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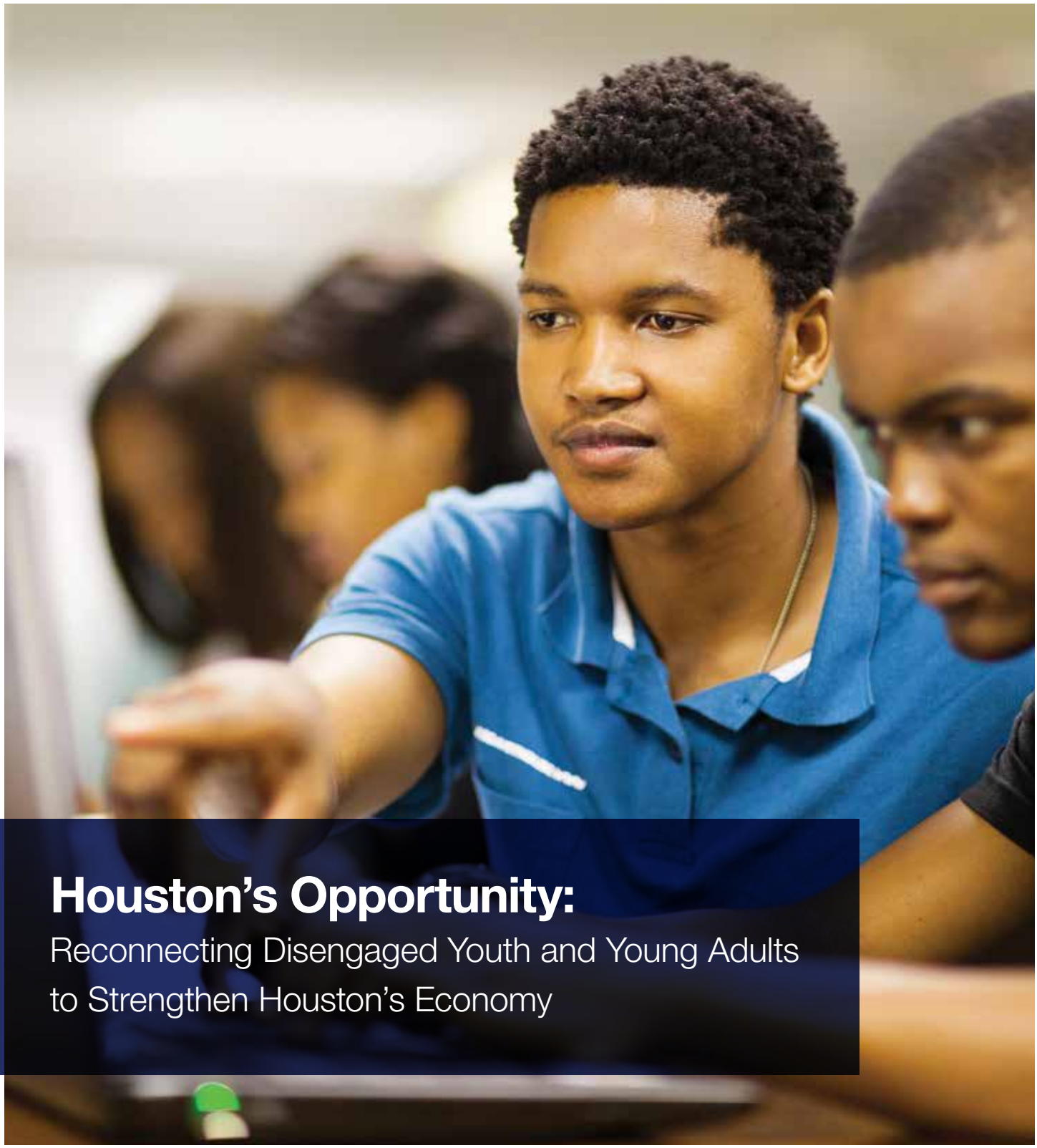

Houston's Opportunity:

Reconnecting Disengaged Youth and Young Adults to Strengthen Houston's Economy

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Executive Summary

Though the U.S. economy is gradually showing signs of rebounding, a group of young people known as Opportunity Youth and Young Adults (OYYA) continues to lag behind. Defined as young people ages 16 to 24 who neither work nor attend school, the OYYA population is growing both nationally and in the Houston area. This study aims to identify characteristics of the group and highlight the most successful practices to address its needs.

Background

An estimated 6.7 million individuals nationally and 111,000 individuals locally are categorized as OYYA. Given the obstacles they face at the individual, family and societal levels, as well as the often-cyclical nature of poverty, supporting Opportunity Youth and Young Adults in finding pathways to success can be a complex challenge. However, this is also a population that has numerous strengths that should be celebrated and even leveraged as assets. There is a critical need for communities to take steps to provide pathways to opportunity for this population.

The cost to the taxpayer for inaction is potentially vast—an estimated $30 billion in the Houston area alone. A relatively modest investment in comparison in programs that lead to credentials with value in the labor market for this population would help open doors for OYYA and go a long way toward reducing the burden.

Methodology

Using Census data as well as the data from the Kinder Houston Area Survey, a team of researchers sought to quantify, locate and highlight characteristics of the Houston-area OYYA population. Researchers were also able to use data from the Health of Houston Survey to identify health characteristics of the population and calls from the 2-1-1 system to identify service requests and needs for this population.

The research team also conducted extensive interviews with service providers, as well as young people that are currently or were formerly members of the OYYA population, to better understand challenges facing the population as well as approaches to support them.

Finally, this report was informed by the national nonprofit Jobs for the Future to highlight case studies of successful service models.

Findings

Characteristics

- The population of Houston-area Opportunity Youth and Young Adults represents 14.2 percent of young people ages 16 to 24 in the area. Nearly one in seven young adults in the Houston area is neither working nor in school.
- Despite assumptions about "inner-city youth," some of the largest numbers of OYYA in the Houston region are outside the city in areas near Angleton, Baytown, Cloverleaf, Humble and Texas City. In Houston, they are found in areas including Alief, Five Corners and Fifth Ward.
- Approximately 78 percent of this population has a high school credential or higher but is not in school or working; 22 percent do not have a high school credential. This suggests a critical need for on-ramps to postsecondary/training programs leading to credentials with value in the labor market.
- Despite difficulties securing employment, many OYYA are positive about their economic outlook. More than 1 in 4 members of the local OYYA population rate job opportunities as "poor," yet 72 percent say they expect to be better off within three or four years, indicating the aspirations of this population to succeed.

Contributing Factors

- Interviews reveal that OYYA feel a sense of disconnection from the education system. Other challenges include limited guidance and family responsibilities that may hinder their ability to pursue work or school.
- Service providers and young people stated in interviews that criminal backgrounds can be a major obstacle to securing employment. There is also a disconnect between employers and the OYYA population, who may not be aware of training opportunities and pathways to middle-skills jobs.

Recommendations

- For service providers, the first interaction they have with an OYYA is critical. Actively reaching out to young adults and building relationship with them is the key to serve this population effectively. An "Opportunity Assessment Tool" can be used to facilitate the dialogue and help identify not only the barriers facing an individual but can also help determine his or her assets and aspirations.
- "Wrap-around services" that target multiple areas of need simultaneously may help the OYYA population navigate a fragmented social services system and keep them engaged. Forming cross-sector community-based partnerships may help ensure efficiency in resource allocation and service delivery, and increase social impact.
- Alternative credentialing and education programs, outside the typical high school environment, have been proven to re-engage students who are otherwise struggling.
- Innovative training programs such as the "Earn and Learn" model with enhanced mentoring and personalized curricula may fill a critical service gap.

Table of Contents

4 Introduction
- **4** Purpose of this report
- **5** Houston's OYYA: Nearly one in seven young adults

7 Characteristics of Houston Area OYYA
- **7** Location in and around Houston
- **8** Demographics, family circumstances and household income
- **9** Education characteristics and outlook
- **9** Health and other socioeconomic correlates
- **10** Sources of concern among Houston's young people: Insight from 211 Call Data

11 Contributing Factors
- **11** Interviews & Focus Groups
- **11** Disconnection, Poverty, and Family
- **12** Educational Barriers
- **13** Workforce Barriers
- **14** Other Barriers
- **14** Service Gaps

16 Recommendations
- **16** Recommended Practices
  - **16** Opportunity Assessment Tool
  - **17** Engaging Youth
  - **18** Wrap-around Services
  - **18** Develop Community Partnerships
- **19** Applying What We Learned
  - **19** Education Pathways
  - **22** Career Pathways
- **30** Policy Implications

31 Conclusion

32 Appendix: Opportunity Assessment Tool

33 Acknowledgements

Introduction

As the country gradually recovers from the worst recession in generations, there are signs of renewed vibrancy in the U.S. economy. State unemployment claims are dropping, the national housing market is improving, corporate profits are stabilizing, and the unemployment rate is falling. Despite this progress, there's one particular category of Americans who have been left behind and are poised to suffer economically—as well as in myriad other ways—if governments, non-profits, businesses and civic leaders fail to respond appropriately to their circumstances. They are the "Opportunity Youth and Young Adults," or OYYA.

Also known as "disconnected youth," the category includes young people, ages 16 to 24, who are neither working nor attending school. In Houston, as well as in many U.S. cities, the disadvantages facing the growing OYYA population are a central social and economic concern. Data indicate that once an individual does become disconnected from school or the workforce, the effects of diminished earnings and educational deficits become increasingly difficult to address. Failure to address the needs of this group in particular may create negative conditions that can be passed onto the community and the next generation. In addition to the damages of inequality to community cohesion, when we miss out on the opportunity to integrate these young people, the economic impact is substantial with taxpayer costs reaching upwards of $13,900 per year and additional "social costs" reaching $37,450.[1] Over a lifetime, a single 16-year-old opportunity youth may cost taxpayers a lump sum of $258,240, and the total social burden is estimated at $755,900.

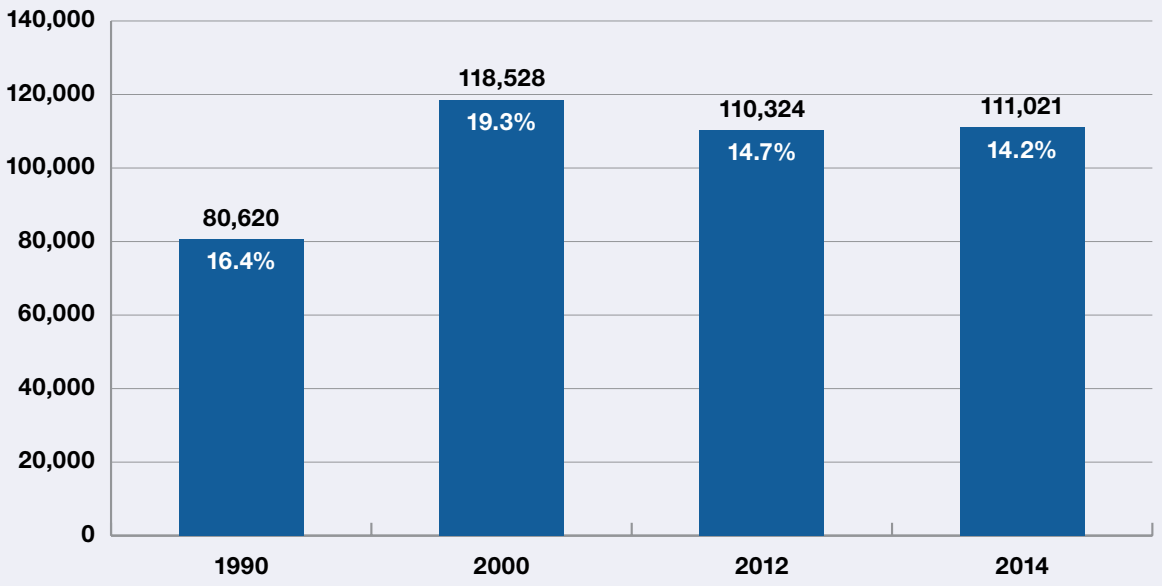
Cost-effective, targeted investments in education, workforce development and social support systems are all necessary to reduce the social and economic costs associated with this inequality. But the costs of these programs are minimal compared to the consequences of inaction. It's critical that leaders proactively find ways to create opportunities to reengage those young people. And by drawing on the untapped potential of Opportunity Youth and Young Adults, we make Houston stronger.

Purpose of this report

This report aims to advance the work already being undertaken by government agencies and non-profit organizations that are seeking ways to expand opportunities for disconnected youth nationwide. Specifically, the report seeks to quantify the size of the OYYA population in Houston, to highlight characteristics of this population and to identify areas where the population is most concentrated, using a combination of data from the U.S. Census and from local surveys.

FIGURE 1

OYYA Population in Houston Metropolitan Area (1990–2014)



Source: IPUMS, Census 1990, 2002, ACS 2008–2012, ACS 2010–2014.

The report also explores some of the most intractable obstacles facing the OYYA population and outlines some promising strategies to help them find a job or return to school. As part of this effort, researchers interviewed 22 individuals representing stakeholder organizations in education, non-profits, workforce and government agencies that serve the OYYA population, as well as 25 young adults ages 18–24 who are or have been "disconnected."

Finally, researchers consulted closely with the national non-profit Jobs for the Future to highlight the most promising service models and strategies that can meet the needs of this population in the region. This report aims to establish a solid knowledge base on the OYYA issue, to increase awareness of the obstacles facing this population and to shine a spotlight on what works in Houston and beyond. With these efforts, we provide the foundation for more productive conversation—and action—around this critical issue.

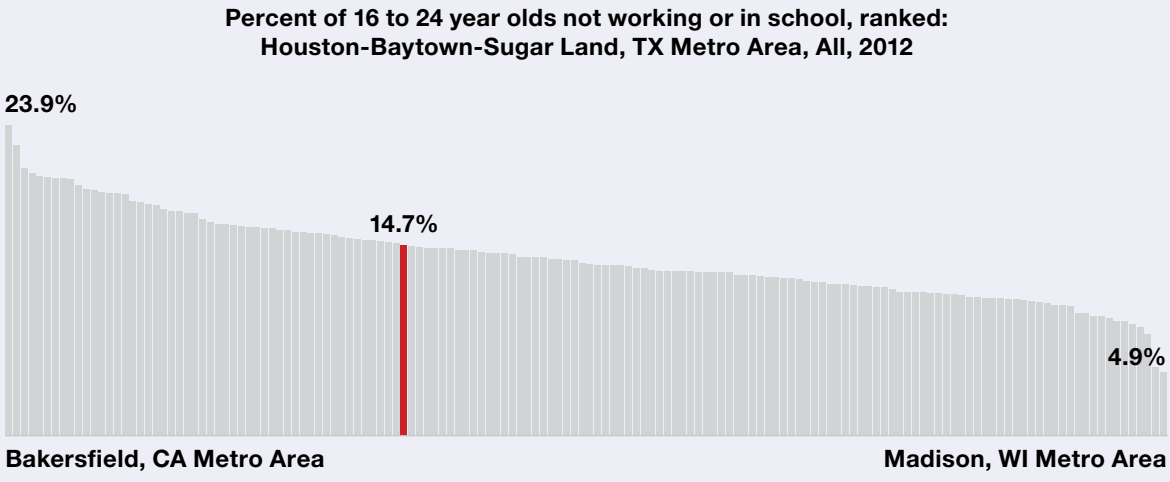
Houston's OYYA: Nearly one in seven young adults

Opportunity Youth and Young Adults are defined as individuals between the ages of 16 and 24 who are neither attending school nor working.

The OYYA population in the Houston metropolitan area is growing. Between 1990 and 2000, it increased from 80,620, or 16.4 percent of the youth population to 118,528, or 19.3 percent of the youth population. Since then, it has dipped slightly—falling to 110,324 in 2012 and rising back to 111,021 in 2014.[2] Nearly one in seven young adults in Houston region falls under the definition. Though the number of OYYA has increased from 1990 to 2014, its percentage has decreased, suggesting some success locally at addressing the challenge.

FIGURE 2

Houston OYYA Population relative to other metropolitan areas



Source: IPUMS, Policy Link/ PERE National Equity Atlas, www.nationalequityatlas.org

Nationally, 6.7 million individuals, or 17 percent of the 16- to 24-year-old population, are estimated to meet these criteria.[3] Over the last several decades, the percentage of individuals considered to be OYYA has increased from about 4 percent of young adults in 1988 to an estimate of 17 percent in 2012. Not surprisingly, this number fluctuates with economic cycles; in better economic times, the percentage declines, while in recessionary periods, the percentage increases.

Compared to other U.S. metropolitan areas, Houston ranks in the middle in terms of the relative size of its OYYA population.[4] The relative size of the OYYA population among the 10 most populous U.S. metropolitan areas ranges from 9 percent to 16 percent.

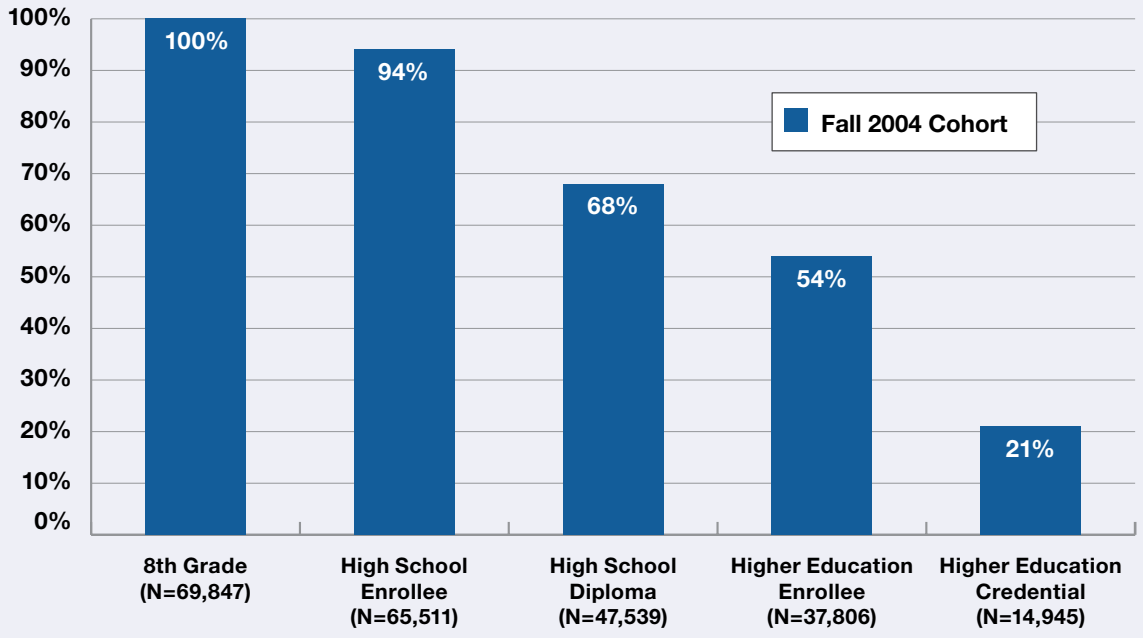
By 2020, nearly two-thirds of all American jobs will require at least some education and training beyond high school.[5] In the Houston region, there are more than 1.4 million middle-skill jobs that require technical training at the post-secondary level and offer economic mobility and middle-income wages.[6] Yet many young people do not have any post-secondary credentials or skills that meet those needs.

A cohort study of the 69,847 public school students who started 8th grade in 2004 in the Houston region, as defined by the Texas Education Agency, shows 54 percent of students enrolled in a post-secondary education institution for a two- or four-year degree. Only 14,945, or 21 percent, completed a post-secondary certificate or degree program in Texas.[7]

The economic potential of an OYYA cohort is very large. Over the full lifetime of a cohort of 110,000 OYYA in the Houston region, the aggregate taxpayer burden amounts to $28.4 billion in 2011 dollars, or $30.2 billion in present value terms. The aggregate social burden is estimated at $88.3 billion in 2016 dollars. The success of this population is critical for the health of Houston's economic future and the well-being of all Houstonians.

FIGURE 3

Leaks in the Educational Pipeline: 8th grade cohort progression over 11 years in Houston



Source: Data for the FY 2004 8th grader cohort. Data from Texas Education Agency and Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

Characteristics of Houston Area OYYA

Before policymakers and service providers can consider effective ways of serving the Opportunity Youth and Young Adult population, they need a full understanding of the characteristics of this population and the challenges they face.

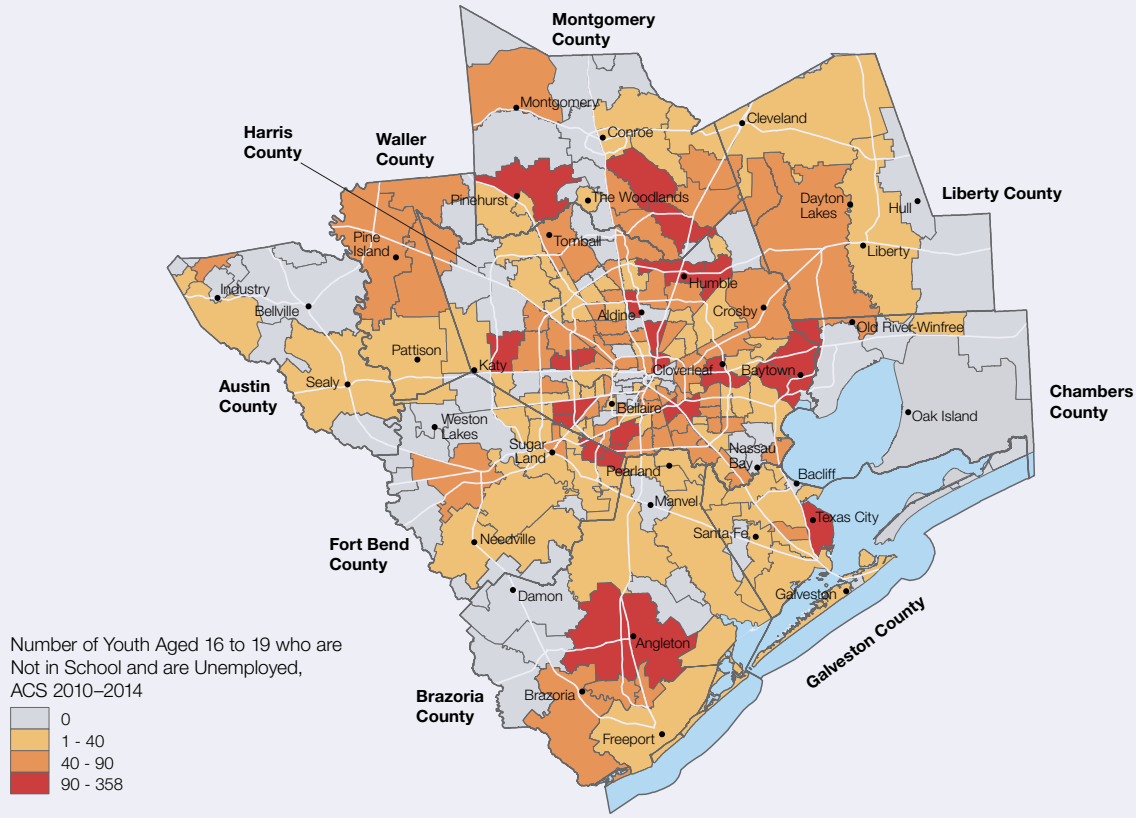
Location in and around Houston

Providing effective services first requires knowing where the largest numbers of disconnected young people reside. We find that OYYA live throughout the Houston metro area, but the population is particularly sizable in several specific areas. Despite pervasive assumptions regarding "inner-city youth," some of the largest numbers of OYYA are found outside of the center of the city, beyond the Loop 610 boundary.

In particular, OYYA are most likely to be found in the areas near Angleton, Baytown, Cloverleaf, Humble and Texas City. They also reside in large numbers in the outskirts of the city, particularly in parts of southwest Houston such as Alief and Five Corners (see Figure 4). However, there is one

FIGURE 4

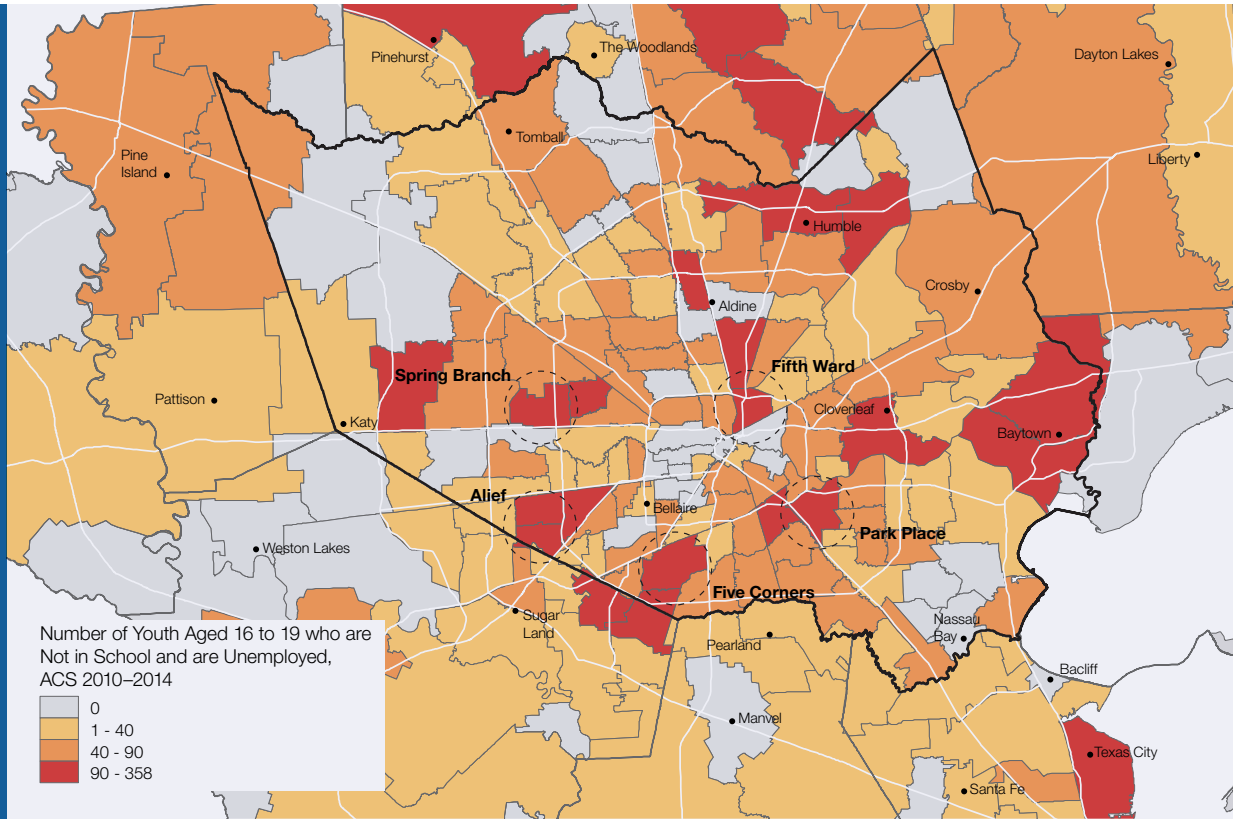
Number of youth aged 16 to 19 who are not in school and are unemployed in Houston metropolitan area, by ZIP code (2010–2014)



Source: ACS 2010–2014.

FIGURE 5

Number of OYYA aged 16 to 19 who are not in school and are unemployed in Harris County, by ZIP Code (2010–2014)



Source: ACS 2010–2014.

notable Inner Loop community with a sizable OYYA population: the Fifth Ward, located just northeast of downtown Houston. Programs aiming to serve this population may thus be of greatest benefit in the highlighted areas of the map, and they should consider offering their services in multiple locations both inside and outside of the central city.[8]

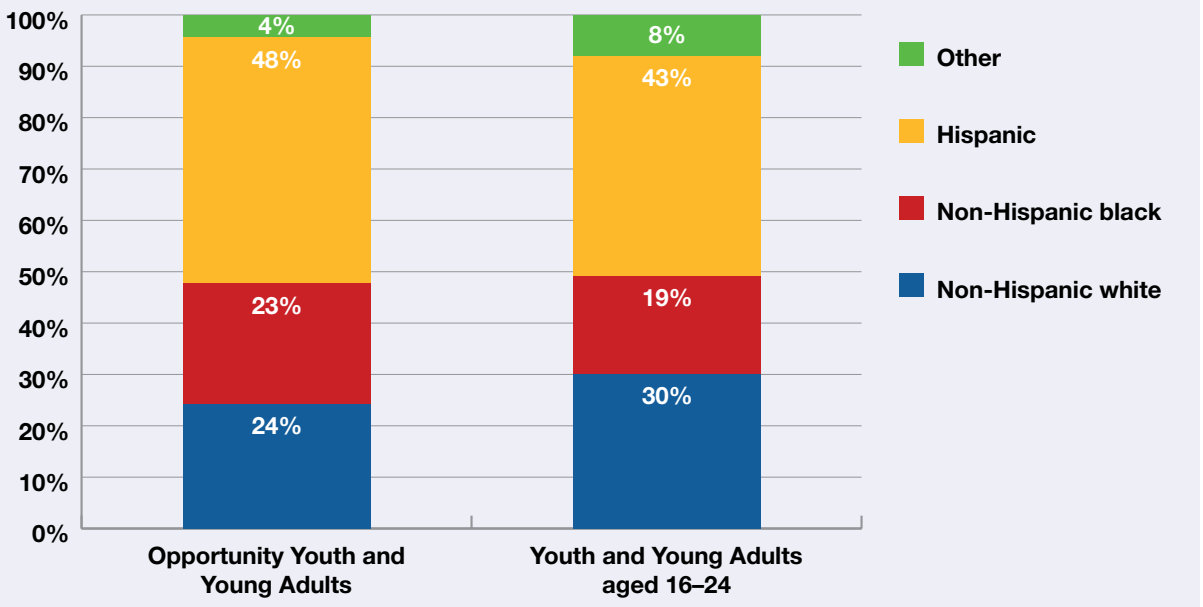
Demographics, family circumstances and household income

The map above refers only to the youngest OYYA, those ages 16 to 19. According to ACS 2010–2014 five-year estimates, approximately 73 percent of the OYYA are between the ages of 20 and 24. However, the patterns are fairly consistent when considering 20- to 24-year-olds.[9] More than half (54 percent) of the population is female. OYYA in Houston are most likely to be Hispanic, representing almost half of the OYYA population (48 percent). African-Americans are also over-represented in this population.

Data from the Kinder Houston Area Survey (KHAS)—an annual survey of adults residing in the Houston area, also help shed light on the Opportunity Youth population.[10] For

FIGURE 6

Racial composition of Opportunity Youth and Young Adults in Houston Metro Area (2010–2014)



Source: ACS 2010–2014.

the purposes of this study, researchers focused on survey respondents who live in Harris County and participated in the surveys conducted over the 12 years from 2005 to 2016.

According to KHAS data, a much larger proportion of Houston's OYYA population is married or in a domestic partnership, compared to their non-OYYA peers in Harris County. Thirty-eight percent of OYYA are currently married—more than three times the rate of non-OYYA young adults in Houston. Similarly, nearly half of the OYYA population lives in a household with a child present, while 84 percent of non-OYYA young adults live in households *without* children.

Being disconnected is both a consequence and cause of poverty. Compared to their peers, OYYA are more likely to live in households with an annual income below $25,000 (55 percent compared to 32 percent). While unsurprising, this result emphasizes the need to consider the economic reality of this population when designing and implementing programs aimed to serve them.

It is worth noting that among OYYA who are married or have a domestic partner, 91 percent have a partner who is working full- or part-time. It is unclear from the available data what proportion of this segment of the OYYA population is actually in need of work, especially when young children are at home, but their partners provide a valuable connection to this group of people.

Education characteristics and outlook

By definition, OYYA are more likely than their non-OYYA peers to have lower levels of educational attainment, as well as lower rates of college attendance and completion. However, it's worth underlining the extent of this disparity. More than half of the non-OYYA population has post-secondary education, but this is the case for only one-third of the OYYA population.

Programs aimed at reaching out to this population can build on its positive outlooks and motivation. The survey data indicate that OYYA are only slightly less optimistic about their future than their non-OYYA counterparts. Despite their circumstances, fully 72 percent of OYYA said they expected to be better off within three to four years, and just 5 percent thought their situation would get worse.

Not surprisingly, however, OYYA are more likely to say that job opportunities in Houston are "poor." This statistic reflects the OYYA's perception of the dearth of jobs available to them, and it also underscores the need to develop programs—and just as importantly, connect OYYA to programs—that can help them gain access to employment opportunities.

Health and other socioeconomic correlates

In addition to the Kinder Houston Area Survey, another source of data—the Health of Houston Survey—can provide further information about the behavioral and health characteristics of this population.[11]

TABLE 1. OYYA Characteristics

	18–24 Non-OYYA	OYYA
Relationship Status		
Never Married (%)	85.6	57.8
Married/partnership	12.1	38.1
Children		
Household with No Child (%)	84.4	49.9
Household Income* (%)		
< 25k	31.8	54.7
25k – 50k	33.3	30.9
50k – 75k	17.7	9.4
75k – 100k	7.4	1.4
100k +	9.9	3.6
Education (%)		
Less than HS	10.0	22.2
HS Degree	37.6	46.6
Some College (no A.A.)	16.1	12.0
2 or 3 years / A.A.	23.5	12.0
B.A. College +	12.9	7.3
Job Opportunities (%)		
Poor	19.5	27.5
Fair	38.1	39.0
Good	31.2	23.7
Excellent	9.7	6.8

Source: Kinder Houston Area Surveys (2005–2016), Harris County.
* Note that about one third of the respondents of each group chose not to reveal their household income.

Opportunity Youth and Young Adults in Harris County have significantly more difficulties than their non-OYYA peers in paying for day-to-day expenses. For example, OYYA were more than twice as likely as their non-OYYA peers to report difficulty buying food. Only 16 percent of non-OYYA report "sometimes," "often," or "always" having difficulty buying food, compared to 35 percent of OYYA. Additionally, 25 percent of the OYYA population "sometimes," "often," or "always" had difficulty paying their rent or mortgage, compared to 15 percent of the non-OYYA population.

These economic difficulties are reflected in negative health circumstances. In particular, there are staggering differences between the two populations' self-reported health status. While almost two-thirds of young people in the non-OYYA population self-reported their health as "excellent" or "very good," just over a quarter of the OYYA gave the same positive report.

Health and disability status are clearly linked to OYYA status. About 30 percent of this population self-reports having a disability severe enough that they are unable to work. Other

OYYA may have an undiagnosed disability that prevents them from connecting with work or school.

Compounding the health issues of this population are difficulties accessing medical care. Nearly half of the OYYA population is uninsured, compared to 36 percent of the non-OYYA population.

TABLE 2. OYYA health status and health insurance coverage

	Non-OYYA	OYYA
Self-reported health status		
Excellent	15.0	10.3
Very Good	48.5	18.3
Good	23.7	54.8
Fair	12.6	13.1
Poor	0.3	3.5
Health insurance coverage, all cases		
Not Insured	36.4	47.4
Private insurance	45.8	23.2
Public insurance	17.8	29.4

Source: Health of Houston Survey 2010.

Sources of concern among Houston's young people: Insight from 211 Call Data

Finally, we identify some of the primary needs of Opportunity Youth and Young Adults by examining patterns in 211 calls made in the Houston region. Across the country 211 is a free and confidential phone service used by individuals seeking quick and reliable information about how to access health and human services 24 hours per day. Trained help line specialists blend understanding and expertise to provide information and referrals drawn from a comprehensive database of social services in multiple languages.[12]

The most frequent category of the calls were inquiries regarding food stamps/SNAP. This was true across each of the nine counties in the Houston metropolitan area. However, Houston's young people are also calling to inquire about health issues, childcare, housing, and utility payment assistance. Far fewer calls were made regarding General Educational Development (GED) instruction and job assistance, although the frequency of this type of call did increase with the age of the caller.

TABLE 3. Top Ten Services Requested by 16 to 24 Year Olds when they make 2-1-1 calls in 2015: 9-County Houston Metro area

Food Stamps/SNAP	8,534
Rent Payment Assistance	7,302
Medicaid Applications	6,361
Electric Service Payment Assistance	3,809
Food Pantries	2,538
Child Care Expense Assistance	2,110
Food Stamps/SNAP, Medicaid Applications	1,888
Homeless Shelters	1,785
Housing Authorities	1,630
Community Clinics	1,879

Source: Data provided by United Way of Greater Houston.[13]

Interestingly, requests for assistance were fairly consistent across the 12 months of the year with one exception: March. Generally, 6 to 9 percent of a year's calls were made in any individual month, but March represented 16 percent of the year's calls. The reasons for this are unclear and may warrant more study, but it may be a signal that March represents a particularly important time of year to focus on delivering services to this population.

Contributing Factors

Fundamentally, the mismatch between the needs of disconnected youth, and the resources available to help them, contributes to perpetuating the Opportunity Youth and Young Adults population. It is also important to remember the sometimes-cyclical nature of these young people's circumstances. Whether as a cause, effect, or both, the critical factors that shape the experiences of the OYYA population occur at the individual, family and societal levels. Each is interconnected, and effective interventions will be needed at all three levels.

Interviews & Focus Groups

As a way to begin framing conversations around effective interventions, and in an effort to understand the challenges facing OYYA, the research team interviewed young adults who are or have been categorized as disconnected. The interviews took the form of three separate focus groups with a total of 25 young adults ages 18 to 24. The young people met at least one of the following criteria: 1) currently not enrolled in school or job training, 2) unemployed, 3) history of school disenrollment/dropout, and 4) history of unemployment. The focus groups examined topics such as their feelings about education and workforce opportunities, as well as strategies they believed would improve their chances for success.

Separately, researchers conducted 22 interviews with personnel from organizations that serve OYYA. They came from sectors such as K-12 education, secondary education, nonprofit, workforce development and government. Each interview focused on attitudes and opinions about the challenges of serving the OY population, as well as strategies they believed could successfully engage OYYA.

The conversations with both the young adults and the service organizations revealed major themes that will be discussed in-depth: *1) disconnection, poverty and family; 2) educational barriers; 3) workforce barriers; 4) other barriers.*

Disconnection, Poverty, and Family

While addressing disconnected youth represents a specific challenge, the circumstances that cause and contribute to this challenge are broad. Much of the disconnection from educational and workforce opportunities is the result of poverty. Its effect on families, finances and opportunities cannot be understated. Indeed, several stakeholders noted the cyclical, generational nature of poverty. Poverty is a topic that is complex, multi-faceted and can profoundly affect the ability to lift oneself out of those circumstances.

Stakeholders criticized what they called a "one-size-fits-all" approach to education that discounts the many disparate needs facing young people. Indeed, one stakeholder noted that many students come to school with significant needs—financial, health, behavioral, etc.—yet often find a lack of support in their

schools, the logical place to seek coordination of services. "We have those programs, and we have these agencies. However, who on campus is going to help manage them and make sure the kids get invested with them?" one stakeholder said.

OYYA themselves expressed a similar sense of disconnection from the school system, indicating they were eager to learn but often felt isolated. One female participant said she didn't know how to read until the ninth grade and didn't believe there were any adults at the school who were aware of this. Other young adults said they felt the school system was disorganized and lacking in both structure and opportunity for meaningful comprehension. One student said he simply dropped out because he "got bored," and there wasn't an adult at the school he felt comfortable to talk to about his personal problems.

Finally, both stakeholders and young adults believed that disconnected youth suffer from a lack of motivation and low self-confidence that's a direct result of stressful home lives, insufficient finances, detachment from school and neighborhood challenges. One stakeholder said that with so many challenges facing a young person *outside* of school, it's naïve to think that teachers alone can close the gap. Another suggested not only do these circumstances stress students; they also stress teachers and may contribute to teacher burnout. "The teachers are done with it," one stakeholder said. "They're tired of it. It's like it's a two-way street."

Young people also expressed frustration at seeing their older peers struggling with debt and financial hurdles as a result of being unable to secure employment, even after attending college. "You're in high school and you're saying, 'What's the point of this?'" one young adult said. "I do that and I'm only going to be worse off than I am now."

> "We have those programs, and we have these agencies; however, who on campus is going to help manage them and make sure the kids get invested with them?"

Across the country, OYYA are more likely than their peers to have a parent who has not completed high school, and they are more likely to have a parent who is not currently working. This suggests that the disconnections from work and school may be generational, consistent with a large body of academic research indicating that children who grow up in poverty suffer disproportionately from poor educational, economic and health outcomes later in life.

It is important to consider the family responsibilities of OYYA, since they may be charged with caring for their own children, siblings, parents or other family members. About 17 percent of those in the OYYA population reported that they could not work due to childrearing responsibilities, while another 13 percent cited their role in providing care to other family members[14]. One focus group conducted in 2015 with Houston Community College's GED and Adult Basic Education (ABE) students and teachers found three major reasons for quitting school. Besides the problems in the high school setting, such as the way most of the "free" GED classes are structured—not enough electronics, too long a winter, spring and summer break, etc., the other two reasons are family responsibility and time constraints/work responsibilities. Having financial security would have helped most students stay in school (Jean Kegler, 2015).

Additional individual factors contributing to disconnection include substance abuse, incarceration, criminal activity, or having a criminal record and other forms of institutionalization. The extent to which these conditions are present among OYYA is not clear, but they merit consideration in any intervention.

Educational Barriers

Stakeholders and young adults agreed that education needs to be both relevant and applicable to students' current and future lives; both expressed a belief that this is not happening today. As mentioned before, the term "one-size-fits-all" was repeated often. "'Why am I learning the Pythagorean Theorem, and how is that relevant to what I want to be able to do?'" one stakeholder said, echoing what she often hears from other young adults. "Because those are valid questions that I'm not even well-versed to answer." Instead, she suggested, more attention should be given to workforce skills that would more directly benefit young adults.

Young adults similarly expressed skepticism that the content they were tasked with learning in school had real-world applicability. "Some things are unnecessary … in the curriculum, which makes people (think) 'I don't need this, I can do this on my own, so why do I need to come to school to do this?'" one young woman said.

Similarly, there was a belief that there is very limited guidance for students as they prepare for post-secondary education such as community college. Some said when guidance is provided, it is too late. One stakeholder described the region's community college system as "byzantine" and so difficult to navigate that students—if they have any hope for success—would literally need an adult by their side as they went through the process of applying for admission, seeking financial aid and registering for classes. Another stakeholder noted that many students lack parents with the ability to help them navigate the college application process. "You really just want guidance in life," one young man said.

Almost all the young people wholeheartedly agreed that standardized testing, along with its effects on curriculum and instruction, posed a barrier. Stakeholders also echoed

that belief, saying it was a "missed opportunity" that high school teachers must teach a curriculum aligned with the state's standardized tests, as opposed to career readiness skills that may be far more germane.

Finally, students emphasized a sense of disengagement from school based on their inability to form relationships with school staff. "There's no structure. There's no focus. There's no learning. Nobody's comprehending," one young woman said.

> "There's no structure. There's no focus. There's no learning. Nobody's comprehending."

Workforce Barriers

Stakeholders and OYYA both said there is a lack of connection between young adults and vocational opportunities, even though those careers may afford the young adults the best chance to support themselves. "Mom and dad or whoever's at the house … are either thinking, 'You have got to get a four-year degree or you just got to go find something else,'" one stakeholder said. "They don't want to hear about petrochemical or construction." In other cases, a young adult—as well as his or her family—simply doesn't know about the types of middle-skills jobs that exist. "What do you want to be?" one stakeholder asked. "They don't know what they want to be because they don't know what the possibilities are." It is critical to involve all parties, including parents, counselors, employers and career coordinators to make young people aware of the opportunities in trade, vocational and middle-skill fields.

Criminal background checks, age requirements and even an employer's own biases can also pose barriers to employment. One young woman said that many employers automatically dismiss applicants with criminal histories, regardless of the charge. One young man recalled being denied a job due to his criminal background, even though the potential employer wasn't aware of the exact nature of the criminal charge. "They really don't ask why you got in trouble," he said. Another young adult said he too was frequently denied employment due to his criminal background. "I filled out so many applications, and I almost got hired," he said. "The only thing (is) the background check. I don't understand. I'm not a bad kid, but you all judge me off my background." Stakeholders advocate for an approach in which employers

look at criminal convictions in a wider context. It is equally important that young adults with criminal records receive more guidance to be primed for the right job search in the right context.

Some stakeholders said employers fail to proactively reach out to OYYA, even if they would be a good fit for their organization. OYYA, meanwhile, are often unaware of employment and training opportunities. "'Just come here and we'll see if we can get you a job,' or 'it's not our job to find the best match for you,'" one stakeholder said, recalling the mindset of many employers. "It has to be more proactive than that." Added another stakeholder, "I think that there is a fairly strong disconnect between the business community looking for middle-skill workers, and the workers that could do this that are right here."

Several stakeholders also noted other more personal barriers to job access, whether it's a lack of access to an automobile or transit, homelessness or inability to secure childcare. Even something that may seem minor, like producing the identification most employers require prior to employment, can be a hurdle. "To get a job, you need an ID, and to get an ID, you need your original birth certificate and Social Security (card)," one stakeholder said. "To get them, you need two billing addresses. The majority of the kids don't have this information."

Finally, some stakeholders suggested outright that discrimination is responsible for some young adults' inability to secure jobs. "One of the questions that some employers would ask (is), 'Are these kids that ride the bus?'" recalled one government worker. "I was always like, 'What does that mean?'"

> "I filled out so many applications, and I almost got hired. The only thing (is) the background check. I don't understand. I'm not a bad kid, but you all judge me off my background."

Other Barriers

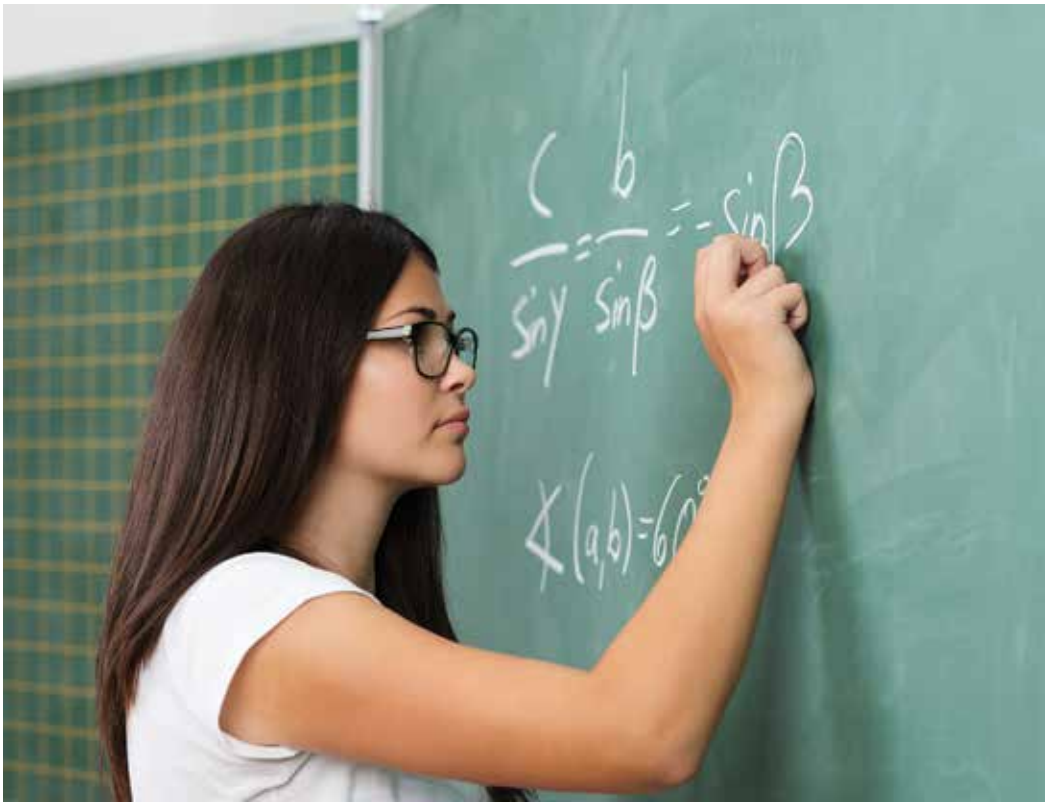
Research has also suggested that communities should consider how local systems affect youths' and young adults' ability to transition out of OYYA status. Limited connectivity among service providers is a primary concern. Researchers (as well as stakeholders interviewed for this report) identify a pattern of service providers who fail to communicate effectively with each other and are often unaware of the services offered by similar organizations, even though they serve similar (or in some cases the very same) populations. In many cases, OYYA may be unaware of resources that exist to serve them. That paper also highlights the need to ensure that pathways between the education system and the labor force are able to meet the needs of this population.

At a societal or systems level, barriers to work or school engagement also include a lack of transportation and childcare options. In some areas, there may be a total lack of these services; in other cases, they may available but unaffordable. Researchers also point to a youth criminal justice system that focuses primarily on discipline rather than rehabilitation as a contributor to the growth of OYYA populations.

Service Gaps

The first step to addressing these barriers is to talk directly to OYYA to identify their needs. It is critical that there be continual conversations between governments, service providers and OYYA.

Stakeholders articulated their organizations' own shortcomings with regard to outreach, as well as a failure to make OYYA aware of their services. Stakeholders and OYYA alike said stakeholders must do a better job reaching young adults via social media, mass media and on-the-ground in at-risk neighborhoods if they want to be effective. Similarly,



Similarly, stakeholders described the challenge of childcare and providing for a young family. One stakeholder explained that students with low-paying jobs are often unable to pursue educational opportunities, since doing so would mean working less, and thus earning less money to support their family. Another stakeholder described the school system's inflexibility in accommodating students who have work or familial obligations. She recalled a young woman who dropped out of school but agreed to come back, only to discover that it would be difficult—if not impossible—to do so, since the district didn't offer evening, weekend or online classes outside of her working hours.

stakeholders acknowledged that they have to do more to share data among themselves in order to develop effective programs. They also said they should do more to track the success rates of various intervention techniques.

There is also a need for greater access to several types of "critical" services including mental health, transportation, affordable daycare, record expungement and housing assistance services, stakeholders said. Failure to meet a young adult's needs in any one of these areas can make enrollment in educational programs, as well as employment, particularly difficult. "If you are hungry and you don't have any clothing and you have nowhere to stay every night, there's no point of me talking to you about going to school or 'What are your goals in life,'" one stakeholder said, arguing that people's most immediate needs will become their immediate priorities.

Others spoke of the hurdles facing young adults who don't have access to reliable transportation. One service provider cited an employer who indicated that he can't hire employees who do not have access to a reliable vehicle, since they need to travel to many different job sites. One service provider called METRO Houston "not the best fit." Another said while the transit system is relatively reliable, it simply takes too long to connect people to jobs. "I had one lady who—it took her two hours to get to work one way," one stakeholder said. "So, four hours a day she was riding the bus … So yeah, that can get discouraging really fast and, you know, to be seen as not worth it." Still another stakeholder wondered whether some sort of relationship could be formed with the rideshare service as an alternative to reliance on METRO.

Another service provider summed up this challenge by acknowledging that the term "Opportunity Youth," used by some organizations, may be a misnomer in itself, since the group is really young adults who often have major responsibilities. She suggested that thinking of the population as "youth" may be doing them a disservice. "Some of them, again, have been parents for eight years already," the stakeholder said. "(They say), 'You keep calling me a youth. You keep calling me a kid. Again, I'm 23 years old. I've got a 4-year old daughter, and I am working at the plant.'"

Finally, one stakeholder touted the need for "responsive employer" approaches that recognize the fact that some OYYA haven't had adequate exposure to typical workplaces and may have trouble understanding expectations—but can also quickly learn. She called for more employers to give second-chances to disconnected young adults. "'I know that if I give you another chance, you are going to be able to be exposed to the behaviors around you, and you're going to learn by what you're seeing and by what you're doing,'" one stakeholder said, describing the attitude she wanted to see among more bosses.

> "If you are hungry and you don't have any clothing and you have nowhere to stay every night, there's no point of me talking to you about going to school or 'what are your goals in life?'"

Recommendations

It's imperative for those seeking to serve the OYYA population to understand that the group is not a monolith. Different categories of young people exist under the Opportunity Youth and Young Adults banner, and their needs are very different. Any programs serving the OYYA population need to be flexible and responsive. Service providers emphasized the importance of understanding the unique circumstances that often surround their clients' daily lives, and immediately providing them with services when requested.

Programs designed to help this population also need to have good youth engagement plans. Efficiency in the service delivery systems is also important. Shared vision and mission, as well as shared information, may facilitate effective allocation of limited resources.

Based on these fundamental principles and on the assessment of the strengths and barriers of the region's OYYA population, the research team developed the following strategies and recommendations to address the service gaps.

Recommended Practices

In this section, we emphasize several themes that are critical to serving this population, regardless of the specific sector of the organization. Successful programs were selected based on their local and national reputations and in most cases a solid record of beating the odds for the OYYA population.

Opportunity Assessment Tool

The first challenge for service providers is to find the Opportunity Youth and Young Adults. Almost all the service providers the research team interviewed mentioned that the first initial contact with the youth and youth adults is their most critical interaction. Many programs approach this first meeting with the intention of determining whether the young person is a proper fit for the organization's programs. We argue that the appropriate approach for this particular population would be for service providers to get to know their OYYA population and understand their needs, rather than simply complete an assessment form.

Existing screening instruments are frequently termed as barrier assessment tools. Focus on potential deficits of the individual being screened may prevent them from successfully re-entering the education system or moving into the workforce. However, feedback from service providers indicates that any intake tool should assess not just barriers but also an individual's assets and aspirations.

In the **Appendix**, we list core concepts and some sample questions for consideration. We stress that even though we are recommending a structured tool, the aim of this initial interaction, regardless of the type of service provided, is to understand the position of the youth/young adult and to develop a connection. As a result, personnel should start by introducing her/himself and slowly move into asking specific questions, starting with the more positive assets before transitioning into the barriers.

An additional tool that may be considered is MyBestBets, which is a unique application that aids in identifying the primary interests and aspirations of a person.

MyBestBets is a unique web and mobile application that supports low-income young adults by guiding them to the best choices when it comes to post-secondary education and training pathways—choices that will lead to high-demand and high-growth careers. Developed by Jobs for the Future and YouthBuild USA, it is in use in schools and programs serving Opportunity Youth and Young Adults in communities across the country. Through MyBestBets, young people identify their interests, talents and aspirations; utilize sophisticated and visually dynamic data sets to investigate potential careers; organize and track progress towards their post-secondary goals; stay connected to staff and career coaches that care; develop skills and social capital through real-world experiences and take ownership of and actively shape their own best-bet education and career pathway.

Finally, good tools are not sufficient on their own. Service providers also emphasized the need for proper training in screening protocols, including ongoing training and evaluation to ensure the right personnel are conducting these critical and potentially sensitive interviews. These interviews, perhaps more appropriately referred to as conversations, may be the first interaction that a youth has with an agency, which makes it imperative that the person conducting the interview establishes a real connection with the young person, and that it be open and positive, with significant listening done by the interviewer. This connection may be the only reason the youth decides to come back.

Engaging Youth

Research shows that OYYA have informed views of what works best for them and their peers. When designing and evaluating programs for OYYA, organizations and service providers should consider youth as an important stakeholder and engage them at earlier stages. For example, leading organizations may consider creating a youth council to provide input to the program design and assist in disseminating information among their peers. Another way to engage youth, especially those who are able to overcome different barriers and are on the pathways to education, is to hire youth leaders for coaching and advocacy needs.

Youth Empowerment Solutions (YES) is an evidence-based curriculum used by My Brother's Keeper Houston staff to train their youth participants.[15] The YES program was originally designed by Dr. Marc Zimmerman and his team at University of Michigan's Prevention Research Center to provide youth with opportunities for meaningful involvement in creating community change, to enhance neighborhood organizations' ability to engage youth in their activities, and to change the social and physical environment to reduce and prevent violence (especially youth violence). It also trains local adult volunteers to assist and mentor participants as they complete their community projects. Participants receive a certificate of completion at the end of the program.

The program contents have been utilized in several community efforts and have been implemented by trained staff in larger programs across the U.S. to engage youth with positive development. This model is effective among high school students, aged 14–18 years old. One evaluation found that the curriculum needed to be engaging and enjoyable for the youth with fun and interactive learning sessions that allowed time to discuss issues and concerns. It is also important that program staff be flexible with youth to promote positive youth-adult relationships. Providing sufficient time at the beginning of a session to discuss concerns, or to ask questions, allows youth time to debrief about events at their school or in their community.[16]

Wrap-around Services

The reasons for disconnection from education and employment are often many and overlapping, thus the services offered in support of this population need to reflect that reality. One approach to addressing this complexity is to offer "wrap-around" services that target multiple areas of need simultaneously. This approach helps address one of the primary barriers to reconnecting OYYA: fragmented and complex systems that are difficult to navigate, which lead to discouragement and disengagement.

It can also be conceived of as a "one-stop-shop" where someone seeking assistance with finding employment can be easily offered educational guidance, family support and resources to address immediate needs such as food, stable housing, health care, affordable daycare and financial literacy. Addressing one need successfully may require several interventions simultaneously. The Houston Alumni & Youth Center provides a good example of this approach.

The Houston Alumni & Youth (HAY) Center, founded in 2005, is a one-stop center serving more than 1,000 current and former foster youth each year with free resources and supportive services to allow them to meet their transition goals. Since 2005, the HAY Center has grown from a contract dependent program to one that is youth-informed and mission-based. Their services include life skills training, transition case management, aftercare room and board, educational and vocational counseling, summer jobs program, sustainable workforce program, housing options and links to mental health resources.

In addition to building out new and existing service approaches to be more comprehensive, local organizations may be able to collaborate through referrals or build a co-located, multiple-organization center that draws on the strengths of existing groups.

Develop Community Partnerships

Regardless of which Opportunity Youth segment is targeted, cross-sector community-based partnerships—coordinated efforts to address a social problem—are a well-documented means of having a significant impact. A collaborative approach relates to our recommendation to further develop a wrap-around service approach, but we provide more detail on the structure of that approach here.

Successful community partnerships have several things in common. They are driven by the belief that multiple sectors, systems and organizations must align their work toward a common goal. They often have a shared vision and deliberately align resource allocation to increase social impact. They create a network or platform to share information with a focus on community engagement. Effective cross-sector community-based partnerships have clear leadership and governance as well as sufficient resources. They often adopt a data-driven approach to address issues.[17] The goal is to share experiences and results, and learn from each other using common tools to improve their programs and services.

Parramore was Orlando's toughest neighborhood when Mayor Buddy Dyer took office in 2003. Fully three quarters of Parramore's children were living in poverty and almost half of neighborhood adults neither had a high school diploma nor a GED. As one of Dyer's earliest priorities, the city began allocating significant resources to address the neighborhood's housing, public safety, and quality-of-life problems through a program called "**Parramore Kidz Zone (PKZ).**" PKZ is a neighborhood-based education collaborative modeled after the well-known Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ) with many specific adaptations that work better for their community.

Rather than centering services around a particular school, PKZ focused on providing primary prevention services, such as tutoring services, to children at neighborhood-based sites. PKZ lowers requirement for kids to join the programs through grassroots marketing, subsidized fees, simple paperwork, and transportation to sites. The program also expanded the capacity of participating community-based organizations serving Parramore children through funding, free rent and administrative support.

Scores of the FCAT, Florida's standardized test have been improved significantly, both in reading and math, since the program took place.

A White House-commissioned report summarized the four key factors that have made PKZ successful: building on other successful models and deliberately customizing toward what works for the community; strong and effective leadership and governance; use of data to set the agenda and improve over time; and community members as partners and producers of impact.

To ensure efficiency in resource allocation and service delivery, the stakeholders may consider developing an interagency system to track the progress of program applicants, which could also assist with the assessment of how effective different programs are for supporting Houston's young people.

"Crossover" or "dual-status" youth are those youth who have been part of both the juvenile justice system and the child welfare system. Because the data from the two systems were housed separately between local and state agencies, it was a struggle for non-profit organizations in the field to know for sure what, exactly, a youth was up against when they first encountered him and to determine whether a young person was in either or both categories.

Houston reVision, a nonprofit focusing on reintegrating gang-affected and adjudicated youth, is spearheading an effort to share data between agencies and non-profits working with juveniles. Various confidentiality regulations make data-sharing a complicated process. But an inter-agency data sharing system is already in place after years of effort. Harris County's effort, which brings together data from juvenile justice, protective services and mental healthcare providers, began more than a decade ago after a report found that there were gaps between the systems. It took years to produce a tangible result because the county realized it needed new state legislation to enable that kind of data sharing.

In 2011, the county was finally able to get a bill passed that would allow for the implementation of the Harris County Juvenile Information System several years later in 2015. The hope was that agencies could avoid duplications, like repeating assessments or intake interviews to get a sense of an individual's situation each time a child came to a new agency. This sort of system will enable the service providers to have a complete picture and a better understanding of a youth's life, in order to coordinate case planning in a more effective way.[18]

Applying What We Learned

The challenges faced by the OYYA population are varied, and individuals will engage with service providers at different stages.[19] To further detail how best to support those among the Opportunity Youth and Young Adults, we focus on two key stages: those focusing on reconnecting with education, and those primarily in need of employment connections. Descriptions of some of the most promising programs were provided to the research team by Jobs for the Future.

Education Pathways

About one quarter of OYYA population does not have a high school diploma or equivalent. For these individuals, it may be necessary to develop alternative credentialing programs outside the traditional education system. This may include General Education Diploma (GED),[20] Adult Basic Education (ABE) and specialized charter schools. They also need more counseling services and high school graduation support.

Encourage re-enrollment in high school

To design programs that target youth to re-enroll in high school, it is very important to focus on the development of community ties. Existing programs can be expanded to develop stronger connections with the communities. Below we highlight some examples.

Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Community Walks

Pharr-San Juan-Alamo (PSJA) Independent School District operates in one of the nation's most impoverished regions along the Texas-Mexico border. Of the 32,000 students enrolled at PSJA ISD, 88 percent are economically disadvantaged, 99 percent are Hispanic and 41 percent have limited English proficiency.

Led by superintendent Dr. Daniel P. King, the district initiated a community-based effort to recover dropouts and non-completers in 2007 called **Countdown to Zero**, which aimed to graduate every student who enrolled in the district. A centerpiece of the district's strategy, which has dramatically increased the graduation rate over the last eight years, is the annual Community Walk. The Walk is a coordinated recruitment event that sends district staff and community volunteers to the homes of young people who have dropped out of school. During the walk, district and school staff and community members encourage youth to persevere and graduate, and they register the youth for the education program that is most appropriate for them.

Since 2007, PSJA have graduated more than 1,200 former dropouts ages 18 to 26 and connected them to college. It has become a state and national model.

A number of communities across the country have launched "**Reengagement Centers**" that serve as one-stop reentry centers for youth who have dropped out of school. Often operated in a partnership between a school district, city government, and community-based organizations, the centers offer a range of services such as individual academic assessments, opportunities to explore different education options and referrals to appropriate schools or other credential programs. Some of the strongest reengagement centers are in Boston, Chicago and Los Angeles.

Boston is unique in launching a second reengagement center specifically for youth who have graduated from high school but are disconnected from school and work. Its Connection Center is the central location where OYYA participate in outreach, intake, assessment and referral services. The Connection Center staff assesses youth over multiple one-on-one appointments; identifies resources, barriers, employment interests and personal preferences; and recommends a personalized plan for each youth. They then facilitate a supported "hand-off" to the next step in pursuit of an occupational training or post-secondary pathway.

Provide alternative options for high school credentials for young adults

As with other populations facing educational obstacles, OYYA stand to benefit from alternative-credentialing programs. Innovative secondary and post-secondary education programs may provide additional opportunities to re-engage youth in education. Community colleges and community organizations can play an important role in re-engaging this population by providing alternative programs for remediation and career-oriented instruction that fit their needs.

Here are some examples of what works.

Located in the Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Independent School District, Texas, **the College, Career, and Technology Academy** is a dropout recovery school where young people are able to re-enroll and learn as college students rather than high school dropouts. CCTA's mission is to ensure that all students meet requirements for graduation and are prepared to succeed in institutions of higher education and/or the career of their choice. CCTA serves students who are off track or who have dropped out and are close to high school graduation. Through a partnership with South Texas College, CCTA students have customized college courses available to them. As soon as they pass the English Language Arts state test, they take a compressed college-level, college-credit-bearing Career and Technical Education course called a "mini-mester." Developed by the college for CCTA students, mini-mester courses can be held on the STC campus or on site at CCTA.

The students also enroll in South Texas College's College Success class to develop additional learning strategies and transition knowledge and skills they need to succeed in post-secondary education.

Located in five California counties, and headquartered in Oakland, **First Place for Youth** works to prevent poverty and homelessness among the growing population of transition-age foster youth. The organizational mission is to help these young people obtain safe, affordable apartments and receive educational and employment support in moving towards self-sufficiency and responsible adulthood.

Through the Career Pathway Initiative, First Place has added a focused set of services to help launch transition-age foster youth to post-secondary programs of study leading to a family-sustaining career. Building on its strong case manager approach, First Place trains Education and Employment Specialists to assess the readiness and specific career pathway interests of the young people, to help them explore a range of careers and develop their job readiness skills, and to support them in developing the necessary prerequisite skills and personal attributes to perform well at a post-secondary level and complete an industry-recognized certificate program. Potential learning partners (community colleges, adult schools, technical trade schools) are vetted for their "fit" with the First Place program model.

Supported through the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), **the Accelerate TEXAS (ATX)** is an initiative aimed to meet the growing demand for a highly-skilled workforce by addressing the educational needs of the under-skilled or under-employed population in the state. In particular, the program provides structured support for English language learners, basic skills instruction, and/or GED preparation. The Adult Education Program at Houston Community College (HCC), Lone Star College System and San Jacinto College were among the early adopters of ATX model. At HCC, adult learners who enroll in credit-bearing ATX programs receive reduced tuition at a rate of approximately $20 per semester credit hour as opposed to the full rate of over $67 per semester credit hour.[21] Known as ACCELERATE Lone Star, the program at Lone Star College System focused on adult learners without a high school diploma, and allows students to earn workforce certification such as automotive technician, machining technology and welding in one of their Career and Technical Education Certification programs while building core skills in math, reading and language. San Jacinto College's program offers career pathways in Business Management and Craft Trades. Beginning 2015, Lee College, Galveston College, and Brazosport College have received grants through THECB to offer similar ATX programs.

Between January 2011 and May 2015, over 5,200 adult education students have been served across 21 colleges offering integrated education and workforce training through ATX programs.

Prevention and College Counseling

One of the biggest lessons learned is that prevention can have the greatest impact. Educators need to adjust the school context to support students through a wrap-around approach. The education-to -economic opportunity pipeline for Opportunity Youth and Young Adults, a framework developed by Jobs for the Future, underscores the need for schools and community organizations to emphasize effective early intervention, prevention and community-based case management and counseling programs to keep youth en-

FIGURE 7

Education to Economic Opportunity Pipeline

Source: Framework developed by Jobs for the Future

gaged in education. It is also important for schools to work with social sectors to increase capacity and the quality of out-of-school programs in targeted neighborhoods and provide wrap-around services to positively impact youth. In addition, students need more mentors and earlier college counseling both at school and out of school.

Alief ISD is a school district located in southwest Houston. The district has a highly transient population in the service area. More than half of the students are Hispanic and nearly 30 percent are African American. Eighty percent of the students are from economically disadvantaged family, and more than 70 percent are categorized as "at-risk."[22] The relative mobility of the community results in gaps in education and hinders meaningful connections being made at school and in the neighborhood.

Over the past six years, the Alief ISD attendance team has made several changes to how school attendance is handled to address chronic absenteeism and dropout issues. In the past, the district hired former police officers, called truancy officers, to visit families and inform them of the law and the consequence of missing school. Most intervention efforts had been focused on only grades 9–12.

One potential problem with this model is that sending former police officers to the community may alienate people. The former superintendent, thus, dedicated a position in the central office to oversee the attendance team and develop new strategies to combat non-attendance. The attendance team supervisor requested that the position of "Truancy Officer" be phased out through attrition, and that two new positions be created; Attendance Counselor and Community Liaison, which were to be staffed by educators with school counselling backgrounds. This approach sought to understand the causes of non-attendance and work alongside families and communities rather than simply enforce the truancy law. In addition, the attendance team placed more emphasis on intervention at elementary and intermediate campuses.

From this process, the team has discovered several root causes for student disengagement, including family responsibilities, financial instability, teen pregnancy, lack of support from parents and teachers, etc. The team has been working closely with a number of community organizations and agencies, such as Legacy Community Health, Houston Food Bank and Children's Memorial Hermann Hospital, and providing referral services to families and youth who have special needs. The district also partnered with Communities In Schools of Houston to provide integrated support to address both campus wide needs as well as the unique needs of individual students. So far, they have recovered 25 to 40 percent of dropouts and students who were chronically absent, according to an estimate from a team member.

cafécollege is a one-stop clearinghouse of information, resources and experts offering free guidance to Houstonians preparing for, applying to and enrolling in a higher education institution of their choice, and completing their college and career plans.

The new resource center inside the Carnegie Neighborhood Library borrows a model that's been successful in San Antonio, and it is one of two statewide pilot programs for the Texas College Access Network. The Houston version is supported by the City of Houston with management oversight by the Houston Public Library in partnership with Project GRAD. It is dedicated to providing college access and career information, resources and opportunities to the citizens of Houston. Students, parents and others interested in going to college or starting a new career can use cafécollege as a resource.

This model may work particularly well with youth who are motivated but need help and support to guide them through the system. It creates an additional pathway to reconnect youth in the community to education.

Career Pathways

Three quarters of Opportunity Youth and Young Adults in Houston have a high school diploma or some post-secondary education. However, these individuals cannot find the appropriate opportunities in the job market. In general, this group is facing a "skills gap," in which their skills and education do not align with the needs of potential employers.

According to an analysis conducted by the Greater Houston Partnership, the seven critical sectors of the local economy—*Commercial and Industrial Construction; Oil and Gas (Upstream and Midstream); Petrochemical; Utilities; Ports & Maritime; Advanced Manufacturing (except Petrochemical) and Healthcare*—provide fairly good employment opportunities for Opportunity Youth and Young Adults who are able to attain a high school credential. In addition, jobs in those sectors have growth potential for workers who obtain post-secondary education.

Youth and young adults would benefit from the extensive recent efforts (such as UpSkill Houston) to promote high-demand, middle-skill positions such as production supervisors, welders, electricians, construction managers and instrumentation and electronic technician. These efforts include developing internships, on-the-job-training and accelerated programs to give individuals the skills employers want. It also includes promoting "soft skills" (e.g. communication, leadership, organization) needed to advance in any career, as well as job-related technical skills.

To build high-quality and successful pathways to employment, we need a collective effort that is driven by employers but is also responsive to the needs of the OYYA population.

Mentoring should be a key component of the program. One stakeholder described young people as facing a "dire need" for connections in their lives and emphasized the need for role models and mentors. "Oftentimes, they've not felt connected to anyone in their lives, and so it's hard to trust," she said. "They never allowed themselves to trust another adult, because the adults in their lives have failed them." Indeed, stakeholders say mentorship doesn't necessarily have to be hands on or even in-person. "Even if it's online and emails back and forth … the communication has to be there," said one stakeholder in the education field.

> "They never allowed themselves to trust another adult, because the adults in their lives have failed them."

Develop innovative training program such as Earn and Learn programs with mentorship and personalized curricula

Developing new training programs with mentorship and personalized curricula would fill a critical service gap. Several stakeholders touted "Earn and Learn" programs as having the greatest potential to generate sustainable career pathways for OYYA while addressing the unique circumstances associated with this population.

A successful Earn and Learn model provides youth with the opportunity to learn on the job, develop work-relevant soft skills and professional skills and receive compensation for their work. It can come in the form of internships or apprenticeships, and offers structured training and life coaching on or off site. Employers may leverage existing systems and partner with community agencies to develop training programs that adapt to the needs of this population.

By offering training and an income-earning opportunity simultaneously, these types of programs allow youth to develop skills while making career ladders more apparent. "To me, that's the best model—an actual apprentice program—because those … individuals that go through are working for the company from the day that they go there, so they're getting a check," one stakeholder said. Indeed, the value of a first paycheck can often help young adults appreciate the importance of work and understand how their earnings can increase as they develop their skills.

There are some limitations to this approach, despite its potential benefits. One major barrier to implementing these programs relates to the concerns of potential employers. Employers expressed concerns about hiring and providing training for OYYA because they lack foundational skills, and/or may have a bad attitude or work ethic. Employers are also constrained by youth's failure to pass a drug test or disclose a criminal record. Yet, for certain occupations and industries, employers cannot ignore the applicant's

criminal records. Stakeholders advocate for an approach in which employers look at criminal convictions in a wider context. "It's an extreme barrier especially if you had a youthful indiscretion, and now you are 24-years-old, and you are trying to figure (it) out," one stakeholder said. "(You can say) 'I was 17 at the time and I am a changed person.' You can give your whole story. But it really doesn't matter at that point."

Enhanced mentoring can address some of these reservations—as one stakeholder said, it's important for employers to understand their role as mentors as they train young people. However, other measures are needed to address criminal records. One stakeholder said, "Diversion programs should be considered especially for youth offenders with relatively minor offenses." This alternative may help first-time youth offenders avoid criminal charges and a criminal record, and could be built into the initial stages as youth apply for new Earn and Learn programs.

Social enterprises, such as Homeboy Industries in Los Angeles with a $14 million annual budget, Revive Café in New Orleans, Café Momentum in Dallas and FareStart in Seattle, apply commercial strategies and adopt Earn and Learn model to maximize improvements of the well-being of opportunity youth. The culinary industry might be the easiest portal, providing young people with job experience, work record and opportunities to develop skills along the way.

Although the Earn and Learn models are still in earlier stages, more employers are adopting this kind of approach nationwide. There are several examples below.

The Tulane Earn and Learn Career Pathways Program (Earn and Learn) in New Orleans offers post-secondary and career readiness training to Opportunity Youth and Young Adults through year-long apprenticeships on Tulane University's campus and supplementary academic instruction at local education institutions. Apprentices are placed in employment that aligns with one of two high-growth career pathways and receive technical skills training in these positions. In addition to dual enrollment at local institutions, apprentices also receive social-emotional learning and life coaching through a custom-developed curriculum called Apprentice Academy. Through Apprentice Academy, the "Learn" components of the program are reinforced by exposure to college-level seminar classes led by Bard Early College instructors and access to academic tutoring and resources. Apprentices meet weekly with college and career coaches to continuously develop individual success plans that are informed by work and academic performance, and long- and short-term goals.

For the past decade, **Youth Uprising** has offered integrated and comprehensive programming to thousands of East Oakland's most at-risk youth ages 13–24. Their Career Pathways Initiative, with its focus on older youth and young adults, recruits young people primarily from two of Youth Uprising's core programs: Achieve, a summer and afterschool program offering high school youth jobs and professional development (employability and life skills) as well as academic advising; and Excel, an intensive year-long fellowship that stabilizes older youth (18–24) and bridges them to educational and work experiences.

Youth participate in a bridge to credentials and career programming that prepares them to succeed in technical certification programs at the post-secondary level. The coursework, offered in conjunction with an online university partner, strengthens their math and English skills and allows them to earn first-year college credits. Young people in the bridge program also take part in career coaching and personal transformation activities. Once young people complete the bridge, they have the option of entering two technical training programs leading to a first credential: Emergency Medical Technician offered on-site in collaboration with Bay Area EMT and Medical Assisting at Merritt College. As part of Youth Uprising, participants have access to a variety of support services, including on-site clinics offering health/wellness services and referrals to other agencies.

Building on a 20-year history helping young adults gain the job training and life skills to support themselves and their families, **Taller San Jose** has developed a career on-ramp of academic and technical training and professional experience that launches cohorts of 18–28 year olds on a pathway to post-secondary credential and livable wage careers in the health care industry.

The program begins with 20 intensive weeks of hands-on skill development, which includes a focus on college and career readiness, professionalism, financial stability, and personal development, overseen by support service specialists. Students spend the first 16 weeks taking classes and workshops and meeting with their support specialists; when they have fulfilled the requirements, they enter four-week externships in partnering medical clinics. By meeting benchmarks along the way, participants can earn a $1,600 stipend. Support specialists continue to work with them for two years by providing case management, including: individual meetings, support groups, job coaching, retention and progression services and educational support to complete the credentials and gain the work experience they need to launch their careers.

A well-known and highly-regarded youth media production company, **Youth Radio** has established a pathway to careers in digital media, arts and design for 18–24 year old OYYA. In the first three months, young people take a critical first step on the way to a post-secondary credential and a good job by completing a technology skills course (e.g. PhotoShop) for college credit, offered at Youth Radio. During that period they also participate in professional development, which includes a combination of academic support, college and career readiness, emotional regulation and ability to navigate through the education system.

Participants then enter three-month, 25 hour/week internships with industry partners in the related fields of marketing/promotion, public media and technology. Students earn modest stipends during the whole six-month period. By the end of the internship, the goal is for the young people to have the momentum to complete stackable certificates towards an associate's degree. The last phase of the program is a year of follow-up services, including: continuing use of the Youth Radio facility and studios, academic and career advising, and case management to help them gain access to other needed services.

Per Scholas is an experienced workforce training provider that specializes in information technology (IT) sector training for low-income New Yorkers. In partnership with The Door's Bronx Youth Center, Per Scholas piloted TechBridge, a collaborative bridge program that provides a more supported pathway to Per Scholas and the IT industry for out-of-school, out-of-work young adults who do not initially meet academic prerequisites for admission.

The Disconnected Young Adult Demo Project run by **Workforce Solutions** is a program that prepares young adults for and supports them in jobs in high-demand sectors in Houston. Because the needs of young adults are diverse, the program adopts a coherent model that provides multiple on-ramps to employment and reentry opportunities and provides credentials, skill development as well as work record and experience for young adults. The goal is to test the model and make sure it is replicable and could support sustainable services in the area.

The program targets the manufacturing, construction, and logistics industries based on the needs and accessibility of entry-level to middle-skills pathways for the next three years in Houston area. Construction and manufacturing also tend to offer more opportunities to youth with criminal records.

Feedback is critical to the success of the demo project. The team works closely with employers to understand their needs and concerns and develop a good relationship. For example, team building is very important to these three industries. Participants need to be acculturated to the working environment. The program provides peer mentors and life coaching on site as well as counseling sessions with case managers. Customized recruiting increases success in job placements and positive experiences encourage employers, such as Building Specialties Inc., to provide more opportunities.

To overcome the transportation barriers, the program partnered with Uber to provide participants transportation to the work site. One unexpected positive effect is that through this process, the participants and the Uber drivers establish a supportive relationship. Uber drivers advise participants to get to work on time. Participants appreciate the program's effort to solve the transportation problem, but they also expressed concerns about the negative perceptions of their co-workers on the worksite, as using Uber for transportation is considered a privilege.

In addition, the program partners with United Way THRIVE program to offer their participants access to wrap-around supports. It also creates customized training funds and partners with Harris County Education Department to provide adult education and literacy (AEL) training and integrated skill training, focusing on credit-to-completion and credential attainment.

Often, the biggest challenge to such programs is that the experiences and lessons don't always click for the young adults until after they're completed. It can be hard to shift some participants' mindsets, especially those who have had traumatic experiences and often think of such programs, "This is too good to be true."

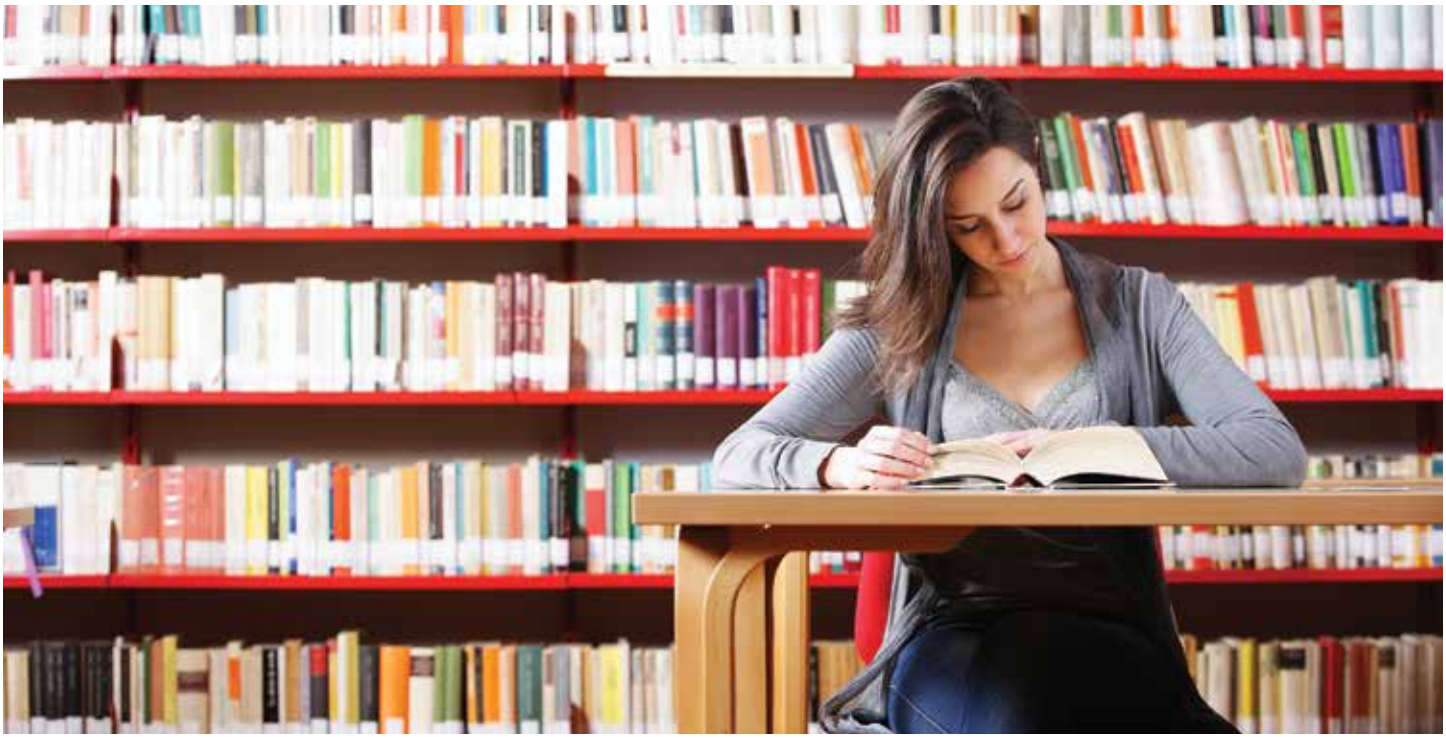
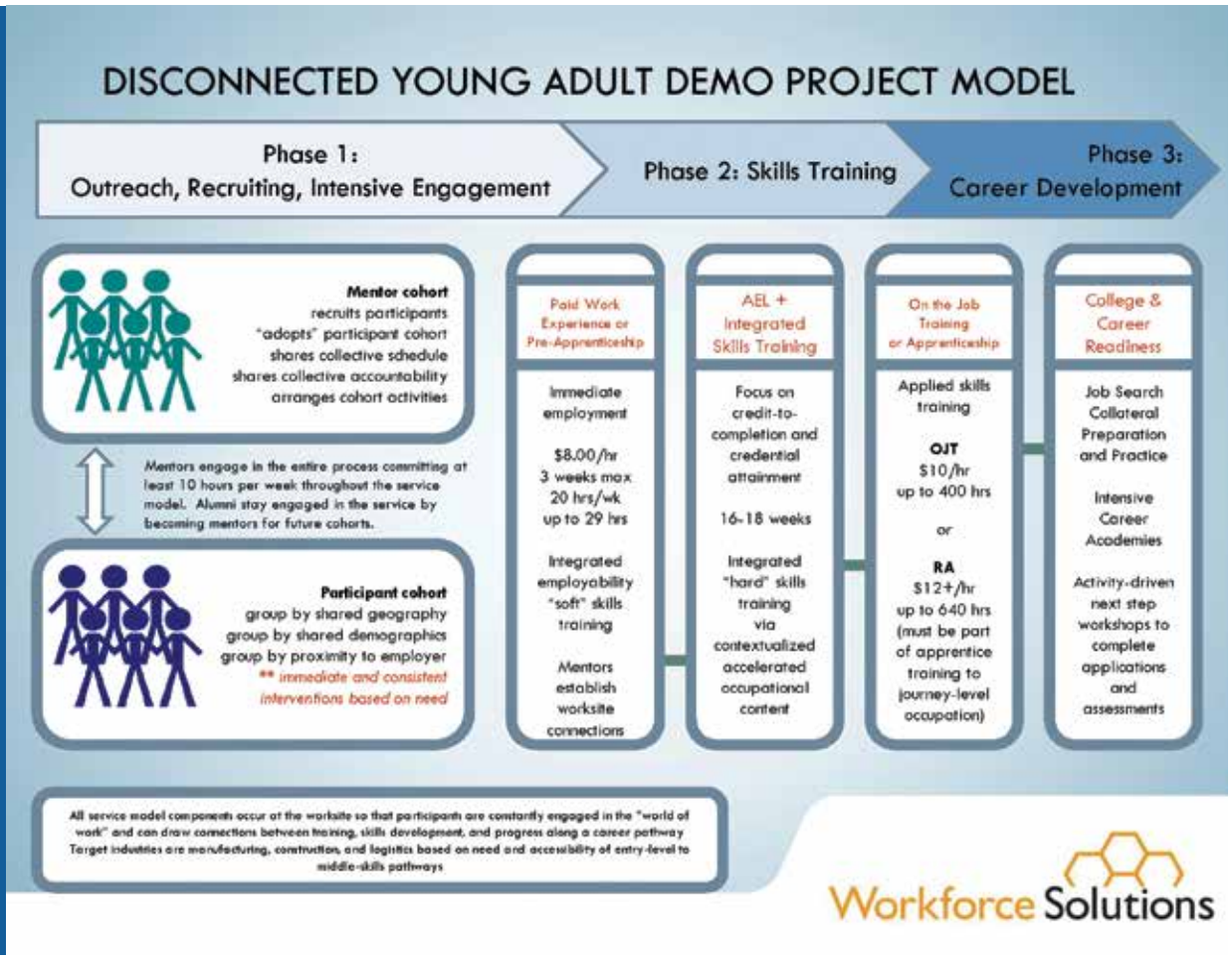


FIGURE 8

Disconnected Young Adult Demo Project Model



YouthBuild Houston is an SER—Jobs for Progress program funded through the Department of Labor; it serves out-of-school youth, ages 17–24, by providing them with GED instruction, on-the-job construction skills training, and the soft skills required to maximize employment opportunities. The program operates 40-hours a week, 5 days a week and is run very similar to a full-time job. During training, their members earn multiple work-ready certifications, including NCCER Core, OSHA-10, CPR/First Aid and Warehousing/Forklift. Also, during the on-the-job training component of the program, students work on homes in partnership with Rebuilding Together Houston, providing home repair services for low-income, elderly veterans and widows of veterans. The overall goal of the program is to prepare youth with the skills needed to attain a job and/or successfully transition into post-secondary education.

Recently, the program successfully finished the first grant cycle and was able to serve 70 students. Each of the participants must have one or more of the following barriers: be below 80 percent of the poverty level, be homeless or migrant, be a foster youth, have a disability, be a previous offender, or be the child of an incarcerated parent. Each of the participants strives for success through overwhelming obstacles; 85 percent of them test below the eighth grade level upon entry, and many have been homeless or living without parental support for years, while others struggle with substance abuse, and many have children of their own. SERs have been able to provide 96 percent of the participants with a national certification, 78 percent have made a literacy gain of at least one functioning level (ex. third to sixth grade), and 67 percent have successfully completed their GED this year while many more are still working toward earning their credential.

This Way Ahead (TWA) is a national initiative funded and supported by Gap Foundation, Inc., to help youth and young adults from underserved communities land their first job. The program provides paid store internship opportunities at Gap, Banana Republic and Old Navy stores. The internship resembles the experience of a store Sales Associate in terms of roles and responsibilities. Interested youth attend a series of job training workshops hosted by SER, where they learn work-ready skills, such as how to conduct a job search, build a resume, apply for a job and interview successfully. The workshops also target soft skills, such as communications, problem solving, interpersonal skills, decision-making, time management and relationship-building. As participants are attending workshops, they have an opportunity to interview at the store for a position within the program. Selected interns receive ongoing support from a SER Career Coach and Gap, Inc. management within the hosting store for the duration of the internship. After the internship, participants have the opportunity to receive ongoing employment at the hosting store. To date, 62 percent of the interns have been offered permanent employment through this program.

Have workforce intermediaries involved in the program design

The success of Earn and Learn programs depends heavily on the involvement of workforce intermediaries, especially during the process of program design. Workforce intermediaries work closely with agencies, training institutions and programs and employers, and help connect employers with talents and identify which industries are most promising for training and job opportunities for OYYA.

We might consider using the existing workforce system to serve as a point of connection for this age group of young adults. In addition, the system also has resources to accomplish some of the recommendations we listed here.

The Gulf Coast Workforce Board and its operating affiliate **Workforce Solutions** are the public workforce system in the 13-county Houston-Galveston region. They help employers meet human resource needs and individuals build careers.

The Workforce Board is business-led and community focused, with members representing private sector business, education, organized labor, and community-based organizations. With participation from the region's chief local elected officials, the Workforce Board sets the strategic direction for the regional workforce system and guides the area's workforce agenda focusing on four key results: competitive employers, an educated workforce, more and better jobs, and higher incomes.

The board contracts for the operations of its affiliate Workforce Solutions, which directly delivers service to employers and individuals. Their work is funded by state and federal taxes, which are redirected back into the region for employment and job training. Services are offered at no cost to the customer.

During 2015, its employer service helped more than 26,000 employers find candidates to fill about 200,000 openings; provide outplacement service for more than 4,000 workers; and get advice on human recourses issues and concerns. The 25 local offices and seven adult education providers have been approached by more than 380,000 individuals and helped about 237,000 go to work. More than 22,000 individuals improved their basic education skills, and more than 31,000 used $134 million in financial aid to get a job, keep a job or get a better job.

The entire system worked to provide individuals, students, parents, teachers and counselors with up-to-date and useful information on the good jobs of the future—focusing on the high-skill, high-growth jobs that provide opportunities for growth and good wages.

UpSkill Houston is a comprehensive, industry-led initiative developed by the Greater Houston Partnership in 2014 to address the skills mismatch in middle-skill jobs in the region. The goal is to develop a demand-driven career pathways system by increasing the skills of under-utilized local talents, especially the unemployed and underemployed, low-skill youth and adults, to meet the requirements of those middle-skill positions in high-demand, high-growth industries that typically require more than a high school education but less than a four-year college degree. The program targets seven sectors, namely Commercial and Industrial Construction; Oil and Gas (Upstream and Midstream); Petrochemical; Utilities; Ports & Maritime; Advanced Manufacturing (except Petrochemical) and Healthcare.

Following a model recommended in the "Collective Impact for Opportunity Youth" report[23], produced by a mission-driven consulting firm focusing on large-scale social change, the Partnership convened a two-day Collective Impact Workshop to help employers, educators and community leaders better plan, organize and collaborate in order to address Houston's workforce challenge. Among the six strategies they identified, two may have specific impacts for the Opportunity Youth and Young Adult population.

The first applicable strategy is to encourage the adoption of common curricula to provide training to address weaknesses in basic skills and employability. In particular, soft skills training could be embedded in the curricula in PK-12 education and community colleges, as well as other workforce training programs. It will teach students and adults what is expected of them as employees. The second pertinent strategy is to forge relationships with education, workforce, economic development and community-based organizations to open the lines of communication and better connect employers with talent.

Policy Implications

In recent years, advocates have pushed for policy changes at the state level that they believe could help improve the opportunities available to disconnected young people. These policy reforms are primarily in the areas of education. So far, several of those reforms are showing promise.

Under Texas House Bill 5, passed in 2013, students must select a diploma endorsement prior to entering high school. Like a major, the endorsement includes specific course requirements around that subject area. Experts see it as a way to add structure and a potential career focus on the time spent in high school. But some worry whether the new requirements might further perpetuate inequalities, whether it be through some students being pushed into less competitive endorsements that don't provide as clear a path to college or through unequal access to the courses required under a given endorsement depending on the student's campus.

Additionally, the state legislature recently decriminalized truancy. Historically, truancy was a major barrier, since truancy charges as a juvenile could result in contempt charges as an adult if they were ignored, one stakeholder said. "What you had was a lot of kids getting arrested for something they did when they were 14-years-old," one stakeholder said. Though the charges no longer carry a criminal penalty for students, their parents can still face a misdemeanor charge, and students and parents can both be fined.

Service providers cited government definitions of homelessness, which often restrict support for young adults who move around to the homes of different family members and friends. They aren't sleeping in shelters, but they don't have the stability of a true home either. "In order to qualify for housing programs, a lot of times you have to be what they call truly homeless … you have to be sleeping on the street," one stakeholder said. Another warned that while it may be easy for a young adult to find housing with family and friends today—they're young, social and resilient—it will become more difficult as they age. Similarly, other stakeholders expressed concerns that federal funding for programs that would aid Opportunity Youth and Young Adults is not necessarily being targeted to the geographic areas where they're poised to have the greatest impact.

Experts say age-related policies and testing requirements can be an obstacle. For example, the age requirement for securing an apprenticeship or receiving a certification is usually 18, providing a barrier for some who fall just below that threshold but seek to advance themselves professionally. Funding allocations at the federal level for 18–24 year olds also create hurdles for organizations serving 16–17 year olds. These policies may be counterintuitive, given evidence that young adults' likelihood of success often increases with earlier interventions.

In 2015, Texas announced the new higher education plan, 60x30TX, which sets a goal of having 60 percent of all 25- to 34-year-old Texans to hold a post-secondary certificate or degree by 2030. To reach the 60x30 goal, post-secondary institutions need to partner with public K-12 school districts to develop a plan focusing on students currently ages 11 to 20. A cross-agency and cross-sector state leadership team is needed to guide the work, particularly for post-secondary programs looking to focus more on marketable skills. Texas may consider creating a similar model to Illinois' Pathways Initiative, which is designed to create a public-private education infrastructure that can advance college and career readiness by coordinating statewide networks of P-20 education partners, business, labor, and other organizations based on career clusters; where P-20 stands for Pre-K through graduate school and/or the workforce.

It may also be worth considering adding an indicator to the college and career readiness programs in the K-12 accountability system to encourage more work-based learning, or establishing policies to encourage employers to partner with education institutions to provide internship programs aligned with a student's major. Successful programs such as the Youth Opportunity Program[24] and New York Youth Jobs Program[25] have helped many disadvantaged youth in Missouri and New York state.

Conclusion

Addressing the needs of the OYYA population requires a "whatever it takes" mindset and culture due to the myriad hurdles facing the population: cyclical poverty, familial obligations, health concerns, and a sense of disconnection from the education system and workforce, among other challenges.

However, this is also a population that has numerous strengths that should be celebrated and even leveraged as assets. Despite their circumstances, members of the OYYA population are optimistic that their circumstances will improve. Moreover, nearly a third of the population has some level of post-high school education.

Recognizing those strengths, it's critical that communities take steps to help the population navigate the complex network of service providers, workforce organizations, nonprofits, and government agencies that aim to serve them. Stakeholders have wondered why many youth were disconnected from services when there are so many youth-serving organizations available in the community. The research team identified the need to map resources available for the OYYA population in order to better understand the supply and demand for youth services in Houston's context and to serve them more effectively.

One way to start this process is by initiating a "community partnership" that can map and assess services available in a given areas. Through that process, organizations including educational institutions, service providers, faith-based organizations, community leaders and youth groups can learn from each other and ensure their services are coordinated.

Crucially, policies and funding designed to serve the OYYA population must be data-driven to ensure limited sources are invested wisely. Local and state agencies can leverage resources and expand services by aligning existing programs with the goals and efforts to serve OYYA population. The report identifies neighborhoods that have large numbers of disconnected youth. These communities may be appropriate targets for intervention by private donors.

This study also endorsed a comprehensive approach to job training of the OYYA population, as well as a systematic approach to training the career and college readiness staff that serve the OYYA population. Moreover, it's crucial that those serving the OYYA population make these young people aware of educational and career opportunities well before they reach even the 8th grade. In that same vein, employers can support the career development of OYYA by providing key information to stakeholders on the types of skills required to advance young adults in their respective fields and information on curriculum design and training programs. Many stakeholders note that if this information is provided later, it can become more difficult or take much longer time to guide young people on career and education pathways.

Serving this population is no easy task. It's one that requires extensive collaboration and a willingness to try new and even unconventional approaches. But given the vast numbers of disconnected young people—and the cost of inaction—the time to consider a different approach is now.

Appendix: Opportunity Assessment Tool

The objective of this section is to provide information about what may be appropriate concepts to address in a tool to help service providers better understand the unique situation of Opportunity Youth.

Core concepts (*Example items in italics*):

A. Opportunities / Assets
   a. Resiliency
      i. *I tend to bounce back quickly after hard times*
      ii. *It does not take me long to recover after a stressful event*
   b. Soft skills
      i. *I am ready to demonstrate positive attitudes and behaviors.*
      ii. *I am willing and capable to work as a team member, putting safety first.*
   c. Aspirations/life goals
      i. *How important is it to you to grow and learn new things?*
      ii. *How important is it to you to be admired by many people?*
      iii. *What kind of work would you like to do in 5 years?*
   d. Unique talents
      i. *Would you say that you are artistic?*
      ii. *Would you say that you are good at puzzles?*
   e. Hobbies (e.g. sports, dancing, art-including spray painting)
      i. *What are your favorite types of activities? (e.g. sports, dancing, art)*
   f. Situations of success
      i. *When have you been most successful in an education or employment setting? What helped make that most successful?*
      ii. *What can you teach others?*

B. Barriers / Challenges
   a. Transportation
      i. *Do you have reliable transportation?*
      ii. *Do you have a valid driver's license?*
   b. Housing
      i. *Where did you stay last night?*
   c. Food insecurity
      i. *In the last 12 months, did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money for food?*
      ii. *In the last 12 months, were you ever hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food?*
   d. Ability to pass drug/alcohol test
      i. *Can you successfully pass a drug test?*
   e. Ability to pass criminal background check
      i. *Can you successfully pass a criminal background check?*
   f. Valid identification/Social Security card/driver's license
      i. *Do you have a Social Security card?*
   g. Prior educational/work experience
      i. *How many jobs have you had in the past 12 months?*
      ii. *Do you have a diploma or GED?*
   h. Health
      i. *Physical*
         1. *Do you have problems standing or sitting for long periods of time?*
         2. *Do you have any difficulties lifting?*
         3. *Would you like to become pregnant in the next year?*
      ii. *Mental*
         1. *Has a doctor or professional ever recommended mental health services?*
         2. *Do you have any mental health or brain issues that might make it hard for you to live on your own?*
   i. Family situation
      i. *Responsibility for adult family members*
         1. *Do you have a family member in your household with special needs that makes it difficult for you to work?*
      ii. *Responsibility for children*
         1. *Do you have any children you are responsible for?*
         2. *Do you have a child that misses school frequently?*
         3. *Do you have reliable childcare assistance?*
      iii. *Domestic violence/abuse*
         1. *Have you left home because of violence between family members or to you?*
         2. *Were you abused as a child (physically, emotionally, or sexually)?*

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About the Sponsor

JPMorgan Chase & Co. knows that helping people gain the skills they need to compete in the labor market is a powerful strategy for expanding access to opportunity and promoting economic growth. Around the world, there are signs of renewed economic expansion, yet millions of aspiring workers are unemployed and an unprecedented share of the workforce is underemployed. At the same time, many employers are struggling to fill vacancies—especially for technical and skilled positions—that require more education and training than a high school diploma, but not a four-year college degree. To help address this gap, JPMorgan Chase & Co. developed New Skills at Work, a five-year, $250 million global initiative to build employer-led talent-development systems. Through New Skills at Work, JPMorgan Chase & Co. is helping to address the lack of data that business, education and policy makers need to help close the skills gap.

About the Advisors

Throughout the project, the research was guided by an Advisory Committee that consists of researchers, service providers, business supporters, government agencies and community leaders. They provided generous support to the research team to ensure that the results meet the project's objectives. They also reviewed the report and provided valuable input. We are very grateful for their suggestions and advice. Listed below are those who have helped with this research endeavor.

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Endnotes

1 Belfield, et. al., 2012. "The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth."

2 Estimates for 1990, 2000 and 2012 are cited from PolicyLink and the USC program. The estimate for 2014 is based on our analysis of American Community Survey data.

3 Belfield, et. al. 2012. "The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth."

4 This is 9 percentage points below Bakersfield, California, which has the highest proportion of Opportunity Youth of any metro in the country, but it is 10 percentage points above the metro area with the lowest Opportunity Youth population, Madison, Wisconsin.

5 Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce, 2014. "Recovery: Job Growth and Education Requirements through 2020."

6 JPMorgan Chase, 2014. "Preparing Houston to Skill Up: Addressing the skills mismatch to meet employer demand in high-growth industries."

7 National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, 2012. "A New Measure of Educational Success in Texas: Tracking the Success of 8th Graders into and through College." Note that data were not adjusted to account for certificates and degrees earned outside Texas.

8 We have focused on the youngest segment of this population due to data limitations, but this focus may also be beneficial because it is at this stage that programs can be most effective.

9 We focus on mapping the geographic location of the youngest segment of the Opportunity Youth population for two reasons. First, American Community Survey data are best suited for detailed mapping, but the available data cannot identify youth aged 20 to 24 who are not enrolled in school. Second, research suggests that programs designed to address the needs of disconnected youths, are likely to be most effective when they reach their target population at earlier ages—perhaps even before age 16—underscoring the value of directing resources toward the younger end of the OY population.

10 For 35 years, the countywide surveys have measured systematically the continuities and changes in demographic patterns, life experiences, attitudes and beliefs among successive representative samples of area residents.

11 The School of Public Health at the University of Texas conducted this survey in 2010. It was intended to provide locally relevant data to health agencies, service providers, non-profits and other community groups interested in assessing the area's health needs and developing strategies to meet them. Funded by Houston Endowment Inc., the survey reached a representative sample of the non-institutionalized population of adults and children in Harris County and was administered in English, Spanish and Vietnamese via telephone, web and mail.

12 United Way of Greater Houston also provides an online community resource directory that can be found at http://referral.unitedwayhouston.org/. Individuals can enter the ZIP code or select the city where services are needed to learn about available resources and information. The database contains contact information from 1,751 agencies with 5,333 services.

13 In 2015, 16- to 24-year-olds in the nine-county Houston metropolitan area made 59,900 calls to the service. That represents 8 percent of the total population of that age group (although the same individual may have made multiple calls).

14 Congressional Research Service report (2009).

15 To learn more about the YES curriculum, go to http://yes.sph.umich.edu/. Training is available for organizations that would like to adopt the YES program.

16 Zimmerman, M. A., Stewart, S. E., Morrel-Samuels, S., Franzen, S., & Reischl, T. M. (2011). Youth Empowerment Solutions for Peaceful Communities: combining theory and practice in a community-level violence prevention curriculum. Health Promotion Practice, 12(3), 425–439. Retrieved at http://doi.org/10.1177/1524839909357316.

17 The White House Council for Community Solutions, 2012. "Community Solutions for Opportunity Youth."

18 You can read more about this effort at http://urbanedge.blogs.rice.edu/2016/08/03/data-sharing-efforts-aim-to-improve-child-welfare-juvenile-justice-outcomes/#.V793HvkrKU1.

19 The White House Council for Community Solutions, 2012. "Community Solutions for Opportunity Youth."

20 In the past, the GED exam has been widely seen as providing a path to high school equivalency credentials for people who did not obtain a traditional high school diploma and needed a second chance. In recent years, in response to criticism and the changing workforce needs, the GED has been updated several times. The most recent change in 2014, shifting from a non-profit program to a for-profit business, has been the most controversial. More than a dozen states have either dropped the GED and switched to other alternatives, or added those alternative tests as additional options for those seeking a high school credential. In Texas, the State Board of Education voted in January 2016 to award contracts to three separate companies to provide high school equivalency assessments. The minimum passing score has also been adjusted. All these changes have made the GED less affordable and less valuable.

21 For more information about the program, go to http://www.hccs.edu/adult-education/accelerate-texas-atx/.

22 Data from the 2014–15 Texas Academic Performance Report (TAPR). It can be retrieved at https://rptsvr1.tea.texas.gov/cgi/sas/broker?_service=marykay&year4=2015&year2=15&_debug=0&single=N&title=2015+Texas+Academic+Performance+Reports&_program=perfrept.perfmast.sas&prgopt=2015%2Ftapr%2Ftapr.sas&ptype=P&level=district&search=distnum&namenum=101903.

23 Corcoran, et. al., 2012. "Collective Impact for Opportunity Youth." Report can be retrieved at https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/collective-impact-opportunity-youth20120919.pdf.

24 For more information about the program, go to https://ded.mo.gov/BCS%20Programs/BCSProgramDetails.aspx?BCSProgramID=85.

25 For more information about the program, go to http://labor.ny.gov/careerservices/youth-tax-credit.shtm.

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