

Employment and Youth with Foster Care Experience



Problem

Employment is foundational to youth's successful transition into adulthood, yet many youth with lived experience in the foster care system struggle to obtain employment that provides a living wage. While participation in extended foster care improves youth's employment outcomes, their outcomes are still poor compared to their peers in the general population. A longitudinal study of youth formerly in California's extended foster care program found that, at age 23, two years after leaving the child welfare system, only 55% of respondents were currently employed working 10 or more hours per week, compared to 75% of youth in the general population. Also, nearly 60% of the young people in the study earned an annual income below the federal poverty level, compared to 46% of youth in the general population.ⁱ

Youth with foster care experience face multiple barriers in securing and maintaining meaningful employment including:

- *Poor high school and college graduation rates*, which impact their prospects for jobs that pay a living wage.ⁱⁱ
- *A dearth of job training and placement programs specific to youth with foster care experience.*ⁱⁱⁱ
- *Inadequate transition services*, which are intended to help youth with foster care experience transition to adulthood but may face challenges in connecting youth to needed employment, education or housing services.^{iv}
- *Missing vital documents needed for employment*, like a birth certificate or Social Security card, that can be difficult for a young person to obtain.^v
- *Lack of access to child care and transportation.*^{vi}
- *Current or past justice system involvement.*^{vii}
- *A history of and/or current substance use.*^{viii}
- *Limited work history.*^{ix}

To overcome these barriers, youth currently and formerly in foster care must first be provided with targeted services and supports to help improve their academic engagement and achievement and aid their successful transition to postsecondary education and career. Additionally, they must be provided with employment preparation and readiness supports, such as resume building and interview skills, as well as job training and placement programs that include meaningful work experience, as prior work experience is an important predictor of later success in employment. Finally, these programs must be trauma-sensitive and prepared to serve youth with foster care experience, including by understanding the challenges these youth may be facing and making an effort to meet youth where they are. With proper supports and services such as these, youth currently and formerly in foster care will be equipped to find and maintain the employment they need to be self-sufficient and achieve their career goals.

Solution

Moving forward, the California Legislature should ensure employers are appropriately incentivized to hire eligible youth currently and formerly in foster care. An annual tax credit should be made available to employers ranging from \$2,500 up to \$10,000 per youth based on the hours worked. Employers should also be required to pay at least 120% of minimum wage. Eligible youth should include those who spent time in foster care on or after their 13th birthday and are ages 16 to 26, including crossover youth being served by the probation system.

For more information, contact Susanna Kniffen at skniffen@childrennow.org.

ⁱ Courtney, M. E., Okpych, N. J., Harty, J. S., Feng, H., Park, S., Powers, J., Nadon, M., Ditto, D. J., & Park, K. (2020). *Findings from the California Youth Transitions to Adulthood Study (CaYOUTH): Conditions of youth at age 23*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

ⁱⁱ [cite CN FY Ed white paper for education outcomes?]; Okpych, N.J., & Courtney, M.E. (2014). "Does education pay for youth formerly in foster care?: Comparison of employment outcomes with a national sample." *Children and Youth Services Review*. Vol. 43, pp. 18–28. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2014.04.013>

ⁱⁱⁱ Dworsky, A., and Havlicek, J. (2010). *An Employment Training and Job Placement Program for Foster Youth in Cook County, Illinois*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

^{iv} Annie E. Casey Foundation. "2018 California Profile: Transition-Age Youth in Foster Care." *Foster Youth Transitions: Using Data to Drive Policy and Practice Decisions*. <https://assets.aecf.org/m/blogimg/california-fosteringyouthtransitions-2018.pdf>

^v L.A. Opportunity Youth Collaborative. (2021). *Improving Equitable Employment Outcomes for Transition-Age Foster Youth in L.A. County: Streamlining Access to Career Development Services*.

https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/unitela/pages/5307/attachments/original/1626889779/OYC-Study_FINAL-Web.pdf

^{vi} Van Buren, E., Schroeder, J., & York, P. (2021). *Raising the Bar: Building system- and provider-level evidence to drive equitable education and employment outcomes for youth in extended foster care*. First Place for Youth. https://firstplaceforyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Research-Brief_V14.pdf

^{vii} Ibid.

^{viii} Ibid.

^{ix} Stewart, C.J., Kum, H.C., Barth, R.P., & Duncan, D.F. (2014). "Former foster youth: Employment outcomes up to age 30." *Children and Youth Services Review*. Vol. 36, pp. 220-229. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2013.11.024>