
California Youth Transitions to Adulthood Study

Responses from Youth at Age 19

May 2016

The CalYOUTH study provides the most comprehensive view to date of young people transitioning to adulthood from foster care in California. This first-of-its-kind, multi-year study is a valuable resource for policymakers, program developers, advocates, and practitioners interested in better meeting the needs of transition-age youth in care.

CalYOUTH is a five-year (2012-17) ongoing study designed to evaluate the impact of extended foster care on youth outcomes. The study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. Does extending foster care past age 18 influence youth outcomes during the transition to adulthood?
2. What factors influence the types of support youth receive during the transition to adulthood in the context of extended foster care?
3. How do living arrangements and other services that result from extending foster care influence the relationship between extending care and youth outcomes?

To help answer these questions, the study is collecting and analyzing data from transition-age youth and child welfare workers providing services to foster youth, and analyzing government program data. Interviews are conducted with the same youth at ages 17, 19 and 21. This CalYOUTH Wave 2 Youth Survey reports their responses at age 19.

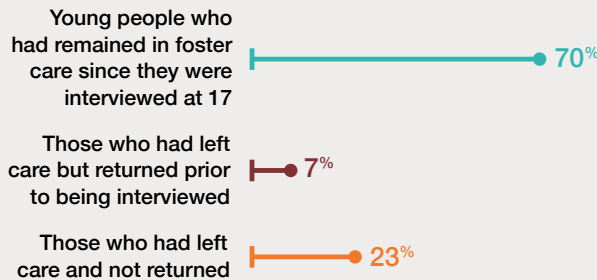
Foster Youth at Age 19

Wave 2 Study Participants

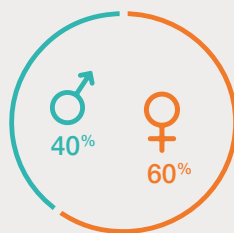
611 youth completed the Wave 2 interviews, just over 80 percent of the original sample that met the study's eligibility criteria and 84 percent of the adolescents who completed the Wave 1 interview.

Selected Demographic and Background Characteristics

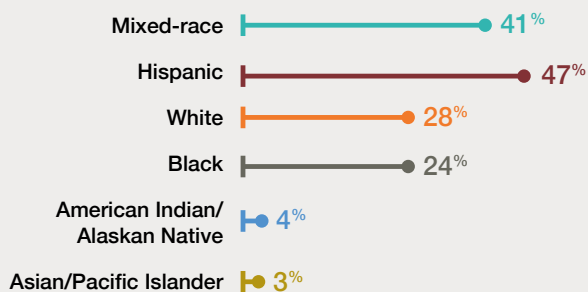
Foster Care Status



Gender



Race and Ethnicity



Developing Themes

1. Youth Who Stayed in Care Reported Better Outcomes. The vast majority of youth thought extended care was supporting them in their life goals and most of them positively characterized the assistance they received from professionals such as their caseworkers and attorneys. Remaining in care was associated with a wide range of positive outcomes, including being more likely than those who had left care to be enrolled in school, reporting more social support, experiencing fewer economic hardships, and receiving more supportive services.

2. One Size Approach Does Not Fit Wide Range of Needs. Extended care should provide young adults with developmentally-appropriate living arrangements and connect them to formal and informal supports that recognize their wide range of needs. The CalYOUTH participants were diverse with respect to demographic characteristics and their needs pertaining to the transition to adulthood. Reflecting the rapidly changing US population, CalYOUTH participants were primarily people of color. If extended care is to effectively engage these young people, it must be sensitive to culture and community.

3. Potential to Improve Extended Care. While most youth in care were satisfied with the services they received and their interactions with professionals associated with the system, a sizable minority expressed dissatisfaction. Only about half of the youth said the independent living services they received prepared them “well” or “very well” to live on their own, budget money, pay bills, buy food, and cook, leaving a sizeable portion of young adults feeling unprepared.

4. Optimistic In Spite of Challenges. The study provided encouraging evidence of the resilience of older adolescents in foster care. Many participants reported feeling overwhelmingly optimistic about their futures and having access to adults to provide support.

Key Findings

The living arrangements experienced by youth still in care differed significantly from those of youth out of care.

- The majority of youth who remained in foster care were “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with their current housing. They were living in the following settings: Supervised Independent Living Placement (SILP; 31%), home of a relative (22%), Transitional Housing Placement Program (19%), nonrelative foster home (13%), home of a non-related extended family member (9%), group care (2%), and “other” living arrangements (4%).
- Youth who had left care lived in their own place (22%), or the home of a birth parent (16%), another relative (23%), a spouse/partner (13%), a friend (5%), or in “other” living arrangements (18%). Four percent were homeless when interviewed.
- Youth who were no longer in care were much more likely than youth in care to have experienced homelessness since their last interview (34% vs 14%).

Youth report receiving considerable life skills training and preparation, but feel more prepared for some tasks associated with adulthood than for others.

- More than half of youth felt “very prepared” in the areas of independent living skills, substance abuse risks, sexual health, family planning, parenting (among parents), and relationship skills.

- Youth were most likely to report receiving “a lot” of preparation in the areas of sexual health, family planning, parenting (among parents) and substance abuse, with more than half of youth reporting receiving “a lot” of services in each of those areas. Youth were least likely to report receiving a lot of preparation in the area of financial literacy and housing, with less than a third of youth reporting receiving “a lot” of services in each of those areas.

Most youth felt that they were involved in planning for their future.

- More than three-fourths of youth said that they either “led” or “were involved in but did not lead” the development of their Transitional Independent Living Plan (TILP). The remaining one-fourth of youth said that they were either not involved in the development of their TILP or were unaware of the plan.
- About three-fourths of youth reported being “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with team meetings to help them decide about staying in foster care past 18, developing an independent living plan, or making decisions about their future.
- Among youths who ever attended an extended foster care proceeding, more than half indicated they felt they were included in courtroom discussion “a lot” and the majority of the youth felt that their attorney represented their wishes in court well.

Key Findings

The majority of youth reported meeting with their social worker once a month.

- About 70% of the youth who were in care during their Wave 2 interview reported having at least 12 face-to-face visits with their social worker in the past year.*
- One-third of the youth reported never having face-to-face visits or phone calls with their attorney in the past year, and another 15 percent of youths had only one face-to-face visit or phone call with their attorney.
- Half of the youth reported their case manager has provided “a lot” of support in working to meet their goals during their time in extended foster care.

More than 70% of youth were enrolled in school and/or employed at the time of the interview.

- About 40% were just enrolled in school, 18% were just working, and 15% were both enrolled in school and working.

More than half of the CalYOUTH participants were enrolled in school.

- Among youth who were currently enrolled, about three-fifths were attending two-year or four-year colleges.
- More than two-thirds of respondents had earned their high school diploma or equivalency certificate by the time they were interviewed.

Many young people aren't accessing, or aware of, financial aid resources and support available.

- Among youth who were currently enrolled in school, about two-in-five were using a scholarship, fellowship, grant, stipend, or student loan to help pay for their schooling.
- More than a third of youth with a high school credential reported that they did not know about the Education and Training Voucher (ETV) program and another quarter said that they applied for an ETV but never received one. Over half of the youth who were currently or previously enrolled in college received an ETV.
- Half of the youth who were enrolled in college said they were ever involved in a campus support program designed to help youth in foster care. About three-in-ten youth said that they were not sure if their college had such a program, and about one-fifth reported that their college had a program but they were never involved.

About 1 in 3 CalYOUTH participants were employed, and the majority of those who are working are satisfied with their job.

- Although three-fourths of respondents reported ever having a job, about one-third were employed at the time of the interview.
- Just over three-in-ten young people reported working for pay 10 or more hours per week.

* Some of the in-care youth may not have been in foster care for the entire 12 months before their interview. Among youth who had remained in care since the Wave 1 interview, 72% reported meeting with their caseworker at least 12 times during the past year.

- Of the 201 young people working at least 10 or more hours per week, about three-fourths reported being “extremely satisfied” or “satisfied” with their job.

Most youth reported experiencing some form of economic hardship and many reported food insecurity, but those who remained in care were generally less likely than those who had left care to experience these problems.

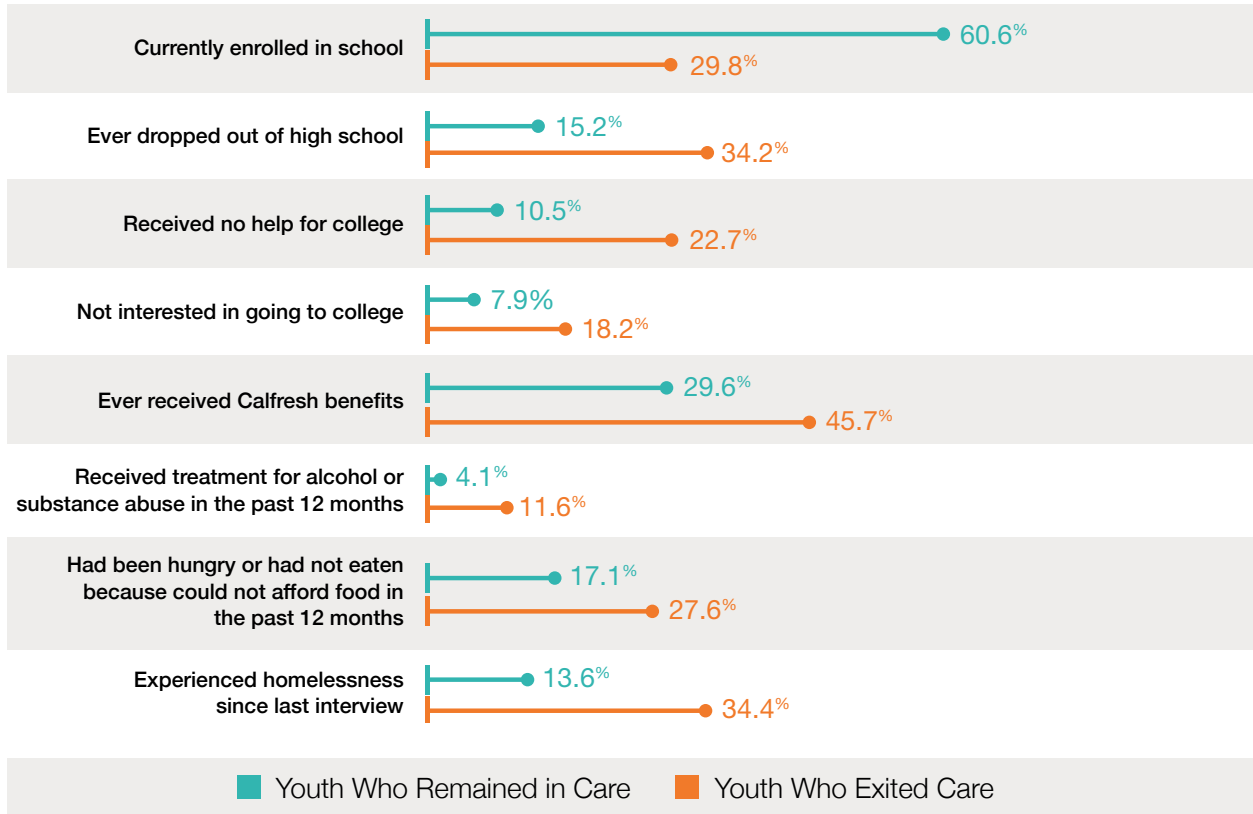
- For example, youth who had left care were more likely than those who were in care to have been evicted (8% vs 2%), to have been unable to pay their rent (26% vs 16%) or a utility bill (26% vs 17%), and to have their gas or electricity turned off (12% vs 5%) in the prior year.
- Close to nine-in-ten youth reported having enough food to eat in the past month. Nevertheless, youth who had left care were more likely than those who were in care to report that they had been hungry but had not eaten at some point in the past year because they could not afford food (28% vs 17%).
- One-in-three youth reported that they had ever received CalFresh (Food Stamps) benefits, with youth who had left care being more likely than those who were in care to have received such benefits (46% vs. 30%). About one-in-five youth were currently receiving CalFresh. About three-quarters of the young mothers were receiving Women Infant and Children (WIC) benefits, but very few youth were receiving public housing assistance or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) (less than 5% each).

The study highlights the importance of these young adults having access to mental health services.

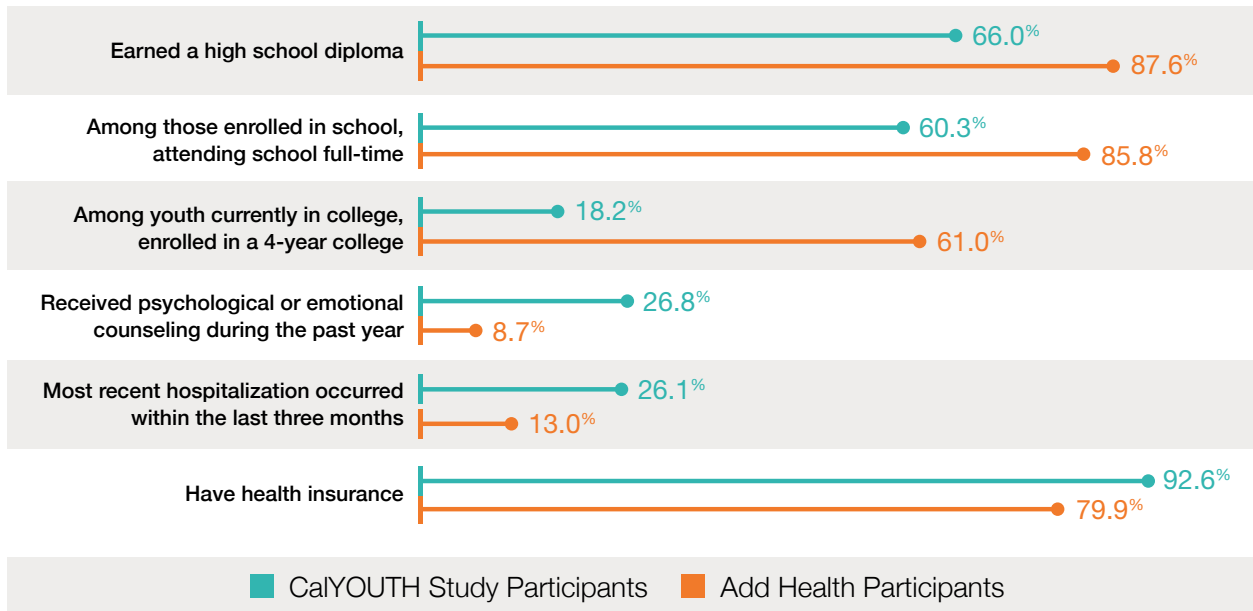
- Overall, over one-quarter of the youth reported receiving psychological or emotional counseling in the past year.
- About six percent reported receiving treatment for an alcohol or substance abuse problem in the past year, and 15 percent reported they were prescribed medication for their emotions during the same time period.
- About one-in-three youth screened positive for a mental health and/or substance use disorder.
- About one-in-five youth reported thinking about suicide sometime during the approximately two years since their first CalYOUTH Study interview and over one-third of those youth reported attempting suicide during that period.

When asked about their optimism in their future hopes and goals, most youth reported being “very optimistic.”

Those Who Remained in Care vs. Those Who Exited Care



CalYOUTH Study Participants vs. Add Health Participants



Next Steps

This report is descriptive in nature; going forward we will be examining these young adults' responses in more depth. We will also link the responses of the youth who were still in care at the time of the Wave 2 Youth Survey to the responses of their caseworkers in the CalYOUTH Survey of Young Adults' Child Welfare Workers (Courtney et al., 2016). Our analyses will focus on identifying risk and protective factors associated with youth's outcomes and more rigorously assessing the benefits of extended foster care.

By sharing the perceptions of the professionals involved in implementing California's Fostering Connections Act, and the experiences of the young people the new law is intended to help, CalYOUTH promises to continue to provide timely information about California's ambitious implementation of extended foster care.

In 2008, the federal government passed the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act, marking a fundamental shift in supporting foster youth transitioning to adulthood. California was one of the first states to adopt the extension of foster care through age 21 with the passage of Assembly Bill 12, the California Fostering Connections to Success Act. California has the largest state foster care population in the U.S. and like many states runs a county-administered child welfare system. As such, California is uniquely positioned to provide lessons for other states implementing extended care.

The study is the result of a public and private collaboration among: the California Department of Social Services, the County Welfare Directors Association of California, and the University of Chicago.

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More Info

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Full Report and Additional Materials
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