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### Life Domain Research Report Series: Family

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**Long Term Community Adaptation of Children/Youth and  
Families Participating in Residential and Intensive Family  
Service Children's Mental Health Programs**

**Life Domain Research Report Series:  
Family**

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# Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
<i>Participants</i> .....	3
<i>Description of Services</i> .....	4
<i>Measures</i> .....	4
<i>Data Analysis</i> .....	6
<i>Limitations of the Study</i> .....	6
Results.....	7
<i>Description of IFS Families</i> .....	10
<i>IFS Family Relationships</i> .....	12
<i>IFS Family Functioning</i> .....	17
<i>Profile of RT Families</i> .....	25
<i>Youth Descriptions of Families, Living Situations and Resources</i> .....	30
<i>Youth Perspectives on How Families Are Doing (Realities)</i> .....	42
<i>How Youth Talk About Families (Feelings)</i> .....	60
<i>Future Aspirations of Youth</i> .....	64
Overall Comments on Family Profiles .....	69
References.....	71

## Introduction

A key consideration in understanding the long term community adaptation of children and youth involved with residential treatment or intensive family services is the role that family plays in sustaining or eroding gains made by children and youth in treatment (Frensch & Cameron, 2002). This report includes a summary of family descriptive information, the nature of family relationships, and indicators of family functioning for children and youth who have participated in children's mental health services.

Data was collected about youth who had been involved with children's mental health residential treatment (RT) or intensive family service programs (IFS), designed as an alternative to residential treatment. Data was gathered about youth functioning at program entry, discharge and 12 to 18 months after leaving the program. Parent-reported measures were used to assess youth functioning prior to service involvement and at follow up. Discharge information was gathered from program records.

Both youth and parents were asked a series of questions that assessed family functioning and feelings within the family. For example, parents indicated how often youth's behaviour prevented the family from engaging in various family activities, like shopping or visiting. Parents were also asked about their family's ability to make decisions or solve problems together. Youth in our study had the opportunity to speak freely about their families including what qualities they liked or disliked in their family members. We also sought to describe the characteristics of the families in our study. Parents were asked a series of demographic questions including the number of children in the home, marital status, and source of family income.

## Participants

Participants were recruited from five children's mental health agencies in south western Ontario, Canada that offered both residential treatment and intensive family service programs. Three of these agencies served children aged 5 to 12 years at admission and their families. The remaining two agencies served youth aged 12 to 16 years and their families.

To maximize sample size, two panels of youth were recruited. In the first, all youth and their families entering residential treatment or the home-based programs in our five partner agencies within one year were invited to participate. In the second panel, all youth discharged from our partner agencies within the previous 12 to 18 months and their parents were invited to participate.

This strategy generated a sample of 106 parents or guardians and 33 youth from the residential treatment program and 104 parents or guardians and 35 youth from the intensive family service program. Within the RT sample group, only 48 respondents were parents. The remaining respondents were guardians from the Children's Aid Society (CAS). Respondents in the IFS sample consisted of 101 parents and 3 CAS guardians. Only youth 12 years and older were interviewed individually.

Interviews with caregivers and youth were mainly conducted in the families' homes; however, on a few occasions, participants chose to meet at another location such as at the university or local library. Participants received \$25.00 for their participation. All participants provided informed consent. Ethical approval was obtained from Wilfrid Laurier University Research Ethics Board, and the participating mental health agencies.

## ***Description of Services***

Residential treatment involved multi-disciplinary teams who created individual treatment plans for each child based on cognitive-behavioural, psycho educational, brief and solution-focussed models. RT environments were intended to be safe and structured. Children received individual counselling and were usually involved in family counselling. Children lived in residence five days a week and attended either their own community school or an on-site school. Children usually returned home on weekends; however, children referred by a child welfare agency may have remained in residential care on weekends. The expected length of stay was three to nine months.

Intensive-family service was the home-based alternative to residential treatment that was developed in response to the long waitlists for residential services. Originally intended for children and youth with difficulties of comparable severity to those accessing RT, in IFS programs children remained at home, and the family received a range of intensive, home-based services similar to those offered in residential care. The expected length of involvement ranged from three to nine months.

## ***Measures***

Clinical data were obtained using The Brief Child and Family Phone Interview, 3<sup>rd</sup> version (BCFPI-3) (Cunningham, Pettingill, & Boyle, 2002) and the Child and Adolescent Functional Assessment Scale (CAFAS) (Hodges, 2000). These standardised measures were already in use by the participating agencies at intake and at discharge, and the BCFPI data was collected again at follow up. Using existing clinical data reduced the burden for clinicians and enhanced the cost efficiency of the research. Additional quality of life, social relations and community conduct data was collected from parents and guardians.

### *Child and Adolescent Functional Assessment Scale*

The CAFAS was designed to assess impairments in day-to-day functioning secondary to behavioral, emotional, psychological, psychiatric, or substance use problems. Eight subscales assess functioning in various domains: role performance at school or work, home, community (reflects delinquent acts), behavior toward others, mood/emotions (primarily anxiety and depression), self-harm behavior, substance use and problems in thinking.

The CAFAS subscales assess the severity of impairment in domain related role performance. Subscale scores can range from 0 (*minimal or no impairment*) to 30 (*severe disruption or incapacitation*). CAFAS has shown sensitivity to change, good concurrent-criterion validity and predictive validity, good discriminant validity and reliability, and has been widely used (Hodges, Doucette-Gates, & Kim, 2000; Hodges & Kim, 2000; Hodges & Wong, 1996).

### *The Brief Child and Family Phone Interview-3*

The BCFPI-3 is an interview protocol that measures the severity of three externalizing problems (corresponding to attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, oppositional defiant disorder and conduct disorder), and three internalizing disorders (corresponding to separation anxiety disorder, anxiety and general mood and self-harm). It also provides descriptive measures of child functioning (social participation, quality of relationships, and school participation and achievement), and child functioning impacts on the family (social activities and comfort).

The questions used in this computerized instrument were taken from the Revised Ontario Child Health Study, and generate *t*-scores. A *t*-score greater than 70, a score higher than 98% of the general population, is indicative of a significant problem. Internal consistency scores range from .73 to .85, and content validity “was ensured by selecting items which map onto the descriptions of common clinical problems in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association IV” (Cunningham, et al., 2002, p. 77).

### *KINDL Quality of Life Questionnaire for Children (Parent’s Version)*

The KINDL is a 24 item instrument designed to measure health related quality of life in children and adolescents age 8-16 (Ravens-Sieberer & Bullinger, 2000). A higher score corresponds to a higher health related quality of life. Item responses range from 1 (never) to 5 (all the time). There are five subscales that assess quality of life in various life domains including physical health, emotional health, social contacts, self esteem, family and school.

### *Qualitative Youth Interviews*

A subset of youth in our sample who were age 12 or older participated in a semi-structured qualitative interview in which youth were asked to describe, in their own words, their functioning in several life domains including school and work, family, social connections and health. Information youth shared with us included discussions about their physical health,

lifestyle issues such as smoking, alcohol and drug use, and managing mental health concerns like depression, anxiety, and anger.

## ***Data Analysis***

For the CAFAS, frequencies were generated to estimate prevalence of clinical severity, and the Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks test was used to assess change over time. For the BCFPI-3, changes from admission to discharge and follow up were analyzed with Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance. Differences between the RT and IFS groups at specific points in time were analyzed with *t*-tests.

Qualitative data were subjected to a thematic analysis. Transcripts of youth interviews were coded using the qualitative data analysis software package N-Vivo. Interview content was organized into four broad life domains (family, social connections and community conduct, health and well being, and school and employment). Through a process of reading the content of a particular life domain by the research team (3 individuals), descriptive codes emerged that were common among the experiences of youth.

Results from the quantitative and qualitative analyses were shared with service providers and program directors from the partner children's mental health agencies. Their feedback was incorporated into the final analyses and interpretations of study results.

## ***Limitations of the Study***

While the study sample likely represents experiences typical of many youth and families using these types of programs, the sample came from five agencies in south west Ontario. In areas with very different socio-economic or ethno cultural characteristics or with other service delivery models, the results might be quite different.

Also, the sample represents all of the youth and families we were able to contact who agreed to participate. Participation levels were very high (> 80%) for the youth and families entering the program during our recruitment year; however, since the mental health agencies had minimal contact with youth after they left their programs, we were only able to establish contact with about half of parents/guardians of children of these youth. Selecting a statistically representative sample was not possible. Sample recruitment strategies were also shaped by the limited number of youth and families participating in these programs at the partner agencies.

The study was not intended to be a formal evaluation of the participating programs. It also does not address the relative effectiveness of the two program approaches. The study's focus was on describing what happens over time to these youth and their families. For this purpose, despite the above limitations, the data was sufficient.

## Results

This report includes a summary of family descriptive information, the nature of family relationships, and indicators of family functioning. For each area of interest, we begin with a presentation of data from parent-reported standardized measures. This is followed by a summary of youth perspectives. Where available we present information from admission and follow up. There is some variation in the data presented for each time (admission and follow up), as not all questions or measures were administered or available at all points in time. The information collected on family functioning at admission was collected retrospectively from paper files. As well, parents were asked to reflect back to the few weeks prior to youth entering services to answer certain questions. Youth spoke mostly about current family relationships (which we consider as follow up data).

Understanding the family profiles of RT youth and IFS youth first required us to consider whether or not youth in our sample were living with their families on a daily basis. More specifically, we looked at who was the legal guardian of the youth and where was the youth living. Using these criteria, it was apparent that these two groups of youth differed greatly from one another. Table 1 shows that approximately two-thirds of our RT youth sample was in the guardianship of the child welfare system and only one-third had a parent as their legal guardian at follow up. This stands in contrast to the majority of IFS youth with a parent as legal guardian (94.5%) and only 5% in the care of the child welfare system at follow up. In general, there are more children in the care of the Children's Aid Society (CAS) participating in residential treatment than in intensive family services. In our study, all participating children's mental health centres had a certain proportion of their RT program spaces designated for children in CAS care. In addition, the programmatic nature of intensive family services is best matched with youth in the care of their parents and still living at home.

**Table 1: Who was the legal guardian at follow up?**

	RT	IFS
Parent as legal guardian	49 (45.8%)	101 (96.2%)
Children's Aid Society as legal guardian	58 (54.2%)	4 (3.8%)
Total	107	105



Unlike our other life domain reports, all indicators of family functioning were analyzed only for youth with a parent as their reported legal guardian. This reduced our sample size at follow up for each group and resulted in 49 RT youth and 101 IFS youth for inclusion in the family functioning analysis. Given the uneven sample sizes between the two groups and the consideration that youth in the legal care of their parents participating in residential treatment are a unique subgroup, any comparisons between the two groups would be misleading. Instead, we present the findings for RT and IFS families separately. This study was not designed to evaluate the effectiveness of residential treatment or intensive family services. Our intention was to provide a portrait of youth adaptation in key life domains following involvement in children’s residential and intensive family service programs.

Also important to understanding how youth and their families were functioning was where the youth was living at follow up. Table 2 shows that 57% of RT youth and 15.2% of IFS youth were not living with their family at the time of our follow up interview.

**Table 2: Where was youth living at follow up?**

	RT	IFS
Living with family	46 (43%)	89 (84.8%)
Not living with family	61 (57%)	16 (15.2%)
Total	107	105

Table 3 provides further information on where youth were living if they were reported to not live with their family at follow up. The most frequently reported place both RT and IFS youth lived was in a foster home (32.8% for RT youth and 26.7% for IFS youth) followed by independent living for IFS youth (26.7%) and group homes for RT youth (24.1%).

**Table 3: Where was youth living if “not living with family?”**

	RT	IFS
With extended family	4 (6.9%)	2 (13.3%)
Foster home (includes treatment foster home)	19 (32.8%)	4 (26.7%)
Group home	14 (24.1%)	1 (6.7%)
Independent living	11 (19%)	4 (26.7%)
In residential treatment	1 (1.7%)	2 (13.3%)
Open custody	1 (1.7%)	0
Closed custody	6 (10.3%)	1 (6.7%)
On the street/whereabouts unknown	2 (3.5%)	1 (6.7%)
Total	58	15
Missing Data	2	1

The remainder of the quantitative findings from our standardized measures is presented first for IFS families followed by a shorter summary of findings for the 49 RT youth in the legal custody of their parent(s).

## **Description of IFS Families**

There were several questions used to build a demographic profile of families in our study. These included:

- Marital status
- Number of children in the household
- Employment
- Source of family income
- Level of annual income

The following series of tables provide demographic information on family composition and financial resources for IFS families in which a parent was reported to be the legal guardian. Table 4 shows that approximately 51.5% of IFS parents were either married or in common law relationships.

**Table 4: Marital Status of IFS Parents at Follow Up**

Married	40 (39.6%)
Common Law	12 (11.9%)
Separated	18 (17.8%)
Divorced	14 (13.9%)
Single	16 (15.8%)
Total	101

Table 5 shows the reported number of children living in the household under the age of 18. The most frequently reported number of children in the home for IFS families was two (41.6% of families). This was followed by three children in the home for IFS families (26.7%).

**Table 5: Number of Children in IFS Families Under 18 years old at Follow Up**

None	7 (6.9%)
One	19 (18.8%)
Two	42 (41.6%)
Three	27 (26.7%)
More than three	6 (6%)
Total	101

Parents were asked if they had a job and, if so, did they work full time or part time. From Table 6 we see that 55.4% of IFS parents were employed in either full time or part time work.

**Table 6: IFS Parent Employment at Follow Up**

Employed	56 (55.4%)
Not Employed	45 (44.6%)
Total	101

Table 7 shows that, of the 56 IFS parents who were employed, 69.6% were working in full time positions at follow up.

**Table 7: IFS Parent Employment Status at Follow Up**

Full Time	39 (69.6%)
Part Time	17 (30.4%)
Total	56

The majority of IFS families reported that their primary source of family income came from paid employment (63.5% of IFS families). Table 8 also shows that 31.2% of IFS families relied on disability insurance and social assistance as their primary source of income.

**Table 8: Source of IFS Family Income at Follow Up**

Employment	61(63.5%)
Disability Insurance	20 (20.8%)
Social Assistance	10 (10.4%)
Other	5 (5.2%)
Total	96
Missing Data	5

Table 9 shows that more than half of all IFS parents who reported their current annual individual salary range indicated earning less than \$30,000 annually (52.1%). This is likely related to the finding that over 30% of IFS parents received disability insurance and social assistance.

**Table 9: Annual Salary Range of IFS Parents at Follow Up**

Under \$10,000	1 (1.1%)
\$10,000 to \$19,999	28 (29.5%)
\$20,000 to \$29,999	12 (12.6%)
\$30,000 to \$39,999	14 (14.8%)
\$40,000 to \$49,999	12 (12.6%)
\$50,000 to \$59,999	10 (10.5%)
\$60,000 to \$69,999	6 (6.3%)
\$70,000 to \$79,999	4 (4.2%)
\$80,000 to \$89,999	2 (2.1%)
\$90,000 to \$99,999	2 (2.1%)
\$100,000 or more	4 (4.2%)
Total	95
Missing Data	6

## ***IFS Family Relationships***

There were two measures analyzed to better understand IFS youth’s relationships within the home and more specifically with their parent(s). These were:

- CAFAS Home Subscale
- BCFPI Quality of Child’s Relationships (“getting along with parents” single item)

Scores for these measures were analyzed at admission, discharge, and follow up where available. We comment on any patterns of change in scores over time.

### **(a) CAFAS: HOME SUBSCALE**

The CAFAS Home Subscale assesses youth behaviour toward others within the household including youth’s willingness to comply with rules and expectations within the home, nature and frequency of irresponsible or potentially dangerous behaviour in the home, and physical threats or acts of intimidation toward household members. A higher score is indicative of greater impairment in this domain. Scores ranged from 0 (no disruption of functioning) to 30 (severe disruption of functioning or incapacitation).

Table 10 shows mean scores for IFS youth at both admission and discharge on the CAFAS Home Subscale. At admission the mean score on the CAFAS Home Subscale for IFS youth was 19.77. This score is higher than the 2006 Ontario average score of 13.8 which was calculated using scores at admission to children’s mental health services (including both

inpatient and outpatient services).<sup>1</sup> The largest proportion of IFS youth (35.6%) scored at the highest level of impairment (score of 30) on the CAFAS Home Subscale at admission.

At discharge, IFS youth evidenced a reduction in impairment on the CAFAS Home Subscale. The mean score for IFS youth was 10.89 at discharge. The majority of IFS youth (73.1%) were reported to have minimal to no impairment (scores of 0 or 10) on this subscale at discharge. This pattern is consistent with St. Pierre's (2007) finding of improvement in functioning within the home (as measured by the CAFAS Home subscale) at discharge for 149 children and youth admitted to the Child and Parent Resource Institute (CPRI) in 2006.

**Table 10: CAFAS Home Subscale Scores for IFS Youth**

Statistics	Admission (N=87)	Discharge (N=78)	2006 Ontario Admission Average
Mean	19.77	10.89	13.8
Std. Dev.	9.14	9.82	
Frequencies			
0.00=	4 (4.6%)	24 (30.8%)	25.1%
10.00=	25 (28.7%)	33 (42.3%)	33.2%
20.00=	27 (31.1%)	11 (14.1%)	20.2%
30.00=	31 (35.6%)	10 (12.8%)	21.5%

We looked for any change in scores on the CAFAS Home Subscale from admission to discharge for IFS youth. A Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks test which analyzes change in scores revealed a statistically significant difference for IFS youth on their distribution of scores from admission to discharge ( $p=.000^*$ ). Table 11 summarizes the direction of change for each youth over time. There were 44 IFS youth who moved to a lower score from admission to discharge on the CAFAS Home Subscale indicative of a reduction in severity of impairment. Only 5 IFS youth had an increase in severity of impairment from admission to discharge. The remaining youth had no change in their scores over time.

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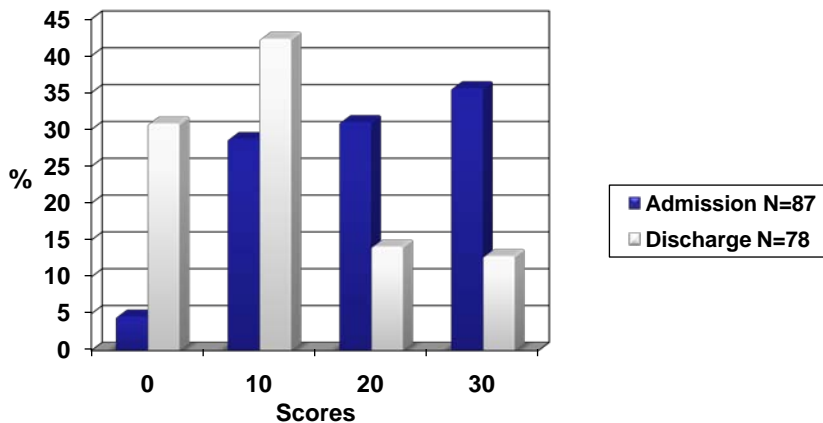
<sup>1</sup> CAFAS in Ontario, 2006.

**Table 11: Change in CAFAS Home Subscale Scores for IFS Youth from Admission to Discharge**

Direction of Change	Number of Respondents
Reduction in Severity of Impairment	44
Increase in Severity of Impairment	5
No Change in Severity of Impairment	29
Total	78
Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test	Z= -5.333 p=.000*

Figure 1 shows the distribution of scores for IFS youth on the CAFAS Home Subscale at admission and discharge. At admission, 66.6% of youth displayed moderate to severe impairment (scores of 20 or 30) on this measure. In contrast, at discharge 73.1% of IFS youth had only minimal or mild impairment (scores of 0 or 10).

**Figure 1: CAFAS Home Subscale Scores for IFS Youth Only**



(b) BCFPI: QUALITY OF CHILD’S RELATIONSHIPS (single item)

While the overall score for the BCFPI: Quality of Child’s Relationships Subscale provides an indication of the quality of youth interaction with teachers, parents, and peers combined, for this family domain analysis, we were specifically interested in youth relationships with their parent(s). Parents were asked about their perception of how much trouble youth had “getting along with” their parent(s).

Table 12 reports the response frequencies for how much IFS youth had trouble getting along with their parents at admission and follow up. Item scores were available for 79 IFS youth at admission. At admission, the majority of IFS parents (78.5%) reported youth had “a lot” of trouble getting along with parents.

Our sample size at follow up was larger than at admission with 100 responses to this question. Table 12 shows that, at follow up, more than half of IFS parents (53%) reported that youth still had “a lot” of trouble getting along with parents at follow up.

**Table 12: “How much trouble has your child had getting along with you or your partner as a result of these problems?”**

	Admission (N=79)	Follow Up (N=100)
Frequencies		
None=	3 (3.8%)	9 (9%)
A Little=	14 (17.7%)	38 (38%)
A Lot=	62 (78.5%)	53 (53%)

We next looked for any change in scores on this item from admission to follow up for IFS youth. Table 13 summarizes the direction of change for IFS youth over time. There were 28 IFS youth who moved to a lower score from admission to follow up which indicated that they were experiencing less trouble getting along with their parent at follow up than at admission. Conversely there were 10 IFS youth who had a higher score at follow up on this question which suggested they were having more trouble getting along with their parents at follow up than at admission. The remaining 41 IFS youth had no change in their score from admission to follow up. A Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test revealed a statistically significant difference in how much trouble IFS youth were reported to have getting along with their parents over time ( $p=.002^*$ ).

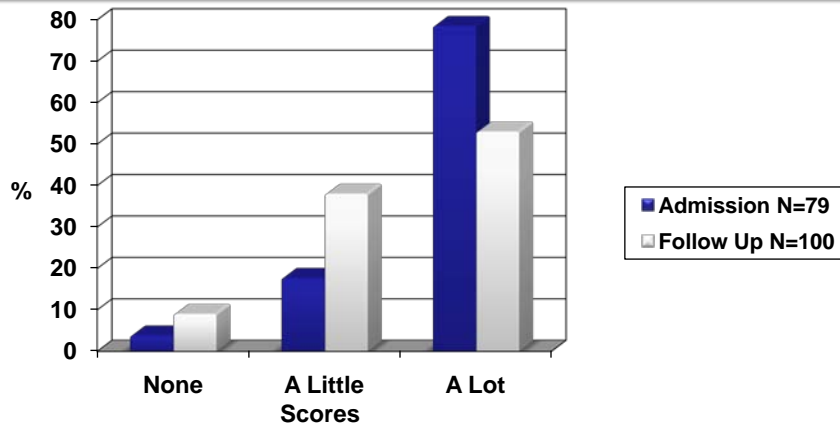


**Table 13: Change in BCFPI Quality of Child’s Relationships (parent item score) from Admission to Follow Up**

Direction of Change	Number of Respondents
Less trouble getting along with parents	28
More trouble getting along with parents	10
No Change in getting along with parents	41
Total	79
Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test	Z= -3.116 p=.002*

Figure 2 shows the distribution of responses for IFS youth at admission and follow up. The sample size at admission (N=79) included all IFS youth with a response to this item. The sample size at follow up (N=100) reflects all IFS youth with a parent as a legal guardian. At both admission and follow up, the largest proportion of youth were reported to have “a lot” of trouble getting along with their parents.

Figure 2: How much trouble has your child had getting along with you or your partner as a result of these problems? (IFS Only)



## ***IFS Family Functioning***

In order to understand how IFS parents and youth were functioning as a family unit, we examined several behavioural and affective scales at admission and follow up. These included:

- BCFPI Family Activities Subscale
- BCFPI Family Comfort Subscale
- KINDL Quality of Life—Family Subscale
- Family Assessment Device
- Parenting Sense of Competence Scale

Where appropriate, we examined these measures for any patterns of change over time.

### **(a) BCFPI: FAMILY ACTITIVITES SUBSCALE**

The BCFPI Family Activities Subscale measures the extent to which a child's behaviour is thought to impact a family's involvement with external social networks. Parents were asked about how frequently their child's behaviour prevented the family from engaging in certain activities such as going on family outings (shopping, visiting), prevented parents or siblings from having friends or relatives to the home, or deciding not to leave their child with a babysitter. A higher score on the BCFPI Family Activities Subscale indicated that the child's behaviour had a greater negative impact on performing family activities.

Table 14 shows the mean score for IFS families at admission and follow upon the BCFPI Family Activities Subscale. At admission, there were 77 families with available subscale scores. This fell to 49 IFS families at follow up. A subscale score could not be completed if there was missing data on any one of the four items that make up this subscale. The item "How frequently has your child's behaviour made you decide not to leave him/her with a babysitter?" was often left unanswered if the item was not applicable (due to the older age of the child).

At admission, IFS families were experiencing a high level of impairment in engaging in family activities. Table 14 shows that the mean score for IFS families was 110.28 on the BCFPI Family Activities subscale. For those families we had scores for at follow up, their mean score on the BCFPI Family Activities subscale was 93.11. Scores at both admission and follow up were well above the clinical threshold score of 70.<sup>2</sup> Large standard deviations were found for this subscale perhaps indicative of a bi-modal pattern of scores associated with the presence of two distinct groups of families: families scoring well below the clinical cut off score of 70 and a cluster of families scoring very high on this measure.

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<sup>2</sup> St. Pierre (2007).

**Table 14: BCFPI Family Activities Subscale Scores**

Statistics	Admission (N=77)	Follow Up (N=49)	2006 Ontario Outpatient Admission Average (N=4918)
Mean	110.28	93.11	75.77
Std. Dev.	41.11	34.65	

As there were fewer IFS families with subscale scores due to missing data, we also looked at the individual items for this subscale. Table 15 shows the distribution of scores for IFS families at admission and follow up on the individual items that make up the BCFPI Family Activities Subscale. Overall IFS families saw a reduction in the impact of youth behaviour on engaging in family activities from admission to follow up. There were, however, some variations in patterns of change across time for individual items:

- *Shopping or Visiting:* At admission 58.3% of IFS families reported that their child’s behaviour prevented them from going on family outings “often” or “always”. This fell to 35.6% at follow up. A Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test revealed a statistically significant difference in the distribution of scores for IFS families on this item from admission to follow up ( $Z = -3.440$ ,  $p = .001^*$ ).
- *Decide Not to Leave with Babysitter:* There was only a small change over time in the proportion of IFS families who reported “often” or “always” deciding not to leave their child with a babysitter (53.3% at admission and 42.8% at follow up).
- *Guests in the Home:* At admission, 38% of IFS families reported that their child’s behaviour prevented parents from having friends, relatives, or neighbours to the home “often” or “always.” At follow up, a smaller proportion of IFS families (17%) reported that this was happening as frequently. A Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test indicated that this difference for IFS families from admission to follow up was statistically significant ( $Z = -3.302$ ,  $p = .001^*$ ).
- *Siblings’ Friends to the Home:* At admission 32% of IFS youth siblings were reported to “often” or “always” be prevented from inviting friends to the home. This decreased to 21.5% at follow up. This change in distribution from admission to follow up was statistically significant ( $Z = -2.015$ ,  $p = .044^*$ ).

**Table 15: Distribution of Scores for BCFPI Family Activities Subscale Items at Admission and Follow Up for IFS Families**

How frequently has your child’s behaviour prevented you from taking him/her shopping or visiting?

<b>Time</b>	<i>Never</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Always</i>
Admission (N=79)	13.9%	27.8%	34.2%	24.1%
Follow Up (N=101)	23.8%	40.6%	29.7%	5.9%

How frequently has your child’s behaviour made you decide not to leave him/her with a babysitter (if applicable)?

<b>Time</b>	<i>Never</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Always</i>
Admission (N=77)	28.6%	18.2%	23.4%	29.9%
Follow Up (N=49)	22.4%	34.7%	30.6%	12.2%

How frequently has your child’s behaviour prevented you from having friends, relatives or neighbours to your home?

<b>Time</b>	<i>Never</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Always</i>
Admission (N=79)	39.2%	22.8%	21.5%	16.5%
Follow Up (N=100)	47%	36%	16%	1%

How frequently has your child’s behaviour prevented his/her siblings from having friends, relatives or neighbours to the home?

<b>Time</b>	<i>Never</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Always</i>
Admission (N=75)	44%	24%	14.7%	17.3%
Follow Up (N=79)	44.3%	34.2%	17.7%	3.8%

## (b) BCFPI FAMILY COMFORT SUBSCALE

### *i. Admission*

The BCFPI Family Comfort Subscale measures the perceived impact of a child's behaviour on the internal functioning of the family. Parents were asked how frequently their child's behaviour impacted how often they quarreled with their spouse, worried about how their child would do in the future, and whether people outside of the home expressed concern about their child's behaviour. A higher score on the BCFPI Family Comfort subscale indicated that the child's behaviour had a greater negative impact on family comfort.

Table 16 shows the mean scores for IFS families at admission and follow up on the BCFPI Family Comfort Subscale. Similar to the previous family activities subscale, a score could not be calculated if there were data missing from any of the three items that make up this subscale. Subscale scores were available for 73 IFS families at admission and 75 families at follow up. The mean score at admission was 84.61 and 79.73 at follow up. Both of these mean scores were above 70 indicating an impact on family comfort that was in the clinical range of concern on this subscale.<sup>3</sup>

**Table 16: BCFPI Family Comfort Subscale Scores for IFS Families**

Statistics	Admission (N=73)	Follow Up (N=75)	2006 Ontario Outpatient Admission Average (N=4918)
Mean	84.61	79.73	72.15
Std. Dev.	14.86	16.38	

As there were fewer IFS families with BCFPI Family Comfort subscale scores due to missing data, we also looked at the individual items for this subscale. Table 17 shows the distribution of scores at admission and follow up for IFS families on the individual items that make up the BCFPI Family Comfort Subscale. We noticed the following patterns:

- *Quarreling with Spouse:* The proportion of IFS parents who reported quarreling with their spouse about their child's behaviour increased from admission to follow up. At admission 39.7% of IFS parents said they "never" quarreled about their child's behaviour. This proportion decreased to 17.1% at follow up.
- *Anxious about Child's Chances for Doing Well in the Future:* The majority of parents at admission and follow up reported being anxious or worried about their child's chances for doing well in the future. At follow up, however, the proportion of parents reported to "always" be anxious decreased from 60.3% to 38.6%.

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<sup>3</sup>St. Pierre (2007).

**Table 17: Distribution of Scores for BCFPI Family Comfort Subscale Items at Admission and Follow Up for IFS Families**

How frequently have you quarreled with your partner regarding your child’s behaviour?

<b>Time</b>	<i>Never</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Always</i>
Admission (N=73)	39.7%	19.2%	26%	15.1%
Follow Up (N=76)	17.1%	32.9%	28.9%	21.1%

How frequently has your child’s behaviour caused you to be anxious or worried about his/her chances for doing well in the future?

<b>Time</b>	<i>Never</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Always</i>
Admission (N=78)	1.3%	6.4%	32.1%	60.3%
Follow Up (N=101)	5%	20.8%	35.6%	38.6%

How frequently have neighbours, relatives or friends expressed concerns about your child’s behaviour?

<b>Time</b>	<i>Never</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Always</i>
Admission (N=79)	2.5%	26.6%	36.7%	34.2%
Follow Up (N=100)	1.8%	38%	31%	13%

- *Concerns Expressed by Others:* At admission, 70.9% of IFS parents reported that friends, relatives, or neighbours had expressed concerns about their child’s behaviour “often” or “always”. This proportion decreased to 44% at follow up.

(c) KINDL QUALITY OF LIFE—FAMILY SUBSCALE

Parents were asked to assess their child’s quality of life within the family by rating how often their child got along with them, if their child felt “fine” in the home, how often they quarreled and whether their child felt that the parent was “bossing” him or her around. Parents responded to these questions in the present (follow up measure of quality of life) and retrospectively, thinking about the short time leading up to service involvement (admission measure of quality of life). Scores could range from 1 (never) to 5 (all the time). A higher overall score indicated a greater quality of family life.

Table 18 reports the mean scores at admission and follow up for IFS youth on the “family” subscale of the KINDL Quality of Life measure. At admission, the mean score for IFS youth’s quality of family life was 2.41. Quality of family life increased for IFS youth at follow up with a mean score of 3.06. A paired samples t-test revealed a statistically significant difference between the mean scores at admission and follow up for IFS youth ( $p=.000^*$ ). Parents perceived their youth’s quality of family life to be higher at follow up than their retrospective perceptions of youth’s quality of life in the short time leading up to service involvement.

**Table 18: KINDL Quality of Life—Family Subscale Scores for IFS Youth**

Statistics	Admission (N=93)	Follow Up (N=93)
Mean	2.41	3.06
Std. Dev.	.741	.850
T-test	t=6.41 df=92 p=.000*	

#### (d) FAMILY ASSESSMENT DEVICE

The Family Assessment Device (FAD) has been used to distinguish between healthy and unhealthy families by describing organizational and structural dimensions of the family and patterns of transactions among family members (Byles, Byrne, Boyle, & Offord, 1988). We used the 12 item General Functioning subscale of the FAD. This measure was only administered at follow up.

Parents were asked to respond to statements about their family. Item responses ranged from 1 (strongly agree) to 4 (strongly disagree). Examples included “In times of crisis we can turn to each other for support”, “We express feelings to each other”, and “Individuals in the family are accepted for who they are.” A lower score indicated a healthier general functioning of the family. Possible mean item scores could range from 1 to 4.

Table 19 shows the mean score for IFS families was 1.98 at follow up. This mean score was higher than the average score of 1.75 for the Ontario Child Health Study sample which measured family functioning in a large random sample of Ontario families. A t-test revealed a statistically significant difference between our research sample mean and the OCHS population mean ( $t=5.028$ ,  $df=98$ ,  $p=.000^*$ ). However, our sample mean score was lower than the OCHS cut off score of 2.17 used to distinguish “pathological” family functioning from “healthy” functioning (scores under 2.17).<sup>4</sup>

**Table 19: Family Assessment Device Scores at Follow Up for IFS Families**

Statistics	IFS Families (N=99)	OCHS Population Average Score (N=1,869)
Mean	1.98	1.75
Std. Dev.	.46	.44

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<sup>4</sup> Byles, et al., 1988.



(e) PARENTING SENSE OF COMPETENCE

The Parenting Sense of Competence Scale (PSOC) is an instrument designed to measure parenting self esteem (Gibaud-Wallston & Wandersman, 1978). Our version of this scale was a shortened 12 item instrument based on the original 17 item instrument. The PSOC was administered only at follow up.

Parents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with statements about being a parent. Items included “It’s hard to know whether you are doing a good job or a bad job as a parent,” “Parenting leaves you feeling drained and exhausted,” and “It seems like you are so busy as a parent that you never get anything done.” Item responses ranged from 1 (strongly agree) to 7 (strongly disagree). A higher score indicated a greater sense of parenting self esteem. Possible item mean scores ranged from 1 to 7. As the original PSOC instrument had a 6 point response scale (range 1-6), we weighted our mean score accordingly to allow comparisons to other studies using the PSOC in its original format. Using a weighted mean score restricted our ability to include any more advanced analyses other than comparing various group means.

Table 20 compares the mean score for IFS parents in our study to a random sample of 129 mothers with children age 7-9 years old recruited in a door-to-door survey in a large Canadian city.<sup>5</sup> IFS parents in our study had a weighted mean score of 3.88 on the PSOC scale. This mean score was slightly lower than the comparison sample mean score of 3.96 suggesting that IFS parents in our sample may have had diminished levels of parenting self esteem in contrast to the comparison sample. This difference, however, was not tested statistically and must be interpreted with caution.

**Table 20: Parenting Sense of Competence at Follow Up for IFS Parents**

Statistics	Follow Up (N=101)	Comparison Sample (N=129)
Mean	3.88	3.96

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<sup>5</sup> Johnston & Mash, 1989.

## Profile of RT Families

This section presents selected findings for the 49 RT youth for whom their parent(s) was reported to be the legal guardian. The findings reported here are not as comprehensive as those reported earlier for IFS families as some of the item and scale sample sizes were too small to conduct any meaningful statistical analysis. Because the analyses included here had small sample sizes (N=49 or less), these findings should be considered cautiously and are not intended to represent the larger sample of all RT youth in our study.

The same standardized measures were used to assess RT family functioning as IFS family functioning. These included the BCFPI Family Activities and Family Comfort Subscales, KINDL Quality of Life—Family Subscale, Family Assessment Device, and the Parenting Sense of Competence Scale. In our analyses of all these indicators, sample sizes varied and in all instances were considered too small to perform any advanced statistical analyses.

Table 25 contains some descriptive information about the 49 RT families included in the following analyses. Almost 40% of RT parents were married, 45.8% had two children in the home, almost two-thirds of RT parents were employed (64.6%), and, of those parents employed, the majority worked full time (80.6%).

**Table 25: Demographic Profile of RT Families  
(with parent as legal guardian) at Follow Up**

Marital Status (n=48):	
<i>Married</i>	19 (39.6%)
<i>Common Law</i>	5 (10.4%)
<i>Separated</i>	10 (20.8%)
<i>Divorced</i>	8 (16.7%)
<i>Single</i>	6 (12.5%)
Number of Children in the Household Under 18 (n=48):	
<i>None</i>	3 (6.3%)
<i>One</i>	13 (27.1%)
<i>Two</i>	22 (45.8%)
<i>Three</i>	9 (18.8%)
<i>More than three</i>	1 (2.1%)
Employed (n=48):	
<i>Yes</i>	31 (64.6%)
<i>No</i>	17 (35.4%)
Employment Status (n=31):	
<i>Full Time</i>	25 (80.6%)
<i>Part Time</i>	4 (12.9%)
<i>Other</i>	2 (6.5%)

We looked at how this subgroup of RT youth was reported to “get along” with others in the family, in particular their parent(s), at admission and follow up. Table 26 summarizes parents responses to how much trouble youth were reported to have getting along with them. A large majority of RT youth (58.8%) were reported to have “a lot” of trouble getting along with their parents at admission. While this proportion dropped at follow up, 58.3% of RT youth were reported to still have “a lot” of trouble getting along with parents.

**Table 26: “How much trouble has your child had getting along with you or your partner as a result of these problems?”**

	<i>None</i>	<i>A Little</i>	<i>A Lot</i>
Admission (N=40)	6 (15%)	6 (15%)	28 (70%)
Follow Up (N=48)	5 (10.4%)	15 (31.3%)	28 (58.3%)

There were few RT families that had scores on the BCFPI Family Activities subscale at admission. In order for a scale score to be completed, all individual item responses had to be available. Table 27 shows the mean score for RT families with scores on the family activities subscale at admission and follow up. The average score for families at admission was 117.49 and 112.21 at follow up. There appeared to be little change in average scores from admission to follow up, however, this observation is made cautiously due to the small sample sizes.

**Table 27: BCFPI Family Activities Subscale Scores for RT Families**

Statistics	Admission (N=36)	Follow Up (N=20)
Mean	117.49	112.21
Std. Dev.	34.98	43.47

We also looked at the individual items that made up the BCFPI Family Activities subscale. Table 28 shows the distribution of scores for RT families at admission and follow up for the four items that comprised this subscale. While any patterns must be considered tentative due to the small sample sizes, from Table 28 we noted the following patterns:

- At admission, over three-quarters of parents reported that they were “often” or “always” prevented from taking their child shopping or visiting. This fell to just over half of RT parents at follow up.
- At both admission (73.7%) and follow up (69.5%), the majority of RT parents reported “often” or “always” deciding not to leave their child with a babysitter as a result of their behaviours.
- Fewer RT parents were prevented from having friends, relatives or neighbours to the home as a result of their child’s behaviour at follow up than at admission. Approximately 35% of RT families reported “never” being prevented from having other people to the home at follow up in contrast to the 17.9% at admission.

- At both admission (63.9%) and follow up (70%), the majority of RT parents reported that their child's behaviour "never" or only "sometimes" prevented his/her brothers or sisters from having friends, relatives or neighbours to the family home.

**Table 28: Distribution of Scores for BCFPI Family Activities Subscale Items at Admission and Follow Up for RT Families**

How frequently has your child's behaviour prevented you from taking him/her shopping or visiting?				
<b>Time</b>	<i>Never</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Always</i>
Admission (N=39)	12.8%	15.4%	53.8%	17.9%
Follow Up (N=47)	34%	19.1%	36.2%	10.6%
How frequently has your child's behaviour made you decide not to leave him/her with a babysitter (if applicable)?				
<b>Time</b>	<i>Never</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Always</i>
Admission (N=38)	23.7%	2.6%	31.6%	42.1%
Follow Up (N=23)	17.4%	13%	30.4%	39.1%
How frequently has your child's behaviour prevented you from having friends, relatives or neighbours to your home?				
<b>Time</b>	<i>Never</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Always</i>
Admission (N=39)	17.9%	30.8%	41%	10.3%
Follow Up (N=46)	34.8%	26.1%	32.6%	6.5%
How frequently has your child's behaviour prevented his/her brothers or sisters from having friends, relatives or neighbours to your home?				
<b>Time</b>	<i>Never</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Always</i>
Admission (N=36)	50%	13.9%	19.4%	16.7%
Follow Up (N=30)	46.7%	23.3%	16.7%	13.3%

Another measure used to assess family functioning was the BCFPI Family Comfort subscale. This subscale measures the extent to which a child’s behaviour is thought to be a source of conflict and anxiety within the family. A higher score indicates a greater impact of a child’s behaviour on the family. There were few RT families that had scores on the BCFPI Family Comfort subscale at admission. In order for a scale score to be completed, all individual item responses had to be available. Table 29 shows the mean score for RT families on the family comfort subscale at admission and follow up. The average score for families at admission was 88.81 and 76.86 at follow up. While there appeared to be an improvement in scores overtime, both of these scores (admission and follow up) were still higher than the Ontario outpatient average admission score of 72.15 reported earlier. This was also true for IFS families’ mean scores at admission and follow up.

**Table 29: BCFPI Family Comfort Subscale Scores for RT Families**

Statistics	Admission (N=31)	Follow Up (N=36)
Mean	88.81	76.86
Std. Dev.	10.87	15.17

We also looked at the distribution of responses at admission and follow up for the three items that made up the Family Comfort subscale. Table 30 shows that, similar to IFS parents, RT parents reported quarreling more frequently with their spouse at follow up than admission. At follow up, 22.2% of parents said they “never” quarreled about their child’s behaviour. This fell from 26.7% at admission. The majority of RT parents were frequently anxious or worried about their child’s chances for doing well in the future both at admission and follow up. At admission 89.7% of RT parents were “always” anxious. At follow up, 54.2% of RT parents were “always” anxious about their child’s future. Table 30 also shows that at follow up far fewer RT parents reported that neighbours, relatives, or friends expressed concerns with any great frequency (41% vs. 8.3%).

**Table 30: Distribution of Scores for Selected BCFPI Family Comfort Subscale Items at Admission and Follow Up for RT Families**

How frequently have you quarreled with your spouse regarding your child's behaviour?				
Time	<i>Never</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Always</i>
Admission (N=30)	26.7%	16.7%	53.3%	3.3%
Follow Up (N=36)	22.2%	38.9%	19.4%	19.4%
How frequently has your child's behaviour caused you to be anxious or worried about his/her chances for doing well in the future?				
Time	<i>Never</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Always</i>
Admission (N=39)	0	0	10.3%	89.7%
Follow Up (N=48)	2.1%	16.7%	27.1%	54.2%
How frequently have neighbours, relatives or friends expressed concerns about your child's behaviour?				
Time	<i>Never</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Always</i>
Admission (N=39)	5.1%	12.8	41%	41%
Follow Up (N=48)	16.7%	27.1%	47.9%	8.3%

Table 31 shows the mean scores at admission and follow up for RT youth on the KINDL Quality of Life—Family Subscale. At admission, the mean score for RT youth was 2.20. Quality of family life increased for RT youth at follow up with a mean score of 3.11. Unlike some of the small sample sizes reported earlier, there were 45 RT youth with scores on the KINDL Quality of Life—Family Subscale at both admission and follow up. A paired t-test analysis revealed a statistically significant difference between the mean scores for these RT youth at admission and follow up ( $t=5.201$ ,  $df=44$ ,  $p=.000^*$ ). Reported quality of life within the family was higher at follow up than at admission for this group of RT youth.

**Table 31: KINDL Quality of Life—Family Subscale Scores for RT Youth**

Statistics	Admission (N=47)	Follow Up (N=46)
Mean	2.20	3.11
Std. Dev.	.759	.995

## ***Youth Descriptions of Families, Living Situations and Resources***

This section presents a combined analysis of qualitative information gathered from RT and IFS youth in our study. Youth were asked a series of open-ended questions about their family composition, what they liked or disliked about their family and where they lived, and activities the family enjoyed doing together. In the interviews, youth described their family connections including parents, siblings and extended family. Youth also talked about their living situations, including their physical environments, resources and the people with whom they lived. Many youth, especially those from the IFS group, lived with one or both parents while a smaller group, primarily RT youth, lived in group homes or on their own. The quality of relationships within the home or within group homes settings were described by most of the youth interviewed. One of key themes that emerged was the degree of conflict that existed in the home or group home. Youth also talked about the activities that they engaged in with family members or co-residents. How youth generally felt about their families may be understood through the ways in which they talked about them.

There were significant differences between IFS youth and RT youth in this domain. At the time of the interview, about 94% of the 35 IFS youth interviewed were living in the family home; whereas, 60% of the 33 RT youth were living in the family home and 40% were in the care of a Children's Aid Society. Of the 33 RT youth, 17 youth lived with family members, 12 lived in a group home or custody facility, 2 youth lived with grandparents, 1 youth lived independently and 1 youth lived in a foster home. *For the purposes of this analysis, family experiences for youth living at home, whether they came from the IFS group or the RT group, will generally be discussed as one group. Youth living in group care or other placements will be discussed as a second group and youth living independently as a separate group.*

There did appear to be differences in the experiences of IFS youth living at home and RT youth living at home. However, it is difficult to make solid comparisons due to the smaller number of RT youth who live in the family home. Conflict in the home was fairly common among approximately 63% of IFS youth but was more common among RT youth with approximately 88% of RT youth reporting conflict with parents. For youth-in-care, all from the RT group, there was significant conflict in almost all group living situations. These observations are consistent with the level of interpersonal conflict described for RT youth in other life domains. Despite numerous challenges in the family domain for a significant number of youth, particularly the RT youth, family was still seen as important by a majority of the youth in both groups, including those not living with their families.

## **(a) WHO IS FAMILY?**

Most of the youth from the IFS group live in a parental home (94%) while less of the youth from the RT group (60%) lived in a parental home. Other living arrangements include group homes, custody, grandparents, a foster home and no fixed address. There are many different family compositions for youth living in a family home, with many single parent-led families, blended families, and relatives acting as temporary guardians. Youth generally define family as family of origin whether or not they have any strong connections with their family of origin. For some youth, primarily RT youth, contact with family of origin is sporadic or non-existent.

### *Single Parent Families*

There was a high prevalence of single parent households in family homes across the two groups. Of the youth living in the home in both groups, approximately 49% lived in single parent led households, all excepting two headed by single mothers:

Well, I live with my mom and my cat, obviously. [Q. And it's just you and your mom living together? And the cat. [Q. And the cat, oh right, sorry cat, forgot you. I understand you don't see your dad?] Yeah. [IFS-1]]

[Q. So who are you currently living with?] My mom. [Q. Okay, and your little brother?] And my little brother too. [IFS-2]

[Q. Who do you currently live with?] Uh, my mom and my [grandma]. [Q..... you have a sister too?] Yeah. [IFS-3]



## *Absent Fathers*

The absence of fathers was a common theme among youth in family homes across both groups. While 60% of IFS youth and 33% of RT youth living in the home had some contact with biological fathers, the connections described were often limited. While a few youth from both the IFS and RT group had regular contact with their noncustodial fathers, a significant number of youth from both groups reported either sporadic contact or non-existent contact with biological fathers following parental separation:

He's been visiting [country name] a lot because his girlfriend was there, but then he was going to marry her, but then things didn't work out so he's here and he's living with his friend and he moved to a different place, and I don't know where he is now, he's with this guy he works with and he's just moving in, I don't think he's going to be there for a while, though, maybe. And so yeah and so yeah, I might visit him sometimes too. [IFS-1]

[Q. When was the last time you saw him?] Probably a couple of years ago. [Q. How do you feel about that?] A. Well, I wish... I'd be at least allowed to go up to his place for weekends... [IFS-2]

I've never met my dad. [Q. No? What's that like for you?] Well... I don't really think about it. [IFS-3]

I've known him for about 6 months. About a year ago that I dropped con—or, two years ago, sorry, that I dropped contact and just got back to him about October. [RT-1]

Actually, I don't know my dad, but I see my step-dad every other weekend. [...]...nothing really happens between me and him because I tend to stay out of the way or tend to stay in my room when he's around. [RT-2]

[Q. Do you see your dad ever?] I saw him just a couple—uh... a month and a half ago. [RT-3]

While youth from both groups spoke more often of enjoying a positive relationship with their mother, there were a few examples of strong father/child connections, both by youth living with both biological parents and by youth who were living only with their fathers.

The following comments were made by youth residing with their biological fathers:

I like this environment better than it was at [place]. It was constant fighting over there. I just have a great time here... I really like it. [IFS-4]

[Q. How do you and your dad get a long?] Good.....We used to always go fishing.....Yeah. Not too much anymore 'cause...We just don't get the time. [IFS-5]

[Q. And what do you think makes your relationship with your dad good?]We don't argue. We don't force each other to do stuff, we ask and that's different. With my mom we force... so like we say do this, it's not can you please do this? [IFS-6]

These next youth appear to be enjoying a positive access relationship with their fathers:

[Q. And so you see your dad on weekends. What's your relationship like with your dad?] Fun...Cool. [RT-4]

Uh he works a lot. Um he loves us, all his kids right, a lot, like he'll always be doing stuff for us, make sure we uh have what we need, what we want and that, and uh he'll always like just keep going, when we get what we need and want he'll be like, is that all you need? And he'll, he'll always just make sure we have what we want and need right. Um he'll come, like if we're at his house, he'll come down and see if we want to do anything and play like a game of dice and that or something and watch TV with him or something so. [IFS-7]

However, these examples are in the minority given that descriptions of a positive or active relationship with father were absent from the majority of youth interviews.

### *Blended Families*

For youth living in family homes, blended families were second to single parent families in prevalence. In families with two parents, one was usually a step parent to the youth in our study. Approximately 43% of IFS youth and 33% of RT youth lived in a home where there were two parents. However, only 29% of IFS youth and only 9% of the RT youth lived with both biological parents. While some youth did have step-fathers in their lives, many did not seem to have strong connections to these step-fathers. Step-siblings were sometimes part of the family constellation as well, though youth talked little about their connections to step-siblings. The following describes the make-up of one blended family:

[My big brother (name), my kind of like my sister, because she's with (brother), ...There's (name) which is my stepdad. There's my mom and my brother (name). [IFS-1]

In this example, the youth named all family members when asked about his family. In many other cases, youth only mentioned a parent when asked with whom they lived and only mentioned other step family and siblings with more questioning. The absence of discussion by some youth about step parents and siblings suggests that some of these relationships may be secondary in importance to them.

## *Siblings*

The large majority of youth living at home, 68%, had other siblings in the home. Four youth identified having a sibling with a physical or mental disability. Because of their circumstances, none of the youth in care lived with their siblings; however, approximately 73% made some mention of siblings. It should be noted that in the cases described, siblings may include full biological siblings, half siblings or step siblings.

## *The Role of Extended Family*

Extended family, primarily grandparents, played an active role in the lives of a minority of the youth interviewed. Among youth living at home, 36% mentioned some connection to extended family while among youth in care, 20% mentioned some connection to extended family. Single mothers sometimes received some support from grandparents and, in two IFS families, a grandparent lived in the family home. In the other situations, grandparents were talked about in terms of holidays or visits. Some grandparents also provided a temporary home to both youth in care and youth “taking a break” from family homes. The following quotes describe some of the roles of extended family members:

I got a younger brother, my mom and stepfather, that’s pretty much the family here and I have lots of aunts and uncles and grandparents that I consider my parents, because... my grandpa, I consider him as being my father-figure...[RT-1]

Do you have a good relationship with your grandparents? Oh yeah. I used to live—I lived with them for a year. [...] Because of, uh, family difficulties, I’ll just say that. [RT-2]

My little brother’s living with my grandparents right now, just... Yeah, I used to live there, I lived there for a year. [...] There was a threat towards me from my [family member] and they said I could live there for a cooling off time and the cooling off time ended up turning into a year. And there was just, I loved it, I ended up finding a dad and just had so much fun and then I came back and it just started going downhill. I just wish I could relax, I’ve always run up there...[RT-3]

[Q. So you see your grandma, your extended family, quite often?] Well, not all the time, but a lot I talk to them and my grandma and aunt and cousin, I see them almost every day. [IFS-1]

Then on my mom’s side of the family, I get to see them quite a bit, but it’s... I don’t know what it is, it’s just, um... it’s just like a tiny visit thing and then we just go. [IFS-2]

What’s it like living with your grandmother? It’s really nice. [Q. Yeah? What’s nice about it?] Knowing that she’s always there. Like, I grew up in my grandmother’s house when I was born, she’s like a second parent to me. [IFS-3]

[Q. Who you live with right now?] My grandma...And my papa...My 3 sisters. [RT-4]

(temporarily with grandparents) It's nice. It's an old campground for the disabled. [...]Guess it's the best situation for me right now, but as soon as June comes by and I graduate, I'm moving back to London. . [RT-5]

We see that grandparents served a role as substitute parents in some families, particularly when something had gone wrong with the relationships in the parental home. However, only a minority of youth interviewed identified extended family members who played any significant role in their lives which may suggest a lack of extended family supports.

### **(b) YOUTH IN CARE**

Many youth from the RT group were children who had been in care for much of their lives. Of youth from our RT group, approximately 40% were in the care of the Children's Aid Society at the time of the interview and 27% of these youth had been "in care" for the majority of their lives. Furthermore, 67% of youth in care talked about having little to no contact with their families of origin. The following quotes illustrate the lack of family relationships that many of these youth in care experienced. Implicit in some of these quotes is a desire to have more contact:

They're cool. [Q. Do you see them?] Yeah. [...] Uh, I see my mom on Saturdays so that's cool. I don't get to see my family very often, but whatever.[...] [Q. Okay, do you have brothers and sisters?] Uh, one brother and one sister. [Q. Okay. And you... so you see your mom on Saturdays? Do you—] No, not on Saturdays, just anytime she can. [...] [Q. And how long have you lived separate from your family?] Uh, basically all my life.[...] [Q. ...do you have contact with your brother and sister?] No I don't. [Q. And your dad?] A. No, I don't have contact with him either. [RT-1]

(youth in care who sees only dad and only supervised visits for 1.5 hours) [Q.Tell me a little bit about your family.] I don't see them. [Q. No?] Not very often. [Q. No? Do you know how come?] No, because my social worker's too lazy to get on the phone. ....now once every month instead of once every two months. [RT-2]

(in care but currently living with grandparents)  
[Q. Um, can you tell me a little bit about your family? Your natural family? Like your mom and dad... ] Can't answer, because I don't know them that well. Haven't seen my—just started seeing my dad again since I was 5 and my mom, I only see once in a while and all I know is that she always has something against me.[RT-3]

(only went into care several years ago)  
Well, I have a sister and I have a mother and a father. They're divorced. My father's whereabouts is somewhere in Toronto or Newfoundland. My mother's whereabouts is unknown and my sister lives at (in a care home). [RT-4]

[Q...who are you currently living with?] Group homes until maybe I'm 16...[...] Q. Okay, so who do you hope to go live with?] My grandma and my mom. [Q. Your grandma and your mom?] Maybe grandma because I can't depend on my mom. [RT-5]

[Q. And where does your family live?] My sister lives in the east side and my brother lives out west with my mom and dad, and my other sister, she died. [RT-6]

...and my mom's just staying with one of our buddies right now who's like a brother to her. ...And my brother, out of 4 brothers, my littlest brother, I think he's in [city], he's with a foster home. My other brother that I'm closest to, (name), he's in (custody facility) right now....and then my other brother (name), he was adopted at birth so I never met him, because he's older, so I don't know where he is, but my oldest brother, (name), he's in (correctional facility) and he gets out really soon [...] Yes, when I'm out of secure custody, I go into a group home and I just leave because I'm not staying there and I go with my family. [Q. Is it hard to leave? When it group homes? Is it an easy thing to do to get out of them?] Yeah, you just walk out the door. You just say, I'm leaving, they're like, okay, and you just leave. [RT-7]

Some RT youth also described the separation of siblings that had occurred in their families:

My sister lives in a foster home, my brother lives in a group home.[Q. So, do you get to see them?] I get to see my brother every month and my sister every month. [RT-1]

Well (brother 1) and (brother 2), of like my entire family, (brother 1) is the closest one, (brother 2) is the second closest and me and (brother 1) get into a lot of trouble together because we're always running away to see each other, because people in CAS really don't set that up too often so we just want to see each other all the time so we're always running away to see each other. [RT-2]

Youth in group care made some references to relationships with staff and with other youth in those settings, however, these did not parallel the parental and sibling relationships referred to in family homes. There was an overall absence of description or naming of significant relationships in care homes (i.e. primary workers, child welfare workers) in the interviews. Some of the group home dynamics are described later.

### (c) YOUTH LIVING ON THEIR OWN

At the time of the interview, two IFS youth and one RT youth were living on their own in semi-independent housing or a rooming house. Another RT youth identified his living situation as living “on the street” and another RT youth was scheduled to move into her own apartment in one month’s time. The following quotes illustrate the semi-independent and independent living situations:

Who are you currently living with?] People I don’t like.[...] It’s a rooming house, I don’t like them. [RT-1]

... my mom had kicked me out, but after that, I just decided, while I was living with my grandma for about a couple of days, and I just decided to go to my own place [...] I’m going to be getting a job, but so far, my mom and my aunt paid the rent the first time...[IFS-1]

I was talking about—my mom was talking about kicking me out and that and I had another councilor and she told me about this place here and I’m like—I signed up for this place, so y’know. [IFS-2]

One IFS youth described being homeless at the time of our interview and a number of youth from the RT group (15%) described living a transient or street lifestyle within the past year. The risk of becoming a “street youth”, a youth who has no stable living situation, appeared to be significant for RT youth in particular. Youth who described transient or “street” lifestyles as part of their recent pattern, included three (in-care) RT youth, two RT youth who lived in their family homes, and two IFS youth now living in their parents’ home. The following quotes illustrate some examples of the transient lifestyles they described:

Well, I lived with my boyfriend for 8 months, then I moved back here, then I moved back in with him. And then I lived with him for 8 months and then broke up and then I moved back in with him for 2 and we broke up again and I just came back here, but now we’re back together.[...] I used to live with (best friend).[...] Um, 7 months. [Q. So how long have you been living back home now then?] Um, two months. [RT-2]

I was in a group home.[.] But when I wasn’t in group home, I was living with my girlfriend. [RT-3]

In-between places. Stay at my friends some nights.[...] My friends, I don’t know, they’re good, take care of each other. [Q. So where do you sleep?] On the couch. Just got a... couch or something. And a blanket and a pillow. [RT-4]

And where would you—where do you live when you’re on the street? At my buddy’s house.[RT-5]

When youth talked about street life, they often mentioned friends who were part of that life. The spectrum of significant relationships was different for youth who lived in group homes or on the street than it was for youth who lived with biological families or relatives. Three of these youth returned home after an independent living experience and another two went into custody, suggesting that their living situations were not sustainable.

#### **(d) SCARCE RESOURCES**

For youth at home, the family was the primary source of basic financial and practical needs. For youth in care, the child welfare system provided a basic standard of living in a group home setting and the guardian provided an allowance and possible financial assistance beyond the group home.

Kind of run down from the outside, it doesn't make you look like you want to go in from the outside, just this whole semi-detached area here. And inside is falling apart too, we have that floor, the water leaked through and there's some sort of—not mold, but something started to grow in my sister's bedroom wall. Very rundown house and our landlord doesn't fix anything around here. [IFS-1]

The following examples are family situations where there seemed to be less than adequate space for a large family:

Who lives in this apartment? My big brother (name), my kind of like my sister, because she's with (brother), (name)...There's (stepdad) which is my stepdad. There's my mom and my brother (name). [IFS-2]

My house is like, kind of small for my family. It's really busy, especially in the morning when everybody's up and trying to get to school, we're all like, using the washroom or like, making food in the kitchen, but there's too many people around and stuff. [RT-1]

This youth talked about the difference it made to him to have good housing:

I really like it. I don't ever want to move, because I don't like housing or anything, because that where I've lived before, before we got this house. I don't want to move, because I like this place better than housing. [Q...] It's bigger. You get more freedom, because they're not asking you to pay your rent or anything. [Q...] Get your own room. [IFS-3]

In some situations, family finances seemed to be less than adequate to meet the family's needs. These two youth voiced explicit concerns over financial matters:

[Q. What are some of the more tough things that you think might happen in the future coming up that you may have to deal with?] Lack of money and stuff. [...] Because everything's so expensive nowadays. [IFS-4]

[Q. Is it stressful not having a lot of money sometimes?] Yeah. [Q....] Just, like, uh, not having the money to get food and stuff. Worrying all the time about money and stuff. [IFS-5]

Poor housing conditions and/or financial hardship meant added stress for some families which in turn affected the individual youth's quality of life. The following examples illustrate some of this strife:

Grubby and the neighbours are just rude and annoying.[...] They try to evict us for every little thing. Like really little things. [RT-1]

Um, like, my mom kinda stressed out about not being able to pay the—like, she can pay the rent, but she wants to have money to be able to like, to like, buy stuff for the girls and stuff and she doesn't have that all the time so it kind of stresses her out. [RT-2]

[Q. Already gone through challenges?]. Pretty much, yeah. All their life, they have, so... [Q. What have they been like?] Hard times, good times. Mostly hard, but they're getting through it. [RT-3]

There appeared to a significant group of youth in our study who came from homes where there was some financial hardship. Reference to lack of money is also discussed in the social connections domain where several youth talked about not having money for recreation.

Youth from both RT and IFS groups were asked specifically about money and personal possessions. In terms of spending money, about half of those living at home mentioned receiving an allowance from their parents or spending money from a part-time job. Some youth in care mentioned receiving a regular allowance from their worker. In terms of personal possessions, youth typically mentioned such items as clothes, CDs DVDs, skateboards, MP3 players, bikes and access to computers as their important personal possessions. Several youth in our study appeared to have more material possessions and spending money, due to their parents' financial position or a regular part-time job. Youth desires for personal possessions appeared to be fairly similar across the group and most youth seemed to be able to meet most of their basic wants. While several youth who reported regular use of 'hard' drugs expressed frustration about their lack of income as a consequence of their drug use, the majority of youth did not express the need for many material possessions and generally seemed content with the items they had. For example:

Well, we don't really have a lot of money, but I'm happy with what I've got. [IFS-1]



And how happy or unhappy do you feel about the money you have or the things you own?] Well, it depends, I mean, I got no money, but I got tons of stuff, I mean, for example, my cat, that's like, perfect for me. [IFS-2]

Because I have everything. Well, I don't have everything that I want, but I have everything that I need. And I'm not like, begging someone for something that I need, so... yeah. [IFS-3]

Like, I want a bike right now, but I'm going to get one soon, like, for my birthday. But, other than that... well, actually, I do want an in-ground pool, but don't need it though. [IFS-4]

[Q. What are some of the things you like about living here?] Um, that... that I have everything I need here.[...]And that I actually have a home. [IFS-5]

For the most part, while many youth living at home did not seem to have much money or many valuable possessions, they also did not express wanting much for themselves personally. More concern was expressed about lack of family resources than personal possessions. Two youth in care reported concern about their natural family members' limited financial means. The following youth reported feeling satisfied with his personal possessions but alluded to concerns for his natural siblings' wellbeing:

[What's it like here [at foster home]?] It's cool 'cause you get all the stuff you need. At my mom's house sometimes we had to go without the stuff we need for the babies. [Q. Right. Can you tell me the kind of stuff that you get here that it's harder to get at home?] You get more attention and you get the um proper clothing and stuff and not just like stuff that has like has skulls on it like to wear to school. [RT-1]

Other youth expressed a desire to have more personal income in order to move out on their own. For many youth, money was described as means of attaining their future independence and long term success.

[...looking ahead what are you expecting for yourself in the future?] Um probably to finish school um and then go to college for advertising and psychology. And then I don't know. Hopefully I'll have a good job while I'm doing that and a good relationship and good friends, and hopefully I'll be living on my own soon, cause I want to do that so. [Q.... in the near future you want to do that?] Yeah well I'll have to get a job obviously first. [RT-2]

I don't know I just want to like get married, have family, that's like my main long term goal....Just like, I don't know. I don't want to be like rich or anything, I just want to be comfortable, like be able to like have a secure job and like stable life, that's like pretty much it. [IFS-1]

Um expecting to go through high school, complete grade 12, get the credits that I need and to hopefully do enough work and to have enough knowledge to get a good job that

way I can make enough money to support. Now I'm not planning on moving away from my family immediately, I think I might stay with them for a few years, make some money, save it into a bank and then possibly get an apartment or something, that way I don't start off immediately and have a hard time. [RT-3]

Several of the youth-in-care seemed less than content with their finances and resources:

...Ontario Disability Support Program. [Q. Okay. Does that give you enough money?] No....Well, I have a trustee so she manages my money and she doesn't give me very much spending money, so...[Q. Okay, so she keeps you on a budget?] Yeah, unfortunately. [RT-1]

Because my dad doesn't give me much money and right now I don't get money from my mom because... because it's... kinda... like, just moved back in kinda, haven't moved back all the way yet. I only get a certain amount of money from CAS, so... and once a month, so it's not much. [RT-2]

Well, once again, my possessions get disrespected. A lot of my stuff gets broken, stolen, smashed, or, you know, just unusable, so... I don't know...[...]Well, it depends, I mean, I'm happy and grateful that I get some things, but I'm not happy that they never last because nobody knows how to respect people's stuff. [RT-3]

There are several youth who did not fit into the family home or group home context and their financial circumstances were a little different. One IFS youth who recently moved out on his own was assisted by his mother who was paying his rent and expenses until he got a job. Another IFS youth in semi-independent living still received support from his family. These are much more advantaged scenarios than an RT youth who left home and was on the street. This homeless youth talked about being dependent on a variety of friends and sometimes family for places to stay and for food. He talked about the challenges of his lifestyle:

[Q. What's it like to be sleeping on couches?] Still it's comfortabler (sic) than the floor.[...] Yeah. Just have to find somewhere, one of my friends. [Q. And what's that like?] I don't know. It's hard. Especially when it's cold out. [RT-1]

Several youth who were expecting to move into independent living expressed anxiety about this transition. The following youth expressed anxiety about the uncertainty of her future living arrangement:

[Q. Can you tell me where you're headed?] I have no where, know where I'm going so far, I don't know anything about it yet. .... So I have no idea. [Q. What's that like?] Um it's really, I get really anxious about it. I do have an issue with that and I need to work on it but I get very anxious and it's very difficult so. [RT-2]

And while this youth hoped to remain at home for a few more years, her concerns about independent living are similar to those shared by several of other youth:

[Q...what are some of the tough things that you might have to face in the future? I would think if I were to live on my own, like paying bills and stuff like that, I'm really nervous about doing that yeah. [Q... What makes you nervous about that?].... I see my mom always having to have stuff in on time and having to like budget things and I can't do that, I can't picture myself doing that. [RT-3]

Two youth in custody who were previously on the street talked about making a lot of money from criminal activity and spending it on material goods and drugs. However, the consistency and security of these two youth's resources were always in question. Youth who are living on their own appear to be much more at-risk when it comes to their financial and other resources.

In conclusion, we saw a variety of family compositions and living arrangements across the two groups. When asked about "family", youth usually described biological family, whether or not there was a strong connection. However, many youth lived with what could be described as substitute families in the form of group home co-residents and staff, extended family and street friends. Resources varied considerably and financial hardship was not uncommon in families as well as for youth who were out on their own. It needs to be emphasized that there was a distinct difference between family for youth who lived in the family home and youth who did not.

## ***Youth Perspectives on How Families Are Doing (Realities)***

Family relationships were again very different for youth who lived with a parent. Parent/child relationships for youth living in a family home will be discussed as a distinct group and family relationships specific to youth living in care and youth living on their own will be examined separately. Relationships with siblings and with grandparents will be discussed for youth who talk about these connections, for both youth living at home or in other arrangements. Conflict in the family home or group living setting will be specifically looked at as it is a key issue for many youth. Finally, the nature and diversity of family or group home activities will be discussed.

### *Quality of Parent/Child Relationships*

Youth living at home made a variety of comments that gave some insight into how their relationships with parents were functioning day to day. Comments ranged from very positive to very negative when it came to parent/child dynamics; however, most youth had a mix of positive and negative things to say about how they got along with their parents. Because there were generally stronger connections with mothers, there was more feedback about mother/child relationships. Some examples of positive depictions of parent/child relationships are:

Well, when she noticed that my homework completion grade was slipping, she had been telling me, well, if you want to watch TV or go on the computer, you have to do your homework first and she really helped with that and she's always supportive, like, when I write a new piece of poetry or when I write a book, she always takes time to read it and if I have a party or something then she'll always try to be supportive of that and she always tries to be really fair with the fights between me and my brothers. [IFS-1]

It's good. Yup. Um, I don't know, she's more of, how do I say this? She's less strict. She's very nice to everyone and I don't know, we have a good relationship. [IFS-2]

[what's your relationship like with your mom?] I can tell her everything. I can talk to her about everything, she's always there for me when I need something. So she gets me out of trouble and she's always sticking up for me and just showing me the right way to go. [RT-1]

More often youth described a combination of positive and negative qualities in their relationships with their parents or families:

We're a big family, we—there's always somebody in the house, there's never a point in time when we're all out. We're a fairly happy family. We get along okay. We have our problems every now and then? [RT-2]

Me and my dad get along great, it's an amazing environment, like, we watch TV together, we'll watch movies together, we're joking around, and I can tell my dad anything. [...] because with my mom, I'm afraid that she'll say something to me that will really hurt me, or she'll do something that will really hurt me. With my dad, I can say anything to him, knowing that I'll get—feedback that I need to know, which won't hurt me too much. With my mom, she'll ground me for just saying it. [IFS-3]

[Q. And what's that like having a single parent?] It's kind of frustrating at times just because it is the two of us, so we get sick of being around each other all the time and we're just like, okay, go away... Yeah, so I don't know, I like it, just because it's more of a personal basis with my mom and like, we know more about each other and whatnot. I don't know, it's easier and it's not as hectic as some families would be. [IFS-4]

A smaller number of youth described primarily negative dynamics in their relationships with parents:

I don't know, shit happens, she knows I don't mean it, because she's knows I'm that mad and I say shit like that, she knows I don't mean it, I just say it.[...] [Q. You don't think you're a very good [child]?] I know I'm not. Well, if I didn't have to be with my mom—if she could ship me off to a different country, she would. [RT-3]

Not really the happiest living here. [...] It's so noisy, my mom's kinda controlling in a way. Overprotective. Doesn't want me to go out and doing anything. Has to know who I'm with, all my friends, what I did every day, it gets quite annoying sometimes. [IFS-6]

We've never really had a good relationship anyways, but in the past couple of weeks, she's just been crazy....I don't know, I ignore her. I don't listen to her. [RT-4]

Overall, IFS youth generally appeared to be faring better than RT youth when it came to family relationships. As a group, IFS youth reported more positive and fewer negative parental relationships than did RT youth. It must be kept in mind, however, that the number of RT youth living at home was smaller than the number of IFS youth living at home.

### *Non Custodial Fathers*

There were a number of IFS youth and one RT youth who lived with their mothers but had regular contact with biological fathers. Generally, youth described their relationships with these fathers as positive, but at times distant. Some suggested that they would like to see more of their fathers. Where stepmothers were part of the picture, there seemed to be some relationship difficulties:

Um, my dad lives in (town) and he's generally supportive, not as supportive as my mother, but that's just because he's not used to having us along, because he was never really around when I was a kid, but he's generally supportive... [...] Before, I had feelings that I wanted to move in with my father, but those feelings just kind of evaporated, because I realized that I could never get along with his girlfriend... [IFS-1]

He's fun, he's always fun to be around, never gets mad, gives us a lot of money, buys us a lot of stuff. Takes us to—well, his company takes us to [park] every year...I can't wait. He's just really understanding and fun, can always come up to him and talk to him, really nice. [IFS-2]

My (dad) lives in (place), because he got a job offering up there, he's a (employment) and he used to live down here, so we used to go up every other weekend and out for dinner on Wednesday nights, and now that he moved, I'm lucky if I see him once a month, maybe once every two months. And then in the summertime, I go down for a month and see him. [...] It's sort of hard, because, like, I love my dad a lot. Me and him are a lot alike, so we collide big-time. On the other hand, it's not that hard to get along with him, if you understand him like I do. It's easy for me to understand him because he's exactly like me and no one gets that like I do. [IFS-3]

Youth who had less regular contact with fathers seemed to have more strained relationships:

I don't like it.[...] He lives ...hours away.[...]He doesn't see me much though.[...] He's always gone....-for five days, and he's supposed to take me for 10, the whole time, and he left for work, he took me for 5 days and left me for 5 days with my [extended family]. [...] And my grandma lives close to him, my grandma.[...] ... my dad, I wish he would care. [IFS-4]

Because it went 9 years and found him before and I just started seeing him four years ago, five years ago, I think I can manage without him for just a bit longer. Like, he was gone for 9 years, so I think I can last a weekend without seeing him. [Q. So how often do you see him then?] Every few weeks probably, or every few months.[...] I have to go out there, which I hate doing, I get into a fight with my stepmom. [IFS-5]

[Q: Can you tell me a little bit about your family?] Ah, it's very torn apart because my dad, he left us when I was really young and ah he just never really been there for any of us, he's trying to now, but I still don't see a change at all in him. That's the only aggravating part in our family, it's I only have a problem with him. [IFS-6]

My father, I tend to not care about him. He doesn't care about me either, he walked out on my life when I was, wasn't even one. I was one maybe one and a half...If that when he walked out....So he's not overly talked about in this household... I spend some time with him, that's about it. If ever spending time with him, it's very very rare.... he hasn't contacted me and I, I've been the one that's contacted him all the time, and I don't think that's the right thing to do, the child being more mature than the father. [RT-1]

In one case, a youth described abuse at the hands of the non-custodial parent. These issues resulted in the youth seeing little of his father since the abuse was discovered:

He didn't feed me for the whole day with my step-mother, and so my mom called the police and told them to come in and in fact, they called the (location) police, because my step-mother who is a moron said, oh, he didn't do nothing. And my mom found out I have [injuries] because my dad would throw me, and again she called the cops and that same thing happened, like oi. [IFS-7]

While 11 youth from the IFS group and 2 youth from the RT group described a strong relationship with their biological father, strained or non-existent relationships with biological fathers was a predominant theme found among youth from both groups. The fact that youth did not typically reside with biological fathers and the fact that there was often a step-mother involved seemed to contribute to a problematic or distant relationship from the youth's perspective.

### *Leaving Home Due to Family Dynamics*

In several cases, family dynamics were problematic to the extent that the youth left home. Two IFS youth in independent living and one youth who left his mother's home to move in with his father made reference to the dynamics that preceded and followed their moving out.

...my mom's pretty cool I guess, she helps me a lot too, just sometimes we argue and we'll disagree on things, and that's basically what starts arguments and then she'll kick me out or something like that, but it hasn't been happening often since I moved out, it hasn't happened at all, basically. [IFS-1]

Yes, I am still in touch with her, actually, I get along with her the best I can. [Q. Do you get along with her now that you don't live there?] Um, it's a little bit better, but not much, there's still stuff we have to work on. [IFS-2]

[Q. What's your relationship with your dad right now?] It's good. But his...He's got discipline.[...] I don't know, it's good and bad.[...] Uh... I don't know, now I... like when I was living with him I had um, problems, I brought people, friends over when I'm not supposed to—without asking, and I'm not supposed to when he's at work and stuff. And uh, it's... that's it. [RT-1]

### *Extended Family Dynamics*

Extended family were described as a support to about 25% of IFS families and played a strong role in 15% of RT cases where grandparents had provided a home to the youth at some point in time. The following are some examples of the nature of some of these relationships with grandparents:

Um... they're nice, and they help me with some stuff and them taking me places. [RT-1]

Grandparents are fairly good. They try to help me out as much as they can. [RT-2]

Yeah, I love going up to my grandpa's. It's .. hours away up by [place name]. [Q. What kinds of things do you do when you're there?] Go fishing, ride bikes....[IFS-1]

Ah well, me and my grandpa play scrabble, on our computer or on our board.. Me and grandpa play cards or Crokino. [RT-3]

Well, every time something happens, normally, like if someone's sick or whatever, our family's always there...—my grandma and them, and my aunt, live together now, ...because she really can't take care of herself anymore. Well, she can, but we don't want her to, because she always hurts her back, but we always get together and

do stuff all the time and we'd get to go grocery shopping and we normally don't get to see my cousins (name), (name), and (name) but we always get together anyways, because my grandma has a huge family, like a bunch of sisters, so yeah. [IFS-2]

This support from grandparents appeared to be a very helpful resource to the youth who had it. On the other end of the spectrum, some youth talked about disconnection from extended family and a lack of supportive relationships:

No, my mom has cut herself off with her family and wants us to do the same. I try not to, I can't cut people out of my life that easily... so I see them at Christmas and my birthday, but not very often. She doesn't talk to her family at all. [IFS-3]

[Q...so you see your great aunt every couple of weeks, and you don't get along so well?] Sometimes we get along, most of the time we don't. [RT-4]

Uh, my mom doesn't really get along with my grandma and her sisters and her brothers and stuff like that because she thinks that... because my mom has depression she kind of thinks that everybody is taking somebody else's side and all against her, type thing, but usually... they're not really good with my mom or me.. I don't really like my Uncle (name) because he thinks I'm like, irresponsible type thing and he'll just look down on me type thing, but then there's like Uncle (name) he'll just be really nice and stuff like that, and my mom and my aunt will be like arguing all the time, I really stay out of it, so I don't know much for it. [IFS-4]

Again, the majority of the youth in the group did not identify any extended family supports.

### *Relationships with Siblings*

Siblings played a strong role in the lives of about 63% of IFS youth and about 30% of RT youth with these stronger connections primarily being experienced by youth living at home. The quality of these relationships varied, with most youth describing some degree of sibling conflict and several cases where there was a high degree of conflict. There were a number of cases, primarily among IFS youth, where youth expressed a very close relationship with siblings. The following quotes make reference to strengths in sibling relationships:

(sibling has a physical disability) Well, we can play, like, she can clap my hands or something like that, but she doesn't really the meaning of playing around and stuff like that, or video games or board games, like, she can laugh and stuff like that and you can jump in front of her and she'd giggle and stuff like that, it's pretty fun, but she doesn't really realize what it means to do that kind of stuff, I just like having fun, playing with her, stuff like that. Like, I'll give her a rattle and she'll play with that. [IFS-1]

He's very unique. He's not getting into as much trouble as he used to and he protects me.[...] Like, I'll give you an example. Last summer, there's this bigger guy, (name)



and this guy's 16 and he came after me and my brother was only 17 at the time and I told my brother about it and then my brother went and found the scary guy and said to him, you touch my brother again and something will happen. So he protects me in that way if anything happens to me.[...] He actually wants to get a job. He fixes stuff of mine, like my little pocket bike downstairs, he's fixing that for me, so I can ride around. And then, me and him can ride around on his bigger one and I can ride my smaller one. He does a lot of hands-on stuff too. [IFS-2]

They're little brothers, so they're crazy and wild, but gotta love them. You gotta love them, because, (name) is the blonde one, he's really athletic and he gets moody sometimes but he's generally nice and (name) is the artistic type, he always is drawing and writing and doing something that's creative, which is pretty much runs in the family...[IFS-3]

Well (sister) she's young and stuff, and, like she's a fun sister to have. Older sisters say, they say I wish I didn't have any siblings and stuff, but really do you think about all the things in your life that you've done and stuff, imagine how lonely it would be if you took her out of the picture and stuff so she's pretty cool to have as a sister. [IFS-4]

[Q. What do you like about your sister?] She's just... fun—sometimes, fun to be around. Weird, we can be weird around each other, because we're weird people. [IFS-5]

Yeah, like, when we... like my brother (name) had a friend, like, when he was done here, he had a friend named (name) and we went over to her house every Friday night and we'd start talking and everything and we got really close. Like when my mom was treating us all horribly and we got really close because of that and we helped each other out. Like it's like, they're my friends. [RT-1]

Several youth had more mixed reviews about their relationships with siblings:

I guess the same as most people are with their brothers, you have your arguments and then you don't have your arguments. Typical brother-brother relationship. [RT-2]

Well, me and my sister get along somewhat well. Quite well. My brother, I kind of annoy him a lot and he gets annoyed with me sometimes and my mom will tell me to leave him alone sometimes. [IFS-6]

(about sisters) ... sometimes we, like, argue and sometimes we help each other.[ Q. What are the kinds of things you argue about?] Like... like... get off the computer or do this and all that. [Q. Yeah? But sometimes they help you? ] Um, with cleaning. Mostly math and homework. And if I couldn't do something, then I ask them for help and that. [Q. Okay, would you say, are you a lot like your sisters or a little bit?] A lot. [RT-3]

Overall, youth who mentioned sibling relationships tended to highlight the positives in these relationships. This is not to say that there was not any conflict in their relationships, but that youth saw themselves as having some positive connections with their siblings. Many youth described meaningful and supportive relationships with siblings.

### *Living in Care*

Relationships in-care appeared to be very different from relationships in family homes. Youth expectations for closeness with staff and co-residents seemed fairly low and while several youth mentioned that there were some “good” relationships with staff, these relationships were not explored and seemed somewhat distant. However, one RT youth who had no contact with her natural family described her relationship with group home staff in quite positive terms. Her following comment suggests that staff provide this youth with valuable emotional support:

[Q. Ok can you describe for us a little bit about um what qualities cause you to like staff?] Uh just the way they handle, how they work with me, the, what techniques they use to talk to me or to help me when I’m upset, it’s just what they do, I’m not sure exactly how but...[RT-1]

The following quotes give a sense of the overall experience of living in care for other RT youth. These youths’ experiences ranged from fair to very negative.

Q. What about the people that you live with?] Um, okay. [Q. What are the staff like?] Good. [Q.What makes them good?] That they actually plan recreation stuff, because if we didn’t agree on something, we’d be here all day arguing, not knowing, we just want to do that, so stop and decide what we do. [RT-2]

I tend to find staff in secure better than staff in group homes.[...] I dunno, they’re more looking for your positive rather than just following, like, the rules. Like, they’ll go out of their way on their own time to do something for you, like, when you’re in a group home, it’s work, you just go there, babysit you and go home. [RT-3]

Some of the kids I get along with, some of them I don’t. Some of the staff, they’re great, some of them are miserable and stuff, but we get along good.[...] If they’re nice to me, I’m nice to them. [RT-4]

Yeah it is, I mean I’m [age] and the other oldest would be 14 and I personally... I mean I’m great with kids but not living with 24/7, especially that don’t behave normally. Y’know? It’s hard to explain, I mean, I’m not trying to bash this house whatsoever, but I don’t know, I don’t want to tolerate it anymore. [Q. So, anything you do like about this place?] Um, well, I mean it’s a roof over my head, right? Even if I don’t like it at all, it’s still sometimes available for me. Um, I don’t know. I really don’t. There’s not much that I do enjoy about this house, hence why I’m never here. [RT-5]

Because I don't feel safe here, really, because some of the staff, I just don't feel safe, period. Sometime I do, because the staff I knew for a while that I worked before with, like this lady named (name), but not the one I talked to, there's another (name) here that worked in (another group home) group home with me. I'd trust her, because we had a bond, a relationship and there's another staff named (name) and another staff named (name), her real name is (name) or something. But I don't know, we have just them because I've worked with them, I don't trust anyone else. [RT-6]

Overall, based on these youth comments, close and lasting relationships were not made in the group living setting.

### *Street Youth and Youth Living on Their Own*

Relationships and daily living realities were again different for this sub-set of youth. The two IFS youth living independently, but still with some support from family, had some positive things to say about their experience:

It's just a lot better than at home. There's really no rules. The only rules to follow are just, treat other people with respect, that's it. [IFS-1]

Um, I don't know, like, if my room was messy, she'd ask me to clean it up, or if like, I had to do dishes, I'd argue about not wanting to do them. But now that I'm living on my own or something like that, I know I gotta do that stuff, so I do dishes and stuff, but...[Q....?] Yeah, like now that I'm on my own, I can actually go to class, but usually it was also problems at home that prevented me from going to school, too... alright, I'm just going to hang out with my friends, I don't feel like going to class to make my mom angry, because she wanted me to go to class. [IFS-2]

The second youth above spoke of how living on his own has helped him to be more responsible. The first youth's comment suggests that he experienced respectful relationships in his new living situation. Overall, these seem to have been positive transitions for these youth. However, a youth who was formally in group homes and now resides independently in a rooming house reported a very negative experience and highly problematic relationships in this independent living arrangement:

They do drugs and they drink. All the time. Ah, I hate it. Yeah, I don't talk to anyone. Well, when I am in there. [Q. Yeah, so how often are you there during the day?] Basically, just at night, just to sleep. Any other time I'm out, because I don't like that place. [RT-1]

A youth who is currently homeless and relies on friends was struggling in a very different way in his day to day situation:

[Q. What's the best part about staying with different friends?] The best part? [Q. Yeah. Is there a best part?] No. I don't know, not really. [Q. What's the hardest part

about it?] I don't know, sometimes you don't get to eat much. Still gotta eat something. [Q. Okay, so it's kinda hard?] Mmhm. [RT-2]

The amount of support that youth living independently (or semi-independently) experienced, had an impact on success for these youth. In the first two examples the youth had a combination of some family support and some structured living arrangements, while in the last two examples, the youth had little family support or structure in their day to day living.

### *Conflict within Families*

The degree of interpersonal conflict within families varied considerably across youth. Most youth reported being involved in some degree of parent-child conflict. In a minority of families, the majority of which were IFS families, the youth reported little conflict or relatively minor conflict. However, the majority of youth living in the home talked about interpersonal conflict as a relationship dynamic of concern to them. The most common type of conflict was parent/child conflict but there was some reference to sibling conflict as well. On the positive side, some of the youth talked about a decrease in the amount of family conflict.

A significant segment of IFS and a smaller number of RT families and youth appear to be doing relatively well when it came to managing conflict. These two IFS youth reported no concerns:

What's the best part about your family? Um, that we all live civilized, we don't fight. [Q... What would you change about your family?] Nothing. [IFS-1]

[Q.Um, how well do people get along in this family?] Pretty good. [Q. Yeah. Okay. Um, is there anything you would change about living with your family?] No, I like it how it is. [IFS-2]

The conflict situations that the following youth experienced, while worth noting, appeared to be relatively minor. The following quotes provide a sense of the sort of mild conflict discussed by some IFS youth:

Oh, we have our ups and downs. Same with me and my dad, we have our ups and downs. But, we pretty much get along, up until a point. [...] Well, about school and I had to clean my room and I procrastinate, but I got it done yesterday though. I cleaned it all up. I had to pack all my clothes that didn't fit me anymore into boxes and put them away. [IFS-3]

Um, well like, normal families we do fight a lot, but we usually always end up fixing it or working out some way shape, or form, and my mom is really supportive about everything in general and yeah, it's really good and I'm really happy with the way things are. [IFS-4]

I don't know, I'm not really not nice, but my mom does yell a couple times, but not really not nice. Wants us to do a lot of different things. [...] Clean up the house, clean up my room, she can be... not mean about it, kinda annoying, gets annoying for a while, but... [IFS-5]

Like, when (brother) and I get in a fight, she steps in and she sometimes doesn't know what's going on and she just, like, steps in no matter what side—like, when we're, like, fooling around sometimes, she comes in the room and gives us a punishment, but we weren't really fighting. Some of the times when we are fighting, she comes in, gives us punishments and we say it's not fair and stuff like that. [IFS-6]

Um, I don't know, sometimes she like, gets on my case about school and stuff, but it's like I feel like I do as much as I can, but sometimes I feel like sometimes she feels like the only thing in my life is school, and it's like, okay, I'm [age], clearly I have a lot of other things, it's not the only thing in my life. [...] So I don't know, we just get like, in conflict over my priorities and whatnot, like I'll want to go out and she'll be like, no you have to do this first, and I'll be like, no, I don't want to. [IFS-7]

More intense child-parent conflict was reported by youth in about one third of the IFS group and by approximately two thirds of youth in the RT group who lived in family homes. Several of the more significant parent-child conflicts reported in the interviews are illustrated in the following examples:

They upset me some days and sometimes not.[...]Blame me for stuff or—[...] Sometimes, or if I didn't do something right, or— [...] They yell at me and stuff like that. [...] I don't really like it, I've had enough of it. [IFS-8]

[Q. And at home, with some of the arguments, did those ever get physical?] Mmm, usually not, there's just maybe a couple of times when I was living there, there was a couple of hits and that was about it, both pretty minor. [IFS-9]

Just like—well, (sister) [borrowed my bike] and I freaked out on her...and then my mom she steps in because I shouldn't be talking to my sister that way and then I freak out on her and then my mom's boyfriend, he kind of steps in and I start mouthing off at him and say stuff I'm probably not supposed to say to him.. and then he gets mad at me and sort mad at mom... [IFS-10]

I would say we have a pretty good relationship. [Q...?] Yeah, for the most part, yeah. [Q. Do you ever get into fights with each other?] Yeah. [Q. Yeah? What kind of stuff do you argue over?] I don't know, lots of stuff. [...] We don't really answer each others questions the way we want them to be answered. And then it just goes from there. [Q. Okay, and that's a common thing?] Yeah. [IFS-11]

How well do you and your mom get along? Okay sometimes and then terrible other times. [Q. ..Tell me about the times when you get along.] When we're away from

each other.[...] [Q. And what is it like when you're together?] We argue. About little things. [Q...] What's on TV, stuff like that. That's all really. [Q. Uh-huh, how do you find it?] I just don't really care. [RT-1]

My mom's like a good mom and stuff. Just me and her just collide heads a lot, like, we don't really get along. I don't know, she's a real nagger and I can't stand it, it's just like someone standing there, I'm poking you, I'm poking you, I'm poking you, I'm poking you, it's just, agh, it's constantly, (name) do this, (name) do that...It's just like, leave me alone, like you're not satisfied with this, you're not satisfied with that, like if I done everything you asked, you still wouldn't be satisfied. [IFS-12]

We'd always argue, we'd argue about everything. Because she always bitches about something and I just can't stand it, like, she tells me what I can and can't do and I'm like,... like I'm still going to do it. She's like, you need to do this, you need to do that, blah, blah, blah and I'm like, that's nice mom. [RT-2]

[Q. Okay so you don't like the fact that your grandpa cut you off?] Yeah. But if I was getting to the point where I get violent or something, yeah, cut me off. Tell me to go for a walk or whatever, but just steaming off, saying whatever I might have to say, no, like that's what happened all my life. Steaming, even in the group homes, steaming, getting what I'm trying to say across and staff or whoever would cut me off, and y'know what, that just sets me off even more.[...] And if I hadn't gone for a walk, I guarantee something would have been busted because I'm done—I have had minor assault charges in my life and I have had mischief charges in my life. [RT-3]

Several youth described experiencing conflict related to parental mental illness or substance abuse. The following youth discusses how her mother's bipolar disorder increases the frequency of parent/child conflicts and prevents resolution of such conflicts:

Um well my mom um she has like bipolar but she only has it when it's convenient for her apparently. Like she, she'd say she has bipolar to certain people for like, I don't know, excuse for something or whatever, but when I bring it up in like an argument or bring it up at all she's like I don't have it blah blah blah, even though it's in her doctor's records that she has it and so that makes it really hard, so I think that's why our arguments, like our fights don't get resolved cause of her like issue and that's why we do fight most of the time cause she'll be in like a bad slope, like she'll just keep nagging or pushing my buttons and then that's usually when we fight, when she's in her like low part so. [IFS-13]

This youth describes her experience of her step-father's mental illness:

[Q. How do you get along with your step-father?...] not really good because he's really annoying and he doesn't take his medication anymore. [..what does he get like when he doesn't take his medication?] Oh my god, he's like a five year old.... one time he lifted up his shirt in front of my friends, he and he has a big round stomach like pregnant lady

stomach, and it's hairy, and I was so embarrassed. [RT-4]

The following youth describes how he views the impact of his mother's drug abuse upon her relationship with her children:

She's a big drug addict. Uh she's always in jail, hearing that so she's got kids all the time so um she doesn't really... I can't really say she doesn't care 'cause I don't really know but that looks like she doesn't really care about any of her kids that she has because she just ends up giving them away or they just end up doing their own thing, going on the street so...[Q. How do you feel about that situation with your mom?] I don't know. It's kind of a blank feeling right now, I don't know what to feel about it so... it's like, I don't know where to go.[RT-5]

While the following youth expressed hope that his father will be able to stay "clean", he describes how his father's recent drug abuse created significant conflict within their relationship:

And but we would get into arguments, we argued quite a bit sometimes when he'd be high and I'd be high, or he'd be high and I'd be sober. Cause it's the, the certain drug that he does is affects him a lot...It's seven day cycle pretty much... So he could be high one day and then he'll be angry for the next seven days. [Q...how is that for you to deal with, is it difficult?] Very hard. [Q...What do you find difficult about that?] Just everything like him stealing my money and buying drugs with it when I had my job...And sometimes get physical in the fights and throwing stuff at each other and just we just yell at each other a lot sometimes too. [RT-6]

As noted previously, several youth reported experiencing conflict with step-parents. While a few youth described their relationship with their step-parent in positive terms, the following comments reflect the type of conflicts several youth described experiencing with their step-parent. This youth believed that her step-mother influenced her father to "kick her out" of their home. Her comment suggests that she views her step-mother as negatively impacting her relationship with her father:

Like I finally got my dad to admit that he's realized that like why she doesn't like me, apparently it's my mom's fault somehow, which is ridiculous because she's supposed to be a grown adult and you don't hold a grudge on like your boyfriend's kid, you know it's stupid, like you don't get involved, no matter what I did to her, she shouldn't get involved between me and my dad's relationship. [IFS-1]

This youth comments seem to suggest little confidence that his relationship with his step-father may improve over time:

....and me and my step-dad don't really get a long. [Q. How come?] I don't know it's just always been that way.... Forever...[Q...What kinds of stuff do you guys argue about?] Everything.... I don't think there is any topic we don't argue about. [RT-2]

Alcohol abuse is described by this youth as causing unpredictability within her relationship with her step-father:

[Q...as far as not getting a long with your step-dad, can you reflect why?] He's an alcoholic.[Q...what's that experience like for you?] It's different....You're not used to having somebody that you don't know how they could react. [IFS-2]

Current conflict in sibling relationships was not a strong theme in the interviews, though some comments suggested that conflict was more of a concern in the past. Only five youth across both RT and IFS groups reported a high degree of current sibling conflict:

My brother is like—he doesn't fight with me, like, all the time, but some of the time he could fight with me but some of the—most of the time he's pretty good. Did it ever get physical for you? Like, I don't know. Maybe, a little of the time? We'd push each other. [IFS-1]

[Q. What other stuff do you and your sister fight about?] Like everything.[...] The computer, the phone, when she starts getting mouthy or when I start yelling at her... everything. [...] And when she got mad at me, she [slammed the door] because she knew I hated it and I yelled at her and [scratched her]. I don't bite her anymore because I did that when I was [age]. [IFS-2]

There were several of comments about sibling relationships where youth specifically described a significant degree of fighting in the past, but stated that now things were very different:

When I was—when we were little, we'd constantly get into fights. Now we're a lot better, like, like, again it's not perfect, but I don't think any brother-sister relationship is. Y'know, we'll get into little arguments and y'know, not agree about everything, but we do get along with each other quite a bit now, a lot more than we used to. We used to get into fights a lot. [IFS-3]

We don't really fight like we used to, we'll just—she'll borrow something of mine, we'll get in a fight about that, or I'd wear something of hers without asking, we'll get in a fight about that, and we'll swear at each other sometimes, but that's about it. [IFS-4]

We used to fight constantly. Like, there's fights and everything. As soon as my mom wasn't there, like maybe 20 minutes after she left, we would be in a fight, like an actual fistfight with blood and everything.....] Stupid stuff, like the way it was, my mom wasn't home, she'd tell me what to do, and I wouldn't like that, because I didn't like people telling me what to do, my personality, and since he was older, he's like, yeah, I'm in charge, you have to do this and I'd yell at home or something and we'd get into a fight over it. Like he would try, basically he'd make me do it and we'd get into a fight. [Q. How's your relationship with that brother right now?] Oh, really close. We're the closest of my whole family. [IFS-5]



Improvement in the area of conflict management was a small but important theme seen particularly in the IFS group. A total of 11 IFS youth and 6 RT youth reported that they experienced less conflict in familial relationships than previously. The following quotes illustrate additional examples of this theme:

It's a really good environment and there's not that much fighting as there used to be. [IFS-1]

Well, my dad, we've never really seen eye-to-eye on everything, but our relationship has gotten better in the past while, like, I think it was really bad a year ago, say, like, it never got physical or anything but we were always getting into arguments about certain things, but now it seems to be improving I think. [...]Um, well, yeah, I can understand. Like, a lot of the situations where me and my dad, we'll get into a conflict or me and my mom, y'know, we get into a little spat or something, I'll usually try to look at it through their eyes and sometimes I think, like, maybe he usually he is being truly unfair, but I think I'll usually think what they're doing is reasonable afterwards. Or even if I think about it a few months down the line. [IFS-2]

Well, I did a couple of anger management courses a couple of years back and I kind of used steps from that and my mom kind of helps me out with that too. [...]Yeah. I can talk about stuff with my brothers and that and they help me, but I don't know, it's just kind of like, I don't know, me and my mom, just I don't know, she just gives me the suggestions that nobody else would. [RT-1]

[...]Um, everyone works together, pretty much and we succeed, I guess. [RT-2]

While the level of familial conflict was still fairly high for about one third of the IFS group and by approximately two thirds of youth in the RT group, there were some optimistic trends in that a sizeable portion of youth report relatively little conflict and/or significant improvement in the level of conflict between themselves and other family members.

### *Conflict in Group Living Situations*

The majority of youth living in group settings described ongoing difficulty in managing conflict in these settings. Most reported being personally involved in significant interpersonal conflicts and altercations in these settings:

I don't know, staff piss me off....Just the things the staff do, piss off the kids....I don't know, they say stuff to try to make you get mad, so you have to be in your room all day.[...] I dunno, yesterday they saw me coming out of this girl's room, even though I didn't do that. They said that, and they know I would get angry, so I got angry and had a stand-off and tried to stab a staff.[...] I got restrained.[...] I get restrained all the time. [RT-1]

Don't send kids to group homes. [Q. How come?]Because everybody that I've been in there with, like all those kids, they're telling stories about how they used to be better people than they were when they joined in there. Stuff like that. Just... my life too, I just had a good life until then. I never got in any trouble until I went there. [RT-2]

You get three written warnings here, so then, the first one was skipping classes too many times. The second one, because I got in a little argument here with one of the guys here. And the third one was I put spaghetti in one of the staff's hair and locked her in the kitchen with a crutch and I got kicked out because of that. [RT-3]

[Q. How about the other kids? Tell me about other kids.] They're fine—they're okay.[Q. Yeah? Tell me what it's like when things aren't okay with the other kids.] Because of bullying, the swearing, the waking people up in the morning, that's why I'm tired. [RT-4]

Because a lot of the kids in here are really immature and it just bugs me. I mean, I'm young, but I'm pretty mature for my age. All the stuff I've been through, they just make stupid comments and it's annoying all the time, because most of my... the majority of my emotions change into anger. [RT-5]

Overall, we saw significant difficulty in managing interpersonal conflict in group living situations for almost all youth living in group care.

#### *Family Activities and Group Home Activities*

Youth were asked in the interviews what they and their families liked to do together. Responses give a sense of the quality of time spent together as a family. About 55% of the youth living at home described shared family activities (watching television together, talking together, playing on the computer together, outings to the mall and restaurants, going on family vacations, and trips to theme parks). Approximately 45% of the youth living at home described substantial time spent with family including family trips, recreational activities and in-depth conversation. The following are some examples where youth seemed to be engaged in a variety of family activities:

Um, me and my mom will occasionally go to movies. Me and my dad will even more occasionally go to movies, um, yeah, like, I'll occasionally do something. Like, go out and get dinner, [restaurant] or something.[IFS-1]

What kind of stuff do you do with (older brother)? Well, I look at him draw, I play chess with him, play a little bit of other stuff, Monopoly... and... ..[IFS-2]

Me and my mom went on a trip last year to Florida. Went to Disneyworld, just me and her, spend some time together. [IFS-3]

Um, we usually, like, rent movies and watch them and there's a conservation area near where my dad lives, and he has two dogs, so we take them on a walk at the falls and take pictures and it's a good time. And we sometimes go see my grandmother who lives out in [city]. [IFS-4]

We go out to the mall and he'll take us to movies, we go out for dinner sometimes, we'll go over to our grandparent's for dinner almost every weekend, we'll play on the PlayStation 2, hang around there, really.[...]Yeah, we go to [name] Beach then, with my mom, and then we go to [park] and up to my cottage for a week or two in the summer with my dad. [IFS-5]

(at mom's) Like, when my sisters go to bed, we'll watch TV and stuff. And one time, like, a couple of times we go for ice cream and one, like, I had my dentist appointment, and we went to go have lunch and stuff and then we went to go get the papers for (school) [...] (with dad) I... me and my cousin went to my dad's trailer up in – up by [place name] and it was like a boys' weekend. And it was fun. [...] Well, we went fishing and we built this fence and stuff like that. And built a garden, like, made a garden.[...] Uh, I go trucking with him, like, I think the week after next week, I might go trucking with him. [IFS-6]

Well, most nights we all down and eat supper at the same time, like not a lot of other families do. [Q. And do you enjoy doing that then? Yeah?] Yeah. Once every couple weeks we go and do something as the whole family. [Q....?] Sometimes we rent movies and watch them. Play board games. Sometimes we'll go hiking. [IFS-7]

Watch TV. Talk. Going shopping. [Q. Is there anything you wish you could do with your family that you don't?] Travel. [Q. Travel? Yeah? You don't travel? Okay, how come?] Um, don't have money. [IFS-8]

Uh, sometimes we go out for supper, other times we'll go out and rent movies. Sometimes we just have a family night where we all, like, stay home and watch a movie or watch a TV show together and play board games or whatever. Sometimes we have family events where we just go out to one of my mom's friends' houses, like, my mom's friend, like she has one friend who has parties every now and then so my mom, as a family, we'll go to one of her parties. [RT-1]

Go to the grocery store. [...] Well, I might go to camp. We go to the mall, we go to the movies once in a while. I'm going to rent a movie ..... Go for walks. [RT-2]

Well, I do hang out with my mother quite often, I'll sit around and just talk to her. We'll go out for a drive, go do something. [RT-3]

We eat. Like, we go to [restaurant] and get something to eat. We play board games, we hang out, we watch TV, we play with my dad's digital camera... [RT-4]

Some of the leisure activities mentioned above required financial resources that simply were not available to all families. The following suggested less expensive yet still positive family activity time:

...sometimes when we feel like shopping, we go shopping and uh... if we want to go to [coffee shop], we go to [coffee shop]. [RT-5]

I like when they're all sitting down together watching a movie and when we're all getting along, that's what I like. [IFS-9]

Yeah, it's pretty good. [Q. Do you guys do stuff together?] Not a lot, but occasionally we do the occasional card game or board game or something like that. Go out for a bike ride or something. [RT-6]

Like a lot of things, like she couldn't really do that much stuff on the weekend. Like, she did, but then she would have to cram the night before and stuff and even if couldn't do that much on weekends and she couldn't do that much during weeks or anything or do anything fun because she always studying non-stop for, like, 10 months. [Q. And did you kind of have less time with mom then?] Well, I didn't spend that much time with her anyways, like, unless she wanted to, because I'm normally on the computer or out with my friends, so yeah, but I still always went up with her in her room and watched TV while she studied, so yeah... [IFS-10]

The remaining youth, representing approximately 45% of the group of youth living at home, did not respond with any information about family activities, suggesting that they may not have been very engaged in family activities. However, this may be an underestimation of families' activities for youth living at home given that this area was not consistently explored during early study interviews.

Youth in care had little to say about group home activities. Only five youth had something to say about time spent with staff or other youth in their residential setting. Of the youth in-care, these were the youth whose experiences appeared to be the most positive overall as well:

Kinda fun, kind of boring. [Q. Tell me about the fun part.] That we do a lot of recreation and I like rec, so... Like, sports, like hockey, soccer. Mmm... we'll play basketball sometimes. That's about it. [RT-1]

You watch—like, we only get one channel up here because we don't cable, that's a channel, but we get lots of movies and staff are always bringing in movies and stuff. And we go over to the pool room to play pool and air hockey. Staff dedicate a lot of their time into making our stay here more positive. [RT-2]

These youth also made reference to group home outings elsewhere in the interview. Though other group home kids did not mention group home activities, we know that activities must have

existed. The lack of mention, along with other feedback from these youth, suggested that these youth may not have been very positively engaged in their group home life.

In conclusion, there were certainly some examples of strong and mutually supportive relationships between youth and their families, particularly among IFS youth where most of the youth lived at home. Some of the commonalities in these experiences were strong parent-child connections, parent support to the child including emotional support and financial assistance, and time spent together engaged in family activities. Conflict between youth and other family members was found in most families but a significant degree of conflict was reported by all but four RT youth living at home and about one quarter of the IFS youth living at home. Substantial conflict was commonly reported in group home settings.

### ***How Youth Talk About Families (Feelings)***

The ways in which youth spoke about their families suggested a variety of feelings. Their words gave some insight as to how they were coping with family issues and how they might generally have felt about their families at this point in time. Descriptions of family life and family members suggested that some youth had a sense of pride in their family or a sense of belonging with their family. Some youth also talked about the caring and love they felt toward their families. At the same time, some youth, particularly those in care or those with an absent parent, expressed some anger toward families and family members. Finally, there were a number of quotes from youth who were separated from family members that suggested a deep sadness. Many youth did not explicitly name their feelings but talked in ways that suggested angry or sad feelings.

Some youth described a sense of pride in their families. This youth saw his family as hard workers:

We're hard workers. [...] We like making money.[...] My mom doesn't work now, but I work, my brother works, she's not old enough to work. Um, my sister works, my other sister, um, so we just generally like work. [RT-1]

These youth saw their mothers as very strong and were proud of their mother's strength:

She's like, whatever, my mom's tough. She doesn't take anything. [Q. Yeah. You like that about mom?] Because she thinks she can do anything because there she is at 1 'o clock in the morning building a shelf, it's like, what are you doing? [IFS-1]

Um, she's really strong, in her mind, she's amazingly strong and she gets it from her—my grandmother and um, she's a very kind woman and she always tries to please everybody which is pretty much impossible to please everyone and she's just a great woman. [...] Like, we've been through a lot in my family and my mom has

always been there and stuck it out and been the one that kept us together and she's just a really strong person. [IFS-2]

Similarly, the following youth described positive feelings toward their mothers:

Uh... she likes to have fun.[...] She cooks good. [Q. Are there things that you don't like about her? That you wish you could change?] There's probably a few things, but I can't think of any. [IFS-3]

Um, well, she does—like, she's nice, and she gives a lot and stuff like that, but... I guess the real reason I like my mom is she's put up with me for the past 16 years, so...[IFS-4]

She's a very neat person. I look up to her and she ... she does things that I like, what she likes. [IFS-5]

These youth talked about positive feelings about their families in general:

Because they're really supportive and we're generally really happy to see each other every day and everything like that and we're a family, we're a family. [IFS-6]

As a group. I don't know, they're good people, they... I don't know, they just... um, they're just kind of fun to be around, I guess. [...] They're like—they're generous to others and they're positive which is sorta weird because I'm pretty neg—I'm known as being very pessimistic about things. [...] I'm happy, like the experience that happened a few years ago it made me appreciate it more. [IFS-7]

[Q. What are some of the good things in your life?] My cat, obviously. School. My stuff, my mom. My grandmother in [place name] and my aunt in [pace name], my family in [place name]. [IFS-8]

[Q. How happy or unhappy do you feel about your family? People you live with? ] I'm very happy. [Q. And how happy or unhappy do you feel about how safe you are where you live?] Because, we don't have to, like, worry about what happens to all of us.[Q. You don't worry about what happens to all of you?] Well, I do worry about my family. [RT-2]

All of these quotes suggest a sense of pride and connection to families and family members. Further to this several youth talked candidly about loving their families and feeling loved:

What are the things that you're happy with in your life? A. That my family loves me. [IFS-9]

Because I feel very, very, safe and I feel like no matter what happens, my family will love me and my family will be there for me, so I have nothing to worry about. [IFS-10]

Because they're my family and I love them and...[Q. Mmhm. So even despite not getting along and stuff, you still love them?] Yeah. Mmhm. [IFS-11]

The preceding quotes all came from youth who were living with their families. The following youth in care talked about loving their families but their experience was a mixed one because they were separated from their families. A few of the quotes suggested some turmoil and sadness:

I love my family, so much. I don't care what goes on, but I still love them. [RT-1]

Because I love my family. I have this disease called separation disorder, if I'm away from my family for a long time, I go into depression. I haven't felt it yet, but I know it's coming soon [...] But like I said before, it's hard. But I love to be around my family because it's fun. Yeah, we have great times. [RT-2]

Some of the youth in care in our study have been through some very difficult experiences with their families. In the following quotes, youth talked about some of the complex feelings including confusion, frustration and sadness related to having been put in care:

It was a normal family, there was absolutely nothing wrong with it.[...]. It was just normal, it was a life that I enjoyed having, it was a life worth having, y'know? [Q. What were some of the good things?] Everything. We were not in poverty, it was just frickin' normal, I don't know what to say, it was just normal. I miss it. [RT-3]

I'm happy with my family, but I'm not happy with the situation that they've put me in throughout my life. [Q...] Like, when they dropped me at CAS, sometimes they said it's my fault. [...] [Q. What's it like to be told that it was your fault?] Difficult. But mostly I don't listen to them when they're doing that, because my mom and I do talk, when I'm in here they're always stoned and stuff, so most of the stuff that they're saying doesn't make any sense, though, they're either stoned or drunk. [RT-4]

We've been through a lot. Been through rich times, we had a lot of money. Been through a time when we wouldn't have barely any food. It's tough. As long as you have family and love in your family, you can get by it. [...] I like it just the way it is, besides... besides my mom with her problem, that's it. [Q....?] She had a drug addiction, that's it. [Q. What was that like for you?] It was hard, being right there. I talked to her, she's in rehab. [RT-5]

[Q. So, what do you like best about your family?] They care for me. Uh-huh. My brother always tell me not to—I don't know, my brother always tells me to stop stealing cars and stuff. They care about me. [...] [Q. At what age did you start living away from your family?] I don't know, I was like, two years old. [Q....?] I don't know, I don't know anything about them. [Q...?] I don't know—I don't barely know anything about them. [RT-6]

While the above youth in care were fairly expressive about their feelings toward their families and being separated, some youth-in-care used a language of indifference when talking about family. For example:

And I understand you don't see your dad?] No. [Q. No. Tell me about that.] What's there to tell? [Q. Fair enough. Do you like not seeing your dad, are you okay with that?] Yeah. [RT-7]

There's nothing really, in my family. [Q. No? Tell me about that.] We just don't have any family. [Q. What's that like?] It's fine. [Q. It's fine with you?] Yeah. [Q. Okay. Is there something you like about your family?] No. [RT-8]

[Q. Nothing's tough about your family?] Nope. [Q. How about not living with your family? What's that like?] It's okay, I guess, I see them still. [...]  
Because living... I don't really see my family, so I don't really know why I'm not living with them, so I don't care about them. [...] [Q. And do you see your mom?] No. [Q. No? Do you know why?]. Nope. Because she's not my mother, I don't think so... and she never calls my social worker. When my social worker calls her, she never calls him. [RT-9]

This youth in care was very reluctant to discuss her relationship with her natural parents and the following comment suggests a lack of confidence that this relationship may improve over time:

[Q... is there anything you would change about your relationship with your family?] With my mom and dad nothing, but my brothers and sister, I don't really have anything to change because I like the way I am with my brothers and sister. [Q Ok and with your parents?] Nothing's going to come off of that one. [Q. So you just kind of let go of that one?]Yeah. [RT-1]

Language expressing anger toward absent fathers was a theme amongst some youth living in single parent or blended family settings. For example:

[Q. What about, you mentioned that you've never met your dad before, how do you feel about that?] Uh, the stories my mom tells me about him, it's going to be like, different stories to me, because, well, I mean like, I guess, I don't really like him, because he used to hit my mom and stuff like that, so basically I don't really care much for him. [IFS-1]

[Q. Why can't you stand him?] Because he's never been there. I don't know what the hell happened, all of a sudden, he decided to call, he calls every day now, ...I can't stand him, like I hate him, and he's always like, I love you and I won't say I love you too ... I can't love someone who I don't know. [RT-2]



[Q: What makes ya think that your dad doesn't care?] Do you want me to answer that truthfully? [Sure]. Alright... Ah, he never does anything with us, he barely says anything to us when we go over to his place, he's so interested in his new girlfriend, ah, he treats us like dirt almost [hmm] because he never does anything with us, he just leaves us alone when we get to his house, the only thing he says to us is "Supper" and when we have to get home, when we go home, "do you have everything?", that's basically all he says to us... [IFS-2]

[Q. And do you (and dad) have a close relationship?] No I wouldn't say so... my dad's going through a midlife crisis... My dad, uh I don't know, my dad's alright, my dad's better now that I don't live with him... However I wouldn't agree with a lot of the choices he's making at the moment... [Like what, can you give an example of one?] Ah when my parents split up we sold our house, he moved in with this midget whore, and like gave up his life, lives in like this shitty little dumpy apartment and like. [IFS-3]

In summary, the language youth often used when speaking about their families suggested some strong emotions. Needless to say, many of the youth interviewed have faced many challenges with their families in the recent and distant past. However, a significant number of youth expressed feelings such as pride, love and caring in reference to their families. Feelings such as sadness, confusion and anger were also present, particularly for youth who are separated from family members. Several youth used language of indifference when talking about their families.

## ***Future Aspirations of Youth***

In the interviews, youth were asked generally about how they felt about the future and a majority of youth (63% of IFS and 79% of RT) shared hopes about their family life. Most of these hopes were in reference to their family of origin but several were regarding their hopes of starting a family of their own in the future. A central theme that emerged among youth living at home was the theme of hoping for better relationships. Some other minor themes that emerged included youth's desires to move out on their own and youth's wishes for more resources for their families. A theme among some youth in care was being reunited with their families. Finally, some youth, primarily RT youth not living with family, talked about starting families of their own.

### *Aspirations within the Family of Origin*

Of the youth living at home, over a third mentioned hopes for less family conflict and better family relationships in their future. While some of these same youth reported that there had been improvements in their family functioning, their comments nonetheless suggested that they hoped for stronger relationships and less conflict in their families. Some of the wishes youth had for family relationships included:

I guess, that things can get a little bit better.[...] Like, no more arguing, stuff like that.[...] I hope not, and help each other.[IFS-1]

Well, they'll get along for about a month and all of a sudden they'll get into this argument and blow up or something, 2-3 weeks at a time, they'll go back and forth. [IFS-2]

...there things that I know could be better, like me and my brothers could stop fighting more and my sister could get her life on track and people could just generally be happier in this family, but... I'm not... we're happy, I think I am, anyway. [IFS-3]

The fighting to stop. [IFS-4]

[Q...When you say you want to get along better with people, what does that look like?] Like, joking around constantly and things like no fights at all. [Q. No fights?] Yeah, like no arguments or anything. We get along great. [Q. And that's with your friends, family...?] Mostly with my family. [IFS-5]

[Q...are there things you look forward to in the future with your family?] Yeah, hopefully me and my mom will be able to pick our battles a lot better. As we get older, but I don't know. [Q. Okay, is there any tough things that you think you and your mom will have to face in the future?] Probably, because she is sick and I don't know, she does have a lot of stuff she's going through right now. There's a lot of stress between us and I don't know, but hopefully we'll get past it all. [IFS-6]

I hope it gets easier, that's about it. [...] Well, my mom would change a little bit, but I don't think she'll change ...[RT-1]

I think my family's going pretty good. Could use a little bit of improvement, especially in the way we treat each other, I know I could make some changes, I know my parents could make some changes, and I know my little brother could make some changes. [Q. What kind of changes do you think you could make?] Um, just doing more to help out and kind of pulling my own weight around, being around for dinner and stuff like that. [RT-2]

Another theme that emerged among several youth living at home concerned the lack of financial and practical resources in their families and the hope that their family's lifestyle would improve. Some mentioned a desire for more family activities and trips:

[Q. What do you hope will happen for your family in the future?] Maybe have more money. I don't know. I don't really know. [RT-1]

To go out more. Like to movies and stuff. [Q. ...] Go to Niagara Falls... Going to African Lion Safari. [RT-2]

[Q. Is there any tough things that you think you and your mom will have to face in the future?] Nothing that we haven't already. [Q. What are some of the tough things you've already faced?] Well, living in where we are. And yeah, that's all. [RT-3]

Any good things you think will happen for your family in the future? Go places. And them having peace and quiet. [RT-4]

Further to the theme of lack of resources was the theme of hardships faced by some families and the hope that these problems would go away. For example:

[Q. Okay, so you hope your brother to get lots of money. Is there anything you hope to happen in the future for your mom?] To do better, and when she gets out of rehab, she'll be all good. She'll be better. [Q. Is there any tough things you think you or your family will face in the future?] Yeah, but I don't want to say it. [RT-5]

Yeah, I'm hoping [grandma's] blood pressure will go down. Yeah... and my mom's looking for a job, I hope she gets one. [Q. Are there tough things you think your family will face in the next year?] Probably. There's always tough things. [Q. And how do you feel about your family being able to cope with those?] It's pretty good. As long as we can cope, that's enough. [IFS-1]

In the last case, the youth seemed optimistic about the family's ability to cope with whatever comes their way. Similar optimism may be seen in some of the quotes about hopes for less family conflict. While the wish for improvement was there among a significant group of youth, some were more optimistic or confident than others about their and their family's ability to cope. The overriding theme in all of these quotes is the hope that family life will improve in some way, whether it be improved relationships, resources, or fewer hardships.

A theme among several of the youth-in-care was the desire to live with their family. The following youth made reference to this wish in their comments about hopes for the future:

[Q. Is there anything you would change about your family?] Probably change the fact that I would've like to live with them. [RT-1]

[Q...what do you hope will happen for you next year?] I don't know, I won't be in a group home? [Q. Where would you like to be?] My parents. [RT-2]

That I get to live with them. [...] Uh... my brother. Or my sister. [RT-3]

A theme that was shared by several youth living at home and by one RT youth living in care was that of living independently. These youth expressed feeling that life would be somehow better when they moved out on their own:

I could see me living with my family until I'm at least 19, but after 19, I'll probably be gone. Just move on with my life, because get everything ready and go. [Q. You

look forward to that?] Yeah, just being out by myself, working and just being able to do what I want to do, when I want to do it. Everything's so much easier. [RT-1]

Ah, just a simple house for me and my kid and get a couch so my sister could come over and sleep over sometimes. [IFS-1]

Um, once I move to my own place, then I know that my life will somewhat be stable, like I'm not going to be worrying like when are they going to move me, I'm not going to be stressed out in the house because I'm getting disrespected and just stuff like that, so uh, once I move, which will be shortly, I will certainly have a job. [RT-2]

It is interesting to note that among youth who have already moved out on their own, both from family homes and from care, their reported level of satisfaction with living independently was certainly varied as indicated in earlier sections.

### *Aspirations for Starting A Family*

A small number of youth, 7 IFS (all living at home) and 8 RT youth (5 in care and 3 living at home), spoke of a desire to start families of their own. Overall, youth living at home appeared to have a more cautious perspective on becoming parents themselves than was noted with several RT youth in care. As a group, youth in care presented as quite confident about their potential for future success as parents. One of the youth living at home was pregnant at the time of the interview and expressed future hopes around her life as a new mother.

[So you're saying—you feel the pregnancy is going to help mature you?] Yeah, because then once I get on my own, I'll have my house and when I'm leaving I'm planning on moving to (location), near my sister and parents and everything. And then I'll have my own place, my sister can come see me, and she'll be able to—I got lots of support down there. Well, actually just my family, some of my mom's friends too and my dad's friends. [IFS-1]

While this youth appeared quite optimistic about her new life, she also recognized her need for support.

Another two youth who were living at home expressed a relatively cautious approach to starting a family of their own. While they expressed a desire to have their own child or children, they did not appear to be in a hurry. These youth saw parenthood as something in their more distant future:

[Do you want a family in the future?] Yeah. Q Yeah? [Do you want kids?] Yeah. [How many kids would you like?] One. [IFS-2]

Um, I really don't know that much, but maybe have a family or something like that one day, like, and then, like I want to be able to have a family and be friends with my

mom still before when I get older, like I don't want to get married or something like that, but have kids, yeah. [IFS-3]

In contrast, these two RT youth in care both saw themselves having children of their own fairly soon:

Try to get a job, I want a child when I get older. [Q. What age do you want to have a child?] Uh, 17-18, my brother's 16. His girlfriend is turning 17... he just got his baby. November 1<sup>st</sup>, so I'm an uncle, I love it, I want to see my kid, my nephew, and I'll probably see him soon, probably today because I have a CAS visit, so I'm hoping. [RT-1]

[Q. And what would you like—sorry where would you like to live, say, next year?] With my girlfriend. [Q....what are some of the good things that you hope will happen next year?] Next year? I dunno, have a kid. [Q. Have a kid next year?] No, I am.[...] [Q...what do you think that will be like?] I don't know. [...] [Q. How does your girlfriend feel about it?] I don't know. [RT-2]

These comments suggest a lack of awareness of the challenges of becoming a parent at a young age, with few resources. On the other hand, one RT youth in care stated that she did not want to have a family of her own specifically because of the challenges with which she had grown up:

[Q. Do you want to have a family down the road?] No. [Q. No? How come?] Too much work. I don't know, the way I was growing up and all the stuff I've been through, I don't know if I want to do that, because there's still a chance it might happen, might get... I don't want that to go on. [RT-3]

We saw two markedly different perspectives on having a family of one's own from youth-in-care. We also see a general difference between comments from IFS youth living at home and RT youth living in care, about their plans to have children in the future. The youth living at home who spoke about future family or children of their own expressed much more cautious notions of when and how parenting a child of their own would become a reality.

## Overall Comments on Family Profiles

It is clear that youth living in the parental home had different family experiences than youth living in care or elsewhere outside the home. Results from the parent reported data revealed that almost 85% of IFS youth lived at home at the time of the interview while only 43% of RT youth were reported to live at home. Among the youth we spoke to directly, 94% of IFS youth and 60% of RT youth lived at home. The increased proportion of RT youth living at home that we interviewed likely reflects the greater accessibility of these youth to be approached by researchers.

The majority of youth living in the family home who we spoke to directly described meaningful connections and relationships with family. Conflict in the home, usually between the youth of interest and a parent or parents, was commonly described and, in a minority of IFS families and a majority of RT families, the conflict appeared to be significant. This conflict within the family was also evident in the parent reported data with over half of all IFS youth and RT youth reported to have “a lot” of difficulty getting along with parents at follow up (53% and 58.3% respectively). This was, however, an improvement for IFS youth as almost 80% were reported to have significant difficulties getting along with their parents at admission. Furthermore, 36% of IFS youth with admission data, scored in the highest category of impairment on the CAFAS Home Subscale which indicated that the youth required “extensive management by others...in order to be maintained in the home.” Among the youth we interviewed, in several cases significant conflict led to the youth leaving home.

Parents reported positive gains from admission to follow up in the areas of family comfort and activities completed as a family. More specifically, at follow up fewer parents reported impediments to taking their family shopping or visiting and were freer to have guests into their home. About half of the youth living at home we interviewed described their family relationships and level of conflict as significantly improved over time. These youth appeared to be optimistic about the future of their family relationships. About half the youth living at home also talked about spending some time engaged in family activities. Many youth living in the family home used language that expressed some positive feelings about family. Quality of family life, from the parent reported data, also showed a trend toward increased quality of life at follow up for families with youth living at home.

While youth in care did talk about their families (biological), there appeared to be a clear lack of family connections, a lack of time spent with family and a lack of strong relationships. Most of these youth expressed a desire for more connection to family. Youth did not describe other relationships that substituted or mirrored family relationships. Significant conflict in group home relationships was commonly described. Some dissatisfaction with group living and group living relationships was expressed. Finally, youth in care often used language that expressed either sadness or indifference when talking about their family relationships.

From our youth interview data, youth living independently appeared to either struggle to survive or relied heavily on family support. The youth who relied on family support reported a generally positive experience with independent living in the short term. Youth who relied on friends and on themselves struggled to meet basic needs. They often ended up returning home or going into care/custody after their independent living experience.

The overall picture of the family domain for the youth in our study is varied. For many youth still at home, the picture for strong family relationships was somewhat hopeful. When talking about family in their future, youth living at home focused on further improvement in family relationships, decreased conflict and a cautious perspective on having their own children in the future. For youth in care, the picture for family relationships was much less hopeful. There was often an absence of optimism, future planning and realistic hope for family in their future. For the few youth who were living semi-independently, or had attempted to live independently, the outcome appeared to be varied. Those who already had family connections and support were more successful at semi-independent living or were able to return to family when independent living did not work out. Those who did not have family support appeared to be at significant risk of struggling to meet basic needs.

Family connections appeared to be relevant to the future success of youth in a variety of ways. Family was described as a source of identity, a source of emotional and financial support for youth who remained at home and family sometimes continued to be a source of support when youth embarked on independent living. Youth who described weak or non-existent family connections were generally less optimistic about their future in regard to living situations and improving relationships.

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