

HEY Statistics: Best Practices to Track Former Foster Youth Employment Data

Why Collect Data?

Understandably, programs that focus on direct service have limited resources and therefore little capacity to track consistent and relevant data. They also have limited capacity to utilize that data to evaluate their programs.

In order to serve youth in the best way, all agencies must not only consistently evaluate their effectiveness they must be able to systematically prove and value to the community to continue their support and funding, as well as continue to raise awareness and advocate.

How to Begin to Collect Data

- Identify the exact population you serve and clarify the strategies you use to serve them.
- Define your values and assumptions about who you serve and why.
- Define clear outcomes.
- Use validated tools to outline your strategy and outcomes, like the Theory of Change Model or the Logic Model.
- Identify the most natural strategy to collect data that can be implemented within the existing workflow.

How to Collect Useful Data

Collect data consistently, and make sure everyone who records data uses the same set of definitions.

Collect numbers of youth served with which services, but make sure to record numbers and percentages.

Explain why specific data is collected, and how that data will improve the programs and practices.

Explain statistical flaws, like why numbers do not equal 100%, how and when the data was collected.

Include stories for a complete picture.

Data Collection Methods: Promising Practices and Opportunities for Improvement

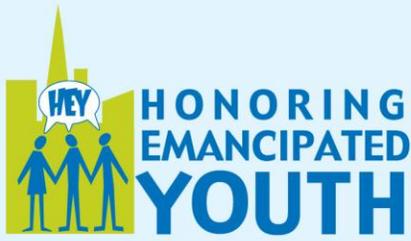
It is extremely important to collect data in order to provide meaningful services to foster youth. With reliable data, programs can enhance their services, demonstrate their effectiveness for continued funding, and maintain successful outcomes for youth. Here, HEY illustrates how to best track and document data regarding employment status of current and former foster youth.

Promising Practice: Transitional Housing Program-Plus (THP-Plus)

Through the THP-Plus Implementation Project, The John Burton Foundation for Children Without Homes and partners have developed a tracking system to collect data about youth in the THP-Plus Program. In order to participate in the THP-Plus program, youth must be emancipated from foster care or probation, and be between the ages of 18-24. Data is collected, aggregated and analyzed using statistical methods. The data measures many outcomes, and is the most comprehensive and consistent collection of data about former foster youth in California. Highlighted here are employment statistics only.

- Upon entry into THP-Plus, 45% of youth report they were already working, 45% were seeking employment, and about 10% were unemployed and not seeking employment. Those who had SSI or could not work were excluded from this count.³
- Out of those who were working, the median wage reported for employed THP-Plus participants was \$8.50 per hour.³
- 23% of the former foster youth had income from public benefits, such as Food Stamps, CalWORKS, WIC, General Assistance, or SSI, and 19% had other types of financial support, such as educational grants or loans, child support, or family contributions.³
- 27% of participants had no reported income at entrance.³
- For those with a non-zero income, the median monthly income from all sources was \$700, equivalent to an annual income of \$8,400.³

Even though the THP-Plus system is valid and reliable, it does still not fully represent the full former foster youth population. THP-Plus participants only represent a portion of former foster youth, and only for the time they are involved in the respective THP-Plus programs.



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What are HEY Statistics?

- HEY Statistics offer relevant information for any person interested in foster care, emancipation and transitional age youth in the Bay Area.
- HEY Statistics shows the most current statistics regarding foster youth in the Bay Area in many subject areas. This issue focuses on the education plans and education supports for former foster youth.

What is HEY?

- Honoring Emancipated Youth (HEY), a community project of United Way of the Bay Area, is dedicated to strengthening and connecting San Francisco's systems of support so that Bay Area youth emancipating, or "aging out" of the foster care system can enjoy a healthy transition to adulthood.
- HEY identifies and raises awareness around challenges affecting local emancipating or emancipated foster youth by bringing together a diversity of voices and experiences, including those of former foster youth, service providers, and other supporters, in finding solutions.

HEY's core work includes:

1. **Focused research on local practices** that affect transition aged current and former foster youth
2. **Skill building and information sharing opportunities** for youth and direct service providers through trainings and convenings
3. **An information hub** of issues and challenges affecting local transition aged current and former foster care youth

As a result, supporters of foster youth are linked and informed about the challenges faced by former foster youth and gain access to hard data and expert review of policies and practices so that they can help improve the lives of former foster youth.

Practice That Needs Improvement: ILSP Data Tracking

Another program that tracks former foster youth is the Independent Living Skills Program (ILSP). ILSP services are available to a specific subset of current and former foster youth, between the ages of 14-21, and eligibility varies by county. While ILSP tracks a larger number of former foster youth, the ILSP data is less reliable.

California: Out of 32,840 ILSP program participants who received ILSP Services from October 2007-September 2008:

- 6447 youth reported that they obtained employment during the year period.
- Of the 6447 youth who obtained employment: 1,731 obtained full-time employment, 4,716 obtained part-time employment, 341 enlisted in military, Job Corps, or California Conservation Corps and were 27 determined unemployable, SSI eligible, or other similar special category.
- 6,856 youth are actively seeking employment, but are not yet employed.⁴

San Francisco: 1,678 youth were "offered ILSP services" and 752 youth officially received services during October 2007-September 2008

- Of the 752 youth who received services, 157 were already employed, 40 found full-time employment, 117 found part-time employment, 6 enlisted in the military, Job Corps or Conservation Corps and 14 were determined unemployable or SSI eligible.
- 134 youth were still seeking work.⁴

ILSP data lacks context and explanation of why the data varies and is not complete. Explanations of values, assumptions and data collection methods, along with stories and quotes help to tell the whole story of youth involved in the program.

Works Cited

¹ Honoring Emancipated Youth, *2008 San Francisco Vocational Resources for Foster and Probation Youth through Partnerships with the Human Services Agency. Lists of employment services:* http://www.sfgov.org/site/youth_commission_index.asp?id=4726

² Accd to SFHSA, Dan Kelly 2007.

³ Kimberlin, Sara, Lemley, Amy & Byrnes, Michele. John Burton Foundation for Children without Homes Policy Brief: **Needs and Demographics of Former Foster Youth Entering California's THP-Plus Program: Findings from the Statewide Participant-Tracking System, July 2009.**

⁴ State Of California - Health And Human Services Agency California Department Of Social Services Data Systems And Survey Design Bureau Soc 405a (10/05) Page 1 Of 1 Released: March 5, 2009 Independent Living Program (ILP) Annual Statistical Report Federal Fiscal Year October 1 Through September 30