



All Young Families Thriving

A Well-Being Survey of Expectant & Parenting Youth in the District of Columbia

Introduction

The District of Columbia Primary Care Association (DCPCA) and lead partners Children’s National Hospital (CNH), Howard University (HU), and DC Action joined with other District of Columbia organizations serving expectant and parenting teens and with teen parents themselves to form the DC Network for Expectant and Parenting Teens, or DCNEXT!.

DCNEXT! is a network of community organizations, health care providers, academic and government partners, and young parents working to increase young parents’ capacity to make healthy decisions about relationships, sex, parenting, education, and their future. The network’s relevance and success relies on the voices of expectant and parenting youth bringing their lived experience and expertise to the table.

In 2023, DCNEXT! completed a well-being survey capturing a comprehensive data set of the demographics, well-being, challenges, opportunities, and barriers facing expectant and parenting youth in the District.

Our goal was to generate data to inform and encourage program and service providers and policymakers to focus on this population’s unique challenges, strengths, and opportunities. When coupled with the Network’s significant qualitative research, we have ample findings to draw conclusions and recommend proposed actions.

Young parents with a network of support that helps them secure safe housing, stay in school, and find sustaining employment can succeed in all the roles and responsibilities they must meet and THRIVE.

The intersection of unmet basic needs, isolation, and fraying of family and community lead to a cascade of challenges that make it difficult, if not impossible to thrive. The lack of a coordinated, integrated system of care and support leaves gaps that create vulnerabilities and instability.

Young parents are deeply motivated, and with the right wraparound support, they are ready to push forward and pursue their goals. Their parenting is unflagging, and they make choices that place parenting at the center of their lives.

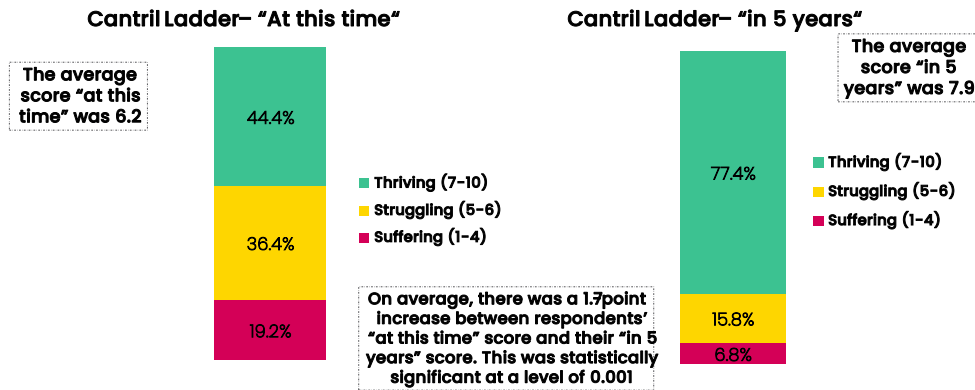
It is not “one thing” that makes for healthy, vibrant young families—it is a constellation of education, employment, health and social resources, family, friends, knowledge, and resilience. Early investments in young families will bear dividends across generations.

Survey Findings

Cantril's Ladder: Well-being "Now" and "In Five Years"

This validated measure captures individuals' subjective well-being and life satisfaction. Over half of respondents reported a "Struggling or Suffering" status at this time. But almost 45% reported "Thriving," and this gives us a tremendous opportunity to learn directly from those young parents about the conditions for thriving.

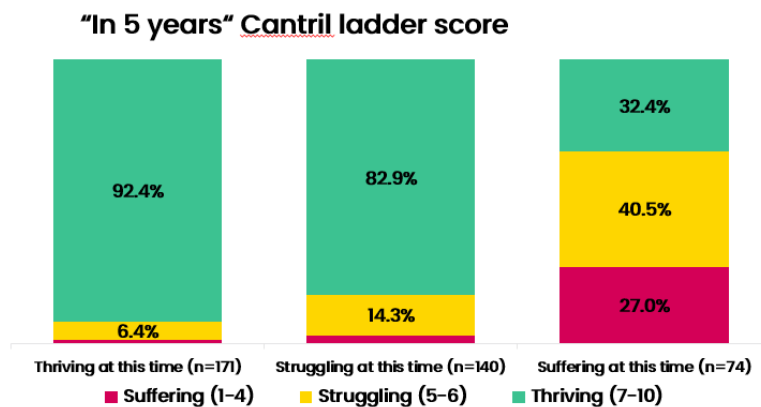
Cantril's Ladder Results (N=385)



Note the dramatic shift from 44% to 77% thriving status when considering future well-being. This result captures significant optimism from respondents and is consistent with our qualitative findings that young parents have hope for a bright future.

Still, there is a subset of expectant and parenting youth who do not see a way to transition from suffering status to a better life ahead. The chart below shows that **92.4% of those who were thriving at this time said they expected to be thriving in five years compared to only 32.4% of those who said they were suffering at this time**

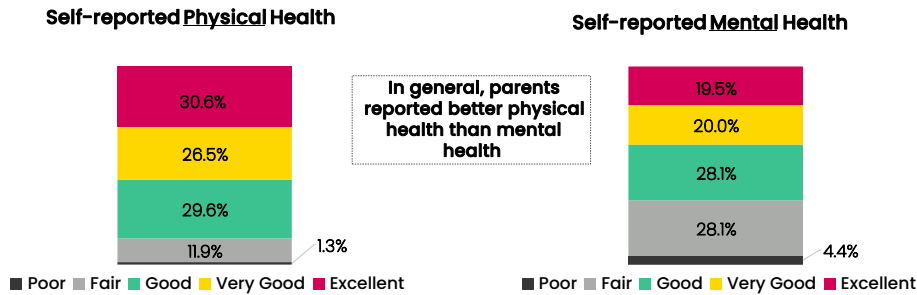
Cantril Ladder Results (N=385)



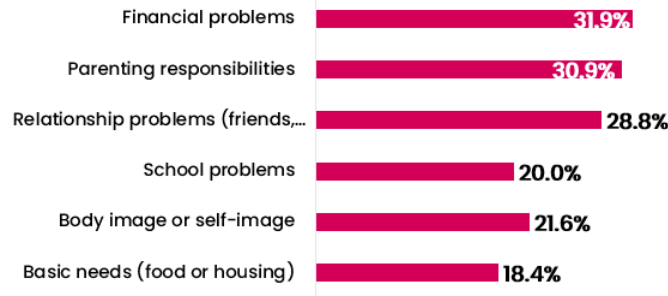
Physical and Mental Health

Almost 87% of young parents report their physical health as “Good,” “Very Good,” or “Excellent.” But almost one-third of respondents report mental health as only “Fair” or “Poor.” The top factors driving poor mental health include financial problems, parenting responsibilities, and relationship problems as noted below.

Self-reported Physical and Mental Health(N=385)



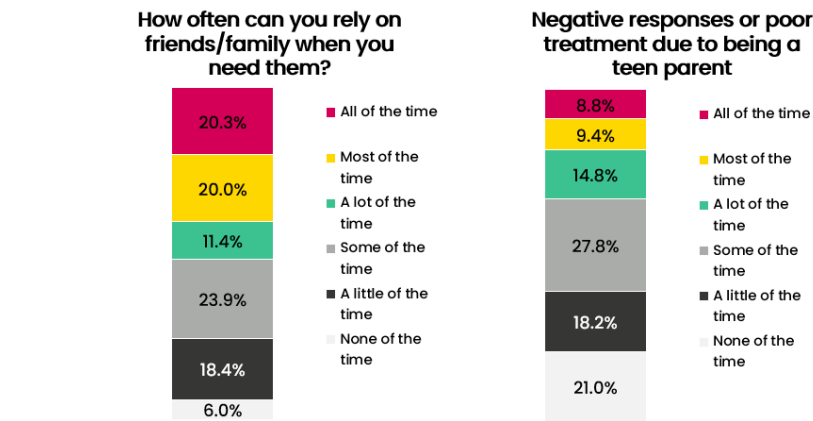
Main things contributing to mental health problems (n=385)



Family & Social Support

Almost one quarter of young parents report they can only rely on family and friends “a little of the time,” or “none of the time.” One-third of respondents experience poor treatment due to being a teen parent “all of the time,” “most of the time,” or “a lot of the time. Stigma contributes to the stress and struggle many young parents already confront.

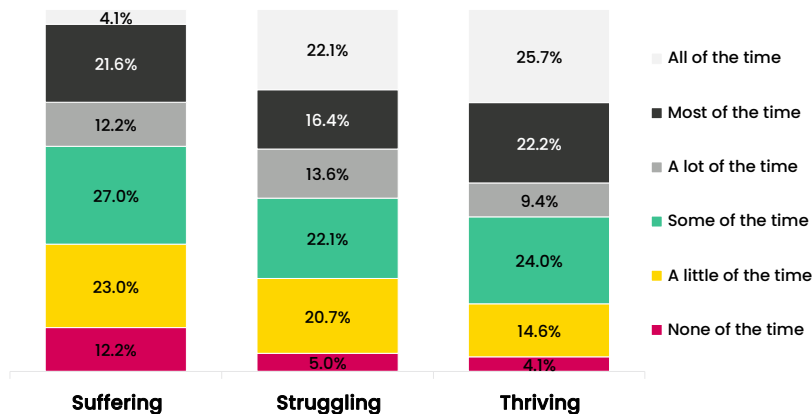
Family and Social Support (N=385)



More than one-third of sufferers can only count on help a little or none of the time. But one quarter of the struggling and even 19% of the thrivers say the same. We have a lot of young people “who don’t have people”—a lot of young parents who feel like they are going it alone.

“Suffering”, “Struggling”, and “Thriving” (N=385)

How often can you count on friends or family when you need them?

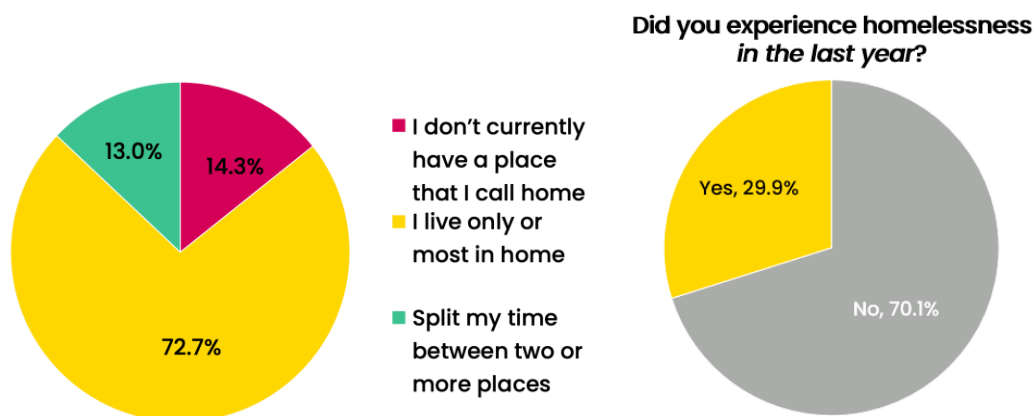


43

Family support was the most reported factor assisting parents who stayed in school and those who left school but subsequently returned. For those who left school and did not return, over 30% indicated a lack of family support was a factor. This indicates a need to better nurture family support networks, work to address family challenges, and intentionally identify and foster alternatives when necessary.

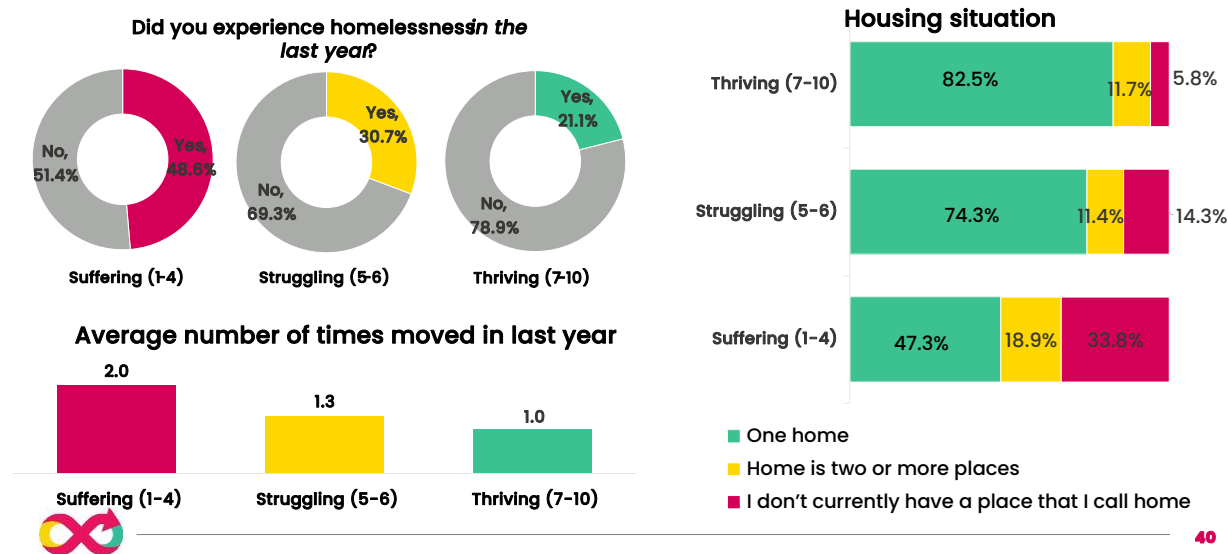
Housing:

Fourteen percent of young families informed us that “they currently do not have a place to call home” and 30% of respondents experienced homelessness in the last year. Housing is a worrisome reality for these young families—with close to 50% reporting it as a top-of-mind concern.



Those who report suffering on the general well-being scale are significantly more likely to have experienced homelessness and more frequent moving. Thrivers are most likely to have *one* place they call home.

“Suffering”, “Struggling”, and “Thriving” (N=385)

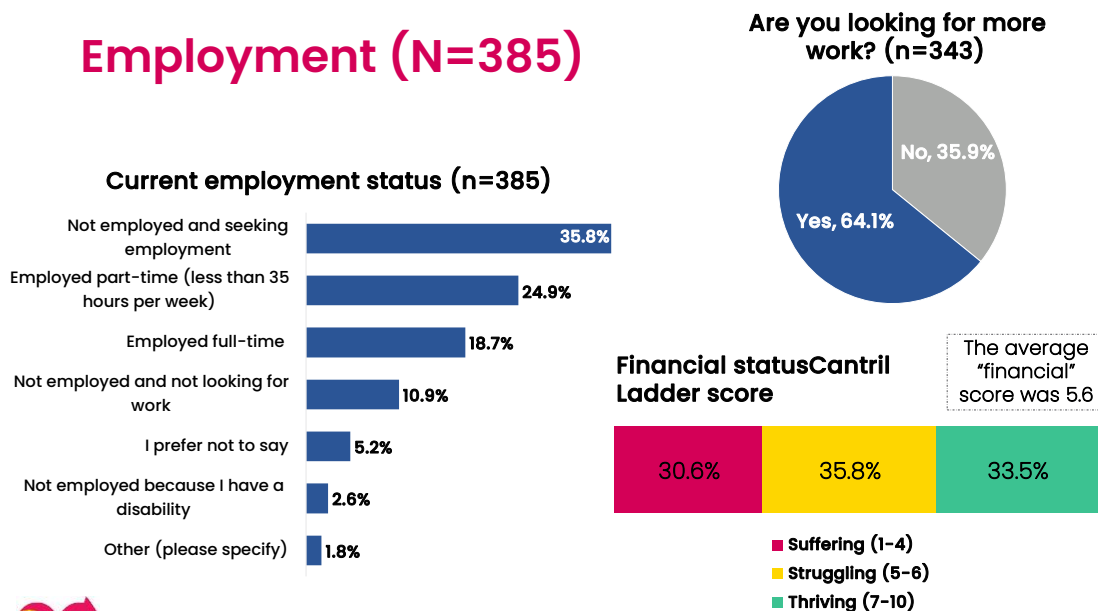


Employment

Employment and financial concerns ranked high among responders—reflected in impact on mental health status and as the most-cited reason for not returning to school.

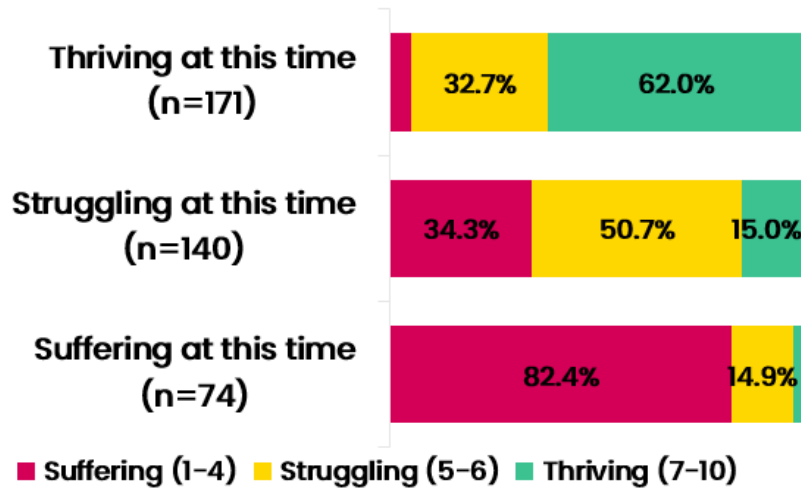
Young parents want to work. Over 64% want *more* work, and over 35% not currently employed are looking for work.

Employment (N=385)



Of those who consider themselves suffering on the overall well-being scale, 82.4% consider themselves suffering financially. Only 5.2% of thrivers report suffering financially—not surprising, but it points to economic security as key to overall well-being.

“Financial” Cantril’s ladder score



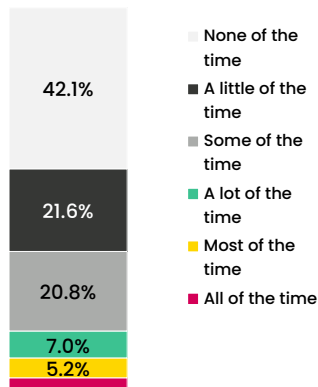
Basic Needs

The most common unmet need is for housing, with income or employment not far behind. Transportation needs are also significant. Over one-third of respondents report that their household did not have enough to eat some, a lot, most, or all of the time.

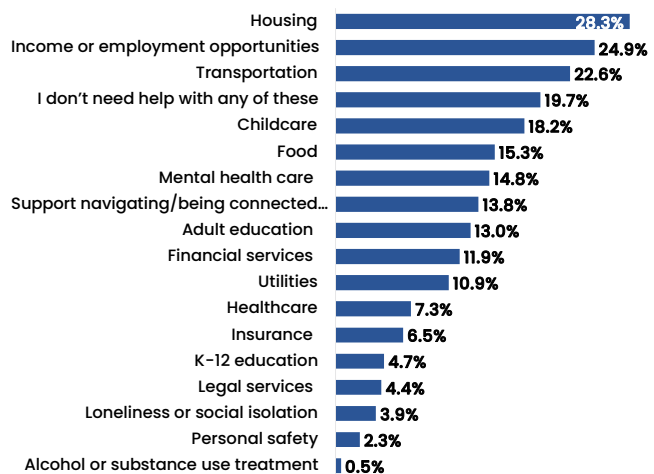
Over 60% of thriver households always had enough to eat. Only about 11% of sufferers reported the same, and 25% of sufferers frequently lacked enough to eat. Food security is an issue for young families that needs our attention.

Basic needs (N=385)

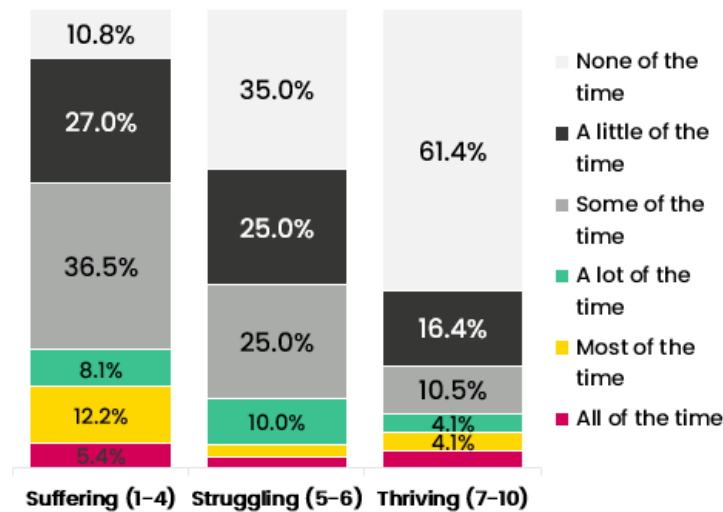
How often did your household not have enough to eat?



Needs not met



How often did your household not have enough to eat?



Predicting Thriving

Young parents working full-time were 2.6 times more likely to be thriving than those without jobs. Part-time employment also showed signs of improving the odds of thriving, but our sample size was not large enough to achieve statistical significance.

Each additional move a young parent made reduced the odds of thriving by 23%. Each additional unmet need increased the odds of suffering. Staying in school is associated with better odds of thriving, and leaving school increased the odds of suffering.

Having friends and family they could count on made young parents three times more likely to be thriving, and those in a relationship with their child's other parent decreased their odds of suffering by 51%.

Predicting "Thriving" Preventing "Suffering"

Variable	Odds Ratio	Interpretation
Full-time employment	2.60	Compared to those who were unemployed, those who were employed full-time had 2.6 times the odds of "thriving" **
Number of moves in last year	0.77	For every additional move that a respondent made in the last year, they had 23% less odds of "thriving"
Housing situation- "one current home"	1.69	Those who said they one place they could call home had 69% greater odds of "thriving" than those who said they had no place they could call home.
Left school due to pregnancy	0.47	Those who left school due to pregnancy or parenting responsibility had 53% less odds of "thriving" compared to those who did not leave school
Homelessness in last year	0.46	Those who experienced homelessness in the last year had 54% less odds of "thriving" than those who did not
Count on family/friends - "all the time"	3.0	Those who said they could count on friends/family when they needed them had 3 times the odds of "thriving" compared to those who said they could never count on friends/family
Number of unmet needs	0.78	For every additional unmet need, a respondent had 22% less odds of "thriving"
Not enough to eat "most- of the time"	0.29	Those who reported that their household didn't have enough to eat "most of the time" had 71% less odds of "thriving" compared to those who said "none of the time"
In a relationship with child's other parent	0.49	Those who said that they were in a relationship with their child's other parent had 51% less odds of "suffering" compared to those who were not.

Conclusion

It is not “one thing” that makes for healthy, vibrant young families—it is a constellation of resources, family, friends, knowledge, and resilience. Early investments in young families will bear dividends across generations.

Call to Action

Our work through DCNEXT! and the culmination of this comprehensive survey helps us to envision what “All Young Families Thriving” can look like. This incisive data set calls us to:

- 1. Honor young parents’ strong commitment to their families and their future by respecting their efforts to be good parents and continue their own growth.**
- 2. Meet young parents’ needs for stable housing, either by making intergenerational living more feasible or providing safe alternatives for those young parents without family support.**
- 3. Help young parents stay in and finish high school and advance their educational goals through flexible, tailored programs that build pathways to meaningful careers.**
- 4. Ensure that all young parents have a community of support—peers, family, mentors—on which they can consistently rely.**
- 5. Solve the food security problem.**

To learn more about DC NEXT! and this report

<https://www.dc-next.org/>

_Contact : Patricia Quinn, VP of Policy and Partnerships, DC Primary Care Association
pquinn@dcpc.org

To Learn more about DC Primary Care Association

<https://www.dcpca.org/>

Contact : Patricia Quinn, VP of Policy and Partnerships, DC Primary Care Association
pquinn@dcpc.org

To Learn more about DC Action

<https://www.wearedcaction.org/>

Contact: Jorge Membreno, Director of Youth Advocacy, DC Action
jmembreno@dckids.org