



Measuring What Lasts:

A mixed-methods longitudinal evaluation of Youth On Their Own alumni outcomes



A national research firm that helps governments and nonprofits end homelessness.

The Link Between Education & Youth Homelessness

According to the independent policy research center Chapin Hall, youth who do not graduate from high school are 4.5 times more likely to experience homelessness as young adults. For over 40 years, Tucson nonprofit Youth On Their Own (YOTO) has worked to disrupt this cycle by supporting the high school graduation and continued success of youth experiencing homelessness. For many years, we've known that YOTO has a positive and significant impact on high school graduation. Our 2026 senior graduation rate, for instance, was 91% - significantly higher than both the four-year graduation rate for all Pima County youth (73%) and the rate at which youth experiencing homelessness in Arizona graduate (43%).

Measuring Lasting Impact

For the first time, however, YOTO is now able to confidently demonstrate that our program not only helps youth graduate from high school, but that participation in the YOTO program leads to lasting increases in the financial stability, postsecondary educational outcomes, and long-term mental health of participants. By comparing outcomes for YOTO alumni to publicly available datasets, we can now say for certain that the YOTO program has a long-lasting positive impact on the lives of youth in our community.

Three Questions

The study – *Measuring What Lasts: A mixed-methods longitudinal evaluation of Youth On Their Own alumni outcomes 5, 10, and 15+ years after high school graduation* – was conducted by independent evaluator System Change Partners and sought to answer three key questions:

- 1) What is YOTO's long-term economic impact on our program alumni?
- 2) What impact does YOTO have on alumni's postsecondary pathways and achievements?
- 3) What is the long-term impact on YOTO alumni's mental health?

In short, the study found that in all three areas, YOTO has had a lasting and significant impact on the lives of those who participated in our program.

"YOTO helped me realize my circumstances were not my fault. I wasn't broken. I was in a broken situation."



Long-term economic impact

\$19,546

Higher salaries

On average, YOTO alumni made \$19,546 more per year than their peers. This compounds over time, rising to \$30,435 more among alumni who have been out of the program for at least 10 years.

91%

Higher employment rates

The employment rate for alumni 10 years out of the program is 91%, compared to 60% for their peers.

85%

Higher home ownership rates

85% of alumni 45-54 years old own their own home compared to 69% of adults in the same age range.

Impact on postsecondary pathways and achievements

65%

Higher rates of postsecondary education

65% of alumni 10 years out of the program have a Bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 17% of their peers. This is particularly impressive given that, according to Chapin Hall, young adults who experienced homelessness were less than one-third as likely to be enrolled in a four-year college as stably housed peers.

45%

A calling to help others

45% of alumni report that they were inspired by YOTO to pursue their chosen careers, including social work, behavioral health, child welfare, nonprofit leadership, counseling, and community advocacy.

Long-term mental health impact



Reduced long-term mental health challenges

Compared to the population as a whole, youth who experience the trauma of homelessness are far more likely to have mental health challenges later in life. YOTO alumni, however, do not experience this increase in mental health challenges, indicating that YOTO interrupts the expected psychological distress caused by youth homelessness.



Breaking the cycle

Alumni with children reported that the support they received from YOTO enabled them to believe in themselves, with a common theme being: "The cycle ends with me."

To Our YOTO Family,
Thank you for being a constant, dependable source of encouragement for youth in our community. We hope the results of YOTO's first longitudinal study show you that your support matters, not just today, but for decades to come.

The study *Measuring What Lasts: A mixed-methods longitudinal evaluation of Youth On Their Own alumni outcomes 5, 10, and 15+ years after high school graduation* was conducted during the 2025-2026 school year by independent evaluator System Change Partners. Control groups were created with publicly available federal datasets of similarly aged peers. We would like to express our gratitude to System Change Partners for their work, as well as **The Abbett Family Foundation** for the financial support that made this study possible.

"Making it to the other side of housing insecurity in high school gave me an unshakeable confidence in adulthood that I can handle hard things."



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