

The 2024 Transition-Age Youth Research & Evaluation Hub Convening



Friday, June 14, 2024
8:15 am – 4 pm PST

The University of Southern California
USC Ronald Tutor Campus Center Room 450
3607 Trousdale Pkwy, Los Angeles, CA 90089
(Parking: McCarthy Structure, 620 USC McCarthy Way,
Los Angeles, CA, 90089)



RESEARCH SUMMARIES

PANEL 1

Accessing Services

County-level Variations in Transition-age Youth's Transitional Independent Living Plan Development Independent Living Service Utilization

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Arizona State University

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University of Connecticut

Summary. Many transition-age youth (TAY) exit care to independent adulthood and they tend to experience unfavorable outcomes in many areas compared to their peers without foster care histories. To better prepare TAY for adulthood, multiple federal policies promote co-producing Transitional Independent Living Plan (TILP) and connecting TAY with relevant Independent Living Services (ILS).

Leveraging multiple data sources on the TAY population in California, our study shows that TAY develop less than one TILP per year and use 7-10 ILS per year while in care. Our results suggest that TAY with documented TILPs seems to receive ILS more frequently, which, while not surprising, is an assuring finding. TILPs seem to inform the caseworker and TAY's care planning and encourage TAY's ILS use. In addition to the TAY's characteristics, multiple county-level attributes (e.g., political atmosphere) and county child welfare department's administrative contexts (e.g., quality of collaboration with other service systems) were associated with TAY's TILP development and ILS utilization.

Our study should encourage caseworkers to co-produce and update TILPs regularly, paying particular attention to marginalized subgroups (e.g., parenting TAY). Our results also motivate administrators and supervisors to provide the necessary support (e.g., TILP tools and caseworker training on collaborating with TAY to address their multifaceted needs) and improve collaboration with other service systems.

Exploring Provider Perspectives on County Factors Impacting Utilization of Transitional Housing Programs for Non-Minor Dependents in California

Selena Liu Raphael, Catalyst
Center Learning Hub

Mirabel Raphael, Catalyst
Center Learning Hub

Cornelle A. Jenkins, JD, MBA,
Catalyst Center Learning Hub

Summary. The CA Alliance/Catalyst Center project investigated the reasons for county-level variation in Transitional Housing Placement Program for Non-Minor Dependents (THPP-NMD) vs. Supervised Independent Living Placement (SILP) utilization from the provider perspective, beginning with a literature review of THPP-NMD contracting practices across the state. We then surveyed THPP-NMD providers in four waves, investigating factors that support or inhibit their ability to serve youth. Some survey responses led to one-on-one conversations that provided more context and in-depth information.

Our research revealed not only widespread obstacles facing THPP-NMD providers statewide, but also county-level variances, ranging from THPP-NMD programs' target populations to referral practices. As in other child welfare programs, the quality of collaborative relationships impacts capacity building and service sustainability. We also discovered that data accuracy varies across counties due to differences in defining housing-related terms.

As the state continues to navigate the affordable housing crisis, addressing provider barriers and uplifting county successes can greatly increase programs' ability to serve transition-age youth through their critical launch into adulthood.

PANEL 1: ACCESSING SERVICES (CONTINUED)

A Case Study of Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) Housing Choice Vouchers in Los Angeles: The Experiences of Young Adults, Property Managers, and Case Managers

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Los Angeles

Summary. The Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) program provides housing choice vouchers (HCVs) to young people exiting the foster system to adulthood. FYI vouchers are underutilized in the County and City of Los Angeles. This study aimed to understand barriers and facilitators to FYI HCV uptake and maintenance in Los Angeles from the perspectives of young adults exiting the foster system, property owners, and case managers. Data collection and analysis are ongoing. Preliminary findings suggest systems barriers: fewer vouchers are available than needed and limited geographically, limited property owner recruitment, and delays in voucher receipt; and interpersonal barriers: unreliable communication among young adults, case managers, Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), and housing authorities. Consequences of these barriers include persistent housing instability and related stressors, difficulty using vouchers before expiration, and living far from social connections, work, and school. Systems and interpersonal facilitators, respectively, reflect that DCFS-connected service providers are informed when vouchers become available, the DCFS application is easy to complete, and when young people have support managing each stage in the FYI process, they experience more success. We recommend expanding the Housing Navigation and Maintenance Program to ensure support for young adults and property owner cultivation and incentives.

PANEL 2

The Importance of Relationships and Identities

Nature, Determinants, and Impacts of Family-of-Origin Relationship Networks among California's Transition-Age-Youth

Julia Arroyo, PhD,
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Summary. This research analyzes CalYOUTH survey data, Waves 1 & 4, to examine the nature, determinants, and impacts of closeness with family-of-origin among a recent cohort of youth aging out of foster care in California. Using bivariate and multivariate analysis, it shows that most youth have more than one close tie to a member of their family of origin and that agency efforts to support family ties are associated with more close ties. It also finds that agency efforts to support family ties depend to an extent on the number of issues their parent/caregiver had, the youth's own gender and race/ethnicity, and placement type at age 17. Looking ahead to early adulthood, youth who had a greater number of close ties at age 17 were more likely to experience well-being in early adulthood. Youth for whom agencies made greater efforts to support family ties by age 17 were also more likely to experience well-being, as well as avoid several negative outcomes. Further, they reported greater satisfaction with their experiences in foster care. More research is needed to understand causal pathways and scaffold family ties and/or well-being.

PANEL 2: THE IMPORTANCE OF RELATIONSHIPS AND IDENTITIES (CONTINUED)

Expectant and Parenting Youth in Foster Care

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Summary. Parenting foster youth (PFY), as compared to non-parenting foster youth (NPFY), experience greater adverse outcomes in education, employment, housing stability, mental health, and criminal justice involvement. However, there is limited research on understanding the age-specific trends. The study analyzed outcomes among 727 CalYOUTH participants from Waves 2-4 at ages 19, 21, and 23, using data from the CalYOUTH survey, National Student Clearinghouse, and California Employment Development Department. We conducted chi-square tests and t-tests to compare differences in outcomes between PFY and NPFY in several key areas.

At ages 19–23, the percentage of PFY increased from 20.1% to 41.7%. A greater percentage of PFY were female and Hispanic as youth got older. Additionally, PFY had lower rates of high school completion, college enrollment, and 2- or 4-year college degrees than NPFY. PFY received significantly more CalFresh benefits but reported lower perceived social support adequacy.

Findings underscore the unique challenges faced by PFY as they grow older. Since Hispanic and female youth are more likely to be PFY, age-, gender-, and culturally-responsive interventions must be prioritized. Targeted supports such as childcare, flexible educational opportunities, and enhancing PFY social support systems can directly influence PFY, child, and family outcomes.

Socioeconomic and Behavioral Health Outcomes of Non-Heterosexual Youth Who Have Aged-Out of Foster Care in California

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Summary. Youth who identify as non-heterosexual (e.g., lesbian, gay, bisexual, and other non-heterosexual identities) tend to be overrepresented in foster care; however, little is known about their psychosocial outcomes during the period of transition to adulthood. Using data from the California Youth Transitions to Adulthood Study (CalYOUTH), we examined these youths' socioeconomic and behavioral health outcomes at age 23. The main goal of the analysis was to identify potential disparities between non-heterosexual youth and their heterosexual peers as they transitioned to independent adulthood. Youth changed their stated sexual preferences frequently between ages 17 and 23, with more than 40% identifying as non-heterosexual at least once during this period. Non-heterosexual youth were more likely to experience homelessness and economic hardship at age 23, despite comparable levels of education and income. Non-heterosexual youth reported higher rates of mental health concerns and substance misuse or dependence than those who identified as heterosexual. These differences could not be fully explained by variations in child welfare experiences and other intervening factors, such as social support or parenthood. It is important to address the needs of non-heterosexual youth while they are still in foster care, to set them up for success in early adulthood.

Policies and TAY Outcomes

Leveraging Quasi-Experimental Methods to Evaluate Foster Care Reform in California

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Summary. Prior to the introduction of extended foster care in 2012, four to five thousand children aged out of foster care every year in California at age 18. The California Fostering Connections to Success Act (AB 12), which first took effect on January 1, 2012, extended foster care eligibility from up to age 18 to up to age 21 over the course of three years. In this study, I provide estimates of the causal effects of AB 12 on college enrollment and earnings for the first youth affected by this program, employing new tools from the econometrics literature. I find that each additional year of extended foster care increases the likelihood that youth enroll in 2-year college by 2.9 percentage points (6.2% of the mean) and increases earnings at 24 and 25 by 4.9%. Aggregated effects mask substantial heterogeneity in the effects of extended care by race and gender; however, with non-Hispanic white men benefiting the most. I provide suggestive evidence of the importance of disability status and geography mediating the effects of extended care but neither are fully explanatory. Further work is needed to unpack mechanisms behind the effects found and to design optimal foster care policy.

Understanding the Nature of Adolescent Neglect and the Role of the Child Protection System

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Sarah Font, PhD, MSW,
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Summary. Each year in California, more than 130,000 adolescents are reported to the child protection hotline, with the majority of reports including allegations of neglect. Yet, the type, severity, and proximal contributors to the alleged neglect experienced by adolescents are poorly defined and understood. The objective of this study is to understand the nature and context of child protection allegations and interventions received by adolescents reported to CPS for allegations of neglect. A statewide stratified sample of 1,000 adolescents aged 13 to 17 years who were the subject of a CPS referral for allegations of neglect were randomly selected and their records reviewed. Findings suggest that 41% of referrals pertained to the adolescent's behavioral health and 31% to the adolescent's mental health, accounting for 55% of all referrals. Commonly reported household concerns were caregiver alcohol or substance use (28%), domestic violence (17%), and caregiver mental illness (10%). Overall, 7% of adolescents with a neglect referral had a case opened and 3% entered care. Approximately 40% of families had a documented referral to community-based services. Findings indicate gaps in service needs and referrals, and highlight the need for better coordination between mental health and social service agencies, as well as a reevaluation of reporting policies and intervention protocols.

Learning from the Voices of Young People with Lived Experience of Foster Care

Challenging Anti-Blackness in Education: Amplifying the Voices of Black Foster Youth Students through Counter-Storytelling

Brianna Harvey, PhD, MSW,
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Fullerton

Summary. The study "Challenging Anti-Blackness in Education: Amplifying the Voices of Black Foster Youth Students through Counter-Storytelling," led by Principal Investigator Dr. Brianna Harvey, explored the multifaceted and nuanced experiences of Black foster youth in K-12 schools. The findings reveal a duality in these experiences: while some Black foster youth found schools to be supportive and protective, others encountered additional harm within these institutions. This harm was often exacerbated by their multiply marginalized identities, resulting in unique forms of discrimination that intersected with both racism and sexism. For many Black foster youth, striving for academic excellence was both a pathway to an independent and stable future and a crucial coping mechanism for navigating incidents of trauma. Nevertheless, even those who excelled academically frequently faced anti-Black racism and prejudice, with their intelligence and abilities being unfairly questioned. This study also emphasizes the importance of schools providing resources specifically tailored to Black foster youth, which takes into consideration their unique experiences in care. Lastly, it highlights the significance of maintaining familial bonds with birth family members despite legal separations, which profoundly impacted their lived experiences both inside and outside of school.

Seedless: A Study on the Higher Education Experiences of Youth Impacted by Foster Care with (Dis)abilities

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Evelyn Karina Rodriquez,
Lived Experience Expert

Summary. Earning a college degree is correlated with positive outcomes however, limited scholarship exists on the educational attainment of youth impacted by foster care (YIFC) experiencing (dis)abilities. This study fills this gap in the literature by examining how YIFC with (dis)abilities experience attending public 2-year colleges with a particular focus on their access to supportive services and resources to meet their basic needs. We recruited seventeen individuals between the ages of 18 and 30 years of age who are or were formerly involved with the child welfare system in California, identified as having a (dis)ability, and were currently enrolled or had been enrolled in the last five years at a public, 2-year college to participate in interviews, photo-elicitation activities, and focus groups. Data analysis revealed that youth faced significant challenges meeting their basic needs while attending community college and that these challenges greatly impacted symptoms and conditions related to their dis(abilities) and their academic trajectories. Findings have identified gaps in our policies and practices and provided vital information on how the child welfare system can better support YIFC experiencing dis(abilities) to achieve a higher education and protect their mental and physical health by ensuring these youth's basic needs are met.