

## Highlights from the NYTD Survey: Outcomes reported by young people at ages 17, 19, and 21 (Cohort 2)

### Background

To measure the outcomes of youth transitioning out of foster care, states are required to administer the NYTD survey to cohorts of youth at ages 17, 19 and 21. With this second cohort of youth having completed all three waves of data collection<sup>1</sup>, we are beginning to better understand the experiences of current and former foster care youth as they age. Response rates for both baseline (age 17) and follow-up (ages 19 and 21) surveys varied widely by state. To account for the variation and to ensure that groups that differ in response behavior are represented by members of those groups who did respond, the Children’s Bureau employed a weighting methodology to the NYTD survey responses to identify and correct potential non-response bias in each of the three waves of data collection<sup>2</sup>. All outcome results were weighted to represent the second cohort of 17-year-olds eligible to take the NYTD survey in federal fiscal year (FFY) 2014. All outcomes percentages reported in this data brief are weighted estimates unless otherwise noted.

#### In this data brief:

We present findings from NYTD surveys completed by Cohort 2 youth at ages 17, 19, and 21.

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### Findings

#### *Response Rates and Reasons for Non-Participation*

In FFY 2014, 23,780 youth were identified as eligible to take the survey at age 17. Of those, 16,480 completed the survey, resulting in a national response rate of 69%. In FFY 2016, 12,309 youth were eligible for follow-up at age 19, and 8,898 (72%) completed the survey. In FFY 2018, 12,273 youth were eligible for follow-up at age 21, and 7,799 (64%) responded<sup>3</sup>.

## Survey Response Rates and Reasons for Non-Participation, Cohort 2

Survey Status	Age 17 (n=23,780)	Age 19 (n=12,309)	Age 21 (n=12,273)
Participated	69%	72%	64%
Youth declined	8%	6%	5%
Parent declined	<1%	<1%	0%
Incapacitated	2%	1%	1%
Incarcerated	1%	2%	3%
Runaway or missing	4%	<1%	<1%
Unable to locate or invite	9%	19%	25%
Death	<1%	<1%	<1%
Blank/Not Reported	5%	<1%	2%

### Demographics of Survey Participants

Youth who participated in the survey at age 17 and youth who participated again at age 19 and/or 21 were demographically similar. This second cohort of youth is racially diverse and generally represented equally by both sexes. All youth surveyed at age 17 were in foster care. By age 19, 64% of youth surveyed were no longer in foster care, and by age 21 that percentage had increased to 78%.

### Demographics of Survey Participants, Cohort 2

Demographics	Age 17 (n=16,480)	Age 19 (n=8,898)	Age 21 (n=7,799)
<b>Race</b>			
American Indian or Alaska Native	3%	4%	4%
Asian	1%	2%	2%
Black or African American	35%	34%	34%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1%	1%	1%
White	60%	59%	61%
Unknown/Declined to Specify	7%	8%	6%
<b>Ethnicity</b>			
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	20%	20%	21%
<b>Sex</b>			
Male	51%	48%	45%
Female	49%	52%	55%

### Youth Outcomes at Ages 17, 19, and 21

As youth begin their transition to adulthood, they should have experiences that promote growth and independence. Youth who are or have been in foster care face a number of challenges that can hinder a smooth transition. The NYTD results from this second cohort of youth can provide a national glimpse of how these young people are faring in certain outcome areas as they age.

## Outcome 1: Financial Self-Sufficiency<sup>4</sup>

To better understand a youth's outcome experiences in the area of financial self-sufficiency, the NYTD survey poses questions to youth regarding their acquisition of skills necessary to enter the labor market and to access financial resources to help meet their living expenses. As youth age and make decisions about whether or not to remain in or return to foster care<sup>5</sup>, financial stability becomes a crucial indicator of youth's readiness for independence.

- Although respondents at age 17 were young and in foster care, over one-quarter (29%) reported experiences in at least one employment-related category (full- or part-time employment; paid or unpaid apprenticeship, internship, or other on-the-job training). Over half (56%) at age 19 and 67% at age 21 reported that they were receiving some employment-related experience at the time they completed the survey.
- At age 19, 40% reported receiving at least one form of financial assistance (Social Security, educational aid, or some other form of significant, periodic financial support). At age 21, that percentage had declined to 34%.
- Pursuing either employment or educational programming can be an important indication of a youth's readiness for independence. At age 17, 30% of youth reported experiences in at least one employment-related category or receiving some type of educational aid. That percentage increased to 36% for 19-year-old and 71% for 21-year-old respondents.
- Only youth not in care at ages 19 or 21 were asked about receiving public assistance. Of those not in care, 30% at age 19 and 31% at age 21 reported that at the time they completed the survey, they were receiving at least one type of public assistance (housing, food, or financial).

### Financial Self-Sufficiency among Young People in Cohort 2

Outcome area	Age 17 (n=16,480)	Age 19 (n=8,898)	Age 21 (n=7,799)
Employed full- or part-time	15%	41%	55%
Receiving employment-related skills training	21%	31%	31%
Receiving Social Security	13%	12%	11%
Receiving education aid	3%	22%	16%
Receiving other financial support	8%	14%	9%
Receiving public assistance <sup>6</sup>	N/A	30%	31%

## Outcome 2: Educational Attainment

Achieving a high school diploma or General Equivalency Degree (GED) can be considered a minimal requirement for self-sufficiency and can assist in establishing a solid educational foundation that will prepare youth for future educational pursuits. The NYTD survey asks young people to report their current enrollment status in an educational program and the highest educational certification received.

- While most youth (92%) at age 17 had not yet received any educational certifications, the majority (93%) of them indicated they were enrolled in and attending some type of educational program.
- By age 19, over half (55%) had received at least a high school diploma/GED or higher degree. By age 21, that percentage had increased to 76%.

### **Educational Attainment among Young People in Cohort 2**

<b>Outcome area</b>	<b>Age 17</b> (n=16,480)	<b>Age 19</b> (n=8,898)	<b>Age 21</b> (n=7,799)
Received high school diploma or GED	4%	53%	69%
Received vocational certificate/license, associate's or bachelor's degree, or higher	<1%	2%	7%
Enrolled and attending an educational program	93%	54%	24%

### **Outcome 3: Connections with Adults**

Establishing or maintaining a positive, consistent and lasting relationship with at least one adult is a critical component in ensuring youth make a successful transition from foster care to adulthood. The NYTD survey asks youth whether there is currently at least one adult in their life to whom they can go for advice or emotional support.<sup>7</sup>

- At age 17, 94% of youth had reported having an adult in their lives.
- The vast majority of young adults continue to report having a positive connection as they age, including 88% of 19-year-olds and 87% of 21-year-olds.

### **Outcome 4: Experiences with Homelessness**

Having a safe, stable, and affordable place to live can protect against a number of negative outcomes. Young people who leave foster care unprepared to live on their own are at risk for becoming homeless soon after discharge. In FFY 2014, youth were asked at age 17 if they had ever been homeless at some point in their lives. In FFYs 2016 and 2018, youth at age 19 and 21 were asked if they had experienced homelessness within the past two years.

- At age 17, 17% had experienced homelessness at some point in their lives. Twenty (20) percent of 19-year-olds reported having been homeless at some point within the past two years, the majority (79%) of whom were no longer in foster care. At age 21, 27% had experienced homelessness within the past two years. Of these young people, 90% had left foster care.
- Of the 6,461 youth who completed all three waves of the NYTD survey, 42% reported having had a homeless experience by age 21 (based on survey responses at age 17, 19, or 21).

- Of the 1,042 young people who reported at age 17 having been homeless at some point, almost half (49%) reported another homeless episode at either age 19 or 21, and 20% reported a homeless experience in all three survey waves.

## Outcome 5: High-Risk Behaviors

Transition-age youth who engage in high-risk behaviors are at increased risk for a variety of negative outcomes. The NYTD survey collects information on three key outcomes that have been associated with hindering successful transitions to adulthood among youth in foster care.<sup>8</sup> Results from the survey indicate that more than one-third (37%) of 19-year-olds and 42% of 21-year-olds reported experiencing at least one high-risk outcome within the past two years. At age 17, over half (54%) had reported a history of high-risk behaviors.

- At age 17, over one-quarter (27%) had, at some point during their lifetimes, been referred for substance abuse assessment or counseling. Fourteen (14) percent at age 19 and 11% at age 21 reported having had a referral within the past two years.
- At age 17, one-third (33%) of the youth reported a history of incarceration for allegedly committing a crime. At both ages 19 and 21, 20% of young adults reported having been incarcerated for allegedly committing a crime within the past two years.
- The proportion of youth reporting having given birth to or fathered a child has steadily increased at each wave of the survey. At age 17, 5% of youth had a child. Ten (10) percent of 19-year-olds and 22% of 21-year-olds reported having given birth to or fathered a child within the past two years. The NYTD survey also asks youth if they were married at the time of the child's birth. Only 5% of the youth at age 19 and 8% of the youth at age 21 who had children were married at the time of the child's birth.
- Among the 6,461 youth who completed all three waves of the NYTD survey, 25% reported having had a child by age 21. Of those, 70% were females.

### High-Risk Behaviors among Young People in Cohort 2

Outcome Area	Age 17 (n=16,480)	Age 19 (n=8,898)	Age 21 (n=7,799)
Referred for substance abuse assessment or counseling	27% (in lifetime)	14% (in past two years)	11% (in past two years)
Incarcerated	33% (in lifetime)	20% (in past two years)	20% (in past two years)
Had children	5% (in lifetime)	10% (in past two years)	22% (in past two years)

## **Outcome 6: Access to Health Insurance**

Access to health care can help ensure that youth receive the prevention and treatment services they need to remain healthy. Youth in title IV-E foster care are categorically eligible to receive Medicaid. Additionally, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act allows for certain eligible youth to be covered by Medicaid up to age 26.<sup>9</sup> The NYTD survey asks youth whether they are receiving Medicaid or some other type of health insurance coverage.

- The majority of youth at age 17 (85%) reported having Medicaid insurance coverage. Seven (7) percent of surveyed youth, however, reported not knowing if they had Medicaid coverage.
- The majority of 19-year-olds (77%) reported having Medicaid, and 16% also reported having some other type of health insurance. More youth in care (89%) than youth not in care (69%) reported having Medicaid coverage at age 19.
- At age 21, 69% of young adults reported having Medicaid, and 17% reported having some other type of health insurance. Similar to 19-year-old respondents, more young adults at age 21 who were in care (90%) reported having Medicaid coverage than those not in care (64%).

### *Highlighting Differences by Sex*

Results above reveal that there are differences in outcomes reported between age 17 when youth were in foster care and at ages 19 and 21 as they are preparing to transition to adulthood. These differences become more notable when examined separately for males and females at ages 19 and 21. Overall, females fared somewhat better than males in educational achievement, high-risk behaviors, and health insurance coverage, but were more likely to report having given birth to a child

- Females were more likely to have received a high school degree/GED or higher than males. At age 19, 55% of males and 61% of females had achieved at least a high school degree or GED. At age 21, those percentages increased to 75% for males and 79% for females.
- The percentages of males reporting having been incarcerated for allegedly committing a crime were higher than as reported by females. At both ages 19 and 21, more than twice as many males as females reported being incarcerated for allegedly committing a crime within the past two years of completing the NYTD survey (27% versus 13% at age 19, and 28% versus 12% at age 21).
- At both ages 19 and 21, a higher percentage of females reported giving birth to a child than males who reported fathering a child within the past two years of completing the NYTD survey. At age 19, 14% of females reported giving birth within the past two years, and at age 21 that percentage increased to 30%. Comparatively, only 6% of males at age 19 and 14% at age 21 had reported fathering a child within the past two years.

- Although the proportions of both males and females reporting receiving Medicaid or some other type of health insurance declined between ages 19 and 21, the decrease was larger for males (80% to 72%) than females (86% to 84%).

### **Youth Outcomes Reported at Ages 19 and 21 by Sex**

<b>Outcome Area</b>	<b>Males at Age 19 (n=4,227)</b>	<b>Males at Age 21 (n=3,478)</b>	<b>Females at Age 19 (n=4,671)</b>	<b>Females at Age 21 (n=4,321)</b>
High school degree/GED or higher	55%	75%	61%	79%
Receiving Medicaid or some other type of health insurance	80%	72%	86%	84%
Referred for substance abuse treatment within past two years	16%	12%	11%	9%
Incarcerated within past two years	27%	28%	13%	12%
Had children within past two years	6%	14%	14%	30%

## **Conclusion**

The baseline and follow-up survey information from Cohort 2 reveals that, generally, some young adults are faring well in many outcome areas but some youth are struggling. By age 21, young people reported positive gains in many protective factors, yet, in some cases there is evidence that current and former youth in foster care continue to face challenges that can be barriers to independence.

At age 17, the majority of youth in foster care were attending school, had positive connections to at least one adult, were receiving Medicaid, and had never been homeless. At ages 19 and 21, many of these positive indicators were still evident. From age 17 to age 21, the proportions of youth in each survey wave reporting referrals to substance abuse treatment or counseling or having been incarcerated decreased. By age 21, over two-thirds reported having earned at least a high school diploma or GED, and the vast majority had maintained a positive connection to an adult. There also are encouraging signs of financial self-sufficiency with the majority of 19 and 21-year-olds reporting being employed or receiving employment-related skills or some type of educational aid.

Although these gains are promising, there are indications that in some outcome areas young adults are struggling. As they aged, an increasing proportion of youth reported experiencing homelessness, giving birth to or fathering a child, and not having any health insurance.

These findings may help underscore the importance of providing supports to youth who may be particularly vulnerable to certain outcomes, including providing targeted independent living services or allowing youth to remain in foster care during this transition to adulthood. In many outcome areas, youth who were in care past age 18 reported experiencing fewer challenges than their peers who had left care.

We hope states will see these results as one additional piece of information that may be used to help inform transition planning practices, service provision, extended foster care policies, and data collection procedures. We encourage states to analyze their own NYTD data to guide continuous data quality improvements, and, if needed, identify areas where systems or practice changes may be needed to increase survey participation rates. We also urge states to continue to engage young people as partners in data collection, data analysis, and dissemination of survey results.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> All 50 states plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico are required to collect and report NYTD data. States were required to collect baseline outcomes information from youth who turned age 17 while in foster care in FFY 2014. At follow-up, states were required to survey youth during the six-month reporting periods in which they turned age 19 (in FFY 16) and 21 (in FFY 18). Depending on when the state invited the youth's participation, a youth may have been age 18 or 19 (in FFY 16) or age 20 or 21 (in FFY 18) when surveyed. Because the goal of the NYTD survey is to capture a youth's outcome experiences on or around the 19<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> birthdays, we refer to these youth as 19-year-olds and 21-year-olds in this brief. The NYTD survey questions are in Appendix B of the NYTD regulation, available at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2008-02-26/pdf/E8-3050.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Weighted results did not vary dramatically from unweighted results. Non-response bias corrections were small. For a description of the weighting methodology used, please see the NYTD User's Guide available at the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect (NDACAN): <http://www.ndacan.cornell.edu>.

<sup>3</sup> Participation rates reported in this brief are the numbers of young adults who participated in the NYTD survey divided by the numbers of youth eligible to take the NYTD survey in each survey wave. When determining participation rates to meet compliance standards, states are not required to survey young adults at age 19 or 21 if the youth was reported to be incarcerated, incapacitated, or deceased (see 45 CFR 1356.85). For information on survey results and compliance response rates see the NYTD Cohort 2 State-by-State tables at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/nytd-services-and-outcomes-reports>.

<sup>4</sup> Financial self-sufficiency includes whether or not the youth reports (1) being employed full-time, (2) being employed part-time, (3) completing training for employment-related skills, and/or (3) receiving financial supports such as Social Security, educational aid, or some other type of financial assistance. See 45 CFR 1356.83(g) for complete definitions of NYTD data elements.

<sup>5</sup> Some states have opted to extend title IV-E assistance to youth over age 18, permitting some youth to remain in foster care voluntarily.

<sup>6</sup> The NYTD survey questions related to a young person's use of public assistance are only asked of youth who are no longer in foster care.

<sup>7</sup> "Adult" is considered to be someone other than the youth's spouse/partner, boyfriend/girlfriend, or current caseworker.

<sup>8</sup> High risk behaviors include histories of substance abuse assessment or counseling, incarceration, or having children. The NYTD survey also asks a youth if they were married at the time of the child's birth. Only 5% of the youth at age 19 and 8% of the youth at age 21 who had children were married at the time of the child's birth.



<sup>9</sup> Section 1902(a)(10)(A)(i)(IX) of the Social Security Act extends Medicaid assistance to former foster youth in certain circumstances. This provision became effective January 1, 2014.