



WE ASKED :

## “What are the ways that the COVID-19 crisis is impacting you and/or your family?”

The Family Voices United campaign brings together the voices of young people, birth parents, and relative caregivers with lived experience in the child welfare system to drive change in foster care. Learn more at [familyvoicesunited.org](https://familyvoicesunited.org).

### Why COVID-19?

The current COVID-19 crisis is impacting the lives and well-being of people across the world. Child Welfare constituents especially are facing unprecedented challenges in their daily life. It's imperative to support our most vulnerable populations in time of crisis and ensure their voices are elevated and immediate concerns are recognized and considered.

Some key themes that came out of the responses we received to this question:

- Basic needs like food, housing and financial resources are being impacted by COVID-19.
- Families are experiencing a lack of access to technology and inability to conduct home visits and educational practices.



FAMILY VOICES UNITED

A collaborative project of Children's Trust Fund Alliance, FosterClub, and Generations United with support from Casey Family Programs.

- Social isolation is impacting the emotional and mental wellbeing of children and families.
- Many Kinship/Relative Caregivers are high-risk for contracting COVID-19.

### Here is what young people, parents and kinship caregivers said...

“COVID19 has forced me to use all the extra money I have to feed and provide hygiene/sanitary products for myself and my sister. **I feel food insecurity consistently. I have definitely experienced anxiety, panic and depression since the Covid-19 crisis started and have been unable to access counseling services that accept Medicaid during this time.** Every day I see several people I know post on their social media that a friend, relative, classmate has died. The entire community is grieving, suffering survivors guilt, and we don’t feel safe. As a person of color **I am disturbed that African Americans represent 70% of those who’ve died from Covid-19 in my state.** Regarding employment, **I fear that I may be laid off just like the other 39% of foster youth in the US.** Many people that are Essential workers can’t afford to take off work in my community due their economic status which puts their Health at risk. Students on campus have been forced to leave and are struggling to locate stable housing in this crisis. Many food banks are closed. **Many former youth in the state are struggling with homelessness, employment, mental health, transportation, access to technology. Child welfare programs are doing what they can but funds are limited.”**

*- Aliyah Zeien, Former Foster Youth Care from Louisiana*

“As a parent mentor in a small coastal community, working with families who are currently utilizing the child welfare system, I am seeing the **fear of uncertainty creating increased fear and decreased hope in regards to progress and reunification and wondering how this will affect their timeline.** Parents and children are experiencing separation anxiety. **Some parents who have recently transitioned into a reunification plan are experiencing loss of jobs and fear losing their home and fear they will then lose their children, again.** Parents who are working a program of recovery from substance abuse are challenged with the fear of relapse, some people have relapsed and in-patient A & D treatment is difficult to get into, even prior to the outbreak. Mental health services were already difficult to get as well. People who are suffering a new and current mental health condition cannot find anyone taking new patients. Our community is a tourist town and many residents have lost their jobs, or those who haven't can't find daycare. However, our small community is also coming together to help those in need”.

*-Leanne Walsh, Birth parent/Community Partner from Oregon*

This is a very challenging time. I am 73, a foster parent/kinship caregiver for my 4 year old granddaughter and have guardianship of my 4½ year old grandson. I am the only adult gainfully employed at this time. **Food as well as paying bills with only my income is stressful!** One of my sons is homeless, another source of worry! I work with hundreds of families in similar situations to my own. If there is one thing I am convinced of is that **empathy along with access to resources, support and food with kinship caregivers is crucial!**

- Bette Hoxie, Relative/Kinship Caregiver from Maine

"The needs I'm seeing within my community are people not only afraid of and worried about catching the virus and the worst happening, but also stressed about daycares and schools being shut down. There is no one to babysit, so they cannot work or hours are being cut, some are laid off, as a result lack of money, unable to pay rent or utilities. **I am a Parent Partner Mentor and it's even sadder for the children and families involved with the Department of Children & Family Services. Virtual visits aren't happening, Case plans at a halt (no movement, Parents/Children aren't getting proper or necessary treatment for mental, physical, sexual abuse, substance abuse etc, as a result of not getting the proper treatment these families are suffering , relapsing and having mental breakdowns!"**

- Raven Sigure~Collette, Birth parent from Louisiana

**"The stress and mental health is at risk for me and my family.** The financial worry is extremely high. **What this crisis is going to do to our child with special needs** education is going to put him even further behind. My other daughter has MS and her husband is a manager in a grocery store, he is required to be at work. He has been exposed and is being quarantined in his office at work until he shows symptom, and is exposing my other grandchildren"

-Gail Engel, Relative/Kinship Caregiver from Colorado

**"I am a parent of 3 boys and a Parent Advocate in NYC. It has been difficult to stock up on what they boys need like food or household supplies.** I have families that try to assist those who are in need of baby formula, diapers and everyday essentials and basic needs to fulfill their children's education. **It has been hard to balance teaching kids at home and doing work without the electronics we need to support our children.** I am currently in my new apartment and can't furnish it because of the need to buy enough food and supplies to last for two weeks at a time. **It's scary when you are fearful to take kids outside to play and they don't have electronic games or activities to do.."**

- Jeanette Vega, Birth Parent/Community Partner from New York

**"I work for a local community mental health center running support groups for adoptive/ kin families.** I'm making weekly check-in calls to our clients to see how they're doing emotionally and what activities they're doing with their kiddos. Craft projects, painting, video games, kick ball out in the street with their babysitter who lives

across the street, planting a vegetable garden, making cookies, making pots of chili, playing those old-fashioned board games like Sorry, Battleship and Clue to name a few. **Many said how important the call was to them, to be able to connect with another caring adult!.**"

-Mickey Axtell-Mauck, *Relative/Kinship Caregiver from Colorado*

**"Our biggest challenge right now is how to balance two adults working at home, and the need to homeschool our granddaughter,** for whom we are the primary caretakers. This has created some tense moments as we try to meet everyone's needs. Hopefully things will get smoother as we all make adjustments".

- Lisa *Relative/Kinship Caregiver from Colorado*

"My community needs food, shelters and basic needs being met such as showers"

- Amber *Birth Parent/Community Partner from*

**"I am concerned that I could lose my job.** I am an office manager, and the office will need to be closed for several weeks. Additionally, I handle international travel for the company which has been non-existent for weeks. **It is difficult to work from home and keep my granddaughter, a 5 year old of which I have custody, engaged for long time frames"**.

- Roberta Edgar, *Pennsylvania Relative/Kinship Caregiver from Oregon*

**"My main concerns are keeping myself fed and maintaining my bills.** I am high risk and cannot go to the store which has made things complicated".

-April Barcus, *Former Foster Youth from California*

**"We are having to do without so many things we need, food, money, possibly a job, rent, toilet paper. The community I live in is reaching out to help each other.** For the first time in many years to my surprise **I see other people giving their time, money, goods and support to total strangers.** My heart goes out to all for the horror that this pandemic is causing, prayers for all of us that it ends soon. **Love your family and neighbors and know that there is hope for all of us to survive this"**.

- Alice Carter, *Relative/Kinship Caregiver from Wyoming*

**"Being isolated and having to work from home is starting to affect me a bit,** but I am making sure that I stay healthy by taking long walks in the woods, eating right, bubble baths and lots of animal therapy playing with my black lab. My community is holding strong, supplies are available and food is still on the shelves. I can only pray for those who have lost loved ones and that are less fortunate at his time. Stay well America!"

- Paula, *Birth Parent from New Hampshire*

**“The biggest challenge has been for grandparents who have young grandchildren at home and do not have transportation to either find a ride or need to take public transportation and get to a store to find very little products and or food.** There have been many food stations throughout the City, however, they are for those who have vehicles to drive through and get food! There’s a need for access to food and transportation services”.

*-Mercedes Bristol, Relative/Kinship Caregiver from Texas*

**“Within this crisis families are losing their jobs, kids are unable to attend school and rent can't be paid. Families can't buy food, children are missing out on school work if they don't have internet service in their home”**

*- Keyna, Birth Parent from New York*

“I am trying to work from home while caring for my 4 year old granddaughter. It is very difficult to conduct telephone calls and zoom meetings with a child this age in the home. **I am high risk for covid-19 because I am 63, have heart disease and am immune compromised.** My granddaughter is very hyper and misses the routine of her pre school and her preschool friends.

*-Joanne, Relative/Kinship Caregiver from Philadelphia*

“Like many others, school in our state has been out since mid-March. **It is a challenge to try to attend zoom meetings, teleconferences and still be productive while entertaining a six year old.** On-line schooling will begin this week, so that will be another component that will need to be incorporated into the day”

*- Robyn Relative/Kinship Caregiver from Oklahoma*

**“I’m losing income from my full time job starting April 6th.** I will either be reduced in hours or furloughed for 8 weeks no pay”.

*- Ashley, Relative/Kinship Caregiver from Florida*

**“The most difficult part is trying to keep our almost 11 year old apart from his friends.** He is a very social child and very active in Martial Arts. He is doing Martial Arts training online via Zoom but he is missing the human to human interaction. We did allow him to go bike riding with a couple friends yesterday, we gave strict warnings about staying 6’ away and not going to any playground. It’s still scary because we are not sure if they really understand what is going on. School work online at home can be difficult as well. He has difficulty concentrating anyway. He is very distracted at times and we know that we are not the best teachers”.

*- Cindy, Relative/Kinship Caregiver from Nebraska*



# FAMILY VOICES UNITED

## About the Family Voices United campaign

The Campaign elevates the voices and perspectives of young people, parents, and kinship caregivers, collectively known as family voices or “constituent voices”. Individuals with lived experience in the child welfare system are currently sharing their stories and expertise to educate, inform and transform the systems that serve children, youth and families - both in policy and practice. With new federal legislation - the Family First Prevention Services Act - states, tribes, and territories have new opportunities to implement changes that many constituents have identified are needed to fully support keeping children safe in strong, supported families.

**Join the movement! Sign up at [FamilyVoicesUnited.org](https://FamilyVoicesUnited.org)**