



California Child Welfare  
**Co-Investment Partnership**



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# California Youth Transitions to Adulthood Study

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## Responses from Youth at Age 23

December 2020

This report presents findings from the [\*CalYOUTH Wave 4 Youth Survey\*](#). CalYOUTH (the California Youth Transitions to Adulthood Study), is an evaluation of the impact of the California Fostering Connections to Success Act on outcomes during foster youth's transition to adulthood. CalYOUTH includes collection and analysis of information from three sources:

- (1) transition-age youth,
- (2) child welfare workers, and
- (3) government program data.

The study, directed by Dr. Mark Courtney at the University of Chicago and conducted in collaboration with the California Department of Social Services and County Welfare Directors Association of California (CWDA), was carried out over an 8-year period from 2012–20.

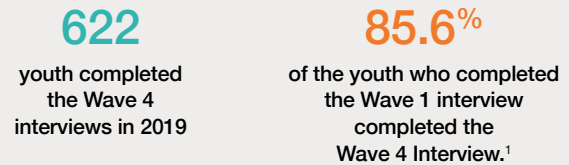
# CalYOUTH Objectives

The study addresses three research questions:

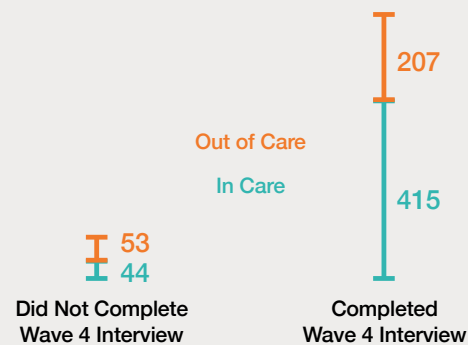
- Does extending foster care past age 18 influence youths' outcomes during the transition to adulthood (e.g., outcomes in education, employment, health, housing, parenting, and general well-being)?
- What factors influence the types of support youth receive during the transition to adulthood in the context of extended foster care?
- How do living arrangements and other services that result from extending foster care influence the relationship between extending care and youth outcomes?

The CalYOUTH Wave 4 Youth Survey is the final report on young people participating in the longitudinal youth study. These young people were previously interviewed at ages 17, 19, and 21. The fourth wave of interviews were conducted when CalYOUTH participants were 23 years old and had been out of the California foster care system for 2 or more years.

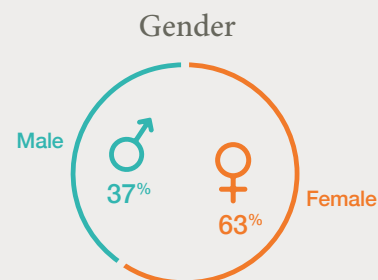
## Response Rate



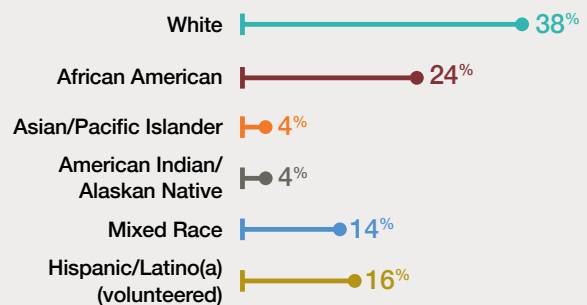
### Response Rate by In-Care Status at Age 21



## Demographic Highlights



### Race and Ethnicity



<sup>1</sup> A total of 732 youth completed baseline interviews in 2013.

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# Key Findings

## Housing Stability

- The majority of CalYOUTH participants had not experienced homelessness, however, more than a quarter of youth (25.4%) reported being homeless (i.e., slept in a homeless shelter or in a place where people were not meant to sleep, because they had no place to stay) for at least one night since their last interview.
- Among youth who had ever been in extended care, 17.5% reported that they had experienced homelessness while in extended care.

## Experiences in Care

- Over two-thirds (68.4%) of youth “agreed,” “strongly agreed,” or “very strongly agreed” that they felt lucky they were placed in foster care. When asked about satisfaction with foster care, close to three in five (57.4%) youth indicated that they “agreed,” “strongly agreed,” or “very strongly agreed” that they were generally satisfied with their experience in care.

## Optimism About the Future

- Despite difficulties encountered by foster youth after leaving care, a majority of these young adults remain optimistic about the future.
- The overwhelming majority of youth (94.7%) reported being “very optimistic” or “fairly optimistic,” while about 5% reported being “not too optimistic” or “not at all optimistic”.

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## Education

Studies have shown that educational attainment is an important predictor of employment outcomes for foster care youth, which underscores the importance of supporting educational attainment. Foster youth with higher levels of educational attainment tend to have higher rates of employment and earnings than foster youth who have completed less education.

- Over two-thirds (67.6%) of all youth were either enrolled in school or employed at the time of the interview.
- 8.6% of youth were enrolled in school only, 45.2% were employed only, and 13.8% were both enrolled and employed.
- Almost 85% (84.9%) of youth had earned a high school credential.
- Of the youth who had earned a high school credential, nearly 13% had earned a college degree.
- Among all youth in the study, 10.8% had earned a college degree, including 6.0% who earned a 2-year degree and 4.8% who earned a 4-year degree.
- Over two-thirds of youth who were currently enrolled in school were using a scholarship, loan, or some other type of financial aid to help pay for educational expenses.
- Among CaYOUTH participants with a high school credential, 28.0% reported that they had received an Educational and Training Voucher (ETV) since their last interview, 12.0% applied for but did not receive an ETV, 42.6% knew about ETVs but had not applied for one, and 17.5% had never heard of the ETV.

- Among youth who were currently or recently enrolled in college, Pell Grants and ETVs were the most common ways they were paying for college.
- Among youth who were currently or recently enrolled in college, about half (50.6%) had some involvement in a campus support program for foster youth.

### Barriers to Education Among Youth Not Enrolled

- Among youth who were not currently enrolled in school, over one-third (35.0%) reported that they faced at least one barrier to continuing their education.
- Among youth who reported that they faced a barrier, needing to work full time, concerns about not being able to afford college, and childcare responsibilities were the barriers most commonly reported as being a “major reason” for not returning.
- A greater percentage of females than males reported that there was something preventing them from continuing their education (41.5% vs. 24.1%), with childcare responsibilities being a much more common reason for females than for males.

### Educational Aspirations and Expectations

- Overall, most youth aspired to complete a college degree (86.5%), with 77.1% wanting to complete a 4-year degree or higher.
- However, the amount of education youth expected they would complete was a bit lower than what they aspired to. For example, 76.6% expected to complete a college degree, including 60.3% who expected to earn a 4-year degree or higher.

## Employment

- At the time of the interview, almost 60% (59.9%) of youth were employed and more than 55% were working 10 or more hours per week.
- Less than 1% of respondents were currently serving in full-time active duty military.
- Youths' average hourly wage was \$14.96.
- About two-thirds (67.8%) were “satisfied” or “extremely satisfied” with their job, and only about 11% (10.9%) were “dissatisfied” or “extremely dissatisfied” with their job.

## Economic Stability and Hardships

- More than half (57.2%) of youth reporting having a checking, savings, or money market account.
  - » Among youth with an account, the average balance in the account(s) was \$3,245.
- Nearly nine in ten (87.8%) youth reported having enough food to eat in the past month.
- Almost one-quarter of youth said they had to borrow food or food money from relatives or friends, a little under one-quarter reported having to forego paying a bill to purchase food, one-fifth got emergency food from a pantry, and slightly under one-tenth ate at a soup kitchen or community meal program.
- Just under half (48.6%) of the youth reported experiencing at least one of the six economic hardships in the past year (e.g., not enough money to buy clothing, not enough money to pay rent) that we asked them about.
- 55.4% reported that they ever received CalFresh, California's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).
  - » Of the youth who ever received CalFresh, 57.9% were currently receiving this benefit.

## Physical and Mental Health

- About three in four (73.3%) youth rated their health as “excellent,” or “very good.”
- Almost 90% (88.9%) of young adults reported having health insurance.
  - » Among those with health coverage, almost 90% reported their primary source of insurance as Medi-Cal (California's Medicaid program) or another state program.
- More than 75% (75.7%) of young adults had dental insurance coverage.
- Most youth had a physical exam (80.8%) and a dental exam (76.4%) in the past 2 years.
- About 13% (12.5%) of youth reported being unable to receive needed medical care within the past year, and among these respondents the most common reasons for not being able to receive needed medical care were not having insurance, not having transportation, and costs being too much.
- In the past year, 19% (18.5%) reported receiving psychological or emotional counseling, about 13% (12.6%) reported they were prescribed medication for their emotions, and 7.0% reported receiving treatment for an alcohol or substance abuse problem.
- More than one-quarter (28.8%) of youth had a positive screen for one of the psychological disorders that were assessed, and more than one-seventh (15.3%) of youth screened positive for a substance or alcohol use disorder.

## ★ Life Skills and Satisfaction ★★ with Services

- Youth were the most satisfied with the services they received in the area of sexual health, family planning, independent living skills, and substance abuse.
- Youth reported being the least satisfied with the preparation they received in the area of financial literacy.

## Social Support

- Youth reported having an average of about 5 (4.9) people that they could turn to if they needed support, and 2.1% of youth reported having no one to turn to.
- When asked to name specific individuals they could turn to for support, youth named an average of 2.9 individuals.
  - » Most of the nominated individuals were relatives (38%), friends (27%), or romantic partners/spouses (15%).
- When asked about whether they had enough people to turn to for different kinds of support, 56.9% of youth had “enough” people to provide emotional support, 57.7% had “enough” for tangible support, and 66.5% had “enough” for advice and guidance.
- Nearly 10% of youth reported having zero people to count on for advice/guidance, nearly 8% of youth said they had no one to rely on for tangible support, and about 4% said no one was available for emotional support.

## Pregnancy and Parenting

- About two-thirds (66.7%) of females had ever been pregnant and more than half (53.3%) of females had ever given birth to a child.

- Less than half (47.0%) of males had ever gotten a female pregnant and about a quarter (24.2%) of males had ever fathered a child.
- More than four-fifths (81.0%) of all children were living with the CalYOUTH parent.

## Marriage and Romantic Relationships

- More than half (55.1%) of the youth were currently involved in a romantic relationship and less than one-in-ten (7.9%) youth were married.

## Criminal Justice System Involvement

- The overwhelming majority of participants had no contact with the criminal justice system since their last interview.
  - » 14.4% had been arrested.
  - » 12.9% had spent a night in a jail, prison, juvenile hall, or other correctional facility.
  - » 6.9% had been convicted of a crime.

## Differences in Outcome by Race, Ethnicity, and Gender

- Some disparities by race and ethnicity in indicators of disadvantage seen in the general population were not seen in the CalYOUTH population; for example, we found no differences between African American, Hispanic, and white youth in the likelihood of having a high school diploma or GED. Nevertheless, other indicators of disadvantage were more common for youth of color, such as the relatively low levels of social support reported by African American youth. Outcomes also differed by gender, with males faring worse than females in educational attainment and involvement in the criminal justice system while earning more on average from their employment.