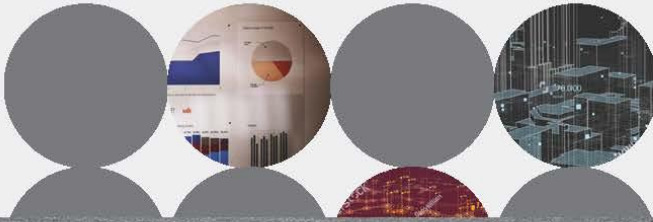


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THE INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



Bringing Young Adults into Education and the Workforce

May 2023

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Turning Information into Insight

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Research Methodology

A literature review was conducted to gather research on the causes and consequences of the disengagement of opportunity youth, as well as to inform recommendations. Secondary data was sourced from JobsEQ, Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Pennsylvania Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), and the International Labour Organization. The most current data was used in this analysis.

Executive Summary

There are currently 4.6 million opportunity youth, those between the ages of 16 and 24, who are not enrolled in school and not participating in the labor market. According to Jobs For The Future, nearly 40 percent of young people between the ages of 16 and 24 are weakly attached or unattached to school and work at some point during that formative time. Although many young people aspire to advance and secure family wage jobs, make connections in civic engagement, and improve their communities, once these young adults have experienced a disconnection from school and work, it is often very unlikely they will be able to meet these aspirations. A large majority of family-supporting wage jobs require some type of training or credential beyond a high school degree, yet only one percent of youth who have been disconnected will ever earn an Associate's degree or higher, compared to 36 percent of the general population.⁴

By improving outcomes for this population, communities have the ability to enhance the quality of talent available to employers and disrupt a multi-generational cycle of poverty for youth and their families.⁵

Ultimately, this region, and the country, cannot afford to write off this group of young adults or the long-term public and social costs of not supporting Opportunity Youth, who have a great deal of potential.⁴

The number of opportunity youth across the globe, in the nation, and across the state of Pennsylvania is large and diverse. It is critical that Opportunity Youth's diversity be understood to put these young adults on the best path to success. The opportunity youth population represents various socioeconomic backgrounds and needs to be supported to address their varying and diverse challenges. Moreover, White House Council listening sessions and United Way Opportunity Community Conversations found that disconnected youth want to be actively involved in developing solutions for themselves.²¹

Young adults not in education, employment, and training ('NEET'), Opportunity Youth, or disconnected youth are at increased risk for a myriad of adverse life outcomes. For instance, they are likelier than their engaged peers to develop depression, anxiety, drug problems, and long-term illnesses and hold lower-status occupations even if they subsequently enter employment.⁹

Who are Opportunity Youth in the United States?⁷

- *4.9 million youth ages 16-24 were not in school or working in 2015*
- *41 percent live in a poor household compared to 27 percent of youth who are in school or working*
- *15 percent have a disability compared to five percent of youth who are in school or working*
- *Over seven percent of Asian American youth*
- *10 percent of White youth*
- *Over 14 percent of Latino youth*

- *Nearly 19 percent of Black youth*
- *More than one-quarter of Native American youth*

Opportunity Youth are heavily represented in rural areas and small towns. By definition, Opportunity Youth are not in school or working, and only four percent achieve a bachelor's degree by age 24 compared to eight percent of youth who are in school or working. Additionally, Opportunity Youth experience poverty at higher rates, 44 percent compared to 17 percent (2014), than youth who are in school or working.⁷

The 2016 Measure of America data suggested that the probability of disconnection among young people was affected by income, race/ethnicity, and residential environment. Disconnected youth were nearly twice as likely as connected youth to live in poverty and receive Medicaid. In communities where the poverty rate was below six percent, about 1 in 14 young people were disconnected; however, in communities where the poverty rate was above 21 percent, 1 in 5 young people was disconnected. Racial/ethnic disparities were striking; youth disconnection occurred in nearly seven percent of Asian Americans, nearly 10 percent of white adolescence, nearly 14 percent of Latinos, more than 17 percent of Black adolescents, and more than one-quarter of American Indian/Alaska Native young people.² The fact that these disparities persisted even when controlling for income suggests that structural racism and discrimination may also contribute to youth disconnection.¹¹

Residential environment disparities were also noted; youth disconnection was found among over 11 percent of young people in suburban areas, 13 percent in urban areas, and 19 percent in rural areas – whereas the national average for youth disconnection was almost 12 percent, 24 percent of young people in the rural South were disconnected. Other factors reportedly related to youth disconnection include poor grades, mental health and substance use disorders, parental unemployment, trauma exposure, and socially deviant peers.¹¹

In 2011 alone, taxpayers shouldered more than \$93 billion to compensate for lost taxes and direct costs to support young people disengaged from education and work. In their analysis of *The Economic Value of Disconnected Youth*, researchers found that the cost to society is estimated to be \$4.7 trillion over this group's lifetime. Lifetime earnings are diminished with each missed year of work, equating to two percent to three percent fewer earnings each year after that. Furthermore, significant gaps in the education-work sequence of activity lead to pay and employability handicaps. Over a lifetime, an Opportunity Youth's earnings are estimated to be \$375,000 compared with a high school graduate of \$712,000. The fiscal burden of inaction is high. There is an urgent need for action and collaboration among government, business, nonprofit, and community leaders.²¹

Young adults who are parents face particular challenges concerning employment and education that could increase disconnection. In an analysis of young parents aged 18 to 24 who live with their children, researchers found that about 27 percent did not hold a job in 2013. Nonparents aged 18 to 24 had only slightly higher rates of employment during the year but were much likelier to go to school, with 65 percent of nonparents attending school relative to only 23 percent of parents aged 18 to 24.³³

Lack of access to childcare is also a cause of disconnection for young parents. While managing schedules is challenging for any parent, it can be especially challenging for those who work and attend school. Care availability for infants and toddlers is limited and securing part-time and nontraditional hourly care can be difficult. Also, resources to support childcare are limited; only 15 percent of those eligible for

childcare subsidies are estimated to be able to access the vouchers to pay for care. The limited availability and limited funding are significant obstacles to employment for low-income parents.³³

Another potential reason for young people being disconnected may be the increased abuse of opioids. However, it is unclear whether drug abuse leads to declining labor-force participation or declining participation leads to drug abuse. Krueger (2017) discusses this for nonemployment of prime-age men, but it may also play a role for youth. Nonmedical use of prescription drugs is highest among youth aged 18 to 25 (relative to older groups), and deaths due to prescription drug overdose increased fourfold from 1999 to 2014 for this group ([National Institute on Drug Abuse 2015](#)). It is unclear whether or how much this translates into or is related to declines in employment and schooling for this age group. One recent study (Florence et al., 2016), however, finds that opioid abuse leads to economic losses resulting from reduced hours in productive employment and household activity.³³

Involvement with the criminal justice system is another cause of disconnection among youth. Criminal justice involvement peaks in the teenage years and declines in the early twenties but can have lasting impacts. Those incarcerated are, by definition, detached from the labor market. Youth involved in the juvenile justice system often have trouble transitioning into adulthood. Criminal justice involvement interrupts connections to school, family, and work. Involvement in the system itself exposes youth to negative influences and increases the likelihood of further involvement in criminal activities. Time incarcerated may lead to worse labor-market outcomes when released due to less work experience and human capital, as well as the stigma with employers of incarceration. Studies indicate incarceration as a juvenile or adult leads to diminished labor-market outcomes and a host of additional issues that could also affect employment, including worsening health, diminished social relationships and community connections, and increased likelihood of recidivism.³³

U.S. studies indicate that Opportunity youth face challenges in their social and physical environments that put them at an increased risk of numerous adverse outcomes, including lower completion rates for high school and post-secondary education as well as greater involvement with the justice system.⁵

Multifaceted and intersecting experiences, such as poverty, homelessness, mental health problems, or physical disabilities, contribute to the “disconnect” youth feel from education or employment. As such, it is crucial to recognize that employment-specific interventions alone are likely to be insufficient to support Opportunity youth and should be accompanied by interventions to health, educational, and social environments.⁵

Additionally, studies indicate that the Opportunity Youth or NEET population reports poorer health than their non-NEET peers, and this difference remains strong even when individual characteristics, health behaviors, and contextual characteristics are accounted for within the empirical models. The results support the hypothesis that the health of the NEET population is worse than that of respondents connected to the major socioeconomic structures of society.³²

Research also demonstrates that the Opportunity Youth population reports worse health than those who remain either in education/training, employed, or both. This disparity may be associated with the disconnection from school, employment, and critical social support structures, such as pro-social peers, supportive teachers, career counselors, training providers, schools, and access to employment or education/training.³²

Moreover, being an Opportunity Youth is intertwined with young people's mental health and substance use problems. Studies have linked Opportunity Youth with the emergence of symptoms of depression,

anxiety, substance use, and suicidality. Mental health and substance use problems can deplete the drive and energy needed to enter the workforce or continue education/training and increase the risk of disengaging. However, the link between Opportunity Youth or NEET and poor mental health is unclear.³¹

Research reveals that youths disengaged from the education system and the labor force are often at reduced capacity to flourish and thrive as adults. Developmental precursors to Opportunity Youth or NEET status may extend back to temperamental features, though this—and possible mediators of such associations such as attention deficit hyperactivity (ADHD) symptoms and antisocial behaviors (ASB)—have yet to be directly tested. One study investigated whether difficult temperament in toddlerhood is associated with NEET status in adulthood and whether different subdomains of ADHD (i.e., hyperactivity-impulsivity vs. inattention) in late childhood and ASB in adolescence partially explain this pathway.⁹

Overall, the complexity and challenges of these interrelated issues and circumstances can contribute to trauma for young people. The traumatic conditions could originate from childhood experiences or could represent an intergenerational transmission of trauma that affects the youth's ability to transition to adulthood successfully or to emerge from a high-risk or complex situation.³³

There is research suggesting that youth, particularly less-educated African American youth who are not in school or work, have responded to what appears to them to be a decline in long-term employment opportunities by giving up on mainstream possibilities and institutions. This behavior is framed as being largely a response to declining demand for their labor.³⁴

In addition to negative impacts on future labor-market outcomes, being disconnected is correlated with other negative consequences, including criminal activity, depression, and substance abuse—though the direction of causality is not clear. Furthermore, intergenerational impacts are possible, specifically on children of young adults, primarily if childbearing occurs when the parents are teens or young adults³⁴

The young people struggling and off track prior to the pandemic will have the most challenging time reconnecting to jobs and schools. These young people and their communities should receive the majority of attention and resources available to address this crisis. These hardest-hit youth tend to live in low-income communities of color, particularly Black and Native American communities.²⁴

Although research demonstrates that 20- to 24-year-olds have experienced a steady decline in NEET rates since their April 2020 peak, there were still roughly 740,000 more young adults not in work or school in the first quarter of 2021 compared to the first quarter of 2020. Taking a longer-term perspective, the gradual declines in the percentage of young adults who are not in work or school and the narrowing of disparities by gender, race, and ethnicity are good news, but considerable racial and ethnic disparities remain. Moreover, the progress in reducing racial and ethnic inequalities has been disrupted by the pandemic. It is vital for leaders of ongoing recovery efforts to ensure that young adults in today's diverse and working class can improve their long-term prospects in the labor market and prosper in the coming years.²⁸

As of 2020, 166,100 youth (nearly 12 percent) are disconnected in Pennsylvania. Over 20 percent of black youth, over 15 percent of Latino youth, and nearly 10 percent of White youth are disconnected in Pennsylvania.²⁴

It is important that the regional data also be taken into consideration with national and worldwide data, along with the literature reviewed, which signifies a growing trend in disconnected youth, compounded by a myriad of factors, including COVID-19.

As of the most recent data, three percent of Luzerne County's youth is disconnected. The same is true for over two percent of Lackawanna County's youth. Additionally, the poverty levels in Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties are 12 percent 14 percent respectively. Furthermore, almost eight percent of those residing in Lackawanna County do not have a high school diploma while 7.5 percent of those residing in Luzerne County do not have a high school diploma. Finally, the labor force participation rate in Luzerne County is 60 percent, while the labor force participation rate in Lackawanna County is slightly higher, at 63 percent.

It is critical that the region works toward innovative and collaborative initiatives in order for the area's population of disconnected youth to receive the attention and resources they need and deserve. It is also pivotal to consider that disconnected youth are a diverse group and as such, the causes behind their disconnection need to be understood in order to provide the correct type and amount of resources to help reengage them.

As part of this research, various case studies and recommendations were identified in order to prevent disconnection and reengage disconnected youth. A brief listing of the recommendations is included below. A thorough exploration can be found in the Recommendations section at the end of this document.

- *Addressing Systemic Challenges*
- *Atypical Development Pathway*
- *Donor involvement*
- *Coordinated Data Systems and Service Delivery*
- *Disconnected Youth Involvement*
- *Soft skills development*
- *Building More Robust On-Ramps to Employment*
- *A Public Health Approach*
- *Community involvement*
- *Needle-moving collaboratives*
- *Using a social justice lens*

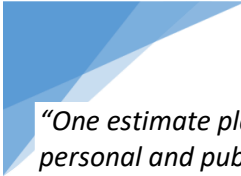
Introduction

What is a NEET?

The policy term 'NEET' or Not in Education, Employment, or Training, celebrated a milestone '21st birthday' in 2020. NEET first became streamlined into young people's policy rhetoric in 1999. The term was initially coined during the mid-90s in the United Kingdom to describe young people who had fallen outside the labor market and education. Since then, the NEET label has become a key concern in the media regarding social welfare, academic, and global policy concerning young people. Over time there have been various strategies developed across the globe to attempt to tackle the disconnection of those aged 16-24 years who fall outside education, employment, or training – each of which has had varying degrees of successes and failures.¹

Defining Opportunity Youth

There are currently 4.6 million opportunity youth, those between the ages of 16 and 24, who are not enrolled in school and not participating in the labor market. According to Jobs For The Future, nearly 40 percent of young people between the ages of 16 and 24 are weakly attached or unattached to school and work at some point during that formative time. Although many young people aspire to advance and secure family wage jobs, make connections in civic engagement, and improve their communities, once these young adults have experienced a disconnection from school and work, it is often very unlikely they will be able to meet these aspirations. A large majority of family-supporting wage jobs require some type of training or credential beyond a high school degree, yet only one percent of youth who have been disconnected will ever earn an Associate's degree or higher, compared to 36 percent of the general population.⁴



"One estimate places the personal and public costs of not changing the trajectories of opportunity youth at \$6.3 trillion dollars over the lifetimes of all current opportunity youth."⁴

There have been growing demands to move beyond the deficit-based term NEET to describe these youth and toward using the term 'Opportunity Youth.' The term 'Opportunity Youth' suggests that without investment and support systems for these young people, their potential might not be fully realized. By improving outcomes for this population, businesses and communities have the ability to enhance the quality of talent available to employers and disrupt a multi-generational cycle of poverty for youth and their families.⁵

The term 'NEET,' which characterizes young people in a state they are not in (i.e., not in education or employment), can be stigmatizing for young people who are involved in other pursuits, such as volunteering, caring for others, transitioning between school and work, or facing systemic challenges to pursuing employment or education.⁵

'Opportunity Youth' recognizes that some young people face different levels of disadvantage and that some young people may be actively seeking opportunities to succeed but face individual, structural, and social barriers to finding sustainable employment. As such, all Opportunity Youth can be classified as NEET, but not all NEET youth may be considered Opportunity Youth.⁵

Ultimately, the United States cannot afford to write off this group of young adults or the long-term public and social costs of not supporting Opportunity Youth, who, with the proper support, have a great deal of potential.⁴

Understanding Opportunity Youth

The number of opportunity youth across the globe, in the nation, and across the state of Pennsylvania is large and diverse. It is critical that Opportunity Youth's diversity be understood to put these young adults on the best path to success. The population represents various socioeconomic backgrounds and needs to be supported to address their varying and diverse challenges. Moreover, White House Council listening sessions and United Way Opportunity Community Conversations found that disconnected youth want to be actively involved in developing solutions for themselves.²¹

A report from 2011, *Opportunity Road: The Promise and Challenge of America's Forgotten Youth*, by Civic Enterprises and America's Promise Alliance in association with Peter D. Hart Research Associates, confirmed the Council's findings. This study included in-person interviews with 613 disconnected youth in 23 locations across the United States. Survey respondents were between the ages of 16 and 24, in

numbers representative of the population as a whole in terms of gender and race/ethnicity who are currently out of school, out of work for at least six months, have no college degree, are not disabled, not incarcerated, and are not a stay-at-home parent with a working spouse.²¹

Key findings from this research include:

1. Opportunity Youth are optimistic. Despite their challenges, 73 percent are very confident or hopeful about achieving their goals, 85 percent want a good career and job, 67 percent want a college or technical degree, and 65 percent have a goal to finish high school or college and know they can achieve it.²¹
2. Opportunity Youth accept responsibility for their futures. Some 77 percent believe getting a good education and job are their responsibilities.²¹
3. Opportunity youth want to reconnect to work, school, and service but need help. The top obstacles that youth face to reconnecting to work involve lack of available jobs where they live (51 percent), and lack of sufficient work experience (50 percent) or education (47 percent) to get the job they want. Nearly one-third (32 percent) said they do not know how to prepare a resume or interview.²¹
 - a. The top obstacles to reconnecting to school are as follows: cost is more than they or their families can afford (63 percent); they need to make money to take care of their families (48 percent), and they do not have transportation or they need to work and cannot balance work and school (40 percent in each case). Nearly one-third (32 percent) say no one showed them how to apply to college or helped them figure out how to pay for it.²¹
4. Opportunity youth point the way to reconnecting. Some 79 percent want to connect with successful peers to whom they can relate. They want to connect with college professors (69 percent) and business mentors (65 percent) for help going back to school and work; 78 percent want job opportunities that enable them to earn some money and attend school at the same time (“Learn and Earn”).²¹
5. Opportunity youth want to improve life for others. Nearly seven in ten (69 percent) want to make a difference, while only three percent report volunteering in their communities, suggesting their disconnection from school and work impedes their desire to give back. These young people offer an opportunity for an infusion of potential leadership and productivity in our workforce and economy—and they are eager to accept this responsibility.²¹

Literature Review

Young adults not in education, employment, and training (‘NEET’), Opportunity Youth, or disconnected youth are at increased risk for a myriad of adverse life outcomes. For instance, they are likelier than their connected peers to develop depression, anxiety, drug problems, and long-term illnesses and hold lower-status occupations even if they subsequently enter employment.⁹

Who are Opportunity Youth in the United States?⁷

- *4.9 million youth ages 16-24 were not in school or working in 2015*
- *41 percent live in a poor household compared to 27 percent of youth who are in school or working*
- *15 percent have a disability compared to five percent of youth who are in school or working*
- *More than seven percent of Asian American youth*
- *10 percent of White youth*

- *Over 14 percent of Latino youth*
- *Nearly 19 percent of Black youth*
- *Over one-quarter of Native American youth*

Opportunity Youth are heavily represented in rural areas and small towns. By definition, Opportunity Youth are not in school or working, and only four percent achieve a bachelor's degree by age 24 compared to eight percent of youth who are in school or working. Additionally, Opportunity Youth experience poverty at higher rates, 44 percent compared to 17 percent (2014), than youth who are in school or working.⁷

A thorough literature review was conducted to better understand Opportunity Youth's diverseness, the causes of disengagement, and the barriers they face. It is evident through research that the number of young people currently not in employment, education, or training is rising, and young women across the globe are more than twice as likely as their male counterparts to be affected, according to an International Labour Organization (ILO) report. The report also indicates that young people (aged 15 – 24) who are employed face a greater risk than older workers of losing their jobs due to automation. Those with vocational training are particularly vulnerable. The report suggests that occupation-specific skills imparted by vocational training tend to become obsolete faster than general educational skills. It calls for vocational training programs to be revised and modernized to meet the changing demands of the digital economy.²³

According to the *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2020: Technology and the future of jobs* (GET Youth 2020), an upward trend in NEET status has emerged since the previous GET Youth report in 2017. In 2016 there were 259 million young people classified as NEET, which rose to an estimated 267 million in 2019 and was projected to continue rising to 273 million in 2021. These trends imply that the target set by the international community to reduce the NEET rate by 2020 would substantially fall short. It is also essential to consider the ways in which COVID-19 impacted the status of Opportunity Youth. These ramifications will be explored in the literature review that follows.²³ The International Labour Organization (ILO) has identified NEET status as a growing global problem, which effects future prospects, including poorer health and employment outcomes. Young women are twice as likely as young men globally to be affected by NEET status, and jobs held by youth carry the highest risk of automation.⁴¹

It is evident that a growing number of young people across the globe are becoming detached from education and the labor market, which ultimately hinders their long-term prospects and creates adverse effects on the social and economic development of their countries, states, and local communities. The challenge to consider is how to create a flexible and diverse approach to reach this youth population since, as the literature demonstrates, a 'one-size-fits-all' approach will not work.²³

The GET Youth 2020 indicates that those who complete tertiary education are less likely than those without higher education to find jobs replaced by automation. However, the rapid rise in the number of young people with degrees in the labor force has begun to outpace the demand for graduate labor. Responsive training systems and collaboration between governments, workers, and employers are vital.²³

Note that the terms 'NEET,' 'Opportunity Youth,' and 'Disconnected Youth' are each used throughout the literature review in the same manner as the individual research articles have applied them.

Young adulthood, which is generally considered between the ages of 16 to 24, is a period of transition. Most individuals enter this stage entirely 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. During this transition, many develop a sense of self and an understanding of who they are and their relationships with their family, community, and society. Young adulthood is also a transition period between systems: from Kindergarten through 12 education to postsecondary or full-time employment.⁸

While this stage can be filled with hope and opportunity, many find themselves burdened 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 does not have the option to keep a guardian's insurance coverage, a 19th birthday means an end to affordable health care. For young adults involved in the courts, it is a transition to a harsher, more punitive justice system. For many under-skilled young adults, finding a job that pays a living wage can feel out of reach.⁸

Of the nearly 40 million Americans between the ages of 16 to 24 in the United States, approximately five million are neither employed nor in school. This statistic translates to one in eight, more than double the rate of some Western European countries. In rural areas of the United States, this number increases to one in five. While these young adults are often called "NEET," "disconnected youth," or "opportunity youth," it is vital to realize that many of these young adults have experienced unstable housing, homelessness, physical or emotional abuse, substance abuse, teen pregnancy, and mental and behavioral health challenges. Furthermore, some young adults have dropped out of the K-12 school system or are involved in courts or foster care. All these factors contribute to work-limiting mental and physical disabilities and unemployment. The disconnection of youth is not only difficult for the youth themselves, it is a costly burden in society in the long term. Young adults who do not connect to the workforce early tend to remain more vulnerable and reliant on government programs on an ongoing basis.⁸

Causes of Disengagement

The 2016 Measure of America data suggested that the probability of disconnection among young people was affected by income, race/ethnicity, and residential environment. Disconnected youth were nearly twice as likely as connected youth to live in poverty and receive Medicaid. In communities where the poverty rate was below six percent, about 1 in 14 young people was disconnected; however, in communities where the poverty rate was above 21 percent, 1 in 5 young people was disconnected. Racial/ethnic disparities were striking; youth disconnection occurred among almost seven percent of Asian Americans, nearly 10 percent of White individuals, 14 percent of Latinos, over 17 percent of Black individuals, and almost 26 percent of American Indian/Alaska Native young people.² The fact that these disparities persisted even when controlling for income suggests that structural racism and discrimination may also contribute to youth disconnection.¹¹

Residential environment disparities were also noted; youth disconnection was found among 11 percent of young people in suburban areas, 13 percent in urban areas, and 19 percent in rural areas. The national share of youth disconnection was nearly 12 percent, and 24 percent of young people in the rural South were disconnected. Other factors reportedly related to youth disconnection include poor grades, mental health and substance use disorders, parental unemployment, trauma exposure, and socially deviant peers.¹¹

In 2011 alone, taxpayers shouldered more than \$93 billion to compensate for lost taxes and direct costs to support young people disengaged from education and work. In their analysis of the economic value of disconnected youth, researchers found that the cost to society is estimated to be \$4.7 trillion over this group's lifetime. Lifetime earnings are diminished with each missed year of work, equaling two percent to three percent fewer earnings each year after that. Additionally, significant gaps in the education-work sequence of activity lead to pay and employability handicaps. Over a lifetime, an Opportunity Youth's earnings are estimated to be \$375,000 compared with a high school graduate's earnings of \$712,000. The fiscal burden of inaction is high. There is an urgent need for action and collaboration among government, business, nonprofit, and community leaders.²¹

Parenting and Childcare Access

Young adults who are parents face particular challenges concerning employment and education, which could increase disconnection. In an analysis of young parents aged 18 to 24 who live with their children, researchers found that about 27 percent did not hold a job in 2013. Nonparents aged 18 to 24 had only slightly higher rates of employment during the year but were much likelier to go to school, with 65 percent of nonparents attending school relative to only 23 percent of parents aged 18 to 24.³³

For some young mothers, teen parenting creates challenges to completing school and diminishes economic opportunity. Teen birth rates have fallen significantly for all races and ethnic groups since 1990, but rates for Latino and African American teens remain more than twice as high compared to white teens. Young women aged 20 to 29 who gave birth in their teenage years are less likely to have a high school diploma relative to their counterparts who did not have teen births; rates are lowest for African American and Latina teen mothers.³³

For young fathers, teen and out-of-wedlock childbearing also have labor-market consequences. It can lead some men to work more but accept low-paying jobs and drop out of school to pay for the immediate financial needs of their children. Some noncustodial fathers may also withdraw from the formal labor force if their child support orders are too high for them to pay, resulting in arrearages, which are often owed to the state - not the custodial parent and child. This may lead the young father to decide that it is more advantageous to work "off the books," where they will not be subject to arrears payments, and the money they make can instead go directly to support their child.³³

Lack of access to childcare is also a cause of disconnection. While managing schedules is challenging for any parent, it can be especially challenging for young parents who work and attend school. Care availability for infants and toddlers is limited, and securing part-time and nontraditional hourly care can be difficult. Resources to support childcare are limited as well; only 15 percent of those eligible for childcare subsidies are estimated to be able to access the vouchers to pay for care. The limited availability and limited funding are significant obstacles to employment for low-income parents.³³

Drug Abuse and Incarceration

The increased use of opioids may be another potential reason for young people being disconnected. However, it is unclear whether drug abuse leads to declining labor-force participation or whether declining participation leads to drug abuse. Krueger (2017) discusses this for nonemployment of prime-age men, but it may also play a role for youth. Nonmedical use of prescription drugs is highest among youth aged 18 to 25 (relative to older groups), and deaths due to prescription drug overdose increased fourfold from 1999 to 2014 for this group ([National Institute on Drug Abuse 2015](#)). It is unclear whether or how much this translates into or is related to declines in employment and schooling for this age group. One study (Florence et al., 2016), however, finds that opioid abuse leads to economic losses resulting from reduced hours in productive employment and household activity.³³

Involvement with the criminal justice system is another cause of disconnection among youth. Criminal justice involvement peaks in the teenage years and declines in the early twenties but can have lasting impacts. Those incarcerated are, by definition, detached from the labor market. Youth involved in the juvenile justice system often have trouble transitioning into adulthood. Criminal justice involvement interrupts connections to school, family, and work. Involvement in the system itself exposes youth to negative influences and increases the likelihood of further criminal activity. Time incarcerated may lead to worse labor-market outcomes when released due to limited work experience and human capital, as well as the stigma of incarceration perceived by employers. Studies indicate that incarceration as a juvenile or adult leads to diminished labor-market outcomes and a host of additional issues that could also affect employment, including worse health, diminished social relationships and community connections, and increased likelihood of recidivism.³³

Health - Physical, Mental, and Behavioral

U.S. studies indicate that Opportunity Youth navigate social and physical environments that put them at increased risk of numerous adverse outcomes, including lower completion rates for high school and post-secondary education as well as greater involvement with the justice system.⁵

Multifaceted and intersecting experiences, such as poverty, homelessness, mental health problems, or physical disabilities, contribute to the disconnect youth feel from education or employment. As such, it is crucial to recognize that employment-specific interventions alone are likely insufficient to support Opportunity Youth and should be accompanied by interventions to health, educational, and social environments.⁵

Additionally, studies indicate that the Opportunity Youth or NEET population reports poorer health than their non-NEET peers, and this difference remains strong even when individual characteristics, health behaviors, and contextual characteristics are accounted for within the empirical models. The results support the hypothesis that the health of the NEET population is worse than that of respondents connected to the major socioeconomic structures of society.³²

Research also demonstrates that the Opportunity Youth population reports worse health than those who remain either in education/training, employed, or both. This disparity may be associated with the disconnection from school, employment, and critical social support structures, such as pro-social peers, supportive teachers, career counselors, training providers, schools, and access to employment or education/training.³²

Moreover, studies have linked Opportunity Youth with the emergence of symptoms of depression, anxiety, substance use, and suicidality. Mental health and substance use problems can deplete the drive

and energy needed to enter the workforce or continue education/training and increase the risk of disengagement. However, the link between Opportunity Youth or NEET and poor mental health is unclear.³¹

Research reveals that youths disengaged from the education system and the labor force are often at reduced capacity to flourish and thrive as adults. Developmental precursors to Opportunity Youth or NEET status may extend back to temperamental features, though this—and possible mediators of such associations such as attention deficit hyperactivity (ADHD) symptoms and antisocial behaviors (ASB)—have yet to be directly tested.

One study investigated whether difficult temperament in toddlerhood is associated with NEET status in adulthood and whether different subdomains of ADHD (i.e., hyperactivity-impulsivity versus inattention) in late childhood and ASB in adolescence partially explain this pathway. In this study of 6,240 mother-child dyads (nearly 61 percent female) from the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children, mothers reported on their children's difficult temperament (i.e., mood, intensity, and adaptability) at age two and their children's ADHD symptoms at ages eight and 10. Participants reported their own ASB at age 14 and NEET status in adulthood (ages 18, 20, 22, and 23).⁹

In this study, higher levels of difficult temperament in toddlerhood were directly associated with increased probability of being NEET in adulthood. The study “demonstrates a differential contribution to the pathway between the ADHD dimensions, with symptoms of hyperactivity-impulsivity playing a prominent role.” These results indicate that early difficult temperament is a vulnerability factor for NEET status in adulthood. Difficult temperament, as measured in this study, reflects difficulties in emotional and behavioral self-control (e.g., low adaptability and high-intensity negative emotional expressions). The results thus suggest a prominent developmental role for lack of self-control from toddlerhood onward in increasing risk for NEET.⁹

It is critical to be mindful that disability is not an unchanging or inflexible category. The American Community Survey, the source for this study's disconnected youth calculations, presents six questions about difficulties a person may have with physical or mental activities. If the answer to any one of the six following questions is affirmative, the person is categorized as having a disability:²⁴

- *Self-care difficulty: Does this person have difficulty dressing or bathing?*
- *Hearing difficulty: Is this person deaf, or does he or she have serious difficulty hearing?*
- *Vision difficulty: Is this person blind or does he or she have serious difficulty seeing even when wearing glasses?*
- *Independent-living difficulty: Because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition, does this person have difficulty doing errands alone, such as visiting a doctor's office or shopping?*
- *Ambulatory difficulty: Does this person have serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs?*
- *Cognitive difficulty: Because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition, does this person have serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions?*

Each respondent with a disability could report anywhere between one and six of these types of difficulties. Disconnected youth with disabilities are twice as likely to have three or more difficulties, greatly compounding their challenges.²⁴

A report from the National Institute of Economic and Social Research on young people not in education, employment, or training reveals that young people with disadvantaged family backgrounds are 50 percent likelier to be NEET than their better-off peers, irrespective of their educational outcomes. Young

people with low qualifications are twice as likely to be NEET than those with certificates of secondary education (29 percent compared to 15 percent)⁶

Overall, the complexity and challenges of these interrelated issues and circumstances can contribute to trauma for young people. The traumatic conditions could originate from childhood experiences, or they could represent an intergenerational transmission of trauma that affects the youth's ability to transition to adulthood successfully or to emerge from a high-risk or complex situation.³³

“The best defense against social exclusion is to have a job...the best way to get a job is to have a good education, with the right training...The young people involved are disproportionately from poor backgrounds in deprived areas...social exclusion in later life is disproportionately the result. They [NEETs] are much more likely to be unemployed, dependent on benefits, to live in unstable family structures and to be depressed about their lives.” (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999: 6-8)¹

Consequences of Disengagement

Opportunity Youth, sometimes considered disconnected youth, are between the ages of 16 and 24 and are neither in school nor working. Research illustrates that some of these youth have disabilities, are homeless, or are involved with the juvenile justice or child welfare systems. The effects of this disconnection, without intervention, can follow individuals for the rest of their lives, resulting in lower incomes, higher unemployment rates, and negative physical and mental health outcomes. Young adults not in school or working represent untapped potential for the nation and individual communities.⁷


Youth disconnection has consequences for each affected young person and society. In a longitudinal study published in 2002, young people who were not in school or employed for at least six months while aged 16-18 were three times likelier than their connected peers to develop depression and other mental health disorders and five times likelier to have criminal records, yet one-sixth as likely to obtain high school or college degrees. In 2012, each disconnected young person was estimated to cost taxpayers \$13 890 per year and approximately \$250 000 during a lifetime, taking into account criminal justice expenses, welfare and social service payments, taxpayer-funded health care costs, and lost tax revenue.¹¹

There is extensive literature exploring whether youth unemployment might lead to diminished labor market outcomes later in life. Some of this research has been put forth in response to concerns about youth starting their working lives during periods of high unemployment. Several studies from the early 1980s found that work among youth generally led to higher wages in the future and that the impact of youth unemployment was not persistent. Later studies have found adverse effects of youth unemployment on future wages and work. In one study, a period of unemployment for young workers led to increased participation in training, but even so, left a lasting impact of lower wages nine years later. Using data from the United Kingdom, Bell and Blanchflower (2011) found that periods of unemployment when young had negative effects on adults, even decades later.³⁴

There is research that suggests that youth, particularly less-educated African American youth who are not in school or work, have responded to what appears to them to be a decline in long-term

employment opportunities by giving up on mainstream possibilities and institutions. This behavior is framed as largely being a response to declining demand for their labor.³⁴

In addition to negative impacts on future labor-market outcomes, disconnection is correlated with other negative consequences, including criminal activity, depression, and substance abuse—though the direction of causality is not clear. Furthermore, intergenerational impacts are possible, specifically on children of young adults, primarily if childbearing occurs when the parents are teens or young adults³⁴



“There are fewer work opportunities, and young people are competing with unemployed people with more experience. The pressure is on to prevent a whole generation from being left behind.”¹⁴

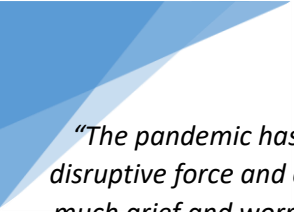
The Effects of COVID-19 on NEETS and Opportunity Youth

Post-pandemic, young adults entering the workforce have an even more unique set of hurdles – years of remote learning and isolation, pandemic grief, a sometimes destructive relationship with social media, fiery political division, and the task of figuring out the rest of their lives.¹²

Since 2020, one in three young adults aged 18-25 has experienced a mental illness, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness. As of 2022, one-third of young adults are not able to engage in work or other activities due to their mental health conditions, according to a survey on mental health by the Kaiser Family Foundation and CNN. This adds a new dimension to the present-day labor shortage.¹²

The last few years have been challenging for potential candidates entering the workforce, and one new program aims to help future workers — not through a training program alone but also by addressing mental health needs head-on. The Career EXCErate Wisconsin Project is a collaboration of Rawhide, Goodwill, and Fox Valley Technical College. With a \$6-million Wisconsin Workforce Innovation Grant, the project plans to give those struggling with mental health concerns the wraparound resources they need to start careers in a number of in-demand fields — including childcare, an industry that has lost a vast number of teachers and aides and has grappled with extensive wait lists long before the pandemic. The program will also offer employment pathways to other industries in need, including nursing, construction, manufacturing, truck driving, and maintenance.¹²

Under the childcare program, eight to 12 eligible candidates will complete two eight-week Fox Valley Technical College classes free of charge with other cohort members. The program is intended to prepare them to work in licensed childcare centers. Students will work in tandem with embedded mental health navigators, and Goodwill will provide case management services, such as help with resume writing, to boost their employability.¹²



“The pandemic has been a disruptive force and caused so much grief and worry. It’s not surprising that it’s showing up more as an issue in the workforce,” said Greg Rogers, director of behavioral health services at UW Health. “As organizations tried to bring people back to worksites, it served as a new disruptive force — and change is stressful, in general.”¹²

The 2020 youth disconnection rate is nearly 13 percent or 4,830,700 young people. This rate signals a Covid-fueled reversal of the decade-long decline in the share of the country’s young people neither working nor in school. Between 2010 and 2019, the youth disconnection rate fell 27 percent, from almost 15 percent in 2010 in the aftermath of the Great Recession to nearly 11 percent in 2019. This improvement was primarily driven by the steady increase in youth employment in the years following the Great Recession.²⁴

The youth disconnection rate varies by race and ethnicity and by gender. Native Americans have the highest rate, exceeding 23 percent, and Asians have the lowest, just over seven percent.²⁴

Covid-19 overturned lives in 2020 and 2021 and continues to pose numerous health, educational, and economic challenges today. Though they were less likely than older people to become seriously ill, teenagers and young adults suffered severe losses in these Covid years. Many experiences that help to allow youth in their late teens and early twenties to build the skills and abilities they need to flourish as adults disappeared or were reduced to stripped-down versions. These losses are reflected in the 2020 national youth disconnection rate of approximately 13 percent—an upward spike that reverses a decade-long trend of falling rates.²⁴

The 2020 data from the Current Population Survey (CPS) indicate that the national disconnection rate in April 2020 was 20 percent—two in ten young people across the country were neither working nor in school—and by June, the rate reached 28 percent, nearly three in ten young people. A staggering four million fewer youth were employed in July 2020 than in July 2019.²⁴

The young people struggling and off track prior to the pandemic will have the most challenging time reconnecting to jobs and schools. These young people and their communities should receive the majority of attention and resources available to address this crisis. These hardest-hit youth tend to live in low-income communities of color, particularly Black and Native American communities.²⁴

Compared to older workers, young adults tend to get hit harder during recessions and experience more long-term consequences from downturns. Analysis from the Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR) has found that young people were hit hard by the pandemic and were employed mainly in sectors that did not allow remote work options and would not be as quick to recover from the pandemic shock. Young adults remain disproportionately affected by the economic shock.²⁸

To better understand the impact of the pandemic on adults in their early 20s, it is helpful to consider trends in the share of 20- to 24-year-olds who are not in work or school. In the first three months of 2021, nearly four million 20- to 24-year-olds, on average, were not in work or school, an increase of 740,000 compared to the same time last year. The NEET rate for 20- to 24-year-olds increased from almost 15 percent to more than 18 percent over the same period.²⁸ As seen in Table 1, there is relatively little difference in current NEET rates by gender but significant differences by race and ethnicity. About one in four Black 20- to 24-year-olds were neither in school nor working during the first quarter of 2021 compared to about one in five Hispanics and one in six whites.

Table 1 – Pandemic Recession Continues to Impact NEET Rates of Young Adults. Number and Percentage of 20 – 24 – Year – Olds Not in Work or School, First Quarters of 2020 and 2021²⁸

	Jan – Mar 2020			Jan – Mar 2021		
	Number not in work or	Share not in work or school (%)	As a share of all not in	Number not in work or	Share not in work or school (%)	As a share of all not in

	school (1000s)		work or school (%)	school (1000s)		work or school (%)
Total	3,070	14.7	100.0	3,810	18.3	100.0
Female	1,603	15.3	52.2	1,932	18.5	50.7
Male	1,467	14.0	47.8	1,878	18.0	49.3
Hispanic	771	16.2	25.1	949	19.7	24.9
Black	654	20.9	21.3	796	24.8	20.9
White	1,421	12.8	46.3	1,768	15.9	46.4
Asian	160	10.4	5.2	206	14.3	5.4
Other	64	20.5	2.1	95	31.7	2.5

Source: Center for Economic and Policy Research (cepr.net) (Author's analysis of the monthly Current Population Survey, accessed through IPUMS)

The increase in NEET rates for 20- to 24-year-olds between 2020 and 2021 appears to be driven exclusively by significant employment declines and offset slightly by a modest increase in school attendance.²⁸ As Table 2 shows, the employment rate for 20- to 24-year-olds was nearly six percentage points lower in the first quarter of 2021 than it was in 2019, while the percentage of those in school was up by nearly one percentage point.²⁸

NEET rates for 20- to 24-year-olds prior to 2020 had been trending downward, but they spiked for both male and females in 2020. In 2005, 17.5 percent of young people (female and male) were not in education or employment compared to almost 15 percent in 2019.

Table 1 – Elevated NEET Rates During the Pandemic Were Driven by Job Losses. Percentage of 20 – to 24- Year Olds Employed, In School, or NEET, by Gender, 2019 to 2021²⁸

Year	Employed		In School		NEET	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
2019	67.9	66.1	33.1	38.1	13.9	15.8
2020	60.5	58.0	32.6	37.5	19.4	20.8
2021 (1 st q.)	62.1	60.7	33.7	39.3	18.0	18.5

Source: Center for Economic and Policy Research (cepr.net) (Author's analysis of the monthly Current Population Survey, accessed through IPUMS)

There has also been a gradual narrowing of the gender gap in NEET rates since 2005. Although young women's NEET rates remained higher over the period examined, men's NEET rates climbed faster in both the Great Recession and the pandemic recession.²⁸

In 2005, the difference between male and female NEET rates neared seven percent; by 2021, that number fell to about half a percentage point. The initial narrowing of the gap was primarily due to a large increase in young men's NEET rates during the Great Recession.²⁸

From 2011 onward, some of the narrowing between the young men's and young women's NEET rates can be explained by a steady decrease in the NEET rate for women. By 2019, young women's NEET rate was about two percentage points higher than young men's. In 2020, the NEET rate for both groups increased sharply, but with a larger increase for young men, which further narrowed the gender gap. Compared to 2005, the narrowing is almost exclusively due to a reduced gender gap in young adults' employment, which decreased from approximately seven percentage points in 2005 to just over one percentage point in 2021.²⁸

With regard to NEET rates by Race and Ethnicity, the NEET trend for Asian adults in their early 20s more or less mirrors that of their white peers. In 2005, however, Black young adults' NEET rate (25.5 percent) was almost twice as high as it was for their White counterparts (13.5 percent).²⁸

The NEET rate gap between Black and White young adults narrowed in the 2010s, but the NEET rate for Black young adults at its lowest point (almost 20 percent in 2019) was still about 1.5 times higher than it was for their White counterparts (13 percent).²⁸

During the pandemic in 2020, Black young adults experienced the largest increase in NEET rates (nearly eight percentage points), compared to more than four percent for White young adults. Despite the pre-pandemic progress and the current gradual decline in NEET rates among all groups, there is still a striking difference between the Black and White NEET rates.²⁸

Young Hispanic adults have also seen a steady decline in NEET rates. Between 2005 and 2019, there was a decrease of nearly six percentage points in the Hispanic and White NEET rate gap. In 2019, the Hispanic and White NEET rate gap neared four percentage points. However, it seems to have returned to 2019 levels after a sudden increase in 2020. Although the NEET rate gap between Hispanic and White young adults has narrowed since 2005, young Hispanic adults still face higher rates of noninvolvement in employment, education, or training.²⁸

Conclusion

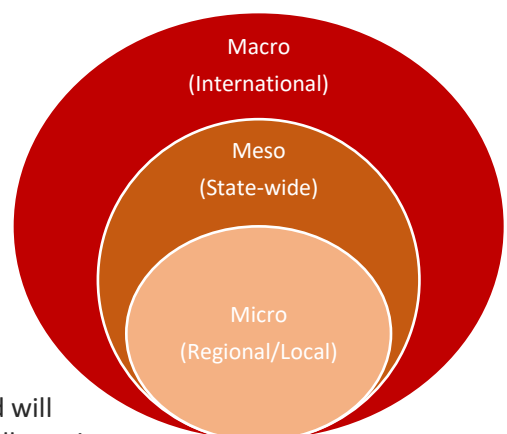
Although research demonstrates that 20- to 24-year-olds have experienced a steady decline in NEET rates since their April 2020 peak, there were still roughly 740,000 more young adults not in work or school in the first quarter of 2021 compared to the first quarter of 2020. Taking a longer-term perspective, the gradual declines in the percentage of young adults who are not in work or school and the narrowing of disparities by gender, race, and ethnicity are good news, but considerable racial and ethnic disparities remain. Moreover, the progress in reducing racial and ethnic inequalities has been disrupted by the pandemic. It is vital for current and ongoing recovery efforts to ensure that young adults in today's diverse and working class can improve their long-term prospects in the labor market and prosper in the coming years.²⁸

Secondary Data

Data in this section has been separated into a macro, meso, and micro contexts where available in order to illustrate the circumstances of disengaged youth and the consequences of inaction toward solutions to reengage this population.

Worldwide

Labor economists are paying increasing attention to NEETs – especially when NEET (Opportunity Youth) rates are persistently high, as in much of Europe. They fear that economically inactive young people will not gain critical job skills without assistance and will never fully integrate into the broader economy or achieve their full earning potential. Some observers also worry that large numbers of NEETs represent a potential source of social unrest.²⁶ In the last quarter of 2021, nearly 13 percent of people aged 15-29 in the European Union were NEETs, which is almost nine million young people.¹²



The European Union's goal is to lower the rate of young people who are NEETs to nine percent by 2030. Across the EU Member States there were wide variations in the 2021 NEET rates for the targeted age group. The lowest rates were already below the target of nine percent, and found in the Netherlands, Sweden, Slovenia, Denmark and Luxembourg; this was also the case in Iceland and Norway. These countries thus reached the long term EU-level target for 2030 in 2021 or earlier. Furthermore, nine Member States recorded NEET rates above the EU average of 13 percent in 2021. Among them, the highest rates were recorded in Italy and Romania, where more than 20 percent of all young people aged 15–29 were neither in employment nor in education or training.⁴²

A comparison between the EU Member States with the highest and lowest NEET rates in 2021 reveals that the proportion of young adults who were NEETs was four times as high in Italy than in the Netherlands. The overall share of NEETs decreased in the EU by more than two percentage points (pp.) between 2011 and 2021. Among the EU Member States, the largest reduction in the NEET rates (in percentage point terms) between 2011 and 2021 occurred in Ireland (almost 13 pp.), followed by Bulgaria (seven pp.), and Latvia (seven pp.). There were also five Member States with increases in their NEET rates since 2011. These countries are Luxembourg (by two pp.), Austria (one pp.), Romania (nearly pp.), Italy and Cyprus (both just over 0.5 pp.).⁴²

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, in 2021, the United States NEET rate was relatively high (nine percent) compared to the other countries, and also slightly above the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) determined average (8.5 percent).²⁶

United States

The World Health Organization (WHO) calculates the NEET rate as "the share of youth [age 15-24] not in education, employment or training (also known as "the NEET rate") conveys the number of young persons not in education, employment or training as a percentage of the total youth population."³

As of 2020, according to the World Health Organization, the United States NEET rate was 14 percent for both sexes. Prior to COVID, the NEET rate for both sexes in the United States neared 11 percent (with females at 11.5 and males just over 10 percent).³

In 2015, there were approximately 10 million NEETS aged 16 to 29 in the U.S., or 17 percent of that age bracket's total population, according to a new Pew Research Center analysis of data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. That represents a modest decline from prior years; in 2013, there were just over 11 million NEETs in the U.S., representing 18.5 percent of the age 16-to-29 population.²⁶ Precisely corresponding data is not available for prior years because the monthly Current Population Survey used by BLS only began collecting detailed school-enrollment data from Americans aged 25 and older in 2013.²⁶

However, longer-trend CPS data *are* available for 16- to 24-year-olds. Those numbers show that the NEET rate among that group generally follows the economic cycle. It fell between 1985 and 2000, from 19.5 percent to just over 14 percent, except for a bump during the early-1990s recession. The 16-to-24 NEET rate rose again following the early-2000s recession, fell back to 14.5 percent in 2007, then jumped during the Great Recession. The rate has ratcheted lower since a peak near 18 percent in 2010, and in 2015 it was about 16 percent – slightly above what it was in 2008.²⁶

What does the nation's NEET population look like? It is a varied and diverse group of young adults. According to an analysis of 2015 data on 16-to-29-year-olds, there are more female than male (57 percent to 43 percent) NEETs, and two-thirds have a high school education or less. Blacks and Hispanics are likeliest to be NEETS; 22 percent of young Black people aged 16-29 are neither employed nor in school, versus 16 percent of young Whites. About 20 percent of young Hispanics are NEET.²⁶

While not directly comparable, a separate analysis by Measure of America (a project of the Social Science Research Council) adds additional context. Using 2013 data from the American Community Survey, the report found considerable variation in the estimated share of “disconnected youth” (ages 16 to 24 only) in nearly 100 of the most populous metropolitan areas. The metro areas with the highest rates were Memphis (almost 22 percent); Bakersfield, California (21 percent); and Lakeland-Winter Haven, Florida (over 20 percent).²⁶ The metro areas with the lowest rates were Omaha-Council Bluffs, Nebraska-Iowa, and Fairfield County, Connecticut (both nearing eight percent) and Boston (eight percent). In general, higher disconnection rates were more commonly found in the South and West than in the Northeast and Midwest.²⁶

Noting that “disconnected youth come overwhelmingly from communities that have long been isolated from the mainstream,” the researchers associated the following six factors with high rates of youth disconnection:²⁶

- High rates of disconnection a decade earlier
- Low levels of human development (as measured by an index combining health, education, and income indicators)
- High rates of poverty and adult unemployment
- Low levels of adult educational attainment
- A high degree of racial segregation

Data retrieved from the Eurostat, European Commission depicts the United States' rate of “disconnected youth,” which, as of 2017, was twice that of some Western countries.⁸ Although the number of disconnected youth was *higher* in urban areas, the *disconnection rate* is *more significant* in rural areas.⁸

As of 2020, rural counties have a youth disconnection rate of more than 17 percent, on average, compared to 11 percent in urban centers and ten percent in the suburbs.²⁴

Although rates of disconnection were over ten percent for all groups as of 2017, they were especially high among Native American and African American young adults in the United States.⁸

Research indicates that the brain is not fully formed until the early 20s. This reveals the potential and ability to learn and adopt positive behavior skills and habits rapidly, and although the brain’s ability to change declines among young adults, there is considerable opportunity for change.⁸

Measure of America compared connected and disconnected youth against various attributes, such as a high school diploma but no further education, receipt of Medicaid assistance, poverty and disability status, and family status. As of 2019, disconnected youth were much likelier to lack an education past high school, receive Medicaid, be a mother, live in poverty, have a disability, and be uninsured.²⁴

Disconnected youth are less likely to have completed a Bachelor’s degree and unlikely to live with their parents. Disconnected Youth also have a slightly higher chance of living in institutionalized group quarters, being married, having limited English proficiency, and being a noncitizen.²⁴

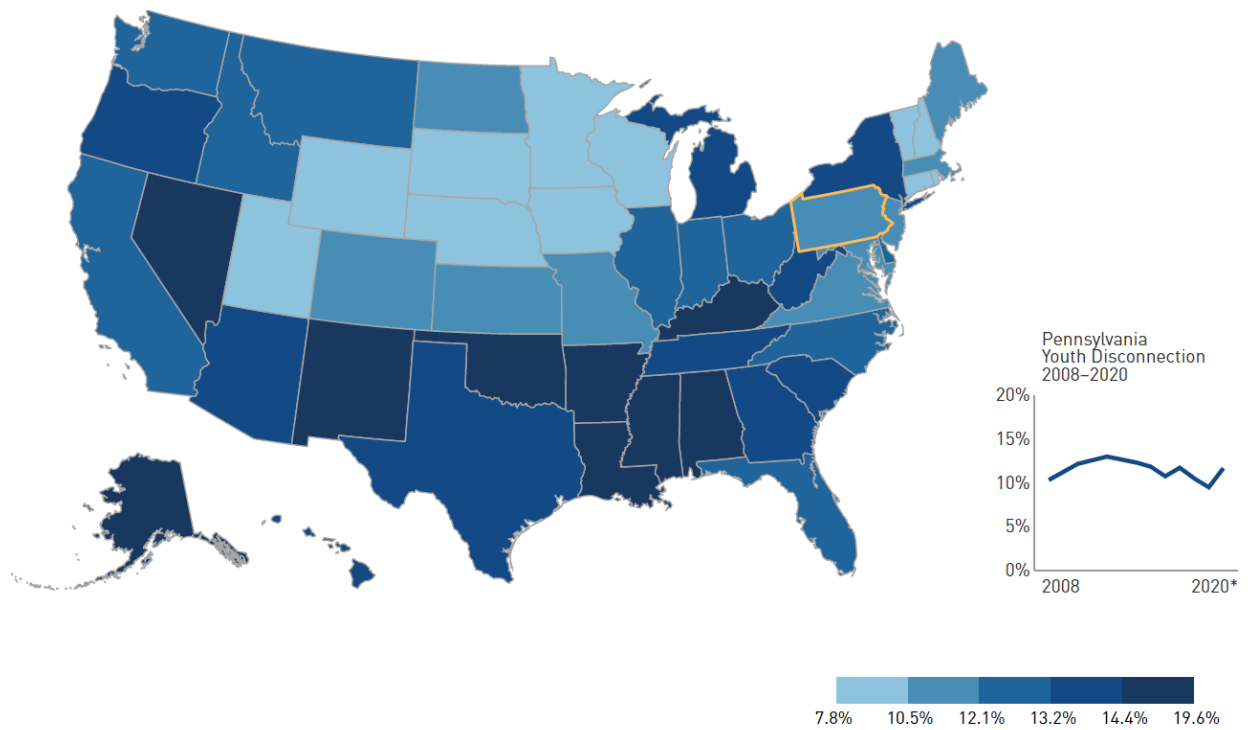
The table below is a breakdown of various indicators from The World Bank as of June 2022, pertaining to the share of youth not in education, employment, or training. According to these estimates, the male labor force currently has a higher unemployment rate compared to females. Females with an advanced education have a slightly higher rate of unemployment than males. Additionally, females with basic

education have a higher unemployment rate than males with basic education. Overall, females account for a greater share of youth not in education, employment, or training, than males.

The World Bank, Share of youth not in education, employment or training (% of youth population) World Bank Gender Data Portal International Labour Organization, ILOSTAT database Data as of June 2022 ²⁷	
Indicator	United States Rate
Unemployment, female (% of female labor force) (modeled ILO estimate)	5.3 percent
Unemployment, female (% of female labor force) (national estimate)	5.2 percent
Unemployment, male (% of male labor force) (modeled ILO estimate)	5.7 percent
Unemployment, male (% of male labor force) (national estimate)	5.5 percent
Unemployment, total (% of total labor force) (modeled ILO estimate)	5.5 percent
Unemployment, total (% of total labor force) (national estimate)	5.4 percent
Unemployment with advanced education (% of total labor force with advanced education)	3.6 percent
Unemployment with advanced education, male (% of male labor force with advanced education)	3.6 percent
Unemployment with advanced education, female (% of female labor force with advanced education)	3.6 percent
Unemployment with basic education, total (% of total labor force with basic education)	8.1 percent
Unemployment with basic education, female (% of female labor force with basic education)	9.8 percent
Unemployment with basic education, male (% of male labor force with basic education)	7.2 percent
Share of youth not in education, employment, or training, total youth (% of youth population)	12.2 percent
Share of youth not in education, employment, or training, female (% of female youth population)	12.6 percent
Share of youth not in education, employment, or training, male (% of male youth population)	11.8 percent

Pennsylvania Disconnected Youth

As of 2020, 166,100 youth are disconnected in Pennsylvania (almost 12 percent). Approximately 20 percent of Black youth, over 15 percent of Latino youth, and nearly ten percent of White youth are disconnected in Pennsylvania.²⁴



Local Disconnected Youth Rates

The table below reflects the disconnected youth rates based on various indicators, such as congressional district, metro area, neighborhood cluster, and county.

Disconnected Youth Rates ²⁴		
Indicator	Region	Disconnection Rate
By congressional district ²⁴ (As of 2020)	8 th Congressional District – Lackawanna and parts of Luzerne	14.5 percent 11,300 disconnected
	9 th Congressional District	12.8 percent 9,300 disconnected
By metro Areas ²⁴ (As of 2020)	Scranton	13.0 percent 7,200 disconnected
Youth disconnection by neighborhood cluster ²⁴ (Data is from 2016-2020)	Columbia and Luzerne County (West counties)	12.8 percent disconnection
	Luzerne County (South Central)	10.2 percent disconnection rate
	Lackawanna County	10.7 percent disconnection rate
By County ²⁴	Luzerne County	11.4 percent

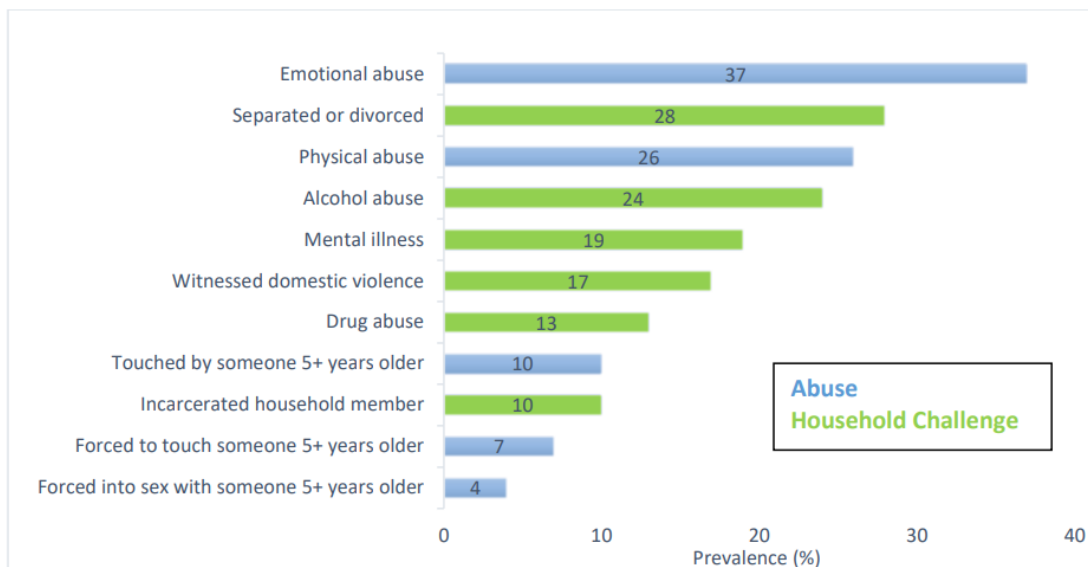
<i>(Measure of America has not yet obtained a custom data tabulation from the US Census Bureau required to update this section, which currently displays 2015–2019 data.)</i>		4,100 disconnected youth
	Lackawanna County	10.6 percent 2,500 disconnected youth
<i>In this report the disconnected youth rates and numbers at the national, state, congressional district, and metro area levels use 2020 data. Time series data are one-year estimates from the relevant year.</i>		

Pennsylvania Adverse Childhood Experiences Data

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are negative life events or experiences that occur before age 18. A strong relationship has been found between the number of ACEs and the risk for serious health problems in adults, such as increased risky behaviors and chronic diseases. This illustrates that environment, choices, and experiences, in addition to genetics, impact health and well-being. To better understand the prevalence of ACEs and their impact in Pennsylvania, the Pennsylvania Department of Health collected statewide data on ACEs in the 2019 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) annual telephone survey. Analysis of the data collected is presented on the following pages, as well as steps Pennsylvania can take to combat ACEs.³⁸

Figure 1 illustrates the prevalence estimates for individual ACEs in Pennsylvania, as determined through analysis of BRFSS 2019 data. Eleven questions about ACEs were included in this BRFSS 2019 Pennsylvania survey. Emotional abuse accounts for the most ACEs in the commonwealth, at a prevalence of 37 percent. These categories are similar to the national BRFSS ACE data, which found that emotional abuse is the ACE with the highest prevalence nationally.³⁸

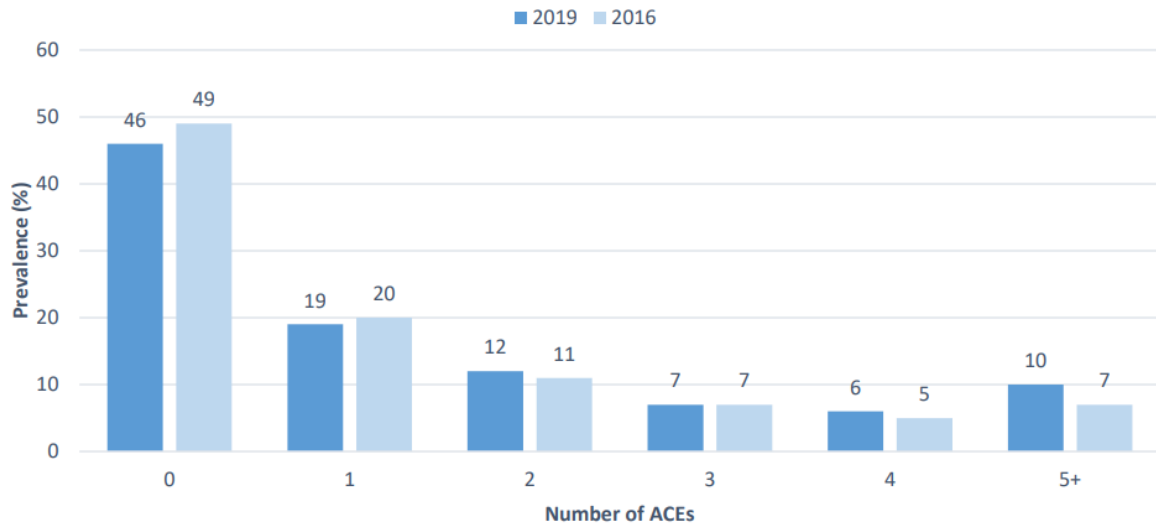
Figure 1: Prevalence (%) Estimates (N=6,606) of Individual ACEs in Pennsylvania, 2019



Source: Centers for Disease Control [Adverse Childhood Experiences \(ACEs\) \(cdc.gov\)](https://www.cdc.gov/ncjrs/ce4/ace/ace.html)

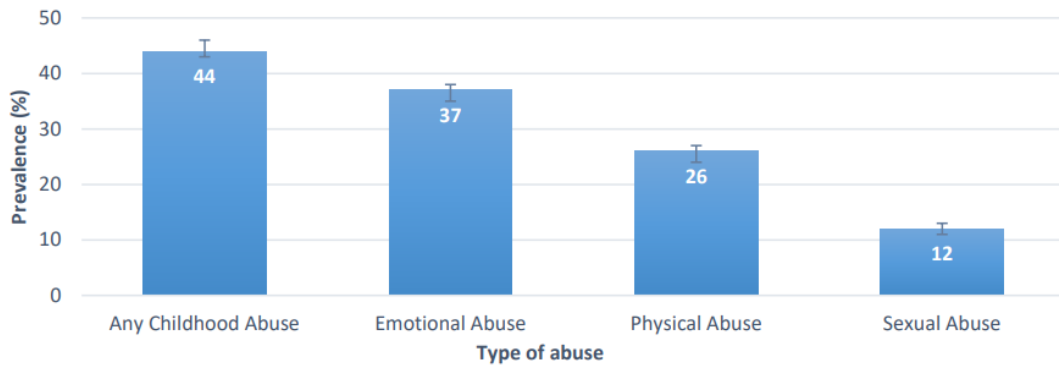
As determined from the 2019 BRFSS data, over half of Pennsylvania adults experienced one or more ACEs (Figure 2). Of those who experienced ACEs, 44 percent indicated that these experiences were forms of childhood abuse (Figure 3).³⁸

Figure 2: Prevalence (%) Estimates (N=6,606) of ACEs by ACE Scores, Pennsylvania adults, 2016 & 2019



Note: Prevalence estimates may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Figure 3: Prevalence (%) Estimates (N=6,606) of ACEs by Type of Abuse, Pennsylvania adults, 2019



According to the Pennsylvania Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, nearly one in eight children (12 percent) have had three or more negative life experiences associated with levels of stress that can harm their health and development.²

Approximately 19 percent of all adults in Pennsylvania, before age 18, lived with anyone who was depressed, mentally ill or suicidal. Approximately 24 percent, prior to age 18, lived with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic, and ten percent lived with anyone who was sentenced to serve time in prison. The rate of females (23 percent) who lived with anyone who has depressed, mentally ill or suicidal is higher than rate for males (16 percent). In addition, the rate of females (27 percent) who lived with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic is higher than that of males (22 percent). The rate of males (12 percent) who lived with anyone who used illegal street drugs or abused prescriptions is only one percentage point lower than the rate for females (13 percent). The full Adverse Childhood Experiences table can be found in Appendix B.³⁹

According to the Pennsylvania BRFSS, there was a spike from 2014 to 2016 in the prevalence of those who before age 18 lived with anyone who was depressed, mentally ill, or suicidal. This prevalence leveled between 2016 and 2019 (See Appendix C).³⁹ As of 2019, the Northeast region had high prevalence in the state of individuals who, prior to age 18, lived with anyone who was depressed, mentally ill, or suicidal (See Appendix D).³⁹

When broken down by county groupings, Lackawanna, Luzerne, and Wyoming Counties (nearly 22 percent) and Pike, Monroe, Susquehanna, and Wayne Counties (24 percent) had relatively large shares of individuals who prior to the age of 18 lived with anyone who was depressed, mentally ill, or suicidal (See Appendix D).³⁹

Demographic Indicators

The following demographic indicators can be seen in totality in Appendix A. Nine percent of Pennsylvanians fall into the age category of 18 to 24, while rates for Lackawanna County and Luzerne County both near nine percent.³⁷

The labor force participation rate and size for those aged 16 years and over in Pennsylvania is 63 percent, while the participant rate in Lackawanna County is slightly lower at 60 percent. Luzerne County's labor force participation rate is over 61 percent.³⁷

Concerning educational attainment, Luzerne County has a slightly higher rate of adults without high school diplomas (nine percent) than the state rate (nearly eight percent). Luzerne County has higher rates of high school graduates (35 percent), people with some college but no degree (18 percent), and people with an Associate's degree (12 percent) than the state.³⁷

Both Lackawanna County (20 percent) and Luzerne County (17 percent) have lower rates of people with a Bachelor's degree compared to Pennsylvania (almost 22 percent). Lackawanna County (11.5 percent) and Luzerne County (nine percent) have lower rates of people with postgraduate degrees compared to Pennsylvania as a whole (13 percent).³⁷

The shares of Lackawanna and Luzerne County residents living below the poverty level (14 percent and nearly 15 percent, respectively) are higher than the state poverty rate of 12 percent. Furthermore, Lackawanna County (three percent) and Luzerne County (almost four percent) have higher rates of disconnected youth when compared to Pennsylvania as a whole (over two percent). This data source

defines disconnected youth as 16-19-year-olds who are not in school, not high school graduates, and neither unemployed nor in the labor force.³⁷

Employment Opportunities

When it comes to two-year degree or higher awards gaps in Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties, there are projected supply deficits of software engineers, lawyers, coaches and scouts, and career/technical postsecondary education teachers over the next ten years. There are projected surpluses of medical and health services managers, registered nurses, health specialties teachers, postsecondary accountants and auditors, and elementary school teachers (except special education).³⁷

Over the next ten years in Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties, there are expected supply deficits in hand trucks, manufacturing, Microsoft Excel, Spanish, and medical administration skills. There are expected surpluses of those with skills related to pallet jacks, forklifts, business-to-business sales, personal computers, and Microsoft Word.³⁷

Over the next ten years in Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties, there are projected supply deficits in healthcare practitioners and technical occupations; management occupations; educational instruction and library occupations; installation, maintenance, and repair occupations; and business financial operations occupations. There are expected surpluses of sales and related occupations, office and administrative support occupations, production occupations, food preparation and serving-related occupations, and transportation and material moving occupations.³⁷

Summary and Conclusions

It is important that regional data be taken into consideration with national and worldwide data, along with the literature reviewed, which signifies a growing trend in disconnected youth compounded by a myriad of factors that promote the growth of disengaged youth, as well the effects COVID-19 has had on the youth population.

As of the most recent data, the share of disconnected youth in Luzerne County is three percent and the share in Lackawanna County exceeds two percent. The shares of people living below the poverty level are 14 percent in Luzerne County and 12 percent in Lackawanna County. Furthermore, nearly eight percent of those residing in Lackawanna County do not have a high school diploma while 7.5 percent of those residing in Luzerne County do not have a high school diploma. Finally, the labor force participation rate in Luzerne County is 60 percent, and the labor force participation rate in Lackawanna County is slightly higher, at 63 percent.

It is critical that the region work toward innovative and collaborative initiatives in order for the area's population of disconnected youth to receive the attention and resources they need and deserve. It is also pivotal to consider that disconnected youth are a diverse group, and as such, the causes behind their disconnection need to be understood in order to provide the correct type and number of resources to help reengage this population.

Case Studies

Below is a summary of various public health tools used to identify the disengaged youth population and a variety of programs implemented across the nation and the globe to work toward re-engaging this youth population. In addition to initiatives that serve the purpose of re-engaging youth, there are initiatives included below that strive to prevent disengagement.

Public health tools

Below is a listing of public health tools and programs used to identify populations at the highest risk for health issues, monitor protective and risk factors, and implement population-based prevention and intervention strategies, which can be used intentionally and systematically to reduce the number of opportunity youth. These programs include school, family, community, and employer-based efforts to re-engage disconnected youth.¹¹

Public Health Tools for High-Risk Populations			
Program Name	Target Audience	Program Description	Outcomes
School-based program- PACE Center for Girls	Girls aged 11-18 who exhibit multiple health, safety, and delinquency risk factors such as poor academic performance, truancy, risky sexual behavior, and substance use.	PACE operates in 19 nonresidential, year-round centers across Florida. Girls attend PACE during school hours and receive academic and social services (e.g., life skills training, care planning). Parental engagement, transition, and follow-up services are key to PACE, they are expected to return to schools to complete their secondary education.	A randomized trial examining the impact of the program on high school completion, school suspension, absenteeism, arrests, and employment stability was conducted. Interim report findings were included in Treskon et al.
School-based program- Reconnecting Youth	Adolescents ages 10-12 who are (1) behind in credits for grade level, (2) in the top 25 th percentile for absences, (3) have a grade point average lower than 2.3 OR have a prior dropout OR have been referred by school personnel	Evidence-based program intended to increase school performance, decrease drug involvement, and decrease emotional distress via a 75-lesson curriculum, social and school bonding activities, and a school crisis response plan.	A qualitative student in an urban high school setting showed that the program directly increased personal control, prolonged exposure to the program, and increased protective factors.
Employer-based program- National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program	Young men and women aged 16-18 who have difficulty completing traditional high school	Using a military model, a voluntary 17-month dropout recovery program helps at-risk young people earn their high school diploma or GED, enroll in college or trade school, start a career, or join the military.	Compared with controls, program participants were more likely to obtain their GED, to have earned college credits (72 percent vs 56 percent), to be employed and earning about 20 percent more income, and to report living on

			their own. Unfavorable trends increased the risk of not using birth control and having tried illegal drugs other than marijuana.
Employer-based program- Opportunity Youth Service Initiative	Diverse young people and young adults aged 18-24 from disadvantaged backgrounds.	The initiative provides young people with an opportunity to engage in an environmental service project, workplace readiness training, assistance in transition to college, and professional certifications, including OSHA.	Results showed that 48 percent of participants indicated that they enrolled in a school, and 52 percent indicated that they successfully obtained employment. Substantial differences emerged in community engagement, teamwork, leadership, self-responsibility, communication, and grit.

Abbreviations: GED, general educational development; OSHA, Occupational Safety and Health Administration.
^a Disconnected (or opportunity) youth are teenagers and young adults aged 16-24 who are neither in school nor employed.²
 Note: Additional evidence-based and promising prevention and re-engagement programs can be found at the following websites: <https://www.oasas.ny.gov/prevention/evidence/EBPSList.cfm>, https://youth.gov/evidence-innovation/program-directory?keywords=&field_pd_factors_risks_tid=413&field_pd_factors_protective_tid=All, <http://goc.maryland.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2015/10/Program-Models-for-Serving-Opportunity-Youth.pdf>

On the national level, many well-regarded organizations and networks have taken on leadership roles in support of the opportunity youth movement. Below are some of the coalitions and partners working to support opportunity youth.⁴

Aspen Institute - The Forum for Community Solutions

The Forum for Community Solutions, a program of the Aspen Institute, launched the Opportunity Youth Forum (previously titled the Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund) in 2012 as part of its work to build a future where communities create their own vibrant and lasting solutions to the social and economic problems that they face. The Forum for Community Solutions promotes these collaborative, community-based efforts that build the power and influence of those with the least access to opportunity and support communities to come together to expand mobility and eliminate systemic barriers. The Forum for Community Solutions and the Opportunity Youth Forum were launched to leverage the new visibility and momentum of the opportunity youth movement coming out of the White House Council on Community Solutions and its 2012 report Community Solutions for Opportunity Youth, which called for innovative, place-based, collaborative solutions to reconnect opportunity youth. [Read more about the Opportunity Youth Forum here.](#)⁴

Opportunity Youth Network

[Forum for Youth Investment](#), in collaboration with the Forum for Community Solutions and Gap, Inc., co-convene this network. Opportunity Youth Network (OYN) was launched with key leaders from nearly

100 national organizations in March 2013 to capitalize on the momentum created by the White House Council on Community Solutions, which brought new visibility and focus to the needs of 16-24-year-olds who are not in school and not working. OYN brings together the country's leading funders and corporations of all sizes, federal, state, and local government officials, non-profits, and formerly disconnected youth to work together to reduce the number of disconnected youth by one million over five years.⁴

The Opportunity Youth Network works to hold the field collectively accountable to the goal of reducing the number of disconnected youth by one million over five years, continually taking stock of progress in the field, helping align related efforts, and catalyzing efforts where there are gaps.⁴

Opportunity Youth United

Opportunity Youth United (OYUnited) is a national movement of young people and champions from all backgrounds committed to creating a society that invests adequately in the education and welfare of its children and youth, supports family and community life, ends mass incarceration and discrimination of all kinds and is structured to provide opportunity and responsibility for all.⁴ OYUnited began with the National Council of Young Leaders, a group of 20 former opportunity youth who now serves as a steering committee for OYUnited. To do this work, they:

Work with diverse allies to identify solutions and advise policymakers, business leaders, and funders on issues affecting low-income youth and communities.⁴

Craft comprehensive and cross-cutting policy solutions to transform our nation as a whole, as well as our states and communities.⁴

Mobilize low-income young people to become active, informed, engaged citizens who vote, run for office, and mobilize their communities to exercise their rights and responsibilities as citizens.⁴ Learn more about OYU here.

Other Movement Leaders:

In addition to the three named above, other networks and organizations in the opportunity youth movement include:

Jobs for the Future⁴

100,000 Opportunities Initiative™ (a collaboration of dozens of Fortune 500 corporations)⁴

Measure of America (a program of the Social Science Research Council)⁴

Grads of Life (with support from the Ad Council and others)⁴

National League of Cities, Institute for Youth, Education, and Families and their Reengagement Network⁴

Opportunity Youth Forum

Convened by the Forum for Community Solutions with the help of many partners, the Opportunity Youth Forum is a network of over two dozen place-based opportunity youth collaboratives spread across the United States in rural, tribal, and urban communities.⁴

Preventing Youth Disconnection

Historically, strategies to prevent youth disconnection have not received the same level of priority as re-engagement strategies. Yet prevention is at least as important as re-engagement; it can reduce the need for costly interventions later in life, reduce suffering and enhance well-being among young people.¹¹

Preventive approaches for youth disconnection include strengthening connections within the key contexts in young people’s lives (school, family, and community) and promoting academic and career engagement among young people. For example, a large body of evidence supports the role that universal preschool education can play in both readiness to learn and good academic performance, demonstrating a positive long-term effect on student engagement in school.¹¹

The Good Behavior Game, an example of a classroom-centered universal prevention program, was found to reduce conduct problems, emotional disorders, school suspensions, and special education service use, as well as to increase high school standardized test scores and the odds of high school graduation and college attendance; and, during early childhood, to reduce antisocial behaviors, substance use, and violent and criminal behavior.¹¹

Both Communities That Care and Promoting School-Community-University Partnerships to Enhance Resilience (PROSPER) are examples of community-based strategies to prevent youth disconnection, each of which has demonstrated positive effects that extend into young adulthood.¹¹

In these approaches, researchers provide structured guidelines and support to communities and help them convene a coalition of agencies, schools, and community leaders to conduct school-based assessments, prioritize protective and risk factors, and implement evidence-based school, family, and community prevention programs matched to their identified priorities.¹¹

Examples of school-, family-, community-, and employer-based programs for the prevention of youth disconnection¹¹

Program Name	Target Audience	Program Description	Outcomes
School-based program - Good behavior Game	Early elementary grades	Classroom-centered universal prevention program delivered by teachers in classroom	Shown to have short- and long-term positive effects on problem behaviors, conduct, disorder, educational outcomes, substance use, and violence
School-based program – Life Skills Training	Students in kindergarten through 12 th grade, students in transition, and parents	Substance abuse prevention program that builds knowledge about the dangers of drug use and promotes health alternatives through personal self-management skills, general social skills, and drug and violence resistance skills	Reduced tobacco, alcohol, and illicit drug use and reduced verbal and physical aggression and delinquency for intervention participants relative to controls. Produced \$50 benefit for every \$1 invested in terms of reduced corrections costs, welfare and social services burden, drug and mental health treatment, and increased employment, and tax revenue.

School-based program – Strengthening Families	High-risk families with children in preschool through age 17	14-session evidence-based program that provides parent, child, and family with life skills training. Parents and children participate in groups together and separately	Various randomized controlled trials evaluating the program reported positive results in reducing substance use and delinquency by improving family relationships.
Parenting Program – Triple P. Positive	Parents of children up to age 17, specialized programs for parents of children with disabilities, family issues (separation/divorce), minority populations	Parenting program designed to address behavioral and emotional problems in children and teens. Based on social learning, cognitive behavioral theory, and developmental theory.	Shown to reduce rates of child abuse, reduce foster care placements, and decrease hospitalizations from child abuse injuries. Reduced problems in children and improved parental well-being and parenting skills.
Community-based Program – Communities That Care (CTC)	Young people in grades 5 through 12 in participating communities	CTC is a coalition-based prevention approach in which researchers consult with community stakeholders to identify relevant risk and protective factors and implement evidence-based school, family, and community preventive interventions to promote positive youth development	Multiple large-scale impact evaluations have found that CTC reduces short- and long-term substance use and delinquent behaviors. CTC was also found to increase youth-reported protective factors and to be a cost-beneficial intervention with a return of \$5.30 per \$1 invested under conservative assumptions
PROSPER (PROmoting School-Community Partnerships to Enhance Resilience)	Young people through 12 th grade	PROSPER is a community-university partnership that delivers evidence-based school, family, and community-based preventive interventions with the primary goal of preventing substance misuse	Lower substance misuse was seen in intervention youth (relative reduction rates up to approximately 31%) as well as reduced conduct problems through 6.5 years after baseline. Long-term effects beyond high school were observed

Disconnected (or opportunity) youth are teenagers and young adults aged 16-24 who are neither in school nor employed.²
Note: Additional evidence-based and promising prevention and re-engagement programs can be found at the following websites: <https://www.oasas.ny.gov/prevention/evidence/EBPSList.cfm>, https://youth.gov/evidence-innovation/program-directory?keywords=&field_pd_factors_risks_tid=413&field_pd_factors_protective_tid=All, <http://goc.maryland.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2015/10/Program-Models-for-Serving-Opportunity-Youth.pdf>

Art Empowering At-Risk and Opportunity Youth: A Case Study of artworxLA

artworxLA is an arts education organization with the mission to combat the epidemic high school dropout crisis. Based in Los Angeles, where nearly 16,000 high school students drop out each year, art is crucial in re-engaging at-risk and opportunity youth. Through partnerships with Los Angeles County schools and the region's key cultural institutions, youth are motivated to learn and stay in school through the use of progressive teaching and learning methodologies that have proven effective for this community. The teaching methodology of artworxLA uses a concept-based curriculum with inquiry discussion and other interactive, participatory learning modes. The fundamental principles of experience, engagement, relevance, and authenticity guide teaching artists to lead dynamic learning experiences that empower youth to become more civically engaged and reclaim their futures.¹²

The European Youth Guarantee

To help get young people into work, the EU's Youth Guarantee guarantees that all young people under the age of 30 who sign up will receive an offer of a job, apprenticeship, education, or training within four months.¹³

The European Commission has adopted the Youth Employment Support Programme with an investment of at least 22 billion euros over the next seven years. It follows a previous investment of 22 billion euros over the past seven years to get young people into work through vocational training and apprenticeships.¹⁴

Tremplin is a Brussels region program funded by the European Social Fund. The Fund has a budget of € 18 million over seven years, and 10,000 18-25 year-olds have benefited from it.¹⁴

Since it was adopted in 2013, more than three million young people have taken up an offer every year, with more than 36 million people helped so far.¹³

EU Commissioner for Jobs and Social rights Nicolas Schmit says that when countries implement the Youth Guarantee well, it can have long-lasting results.¹³

One of the ways of helping implement the Youth Guarantee is by offering young people from disadvantaged backgrounds a chance to gain new skills and confidence by working abroad.¹³

A new initiative called ALMA, which stands for Aim, Learn, Master, Achieve, will offer exactly that across the EU later this year. It is inspired by a smaller, existing European initiative called TLN Mobility.¹³

With a total budget of around 100 million euros, 70 percent of which comes from the European Social Fund, this program has already supported around 7,000 disadvantaged young people in finding work.¹³

The Youth Employment Support package (YES), financed by the European Social Fund+ and other EU funds, includes a guarantee that all those who sign up will receive an offer of a job, an apprenticeship, education, or training within four months.¹⁴

The King County Reengagement Provider Network

King County is home to many innovative programs that help youth return to school or find employment opportunities, but until recently, they lacked an aligned system to make the most significant impact.¹⁷

The King County Reengagement Provider Network was created to address this gap. The network brings together reengagement providers monthly to coordinate efforts and learn and collaborate with peers. Goals include:¹⁷

- Cross-program sharing and networking
- Data-driven learning and improvement in tracking regional progress
- Regional collaboration

The King County Road Map Project - Data Dashboard is a tool that allows you to explore demographics and education outcomes in the Road Map Project region. [Data Dashboard - Road Map Project](#)¹⁷

Opportunity Works

Opportunity Works was a three-year effort led by Jobs for the Future to help opportunity youth--young people ages 16 to 24 who are not in school or meaningfully employed--access postsecondary and career pathways. Based on the Back on Track framework, seven cities across the country undertook collective impact approaches with diverse partners to provide supportive, enhanced preparation and postsecondary/career bridging for eligible young people, with a particular focus on young men of color.¹⁸

A quasi-experimental evaluation conducted by the Urban Institute in three Opportunity Works sites found large, consistent, positive effects on participants' postsecondary enrollment and increased connection with either education or employment about one year after program entry. Specifically, Opportunity Works participants were twice as likely to enroll in college and 25 percent more likely to be in either education or employment. Postsecondary results were even more significant for young men of color, who were nearly six times as likely to enroll in college.¹⁸

The Back on Track framework fosters the growth and scale of programs aimed at improving the postsecondary success of opportunity youth. Back on Track is characterized by three program phases:

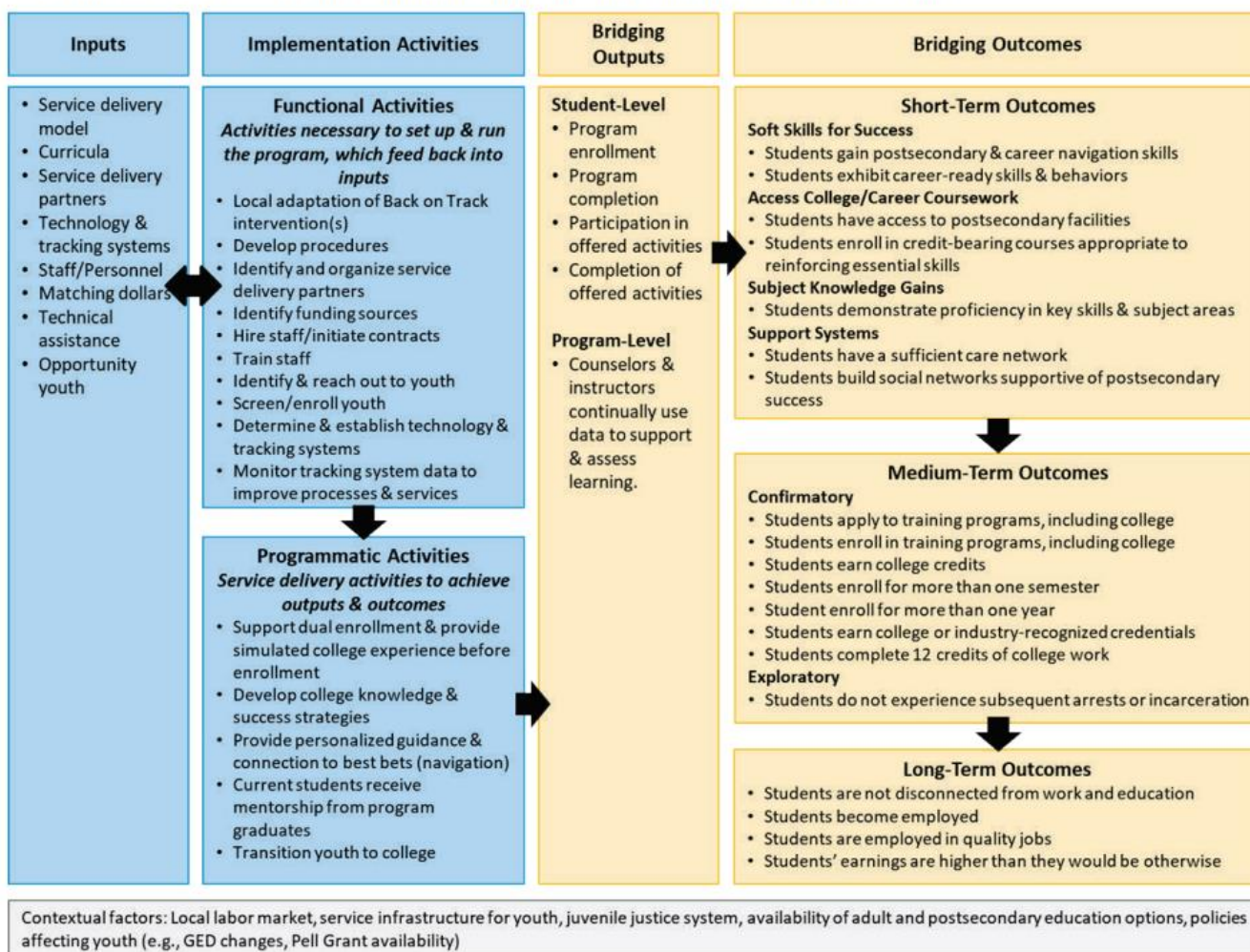
- Enriched preparation: recruits high school non-completers ages 16 to 24 and provides them with the curriculum, support, and coaching essential for educational success and career readiness, as well as aid in completing a high school equivalency (HSE).¹⁸
- Postsecondary/career bridging: helps students bridge to college and/or careers. This phase caters to opportunity youth who already have or are very close to obtaining high school credentials and helps them build the skill set essential for postsecondary achievement.¹⁸
- First-year support encourages program staff members to continue working with students through their first year of college or career.¹⁸

The Back on Track postsecondary bridging framework also appears to have helped participants reduce their chance of disconnection from education and employment. However, the program did not affect some of the exploratory outcomes around goals for education and justice involvement. It is suggested in the literature that it could be valuable to build out elements of the model that might improve these

outcomes, such as mentoring support, which appeared in the original framework but was not implemented in any Opportunity Works site.¹⁸

Back on Track serves as a framework that programs could use to structure their service delivery to help

Back on Track Postsecondary Bridging Logic Model (Original 2014 Framework)



young people obtain secondary, postsecondary, and employment success. The research conveyed that Back on Track is a framework rather than a rigid model, and individual programs could adapt Back on Track to their local context.¹⁸

Opportunities for Youth Coalition

Opportunity youth (i.e., ages 16–24 who are neither working nor in school) are difficult to engage in services. Population-level data and Geographic Information System (GIS) technology play a critical role in helping social work practitioners understand where target populations reside, and which characteristics are most salient to their service needs. This case study of the Opportunities for Youth Coalition demonstrates population-level data and GIS technology use in social work research and practice. We describe the collective impact approach, extant methods of youth outreach, and the Coalition's efforts to address youth disconnection. We used American Community Survey data, ArcGIS software, and hot spot analysis to answer three research questions.¹⁹

Community Collaborative Success

Increasing High School Graduation and College Enrollment Rates, The Strive Partnership, a cross-sector collaboration focused on “cradle-to-career” education, has achieved an increase of 10 percent in high school graduation and 16 percent in college enrollment since 2006. Cincinnati’s students were falling behind in college readiness, with Ohio ranked 42nd in the nation for bachelor’s degrees. The president of the University of Cincinnati joined KnowledgeWorks, a community foundation, and the local United Way to understand the problem and plot a path forward. They created Strive, comprised of multiple collaborative networks, linked to an overall student roadmap of success, and outlined research-based milestones for kids from cradle to career. A shared vision, deep research, and data-driven planning and evaluation were several important factors that made the program succeed.²¹

Strategically aligning existing resources against cradle-to-career needs has led to 40 of the 54 identified indicators moving in a positive direction, with several, including college enrollment rates increasing by more than 10 percent. White House Council for Community Solutions. Case Studies of Effective Collaboratives. 2011.²¹

Conrad N. Hilton Foundation

The Conrad N. Hilton Foundation’s Opportunity Youth Initiative serves young people aged 16-24 who are disconnected from school and work. The Conrad N. Hilton Foundation and our partners provide access to meaningful career pathways, particularly in the hospitality and healthcare industries, including wrap-around support and opportunities for advancement. Ultimately, this work aims to fulfill the economic and personal promise for youth the Hilton Foundation serves, without outcome disparities dependent on race/ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation. The Opportunity Youth Initiative has historically operated in New Orleans, where it will continue, while now expanding to Los Angeles and two international cities to be determined.²²

The Engagement Center – Flint, MI

FLINT, MI – A new program at the Sylvester Broome Empowerment Village will allow youth to find access to job opportunities, education opportunities, and wraparound services.²³

The Engagement Center works to identify opportunity youth, 16-24-year-olds who are not enrolled in school and are unemployed and provide them with different opportunities for education, jobs, and wraparound services.²³

The Engagement Center currently has a group of 20 community partners in different areas like education, behavioral health, workforce development, and community leaders to refer clients to.²³

The Engagement Center offers services free of charge to residents in need through grant funding.²³

Recommendations

The transition to adulthood is a critical time during which individuals must accomplish several essential tasks, including completing their education and beginning their careers. In recent years, however, young adults in the United States have experienced unusual difficulty obtaining higher education credentials and early work experience due to the COVID-19 pandemic. To improve opportunities for young adults, and especially to provide pathways for upward mobility for those from disadvantaged backgrounds, it is necessary to raise success rates in education and the workforce. Doing so will also improve young Americans' health and social well-being.²⁵

As noted earlier, it is important that the regional data also be taken into consideration with national and worldwide data, along with the literature reviewed, due to the increasing trend of disconnected youth resulting partially from factors such as the effects of COVID-19 on the youth-aged population.

It has been suggested that achieving greater opportunity and success will require accomplishing two major goals: (1) raising completion rates in high school and among those who enroll in postsecondary institutions and (2) ensuring that the skills and credentials they attain are those the labor market rewards.²⁵

Researchers suggest that achieving these goals will, in turn, require better integration of secondary and higher education institutions with workforce agencies and ensure that both are more responsive to labor market needs than is the case today. Instead of siloed agencies in each realm, the two need to work together more effectively to prepare young Americans for available and well-paying jobs.²⁵ Moreover, postsecondary institutions must create an environment that fosters student success, develop mechanisms to ensure students' needs are being met, and maintain consistent engagement with students. In addition, it is critical to acknowledge non-traditional options, including training and certificate programs as a viable alternative for occupational-specific goals.

The heterogeneity of this population complicates efforts to understand the unique experiences of or help opportunity youth. The population encompasses a broad range of young people, including those in the juvenile justice and foster care systems, teenage mothers, and homeless young people. Yet these subgroups are often excluded from or underrepresented in population surveys, including the ACS and Current Population Survey.¹¹

Furthermore, adding to the challenge, youth disconnection is typically assessed as binary (i.e., disconnected or not) when it may be better conceptualized and measured along a continuum. Although some young people (described as *chronically disconnected youth*) are consistently out of work and school, others (described as *under attached youth*) are only intermittently disconnected, having either not progressed satisfactorily through the educational system or not secured consistent, stable employment. Evidence from several studies suggests that various subgroups may require different intervention approaches.¹¹

Another challenge is that the prevailing structural definition of disconnection (i.e., out of school and work) may not capture the extent to which many young people lack meaningful connections, including positive relationships with peers, adults, and family. Those enrolled in school (technically *connected*) may be homeless or abused or may have family disruptions or inadequate peer relationships. Thus, understanding disconnection within both a structural context and a social and emotional context is crucial to providing adequate support to opportunity youth.¹¹

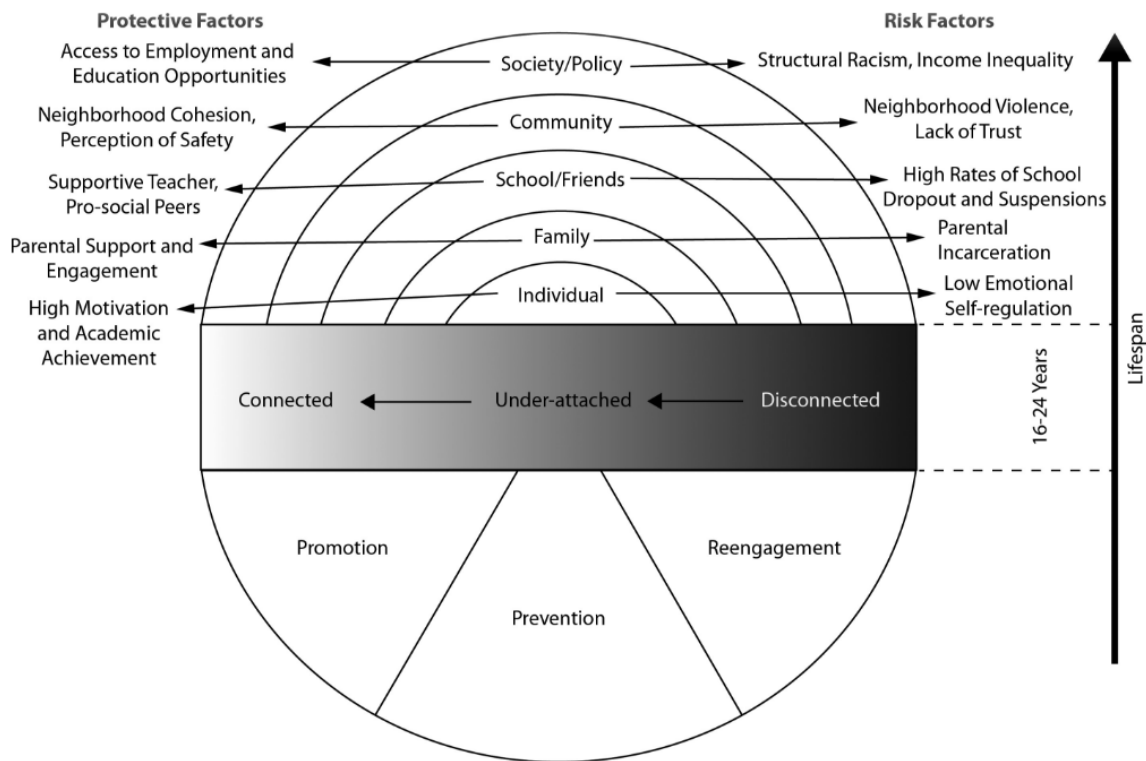
The successful reconnection of these young people is a local and national issue. At the local level, it requires community collaborations across multiple sectors, including non-profit organizations, school districts, and government entities in order to effectively remove barriers, connect the many systems that touch their lives, and build and deepen education and employment pathways.⁴

Employment support and training programs exist worldwide to help people on the path toward employment. These programs can lead to many positive labor market outcomes for young people. However, evidence from systematic reviews shows that, overall, the success of these programs may primarily be due to local contextual factors such as the local labor market and participant characteristics and may not lead to better outcomes for all young people. Consequently, there is growing interest in

developing innovative approaches to better support young people in general toward employment, and to better support young people facing multiple barriers (such as Opportunity youth) in particular.⁵

To clarify the theoretical underpinnings of youth disconnection, research proposes a conceptual model that draws from epidemiological principles, life course development concepts, and ecological theory (See figure below). The model is informed by the Positive Youth Development Framework, which views youth development as embedded within family, school, community, society, culture, and history, and promotes strategies that provide opportunities that build on young people’s strengths.¹¹

The framework below assumes plasticity (i.e., the capacity for adaptive change), which is especially relevant during adolescence, a time of dramatic brain development and emotional growth, provides opportunities for transformation. The framework also emphasizes that positive change can occur within multiple social contexts (i.e., family, peer groups, school, and community) and can be promoted by various people in those contexts.¹¹



The model includes protective factors for connection and risk factors for disconnection, potentially affecting youth development at multiple ecological levels, including individual, family, school/friends, community, and society/policy. At each developmental stage and ecological level, risk and protective factors can increase or decrease disconnection. For example, at the societal level, structural racism, sexism, and income inequality may limit options for housing, education, and employment and, thus, increase the likelihood of disconnection. Conversely, access to supportive adults and services can reduce the possibility of disconnection.¹¹

The model incorporates various interventions, which can also influence youth development. These interventions may range from promoting connection to preventing disconnection to re-engaging those

who are disconnected. The model indicates that promotion and prevention strategies, critical components of a public health approach that are detailed later, as well as re-engagement strategies, can be envisioned that target various youth populations. Depending on the intervention goals, target populations may include all young people regardless of risk (universal interventions); young people with risk factors for disconnection, such as placement in child welfare (selective interventions); and young people exhibiting early signs of disconnection, such as missing numerous school days (indicated interventions).¹¹

Models, such as the above, speak to the necessity of innovative and collaborative initiatives that are necessary to prevent and reengage disconnected youth. Due to the diversity of the makeup of disconnected youth, including the factors behind their disengagement, an understanding of the resources needed is necessary, along with collaborative efforts across the region to address disconnected youth that are dealing with intersecting risk factors.

The recommendations take into consideration the Northeast Pennsylvania Consortium of Workforce Boards, Lackawanna County Workforce Development Board, and the Luzerne/Schuylkill Workforce Investment Board plans which address youth barriers in the region. A summary of the components of the work plans which address youth barriers can be found in Appendices E-G. These current plans should take into account the recommendations, which could be used to strengthen current programs and/or to develop new programs and tools to re-engage and prevent the disengagement of the region's youth population.

Community Developed Solutions

The White House Council for Community Solutions (the Council) was charged with identifying critical attributes of successful community solutions; highlighting best practices, tools, and models of cross-sector collaboration and civic participation; and making recommendations on how to engage all stakeholders in community solutions that have a significant impact on solving our nation's most serious problems.²¹

Executive Order 13560 also directed this diverse group of leaders from various sectors to identify specific policy areas in which the federal government is investing significant resources that lend themselves to cross-sector collaboration. The Council, therefore, focused its attention on the broad question of what drives successful community solutions – those making greater than ten percent progress on a metric. Next, it focused on applying these findings to create substantial opportunities for disconnected youth. The Council chose this often overlooked population because of the untapped potential of these young people and the high cost to the nation. The near seven million disconnected youth cost the nation approximately \$93 billion in direct and indirect social costs in 2011 alone, making this issue both compelling and urgent.²¹

While all youth have potential, connecting them to education or employment will change their lives' trajectory and benefit their communities and the nation as a whole. In its outreach and listening sessions, the Council discovered these young people have energy and aspirations and do not view themselves as disconnected. On the contrary, they are eager to participate in their communities and own the development of their lives. They want to create a prosperous future but need the tools and opportunities to create that success. To acknowledge their untapped potential, the Council chose to refer to this population as Opportunity Youth.²¹

Consistent with the administration’s view at that time, the most innovative, effective solutions come not from the federal government but from communities themselves. The Executive Order directed the Council to identify key attributes of effective community-developed solutions to national problems. Recognizing that despite good intentions and examples of success, most community efforts fail to achieve significant results, the White House Council for Community Solutions worked with The Bridgespan Group to identify collaboratives that have moved the needle or created more than a ten percent improvement on a community-wide metric, to understand what makes them effective, and to determine whether these key characteristics could be adopted by other communities seeking greater impact. The analysis identified a dozen communities across the country where all sectors have pulled together to make more than ten percent progress on a community-wide metric and more than 100 additional communities that are making progress in this direction.²¹

One of these approaches may be for programs to incorporate skills development better aligned with shifts in the modern economy. Due to technological shifts and greater digitization, employers and government agencies are increasingly reporting the need for young people to have a diverse set of non-technical skills to succeed in the modern economy; these are often referred to as soft skills, non-cognitive skills, 21st-century skills, or socio-emotional learning skills. These skills are among the top skills employers seek in young workers, but which employers report are the skills youth lack most. Some evidence suggests that the levels of soft skills may be lower among Opportunity Youth compared to other youth.⁵

Additional approaches include:

- Programs that promote social capital enhance Opportunity Youths’ work readiness.¹⁰
- Youth access valuable program resources through strong developmental relationships.¹⁰
- Targeted components may enhance relationally rich workforce development programs.¹⁰

Due to the increased interest in and demand for soft skills, there is a need to understand the evidence base regarding effective approaches to operationalize their development within employment programs. Embedding promising approaches for soft skills development within employment support and training programs may help increase their effectiveness.⁵

The main conclusion from this analysis is that improving education outcomes is a necessary but not sufficient condition to lower the disproportionately higher NEET rates of disadvantaged young people. Better local support for them and investment in, e.g., youth employability services and careers advice are also very relevant.⁶

The Role of the Community

Individual nonprofit services can be fragmented and dispersed, with each organization typically serving a limited population with specific interventions. Funders then measure success at the organizational level rather than the broader community level. These individual efforts are critical to the lives and well-being of the people they serve and are important examples of success to demonstrate that progress is possible. Overall, these approaches are not resulting in significant change at a community-wide level, which is frustrating to all – taxpayers, funders, policymakers, service providers, and the beneficiaries themselves.²¹

Despite a varied national curriculum and efforts to incorporate work placements into formal education, hundreds of thousands of young people leave education every year to find themselves unemployed without the necessary skills and self-confidence to navigate the job market. For many school leavers and

soon-to-be graduates, the jump from education to employment is far too vast, and, according to research, a large proportion of young people are falling behind.²¹

As discussed throughout the literature, young people must leave school with an understanding of the opportunities available and the roles of schools and the broader community in empowering them with the skills to take control of their futures. Unemployment indirectly affects the economy and social cohesion, negatively impacting the well-being and livelihoods of those involved.¹⁵

To connect the dots between education and employment in practice for Opportunity Youth, there is a range of activities that teachers can organize to bolster support for their students. For example, arranging a variety of ‘go and see’ days with different organizations in the community can provide invaluable insights into sectors that young people might not have even known existed. The broader the range of these visits, the better the students will understand what jobs exist and how they all contribute to a broader society. Looking across various sectors, such as the arts, police and criminal justice, health and social care, professional services, and charities and fundraising, the possibilities are endless.¹⁵

While age restrictions sometimes limit work experience opportunities, any form of real-life experience stands to offer students valuable insights. Opportunities to interact with different people, draw parallels between others’ experiences and their own, and learn first-hand about the realities of different career paths will not only broaden students’ skillsets and horizons but may also challenge their way of thinking and help them feel better connected to their communities.¹⁵

In addition to efforts outside the classroom, the positive impact of these days out can be enhanced by complementary workshops focusing on building skills and self-confidence. Leading sessions that outline the transferable skills that students have already acquired over the years, for example, does vital work in building students’ self-confidence and guiding them through the first steps between education and the world of work. Workshops benefit female students and students from disadvantaged backgrounds the most, as these demographics routinely miss employment opportunities due to a lack of self-confidence and assertiveness. With increased levels of confidence and a better understanding of the skills they already have, the prospect of starting a new career can seem less daunting, and young people are more likely to apply for jobs for which they may have otherwise mistakenly felt ill-equipped.¹⁵

Finally, taking time to educate young people on the importance of physical and mental well-being will further equip them to embark on the next stage of their lives. Destigmatizing mental health issues, recognizing how physical health contributes to overall well-being, and learning more about the environment can improve how young people regard themselves and equip them with the tools to cope with potential periods of unemployment in the future. By hosting a range of theoretical seminars and practical workshops on these topics, both in the classroom and in collaboration with local organizations, school leavers will be equipped with yet another key set of skills that can guide them through the minefield of entering the world of employment and even beyond into later life.¹⁵

Overall, more extensive, real-life workplace experience needs to be made available to young people to educate them on the countless career paths they can embark on post-education and, secondly, introduce them to the skills needed to excel in the world of work. Educators can also provide more comprehensive guidance on how skills developed in education and each person’s unique talents and capabilities can be transferred into the workplace. By challenging the way young people think about themselves and others, broadening their horizons, and building on their experiences, it is possible to close the knowledge and skills gap that currently exists and get more young people into employment, training, and further education.¹⁵

Expanding access to postsecondary education and skills training for adults and youth is another avenue for preventing disconnection and re-engagement. Summer youth employment programs (SYEP) are perhaps the most widespread training programs for young people, and large-scale programs operate in many urban areas. Summer jobs offer youth exposure to employers and the opportunity to build work habits and skills while still in school. Outcomes of these programs are mixed, but some evidence suggests well-designed programs, including those incorporating classroom ‘work readiness’ components, can positively affect youth. Evaluations have found relatively limited impacts on subsequent employment or earnings, although some impacts for certain subgroups. For example, a study of Boston’s SYEP found no overall impact on employment and wages but significant impacts on employment and quarterly earnings for older (ages 19 to 24) African American males during the subsequent academic year ([Mayor’s Office of Workforce Development 2017](#)). A study of a Chicago SYEP again found no overall impacts on employment but did find improved employment for youth who were less criminally involved and more engaged in school ([Davis and Heller 2017](#)).³⁵

Multiple evaluations have also found that SYEP led to significant declines in criminal activity and violence; some improvements in academic outcomes; and improved social, emotional, and work readiness skills.³⁵

Apprenticeship programs combine classroom instruction, structured work-based training, jobs with wages, and contributions to work. Apprenticeships for adults raise wages and are cost-effective. Robert Lerman and Arnold Packer (2015) describe the benefits of apprenticeships for youth, including mentorship, income, accommodating different learning styles, and developing real-world skills. Youth apprenticeship programs for in-school youth in Wisconsin and Georgia have shown promising results. Georgia youth apprentices have higher graduation rates than comparable youth. Wisconsin provides apprenticeship opportunities to 2,500 juniors and seniors. Increasing the availability of apprenticeships to youth in and out of school is a way to increase skills and employment.³⁵

To assist in tackling the problem of disconnected youth, it is critical to build partnerships with businesses and others to increase career opportunities for low-wage and jobseekers and the pool of workers with skills that employers seek.¹⁶

The Council developed a Community Collaborative Framework (see Exhibit below) that serves as a road map for success for other communities across the country to effect large-scale change. Based on their findings, the Council believes that community collaboratives with these identified attributes should be replicated to address complex, persistent social issues in communities across the nation.²¹

Effective Community Solutions. ²¹		
Core Principles	Characteristics of Success	Supportive Resources
What types of collaborative are we talking about?	What do successful collaboratives have in common?	What do they need to thrive?
Collaboratives with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aspiration to needle-moving (e.g., ten percent +) change on a community-wide metric Long-term investment in success 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shared vision and agenda Effective leadership and governance Deliberate alignments of resources, programs, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledge Tools Technical assistance from peers/experts Policy Funding

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross-sector engagement • Use of data to set the agenda and improve over time <p>Community members as partners and producers of impact</p>	<p>and advocacy toward what works</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated capacity and appropriate structure • Sufficient resources 	
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Core Principles of Needle Moving Collaboratives

In addition to sharing a commitment to significant change, successful collaboratives have the following operating principles in common:

1. Commitment to long-term involvement: Successful collaboratives make multi-year commitments because long-term change takes time. Even after meeting goals, a collaboration must work to sustain them.
2. Involvement of key stakeholders across sectors. All relevant partners play a role, including decision-makers from government, philanthropy, business, nonprofits, and individuals and families. Funders need to be at the table from the beginning to help develop the goals and vision and, over time, align their funding with the collaborative’s strategies.
3. Use of shared data to set the agenda and improve over time. Data is central to collaborative work and are the guiding elements for collective decision-making.
4. Engagement of community members as substantive partners. Community members are involved throughout the process in shaping services, offering perspectives, and providing services to each other, not just as focus group participants.²¹

Through research, five common elements emerged as essential to collaborative success: (See Figure above)²¹

1. Shared vision and agenda: finding the common denominator. Developing a shared vision and agenda are two of the most time-consuming and challenging tasks a community collaborative undertakes. They are also two of the most vital. Establishing quantifiable goals can catalyze support and build momentum, and developing a clear road map can help organizations look beyond narrow institutional interests to achieve community-wide goals.²¹
2. Effective leadership and governance: keeping decision-makers at the table. Successful collaboratives need a strong leader to engage stakeholders and coordinate their efforts fully. The biggest challenge is not bringing decision-makers to the table but keeping them there for years of hard work ahead. To achieve such a feat, it is essential for the collaborative’s leader to be respected highly by the community and viewed as a neutral, honest broker. In addition, the leader must work to create and maintain a diverse, inclusive table where both large organizations and small grassroots organizations have powerful voices.²¹
3. Alignment of resources toward what works: using data to adapt continually. Regardless of their breadth, successful collaboratives pursue a logical link among the goals they seek, the interventions they support, and what they measure to assess progress and success. Collaboratives are required to be adaptive, adjusting their approaches based on new information, changes in conditions, and data on progress toward goals. At times, collaboratives may push for new services to fill in gaps. But much of the work of successful collaborations focus

on “doing better without spending more” or getting funders, nonprofits, government, and business to align existing resources and funding with the most effective approaches and services to achieve their goals. In many cases, this will mean working together to target efforts toward particular populations, schools, or neighborhoods rather than operating in a more ad hoc manner.²¹

4. Dedicated staff capacity and appropriate structure: linking talk to action. Having dedicated staff is critical to success, as is having a staff structure appropriate to the collaborative’s plan and goals. There is no predetermined right size. Effective staff teams can range from one full-time strategic planning coordinator to as many as seven staff for more complex, formalized operations. Dedicated resources generally focus on convening and facilitating the collaborative, data collection, communications, and administrative functions.²¹
5. Sufficient funding: targeted investments to support what works. Collaboratives require funding to maintain their dedicated staff and ensure nonprofits have the means to deliver high-quality services. Even though the first job of most collaboratives is to leverage existing resources, in every needle-moving collaborative studied, there was at least a modest investment in staff and infrastructure. This investment often included in-kind contributions of staff or other resources from partners. Sustainable funding becomes one of the collaborative’s key objectives, as does “funder discipline”— sticking with the plan rather than developing individualized approaches or continuing to fund activities that are not part of the strategy.²¹

The concept of collective impact has been growing over a number of years. However, when members of The Bridgespan Group convened leaders in collaboration, they pointed to several gaps in knowledge and tools. Building on the substantive work of pioneering collaborative efforts that launched the evolving field of collective impact, the Council chose to focus its efforts on these gaps: life stages of a community collaborative, best practices within each stage, dedicated capacity required for success (in terms of staff time and talent, committees, oversight, etc.), and best practices in community engagement for greater impact.²¹

As a result of these articulated needs, the Council developed specific tools and a set of 12 case studies of collaboratives that have demonstrated change for all communities interested in launching or enhancing existing collaborative efforts. These resources are available at www.serve.gov.²¹

Youth unemployment is higher than unemployment for other age groups. Additionally, the existing workforce does not match the job requirements of the future. Georgetown University’s Center on Education and the Workforce predicted a skills gap of approximately three million postsecondary degrees and nearly five million postsecondary certificates by 2018. Even today, 80 percent of manufacturers report they cannot find people to fill their skilled production jobs, translating to more than 500,000 unfilled manufacturing jobs; some 53 percent of large employers and 67 percent of small business leaders report they cannot find qualified nonmanagerial employees.²¹

Based on the research of successful employer programs for opportunity youth, it is evident that every employer can play a role in creating paths to employment. Approximately 50 percent of opportunity youth surveyed indicated that they do not have enough work experience to get the type of job they want. Employers have a great deal to offer young people to prepare them for work better and equip them with the right skills, experience, and outlook. Whether providing work-relevant soft skills through one-on-one mentoring or workshops, hosting job shadow days, or providing youth with an opportunity to learn on the job and develop marketable skills while receiving compensation, employers can create opportunities to help youth get back on track. In addition to the impact on the youth, there is a clear

benefit to employers who thoughtfully develop programs for opportunity youth. Employers have reported increased employee engagement, customer loyalty, and retention. These programs also provide employers with an improved local talent pipeline, help further diversity objectives, and contribute to the societal benefits of stronger communities as a whole.²¹

Based on nationwide stakeholder listening sessions and extensive case study analysis of employers operating successful youth programs, the White House Council for Community Solutions developed a set of best practices for employer engagement. These include establishing clear youth selection criteria, creating flexible education support, providing on-the-job learning, working with a nonprofit partner, setting high expectations, and ensuring that wraparound services are available. Building on this research, the Council identified three fundamental lanes of engagement through which a business can support youth – developing soft skills, developing work-ready skills, and offering learn and earn employment opportunities.²¹

Three Lanes of Employer Engagement		
Soft Skills Development	Work-Ready Skills Development	Learn and Earn Programs
Opportunities that provide youth with work-relevant soft skills via course work and/or direct experience	Opportunities that provide youth with insight into the world of work to prepare them for employment	Opportunities for youth to develop on-the-job skills in a learning environment while receiving wages for their work
Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soft skills workshops • Employee mentors 	Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job shadow days • Career exploration guidance • Job readiness training 	Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paid internships with structured training and support (e.g., buddy) • Permanent positions with structured training and support (e.g., mentor)

Examples of Effective Collaboratives

Education Solutions:

Prevention Strive, a nonprofit based in Cincinnati, has brought together more than 300 local leaders from the private, government, secondary, and postsecondary education, and nonprofit sectors to drive educational progress through collective impact, resource alignment, and data-informed decision-making. Stakeholders developed a common agenda, evaluation standards, and a consistent communication platform to improve the education system throughout greater Cincinnati and northern Kentucky. Strive’s goals directly relate to the prevention of disconnected youth by preparing every child for school, supporting children inside and outside of school, promoting academic success, and aiming to ensure that every child enrolls and succeeds in some form of postsecondary education. Stakeholders who participate in Strive share a common agenda, but their individual activities are not uniform. Instead, participants perform coordinated activities at which they excel and which support Strive’s overarching mission. All activities are informed by the shared metrics. The program has achieved impressive successes in the four years since its inception. Stakeholders set aside their individual agendas in favor of a collective approach in order to solve this entrenched, systemic problem.²¹

Youth Re-Engagement The Gateway to College program allows high school dropouts to enroll in community colleges across the country to gain the competencies needed to graduate from high school

while accumulating credits toward a postsecondary credential. This program, originating at the Portland Community College in Portland, Oregon, has been replicated at 29 colleges in 16 states. Students in the Gateway to College program attend classes on the college campus; they are college students. The program pays the cost of admission, fees, and books. Gateway to College uses public education funding and the college infrastructure to support the program. In addition to providing academic support, Gateway to College offers wrap-around services to address students' social and emotional needs. Students are provided an opportunity to learn within a small cadre of their peers and are taught by a team of instructors and resource specialists. After the first year of intensive transitional guidance to build their academic and personal skills, students join the general college student population. The program combines high expectations with personal coaching and support. Although the Gateway to College program is relatively new, early data indicate promising results. Students who experienced poor attendance rates in high school show an increase in attendance at Gateway to College (an average rate of 82 percent.) To date, Gateway to College students have passed 72 percent of nearly 70,000 college courses with a C or better. White House Council for Community Solutions. Case Studies of Effective Collaboratives.²¹

It is critical to encourage school districts and community and faith-based organizations to provide high-quality remedial and dropout recovery services to opportunity youth. Current offerings are not sufficient to meet this need. Regulations should encourage dropout recovery services, and Race to the Top should include selection criteria for applicants, including reconnecting opportunity youth strategies in their state plans.²¹

Investing in Disconnected Youth

By investing in programs that get disconnected youth back on track, donors can help transform the futures of generations. Additionally, the savings to society are exponential; taxpayers save an estimated \$14,000 per year for each young adult who is helped out of homelessness, criminal activity, or job loss after pregnancy. Research indicates that now is the time for regional and local funders to help bring these approaches home, invest in proven models, elevate best practices, and continue to support research, development, and growth of this emerging field.⁸

Donors have a tremendous opportunity here to intervene. Many of these disconnected young adults find a positive path forward when given the opportunity and support. This period of young adulthood is a time when trajectories are much more susceptible to change. And research indicates that the brain is not fully formed until the early 20s. This reveals an extraordinary ability to rapidly learn and adopt positive behaviors, skills, and habits, literally rewiring their brains. Moreover, 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.⁸

The organizations listed below, recognized for their national reach and diversity of approaches, have shown notable achievement in reconnecting youth.⁸

Two of these organizations are focused on highly vulnerable subgroups:

1. Youth Villages concentrates on those aging out of the foster system.
2. The Center for Employment Opportunities services formerly incarcerated youth.

The remaining three organizations are focused on connecting young adults to education and employment:

1. Youth- Build
2. Year Up
3. Goodwill Excel Academies

Included here is a link to a guide for Identifying High-Quality Youth Programs that should be considered before donating or establishing a program to support disconnected youth.⁸ [Best Practices - Center for High Impact Philanthropy - University of Pennsylvania \(upenn.edu\)](#)

Coordinated Data Systems and Service Delivery

To maximize effectiveness, strategies to prevent disconnection need to be delivered at multiple ecological levels (i.e., family, peers, school, community), during various developmental stages (infancy through early adulthood), and across various sectors (e.g., education, health).¹¹

Effective evidence-based prevention strategies exist, but many have not measured their effect on youth disconnection, and most have not been scaled up sufficiently to affect a broad population. In addition, only a few prevention strategies, such as that reported by [Stormshak et al. \(2010\)](#) have been integrated with re-engagement strategies.¹¹

Multisectoral approaches are needed to expand on the work already begun and address a problem as complex as youth disconnection. Public health strategies should be well suited to this effort because they can be formulated to target diverse sectors, work at multiple ecological levels, and engage a wide range of stakeholders and disciplines concurrently.¹¹

The strategies most likely to succeed are those that (1) use coordinated data systems, (2) consolidate service delivery and blend funding, (3) involve young people in the design and implementation of interventions, and (4) undertake systematic approaches to the testing and scaling up of prevention and re-engagement interventions.¹¹

With high-level, consistent leadership on this issue and a publicly tracked, common metric, it will be possible to assess the range of services supporting opportunity youth and their efficacy, which is essential to creating a coordinated, cost-effective effort to make significant progress.²¹

The question then becomes, how do leaders in the region uniformly analyze and build a policy response around the disconnected youth rate? The research included in the literature review and case studies demonstrates the vitalness of case studies and data collection analysis prior to implementing programs and policies.

Addressing Systemic Challenges

Opportunity youth face broader systemic challenges to employment. These may include experiences of racism, discrimination, lack of access to appropriate health services, and limited reliable access to transportation, among several other intersectional barriers. However, skills-focused interventions are likely only one part of a mix of approaches needed to support Opportunity Youth to fulfill their potential and succeed in employment and society. These systemic challenges serve as a barrier for opportunity youth who desire to further their education and training as well as pursue employment opportunities. Improving access to resources will support opportunity youth in reaching their education and employment goals. Accordingly, it is critical to explore how support and training providers address the broader systemic challenges to employment faced by Opportunity youth. Training providers can begin to explore solutions to and address broader systemic challenges by collaborating with school districts, social service providers, and local government entities.⁵

A Public Health Approach

Research demonstrates that Opportunity Youth has a disproportionate share of problems as they age, including chronic unemployment, poverty, mental health disorders, criminal behaviors, incarceration, poor health, and early mortality. These alarming disparities between opportunity youth and their more connected peers represent a public health problem with profound social, economic, and health implications.¹¹

A public health approach to the problem of opportunity youth would involve developing and investing in youth monitoring data systems that can be coordinated across multiple sectors, consolidating both the delivery and funding of services for opportunity youth, developing policies and programs that encourage engagement of young people, and fostering systematic approaches to the testing and scaling up of preventive and re-engagement interventions.¹¹

Public health tools, including identifying populations at the highest risk for health issues, monitoring protective and risk factors, and implementing population-based prevention and intervention strategies, can be used intentionally and systematically to reduce the number of opportunity youth.¹¹

Multisectoral approaches are needed to expand on the work already begun and address a problem as complex as youth disconnection. Public health strategies should be well suited to this effort because they can be formulated to target diverse sectors, work at multiple ecological levels, and engage a wide range of stakeholders and disciplines concurrently. Strategies most likely to succeed will be those that (1) use coordinated data systems, (2) consolidate service delivery and blend funding, (3) involve young people in the design and implementation of interventions, and (4) undertake systematic approaches to the testing and scaling up of prevention and re-engagement interventions.¹¹

To do so, the following recommendations have been included throughout research: (1) assess differences in the prevalence of health conditions and their severity between both populations, (2) study the role of daily experiences among the NEET population and how these may differentiate them from their non-NEET peers, (3) assess health for this population using objective health markers (i.e., biomarkers or allostatic load scores) in order to determine differences in a measure that is not based on self-report, prone to recall bias, or dependent on a diagnosis such as health conditions. As adolescence and young adulthood are critical developmental stages, identifying the factors associated with the increased likelihood of being disconnected and the subsequent disparities associated with NEET status will illuminate pathways for improvement in later-life outcomes such as reinsertion in the labor force, social mobility, and risk reduction of diseases and/or mortality.³²

Disconnected Youth Involvement

Disconnected youth should be asked to provide input on research, strategy development, and intervention delivery efforts. The participation of disconnected youth who are most marginalized (i.e., those who are chronically disconnected) should be sought. Young people can provide important perspectives on intervention feasibility and acceptability, which may improve program efficacy.¹¹ Their involvement also has the potential to provide opportunity youth with leadership and employment opportunities and positive connections with adults. One strategy involves the use of previously disconnected youth as mentors or coaches to young people at risk of leaving school and being disconnected.¹¹

An example of this strategy is in Baltimore City, Maryland, where the Thread Program (<https://www.thread.org>) provides a network of support for high school students at the highest risk of

leaving school early or for gang engagement. Keys to success in involving disconnected youth include using specific outreach strategies, providing ongoing training with useful real-world applications, engaging in retention efforts, ensuring meaningful representation, and acknowledging input. Trust can be developed by prioritizing the concerns of young people over those of service providers.¹¹

The most successful efforts to involve disconnected youth have provided young people with human and financial resources and training on making meaningful contributions. That said, more research is needed to ascertain the most effective ways to engage disconnected youth in research, strategy, and intervention efforts.¹¹

Engaging youth as leaders in developing and highlighting solutions that work will create more relevant, higher quality, and increasingly effective programs and resources for opportunity youth. Youth want their voices to be heard and have strong and informed opinions of what will help them reconnect. Young people have a critical stake in the quality and sustainability of the solution, as the Council heard in youth roundtables, United Way Community Conversations, and the national survey as presented in Opportunity Road. Specifically, almost 80 percent of opportunity youth want to connect with mentors to whom they can relate, such as successful peers, business mentors, and college mentors. Opportunity youth are likeliest to respond to reconnection strategies that provide strong, integrated support and treat youth as part of the solution rather than the problem.²¹

There are many examples of how youth leadership has made programs more effective, including youth-driven solutions in the Chicago public school system and the Nashville Child and Youth Master Plan. When youth are involved as community leaders, the decisions are more relevant, reliable, and more likely to be embraced by them. Perhaps most importantly, their innate understanding of their generation allows them to develop more authentic solutions to the issues they face.²¹

The programs discussed above can be replicated as a collaborative effort within the region, with modifications within the environment, as deemed necessary, dependent upon the stakeholders involved and available resources, including financial and physical resources.

Atypical Development Pathway

Given the findings throughout the literature review, interventions targeting self-regulation at an early age may be helpful in mitigating adverse outcomes. Moreover, self-control has been empirically found to stabilize between ages 8.5 and 10.5 years, suggesting that childhood offers a key window for intervention. A meta-analysis of self-control intervention programs with children of a mean age below ten years lends support to the efficacy of early intervention on self-control and delinquency.

It is noteworthy that some of these programs also included elements of emotional understanding and communication, which target children's emotional regulation. Small-to-medium effect sizes for improvement in self-control and delinquency were found (Piquero et al., 2016), indicating that early interventions targeting self-control may reduce the risks of becoming NEET later in life. These findings suggest that it may be valuable to investigate atypical pathways earlier in development that may lead to NEET. Overall, the literature supports the plausibility of an atypical developmental pathway from early difficult temperament to NEET status in adulthood.⁹ Communities should consider to constructing targeted early intervention programs in both the community and schools that address creating positive relationships and emotional regulation at an early age.

Soft Skills Development

Interventions that recognize and address the broader experiences of Opportunity Youth and take a strength-based lens to their skills and assets have the potential to change the life trajectory of those young people and promote a wide range of positive outcomes for individuals and communities.⁵

In particular, there is increasing interest in re-developing youth employment programs to enhance skills – soft skills in particular – so they align with business needs, but also to address the challenges young people are facing and support them on the path to employment. Incorporating promising approaches for soft skills development through cross-sector collaborations, and specifically within employment support and training programs, may help increase these programs' effectiveness and help youth facing multiple barriers attain employment goals. The following section summarizes the reviewed literature to define and describe “soft skills.”⁵

What is the Value of Soft Skills for Opportunity Youth?

Soft skills are in high demand in today's economy and are considered a critical part of a transferable skillset as movement across job sectors is becoming more common. Additionally, soft skills play an important role in success along the career pathway – from job searching to landing a job to excelling in the workplace. Employers are placing an increasing demand on soft skills. Still, according to research, they repeatedly report being dissatisfied with the soft skills of youth and recent graduates entering the workforce. Furthermore, much of the research on soft skills in the workplace is focused on employer perspectives; the lack of youth perspectives presents a significant gap, which could affect the design of training and other interventions. With Opportunity Youth facing multiple barriers, they often encounter challenges to skill development, which puts them at a greater risk for unemployment than youth who already have strong, soft skills.⁵

Key Soft Skills for Cross-Sectoral Youth Outcomes

This framework, developed by YouthPower, a U.S. agency dedicated to expanding the evidence base for positive youth development, underscores the value of soft skills in predicting positive outcomes for young people in workforce development, violence prevention, and sexual and reproductive health programs.⁵

As such, the soft skills identified by YouthPower are applicable across a wide range of employment and social programs. This framework is valuable because it brings a youth development lens and is accompanied by an inventory of tools used to measure the skills in this framework. The five skills this framework identified as being related to workforce success include:

1. Higher-order thinking skills⁵
2. Communication⁵
3. Positive self-concept⁵
4. Self-control⁵
5. Social skills⁵

ACT Holistic Framework of Education and Work Readiness by ACT Inc.

This framework, developed by ACT – a U.S.-based non-profit focused on education development and assessment – consists of skill domains intended to support young people along the path from education to employment. During each phase of training (early education, high school, post-secondary, and the workplace), skills are grouped into categories: academic skills, cross-cutting abilities, behavioral skills, and education and career navigation skills. While ACT is geared more toward education, a key aspect of

this framework is that it emphasizes skills essential for the school-to-work transition, which may be critical to supporting Opportunity Youth.⁵

Frameworks such as those illustrated below should be included into collaborative regional efforts to eliminate intersecting barriers for opportunity youth.

Subset of Soft Skills Identified by the ACT Framework⁵

Cross-cutting Abilities	Behavioural Skills	Education & Career Navigation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Technology and information literacy Collaborative problem solving Learning skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acting with honesty Getting along well with others Maintaining composure Socializing with others Sustaining effort 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-knowledge Environmental factors Integration of skills/ abilities Managing career and education actions

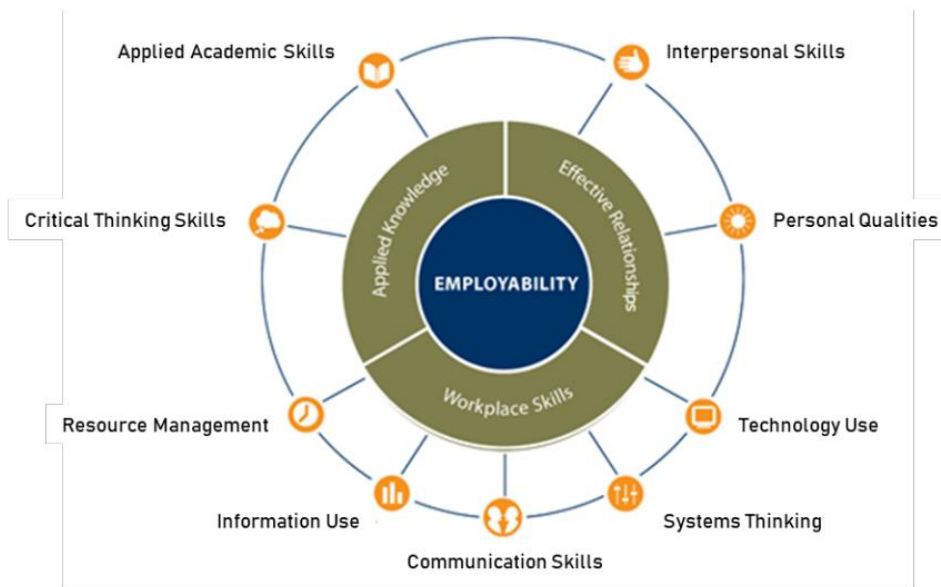
Critical soft skills across the employment pathway⁵








**Adapted from a review by Child Trends of critical soft skills across the employment pathway³⁷*

Employability Skills Framework by the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education
 This framework was developed by the leading U.S. government agency focused on skills and career development. It compiles the necessary skills that can allow young people to succeed in the labor market, irrespective of industry or vocation. Its three domains are skills related to the workplace, effective relationships, and applied knowledge (see Figure below). An accompanying checklist of the skills within each domain is also provided to help education and training providers consider how a learning activity aligns with these skills. Designed from the onset for training providers, it may resonate most with service providers working with youth. Currently, measurement tools are not available for this framework.⁵



Employability Skills Framework





Workplace skills are the abilities employees need to successfully accomplish work tasks. Workplace skills include:

-  **Resource management** skills enable employees to successfully perform work tasks by managing time and other resources.
-  **Information use** skills enable employees to successfully perform work tasks by understanding, evaluating, and using a variety of information.
-  **Communication skills** enable employees to successfully perform work tasks by communicating effectively with others in multiple formats.
-  **Systems thinking** skills enable employees to successfully perform work tasks by understanding relationships among the components of a system.
-  **Technology use** skills enable employees to successfully perform work tasks by applying information technology appropriately and effectively.

Developing **effective relationships** in the workplace requires a combination of interpersonal skills and personal qualities.

-  **Interpersonal skills** include the ability to collaborate as a member of a team or work independently, as appropriate; communicate effectively; maintain a positive attitude; and contribute to the overarching goals of the workplace.
-  **Personal qualities** that contribute to effective relationships include responsibility, self-discipline, flexibility, integrity, and initiative. Other essential qualities are a sense of professionalism and self-worth; willingness to learn; and acceptance of responsibility for one's own personal growth.

Applied knowledge is the thoughtful integration of academic knowledge and technical skills, put to practical use in the workplace. Applied knowledge falls into two main areas:

-  **Applied academic skills** enable employees to put skills based on academic disciplines and learning—such as reading, writing, mathematical strategies and procedures, and scientific principles and procedures—to practical use in the workplace.
-  **Critical thinking skills** enable employees to analyze, reason, solve problems, plan, organize, and make sound decisions in their work.

Across all these frameworks, several skills overlap. First, building a strong personal identity, which includes having a positive sense of self and high self-worth, along with an ability to assess and recognize one's strengths, is noted as important by all three frameworks. For Opportunity Youth likely to face more systemic barriers in education and employment, building a sense of confidence and self-worth may be especially pertinent. Additionally, skills relevant to relationships, like communication, collaboration, and social skills, and those related to learning and applying knowledge, especially critical thinking skills, are prominent in these frameworks. These skills apply to various settings and may help young people obtain job opportunities and progress and succeed in employment.⁵

The three conceptual frameworks emphasize distinct aspects of skills. For example, the YouthPower framework is more focused on broad traits and categories of skills important for youth development. The ACT framework provides a unique lens on the value of skills that may be important for the transition

between school and work. Both frameworks take a youth-centric lens, which is important for organizations aiming to support young people. While the Employability Skills framework was not developed specifically for youth, it provides more breadth in specific skills relevant for the modern economy. Its emphasis on skills relevant to applying knowledge, strengthening relationships, and workplace skills provide direction to employment support organizations aiming to build these skills within trainees. With the presence of many different frameworks conceptualizing soft skills, these three frameworks illustrate a variety of principles and concepts that may be important for different areas of development.⁵

Moreover, with so many definitions and varied interpretations of soft skills, these frameworks identify common areas and list specific soft skills that could be applied and understood in real-world settings. Employers and employment support providers may find these frameworks particularly relevant when designing skills development programs for Opportunity Youth.⁵

Build More Robust On-Ramps to Employment

Opportunity youth can be successfully connected to employment when multiple on-ramps linked to education and employment and designed to fit their community and youth needs are available and growing. The needs of opportunity youth are diverse, so it is necessary to meet them where they are by offering multiple on-ramps to employment—including education and service with job readiness training.²¹

Building on the Harvard Graduate School of Education’s report *Pathways to Prosperity*, the PACE report *Civic Pathways Out of Poverty and Into Prosperity*, and Civic Enterprises’ *Opportunity Road*, the Council’s research pointed to opportunities to expand existing on-ramps and to build more robust on-ramps by increasing awareness of and access to wrap-around supports that will put youth on a path to reconnection.²¹

The Council focused on three key engagement strategies that serve as on-ramps to employment for opportunity youth, listed below.

1. **Direct to Employment:** Employers being actively engaged to reconnect youth to employment through soft skills successfully (e.g., communications, teamwork, time management) development, work-ready skills development, or learn and earn employment programs.
2. **Relevant Education and Credentialing:** The education sector employs strategies to reconnect youth to education (secondary and postsecondary) and to help prevent disconnection through programs with accessibility and relevancy to opportunity youth needs.
3. **Structured, Long-Term Service Programs:** Community and national service opportunities providing on-ramps for youth to gain work/life skills needed to reconnect to education and workforce opportunities.

Ultimately, the approach to reconnecting youth requires a multi-sector effort to succeed. A successful strategy requires the active engagement of different partners. The interconnectedness of employers, education systems, and services, along with communities and nonprofits providing wrap-around support, is critical for the effective reconnection of this population. Wrap-around support systems that are provided through organizations that serve youth are vital. Youth may need alternative learning models, soft or work-ready skills, flexible employment options, or overall integrated social support systems to enable them to take up opportunities. Employers, service organizations, educators, and

youth service organizations can all play a role in meeting the needs of youth by collaborating in multi-sector efforts.²¹

For example, Summer Jobs+ is a call to action for businesses, nonprofits, and the government to work together to provide pathways to employment for low-income and disconnected youth in the summer of 2012. As of May 2012, this initiative is providing nearly 300,000 opportunities. Employment opportunities include 90,000 paid jobs and thousands of mentorships, internships, and other training opportunities. This initiative is also launching the Summer Jobs+ Bank, a new online search tool to help connect young people to jobs, internships, and other employment opportunities this summer and year-round.²¹

San Francisco Mayor Ed Lee and United Way of the Bay Area announced the San Francisco Summer Jobs+ launch in April 2012. The initiative aims to create 5,000 jobs and paid internships for young people. It is San Francisco's local response to former President Obama's national call to action for businesses, nonprofits, and government to provide pathways to employment for young people, especially low-income and disconnected youth. A local youth employment program, MatchBridge, will take the lead in the program to support young job seekers with resources such as work-readiness workshops, resume writing assistance, interview tips, and job-search coaching. MatchBridge also works with employers to ensure a good match with youth employees.²¹

A similar approach to Summer Jobs+ could be replicated as a regional effort, with support from various stakeholders, including, but not limited to local businesses, nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, and local government, in collaboration to support disconnected youth opportunities.

Utilizing a Social Justice Lens

Overall, it is imperative that any recommendations, policies, and programs implemented use a social justice perspective with regard to program design strategies for improving high-need, high-opportunity youth access to quality education, career, and workforce development.²⁰

Globally, high need, high opportunity youth refers to the estimated 500 million youth who live on less than \$2 per day – the estimated 600 million youth who are not in school, not employed, and not in training (i.e., NEET or Opportunity Youth).²⁰

Any implementation should be framed considering the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals, which aim to increase access to decent work. Some of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals include:^{20,40}

1. No poverty
2. Zero hunger
3. Good health and well-being
4. Quality education
5. Gender equality
6. Decent work and economic growth
7. Industry, innovation, and infrastructure
8. Reduced inequalities
9. Peace, justice, and strong institutions
10. Partnerships for the goals

Efforts to prevent young people from becoming or remaining vocationally and socially disengaged should include provisions for preventing and for early intervention for mental health problems. Furthermore, youth mental health services should integrate educational and employment supports and services to address vocational needs and promote recovery due to the fact that there is evidence for a bidirectional relationship between NEET status and mental health and that problems with vocational functioning are well-documented among youth with mental health problems.³¹

The connectedness of vocational disengagement and mental health problems among young people underlines the need for consistent, widespread policy support for broader-spectrum integrated youth-focused services. Literature also highlights the importance of schools, universities, and employers developing the will and capacity to address the needs of youth experiencing mental health problems. The socioeconomic disruptions and mental health implications of the ongoing pandemic make these needs ever more urgent.³²

Many disconnected youths have challenges that make it difficult for them to participate in training or school or maintain a job. Efforts to engage the most disadvantaged youth—for example, those who have experienced violence or trauma, have dropped out of high school, are involved in or exiting the criminal justice system, have disabilities, have aged out of the foster care system, or are teen parents—require services and considerations in addition to education and training. Many steps can be taken to reduce some common barriers.³⁶

Furthermore, interest is growing in trauma-informed policy and practice, which involves designing interventions and programs that acknowledge the compounding effect of an individual's circumstances, environment, and social condition (SAMHSA 2014). Research is being done on programs serving those with criminal justice involvement or mental health conditions, and also in Native American and some low-income urban communities where populations have been subjected to generations of discrimination in society. The existence of deep trauma conditions among some subgroups of disconnected youth suggests that services or interventions that could lead to economic well-being should address that trauma as well as provide remedial training or education.³⁶

Tailoring programs to meet the distinct needs of different groups of young people is more important than ever. Data throughout research demonstrate how disconnected young people share many challenges but also differ in significant ways. School enrollment for the population ages 3 to 34 declined dramatically in 2020—the largest drop since records began in 1964. Any efforts to reconnect youth need to consider this broad backdrop, although it is important to keep in mind that one size does not fit all. Tailoring interventions to the specific needs of communities and individuals experiencing disconnection should be front of mind for policymakers, philanthropists, advocates, and researchers.²⁴

1. Focus on outreach strategies. One of the clear lessons emerging from the Youth Guarantee program implemented throughout EU countries since 2014 concerns the need to develop outreach strategies to reach beyond the traditional “unemployed youth” target group. This has been partially successful in EU countries; since its introduction, NEET rates have fallen significantly across the EU. However, this reduction has been achieved mainly as a result of reductions in NEET unemployment rather than in NEET inactivity. In low- and middle-income countries, there is much scope to develop the role of the public employment services to engage with the social partners and with other civil society organizations in order to develop approaches to reach young NEETs who do not, for whatever reason, seek out such services.²⁹
2. Adopt a comprehensive approach. A fundamental principle of ILO policy advocacy regarding youth employment policy concerns the need to adopt comprehensive, multi-pronged strategies.

Nowhere is this more evident than in developing approaches to combat and reduce NEET rates among young people. The variety of obstacles and difficulties faced by different types of young people who are not in employment, education, or training, means that a comprehensive approach comprising different strategies and intervention types is essential. Additionally, the literature supports the rationale that comprehensive approaches are more effective regarding their impact on young people's employment prospects.²⁹

A more detailed focus on the subgroups of disconnected youth could guarantee the setting of tailored social support policies, considering each subgroup's specific characteristics and needs. This creates the need for investments in social, educational, and training infrastructures that will keep opportunities open, guaranteeing attention to the mental health of disconnected youth. In accordance with Maguire (2015), re-engagement strategies for the most isolated NEET groups should be implemented.³⁰

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Appendix A

Demographic Indicators ³⁷						
	Percent			Value		
	Pennsylvania	Lackawanna County, Pennsylvania	Luzerne County, Pennsylvania	Pennsylvania	Lackawanna County, Pennsylvania	Luzerne County, Pennsylvania
Demographics						
Population (ACS)	—	—	—	12,794,885	210,162	317,547
Male	49.0%	48.5%	49.4%	6,269,142	101,990	156,984
Female	51.0%	51.5%	50.6%	6,525,743	108,172	160,563
Median Age ²	—	—	—	40.9	42.1	42.7
Under 18 Years	20.7%	20.4%	19.8%	2,649,582	42,875	62,857
18 to 24 Years	9.0%	8.8%	8.7%	1,155,305	18,537	27,476
25 to 34 Years	13.2%	12.4%	12.7%	1,693,816	26,153	40,175
35 to 44 Years	11.7%	11.4%	11.5%	1,502,764	23,963	36,582
45 to 54 Years	12.9%	12.8%	13.4%	1,651,599	26,948	42,572
55 to 64 Years	14.1%	14.2%	14.1%	1,806,715	29,768	44,808
65 to 74 Years	10.3%	11.1%	11.0%	1,317,854	23,267	34,901
75 Years and Over	8.0%	8.9%	8.9%	1,017,250	18,651	28,176
Race: White	79.4%	89.2%	86.0%	10,155,004	187,519	273,141
Race: Black or African American	11.1%	2.8%	5.2%	1,419,582	5,920	16,411
Race: American Indian and Alaska Native	0.2%	0.1%	0.2%	20,798	141	538
Race: Asian	3.5%	3.0%	1.2%	449,320	6,220	3,835
Race: Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	0.0%	0.1%	0.1%	4,268	110	188
Race: Some Other Race	2.4%	1.1%	4.1%	312,888	2,282	13,076
Race: Two or More Races	3.4%	3.8%	3.3%	433,025	7,970	10,358
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	7.6%	8.0%	12.9%	971,813	16,882	41,053
Population Growth						
Population (Pop Estimates) ⁴	—	—	—	12,783,254	208,989	316,982
Population Annual Average Growth ⁴	0.1%	-0.3%	-0.1%	7,185	-553	-404
People per Square Mile	—	—	—	286.1	456.7	356.5
Economic						
Labor Force Participation Rate and Size (civilian population 16 years and over)	62.8%	59.9%	61.3%	6,558,087	103,306	160,661
Prime-Age Labor Force Participation Rate and Size (civilian population 25-54)	83.5%	81.6%	82.2%	4,042,643	62,781	98,030

Demographic Indicators ³⁷

	Percent			Value		
	Pennsylvania	Lackawanna County, Pennsylvania	Luzerne County, Pennsylvania	Pennsylvania	Lackawanna County, Pennsylvania	Luzerne County, Pennsylvania
Armed Forces Labor Force	0.1%	0.1%	0.0%	8,039	147	79
Veterans, Age 18-64	4.1%	3.8%	4.7%	317,418	4,758	8,978
Veterans Labor Force Participation Rate and Size, Age 18-64	77.5%	72.4%	77.9%	245,898	3,444	6,997
Median Household Income ²	—	—	—	\$63,627	\$54,064	\$53,194
Per Capita Income	—	—	—	\$35,518	\$30,452	\$29,732
Mean Commute Time (minutes)	—	—	—	27.1	21.8	23.1
Commute via Public Transportation	5.2%	1.0%	0.9%	315,578	935	1,283
Educational Attainment, Age 25-64						
No High School Diploma	7.6%	7.5%	8.8%	505,693	8,002	14,394
High School Graduate	31.4%	32.8%	35.2%	2,088,636	35,062	57,765
Some College, No Degree	16.4%	17.3%	18.3%	1,089,237	18,479	29,978
Associate's Degree	9.6%	10.6%	12.1%	640,510	11,325	19,871
Bachelor's Degree	21.7%	20.3%	16.8%	1,446,467	21,726	27,513
Postgraduate Degree	13.3%	11.5%	8.9%	884,351	12,238	14,616
Housing						
Total Housing Units	—	—	—	5,713,345	100,576	150,235
Median House Value (of owner-occupied units) ²	—	—	—	\$187,500	\$154,700	\$129,600
Homeowner Vacancy	1.4%	1.2%	2.1%	48,852	723	1,919
Rental Vacancy	5.1%	4.3%	5.0%	86,625	1,456	2,237
Renter-Occupied Housing Units (% of Occupied Units)	31.0%	35.8%	32.0%	1,584,332	31,421	41,572
Occupied Housing Units with No Vehicle Available (% of Occupied Units)	10.7%	9.9%	10.7%	544,554	8,675	13,859
Social						
Poverty Level (of all people)	12.0%	13.8%	14.6%	1,480,430	28,015	44,690
Households Receiving Food Stamps/SNAP	13.1%	16.6%	17.8%	670,877	14,566	23,173
Enrolled in Grade 12 (% of total population)	1.2%	1.1%	1.2%	159,243	2,394	3,754
Disconnected Youth ³	2.4%	3.1%	3.6%	15,583	345	564
Children in Single Parent Families (% of all children)	34.5%	38.9%	44.8%	869,915	15,768	26,623
Uninsured	5.6%	4.4%	5.4%	705,891	9,038	16,606
With a Disability, Age 18-64	11.3%	12.8%	12.6%	865,740	15,886	23,519
With a Disability, Age 18-64, Labor Force Participation Rate and Size	43.6%	42.1%	41.5%	377,074	6,686	9,761
Foreign Born	7.0%	5.6%	7.0%	896,853	11,859	22,254

Demographic Indicators ³⁷

	Percent			Value		
	Pennsylvania	Lackawanna County, Pennsylvania	Luzerne County, Pennsylvania	Pennsylvania	Lackawanna County, Pennsylvania	Luzerne County, Pennsylvania
Speak English Less Than Very Well (population 5 years and over)	4.4%	4.1%	4.9%	529,640	8,208	14,818

Source: [JobsEQ®](#)

1. American Community Survey 2016-2020, unless noted otherwise

2. Median values for certain aggregate regions (such as MSAs) may be estimated as the weighted averages of the median values from the composing counties.

3. Disconnected Youth are 16-19 year olds who are (1) not in school, (2) not high school graduates, and (3) either unemployed or not in the labor force.

4. Census Population Estimate for 2020, annual average growth rate since 2010

Appendix B

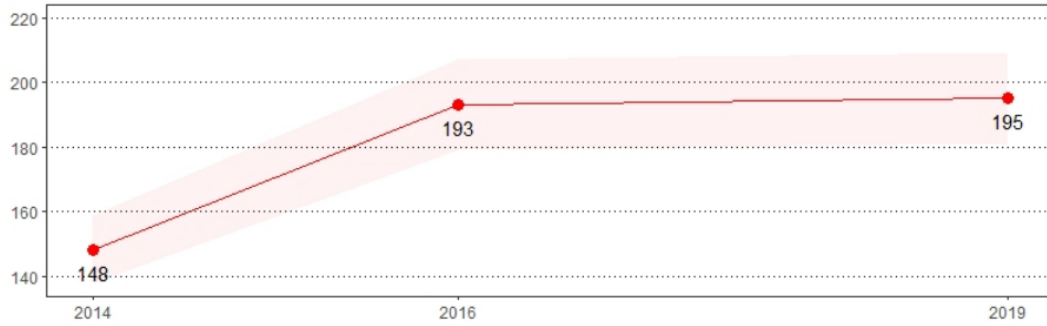
Adverse Childhood Experiences, Pennsylvania Adults, 2019

Demographics	Before Age 18, Lived With Anyone Who Was Depressed, Mentally Ill or Suicidal*		Before Age 18, Lived With Anyone Who Was a Problem Drinker or Alcoholic*		Before Age 18, Lived With Anyone Who Used Illegal Street Drugs or Abused Prescriptions*		Before Age 18, Lived With Anyone Who Was Sentenced to Serve Time in Prison*	
	%	CI	%	CI	%	CI	%	CI
All adults	19	18-21	24	23-26	13	12-14	10	9-11
Gender								
Male	16	14-18	22	20-24	13	12-15	11	10-13
Female	23	21-25	27	25-29	12	11-14	9	8-11
Age								
18-29	34	29-38	28	24-32	19	16-23	19	15-22
30-44	24	21-28	27	24-31	22	19-26	17	14-20
45-64	16	15-19	26	24-28	10	9-12	7	6-9
65+	9	8-11	17	15-20	3	2-4	3	2-4
Education								
< High school	20	15-27	28	21-35	20	15-27	18	13-25
High school	17	14-19	25	23-28	13	11-15	12	10-14
Some college	23	20-26	27	24-30	13	11-16	11	9-13
College degree	20	18-22	20	18-22	9	8-11	5	4-6
Household income								
< \$15,000	22	17-28	30	24-37	19	14-25	13	9-19
\$15,000 to \$24,999	20	16-25	27	23-32	14	11-19	15	11-19
\$25,000 to \$49,999	22	19-25	27	24-31	15	13-19	13	10-16
\$50,000 to \$74,999	19	16-23	24	20-28	11	9-14	10	7-13
\$75,000+	19	17-22	22	19-24	11	9-13	7	5-9
Race								
White, non-Hispanic	20	18-21	24	23-26	11	10-12	8	7-9
Black, non-Hispanic	17	13-21	25	21-31	22	18-27	21	17-27
Hispanic	27	20-35	27	20-35	21	15-29	21	15-29

*Excludes missing, don't know and refused

Appendix C

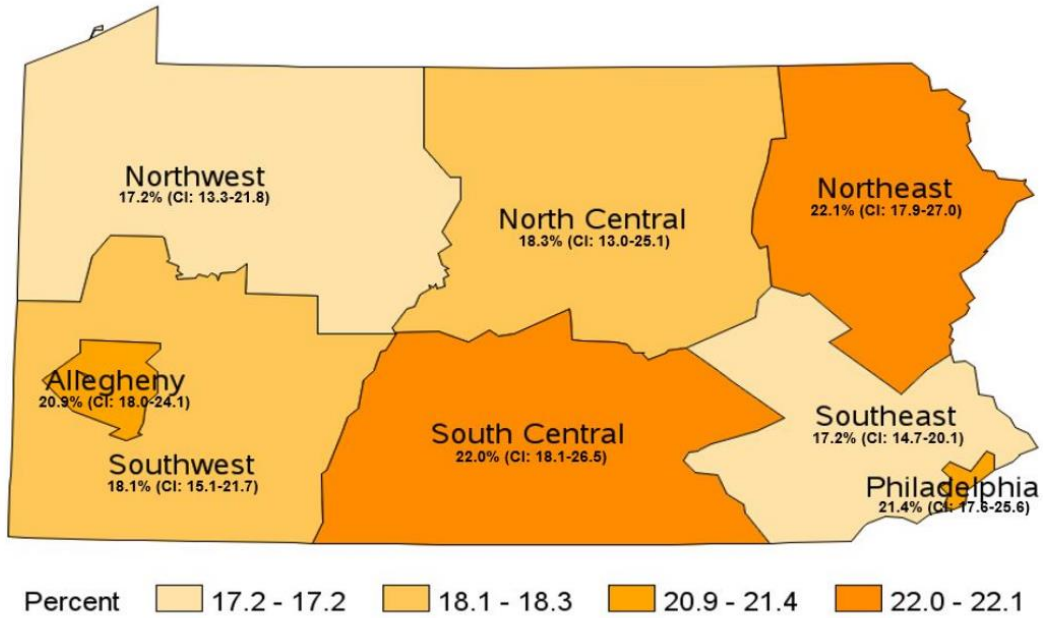
Before Age 18, Lived with Anyone Who Was Depressed, Mentally Ill or Suicidal Prevalence per 1,000 Pennsylvania Population, Pennsylvania Adults, 2014-2019



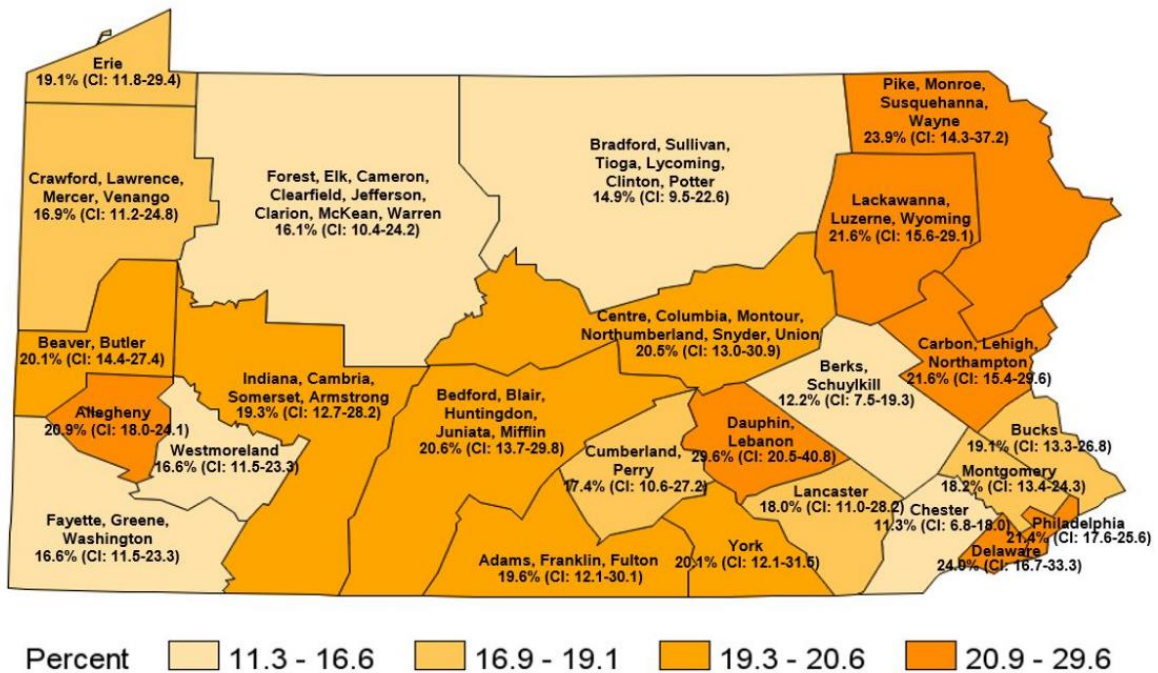
Color shading around estimates show 95% confidence intervals

Appendix D

Before Age 18, Lived With Anyone Who Was Depressed, Mentally Ill or Suicidal, Pennsylvania Health Districts, 2019



Before Age 18, Lived With Anyone Who Was Depressed, Mentally Ill or Suicidal, Pennsylvania Regions, 2019



Appendix E

Northeast Pennsylvania Consortium of Workforce Boards

WIOA Multi-Year Regional Plan

Effective Dates: July 1, 2021-June 30, 2025

The Northeast Pennsylvania Consortium of Workforce Boards, WIOA Multi-Year Regional Plan, effective July 2021 through June 2025, addresses multiple barriers that youth throughout the region face, such as living in foster care, poverty, living in single-parent households, teen pregnancy, language barriers, youth with disability, juvenile delinquency, homelessness, and maternal education.

To ensure overarching support for all segments of the regional population such as youth and/or individuals with barriers to employment, each local area receives Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funding to support these segments of the population. Procedures are established in each of the PA CareerLink® One-Stop sites to conduct program enrollments, provide assessment and case management services, and assist young adults and others with barriers in attaining their educational goals. WIOA Case Managers serve as advocates for these individuals as they research training and career pathway options that will set them on a path to self-sufficiency. Also, located within the area, in Luzerne County, is the Keystone Job Corp Center who actively recruits across the entire region through scheduled sessions in the PA CareerLink® sites. There are no YouthBuild projects currently within the region but an Americorps project revolving around the provision of mentors to youth was recently approved for Carbon County through the United Way of the Greater Lehigh Valley. It is envisioned that youth from the southeast corner of the region will be recruited for this project.

The region will connect employer labor force requirements and occupational demands with the region's labor force, including individuals with barriers to employment. The Northeast Region continues to utilize the State-approved *High-Priority Occupational (HPO) List* and *Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL)* to connect jobseekers, including those with barriers to employment, with occupational demands across the region. The services provided through the PA CareerLink® centers and satellite locations are designed to assist individuals who are actively seeking employment or who are interested in improving their current skills. Overall, the Northeast Region strives to ensure that at least 51% of enrolled participants are individuals with barriers to employment, such as veterans, recipients of public assistance, low-income individuals, individuals who are basic skills deficient, and out-of-school youth. The following strategies promote the achievement of this goal.

Appendix F

LACKAWANNA COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AREA NE 055 MULTI-YEAR LOCAL PLAN

Effective Dates:
July 1, 2021-June 30, 2025

According to the Lackawanna County Workforce Development Board Multi-Year Local Plan,

The Commonwealth of PA has outlined a vision with a rigorous plan of action to make changes to enhance the current workforce system. The Commonwealth's goals surrounding career pathways models, addressing significant worker pipelines and incumbent worker upgrading, increased opportunities for youth, engagement of both local as well as regional employer bases, and data sharing are being replicated locally based on current practices and the development of new and innovative methods of service provision.

Work Experience: *(primarily available for the out-of-school youth population up to 24 years of age and EARN customers)* provides an opportunity for those young adults with little or no work history to gain vocational as well as soft skills in an actual worksite setting. Placements occur at both not-for-profit as well as private sites for up to 35 hours per week at a wage of \$10.35 (currently) per hour.

Apprenticeships: Strong linkages are maintained with representatives of labor organizations to support various apprenticeship opportunities and a listing is available at the PA CareerLink® Lackawanna County. Also, apprenticeship and trade opportunities are strongly promoted in PA CareerLink® workshops and outreach ventures. The local Center provides contact information to prospective trainees on local application submission processes.

In an attempt to further expand connections, from a youth standpoint, WIOA staff are visiting local intermediate and secondary schools, providing career information, discussing services available following graduation, and promoting technical education. Also, linkages have been established with the Lackawanna County Department of Human Services (formerly Lackawanna County Children and Youth Services) for referral of youngsters that are foster children, those aging out of the foster care system, or are involved with the Juvenile Justice system. An additional collaboration with the Lackawanna County Department of Human Services (formerly Department of Public Welfare) provides assistance in identifying prospective customers which may, in turn, assist in the reduction of the welfare rolls.

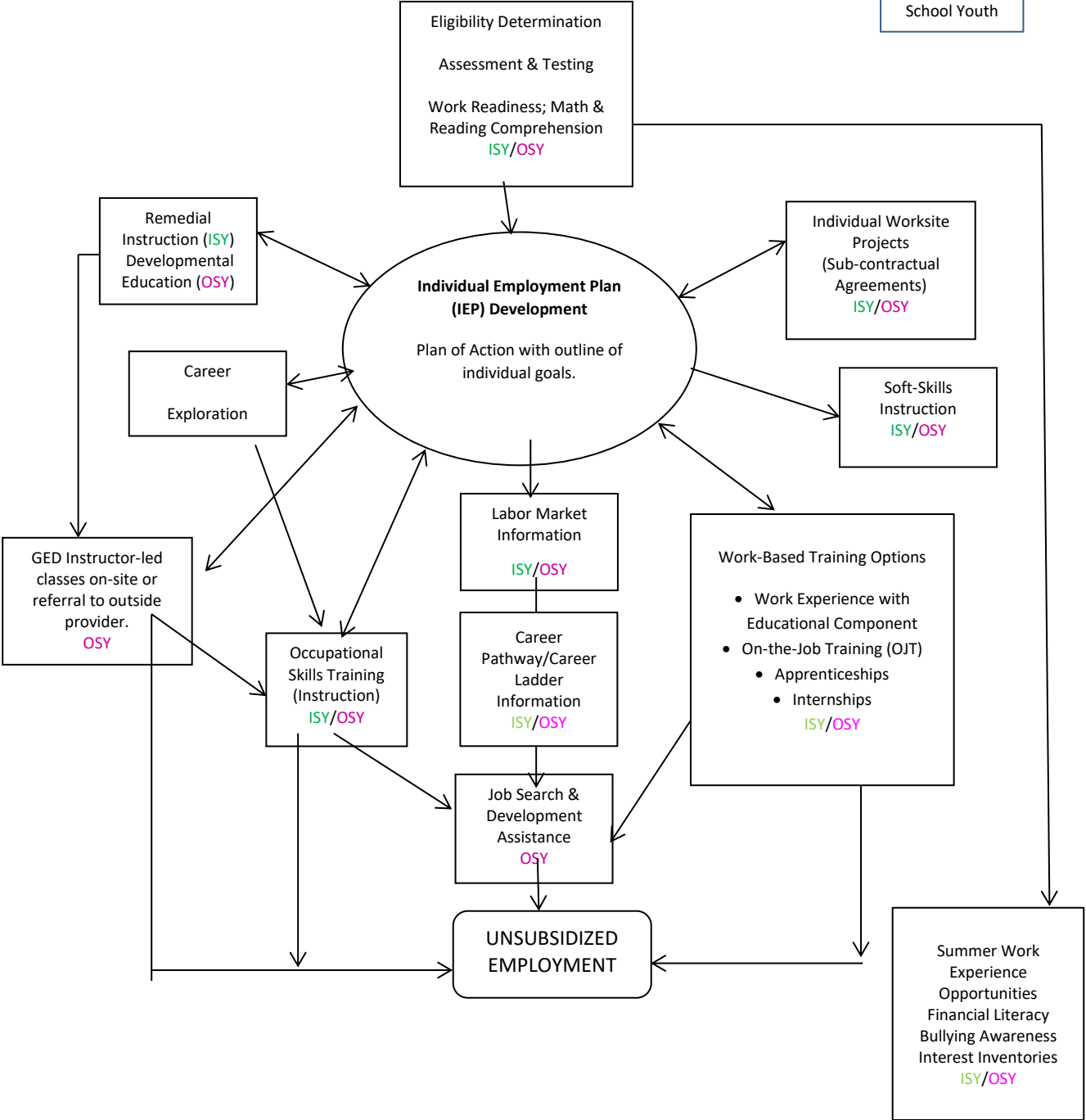
In responding to the WIOA of 2014's new emphasis on providing services to older youth, the Lackawanna County WDA conducts monthly programmatic and fiscal review meetings with its Title I Youth provider of services, Equus Workforce Solutions, to ensure that services to older youth continue to be a priority for enrollment and service provision. The local area currently has set a minimum requirement of 90 percent for provision of services to out-of-school youth.

Recognizing that career ladders and goal setting should begin during the intermediate and secondary school years, it must also be accepted that those youth traditionally classified as out-of-school youth, including those categorized as "disconnected", if they can be successfully engaged and maintained, are

adaptable to open options and development of employment plans. Intensive promotion of available services coupled with information on local employment opportunities including wage scales, post-secondary training opportunities, and funding availability serves to entice prospective youth job seekers (through 24 years of age). Initiatives such as school visits, dissemination of career pathways information, speaker presentations, and involvement in career fairs help to “fill the gaps” in career-based education and promotes the investigation of future career paths. Additionally, implementation of a Business Education Partnership (BEP) Grant, afforded by the Commonwealth of PA, is allowing for much enhanced infiltration with Intermediate (grades 6th, 7th, and 8th) as well as high school level students for career-related material dissemination, interactive career pathways projects, and career “fun days” in local schools.

The design of the local youth program format is such as to provide a myriad of opportunities to guide eligible participants in meeting their individual goals which may include attainment of educational credentials, assistance with basic literacy skills, acquisition of a HSE or GED, acquiring basic work experience, smoothly transitioning from high school to post-secondary education, learning new skills, and/or entering the work force. In accordance with WIOA mandates, the local youth program is designed to serve primarily an out-of-school (OSY) youth population, thus ensuring attainment of the required 75% expenditure requirement. The program framework, as detailed in the chart below, reflects this design.

CODE:
 ISY – In-School Youth
 OSY – Out-of-School Youth



Most youth operations are conducted from the PA CareerLink® Lackawanna County, located at 135 Franklin Avenue in downtown Scranton. Center hours are 8:30 to 4:30, Monday through Friday. A variety of activities, as charted on the following page, are available to youth from ages 12-24, utilizing both TANF as well as WIOA funding.

Activities are developed on an individual basis based on the youngsters/young adults’ skills, abilities, desires, specific program (funding stream) eligibility, transportation needs, and financial feasibility (for occupational training above and beyond local ITA limits). All services are prioritized to any youth with disabilities. As previously noted herein, the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) is a partner in the PA CareerLink® Lackawanna County and has a youth OVR counselor stationed at the One-Stop. This individual not only sits as a member of the WDB’s Youth Advocacy Sub-Committee but works closely with Equus staff to ensure that youth with disabilities received the most appropriate mix of services, based on their individualized needs. This linkage also affords leveraging of resources to services to best serve those youngsters with disabilities.

In addressing the 14 essential elements specified for youth under WIOA, the implementation strategy for each element is herein defined:

Element #	Implementation Strategy
<p>1 Tutoring, study skills training, instruction and evidence-based dropout prevention and recovery strategies that lead to completion requirements for a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent (including a recognized certificate of attendance or similar document for individuals with disabilities) or for a recognized post-secondary credential.</p>	<p>The Local WDB has, for many years, solicited youth providers of services that address this element. During the current program year, locally approved vendors provide tutoring and academic enrichment, study skills training, career awareness, strengthening of individual self-advocacy skills, post-secondary opportunities, and individual one-on-one counseling through a mix of after-school study programs, skill-development activities coupled with remedial education, a personal growth/leadership/community service project, and a pre-apprenticeship project. In addressing drop-out initiatives, the local Board, has, for the past several years, distributed a packet of informational materials, <i>What’s Next</i> (a packet of informational materials designed to assist high school students and their parents in navigating community-based resources when transitioning from school to employment), for distribution to any student having made the decision to leave school. Included is invaluable information regarding “where to go” for services, accessing GED/remedial programs, labor market data, training opportunities, etc. Presently, this information is posted on the WDB and PA CareerLink® websites and, additionally, the Scranton School District has made it available on its own website for student access.</p>
<p>2 Alternative school services, or dropout recovery services</p>	<p>Drop-out recovery services are discussed above. This process will continue with possible enhanced distribution of information to providers of in-school youth services, the alternative schools, libraries, etc. Alternative schools in Lackawanna County are: Friendship House, Nativity Miguel, and New Story. Youth program staff makes visits to these sites at least once per school year to speak with the participants about opportunities available to them upon graduation with each student receiving a packet of information containing handouts on job searching activities (i.e., enrolling in the PA CareerLink® System, searching for jobs, resume’ preparation, and interviewing skills). During these presentations, students are also encouraged to visit the PA CareerLink® Lackawanna County to become familiar with activities offered and participate in the many workshops that are offered to the public at no charge. Although not specifically considered an alternative school, the Commonwealth Connections Academy is available for interested students. Finally, other programs available in the community support pregnant and parenting youth (Project Elect) as well as remedial needs.</p>
<p>3 Paid and unpaid work experience coupled with academic and occupational education which may include: i. summer employment and/or other employment</p>	<p>Paid work experience and on-the-job training (OJT) experiences are an integral part of the current program strategy. Any participant enrolled in work experience has, included in their employment plan, an education activity that may include GED preparation; remediation; referral to local literacy programs; and/or financial literacy. Currently, a pre-apprenticeship project (in collaboration with the other NE PA workforce boards) is available at the Career Technology Center of Lackawanna County, specializing in the building trades and manufacturing. Additionally, each year the local area provides a</p>

<p>opportunities available throughout the school year;</p> <p>ii. pre-apprenticeship programs;</p> <p>iii. internships and job shadowing; and</p> <p>iv. on-the-job training opportunities.</p>	<p>summer work experience program from late June to late August for approximately 100 participants, working 30-35 hours per week, earning a \$10.35 wage. In addition to the work experience activity, participants receive information on financial literacy, bullying, and career exploration.</p>
<p>4</p> <p>Occupational skill training with priority consideration for training that leads to recognized post-secondary credentials that align with demand industry sectors or occupations in the local area as approved by the local Board as meeting the criteria defined in the WIOA.</p>	<p>Occupational skills training is addressed through the award of Individual Training Accounts (ITAs) to eligible out-of-school youth, with amounts customarily ranging from \$7,500 up to \$10,000 maximum (current WDB-approved funding level) toward specific skills training in in-demand occupational areas at an approved training/educational facility (on ETPL). Historically, approximately 40 ITAs are awarded during each Program year.</p>
<p>5</p> <p>Education offered concurrently with and in the same context as workforce preparation activities and training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster.</p>	<p>At present, students attending occupational skills training receive job data/information as part of their program involvement. A much enhanced approach to the provision of labor market information has been implemented to ensure that a comprehensive package is available to all students as they matriculate through their educational endeavor. This new career decision-making component promotes a smarter, quicker, and easier job search upon completion.</p> <p>Youth participants will have the opportunity to master basic academic skills at the same time as learning career-specific technical skills. This approach aligns with recent research which found students using an integrated education and training model occurring concurrently and contextually with workforce preparation activities had better rates of program completion and persistence than a comparison group.</p>
<p>6</p> <p>Leadership development opportunities, including community service and peer-centered activities that encourage responsibility and other positive social and civic behaviors.</p>	<p>Leadership development opportunities are opportunities that encourage responsibility, confidence, employability, self-determination, and other positive social behaviors such as: exposure to post-secondary educational possibilities; community and service learning possibilities; peer-centered activities, including peer mentoring and tutoring; organizational and team work training, including team leadership training; training in decision-making, including determining priorities and problem solving; citizenship training, including life skills training such as parenting and work behavior training; civic engagement activities which promote the quality of life in a community; and other leadership activities that place youth in a leadership role.</p> <p>During the current Program Year, United Neighborhood Centers of Northeastern PA (UNC) is subcontracted to conduct a <i>Leaders in Training</i> program for youth between the ages of 14 to 18 years of age, which promotes good citizenship and community involvement. Students who successfully complete the program may be placed at Project Hope, a summer camp for economically disadvantaged families, as Junior Camp Counselors to assist and facilitate the activities sponsored by the camp or enrolled in another summer work experience activity.</p>
<p>7</p> <p>Supportive services.</p>	<p>Supportive services can be defined as services/assistance that are needed to enable an individual to participate in activities. The need for supportive services is determined during each participant's enrollment process and the development of their <i>Individual Employment Plan (IEP)/Individual Service Strategy (ISS)</i>. In accordance with a WDB-approved WIOA Supportive Services Policy, supportive Services, as determined by individual need, can include but are not necessarily limited to the following: linkages to community services; transportation assistance; child and dependent care assistance; housing assistance; needs-related payments; educational testing assistance; reasonable accommodations for youth with disabilities; referrals to health care; assistance with uniforms or other appropriate work attire, and the provision of work-related tools, including such items as eye glasses and protective eye gear. As services are administered, they are recorded in the participant personnel record accordingly.</p>
<p>8</p> <p>Adult mentoring for at least 12 months that may occur both</p>	<p>Historically, youth program staff mentor their participants due to their one-on-one involvement with each participant and their understanding of the individual participant's needs, concerns, issues, etc.</p>

during and after program participation.	<p>On-going contacts by the Case Managers serve to identify issues and allow for immediate intervention.</p> <p>The local area will solicit adult mentors from the community at-large, from other community organizations, from WDB membership, from the Youth Advocacy Sub-Committee membership, from the Greater Scranton Chamber of Commerce Skills in Scranton Advisory Board. Adult mentors (other than the assigned case manager) must commit for at least 12 months and provide guidance, support, and encouragement (face-to-face once per year) to promote the development of competence and character of the mentee. Mentoring activities can be done through electronic means and may include workplace mentoring at assigned worksites.</p>
9 Follow-up services for not less than 12 months after the completion of participation.	<p>Follow up services are the responsibility of the Youth Program staff or contracted provider with all contacts/outcomes recorded in the participant's personnel file.</p> <p>Follow-up services are provided monthly to ensure that all aspects of a participant's plan is being followed as per their agreement. All exited youth participants are contacted at 30-, 60-, and 90-day intervals; reviewed again at 6 months after exit; and, finally, at 1 year from their exit date.</p> <p>Follow-up contacts are made more often in situations where extenuating circumstances exist. Follow-up services for youth may include the leadership development and supportive services listed earlier; regular contact with a youth participant's employer to address work related problems that may arise; assistance securing a better paying job, career pathway development, and further education or training; work related peer support groups; adult mentoring - minimum duration of 12 months, more if deemed necessary; follow-up services must include more than only a contact attempted or made for securing documentation in order to report a performance outcome.</p>
10 Comprehensive guidance and counseling, which may include drug and alcohol abuse counseling, as well as referrals to counseling, as appropriate based on individual needs.	<p>The approved contracted provider will provide one-on-one comprehensive and counseling services throughout a participant's enrollment in activities as well as support after a participant exits the program. Any participant in need of out-side services (which may include drug and alcohol or abuse services) are referred to community programs, as appropriate.</p>
11 Financial literacy training.	<p>As previously stated in item #3, the local area has, for many years, conducted a summer work experience program. As part of this activity, Wells Fargo Bank provided a curriculum that was used for instructional purposes revolving around the basics of the banking system including such topics as: how to start saving money, opening up a checking and/or savings account, understanding wage tax deductions, debit versus credit use, spending money wisely, electronic banking etc. This activity is being expanded to all work experience participants as part of their overall educational component. Additionally, workers from local banks can be encouraged to serve as speakers in classroom presentations.</p>
12 Entrepreneurial training.	<p>An "entrepreneurial workshop" series provided by the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) at the University of Scranton for presentation to OSY participants as well as possible inclusion in high school visit presentations.</p>
13 Services that provide labor market and employment information about in-demand industry sectors or occupations available in the local area such as career awareness, career counseling, and career exploration services.	<p>Currently, career awareness, counseling, and information is provided to all OSY participants during their enrollment in youth activities. This is handled one-on-one between the participants and their assigned case manager as well as through PA CareerLink® workshops and sector initiative projects. The in-school populations receive this as part of classroom/group presentations. The local also utilizes the CWIA High School Guide as an additional resource for dissemination labor market and employment information.</p>
14 Activities that help youth prepare for and transition to post-secondary education and training.	<p>Currently, this is handled through the provision of an interest inventory to all eligible participants through one-on-one discussions and provision of labor market and educational services data. Case managers provide guidance based on a participant's goals and plan of action, all of which are documented in an IEP/ISS. The Educational Opportunity Center will also provide financial aid workshops for transitioning students to identify funding sources.</p>

If a young adult “requires additional assistance to complete an educational program or to secure and hold employment”, Equus staff provides intensive one-on-one case management to ensure that the individual receives a viable plan of action. All activity will be thoroughly documented in the individual’s IEP/ISS and monitored, at a minimum, on a monthly basis to allow for updates and changes as may be necessary. Also, information which may be received from the youth’s educational provider will be incorporated into the overall case management activity and case file.

The WDB has not, customarily, utilized the 5% exception but, if it so implemented in the future, any youth placements will need WDB staff approval.

A Keystone Job Corps representative, who sits as a member of the Youth Advocacy Sub-Committee, prior to the pandemic, visited the PA CareerLink® Lackawanna County on a bi-weekly basis to present information on the Luzerne County Site as well as to conduct interviews and complete applications on prospective candidates. Referrals are made whenever a need is expressed by a customer, thus enabling a seamless delivery of service. This activity is currently offered as a virtual session, as applicable.

A major component of the Lackawanna County WDB’s youth program design is the utilization of Transitional Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Youth Development Funding (YDF) to support a major work experience component coupled with a variety of specialized projects conducted by community partners. A large work experience activity traditionally engages (during non-pandemic times) in excess of 100 youngsters during the summer months of June, July, and August. Program participants are placed in, primarily, non-profit worksites across Lackawanna County that includes, but is not necessarily limited to, county and city parks, county and city offices, schools, social service organizations, Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCAs, libraries, community centers, departments of public works, Catholic Social Services, and housing authorities. Work performed is generally clerical, maintenance, or laborer oriented. Participants are currently reimbursed at the rate of \$10.35 per hour (under consideration is a possible increase to \$11.50 - \$12.00 per hour) and assigned to work up to a 30-hour week. This work experience activity is augmented with both academic and social components addressing: financial literacy (Wells Fargo Bank and NET Credit Union), consumer credit counseling (Advantage Credit Counseling Service), teen health issues including tobacco/drug youth and the consequences of sexting and inappropriate posting on social media (provided by program staff), bullying/cyberbullying (program staff), apprenticeships (local union officials), labor market information/career awareness (program staff), and soft skills needed in the workplace (program staff). At the conclusion of each summer’s activity, based on both funding availability, worksite availability, as well as the interest of participants, a small number of youngsters are afforded the opportunity for after-school and Saturday work experience employment during the school year. In the past, 12 to 15 youngsters have availed themselves of this opportunity.

A second component in the design of the local TANF program is a yearly (more often based on fiscal availability) solicitation (through a formal RFP process) of year-round projects from across the community. Historically, projects have revolved around career awareness, financial literacy, mentoring, after-school homework assistance, skill-specific instruction, educational competency, pre-apprenticeship introduction, bullying information, and instruction in the necessary soft-skills needed for entering the “world of work.” Prospective providers must delineate the types of activities proposed based on specific age groups ranging from 12 to 24 years of age (inclusive). Priority of service is given to those students who reside in TANF households; dropouts, or are at risk of dropping out of school; foster children or those aging out of the system; homeless or runaway children; children of migrant families; court-involved youth or those at risk of involvement; children of incarcerated parents; and/or any child with a documented disability. It is anticipated that a total of 110 youngsters will be served with over 50%

residing in TANF households. Of these, it is envisioned that 90-100 will be enrolled in work experience activities and the remaining 30 in community-based projects.

Appendix G

Luzerne/Schuylkill Workforce Development Board

PY 2021-2024 WIOA Multi-Year Local Area Plan

Effective Dates: July 1, 2021-June 30, 2025

YOUTH REENTRY DEMONSTRATION PROJECT L/S WDB is piloting a Youth Reentry Demonstration Project through which a full-time Life Coach/Family Advocate provides mentoring and support to youth reentering the workforce. This professional helps an individual make a healthy, positive transition to self-sustaining employment through group and individual coaching sessions. The Life Coach/Family Advocate provides guidance and encouragement while modeling pro-social behavior in a mentoring environment that includes both individual and group sessions. In addition to the Life Coach/Family Advocate, an Intake/Outreach Coordinator in each county assists participants in the enrollment process, provides them with an overview of PA CareerLink® services, and connects them with the tools to obtain and sustain meaningful employment. The Intake/Outreach Coordinator and Life Coach/Family Advocate are employed by L/S WDB's incumbent WIOA service provider, Educational Data Systems, Inc. (EDSI).

The Board recognizes the importance of education and addressing the need to increase employment opportunities for youth, particularly 18 to 24-year old's, youth with barriers, and youth with disabilities. Age demographics for the Northeast indicate an aging workforce. As a result, there is a need to recruit younger workers to fill the skilled positions that are being vacated by retiring workers. The Board is prioritizing services to Out-of-School Youth for work-based learning via year-round employment, pre-apprenticeship programs, and apprenticeships. The PA CareerLink® offices reach out to businesses through cold calling, Constant Contact and other social media venues for interest in sponsoring youth work-experience. There are approximately 65 businesses who are committed to be work experience sites. The Title I Youth Providers are focused in engaging youth with work-based training that offers enhanced training opportunities, career awareness, exposure to peer- to-peer, peer-to-authority interaction, and high school equivalency/literacy instruction. Businesses agreed to utilize students in work experience activities throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. All employers are required to comply with CDC and Commonwealth requirements to protect the students, employees and customers.

The Board expands the youth pipeline through a number of strategies for in-school and out of school youth. These strategies include: Promotion of the YES (Your Employability Skills) Program and workshops to students enrolled in GED training, youth activity programs and TANF programs; working closely with Job Corps to co-enroll, refer and educate Job Corps students about the services and programs available in the One-Stop Centers; partner with Junior Achievement; NEPA Manufacturers and Employers Council; PA Partners in Education; Educational Opportunity Centers; Advantage Credit Counseling Services; local chambers of commerce and other entities to ensure youth are offered the required 14 WIOA program elements.

Youth Committee provides a forum for stakeholders who offer youth leadership expertise; actively engages in advocating youth program goals and strategies; and focuses efforts on the expansion of the emerging workforce. and The Committee strategically aligns with state and federal priorities of the

public workforce system. Their involvement and commitment are intended to broaden the delivery of youth services at the local level.

- **WIOA Youth.** Youth services are provided to youth aged 14-24 that support educational attainment and career guidance, an opportunity for a summer or year-round work experience, internship or pre-apprentice component, skills training focused on a career pathway that is based on in-demand occupations and industries. Supportive services are also offered to eligible youth. Goals for youth in this programming are to advance into postsecondary training, or employment leading to a self-sustaining wage or the military. Services are available for youth who are deemed out-of-school (e.g., a high school dropout, a youth possessing a barrier such as a disability, a pregnant or parenting youth, a youth who is in foster care, or a youth involved with the juvenile or adult justice system).

The Board also formally adopted the Your Employability Skills (YES) Northeast Initiative, which addresses workforce skill gaps. The YES program provides the youth population with basic skills training for the foundation of employability skills that are mandatory in today's business environment. The Board's strategic goal is to have this program implemented in every school district in the local area. The YES Northeast Initiative addresses the talent pipeline of youth; the future workforce of the region and nation. The 120-hour curriculum coursework focuses on employability skills, which include the following: communication; customer service; writing skills; interview training; resume writing; career exploration; health and safety; personal development; goal setting; quality and technology; teamwork and leadership; entrepreneurship; financial literacy; plus, many more beneficial and relevant workforce topics. It also conducts on-site business tours providing participants with a first-hand look at how industry functions and the employment opportunities available. The Yes Program modules meet and exceed PA Chapter 4 Academic Standards for career education and work.

YouthBuild- YouthBuild provides education, counseling and job skills to unemployed young American adults (between ages 16 and 24), generally high school dropouts. There are 273 YouthBuild programs in the United States with a total capacity of about 10,000 students yearly, and there are similar programs underway in over 15 countries. The YouthBuild program has five components: construction, education, counseling, leadership, and graduate opportunity. Students spend every other week on a job site, learning the construction trade by building homes for their own communities. This creates housing for low-income people and also gives the students marketable job skills. The alternate weeks are spent on education in the YouthBuild classroom, with the goal of attaining a GED or completing their high school diploma. YouthBuild is not local. Reintegration of Ex-Offenders (REO)-Reintegration of Ex-Offenders program targets court-involved youth, young adults, and adult ex-offenders through a variety of discretionary grant awards. Organizations partner with juvenile and adult justice systems to assist in providing employment and training to this population of individuals who may find it difficult to obtain employment or training without additional assistance. Projects support a comprehensive strategy for serving youth in a local area to which many are returning from juvenile correctional or detention facilities. Both the adult and youthful offender grants serve as demonstration projects for improving communities with high rates of crime and poverty. Reintegration of Ex-Offenders provides monetary contributions.

The Board recognizes that producing an educated and skilled workforce is critical to economic development, growth, and prosperity in the region. Availability of workforce services to youth/young adults is one critical component of this broad view. The local Board utilizes its Youth Committee (YC) to develop youth services programming and define a vision. The committee is comprised of L/S WDB board members and members of the community. Many members work for organizations that provide services

to youth, are employers or are interested in developing a pipeline of skilled workers for current and future growth. Members represent chambers of commerce, secondary schools including career and technical schools, post-secondary institutions, Title I and Title II providers, labor unions, Job Corps, local county assistance offices, juvenile probation, vocational rehabilitation and youth service organizations in the nonprofit sector that provide programming and services for youth. YC has developed a vision for providing comprehensive services to as many youth as possible that includes goals and objectives to attain that vision. The Board first and foremost focuses youth services programming on Out-of-School Young Adults (OSY) in order to meet the 75% WIOA expenditure rate for OSY young adults, older youth and young people who are most at risk of not acquiring the necessary skills and abilities to attain meaningful employment, including individuals with a disability. It acknowledges that in order to be successful a young adult first needs to obtain a high school equivalency diploma before pursuing a career, post-secondary education or the military. It ensures that high school equivalency training classes are available on site at the PA CareerLink® centers and online virtually through a variety of platforms such as ZOOM, Google classroom and GED Academy.

Work Experience- The Board is successful in meeting the WIOA 20 percent work experience expenditure requirement and works to secure high quality work sites that directly relate to the participants Individual Service Strategy (ISS), career exploration activities and assessments. All participants are encouraged to complete a work experience that directly aligns with their individual goals. Part of the training prior to a work experience is the YES Northeast program that provides youth with numerous soft skills and entrepreneurship workshops. Each of the YES workshops provide high quality instruction on what is needed to be successful in a job or career including interacting with co-workers and supervisors, financial literacy, and occupational skills training. The Board also utilizes the industry recognized ServSafe certificate for participants that helps open the door to employment in the food service industry. This certificate has been useful in securing employment for young adults, many times the first job for OSY. The food service industry provides a variety of entry level positions that align with the boards career pathway in the Food Processing industry. All participants receive information on the 14 WIOA Youth program elements and may access each element that is applicable to their needs. The participants ISS serves as the guide or tool for services and is developed by the participant and case manager. The ISS identifies the steps and actions required to connect the individual to his or her education, training, and career goal. The local youth program provides a variety of opportunities to guide participants to meet their individual goals such as attainment of a high school diploma or equivalency, work experience, learning new skills such as employment skills and life skills, acquiring an industry credential and transitioning to postsecondary training or a job. Co-enrollment and Referral of young adult participants into partner programs are promoted by the Board. Co-enrollment in TANF programming is encouraged. TANF eligible youth have completed grade five or are 12 -24 years of age and are provided with a year-round program that includes life skills, job searching skills; and career awareness activities. Life skills focus on such things as financial literacy (i.e. budgeting, PY 2021-2024 WIOA Multi-Year Local Area Plan Luzerne/Schuylkill Workforce Development Board Effective July 1, 2021 Page 65 of 103 credit card usage, etc.), community service, substance abuse and wellness, diversity, sexual harassment, time management, conflict resolution, getting along with co-workers, respecting supervisors, and leadership. Job searching skills activities include how to apply for a job, put a resume together, interview for a job, and keep a job. Career awareness activities help prepare TANF-eligible youth for life after high school. Youth are exposed to career interest inventories, exploration of various careers, O*Net Interest profiler, and high priority occupations in the region. Participants learn the differences in apprenticeships, vocational-technical training, community college and

university/college programs of study. Participants are exposed to information about the local business community and labor market information. Youth are given an opportunity to participate in job shadowing activities as well as campus tours.

Additionally, work experience opportunities are available to eligible participants, ages 14-24. Most work experiences occur during the summer months and worksites are chosen as close to the participants' homes as possible so that transportation is minimal. Youth with disabilities are provided with information on the services available through the OVR. It is helpful that OVR staff are co-located within the PA CareerLink® centers as referrals are easily made and facilitate a much shorter turnaround time for service. Additionally, the Board supports Job Corps' monthly presentations to WIOA OSY at PA CareerLink® OneStop Centers providing them with opportunities to interview and visit the Luzerne Job Corps location. WIOA Youth Eligibility. The Board in concert with the Youth Committee evaluate, outline and approve tools for WIOA Youth/Young Adult requirements regarding documentation. They also have outlined the policy for "requires additional assistance to complete an education program or to secure and hold employment" for eligibility and enrollment for WIOA Title I Youth services".

In order to enroll in WIOA Youth programming, a youth must provide documentation to determine eligibility. The following requirements must be met:

- Age (In-School Youth are 14-21 years old and Out-of-School Youth are 16-24 years old)
- Authorization to Work
- Residency
- Selective Service Registration (if applicable)
- School Status
- Low-Income Determination (if applicable)
- Barrier Status (School drop-out; pregnant/parenting; youth with a disability; individual in foster care/aged out; homeless or runaway; offender; basic skills deficient; English language learner; requires additional assistance)

The Board has adopted the following criteria as its definition for an eligible youth: "requires additional assistance to complete an educational program, or to secure and hold employment":

- Underemployed or Poor Work History or Fired from one or more jobs, or has a history of sporadic employment (i.e., held three or more jobs within the last 12 months and is no longer employed)
- Has actively been seeking employment for at least three months but remains unemployed or underemployed. This includes a youth with no employment history, with limited work experience, and/or actively seeking full-time employment, but have only achieved part-time employment

In 2019 and 2020, the Board secured ancillary grants from the Governor's set aside statewide activity reserves supporting a Business-Education Partnership Grant, a Youth Re-entry Demonstration Grant, a NEPA State Apprenticeship Expansion Grant and a State/Local Internship Grant. The Business-Education Partnership Grant (BEP) exposes students, the future workforce, their parents and guardians to high priority occupations, career pathway awareness, and in-demand technical careers for those directly entering the workforce. The Board is collaborating with local career and technical centers and local employers for co-op/work experience that will take place in the fall and spring 2020/2021.

A Workplace Boot Camp theme will expose students and their parents to career awareness. A virtual career panel with employers and a virtual career fair are planned. A partnership has been established with four chambers of commerce: Greater Hazleton, Greater Pittston, Greater Wyoming Valley and Back Mountain Chambers and Northeast PA Jr. Achievement to conduct this virtual event.

The Board secured a Youth Re-entry Demonstration grant, titled Project REAL: Reconnect, Engage, Advocate, Lead. The funding will be utilized to enroll 50 justice-involved young adults ages 18-24. Staff will work with these individuals to overcome their barriers to employment and embark on a career pathway in high-priority occupations, including manufacturing logistics, health care, and food processing. This will be achieved by establishing close relationships with each county's justice system, parole boards, and community partners that can offer assistance in remediating barriers, and by leveraging WIOA-funded PA CareerLink® resources. Enrollees are provided with individualized services designed to alleviate their particular barriers to employment and one-on-one mentoring. Job-ready young adults will then be placed in a carefully chosen work experience that will lead to unsubsidized employment and self-sufficiency.

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