they would always go through my mom and ask my mom questions about the incident, and it was not always the most beneficial thing for me. Because then words got twisted and everything. And I just think that CPS could have done a better job at seeing me as the person that needed help rather than going through my mom and being like she isn't in her right mind to actively seek the help.

I was talking to my sister the other day, and she's 14, and she is very much like me with the way she talks about her feelings and what she's been through. It's like, I know exactly what you're feeling like. She was talking about how she's never really felt the most heard, about how she's like, yeah, it's like they told me what to do, and they don't even consider my feelings about it, which is a lot of CPS situations. And I understand it's being taken out of bad situations, but it's like you're also being put into other not good situations as well. And it's just overall bad.

Better Understanding and Empathy of System Workers

A lack of deeper and more caring engagement by case managers and social workers was mentioned as a problem. A few participants felt system workers needed to ask more questions to

understand their situation or lives better and would have demonstrated that system workers cared about their circumstances.

“ I will say that they're not not trying, but I also think that they're not going out of their way to do that... I'll just take my case worker for example. She was definitely there and definitely knew what was up-to-date with our family if my parents texted them, but it wasn't like she was going out of her way to like understand.”

... I feel like if I had a therapist during that time, maybe I would've been able to process it [referring to a physical and sexual assault she experienced while system involved] and whatnot. And it's not one of those things that really sits with me, honestly. I kind of forget about it unless I'm being asked to talk about it. So, I guess just having a structure of needing to have check-ins and maybe asking more of those uncomfortable questions. Cause I remember specifically too, thinking to myself, I'm not going to say anything. I feel like that's me telling on myself. But if someone were to maybe ask or just something even remotely close, maybe that would've made things better at that time... Yeah, so I guess they were very concerned with more or less how I was doing on paper. What it looked like I was doing. If I looked okay and fine on paper, then I must have been fine. But there were things where I... this was obviously a very tough situation that I had to go through, and I had to go through it on my own. There was no one else that I knew that had been in a situation like that. So, it was just kind of like, who am I supposed to talk to? I wish they had resources of having people who were in the system caring about the system and working with the system and being able to talk to them. And if you have questions or you need someone to talk to that's been through this, here's these resources. I think that would've been kind of helpful cause that was never really... I guess more or less... it kind of goes back to they were more concerned of what I looked like on paper. They didn't really care about my problems... as long as I checked off all the boxes on paper, there must be no problems. I'm not going to ask any further questions because the boxes are checked.

Finally, one participant spoke explicitly about the need for fewer yet more caring and invested caseworkers for young people.

I had a few case workers. I finally got settled down. I don't know if I'm supposed to say her name or not, but with [Caseworkers name]... and it's hard because now that I'm getting settled down with her, my case is almost closed. I don't really see [Caseworker name] as a case worker.

She's more of... I look at her more like a mom. I've been through a lot with her just going back and forth with me, with running away, trying to find my own home by myself. So, I don't know if this is the right answer to that, but maybe the workers... maybe finding... I don't know if it's the reason why they have to get new workers. Maybe that's not for them. But finding that right kid maybe and sticking to it. My problem is I don't like getting a caseworker, and the caseworker changes. So now I have to repeat everything that I have done said already or opening up to a person and repeating it to this person. Now I have to start all over again. So now that I got used to [Caseworker name], my case is almost over. But she lets me know all the time, it'll never be an end to it. We will always stay attached.



Intersecting Identities and Culture

Several participants highlighted how their identities—such as race, ethnicity, gender identity, and sexual orientation—and other cultural aspects significantly shaped their experiences with the systems. They emphasized the importance of systems recognizing and considering young people's diverse identities when making decisions or providing services and programs. For instance, one young person, a recent immigrant, shared how systems often overlook or undervalue cultural elements like food traditions, which are essential to young people's sense of comfort and safety.

“...when you get to a shelter and when you get, I think to foster homes, what they eat, you eat. So, it's not like they're going in cook your food or cook somebody's cultural food, no. It's whatever they eat, you have to eat it. If not, you going to starve. But when I get to my foster home... I'm going with them because I was so shy at first, I tell them I want to cook this and that, and they give me a chance to cook. Or sometimes they take me to a Spanish restaurant, but just that. But yeah, when you

get to a foster home, maybe if you can talk with them and see what you like, what food you like, and they maybe let you cook or buy it. But when you're at a shelter or different homes, no. You eat what they eat.

Another noted the importance of having diverse and multi-lingual first responders capable of addressing the needs of communities with varying communication styles and languages.

“ For me, my parents are [African country] and in that community, if you experience abuse or anything like that, it's like whatever happens in the house stays in the house. And when I first started realizing what was going on in my family was not okay, I would call 911 after every time I was abused. And I would be help, I need help. And I couldn't speak English at the time, and they would just think that it's a little kid making a prank call and stuff like that, and it wasn't.

Several participants raised the importance of not making assumptions about families based on racial and ethnic identities. For these participants, their needs were overlooked because they were young people of color while their parents or guardians were white.

“ I also just think being more open-minded and understanding that there's a lot of different forms of families because I'm adopted. And so, I think that when CPS first looked at my family they were like, well here's an idealistic family because my mom was white and so is my father. So, they just looked at us and they were like, oh there can't be anything wrong in this family just cuz they adopted us. So, it was the perfect little family to start off with even though it wasn't.

I think that they did not then because I think they saw my parents' skin tone more than my own. And I think that being an Asian American with mainly predominantly white parents, that plays a huge role in how I see myself as a person too. And I think that brought a lot of confidence struggles in me as well to begin with. And the fact that my situation's been very unique compared to everyone else is at my school - they didn't give me the right tools to try to adjust from changing from one parent's home to another. And having to adjust to being in CPS with everything. Cuz, I think they just saw me and were like, well her parents are white so she's fine.

I don't think there were cultural needs specifically. But I just think as a whole me and all my sisters are adopted and I think they kind of just glazed over that, especially with the fact that we live in a predominantly white neighborhood as well. And I think that having more support from POC [people of color] would've been a lot more helpful just because everyone talking to us were white and it just kind of made it seem like

they were siding with our parents rather than actually caring for our needs - because our parents were white, but we were not.

Some participants also noted how their gender, and their race and ethnicity played a role in how system workers responded to their cases. They reported feeling ignored and not taken seriously because of their identities.

“ I feel like as a Native woman, I wasn’t listened to as much as I could have been. And I feel like a lot of the things, especially with men caused them to come in, they didn’t really care. And I’ve noticed in the world in general, people don’t really take into account Native American women’s struggles in general. So, I just feel like that’s it, it feels very apparent that I didn’t matter as much because of that.

Yeah, so from my experience, usually people seem to believe men more than you, especially as a Black girl. A lot of the things that I say or do are perceived in a way that’s not really positive or anything like that. And people seem to believe and trust and hear more like men’s voices and stuff like that than your own voice. For me, I was abused by my father and for the longest time ever I couldn’t prove it and I felt like I was crazy because they kept on believing him over me. Even though I had the bruises. I had the marks and everything like that. I had the evidence on my body.

Finally, some participants noted the importance of accepting and acknowledging young peoples’ sexual orientations and gender identities to build trust and understanding.

“ I feel, so a big part of my identity is the fact that I’m gay and my biological family doesn’t really understand that. They don’t really get with that and that’s not something they are willing to support. And what the system did for me is show me that it’s okay, it’s normal. I’m not this chaotic crazy person that’s just into the same sex for absolutely no reason. A lot of people who are LGBT really don’t have the support they need. And ‘cause I thought I was crazy... and a lot of the other people have experiences like that and stuff like that. So, I just feel like what we really need is just to feel safe enough to tell you and feel supported.

So, you can’t really tell if someone is a supporter just by looking at them. But if someone asks me my pronouns, I all of a sudden feel more comfortable around them because they’re aware of that and know about how that could really help someone if you ask them their pronouns and stuff like that. So just someone who’s understanding of like LGBTQ and is willing to just be there with you and just support you and know that you’re safe, not just physically but emotionally.



Section IV: Transition Planning

Section IV focused on the services and programs offered by systems to support girls and gender-expansive young people in their transition to adulthood. Participants were asked about the resources and programs they found helpful or unhelpful, as well as areas in case planning and transitional planning where they felt the system had failed or "dropped the ball." Additional questions explored whether caseworkers considered participants' cultural identities during the transition planning process and how systems could better support girls across the gender spectrum in transitioning successfully into adulthood.

Services and Resources

When reflecting on their adolescent years, only a few participants could identify programs or services provided by the systems that effectively addressed their transitional needs. For example, one participant shared that having a female nurse to speak with one-on-one helped her access additional services and sexual health-related resources. Another participant mentioned that the shelter they stayed in offered helpful programming, though they did not specify which programs were most beneficial. Overall, participants struggled to name system-related programs, services, or resources that had supported them during their adolescence.

“ No, I didn't get any programs because I was just working and in school, so I didn't have time to go to some programs.

I don't think I was given enough resources in high school, though... And that's another thing, too, the resources that I wanted, I don't think were available.

Participants who aged out of the system were more likely to identify helpful supports, such as extended foster care support, college tuition, individual therapy, and bus cards.

“ Well, so the main social worker I used to have really, she was... I don't know, she didn't pay attention to me. She did nothing, but I just leave it the way it is. But I remember [Social worker's name], that she really

helped me at first, but then she left because something happened. So, she left, but then came another social worker, another social worker, and they were not helpful. But anyways, I met [Social worker's name], and she really helped me a lot. She requested bus cards. She gave me things like a computer or laptop for school, like Target gift cards, Whole Foods gift cards. I remember that she paid my bills that I couldn't pay. They paid my rent. And no, she was so helpful. I miss her anyways 'cause I just turned 23.

... like I said, I'm beyond grateful for the college and the monthly payments.

And the extended foster care is really helping. I know my mom doesn't show it, but my mom struggles. So, I know the extra things that are coming in is also helping her with what she needs to provide for me and my son.

A few participants did mention supports that would have been helpful, including assistance with locating and paying for a place to live or housing, support groups with other girls their age going through similar situations, and better resources, services, and living conditions that meet the needs of children who are recent immigrants.

“ I think I personally would've liked a support group with other girls my age who are also transitioning, just because I feel like it would've made me feel not so alone and I could have those people to rely on. Because I am in college right now and when I first moved to college I just felt very alone.

I think that they do a really good job with the transition period into college. I think those resources are honestly amazing and just wonderful to have. And I think that was a big pusher too, because once I knew about that, then I was like, okay, I can see the light at the end of the tunnel. And it gave me that motivation. But I also feel like during high school, when I was going through it and stuff, I'm just kind of recapping. I just wish there was just more options. I just felt like there was a lot of hoops and stuff I had to jump through. And then it didn't benefit me or anyone around me.

This might sound bad, but just placements. With you being young and you're just wanting a place to stay or looking for a safe home, you [the system] could be wrong. Just trying to force yourself into a home that you [the system] might think is okay, but maybe it's not. Umm... I could

say maybe go deeper into the backgrounds and stuff. Maybe doing walkthroughs more often when you come...

Gaps in the System – The System “Dropped the Ball”

When asked how the systems had failed them or “dropped the ball,” participants reiterated prior responses: ensuring the safety and needs of young people are prioritized, honest and open communication, and more caring and sensitive interactions.

“And then that's another thing too. The cops, when they had taken me out... and I know that maybe that's a little bit different than necessarily Ramsey County... but they were like, oh, just grab some stuff for tonight. We're just going to take you somewhere tonight and you'll be back home tomorrow. And so, I was wearing my pajamas, so I had those with me. And I was like, well, I don't need anything else if I'm coming back, I can wear sweatpants, sweatshirt, whatever, I'll just wear it to school tomorrow. No biggie. And I ended up wearing those clothes for five days because those were the only clothes I had... there was just no communication like of me needing clothes, and there was just no clothes available for me. So that was tough. And then obviously with one night, I figured I'm not going to need a toothbrush. I don't need a hairbrush, whatnot. So, I didn't have those. And then for the first day and a half, two days, and then I built up the courage to be like, can I have a toothbrush? My breath stinks and I don't want to go to school like this... it's just things like that.

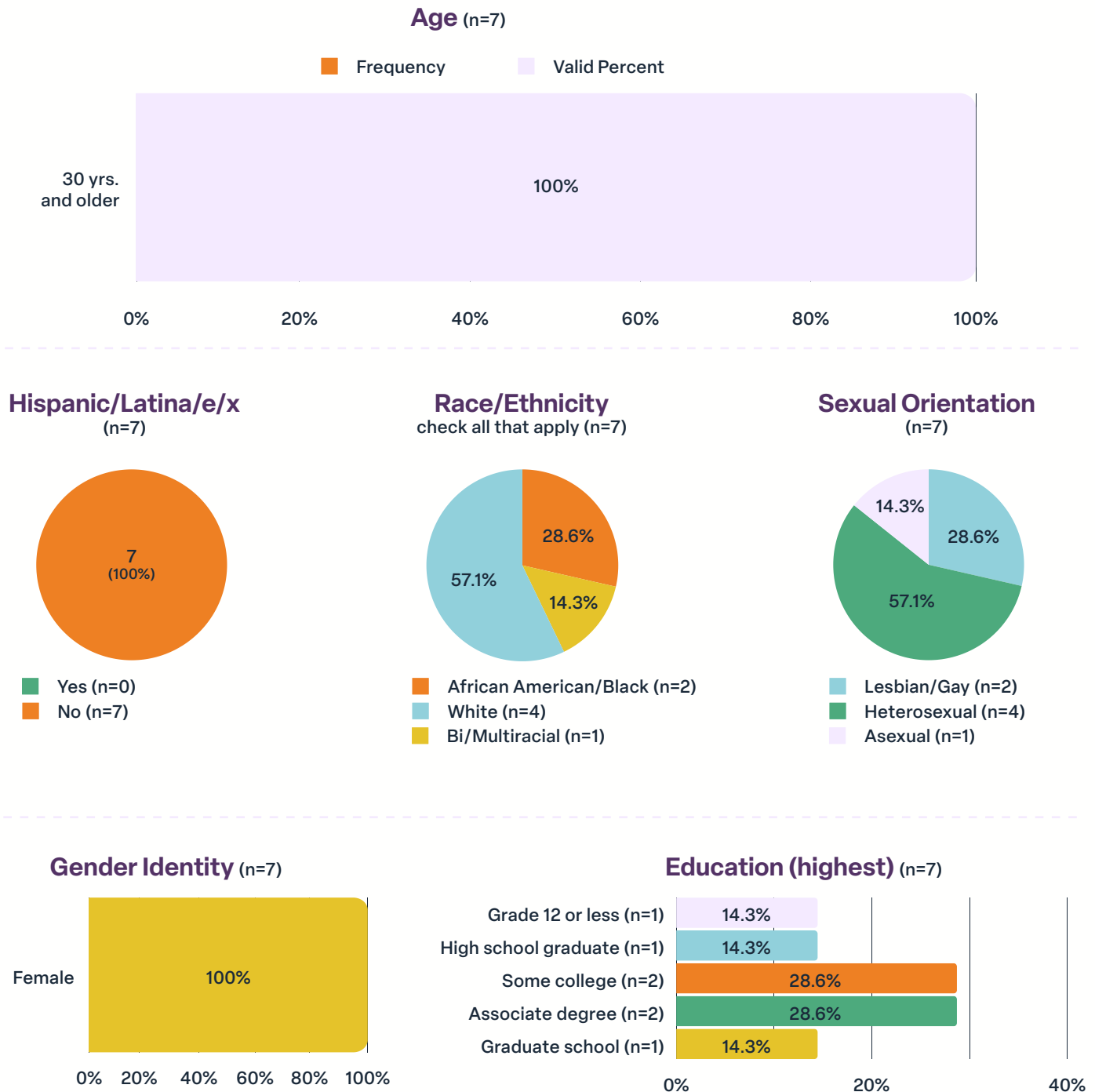
I think for me in the end it all worked out. But I think during the process, just as I've said before, just more communication and honestly just believing me over my mom and my father. And just understanding that it's child protection services, not adult protection services. I don't know how to explain it but I felt like a lot of times I wasn't their main priority, and it was more of they were trying to appease my parents. And I think that's kind of where they dropped the ball. Just because I felt like although I was in CPS, I wasn't being helped to the full extent that I should have been.

And I know you can't be best friends, family members with these people, so it's not the same. But I really think that people just need to be more connective and personable and have more humanity.

Conversation Findings - Parents

Eight (n = 8) parents, including biological, foster, and adoptive parents, caring for at least one child who identified as a girl or gender-expansive, with a history of Ramsey County system involvement, participated in the individual interviews of parents. All parents were thirty years of age and older and identified as female. Just over half (n = 4) were white, heterosexual (n = 4), and almost all (n = 6) had a high school diploma or higher levels of education.

TABLE X: PARENT DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION (N=7*)



*One parent demographic form was missing.

Section I – System Impact

Section I of the parent interviews focused on the impact of system involvement on their lives. Questions focused on how system involvement affected their family and peer relationships, their ability to build community support systems, and the impact of system involvement on their ability to support their families financially. This series of questions also asked about resources and services participants felt would have been helpful.

Impact on Family Relationships

Participating parents described the negative impact of system involvement as creating new and, at times, additional challenges in their relationships with family members. One parent described the severing of family relationships due to differing opinions on how best to address the needs of the children involved.

“Some family members I do not keep in contact with anymore based off my own decisions to keep the kids I care for safe. Overall, family... it's torn my family in different directions.”

One foster care to adoption parent discussed the negative impact system involvement had on their relationship with the biological parents of the children they eventually adopted. The participant felt the biological parents viewed them as another part of "the system" working to take their children away from them – ultimately creating a hostile situation with the biological parents.

“I remember for my kids when they were foster children before we finalized adoptions, that having visits with biological family was very difficult because the family, the biological family, would see us as part of the system... We're not on anybody's side but the child's and things like that. I feel like we were looked at as social workers, or we were looked at as the system. So, I feel like how it affected our family is just that feeling of being the bad guy. The feeling of being, you know, on the negative side.”

Another parent described the impact of being required to enter voluntary foster care to receive services for their children as causing more trauma for their children who'd already had a negative experience with the system.

“I would say that the way that it's impacted my relationships with my kids is that oftentimes I think the link between child protection, juvenile justice, and then the need for mental health supports, having all of those things linked on one level... in order to get that service, they had to go into voluntary foster care placement. And that's scary language for them because we had to spend a lot of time being like, we're not going anywhere. We're right here. This is just the only way we can get the help that is needed right now. And I think that is tough, especially for young people that have come out of child welfare to begin with... I

wish there were ways to get the level of care that was needed without it being associated with foster care. Because I think that really gives young people the idea that their needs and getting their needs met means that their family is going to be taken away from them.

Biological parents experiencing CPS investigation were more likely to view system involvement as harming their relationships with their children and other family members.

“ The system impacted my relationship with my children because it broke the bond that we had created. It broke the structure in our family that was there. It strictly took my authority away from me as a parent... from being a mother and a disciplinarian to my children. And it taught my children a way of being able to be. To learn how to manipulate and use that as a weapon. It destroyed my family.

Another parent reflects on losing her children to the system.

“ I'm struggling. I am truly struggling in my life. It's something... it was my worst fear. And my worst fear came to life that I lost my children through the system. I'm from [Northeast African Country] so we was running from war and I seen people lose their children. People lose their children to death, to war, and stuff. And with that fear, I lived with that fear throughout my whole life until I got to America. And for this to happen here is a trigger of what I seen or what I experienced as a child... I accepted that I'm going to be in therapy maybe until I see my children again. And I accepted that this is my life from now on and until I get to see my children again. So, I would say that's not a normal feeling. I want to be normal just like any other parents. But I don't get to be normal no more. There's no way of coming back from that, from what I experienced.

This same parent describes the effects of losing custody of her children on other family members.

“ It really affected my whole family. My mom still cries about it until this day. I can't imagine, what does her mental health look like? Because they refused to give the children to my mom. Okay. It was a team of them working together. It didn't matter what corner we hit; we were block[ed]... She put in motion to interfere. They keep saying, “Oh you've done this wrong. You've done this wrong”. They keep giving her the runaround to where the day that they was finalizing the adoption, they finally said, they finally sent her a letter stating that, oh, you could be involved now. So, we went to court. When we got to court, they locked her out of the courtroom while they was finalizing the adoption.



Parents described the challenges they faced when their children were removed and placed temporarily in foster homes that were economically more well off.

“Like the, the accusation was stated before they kept them and took them out of the home for 72 hours. And then it went on for, like I said, for like three months. And it was the same cycle. And so, it just messed up the structure in my home. It messed up the authority as a parent. It messed up with my kids. You know, the things that I couldn't afford for my kids, they went to these foster homes for these two days, and they give them things that I couldn't afford. And so, my kids felt like they'd rather be there than at home with me because we were struggling a little bit more than these people who had more money than me. It was just ridiculous. And my son, you know, he used that against me, and he used it against his siblings. Like, if we say this, if we say that we can go to a foster home and get us a video game. They got video games at the foster home. You know, like stuff like that. It just messed up a lot of stuff in my family. And even though I voiced that to the system it still continued to be a cycle for a long time before they figured out that wasn't okay.

Another parent described the negative impact system involvement had on her daughter as a result of the foster parent talking poorly about her as the biological parent.

“... she [foster parent] would tell her, “I don't have faith in your mom” to a point where she [her daughter] was like, “Mom, if you don't believe me, I'll record it for you”. She recorded it and sent it to me. This is what she's telling my daughter. “I don't believe in your mom. I don't have a faith in your mother. I will never have faith in your mother.” You know just laying all this stuff on her. She's a child. Why are you telling her those

things?... I don't think she's safe in that environment because no child should be hearing that.

While many participating parents discussed the challenges, a few parents described the benefits of system involvement for their families and mainly their children in need.

“ ... it helped her a lot. It got her the help that she needed. And we got in contact with MCRC, and they have been wonderful. They've been on top of things. They've given us the help that we needed. We actually have her a nurse practitioner that sees her every week at her school. And then she just started with a new therapist that goes to her school and sees her once a week.

The workers that I've worked with, that I've personally worked with have been great and amazing. Our situation, the kid was in CPS three times. The first two times nothing happened, or the results were not, I don't want to say good enough, but they just weren't good enough. They did nothing in my eyes... And then the third time when CPS got involved... something actually got done about it. So, my ending experience and when I got involved when the kids were placed with me was great. The beginning to start this whole journey was not. It was very frustrating.

Impact on Peer Relationships and Other Community Social Supports

Most parents described the loss of friends and community support due to their involvement with the systems. Some parents withdrew from existing supports or limited their interactions with those around them because of feelings of shame and stigma. This was especially noted among parents under investigation by CPS.

“ I'm constantly in hiding. I'm in fear to be friends with anybody. I'm ashamed. I walk around with this shame to where I'm thinking they can see it. They can see it that I don't have the rest of my children. They can see that I am dying inside. So, I distanced myself with people. The only people that I'm allowing myself to be myself is with my family and my support system that I built around me during the time that I was going through CPS. So, I still have those support systems and every time that a new person come in or anything, I refuse to open up... I'm constantly scared.

It impacted my friends and peers because a lot of people didn't know what was going on really. You know? People are outside looking in so they're very judgmental and look down on you. It affected friendships and relationships in that way, but then also, it brought us together as

well with some people who were going through similar and the same situations. Because this is very common, especially in the African American community. And so, it brought people together to support me when I was going through it, especially because I really didn't have any knowledge of how the system worked and what was going on really.

However, as noted in the previous statements, many parents found support from other parents and families with histories of involvement in the systems, regardless of their reason for system involvement.

“ We really find ourselves in community and surrounded ourselves with families that have adopted or have kids that are in foster care because they're the people that get us and our kids and have this whole time. So, I feel like we found our place. We did lose a lot of friends along the way. Absolutely.



Impact on Economic Stability and Ability to Support Their Family

Most participants mentioned economic challenges resulting from their involvement in the various systems. One challenge parents faced was accessing services and programs only available during the typical workday and hours, which forced some parents to lose work and wages.

“ Like, loss of work. Like the therapy wise. Like DBT^E was like three times a week and it was two hours that I had to skip work every week... I wish there were more resources, like after hours. You could say, that would be a good thing... I don't mind losing work if it's something that is actually gonna work or it's gonna be helpful for us. But yeah, I would say just losing money and losing out on work.

^E Dialectical behavior therapy or DBT is a comprehensive and multifaceted type of talk therapy designed to help patients cope with extreme emotional suffering and, often, self-injurious behavior. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapy-types/dialectical-behavior-therapy>

Another parent noted, to navigate the foster care system's requirements and to schedule needed services and programs, one parent in their household had to leave their place of work, ultimately reducing the family's income.

“ Well, I will say that in our family, when the kids first came, we figured out really quickly that only one of us was going to be able to work and that parenting through navigating this system was going to be a full-time job. So, within the first half a year of placement, and since then in our two-parent family, one of us has worked and one of us has been sort of, I call it the social work mom. The one that's just navigating everything. And so, for the first 10 years that was me, and then it was, now it's my wife and I'm working. So, we've flipped that role as well and that definitely has had a financial impact in our family once again.

Parents under investigation identified system involvement as harming their ability to provide for their families. For these parents, system involvement resulted in short- and long-term economic hardships.

“ I was going to [type of school/degree] that I paid for out of my pocket. And when the system got involved, it was around my graduation, and I was unable to graduate. So, I didn't get my certificate. And then I had a 10-year restriction to work in the medical field or around people or children for 10 years. I was restricted because the system was involved. And so yeah, being able to provide for my children and the goals that I set for me and my family, that was taken away when the system got involved.

Another parent discussed the negative economic impact, demonstrating the rippling effect system involvement can have on families involved in multiple systems.

“ I couldn't work at all. I had an immigration issue that was going on and when she asked me “Why aren't you working and what is going on with your work?” I told her I have immigration issues that I'm trying to correct. And she took it upon herself to call Immigration Services and told them that I got in trouble. That they shouldn't go on with the process that they're doing. And the immigration people, they told her that it wasn't in her business to call to contact them. She's working in a different place where it is not aligned with us. So, we can't give you any information about her. And it's not your business to report what you're reporting right now. Even though they said that to her, it still affected me and I'm still struggling today to get a work authorization card. That still affected me.

While navigating system requirements was viewed as challenging for most parents, a few participants mentioned the benefits of economic subsidies provided by the systems. These

subsidies included food and gas cards, Community Access for Disability Inclusion [CADI] waivers,¹³ medical assistance, and adoption assistance and subsidies.¹⁴ As noted by these parents,

I'll be honest, Ramsey County workers and CPS and everything has been a blessing. They've been really helpful. If I'm in need of gas cards or food cards, they've been there to help.

... if we wouldn't have had that adoption subsidy or the subsidy, the foster care, before they were adopted... That subsidy really helped me to be able to take care of them, because that's what I did. I did full-time taking care of them. I feel like that we were really fortunate in that we had that to help. And the medical assistants is just, you know, phenomenal. To be able to take care of the needs of the kids... the doctors appointments... I mean, I never had to sit and think, "okay, are we sure we can go into the doctor to take care of this?"... We couldn't have had the family that we have without it because it did really provide for the needs of the kids.

Services and Programs that Would Have Helped

Parents were asked to reflect on their experiences in the systems and to share one or two examples of programs, resources, or initiatives that would have been helpful. Most parents identified effective crisis response systems and care networks as services that would have been helpful. Parents described the systems as being ill-prepared to address crises in a timely and effective manner, often leaving parents to navigate difficult and, at times, dangerous situations on their own.

I feel like something that could have helped would've been crisis case management. So, I think you got what, regular case management, but then who are the folks... like we actually have had crisis case management once through Washburn, but I've often thought, how do you expand that service? How do you expand the service of the person who knows what it's like when the shit is hitting the fan, and all of the systems are having to come together all at the same time? And the JDC folks are saying that this child's too mentally ill to be in JDC, and the hospital is saying this child is too violent to be in the hospital, and the group home's saying they cut a hole in the wall with a steak knife and then everybody's just throwing up their hands. I think the thing is that as parents, everybody else of course gets to go home at the end of the day. True for my job as well. But when I'm the parent and everybody else gets to say no, I still have to figure it out. And I think in those moments, having someone that can navigate that with you would be huge.

I guess the only thing that would've helped better is this chain of commands with the children's Crisis line. Like you call the police and then the police have to call the crisis team, and then they come out and they're like, "That's probably not necessary." Especially when the kid is pulling knives, they need to take her. So, there's kind of a flaw in that, definitely. Another time she had, because we had CPS, and there was an order that if she were to get in any sort of violent altercations with me and the cops were to have to take her somewhere, it was supposed to be down to United Hospital or Children's Hospital, and then they put a hold on her and do something else. However, they called down there and they weren't willing to take her. So, then she had to go to juvenile hall. So that's weird.

I think the systems are set up for that someone who isn't traumatized. They can navigate them very smoothly. But if you throw trauma in there, it's not gonna work. You know, it doesn't work if you're trying to help someone who's been through something, unless that person is very resilient or has really good coping mechanisms. If somebody's broken...

Several parents identified alternative placement or housing options as a needed service. This need ranged from short-term respite care centers to longer-term residential treatment and housing services for young people experiencing severe behavioral or mental health challenges or ongoing challenges with living with their parents or guardians. As noted by one parent,

“ I also think a huge thing that is missing is crisis respite. It's something that in our organization we're trying to address as well is having places for young people to go that aren't the hospital, that aren't JDC, with skilled folks that can give the family a break so everybody can reset for the weekend. That's just a huge, huge, huge need.

Parents identified the need for more services and programs relevant to their needs and their families. Several parents discussed looking outside the systems and relying on their social networks to find the help they needed or being unable to access services due to limited availability or long wait lists.

“ The only services that they gave me that was helpful, honest to God, is the parenting class. Everything else... The services that I had in place for me and my family, even to this day, I did that on my own... But a lot of families are not able to do that. And that's the thing, when your mind can't even think straight, when someone comes in your house and snatch your children from you and barely even give you an understanding like, what's really going on? Or what do I need to do or anything. So, a lot of times families can't even process, especially if it's

already like drugs involved or domestic abuse, it's hard to process and be like, okay, I need to get this, this and that together.

... all the different programs she [case worker] told us about, never ended up working out. I can't remember which ones we were talking about.... I just feel like getting her into the residential care, that would've been a good thing. But there's so many waitlists out there... or once she went to the hospital, we were trying to find her a bed and the closest one was [Name of City]. So it's just more resources for them to get the help that they need would be a good thing. And not taking much time. They need help. Let's not wait for three months to get them the help that they need. That wait is a big thing.

... I feel bad cuz I said, what do I do [County Worker Name]? Why will the county not look at her? And he said, well, what you can do, he told me is to send her to a wilderness program. I said, 'where's the placement supervisor', I said, 'for Ramsey County?' I said, this is a child with a disability, with a long history of mental illness. I've done everything that I'm supposed to do. I'm begging you for help and you're telling me to send her to a wilderness program. That's the best you've got. You know, I've found the programs. The programs were willing [to take her daughter]. I wasn't asking for money. I wasn't asking for anything other than they would just like check a box to say, yeah, we'll send her there. You know, I wasn't asking for anything other than [that].

Section II – Safety

Section II of the parent interviews focused on the concept of safety. Parents were asked to reflect on what safety means and how it looks. Parents were also asked to reflect on the impact of the system on their family's sense of safety.

Definition of Safety

The responses of parents when asked to define safety primarily focused on the physical and mental safety of the child(ren) directly involved in the system and the safety related to themselves and other family members.

“ Safety to me means that no hurt, harm, or danger is coming to me or my children.

I think safety is also... it's not just the safety for that person who maybe is experiencing the behavioral escalation or the mental health crisis, it's also safety for the other children in the home.



Parents also mentioned living in safe neighborhoods, feeling comfortable, feeling like they don't have to worry about being punished for seeking help, being accepted for who they are, having a bed to sleep in, clothing, clean living conditions, having food to eat, being "loved, no matter what," and having a strong support system as playing a role in safety. One parent also mentioned safety as being able to seek and get help that doesn't "create more violence."

System Impact on Sense of Safety

The system's impact on parents' perceptions of family safety varied based on the reasons for system involvement. Parents who experienced child protective services investigations identified the removal of their children from their homes as having a negative impact on the safety of their children and families. One parent described the harmful effects of multiple seventy-two hour holds on her family.

“...I would be at work, come home from work, and I'm waiting on the kids to get off the bus, and they never got off the bus. And this was, like, for three months almost, every weekend. So, Friday, they would go to school that morning, and then they wouldn't come home Friday. And then I would call the school like, where's the kids at? And they're like, oh, they're at children's hospital. You need to call 911 and find out what's going on. You need to contact the police department. And so, my son learned how to, like, when he would not act right in school, and he didn't wanna come home and be on punishment, he would say things that he knew would be able to get him displaced from the house. Like, he learned how to manipulate the system, and it would remove all the children from the home, and they would keep them for a seventy-two hour hold until they investigated and then they would bring them back. But that causes a lot of trauma because me and my kids had never been separated from each other. My kids were very scared. They felt displaced. They felt unsafe. They didn't know these people that they

had them with for this seventy-two hours. You know what I mean? Yeah. And they took their time to investigate. And then you barely even get an apology after they come and investigate and see that it was a false statement. It wasn't true. They would barely even apologize...

The same parent goes on to describe the impact of these experiences on her daughters' and her son's feelings and actual safety.

“My girls were very scared, very confused. I was worried because I was involved in the system young and it was people that were not good, people that they thought were good people that they placed us with that did things to me when I was in the system. And so, I was worried about my children, especially my daughters, being there without me. Where they thought that, oh, they were putting them somewhere safe, and they probably was not. And it was different placements each time. And so, it was scary. It was scary for them. It was scary for me. They didn't know these people. So, my daughters were definitely terrified, and it traumatized them. It changed the relationship with us. I mean, even when they came home, they were scared, like, to go to sleep because they thought they would come in the house and take them at any time. They were scared to go to school because they thought they would pull them out of school at any time... But a particular time is when they removed my son because they figured out that he was using being able to say things... and when they realized that the accusations were not true, they felt like he was a child that needed some support and services. So, they provided those services for my child, and instead of keeping him in the house, they removed him and put him in a residential treatment program. And in that program, he was touched by another young man that was being touched by somebody else. And it, it just created more trauma. It ruined my family even more.

Finally, this same parent describes the fear generated as a result of out-of-home placements for her daughters and as a parent.

“Yeah, I felt like they were unsafe each and every time. There was never a time where I felt like they were safe unless they were with me. They wanted to be with me. They didn't feel unsafe being with me. But, you know, by law when an accusation is made, this is what they have, you know, this is what they do. And so, they remove my children and then it may put them in a 72 hour hold and kept them. And my daughters were terrified and so was I.

Another parent who experienced the termination of her parental rights described how their family's experiences with the system created a fear of the system for themselves and other family members.

“ ...my mom did everything that she could to get those children to family. So, the experience with that, I don't think any of us from my family will ever try to get in trouble to where their children are in the system. Cause the fear that is implanted in us. We're always going to fear child protection services to where we're going to try to make our way around there to make sure that we don't come in contact with them, including myself.

Parents receiving services to address their children's needs mainly discussed safety as it related to protecting the child(ren) in need of services and, when applicable, the safety of themselves and other family members. For these parents, the lack of services, especially crisis services, and the types of responses from the systems to their children's needs were inadequate, creating challenges to their sense of safety. One parent described fearing for the safety of their child when they were advised by the Crisis Hotline to contact law enforcement when their child is having a mental health crisis.

“ ... at the point that we're calling Crisis, we're usually at a place where all Crisis is going to tell us to do is to call 911. And then when you call 911, you just never know what kind of attitude you're going to be met with in that moment. We know to say we've met with the police department in the last two places we've lived in Ramsey County after incidents have increased to just call and have ourselves marked as, “this is a place where mental health crises happen”. But I've had varying experiences with law enforcement. We try almost never to call law enforcement because it's just so scary. And... Sorry, this is the hardest part, honestly, for me, is when we're talking about that level of need in that moment, it is, it's terrifying. It's terrifying on the level of the moment.

These frustrations can be seen in another parent's struggles to find appropriate services for their daughter, who was being targeted for violence and trafficking in her neighborhood.

“ I would say that the rules have left us not safe at all. I think we felt safer thinking that there were systems in place that were going to keep us safe until we came up against them and we're not, you know... Two other mandated reporters told the CPS worker what [Child's Name] said about the rape, about what's been happening to her. And this person dismissed her. And what we were hoping for is someone to recognize the fact that she's disabled, that she's vulnerable, that she's in grave danger, that she's bringing danger to our home. And yes, she's

16. But at what point can we have an involuntary placement somewhere to keep her safe? That's what I've been hoping for.

Another parent describes services being withheld because their child was not in an immediate crisis, while others discuss the slow response of the system to their needs as creating unsafe environments for their families.

“ So, I'm going to be having a baby. I don't want her to be around and have something happen and the baby is a week old. I don't have time for this. Why can't we get her the help now and the safety that she needs? Because her outbursts are ridiculous. So, I wish that was a little better. I know we have to do certain things, but you know her past. She literally just did something a month ago, and now we have to wait until she does something again to get her the safety and the help that she needs. It just does not make sense to me... I wish there was different policies and rules and stuff on if, depending on the circumstances and the level she was at, it should be, 'this is in place if this happens'. Not 'we have to wait for everything'.

I would say that sometimes not having questions answered in a timely manner that you needed it. I remember situations where I felt that there was a safety concern, and I would call and leave a message, and sometimes an extensive message and a social worker wouldn't get back to me till a week later. And here I was like, you know, on edge.

I would just say being there better... we're working with MCRC still. And I feel more safe with them because they're actually there for us and are on top of things and not making us wait a million years. So, I mean, just actually doing the stuff that they're saying that they're going to do is making me feel safe because hopefully she will get the help she needs and if it's not the right fit, we find something else to figure out what she needs.

Section III – System Engagement and Relational Approach of the System

Section III of the parent interviews focused on system engagement and relational approaches of system workers. Parents were asked to reflect on how systems could better support families, help families problem-solve, address their specific cultural needs, and build trust and confidence that systems would meet their needs.

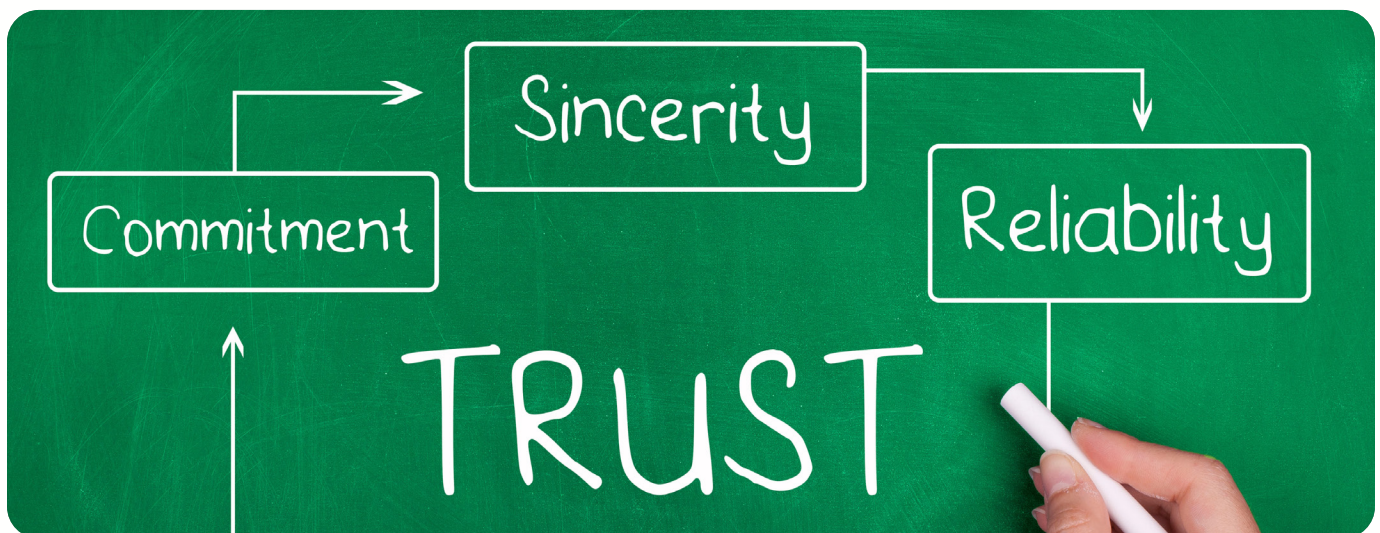
Improved Recognition and Response to Crisis

Parents, regardless of why they were system involved, felt an area in need of improvement by the system revolved around the system and system workers' ability to respond promptly to crises with

appropriate services, and with understanding – whether the situation was occurring at the parent or child level.

“ They can show you by providing services. Come through the door like, hey, I understand right now it's a hard time. I see that you lost your job. Here goes some resources for food, shelter. Here goes some, you know, if you need this help. ‘You need a ride to the aid office to apply for assistance?’ Things like that so that you can feel like they're working with you and not against you. You know what I mean? You can't come in my house and pull my kids away from me because I lost my job, and I can't afford to buy a lot of food for them or clothes for them or things like that. Or I'm struggling with cleaning up the home because I'm exhausted cuz I work so many hours so the home is a mess...

My suggestion is that they should, if it's an accusation being made, an investigation should be done right away. That's one of the main suggestions that I have. It shouldn't be a reason why you just automatically put them on the 72-hour hold and then investigate. It needs to be an investigation right away. That's what I feel. I feel like that you shouldn't just pull the kids out. I feel like it should be not just a worker there investigating, but someone there who can mediate whatever situation is there and can provide resources.



Decriminalize and De-Stigmatize System Involvement

Several parents noted feeling criminalized by the different systems. One parent recalls protections afforded to children, while few resources or understanding were offered to struggling parents. Another felt system workers should respect struggling parents and come prepared to provide needed resources and services without looking down on families.



And then the court system seems like it's a criminal [court system]. It don't feel like it's a system for families and stuff like that. So, when you go in there you feel like you are a criminal. It don't seem like they're advocating for you or working for you. There's really not anyone. There's a guardian-ad-litem for the kids. It's an attorney for the kids and then it's child protection that's there for the kids. And then you have a public defender who really don't even know what's going on, who's not really advocating and voicing what your concerns are for you and your family and your needs and wants. Although you sit down and talk with them, they never do. And I think that it should be like the workers should be working with you more to try to understand what the needs and support and resources that your family needs. And then it wouldn't feel like you're fighting against them, but you are all working together.

The way the workers can do that is by the way that they deal with the parent and the family... do more showing than just saying, you know. So, like coming through, providing the resources. Being respectful. Not looking down on people. Not being judgmental. Not assuming. And not coming in like, you know, like you are the authority. Like still let the parent have their authority as the parent and be acknowledged as a parent and not like I'm a bad guy. Belittle them and make them feel lack of.

I think one of the ways that they can help families and me feel safe is by making it clear that they're not working against us but trying to help us. Because, when they get involved, it seems like it's a bad thing. You know what I mean? And that they're there just to take your kids away from you and do harm to you and your family and pull us apart. And so, if that's not the case and you guys are working with us, then make that clear. Make us feel that way. Make us feel safe. Make it seem like, you know, feel like that's what you're here to do, to figure out what's the crisis. Fix the crisis and help the family stay connected with each other. You know, not all situations is that way, but it is a situation that can be resolved and keep the family together, make that clear and work hard at making it that way instead of making the family feel unsafe. Like you're out to get them. You're out to pull them apart. You out to hurt them and their families... that's why a lot of families don't wanna work with the system and comply with what they ask you to do... it seemed like they're against you and not there to help you. And that right there, it makes you feel unsafe, and it makes you put up a wall that you don't even wanna work with them... what's the fight for, because I'm not gonna win. And, and it shouldn't feel like that. It should feel like you

here to help me. Provide some services and support to help me and my family to make sure that my children are good and to resolve whatever circumstances and situation that is there so that the family can stay together. And that's not how it feels.

Culturally Aware Service Providers and Relevant Services

Several parents felt county workers and staff, as well as system policies and practices, should be aware of and consider the different cultures and practices of the families they encounter. Parents felt this approach would increase understanding between parents and system workers and create a space for more open dialogue and engagement.

“What you don't know, you don't know. How can I be wrong for not doing something I don't know? If no one ever taught me. If no one ever, you know, never told me. If in my culture that's not how we deal with things. If I'm not showed a different avenue, a different way, and that's what I explained to the system when I was working with them. And my family and in my, you know, in my culture we spank our kids. They get whoopings. And I never knew another way. So, show me other resources and ways to deal with things after, you know, you constantly repeat yourself and kids are acting up and then I can learn from that.

They need to understand first if you don't understand about the culture, because a lot of times it's a Caucasian person or an Asian person that will come into the family of an African American family, have no kind of idea how our culture works, how our family works or anything. And, and so I think it's better to understand, like come in the door, ask some questions about our culture, how do we deal with things? How do things work in our families? And understand if you don't understand the culture, then how can you help that family when they're different? You know what I mean? And that just goes for any culture, not just African American. It should be more African American workers and in place. They need to hire more people that can relate to, to those people that they're working with. They understand, they can relate to them.

Maybe raise awareness on cultural differences. When I did my parenting assessment through [Different county name], the lady said, you need to go back to school. You are illiterate, and you need some help. You need to stop manipulating people to get what you want. Because I did not understand the American saying, the question that they asked in the parenting assessment. She basically said I wasn't fit to be a parent because I didn't finish high school, and she didn't respect

my culture. That there's a culture difference here. And when I did my parenting assessment with Ramsey County, the first thing the lady say was, I know you are from a different country, so I'm going to base this on your culture. I'm going to separate the American culture a little bit and listen to how you were brought up.

I felt like the system, meaning the workers did not understand our culture, our beliefs, and how we deal with our children or anything. And I felt like they never experienced the situation at all. So, they couldn't relate. They were just like, you know, they're too, I don't know, I don't know how to say it, like they was doing their job, but at the same time they had no empathy or compassion or understanding or tried to understand or anything. And then a lot of them don't even have children, so they definitely can't really understand what we're going through at all... So how can they even understand or relate to how stressful or anything things can get or anything like that.



Section IV - System Services and Programs

Section IV of the parent interviews focused on system services and programs. This section included questions about the services and programs that were helpful or unhelpful, what was missing, where the cracks happened, whether the transition plan for children was successful, how systems could improve, and what systems could do to serve girls and gender-expansive young people better. Finally, participants were asked to reflect on the impact on their family's overall well-being.

Caring and Responsive System Workers

One beneficial resource mentioned by parents was having a system or case worker who was caring and went above and beyond to assist the family.



I had two workers that were involved and that showed a lot of empathy for what me and my family needed, and I was thankful for those two workers. The whole process was very overwhelming. It was stressful and traumatic. What good I can say is that I learned new skills about discipline. And as far as parenting, I learned to listen more and not just be like the authority and you do this, and you do that. But ask questions. To listen. I did learn that. And that helped a lot with my family.

Oh my gosh, I don't even know if you got time for all this. So [Name of worker] is my mother's first worker. We go to their events. Their Mother's Day. Their baby shower. She will come to my home if I reach out to her and tell her I'm struggling, and she'll drop a meeting to help me. She'll help other people in my family, like outside of her client. She's not just about me and the baby. She's like, "Do your kids want to do swimming lessons or karate or anything like that?" She's helping me with my 15-year-old and contacted my CPS worker, even though that's not even her area. They go above and beyond. They have paid my electric bill, they've paid my back rent, they've brought me strollers, adoption programs, Christmas presents. You name it, they are my world. I love them. Amazing. They're getting me into a peer recovery specialist course to better my living situation, to better my life for me and my kids.

Some parents mentioned specific programs or services that helped them become better parents or helped their children. These services included things like cultural awareness type classes, mentorship programs, mental health services for the child and parent, parenting classes and mentorship, and financial assistance for services like childcare.



We went through probably the most beneficial, and I tell people this all the time, when they're especially adopting, um, different, um, ethnicities, is they've got to go through some transracial adoption class. And it needs to be led by an adult adoptee; needs to be at least one of the facilitators. We went and we had [Adoptee facilitator name] was a co-facilitator in our class. [Adopted child's name] had been placed in our home for like three months. And [Husband/partner's name] and I went to this training, and it was phenomenal.

So, my youngest daughter, one thing that was really beneficial for her but took a really long time to get, was into a mentorship. And when she did, it was really great, but we waited three years for there to be an opening. And she loved it once she was in it. And that relationship was really beneficial... And I think just more than anything, when I look, think

back on it and what was really successful for her is she was involved in the Irreducible Grace Foundation. Have you all heard of them before? I think anytime young people can actually be involved in not just receiving services, but actually something where it's about belonging and community and having their own voices heard in leadership. I think that's probably the most beneficial kind of service we can give young people because it gives them agency and autonomy.

I do think that children's mental health case management is hugely beneficial even if they're still gaps. I think having a case manager and being able to get a foot in the door, and once again, I've had amazing case managers that have gone above and beyond, and I've had so-so case managers that I still really needed to have in my court because they could put their foot in the door. That is important. I think that's been really helpful. Like I said, I think referral to crisis case management, even through a nonprofit, but from the county has been important.

When I got here to Ramsey County, there was more resources, and I made it my business to look into any resources that was going to help me with the situation that I'm dealing with. I looked for parenting mentors, I signed on myself for that. And it was through Minnesota One stop. And I apply something with Family Wise. I also work with them. And I think those were the only two programs that I really, really like. That helped me through this whole situation. And if anybody is going through CPS or anything, I will quickly say Call Minnesota One Stop, call Family Wise. And when I applied for them, my caseworker made it so easy for me to connect with them. She emailed them herself and that was very helpful for me to get on top of the list.

So, the programs we used, we used the Think Small, which helped pay for their childcare. Childcare is not cheap. The fact that they still get insurance and were granted it is also really amazing because it's not cheap. We use those two resources. I did use a resource through the insurance company. I don't think I ever knew the name of it, but a lady would call and check up on the baby every month, and that was helpful to make sure all their needs were met. And I think those are the only resources that I've actually used. Just the fact that they gave the kids insurance, and they gave me the Think Small scholarship.

The most helpful would be MCRC just all around like how fast we got in there to do like the intake and for her to tell the story and get a

therapist and get a nurse practitioner. And she literally started seeing her every week. Like she came to our house, met everyone and every week from there she like came here because it was summertime and then she sees her every week once or twice a week. She goes up to the school and talks with her for a while. And then she has a therapist that does the same thing that took a little bit longer to get, but we were still had another therapist that she was seeing so it wasn't that she just wasn't seeing anybody.

Crisis Resources and Services

Parents again mentioned the need for crisis services. They noted the need for programs that would accept children in crisis, have crisis plans in place before situations arise, and ensure parents are prepared to address crises before bringing children into their homes as foster or adoptive parents.

“What's not been helpful, I hate to say this, but the crisis line has not been helpful. I want it to be helpful. I know that it needs to exist, but it really hasn't been helpful... Yeah, it just hasn't met the intensity of what's been going on. And I think that's unfortunate. I wish we had a better crisis response.... We do not have good ways to move from one level of need to the next... and the kids with the highest level of needs and the biggest behaviors have the least access to resources. So, I think when it comes back to that thing again where everybody else gets to say no, right? So, you've got a kid coming out of residential treatment, you've got a kid coming out of the hospital, everybody's saying that they need therapy, and they need this, and they need that... I mean now there's just a waitlist for everything... But in addition to that, once you've got a track record, all those places get to say no. So, they need DBT. Well, there's no DBT place that'll take a kid who's had physical aggression before. They need this. Well, I can't even send them to Prairie Care because they've had physical aggression before... and I would imagine it's really true for kids in the juvenile justice system... Once you get marked, you are scary to everybody else and everybody else gets to say no. So, to turn to families and be like, you need to get these support resources in place without actually having good referrals, that's the big miss to me because then we're just in a cycle.

And I think safety plans should be made before kids come in - new kids come in. If this child starts to rage and go after one of your children, I think those kinds of scenarios need to be talked about. I think that families that have children need to go through more extensive training

or more extensive rule of things that they have to do... so that they're equipped. Because I didn't understand that you bring a kid that comes in with trauma. Trauma... it, it comes over the whole family. And I had no idea that... I mean, I thought I was invincible and that I never even considered that. But it did happen.

I think I should have had therapy. I think I should have, and I did. I did get therapy during, throughout, you know, intermittent, but I think it should have started before the child was placed in my home so that I could be, you know, knowing myself enough to know when I was getting dysregulated. And teaching me, or maybe it's a coaching, maybe it's not therapy, maybe it's a therapy slash coaching... because it is such a different way of parenting when a kid is coming from trauma... is that, you know, you come along, and you coach them.



A few parents noted that the lack of relevant services and responses to their families' needs was a major issue.

“ They didn't provide barely any services for me and my family, so that was the crack. They didn't ask really what services and resources we needed. That was a crack. They didn't ask the kids that. That was a crack. They didn't look for culture like around our culture, like services that we could use or utilize and need.

Like I said, in the beginning with my niece, her needs and her safety in my opinion were not met at an early enough state. Granted she was only one and a half, almost two when she really got placed into the system officially. I think a lot of people don't realize the younger years really mold your mind. So that was a miss. Big, big miss for me.

Numerous parents also mentioned the slow pace at which systems would respond or not respond at all. This was noted as a problem whether the issues were considered a crisis or if systems were providing basic programs and services that were needed by children and families.

“ ... like the worst would be just the case worker and how long it took. I had one person, and they got all the intake paperwork and all the paperwork filled out. And then we got transferred over to her [a new case worker] and that took like three months. I just feel like it shouldn't take that long. So, case workers in general I feel should be more, should be better.

It was ridiculous and so frustrating. I even called her out and I called her the B word, and I was like, I'm sorry, but like I explained the whole situation and she was like, well I would be mad too. And I was like, okay then why are we not trying harder? Like all I'm asking for is a text message that you're not gonna be there or we have to reschedule because she canceled on going to get coffee with [child name] like five times but wouldn't tell me she was not gonna be able to be there. She just didn't talk to me and I'm blowing up her phone and emails and text messages. Just, hey, text me back and say you're unavailable. That's all I'm asking for...

I would meet with our CPS worker regularly and text her as things were to happen, and it just felt like it was dragging on and on and on. And I was telling her, I was crying for help and not getting anywhere and being very discouraged in that area until she had enough to then finally get the out-of-home placement order. I feel like there could have been steps taken along the way that would help alleviate it or turn it around some way.

I just feel like, be there for us. Like if we're trying to reach out to you, reach back to us. Like, I know you can't be on the phone twenty-four seven, but in a timely fashion, get back to us. If you're referring something to get us the help we need, follow through with it and actually get us the help that we need, not just talk about it. And then two months down the line we're still talking about it, but no actions have been done. That would be the two biggest things - is the communication and following through. Like I know they have a bunch of cases and a bunch of people that they're working with and the county's crazy. I know. I just feel like they shouldn't be pretty much promoting these things but not following through with it.

When it came to transition planning, most parents could not identify specific services and programs focused on helping their children transition from the system or into adulthood. Several parents stated no transition planning occurred, and if it did happen, it was primarily due to their efforts and not the system.

“ No, they literally, I really don't even know what we're doing next. Like, I should probably call and figure that out. Or if it's just gonna be therapy and the nurse practitioner seeing her... I don't know if we're still going to try to do residential or just, yeah. I really don't know what's next. I don't know if we're waiting for her to mess up again. It's bound to happen. I know [Child's name]... it's gonna happen. I'm surprised it hasn't happened yet. But yeah, I don't know what the future holds for this. I don't know if MCRC has anything else that we need to be doing, but really, I've only talked with the nurse practitioner and the therapist. I haven't heard anything else from anybody else.

We didn't have a plan.

No. No one has ever created a transition plan that has been successful for our family. I feel like we have created transition plans that did or didn't work, but I don't think anyone has ever created a transition plan. Well, I think we've even had to sort of beg for transition planning. Ya know.... My oldest daughter, I think could have benefited from some help. Well, definitely she did fairly well transitioning out of residential into school for her junior and senior year and then actually went to college. And I think what could have helped her was definitely some of those young adult transition skills into college. She needed some more of that scaffolding around how do you balance a checkbook and how do you create a resume and those kinds of things, which once again, we tried to help with as well. But I think sometimes that can be better received when it's coming from elsewhere.

A few parents noted that the systems' policies and practices should be reviewed and changed to better meet the needs of those in the systems. It was pointed out that some system policies prevented the delivery of needed services and, at times, caused unnecessary harm.

“ I don't know. I don't feel like they missed anything. I think that legally and laws prevent them from being able to do anything extra like that.”

... you shouldn't have to know someone who can get behind the scenes information to tell you how screwed up your case has been. You shouldn't have to be connected to get help.

Well, I think I would just reiterate, think outside the box. You know, listen to the families instead of the policies. I know that the policies are set up to help families that might otherwise suffer. You know, don't take Black and brown kids from their families if you don't have to. Yes, provide families that need services with services. But a family like mine, we've had services coming in out of our ears and our daughter needs more services. You know. Some people need extra. Some people need help outside the home. Don't make them be a criminal in order to get the help that they need. And then unfortunately now she's got a record and she's still not getting help.

We've really gotta do a psychological background on the parents. And today there is so many close minded... and I think that there's gotta be a bigger view on who these parents are that are taking kids. I think we've gotta ask these questions and ask them to explain. And I think we've gotta look at political views. I think if we don't look at these things, we're gonna cause more harm. I mean, I know that they're not the politically correct questions to ask, but I think that we absolutely, for the safety of these, of our children. And I do think it would be good if we can place a kid with a sibling because for the majority of our kids there is siblings. And to not be alone changes everything. I think personally, I think for girls especially because there's an emotional difference that happens in our girls. Yeah, I think that we've got to also look at the issues that girls are having and specifically do some training for girls.

System Changes to Better Meet the Needs of Girls

Some participants stated that additional services were needed to address the needs of girls and gender-expansive young people moving through the systems. Most identified the need for services and programs to help girls plan for their futures, take care of their essential everyday responsibilities, and identify or connect with social supports, including peers, positive adults, and family members.

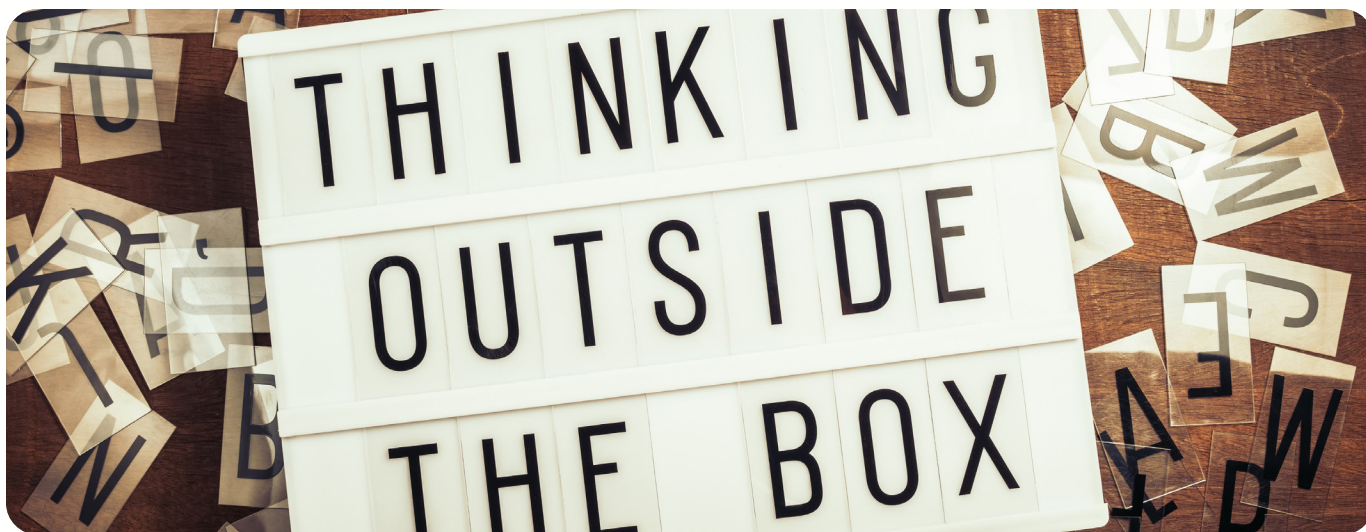
“ ... it was a real lack of services for girls anyway. Like they didn't really offer anything for my girls, and I think that shouldn't be the case... I feel like they should have sat down with them and asked them what were their goals and what do you guys want to be different? What do you need help with? You know what I mean? What are you struggling with? They were struggling in school, all of them. And especially my daughters. They were struggling and when they came home it was still the same situation. They were still going through the same thing. Like it wasn't resolved. There was no resolution for that. They didn't provide any services for that other than what I found on my own and with the

community support. So, it should be more of that involved with the system... They can help them with learning how to be independent. Resources to help them learn about being independent, being on their own. Resources to help them with things to be aware of and safety-ness. To provide life skills like home skills, like cleaning skills, cooking skills, work ethics, resumes, saving. Like things that as a parent I do with my kids. So, if they get involved and they pull 'em away from their family and the parent that's guiding them, they should provide those things to help them so that they can be independent. And then especially if they are TPR and they will not go back home with their mother or father or their family, they should have something in place to help them.

Have some programs ready for them. Cause they're going to need it. If it's therapy, if it's teaching them to be young ladies, something. They're going to need it cause the system is not what it's supposed to be.

I would think, I don't want to say or what they should be doing differently or improved because I personally don't know exactly what they're doing. All I could say is what I would do. Make sure they have a support system. Peers alike. Adults alike. Helping them understand and set them up for the future because I teach at a school, but the crazy thing I learned yesterday is half my sixth-grade class cannot read a regular clock. So, I'm learning that a lot of kids lack a lot of the basic essentials. And just from things I've read and seen on social media and stuff, kids who identify as things other than what society wants them to identify as, they're getting even less because they're either not going to school, they don't have nowhere to live, they don't have no one love for them or loving them and caring for them, so they're getting left in the cracks and then they grow up to be doing whatever they can to get by.

I would say let 'em have connection with their family. Even if it's their grandmother, they uncles, somebody. Let 'em have that connection. If the mother was terminated, okay, That's okay. But let 'em have some type of connection with their family to where they feel like they can speak when they need to. How my daughter is silent now on her birthday, I asked to talk to her to wish her a happy birthday and stuff. And she totally refused to. When she talked with my youngest sister... they're around the same age, she's just two years older than her... But she said, please don't tell mom that you talked to me. Don't tell grandma that you talked to me. Cause [Name – maybe foster mother?]



is going to freak out. Why should a child feel like that? Let 'em have some type of connection with family. It will make 'em feel okay to go to deal with whatever is going on. And get some help for them. Please. A lot of girls are going through this and a lot of foster parents or adoptive parents, sometimes when they come to CPS, they only care about the change of their income. They don't care about those children. And you could see it. You could tell that it is the change of income that's why they want to foster those kids.

Impact of Systems on Overall Family Wellbeing

Parents were asked to summarize the impact of the system on their family's overall well-being. Several parents summarized the system's impact on their family's overall well-being as positive. These parents' positive experiences resulted from service providers (not necessarily system staff) going over and above what was expected.

“ Not really with CPS. More with MCRC. They called to follow up a lot to make sure that we've heard from the people that we were supposed to. They reached out to make sure. Just being involved with her school. They were just very on top of it, and I felt amazed about that cuz they could have blown it off and just put us on the back burner. And they're actually trying to help the child.

Great. Absolutely wonderful. They're there to help. The ones that I've dealt with anyway. They're willing to go above and beyond to make that happen. Even with the YIT program, [Name of worker], she has met me at the MCRC interview for [Daughter's name] when there was potential sex trafficking going on, and she's offered to pick her up and bring her. We have a nurse from that program that she's able to get through to [Daughter's name] a little bit, and she'll come to my home

or wherever [Daughter's name]'s in the community and give her depo shot or find out if she needs anything safety-wise or keep her healthy... Everybody's been very supportive, very helpful, and gone above and beyond.

I think for me personally, the overall impact has been, at the end of the day, it's been a success. Yeah. Both kids are now safe. The workers I worked with did absolutely everything in their power to make sure I didn't have to run and jump through hoops. That I didn't have to sit here and spend two hours filling out paperwork. They made sure all answers were, or all questions were answered.

Finally, one parent sums up their general feelings about the systems.

“ We had some okay experiences, but I believe with all of who I am that the system, Ramsey County, or any of them, they're just so hands off. And it feels like they really don't care. That it's really more about getting a child off their caseload so that they can go on to the next... I've met some social workers that have their license. There're so many that wanna change the world and they've got great intentions, but then when it comes to getting there, it's so much of the checking it off, we did it, we did it.

Key Findings & Conclusion

This report focuses on the experiences of children and families with histories of involvement in Ramsey County Social Services and Ramsey County Community Corrections Department. While specific to Ramsey County, the challenges identified by girls, gender-expansive young people, and parents reflect broader systemic issues seen across similar systems nationwide. Many systems remain under-resourced and struggling to adopt practices and services that address the complex needs of the communities they serve. The findings presented here highlight critical areas for improvement and reform, including criminalization, communication, decision-making, timely service delivery, social support, and culturally responsive practices.

KEY FINDINGS INCLUDE:

Criminalization and Stigma

Involvement in the child welfare and correctional systems often carries negative stigma and connotations, leading to feelings of being criminalized and judged. While the immediate behaviors or circumstances prompting system involvement are important, they frequently overshadow the root causes, such as poverty, stress, or unmet substance use and mental health needs. This focus tends to shape system responses, which participants described as punitive and unhelpful. Both young people and parents emphasized the need for systems to adopt a more inclusive approach that considers everyone's voice—especially that of young people. They called for individualized, non-judgmental responses aimed at addressing complex individual and family challenges without resorting to punitive measures.

Communication

Involvement in child welfare and legal systems, regardless of the circumstances, can be both confusing and traumatic. Individuals often struggle to understand the process, what is expected of them, and how to access services

that meet their needs. This is particularly challenging for young people who have little control over their circumstances. Accurate, honest, and timely communication is therefore essential to ensure they understand what is happening and, most importantly, why. This may require reiterating information and conducting multiple check-ins to assess and reinforce their level of understanding.

Case Planning and Decision Making

Effective case planning is a delicate balance. It requires system workers to accurately identify needs and outline a plan of action that addresses those needs while securing the buy-in of those most affected. However, participants frequently reported feeling that systems acted upon them, resulting in services and programs that failed to meet their needs. While participatory decision-making can be challenging, it is essential to engage everyone involved—particularly young people who are often excluded from the process. Such engagement can be the deciding factor between completing or rejecting system requirements and case plans. Moreover, including all stakeholders in the planning process ensures clarity about why certain

decisions are made and helps ensure those decisions address the needs of everyone involved.

Timely Service Delivery and Expansion of Crisis Services

Identifying services and programs that meet the needs of young people and families requires significant time and effort. To address these challenges, there is a need for greater flexibility in policies and practices to ensure timely connections between system-involved families and service providers. Long waiting lists and a lack of essential services were highlighted as significant flaws and sources of concern. Expanding the availability of crisis intervention services is particularly critical. Increased investment is needed to identify, develop, and enhance existing crisis services and programs—whether by creating new initiatives or training current service providers to address gaps in support and essential services. This shortage of services is especially problematic for families in deep crisis, who are often turned away because providers are either unwilling or unable to serve children and families with high needs.

Social Supports and Social Networks

System involvement is often challenging for all parties involved. For children and families, it is frequently accompanied by the loss of family, friends, and other supports. This loss is often rooted in a lack of understanding about what it means to navigate the child welfare and correctional systems. Connecting system-impacted young people and families with others who have had similar experiences is critical. These connections were described as invaluable for understanding the systems and identifying effective strategies for navigation, particularly in cases where interactions with system workers have caused harm and fostered distrust. Additionally, resources and support were often more accessible through informal networks of individuals with prior system involvement, rather than through those with limited understanding or even system workers themselves.

Case and Social Worker Interactions

Interactions with caseworkers, social workers, and other system staff were identified as





pivotal in shaping how system-involved young people and families perceived the systems and their overall impact. Positive experiences were often linked to interactions with staff who were patient, attentive, empathetic, understanding, and consistent (e.g., minimal staff turnover) throughout their involvement. Acts of care—both small and significant—beyond the basic requirements were particularly noticed and appreciated. Systems should aim to make these types of meaningful interactions the norm rather than the exception.

Identity and Culturally Aware Services and Programs

System approaches that prioritize self-identification, cultural awareness, and expression were highlighted as crucial and are reportedly successful in many situations—particularly regarding gender identity and sexual orientation. However, there is still significant work to be done to enhance placement settings, policies, and practices to better respect and accommodate individual identities and cultures. Additionally, systems

must address the fundamental needs of girls and gender-expansive young people during their childhood and adolescence. For example, ensuring access to reproductive health services and supporting milestones like obtaining a driver's license are essential steps that are often overlooked by these systems.

Moving forward, a more thorough examination of the challenges faced by girls, gender-expansive young people, and families is needed. Ongoing collaboration with impacted communities and stakeholders is vital to reimagine and restructure systems in ways that prioritize dignity, respect, and equity. By addressing these critical gaps, Ramsey County can better meet the needs of those it serves, paving the way for a more just and effective approach to child welfare and community corrections.



Limitations

Several challenges proved to be barriers to engaging more girls and gender-expansive young people and parents in the study conversations.

These challenges included a lack of trust by system-impacted community members to participate in discussions about Ramsey County systems, lack of confidence and adversarial relationships between service providers, gatekeeping behaviors of service providers that prevented dissemination of information directly to young people and parents, service providers interest in controlling the recruiting process and determining who would or would not receive information, and scheduling challenges, especially among young participants. These challenges led to a smaller sample size than anticipated and created challenges in reaching theme saturation during the analysis. However, the findings from these discussions are supported by similar studies published in the literature.

Appendices

Appendix I: Advice from System Impact Young People and Parents

Young People

Advise to Other Girls and Gender Expansive Young People Involved in Systems

“I would say that you're not crazy and the things you are going through are not gonna break you and stuff like that. I would say that other people's opinion on you does not matter, as long as your opinion on yourselves is a positive one. As long as you think of yourself as a good person, as someone who's worth living for, then you're good.”

“I would say that even though it's probably a really tough time right now for them, that it does get better. And overall CPS really does mean the best for you. And that although you might not feel competent in yourself, the only person who truly can fight for you is you. And so don't back down from a fight and really know that it's okay to speak for yourself and to advocate for yourself.”

“I would just say, find the people that you trust and the people who you know will stick around through whenever you're doing hard times. I know it sounds cheesy, but also it does get better. It might not seem like it at the time, but it most definitely does get better eventually. Having your own hobbies is a good way to occupy yourself until then.”

Parents

Advice to Other Parents

At the conclusion, each participant was asked to provide advice to other parents or families going through similar situations. Below are responses from participating parents.

“Only advice is that you advocate for your family. You know, let them know what support and help that the, that that family needs. That's important. To speak for you and your family. And understand that it's not meant [inaudible], even though it feels like that, to give it a chance because some things that you're struggling with, you can get the support and services that you need and advocate for that and not feel

like they're against you. So don't fight against it, try to work with the system.”

“I would just say like, if you're having issues, make sure you're on them and make sure you get the help. I mean, they probably didn't wanna hear from me of all the different people that I tried to talk to to get her the help because the caseworker wasn't helping. But just be on top of it and just make sure you get them the help that they need. Cuz we don't want them to get lost in the system or end up hurt or injured or even dead if we don't get 'em the help that they need. Just, that would be my main thing is stay on top of it.”

“Get a lawyer... I'm not being smug. You know, I kind of wish I had. [Child's Name] is 17. I feel like if she were 11 again and we were in this position, I absolutely would. I feel like I'm running out of time with her.”

“For parents, ugh, for parents, let the small stuff be the small stuff. Don't get bent outta shape over, um, over small things like, um, swearing. You know, let that go. You know, they know how you feel about it. Let it go. It's not important. Um, that's one. Number two, keep school at school. Keep home at home. Your job as a parent is to be a parent. And, um, the school's gotta figure out their stuff and how to, um, do school and help that child to succeed in school and let the school do that. Three, I would say, um, make memories and take pictures of your children smiling when they're young. Um, my, yeah, I've had one of my kids say, oh, it really does look like I was a happy child. Um, and I'll go, yeah, we had a lot of good and they just don't remember.”

“First of all, I wish these parents luck. My heart goes out to them. It's not easy. Trust the system, trust the process. Let it happen the way that it needs to. Be open, be vulnerable, be honest. You can't get help from a closed mouth. Closed mouth don't get fed. They're here to help. Utilize them.”

“The advice I give all parents involved in systems, show up with your own agenda, bring a snack, sit at the head of the table next to the most seemingly most important person in the room.”

“I'd say if you know something is what it is, don't give up and keep fighting. Eventually you will be heard, especially for these kids or these teens or ones that are positioning into adulthood. They all still need somebody. So yeah, just don't give up.”

Appendix II: Helpful Programs and Resources

Throughout the conversations, participants specifically named programs and resources they found to be helpful during their involvement with Ramsey County Social Services and/or Ramsey County Community Corrections Department. These programs are listed below for future reference:

- Archers for Life Horse Therapy
- Attachment Center
- Children's Home Society
- Kofi school-based mental health program through Wilder Foundation
- Cultural Wellness Program at child's school
- Family Wise
- Irreducible Grace Foundation
- Midwest Children's Resource Center (MCRC)
- Minnesota Adopt
- Minnesota One Stop
- Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) resource emails
- Minnesota Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (MOFAS)
- National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
- Northwest Passage in Western Wisconsin
- Think Small and Think Small scholarships

Participants also mentioned parenting classes and access to therapy or mental health services as helpful.

Appendix III: Girls and Gender-Expansive Young People Discussion Guide

Introduction Script

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this focus group. My name is _____, and I am a YPAR facilitator working with Partnerships for Permanence, and we are interested in learning more about the experiences of girls who have been involved in Ramsey County's child protection and juvenile justice systems. We are looking to better understand girls' interactions with child protection and juvenile justice -related staff, perceptions of safety, opinions about services and programs, and whether girls are prepared for and provided the right support to move into adulthood. Your individual responses will be kept confidential, and we will not share what you individually said to anybody. Your participation in this interview is voluntary.

You may feel uncomfortable with some of the questions we ask about your experiences. You can skip any questions you do not want to answer and you can stop at any time. If it is okay with you, we will be audio and video recording this conversation to make sure we remember correctly what you all said. Do you have any questions for us? Do we have permission from everyone to record this conversation?

Setting Discussion Guidelines

We'd like to set a few discussion guidelines in order to ensure that this is a safe space for all of us to share our experiences and speak our truth. Has anyone ever used community agreements in a space? What are some agreements or behaviors that will make us feel safe sharing our experiences & speaking our truth? *(If there is silence in the group offer some suggestions of common norms):*

- *Confidentiality – share experiences & lessons, not gossip and identifying details*
- *Make space/take space – challenge yourself to step out of your pattern*
- *Judge-free zone– no judgments or assumptions about one another*
- *'I Statements' – own your perspective, don't project it*
- *Everyone has equal worth, and all perspectives are equally valid*

Thank you for setting up these discussion guidelines with me. We'll now transition into the conversation.

Focus Group Discussion Protocol

****Begin Recording****

I. Personal Background and Ice Breaker Activity

We first want to start out getting to know you better. Can you tell us your name, gender pronouns, and how you would describe yourself to someone you've never met?

Ice Breaker Activity- To be determined by YPAR facilitators.

II. Systems Impact Questions

Thank you so much everyone for sharing. The next part of the conversation we'd like to ask you some questions about your experiences with Child protection services (CPS) and juvenile justice systems and how these experiences (i.e., system workers, policies or rules, and the types of systems) have impacted you personally.

- 1. How have your experiences with child protection or juvenile justice systems impacted your relationships/connections in the following areas:**
 - Family relationships with siblings, parents, or other family members
 - Friends and peers
 - Sense of belonging or community
 - Your ability to build a support system for yourself
- 2. Can you share a time when you felt your involvement with child protection or juvenile justice systems impacted your ability to engage in school? (i.e., system workers, policies or rules, and the types of systems)**

Probe: 1) Has involvement impacted your grades, 2) attendance record, 3) relationships and connections to your educators or other adults in school, 4) impacted your behavior, 5) impacted your involvement in after school activities or other extracurricular activities?

III. Safety Questions

For the next set of questions we'd like to talk about the concept of safety. Safety has many different meanings to each of us whether that be emotional or physical safety.

- 1. To begin, we'd like to know what does safety mean to you? How would you describe what it looks like and feels like to be safe?**

2. **Can you tell me about a time where you felt your experiences with child protection or juvenile justice has impacted your sense of safety?**

Probe: 1) Have there been specific out of home settings that you considered safer than others, and if so can you describe what that looked like? 2) Are there things that the system could have done to help you feel more safe physically as well as emotionally?

IV. Engagement/Relational Approach Questions

We are now going to talk about your ideas about how the child protection and juvenile justice systems can improve their practices and support structures.

1. **In what ways can system workers be more effective (or do better) in the following areas:**
 - a. Listening and advocating for your needs – in case planning, court proceedings, etc.
 - b. Helping with problem solving
 - c. Keeping you informed about your case process
2. **Do you think your race, gender, or culture have impacted your experiences with CPS or the juvenile justice system? If so, tell me about a time you've felt this way.**
3. **How can Ramsey County better support the needs of people who share your race, culture, or gender?**
4. **How are the systems and/or Ramsey County workers helping to build trust, confidence, or address your needs?**

V. Transition Planning

Next, we'll be asking you some questions about the kind of preparation and support you've received for transitioning into adulthood.

1. **Which resources or programs were most beneficial in your case planning/transition planning?**
2. **Were there any resources or programs that you considered to be unhelpful or unsupportive in your case planning/transitional planning?**
3. **Were there any areas in the case planning/transitional planning where you felt the system failed you or the "ball was dropped?"**

4. Do you feel the systems took into consideration your cultural needs in the transitional planning and delivery of services? If so, in what ways?

Probe: cultural identities e.g. (race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity)

5. In what ways do the different systems need to change to better help Girls (who identify as Cis, Trans, or gender non-conforming) transition successfully into adulthood?

VI. Conclusion

As we wrap up the conversation, is there anything else you'd like to share with us or is there something we haven't talked about?

1. What advice do you have for Girls (who identify as Cis, Trans, or gender non-conforming) currently involved in Ramsey County child protection and juvenile justice systems?

Closing

Thank you so much for your participation in today's conversation. We appreciate your openness and willingness to share your experiences with us. We have learned so much from you that will help further our efforts to support and advocate for girls* in our communities.

Appendix IV: Parent Discussion Guide

Introduction Script

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. My name is _____, and I am a YPAR facilitator working with Partnerships for Permanence, and we are interested in learning more about the experiences of girls who have been involved in Ramsey County's child protection and juvenile justice systems. We are looking to better understand girls' interactions with child protection and juvenile justice -related staff, perceptions of safety, opinions about services and programs, and whether girls are prepared for and provided the right support to move into adulthood. Your individual responses will be kept confidential, and we will not share this conversation with anybody. Your participation in this interview is voluntary. You may feel uncomfortable with some of the questions we ask about your experiences. You can skip any questions you do not want to answer, and you can stop at any time. If it is okay with you, we will audio and video record this conversation to make sure we remember correctly what you said. Only the study staff will have access to the recording. Your responses will be grouped with other parents/guardians as general themes or ideas. Your personal identification like your name will not be used. Do you have any questions for us? Do we have permission to record this conversation?

I. Systems Impact Questions

Again, we are interested in learning more about the impact of Ramsey County systems – specifically the child welfare system and juvenile justice system – in the lives of girls and gender expansive young people and their families. Please keep these systems in mind during our conversation. For the first part of the conversation, we'd like to ask you some questions about your experiences with the child protection and juvenile justice systems and how these experiences (i.e., system workers, policies or rules, and the types of systems) have impacted you personally.

- 1. How have your experiences with child protection or juvenile justice systems impacted your relationships/connections in the following areas:**
 - Family relationships with your children and/or other family members
 - Friends and peers
 - Sense of belonging or community
 - Your ability to build a support system for yourself and family
- 2. How have they (i.e., system workers, policies or rules, and the types of systems) impacted your ability to earn an income or support your family financially?**
- 3. Can you share one or two examples of a program, resource, or initiative that would've helped you as you navigated the Ramsey County Systems?**

II. Safety Questions

For the next set of questions we'd like to talk about the concept of safety. Safety has many different meanings to each of us whether that be emotional or physical safety.

1. **Thinking about the concept of safety for your child and/or children, what does safety mean to you? What does it look like?**
2. **How have your experiences with County systems (i.e., system workers, policies or rules, etc.) impacted your family's sense of safety?**

Probe: 1) Are there things that the system could have done that would have helped you and your family to feel safer physically as well as emotionally? 2) Is there a time that you've felt that your children were safe or unsafe?

III. Engagement/Relational Approach Questions

Now we would like to talk about how the child protection and juvenile justice systems can improve their interactions with you and your family.

1. **In what ways can system workers be more effective (or do better) in the following areas:**
 - a. Listening and advocating for you and your family's needs – in case planning, court proceedings, etc.
 - b. Helping with problem solving
 - c. Keeping you informed about your case process
2. **How can Ramsey County be more responsive/attentive to your racial, cultural or gender specific needs?**
3. **How are the systems and/or Ramsey County workers helping to build trust, confidence, or show respect to you and your family's needs?**

IV. Systems Services and Programs Questions

Next, we would like to talk about the programs and services provided by child protection and juvenile justice systems.

1. **Which resources or programs were most beneficial and least helpful to you and your family?**
2. **What needs were missed by the system that would have been most helpful for you and your family?**
3. **Where did the cracks happen with implementing the services, resources, or a specific case plan? Did the ball get dropped?**

4. **How successful was the transition plan that was created for your child or children? Did it address their needs?**
5. **In what ways do the different systems need to change to better help Girls (who identify as Cis, Trans, or gender non-conforming) transition successfully into adulthood?**
6. **Thinking about your experiences with Ramsey County systems, how would you describe their impact on you and your families overall wellbeing?**

VI. Conclusion

As we wrap up the conversation, is there anything else you'd like to share?

1. **What advice do you have for parents/guardians of *Girls involved in Ramsey County's child protection and juvenile justice systems?**

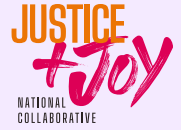
Closing

Thank you so much for your participation in today's conversation. We appreciate your openness and willingness to share your experiences with us. We have learned so much from you that will help further our efforts to support and advocate for girls* in our communities.

Appendix V: References

1. White, S., Persson, S.M. (2022). Racial Discrimination in Child Welfare Is a Human Rights Violation – Let’s Talk About it That Way. American Bar Association.
2. Yordy, J. (2023). Poverty and Child Neglect: How Did We Get It Wrong? National Council of State Legislators. <https://www.ncsl.org/state-legislatures-news/details/poverty-and-child-neglect-how-did-we-get-it-wrong>.
3. Stott, T., & Gustavsson, N. (2010). Child Welfare Outcomes and Special Education Services: How do they Compare? Children and Youth Services Review, 32(8), 1189-1195. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2010.03.025.
4. Pecora, P. J., White, C. R., Jackson, L. J., & Wiggins, A. (2009). Mental Health of Current and Former Recipients of Foster Care: A Review of Recent Studies in the USA. Child & Family Social Work, 14(2), 132-146. doi:10.1111/j.1365-2206.2009.00618.x.
5. Schofield, G., & Beek, M. (2005). Risk and Resilience in Long-Term Foster-Care. British Journal of Social Work, 35(8), 1283-1301. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bch213.
6. Munro, E. R. (2001). Empowering Looked After Children. Child & Family Social Work, 6(1), 37-44. doi:10.1046/j.1365-2206.2001.00181.x.
7. Bellamy, J. L., Gopalan, G., & Traube, D. E. (2010). A National Study of the Impact of Out-of-Home Care on the Mental Health of Children in the Child Welfare System. Journal of Child and Family Studies, 19(3), 353-367. doi:10.1007/s10826-009-9302-0.
8. Unrau, Y. A., Seita, J. R., & Putney, K. S. (2008). Former Foster Youth Remember Multiple Placement Moves: A Journey of Loss and Hope. Children and Youth Services Review, 30(11), 1256-1266.
9. Unrau, Y. A., Seita, J. R., & Putney, K. S. (2008). Former Foster Youth Remember Multiple Placement Moves: A Journey of Loss and Hope. Children and Youth Services Review, 30(11), 1256-1266.
10. Merritt, D.H. (2020). How do Families Experience and Interact with CPS? Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10704914/pdf/nihms-1948000.pdf>.
11. Rosinsky, K., Fischer, M., Hass, M. (2023). Child Welfare Financing SFY 2020 – A survey of federal, state, and local expenditures. Child Trends. https://cms.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/ChildWelfareFinancingReport_ChildTrends_May2023.pdf.
12. Justice Policy Institute. (2020). Sticker Shock 2020: The Cost of Youth Incarceration. https://justicepolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Sticker_Shock_2020.pdf.

13. The Community Access for Disability Inclusion (CADI) Waiver provides home and community-based care to children and adults with disabilities requiring a high level of care equivalent to that of a nursing facility. However, instead of receiving these services in a nursing facility, individuals can receive these services in the community or within their own homes through the CADI Waiver. <https://sunflowercommunities.org/cadi-waiver-guide/>.
14. Federal (Title IV-E) and state (often called non-IV-E) adoption assistance programs are designed to help parents meet their adopted children's varied, and often costly, needs. Children can qualify for federal adoption assistance or state assistance, depending on the child's history and the child's special needs. <https://nacac.org/help/adoption-assistance/adoption-assistance-us/state-programs/minnesota-adoption-assistance-program/>.



Ramsey County Qualitative Girls Report

For more information about Justice + Joy
National Collaborative:

www.justiceandjoynatl.org