



**TAY-Hub**  
Transition-Age Youth  
Research & Evaluation Hub



# EMPLOYMENT AND EARNINGS OUTCOMES Among Transition-Age Youth in Care



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## Project Overview

The Transition-Age Youth Research and Evaluation Hub (TAY-Hub) is a university-based research collaborative housed in the California Child Welfare Indicators Project at the University of California, Berkeley. The TAY-Hub specializes in research related to policies and practices affecting transition-age youth by monitoring outcomes and through applied research. This work is grounded in engagement with members of the child welfare services community, including those with lived experience of foster care.

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# Introduction

Entering the workforce and securing a livable wage are essential milestones for most emerging adults. Consistent, well-compensated employment undergirds the ability to live independently and builds the foundation for financial well-being across the life course (Lee & Mortimer, 2009). Nevertheless, young people making the transition from foster care to early adulthood (also referred to as transition-age youth or TAY) report exceedingly high unemployment rates and suppressed wages (Gypen et al., 2017; Naccarato & DeLorenzo, 2008). Research during the last 2 decades has indicated that employment rates among TAY are between 15% and 31% lower than those of young people who were never involved in the child welfare system, a dynamic that persists throughout their mid to late 20s (Courtney & Dworsky, 2006; Gypen et al., 2017; Hook & Courtney, 2011; Stewart et al., 2014). Once employed, TAY experience greater job insecurity and earn lower wages (Dworsky & Havlicek, 2010; Salazar, 2013), with several studies finding that TAY not only make significantly less than their counterparts without foster care experience (Courtney & Dworsky, 2006; Dworsky, 2005; Salazar, 2013; Stewart et al., 2014), but also are more likely to have incomes below the federal poverty threshold (Dworsky, 2005; Hook & Courtney, 2011). Gender and racial disparities in TAY employment rates and earnings are prevalent, with women and youth of color earning significantly less than their White male peers (Dworsky, 2005; Dworsky & Courtney, 2001; Stewart et al., 2014).



Several factors likely contribute to the suppressed employment rates and earnings of TAY. TAY report higher rates of trauma, mental health disorders, developmental disabilities, or other special health care needs that can interfere with their capacity to find and maintain employment (Leathers & Testa, 2006; Salazar, 2013). Hook and Courtney (2011) also found that incarceration and motherhood, two outcomes disproportionately experienced by young people aging out of care (Cutuli et al., 2016; Eastman et al., 2019), also pose barriers to employment during emerging adulthood. Finally, young people leaving foster care may have less robust social networks, which some research has linked to lower employment rates and earnings (Hook & Courtney, 2011; Okpych et al., 2023). Taken together, the challenges experienced by youth before, during, and after foster care combined with limited, albeit growing, independent living supports can impede their employment and earning potential.

Despite California having one of the largest youth populations in care, little research has examined the employment and earnings outcomes of TAY in this state. This brief summarizes data collected on the employment and earnings outcomes of TAY participating in the California Youth Transitions to Adulthood (CalYOUTH) Study to (a) develop an understanding of TAY employment and earnings outcomes in the context of California’s implementation of extended foster care (EFC), (b) compare employment rates and earnings of the CalYOUTH sample to those of same-age peers in California during the CalYOUTH study, and (c) inform the development of policies and programs supporting the economic self-sufficiency of TAY in California. CalYOUTH is a

longitudinal evaluation of California’s EFC program authorized by the California Fostering Connections to Success Act (2010). Given that California is home to a substantial proportion of all U.S. young adults in foster care (Webster et al., 2023), these data have great potential to inform policy and programmatic efforts to support TAY’s economic well-being. Results from the current analysis suggest TAY are employed at significantly lower rates than youth in the general population, earn substantially less, and may experience gender and racial disparities in employment and earning outcomes. Taken together, our findings emphasize the need for greater and more sustained support as youth exit care and enter the workforce.





# Method

Data for this report were derived from three sources: CalYOUTH survey and study reports for ages 17, 19, 21, and 23 (Courtney et al., 2014, 2016, 2020; Courtney, Okpych, Park, et al., 2018), the California Child Welfare Indicators Project (CCWIP; Webster et al., 2023), and the American Community Survey Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (ACS IPUMS; Ruggles et al., 2023).

## CalYOUTH Survey and Reports

Employment rates, efforts to become employed, earnings, and work schedule data were derived from four reports detailing the conditions of CalYOUTH participants at ages 17 (Wave 1 in 2013), 19 (Wave 2 in 2015), 21 (Wave 3 in 2017), and 23 (Wave 4 in 2019). Data points and confidence intervals not listed in the original reports were calculated using CalYOUTH survey data. At each wave, researchers conducted in-person interviews in which youth were asked about health, mental health, education, employment, living arrangements, social networks, and other indicators of global well-being. Youth were eligible to participate in Wave 1 if they were between ages 16.75 and 17.75 in 2013 and had been placed in California child welfare-supervised foster care for at least 6 months. Of the 2,583 youths deemed eligible, a stratified sampling method yielded 763 potential participants. Of these, 727 youths completed the first survey (95.3% response rate). Sample weights were created to adjust for the sampling strategy and nonresponse rates, which enabled

these data to be representative of foster youth who met CalYOUTH criteria at Wave 1 (see Courtney et al., 2014 for more information). Accordingly, the tables and figures reporting CalYOUTH data use survey-weighted percentages. The reports detailing conditions at ages 19, 21, and 23 also indicate statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ) between-group differences by gender, race, and ethnicity. We included 95% confidence intervals to signal statistically significant differences across groups (e.g., race and ethnicity, gender, CalYOUTH participants and general population youth). Study approval was obtained from the University of Chicago Institutional Review Board and the California Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects.

For the current report, we extracted data from the following CalYOUTH measures: current employment rates (“Are you currently working for pay?”); efforts to become employed (“What are all of the things you have done to find work during the last four weeks?”); work schedules (“How many hours a week do you usually work at this job?”); reasons for part-time employment (“What is your main reason for working part-time instead of full-time?”); and annual earnings from employment (“What are your usual annual earnings on your job before taxes or other deductions?”). Questions about work schedules were only asked of youth who reported they were currently working for pay for 10 or more hours a week.

## California Child Welfare Indicators Project

CCWIP is a collaborative venture between the School of Social Welfare at the University of California, Berkeley and the California Department of Social Services provides agency staff, policymakers, researchers, and the public with reports detailing the outcomes of children and youth involved in California’s child welfare system. As it pertains to this report, data from the *TAY Quarters Employed by Age* report were used to supplement employment rate data from CalYOUTH with quarterly earnings data of all TAY who were in a California child welfare-supervised out-of-home placement that began before their 18th birthday and ended on or after their 16th birthday (Webster et al., 2023). These data were also used to render quarterly earnings estimates among foster care-involved TAY by gender, race, and ethnicity. This report was derived by matching TAY in California’s Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS) with California quarterly wage data reported by employers in the state to the Employment Development Department (EDD). California quarterly wage data contain the quarterly earnings of individuals who made at least \$50 in the quarter of interest from private, state, local, and federal government employment (approximately 95% of wage and salary civilian jobs in the United States). Consequently, the parts of this report that relied on CWS/CMS and EDD data did not require

estimating employment rates (percentage of the labor force that is employed) but rather the number of quarters in which foster care-involved TAY had quarterly earnings of at least \$50 between ages 18 and 22. It should be noted that this report included youth in foster care for any amount of time, whereas young people in the CalYOUTH study had to have been in care for at least 6 months prior to Wave 1.

To construct employment status at specific ages, this report used the quarter in which youth turned 18 as a reference quarter and then tracked quarterly earnings moving forward. Four quarters of earnings were considered at each age between 18 and 22, beginning with the quarter following a youth’s 18th, 19th, 20th, 21st, and 22nd birthdays through the quarter of their 19th, 20th, 21st, 22nd, and 23rd birthdays, respectively. We followed the cohort of youth who turned 18 in 2014, which corresponds with the age of CalYOUTH participants. To increase interpretability, we report the percentage of youth who had at least one quarter of earnings in any given year (ages 18–22). We also conducted tests of proportions to facilitate comparisons with youth in the CalYOUTH sample and the general population. Given that Latino<sup>1</sup> youth constitute the most populous racial and ethnic group in California’s foster care system, we used Latino as the referent for all comparisons between racial and ethnic groups.

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<sup>1</sup> The CalYOUTH Survey, ACS, and CWS/CMS use the term “Hispanic” to refer to people of Latin American descent. This term excludes not only Latin Americans who do not speak Spanish (e.g., Brazil), but also those with Indigenous and African heritage. Consequently, we use the term “Latino” to describe those categorized as Hispanic in our data sources.

## ACS IPUMS

Public use microdata from the ACS were analyzed to derive employment rates, earnings, and work schedules of youth in the general population. The ACS is a nationwide survey administered by the U.S. Census Bureau that collects and produces information on the U.S. population's social, economic, housing, and demographic characteristics. The ACS is administered monthly and contacts approximately 3.5 million households across the country each year to participate. Between sampling strategies and survey weights, the resulting data are representative of all individuals living in the United States yearly (see IPUMS USA, n.d. for more information).

Five-year public use microdata were downloaded from IPUMS USA, a website and database that publishes data from the ACS and U.S. Census Bureau-administered surveys (Ruggles et al., 2023). To increase the reliability of estimates, we rendered 5-year estimates that included data from samples collected during a 60-month window (for example, 2013 estimates were derived from the 2009–2013 data file). Although this resulted in less current estimates compared to 1-year estimates, it provided a larger sample size, which allowed the generation of more reliable estimates, particularly among smaller populations such as TAY (IPUMS USA, n.d.). The coefficient of variation was used to assess the reliability of estimates across the overall sample and racial and ethnic subgroups. All estimates had an acceptable coefficient ( $\leq 12\%$ ). For the current report, we calculated employment rates,



earnings, and hours worked for all California youth aged 17, 19, 21, and 23 in 2013, 2015, 2017, and 2019, respectively, thus matching the ages and years of CalYOUTH data collection. Employment rates represent the proportion of youth who (a) were part of the labor force and (b) worked during the preceding week. Earnings amounts reflect the total wages, salary, commissions, bonuses, and tips from all jobs during the last 12 months. Hours worked reflect the usual hours worked per week during the last 12 months. To ensure consistency in comparisons with the CalYOUTH data, we limited analyses of work schedules to youth who reported working 10 or more hours per week. As with the CalYOUTH reports, full-time work was denoted as working 35 hours or more per week. We included 95% confidence intervals to facilitate comparisons between youth in the general population and the CalYOUTH sample. Nonoverlapping confidence intervals denote statistically significant differences in rates and estimates.



# Results

## Current Employment Rates Over Time

Table 1 shows current employment rates among CalYOUTH participants and youth in the general California population. Although employment rates increased in both samples, CalYOUTH employment rates were significantly lower than youth in the general population, with differences between 29% and 43%. By age 23, 90.4% of youth in the general population were employed, whereas 58.7% of CalYOUTH participants were employed at the same age (Figure 1). A similar pattern emerged in the administrative data showing quarterly earnings of TAY with foster care experience (Table 2). At age 18, approximately 42.8% of foster care-involved TAY had at least one quarter with earnings, whereas 57.3% reported quarterly earnings by age 22. Across all four time points, the proportion of foster care-involved TAY with quarterly earnings was significantly smaller than the proportion of youth in the general population who were employed (age 19:  $z = 23.04$ ,  $p < .001$ ; age 21:  $z = 38.5$ ,  $p < .001$ ; age 22 or 23:  $z = 49.5$ ,  $p < .001$ ). At age 19, a greater proportion of foster care-involved TAY reported quarterly earnings than CalYOUTH participants ( $z = -8.52$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This difference was not significant at later points.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Employment rates measured by the American Community and CalYOUTH surveys are different from the measure of quarterly earnings derived from CWS/CMS and EDD data. The American Community and CalYOUTH surveys measure if respondents are currently employed (or were employed within the last week prior to completing the American Community Survey). In contrast, the CWS/CMS-EDD data report the number of youth who had at least one quarter of earnings at ages 18/19/20/21/22. We urge readers to consider these differences when interpreting results.

## Current Employment Rates by Race and Ethnicity

Table 3 shows current employment rates among the CalYOUTH sample and TAY in the general population by race and ethnicity. As with overall employment rates, youth in the general population were employed at significantly higher rates than their CalYOUTH peers of the same racial or ethnic group. Although employment rates among youth in the general population were roughly the same at ages 17 and 19, racial disparities in employment rates emerged as youth matured, with White youth being employed at higher rates compared to youth who were Black, multiracial, or another race or ethnicity by age 23. Similarly, Latino youth in the general population were employed at significantly higher rates than Black and multiracial youth at age 23. In contrast, we did not observe any statistically significant differences in employment rates by race or ethnicity in the CalYOUTH sample.

We also found evidence of racial and ethnic disparities in the proportion of foster care-involved TAY reporting quarterly earnings (Figure 2). At ages 19, 21, and 22, the proportion of Latino youth reporting quarterly earnings was



significantly greater than those of Black youth (age 19:  $z = 3.39, p < .001$ ; age 21:  $z = 2.37, p = .02$ ; age 22:  $z = 3.26, p = .001$ ); Native American youth (age 19:  $z = 1.96, p = .049$ ; age 21:  $z = 3.65, p < .001$ ; age 22:  $z = 3.13, p = .002$ ); and White youth (age 19:  $z = 2.17, p = .03$ ; age 21:  $z = 4.20, p < .001$ ; age 22:  $z = 5.26, p < .001$ ).

### **Current Employment Rates by Gender**

Employment rates did not significantly differ by gender in the CalYOUTH sample (Table 1), although employment rates skewed higher among men than women. In comparison, women in the general population were employed at significantly higher rates than men across all four time points. A similar pattern was observed in the quarterly earnings data among foster care-involved TAY at ages 21 and 22: Female youth reported quarterly earnings at higher proportions than male youth (age 21:  $z = 3.28, p = .001$ ; age 22:  $z = 3.34, p < .001$ ).

Men and women in the general population were employed at significantly higher rates at all time points than their counterparts in the CalYOUTH and CWS/CMS samples ( $z \geq 17.34, p < .001$  for all within-gender comparisons between the CWS/CMS sample and general population). Although the proportion of employed CalYOUTH men was significantly less than the proportion of male foster care-involved TAY who reported quarterly earnings at age 19 ( $z = -4.39, p < .001$ ), a greater proportion of CalYOUTH men were employed at age 21 ( $z = 2.28, p = .02$ ) and 23 ( $z = 2.91, p = .004$ ). At age 19, a smaller proportion of CalYOUTH female participants were employed compared to other female foster care-involved TAY who reported

quarterly earnings ( $z = -7.5, p < .001$ ). These differences were not significant at ages 21, 22, or 23.

### **Efforts to Become Employed**

Table 4 displays CalYOUTH participants' efforts to become employed. When asked if they currently wanted a job, at least three quarters of unemployed youth indicated "yes" or "maybe, it depends" across Waves 2–4. The proportion of youth who were disabled or otherwise unable to work increased slightly from 5.1% at age 19 to 10.4% by age 23. Between 75% and 80% of youth who were unemployed and able to work had not worked in the week preceding the interview. More than half of these respondents had engaged in some job-finding activity in the last 4 weeks. Youth were engaged in several job-finding activities, the most common being sending out resumes, filling out applications, directly contacting an employer or having a job interview, or contacting friends or relatives for job leads. At the time of the interview, 56% to 65% of youth had been looking for work for "weeks," whereas 27% to 40% had been looking for months. The proportion of TAY looking for full-time work (35 hours or more per week) increased from 38.8% at age 19 to 64.9% at age 23.

### **Work Schedules**

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#### **Full-Time Versus Part-Time Work**

Table 5 shows the proportion of working CalYOUTH participants and youth in the general population who worked full-time. At ages 19, 21, and 23, CalYOUTH participants were

significantly more likely to report working full-time than youth in the general population. Employed CalYOUTH women worked full-time at higher rates than young women in the general population at ages 19, 21, and 23. No other gender differences were significant. Full-time work did not significantly vary by the racial or ethnic identities of CalYOUTH participants.

Among youth working 10 or more hours a week, a greater proportion of CalYOUTH participants worked more than 40 hours per week compared to youth in the general population, with the difference peaking at age 21 at 11% (Table 6). A significantly greater proportion of CalYOUTH young women worked more than 40 hours per week compared to their peers in the general population at all observed time points. A greater proportion of male CalYOUTH participants compared to men in the general population worked more than 40 hours per week at age 21 but at no other time. Although working more than 40 hours per week was more likely among men in the general population, there were no observed gender differences among CalYOUTH participants. Race and ethnicity were also not associated with the likelihood of working more than 40 hours a week.

### **Reasons for Part-Time Work**

Among CalYOUTH participants working part-time, about a third reported schooling or training interfering with their ability to work full-time at ages 19 and 21 (Table 7). The respondents' main reasons for not working full-time differed significantly ( $F = 2.3, p < .05$ ). Youth who were in extended foster care were more likely than youth who left care to report

that school interfered with the ability to work full time (39.2% vs. 10.6%, respectively). In comparison, youth who left care were more likely to cite family and personal obligations as barriers to full-time work (7.6% vs. 1.5%). Approximately 20% to 26% of youth reported only being able to find part-time work at ages 19 and 21, although this proportion decreased by age 23. Between 14% and 17% preferred working part-time at each wave. Childcare limitations increasingly became a barrier to full-time work (13.8% at age 23). Across all waves, about two thirds of all youth working part-time wanted full-time work. Reasons for part-time work did not significantly differ by gender, race, or ethnicity.

## **Earnings from Employment**

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Table 8 shows the average annual earnings from employment between ages 19 and 23 among working CalYOUTH participants and youth in the general population. CalYOUTH participants earned significantly less than youth in the general population, with the wage gap increasing slightly between ages 19 (\$2,149) and 23 (\$3,419).

### **Earnings by Race and Ethnicity**

Table 9 shows the average earnings from employment among CalYOUTH participants and youth in the general population by race and ethnicity. Among CalYOUTH participants, Latino youth earned significantly more than Black youth at ages 21 and 23. Youth who identified as another race earned significantly more than Black youth at age 21 but at no other time point. White youth earned more than Black youth at

age 21 (Figure 3). In the general population, White youth earned significantly more than Black, multiracial, and youth of another race at age 19. White youth also earned more than youth of another race at age 21. By age 23, White youth earned significantly more than Black and Latino youth. No other differences were significant in the general population sample.

Although Black CalYOUTH participants earned less than Black youth in the general population at ages 19 and 21, their earnings were not significantly different at age 23. White youth in the general population outearned White CalYOUTH participants at age 23 but not at earlier time points. No other differences were significant.

### *Earnings by Gender*

As in the general population, female CalYOUTH participants earned significantly less than their male counterparts at ages 21 and 23. Although CalYOUTH men earned less than those in the general population, there were no detectable differences in earnings between these two groups at ages 21 and 23. In contrast, the wages of female CalYOUTH participants were comparable to those of women in the general population at age 19 (Figure 4). At ages 21 and 23, however, female youth in the general population earned significantly more.





## Limitations

It is important to consider this report's findings alongside its limitations. Although more than 85% of youth who participated in the baseline interview also completed the Wave 4 interview, we cannot determine the extent to which recorded survey responses differed from those of participants who dropped out. Characteristics among participants and nonparticipants were broadly similar, although differences in gender and foster care status at age 21 were detected (participation rates were higher among women and those in care on their 21st birthday). Self-reported employment and earnings are also subject to bias introduced by individuals' limited recall of their employment history. Our findings represent state averages, which may mask previously documented differences tied to service variation between counties (Park et al., 2022). Additionally, the absence of certain subgroup differences in the CalYOUTH data (e.g., by race, ethnicity, or gender) may be due to low statistical power rather than the genuine absence of a difference. Additional research with larger sample sizes is needed to determine how racial, ethnic, and gender disparities mirror those found in the general population of emerging adults.

Although similar, the rate of youth with quarterly earnings recorded by California's

unemployment insurance system is not directly comparable to employment rates calculated from the ACS sample. Quarterly earnings data represent the proportion of youth for whom California employers reported at least one quarter of earnings at a given age, whereas employment rates derived from the ACS sample denote the proportion of individuals in the labor force who reported being employed in the week prior to completing the ACS. Additionally, quarterly earnings data do not capture income not reported by employers to the EDD, meaning "under-the-table" work is not factored into these estimates, nor are the earnings of young adults in out-of-state placements. As previously mentioned, CWS/CMS data include all youth regardless of their length of stay in foster care, whereas CalYOUTH participants were in care for at least 6 months upon enrolling in the study at Wave 1. The ACS features population-level data, meaning these estimates likely include data from youth in foster care at the time of the ACS, though that number is likely to be very small. Future work would benefit from methods that facilitate comparisons between youth with and without care experience. Finally, California is unique in its implementation of EFC, meaning our data may not represent youth in other states with differences in youth characteristics and child welfare policies and practices.



# Discussion

## TAY Experience High Unemployment Rates

Employment rates among CalYOUTH participants were significantly lower—to the tune of 30%—than those of youth in the general population, a finding corroborated by quarterly earnings data among all child welfare-involved TAY in California. Data suggest these suppressed employment rates are not due to a lack of desire to work. More than 75% of unemployed CalYOUTH participants wanted to be employed across Waves 2 and 4. Among those who had been unemployed for more than a week at the time of the interview, three-fifths had engaged in job-seeking activities during the last month, and of those, most—upward of 91% by age 23—were looking for full-time work. Job seekers were proactive, tracking job announcements, contacting employers, submitting applications, and engaging their social networks for employment leads.

We found that Latino youth reported quarterly earnings at higher rates than Black, White, and Native American youth in the CWS/CMS and EDD data. Additional research is needed to replicate this finding and examine why Latino youth may report quarterly earnings at higher rates. This said, all racial and ethnic groups in the CalYOUTH, CWS/CMS, and EDD samples showed significantly lower labor force participation (i.e., employment or quarterly earnings) than those in the ACS sample. When

considered alongside CalYOUTH participants' avid job-finding efforts, this finding highlights the need for additional systemwide supports that provide foster care-involved TAY with the skills needed to be viable job candidates in an increasingly competitive job market. Research has suggested that employment services are most effective at promoting positive employment and earnings outcomes among TAY when embedded in a broader intensive case management model (Courtney et al., 2019; Gunawardena & Stich, 2021; Zinn & Courtney, 2017). For instance, Courtney and colleagues (2019) found that TAY reaped measurable professional and economic benefits when served by a transitional living program staffed by caseworkers who had (a) expertise in working with TAY, (b) low caseloads that enabled weekly one-on-one meetings with youth, and (c) regular supervision and training from supervisors. Less intensive programs tend to yield minimal to no results regarding employment and earnings outcomes (Gunawardena & Stich, 2021; Zinn & Courtney, 2017), highlighting the potential of cultivating a well-trained and -supported workforce of caseworkers who specialize in serving TAY. Moreover, it may be helpful for transitional and independent living programs to provide youth with tangible work opportunities so they can leave care with work experience that makes them competitive in the job market (Naccarato & DeLorenzo, 2008).

## Recommendation

Build capacity to provide relevant employment services in intensive case management programs staffed by specialized caseworkers who can meet with TAY frequently (i.e., weekly) to ensure they receive the training and guidance needed to be competitive in the modern job market. Part of this should include providing youth with tangible work experience they can highlight on their resume and during interviews. Although recent advocacy and policy efforts have made progress, there remains a need for greater coordination and collaboration between child welfare and workforce development programs in California and nationwide.

## TAY Balance Work with School and Other Commitments

Although employment rates among TAY aging out of care were lower than those of the general population, employed CalYOUTH participants worked full-time at higher rates than youth in the general population. We also found evidence that TAY worked more than 40 hours per week at higher rates than youth in the general population. These numbers are small, however, and should be corroborated by additional research with larger samples.

School was the leading reason for pursuing part-time work at ages 19 and 21. This finding is promising, because it suggests that youth are taking advantage of resources offered by EFC to attend school while working. Nevertheless, the percentage of youth working part-time due to school at age 23 dropped from 37% to 17.2%. Other reports using CalYOUTH data suggested this drop did not stem from youth graduating. Between ages 21 and 23, the percentage of young women enrolled in college dropped from 25% to 15%, with many leaving school without

graduating or receiving a credential (Courtney et al., 2020). In contrast, the percentage of college-enrolled young men remained constant between ages 21 and 23, at 18%. Together, these data signal that youth may struggle to complete their postsecondary programs without the additional support offered by EFC. Although EFC, as it is currently designed, has measurable advantages for youth employment and earnings (Courtney et al., 2021; Courtney, Okpych, & Park, 2018), other research has underscored the critical role of educational attainment in promoting positive employment and earnings outcomes among youth aging out of care (Hook & Courtney, 2011; Kim et al., 2019). Moreover, few young people finish a 4-year undergraduate degree before their 21st birthday and less than half of all young people in the United States earn their undergraduate degree within 4 years of entry (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). Together, this evidence suggests ending EFC at age 21 may unintentionally remove essential resources that youth need to earn a degree or credential that makes them competitive in the labor market.

## Recommendation

Policymakers should consider extending basic financial support or EFC past age 21 to reflect the normative time required to complete postsecondary education programs, obtain vocational training, and find well-compensated employment. Guaranteed income programs may be a viable solution, and current pilot programs funded by California may provide evidence of their effectiveness.

## Racial and Gender Disparities in Earnings Emerge as Youth Age

Although we did not observe racial disparities in income among CalYOUTH participants at age 19, Black youth earned less than White youth and youth who identified as another race at age 21. Latino youth earned significantly more than Black youth at ages 21 and 23. Further, Native American youth reported quarterly earnings at consistently lower rates than youth from other racial and ethnic groups in the CWS/CMS and EDD sample. The emergence of these earning disparities is puzzling and warrants further research to understand why the earnings of working Black and Native American youth did not keep up with those of youth from other racial and ethnic backgrounds. This finding joins a broader literature that illustrates Black and Native American youth fare worse than their White peers at effectively every point in the child welfare system (Hill, 2004; Merritt, 2020; Pon et al., 2011; Putnam-Hornstein et al., 2021). It is unrealistic to expect the child welfare system alone to redress all harms incurred by systemic

racism. However, policymakers, practitioners, and scholars in child welfare must ensure that our practices benefit Black and Native American youth while not perpetuating racialized structural violence.

In addition to the income gap between male and female TAY in the CalYOUTH sample, the income of female CalYOUTH participants was notably less than that of female youth in the general population. Although the incomes of male TAY were effectively the same as those of male youth in the general population by age 21, the gap between female earners in the CalYOUTH and ACS samples grew between Waves 2 and 4. Although this is concerning at first glance, there may be other factors influencing female TAY's earnings. First, female TAY were significantly more likely than male TAY to report income from their spouse or partner at ages 19 ( $F = 14.1, p < .001$ ) and 23 (79.3% vs. 60.6%, respectively;  $F = 5.6, p < .05$ ) and gained significantly more income from their spouse's employment at age 21 (\$17,563 vs. \$9,524;  $F = 9.7,$

$p < .01$ ). Moreover, a greater proportion of female CalYOUTH participants were enrolled in postsecondary institutions than male youth, suggesting they opted for part-time employment to balance work with their academic pursuits. This is corroborated by our finding that employed female CalYOUTH participants worked full-time at somewhat lower rates than male youth. In sum, future research is needed to control for other variables that might

explain the lower employment rates among female youth aging out of care. Confounding factors notwithstanding, the observed gender disparities in earnings among youth in the general population suggest that the observed wage difference is at least partially tied to historical wage inequities among women.

## Recommendation

Service providers must ensure that Black, Native American, and female youth receive the necessary support to overcome systemic barriers to equitable wages. Funding for additional research is needed to better understand why the earnings of working Black, Native American, and female TAY fall behind their peers as they get older.







## Conclusion

Although California's extension of foster care has allowed youth to obtain critical support as they enter adulthood, findings suggest that the child welfare system may need to shift how it supports TAY's employment and earnings. Given that TAY were unemployed at higher rates and earned less than their peers when employed, our data suggest TAY likely need more sustained support that provides them with the skills and mentorship needed to navigate an increasingly competitive job market successfully. Extending foster care through the completion of postsecondary

programs may boost the number of youth earning college degrees and credentials, thus increasing their lifetime earning potential. Additional resources to address the employment and income disparities among female, Black, and Native American youth are especially needed. Nevertheless, our findings also show TAY want to work and are proactive in their search for employment, suggesting that with the right resources and supports, youth will be well positioned to enter the workforce and forge meaningful, well-compensated careers.





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# Appendix

**Table 1. Current Employment Rates at Ages 17, 19, 21, and 23 (2013, 2015, 2017, and 2019) among TAY in the General California Population and CalYOUTH Sample**

	Age 17 (2013)	Age 19 (2015)	Age 21 (2017)	Age 23 (2019)
	%	%	%	%
Sample	[95% CI]	[95% CI]	[95% CI]	[95% CI]
General population	58.1	74.0	86.5	90.4
	[56.7, 59.7]	[73.0, 75.0]	[85.9, 87.1]	[89.9, 90.9]
CalYOUTH sample <sup>a</sup>	14.5	33.1	57.1	58.7
	[11.9, 17.6]	[29.0, 37.4]	[52.5, 61.5]	[54.2, 63.0]
General population women	61.8	76.4	88.2	91.3
	[60.0, 63.5]	[75.1, 77.6]	[87.6, 88.8]	[90.6, 92.0]
CalYOUTH women	15.6	31.1	54.5	55.9
	[12.1, 19.8]	[26.0, 36.7]	[48.7, 60.3]	[50.1, 61.4]
General population men	54.2	71.9	85.0	89.6
	[51.9, 56.4]	[70.5, 73.2]	[84.1, 85.9]	[88.9, 90.3]
CalYOUTH men	13.0	36.03	61.3	63.4
	[9.3, 17.8]	[29.5, 43.1]	[54.0, 68.2]	[56.2, 70.2]

Note. Data sources: CalYOUTH survey; 5-year ACS IPUMS.

<sup>a</sup>Numbers in the original CalYOUTH report were reported separately by work schedule (full- and part-time). To render the confidence intervals, the estimates for the total employment rate were recalculated from survey data. Due to survey weighting, the percentages shown here are slightly different (within two tenths of a percentage point) from the summed percentages of part- and full-time workers presented in the CalYOUTH reports.

**Table 2. Proportion of Foster Care-Involved TAY with One or More Quarters of Earnings per Year between Ages 18 and 23**

	Age 18 (2014)	Age 19 (2015)	Age 20 (2016)	Age 21 (2017)	Age 22 (2018)
All	42.3	52.0	56.4	57.1	56.1
Black	39.9	49.0	54.6	56.3	54.6
White	42.7	51.1	53.8	53.2	51.2
Latino	43.9	54.8	59.1	60.3	60.1
Asian or Pacific Islander	41.1	49.2	55.7	57.8	56.2
Native American	31.9	43.1	18.1	38.9	41.7
Young women	43.2	52.0	56.7	59.1	58.2
Young men	41.2	52.2	56.2	54.6	53.6

Note. Data source: California Child Welfare Indicators Project.

**Table 3. Current Employment Rates by Race and Ethnicity among CalYOUTH Participants and TAY in the General Population**

	Age 17 (2013)	Age 19 (2015)	Age 21 (2017)	Age 23 (2019)
	%	%	%	%
	95% CI	95% CI	95% CI	95% CI
GP White	68.4	78.1	88.4	92.0
	[29.4, 34.0]	[76.5, 79.5]	[87.4, 89.4]	[91.0, 92.6]
CY White	12.8	31.9	55.5	58.3
	[8.4, 19.0]	[24.2, 40.7]	[46.8, 63.9]	[49.5, 66.6]
GP Black	42.8	58.0	74.9	82.7
	[35.5, 50.3]	[53.8, 62.1]	[70.8, 78.7]	[79.6, 85.3]
CY Black	10.2	30.1	57.2	49.6
	[5.7, 17.6]	[21.3, 40.7]	[46.4, 67.3]	[39.2, 60.1]
GP multiracial	64.4	71.9	85.6	87.5
	[56.0, 72.0]	[66.9, 76.3]	[80.9, 88.9]	[84.0, 90.3]
CY multiracial	12.7	37.0	57.4	59.6
	[7.1, 21.7]	[25.2, 50.6]	[43.6, 70.2]	[44.0, 73.5]
GP Latino	50.8	73.0	86.7	91.1
	[48.2, 53.3]	[71.5, 74.3]	[85.8, 87.5]	[90.4, 91.8]
CY Latino	17.4	34.5	56.2	62.7
	[13.2, 22.6]	[28.5, 41.0]	[49.1, 63.1]	[56.0, 68.9]
GP other	55.8	78.6	86.9	89.1
	[49.3, 62.0]	[76.2, 80.9]	[84.8, 88.7]	[87.2, 90.7]
CY other	14.8	27.7	78.9	58.0
	[5.1, 36.3]	[12.2, 51.3]	[56.5, 91.5]	[36.5, 76.8]

Note. Data sources: CalYOUTH survey; 5-year ACS IPUMS. GP = general population sample from ACS; CY = CalYOUTH sample.



**Table 4. Efforts to Become Employed among CalYOUTH Participants Who were Unemployed at the Time of Interview**

	Age 19	Age 21	Age 23
Currently want a job <sup>a</sup>	n = 387	n = 266	n = 249
Yes or maybe, it depends	88.5	81.6	75.3
No	6.5	9.4	14.3
Disabled or unable to work	5.1	0.8	10.4
Worked for pay in the week preceding the interview <sup>b</sup>	n = 365	n = 237	n = 219
Yes	15.0	21.0	19.4
No	80.2	78.2	75.1
Disabled or unable to work	4.8	0.8	5.5
Among youth who did not work last week, did anything to find work in the last 4 weeks <sup>c</sup>	n = 292	n = 186	n = 168
Yes	65.1	61.5	59.2
No	32.3	35.9	37.2
Disabled or unable to work	2.6	2.7	3.6
Length of time looking for work <sup>d</sup>	n = 186	n = 116	n = 93
Weeks	65.4	56.7	65.0
Months	29.8	40.5	27.5
Years	4.8	2.9	7.5
Looking for work of 35 hours or more per week <sup>d</sup>	n = 186	n = 116	n = 93
Yes	38.8	47.8	64.9
No	23.6	13.2	8.1
Doesn't matter	37.6	39.0	27.0
Activities done in past 4 weeks to find work (can select more than one) <sup>d</sup>	n = 186	n = 116	n = 93
Contacted an employer directly or had a job interview	56.4	68.7	72.5
Contacted an employment agency	38.2	48.6	52.0
Contacted friends or relatives	56.6	52.3	66.1
Contacted a school or university employment center	25.7	7.6	18.6
Sent out resumes or filled out applications	89.0	87.4	88.9
Placed or answered ads	19.3	43.9	43.3
Checked union or professional registers	3.8	7.2	16.7
Looked at ads	43.3	68.5	58.9
Attended job training programs or courses	30.2	23.6	21.5
Other	7.5	5.1	2.5

Note. Data source: CalYOUTH survey.

<sup>a</sup>Among youth who were unemployed at the time of interview.

<sup>b</sup>Among youth who did not indicate they were disabled or unable to work in the previous question.

<sup>c</sup>Among youth who did not work for pay in the week preceding the interview.

<sup>d</sup>Among youth who indicated they had engaged in job-finding efforts in the past 4 weeks.

**Table 5. Among Working Youth, Proportion with Full-Time Employment<sup>a</sup>**

	Age 17 (2013)	Age 19 (2015)	Age 21 (2017)	Age 23 (2019)
	%	%	%	%
	[95% CI]	[95% CI]	[95% CI]	[95% CI]
General population	8.2	27.3	43.6	62.1
	[7.2, 9.4]	[26.1, 28.5]	[42.5, 44.6]	[61.1, 63.1]
CalYOUTH sample	11.6	45.7	62.1	71.2
	[6.4, 20.0]	[38.2, 53.4]	[56.0, 67.9]	[65.7, 76.2]
General population women	4.5	18.5	34.9	56.3
	[3.4, 6.0]	[16.9, 20.2]	[33.3, 36.4]	[54.9, 57.7]
CalYOUTH women	8.0	44.6	56.8	68.2
	[3.5, 17.1]	[34.7, 54.9]	[49.0, 64.5]	[60.7, 74.8]
General population men	12.6	35.7	51.4	67.5
	[10.7, 14.8]	[34.1, 37.4]	[50.0, 52.8]	[66.2, 68.7]
CalYOUTH men	17.8	47.2	70.0	75.8
	[7.8, 36.0]	[36.0, 58.8]	[60.2, 78.2]	[67.5, 82.5]

Note. Data sources: CalYOUTH survey; 5-year ACS IPUMS.

<sup>a</sup>Full-time employment is defined as 35 or more hours per week.

**Table 6. Among Youth Who Currently Worked 10+ Hours a Week, Proportion of CalYOUTH and California TAY Who Worked More Than 40 Hours per Week**

	Age 19 (2015)	Age 21 (2017)	Age 23 (2019)
	%	%	%
	[95% CI]	[95% CI]	[95% CI]
General population	5.8	7.7	13.0
	[5.3, 6.4]	[7.1, 8.3]	[12.4, 13.6]
Overall CalYOUTH	11.2	18.7	18.4
	[7.0, 17.4]	[14.1, 24.3]	[14.1, 23.5]
General population women	2.8	4.4	9.2
	[2.2, 3.6]	[3.7, 5.1]	[8.5, 9.9]
CalYOUTH women	10.5	16.1	16.4
	[5.2, 19.9]	[10.6, 23.6]	[11.3, 23.1]
General population men	8.5	10.6	16.5
	[7.6, 9.4]	[9.7, 11.6]	[15.6, 17.4]
CalYOUTH men	12.1	22.5	21.3
	[6.6, 21.3]	[15.2, 32.1]	[14.6, 30.0]

Note. Data sources: CalYOUTH survey; 5-year ACS IPUMS.

**Table 7. Reasons for Part-Time Work among CalYOUTH Participants**

	Age 19 (2015)	Age 21 (2017)	Age 23 (2019)
Slack work or business conditions	5.7	2.8	8.4
Could only find part-time work	20.0	26.2	16.6
Seasonal work	2.5	1.5	1.3
Childcare problems	4.8	1.3	13.8
Other family or personal obligations	2.7	4.7	7.2
Health or medical limitations	1.5	0.0	5.2
School or training	33.7	37.0	17.2
Full-time work week is less than 35 hours	2.1	5.4	11.7
Only want to work part-time, preference	16.3	14.5	17.6
Other	10.7	6.6	1.3
Want to work full-time	67.3	68.8	68.5

*Note.* Data source: CalYOUTH survey.

**Table 8. Average Annual Employment Earnings of Working CalYOUTH Participants and TAY in the General Population**

	Age 19 (2015)	Age 21 (2017)	Age 23 (2019)
	M	M	M
	[95% CI]	[95% CI]	[95% CI]
General population	8,214	14,080	23,020
	[8,001, 8,426]	[13,819, 14,341]	[22,617, 23,423]
CalYOUTH sample	6,064	11,904	19,601
	[5,018, 7,111]	[10,709, 13,098]	[17,655, 21,548]
General population women	7,161	12,582	21,219
	[6,907, 7,414]	[12,225, 12,940]	[20,799, 21,639]
CalYOUTH women	5,518	9,580	15,944
	[4,089, 6,947]	[8,244, 10,916]	[13,810, 18,078]
General population men	9,208	15,425	24,677
	[8,825, 9,591]	[15,061, 15,789]	[24,101, 25,253]
CalYOUTH men	6,840	15,384	25,407
	[5,367, 8,312]	[13,297, 17,471]	[21,970, 28,845]

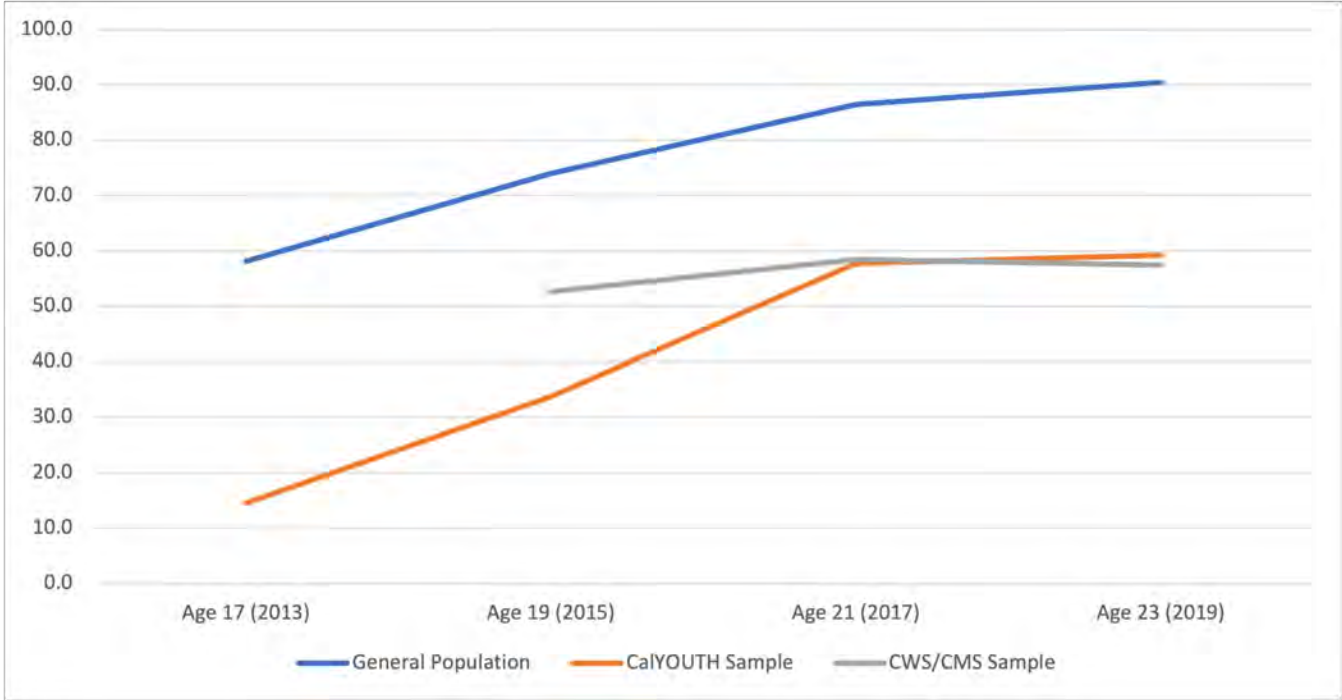
Note. Data sources: CalYOUTH survey; 5-year ACS IPUMS. Amounts are listed in USD and rounded to the nearest dollar.

**Table 9. Average Annual Employment Earnings of Working CalYOUTH Participants and TAY in the General Population**

	Age 19 (2015)	Age 21 (2017)	Age 23 (2019)
	M	M	M
	[95% CI]	[95% CI]	[95% CI]
GP White	6,856	12,946	23,785
	[6,548, 7,164]	[12,552, 13,340]	[23,074, 24,496]
CY White	6,056	12,723	18,063
	[4,586, 7,526]	[10,453, 14,994]	[14,646, 21,479]
GP Black	4,342	11,575	17,157
	[3,774, 4,910]	[10,290, 15,860]	[16,064, 18,249]
CY Black	7,001	8,034	13,372
	[3,188, 10,815]	[6,134, 9,933]	[9,664, 17,080]
GP multiracial	5,267	12,312	21,271
	[4,540, 5,994]	[11,098, 13,526]	[18,588, 23,954]
CY multiracial	5,940	12,823	23,341
	[3,995, 7,887]	[9,525, 16,121]	[15,023, 31,659]
GP Latino	6,801	13,005	19,357
	[6,523, 7,079]	[12,707, 13,303]	[18,905, 19,810]
CY Latino	5,860	13,073	22,164
	[4,630, 7,089]	[10,988, 15,157]	[19,195, 25,132]
GP other	5,110	10,569	25,050
	[4,633, 5,587]	[9,670, 11,468]	[23,639, 26,461]
CY other	3,350	15,023	23,696
	[1,248, 5,453]	[11,144, 18,902]	[16,042, 31,350]

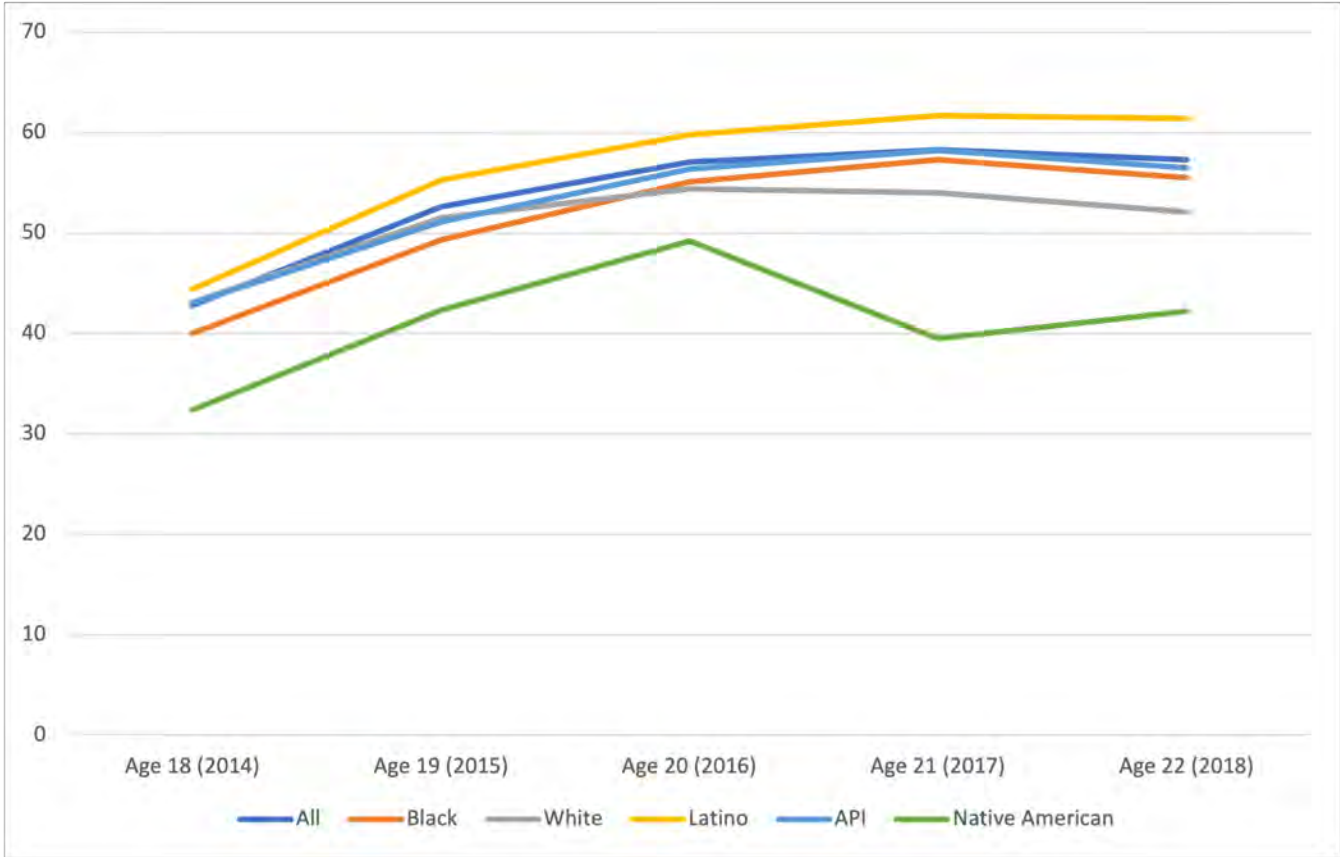
Note. Data sources: CalYOUTH survey, 5-year ACS IPUMS. Amounts are listed in USD and rounded to the nearest dollar. GP = general population ACS sample; CY = CalYOUTH sample.

**Figure 1. Current Employment Rates among California TAY in the General Population, CalYOUTH Participants, and CWS/CMS Sample at Ages 17, 19, 21, and 23**



Data sources: CalYOUTH survey; 5-year ACS IPUMS; California Child Welfare Indicators Project. CWS/CMS data indicate youth who reported at least one quarter of earnings in a given year. The estimate for age 23 represents TAY who reported at least one quarter of earnings at age 22.

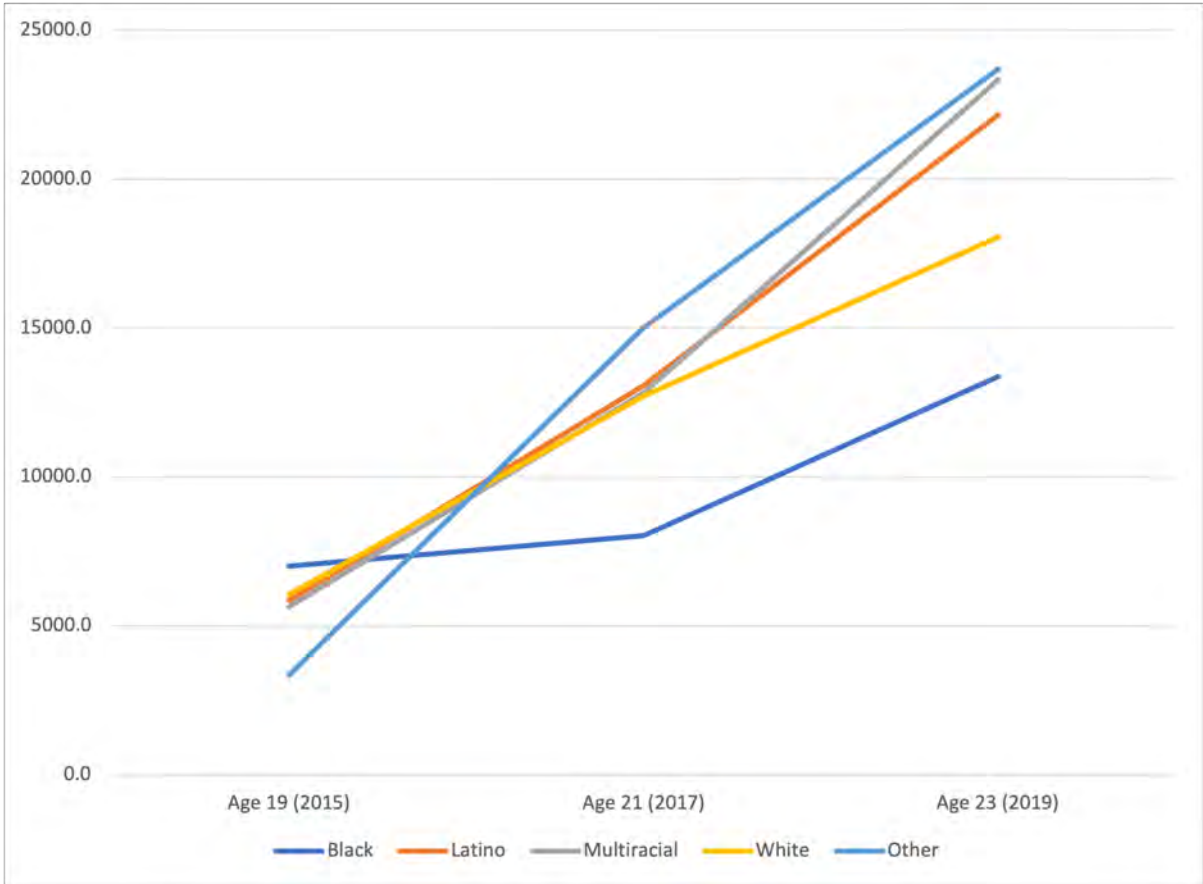
**Figure 2. TAY with One or More Quarters of Earnings per Year between Ages 18 and 22 by Race and Ethnicity; 2014 Cohort**



Data source: California Child Welfare Indicators Project.

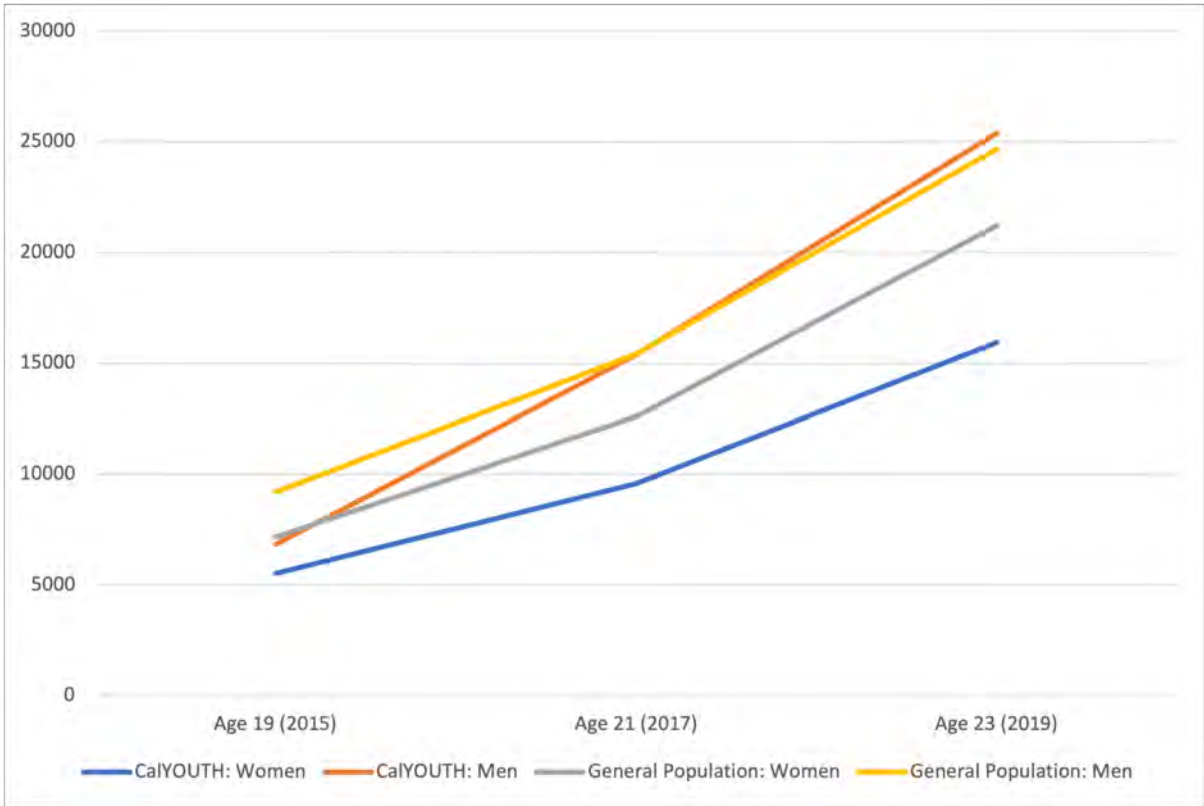


**Figure 3. Average Earnings between Ages 19 and 23 among CalYOUTH Participants by Race and Ethnicity**



Data source: CalYOUTH survey.

**Figure 4. Average Earnings at Ages 19, 21, and 23 among CalYOUTH Sample and Youth in the General Population by Gender**



Data source: CalYOUTH survey; 5-year ACS IPUMS.