

Findings from the Transitional Living Program Youth Outcomes Study



September 2021

OPRE Report 2021-191

Findings from the Transitional Living Program Youth Outcomes Study

OPRE Report 2021-191
September 2021

Anna Mahathey, Scott Brown, Tanya de Sousa, Karen Loya, Jessica Thornton Walker, and Alisa Santucci, Abt Associates, Inc.

Submitted to:
Caryn Blitz, Project Officer
Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation
Administration for Children and Families
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre>

Contract Number: HHSP23320095624WC_HHSP23337015T

Project Director: Alisa Santucci
Principal Investigator: Jessica Thornton Walker
Abt Associates, Inc.
6130 Executive Blvd.
Rockville, MD 20852
<https://www.abtassociates.com/>

This report is in the public domain. Permission to reproduce is not necessary. Suggested citation: Mahathey, Anna, Scott Brown, Tanya de Sousa, Karen Loya, Jessica Thornton Walker, and Alisa Santucci (2021). *Findings from the Transitional Living Program Youth Outcomes Study*, OPRE Report 2021-191, Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Disclaimer

The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, the Family and Youth Services Bureau, the Administration for Children and Families, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

This report and other reports sponsored by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation are available at www.acf.hhs.gov/opre.



[Sign-up for the OPRE Newsletter](#)



Follow OPRE
on Twitter
[@OPRE_ACF](#)



Like OPRE's
page on
Facebook
[OPRE.ACF](#)



Follow OPRE
on Instagram
[@opre_acf](#)



Connect on
LinkedIn
[company/opreacf](#)



Acknowledgements

The authors of this report gratefully acknowledge the efforts of many individuals who assisted us as we conducted the Transitional Living Program (TLP) Youth Outcomes Study. We send heartfelt appreciation to the staff members at the 30 TLP and Maternity Group Home programs who recruited and enrolled youth into the study, worked with the Study Team to provide data on study participants, and shared their experiences and insights with the Study Team. We are especially grateful to the 365 youth who volunteered to participate in this study and whose experiences are described in this report. Their participation in the study made this report possible.

At the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, the Study Team would like to thank our project officers, Caryn Blitz at the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation and Christopher Holloway at the Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) for their input and guidance throughout the study. We would also like to thank Maria Woolverton, Samantha Illangasekare, Emily Schmitt, Debbie Powell, Resa Matthew, Sanzanna Dean, Tyanna Williams, and Timothy Joice at FYSB for their input on earlier versions of the report.

Many individuals at Abt Associates contributed to the Youth Outcomes Study and this report. The site liaisons who provided TLP and Maternity Group Home staff with technical assistance throughout the study were Lesley Freiman, Nathan Greenstein, Yuhe Gu, Rachel Jollie, Tresa Kappil, Karen Loya, Anna Mahathey, Alec Wall, and Will Yetvin. Data programmers and analysts were Scott Brown, Tom McCall, Nayara Mowry, and Jason Rodriguez. Jill Khadduri, the study's Project Quality Reviewer, provided guidance and feedback throughout all phases of the project. The team also appreciates Bry Pollack, Marina Kosareva, and Katheleen Linton, who provided editing, production, and graphic design support.

Contents

Overview	iv
Introduction	iv
Primary Research Questions	iv
Purpose	iv
Key Findings	iv
Methods	v
Glossary	v
Executive Summary	vi
Overview of the Youth Outcomes Study	vi
Key Findings	vi
Conclusion	vii
1. About the Study	1
1.1. Background	1
1.1.1 Transitional Living Programs and Maternity Group Homes	1
1.1.2 Prior Research on TLPs	2
1.1.3 Purpose of the Youth Outcomes Study	3
1.2. Study Design	3
1.2.1 Grantee Selection	4
1.2.2 Study Participants	4
1.2.3 Data Sources	5
2. Study Findings	7
2.1. Housing Outcomes	7
2.1.1 Housing Situation Before Entering TLP	7
2.1.2 Housing in TLP	7
2.1.3 Housing After Leaving TLP	8
2.1.4 Housing Experience During COVID-19	8
2.2. Employment and Earnings Outcomes	9
2.2.1 Employment Rates and Earnings Before, During, and After TLP	10
2.2.2 Employment and Earnings Trends	13
2.2.3 COVID-19 Experiences Related to Youth Jobs and Earnings	14
2.3. Education Outcomes	14
2.3.1 Level of Educational Attainment and Enrollment Status Before, During, and After TLP	15
2.3.2 Education Trends	17
2.3.3 COVID-19 Experiences Related to Youth Education	18
3. Conclusion	20
3.1. Key Considerations	20
3.2. Limitations and Need for Further Evaluation	21
References	23

List of Exhibits

Exhibit 1.1: Research on TLP and TLP-like programs prior to the Youth Outcomes Study	2
Exhibit 1.2: Thirty TLP grantees from 17 states participated in the Youth Outcomes Study	4
Exhibit 1.3: Youth Outcomes Study eligibility criteria for youth study participants	4
Exhibit 1.4: Types of analysis conducted for the YOS	6
Exhibit 2.1: More than half of study youth experienced homelessness immediately before entering TLP... 7	
Exhibit 2.2: Most youth exited TLP to permanent housing situations.	8
Exhibit 2.3: Average quarterly employment rates increased to 62% during TLP participation.	11
Exhibit 2.4: Employed youth earned \$2,358 during TLP participation, in an average quarter.	11
Exhibit 2.5: Youth quarterly employment rates rose steadily before and during TLP while trends in quarterly earnings varied.....	13
Exhibit 2.6: The proportion of youth who had some college rose after participating in TLP.....	17
Exhibit 2.7: Youth postsecondary education enrollment rates before and after TLP entry	18
Exhibit 2.8: Some Youth Outcomes Study participants could not complete their classes because of COVID-19.....	18

List of Infographics

Infographic 2.1: Youth Employment Rates Before and During TLP	12
Infographic 2.2: Youth Employment Rates and Earnings After TLP Exit.....	12
Infographic 2.3: Youth Post-Secondary Education Enrollment.....	16

List of Boxes

Youth Outcomes Study Funding Partners	vi
Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic	3
Youth Voice: COVID-19 Experiences with Housing	9
Youth Voice: COVID-19 Experiences with Employment.....	14
Youth Voice: COVID-19 Experiences Navigating Education	19

Overview

Introduction

This report describes findings from the **Transitional Living Program (TLP) Youth Outcomes Study (YOS)**. The TLP is a Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB)-funded grant program for runaway and homeless youth ages 16 through 21. TLPs provide a package of supports consisting of transitional housing, wrap-around support services, and intensive case management to provide safety and emotional support and help youth attain self-sufficiency. Although the TLP has served youth for more than 30 years, little research exists on the outcomes of its participants.

The Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE) and FYSB, both within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), contracted with Abt Associates to evaluate the TLP. This report is one of three studies conducted under a larger evaluation of TLP. In March 2021, ACF published the TLP Special Population Demonstration Report. In the fall of 2021, ACF published the *Transitional Living Program Pilot Test of a Randomized Controlled Trial: November 2016 to August 2017* report. These publications are available at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/project/transitional-living-program-evaluation-studies-2014-2021>.

Primary Research Questions

The design of the YOS was guided by four research questions:

- What are the housing, employment and earnings, and education **outcomes among TLP participants** before, during, and after TLP participation?
- What are TLP participants' **employment, earnings, and postsecondary education pathways** before, during, and after TLP participation?
- Do TLP participants **maintain** employment and enrollment in postsecondary education?
- How might TLP services and TLP participants' housing, employment and earnings, and education experiences have been **affected by the COVID-19 pandemic**?

Purpose

The YOS was conducted to better understand key youth outcomes in housing, employment and earnings, and education before, during, and after program participation. The report also explores how the COVID-19 pandemic may have affected TLP services and TLP participants' experiences regarding our outcomes of interest. The YOS was part of a larger ACF research effort, the TLP Evaluation, aimed at measuring the effects the TLP may have on the lives of runaway and homeless youth.

Key Findings

- **Housing:** At the time program data collection for the YOS ended in April 2021, 56 percent of study participants had left TLP. Three-quarters (78%) of youth went to a permanent housing situation upon exiting TLP. Housing-related supports that TLPs provided to youth during their TLP stay may have helped prepare youth to find and maintain stable housing after leaving TLP.
- **Employment:** Youth employment rates were higher during TLP participation than before participation with employment rates of 62% during TLP versus 52% before, despite experiencing employment instability.
- **Earnings:** Youth who were working earned an average of \$2,258 per quarter, or about \$9,000 annually if they remained continuously employed (about 70% of the 2020 federal poverty guidelines for a single-person household). While youth were able to find jobs during TLP participation that had the potential to elevate their earnings above federal poverty guidelines, persistent employment instability may have prevented them from reaching that higher level of earnings.

- **Education:** Staff-reported information suggested that education goals may have been a lower priority for some youth relative to other targeted TLP goals. More than one-quarter (28%) of study participants were ever enrolled in a postsecondary education program over a 4-year period, covering before and after TLP, with 2 percent completing an associate degree or certificate. The proportion of youth who were ever enrolled in a postsecondary education program during TLP (15%) was lower than during the 18 months prior to TLP entry (22%).
- **COVID-19.** The COVID-19 pandemic may have affected youth housing, employment and earnings, and education plans. About one in 10 study participants (11%) reported entering TLP because of the pandemic and one-third of participants reported having lost or left a job because of the pandemic. The pandemic may have also affected study participants' education: 8 percent reported they did not finish at least one of their courses because of the COVID-19 pandemic; 8 percent reported their education program closed; and 8 percent said their classes moved online but they were unable to attend.

Methods

The YOS relied primarily on the collection and analysis of existing program and administrative data to identify housing, employment and earnings, and education pathways, outcomes, and themes. These data were collected directly from youth study participants via a Background Information Form and one-on-one interviews, from TLP program staff via a Youth Information Form and a focus group, and from the National Directory of New Hires and National Student Clearinghouse administrative databases. The data collected cover the period between January 2017 and June 2021. The Study Team ran **five types of analysis models** on the program and administrative data collected as part of the study and used NVivo software to identify and analyze key themes from the interview and focus group data. For each of the study's primary outcomes related to housing, employment and earnings, and education, the Study Team explored whether the outcomes differed by select youth and TLP characteristics. However, findings should be interpreted with caution due to study design limitations, particularly the lack of a comparison group. Differences or trends in outcomes reported for study youth cannot definitively be attributed to their participation in TLP.

Glossary

ACF: The Administration for Children and Families

BIF: Background Information Form

FYSB: The Family and Youth Services Bureau

HMIS: Homeless Management Information System

MGH: Maternity Group Home

NDNH: National Directory of New Hires

NSC: National Student Clearinghouse

TLP: The Transitional Living Program

YIF: Youth Information Form

YOS: The TLP Youth Outcomes Study

Executive Summary

This report documents the findings from the **Transitional Living Program (TLP) Youth Outcomes Study (YOS)**. Abt Associates, an independent research firm, conducted the study in partnership with 30 TLP and Maternity Group Home (MGH) grantees from across the United States to explore the housing, employment and earnings, and education experiences and outcomes of youth who participate in these programs.

The TLP is a Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB)-funded grant program for runaway and homeless youth ages 16 through 21. Some TLP grantees also receive funding to operate an MGH, a TLP-like program tailored to parenting and pregnant youth to provide parenting skills, childcare, child development, education, and health and nutrition services. TLP and MGH programs (referred to henceforth as TLPs) provide a package of supports consisting of transitional housing, wrap-around support services, and intensive case management to provide safety and emotional support and help youth build self-sufficiency.

Youth Outcomes Study Funding Partners

The Family and Youth Services Bureau and the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, both within the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, provided funding for the YOS, which ran from August 2019 to June 2021.

Overview of the Youth Outcomes Study

Although the TLP has served youth for more than 30 years, little research exists on the outcomes of its participants. The **objective of the YOS** was to expand the base of knowledge on the TLP by describing key youth outcomes in housing, employment and earnings, and education before, during, and after program participation. The YOS also explored how the COVID-19 pandemic may have affected TLP services and TLP participants' experiences regarding the outcomes of interest. A total of 30 TLP grantees participated in the YOS. Across all grantees, 365 youth participated in the study.

To conduct the YOS, the Study Team collected background and demographic data from study participants; program data from TLP staff; administrative data on employment and earnings from the National Directory of New Hires; and administrative data on enrollment and attainment in postsecondary programs, including bachelor's degrees, associate degrees, or vocational certificate programs, from the National Student Clearinghouse. At the time data collection for the YOS ended, 56 percent of the 365 study participants had left TLP. To contextualize findings and better understand how the COVID-19 pandemic may have affected study participants' outcomes, the Study Team conducted nine interviews with individual study youth and one focus group with eight program staff.

Key Findings

- **Housing.** At the time data collection for the YOS ended, 56 percent of study participants had left TLP. Three-quarters (78%) of youth went to a permanent housing situation upon exiting TLP. Fewer than 1 in 10 (8%) experienced homelessness immediately upon leaving their program, with similar rates observed three months after exiting.
- **Employment.** Youth employment rates were higher during TLP participation than before participation (62% during versus 52% before). Over a two-year period that included their TLP stay, youth experienced substantial instability in employment: two-thirds lost a job at least once, and on average, 1 in 10 lost a job per quarter, and had four different employers.
- **Earnings.** Youth who were working earned an average of \$2,258 per quarter, or about \$9,000 annually if they remained continuously employed (about 70% of the 2020 federal poverty guidelines for a single-person household). More than one-quarter of employed youth (27%) had earnings above federal poverty guidelines. Earnings of employed youth were similar before (\$2,117) and during TLP (\$2,458), but earnings were higher three to six months after leaving TLP (\$3,134) among youth who had exited by the end of the study period.
- **Education.** More than one-quarter (28%) of study participants were ever enrolled in a postsecondary education program over a 4-year period, covering before and after TLP, with 2 percent completing an associate degree or certificate. The proportion of youth who were ever enrolled during TLP (15%) was lower than during the 18 months prior to TLP entry (22%).

- **COVID-19.** The COVID-19 pandemic may have affected youth housing, employment and earnings, and education plans. About one in 10 study participants (11%) reported entering TLP because of the pandemic. Overall, study youth employment rates remained similar before and after the United States declared a state of emergency regarding the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, despite a sharp drop nationally in youth employment over this period. During this time, however, study youth may have experienced greater employment instability and loss of earnings, reflected in lower average earnings in the first three months of the pandemic among those employed. One-third of participants reported having lost or left a job because of the pandemic. It may have also affected study participants' education: 8 percent reported they did not finish at least one of their courses because of the COVID-19 pandemic; 8 percent reported their education program closed; and 8 percent said their classes moved online, but they were unable to attend.

Conclusion

The Study Team sought to update and extend the existing research on the TLP and youth who participate in it. The YOS fills some knowledge gaps about the housing, employment and earnings, and education outcomes of TLP participants. It also provides new context for the data programs collect when youth enter and exit TLP and is the first study to examine how youth fare after leaving TLP. Finally, it provides important context for changes in outcomes of youth during program participation by examining how youth fared before entering TLP. YOS findings raise a few integral considerations.

- **Housing stability:** Housing-related supports that TLPs provided to youth during their TLP stay may have helped prepare youth to find and maintain stable housing after leaving the TLP. More than half of TLPs helped youth save money during their TLP stay by charging “rent” that was returned to youth at exit. This practice may have helped refine budgeting skills among youth and provided them a helpful financial cushion when they exited the program. Additionally, a little more than one-quarter of youth who exited (26%) received housing assistance, such as rapid re-housing funds, which also may have contributed to stability.
- **Employment:** Youth appeared to fare better on employment outcomes while in TLP than they were prior to entering TLP, despite experiencing employment instability. Even with TLP stays primarily occurring during the pandemic, youth employment rates were higher during TLP stays than they were in the 18 months prior to youth entering TLP, which was mostly before the pandemic.
- **Earnings:** Youth were able to find jobs during TLP participation that had the potential to elevate their earnings above federal poverty guidelines, but persistent employment instability may have prevented them from reaching that higher level of earnings.
- **Education:** Findings suggest that education goals may have been a lower priority for some youth relative to other targeted TLP goals. Staff reported that over half of TLP participants had already completed their education goals when they started TLP. Despite lower overall postsecondary enrollment rates during than before TLP participation, findings suggest TLPs may have helped stabilize enrollment rates, particularly during the pandemic, when youth reported technological and administrative barriers to enrolling in classes.

Findings need to be interpreted with caution due to study limitations. First, the YOS did not include a comparison group (such as youth who were eligible to enter TLP but did not) to understand how outcomes for study participants may have changed over time if they had not participated in TLP. Without a comparison group, differences or trends in outcomes reported for study youth cannot definitively be attributed to their participation in TLP. Second, for findings on youth outcomes after TLP exit, only a little more than half of youth had left TLP when data collection ended (56%). The findings also reflect a relatively short follow-up period (3 to 6 months) for youth who had left TLP. Additional follow-up could help identify the longer-term influence of the TLP on youth outcomes. Finally, the Study Team conducted the YOS during a global pandemic. Study findings must be understood in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and how related disruptions in daily life may have affected study participants' housing, employment and earnings, and education. Recruiting a new group of youth entering TLP at a later time could help clarify the extent to which findings from the present study may have been influenced by the onset of the pandemic.

1. About the Study

Abt Associates conducted the **Transitional Living Program Youth Outcomes Study (YOS)** to explore the housing, employment and earnings, and education experiences and outcomes of youth and young adults who participated in a **Transitional Living Program (TLP)** or a **Maternity Group Home (MGH)**.¹ Youth study participants were drawn from TLPs across the country. Section 1.1 provides an overview of the YOS. In it, we offer background on the two programs, a description of prior research on TLP, and details on the purpose of the study. Section 1.2 provides an overview of the study design, including data sources and analysis methodologies used.

1.1. Background

The Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) and the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services sponsored the YOS. ACF contracted Abt Associates, an independent research firm, to conduct the study. Abt Associates conducted the study in partnership with a group of 30 TLP grantees from across the United States to explore the experiences and outcomes of youth who participate in the grantee programs.

1.1.1 Transitional Living Programs and Maternity Group Homes

The TLP is an ACF grant program that FYSB administers as most recently authorized under the Juvenile Justice Reform Act of 2018.² Some TLP grantees also receive funding to operate an MGH, which is a TLP-like program tailored to parenting and pregnant youth to provide parenting skills, childcare, child development, education, and health and nutrition services. Runaway and homeless youth and young adults ages 16 through 21 may participate in TLP for up to 18 months.³ The program provides a comprehensive package of supports consisting of three core components:

1. Transitional housing through host homes, group homes, and apartments;
2. Intensive case management that includes an individualized service plan; and
3. Wrap-around support services, such as life skills training, educational opportunities, employment support, and mental and physical health care.⁴

Implemented by community-based organizations across the United States, the TLP's combination of housing and services is intended to address youth developmental needs and build resiliency by promoting safety and stability, as well as emotional, intellectual, physical, and social wellness.

¹ The Study Team selected grantees that had been awarded a TLP grant from FYSB in fiscal years 2017 and 2018, some of which may have also received funding to operate an MGH. Selected grantees that operate both a TLP and an MGH recruited youth served by those programs for the YOS. For simplicity throughout the report, the Study Team uses the term “the TLP” to refer to both the TLP and MGH programs FYSB funds (and to grantees operating either program as “TLPs”), unless we report differences by program type or specifically highlight an MGH program. Throughout the remainder of the report, the Study Team refers to TLP and MGH participants as “youth” regardless of age.

² The TLP was most recently reauthorized under the Juvenile Justice Reform Act of 2018: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/6964/text>. The Runaway Homeless Youth and Trafficking Prevention Act was introduced in 2019, which would further reauthorize the program: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-bill/2916/all-info>.

³ Under exceptional circumstances, youth may be permitted to participate in the TLP for up to 635 days (about 21 months).

⁴ For more detail on the TLP model, see ACF's website: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/fysb/programs/runaway-homeless-youth/programs/transitional-living>.

The program focuses on achieving four long-term core outcome areas:⁵





1. Improved well-being;
2. Increased permanent connections;
3. Increased education or employment; and
4. Safe and stable housing.

Included in the supportive services TLPs provide are “aftercare” services, which involve staff reaching out to youth for at least three months after they exit TLP to determine how youth are doing, where they are staying, and if they need any support or resources.

1.1.2 Prior Research on TLPs

Although the TLP has served youth for more than 30 years, little research exists about the outcomes of its participants. Exhibit 1.1 details two noteworthy studies of the TLP or TLP-like programs prior to the YOS.

Exhibit 1.1: Research on TLP and TLP-like programs prior to the Youth Outcomes Study

Quasi-Experimental Study:	Randomized Evaluation:
In the 1990s, a quasi-experimental study compared participants in 10 FYSB-funded TLPs to similar youth in a matched comparison group. ^a	A randomized evaluation of a single TLP-like model, Youth Villages, was implemented in Tennessee with youth aging out of foster care. ^b
 FINDINGS: The study found some positive impacts of TLP participation. There were significant gains in youth school enrollment and employment rates but no gains in hourly wages or hours of employment six months after program enrollment, when youth were still largely in TLPs. This study suggests TLP activities may lead to greater connection to education or employment.	 FINDINGS: The study found small but statistically significant improvements in youth housing stability, earnings, and employment one year after program enrollment. Results from a two-year follow-up using administrative data indicated more modest earnings gains compared to the one-year findings.
 KNOWLEDGE GAPS: Whether such gains are sustained after exiting the program is not clear. Findings may be outdated due to changes in the social context of youth employment and education in the two decades since this study concluded.	 KNOWLEDGE GAPS: The study focused on a limited geographic area and tested only a subset of TLP-like program services (i.e., it tested the impact of case management and supportive services but not housing). The findings suggest that services offered by TLPs may improve youths’ connection to employment and education after program exit, but findings are not generalizable to FYSB’s broader TLP model, which serves a more diverse group of youth nationwide with a broader set of services.

^[a] MacAllum, Kerttula, & Quinn, 1997.

^[b] Valentine, Skemer, & Courtney, 2015; Skemer & Valentine, 2016.

⁵ The study design relied heavily on the use of administrative data. Because there were no accessible administrative data on the well-being or permanent connections of youth, the YOS did not explore those outcomes.

1.1.3 Purpose of the Youth Outcomes Study

The goal of the YOS was to **update and extend the existing research on the TLP** by studying a diverse population of youth participants across a wider geographic area and by examining outcomes for the complete package of TLP housing, employment, and education services. Because the YOS was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Study Team also sought to understand how the pandemic may have affected the TLP experience and outcomes for youth.

Specifically, the YOS describes:

- Housing, employment and earnings, and education **outcomes among TLP participants** before, during, and after TLP participation;
- Youth **employment, earnings, and postsecondary education pathways** before, during, and after TLP participation;
- TLP participants' **maintenance of employment and enrollment in postsecondary education**; and
- The ways in which TLP services and TLP participants' housing, employment and earnings, and education **experiences may have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic**.

Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic

In March 2020, the United States declared a state of emergency regarding COVID-19, a highly contagious and potentially deadly respiratory disease. To reduce transmission of the virus, the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention advised people to “social distance,” defined as maintaining a distance of at least six feet from people. Many states also issued temporary stay-at-home orders, restricted travel and work to just “essential” activities, and closed public spaces.

The Study Team began designing and conducting study activities prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the Study Team and ACF were concerned that the pandemic might affect the program services and outcomes central to the YOS: housing, employment and earnings, and education among an extremely vulnerable population. As a result, the Study Team, in collaboration with ACF, determined that it was important to account for pandemic-related experiences of TLP youth and how TLPs may have adjusted services in response to the pandemic. To help contextualize the findings from the program and administrative data collection, the Study Team conducted one-on-one virtual interviews with nine study participants and one virtual focus group with eight program staff members.

Readers should review study findings while keeping in mind the possible effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on TLP services and participants. Throughout the report, we have included several sections highlighting youth voices on how the pandemic may have affected their housing, employment and earnings, and education outcomes.

1.2. Study Design

The Study Team conducted the YOS from **August 2019 through June 2021**. The study included five main activities:

1. Grantee selection;
2. Four-month YOS participant recruitment;
3. Regular updates and check-in calls with program staff;
4. National administrative data matching; and
5. Individual interviews with program participants and a focus group with program staff.

This section details how the Study Team selected grantees; who participated in the YOS; the data sources used to identify youth outcomes in housing, employment and earnings, and education; and a brief overview of the analytic methodologies used.

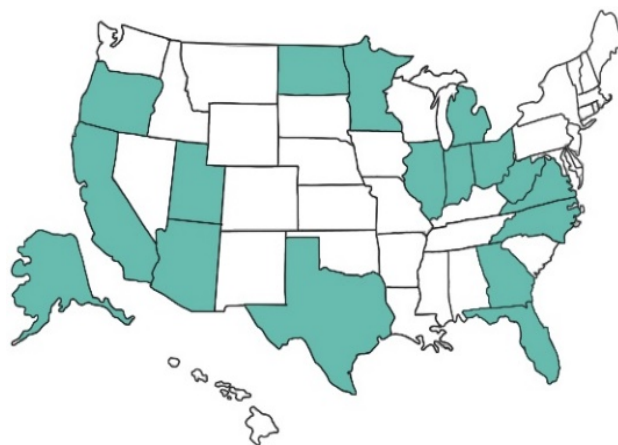
1.2.1 Grantee Selection

To estimate enrollment targets for the study, the Study Team worked with FYSB Regional Program Managers and Federal Project Officers to verify the service volumes for all TLP grantees awarded TLP or MGH funding in fiscal years 2017 and 2018. We considered six factors for candidate selection:⁶

1. TLP's service volume;
2. Number of fully subsidized beds;
3. Turnover rate;
4. Program configuration;
5. Aftercare response rate; and
6. Availability of participant Social Security numbers (SSNs) at TLP entry.

The Study Team selected **30 TLP grantees from 17 states** to participate in the YOS. Of those grantees, 14 also operated an MGH program. In total, the 30 grantees provided more than 500 TLP beds.

Exhibit 1.2: Thirty TLP grantees from 17 states participated in the Youth Outcomes Study



1.2.2 Study Participants

Youth were recruited by trained program staff at each of the 30 participating grantees. Youth were eligible to participate in the study if they met all of the eligibility criteria defined in Exhibit 1.3.

Exhibit 1.3: Youth Outcomes Study eligibility criteria for youth study participants

  Be age 16 to 21 at TLP entry	  Provide informed consent
  Receive transitional housing, case management, and support services	  Already be enrolled in TLP; enroll during the study period; or have exited TLP on or after September 1, 2019, and have participated in the program for at least one month
  Speak or read English or Spanish	

The 30 participating grantees were able to enroll a total of 365 youth into the YOS.⁷ Of those youth, more than half (57%) were female.⁸ Most participants (80%) were between ages 18 and 20 when they entered TLP; a few (3%) were younger than age 18. Thirty-nine (39) percent were white, and 39 percent were black. Roughly one-quarter (26%) were of Hispanic, Latinx, or Spanish origin. Seventeen (17) percent participated in an MGH program.⁹

⁶ For more details on the rationale for each factor, see *Findings from the Transitional Living Program Youth Outcomes Study: Technical Appendix* (Brown et. al. 2021).

⁷ Throughout the report all references to study participants or study youth refer to these 365 youth, unless otherwise specified.

⁸ Thirty-nine percent of study participants identified as male and 4 percent identified as transgender or gender non-conforming.

⁹ One grantee was awarded a TLP grant but limited its services to pregnant and parenting youth. The grantee's nine pregnant and parenting youth who joined the YOS are not included among the 61 youth who made up the 17 percent.

1.2.3 Data Sources

The Study Team drew data from five sources to conduct the YOS:

1. **Youth:** Youth completed a brief Background Information Form (BIF) when they joined the YOS, using a secure online portal (study portal) developed by the Study Team. The BIF collected demographic information about the youth and about how the COVID-19 pandemic may have affected them. The Study Team also conducted one-on-one virtual interviews with nine youth to learn more about their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. **TLP Program Data:** Program staff entered study participants' program enrollment and exit information into the Youth Information Form (YIF) located in the study portal. The YIF collected information on youth demographics, entry and exit dates, and information related to the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. **National Directory of New Hires (NDNH):** A national administrative database, the NDNH collects employment and earnings information from state Unemployment Insurance offices for all formally employed workers.
4. **National Student Clearinghouse (NSC):** A national administrative database, the NSC collects information on enrollment into postsecondary programs, which might offer bachelor's degrees, associate degrees, and/or certificates.
5. **Program Staff:** The Study Team conducted one virtual focus group with eight TLP program staff from among the 30 grantees participating in the YOS to learn how they adjusted their programs and services as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition to these data sources, the Study Team also conducted routine monitoring activities, which included regular check-in calls and Community of Practice webinars with grantee staff.

- **Check-in Calls:** The Study Team assigned two site liaisons to each grantee to serve as a resource to study sites by monitoring sites' progress building the study sample and providing technical assistance on study recruitment challenges. In regular calls with program staff, site liaisons checked in with grantee staff on YOS-related questions, challenges, and successes; sample updates; and data entry.
- **Community of Practice Webinars:** The Study Team hosted three Community of Practice webinars with study site program staff. The sessions provided an opportunity for the program staff to share their knowledge, experiences, challenges, and solutions for enrolling youth into the study with one another and the Study Team throughout the study period.






To identify housing, employment and earnings, and education pathways, outcomes, and themes in the data, the Study Team ran **five types of analysis models** on the program and administrative data and used NVivo software to identify and analyze key themes from the interview and focus group data (Exhibit 1.4 below). Additional detail on the analysis models can be found in *Findings from the Transitional Living Program Youth Outcomes Study: Technical Appendix* (Brown et al., 2021).

For each of the primary outcomes related to housing, employment and earnings, and education, the Study Team explored whether these outcomes differed by select youth and TLP characteristics. Characteristics included gender, race, ethnicity, educational attainment at entry, program type, and program housing model. This report presents only differences that are statistically significant (i.e., differences that are unlikely to occur by chance alone in study samples of this size when there were no actual differences between these groups of youth).¹⁰

¹⁰ The Study Team used a conventional 5 percent threshold for statistical significance.

Findings need to be interpreted with caution due to study limitations. The YOS did not include a comparison group (such as youth who were eligible to enter TLP but did not) to understand how outcomes for study youth may have changed over time if they had not participated in TLP. Without a comparison group, differences or trends in outcomes reported for study youth cannot definitively be attributed to participation in the TLP.

Exhibit 1.4: Types of analysis conducted for the YOS

	<p>DESCRIPTIVE INFORMATION.</p> <p>The Study Team calculated proportions and averages for the study sample overall or by youth and program characteristics. Descriptive information does not include statistical tests of differences by characteristics.</p>
	<p>AVERAGE DIFFERENCES.</p> <p>The Study Team ran statistical tests of whether average (mean) youth outcomes differ by some other characteristic.^a One set of analyses test for whether average youth outcomes are different prior to TLP or after exiting TLP compared to when youth were staying in a TLP. We also used average difference tests to examine differences by youth characteristics.</p>
	<p>TREND ANALYSES.</p> <p>The Study Team characterized trends in youth employment, earnings, and educational outcomes over the study period.^b We applied statistical tests to assess whether these trends differed prior to and after youth entered TLP.</p>
	<p>SURVIVAL ANALYSES.</p> <p>The Study Team assessed whether youth, on average, sustain employment and educational enrollment across the time before, during, and after TLP participation. We adjusted for the fact that some youth were still employed or enrolled in education at the end of the study period and were observed for differing lengths of time.</p>
	<p>INDIVIDUAL AND FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS.</p> <p>The Study Team conducted nine in-depth interviews with youth study participants and one focus group with eight program staff members to better understand how the COVID-19 pandemic may have affected TLP programs and youth outcomes and program experiences. We audio recorded and transcribed each session and then coded and analyzed the qualitative data using NVivo qualitative analysis software to identify common themes.</p>

^[a] As described in the YOS Final Report Technical Appendix, the significance tests for the average differences results use a statistical model that appropriately adjusts for clustering—that is, that that one youth's outcomes might have been repeatedly assessed, before, during, or after their TLP stay.

^[b] Formally, we use latent growth curve models and test whether the rate and form of change (i.e., steady increase, steady decrease, curved) differ prior to versus after entering a TLP.

2. Study Findings

This section provides findings related to youth housing, employment and earnings, and education outcomes. For each of these primary outcomes, the section details information about the experiences of study youth before, during, and after they participated in TLP and the ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic may have affected their experiences.

2.1. Housing Outcomes

A primary goal of the TLP is to **provide safe and stable housing** to youth. As part of TLP grantees' efforts to promote youth self-sufficiency and to build their independence and financial skills, 24 of the programs required youth to pay some portion of their income each month into a savings account or apply it toward rent, utility, or program costs. Of those programs, 16 returned the funds in full when youth left the program, which provided youth with a small cushion of savings to support their transition to independent living. This policy also may have provided youth with practice budgeting for their rent and other housing expenses.

This section includes data on the housing situations of youth through April 2021 as collected from youth via self-reported data on the BIF when they joined the study; program data staff reported on the YIF about program entry, exit, and aftercare; and insights from individual interviews with youth and a focus group with program staff members.

Overall, one-quarter of study participants (27%) were already in TLP when the COVID-19 pandemic began, more than half (59%) entered TLP at some point during the pandemic, and 14 percent of study participants left TLP before the pandemic began. About 1 in 10 study participants (11%) reported entering TLP *because* of the pandemic.

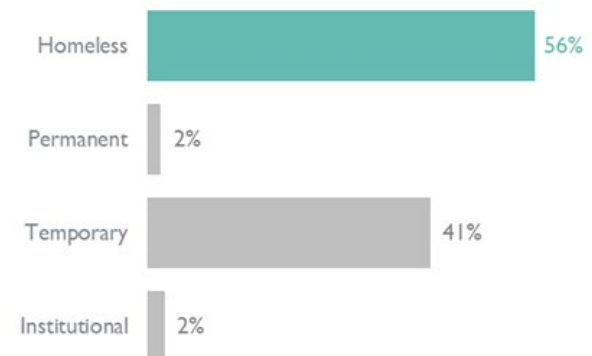
2.1.1 Housing Situation Before Entering TLP

Prior to entering TLP, youth lived in a variety of housing situations. More than half of study participants (56%) reported experiencing homelessness immediately before entering TLP (Exhibit 2.1); this included staying in places such as cars, emergency shelters, or on the streets. The percentage of youth living in institutional settings, such as inpatient health care facilities or prisons, was small (2%). The remainder of study participants (42%) were housed in permanent or temporary living situations before entering TLP and primarily stayed with friends or family.¹¹

2.1.2 Housing in TLP

Upon entering TLP, each youth receives housing support services, including subsidized housing (a bed in a housing unit). Of the 30 grantees that participated in the YOS, 16 had multiple congregate-style living facilities where they provided housing to youth participants. One program, for instance, had four separate group homes, each of which could house up to four youth. Although most congregate housing sites provided youth their own bedroom with shared common spaces, a few required youth to share the bedroom with a roommate. Another eight grantees operated only scattered-site programs, with youth living in their own apartments; four grantees operated both types of housing; and two grantees operated a single congregate site.

Exhibit 2.1: More than half of study youth experienced homelessness immediately before entering TLP.



Note: The sample includes all study participants with non-missing data ($n=360$). Permanent and temporary housing percentages in the exhibit add to 43% due to rounding. Total percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.
Source: Staff-reported data on the Youth Information Form.

¹¹ Totals do not add to 100 percent because of rounding.

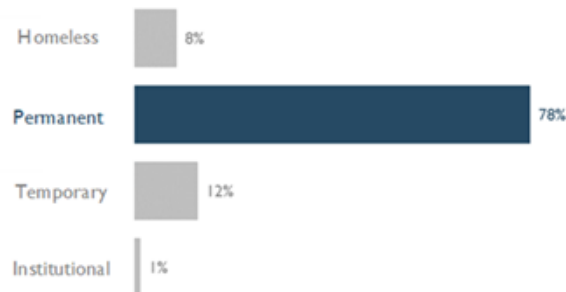
Across all housing types, study participants spent an average of approximately **9 months living and participating in TLP**.¹² Youth reported that the COVID-19 pandemic may have affected how long they stayed in TLP. More than 1 in 10 youth (12%) said they stayed in TLP longer than planned because of the pandemic. During interviews, three youth reported that pandemic-related job closures or reductions in work hours made it harder to save enough money to find an apartment on their own or to leave TLP on their original timeline. Some programs were able to help youth navigate this challenge by allowing them to extend their stay beyond the usual 18-month limit.¹³

2.1.3 Housing After Leaving TLP

In April 2021, when program data collection for the YOS concluded, 56 percent of study participants had exited TLP. Of the youth who had left TLP, **most went to permanent (78%) or temporary (12%) housing situations** immediately upon their exit from the program (Exhibit 2.2).¹⁴ One-quarter of study participants who had exited (26%) received housing assistance, primarily through rapid re-housing programs. Fewer than 1 in 10 (8%) experienced homelessness immediately upon leaving their program.

Program staff were able to report on the housing status of 58 percent of youth who left had TLP (31% of the full study sample) based on aftercare contacts, with the most recent contact happening an average of three months after exit.¹⁵ Rates of homelessness among youth in aftercare remained low over this time (6% at exit versus 7% three months later).¹⁶

Exhibit 2.2: Most youth exited TLP to permanent housing situations.



Note: The sample includes only those who had left TLP by the end of the study period ($n=105$). Exit destinations based on HMIS Destination data element codes (FY2020) – see Technical Appendix Exhibit A1.3 for more information on coding of exit destinations as homeless, permanent, temporary, or institutional.

Source: Staff-reported data on the Youth Information Form.

2.1.4 Housing Experience During COVID-19

The Study Team spoke with youth and program staff to learn more about the challenges the COVID-19 pandemic may have created for youth in their housing arrangements and choices. Although some TLP grantees received additional

¹² Among youth who had exited TLP before program data collection for the YOS ended (56%), the average time spent in the program was 9.4 months.

¹³ To extend TLP participation beyond 18 months took exceptional circumstances or the support of other funding. One grantee extended its MGH program an additional three months to provide more flexibility and support to participants.

¹⁴ Definitions of permanent and temporary housing situations are based on HMIS Destination codes and categories in the HMIS FY2020 Data Dictionary (2021). See Technical Appendix Exhibit A1.3. for a detailed crosswalk.

¹⁵ Housing status after TLP exit was not available for the 42 percent of youth who left and had no aftercare contacts. Youth who maintained aftercare contact may differ from those who did not. Prior living situations were similar at entry for youth with and without aftercare contact; housing situations at exit from TLP did differ between youth with and without aftercare contact ($p=0.01$) with a higher proportion of aftercare youth having permanent exits than non-aftercare (83% vs. 66%, Technical Appendix Exhibit B2.3).

¹⁶ It is possible that differences between the 58 percent of youth who left TLP and were engaged in aftercare and the 42 percent who were not engaged could result in this proportion being higher or lower if all youth who had exited had been contacted about their housing status. Youth with more stable housing after leaving TLP may be easier to contact for aftercare, but youth with less stable housing after leaving TLP may have greater needs and be more likely to contact program staff for aftercare services.

funding to operate more beds during the pandemic, others had to reduce their bed count to adhere to social distancing protocols. During the program staff focus group, one grantee staff member expressed concern over the lack of housing options for youth during the pandemic, as their TLP had limited capacity, local emergency shelters had closed or reduced capacity, and other area programs were not accepting new clients. Youth who were interviewed echoed the limitations in housing options. The youth entered TLP during the pandemic and did not have other housing options at the time. As a result, they felt stressed and fearful of not getting into TLP.

Each program also had to implement a variety of **social distancing and quarantine protocols** to keep youth, their children (if in an MGH), and program staff safe. During the study period, three grantees reported having to place one or more of their sites under full quarantine at least once. One site closed its entire MGH house so the beds could be used for COVID-19 isolation. Another grantee followed a similar strategy and reduced its intake capacity from 24 beds to 20 beds to create isolation rooms for new intakes. Ten other grantees reported taking measures to minimize the risk of spreading COVID-19. These programs required youth to quarantine in their rooms and program staff to quarantine in their homes if they had potentially been exposed to or tested positive for COVID-19. One of the grantees implemented a rule that any youth who were out of the TLP housing unit for more than 24 hours or stayed overnight in a different location must quarantine for 14 days or until they tested negative for COVID-19.

COVID-19 Protocols:



- Required masks
- Social distancing stickers and signs
- Required COVID-19 testing
- Quarantine rooms and bathrooms
- Restricted visitation
- Virtual case management

Other policies and practices ranged from strong encouragement of mask wearing to potential program expulsion for disregarding testing and quarantine requirements. Staff and youth described the emotional and mental strain that social distancing protocols put on youth. Although youth understood the need for the protocols, several reported feeling socially isolated because they could not visit friends or family outside of their program and were sometimes also physically isolated within their program's housing site. One MGH participant with a young son described the difficulty of her program's restricted visitation that left her unable to visit with her son's father.



Youth Voice: COVID-19 Experiences with Housing

Alexis* recalled the stress of the early days of the pandemic as people at school, work, and her group home disinfected every surface and feared how quickly the virus could spread. When staff at her group home suspected she had been exposed to the virus, they required her to quarantine alone in a room. Shortly thereafter, the entire home closed and required all residents to live temporarily with the people listed as their emergency contacts; Alexis moved in with her best friend's family.

She was thankful to stay with her best friend, but the health of her friend's mom made Alexis worry a lot about putting the mom at risk of contracting COVID-19. After a few weeks, she began looking for somewhere else to stay. When she found a TLP, she called every other day to make sure she would get a bed, remembering that "it took a lot of hard work." Three months after leaving the group home, Alexis moved into the TLP.

*Names have been changed to preserve participants' anonymity.

2.2. Employment and Earnings Outcomes

In addition to housing support, TLPs provide a range of **employment supports and services** to youth to help them gain job skills, find and keep jobs, increase their employment and earnings, and foster independence. One way that programs do this is through an employment requirement. Of the 30 grantees participating in the YOS, six required youth to have a

job. Nine other grantees required youth to either have a job *or* be actively working on educational goals. The remainder highly encouraged youth to have a job.

In working with youth, TLP staff encouraged youth to form employment goals as part of their individual service plan, and the staff provided youth flexibility and support to meet those goals. Grantee staff explained that they might help a youth find a job by first addressing their substance use or mental health conditions. Some programs had dedicated job coaches or employment specialists who helped youth search for available jobs, develop strong resumes, and practice interview skills. Other programs provided training on the skills required to keep a job, such as how and when to communicate with a boss if they need to call out sick.

This section includes data that youth self-reported on the BIF when they joined the study; program data that staff reported on the YIF about program entry, exit, and aftercare; and insights from interviews with youth and program staff members. This section also includes quarterly data from NDNH on youth employment and earnings over approximately two years (October 2018 through December 2020), during which time youth entered and exited TLP.

2.2.1 Employment Rates and Earnings Before, During, and After TLP

Overall, over the two years of NDNH data available, most study participants (91%) had a job in the formal workforce at least once.¹⁷ In an average quarter, slightly more than half of study youth (55%) had a job. Nationally, slightly less than half of youth ages 16 to 24 years (49%) were employed, on average, over this same time period.¹⁸

Although employment rates of study youth were relatively consistent, their **earnings were low**. On average, youth earned \$2,258 per quarter when they were employed,¹⁹ or about \$9,000 annually if they were continuously employed for a full year (about 70% of the 2020 federal poverty guidelines for a single-person household).²⁰ Only one-quarter of employed youth (27%) had earnings above federal poverty guidelines in an average quarter.

However, data suggest **instability in employment** over time; youth were not continuously employed, on average. Two-thirds of study participants lost a job at some point during the two-year period, with 1 in 10 youth losing a job each quarter. Additionally, the average youth had four different employers over that period. As a result of that instability, the average youth study participant earned only about \$4,988 annually (or approximately 40% of the federal poverty guidelines for a single-person household) after accounting for periods when they had no formal earnings.

¹⁷ Findings are based on the 331 (of 365) study youth who provided a valid SSN having any recorded earnings from formal employment in NDNH. Youth may have had informal jobs, such as babysitting or jobs in the gig economy, which would typically not be reported to NDNH by state Unemployment Insurance agencies. Informal jobs may be included in the youth- and staff-reported outcomes in the BIF and YIF.

¹⁸ Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2021). (Unadj) Employment-Population Ratio – 16-24 yrs. (Series LNU02324887Q).

¹⁹ The Study Team conducted sensitivity analyses assuming \$0 in earnings for youth who had a valid SSN but were not employed in the formal labor force in a given quarter and thus had no earnings data in NDNH for that quarter. Averages using these results reflect how the sample as a whole fared in earnings but can make interpreting gains in earnings more difficult, as changes are a mixture of the share of youth employed and how much employed youth earn. We primarily focus on earnings among employed youth in this report for clearer interpretation, with results from sensitivity analyses presented in Technical Appendix Exhibits B3.1 to B3.5.

²⁰ Source: U.S. Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. (2020). *U.S. Federal Poverty Guidelines Used to Determine Financial Eligibility for Certain Federal Programs*. <https://aspe.hhs.gov/topics/poverty-economic-mobility/poverty-guidelines/prior-hhs-poverty-guidelines-federal-register-references/2020-poverty-guidelines>

Earnings also varied by youth characteristics across the study time period. Employed youth of color earned more per quarter (\$2,396), on average, than employed white youth (\$2,103). Youth who had completed some college or a vocational degree by TLP entry (\$2,507) and those with a high school diploma or GED (\$2,383) earned more per quarter than those without a high school diploma or equivalent (\$1,824).

Before TLP: On average, more than half of study participants (52%) worked in a given quarter before they entered TLP (Exhibit 2.3), according to NDNH data. Employed youth earned, on average, \$2,117 per quarter before entering TLP, with a quarter (25%) having earnings above poverty guidelines (Exhibit 2.4).

Staff-reported program data show that slightly more than one-third of YOS youth (37%) had a job on the day that they entered the TLP. One in 10 youth (10%) were working full-time (30 or more hours per week) and about one-quarter (26%) were working part-time.

During TLP: During their tenure in TLP, youth average employment rates were higher than before they entered TLP, with 62 percent of youth employed, on average, in a given quarter during TLP, compared to 52 percent employed before TLP, according to NDNH data (Exhibit 2.3).²¹

Average earnings among youth employed during TLP were similar to earnings observed before TLP entry (\$2,458 versus \$2,117, Exhibit 2.4).²² Employment rates were higher during TLP for youth who at TLP entry had completed some college or a vocational degree (73%) or who had a high school diploma or GED (68%), compared to those without a high school diploma or GED (48%).

Although employment rates were higher during TLP, employment was unstable. On average, nearly half of youth (46%) lost a job at least once while they were in TLP, and 11 percent of youth lost a job per quarter during their stay, according to NDNH data. Those who worked within the first three months after starting TLP generally kept their jobs continuously

Exhibit 2.3: Average quarterly employment rates increased to 62% during TLP participation.



Exhibit 2.4: Employed youth earned \$2,358 during TLP participation, in an average quarter.



Note: N (# of quarters) = 1,180 before TLP, 1,008 during TLP, and 161 after TLP. Employment rate during TLP is statistically different from the rates before and after TLP. N (# of quarters) = 939 before TLP, 626 during TLP, 80 after TLP for earnings among employed youth. Earnings after TLP are statistically different from earnings during TLP. Earnings before and during TLP are not statistically different.

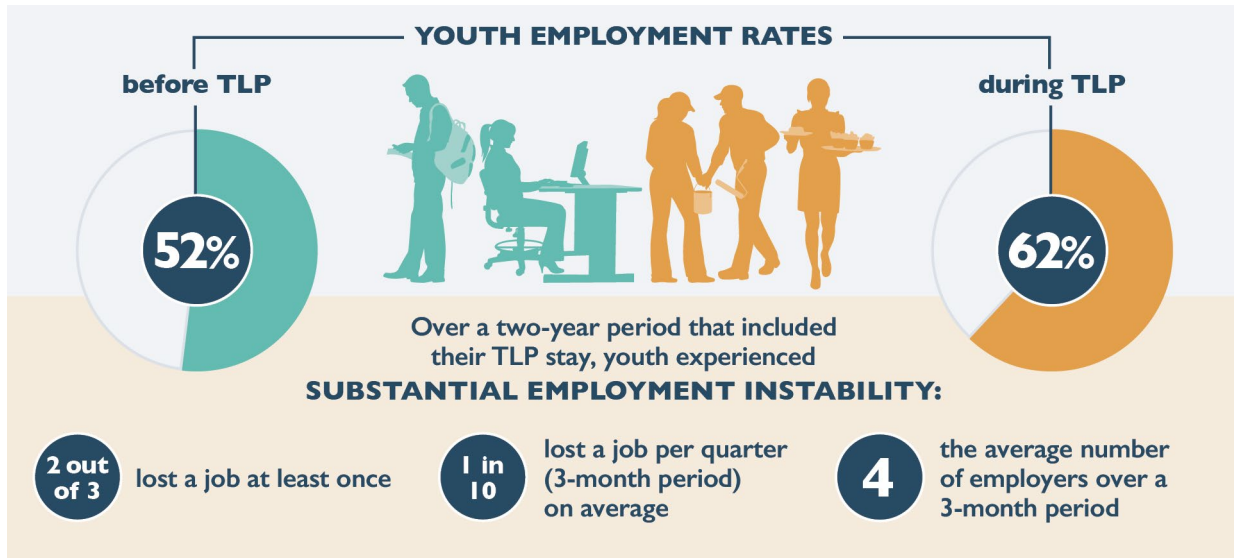
Sources: National Directory of New Hires, 2018Q4-2020Q4; staff-reported data on the Youth Information Form.

²¹ This rate was statistically different from the quarterly average before entering TLP.

²² Earnings among all study youth, counting those not working in a quarter as earning \$0, rose from \$1,098 before TLP to \$1,464 during TLP and were statistically different. Taken together, this suggests earnings among all study youth were higher primarily because of a higher employment rate during TLP, not because earnings among employed youth were higher.

for five quarters, on average.²³ There was some variation by race. On average, Black youth employed at entry tended to stay employed longer (seven quarters) than did white youth employed at entry (four quarters).

Infographic 2.1: Youth Employment Rates Before and During TLP



After TLP Exit: Staff-reported program data show that 61 percent of youth who exited TLPs were working at the time they left the program, which was higher than at program entry.²⁴ One-third of all youth (34%) had full-time jobs, and one-quarter (27%) had part-time jobs. Subsequently, NDNH data confirmed that half were employed, on average, in a given quarter after leaving TLP (Exhibit 2.3 above). These youth earned an average of \$3,134 per quarter, while employed, with 44 percent having earnings above poverty guidelines (Exhibit 2.4 above).²⁵

Infographic 2.2: Youth Employment Rates and Earnings After TLP Exit



²³ Averages for these results and other results based on survival analysis are computed as medians, the middle value for the sample, as they are less sensitive to a small number of youth having much longer durations of employment or enrollment relative to the rest of the sample.

²⁴ Among youth who left TLP, employment rates at exit were statistically significantly higher from those at their entry into TLP.

²⁵ These earnings are statistically different from average earnings among those employed during TLP. Most youth who left TLP by the end of the study period had only one or two quarters of data available, primarily from the second half of 2020. Their lower average employment rate after leaving TLP was statistically different than their average employment rate while in TLP.

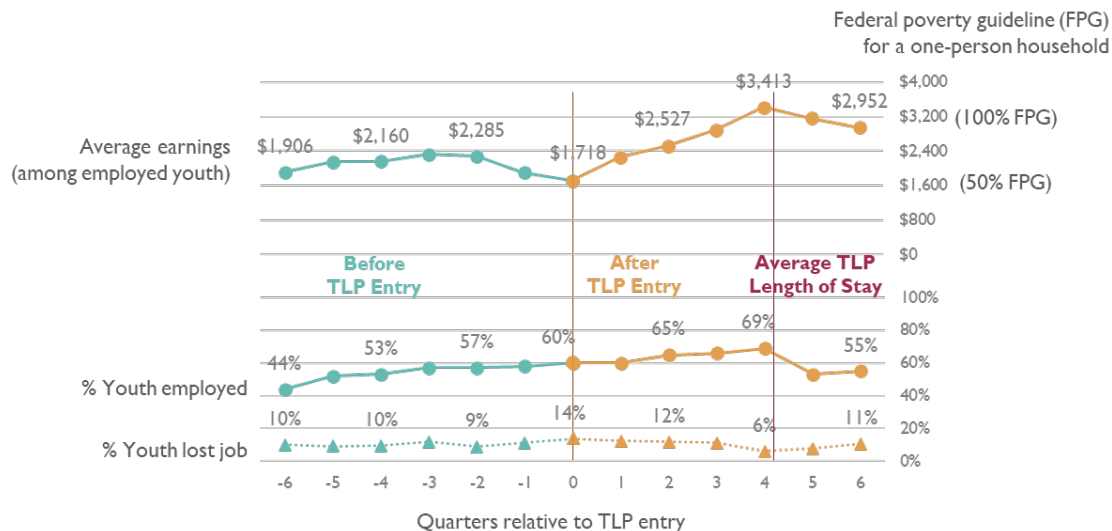
2.2.2 Employment and Earnings Trends

Youth employment trends remained relatively consistent before and after starting TLP (Exhibit 2.5 below). Youth employment rates increased in the six quarters prior to entering TLP, according to NDNH data. Rates continued increasing consistently for the first four quarters after youth started TLP, which is roughly consistent with the average time they participated in the program (9 months). Such growth may reflect the support and services programs provided to youth to help them find and maintain employment. However, employment rates began to drop the following two quarters as many youth left TLP.²⁶ Most youth who left TLP did so during the pandemic, so the pandemic may have affected their ability to maintain employment.

The pattern for average earnings among employed study youth followed a slightly different trend than the employment pattern. The NDNH data revealed that youth average earnings varied in the six quarters before they entered TLP, initially increasing and then decreasing right before TLP entry. Earnings began increasing during the four quarters after youth started TLP, and then fell in the subsequent two quarters as youth left TLP, coinciding with a drop in employment rates.²⁷

Although study youth employment rates were relatively consistent, the data do not capture the trade-offs youth considered regarding their health and employment. In interviews, study youth described the decisions they contemplated; some youth may have preferred to leave their job for health or safety reasons but believed they could not do so for economic reasons.

Exhibit 2.5: Youth quarterly employment rates rose steadily before and during TLP while trends in quarterly earnings varied.



Note: $n = 331$ for % youth employed and lost job. Earnings is among those employed in the quarter; number of study youth for earnings vary by quarter, equaling $331 \times$ percentage employed in quarter. Results after TLP entry reflect both study youth still in TLP and those who had exited because of data limitations. See Technical Appendix Exhibit B3.3 for the number of study youth who had exited by quarter after TLP entry and averages by quarter after TLP exit for youth who had exited TLP. Federal poverty guidelines based on 2020 annual guidelines divided by four.

Sources: National Directory of New Hires, 2018Q4-2020Q4; TLP Program Data (YIF); 2020 Federal Poverty Guidelines.

²⁶ There are too few quarters of data after youth exited TLP to conduct a statistical test of whether the trend after youth leave TLP is distinct from the trend during TLP. We use youth average time in TLP here as an approximation for understanding what may be happening after youth leave TLP, but results displayed in Exhibit 2.5 reflect a mixture of youth still in TLP and those having exited TLP. Technical Appendix Exhibit B3.3 provides means by quarter after TLP exit among those who have exited, for the limited data available.

²⁷ Similar earnings trends are observed when analyzing all study youth, counting those not employed in a quarter as earning \$0.

2.2.3 COVID-19 Experiences Related to Youth Jobs and Earnings

Before and throughout the pandemic, TLP youth **employment rates stayed relatively stable, despite sharp drops in youth employment nationally**. NDNH data indicate that 59 percent of study youth were employed in the third and fourth quarters of 2019 and 57 percent in the first quarter of 2020 (January-March). After the pandemic was declared in March 2020, 57 percent were employed in the second quarter (April-June), 58 percent in the third quarter, and 54 percent in the fourth quarter (see Technical Appendix Exhibit B3.1 for employment and average earnings by calendar time). This is in contrast to a sharp drop in youth employment nationally, from 50 percent in January-March 2020 to 39 percent in April-June 2020, before rising to 47 percent in July-September and 48 percent in October-December.²⁸

Despite relatively stable rates of study youth employment, the pandemic may have negatively affected youth earnings and employment stability. Average earnings among employed study youth fell by \$343 between the first and second quarters of 2020 (\$2,483 to \$2,140). Earnings rose in the remaining two quarters of 2020, such that earnings in the fourth quarter of 2020 were greater than the first quarter (\$2,622). Staff and youth described the difficulty youth faced in losing a job, searching for new work, and adjusting to social distancing protocols during the pandemic. Some youth reported losing their job temporarily, and more than a fifth of youth (22%) reported that their hours were reduced because of the pandemic. For example, one of the study participants interviewed reported that his job site closed for two weeks when the pandemic began. To follow social distancing guidelines, the site reopened with limited capacity, which resulted in his not being scheduled to work for an additional month.

Other youth lost their jobs permanently. At the time they joined the YOS, one-third (33%) of study participants reported on the BIF that they had lost a job because of the pandemic. More than 1 in 10 study participants (12%) had worked between January and March 2020 but were not employed at all between April and June 2020, according to NDNH data. The pandemic also may have affected the time it took youth to find new work. Multiple youth interviewed reported that their job search became more difficult once the pandemic started because many employers began closing.



Youth Voice: COVID-19 Experiences with Employment

Beyond the instability the pandemic may have created in employment, youth also reported that it caused additional stress and anxiety over their safety. Ruby* was working in a fast-food restaurant when the pandemic began. Although she kept her job, she felt stressed about her health. She explained that she refused to keep working the front counter because many customers did not wear masks. The restaurant was unable to require customers to do so, and there was no plastic divider separating employees from customers.

Shari* was also working at a restaurant when the pandemic started. At the time, she was living with people older than age 60, one of whom had underlying health conditions that made her more vulnerable to the virus. Shari's job closed temporarily at the beginning of the pandemic. When it reopened, Shari chose not to return out of fear of exposing the people with whom she was living to COVID-19.

*Names have been changed to preserve participants' anonymity.

2.3. Education Outcomes

TLPs provide a range of education-related supports and services to youth to help them reach their education goals. Some of those services are mandatory. Of the 30 grantees participating in the YOS, seven required youth to actively be enrolled in school and working toward an educational goal, such as their high school diploma, GED, or a vocational

²⁸ Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2021). (Unadj) Employment-Population Ratio – 16-24 yrs. (Series LNU02324887Q).

certificate. Eight grantees required youth to be actively working toward education *or* employment. Some grantees required youth to meet productivity hours, ranging from 30 to 40 hours per week dedicated to attending classes, completing homework assignments, or working. To help youth meet their education goals, some grantees had education specialists on staff who helped youth fill out financial aid forms, determine what courses to take, and navigate education systems. One program developed a partnership with a local university whereby a professor mentored youth in their program, giving them on-campus tours and talking with them about their education options. Several TLPs had computer rooms on site, which helped youth transition to all-virtual coursework during the pandemic.

This section includes youth BIF data, program staff YIF data, NSC administrative data that covers a 53-month period from January 2017 through May 2021 (about four and a half years), and insights from interviews with youth and program staff members.

2.3.1 Level of Educational Attainment and Enrollment Status Before, During, and After TLP

Overall, NSC data revealed **more than one-quarter (28%)** of study youth were enrolled in a postsecondary education program at some point between January 2017 and May 2021, including bachelor's degree, associate degree, or certificate programs. College enrollment rates were higher nationally, with about 40 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds enrolled across the same timeframe.²⁹ Of all study participants, 2 percent completed a credential, all of which were associate degrees or certificates. Fifteen percent of study youth enrolled in a program but withdrew from all courses at least once over this period. Enrollment rates varied by race, with youth of color having higher enrollment rates than white youth (33% versus 23% ever enrolled).

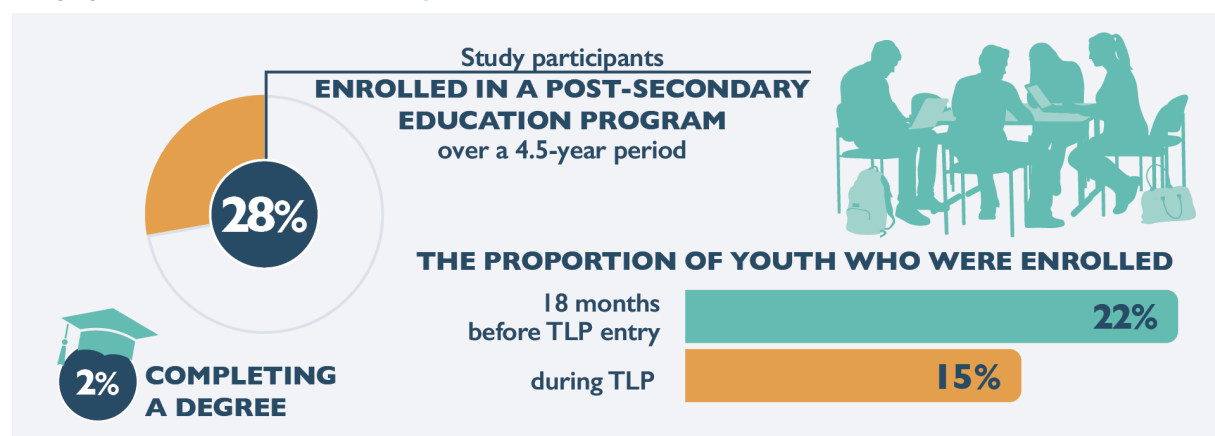
On average, study youth who enrolled in postsecondary education between January 2017 and May 2021 were **enrolled for roughly 12 months**. More than half of those enrolled (56%) pursued a bachelor's degree, and 39 percent pursued an associate degree or certificate.³⁰ Nearly three-quarters of study participants enrolled (72%) were ever enrolled in a two-year college, and 39 percent were ever enrolled in a four-year college or university. Nationally, among enrolled 18- to 24-year-olds, one-quarter of them were in two-year colleges and three-quarters were in four-year colleges over this time period.³¹ Of those enrolled, most study youth (90%) attended public colleges or universities, with few youth (10%) attending private or for-profit institutions. Youth took courses at one or two colleges or universities (average of 1.5).

²⁹ Exact rates were 40.4 percent in 2017, 40.9 percent in 2018, 40.7 percent in 2019. *Source:* Digest of Education Statistics, *Table 302.60: Percentage of 18- to 24-year-olds enrolled in college, by level of institution and sex and race/ethnicity of study: 1970 through 2019*. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d20/tables/dt20_302.60.asp?current=yes

³⁰ Percentages in this section do not add to 100 percent because youth could enroll in multiple institutions or degree programs over the study time period.

³¹ *Source:* Digest of Education Statistics, *Table 302.60: Percentage of 18- to 24-year-olds enrolled in college, by level of institution and sex and race/ethnicity of study: 1970 through 2019*. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d20/tables/dt20_302.60.asp?current=yes

Infographic 2.3: Youth Post-Secondary Education Enrollment



Before TLP: In the 18 months prior to entering TLP, roughly a fifth of study participants (22%) were enrolled in a postsecondary degree program.³² Among youth who enrolled during the 18-month timeframe before entering TLP, their level of engagement in education varied considerably after their first month enrolled. In an average month prior to TLP, some 23 percent of these youth were enrolled full-time, 17 percent half- or three-quarters time, 11 percent quarter-time or less, and 57 percent were not enrolled.

On the day they started TLP, 39 percent of study participants had less than a high school diploma, half (51%) had a high school diploma or GED, and roughly 1 in 10 (11%) had completed some college or a vocational certificate (Exhibit 2.6 below). According to BIF data, half of the study youth were not enrolled in an educational program on the day they started TLP because they already had completed their educational goal, such as obtaining their high school diploma, vocational certificate, or associate degree, according to staff-reported data.

During TLP: NSC data revealed that at some point during their TLP stay, 15 percent of all study participants were enrolled in a postsecondary program. On average, those who were ever enrolled in a program were enrolled for three to four months. Among these youth, some 17 percent were enrolled full-time, 10 percent half- or three-quarters time, 10 percent quarter-time or less, and 64 percent were not enrolled in an average month during their TLP stay. Youth who were already enrolled in a program when they started TLP (8%) remained continuously enrolled for an average of 12 months, even if their level of engagement changed during their stay.³³

Among those in postsecondary education programs during their time in TLP, NSC data shows that enrollment rates differed by various youth characteristics. Youth of Hispanic, Latinx, or Spanish origin had higher enrollment rates than other youth (18% versus 8%). Youth who were working when they started TLP had higher enrollment rates than those who were not working (16% versus 7%). Youth who had already completed some college or a vocational certificate (34%) had higher enrollment rates than those with a high school diploma or GED at entry (9%) or those who had not completed high school or a GED (5%).

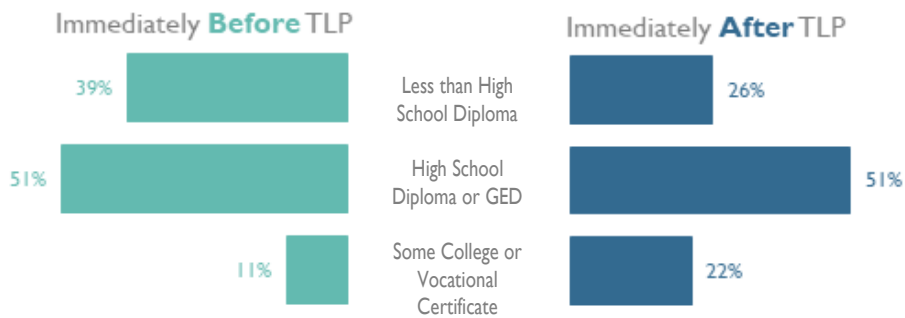
³² The Study Team selected an 18-month window to be comparable with the employment outcomes when analyzing average monthly postsecondary enrollment rates and trends. The percentage ever enrolled prior to TLP is the same whether data for all youth back to January 2017 is included or only the 18 months prior to TLP enrollment.

³³ This rate is from NSC administrative data and differs from the self-reported rate of 11 percent. Potential reasons for differences include our NSC analyses not counting youth as successfully enrolling if they withdrew or took a leave of absence for that time period, youth enrolling in a program not covered in NSC data, or invalid matching data being provided.

After TLP Exit: Among youth who left TLP by the end of the study period, the percentage of youth who had completed some college or a vocational certificate had risen to 22 percent, according to YIF data.³⁴ Only one-quarter of youth (26%) had less than a high school diploma, and half of youth (51%) had a high school diploma or GED (Exhibit 2.6). Of youth who left TLP, 17 percent were enrolled in a postsecondary program at exit.

Among study participants who left TLP, 7 percent ever enrolled in a postsecondary program after leaving TLP, according to NSC data. Those who were ever enrolled after leaving TLP had varying levels of engagement. In an average month after TLP exit, 15 percent of youth were enrolled full-time, 10 percent were enrolled half- or three-quarters time, 8 percent were enrolled quarter-time, and 67 percent were not enrolled.

Exhibit 2.6: The proportion of youth who had some college rose after participating in TLP.



Note: The sample for Immediately Before TLP includes all study participants ($n = 365$). The sample for Immediately After TLP includes only those study participants who had left TLP by the end of the study period ($n = 206$).

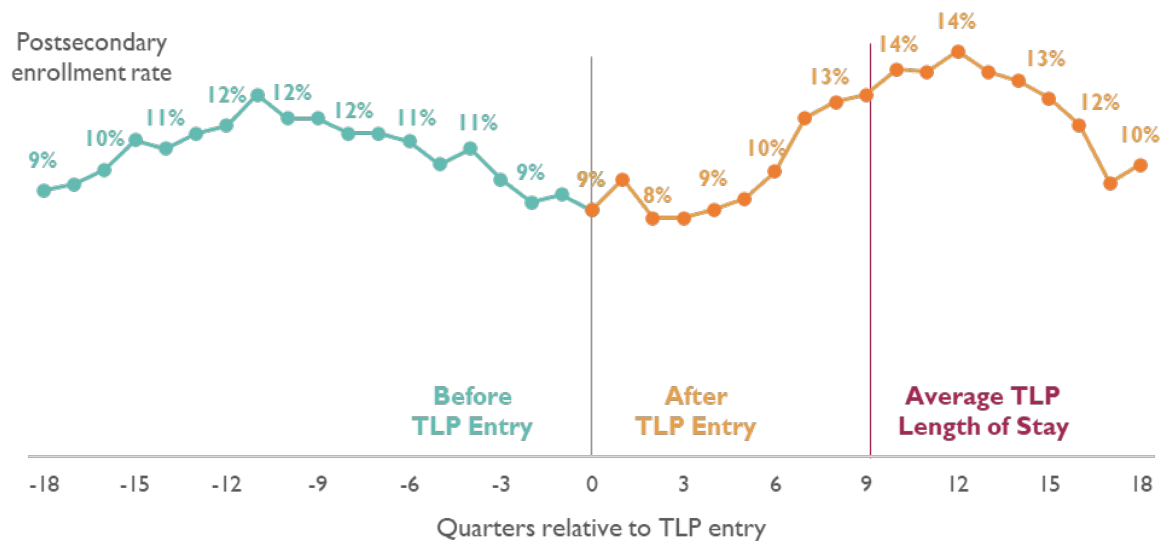
Source: Staff-reported program data in the Youth Information Form.

2.3.2 Education Trends

Youth postsecondary education trends varied before, during, and after they started TLP (Exhibit 2.7 below). Enrollment rates initially peaked at 12 percent, roughly nine months before youth started TLP. By the time youth entered TLP, enrollment rates had dropped by almost half (down to 9%). However, while youth were in TLP, enrollment rates slowly rose, peaking at 14 percent at twelve months after TLP entry, slightly longer than the amount of time youth spent in TLP on average (9 months). Rates then remained relatively consistent until the end of the study period, when there was another drop.

The increase in enrollment rates after youth entered TLP suggests that the education supports that programs provided through intensive case management and support services may have helped keep youth connected to educational programs, despite disruptions to educational programs and shifts to remote learning that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic.

³⁴ Among youth who had exited TLP during the study period, 13 percent had completed some college at study entry (versus 11% of all youth at study entry).

Exhibit 2.7: Youth postsecondary education enrollment rates before and after TLP entry

Note: n = 365 youth, with 6,556 total months observed before TLP entry, 4,786 months after TLP entry (monthly sample sizes available in Technical Appendix Exhibit B4.1).

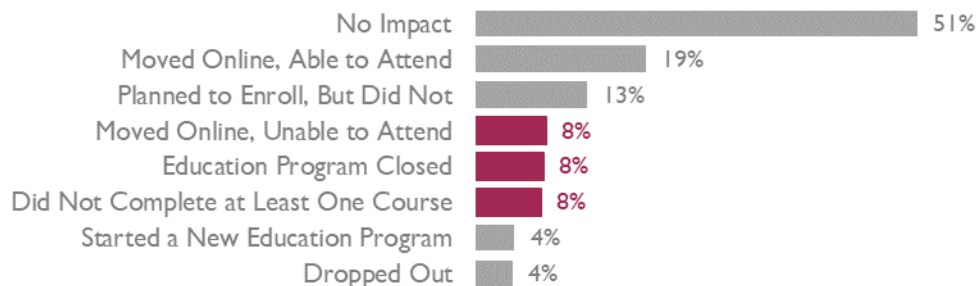
Sources: National Student Clearinghouse Student Tracker, Jan 2017 to May 2021. Staff-reported data on the Youth Information Form.

2.3.3 COVID-19 Experiences Related to Youth Education

Although the COVID-19 pandemic may have led to remote learning and other modifications for education programs across the country, roughly half of study youth (51%) reported in the BIF that the pandemic had no impact on their secondary or postsecondary education. Others, however, reported challenges. They reported that COVID-19 had interfered with their ability to complete their education programs in one or more ways (Exhibit 2.8 below):

1. Their education program closed (8%);
2. Their classes had moved online but they were unable to attend (8%); or
3. They were unable to finish a course (8%).

More than 1 in 10 youth (13%) reported that they planned to enroll in some sort of education program but did not do so because of the pandemic.

Exhibit 2.8: Some Youth Outcomes Study participants could not complete their classes because of COVID-19.

Note: Categories do not total 100 percent because study participants could select more than one response. n = 359 youth.

Source: Youth self-reported responses on the Background Information Form.

Some study participants recalled during interviews the various ways they believed the pandemic had affected their education. Some discussed how quickly their classes changed. One youth remembered Spring Break being extended for a few weeks and then classes going fully remote. Another youth described how difficult it would be to get her high school diploma. She was supposed to finish classes and get her diploma in 2020, but because of the pandemic and the difficulty she faced with remote learning as a pregnant parent, she was uncertain when she would be able to complete her course requirements. TLP staff noted similar difficulties for other pregnant and parenting youth trying to navigate their own remote learning with children in the home.

Staff and youth alike indicated that accessing the necessary technology in the shift from in-person to remote learning was not difficult. Many schools provided students laptops, and TLPs sometimes found funding to purchase computers for youth. The difficulty youth reported having was sitting in front of a computer screen for multiple hours at a time.



Youth Voice: COVID-19 Experiences Navigating Education

Before the pandemic began, Olivia* was working actively toward her goal of improving her grades by going in after class to meet with her teachers for additional support. When all of her classes moved to a virtual environment, she could no longer see her teachers in person. She expressed frustration around the difficulty of remote learning. She valued the in-person time with teachers; without it, she felt like she was not learning anything.

Erica* was lining up the necessary paperwork to start college classes. Because of the pandemic, however, her paperwork got stalled and she had to push her timeline back one semester. Justin* similarly tried to enroll in community college courses, but because of COVID-19-related delays, he was placed on a waitlist and had not been taken off of it by the time we spoke with him nearly a year later.

*Names have been changed to preserve participants' anonymity.

3. Conclusion

This section discusses key considerations from the TLP Youth Outcomes Study findings (Section 3.1) and outlines study limitations and the need for future research (Section 3.2).

3.1. Key Considerations

Housing Considerations: Findings suggest the housing-related supports programs provided to youth during their TLP stay may have helped prepare youth to find and maintain stable housing after TLP. More than half of the programs (16 of 30) required youth to pay “rent” while in TLP, returning the funds in full to youth when they left the program. This policy may provide practice budgeting for living expenses as well as a financial cushion to youth at exit, both of which could help youth maintain stable housing after leaving the program. Connection to housing assistance programs may have also contributed to stability, with one-quarter of youth receiving assistance after exiting TLP, primarily through rapid re-housing programs.

The federally mandated eviction moratorium during the COVID-19 pandemic may have provided additional housing stability for youth by preventing those who were unable to afford rent payments from losing their housing. This might have increased the proportion of youth remaining in permanent living situations after they left TLP. The pandemic led some youth to stay longer in TLP than intended, with youth reporting loss of income and an inability to save enough for housing as contributing factors. Some youth interviewed reported that racial unrest contributed to their decision to move out of TLP earlier than anticipated to relocate to a safer city.

Employment Considerations: NDNH data indicate that study participants maintained high rates of employment despite sharp national drops in youth employment rates during the early stages of the pandemic (April-June 2020). Even with most study youth staying in TLP during the pandemic, employment rates were higher during TLP stays than they were in the 18 months before youth entered TLP, which was mostly before the pandemic. Though the study cannot definitively attribute these gains to the TLP, youth, on average, appeared to be faring better in TLP than youth were nationally during this time.

Preliminary data on a subset of youth who left TLP indicate that employment rates were lower after youth left TLP than during their TLP stays. This pattern may reflect some combination of drop-off from youth no longer having the employment supports that were available to them during their TLP stays, youth primarily exiting TLP during the pandemic, and/or differences in the characteristics of youth who left TLP. The limited number of youth and follow-up data included in these analyses suggest that this finding should be interpreted with caution.

Insights from youth interviews suggest that youth considered their personal well-being and health as they navigated their economic needs during the pandemic. Some study participants reported tension between their need to remain employed and their fear over potential health risks for themselves or others close to them. Some youth said they would have preferred to leave their job for health or safety reasons but could not do so for economic reasons. Although NDNH data show study participants did not, on average, experience substantial economic declines, during the pandemic, these findings may not capture the trade-offs and difficulties some youth faced in remaining employed during the pandemic.

Earnings Considerations: Employment instability provides important context to earnings findings. For the 9 months the average study youth remained in TLP, average earnings among employed study youth rose from just above half of the federal poverty guideline to being above it. However, on average, 1 in 10 youth lost a job each quarter during their TLP stay and had no employment in the following quarter. When incorporating periods of unemployment, the average study youth's earnings rose from just one-third of the poverty guideline to two-thirds of the poverty guideline over this period. These findings suggest the average youth in TLP is able to find jobs during TLP that could bring their earnings above poverty levels, but persistent employment instability may be preventing youth from sustaining this level of earnings.

Use of administrative data is also an important consideration. Self-reported employment rates at program entry were somewhat higher than the employment rate in NDNH records in the quarter of TLP entry. NDNH captures only formal earnings reported to state unemployment agencies. Youth may have other informal sources of earnings or income from government assistance programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

The COVID-19 pandemic also may help explain the drop in earnings observed in the quarters immediately preceding TLP participation. More than one in five youth reported that their hours or earnings were reduced due to COVID-19. A substantial proportion of study youth entered TLP between April and December 2020, which could help explain the coinciding drop in earnings in the period immediately preceding TLP entry. Other considerations might include housing instability immediately preceding TLP entry as also potentially affecting employment stability.

Education Considerations: About half of youth reported they had completed their current educational goals when they had entered TLP, which provides important context for findings on overall enrollment rates. Educational goals may have been a lower priority for some youth relative to other areas targeted by TLPs. Youth who were attempting to pursue educational goals also reported administrative challenges to enrollment, such as colleges closing during the pandemic or lacking staff capacity to process applications. Enrollment rates were higher among youth employed at TLP entry, and both employment rates and enrollment rates rose over the course of their TLP stays. These findings could suggest that lower enrollment rates during TLP were not due to youth substituting employment for educational goals.

That few youth completed postsecondary degrees may reflect both uneven progress toward degree completion and a need for a longer follow-up period. More than half of youth who ever enrolled in a postsecondary institution withdrew from all courses at least once. Less than a quarter were enrolled full-time in an average month; and enrollment intensity was lower during their time in TLP than prior to TLP. There was some evidence to suggest the pandemic influenced enrollment rates and intensity. More than 1 in 10 youth reported forgoing enrollment, and some 4 percent dropped out entirely due to the pandemic. About 1 in 10 youth reported pandemic-related disruptions to their education programs. Despite a four-year observation period, the majority of students enrolled in bachelor's degree programs, which require a longer follow-up period relative to associate and vocational certificate programs. Longer-term follow-up could help identify the extent to which findings from this study reflect a longer time to degree completion or may indicate higher risk for youth starting but not completing postsecondary programs.

Despite these challenges, average postsecondary enrollment rates also steadily increased during TLP participation, whereas they had been declining prior to TLP entry. This could potentially reflect additional education supports provided by TLPs. Almost 20 percent of youth reported their classes had moved online, yet they were still able to attend them.

3.2. *Limitations and Need for Further Evaluation*

Outcomes among youth who exited TLP must be interpreted with caution due to three limitations associated with the YOS data collection period:

1. Only half of study participants (56%) had left TLP by the end of data collection period;
2. The average study follow-up period was short (three to six months); and
3. More than three-quarters of study youth stayed in TLP during the COVID-19 pandemic. Of youth who left TLP during the study period, most did so during the pandemic.

The short observation period for youth who left TLP meant there was limited data for identifying trends in youth outcomes after they left TLP or for assessing whether changes over time after leaving TLP differed from changes during their TLP participation. Additionally, the YOS explored youth outcomes, but absent a control or comparison group, the study cannot directly attribute changes in youth outcomes directly to TLP. This report provides national benchmarks for youth for comparison, but producing more rigorous evidence of the effect of TLP services would require comparisons to a similar group of youth who did not enter TLP during the same time period.

More evidence is needed to understand to what degree TLPs successfully help youth move toward self-sufficiency by supporting them in achieving both stable housing and strong connections to employment and education, particularly around tracking outcomes after youth leave TLP. Options for gathering more evidence on the outcomes of TLP participants include:

- **Extend follow-up of YOS study participants.** Extending the length of the data collection period after study youth leave TLP would provide more data points for trends after TLP exit and would help indicate whether changes over time differed from the trends observed during TLP participation.
- **Conduct a similar study once the COVID-19 pandemic ends.** TLP program staff and study youth explained that several of the events of 2020 and 2021 may have affected their experiences and mental health. The YOS occurred during a global pandemic. There was also significant federal investment to support individuals affected by the pandemic, such as increased Unemployment Insurance benefits and additional supports funded through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. It is unclear whether the outcomes explored in the YOS represent broader trends or are specific to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Reproducing the study after the effects of the pandemic have subsided would provide additional detail and clarity on youth outcomes.
- **Conduct a more rigorous study.** One option is to design a matched comparison study that compares outcomes of TLP participant youth with outcomes of demonstrably similar youth who are eligible to participate in TLP but do not. A second option is to conduct a randomized control trial (RCT), which would randomly assign eligible youth to either participate in TLP (treatment group) or not (control group) and then compare their outcomes. An RCT is capable of attributing changes in outcomes to the TLP program; however, conducting an RCT with the TLP population and program model presents multiple challenges. Members of the Study Team piloted an RCT of the TLP in 2017. To read about the study design, associated challenges, and recommendations for future studies, see *Transitional Living Program Pilot Test of a Randomized Controlled Trial: November 2016 to August 2017* (OPRE Report # 2021-168).

References

- Brown, Scott, Tanya de Sousa, Anna Mahathey, Karen Loya, Jessica Thornton Walker, and Alisa Santucci (2021). Findings from the Transitional Living Program Youth Outcomes Study: Technical Appendix, OPRE Report # 2021-191, Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- MacAllum, C., Kerttula, M. A., & Quinn, E. (1997). *Evaluation of the Transitional Living Program for Homeless Youth*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- Skemer, M., & Valentine, E. J. (2016). *Striving for independence: Two-year impact findings from the Youth Villages Transitional Living Evaluation*. MDRC. https://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/YV_2016_FR.pdf
- Valentine, E. J., Skemer, M., & Courtney, M. E. (2015). *Becoming adults: One-year impact findings from the Youth Villages Transitional Living Evaluation*. MDRC. https://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/Becoming_Adults_FR.pdf