

**MYTH:** Youth in foster care cannot be served in the WIOA Youth program.

**FACT:**

**Youth in foster care are eligible to be served in the WIOA Youth Program. Both the WIOA Youth Program and the foster care system can provide complementary services to youth in foster care.**

Youth in foster care and youth who have exited foster care, like all youth, need many resources to assist them in becoming successful adults. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act’s (WIOA) Youth Program (Title I) and Social Security Act’s Title IV-E Program (federal foster care funding) can be leveraged together to prepare young adults in foster care for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century workforce.

The federal foster care system helps to provide safe and stable out-of-home care for children until the children are safely returned home or placed permanently in other living situations (adoption or guardianship).<sup>1</sup> While in foster care, there is an opportunity for workforce development and child welfare professionals to partner to provide services to assist youth in their transition to adulthood. Youth in foster care may live in foster homes, with relatives, or are living independently. State foster care systems can vary in how they are operated but all are responsible for case management services. While the child welfare system provides case management, services regarding employment and career planning may be better delivered by WIOA Youth Program professionals who have expert knowledge.

The WIOA Youth Program<sup>2</sup> focuses on assisting youth with one or more barriers to employment prepare for postsecondary education and employment opportunities, attain educational and/or skills training credentials, and secure employment with career/promotional opportunities. Eligible youth include both out-of-school youth (OSY) and in-school youth (ISY).

OSY Eligibility	ISY Eligibility
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 16-24 years of age</li><li>• Not attending school</li><li>• One or more barriers to employment</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 14-21 years of age</li><li>• Attending school</li><li>• Low income</li><li>• One or more barriers to employment</li></ul>

One of the barriers included in the definition of both ISY and OSY is “an individual in foster care or who has aged out of the foster care system or who has attained 16 years of age and left foster care for kinship guardianship or adoption, a child eligible for assistance under sec. 477 (the John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood (the Chafee program)) of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 677), or in an out-of-home placement.”

Both the WIOA Youth Program and foster care systems serve a population within the age range of 14-24; child welfare agencies around the country work with youth until they transition out of foster care at age 18 or 21 and can continue to

<sup>1</sup> For more information on the Children’s Bureau and foster care, please see: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/focus-areas/foster-care>.

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.doleta.gov/youth\\_services/](http://www.doleta.gov/youth_services/)

provide services up to age 23 or 24 in some states.<sup>3</sup> Through partnership and alignment, the WIOA Youth Program and the foster care system can increase the capacity of service providers to assist young adults in foster care meet their employment and educational goals.

## FACT:

### **The WIOA Youth Program can serve both in-school and out-of-school youth that are in foster care.**

Youth in foster care or who have left foster care are eligible for the WIOA youth program whether in school or out of school. The WIOA Youth Program requires that at least 75% of program funds be spent on OSY. Many youth in foster care fall into the category of OSY, and local areas have up to 25% of funds that can be spent on eligible ISY.

Most youth in foster care could benefit from additional opportunities to prepare for life after high school, such as career preparation, and technical education or training, or postsecondary education. While child welfare professionals are able to assist youth with basic employment activities and skills, WIOA Youth Program professionals have the ability to help youth build the skills needed to progress along their career trajectory.<sup>4</sup> Collaboration across these programs is foundational to serving youth as services and supports are needed.

## FACT:

### **The WIOA Youth Program and the foster care system assist with planning and providing support for a youth's transition out of foster care.**

Few youth are able to assume all aspects of the transition to adulthood at age 18, and there is growing support for allowing youth 18 and older to remain in foster care. At least 25 states provide foster care after the age of 18 under the federal option and a dozen more states offer state-funded extended foster care or subsidy programs. Extended foster care (and most state subsidy programs) require the youth to meet educational or employment conditions to remain eligible for foster care. For the federal foster care program, young adults must meet the following educational or employment conditions<sup>5</sup>:

1. Completing secondary education or a program leading to an equivalent credential, e.g., a youth age 18 and older is finishing high school or taking classes in preparation for a general equivalency diploma exam. *(For WIOA Youth program eligibility purposes, those in high school at time of enrollment would be considered ISY. Those taking high school equivalencies may be considered OSY at time of enrollment)*

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<sup>3</sup> Over twenty-five states are approved to operate their foster care program after the age of 18. More than a dozen states operate state-funded foster care programs after the age of 18 and provide services after the age of 21.

<sup>4</sup> [https://youth.workforcegps.org/resources/2017/01/18/14/52/EKFA\\_Fostercare](https://youth.workforcegps.org/resources/2017/01/18/14/52/EKFA_Fostercare)

<sup>5</sup> At state selection of the foster care conditions.

2. Enrolled in an institution which provides post-secondary or vocational education e.g., a youth could be enrolled full-time or part-time in a university or college, or enrolled in a vocational or trade school. *(For WIOA Youth program eligibility purposes, those engaged in this activity at time of enrollment would likely be considered ISY)*
3. Participating in a program or activity designed to promote, or remove barriers to employment e.g., a youth could be in Job Corps or attending classes on resume writing and interview skills. *(For WIOA Youth program eligibility purposes, those engaged in this activity at time of enrollment would likely be considered OSY)*
4. Employed for at least 80 hours per month e.g., a youth could be employed part time or full time, at one or more places of employment. *(For WIOA Youth program eligibility, those engaged in this activity at time of enrollment and also not enrolled in high school or postsecondary education would likely be considered OSY)*
5. Is incapable of doing any of the previously described educational or employment activities due to a medical condition. *(For WIOA Youth program eligibility purposes, those not engaged in educational or employment activities at time of enrollment would likely be considered OSY)*

By leveraging WIOA Youth Program and foster care system resources, youth are provided the services and supports needed to transition into adulthood and meet the requirements and goals of both programs.

Workforce development professionals should be aware that youth that have been in foster care or are transiting out of foster care after age 18 are eligible for a variety of services and supports, provided at the state or local level. Many states provide state-funded college support services and funding in addition to the federal support of the Education and Training Voucher Program (ETV). Workforce development and child welfare professionals should work together and coordinate a thoughtful service delivery strategy to ensure that the resources available to these young adults are maximized to best meet the youth's needs and achieve their goals.

## FACT:

**The WIOA Youth Program and the foster care system can both help youth gain work experience and attain employment.**

As shown above, youth in foster care after age 18 are required to be engaged in either educational or employment activities to remain eligible for foster care. The WIOA Youth program requires that at least 20 percent of program funds are spent on paid and unpaid work experiences for both in-school and out-of-school youth, which may include: summer employment opportunities and other employment opportunities available throughout the school year; pre-apprenticeship programs; internships and job shadowing; and on-the-job training opportunities. Youth in foster care can gain skills by participating in a work experience through the WIOA Youth program and also meet the employment requirements of the foster care system.

### RESOURCES:

- National Foster Care Month, <https://www.childwelfare.gov/fostercaremonth/>
- Supporting the Educational and Career Success of Foster Youth under WIOA, [https://youth.workforcegps.org/resources/2017/01/18/14/52/EKFA\\_Fostercare](https://youth.workforcegps.org/resources/2017/01/18/14/52/EKFA_Fostercare)
- Supporting Youth Transitioning out of Foster Care – Issue Brief 3: Employment Programs <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/resource/supporting-youth-transitioning-out-of-foster-care-issue-brief-3-employment-programs>
- Title IV-E Foster Care, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/title-ive-foster-care>