Amity Foundation
when people gather with good intent

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT INITIATIVE

Helping Justice-Involved Youth Get Jobs and Stay Out

California | 10 Counties | Ages 14–25

The Simple Story

When a young person ends up in a detention facility, most people wonder what went wrong. We ask a different question: what happens next?

The Youth Employment Initiative — YEI for short — is a program that goes inside California's juvenile detention facilities and meets young people where they are. We don't wait until they're released. We start working with them while they're still inside, helping them figure out what kind of work they want to do, building real skills, earning real credentials, and when possible, earning a real paycheck before they ever walk out the door.

By the time a young person leaves the facility, our goal is simple: they have a job to go to, or a clear path to one. And we stay connected after they leave, helping them hold on to that job and build from there.

The reason this matters is also simple. Young people who leave detention with a job are far less likely to come back. Employment is one of the most powerful forces we have for breaking the cycle of justice involvement. YEI is how we put that belief into action.

Who This Is For

YEI serves young people between the ages of 14 and 25 who are involved in the California juvenile justice system and who have a disability or learning difference — including physical, mental, or emotional conditions. Many of the youth we serve have interrupted schooling, limited work experience, and barriers to employment that go far beyond what a typical job seeker faces.

We serve youth in two settings:

Inside Detention Facilities

We go on-site to secure facilities in partnership with county Probation Departments.

In the Community

We also serve youth who are supervised in the community rather than housed in a facility — connecting them to career planning, training, job placement, and the support they need to stay on track.

What We Do

Everything we do is organized around one question: what does this young person need to succeed in the working world? The answer is different for every youth — but there are six areas where we focus our energy, and together they build a complete foundation for employment.

1

Explore Careers — Figure Out What You Want to Do

Many young people in detention have never had a real conversation about what kind of work they'd like to do. We change that. Through career assessments, industry information, and one-on-one guidance, we help youth connect their own strengths and interests to real careers in the labor market. This is usually the first time someone has asked them what they want — and it matters.

2

Work-Based Learning — Real Work, Real Paychecks

This is the heart of what makes YEI different. Youth don't just learn about work in a classroom — they do it. Inside the facility, youth apply for positions, go through an interview, get hired, and earn a paycheck. We also use a program called Jobs Reimagined, which simulates the full employment experience — from application to performance review — so that youth know exactly what to expect when they step into a real job.

3

Workplace Readiness — The Skills Every Employer Expects

We build the foundational skills that make the difference between getting a job and keeping one: how to write a resume, how to show up for an interview, how to communicate professionally, how to manage conflict, how to handle a tough day at work without walking out. Youth complete the program with a finished resume and real interview experience under their belts.

4

Education After High School — Knowing the Options

A detention facility should not be the end of a young person's education — it can be a starting point. We help youth understand what comes next: community college, vocational programs, trade schools, apprenticeships, and financial aid. Many of the youth we serve have never been told these options exist or that they could qualify. We tell them — and we help them get there.

5

Speaking Up for Yourself — Knowing Your Rights

Youth with disabilities have rights in the workplace and in educational settings — the right to ask for reasonable accommodations, the right to appeal decisions, the right to get help from state agencies. We teach young people how to use those rights, how to advocate for themselves, and how to navigate systems without needing someone else to do it for them. This is a life skill that goes far beyond the job.

6

Job Placement and Staying Employed — We Don't Just Open the Door

Getting a job is step one. Keeping it is step two — and often the harder one. Our team actively works with employers to find the right fit for each youth, supports

them through the critical first weeks on the job, and stays in contact at 30 and 90 days after they start to make sure things are going well. If challenges come up, we help navigate them. The goal is a job that sticks.

In addition to all of this, youth who qualify receive industry-recognized credentials — including OSHA 10 safety certification, customer service certification, and other approved programs — that give employers a clear signal of what a young person knows and can do.

What Happens, Step by Step

Here is what a young person's journey through YEI looks like from beginning to end — from the first time they hear about the program to the day they are holding down a job in their community.

1 **They hear about YEI.**
Our team visits the facility and explains the program — what it is, what participation looks like, and what a young person can gain from it. No pressure. Just information and an open door.

2 **We figure out if they qualify.**
We review their documentation to confirm they meet the eligibility requirements. Youth need to have a qualifying disability or learning difference to access the state vocational rehabilitation funding that makes this program possible.

3 **They connect with the Department of Rehabilitation.**
A DOR counselor comes on-site — right at the facility — to meet with the youth, determine eligibility, and co-create a personalized employment plan called an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). This is their roadmap.

4 **They enroll and we get to work.**
Once enrolled, youth take a career assessment, complete a digital skills screening, and set up their payroll account. From here, the program begins in full.

5 **They build skills and earn credentials.**
Youth participate in workshops, earn industry certifications, explore career options, learn to speak up for themselves, and get connected to education pathways. Everything is happening at the facility, on a schedule that works around their existing programming.

6 **They work — and get paid.**

Inside the facility, youth participate in paid work activities. They apply for positions, complete interviews, receive performance feedback, and earn real paychecks. This is not a simulation of work. It is work.

7 **They plan for what's next.**

Before release, we update their career plan, connect them to community resources, and make sure there is no gap between walking out the door and having somewhere to go.

8 **We stay with them after they leave.**

Our team follows up at 30 days and 90 days to check in, troubleshoot, and make sure employment is sticking. The California Department of Rehabilitation continues providing services in the community. We track outcomes because results matter.

Who Makes This Happen

YEI is not a single organization working alone. It is a coordinated network of partners — state agencies, county departments, community organizations, and employers — all working toward the same goal.

The State of California funds and oversees this program through the Office of Youth and Community Restoration (OYCR) and the California Department of Rehabilitation (DOR). These agencies set the standards, provide the funding, and hold the program accountable for results.

Amity Foundation in partnership with New Ways to Work are the organizations responsible for running YEI across all ten counties. Amity has decades of experience working with justice-involved individuals and communities and brings that expertise to every aspect of this program.

County Probation Departments and County Offices of Education are essential partners in every county. They open the doors of their facilities, connect youth to the program, and in many counties employ the Workforce Development Navigators who are the first people a youth meets when they enter YEI.

Workforce Development Navigators are the frontline professionals who identify eligible youth, walk them through the DOR referral process, and stay connected throughout their participation. They work inside the probation and education system — which means they already have the trust of the youth and the institutions we serve.

Community-Based Organizations in each of the ten counties deliver direct services under contract with Amity Foundation. They are local organizations that know their communities, know their labor markets, and have relationships with the employers who can hire our youth.

Credible Messengers are mentors with their own lived experience in the justice system. They are proof that a different future is possible — and for many youth, they are the most powerful voice in the room.

Where We Work

YEI operates across ten California counties — a geographic reach that spans from the Oregon border to the US-Mexico border, from rural farming communities to major urban centers. Each county has its own local team and local agency partner. The services are consistent. The relationships are local.

Contra Costa *Bay Area*	**Humboldt** *Far Northern California*
Imperial *US-Mexico Border*	**Kern** *Central Valley*
Los Angeles *Southern California — largest county served*	**Riverside** *Inland Empire*
Sacramento *State Capital*	**San Benito** *Central Coast*
San Mateo *Bay Area Peninsula*	**Solano** *North Bay*

Why This Works

We are not guessing. Everything about YEI — how it is designed, what services it delivers, how it follows up after release — is grounded in research on what actually reduces recidivism and what helps justice-involved youth succeed in the workforce.

- Young people who participate in paid work experience during incarceration are significantly less likely to return to a facility. Having a job is one of the strongest protective factors we know of.

- Industry-recognized credentials make a measurable difference in hiring. An OSHA 10 card or a customer service certification tells an employer what a young person knows — and removes the guesswork that often disadvantages youth with justice histories.
- Mentoring by people with lived experience in the justice system — Credible Messengers — has been shown in multiple studies to reduce reoffending, improve program engagement, and increase the sense of possibility that youth feel about their own futures.
- Starting vocational services before release — not after — closes the gap that is most dangerous for justice-involved youth. The weeks immediately following release are when risk is highest. YEI makes sure that gap is filled before it opens.
- Following up after placement is not optional. The first 90 days in a job are when most employment endings happen. Our 30- and 90-day follow-up contacts are not a courtesy call — they are a core part of the program.

A young person who leaves a detention facility with a job, a credential, and someone in their corner is a young person who is far less likely to come back. That is the whole idea.

Want to learn more? We'd love to connect.

Amity Foundation and New Ways to Work| MSarabia@amityfdn.org | Otto@Newwaystowork.org