

# "Putting Youth to Work" Series

Examples of Effective Practice in Distressed Communities

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## Philadelphia, PA

### Best Practice Examples in:

- ✓ **Convening Body**
- ✓ **Delivery Agent**
- ✓ **Workforce and Employer Engagement**
- ✓ **Partnership with Education**
- ✓ **Partnership with Juvenile Justice**

### OVERVIEW

Thousands of young people in Philadelphia are disconnected from employment, education and social support systems. For example, the Center for Labor Market Studies reports that more than 52,000 Philadelphians ages 16 to 24 are unemployed and not in school. At least 30,000 of them have not earned either a high school diploma or a GED. Philadelphia puts youth education and workforce development at the top of its agenda and is working hard to address these issues.

Over the last ten years, the City of Philadelphia, the School District of Philadelphia, the Youth Council and the Workforce Investment Board (WIB) have analyzed data, designed models and built systems to address the needs of youth and young adults for high-quality education, training and employment opportunities. These efforts continue to flourish.

In his inauguration speech in January 2008, Mayor Michael A. Nutter directly confronted issues of education and career preparation, pledging to reduce the high school dropout rate by 50 percent in 5 to 7 years (or inversely raising the graduation rate to 80 percent), and to double the baccalaureate attainment rate of Philadelphians in eight to ten years<sup>1</sup>.

To lead these efforts, Mayor Nutter re-constituted the Youth Council as the Philadelphia Council for College and Career Success, appointed representatives from strategically important sectors in the Greater Philadelphia region to serve on the body, and made the Council responsible for leading efforts to accomplish the City's high school graduation and college completion goals. The Council is now actively engaged in a variety of strategies designed to build cross-sector approaches that address the needs of youth and young adults, and is also developing, leveraging and aligning resources from diverse funding streams to support them.

The new council is directed by a four-person Leadership Team, comprised of the mayor's chief education officer, a leading private sector employer, the superintendent of the School District of Philadelphia, and a president or provost of a local higher education institution<sup>2</sup>. Council members include leaders in secondary education, higher education, the business community, public care systems like foster care and juvenile justice, non-profit youth serving agencies, youth advocates and other representatives from municipal government. The council works through three subcommittees that address critical elements of the city's goals: addressing the needs of disconnected and out-of-school youth; creating strategies to increase the work readiness and career preparation

of Philadelphia's young people, and improving college preparation, access and success. The strength and breadth of council membership helps to foster strong relationships among systems and stakeholders across the city and to build consensus approaches to address the city's goals.

The Council is staffed and supported by the Philadelphia Youth Network (PYN), a youth intermediary organization dedicated to ensuring that Philadelphia youth take their rightful places as full and contributing members of Philadelphia's regional economy. PYN also manages federal funds available to the Council, based on a competitively procured contract with the Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board.

## MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

### *Workforce Preparation*

After several years of experience overseeing youth workforce preparation programs funded through investments from government sources (the Workforce Investment Act, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, the School District of Philadelphia and the Philadelphia Housing Authority), the Youth Council in 2003 established WorkReady Philadelphia to coordinate and expand opportunities for academically enriched summer and year-round career preparation experiences for young people. WorkReady Philadelphia offers a variety of program models, including private sector internships, service learning, subsidized employment in non-profit organizations, and academic support, including college awareness exposure. Depending on funding levels, WorkReady annually offers opportunities for between 7,500 and 9,000 young people. WorkReady programs are administered by the Philadelphia Youth Network, and are supported by hundreds of employers, youth-serving organizations, public agencies, foundations and individuals.

Philadelphia also operates five community-based E<sup>3</sup> Power (Education, Employment and Empowerment) Centers, which offer skill-building experiences for out-of-school and other disconnected 14- to 21-year-old youth, and help them to achieve long-term goals in the areas of education, occupational skills, life skills and employment. The Philadelphia Youth Network contracts with youth-serving organizations to operate the centers, which are expansions of the city's three original Youth Opportunity Centers. E<sup>3</sup> Centers offer GED preparation, job readiness, occupational skills training, job referral and placement, as well as a schedule of diverse activities.<sup>3</sup> Advisors help center youth to stay focused on meeting their goals, and to address any other challenging issues, such as child care, system involvement, and health care.

### *Education*

Due in part to the success of Philadelphia's nationally recognized school-to-career system developed in the 1990s, the Youth Council from its inception was keenly interested in promoting career preparation and academic achievement for all young people in Philadelphia. Over time, this interest in school-based connections grew to include young people who were struggling academically and who had already dropped out of high school. After a careful analysis of its efforts on behalf of out-of-school youth, Youth Council in 2003 took two important steps: (1) establishing a formal committee focused squarely on dropout recovery; and (2) increasing its

Workforce Investment Act funding for out-of-school youth from the statutory floor of 30 percent to 50 percent. Based on this work and on major matching support from the William Penn Foundation, Philadelphia in 2004 became one of only five cities nationally to receive support from the Youth Transition Funders Group, a set of national and regional philanthropies dedicated to enhancing opportunities for struggling students and out-of-school youth. After 18 months of data collection, analysis and discussion, Philadelphia launched Project U-Turn - a citywide campaign to build public will to resolve the City’s dropout crisis. Since its launch in Fall 2006, Project U-Turn has brought together more than 60 partners and stakeholders to work collaboratively on the dropout crisis.<sup>4</sup> Through these efforts, Project U-Turn has helped to create nearly 3,000 new high-quality education opportunities for over-age and under-credited youth; design and implement a new system for reconnecting dropouts to educational options including a re-engagement center jointly staffed by the School District and the City Department of Human services, and develop and leverage more than \$50 million to support re-engagement strategies.<sup>5</sup> Project U-Turn continues to work with the School District to support the establishment and support of high-quality educational options for all Philadelphia students, and to promote related aspects of the School District’s new strategic plan.

### *Juvenile Justice*

Youth advocates and public officials in Philadelphia understand that youth involved in the juvenile justice system need specialized services, supports and tools to transition successfully back into their communities for school, rehabilitation and work. To that end, a strong partnership has developed between the workforce, education and juvenile justice systems to support youth leaving delinquent placement by connecting them to the E<sup>3</sup> Centers and the City’s Reintegration Initiative.

In the last several years, Philadelphia’s juvenile justice work has focused on aligning and strengthening the career and occupational skills curricula at juvenile placement sites. Attention has been paid to program of study for youth and a system through which they can continue their studies when they return to the community. Much of this is being done in partnership with the E<sup>3</sup> Centers (serving as “step-down” programs to offer academic support, GED training, workforce preparation and job referral and placement, and life-skills training) and through a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor.

Based largely on the successes of the Youth Council’s focus on struggling students and out-of-school youth, Philadelphia in 2007 received two Department of Labor grants that support the creation of academic and occupational skill pathways for youth returning from delinquent placement to augment their core academic skills, and to support a variety of educational and employment interventions for youth who are, have been, or are at high risk of being involved in gangs or the juvenile justice system.

<sup>1</sup> Philadelphia Council for College and Career Success, First Meeting document, December 17, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Philadelphia Council for College and Career Success, First Meeting document, December 17, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Philadelphia’s E3Power Centers Web site, <http://www.e3philly.org/>.

<sup>4</sup> Philadelphia Council for College and Career Success, First Meeting document, December 17, 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Project U-Turn, “Where Are We Now? An Update to the Community,” November 2007, [http://www.projectturn.net/downloads/pdf/WhereAreWeNow\\_hi\\_res.pdf](http://www.projectturn.net/downloads/pdf/WhereAreWeNow_hi_res.pdf).

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