In Their Own Words:

What Young Males of Color Say About Dropping Out and Being Reconnected

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Disconnected Youth

What is a “disconnected” youth?

- A person between ages of 16 and 24 who:
  - Is not currently enrolled in school
  - Lacks a secondary credential or high school diploma
  - Is unemployed or not in the labor market
Disconnected Youth

- The percentage of disconnected youth in high-poverty, high-minority communities is higher than the national average.

Source: Kids Count Data Center
In 2000, the Youth Opportunity (YO) Grant Program was created under Clinton Administration as a part of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998. Its purpose was to fund communities to create a comprehensive approach to improving the educational and labor market outcomes for 14 to 21 year olds. $955 million was invested in urban, rural, and tribal communities through YO, and more than 86,000 youth were served.

In 2005, funding ended for the program.

In 2005, CLASP created the Communities Collaborating to Reconnect Youth Network as a resource for former YO communities.

In 2006, CLASP designed and administered a youth survey in 13 of the YO communities as a part of our independent analysis of the success of YO in distressed communities.
Demographics of Youth Surveyed

- 194 youth
- All participants were high school dropouts who enrolled in YO services
- Represent 13 communities
  - Albany, Baltimore, Brockton, Buffalo, Cleveland, Denver, Detroit, Kansas City, Los Angeles, Memphis, San Diego, San Francisco, Seattle
- 96% youth of color, primarily Black and Hispanic
- 42% male
79 survey participants were males of color
Age range of 15 to 23 years old
15 of the males were parents (19%)
24 had been formerly incarcerated (30%)
32 had dropped out by age of 16 (40%)
46 only made it to the 10\textsuperscript{th} grade (58%)
There were 5 who never even began high school.
Of those assessed academically, 37 had a reading level at or below 8\textsuperscript{th} grade (59%)
Of those assessed academically, 32 had a math level at or below 8\textsuperscript{th} grade (52%)
60% cited a school-related reason for dropping out

Males of color were two times more likely to cite suspension or expulsion

27% cited home or personal issues
We See Ourselves Positively

- Determined
- Hard-working
- Kind
- Smart
- Nice
- Respectful
- Honest
- Mature
- Friendly
- Spiritual
- Reliable
- Motivated

- Gentle
- Dependable
- Lovable
- Generous
- Special
- Positive
- Unique
- Dedicated
- Sensitive
- Independent
- Outgoing
About 1/3 actively attempted to re-enroll in high school. They encountered obstacles.

38% said the primary reason they enrolled in YO was because they “wanted more education.”

- “They told me wait until next semester”
- “They told me I was too old, but I wasn’t”
- “They just never returned any of my calls”
- “My credits were messed up”
- “Didn’t have money to pay for books”
- “They weren’t going for it”
We Want to Work

- 72% said that after dropping out, they spent time looking for work.
- Only half of males of color in the survey had jobs between dropping out and enrolling in a youth development program.

- “work[ed] at a full service gas station”
- “I had a moving job”
- “working to take care of my child”
- “I would go out on the bus or walking to look for jobs”
- “playing basketball, hanging out”
- “In the street trying to think of ways to make money”
We Want to Stay Out of Trouble

- 23 participated in organized sports or recreational activities (32%)
- 7 participated in church or community activities (10%)
- 11 participated in arts-related activities (15%)
- 15 took on responsibility of caring for family members (21%)
We Had Some Tough Situations to Overcome After Dropping Out

- 3 were victims of abuse in the home (4%)
- 4 were victims of violent crime (5%)
- 7 were homeless (10%)
- 16 were arrested (22%)
- 9 were incarcerated (12%)
- 15 were involved in gang activity (21%)
- 18 were involved in dangerous or street activities (25%)
- 15 had a drug or alcohol problem (21%)
We Value the Opportunity to Improve Our Lives

- 38% enrolled in the program because they “wanted more education.”
- 22% enrolled because they wanted “a better future for themselves or their families.”
- 17% enrolled because “the opportunity seemed worthwhile.”

- “I want [ed] to make a change in my life.”
- “I knew I had to get a diploma to make it.”
- “Hav[e] a chance to fulfill my dreams”
- “Tired of doing the same old thing. I need to better myself.”
- “I wanted to achieve something in life so I started making goals and one goal was to get my GED.”
- “Too many people I knew was getting killed or messed up and I did not want to end up like them.”
- “I needed a good job.”
- “I needed to get ready for real life.”
We Need Adult Support

What Part of the Program was Most Helpful to You?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Number of Youth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GED/Academic Support</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding a job</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support of Case Managers</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Search/Skills Training</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Environment</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility of Program</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We Need Adult Support

- “Support of case managers or teachers” in the program was cited as the single most helpful thing about their experience.

- When asked what should be done to help other youth succeed, they cited “staff/teachers who care and support students” as most important.

- “The counselors care what you say, think, or do”

- “They help[ed] me to realize that it wasn't too late to have a good future”

- “The support they were willing to provide”

- “people caring about my future”

- “I have been supported in everything I do that is positive, and have been encouraged to take responsibility for my actions.”

- “Neighborhood adult talked to me and introduced me to the Youth Opportunities program. He provided me with a ride.”
We Have Concrete Goals

- **Where Do You See Yourself in the Next Five Years?**
  - Have a specific career (41%)
  - Go to college (34%)
  - Find a job (18%)
  - Own a home (10%)
  - Own a business (7%)
  - Have stable family relationships (7%)
  - Financial independence (5%)
  - Own a car (1%)

- “have a good paying steady job and start at community college for electricians”
- “Get my GED, go to college and become an engineer”
- “To go to college for business classes and open up my own restaurant.”
- “graduate from college with a degree in Forensic Science”
- “I will own my car wash and grocery store”
We Have A Message for Other Youth

- “Stay in school and **do not quit**... it is the best way.”
- “You got to **focus**, got to **have passion**.”
- “**Trust yourself** that you can do it.”
- “**Get a support person** that believes in you.”
- “**Pace yourself** and **stay focused** on what your doing.”
- “Go back and learn and **be more dedicated**.”
- “Get in [this] program like I did...**get yourself on the right track**.”
- “How ever you feel, **don't give up**.”
- “**Stay positive** and **talk to each other** in a good way. **Get help when you need it**.”
- “You have to **set your mind** to be positive in order to succeed.”
Overall in our youth survey, 1/3 of the youth said that the most important thing that could be done to help youth who dropped out to succeed was to have more programs like this one.

In the five years that YO was funded, 36 communities served almost 92,000 youth.

- Most of them were youth of color
- 48% were out-of-school youth

YO provided a safe space for young people; quality youth and adult relationships; enhanced training and education services; and opportunities to be productive.

The YO Developmental Framework had a major impact on youth-serving agencies by demonstrating models for holistic programs that address multiple aspects of youth learning by combining a variety of services.

Department of Labor’s evaluation of YO showed that when adequate resources are targeted at building community capacity to serve youth, labor force participation and education outcomes can improve.
What We Know About this Saturation Approach in Communities

- YO reduced the overall number of out-of-school and out-of-work (disconnected) youth.
- YO increased the Pell grant receipt in urban sites from 3 to 6 percent.
- YO reduced the number of high-school dropouts.
- YO increased postsecondary enrollment for foreign-born youths.
- YO increased the labor-force participation rate overall and specifically for teens ages 16 to 19, women, native-born residents, blacks, and in-school youth.
- YO increased the employment rate among blacks, teens, out-of-school youth, and native-born youths and had a positive effect on the hourly wages of women and teens.
- YO reduced crime, juvenile delinquency, and gang activity.
- YO resulted in more churches getting involved in serving youth.