

**As a nation, we face a set of challenges that we can no longer ignore.** The economic future of our country depends on the next generation of young Americans becoming ready for college, work, and life. However, many of our young people are reaching young adulthood without the skills and competencies they need to succeed. Millions of youth are disconnected from societal and economic mainstreams and are being left behind.

## The Youth Unemployment Crisis:

- Youth and young adults ages 16-24 face an unemployment rate more than twice the overall unemployment rate
- Only one in five black teens and one in four Latino teens worked last year
- The taxpayer and social burden of a disconnected 16 year-old young person during his or her lifetime is over \$1,014,140

## Youth and young adults in the United States face an unprecedented employment crisis.

Seven years after the “official” end of the Great Recession, teen unemployment remains high at nearly 17 percent. While there have been improvements, the unemployment rate for youth and young adults ages 16-24 was more than twice as high as the overall unemployment rate of 5.3 percent.<sup>i</sup> Youth of color and those with disabilities have been particularly impacted. **Only one in five black teens and one in four Latino teens worked last year.**<sup>ii</sup> Youth with disabilities also have an uphill climb to gain access to work. **Youth with disabilities have an employment rate of just 12.9 percent**, compared to 26 percent for their non-disabled peers. Young adults (ages 20 to 24) with disabilities have an employment rate of 30.4 percent—less than 63.5 percent among those without disabilities in the same age group.<sup>iii</sup>

## An estimated 5.25 million young people ages 16 to 24 are unattached to school or work<sup>iv</sup>; they make up nearly one-third of unemployed people.

Recent research finds that 3 million of these out-of-school youth are low-income and have less than an associate’s degree.<sup>v</sup> And they are disproportionately youth of color. Young people leave school early for a variety of reasons. Vulnerable youth, including those attached to our juvenile justice and child welfare systems face insurmountable odds as they transition into adulthood. Research suggests that interrupted enrollment happens when a cluster of adverse life events occur.<sup>vi</sup> Many experience unstable home and community environments or leave school to earn income to support their families: nearly one million have care-giving responsibilities in their families.<sup>vii</sup> For example, over 60 percent of participants in a recent transitional-jobs program were the sole earners in their households.<sup>viii</sup> Some opportunity youth are even pushed out of school as a result of

punitive school discipline policies. For example, male and female students of color are more likely to be referred to law enforcement from school than their White counterparts. Black and Hispanic students compose 39 percent of male students but 50 percent of referrals to law enforcement. Similarly, Black and Hispanic students compose 40 percent of female students but 55 percent of referrals to law enforcement.<sup>ix</sup>

Undocumented immigrant youth face a unique set of challenges. Just 40 percent of undocumented immigrant youth ages 18-24 complete high school, largely due to federal and state laws that limit their ability to pursue higher education or participate in the workforce.<sup>x</sup> A postsecondary education is critical for these young people. By 2018, 60 percent of all U.S. jobs will require some level of postsecondary education, and, at the current rate, employers in 2025 will need about 23 million more degree holders than our higher education system will have produced.<sup>xi</sup>

Ages 16 through 24 are developmentally critical, as young people prepare to take on adult responsibilities. During this age span, young people need exposure to rigorous education, as well as extra-curricular opportunities that promote leadership and decision making skills. They also need the support of multiple caring adults who can help guide their career and postsecondary education advancement, offer emotional support, and serve as role models, and mentors.

**We know what needs to be done.** Helping out-of-school youth access education and the workforce is the best solution to persistent poverty and income inequality. The longer youth are separated from education and work, the less likely they are to ever reconnect. The good news is that we have decades of research on what programs work to reconnect young people to education and the workforce.<sup>xii</sup> It's now crucial to make comprehensive investments in these solutions.



*In 2002, the leadership of national youth-serving organizations established the Campaign for Youth to build a united voice for disadvantaged youth. Our mission is to lift up strategies that help young people who are out of work, out of school, and out of the mainstream reconnect and succeed. For over a decade, the Campaign has advanced common-sense recommendations and elevated awareness of the disconnected youth challenge among policymakers and the field. Moving forward, the Campaign will continue to take concrete steps to advance social and economic equity for our nation's youth.*

## The Goal: Increase the number of youth who are connected to school and work

America's knowledge-based economy requires better youth outcomes than we are achieving today. However, we know what works. What's needed is with strong public support, substantial public and private investment, supportive government policies, and the collective knowledge of the youth development field.

1. **Make reconnecting our youth a national priority.** Millions of our youth need to be reconnected to education, employment, and service. Significant resources are already devoted to these young people, but is mostly spent unproductively: confining young people in jails and prisons or providing safety-net benefits. The estimated immediate fiscal burden – the pure outlay on services and lost tax revenue – per opportunity youth has been estimated at \$64,940 over five years.<sup>xiii</sup> Fortunately, many successful models exist to transition opportunity youth to education and employment, but national investment is insufficient to take these strategies to scale. The know-how and resources exist, if redirected, to reconnect one million young people per year. Consistent leadership is needed to support, advance, and connect congressional and federal interagency efforts that promote youth's healthy development.
  - Make out-of-school youth a priority of the Domestic Policy Council and National Economic Council.
  - Maintain and strengthen the role of the Interagency Workgroup for Disconnected Youth.
  - Reconvene the White House Council for Community Solutions.
  
2. **Build on the strengths of young people and involve them in finding solutions for their own generation.** Young people, even those growing up in disinvested communities, have immense assets: they are resilient in the face of enormous challenges, navigate complex interpersonal and economic relationships, and find ways to contribute to their families and communities even when resources are limited. Young people can and should work with adult allies to address their communities' challenges. Incorporating the experiences of young people directly impacted by federal policies is critical to establishing an effective national youth investment strategy.
  - Build upon the momentum and work of youth movements and organizations across the country, including but not limited to, the National Youth Alliance for Boys and Men of Color, Young Invincibles and Opportunity Youth United (OYU). OYU is made up of young people from across the country who have overcome disconnection and poverty and designed to bring young people's unique perspective to bear on policy and practice.<sup>xiv</sup>
  - Continue to support state and local youth councils to bring their perspectives into local programming and provide input on the work of the Congressional Youth Council.
  - Provide ongoing opportunities for young people served by multiple federal programs to participate in forums, advisory councils, and convenings to enhance the quality and effectiveness of those services.
  - Acknowledge the value of youth leadership development opportunities as part of all reconnection strategies and build them into program delivery.

3. **Invest in high-need communities.** High-poverty and high-crime communities have far greater concentrations of disconnected youth. The existing youth service delivery system lacks the capacity to meet the needs of such large numbers of youth. Yet there are many assets within those communities—urban and rural alike—that can be leveraged to create comprehensive, systemic solutions.
    - Build on research and lessons learned from comprehensive, community-wide approaches<sup>1</sup> to create a funding stream for high-need urban and rural communities to implement innovative community-based and nationally recognized strategies and sustainable youth service delivery systems.
    - Fund and develop large-scale diversion policies and strategies to prevent youth from entering the justice system and support reentry pathways for those that are already attached the justice system that includes education, workforce, and youth development programming.
    - Invest in community efforts to build a robust youth service delivery infrastructure that brings together faith- and community-based organizations, the business community, private foundations, and youth-serving systems (such as education, workforce, child welfare and juvenile justice).
    - Provide communities with incentives and assistance to integrate new and existing services and funding streams to support comprehensive quality youth programs, systems, and intermediaries, such as the Performance Partnership Pilots for Disconnected Youth.
  
  4. **Create opportunities for work experience that are relevant to careers and have real world applications.** Youth need access to different kinds of experiences that expose them to the world of work, such as internships, career and technical education, work-based learning, service learning, and of course unsubsidized employment. This exposure—coupled with workforce preparation activities that promote the development of applied skills, including oral and written communication, teamwork, leadership, critical thinking, and a commitment to social and civic responsibility—are necessary to prepare youth for today’s highly competitive labor market.
    - Expand funding and opportunities to achieve full employment for youth through job training, youth entrepreneurship, career and technical skill building, service and conservation corps, paid internships, pre-apprenticeships, and apprenticeships, and other employment (including summer and year-round employment, national and community service, and service-learning).
    - Develop policies to support flexible work experiences that incorporate applied, contextual, and competency-based learning, as well as innovative instructional strategies that lead to postsecondary skills and credentials.
  
  5. **Create pathways to financial independence and social mobility.** The educational profiles of out-of-school and out-of-work youth range from well below sixth-grade literacy to levels just short of a secondary school credential and beyond. The objective is to work with the education system, workforce system, youth practitioners, and the private sector to create pathways that will lead to secondary and postsecondary credentials, impart skills that are marketable in the emerging economy, and provide supports that will help youth navigate a complicated labor market. This will take leadership and capacity building to construct more flexible learning environments that incorporate contextual learning, innovative instructional technologies, alternative methods of awarding credit, and alternative vehicles for financing education.
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- Expand multiple pathways that support secondary and postsecondary educational programming that occurs in non-traditional environments.
- Ensure higher education policies and institutions address the unique needs of out-of-school youth and provide them with access to federal and state financial aid, supportive services, and education pathways.
- Engage and incentivize business and industry to create pipelines and employment opportunities in existing and emerging areas of the economy.
- Support a career pathways approach that connects progressive levels of basic skills and postsecondary education, training, and supportive services in specific sectors or cross-sector occupations to optimize the progress and success of youth in securing marketable credentials.

6. **Build state and local capacity to expand effective, high-quality, evidence-based programming.** We know what works. For example, the National Academy of Sciences has documented the features of positive developmental settings for youth; the Weikert Center for Youth Program Quality and the National Youth Employment Coalition have identified a set of quality standards for youth programs rooted in research and practice; and MDRC has recently synthesized lessons from research on effective strategies for disconnected young people<sup>xv2</sup> These and other findings suggest several primary intersecting programmatic features of successful holistic interventions, which include comprehensive case management, wrap-around supports, and multiple education options (e.g. postsecondary education, paid and unpaid work experience, and employment).<sup>xvi</sup> To promote high-quality and accountable programming, we urge the federal government to take several key steps:
- Create an overarching program quality assessment for federal youth programs, including measures of youth reconnection (e.g. 4-year and extended cohort high school graduation rates; and employment and work-related measures).
  - Replicate research-based strategies and interventions that have demonstrated success and for which there is strong demand, and invest in promising innovations that may become best practices once successful outcomes are documented.
  - Strengthen and continue to build the youth workforce development field by increasing high-quality professional development opportunities and training, disseminating lessons learned, and offering professional recognition.

## Reconnecting America's Youth: What Will It Take?

Federal youth employment and training programs only serve a fraction of the young people who could benefit from them.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, billions of dollars per year are spent on confining or providing basic safety-net supports to opportunity youth. Investing in strategies and program models that work, and redirecting savings to taxpayers back into these programs over the long term, is the only way to reach opportunity youth at scale. Youth and young adults face unique individual challenges and have varying education, skills, and social support needs. Accordingly, interventions range from short-term, part-time activities to strategies that engage young people full time over longer periods.

Public will exists to better serve this population. The private and philanthropic sectors are creating opportunities and addressing disconnection through initiatives like the Aspen Forum for Community Solutions' Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund, the Ad Council's Grads of Life Campaign, Opportunity Nation's bipartisan national campaign, the My Brother's Keeper Alliance, and the 100,000 Opportunities Initiative, made up of over 40 international and domestic corporations. Proposals such as Civic Enterprises' recent update to the "Bridge to Reconnection" plan show how funding streams could work together to reconnect one million young people per year. The following chart<sup>4</sup> provides a starting place for investing in federal programs that can support youth reconnection to education, training, employment, and service. **At a minimum, doubling the appropriations for these key programs would provide opportunities for hundreds of thousands of youth.**

*The list of federal programs included on this chart is not exhaustive and does not include funding sources across all federal agencies, including the Departments' of Agriculture, Interior, Housing and Urban Development, and Transportation. Rather, it is representative of select funding streams that are used to support education, employment, training, and service programming for youth in disadvantaged situations.*

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<sup>3</sup> For example, according to the most recent U.S. Department of Labor program data, only 218,050 young people ages 14 to 21 were served in program year 2012 through Workforce Investment Act Youth Activities Funding.

<sup>4</sup> The list of federal programs included on this chart is not exhaustive and does not include funding sources across all federal agencies, including the Departments' of Agriculture, Interior, Housing and Urban Development, and Transportation. Rather, it is representative of select funding streams that are used to support education, employment, training, and service programming for youth in disadvantaged situations.

<b>Federal Youth Education Employment, Training, and Service Programs</b>	<b>FY 2016</b>
<b>US Department of Labor</b>	<b>Number in Thousands</b>
Job Corps	\$1,689,155
WIOA Title I Youth Activities/Youth Employment and Training Activities	\$873,416
Registered Apprenticeships	\$90,000
Reintegration of Ex-Offenders	\$88,078
YouthBuild	\$84,534
<b>US Department of Education</b>	
Title I - Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged	\$4,068,625
Adult Education Basic Grants to States	\$581,995
Homeless Children and Youth - Grants for States and Local Activities	\$65,042
Title I-D Prevention and Intervention Programs for Children and Youth Who are Neglected, Delinquent, or at Risk - Grants for States and Localities	\$47,614
Promise Neighborhoods	\$73,254
IDEA - Part B Grants to States (B-611)*	\$11,912,848
Vocational Rehabilitation and Supported Employment	\$3,161,130
High School Graduation Initiative/ESSA	\$0
<b>US Department of Health and Human Services</b>	
Chafee Education and Training Vouchers	\$43,257
Community Services Block Grant	\$715,000
Runaway and Homeless Youth Program	\$101,980
Service Connection for Youth on the Streets	\$17,141
Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant	\$1,858,079
<b>Corporation for National and Community Service</b>	
AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps	\$30,000
AmeriCorps State/National	\$386,010
AmeriCorps VISTA	\$92,364
Social Innovation Fund	\$50,000
<b>US Department of Justice</b>	
Juvenile and Delinquency Prevention Title II	\$58,000
Juvenile and Delinquency Prevention Title V Community Prevention Block Grants	\$17,500
Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) Program	\$376,000
Youth Mentoring	\$90,000
<b>Department of Defense</b>	
National Youth Challenge	\$195,527

### Steering Committee

American Youth Policy Forum  
 Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)  
 Forum for Youth Investment  
 First Focus  
 Gateway to College National Network  
 Institute for Educational Leadership  
 Jobs for the Future  
 National Council of La Raza  
 National Youth Employment Coalition  
 The Corps Network  
 The Susquehanna Group  
 Young Invincibles  
 YouthBuild USA

### About the Campaign for Youth

The Campaign for Youth focuses attention on the needs of young people who are out of work, out of school and out of the mainstream. Campaign for Youth advocates for the expansion of those opportunities and supports that prepare youth for their future roles as workers, parents, civic leaders and engaged members of caring communities. The Campaign for Youth brings together national and local youth policy leaders to create a strong collective voice that transcends individual organizational agendas to promote actionable solutions for youth.

For more information, contact: Kisha Bird, Director, Youth Policy, CLASP, at [kbird@clasp.org](mailto:kbird@clasp.org)

### End Notes

<sup>i</sup> U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics Current Population Survey, (Unadj) Unemployment rate, 2015 Annual Average, Retrieved October 11, 2016.

<sup>ii</sup> U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics Current Population Survey, (Unadj) Employment-Population Ratio - 16-19 yrs., Black or African American, (Unadj) Employment-Population Ratio - 16-19 yrs. Hispanic or Latino, 2015 Annual Average, Retrieved October 11, 2016.

<sup>iii</sup> U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics Current Population Survey (CPS), April 2014. Available from <http://www.dol.gov/odep/categories/youth/youthemployment.htm>.

<sup>iv</sup> Kristen Lewis and Sarah Burd-Sharps, Zeroing In on Place and Race: Youth Disconnection in America's Cities, Measure of America, June 2015, <http://www.measureofamerica.org/youth-disconnection-2015/>.

<sup>v</sup> Martha Ross and Nicole Prchal Svajlenka, Employment and disconnection among teens and young adults: The role of place, race, and education, May 24, 2016, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/employment-and-disconnection-among-teens-and-young-adults-the-role-of-place-race-and-education/>.

<sup>vi</sup> Don't Quit on Me What Young People Who Left School Say About the Power of Relationships, Grad Nation: America's Promise Alliance, September 2015, <https://www.gradnation.org/report/don%E2%80%99t-quit-me>.

<sup>vii</sup> Clive Belfield, Henry Levin, Rachel Rosen, The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth, Queens College, City University of New York; Teachers College, Columbia University, Civic Enterprises, 2012, [http://www.civicerprises.net/MediaLibrary/Docs/econ\\_value\\_opportunity\\_youth.pdf](http://www.civicerprises.net/MediaLibrary/Docs/econ_value_opportunity_youth.pdf).

<sup>viii</sup> J Kushner, Chicago Neighborhood JobStart full evaluation report: A transitional jobs response to the Great Recession, February 2012,

[http://socialimpactresearchcenter.issuelab.org/resource/chicago\\_neighborhood\\_job\\_start\\_summary\\_evaluation\\_report\\_a\\_transitional\\_jobs\\_response\\_to\\_the\\_great\\_recession\\_executive\\_summary](http://socialimpactresearchcenter.issuelab.org/resource/chicago_neighborhood_job_start_summary_evaluation_report_a_transitional_jobs_response_to_the_great_recession_executive_summary)

<sup>ix</sup> CLASP, Unrealized Justice, June 2016, <http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/publication-1/2016.06.14-Youth-Infographic-Men-FINAL.pdf>.

<sup>x</sup> Jeffrey S. Passel and D'Vera Cohn (2009). "A Portrait of Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States." Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center.

<sup>xi</sup> Lumina Foundation, "A Stronger Nation Through Higher Education", March 2013

[http://www.luminafoundation.org/publications/A\\_stronger\\_nation\\_through\\_higher\\_education.pdf](http://www.luminafoundation.org/publications/A_stronger_nation_through_higher_education.pdf).

<sup>xii</sup> See, for example, "What Works for Disconnected Young People: A Scan of the Evidence" ([http://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/What\\_works\\_for\\_disconnected\\_young\\_people\\_WP.pdf](http://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/What_works_for_disconnected_young_people_WP.pdf)) for a summary of recent research.

<sup>xiii</sup> Clive Belfield, Henry Levin, Rachel Rosen, The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth, Queens College, City University of New York; Teachers College, Columbia University, Civic Enterprises, 2012,

[http://www.civicerprises.net/MediaLibrary/Docs/econ\\_value\\_opportunity\\_youth.pdf](http://www.civicerprises.net/MediaLibrary/Docs/econ_value_opportunity_youth.pdf)

<sup>xiv</sup> OYU is organized and sponsored by YouthBuild USA, the Corps Network, Public Allies, Jobs for the Future, the National College Advising Corps, Year Up, the National Congress of American Indians, the Aspen Institute, Gateway to College, Mikva Challenge, the National Guard Youth Foundation, Berea College, and the Youth Leadership Institute.

