

# Youth in Transition

A Community Initiative in Forsyth County, North Carolina



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## Executive Summary

The Youth in Transition Initiative is designed to help young people make a successful transition to adulthood through direct support and systems improvement. Using a holistic approach, it seeks to improve youth outcomes in seven goal areas: housing, education, employment and income, health and wellness, permanence, social capital, and income management. The seeds for YIT were sown in 2008, when the Director of the Forsyth County Department of Social Services approached the Winston Salem Foundation to establish a work group and develop a community plan to ensure that all young people in Forsyth County leaving foster care make a successful transition to adulthood.

That task force was convened in January 2009. Through a series of meetings and retreats, a community initiative—Youth in Transition: A Community Initiative in Forsyth County—was established in 2010. Goodwill Industries of Northwest North Carolina was named as the lead agency. The Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust and The Duke Endowment provided substantial funding. The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative has provided technical support. YIT began hiring staff in 2011, and activities and services for youth began the following year.



YIT is open to youth ages 14 to 25 who were in public foster care at age 14 or later and now live in Forsyth County. Youth must complete an orientation and demonstrate progress toward goals established jointly by the youth and YIT staff in order to be eligible for certain goods and services, such as more intensive staff support and monthly bus passes. Those who lose contact or fail to follow through on goals will be eligible for basic case management but must successfully reengage in order to requalify for enhanced services.

Most youth are referred by DSS, but youth may self-refer or be referred by a cooperating agency. The activities and services provided through YIT include financial literacy training; the Opportunity Passport Participant Survey (OPPS); matching funds for an array of approved purposes including housing, transportation, education, medical expenses, and paying off debt in order to raise a credit rating; Jim Casey Initiative activities; participation on the Leading Youth for Empowerment (LYFE)

board; assessment; housing support; employment support; educational support; mentors and support from local churches; and group and individual counseling.

Like many young organizations, YIT has undergone a number of significant changes as it has worked to find a place in the community and find the best way to serve its population. YIT's original vision was to connect youth to existing providers and services. The idea was that youth would enter YIT and, with limited direction and coaching from a YIT youth advisor (a cross between a coach and a case manager), be ready to enter college or maintain steady employment, maintain housing, manage their money and (with assistance) invest in assets—all the hallmarks of a successful transition to adulthood.

In reality, many YIT participants needed far more assistance than expected. A significant number of participants experienced crises, such as criminal arrest, imminent eviction, and intimate partner violence, which required immediate and prolonged assistance from staff. Others were steadier on their feet but simply not ready or able to take the steps needed to move toward independence.

This greater need for assistance existed for at least two reasons. First, youth in other Jim Casey Initiative programs (which served as a model for YIT) are typically far younger than those in YIT. Most participants in other Jim Casey Initiative programs are still in foster care and thus still have access to comprehensive support from DSS and foster parents. In contrast, nearly all YIT participants have left foster care and more than half are 21 or older, rendering them ineligible for LINKS funding and most

educational vouchers. They have no safety net. A second, related reason is that because most current YIT participants left foster care and LINKS before YIT started, they were without a safety net for a long time. During that time, many struggled and, under duress, made choices that had steep and lasting consequences.

When YIT began providing services in 2011, entry was available to all who had been in public foster care in Forsyth County at age 13 or later. Demand for program entry was immediate and overwhelming, and soon outstripped YIT staff capacity. In 2012, entry was limited to those who completed a multi-session financial literacy class and subsequently completed a baseline survey administered by the Jim Casey Initiative. Completion of this survey, the Opportunity Passport Participant Survey or OPPS, qualifies youth for a number of benefits and services, including access to a matching grant program.

In November 2013, program membership was expanded to those who attended an orientation and demonstrated a commitment to the program. As before, only youth who complete the financial literacy class become eligible for matching funds, but all youth who complete orientation are eligible for other services and activities, including mentoring, referrals, and participation on the LYFE Board.

In late 2014, YIT began offering more intensive services to participants expressing interest. Youth may elect to participate in Future Planning, a manualized process in which they, with the help of an adult, write out or draw pictures of their values, dreams, and fears.

YIT has had 79 total participants since inception; 60 of these were enrolled as of June 30, 2015. The typical participant is an African American female age 22 or older.

Youth outcomes were measured using four tools: in-depth interviews with participants; the Opportunity Passport Participant Survey (OPPS), a semi-annual computer-based survey of youth; the Self-Sufficiency Survey, a semi-annual tool completed by YIT staff; and state employment records of YIT participants and similar youth from Forsyth County and four other comparison counties.



## Key Findings

- A substantially higher percentage of YIT participants had jobs compared with other current or former foster youth from Forsyth County as well as current or former foster youth from four other comparison counties between January 2013 and March 2015
- The median wage for YIT participants has been increasing and has been consistent with the earnings of comparison groups of current and former foster youth from Forsyth and other comparison counties
- More than two out of three YIT participants interviewed said they were currently employed. Their median longevity in their current job was 8 months
- Only a small number of YIT participants have never had a job
- Almost all of the participants interviewed reported having an adult they could always rely on
- The outcomes for YIT participants improve the longer the youth remain in the program
- The longer a youth participates in YIT, the more likely he or she is to have received a high school diploma or received a GED
- Almost half of the YIT participants interviewed reported that they had one or more years of post-secondary education, an associate's degree, or higher
- Housing stability increases the longer a youth participates in YIT
- Self-Sufficiency Surveys show that YIT participants show improvement in housing, education, employment and income, wellness, permanence, social capital, and income management over time
- Even though many YIT participants do not have a valid driver's license, access to transportation is not a problem

- Most YIT participants have a bank account
- Close to two-thirds of the youth interviewed reported they had received food stamps
- The average hourly wage for YIT participants who were employed is \$8.50
- Three out of four of the youth interviewed said they had enough money to cover expenses last month
- 49% of the youth had health insurance
- Almost two out of five YIT participants interviewed reported having birthed or fathered children

## Introduction

Youth aging out of foster care face numerous challenges, and upon leaving foster care they often have poor outcomes. Former foster youth, when compared to the national average, are far less likely to go to or complete college, own a home, or have steady employment, and are far more likely to be involved with the criminal justice system, suffer from mental illness, or be homeless.

Recent legislation has attempted to address these longstanding problems. Recognizing these problems, the federal government has passed several significant pieces of legislation to help foster youth. The 1997 Adoption and Safe Families Act aimed to move children in foster care more quickly to permanent homes by shortening the time frame for a child's first permanency hearing, offering financial incentives to increase adoptions, and setting new requirements for states to petition to terminate parental rights. The 1999 Foster Care Independence Act revised funding to states and expanded opportunities for independent living programs providing education, training, and employment services, and financial support for foster youth to prepare for living on their own, and allowed funds to be used to pay for room and board for former foster youth age 18 to 21. The 2008 Fostering Connections Act allowed states to provide foster care supports and services to young people up to age 21, increased federal reimbursement and expanded allowable costs for independent living training, and improved oversight of educational progress and health care needs of children while in care. Most recently, Foster Care Family Act, which went into effect in North Carolina in October 2015, will provide liability insurance for foster parents, reduce barriers to obtaining a driver's license for foster children, make it easier for foster children go on overnight field trips and participate in other activities common among their same-age peers, and require county social services departments to work diligently to find foster children permanent placement with either a parent, relative, guardianship or adoptive placement if at all possible.

Despite these policy changes, problems persist. The numbers are startling. According to data from the Midwest Study<sup>1</sup> conducted by the Chapin Hall policy center at the University of Chicago, nearly 60% of youth who aged out of foster care at 18 had been convicted of a crime by age 23 or 24, and 80% had been arrested. Nearly 25% had experienced homelessness. Only 6% had a degree from a two- or four-year college or university. Less than half were employed.

### Lack of Established Service Model

No government or university has come up with a proven, effective service model to assist youth aging out of foster care with the transition to adulthood. In North Carolina, teens in foster care are invited to take part in the LINKS independent living programs run by the department of social services (DSS) in the county where they live. These programs vary widely but typically include monthly gatherings for teens featuring dinner followed by a class or field trip as well as case management from a LINKS social worker. While these programs provide critical opportunities for skill development and a good social outlet, most foster youth need more. Also, youth age out of LINKS when they turn 21.

<sup>1</sup> Courtney, M.E., Dworsky, A., Lee, J.S., and Rapp, M. (2010). Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at ages 23 and 24. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children. Retrieved from [https://www.chapinhall.org/sites/default/files/Midwest\\_Study\\_Age\\_23\\_24.pdf](https://www.chapinhall.org/sites/default/files/Midwest_Study_Age_23_24.pdf)

Forsyth County, North Carolina, a metropolitan county (population: 358,137 in 2012) in the populous central region of the state, had an active LINKS program but was continuing to see poor outcomes among their former foster youth. The county has relatively few foster youth, far less per capita than most North Carolina counties, and only a dozen or two age out per year. Given this relatively small number of youth, certainly a resource-rich county like Forsyth could wrap its arms around these young people and help them successfully launch into adulthood. It was this thinking that led to the creation of the Youth in Transition initiative (YIT).

YIT works to help young people make a successful transition to adulthood through direct support and systems improvement. Using a holistic approach, it seeks to improve youth outcomes in seven goal areas: education, employment, housing, health and wellness, financial capability, social capital, and building permanent connections.

## YIT: A Public-Private Partnership

The seeds for YIT were germinated in 2008, when [Forsyth DSS](#) Director Joe Raymond and others asked [The Winston-Salem Foundation](#), a respected community convener, to establish a work group and develop a community plan to ensure that all young people in Forsyth County leaving foster care make a successful transition to adulthood. That task force was convened in January 2009. Through a series of meetings and retreats, a community initiative—Youth in Transition: A Community Initiative in Forsyth County—was established in 2010. [Goodwill Industries of Northwest North Carolina](#) was named as the lead agency, and the [Kate B Reynolds Charitable Trust](#) and [The Duke Endowment](#) provided substantial funding. (Duke Endowment provided additional funding in 2015.) Technical support has been provided by the [Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative](#),<sup>2</sup> a national foundation that supports programs for youth transitioning out of foster care.<sup>3</sup> [Youth representation](#) is a core principle of the Jim Casey Initiative, and YIT has incorporated that value by ensuring that current and/or former foster youth are included in all phases of the project. Three youth sat on the task force that established YIT, and youth continue to sit on the Community Partnership Board and its subcommittees. Youth also lead the LYFE Board (Leading Youth for Empowerment), an advocacy board that helps shape YIT's goals and direction.

YIT began hiring staff in 2011, and activities and services for youth began the following year.

## Entry Criteria and Referrals

YIT is open to youth ages 14 to 25 who were in public foster care at age 14 or later and now live in Forsyth County. Youth must complete an orientation and demonstrate progress toward goals established jointly by the youth and YIT staff in order to be eligible for certain goods and services, such as more intensive staff support and monthly bus passes. Those who lose contact or fail to follow through on goals will be eligible

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<sup>2</sup> YIT is one of 17 sites currently receiving funding and/or technical assistance from the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiatives. Other sites are in Arizona, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, Iowa, Maine, Michigan, Mississippi, Nebraska, New Mexico, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Tennessee. Most of these programs are local or regional (i.e., not statewide) and centered on policy improvement such as extending foster care to age 21, extending Medicaid access to age 21, and providing tuition waivers for post-secondary education. All sites do direct work with youth through the Opportunity Passport program, which provides matched savings and financial education.

While YIT shares much in common with the other Jim Casey Initiative sites, there are significant differences. In general, other Jim Casey Initiative programs do not offer the comprehensive hands-on services that YIT provides. Too, participants in other states are generally younger when they begin the program. Finally, early Jim Casey Initiative programs (i.e., those started before 2011) received startup and/or ongoing funding from the Initiative, while YIT and other more recent programs did not.

<sup>3</sup> Detailed descriptions of YIT's other community partners may be found in a 2014 [report](#) from the [Jordan Institute for Families](#) at the [University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Social Work](#).

for basic case management but must successfully reengage in order to requalify for enhanced services. Most youth are referred by DSS, but youth may self-refer or be referred by a cooperating agency.

## Activities and Services

Participants are eligible for a wide variety of activities and services, including:

- Financial literacy class. Youth receive<sup>4</sup> an 8- to 10-week financial literacy class taught by an experienced financial educator from partner agency Financial Pathways of the Piedmont. The curriculum, titled “Keys to Your Financial Future,” was designed by the Jim Casey Initiative and specifically targets youth with foster care experience. Revised and expanded in July 2013, it contains three modules covering basic financial concepts—asset-building, credit, and money management—plus additional modules about housing, transportation, education and training, and saving and investing. The comprehensive curriculum includes a 368-page student manual. The class generally meets one evening per week for two hours at Goodwill, although condensed sessions have been held in summer. It consists of lecture and hands-on activities, including group and computer-based work.

Youth receive \$240 for completing the financial literacy class.



- Opportunity Passport Participant Survey. Youth who have completed the financial literacy class are invited to take the Opportunity Passport Participant Survey, a 50-question, computer-based survey administered by the Jim Casey Initiative. The survey contains questions about the 7 Jim Casey Initiative outcome areas—education, employment, housing, physical and mental health, financial capability, social capital, and personal and community engagement—as well as government assistance and access to healthcare. Participants are encouraged to take follow-up surveys each April and October until they turn 26. Youth receive \$40 for each completed survey. The Jim Casey Initiative maintains a database containing OPPS data from all Jim Casey Initiative sites nationwide.
- Matching funds. Youth who have completed the financial literacy class and taken the baseline Opportunity Passport Participant Survey are eligible for matching funds<sup>5</sup> of up to \$3,000. Match funds may be used for approved purposes including housing, transportation, education, medical expenses, and paying off debt in order to raise a credit rating. Other types of expenses are reviewed on an individual basis. Applications must be approved by a youth advisor, and funds are sent directly to a landlord, car dealer, or educational institution.
- Jim Casey Initiative activities. As a Jim Casey Initiative site, selected YIT staff, participants, and Community Partnership Board members regularly attend national multi-day meetings, including an annual Convening in Florida and a Youth Leadership Institute in St. Louis. These meetings offer opportunities for networking, training, and development for youth and staff. This networking has led to other opportunities. For example, one YIT participant joined Jim Casey Initiative leaders to

<sup>4</sup> Until November 2013, youth who entered the program were immediately enrolled in a multi-week financial literacy class developed by the Jim Casey Initiative. Beginning in November 2013, youth may delay that class for several months but are still expected to take it within a year of program entry.

<sup>5</sup> Participant-contributed funds are matched on a 1:1 basis. However, youth may receive a higher match rate (1.5:1) on their first disbursement of match funds.

attend a briefing at the White House about issues affecting youth in foster care.

- LYFE Board. All participants were invited to join the LYFE Board (Leading Youth for Empowerment), a youth governing board that helps participants learn leadership skills and advocate for policy changes related to foster youth and foster care. Youth set the agenda for LYFE Board meetings and lead the meetings with occasional direction from a YIT staff member. LYFE Board members can sign up to be youth representatives on YIT committees and sub-committees. They also select topics and help organize workshops for YIT participants.

The LYFE Board has undergone a number of changes since its inception, its focus and activities changing with the needs of members. In 2012, the Board purchased a laptop, printer, and video camera for filming interviews to tell their story for advocacy purposes. In 2013, faced with a surplus of earmarked funding, the Board decided to create an emergency fund for distribution to YIT members with unanticipated expenses, and wrote a detailed policy and application process. That same year they worked with staff to organize evening workshops that included supper and were open to children. Topics include time management, dressing for success, and interviewing skills.

Youth received a stipend of \$10 per hour for attending LYFE Board meetings.

Since mid-2015, due to declining interest and decreased staff availability, the LYFE Board has stopped holding regular meetings. However, youth continue to take part in advocacy activities. For example, in June 2015, two youth made a presentation to members of the N.C. General Assembly in support of a foster care bill.

- Assessment. YIT has worked closely with DSS to develop tools to assess independent living skills, mental health, and career readiness and vocational interest.
  - Independent living. A key mission of YIT is to help youth prepare for successful adulthood. Former foster youth often face more challenges than their peers due to the instability they have faced and the frequent lack of a stable adult. Foster youth, particularly those who live in group settings, often lack the opportunity to learn life skills such as driving, cooking, budgeting, and housekeeping that are critical to independence. They may also fail to receive guidance and encouragement to apply for college or vocational training, seek appropriate medical care, and avoid high-risk behaviors and unplanned parenthood.

To address these gaps, Congress in 1999 passed the Foster Care Independence Act, which established block grants to help states build and conduct independent living programs for youth. North Carolina's foster care independent living program is called LINKS<sup>6</sup>. The LINKS programs serves all youth in foster care between ages 16 and 18 years; in many counties, including Forsyth, youth ages 13 to 15 are also served. LINKS also serves youth ages 18 to 21 who are participating in a Contractual Agreement for Residential Services (CARS)<sup>7</sup> agreement with their county DSS. It also serves youth who aged out of DSS foster care until they turn 21. Most counties, including Forsyth, hold monthly LINKS meetings that typically include a lecture or hands-on training about a specific life skill.

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<sup>6</sup> LINKS is not an acronym but is drawn from the purpose of the Chafee Act to build a network of connections with family, friends, mentors, the community, employment, and education. Information about LINKS is drawn from North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services [online manuals](#), specifically the Family Support and Child Welfare Section, 1201 – Child Placement Services.

<sup>7</sup> Counties have the option of offering CARS agreements (Contractual Agreements for Residential Care) to youth who age out of care or who were discharged and are now young adults. These agreements allow for state contribution to the cost of a licensed foster home while the youth continues his/her education. Information about CARS is drawn from North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services [online manuals](#), specifically the Family Support and Child Welfare Section, 1201 – Child Placement Services.

DSS has long conducted assessments of youth's skills beginning at age 16 and created individualized transitional living plans for youth aging out. To bolster these efforts, YIT purchased a specialized life skills assessment tool, the Daniel Memorial Independent Living Skills Assessment, for use with all youth entering the program. This 1- to 3-hour computer-based assessment allows youth and their social workers learn strengths and gaps in youth's skills and knowledge so they can prioritize learning. YIT shared the tool with DSS, who now assesses all youth who enter care beginning at age 13.

- Mental health. Foster youth are at elevated risk for depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and other conditions. At the same time, many foster youth do not seek mental health treatment, either due to barriers such as cost and transportation or because of stigma associated with mental illness and mental health care. To address this problem, YIT had formed a workgroup of community partners to create or adapt an assessment tool to gauge the mental health of foster youth. YIT participants. The tool would be used by YIT as well as DSS: YIT would assess participants soon after entry, and DSS would assess youth when they enter foster care and periodically thereafter.  
The status of this instrument development is unknown.
- Career readiness and vocational interests. YIT long ago identified the need to assess participants to determine career readiness and identify vocational interests. These needs are being met through Futures Planning, described later in this report.
- Housing support. YIT participants who lack housing receive help on a case-by-case basis. While a few participants have received housing and/or assistance, designated housing is not yet available on a large scale. To address this important gap, YIT created a housing assistance fund in early 2015. Participants can receive up to \$300 per year for emergency housing needs. In addition, participants may use match funds for selected housing-related expenses, such as deposits and move-in costs.

YIT staff are working to piece together resources and write policies regarding service



provision. In the interim, a small network of community members has stepped up to help out. For example, a downtown church gave YIT free use of a one bedroom missionary cottage on church property. A local property management company accepts referrals of YIT participants who might otherwise be turned down for housing.

Former foster youth may be eligible for Family Unification Program (FUP) vouchers. The federally funded vouchers are distributed by DSS, and housing is handled by the Housing Authority of Winston-Salem. The demand for vouchers far outstrips the need however, and most vouchers go to other targeted populations such as foster families and others in the child welfare system at risk of losing housing.

Housing opportunities will soon begin to increase, thanks to the opening of The Commons, a supportive housing complex 4 miles east of downtown Winston-Salem. Formerly a residential and business complex that housed an agricultural company, The Commons is being converted to housing for three target populations, including former foster youth. A YIT participant moved in in April 2015, and other units should open on a rolling basis beginning in 2016. Rent will be on a sliding scale, and while most youth are expected to stay for 12 to 18 months, there are no rules about maximum length of stay.

- Employment support. While there is no comprehensive network of employers who specifically recruit and hire YIT participants, YIT staff and committees have established relationships with a number of local businesses who are willing to employ current and former foster youth. A local landscaping service has signed on as an official YIT employment partner and hired at least one YIT participant. Other businesses have not established formal agreements but have informally agreed to grant interviews to YIT participants looking for jobs. In still other cases, YIT has been able to take advantage of existing community ties with DSS. For example, a local fast food franchisee has for years hired DSS foster youth. Now YIT can join that partnership.



YIT staff have also developed relationships with alternative employment programs such as [City of Winston-Salem YouthBuild](#), which provides education and training for youth who dropped out of high school; [Northwest](#)

[Piedmont Service Corps](#), a work experience and leadership program; and [Forsyth Futures](#), a nonprofit, community-led research and knowledge-sharing organization.

The YIT youth support specialist works closely with Goodwill to keep track of job openings and send youth a weekly email of job leads. In addition, The Commons supportive housing complex (described in the previous section) will have a workforce development specialist on site to create job training skills for residents and other YIT participants.

- Educational support. Educational success is a key target outcome for DSS and YIT. To that end, YIT is partnering with Wake Forest School of Medicine’s [Maya Angelou Center for Health Equity](#) to implement [Guide Right](#), a post-secondary success initiative for youth aging out of foster care that is funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Work began in December 2013. Guide Right is a “bridge program” to help prepare former foster youth entering college for the academic and social challenges they will face and explore college major and career options. It includes a mentoring component in which youth are paired with mentors, with whom they communicate weekly, usually online. It also features a Forsyth County-specific information tool to link youth and service providers to existing resources and navigate the college application process.

Other supports are also available for YIT participants, particularly those under age 21. Youth in NC DSS foster care on or after their 17th birthday, or who were adopted from NC DSS at or after age 16, can receive up to 4 years of federally funded Educational Training Vouchers (ETVs), each worth up to \$5,000, to apply toward college. In addition, youth who age out of NC DSS foster care, or who were adopted from NC DSS foster care at age 12 or later, are eligible for NC Reach, which pays for attendance at any of North Carolina’s public universities or community colleges. Also, youth in public foster care in Forsyth County at age 18 can sign a Contractual Agreement for Residential Services<sup>8</sup>, commonly known as a CARS agreement, which provides a foster home for youth enrolled in college or vocational school.

For YIT participants ineligible for DSS support, YIT currently provides limited assistance on a case-by-case basis, such as linking youth interested in college to a potential mentor at the local community college.

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<sup>8</sup> Counties are not required to offer CARS agreements. Forsyth County offers these agreements, as do most of North Carolina’s 100 counties.

- Mentors and support from local churches. In 2013, YIT attempted to launch a mentor program. Mentors were expected to meet with youth one hour per week for at least a year and serve as an encouraging, dependable, and consistent friend—as “resource brokers, not resource providers,” according to the mentor handbook developed by YIT staff. Mentors received specialized training and support and had to pass a background check and meet other requirements of Goodwill volunteers. By March 2014, 10 youth had been matched with mentors. However, the needs of youth were more intense than expected, and YIT did not have staff capacity to provide the high levels of support that mentors needed. As a result, the program has become largely inactive.

In 2015, YIT, in partnership with DSS and the local EACH (Empowering Adolescents with Christ’s Help) Foundation, created a program called “One Congregation, One Child.” As its name suggests, the program invites congregations to provide support and mentoring for a single YIT participant. As of November 2015, four local churches had joined, with others expressing interest.

- Group therapy and individual counseling. YIT has started two efforts that address mental health: one for women and one for men.

In early 2015, a YIT youth advisor developed and won funding support for a unique program for female YIT participants. The HEART Project (Healing and Empowering through Art Rejuvenation Therapy) was designed as a 20-session art therapy and support group led by a YIT youth advisor and a professional psychotherapist. Besides supporting and empowering members, project goals include strengthening interpersonal skills by building strong bonds among members, and raising community awareness of foster youth. Sessions include working with guest artists and regular outings to community arts venues to do hands-on activities. Partners have included a glassblowing studio, a local art school, and a drumming group. The first group of participants started in February 2015 and will graduate in December 2015. Funding has been secured for a second group in 2016.

A men’s group focused on “Getting More Control” was planned in 2014; it was to be offered by a psychologist at Wake Forest School of Medicine’s [Maya Angelou Center for Health Equity](#) in cooperation with a Christian counseling provider. After the group failed to get off the ground due to lack of interest, the psychologist began offering free individual counseling to interested male YIT participants.

## Community Partnership Board

YIT is led by a Community Partnership Board consisting of a mix of direct stakeholders—funding partners and DSS—as well as individuals from the greater community, including experts on housing, mental health, and public relations, as well as representatives from the Chamber of Commerce and the United Way. This “working board” meets every other month for 90 minutes. Meetings are carefully designed to maximize meaningful discussion and decision-making and make optimal use of board members’ expertise. The board has also created official bylaws, and executive director “compact,” and annual work plans.

The current makeup and functioning of the board was established in early 2014. Prior to that, the board had been composed almost entirely of direct stakeholders, including a large number of DSS administrators and staff. Meetings were more frequent (monthly) but shorter (60 minutes), more informal, and less in-depth.

## Funding

Unlike most other programs built on the Jim Casey Initiative model, YIT receives no funding from Jim Casey, only technical assistance. Instead, funding is provided by grants. Seed funding (in 2011) was

provided by The Duke Endowment, which provided funding to cover two years of program costs, and the Kate B Reynolds Charitable Trust, which provided funding to cover three years of matching grants for youth in YIT with individual development accounts. Goodwill Industries of Northwest North Carolina is the lead agency; as such, it provides office space and other in-kind support.

Seed funding will run out in early 2016. Subsequent support will come from The Duke Endowment, Goodwill, and a donor-designated gift through the Kate B Reynolds Charitable Trust. In addition, an individual donor will supply funding to cover expenses for a specific program.

## Relationship with DSS

Forsyth County DSS and YIT have similar missions when it comes to their work with youth who are or were in foster care: improving outcomes and helping them become healthy, independent adults. Nearly all YIT participants were or are in public foster care through DSS, and most participants come to YIT following a referral from DSS. Many YIT participants under age 21 are being served by both organizations. Given their similar missions and sometimes overlapping services, it is not surprising in the first few years of YIT, the two organizations struggled to identify each other's role in the lives of the youth. Differences in organizational culture and staff members' training background also led to tension, as did conflicting policies and understandings about communication and information sharing. These tensions were magnified because DSS leaders and staff served such a large role in YIT during its early years: YIT was the brainchild of the former DSS director, who sat on the Community Partnership Board, and DSS administrators, supervisors, and frontline staff sat on all YIT committees.



These tensions have largely resolved, thanks to conflict resolution efforts on both sides as well as active and intentional communication. Also vital have been cooperative efforts by staff in both organizations. For example, a newly hired coordinator for the LINKS program (which teaches independent living and other skills to current and former foster youth from age 13 to their 21st birthday) has agreed to partner with YIT's youth leadership board. A DSS staff member is also playing an advisory role in a YIT art therapy group for young women. Finally, staffing changes at DSS have played a role in reducing tension: a long-vacant division director position was filled in 2014, greatly increasing capacity in the child welfare division, and turnover among administrative, supervisory, and frontline staff has led to increased cooperation and collaboration with YIT.

Since summer 2015, YIT and DSS have held regular monthly meetings to discuss the cases of YIT participants who are also receiving services from DSS.

## Changes and Transitions

Like many young organizations, YIT has undergone a number of significant changes as it has worked to find a place in the community and find the best way to serve its population.

**From community partnership/liaison to service provider.** YIT's original vision was to connect youth to existing providers and services. (Other facets included policy advocacy and making changes at DSS that would, over time, strengthen systems and thereby protect current foster children and youth who eventually would age out.) The idea was that youth would enter YIT and, with limited direction and coaching from a YIT youth advisor (a cross between a coach and a case manager), be ready to enter college or maintain steady employment, maintain housing, manage their money and (with assistance) invest in assets—all the hallmarks of a successful transition to adulthood. While YIT would offer support—through youth advisors

as well as a planned one-on-one mentoring program—and connections to “door openers” who could provide leads or offers for jobs and housing, most services would be provided by others, and youth would soon be able to navigate those services with minimal help from YIT.

In reality, many YIT participants needed far more assistance than expected. A significant number of participants experienced crises, such as criminal arrest, imminent eviction, and intimate partner violence, which required immediate and prolonged assistance from staff. Others were steadier on their feet but simply not ready or able to take the steps needed to move toward independence.

This greater need for assistance existed for at least two reasons. First, youth in other Jim Casey Initiative programs (which served as a model for YIT) are typically far younger than those in YIT. Most participants in other Jim Casey Initiative programs are still in foster care and thus still have access to comprehensive support from DSS and foster parents. In contrast, nearly all YIT participants have left foster care and more than half are 21 or older, rendering them ineligible for LINKS funding and most educational vouchers. They have no safety net. A second, related reason is that because most current



YIT participants left foster care and LINKS before YIT started, they were without a safety net for a long time. During that time, many struggled and, under duress, made choices that had steep and lasting consequences. For example, a significant percentage of YIT participants interviewed for this study had been convicted of a crime, thereby reducing their chances for employment and housing. Others, lacking money and/or someone to motivate them, had dropped out of school. While all former foster youth face challenges, those who joined YIT after spending time without support arguably face greater odds.

Because youth needed more assistance than expected, YIT staff have been forced to curtail efforts toward long-term goals. Policy advocacy is largely on hold, and the LYFE Board has become inactive, in part due to lack of staff time. Instead, YIT has begun to focus more on hands-on services for youth. In 2015, the Community Partnership Board approved funding for an additional youth advisor, which would increase that number to three.

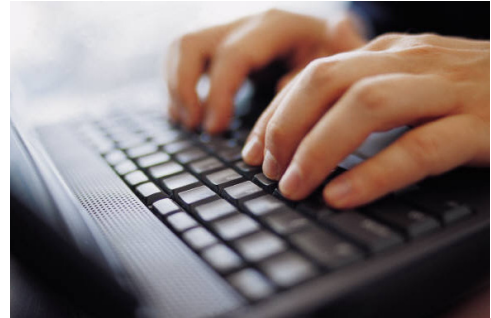
**From serving all to focusing on the interested.** When YIT began providing services in 2011, entry was available to anyone living in Fosyth County who had been in public foster care at age 13 or later. Demand for program entry was immediate and overwhelming, and soon outstripped YIT staff capacity. In 2012, entry was limited to those who completed a multi-session financial literacy class and subsequently completed a baseline survey administered by the Jim Casey Initiative. Completion of this survey, the Opportunity Passport Participant Survey or OPPS, qualifies youth for a number of benefits and services, including access to a matching grant program.

In November 2013, program membership was expanded to those who attended an orientation and demonstrated a commitment to the program. As before, only youth who complete the financial literacy class become eligible for matching funds, but all youth who complete orientation are eligible for other services and activities, including mentoring, referrals, and participation on the LYFE Board.

In late 2014, YIT began offering more intensive services to participants expressing interest. Youth may elect to participate in Future Planning, a manualized process in which they, with the help of an adult, write out or draw pictures of their values, dreams, and fears. It is a lengthy process, with the initial session lasting 1 to 4 hours and regular follow-up to ensure youth stay on track. Future Planning uses RENEW (Rehabilitation for Empowerment, Natural Supports, Education, and Work), a nationally recognized model to create wraparound supports for vulnerable youth. The goal is to facilitate a more comprehensive approach to transitioning to adulthood, thereby adding protective factors that can reduce risk of poor outcomes. In North Carolina, RENEW training and support is offered by [North Carolina Families United](#). YIT and DSS staff received RENEW training in November 2014 and began doing Future Planning soon

thereafter. At least 25 youth had participated in Future Planning as of November 2015.

**A growing focus on tracking services provided: ClientTrack.** When YIT began, recordkeeping about services provided was disorganized. Staff maintained a mixture of paper and electronic records about clients but did not have a user-friendly central database. They did not record interactions with participants on a systematic and consistent basis. This began to change in 2014 with the introduction of the [ClientTrack](#)-enabled database at Goodwill, the agency that houses YIT. ClientTrack is a social services case management software system. While difficult to learn, ClientTrack allows for systematic entry and organization of information about services provided. It also enables tracking of client outcomes. YIT now maintains easily accessible electronic files on all participants. Data is entered by the YIT youth support specialist.



In August 2015, YIT also began tracking specific services provided. Each staff member maintains an Excel spreadsheet of participant encounters, entering information about meeting type and duration, resources and referrals provided, and participant outcome area(s) toward which the service was directed (e.g., employment, financial capability).

**A growing focus on tracking outcomes: Self-Sufficiency Survey.** When YIT began, youth outcomes were tracked via the Opportunity Passport Participant Survey (OPPS), administered each April and October by computer. (Participants usually travel to YIT to use a computer there.) While these comprehensive surveys capture a great deal of information and allow YIT to follow track individuals and cohorts over time, they have limitations. First, the surveys cannot be matched to participants by name and thus cannot be verified or linked to a participant's other characteristics or outcomes. Second, OPPS is based on self-report; this leads to the potential for inaccurate data due to misunderstood questions as well as intentional deception due to social desirability bias. Third, OPPS is administered only twice a year and is only available to participants who have completed the Jim Casey Initiative-required financial literacy class. A growing number of YIT participants do not take that class immediately upon entry, meaning that OPPS data doesn't include them. To address these concerns, YIT created a Self-Sufficiency Survey to formally measure participants' progress in the seven YIT outcome areas. The tool is completed by YIT staff. Data is collected in January and July. YIT first administered the tool in July 2014 to 33 of its most active participants. Those same 33 individuals were surveyed again in January 2015. In July 2015, 41 participants were surveyed.

## Who Is Being Served

YIT has had 79 total participants since inception; 60 of these were enrolled as of June 30, 2015. The typical participant is an African American female age 22 or older.

**Table 1** describes demographic information of participants on June 30, 2015, according to data from the Jim Casey Initiative.

**TABLE 1: Demographic Information of YIT Participants Active on June 30, 2015 (n=60)**

	Number	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	35	58%
Male	25	42%
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		
African American	46	77%
Caucasian	7	12%
More than one race	6	10%
Latino or Hispanic	1	2%
<b>Age</b>		
14-17	3	5%
18-21	26	43%
22-25	31	52%

Source: Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative

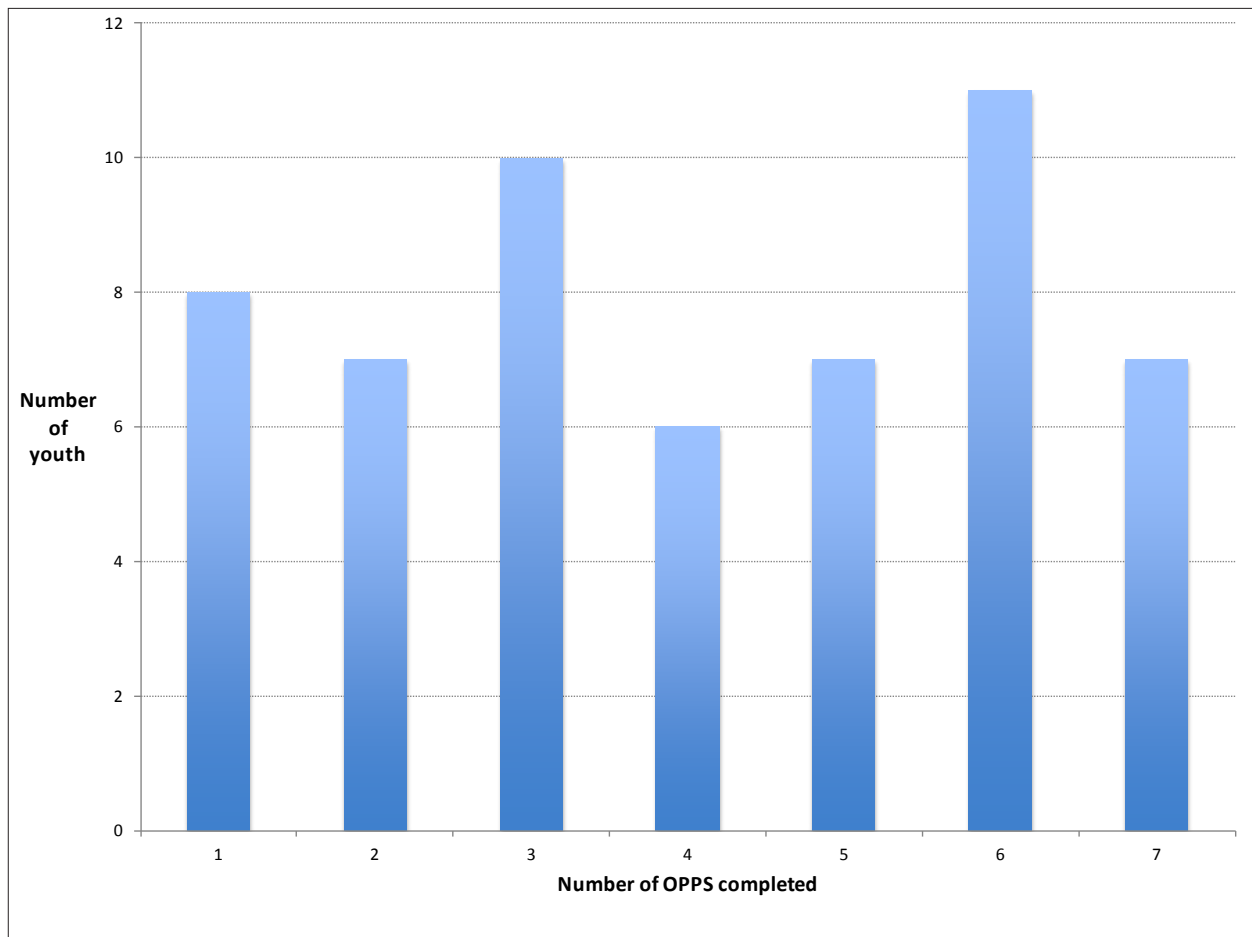
# Outcomes

## Opportunity Passport Survey

In addition to surveys of YIT participants conducted by UNC-CH researchers, information collected through semi-annual Opportunity Passport Participant Surveys (OPPS) was used to assess outcomes for youth. The OPPS is administered in April and October each year. The following analysis is based on the responses from the 56 youth who completed the OPPS in April 2015.

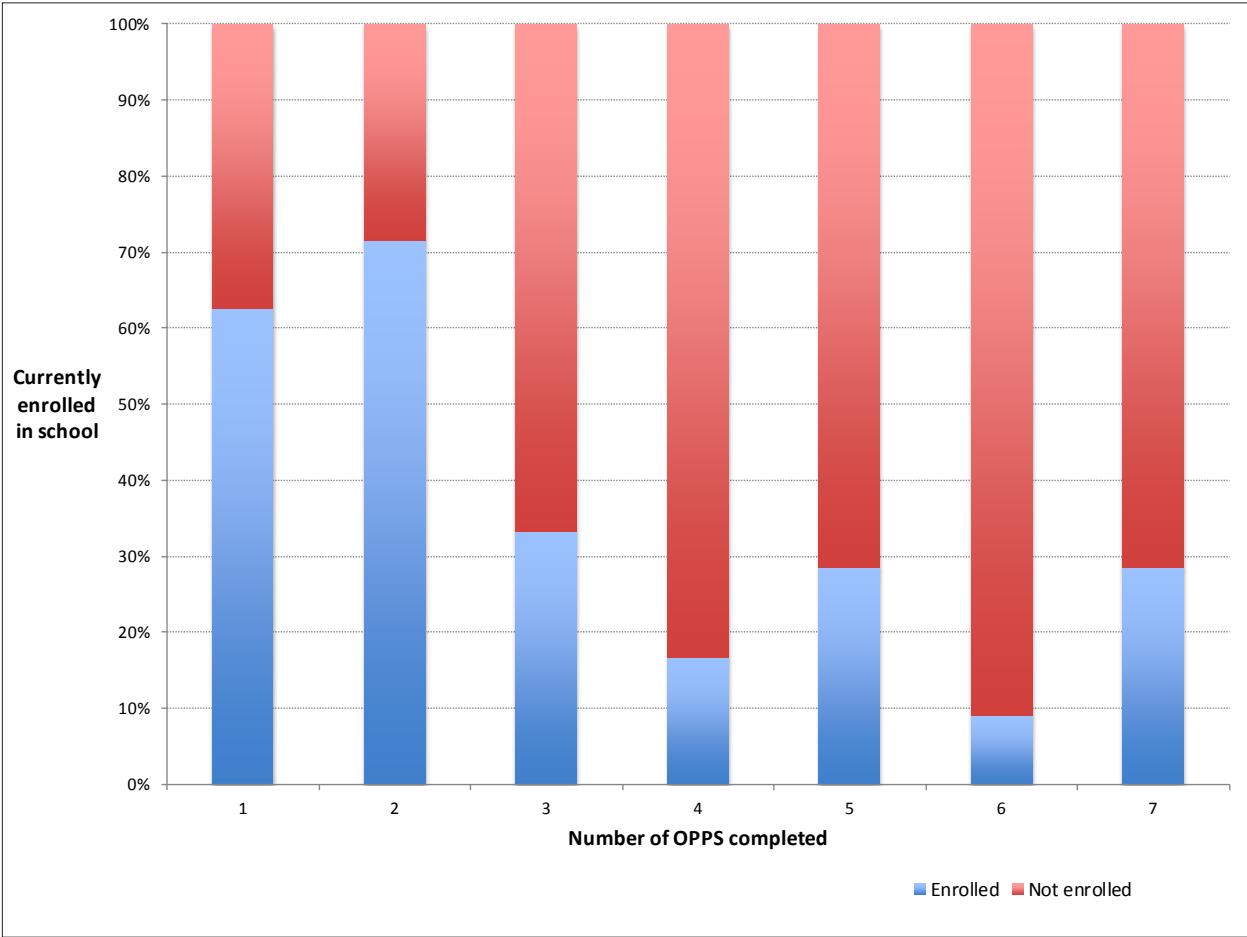
As **Figure 1** indicates, most of the youth who completed OPPS in April 2015 had completed the survey multiple times. As the figure indicates, only eight youth took OPPS for the first time in April. Ten youth took it for the third time in April, and 11 youth took it for the sixth time. Seven youth took it for the seventh time in April.

**FIGURE 1:** The Number of Times Youth Have Taken OPPS



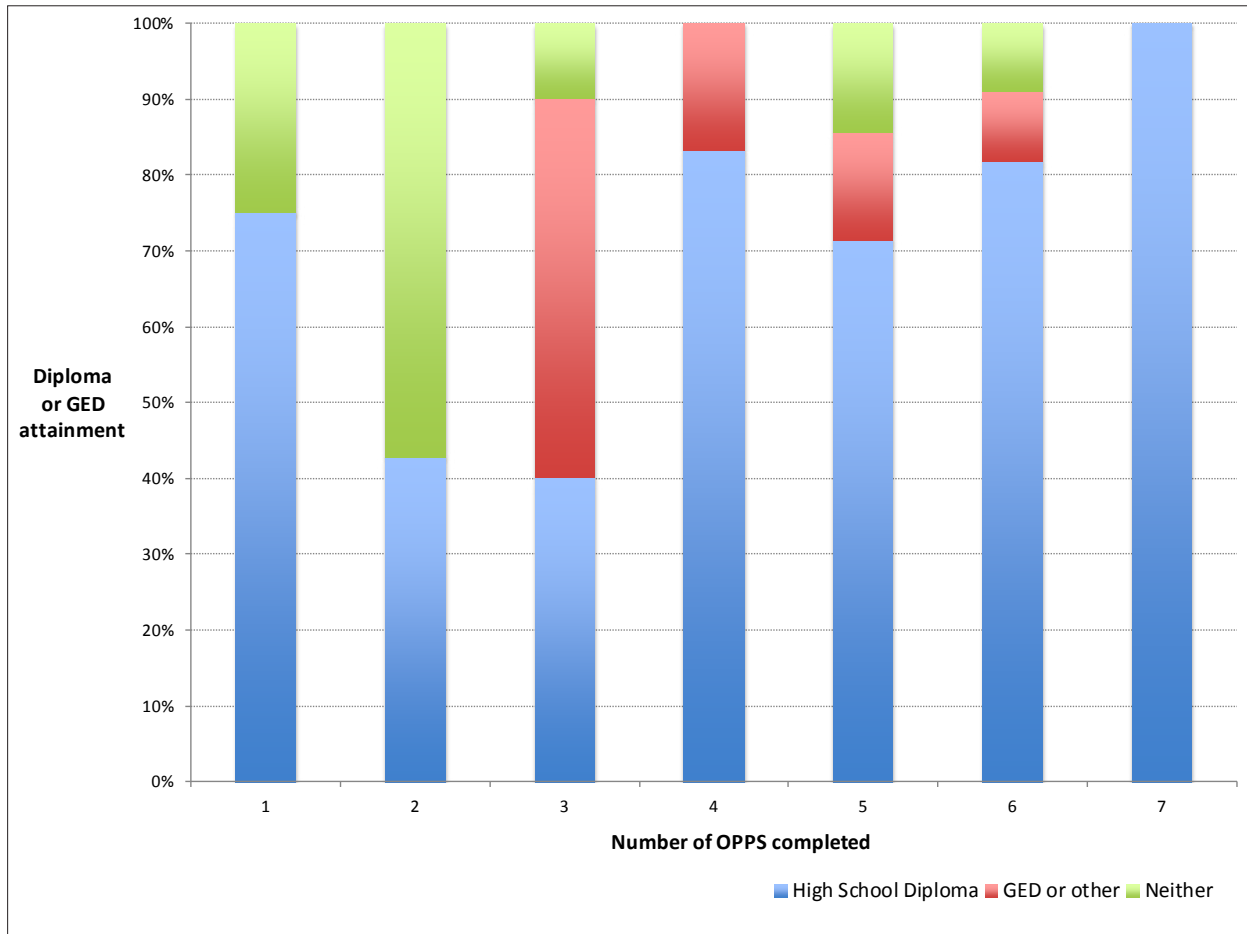
**Figure 2** reports whether the youth was currently enrolled in school by the number of times the youth has taken OPPS. (Note that the number of times a youth has taken OPPS serves as a rough proxy of that youth’s length of enrollment in YIT.) According to the figure, almost two-thirds of the youth taking OPPS for the first time are enrolled in school, compared with less than 30% of the youth taking it for the seventh time. The number of times a youth has taken OPPS is an indicator of how long he or she has been involved with YIT. The figure also shows that youth who have been participating in YIT for the longest amount of time are less likely to be enrolled in school than those youth who recently started.

**FIGURE 2: Current School Enrollment by Number of OPPS Completed**



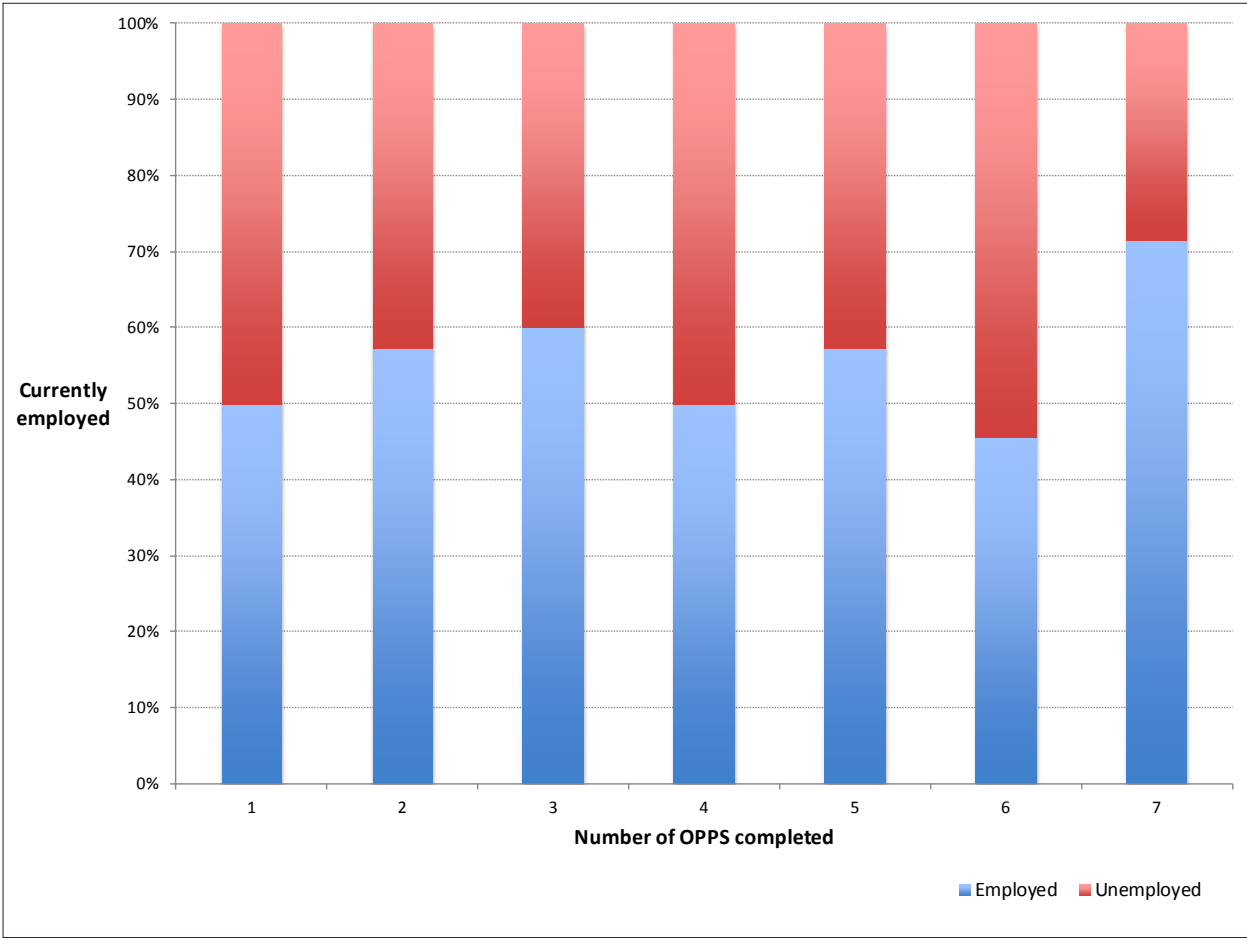
A primary reason that the youth who have been participating in OPPS the longest currently are not enrolled in school is that they have earned a high school diploma. As **Figure 3** indicates, all 7 youth who completed OPPS for the seventh time in April 2015 have a high school diploma. Also, as the figure indicates, only 10% of the youth who took OPPS for the sixth time in April had not graduated from high school or earned a GED. In addition, about three out of four youth who took the OPPS for the first time had earned a high school diploma.

**FIGURE 3: High School Diploma or GED Attainment by Number of OPPS Completed**



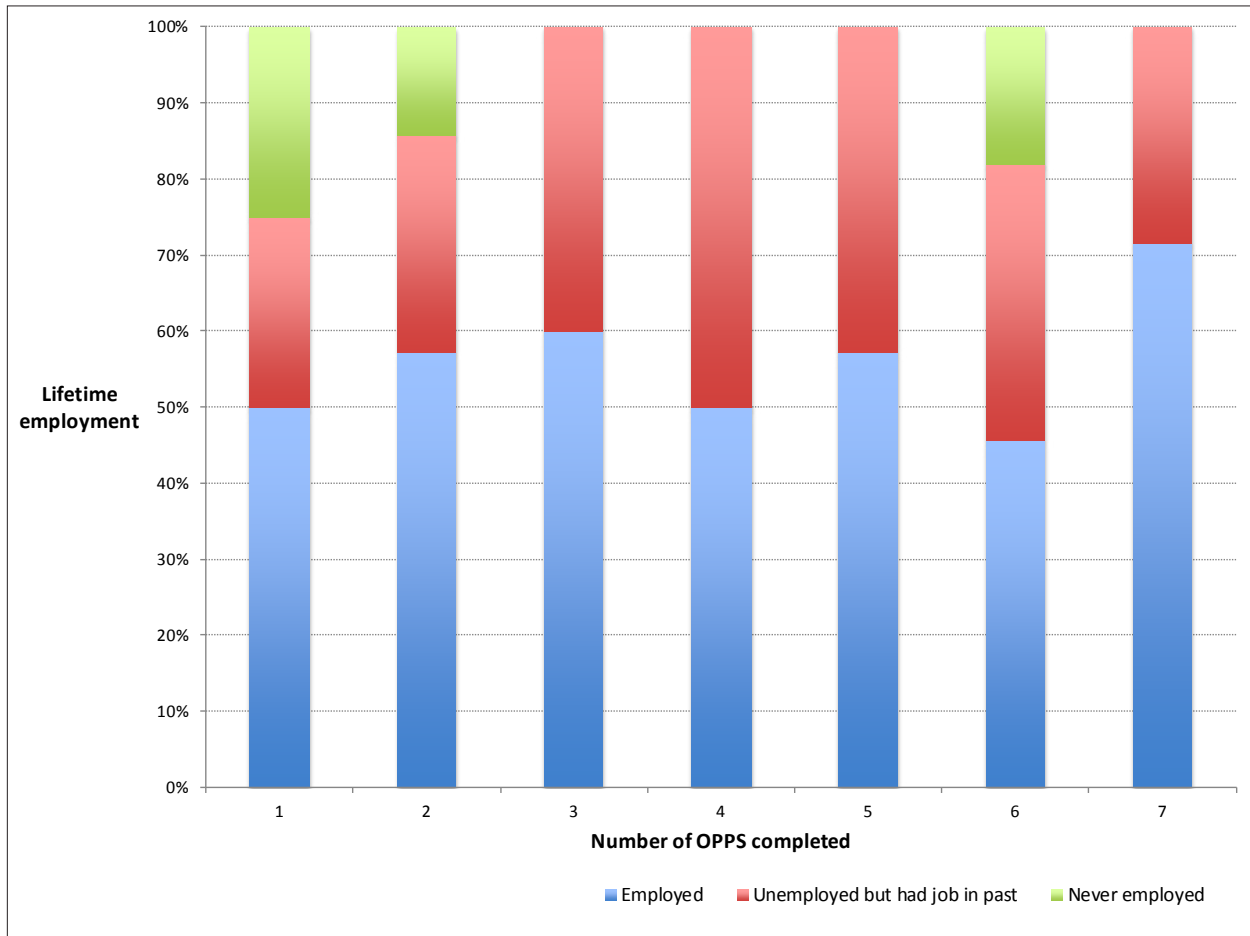
**Figure 4** displays the percentage of youth who have a job by the number of times they have taken OPPS. As the figure reports, half of the youth who took OPPS for the first time in April 2015 were employed. A slightly higher percentage of youth who were taking OPPS for the second time were employed, and 60% of the youth taking OPPS for the third time were employed. Also, 70% of the youth taking OPPS for the seventh time were employed.

**FIGURE 4: Current Employment by Number of OPPS Completed**



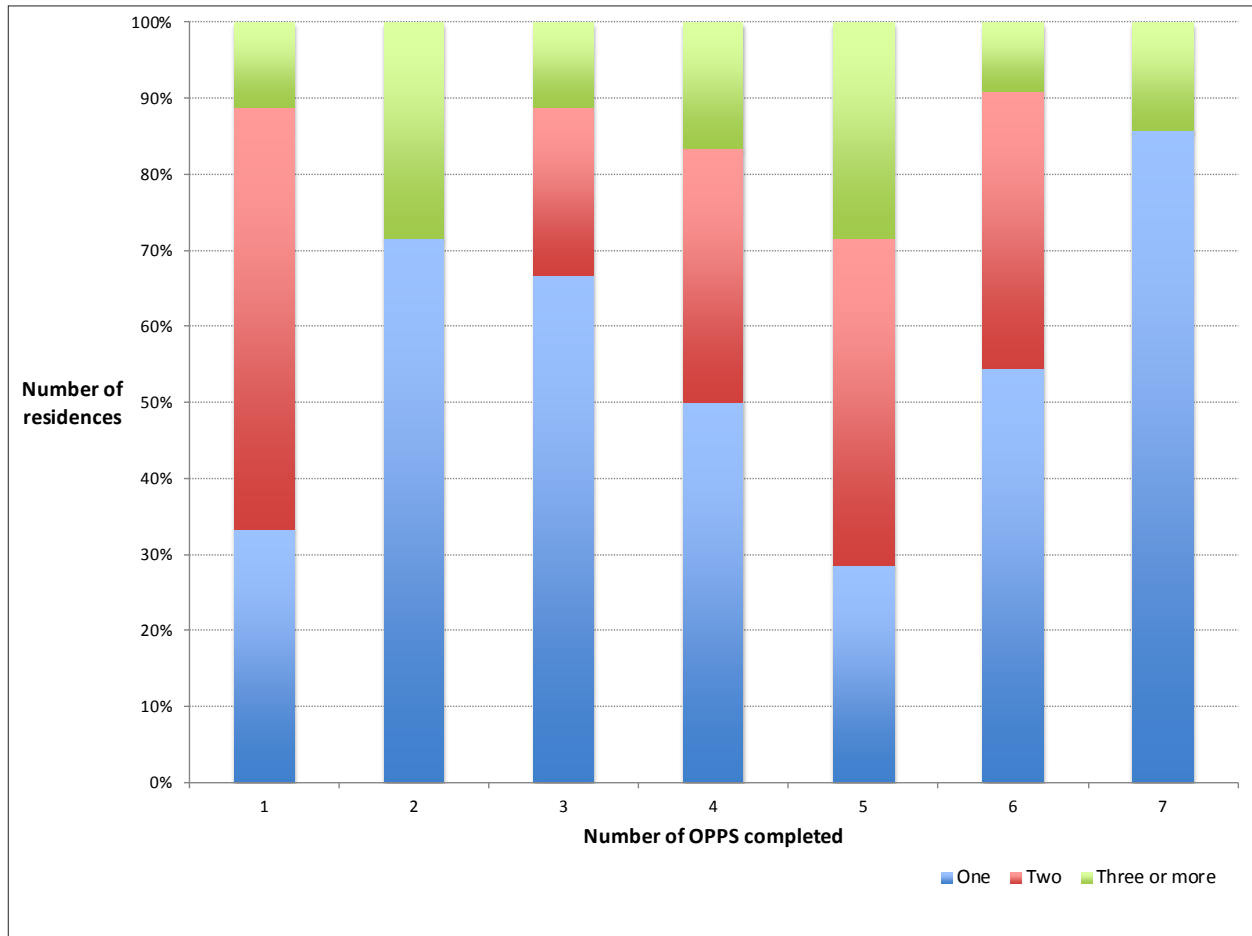
While a substantial percentage of the youth who completed OPPS in April 2015 were not currently employed, most of the youth who were not working had held a job in the past, as **Figure 5** indicates. According to the figure, while only half of the youth taking OPPS for the first time were currently employed, an additional 25% had held a job in the past. Also, all of the youth who were taking OPPS for the third, fourth, fifth, or seventh time were either currently working or had held a job in the past.

**FIGURE 5: Lifetime Employment by Number of OPPS Completed**



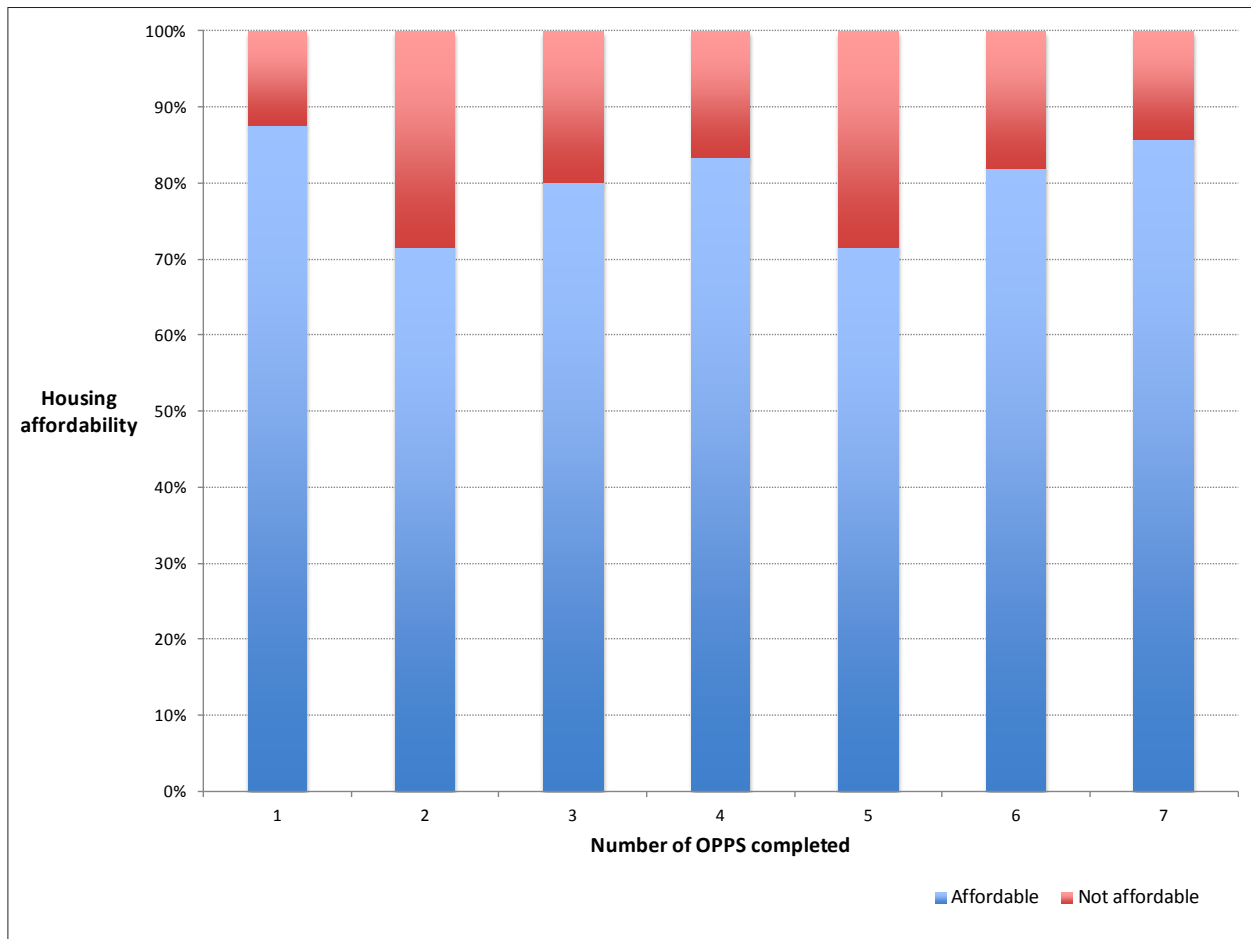
**Figure 6** illustrates the level of housing stability among the youth completing OPSS. As the figure reports, about one third of the youth taking OPSS for the first time had lived in only one place during the previous year. About 56% of those youth had lived in two places and more than 10% had lived in three or more places. By the same token, around 85% of the youth who had been involved with YIT the longest—those completing OPSS for the seventh time—had lived in only one place.

**FIGURE 6: Number of Residences in the Past Year by Number of OPSS Completed**



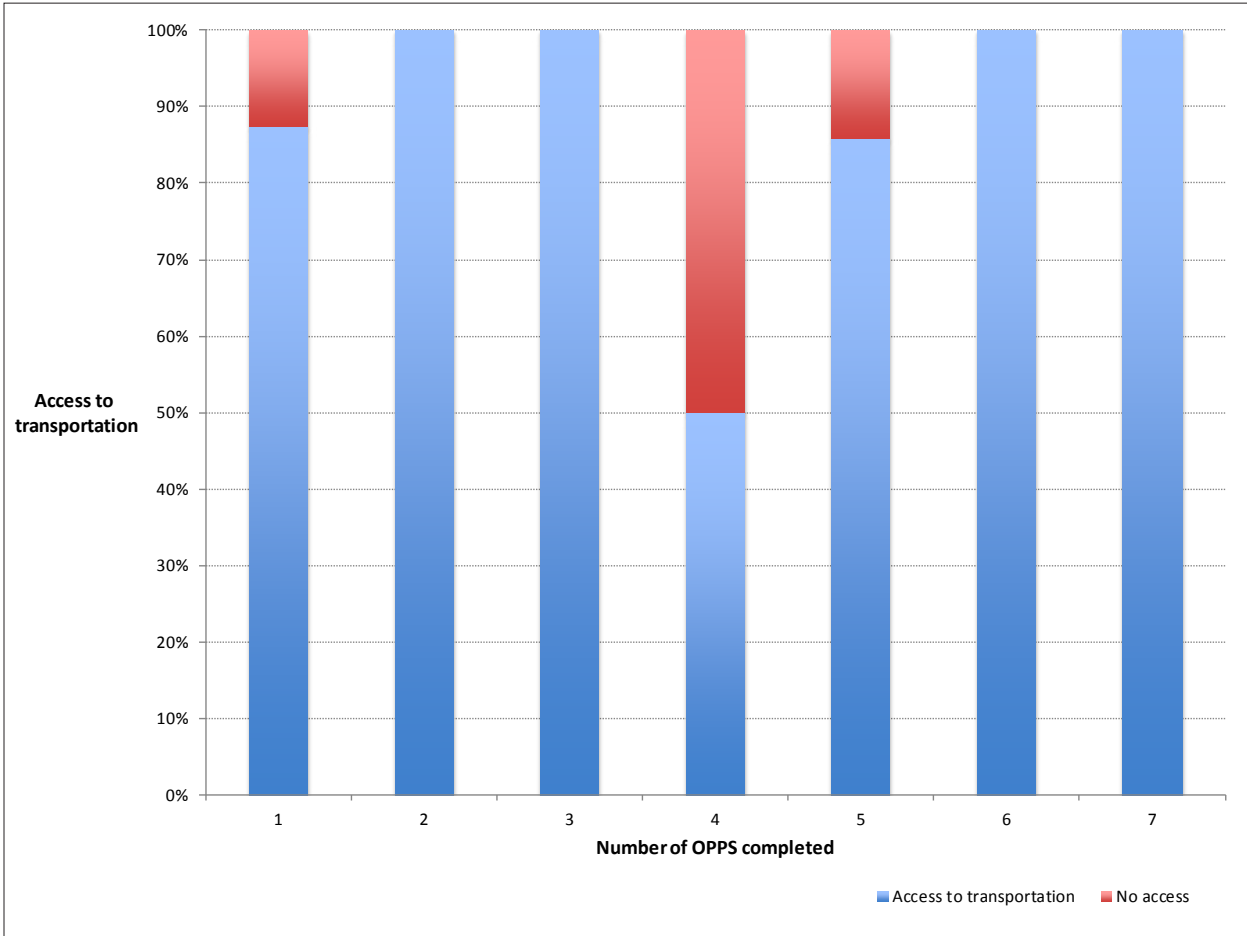
Most of the youth completing OPPS think that the cost of their housing is reasonable, as **Figure 7** illustrates. According to the figure, close to 90% of the youth taking OPPS for the first time reported that the cost of their housing is reasonable, compared with only 70% of the youth who took it for the second time.

**FIGURE 7: Perceived Housing Affordability by Number of OPPS Completed**



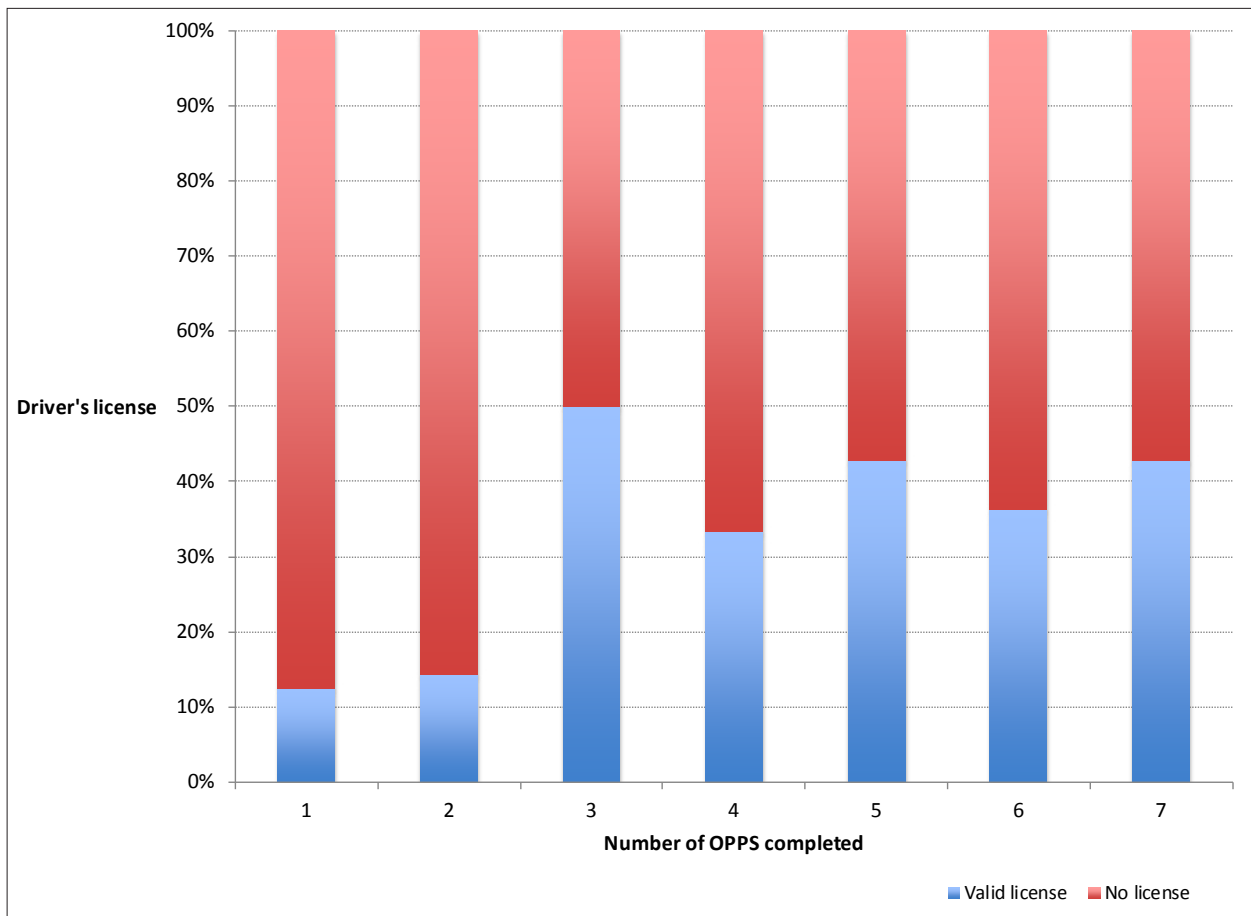
Access to transportation does not seem to be a problem for most youth participating in YIT. As **Figure 8** indicates, close to nine out of ten youth completing the OPPS for the first time said they had access to transportation. In addition, all of the youth who were taking the OPPS for the second, third, sixth, or seventh time reported that they had access to transportation. Interestingly, about half of the youth who were completing the OPPS for the fourth time and 15% of those completing OPPS for the fifth time said they did not have access to transportation. It is not clear why these youth reported they did not have access to transportation, nor whether or why these youth are different than others in YIT.

**FIGURE 8: Access to Transportation by Number of OPPS Completed**



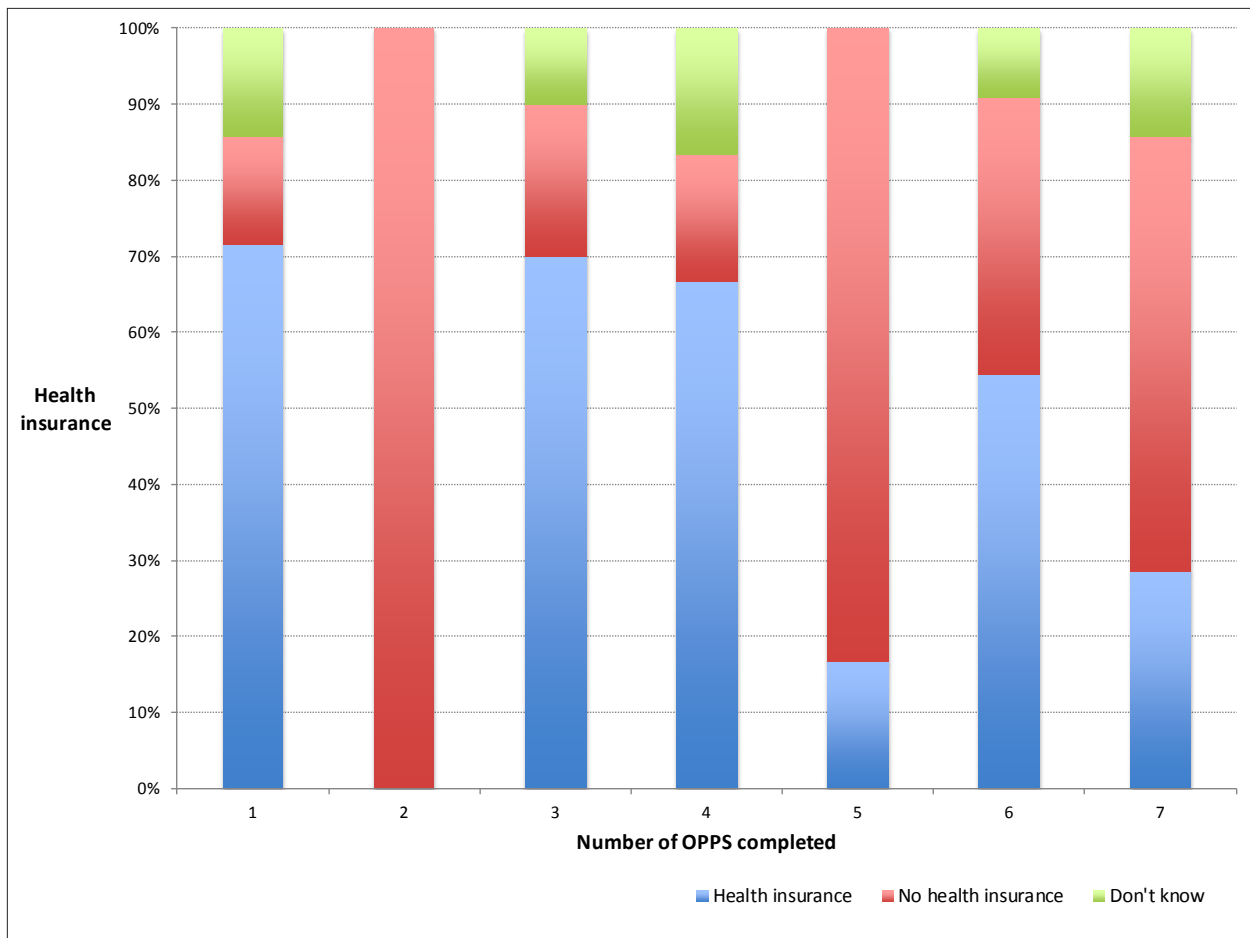
A high percentage of the youth completing the OPPS in April 2015 reported that they do not have a valid driver's license. As **Figure 9** reports, close to 90% of the youth completing OPPS for the first time responded that they did not have a valid driver's license. A slightly lower percentage of the youth taking the OPPS for the second time reported that they, too, did not have a driver's license. That pattern of a low percentage of youth not having a valid license was not consistent. Youth who had completed the OPPS three or more times were more likely to report that they had a driver's license. As the figure indicates, 50% of the youth taking the OPPS for the third time reported they had a license. That percentage fell for youth taking OPPS for the fourth time but rose for youth who had taken the OPPS five or more times.

**FIGURE 9: Valid Driver's Licensure by Number of OPPS Completed**



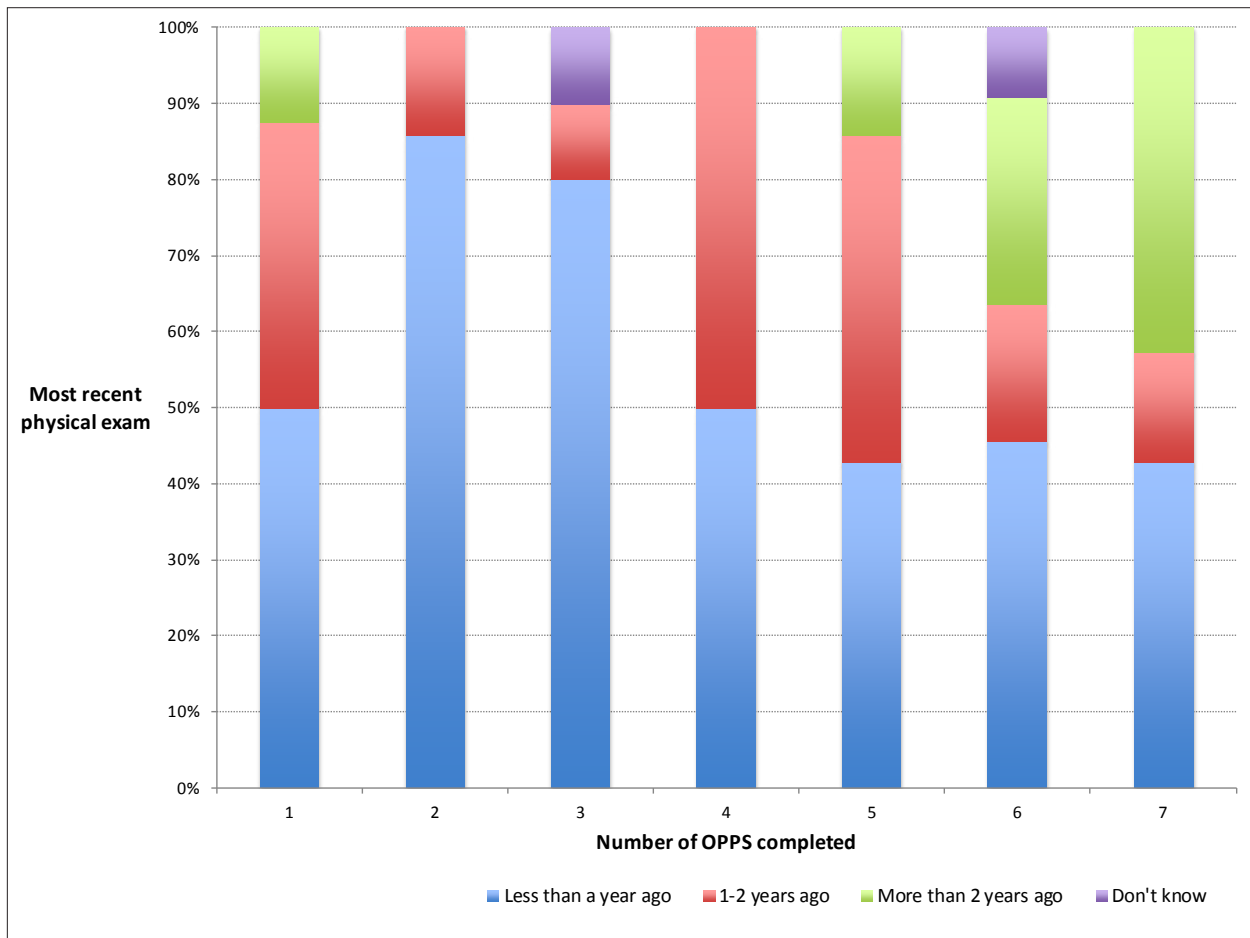
**Figure 10** provides information on whether the youth has health insurance for those who are not currently in foster care. The pattern of health insurance coverage is not clear. According to the figure, more than 70% of the youth taking the OPPS for the first time indicated they had health insurance. At the same time, none of the youth taking the OPPS for the second time reported they were covered by health insurance. The percentage who reported they had health insurance rose to 70% for youth taking the OPPS for the third time, and was slightly less than 70% for those taking the OPPS for the fourth time. That percentage fell to less than 20% for youth taking the OPPS for the fifth time.

**FIGURE 10: Health Insurance Coverage for Youth Not in Foster Care by Number of OPPS Completed**



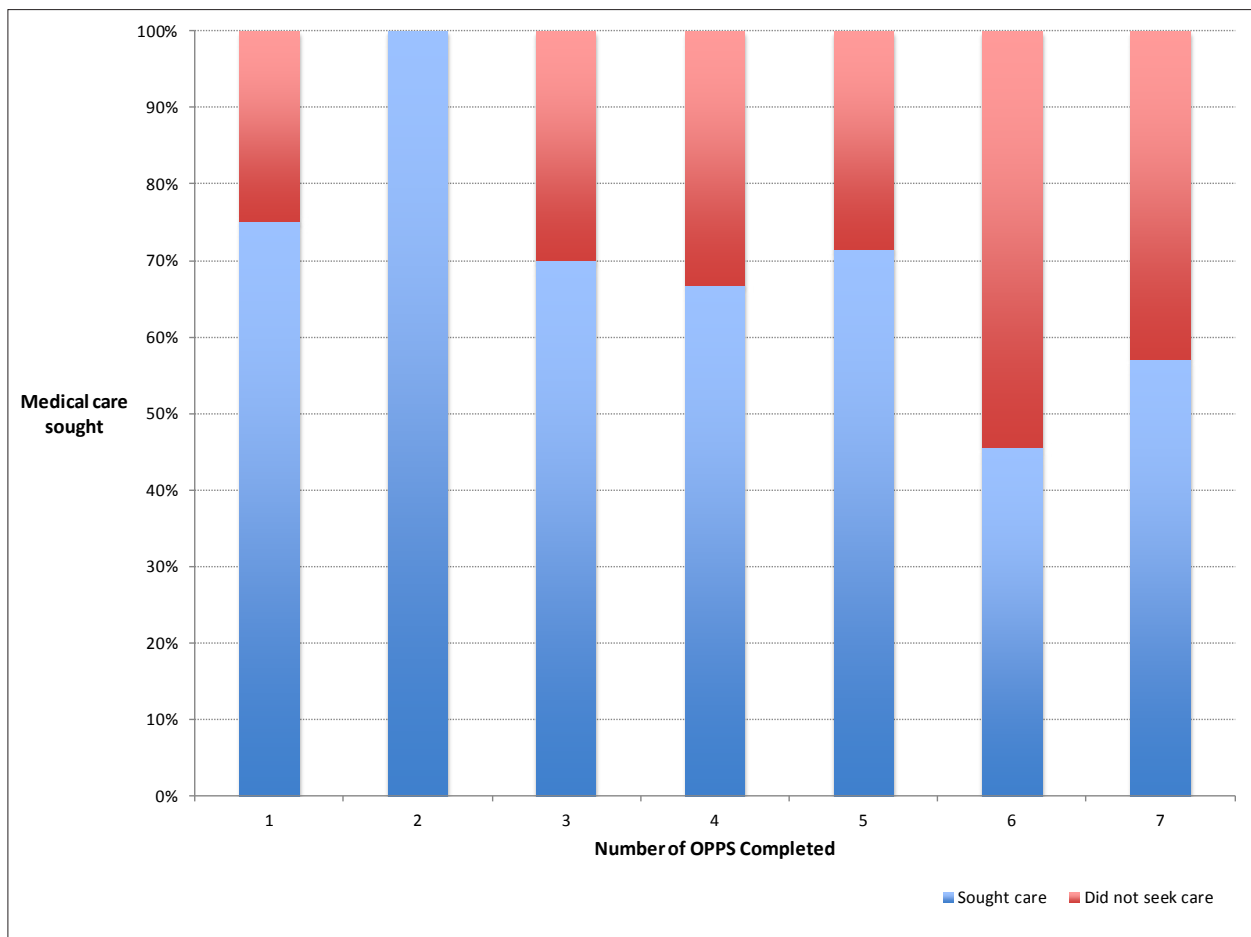
More than half of the youth who completed the OPPS in April 2015 reported having a physical exam in the last year, as **Figure 11** indicates. According to the figure, half of the youth who took the OPPS for the first time had a physical exam in the last year. Another 37% of those youth had a physical exam between a year and two years before completing the OPPS. Of those taking the OPPS for the second time, 86% had a physical exam in the prior year. Among those taking the OPPS for the third time, 89% had a physical exam in the last year. The percentage of youth who had a physical exam in the prior year fell for those taking the OPPS for the fourth or greater time.

**FIGURE 11: Most Recent Physical Exam by Number of OPPS Completed**



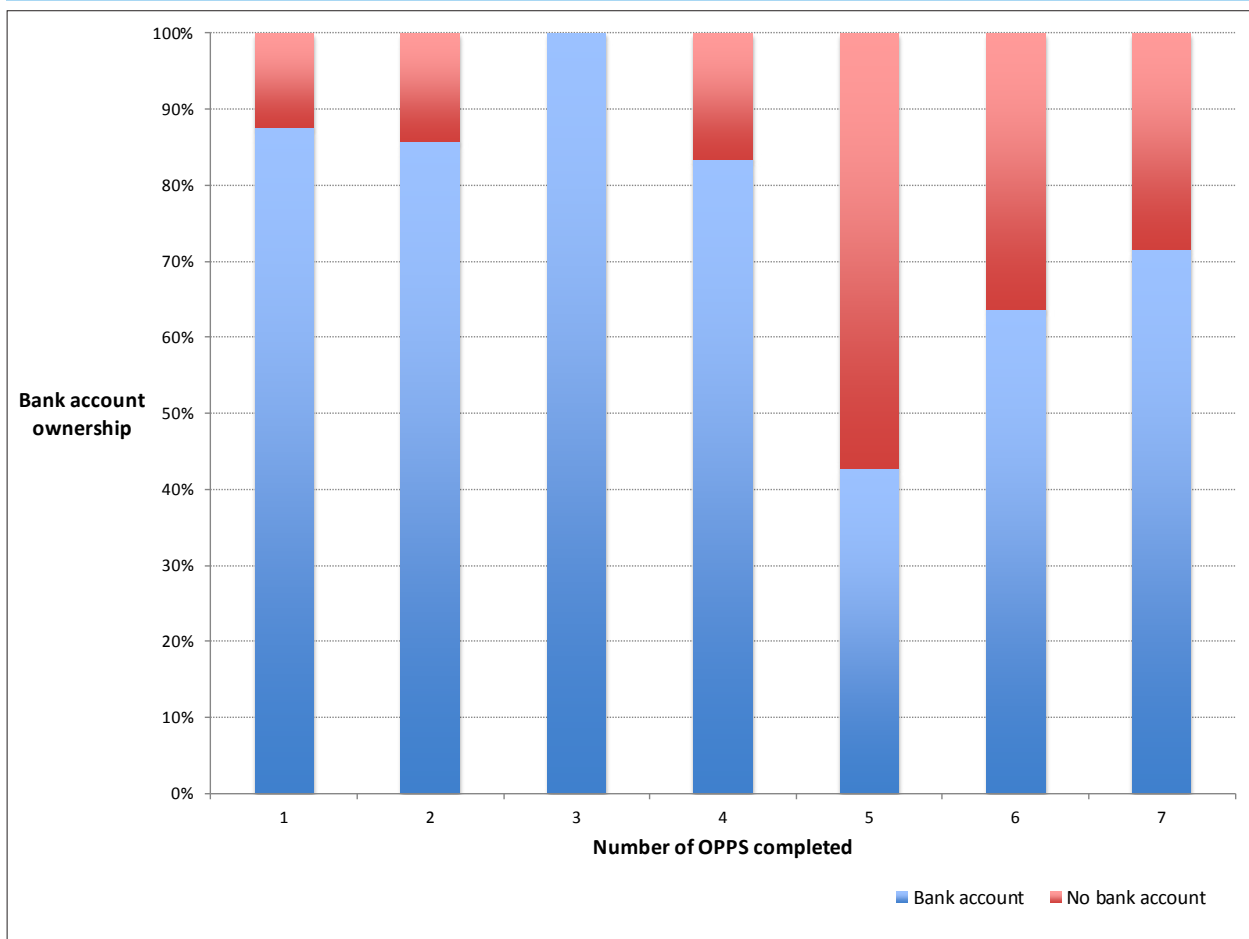
The youth who completed the OPPS in April 2015 reported that they generally seek medical care when they feel they need it, as **Figure 12** shows. According to the figure, only 25% of the youth taking the OPPS for the first time reported that they did not get medical care when they needed it during the last six months. None of the youth who completed the OPPS for the second time reported that they did not get medical care. Around 30% of the youth completing the OPPS for the third, fourth, and fifth time said they did not always get medical care when they needed it. A higher percentage of the youth who had been involved in YIT for a longer period of time—those completing the OPPS for the sixth or seventh time—reported there were times in the last six months that they did not get medical care when they needed it. More than half the youth who completed the OPPS for the sixth time and more than 40% of the youth completing the OPPS for the seventh time reported that there were times in the last six months that they did not get medical care when they needed it. The reason for this is not clear. Case managers may want to bring up the need to seek medical care when it is needed with all YIT participants.

**FIGURE 12: Sought Needed Medical Care in Last Six Months by Number of OPPS Completed**



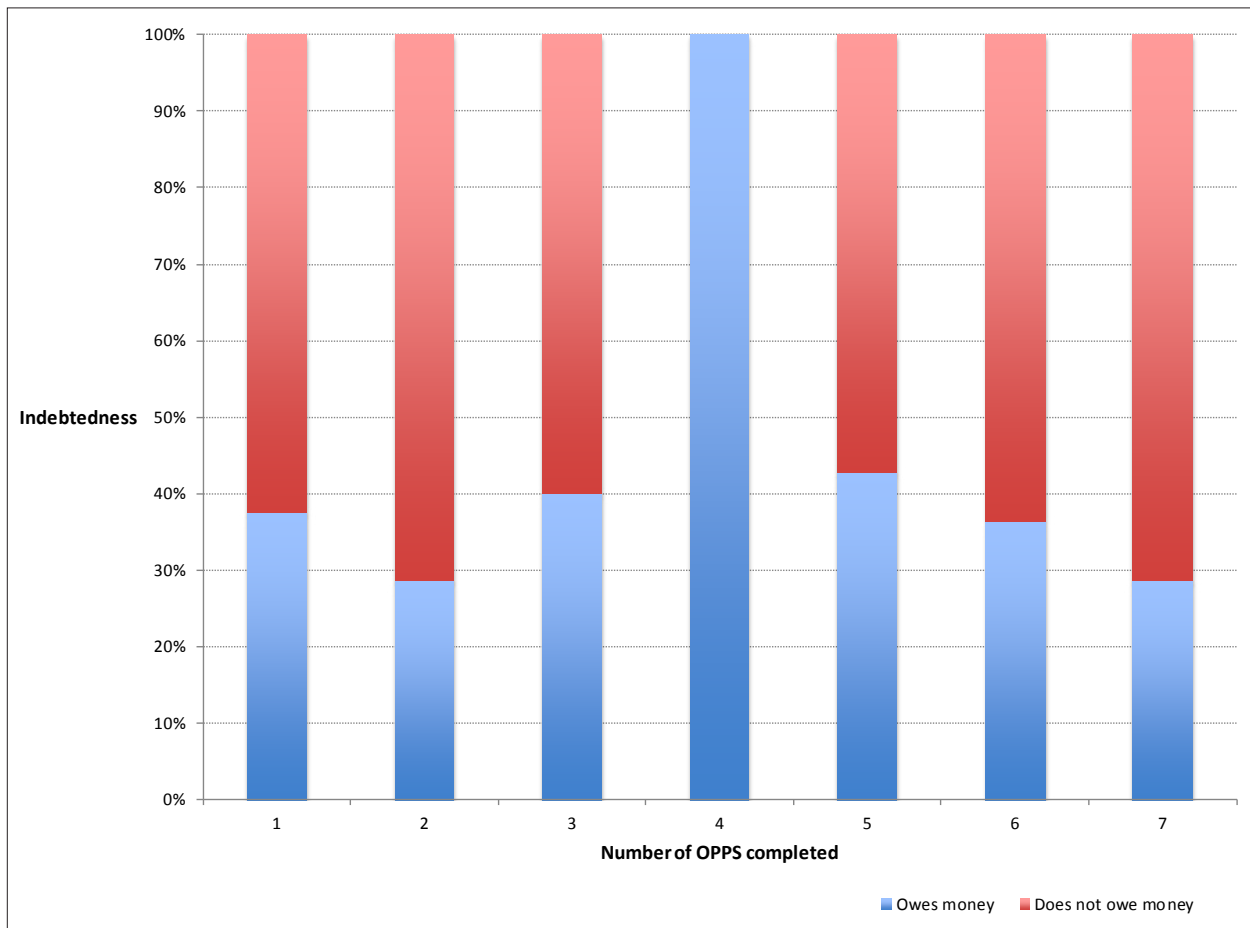
Youth who are new to YIT are more likely to have a bank account than those who have been in the program for longer, as **Figure 13** reports. As the figure illustrates, about 85% of the youth who completed the OPPS for the first or second time in April 2015 reported that they had a bank account, while all of the youth taking the OPPS for the third time reported having a bank account. More than 80% of the youth who completed the OPPS for the fourth time reported having a bank account. Less than half of the youth who completed the OPPS for the fifth time reporting having a bank account. That percentage rose to more than 60% of those taking the OPPS for the sixth time and 70% of those taking it for the seventh time. The decline in the percentage of youth who have been in YIT longer, based on the number of times they had completed the OPPS, may be due to the passage of time since they participated in the financial literacy training. The financial literacy curriculum addresses the need for bank accounts.

**FIGURE 13: Bank Account Ownership by Number of OPPS Completed**



**Figure 14** provides information on whether the youth currently owes money. As the figure indicates, about 42% of all youth taking the OPPS in April 2015 owe money. The percentage of youth who owe money varies across the number of times they have completed the OPPS. Less than 40% of youth taking the OPPS for the first time and less than 30% of those taking it for the second time owe money. All of the youth who completed the OPPS for the fourth time report owing money. The percentage drops for youth who were completing the OPPS for the fifth or greater time. Less than 30% of the youth who completed the OPPS for the seventh time reported owing money.

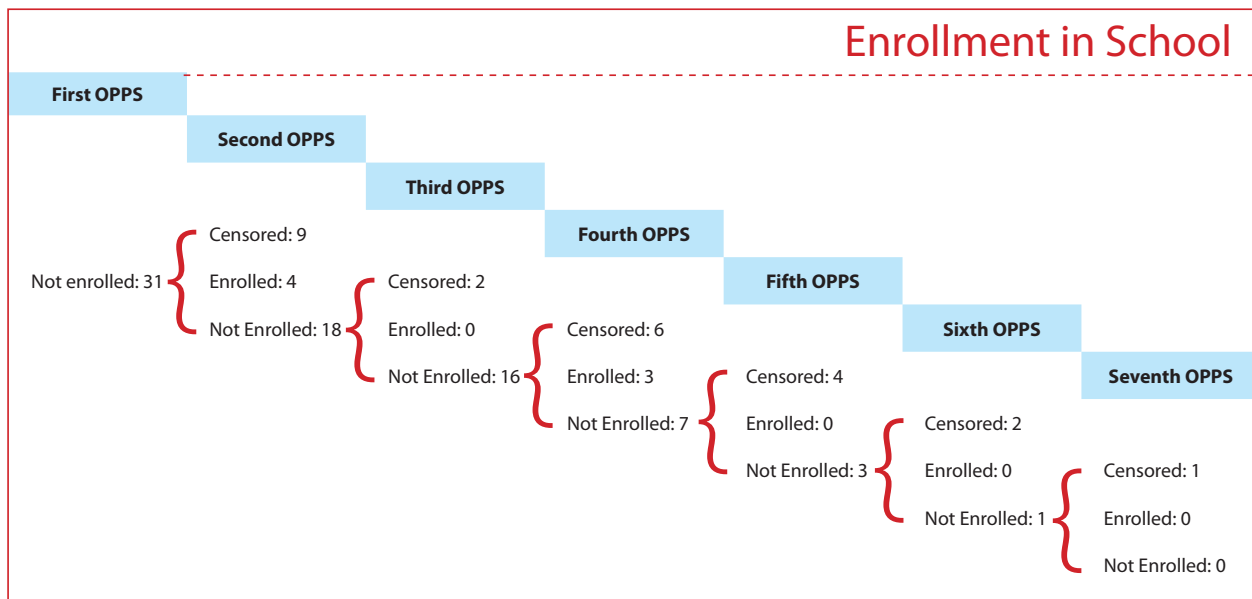
**FIGURE 14: Indebtedness by Number of OPPS Completed**



## Trajectories

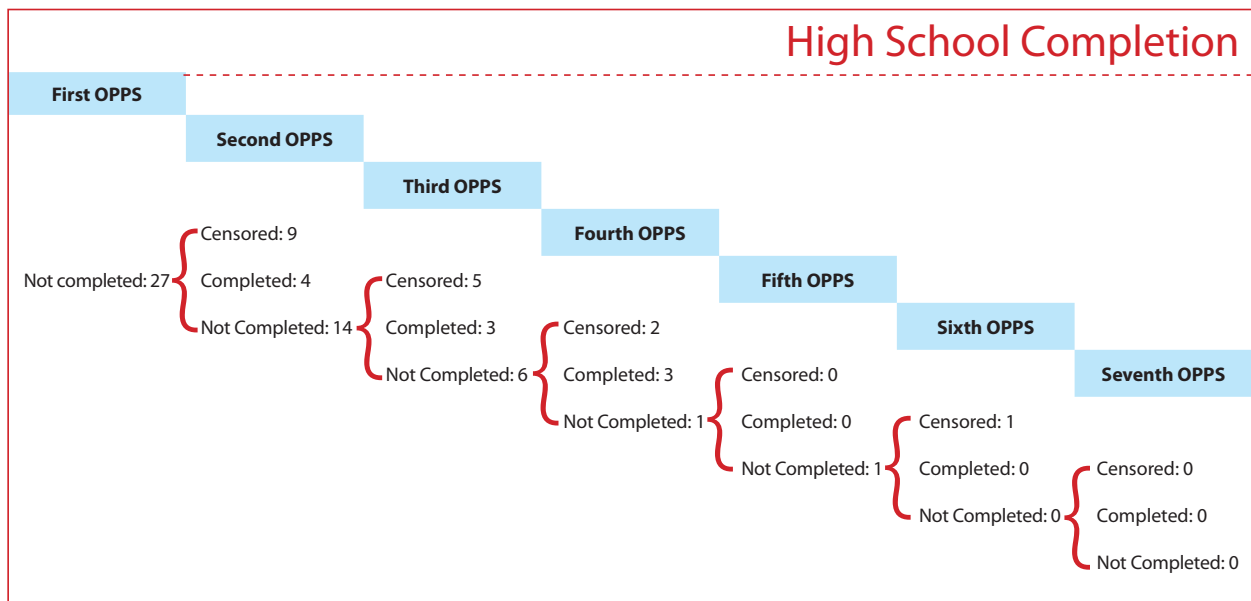
The impact of YIT can be seen by following the trajectories of youth who completed the OPPS multiple times. **Figure 15** illustrates the trajectories of youth who reported that they were not enrolled in school the first time they completed the OPPS. As the figure reports, 31 youth reported that they were not enrolled in school the first time they took the OPPS. Of those youth, nine have taken the OPPS only one time. Their outcome—whether they enrolled in school—is censored and their outcome is not known. Of the remaining 22 youth, four were enrolled in school the second time they completed the OPPS. The remaining 18 were not enrolled. Of those 18, two were censored and we do not know whether they were enrolled or not. None of the remaining 16 youth were enrolled when they completed the OPPS for the third time. Of those 16 youth, only 10 completed the OPPS for the fourth time. Of those 10, three were enrolled and seven were not. The remaining six out of the 16 were censored and we do not know their outcomes. Of the seven who were not enrolled, only three completed the OPPS for a fifth time, with the outcomes for the remaining four being censored. Of those three, none were enrolled.

**FIGURE 15: Trajectory of Enrollment in School**



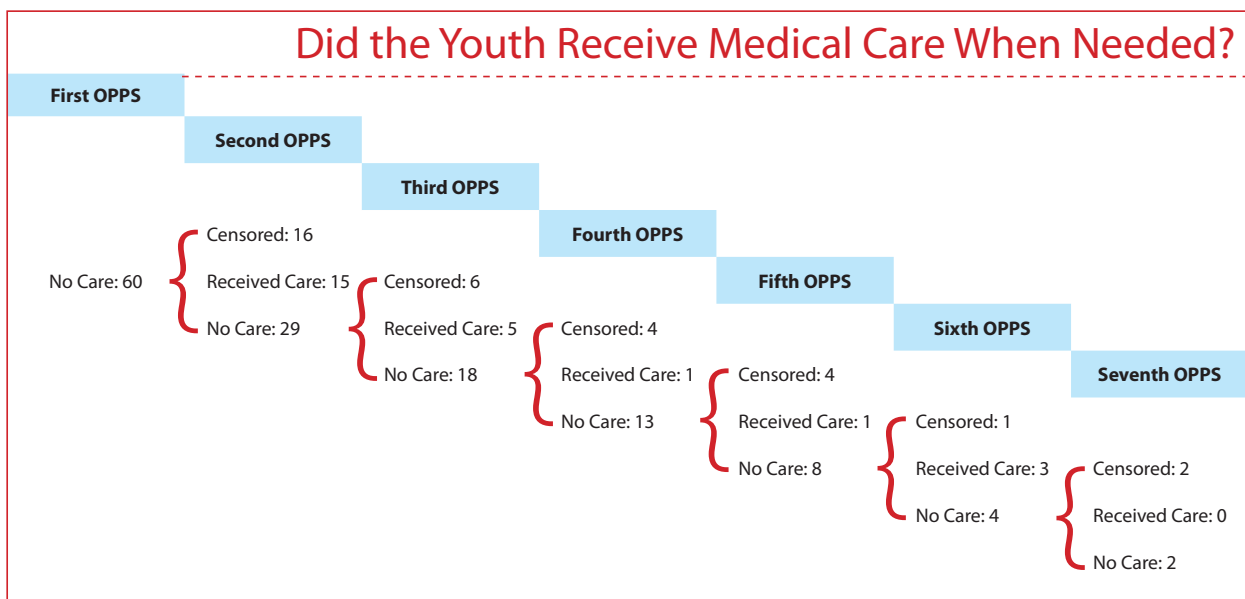
**Figure 16** displays the transition of youth who reported that they had not finished high school the first time they completed the OPPS. According to the figure, 27 youth reported they had not finished high school the first time they took the OPPS. Of those 27, nine did not take the OPPS again. Of the remaining 18, four reported they had completed high school and 14 reported that they had not when they took the OPPS the second time. Of those 14, five did not take the OPPS a third time. Of the nine who did, three reported they completed high school and six reported they had not the third time they took the OPPS. Of those six, two did not take the OPPS a fourth time. Of the remaining four, three reported that they completed high school and one reported he or she had not finished the fourth time they took the OPPS. That one individual took the OPPS a fifth time and reported he or she had not finished high school at that time. That youth has not taken the OPPS a sixth time.

**FIGURE 16: Trajectory of High School Completion**



The trajectory of youth who reported they had not received medical care when they needed it is illustrated in **Figure 17**. As the figure indicates, 60 youth reported they had not received medical care when they needed it during the prior six months when they took the OPPS for the first time. Of those 60 youth, 16 did not take the OPPS again. Of the 44 who did, 15 reported that they did receive medical care when they needed it and 29 reported that they had not when they took the OPPS for a second time. Of those 29, six have not taken the OPPS for a third time. Of the remaining 23, five reported that they had received medical care when they needed it and 18 reported that they did not when they took the OPPS for the third time. Of those 18, four have not taken the OPPS for a fourth time. Among the remaining 14, one reported he or she had received medical care when needed and 13 reported they had not. The trajectories for those 13 are shown in the figure.

**FIGURE 17: Trajectory for Medical Care**



### Summary of Opportunity Passport Participant Survey Data

The analysis of the OPPS information suggests that the outcomes for youth who participate in YIT improve the longer they remain in the program. A high percentage of the youth who are just entering YIT are enrolled in school. That percentage falls over time, but that decline appears to be due to most of the youth who have been in YIT for several years have earned a high school diploma or a GED. Most of the youth in YIT are working or have worked in the past.

The longer a youth has been involved with YIT, the more likely they are to report having stable housing. Most of the youth involved in YIT think their housing is affordable. In addition to housing, most of the youth have access to transportation even though a high percentage of them do not have a driver's license.

Access to health care is a little spotty. Most have had a physical exam in the last year or two. Not all of the youth are covered by health insurance. About a third said there was a time in the last six months when they needed medical care but did not get it. Most of the youth have a bank account but a sizable percentage owe money.

## RESEARCH INTERVIEWS

To gain more detailed information about YIT participants, we conducted individual, in-depth interviews with 37 YIT participants between November 2014 and March 2015. These individuals were recruited by YIT staff and encouraged to call the YIT office to set up interviews at pre-arranged times. Most interviews were held in a private office or conference room at the large Goodwill facility where YIT is housed. One interview was held in a participant's home at her request.

## Demographics

**Age.** Participants ranged in age from 17 years to 25 years. The average age was 22 years. The median age was also 22 years. The most common age (mode) was also 22 years.

**Gender:** YIT is predominantly female. Twenty-four participants (65%) identified as female; the remaining 13 identified as male. In contrast, the general North Carolina foster care population is evenly divided by gender, according to 2013 data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS). (While the current foster youth described in AFCARS may differ slightly from former foster youth like those in YIT, they are similar enough to allow comparison.)

**Race and ethnicity.** More than 4 in 5 participants (31, or 84%) identified as African American only (i.e., not more than one race), while 2 (5%) identified as White only. Four (11%) identified as Other or More than one race. In terms of ethnicity, 2 participants (5%) identified as Hispanic or Latino, while the other 35 (95%) identified as non-Hispanic or Latino. The general North Carolina foster care population is more evenly distributed by race, with 47% identified as non-Hispanic White, 40% non-Hispanic African American, 8% Hispanic or Latino, and 6% Other or More than one race, according to AFCARS.

**Marital status.** Most participants (31, or 84%) identified as being single. One (3%) identified as being married, and 5 (13%) identified as being unmarried but living with a partner.

This information is summarized in **Table 2**.

**TABLE 2: Demographic Information of UNC Study Participants (n=37) and Selected Statewide Data**

	YIT		N.C. <sup>†</sup>
	Number	%	%
<b>Age</b>			
14-17	1	3%	
18-21	10	27%	
22-25	26	70%	
Lowest/highest	17/25		
Average age	22		
Median age	22		
Most common age (mode)	22		
<b>Gender</b>			
Female	24	65%	50%
Male	13	3%	50%
<b>Race</b>			
African American only	31	84%	35%
Caucasian only	2	5%	54%
Other, >1 race, or missing	4	11%	11%*
<b>Ethnicity</b>			
Latino or Hispanic	2	5%	8%
Non-Latino or Hispanic	35	95%	92%
<b>Marital Status</b>			
Single	31	84%	
Unmarried, living with partner	5	13%	
Married	1	3%	

Source: UNC research interviews, November 2014 to March 2015

<sup>†</sup>N.C. figures comes from 2013 AFCARS data for children in foster care on 9/30:

[http://cwoutcomes.acf.hhs.gov/data/tables/foster\\_race\\_incareseptemberthirties\\_alt?states\[\]=34&state=&region=](http://cwoutcomes.acf.hhs.gov/data/tables/foster_race_incareseptemberthirties_alt?states[]=34&state=&region=)

\*In AFCARS data, persons identifying as ethnic Latino/Hispanics are included in the category Other or >1 race.

## Foster Care History

**Age at entry.** Self-reported age at entry into foster care ranged from 0 years (i.e., entered care immediately after birth) to 16 years. Average age at entry was 9.4 years; median age at entry was 11 years. Ten participants (27%) reported being under age 6 years at entry into foster care; 18 (49%) reported being between 6 and 12 years at entry; and 9 (24%) said they were 13 years or older at entry into care.

**Current foster care status.** Nearly all participants—35 (95%)—had left foster care by the time of their research interview. One participant reported being currently in care (in a family foster home), and one reporting having a CARS agreement. (A CARS agreement is an agreement for Continuing Residential Support.) Youth must be between 18 and 20 years old to be eligible for CARS in North Carolina; eligibility expires on the 21st birthday. Youth must be living in a foster care placement or other approved group living situation such as a college dorm, and have to be enrolled full-time in school or vocational training, or working at least 80 hours per month.

**Age at exit from foster care.** Of the participants who had left care at the time of the interview (n=35), most reported leaving care at age 17 or 18 years. Fourteen (38%) reported leaving care at age 18 years, while 5 (14%) reported leaving at 17 years, and another 5 reported leaving at 19 years. Three (8%) reported leaving foster care at age 15, and 3 reported leaving at age 16.

This information is summarized in **Table 3**.

**TABLE 3: Foster Care History of UNC Study Participants (n=37)**

	Number	%
<b>Age at first entry</b>		
0-5	10	27%
6-12	18	49%
13-17	9	24%
<b>Foster care status at interview</b>		
Not in care	35	95%
In care or on CARS	2	5%
<b>Age at exit</b>		
15 years	3	8%
16 years	3	8%
17 years	5	14%
18 years	14	38%
19 years	5	14%
Still in care	2	5%
Source: UNC research interviews, November 2014 to March 2015		

## Housing

**Current housing situation.** Most participants (26, or 70%) reported living independently, either alone or with a partner, roommate, or family of their own, while a sizeable minority (7, or 19%) reported living with family such as birth parents or extended family. Specifically, 26 participants (70%) reported living independently at the time of the interview. One (3%) reported living in a family foster home, while 3 (8%) were living in other situations such as a group home or supportive housing.

**Housing stability.** As is typical for youth and young adults, study participants reported frequent household moves; just over half said they had moved at least once in the last 12 months. Ten participants (27%) reported living in 2 different places (that is, one move) within the last year. Four (11%) said they had lived in 3 different places in the last year, while another 4 reported living in 4 to 9 different places during that period. One participant (3%) reported living in 10 or more different places in the last year. The other 18 participants (49%) reported living in the same place for at least the last 12 months.

Despite these frequent moves, most participants (31, or 84%) said they believed their housing situation was stable.

It is important to note that while relocating in and of itself is not indicative of risk—some relocations represent a step toward permanency or greater safety—frequent moves are often associated with other risk factors, including homelessness.

**Homelessness and “couch surfing.”** A few participants (5, or 14%) reported that they had slept in a homeless shelter and/or in a place not meant for sleep (i.e., outside or in an abandoned building) within the last 12 months. Eight participants (22%) said they had “couch surfed,” within the last 12 months, meaning that they had moved from place to place (typically the couches of various friends and family) because they did not have a regular place to stay. Three had experienced both conditions. Because federal policy does not include couch surfing in its definition of homelessness, those who couch surf but never sleep in a shelter or other place not meant for sleep are typically ineligible for federal housing subsidies and other assistance. Most participants (27, or 73%) said they had not been homeless, slept in a place not meant for sleep, or couch surfed in the last 12 months.

**Rent, affordability, and safety.** Like many youth and young adults in the U.S., many study participants receive help paying for housing. Nearly half (16, or 43%) receive housing vouchers or rental assistance subsidies which cover full or partial housing costs. In contrast, 7 participants (19%) said their household pays full-market rent with no subsidies. Thirteen participants (35%) said they do not pay rent; that number includes the two participants still in foster care, while 17 said they (46%) split living costs with roommates, partners, or family. (These percentages add up to less than 100% because some participants declined to respond.)

The average household rent paid was \$189 per month, an amount that typically did not include utilities. Among participants paying rent, the average household rent paid was \$271.

An overwhelming majority of participants (31, or 84%) said they considered their housing to be “affordable.” Two (5%) said their housing was not affordable, and 4 (11%) declined to respond. Most also deemed their homes and neighborhoods to be safe. Thirty-six participants (97%) said they felt safe inside their home, and 34 (92%) reported feeling safe in their neighborhood.

This information is summarized in **Table 4**.

**TABLE 4: Housing Status of UNC Study Participants (n=37)**

	Number	%
<b>Current housing situation</b>		
Living independently	26	70%
Living with family	7	19%
Group home or supportive housing	3	8%
Family foster home	1	3%
<b>Number of places lived in during last year</b>		
1	18	49%
2	10	27%
3	4	11%
4-9	4	11%
10 or more	1	3%
<b>Self-reported housing stability</b>		
Stable	31	84%
Not stable	4	11%
No response	2	5%
<b>Homeless or couch surfed in last year</b>		
Homeless	5	14%
Couch surfed	8	22%
Both	3	8%
Neither	27	73%
<b>Rent assistance</b>		
Household receives voucher or assistance	16	43%
Household receives no subsidies	7	19%
Participant pays no rent	13	35%
Participant splits rent costs with others in household	17	46%
Average rent among all participants	\$189	
Average rent among rent payers	\$271	
<b>Self-reported housing affordability</b>		
Affordable	31	84%
Not affordable	5	14%
No response	4	11%
Still in care	2	5%
Source: UNC research interviews, November 2014 to March 2015		

## Transportation

Reliable and efficient transportation is frequently cited as a key challenge among persons with low income living in the underserved neighborhoods where many study participants live. A few participants have cars, but most rely on other forms of transportation. Those living in urban neighborhoods typically rely on public buses<sup>9</sup>. Others said they relied on rides from friends. A few owned motor scooters, while at least one participant said she regularly walked several miles to get to work by 4 am.

**Access and reliability.** Nearly all participants (33, or 89%) said they had access to the transportation they needed, and many (21, or 57%) deemed it reliable, rating reliability 8 or higher on a 10-point scale.

**Car ownership and driver's licenses.** Just under one-third of participants (12, or 32%) said they owned a car, though a few of those car owners did not have a driver's license. Overall, 14 participants (38%) reported having a valid driver's license; 4 more (11%) said they had a valid learner's permit. Still, more than half of the participants (19, or 51%) said they didn't have a valid driver's license; among that number were two people whose license had been suspended pending payment of fines.

This information is summarized in **Table 5**.

**TABLE 5: Transportation Status of UNC Study Participants (n=37)**

	Number	%
<b>Access to transportation</b>		
Have access to transportation I need	33	89%
Do not have access to transportation I need	2	5%
No response	2	5%
<b>Reliability of transportation (1-10)</b>		
1 to 3 (least reliable)	1	3%
4 to 7	14	38%
8 to 10 (most reliable)	21	57%
No response	1	3%
<b>Car ownership</b>		
Own a car	12	32%
<b>Driver's license</b>		
Valid license	14	38%
Valid learner's permit	4	11%
No license or permit	19	51%
No response	1	3%
Source: UNC research interviews, November 2014 to March 2015		

<sup>9</sup>Most [Winston-Salem Transit Authority](#) routes run once or twice an hour (more frequently during peak hours), and travelers frequently must make at least one transfer to get to their destination. Many routes stop service by 7 pm. Bus fare is \$1 per ride (free transfers), and 30-day passes are \$30. YIT provides 30-day passes for active YIT participants.

## Education

Nearly all participants have finished high school, and a significant number are seeking further education, typically at community college. One study participant was still enrolled in high school at the time of the interview.

**Enrollment.** Ten participants (27%) said they were enrolled in school at the time of the interview, including one student still in high school. These numbers are lower than that for the general population. According to [U.S. Census 2013 Current Population Survey data](#), a majority of youth ages 18 to 21 are enrolled in school, and a sizeable percentage remain in school later than that.<sup>10</sup>

**High school diploma and GED.** Twenty-five participants (68%) had a high school diploma, and another 8 (22%) had earned a GED. Three (8%) had neither a diploma or GED, and one (3%) was still in high school. These numbers are higher than state and national averages: According to data from the American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2009-2013), 76% of North Carolina residents ages 17-25 had earned a high school diploma or GED; the national percentage was 82%.

**Highest educational attainment.** Just under half of the participants had taken classes beyond high school, although only a few had received a post-secondary degree. Specifically, 2 participants (5%) had received an associate's degree or higher. Fifteen participants (41%) had completed one or more year of study at a two- or four-year college but received no degree. Another 15 participants (41%) had finished 12th grade or equivalent. Four (11%) had not completed high school; that number included a participant still enrolled in school.

Nearly half of participants (16, or 43%) had earned a skills certificate in a topic such as carpentry, horticulture, restaurant service safety, or personal care assistant (PCA).

The percentage of YIT participants who have attended a post-secondary institution (46%) is somewhat lower than the state and national average (55%) reported in the ACS 5-Year Estimates (2009-2013).

This information is summarized in **Table 6**.

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<sup>10</sup> The following table displays the percentage of U.S. population enrolled in school by age.

Age	% Enrolled in School
18 years	72.9
19	61.3
20	52.6
21	53.0
22	38.0
23	29.5
24	22.1
25-29	13.3

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

**TABLE 6: Education Status of UNC Study Participants (n=37)**

	Number	%
<b>Enrolled in school</b>		
High school	1	3%
2- or 4-year college	9	24%
Not enrolled	27	73%
<b>High school diploma</b>		
High school diploma	25	68%
GED	8	22%
No diploma or GED	3	8%
Still in high school	1	3%
<b>Highest educational attainment</b>		
Less than high school diploma	4	11%
High school diploma or GED	15	41%
1+ year of college, no degree	15	41%
Associate's degree or higher	2	5%
<b>Skills certification</b>		
Skills certificate	16	43%
No skills certificate	21	57%

Source: UNC research interviews, November 2014 to March 2015

## Employment

Nearly all participants were working or had previously been connected with the workforce, and on average they earned more than the minimum wage.

**Connection to the workforce.** Specifically, 25 (68%) were working at the time of their interview; 9 others (24%) reported they weren't working now but had in the past. Only 3 (8%) said they had never held a paying job. This rate of current employment compares favorably to that of a similar group of youth from a [2008 study](#) (Macomber et al.) of youth who aged out of care in North Carolina, California, and Minnesota. In that study, 60% of youth were working at age 24.

**Wages.** Among those with jobs at the time of the interview (n=25), average hourly wage was \$8.50, and median hourly wage was \$8. Average and median wage calculations do not include two individuals whose wage structures were something other than hourly (e.g., commission).

These wages are lower than national median wages for those ages 15-24, according to a [2015 Census Report](#) (DeNavas & Proctor, 2015). This trend is not surprising; youth in the [2008 study](#) cited above (Macomber et al.) had a substantially lower average income than the national average; North Carolina youth in that study earned less than one third of the national average at age 24 (\$450 vs. \$1535). National median wages for that age group were \$34,311 in 2013.<sup>11</sup> Working full-time (defined as 40 hours per week,

<sup>11</sup> The 2013 median wage for ages 15-24 was \$34,311 when calculations were based upon responses to the Census Bureau's "traditional" questions about income on its Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement. When questions were redesigned to allow for more comprehensive data, the median wage was \$33,791.

52 weeks per year) for \$8 per would produce yearly earnings of \$16,640, and many interview participants did not work full-time, usually because their managers did not offer them eight-hour shifts.

**Hours worked.** Among those with jobs at the time of the interview (n=25), the average number of hours worked per week was 29.5. The median number of weekly hours worked was 27.5.

**Take-home pay.** Among those with jobs at the time of the interview (n=25), the average weekly take-home pay was \$224. The median weekly take-home pay was \$200.

**Longevity at current job.** Among those with jobs at the time of the interview (n=25), the average length of time working at the current job was 8.8 months, and median was 8 months.

**Longevity at longest job.** Most study participants had worked at a paying job—either a current or former job—for more than one year. Eleven participants (30%) had held the same job for 24 months or more, and 10 (27%) had held the same job for more than 12 but less than 24 months. Four (11%) had held the same job for more than 9 but less than 12 months, and 3 (8%) had held the same job for more than 6 but less than 9 months. Six (16%) others had held the same job for less than 6 months, and 3 (8%) had never held a paying job.

This information is summarized in **Table 7**.

**TABLE 7: Employment Status of UNC Study Participants (n=37)**

	Number	%
<b>Connection to workforce</b>		
Currently working	25	68%
Not working now but worked in past	9	24%
Never had paid employment	3	8%
<b>Wages</b>		
Average hourly wage	\$8.50	
Median hourly wage	\$8	
<b>Longevity at current job</b>		
Average longevity at current job, in months	8.8	
Median longevity at current job, in months	8	
<b>Longevity at longest paying job</b>		
24 months or more	11	30%
More than 12 but less than 24 months	10	27%
More than 9 but less than 12 months	4	11%
More than 6 but less than 9 months	3	8%
Less than 6 months	6	16%
Never had paid employment	3	8%

Source: UNC research interviews, November 2014 to March 2015

## Disconnected Youth

Disconnected youth are teens and young adults ages 16 to 24 who are not working and not in school. The costs of disconnection are steep, both for individuals and society. “Disconnected youth are cut off from the people, institutions, and experiences that would otherwise help them develop the knowledge, skills, maturity, and sense of purpose required to live rewarding lives as adults” (Lewis & Burd-Sharps, 2015). Being disconnected puts youth at risk—particularly former foster youth, who by definition have been cut off from family, and often community, at some point in their lives.

Factors associated with disconnected youth include living in a high-poverty neighborhood and having parents who have low educational attainment and/or a weak attachment to the labor market. Living in a highly segregated neighborhood is another risk factor.

Given the risk factors for disconnection, it is perhaps not surprising that nearly 1 in 4 study participants (9, or 24%) are disconnected. Of those, 5 are mothers with one or more young children, and 2 others had worked within the last 6 months and were actively looking for work.

These rates are higher than national average and also higher than those for the state and for the Winston-Salem metropolitan area.<sup>12</sup>

## Government Assistance

Most participants received one or more forms of government assistance, typically non-cash benefits such as food and housing assistance. Twenty-four participants (65%) said they received Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, commonly known as food stamps. Eight (22%) received WIC benefits, typically vouchers for baby formula, milk, and other nutritious food for mothers and small children. Fourteen (38%) received housing benefits, including Section 8 vouchers and rental assistance. Two (5%) received cash benefits including Supplemental Security Income or SSI. Eight said they received no government assistance.

In comparison, 17.1% of North Carolina families received SNAP in May 2015 as per [Food Research and Action Center data](#).

This information is summarized in **Table 8**.

**TABLE 8: Government Assistant Received by UNC Study Participants (n=37)**

	Number	%
<b>Government assistance</b>		
SNAP (food stamps)	24	65%
WIC	8	22%
Housing assistance	14	38%
Cash benefits including SSI	2	5%
No assistance	8	22%

Source: UNC research interviews, November 2014 to March 2015

<sup>12</sup> According to data from a [2015 report](#) by Measure of America (Lewis & Burd-Sharps, 2015), the Winston-Salem metropolitan area falls right in the middle of the 98 metropolitan areas in percentage of youth ages 16-24 who are disconnected (i.e., not working or in school). Winston-Salem is #54 out of 98. Just under 1 in 7 (13.9%) of all youth in the Winston-Salem metro area are disconnected. When divided by race, 13.0% of Whites are deemed disconnected. While the percentages of Blacks and Latinos who are disconnected were too small to be estimated, they are likely higher than those of Whites, given that the overall average (13.9%) is higher than that for whites (13.0%). The overall U.S. rate of disconnected youth is 13.8%, including 21.6% of African Americans, 16.3% of Latinos, and 11.3% of whites. In North Carolina, the rate is 14.7%, 32nd lowest in nation.

## Money for Expenses

Through job wages, government assistance, and help from others in their household, most participants said they had enough money to cover expenses. When asked if they'd had enough money to cover expenses last month, 28 (76%) replied Yes, 8 (22%) replied No, and 1 (3%) declined to respond.

This information is summarized in **Table 9**.

**TABLE 9: Self-Reported Ability to Cover Expenses of UNC Study Participants (n=37)**

	Number	%
<b>Ability to cover expenses</b>		
I had enough money to cover expenses last month	28	76%
I did not have enough money or No response	9	24%

Source: UNC research interviews, November 2014 to March 2015

## Health Insurance

About half of participants (18, or 49%) reported having health insurance, typically Medicaid. That number includes the 2 participants either in care or on a CARS agreement. Of those with insurance, 14 said they had Medicaid (including the 2 participants in care or on a CARS agreement), 2 reported having employer-provided insurance, and 2 had a self-purchased plan.

These percentages are low compared to national averages for youth in the U.S. According to the [U.S. Census Bureau](#), 21% of the population ages 18-24 had no insurance at any time in 2013. Insurance coverage varies by income, educational attainment, and race/ethnicity, with lower rates of coverage for those with low income, no college degree, and who are non-White.<sup>13</sup>

This information is summarized in **Table 10**.

**TABLE 10: Health Insurance Coverage of UNC Study Participants (n=37)**

	Number	%
<b>Health insurance</b>		
Health insurance	18	49%
Medicaid	14	38%
Employer-provided insurance	2	5%
Self-purchased insurance	2	5%
No health insurance	21	51%

Source: UNC research interviews, November 2014 to March 2015

<sup>13</sup> For those with incomes less than \$25,000 (all ages), the percentage of those with no health insurance at any time in 2013 was 23.3%, compared with 17.3% of those with incomes of \$25,000 to \$49,999; 11.8% of those with incomes of \$50,000 to \$74,999; and 6.2% of those with incomes of \$75,000 or more. For those with no high school diploma (all ages), the percentage of those with no health insurance in any of 2013 was 26.6%. The rate was 18.5% for those with high school diploma only; 15.4% for those with some college, no degree; 12.3% for those with associate's degree; and 8.1% with bachelor's degree or more. As for [uninsured rates by race](#), 10.2% of White, non-Hispanic people of all ages were uninsured for all of 2013, and 17.1% of Blacks and 28.4% of Hispanics of any race ([U.S. Census Bureau](#))

The percentage of uninsured has begun to drop since that time, likely due in large part to the passage of the ACA healthcare law. (The law fully went into effect in January 2014. Young people were able to join the parents' plan beginning in September 2010.) According to a [Gallup-Healthways Wellbeing poll \(Levy, 2015\)](#), 16.8% of persons ages 18-25 were uninsured during the first quarter of 2015, down from 23.5% in the first quarter of 2013.

## Children

Just over one third of participants (14, or 38%) had given birth to or fathered children. Most of those with children (9, or 24%) typically had one child, but 5 participants (14%) had two or three children.

This rate is higher than the national average for women ages 15-19 years and 20-24 years of all races.<sup>14</sup> This information is summarized in **Table 11**.

**TABLE 11: Children of UNC Study Participants (n=37)**

	Number	%
<b>Children</b>		
Have birthed or fathered children	14	38%
1 child	9	24%
2 or 3 children	5	14%
No children	23	62%

Source: UNC research interviews, November 2014 to March 2015

## Interaction with the Criminal Justice System

During research interviews between November 2014 and March 2015, nearly two thirds of participants (24, or 65%) reported having been arrested; 8 (22%) said they had been arrested multiple times, and just under half (17, or 46%) said they had spent time in jail, even if only few hours. Just under half (18, or 49%) said they had been convicted of a crime, 5 (14%) more than once.

In October 2015, UNC researchers examined the [North Carolina Department of Public Safety Offender Public Information database](#) of publicly available North Carolina criminal records about the 35 study participants who granted permission for UNC to look at their records. These records reflect convictions in North Carolina as well as sentences for probation and prison. According to these data, 10 YIT participants had received a conviction that resulted in probation offenses which led to conviction; most were misdemeanor offenses but 2 participants had felonies. All but one of these offenses occurred before enrollment in YIT. In addition, one participant had served time in prison before enrollment in YIT.

Research has shown that former foster youth have higher rates of arrest than the average population. In fact, former foster youth have been found to have higher felonious arrest rates even than other youth who are in many ways their peers—that is, non-foster youth from low-income families who receive TANF or Work First, according to a [2010 study](#) of North Carolina youth (Barth et al.) Still, comparison of these rates to those in the general population is difficult, as the FBI reports on number of arrests, not number of individuals arrested. Too, there is little data about arrest rates by age and race. Nonetheless, it is important

<sup>14</sup> The [Census](#) reports in its June 2014 Current Population Survey 3.1% of women ages 15-19 had given birth to at least one child. For women ages 20-24, that percentage was 24.8%. For white, non-Hispanic women, 3% of those ages 15-19 had given birth. For women ages 20-24, that percentage was 19.8%. For those Black alone, it was 6% and 35.9%. For those Hispanic, it was 6.3% and 33.5%. Meanwhile, according to [National Health Statistics Reports](#) (Martinez, Daniels, & Chandra, 2012), the percentage of women in 2006-2010 who ever had a biological child was 6.7% of women ages 15-19 and 29.7% of women ages 20-24. For men, the percentages were 2.6% for ages 15-19 and 15.3% for ages 20-24.

to note that males and African Americans are overrepresented in arrests. Arrests also skew young.<sup>15</sup> This information is summarized in **Table 12**.

**TABLE 12: UNC Study Participants' (n=37) Interaction with the Criminal Justice System**

	Number	%
<b>Interaction with the criminal justice system (Self-report)</b>		
Arrested	24	65%
Arrested one time	16	43%
Arrested more than once	8	22%
Held in jail	17	46%
Convicted of a crime	18	49%
Convicted once	13	35%
Convicted more than once	5	14%
Never arrested or convicted	13	35%
<b>Criminal convictions (Public records)</b>		
Convicted of a crime	10	27%
Misdemeanor	8	22%
Felony	2	5%
Before YIT enrollment	9	24%
After YIT enrollment	1	3%
Never arrested or convicted	25	68%
Records not available	2	5%

Source: UNC research interviews, November 2014 to March 2015; public criminal records

### “Survival Sex”

Former foster youth—runaways and those who aged out of care—are thought to be at elevated risk for becoming victims of sexual trafficking. Others may engage in “survival sex” in exchange for cash, drugs, or a place to stay. Among study participants, one (3%) responded Yes when asked if she had exchanged sex for money, drugs, or a place to stay. When asked if someone had forced her into these actions, she responded No.

This information is summarized in **Table 13**.

<sup>15</sup> According to the [FBI Uniform Crime Reports \(2014\)](#), 73.5% of those arrested in the U.S. during 2013 were males. That same year 28.3% were African American, even though African Americans represented only 13.9% of the general population on July 1 of that year, according to the [U.S. Census 2013 Population Estimates](#). Meanwhile, Whites were underrepresented in arrests: 68.9% of all those arrested were White, while Whites represented 77.7% of the general U.S. population on July 1, 2013.

The young are slightly overrepresented in arrests. [FBI Uniform Crime Reports](#) state that 37.5% of arrests during 2013 were arrests of persons under age 25. Persons under age 25 represented 33.2% of the U.S. general population on July 1, 2013, according to the [U.S. Census 2013 Population Estimates](#).

**TABLE 13: UNC Study Participants' (n=37) Engagement in "Survival Sex"**

	Number	%
<b>Engaged in sex for money, drugs, or shelter</b>		
Yes	1	3%
Forced to engage in this sex	0	0%
Not forced to engage in this sex	1	3%
No	36	97%

Source: UNC research interviews, November 2014 to March 2015

### Permanency

Most participants (29, or 78%) reported having one or more adults in their family that they could always rely on; in this case, family is defined as birth family, adoptive or foster family, or other family as designated by the participant. For some (11, or 30%) the most important adult family member in their life was a birth parent; for others (12, or 32%), it was an adult from their extended birth family. Five others (14%) named an adult from outside of their birth family as the most important adult family member in their life.

Most participants (32, or 86%) also said they had one or more adults *outside* their family they could always rely on. For some (8, or 22%), it was a current or former foster parent; for others (6, or 16%), it was someone from their church or faith community. Five others (14%) said they had a caseworker or social worker they could always rely upon. Ten (27%) named another person, including an adult friend, a parent of a friend, or a community member.

Only one participant (3%) said reporting having no adult s/he could always rely on.

This information is summarized in **Table 14**.

**TABLE 14: UNC Study Participants' (n=37) Permanent Connections to Family**

	Number	%
<b>I have an adult I can always rely on</b>		
Yes	36	97%
No	1	3%
<b>I have an adult family member I can always rely on</b>		
Yes	29	78%
Birth parent	11	30%
Adult from extended family	12	32%
Adult from outside birth family	5	14%
No	8	22%

*Continued on next page*

	Number	%
<b>I have an adult outside the family I can always rely on</b>		
Yes	32	86%
Current or former foster parent	8	22%
Someone from church or faith community	6	16%
Caseworker	5	14%
Other	10	27%
No	5	14%
Source: UNC research interviews, November 2014 to March 2015		

## Life Goals

**Goal type.** Nearly all participants (36, or 97%) were able to name a life goal, often more than one. The most common goal was to get a job; 26 participants (70%) named this as a goal, and most of these participants (22) were able to name a specific job they had in mind. Interestingly, 12 participants (33%) said they wanted to start their own business, and all but one had a specific business in mind. Finishing high school or college was a goal named by 5 participants (14%). (Numbers add up to more than 100% because some participants named more than one goal.)

**People to help achieve goals.** Most participants (33, or 89%) said they have at least one adult in their lives who can help them go after their goals. Many were able to name multiple adults, including a family member (20, or 54%) or a person from their church or community (12, or 32%), workplace (6, or 16%), or school (6, or 16%). Many youth (21, or 57%) also reported that they had one or more peers who could help them go after their goals. Only 3 participants (8%) said they did not have an adult or peer in their lives who could help them go after their life goals.

**On track to complete goals.** When asked if they were on track to completing their goals, most participants (27, or 73%) responded Yes.

This information is summarized in **Table 15**.

**TABLE 15: UNC Study Participants' (n=36<sup>†</sup>) Life Goals**

	Number	%
<b>Can name one or more life goals</b>		
Yes	35	95%
No or Declined	1	3%
Declined	1	3%
<b>Types of life goals</b>		
Get a job	26	70%
Specified job	22	60%
Unspecified job	4	11%
Start my own business	12	33%
Finish high school/college	5	14%
Other goal, unspecified	8	22%

*Continued on next page*

	Number	%
<b>People to help achieve goals</b>		
Has adult(s) who can help	33	89%
Family member	20	54%
Someone from church or community	12	32%
Someone from workplace	6	16%
Someone from school	6	16%
Has peer(s) who can help	21	57%
Has no adults or peers who can help	3	8%
<b>On track to achieve life goal(s)</b>		
Yes	27	73%
No or declined	10	27%
Source: UNC research interviews, November 2014 to March 2015		
*One participant was unable to complete these questions.		

## Financial Capability and Asset Purchases

**Bank accounts.** Just over two thirds of participants (25, or 68%) reported having a bank account into which they can deposit and withdraw money. Of those 25 with bank accounts, 6 had a checking account, 4 had a savings account, and 15 had both. Of the 12 with no bank account, 3 stated that they use a prepaid debit card provided by their employer.

These numbers are in line with others who fit the demographic profile of a typical YIT participant, according to the [FDIC \(2014\)](#). Compared to national averages, young African Americans who live in South are less likely to be “banked”—that is, have an open account at a federally insured depository institution. These same individuals are more likely to be “unbanked” (have no bank account) or “underbanked” (have a bank account but also use alternative financial services including payday lenders or prepaid debit cards).

Specifically, the FDIC (2014) reported that in a 2013 survey, among households in which the main occupant (householder) is age 15-24, 15.7% of these households are unbanked and 30.8% are underbanked. Among all households regardless of householder age, 27.7% of households with incomes of less than \$15,000 are unbanked and 22.4% are underbanked.

The young and unbanked are also more likely use prepaid debit cards, although those cards have fees associated with them. Fees are going down but still exist. A [February 2015 survey by BankRate.com](#) (Bell, 2015) found that many charge monthly maintenance fees of \$5 or more, ATM withdrawal fees (even at the issuer’s ATM), and fees for checking balances.

**Savings.** A little over half of participants (21, or 57%) said they had savings, either in a bank account or at home.

These rates are not unusual for young adults. According to a [June 2015 Bankrate survey \(Herron, 2015\)](#), about 1 in 4 adults of all ages (26%) had no emergency savings and only about half (45%) had enough emergency savings to last 3 months. An [August 2014 report](#) (Dominguez, 2014) from Bankrate said that only 31% of young adults ages 18 to 29 are saving for retirement.

**Matched asset purchases.** The Opportunity Passport Program allows YIT participants to receive up to \$3000 in matching funds<sup>16</sup> to purchase assets that meet program requirements. Purchases, which must be approved by staff, typically fall into four categories: housing, transportation (usually the purchase of a car

<sup>16</sup> Participant funds are typically matched on a 1:1 basis, but YIT matches purchases for some first-time match participants at a rate of 1.5:1.

or motorized scooter), credit rebuilding, and participant-specific purchases.

During research interviews that occurred between November 2014 and March 2015, just over half of participants (21, or 57%) said they had received a match through the Opportunity Passport Program, and many had received more than one match. Of the 32 matched purchases reported during interviews, 13 were for housing, 9 were for vehicles, and 10 were participant-specific, including paying off debt to regain a driver's license or cell phone service. That number increased over time. In October 2015, UNC researchers examined matched asset purchase data about the 35 study participants who granted permission for UNC to look at their records. Of those, 25 had made matched purchases, often more than one purchase in more than category. Specifically, 13 participants (35%) made purchases related to vehicles or transportation; 11 (30%) made purchases for housing; 5 (14%) made purchases for credit-building; and 1 (3%) each made purchases for healthcare and for education and training. In addition, 19 (15%) made purchases related to participant-specific needs.

This information is summarized in **Table 16**.

**TABLE 16: UNC Study Participants' (n=37) Financial Capability and Asset Purchases**

	Number	%
<b>Have a bank account</b>		
Yes	25	68%
Checking	6	16%
Savings	4	11%
Both checking and savings	15	51%
No	12	32%
<b>Have savings</b>		
Yes	21	57%
No or declined	16	43%
<b>Have purchased matched assets (self-reported)</b>		
Yes	21	57%
No or declined	16	43%
<b>Have purchased matched assets (YIT records)<sup>†</sup></b>		
Yes	25	68%
No	10	27%
Records not available	2	5%
<b>Type of assets purchased (YIT records)<sup>†</sup></b>		
Vehicle	13	35%
Housing	11	30%
Credit-building	5	14%
Participant-specific	19	51%

Source: UNC research interviews, November 2014 to March 2015

<sup>†</sup> Information from YIT records is available for the 35 participants who signed releases.

## YIT Interaction

**Frequency of interaction.** Participants reported being in touch with YIT frequently, with contact initiated with equal frequency by both parties. Most (26, or 70%) said they were in touch with YIT at least once a month, with 12 of those individuals reporting weekly contact. Among those in touch with YIT less frequently, 7 (19%) said they were in touch with YIT at least bimonthly, while 3 (8%) said they were in touch less than four times a year and 1 (3%) declined to respond. Most participants (22, or 59%) said that contact was “about 50/50”—that is, YIT contacted them about half the time, and they contacted YIT about half the time. Eight participants (22%) said YIT usually initiated contact; 6 (16%) said they usually initiated contact; and 1 (3%) declined to respond.

**Satisfaction with YIT.** Most participants reported being satisfied with YIT and their participation in it. When asked, “Are you able to get as much out of YIT as you want or participate as much as you want,” 25 (68%) responded Yes.

This information is summarized in **Table 17**.

**TABLE 17: UNC Study Participants’ (n=37) Interactions with YIT**

	Number	%
<b>Frequency of contact</b>		
Weekly	12	32%
Monthly	14	38%
Bimonthly	7	19%
Less than quarterly	3	8%
No response	1	3%
<b>Who usually initiates contact</b>		
YIT	8	22%
Participant	6	16%
About 50/50	22	59%
No response	1	3%
<b>Satisfaction with YIT</b>		
I am able to get as much/participate as much as I want	25	68%
I am not able to do this or No response	12	32%
Source: UNC research interviews, November 2014 to March 2015		

**Help received.** Participants reported receiving a number of specific goods and services from YIT, as outlined in **Table 18** below.

**TABLE 18: Help Received from YIT**

	Number	%
<b>Service or good received</b>		
Help with job search assistance or career counseling, or providing a reference	30	81%
Checking in on youth regularly -- to see how they are doing	29	78%
Assisting with budgeting and other financial matters	29	78%
Emotional support -- a caring adult to talk to	26	70%
Assisting with finding and accessing community resources	26	70%
Bus passes	26	70%
Help providing transportation (help with purchasing a car) or figuring out public transportation	21	57%
Assisting with daily living skills, such as cooking, paying bills, and housecleaning	17	46%
Assisting with an emergency (car accident, eviction) so youth does not have to experience that alone	14	38%
Help with finding an apartment or co-signing a lease	10	27%
Help with school (homework, re-enrollment in school, help applying to colleges)	10	27%
Assisting with medical or counseling appointments so youth does not have to experience that alone	7	19%

Source: UNC research interviews, November 2014 to March 2015

### Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Ample research speaks to the lifelong impact of early trauma. To quantify this impact, scientists at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Kaiser Permanente are systematically studying outcomes of persons with high numbers of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).

Findings of this [ACE Study \(see Felitti et al., 1998\)](#), which began in 1995, suggest that ACEs harm children’s developing brains so profoundly that the effects show up or continue decades later; they cause much chronic disease, mental illness, and are at the root of much violence.

Many service providers who work with at-risk youth are beginning to assess youth’s traumatic history by using the ACEs scale, which measures 10 specific ACEs identified by researchers. Five of the ACEs

measured are personal — physical abuse, verbal abuse, sexual abuse, physical neglect, and emotional neglect—and five are related to other family members: a parent who’s an alcoholic, a mother who’s a victim of domestic violence, a family member in jail, a family member diagnosed with a mental illness, and the disappearance of a parent through divorce, death or abandonment. Youth are asked to recall whether each specific type of ACE happened to them during childhood. They receive one point for each type of ACE that occurred. For example, a youth who suffered physical and sexual abuse and had a family member in jail would have an ACEs score of 3. As a youth’s ACE score increases, so does their risk for disease and social and emotional problems. Scores of 4 or higher indicate serious risk.

At YIT, youth who participate in Futures Planning are asked to complete an ACEs survey. ACEs scores are available for 10 YIT participants who participated in research interviews for the UNC study, and who also provided informed consent for UNC to see other information about them. Their average score was 6.2, which is extremely high. Only one of the 10 scores fell below 4.

This situation is summarized in **Table 19**.

**TABLE 19: ACEs Scores of Selected UNC Study Participants (n=10)**

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Scores	YIT		National <sup>†</sup>
	Number	%	%
0	0	0%	36%
1	1	10%	26%
2	0	0%	16%
3	0	0%	9.5%
4 or more	9	90%	12.5%
Average	6.2		

Source: UNC research interviews, November 2014 to March 2015

<sup>†</sup>National figures comes from the original ACEs Study of 17,000 Kaiser Permanente HMO members.

Although the low number of scores available requires that we interpret these findings with caution, they confirm that YIT participants are a population at high risk for poor health later in life.

This awareness about the lifelong effects of early trauma has led medical and mental health care providers to search for better treatment methods that could help children recover from trauma and perhaps reduce their risk for poor long-term outcomes. Chief among these are so-called *trauma-informed* and *trauma-focused* psychotherapies such as trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy. In North Carolina, the state Division of Social Services, which oversees local DSSs including Forsyth DSS, is piloting an intervention to bring trauma-informed practice to local DSSs. A major focus is assessing foster children, as well as other children who become involved in the child welfare system, for trauma symptoms and provide trauma-informed therapy as needed. The program is being piloted in 9 counties and is expected to be expanded statewide within the next 5 to 10 years. While Forsyth is not one of the pilot counties, Forsyth DSS has already begun efforts to make trauma-informed therapy available to more children who need it.

**SELF-SUFFICIENCY SURVEYS**

In July 2014, YIT staff began formally measuring participants’ progress in the seven YIT outcome areas. YIT’s measurement tool, called the Self-Sufficiency Survey (SSS), is based on the Results Oriented Management and Accountability model, or ROMA, which was designed by community action officials to achieve continuous improvement. ROMA is achieved through the use of a continuous cycle of assessment, planning, implementation, achievement of results, and evaluation.<sup>17</sup> YIT’s SSS was adapted from several ROMA-type tools, including the Massachusetts Family Self-Sufficiency Scales and Ladder Assessment Form, a self-sufficiency matrix created by the Snohomish County (Washington) Self-Sufficiency Taskforce. The tool is completed by YIT staff. Data is collected in January and July.

The SSS rates progress on an 11-point scale divided into five categories as outlined below. The survey itself may be found in Appendix A.

Thriving	Stable	Safe	PREVENTION LINE	Vulnerable	In Crisis
9-10	7-8	5-6		3-4	0-2

YIT first administered the tool in July 2014 to its most active participants—a little over half of those enrolled at the time. Those same individuals were surveyed again in January 2015. In July 2015, more were added.

For this report, we analyzed scores only for the YIT participants who took part in UNC research interviews and signed a release allowing UNC researchers to look at their records. Thirty-seven YIT participants completed interviews, and 35 of those signed releases. Of those 35 UNC study participants, 16 took the SSS all three times it has been offered to date: July 2014, January 2015, and July 2016.<sup>18</sup> **Table 20** includes information about these 16 participants.

**TABLE 20: Self-Sufficiency Survey Scores for UNC Study Participants Who Took All 3 Surveys (n=16)**

	Scores			% change		
	July 2014 (Time 1)	Jan 2015 (Time 2)	July 2015 (Time 3)	T1 to T2	T2 to T3	T1 to T3
Housing	5.44	6.81	7.41	25%	9%	36%
Education	5.63	5.94	5.85	6%	-2%	4%
Employment and Income	3.87	5.07	5.47	31%	8%	41%
Wellness: Health	5.88	6.44	6.35	10%	-1%	8%
Wellness: Safety	6.44	7.25	6.79	13%	-6%	5%
Permanence	4.63	5.44	5.44	17%	0%	17%
Social Capital	4.44	6.06	6.08	36%	0%	37%
Income Management	3.81	5.19	4.73	36%	-9%	24%
AVERAGE	5.04	6.04	6.02	20%	0%	19%

<sup>17</sup> To learn more about ROMA, visit <http://www.nascsp.org/CSBG/594/ROMA.aspx?iHt=13>.

<sup>18</sup> Thirty-three YIT participants took the SSS in July 2014; 21 of these were UNC study participants who signed a release of information. All these individuals took the SSS again in January 2015. However, by July 2015, 9 of the original 33 (including 5 of the 21 UNC study participants with signed releases) had left the program. The remaining 24 (including 16 UNC study participants) completed the SSS all three times.

July 2015 SSS respondents included 41 YIT participants overall, including 26 UNC study participants with signed releases.

As can be seen in **Table 20**, participant improvement is not linear. When compared to July 2014, average scores rise in January 2015 but then fall in July 2015. However, this dropoff is not uniform across all categories. Notably, housing and employment scores saw noticeable increases.

There are several possible explanations for this falloff in scores:

- **Rapid but unsustainable gains.** Many participants come to YIT during periods of difficulty or even crisis, during which time their self-sufficiency scores would be low. These scores would improve as a result of YIT assistance, which is reflected in the higher scores in January 2015. Over time, however, complications may arise. A job may fall through; personal relationships may sour; attempts to return to school could be derailed. These complications would lead to decreased self-sufficiency, as reflected in the lower scores in July 2015.
- **Reduced staff capacity.** YIT enrollment continues to increase, but until recently staff capacity did not grow along with it, resulting in a net reduction in resources available for each participant. If staff capacity outstripped participant demand, thereby leading to unmet needs, then this could have led to a decrease in scores.
- **Intervention not strong enough to erase risk.** As discussed in the introduction to this report, current and former foster youth are at high risk for poor outcomes such as unplanned parenthood and involvement with the criminal justice system. The experiences that lead to this increased risk—including but not limited to adverse childhood experiences and trauma related to abuse or neglect as well as removal from the home and placement into foster care—have a deep and lingering impact. While enrollment in YIT and similar programs can help youth as they transition to adulthood, it is possible that these interventions are not strong enough to overcome the risks that participants bring with them to YIT. Participation in YIT could forestall poor outcomes but not prevent them altogether.

Also, while the decreased scores in July 2015 may be discouraging, it is important to note that July 2015 scores are higher than those in July 2014 in all categories.

## EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES

One way to compare the impact of YIT on outcomes for youth is to compare the outcomes of youth who participate in the initiative with those of youth in similar counties. One outcome of interest is employment. Youth who work, especially those who have formed an attachment to the labor force by their early 20s, are believed to be more likely to transition to self-sufficiency than those who aren't employed. To explore earning and attachment to the labor force, an analysis was undertaken using earnings data obtained by the NC Department of Commerce Division of Employment Security (DES). These data were made available through a Memorandum of Understanding between the NC Division of Social Services and the DES. The data are used to track outcomes of youth who entered foster care as well as for individuals receiving services through county departments of social services across the state.

Youth who participated in an interview with UNC researchers were asked to sign a release of information and to provide identifying information so that these earnings data could be used in the analysis. Of the youth who were interviewed, all but three gave permission. Earnings information for these youth was compared to that of all youth in Forsyth County who were eligible to participate in YIT (i.e., the youth was in foster care at some point after turning 14 and is currently age 25 or younger)<sup>19</sup>. For purposes of comparison, the experiences of youth from four other counties, in addition to Forsyth, were used. These comparison counties were selected based on geographic location or because they had a similar number of

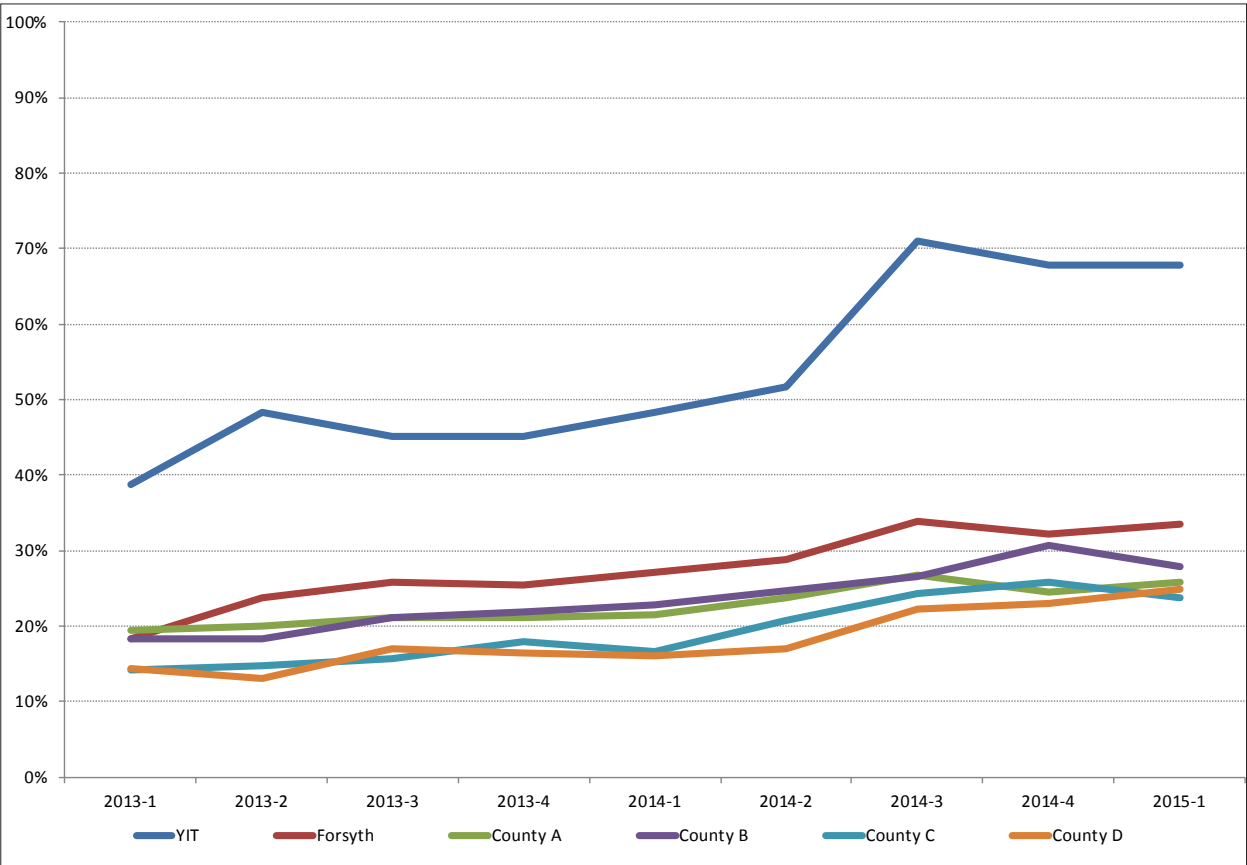
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<sup>19</sup> The data for Forsyth County include the YIT participants who were interviewed as part of this study, YIT participants who were not interviewed, and youth who are eligible for YIT but not participating. Without the release of information it was not possible to separate the YIT participants who were not interviewed from the YIT-eligible population in Forsyth. By including all YIT-eligible youth, whether they were participating and signed a release or not, it was possible to compare the outcomes for youth in Forsyth with the youth from the four other counties.

youth who would have been eligible to participate in YIT if it were available in their county.

**Figure 18** shows the percentage of YIT participants who were interviewed and signed a release who had earnings in any calendar quarter between January 2013 and March 2015. The figure also shows the percentage of YIT-eligible youth from Forsyth and the four comparison counties who had earnings in any of those calendar quarters. As the figure illustrates, the percentages of youth with earnings were similar for YIT-eligible youth in Forsyth and the comparison counties. For those counties, those percentages ranged between 14% and 18% in the first quarter of 2013 and rose to between 24% and 33% in the first quarter of 2015. The figure also shows that the 39% of the YIT youth who were interviewed had earnings in the first quarter of 2013. By the first quarter of 2015, 68% of the youth who were interviewed had earnings.

**FIGURE 18: Percentage of Youth with Earnings by Quarter**

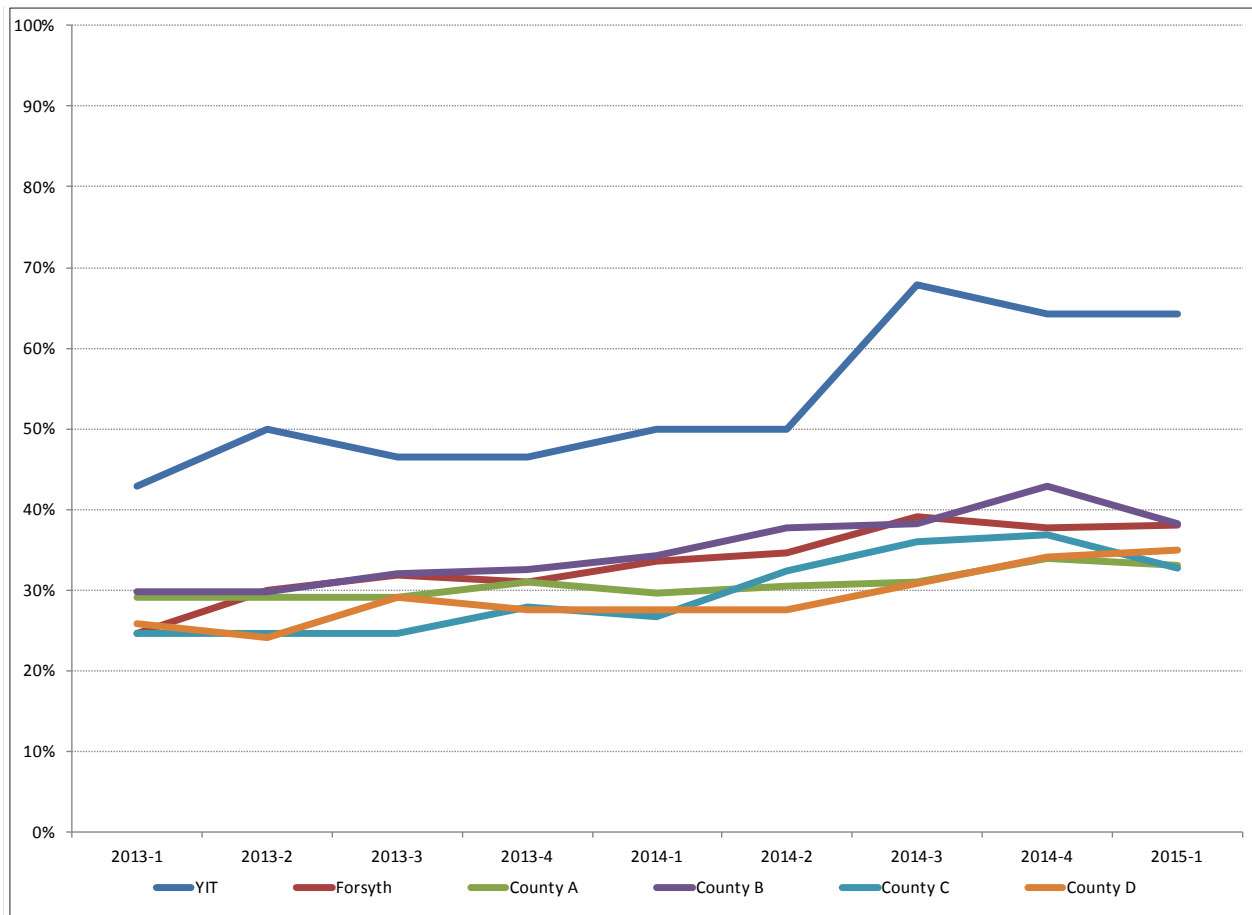


Not all of the youth who were interviewed were currently employed. While many of the youth who were not working at the time of the interview reported that they had held a job in the past, not all of the youth had work experience. Some YIT participants who were contacted and invited to participate in the study were unable to do so because they were working. It is not clear what proportion of YIT participants who were unable to schedule an interview were working. It is also not clear whether the youth who were interviewed were more likely to be employed than those who were not. More than half of the YIT participants were interviewed.

Since youth eligible for YIT include those as young as 14, a separate analysis was conducted examining the employment experiences of youth who were age 18 or older on January 1, 2013. The results of that analysis are illustrated in **Figure 19**. As the figure indicates, in the first quarter of 2013, 43% of the YIT

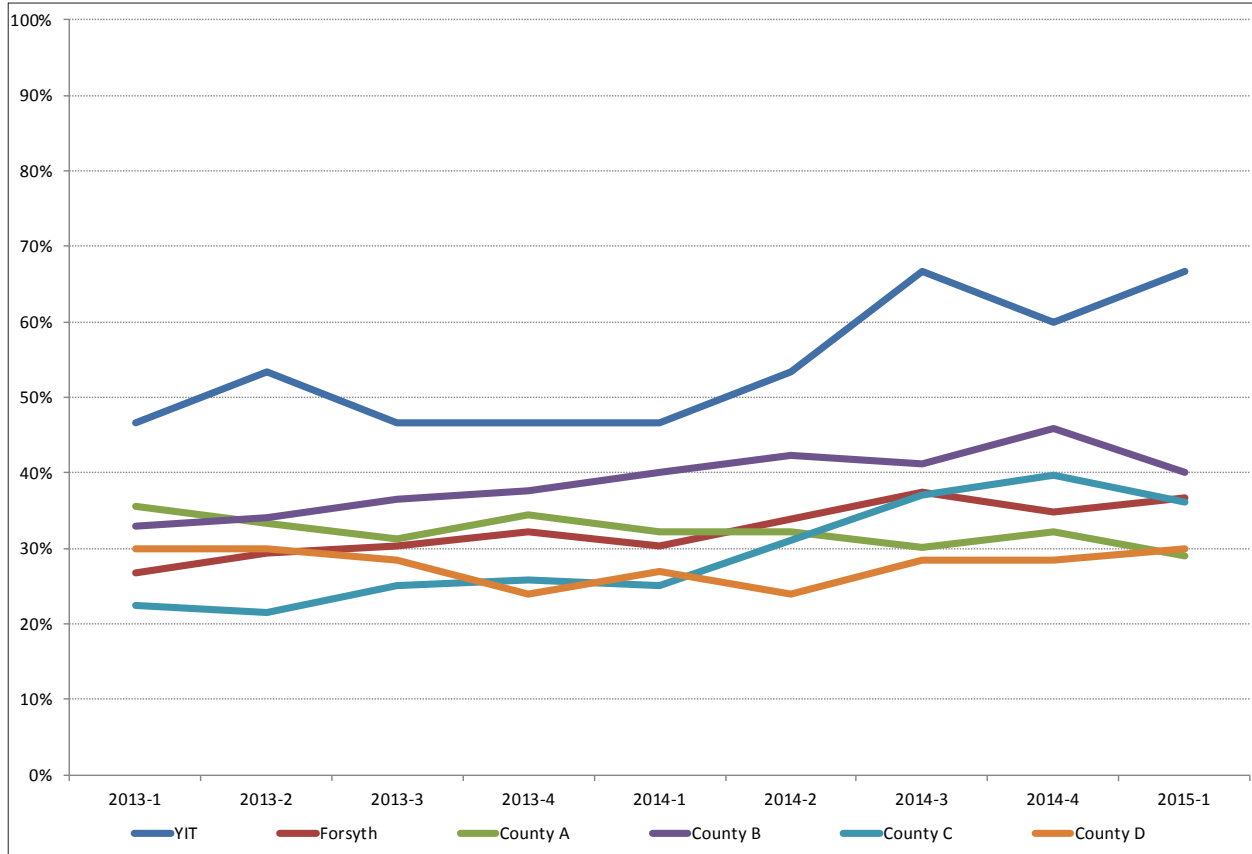
participants who were interviewed had earnings. This is a higher percentage than that reported in Figure 18 because youth who were not 18 by January 1, 2013, were omitted. By the first quarter of 2015, 64% of the YIT participants who were interviewed and signed a release had earnings. In Forsyth and the four comparison counties, between 25% and 30% of the youth had earnings in the first quarter of 2013. By the first quarter of 2015, between 33% and 38% of these youth had earnings.

**FIGURE 19: Percentage of Youth Age 18+ on January 1, 2013, with Earnings by Quarter**



**Figure 20** further refines this analysis by analyzing only those youth who were age 21 or older on January 1, 2013. By including only youth who are age 21 or older, the percentage of youth with earnings each quarter increased, as the figure reports. In the first quarter of 2013, between 22% and 25% of the youth in the four comparison counties had earnings. In Forsyth County, 27% of the YIT eligible youth had earnings. At the same time, 47% of the YIT youth age 21 and older as of January 1, 2013, who were interviewed had earnings, a higher percentage than that shown in previous figures because younger youth were omitted.

**FIGURE 20: Percentage of Youth Age 21+ on January 1, 2013, with Earnings by Quarter**

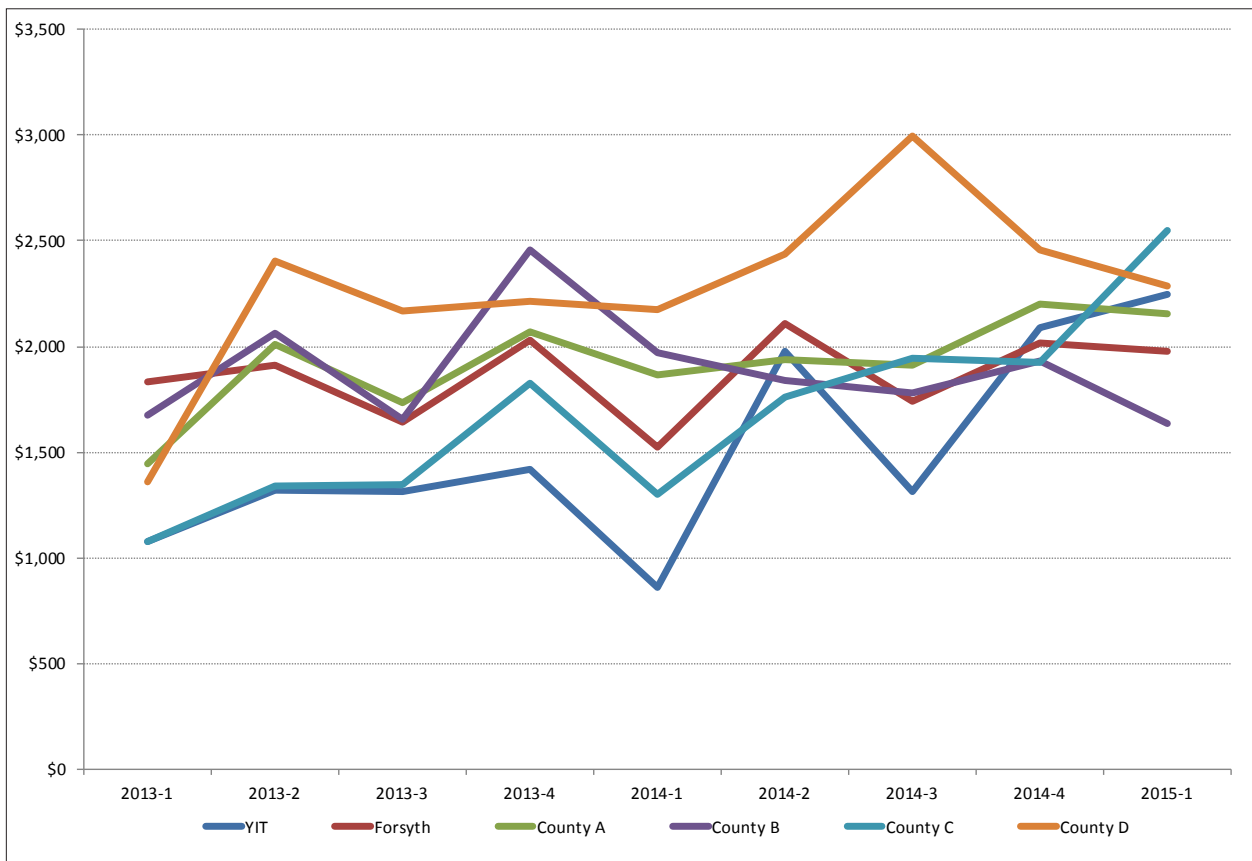


The percentage of youth with earnings increased over time for all groups. By the first quarter of 2015, the percentage of youth who would have been eligible for YIT and who were age 21 or older on January 1, 2013, from the four comparison counties ranged from 29% to 40%. In Forsyth County, 37% of these YIT-eligible youth had earnings. Among the YIT participants who were interviewed, 67%—more than two out of three youth—had earnings in the first quarter of 2015.

Even though a high percentage of the YIT participants were working, their wages were not as high as the earnings of the youth in Forsyth or the four comparison counties, as **Figure 21** reports. According to the figure, the median wages for the YIT participants who were 18 or older on January 1, 2013, tended to be the lowest when compared with Forsyth and the four other comparison counties. In the first quarter of 2013, four counties had higher median wages among their YIT-eligible youth who were 18 or older on January 1, 2013. The median wage for the YIT participants who were interviewed and who were 18 or older on January 1, 2013, was \$1,076.22. Only one other county—County C—had a lower median wage (\$1,074.43), less than two dollars below the median wage of the YIT participants who were interviewed.

By the first quarter of 2014, the median wage among the YIT participants who were interviewed had fallen to \$860.79. Among the other counties, the median wage ranged from \$1,301.94 to \$2,174.42. The median wage for the YIT participants who were interviewed began to climb after that, reaching \$2,249.91 in the first quarter of 2015, higher than the median wage for three other counties.

**FIGURE 21: Median Earnings by Quarter for Youth Age 18+ on January 1, 2013, with Earnings**



It is not clear why the median earnings for the YIT participants who were interviewed were lower through the third quarter of 2014 than those for Forsyth and the four other comparison counties. One reason may be that many of the YIT participants who had earnings were working part time and, as a result, their earnings were low. Among the YIT participants, 43% had earnings in the first quarter of 2013, 13 percentage points higher than the next county. Even though their earnings were low, they were employed. By the fourth quarter of 2014, their median earnings were higher than those for youth in three other counties. In the first quarter of 2015, there were only two other counties where the youth had higher median wages. At the same time, 64% of the YIT participants who were interviewed and who signed a release of information had earnings, 26 percentage points higher than the closest county.

## ARRESTS

A file from the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) containing information on arrests was linked with the files containing information on the YIT participants and the youth who would be eligible for YIT in the comparison counties. That linkage was not fruitful. The AOC file appeared to contain information on a very small number of youth from either the YIT pool or from the comparison counties. The number of youth identified was too small to use for analysis.

## Summary

**In its first 4 years, YIT has refined its focus and services.** YIT's original vision was to connect youth to existing providers and services, provide opportunities for youth leadership, and work to create broad policy and systems changes. However, given the substantial and urgent challenges faced by many participants, YIT has been forced to place a greater emphasis on direct services, at least for now. YIT has also narrowed its client base; where it once attempted to serve all who met eligibility requirements, it now offers enhanced services for a smaller group of engaged participants. In addition, YIT has enhanced its recordkeeping through the use of Goodwill's ClientTrack system as well as an Excel spreadsheet to track each interaction with youth. Finally, YIT has expanded efforts to track outcomes. Youth have always completed the semiannual Opportunity Passport Participant Survey (OPPS), but now participants also meet with staff to complete a Self-Sufficiency Scale to track progress on short- and long-term goals.

YIT appears to be making a significant difference in the lives of the youth who participate. Services, particularly intensive case management, are being provided. The outcome for the youth continue to improve the longer they remain in the program. Analysis of administrative data indicate that a much higher percentage of the YIT participants are employed compared with similar groups of youth from Forsyth and other counties.

The participants continue to face many challenges. According to interviews conducted by researchers from the UNC-CH School of Social Work, most of the youth who participate have low incomes. Many are have children. A number have received benefits such as food stamps. A proportion of the youth report a history of arrest and subsequent conviction. A high percentage experienced physical and psychological trauma as children and youth.

At the same time, the researcher found that almost three out of four YIT participants had earned a high school diploma or a GED. More than two out of three were currently working, and more than nine out of ten were currently working or had been employed in the past. Most had accounts with banks and 57% reported having savings. Almost every youth interviewed—97%—reported having a connection with an adult. Among the most committed participants, the outcomes are improving. While the improvement may not be continuous or occur at the same rate over time, there have been no major backslides

## Recommendations

Recommendations for future work include the following:

**Continue to provide intensive, sustained services to youth who show commitment.** YIT's services are certainly needed and should continue. YIT serves a vulnerable population that often "falls through the cracks." There are few other services available for this group, as they are too old for most DSS services but too young or not yet eligible for other social services. This is especially true for participants over age 21, who comprise more than half of the current YIT population.

That said, services should continue to be focused on youth who show commitment to the program, as evidenced by (1) willingness to establish specific goals, (2) demonstration of effort to reach goals, and (3) regular, consistent communication from youth. Youth who do not maintain commitment should receive less intensive services, if any at all. This focus on committed youth will ensure that YIT is able to maximize its limited resources.

**Intensify partnerships with providers and agencies so youth can get needed services.** YIT has worked to form and maintain relationships with community providers and agencies—including DSS, CenterPoint LME/MCO, Goodwill, United Way, and others—who can provide services and opportunities for youth. However, these efforts have been hemmed in by YIT's limited staff capacity. Staff capacity will

expand with the hiring in 2016 of an additional youth advisor. At that time, YIT should redouble its partnership efforts.

**Seek diverse funders.** YIT received seed funding from local philanthropic organizations, and its funding base has expanded little since then. While YIT will always rely on external funding to meet its operating expenses—there are no profit margins in providing services and opportunities to former foster youth—it may wish to diversify its support. Other Jim Casey programs receive funding from a variety of sources, which would serve to cushion the blow should one or more funder withdraw support. YIT should continue to seek ongoing funding from local and regional foundations. It may also wish to pursue private-sector support for specific goal areas such as transportation or employment. For example, a partnership with a local grocery store, auto mechanic, or used car dealership. Finally, YIT may wish to seek public funding from the city or the county, or work more closely with selected public agencies such as the housing authority.

**Continue awareness efforts.** YIT received a flurry of media coverage upon startup in 2012 and has continued a moderate media presence since then, thanks largely to efforts by a Community Partnership Board member who is a public relations expert. Significantly, YIT was featured in a front-page story in the local daily newspaper ([Hewlett, 2013](#); [Herron, 2014](#)). On social media, YIT maintains a [website](#) (coordinated by a youth participant) and a [Facebook page](#) and releases an occasional electronic newsletter. YIT should continue its efforts to gain attention in the traditional media (e.g., newspaper, radio) and work to expand its online presence, perhaps by partnering with a community or student volunteer to retool its website and create regular Facebook updates.

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## Websites

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study. <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/>

City of Winston-Salem YouthBuild. <http://ybusa-qa.civicactions.net/siteview/75622/info>

Client Track. <http://clienttrack.com/>

The Duke Endowment. <http://dukeendowment.org/>

Forsyth County Department of Social Services. <http://co.forsyth.nc.us/DSS/>

Forsyth Futures. <http://www.forsythfutures.org/>

Goodwill of Northwest North Carolina. <http://www.goodwillnwc.org/>

Guide Right. [http://www.mindbodyinstitutebeyond.com/GuideRight\\_2.html](http://www.mindbodyinstitutebeyond.com/GuideRight_2.html)

Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative. <http://www.jimcaseeyouth.org/>

Jordan Institute, School of Social Work, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Social Work. <http://ssw.unc.edu/jordan>

Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust. <http://www.kbr.org/>

Maya Angelou Center for Health Equity. <http://www.wakehealth.edu/MACHE/>

North Carolina Department of Public Safety Offender Public Information. <http://webapps6.doc.state.nc.us/opi/offendersearch.do?method=view>

North Carolina Families United. <http://www.ncfamiliesunited.org/>

Northwest Piedmont Service Corps. <http://www.nwpcog.dst.nc.us/index.aspx?page=73>

Results Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA). <http://www.nascsp.org/CSBG/594/ROMA.aspx?iHt=13>

School of Social Work, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Social Work. <http://ssw.unc.edu>

Winston-Salem Foundation. <https://wsfoundation.org/>

Winston-Salem Transit Authority. <http://www.wstransit.com/>

Youth in Transition. <http://youthintransition.org/>

Youth in Transition (on Facebook). <https://www.facebook.com/youthintransitionfc/?fref=ts>

## Appendix A

OUTCOME 1: HOUSING						
Ladders↓	Affordability	Stability	Safety of Community	Safety at Home	Longevity	Number of boxes checked
THRIVING (9-10)	Rent payment is <25% of gross income	No threat of eviction.	Feels safe in the community all the time and is able to use emergency services if needed. (10)	Lives alone, or relationships with others in the home are emotionally supportive/ nurturing and free of violence. (10)	Has lived in current residence for over a year. (10)	5 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/>
STABLE (7-8)	Rent payment is <30% of gross income	No pending eviction but eligibility for housing will end in 13-24 months.	Occasionally feels unsafe in the community, but uses emergency services when needed. (8)	Lives in a safe relationship and has people to call on if (s)he needs help or is afraid. (8)	Has lived in current residence for 6-12 months.	5 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/>
SAFE (5-6)	Rent payment is 30-35% of gross income	No pending eviction but eligibility for housing will end within 1 year.	Feels unsafe in community at various times (e.g., night) but knows how to and chooses to access community services. (6)	Does not live with a violent person. (6)	Has lived in current residence 3-6 months. (6)	5 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Prevention Line</b>						
VULNERABLE (3-4)	Rent payment is 35-40% of gross income	Living in transitional housing. (4) Living in temporary shelter. (3)	Feels unsafe in community most of the time and has access to emergency services but is unlikely or chooses not to use them. (3)	Relationships with others in the home are emotionally/ mentally abusive but not physically violent. OR Theft occurs. (3)	Has lived in residence less than 3 months.	5 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/>
IN CRISIS (0-2)	Rent payment is >40% of gross income	Forced displacement (received eviction notice; told to move out) (2) Couch surfing or doubling up with others (1) Homeless (0)	Feels unsafe in community at all times and has no access or hasn't learned how to access emergency services like 911. (0)	Relationships with others in the home are physically abusive. (0)	Homeless. (0)	5 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/>

<b>OUTCOME 2: EDUCATION (Ages 14-18)</b>	
Thriving (9-10)	Individual is at grade level and on track to finish high school on time, or has received a high school diploma or GED. (10)
Safe (7-8)	
Stable (5-6)	
<b>Prevention Line</b>	
Vulnerable (3-4)	Individual has basic reading, writing, and math skills but is behind grade level. (4).  Individual is not a native English speaker and cannot comfortably understand and speak English. (3)
In Crisis (0-2)	Individual has difficulty with reading, writing and math skills but is enrolled in school. (2)  Individual has dropped out of school. (0)

<b>OUTCOME 2: EDUCATION (Ages 19-25)</b>	
Thriving (9-10)	Individual is enrolled in a 4-year college and on track to complete degree, or has completed a 4-year degree. (10)
Safe (7-8)	Individual is enrolled in a 2-year college or vocational school and on track to complete degree or coursework, or has completed a 2-year degree or vocational training.
Stable (5-6)	Individual has a high school diploma, GED, or equivalent.
<b>Prevention Line</b>	
Vulnerable (3-4)	Individual does not have a HS Diploma or equivalent; does have basic reading, writing, and math skills. (4) Individual is not a native English speaker and cannot comfortably understand and speak English. (3)
In Crisis (0-2)	Individual has plans to seek GED. (2)  Individual has no high school diploma and no plans to seek GED. (0)

<b>OUTCOME 3: EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME: AGES 18-25</b>				
<b>Ladders ↓</b>	<b>Employment</b>	<b>Income</b>	<b>Transportation</b>	<b>Number of boxes checked</b>
<b>THRIVING (9-10)</b>	Individual is a full-time employee (35+ hours per week), receiving benefits, and can fully support themselves and their family without subsidies. (10)	Individual pays all bills without assistance, has savings account with one months' savings.	Individual maintains a reliable vehicle, has a valid driver's license and can purchase gas for all of their transportation needs. (10)  Individual maintains a reliable vehicle, has a valid driver's license and can purchase gas for most transportation needs. (9)	3 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>STABLE (7-8)</b>	Individual is a full-time employee (35+ hours), receiving benefits, and can pay their share of household expenses. (8)  Individual is employed full-time (35+ hours) with an established work history in their chosen field. (7)	Individual pays bills without assistance, has no savings.	Individual has a valid driver's license but no reliable vehicle, and is able to get where they need to go using public transportation. (8)	3 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>SAFE (5-6)</b>	Individual is employed part time (20-34 hours) with some work history and skills that offer potential for growth within current job or an upward move to a different employer.	Individual attempting to pay bills without subsidies but may need some assistance (e.g., may be paying on alternating months).	Individual has no driver's license but is able to get where they need to go using public transportation. (6)	3 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Prevention Line</b>				
<b>VULNERABLE (3-4)</b>	Individual works less than 20 hours per week.	Individual can meet basic living expenses with subsidies.	Individual knows how to use public transportation and lives within walking distance of a bus stop. (4)  Individual knows how to use public transportation but doesn't live within walking distance of a bus stop. (3)	3 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>IN CRISIS (0-2)</b>	Individual is unemployed.	No income.	Individual has no vehicle or driver's license and does not know how to use public transportation. (0)	3 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/>

**OUTCOME 3: EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME: AGES 14-17**

Ladders ↓	Employment	Income	Transportation	Number of boxes checked
THRIVING (9-10)			Individual has a foster parent or other adult who can always take them where they need to go. (10)	3 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/>
STABLE (7-8)			Individual has a foster parent or other adult who can take them where they need to go most of the time; if no ride, is able to get where they need to go using public transportation. (8)	3 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/>
SAFE (5-6)			Individual has a foster parent or other adult who can take them where they need to go occasionally; if no ride, is able to get where they need to go using public transportation. (6)	3 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Prevention Line</b>				
VULNERABLE (3-4)			Individual knows how to use public transportation and lives within walking distance of a bus stop. (4)  Individual knows how to use public transportation but does not live within walking distance of a bus stop. (3)	3 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/>
IN CRISIS (0-2)			Individual has no reliable ride and does not know how to use public transportation. (0)	3 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/>

**OUTCOME 4: WELLNESS (HEALTH AND HEALTH CARE)**

Ladders ↓	Physical Health	Mental Health	Access to Services	Insurance	Health Behavior	Number of boxes checked
THRIVING (9-10)	No chronic illness. (10)	Individual has mental health issue symptoms that are absent or rare; has good or superior functioning in a wide range of activities.	No longer needs services or is receiving full range of services to meet needs. (10)  No significant barriers limit access to needed services. (9)	Covered by private (or employer-provided) health insurance for physical, mental health, and dental needs. (10)  Covered by private (or employer-provided) health insurance for physical and mental health needs. (9)	Maintains pro-active preventative medical care and dental care. (10)  Maintains pro-active preventative medical care, but not dental care. (9)	5 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/>
STABLE (7-8)	Stable chronic illness. (8)	Individual shows minimal symptoms that are expectable responses to life stressors; has only slight impairment in functioning.	Receiving needed services but barriers may limit choice of providers, geography, times of service, or quality. (8)	Receives Medicaid or other assistance. (7)	Takes all medications as prescribed for mental/physical health care needs; maintains good preventative medical care.	5 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/>
SAFE (5-6)	Chronic illness generally well managed. (6)	Individual has some/moderate difficulty in functioning due to mental health problems; mild symptoms may be present, but are transient.	Knows what s/he needs, or knows how to learn about services available to meet needs, but has only 1 option for service provision. (6)	Has health insurance but coverage is inadequate. (6)	Attempts to make and keep routine medical appointments. (6)	5 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Prevention Line</b>						
VULNERABLE (3-4)	Chronic medical conditions, potentially life-threatening. (3)	Has great difficulty caring for self or others; significant problems with social, work, or school settings. (3)	Knows his/her needs and where to get services but significant barriers inhibit individual from getting services on their own. Assistance required. (4)	Individual is eligible for Medicaid but does not receive it. (4)	Inconsistent use of health care services despite serious medical condition. (3)	5 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/>
IN CRISIS (0-2)	Chronic, life-threatening medical conditions. with inconsistent to minimal follow-up with care. (0)	Cannot care for self or family; shows recurring suicide ideation. (1)  At clear risk of harm to self or others. (0)	Services don't exist in a location where individual can access them, or barriers prevent access (cost, transportation). (2)  Individual is unaware of resources. (1)	Individual is ineligible for health insurance. (0)	Needs help identifying health care needs. (1)  Unable to health care articulate needs. (0)	5 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/>

<b>OUTCOME 4: WELLNESS (SAFETY)</b>				
<b>Ladders ↓</b>	<b>Substance Use</b>	<b>Legal</b>	<b>Safe Relationships</b>	<b>Number of boxes checked</b>
<b>THRIVING</b> (9-10)	Uses alcohol and prescription drugs in an appropriate manner (minimal to no usage). (10)	No legal issues or legal issues fully resolved through litigation, negotiations, dismissal or other legal means. (10)	Involved in intimate or personal relationships that are emotionally supportive/nurturing and free of violence. (10)	3 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>STABLE</b> (7-8)	Occasional misuse of alcohol and/or prescription drugs, generally uses in an appropriate manner. (8)	Has legal representation and issues are moving towards resolution. (8)	Lives in a safe relationship or lives alone and has people to call on if (s)he needs help or is afraid. (8)	3 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>SAFE</b> (5-6)	Occasional abuse of substances. Usage of chemicals has a tendency to lead to an abuse pattern, resulting in negative consequences. (6)	With legal assistance, has initiated or responded to legal actions, is in court system. (6)  Has obtained pro se assistance (assistance to individuals representing themselves) or representation sufficient to initiate legal action or respond to actions initiated by others. (5)	Does not live with a violent person or is not in a relationship with a violent/abusive person. (6)	3 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Prevention Line</b>				
<b>VULNERABLE</b> (3-4)	Significant abuse of substances, resulting in chronic family/work difficulties. (3)	Has legal information/advice; correctly identifies the problem as legal problem; knows what to do but lacks ability to proceed without legal assistance. (4)  Has received legal information/advice and correctly identifies the problem as a legal problem, may not know what to do. (3)	In an emotionally/mentally abusive relationship that has not yet become physically violent. (3)	3 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>IN CRISIS</b> (0-2)	Toxicity due to chemical dependency or alcoholism. Detoxification may be required. (0)	Has significant legal problem, recognizes the legal issues but does not know what to do. (2) Has significant legal problem (defined as legal problem affecting basic needs of living but does not understand that the problem involves legal issues and does not know what to do. (1)	In a relationship that is physically and/or emotionally abusive. (0)	3 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/>

**OUTCOME 5: PERMANENCE**

THRIVING (9-10)	Individual has an adult to rely on for a lifetime; has a supportive family network; utilizes connections to help them achieve life goals.
STABLE (7-8)	Individual maintains a healthy personal relationship with 5 responsible adults.
SAFE (5-6)	Individual has at least one connection in all social capital domains (family, school/work, neighborhood/community, peers); and/or maintains a strong relationship with someone in their family, school/work, neighborhood/community, or peer group.
<b>Prevention Line</b>	
VULNERABLE (3-4)	Individual is engaged in Family Finding; has a mentor; and/or and has a strong relationship with someone in their family, school/work, neighborhood/community, or peer group.
IN CRISIS (0-2)	Individual has no adult they can rely on for a lifetime; has no supportive family network.

**OUTCOME 6: SOCIAL CAPITAL**

THRIVING (9-10)	Individual has supportive, trust-based, relationships in the community that help them achieve their personal goals.
STABLE (7-8)	Individual knows how to access resources in the community to work towards their personal goals; has broadened networking within the community; and has strengthened relationship with initial community leaders contacted.
SAFE (5-6)	Individual is active in community events; has networked with 2-3 community leaders to start a networking base.
<b>Prevention Line</b>	
VULNERABLE (3-4)	Individual has a mentor; and/or is learning about social capital and how to access.
IN CRISIS (0-2)	Individual has no supportive relationships in the community to help them achieve their personal goals.

**OUTCOME 7 : INCOME MANAGEMENT/FINANCIAL CAPABILITY**

Ladders ↓	Basic Needs	Debt	Budgeting	Savings	Credit	Number of boxes checked
THRIVING (9-10)	Secure income stream that meets basic needs and allow for choice.	Income exceeds debt.	Family able to plan.	More than three months or more of income saved.	Good credit available.	5 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/>
STABLE (7-8)	Income meets basic needs.	Income pays more than minimum amount due on debt.	Able to manage budget and debt load.	One to three months of income saved.	Credit line available.	5 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/>
SAFE (5-6)	Income meets basic needs.	Income pays minimum amount due on debts.	Able to manage budget and debt load.	One month of income saved.	Credit line available.	5 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Prevention Line</b>						
VULNERABLE (3-4)	Adequate income to meet basic needs however basic needs are not being met due to inappropriate spending.	Excessive debt and limited ability to pay debt.	Inability to budget.	A few weeks of income or less saved.	No credit line available.	5 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/>
IN CRISIS (0-2)	Income inadequate to meet basic needs.	Excessive debt and inability to pay debt.	Inability to budget.	No savings.	Bad credit and no credit available.	5 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/>



