

HEY Statistics: Measuring Foster Youth Unemployment

Gathering Foster Youth Unemployment Data to Better Advocate for Programs, Policy & Services

HEY Needs Your Support: Help us Measure the Impact of the Current Economy on Former Foster Youth

HEY recommends that programs collect employment data about current and former foster youth. Below is a list of questions that would assist the foster care community to make a case for additional funding for employment programs and opportunities for foster youth.

Ask each youth at entry and exit to your program:

- *Are you a current or former foster youth?*
- *If yes, were you in the system until you were emancipated, or aged out at or near 18 years old?*
- *How long have you been seeking employment?*
- *Have you utilized services to prepare for or get a job?*
- *Have you been unemployed? How long?*
- *What do you need to get a job?*
- *What barriers have you experienced in getting a job?*

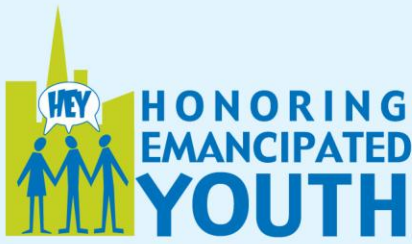
The current recession has adversely affected San Francisco foster youth. All youth experience difficulty finding employment as competition for jobs increase; foster youth experience additional barriers such as trauma, poverty and other factors. In the spring of 2009, HEY began to research how the recession was affecting Bay Area foster youth who were transitioning out of care, and those who had recently transitioned from care. This information was especially difficult to find.

- In late 2008, the official national count of unemployed teens aged 16-19 was 22.1%. Including “hidden unemployed and under-employed” rates, the true unemployment rate for teens was 38.2%.¹

Youth Often Fall Into the “Hidden Unemployed and Under-employed” Category

Traditional counting methods pose problems because of the unique characteristics of young workers. The United States measures unemployment rates based on those eligible for unemployment insurance, but this method often overlooks youth.

- Youth have unique summer employment patterns that make it difficult to measure their unemployment rates.
- Youth are not counted as officially unemployed if they have not yet been employed but are looking for work.
- Youth are not being counted if they do not meet the eligibility requirements for unemployment because those with limited or only part time employment are ineligible.
- Many youth are uninformed about government services, and do not even apply for benefits; therefore are not counted as unemployed.
- The tight employment market is having a harsh impact not only on those looking for permanent, full-time employment, but on students and other youth seeking summer-time or short-term employment. It has recently been reported that it was harder to find jobs in summer 2008 than at any other time since the 1940s.¹
- July is the traditional summertime peak for youth employment. In July 2008, the national youth unemployment rate was 14.0%, the highest rate for July in 16 years.²
- From 2000-2008 the percentage of youth ages 16-19 employed during the summer months of June-August declined from 51.7% to 37.8%.³



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What are HEY Statistics?

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

What is HEY?

- Honoring Emancipated Youth (HEY), a community project of United Way of the Bay Area, is dedicated to strengthening and connecting San Francisco's systems of support so that Bay Area youth emancipating, or "aging out" of the foster care system can enjoy a healthy transition to adulthood.

HEY's core work includes:

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

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

Measuring Emancipated Foster Youth Unemployment Is Especially Difficult

When trying to capture foster youth employment patterns, researchers have to balance the issues of youth employment as well as barriers specific to foster youth.

- The US Bureau of Labor can disaggregate unemployment statistics by age for national rates, but their website does not allow age as a variable for states and metropolitan areas. Also, current or former foster youth is not an accessible variable.
- California utilizes a content management system to track foster youth data, but employment status is currently not tracked.
- Some non-profit or government employment programs track client numbers and outcomes, but often do not identify foster youth as a category.
- Sometimes youth do not report or identify as foster youth and are therefore not counted.
- Some organizations track the employment status of foster youth involved in their programs, but those youth represent various counties and ages, and are only a portion of the entire population.
- Once youth emancipate from care, neither California, nor San Francisco have reliable methods for following and tracking former foster youth.

The foster care community can only provide support for emancipated foster youth when we are prepared. HEY has been unable to fully track specific employment needs of former foster youth in the Bay Area. There are many entities that track foster youth data, but many aren't tracking foster youth unemployment rates in the current recession.

Works Cited

¹ Nichols, Mary, Teaching a Man to Fish: How to Solve Youth Unemployment in the U.S., Citizen Economists, November 6, 2008.

² US Department of Labor; Bureau of Labor Statistics. Economic Issue Brief: Employment and Unemployment Among Youth Summary, August 28, 2008. <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/youth.nro.htm>

³ The Collapse of the Nation's Labor Market for Teens and Young Adults (20-24): Designing A Set of Workforce Development Strategies to Improve the Immediate and Long-Term Employment Prospects of the Nation's Youth Andrew Sum enter for Labor Market Studies, Northeastern University, Boston, Massachusetts, May 2009.