

In Case You Missed It!



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Our Vision

The Joseph C. Cornwall Center strives to be:

-A key resource in the production of “usable” knowledge for the public, private, and nonprofit sector development in Newark, the northern region of New Jersey and beyond.

-A central force convening key civil society individuals and institutions as they engage in and pursue the economic, political, and cultural revitalization of Newark.

-A forceful agent for the economic and administrative coordination and cooperation of Newark and its surrounding communities.

-A national model for what a university-based center can accomplish working with regional, local, and community partners.

From the Director's Desk

Tuesday, August 6, 2013

Greetings,

Please see the attached article.

All the best

RVA

OPINION: RECLAIMING UNEMPLOYED, AT-RISK YOUTH WITH A WEB OF OPPORTUNITY

ROLAND V. ANGLIN | AUGUST 6, 2013



Public policy has already demonstrated that it can help young people in almost any circumstances reconnect to the world of work.

Hollywood could not have written a better title for a science fiction or horror blockbuster: “Worldwide, Work Disappears for Youth.”

Essentially, that is what the Economist reported in its April 27 issue in an article titled “Generation Jobless.” In many places in Europe, Africa, and Asia, unemployment for youth ages 15 to 24 hovers around 50 percent. Officially, the International Labor Organization reports that 6 percent of all 15- to 24-year-olds worldwide are unemployed, but that figure does not count those who are disconnected from work, education, or training.

The World Bank calculates that over 290 million young people, or a quarter of the world’s 15- to 24-year-old are “inactive,” meaning they have disappeared not only from the world of work but also from the paths to work. The pressing problem is that the time spent out of the labor market adds significantly to the wage penalty unemployed youth face over the course of their work lives. They simply cannot make up the work experience necessary to command increased wages over time.

In New Jersey, we have seen this movie, and, unfortunately, we continue to watch. Although general youth unemployment is a problem, the numbers reveal a major concern in communities marked by concentrated poverty. Unemployment for African-American and Latino youth often runs two times higher than other cohorts. The concern is further magnified in light of the statistics for African-American and Latino youth who leave school early without a high school diploma.

We know the prospects for school-leavers (“dropouts” seems a pejorative term) living in high-poverty areas are bleak when employment is concerned. Of course finding and maintaining stable employment is important, but the other challenges in the lives of at-risk youth -- family trauma and dislocation, limited access to healthcare (including mental-health counseling), early parenthood, and “open matters” with the justice system -- often intervene to make finding and keeping jobs impossible. These challenges are so difficult to address that public policy seems helpless in the face of unemployed youth at risk of becoming disconnected from the American mainstream.

Public policy is not helpless, however. We have programs such as Youth Corps and YouthBuild that can help youth connect to the world of work and opportunity. YouthBuild, for instance, has an enviable 30-year track record of reclaiming young people ages 16 to 24.

The core of the program sees low-income youth work full-time for 6 to 24 months, learning the full gamut of the construction trades while receiving a stipend. The participants practice what they learn by building affordable housing, often in blighted communities. This is a win for youth and communities in Newark, Paterson, Trenton, Elizabeth, Vineland, Atlantic City, and Camden, all of which have YouthBuild programs.

YouthBuild includes both an educational and a civic component. Participants’ study for their General Education Degree (GED) or high school diplomas with the added incentive of seeing what they learn directly applied in their construction training.

Leadership development, an important focus, comes through guided exercises and applied experience in which the participants are pushed to take responsibility for their lives and not let circumstances dictate their opportunities. The program practices tough love and discipline, but a core element is getting youth the type of help necessary to manage and overcome the challenges they bring to the program.

That YouthBuild is a successful, proven program that demonstrates that impact is not at issue. Nationally, for example, 75 percent of graduates are in college or employed at an average wage of \$10/hour up to seven years after program completion. In a well-regarded study of the program, researchers found evidence of reduced recidivism and improved education outcomes, as well as a positive benefit-to-cost ratio. What is at issue is that as good as the program is, it does not fall within a coherent, connected youth development framework here in the state.

In New Jersey and elsewhere in the United States, support and use of innovative programs such as YouthBuild are fragmented and not well coordinated with other systems that serve the same population. This is not a call for a Marshall Plan–like effort to solve New Jersey’s at-risk youth unemployment. Though more resources are always helpful, the greater need is for more reengineering, refocusing, and networking of the various parts of state government that affect young people and their chances to lead productive lives.

Talk to the dedicated youth development and juvenile justice program administrators, as I have; they know the agencies and programs they need to work closely with to help young people succeed. In some instances they are able to forge street-level alliances to provide a web of hope. But we cannot ask these beleaguered administrators to do everything. We owe it to the youth to put more thought into creating a system of opportunity that helps them when needed, and establishes a path to success with the community, the public, and private and nonprofit sectors all working in concert.

Increasingly, other states and localities are coming to the conclusion that they need more networked government (not bigger government) to help young people succeed. At one end of the spectrum, juvenile justice agencies are finding that they need formal discussions and relationships with child welfare agencies and practitioners as youth suffering from the effects of childhood trauma are moving from one system to the other. “Dually involved” youth, as they are sometimes called, present a challenge and an opportunity. If the duality is not addressed, precious resources are wasted in the provision of duplicative service, or problems are left to fester because systems do not collaborate and customize efforts to truly help young people in need. Alternatively, addressing the problem of system fragmentation offers an opportunity to improve government, provide better services, and possibly save money.

At the base of these emerging cross-sector networks is the recognition that agencies and their partners in the nonprofit sector have to spend time creating a map of paths to success and opportunity. This is not about one or two meetings, but rather active, facilitated exchanges, where cross-agency trust is built over time. Eventually, the hope is that data-sharing agreements that protect privacy can be enacted to encourage more effective targeted interventions. The same at-risk youth who travel through the foster care system, the Division of Youth and Family Services system, and the juvenile justice system eventually find their way to the workforce development system. Would it not be better if we could build a network with multiple and connected opportunities for our youth to succeed?

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