

Youth Opportunity: The Lessons, Legacy, and Impact on Community Practice

California Indian Manpower Consortium

In Brief:

- In 2000, the California Indian Manpower Consortium, Inc. (CIMC) was awarded a \$15.9 million Youth Opportunity Grant from the U.S. Department of Labor.
- With this grant, CIMC was able to serve almost 93 percent of all eligible youth in its “YO! target area” and had enough funding to spend more than \$10,000 per participant.
- Since opening its doors, YO! CIMC has engaged more than 1,400 young people in array of workforce and education programs.
- YO! CIMC received a separate add-on grant, Rewarding Youth Achievement (RYA), for additional youth development activities. 296 youth participated in these activities.
- 20 of the 23 YO! CIMC sites developed Youth Advisory Councils which held monthly/bi-monthly meetings.
- Approximately 95% of YO! CIMC staff had a minimum of 2 years training. (40% had 3+ years.)
- YO! CIMC served 726 youth ages 14-16 who actively participated in programs to prepare for post-secondary education and careers.

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The Youth Opportunity Story: Changing the Landscape For Youth In High Poverty Communities

In May 2000, the United States Department of Labor created the Youth Opportunity Grant Program (YO) to establish a national demonstration initiative to overhaul the youth delivery system that originated in the Workforce Investment Act of 1988. During the first year, the Department awarded YO grants to 36 high-poverty urban, rural, and Native American communities. These communities, which were among the most economically distressed communities in the nation, were also experiencing high dropout rates, high youth unemployment rates, and greater incidences of juvenile crime, violence, and gang activity.

Communities used the Youth Opportunity Grants – ranging from \$3.1 to \$43.8 million over five years – to establish comprehensive approaches to youth service delivery and create:

- Comprehensive youth service systems, which offered skills training, basic education, work experience, committed involvement of caring adults and developmental opportunities aimed at assisting young people in the successful transition to adulthood and responsible citizenship;
- Youth Opportunity Community Centers to serve as safe and accessible places where youth could develop and improve educational and employment skills as well as receive long-term supportive services; and
- Partnerships among public, private and nonprofit organizations to leverage resources and expand outcomes.

YO! CIMC has changed the mindset of many youth who believed they would not succeed.

The YOG Program allowed me to focus on my studies instead of on financial stress. I am now a pediatric resident at the University of Washington in Seattle.

YO! CIMC Participant

At the heart of the YO story are the tens of thousands of youth who lives have been changed as a result of access to the opportunities, tools and resources they needed to prepare for successful futures.

Simply put, YO changed lives.

The Lessons: YO! CIMC

The YO! CIMC Project was a collaborative effort of 23 Indian Tribes and CIMC aimed at providing comprehensive development activities and support for youth, ages 14 - 21, using a unique cultural approach. CIMC used the federal grant to ensure that every site had:

- Trained Youth Development Workers;
- Youth Advisory Councils;
- Community Advisory Boards; and
- A plan for sustaining youth activities after the federal funding cycle ended.

CIMC used a combination of approaches to establish educational, occupational, and other services for youth and provided them with skills training that involved hands-on experience. For example, at one site, CIMC participants worked with tribal elders to map the local cemetery with the names of the deceased (the cemeteries on this reservation did not have headstones) as a leadership development exercise. Participants worked with local experts to create a map of the cemetery using computer software.

The YO! CIMC experience afforded disadvantaged youth (many of whom attended schools in rural and isolated areas, which lacked qualified teachers or adequate curricula and serious health, social, and economic disparities) the opportunity to gain educational and occupational skills through Internships and Subsidized Employment, Life Skills Training, Job Readiness Training, and College SAT Prep programs.

The CIMC Legacy

Many of the 36 communities that received federal funding through the YO program have continued to provide comprehensive youth services and supports based on the YO model even after the grant period ended. In California, CIMC has been able to leverage new funding in order to continue serving Native American youth, helping them reconnect with school and work. Today, YO! CIMC participants continue to reap the benefits of year-round youth programs and receive assistance with youth employment opportunities through local agencies that have partnered with CIMC field offices.

Because of this Program (YOG), it helped me to be prepared for the 'real world'.

YO! CIMC Participant

Addressing the Facts

While high dropout rates are a problem across all racial and ethnic groups in the U.S., they are highest among Native American youth. This disparity poses a very real threat to the self-sufficiency of tribal peoples and their nations. Communities have to do a better job in providing services that address the cultural and linguistic diversity of American Indian and Alaska Native students. Any system providing youth services must involve and include input from Native families, communities and organizations to ensure the best possible outcomes for Native American youth.

YOG really motivated me & gave me an opportunity to travel to a Leadership Conference with other Native Youth. Thank You!

YO! CIMC Participant

Consider the Facts:

- A 2005 study titled, "*Failure to Respond Places the Future of Native People at Risk*," reveals national graduation rates for American Indian and Alaska Native students (AI/AN) (46.6%) were lower than those of any other U.S. ethnic or racial group.
- In California, the graduation rate for Native American youth is 17 percentage points lower than the rate for youth overall, and the graduation rate for Native American males is 21 percentage points lower than those for all young males.
- State and national dropout statistics, released by *Education Week* in June 2009, shows a 2.8% decline in graduation rates (from 52.4% to 49.8%) for AI/AN in California.
- The dropout rate for AI/AN is twice the national average (30%). This high rate may be associated with school-level factors that include larger schools, a perceived lack of empathy among teachers, passive teaching methods, irrelevant curricula and inappropriate testing, and tracking.