

The Young Adult Services Study: Background and Purpose

Overview

The New Jersey Department of Children and Families (DCF) is collaborating with a team of researchers led by the Urban Institute with RTI International (RTI) to conduct the *Young Adult Services Study* (YASS). The purpose of YASS is to improve the lives of youth and young adults currently and formerly in foster care by learning about their experiences during their transition out of foster care in New Jersey. The study will collect information about the services youth receive and how they fare after leaving foster care. The study hopes to learn about both the challenges and successes youth have in areas such as education and employment, supportive relationships, housing stability, resiliency, social and emotional well-being, mental health, and criminal justice involvement. It is hoped that the lessons learned through YASS will improve services for youth in New Jersey and across the country. The study is planned to begin in the fall of 2021 and end in 2025.

Eligible youth must be between 17-21 years old, have an open DCF case, be living in the community in New Jersey (i.e., not incarcerated or hospitalized), and not have a disqualifying condition (i.e., intellectual disability). The DCF Offices of Adolescent Services and Research, Evaluation and Reporting will screen youth for eligibility. DCF will send a list of eligible youth to the Urban Institute who will provide youths' names and contact information to RTI.

Youth Participation in YASS

Staff from RTI will contact youth either by phone or in person to invite them to participate. Youth selected to take part in the study will be asked to participate in three surveys over the course of the study: shortly after enrollment in the study, one year after enrollment, and two years after enrollment. Participation is voluntary.

Some youth selected to participate in YASS may be 17-year-olds who are in DCF custody (but not guardianship). Caseworkers will notify biological parents by letter that their adolescent has been selected to participate. Parents can choose to opt their child out of the study by contacting the research team.

What We Hope to Learn

By speaking directly with youth and young adults, we hope to learn more about their life experiences during their time in foster care, as well as any changes over time. The surveys ask youth about their education and work history, places they have lived, and the relationships they have with family and friends. The surveys also collect information about mental health, substance use, or behavior that may be against the law. Youth can decline to answer any question they do not wish to answer and can withdraw their consent to participate in the study at any time. RTI staff are trained to identify and respond to signs of distress in youth, including providing youth information on services they can access if they feel upset by any topics discussed during the survey.

Additional Information About YASS

YASS is being funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families' (ACF) Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) in partnership with the Children's Bureau. The U.S. Office of Management and Budget is currently reviewing the study and survey collection will begin once approval is received. Staff from DCF's Office of Adolescent Services and Research, Evaluation and Reporting have collaborated with the Urban Institute research team to develop and carry out the study. It has been approved by the DCF Research Review Committee.

The Urban Institute is a non-profit research organization based in Washington, DC, that conducts research on social policy and practice with the goal of expanding opportunities for all people. RTI International is a non-profit research company located in North Carolina.

Questions?

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us:

Michael Pergamit, Principal Investigator
Urban Institute
202-261-5276
cwevaluation@urban.org

Jennifer Keeney, RTI Study Director
RTI International
1-800-334-8571 extension 23525
YASS@rti.org