

2008 Foster Youth Survey Results

INTRODUCTION:

A foster youth survey comprised of seventeen questions evaluating child safety, child permanency, and child well being was distributed to youth in the foster care system in North Carolina. An e-mail was sent to all LINKS coordinators with instructions for completion of the confidential survey on-line at the SurveyMax website as well as an option for completion of a hard copy with instructions for returning completed surveys via fax or mail. SAYSO, Strong Able Youth Speaking Out posted a link to the survey on their website. There were a total of 351 surveys completed; a 10% response rate when compared to the total number of youth in foster care ages 13 and up for fiscal year 2008 (3,578). The survey provided an opportunity for youth to add comments about their experiences in foster care. The comments have been sorted into the following categories: Strengths, Challenges, Visitation/Contact with Parents and Siblings, LINKS, Financial, and Other. Comments that are relevant to the items we measured are included in the results and are direct quotes from the youth; for full text with all comments, refer to the end of this report.

The survey results are intended to assist county directors of social services as they begin or continue a dialogue with older foster youth in their care. The survey results indicate we are doing some things well: the majority of youth state they are treated with respect by their social worker and foster parent/caregiver, the majority of youth state they are taken to the doctor when they are sick and the majority feel safe in their placement. Some areas we need to take a look at include: the percentage of youth respondents who indicated they live in a group home setting, the percentage of youth who express a desire to visit with their parents and siblings on a more frequent basis, and consistent provision of LINKS services.

According to the statewide data for fiscal year 2008 (July 1, 2007 – June 30, 2008), there were 10,524 youth in the foster care system. The youth in care had the following characteristics: Male (51.2%) and Female (48.8%); White (51.0%), Black (41.0%), or a combination of other races (2.13%); 48.9% were in a foster care living arrangement and 34.0% were ages 13 and older.

The survey respondents' demographics represented of the following characteristics: Female (57.5%) and Male (42.5%); White (49.5%), Black (47.1%), or a combination of other races (3.4%); and Non-Hispanic (93.7%) and Hispanic (6.3%). There were more respondents residing in a Group Home setting (31.7%), than Foster Home (30.4%), Therapeutic Foster Home (16.5%), or a combination of other type of living arrangements (21.4%). There were more respondents with 0-2 placement moves (58.6%) in the past year, than 3-5 moves (26.2%), 6-8 moves (6.7%), and 8 or more moves (8.6%).

The average age of the respondents was 16 years old (27.5%) with a range: 13 years to 21 years of age. The average length of time in foster care is 5 years, 10 months (median: 4 years, 10.5 months, range: 2 weeks to 16 years) however, 47.7% of the respondents did not provide a valid response.

Responses were received from youth in 57 of the 100 counties in NC. The following counties received the largest number of respondents: Forsyth County (12.1%), Guilford County (6.0%), New Hanover County (5.8%), and Harnett & Edgecombe Counties (4.9%).

RESULTS: YOUTH

The survey asked the youth to rate the questions on a 5 point Likert scale, "Strongly Disagree (1)" to "Strongly Agree (5)." The respondents were also given the choice of "Not Applicable, N/A." Space was provided for additional comments at the end of the survey. In the following results section, the "Strongly Agree" and "Somewhat Agree" responses were collapsed into an aggregate indicator of agreement and the "Strongly Disagree" and "Somewhat Disagree" were collapsed into disagreement.

I. I am treated with respect by my social worker.

80.3% felt treated with respect by their social worker (6.4% responded that they felt disrespected, 8.3% responded neutral, and 5.1% responded “Not Applicable”).

“My social worker really cares about me.” “I really feel the head of the Department of Social Services can do a better job than they are doing.”

II. I am treated with respect by my foster parent/caregiver.

78.1% felt treated with respect by their foster parent/caregiver (6.4% responded that they felt disrespected, 10.4% responded neutral, and 5.1% responded “Not Applicable”).

“I enjoyed the time I spent with _____. She is a great person. The experience was crazy but I am glad I was safe. Thank you for all your help and time. May God Bless!”

III. I am included as an important member of the child and family team.

78.8% felt included as an important member of the child and family team (5.8% responded that they did not feel included, 7.2% responded neutral, and 8.0% responded “Not Applicable”).

“My life is going well and DSS is doing their part.”

IV. I have been offered the opportunity to participate in court hearings concerning my placement.

72.5% participated in court hearings concerning the placement (11.7% responded that they did not participate, 5.3% responded neutral, and 10.4% responded “Not Applicable”).

“My social worker and the people involved in my placement plan always look out for my best interest and really to what i want.”

V. I have a say in my permanency plan.

70.8% felt they had a say in the permanency plan (8.0% responded that they did not have a say, 7.0% responded neutral, and 11.3% responded “Not Applicable”).

“This is a start, to really see what goes on in the placements.”

“I feel like DSS needs to listen more to the kids. A lot of the times i feel like the people that make the decisions in my life don’t take the time to listen to me.”

VI. I am visited monthly by my social worker.

75.5% report that they were visited regularly by their social worker (9.1% responded that they were not visited, 7.2% responded neutral, and 9.0% responded “Not Applicable”).

“I really feel that through all that i have been through D.S.S. has been in my corner during the good and the bad.”

VII. My social worker pays attention to my progress in school.

77.7% agree that the social worker pays attention to progress in school (6.7% did not agree, 7.0% responded neutral, and 8.6% responded “Not Applicable”)

“I want to thank my social worker for making sure I was able to remain at the school I was attending before I entered foster care.”

VIII. I am taken to the doctor when I am sick.

81.3% felt they were taken to the doctor when sick (6.4% responded that they were not taken, 8.8% responded neutral, and 3.5% responded “Not Applicable”).

“I love my living situation and I get what I need.”

IX. I am taken to a therapist/counselor when necessary.

77.9% agree that they were taken to the therapist/counselor when necessary (3.5% responded that they were not taken, 7.0% responded neutral, and 11.3% responded “Not Applicable”).

“Want to terminate therapy and initiate contact with uncle on mother's side.”

X. I feel connected to my culture.

74.0% felt connected to their culture (7.5% responded that they did not feel connected, 10.7% responded neutral, and 7.8% responded “Not Applicable”).

“I want to go home!!!!” “I want to return to my family but foster care overall has not been horrible.”

XI. I feel safe in my placement.

84.5% felt safe in their placement (5.1% responded that they did not feel safe, 5.3% responded neutral, and 5.1% responded “Not Applicable”).

“As a foster care veteran I hated foster when I was in it. I was mistreated and had to lie about it. When I spoke up no one believed me because I was accused of always lying. My experience was NOT the best. SORRY.”

XII. I visit my Mom often enough to maintain the relationship I want to have with my Mom.

33.6% disagree that they visit their mother often enough to maintain a relationship (31.7% agree, 9.4% responded neutral, and 25.5% responded “Not Applicable”).

“I feel my sister nor myself spend enough time w/Mom.”

XIII. I visit my Dad often enough to maintain the relationship I want to have with my Dad.

36.9% disagree they that visit their father often enough to maintain a relationship (17.8% agree, 7.5% responded neutral, and 37.7% responded “Not Applicable”).

“I have no connections with Mom or Dad.”

XIV. I visit other family enough to maintain the relationship I want to have.

42.9% agree that they visit other family often enough to maintain a relationship (34.5% disagree, 10.9% responded neutral, and 11.7% responded “Not Applicable”).

“I just want to say my aunt and uncle and family have boosted my hopes in life! I love them.”

XV. I visit my siblings at least twice per month.

36.8% agree that they have visits with their siblings at least twice per month (32.2% disagree, 11.1% responded neutral, and 20% responded “Not Applicable”).

“Want more sibling visits.” “I visit my sibling but it’s not twice a month. It’s like every other month or so.”

XVI. I participate in LINKS/Independent Living program.

67.5% report they participate in the LINKS/Independent Living Program (8.6% disagree, 12.2% responded neutral, and 11.6% responded “Not Applicable”).

“i think links program play a big part in my life at this point it helped me take a positive outlook on my life and to provide a good life for me and my child so i think these surveys are very helpful to those who need help understanding their situations.”

“The links program will really help you but you have to be willing to help yourself.”

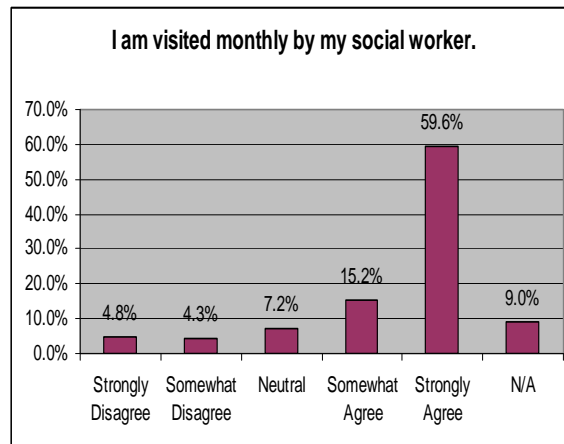
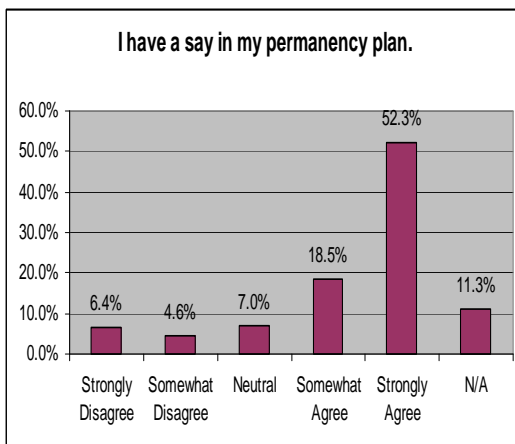
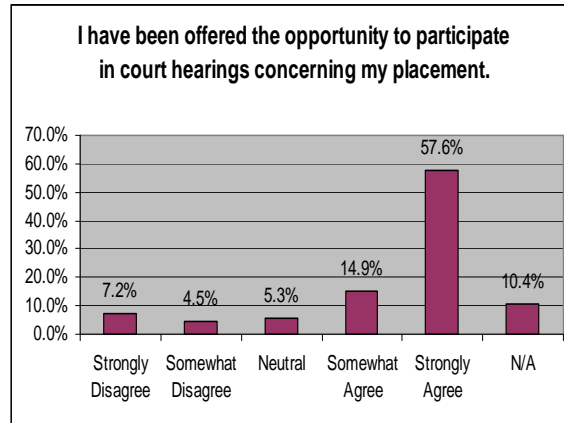
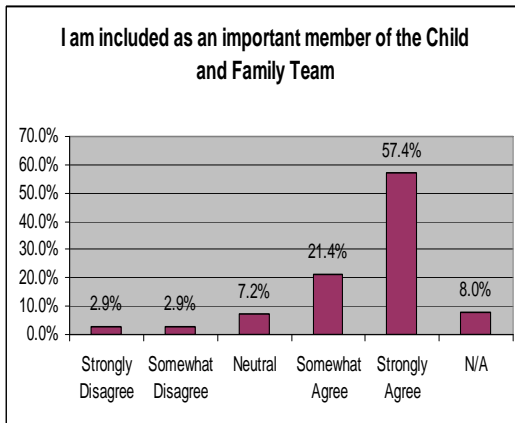
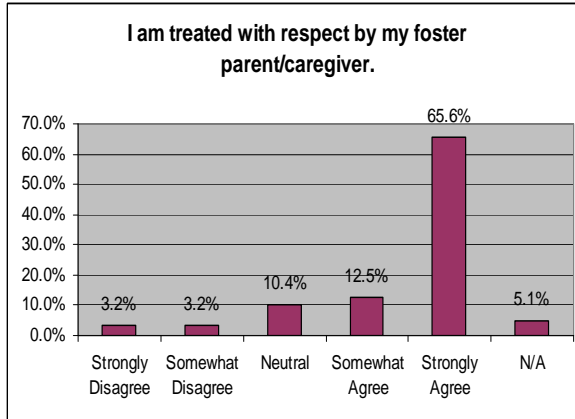
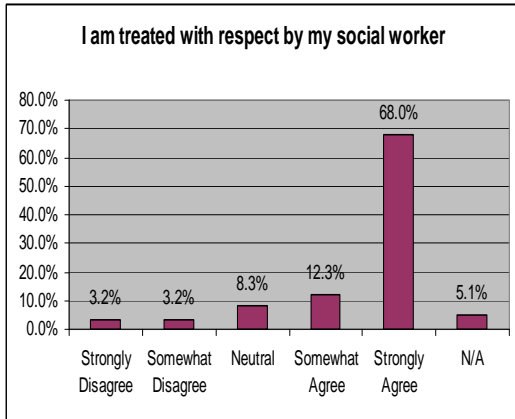
“I also feel like the kids in DSS should receive money that we could spend on personal things more often, so we could spend on personal things more often, so we could actually feel like real teenagers.”

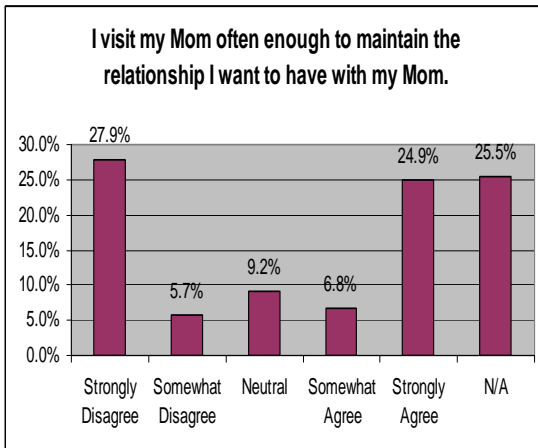
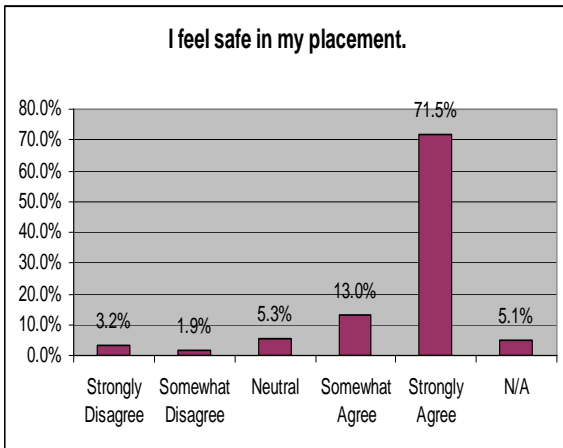
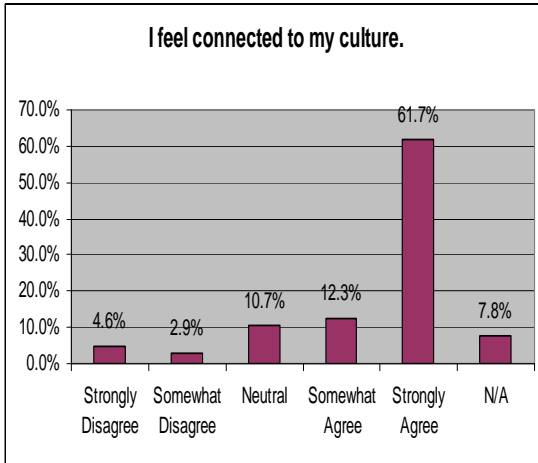
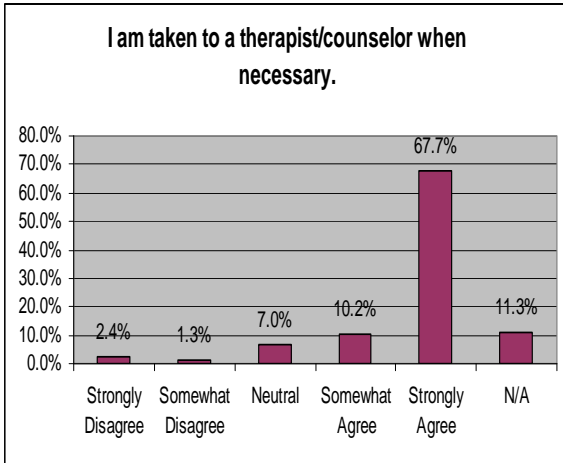
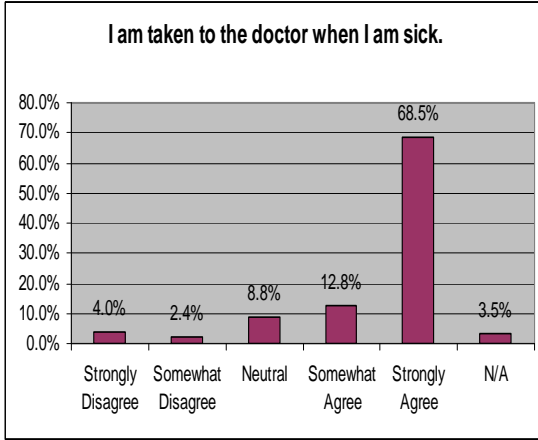
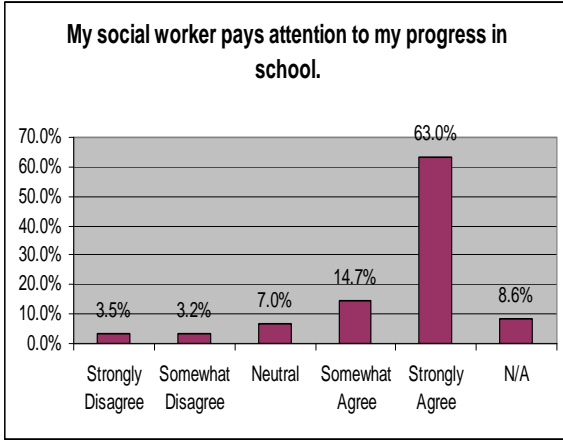
XVII. LINKS/Independent Living Program is offered consistently in my county.

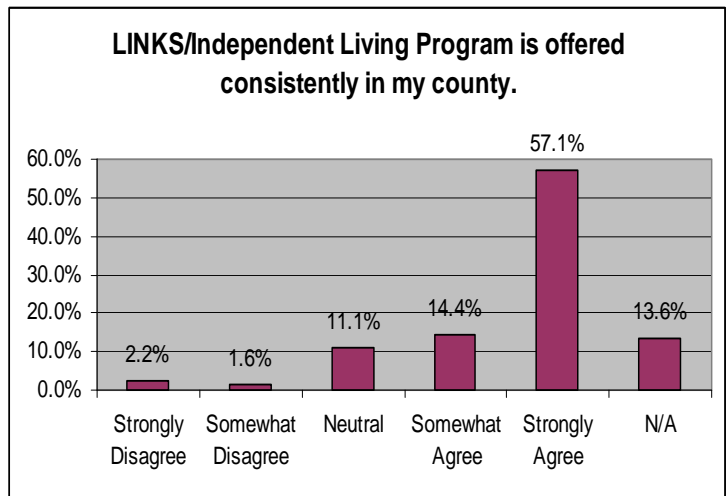
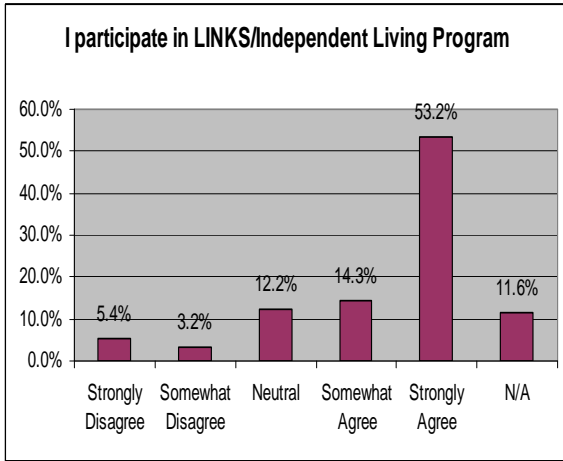
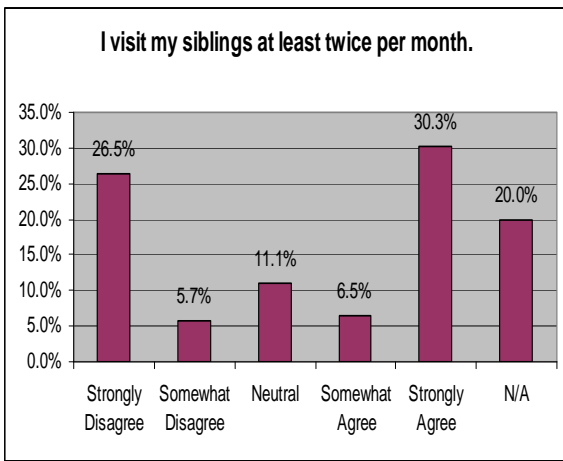
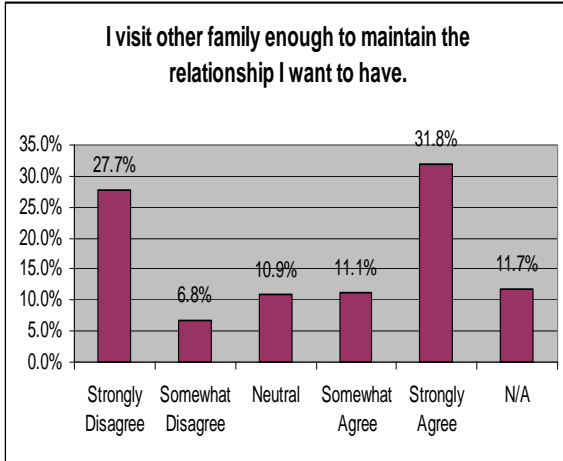
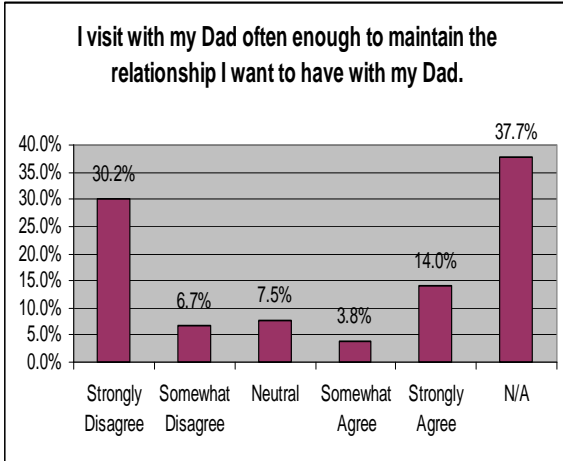
71.5% report that LINKS/Independent Living Program is offered consistently in their county (3.8% disagree, 11.1% responded neutral, and 13.6% responded “Not Applicable”).

“I would love to participate consistently in the Links program.”

The following charts illustrate the above results of the youths' responses to the survey questions. The column graphs report the youth's responses, in range from "Strongly Disagree" to "N/A." Overall, the responses to the seventeen questions were indicated by "Strongly Agree" which indicates the youths' high level of satisfaction.







Full Text of Youth Comments

Strengths

"I really feel that through all that i have been through D.S.S. has been in my corner during the good and the bad."

"Everything is good."

"Good survey."

"I am being adopted this month!"

"I am glad I got adopted."

"I enjoyed the time I spent with _____. She is a great person. The experience was crazy but I am glad I was safe. Thank you for all your help and time. May God Bless!"

"I feel good to live in this house at this moment, but I want to learn more about how to be good person in the future."

"I just want to say my aunt and uncle and family have boosted my hopes in life! I love them."

"I like my social worker."

"I love my living situation and I get what I need."

"I think that social services has help me a great deal."

" I want to thank my social worker for making sure I was able to remain at the school. I was attending before I entered foster care."

" I was in the custody of another county in the past. _____ County DSS is much better. My social worker really cares about me."

"Ms. _____ is my house parent and she is great."

"My life is going well and DSS is doing their part."

"My social worker and the people involved in my placement plan always look out for my best interest and really to what i want."

"My social worker is awesome."

"This is a start, to really see what goes on in the placements."

Challenges

"As a foster care veteran I hated foster care when I was in it. I was mistreated and had to lie about it. When I spoke up no one believed me because I was accused of always lying. My experience was NOT the best. SORRY"

“I don't like my original social worker _____, please change her.”

“I hate the group home.”

“I really feel that the head of the Department of Social Services can do a better job than they are doing.”

“I want out of foster care!!”

“I want to go home!!!!”

“I want to return to my family but foster care overall has not been horrible.”

“I feel like DSS needs to listen more to the kids. A lot of the times i feel like the people that make the decisions in my life don't take the time to listen to me.”

“Living in Children's home is a great place, but i would rather live with my family!

Financial Concerns

“I would say that since I have been out of foster care I have received a great amount of help with college and my financial needs. BUT while I was in foster care it was the worst experience of my life.”

I also feel like the kids in DSS should receive money that we could spend on personal things more often, so we could spend on personal things more often, so we could actually feel like real teenagers.”

“I am in the LINKS INdependent Living Program and I attend Mayland Community College. I am in the ADN Program to be a RN and in that program students are encouraged not to work over 10 hours per week. I would really like to receive some assistance from LINKS or gas since the rise in fuel costs have overstretched my already tight budget. I have maintained a term GPA of 4.0 for over a year now and I really feel that I deserve some assistance since I have not received any assistance from LINKS in one year even though I have maintained excellent grades and reported them to my social worker in a timely manner. I have tried numerous times to receive assistance for fuel but every time it has been denied so I am again requesting assistance.”

“Want internet for laptop.”

Visitation/Contact with Parents/Siblings

“I do not like foster care because it keeps me away from my family.”

“I feel my sister nor myself spend enough time w/ Mom.”

“I have no connection with Mom, Dad, sibling, so.....”

“I need to move to a foster family with my brother.”

“Want more sibling visits.”

“Want to see siblings more.”

“Want to terminate therapy and initiate contact with uncle on mother's side.”

“Wishes to see my sister.”

“I am not able. I am in a locked facility.”

“I have no connections with Mom or Dad. I visit my sibling but it's not twice a month. It's like every other month or so.”

LINKS:

“Don't know what link is about.”

“Hey i love the links class.”

“I like LINKS, it helps me.”

“I think the links is a good place for kids because it teach us about how the world going to be when i grow up.”

“i think the links program play a big part in my life at this point it helped me take a positive outlook on my life and to provide a good life for me and my child so i think these surveys are very helpful to those who need help understanding their situations.”

“The links program will really help you but you have to be willing to help yourself.”

“LINKS sucks. I'm not kidding. P.S. "Love all of you."”

“I would love to participate consistently in the LINKS program.”

“My Links Provider is very good in _____ County.”

Other:

“I hate surveys. Please stop making me do them. Update I just read the instructions and repeal my previous statement.”

“This was a nice survey.”

“Blah...blah.”

“I hope this survey helps.”

“Jesus loves you.”

“I'm neutral about this survey.”

“It is nice but it would be nice to be back home.”

“Pershate it!! Hope ya get with ya lookin' for!!”

“Ready to go home to my father.”

“Some questions made me check strongly disagree because of my situation.”

“Thank you.”

“The people that i live with is my family and i will never leave them anytime no matter what happens.”

“These answers are based off her previously living with _____ and my current living with Aunt _____. Mixed answers off living at both places.