

# Employment

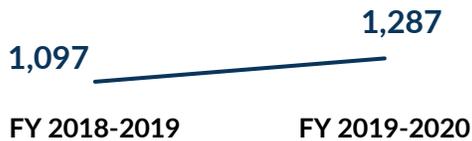
Stable employment that provides a living wage is critically important for all youth transitioning to adulthood. The Conrad N. Hilton Foundation’s Foster Youth Strategic Initiative supports foster youth preparing to enter the workforce and employer engagement with foster youth.

## Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has limited and eliminated employment and workforce development opportunities in sectors where young people, including foster youth, often work, such as food service, hospitality, and other service industries.<sup>i</sup> National data show that the percentage of young people ages 16-24 who were unemployed more than doubled from July 2019 to July 2020 (9.1% to 18.5%),<sup>ii, iii</sup> and more than half of young people who are out of work report that they are unemployed due to the pandemic.<sup>iv</sup> Some job training and employment programs closed, while those that remained opened struggled to adapt to virtual formats.

**More foster youth participated in public workforce programs in LA compared to last year, gains largely achieved pre-pandemic.<sup>v</sup>**

Number of LA foster youth who participated in public workforce programs | Los Angeles, 2018-2019 & 2019-2020



**More NYC foster TAY had a verifiable source of income at exit in 2019, compared to 2018.<sup>vi</sup>**

Percentage of foster TAY who aged out of care with a verifiable source of income at exit | New York City, 2018-2019



## Targeted workforce preparation for foster youth

*To continue preparing young people for the workforce during the COVID-19 pandemic, NYC and LA grantees moved their training and education services online in 2020. NYC public agencies and grantees offered basic work readiness and career skills training, and in LA, the **Opportunity Youth Collaborative (OYC)** worked quickly and in close partnership with the county workforce agency to successfully shift workforce training programming to a virtual platform. In NYC, **The Door** continued to offer youth in their Academy virtual basic work readiness training, and **Fair Futures** coaches served as key points of contact for informing foster TAY of workforce opportunities. However, some well-regarded job training*

organizations closed in NYC due to the pandemic, and many initiatives did not target foster youth specifically, which has limited career opportunities for foster youth. While some youth may prefer and have had more time to engage in virtual employment readiness programming during the pandemic, grantees noted that others may not find this format conducive to their learning or participation.

***The county workforce agency in LA continued implementing its Automatic Referral System and successfully advocated for funding for foster youth employment.*** Through the Automatic Referral System in LA, the child welfare agency linked a larger number of foster youth to county workforce agency services. In response to proposed budget cuts spurred by the pandemic, OYC advocated to prioritize foster youth employment and organized youth leaders to testify before the LA County Board of Supervisors in support of maintaining funding levels for the Youth@Work program. The Board voted to maintain \$20 million in funding for the program, including \$5 million in multi-year funding to support the program's sustainability.

## Employer engagement

***While grantees and public agencies shifted internship and employment opportunities and career fairs online in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many youth lost their jobs and faced greater competition for available positions.*** LA city and county created remote work opportunities related to recovery (e.g., resident outreach, student follow-ups), and placed youth at food banks, resource distribution centers, and child care centers, so youth could help their communities during the pandemic. In NYC, grantees and stakeholders offered virtual summer internships and a career fair, placing some youth immediately into jobs. Grantees including [Children's Aid](#), [Children's Village](#), [GrahamWindham](#), [HeartShare St. Vincent](#), and the [New York Foundling](#) continued to participate in NYC's mentored internship program for foster youth. However, the pandemic and other public funding constraints limited other opportunities, as NYC scaled back its Summer Youth Employment Program and DCFS scaled back iFoster's TAY AmeriCorps program in LA.

### Spotlight: Fair Futures creates new resource directory

[Fair Futures](#) developed and disseminated a new resource directory in 2020, designed by [One Degree](#) and available to everyone in NYC which for the first time provides centralized information on programs available to foster youth, including employment training. The directory lists all certification programs and other employment resources available in NYC with the capability to filter for resources specific to current and former foster youth.

## Looking ahead

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented numerous challenges to workforce preparation programs for foster TAY, and many youth lost their jobs and found it difficult to secure new employment or apply for benefits. Recognizing that changes to the job market will persist post-pandemic, grantees and public agencies have focused on supporting foster TAY during the current crisis and in the long-term. For example, LA's child welfare agency is beginning to reevaluate its service offerings and identify ways to help youth become more competitive for future employment. In NYC and LA, [First Star](#) is leveraging hybrid learning opportunities (that emerged as a result of COVID-19) to engage youth in technology careers through gaming.

For more information on progress made toward accomplishing all the Initiative's objectives in 2020, see the Foster Youth Strategic Initiative 2020 Evaluation [Report](#).

<sup>i</sup> Urban Institute (2020). Where low-income jobs are being lost to COVID-19. <https://www.urban.org/features/where-low-income-jobs-are-being-lost-covid-19>

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<sup>ii</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019). Youth labor force participation rate at 61.8 percent in July 2019, a 9-year high. *The Economics Daily*. <https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2019/youth-labor-force-participation-rate-at-61-point-8-percent-in-july-2019-a-9-year-high.htm>

<sup>iii</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020). *Employment and unemployment among youth—summer 2020* [News release]. <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/youth.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey Week 12. Source: Center for Law and Social Policy (2020). *#WhyWeCantWait: Youth Data Portrait 2020: Economic Justice*. <https://www.clasp.org/why-we-cant-wait-economic-justice>

<sup>v</sup> Totals represent foster youth served by WDACS in fiscal year 2019-2020 through Youth@Work including Work Based Learning (WBL) (data as of 10/6/2020) and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) (data as of 10/1/2020). Foster youth status based on demographic, not funding source. Source: Los Angeles County Department of Workforce, Development, Aging, and Community Services. (2020). Workforce Development Programs Youth@Work Program: Participant Performance Report FY 2019-2020. Email Correspondence.

Totals represent foster youth served by WDACS in fiscal year 2018-2019 through Youth@Work including Work Based Learning (WBL) and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Data as of 7/7/2020. Foster youth status based on demographic, not funding source. Source: Los Angeles County Department of Workforce, Development, Aging, and Community Services. (2020). Los Angeles County Youth@Work Program: Foster Youth Participants FY 17-18 through 19-20. Email Correspondence.

<sup>vi</sup> Among other data sources, this report uses Preparing Youth for Adulthood (PYA) data which is youth- or caseworker-reported and not verified, with more reliable administrative data. This data should be interpreted with caution. Sources: New York City Administration for Children's Services. (2018). *Report on Youth in Foster Care*. Retrieved from <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/data-analysis/2018/ReportOnYouthInFC2018.pdf> & New York City Administration for Children's Services. (2020). *Report on Youth in Foster Care, 2019*. <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/data-analysis/2019/ReportOnYouthInFC2019.pdf>