

Strengthening Families Act Look Back Survey 2019

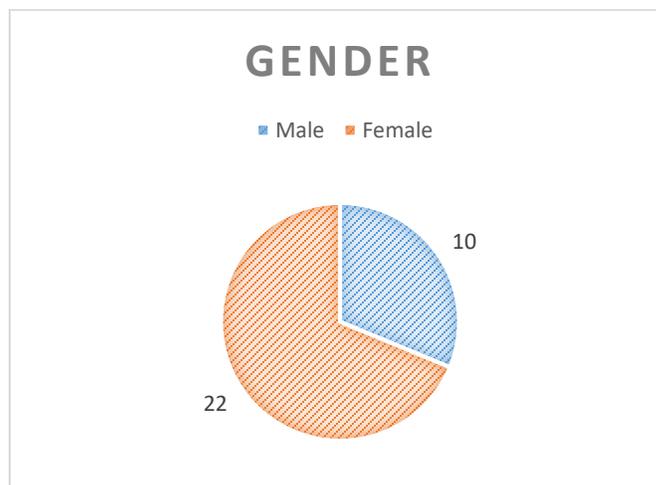
The Nebraska Strengthening Families Act Normalcy Subcommittee issued a look-back survey to measure progress made since the enactment of the Nebraska Strengthening Families Act in 2016. As part of the 2019 look-back survey, the Normalcy Subcommittee of the NSFA Committee issued a survey which measured youth responses to normalcy activities in six categories including:

1. School related activities
2. Social activities
3. Independence
4. Employment and volunteering
5. Family and Home Life
6. Personal Expression

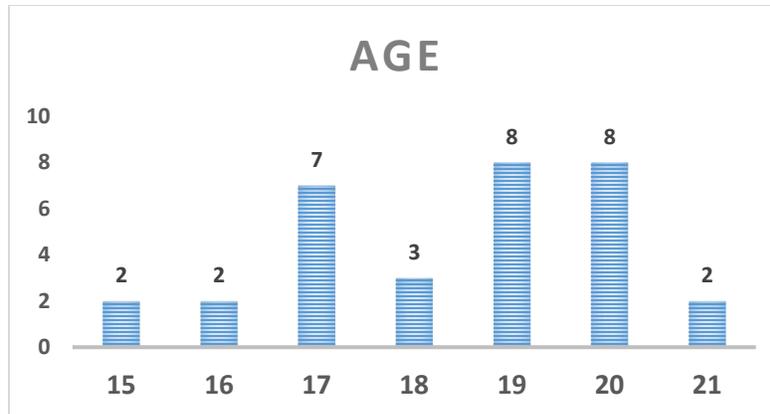
Each of these categories included specific activities such as “attending events with biological family,” “wearing the kinds of clothes you want to wear,” and “having your picture in the school yearbook.” In total, there were 34 activities across all six categories. For each activity, respondents were asked to rate their involvement as:

- a) I can do this/ I was allowed to participate;
- b) Not allowed to participate;
- c) Transportation, money or safety was a barrier to participation; or
- d) This doesn't apply to me or I wasn't interested in this.

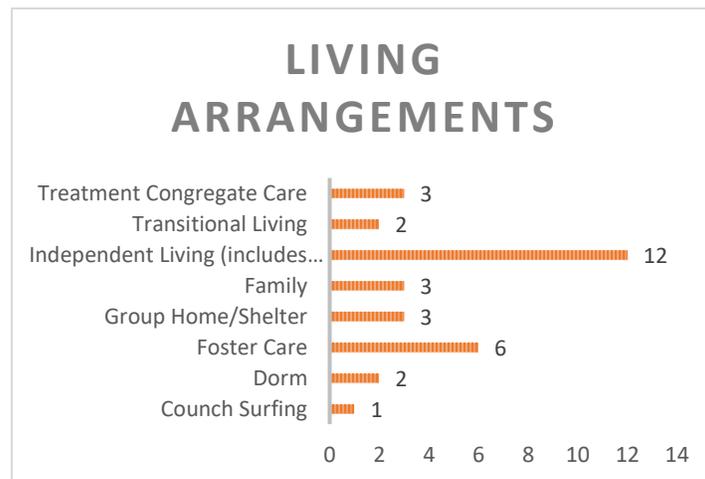
There were a total of 32 youth and young adults included in the survey results, ages 15 to 21 years old. This age range represents youth and young adults who have been in out of home placement at some point, now or in the past, since the enactment of the Strengthening Families Act (2016). The survey was available to youth and young adults currently or previously involved in child welfare or juvenile justice, who are or were previously placed out of home (foster care, group home, shelter, treatment placement, etc). The survey was administered online, via Survey Monkey and was advertised through the Children's Commission and statutory Committee's membership base, through the Department of Health and Human Services Children and Family Services, PromiseShip and the Administrative Office of the Courts and Probation.



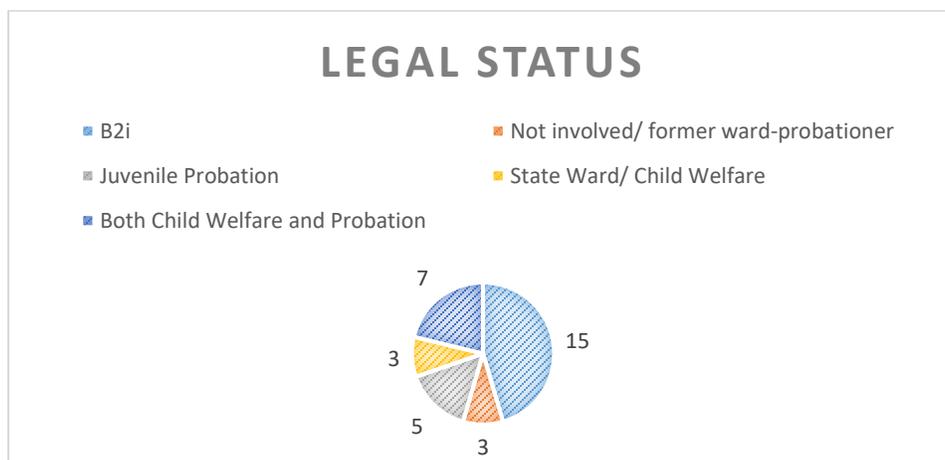
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Participants self-identified their race as Black or African American (n=2), Hispanic or Latino (n=1), Iraqi (n=1), and White or Caucasian (n=23). While five participants identified as having multiple (two or more) races including American Indian or Alaska Native, African American, Caucasian/White, and Hispanic/Latino.



Participants ranged in age, (15-21 years old), with the majority (45%) currently being served in the Bridge to Independence program and living independently (37.5%).



Look Back to 2015

In 2015, Nebraska Appleseed hosted a series of former foster youth focus groups to listen and survey the young adults about normalcy in foster care. According to “Letting Kids Be Kids” (2015), 37 activities were provided in the survey for respondents to rate their ability to participate. Among those listed, more than one-third of respondents in 2015 identified not being allowed to participate in several activities. The Look Back Survey, designed to measure progress, measured most activities with low (one third or more) participation rates in 2015. A lower percentage of responses “Not allowed to participate,” or “Transportation, money or safety was a barrier to participation” in 2019 than in 2015 indicate positive progress towards normalcy for youth in out of home placement.

Activity	2015 “Not Allowed to Participate”	2019 “Not Allowed to Participate” or “Transportation, Money or Safety Reasons was a barrier to participation”
Participating in activities outside of school (e.g. music lessons, dance, etc.)	34.6%	24%
Staying the night at a friend’s house	48%	28%
Going on a date	57%	25%
Being able to babysit	50%	9%
Traveling out of state with your foster parents	40%	30%
Having free access to food	34%	19%
Getting an allowance	46%	36%
Attending school-related overnight activities (e.g. for band, a club, a sports team, etc.)	36%	39%
Riding in cars with licensed teen drivers (your friends)	46%	27%
Having friends sleep over at your house	52%	36%
Having a cell phone	46%	22%
Learning/ practicing to drive (legally)/ Getting a driver’s license	39%	10%
Spending unsupervised time with siblings	35%	20%

The only activity listed which resulted in more respondents indicating they were unable to participate now (in 2019) than in 2015, was “Attending school-related overnight activities.”

“I could do whatever any other kid could do and still can.”

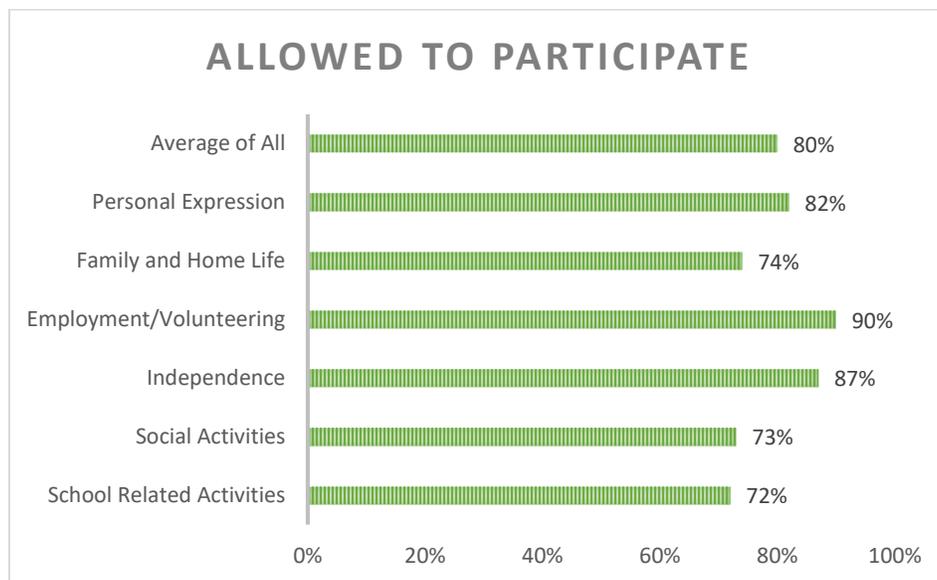
- Former Ward

Allowed to Participate

On average, 80% of participants indicated they were allowed to participate in all normalcy activity examples provided, excluding individuals who indicated the activity did not apply to them, or they were not interested in participating. A complete list of all activities and responses can be found on page 8.

The highest category of participation was the Employment or Volunteering category with an overall average of 90% of respondents indicating they were allowed or did participate in activities such as babysitting, having a job, being able to volunteer and job shadowing or being an intern.

The lowest categories of participation were School Related Activities and Social Activities and Family and Home Life (between 72% and 74%). More than one third of respondents in these categories indicated they were unable to participate reasons for which did not include transportation, money or safety concerns. Activity examples included attending school related overnight activities (e.g. for band, a club, a sports team, etc.), having their picture in the school year book, getting senior pictures, attending a party with adults present, getting an allowance and having friends spend the night for a sleepover.



“My folks are big believers in having the opportunity to do means helping me be responsible” -Former Ward

Barriers to Participation

Barriers to participation include things such as transportation limitations, money/finances and safety reasons. One participant indicated they were able to attend family events, but only if there was supervision. This is an experience unique to youth who are system involved, as opposed to their peer counterparts who are not system-involved.

The highest number of responses for which there were barriers to participation appeared across all six categories (School, Social, Independence, Employment/Volunteering, Family Life and Personal Expression).

“Wasn’t able to go to prom due to foster parents not having money to buy me a dress”

-Former Ward

Transportation, Money or Safety was a Barrier to Participation (% of total responses)	
Being a part of a school club, group, or sports team (e.g. band, debate, cheerleading, football, etc.)	14%
Getting senior pictures	17%
Having your picture in the school yearbook	22%
Attending School-related overnight activities (e.g. for band, a club, a sports team, etc.)	29%
Getting a driver's license	7%
Traveling out of state with your foster parents	10%
Having friends sleep over at your house	7%

“Can go with family events but have to have supervision.”

-State Ward

Not Allowed to Participate

While most indicators reflect that conditions for these youth have improved since the enactment of the Nebraska Strengthening Families Act, respondents still indicate youth in out of home placement are not allowed to do a number of extracurricular, social and spiritual activities. More than one fourth of respondents indicated they were unable to participate in these activities:

School Activities afterschool hours (e.g. music lessons, dance, etc.)	24%
Getting senior pictures	22%
Going to a party with adults present	35%
Riding in cars with licensed teen drivers (your friends)	27%
Traveling out of state with your foster parents	20%
Getting an allowance	36%
Having friends sleep over at your house	29%
Choosing whether to go to a church, mosque, synagogue, or other setting to express your religious/spiritual beliefs	24%

Other Provisions of the NSFA

There are additional provisions of the NSFA which were included in the survey separate from access to normalcy activities for participants who are/were state wards (child welfare involved). These include:

1. Youth Bill of Rights being provided to youth age 14 and older;
2. The availability of a Grievance Process;
3. Having a SFA Advisor; and
4. Completing a Youth Court Questionnaire for review hearings.

Overall, there was a very low number of respondents (n=8) which fell into this category. Of the respondents who were state wards, 50% indicated they were provided a Youth Bill of Rights, were aware there is a Grievance Process and a SFA Advisor. For most of the respondents who indicated they had a SFA Advisor, when asked, the person identified as their advisor would not technically fit the definition of the SFA Advisor. Examples included their parents, case managers or Independence Coordinators, therapist, or child placing agency staff. These responses indicate a lack of education about the role of the SFA Advisor.

The Youth Court Questionnaire is a valuable tool which can provide youth who may feel intimidated or uncomfortable speaking in a court setting, or, are otherwise unable to attend their review hearings, important information. The Judge can make judicial findings related to normalcy for youth with the contents of this questionnaire. Of the 8 state wards responding to this series of questions, more than half indicated they had received a Youth Court Questionnaire.

	Yes	No	I don't Know
I receive a Youth Court Questionnaire for every hearing.	50%	37%	13%
I know how to get the Youth Court Questionnaire to my judge.	13%	50%	37%
I submit a Youth Court Questionnaire for every court hearing.	13%	88%	

“No one has given me one yet and I barely get to go to my court dates ‘cause my worker doesn’t always take me.” -State Ward

“I attend the court hearings and I get to say what I want and talk to my lawyer.”
State Ward

Conclusions

This survey is a sample of 32 youth and young adults currently or formerly involved in child welfare and the juvenile justice system in out of home placement. Components of this survey replicated a 2015 survey conducted by Nebraska Appleseed, prior to the enactment of the Nebraska Strengthening Families Act. This section (page 3) indicates conditions across these items have improved for youth in out of home placement.

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Due to the limited sample size, it is difficult to draw wide sweeping conclusions, however results suggest improvements overall, with 80% of respondents indicating “I did this or was allowed to do this” in all 36 normalcy activities measured, there has been positive progress made towards ensuring access to normalcy for youth in out of home placement. Respondents across juvenile justice and child welfare out of home placement settings report being able to participate in normalcy activities.

While progress has been noted overall, there continues to be at least one-fourth (20%) of respondents indicating they were not allowed to participate in multiple normal teen age experiences such as attending afterschool activities, having their picture in the year book, riding in cars with friends, having friends sleep over, and choosing whether to go to a place of spiritual worship.

The Normalcy Subcommittee and SFA Committee will continue to analyze the results and partner with system stakeholders to improve conditions for youth in out of home placement.

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Normalcy Activity Responses

(n=32)

		Allowed to participate	Transportation, Money, or Safety was a barrier to participation	Not Allowed to Participate
School Related Activities	Attending Public School	92%		8%
	School Activities afterschool hours (e.g. music lessons, dance, etc.)	71%	<1%	24%
	School Dances (e.g. prom)	84%	<1%	14%
	Being a part of a school club, group, or sports team (e.g. band, debate, cheerleading, football, etc.)	73%	14%	14%
	Getting senior pictures	61%	17%	22%
	Having your picture in the school yearbook	61%	22%	17%
	Attending School-related overnight activities (e.g. for band, a club, a sports team, etc.)	62%	29%	10%
	Average "Allowed to Participate" in School Related Activities	72%		
Social Activities	Going to a party with adults present	65%		35%
	Riding in cars with licensed teen drivers (your friends)	73%		27%
	Going on a date	75%		25%
	Staying the night at a friend's house	72%		28%
	Using social media such as Snapchat, Instagram, etc.	79%		21%
	Average "Allowed to Participate" in Social Activities	73%		
Independence	Using the internet	91%		9%
	Getting a driver's license	90%	7%	3%
	Watching TV/playing video games	93%		7%
	Having a cell phone	78%	3%	19%
	Going to the library	83%		17%
	Learning to cook	94%		6%
	Having alone (unsupervised) time	81%		19%
Average "Allowed to Participate" in Independence Activities	87%			
Employment and Volunteering	Babysitting	91%		9%
	Having a job	91%	3%	6%
	Being able to volunteer	90%		10%
	Job shadowing or being an intern	87%	4%	9%

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	Average "Allowed to Participate" in Employment/Volunteering	90%			
Family and Home Life	Attending events with biological family (e.g. birthdays, holidays, other family get-togethers)	86%	4%	11%	
	Traveling out of state with your foster parents	70%	10%	20%	
	Having free access to food	81%	3%	16%	
	Getting an allowance	64%		36%	
	Having friends sleep over at your house	64%	7%	29%	
	Spending unsupervised time with siblings	80%	3%	17%	
	Average "Allowed to Participate" in Family/Home Life	74%			
Personal Expression	Getting a haircut/style the way you want	88%		13%	
	Choosing whether to go to a church, mosque, synagogue, or other setting to express your religious/spiritual beliefs	76%		24%	
	Being able to eat and/or drink the kinds of food/beverages you like	81%	3%	16%	
	Wearing the kinds of clothes you want to wear	84%		16%	
	Having pictures of yourself, your family, and your friends from different times in your life	80%	3%	17%	
	Average "Allowed to Participate" in personal expression	82%			
Average "allowed to participate" in <u>all</u> normalcy activities		80%			