



Final Report from the Descriptive Study of the Unaccompanied Refugee Minors Program

**Service Provision, Trends, and Evaluation
Recommendations**

May 2021

OPRE Report 2021-81

Final Report of the Descriptive Study of the Unaccompanied Refugee Minors Program: Service Provision, Trends, and Evaluation Recommendations

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Overview

Introduction

The Unaccompanied Refugee Minors (URM) Program, funded by the Office of Refugee Resettlement in the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, provides child welfare services and benefits to refugee youth and other eligible youth within the United States who do not have a parent or relative available to care for them. URM programs are expected to provide the same range of services to URM youth as are provided to youth in the domestic foster care system in the state in which they operate. URM programs provide out-of-home placements (e.g., foster care, group homes) and other child welfare services to promote youth's well-being. The URM Program also provides services related to integrating the youth into their new communities while preserving the youth's cultural, ethnic, and religious heritage.

The Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) in ACF contracted with MEF Associates and their subcontractor, Child Trends, to conduct a descriptive study of the URM Program. The project explored the characteristics of youth in the URM Program; the services local URM programs offered and provided to youth; innovative practices, successes, and lessons learned in serving URM youth; and available data on URM youth's experiences and outcomes. This final report summarizes the study's key findings and presents recommendations for the design of a future evaluation of the URM Program.

Primary research questions

- What are the characteristics of populations served by the URM Program and how are services for each target population implemented?
- What do we know about how different URM programs administer benefits and services for refugee youth?
- What data are currently collected for the URM Program and what do they tell us about the extent that URM youth achieve self-sufficiency?
- What would be the best evaluation design strategies for learning more about the effectiveness of the URM Program?

Purpose

The Descriptive Study of the Unaccompanied Refugee Minors Program (“the study”) aims to better understand the range of child welfare services and benefits provided through individual URM programs. This study also aims to lay the foundation for future evaluations of the URM Program.

Methods

The study included an analysis of administrative data; surveys of URM program directors (23 respondents, including 20 main offices and 3 sub-offices), State Refugee Coordinators (14 respondents), and child welfare administrators (four survey respondents and four semi-structured interviews); and qualitative data collected through visits to six URM programs, in which we

conducted semi-structured interviews with URM program staff and community partners, as well as focus groups with a total of 45 URM youth and 56 foster parents.

Key findings

Key findings from the study include:

- **The number of youth entering the URM Program declined in recent years and changed in composition.** The number of youth entering the Program declined from fiscal year (FY) 2014 to FY 2018. The percentage of those entering who fall into the legal category of victims of trafficking increased, while the percentage of youth entering as refugees decreased. In FY 2018, roughly one third of youth entering the program were refugees, one third had Special Immigrant Juvenile classification, and one third were victims of trafficking.
- **URM youth enter the URM Program with diverse strengths and needs.** Program staff and foster families describe youth as resilient, goal-oriented, hardworking, and committed to their families, friends, and communities. Key needs upon arrival include education and English Language support, physical and mental health services, and immigration status support. Local URM programs provide services and/or build partnerships with external providers to address these needs and help youth achieve their goals.
- **All local URM programs offer a comprehensive set of services to youth, either internally, through external partners, or both.** These services include out-of-home placements, case management, physical and mental health services, education support, and services to support a successful transition to adulthood. However, there is variation in how programs actually provide services to youth due to differences among programs, in state and local context and policies, and in the characteristics of youth served. The Program's model also tailors services to individual youth, so youth experiences in the Program vary depending on their strengths, needs, and past experiences (including their pathway into the URM Program).
- **The URM Program aims to help youth maintain connections to their cultural, ethnic, and religious heritage, if youth desire, both formally and informally.** Success in maintaining these connections may depend on availability of cultural, ethnic, and religious communities and resources in URM program localities.
- **URM youth describe feeling grateful for the resources and support provided by their URM case managers and foster parents.** Although they described challenges in adjusting to life in the United States, many youth find joy in connecting with foster families, making friends at school and through sports, and pursuing their goals.

Recommendations for future research

This study lays the groundwork for a future evaluation of the URM Program through understanding service delivery approaches, contextual factors, and existing information available on the Program. For future evaluators of the URM Program, we recommend a mixed-methods approach, which includes utilizing quantitative data and collecting new qualitative information on services and youth experiences to explore the implementation of program services. To prepare for future evaluations, we recommend engaging stakeholders in the planning and design of an evaluation, including youth, foster families, and program staff; adapting the conceptual model included in this report or developing a more tailored conceptual model to address the research questions of interest; defining outcomes; increasing capacity for new data collection, data sharing with partners, and identifying

existing data that could be used for an evaluation; and identifying service components for evaluation. We provide four broad research questions to guide decision-making for a future evaluation and relevant design options for each:

- What outcomes do youth in the URM Program experience?
- How do short- and long-term outcomes of URM youth compare to the outcomes of youth who have similar or overlapping experiences but who do not enter the URM Program (e.g., non-URM youth in domestic foster care)?
- How do different URM program models and contexts relate to experiences and outcomes for URM youth? How do different models, services/activities, and contexts contribute to positive youth outcomes?
- What specific services/activities are effective? Do they help youth achieve the intended outputs and short- and long-term outcomes? Why or why not?

Glossary

ACF: Administration for Children and Families, in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

ORR: Office of Refugee Resettlement, within Administration for Children and Families, in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Refugee: Any person who is outside any country of such person’s nationality or habitual residence, and who is unable or unwilling to return to or seek the protection of that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.

Special Immigrant Juvenile: This classification is available to immigrant children who have been subject to state juvenile court proceedings related to abuse, neglect, abandonment, or a similar basis under state law.

SRC: State Refugee Coordinator—the administrator who oversees the state’s refugee resettlement services. This term may refer to the individual SRC within a state, or the state office of the SRC.

Victim of Trafficking: A person who has experienced the “severe forms of trafficking in persons,” as defined by the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA). This includes sex trafficking and labor trafficking.

Note on usage: *This report uses “URM Program” with an uppercase “P” to denote the federally administered program. It uses “URM program” with a lowercase “p” to denote local providers of services to youth in the URM Program.*

Executive Summary

A. Introduction and background

In 2017, the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) in the Administration for Children and Families in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services contracted with MEF Associates and their subcontractor, Child Trends, to conduct the Descriptive Study of the Unaccompanied Refugee Minors (URM) Program.

Funded by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) in the Administration for Children and Families, the URM Program provides child welfare services and benefits to refugees and other eligible youth within the United States who do not have a parent or relative available to care for them. Each URM program parallels the child welfare system in the state in which it operates. This means that URM programs are required to provide the same range of services to URM youth as are provided to youth in the domestic foster care system in the state. Services provided include coordinating foster care, group homes, independent living arrangements, or reunification with relatives in the United States, as well as other child welfare services to promote youth's well-being. The program also includes services focused on integrating the youth into their new communities while preserving the youth's ethnic and religious heritage.¹

Youth are eligible for the URM Program through six legal categories: refugees, asylees, youth with Special Immigrant Juvenile (SIJ) classification, victims of trafficking, Cuban/Haitian entrants, and U-status recipients (See: Appendix A. Glossary).² For all categories, youth must be under age 18 when they enter the URM Program and not have a parent or relative who is eligible and available to care for them.

The study focused on four research questions:

- What are the characteristics of populations served by the URM Program and how are services for each target population implemented?
- What do we know about how different URM programs administer benefits and services for refugee youth?
- What data are currently collected for the URM Program and what do they tell us about the extent that URM youth achieve self-sufficiency?
- What would be the best evaluation design strategies for learning more about the effectiveness of the URM Program?

The project explored the characteristics of youth in the Program; services offered and provided to youth; innovative practices, successes, and lessons learned in serving URM youth; and available data on URM youth's experiences and outcomes. It also focused on developing the foundation for a future evaluation of the URM Program, including proposing evaluation designs to learn more about how program services relate to youth outcomes.

The project included the following data sources and activities:

- Site visits to six programs, which included interviews with program and partner staff, as well as focus groups with 45 URM youth and 56 foster parents. The programs visited were Catholic Charities Community Services in Phoenix, AZ; Crittenton Services for Families and Children in Fullerton, CA; Lutheran Family Services Rocky Mountains in

¹ For more detail on the URM Program, visit <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/programs/urm>.

² There were no U-status recipients in the URM Program at the time of data collection for this study.

- Denver, CO; Bethany Christian Services in Grand Rapids, MI; Commonwealth Catholic Charities in Richmond, VA; and Lutheran Community Services Northwest in Seattle, WA.
- Web-based surveys of program directors, State Refugee Coordinators, and child welfare agency administrators. We received responses from 23 URM program directors (including 20 main offices and 3 sub-offices), 14 State Refugee Coordinator offices, and four child welfare administrators. We also conducted semi-structured interviews with four additional child welfare agency administrators.
 - An analysis of program data that included characteristics of URM youth who entered the Program from FY 2014 to FY 2018 and information on the services provided to these youth.

B. Key findings in brief

The information sources discussed above provided insight into the characteristics of URM youth, the range of services the URM programs offer and deliver to them, and youth's experiences in the Program. Some main findings follow.

Youth characteristics

We explored the demographics of youth who entered the URM Program from FY 2014 to FY 2018; the strengths and needs of youth as described by URM provider staff, foster parents, and youth; and how these characteristics have changed over time. Findings include:

- **The number of youth entering the URM Program declined from FY 2014 to FY 2018, and the relative proportions of different eligibility statuses changed over this period.** According to our analysis of program data, the number of youth entering the Program peaked in 2015 but then decreased in subsequent years. Refugees made up the largest group of youth entering the Program during this period, followed by youth with SIJ classification. Youth who entered the Program as victims of trafficking increased in both number and percentage of youth entering the Program since 2014 and made up nearly a third of youth entering the Program in 2018.
- **URM youth enter the Program with strengths that help them navigate the United States and build community, as well as needs that URM providers work to address.** Program staff, foster families, and youth themselves described URM youth as resilient, goal-oriented, hardworking, and committed to their families, friends, and communities. Youth also arrive in need of mental health services, education and English Language support, physical health services, and immigration status support. Programs focus on providing these and additional services to youth, based on their individual needs.

Program services

The URM Program offers a comprehensive set of services to youth—including out-of-home placements, case management, physical and mental health services, education support, and services to support a successful transition to adulthood—either internally, through external partners, or both. However, services vary due to factors such as state and local context, characteristics of youth served, and program characteristics. Findings include:

- **URM providers initially place youth primarily in family or therapeutic foster care.** Foster families play a central role in the experiences of youth placed in foster homes; they

can help connect youth with services, provide a supportive environment, teach them about U.S. systems and culture, and support connections to religious, cultural, and ethnic heritage, if the youth desires. Providers make other types of initial placements—including placements in group homes, semi-independent living, and residential treatment facilities—less frequently, when they fit youth’s specific needs.

- **All programs provide services to support URM youth’s successful transition to adulthood, which may include case management, regular workshops, and financial assistance.** These services include teaching youth how to access resources and navigate systems independently. Findings from our site visits show that programs have adopted different programmatic approaches to help youth prepare for living independently, as well as supporting them once they have transitioned to an independent living arrangement. These approaches include dedicated independent living case managers and cash incentive programs to help youth accrue savings.
- **Programs aim to help youth maintain connections to their cultural, ethnic, and religious heritage, if youth desire, both formally and informally.** Success in maintaining these connections may depend on availability of cultural, ethnic, and religious communities and resources in the areas served by the programs.
- **Youth education experiences depend on the schools they attend, and URM programs provide services to help youth pursue their education goals.** Local schools that URM youth attend vary in their capacity to provide linguistically and culturally competent services to URM youth. Where there is flexibility in which school youth can attend, some URM program staff prioritize the quality of English Language Learning services. Many URM programs connect youth with supportive services, such as tutoring.
- **Mental health services are a primary need for URM youth.** While program staff described challenges in providing these services to youth, they have developed different approaches to addressing these needs and work with youth to access therapy or counseling when youth feel ready. For some programs, these approaches include group therapy and holding mock therapy sessions to get youth used to the idea of therapy and reduce the feeling of being singled out for mental health needs.

Youth experiences and perspectives

We learned about youth experiences and perspectives from program and partner staff, foster parents, and youth themselves. Youth who participated in the focus groups generally reported positive experiences in the Program. Findings include:

- **Youth experiences in the Program vary depending on their strengths, needs, and past experiences, because the URM Program model tailors services to individual youth.** For example, a youth’s pathway into the URM Program may influence their experiences and the services they receive. Program staff consistently reported that refugees have different migration experiences, goals, and needs from those who entered as former unaccompanied alien children (UACs).³ For example, staff described ways in which URM youth who are former UACs need more legal assistance than refugees as a result of the immigration status with which they enter the Program.

³ As noted earlier, youth are eligible for the URM Program through a number of different legal categories. Former UACs may have SIJ classification or be victims of trafficking, asylees, Cuban/Haitian entrants, or U-status recipients who were part of the Unaccompanied Alien Children Program before entering the URM program.

- **URM youth have diverse long-term goals.** Youth discussed pursuing varying levels of education, employment opportunities, and connections with their culture or heritage. URM case managers described supporting youth in achieving their goals as a top priority.
- **URM youth describe feeling appreciative of the resources and support provided by their URM case managers and foster parents.** Although they described challenges in adjusting to life in the United States, many youth find joy in connecting with foster families, making friends at school and through sports, and pursuing their goals.

C. Recommendations for future evaluation

This study laid the foundation for a future evaluation of the URM Program through learning about what services the URM Program offers to youth, how local URM programs provide services, understanding the local context in which they operate, and examining what available data could provide insight into URM youth experiences and outcomes. We also learned about what program staff, youth, foster families, and other stakeholders wanted to learn about the program and how they define success for URM youth.

Based on our findings, we developed a conceptual model to guide a future evaluation, including evaluations that focus on youth outcomes, the impact of services on youth outcomes, and/or how URM programs implement services. We offer a variety of possible designs that can support evaluations, based on the conceptual model presented in the report. While we do not believe it is feasible to use a randomized controlled trial to assess the effectiveness of the URM Program in achieving its goals for URM youth, there may be options for quasi-experimental or non-experimental approaches, or experimental approaches that focus on specific services or rapid learning methods.

In recommending approaches for future evaluations of the URM Program or its components, we considered factors such as local context and program structure; existing data, such as program data required by ORR, other program data, state and local data, and national databases that could be linked to URM Program data to learn about youth outcomes; options for new data collection, such as interviews with youth and observations of program services to explore the implementation of program services; and logistics such as cost and timing of an evaluation.

We identified four overarching research questions and recommended multiple methods—including both quantitative and qualitative approaches—to address them:

1. **What short- and long-term outcomes do URM youth experience after leaving the program?** We recommend a mixed-methods outcome evaluation, which focuses on measuring long-term outcomes for youth and incorporating qualitative data collection to learn about program context and youth experiences.
2. **How do short- and long-term outcomes of URM youth compare to the outcomes of youth who have similar or overlapping experiences but who do not enter the URM Program (e.g., non-URM youth who are in domestic foster care)?** We recommend a comparative case studies approach that explores the experiences and outcomes of URM youth who enter the URM program and youth who are in domestic foster care. These youth have experienced separation from their families and may have received similar services. We also note that evaluators could explore the feasibility of a quasi-experimental design.

3. **How do different URM program models and contexts relate to experiences and outcomes for URM youth? How do different models, services/activities, and contexts contribute to positive youth outcomes?** We recommend comparative case studies or an outcomes evaluation, both with a strong emphasis on qualitative data collection.
4. **What specific services/activities are effective? Do they help youth achieve the intended outputs and short- and long-term outcomes? Why or why not?** We recommend rapid learning approaches (also known as rapid cycle evaluation) or tests of individual services, with an emphasis on implementation to understand whether services are delivered as designed and how this relates to whether services achieve their desired goals.

To prepare for a future evaluation, we recommend that ORR engage programs and stakeholders in designing evaluations, including youth, foster parents, staff, and resettlement agencies; define specific questions or outcomes for an evaluation; adapt the conceptual model included in this report or develop a more tailored conceptual model to address the research questions of interest; prepare for data collection and analysis through building program capacity and identifying data sources; and identify specific components for an evaluation.

1. Introduction

In 2017, the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) in the Administration for Children and Families in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services contracted with MEF Associates and their subcontractor, Child Trends, to conduct the Descriptive Study of the Unaccompanied Refugee Minors (URM) Program.

The study focused on four primary research questions:

- What are the characteristics of populations served by the URM Program and how are services for each target population implemented?
- What do we know about how different URM programs administer benefits and services for refugee youth?
- What data are currently collected for the URM Program and what do they tell us about the extent that URM youth achieve self-sufficiency?
- What would be the best evaluation design strategies for learning more about the effectiveness of the URM Program?

In investigating these research questions, the project explored the characteristics of youth in the Program; services offered and provided to youth; innovative practices, successes, and lessons learned in serving URM youth; and available data on URM youth's experiences and outcomes. It also focused on developing the foundation for a future evaluation of the URM Program, including proposing evaluation designs to learn more about how program services relate to youth outcomes. This report summarizes the study's key findings and recommendations. (See the box on page 13 for a discussion of the study's data sources).

The report begins with background on the URM Program, including eligibility requirements, program structure, and funding, to provide context for the rest of the report. We then describe the study in Chapter 2, including the research questions and primary data collection and analysis components that contributed to our findings. In Chapter 3, we provide an overview of the characteristics of youth in the URM Program, which informs the discussion of program services. In Chapter 4, which is focused on services, we discuss initial pre-arrival and arrival activities (4.A), the various services offered by programs (4.B), contextual factors that influence service delivery (4.C), and how programs implement these services and how youth experience them (4.D). We conclude in Chapter 5 with a discussion of options for a future evaluation of the URM Program, including a conceptual model, potential research questions, design options, and recommendations.

2. Background on URM Program

The URM Program operates as a partnership of multiple entities at the federal, state, and local levels and uses complex funding sources. This chapter provides an overview of how the URM Program operates and introduces key organizations involved in the administration of URM programs.

Funded by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) in the Administration for Children and Families, the URM Program provides child welfare services and benefits to refugees and other eligible youth within the United States who do not have a parent or relative available to care for them. Each URM program parallels the child welfare system in the state in which it operates. This means that ORR regulations require that URM programs provide the same range of services to URM youth as are provided to youth in the domestic foster care system in the state.⁴ Services provided include



We use “**Program**” with an uppercase “P” to denote the federal URM Program, and “**program**” with a lowercase “p” to denote the individual local programs.

coordinating foster care, group homes, and independent living arrangements and providing other child welfare services to promote youth’s well-being. The Program also includes services focused on integrating the youth into their new communities while preserving the youth’s ethnic and religious heritage.⁵

The URM Program has served over 13,000 youth since the federal program was founded in 1980, with an average of 390 youth entering the program each year from federal fiscal years (FY) 2014 to FY 2018.

A. URM Program structure and administration

At the federal level, the URM Program is operated and funded by ORR. At the state level, State Refugee Coordinators (SRCs) oversee the operations of individual URM programs. Local organizations, which are affiliated with national resettlement agencies, operate the URM programs (see textbox). (Style note: We use “Program” with an uppercase “P” to denote the federal URM Program, and “program” with a lowercase “p” to denote the individual local programs.)

As of 2020, there are 22 local URM providers, located in 15 states, as shown in the map in Exhibit 1. Some programs have multiple office locations throughout the state, which allow them to increase their reach and service capacity. Most URM provider agencies operate multiple programs in addition to a URM program, such as domestic foster care, refugee resettlement and other services for adult and family refugee cases, and other community services. Local URM programs range in size, with the smallest serving roughly 20 youth and the largest serving over 300 at any given time. The staffing structure of URM programs tends to mirror domestic foster care programs, comprising a team of

National Resettlement Agencies

Two national resettlement agencies work with the URM provider agencies:

- Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS)
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB)

These agencies partner with ORR to coordinate the placement of URM youth. USCCB and LIRS also hold cooperative agreements with the U.S. Department of State to help refugees settle in the United States. They also provide training to URM program staff.

Of the 22 URM provider agencies, 11 agencies are affiliated with USCCB, 10 are LIRS affiliates, and one is affiliated with both agencies.

⁴ 45 C.F.R. § 400.116.

⁵ For more detail on the URM Program, visit <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/programs/urm>.

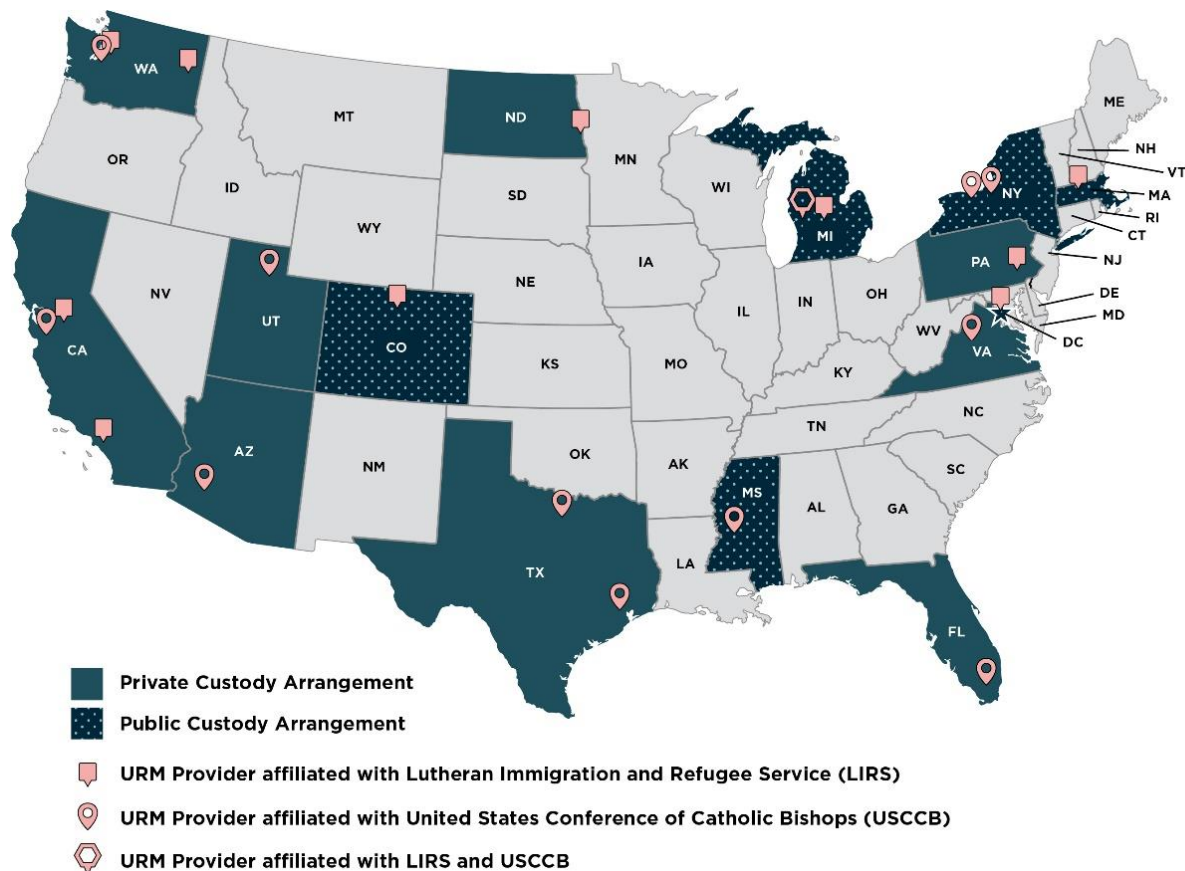
case managers, a foster family recruitment and training specialist, and other support staff. According to the survey, the largest URM program has 77 staff and the smallest has four staff members. Most programs are based in large cities, but they also serve surrounding suburban and sometimes rural areas. The number of local URM programs has changed over time in response to international migration trends and resettlement capacity.

B. Relationship with the child welfare system

The URM Program coordinates with state and/or local child welfare agencies overseeing domestic child welfare services. Programs operate under one of two custody arrangements: public or private. In states with public custody arrangements, the state or county child welfare agency maintains legal custody of URM youth. Most states with public custody arrangements are state-administered, which means the child welfare system operates at the state level, but a few are county-administered, meaning each county operates its own child welfare agency. In states with private custody arrangements, the private agencies that operate URM programs are legal custodians and licensed by the state to be child-placing agencies. Of the 22 local URM program providers, eight operate in states with public custody arrangements (five in state-administered systems and three in county-administered systems) and 14 operate in states with private custody arrangements.

While all URM programs are required to provide the same range of services to URM youth that foster care programs provide to youth in the domestic foster care system, their custody arrangement impacts how those services are provided and funded. This will be described in greater detail throughout the report.

Exhibit 1. Locations of local URM programs



C. Funding

ORR provides grant funding to the state office that administers each state's refugee services, which then disburses funding to local URM program providers. ORR funding covers the provision of services to URM youth, financial reimbursement to foster parents and group homes, and URM program staffing and administration at state and local levels. Most programs described providing the same reimbursement rates for URM youth as in the domestic foster care system, though in some cases URM foster parents may receive higher reimbursement rates when youth needs are more complex.

In states with public custody arrangements, URM youth are eligible for services funded through the John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood (hereafter "Chafee"), which provides funding to states to support youth currently in foster care and those exiting foster care (Congressional Research Service, 2019). The Chafee program is a capped entitlement, meaning there are set funding levels for each state up to which they can claim reimbursement, with those levels dependent on annual federal appropriations. ORR provides funding to cover the same services in states with private custody arrangements, as URM youth in private custody arrangements are not eligible for the state Chafee program.

D. URM youth eligibility and entry into the URM Program

Youth are eligible for the URM Program through six legal categories: refugees, asylees, youth with Special Immigrant Juvenile (SIJ) classification, victims of trafficking, Cuban/Haitian entrants, and U-status recipients (See: Appendix A. Glossary).⁶ For all categories, youth must be under age 18 when they enter the URM Program and not have a parent or relative who is available and willing to care for them.

The process by which youth enter the URM Program varies according to different eligibility categories and has evolved over time. In general, youth enter the Program via one of two broad pathways: a) being identified as eligible while overseas and being enrolled in a local URM program directly when arriving as a refugee, or b) being identified as eligible after entering the United States (See Appendix B for details). In all cases, local URM provider agencies have discretion over whether to accept referrals based on their capacity and ability to meet the needs of specific youth.⁷

Overseas refugees

Historically, the majority of URM youth have been refugees, defined as any persons who are outside the country of their nationality and who are unable or unwilling to return to that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.

In most cases, the U.S. State Department (DOS) identifies refugee children overseas who may be eligible for the URM Program through coordinating with the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR), the international coordinating body of refugees in camps and host communities. UNHCR completes a best interest determination (BID), which includes biographical information about the youth used to coordinate placement in the United States. The Department of Homeland

⁶ There were no U-status recipients in the URM Program at the time of data collection for this study.

⁷ While individual URM provider agencies have discretion to not accept a referral, there are two ways in which youth who are referred to the Program do not enter the Program: (1) Youth turn 18 and age out of eligibility before a provider agency can identify an appropriate placement for them, or (2) for youth who are in the United States when referred to the Program, ORR may determine that a referred youth needs a higher level of care than the community-based care provided through the URM Program and determines the referral is not appropriate. Both scenarios occur infrequently.

Security (DHS) determines the youth eligible for U.S. resettlement, and then DOS and the national resettlement agencies coordinate placement for the youth in a local URM program.

Youth identified in the United States

Some youth are identified as eligible for the URM Program after they arrive in the United States. Many of these youth enter the United States as unaccompanied alien children (UACs), which means they are under age 18, do not have a lawful immigration status, and entered the United States unaccompanied by a parent or legal guardian. UACs are apprehended by DHS after entering the United States and then transferred to ORR custody and referred to ORR care facilities, including shelters and long-term foster care, where they stay while their cases are processed. While many UACs are reunified with relatives or sponsors living in the United States, some do not have any reunification options.

Immigration attorneys work with UAC youth who do not have reunification options to apply for a legal status that would allow them to apply for the URM Program. Eligible groups include:

- **Asylees** are individuals who meet the same criteria as refugees, but are already present in the United States and have a grant of asylum from an immigration judge or from USCIS.
- **SIJ** classification may be granted to youth who have experienced abuse, neglect, or abandonment by at least one parental caregiver. SIJs are eligible for the URM program if a juvenile court declared the youth dependent while in ORR custody.
- **Victims of trafficking** who meet the federal definition of a victim of a severe form of human trafficking, such as forced labor or commercial sex.⁸
- **Cuban and Haitian entrants** are individuals who have a current or expired parole, have a pending application for asylum, or are in pending removal proceedings.
- **U-status** may be granted to victims of crimes who have suffered abuse while in the United States and who are willing to assist in the investigation or prosecution of the criminal activity.⁹

UAC care providers help youth apply for the URM Program after they qualify for one of these statuses and ORR confirms eligibility. The national resettlement agencies then work with local URM providers who try to find a placement for the youth. Some URM provider agencies operate long-term foster care for both UACs and URM programs, which means youth can transfer from one program to the other while maintaining the same living arrangement.

Although youth with SIJ classification and victims of trafficking are eligible for the same URM Program services as refugees, they do not share all of the rights of youth with refugee status. For example, youth with SIJ classification and victims of trafficking often face long delays in obtaining lawful permanent residency and work authorization.

⁸ 22 U.S.C. § 7102

⁹ As noted above, U-status recipients are eligible for the URM Program, but there were no youth with this status participating in the URM Program at the time of the study's data collection.

Study data sources and methods

The study employed several sources of information to answer the research questions, including engagement with stakeholders early during the study on the approach and goals of the study; web-based surveys of URM program directors, State Refugee Coordinators, and child welfare agency administrators; site visits to six local URM programs; and an analysis of URM Program data.

Stakeholder engagement. Throughout the project, we consulted with federal staff, national resettlement agencies, SRCs, URM program staff, and academic experts. These stakeholders provided input about their experiences with the URM program and research questions of importance to them. This engagement informed the approach for other research activities, including the development of surveys and qualitative interview guides, as well as the selection of topics for special reports (education experiences and mental health).

Surveys. We designed web-based surveys to systematically collect information across URM programs from URM program directors, SRCs, and child welfare agency administrators. Topics included the services provided by URM programs, perceptions of URM youth in care, and challenges to providing services. We fielded the surveys between from August to November 2019.

We received responses from 23 of the 24 URM program directors (20 main offices, 3 sub-offices)ⁱ, 14 of the 15 SRC offices, and 4 child welfare administrators from states with private custody arrangements. Due to the variety of relationships between URM programs and child welfare agencies in public custody arrangements, the team conducted semi-structured interviews with four child welfare administrators from states with public custody arrangements instead of surveys.

Site visits. We conducted site visits to six URM programs from November 2019 to January 2020. In collaboration with OPRE and ORR, we selected sites that capture a variety of program characteristics, administrative structures, and promising practices. These programs included:

- Catholic Charities Community Services in Phoenix, AZ;
- Crittenton Services for Families and Children in Fullerton, CA;
- Lutheran Family Services Rocky Mountains in Denver, CO;
- Bethany Christian Services in Grand Rapids, MI;
- Commonwealth Catholic Charities in Richmond, VA; and
- Lutheran Community Services Northwest in Seattle, WA.

During the visits, we conducted semi-structured interviews with URM program leadership, case managers and other staff, as well as partner organizations and education providers. We also facilitated focus groups with URM youth and foster parents.

URM Program data. We analyzed program data for URM youth who entered the URM Program from federal fiscal year (FY) 2014 to FY 2018. The data includes information from two reports: the ORR-3, which programs complete at initial placement and for any change of status or information for youth (e.g., placement, immigration status, etc.), and the ORR-4, which is completed for youth at specific timepoints (e.g., at program entry, on the anniversary of their initial placement). Our data analysis focused on understanding what kind of information researchers can learn from the URM Program data, as well as on the characteristics of youth and services provided.

Appendix C provides more detail about data sources, study design, and methods.

ⁱ While there are only 22 URM programs across the country, two of these programs operate in two different locations in their state. Based on guidance from ORR, for the purposes of the survey of URM program directors, these two programs were given the opportunity for each location to separately respond to the survey. In total, the study team sought 24 survey responses from URM programs; one did not respond, resulting in a final sample of 23. More detail is available in Appendix C.

3. Characteristics of URM youth

URM youth are a diverse group. Understanding the characteristics of youth, including demographics, strengths, and needs, is important for understanding the services that programs provide and youth experiences in the program. In this chapter, we discuss the demographics of youth who entered the program between FY 2014 and FY 2018, based on our analysis of the URM Program data and how they have changed over time, as well as strengths and needs of youth that we learned about through the site visits and survey.

A. URM Program context over time

Since URM provider agencies began serving unaccompanied youth arriving from Southeast Asia in the late 1970s (which predated the federal program's founding in 1980), characteristics of youth entering the Program have changed. ORR, program staff, and stakeholders noted that constantly changing geopolitical circumstances around the world lead to these changes. Some more recent examples include an increase in Haitian youth arriving after the earthquake in Haiti in 2010, the increase in UACs crossing the United States-Mexico border in 2014, forced conscription and other factors in Eritrea leading to a large group of Eritrean youth arriving in 2015. These trends reflect refugee populations worldwide, with unaccompanied youth often identified as the most vulnerable among them.

In addition, reductions in the number of refugees entering the United States in recent years and restrictions on immigration from certain countries affected the number of youth coming into the Program from the overseas pathway. Because program capacity is limited, the changes in youth entering the Program through one pathway or eligibility type are often complemented by corresponding changes in the opposite direction in youth entering from other eligibility pathways. For example, the increase in refugees entering the program in 2015 was accompanied by a decrease in the number of SIJs, as programs could not accommodate large numbers of both groups.

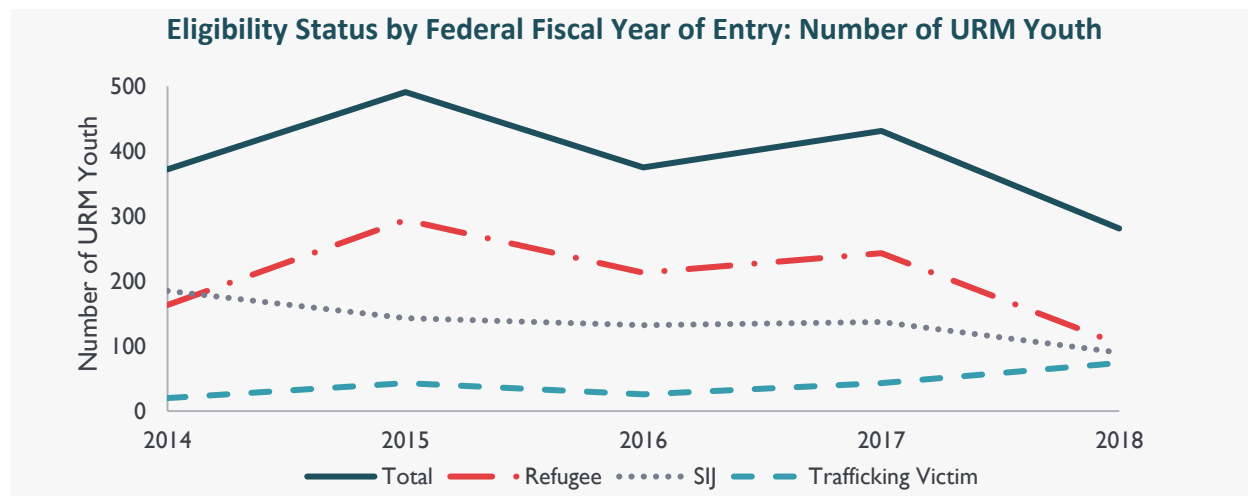
Eligibility for the URM Program has also changed over time, in particular through bipartisan legislation to extend services to new groups of youth. In 2000, the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) gave child victims of human trafficking eligibility for services and benefits to the same extent as refugees, which includes the URM Program. In 2002, with the passage of the Homeland Security Act, ORR became responsible for the care and custody of UACs (Congressional Research Services, 2019a). This laid the foundation for the expansion of URM eligibility in the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA) of 2008, which allowed youth from the UAC pathway with SIJ classification to enter the URM Program. The URM Program has adapted over time as a consequence of these changes.

B. Demographics

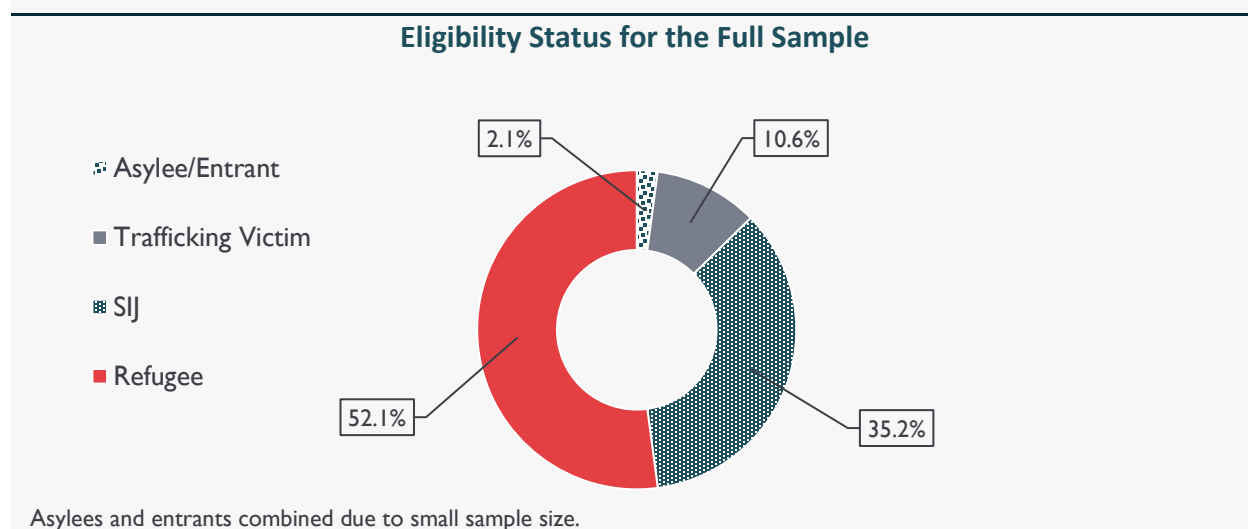
URM youth who entered the program from FY 2014 to FY 2018 came from over 50 countries of origin, represented over 100 ethnicities, and spoke over 80 primary languages. While the demographics for this group do not reflect the full history of youth in the URM Program, they show the makeup of youth who entered the program over the last several years and how it has changed over time. We combined country of origin and ethnicity into larger groups; details are available in Appendix C.

Youth entering the Program: From FY 2014 to FY 2018, 1,950 youth entered the Program, peaking in 2015 and generally decreasing over time, as shown in Exhibit 2.

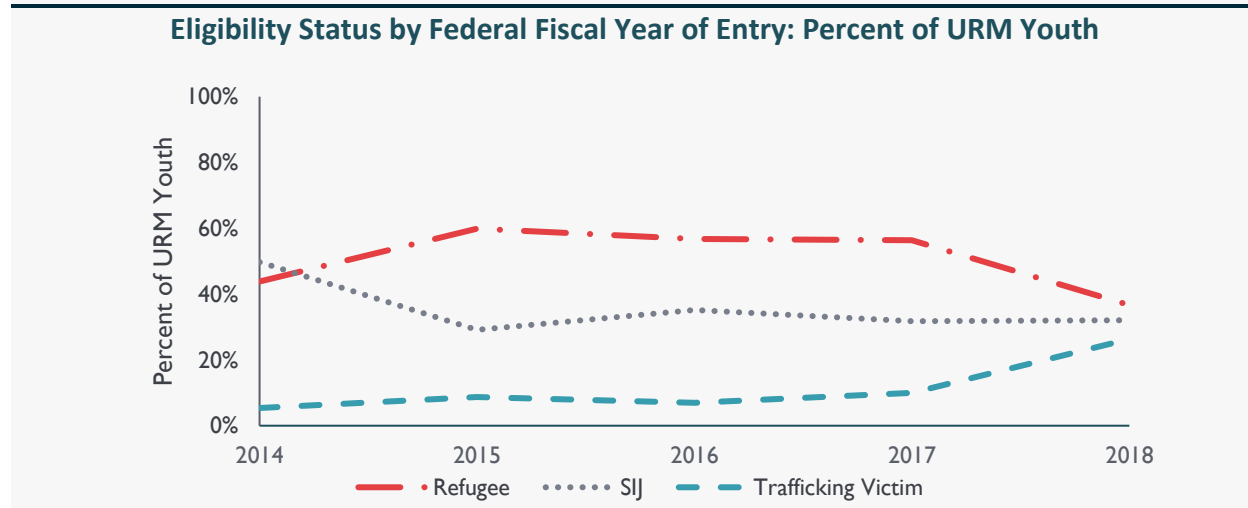
Exhibit 2. Eligibility status for entire sample and by Federal Fiscal Year of entry.



Individual lines for asylees and entrants excluded due to small sample size; however, both groups are included in the total.



Asylees and entrants combined due to small sample size.



Individual lines for asylees and entrants excluded due to small sample size.

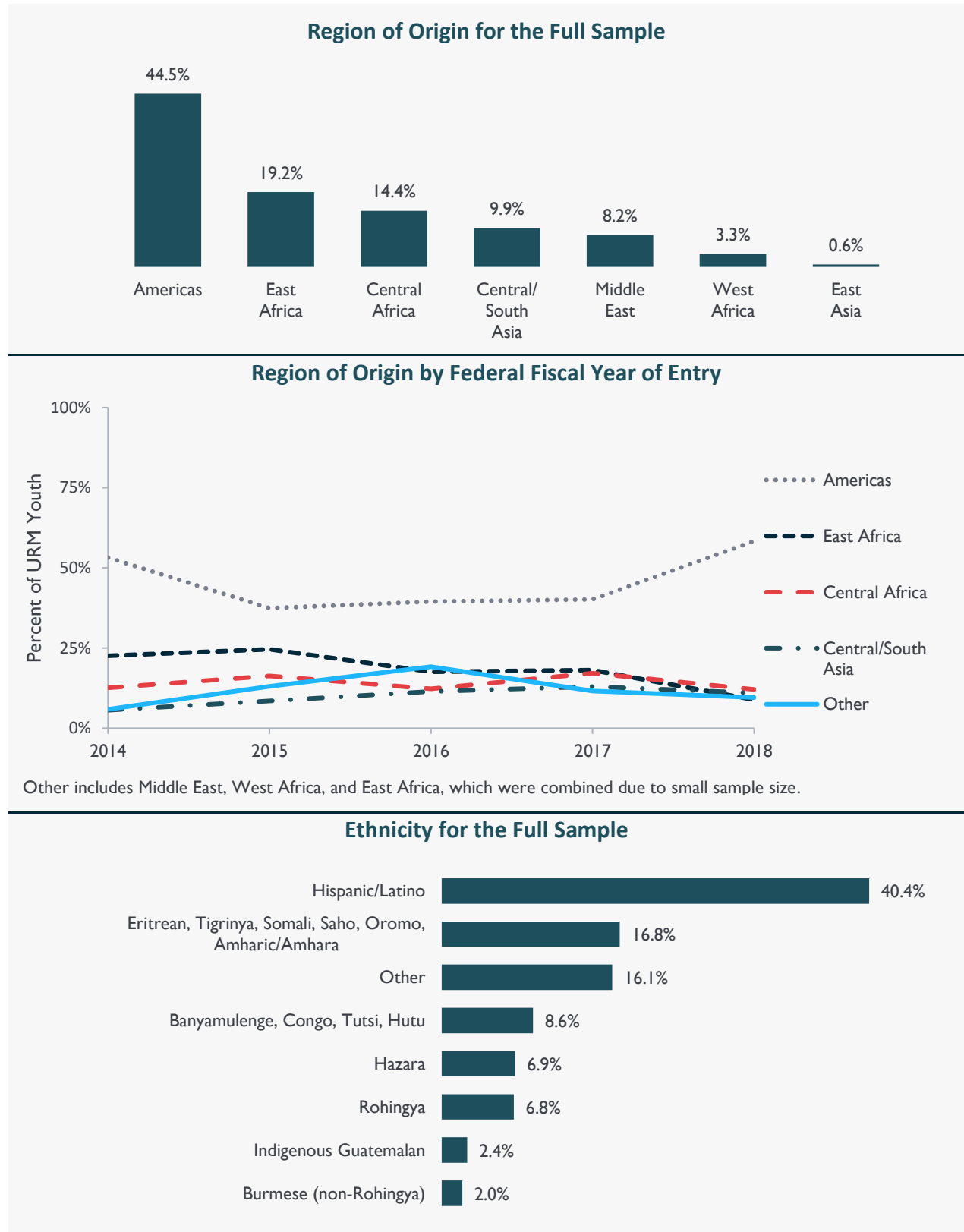
Note: This data is from original analysis of data from ORR’s Refugee Arrivals Data Systems (RADS). N = 1,950. To protect the identity of program participants, categories with fewer than 10 youth were combined with other categories or excluded where noted. SIJ stands for Special Immigration Juvenile.

Eligibility status: Over half of the FY 2014 to FY 2018 sample were refugees, as shown in Exhibit 2. While refugees made up the largest proportion of youth, the percentage of SIJs and trafficking victims increased during this time period. In 2018, SIJs, refugees, and victims of trafficking each made up to close to a third of youth entering the program (see Exhibit 2).

Region of origin: The largest proportion of youth for the full group and every year of entry during our timeframe came from the Americas (North, Central, and South America), at 44.5 percent for the whole period (Exhibit 3). Because many SIJs and victims of trafficking came from this region, the change in arrivals over time for this group is similar to that of SIJs and victims of trafficking. This is most visible between 2014 and 2015 when there was a decrease in SIJs entering the program, and between 2017 and 2018 when there was an increase in youth who were victims of trafficking entering the program. Youth from East Africa were the second largest group (19.2 percent), followed by youth from Central Africa.

Ethnicity: As with trends in representation of URM youth by region of origin, where large proportions of youth came from the Americas, trends in representation of URM youth by ethnicity groupings were largely driven by Hispanic/Latino URM youth who come from this region and who make up over 40 percent of the sample, shown in Exhibit 3. However, it is important to recognize that indigenous youth, many from Guatemala, also come from this region and may have very different experiences and needs from Hispanic/Latino youth. They make up 2.4 percent of this group. Eritrean, Tigrinya, Somali, Saho, Oromo, and Amharic/Amhara youth made up the second largest group, followed by youth in the “Other” category.

Exhibit 3. Region of origin and ethnicity for the full sample and by Federal Fiscal Year of entry.

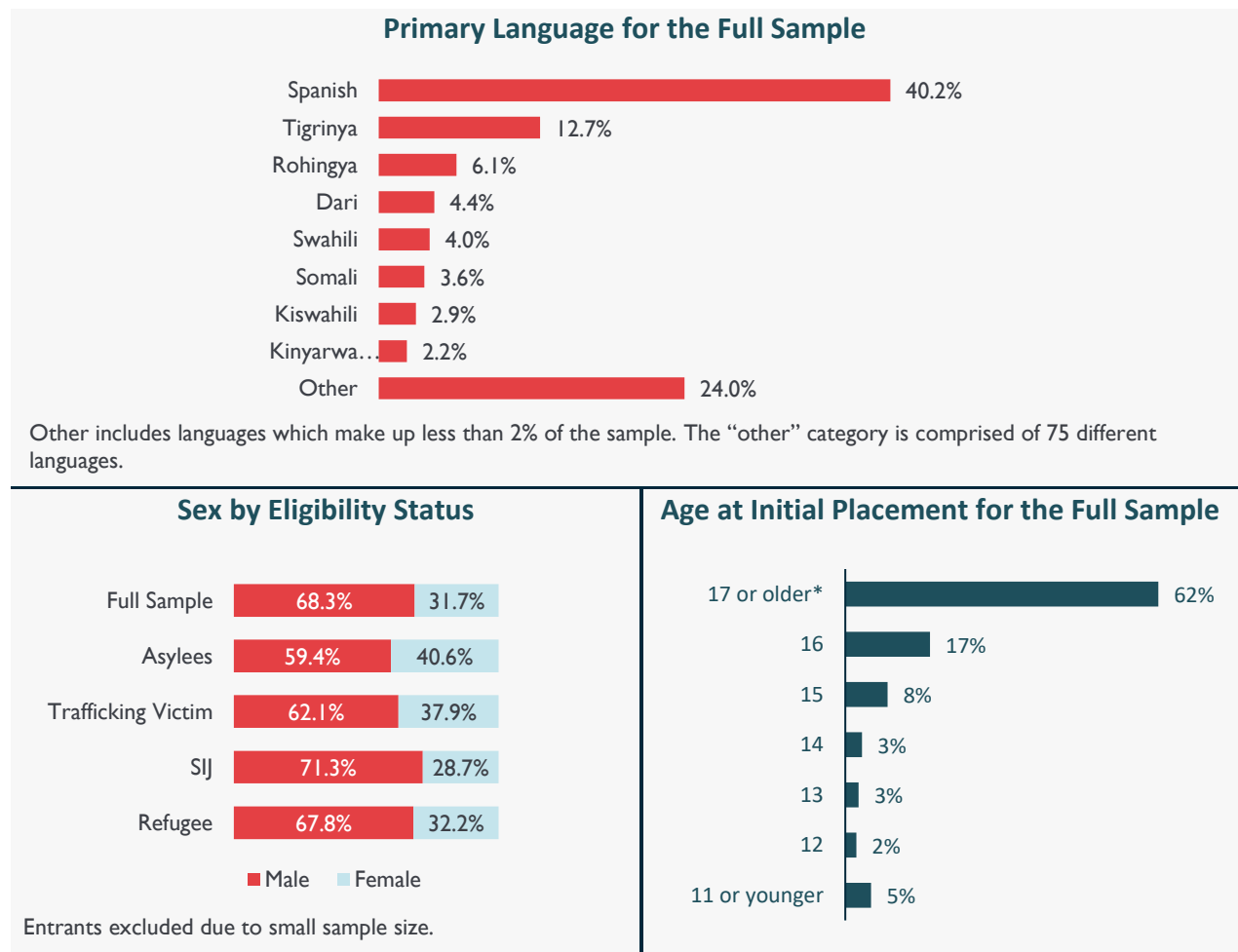


Note: This data is from an original analysis of data from ORR's Refugee Arrivals Data Systems (RADS). N = 1,950. To protect the identity of program participants, categories with fewer than 10 youth were combined with other categories or excluded where noted. Therefore, we collapsed countries of origin into global regions, based on guidance from ORR (see Appendix C). No youth came from Europe or Australia.

Language: Spanish was the most common primary language in our sample (see Exhibit 4). The changing percentage of URM youth with Spanish as their primary language follows similar trends of the proportion of youth entering the program who are Hispanic/Latino or from regions of origin where Spanish is spoken (not shown). Some youth from the Americas speak indigenous languages, which are included in the “Other” group.

Sex: As seen in Exhibit 4, the majority of URM youth who entered in FY 2014 to FY 2018 were male (68.3 percent). Compared with refugees and SIJs (32.2 and 28.7 percent, respectively), larger percentages of victims of trafficking and asylees were female (37.9 and 40.6 percent, respectively).

Exhibit 4. Primary language, sex, and age at initial placement for the full sample.



Note: This data is from an original analysis of data from ORR’s Refugee Arrivals Data Systems (RADS). N = 1,950. To protect the identity of program participants, categories with fewer than 10 youth were combined with other categories or excluded where noted. SIJ stands for Special Immigration Juvenile.

*On rare occasions, there is an age redetermination done after a youth enters the program that determines that they were 18 or older at entry (this does not change their program eligibility).

Age at initial placement: The average age of youth at initial placement in our sample was 16 years old, though over 60 percent of youth entering the program were 17 (shown in Exhibit 4). Even though most youth (over 85 percent) were over the age of 15 upon arrival, some youth were as young as two years old. On average, refugees were 15.3 years old, while SIJs, victims of trafficking, and asylees were 16.7 years old. There were very few young children in the sample; fewer than 10 children in our sample were under the age of six when they entered the Program.

C. Youth strengths and needs

In addition to being demographically diverse, URM youth arrive in the United States with a variety of strengths and needs, as we learned through our interviews, focus groups, and surveys. Although site visit interviews and surveys confirmed the wide spectrum of youth experiences, consistent themes emerged. Program staff and foster parents said that youth bring strength and resilience, developed before, during, and after their journey to the United States. At the same time, URM youth present a unique combination of needs, with both similarities and differences to other vulnerable populations, such as youth in domestic foster care, recent immigrants, and refugee youth who resettle to the United States with families.

3.C.1. Strengths

Program and partner staff described youth as resilient, goal-oriented, and hardworking. They also noted that youth are committed to their families, friends, and communities. On our survey, in open-ended responses, program directors similarly described URM youth as resilient, hardworking, family/community-minded, quick and dedicated learners, and goal-oriented.

Program staff, foster parents, and youth themselves consistently described URM youth as focused on achieving their goals, especially those related to education and employment. While most youth mentioned employment as a long-term goal in focus groups, several youth expressed an interest in postsecondary education. Youth reported wanting to become nurses and doctors, chefs, professional soccer players, lawyers, public speakers, published authors, tech developers, flight attendants, and more. Some program staff reported during site visits that refugees are more likely to be interested in pursuing higher education, while youth from the former UAC pathway are more often interested in prioritizing employment over education. Some program staff and youth reported that, in some cases, this desire to work stems from motivation to provide financial resources to families in their home countries.



URM youth reported wanting to become nurses and doctors, chefs, professional soccer players, lawyers, public speakers, published authors, tech developers, flight attendants, and more.

Some youth can draw on their relatives for a range of support. On site visits, some program staff reported that, while most youth do not have family in the United States, many stay connected to relatives via WhatsApp and social media. They noted that these relationships can be a source of strength and cultural connection for youth. In addition, staff at sites visited reported that URM youth are dedicated to their communities and develop networks of support for themselves and others.

3.C.2. Needs

While URM youth arrive with strengths that help them succeed, they also arrive with diverse needs, especially given the traumatic experiences they may have experienced before entering the URM Program.

Mental health. Many program staff, partner staff, and foster parents identified culturally responsive, high-quality mental health care as an acute need for URM youth across all types of eligibility categories. In open-ended responses on the survey, several program directors mentioned mental health services as a key need. Some staff from programs visited said that URM youth are diagnosed with mental health conditions at high rates, with posttraumatic stress disorder, adjustment disorder, and depression among the most common. Youth may have experienced traumatic events before,

during, and after their migration to the United States, including torture, rape, harassment, or witnessing violence against family and community members. While the cause and effects of trauma may vary, staff reported that all URM youth experience disruptions in and separation from families, friends, and communities, as well as from their native languages and cultures. URM program staff reported that youth's traumatic experiences and how recently they occurred vary based on youth characteristics, such as eligibility status or country of origin. For example, a program staff member reported that youth who entered the program with refugee status had primarily experienced traumatic events several years prior to arrival in the United States (prior to arrival at a refugee camp), while youth who originally entered the United States as UACs may have experienced traumatic events immediately prior to entering the URM Program. However, staff also described that experiences of traumatic events can vary widely among youth based on their unique circumstances. ORR, as well as interviewees at multiple sites we visited, reported anecdotally that there are more youth arriving with more complex mental health needs than in the past. More information about youth mental health is included in the Special Topic Report: *Youth Mental Health in the Unaccompanied Refugee Minors Program*.

Education and English language support. URM program staff across all sites visited said that most URM youth have experienced interruptions in formal education or stopped attending school at young ages. URM youth arrive in the United States with a variety of literacy, numeracy, and language skills. Some youth are not literate in their native language(s), and a few speak languages that do not have written forms. Others arrive already speaking English.

URM program staff, partner staff, foster parents, and youth themselves identified English language acquisition as a key need and challenge for URM youth. Staff said that learning English has implications not only for how youth perform in school and progress to graduation, but also for how well they connect with foster families, make friends, understand rules, participate in activities, and gain employment.

As a result of interrupted formal education and limited English skills upon arrival, program staff said that many URM youth need additional supports to be successful in school and learn English. Aside from support in learning English, staff also reported youth may need support with curriculum content and understanding the structure and progression of the U.S. education system.

Physical health. URM youth often enter the Program in need of routine or preventative medical or dental care. Staff from most programs visited reported that youth rarely arrive to the URM Program with acute physical health issues such as physical disabilities or chronic conditions requiring intensive medical care. While some programs may have limited capacity to serve youth with acute needs (and therefore do not accept such referrals), others can accept these referrals to the extent they have placements available that can support youth with severe medical needs. Some program staff interviewed also mentioned that some youth enter the program pregnant or with HIV. All URM provider agencies partner with local health providers to meet the health needs of youth as they arise. URM program staff in a few sites said URM youth may not be accustomed to preventative or routine medical care or dental care.

Immigration status support. As described above, not all URM youth have the same legal status or chance to pursue legal permanent residency. In open-ended responses question on the survey, some program directors mentioned legal assistance, particularly related to immigration status, as the most common need for URM youth. Program staff at sites visited said that some youth need additional support to apply for legal status and to cope with stress and uncertainty as they wait for approval.

Some former UACs are admitted into the URM Program while they wait for their SIJ visa applications to be processed. During this waiting period, these URM youth receive all URM Program services but do not have authorization to work. This can be especially challenging for these youth

because some program staff described former UACs as more driven to work and send money to families in their home countries. As some program directors reported on the survey, in some states, youth who are former UACs may also be ineligible for some public benefits, such as Medicaid.

Some URM program staff said that this stress of “living in limbo” until gaining work authorization means that some former UAC youth do not have the same level of security as overseas refugees, which contributes to a sense of impermanence, fears of deportation, and general anxiety. Some program directors reported on the survey that the lack of employment authorization can cause anxiety as the youth cannot make long-term plans or build self-sufficiency.

4. URM Program services and benefits

URM youth receive program services as soon as they arrive in the United States (or enter the URM Program if they are already in the United States). URM programs recruit, train, and license foster families and maintain relationships with placement providers, like group homes, on an ongoing basis. After youth enter the Program, services are provided until they exit the Program, which often occurs at their state’s age of emancipation. In this chapter, we describe the activities that occur before and immediately after a youth’s arrival in the program, the services URM programs offer to youth after they have entered the program, contextual factors that influence service implementation and access to services, and how programs implement services and arrange for placements, including successes, challenges, and youth and foster parent experiences.

A. Pre-arrival and arrival activities

The pre-arrival and arrival activities that URM programs and youth engage in provide an important backdrop for the services youth receive once they enter the program. This section discusses foster parent recruitment, training, and licensing; the process by which youth are placed in a local URM program; and the services provided shortly after arrival.

4.A.1. Foster parent recruitment and training

URM programs recruit, train, and license foster parents to serve as caregivers for URM youth. Foster parent recruitment is an important component of the program as the majority of URM youth are initially placed in a family-based foster home upon their arrival in the URM program. This section provides an overview of the recruitment and training procedures, while the Placements section (Section 4.D.2) discusses the implementation, challenges, and innovative practices.

Recruitment of foster families

URM programs described using recruitment methods similar to those used in domestic foster care, including word of mouth referrals, online ads (e.g., Facebook), and community outreach through churches or other community partners. On the survey, URM programs identified referrals through other families (74 percent of programs), recruitment events (70 percent), and partnerships with religious organizations (57 percent) as the most successful recruitment strategies. The vast majority of URM program directors (91 percent) reported that they had at least one program staff member dedicated to recruiting, licensing, and/or supporting foster families. This role includes conducting outreach to identify potential foster parents, holding information sessions and trainings, and working with families to complete licensing requirements.

Many program staff said they try to recruit families who share the same culture, religion, and/or language as URM youth, as they feel this helps youth maintain connections with their heritage, which is a URM Program goal. However, staff at multiple URM programs visited described challenges in doing so. Some program staff said that their agencies are increasing outreach to certain communities and/or partnering with local culturally- or faith-based community organizations or groups to increase the diversity of their foster parent pool.

In focus groups, foster parents expressed a variety of motivations for becoming URM foster parents, including religious reasons, experience as a refugee and desire to “give back,” responding to a need in and a commitment to serving their community, and looking to expand or build a family of their own. Some had already been foster parents in the domestic system. In some cases, URM youth have a relative in the United States who may become a licensed foster parent to care for their URM youth family member.

For four of the programs we visited that also have UAC and/or domestic foster care programs, staff reported recruiting, training, and/or licensing families for multiple programs to create efficiencies in training, so they can be flexible in responding to youth’s needs across programs.

Training and approval

URM foster families must meet the same training, licensing, and monitoring requirements that parents in the domestic foster care system must meet. To become licensed as a foster home, caregivers must complete required trainings, at least one home study, an interview, paperwork, and a background check. For the six sites visited, program staff reported that it takes families as little as one month and as long as one year to complete the licensing process, though most are licensed within three to six months. Differences depend on state requirements and families’ speed of completing approval steps.

URM program staff and families said that while the state-required training is helpful, much of it is not

Practice Highlight: UAC to URM continuation



Two of the URM programs visited operate both UAC programs and URM programs. In these arrangements, UAC youth are often placed in long-term family-based foster care while their legal case is pending. Both URM programs described this arrangement as allowing for continuity of care, as youth can stay with the same foster family even as they technically transition from the UAC program to the URM Program.

Practice Highlight: Foster Parent Advisory Group



At Bethany Christian Services, based in Grand Rapids MI, a foster parent advisory group helps the URM program recruit new foster parents. The advisory group makes recommendations for recruitment events and outreach materials, while also supporting foster parent training and retention. For example, as a recruitment event the group has plans to facilitate cooking classes focused on food from youth’s home countries and asks foster parent attendees to bring a friend. The group also recommended incorporating foster parents’ biological children into trainings to improve families’ preparedness.

directly relevant to URM youth. On the survey, nearly all programs surveyed (21 out of 23) reported that they require foster families to participate in additional training beyond state requirements, including cultural sensitivity training, specialized sessions on fostering refugee youth, or trauma-informed care training. To address this need, some of the six programs visited by the research team develop their own training materials and invite speakers and community members to participate in training. Some foster parents in the focus groups reported that they conducted research on their own to learn about URM

youth's cultures. Some also said that they learned from their own experiences that it is very challenging to truly to prepare for the URM youth's potential needs.

Program staff reported that families must undergo formal monitoring and complete additional training on a regular basis, most often annually, based on state requirements. The programs we visited provide opportunities for families to fulfill training hours through program activities.

4.A.2. Referral and placement processes

The process for referring and accepting youth into the URM Program varies by eligibility category (see Appendix B). DOS and the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration provide initial referral information to the resettlement agencies (LIRS or USCCB), which then facilitate placement with local URM providers in their networks. For youth who are identified while they are living in another country, the referral information includes a brief description of the youth's family and migration history, education background, and health. For youth identified in the United States while in ORR custody, resettlement agencies may receive more detailed information gathered by UAC care providers.

In deciding whether to accept a referral, URM program staff in all sites visited said they consider available placement openings and the physical and mental health needs of the youth. Before accepting a referral while youth are still overseas or in ORR custody, program staff must identify a placement and confirm that the caregiver is willing and able to provide a placement. During the site visits, URM program staff said that the referral information they receive about youth is often limited and occasionally incorrect, so they prepare foster parents for the possibility of URM youth arriving with unanticipated needs.

The referral process can pose challenges for programs and potential foster families. Multiple URM programs may work simultaneously to find placements for the same URM youth. In these cases, one program may decide to accept a referral, only to have another program confirm the placement first. In addition, URM programs visited reported wide variation in the amount of time between identifying a potential URM youth for placement and the youth arriving; for UAC youth transferring locally, it can be very quick. However, it can be up to one year for youth arriving from other countries due to delays in approval processes. Staff at the programs visited said that this variation makes it challenging for URM programs to prepare foster families for placements and to keep them engaged during a long waiting period.

Arrival and initial services

URM program case managers reported that they begin serving URM youth as soon as they arrive. For those arriving from overseas or a different city, the URM case managers meet the youth at the airport and take them to their placement. Sometimes URM foster parents and/or public child welfare agency case managers join URM staff at the airport. When former UACs transfer within the same city or same provider agency, they often stay with the same foster family.

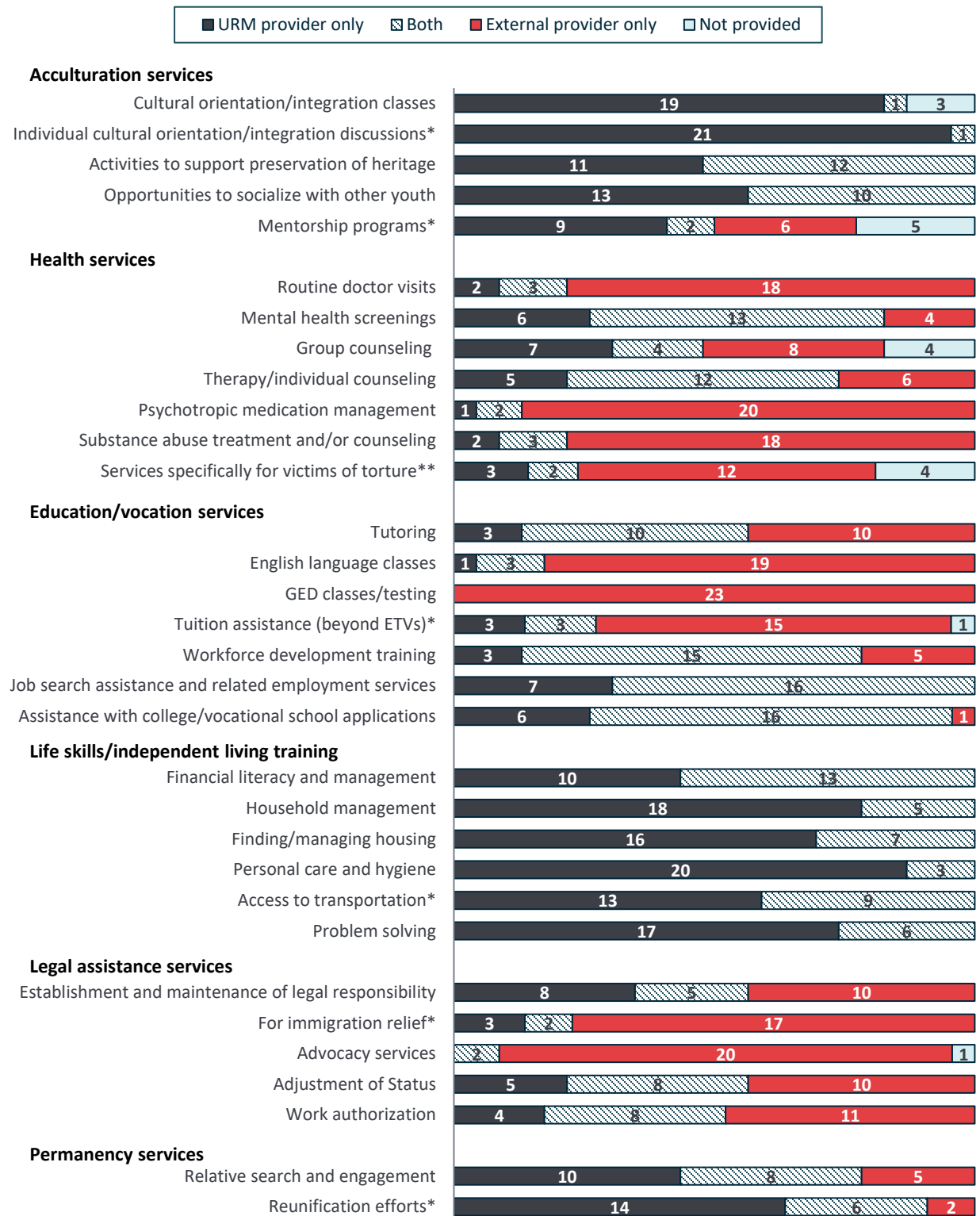
In the youth's first days in the program, case managers make sure youth go through the required initial processes within timelines required by state child welfare systems, including school enrollment, medical and dental screening and services, immunizations, applying for identification, and initial needs assessments. While all URM youth receive the same initial services, the funding for those services may differ among youth of different eligibility categories. For example, refugee youth arriving from overseas receive reception and placement funding from DOS, which case managers may use to help the youth shop for clothes, food, and school supplies.

Shortly after arrival, case managers also ensure legal custody is established for the youth. Depending on the state's custody arrangement, program staff may need to petition for guardianship and file for dependency or coordinate with the state's public child welfare agency to handle the dependency. Dependency must be established before the youth turns 18, and therefore needs to happen quickly in many cases. Some programs have taken steps to expedite this process. For example, the Seattle URM program has developed an efficient process to establish dependency for URM youth, which the program staff described as being based on strong relationships with the court and attorneys, advocacy by program staff, and willingness among placement providers to accept referrals for URM youth with little advance notice. As a result, the program can accept referrals for youth who are quickly approaching their 18th birthday and who otherwise may not be able to enter the URM Program due to their age.

B. Services and living arrangements offered by the URM Program

The program director survey asked about the types of services that programs provide. Because URM programs must offer the same range of services as the domestic child welfare system, we found relatively little variation in the types of services and living arrangement types offered. Exhibit 5 and Exhibit 6 show the services and living arrangements, respectively, that URM program directors reported providing on the survey. These exhibits also break down whether each service or living arrangement is provided by programs internally, externally, or both.

Exhibit 5. URM Program service offerings



Source: Program Director Survey. *1 response missing; **2 responses missing. Program directors reported whether their services were offered internally, through an external provider, or whether the service was not available at their program. ETV stands for Education and Training Vouchers.

Overview of living arrangement types

Family-based foster care: Family-based settings with foster parents who have been licensed by the state.

Kinship/relative foster care: Family-based settings with relatives or other kin (e.g., close family friend). The licensure of relative caregivers depends on the state of residence.

Group homes: Licensed care facilities that provide 24-hour care for small groups of youth (e.g., youth ages 7 to 12).

Therapeutic foster care: Family-based settings in which foster parents have received special training on how to care for youth with more serious mental or behavioral health needs.

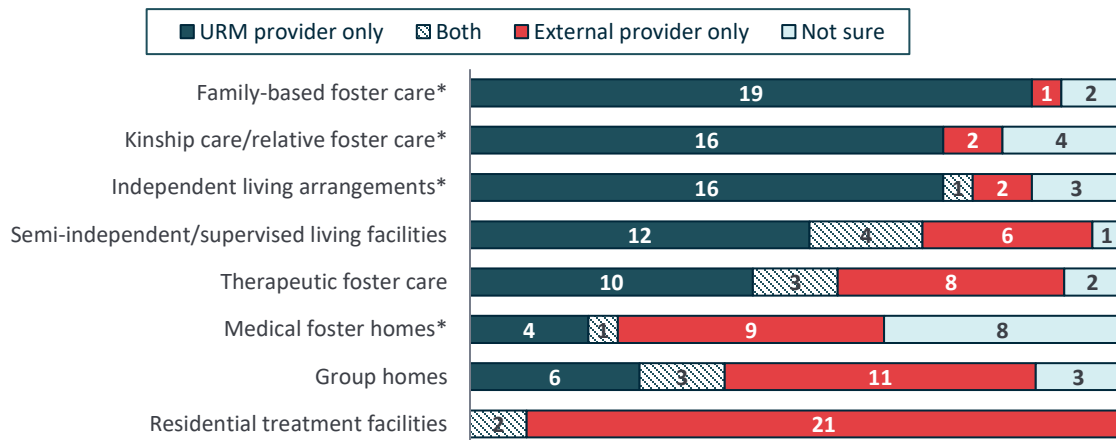
Semi-independent living arrangement: Arrangements that provide the opportunity for increased responsibility for self-care. Youth are still under the supervision and care of the agency, with reduced adult supervision (i.e., less than 24-hour supervision). For example, youth may reside in a small apartment complex run by the agency where youth live in their own apartments but have a curfew or other requirements for living there (e.g., attending group meetings or trainings).

Independent living arrangement: Youth are still under the supervision and care of the agency but live independently without adult supervision. In such arrangements, youth are responsible for making sure all their bills and expenses are paid, even if it is through stipends from the agency.

Medical foster homes: Family-based settings in which foster parents have received special training on how to care for youth with more serious medical needs.

Residential treatment facilities: Care facilities that provide 24-hour care and treatment for youth with more serious medical or mental health needs that cannot be met in family-based settings.

Exhibit 6. URM Program living arrangement offerings.



Source: Program Director Survey. *1 response missing. Program directors reported whether living arrangements were available internally through the URM provider, through an external provider, or whether they were not sure if the living arrangement was offered at their program.

Programs offer a wide range of services to URM youth. Nearly every URM program director surveyed reported providing services related to acculturation, health, education/vocation, life skills and independent living training, legal assistance, and permanency. Within these categories of services, some were less frequently provided than others, though most types of services were still offered by most programs, either internally or externally. For example, all programs reported offering some type of acculturation services, but only 17 program directors surveyed reported offering mentoring services (which is considered a type of acculturation service).

URM programs also offer many types of living arrangements, which mirror those offered in the domestic foster care system. See the “Overview of Living Arrangements” text box for definitions of these different living arrangement types. Nearly all URM programs reported offering family-based foster care, therapeutic foster care, relative foster care/kinship care, semi-independent living, residential treatment facilities, group homes, and independent living arrangements. Only two-thirds of programs reported that medical foster homes were available either internally or through an external provider. The remaining one-third of programs reported that they were not sure.

URM programs provide services and living arrangements directly, using in-house resources, or externally through partner organizations. In-house services were provided not only by the URM program, but also by other programs within the same umbrella provider agencies that operate URM programs. In general, programs partnered with external providers to offer services that require specific expertise or facilities, such as doctor visits, medication management, GED classes/testing, or legal assistance.

Most programs that reported offering family-based foster care, relative foster care, and independent living arrangements offered these internally, while almost all programs who offered placements in residential treatment facilities reported working with an external provider for these placements. This is to be expected, as residential treatment facilities require special licensing and permits to operate. While nearly all programs reported being able to offer a variety of living arrangements, there was variation in how often programs utilize these different settings and the ease with which they can access them. This will be described further in Section 4.D.2 (Placements).

C. URM Program service context

The different local and state environments in which URM programs operate affect how programs deliver services. Building off the discussion of the services and living arrangements URM programs offer, this section discusses important contextual factors that influence how URM programs deliver the services and offer living arrangements, as well as how youth experience services. This section provides key context for the discussion of service implementation in Section 4.D. We also discuss these factors as they relate to each service.

4.C.1. Child welfare custody arrangements

Surveys and site visits revealed that one of the main distinctions among URM programs in different states is the custody arrangement between child welfare agencies and URM provider agencies. As noted earlier in the report, federal regulations require URM programs to provide the same range of services provided by the state’s domestic child welfare program regardless of whether they have private or public custody arrangements. As a result, there are not any overall differences in the type or intensity of services between programs in the two types of custody arrangements. However, custody arrangements affect how URM programs provide those services and how some services are funded.

Relationship with child welfare agency. According to survey respondents, URM programs with public custody arrangements interact more frequently with the child welfare agency than programs with private custody arrangements. This likely reflects that in states with public custody



Private custody arrangement:

Youth are in the custody of the URM provider agency.

Public custody arrangement:

Youth are in the custody of the state or county in which the program is located, like youth in the domestic foster care system.

arrangements, the child welfare agency maintains custody and legal responsibility for youth and therefore plays a more prominent role in providing services and monitoring youth. Interviews with program staff supported this finding.

The role of child welfare agencies in states with private custody arrangements is more administrative; agencies license the URM provider agencies as child-placing agencies and/or directly license foster homes (which agencies also do in states with public custody arrangements). In open-ended responses, survey respondents from states with private custody arrangements reported that child welfare agencies may also provide technical assistance or guidance to the URM program or refugee services offices on child welfare policy.

In contrast, surveys and site visits suggest child welfare agencies in states with public custody arrangements monitor youth well-being and provide case management to URM youth more frequently than in states with private custody arrangements. Child welfare agency administrators interviewed reported that their staff is involved in providing approvals or accessing services (e.g., access to federal funds to support school stability), since the child welfare agency has legal custody of the youth. The site visits and child welfare administrator interviews revealed a range of roles played by child welfare agency staff, from assigning case managers to youth in some states to more monitoring-focused activities (e.g., re-licensing foster families) in others.

Funding sources. The funding sources for URM services also differ by custody arrangement, particularly for services and benefits to support a successful transition to adulthood (“transition services”) and Education and Training Vouchers (ETVs). In the domestic foster care system, these services are commonly funded through the Chafee program (See Section 2.C. Funding). In states with private custody arrangements, URM youth are not eligible to receive transition services or ETVs through Chafee because they are not in the custody of the public child welfare agency. In those cases, to ensure the same range of services provided in the domestic child welfare system, URM provider agencies use ORR funding or other funding sources (e.g., state-funded programs) to provide transition services and ETVs. Our survey confirmed that these services are more likely to be solely funded by ORR in states with private custody arrangements, and solely funded by Chafee funds in states with public custody arrangements. However, there are instances in which funds from ORR and other sources help cover these costs in states with public custody arrangements. For example, since Chafee is a capped entitlement, states may run out of funding for ETVs before all eligible youth, including URM youth, can access them. To ensure the same range of services provided in the domestic foster care system, programs provide URM youth with ETVs through other funding sources.

4.C.2. Other state and local policies

State and local policies affect the way URM programs operate and impact the services that URM youth can receive. Two examples are court procedures and eligibility for Medicaid.

- **Court.** Court procedures, which vary across states and counties, impact the process by which URM programs gain custody of URM youth, and can consequently also affect where URM

youth are placed. For example, the local court in Kent County, MI—the county that includes Grand Rapids—does not accept youth within three months of turning 18. The URM program in Grand Rapids places former UAC youth entering the program who are in this age range in a different county in Michigan.

- **Eligibility for Medicaid.** State policies outline eligibility rules for Medicaid, which can impact the health services youth receive in their communities. Regarding health services, several survey respondents noted gaps in the types of services covered or in whether Medicaid services were available to former UAC youth (Medicaid policies regarding immigrants differ by state). Because youth's eligibility for health coverage impacts the doctors they can visit and the services they can receive, URM case managers must keep track of local providers accepting different types of coverage (e.g., Medicaid) when helping youth access health services.

In addition, and as noted throughout this report, each URM program is supposed to offer the same range of services as its state's domestic child welfare system. One example is that states have different policies outlining options for youth in foster care to continue living in an out-of-home care placement past the age of 18. As a result, some URM youth have the option to continue living in their foster home or other placement until they reach their state's maximum age to receive services from a child welfare provider agency. While the maximum age is 21 in most states, some states extend services for youth in foster care to older ages.

4.C.3. Local context

Our site visits provided insight into the ways local context affects URM programs. Each program we visited is in an area with large and diverse refugee and/or immigrant populations, though the make-up of these groups varies within and across the regions they serve. All six URM programs found their surrounding communities generally supportive of refugees and immigrants. (The survey showed this held true more broadly; of the 21 program directors who responded to a question asking if community sentiment toward refugees and immigrants was a challenge, only four reported that it was.)

Each site also described local refugee and immigrant populations that overlapped with the cultural backgrounds of the youth in their program, though not every culture is represented in each site. The cultural groups present in each area can provide resources for URM programs to help foster connections between youth and their religious and cultural heritage. However, some groups of URM youth live in communities that do not have populations or community groups that match their cultural background.

Another way in which local context can affect how URM programs serve youth are local economic factors. Program staff did not report many economically driven challenges, such as finding jobs for older youth. This may have occurred in part because the site visits occurred during a strong economy. However, some programs reported high rents and costs of living. For example, as rents have risen in Seattle, fewer foster families live in the city than before. Staff noted that as people move further out, youth may become more isolated from each other and their communities.

D. How programs provide services and URM youth access services

While the array of services and living arrangements that URM programs offer does not vary widely, we found that programs implement these services and living arrangements in different ways. This section describes findings from the site visits and survey about different approaches to service

provision, innovative practices, challenges, and youth experiences in the program. We start with case management, then discuss placements and living arrangements, independent living skills, connections to cultural heritage and religion, education, mental health, legal services, health services, and other services. We conclude with a brief description of what we learned about youth experiences after leaving the program.

4.D.1. Case management

Case managers have primary responsibility for ensuring youth’s well-being and that youth receive services. URM case managers share many of the same responsibilities as case managers in the domestic foster care system, but they are also responsible for helping URM youth maintain connections with their culture and heritage. Similar to domestic foster care case managers, they also provide crisis support, which means they are available at all hours to address emergencies. Both foster parents and youth discussed appreciating case managers for their responsiveness and availability.

Case managers serve as liaisons to youth’s schools, lawyers, and other services. In states with public custody arrangements, URM youth are also assigned to a case manager from the public child welfare agency. In these cases, URM case managers work in partnership with the public agency case managers to ensure each youth’s well-being.

Staffing

Caseloads vary by URM program but are generally low compared to domestic child welfare systems. Caseloads among sites visited ranged from about 10 to 14, compared to previous national estimates of 24 to 31 in the domestic system (Whitaker et al., 2004). In some URM provider agencies, the URM program is under the same umbrella as their UAC or domestic foster care programs. In some instances, case managers have mixed caseloads of UACs and URM youth or URM and youth in domestic foster care. Caseloads may be lower for case managers with youth in therapeutic foster care on their caseloads.

Social work credentials, trainings, and requirements for being a case manager vary by URM provider agency. One program visited requires case managers to be licensed social workers, which enables them to provide clinical case management, while another requires that all case managers are Masters’ level social workers. While most case managers in programs visited did not have cultural backgrounds that matched the youth they serve, one program discussed efforts to recruit staff who share common languages or immigration experiences with URM youth.

Several URM programs have case managers or other staff providing case management services specifically for group homes or for youth in independent living arrangements. For example, one site has two case managers and one supervisor specifically dedicated to providing independent living services. In another program, case managers who work with the youth in transitional independent living situations are not required to be licensed clinical social workers, as the services they provide are expected to be less intensive than services provided to youth who do not yet live independently.

Ongoing support and monitoring

Case managers have regular contact with youth, both as part of standard case management and to adhere to state regulations. This includes home visits, phone calls and texts, in-person meetings with URM youth at program offices, and responding to needs and challenges that arise. Staff at one site described their approach as “youth-driven” and aimed at helping youth make decisions and supporting them as they execute those decisions. A URM youth described their experience in



Caseloads among sites visited ranged from 10 to 14 youth per case manager.

working with staff: “[Program staff] respect your decision. They never force you to do something you don’t want to do.” Case managers across multiple sites also described providing ad hoc support in the form of transportation to cultural resources, events, or grocery stores that sell food from the youth’s home country.

Case managers support youth through ad hoc outreach as well as regular check-in meetings, sometimes called “treatment team meetings,” in which case managers meet with URM youth, foster parents, and other staff or service providers as necessary, such as case managers from the public child welfare agency. These team meetings also allow case managers to check in with URM youth on goals and challenges and mediate any issues between youth and foster families, such as disagreements about house rules.

Youth applying for SIJ classification, trafficking visas, work authorization, or other statuses require legal support to process their cases. URM case managers work with legal partners and local courts, coordinating logistics and providing information to lawyers, and provide emotional support to youth. For example, case managers said that many URM youth experience anxiety and stress about their pending legal cases, especially regarding delays to work authorization approval. Case managers help youth manage the emotional burden of this uncertainty and inability to earn income, and in some cases, may help them find educational or volunteer activities to participate in while they await work authorization.

Case managers and program staff also work with youth to establish and work towards permanency goals and long-term living plans that may include emancipation, adoption, or family tracing and reunification, if possible. As with the domestic child welfare system, federal regulations require that URM program staff try to identify family members in the United States and pursue reunification if they find a family member. Program staff reported that it was rare for them to identify a family member in the United States with whom a youth could be placed, but some youth have family members in the United States with whom they stay in contact. One program said it is more common for former UACs to have family in the United States than it is for refugees, but these family members are often distant relatives.



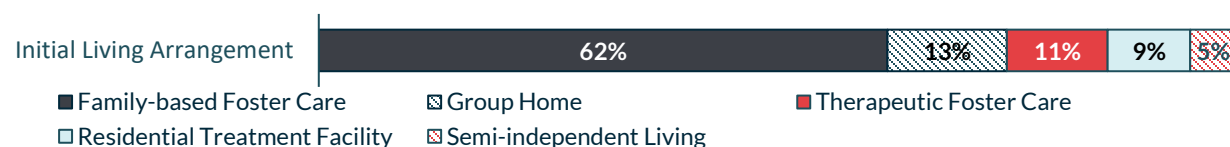
“[Program staff] respect your decision. They never force you to do something you don’t want to do.”

– URM youth

4.D.2. Placements

Out-of-home care placements are central to the URM Program; URM programs place all youth in a placement that aligns with their specific needs. Providers must coordinate individual youth’s needs and goals with available placements when youth enter the program and as needed throughout their stay in the program. In this section, we discuss how programs identify placements for youth, the different types of living arrangements that programs utilize, and youth and foster parent experiences. To provide context for the discussion to follow, Exhibit 7 shows the distribution of initial living arrangements for youth in our sample. The most common living arrangement upon arrival is family-based foster care (over 60 percent of youth), followed by group homes, and therapeutic foster care.

Exhibit 7. Initial living arrangements for URM youth who entered in FY 2014-FY 2018



Note: The source is an original analysis of data from ORR’s Refugee Arrivals Data Systems (RADS). N = 1,950. To protect the identity of program participants, categories with fewer than 10 youth were combined with other categories or excluded where noted. Note that some states define living arrangement types in different ways, which can lead to variation in how programs report living arrangement types.

Identifying and changing placements

While the types of living arrangement *available* to youth do not vary widely among programs (see Section 4.B), during our site visits we learned that programs vary in how they *utilize* living arrangements; provider agencies typically use only a subset of the types of placements they may have access to. Similar to the domestic foster care system, URM programs try to place youth in the least restrictive setting possible (i.e., the most family-like setting). As a result, they use restrictive living arrangements like residential treatment less frequently than others, and they move youth out of these placements into less restrictive settings, such as family-based foster care, as soon as they can. In this section, we discuss how URM program staff identify placements for URM youth, as well as how staff, youth, and foster parents determine when a placement change is needed.

Identifying placements

When identifying an appropriate placement, program staff reported that they consider the needs of the youth and the characteristics of available placements, including level of care, schools, and the placements' requirements. As noted in Section 4.A.2, programs must identify an available placement for youth before accepting a referral. The programs we visited involved multiple staff members in these decisions, such as the case manager, the staff member that works with and licenses foster parents, program supervisors, and the program director.

Program staff and youth also noted that staff incorporate youth preferences in selecting a placement when they can, though doing so is less feasible for youth entering the program from overseas, as there is less opportunity to engage these youth about their preferences than there is for youth entering the program from within the United States. Multiple focus group participants reported having a say in their placement decisions, such as staying in a group home versus living with a foster family. One foster parent described their experience with how URM program staff match youth and families: “Our son who came from the group home wanted a different educational path and wanted to be part of a family. They try to think of a family that will fit that kid, whatever they are looking for.”



“Our son who came from the group home wanted a different educational path and wanted to be part of a family. They try to think of a family that will fit that kid, whatever they are looking for.”

– URM foster parent

Changing placements

On our site visits, program staff said that they strive to help youth stay in the same placement, with the exception of transitioning to semi- or independent living or moving to a less restrictive setting. Youth and their team (e.g., case managers, licensing specialist, foster parents) work together to determine whether a placement change is needed. Youth may change placements for a variety of reasons:

- **Transition to foster home after initial placement:** Some programs initially place youth in group homes to secure their place in the program before transitioning them to a foster home later.
- **Transition to independent living:** In a similar vein, youth can transition to living on their own after turning 18.
- **Placement disruptions or challenges:** Some placements are not a good fit, resulting in challenges or placement disruptions. However, some programs we visited reported that such placement changes are rare. Youth may present new needs after they arrive, necessitating a

move to a placement that is a better fit (such as a foster family with different characteristics) or higher level of care (such as residential treatment).

Foster homes

Across programs, family-based foster care is the most common living arrangement for newly arriving URM youth. As shown in Section 4.B, nearly all programs (19 out of 22) surveyed reported that they offer family-based foster care internally, as opposed to through an external provider; over half (13 out of 22) reported they offered therapeutic foster care internally. In this section, we describe how URM program staff match foster families with youth, how URM programs support youth in foster homes and their foster families, and youth and foster family experiences.

Foster families provide care and support to youth in their homes. They work with case managers to connect youth with services, including medical, dental, and mental health care. They often engage with teachers or counselors at youth's schools to ensure youth are receiving the support they need. In addition to these concrete activities, they help youth adjust to living in the United States, support youth in reaching their goals, and generally aim to improve youth well-being.

Matching youth and foster homes

When placing youth with foster families, program staff interviewed said they consider the characteristics and needs of both youth and families. Foster families provide their preferences for the characteristics of youth they feel equipped to serve, such as age, sex and gender, religion, language, and country of origin. Program staff also consider family members in the home, such as biological children or other youth in foster care, physical space in the home, and the family's connections to the youth's culture or heritage. In addition, program staff consider whether foster families have developed familiarity with backgrounds or languages other than their own through fostering URM youth. Staff may consider them as good fits for youth from that background in the future. Foster families have the discretion to choose not to be a placement for youth.

When possible, program staff at sites visited said they attempt to match URM youth with foster families from similar cultural, linguistic, or religious backgrounds. However, multiple programs reported challenges in recruiting foster parents with similar backgrounds as URM youth. On the survey, 15 out of 23 program directors reported this as a serious challenge, making it the most frequently cited serious challenge. To address this issue, staff at the programs visited planned to increase outreach specifically to immigrant and refugee communities. Of the programs we visited, the Fullerton program was especially successful at identifying Spanish-speaking foster families for youth. This is likely due in part to the large Spanish-speaking community in the Fullerton area.

Support for foster parents

Program staff and foster families said that URM case managers often serve as the primary point of contact for foster parents to ensure the placement is successful. Staff in multiple sites visited also described managing the expectations of foster parents and dynamics between foster families and URM youth. Case managers said they consider it their responsibility to help foster parents understand the psychological factors driving youth's behavior, and to help them with strategies to address those behaviors. For example, some URM foster parents said URM youth are not always as grateful as initially expected, and case managers help foster parents understand past experiences of URM youth that could contribute to these reactions. Similarly, URM case managers across multiple sites discussed helping address conflict between youth and foster parents who had different expectations for youth who are used to supporting themselves. Different expectations include house rules, such as curfews,

and long-term goals, such as whether youth would go to college, attend a vocational program, or begin working after completing school.

Foster parents also support each other. Focus group participants mentioned other families as a main source of support. For example, the Seattle program holds monthly meetings for youth and parents, which provide foster parents with the opportunity to seek support from others who understand the unique experience of fostering a URM youth. In one focus group, parents reported calling each other for support when they were matched with a youth for the first time. In addition, one program also has mentor foster families; the program connects a newly licensed foster family with a more experienced foster family who can provide support. Other sources of support include churches, other organized groups for foster parents, and online resources.

Experiences and perspectives on foster homes

Overall, youth in the focus groups mostly reported positive experiences with foster families. One URM youth said of his foster mother: “Our foster mom is just too great...she could be a case worker, but she is a foster mom. She connects with the case workers and she does everything that the case workers ask.” Foster families were also positive in the focus groups about the program and their experiences, though both youth and foster families described some challenges. In this section, we describe youth and foster parent perspectives and experiences.



“Our foster mom is just too great...she could be a case worker, but she is a foster mom. She connects with the case workers, and she does everything that the case workers ask.”

– URM youth

Adjustment to U.S. culture and foster homes. Youth and families both reported that the initial adjustment to the United States could be difficult, especially as youth learn about U.S. systems and culture, adjust to living with strangers, and acclimate to rules in the house. Families and youth reported that when youth arrived, they were often unfamiliar with aspects of living in the United States that foster families often take for granted. For example, foster parents described showing youth how showers work, introducing them to recreational experiences, and helping them access community services. One URM foster parent remembered introducing a URM youth to public libraries: “The next day [after he arrived] he woke up and said, ‘I hear there is a place here where you can find books and borrow them for free.’ We were like, ‘That’s a library, let’s go.’”



“After taking one of our kids camping, he said ‘You Americans are nuts, you have *houses!*’”

– URM foster parent

described the reaction of a URM youth to camping: “After taking one of our kids camping, he said ‘You Americans are nuts, you have *houses!*’”

Youth backgrounds and knowledge of U.S. culture and systems varied. Programs and families reported that some youth arrive already knowing some English, which they may have learned in refugee camps or through media, such as movies or TV shows. For example, multiple youth in a foster home bonded when they first arrived over having seen *Titanic*.

Beyond knowledge of U.S. practices and popular culture, many respondents said that URM youth placed in foster homes had difficulties adjusting to living with an unfamiliar family, especially considering past traumatic events and experiences. One youth described the challenges that come

from living with an unfamiliar family while also learning a new culture, noting that it can be confusing and that misunderstandings can affect a youth's emotions.

URM program staff and foster families described many URM youth as "wise beyond their years," after a journey from their home country that may have involved long stretches of living on their own. At the same time, youth are trying to learn a new culture and language through interactions with people who are, initially, strangers. As a result, URM youth may be more mature than other youth their age in some regards, while also requiring support and explanations that may be more typically provided to younger youth. This can be challenging for youth and families alike. One foster parent expressed this tension: "They're three, they're 30, and they're 80 at the same time. It's a full-time job to figure out whether I'm talking to my three-year-old or my 30-year-old today."

Another key factor in youth and families' experiences with foster homes is language. While some programs are able to recruit families that speak the same language as youth, others are not, which can be challenging as youth learn to speak English. Foster parents reported using Google Translate, language lines, and other makeshift methods to communicate with youth and learn about what youth


"They're three, they're 30, and they're 80 at the same time. It's a full-time job to figure out whether I'm talking to my three-year-old or my 30-year-old today."
– URM foster parent

needed to feel comfortable in the beginning. Staff and foster families reported that some youth pick up conversational English very quickly. While program staff generally felt that having foster families with similar languages and backgrounds to youth was positive, especially for maintaining connections to their culture and supporting their transition to the United States, some foster parents felt that having foster families that speak the same language as youth impeded youth's ability to learn English quickly.

Program staff and foster families described challenges in meeting the youth's needs and providing necessary support. As described above, many URM youth have experienced

traumatic events before, during, and after their migration to the United States and may have complex mental health needs, which some families may not feel prepared to support. In addition, foster families and staff reported that youth experience feelings such as guilt, isolation, and homesickness from missing their families, home countries, and friends. These feelings may impact youth's ability or willingness to adjust to living with a foster family. Youth may not view the foster family as an extension of their own family, as foster parents might expect or hope, especially if the youth are still in touch with their biological family. Some youth in the focus groups said that they had found it difficult to trust others when they first arrived.

Navigating rules and expectations. Multiple URM youth reported that their foster families are generally supportive, help them adjust to life in the United States, teach them how to navigate U.S. systems and culture, and answer their questions. Some youth expressed appreciation for their foster parents who always make sure to support them, even when they are extremely busy.



"The next day [after he arrived] he woke up and said, 'I hear there is a place here where you can find books and borrow them for free.' We were like, 'That's a library, let's go.'"

– URM foster parent

In multiple focus groups, URM youth described struggling initially with rules and curfews in their foster homes. For example, youth said they wanted to be able to spend time with friends and use the internet as they pleased, and it took time to adjust to having house rules. One URM youth reported that the rules at the house could feel limiting: “It’s quite challenging. Especially the rules at the house. They tell you to come at a certain time, and they don’t understand that you have friends outside and you want to have fun with them. They assume you are doing bad things. Sometimes they ground you, and I never experienced that before.”



“It’s quite challenging. Especially the rules at the house. They tell you to come at a certain time, and they don’t understand that you have friends outside and you want to have fun with them. They assume you are doing bad things. Sometimes they ground you, and I never experienced that before.”

– URM youth

In one program, to help manage expectations, case managers tell foster parents that the youth are teenagers who have been in survival mode, taking care of themselves for long periods of time, and they may resist following rules or doing things like chores. Some foster families felt that youth connections with peers, classmates, and friends helped with these adjustments, as youth saw that others also have rules, such as curfews. As one URM youth said, “I used to live by myself, like three years ago. I was responsible for myself... I eat what I eat when I eat, I sleep when I sleep. It’s different to come here and have these rules. It’s not difficult, but sometimes you struggle.”



“I used to live by myself, like three years ago. I was responsible for myself... I eat what I eat when I eat, I sleep when I sleep. It’s different to come here and have these rules. It’s not difficult, but sometimes you struggle.”

– URM youth

On the other hand, some youth noted that families do not always support their choices or goals and moved placements as a result. Some points of tension included a foster family that did not support a youth attending a church of their choice and mismatches in long-term goals, such as attending vocational training instead of college. In addition to expectations that families have of youth, families and program staff also said that youth expectations of what they would receive or how quickly they would adjust after arrival were not met; for example, some youth reported thinking they would receive cell phones, cars, and money from their foster parents.

Therapeutic foster homes

As noted above, nearly all programs reported on the survey that they offer therapeutic foster care placements, either internally or through a partner. Programs reported that, in addition to the more intensive training and higher reimbursement rate provided to foster families for therapeutic foster homes, youth and families in therapeutic placements receive more support from case managers, as well as regular contact from additional staff (such as a behavioral aide). Half of the sites visited licensed all their family-based foster homes as therapeutic foster homes, while the other half did not recruit, train, or license therapeutic foster homes at all. These programs rely on external providers for therapeutic placements when needed. (The six sites visited are not a representative sample, so other programs may do a hybrid approach, where they license some families as therapeutic placements, but such approaches were not captured in our visits.)

The three sites that license all their homes as therapeutic report that this approach offers placement stability or continuity for youth. For example, if youth enter a foster home as a non-therapeutic placement but later need a higher level of care, they can stay in the same foster home, which helps promote youth well-being.

At two programs that did not license therapeutic foster homes, program staff cited difficulty recruiting foster parents for a higher level of care as a barrier. Staff reported that when they need a therapeutic placement, they partner with other agencies to provide it. However, one program reported that because there are often no therapeutic placements available through other agencies due to general shortages of placements, they do not accept referrals for youth whom they know need this level of care. One program reported that they provide training related to therapeutic care to families as needed, especially if a youth is found to need a higher level of care after arriving at the program.

Kinship care/relative foster care

On site visits, programs reported that some instances of kinship or relative foster care placements occur, but they are not common. While URM youth may have family in the United States, these family members are not always able to foster the youth. For those that can be a kinship placement, the service provider develops a formal placement arrangement with the family, which normally follows the same licensing requirements as regular foster homes.

Group homes

A vast majority of program directors (20 out of 23) reported on the survey that they offer group home placements. Among the sites visited, URM programs varied in how they utilize group homes for youth. Three programs we visited regularly place youth in group homes, although the number of youth actually placed into these group homes can be quite small. URM programs use group homes if it is the youth's preference not to live in a foster home, if the group home is a better fit for the youth's needs, or to prepare youth to live independently. Two programs only use group homes if there is disruption in a foster home placement or a youth is continuing to experience behaviors that do not allow them to remain in a family-based setting. They provide these placements through external partnerships. One program we visited does not offer group homes as a placement for youth.

Some programs regularly use group homes as an initial placement for youth. This is advantageous to programs as it allows them to secure a spot in the program for the youth as they work to find an appropriate family-based setting. Additionally, some youth have unique needs that may be burdensome for a family to handle upon the youth's arrival. For example, the Fullerton URM program places youth arriving from overseas into group homes called "Welcome Centers." The two group homes we visited in Seattle and Grand Rapids were similar in structure, in that youth live in a facility that is staffed around the clock and learn independent living skills such as conflict resolution, grocery shopping and cooking meals, and navigating U.S. systems such as traffic and driving laws. The programs also provide case management, onsite mental health support, recreation, education support, and other independent living skills development. These programs are specifically for teenage males. Youth often spend 6-12 months in these homes, though youth may stay for shorter periods if they are placed there as an initial transition placement before moving to a foster home. We highlight these homes in the text boxes.



Group Home Highlight: Transitional Living Center (Grand Rapids, MI)

Bethany Christian Services operates the Transitional Living Center (TLC), a group home for male URM youth under age 18. Most youth stay at the home for six to nine months, and then transition to a supervised independent living or independent living setting. However, some choose to move to foster homes instead. Onsite staff includes case managers, clinicians, youth specialists, a nurse, and a recreational therapist. Youth receive therapy onsite every week, as well as tutoring support and recreational activities. The TLC represents its services for each youth with a pie chart; youth receive a slice when they have completed a class or demonstrated an accomplishment related to adjusting to the United States, including topics such as English, responsibility, depositing checks, housing and rent, sexual harassment and assault laws, nutrition, cooking, and shopping. Classes focus on a different pie section each month and are taught by various staff at the home. There are also activities associated with pie slices, such as trips to the grocery store or Social Security office to learn how to navigate to those locations. The treatment team considers progress in the PIE system when deciding if a youth is ready to transition to another living arrangement.



Group Home Highlight: Friends of Youth (Seattle, WA)

Lutheran Community Services Northwest places male URM youth in a group home through a subcontract with Friends of Youth (FOY). FOY operates several group homes in the greater Seattle area, including one in Kirkland, WA. Staff at the group home described the services as preparation for independent living. At the group home, youth live in units designed to imitate a family-based setting, where each unit has a kitchen, common living area, garage, and individual bedrooms for each youth. While in the group home, youth receive support from their URM case manager, the FOY primary counselor, program supervisor, the therapist, and an education specialist from a partner organization. Having a therapist on site and involved in the youth's support team helps convey youth's mental health needs to staff, though youth are not required to attend therapy. FOY also has cultural liaisons in each house who are responsible for learning about youth's cultures and sharing that information with staff teams. The goal is that youth will be ready to live on their own when they leave, though youth may choose to transition to family foster homes when they leave, rather than into independent living.

Youth experiences in group homes

Program staff interviewed said that group homes can be a good fit for youth who lived independently prior to joining the program or whose needs may not align with the support a foster family can provide. In addition, youth may prefer to live in a group home with peers, rather than with a family. On site visits, program staff reported that living with other youth can be a source of support in the group home, as they participate in recreation, team-building, and daily activities, such as cooking and sharing meals, together. On the other hand, some staff also said that youth may find life in group homes isolating; this may be especially true if others in the home do not share the youth's ethnic, cultural, linguistic, or religious backgrounds and if the home is not near any communities or organizations that share these backgrounds. In addition, as with group homes in the domestic child welfare system, staff noted that URM youth sometimes find the rules of group homes disempowering, such as lack of access to basics that could be used for self-harm, such as razors.

Program and partner staff at sites visited felt that the strong support system in group homes is an asset, especially those that have a therapist on staff. As discussed further in the Mental Health section (4.D.6.) below, youth with mental health needs may be reluctant to seek services and having these services onsite for youth can help overcome that barrier. Group home staff also coordinate closely

with URM program staff and other partners as needed to ensure that youth have a strong support network to help them succeed in the group home. A few program staff also said that youth in group homes often form friendships and support each other, though they may occasionally bicker.

Semi-independent living

Programs described both formal and informal approaches to semi-independent living. Youth often live in semi-independent living arrangements as a bridge between a foster or group home and living independently. These can be specific semi-independent living facilities or less formal arrangements, where youth live with members of the local community.

The semi-independent living programs described below evolved as responses to challenges that youth face when transitioning to living independently. Some program staff said that while many URM youth have lived on their own before coming to the United States, supporting oneself financially in a new country is a challenge for many youth—especially if they are still in school or unable to work due to delayed work authorization—and youth face additional challenges related to unfamiliarity with U.S. systems (such as banking or driving). Semi-independent living is an important step along this pathway.

Notable examples of supervised facilities from the sites visited include:

- ***Transitional Housing Placement Program (THPP+)***: Crittenton Family Services, the URM provider in Fullerton, California, operates THPP+ as a bridge to their independent living program. In this arrangement, youth ages 18-21 live in a furnished apartment paid for by the URM program and receive weekly case management from an onsite case manager. Youth receive a stipend, clothing allowance, and money for savings while they work, attend school, or participate in community service. At age 21, youth can transition to the Transitional Housing Program (THP), the provider’s independent living program.
- ***Independent Living Plus (ILP)***: In Grand Rapids, MI, Bethany Christian Services (“Bethany”) operates ILP, in which youth live in homes owned by Bethany that are staffed 16 hours per day. Youth pay rent to Bethany, purchase their own groceries, and can come and go on their own schedule. Bethany mainly places older youth (ages 17-19) who are transitioning from a group or foster home in ILP before living entirely independently. Youth stay in ILP for about a year. Bethany provides services such as independent living skills training, mentoring, and tutoring.

In other, less formal arrangements, youth over the age of 18 live with families or individuals who are not licensed foster parents but rent out a room and provide some support to youth. The level of support varies depending on the family and youth. Examples include:

- ***Community Member Placements***: At Catholic Charities Community Services (CCCS) in Phoenix, Arizona, on rare occasions youth may be placed in a “Community Member Placement” if they are over 18 and still awaiting their employment authorization. In this arrangement, a community member allows URM youth to live in their home and pay part of their independent living stipend to the community member as “rent,” which helps them adapt to paying rent and bills. CCCS has only recently started using this arrangement, but staff said it is a promising strategy for matching youth with members of the same cultural group and fostering a sense of independence. These community members must undergo background checks and CCCS’s standard volunteer onboarding process but are not licensed by the state.
- ***“Host Homes”***: Lutheran Community Services Northwest, Seattle’s URM provider agency, implemented a living arrangement for youth over age 18 called “host homes.” The hosts are individuals who do not want to be formal foster parents or who are former foster parents

who no longer foster. The hosts provide a room in their home for youth and some support. Rents in Seattle are typically high, and these arrangements are offered below market rent.

Program staff have also identified other creative options for URM youth in their communities, such as a former parsonage, in which the attached church rents to URM youth below market rate.

Independent living arrangements

After youth turn 18, many choose to live independently. In these situations, program staff interviewed on site visits said that youth live in a unit which they identify themselves and which they pay for (often out of their independent living stipend; see Independent Living Services, Section 4.D.3). While youth are not living in placements provided by the URM provider, URM program staff may help them search for apartments, identify roommates, and plan for living on their own, such as managing finances to pay for utilities. Youth in independent living arrangements still receive support from the URM provider, including ongoing case management and services to support a successful transition to adulthood. Case managers conduct home visits to ensure the youth's continued safety. One site described how case managers visit housing that youth identify to make sure they are safe. However, they noted that it is harder to monitor the safety of a placement when youth are living independently than when youth are in foster or group homes. (We discuss supports provided to youth in independent living situations more in Section 4.D.3.)

Other placements

Other living arrangements include residential treatment facilities, inpatient psychiatric facilities, and medical foster homes. Programs reported that these living arrangement types are used as-needed for youth with complex needs, and programs strive to transition youth into a less restrictive placement such as a foster home, semi-independent living arrangement, or group home, as soon as they are able.

The availability of these living arrangements for youth with more complex needs varies among URM programs, as shown in Section 4.B. As described in the Arrivals section (4.A), the resettlement agencies most often refer youth with complex needs to programs that have established placements available to serve them, but resettlement agencies and programs may not have full information on youth needs before they arrive.

4.D.3. Independent living services

Supporting a successful transition to adulthood and living independently is central to the URM Program's goals. Survey responses indicated that all URM programs provide services and activities to help prepare youth to live on their own and support youth in independent living arrangements (Section 4.B) for as long as they are in the program. URM programs deliver these services in various ways, including regular group meetings and workshops, one-on-one support provided by case managers, financial support, and other activities. All URM youth have access to independent living services, but the funding sources for these services vary based on the child welfare custody arrangement in each state.

Preparation for living independently

Case managers at sites visited noted that as they prepare youth for living independently, they focus on teaching youth how to access resources on their own without additional support. However, case managers also aim to provide information and teach skills to prepare youth for this transition. The

survey confirmed that all URM programs offer these services directly, though some also partner with external providers to supplement them.

Group meetings and workshops

All sites visited offered weekly or monthly independent living or life skills workshops. In general, URM programs design these workshops for older youth and invite all youth above a certain age (e.g., 14 or 16). In most of the sites visited, the classes were URM-specific, but one site conducted hybrid sessions with UACs or youth in domestic foster care (as they were financed by county Chafee funds to serve all youth in the agency's custody).

Participation in the groups was not always required, but in some sites, staff reported high participation, in part because the groups were also opportunities to socialize with other youth in the program. One site said some youth already living independently continue to come to the groups for a hot meal. Another program encourages attendance with points toward a reward or other incentive.

Issues covered in the groups varied across sites and from year to year. Topics have included budgeting and money management; employment readiness; public transportation; U.S. laws; cybersecurity; hygiene, housekeeping, and cooking; and healthy relationships and prevention of sexually transmitted infections. Several programs bring in outside speakers, including members of the police department, lawyers, self-defense trainers, employers, and representatives of various careers. Other programs offer additional special classes beyond their typical workshops. For example, one program does a one- to two-week all-day training during the summer that involves trips out to the community. These trips included visiting a car dealership to help youth learn about the cost of cars and insurance; a mechanic to learn about car maintenance; and an apartment complex to learn about its rules and rent.

One-on-one support

In addition to the workshops, case managers provide one-on-one support to youth to prepare them for living independently. In Seattle, there are case managers dedicated specifically to preparing youth for independent living and supporting them when they move out on their own. They coordinate with the youth's other case managers. In Denver, which is county-administered and has a public custody arrangement, a case manager from the county human services department funded by the Chafee program works one-on-one with youth on independent living skills and on finding appropriate housing.

Program staff described case managers working with youth to develop transition plans for preparing for independent living. These plans are also required for youth in domestic foster care and are developed with input from the youth and the foster parents. Sites reported that the plans included topics such as youth's goals related to education, finances, and housing; identifying potential sources of support, including family inside and outside the United States; identifying medical and dental providers; financial management and planning; and rules and expectations for living in an apartment.



Topics covered in independent living skills workshops include:

- Budgeting and money management
- Employment readiness
- Public transportation
- U.S. laws
- Cybersecurity
- Hygiene, housekeeping, and cooking
- Healthy relationships and prevention of sexually transmitted infections

Savings and incentives

Staff at several programs visited mentioned the importance of youth having savings set aside before they live on their own. One program requires youth to save at least \$800 before living independently and encourages them to have twice that saved. Some independent living stipends include amounts that are supposed to go into savings.

Some program staff also described using cash or incentives to encourage youth to meet goals and milestones in preparing for independent living. For example, youth in one program receive \$30 when they get a job and \$100 if they sign a lease on an apartment. Another offers points, paid out when they successfully exit the program, for completing tasks such as making doctors' appointments and attending workshops. Staff reported that youth can leave the program with up to \$5,000 in savings, which helps them transition to living independently.

Supports during independent living

As described in Section 4.D.2., youth who enter independent living situations continue to receive support from the URM program for as long as they are in the program. That includes both program services and financial support and related assistance.

Case management

Youth continue to receive case management when living independently, though it may be less intensive and focused on different needs, such as preparing youth for life after the URM program. For example, case managers said they may begin to focus more on long-term education and employment goals, as well as connecting youth with supports in the community that will not end once they leave the URM program.

Financial support

URM programs provide a stipend to youth who move to independent living when they turn 18. These stipends help cover the costs of room, board, and utilities, and in some instances a set amount goes into savings. The stipend amount differs across programs and may vary within a program. For example, one program calculates the stipend amount based on factors such as whether youth are employed or in school, their total living expenses, and receipt of financial aid. Another provides smaller stipends to youth for whom the program pays rent directly to a landlord (as they are not responsible for paying rent), and larger stipends to youth who pay their rent themselves. One



“Everybody here is trying to help and be supportive of family back in their countries. Going to school, coming back, and going to work, plus all of the expenses that you have—car insurance, food, rent, and everything—is tough, and besides that you have to support your family back there.”

— URM youth

program also offers emergency assistance when youth find themselves with unexpected financial challenges, which youth are responsible for paying back. Several youth in focus groups expressed that they did not find these amounts sufficient to cover both their living expenses and their desire to send remittances to support their families in their home country. As one youth said, “Everybody here is trying to help and be supportive of family back in their countries. Going to school, coming back, and going to work, plus all of the expenses that you have—car insurance, food, rent, and everything—is tough, and besides that you have to support your family back there.”

These stipends are funded in a variety of ways. Chafee funds or the corresponding funding streams

in states with private custody arrangements can be used to cover room and board and other approved expenses that support independent living. One program gave examples of such supports, which include clothes, driving classes, a guitar for a youth for therapeutic purposes, and soccer cleats. Other programs mentioned providing transportation assistance (e.g., bus passes). In states with public custody arrangements, such requests must be approved by the child welfare agency.

In addition to independent living stipends, youth receive support in other ways. For example, one program visited has a partnership with an organization that helps refugees furnish their homes via material donations from the community (e.g., linens, furniture, lamps, kitchen supplies). URM youth may also be eligible for vouchers from the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development Foster Youth to Independence program which provides housing vouchers to youth formerly in foster care at risk of homelessness (United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2019). Child welfare agencies that participate in this program are required to offer supportive services to youth who receive these vouchers, such as basic life skills counseling, job preparation and attainment counseling, and education and career advancement counseling.

4.D.4. Connections to cultural heritage and religion

One of the key tenets of the URM Program is to foster connections to youth’s heritage, culture, and religion, while helping youth adjust to life in the United States. Activities with these aims are more central to the URM Program than to the domestic child welfare system. URM program staff discussed efforts to foster these connections through leveraging local resources, educating foster parents on the needs of each URM youth, and hiring diverse staff who share youth’s cultures and backgrounds.

URM program activities

All URM program directors reported on our survey that they offer activities directly aimed at preserving youth’s ethnic and religious heritage. Further, about half of URM programs (12 out of 23) also provide these services by partnering with external organizations. To help youth find connections with their culture, heritage, or religion, URM providers may connect youth to local culturally based community organizations, faith-based groups or places of worship, or neighborhoods with grocery stores and restaurants that match youth’s needs and preferences.



“In this program, you never feel lonely because you see people like you, so you never feel lonely.”

– URM youth

Case managers also discussed encouraging connections among URM youth within the program. Staff at one program described introducing new arrivals to youth from the same country who have been in the United States for a longer period of time. This helps connect newer youth to mentors and helps them feel more comfortable integrating into their communities. In the words of youth, “In this program, you never feel lonely because you see people like you, so you never feel lonely.” Some URM programs also host social events for youth that are partially aimed at

helping them stay connected to their own cultures. For example, one has an annual Christmas party with dancers from different cultures.

URM program staffing

Most URM programs make efforts to ensure their staff can work with URM youth from a variety of backgrounds. On the survey, all program directors reported attempting to hire bilingual staff or those with prior experience working with immigrant or refugee populations. Approximately 90 percent of

URM program directors surveyed reported hiring staff who share cultural or ethnic backgrounds with URM youth, hiring staff who are themselves immigrants or refugees, providing special training, and encouraging staff to participate in culturally specific community events. For example, staff at one program visited described bringing in speakers to educate staff on the cultural practices of youth they serve. URM provider agencies that also run adult and family refugee resettlement programs may combine efforts and support connections between URM youth and other refugee populations.

Community engagement

The cultural diversity of communities in which URM programs operates varies across the country, which can impact a URM program's ability to leverage existing community resources and foster connections for URM youth. All sites we visited discussed the diversity of surrounding communities, but local ethnic, cultural, or religious communities are not necessarily available for URM youth of all backgrounds.

Staff and foster parents also described how faith-based communities provide broad cultural connections for URM youth. In one site, a foster parent said that taking a youth to services at a mosque presented an opportunity for the youth to connect with their religion and socialize with friends of the same religious and cultural background. In multiple sites, local mosques have helped to educate the URM programs about the religious observations of Muslim youth and partnered with the URM programs in organizing events for Muslim holidays.

Role of foster parents in supporting cultural connections

Foster parents play an important role in helping youth connect with cultural resources in the community. On site visits, URM programs reported preparing foster parents to help youth maintain connections to their culture of origin, including providing training on specific cultures. Staff in one URM program visited said foster parents can apply hours spent attending approved cultural events in the community to their annual training requirements. For foster parents caring for youth from multiple cultures and practicing different religions, this could mean coordinating multiple connections to different cultural or religious communities. In focus groups, foster parents reiterated the importance of faith communities for some of their URM youth, and described providing transportation and encouragement to attend, even if youth wish to worship differently than foster families. One foster parent described driving youth multiple hours every other weekend to attend the youth's church, while another discussed attending holiday events in an effort to support the youth placed in her home and learn about his culture and religion. As one URM foster parent put it, "You drive [your foster children] all over the place... Lots of just showing up. Fostering relationships at schools and introducing yourself to their friends and parents."



"You drive [your foster children] all over the place... Lots of just showing up. Fostering relationships at schools and introducing yourself to their friends and parents."

– URM foster parent

Challenges to supporting cultural connections

Interviewees also noted several challenges to supporting cultural connections for youth. Foster parents described lack of diversity in schools and communities as a common challenge, especially for those who live further outside of metropolitan areas. For example, one foster parent living in a rural town said that even though the community was friendly to URM youth, there were few opportunities for engagement with their cultures and the youth faced differential treatment, albeit friendly. The parent said: "It's a tiny town, tiny school. When the boys arrived, they were like celebrities because

they spoke another language. They broke out a map, etc. I had to tell the teacher that they had to stop bringing the kids up to the front of the line because this taught the kids that they get to do that.”

However, even if a URM program is based in a diverse metropolitan area, the geographic spread of where youth are placed makes it difficult for some to access culturally relevant resources. Staff from programs visited said that even in diverse areas, it is unlikely that all cultures will be represented to the same degree and there is diversity within ethnic communities. For example, even among URM youth from the same country, youth may speak different languages, identify as different ethnicities, practice different religions, or have different political affiliations than others in the local community. A youth in one focus group noted also that the local cultural community in the area included mostly U.S.-born members, and there were not many community activities.

Many places of worship near the URM programs serve specific communities based on ethnicity and culture in addition to religion, which can make it both more challenging and more important to find places of worship that meet the needs of URM youth. For example, while there may be many types of churches in a given city, there may only be one that serves the local Ethiopian community.

4.D.5. Education services

URM program staff, partner staff, and foster parents described education support as a primary need for URM youth, as many have experienced interruptions in formal education. Navigating the U.S. education system can be a challenge, especially for youth who lack English proficiency. This section describes how the URM program connects youth with education services and the types of schools they typically attend. The information highlights findings from site visits and program director surveys. More information on educational services and youth experiences in schools is available in the Special Topics Report.



Our brief, *Educational Supports and Experiences in the Unaccompanied Refugee Minors Program*, available on the OPRE website, provides more information on educational services and youth experiences in schools.

Selecting schools and enrollment

URM youth are enrolled in school very soon after entering their local URM program. URM program staff work with foster parents and local education providers to assess URM youth’s education needs and provide supportive services. Youth are often enrolled in their neighborhood school based on their foster family or group home’s zip code. However, many URM program staff said that in



“The schools that serve our kids or those more similar to our kids have extra homework help and teachers that gear their curriculum to fit the child without an ILP [Individualized Learning Plan] or 504 plan. With other schools, it’s pulling teeth.”

– URM case manager

districts with flexible enrollment or school choice policies, they prioritize the quality of English Language Learning (ELL) services and diversity of a school’s student body over other factors, such as the proximity of a school to a youth’s foster home. One case manager said it is easier to work with schools serving more ELL youth because they have more of the important services and infrastructure in place for ELL students. “The schools that serve our kids, or those more similar to our kids, have extra homework help and teachers that gear their curriculum to fit the child without an ILP [Individualized Learning Plan] or 504 plan. With other schools, it’s pulling teeth,” they said.

Because most URM youth arrive in the United States at age 16 or 17, most youth are first placed in public high

school. URM staff across programs said they hope for youth to at least complete high school. Some youth pursue postsecondary education, but others opt for immediate employment. Few URM youth attend elementary school, middle school, or school in private settings, and we did not gather substantial information on these settings during site visits.

High school communities

Across sites visited, URM program staff, foster parents, and youth described school communities as welcoming and open to URM youth and refugee populations more broadly. While the characteristics of school communities varied drastically between public schools and non-traditional schools in different communities throughout the country, URM youth generally described school staff and their peers as kind and helpful.

ELL Programs. Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, all public schools are required to provide accommodations for students who are not proficient in English so that they gain English skills, have support to enroll in mainstream classes, and work toward their education goals. That said, URM program and school staff reported during site visits that the quality and size of programs for ELLs vary substantially throughout metropolitan areas and school districts, based on factors including the number of students in need, the availability of staff who can provide such services, and district resources. Staff said that communities with higher populations of non-English speakers tend to have more robust programs for youth with limited English proficiency, such as more ELL class options and programs to support ELL students in enrolling in more advanced mainstream classes.

Newcomer Programs. Beyond ELL services, some public schools operate programs specifically for recent immigrants and refugees, or “newcomers.”¹⁰ In interviews with education partners, staff said these programs provide additional support to students who may have experienced disruptions in their education, have limited or no formal education experience, and have limited or no literacy. Newcomer programs are often small and aim to introduce students to the structure of formal education and equip them with core academic skills. Staff said that over time, newcomer students transition into classes with other ELL students and the general student population. URM program

Practice Spotlight: Charter school for refugees and UACs (Grand Rapids, MI)



Lighthouse Academy is a charter high school district with nine programs on six campuses. The North Anchor Program is designed for refugee students and was created in 2014 in partnership with the local URM program. Of the school’s 70 students in 2020, around half were URM youth, while the rest were UAC youth or refugee youth resettled with families. While grade level is based on credits, class placement is based on each students’ needs, so classes often have students from several grades. In addition to core subjects and language development, the school focuses on providing behavioral and emotional support, with a philosophy that students who do not feel safe or who are dealing with significant issues in their lives will have trouble learning.

The North Anchor Program has five teachers, one student advocate who focuses on student credits and transitions after high school, and one responsible thinking advisor who helps students with decision making and behavior management. All staff are trained in trauma-informed practices to prepare them to work specifically with refugee students, many of whom have faced trauma prior to and/or after arriving in the United States. Interviewees said that helping youth who are separated from their families starts with awareness of the staff about the refugee experience.

¹⁰ For more information on Newcomer Programs, visit: <https://www.cal.org/resource-center/publications-products/helping-newcomer-students>.

staff said that few schools have the resources available to create and operate newcomer programs, but those who do often provide more support for URM youth.

Alternative high schools. Most public school districts have specific schools or programs to serve students who are not on track to graduate high school in four years. These schools and programs, sometimes referred to as “continuation” or “alternative” high schools, often use accelerated curricula, extended or flexible school days, and smaller class sizes to help students obtain high school diplomas before reaching the maximum age allowed by the state. One URM program visited partnered with a local school district to create a school specifically for refugee and UAC youth (see Practice Spotlight above).

Postsecondary education

When youth age out of the URM program (at age 21 or their state’s age of emancipation), many have not completed postsecondary education, and some may still be pursuing a high school diploma or GED. However, many program staff interviewed said that many youth aspire to higher education, and enroll in vocational programs, community colleges, and four-year colleges while still in the URM program. URM program staff said they encourage URM youth to pursue postsecondary education and access support services for as long as possible.

URM programs reported that youth have access to financial support to attend postsecondary education, both while in and after exiting the URM program. URM youth are eligible to receive support equivalent to what is offered to youth in domestic foster care, including ETVs provided through the Chafee program. URM youth may apply for funding from the Chafee program, which can cover up to \$5,000 per year of postsecondary education tuition, housing, transportation, books and materials for up to five years. URM program staff may help youth apply for funding or seek other external funding, such as general scholarships for youth in domestic foster care, to support their educational goals.

URM program staff reported that it can be challenging for URM youth to transition to postsecondary education settings that lack the same level of support as high school. These transitions may also coincide with URM youth exiting the URM program, which means they are also adjusting to life without case management and independent living supports. Staff said that to prepare youth for this transition, they aim to teach URM youth how to ask for help from teachers and establish strong time management practices while they are in high school and living in more supportive settings (e.g., foster homes).

Education partners

URM programs surveyed reported using external education partners to provide tutoring (20 out of 23 programs), college preparation (21 out of 23), and other educational supports. The relationships between URM programs and partners vary, with some education partners viewing the URM program as just a referral source and others relying on frequent communication with case managers to tailor services to specific youth.

Many students also find academic support directly through their schools, which may provide professional or peer-based tutoring. URM staff said that when youth or foster parents point out academic challenges that are not being met by schools, case managers find tutors within the URM program or through local partner organizations. One program had the capacity to hire in-house tutors for URM youth and provide tutors at group homes, but most other programs rely on community-based organizations. Topics of tutoring typically include English, academic material, or general study practices.

Challenges in education

Most challenges raised by URM staff, foster parents, and URM youth pertained to academic rather than social or community aspects of school. URM staff across sites identified graduating high school on time as a pressing challenge for many URM youth. Because so many URM youth enter the program as teenagers, there are limits on how long they can stay in high school before aging out of eligibility for both the URM program and traditional public high schools. Additionally, URM youth often load schedules with ELL classes, which may not count toward graduation credits. This is especially challenging for youth who are eager to finish secondary education and pursue full-time employment.

URM programs also described some challenges to finding services that are tailored to the unique needs of URM youth, including services that are culturally and linguistically responsive. In open-ended responses on the survey, some URM program directors described a lack of GED programs or vocational training, a need for more English language trainings, and expanded tutoring services.

4.D.6. Mental health services

As described in Section 3.C.2., mental health is a common need and challenge among URM youth. According to our survey, URM programs offer a wide range of mental health services to address these needs, with some delivered by the URM programs themselves and others provided primarily by external providers. A majority of programs provide screenings, group counseling, and therapy or individual counseling directly, using in-house staff. At the same time, most programs rely on external partners for services requiring greater specialization, such as psychotropic medication management and substance abuse treatment or counseling. Further information on URM youth's mental health and the services they receive in the program is available in the Special Topics Report.

Mental health is intertwined with all the services and experiences that youth have in the URM Program, including in their placements, relationships with peers and adults, legal status changes, educational experiences, and connections to culture, heritage, and religion, among many others. We discuss these throughout the report; in this section, we focus on services and experiences related to mental health services such as therapy and counseling.

All programs are required to provide mental health screenings shortly after youth's arrival and provide or make referrals for therapy or individual counseling. Some programs have the capacity to offer these services in-house. For example, Bethany Christian Services in Grand Rapids has therapists and behavioral specialists on staff, including one located in a group home. Catholic Charities Community Services in Phoenix has a counselor on staff who works with URM youth and other refugees. For programs whose URM case managers are licensed clinical social workers, these youth have access to staff with experience facilitating therapy. As described in Section 4.D.2., mental health needs are a central component of placement identification for youth.

Accessing mental health services

On the survey, several respondents noted a lack of culturally appropriate or trauma-informed service providers, particularly mental health care providers. Some programs noted challenges finding appropriate psychiatric care and others felt that wraparound or specialized services for refugees and survivors of torture were lacking in their community. During site visits, two programs similarly



Our brief, *Youth Mental Health in the Unaccompanied Refugee Minors Program*, available on the OPRE website, provides more information on URM youth's mental health and the services they receive in the Program.

described a lack of therapists with the desired level of cultural competency, and even fewer when limiting options to those accepting Medicaid. In cases when youth do not speak the same language as a therapist, the URM program may provide interpreters to accompany youth to their appointments.

Not all URM programs were able to estimate the utilization of mental health services, but all discussed the high prevalence of need for services. While URM case managers may recommend that youth participate in therapy, they cannot require youth to do so. Many foster parents also described efforts to encourage youth to attend therapy but said it can be difficult because the services are not required.

Addressing stigma related to mental health

During site visits, URM staff and foster parents also frequently identified stigma or misunderstanding of mental health conditions or therapy as a challenge to youth participation in services. URM staff



“Sometimes we’re planting the seeds as soon as they get here and four years later, they are like, ‘I think it’d be a good idea to go to therapy.’”

– URM program staff

and foster parents said that for some youth, therapy may be a completely new concept, or they believe that therapy is for “crazy people” or that a mental health diagnosis means there is something wrong with them.

URM staff described multiple strategies to address stigma, including describing therapy in terms that made more sense to URM youth and utilizing group therapy to normalize the concept. One program said it is helpful for youth to hear others express similar experiences and sentiments and that group therapy reduces instances of youth feeling singled out for

mental health needs. Case managers in another URM program described introducing the concept of therapy through mock sessions or by describing sessions as similar to case managers’ recurring meetings with the youth. Other program staff said that it takes time for youth to become comfortable with therapy and highlighted the importance of therapists building trust with youth. As one program staff member said, “Sometimes we’re planting the seeds as soon as they get here and four years later, they are like, ‘I think it’d be a good idea to go to therapy.’”

4.D.7. Legal services

Many URM youth—particularly former UACs—need legal assistance to obtain legal status to stay in the United States after exiting the URM program. URM staff consistently described gaining legal work authorization as the most pressing legal challenge for some URM youth, as this process is increasingly delayed and affects youth’s ability to gain employment. To process these cases, some URM programs described utilizing both legal advisors at their organizations and community-based legal aid organizations. On the survey, program directors and State Refugee Coordinators identified access to pro bono or in-house

Legal Services Partner Highlight: Kids in Need of Defense (KIND)



KIND is a national legal assistance organization with 10 field offices across the United States. In Seattle, KIND provides pro-bono legal services to UACs in ORR custody and partners with Lutheran Community Services Northwest to provide services to former UACs in need of legal assistance. Though they do not have a formal contract, KIND attorneys and LCSNW social workers have monthly calls to discuss cases. KIND’s administrative staff are knowledgeable of the UAC-to-URM population and able to manage logistics and timelines for the URM cases. Beyond the direct services provided to the youth, KIND also does annual trainings with URM foster parents.

immigration services as an issue, especially in areas that do not have a large immigrant population. At the same time, even in areas where pro bono services are available, respondents reported that the pro bono caseloads fill up quickly.

As a result, many URM programs rely on a combination of in-house and external services. Half of the programs visited (3 sites) reported having in-house attorneys but relied on a community-based partner as well, especially for more complicated immigration cases (e.g., former UACs with trafficking claims) that go beyond the scope of what their in-house immigration attorneys could handle.

In-house capacity to handle complex legal cases can affect where youth are initially placed. Lutheran Community Services Northwest (LCSNW), the URM program based in Seattle, has a track record of accepting youth into the program and filing for dependency quickly before youth turn 18. This allows them to accept youth that otherwise would not have been eligible. Staff and partners attributed this to “building trust” between the courts, case managers, and attorneys, through a long history of working together and LCSNW case managers building a strong reputation with the judges. The program director also advocates for youth through coordinating with ORR, identifying foster families who are willing to accept very short-notice placements, and working with legal partners.

4.D.8. Health services

URM youth have a variety of health needs but varying levels of access to health providers who can provide linguistically and culturally competent health care. On the survey, some URM program directors identified gaps in medical and dental services in open-ended responses. Similar to the gaps identified for mental health services, many reported that these gaps were due at least in part to state Medicaid policies, which limited access to certain providers.

Health Partner Highlight: Refugee Women’s Health Clinic



URM youth sometimes have a difficult time understanding the health care system in the United States. CCCS, Phoenix’s URM program, has a partnership with the Refugee Women’s Health Clinic, a multi-site health organization designed specifically for refugee women. The clinic matches “navigators” to all their clients to advocate for the clients’ needs and act as “cultural health brokers.” Navigators are refugees themselves and are paired with clients from the same country or region of the world, with the goal of navigators sharing similar values and traditions with their clients. Navigators help clients navigate the U.S. health care system in a way that is responsive to clients’ experiences and preferences. At the time of the site visit, a small number of URM youth had used this service. The clinic also has plans to expand services to male clients in the future.

On site visits, program staff reported addressing these challenges by relying on longstanding relationships with local health providers, in-house medical departments, and case managers’ willingness to search for culturally competent providers in the community. One URM program partners with a local organization that helps refugees navigate the U.S. health system (see textbox). Another has in-house medical services, which allows youth to work with nurses and doctors who understand the URM program and have a better sense of youth’s prior experiences.

4.D.9. Other services

In addition to the services and placements discussed above, URM programs provide a wide array of services to meet youth’s individual needs. Programs may utilize services available through their wider organization, as each URM provider agency visited operates several programs beyond the URM program, such as domestic foster care, family refugee resettlement programs, and domestic violence

shelters. For example, agencies may provide mentoring services to youth across their programs (see Mentoring Services Highlight).

In addition, URM programs offer many services to URM youth through partnerships or referrals to other organizations. These services include driver's education, pregnancy and parenting services, child care, substance abuse treatment, assistance with furniture and equipment, mobile food pantries, and homelessness prevention.

Mentoring Services Highlight: Bethany Christian Services Mentoring



Many youth at Bethany are referred to mentoring services to have additional opportunities to practice their English or engage in activities from their own culture. Mentors are adult volunteers from the community. Bethany provides quarterly events for mentor/mentee pairs, YMCA passes, and service projects, such as Habitat for Humanity workdays. About 60 youth participate each year, and many remain engaged with their mentor beyond the formal one-year commitment. Mentors provide one-on-one support and connect youth with local activities. Bethany surveys mentors and youth on activities, skills and interests, and general life goals to help make a good match. Mentors are asked to meet with youth for four hours each month and submit monthly reports to the coordinator. The activities can be any recreational activity, and the coordinator maintains a calendar of free or low-cost events as suggested activities.

4.D.10. Services and experiences after leaving the URM Program

Understanding the outcomes and experiences after youth leave the program is a high priority for ORR, URM programs, and other stakeholders. Although systematic information on youth outcomes and experiences after program exit was not available for this study, we gathered some anecdotal information about youth experiences after leaving the program. Youth emancipate from the URM Program at age 21, or at their state's age of emancipation from the child welfare system, but they may continue to access some services.

On site visits, URM service providers reported a variety of supports and policies for serving youth after they leave the URM Program. Some programs can provide limited services, such as tutoring, but they do not provide case management or funding. One site visited offers six months of “after care” services, in which case managers continue to call and check-in with youth.

Some youth exit the Program before age 21. Staff said the most common reasons for early Program exit are to pursue employment on their own or freedom from the rules of the URM Program, such as the requirement to be working or in school. However, one site mentioned having flexible re-entry policies that enable youth to return to the URM Program. Staff said that they offer second, third—even fourth—chances to youth and aim to make it clear to youth that if they choose to exit the URM Program, they can return and receive support.

Foster parents as a lasting resource

In some cases, foster parents also continue to be a resource for URM youth after they leave the Program. However, as in the domestic foster care system, this is not a requirement. Some foster parents discussed efforts to provide support and maintain relationships with youth after they leave the URM Program. For example, a few parents in different sites mentioned inviting youth to holidays, having them over for meals, or letting them stay for longer periods of time if they need. Those who had been fostering for many years (in some cases, decades) said that they do not maintain relationships with all youth but tell them that they can keep in touch if they want.

One URM youth explained that his foster parent agreed to let the youth stay in the foster home after aging out of the URM Program and pay a reduced “rent” as a way of contributing to household expenses and preparing for independent living. The youth expressed appreciation for this support: “It makes me feel like ‘Wow, I’m going to be out [of the program], how is it going to look like?’ To me, it looks like getting your own apartment—it’s hard, it’s expensive... I also have a mom who said I



can stay—not all foster youth have the same situation as me, they are having a hard time... Since my mom told me this, I have not worried any more. I wasn't stressed.”

– URM youth

can stay—not all foster youth have the same situation as me, they are having a hard time... Since my mom told me this, I have not worried any more. I wasn't stressed.”

Foster parents also provided positive anecdotes of youth’s outcomes after leaving the program, saying many go on to complete college, buy houses, and start families. In a few focus groups, foster parents said that youth’s ability to live independently after leaving the program goes to show how determined and resilient many URM youth are, as well as how well URM program staff are able to support youth when they first arrive.

In the next section, we discuss the information on youth outcomes that URM programs collect, as well as options for learning more about youth experiences and outcomes after youth leave the URM Program.

5. Evaluation

The descriptive components of this study provided insight into how local URM programs provide services and how URM youth experience these services, as described in the previous chapters. Another major component of this study was to understand the URM Program's structure, context, services, and youth served in order to provide recommendations on the design of a future evaluation that can address this question. In addition, we aimed to document existing data sources that could contribute to a deeper understanding of URM youth's experiences and outcomes.

To lay the groundwork for the recommended design options and next steps at the end of this chapter, we build on the study findings to discuss the goals of a future evaluation and provide a conceptual model that could guide an evaluation. We present evaluation design options and discuss factors to consider in designing an evaluation, such as the role of program structure and characteristics, existing data sources, new data collection opportunities, and logistics such as cost and timing. While this chapter is not a comprehensive review of evaluation designs, we discuss some specific designs for future consideration and how they might apply specifically to the URM Program. Finally, we present suggested research questions for a future evaluation and provide our recommendations for the design options for each research question, as well as recommended next steps for preparing for an evaluation.

A. Goals of future evaluations

Ideally, an evaluation can provide information on how a program's design and services affect the short- and long-term outcomes of the population it serves, as well as an understanding of contextual factors that affect both service delivery and outcomes. In practice, it can be difficult to design an evaluation that will fully achieve those goals. However, if evaluation designs that show how services impact youth outcomes are not feasible, there are approaches that can still provide useful information about a program and the experiences of its participants.

An evaluation of the URM Program might aim to provide insight into the relationship between program services and youth outcomes, or, short of that, to just provide information on the short- and long-term outcomes that URM youth experience.

An evaluation of the URM Program could include other aims such as understanding how URM youth outcomes relate to those of other youth who receive similar services or who have similar characteristics. It could also explore how different programmatic approaches and contexts relate to youth experiences and outcomes. Furthermore, an evaluation might focus specifically on understanding which services achieve the intended program outcomes. In doing so, it could document promising practices for programs to learn from or replicate; identify additional areas for future research or investment; and highlight findings that may be relevant in other contexts, such as the domestic child welfare system, refugee services more broadly, or programs in other countries.

This section focuses on these goals starting with a conceptual model that provides a framework for understanding the focuses of different evaluation options. We also discuss the outcomes that youth, program staff, partner staff, and foster families felt were important for URM youth and which relate to outcomes in the conceptual model. We then present potential research questions that will provide the foundation of the discussion of evaluation designs and recommendations.

Throughout this chapter, we consider three different types of evaluations, each of which may help answer research questions related to the URM Program:

- **Implementation studies** focus on *how programs provide and deliver services*, whether they deliver services according to the intended model, and promising practices and challenges in service delivery.
- **Outcomes studies** focus on measuring *what outcomes of program participants experience*.
- **Impact studies** go beyond outcomes studies to understand *how services or programs affect outcomes*.

5.A.1. Conceptual model for an evaluation of the URM Program

To guide a discussion of potential evaluation options for the URM Program and inform research questions and priorities, we developed a conceptual model for an evaluation of the URM Program, shown in Exhibit 8.¹¹ As we discuss evaluation designs and recommended research questions later in this section, we tie these different approaches back to the elements of the conceptual model.

The conceptual model incorporates standard elements of logic models:

- **Inputs:** Inputs include resources that youth, programs, and other stakeholders bring to the URM Program. These may vary by program, youth, or state.
- **Activities:** This includes all the activities that the URM Program conducts with youth in order to achieve the desired outcomes.
- **Outputs:** Outputs are short-term measurable indicators of progress. Outputs should align with the outcomes, with the idea that if programs achieve their goals for outputs, it should contribute to the achievement of long-term outcomes.
- **Short-term outcomes:** These are outcomes that can be measured at program exit or in other near-term intervals.
- **Long-term outcomes:** Long-term outcomes are the ultimate goals of the Program, which would be measured at least several years after youth exit the program.
- **State/local/program context:** As described in Section 4.C., the context in which each program operates is unique. This section captures factors outside of URM Program activities that may influence whether and how URM youth achieve desired outcomes.
- **National context.** National context includes factors outside of the URM Program that affect URM Program services and models.

Including these factors in a single diagram can inform an evaluation design by displaying the relationship between different elements and identifying potentially measurable factors important to understanding a program's implementation and effectiveness.

The conceptual model incorporates the main features of the URM Program in the inputs and activities section. To inform the appropriate short- and long-term outcomes for inclusion in the conceptual model, we relied on information collected during the site visits on how youth, foster parents, and program and partner staff define success for URM youth, as well as similar information provided by program directors on the survey. The definitions of success largely fell into three categories:

- **Ability to live independently.** Respondents described goals related to living independently, including achieving educational goals and/or attending college; employment, including both having and being able to find/apply for jobs; having health insurance; affordable and stable

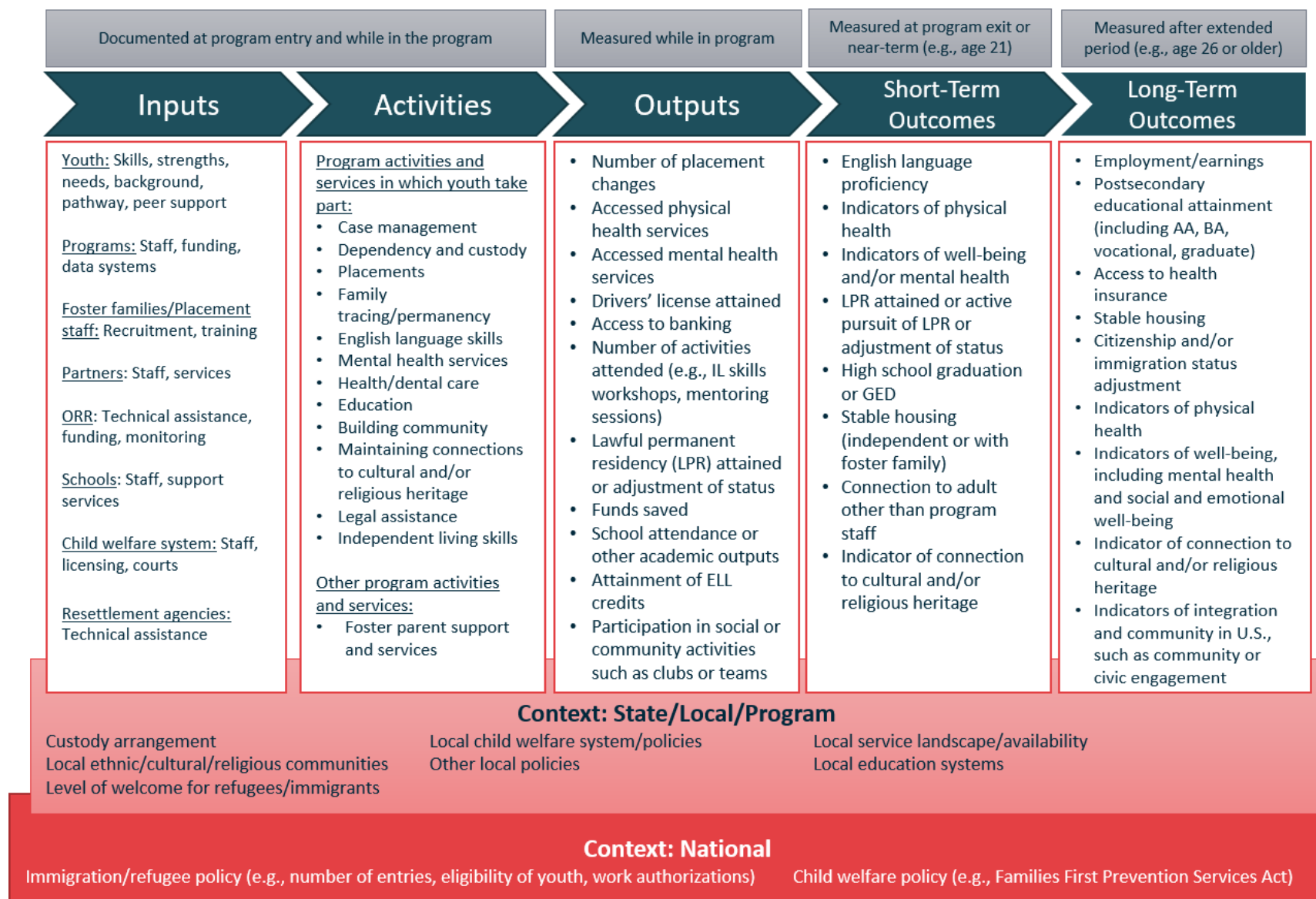
¹¹ ORR provided a theory of change, logic model, and list of indicators designed for program monitoring, which we used for reference in developing this conceptual model.

housing; ability to navigate U.S. systems and connections to resources; and financial security, including savings and the ability to purchase special items, such as cars.

- **Social and emotional well-being.** A second category was emotional well-being, or “being happy.” This included having healthy relationships, building community and connections in the United States, staying in touch with family from their home country (if desired), and leaving the program with connections to an adult outside the program who can provide support to youth if needed.
- **Other.** Other priorities included immigration status, such as legal permanent residency (LPR), and English proficiency.

The outcomes included in the conceptual model reflect these definitions, as well as priorities identified by ORR and other stakeholders.

Exhibit 8. Conceptual model.



B. Evaluation designs

In recommending potential evaluations of the URM Program, we consider a variety of types of evaluation designs. We discuss those types in this section. While we discuss them individually, the options could be combined into a mixed methods approach, which could focus on outcomes, impacts, and/or implementation. In each option, we include examples of research questions (RQs) that each design could answer, to illustrate each option's relevance to the URM Program. In considering a specific evaluation approach, the conceptual model presented above may be tailored or updated to be relevant to specific research questions.

5.B.1. Randomized controlled trials

A randomized controlled trial (RCT)—also known as an experimental evaluation—is the gold standard for evaluating the impacts of an intervention (i.e., a service or package of services) on the intervention's desired outcomes. In an RCT, individuals from an eligible group are selected at random to either receive or not receive a service or intervention, creating two groups for comparison that can be used to understand the impact of the service (White, Sabarwal, & de Hoop, 2014). If conducted properly, randomly assigning individuals to receive an intervention ensures that the characteristics of the individuals who received the intervention are the same, on average, as those who did not receive the intervention. As a result, researchers can attribute differences in outcomes between the two groups to the intervention, rather than to other differences between the two groups. However, a full experimental evaluation of the URM Program at the point of entry is extremely challenging and likely not feasible, for the reasons listed below.

- **Ethical considerations:** Youth who are eligible for the URM Program are often in unstable or dangerous situations prior to entry. There is a well-developed, complex process for determining which youth can enter the program and an individualized and tailored process for determining placements that takes into account the characteristics and needs of the youth. These processes are not random, and introducing random assignment into them for the purposes of conducting an evaluation would not be ethical.
- **Flow of youth into the program:** Because there are a series of steps and actors in the United States and abroad that lead to youth being referred and placed in the URM Program, which vary by eligibility pathway, it may not be logistically feasible to randomize this process.
- **Comparison group:** Because many URM youth only come to the United States once they enter the URM Program, a comparison group not entering the Program would remain overseas. It may not be feasible to collect data on their experiences and outcomes.

Therefore, we propose smaller scale experimental tests to learn more about what types of *services* are effective. These methods would still use a rigorous experimental design but would focus on more specific services and groups of youth. They would avoid the ethical issues by focusing only on services that it could be ethical to test, either due to limited capacity to offer a given service to all youth (in which case the program would need a method for allocating the limited number of slots for the service, which an experimental design could provide) or by providing the same service in a different way, therefore avoiding denying services. We discuss additional options, including some approaches using experimental designs, in Section 5.B.4 (Designs for evaluating specific services).

5.B.2. Quasi-experimental designs

Researchers often use quasi-experimental designs (QEDs) to examine impacts when randomization is not feasible. Such designs use a comparison group to create a counterfactual that approximates an experimental design (White & Sabarwal, 2014). QEDs have some advantages over experimental or non-experimental designs. Because they can be done using existing data and without randomization, they are often lower cost than experimental designs. They can also be launched more quickly, as they may not require time for sample build up. Even in cases where QEDs may not be rigorous enough to establish impacts due to methodological limitations (e.g., if the groups being compared differ on characteristics that cannot be controlled for), some quasi-experimental tools may nonetheless provide insight into similarities and differences in how services and contexts affect different groups of youth, especially when controlling for differences between groups.

On the other hand, there are drawbacks to consider as well. From a methodological perspective, QEDs do not account for unobserved characteristics. In other words, if the two groups experience different outcomes, the differences may be due to characteristics that are not captured in the data and therefore are not solely attributable to the intervention or program. They also require considerable amounts of data and some approaches may require a large sample. Finally, some QEDs may require specific assumptions to consider, based on the structure and data available on the URM Program. We will discuss these considerations further below.

Comparison groups

A key question for any QED is what can serve as a meaningful comparison group. There is no single group of youth in the United States that have the same background, experiences, and trajectories who do not gain access to the URM Program. Below, we discuss some groups that have some similar characteristics to URM youth that might lead a researcher to consider them for a comparison group and consider what comparisons to these groups might illustrate. Researchers could also explore comparisons between URM youth and these groups in non-experimental designs, which we discuss in the next section (Section 5.B.3).

We consider and discuss three groups as possibilities: youth in the domestic foster care system, UACs, and refugee youth resettled with families. Comparisons to these groups would answer different questions and provide different types of information on the URM Program. In section 5.B.4, we also discuss how QEDs could examine differences between groups of URM youth who did and did not receive a specific service.

Youth in the domestic foster care system: Because programs are required to offer the same range of services to URM youth as youth in domestic foster care, comparing outcomes and program experiences among these two groups could address research questions related to whether similar services are more or less appropriate or effective for one group or another. In addition, some program structures that serve both URM youth and youth in domestic foster care would lend themselves to this comparison. Finally, state and county systems have data on youth in domestic foster care that may be accessible for an evaluation. Youth in domestic foster care make up a much larger group than either URM youth or UACs.¹² On the other hand, URM youth and youth in domestic foster care have systematically different characteristics, so interpreting findings might be challenging, depending on the design. In addition, certain outcomes, such as immigration status changes, are not a relevant comparison for youth in domestic foster care. However, components of

¹² According to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System, 262,956 youth entered the domestic foster care system in FY 2018 (US. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019).

the required reporting for URM programs are modeled on the National Youth in Transition Database, which can facilitate comparing outcomes between URM youth and youth in domestic foster care.

Unaccompanied alien children: As described in Chapter 2, UACs who meet specific eligibility requirements can enter the URM Program. UACs who do not enter the URM Program are in the United States and may have similar experiences to UACs who become URM youth. A comparison could answer research questions about how URM Program services impact youth experiences or outcomes by comparing URM youth to UACs with similar experiences or characteristics who do not gain access, which is a much larger group.¹³ Some programs serve both UACs and URM youth, including mixed caseloads, so these program models may be a good fit for this comparison. However, there are likely to be systematic differences between the UAC youth who qualify to enter the URM Program and those who do not.

Refugee minors resettled with families: While these accompanied refugee minors have not experienced familial separation to the same degree as URM youth, they have similar pre-migration experiences, which may include trauma, interrupted formal education, and separation from some family members. They also may have limited English proficiency when they arrive. On the other hand, there may be limited data available on these youth and they may not need the same services (e.g., out-of-home care placements). Comparisons to refugee youth who are resettled with their families may be informative for answering research questions related to how outcomes may differ between youth with similar service needs, such as English language acquisition or education support, but who receive different types of services or participate in different programs.

Design options for quasi-experimental designs

In this section, we provide high-level descriptions of select QED methods to develop a comparison group for youth in the URM Program. These designs could be used with the groups described in the previous section. In each option below, we discuss how these may apply to specific comparison groups. It is important to note that these descriptions are not exhaustive discussions of these methods, nor do they take into consideration the range of assumptions, different approaches within each technique, or advantages and disadvantages of each technique. Moreover, there are other potential methods not included in this discussion.

Propensity score matching (PSM): Propensity score matching techniques use existing data to develop a comparison group using characteristics captured in data. It uses these characteristics to develop a score that represents the likelihood that an individual would participate in a specific program or intervention (in this case, the URM Program or a specific program service), based on the characteristics of the individuals who actually participated in the program. It then matches those who participated in the program with those who did not, based on the score (Dehejia & Wahba, 2002; White & Sabarwal, 2014). This approach could identify a comparison group, such as youth in domestic foster care, who were as similar as possible on observable characteristics as URM youth. However, it requires sufficient

Propensity score matching example research questions:

- *Do URM youth graduate from high school at a similar rate compared to youth in the domestic foster care system by age 21?*
- *How do URM youth's employment status and earnings compare to refugee youth who arrived with their families?*

¹³ There were 49,100 UACs referred in FY 2018 (ORR, 2018). In comparison, 281 URM youth entered the URM Program, and only a subset of those youth were former UACs.

baseline data on both groups of youth, including sufficient relevant variables to create a strong matched sample, as well as a large sample, as not all youth would be included in the matched sample. Depending on the data and the comparison group, it could be challenging to identify enough youth with similar observable characteristics to URM youth. As in section 5.4.B, it may also be feasible to use PSM to develop groups among URM youth to examine the effect of specific services.

Interrupted time series (ITS): ITS compares the trajectory of outcomes in the presence of an intervention against the counterfactual of what would have happened without the intervention, based on trends suggested by longitudinal data (Penfold & Zhang, 2013; Fok, Henry, & Allen, 2015). This could be a good option for analyzing specific policy changes within the URM program and the resulting outcomes for URM youth. ITS requires specific methodological assumptions regarding the trajectory of outcomes, as well as data on outcomes at multiple time points, including outcomes measurable at baseline.

Interrupted time series and difference-in-difference example research question:

What was the impact on URM youth experiences or outcomes of a policy change that increased the maximum foster care age?

Difference-in-difference (DID): DID accounts for differences in outcome measures between two groups prior to the implementation of an intervention when estimating impacts (White & Sabarwal, 2014; Wing, Simon, & Bello-Gomez, 2018). It is often used for measuring differences between two groups for a discrete intervention or policy change. Like ITS, DID has specific assumptions and requires data at multiple time points, including pre- and post-program/intervention. Like PSM, evaluators could use DID to explore differences in outcomes between URM youth who accessed a specific service and URM youth who did not.

Analysis options: While we do not provide a discussion of options for the analysis phase, there are multiple potentially appropriate methods. These range from simple tests of means to more advanced regression-based approaches. Evaluators would determine these in conjunction with the design.

5.B.3. Non-experimental designs

Non-experimental designs do not use statistical approaches to create a comparison group or statistical methods to evaluate the impacts of a program or intervention on youth outcomes. However, they can provide in-depth information on URM programs and the youth they serve, including youth outcomes and how services are implemented. They can also incorporate contextual factors and the unique environment of each program. For designs that could include a comparison to other youth, researchers could include comparisons to the groups described in Section 5.B.2. On the other hand, non-experimental approaches are not as rigorous as experimental or quasi-experimental designs in understanding causal relationships.

Design options for non-experimental approaches

Design options for non-experimental approaches are wide-ranging, and could encompass a broader range of research questions, methods, and approaches than experimental or quasi-experimental designs.

Non-experimental outcomes evaluation: In this option, an evaluation would measure outcomes for URM youth but would not have a comparison group. Data collection and analysis methods could include quantitative analysis (such as analysis of ORR data or linkages to administrative data) or qualitative data collection and analysis, including any of the new data collection approaches described below in Section 5.C.3. An evaluation of this type could examine a wide variety of

outcomes, as well as how they compare across all programs, while providing a rich source of in-program and follow-up information on youth for a subset of programs.

On the other hand, many non-experimental approaches would not provide information on whether services have an impact on or change youth outcomes. In addition, similar

to QEDs, it may take a long time to observe long-term outcomes for youth. An evaluation of this type could also require identifying goals that the outcomes of the evaluation could be compared against; for example, ORR may want to identify a goal of how many youth have attained a bachelor's degree by age 25, in order to assess the program's progress against these goals. ORR, service providers, or researchers could develop these goals using existing data, engagement of programs, youth, and stakeholders, or other methods to ensure the goals are appropriate.

Case studies. Case studies are an in-depth exploration of individual cases. Cases could be programs, specific services or components of programs (e.g., group homes), or youth, depending on the research questions. While this study focused on URM programs broadly and the services they provide to the diverse group of youth in the Program, a case study approach provides an opportunity for a deeper dive, through more in-depth data collection and analysis and/or through a

Case study example research questions:

- *What service models and approaches do URM programs employ to serve youth with specific types of complex needs?*
- *What are the experiences of victims of trafficking in the URM Program? How do these experiences relate to their outcomes after leaving the Program?*

Non-experimental outcomes evaluation example research questions:

- *What employment outcomes do URM youth experience at age 26?*
- *How do these outcomes vary among different types of programs, such as variation in custody arrangement?*

focus on specific components of the program model. For example, in a case study approach, researchers could collect more in-depth data through one-on-one interviews with youth, program participation data, and observations (data collection methods are described further in Section 5.C.3). In addition, they could focus research questions on certain program elements, such as how programs serve youth whose needs are best met in therapeutic foster care or residential treatment. They can include a variety of data collection and analysis techniques and focus on that specific unit in context. Case

studies are often used in conjunction with quantitative analysis to highlight specific components or units of a program. A mixed methods approach could include a variety of the data collection methods described below in Section 5.C.3.

Case studies would yield in-depth information on a small set of cases. On the other hand, they may not provide information across all URM programs, if not all are included, and it would take a considerable amount of up-front work to identify cases for inclusion.

Comparative case studies: Comparative case studies allow researchers to explore different cases (which can be a variety of different units) that are strategically selected to provide insight into how different service delivery models and contexts influence outcomes (Goodrick, 2014). Below, we describe some options for comparisons, as well as advantages and disadvantages. As with case studies, a mixed methods approach could draw on quantitative analysis and new data collection.

Similar to a regular case study approach, cases could be programs, specific services, or individuals, among others, depending on the research questions and type of comparison that is of interest. If looking at programs as cases, inclusion in the study could be based on characteristics, such as custody arrangement, or different structures or service delivery models. As an example, researchers could compare URM programs at agencies that only provide URM services to others that also provide domestic foster care services, and conduct case studies of each to understand whether and how providing services to both URM youth and youth in domestic foster care affects the services and outcomes of the URM program. Alternatively, cases could be selected for comparison based on similarities in their outcomes but different service delivery models, or similar models that result in different outcomes.

Comparative case studies could be an option for investigating relationships between experiences, services, and outcomes, though the approach is not as rigorous as experimental or quasi-experimental designs. Like single case studies, it would yield in-depth information on a specific group of cases, while the comparative element would provide more information on context and program characteristics. As with case studies, a comparative case study approach would not provide information on all sites and may take more initial effort to identify comparisons and cases for inclusion.

Ethnographic-style research: Ethnographic methods focus on learning about individuals in the context and culture in which they live through in-person or first-hand interactions (Hammersley, 2006). Given that context, background, and experiences are integral to URM youth’s trajectories and outcomes, using ethnographic methods would yield information that goes beyond measurable quantitative outputs or outcomes. Ethnographic approaches often involve individual interviews and observations (see discussion of new data collection options, described below in Section 5.C.3.).

Ethnographic-style research can generate a wide range of data on youth, including their perceptions of what is or is not successful about the program and their successes, challenges, and needs, as well as the context in which they experience program services. It may also capture cultural or other factors specific to URM youth that are not captured in existing data. Further, ethnographic methods emphasize interacting with youth in their own environment, such as their home or school.

Ethnographic methods example research questions:

- *How do youth experience URM Program services, adjustment to the United States, and navigating U.S. systems?*
- *What past experiences, strengths, and needs do they bring to this perspective?*
- *How does the context of their URM program experience (peers, local community, state/local policies) relate to their outcomes?*

Comparative studies example research questions:

- *How do short- and long-term outcomes for youth compare between programs that serve primarily refugee youth who were referred while overseas, and programs that serve primarily former UACs, and those that serve an even mix?*
- *How do programs tailor their approaches to these different groups of youth?*
- *What services, contexts, and experiences of these programs contribute to these outcomes?*

in-depth information and youth voice and could also focus on more specific topics. For example, during our focus groups, a few youth discussed high-level perspectives on mental health services; in

an ethnographic study, researchers could explore these experiences and perceptions much more deeply, including the cultural underpinnings of the youth perspectives.

As with all qualitative methods, sample size is less of an issue. On the other hand, it can be resource-intensive and require extensive logistic coordination. For example, for URM youth, researchers would need to consider interpretation and/or language capacity of researchers. It would also not yield causal information or systematic analysis of long-term outcomes. Finally, this method requires researchers who are highly qualified in conducting ethnographic research, especially with vulnerable groups, as these types of interviews may touch on difficult topics such as their family history and past trauma.

5.B.4. Designs for evaluating specific services

In addition to the designs above, there are additional ways to learn about impacts and implementation of URM program services, including options to provide quick feedback to program staff. These approaches focus on measuring outputs or short-term outcomes and how programs implement services. The methodologies used in these designs overlap with those used in the designs discussed in Sections 5.B.1-5.B.3. For example, some designs involve RCTs, QEDs, nonexperimental outcome measures, or similar modes of qualitative data collection. However, we treat them as distinct because by focusing on smaller scale questions or on providing rapid feedback to programs, they involve different designs and ways of implementing the evaluations than the studies described earlier. These approaches could include questions related to program processes or services that relate to youth outcomes, like staff retention or training, or foster parent recruitment, as we may expect that high-quality training or recruitment practices contribute to positive outcomes for youth.

Evaluating specific services: In the absence of a full experimental evaluation of the URM Program, tests of individual services can use rigorous experimental approaches to learn more about the URM Program by identifying individual service components and randomly assigning youth (or other individuals, as relevant) to receive the service or variation of the service. This would be appropriate for services to which all youth do not have access already due to limited program capacity, in which case randomization is a reasonable way to allocate these services. It also may be appropriate for services that programs have reason to believe may not be better than the usual approach; for example, if programs want to test a new training curriculum for foster parents, they could randomize participants to receive either the new or old curriculum, and not deny the service to anyone. Another option would be to use a quasi-experimental method to explore the impact of specific services. For example, if youth enter a waitlist for a specific service and a subset of those youth are selected in a non-random way to receive the service, then the group of youth who did not receive the service could form a comparison group for a quasi-experimental design. In this case, researchers could use propensity score matching or another quasi-experimental approach to develop two similar groups and to account for potential differences in the two groups that could arise from the non-random selection of youth to receive the service.

Evaluating specific services example research questions:

- *Does a cash incentive program result in higher levels of youth savings six months after completing the program? Why or why not?*
- *Does a specific approach (e.g., design or wording) for foster parent recruitment materials result in higher attendance at information sessions and/or higher rates of licensing than the normal approach?*

Rapid learning methods: Rapid learning approaches, sometimes known as rapid cycle evaluation, focus on providing quick and actionable feedback to programs (Holzwardt & Wagner, 2019). They can be either experimental or non-experimental, or a combination of both. As described in Chapter 4, URM programs implement a variety of approaches and services designed to improve URM youth outcomes; rapid learning methods can allow programs to implement, evaluate, and refine these services in a short timeframe. Experimental rapid learning methods are similar to conducting tests on individual service components but often include iterative approaches and tweaks to service delivery until the goals identified have been reached. Programs with capacity and partnerships to use experimental rapid learning methods can be innovative and flexible in adapting their services to youth needs. With a focus on implementation and service delivery, programs can learn about why these approaches are effective to inform future service provision and development. For example, on

Rapid learning methods example research questions:

- *Does a specific mentoring program achieve the intended outputs (e.g., mentor pairs still meeting regularly after a specific time period, measure of satisfaction or engagement based on mentor/mentee surveys)?*
- *Are the components of the service being evaluated implemented as intended (e.g., do mentors meet as often as the program intends? Are mentor-mentee matches created according to the program design?)? What works well? What does not work well?*
- *If not meeting desired goals, what changes might be made (e.g., expanding preparation/support for mentors, revised approach to identifying mentor/mentee matches)?*

our site visits, we learned that programs use different ways to engage youth in independent living programming. In a rapid learning approach, a program could implement a supplemental independent living skills curriculum (e.g., additional reading, topics, or materials), randomly assign youth to receive the additional component, and then compare the attendance rates at independent living workshops between the groups of youth who received the independent living curriculum and those that did not. Based on their findings, they decide if they need to adapt the supplemental curriculum to improve attendance.

Rapid learning methods can also be non-experimental; these would focus on refining approaches in order to meet goals, but without randomization. Non-experimental approaches could also include data collection about how programs implement services in order to inform tweaks to service delivery in order to achieve the desired goals. In the example of the independent living skills curriculum, rather than randomly assigning youth, a program could provide the supplemental curriculum to all youth and aim to increase the overall rate of youth attendance at independent living skills programming.

These approaches have advantages and trade-offs. Rapid learning approaches that use experimental methodology can show impacts of an intervention or service on outcomes. In addition, rapid-learning approaches, either experimental or non-experimental, can provide quick feedback to programs, so they can allocate resources and adapt their approach in response to findings. Implementing these approaches can also help programs build capacity for research and evaluation.

On the other hand, they require capacity to implement and manage study activities. As a result, studies often provide funding for programs to build this capacity and implement these approaches, which has cost implications. In addition, these approaches would work only for certain services, such as discrete interventions.

Finally, for the quantitative approaches, statistical power to observe effects depends on building a sufficient sample. This could be a challenge, depending on how many youth access the service, how many sites or programs are involved in the study, and how long the study operates. For example, if

only youth who need tutoring are randomly assigned into an intervention, it could take a long time to build up a sufficient sample to detect effects.

C. Factors and considerations for selecting an evaluation design

While the conceptual model can help understand what measures might contribute to answering those questions and a discussion of designs can shed light on how we might understand the different components of the model, it is also important to consider program factors, logistics, and data when considering evaluation designs. This section builds off the discussion of designs to provide more concrete considerations to ground the recommendations provided in the concluding section.

5.C.1. How program structure, characteristics, and contexts affect evaluability

Program structure, characteristics, and contexts are critical for considering what types of evaluations are feasible, what types of support programs might benefit from before beginning an evaluation, and what types of information we might learn from an evaluation. Factors include:

- **Program structure:** Understanding the structure of the overall URM Program, as well as variation in structure of local URM programs, is important when considering evaluation options, as different designs may be a better fit for certain structures. Programs offer a range of services to youth and provide individualized services based on youth's goals and needs, rather than providing a single intervention or a set of services that are consistent for all youth, which may make a meaningful evaluation that applies to the full Program challenging. Further, the specific services that programs or partners offer may vary across different local URM programs. In addition, programs provide some services through a network of partners, which adds complexity to the model. Finally, programs have different approaches to staffing and caseloads, such as a mix of UAC and URM youth or URM youth only, which may have implications for identifying comparison groups.
- **State and local policies:** In addition to the influence of custody arrangement and other policies on program context and service implementation, variation in custody arrangement, eligibility for Medicaid, and other state and local policies have implications for evaluation. For example, in public custody arrangements, programs may have access to additional data on youth (e.g., if youth are in a public custody arrangement, they are more likely to be included in the state child welfare data system than youth in private custody arrangements). State and local policies are also important factors when considering comparisons between programs; for example, researchers could select cases for comparison in a comparative case study design based on different states' eligibility for Medicaid.
- **Program capacity:** Evaluation requires time, expertise, and buy-in from programs. We learned that programs have varying levels of capacity to participate in research and evaluation activities. This includes having staff dedicated to data collection, quality improvement, research, and evaluation; organizational capacity to collect and use data, including data management systems; and partner buy-in and support, including data sharing agreements. It is important to understand existing program capacity, as well as ways to boost this capacity if needed to implement specific designs.
- **Sample size:** Sufficient sample size is necessary to detect effects when analyzing the impact of services on outcomes using quantitative data. The URM Program does not serve a large number of youth at any given time, and the number of youth entering the Program has been decreasing in recent years. These small samples may make it more difficult to implement designs that rely on sample size for statistical power. While sample size is a factor, it does

not make an evaluation of the program infeasible, as there are qualitative designs that do not rely on a large sample, as well as quantitative methods for working with small samples.¹⁴ Given the availability of such methods, as well as the importance of documenting the experiences and outcomes of this small and unique group of youth, low sample size is not in itself a disqualifying factor for some types of evaluations.

- **Incorporating youth perspectives into an evaluation:** URM youth voices and perspectives are central to an evaluation of the URM Program, both in the design and interpretation of findings. In addition, including youth feedback and gaining youth buy-in may increase the likelihood that youth participate in evaluation activities.
- **Flow of youth into program:** Youth enter the program through different referral channels, and often have different experiences and/or needs based on how they entered the Program. As a result, considering how youth are referred to the program is important for sample build-up and availability of data on youth before they enter the program, among others.

5.C.2. Existing data sources, quality, and potential for use in future research

Understanding existing data sources that researchers could use to learn more about youth experiences and outcomes is an important step before planning an evaluation. Access to data that can help answer the research questions is necessary for an evaluation, whether it is existing data or data that researchers collect for a specific project. These data sources could provide information on all components included in the conceptual model. In this section, we discuss existing data sources, including ORR data, program data, and other data sources. In the next section, we discuss options for new data collection.

ORR data

Programs are required by ORR to collect data on youth via the ORR-3 and ORR-4 reports. Programs submit ORR-3 reports for specific changes for URM youth, such as initial placement, a change of placement or address, and change in immigration status. These records show the services programs provide to youth, youth placements, youth program status, and youth legal status. The ORR-4 includes information on youth education, well-being (as assessed by case managers), family contact and tracing, and independent living services and outcomes. Programs are required to collect the ORR-4 at specific points in the youth's program experience, such as at program entry, every year on the anniversary of their initial placement, and after they exit the program and stop receiving ORR-funded services, up to age 21.

While these data are rich sources of information on youth, there are some limitations:

- ORR has noted that some components are inconsistent and unreliable, due to variation in how program staff report information.
- ORR has provided technical assistance to programs on submitting the reports, especially in recent years. As a result, the consistency and accuracy of the data have improved over time. However, the variation in reliability makes it difficult to discern trends in reporting from trends in actual service provision.
- There may be backlogs in report approval, which may delay reports being submitted on time.

¹⁴ There are approaches for implementing tests and analyzing data with small samples, such as Dynamic Waitlisted Design, Stepped Wedge Designs, and applications of ITS (Wyman & Brown, 2015; Fok, Henry, & Allen, 2015). While a full discussion of these techniques is outside the scope of this report, it is worth noting that there are analysis and design options that may be appropriate.

- The data do not provide substantive information on URM youth experiences after they leave the program, as programs are only required to collect information until youth turn 21. URM youth may still be in the Program until age 21. For those who are not in the program, there may be a short period of time between when they exit and when they turn 21, which leaves relatively little time to observe post-Program experiences and outcomes. In addition, program staff face challenges in contacting youth after they leave the Program.

Non-ORR data sources

In addition to the data collected and submitted to ORR, programs may collect their own data and other local, state, and national sources may be available. In this section, we provide a brief description of additional data sources for consideration in an evaluation.

Program data

From the survey and site visits, we learned that some programs collect information beyond what they report to ORR. On the survey, half of the project directors reported collecting additional information on youth while in the Program; educational attainment was the most common category collected, followed by physical health indicators and employment status. In addition, nearly all the program directors surveyed reported that they track education and employment status as youth outcomes. They also described collecting outcomes such as English language proficiency, existence of social networks, and housing stability. More than half of project directors reported that they collect data on youth after they emancipate from the program.

On the site visits, some programs reported collecting outcome information such as a “termination summary” when youth exit, conducting exit interviews, and collecting data to support continuous quality improvement processes. However, these focus more on information on youth while in the program or right when they leave, rather than longer-term/post-exit outcomes.

Programs and partners said that tracking youth outcomes after they exit can be challenging because it can be difficult to maintain contact with youth over time, especially if their contact information changes. While some youth stay in touch with the program, others do not. In addition, programs report a lack of clarity on what specific outcomes would be the most useful to track.

Other state/local data

In addition to the data that programs collect themselves, there may also be data available through other state or local sources, such as education data. Some partners we spoke to during site visits collect data on URM youth they serve, but the data may not be specific to URM youth or clearly identify which youth are in the URM Program. This is especially likely for schools or partners that serve a broad population of youth, though researchers have developed methods for analyzing data related to refugees using sources that do not include fields identifying refugee status (Capps et al., 2015; Bernstein & DuBois, 2018). We also found that programs did not often have data-sharing agreements with partners to share data on the youth they serve. Programs and partners may not have the time, resources, or capacity for developing the infrastructure to share data on URM youth and maintain confidentiality, which is a key factor in planning future evaluations.

Potential data sources for outcomes

One possibility for learning about URM youth outcomes is linking to additional data sources. As part of our data analysis task, we examined data sources to which researchers may be able to link the ORR-3 and ORR-4 data. Prior to determining which data sources to link, researchers or evaluators should assess the feasibility of linking based on identifiers in the data, such as name, birthdate, or

social security number. For this study, we did not receive identifiers other than birthdate so we could not assess the quality of other fields for linking. In this section, we will briefly describe each data source, as well as the benefits and limitations of each for learning about URM youth outcomes.

National Directory of New Hires (NDNH): The National Directory of New Hires is a national repository of state-level directories to which employers report hires and their wages on a quarterly basis. It is maintained by the Office of Child Support Enforcement, and its primary purpose is to assist in the collection of child support. Researchers often use NDNH to analyze employment outcomes. While NDNH has limitations related to timeframe, type of employment included, and specificity for identifiers needed for matching, it could be a rich source of information on employment and earnings for URM youth after leaving the program (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2020).

National Student Clearinghouse (NSC): The National Student Clearinghouse collects information from postsecondary education institutions, including enrollment and degree attainment. It is primarily used for enrollment and degree verification but can also be available for research. Linking to NSC data can help understand when and where URM youth enroll in postsecondary education, how long they attend, and whether they graduate (American Council on Education, 2010). However, not all institutions report to the Clearinghouse and reporting is inconsistent across types of institutions, as participation in NSC is voluntary. Large public institutions are more likely to share data with NSC, while smaller, private, and non-Title IV, degree-granting institutions are less likely to share data (Dundar & Shapiro, 2016).

Medicaid Analytic eXtract (MAX) and Transformed Medicaid Statistical Information System (T-MSIS) Analytic Files (TAF):

The MAX files and newer TAF files, which replace the MAX files, include several datasets related to Medicaid claims at the individual level. Both files could answer questions about youth's medical needs and health services paid for by Medicaid. However, these files are not currently available for Medicaid data from 2017 to present. They are backlogged due to the transition to the new database that is the data source for the TAF files (Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services, 2019). The MAX and TAF files only include services paid for by Medicaid, so youth with other insurance will not be included. If youth receive care through managed care organizations, Medicaid claims data may not accurately represent the care they receive.





Census Bureau: The data sources included in the Census Bureau's Data Linkage Infrastructure cover a range of topics and populations, such as tax information, social service program participation, and other datasets such as the National Change of Address database, which could help understand how youth move after leaving the program. The Census Bureau creates a person-specific linking key that can link individuals across many datasets, using social security number (SSN) if available, and name and birthdate, as well as other identifiers, if SSN is unavailable (Chiu, 2017).

Other: Other data sources include national child welfare databases (e.g., the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS)), Internal Revenue Service data, Social Security Administration data, state- or local-level data (e.g., state/county child welfare data, Medicaid data, postsecondary systems, integrated data systems, school district data), national immigration status data, and other ORR sources on refugees, among others. While these may have information on URM youth, potential challenges include lack of information on how many URM youth would actually be included in the datasets, the resources required to identify and access datasets across multiple jurisdictions, and identifying whether there is information in these sources that ORR does not already collect as part of its required reporting. There may also be data on contextual factors, such as local policies, characteristics of localities, and service availability. These may be available through the resettlement agencies or published sources such as the Census Bureau's American Community Survey.

5.C.3. Options for new types of data collection

Evaluations often benefit from new primary data collection that focuses on the topics of interest for the evaluation and reflects the constantly evolving circumstances of programs. There are many options for new data collection; the most appropriate methods will depend on the specific questions the evaluation is trying to answer and on resources available. These data collection options could accompany the designs described in Section 5.B. Exhibit 9 provides an overview of several types of data collection.

Exhibit 9. Methods for new data collection

Method	Description
Interviews 	<p>Conducting one-on-one interviews with individuals involved in the URM Program, especially youth, would yield information on youth experiences, perspectives, and potentially outcomes, depending on the time point at which it is collected. In addition to youth, interviews with foster families and program and partner staff would be critical to some of the design options and recommendations we present at the end of this chapter. In this study, we conducted focus groups with youth and foster parents and primarily group interviews with staff, which was sufficient for the study's goal of providing a broad description of the services and administration of the URM Program. Individual interviews would allow a deeper dive than the approach in this study.</p>
Focus groups 	<p>Focus groups can foster discussion among diverse perspectives and show how individuals in a group interact with each other. While we think that interviews are better for engagement with youth, focus groups that document interaction and relationships among a specific group of individuals or elicit diverse perspectives can provide helpful information. Options could be youth from a specific group home to learn about their interactions and shared experiences in the group home, or staff who share a similar role.</p>
Surveys 	<p>An in-depth survey with youth who left the program could provide outcome and experience data that may be difficult for programs to collect. A specialized survey firm could develop a sample of youth, contact them, and conduct the survey over the phone. Such surveys could be part of any design option that includes analysis of long-term outcomes and could be used in conjunction with administrative data to understand long-term outcomes. Another option would be to survey staff to learn about implementation (e.g., a survey of all URM case managers).</p>
Observations 	<p>Using observations of program activities, researchers can learn about how activities are documented and compare the observed implementation to perceptions of program services from staff, youth, and foster parents. Researchers could observe key URM Program activities, such as independent living workshops or foster parent recruitment sessions, to learn about program implementation and youth's and/or foster parents' engagement, as well as to understand variation in how different programs deliver similar services.</p>
Case file analysis 	<p>Reviewing documents, notes, and case files can provide context for certain design options. For example, a comparison of case file notes for URM and domestic foster care youth could provide insight into case managers' approaches to individual cases, documentation of services provided, and reasons for providing services on an individual level, which may not come across in other types of data collection.</p>
Program data collection 	<p>An evaluation could provide funding to programs to collect systematic quantitative data on youth for evaluation, in addition to what they already collect. For the URM Program, this could be a useful approach for collecting information on services provided at a more granular level than what is collected in the required program data (e.g., frequency of attendance at independent living workshops). Evaluations often include a Management Information System which researchers or evaluators and programs design together to collect information specific to a certain program or intervention.</p>

5.C.4. Logistics

When designing an evaluation, there are several logistical elements to consider, such as cost, language capacity, research subject projections, administrative data linking, and timing of an evaluation. **Evaluation costs** include staffing, materials, and other resources. Different approaches have different cost implications; for example, site visits may be more costly than phone interviews, due to logistics related to travel and conducting interviews on site, while low-cost secondary data sources may make quantitative analyses less resource intensive than other approaches. Surveys of individuals who have left programs can be very expensive, as they must develop the instrument, locate and maintain contact with youth, administer the survey, and process the data for analysis.

For the URM Program specifically, **language capacity** is key. In order to incorporate the perspectives of youth who are not proficient in English, we recommend conducting data collection in languages other than English. Qualitative data collection and surveys with youth would require translation and/or interpretation, as well as approvals for interpreters to conduct data collection, which is an added cost.

In addition, any evaluation that qualifies as human subjects research will require **review and approval of an Institutional Review Board (IRB)** to ensure participants are protected. The level of effort involved in IRB review and approval depends on the study goals and content, vulnerability of and level of risk to participants, and data collection methods. Resources to consider include staff time and coordination to ensure all protections are in place and the project upholds the required standards.

Accessing **administrative data** for linking would require identifying and accessing data, as well as logistics such as negotiating data sharing agreements and ensuring data security. If the data are not linked by the entity providing the data, then researchers would need to have the expertise to match the data source to the ORR data. If researchers choose to pursue state-level data for linking, such as Medicaid, then implementing this approach for each state will be time- and resource-intensive.

Finally, evaluators would need to consider the **time** an evaluation would take. Designs including long-term outcomes, as well as quantitative designs requiring sufficient sample size and statistical power to detect effects, may not be feasible for several years. On the other hand, designs that do not rely on statistical power may be conducted with existing data or may include new data collection and could be done more quickly.

D. Potential future research questions and design considerations

Having discussed design options, considerations, and logistics, we bring these components together to suggest research questions, recommended designs options that could answer the research questions, and next steps that ORR could take for preparing for an evaluation.

5.D.1. Research questions

We developed four overarching research questions to guide future evaluations of the URM Program, based on conversations with ORR, programs, and other stakeholders about what they would like to know about the URM Program and on the Program's theory of change (provided by ORR). These questions are broad, and we expect that designers of a future evaluation of the URM Program would identify more specific research questions that fall under these larger questions.

Research questions for a future evaluation

RQ 1: What short- and long-term outcomes do URM youth experience after leaving the program?

RQ 2: How do short- and long-term outcomes of URM youth compare to the outcomes of youth who have similar or overlapping experiences but who do not enter the URM Program (e.g., youth in domestic foster care)?

RQ 3: How do different URM program models and contexts relate to experiences and outcomes for URM youth? How do different models, services/activities, and contexts contribute to positive youth outcomes?

RQ 4: What specific services/activities are effective? Do they help youth achieve the intended outputs and short- and long-term outcomes? Why or why not?

The research questions build off the conceptual model and the three types of approaches we described in Section 5.A.1 (measuring outcomes, measuring impacts, and implementation). For example, Research Question 1 emphasizes measuring outcomes, focusing on the Short- and Long-Term Outcomes on the right side of the model. Research Question 3 has a more intentional focus on the context at the bottom of the model and incorporates both measuring outcomes and how programs deliver these services. Research Question 3 could also encompass other attributes of service models, such as partnerships or program improvement processes. These questions are stated at a general level; the conceptual model helps demonstrate what specific topics and measures each might involve. We recognize that some of these questions may be more feasible to answer than others. Exhibit 10 provides a preview of which research questions each type of design discussed in Section 5.B could answer.

Exhibit 10. Research questions for future evaluations addressed by design options

Research questions addressed by design	RQ 1	RQ 2	RQ 3	RQ 4
Quasi-Experimental Designs				
Propensity score matching		X		
Interrupted time series		X		X
Difference-in-difference		X		X
Non-Experimental Designs				
Non-experimental outcomes evaluation	X		X	
Case studies			X	
Comparative case studies	X	X	X	
Ethnographic-style research			X	
Other Designs				
Tests of individual services				X
Rapid learning methods/Rapid cycle evaluation			X	X

*We discuss randomized controlled trials in this chapter but do not think this design is feasible for the URM Program.

In the next section, we provide recommendations for approaches that could answer these questions.

5.D.2. Recommended evaluation designs

Ultimately, the choice of evaluation design depends on what ORR, URM provider agencies, and other stakeholders want to learn about the URM Program. In this section, we offer recommended design options for each of the suggested research questions, along with considerations and trade-offs. In addition, we describe next steps that we hope will help ORR and URM programs prepare for a future evaluation.

As a general approach, we recommend incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methods for all research questions. Incorporating youth and staff perspectives and voices into the design is critical for understanding the relationship between the services and implementation of the URM Program and youth outcomes.

RQ 1 What outcomes do youth in the URM Program experience?

To understand the central question of what outcomes URM youth experience, we suggest a mixed methods outcome evaluation, accompanied by existing benchmarks or goals against which to compare youth outcomes. In order to capture long-term outcomes, this would require a survey and/or links to external administrative data sources. We also recommend incorporating an element focused on implementation to learn more about the contexts and experiences of specific programs or services, such as case studies of specific programs or ethnographic interviews with youth.

RQ 2 How do short- and long-term outcomes of URM youth compare to the outcomes of youth who have similar or overlapping experiences but who do not enter the URM Program?

This question may be difficult to answer due to the limitations of potential comparison groups. We recommend comparisons to youth in domestic foster care. While youth in domestic foster care have different characteristics than URM youth, we believe that the requirement for the same range of services offered to each group could provide a useful comparison. A comparison to youth in domestic foster care could show how youth who have different characteristics but receive similar services, achieve similar or different outcomes. Understanding this comparison would provide information to ORR on what elements of the domestic child welfare system are most applicable to URM youth, what practices or service delivery approaches from domestic child welfare are most beneficial for URM youth, and what elements may be less relevant. These comparisons may also provide insight for the domestic child welfare system about notable practices from URM programs that they could benefit from, perhaps especially for jurisdictions who serve more youth in domestic foster care from linguistically, religiously, and culturally diverse backgrounds.

From a design perspective, we recommend comparative case studies. This could include a survey or administrative data linkages to compare long-term outcomes but would focus on strategically identifying programs or services for comparison (e.g., a URM program that provides services for both URM youth and youth in domestic foster care). We recommend including in-depth interviews with youth, as well as a variety of other data collection methods, such as surveys and interviews with staff members and foster parents, observations of program activities, document reviews, and/or additional data collection by programs. These data collection approaches could shed light on how URM and domestic child welfare programs implement services, youth experiences in these programs, and how local context and availability of services for URM youth and youth in domestic foster care may vary.

ORR or researchers could also explore QEDs. However, we do not recommend a specific one here, given the challenges with feasibility discussed earlier. It is possible that researchers may identify more feasible comparison groups than we considered or identify a programmatic or policy change of interest that they could analyze using the methods described above. If researchers do pursue a QED, we would suggest pairing it with a focus on program implementation and/or a qualitative approach, such as interviews with youth and staff in order to incorporate their perspectives.

RQ 3

How do different URM program models and contexts relate to experiences and outcomes for URM youth? How do different models, services/activities, and contexts contribute to positive youth outcomes?

A comparative case study design, which analyzes youth outcomes and takes a deep dive into strategically selected cases to illustrate relationships between program service, context, and youth outcomes, would be a good option. An example of cases to compare could be URM programs that license all foster parents as therapeutic foster homes compared to those that do not license therapeutic foster homes at all in order to learn about how this contributes to youth and foster family experiences, how this affects the characteristics of youth who enter the program, and whether it relates to youth well-being outcomes. To understand long-term outcomes, a survey or administrative data linkages would be necessary. As with RQ 2, we recommend using a variety of data collection options. However, in contrast to RQ 2, these case studies would not need to focus on a specific comparison group but could include cases for comparison on a broader range of attributes, such as comparing programs with different structures, service delivery models, or partnerships.

An outcome evaluation, similar in approach to RQ 1 could also provide insight on this research question. A qualitative data collection component, such as ethnographic interviews with youth and staff or an implementation study, would be especially important here to document service delivery and context.

RQ 4

What specific services/activities are effective? Do they help youth achieve the intended outputs and short- and long-term outcomes? Why or why not?

To understand the effectiveness of specific services, we recommend conducting tests of individual services, along with implementation research or rapid learning methods. This allows programs to compare URM youth to each other, rather than other groups that may not have similar characteristics or experiences. We also think that supporting programs to invest in this type of quality improvement would be beneficial over the long-term and would support a learning community across programs, as they could share their successes, promising practices, and lessons learned with each other. Examples of specific services we learned about on our site visits include financial incentive programs and mentoring programs.

5.D.3. Next steps and preparation for an evaluation

With these evaluation options in mind, ORR and OPRE can support a potential future evaluation through specific tasks focused on gaining input on design and building capacity for data collection and research. These next steps will provide a concrete foundation for an evaluation, even before the evaluation design is selected.

Engage programs and stakeholders in all stages of research and evaluation: Engaging programs (e.g., youth, staff, foster parents, SRCs) and stakeholders (e.g., resettlement agencies) on what they want to learn, how they think it might be feasible to learn it, and what they think is important to consider is critical for developing an evaluation approach that puts participants' perspectives at the center and produces findings that are useful and actionable for ORR and individual URM programs. Youth, foster families, and program staff bring unique expertise on the program which is key for an evaluation. Some specific ideas for structuring this engagement include:

- **Participatory approaches that include youth, foster parents, and staff in evaluation or research approaches, findings, and priorities:** Including individuals who experience the program in evaluation design, interpreting findings, and shaping future research ensures that the research not only includes them in data collection but also in the implementation and use of evaluation. Participatory evaluation strategies emphasize participants' lived experience and expertise in identifying research priorities, designing data collection approaches, discussing and contextualizing findings, and identifying lessons learned (Gujit, 2014). As a next step, ORR should engage youth, families, and staff in identifying evaluation priorities, research questions, and outcomes.
- **Develop an evaluation working group:** This group could include representatives from ORR, URM programs and state offices, researchers, and/or resettlement agencies to provide regular input on the design and development of an evaluation, including the topics listed below (defining outcomes, data collection, etc.).
- **Engage committees with representatives from programs on specific topics:** This could include bringing programs together to identify priorities for specific types of services such as independent skills, placements such as group homes, mental health services, etc. This could create a learning community while also developing strategic goals for research and evaluation that ensure methods and approaches are responsive to programs' individual needs. This would be most appropriate if considering approaches related to RQ 4.

Defining outcomes and specific research questions: Developing specific and measurable outcomes to explore in an evaluation that reflect the URM Program's goals is an important step. The conceptual model we presented earlier offers high-level outcomes to explore, based largely on definitions of success that youth, foster parents, and URM program staff identified during our information collection. However, those designing evaluations will need to define more specific outputs, short-term outcomes, and long-term outcomes on which they want their studies to focus. They may also need to tailor the conceptual model provided in this chapter or develop new conceptual models for their specific research questions and/or studies. In addition, ORR, evaluators, and/or stakeholders could collaborate to develop specific research questions, within the overarching questions described in this section, to guide an evaluation.

Preparing for data collection and analysis: While ORR collects detailed information on youth and services, there may be opportunities to collect data that is more detailed and for longer periods of time. Some ideas for steps for data collection include the following:

- **Increase capacity for data collection:** Developing approaches to collecting outcome data by programs and/or ORR, including revisiting existing data collection methods and supporting programs to collect outcome data, could yield better quality information. Multiple program directors and SRCs noted on the surveys that training and assistance on data collection would be helpful. Programs visited also articulated the desire to measure long-term outcomes on youth and to have a standardized way of assessing outcomes that are difficult to define, such as well-being or mental health. For example, one program cited the Colorado RISE survey as an example for what might be helpful for the URM Program (Lichtenstein,

Puma, Engelman, & Miller, 2016). This survey collected information to measure the integration of adult refugees in Colorado, using a conceptual framework for integration developed by Ager & Strang (2008). ORR could also consider updates to the ORR-3 and ORR-4 forms to systematically capture desired information on youth experiences and outcomes.

- Support programs to develop data-sharing agreements with partners: Partners are a valuable source of information, as URM programs work with other organizations to provide services to youth, as described in the previous section. Gaining access to information that partners have on youth could provide a more comprehensive picture of youth experiences.
- Prepare for administrative data linkages to understand long-term outcomes of URM youth: This includes examining possible resources, depending on the outcomes of interest, and identifying steps needed to acquire and/or link the data.
- Learn more about what sample size would be required for addressing specific research questions to determine feasibility and timeframe of evaluation: This may include conducting power calculations to determine what sample sizes would be needed to identify a minimum detectable effect for the approach and intervention being studied.

Identifying components for evaluation: If ORR pursues tests of specific interventions or rapid learning methods, ORR and/or individual programs would need to identify components of the URM Program to evaluate. This could include ORR and/or programs identifying existing service components which they already implement and think would be helpful to understand internally and to share more broadly with the URM, UAC, and/or domestic foster care community. Alternatively, ORR could provide programs with funding opportunities to support innovation and the development of new methods of meeting youth needs and include the evaluation component as part of the grant.

6. Conclusion

This study documented the characteristics of the unique group of youth served by the URM Program, the services that the URM Program offers to youth, and how local URM programs provide these services to youth based on their individual goals and needs. URM providers work individually with youth to identify their strengths and needs and have developed innovative approaches to support youth when they arrive in the United States in making a successful transition to adulthood, and in maintaining connections to their cultural and religious heritage, if youth desire.

Looking forward, ORR, local URM providers, youth, foster families, and other stakeholders can collaborate to develop an evaluation of the URM Program. There are a variety of options, depending on the goals for an evaluation and specific research questions. An evaluation could provide further insight into how program services build on youth's strengths and address their needs in order to help youth achieve their long-term goals related to employment, education, well-being, connections to their local communities as well as to their cultural and religious heritage.

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APPENDIX

A. Glossary

B. URM Program entry flow chart

C. Technical Appendix

Appendix A. Glossary

ACF: Administration for Children and Families, in the United States Department of Health and Human Services.

Asylee: A person who meets the definition of refugee and is already present in the United States or is seeking admission at a port of entry.

Cuban/Haitian Entrant: Cubans and Haitians who have been paroled into the United States, who are in pending removal proceedings, or who have a pending application for asylum.

DHS: United States Department of Homeland Security.

DOS: United States Department of State.

ORR: Office of Refugee Resettlement.

RADS: Refugee Arrival Data System. This is the data management system used by ORR to house data pertaining to refugees resettled in the United States

Refugee: Any person who is outside any country of such person's nationality or habitual residence, and who is unable or unwilling to return to or seek the protection of that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.

Special Immigrant Juvenile: This classification is available to immigrant children who have been subject to state juvenile court proceedings related to abuse, neglect, abandonment, or a similar basis under state law.

SRC: State Refugee Coordinator—the administrator who oversees the state's refugee resettlement services. This term may refer to the individual SRC within a state, or the office of the SRC.

Victim of Trafficking: A person who has experienced the “severe forms of trafficking in persons,” as defined by the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA). This includes sex trafficking and labor trafficking.

UAC: Unaccompanied alien children are youth who are under age 18, do not have a lawful immigration status in the United States, and have no parent or legal guardian in the United States is available to care for them.

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees, an agency within the United Nations, is the international governing body that aims to protect refugees and other forcibly displaced communities and assist with their resettlement and repatriation.

U-Status: This status may be awarded to victims of crimes who have experienced significant mental or physical abuse while in the United States and who are willing to assist the government in investigation of the criminal activity. This status is designated with a nonimmigrant visa that was created through the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA).

Appendix B. URM Program entry flow chart

Eligibility Type	Initial Identification	Referral and Placement	URM youth enter local URM program
Refugee	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. UNHCR identifies unaccompanied youth in a refugee camp or host community outside of the United States. 2. A Best Interest Determination is conducted and third country resettlement is identified as the durable solution. 3. The youth is referred by UNCHR for U.S. resettlement. 4. Resettlement Support Centers, working on behalf of the U.S. Department of State, begin U.S. resettlement processing. 5. DHS interviews youth and adjudicates the case. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. DHS approves youth for U.S. resettlement. Because the youth does not have a family member or guardian to care for them, the U.S. Department of State refers the youth to the URM Program. 2. Resettlement agency accepts case and coordinates with local URM providers to determine local placement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth travels from overseas to local URM program for initial placement.
Special Immigrant Juvenile Asylee Victim of Trafficking Cuban/Haitian Entrant U-Status	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Youth enter ORR’s UAC program after being identified by DHS. 2. Youth qualify as an SIJ, asylee, victim of trafficking, Cuban/Haitian Entrant, or for U-status. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. UAC care provider or community member/advocate initiates URM application for youth. 2. ORR coordinates with resettlement agencies and local URM providers to evaluate capacity for placement in the URM Program. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth travels from ORR care facility to URM provider, which may be in a different state. <p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth is in UAC long-term foster care co-located with URM program; upon gaining eligibility for URM, youth continues to receive services from same agency and may continue living in the same placement.

Note: This exhibit presents the major pathways into the URM program; however, a small number of the youth may enter the URM Program in ways not included here.

Appendix C. Technical appendix

This appendix provides details on the collection and analysis of the three major information sources used in this study: the surveys, the site visits, and the URM Program data. We received clearance from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB Control Number 0970-0526) for all data collection protocols, including the surveys, interview guides, and focus group guides, as well as for outreach communication materials for respondents.

Surveys

The objective of the surveys was to systematically collect program-level information to document state/local policies, as well as program operations and implementation of the URM program across the country. We fielded three surveys, one for each of the following: URM program directors (PDs), State Refugee Coordinators (SRCs), and child welfare agency administrators from states with private custody arrangements.¹⁵ The surveys helped us identify:

- the types of services offered under the URM Program;
- how services and benefits are administered;
- how URM programs and child welfare agencies work together;
- how services are implemented with different sub-populations (e.g., country of origin, method of entry, referral source);
- types of data collected and data collection systems used by URM programs;
- types of policies in place within URM programs; and
- expected outcomes of URM program participants.

The surveys also asked questions to identify any differences in program implementation by program characteristics as well as data collection needs. It gathered consistent information from all URM programs, which is a complement to the qualitative information collected from a subset of programs in the site visit portion of the study.

Survey administration

Respondents were asked to complete the survey via the secure online platform, SurveyGizmo. Below we describe the topics of the survey and expected time of completion for the survey. We gave the participants a response deadline of two weeks from the day the survey invitation was sent out but kept the survey open for eight weeks to maximize participation.

¹⁵ Due to the different levels of involvement of child welfare agencies in sites with public vs. private custody arrangements, we used different approaches to collect data for sites with each type of arrangement. In states with public custody arrangements, the child welfare agency has legal custody of the URM youth. In states with private custody arrangements, the URM program provider maintains legal custody of the youth. After consultation with ACF, we determined that the public custody child welfare administrators would be more likely to have in-depth knowledge of the URM Program, while the private custody child welfare administrators may have less to say. We decided that holding conversations with public custody child welfare administrators would be beneficial while a short, open-ended survey would be best for private custody child welfare administrators.

Survey	Topics	Question format	Duration
URM program directors	Program administration, services provided to youth, partnerships, program funding, promising approaches, challenges, and data and evaluation efforts	Multiple choice and open-ended	60 min
SRCs	Program administration, partnerships, program funding, promising approaches, and data and evaluation efforts	Multiple choice and open-ended	40 min
Private custody child welfare administrators	Relationship to URM programs, role in monitoring URM youth and foster families, role in licensing child placing agencies	Open-ended and one multiple choice	40 min

The PD and SRC surveys are mainly made up of multiple choice questions, with some open-ended questions. This mix of question formats allowed us to gather systematic information from all respondents, while at the same time capturing the nuances between programs. For the child welfare administrator survey, we used open-ended questions exclusively. Given the wide variety of relationships between child welfare agencies and URM program staff, we determined that this was the most productive approach to gathering accurate and useful information.

We expected that respondents would need to consult with their colleagues in order to answer all questions, and we encouraged them to do so. Respondents were able to download a Word version of the survey so they could print and fill it out as a group, and then enter their responses all at one time. Respondents were also given a link unique to their program/site/state, allowing them to share the link with colleagues and to save the survey and come back to it at a later time. Respondents could skip any questions on the survey that they did not want to answer.

Survey piloting

We piloted the survey in May/June 2019. The purpose of piloting the survey was to identify potential problems (both methodological and technical) with the survey before its full implementation (e.g., questions or wording that are confusing/unclear), as well as to better estimate how long it will take participants to complete the survey. This pilot period was also an opportunity to pinpoint any potential glitches or problems with the online survey platform, such as broken logic programming (e.g., skip patterns). We selected three URM program directors and three SRCs to pilot the surveys from the people who participated in the stakeholder engagement phase of the project.

We did not pilot the survey with child welfare administrators as we did not have established relationships with child welfare administrators in the URM program sites to whom we could reach out to pilot the survey. Additionally, the child welfare administrator survey is shorter and contains only open-ended questions, which we felt did not need to be piloted.

Target sample and recruitment

Survey sample

The table below presents our target sample size, compared to the final analytic sample. Participants in one state declined to participate in the survey.

Group	Target sample		
	size	Final sample size	Response rate
URM program directors (PDs)	24	23	96%
State Refugee Coordinators (SRCs) in states that have a URM program	15	14	93%
Child welfare administrators associated with URM Program sites with a private custody arrangement	10	4	40%*

*Some URM provider agencies in states with private custody arrangements have relatively minimal interaction with the child welfare agencies in their states. As a result, not all programs in states with private custody arrangements suggested child welfare agency contacts, and of those that did, we did not receive responses from all suggested contacts.

The program in Grand Rapids, Michigan has a large sub-office in Kalamazoo. Additionally, Lutheran Family Services Rocky Mountains (LFSRM) is the single URM provider in Colorado, but their Colorado Springs program and Denver program are distinct from each other. On the advice of ORR, we treated the Kalamazoo sub-office and the two programs under LFSRM as separate programs for the purpose of this survey. Therefore, survey respondents included: Bethany Christian Services – Grand Rapids; Bethany Christian Services – Kalamazoo; LFSRM – Denver; and LFSRM – Colorado Springs.

In North Dakota, due to a programmatic anomaly, the SRC is an employee of Lutheran Social Services of North Dakota (LSSND), the URM service provider in that state. Upon guidance from ORR, we asked the SRC to complete the PD survey as she is an employee of LSSND. We then asked the state Foster Care Administrator to respond to the SRC survey.

Identifying and recruiting participants

The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) provided the study team with names and contact information for PDs and SRCs in states that have a URM program. ORR sent an initial email to all respondents to introduce the study team and the project. This was intended to lend credibility to our study and to encourage participation. The study team then sent an email invitation to participants, which included a unique electronic link for each designated respondent and instructions for completing the survey.

The survey was open for eight weeks to ensure survey participants had ample time to complete the survey. During that period, the team monitored responses and sent email reminders or made phone calls to respondents who had not completed the survey. Toward the end of the data collection period, we consulted with OPRE and ORR about strategies to encourage participation and to identify alternate contacts in some instances. Participants received a thank you email after the submitted their survey.

The process for identifying participants for the child welfare administrator survey was different than for the other two surveys. Given the variation in how these programs are implemented, there is no one set person at each child welfare agency whom we could contact. On the PD and SRC survey, we asked respondents to provide the name and contact information for a point of contact at the child welfare agency associated with their URM program. This was supposed to be someone knowledgeable about the URM program and the child welfare agency’s role/responsibilities with the URM program.

Ensuring adequate survey response rates

Our target response rate for all three surveys was 100 percent, which we came close to meeting. The initial email from ORR to all participants indicating their involvement and support of the study was

helpful in achieving a high response rate. We conducted follow-up with respondents to help ensure we received as many responses as possible.

We also made attempts to reduce the burden of participation in the survey that we believe helped us reach our target response rate. For example, the SurveyGizmo platform allows participants to stop and save their survey responses so they can come back to the survey should they get interrupted.

Survey data analysis

Our analysis of the survey data was descriptive in nature and was led by the project's research questions, with subgroup analyses where possible. The section below describes how we prepared and analyzed the data.

Data cleaning/preparation

Missing values

Respondents answered most questions on each survey, with the exception of some open-ended questions. Some responses were missing due to skip patterns in the survey logic, meaning that respondents were only asked certain questions based on how they answered prior questions. For some questions it was clear whether the respondent skipped the question, but with others we had to make our own determinations.

Recoding "other" responses

Most questions on the survey had an "other" response, and respondents were prompted to further specify their answer. One study team member reviewed each response to determine (1) whether it should be included in one of the existing response options or (2) whether there were enough of those responses to warrant creating a new additional option. Based on the number of respondents and patterns of responses, the threshold for creating a new response option was three, combined between PD and SRC responses in some cases. A second team member performed quality control checks of the recoding and made changes as needed.

Recoding responses to open-ended questions

For the open-ended question on the surveys, we attempted to pull out common themes and recode the responses into "like" categories. Due to the small overall sample size and the available responses, we were not able to do this for every open-ended question. One study team member reviewed the responses to all open-ended questions to determine common themes. We used a threshold of three consistent responses (combined between PD and SRC responses in some cases) to create a response category. A second team member performed quality control checks of the recoding and made changes as needed.

Analysis

All analyses were descriptive due to the small sample sizes. When possible, we conducted subgroup analyses (via crosstabs) to compare responses among program characteristics. Due to skip patterns on some questions, the cell size for individual questions was too small in some instances to conduct subgroup analyses.

Site visits

We conducted six site visits to URM programs across the country to interview program staff and partners and conduct focus groups with youth and foster parents in the program.

Site selection

Given that only six of the 22 URM programs could be chosen for site visits, we aimed to capture a wide variety of program features that impact how services are provided to URM youth. The six sites were not fully representative of the characteristics of URM programs or of the individuals these programs served. Instead, we aimed to use the six sites to inform OPRE, ORR, and other audiences about the variety of ways programs operate in different conditions, and offer useful lessons for improving programs and crafting future evaluations. In consultation with ORR, we selected six programs that captured diversity across the following criteria: whether the program was affiliated with Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) or the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), or both; custody arrangement; geography; and program size. Other factors were also considered, including relative proportions of refugees and unaccompanied children (UACs), types of services provided, and program tenure.

URM Provider agency	Location (Main Office)	Custody Arrangement	Resettlement Agency	Size
Catholic Charities Community Services	Phoenix, AZ	Private	USCCB	Medium
Crittenton Services for Families and Children	Fullerton, CA	Private	LIRS	Large
Lutheran Family Services Rocky Mountains	Denver, CO	Public (county- administered)	LIRS	Medium
Bethany Christian Services	Grand Rapids, MI	Public (state- administered)	LIRS and USCCB	Large
Commonwealth Catholic Charities	Richmond, VA	Private	USCCB	Medium
Lutheran Community Services Northwest	Seattle, WA	Private	LIRS	Large

Site recruitment

Once we determined the sites for inclusion, we first contacted the SRCs as a courtesy, and to learn contextual information and recommendations about engaging with local programs. We then reached out to program directors via email and scheduled calls to discuss the possibility of a site visit and to begin developing a site visit agenda. We coordinated directly with the program director and partners to schedule the visits.

Schedules and respondents

Site visit schedules varied by site, in response to recommendations of local URM program staff and availability of partner organizations. Site visits lasted two or three days and were conducted from

November 2019 to January 2020. We conducted 60- to 90-minute semi-structured interviews with URM program leadership, URM case managers, recruitment and licensing staff, staff from local community partners, and staff from schools attended by URM youth. All interviews were recorded with the consent of participants.

In addition, we conducted 90-minute focus groups with URM foster parents and youth. Local URM program staff recruited parents and youth to participate in the focus groups, which were voluntary. Focus groups were conducted in English at five sites and Spanish at one site, led by members of the research team. Participants received \$30 gift cards as tokens of appreciation for their time. Forty-five youth participated and 56 foster parents participated across all sites.

Example matrix of organizations visited and topics covered in interviews:

Organization	Services for URMs						
	URM Case Management	Licensing	Counseling & Mental Health Services	Cultural Orientation & Integration	Education Services	Health Services	Other Social Services
URM Program	X		X	X	X	X	X
Local child welfare agency (if state with public custody arrangement)	X	X					X
Community partner(s)			X	X	X	X	X
Education partner(s)—e.g., local high school					X		

Analysis of ORR-3 and ORR-4 data

We analyzed the URM Program data collected on the ORR-3 and ORR-4 forms to learn about youth experiences and services in the Program, and to understand what we can learn from the data for future research.

Data received

Data extract. ORR provided data from the ORR-3 and ORR-4, as well as from the case records for fiscal years 2014-2018. The specific files provided were as follows:

- Case records submitted FY 2014-FY 2018
- ORR-3 records submitted FY 2014-FY 2018
- ORR-4 records submitted FY 2014-FY 2018
- Case records submitted prior to FY 2014 for cases that had ORR-3s and ORR-4s submitted during FY 2014-FY 2018
- Codebooks for specific variables (immigration status, placement agency, and state agency)

The data did not include ORR-3s and ORR-4s filed prior to FY 2014 for cases that opened prior to FY 2014. If a case closure form was submitted during FY 2014, case records for those youth were provided but no other ORR-3s or ORR-4s from prior to FY 2014 were included.

Sample. For the purposes of this analysis, we agreed with OPRE and ORR on an analytic sample of youth who entered the program during federal fiscal years 2014-2018. Specifically, this includes youth who had an initial placement date from October 1, 2013 to September 30, 2018. There were 1,950 youth in our sample based on this definition. Of these, 533 (27.3 percent) had left the program by the end of FY 2018. Whether certain types of ORR-3 and ORR-4 reports and sections of each report are required can vary by the age of the youth.

Due to the large number of countries of origin, we created larger groups for reporting based on guidance from ORR. The table below shows the countries in each region. No youth were from Europe or Australia.

Region	Countries
Americas	Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Haiti, Cuba, Ecuador, Dominican Republic
Middle East	Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Syria, Palestine, Iran
East Africa	Eritrea, Somalia, Ethiopia
Central Africa	Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, Central African Republic, Uganda, Sudan, South Sudan, Zambia, Angola, Tanzania
Central/South Asia	Burma, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, India, Kazakhstan, Russia
West Africa	Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Nigeria, Liberia, Togo, Benin, Mali
East Asia	North Korea, Thailand, China, Cambodia

Analysis steps

We used Stata (Version 15.1) to analyze the data. We began by creating programs to clean the case data, ORR-3 data, and ORR-4 data, including recoding variables and creating new variables we required for analysis. We constructed several analytic files using these programs and used these files to conduct descriptive analyses, including frequencies and crosstabs, as well as graphs and tables.