

# How do LGBTQ+ youth and youth of color experience social support after leaving foster care?

LABRENZ, C. A., YU, M., WASHBURN, M., PALMER, A. N., JENKINS, L., & KENNEDY, D. (2022). EXPERIENCES OF PERCEIVED SUPPORT POST DISCHARGE AMONG FOSTER CARE ALUMNI: DIFFERENCES AMONG LGBTQ+ YOUTH AND YOUTH OF COLOR. *JOURNAL OF PUBLIC CHILD WELFARE*, 17(3), 569-594.

## What can we learn from this study?

Social support during the transition to adulthood is a key protective factor for youth with lived experience in foster care. Social support is associated with better mental health, psychosocial functioning, and life satisfaction. Some studies have shown that social support for alumni of foster care decreases as they transition to adulthood. This study examined whether LGBTQ+ youth and youth of color perceived different levels of social support after leaving foster care when compared to other youth leaving foster care.

### Study details:

- **Population:** 1,377 alumni of foster care ages 14-26 involved in the [Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative](#) (38% LGBTQ+, 36% white, 26% Black, 38% other racial/ethnic groups)
- **Data source:** Biannual survey
- **Methodology:** Bivariate chi-square tests and growth curve analyses
- **Dates:** 2009 through 2020

## What are the critical findings?

This study examined responses to two questions about social support: the first pertaining to adult support from family, and the second regarding adult support from someone other than a family member who the youth will “always be able to turn to for support.”

- **A smaller proportion of LGBTQ+ youth (72%) said they had family support, when compared to non-LGBTQ+ youth (80%).** Similarly, a smaller proportion of LGBTQ+ youth (68%) said they had non-family support, when compared to non-LGBTQ+ youth (73%).
- **A smaller proportion of Black youth (70%) said they had family support, when compared to white youth (79%) and youth from other racial/ethnic groups.** Similarly, a smaller proportion of Black youth (65%) said they had non-family support, when compared to white youth (73%) and youth from other racial/ethnic groups.
- **As youth got older, regardless of race and gender identity, the likelihood of reporting either family support or non-family support decreased.**
- **There was no relationship between LGBTQ+ identity and perceived family or non-family support across racial groups.**

## Why is this important for our work?

Well-being outcomes among alumni of foster care are generally poorer than those of their peers in the general population. Social support is vital for youth preparing to leave foster care, particularly among Black youth and youth who have experienced rejection from their family due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. Child welfare professionals should be trained in affirming practices, and efforts should be made to strengthen relationships with youth’s families of origin when safe and appropriate. Promoting relational permanency should be a top priority for all youth exiting foster care.

This summary synthesizes the findings from a single research report. To learn more about supporting LGBTQ+ youth and youth of color, please see [How can child welfare agencies effectively support LGBTQ+ youth in care?](#) and various [Casey resources on racial equity](#).

For additional information about this article, see the [abstract](#) or contact [KMResources@casey.org](mailto:KMResources@casey.org).