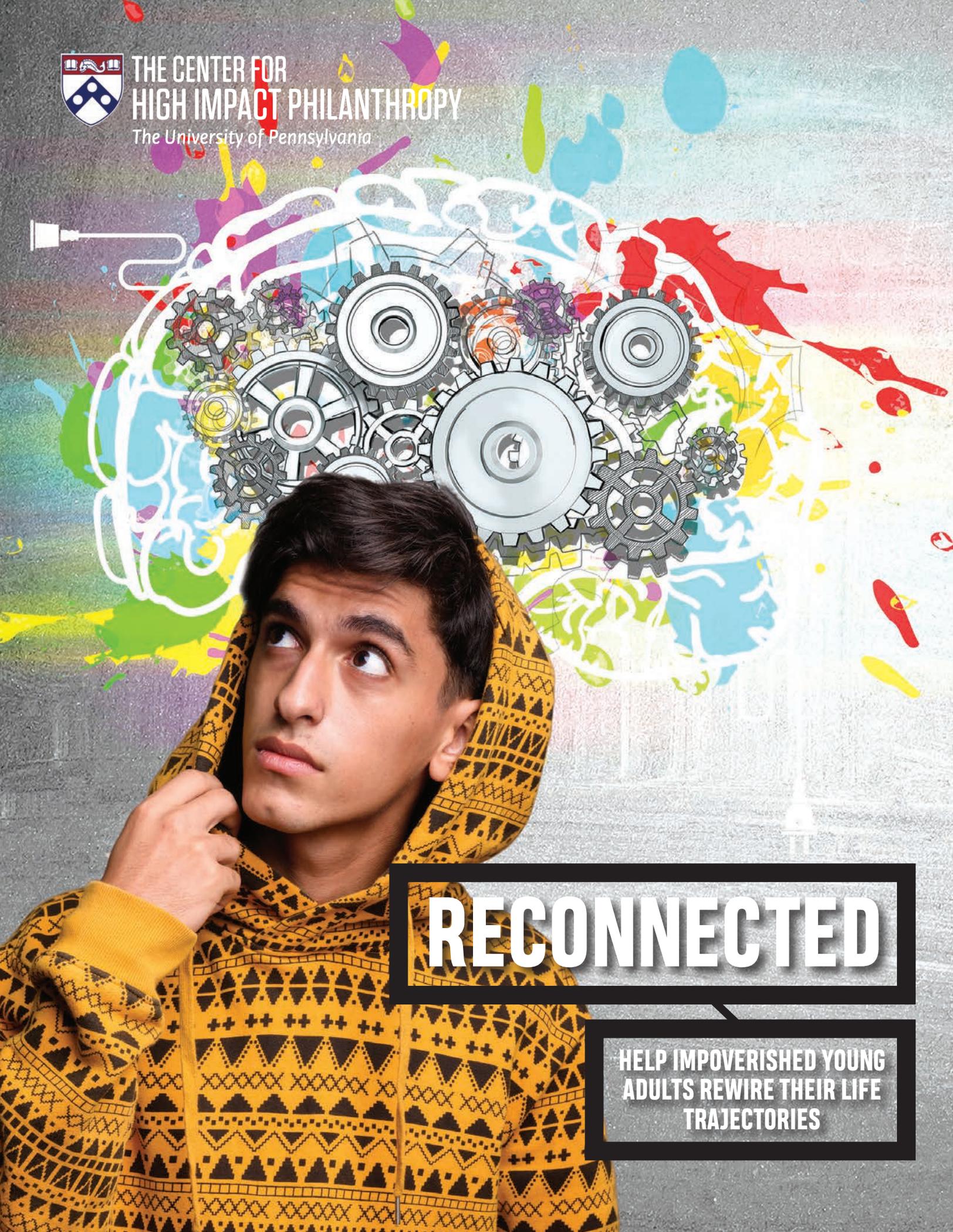




**THE CENTER FOR
HIGH IMPACT PHILANTHROPY**
The University of Pennsylvania



RECONNECTED

**HELP IMPOVERISHED YOUNG
ADULTS REWIRE THEIR LIFE
TRAJECTORIES**



THE CENTER FOR HIGH IMPACT PHILANTHROPY

The University of Pennsylvania

CELEBRATING 10 YEARS

The Center for High Impact Philanthropy (CHIP) is the only university-based center with a singular focus on philanthropy for social impact. Founded as a collaboration between the School of Social Policy & Practice and alumni of the Wharton School, it is a trusted source of knowledge and education to help donors around the world do more good. To learn more about how CHIP analyzes opportunities for high social impact, visit:

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OPPORTUNITY YOUTH

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OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH

Young adulthood, between the ages of 16 to 24, is a period of transition. Most enter this stage fully dependent on the individuals and systems around them for food, shelter, guidance, and emotional support. Most exit with the expectation that they are economically self-sufficient. It is a transition of sense of self—a time when young adults ask questions about who they are and test their relationship with family, community, and society. This period is also a transition between systems: from K through 12 education to postsecondary, or full-time employment.

While this stage can be full of hope and opportunity, for some it is fraught with anxiety about disappearing support systems. For example, for youth in foster care, an 18th birthday can mean an abrupt end to a home. For a young person who doesn't have the option to stay on a guardian's insurance, a 19th birthday

**A DIVERSITY OF
APPROACHES
TO HELP
IMPOVERISHED
YOUNG ADULTS
REDEFINE THEIR
LIFE TRAJECTORIES**

“When you invest in young people—when you support, mentor, and guide them—you can change the trajectory of their life. When young people have their eyes opened to experiences and opportunities they never thought were possible, they can dream bigger and their reality can be so much more.”

—Carmen, YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School Graduate

means an end to health insurance. For young adults involved in the courts, it is a transition to a harsher, more punitive justice system. And for many under-skilled young adults, finding a job that pays a living wage can feel out of reach.

Of the nearly 40 million Americans between the ages of 16 to 24 in the U.S., approximately five million are neither employed nor in school.

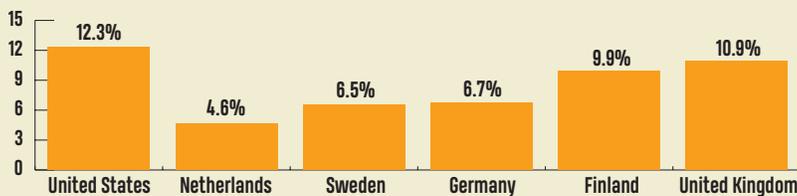
That translates to 1 in 8, more than double the rate of some Western European countries. In rural areas of the U.S., the number grows to 1 in 5. Often called “disconnected youth” or “opportunity youth,” many of these folks have experienced homelessness, substance abuse, and teen pregnancy. Still others have dropped out of the mainstream school system or been tangled up in the courts or foster systems—all of which contribute to work-limiting mental and physical disabilities and unemployment. This disconnection is not only difficult for the youth themselves, it is also costly to society in the long run: Young people who do not connect to the workforce early on tend to remain more vulnerable and reliant on government programs on an ongoing basis.

But donors have a tremendous opportunity here to intervene. The odds may be stacked against them, but when given the opportunity and support, many of these disconnected young adults find their way forward. This period of young adulthood is a time when trajectories are much more susceptible to change. New research indicates that our brains are not fully formed until we reach our early 20s. This helps explain some dubious decision-making among teens and young adults, but also reveals their potential: a remarkable ability to rapidly learn and adopt positive behaviors, skills, and habits—literally rewiring their brains. Furthermore, if young adults are more stable, personally and economically, not only do they benefit, but so do their children, who have a better shot at growing up in a supportive environment.

THE AMERICAN GAP

The U.S. rate of “disconnected youth”—defined as those between the ages of 16 to 24 who are neither employed nor in school—is twice that of some Western countries.

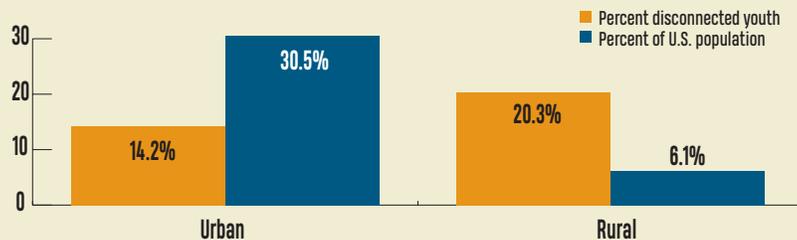
Rates of youth disconnection: U.S. and selected western European countries



Source: Eurostat, European Commission, <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>

THE URBAN-RURAL DIVIDE

Although the number of “disconnected youth” is higher in urban areas, the rate of disconnection is greater in rural areas.



Source: Measure of America, <http://www.measureofamerica.org/OY2017>

As with most antipoverty efforts, there is no silver bullet, and progress tends to be incremental. Large-scale change also requires a reexamination of systems and policies. By investing in programs that work to get disconnected youth back on track, donors help transform the futures of generations. What's more, the savings to society are exponential: Taxpayers save an estimated \$14,000 per year for each young adult that is helped out of homelessness, criminal activity, or job loss after pregnancy.

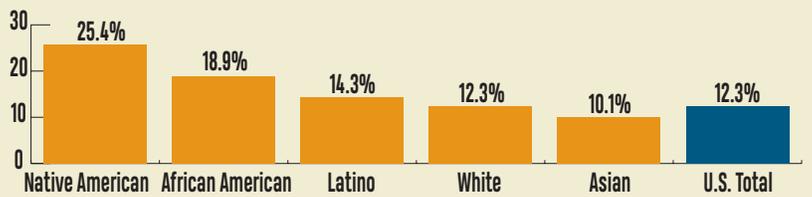
Today, thanks in part to investments by national funders and advocates, there are also clearer on-ramps and more developed programs. Therefore, now is the time for regional and local funders to help bring these approaches home, to invest in proven models, elevate best practices, and continue to support research, development, and growth of this emerging field.

In this report, we profile five organizations that have shown notable achievement in reconnecting youth: four with established track records of success for this cohort, and a newer, innovative effort that builds on the success of an established program to support poor, rural young parents. Selected for their national reach and diversity of approaches, two are focused on highly vulnerable subgroups: Youth Villages concentrates on those aging out of the foster system while the Center for Employment Opportunities services formerly incarcerated youth. The remaining three organizations are focused on connecting young adults to education and employment (YouthBuild, Year Up, and Goodwill Excel Academies).

We selected these specific organizations because of their geographic range (urban, suburban, rural) and variety of populations, including those facing additional vulnerabilities such as parenting or involvement in the courts or foster care systems. Additionally, we selected for clear philanthropic on-ramps as well as evidence of effectiveness. The organizations we highlight over the next few pages serve youth exclusively or have incorporated youth services into broader programming to show a range of approaches. While a host of

DISCONNECTION BY RACE/ETHNICITY

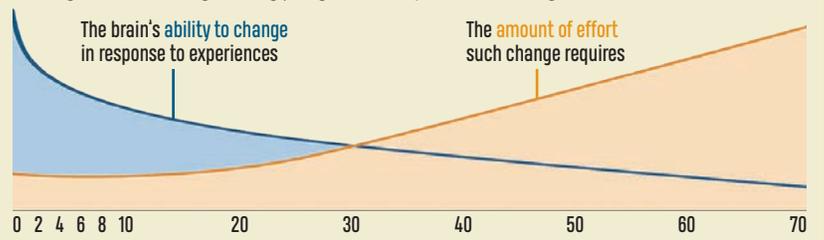
While rates of disconnection are in the double digits for all groups, they are particularly high among Native American and African American young adults.



Source: Measure of America, <http://www.measureofamerica.org/DY2017>

THE CHANGING BRAINS OF YOUNG ADULTS

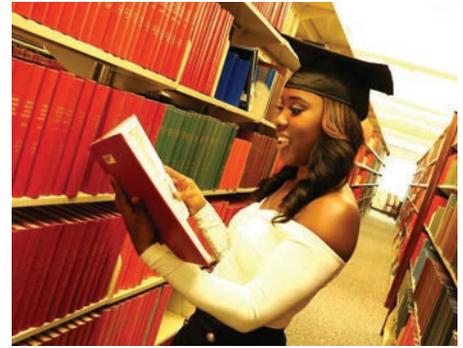
New research indicates that our brains are not fully formed until we reach our early 20s. This fact helps explain some dubious decision-making among teens and young adults, but also reveals their potential; a remarkable ability to rapidly learn and adopt positive behaviors, skills, and habits. While the brain's ability to change declines with age, among young adults, the potential for change is still substantial.



Source: Levitt (2009), Harvard Center for the Developing Child

other programs and approaches focus on preventing youth from disconnecting in the first place—through dropout prevention, or youth crime prevention, for example—our focus in this brief is on helping disengaged young adults reconnect.

In championing the work of these and similar organizations, donors can help young people at critical stages of their lives and assist them in reaching their untapped potential. As one such young adult described her transformation from high school dropout (because she couldn't afford the school uniform) to exotic dancer to salutatorian of YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School's Class of 2014: "I really wish you could meet all the young people I know. Because, to you, my story is so amazing. But it's a life that I'm used to. It's all I know. If you think I'm amazing, I wish you could invest in and see the people I know, because they are phenomenal."



NONPROFIT MAKING AN IMPACT

Youth Villages/YVLifeSet

WHAT IT DOES

Approximately 23,000 young adults in the U.S. age out of the foster care system every year. One in four experience homelessness, half end up unemployed, and close to 70% have been involved in the criminal justice system. YVLifeSet is an intensive 6- to 12-month intervention program. Participants meet one-on-one with a specialist at least once a week in settings convenient to them, such as their home, school, job, or doctor's office. In addition to weekly meetings, YVLifeSet provides 24/7 on-call support.

Participants set their own goals for housing, education, employment, and other aspects of independent life. YVLifeSet specialists meet the young adults where they are—whether learning

to do laundry, role playing conflicts with roommates, or practicing job interviews. The YVLifeSet specialist does not provide direct supports like housing or a job, but rather helps the youth develop the skills and capabilities to identify and put into place supports on his or her own.

HOW EFFECTIVE IS IT

Compared to a randomly-selected control group, YVLifeSet participants experienced measurable positive changes, including a 30% decrease in violent relationships, 22% decline in homelessness, and a 17% increase in earnings from formal work in year one of a two-year study. Year two of the study did not track all outcomes; the limited results indicated that improvement in earnings was less conclusive. Nonetheless, year one results are impressive, because few programs working with this population have demonstrated any positive results at all. The cost of moving a young adult through the program is about \$12,000—well be-

low the estimated \$20,000 to \$50,000 communities pay in social welfare costs for a chronically homeless person.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

There are no dedicated public funding streams for this type of program; philanthropy covers 50% to 100% of the cost, depending on the jurisdiction. Philanthropic dollars provide YVLifeSet with the flexibility to better meet diverse youth needs. For example, many state contracts include funding for a maximum of six months. Philanthropy means that participants who need another two to three months to reach independence are not arbitrarily kicked out. Philanthropic funds also provide wrap-around services—sometimes for something as simple as a \$100 monthly bus pass to get to work. Finally, donor support has been key to bringing YVLifeSet to new locations. You can help cover the cost of providing YVLifeSet by donating to [Youth Villages](#) nationally or [find a local program](#) on their website.

RELATED POLICIES & PARTNERSHIPS YOU CAN SUPPORT

In addition to supporting organizations that work directly with former foster youth, donors can also make a difference through efforts to improve the foster care system. One effective, relatively straightforward way to address aging out is to support policies that allow youth to stay in foster care after 18 years of age. A Midwest study comparing outcomes in Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin estimated that extending foster care to age 21 can double rates of college enrollment and graduation. It can also increase lifetime earnings by about \$72,000 per youth, a return of about \$2 per every \$1 invested by the state.

The federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 grants funding to states for extending foster care to 21, but states must enact these policies themselves. The most effective policies are designed through collaboration with many stakeholders. They include developmentally appropriate services that involve the young person in decision-making in areas such as future planning and employment help, options for exit, and reentry to “try out” independent living.

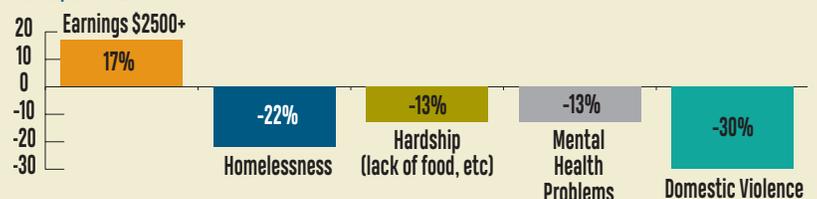
I actually lived on my own from when I was 15 until I was 17. I was homeless for a while. I was sexually molested by one of my mother's various boyfriends. My brother. I watched him get beat all the time. That's why I left. I was just fed up with it. The [YVLifeSet] program believed in me when no one else believed in me. It gave me the courage and motivation to apply to school. [My counselor] helped me realize that not only was I passionate about science but I could do a lot with it. Now I realize science is probably what I'm going to do for the rest of my life. When [YVLifeSet] came into my life, they gave me the motivation I needed and the resources to help me. I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for them.”

—Angelica, Youth Villages/YVLifeSet participant

LIFE CHANGES

Compared to a randomly-selected control group, YVLifeSet participants experienced measurable positive changes, including increased earnings and declines in housing instability, economic hardship, mental health problems, and violent relationships.

Year 1 impact of YVLifeSet



Note: Results are from year one of a two-year study. Year two of the study did not track all outcomes.

Source: Data from Valentine, Skemer, and Courtney (2015); https://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/Becoming_Adults_FR.pdf



NONPROFIT MAKING AN IMPACT

Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO)

WHAT IT DOES

Approximately 400,000 young adults ages 18 to 24 are presently incarcerated. Once they exit the prison system, 80% are expected to return within three years. The Center for Employment Opportunities provides short-term paid transitional employment, life skills education, full-time job placement, and post-placement services to formerly incarcerated individuals. Initially, maintenance crew work provides immediate opportunities for those returning from prison to earn a paycheck and build skills—as early as four days after signing up.

Participants not only earn a paycheck, but also build connections with staff, create a work history, and connect to more comprehensive services. They meet one-on-one with a coach regularly while in the program, and up to a year after job placement. Individual and group programming emphasizes the practical skills of getting and maintaining a job (interviewing,

dealing with conflict, how to describe past conviction). Participants receive monthly stipends for maintaining employment and meeting with their CEO coach. If they lose a job, they can re-enroll in transitional work during their job search. In addition to supporting participants, CEO works with private partners to recruit and support employers open to hiring CEO graduates.

HOW EFFECTIVE IS IT

Stable employment is a strong predictor of lower long-term recidivism. A rigorous external study found that CEO reduced the three-year recidivism rate by up to 22% for participants recently released from prison, with particularly strong effects for the most high-risk groups such as young adults, those without a high school diploma or GED, and those with prior convictions. The cost of providing CEO services is approximately \$6,000 per participant for the year-long program, including \$1,000 in direct payments to participants. The same external study estimates that, based on overall effectiveness, the program generates between \$1.26 and \$3.85 in benefits to society per \$1.00 of cost.

“The easy step for anybody who’s coming out of jail would be to revert back to what they were doing because this is one thing that they know how to do the best. The fear of not knowing and messing up, that’s what stops you from moving on. I didn’t know what to say in an interview, how to act—basically because I hadn’t had a real job before. Don’t say, ‘I’m never going to do anything in life.’ There’s always the chance as long as you’re willing to take the chance.”

—Lobsang, Center for Employment Opportunities participant

HOW YOU CAN HELP

You can give to CEO for central or local operations [through its website](#). About 80% of CEO’s funding comes from local government and other work contracts, meaning that philanthropic support can leverage existing public and private market funds for greater impact. In addition, employers can partner with CEO to hire participants and receive support and tax benefits. Employers can also contract services through CEO work crews—CEO provides all training, equipment, and oversight. Employers interested in hiring CEO participants or work crews, or donors interested in supporting expansion to new sites, can [contact CEO](#).

If CEO is not currently in your community, there may be other local programs with similar models in various fields. In evaluating local programs, look for ones that offer more comprehensive supports to ex-offenders, that connect them to employment at a living wage, and that track outcomes over time.

RELATED POLICIES & PARTNERSHIPS YOU CAN SUPPORT

Research now shows that focusing on treatment and connections to services is a more effective approach to reducing youth crime than treating juveniles as adults. Adolescent brain research was behind both the U.S. Supreme Court’s 2005 decision to forbid imposing the death penalty on youth younger than 18, as well as several state decisions to extend the age at which offenders leave juvenile justice

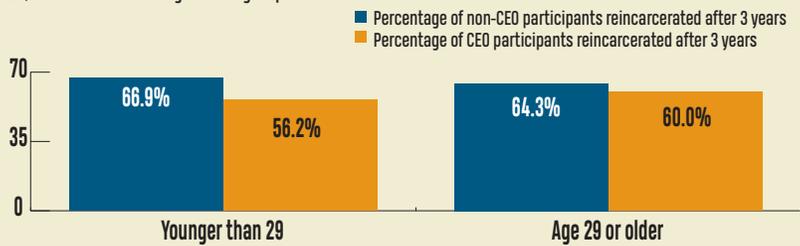
and enter the adult criminal justice system. These findings point to additional ways donors can help.

Donors can advocate for and support effective diversion policies. Such policies provide evidence-based, high quality treatment and mental health services while connecting inmates with mentors and social services to prepare for release. For drug offenders, especially, these policies can reduce recidivism.

Additionally, donors can support policies and programs that keep youth in the less-punitive juvenile justice system longer, instead of waiving them into adult court. For example, a 2007 study by the CDC found that keeping youth in the juvenile justice system versus transferring them to the adult system resulted in an average 34% drop in subsequent criminal involvement.

YOUNG AND IMPRESSIONABLE

CEO results are notable for its strong effect on lowering incarceration among participants younger than age 29, who tend to be a higher risk group.



Source: Redcross, Millenky, Rudd, and Levshin (2012)



NONPROFIT MAKING AN IMPACT

YouthBuild Philadelphia

WHAT IT DOES

Some 2.4 million young adults ages 16 to 24 have dropped out of school. YouthBuild offers a second chance to obtain a high school diploma, real-life work opportunities, and support to ensure that small hiccups don't turn into insurmountable barriers. YouthBuild Philadelphia, part of the national YouthBuild network, operates the YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School of the Philadelphia School District. Students completing the program earn a high school diploma (not a GED) in one year and certifications through employer partners in one of four areas: building trades, childcare, health care, or business administration/customer service. It also offers dual enrollment with the Community College of Philadelphia.

Whether or not they earn a degree, all students receive an additional year of YouthBuild services after they leave the school. Perhaps most importantly, YouthBuild staff members meet students where they are, helping with finding housing, applying for SNAP benefits, preparing for an interview, or talking through a conflict with a family member.

HOW EFFECTIVE IS IT

YouthBuild's goal is to give students the opportunity to earn a high school diploma and help them move into postsecondary education or employment. Having a high school degree can add up to a large earnings differential over time. More than 70% of YouthBuild Philadelphia students graduate the program. Of those who graduate, more than 90% move on to full-time employment or postsecondary education with over 75% retention one year later.

The program costs less than \$30,000 per student over two years. CHIP used YouthBuild Philadelphia's program results, along with its per student program costs, to estimate the cost for a student to complete the program and move into postsecondary education or employment. That program result costs approximately \$47,000. Compare that to an estimated \$623,000 in lifetime social welfare costs and lost income/tax revenue per high school dropout, to understand YouthBuild's 'bang for buck': a savings of \$13 for every \$1 spent on the program.

Although YouthBuild Philadelphia has not undergone a standalone outside evaluation, the national YouthBuild organization began a rigorous evaluation in 2011. Interim findings were published in 2016. Nationally, after 2.5 years, the study found that YouthBuild participants are more likely to have earned their high school credentials and be employed at a higher salary than youth receiving other services. They are also less likely to rely on government services and more likely to live with their children.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Philanthropic contributions account for 30% of YouthBuild Philadelphia's budget, with local, state, and federal government funds covering the rest. You can donate any amount direct-

ly **through its website**: \$25 can provide needed classroom supplies, \$50 can purchase worksite tools, and \$250 can furnish a classroom. Philanthropy may be particularly important now because of proposed budget cuts to YouthBuild’s primary federal funder, the U.S. Department of Labor. YouthBuild Philadelphia also heavily relies on partnerships for its success. Donors can **partner as an employer**, or volunteer as a mentor or tutor.

YouthBuild national affiliates operate in urban, rural, and suburban locations across the country. Donors can give to **YouthBuild USA** or find a **local affiliate**. Funders interested in bolstering local efforts can provide financial support to increase career tracks or provide connections to local employers for training and employment in new fields.

RELATED POLICIES & PARTNERSHIPS YOU CAN SUPPORT

YouthBuild Philadelphia is a high school degree-granting charter school that receives district funding, a fact that is critical to program sustainability. Charter laws, in turn, are adopted

“I’ve been going through stuff, but I manage to show up and stay resilient, and I’m proud of that. **The best piece of advice I’ve gotten at YouthBuild is that nothing is handed to you; you’ve got to put in the work.** And when I think about my future, it makes me go at it more.”

—Andrea, YouthBuild Philadelphia graduate

LONG-TERM PAYOUT

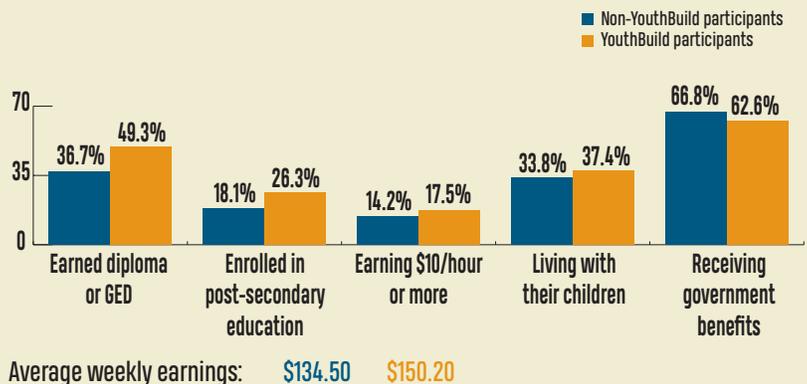
Earning a high school diploma, as opposed to a GED, leads to higher income and employment rates later on.

	Average income, ages 30–36	Percent employed ages 30–36
Dropout	\$15,604	79%
GED	\$15,473	79%
High school diploma	\$25,547	89%
Associate’s degree	\$38,083	89%
Bachelor’s degree	\$48,211	94%

Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 (2015 data); <https://www.nlsinfo.org/investigator/pages/login.jsp>

BRIGHTER FUTURE

After 2.5 years in a national study, YouthBuild participants were more likely to experience multiple, positive outcomes compared to non-YouthBuild participants.



Source: Miller et al. (2016); <https://www.mdrc.org/publication/building-future>

at the state level, and differ from state to state. Donors interested in policy can support the adoption of charter laws that encourage alternative programming/recovery for youth who have dropped out of the mainstream school system.

Many U.S. school districts (about 64%) already have programs for students who have dropped out or are at risk of doing so. However, not all students have access to these programs: one-third of districts reported denying enrollment due to staff or space limitations. Donors can support expansion of programs directly or help districts partner with nonprofit charter schools. In doing so, it is important to check the evaluation data for these programs—and to make sure they are tracking students and collecting statistics on outcomes.



NONPROFIT MAKING AN IMPACT

Year Up

WHAT IT DOES

Approximately five million young adults in the U.S. are neither employed nor in school. Year Up provides low- and moderate-income high school/GED graduates with six months of skills education, followed by six months of hands-on training at a corporate internship. Participants learn technical/career-specific skills (such as computer installation and IT networking), as well as professional/“soft-skills” (such as effective oral and written communication). Corporate partners host internships, often retaining students after graduation as employees.

Students sign a contract that they will attend the program regularly, be on time, and complete assignments. Based on their performance, they receive a weekly stipend. The program emphasizes support from peers, past graduates, staff, and volunteers, to help students resolve difficulties and maintain motivation. Year Up also partners with postsecondary education providers to house the program and provide technical training elements, allowing for faster, lower-cost scaling.

HOW EFFECTIVE IS IT

Year Up’s goals are to move students toward postsecondary education or employment and

develop new talent pipelines for employers. In 2016, Year Up served nearly 3,000 students in 20 U.S. cities. Two-thirds were either employed or in school four months after completing the program with an average starting salary of \$38,000 per year. A 2014 study found that over the first three years, the program boosts a young adult’s earnings by an average of 32%, or about \$13,000 more than comparison youth who did not participate in Year Up.

Using Year Up’s program results, along with its per student implementation costs, we estimate the cost for a student to successfully transition to postsecondary education or employment at approximately \$42,300. Given the relatively high starting salary of Year Up alumni, they more than earn back the resources invested in them less than two years after completing the program. Moreover, success breeds success: Higher starting salaries tend to continue and compound, leading to higher earnings for the rest of their lives.

Donor dollars don’t need to cover all the costs since nearly half of the program’s expenses are covered by companies that sponsor internships—often as a source of entry-level, professional talent.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Donations to the national organization help with ongoing monitoring and evaluation work (as

“I was challenged, tested, and forced to break out of my shell. [At Year Up] I was learning and getting the experiences I had yearned for in high school. Year Up instilled in me the fact that I am capable of whatever I set my mind to. I learned how to lead, how to collaborate, and how to work in the best interest of not only myself but others as well. I am confident and comfortable opening up to others. And, importantly, I have found a place where I fit. I now know that I am limitless.”

—Stephen, Year Up graduate

well as curriculum development), support the growing alumni network, and aid in establishing new program sites. You can support the Year Up program [through its website](#), where you can also locate a program in your community, or find information on bringing Year Up to your community or becoming a corporate partner.

RELATED POLICIES & PARTNERSHIPS YOU CAN SUPPORT

Year Up helps address a phenomenon known as the “skills gap” or “opportunity divide.” Employers contend they cannot find qualified candidates to fill middle-skill jobs, because there are not enough people with the credentials and education to fill them. Yet at the same time a group of young people is unable to access good jobs. Year Up helps fill this gap by training young people in the skills they need to succeed in middle-skill jobs, and by connecting them to the employers who need middle-skill workers. Donors can help fill the skills gap by funding community colleges, which—sometimes in partnership with programs such as Year Up and YouthBuild—provide training and certifications that local employers need.

In recent years, community colleges have been hit hard by state and federal budget cuts, putting more financial burden on students. Donors can support community colleges by giving directly to a fund or foundation run by the college, advocating for increased sustainable funding through state and local legislation, or fostering partnerships with local employers to

subsidize programs that provide real-world experience and marketable skills.

Donors can also help raise awareness within businesses and corporations about the existence and advantages of tapping into pipelines of nontraditional employees, including formerly disconnected youth. This is the premise behind the Grads of Life campaign, profiled on page 16.

STEADY BOOST IN EARNINGS

A study of Year Up graduates shows that over time they earn more income than those who did not participate in the program.



Source: Economic Mobility Corp. (2014); <https://economicmobilitycorp.org/uploads/sustained-gains-economic-mobility-corp.pdf>

COMPOUNDED RETURNS

Year Up participants earn higher hourly wages four years after graduation than their non-Year Up peers.



Source: Economic Mobility Corp. (2014); <https://economicmobilitycorp.org/uploads/sustained-gains-economic-mobility-corp.pdf>



Advocacy Opportunity: Grads of Life

A public awareness campaign persuades businesses to hire nontraditional candidates

Grads of Life has a straightforward message to employers: To meet the growing need for qualified applicants, businesses should be part of the solution and address high rates of disconnectness among young people. While organizations like Year Up, YouthBuild, and others can help improve a young person’s skill base, employers still need to be willing to take a chance on him or her.

However, traditional corporate hiring policies are not necessarily designed to recruit and hire nontraditional candidates. That’s why a coalition of partners (including Year Up, the Employment Pathways Project, ConPRmetidos, MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership, New Options Project, and Opportunity Nation) launched Grads of Life in 2014. In association with the nonprofit Ad Council, it developed a public awareness campaign geared toward encouraging employers to consider young, nontraditional candidates as a valuable source of talent.

The crux of Grads of Life’s work is to shift employer perceptions of opportunity youth from social liabilities to economic assets, and help hiring professionals broaden and diversify their talent pools to include these young adults. Given that opportunity youth do not usually have a strong traditional resume, the campaign designed **7 Second Resumes**, short videos in which young adults talk about the unique skills they have acquired through their life experienc-

es—qualities that have helped shape them into more valuable, well-rounded employees. It used print, radio, video, and social media to promote its message, knowing that seven seconds is the average time a human resource professional at a major corporation takes to review a resume. With the support of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Grads of Life has also established a website to provide additional background on the campaign, its rationale, and help employers connect to local pipelines of nontraditional candidates.

ENCOURAGING RESULTS AND WAYS TO HELP

The metrics for evaluating a public awareness campaign like Grads of Life differ from those used to evaluate a direct service organization. Thus far, the campaign’s metrics look positive. For starters, the campaign has secured \$76 million in donated media, far exceeding expectations. An Ad Council tracking survey of 600 recruiters and hiring managers found that one-quarter had seen the Grads of Life campaign, and that three in four believed that hiring opportunity youth “is good for business.” General awareness about hiring nontraditional candidates increased from 17% to 29% between 2014 and 2017, while the number of employers that are planning to fill positions with these workers has grown from 11% to 19% in the same period.

Most tellingly, the number of individual inquiries from corporations for further information has been steadily climbing. This is promising given that a Grads of Life survey of 600 businesses found that 35% of employers considered the majority of their jobs as “middle skills” defined as those that require more than a high school diploma but less than a four-year college degree. Yet, 63% of those same businesses reported that middle skills jobs were difficult to fill in their companies.

Donors interested in advancing the message of the campaign can help in a variety of ways such as helping secure local media donations, contributing information about local organizations working with this cohort, or urging your own employer to consider exploring nontraditional employment pipelines. You can find a detailed summary of ways to get involved at <http://gradsoflife.adcouncil.org/SpreadTheWord/>.



INNOVATIVE NONPROFIT WITH PROMISING RESULTS

Case Study: Goodwill Excel Centers of Central and Southern Indiana

Most Americans know of Goodwill as the place where they drop off or pick up gently used goods. Yet, its true mission is bigger: to enhance the quality of life of individuals and families through education, skills training, and work. Here, we feature the Goodwill Excel Centers of Central and Southern Indiana for its innovative approach to addressing the needs of poor, rural youth, many of whom are also parents.

We chose to profile Goodwill Excel Centers of Indiana for three reasons. First, it has demonstrated a statewide capacity to reach all locations, including rural areas, where the disconnected youth rate is the highest. Second, it has

“Coming to The Excel Center makes me feel like I have a purpose and they’ve given me the tools I need to succeed. The life coaches and teachers sincerely want to help you and are your support system that will be there lifelong.”

—Kenyatta, student at The Excel Center in University Heights

developed a particular focus on parents. This is key because children born into poverty, and to parents without a high school degree, are far more likely to remain poor. Finally, its affiliation with Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP)—a well-established nurse-home visitation program with proven benefits for mother and child—demonstrate how philanthropy can encourage novel collaboration, built off of past success.

The Excel Center makes it possible [for me] to gain my diploma because they offer assistance with transportation and free childcare. The drop in [childcare] center has helped me and my daughter because it's made her more independent, and it's helped me relieve a lot of stress so I can focus on my studies, 'cause I know where she's at and that she's being taken care of.... I wanted to show my daughter that, against all odds, she can be successful in life and she can achieve any goal no matter what.”

—Shelbi, Excel Center student

WHAT IT DOES

The Excel Centers are public charter schools that offer a path to a high school diploma (rather than GED), as well as industry-recognized certifications and even post-graduate education at select sites. The key to its learning centers is the flexible schedules and wrap-around supports they offer students, allowing adults ages 17 to 50 to break the cycle of poverty. Since 2010, Goodwill of Greater Indiana has opened 11 Excel Center sites in central and southern Indiana, serving more than 5,000 students a year. It is one of the oldest and largest statewide networks of Excel Centers.

The schools are organized to better meet the needs of older youth, adults, and parents—and to provide additional services such as one-on-one coaches, transportation assistance, and on-site childcare. The model is known for providing flexible, accessible education in year-round, eight-week terms to give students flexibility to attend, leave, and return with frequency. Students are not penalized for dropping out and returning. Many schools also offer flexibility to choose between morning, afternoon, evening, and online classes. Additionally, the Excel Centers offer specialized learning for ESL and special education students.

In rural locations over 70% of Excel students are between the ages of 16 and 24, a higher percentage than in urban areas. Excel Centers adapt curriculum and employer partnerships to respond to the local economy and unique needs of students. For example, through partnership with a local hospital in the rural community of Shelbyville, Indiana, local centers created a medical assistance and pharmaceutical industry certifications program, with an on-site

internship component. The program created an employer pipeline for local Excel Center graduates. Indeed, that pipeline is so strong that the centers had to adjust coursework and graduation requirements to meet the needs of the employer while still giving participants enough time to graduate with a high school degree.

To meet the needs of young parents, the Excel Centers provide on-site childcare, along with access to maternal and child health services through NFP, whose nurses are co-located in two Goodwill Indiana locations—making it even easier for young parents and their children to receive health services on-site. The partnership also works in reverse. NFP nurses refer over 20% of the young mothers they serve to Excel Centers to further their education.

HOW EFFECTIVE IS IT

The national program has yet to be evaluated, but Goodwill of Indiana has been studied by external evaluators who have documented average wage increases of \$4,700 for graduates. Of those who graduate, over 70% are employed and see a 50% wage increase six months after graduation, and 38% are enrolled in postsecondary education. More than 70% of graduates also self-reported an improvement in their children's academic performance. NFP Indiana, supported by Goodwill, saw clear increases in immunization, breastfeeding, education levels, income, and wage rates. (For more on NFP, see [its profile](#) in our [High Impact Giving Guide](#).)

Goodwill Excel Centers serve a particularly vulnerable population of students known to cycle in and out of the program as life circumstances (i.e., pregnancy, illness, work) prevent or allow participation. So while the impact on

graduates appears to be strong, only about 15% to 25% of students served graduate in a given year. For example, in 2016, the centers offered 3,200 program slots (or “seats”), but served more than 5,000 people as students cycled in and out of the program throughout the year, at a cost of approximately \$4,400 per student.

With a low percentage of students graduating in any given year, we estimate the cost of moving a student successfully through the program into employment or post-secondary education to be in the range of \$22,000 to \$36,000. Still, compare that to an estimated \$623,000 in lifetime social welfare costs and lost income/tax revenue per high school dropout, to understand the program’s potential ‘bang for buck’: a savings of approximately \$17 to \$28 for every \$1 spent on the program.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Donors can facilitate high-quality affiliations such as the one between Goodwill Indiana and NFP to encourage innovative and promising ways to reach the most disconnected youth. In addition to Indiana, Goodwill currently operates Excel Centers in Texas, Washington D.C., and Tennessee, with two more opening in Hawaii and Arkansas. And they have the potential to reach many more communities given the existing Goodwill network. The goal is to expand to 25 states by 2023. Interested donors can help expand the centers to new communities.

More mature programs are largely funded by state and federal grants, with support from Goodwill Industries. For these programs, philanthropy provides a critical, flexible pool of funds for identifying and building out new career pathways and employer partnerships. Philanthropic funds can also help cover smaller costs not covered by state and federal grants, such as a monthly transportation allowance—a significant detail considering that without it participants wouldn’t be able to get to school or a new job. As the Excel model expands to new communities, philanthropic funding will also be crucial to support the creation of a national office to share best practices and technical assistance across sites. To donate any amount to Goodwill Excel Centers of Central and Southern Indiana, visit: <http://www.goodwillindy.org/donatenow/>. To donate to Goodwill

Excel Centers in Central Texas, go to: <http://www.goodwillcentraltexas.org/donate/monetary-gifts>.

RELATED POLICIES & PARTNERSHIPS YOU CAN SUPPORT

Interest in two-generation approaches to helping families gain more personal and economic stability has grown over the last few years. Donors have supported the efforts of multiservice organizations to better integrate existing programs for parents and children, as well as partnerships between organizations (like the Goodwill-NFP relationship) to provide more comprehensive services. While such partnerships can ease the transition between services for young parents and children, they often require additional time and effort on the part of social service organizations. Donors can provide this necessary “glue” money that helps organizations clear logistical hurdles to closer cooperation.

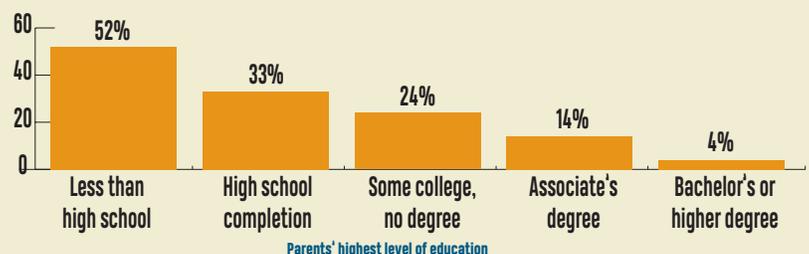
Many programs like NFP and Goodwill rely on existing federal funding sources (such as money for home visitation under the Health and Human Service budget or Workforce Innovation and Opportunity financing under the Department of Labor). The [National Center for Children in Poverty](#) offers a [useful, short summary](#) of the kinds of policies at the state level that can facilitate or impede efforts to help poor families.

Finally, though promising, the evidence around the effectiveness of two-generation programming, such as the partnership described above, is still emerging. Funding rigorous study and evaluation of models is yet another opportunity for philanthropy to help, one with the potential of strengthening the field overall.

VALUE OF EDUCATION

The percentage of children living with families in poverty decreases as parental education rises.

Percent of children under 18 living in poverty



Source: Economic Mobility Corp. (2014); <https://economicmobilitycorp.org/uploads/sustained-gains-economic-mobility-corp.pdf>

BEST PRACTICES

HOW TO IDENTIFY HIGH-QUALITY YOUTH PROGRAMS

Exemplary programs meet youth where they are and connect participants to a comprehensive set of services, delivered in-house, via partnership, or referral. Such programs understand that youth cannot learn if basic needs—food and shelter—are not met. Below are tips for donors considering funding nonprofits outside of those profiled in this guide.



1 Focus on the “trivial” details so they don’t become insurmountable barriers

Seemingly small barriers, such as not having money for public transportation or to purchase a work uniform, can quickly lead to job loss or homelessness for youth. The best programs strive to make it as easy as possible for participants to access support, whether by purchasing a bus pass or by providing coaches who physically accompany youth to appointments to, say, open a bank account, visit a caseworker, or go to a job interview.

Even programs that get government funding need philanthropic support to supplement services. This is because government funding often comes with specific restrictions on how those funds are used. Programs profiled in this report, such as Youth Villages, use philanthropic capital to create wrap-around services, develop partnerships and referral services, and/or create small grant or loan funds. These flexible funds can then be used to help youth buy bus passes, work uniforms, school supplies, or other goods that may seem “trivial” but can become insurmountable barriers if participants cannot afford work clothes, materials, or transportation for work or school.

2 Anticipate mistakes as learning opportunities

Young adulthood is a period characterized by testing relationships, taking risks, and often making mistakes. Researchers have long known that the brain continues to develop well past adolescence. Most notably, the prefrontal cortex—the part of the brain that controls impulses and decision-making—is not fully developed until well into our 20s. Even more recent research has revealed that young adult brains are more susceptible to external stressors. Brains of young adults may act like more mature adult brains under normal circumstances. However, as external threats or stressors intensify, young adults are more likely to increase risk-taking and harmful choices. Vulnerable young adults often live under constant threat and external stress, thus science predicts they are more

prone to risky behaviors and impulse control challenges.

The highest quality programs not only accommodate but plan for these scenarios. They leverage them not as reasons to exit a program, but to learn and engage in new ways. Successful funders understand that the path forward for youth is not without bumps. The organizations profiled in this report have built in second chances: If a job doesn’t work out, CEO, for example (page 10) allows clients to work short-term on maintenance crews until new, long-term employment is found. Year Up (page 14) structures participant internships so that both students and companies can “try each other out”—and many interns are subsequently hired. If, however, it doesn’t work out, participants still have access to Year Up’s coaches and services.

3 Seek data to clarify missions and improve operations

Programs cannot be everything to everyone. The best programs know whom they are best positioned to serve—whether it’s the most vulnerable youth or those who need a little support to launch into new career trajectories. Success can be measured by change in trajectory and will not look the same for all youth cohorts. Programs should be clear about what success means for the cohort they are serving. In addition, the best programs follow the longer-term trajectories of participants and continue to gather data and evaluate success for at least six months to a year after the service period.

Youth in general are a transient population. This is especially true for low income, vulnerable youth. Even programs that wish to follow young adults beyond their tenure may not have the resources to do so. Donors should set the expectation to follow-up with program participants six months after exiting the program, and ensure that the organization has sufficient resources to do so. Many practitioners and funders note a continued need for both identifying opportunities to use data for feedback and iterative learning, as well as experimenting with ways to measure longer-term outcomes.



For example, many programs measure college enrollment. But donors care not only about graduation rates but what happens to participants after graduation. Developing and testing new metrics and collection methods will require long-term donor investment.

4 Invest in ongoing, reliable relationships

As youth ages 16 to 24 find their way in the world, relationships, or lack of relationships, have significant impact on emotional, mental, and physical well-being. All of the organizations we spoke with highlighted the importance of being available to support young adults with ongoing and reliable relationships. Clients of programs profiled in this report often cited relationships with staff as the most important component of their work. This requires investments in professional training specific to working with the target population, trauma-informed care, as well as investments in low staff to client ratios to ensure coaches have the time and flexibility to meet participants where they are, when they need the support. This can include but is not limited to crisis intervention (i.e., 24/7 on-call support).

Many youth have experienced relationships with adults, even well-intentioned ones, who have disappeared from their lives. The best programs prioritize long-term relationships and sources of support—whether that is in-house or through local communities.

It's important to note that for many youth-serving organizations, staff expenses can be

upwards of 50% to 80% of program-related expenses. Professional turnover can be costly, disruptive, and difficult for youth enrolled in the program. By investing in funding for training and support, fair wages, and low staff to client ratios, donors can help programs retain and better utilize their most important asset—their workforce.

5 Create opportunities for paid employment

Providing young adults access to paid employment creates opportunity to earn money to cover small dollar expenses and gain real world experience. Internships can be helpful resumé builders, and the best programs provide not only work and training but also a paycheck. Paid internships and employment are preferred because they help youth pay for basic needs and learn financial best practices in a supportive environment. What's more, they allow these impoverished young adults to feel valued and give employers a bigger stake in their success.

Employers, such as those involved in the **100,000 Opportunities Initiative**, are beginning to recognize the long-term business value of hiring and investing in opportunity youth. Part of this shift in attitude is due to investments in creative public awareness campaigns such as Grads of Life, profiled on page 16. Philanthropists can help create additional training programs that lower the risk for potential employers interested in developing employment pathways for nontraditional talent.

Additional Organizations and Efforts related to Opportunities for Youth

The organizations and efforts profiled in this guide are examples of high impact opportunities for donors to help. Many other organizations and efforts surfaced during our research as innovative and/or high quality. While CHIP could not examine all with the same depth as those profiled, we include these organizations here for donors who are able to conduct their own due diligence and are interested in additional opportunities beyond those we analyzed. For more on what to look for in identifying high-quality programs, please refer to our “Best Practices” tips on page 20.

NONPROFIT INITIATIVES/DIRECT SERVICE

- **Covenant House**, founded in 1972 with branches in 31 cities in six countries, participated in the largest national study to date on the intersection of youth homelessness and sex trafficking. The study found that 1 in 5 homeless youth had been the victim of trafficking. It is the largest nonprofit organization providing emergency shelter and other services to runaway and homeless youth. Local shelters can be found on its website.
- Boston’s nonprofit **Jewish Vocational Service** provides training and job placement in the health care field complemented by a high level of support such as childcare, transportation assistance, ESL, basic skills, and tax preparation aid. While the program targets all disadvantaged populations, it has produced particularly impressive results serving young adults. An evaluation found that 18- to 24-year-olds in the program earned almost 50% more than a young adult control group after two years.
- **Juma** is a youth-run social enterprise that employs youth to sell concessions in major U.S. sports and entertainment venues so they can earn an income, get training and experience to launch a career, and build financial capability. Youth receive coaching to help them identify and plan towards educational, employment, career, and financial goals. Juma is currently in nine cities, and is expanding rapidly. Internal tracking shows that 90% of youth were placed in a full time job; and 92% of youth retained a new job 90 days post-Juma. An external random control trial study of organizational effectiveness is underway.
- **Larkin Street Youth Services** based in San Francisco, CA serves young people ages 12-24 experiencing homelessness. It began as a volunteer-run drop-in center but has expanded to provide a range of services that include outreach, shelter, housing, health, wellness, education, and employment. A 2009 study by Bain and Co. found that every dollar invested in Larkin Street yields \$8 in saved social costs and benefits. Three in four youth who complete Larkin Street programs do not return to street life.
- **Roca**, operating in four communities in the Boston area, is a comprehensive model of engaging court-involved youth for extended periods of time (two to five years). It uses an intensive case management model and provides life skills, educational, pre-vocational, and employment programming. Roca is best known for its outreach and follow-up, knocking on doors, calling, and showing up again and again to support the most reluctant hard to reach youth. Early results

indicate Roca reduces recidivism, reduces pregnancy, and has positive impacts on employment and wages.

- **UTEC** based in Lowell, MA provides workforce development and alternative education options, but is best known for its emphasis on youth-led grassroots organizing. UTEC begins with intensive street outreach and gang intervention efforts. Then, all enrolled youth are paired with a coach who assesses participants' socio-emotional, educational, and behavioral needs—and creates a service plan with them. Internal evaluations indicate UTEC has reduced recidivism and increased educational attainment.
- **Youth Advocate Programs** is a national organization working in 22 states via direct service and policy/advocacy efforts. The program includes intensive wraparound services via an in-home coach or advocate for youth and families. The model is rooted in the principle of “family voice and choice,” meaning the model emphasizes building on strengths, not just meeting needs, and all services are selected and driven by the families served.

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS/DIRECT SERVICE

- **Jobs Corps** is a federally funded and government-administered education and job training program for low income youth. Job Corps has 119 centers throughout the country and serves approximately 60,000 youth annually. It has been subject to rigorous evaluation, and has made a positive impact in the lives of participants. Although there is no easy way for donors to support the program directly, donors can advocate to protect public funding for the program.
- **National Guard Youth Challenge** offers a 17-month comprehensive alternative education and employment training program to youth in 28 states and one federal territory. It too

has been subject to rigorous evaluation and has documented positive results. Run by the National Guard, the program is supported in part through the **National Guard Youth Foundation**, which accepts philanthropic donations.

- **Service and Conservation Corps** is a network of both government and nonprofit programs aimed at fostering youth service, life skills, and job experience, often through work in national and state parks. A 2011 national evaluation found a positive impact on youth education and employment. Individual members of the Corps Network by state can be found on its website; some of these accept philanthropic donations.

NONPROFIT, FOUNDATION, AND PUBLIC/PRIVATE INITIATIVES: ADVOCACY/SYSTEMS WORK

- **Annie E. Casey LEAP initiative and Opportunity Works Social Innovation Fund** With Learn and Earn to Achieve Potential (LEAP), Annie E. Casey is making a \$24 million investment to increase employment and educational opportunities for young people formerly involved with the foster and/or criminal justice systems. This includes promoting **Jobs for the Future's** Back on Track and **Jobs for America's Graduates** as well as regionally based collaborations in 10 areas.
- **Aspen Institute: Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund** Established in 2012, this is a multi-funder effort of over 30 foundations and individual donors to support 24 urban, rural, and tribal communities with multiyear grants to improve outcomes for opportunity youth.
- **Forum for Youth Investment** Though not focused exclusively on disconnected youth, the Forum for Youth Investment works with state and local leaders to support partnerships, policies, and direct service offerings to improve learning and engagement oppor-



tunities for all youth. The website includes research produced in-house on youth development, services, and engagement.

- **Harris County, TX Dual Status Youth Initiative** This is an early-stage but interesting effort to bring together child welfare, juvenile justice, and criminal justice agencies to better address needs of youth who have been involved in both the foster care and juvenile and/or criminal justice systems. The Houston Endowment financially backs this initiative.
- **Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative** This initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation supports efforts to ease the transition to adulthood for youth aging out of foster care, including the development of financial tools and an advocacy campaign, Success Beyond 18.
- **Maricopa County, AZ**, a large urban county in the Phoenix area, launched in 2012 a county-wide awareness campaign and set up a cross-sector coalition to address youth disconnection on multiple fronts. For example, the county obtained a \$1.5 million grant from the U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention to

prevent youth who are or have been incarcerated from becoming disconnected or returning to prison. Other coalition activities include participating in the 100,000 Opportunities Initiative, focusing on high school completion, and organizing paid summer internships via public-private partnerships. Assessment is ongoing, but early results show a 30% decrease in youth disconnection rates.

- **100,000 Opportunities Initiative** is a national effort with more than 50 leading companies working to galvanize local business communities to hire and advance disconnected youth. Started in 2015, the network has already met its original goal to hire 100,000 disconnected youth, providing employment to more than 170,000 of them in the past two years. It has set a new goal of hiring one million disconnected youth by 2021. The **Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions** helps to support this momentum by leveraging a funders' collaborative (**Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund**) and, along with **Jobs for the Future**, provides technical assistance to organizations helping young workers build skills, attain credentials, advance in their careers, and expand career pathways.

APPROACH & METHODOLOGY

To meet our goal of providing smart, practical guidance to funders, we synthesize the best available information from three domains: research, informed opinion, and field experience. For this report, we

- Reviewed over 50 background research studies;
- Conducted interviews with more than 30 experts and practitioners in areas related to opportunity youth; and
- Completed site visits to the four organizations featured in the Nonprofits Making an Impact section

By considering evidence from all three sources, we leverage the strengths while minimizing the limitations of each. The most promising opportunities exist where the recommendations of these three domains overlap. For additional information, including relevant citations and endnotes, as well as updates to this work, please visit our website: www.impact.upenn.edu.

NONPROFITS MENTIONED IN THIS GUIDE

Page 8 Youth Villages, www.youthvillages.org

Page 10 Center for Employment Opportunities, ceoworks.org

Page 12 YouthBuild Philadelphia, youthbuildphilly.org

Page 13 YouthBuild USA, www.youthbuild.org

Page 14 Year Up, www.yearup.org

Page 16 Grads of Life, gradsoflife.org

Page 17 Goodwill Excel Centers, excelcenter.org
Nurse-Family Partnership, www.nursefamilypartnership.org

Page 18 Goodwill of Greater Indiana, www.goodwillindy.org

Page 19 Goodwill of Central Texas, www.goodwillcentraltexas.org
National Center for Children in Poverty, www.nccp.org

Page 22 100,000 Opportunities Initiative, www.100kopportunities.org

Page 23 Covenant House, www.covenanthouse.org
Jewish Vocation Services, www.jvs-boston.org
Juma, www.juma.org
Larkin Street Youth Services, larkinstreetyouth.org
Roca, rocainc.org

Page 24 UTEC, www.utec-lowell.org

Youth Advocate Programs, www.yapinc.org

Jobs Corps, www.jobcorps.gov

National Guard Youth Challenge, www.jointservicessupport.org/NGYCP/

National Guard Youth Foundation, www.ngyf.org

Service and Conservation Corps, www.corpsnetwork.org

Annie E. Casey Foundation, www.aecf.org

LEAP Initiative, www.aecf.org/work/economic-opportunity/work-education-and-income/learn-and-earn-to-achieve-potential/

Jobs for the Future, www.jff.org

Jobs for America's Graduates, www.jag.org

Aspen Institute, aspencommunitysolutions.org

Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund, aspencommunitysolutions.org/opportunity-youth-incentive-fund-overview/

Forum for Youth Investment, forumfyi.org

Page 25 Harris County, TX Dual Status Youth Initiative, www.houstonendowment.org/feature/harris-county-dual-status-youth-initiative/

Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, www.aecf.org/work/child-welfare/jim-casey-youth-opportunities-initiative/

Maricopa County, AZ, www.maricopa.gov

100,000 Opportunities Initiative, www.100kopportunities.org

Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions, aspencommunitysolutions.org

Jobs for the Future, www.jff.org

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