

Telling Our Own Stories: Former Foster Youth Experiences with Barriers and Healing during COVID-19

Reproductive Health Equity Project for Foster Youth National Center for Youth Law

**By the Foster Youth-Led Intersections Working Group
Autumn Taylor, Jaci Cortez, Jay R., Cindy Evans, Felicia Reyes,
Alexandra-Grissell Gomez**

In early 2020, the Intersections Working Group (IWG), a subset of the Reproductive Health Equity Project for Foster Youth's Youth Advisory Board (YAB), set out to understand the impact of COVID-19 on young people's ability to access sexual and reproductive health care.

Our goal was to provide knowledge about the range of experiences of foster youth, from former foster youth. We executed a youth-led research project where young people lead every part of the research, from the conception of the research question, to gathering data, to writing the report and disseminating the findings. This approach centers young people and aims to further develop their leadership, advocacy, problem solving, and community engagement skills. The data, findings and recommendations presented in the report comes from an analysis of testimonios, interviews, listening sessions, and summer learning webinars with people who self-identified as former foster youth.

In doing this project, we discovered how incredibly challenging it is to disentangle reproductive and sexual health needs and barriers from other issue areas such as housing, education, employment, and overall health. We drew on Kimberly Crenshaw's lens of intersectionality to explore the subtle complexities and hardships of being a young person with experiences in the foster care system, and how they intersect and interlock with other systems such as race, gender identity, sexuality, socio-economic status, and parenting status, among others.

Our research and process led us to identify key barriers to care and to some key findings. The strongest finding was that the barriers highlighted in this report are not new. Young people with lived experience in foster care have been battling with housing and economic security before COVID-19 changed anything. Our social support networks were already much smaller than others and our mental health was something that we've always needed more resources for. What COVID-19 did was exacerbate these issues for us and our community and made us understand how deeply entrenched these systems and issue areas are with each other—they do not exist in silos. The report concludes with several policy recommendations based on these findings.

To download a full version of the report, go [here](#).