



**TAY-Hub**

Transition-Age Youth  
Research & Evaluation Hub

EFFECTIVENESS OF PUBLIC-NONPROFIT COLLABORATION:  
**Transitional Housing Placements for  
Foster Youth in California Foster Care**



**OCTOBER 2024**

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# Significance

Nonprofit organizations have increasingly become crucial partners for local governments in providing public services through grants and contracting out. This has especially been the case in social service fields, where nonprofits are frequently the main—if not sole—providers of services. Although government reliance on nonprofit organizations to deliver social services has continued to increase, few large-scale empirical studies have examined whether nonprofits' services effectively produce desirable outcomes.

A prime example of such a partnership is California's decentralized child welfare system, in which county child welfare departments have relied on nonprofit organizations to

administer specialized extended foster care (EFC) services to transition-age youth (TAY). In 2020, over 2,000 TAYs in California were being served by a Transitional Housing Placement (THP) administered by one of more than 60 nonprofit providers licensed and certified by the state as community care facilities (John Burton Advocates for Youth, 2020). In 2021, on average, county child welfare departments paid over \$3,000 per month—plus a housing supplement based on the county fair market rent level—per youth served by a THP provider. To our knowledge, our study is the first to evaluate the effectiveness of THP providers in producing positive outcomes for young people served by their placements and to examine between-provider differences in TAY outcomes.

## Study Methods

In this analysis, we sought to examine the postsecondary education and employment outcomes of California's youth who were served by THP placements between 2016 and 2018 and their propensity to experience undesirable discharge (i.e., incarceration, hospitalization, runaway, or involuntary removal). We used administrative data from the California Child Welfare Services Case Management System, the California Labor Force Data System, and the National Student Clearinghouse. We also leveraged data from John Burton Advocates for Youth's annual survey of California's THP program administrators. We used the youth-provider placement pairs as the unit of analysis, as 10% of the youth in our sample were placed in more than one THP provider between 2016 and 2018.

### THE STUDY SOUGHT TO ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- ✓ What were the overall education, employment, and undesirable discharge outcomes of young people in California who were placed in a THP between 2016 and 2018?
- ✓ While in THP, did young people's outcomes differ based on their foster care placement history?
- ✓ Were there differences in young people's postsecondary education, employment, and discharge outcomes based on the THP providers in which they were placed?
- ✓ For the subset of TAY placed in a THP that participated in the THP program administrator survey, were any provider-level variables associated with TAY outcomes?

# Findings

**1** Over two-thirds of TAY were employed and over a third were enrolled in a postsecondary institution during a given month while placed in THP. About one-fourth experienced an undesirable discharge from their THP.

TAY who were employed had average monthly earnings of \$714, and on average, those enrolled in postsecondary education remained enrolled for more than four months during the academic year.

**2** Foster care history was significantly associated with young people's postsecondary education, employment, and undesirable discharge outcomes.

For instance, TAY who had ever been placed in **congregate care** generally had poorer outcomes compared to peers who had never been in congregate care. Interestingly, the **length of time in EFC** was positively associated with young people's monthly earnings but negatively associated with their college enrollment length during the academic year.

**3** Findings showed significant differences between THP providers for each outcome after controlling for youth-, county-, and provider-level characteristics.

For example, the odds of undesirable discharge of the provider with the highest predicted odds was 4.3 times higher than the provider with the lowest predicted odds.

**4** Certain provider-level attributes were associated with young people's outcomes.

Interestingly, TAY served by providers who received less than 50% of their revenue from the state government were more likely to enroll in postsecondary education and less likely to be employed than TAY served by providers who relied on more than 75% of their funding from the state government. See the full study (Park et al., 2024) for a discussion of other provider-level attributes associated with young people's outcomes.

# Implications

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Findings from this study indicated material differences in education, employment, and undesirable discharge outcomes for young people placed in different nonprofit THP providers in California. Given county child welfare departments' significant public investments toward youth placed in THP, the effectiveness of providers in producing consistent positive youth outcomes is of great consequence to researchers, policymakers, and child welfare practitioners alike.

- **It is important to invest in monitoring, evaluating, and improving public-nonprofit collaboration in the child welfare service field, where nonprofits are the main providers of many services.**

Despite the growing significance of public-nonprofit collaboration, few large-scale empirical studies have examined whether nonprofits' services are effective in producing desirable outcomes for users.

- **Collaborative governance can be a model for identifying relevant performance indicators to improve public-nonprofit collaboration and TAY outcomes.**

Diverse public and private stakeholders—including state agencies, scholars, nonprofit providers, young people with foster care experience, philanthropic funders, advocates, and court personnel—can contribute unique insights to identify relevant performance indicators that will result in favorable outcomes for TAY.

- **Policymakers and child welfare agencies need to know how contextual attributes translate to public-nonprofit collaboration outcomes.** For example, our findings indicated that nonprofit providers' level of dependence on state funding may influence their priorities for youth outcomes.



## READ THE FULL STUDY:

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Park, S., Okpych, N. J., & Courtney, M. E. (2024). Effectiveness of public-nonprofit collaboration: Transitional housing placements for foster youth in California foster care. *Journal of the Society for Social Work and Research*, 732822. <https://doi.org/10.1086/732822>