

Reconnecting Young Adults, 18 - 24

A Report to the
Washington Legislature



November 2008

Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board
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**RECONNECTING YOUNG ADULTS 18-24
A REPORT TO THE WASHINGTON STATE LEGISLATURE**

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The Washington State Legislature passed Senate Bill 6261 in 2008. SB 6261 called for the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board to examine programs to help young people between 18 and 24 years of age be more successful in the workforce and make recommendations to improve policies and programs in Washington. Section 28 states:

Conduct research into workforce development programs designed to reduce the high unemployment rate among young people between approximately eighteen and twenty-four years of age. In consultation with the operating agencies, the board shall advise the governor and legislature on policies and programs to alleviate the high unemployment rate among young people. The research shall include disaggregated demographic information and, to the extent possible, income data for adult youth. The research shall also include a comparison of the effectiveness of programs examined as part of the research conducted in this subsection in relation to the public investment made in these programs in reducing unemployment of young adults. The board shall report to the appropriate committees of the legislature by November 15, 2008, and every two years thereafter. Where possible, the data reported to the legislature should be reported in numbers and in percentages.

The Workforce Board's research report is entitled *Reconnecting Young Adults 18-24: A Report To The Washington State Legislature*. The Workforce Board adopted the recommendations contained in this report on November 20, 2008.

“The number, size, and intractability of many of our nation’s problems have obscured our view of an entire generation of youth that stands in silent danger of being lost to the country and to themselves – their talent and energy wasted, their hopes muted, and their promise unrealized because they live in a generation that has not found its time or place in this one.” Andrew Sum, Northeastern University, Boston¹

RECONNECTING YOUNG ADULTS 18-24 A REPORT TO THE WASHINGTON STATE LEGISLATURE

This report examines the economic and educational situation of Washingtonians who are in their late teenage years and early 20s. The report presents selected best practices in comprehensive work and learning programs serving disconnected youth among this age group. The report features postsecondary pathways initiatives and concludes with recommendations for policymakers. The term “young adults” in this report is defined as individuals 18 to 24 years of age. The term “disconnected youth” in this report is defined as individuals approximately 18 to 24 who are neither employed or in school.

The age span from 18 to 24 is a critical one for educational and labor market development. This time span is developmentally important, as young people prepare to take on adult responsibilities. This is the time to lay the foundation through work and learning for successful labor market participation and civic responsibility.² Yet, while research identifies this transitional period as extending at least through age 24, most federal youth programs cease providing the important support services these young adults need at age 21, and in some cases, even younger.

Strong correlation between education, training and employment

In 2006, Washington’s unemployment rate stood at 5 percent, or roughly 168,000 people.³ Meanwhile, the unemployment rate of the 18-24 age group was more than three times higher, or 17 percent. Not only are young people unemployed at much higher rates, they make up a large proportion of the overall unemployed. Of the unemployed, 64,000, or one in three were young adults. This figure is troubling on many levels, particularly when considering young adults account for just 16 percent of the overall working population.⁴

We can expect the high unemployment rate for youth to worsen as Washington, and the nation, suffers through a recession. General economic conditions have a profound impact on the 18-24 age group. Young adults tend to experience above average rates of job loss and reduced access to high-skilled positions when the economy enters a recession or endures a jobless recovery.

¹ Andrew Sum et al., A Generation of Challenge: Pathways to Success for Urban Youth, produced for the Institute for Policy Studies, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, 1997. Andrew M. Sum is Professor of Economics and Director of the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University in Boston.

² Campaign For Youth: Our Youth, Our Economy, Our Future, A National Investment Strategy for Reconnecting America’s Youth, a 12 member national steering committee, 2008

³ This represents the state’s civilian, non-institutional population, which excludes such groups as military personnel and those housed in institutional settings, including prisons and jails.

⁴ This figure represents youth aged 16-24. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics measures the young adult population using these ages, rather than 18-24.

During 2001-2002, for example, employment opportunities for the nation's out-of-school young adults declined at a rate approximately three times as fast as that of older adults.⁵

The cumulative amount of education, work experience, and training that young adults receive directly influences their long-term labor market success. In recent decades, the correlation has increased. As Andrew Sum of Northeastern University in Boston states:

The median earnings of most young men (ages 16-24) today, adjusted for inflation, are substantially lower than those enjoyed by their counterparts three decades ago. These young men without at least some postsecondary education suffered the greatest losses, a reflection of the increasingly prominent role of education in determining an individual's workforce success. Key Finding: *Young men who failed to obtain a high school diploma or GED and those who graduated from high school, but did not complete any years of post-secondary education, saw their real earnings decline by one-fourth between 1973 and 2000.*⁶

Of the 21 percent (112,355) of Washington young adults with less than a high school diploma and were not attending school, three out of four were working in 2006, the latest date that figures are available⁷. But, their median hourly wage sat at \$9.05, compared to the minimum wage, which reached \$7.63 an hour in 2006. And their unemployment rate, 24 percent, was five times the rate of the general working age population. Additional education makes a clear difference. Of the 41 percent (226,052) of young adults who were not attending school but had some college or more, they received a median wage of \$10.68 per hour and their unemployment rate stood at 17 percent.

Some 38 percent (206,854) of Washington's young adults have only a high school diploma and yet they represent almost 60 percent of the young adults who are unemployed. Of those high school graduates who did hold jobs, their median hourly wage was \$11.

Three out of four of Washington's unemployed young adults, (52,203), did not go beyond high school or obtain a GED.

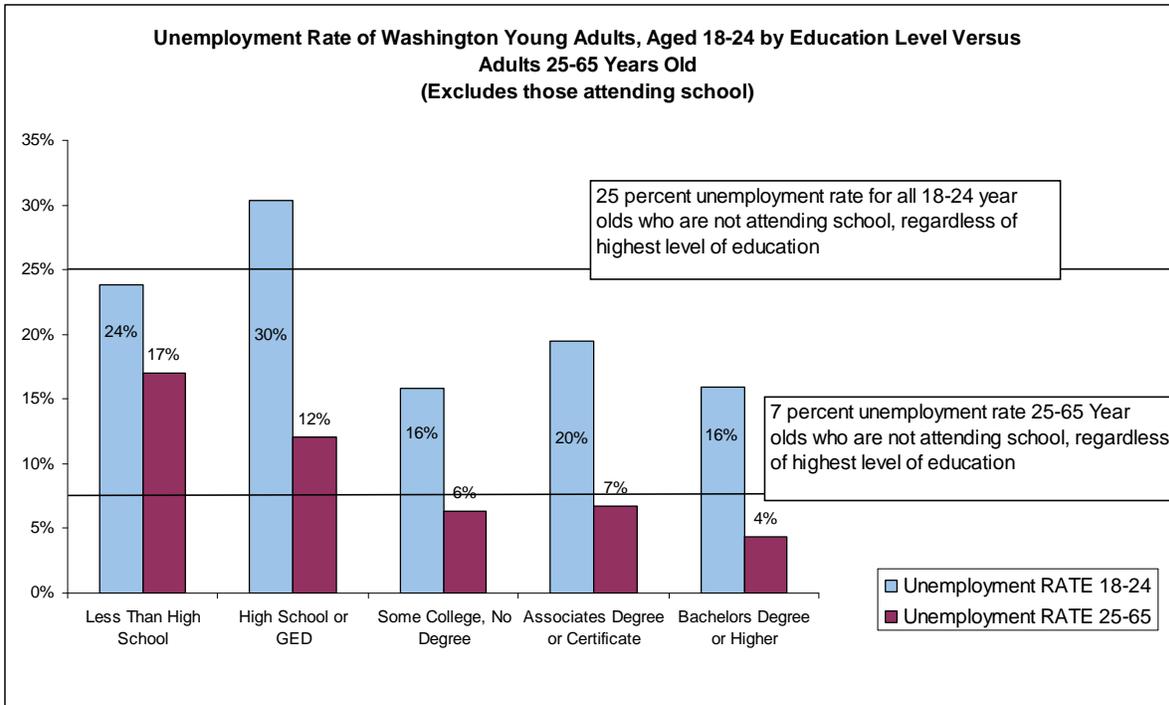
In 2006, young adults comprised 16 percent (551,126) of Washington's working age population.⁸ Thirty-nine percent (213,899) of young adults were attending school—with about half that group holding a job at the same time. Another 38 percent who were not attending school were working. Of those not attending school and working, 76 percent were working full time and 24 percent part time. Of those working full time, the median hourly wage was \$11, for those working part time the median wage was \$8.50. About 13 percent, or more than one out of 10 Washington young people, were not working or going to school.

⁵ Andrew M. Sum, et al., Left Behind in the Labor Market: Labor Market Problems of the Nation's Out-of-School, Young Adult Population, produced for the Center for Labor Market Studies, Northwestern University, Chicago 2003.

⁶ Andrew M. Sum, Leaving Young Workers Behind, produced for the Institute for Youth, Education, and Families, Center for Labor Market Studies, Northwestern University, Chicago, 2003

⁷ Office of Financial Management 2006 State Population Survey.

⁸ The working age population is generally defined as those aged 18 to 64.



Source: Office of Financial Management 2006 Population Survey.

Note: The overall unemployment rate for 18 to 24 year olds who may or may not be in school is 17 percent.

By far, these “disconnected” young adults who are out of school and out of work are in the greatest distress. Experts agree that this combination of unemployment and lack of education can lead to crime and other troubles, increasing the likelihood that a young person will end up permanently disenfranchised, poor and dependent on social service subsidies. The link between low education levels, low wages and high unemployment is clear.

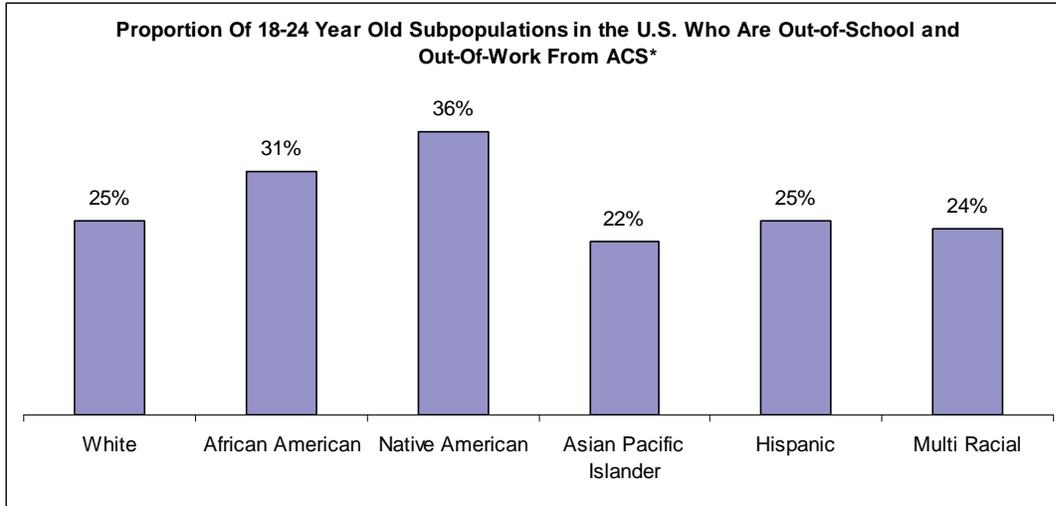
Who are these disconnected (unemployed and not in school) young adults in Washington?

- 62 percent are male, 38 percent female
- 87 percent were born a U.S. citizen, 13 percent foreign born
- 68 percent are urban, 32 percent rural
- 35 percent are 18-19 years old, 65 percent are 20-24

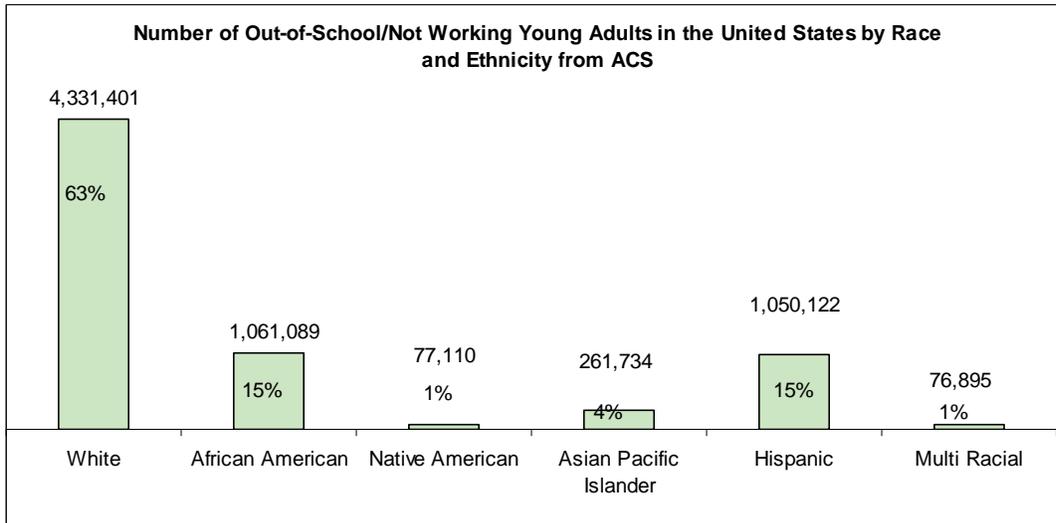
It’s worth noting that some of Washington’s youth demographics depart from national statistics. For example, while 68 percent of our disconnected young adults come from urban areas, just 50 percent of the nation’s disconnected young adults are city dwellers.

The unemployment rate among Washington state young adults with disabilities 18-24 years of age who are in the labor force is 20 percent compared to the 17 percent unemployment rate among all young adults in the same age group.

Nationwide, the populations of youth (18-24) who are both out of school and out of work are similar among racial and ethnic groups, except the proportion is higher among African Americans and Native Americans.



(For example among African American 18-24 year olds, 31 percent are out-of-school and out-of-work).
 *Source: 2007 American Community Survey, published by the U.S. Census Bureau.



There is insufficient data from Washington state to support this information on a state level.

10-Year Drift

Some call it a “10-year drift.” That’s the time when many young adults enter the labor force and wander through a series of low-paying jobs and bouts of unemployment, without building toward a future career. Years are lost before many of these individuals enter postsecondary education. A Washington State Board for Community and Technical College (SBCTC) research report entitled “The Socioeconomic Well-being of Washington State: Who Attends Community and Technical College” found that lower socioeconomic levels are linked to lower attendance levels. People in the lowest socioeconomic quintile delay college attendance. When they finally do arrive at college, they tend to be older adults with low skills. This means they are less likely to be prepared for college and are more likely to have additional priorities to deal with while in college, including families and jobs.

Jobs for the Future (JFF) analyzed data from the National Education Longitudinal Study, which tracked the educational progress of 25,000 eighth graders over the period from 1988 to 2000. The study found while 20 percent of students drop out, most dropouts are remarkably persistent in their drive to complete secondary education. Close to 60 percent of dropouts eventually do earn a high school credential—in most cases a GED certificate. Almost half of the dropouts who attain a secondary credential—44 percent—later enroll in two- or four-year colleges. Yet for all their effort, less than 10 percent earn a postsecondary degree.⁹ “The JFF study provides compelling evidence of the willingness and desire on the part of these youth to improve their labor market and educational status. It also provides evidence that with access to alternative options for high school credentialing, a substantial proportion of these youth can achieve the academic skill level to pass the GED and reach the doorstep of postsecondary institutions.”¹⁰

Brief history on federal youth employment and training programs

In 1982, Congress directed federal funds to provide employment and training services to economically disadvantaged youth under the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA). A 1994 long-term study of JTPA by Abt Associates, a social policy research organization, found discouraging results. There were no statistically significant positive effects for out-of-school youth (either male or female) from classroom training, on-the-job training, job search or other services.¹¹ Some researchers and JTPA practitioners questioned the random sampling and comparison group techniques used in the study. The evaluation did not assess the design of the programs nor the quality of services. The evaluation results, nevertheless, led many national policymakers to think that “nothing works for these kids.”

Responding to the Abt study, and a 1995 U.S. Department of Labor report that stated JTPA youth programs were unsuccessful in raising long-term employment or earnings for youth, Congress significantly cut appropriations for the JTPA Out-of-School Youth Programs.¹² Congress eliminated the Summer Youth Employment Program in 1998.

In the second half of the 1990s, practitioners, researchers, and policymakers began to point out that the employment and training components in the key federal programs had been poorly adapted to the needs of disconnected youth. In 1997, the Levitan Youth Policy Network¹³ began to advocate for an integrated and comprehensive service delivery system among community partners to make a difference in disconnected lives.

⁹ Cheryl Almaida, Cassius Johnson, Adria Steinberg, Making Good on a Promise: What Policymakers Can Do to Support the Educational Persistence of Dropouts, Jobs For the Future, April 2006

¹⁰ Linda Harris and Evelyn Ganzglass, Creating Postsecondary Pathways To Good Jobs for Young High School Dropouts: the Possibilities and the Challenges, Center for American Progress, October 2008

¹¹ Howard Bloom, et al., The National JTPA Study: Overview of Impacts, Benefits, and Costs of Title II-A, Abt Associates, 1994

¹² Alan Zuckerman, The More Things Change The More They Stay The Same: The Evolution and Devolution of Youth Employment Programs, National Youth Employment Coalition, undated

¹³ The Levitan Center, based at the Johns Hopkins Institute for Policy Studies, convenes an informal group of national researchers, policy leaders, foundation officers, and practitioners, known as the Levitan Youth Policy Network, to focus on the serious challenges presented by the growing number of out-of-school youth.

Leaders in the Levitan Youth Policy Network realized that this stage of development is critical and that young people must be engaged in preparing for their future with the support of caring, competent adults. They recommended seven “principles” in youth programs.¹⁴

Seven Levitan Youth Program Principles

1. Each young person needs to feel that at least one adult has a strong stake and interest in his or her labor market success.
2. Each young person must sense three things: strong and effective connections between the activity or program and employers; a high priority on placing the young person into a paid position with one of those employers as soon as possible; and a continuing and long-term relationship with the program that starts with that initial job placement and projects a commitment to the young person’s employment and income potential.
3. Each person must feel at each step of the way the need and opportunity to improve his or her educational skills and certification.
4. Each person must feel that the program or initiative will provide support and assistance over a period of time—perhaps up to several years—that may include several jobs and several attempts at further education (brief, time-limited programs for youth that pointed only toward a job placement achieved little success).
5. Effective connections are needed between the program and external providers of basic supports such as housing, counseling, medical assistance, food, and clothing.
6. The program requires an “atmosphere” buttressed by specific activities that emphasize civic involvement and service—in short, an extension of practical caring beyond self, family, and friends.
7. Motivational techniques are needed, such as financial and other incentives for good performance, peer group activities, and leadership opportunities.

These seven principles were considered as Congress worked to design JTPA’s successor, the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998. WIA aimed to move JTPA’s patchwork system toward a more comprehensive approach for serving disadvantaged youth. WIA consolidated JTPA’s year-round and summer youth programs into a single program that supports services for low-income youth who are between the ages of 14 and 21 and who face barriers to employment. In addition, WIA encouraged communities to develop a clearer picture of the diverse array of agencies and organizations, both public and private, critical to youth development.

The purpose of the WIA youth program is to provide effective and comprehensive activities to in-school and out-of-school youth seeking assistance in achieving academic and employment success. The Act described a new service strategy: 1) preparation for postsecondary educational opportunities, in appropriate cases; 2) strong linkages between academic and occupational learning; 3) preparation for unsubsidized employment, in appropriate cases; and 4) effective connections to intermediaries with strong links to the job market and local and regional employers. WIA requires 10 program elements, including youth development activities, be made available to eligible youth:

¹⁴ Gary Walker, Out of School and Unemployed: Principles for More Effective Policy and Programs, Chapter Four of “A Generation of Challenge: Pathways to Success for Urban Youth,” Levitan Youth Policy Network, 1997

10 Program Elements of WIA

- 1) Tutoring, study skills training, and instruction, leading to completion of high school, including dropout prevention strategies.
- 2) Alternative school services.
- 3) Summer employment opportunities that are directly linked to academic and occupational learning.
- 4) Paid and unpaid work experiences, including internships and job shadowing.
- 5) Occupational skill training.
- 6) Leadership development opportunities, which may include community service and peer-centered activities encouraging responsibility and other positive behaviors during non-school hours.
- 7) Support services.
- 8) Adult mentoring for the period of participation and a subsequent period, lasting at least a year long.
- 9) Follow up services for at least a year after completion.
- 10) Comprehensive guidance and counseling, which may include drug and alcohol abuse counseling and referral.

WIA Youth Program results in Washington

In Program Year (PY) 2007,¹⁵ the WIA Youth Program served 4,905 Washington youth aged 14 through 21. Many of the youth were older, with about one in four aged 19-21 (1,165). That year, Washington's 12 Workforce Development Councils met an average of 102.6 percent of the U.S. Department of Labor's performance targets for WIA youth.¹⁶ The PY 2007 WIA program results for older youth were:

- Entered employment rate (within three months of exiting program): 73.5 percent.
- Employment retention rate (of those working in the first quarter after exit, the percent working in the 3rd quarter): 87.6 percent.
- Six months earnings increase (the change in earnings from a six month pre-program period to a six month post-program period): \$4,900.
- Credential rate (percent of those earning an education credential during the program): 49.5 percent

The WIA Adult Program serves individuals 18 years of age and older, including a significant segment of young adults. In Program Year 2007, the WIA Adult Program served 831 Washington youth aged 18-24, or 21 percent of program participants. The PY 2007 program results for youth aged 18 to 24 were:

- Entered employment rate: 80 percent
- Employment retention rate: 88.3 percent
- Six months earnings increase: \$4,479
- Credential rate: 47 percent

¹⁵ Program Year 2007 runs from July 2007-June 2008.

¹⁶ Number is greater than 100 percent because Workforce Development Councils exceeded targets in some cases.

Every four years, the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board conducts a net impact and cost-benefit analysis of workforce development programs. The most recent net impact study was conducted in 2006. To estimate short-term and long-term impacts, those who participated in the WIA Youth Program were compared to individuals who had similar characteristics, but who did not participate in any of the programs included in the study. The study revealed: “The WIA Youth program in Washington state has positive long-term net impacts on employment, hourly wages, hours worked, and earnings. Participation increases lifetime earnings.”¹⁷

The cost-benefit analysis estimates the value of the net impact on earnings, employee benefits (estimated at 20 percent of earnings), social welfare benefits, Unemployment Insurance benefits, and certain taxes. For each WIA Youth, the public (taxpayer) program cost is about \$6,300 over the length of enrollment. During the first two-and-a-half years after leaving the program, participation increases the average youth participant’s earnings by \$1,719. During the course of a working life to age 65, the average youth participant will gain about \$27,780 in net earnings (earnings minus forgone earnings) and about \$5,560 in employee benefits. These are net gains compared to the earnings of similar individuals who did not participate in the program.

Projected participant benefits to age 65 outweigh public costs for the WIA Youth program by a ratio of 5.3 to 1, or \$33,336 to \$6,314. From the time of leaving the program to age 65, the public is expected to gain about \$4,800 per youth participant in additional Social Security, Medicare, and federal income and state sales taxes, and to save about \$2,800 per youth participant in total social welfare costs, and UI benefits—greater than the direct cost of the program.^{18 19}

Despite this success, the federal WIA youth program is underfunded, with falling annual budgets. The size of Washington’s WIA Youth Grant was \$21 million in PY 2000 and still only \$20 million in PY 2008. Washington’s WIA youth programs served just 1,996 youth aged 19-24 in PY 2007 compared to the 56,308 disconnected youth (19-24 out-of-school and out of work) who live in the state—only a 3 percent penetration level.

Model programs that succeed in serving disconnected young adults

A patchwork of second chance programs have succeeded against the odds in transforming the future for youth they touch. These programs illustrate effective ways of reaching disconnected young adults and helping them become productive, successful members of the workforce. Here are some examples:

JOBSTART at the San Jose Center for Employment and Training (CET) site

Between 1985 and 1988, 13 service providers across the county chose to participate in JOBSTART, a federal Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) demonstration project. JOBSTART was a program of basic education, occupational skills training, support services, and job placement assistance for young, economically disadvantaged dropouts who read below the eighth grade level. The program served predominately black or Hispanic high school dropouts. The JOBSTART demonstration project tested various approaches to provide short-term, moderately expensive training for youth.

¹⁷ 2006 Workforce Training Results, Net Impact analysis, W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research for the Washington State Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ The U.S. Department of Labor has not conducted a net impact evaluation of the WIA of 1998.

In formal evaluations, there was a statistically significant difference between JOBSTART and control group youth on the likelihood of receiving a high school diploma or GED certificate.

But when it came to long-term earnings impact, only the San Jose Center for Employment Training (CET) fared better than the control group. CET had very impressive long-term earnings impacts.²⁰ Annual earnings for participants improved by over \$3,000 (in 1993 dollars). Here is what made CET stand out from the other 12 JOBSTART sites.

1. Compared to the other JOBSTART sites, San Jose CET was more of a full-immersion program with a more intensive experience for the youth. Youth were enrolled for an average of 4.1 months and spent 355 hours in training. Over 80 hours per month were spent in training
2. CET was effective in involving employers in developing the program's occupational emphasis and curriculum. Training areas were chosen carefully, based on analysis of local labor market needs. San Jose CET was also unusual in the extent to which educational services were shaped by occupational training needs and provided in an integrated way. The program had a strong labor market orientation and its experienced staff used their many employer connections to help place their participants after training was complete.
3. San Jose CET offered integrated basic education that was tightly connected to skills training. In this individualized open-entry, open-exit program, trainees immediately began vocational training designed to simulate a real job situation. If a trainee had difficulty with basic reading or math during this training, he or she was given individual assistance on the spot by basic skills tutors present during the training. Instead of being taught academic skills through classroom instruction, students learned them in the context of job training.
4. Finally, the San Jose CET excelled because it employed and retained highly experienced staff with extensive local knowledge. The cumulative experience of staff allowed the program to develop many contacts in the business community and earn an excellent reputation among employers. The program forged very close connections to the labor market.²¹

YouthBuild

YouthBuild is an alternative education program that draws young adults, ages 17-24, for hands-on construction trades training. Youth acquire construction skills as they build or rehabilitate low-income housing in their communities. This "tools for life" program aims to empower young adults to rebuild their communities and their own lives with a commitment to work, education, responsibility, safety, and family. The U.S. Department of Labor awards YouthBuild grants through a national competitive process. Participants spend 50 percent of their time alternating between the job site and school. YouthBuild participants receive leadership training while they earn high school diplomas or GEDs through the program.

²⁰ George Cave, et al., JOBSTART: Final Report on a Program for School Dropouts, Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, 1993

²¹ U.S. Department of Labor, What's Working (and What's Not): A Summary of Research Impacts and Employment and Training Programs, 1995

YouthBuild provides personal counseling and training in life skills and financial management. The students are part of a mini-community of adults and youth committed to each other's success and to improving the conditions in their neighborhoods.

Participants include young people who have been in the juvenile justice system, are aging out of foster care, are high school dropouts, or are otherwise at-risk of failing to reach key educational milestones and opportunities that lead to fulfilling careers.

Phoenix has had a YouthBuild program since 1996 and is proud of its results. YouthBuild Phoenix, retained 72 percent of its students until they completed their training and achieved a cumulative attendance average of 91 percent. Over 73 percent of the graduates attained either their GED or a high school diploma. Of those completing the program, 96 percent were initially placed in jobs or postsecondary education, and 73 percent are still engaged in work or school.²²

According to Professor Andrew Hahn, Brandeis University, YouthBuild graduates responding to a survey nearly universally agree that YouthBuild helped them to turn their lives around, and that success would have been out of reach without it. Seventy-five percent of survey respondents said they were in postsecondary education or earning at least \$10/hour (2004 dollars).

In addition, 76 percent are not dependent on federal programs such as food stamps, unemployment insurance or welfare; 85 percent are positively involved in their communities; 70 percent are registered to vote, and almost 50 percent voted. Respondents did say they would like access to post-program follow-up services and assistance, particularly to help them further develop their work skills.²³

The YouthBuild Offender Program²⁴ and the YouthBuild Welfare-to-Work Program²⁵ have also brought about impressive results.

Washington state has three YouthBuild programs:

- YouthBuild Renton
- Nooksack Indian Tribe in Deming
- Tacoma Goodwill YouthBuild

The federal grants that fund these programs end December 31, 2009 and the grant managers at Washington's three YouthBuild sites are applying to the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) for grant extensions. While data is not yet available on participant outcomes, program performance goals established by DOL anticipate 70 percent of youth placed in education or employment in their first quarter following exit with 75 percent retention among those placed.

²² Youthbuild Phoenix, 2008

²³ "Why Do Some Programs for Out-of-School Youth Succeed" In cooperation with the National Youth Employment Coalition and YouthBuild USA, A Forum, 2004

²⁴ Mark Cohen, Vanderbilt University and Alex Piquero, John Jay College of Criminal Justice and City University of New York Graduate Center, Costs and Benefits of a Targeted Intervention Program for Youthful Offenders: the YouthBuild USA Offender Project, 2008

²⁵ Anne Wright, The YouthBuild Welfare-to-Work Program: Its Outcomes and Policy Implications, 2001

Washington Service Corps (WSC)/AmeriCorps

The Washington Service Corps (WSC) was founded in 1983 to involve young adults in their communities while gaining employment experience and skills. In 1994, WSC became part of the nationwide AmeriCorps program. WSC/AmeriCorps places citizens in full-time community service projects and supports them with a minimal living allowance of \$950 per month.

WSC engages people across the state in full-time service projects benefitting their local communities. There is individual participation and team participation. The individual placement program is for youth, including unemployed and out-of school youth that must be between the ages of 18 and 25. There is no upper age limit for those participants enrolled in the team-based program. All participants must either be a citizen or permanent resident alien. Among current program year participants, 55 percent (381) were between 18 and 24.

In partnership with local sponsors, such as school districts, local governments, non-profit agencies and chambers of commerce, WSC promotes work ethic and the satisfaction and skills learned by “getting things done.” WSC/AmeriCorps members offer literacy instruction, tutor and mentor youth, build affordable housing, clean parks and streams, run after-school programs, help communities respond to disasters, and help build the capacity of nonprofit groups to become self-sustaining.

Members who complete their term of service (normally 10 1/2 months) are eligible to receive a federally-funded education award of \$4,725. The award is held in trust and paid to educational institutions or to sponsors of federally guaranteed student loans. In both the individual and team programs, members must have completed high school or received a GED before using their educational awards.

Over 300 Washington WSC/AmeriCorps participants in the 2006-2007 service year responded to a VeraWorks qualitative survey. Survey respondents described AmeriCorps as an intense experience boasting enriching relationships, compelling and intensely rewarding service work, and novel and challenging experiences. WSC/AmeriCorps volunteers did report that the program had its downsides. Chief among these were the financial hardship of living within the program’s stipend, paperwork and an exhausting schedule.

For over 97 percent of respondents, however, the pleasures and challenges of the WDC/AmeriCorps experience came together as a positive and transformative experience. Participants reported that the program experience gave them more skills and made them more confident, directed and service oriented.

Over three quarters of respondents reported higher levels of workplace skills (leadership, management, teamwork and communication as well as technical skills) due to the program²⁶

²⁶ VeraWorks, Waynesboro, PA, [AmeriCorps Service As A Personal and Professional Boost: Results From A Reflective Survey](#), for the Washington Commission for National and Community Service

Nationally, AmeriCorps engages more than 75,000 individuals in intensive, results-driven service each year. A 2008 national AmeriCorps survey reports similar positive longitudinal results:²⁷

1. AmeriCorps members gained a sense of civic empowerment and they continued their participation in community service long after they completed the program.
2. AmeriCorps is a pipeline to public service oriented careers. Forty-four percent of members of racial and ethnic minority groups and 46 percent of those from low-income backgrounds are employed in public service careers as compared to 26 percent in their comparison groups.
3. AmeriCorps alumni are more satisfied with their lives eight years later than others who did not serve in the program.

YouthSource Renton

YouthSource in Renton is a multi-funded, multi-agency education, employment and development center for at-risk youth ages 14-21. The key innovations of YouthSource include:

- Co-location of a range of youth-serving agencies in one site, sharing staff and blending resources.
- Co-location with King County's flagship one-stop site (WorkSource Renton).
- Integration of basic skills education with occupational skills training in innovative skills programs for construction, information technology and manufacturing careers.
- Integration of a public school alternative education program.
- On-site counseling for mental health and substance abuse issues, with referrals for more assistance.
- Direct liaison and partnership with the juvenile court system for cross-referral (a project now expanding with the partnership's new youth offender grant from DOL).
- Integration of a post-secondary institution (technical college) to provide both on-site services and a connection to the college's campus.

In July 2008, YouthSource Renton received the U.S. Department of Labor's Recognition of Excellence Award in the "connecting America's youth to the workforce" category at the national 2008 Workforce Innovations Conference in New Orleans. YouthSource is a model of collaboration across partners and systems, blending the resources and services of more than a dozen government and non-profit agencies in a one-stop center for at-risk youth that meets their unique needs for education, employment and leadership.

By coordinating multiple partners funded by multiple federal, state and local funding streams with differing outcomes and requirements, YouthSource maximizes resources in a seamless way. Youth can find not only a broad range of services for employment and education, but a depth of services that can address underlying issues and barriers, including mental health and substance abuse. YouthSource administrators have great success in identifying mutual benefit for partners and fostering a spirit of collaboration in which partners help each other meet their program goals while serving the needs of youth. Program partners include YouthBuild, Job Corps, Digital Bridge Technology Academy, and Opportunity SkyWay.

²⁷ Still Serving: Measuring the Eight-Year Impact of AmeriCorps on Alumni, co-authored by the corporation for National and Community services and Abt Associates Inc.

YouthSource serves several hundred youth each year in its wide range of programs. In WIA out-of-school youth services, which cross most of the YouthSource programs, 276 youth were served in 2006 and 183 were served in 2007 (decrease due to funding cuts). All participants have significant barriers to success in school and work. Most (97 percent) are school dropouts and 99 percent are educationally at risk. Some 87 percent are unemployed, 66 percent are involved in the justice system, 31 percent have a disability, and 44 percent have problems with drugs or alcohol. About 10 percent are homeless. About two-thirds are young men and 68 percent are youth of color. The average age is 17; about 30 percent are 16 or under and 17 percent are aged 19-24.

In Program Year 2006, YouthSource achieved a 71 percent positive exit rate. That is, participants entered unsubsidized employment or postsecondary advanced training. The team attained 169 percent of its goal for credentials, with 54 achieved. Youth exiting into full-time unsubsidized employment are working at an average wage of \$9.38 per hour. Due to its connections with the construction and information technology sectors and occupational skills training specific to these sectors, many youth are entering jobs or further training in these high-demand careers.

Some 70 percent of youth who had a positive exit were retained in school or employment in the third quarter of follow-up. In addition, for youth 19-21, YouthSource achieved a 78 percent entered employment rate with 77 percent job retention in the third quarter of follow-up. YouthSource has achieved a 62 percent GED/diploma rate.

YouthSource has proved highly effective with court-involved youth thanks to its partnership with King County Superior Court. Out of 190 court referrals, YouthSource achieved an 82 percent non-recidivism rate to the juvenile and adult court systems. Through YouthSource's employment programs in PY04-05, youth involved in the juvenile justice system paid back \$7,539 in victim's restitution/court obligations so they could move forward with their lives—and 10 youth paid their restitution in full.

Youth Opportunity (YO) Grants

In May 2000, the U.S. Department of Labor awarded sizable Youth Opportunity (YO) Grants to 36 high poverty urban, rural, and Native American communities. According to the American Youth Policy Forum, the Youth Opportunity Grant program “represents the most promising federal effort to date for mobilizing the human and financial resources of troubled, generally low-income communities.”²⁸

The Youth Opportunity delivery systems in each of the 36 communities were uniquely tailored to build on the strength of the delivery capacity of local providers, employers, education entities, and the youth-serving systems. Until the federal YO programs ended in 2005, YO grants in Baltimore, Portland, Seattle and other sites enabled young people to know that caring adults were committed to their success, whether in traditional systems or by developing innovative alternative pathways to the mainstream. YO was based on a youth development framework that emphasizes a comprehensive approach to meeting a young person's needs. Under the YO model, trained youth workers were expected to provide follow-up to participants for at least two years after they completed participation in program activities.

²⁸ Nancy Martin and Samuel Halperin, Whatever It Takes: How Twelve Communities Are Reconnecting Out-of-School Youth, American Youth Policy, 2006

This is in keeping with the effective practice of providing youth access to a caring, trusted adult for an extended period of time. Additionally, experts have suggested that youth benefit from continuing a relationship with a program for as long as they need.²⁹

The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) released a study in 2006 that praised the Youth Opportunity Grants for dramatically increasing youth participation in education reengagement activities and in internship opportunities. YO established formal connections with community colleges to provide special programming on campus for YO's high-risk youth. CLASP also found that YO contributed to an increased professionalism of the youth delivery systems in the 36 sites including a youth practitioners' apprenticeship program.³⁰

The U.S. Department of Labor contracted Decision Information Resources, Inc. (DIR), to conduct a comprehensive YO evaluation. The evaluation results suggest that, "as a result of YO, more youth in the targeted communities are in school and fewer are idle."³¹

When the federal YO grants ended in 2005 it created a huge gap in youth services in participating communities. In 2006, the City of Baltimore voted to provide funding to sustain Youth Opportunity (YO!) Baltimore. The two YO! Baltimore Centers provide education and career skills training to out-of-school youth 16-22 years of age. Services include:

- GED and pre-GED classes on-site at each center.
- Classes and online courses for high school completion.
- Career training in high growth industries.
- Life skills, social event clubs, and computer labs.
- Leadership development through community service projects.
- Job readiness classes and job placement services.

The City of Baltimore reports that YO! Baltimore has improved employment and earning among participants, increased educational achievement, lowered teen pregnancy rates and reduced crime. YO! members earn 35 percent more and are employed at a 42 percent higher rate than non-participants. A recent study showed that YO! Baltimore members earned an average of \$5,000 more than their peers, and were more "attached" to the workforce than were their peers. YO! members are one-third less likely to be arrested and convicted than non-participants and the out-of-school YO! members earned GEDs at twice the rate of non-participants.

Options in Vancouver, Washington

The mission of the Clark County Options program is to help youth and families move from isolation to connection. The target population is transition-age youth 14-25 years old who meet the criteria for a mental impairment diagnosis; are in, or at risk of, an "out-of-home" placement; and voluntarily consent to participate. The Options program works to build a system of service and supports to address the particular difficulties that youth with serious emotional disturbances or serious mental illnesses face in making a successful transition to adulthood.

²⁹ U.S. Government Accountability Office, Youth Opportunity Grants, GAO-06-53, 2005

³⁰ Linda Harris, Learning from the Youth Opportunity Experience: Building Delivery Capacity in Distressed Communities, Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP), 2006

³¹ DOL Employment and Training Administration Training and Employment Notice 19-08, November 21, 2008.

Young people in this program work very closely with transition staff to set individualized goals, as described in a report prepared by the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth, in Washington, D.C.:

Upon entry to the program, transition specialists provide information and individual planning opportunities for youth and partner with them to self-determine their goals and activities in four areas: education, housing, employment, and adjusting to community life. Staff members work full-time on youth development and leadership activities, acting as mentors and role models to clients, and providing one-to-one and classroom opportunities to improve conflict resolution, anger management, relationship building, self-advocacy, and other related skills. Connections to various supports (e.g., education, transportation, childcare, personal documentation, and financial planning) are the responsibility of all staff working directly with youth. An on-site mental health professional is also a critical service element of the program.³²

In 2008, Options enrolled about 60 Clark County youth, the majority of whom are significantly at-risk. Some 84 percent have been arrested at some point, 74 percent have been involved with the public mental health system, 62 percent have experience in special education, 48 percent have an alcohol and/or drug problem, and 44 percent have experienced homelessness.³³

The Options program is located within the Clark County Youth House. The Clark County Department of Community Services contracts with Columbia River Mental Health Services to employ the Options transition specialists working at the Youth House. The location of the Options program at the Youth House was intentional, acknowledging that disconnected youth need a place to be, that is, a physical location that they know is their space. Services, however, are not site-based; they are located all over the county and strong partnerships allow youth to access the services as needed.

The combination of supports in managing mental health conditions, developing skills of adult living, and accessing employment opportunities appears to be a success. The Options program has helped participants stabilize their living situations, improve employment outcomes, and reduce involvement with the criminal justice system. Youth interviewed during a site visit from the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth emphasized the benefits of individualized service, staff that listen to their needs, and the importance of a safe place to be while setting life goals.”³⁴ The Options program is driven by the youth it serves, with young people providing guidance at the policy, program, and practice level.

The outcomes for 51 youth were assessed on their ninth month of participation. At the ninth month, 70 percent were involved in high school completion programs and 40 percent had worked during the assessment period. Also, the number of juvenile justice offenses was down from 61 percent pre-program to 29 percent post-intake.

³² Woolsey, L. & Katz-Leavy, J., (2008), Transitioning Youth With Mental Health Needs to Meaningful Employment & Independent Living, Washington, DC: National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth, Institute for Educational Leadership. Funded by the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

Seattle Vocational Institute’s Pre-Apprenticeship Construction Trades

Pre-apprenticeship programs provide a bridge to registered apprenticeships for those who are otherwise unprepared to meet entry requirements. Guided by its industry-based advisory board, Seattle Vocational Institute’s Pre-Apprenticeship Construction Trades (SVI-PACT) is a model that ensures training is appropriate and graduates are ready to succeed as apprentices. Low-income minorities and women are actively recruited to the program. The vast majority of students are high school dropouts, many of whom have criminal histories, some with gang involvement. Yet, SVI-PACT is ushering these students away from their pasts and into well-paying construction jobs. With its six-month commitment to construction and life skills, SVI-PACT strives for an environment of trust and respect combined with high standards that mirror the construction industry. Two sessions are held each year, with an annual capacity of 30 to 45 students. Here are the current enrollment demographics:

Young Adults age 18-24	43 percent
Gender:	Male – 86 percent; Female – 14 percent
Race:	85 percent minority: African American – 59%; Hispanic – 9%; Asian/Pacific Islander – 14%; Caucasian – 15%; Other – 1%
Immigrant	36 percent
Past Incarceration	29 percent

Since 2003, SVI-PACT has had a 90 percent graduation rate, with more than 85 percent of graduates entered into apprenticeships. The retention rate of students who become apprentices is 60 percent compared to the state average of 42 percent. A number of the trades have mentors, including former SVI graduates, who are helping the newest apprentices to stay the course.

Key to its success of the SVI-PACT program is the relationship built between the training staff and the student. Trades math is emphasized. Students are helped to overcome barriers (such as the lack of a driver’s license or a high school diploma or GED) as they develop skills needed to succeed as apprentices in the construction industry.

Here is how the SVI-PACT program is described by program participant John Collins in a recent newspaper article:

At 19, he had spent almost as much time incarcerated for drug, weapons, and robbery offenses as he had in school. With virtually no prospects and little inclination to change, he ambled into the brightly lit building on Jackson Street on the suggestions of a friend. “I pretty much had nothing to lose,” said Collins. “It was go to SVI and try to get a career, or go back to the streets.” Now 23 and a laborer with the commercial construction firm Lease Crutcher Lewis, he is on track to buy a home – or build one himself.
(Seattle Post-Intelligencer, July 27, 2008)

Summer Youth Employment

In 2008, the Center for Labor Market Studies testified before the U.S. Congress that the summer job market for teens would be extremely weak and forecasted a seasonally adjusted teen summer employment rate of only 34 percent, which would have marked a 60-year historic low.³⁵ The 2008 summer employment rate for teens was 4.3 percentage points below its value in 2004 and 12.3 percentage points, or nearly 30 percent below its value in the summer of 2000.³⁶

During the 1990s, the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) provided federal funds for summer youth employment programs. It offered low-income youth age 14-21 paid work experience in the public and private nonprofit sectors and education remediation classes. Prompted by indications that federal funds would not be available for the 1996 summer youth program, the State of Washington appropriated \$5.4 million to ensure the state's at-risk youth would still have the benefits a summer youth program offers. Some 4,301 youth were enrolled in the summer of 1996. Washington State University's Social and Economic Sciences Research Center conducted an evaluation of this 1996 summer youth program. Findings from the evaluation indicate that the summer youth program played a key role in participants' decisions to return to school. Around 63 percent reported that it was "very important" in making the decision to return, and about 59 percent reported that it was very helpful in preparing them to return to school. The effect was particularly strong for non-white participants. As a result of their summer experience, about 94 percent felt more prepared to get another job, 90 percent felt more prepared to finish school, and 96 percent felt more prepared to learn new things.

After the summer of 1996, Washington never again appropriated state funds for the Summer Youth Program and Congress eliminated the federal Summer Youth Employment Program in 1998.

While nationwide the Summer Youth Program came to an end, the need for a summer youth employment program for disadvantaged youth persists and cannot be overlooked. Two cities, Baltimore and Los Angeles, recognized the urgent need and coordinated public and private resources to sustain citywide Summer Youth Programs. Here is a 2008 summary of these city projects:

In early 2008, Baltimore Mayor Sheila Dixon announced that summer jobs would be a priority for her administration and asked leaders from across Baltimore to join her 2008 YouthWorks Leadership Team. She asked them to commit to the Baltimore YouthWorks theme: *Summer Jobs are Everyone's Business*, by placing 6,500 teens in summer jobs. Working in partnership with the Mayor's Office of Employment Development and the Baltimore Workforce Investment Board's Youth Council, the Mayor worked to recruit employers and solicit donations from businesses, philanthropic organizations, faith-based institutions, government agencies, and community leaders. These efforts resulted in raising sufficient funds and job commitments for more than 6,500 summer jobs.

³⁵ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, [The Employment Situation: August 2008](#), Washington, D.C. September 5, 2008.

³⁶ Andrew Sum, Ishwar Khatiwada, and Joseph McLaughlin, [The Historically Low Summer and Year Round 2008 Teen Employment Rate: The Case for An Immediate National Policy Response to Create Jobs for the Nation's Youth](#), Center for Labor Market Studies, Northeastern University, Boston, September 2008

In 2008, 100,000 Los Angeles youth were reported to be out-of-school and out-of-work. The City of Los Angeles responded by allocating \$4 million a year for 5,000 summer jobs, targeted to youth who were dropouts and “Non-Passers.” The L.A. Workforce Investment Board and the L.A. Unified School District partnered to offer another 3,000 jobs on school campuses, paid by the district’s Community Development Block Grant. Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa required every city department to hire a targeted number of young people for entry-level positions, adding another 1,000 summer jobs.

The City of Los Angeles then turned to the private sector, with the Chamber of Commerce encouraging local employers to sponsor “Hire L.A.’s 18-24” at various contribution levels, including: benefactor (\$25,000), sustaining (\$10,000) and supporting (\$5,000). In the end, Mayor Villaraigosa reached his goal to hire 10,000 youth in the summer of 2008 and for next summer the mayor has kicked the goal up to 15,000 summer youth jobs.

Bridges to Opportunity – Creating Pathways to Postsecondary Education

In 2003, the Ford Foundation established the five-year *Bridges to Opportunity* Initiative to promote state policies that strengthen the capacity of community colleges to work with partners to improve educational and economic opportunities for low-income adults. This national initiative targets increased college access and success for low-income students who are trying to drive from Point A: low-income jobs, to Point B: higher income careers.

Washington’s 34 community and technical colleges, through the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, is participating in the *Bridges to Opportunity* Initiative along with Colorado, Kentucky, Louisiana, New Mexico and Ohio. An example of a Bridges to Opportunity program is the Community College of Denver’s *College Connection* model that “provides an intensive eight-week summer remediation for GED graduates (aged 18-24) who are planning to enroll in fall college classes and who test into developmental math, reading, or English.

Keys to the success of this course are that the career exploration component links college work to a specific career goal; the course is taught by college developmental education faculty who understand what knowledge and competencies students must master and how they will be measured; the instructors are sensitive to the instructional and social characteristics of the student; and benefits are immediate to students such as exempting them from classes that they ‘hated’ in high school and GED preparation.”³⁷

Here in Washington, the Ford Foundation’s *Bridges to Opportunities* Initiative was a springboard to expand upon the state’s community and technical colleges’ I-BEST demonstration. Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) pairs English as a second language (ESL)/Adult Basic Education (ABE) instructors and professional-technical instructors in the classroom to provide students with literacy education and workforce skills at the same time. This makes it possible to tailor remediation in credit-bearing occupational classes. Studies show adult learners acquire basic education skills most effectively when learning them in a practical context, rather than trying to acquire vocabulary or math skills in isolation.

³⁷ Linda Harris and Evelyn Ganzglass, [Creating Postsecondary Pathways To Good Jobs for Young High School Dropouts: the Possibilities and the Challenges](#), Center for American Progress, October 2008

I-BEST projects are showing success. Not only did they expand access to college vocational training for ESL students, participants were many times more likely to complete workforce training and earn college credits than were traditional ESL students studying the same amount of time. Encouraged by these results, all of the state's 34 community and technical colleges established I-BEST programs (now totaling 117 programs) across the state.

According to a State Board for Community and Technical Colleges' study ("Increasing Student Achievement for Basic Skills Students") in 2006-07, Adult Basic Education student participation in college-level programs has jumped 33 percent system-wide. A portion of I-BEST program credits must be college-level and count toward the next level certificate or degree in the academic pathway. To ensure students achieve these ambitious objectives, the program also provides support services, including a contact person for every student. This contact person follows up regularly and helps the student obtain other resources that may be needed to stabilize his or her environment.³⁸

Governor's WIA Statewide Activities Grants were awarded in 2008, to Workforce Development Council/college partnerships in the Benton-Franklin, Seattle-King County, and Olympic Workforce Development Areas to advance I-BEST learner supports for 16- to 24-year-old out-of-school youth.

These career pathways demonstrations will study the impact on student success when I-BEST is complemented with case management, financial aid advising, wrap-around support services, job placement, and post-instruction follow-up services.

What works: Elements of model programs that help young adults succeed

As described on pages 7-8 of this report, in 1997, the Levitan Youth Policy Network studied the failures of previous youth employment and training programs and advocated seven youth development principles. The Levitan principles were incorporated, by design, into the WIA Title I-B Youth Program and they guided many of the state and federal projects featured in this report, including:

- Center for Employment and Training (CET in San Jose)
- YouthBuild
- Washington Service Corps/AmeriCorps
- YouthSource Renton
- Youth Opportunity grants
- WIA Title I-B Youth Programs
- Options program in Vancouver, Wash.
- Seattle Vocational Institute's Pre-Apprenticeship Construction Trades

³⁸ SBCTC Literacy Assistance Center, Literacy Update: Education + Work Skills = Jobs, October 2008, Vol. 18 No. 1

Consistent with the Levitan principles, we have provided seven success elements found in common among the programs presented in this report.

Seven Elements of Success

1. Youth service providers hire highly experienced staff with an extensive knowledge and connection to the local business community. They establish an excellent reputation among employers. They work carefully with partner agencies to foster collaboration so that packaged services are comprehensive.
2. Effective programs connect with external providers of basic supports such as housing, and counseling for mental health, youth offender, and substance abuse issues.
3. Incentives such as paid work experience and computer literacy classes help youth stay engaged in skill building activities and avoid risk-taking behavior.
4. Basic remedial education instruction is offered in a practical context by integrating ABE/ESL with occupational skills training. Innovative solutions are found for the youth so that they can enroll in effective alternative education programs (online, on-site, or through a strong community partner) with pathways to postsecondary education and employment always in mind.
5. Young adults have at least one caring adult who is committed to their long-term labor market success. They feel safe in coming to a trusted environment that builds social networks and acts as a mini-community with adults committed to the youth's success.
6. Young adults receive ample opportunities for leadership development through community service projects that encourage responsibility, positive behaviors, teamwork, management, communication, and civic empowerment.
7. Program supports continue after young adults leave a program. Several of the model programs featured in this paper offer post-program follow-up services and career mobility assistance to help youth to continue to develop as they change jobs and make several attempts at further education.

The Workforce Development Councils in Washington's 12 Workforce Development Areas contract with youth program service providers. Through the Workforce Development Councils, our state has a well established WIA Youth Program infrastructure.

As described on pages 9-10 of this report, the WIA youth programs deliver positive results for young adults, yet WIA programs for young adults are underfunded. Since 2000, the funding and the number of young adults served per year in WIA Title I-B programs have declined.

Washington's WIA youth programs served just 1,996 youth aged 19-24 in PY 2007 compared to the 56,308 disconnected youth (19-24, out of school and out of work) who live in the state—only a 3 percent penetration level.

Recommendations for Reconnecting Young Adults:

1. Expand and Enhance Workforce Investment Act Youth Services

The key elements of programmatic success, both those advocated by the Levitan Youth Policy Network (see page 8) and those derived from a review of best practices from around the country, are embodied in Washington's federally funded WIA Youth program. As described earlier, the Workforce Investment Act, or WIA, requires that all states provide services to economically and educationally disadvantaged young people aged 14 to 21. Priority is given to out-of-school youth, and services are designed to help participants reengage in the education system, obtain a high school diploma or GED, and/or obtain employment. The WIA Youth Program statutes were informed by the seven Levitan youth program "principles" but there is little guidance on how to employ these principles or to what extent any of the principles should be emphasized over another.

Washington's WIA system is administered at the state level by the Employment Security Department, with performance accountability measures determined and evaluated by the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board. At the regional level, the design and delivery of WIA youth services are administered by the 12 Workforce Development Councils (WDCs), independent, volunteer boards appointed by local elected officials. Each WDC is also required by WIA statute to have in place a Youth Council, which represents the education and youth service community in their respective regions, as well as business, labor, and community advocates. The Youth Council in each region makes recommendations to the WDC for the strategic deployment of WIA resources allocated for youth services.

To their credit, the 12 WDCs and their Youth Councils established youth service delivery systems that embody the Levitan Principles. Washington's WIA Youth Program's positive results are similar to the outcomes of the best program models reviewed for this report, which is understandable since they share success characteristics.

The WIA Youth Program should be considered as a foundation for addressing the employment needs of the state's older youth. But the program has significant limitations that should be addressed.

1a. Raise the age ceiling for WIA Youth Program eligibility: First and foremost is the age restriction. If Washington is going to address young adults caught in the "10-year drift," the age ceiling of the WIA Youth Program should be raised to at least 24, perhaps with some flexibility to adjust the age ceiling upward depending on the needs of the applicant pool. Flexible criteria would allow an intake counselor to determine if a 25-year-old might benefit from WIA youth services, while a mature 20-year-old with a marketable education credential might benefit best from WIA Adult Program services.

Expanding the age band for eligibility also allows the service provider to maintain contact through the transitions into postsecondary education and the workplace. These transition points are the seams through which vulnerable individuals tend to fall. Young people who age out of services, especially those who have tenuous or erratic education and work histories, are most likely to be unemployed or underemployed in adulthood.

Former foster children, for example, who age out of the foster care system without having achieved high school completion or a postsecondary credential, are among the most likely to suffer unemployment than their same age, same education-level counterparts.

Further, a longer-term connection with each young person enables the service provider to support career pathway development, which by its design will result in job promotion and wage progress for successful participants.

1b. Provide more workplace-based work and learning opportunities: The existing WIA youth service system, being established for a younger population does not offer sufficient workplace-based opportunities for young people to earn and learn concurrently. A more significant connection between the WIA Youth Program and the state's apprenticeship programs would provide these opportunities, and would likely improve the completion rates of young apprentices. Currently, there is very little retention support for apprentices. Washington's rate of completion at the journeyman level is only 42 percent.

Another important connection to work experience is the Washington Service Corps (WSC)/AmeriCorps. WSC/AmeriCorps engages young people and adults in community service projects, and pays a stipend to support living expenses and offers a scholarship for post-secondary education upon completion. As reported earlier, this is a particularly valuable experience for individuals who have little work experience or are unclear about career options or direction. The experience often serves as a stepping stone to either unsubsidized employment or postsecondary education, or both. The WIA Youth and Adult service systems already serve as a primary referral source for WSC/AmeriCorps applicants. For example, 10 WSC/AmeriCorps members are fulfilling their community service as youth outreach workers at 10 WorkSource Centers.

The WSC/AmeriCorps program does not have a resource pool to provide necessary support services for members experiencing barriers to successful participation. Program supervisors, because of their connections in the community, often make referrals for services and support, or even help members navigate the service system, but this is not a consistent arrangement by any means. The WSC/AmeriCorps could benefit significantly from a closer relationship with the WIA Youth Program particularly under an enhanced (higher age ceiling) WIA Youth service system as proposed.

1c. Increase number of WIA Youth Program participant slots: Since 2003, the number of youth served in the WIA program has fallen by 30 percent, from 7,071 in Program Year 2003 to 4,905 in Program Year 2007. Compared to the 2000 WIA funding levels for Washington, there has been a decline in Program Year 2008 of \$1.1 million in the WIA Youth Program and \$1.7 million in the WIA Adult Program. These federal funds are distributed by a formula that is based on unemployment and poverty rates in each state. Because Washington has had a favorable economic climate in recent years, many of our young people have been denied access to these valuable services.

Enhancement in the WIA youth system by increasing slots, by providing more work-based work and learning opportunities, and by raising the age ceiling for WIA Youth Program eligibility and investment in the WIA youth system are the primary recommendations coming out of the research conducted for this paper.

Every two years, the Workforce Board develops *High Skills, High Wages – Washington’s Strategic Plan for Workforce Development*. Addressing the issues of youth workforce development is one of the three goal areas of the plan (along with adult workforce development and serving the needs of industry). Action steps 2 through 13 are among those presented in the *2008-2018 High Skills, High Wages* strategic plan. Together, these action steps encompass the critical success principles identified in this report:

2. Provide opportunities for all youth to connect to the workplace.

Examples of workplace experiences for students include mentorships, job shadows, internships and paid work experience in the public and private non-profit sectors.

3. Create summer youth employment programs.

The federally funded summer youth employment program ended in 1998. The former summer program offered low-income youth age 14-21 paid work experience in the public and private nonprofit sectors and education remediation classes. The program created jobs and learning at the same time.

4. Connect disadvantaged youth to AmeriCorps and Washington Service Corps (WSC).

AmeriCorps and WSC members address critical needs in Washington’s communities. Members gain new skills as they provide community services, and, when completing their full-time (with stipend) term of service, receive a federallyfunded college education award of \$4,725.

5. Develop a system to improve work retention and career advancement.

Getting a job is just the first step. Some youth may need post-employment services that will increase their chances of staying employed and moving forward in their career.

6. Develop I-BEST opportunities specifically for older youth.

Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) is an effective way to provide literacy education, by combining literacy with job skills instruction. Expanding the number of Adult Basic Education programs that integrate occupational skills training through the I-BEST model will ensure more youth have access to this effective program.

7. Connect students completing basic education with college level classes.

By developing better links between Adult Basic Education/English-as-a-Second Language, developmental education, and credit bearing job preparation, we can help young adult students make their next education or career move.

8. Expand pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship opportunities for youth.

Pre-apprenticeship programs provide a bridge to registered apprenticeships for those who are not otherwise prepared to meet entry requirements.

9. Continue to improve the talent of our state workforce development professionals.

Enhance professional development and provide credentials for career coaching, mentoring, and instruction in life skills and employability skills for staff of WorkSource Centers, training institutions, community-based organizations, employers and others.

10. Enhance employment and training options for targeted populations

Ensure that no one is left behind by virtue of their color, disability or gender. Underutilized populations of young adults include veterans and ex-offenders.

11. Financial aid and support services for postsecondary education and training

Provide more financial aid and support services to enable students to enroll in and complete at least one year of postsecondary training and receive a credential, including: 1) expanding the Opportunity Grant program and include support services; and 2) provide the first five credits of postsecondary training free for workforce students who earn less than the state's median family income.

12. Online access to education, training and career counseling information.

Create easy to navigate postsecondary education and training and career websites, including information on financial aid and support services. One example is the Workforce Board's CareerBridge.wa.gov site.

13. Do everything possible to ensure young adults get a high school diploma.

Ensure the Building Bridges Dropout Prevention and Retrieval Program includes strong components for reengaging youth 21 years of age and under to reconnect with education in order to obtain a high school diploma.

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