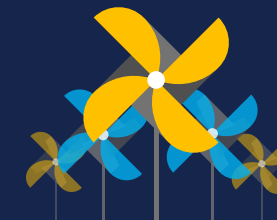




# Young Adults Transitioning Out of Foster Care in NJ



## 2017-2021 DATA BRIEF

### The number of youth aging out of the foster care system in NJ has been steadily in decline since 2017.

The number of New Jersey youth placed in foster care has decreased dramatically in recent years<sup>1</sup>. For example, 2,946 youth were in care in December 2022 compared to 6,191 in December 2017, a trend that is also seen among youth aged 18 and older in placement (228 in December 2022 down from 332 in December 2017<sup>2</sup>). However, research continues to show that youth that transition out of care are at heightened risk for poor outcomes, such as homelessness and incarceration<sup>3</sup>. DCF is committed to assisting these young people as they prepare for a successful transition into adulthood by connecting youth to community services, resources, and programs, as well as transition planning with their caseworkers.

The National Youth in Transition Database Survey (NYTD) is a national survey that DCF uses to learn about the services and lived experiences of youth currently and formerly in foster care in New Jersey foster care<sup>4</sup>. The goal of NYTD is to obtain information directly from young people that age out of foster care about the services they received and their experiences after leaving care. We analyzed data from the most recent NYTD cohort, youth that were 17-21 years old between 2017-2021, to better understand their outcomes and needs.



Young adults in foster care need skills and resources to support their successful transition into adulthood.



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## Key Findings

### We found that:

- **Concrete supports** (e.g., room and board and financial assistance) were the most used independent living services by youth transitioning out of care.
- The majority of youth (82%) obtained a **high school diploma or GED** by the age of 21.
- Half of youth were **employed** by the age of 21.
- Over 90% of youth transitioning out of care were connected to a **supportive adult** in their lives.
- Becoming a **parent** while in care increased risk for homelessness by age 21.
- **Family support, healthy marriage education, and mentoring services** were infrequently accessed by youth. However, data suggest they may improve outcomes for youth transitioning out of care.

# Methods

We administered the NYTD survey to adolescents in NJ's foster care system three times: once in 2017, when they were 17 years old, again when they were 19, and once more when they were 21. This survey allows DCF to assess the characteristics of youth in New Jersey's foster care system, track changes in youth's outcomes over time, and better understand the relationships between youth characteristics, independent living services that they received, and their outcomes. We conducted univariate analyses to examine frequencies and measures of central tendency surrounding youth characteristics, risk or protective factors, and Independent Living Services. We also conducted bivariate (e.g., chi-square) analyses to examine relationships between service usage and youth outcomes. The NYTD data presented in this brief pertains to 90 youth that participated in all three survey intervals.

ABOUT  
**NYTD**  
National Youth in Transition Database

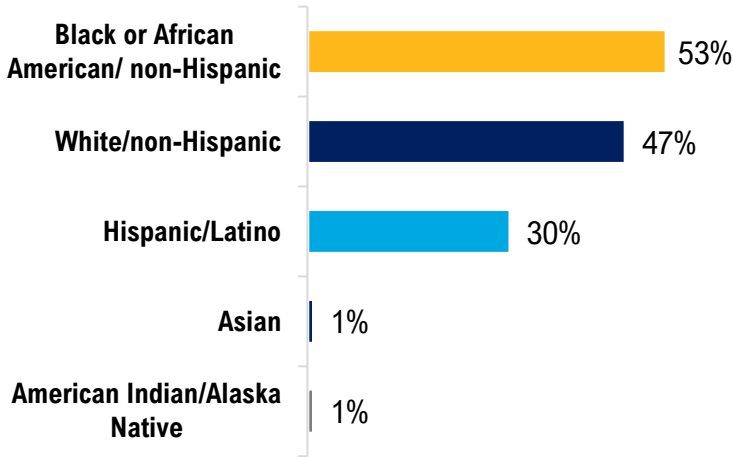
**The National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD)** is a federal reporting system that was initiated in 2010 to:

1. track independent living services that States provide to youth transitioning out of the foster care system, and
2. collect data on outcomes such as *education, housing stability, social support, and incarceration* among youth transitioning out of foster care.<sup>5</sup>

# Characteristics of Youth Aging out of Care

At baseline, most youth were female (54%) and Black or African American (53%), and almost one-third (30%) identified as Hispanic or Latino.

Most youth were **Black or African American**.



\*3% of youth identified as multi-racial.

# Service Use

Youth's use of independent living services was tracked from 2017-2021. On average, youth received money management assistance the most (83%), which included services such as budget management services, financial education services, and financial support to help youth live independently. Youth also commonly received housing assistance (60%), including housing education and home management training, room and board support, and supervised independent living

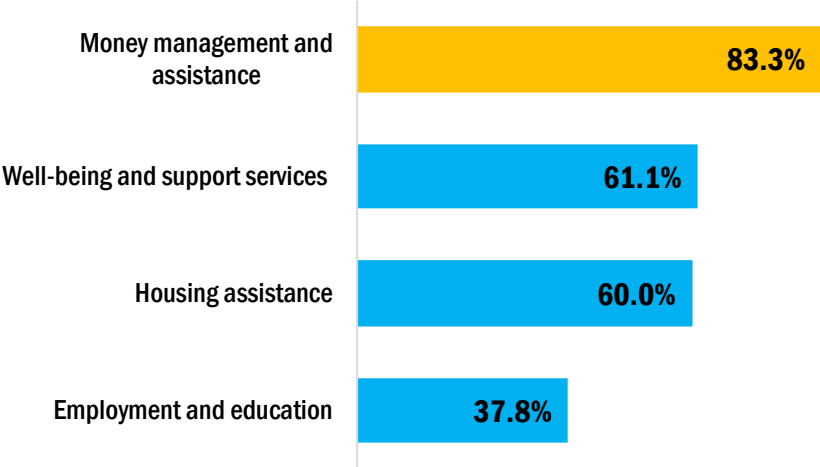
Additionally, youth often received well-being and support services (61%), which included health education and risk prevention, mentoring services, family support/healthy marriage education, and independent living needs assessments.

Among ones that received employment and education assistance (38%), most youth received career preparation and post-secondary education and support during the data collection period.

Family support/healthy marriage education and mentoring were among the least-used Independent Living Services. Between the ages of 18-21, less than 15% of youth accessed family support and marriage education or mentoring services, respectively.

# Concrete supports like **financial assistance** were the most common independent living services accessed by youth.

Use of independent living services\* by the age of 21 (n=90)

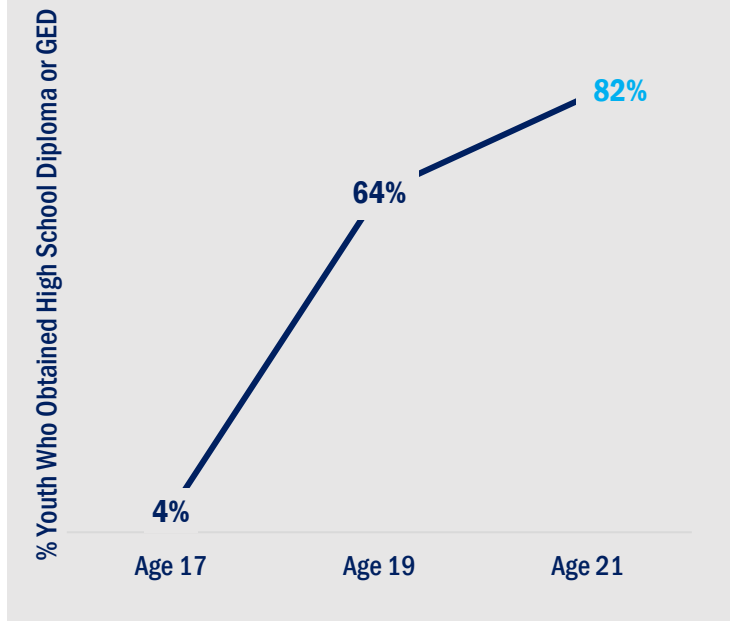


\*This graph displays the percentages of independent living services listed under these categories that were accessed by youth at least once by the age of 21. See Appendix A for more information on youth access to NYTD independent living services.

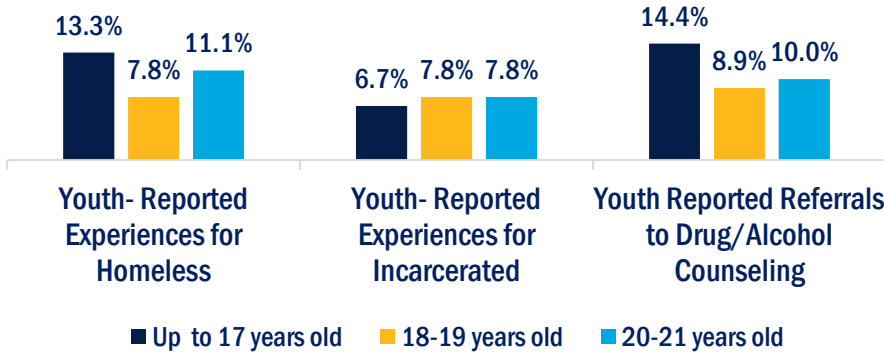
# Outcomes of Youth Aging Out of Care

By the age of 21, 82% of youth had a high school diploma or GED, 6% had a vocational certificate or license, and 39% were enrolled in and attending high school, GED classes, postsecondary vocational training, or college. Additionally, 57% of youth were employed either full-time or part-time by the age of 21. The vast majority (90%) of youth reported having a connection to a supportive adult.

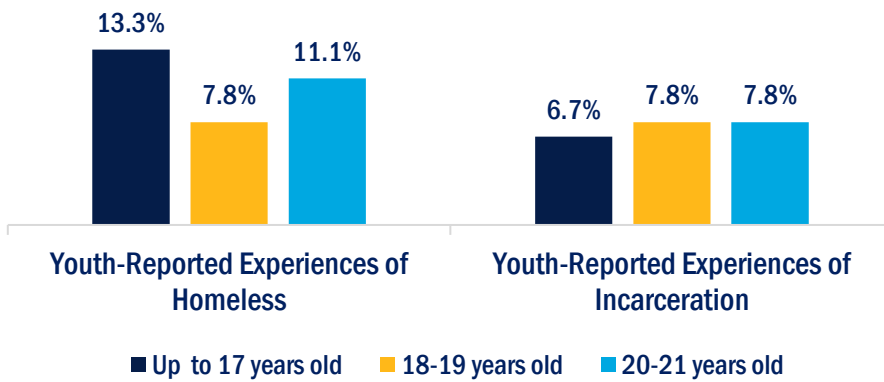
By the age of 21, most youth obtained a high school diploma or GED.



Compared to lifetime exposure of homelessness by the age of 17, homelessness was experienced by 16.5% fewer youth by 20-21 years of age. Ones that experienced homelessness as minors were **6.5 times** more likely to be homeless between the ages of 20-21\*.



Compared to reports of being referred to drug or alcohol counseling as minors, 30.6% fewer youth were referred to alcohol and substance use assessments and counseling by 20-21 years of age. Youth that were referred to alcohol or substance use assessments or counseling as minors were **3 times** more likely to be re-referred between 20-21 years of age when compared to ones that had not been referred to alcohol or substance use counseling as minors\*\*.



When averaging the three survey intervals, we found that **90%** of youth reported a connection to a supportive adult that they could go to for **advice, guidance, or companionship.**



**By 20-21 years of age, youth with children were 3 times more likely to experience homelessness compared to ones without children\*.**

\*p ≤ .05  
\*\*p = .09

# NYTD in ACTION



DCF uses data, including NYTD findings, to enhance programmatic strategies, guide our daily decision-making, and inspire practices that will further support the youth we serve. NYTD data are continuously used to inform DCF program goals and outcomes, identify areas for strengthening, target youth risks geographically, and develop or expand programs to fill gaps in services.

## Understanding the Needs of Parenting Youth Transitioning Out of Care

Findings from analyses of NJ's NYTD data indicated that parenthood was associated with homelessness between the ages of 20-21\*. Adolescent parenthood also increased by 400% between the ages of 18-19 and 20-21. In January of 2024, DCF's Offices of Applied Research and Evaluation and Adolescent Services launched a survey for adolescent parents that are in care to gain a more in-depth understanding of the challenges they face, including barriers to accessing services. The findings will be used to improve service delivery for this population.

## Scaling Up Peer Mentoring Services for Youth Transitioning Out of Care

Although mentoring services were infrequently accessed by youth, research suggests that mentoring may be helpful as they transition out of care<sup>6</sup>. The DCF Youth Council, which is comprised of people that have lived experiences in New Jersey's foster system, validated that youth in out-of-home placement can benefit from the mentorship and modeling of a near-peer who has wisdom in navigating the changes and challenges of being in the foster system. In 2022, DCF introduced [EnlightenMENT](#), a peer mentoring program for youth that enter placements in NJ<sup>7</sup>.



**EnlightenMENT**, a new DCF peer-to-peer mentoring program for youth in out-of-home placements, began enrollment in November 2022.



\*  $p = .058$

## 2020-2024 NYTD Data Sharing Plan<sup>8</sup>

- NYTD data will continue to be shared with the New Jersey Statewide Chafee Advisory Group, Youth Advisory Network and Statewide Youth Council.
- NYTD data will be incorporated into presentations and training (e.g., presentations to court staff, ongoing adolescent training, meetings with providers).
- NYTD data will inform DCF's Continuous Quality Improvement activities.
- DCF will continue to examine NYTD data as Cohort 4 data collection nears completion.



The New Jersey Statewide Chafee Advisory Group (CAG) meets quarterly to discuss Chafee-funded programs, outcomes, updates, and strategies to support youth in New Jersey's child welfare system.



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<sup>1</sup> Flammia, D. (2022, August 1). *How NJ reduced its foster-care population by thousands*. New Jersey 101.5. Retrieved from: [How NJ reduced its foster-care population by thousands \(nj1015.com\)](https://www.nj1015.com/news/how-nj-reduced-its-foster-care-population-by-thousands/).

<sup>2</sup> New Jersey Child Welfare Data Hub. (2024). *Children in Placement (Point in Time)*. Retrieved from: [Children In Placement - Point in Time | Data Hub \(rutgers.edu\)](https://www.rutgers.edu/child-welfare-data-hub/children-in-placement-point-in-time/).

<sup>3</sup> Huang, H., Li, Y., & Campbell, J. M. (2022). Do independent living services protect youth aging out foster care from adverse outcomes? An evaluation using national data. *Child maltreatment*, 27(3), 444-454. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077559521992119>

<sup>4</sup> New Jersey Youth Resource Spot. (2022). *National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) Survey*. New Jersey Department of Children & Families. Retrieved from: [National Youth in Transition Database \(NYTD\) Survey \(nj.gov\)](https://www.nj.gov/children-families/nj-nytd-survey/).

<sup>5</sup> Administration for Children & Families, Children's Bureau. (2022, June 29). *NYTD*. U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. Retrieved from: [NYTD | The Administration for Children and Families \(hhs.gov\)](https://www.hhs.gov/children-families/nytd/).

<sup>6</sup> Poon, C., Christensen, K.M., & Rhodes, J.E. (2021). A Meta-analysis of the effects of mentoring on youth in foster care. *Journal of youth and adolescence*, 50(9), 1741-1756. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-021-01472-6>

<sup>7</sup> Youth Resource Spot. (2023). *New Jersey Peer2Peer program: EnlightenMENT*. Official Site of the State of New Jersey. Retrieved from: [New Jersey Peer2Peer Program: EnlightenMENT \(nj.gov\)](https://www.nj.gov/children-families/enlightenment/).

<sup>8</sup> Office of Adolescent Services. (2023). *New Jersey's 2020-2024 John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood*. Official Site of the State of New Jersey. Retrieved from: [NJ-Chafee-Plan-final.pdf](https://www.nj.gov/children-families/chafee-plan/)

## Percentages of NYTD independent living services accessed by youth in 2017, 2019, and 2021 (n=90).

	2017	2019	2021
<b>Money management and assistance</b>			
Other financial services	68%	67%	73%
Education financial assistance services	18%	16%	14%
Budget and financial management services	26%	21%	22%
<b>Housing assistance</b>			
Housing education and home management training services	21%	19%	20%
Supervised independent living services	38%	36%	33%
Room and board financial assistance services	42%	41%	39%
<b>Well-being and support assistance</b>			
Independent living needs assessment services	38%	37%	39%
Health education and risk prevention services	26%	21%	22%
Mentoring services	17%	14%	10%
Family support and healthy marriage education services	11%	10%	10%
<b>Employment and education assistance</b>			
Employment programs or vocational training services	16%	12%	12%
Academic support services	16%	12%	12%
Post-secondary educational support services	22%	23%	20%
Career preparation services	37%	32%	30%



**Services received by youth and their associations with homelessness, incarceration, and referral to alcohol or substance use counseling between the ages of 20-21, examined using chi-square analysis.**

	Homeless			Incarcerated			Referred to alcohol or substance use counseling		
	No	Yes	<i>p</i> value	No	Yes	<i>p</i> value	No	Yes	<i>p</i> value
Money management assistance	22.20%	8.30%	0.11	11.1%	6.90%	0.62	11.10%	9.70%	1.00
Housing assistance	15.00%	8.00%	0.33	2.5%	12.00%	0.13	7.50%	12.00%	0.73
Self-help services	19.00%	4.20%	<b>.04*</b>	7.1%	8.30%	1.00	9.50%	10.40%	1.00
Employment and education services	13.10%	6.90%	0.49	6.6%	10.30%	0.68	8.20%	13.80%	0.46

\*Statistically significant (*p* < .05)

