

Instrument 4

Focus Group Guide (Treatment and Comparison Sites) – track changes

Updated June 2024

1. FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR PATHWAYS YOUTH

Introductory script

Thank you for taking the time to come to this discussion group today. I'm _____, and I work for Mathematica, a company that studies how programs like Pathways can improve peoples' lives.

We are conducting a study for the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) in the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

We want to spend the next ninety minutes talking about Pathways to understand how this program is working, whether it is making a difference in your life, and how to improve it for you and others. We would like to talk about your experience with the services, what motivates you to participate in the services, and if you are learning useful information.

Your our responses will be kept private to the extent permitted by law and used only for research purposes. I will not share your comments with anyone other than the four members of the small Mathematica study team. We will use the information to describe your opinions, but we will not identify you by name or use your name in any information we share for our study.

In the future, information from this study may be securely shared with qualified individuals to help learn more about the experiences of young adults who have been in foster care. The information that is shared will be de-identified, meaning it would only include a study ID number and not your name.

All of my questions are open-ended. There are no right or wrong answers. Your participation is voluntary, and you can choose to not answer any questions. You are the expert on your experiences with the program, and I would like to learn from you during the discussion.

I would like to record this discussion. The recording will be transcribed to help summarize information from this discussion. No one besides the transcription service and members of the Mathematica study team will have access to or listen to the recording. Recordings and notes will be destroyed after the end of the contract. If you want to say anything that you do *not* want recorded, please let me know, and I will be glad to pause the recorder. Do you have any objections to being part of this discussion or to my recording our discussion?

I hope to get your input on a number of topics during the hour and a half we have for this discussion. At times, I may need to move the conversation along to be sure we cover everything. You might have more to say about some topics than others, but I really want everyone to feel comfortable participating in the discussion. You can disagree, and that's okay. Please feel free to offer your opinion, whether positive or negative.

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If you would like more information about this study and any concerns related to your privacy related rights, please contact Dr. M.C. Bradley at Mathematica at 855-888-2092 or by email at SprvoYSIL@mathematica-mpr.com.

Do you have any questions before I turn on the recorder?

Warm up

[Once the recorder is on] **To start, will you please introduce yourselves?**

- a) **Please tell me your first name and how long you've been involved with Pathways.**
- b) **What do you think about Pathways (let youth know that we are interested in their good and bad thoughts)?**

Experiences with Pathways to Success

I would like to talk with you about your experiences with Pathways to Success in [locality]. [Note to interviewer: if youth interact with multiple service providers, ask these questions for each service received for Pathways to Success.]

First, I'd like to talk with you about your earliest experiences with Pathways to Success.

1. How did you first learn about Pathways to Success?

- a) Who told you about Pathways to Success?
- b) Do you remember what you thought about the program?
 - i) What did you think the program would help you do or achieve?

1. Was your decision to participate easy or hard?

- a) What made it easy?
- b) What made it hard?

2. After you were told about Pathways to Success, was it easy to connect with [navigator]? Why or why not?

- a) Did you meet with your navigator?
- b) Did you have to do anything to start getting services?
 - i) Were you told that you needed to provide any information or documentation about yourself or your situation before you could begin receiving services?
 - ii) Did you need to get permission from a parent or guardian to receive services? How did that go?

Next, I'd like to talk with you about your experiences working with your navigator.

3. Overall, how is talking with your navigator?

- c) Is there anything that you like about talking with [names of navigators]?
- d) Is there anything that you don't like about talking with [names of navigators]?
- e) Probe on the extent to which youth feel the navigator listens to them, understands their needs, and helps them solve problems.

4. How is it going with meeting with your navigator?

- a) How often do you meet?

- b) Is there anything that you like about those meetings? What do you like?
 - c) Is there anything that you don't like about those meetings? What don't you like?
- 5. Has anyone worked with their navigator to set goals? [Ask for examples.]**
- a) Can you tell me how that is going?
 - i) Is there anything that you like about setting goals?
 - ii) Is there anything that you don't like about setting goals?
- 6. Has anyone reached out to their navigator when they were having an emergency? [Ask for examples.]**
- a) How did your navigator help you?
 - b) How could your navigator have been more helpful?
 - c) Has anyone had an emergency and not reached out to their navigator? Why not?
- 7. Has anyone worked with their navigator to find a place to live? [Ask for examples.]**
- a) How did your navigator help you?
 - b) How could your navigator have been more helpful?
- 8. Has anyone received financial help from their navigator? [Ask for examples.]**
- a) How did your navigator help you?
 - b) How could your navigator have been more helpful?
- 9. Has anyone worked with their navigator to organize a roundtable, or a meeting with other people to talk about how to achieve your goals?**
- a) How did your navigator help you?
 - b) How could your navigator have been more helpful?
 - c) What did you like about the meeting?
 - d) How could the meeting have been more helpful?
- 10. Does your navigator help you connect with other services? [Ask for examples.]**
- a) How did your navigator help you connect with the other service? [provided contact information, coaching, warm hand-off, etc.]
 - b) How could your navigator have been more helpful?
 - c) Was [services/supports] helpful to you? How were they helpful? Not helpful?
- 11. Are there any services or supports that you think would be helpful to you that your navigator does not help you with? If so, what are those services?**
- a) What is the biggest area in your life that you are not discussing or working with your Pathways navigator on?
 - b) How would it help if your navigator could provide services or supports to you in this area?
- 12. What other supports have you received from your navigator?**
- a) Are there any services or supports that you need but have not received? If so, what are those services and why have they not been provided to you?
- 13. Out of everything we've talked about (for example, housing, setting goals, financial help, supports during crises), which services and supports provided by your navigator have been the most helpful to or made the biggest impact on your life? Why?**

- a) How has your navigator provided services or supports to you in this area?
- b) What could your navigator have done to provide more services or supports to you in this area?

14. For youth who have been in Pathways for awhile and are close to graduating: You've mentioned you're close to graduation or have been in Pathways for awhile now. What has helped you stay engaged in Pathways?

- a) *Probe on their goals, their relationship with their navigator, changes with navigators, changes in services they've accessed.*

15. For youth who have been in Pathways for awhile and are close to graduating: What, if any, tools or skills did you learn or gain from Pathways that you might use after you graduate?

- a) How do you expect that you will use them?
- b) Where did you learn them?
- c) How has Pathways influenced your participation or enrolment in other services or supports?
[Probe on services they paused because they were participating in Pathways, services they valued more or less after participating in Pathways.]

16. For youth who have recently enrolled in Pathways (within the last 4 months): What tools or skills are you hoping to learn or receive from Pathways?

- a) Why? What will you use them for?
- b) How will they impact your life?

17. Please think about the other service providers or caseworkers you've worked with in the past. How has working with your navigator been different than working with other service providers or past caseworkers?

- a) What has made working with your navigator better or worse than other service providers or caseworkers?
- b) What have other workers done or supported you with that you wish your navigator would do?

18. Overall, what do you find the most helpful, or like the most, about participating in Pathways?

Lastly, I'd like to talk to you about your life outside of Pathways.

19. What is going on in your life outside of Pathways that competes for your time and energy?

- a) What services and supports are you receiving other than Pathways? Who/what agency do you receive them from? When did you enroll in these services?

Wrap Up

Thank you for your time today. Before we end, I'd like to give you an opportunity to share final thoughts about Pathways to Success or changes that would improve the program.

May we contact you in the future to participate in a future product about Pathways that will be made public?

2. FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR COMPARISON YOUTH

Introductory script

Thank you for taking the time to come to this discussion group today. I'm _____, and I work for Mathematica, a company that studies how programs like the Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood can improve peoples' lives.

We are conducting a study for the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) in the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

We want to spend the next ninety minutes talking about services for youth and young adults in foster care in [name of locality]—especially services to help you prepare to live independently—to better understand how they work and your experiences. Your responses will be kept private to the extent permitted by law and used only for research purposes. I will not share your comments with anyone other than the four members of the small Mathematica study team. We will use the information to describe your opinions, but we will not identify you by name or use your name in any information we share for our study.

In the future, information from this study may be securely shared with qualified individuals to help learn more about the experiences of young adults who have been in foster care. The information that is shared will be de-identified, meaning it would only include a study ID number and not your name.

All of my questions are open-ended. There are no right or wrong answers. Your participation is voluntary, and you can choose to not answer any questions. You are the expert on your experiences with the program, and I would like to learn from you during the discussion.

I would like to record this discussion. The recording will be transcribed to help summarize information from this discussion. No one besides the transcription service and members of the Mathematica study team will have access to or listen to the recording. Recordings and notes will be destroyed after the end of the contract. If you want to say anything that you do *not* want recorded, please let me know, and I will be glad to pause the recorder. Do you have any objections to being part of this discussion or to my recording our discussion?

I hope to get your input on a number of topics during the hour and a half we have for this discussion. At times, I may need to move the conversation along to be sure we cover everything. You might have more to say about some topics than others, but I really want everyone to feel comfortable participating in the discussion. You can disagree, and that's okay. Please feel free to offer your opinion, whether positive or negative.

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Do you have any questions before I turn on the recorder?

Warm up

[Once the recorder is on] **To start, will you please introduce yourselves?**

Please tell me your first name and how long you've lived in [locality].

Experiences with foster care

First, I would like to talk with you about your experiences with services that are intended to help you prepare to live independently.

1. Can you tell me what services you've received that have helped you prepare to live independently?

a) **What do you think about these services, good or bad?**

Next, I'd like to talk with you about the services available to you through the child welfare system and the services you have received.

2. How is working with your caseworker or Chafee worker?

- a) Is there anything that you like about talking with your caseworker or Chafee worker?
- b) Is there anything that you don't like about talking with your caseworker or Chafee worker?
[Probe on the extent to which youth feel the caseworker or Chafee worker listens to them, understands their needs, and helps them solve problems.]

3. How often do you meet with your caseworker or Chafee worker?

- a) Is there anything that you like about those meetings? What do you like?
- b) Is there anything that you don't like about those meetings? What don't you like?

4. Has anyone worked with their caseworker or Chafee worker to set goals? *[Ask for examples.]*

- a) Is there anything that you like about setting goals with your caseworker or Chafee worker?
- b) Is there anything that you don't like about setting goals?

5. Has anyone reached out to their caseworker or Chafee worker when you were having an emergency? *[Ask for examples.]*

- a) How did your caseworker help you?
- b) How could your caseworker have been more helpful?
- c) Has anyone had an emergency and not reached out to their caseworker? Why not?

6. Has anyone worked with their caseworker or Chafee worker to find a place to live? *[Ask for examples.]*

- a) How did your caseworker help you?
- b) How could your caseworker have been more helpful?

7. Has anyone received financial help from their caseworker or Chafee worker? *[Ask for examples.]*

- a) How did your caseworker or Chafee worker help you?
 - b) How could your caseworker or Chafee worker have been more helpful?
- 8. Has anyone worked with their caseworker or Chafee worker to organize a roundtable, or meeting with others to talk about how to achieve your goals?**
- a) How did your caseworker or Chafee worker help you?
 - b) How could your caseworker or Chafee worker have been more helpful?
 - c) What did you like about the meeting?
 - d) How could the meeting have been more helpful?
- 9. Does your caseworker or Chafee worker help you connect with other services and supports? [Ask for examples.]**
- a) How did [caseworkers' names] help you connect with the other service? [provided contact information, coaching, warm hand-off, etc.]
 - b) How could your caseworker have been more helpful?
 - c) Was [services/supports] helpful to you? How were they helpful? Not helpful?
 - d) Are there any services or supports that you think would be helpful to you that your caseworker or Chafee worker hasn't helped you access? If so, what are those services?
- 10. What other supports have you received from your caseworker or anyone else from [local agency]?**
- a) Are there any services or supports that you need but have not received? If so, what are those services and why have they not been provided to you?
- 11. Out of everything we've talked about (for example, housing, setting goals, financial help, supports during crises), which services and supports provided by your Chafee worker have been the most helpful to or made the biggest impact on your life? Why?**
- a) How has your Chafee worker provided services or supports to you in this area?
 - b) What could your Chafee worker have done to provide more services or supports to you in this area?
- 12. Overall, do you feel your caseworker or Chafee worker has helped prepare you to live independently, or on your own? Why or why not?**
- a) Are there any services or supports that you think would be helpful to you that your Chafee worker does not help you with? If so, what are those services?
 - b) How has Chafee influenced your participation or enrollment in other services or supports?
[Probe on services they paused because they were participating in Chafee, services they valued more or less after participating in Chafee.]
 - c) What is the biggest area in your life that you are not discussing or working with your Chafee worker on?
- 13. For youth who have been in Chafee for awhile (> 4 months): You've mentioned you've been receiving Chafee services for awhile now. What has helped you stay engaged in Chafee services?**
- a) *Probe on their goals, their relationship with their Chafee worker, changes with Chafee workers, changes in services they've accessed.*

14. For youth who have been in Chafee for awhile (> 4 months): What, if any, tools or skills did you learn or gain from Chafee that you might use after you graduate?

- a) How do you expect that you will use them?
- b) Where did you learn them?

15. For youth who have recently enrolled in Chafee (within the last 4 months): What tools or skills are you hoping to learn or receive from Chafee?

- a) Why? What will you use them for?
- b) How will they impact your life?

16. What is going on in your life outside of Chafee that competes for your time and energy?

Wrap Up

Thank you for your time today. Before we end, I'd like to give you an opportunity to share final thoughts about your experiences with services in [locality] to help you prepare to live independently.

May we contact you in the future to participate in a future product about Chafee services that will be made public?