

What Happens to Adopted Youth and Families after Adoption?

Results of a Follow-Up Study Conducted for Ampersand Families

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Executive summary

Researchers have demonstrated that youth who “age out” of the child welfare system often experience negative outcomes in a variety of areas (Courtney et al., 2005, 2007, 2011). For children and youth whose parents’ legal rights have been terminated, adoption is generally considered the preferred permanency outcome over remaining in care until adulthood (“aging out”). However, there is a significant lack of research exploring outcomes for “older youth” (age 10 and older) who left placement in the child welfare system because they were adopted. There is also a lack of research exploring outcomes for the parents that have adopted “older” youth (age 10 and older) from the child welfare system. Because little is known about how adopted youth and families adjust and fare over time, the general belief that adoption outcomes are better than those achieved when youth remain in care until adulthood may or may not be well-founded.

Minnesota-based Ampersand Families was interested in understanding more about the long-term outcomes for adopted youth and families. The organization specializes exclusively in permanency for older youth, and over the past 10 years has helped move about 160 youth into permanent families. Wilder Research worked with staff from Ampersand Families to design a post-adoption follow-up study interviewing 26 youth adoptees and 33 adoptive parents. The majority of youth (73%) were age 18 or older at the time of the follow-up interviews, but ranged in age from 14 to 22.

Key finding 1.

Older youth adoptees in the study had experienced significant trauma and extensive child welfare involvement.

- ✓ Youth most commonly moved in with their adoptive parent when they were 15 or 16 years old (48%), with an average age of 14 years old.
- ✓ Youth had experienced an average of 7 lifetime placements, and more than a third (35%) had 9 or more placements, by the time of their referral to Ampersand Families.
- ✓ On average, there was 6 years between a youth’s first placement and their move-in with their current adoptive parent.
- ✓ Almost all youth (92%) had at least 5 Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), with an average of 6.5 out of 10. Previous research has demonstrated that childhood trauma as measured by a greater number of ACEs has been associated with increased risk of physical health, mental health, and well-being challenges, including a shortened lifespan (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019).

Key finding 2.

Despite significant trauma and multiple placements, these adopted youth are faring well at follow-up.

- ✓ All youth respondents said they were satisfied or very satisfied with their life overall. Nearly all youth were satisfied with their relationships with family (92%) and friends (85%).
- ✓ When asked who they count on, over three-quarters of youth (77%) said they rely on their adoptive parents or adoptive family members.
- ✓ Throughout the interviews, youth comments indicate a sense of hopefulness about their life overall. It is not known how much their childhood trauma and placement histories may have impacted their expectations, but, nevertheless, youth are overwhelmingly positive about being adopted by their family.

Key finding 3.

Youth adoptees in the study experienced significant mental health issues; adoptive parents have connected youth to therapy and medications and believe that their involvement has had a positive impact.

- ✓ All parents reported that their adopted child had a mental health diagnosis at the time of move-in. Nearly all (97%) reported that their adopted child had received mental health services or therapy since they adopted them.
 - ✓ Just over half of parents (55%) said that their child's diagnosis has changed and 79% said their child's medication has changed since moving in with them; this includes 9% whose child started taking medication for their mental health diagnosis and 70% whose child was on medication before, but now they are on fewer medications, no medications, or different medications.
 - ✓ 9 out of 10 parents believe that their involvement has had a positive impact on their child's mental and emotional health, while 6% said it did not have any impact and 3% said it had a negative impact.
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Key finding 4.

Adoptive parents in the study are generally positive, but mixed, about how the adoption has impacted their family.

- ✓ Over half of adoptive parents (57%) felt that adopting their child had a positive impact on their lives, and another 34% reported a mixed impact; 1 parent reported a very negative impact.
 - ✓ Most parents reported that the youth moving in with them did not change their physical health, relationship with their partner, relationship with their other children, or their finances.
 - ✓ The majority of parents indicated that the adoption had an impact on their mental health (42% positive; 32% negative impact), their relationship with extended family (54% positive; 24% negative impact), and their friendships (44% positive; 22% negative impact).
 - ✓ When parents felt adopting their child changed aspects of their life, there was a split between those who felt the change was positive and those who felt it was negative, with slightly more tending to report positive changes. The exception to this was that those parents who noticed a change in their finances reported that the change was negative.
 - ✓ Parents of youth with more lifetime child welfare placements (average placements=7) were more likely to say that they have an excellent or good relationship with the youth and the adoption positively affected their lives, compared to parents of youth with fewer lifetime placements (average placements=5).
 - ✓ Parents who adopted slightly older youth also tended to have more positive experiences. Parents who reported that the adoption had a positive impact on their own life overall and their own mental health had adopted youth at an older age (average age=16) than those who reported mixed, neutral, or negative impacts on their own lives (average age=15).
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Key finding 5.

Although the sample is small, adopted youth in the study are doing better in some key areas than youth who aged out of foster care at age 19 in the Midwest Study.

11 of the 26 youth interviewed for the adoption study were age 19 or older at follow-up, allowing us to compare this small sample to findings from the Midwest Study's follow-up of 19-year-old youth who had aged out of foster care (Courtney et al., 2005).

- ✓ Compared to the Midwest Study, fewer Ampersand Families youth have been pregnant or made someone pregnant. The Midwest Study reports that “nearly half of females reported that they had ever been pregnant” (Courtney et al., 2005). In the adoption study, only 18% (2 youth) had been pregnant or made someone else pregnant. Similarly, a greater percentage of the Midwest Study youth had children of their own compared to the adoption study (23% vs. 9%).
 - ✓ Strikingly, 80% of the youth age 19 and older in the adoption study are employed, compared to 41% of the 19-year-old youth in the Midwest Study.
 - ✓ Since turning 18, no Ampersand Families youth had experienced homelessness compared to 14% of youth in the Midwest Study.
 - ✓ The one key area in which adopted youth are faring worse is their involvement in the criminal justice system after age 18. A greater percentage of adopted youth had been convicted of a crime (36% vs. 12%) and spent a night in jail or in prison (27% vs. 19%) than their similarly aged foster care peers.
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Implications for practice and systems improvements

Don't withhold information. More than half of families talked about policy or systems barriers that were issues for them in their adoption process. Again and again, adoptive parents emphasized the desire for as much information as possible prior to the adoption. They do not want any information held back about the youth, and they appreciate hearing real life experiences from other adoptive families so they better know what to expect and what questions to ask. Youth also talked about the need for as much information as possible about the potential family, as well as the process involved. Several talked about their desire to have workers know that they should give youth power in an otherwise powerless situation, including giving youth the ability to slow down the process or say no to an adoptive placement.

Mental health care is a critical support. All parents and most youth indicated that the youth had received mental health services post-adoption. In general, youth felt that their adoptive parents were well-prepared for the adoption, and several particularly mentioned their parents learning about the impact of trauma on youth and the resulting behavioral and mental health issues. Several youth also mentioned that parents could have been more prepared for specific mental health or behavioral concerns. In multiple comments, youth and parents talked about the critical support provided by post-adoption mental health services.

Prepare adoptive parents and youth for future interactions with birth family. At follow-up, many youth had contact with some members of their birth family. Over half of youth (58%) wanted more contact, and 27% were dissatisfied with their relationship with their birth family. For youth who were dissatisfied with their relationship with their birth family, there was an even mix of those who had not met or had no contact with certain members of their birth family and

those who felt that their birth family was not supportive or toxic to them. Most youth feel supported by their adoptive family when it comes to talking about or trying to connect with their birth family. However, some adoptive parents expressed a desire for support in navigating these complicated relationships and interactions.

Parents were also asked to reflect on things that could have been done to better prepare them for adoption. Their responses centered around more training on specific issues such as trauma and Reactive Attachment Disorder, more services in place at the time of move-in, and more information about connecting with the biological family.

Conduct further study to explore the impact adoption may have on mitigating the long-term impacts of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). One important area to explore further is the extent to which the adoption of youth from foster care can serve as a protective factor against poor physical and behavioral health outcomes caused by trauma in childhood.

Despite the extensive childhood trauma youth in the study experienced, they are faring well in multiple areas often severally impacted by the toxic stress caused by the brain and body's response to this trauma. Study results suggest several factors that may help mitigate the long-term impact of ACEs. For instance, adopted youth may be benefiting from strong and responsive relationships with caring adults as well as treatment provided by mental health professionals. It is a critical social and financial value to conduct further study to understand whether these supports led adopted youth with multiple risk factors to become healthier adults.

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Background

Children under state guardianship in Minnesota

Minnesota's child welfare system is state-supervised, county-administered. This means that local social service agencies (87 counties and two American Indian tribes participating in the American Indian Child Welfare Initiative) are responsible for the care and protection of children in out-of-home placement.

In 2017, there were 16,593 children who experienced out-of-home placements, in most cases due to parental reasons, such as drug use, abuse, or neglect. Most of these children were returned home with their families (64% of those who left care in 2017). However, in some cases, workers and the courts determine that reunification with parents or primary caregivers cannot be achieved in a safe and/or timely fashion. With the exception of a relatively small number of cases where transfer of physical and legal custody or consent to adopt is ordered, the court must then order a termination of parental rights (TPR), which severs the legal parent-child relationship. These children are then determined to be under guardianship of the Commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Human Services and are referred to as "state wards" (Minnesota Department of Human Services, 2017). Unlike some other states, termination of parental rights usually occurs in Minnesota without an identified option for an adoptive family for the child.

Once TPR has been ordered, adoption is the preferred permanency option. County and tribal social service agencies are responsible for the safety, well-being, and placement of these children, including identifying appropriate adoptive parents and working to facilitate the adoption process. This process can be lengthy; some children remain under guardianship of the commissioner for months, years, or until they turn age 18 and either age out of the foster care system or continue in extended foster care (Minnesota Department of Human Services, 2017).

During 2017, there were 2,314 children who spent at least one day under guardianship of the commissioner. About half of these children were very young (age 4 or younger). Older children tend to remain under guardianship longer. Some children turn age 18 and "age out" of the foster care system while they are still under guardianship of the Commissioner. During 2017, 55 children who had been state wards aged out without having been adopted (Minnesota Department of Human Services, 2017).

Ampersand Families

Founded in 2008, Ampersand Families' mission is to recruit and support permanent families for older youth, and to champion practices in adoption and permanency that restore belonging, dignity, and hope. Ampersand Families' vision is that every young person whose life has been disrupted by trauma and subsequent out of home placement will be restored to a safe, permanent family with an urgency that honors the brevity of childhood.

Ampersand Families is Minnesota's only nonprofit adoption agency focused exclusively on helping older youth—who have generally waited in temporary foster care the longest—join permanent families. Most of the time that means working toward adoptions and providing support after adoptions are finalized.

As of January 2019, Ampersand Families has helped move about 160 youth into permanent families. This number includes cases where the organization represented the youth (via child-specific recruitment), represented the family (through parent training and home studies), or represented both the youth and the family. In cases where Ampersand Families represented only the youth or only the family, they generally coordinated the placement in partnership with a peer agency that worked with the other party. This report uses the term “youth” to refer to adopted individuals up to 24 years of age, consistent with the United Nation's definition (United Nations, n.d.).

Ampersand Families programming includes:

- Child-specific family recruitment emphasizing full engagement of youth in every step of the process.
- Proactive, effective training, matching, and placement services for relative and non-relative adoptive families.
- Comprehensive transition and post-placement support as long as families need it.
- Community outreach and education about the critical need for families for teens and about the community's responsibility to help restore foster youth to family life.
- Leadership to improve the child welfare system, promote best practices, advance equity, and reduce the need for adoption services.

Ampersand Families is one of five agencies under contract with the Minnesota Department of Human Services to provide adoption services for youth who are under the guardianship of the Commissioner or a Minnesota tribe, and services to families interested in adopting them. In all cases, youth in out of home care are served by a county or tribe. Some children and youth who are under guardianship of the Commissioner are also served by one of the private agencies; adoptive parents may receive services from their county, tribe

or a private agency. As a result, many adoptions from foster care in Minnesota involve a county or tribe and one or two private agencies working in concert.

Understanding the need for research on older adopted youth

Most youth enter the child welfare system because they experienced significant parental abuse or neglect. Although the goal of the child welfare system is typically to provide sufficient services and support to the family so the child can return home safely, this is not always possible. In these cases, youth most often live in a foster home or another type of residential facility until they are adopted or “age out” of the system once they reach legal adulthood.

When reunification is not possible, there is almost universal agreement in the child welfare field that adoption, or transfer of permanent physical and legal custody, is the preferred outcome versus “aging out” (Kamarck, Wilson, Hansen, & Katz, 2012). In a comprehensive longitudinal study, Courtney et al. (2007) found that youth who “age out” of foster care experienced a variety of negative outcomes in numerous areas, including education, employment, physical health, mental health, and criminal justice involvement. In a review of longitudinal adoption studies, Bohman and Sigvardsson (1990) also concluded that adoption yields more positive outcomes than “aging out.”

However, there is a significant lack of research assessing whether adoption yields more positive outcomes over remaining in the foster care system until adulthood for youth adopted at an older age from the child welfare system. Thus, Ampersand Families contracted with Wilder Research to explore the mid- to long-term outcomes for adopted youth and their families served by Ampersand Families, the youth and family characteristics associated with positive outcomes, and youth and adoptive parent perceptions of the adoption services and supports they received.

Study methods

Wilder Research and Ampersand Families worked together to create a follow-up study of families served by Ampersand Families, guided by past experience researching child welfare and older youth adoption systems, a comprehensive review of adoption literature, feedback from the Family Builders Network meeting, and key informant interviews with professionals and families. These sources were used to identify the following research questions:

- What are the outcomes for youth who are adopted as older children or teenagers from the child welfare system through Ampersand Families?
- What are the outcomes for families who adopt older youth from foster care with services from Ampersand Families?
- What child and family characteristics and experiences are associated with more positive youth and family outcomes?
- What supports do youth and families identify as being most helpful in adjusting to the adoption over time?
- How do youth and adoptive parents describe the services and supports received from Ampersand Families?

To answer these questions, Wilder Research designed semi-structured phone interviews to gather information on the current status of adopted youth and one of their adoptive parents. In addition, researchers examined some information collected in the Ampersand Families database.

Study participant eligibility criteria

Wilder Research and Ampersand Families selected several eligibility criteria to determine the study sample. The aim was to identify older youth adoptees, and to ensure that at least one year had passed since the time of the youth's move-in with the family. Eligibility criteria included:

- Youth was at least 10 years old at the time they moved in with their adoptive parent(s)
- Move-in occurred prior to January 1, 2018
- The adoption has finalized
- Youth was at least 14 years old on January 1, 2019
- Family was home studied through Ampersand Families and/or the youth received child specific recruitment services from Ampersand Families that resulted in the youth moving in with their adoptive parent

Study recruitment and response rate

Ampersand Families and Wilder Research attempted to contact 71 families that met the eligibility criteria (Figure 1). Families were notified about the study by mail, email, and phone. In all, 43 families responded and were asked to voluntarily participate. Of these, 36 parents and 30 youth gave permission to be contacted for the study, and 33 parents and 26 youth completed an interview. The limitations section that follows explores some possible limitations of the sample. However, it is important to note that there were no significant differences between the parents and youth who participated, versus those that did not, when we examined available characteristics such as age, race, or gender.

1. Study participants and response rates

	Number of adoptive parents	Number of youth
Eligible for study	71	71
Responded to initial outreach about eligibility for study	43	43
Gave permission to be contacted for study	36	30
Completed an interview	33	26
Response rate based upon all eligible	47%	37%
Response rate for all who gave permission to be contacted	92%	87%

Note. Only one parent per adoptive family was interviewed for this study.

Although the goal was to interview both the youth and one of their adoptive parents, this was not possible for every family; for seven families, the youth did not participate for a variety of reasons (e.g., lack of youth contact information, significant mental health concerns). Only one parent was interviewed from each family. Twenty-six pairs of youth and their adoptive parent completed the interview. Additionally, some youth were under age 18 at the time of the interview; in these cases, adoptive parents gave consent for their youth to participate (in addition to the youth). Each youth and adoptive parent received a \$30 gift card upon the completion of their interviews.

Interviews

Wilder Research conducted interviews with adoptive parents and youth between January and July 2019. The first four interviews were conducted by senior researchers as pilot interviews to test the survey instrument, and minor modifications were made to the instrument based on the pilot. These pilot interviews are included in the data analysis.

The interviews covered a variety of topics. Both youth and adoptive parents were asked about the pre-adoption and adoption process, post-adoption support, and potential for disruption or dissolution. All respondents were also asked about their physical health,

mental health, interpersonal relationships, social support, education and employment status, and life satisfaction. Youth were asked about their relationships with their adoptive family and birth family, current housing situation, criminal behavior, crime victimization, substance use and abuse, and whether they have their own children. Adoptive parents were asked about their relationship with their youth and their financial security. Some youth characteristics were reported by the adoptive parent rather than the youth, such as current grade or level in school.

On average, interviews lasted about 45 to 75 minutes in length.

Data analysis

To analyze the interviews, researchers created a codebook using an open-coding method and coded the qualitative data portions of the interviews in Atlas.ti, a qualitative analysis software program.

Secondary data retrieved from the Ampersand Families records database included demographic information for both youth and their adoptive parents; information on the youth's adoption and placement history; and the youth's Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), a measure of traumatic childhood events linked to negative health outcomes (Minnesota Department of Health, 2019). Researchers used SPSS, a quantitative analysis software program, to analyze these data as well as the quantitative data portions of the interviews.

Although the Ampersand Families database has data on the youth of all 33 participating families, data from the youth interviews are limited to the 26 participating youth. Accordingly, youth-related data are reported for the 26 participating youth, regardless of source. Data regarding adoptive parents are reported for the 33 participating adoptive parents, unless data are also available for the partner or spouse of the interviewed adoptive parent and these data are relevant to include (e.g., adoptive parent age retrieved from the Ampersand Families records database). Family-related data are reported for the 33 families with at least one participating member.

Limitations

It is important to note several limitations of the current study. The response rate was relatively low, and the participating families are not representative of adoptive families generally. Additionally, there were some key differences between families in which the youth did (n=26) and did not participate (n=7) in the interview. Overall, the families in which the youth did not participate tended to report more negative experiences with their adoption, including the parents being more likely to seriously consider disrupting or dissolving the adoption, feeling their relationship with the youth is poor or terrible, and reporting that the adoption had a negative impact on different parts of their lives. In

addition, the youth who did not participate were more likely to have fair or poor mental health, according to parent report, and their parents were more likely to be dissatisfied with their lives as a whole. These differences indicate that the results included in this report may reflect particularly successful or well-functioning youth and families.

For the entire group of parents and youth eligible for the study, there were no significant differences between the parents and youth who participated, versus those that did not, when we examined available characteristics such as age, race, or gender. We were unable to explore potential differences in other characteristics of adoptive parents or youth because we could not access these data for adopted youth whose parents did not consent to participate.

In addition, participating families may have received different services from different agencies, and may have worked with different agencies for different lengths of time. Accordingly, this is not an evaluation of Ampersand Families or the services they provide. Some data were also incomplete or unavailable, such as youth mental health diagnoses and sexual orientation for individual adoptive parents and youth.

Lastly, some adopted youth were relatively young at the time of their interviews, and there was a wide age range for adopted youth. This reduced our ability to compare our data to a large longitudinal study on outcomes for youth who “aged out” of foster care (Courtney et al., 2005, 2007). However, the youth outcomes section of this report contains a section summarizing outcomes for youth age 19 and older in this study and those of the Midwest study of youth at age 19 who have aged out of foster care.

Finally, insufficient variability in youth responses further limited the possible data analyses. Further study is needed to understand how well participants represent all older youth adoptions.

Background characteristics of youth, adoptive parents, and adoptive families

Wilder Research compiled data on youth, parent, and family characteristics from the Ampersand Families records database and the key informant interviews with adoptive parents.

Youth demographics and educational and employment status

Most youth (73%) were age 18 or older as of January 2019, with an average age of 18 (Figure 2). In addition, most youth identified as female (65%) and as white or Caucasian (73%). Most youth reported living with their adoptive parent(s) (65%).

2. Youth demographics

	Number of youth	% of youth (N=26)
Age as of January 2019		
14-15 years old	2	8%
16-17 years old	5	19%
18-19 years old	12	46%
20-22 years old	7	27%
Average age as of January 2019		18
Gender		
Female	17	65%
Male	9	35%
Race or ethnicity		
American Indian or Alaska Native	3	12%
Asian American	0	0%
Black or African American	6	23%
Hispanic or Latino	3	12%
White or Caucasian	19	73%
Current living situation		
Independent housing (e.g., own place, with spouse or friend(s), dormitory)	6	23%
Adoptive parent(s)	17	65%
Birth parent(s)	1	4%
Treatment facility	1	4%
Adoptive grandparents	1	4%

Source. Ampersand Families records database and adoptive parent interview

Note. Youth can have multiple races or ethnicities identified, so the numbers do not add up to 100%.

Because of the significant racial disparities for youth of color among Minnesota’s child welfare population, it is useful to compare the racial or ethnic backgrounds of the youth who were interviewed for the study with all youth who are under state guardianship (and thus eligible for adoption). Youth interviewed for the Ampersand Families study were more likely to be white than youth who continued under state guardianship in 2017 (57% vs. 48%). The Ampersand Families study group was slightly less likely to be African American or Native American, but similarly likely to identify as two or more races or Latino as all youth continuing under state guardianship.

3. Race or ethnicity of Ampersand youth interviewed compared to all youth under state guardianship in Minnesota

	Youth interviewed for the Ampersand Families study	Percent of all children/ youth continuing under state guardianship (2017)
Race		
American Indian or Alaska Native	4%	7%
Asian American	0%	1%
Black or African American	19%	23%
White or Caucasian	57%	48%
Two or more races	19%	19%
Ethnicity		
Hispanic (any race)	12%	11%

Source. Ampersand Families records database (left column); DHS Minnesota’s Out-of-home Care and Permanency Report, 2017 (right column).

Note. The percentages for interviewed youth are different from those presented in Figure 2 because the state uses discrete race categories, including a single category for multiracial youth. In addition, ethnicity is reported separately from race.

According to their adoptive parent, almost two-thirds of youth (65%) are currently enrolled in school; many are still in 8th-12th grade. For those not attending school (35%), most (6 of 9) graduated or received their GED. Of all youth, only 3 are not in school who have not graduated high school or received their GED (Figure 4).

Adoptive parents were also asked about their youth’s employment status. Half of youth are working part time or full time (50%), and almost half are not working (46%). Among youth who are not working, most are attending school or working on a GED (11 out of 12).

4. Youth educational and employment status as reported by adoptive parent

	Number of youth	% of youth (N=26)
Educational status		
Enrolled in 8 th -12 th grade	12	46%
Pursuing a GED	1	4%
Enrolled in a postsecondary program (e.g., vocational certificate, two-year program, four year college program)	4	15%
Not currently attending school or working on a GED	9	35%
<i>Of those not in school nor pursuing a GED, number of youth who have completed at least their high school diploma or GED</i>	6/9	
<i>Of those not in school nor pursuing a GED, number of youth who have not completed their high school diploma nor their GED</i>	3/9	
Employment status		
Not working	12	46%
Working part time or full time	13	50%
Keeping house or raising children and not working outside the home	1	4%

Source. Adoptive parent interview

Adoptive parent demographics and employment status

Almost half of adoptive parents were 45-54 years old as of January 2019 (44%), with an average age of 48 (Figure 5). Nearly all adoptive parents identified as white or Caucasian (94%). Most adoptive parents reported that they work full time (94%).

5. Adoptive parent demographics and employment status

	Number of adoptive parents	% of adoptive parents
Age as of January 2019 (N=52 total parents)		
29-34	6	12%
35-44	11	21%
45-54	23	44%
55-65	12	23%
Average age at adoption finalization		48
Race or ethnicity (N=51 total parents)		
American Indian or Alaska Native	0	0%
Asian American	2	4%
Black or African American	0	0%
Hispanic or Latino	1	2%
White or Caucasian	48	94%
Two or more races/ethnicities	0	0%
Employment status (N=33 parents who were interviewed)		
Working full time or part time	31	94%
Retired	1	3%
Keeping house or raising children and not working outside the home	1	3%

Source. Ampersand Families records database and adoptive parent interview

Family characteristics

About half of adoptive parents received their home study and adoption services from Ampersand Families (52%; Figure 6). Adoption services may have included pre-adoption training, post-placement support, or ongoing training. Most youth received adoption support services from Ampersand Families (85%), which may have included permanency preparation and support, permanency reviews, the development of a life-book, or support for kin and birth family search. Just over one-third of participating families had both the youth and parent served by Ampersand Families (36%).

Adoptive parents most commonly reported household incomes between \$50,000 to under \$100,000 (31%) or \$100,000 to under \$150,000 (31%). The majority of adoptive parents

indicated they were married or partnered at the time of move-in (70%), and that there were two adults living in the household (73%) at the time of move-in. A little more than half of adoptive parents reported that they had birth children (52%), and some adoptive parents reported that they had other adoptive children (12%) at the time of move-in. Four in 10 (42%) reported that they did not have any other children. Some adoptive parents indicated that they had children with another type of relationship (18%), although the nature of this relationship was not specified in the interview. Four in 10 families (39%) had other children living with them at the time of adopted youth move-in (Figure 6).

6. Family characteristics

	Number of families	% of families (N=31-33)
Worked with Ampersand Families		
Adoptive parent worked with Ampersand Families	17	52%
Youth worked with Ampersand Families	28	85%
<i>Ampersand Families served both the youth and the adoptive parent(s)</i>	12	36%
Annual income		
Under \$50,000	4	13%
\$50,000 to under \$100,000	10	31%
\$100,000 to under \$150,000	10	31%
\$150,000 or more	8	25%
Adoptive parent married or partnered at time of move-in	23	70%
Adults living in household at time of move-in, including adoptive parent		
1	9	27%
2	24	73%
Other children of adoptive parent at time of move-in		
Had birth children	17	52%
Had no other children	14	42%
Had children with another type of relationship	6	18%
Had adoptive children	4	12%
Other children of adoptive parent living in or outside household at time of move-in		
Had no other children	14	42%
Only had children living in household	9	27%
Only had children living outside of household	6	18%
Had children living inside and outside of household	4	12%

Source. Ampersand Families records database and adoptive parent interview.

Note. Percentages may not add to 100%, as adoptive parents may report having multiple children with different types of relationships.

Youth history with foster care, adoption, and Adverse Childhood Experiences

More than a third of youth were nine to twelve years old (36%) at the time of their first welfare placement outside of their home, with an average age of 9 years old (Figure 7). Child welfare placements include foster care, adoptive placements, group homes, and other types of out-of-home placements. On average, youth had experienced an estimated seven lifetime placements, and more than a third (35%) had experienced nine or more placements by the time of their referral to Ampersand Families. This number is an estimate due to the difficulty of tracking the number of placements, particularly if the youth moves in and out of the same home or the home of their birth family multiple times.

Prior to their referral to Ampersand Families, nearly half of youth (42%) had experienced a disruption in a past adoptive placement, meaning that the adoption process ended after the youth was placed in a pre-adoptive home and before the adoption was finalized (Figure 7). More than a third had experienced adoption dissolution, in which the legal relationship between the adoptive parent(s) and youth ends after adoption finalization (35%). Three youth (12%) had experienced both a disruption and a dissolution of an adoption. In cases of dissolution or disruption, the youth is either placed with a new adoptive family or re-enters foster care or other out-of-home placement.

Youth most commonly moved in with their adoptive parent when they were 15 or 16 years old (48%), with an average age of 14 years old. In addition, youth were most commonly 15 or 16 years old at the time of adoption finalization (36%), with an average age of 15.

Youth experienced an average wait of three years from the termination of the rights of their birth or previous adoptive parent(s) until the finalization of their adoption.

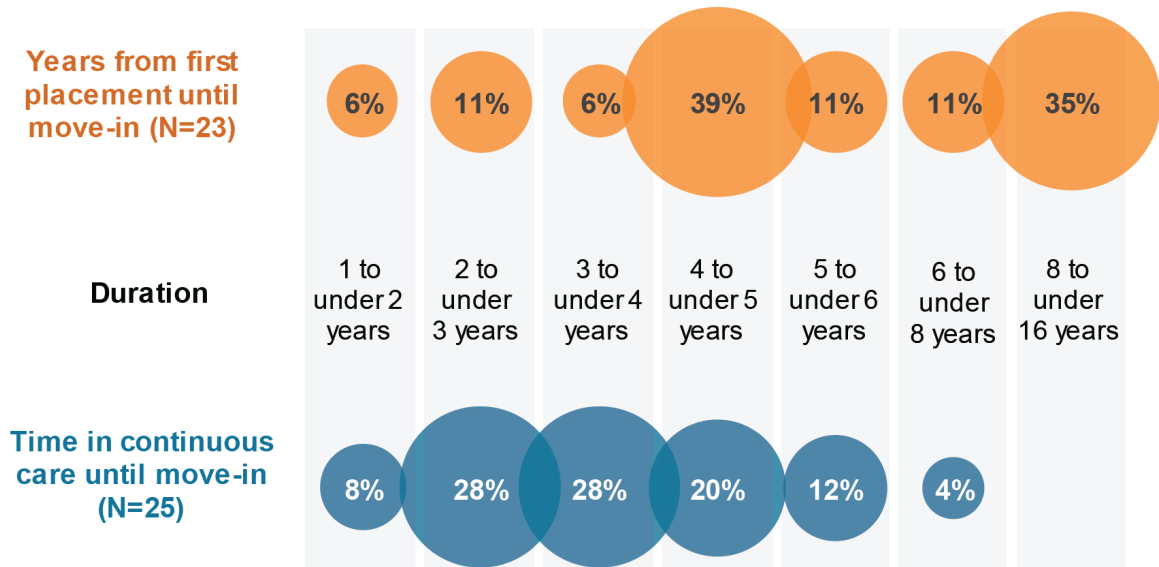
7. Youth foster care and adoption history

	Youth	% of youth (N=25-26)
Age at first placement		
4 years old or younger	6	24%
5-8 years old	4	16%
9-12 years old	9	36%
13-15 years old	6	24%
Average age at first placement		9
Estimated lifetime placements		
1-4	8	31%
5-8	9	35%
9-13	9	35%
Average estimated lifetime placements		7
Previous adoption disruptions and dissolutions		
Youth has experienced a previous adoption disruption	11	42%
Youth has experienced a previous finalized adoption and dissolution	9	35%
<i>Of those above, number of youth who experienced both a previous adoption disruption and an adoption dissolution</i>	3	
Age at move-in		
11-12 years old	4	16%
13-14 years old	8	32%
15-16 years old	12	48%
17 years old	1	4%
Average age at move-in		14
Age at adoption finalization		
11-12 years old	1	4%
13-14 years old	7	28%
15-16 years old	9	36%
17-18 years old	8	32%
Average age at adoption finalization		15
Time from termination of parental rights to adoption finalization		
Under 1 year	1	4%
1 to under 2 years	6	24%
2 to under 3 years	8	32%
3 to under 4 years	5	20%
4 to under 5 years	3	12%
5 to under 9 years	2	8%
Average time from termination of parental rights to adoption finalization		3 years

Source. Ampersand Families records database

Youth most commonly experienced a period of four to five years between their first placement and move-in with their current adoptive parent (Figure 8), with an average of six years. This time may have included time spent reunified with their birth family or other finalized adoptions. Youth most commonly spent two to three years or three to four years in continuous care until they moved in with their most recent adoptive parent (Figure 8), with an average of four years. Continuous care may include time spent in foster care, pre-adoptive homes, or other types of out-of-home placements, but does not include time spent reunified with the youth's birth family or other finalized adoptions.

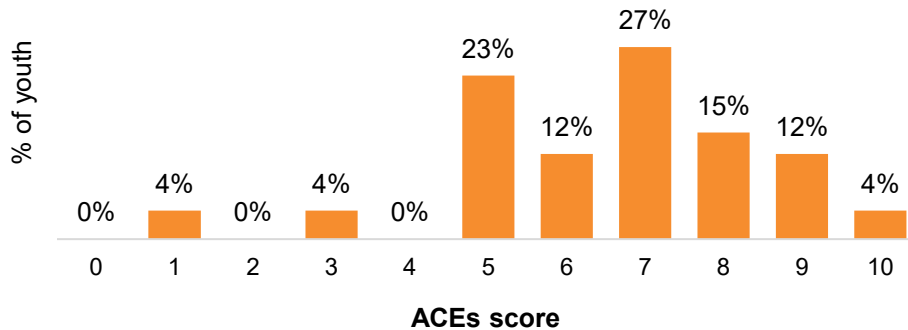
8. Time from first placement until move-in and time spent in continuous care until move-in



Source. Ampersand Families records database

In terms of traumatic experiences in childhood, all youth had at least one Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE), such as abuse or neglect (Figure 9). First developed by Kaiser Permanente, ACE scores are used to measure health risk by assessing cumulative exposure to adverse or traumatic experiences (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019). The range in the number of ACEs varies from 0 to 10, with a score of 10 indicating that the youth experienced all ten types of traumatic experiences identified by Kaiser and the CDC. Almost all youth (92%) had a score of at least 5, with an average of 6.5. Previous research has demonstrated that higher ACE scores are associated with increased risk of physical health, mental health, and well-being challenges, including a shortened lifespan (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019). It should be noted that only data about the total number of ACEs were available for this study, rather than information on experiences with specific adverse childhood events.

9. Youth ACEs score (N=26)



Source. Ampersand Families records database

Outcomes

Youth outcomes

Youth social support

Overall, youth respondents felt they had a support network they could rely on (Figure 10). Specifically, all respondents said they have someone to talk to about their adoption, birth family, or time in foster care. In addition, more than 90% of respondents said they have people to talk to about challenges or successes and someone to help in instrumental ways, such as providing rides, helping with finances, or making connections.

When asked who they count on, over three-quarters of youth (77%) said they rely on their adoptive parents or adoptive family members. In addition, 42% said they count on friends or partners and 15% said members of their birth family.

10. Youth social supports (N=26)

Do you feel like you have people in your life that you can count on in the following situations?	Percentage reporting yes
When you want to talk about your adoption, birth family, siblings, or time in foster care?	100%
When you want to share good news or celebrate something?	96%
When you need help with a school or work problem?	96%
When you need someone to talk to when you're feeling low?	92%
When you need a ride somewhere?	92%
When you need help paying for something you need?	92%
When you need someone to encourage you to meet your goals?	92%
When you want help making connections for things like job leads or school projects?	92%

Youth health and well-being

Physical health

Parents were asked to estimate their child's physical health status. Two-thirds of parents said that their child's physical health is at least good, this includes one-third who said excellent or very good (Figure 11). One-quarter said fair and 9% said poor. The majority of parents (63%) believe their involvement has had a positive impact on their child's physical health, while the remaining parents (36%) believe their involvement has not changed their child's physical health. When asked how they affected their child's health,

parents reported helping them in ways such as stabilizing or ending medications, maintaining a healthy weight, getting to medical appointments, accessing dental care, and ending substance use and self-harming behaviors.

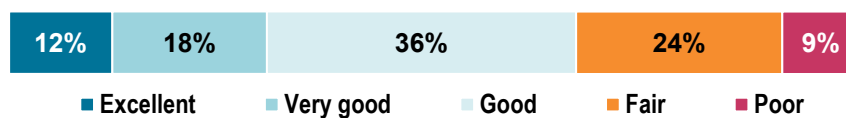
He has some chronic illness and they were in poor shape when we adopted him. Now he's hospitalized less often, we reduced his overall medications and doctor visits. He's doing so much better now.

– Adoptive parent

Her dental care improved and she got to a more normal weight. She had an incident with self-harming behavior (cut herself), and wound up in the ER. She was able to stop this behavior - never did it again.

– Adoptive parent

11. Youth's current physical health status based on parent report (N=31)



Mental health

Parents were also asked to reflect on their child's mental or emotional health. Similar to physical health, the majority of parents (61%) reported their child's mental health is at least good; however, no parents rated their child's mental health as excellent (Figure 12). About one-quarter of parents (27%) said their child's mental health is fair and 12% said it is poor. Youth reported some mental health symptoms as well. Just under half of youth (46%) said that they have felt nervous, anxious, or on edge in the past two weeks, while about one-quarter (23%) felt down, depressed, or hopeless during that time. However, 88% also felt hopeful or excited in the past two weeks and said that they can usually or always calm themselves down when they feel angry or scared; only 4% said they rarely can.

All parents shared that their child had a mental health diagnosis at the time they moved in together, and 79% said their child was on medication for their diagnosis at that time. Just over half of parents (55%) said that their child's diagnosis has changed and 79% said their child's medication has changed since moving in with them, this includes 9% whose child started taking medication for their mental health diagnosis and 70% whose child had reduced medication or a change in medications. Overall, 9 out of 10 parents believe that their involvement has had a positive impact on their child's mental and emotional health. Two parents said it didn't have any impact, and one parent said it had a negative impact. Specific changes parents reported that youth made after moving in with them

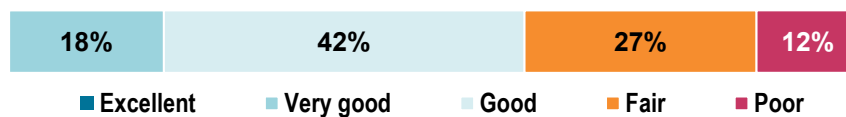
include: seeing a therapist, building coping skills, accessing medications, and building stronger, more trusting relationships.

We were able to get him access to a therapist to talk about his trauma that he's had all his life.
– Adoptive parent

Before she came to live with us, she would have night terrors and had to take medication for it. After living with us, she stopped having them and didn't need to take her medication anymore.
– Adoptive parent

I think because when she first came home, she would keep everything inside and keep a wall up. Now when she struggles with an emotion or anxiety or depression, she would come to my husband and I and talk about it. Prior to her feeling comfortable, she would physically get sick and now she's able to process things better.
– Adoptive parent

12. Youth's current mental health status based on parent report (N=31)



Youth legal issues since age 18

Victim of a crime

Overall, 21% of youth said that they have been a victim of a crime since age 18. All of these individuals (4 of 4) said they experienced a violent crime, such as rape, sexual assault, aggravated assault, vehicular assault, or robbery. In addition, 11% reported that they have been in a personal relationship with someone who physically hurt them or threatened to do so since turning 18.

Committed a crime

Of the 26% of youth who reported being arrested at some point in adulthood, all said that they had been convicted of a crime. This includes convictions for drug crimes (2 of 5), property crimes (1 of 5), violent crimes (1 of 5), motor vehicle citations (1 of 5), and a small firearms charge (1 of 5). Of the five young adults who were convicted of a crime, three spent time in jail or prison.

Family involvement in legal issues

About half of parents (52%) said they were aware of legal issues their child has had since joining their family. These parents were asked an open-ended question about how they were involved with these issues. Over half of the 17 families with a child who had legal issues (53%) reported they were involved in the court process, including advocating for their child and helping to ensure their child did what they were required to do by the court. Of these families, many (41%) mentioned that they helped their child work on behavior changes or access services, such as medication or anger management to avoid future legal issues. In addition, several families (35%) said they provided emotional support to their child through the process, and some visited their child (18%) or provided financial support (12%) as needed. Three families (18%) said they were not involved in their child's legal issues because their child was an adult, the issues were minor, or they were not aware of them until after the fact.

We went to court with her. We visited her. We helped her get on the right medication. We kept her. We just stayed with her and helped her through the process.
– Adoptive parent

Youth substance use

Half of youth respondents reported having used tobacco in their lives, while 27% report having used tobacco in the past 30 days (Figure 13). Nearly half have ever used alcohol (46%) and marijuana (46%), but fewer have used in the past month (27% and 15%, respectively). About a quarter of youth (23%) reported ever using other drugs, such as meth or opiates or misusing prescription drugs, while only one (4%) reported using these types of drugs in the past 30 days.

13. Youth self-reported substance use (N=26)

Have you ever used...	Percentage who ever used	Percentage who used in the last month
Tobacco, including smoking, chew, or vaping?	50%	27%
Alcohol, including beer, wine, or liquor?	46%	27%
Marijuana, including pot, hash, dabbing, or edibles?	46%	15%
Other drugs, including meth, opiates, inhalants, or prescription drugs taken in ways other than prescribed?	23%	4%

Respondents under age 18 were more likely to report ever using tobacco (57%), compared to their peers age 18 and over (47%), despite it being illegal for persons under age 18 to purchase tobacco products. Conversely, respondents under age 21 were less likely to report ever using alcohol (39%) compared to their peers age 21 and over (3 of 3), which better aligns with legal drinking age laws.

Of the 12 respondents who reported using alcohol, most (75%) did not engage in binge drinking in the last two weeks, which is defined as having five or more drinks within a couple of hours. Of the remaining youth, two reported binge drinking once or twice and one youth reported binge drinking three to five times in the past two weeks.

Youth out-of-home placements and running

Youth respondents were asked if, between the time their adoption was finalized and when they turned age 18, they ever stayed somewhere else for more than three nights “because of an issue.” About one-third of respondents (35%) said they had. In addition, 15% said that they had run away from their adoptive family for more than 48 hours before the age of 18. When asked why they ran away or spent time away from home, youth were most likely to report it was because of conflict or issues getting along with their adoptive parents (55%), not feeling happy in the adoptive home (18%), wanting to go back to their previous community (18%), or spending time in a residential behavioral health treatment facility (18%).

Similarly, 39% of parents said that their adopted youth has stayed with someone outside of the home for three or more nights because of an issue the youth was experiencing. When this happened, youth were most likely to stay in a residential care setting (39%), a correctional facility (31%), a hospital for a mental health crisis (25%), or with other family members, friends, or partners (23%). Parents were slightly more likely than youth to report that the youth ran away since moving in with them but before the age of 18 (24% vs. 15%). It should be noted that parents reported that three of the youth not participating in the interview ran away, which would account for this difference.

None of the youth in the study reported experiencing homelessness since moving in with their adoptive family. Youth who age out of care are at high risk of becoming homeless upon leaving care or when they experience a crisis in early adulthood. In Minnesota, 61% of youth experiencing homelessness had been in an out-of-home placement including foster care, group homes, and treatment facilities (Wilder Research, 2017).

Youth life satisfaction and future orientation

All youth respondents said they were satisfied or very satisfied with their life overall. When digging into specific areas of their lives, there was a little more variation in responses. The highest percentage of youth were satisfied with their relationships with family (92%) and friends (85%; Figure 14). In thinking about the future, 65% said they were very hopeful and 35% said they were fairly hopeful; no youth said they were not hopeful.

14. Youth life satisfaction (N=26)

Thinking about specific areas of your life, how satisfied would you say you are with...	Satisfied or very satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Dissatisfied or very dissatisfied
Your education?	73%	12%	15%
Your employment?	70%	20%	10%
Your housing or living situation?	81%	15%	4%
Your relationships with friends?	85%	12%	4%
Your relationships with family?	92%	0%	8%
Your physical health?	69%	12%	19%
Your mental health?	73%	19%	8%

My adoptive family is pushing and helping me strive for what I want, helping me achieve my goals. I want to help foster children. They are helping me with school, helping me realize that I can do better than what I'm doing.

– Youth

Because I grew up from the bottom and everything I have now I've gotten it myself with my dad supporting me. It's going as far as I take it.

– Youth

My goals for my future are in progress. I'm setting smaller goals to achieve the bigger goals. I want to have a house on my own, my own family, a wife – a simple life.

– Youth

Most youth felt that being adopted into their family affected their life in a positive way (85%), though 15% felt it had a mixed effect.

It opened my eyes up that there are good people out there still. They made me realize I am worth more than nothing, instead of being tossed to the side.

– Youth

A complete life change. I started doing better at school. I have a job and I'm not homeless like I was with my birth parents.

– Youth

[The hardest thing about being adopted into this family is] learning to accept someone else into your family that you have never known before.

– Youth

[The hardest thing about being adopted into this family is] the feeling that I have betrayed my birth family.

– Youth

Comparisons to the Midwest Study of Youth at age 19

Because youth interviewed in this study ranged in age, it is difficult to make direct comparisons to those of the large longitudinal “Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Age 19” (Courtney et al., 2005). However, 11 of the 26 youth interviewed for this study were age 19 or older, allowing us to compare this small sample to findings from the Midwest Study’s follow-up of 19-year-old youth who had aged out of foster care. The following summarizes some of the key outcomes identified by the Midwest Study.

Compared to the Midwest Study, fewer Ampersand Families youth have been pregnant or made someone pregnant. The Midwest Study reports that “nearly half of females reported that they had ever been pregnant” (Courtney et al., 2005). In the adoption study, only 18% (2 youth) had been pregnant or made someone pregnant. Similarly, a greater percentage of the Midwest Study youth had children, compared to this study (23% vs. 9%).

Strikingly, 80% of the youth age 19 and older in the adoption study are employed compared to 41% of the 19-year-old youth in the Midwest Study. In the areas of educational attainment or current education or training, the results are more difficult to interpret between the two groups.

It is also notable that no youth reported experiencing homelessness since moving in with their adoptive family. Fourteen percent of 19-year old former foster care youth interviewed for the Midwest Study had been homeless since they aged out (Courtney et al, 2005), and the link between foster care and homelessness has become increasingly evident (Wilder Research, 2017).

The one key area in which adopted youth are faring worse is their involvement in the criminal justice system. A greater percentage of adopted youth had been convicted of a crime (36% vs. 12%) and spent a night in jail or prison (27% vs. 19%) than their similarly aged foster care peers (Figure 15).

15. Comparisons of key youth outcomes to the Midwest Study of former foster care youth at age 19

Key outcomes	Youth adoptees who are 19 or older (n=10-11; this study)	Youth at age 19 who aged out of foster care (Midwest Study)
Has children	9%	23%

15. Comparisons of key youth outcomes to the Midwest Study of former foster care youth at age 19 (continued)

Key outcomes	Youth adoptees who are 19 or older (n=10-11; this study)	Youth at age 19 who aged out of foster care (Midwest Study)
Educational attainment		
Attained high school diploma or GED	70%	63%
Currently enrolled in high school or GED program	30%	15%
Current education or training		
Enrolled in high school or GED program	30%	15%
Enrolled in vocational program or 2-year college	20%	26%
Enrolled in 4 year college	10%	7%
Not enrolled in school or training program	40%	52%
Current employment		
Employed	80%	41%
Criminal justice involvement		
Have been arrested	36%	28%
Have been convicted of a crime	36%	12%
Have spent the night in jail or prison	27%	19%
Experienced homelessness since age 18	0	14%

Note. Because of missing information due to a skip pattern regarding current enrollment in high school or GED programs, Ampersand youth who were currently enrolled in post-high school program (college or vocational program) were categorized as having their high school diploma or GED (30% of Ampersand youth).

Parent outcomes

Information about parent outcomes was collected via interviews with adoptive parents (one parent per family), who provided information about their general well-being; their relationships, social support, and financial security; and their satisfaction with the adoption and life overall.

Parent well-being

The following summarizes the parent's well-being and the perceived impact of the adoption on various aspects of the parent's life.

Current physical health

Parents' ratings of their own health at the time of the interview varied. While just over half described their current physical health as either excellent (21%) or very good (33%),

24% described it as “good,” while the remainder described their physical health as fair (15%) or poor (6%). Nearly half of parents thought parenting their adopted youth had an impact on their physical health – 16% said it had a mostly positive impact, while 29% said it had a mostly negative impact. The remainder (55%) said it had no impact.

He's pretty active, so I'm just trying to keep up with him and all his activities he's got. Trying to get him to do new things forces me to get out more and try new things.
– Adoptive parent

I became way more active, for example, took more walks, and did things that I didn't think I could do.
– Adoptive parent

Living with the level of stress and anxiety for so long takes a toll. You're not sleeping well at night and you have a constant cortisol rush. There was a period that was really, really hard and it's gotten better in the last year.
– Adoptive parent

I gained about 70 pounds. ... [I was] stressed out, really stressed out. I now have eczema on my neck and I never had that before.
– Adoptive parent

Current mental health

Similar to physical health, parents' ratings of their mental or emotional health also varied, although somewhat more positive relative to physical health. More than half described it as excellent (15%) or very good (46%), 30% described their mental health as “good,” and 9% said “fair.” Most parents did feel parenting their adopted youth had an impact on their mental or emotional health, both positive and negative. Forty-two percent thought parenting their adopted youth had a mostly positive effect, while one-third (32%) said it had a mostly negative impact.

I think that going through therapy with her was very educational and insightful for me as a parent [around] how I would handle a situation or view something. So going through that with [youth], I felt it was a positive impact. Learning tools to help stress.
– Adoptive parent

Because it's fulfilling to be her mom. She's teaching me about grace and forgiveness. I have learned a lot from her and how easy she is to forgive me when I have a bad day with her.
– Adoptive parent

The whole situation has been draining most of the time. I've had some major depressive episodes. I came to realize there is only so much I could do. I expected some things that could not be. So, now I view it as one step at a time - that's better. I go to therapy now.
– Adoptive parent

As the [mental health issue] became more of an issue for [youth], the things she would say would trigger my memories of my own childhood trauma - things I had not realized. I put myself into therapy when [youth] went into treatment and now I am doing well.

– Adoptive parent

Interpersonal relationships, social support, and financial security

Marital relationship

Most of the parents (76%) were married at the time of the interview, and 88% of those were married to the same person with whom they adopted the youth. More than half of those with the same partner said that the adoption had impacted their relationship. While about one-third (35%) said that having the youth join their family changed their relationship for the better, 22% said it changed it for the worse. Forty-four percent said the adoption had no impact on their relationship with their partner (Figure 16).

I think because you grow together as a family and through the struggles. I think our marriage got stronger. We use humor a lot in our house, so I just think we leaned on each other more during the stressful times.

– Adoptive parent

I think we had kind of both started going, "This is my deal, this is your deal" and were kind of separate, but now we had a common purpose and goal. We have depended on each other a lot more and I have grown in respect for my husband much more--seeing his patience and constantly giving and forgiving.

– Adoptive parent

A couple of years ago, it was really hard to have any energy for each other... just trying to hang on by our fingernails. We are recovering as a couple and getting to a better place.

– Adoptive parent

At the beginning, it was bad, but then it made us both stronger. We were married ten years before we adopted [youth,] so we were very secure in our relationship first. We are stronger because we trust each other 100%.

– Adoptive parent

Overall, parents expressed satisfaction with their current spouse or partner, with 88% “very satisfied” and 12% “somewhat satisfied.”

Relationship with other children

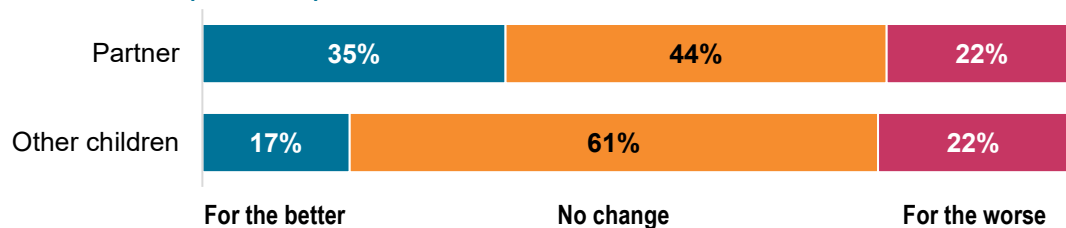
Of the 18 parents who had **other children** besides the child they adopted, 22% said their relationship with their other children changed “for the worse” after their adopted youth moved in, while 17% said it changed “for the better.” Most (61%) said their relationship with their other children did not change as a result of the adoption (Figure 16).

After it changed for the worse, it changed for the better. It was a real growing experience for everybody. People are more tolerant, more willing to talk about things and more open.
– Adoptive parent

Because I had less time for my biological child due to [youth's] mental health needs. He needed my attention more.
– Adoptive parent

When things were getting bad with [youth's] [mental health disorder], and she was being very disrespectful to me, they thought I was taking [youth's] side in the situation, and that I didn't care about them or what they thought. We had always had a very close relationship and, because of the [mental health disorder], they did not want to even come to the house.
– Adoptive parent

16. Parent report of how the adoption affected relationships with partner and other children (N=18-23)

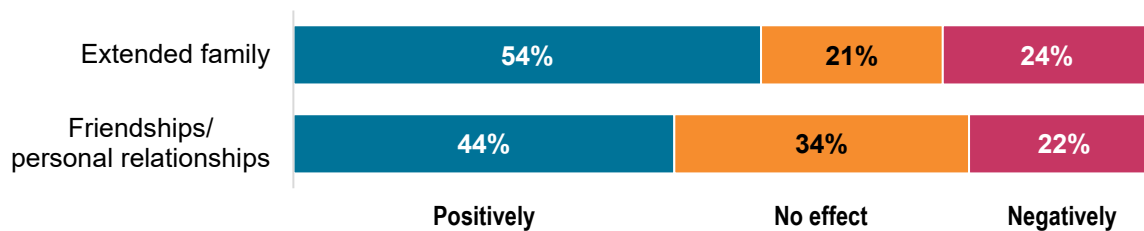


Other relationships

The extent to which the adoption affected **extended family** varied widely. Just over half said the adoption affected their relationships with extended family “very positively” (30%) or “somewhat positively” (24%). One-quarter said the adoption affected their extended family relationship “somewhat negatively” (18%) or “very negatively” (6%). The remainder (21%) said it had no effect (Figure 17).

Similarly, there was variation among parents’ perceptions around the effect of the adoption on **friendships and personal relationships**. Just under half said the adoption affected their friendships and personal relationships “very positively” (16%) or “somewhat positively” (28%). Twenty-two percent of parents said the adoption affected their friendships and personal relationships “somewhat negatively” (16%) or “very negatively” (6%). One-third (34%) said it had no effect (Figure 17).

17. Parent report of how the adoption affected relationships with family and friends (N=32-33)



Financial security

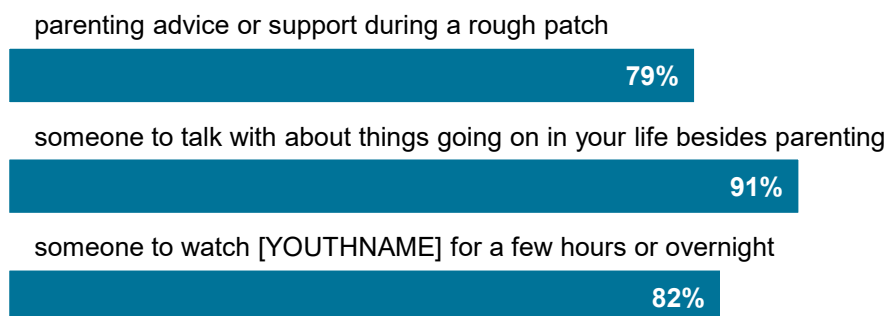
Few parents said that parenting the adopted youth had a significant impact on their finances and financial security. Nine percent said it impacted their finances “somewhat positively,” while 22% said it impacted their finances “somewhat negatively.” About two-thirds of parents (69%) said the adoption had no impact on their finances.

Social support

Overall, parents expressed a high level of social support. The majority of parents said they had “enough people to count on” when it came to needing: parenting advice or support (79%), someone to talk with about things other than parenting (91%), and someone to watch their youth for a few hours or overnight (82%; Figure 18).

18. Parent perception of social support (N=33)*

There are enough people you can count on when you need...



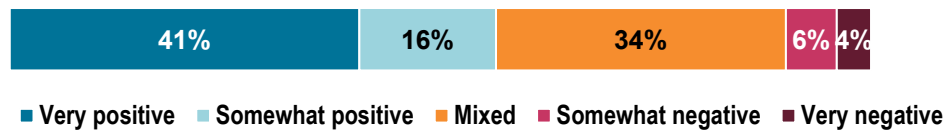
* Only 11 people responded to the question about needing someone to watch [youth] for a few hours or overnight. 22 people indicated the youth is not living at home or did not need that kind of supervision.

The extent to which parents socialized without children varied. Most said they go out socially, with a partner, friend, or family member, “sometimes” (61%) while 21% said they go out “rarely.” A small proportion said they go out socially without children either “often” (9%) or “never” (9%).

Satisfaction with adoption and life overall

The majority of parents said that, overall, the adoption had a positive or mixed effect on their lives (Figure 19). A little over half said the adoption affected their life “very positively” (41%) or “somewhat positively” (16%), while about one-third said it had a “mixed” effect (34%). A small number of parents said it affected their life “somewhat negatively” (2 parents) or “very negatively” (1 parent).

19. Parent report of impact of adoption on parent’s life (N=32)



Parents were asked to explain why they felt the adoption had the positive or negative impact it did. Figure 20 identifies the key themes that emerged from parents’ responses. Parents who cited a positive impact most often noted that the adoption completed their family or was “meant to be,” that they felt they accomplished something by doing something worthwhile for another person, and that they could not imagine the youth not being part of their family and would do it again. Although fewer parents identified negative impacts, those who did most often cited issues with child protection or judicial systems, stress, isolation from friends and family, negative health impacts, and negative impacts on other personal relationships.

20. Parent report of impact of adoption on parent’s life overall: Open-ended responses (coded)

	Number of responses
Positive impact (n=28)	
Positive impact on family as a whole (completed our family, meant to be)	12
General comments about positive effect of adopting child (would do it again, can’t imagine youth not part of family, opportunities to do fun activities with youth)	11
Personal accomplishment on part of parent (doing something worthwhile, helping another person, becoming a parent/part of someone’s life, watching another person grow)	10
Personal growth on part of parent (learned a lot, more grounded)	7
Negative impact (n=11)	
General/other negative impacts (dealing with the child protection or legal systems, feeling misled by adoption system, youth did not appreciate opportunities)	6
Negative impact on family/family life (negative behaviors by youth caused stress, became isolated from friends/extended family)	5
Negative impact on health of parent(s) (more stress, neglected self-care and healthy habits, feelings of failure/guilt, overwhelmed by youth’s needs)	4

	Number of responses
General comments about negative effects of adopting child (youth did not connect with family as hoped, bad decision overall)	4
Negative impact on parent's relationships with others (neglected friendships, caused fights with partner)	2

Note. The number of coded positive impacts and negative impacts totals more than the total number of responses because some responses referenced multiple impacts, both positive and negative.

I can't even think of it not being so. Although we have challenges, it's made us different people and has made me learn more about love - a different level of love. I just think this is what was supposed to happen. – Adoptive parent

I can't imagine him never being here. It's like it's supposed to be this way. There's always ups and downs and that's with any child, but, overall, he'll do something and [my partner] and I will roll our eyes in our heads and laugh. We just can't imagine him not being here. – Adoptive parent

I just feel that she has completed the family. Our family would not be nearly as good without her. – Adoptive parent

It really started to go to hell about a year ago and now, it's just - honest to god - I wish I didn't put myself through this. Intellectually, I know that I did a lot of good for her, but I also know it did a lot of bad to me. I don't know if my life is better having met her. I just feel like I was used. – Adoptive parent

Just all the struggles, like when she got into trouble with the law and having to deal with that court stuff, her emotional outbursts. Those were the tough times, which felt like the negative piece of it. We felt like we bit off more than we can chew. – Adoptive parent

In general, parents expressed a high level of satisfaction with their life overall. Almost all parents (91%) said they were “very satisfied” (42%) or “satisfied” (49%) with their life as a whole. Three parents (9%) said they were “neither satisfied or dissatisfied” or “dissatisfied.”

Broader family outcomes

Relationship between adoptive parents and youth

Nearly all youth reported that their relationship with their adoptive parent is “excellent” (50%) or “good” (46%). One youth reported it was “okay” (4%). About three-quarters of parents described their current relationship with the adopted youth as either “excellent” (30%) or “good” (46%). A smaller proportion described this relationship as either “okay” (6%), “poor” (15%), or “terrible” (3%).

More specifically, most youth (81%) said that they usually or always work with their adoptive parents to make decisions about their life, while fewer parents reported that this happens usually or always (42%), and 30% reported these discussions happen rarely or never. Most youth (81%) felt that their parents were usually or always good listeners when it comes to their thoughts and feelings, and nearly all (96%) are comfortable talking with their adoptive parents about their birth family or time in foster care. However, about half of parents (49%) said that their youth rarely or never worked through emotionally difficult things with them, including their relationship with their birth family or their time in foster care.

Both parents and youth were asked about the ways in which they are or are not a good fit together. Two-thirds of youth only named ways in which their adoptive parents are a good fit with them, while the remaining third had examples of how they were not a good fit. Overall, youth tended to report that their adoptive parents were supportive, loving, and caring, and that they enjoyed spending time with them. They felt they had things in common, including interests and personality traits. However, some youth identified that differences in personalities and expectations can be challenging. Some youth also identified challenges more in the beginning of living together and challenges due to being a different race than their parents.

I think they've been a good fit for me. They've been really helpful with me. They know when I'm feeling down, when something's bothering me, how to support me. We spend a lot of family time together and go out and do activities. I have a good bond with [my parents]. This is probably one of the best families I ever had.

— Youth

First of all, they are a two parent household and I needed that. That was good for me. The whole family welcomed me and they treated me like I had been with this family since birth. I like that their house is in the suburbs and not in the country. [For ways we've not been a good fit,] to start off they are white and I'm black so it was a little awkward at the beginning because I'm black and I tried hard not to use my slang because if I did I had to spend the next ten minutes explaining it to them.

— Youth

They have been a good fit because they are very forgiving. They are very understanding, loving, and very helpful. The only part I would say that is not a good fit would probably be they would like me to be more of a kid and it's hard for me. I'm used to parenting my biological siblings and other young children, so my adoptive parents would like me to not do that and just enjoy being a kid and have fun, but it's hard for me.

— Youth

Adoptive parents tended to have more mixed views of their child's fit with the family. About half identified ways their child was and was not a good fit with the family, about one-third only identified ways they *were* a good fit, and 17% only identified ways in

which they *were not* a fit. Many parents felt that their youth had a good relationship with their family, enjoyed doing things together, and had common interests or personality traits. However, some parents identified that their youth’s mental health issues, trauma history, and behaviors were challenging, and others identified key differences in values, aspirations, and interests. Several parents also described a challenging transition period with the youth.

I would say that [youth] is the best fit that we possibly could have gotten out of any child anywhere. In many, many ways, I am closer to my adopted children than biological children. There's always that little feeling that they [the adopted child] have a biological family and I'll be wondering if they are going to go back to them [their biological family]. But I don't know that there could be a better fit for her.
– Adoptive parent

One of the things we weren't sure of is if she had a sense of humor. It turned out she did. She has such a caring heart. Emotions are not her strong suit. She does little things to let you know she appreciates you. It's weird when you can have these other people move into your house and you connect. She's [an adult] now so it's been a couple of years, but she's always welcome to come and visit. I think what can be hard is she struggles with communication. Sometimes she shuts down when she's upset instead of talking about it.
– Adoptive parent

We just really were not equipped to be able to deal with his severe mental health issues. We got him the services that he needed. We feel like he was never able to bond. His therapist told us he does not have the ability to bond with people. There's no emotional connection for him. I don't think he was ever a good fit for our family and that we were not a good fit for him.
– Adoptive parent

[Youth] has a loving heart and wants to be part of the family, but at first he would not open up and would stress out and not tell us, and things would come to a head, and there would be a big blowout. He is hard to parent - lying is his default. Our [younger] biological child is at the same cognitive level as [youth]. Trying to integrate another child into the family - especially a teen - is difficult.
– Adoptive parent

Fit between youth and adoptive family

Of the 20 parents who had other children besides the adopted youth, just over half described the relationship between the adopted youth and the other children as either “excellent” (15%) or “good” (40%). Thirty-five percent described it as “okay,” while the remainder said it was “poor” (10%). Most of these parents felt that adopting the youth had either a positive (45%) or mixed (44%) impact on their other children. A small proportion (12%) described it as a negative impact (Figure 21).

21. Parent report of impact of adoption on other children (N=18)



Note. Percentages do not total to 100% due to rounding.

Parents were asked to describe the positive or negative impact of the adoption on their other children. Positive impacts included personal growth, increased acceptance of differences and compassion in their other children, and the establishment of strong sibling relationships. Negative impacts included feeling like the adoptive child was not a good role model because of negative behaviors, and the other children experiencing general trauma and stress (Figure 22).

22. Parent report of impact of adoption on other children: Open-ended responses (coded)

	Number of responses
Positive impact (n=15)	
Personal growth in other children (acceptance of differences in abilities/skills, increased tolerance for children's disruptive behaviors, adapted to people from different backgrounds/cultures, increased compassion, increased sharing)	7
Sibling relationships (strong sibling bonds)	7
Adopted child is positive role model for other children	2
More appreciation of own childhood	1
Negative impact (n=10)	
Adoptive child is negative role model (other children witness negative behaviors)	7
Overall trauma/stress for adoptive parent/siblings	4
Adoptive child draws too much attention away from care of other children	3
Disruption of family routines/stability	3
Conflict in family (general)	1

Note. The number of coded positive impacts and negative impacts totals more than the total number of responses because some responses referenced multiple impacts, both positive and negative.

They see that we don't give up on people. They see that in our house people are loved no matter what they're working on and that people can work on different skills at their own pace and that's okay. I would say that they definitely have a much higher tolerance for chaos and behaviors than I think your typical preschooler and first grader.
– Adoptive parent

I think it has taught them a greater understanding and compassion for the circumstances of other families. Some people find themselves struggling, but they're less selfish now.
– Adoptive parent

They're not very close, but fine around each other. My energy is consumed, talking and interacting, and always doing something. That's been one of the biggest issues that's impacting her, with me doing so much, has put a strain on her.
– Adoptive parent

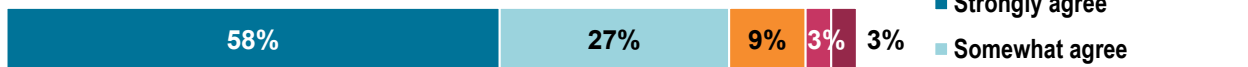
When the [mental health disorder] got worse and [youth 's] disrespect for me built, they became very upset and they felt I was making excuses for [youth 's] behavior and that I had chosen her over them. This caused huge issues for the family stability.
– Adoptive parent

Overall satisfaction with adoption

In general, most parents “strongly agreed” (58%) or “somewhat agreed” (27%) that they were glad they adopted the youth, with a small proportion disagreeing (6%) (Figure 23). Parents also thought that their youth was glad that they had been adopted by their parents (78%), although a few parents (12%) did not think their youth felt that way. However, all youth respondents said that they feel at least somewhat positive about being adopted by their family, and 88% said they feel very positive about it (Figure 24).

23. Parent report of satisfaction with adoption (N=32-33)

I am glad that I adopted [YOUTHNAME].



I think that [YOUTHNAME] is glad we adopted him/her.



24. Youth feelings about being adopted by this family (N=25)

Youth feelings about being adopted by this family.



The whole family vibe. Like it's family oriented, and we all love each other and are very supportive, and that's something I never had before I was adopted.

– Youth

I feel like I have someone there for me, and I feel wanted by them.

– Youth

Growing up, the people who claimed or who were supposed to love me ended up hurting me, emotionally, mentally and physically. Being adopted into this family, they showed me how it's like to actually be loved and to receive love.

– Youth

They are very, very strict people. When they put their foot down, they put their foot down. And that's hard for me to accept sometimes.

– Youth

One of the hardest things is probably having to explain my relationship with my mother wherever I go...Because we look different.

– Youth

Adoption disruption and dissolution

Prior to the finalization of the adoption, 18% of parents said that they and/or their partner had seriously considered disrupting or ending the adoption process. Youth ranged in age

from 12 to 17 at the time. After finalization, 15% of parents said that they had seriously considered or taken steps to dissolve the adoption, or terminate their parental rights. Youth were between the ages of 15 and 18 when this occurred.

Future of relationship between adoptive parents and youth

Parents were asked to describe what their relationship with their youth would look like in five years. Many were optimistic that they would still have a close relationship with the youth and discussed the youth becoming more independent in various ways. Some were less sure if they would still be in touch, or anticipated that the connection would be minimal and limited to when the youth needed something.

I hope she continues to see us as a good support network and a family, and that we continue to have open communication about what's going on. If it stays the same and grows from that - as long as she can see us as a support network for her - I'll be happy with that.
– Adoptive parent

Hoping it will maintain and get stronger and she can see me more as a friend, feel free to ask me more questions as a friend instead of a dad.
– Adoptive parent

I'm hoping it will look really good. I believe she will still be with me, like living with me and that's fine. Or living with someone else, and supporting herself independently. I still hope to maintain a good relationship with her.
– Adoptive parent

It will be about the same as it is now. When he's desperate, like when he needs money, he'll contact me. For the most part, it will be limited, like a text or through social media, on occasions only.
– Adoptive parent

I don't really have a clue, but I am hoping she will see we always had her back and will have come around by then.
– Adoptive parent

Youth were also asked what they thought their relationship with their adoptive parents would look like in five years. All youth said they thought they would still be in each other's lives and the relationship would be as close as it is now or closer as the relationship matures.

I think it'll be stronger as we're both growing older and hopefully I'll graduate and be in my field and get married and have my own kids. I think that would really make our relationship stronger in five years.
– Youth

Probably the same - very close and very happy.
– Youth

Contributors to positive outcomes

To better understand youth and parent outcomes, we wanted to examine whether certain characteristics of the youth, parent, or family were associated with differential outcomes. Overall, the 26 youth who participated in interviews tended to have positive experiences and outcomes. Given the relatively small number of respondents and the lack of variability in their responses, it was not possible to statistically examine characteristics associated with different youth outcomes. There was greater variability in parent responses, so factors associated with these differences are presented here. Specifically, we examined effects on parent reports of: youth out-of-home placements and running away; the quality of the parent child relationship; and how the adoption impacted the parents' physical and mental health, relationships with partners and friends, and life overall.

Differences are identified if there is at least a 20 percentage point difference between groups and statistically significant results are noted. There were no differences that met these criteria based on youth gender or ACEs scores.

Household characteristics at time of adoption

Wilder Research analyzed key outcomes by three household characteristics: parental marital status, the presence of other children in the house at the time their adopted youth moved in with them, and current household income. It should be noted that these household characteristics were overlapping in that 70% of parents who were partnered or married at the time of the adoption also had other children in the home at that time, and 71% of households without children at the time of adoption had a household income of \$100,000 or more.

Overall, ***partnered or married parents*** tended to report better quality relationships with their youth, including being more likely to report the youth talks to them about their lives (78% vs. 50%) and involves them in working through emotionally difficult times (61% vs. 30%). In addition, partnered or married parents were significantly less likely to report that their youth had run away between the time they moved in and when they turned age 18 (13% vs. 50%, $p<.05$).

In addition, ***parents without other children in their home at the time of the adoption*** were more likely to report that the adoption had a positive impact on the parent/s' own mental health (50% vs. 35%) and friendships (62% vs. 32%). However, those with other children in the home at the time of the adoption were more likely to report a positive impact on their relationship with their partner (44% vs. 14%).

Households with incomes of \$100,000 or more tended to have more positive relationships with their youth, including being more likely to describe their relationship as excellent or good (89% vs. 57%) and reporting that their youth talks to them about important decisions (78% vs. 57%). However, this group was also more likely to report that the adoption had a negative impact on their physical health (41% vs. 15%) and their relationship with their partner (36% vs. 0%). In addition, families with a household income under \$100,000 were more likely to say that the adoption had a positive impact on their finances (23% vs. 0%), which may be due to adoption assistance.

Youth welfare history

Wilder Research also analyzed key outcomes by the average estimated number of lifetime child welfare placements and the age of the youth at the time of adoption finalization.

Youth with more estimated lifetime child welfare placements tended to have better relationships with their adoptive parents. Specifically, parents of youth with more lifetime placements (average placements=7) were more likely to say that they have an excellent or good relationship with the youth and the adoption positively affected their own lives, compared to parents of youth with fewer lifetime placements (average placements=5).

Parents who adopted slightly older youth also tended to have more positive experiences. Parents who reported that the adoption had a positive impact on their life overall and their mental health adopted youth at an older age (average age=16) than those who reported mixed, neutral, or negative impacts (average age=15). In addition, parents who adopted youth at an older age (average age=16) were less likely to report that the adoption negatively affected their relationship with their partner (average age=14).

Summary of contributing factors

Figure 25 summarizes the relationship between the contributing factors (chart columns) and the outcomes examined (chart rows). A “+” in a cell means that there is a positive relationship that meets the criteria of a difference of 20 percentage points or more between groups, and a “-” indicates a negative relationship. For more detail about the direction or size of these relationships, please see the relevant sections above.

25. Summary of contributing factors and outcomes

		Contributing Factors				
		Partnered or married at move-in	No children in home at move-in	Household income of \$100,000 or more	Higher estimated # of child welfare placements	Older youth age at adoption
Outcomes	Youth did not run away	+				
	Quality of relationship between parent and youth			+	+	
	Youth talks to parent about life decisions	+		+		
	Youth works through difficult emotional topics with parent	+				
	Adoption impact on parental physical health			-		
	Adoption impact on parental mental health		+			+
	Adoption impact on partner relationship		-	-		+
	Adoption impact on parental friendships		+			
	Adoption impact on parental life overall				+	+

Differences for parents represented by Ampersand Families

About half of the parents interviewed were represented by Ampersand Families (52%), while the others received their home study and adoption services from another agency and their adopted child was represented by Ampersand Families. While this second group of families likely received support services from Ampersand Families during transition and post placement, Wilder Research analyzed data for families who received their primary services (home study, matching and support) from Ampersand Families. Some key factors may make the families with parents represented by Ampersand Families different from families with only youth served by Ampersand Families, so differences and outcomes may not be fully attributed to Ampersand Families services. Specifically, the parents represented by Ampersand Families were slightly more likely to be single parents (38% vs. 13%) with no other children (50% vs. 27%) at the time of adoption. They were also slightly more likely to have an income of \$100,000 or more (69% vs. 50%). In addition, parents served by Ampersand Families tended to adopt youth with a higher number of lifetime child welfare placements (7 placements) compared to those not served by Ampersand Families (5 placements).

Wilder Research analyzed the available data on youth characteristics and outcomes collected from the interview and found that in most areas there were no notable differences in parent and youth outcomes when analyzed by primary adoption agency representing the parent or youth (Ampersand Families or other agency). However, there were a few areas of difference in outcomes between parents served by Ampersand Families versus other parents.

Overall, parents served by Ampersand Families were more likely to report that their youth does not include them in life decisions (44% vs. 13%) or when working through emotionally difficult things (69% vs. 27%, statistically significant). Parents served by Ampersand Families were also more likely to report that their child spent time in an out-of-home placement because of an issue they were experiencing (50% vs. 27%), which may be associated with increased knowledge of or access to placement options for needs (e.g., inpatient mental health or chemical health treatment). In addition, parents served by Ampersand Families were also more likely to report that the adoption had a negative impact on their physical health (44% vs. 15%). However, they were also more likely to say that the adoption helped improve their relationship with their partner (50% vs. 23%). Although there were these few differences, the vast majority of families felt well prepared for the adoption by Ampersand Families and were satisfied with the services they received.

Because of the structure of Minnesota's public private partnership for serving children and youth who are under guardianship of the Commissioner and parent/s who adopt them, multiple agencies (public and private) may be involved in supporting youth and parent/s throughout the matching, transition, placement and post placement support periods. Therefore, it is difficult to assess any one agency's impact unless that agency represented both the youth (child specific recruitment services) and the parent/s (adoption home study and support services) in any particular match. This study includes 12 families in which Ampersand Families was under contract to provide services for both the youth and the adopting parent/s.

Perceptions of adoption process and preparation

Adoptive parent preparation

Most youth (85%) felt that their families were well prepared for their adoption. Youth were asked an open-ended question about ways in which their adoptive parents were prepared or not prepared to adopt them. Youth felt that their parents were knowledgeable, supportive, and understanding. They also felt that their adoptive parents could have been better prepared to deal with challenging behaviors as well as mental health issues, and would have benefited from having more time to prepare (Figure 26).

26. Youth perceptions: in what ways were their adoptive parents well-prepared and not well-prepared to adopt them

Ways parents were <i>well-prepared</i> (categorized into themes)	Youth (n=21)	Ways parents were <i>not prepared</i> (categorized into themes)	Youth (n=25)
Being knowledgeable and trained	57%	Dealing with challenging behaviors	36%
Being supportive or understanding	48%	Process happened too fast; needed more time to prepare	20%
Experience as adoptive parent, social worker, etc.	19%	Dealing with mental health issues	16%
Taking care of physical needs	10%	Dealing with special needs	4%
Having similar interests	10%	Dealing with social workers	4%
Adequate financial resources	5%	Understanding cultural differences	4%

Note. In their comments, youth often gave more than one type of response. Therefore, coded response percentages total more than 100%.

The following are selected youth responses to the open-ended question asking youth about the areas in which their parents were well-prepared for adoption.

[They] went to an all-day training at the U of M to learn how to take better care of my health. They met with my different foster families and with my social workers. They took in a lot of information to take care of me. – Youth

They had done foster care for many years--a lot of years--and they kind of were just really good at making sure we were comfortable. I think a big role was that we just got along really well. – Youth

He was very open minded because of the things/tests that I put him through and he passed. He was very open minded with his limits and he knew I was putting him through some rough tests to see what kind of a person he was. – Youth

They were my prior foster family, so I have been with them for quite some time. They were open minded when I was angry or sad. They went through with my emotions well. There were days I was rebellious, they were patient with me. There were days where I was sad because I missed my family. They gave me space and kept their boundaries. They showed me emotions that my parents never gave me.

– Youth

They had taken classes at Ampersand. I felt they knew what to do in a bad situation like when I was having trouble like a tantrum.

– Youth

I felt they were prepared by understanding my whole situation, my background and where I came from, how complex it was, with abuse and trauma. I think they understood how that affected me and how it could be a domino effect.

– Youth

I felt like they knew how to handle me in situations where I had outbursts. They knew how to give me enough structure in order for me to be the successful person I am now. They knew then and now how to better me and help me mature in ways that I never knew I could grow.

– Youth

The following are selected youth responses to the open-ended question asking youth about the areas in which their parents were not well-prepared for adoption.

Maybe the consequences ... of the baggage I brought with me like severe depression and anxiety. I did not want to leave the house for a long time and was afraid to talk to people.

– Youth

Only if they would have known that they were gonna have the struggles we had. I was a rebellious child. I don't think anyone is really prepared for that. You just have to roll with the punches.

– Youth

The adoption was sprung on them with very little notice, so they were not given much time to prepare. At the time they were approached about adopting, they had not been thinking about adopting. But, the adoption worker was a friend of theirs, so they agreed. They had experience with an older child, but not a 14-year-old. There was a lot of clashing when I first moved in.

– Youth

I feel like we were still learning about each other. I don't think they were ready to have two black girls move in ... [and they] needed to learn about our culture and how we were brought up.

– Youth

Because I'm a special needs person and I felt that they did not have the resources and no one to call in a crisis. If they did call some agency, no one would pick up when they really needed someone.

– Youth

My adoptive mom did not realize how troubled I was. I was a very angry person, and I took it out on her.

– Youth

Most parents (76%) felt “very informed” about the youth before the youth came to live with them. Similarly, most (77%) felt that they had the right amount of visits with the youth before move-in, while the remaining 19% would have liked to have more visits. All parents felt that they had received all (73%) or most (27%) of the information they needed. However, five parents spoke about pieces of information that were missing.

We didn't get enough information. ... I think the foster parents knew him the best, but I don't think they knew what was going on with him either. I felt like [workers] only gave us the information we should know, not that we needed to know. I felt like they were hiding information because, if we knew, we may not have agreed to it.
– Adoptive parent

I didn't have about a year of school records. I think there were childhood medical records that were missing, too, because she told me she had gone to the doctor for things and it did not show on her medical records.
– Adoptive parent

All of it, especially medical. I think our county social worker didn't do a good job. They didn't give us enough information.
– Adoptive parent

Most parents (88%) reported that their team of professionals worked together to create a positive, efficient process for the family and the youth. Parents were asked an open-ended question about the preparation activities that were most helpful to them. Nearly half of parents talked about a variety of things they did to prepare. Many talked about support provided by Ampersand Families or other adoption professionals (Figure 27).

27. Parent perceptions: activities that were most helpful in preparing them for the adoption

Helpful activities (categorized into themes)	Parent (N=33)
Parent's own preparation	49%
Support from social worker, case managers, county workers	46%
Support from Ampersand Families staff	33%
Support from health care providers	18%
Support from child's school	18%
Support from foster parents	15%
Good teamwork and coordinated communication	15%
Support from others	12%
Support from other adoptive parents	9%
None (parent did not feel well-prepared)	3%

The following are selected verbatim parent responses that illustrate the themes parents mentioned about what was most helpful to them in their preparation for adoption:

The county social worker, our social worker, and the foster parent team were good and they all worked together. They were skilled professionals and were respectful of our time and [youth's] time. Privacy was a top priority, also. It was a well-oiled machine. There were a lot of visits and paperwork, but we understood the purpose of all this. I was able to see [youth] on-line. That was helpful.
– Adoptive parent

I attended the Ampersand Families training. This stands out, given the interracial adoption (as a white person, what I would be engaged with - they laid it out). I attended different parent support groups, too; that was helpful.
– Adoptive parent

The workers had planned all the visits with his doctors and we met with them. We were also involved with his school and attended some IEP meetings prior to him moving in. The workers did an excellent job coordinating all of this.
– Adoptive parent

The other meetings with her social worker and all the pre meetings we had. Social workers and therapist were very helpful. With all the officials in her life they gave us tips on how her life looked like and how she was dealing with that and how it related to her past.
– Adoptive parent

I guess just the fact that we visited him as often as we could. The people we worked with were great. We felt very informed and they answered our questions as they came up. I think it was a good process.
– Adoptive parent

Looking at the records; face-to-face meetings with people who knew him, such as his therapist, teachers, and social workers. The face-to-face meetings helped them interpret the records and better understand the experiences of this child. For example, from the records, it looked like he had an intellectual disability, but he is brilliant. They were able to take what was written and put it into context. Often the records are problematic in understanding the child.
– Adoptive parent

I think we went into it blindly and thought we were getting all the information. [Youth] has some severe mental health issues that we did not know about..
– Adoptive parent

I think the thing that prepared us the most was our Ampersand worker who knew [youth] very well, not just on paper. Actually knew personality and would give us insight.
– Adoptive parent

Parents were also asked to reflect on things that could have been done to better prepare for adoption. Their responses centered around more training on specific issues such as trauma and Reactive Attachment Disorder, more services in place at the time of move-in, and more information about connecting with the biological family. Selected responses include:

More education about Reactive Attachment Disorder and the behaviors that go along with that disorder. More education around trauma in general. – Adoptive parent

Services put in place before placement including: a PCA [personal care assistant], mental health case manager for the county that we reside in, in-home skills work, in-home family therapy, regular respite, and a pre-placement neuropsych evaluation. – Adoptive parent

More conversations about people who have gone through the process before. – Adoptive parent

More information about her biological extended family. It would have been helpful to know their names and or even make a connection with them. Also, the financial part of it was very hard for us to go thru the entire process of coming up with the funds and then get reimbursement. – Adoptive parent

More training on her explosive temper, education on not taking things so personally. – Adoptive parent

Youth preparation

In their responses to an open-ended question, youth commonly talked about Ampersand staff or other adoption workers who helped them feel prepared for their adoption (Figure 28). In their open-ended responses, youth pointed out that they liked being well informed about the steps involved in the adoption process, as well as being emotionally supported in the transition to the adoptive home.

28. Youth perceptions: activities that were most helpful in preparing them for the adoption

Helpful activities (categorized into themes)	Youth (N=26)
Support from Ampersand staff	38%
Support from an adoption worker	33%
Support from a social worker	25%
Support from an adoptive family member	25%
Support from a therapist	8%
Support from biological extended family	4%

Note. In their comments, youth often gave more than one response. Therefore, coded response percentages total more than 100%.

The following are selected verbatim responses that illustrate main themes in youth responses about adoption-related preparations helpful to them.

My social worker and my guardian ad litem were both really good about telling me positive things and making sure that they would find someone that would take my [sibling] and I. They were a big support through it all. – Youth

[Worker] was extremely helpful. She went out of her way to take me off campus because I was in treatment at that time and she would take me to visit the potential families that wanted to adopt me. – Youth

Ampersand made me feel welcomed. They were very nice to me and talking to me, not talking down to me. My adopted dad was willing to drive [a distance] when I was having a bad day and would talk to me and calm me down. – Youth

So my adoption worker, she and I became best friends and that really helped me feel confident in trusting her to find a good family for me. She went out of her way to visit me and listened to me for everything I had to say. – Youth

Having the adoption worker walk through each step of the process was helpful. At the time, I did not understand entirely what was going on, but taking the time to guide me through it was helpful, even though I wasn't grasping the depth of the situation at the time. The adoption worker was very accommodating of the situation. The person I was living with was discouraging the adoption because it was to two gay parents, and was told two men should not be together. The Ampersand Families worker was quick to nip that in the bud and stay on track.

– Youth

I think that the social workers and adoption workers were very nice and kind about it. They had everything planned out; they had the agenda and what things were complete and needed to be completed. I think that personally for me I had to remind myself that this would better me. If my biological family really cared they wouldn't have done what they did. My workers always supported me and reassured me. They said things like you need something better, and it's not like you're turning your back on anyone. – Youth

Youth were also asked if there were additional supports that would be helpful to them or other young adopted youth. Most youth commented that they could not think of anything and felt supported in the process. Several specifically mentioned the support provided by Ampersand Families as a model.

I had a great support team for my adoption. Had a Guardian Ad Litem and a bunch of resources. – Youth

Just Ampersand. They really know what they are doing. – Youth

One-on-one therapy because a lot of people go through difficult times throughout the process. It's really good to have someone there to help you, listen to you.

– Youth

Support groups for kids to talk about the transition. If Ampersand Families did an after-adoption therapy group where different kids from different adoption backgrounds could come together and talk about their struggles together, they could support each other or help each other deal with the situation. – Youth

Maybe Respite care for the adoptive parents. I know this has been helpful for my parents. – Youth

Advice for workers

Advice from adoptive parents

Parents were asked a question about what advice they would give to workers trying to support a parent who is thinking about adopting or who is going through the adoption process. Their overwhelming theme was around giving as much information to parents as possible, being realistic about the child, and having compassion and understanding for the parent's process in making a life changing decision. The following are selected verbatim responses from adoptive parents:

Don't withhold information or make judgment calls about what to share. The key is to share everything. – Adoptive parent

I would say, as a worker helping people go through it, I would say to be gentle. It's a scary experience for adoptive parents because they don't know what to expect and they're living it 24/7. And each child is different. – Adoptive parent

Obviously do a lot of reality check questions, "What will you do if in this situation?" especially with any behavior that has come up in any other setting. Also, I would say that I've talked to a number of other parents where they just haven't considered the logistics of having a high needs kid. Those stupid things like, "Okay, summer break is coming up. What's your child care plan?" It seems to be an unnecessary stressor, like that's a very predictable need and a predictable expense. So when there is not a plan for that, it's like, well, you probably should have seen that coming. Even if the kid is at the chronological age a typical child would be staying home alone, a lot of these kids are generally not.

– Adoptive parent

I guess I know their goal is to find families that are right for the child, but it really does have to go both ways. For the child to be successful, the family has to be a good fit for them. I felt like we were good people getting taken advantage of. More education and be more realistic. Don't rush the process or make the decision for them.

– Adoptive parent

I would say be patient, be available, don't hide anything, present the full picture of the child. Don't forget what makes a child beautiful and good. Sometimes I think it's easier to focus on the struggles. Be supportive as a team, really need to feel like the adoption worker has your back.

– Adoptive parent

Giving them as much information as you can on trauma-informed parenting is very important. You're going to have to be willing to take on the mental health system and the medical system because most therapists are not prepared to deal with the trauma these kids have gone through. So you have to be well informed to be a good advocate for your child. Humor will go a long way. It's really important for adoptive parents to have other adoptive parents with kids from similar backgrounds for support because other people won't get it. We knew there was someone to call when they were in crisis because of Ampersand.

– Adoptive parent

Would like [workers] to be aware that if you are adopting kin, there should be some different classes for the parent - there are differences and some of the classes or work assignments didn't really pertain to me as a [relative].

– Adoptive parent

The folks who are working in this area know so much more about the process than new people like us. ... We met his long time therapist, and we googled what questions to ask because we did not know what questions to ask. They're only going to answer questions we ask. I think for the workers, having a little bit more information that might help parents overall.

– Adoptive parent

Advice from youth

Youth were asked a similar question about what advice they would give to workers trying to support a youth waiting to be adopted. Some of the themes were similar to the parent themes and centered around being open and honest and sharing as much information as possible with the youth. The following are selected verbatim responses from youth:

Just always make sure to answer the questions that they might be having or, if you don't know, try to find out or find out with them. My workers were really good support for me in times that I needed them. They supported me when I said, "I don't want to be adopted" or being scared in general that I'm going to be living with people that I've only known for a few months.

– Youth

Make sure you give them all the information and make sure they understand what's going on. And make sure that they make it clear to the kid to not feel bad about saying no.

– Youth

Just do your job. Because the first person that was helping me get adopted was not even trying to find me a family. They really did not know what they were doing. Ampersand came in the picture and I was adopted within six months.

– Youth

Really get to know your child because that's the most important part of your job. You are there to help them.

– Youth

To see the situation through the eyes of the child or teenager.

– Youth

Be as honest with them as you can, within the realm of them being healthy with their honesty. Don't give them false hope if you can avoid it. Encourage them.

– Youth

Definitely to be understanding, to listen because a child or teen may change what they want or figure out what they're hoping for and deserve. Listen and ask the right questions to pry them deeper to what they want. Ask questions as to what they want in a family.

– Youth

Probably to keep checking in with them because sometimes one day they are doing ok and the next day they are not. So it's best to continue to check in with them no matter what.

– Youth

If you have any sort of experience or similar experiences and it ends in a positive way, share that story. I felt so alone because I didn't know anyone who has been adopted or went through the adoption process.

– Youth

Support services

Parents and youth were asked about their use of a variety of adoption-related supports and services. The most frequently used supports were individual or group therapy, connecting with other adoptive families or youth, speaking on a parent or youth panel, and adoption-related retreats or events (Figure 29).

29. Use of adoption-related supports and services

Use of supports	Parents (n=33)	Youth (n=26)
Individual or group therapy for my child	97%	73%
Connecting with other adoptive families/youth (online or in-person)	79%	65%
Speaking on a parent or youth panel	64%	69%
Adoption-related retreats, picnics, or camps	58%	65%
County mental health case management for my child	58%	Not asked
Adoption support group	52%	19%
On-going training from an adoption agency	48%	N/A
Ampersand parent roundtable and youth gathering	36%	42%
Help accessing the Adoption Medicine Clinic or MN Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome	24%	N/A
Youth leadership/My Voice	18%	27%
Ampersand buddy family program	12%	N/A
Organizations for adopted youth or former foster youth, such as Fosterclub	N/A	12%

Satisfaction with Ampersand Families

The vast majority of families (97%) felt Ampersand Families was “very helpful” (81%) or somewhat helpful (16%) in answering their questions, talking through their concerns, or providing other types of support. One parent felt their experience with Ampersand was “unhelpful.” There were similar ratings of the overall experience with Ampersand Families (Figure 30).

30. Parents’ overall experience with Ampersand Families (N=32)



Parents were asked to expand upon their ratings of the helpfulness of Ampersand Families. Many parents talked about the support and training provided. The following are verbatim responses:

Their training was good. They encouraged me to attend various parent support groups.
– Adoptive parent

Our [Ampersand] worker was very involved and always responded to us after the normal working hours. They're a close-knit agency so they would help each other out to get us what we needed.
– Adoptive parent

I think everything was done to ensure the children were comfortable and okay, but it's very stressful and very scary adopting a child. I know the focus should be on the children, but it's very scary for adults, too. "Are they going to like me? Are they going to want me? Are they going to reject me?" These are questions we had as adults, too. It goes both ways.
– Adoptive parent

Out of all of [youth's] social workers, she connected with the one at Ampersand Families the most. She was the one that told [youth] there was a family interested in adopting her. She was helpful in getting us information, making sure the transition went smooth, and creating a crisis plan in case things didn't go well.
– Adoptive parent

They were super responsive and I always felt like they cared and knew their stuff. It just wasn't one worker, but the whole staff and that was a huge part of the positive attitude towards me.
– Adoptive parent

She [the Ampersand staff worker] was very ingrained in our family. She kind of knew who we were, what our quirks were. When there weren't going to be resources available up front, she was upfront about it saying, "Yes, that would be a nice service to have, but that's not going to happen."
– Adoptive parent

I think Ampersand Families, our case worker, was really good. At any time that information became available, she gave it to us right away. She was good at giving us a full picture of who [youth] was, like challenges, strengths, struggles, and positive things. She was good at asking us follow-up questions. She was very available to us. The entire team did not hold back support or information. They supported us.

– Adoptive parent

Met with teachers, social workers, therapists, previous foster parents, etc. Also had about 900 pages of information – really comprehensive. They knew to ask for it, but Ampersand also knew that this kid needed a specific type of placement to be successful. His record made him look like a monster on paper, but they also had conversations about what he would be like in their home, which was much different. [Worker] was so helpful talking us through it and getting us resources and called to check in on us to make sure they were okay. They helped navigate.

– Adoptive parent

I had to go beyond my own worker and connect with the director to get things done. I think my individual worker was slower at times, but I don't think they didn't get things done, but it just took a while to get things done.

– Adoptive parent

It always felt a little bit like they just sort of anticipated things ahead of what we would ask just because they know the process way better than we did. Even them asking questions when we got together with the counselors and people that knew [youth]. They would ask questions that we wouldn't have thought to ask.

– Adoptive parent

They always went above and beyond to answer my questions and help address my needs. If they couldn't take care of it, they could find someone who could - including support systems.

– Adoptive parent

Because the county kept dragging out the adoption and kept saying [youth] had to get better before she could get adopted and it got to a point where they were not really communicating with us. Without our Ampersand worker, we were going to back out and give up, because we felt no one was communicating with us. Our [Ampersand worker] would get information and share it with us.

– Adoptive parent

Family support of youth identity

Adoptive parents' support of youth's racial or cultural identity

Fourteen of 33 parents identified as a different race than their adoptive child. These parents were asked a few questions related to connecting youth with their cultural backgrounds. Of the 12 parents who responded, half (50%) said their family spent at least once a week with adults and youth of the same race as the adopted youth. One-third (33%) said they did so at least once a month, while 17% said they “rarely, if ever” did so.

Additionally, two-thirds of parents said they “strongly agreed” (29%) or “somewhat agreed” (36%) that they were working on strengthening their skills as the parent of a multi-racial family (Figure 31). Twenty-one percent neither agreed nor disagreed, while 14% said they “somewhat disagreed” that they were working on these skills. Most youth strongly agreed (69%) or agreed (8%) that their adoptive families were supportive of their racial or cultural identity.

31. Adoptive families' support of youth racial or cultural identity

Parent perceptions: I'm working on strengthening my skills as the parent of a multi-racial family (n=14)



Youth perceptions: My adoptive family is supportive of my racial or cultural identity (n=26)



- Strongly or somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Strongly or somewhat disagree
- Don't know

When youth were asked to talk about ways their family is or is not supportive of their racial or cultural identity, most youth talked about the support the family provided or made a general comment about feeling supported. Selected responses included:

They're really supportive, because they are always trying to get us to embrace it or they like to bring us down to the Reservation and visit and just see everything that goes on down there.
— Youth

During Black History Month, my grandma and I look up someone who was black that we didn't know about. Not like Rosa Parks or Martin Luther King Jr. I know this year we tried to stay local. We looked up black business owners and ate food that Martin Luther King Jr. ate. It's not an issue in my family that we look different; it just doesn't matter. ... She's always very honest about how she doesn't understand me being African American. She doesn't know how it's like in my shoes. She doesn't say she understands or assumes, she tells me she doesn't. ... At this point I get to decide who I hang out with. She transferred me to a school when I was younger, to a school that had more students that looked like me.
— Youth

They take me to church. ... I'm with my youth every Wednesday. That's about it.

– Youth

We run into issues with not being comfortable with things being said or done.

[Example] My [sibling] had issues with breakdowns and one time it became physical, and our dad wanted to call the police. I told him not to because, you know, Black people and cops. Just the fear of growing up Black and fearing the cops. ... They've never said anything racist or anything to offend us.

– Youth

They always encouraged me to hang out with people, and accept whatever friends I make - whatever color. I eat food from my culture. I visited [a state in the southern U.S.].

– Youth

At the beginning, my mom had one black friend and she would want me to talk and spend time with her friend. She would make appointments at a black hair stylist to do my hair because she wanted me to stay connected with my heritage. Sometimes when I speak slang she makes fun of me in a good way because that's not proper English to her.

– Youth

I don't really practice my culture here growing up, but I do accept my race and they accept it too. If I wanted to do more things with my culture, they would allow me to do it.

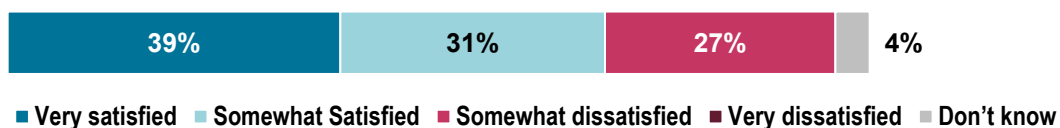
– Youth

Relationship with birth family

Nearly all youth report that their adoptive parents are comfortable talking with them about their birth families or time in foster care. Similarly, all but one youth felt that their adoptive family was helpful with supporting them in their relationship with their birth family.

All but two youth had contact with at least one of their birth family members since their adoption: 77% with siblings, 54% with birth mother, 38% with aunts and uncles, 35% with birth father, and 27% with other relatives. Most youth (70%) were very satisfied or satisfied with their current relationship with their birth family (Figure 32). However, 58% wish they had more contact with someone from their birth family.

32. Overall, how satisfied are you with your current relationship with people in your birth family (N=26)



Conclusions and recommendations

This study highlights the positive benefits of adoption on the lives of 26 youth who had experienced multiple previous foster care placements. Parents of adopted youth were generally positive about the impact on their lives, but noted some areas of strain and complexity. Study results highlight the importance of adoption preparation services that emphasize detailed youth histories, training on trauma, support from other adoptive families, and workers who give youth and families information on each step of the adoption and post-adoption process.

Youth are faring well at follow-up

The study found that, despite experiencing trauma, lengthy histories of child welfare involvement, and mental health issues, youth adoptees are faring well at the time of the study, at least one year after moving in with their adoptive parent/s. The majority of parents believe that they have had a positive impact on their child's mental health (91%) and physical health (63%). The majority of youth did not report issues with the law or with substance use. Half of youth were employed at follow-up, and those who were unemployed tended to be in school.

All youth respondents said they were satisfied or very satisfied with their life overall. Most youth were satisfied with their relationships with family (92%) and with friends (85%). When asked who they count on, over three-quarters of youth (77%) said they rely on their adoptive parents or family members. Throughout the interviews, youth comments indicate a sense of hopefulness about their life overall. It is not known how much their childhood trauma and placement histories may have impacted their expectations, but, nevertheless, youth are overwhelmingly positive about being adopted by their family.

Family experiences are generally positive, but mixed, at follow-up

Over half of adoptive parents (57%) felt that adopting their child had a positive impact on their lives, and another 34% reported a mixed impact. Most parents reported that the youth moving in with them did not change their physical health, relationship with their partner, relationship with their other children, or their finances. However, parents did indicate that the adoption may have had an impact on their mental health, their relationship with extended family, and their friendships. In several areas, when parents felt adopting their child changed aspects of their life, there was a split between those who felt the change was positive and those who felt it was negative, with slightly more tending to report positive changes. The exception to this was that those parents who noticed a change in their finances reported that the change was negative.

Comparisons to the Midwest Study of Youth at age 19

Although the sample is quite small (11 adopted youth were age 19 or older at the time of follow-up), results of this study showed some promising outcomes when compared to the large Midwest Study of former foster care youth at age 19. Fewer adopted youth had been pregnant or made someone pregnant (2 of 11) or had a child (1 of 11). A striking 80% of adopted youth (age 19+) were employed compared to 41% of the 19-year-old youth in the Midwest Study.

The one key area in which adopted youth are faring worse is their involvement in the criminal justice system. A greater percentage of adopted youth had been convicted of a crime (36%) and spent a night in jail or prison (27%) than their similarly aged youth who had aged out of foster care (12% and 19%, respectively).

Considerations for Ampersand Families

In this study, most of the youth (85%) and over half of the adoptive parents (52%) received adoption support services from Ampersand Families. Both groups expressed high levels of satisfaction with the services provided and gave high ratings to staff quality. Parents, in particular, were appreciative for the depth of the preparation services they received and the opportunities to interact with other adoptive families.

In some areas of their lives, parents served by Ampersand expressed greater need at follow-up. This may have been for a variety of reasons. For instance, Ampersand Families may have a greater likelihood of serving single parent adoptive households who may need more support. In addition, because Ampersand Families staff focus considerable efforts on post-adoption supports, families may be more aware of and use services, such as mental health treatment facilities for their children.

Implications for practice and systems improvements

Don't withhold information. More than half of families talked about policy or systems barriers that were issues for them in their adoption process. Again and again, adoptive parents emphasized the desire for as much information as possible prior to the adoption. They do not want any information held back about the youth, and they appreciate hearing real life experiences from other adoptive families so they better know what to expect and what questions to ask. Youth also talked about the need for as much information as possible about the potential family, as well as the process involved. Several talked about their desire to have workers know that they should give youth power in an otherwise powerless situation, including giving youth the ability to slow down the process or say “no” to an adoptive placement.

Mental health care is a critical support. All parents and most youth indicated that the youth had received mental health services post-adoption. In general, youth felt that their adoptive parents were well-prepared for the adoption, and several particularly mentioned their parents learning about the impact of trauma on youth and the resulting behavioral and mental health issues. Several youth also mentioned that parents could have been more prepared for specific mental health or behavioral concerns. In multiple comments, youth and parents talked about the critical support provided by post-adoption mental health services.

Prepare adoptive parents and youth for future interactions with birth family. At follow-up, many youth had contact with some members of their birth family. Over half of youth (58%) wanted more contact, and 27% were dissatisfied with their relationship with their birth family. For youth who were dissatisfied with their relationship with their birth family, there was an even mix of those who had not met or had no contact with certain members of their birth family and those who felt that their birth family was not supportive or toxic to them. Most youth feel supported by their adoptive family when it comes to talking about or trying to connect with their birth family. However, some adoptive parents expressed a desire for support in navigating these complicated relationships and interactions.

Parents were also asked to reflect on things that could have been done to better prepare them for adoption. Their responses centered around more training on specific issues such as trauma and Reactive Attachment Disorder, more services in place at the time of move-in, and more information about connecting with the biological family.

Implications for further study

The study results show promise toward mitigating the long-term impacts of Adverse Childhood Experiences. One important area to explore further is the extent to which the adoption of youth from foster care can serve as a protective factor against poor physical and behavioral health outcomes caused by trauma in childhood. The original [research](#) on ACEs examined data from over 17,000 patients and found that (Felitti et al., 1998):

“Persons who had experienced four or more categories of childhood exposure, compared to those who had experienced none, had 4- to 12-fold increased health risks for alcoholism, drug abuse, depression, and suicide attempt; a 2- to 4-fold increase in smoking, poor self-rated health, ≥50 sexual intercourse partners, and sexually transmitted disease.”

Subsequent research has looked at various other aspects of the negative effects of the toxic stress caused by ACEs, on educational achievement, physical and mental health outcomes, and impact on individuals, families, communities and society, including the significant health costs to individuals and communities.

Youth in this study had experienced extensive childhood trauma in multiple different areas (6.5 ACEs on average). Despite this, they are faring well in multiple areas often severally impacted by the toxic stress caused by the brain and body's response to this trauma. Study results suggest several factors that may help mitigate the long-term impact of ACEs. For instance, adopted youth may be benefiting from strong and responsive relationships with caring adults as well as treatment provided by mental health professionals. It is a critical social and financial value to conduct further study to understand whether these supports led adopted youth with multiple risk factors to become healthier adults.

This study is an important first step in understanding the longer-term well-being of youth who were adopted when they were older and families who have adopted an older youth. However, questions remain – in particular, it would be helpful to know more about families who may not have wished to participate in the study and those who could not be located – perhaps by looking at aggregate child welfare data or other records to see if there are any differences between those who participated in the study and those who did not. For Ampersand Families and other organizations who are interested in how families are faring after adoption, it would be helpful to make it a regular practice to collect detailed information from current families about how to best locate or contact them in the future if their address changes, as well as preliminary consent for future follow-up.

In addition, parents of youth in this study with a higher average number of child welfare placements tended to be more satisfied with the adoption than parents of youth with fewer placements on average. This factor and others were found to be “contributors to positive outcomes” in this study and require further study to fully understand the implications.

Further, only 14 of the parents who participated in the study were of a different racial background than the youth they adopted. A small sample size does not allow us to explore and understand the dynamics of cross-cultural adoption in the lives of these youth and families, and how to improve practice and policies to best meet the needs of these families.

Finally, the average age of youth at the time of the follow-up study was 18. It will be important to understand more about the outcomes of youth and families as youth get further into adulthood. It is hypothesized that a significant positive impact may lie in the lives of the next generation – children of adoptees – who may benefit from the care and support of their adoptive grandparents and extended family.

Ampersand Families is unique in their drive to understand the mid- to long-term implications for adopted youth *and* their families. This study is of critical importance to the field as a step toward developing that knowledge-base and using lessons learned to improve practice.

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Ampersand Families is Minnesota's only nonprofit agency focused solely on meeting the permanency needs of older youth and sibling groups in the child welfare system.

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