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FAIR FUTURES



Photo by: Center for Fair Futures

Implementation Study Report

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Successful evaluations require the cooperation and thoughtful contributions of all those involved. Our ability to fulfill the evaluation role in the implementation study depended on the collaboration with all the individuals who implemented the Fair Futures program, worked with us, helped us make decisions, and fulfilled crucial roles in both the design and execution of data collection. No part of this study was possible without those contributions.

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.a Background

Launched in December 2019, New York City’s Fair Futures initiative is a citywide, comprehensive support program that primarily targets the transition to adulthood on the part of children with a history of foster care.¹ The program is operated in cooperation with 26 current New York City (NYC) foster care agencies. The Fair Futures model envisions that through comprehensive and targeted support provided by Coaches, Tutors, and Specialists, youth in foster care will have a higher likelihood of reaching goals associated with a successful transition to adulthood. Though the goals of Fair Futures are layered and nuanced, the fundamental goal of the program is to improve education, career development, and housing outcomes for youth in foster care in NYC.²

1.b The Task and Our Approach

To determine whether Fair Futures affects outcomes, NYC’s Administration for Children’s Services (ACS) commissioned Chapin Hall to conduct an implementation and outcome evaluation of Fair Futures. During the first phase (first 1.5 years) of the four-year evaluation project, the evaluation team was tasked with conducting an implementation study of Fair Futures and developing the outcome evaluation design.

While the outcome evaluation will investigate the effects of Fair Futures on individuals’ diverse outcomes, the implementation study investigates whether the Fair Futures program components, as defined by the logic model, are being delivered with fidelity and the extent to which youth in foster care participate as expected. The implementation study also examines the organizational and operational contexts, staff training and technical assistance (TA), and the relationships between staff and participants.

In this report, we organized the information we collected into subsections according to the specific research question. To collect data, we relied on a mixed methods approach that included focus groups, interviews with key stakeholders, and the analysis of administrative data. As Fair Futures is a dynamic program that is undergoing refinement, our findings and recommendations reflect the program as of our data collection timeline.

1.c Findings

Adding Fair Futures to the NYC child welfare infrastructure introduced a shared, organized framework for how to approach young people facing the transition to adulthood. There is strong emphasis on systematic goal setting aligned developmentally with educational outcomes, career development goals, and housing. To support progress toward outcomes, Fair Futures tracks progress closely.

Definition and Culture of Fair Futures: Fair Futures agency leaders described the model as: collaborative, within and between agencies and the system at large; a wraparound support system for youth in care; providing young people with individualized support that is focused on their goals; and focused on improving outcomes for youth, specifically across housing, career development, and education. Overwhelmingly, focus group participants described the culture of Fair Futures as “supportive” and “collaborative.” They noted that the collaborative culture fostered by the Fair Futures implementation team has been very beneficial throughout implementation, creating an atmosphere in which staff from different agencies see themselves as part of a larger team focused on achieving a common goal.

¹ In 2022, Fair Futures started to serve youth involved in the Juvenile Justice system in NYC. Fair Futures has also recently expanded its reach to Buffalo.

² The services and supports provided through Fair Futures are expected to impact education, career development, and housing outcomes directly. Fair Futures could potentially impact permanency outcomes indirectly, the effects of which will be explored during the outcome evaluation.

Implementation Progress: Prior to Fair Futures, foster care agencies approached young people making their way to adulthood in different ways. Some agencies already had one or more components of what would become the Fair Futures model in place. Others started programs from further behind. As a consequence, the effort needed to effectively integrate the Fair Futures model into practice varied significantly across agencies. By September 2022, all agencies had adopted the recommended staffing roles (based on their youth census) using the organizational template and TA offered by the Fair Futures implementation team, but funding does not yet support full implementation of the roles at all agencies at the recommended staff-to-youth ratios, particularly for Coaches. On the program side, as of September 2022, 12 agencies had fully implemented all of the first phase best practices; the remaining 14 agencies had fully implemented most of the best practices.³ The progress made during the relatively short period between December 2019 and September 2022 is remarkable, particularly given the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and its many disruptions. During focus group conversations with Fair Futures agency leaders⁴ and staff, they reported improvements both in the communication and collaboration among staff within agencies and in the quality of practice, particularly in the development of a youth-focused culture.

Processes contributing to successful adoption of Fair Futures: Fair Futures agency leadership identified processes that they viewed as key to successful implementation. They described the need, particularly in the early days of implementation, to get the word out to staff so that everyone understood the model and the roles of all the players. They also discussed the importance of developing processes to clarify staff roles during Fair Futures' implementation, and they noted the challenges inherent in transitions from old roles to new ones. It was clear from the focus groups that Fair Futures staff and leadership saw the practices of communicating to all agency staff, being available to them with questions about the model, and creating opportunities for all agency roles to be a part of Fair Futures activities as important ingredients in the successful adoption of Fair Futures. They also indicated that the additional capacity for staff development provided by the Fair Futures implementation team contributed to the successful adoption of Fair Futures. They said that the TA, trainings, and learning communities offered were key to getting agencies and their staff on the same page about the model.

Implementation Challenges: Both agency leadership and Fair Futures staff discussed implementation challenges. Challenges to the implementation of the Fair Futures model varied across the 26 agencies, and focus group participants reported some challenges that were unique to their individual roles. However, challenges related to COVID-19, the Care4 platform (the platform that the agencies used to enter data about activities, goals, engagement, and progress for Fair Futures participants), role definition, and the need for expansion of the model beyond age 21 were commonly cited by leadership and Fair Futures staff across agencies. These issues and others, such as services offerings, youth engagement, and funding, were all brought up as challenges during our conversations with both Fair Futures staff and leadership. Having to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing challenges while also creating new challenges because of how much of the work was being done virtually. This changed how services were delivered across agencies and shifted how the implementation looked (as opposed to how it was originally designed).

Service Determination with Youth-centered Perspective: Fair Futures aims to provide youth ages 11 to 26 with a Coach and/or Specialist services tailored to their unique needs. Focus group responses suggest that each agency emphasizes centering youth when adapting the Fair Futures framework. This youth-centered perspective allows each agency to exercise flexibility when determining which youth they will serve and the ability to consider how they may best meet the needs of the youth in the program.

³ The Checklist for implementation success: phase 1 is available at <https://resources.fairfuturesny.org/AppendixC0>.

⁴ Fair Futures "agency leaders" consist of those from each agency who, at the time of the study's focus groups, were best positioned to discuss their agencies' overall Fair Futures practices. In some cases, these leaders held Director positions. Others were Fair Futures Program Coordinators, and some (from smaller agencies with fewer Fair Futures staff) were Coach Supervisors.

Identifying Youth Needs: There was considerable agreement during focus groups among Fair Futures agency leaders, Coaches, and Specialists about the expectations required to identify and assess the needs of a youth. This agreement was often expressed as the need to understand and process the youth’s experiences, opinions, and interests and determine the skills the young person already had before providing future access to resources, making referrals for services, and/or initiating goal setting. Focus group responses also provided strong evidence of meaningful relationship building, regardless of the role staff may have within the Fair Futures program.

Training and TA: Overall, we received positive feedback on the training, TA, and learning communities offered by the Fair Futures implementation team. In the coming years, with the expansion of the implementation team, the expectation of the team is to continue to deliver the range of training, TA, and learning communities currently offered, as these were universally viewed as extremely helpful and effective for staff to develop skills, solve problems, and build collaboration within and across agencies.

Online Data Tracking Platform: Care4, the data collection system used to keep track of youth and the services received, has been up and running for two years. The Fair Futures data team is dedicated to improving the data accuracy and reporting functionality, including data tracking for non-coached youth, routine data cleaning and quality assurance, and expanding the data support capacity. As far as the user experience, staff noted the ongoing improvement efforts with the system and praised the support they receive from the Care4 team. Many described cumbersome challenges related to system navigation, slow processing times that result in lags or system timeouts, and the burden of entering identical—or similar—information in multiple data entry systems.

Impact of COVID-19: The timing of Fair Futures' rollout coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of that, plans for the implementation of Fair Futures shifted considerably. Staff hired into Fair Futures roles pivoted to learning their jobs and performing them in (mostly) remote or hybrid capacities, which included significant changes to the ways in which they interacted with young people. While some staff working in residential settings reported little to no changes to their day-to-day practices, others' experiences were dramatically different than expected. In addition to performing administrative duties (i.e., meetings, interactions with colleagues, obtaining documentation) in new ways, they were tasked with employing creative strategies for connecting with and working with young people in virtual environments. Some of these strategies worked very well—for staff and/or youth.

Increased Fair Futures Funding: The resources added allowed for the Fair Futures infrastructure to grow. The number of Coaches, Specialists, and Supervisors increased as did the support for leadership and program staff, all of which strengthened Fair Futures within the NYC child welfare context.

Youth Participation: Together, Fair Futures agencies served about 2,700 youth who were eligible for Fair Futures on a daily basis when the program was implemented in December 2019. That number decreased to a low point of about 2,260 youth in January 2022, but since that time, it has begun to increase again, reaching 2,461 at the end of June 2022. We found Fair Futures participation rates for the period from September 2020 to June 2022 of about 64% for the Coaching model, 46% for the Middle School Model, and 32% for Targeted Services, suggesting need for improvement.⁵

Performance and Fidelity Measurement: To monitor agency performance, core performance measures that focus on the number of youth eligible for Fair Futures services and of those, the number actually served, by youth age group and service type, as well as goal completion and interim outcomes, have been put in place. Agency leadership and ACS management can access the statistics by month or cumulatively on an annual basis. The Fair Futures implementation team also designed a set of model fidelity measures, from implementation criteria (the core program components for implementation success, referred to as

⁵ These data include a time period during which contacts were not consistently entered by the Middle School Specialist. As the data entry on contacts improved over time, the Middle School participation rate increased and is much higher in 2022 compared to the year before.

Phase 1 and discussed above) to the more recent “4Ps” guidelines for achieving program integration and long-term success—focused on People/Culture, Program Model, Processes, and Performance Management (referred to as Phase 2).⁶ These fidelity measures serve as overarching guidelines for program implementation. The Fair Futures implementation team uses the fidelity measures as “implementation checklists” to track whether the key components of the model have been adopted by individual agencies and to record narratives about the progress if not fully adopted. They have updated the Phase 1 checklist annually and are working on the first update of the Phase 2 checklist. These fidelity measures have not yet been added to regular reporting on agency performance measures, but the work to do this is underway.

The Continuous Quality Improvement Cycle: The Fair Futures implementation team continually collects feedback from agency leadership and staff through their frequent interactions with them during training, TA, learning communities, and other support activities with agency leadership. In addition, the way in which the Fair Futures data team works with the front-line staff naturally builds feedback loops related to data completeness and accuracy. Conversations between those working on the front-end and back-end of Care4 take place frequently through data capacity-building activities such as targeted training, one-on-one coaching/training, and ongoing technical support sessions. Taken together, these activities provide sufficient opportunities to staff to report first-hand about real-world issues and concerns, and in turn, for the implementation team to work to address those problems.

1.d **Recommendations**

As an initiative that brings together a strong group of stakeholders interested in the well-being of young people whose lives are touched by foster care, Fair Futures asks whether the system, as a whole, is capable of doing a better job with young people at a vulnerable time in their lives. In our evaluation, we examine what Fair Futures asks of foster care agencies and of the individuals who work most closely with young people.

Our recommendations follow, based on what we and the other stakeholders have learned so far.

Fair Futures is a well-developed but still emerging model for working with young people. Long-term success hinges on model components on paper that are faithfully replicated in practice. Because the implementation challenges are persistent, we start with recommendations in the realm of implementation support.

Next, we identify recommendations that fall within the process, quality, and capacity domains used to organize the evaluation. In the grand scheme of things, it is too soon to make precise recommendations that touch on process, quality, and capacity. The process of improvement depends on an unambiguous link between outcomes and the care being delivered. When the link has been made, adjustments to process, quality, and capacity are possible provided the adjustments made improve outcomes. This is the heart of the CQI process.

Implementation has no finish line. Our recommendations are meant to advance the work being done to refine the Fair Futures approach.

1.d.1 *Implementation Support*

- Continue to expand the number of times Core Training is offered to minimize the amount of time staff have to wait to attend.⁷ Additionally, decreasing the number of staff trained in each

⁶ The Checklist for program integration and long-term success: phase 2 is available at <https://resources.fairfuturesny.org/AppendixC00>.

⁷ Per personal communication with the Fair Futures team in November 2022, this has been implemented since the completion of data collection for the implementation study.

session could maximize opportunities to tailor the training to the needs of the group and improve training effectiveness.

- Continue to explore ways to expand the training and support provided to Fair Futures staff around data entry and reporting in Care4. Although the staff who participated in the focus groups highly praised the current training and support they receive, some of the concerns they shared indicated either confusion or lack of knowledge about the Care4 data structure. Their responses also indicated that the need for Care4 support continues to be high; the creation of a designated “Care4 Specialist” position at each agency could help bridge the gap.⁸
- Continue to offer varied opportunities for interagency communication and collaboration to foster relationships and build the bond within the Fair Futures network across agencies towards the common goal.
- Continue to allow non-Fair Futures agency staff to learn and be part of the Fair Futures training and TA to create a shared vision and facilitate collaboration with Fair Futures staff to support youth in their agency.
- Keep a hybrid model of training, TA, and meetings. Some people like seeing others in person. Others expressed benefits of the ease with which they can attend sessions or meetings from any location and without having to factor in travel time. This can mean greater efficiency and/or more time spent with/for youth.

1.d.2 *Process Recommendations*

- Continue to offer the remote or hybrid practices that were adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many find the flexibility of remote work makes managing daily tasks, travel time, and connections with young people easier.
- Engage youth creatively and continue to improve service participation rates. Recommendations include understanding the root causes of youth disengaging or not participating in Fair Futures. Because youth become eligible for Fair Futures support at different ages and with varying foster care experiences, and because they may respond differently to provided services, there is also an opportunity to create targeted and customized strategies for outreach and engagement with different sub-groups.
- Examine how Fair Futures serves undocumented immigrants and youth with higher-level educational, mental health, or behavioral needs. Define program standards and determine whether staff have an approach to special needs youth. Adjust training accordingly so that the quality of care rises.
- When beneficial to a staff person or young person, continue to offer the remote or hybrid practices that were adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic. While these settings did not work best for everyone in all situations, many find the flexibility of remote work and the option to use it to be beneficial to managing their daily tasks (i.e., by reducing things like travel time between obligations or reducing scheduling burdens) and helpful for connecting and working with some young people.

⁸ Per personal communication with the Fair Futures team in November 2022, this has been implemented since the completion of data collection for the implementation study.

1.d.3 *Quality Recommendations*

- Continue to build skills and service quality with training, TA, and learning communities. These were universally viewed as extremely helpful and effective, especially when organized around problem-solving and collaboration in a CQI framework.
- In the CQI framework, strengthen how the meaning assigned to an individual person is connected to the goals that everyone accomplishes together. Monitoring performance consistently is the hallmark of a strong CQI practice, but that importance has to be communicated clearly to everyone working toward a common end. This is an ongoing communication challenge, as evidenced by some of the feedback we received during focus groups reflecting the view that performance measures force a cookie cutter approach to goal setting with youth.
- An important question in the CQI cycle considers whether the program is being implemented with fidelity. As Fair Futures expands, replication requires a watchful eye organized around clear expectations. When organized around the process, quality, and capacity questions, the clarity gained will make it easier to first communicate with agencies and then monitor fidelity in a standard way. When tied to outcomes, adjustments to the Fair Futures model reinforce the improvement cycle.
- As young people change, programs have to follow. Agencies should develop processes for keeping up with the need/service match.

1.d.4 *Capacity Recommendations*

- Capacity – Technology: Invest in improvements to the quality of Care4.
 - Build the procedures for removing duplicates into the data team’s routine data quality checks.
 - One investment that would likely have a ripple effect and positively improve the Care4 experience is to address processing speed.
 - For Care4 updates that involve the User Experience/User Interface, convene a workgroup with representation from all Fair Futures roles and user types to guide and inform efforts to:
 - streamline the system for each level of user;
 - identify and correct errors and system inconsistencies;
 - address the issues underlying the presentation of icons; and
 - explore opportunities to reduce redundant data entry across systems, such as through automated communication between Care4 and other systems Fair Futures staff are required to use at their agencies.
- Capacity – Staff: To bring the program to capacity, hire the Coaches needed to staff the program model. This is particularly pertinent considering the July 1, 2022 expansion of Fair Futures to reach young people up to age 26.

2 INTRODUCTION

2.a Background

Children and youth in foster care have significantly lower rates of high school completion and college enrollment and persistence compared to their peers, and youth who age out of foster care are among the populations at greatest risk for becoming chronically unemployed, homeless, or incarcerated (Legal Center for Foster Care and Education, 2018; The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2013; Courtney et al., 2011). Among 2,197 New York City (NYC) youth in foster care who were enrolled in high school during the 2018-2019 school year, only 53% were on track to complete high school in four years; another six percent were set to complete high school within five years (*High School Graduation Rates of Youth in Foster Care Annual Report 2019*, 2019). Among 620 youth age 18 or older who aged out of foster care in calendar year 2019, 17% had completed high school and an additional 5% had obtained a high school equivalency (New York City Administration of Children and Youth, n.d.).

To address these trends, the NYC Administration for Children’s Services (ACS) partnered with the Mayor’s Office, the City Council, and a network of more than 100 child welfare agencies, non-profits, foundations, advocates, and youth (the “Fair Futures Coalition”) to develop the Fair Futures initiative. With early origins as a grassroots movement between foster care providers and young people, the formal Fair Futures model—which includes infrastructure, resources and materials, and the “Goals & Steps” framework—was developed in collaboration with NYC program-level leadership over a 1.5-year period and is based on best practices for serving young people in foster care, including programs local to NYC that have demonstrated strong outcomes for youth.⁹ Launched in December 2019, Fair Futures has been implemented across the City’s 26 foster care agencies to improve outcomes in education, career development, and housing among youth ages 11 to 26.^{10 11} The public-private partnership that now supports this effort has contributed to over \$70 million in funding since its formal 2019 kickoff.

Fair Futures is distinguished by its approach to the system that supports transition-age youth on their way to adulthood. It starts with the interactions with youth themselves; Fair Futures expects those encounters between service providers and young people to be more purposeful, more goal-directed, and more responsive to what young people need. The Fair Futures model envisions that through comprehensive, individualized, and targeted support provided by Coaches, Tutors, and Specialists, youth in foster care will have a high likelihood of reaching different goals corresponding to their developmental stages, leading to successful transition into adulthood. Fair Futures staff work with youth to address their academic, career development, housing, and social/emotional needs holistically rather than through piecemeal programs. While there is inherent flexibility to the model, as it is centered around the unique circumstances and needs of youth in foster care, the core of Fair Futures is the fully packaged model developed by the Coalition.

To understand how, how well, and within what capacity constraints the Fair Futures initiative is operating in NYC and to subsequently assess the effectiveness and impact of Fair Futures, ACS has asked Chapin Hall to conduct an implementation/process and outcome evaluation of Fair Futures. The project will take place in two phases: (1) implementation study and project design (the first 1.5 years); and (2) ongoing monitoring of program activities and outcomes study (the remaining 2.5 years). Over the four years, the

⁹ The model draws on Graham Windham’s SLAM program (individual coaching) and the New York Foundling’s Road to Success tutoring/educational services program. The model also draws on practices from City Living NY, a housing/independent living program for youth who have aged out of foster care.

¹⁰ The services and supports provided through Fair Futures are expected to impact education, career development, and housing outcomes directly. Fair Futures could potentially impact permanency outcomes indirectly, the effects of which will be explored during the outcome evaluation.

¹¹ Beginning in July 2022, Fair Futures funding was expanded to allow agencies to serve youth until the age of 26. However, our evaluation focuses on the target population originally covered by Fair Futures funding—youth ages 11 to 21.

evaluation will analyze process and outcome measures that reflect the fundamental aims of Fair Futures. This report presents the findings of the first phase of the project—the Implementation Study.

2.b Project Goal

Effective child welfare systems maintain a stock of resources directed at a particular goal toward which the system is working (Wulczyn et al., 2010). The system supports the structures and processes needed to deliver services; caseworkers and supervisors are the people in the best position to change lives given the resources at hand. Like a complex timepiece, the inner workings of this system have to be well synchronized. The implementation study is designed to examine the level of synchronization achieved across the levels of the system affected by what Fair Futures is trying to do.

The design framework for our evaluation begins with the simple idea of investing in youth in foster care so that their transition to adulthood is more successful. As for what goes into a successful transition to adulthood, we propose using a human capital framework for organizing how we think about the Fair Futures outcomes. The pathway to adulthood is varied, and the assets a young person brings to the transition to adulthood are important. In the end, Fair Futures is asking whether, with strategic investment by the public and private sectors, we are able to raise the life course prospects of vulnerable adolescents by building their human capital, even as we acknowledge the significant trauma that shapes their well-being.

In our approach to the evaluation, the value of the Fair Futures investment is measured alongside what others contribute, the youth's own personal qualities, and whatever adversities the young person faces (or has faced) as the transition to adulthood starts and then reaches its conclusion. In the end, when the balance of risk and protective factors persistently favors the protective influences in a person's life, including what Fair Futures contributes, the resources that person has for moving forward in life are thereby increased, with the likelihood of a positive future having been elevated by Fair Futures. Our evaluation design aims to make these specific connections.

Building on an in-depth understanding of Fair Futures' logic model, the overarching goal of the implementation study is to understand how the Fair Futures program produces outcomes by understanding the services delivered to youth and the factors that influence their implementation. To achieve that goal, the implementation study seeks to answer key questions about how Fair Futures services are delivered. Specifically, are they delivered as intended (the content, quantity, quality, and structure of services that Fair Futures set out to deliver), who has participated in/persistently engaged in the services, and to what extent have youth in foster care received the intended services? The implementation study also seeks to answer key questions about the organizational and operational contexts, the process by which staff were trained and supported in delivering the program, and the quality of relationships between staff and participants.

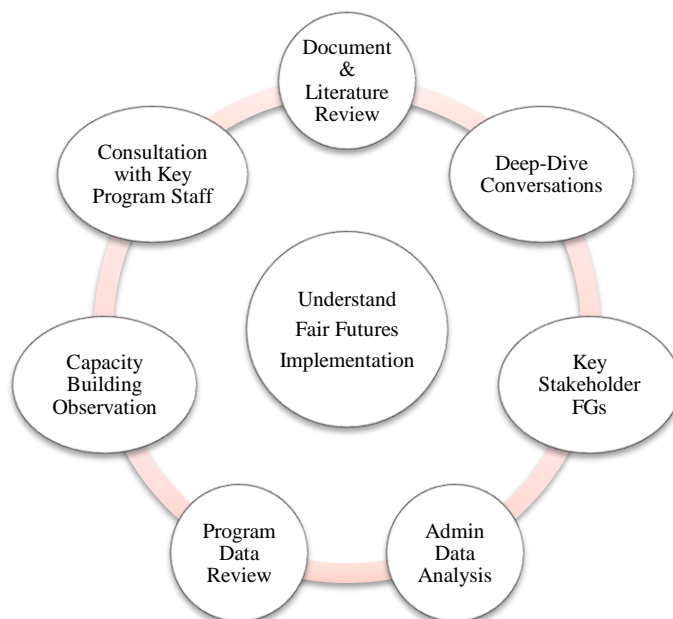
3 METHODOLOGY

The implementation study seeks to understand the Fair Futures program as a planned intervention (the blueprint) and how the Fair Futures program is operated in real world conditions (the actual implementation). The study is grounded in a Fair Futures program logic model, which expresses the overall theory of change for the program. The logic model outlines the resources necessary for program implementation, the population it expects to serve, the program's activities, the specific services to be delivered, and the expected outcomes for participants. Nearly three years into its implementation, Fair Futures has evolved and established itself as a comprehensive services program for youth in foster care in NYC and is distinguished by its approach to the system that supports them on their way to adulthood by holistically addressing young people's academic, career development, housing, and social/emotional needs. It starts with interactions with the youth that are centered around their unique circumstances and needs. Fair Futures expects those encounters between service providers and young people to be purposeful, goal-directed, and responsive to what young people need.

3.a Approach and Data Used

We applied a mixed methodological approach that uses qualitative and quantitative data to assess the implementation of the Fair Futures program. To develop the findings and recommendations from the implementation study, we drew upon the following sources of information (also see Figure 1 and Appendix A):¹²

Figure 1. Sources of Information



- Review of the program documents and literature: We reviewed a wide range of program documents including program manuals, annual agency plans, core training materials, and implementation progress reports, which provided information on different aspects of the program. These helped us understand Fair Futures program components, processes, quality standards, rationale, and expectations. The relevant literature review focused on the field’s best and promising practices assisting youth in foster care, focusing particularly on evidence-based services in education, housing, and career domains (see Appendix B).
- Consultation with ACS colleagues and the Fair Futures implementation team: There has been regular consultation with colleagues from ACS and Fair Futures staff involved in programming, implementation, management, and monitoring. These conversations allowed us to gain a nuanced understanding of Fair Futures’ leadership’s vision for the program, the implementation challenges and successes, and the program’s evolution over time.
- Deep-dive conversations: The Fair Futures implementation team organized a series of “deep-dives” to provide us with in-depth views of the key components of the program, including the

¹² The research design methodology originally included focus groups with youth, in addition to those conducted with staff and other key stakeholders. Due to the time required to identify recruitment and consent/assent procedures, and the subsequent timeline for engaging in coordinated recruitment and consent/assent efforts, Chapin Hall and the implementation study team agreed to extend the timeline for youth data collection. It is crucial for young people to be part of an implementation study about a program that is centrally focused on providing them with support and helping them reach their goals. As such, it is imperative that data collection with young people be conducted thoughtfully, with precise attention to their protection and confidentiality, and in a manner in which their input is not hurriedly collected, analyzed, and synthesized. Feedback from that effort will be included in a subsequent report(s).

core model components, the foundational framework (“Goals & Steps”) embedded in the program, the capacity building activities, agencies’ adaptation of the model, and the recent expansion of the implementation team.

- Training and technical assistance (TA) observation: Capacity building has been crucial to the implementation of the Fair Futures program. Fair Futures staff need to build the skills sets and acquire the knowledge necessary to do the job well. Observing the training firsthand uncovered how the teaching and learning was done. The evaluation team developed a training observation checklist to facilitate the information gathering, focused on the process and quality aspects of building the knowledge base, practicing skills/retaining knowledge, expectations after training, and participants’ level of engagement, etc. The training observation checklist is included as Appendix C.
- Focus groups/interviews with key stakeholders: The evaluation team collected in-depth qualitative information about program practices across a variety of themes via virtual interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders: Fair Futures agency leaders, Coaches, Coach Supervisors, Middle School Specialists, Housing Specialists, Career/Employment Specialists, College Specialists, and Tutors.¹³ Quotes are used throughout the following document and are intended to illustrate a point, in the words of a participant, that is further discussed in the text. Quotes have been deidentified for the purpose of confidentiality. When quotes are used, they represent common themes across interviews and focus groups, not singular opinions or outliers. We conducted the focus groups and interviews primarily between February 2022 and July 2022; the qualitative data we collected is therefore necessarily limited to participants’ knowledge at the time of the focus group/interview. See Appendix D for more details about the data collection and outreach.
- Analysis of the existing foster care data from CONNECTIONS (CNNX): The foster care data analysis focused on studying the volume and demographics of the Fair Futures-eligible target population placed with the 26 foster care agencies, as well as changes in the target population on a daily basis.
- Examination of the program data from Care4: We reviewed the Fair Futures data tracked on the Care4 online platform and sample reports generated from Care4, including youth-level, agency-level, and system-level reports. By performing a preliminary analysis of service participation using the raw data from Care4, we gained a deeper understanding of the data structure at the back end of Care4 and identified a few issues that need to be resolved before moving into the outcome evaluation.

3.b The Fair Futures Model

First and foremost, the Fair Futures model is designed to support young people in foster care between the ages of 11 and 26 as they navigate challenges and transition to adulthood. It is focused on “effectively engaging youth in a long-term coaching relationship, and helping youth develop and make progress towards their academic, career development, and housing/independent living goals so that they can achieve their potential” (“Fair Futures Program Manual,” n.d., p. 7).

ACS has long held implicit expectations of agencies, and the workers employed by them, to do the work of engaging with youth in meaningful ways, identifying their needs, interests, and goals, and helping them connect to education, career development, and housing supports. So, while the core tenets of Fair Futures are not novel in and of themselves, adding Fair Futures to the NYC child welfare infrastructure did

¹³ Focus group question guidelines and other supporting materials are available upon request.

introduce a shared, organized framework for how to approach those tenets, how to engage in systematic goal setting with youth, and how to track activities in order to assess performance and change over time. Where we discuss the “new” model throughout the following text, we are referring to the injection of a planned, universal *framework* for improving outcomes for youth in foster care, not to the idea that working toward said outcomes is a recent shift.

The Fair Futures model is centered on the young person and is brought to life by dedicated staff members with specific and targeted roles and responsibilities. With limited exceptions for agency size,¹⁴ at scale, the model includes the following positions for each participating agency:¹⁵

- Program Director – The person in this position oversees the entire Fair Futures program at the agency.
- Outreach Coordinator – This person is responsible for recruiting youth who may be interested in participating in or reengaging with Fair Futures.
- Middle School Specialist(s) – The people who hold these roles work with middle school-age students to monitor academic performance, provide educational advocacy, connect them to tutors and extracurricular activities, and assist with the high school selection process. The maximum caseload for each Middle School Specialist is 50 youth.
- Coach Supervisor(s) – Those in these roles are responsible for supervising and supporting Fair Futures Coaches. At maximum, they each supervise four or five Coaches.
- Coach(es) – These roles are central to the Fair Futures model. They are responsible for developing relationships with young people and helping them work toward their academic and career development goals. Coaches work with youth beginning in 9th grade and until a young person reaches age 26, and each Coach has a maximum caseload of 15 youth and/or young adults.
- Career Development Specialist – The person in this position works with young people to help them achieve their employment and career goals.
- College Specialist – This person is responsible for helping young people plan and prepare for college.
- Housing Specialist – This person in this role assists young people who need housing or independent living guidance and support.

For agencies that choose to run an in-house tutoring program, additional roles will include Tutor Supervisor(s) and Tutor(s). Otherwise, agencies can contract with another organization for tutoring services. Tutor Supervisors are responsible for supervising a maximum of four to five Tutors. Tutors provide targeted, weekly academic support to young people between 6th and 12th grade, and each holds a maximum caseload of 18.

In addition to the roles and responsibilities of specific Fair Futures staff, the model includes robust training and TA opportunities for staff and a suite of platforms and resources that are designed to capture

¹⁴ See *Fair Futures Example Organizational Charts/Structures* (<https://resources.fairfuturesny.org/AppendixC1>).

¹⁵ See *Section 3. Fair Futures Staff & Key Model Components* of the *Fair Futures Program Manual* (<https://resources.fairfuturesny.org/manual/Section1-4>) for additional detail about each role and its associated responsibilities.

Fair Futures data and support staff in their work with young people.¹⁶ One such resource is One Degree, a “user-friendly, online resource directory and referral tool platform designed to help young people, caregivers, and professional staff find and access resources” (“One Degree + Fair Futures,” n.d.).¹⁷ Coaches use of the model, in particular, relies heavily on its “Goals & Steps” framework—a clearly defined and outlined combination of “roadmaps” and worksheets, tailored to specific ages and needs, that help Coaches and youth work together to 1) set individualized goals for each young person and 2) map out progress toward those goals.¹⁸

Of particular distinction, and one of the elements of Fair Futures that sets it apart from other, large-scale youth-serving efforts, is its heavy focus on youth involvement in planning, decision-making, and advocacy—both during the formative years of the model and now, as it scales and grows. One presentation of this is the Fair Futures Youth Advisory Board (YAB). The YAB’s membership is entirely composed of young people who, in their positions as board members, advocate for the City’s youth in foster care and for their access to necessary supports.¹⁹ Another notable way youth-led activity is embedded in the model is through peer groups for young people. These peer groups are intended to “help young people develop positive, supportive relationships with their peers” (“Fair Futures Program Manual,” n.d., p. 19) and are youth led and co-facilitated.

3.c The Process, Quality, and Capacity Framework

We organized the data collected during the implementation study into three buckets. First, there are Fair Futures inspired changes to what frontline caseworkers do, or what we call the *process of care*. Among other things, the process of care is what happens when working with youth directly—*how* things get done. Second, there are the quality standards adopted by Fair Futures stakeholders, especially the private sector agencies. Quality recognizes that, to have a sustainable impact, the work has to be done persistently well. Last, there are the fundamental issues of capacity building. Perhaps more than other initiatives, Fair Futures addresses the structural challenges agencies face when trying to support the workforce in pursuit of a particular outcome. A practice model that aligns what caseworkers do with the quality standards needed to judge how well the work is done and the resources needed to operate according to those standards, represents the best, most accountable evaluation strategy.

Figure 2 depicts the full CQI cycle. Keeping the cycle in context as a process by which *outcomes* are changed, it is important to overlay the implementation study and the CQI framework. The implementation study and this report focus on the “Do” phase of the cycle, specifically on investments in the process of care, the quality of care, and the capacity of care. During Phase 2, the work will focus on the “Study” phase of the cycle: namely, measuring outcomes.

¹⁶ For access to the full Fair Futures manual that includes detailed information about the model, see: <https://www.fairfuturesny.org/resources>.

¹⁷ See <https://www.fairfuturesny.org/1degree> for a description of One Degree and links to the directory.

¹⁸ For more detail about the “Goals & Steps” framework, see: <https://www.fairfuturesny.org/framework>.

¹⁹ Additional information about the Fair Futures YAB, including member profiles, can be found at <https://www.fairfuturesny.org/yab> or on its Instagram page @fairfutures_yab.

Figure 2: The CQI Cycle

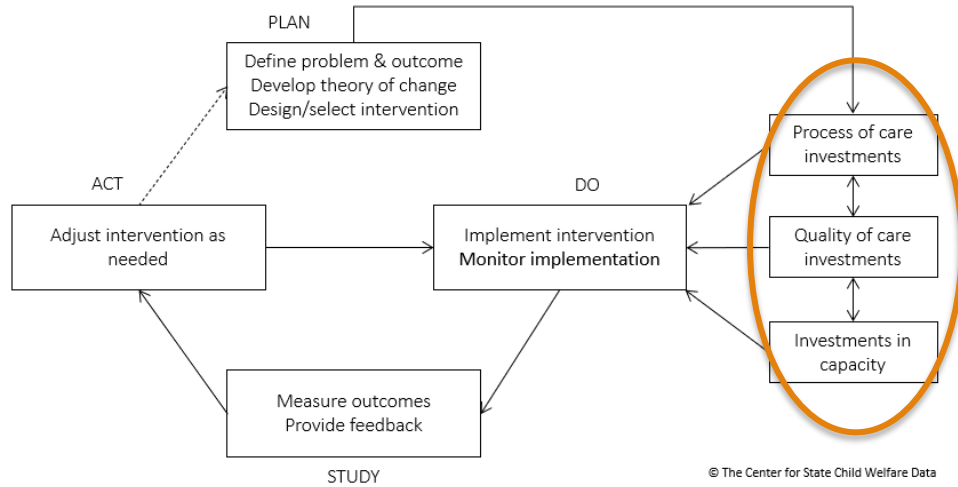


Table 1 below lists the specific research questions the implementation study was designed to answer, organized by domain, and indicates which of the three buckets (process, quality, and/or capacity) are implicated in the data collected to answer those questions. It also lists the source(s) of the data we used to answer each research question. This report is divided into subsections for each of the research questions, and within each of those subsections, the information is organized into the process, quality, and capacity buckets as applicable. The information in the following findings and recommendations subsections may not perfectly align with what is known to be true at the time of this report’s publication. Ongoing improvement efforts are being made by ACS, the Center for Fair Futures, agencies, and individual contributors (alone and in partnership with each other), including during the time between our data collection efforts and the writing of this report. Therefore, not all of those adjustments and improvements are reflected here. When possible, we have noted where changes are already underway.

Table 1. Research Questions, PQC Implementation Study Framework, and Data Sources

Research Question Domain	Research Questions	PQC	Data Sources
Agency Practice	4.b.1. To what extent have the agencies adopted the Fair Futures practice model?	Process, Quality, Capacity	Staff focus groups, Fair Futures implementation checklist
Agency Practice	4.b.2. What are the main implementation challenges?	Process, Capacity	Staff focus groups
Agency Practice	4.b.3. How do agencies determine which youth receive Fair Futures supports and services? Are there selection criteria? Who doesn't receive services? How do agencies prioritize which youth receive coaching or other services?	Process, Capacity	Fair Futures Manual, Deep dives, and Staff Focus Groups
Agency Practice	4.b.4. How do staff identify and assess their needs?	Process, Quality	Staff focus groups
Agency Practice	4.b.5. How do service offerings vary for youth with different needs? Across providers?	Process, Capacity	Staff focus groups
Interagency Collaboration	4.b.6. Is Fair Futures impacting the level or quality of collaboration among the agencies?	Process, Quality	Staff focus groups
Fair Futures Capacity Building	4.c. Have technical assistance and training resources been effective?	Process, Quality, Capacity	Training observation, Staff focus groups
Fair Futures Data Infrastructure	4.d. What is the quality and reliability of data tracked in the online platform?	Process, Quality	Care4 data review, Staff focus groups
COVID-19	4.e. How has the pandemic impacted Fair Futures?	Process, Quality, Capacity	Staff focus groups, Deep dives
Fair Futures Funding	4.f. Did Fair Futures funding change how provider agencies work with youth and if so, how?	Capacity	Staff focus groups, Deep dives
Fair Futures Target Population	4.g. What are the characteristics of participating youth in each service area offered? and foster care characteristics? Which youth choose not to participate? What services do they receive, if any?	Process, Quality	CONNECTIONS, Care4

4 FINDINGS

4.a Definition and Culture of Fair Futures, and Staff Perception of Best Practices

4.a.1 *How do staff define Fair Futures?*

The Fair Futures website (n.d.) defines Fair Futures as “an advocacy movement and a comprehensive model, led by and centered around young people” (“The Fair Futures Model in a Nutshell”). It further says that Fair Futures is “a comprehensive model that helps young people in foster care reach their potential by providing individualized supports from 6th grade through age 26. The model includes a robust middle school program that prepares students for success in high school and a coaching program [that] starts in the 9th grade that includes professional coaching and 1:1 tutoring to help young people achieve their academic, career development, and life goals” (“The Fair Futures Model in a Nutshell,” n.d.). During focus groups and interviews, agency leaders and staff were asked to describe and define Fair Futures. Leaders described the model as: collaborative, within and between agencies and the system at large; a wraparound support system for youth in care; providing young people with individualized support that is focused on their goals; and focused on improving outcomes for youth, specifically across housing, career development, and education. A sample of the way leaders described the model is as follows:

“I would define it as an evidence-based program to support youth to focus on their housing, educational, and employment goals.”

“It is advocacy and support for youth in foster care, helping them to identify goals and be able to take the steps to achieve the goals and kind of set up a path for a better future for them.”

“I emphasize that the Coaches are really there, just for the youth, right? It’s a youth-led process; the youth set their goals, the coaches support them in the way that they need to be supported, as opposed to case planners who have other responsibilities to the court and to work with parents and other resources to focus on permanency.”

Coaches, Coach Supervisors, and Specialists had similar responses, but theirs centered more on the day-to-day aspects of the work.

- Fair Futures provides a set of guidelines for the work and helps Coaches and Specialists (and youth) make sense of a complex foster care system. Some also described the Fair Futures model as a “tool” that helps them do their work. Said one Coach, “I think that the Fair Futures model creates a very structured model for us Coaches in terms of the layout and setting goals, obtainable goals, for youth in order to help them successfully be independent and transition into adulthood.”
- Fair Futures takes a collection of activities that those working with youth in foster care would already be doing, in some form or other, and it codifies them. It tightens the responsibilities of staff in each Fair Futures role and provides support for workers and youth. A Housing Specialist described this by saying: “I think it’s like, kind of like a wand; it’s, like, full of resources and just like, it’s an easier step, easier transition to support youth ... I feel like it’s kind of like a wand, [a] very detailed wand to help staff and the kids pursue whatever they need to accomplish at that specific time.”
- Fair Futures emphasizes the relational importance of the work and relies heavily on a youth-led approach to support. Coaches, Coach Supervisors, and Specialists emphasized the contrast between the typical experience of a young person in foster care—during which a revolving door of professionals come in and out of their lives and tell them what to do—with the approach of Fair Futures which “gives the kids a voice now. [It gives] them options, and they’ll be able to choose what path they want to take. It’s not just showing them one road, but letting them know they have options.” According to one Coach:

“The focus is definitely relational mentorship, coaching relationship. It’s not about telling the youth what they should do with their lives. It’s about getting to know them on a personal level and then presenting them options that they’re able to choose themselves and go ahead. ... I really appreciate the Fair Futures model because it’s not just shoving, like, college down their throat or a certain pathway. It’s really getting to know people on a personal level and just being in their corner, whatever that looks like.”

- Fair Futures fills gaps in how professionals and young people navigate systems and in how services are delivered. One Coach Supervisor described the model as a way to “bridge the gap” and to help youth in foster care have just as strong of a chance at a successful future as any other young person—whether they have foster care experience or not.
- Lastly, Coaches, Coach Supervisors, and Specialists described Fair Futures as targeted and comprehensive support for youth. One Specialist defined Fair Futures as “a youth-centered model that focuses on helping students or helping youth to get on a path to a livable wage, whether that be through college, vocational, or employment.”

4.a.2 *What is the culture of Fair Futures like?*

Overwhelmingly, participants described the culture of Fair Futures as “supportive” and “collaborative.” Some described their agency or team as “a family.” Others called Fair Futures “inclusive” and said the Fair Futures model makes it feel like everyone is rallied around the same goal(s). One Specialist said that the Fair Futures culture is spearheaded by Katie Napolitano and Emil Ramnarine, under whose leadership

and example the cultural tone is set. When discussing the culture of Fair Futures, responses centered around a handful of themes.

- The accessibility of the Fair Futures team and the systemwide contact with peers are novel for Fair Futures staff. It was common to hear about how available the Fair Futures team is and how supported staff feel in their roles. They seem to go above and beyond what people are used to by doing things like giving out their email addresses or phone numbers and backing up those efforts by responding when staff reach out. In addition to the helpfulness of the Fair Futures team, staff value the time they are able to spend with their colleagues, getting to network with and learn from others doing similar work at other agencies across the Fair Futures and child welfare systems.

“I think before Fair Futures, everyone worked in silos, although we were doing the same work. I would have never been on a call with someone from [another agency] unless we were in an ACS training and it was very formalized. So this way, we get to communicate about some of the barriers we may be having, and you can hear what other people are doing if they have faced that same issue. I really enjoy that.”

- The Fair Futures culture centers on a youth-first approach to service provision. Baked into the language of the model, the ways in which training and TA are approached, and how staff interact with each other and with young people, is the core value that young people should be the drivers and decision-makers of their own futures. As a result, staff described Fair Futures as “very youth-driven,” “a strong network,” and focused on building relationships with youth and empowering them.
- In addition to being youth-centered, staff discussed that the Fair Futures model adopts a shift toward genuine care and attention for the whole person. Rather than helping young people navigate specific tasks or milestones (i.e., a court appearance) and checking those things off a list, staff described how the approach defined by the model—and the way staff carry out that approach—often leads to young people feeling like, “this person cares about my dreams, my goals and, like, they want to help explore it with me. This is dope.” Staff said that Fair Futures “helped [them] to start to think differently about how [they] engage [their] youth.”
- Similarly, Fair Futures was described as focusing on fostering a different type of relationship with young people in foster care. When trust has been developed, these relationships mean that staff can have organic conversations that allow youth to speak “freely without feeling like, ‘Okay, is this going to be documented? Is this going to my court report? Like, what are you doing with this information?’” Said one person, “the youth just get an actual person for once ... And that person can follow them through some of the toughest periods of their lives or some of the happiest times of their lives. Like, there are coaches who have remained in contact, even if the youth has gone on.” Another said that they are inspired by Fair Futures because it “seems to be an organization that really meets each individual where they’re at and goes the distance.”
- In addition to pioneering a new approach to working with youth in foster care, staff described how Fair Futures is driving changes in the dynamics of the foster care and service provision systems at large. Said one staff member, “Fair Futures is forcing child welfare as a whole—child welfare youth development as a whole—to shift, and so you’re getting a lot of that pulling-up-the-roots type of work right now.”
- Finally, staff discussed how the culture of Fair Futures is focused on building a model that welcomes, and can adapt to, future improvement. For one thing, Fair Futures has a strong

focus on data collection and use, and was designed to rely on evidence to drive and support continuous improvement efforts. Even so, staff described how the focus of the work falls more heavily on developing high-quality relationships than on “checking boxes.” According to one staff person, while the quantitative measures of success are important, “it doesn’t seem to be the core focal point of the services that we provide. ... the culture is that it’s about really improving how we provide these services to this vulnerable population collectively.”

4.a.3 What do staff see as best practices?

Services provided to young people in foster care are vast, covering different many different arenas of social service supports. Fair Futures seeks to streamline some of these services while also bolstering outcomes of youth in care. A Fair Futures Coach Supervisor explained:

“We talk about disparities and inequality and especially in New York City, there’s so much there. And again, even folks who [indecipherable] people who are not in those systems and have jobs and stuff like that. It can be tough too, it’s tough already. So, it’s an extra needed support with all those factors ... It’s exciting to see the growth and ... how can we, impact more youth, at the same time, but also get going deeper and trying to get to mastering what we already do more.”

Continuing to engage youth in foster services after they turn 18 has been shown to boost educational attainment among people involved in the foster care system. In fact, “each year in care past age 18 is expected to increase enrollment [in college] by about 9 to 11 percentage points” (Okpych & Courtney, 2018, p.254). Ultimately, “a stable foster care placement, establishing a foothold in education and having a steady figure (mentor) who supports youth after they age out of care seem to be important factors to improve the outcomes” (Gypen et al., 2017, p.74; Woodgate et al., 2017). The evidence for prolonged supports is particularly germane to Fair Futures’ July 2022 expansion to including services and supports for young people up to age 26.

Fair Futures proposes that the model is useful in helping engaged youth achieve an average of three academic, career, and/or independent living outcomes before aging out of the system. This suggests a prolonged impact on the youth’s overall success beyond foster care. One Fair Futures Coach Supervisor stated, “taking education and vocational development as its own unique set of goals and a unique program that focuses on that is very instrumental to development of the youth, and it’s something that I really, I really found lacking when I was a case planner”

While achieving goals aimed at ensuring a successful exit from foster care, some Coaches and Coach Supervisors pointed out the need for flexibility when working with youth in care. Meeting the youth on their level and moving at a pace set by the youth is an important part of achieving lasting success. One Supervisor explained:

“I don’t stress goal completion too much. If it happens, that’s great. If it doesn’t, I always know there’s a reason behind it. ... Our kids are not always going to hit these goals every year. A lot of them are never going to hit these goals.... But I do think that something that we lack in this model is the ability to grasp what’s going on behind the scenes for the young people and what’s going on for them? That may affect whether or not we can complete these goals.”

Understanding what goals the youth want to accomplish and how the youth define success is an important part of the work. Coaches and youth should be in partnership to help the youth “to be successful, however they see themselves being successful.” There are some Fair Futures goals that should be met for every youth in the program: “I definitely want them to at least have that high school diploma, because it’s easier to get when they’re younger, and hopefully their housing comes together...”

4.b Agency Fair Futures Practice

From July 2018 through December 2019, a landscape assessment of evidence-based national youth serving programs and best-practices was conducted. It was a collaboration between ACS, foster care

agencies, non-profit organizations, and foundations. The Fair Futures model, which incorporates evidence-based components from other national programs that serve young people, was fully packaged and codified by June 2019.²⁰ As part of the program development, a comprehensive and practical Fair Futures Program Manual and accompanying materials and resources were made possible through a public-private partnership between ACS and the Foster Care Excellence Fund, housed at the New York Community Trust. The existence of the program documentation and its degree of clarity and comprehensiveness contributes to providers' success in implementing the model and maintaining fidelity.

4.b.1 *To what extent have the agencies adopted the Fair Futures practice model?*

4.b.1.1 *Implementation progress*

The Fair Futures model is centered on youth and is carried out by staff members with specific roles and responsibilities who work together in a unified Fair Futures umbrella program within the agency, led by a dedicated program director. All 26 agencies voluntarily committed to implementation of the full packaged model and the training and TA supports.

Prior to implementation of Fair Futures, agency models and programming varied across NYC; some agencies already had one or more components of what would become the Fair Futures model in place (such as Coaches, Specialists, or Tutoring), while others had none of the components.²¹ Therefore, the effort needed to effectively integrate the Fair Futures model into practice varied significantly across agencies. For some agencies, the addition of Fair Futures was seamless because the model mirrored their existing practices. Staff from agencies that already had many of the components of Fair Futures noted how little they perceived the implementation of Fair Futures to have impacted their daily practice processes, apart from incorporating documentation of their work into Care4, the new platform developed to document the Fair Futures work:

“For us, we were already doing the work. We had a Housing Specialist, we had a College Specialist, we had [a] Middle School Specialist. So, it was just maybe, on a larger scale. But we were already doing the work and we were inputting things on the Care4 platform. I will say the Care4, is the only thing that for us was new. We were doing all the work before.”

“I can't really add anything to that. I completely agree... The kids are still our kids. We're still going to support them no matter what.”

But for other agencies, the work was new or, because of other complex factors, it was more challenging to quickly get up to speed with implementation.

By September 2022, all agencies had adopted the recommended staffing roles (based on their youth census) using the example organizational template and TA offered by the Fair Futures implementation team, but funding does not yet support full implementation of the roles at all agencies at the recommended staff to youth ratios, particularly for Coaches. Throughout implementation, the Fair Futures implementation team has tracked the details of agencies' adoption of the key staffing and structural components of the model:

²⁰ Other national programs include Friends of the Children, Transition to Independence, My Lift, YVlifaset, Better Futures, and Threehouse.

²¹ ACS has long held implicit expectations of agencies, and the workers employed by them, to do the work of engaging with youth in meaningful ways, identifying their needs, interests, and goals, and helping them connect to employment, education, and housing supports. So, while the core tenets of Fair Futures are not novel in and of themselves, adding Fair Futures to the NYC child welfare infrastructure did introduce a shared, organized framework for how to approach those tenets, how to engage in systematic goal setting with youth, and how to track activities in an effort to assess performance and change over time.

- During the first year of implementation, 18 agencies had a dedicated Fair Futures program director position. By the end of the second year, all but one agency had a dedicated Fair Futures program director position.
- Two agencies had umbrella programs prior to Fair Futures implementation; an additional 18 agencies had created umbrella programs by the end of the first year, and five more had implemented this component by the end of the second year.
- Since implementation, all 22 agencies that serve more than a handful of middle school students have created Middle School Specialist positions. Nineteen agencies created enough Middle School Specialist positions to serve middle school students at a ratio of 1:50; three additional agencies with large middle school populations initially created Middle School Specialist positions with staff to student ratios above 1:50 but were able to bring the ratios down to the 1:50 standard by creating additional Middle School Specialist positions with the additional funding they received in Year 3.
- Twenty-one of the 22 agencies serving middle school students implemented 1:1 quality tutoring from a provider in line with the Fair Futures model. The remaining agency implemented such tutoring during the second year, and by the third year, all 22 agencies contracted for tutoring with one of the two recommended tutoring agencies (New York Foundling or Tier NYC).
- All 26 agencies created Coach positions to work with youth ages 14 to 20, but the percentage of youth in this group for whom a Coach is available varies by agency based on funding.
 - Twenty-five of the agencies use a staffing ratio of 1:15, and the remaining agency uses a ratio of 1:15 to 1:20, depending on the Coach’s experience and the youths’ needs.
 - All 26 agencies use key Fair Futures model tools and frameworks—the First 90 Days of Coaching Checklist, the coaching approach/framework providing ongoing emotional support to youth, and the “Goals & Steps” framework.
 - Twenty-two of the agencies adopted the full role of the Coach in Year 1; four agencies with existing Coaching programs initially had slight variations in the Coaching role, three of which were later brought in line with the Fair Futures model. The Fair Futures implementation team views the variation at the fourth agency—to have Coaches who also have expertise in college applications and admissions—as a promising practice.
- Overall, funding has been inadequate to support all agencies with large enough youth populations to implement all three Specialist roles (College, Career Development, and Housing). Of the 24 agencies large enough to need Specialists according to the model, 10 had enough funding to implement all three positions during the first year, and 14 agencies combined the roles.

The Fair Futures implementation team also designed a set of model fidelity measures as overarching guidelines for program implementation. The Fair Futures implementation team uses the fidelity measures as “implementation checklists” to track whether the key components of the model have been adopted by

individual agencies and to record narratives about the progress if not fully adopted.²² The Checklist for implementation success: Phase 1 identified 11 best practices for developing a successful, sustainable coaching program and culture during the first phase of program implementation, two of which reflect an emphasis on youth voice and leadership in implementation. The best practices are:

- Use young people and Fair Futures Hiring Guide to screen Fair Futures staff/Coaches
- Create a program umbrella to house all coaching, academic, career development, housing, and youth development programming/staff
- Create a program name
- Develop shared program language
- Circulate shared program language to foster parents and agency staff
- Organize agency-wide meeting to introduce the program and discuss role clarity
- Participate in TA non-mandatory trainings
- Participate in monthly agency TA
- Coaches use First 90 Days of Coaching Checklist
- Coaches use Excel tracker to track “Goals & Steps”²³
- Create youth-driven peer groups

The Fair Futures implementation team worked with each of the agencies to provide technical assistance around these best practices and to track their implementation for each agency. By the end of June 2020, four agencies had fully implemented all of the Phase 1 best practices, and 19 had fully implemented some of the best practices and were in the process of implementing the remaining best practices. The remaining three agencies had fully or partially implemented many of the best practices but had not yet begun implementation of at least one best practice.

By September 2022, the number of agencies that had fully implemented all the Phase 1 best practices had grown to 12—just under half of the 26 Fair Futures agencies—including one of the two large agencies, 10 medium-sized agencies, and one small agency.²⁴ Thirteen agencies were still in the process of implementing at least one of the best practices (including the other large agency, six medium agencies, and six small agencies), and the remaining agency (a small agency) still had one best practice (organizing an agency-wide meeting) for which implementation had not yet begun. The implementation progress during this relatively short period (less than two years) is remarkable, particularly given the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and its many disruptions in early 2020.

²² The Checklist for implementation success: Phase 1 is available at <https://resources.fairfuturesny.org/AppendixC0>, and the Checklist for program integration and long-term success: Phase 2 is available at <https://resources.fairfuturesny.org/AppendixC00>.

²³ Prior to the launch of the Care4 data platform to all agencies in September 2020, the Excel tracker was used to record key information about goals and steps for youth. That information has been recorded in Care4 since September 2020.

²⁴ Refer to Appendix E for an analysis of agency size according to the number of children and youth served on a daily basis since December 1, 2019.

The Fair Futures implementation team has also developed an implementation checklist for Phase 2 focused on program integration and long-term success (the “4Ps”: People/Culture, Program Model, Processes, and Performance Management). They are working with the agencies who have implemented the best practices on the Phase 1 Checklist to support and monitor Phase 2 implementation.

To monitor agency performance, the Fair Futures implementation team also developed core performance measures that focus on the number of youth eligible for Fair Futures services and of those, the number actually served, by youth age group and service type, as well as goal completion and interim outcomes. Agency leadership and ACS management can access the statistics by month or cumulatively on an annual basis to understand performance and identify for further investigation any areas needing improvement. Work is currently underway to add the fidelity measure checklists to the regular reporting of agency performance measures.

Focus groups and interviews with agency staff and leadership elicited a great deal of insight into how the Fair Futures model was adopted by agencies. Some of the strategies talked about by agency staff and leadership were part of the “Phase 1 Implementation Checklist” discussed above. Despite the differences between agencies in the effort needed to implement Fair Futures, staff had several observations and experiences in common.

4.b.1.2 *Processes contributing to successful adoption of Fair Futures*

Irrespective of whether the agencies needed to make few changes or many changes to implement Fair Futures, staff identified processes that they viewed as key to successful implementation. Agency leadership described the need, particularly in the early days of implementation, to get the word out to staff so that everyone understood the model and the roles of all the players. This seemed to be a reoccurring theme across our conversations with agency staff and leadership, regardless of whether they were already running a similar model, or whether it was all new. Comments from two agency leaders who participated in focus groups with us illustrated how they strategized to make sure their agency staff understood, and were on board with the implementation:

“Well, we, I developed like a one-pager to sort of introduce the program that I sent out to everyone. And then I joined, I made sure our team joined every unit meeting with all the case planning teams.”

“I think it took a while, for our case planning staff to understand the role of the Coach and to start really teaming with them and working together. I don't think that was specific to Fair Futures. I think that's true anytime you bring a new model into an agency.”

Staff from some agencies emphasized the importance of processes to ensure that all agency staff (including both Fair Futures staff and other staff who do not directly work in the Fair Futures program, such as case planners) understand the Fair Futures program. A provider in a focus group commented about the importance of an agency-wide shared understanding among staff of the practices and values of Fair Futures:

“[Fair Futures staff] have other stakeholders that they work with. They're working with case planners and therapists and, you know, even the security at the front desk, they know when our events are happening. They can hold those conversations, right? And so, I think that when everybody is having the same conversation, it's helpful and like I said, we don't force it, college on anyone. We wanna make sure that these are their dreams, and these are their visions.”

Respondents reported that many of the Fair Futures trainings were made available to agency staff even if they were not directly working within the Fair Futures model. Agency staff who attended these trainings were able to learn about the information the Fair Futures team members were teaching and disseminating, allowing them to align their work with their Fair Futures colleagues. A respondent in the leadership focus group commented:

“For the Fair Futures trainings that are specific for Fair Futures staff, which are the ones that are usually held by Katie and Emil and their team, and Jennifer, it's mostly Fair Futures staff that go, but we do have a

couple of positions that are not Fair Futures funded where we spend, so we have [non-Fair Futures role] and we usually send [them] to trainings, because it's all overlapping and all cohesive.”

Staff also discussed the importance of developing processes to clarify staff roles during Fair Futures implementation, and they noted the challenges inherent in transitions from old roles to new ones. Because some of the Fair Futures roles already existed at some of the agencies, or the work was similar, there were instances where role clarity was an issue both for staff *and* for youth. The dedicated Coach or Specialist, whose roles were new to the agencies, may be doing work under Fair Futures that had previously been done by a case planner or other staff member. Even when roles were clearly defined, sometimes transitions between roles caused confusion for youth participants. A Specialist remarked:

“...so the kids have all these workers, and they're like, ‘Oh, I thought you were this person,’ or, ‘I thought you were this,’ now a kid [is] reaching out for me because they have school problems or they need a mentor, their girlfriend is giving birth and they want to vent, they're like, ‘Who are you?’ So, I feel like they get confused a lot, like what roles everyone plays.”

Such role transitions were also challenging for staff who had been working with a youth prior to Fair Futures and already had an existing relationship. In those instances, it was sometimes difficult to allow the new Fair Futures staff to do their job.²⁵ A Specialist said:

“...It just can get a little difficult especially if... you're a person who has been with the agency and you've been working with a youth for a long time, they tend to kind of rely on you. They trust you so they—they wouldn't—more often than not, go to you for everything and it's just a matter of, like, kind of redirecting them.”

4.b.1.3 *Impact of adoption of Fair Futures on practice quality*

Respondents also perceived improvements in the quality of practice resulting from the adoption of Fair Futures, particularly in the development of a youth-focused culture within agencies. Fair Futures staff and leadership we spoke with talked frequently about how their work was centered on making sure youth achieved their goals. They described how this focus has created a culture of making Fair Futures work for the benefit of the youth. A provider in one of the focus groups said:

“I want to say across Fair Futures because definitely in attending the learning communities and different meetings surrounding Fair Futures, we all have the same goal, it may look different, the implementation, it looks different between every agency, but when you get down to the moral of the story or whatever is being done, it's literally to obtain the same goal.”

Respondents also highlighted the role of improved communication and collaboration among staff within agencies in successful adoption of Fair Futures into agency practice and in helping the youth accomplish their goals. Fair Futures staff's ability to communicate and work with one another within the agency seems to make them believe that they will achieve better results with the youth. Communication at some agencies prior to Fair Futures was not always efficient or effective. However, following the implementation of Fair Futures, staff describe increased collaboration and communication amongst their colleagues. This is especially true for agencies that already had people in what are now Fair Futures roles prior to implementation. A Coach in a focus group commented:

“I've noticed that with the model in place now, the communication is a lot better between whether it's Specialists and Coaches, supervisors, case planners. I feel that everyone that's a part of the Fair Futures model all understands the objective, so it kind of flows better. So, it's like when we collaborate, like no one's left in the dark, so it's definitely a team effort where before it was more it seemed as more of an individual case.”

²⁵ According to the Fair Futures implementation team, Emil Ramnarine provided agencies significant one-on-one sessions around navigating this challenge.

After some time working with the model, staff began to see the value of reaching out to other team members and making them part of their process to help achieve the goals that have been set for the youth. Staff talked about how they reach out to one another to get information on the youth that they may not be privy to because of their role or relationship with the young person. Also, the “siloed” way of working with the youth has not been as beneficial as the more collaborative approach that some staff are using with the Fair Futures model. A recurring theme we heard is that everyone, no matter their role, wants the same result for Fair Futures participants: to attain their goals. One Specialist talked about it like this:

“Also, working with the case planning team. ‘Cause what I’ve noticed is that youth will share so much with me that they won’t share with their Coach, or they won’t share with their case planner. And so, communication is, like, super important at our agency because sometimes, we’re all getting different things depending on who you are. And if you’re working in a silo, you’re not really, like, knowing entirely what’s going on with the youth.”

4.b.1.4 Capacity improvements related to successful adoption of Fair Futures

The additional capacity for staff development provided by the Fair Futures implementation team through the array of TA, trainings, and learning communities they offer was viewed by respondents as critical infrastructure directly contributing to successful adoption of Fair Futures. Respondents said that the TA, trainings, and learning communities were key to getting agencies and their staff on the same page about the model. Fair Futures trainings and TA convenings, as well as other meetings to help support staff, were components that became embedded in the agencies’ practices as part of the Fair Futures model. The added process of holding and attending these convenings, which were also offered to non-Fair Futures staff, became a valued tool, giving agency staff opportunities to learn about the model and better support youth. Making these convenings available to all agency staff, as well as being deliberate about educating non-Fair Futures staff about the model, helped create an environment where everyone was on the same page and was well versed in the priorities and mechanics of Fair Futures. These added processes created opportunities for staff to communicate about the model with one another as they learned about it.

4.b.2 What are the main implementation challenges?

Both agency leadership and Fair Futures staff talked about implementation challenges. Challenges to the implementation of the Fair Futures model varied across the 26 agencies, and focus group participants reported some challenges were unique to their individual roles. However, challenges related to COVID-19, the Care4 platform, role definition, and the need for expansion of the model beyond age 21 were commonly cited by leadership and Fair Futures staff across agencies. These issues and others, such as services offerings, youth engagement, and funding, were all brought up as challenges during our conversations with both Fair Futures staff and leadership. Having to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing implementation challenges while also creating new challenges because of how much of the work was being done virtually. This changed how services were delivered across agencies and shifted how the implementation looked (as opposed to how it was originally designed).

- Implementation challenges related to COVID-19: COVID-19 impacted implementation of the model across all agencies, as they had to modify service delivery procedures and figure out ways to provide staff supervision, all while also figuring out new processes for getting agency staff up to speed on implementing the new model. Shifting individual supervision and team and agency meetings to virtual platforms like Zoom, as well as utilizing more phone calls, were instrumental process changes that enabled agency staff to continue to operate and provide Fair Future programming to youth. In conversations with some of the Fair Futures agency leadership, we heard how COVID-19 played an enormous role in how the implementation looked. A leader from another agency had similar thoughts about the timing of their implementation and how challenging it has been to get the model up and running. Although it has been over 2.5 years, this leader felt as though the complex issues with which the pandemic presented them has made it a much lengthier process. For additional details

regarding the impact of COVID-19 on the implementation of Fair Futures, refer to Section 4.e.

“I think we are still implementing; I think starting at the end of 2019, and then COVID hit and everything else that came along with it, we’ve been in constant just putting out fires for the past two and a half, three years.” – Agency Leader

“People say that, ‘Oh, well, this program’s been three years. This is a third year now, so you guys should be up and running and doing great.’ And I can be say—I am sure I’m not the only first person to say that in terms of, ‘Yeah, but all of this happened in the middle of and the beginning of a pandemic.’ And I feel like we’re right now really just getting our feet up under us. Even though it’s 2022, we’re really getting our feet up. I have staff that finally just met each other.” – Agency Leader

- Implementation challenges with Care4: Another theme Fair Futures staff discussed frequently during the focus groups was having to integrate the Care4 database into their operating procedures. Care4 is the platform that the agencies use to enter data about activities, goals, engagement, and progress for Fair Futures participants. Coaches, Specialists, and tutors all must log their work with youth in Care4, and this has been troublesome during implementation for a lot of them. Prior to Fair Futures agency staff were already entering their work into another platform, and at some agencies they had two different platforms into which they had to enter data. Staff commented on the burden caused by the additional (and at times duplicative) data entry required for Care4. Another common concern expressed about Care4 was the degree to which staff felt it adequately captured their work.²⁶ However, added training opportunities and TA, as well as the responsiveness of the Care4 team all became vital supports for staff as they dealt with Care4 issues. We discuss the implementation of Care4 in more detail in Section 4.d below.
- Implementation challenges with role clarity: Once Fair Futures was adopted into the agencies, existing staff and Fair Futures staff had to figure out how to work collaboratively with the young people with whom they were working. Some agencies already had someone in place doing work very similar to, if not the same work as, the Fair Futures Coach and Specialist; for those agencies, integrating the model posed some challenges. There were quite a few mentions of “role clarity” and how it was causing some issues. One Coach remarked:

“I could say that there has been a developing animosity in some case planners toward their young people’s coaches, there’s a lot of territoriality that goes on, and on the other hand, the other end of the spectrum, you have case planners who just kind of go, ‘Whoopee, I’ve got somebody to do everything I don’t want to do.’”
- Implementation challenges regarding expanding the program beyond age 21: Until July 2022, when funding was procured to expand Fair Futures services to age 26, the Fair Futures model offered support for youth and young adults up to the age of 21. Housing, educational, and career needs, among others, still existed for these young adults as they ended their time in the Fair Futures program, and staff reported that it was a challenge to deal with that aspect of their work. Informal processes were reported in focus groups, such as staff continuing to assist participants beyond their 21st birthday, but the expansion of Fair Futures services to age 26 created the change that will benefit the participants most.

²⁶ Per communication with the Fair Futures team in November 2022, not tracking life skills in Care4 was a deliberate decision borne of communication with Fair Futures leaders and staff. The decision not to track life skills in Care4 was due, in part, to the effort to reduce duplicative data entry (ex: between Care4 and the Preparing Youth for Adulthood [PYA] Checklist).

“And like we're in an age now, like people still need support, people need support into adulthood, you're 21 you're not an adult, you can't just take on supporting yourself sometimes, you still in college, we've had kids provided to Fair Futures, they will be in college, and then they would be worried about like, 'Well, now what am I going to do,' applying for all these exceptions for them to stay in care, but it's a horrible feeling to be not knowing what you're going to do and, 'Happy birthday, here you are, and now you're off my caseload, congratulations, have a great birthday.' It's horrible.” – Specialist

The Fair Futures implementation team developed a number of CQI processes that enabled them to keep up with implementation challenges as they arose and develop supports to help agencies and staff address them. The Fair Futures implementation team continually collects feedback from agency leadership and staff through their frequent interactions with them during training, TA, learning communities, monthly check-ins with agency leadership, and other support activities, and they regularly conduct surveys to assess the effectiveness of trainings. In addition, the way in which the Fair Futures data team works with the front-line staff naturally builds feedback loops related to data completeness and accuracy. Conversations between those working on the front-end and back-end of Care4 take place frequently through staff data capacity building activities such as targeted training, one-on-one coaching/training, and ongoing technical support sessions.

In addition to these processes for frequent communication, the Fair Futures implementation team could also rely on information from the Phase 1 and Phase 2 implementation checklists and the performance measures discussed in the previous section to identify for further investigation areas needing improvement as implementation progressed.

4.b.3 How do agencies determine which youth receive Fair Futures supports and services? Are there selection criteria? Who doesn't receive services? How do agencies prioritize which youth receive coaching or other services?

Staff responses about the *processes* for referrals and recommendations for coaching and other services, and the *capacity* they have to offer such services, varied by each provider agency, and the processes used were dependent on whether the agency had the capacity to provide Fair Futures services to all eligible youth. Fair Futures aims to provide youth ages 11 to 26 with a Coach and/or Specialist services tailored to their unique needs. Feedback from agencies suggests that each highly emphasizes centering youth when adapting the Fair Futures framework. This youth-centered perspective allows each agency to exercise flexibility when determining which youth they will serve and how they may best meet the needs of the youth in the program. The ability of agencies to implement these services with flexibility is a strength that could persist as agencies continue to determine how the framework is adapted based on distinctive factors affecting the agency (e.g., location, population served, funding). The following summarizes the differences and commonalities between agencies as they determine which services youth receive.

4.b.3.1 Varying capacities affecting service referral processes and implementation of service criteria

Some agencies—typically those with the capacity to provide Fair Futures services to all youth in their care—employ an “opt-out” strategy to participation. In these cases, all eligible youth in the care of an agency are automatically “enrolled” in Fair Futures and must actively decline participation to terminate their services. Other agencies—typically those without the capacity to provide Fair Futures services to all youth in their care—use an “opt-in” strategy, whereby eligible young people who meet an agency’s specific criteria are presented with their options (i.e., Coaching) and asked whether they want to participate in the program. If so, the young person will “opt-in” by explicitly indicating their interest.

While some agencies have the capacity (in the forms of funding and staffing) to provide a Coach to every youth, other agencies do not and instead use a referral process. Referral processes occur when a non-Fair Futures staff member determines that participation would benefit the youth. Agencies primarily refer youth to the Fair Futures program through recommendations made by agency staff (e.g., social workers, case workers, case planners, mental health therapists). These referrals occur by directly connecting with

program leadership (i.e., the Fair Futures Coordinator) or using a specific form (created by the agencies) to connect youth to the program. As one Coach Supervisor explained:

“The referral process goes through the caseworker. We collaborate with them on who they feel would be interested, who would benefit from it. Speak to the kids as well, let them know like, ‘This is a coaching program. This is what we offer. This is how you can benefit.’ And work it that way. If not, we have, like, a waitlist of all the kids that are eligible. And if a youth opts out or decides that they don't want the coaching, then we'll move on to the next youth.”

Some youth referred to the Fair Futures program receive additional follow-up calls to obtain information from them or their family and/or to explain and offer the Fair Futures services before assigning a Coach or connecting them to a Specialist. Many programs mentioned directly communicating with eligible youth to recruit them into the program, often setting up meetings (in-person, by phone, online) to introduce the program, placing participation in youth's hands.

Strong collaboration among staff helps youth to receive well-rounded services and attention. Specialists noted that their referrals often come from other agency staff (e.g., case planners) or directly from youth through a referral form, and service offering is typically determined by the Specialist's capacity to serve the youth at the time of the given referral. When youth do not have Coaches, they may request a Specialist's services or be referred to them if they are determined to have a high need in a particular area (e.g., tutoring, housing). Even if the youth does not want a service like tutoring, all services available may be offered if the youth is in a specific type of program (e.g., residential care) and depending on the agency's staffing capacity and financial ability to do so. As one Coach Supervisor said, “as long as they're in foster care, we just have to keep developing the relationship and letting them know it's reassured that there are other services available.”

The implementation of selection criteria for Fair Futures services was often mentioned in concert with limited staffing availability or funding and the urgency of a youth's connection to a Coach or Specialist. For some agencies, youth in specific placement settings are preselected or may receive priority for services. For example, the youth placed in residential care automatically received referrals to a Coach or Specialist. A Coach described that setup by saying, “I'll talk about our coaching program, and that is currently specifically for young adults who are in our group home programs. So, everyone in our group home program does have a dedicated [Coach], and that's broken down by one Coach per home. So, that makes it really easy in terms of selection.” In other agencies, staff or leadership may determine service criteria by reviewing the youths' academic statuses; for example, some agencies identified eligible youth based on whether young people were in a time of academic transition: moving into high school, beginning college, or starting post-high school careers. Age also was a determining factor for offering services, again, specifically focusing on periods of transition: youth who have reached the age of 12 or those who were older teenagers preparing for transitioning out of the foster care system (typically at age 17 or 18).

4.b.3.2 *Factors considered when prioritizing service referral*

Some agencies prioritized Coaching and/or Specialist services for youth who demonstrated engagement through an agency's non-Fair Futures services. For example, a Coach Supervisor described, “We also have some kids that are just disengaged, completely, consistently AWOL. We work with those young people, but those are not the ones that we usually put to a Coach. We're using the Coaches for the kids that are engaged. They want to move forward [and] want the services that we have to offer; some of them don't want our services.” Similarly, other agencies wait to ensure that a youth is ready to participate the Fair Future's program, viewing Coaching services as an opportunity to enhance their successes. As another Coach Supervisor said, “I've been at this job long enough. I've had kids that dodged me for years and then, at the right opportunity, have jumped in, came on board, and then really soared. I think some of the biggest success stories I have are kids that we chased in some capacity or another or just weren't the right fit at the time.” Before assigning youth to Fair Futures services, eligibility factors such as staff availability or benefits of participating are often communicated.

If a youth is determined by non-Fair Futures agency staff (i.e., a case planner) to need urgent assistance and is thought to be someone who would likely benefit from Fair Futures services, they are directly connected with a Coach or Specialist when the opportunity is available. In some cases where services were limited, priority was given to youth who were either initially transitioning into or out of the foster care system or those who needed urgent support. As one Coach said, “Sometimes case planners, or even supervisors or directors, just skip the process: ‘Hey, I need you to help me with this kid right away.’” Determining specific prioritization for Fair Futures participation benefits youth who may need additional support in critical periods, helping to ensure their needs are met and allowing agencies to measure gaps in support services for each youth. Programs should continue investigating and reassessing program prioritization as time passes and program factors change (new youth, severity of need, staffing changes, funding changes). Programs might consider a timeline to review the prioritization for participation (e.g., reassess priority factors every 3 years).

In contrast, when youth were not selected to receive Coaching or explicitly declined a Coach, programs still offered services from Fair Futures Specialist(s). One Coach Supervisor described the provision of different services as follows: “It’s never our goal to leave a kid on the waitlist because these are services that they really do need. Also, to add, Fair Futures has different cohorts. I’d say you have some youths who are just receiving targeted services. They don’t have to receive full-on weekly coaching. So, I could say [to them]; it’s more targeted services.” When possible, programs may want to continue supporting youth without Coaches with other Fair Futures offerings, leaving no youth behind and promoting growth in areas where needed. There are processes in some agencies for Specialists to receive basic information (e.g., contact information, requested services) at the request of a Coach for additional assistance; sometimes, youth personally request a Specialist’s services.

4.b.4 How do staff identify and assess youth’s needs?

4.b.4.1 Process of identifying and assessing youth’s needs

There was considerable agreement among Fair Futures agency leaders, Coaches, and Specialists about the expectations required to identify and assess the needs of a youth. This agreement was often expressed as the need to understand the youth’s experiences, opinions, and interests and determine the skills the young person already had before providing future access to resources, making referrals for services, and/or initiating goal setting. Responses from Fair Futures staff accentuated the commitment to the framework, using it as a tool to understand the approach needed to work with youth and to uphold the responsibility to fulfill needs through assessment, identification, and service provision.

While Fair Futures staff’s approach to assessing a youth’s needs varies, Coaches and Specialists, alike, are determined to understand a youth’s background from a psychological, behavioral, social, and economic perspective. They also focus on getting “to know the kids first and try[ing] to understand what about the program might be of interest to them, so that [they] can help them.” The Fair Futures staff take a holistic approach to assessing and identifying the needs of youth, creating opportunities for youth to receive services in an interdisciplinary manner and maximizing their potential for success. Coach Supervisors described this process as being about the relationship between staff and youth and about the need for constant reevaluation to make “sure that youth are on the track that they want to be on.” This process reflects the goal of the Fair Futures framework, aiming to develop individualized connections by establishing partnerships and systems that support youth at various junctures of their journey through foster care and beyond.

- In some instances, Coach Supervisors help to assess the potential participants first, to match them with a Coach who can meet more particular needs in the hope of building rapport from the very moment they meet. Coach Supervisors gauge whether youth are open to receiving the help Fair Futures can offer and do their best to ensure that their agency offers services

with the right staff to help youth identify and address their needs. In this way, Coaches are set up from the start to build a trusting relationship more successfully.

- Coaches intentionally focused on creatively developing relationships and building trust with youth during the initial 90-day period. That period is devoted to “rapport building, building that relationship, learning more about them, the things they like, [and the things] they want to do.” Based on what Coaches discover from and about the youth during that time, they begin to recommend services. Building partnerships requires the continuous promotion and use of skills based on trauma-informed practices, reflective listening, and applied skills like motivational interviewing. These skills are continuously used to gauge the needs of youth as circumstances, behavior, and the level of trust evolve.
- Coaches often work with the Specialist to acquire information (e.g., IEP documentation, notes from school counselors, job applications) or to refer youth to particular resources based on the information gathered. Depending on the agency's protocol, this process may heavily involve the youth, or information may be relayed indirectly via the Coach for dissemination to the youth. In some cases, the collaboration between Coaches, Specialists, and youth did not always follow a specific protocol. If the youth are directly referred to Specialists, or when no Coach is available, Specialists continue to deepen their understanding of a youth’s identity before providing specific services. Specialists sometimes follow up with additional questions beyond what they may have received from a referral form. They may request a meeting to sit down with the youth and understand from the youth's perspective what the necessity may be. These meetings create opportunities for Specialists to explore in-depth experiences, skills, and a youth’s vision for meeting needs in various aspects of their lives. Specialists use their knowledge of the system and information learned from the youth to connect them to available resources.
- Some Specialists ensure that the youth do, in fact, want the services they can offer before conversing about them. For a Career Specialist, this process is vital in determining the level of motivation, interest, and level of job-related experiences in order to align them with a potential internship, job placement, or vocational schooling “...that can give them the skills for the profession that they are trying to get into.” For example, through the partnership, Career Specialists ensure that these decisions come from the youth to optimize their success once placed on a particular career path. A Career specialist explains, “...I am also concerned about what their career plans are and making sure that we're also working in getting them into a career or into doing things that is going to assist them in their career path.”

4.b.4.2 *Quality of youth’s needs identification and assessment*

There is strong evidence of meaningful relationship building, regardless of staff’s role within the Fair Futures program. Some College Specialists spend time exploring the possibility of college and the expectations that come with it. They speak to youth about their academic journeys thus far and examine the youths’ perspectives on their reality and future opportunities. College Specialists create open and reflective conversations allowing them to assess factors not always considered in black-and-white forms, such as level of maturity, motivation, or stress. Exploring these grey areas allows College Specialists to analyze the approaches youth may need to take as future college students. For example, some College Specialists spoke about the misconceptions youth, particularly youth in foster care systems, often voice to them, diminishing their confidence and willingness to attend some form of post-secondary education. For this, assessing the youths’ self-confidence helps College Specialists walk through their possibilities and opportunities, regardless of their situations or history. College Specialists seek to detect and lift barriers that youth may unwillingly place on themselves.

Specialists specifically dealing with academic needs also explore the systems or people interacting with the youth. For example, they may connect with the youth’s school (e.g., administrators, teachers, guidance counselors) or family members to collect their thoughts about what might be happening and to gather feedback about the young person’s circumstances. Additional input from those in the young person’s microsystem can be used, in combination with the Specialist’s knowledge, to explore helpful or necessary interventions and the next steps to implementing them.

When youth are aging out or exploring their independent living opportunities, Housing and College Specialists take caution to ask critical questions about their skills and assets. One College Specialist described this experience by saying:

“I really sit them down; I’m like– ‘...don’t be afraid to ask for help. It’s really important that you ask for help when you need it. This is your level of independence. This is where you’re now stepping into adulthood, and a lot of your cushions are going to fall off. So you have to learn how to navigate and really stand up using the support that you have. But navigating [that while] knowing that you are in charge.’”

These assessments of skills and assets help guide conversations about the realities of the “real world” outside the foster care system. They also strategically help access resources and identify key life skills that foster sustainable independence. In this way, Housing and College Specialists help assess resiliency skills young people may need in order to problem-solve independently and strategically.

Fair Futures has established accessible and user-friendly platforms to ensure resources are available for reference by Coaches and Specialists. For example, Career Specialists mentioned the use of career assessments or career readiness workshops, helping to further assist in understanding the needs of the youth. Such a process creates an advantage in quickly connecting youth with support. Coaches and Specialists may use platforms (e.g., One Degree) to swiftly determine how to meet those needs. According to one Career Specialist, “Once I sit and talk with them, I also assess if they haven’t been in high school, what their interest may be so that if I utilize the One Degree system ... I’ll be able ... to source information, source resources for them in the One Degree system.”

“I know that with Fair Futures, one of the great things about it is that they developed OneDegree [...] OneDegree is great, because it puts everything in one place when you’re trying to research some type of program, rather than going on Google and researching different type of mental health programs or educational programs.”

4.b.5 *How do service offerings vary for youth with different needs? Across providers?*

4.b.5.1 *Variations in the process of service offerings*

Agency providers vary in their applications of Fair Futures. Beyond the reasons mentioned earlier (selection criteria and determination of service needs), more specific reasons may be applied to the youth receiving services.

- One such reason may be the staff’s view on whether or not the youth will be engaged in the program. Staff view some youth as preferred candidates for Fair Futures program placement based on observed characteristics that indicate potential success. Often, services vary by the community the agency serves and the type of residential settings in which the youth live.
- Other factors depended on the agency’s availability of staff to fill roles or the need for additional funding to have those roles (e.g., not all agencies have a designated Middle School Specialist). Some Fair Futures services were not available to be offered for that reason, or another role or staff member took such responsibilities. Agencies also varied in the ability to offer virtual services if they were mandated to meet with youth in person, while others had the flexibility to choose based on preference.

The flexibility to implement policies and protocols by agencies led to variability in the frequency of visitation or contact by Coaches or Specialists. This decision often depends on several factors, including the youth's needs or preferences, staff availability, or the role of the staff member working with the youth.

- Frequency was likely higher during the first 90 days, tapering with time or level of support needed. If a crisis or urgent issue arises, staff may increase the frequency of contact or visitation to provide additional support. The type of contact may also be determined by the agency (in-person, virtually, by phone), affecting the frequency of required interaction. One Coach Supervisor explained their agency's specific protocol: "if it's a phone call, it should be interacting really twice a month because they still have so many, and they're dealing with it. But really, I think all my Coaches really call at least once a week, but face-to-face, they prefer two." The Fair Futures Model suggests contacting a youth at least once a week through any means, and if the opportunity is possible, meeting the youth in person twice per month. One Coach explained the established frequency rate was "not mandatory" as set by the model or their agency, saying, "you have some youth who are just receiving targeted services. They don't have to receive full-on weekly coaching." Fair Futures staff reported a significant increase in interactions with youth in residential placement, often having interaction daily due to the nature of the work environment. Technology use also allows staff to interact more consistently with youth.

When a Coach-youth match is being organized, agency leaders described the Coach's availability and experience as their first consideration. Many decisions are also based on the personalities and preferred language(s) of the Coach and youth, or other preferences expressed by the young person.

- If a Coach already carries the maximum caseload of 15, they are unavailable to take on any new students. After assessing for availability, leaders then consider other criteria when possible. They look at the geographic location of Coaches and youth, attempting to match youth to Coaches who work with others in their borough, thus reducing travel time and effort for both parties. They also consider the Coach's experience and how that aligns with a young person's specific needs. Said one leader, "If it's a high school student that's maybe 11th to 12th grade that will be graduating soon, I pair them with that Coach that has a lot of experience with college, and [they know] everything about college, so maybe I'll assign [the youth] to that Coach."
- When they have the opportunity, leaders described considering the personalities of the Coach and youth. In some instances, this might mean matching people with like personalities. In others, it can mean encouraging more of a complementary relationship: "If we have someone that is energetic and very engaging, we try to match [them] with those who we know are going to need a little bit more, in terms of the engagement piece, and would not be discouraged."
- Leaders also pay attention to the language(s) spoken by the Coach and youth; if a young person is more comfortable speaking a non-English language, then they attempt to pair them with a Coach who also speaks that language.
- Preferences expressed by the young person also play a role in service offerings. For instance, one common preference is for a young person to request to work *with* a Coach of a specific gender or to *not* work with a Coach of a specific gender (some agencies may also determine that a gender-based match must occur for the youth to work with a Coach). Often times, these pairings are based on the ability of the agency to accommodate a youth's preferences, respecting the youth's desires to the extent possible. If a desired match cannot be made (e.g., if there are no male coaches, but the young person prefers one) the young person has the

choice of continuing with another Coach who may not meet their preferred criteria or waiting until availability opens with one who does. Sometimes, when no appropriate match is available, youth may receive coaching services from a Coach Supervisor who holds a small caseload.

“So, our coaching program is separated by borough. I usually give the kids an option, I'll say, ‘Totally understand and want to respect that you will only work with a coach who is male. I don't have any male coaches available right now. There are male coaches in [borough name] or [borough name], would you be comfortable with meeting with a coach there?’ Sometimes they say yes. Sometimes they say no. Sometimes hearing that will make them go, ‘Actually, it's fine. I don't mind. I'll have a female coach or whatever.’ I usually will double check several times, like, ‘Are you sure you're okay with that?’ They go, ‘Yes.’ Or if they say they're not okay with that, then... I'll just work with them until we have a space available.” – Coach Supervisor

- Some agencies offer services only to youth who are accepted into their program; these youth may receive religious-based services and may require specific religious considerations, for example.

4.b.5.2 *Different capacities impacting the quality of the service offering*

Limitations in the availability of staff and resources available also create a difference in the type of support Fair Futures Staff may offer, particular around serving youth with additional or special needs. Some agencies were able to hire staff who could best meet the variety of needs a youth may have; however, in focus groups, not all agencies specified their ability to work with these youth. There are limitations in programs for specific youth, as a Coach describes:

“There's a lot of great programs out there for youth, but then there's – there's not – there's limited programs for youth who are undocumented. And there are limited art programs for kids who are interested in the arts and art programs by which they can also be paid to learn more about creative expression and apply it. Also, so one other example the LGBT Center in Manhattan, right, on 13th Street. They're partnered with the – with the Youth and Community Development.”

The services Coaches or Specialists provide may be limited by the barriers surrounding youth. For example, one Coach explains working with a large number of undocumented youth, “...I feel like a lot of the – the things that they should be – a lot of the goals, they – is limited by the – the immigration barrier, and there's also like you know they – they can't legally get a job and things like that. So, if there was some workaround about like internships that they can do that they don't need to submit their birth certificate or – or anything like that, that would be extremely helpful. More like Spanish speaking, like workshops and things like that they could also do would be helpful.”

When working with youth with additional needs (academic or behavioral support), Coaches work collaboratively with others in the youths' lives, such as caregivers or other Specialists. A Coach explains, “... with those who are on my caseload that do have special needs, I don't really speak to them that much as more so like through the parent, and the parent give me the information but like my own relationship is not there.” In some cases, collaboration was not as effective when working with youth. As one Coach describes:

“It depends on the youth and the needs, right? Because we have some where they don't need as much. But then we also, well... because some of them have behavioral specialists, it kind of causes a clash. So, we're not necessarily able to do our jobs 100% with the youth, so it just makes it a little more frustrating because you're trying to hone in and focus on this youth, and then you're not necessarily givin' the time to all the other youths.”

The quality of service offerings might be affected by Fair Futures' staff's preparedness and level of experience in working with youth with additional needs, whether academic, behavioral or another status.

While the Fair Futures model offers a mandatory training for all staff, “Serving Special Education Students,” in addition to other education training programs that also focus on students with IEPs or 504 plans, some staff did not recall participating in such training when asked about working with students with special needs. One Coach explains their perspective on lack of training and experience by saying: “I haven’t been into no training as far as with the youth with special needs, but I’ve been dealing with the youth for so long. I’m pretty much... I’m good at it.” While experience may vary with staff, many staff can understand how their approach may be slightly altered, particularly when there is supporting documentation (e.g., IEP) or diagnosis. A Coach expressed their experience, saying, “You really have to be sensitive to them and sensitive to their needs and also sensitive to their feelings too because they struggled sometimes. They struggle more than the average who’s – who doesn’t have an IEP and may not have the same specific academic needs that another youth who does not [have an] IEP.” The Center for Fair Futures may consider incorporating discussions, surveying the level of understanding and preparedness for working with this population, reassessing the value and impact of the relevant pieces of training, or seeking collaboration with more experienced staff. This may be most meaningful for staff who do not readily engage with these situations as frequently.

4.b.6 *Is Fair Futures impacting the level or quality of collaboration among the agencies?*

The collaborative culture fostered by the Fair Futures implementation team has been very beneficial throughout implementation, creating an atmosphere in which staff from different agencies see themselves as part of a larger team focused on achieving a common goal. As one Coach Supervisor put it, “Well, personally, I think the culture is good. It’s actually spearheaded by the Fair Futures group which is run by Katie... and Emil who works along with her and they basically create a great environment. They bring all the agencies together, kind of rally us behind one common goal and provide any sort of support that we would need to better assist the youth.”

In addition, the array of TA, trainings, and learning communities (such as the monthly leaders’ community group) allows agencies to network, support one another, and observe the extent to which they all are working towards the same goal. The TA, trainings, and learning communities where agencies interacted with one another helped agency staff realize that they were all working to help their youth navigate housing, educational, and career challenges. It has become standard practice at each of the 26 agencies for staff to attend the TA, trainings, and learning communities. These additional processes were created to help Fair Futures staff become comfortable with the model, and to bring the agencies together in a collaborative and supportive environment. The learning opportunities that have become a part of Fair Futures at the agencies help create a sense of shared values, as staff at the agencies have begun to realize that even though their agencies have different programming and are run differently, they are all working to accomplish the same thing.

The following quote is representative of the feedback we heard about the way in which the TA, trainings, and learning communities strengthened inter-agency collaboration:

“It’s like, although so many agencies are doing the same work, we never [gather] with each other. We never collaborate and say, ‘Hey, what’s working for you? What’s not working for you?’ I feel like this is a way that we can really assess what is and what doesn’t work for programs, and you get ideas ‘Oh, okay, you guys took your youth to do this activity. Hey, maybe we can think about that. How much did that cost?’ Certain things there that I feel—because Fair Futures is fairly new, agency-wide. I mean, I have another supervisor that I can go talk to that’s doing this exact same work. But I like that. When we get on the leadership [meetings], I can talk to another person who’s doing the same exact things that I’m doing, and we get to bounce ideas off of one another.” – Coach Supervisor

4.c **Fair Futures Training and TA**

To evaluate the effectiveness of the training and TA resources the Fair Futures implementation team put in place, we gathered the evidence from both core training observation and staff focus group discussion.

4.c.1 *Process of the training and TA*

Since the onset of the Fair Futures, capacity building has been essential to program implementation and development. The capacity-building activities take diverse forms and are led by the Fair Futures implementation team (partnered with field experts), including core model training, special topic workshops, regular agency check-ins, one-on-one technical support, coaching, and learning communities. Combining the mandatory training/learning with experts and various optional support and growth opportunities, and integrating the real life experience of young people when possible, the implementation team aims to equip the Fair Futures staff with the necessary competencies and skills to deliver the Fair Futures core components with confidence and efficiency and meet the needs of the field.

Since the pandemic hit in March 2020, all training and TA supports were converted to virtual. To ensure engagement, for example, everything in the 3.5-day core training was offered via Zoom with large group and small group sessions. Chat was used for participants to communicate ideas, suggestions, and support. PowerPoint presentations were always coupled with interactive activities such as storytelling, quizzes, discussions, and Q&A. Clear instructions through written documents were provided to guide small group activities and conversations. One highlight of the training was the youth panel on the last day of the core training. The attendees were able to hear from youth about their experience with Fair Futures coaches and the ways the program has impacted their lives.

TA and training were frequently discussed in focus groups conducted with Fair Futures leaders, Coaches, and Specialists. Staff pointed to the core training, learning communities, and workshops as sources of ongoing support in their work. The focus groups covered the pros and cons of the in-depth core training, the prevalence of ongoing training opportunities, and the individualized support through TA and coaching.

When asked about their experience with the core training, the leaders, Coaches, and Specialists reported it was a comprehensive review of the information and tools staff need to be successful in their roles. Many stated that it was a strong overview of the work that the Fair Futures model lays out.

“I think they cover every basis that we need to learn, and they're very receptive. If we do need that more one-on-one help, we can always e-mail the facilitators, and they'll make time for us to give us that one-on-one training. So, I think they do for a lot of training for us, and if we need extra support, they're always there to assist us.”

“You also have this additional Fair Futures training ... this kind of like gets everyone to baseline. So, I think that's another aspect of it is that it tries to establish a baseline in terms of how on a larger scale that we can all operate and, and again, it's just, here's the basic info on how to do the coaching program, but then also, and be a successful Coach.”

4.c.2 *Quality of the training and TA*

4.c.2.1 *Feedback of the quality*

The core training covers everything new hires might need to know in their job, from the creation of the model to individual staff roles. The training oscillates between large group discussions, lectures, and small group activities, providing opportunities for trainees to practice what they learned moments after being introduced to it. The materials and resources used in the training are the same as those the trainees use in their work, such as One Degree and the Goal Roadmaps, ensuring a level of comfortability with the tools needed to carry out Fair Futures tasks.

After completing each core training, the Fair Futures implementation team asks participants to take a feedback survey. The survey respondents overwhelmingly indicated that what they learned during the training would be helpful in their work. Additionally, they reported that the training boosted their confidence to do their job and that, as a result of the core training, they will be better at their job.

However, some focus group participants discussed the overwhelming nature of the core training. The length of the training and the number of topics brought up were seen as issues that made it hard to engage staff during the training. Clear training objectives and goals are detailed prior to the training, providing a guide to help attendees narrow their focus onto the most important pieces of information. Despite the tools available and steps taken by the trainers, the training is still dense and information heavy, as participants noted:

“Initially, it's like this huge wall of information that just kind of washes over you like a wave [indecipherable], it's just so much, and you're just trying to take it all in, and it doesn't make a whole lot of sense to begin with.”

“I think that for myself, and for many of the coaches, it can almost be like information overload.”

Ongoing training continued to be a source of knowledge, especially for the Specialists whose positions require expert-level knowledge. In-depth training sessions on topics specific to Coaches' and Specialists' work help staff to have more well-rounded knowledge and tools to work with the youth.

“They have people inside that are actually - have knowledge of what's going to happen and being able to provide those information to us upfront, so we are aware of what is going to happen before it's too late. So, I feel like the information is not too much. And what I like about them, if even you go to a training and you didn't really grasp the information and the training. They're always available for you...”

Another common theme was the usefulness of the learning communities. The Coaches, Specialists, and leaders often discussed the collaborative nature of these groups, describing them as a place where they can work together to solve common problems.

“What the Fair Futures does, it gives an outlet for people like me or Coaches right to really be a part of a forum like a larger group where I can get good advice. Wow, you know, like a network model where, I was in that situation and this is what I did as opposed to saying, this is what you do. This is what I did when I had [this issue].”

“We join in learning communities, we all pretty much have the same questions, share the same results, and the same practices across agencies, so it's definitely a collaborative effort and definitely different agencies across the country or the city are using the Fair Futures model to kind of work together and find the best results for the youth.”

Focus group participants often praised one-on-one support such as TA and individual coaching for staff. These offerings provide support for agencies and individuals based on the areas of the model in which they might need extra space to learn and practice.

“What I like about the Fair Futures model is that we help people get a one-on-one, I've already had one of them about to get one or two more. I like that fact that they really are responsive to your emails, they are really responsive to things that you may be struggling with. I like the fact that they constantly follow-up or they give if you want to learn a model, and you want to be better at what you do with the service you're providing, they give you more than enough opportunity to take advantage of that.”

The TA staff were often specifically highlighted as key to the focus group participants' ongoing learning and work. Matt and Nadine's availability to help with Care4 issues, and Emil and Katie's accessibility for coaching sessions are vital parts of the model.

“Nadine and Matt are amazing, they've been ongoing support tools with videos and one-pager desk cheat sheets, and so that's ongoing, which is extremely helpful.”

“I have to say, and I say it anytime I can to Emil and, Katie, about how grateful I am that we have such strong pillars to lean on, like when it comes to Nadine and Matt. And they're doing like workshop Wednesdays, and then they have development training and development for all the specialists, and all of the coaches and leadership, I've never been a part, I don't receive that kind of support within my own agency.”

4.c.2.2 *Suggested training topics*

While the provided training and professional development support cover many topics, some Coaches and Specialists identified areas they wished to see expanded upon in the extensive training offerings. These areas reflect issues that Coaches and Specialists have faced while working with youth in the field. Some common themes amongst the suggested pieces of training included mental health support or specialized training on the various Specialist roles. Focus group responses mirrored the Core Training Feedback surveys (as provided by Core Trainers Emil and Katie). When asked what additional information should be covered in the core training, multiple respondents indicated they would like more information on working with youth with mental health needs, maintaining housing, and connecting with education.

“A lot of the youth that we work with, could have mental health issues or whatever, they go through things that maybe aren't included in the training ... there's potential for trainings that have to do with things that aren't necessarily coaching ... just to be like aware the type of people that we're working with sometimes come from a background of trauma, and it's been said, but there isn't actual trainings on it, or information sessions.”

“There needs to be more training on ... some of the newer housing options ... in part because the city is a little bit confused around them.”

While some of these topics might be available in some form, at the time of the data collection (i.e., focus groups), participants wished to see these particular issues covered more often or more in-depth because of the relevance they hold to the work of Coaches and Specialists. For example, the Housing Specialists noted how quickly housing options and requirements change, leading them to wish for more trainings focused on the newer options.

4.c.2.3 *From learning to application*

There are ample opportunities for agencies to adapt the model to fit the needs of the specific youth they serve. This space has allowed staff to create their own protocols and methods for connecting with and interacting with youth. The training provides agency staff the knowledge needed to adapt the framework to their own needs, making each program unique in the way it functions.

However, focus group participants also mentioned a sense of some rigidity in the model and training offerings that seemed to be a barrier in their work with youth. Expectations after training do not always meet the needs of the Coach or Specialist in that role. For example, participating agencies may be creative or unique to best meet the needs of their specific program or agency, implementing processes in a manner that is different than what training suggests.

This ambiguity between expectations of implementation may hinder the confidence staff might have when interacting with youth. For example, some staff mentioned feeling some inflexibility in the way they have approached youth when provided with feedback from trainers. While the training creates opportunities to practice approaching the youth, there was no mention of monitoring the quality of how staff interact with youth over time.

“I do think, it was a lot to take on, you do the three-day training, I did it twice, I read the manual, just trying to figure out every way possible that you can just connect with youth, because I think that was like the really hard part, whether it's just really learning how to connect with the youth and I guess, as I became a Coach, it was like all on paper it seemed so good, and it just seemed like it would work so well. And then when you went out in the field to practice it, it was so much harder, and didn't work the same as it was described in the training, which became a little discouraging.”

4.c.3 *Capacity of the training and TA*

A growing number of training and TA sessions were provided each year to the new hires and existing staff. Driven by the needs and challenges faced by front-line staff and agencies implementing Fair Futures, the content of the training and TA has been evolving and expanding. For example, the Fair

Futures implementation team identified housing support as an area that could be strengthened, and in response, they designed additional technical training sessions around using housing systems, maintaining housing, and building independent living to deliver in the current fiscal year.

The newly established Center for Fair Futures expanded the implementation team’s training and TA delivery capacity. By adding the positions of Director of Coaching & Wellness, Relationship Manager, and Training and Evaluation Assistant, the team expects to ensure quality growth of the more targeted one-on-one support to all staff. They also expect to more consistently document the participation and engagement of staff in the capacity building activities, gather feedback, and evaluate what works and what does not.

4.d **Online Data Tracking Platform**

To select the very best system possible with a limited budget at the time, the implementation team created a Platform Committee comprising agency staff and leaders to participate in the planning, selection, and roll-out of the data tracking platform, a process that took 1.5 years to complete. As part of that process, a consultant conducted a landscape assessment of options nationally. As a result of the selection process, the Care4 Software platform was chosen to house Fair Futures program data. It stood out as a full-featured and proven technology platform that houses multiple other programs and makes updates daily. Care4 for Fair Futures,²⁷ which launched in the third quarter of 2020 as a critical resource and infrastructure underlying Fair Futures, intends to be a user-friendly program management and monitoring tool. Prior to that, program data were entered manually and tracked in Excel; the introduction of Care4 replaced that manual record-keeping and monitoring system. As a system-wide data tracking tool keeping records of academic, career, and housing outcomes for youth in foster care served by Fair Futures, it can be used to help support and guide program staff in *how to* help youth with each goal. In addition to the “steps” on how to do so, the platform made a large quantity of resources, tools, and materials available online for staff to use when they need them—these materials are regularly updated to reflect feedback and evolving needs.

The outcome evaluation will rely on the data for the Fair Futures program and on data from multiple other sources about the outcomes selected to assess the impact of the program. Therefore, it is important to understand how the Fair Futures program data has been tracked and whether it works well, as well as the quality and reliability of data. The following observations about the data in the Care4 platform are based on the relevant qualitative information gathered from focus groups with Fair Futures program leadership and staff members (the data users and data producers), our review of the data tables extracted from the Care4 platform, and consultation with Fair Futures Care4 data experts.

4.d.1 *Process of the online platform user experience*

One of the challenges faced by the Fair Futures implementation team has been tailoring Care4 to the Fair Futures program because the standardized back-end structure of Care4 limited the ability to make program-specific changes. Two agencies went through a six-month testing and piloting period during the planning phase, and they provided feedback to assist in tailoring Care4 to the Fair Futures program before the actual roll-out of the platform. All staff were provided opportunities to be trained on how to use the platform based on their role. One-on-one technical support sessions were also made available for staff. Over time, the implementation team has advocated for the Care4 founder to revamp the structure to improve the user experience and user interface (UX/UI).

During focus groups with staff, some thought the Care4 platform is “very put together” and “very organized,” but many staff struggled with the UX/UI. They made requests for the platform and its navigation to be more intuitive (more on navigation challenges below.) One Coach Supervisor said that

²⁷ <https://www.care4software.com/>

Care4 “looks aesthetically pleasing, but the actual use and navigation can be quite awkward.” More than the UI, however, staff discussed the challenges they had using the system. They acknowledged that, like any new system, there is a learning curve with Care4. Many staff who have been longer-term Care4 users also said that the system is in a constant state of construction, in that improvements have been regular and ongoing. Even so, difficulties remain.

4.d.1.1 *System navigation and processing speed*

One of the primary challenges noted about Care4 was with system navigation and reported inefficiencies with said navigation. For starters, not everyone finds the system intuitive. One person guessed that the back end of Care4 is transparent, but described the front end (the UX/UI) as “very complicated and confusing” and not user friendly.

Staff at all levels had much to say about the structure of Care4. One common complaint was about the display of information within the platform. Specifically, staff do not like how individual contacts and their associated goals are shown. Rather than a list of all individuals, from which a user would select a name and to view their corresponding details on a new page, the platform lists all of that information on the same page. That means that in order for a user to see detail associated with a specific person “X,” they have to bypass all detail about persons “A” through “W” to reach the name of the person they are looking for. Instead, they would like to be able to select a specific person from a list of all individuals and be taken to a new screen where they can view other details, like goals. (The Fair Futures implementation team reported that the Care4 team made a change in early 2022 to address this issue; it now separates youth and the goals into different pages.) Similarly, in response to one Coach Supervisor’s challenges with case transfers in Care4, they would like to be able to transfer a case to a new Coach by doing so at the level of the youth, not goal by goal.

Another challenge that seemed to be faced primarily by supervisors with report-generating permissions is with the fields they are asked to complete in order to generate reports. When attempting to run a report, staff are faced with many boxes to check in order to generate the report as desired. In some cases, staff do not even know what each of the checkboxes is asking for. In response to this issue, one Coach Supervisor suggested that the system was built for those who will be accessing and using the data tables stored on the back end. They said that they “feel like [the developers] built it backwards, and then when they got to the front for people who are going to use it, it’s not as simple as it should be.”

Another common difficulty staff at all levels had with the Care4 platform is the speed at which it processes information. For people who are entering information and case notes into multiple systems (i.e., Care4, CNNX, electronic record-keeping systems at the agency level), waiting for entered information to be reflected by the system, waiting for the next page to load, or waiting for a report to download is time that workers feel could be better spent elsewhere. One Coach Supervisor suggested that the speed issues may be due to system overload, occurring primarily around the time that data entries are due and many people are using the system at once. When it comes to Care4, one of the things staff discussed most often is their dislike of what they called the “jumping man” or the “jumping boy.” They described seeing this icon during times when they were already frustrated by the speed at which the platform was processing information, and over time, their disdain for the icon has grown.

“I do hate the jumping man, that jumping man just drives me crazy. Especially if you're having a barrier in the system and he's jumping. He looks so happy. I'm like, 'I'm not happy right now. Fix it.'”

“The little person that jumps up and down gets on my nerves a lot, because he's on the screen for too long of a time, and I'm trying to get things done.”

Staff’s dislike of the icons is less about an aversion to the icons themselves and more about what the icons signify. Staff describe each icon making an appearance right before an error or period of processing time. Over time, and after repeated exposure to the icons in combination with wait time or errors, staff have developed a strong, negative response. Efforts to address processing time and resolve errors are likely to

make a big difference for staff in their daily work. The implementation team suspects that system-wide speed as a broader infrastructure challenge could be related to agencies' low internet bandwidth. Care4 has previously made improvements to its speed and plans to continue its improvement efforts; these efforts are likely to help, but staff may continue to struggle if the issue with agencies' bandwidth is not also addressed.

4.d.1.2 *Data entry across different systems*

Many staff members from the focus groups talked about the challenges with duplicative data entry across different data systems. Although this is not an issue that is unique to Fair Futures, this was one of the most salient comments from staff at all levels. Everyone works with CNNX and Care4, and in addition to these, some also have agency-specific record keeping systems to maintain. Some staff also keep their own personal records (i.e., notes, spreadsheets). Much of the information required to be entered is repetitive, and it is time-consuming to record that information in different places regularly. While they did describe the differences between systems, they also said that the notes that need to be entered are nearly, if not entirely, identical. Because of that, staff spend up to twice as much time entering information because the same notes need to get added to different systems.

"If I could just streamline, and put all of my stuff into one platform, that would just make my life so much easier, because that's hard; it's hard to document it in both places."

Some leaders and Coaches pointed out that the time burden of entering information into multiple systems, and dealing with system slowdowns and errors, reduces the amount of time they are then able to spend providing services to youth. With a finite number of hours per day, data entry inefficiencies mean that staff are either 1) eating into personal time in order to absorb the additional time required to fulfill their duties or 2) they are more limited in the time they can spend on direct service activities, thereby decreasing the proportion of time spent with or for youth and increasing the proportion of time spent on indirect or administrative tasks. In one Coach's words:

"It's one or the other. It's either your notes are perfect and you haven't been having the time to engage your youth properly, or your notes are behind and you're doing all the work on the ground, like – it's kind of like the state of your notes is an indicator of how much time you have with your youth. If your notes are on point, it's probably because you haven't been able to set as much time with them because you're just, you know, doing the clerical side of things, and it's always this kind of back and forth."

As a workaround to the duplicative data entry, and in response to timeouts and other Care4 errors, staff developed a system of writing their notes in a separate location, like a Word document, and copying and pasting them into the relevant sections of each system. Said one Coach Supervisor, "[Staff] all do the Word docs, only because they have CONNECTIONS, and then they have our internal platform where they need to document, and the contact, it looks the same. It's the same documentation. It's just you're repeating it."²⁸

4.d.2 *Quality of the data tracking*

For the data tracked on Care4 to serve its purpose in a particular context such as program performance reporting, monitoring, and evaluation, it needs to accurately and reliably capture the program activities and meet certain quality criteria. During focus group conversations, staff reflected on data entry and their day-to-day work, data accuracy, and completeness. We also reviewed Care4 data tables focusing on the data linkage with foster care administrative data.

²⁸ The Center for Fair Futures has been in communication with OCFS about the possibility of integrating Care4 with CNNX. However, this is a lengthy and complex process.

4.d.2.1 *Scope of data tracked on Care4*

Besides recording basic demographic information on youth in foster care participating in the Fair Futures program and Fair Futures staff, Care4 focuses on tracking youth progress and outcomes in the domains of academic progress, career development, and housing support under the Fair Futures “Goals & Steps” framework. All 26 Fair Futures provider agencies are required to utilize the online platform. Core Fair Futures staff members such as Coaches, Coach Supervisors, Specialists, and Tutors are responsible for the data entry to capture the Fair Futures services provided to youth and progress made each step of the way. Their work is supported by hundreds of resources/tools/materials available on the online platform. The online platform is also designed to create automated reports at different levels (youth-level, service-level, agency-level, and program-level), with the flexibility to support provider agencies’ leadership’s program management and program staff’s continuous monitoring, as well as to assist ACS’ system-level performance review and evaluation across the 26 foster care agencies. In terms of information captured and functionalities of data usage and reporting, staff think that Care4 serves its purpose for program monitoring and management.

“I would say it does capture a lot of information, especially because the Care4 Team and Fair Futures are always coming up with new reports that you can pull in terms of youth and their progress, but also in terms of coaches and what we're doing. So, I feel like it's just a matter of staff knowing how people do these reports and how to use them. But I think all the information is there in the app. They have many different options of how we can use that data, not just for Fair Futures stuff, but for your own agency and your own staff.”

4.d.2.2 *Data capture, completeness, and linkage*

Staff were somewhat frustrated and concerned that Care4 and the fields it offers and requires do not accurately reflect the full scope of the work being done by staff. Because two of the foci of Fair Futures are data collection and evidence use, staff described heavy emphasis on the quantitative measures that are considered markers of the model’s, agencies’, and individuals’ successes (or lack thereof). These indicators track certain aspects of the work, but staff worry that they do not fully capture what is actually happening as they build and sustain relationships with youth, and as they work toward Fair Futures’ objectives in combination with young people’s personal goals. For example, several people talked about the efforts they make to help youth with tasks that fall outside of direct education, career exploration or employment, college, or housing activities. This includes things like assisting youth with getting state IDs, learner’s permits, driver’s licenses, bank accounts, and passports.²⁹ According to one Coach Supervisor, “All of the coached youth [under their supervision] have New York State IDs. A good handful of them have obtained their learner’s permits. I have youths right now who are enrolled in driving classes, they take lessons. All of our youth have passports . . . , they all have bank accounts. And those are things that are not tracked through Fair Futures, Care4.”

Some coaches recommended creating a “miscellaneous” category of sorts, so that they have places to track efforts and successes that are not currently captured in the platform. They said this can be an important addition because “sometimes you need to work on those small goals [i.e., motivation, driver’s license attainment, getting out of bed] to get to those career and educational goals.” A similar recommendation was given for crediting and tracking the work Specialists are doing with non-coached

²⁹ Per communication with the Fair Futures team in November 2022, not tracking life skills in Care4 was a deliberate decision born of communication with Fair Futures leaders and staff. The decision not to track life skills in Care4 was due, in part, to the effort to reduce duplicative data entry (ex: between Care4 and the Preparing Youth for Adulthood [PYA] Checklist).

youth.³⁰ Another Coach Supervisor summarized the complexity well, as it pertains to Fair Futures' goals, Care4 utilization, and staff effectiveness and morale:

"I think that when Fair Futures first came out, we really boasted about it not being one-size-fits-all. But it is becoming one-size-fits-all, is what I'm seeing, especially with my leadership. It's becoming very data driven: 'When we pulled the report and we looked, this is what we saw.' So, I echo that sentiment of coaches feeling like, 'I'm not doing my job.' Even though they are and they're going above and beyond in some instances. If we looked at the data, sometimes it can look like you just hadn't done anything this year. None of your students hit the preset goals that we set—although we call that meeting the students where they are. Are we really meeting the students where they are? If we're required to have these four goals open every year, it's like we're setting where the students should be."

Some staff and supervisors reported experiencing missing data in Care4.³¹ What they described is entering information in a field, saving said entry, and coming back later to find that their entry was gone. This glitch was not specific to any one field and was reported to occur throughout the system. Like they do with duplicate entries in multiple systems, staff described capturing everything in a Word document while entering their notes in Care4; that way, when and if entries disappear, they have a record of what they wrote and do not have to start over from scratch. One Coach described the experience by saying:

"I'm hoping maybe my notes will still be there, [but] they're completely erased, and not actually there. So, if I had all my thoughts down, they disappear. And I'm like, 'I gotta put that note in again.' So, what I've done now, because I know that technically Care4 is not completely fixed or there's a lot of bugs, is I have to cut and paste after almost every sentence I put in and put into a Word document. ... So, if I lose it, I can cut and paste from a Word document back into my notes."

Two issues mentioned by staff are system errors and the inconsistency of such errors. A Coach Supervisor recalled trying to run the "coach youth report" and repeatedly having to close the browser because of problems with the system. They said, "A lot of that goes on. I feel like it's just a waste of time, and I get very, very frustrated with it." Another Coach Supervisor talked about a similar experience, but also discussed the inconsistent nature of the errors. They said, "I get a lot of error messages, and then they will work at some point, but not when I need it to work. Yesterday it was working perfectly fine. This morning when I'm trying to pull that same report, I'm getting an error message which to me, it was very frustrating."

To analyze the Fair Futures service participation and outcomes for different subgroups of youth with varying foster care experience, data linkage needs to be established between the program data tracked on Care4 and foster care data tracked in CNNX, first to scope out the Fair Futures target population—youth in foster care ages 11 and above. Subsequently, the data needs to be connected with outcome data from education, housing, and employment systems. Although there is a common identifier in Care4 and CNNX that can be used for linking, for the data matching required for the analysis presented in Section 4.g of this report, about 6% of the youth in Care4 did not have a match in CNNX. We will continue to explore the causes of this issue during outcome evaluation. In addition, it is crucial to be able to track the number of unique young persons who received the Fair Futures services at different time points in their foster care experience. From our review, a small percentage of youth have more than one identifier. This could happen under circumstances where the youth experienced an inter-agency transfer, or when a case closed out and a different Fair Futures staff initiated a new case. The Care4 data team has been cleaning up the duplicates to resolve this issue.

³⁰ Based on our review of the Care4 data structure, it appears that there is a process for Specialists to document the Targeted Services they provide to non-coached youth, but it is different from the way in which college/career/housing services are documented for coached youth. There may be some confusion about this, and/or it may be that any reporting on the Targeted Services for non-coached youth receives less emphasis, so staff are unaware of it.

³¹ According to the implementation team, not one piece of data/note has ever been lost. It was always recovered on the backend if that happened.

4.d.3 *Data support and continuous improvement*

4.d.3.1 *Feedback on data support*

Despite challenges with the UI experience mentioned above, Fair Futures staff at all levels of the agency praised the support they are able to get from the Care4 team. Matt Sexton and Nadine Yuvienco were mentioned by name multiple times. Staff said they are “very helpful,” “very nice,” and “amazing.”

They also appreciated the formal training they get for Care4. Even though learning to use the system can be challenging, staff like the Fair Futures training dedicated to Care4 and feel that it sets them up to be able to navigate the system with greater proficiency. As one Coach Supervisor said,

“Whatever your problem is, there’s three to four options on how you can solve it and who can help you and in which way can you receive information. You can look it up and read on it on your own with the [manualization] that Fair Futures have performed. You can have a one-on-one session. You can have a group session. I mean depending on your learning style. Fair Futures [is] very mindful to present information to you in various forms.”

There is consensus that the Care4 team is responsive and willing to help individuals solve problems they are having with the system, but some expressed a desire for more in-the-moment access to assistance. Even with a responsive Care4 team that can typically respond to people within 24 hours, Fair Futures staff often find that they need assistance with something before that 24-hour mark. One idea staff brought up was to have a designated quality improvement or data specialist in-house at each agency. With Fair Futures’ focus on using data to generate evidence that informs a process of improvement, they felt that a designated role would be helpful for staff – in terms of training and ad hoc support and for general data and platform management.³² Leaders and Coach Supervisors discussed the Care4 support they currently provide to their staff, so a designated data specialist could also be seen as alleviating some of their responsibilities.

4.d.3.2 *Continuous Improvement*

The way in which the Fair Futures data team works with front-line staff naturally builds feedback loops. Through staff data capacity building activities such as targeted online platform training, one-on-one coaching/training, and ongoing technical support sessions, conversations between those working on the front-end and back-end take place frequently. Sufficient opportunities are provided to staff to report on first-hand and real-world data issues, and in turn, for the data team to better monitor and control the data issues, to constantly address data quality concerns, and to improve the data system. This helps to improve data quality at its source. The following are some highlights of the efforts toward continuous improvement made by the data team:

- **Strengthening data tracking for non-coached youth:** The data around service uptake, “Goals & Steps,” and outcomes has been tracked for coached youth since the implementation of Care4; however, because of inadequate staffing, tracking of outcomes in Care4 was not required for young people who do not engage in coaching or tutoring. Since the beginning of 2022, the program modified the practice and started to track outcome data for non-coached youth.
- **Data quality assurance:** Routine data quality checks of the data in Care4 were put in place, and system-wide data cleaning efforts were performed on a regular schedule to improve data quality and support accurate data reporting at different levels. For example, the data team conducted a system-wide data cleaning effort to handle the duplicated youth information.

³² As of fiscal year 2021-2022, agencies were able to use Fair Futures funding for a Care4 Data Specialist according to demand. The Care4 Data Specialist is envisioned as an in-house staff member dedicated to providing Care4 technical assistance and data support via daily one-on-one TA sessions or email.

Duplicates often occur when a youth moves from one agency to another because agency staff cannot see youth information recorded by a different agency. Through data matching, the data team was able to clean up and deactivate all duplicates in the “People” file and other related files.

- Data Specialists and Care4 support: As of fiscal year 2021-2022, agencies were able to use Fair Futures funding for a Care4 Data Specialist according to demand. The Care4 Data Specialist is envisioned as an in-house staff member dedicated to providing Care4 technical assistance and data support via daily one-on-one TA sessions or email.
- Expansion of the data team: In the summer of 2022, the Center for Fair Futures was established, and data expertise and support was one of the core functions the Center was determined to strengthen. Designated positions such as Data Analyst and Dedicated Trainer were created. With this expansion, the team has already started to provide more training around data use and offer more targeted TA. The proactive approach the expanded data team is taking to engage the data users will help build agency capacity in data use and promote data-driven decision making.

4.e Operating Fair Futures during the Pandemic

The Fair Futures model and its implementation within each of the 26 foster care agencies in NYC launched in December of 2019. As agencies began restructuring their organizations, policies, and practices to align with the model, and as they were hiring and training staff to fill Fair Futures roles, COVID-19 arrived in the United States, and specifically, in NYC. A state of emergency was declared in New York state on March 7, 2020 and four days later, on March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic. New York City quickly became the national epicenter, experiencing the effects of the early days of the pandemic more quickly and severely than the rest of the nation. This timing, a mere four months after launch, unfortunately coincided with the ramp-up of Fair Futures’ implementation, causing providers to have to pivot expeditiously. Of course, simultaneously, individuals, service providers, and systems were tasked with doing the same, with effects rippling throughout the city and state service infrastructure.

These alterations were a direct hit to the process of care (how things were done), the quality of care (how well they were done, at least for a time), and the capacity of care (the resources available to implement Fair Futures as intended).

4.e.1 Impact of COVID-19 on the process of care

First and foremost, the pandemic caused dramatic changes to physical environments. Among Fair Futures agencies, some (i.e., those with residential programs) retained their full suite of in-person activities and services, but many others adapted to a remote work and/or hybrid work structure. As remote work became the predominant arrangement, and as hiring continued, agency leaders and staff found themselves with teams of people who had never met in person, and they were challenged with building team rapport and relationships in new ways. The Fair Futures implementation team worked to support this by bringing agency teams together regularly, and by creating opportunities for them to connect with peers across agencies. Said one Coach Supervisor:

“COVID was interesting, from coming into a remote environment; now it's more hybrid, which is great. So just ... how do you build a team? You know, how do you... I think that's more general, like, how do you come into this work environment getting used to it? What's the norms? What are the norms? How do you build relationships with youth in a hybrid environment? How do you engage? So just being creative—how do you create with your team?”

Similarly, an agency leader described the difficulty of building a team and working together during virtual work: “I think, for us, that it has been difficult just to build a cohesive team, again, solely because everyone started during the pandemic It was hard, and we had to find, you know, creative ways on Zoom to do team building, and supervisions, and division meetings.” Another Coach Supervisor mentioned the complexity of referring young people to other professional staff they (the Coach or Coach Supervisor) had never met. They said:

“I guess more of the, just the remote aspect of like, because you're not in the office, you may not know the people who are referring or how do you, like, if you're not in the office, how do you... yeah, I could call a youth or I could text a youth, but who am I to them? So that that could be a challenge if it's not a warm handoff or if they're not responsive.”

However, the constraints of the pandemic pushed all levels of staff to be flexible and think more creatively. Coaches described the efforts they made to effectively work with youth and to meet them in ways that adhered to requirements but allowed young people to feel supported and cared for. These included masking and meeting outside during times when it was not standard to meet in person. A Career Specialist discussed the challenge of figuring out how to offer in-person career and internship experiences in a virtual environment. One of the things they did was pivot skill-building activities to have a stronger focus on proficiently using software and applications that will be beneficial to young people during a job search or job, such as Google Docs, Google Slides, and Gmail. Coaches also made extra efforts to identify services that were needed, and they brought laptops or tablets to the homes of the youth they worked with. One Coach said they sometimes brought young people “little gifts to remind them that, ‘Hey, even though I’m not there in the physical, here is something to remind you that I’m still here.’”

An agency leader detailed the efforts of their organization and its staff during the early days of the pandemic, saying:

“I would say that COVID-19 definitely created some challenges, but I think we were able to navigate them pretty well. As soon as the pandemic hit, we assessed our entire population of youth to see what their needs were. We were able to provide them with devices. We were able to easily transition to virtual tutoring, which became better because it allowed our tutoring providers to be able to tutor more young people because it eliminated the travel time needed, where they could just log in to Zoom. At first, it was difficult because they were using Google Classroom and you needed Zoom accounts and devices. But now, all of our users have access to a device, and it's not common for them not to have a device.”

Later in the trajectory of COVID-19, as some of the early restrictions lifted and more in-person activities resumed during the summer of 2021, staff experienced difficulty transitioning back to in-person work—or to in-person work for the first time. Some workers were hired early in the pandemic, so they began and acclimated to their roles in remote or hybrid environments. Making the move to a “pre-pandemic” style of work proved challenging. For one thing, during the height of the pandemic, virtual options were offered for many activities and responsibilities (e.g., Fair Futures workshops and ACS-led trainings), but as COVID-19 restrictions have lifted, those same virtual offerings are no longer available. This means that the process by which workers performed their duties changed. Instead of meeting with youth virtually, via Zoom, workers had to adjust to meeting them in person. Doing so necessitates travel time between meetings and more exposure to spaces that may feel less safe, given their personal circumstances. At the same time, others were eager to spend time with young people and peers in physical spaces and to meet with youth face-to-face.

The roles and responsibilities of youth and staff also shifted during the pandemic. According to a Coach Supervisor:

“When COVID happened, they just couldn't find opportunities, which obviously none of us could. So, the Coach ended up taking a much more active and proactive role within that, which hadn't been previously the culture of how employment would happen. Like, the idea of the residents is that they get these skills, so that when they're on their own, they know how to go out and navigate, finding a job and stuff on their own.”

And so I think the coach, out of necessity, became more involved in that area because of COVID, and because of those kind of restrictions.”

In addition to the ways responsibilities were shuffled and transferred between youth and staff, the pandemic resulted in adjustments to relationships with schools and other service systems. Agency leaders and Specialists described the challenges of not being able to take care of needs in person with as much ease as was possible pre-pandemic. For instance, getting a birth certificate or social security card required an appointment, when those things could have been previously accomplished on a walk-in basis. A Housing Specialist talked about the virtual environments’ effects on interactions with Department of Housing Preservation and Development inspectors; having the opportunity to have “that interaction with the inspector, it made things much easier because that relationship was more of a bonding sort of experience. And I miss that about going there and chopping it up with the inspector, and if [they] saw a minor violation, [they’d] let it go and still process my application.” Another leader discussed the impact on service systems, saying that it particularly affected “collaboration with different systems, ... with the lack of communication from other systems, whether it’s getting vital documentation, or the school placement office.”

Additionally, the pandemic led to technical changes in the way staff interacted with youth. Where people formerly would have had impromptu meetings with young people or arranged to meet in person, they were relying on alternate methods of communication. Rather than the traditional warm handoffs staff described when being introduced to a new young person, those transfers were conducted via text, phone, or email, and all subsequent contact occurred virtually. For some people the virtual environment was a welcome work structure, but for others, it complicated things. Staff also found that it has been difficult to navigate meetings and relationships with young people as everyone jostles from in-person to virtual, and back to in-person or hybrid. A Coach said:

“Some of the youth don’t want to meet in person, ... – they barely want to be there for that once a month with their case planner, because they don’t have to have conversations with the case planner; they can just go, ‘Okay, bye-bye.’ But ... it’s been difficult, because now I’m really coming to talk to you, and you really have to sit down with me for like 20 minutes and have an actual conversation, and that’s been difficult.”

Conversely, a Housing Specialist described the improved ease with which young people are able to participate in their care, services, and goals without substantial disruption to their other responsibilities. For example, “Even when we have our ACS meeting, the kids are able to jump in those meetings as well, and they do, and they’re on the phone and they’re just going everywhere, I feel like it helps.”

4.e.2 Impact of COVID-19 on the quality of care

The pandemic left its mark on the relationship-building and relationship-sustaining efforts staff made with youth, and it had significant effects on youth engagement. This was due to several factors: remote work and service delivery, vaccine mandates for youth, and access to physical spaces and places.

Remote work environments affected the quality of work and service delivery. For some staff, virtual work was a welcome change. Some cited easier relationship building with young people and better engagement from them. People felt safe and comfortable, and staff appreciated that they could weave from meeting to meeting without the need for travel or transition time. That meant that working within a particular geographic region became less important, so the door opened for staff to work with youth they might otherwise not have been able to work with. For other staff, remote work presented more of a challenge. As mentioned earlier, it could be difficult for staff and youth to feel like there had been an effective warm handoff when a new assignment was made, and although the new staff member could call or text the youth, it made them wrestle with the question of, “Who am I to them?” One Coach Supervisor described the challenge of the experience of remote work well:

“Because COVID, obviously, affected our home with all of our families. Sometimes the households are crowded, it could just be me at home, or everyone's home. And we have children, and they're all running around on our Zoom calls. So, everyone knew that Zoom calls weren't gonna be the most efficient, and they really weren't. But we had to make the best of it and do the job that we needed to do to help our youth. But I would say we felt the pain of our youth; we were tired.”

Another factor affecting the quality of Fair Futures implementation was vaccination mandates. At the same time that agencies and employers were contending with vaccine requirements for their staff, Fair Futures workers were grappling with the challenges that emerged from vaccine requirements for youth. This became a particularly prevalent difficulty for young people seeking (or maintaining) employment. As a Coach Supervisor said, “There's a lot of young people who do not want to be vaccinated, right, and that did impact 100% how employable they were, and they would be fine with that—making that sacrifice of not being employable if it meant they didn't have to get the vaccine.” For staff, that meant that they were tasked with figuring out how to help youth work toward their goals, even in the face of significant barriers. A Career Specialist described the complexity by saying, “You have the dilemma of kids not wanting to be vaccinated, and even though vaccination restrictions have been lifted in New York City for the most part, I say a lot of jobs [require] vaccinations still. So it's very challenging, but we try to work around that and kind of just inform and let the cards fall where they may.”

Staff and youth also struggled with the limited access to physical spaces and in-person activities that resulted from measures to stop or slow the spread of COVID-19. Coaches, Coach Supervisors, and Specialists discussed how the open-door policies at their agencies had been helpful for building relationships with young people: “We had this open space in [agency name]. Youth would just come in, and it was a place for them that they just wanted to be, right? And some of this was COVID – COVID kinda stole some of that from us.” Formerly casual, unscheduled interactions allowed youth and staff to develop relationships slowly and organically over time, in small increments, and that environment also allowed for easier maintenance of existing relationships with current or former youth participants. A Middle School Specialist described that change to staff-youth dynamics well, saying:

“Just everything is on Zoom, basically. Not a lot of face to face, not a lot of, ‘Oh, let's go out.’ Like a meet and greet beyond Zoom as opposed to in person, which could be a little awkward. But everything is virtual. So, that's the biggest thing, or even places that you will want to take the students might be closed because all operations are different or they were open before but then COVID, they never reopened kind of thing.”

Other staff described relationships with youth as “difficult” or “strained” during times when they were fully virtual, going so far as to say that the environment “has really kind of changed the way we work and [build] relationships.” A Specialist said, “prior to COVID, it was really easy because the students were already there. You might have seen them for, like, other events or meetings. And so it was just easy to, like, build that relationship and have that connection. But you know, now, it's a little bit more difficult.”³³

In addition to how access to physical spaces and activities affected relationships with youth, they also affected other aspects of a young person's experience with systems. For example, a Housing Specialist discussed the pandemic-era change in apartment searching, saying, “with this Zoom thing, they're looking at the apartment through a phone or something; it's not the same.” Beyond virtual interactions, vaccines, and changes to in-person opportunities, the pandemic exacerbated what was already going on, such as poor physical or mental health and inequities in spaces like healthcare and education. At a time when people needed more from support systems, there was less available and less support to go around, as resources and individual energy were diverted to the most critical crises. Despite these constraints, the

³³ Per the Fair Futures implementation team, approximately 3,000 young people received one-on-one, tailored (virtual) supports during the first and second years of implementation: middle school support (965 students during year 1; 843 during year 2), coaching support (1,544 youth matched with a Coach during year 1; 1,569 during year 2), tutoring support (614 received one-on-one tutoring during year 2), and targeted services support (842 young people received targeted services during year 2).

Fair Futures implementation team worked diligently to make sure young people were still receiving high-quality services, even if they needed to occur in new and creative ways. In addition to the agency team meetings and systemwide learning communities facilitated and offered for staff support, one of the resources provided to Fair Futures Coaches by the team was a resource called, “Tips For Coaching During Stressful Times.”³⁴ Another was a guide to coaching best practices—specifically designed for the period coinciding with COVID-19.³⁵ The latter prepared Coaches with suggestions and prompts for conversations around specific topics like education and food access and needs. Throughout this period, the Fair Futures implementation team continued to offer (virtual) workshops and one-on-one TA sessions for staff, and were on call and ready to support staff through whatever individual difficulties they, or the young people with whom they were working, were experiencing.

4.e.3 Impact of COVID-19 on the capacity of care

During focus groups, agency leaders discussed numerous impacts of the pandemic, and one predominant topic was about changes in the hiring and retention of staff.³⁶ As the pandemic progressed, most leaders noticed higher-than-usual staff turnover, as people made decisions to leave, and those same positions became difficult to fill. Some agencies were fully staffed leading into March of 2020, and those staff stayed through the pandemic, with little to no turnover. Because of the nature of their work as service providers (some of which are residential settings), many agencies required at least some in-person time for their staff. Later, with citywide vaccine mandates, some agencies experienced departures of staff and difficulty filling empty positions as a result. Lastly, there is a far-reaching cultural shift in employment benefits and conditions that rose to prominence during the years of the pandemic. Agency leaders reported that staff and prospective employees are more likely than they used to be to desire remote work, job flexibility, and higher pay. Reductions in resources—employees, in this instance—have a direct effect on a worker’s ability to do their job well or for all eligible young people to have the opportunity to benefit from the full expression of Fair Futures.

One significant effect of the pandemic was the strain felt by staff. Individual workers were stretched by personal circumstances (i.e., caregiving and childcare, illness, adjusting to remote work, family unit job searches or job loss), but they were also feeling the effects of a universally challenging period in history on a sector that was stretched for capacity before the difficulties brought on by COVID-19. One Coach Supervisor brought up the pandemic and how it coincided with the challenge of implementing a new service model, saying that staff “have been overextended” and that the compounded challenges of the pandemic plus Fair Futures were “even more [of an] extension.” Others noted the specific strain on their agencies and the foster care system because of resignations of staff, and particularly because of caseworker turnover. Changes and gaps in staffing meant that workers experienced blurred lines around their roles and responsibilities. Role clarity suffered as individuals took on tasks that, under the model, should have been delegated to others; however, as a result of the circumstances, there were no people filling those “other” roles.

As so many things moved to virtual environments (i.e., service delivery, mental and physical healthcare, school), agencies, staff, and youth experienced the inequity of technology access. Where young people could have formerly participated in activities in person without technology, they suddenly needed devices and reliable internet access in order to participate in those same activities. Programs arose that worked to help young people acquire those things, but it was not without time, money, and significant effort on the part of those working to provide what youth needed. Coaches and Coach Supervisors said they “provided

³⁴ <https://resources.fairfuturesny.org/AppendixC10>

³⁵ <https://resources.fairfuturesny.org/AppendixC8>

³⁶ The Fair Futures implementation team reports approximately 300 staff were hired and/or trained on the Fair Futures model by the end of the first year of implementation (7 months).

[their] students with computers that didn't have computers, so [they] would go to their homes. ... They made road trips to bring computers if the students needed, Wi-Fi. So [they] were always hand-on to make sure [the] students had what they needed."

Adding to the physical needs of equipment and access to the internet, staff and youth alike needed spaces that would allow for participation in remote activities. Depending on what an activity was, this also meant locating a space that was safe, quiet, and confidential—notably difficult to do in many living circumstances.

Of course, despite best efforts, no Fair Futures team members were prepared to provide for youth needs in this way; in the leadup to Fair Futures' implementation, no one could have anticipated the upcoming needs and contextual changes to the foster care world. One Career Specialist said, "The difficult part that you cannot be really trained for is a post-COVID society, and a virtual society working with youth, and that's just something you can learn on the job. ... sometimes you have to take on the role of being a technology or IT professional. ... No one will retrain you on that; you just have to learn."

Moving to a remote environment also meant that young people suddenly needed to be *proficient* with technology in order to participate in the new fully virtual world. While many youth were comfortable with a number of the technological aspects, there was still a learning curve as they adjusted to new systems (i.e., Google Classroom) or learned how to work with certain technology for the first time (i.e., Zoom, Teams, Microsoft Office). A Career Specialist described how that plays into a young person's employment or career aspirations saying, "a lot of youth that I work with aren't necessarily proficient with technology as far as even attaching resumes in email or having a Zoom session. A lot of jobs require that; I know for example, Target. I had a youth work for Target, and their interviews now are virtual." Many professional staff talked about being the support people for youth as they adjusted to new technology and new ways of using technology.

4.e.4 Impact of COVID-19 on youth

Considering that Fair Futures' implementation took place during, and shifted in response to, the pandemic, it is important to note the impact of the COVID-19 on youth in foster care and on those aging out of care. Many of the educational and vocational difficulties faced by those aging out of foster care have been exacerbated by the pandemic, which has had broad undesirable effects on their physical and mental health. Additionally, as previously discussed, shutdowns and physical distancing policies made it even more difficult for youth in foster care to establish and maintain local support networks.

This landscape created new challenges for Fair Futures staff and the young people with whom they work. As a Specialist said:

"We work with youth who are already disenfranchised and may have certain barriers that prohibit them or can, I wouldn't want to say disqualify, but that are challenging for them. I think COVID definitely increased those things in terms of anxiety and nervousness and uncertainty of the world, which is normal. These youth already have overcome so much, so to add that in, it's a whole new dynamic."

One Coach discussed their relationship with a young person whose anxiety and aversion to social interaction ballooned during the pandemic, ultimately reaching a point where they were unable to leave their room or join calls via video. After persistent, intentional work together, that young person was able to take steps toward increasing their social exposure and interaction. A Career Specialist talked about the growing anxiety they have seen young people face in their job searches, especially as applicants are asked to navigate online systems in order to apply, interview, and sometimes work. In response, the Career Specialist described taking on a little more responsibility and working with youth on their initial applications.

Fair Futures staff have been left wondering how the pandemic will affect young people longer term, as they transition to adulthood and build independent lives. They observed young people struggling to

engage in virtual school, having difficulty picking up new academic concepts or applying for jobs in a remote environment, facing growing mental health concerns, experiencing bumpy transitions into and out of a heavily virtual existence, and generally feeling disconnected from others. One Coach described the short-term effects of this period well:

“So many of them are just shut down – completely shut down. I would say it took a lot longer [to engage with youth during the pandemic] – so like they were saying that they – they're down to have a relationship but they mentally cannot – the weight of, like, planning for the future or, like, looking for a job. Like, they're just mentally stuck and so shut down from a pandemic. ... so many of my youth are still feeling the ripple effect. So it's trying to like help them out of a rut. Like that's – that's played a really big impact on their ability to move forward.”

In the midst of young people’s struggles and the concerns staff hold, they are also doing what they can to meet youth where they are and to empathize with their experiences. Said one Coach Supervisor:

“There were also times where our staff related to our youth where we struggled ourselves, we felt the pain, we were not always strong. I mean, honestly, it was not the easiest thing because being on a Zoom call 24/7 and not really being visible with our peers, our colleagues... where the students really wanted to be in school. They didn't want to be home because they felt disconnected. We did feel disconnected as well.”

However, for some youth and service providers, COVID-19, while creating other stressors and challenges within a young person’s ecology, did not result in a substantial disruption of services. Residential service settings continued with business as usual, with staff and youth having regular in-person contact through the duration of the pandemic. One Coach Supervisor said, “There are no breaks; we were on the front line. [... COVID-19] didn’t affect the work that we do with our youth.” Another said, “[My team] didn’t skip a beat throughout COVID. I mean, we’re here every day. We were here through COVID every day. Our youth are here. It’s RTC, so they live here; they go to school here.”

4.f Impact of Fair Futures Funding Change

Fair Futures was funded at \$10 million during its first operational year (FY 2019-2020), at \$12 million during its second year (FY 2020-2021), and at \$20 million during its third (FY 2021-2022).³⁷ Fair Futures funding affected provider agencies’ work with youth in two predominant ways: staffing and supports.

4.f.1 Staffing

The influx of Fair Futures funding to agencies allowed them to hire new staff specifically to fill Fair Futures positions. In some cases, this meant hiring internally (ex: a case manager may have been hired as a Coach), and then initiating a search to fill the position from which that person moved. For those agencies that were already implementing a coaching model, they were able to expand their teams; other agencies were able to build their teams from the ground up. Coupled with caps on caseload counts imposed under the Fair Futures model, having (more) dedicated Fair Futures staff meant that those staff were able and empowered to spend more time and give more individualized attention to young people working with Coaches and/or Specialists. At agencies where there was previously no coaching model, the funding provided by Fair Futures allowed youth served by those agencies to have access to Coaches for the first time. However, not all youth have Coaches at this juncture, and additional funding for those positions means that more youth will have Coaches and specialized, targeted support in the future. This is especially pertinent as Fair Futures embraces the formalized support of young people until age 26 and as young people are able to continue with Coaching support, even upon leaving foster care.

³⁷ With New York City Council approval, Fair Futures will be funded for \$30 million during FY 2022-2023 (<https://council.nyc.gov/press/2022/06/14/2197/>).

4.f.2 Supports

Fair Futures funding also bolstered the development of resources and support opportunities used and accessed by staff and leaders. Resources include the Care4 platform, One Degree, Hats & Ladders, and the website, among others. In addition to a team of people that did not exist before Fair Futures and to whom staff have access (this initially consisted of Emil Ramnarine, Katie Napolitano, Matt Sexton, and Nadine Yuvienco, but has since grown substantially), available opportunities for support from Fair Futures team members include peer networks and learning communities, mandatory and optional trainings, and one-on-one TA sessions. Consequently, those opportunities lead to staff’s access to resources, knowledge, and information that are then passed on to the young people.

4.g Fair Futures Target Population

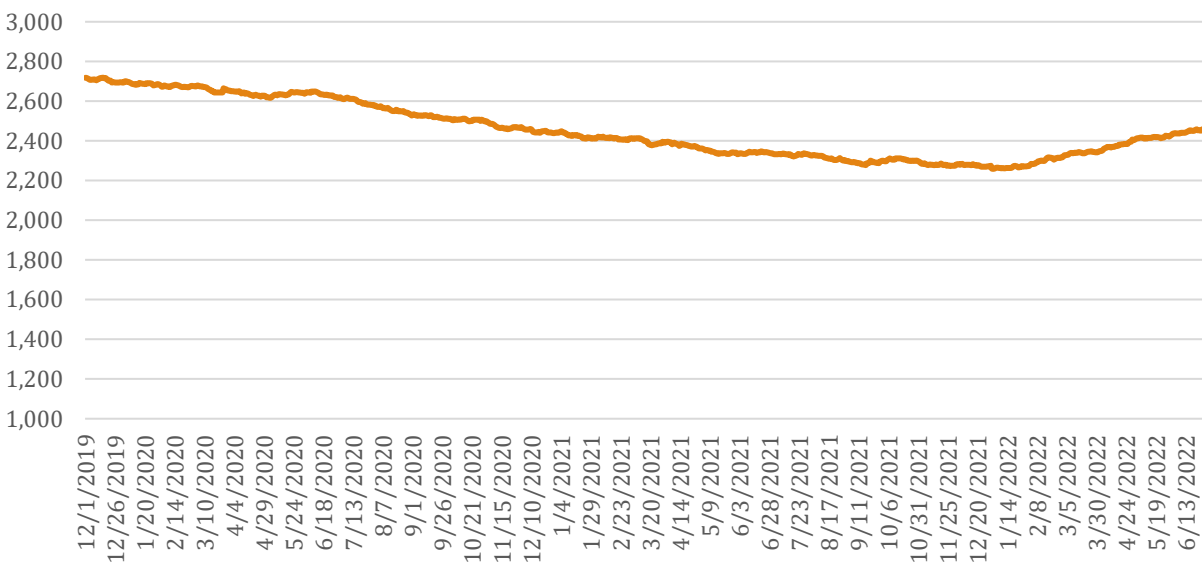
4.g.1 Fair Futures eligible youth daily census

The analysis presented in this section provides an understanding of changes over time in the population of youth who were eligible to be served by Fair Futures because they were between the ages of 11 and 21 and were placed with one of the 26 foster care agencies that provide Fair Futures services. We begin by looking at the daily census or caseload—this is the number of Fair Futures-eligible youth who were in care on each day between December 1, 2019 (when the Fair Futures program began) and June 30, 2022 (the latest data available to us at this time from the foster care administrative data). This analysis allows us to quickly identify whether the number of Fair Futures-eligible youth is growing or shrinking.

Figure 3 shows that the daily census of Fair Futures-eligible youth started at a high level of more than 2,700 youth. This historical “stock” of youth at the beginning of the observation period is the starting point for the Fair Futures program; with the new inflows and outflows of youth through the foster care system over time, it formed the active group of Fair Futures-eligible youth who became the potential target participants of the Fair Futures program.

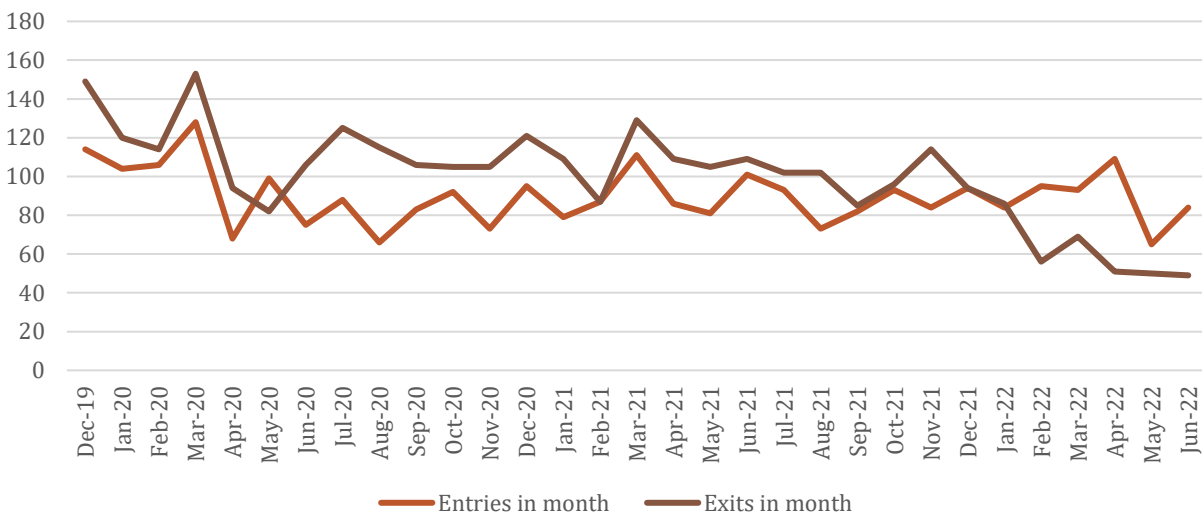
The daily census declined gradually from the initial stock of more than 2,700 youth to a low of 2,260 youth in January 2022, despite slight fluctuations around May 2020 and October 2021. Since January 2022, it has started to go back up—not to the starting level, but to about 2,461 by the end of June 2022 (the average of the daily census during the observation window).

Figure 3. Daily Census of Fair Futures-Eligible Youth



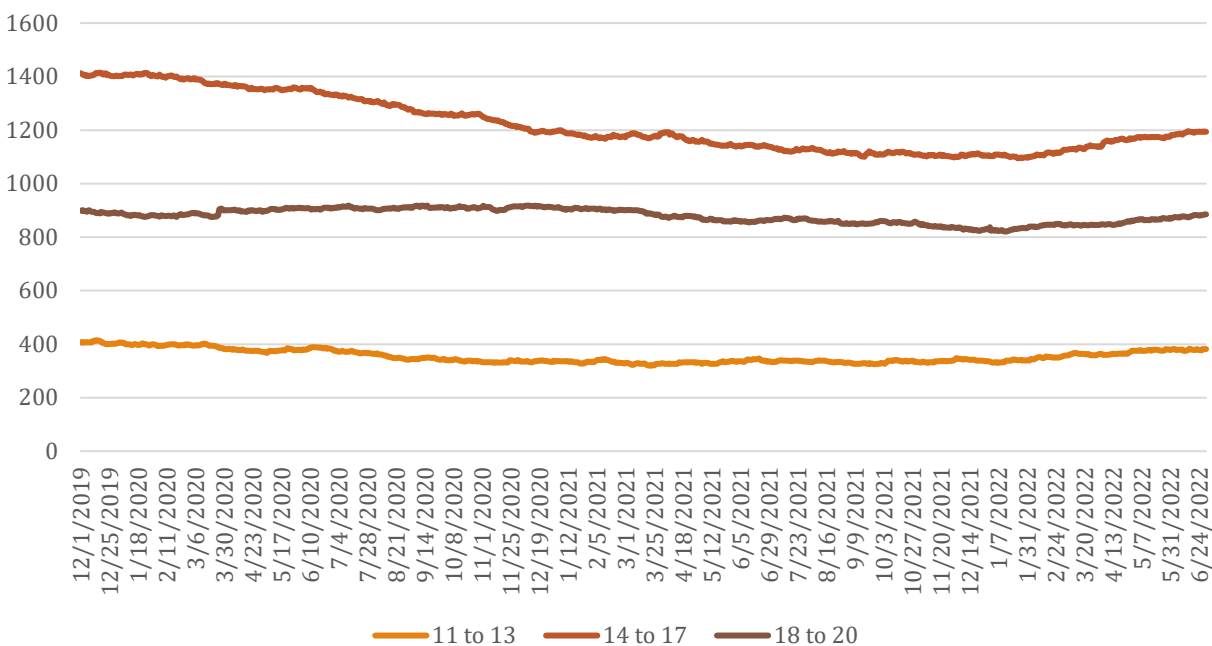
There are underlying processes and conditions that drive the census trend we observe here. When the census is stable over time, it is because the various forces that cause children to move in and out of care are at equilibrium. When the size of the daily census changes, it is because there is an imbalance between the number of admissions and exits. When we see a decline in the census, we should expect that the number of exits exceeds the number of entries leading up to the period of decline. Where we see an increase in census, the reversed pattern would occur behind the scenes—the entries would exceed the exits. For example, Figure 3 shows that there was a steady decrease in the daily census between June 2020 and January 2022; correspondingly, in Figure 4, we observe that the number of exits was greater than the number of admissions starting from May 2020, but the two lines started to cross around December 2021.

Figure 4. Monthly Admissions and Exits for Fair Futures-Eligible Youth



In Figure 5, we show the age composition of the daily census of the Fair Futures-eligible population. The largest group of the daily census was the group of youth ages 14 to 17. They accounted for about half of the daily census, and their trend followed the overall daily census trend. The group in the middle is older youth ages 18 to 21, who made up slightly over one-third of the total census. They have been stable at around 880, ranging from a low of 821 to a high of 918 youth. Lastly, we have the group of youth ages 11 to 13, about 14% of the overall daily census, which has been relatively stable at around 350 youth.

Figure 5. Daily Census of Fair Futures-Eligible Youth By Age



Looking at the daily census by individual agency, the 26 agencies could naturally group into four categories: the two largest agencies, which had averages of 250 to 270 Fair Futures-eligible youth on a daily basis. On the other end of the spectrum, we have eight agencies that kept their average daily census at fewer than 50 youth. For the agencies that fell in the middle, the majority (11) of them carried an average of 100 to 150 youth on a daily basis, and the remaining 6 kept an average daily census of youth between 50 to 100 youth. The figures that show daily census by agency in these four groups can be found in Appendix E, and information about the demographic and foster care characteristics of the population of youth eligible for Fair Futures is presented in Appendix F.

4.g.2 Fair Futures service participation by youth characteristics

The Fair Futures program is centered around comprehensively meeting the needs of youth in foster care. Fair Futures designers would like the program model to “meet young people where they are,” which reflects their thinking around youths’ different developmental stages. The pathway to adulthood is varied and depends on youth life-course stages. For evaluators, it is essential to recognize that over the four years of the evaluation, a young person who takes up a Fair Futures service will do so at a time in their life that differs from when others take up the same service. It means that program effects need to be assessed relative to the start of adolescence, the start of services, and the transition process. For example, a 15-year-old coming into care for the first time is likely to be different developmentally from a 15-year-old who has already been in care for a few years. Though both may benefit from the same service, the nature and time needed to observe the benefit are strikingly different.

The two core Fair Futures models—the Middle School Model and Coaching Model—were designed to focus on servicing youth of different age groups (from 6th to 8th grade, and 9th grade through age 26, respectively) with varying needs to ensure that no young person falls through the cracks. The preliminary look into the Fair Futures service participation data recorded in the Care4 platform (between September 2020 and June 2022) presented in this section will follow the two model constructs. In addition, the overall participation in Tutoring Sessions and Targeted Services is presented.

In this preliminary analysis, we used the following criteria to determine “youth participation” in each service area offered:

- First, a case recorded in Care4 indicating the young person had enrolled in the Middle School Model or Coaching Model or had been provided with Targeted Services by a Housing, Career, or College Specialist at some point during the 22-month window was considered the basic condition of being counted as youth participating in the respective Model or Targeted Services.
- Second, for Middle School Model and Targeted Services participation, further verification of the service delivery was conducted by bringing in the information from the “Appointment” and “Document” files. For example, in order to be counted as having participated in the Middle School model, a youth needed to not only have a case of “Middle School Enrollment & Contact” established in the “Case” file but also have at least one contact with the Fair Futures staff or participation in a Tutoring session documented in the “Appointment” file. Moreover, a relevant document needed to be completed and submitted in the “Document” file to verify that the Targeted Services were indeed delivered.
- Lastly, because tutoring is an important component in both the Middle School Model and the Coaching Model, and tutors' collaborative work with Education Specialists and Coaches helps ensure young people are on the right track with their academic progress, we also looked at the tutoring appointments and outcome data recorded in Care4 during the same 22-month window. An appointment type of “tutoring session” (either in person or via video) with an appointment outcome indicating that the young person attended the tutoring session or engaged in/responded to the appointment request was counted as youth participation in tutoring.

The “People” file in Care4 is intended to capture the universe of all young people who are placed in foster care with one of the 26 agencies and who are eligible for the Fair Futures support and services. However, because the information about when young people enter care has not been consistently entered in a timely fashion in Care4, discrepancies exist between the number of youth in Care4 and CNNX. For this preliminary analysis, we used the number of youth tracked on Care4 as the denominator for the calculation of the overall Fair Futures service participation rate and the participation rate by youth demographics. When examining the participation rate by youth foster care characteristics, youth existing in both Care4 and CNNX were used as the denominator.

Care4 tracks goals and steps depending on the young person’s situation for each of these four types of service, but we do not delve into those details for this report. We will incorporate information from the “Goals & Steps” framework into the data analyses during the upcoming outcome evaluation.

4.g.2.1 *Overall Fair Futures Service Participation*

Table 2 summarizes the Fair Futures Service Participation by age:

- Coaching Model: Of all youth ages 14 to 21 tracked in Care4 and eligible for the Coaching Model, over half (~64%) had enrolled in the Coaching Model at some point during their stay in foster care. Youth ages 15 to 19 had a higher coaching participation rate (about 65% to 68%) than their peers who were younger (~56% for 14-year-olds) or peers who were older (53-54% for 20- and 21-year-olds).

- Middle School Model: Close to half of young people ages 11 to 13 were enrolled in the Middle School Model (~46%)³⁸ during the 22-month observation window. Youth who were 11 years old had a lower participation rate (~39%) compared to 12-year-olds and 13-year-olds (50-51%).
- Targeted Services: The overall participation rate for targeted services was 32%. The participation rate was higher among youth ages 16 to 20 than among other age groups. (The youth enrolled in Targeted services consists of youth who were not enrolled in the Coaching Model.)
- Tutoring:³⁹ Tutoring was provided across all age groups (between 11 and 21). A higher proportion of younger youth generally participated in tutoring sessions compared to older youth. As the young people grew older, fewer of them participated in the tutoring sessions.

Table 2. Fair Futures Service Participation

Age	Coaching	Middle School	Targeted Services	Tutoring	Total
Number					
11		219		162	562
12		221		159	442
13		189		149	371
14	240		101	109	426
15	305		126	91	453
16	357		168	76	524
17	380		191	48	566
18	371		183	36	542
19	311		170	26	476
20	195		138	20	370
21	81		33	3	151
Total	2,240	629	1,110	879	4,883
Percent					
11		39%		29%	-
12		50%		36%	-
13		51%		40%	-
14	56%		24%	26%	-
15	67%		28%	20%	-
16	68%		32%	15%	-
17	67%		34%	8%	-
18	68%		34%	7%	-
19	65%		36%	5%	-
20	53%		37%	5%	-
21	54%		22%	2%	-
Average	64%	*46%	32%	*18%	-

³⁸ These data include a time period during which contacts were not consistently entered by the Middle School Specialist. As the data entry on contacts improved over time, the Middle School participation rate increased and is much higher in 2022 compared to the year before.

³⁹ The tutoring data currently tracked in the Care4 “Appointment” table does not include all tutoring sessions provided by New York Foundling, the primary tutoring provider. They track their tutoring data separately.

4.g.2.2 *Middle School Model Participation by Youth Demographic and Foster Care Characteristics*

Table 3 shows the Middle School Model participation by youth demographics. It was equally likely for girls and boys to participate in the Middle School Model. The participation rate was highest among Hispanic youth (~50%), followed by African American youth (~47%). White youth had the lowest Middle School Model participation rate, although they accounted for a small proportion of all eligible youth (~3%). Youth who were 11 years old were the least likely to enroll in the Middle School Model (~39%).

Table 3. Middle School Model Participation by Youth Demographics

	Demographics	Middle School Model Participation			
		Number		Percent	
		No	Yes	No	Yes
Overall	-	746	629	54%	46%
Gender	Female	371	313	54%	46%
	Male	365	313	54%	46%
	Missing	10	3	77%	23%
Race/Ethnicity	Black	402	351	53%	47%
	Hispanic	232	228	50%	50%
	White	31	17	65%	35%
	Other	25	17	60%	40%
	Missing	56	16	78%	22%
Age	11	343	219	61%	39%
	12	221	221	50%	50%
	13	182	189	49%	51%

To examine the foster care characteristics of youth who participated in the Middle School Model, such as age at entry, first placement type, and length of stay, the participation data from Care4 was linked with the youth’s first child spell, which captures the continuous time in care from when the youth was first placed in foster care until the youth left care or until June 30, 2022 if the youth had not left care.⁴⁰ Just under three-quarters of the participants entered the foster care system for the first time when they were under 11 years old, and the remaining (~28%) entered care for the first time when they were 11 to 13. Table 4 shows that about half of the youth who first entered care when they were under 11 later participated in the Middle School Model, and 57% of youth who first entered care when they were 11 to 13 years old participated in the Middle School Model.

Relative Home, Foster Home, and Institution were the three most common placement settings for youth when they entered foster care for the first time. Half of the youth who were placed in a Foster Home when they entered care for the first time participated in the Middle School Model; that percentage was 51% for youth initially placed in a Group Residence, 47% for youth initially placed in an Institution, and 45% for youth initially placed in a Relative Home. Half of the youth whose first child spell lasted more than a year participated in the Middle School Model; that percentage was 48% for youth whose initial spell lasted less than one month, 38% for youth whose initial spell lasted between 1 and 6 months, and 41% for youth whose initial spell lasted between 7 and 12 months.

⁴⁰ The analysis begins with the youth who were in care with one of the 26 Fair Futures agencies between September 2020 and June 2022 and attempts to match them with the foster care administrative data. We were able to match 95% of the youth who were eligible for the Middle School Model in the Care4 platform with the foster care administrative data. For the matched youth, the analysis looks back through their foster care history to identify their first child spell, which, for the majority of the youth, began (and may have ended) in years prior to the implementation of Care4. The information presented in Table 4 pertains to the characteristics of those first child spells.

Table 4. Middle School Model Participation by Foster Care Characteristics

	Foster Care Characteristics	Middle School Model Participation			
		Number		Percent	
		No	Yes	No	Yes
Overall	-	690	613	53%	47%
Age at Entry	Under 11	499	466	52%	48%
	11 to 13	191	147	57%	43%
First Placement	Agency-operated boarding home	0	1	0%	100%
	Foster Home	208	210	50%	50%
	Group Home	2	1	67%	33%
	Group Residence	19	20	49%	51%
	Institution	166	145	53%	47%
	Relative Home	294	236	55%	45%
	Other	1	0	100%	0%
Length of Stay	Under 1 month	47	43	52%	48%
	1 to 6 months	109	66	62%	38%
	7 to 12 months	93	64	59%	41%
	Over 12 months	441	440	50%	50%

4.g.2.3 Coaching Model Participation by Youth Demographics and Foster Care Characteristics

The following table presents Coaching Model participation by youth demographics, including gender, race/ethnicity, and age. Girls (~65%) were slightly more likely to participate in the Coaching Model than boys (~62%). African American youth had the highest Coaching Model participation rate compared to their peers of other racial/ethnic backgrounds. Youth ages 15 and 18 were more likely to participate in the Coaching Model compared to youth of other age groups.

Table 5. Coaching Model Participation by Youth Demographics

	Demographics	Number		Percent	
		Not Coached	Coached	Not Coached	Coached
Overall	-	1,268	2,240	36%	64%
Gender	Female	708	1,340	35%	65%
	Male	549	891	38%	62%
	Missing	11	9	55%	45%
Race/Ethnicity	Black	646	1,205	35%	65%
	Hispanic	474	794	37%	63%
	White	47	56	46%	54%
	Other	63	82	43%	57%
	Missing	38	103	27%	73%
Age	14	186	240	44%	56%
	15	148	305	33%	67%
	16	167	357	32%	68%
	17	186	380	33%	67%
	18	171	371	32%	68%
	19	165	311	35%	65%
	20	175	195	47%	53%
	21	70	81	46%	54%

When looking at Coaching Model participation by characteristics of the youths’ foster care experience,⁴¹ we found that the percentages of youth who participated in Coaching by their age at their first entry into care were as follows: 65% of youth who were under 11 when they entered care for the first time, 57% of youth who were 11 to 13, 65% of youth who were 14 to 17, and 61% of youth who were 18 to 21. We found that 51% of youth who were initially placed into a Group Home when they first entered care (and 50% who were initially placed in agency-operated boarding homes) participated in Coaching; the percentage for other initial placement types ranged from 60% to 66%. Sixty-five percent of youth whose initial spell lasted less than one month participated in Coaching; that percentage was 57% for youth whose initial spells lasted 1 to 6 months, 59% for youth whose initial spells lasted 7 to 12 months, and 65% for youth whose initial spells lasted more than 12 months.

Table 6. Coaching Model Participation by Foster Care Characteristics

	Foster Care Characteristics	Number		Percent	
		Not Coached	Coached	Not Coached	Coached
Overall	-	1,230	2,137	37%	63%
Age at Entry	Under 11	378	709	35%	65%
	11 to 13	318	429	43%	57%
	14 to 17	527	988	35%	65%
	18 to 21	7	11	39%	61%
First Placement	Agency-operated boarding home	8	8	50%	50%
	Foster Home	400	783	34%	66%
	Group Home	56	59	49%	51%
	Group Residence	42	64	40%	60%
	Institution	395	655	38%	62%
	Relative Home	327	566	37%	63%
	Other	2	2	50%	50%
Length of Stay	Under 1 month	70	132	35%	65%
	1 to 6 months	170	221	43%	57%
	7 to 12 months	148	214	41%	59%
	Over 12 months	842	1,570	35%	65%

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

As an initiative that brings together a strong group of stakeholders interested in the well-being of young people whose lives are touched by foster care, Fair Futures asks whether the system, as a whole, is capable of doing a better job with young people at a vulnerable time in their lives. In our evaluation, we examine what Fair Futures asks of foster care agencies and of the individuals who work most closely with young people.

Our recommendations follow, based on what we and the other stakeholders have learned so far.

Fair Futures is a well-developed but still emerging model for working with young people. Long-term success hinges on model components on paper that are faithfully replicated in practice. Because the implementation challenges are persistent, we start with recommendations in the realm of implementation support.

⁴¹ This analysis uses the same methodology as that for the Foster Care Characteristics for Middle School Model participation described in Footnote 40. Roughly 4% of the youth in Care4 who were eligible for the Coaching Model could not be matched with foster care administrative data. The analysis of Coaching Model participation by foster care characteristics only covers 96% of the youth—those for whom the match between Care4 and foster care administrative data was successful.

Next, we identify recommendations that are organized by the aspects of process, quality, and capacity embedded in the continuous quality improvement evaluation framework. Keeping in mind that under the framework, improvements are made to aspects of process, quality, and capacity *in order to* change outcomes, the recommendations in this report ought to be considered within the full improvement context. Effectively undertaking and assessing an improvement effort must include engagement in a thorough and well-defined process: one in which there is a plan, supported by evidence, to implement a change to an aspect of the process, quality, or capacity of care, and which is clearly tied to an outcome of interest. As we continue our work and begin the next phase of the study—the outcome evaluation—we celebrate the many accomplishments and successes of Fair Futures thus far and identify opportunities for continued improvements, while anticipating a detailed examination of the model’s outcomes.

In the grand scheme of things, it is too soon to make precise recommendations that touch on process, quality, and capacity. The process of improvement depends on an unambiguous link between outcomes and the care being delivered. When the link has been made, adjustments to process, quality, and capacity are possible provided the adjustments made improve outcomes. This is the heart of the CQI process.

Implementation has no finish line. Our recommendations are meant to advance the work being done to refine the Fair Futures approach.

5.a **Implementation Support**

- Continue to expand the number of times Core Training is offered to minimize the amount of time staff have to wait to attend.⁴² Additionally, decreasing the number of staff trained in each session could maximize opportunities to tailor the training to the needs of the group and improve training effectiveness.
- Continue to explore ways to expand the training and support provided to Fair Futures staff around data entry and reporting in Care4. Although the staff who participated in the focus groups highly praised the current training and support they receive, some of the concerns they shared indicated either confusion or lack of knowledge about the Care4 data structure. Their responses also indicated that the need for Care4 support continues to be high; the creation of a designated “Care4 Specialist” position at each agency could help bridge the gap.⁴³
- Continue to offer varied opportunities for interagency communication and collaboration to foster relationships and build the bond within the Fair Futures network across agencies towards the common goal.
- Continue to allow non-Fair Futures agency staff to learn and be part of the Fair Futures training and TA to create a shared vision and facilitate collaboration with Fair Futures staff to support youth in their agency.
- Keep a hybrid model of training, TA, and meetings. Some people like seeing others in person. Others expressed benefits of the ease with which they can attend sessions or meetings from any location and without having to factor in travel time. This can mean greater efficiency and/or more time spent with/for youth.

⁴² Per personal communication with the Fair Futures team in November 2022, this has been implemented since the completion of data collection for the implementation study.

⁴³ Per personal communication with the Fair Futures team in November 2022, this has been implemented since the completion of data collection for the implementation study.

5.b **Process Recommendations**

- Continue to offer the remote or hybrid practices that were adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many find the flexibility of remote work makes managing daily tasks, travel time, and connections with young people easier.
- Engage youth creatively and continue to improve service participation rates. Recommendations include understanding the root causes of youth disengaging or not participating in Fair Futures. Because youth become eligible for Fair Futures support at different ages and with varying foster care experiences, and because they may respond differently to provided services, there is also an opportunity to create targeted and customized strategies for outreach and engagement with different sub-groups.
- Examine how Fair Futures serves undocumented immigrants and youth with higher-level educational, mental health, or behavioral needs. Define program standards and determine whether staff have an approach to special needs youth. Adjust training according so that the quality of care rises.
- When beneficial to a staff person or young person, continue to offer the remote or hybrid practices that were adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic. While these settings did not work best for everyone in all situations, many find the flexibility of remote work and the option to use it to be beneficial to managing their daily tasks (i.e., by reducing things like travel time between obligations or reducing scheduling burdens) and helpful for connecting and working with some young people.

5.c **Quality Recommendations**

- Continue to build skills and service quality with training, TA, and learning communities. These were universally viewed as extremely helpful and effective, especially when organized around problem-solving and collaboration in a CQI framework.
- In the CQI framework, strengthen how the meaning assigned to an individual person is connected to the goals that everyone accomplishes together. Monitoring performance consistently is the hallmark of a strong CQI practice, but that importance has to be communicated clearly to everyone working toward a common end. This is an ongoing communication challenge, as evidenced by some of the feedback we received during focus groups reflecting the view that performance measures force a cookie cutter approach to goal setting with youth.
- An important question in the CQI cycle considers whether the program is being implemented with fidelity. As Fair Futures expands, replication requires a watchful eye organized around clear expectations. When organized around the process, quality, and capacity questions, the clarity gained will make it easier to first communicate with agencies and then monitor fidelity in a standard way. When tied to outcomes, adjustments to the Fair Futures model reinforce the improvement cycle.
- As young people change, programs have to follow. Agencies should develop processes for keeping up with the need/service match.

5.d **Capacity Recommendations**

- Capacity – Technology: Invest in improvements to the quality of Care4.

- Build the procedures for removing duplicates into the data team’s routine data quality checks.
- One investment that would likely have a ripple effect and positively improve the Care4 experience is to address processing speed.
- For Care4 updates that involve the User Experience/User Interface, convene a workgroup with representation from all Fair Futures roles and user types to guide and inform efforts to:
 - streamline the system for each level of user;
 - identify and correct errors and system inconsistencies;
 - address the issues underlying the presentation of icons; and
 - explore opportunities to reduce redundant data entry across systems, such as through automated communication between Care4 and other systems Fair Futures staff are required to use at their agencies.
- Capacity – Staff: To bring the program to capacity, hire the Coaches needed to staff the program model. This is particularly pertinent considering the July 1, 2022 expansion of Fair Futures to reach young people up to age 26.

Appendix A. Data Sources

Document review

- Fair Futures model manual
- NYF Tutoring manual
- Fair Futures training materials
- Annual implementation status checklist (agency specific)
- Budget planning documents

Literature review of best practice/approach

- Needs of youth in foster care
- Best practice/approaches in the field that support the needs of youth in foster care

Deep-dive conversations

- Fair Futures Model
- Fair Futures training and technical support
- Fair Futures data on Care4
- Agency adaptation of the model

Focus groups/interviews with key stakeholders

- The first group includes members of the NYC ACS agencies' Fair Futures workforce, both at the director/coordinator level and of those who have case-level responsibility for youth in foster care placed in that agency (Coaches, Coach Supervisors, Tutors, Specialists, etc.).

Consultation with key program staff

- Fair Futures Implementation Management (Katie Napolitano, Emil Ramnarine)
- ACS program staff
- Care4 data team

Administrative data analysis

- Informing program capacity
- Informing youth focus group sampling strategy

Program data review

- Program service data tracked on Care4

Appendix B. Literature Review

Fair Futures is a coalition of child welfare organizations that seeks to improve outcomes for youth in foster care throughout New York City (NYC). Their approach is centered around individualized care through Coaches and Specialists, so as to offer young people direct and sustained support, with particular emphasis on education (including college), career, and housing. The coalition has secured funding to expand Fair Futures' support to the cohort of people aged 21 to 26 who left or have aged out of the foster care system. This literature review will examine the demographic context of the system(s) Fair Futures works within, the needs of youth in foster care both historically and in the present day, existing training practices for foster care staff, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on foster care involvement and the experience of foster care, and evaluating the Fair Futures plan along these principles.

Though it is among the most diverse areas of the country and in many places among the most integrated, NYC still faces substantial demographic disparities in its child welfare system, especially along racial lines. In fact, “child removals occur almost exclusively in poor neighborhoods of color... in 2018, 141 children were placed in foster care from Brownsville, a predominantly Black neighborhood, while Park Slope and Carroll Gardens combined, two predominantly White and wealthier neighborhoods, had eight children placed in foster care” ([Stephens](#), 2022). Within the foster care system itself, there exist significant disparities in almost every metric, and adverse outcomes disproportionately affect children of color, especially Black children ([Kennedy et al.](#), 2022; [Watt & Kim](#), 2019). There are also substantial health disparities which adversely impact LGBTQAI+ youth in foster care ([Sandfort](#), 2019).

That said, issues with healthcare are universal among NYC's youth in foster care. The experience of entering and living within the foster care system is rife with trauma, including exposure to violence, substance abuse, family dysfunctionality, and a sense of instability that contribute to “extremely high rates of mental health illness” in the foster care population ([Hudson](#), 2013; [Thompson & Hasin](#), 2011; [Lopez & Allen](#), 2007). Many youth in foster care also expressed a lack in mentoring and a difficulty in finding good authority figures, as they may feel disconnected from their caretakers and relatives ([Blakeslee & Best](#), 2020; [Hudson](#), 2013). To this end, there is strong support for the importance of housing programs for youth aging out of foster care programs, which has been shown to bolster a pattern of stable housing and reduce STI rates ([Lim et al.](#), 2017).

Youth in the foster care system face many difficulties with regard to educational attainment, too. The disparities are clear: “Only 45% of foster youth complete high school compared to... 79% of general population students” ([Frerer et al.](#), 2013, p. 4). Considering the direct relationship between academic success and long-term physical and mental health, this and the above issues are intertwined ([Pears et al.](#), 2018). However, post-youth involvement has been shown to bolster educational attainment among people involved in the foster care system: in fact, “each year in care past age 18 is expected to increase enrollment [in college] by about 9 to 11 percentage points” ([Okpych & Courtney](#), 2018, p. 254). Ultimately, “a stable foster care placement, establishing a foothold in education and having a steady figure (mentor) who supports youth after they age out of care seem to be important factors to improve the outcomes” ([Gypen et al.](#), 2017, p. 74; [Woodgate et al.](#), 2017).

For people aging out of the foster care system, issues with securing employment are also commonplace. Many of those aging out do not receive any sort of significant mentorship or guidance towards finding a job, and even those that do earn on average roughly half as much as young adults in the general population ([Dworsky & Gitlow](#), 2017; [Okpych & Courtney](#), 2014; [C. Joy Stewart et al.](#), 2013). There is considerable support for the idea that sustained mentorship throughout the foster care experience improves employment outcomes in both of these regards ([Graham et al.](#), 2015; [C. Joy Stewart et al.](#), 2013).

There have been a number of initiatives to reorient training for those working in foster care towards a “safety net” model that emphasizes direct and continued support for youth in foster care, as Fair Futures suggests. Organized studies have suggested that, given the histories of trauma that many youth in foster

care have endured, a direct approach that takes both physical and mental well-being into continued consideration is crucial to supporting youth in foster care through trauma exposure histories and their consequences ([Fratto](#), 2016; [Atkinson](#), 2008). Another study found that youth in foster care involved in ongoing campus support programs in California significantly increased rates of educational persistence among those aging out of care ([Okpych et al.](#), 2020).

It is worth noting the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on youth in foster care, especially those aging out of care, particularly as Fair Futures' implementation has taken place during the pandemic. Many of the educational and vocational difficulties faced by those aging out of foster care have been exacerbated by the pandemic, which has had broad undesirable effects on their physical and mental health ([Ruff & Linville](#), 2021; [Rosenberg et al.](#), 2022; [Amechi](#), 2020). Additionally, shutdowns and physical distancing policies made it even more difficult for youth in foster care to establish and maintain local support networks ([Whitt-Woosley et al.](#), 2022). Although more evidence will emerge as research efforts to study the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people continue, the field's short-term understanding of the supports an expansion of the services that foster care systems provide, so as to improve the conditions of youth in foster care, and especially those aging out of care.

The above evidence suggests that the reforms and individual care model Fair Futures seeks to implement will be beneficial in supporting youth in foster care through the process of "aging out" of care. Their data suggest that "85% of young people coached in the second year achieved an average of 3 academic, career, and/or independent living goals/outcomes," ([Fair Futures](#), n.d.) and considering the positive impact of prolonged education attainment in aging out of the foster care system, this suggests the current Fair Futures programming is highly productive ([Fair Futures](#), n.d.). Fair Futures' proposals to expand the scope of New York City's foster care program will provide substantial benefits to those aging out of the system and lessen the ongoing negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on foster youth.

Appendix C. Fair Futures Training Observation Tool

Overview

Date of Observation:	
Name of Observer:	
Training Title/Topic:	

Training Data

Name of Facilitator 1	
Title	
Organization	
Name of Facilitator 2	
Title	
Organization	

Participant Data

Number of Participants	
Number of Agencies Represented	
# Coaches	
# Middle School Specialists	
# Education Specialists	
# Career Specialists	
# Housing Specialists	
# Agency Leaders	
# Other	

If other people are present, list their title/affiliation with Fair Futures:

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Training Session Topic/Title of section	<i>Example: Understanding youth through TIL</i>	Training Session Day: ____ ____	
Observations specific to Building Knowledge Base			
Objective/Set up/Goal Alignment <i>(overview, learning outcomes, organization, clear objectives, expectations, ground rules, intro to key terms, etc.)</i>	Resources and Training methods used. <i>(PPT, videos, modeling, strategies for engagement, include any Experts/Speakers who are speaking on topic or Experienced Staff.)</i>	Notable Areas of Strengths What worked particularly well? Any notable feedback from participants?	Notable Areas of Improvement What didn't work or what did participants not take to?
Observations specific to practicing skills or retaining knowledge			
Skill Practice <i>(Methods used to build skills e.g., role play, vignettes.)</i>	Facilitation of exercises <i>(Pace, allotted time, monitoring)</i>	Interactions and Participation <i>(Level of engagement, asking questions, sharing experiences)</i>	Follow up actions on activities <i>(debrief & discussion)</i>
Outcomes and post-training observations of specific sessions			
Expectations after training <i>(homework assignments, readings, etc.)</i>	Were the objectives met in this session (y/n) why or why not?	Notable Areas of strengths	Notable Areas of improvement
Reactions and level of engagement			
Large Group Interaction Was there lively interaction during large group sessions? Did they ask a lot of questions? What rules were set up for safe conversation and confidentiality?	Small Group Interaction Did participants appear engaged in their groups? Were they given clear and useful instructions? Was there enough time?	Notable Areas of strength	Notable Areas of improvement

End of Training Observation

Complete the following questions based on your observation of the entirety of the four days of training. Consider each training section and trainer in your thoughts.

- How did the training prepare participants to enter into the Fair Futures workforce?**
- How were FF learning communities mentioned? What expectations were set for learning communities?**
- How did the training utilize the experience from the following groups?**
Include what information was presented and by whom
 - Existing Fair Futures Staff (coaches, specialists)
 - Trainers (Katie, Emil, etc.)
 - Fair Futures Participants/Alumni
 - ACS Staff
- Were participants aware of what they should learn from each section?**
- How was information presented to training participants?**
 - How did it appeal to different styles of learners? (videos, PowerPoint, reading materials)
- How did the trainers utilize Zoom to create diverse learning opportunities?**
 - How were breakout rooms used to facilitate in-depth learning?

- b. What type of reflection took place? How was this facilitated?*
- 7. How did trainers maintain engagement throughout the training?**
 - 8. What kind of resources and materials were participants given for on-going use in their work?**
 - 9. How did trainers set expectations for the training?**
Think about mutual respect, trust and collaboration amongst training participants.
 - 10. Did the trainers collect feedback from the participants?**
 - a. How is this information used to inform future trainings?*
 - b. Were adjustments made during the training session based on feedback?*
 - 11. Any additional thoughts or information to consider?**

Appendix D. Professional Staff Data Collection and Outreach

Outreach for focus groups began in early February 2022. Outreach and focus groups began with leaders across all 26 agencies, followed by Coaches and Coach Supervisors, Specialists (Career/Employment, High School/College, Housing, and Middle School), and tutors. With each group of professional staff, the initial contact came by way of email from Emil Ramnarine. The introductory email included information about the study and a link to an electronic form asking individuals to indicate their interest in participating and provide their consent to participate. Introductory emails sent by Emil were followed, over the course of several weeks or months, by additional outreach emails from the research team. In order to preserve the confidentiality of participants and non-participants, identities and identifying information were never disclosed to agencies, the Fair Futures team, or ACS.

As participants completed the online form indicating their interest in participating, the research team got in touch by email to schedule them for focus group participation. Respondents were required to read and sign the informed consent form prior to participation in a focus group. All focus groups took place via Zoom. Following participation, each respondent was sent a \$50 gift card to Amazon.com.

During outreach to agency leaders, researchers asked agencies to identify one representative who would be best positioned to discuss their agency's Fair Futures program. In some cases, this person was a director; in others, it was a program supervisor. In total, between February and April, researchers spoke with 24 agency leaders representing 20 agencies.

Following the same outreach strategy, Coaches and Coach Supervisors were first contacted in April 2022, and data collection occurred between April and June. During that period, researchers spoke with 42 Coaches (27) and Coach Supervisors (15) from a total of 17 agencies.

Specialists (Career/Employment, High School/College, Housing, and Middle School) were first contacted in June 2022, and focus groups were conducted between June and September. Researchers heard from 18 individual Specialists representing the four specialties, and those 18 participants were from a total of 11 agencies.

Tutors from New York Foundling were first contacted in August 2022. Instead of working with Emil for the initial outreach to this group, the research team coordinated directly with the agency for contact information and assistance getting the word about upcoming focus groups out to tutors. In total, the team spoke with three tutors.

Compared to the leadership and Coach/Coach Supervisor groups, Specialists and tutors expressed less interest in the focus groups. To maximize participation, the research team extended the deadline for participation by Specialists and tutors by over one month. This effort, in combination with multiple outreach attempts, garnered several additional interested participants and allowed for representation across all identified professional groups of staff.

Because of the rolling nature of the focus groups with professional staff, outreach and scheduled groups occurred during different times throughout the spring and summer. Although the research team does not know with certainty, conversations with the Fair Futures team and agency staff indicated that some of the challenges with participation may have been due to concurrent responsibilities, scheduled time away from the office for leave or vacation, or the cyclical nature of the work (i.e., busy periods, such as during the start or end of the school year). Additional contributing factors may have been position vacancies, recalibration efforts in response to the pandemic, and high staff workloads and responsibilities as a result of the aforementioned vacancies and COVID-19 effects on people and systems.

In total, the research team spoke to 87 professional staff across 25 of the 26 agencies. One agency did not have representation in any of the groups. A breakdown by role affiliation and number of agencies represented is as follows:

Fair Futures Role	Total # Participants	Total Agencies Represented
Agency leadership	24	20
Coach Supervisors	15	9
Coaches	27	15
Career/Employment Specialists	3	3
High School/College Specialists	5	5
Housing Specialists	4	3
Middle School Specialists	6	5
Tutors	3	1*

*all tutors in the sample were employed by a single agency (New York Foundling)

Appendix E. Daily Census of Fair Futures-Eligible Youth by Agency

Figure E1. Large Agencies

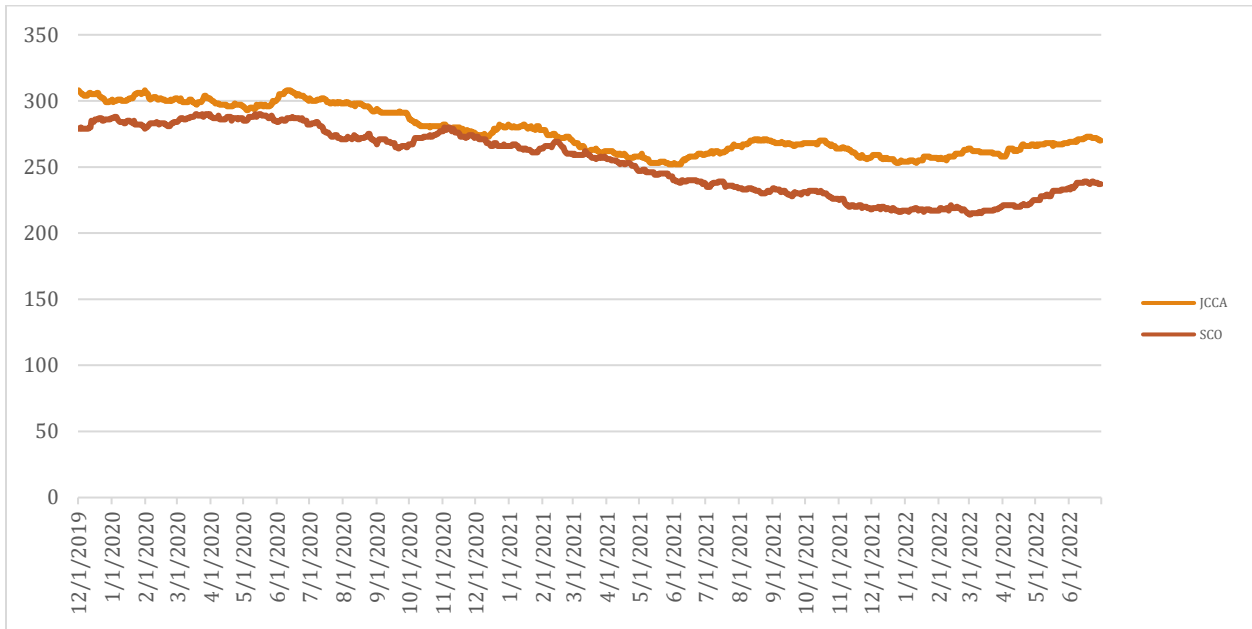


Figure E2. Medium Size Agencies - Upper Group

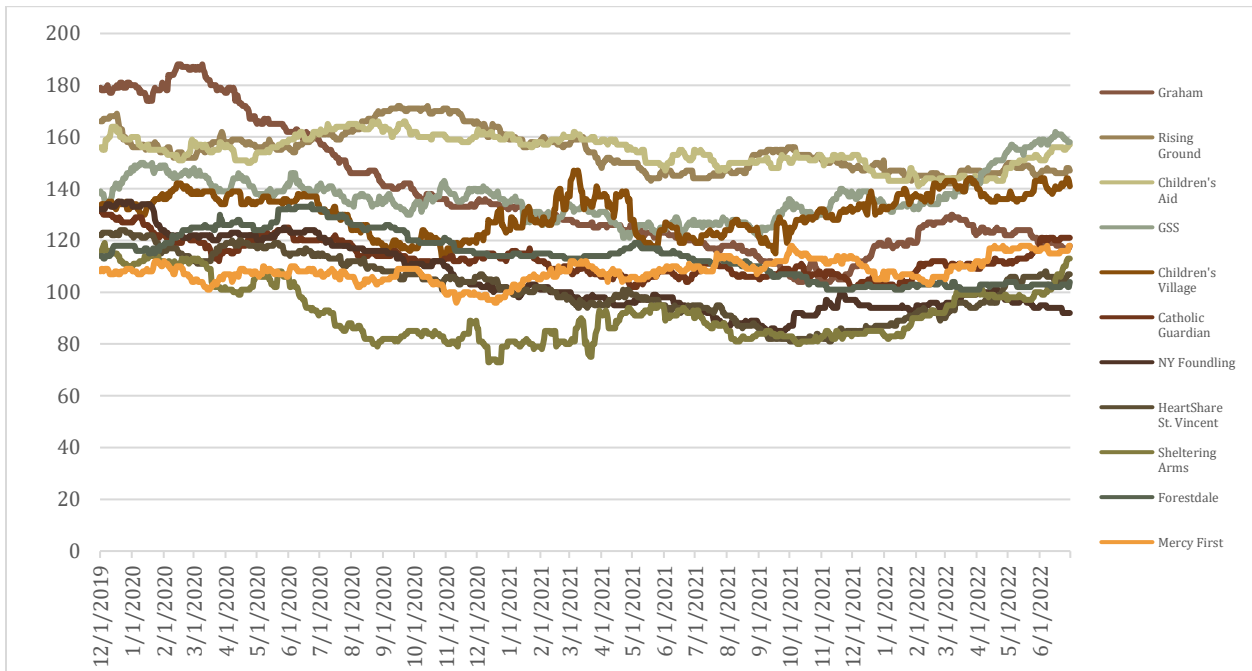


Figure E3. Medium Size Agencies - Lower Group

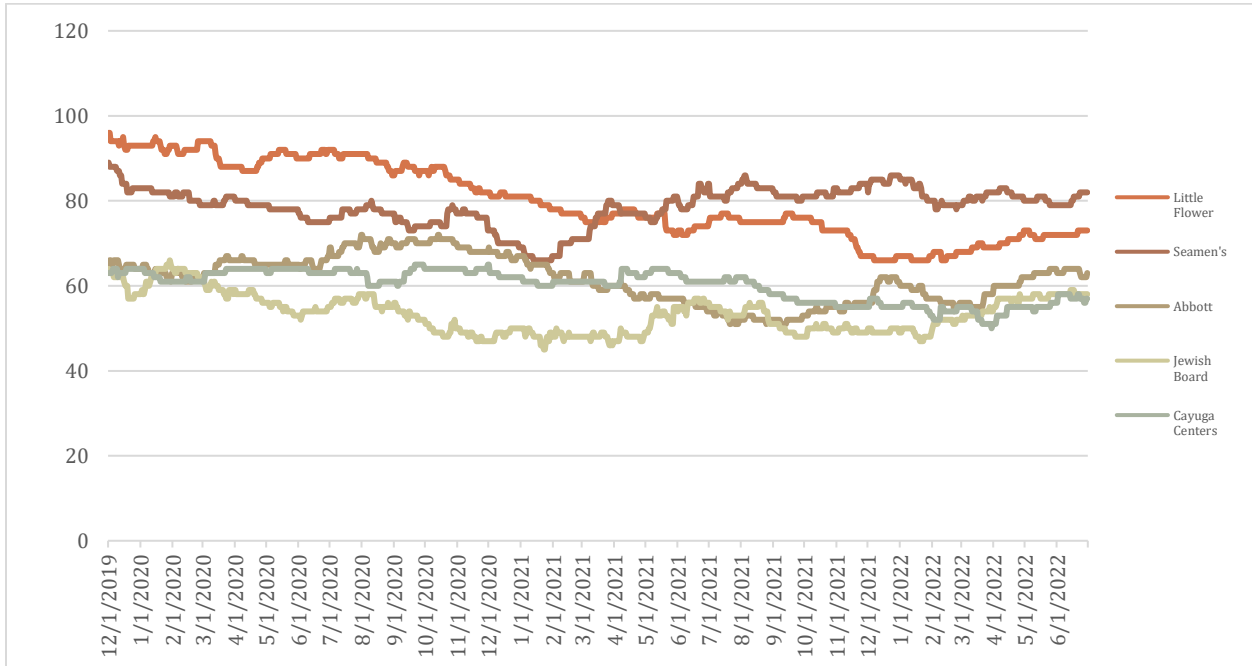
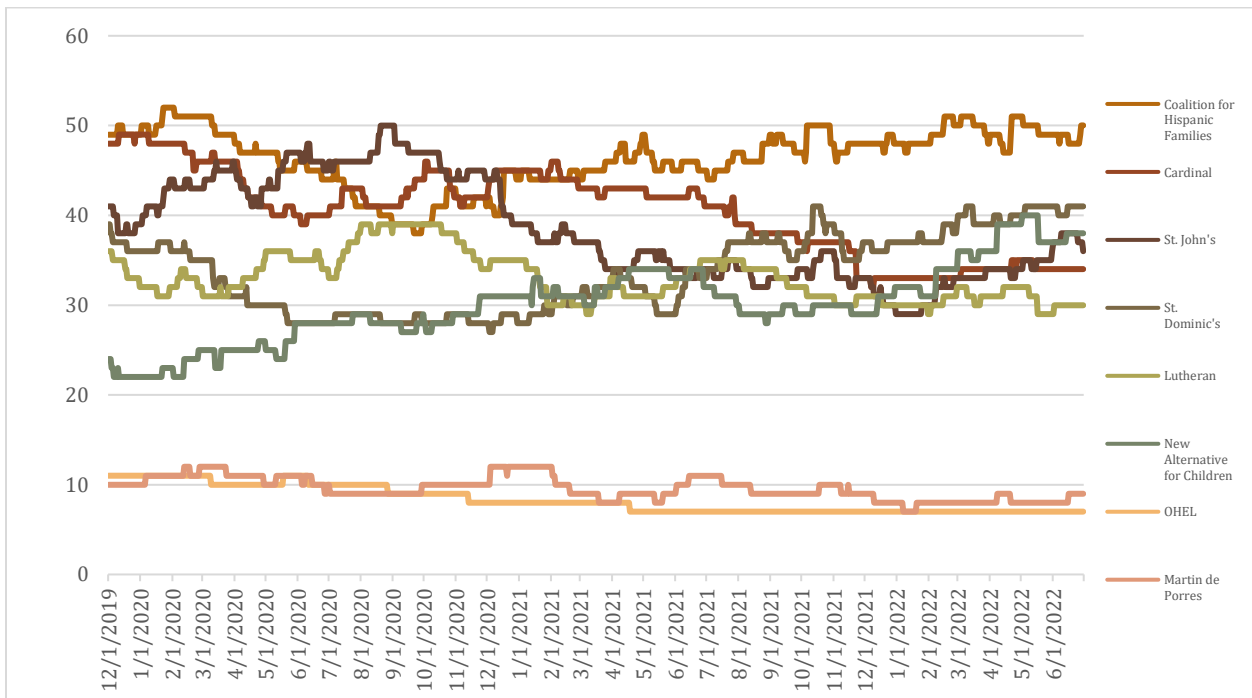


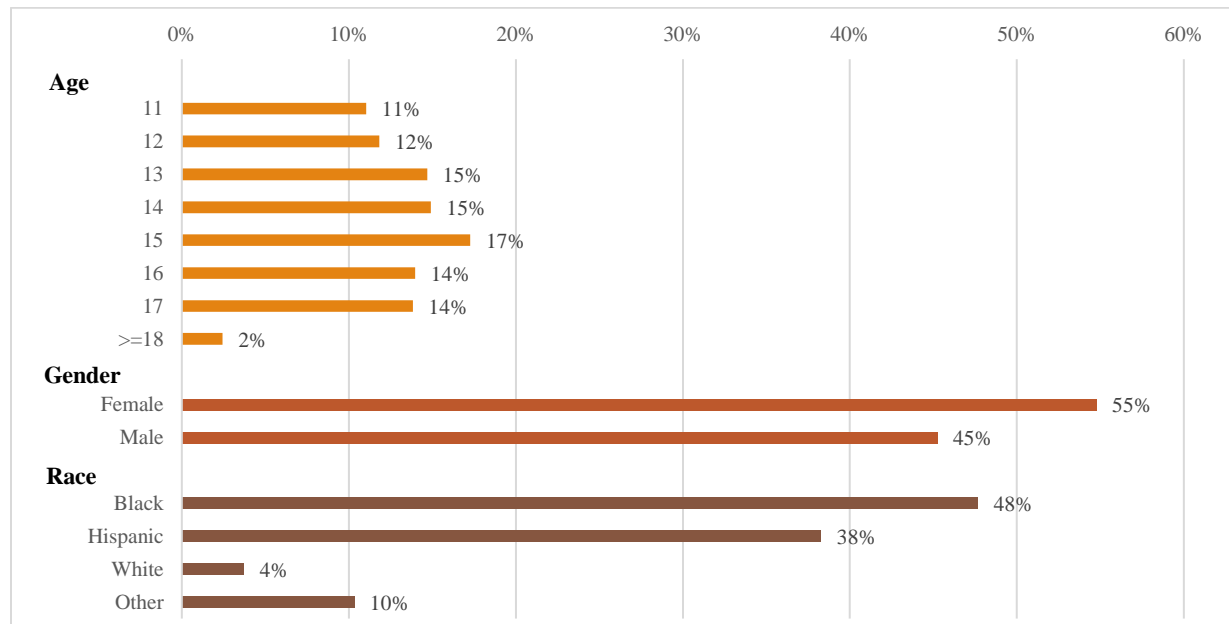
Figure E4. Small Agencies



Appendix F. Fair Futures-Eligible Youth Characteristics

Since the launch of the Fair Futures program on December 1, 2019 until June 30, 2022 when the foster care data is censored,⁴⁴ approximately 46% of the 1,395 youth who entered foster care for the first time when they were between 11 and 21 years old were placed at the Children's Center⁴⁵ as their first temporary stop in the child welfare system, and the remaining 54% of youth in the same age group were placed directly with one of the 26 agencies. For those who were placed at the Children's Center, the majority (~62%) transferred to one of the 26 foster care agencies after a short stay in the Children's Center. These two groups formed our study sample for the following analysis—youth ages 11 to 21 entering foster care for the first time and being placed (either right away or after a short stop at the Children's Center) in one of the 26 foster care agencies that provide Fair Futures services—we call them the Fair Futures eligible population. Figure F1 below presents the basic demographics of this group.

Figure F1. Fair Futures Eligible Youth Demographics



The largest single year of age among the Fair Futures-eligible youth consists of those who were 15 years old at the time of admission. The age distribution among other youth who were under 18 was more or less the same (between ~11% and ~15%). Youth ages 18 to 21 made up a tiny portion of the Fair Futures-eligible youth population (~2%).

More girls than boys were placed with one of the 26 agencies (~55% vs. ~45%).

When looking at the race/ethnicity of the new admissions eligible for Fair Futures, African American youth accounted for almost half (~48%), followed by Hispanic youth (~38%). White youth were the smallest group among all race/ethnicity groups (~4%), and youth of other races and ethnicities were

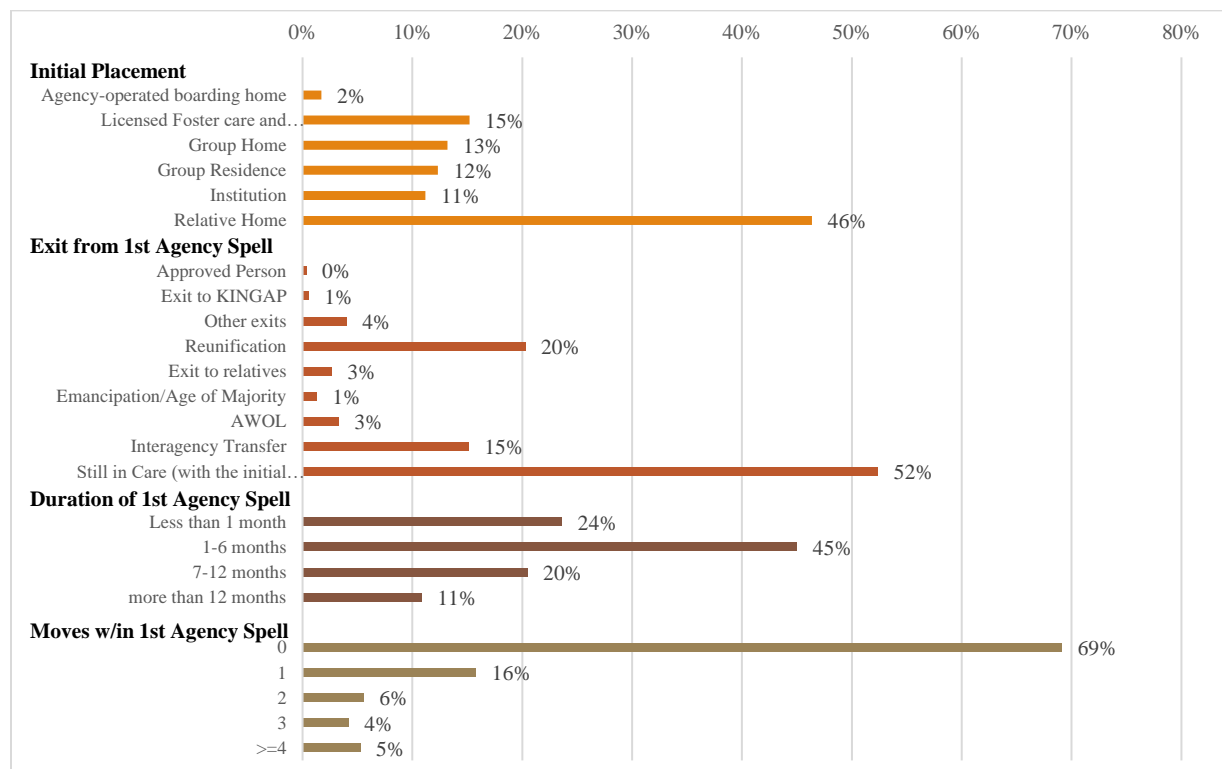
⁴⁴ The censor date is the calendar day as of which the FCDA's analytic database is updated. Therefore, a child's experience in foster care can only be observed as of the censor date. For the administrative data analysis in this report, the censor date is June 30, 2022.

⁴⁵ The Children's Center is where abused and neglected children are brought immediately after being removed from their parents. It is not intended as a place where children would live for extended periods of time, but rather as a temporary rest-stop for children to wait for an appropriate and longer-term foster home placement.

grouped into the “Other” category, accounting for about 10 percent of the total Fair Futures-eligible population.

Fair Futures services are provided to youth while they were in foster care, so it is important to understand youth’s initial experience with foster care to better serve them. Figure F2 below presents the experience of this group in their initial agency spell.⁴⁶

Figure F2. Fair Futures-Eligible Youth Foster Care Characteristics



In Figure F2, Relative Home placement appeared to be the most common initial placement type for this group of youth, and it accounted for approximately 46% of all initial placements. Another 15% of youth were placed in another family setting placement—licensed foster home. Roughly 36% of the youth were placed in a group setting placement, more or less equally with group home, group residence, and institution.

Slightly over half of the new entries (~52%) were still in their initial agency spell as of the censor date. For this group, as time goes on, more youth who have not left their initial agency will move to one of the exit types. More than one-fifth of the youth returned to family through reunification (~20%) and relatives (~3%) after exiting from their initial agency spell. About 15% of the youth transferred to a different agency.

For teenagers who entered foster care for the first time and exited from their initial agency spells, close to a quarter (~24%) of them left within a month, approximately 45% stayed with their initial agency between one and six months before they left that agency, and one-fifth stayed more than six months but less than a year. The remaining 11% remained in the initial agency for more than a year.

⁴⁶ An agency spell captures a continuous time a child is placed in a particular agency. It can consist of more than one placement. When the child moves to a different agency, the agency spell breaks and a new agency spell starts.

Most of the new entries (~69%) did not experience any placement change within their initial agency spell as of the censor date. Approximately 16% had one movement from one type of placement to another when they stayed with their initial agency, and about an equal proportion of youth experienced two or more placement moves during their initial agency spell.

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