

Back on Track:

Re-Connecting New York's Disconnected Youth to Education and Employment



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“Youth want to, and can, take responsibility for their life choices. But our success with these youth will only be complete once we treat them as our own and take responsibility for putting all the resources and supports in place.”¹

Elaine Spaul

Executive Director, Center for Youth, Rochester New York

When we meet an adult whose life has gone wrong—living on the street, serving a term in prison, involved in drugs or petty crime—we often have an intuitive sense that the wrong turn must have happened much earlier.

One leading youth development specialist, Brett Brown, found that teenagers who go off track actually have a great deal in common.² In a 1996 study, Brown argued that youth who never receive an adequate education, fail to get a job and learn the ways of the working world, and lack support from caring adults are likely to disconnect from the workforce. These “disconnected youth” move into their adult years with a history of failure and inadequate preparation for adult responsibilities.

Today, the needs of disconnected youth—and those at risk for disconnection—should be a vital priority in New York State. The state’s intervention can transform a generation of youth now on a path toward prison, homelessness, and dependency on government into a generation of good citizens, taxpayers and parents. And the need is urgent, as youth throughout the state find themselves up against the worst economic crisis in decades.

Until now, good data on disconnected youth has only been available for New York City.³ **Back On Track** provides an in-depth portrait of disconnected youth at the state level. Outside New York City, too little is being done to respond to the needs of disconnected and at-risk youth. The state urgently needs to support and expand effective programs in upstate

New York and the downstate suburbs. **Back On Track** explains who New York State’s disconnected youth are: where they live, the key risk factors for disconnection, and important distinctions between younger and older disconnected youth.

Our key findings include:

- ▶ There are approximately 199,000 youth, ages 16-24, who are out of school and have not worked in at least one year. These youth, 8% of all young people ages 16-24, represent the core population of disconnected youth.
- ▶ New York City has a higher rate of disconnection: 11% of youth, compared to 5% in the downstate suburbs and 6% in the rest of the state.
- ▶ Six in ten disconnected youth are African-American or Hispanic, compared to only one in three non-disconnected youth. Still, 32% of disconnected youth are white, the largest single ethnic group.
- ▶ One in six disconnected women is a single mother, more than triple the rate for non-disconnected women.
- ▶ In 2008-09, the unemployment rate of youth ages 16-19 was 20%, triple the 6% unemployment rate of the overall workforce; among youth ages 20-24, the unemployment rate was 11%.

We then turn to one of the most profound questions in youth development: can disconnected youth be reconnected? The answer is

yes. We explore what is being done—and what can be done—to steer disconnected youth back to the worlds of education, work and the transition to adult life. We identify organizations and agencies that are achieving this mission every day. Their models can teach policy makers a great deal about replicating innovations in youth development. Each model stresses one or more of the following components: educational attainment, workforce connections, and support for youth in transition. The most promising practices include all three components.

Finally, we outline recommendations for the state to take action. Our key recommendations include:

- I. Make the needs of disconnected youth a top statewide priority.** The state urgently needs to develop a comprehensive and effective response to the needs of disconnected youth. The state should publicly identify the recovery and reconnection of at-risk and disconnected youth as a top priority for legislative, budget and other policy measures. The Governor and leaders of the State Legislature would then task their respective staffs with collaborating on a comprehensive plan that would inform and guide these measures. The state should then follow through, not simply with additional funding, but with a commitment to innovation, integrated services and rigorous outcome measurement.
- II. Direct state agencies to review regulations and policies that affect disconnected youth.** Many regulations and policies now on the books at both the state and local level may fail to take account of the needs of disconnected youth. Agencies need to reach out to providers and affected youth to identify rules that may have unintended consequences, and revise those rules.
- III. Integrate and coordinate the services that assist disconnected youth.** The state must coordinate the activities of multiple agencies providing services to the same (or overlapping) youth populations. In practice, this goal will require aligning information systems to track youth across the services that serve them and exploring the potential for case management of disconnected youth to keep them from slipping through the cracks between services.

IV. Focus on education, workforce, and housing interventions. All interventions are not created equal. The most effective strategy, particularly for young adults, is to combine intensive literacy/numeracy training with workforce skills development, and to relentlessly document the outcomes. There are many different ways to approach this model, however. The state should expand support for education/workforce interventions generally and then replicate the most cost-effective. In addition, the state should dedicate funding to help secure independent living and supportive housing arrangements with wraparound services for this population.

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INTRODUCTION

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Youth take many routes to adulthood. Some routes are quick and direct; other routes require more trial and error. Within this diversity of circumstance, however, lies a template that most teenagers are able to understand and follow.

As children, they progress through the elementary, middle and secondary grades; learn to read, write and perform math at various levels of competence. As teens, they graduate from high school and consider their first life choice: whether to enter the labor market or enroll in college for further education. By and large these youth get the education they need and then start work. As young adults in the workplace, they learn the rules and expectations of the working world: showing up on time, planning ahead, collaborating with others, and so on.

Unfortunately, one in 12 youth in New York State lose their way on the road to adulthood. These “disconnected youth” fail to get the education they need, miss that crucial connection with the working world, struggle with damaging distractions—criminal or self-destructive behavior, substance abuse, teen parenthood, and/or school dropout—and enter adulthood without the tools they need to succeed.

Youth who disconnect have some characteristics in common. They are overwhelmingly minority and disproportionately likely to be foster care youth, high school dropouts, teen mothers, or in contact with the juvenile justice system.

HELPING DISCONNECTED YOUTH IN NEW YORK STATE

New York State should make the needs of disconnected youth a top priority. “We see significant failure rates at high societal cost when youth disconnect from the expected paths of higher education or employment,” says Clyde Comstock, Chief Operating Officer at the Hillside Family of Agencies in Monroe County, “and we know that our continuing support could help prevent that from happening.”

Investing in disconnected youth makes sense for several reasons.

- *They can make it:* These youth are capable of turning their lives around, especially with the help of savvy community-based organizations and educational institutions. Thousands of disconnected youth get their lives back on track every year.
- *Their skilled labor will boost the New York economy:* Our state economy cannot spare these youth—given New York’s low population growth rate and retiring generation of baby boomers, we urgently need all of the state’s youth to step into skilled job openings.
- *Disconnected adults are expensive:* Disconnected youth who cannot be reconnected to society are likely to become liabilities rather than assets. High school dropouts from the class of 2006 will cost New York more than \$24.7 billion in lost wages, taxes and productivity over their lifetimes.⁴
- *Disconnected youth are also parents:* New York appropriately invests millions annually in programs to help small children develop their full potential. But the most important influence on those children is their parents, so any effective child-centered strategy must lift up the parents as well.

“The stark reality is that we need these young people to support us in the future and currently, they’re not equipped to do this,” says David Dodson, President of MDC, Inc., a non-profit research organization. “Putting up bars or putting them behind bars is not the solution.”

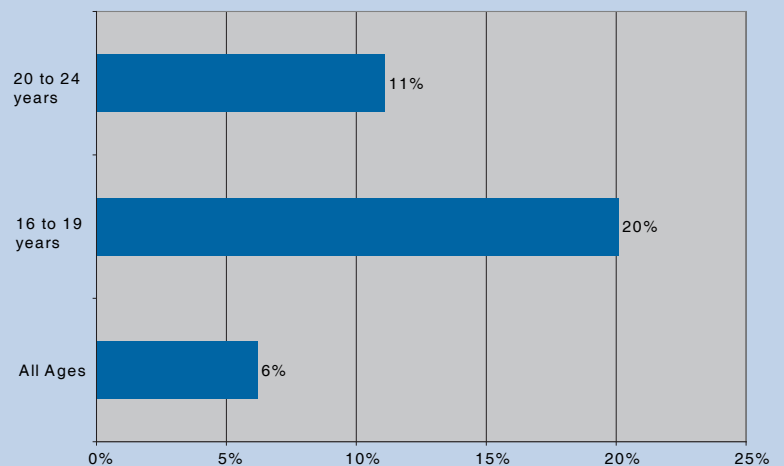
The severe recession that began with the crash of the housing market and mushroomed with the collapse of the finance sector poses special risks to disadvantaged youth. At any given time, youth will struggle to find jobs in a competitive labor market. Economists have noted a long-term upward trend in youth unemployment as traditional jobs filled by youth are automated or shipped overseas. In 2008-09, the unemployment rate for youth ages 16-19 was 20%, triple the unemployment rate of the overall workforce. (School-age youth not seeking employment are excluded from this calculation.) Youth ages 20-24 had an unemployment rate of 11%, double the overall workforce’s unemployment rate. (See Chart 1.) Given that the workforce unemployment rate has jumped by almost one-third to 8.1% as of March 2009, the number of youth at risk of disconnection must be far higher now.

In deep recessions, older workers compete with younger ones for scarce job openings—even in sectors like fast food that have been traditionally dominated by high school-age workers. New York State needs to act now to aid disconnected youth—or our society will pay the price for years to come.

Fortunately, state and local policy makers are now paying close attention to New York’s disconnected youth. Until recently, the needs of this population had been discussed primarily as a national issue. But a 2005 report by the Community Service Society, entitled *Out of*

Chart 1

Unemployment Rate by Age Group in New York State
March 2008 - April 2009



Source: Current Population Survey, March 2008-April 2009, courtesy of New York State Department of Labor

School, Out of Work... Out of Luck?, provided detailed data on youth trends in New York City and called for major new workforce initiatives.⁵ New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg also created several entrepreneurial programs for youth through the Center for Economic Opportunity.

SCAA began calling attention to the needs of this neglected population at the state level with the 2006 publication of *Growing Up In New York: Charting the Next Generation of Workers, Citizens and Leaders*. This overview of the health and welfare of the state's children found that children and youth in every area—from child health and mental health to education, child welfare and economic security—were slipping through the cracks of established programs. In 2007, SCAA published *Disconnected Youth: An Answer to Preventing Disengagement*, which focused on what the child welfare and children's mental health systems could do to help young people in those systems have more successful transitions out of them. The following year, SCAA issued another white paper on the potential role of the juvenile justice and education systems in preventing disconnection.

In 2008, New York State's Children's Cabinet, a body comprised of the state agencies serving the needs of children, collaborated with its Advisory Board to create a workgroup to coordinate policy on behalf of disconnected youth. The Workgroup on Disconnected Youth has tasked two subcommittees with discussing policy options and interventions regarding three distinct categories of young people: those in and leaving foster care (including in kinship care receiving child-only public assistance), in and leaving juvenile justice or probation, and those with incarcerated parents. The Workgroup is charged with determining the needs of disconnected youth, identifying effective strategies for meeting those needs, and organizing the resources and actions needed to implement the strategies.

Also in 2008, Governor Paterson convened a Summit on Student Engagement and Drop-out Prevention. With support from America's Promise Alliance, four regional groups and one statewide group have continued to meet since the summit. They plan to report back to the Governor and the new Commissioner of Education in October 2009.

At the local level, New York City has led the way. Spurred on by some of the nation's most vigorous and knowledgeable youth advocates, City agencies have identified the prevention and re-engagement of disconnected youth as a high priority. Yet the City's activism only highlights the difficult obstacles faced by local governments in aiding disconnected youth. A 2008 survey of youth programs by the Community Service Society called attention to major shortfalls in support for disconnected youth relative to that provided to adults and youth at risk for disconnection. The survey also found a startling level of fragmentation, recording "17 different education and workforce funding streams that are dispersed across eight different public agencies, which report to three different deputy mayors within City Hall, as well as to various state and federal officials."⁶

Youth services is an intensely local field, since the people who connect with youth must be familiar with the local environment and have access to a local web of resources and caring individuals. But the patchwork scraps of a youth support system cannot be fully assembled at the local level. It is essential for policy makers at the state level—in close collaboration with local policy makers, service providers and youth—to weave these scraps together into an integrated system that supports young people.

This report seeks to quantify the dimensions of disconnected youth in New York State. Beyond that, we also explore what is being done—and what can be done—to reconnect disconnected youth to the worlds of education, work and the transition to adult life.

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DISCONNECTED YOUTH: WHO THEY ARE

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The varied experiences of youth defy easy categorization. That said, identifying the children and teens most likely to lose their way helps us to clarify the strategies that might keep them on track—or steer them back on track. A widely accepted definition of "disconnected youth" is young people ages 16-24 who are:

- ▶ Not in school or lacking a high school diploma.

- ▶ Not working or connected to the legitimate labor market.
- ▶ Lacking strong connections to caring adults and community supports.⁷

With assistance from the New York State Department of Labor (DOL), SCAA analyzed the Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS) for the years 2005-07. We obtained population data on young people ages 16-24 for New York State and three regions—New York City, downstate suburbs, and upstate.

Researchers generally agree that youth must be out of school to be disconnected (although youth who are lagging behind in school are certainly at risk for disconnection), but the

“out of work” criterion depends in large part on definitions in the database used. Since ACS distinguishes unemployed New Yorkers by the duration of their unemployment, we used one year of unemployment as our threshold. Youth who have been unemployed for a shorter time may also be disconnected, but we preferred to distinguish youth with long-term difficulty finding and keeping employment from the normal job churning typical to youth in the labor market.⁸ Our estimates are therefore conservative in that they exclude over 100,000 unemployed and potentially disconnected youth. On the other hand, our estimates include some college graduates and married parents staying home with small children. These groups

Table 1
Youth (16 to 24) by School Enrollment and Labor Force Status 2005-2007 Estimates (in thousands) United States, New York State, New York City, New York City Suburbs and Remainder of State

| | US Number | NYS Number | NYC Number | Downstate Number | Rest of State Number |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------|------------|------------|------------------|----------------------|
| All Youth 16 to 24 | 38,004 | 2,484 | 1,005 | 619 | 860 |
| Enrolled in School | 22,651 | 1,604 | 616 | 430 | 558 |
| Employed | 9,586 | 561 | 158 | 164 | 239 |
| Unemployed or not in labor force | 13,069 | 1,044 | 458 | 266 | 320 |
| Not Enrolled in School | 15,352 | 880 | 389 | 189 | 301 |
| Employed | 10,405 | 570 | 230 | 134 | 206 |
| Unemployed or not in labor force less than one year | 2,213 | 111 | 46 | 23 | 42 |
| Disconnected | 2,734 | 199 | 114 | 32 | 53 |

| | US Percentage | NYS Percentage | NYC Percentage | Downstate Percentage | Rest of State Percentage |
|-----------------------------------------------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| All Youth 16 to 24 | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| Enrolled in School | 60% | 65% | 61% | 69% | 65% |
| Employed | 25% | 23% | 16% | 26% | 28% |
| Unemployed or not in labor force | 34% | 42% | 46% | 43% | 37% |
| Not Enrolled in School | 40% | 35% | 39% | 31% | 35% |
| Employed | 27% | 23% | 23% | 22% | 24% |
| Unemployed or not in labor force less than one year | 6% | 4% | 5% | 4% | 5% |
| Disconnected | 7% | 8% | 11% | 5% | 6% |

Source: American Community Survey 2005-2007 three-year estimates Public Use Microdata Sample

Table 2
Profile of Disconnected and All Other Youth, NYS

| | Disconnected Youth | All Other Youth |
|----------------------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| Gender | | |
| Male | 49% | 51% |
| Female | 51% | 49% |
| Marital Child Status | | |
| Married with children (Female Youth) | 13% | 2% |
| Unmarried with children | 17% | 6% |
| No children | 69% | 92% |
| Race/Ethnicity | | |
| White | 32% | 58% |
| Hispanic or Latino of Any Race | 30% | 17% |
| Black | 31% | 16% |
| Asian/Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander | 4% | 7% |
| Other Race/Ethnicity | 3% | 2% |
| Citizenship | | |
| Citizen | 81% | 89% |
| Non-Citizen | 19% | 11% |
| Educational Attainment (Ages 22-24) | | |
| Not a High School Graduate | 35% | 10% |
| High School Graduate | 40% | 23% |
| Some College, No Degree | 12% | 27% |
| Associate's degree | 4% | 10% |
| Bachelor's degree or higher | 9% | 31% |
| Region | | |
| NYC | 57% | 39% |
| Downstate Suburban | 16% | 26% |
| Rest of State | 27% | 35% |
| Age Group | | |
| 16-19 | 29% | 47% |
| 20-21 | 28% | 23% |
| 22-24 | 43% | 30% |

Source: American Community Survey 2005-2007 three-year estimates Public Use Microdata Sample

are probably not truly disconnected, but difficult to disentangle from those who are. Their inclusion testifies to the unavoidable roughness of population estimates.

Of the 2.5 million youth ages 16-24 residing in New York State during the years 2005-2007, 199,000 were disconnected youth, roughly 8% of all New York's young people. Nationally, 7% were disconnected in those years. The disconnection rate was 5-6% in upstate New York and the downstate suburban area and twice as high (11%) in New York City. (See Table 1.)

Looking more closely at the disconnected youth population, they differ significantly from other youth. (See Table 2 for more detailed data.)

- *Race/Ethnicity*: Six in ten disconnected youth are African-American or Hispanic, while only one in three non-disconnected youth are African-American or Hispanic. Still, whites make up the largest single ethnic group of disconnected youth, at 32%.
- *Single motherhood*: One in six disconnected women is a single mother, more than three times the rate for non-disconnected women.
- *Citizenship*: About one in five disconnected youth are non-citizens, a higher rate than that of non-disconnected youth.
- *Educational attainment*: Three out of four older disconnected youth have no more than a high school diploma, compared to only one in three non-disconnected youth. Strikingly, disconnected youth are more than three times as likely to have dropped out of high school and failed to obtain a General Educational Development (GED).

In other respects disconnected youth differ little from their non-disconnected counterparts. Notably, men and women appear equally likely to become disconnected. This is noteworthy, since their risk factors differ. Teen mothers are, obviously, female, while juvenile justice is mostly a male phenomenon. The 2005 Community Service Society study found a declining rate of disconnection among women over the previous decade but no decline among men. Other studies have found that young men, especially African-American and Hispanic men, are more likely to have trouble finding employment than young women.⁹

SCHOOL-AGE DISCONNECTED YOUTH

It may be useful to distinguish the experience of school-age teenagers from young adults. The American ideal of social and economic mobility collides with the findings of many youth development experts and professionals, which is that by the time they enter their teen years, some New Yorkers already face terrible odds against succeeding in life.

Experts in youth disconnection have identified four key factors that dramatically increase the risk that a young person will disconnect over time: school dropout; experience with the juvenile justice system; teen and single motherhood; and foster care placement. We separate out school-age youth for another reason as well—to focus attention on school itself as a primary site for both state and local attention. Young people having trouble in school need special interventions to prevent dropout, while youth who have already dropped out need to be recovered and steered to customized learning opportunities that will increase their odds of success.

How many school-age youth are disconnected? Applying the overall standard (out of school and not working) SCAA found that 5% of youth ages 16-19 in New York State were disconnected, about half the rate of older youth ages 20-24. Almost all of these youth are school dropouts. Given the surge in disconnection after age 19, many more youth in school must be at risk of failing to connect as young adults. If we could add all youth in contact with the juvenile justice system, teen mothers and foster care youth, the overall number would be considerably higher. Because these populations overlap significantly, it is beyond our capability to add them together.¹⁰ But we can suggest the basic size of each population in New York State:

1. *School Dropout:* The New York City Department of Education (DOE) has estimated that 68,000 youth ages 16-21 are dropouts. On a statewide level, that number would suggest more than 100,000 dropout youth in the 16-21 age group. The State Education Department (SED) does not track the statewide number of dropouts in the same fashion.¹¹ However, their

data shows that in 2007, 32,602 students dropped out, while another 5,578 entered an approved program for a high school equivalency diploma, i.e. GED.¹² In that same year 174,443 students graduated.

2. *Juvenile justice:* At year-end 2007, 2,300 youth were in the custody of the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS).¹³ While the majority of these youth will lead healthy and productive lives, they are proportionally more likely to become repeat offenders and disconnected youth. Encouragingly, the number of youth in custody has dropped by more than one-third in the past decade. Of youth in custody in 2007, 93% were male, 82% were African-American or Hispanic, and 50% required treatment for substance abuse.
3. *Teen motherhood:* In 2006, over 17,000 girls ages 15-19 gave birth in New York State. Incidence of teen childbirth is four times as prevalent among Hispanic girls as whites, and three times as prevalent among African-American girls.¹⁴ The incidence of teen motherhood has remained steady over the past several years.
4. *Foster care placement:* Almost 8,000 youth ages 14-17 were in foster care in 2007. Of all foster care youth, two-thirds were African-American or Hispanic.¹⁵ Another 7,000 youth in this age range were living with non-parental kin and receiving child-only public assistance grants. These youth have similar life experiences to those of foster youth, including parental substance abuse and forced separation from parents.

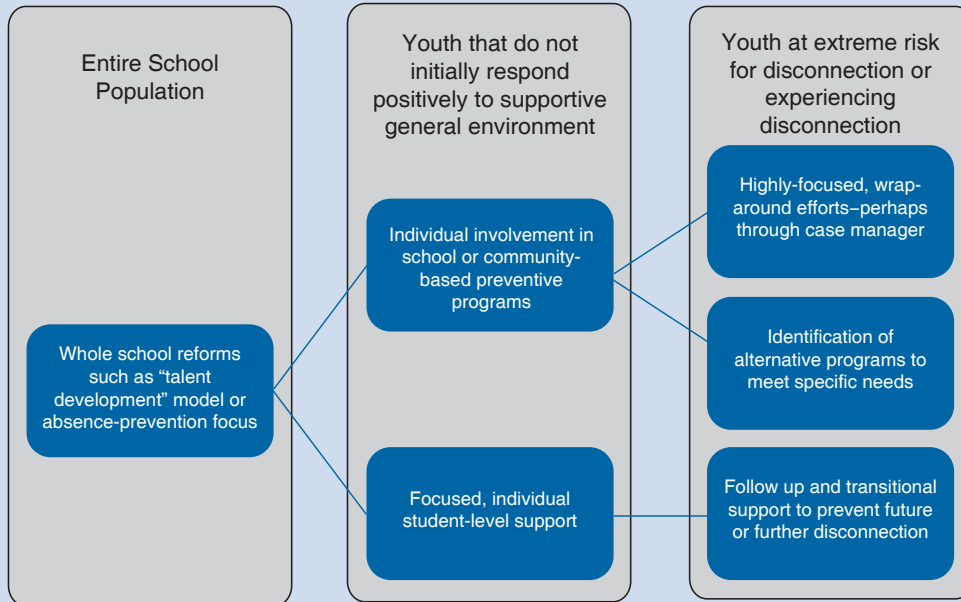
In the teen years, youth are more responsive to preventive steps than in later years. But prevention is not enough. Even with the best dropout prevention programs, thousands of students will nonetheless drop out each year. It is essential that educators continue to give these youth a path to graduation, whether it be a GED or a Regents diploma in some alternate setting.

Youth who drop out of high school continue to aspire to a better life. Of the 31,000 youth who passed the GED test in 2007, six in ten cited their desire to attend college as a reason for taking the test.¹⁶ Yet national data show that only one in nine GED attainers actually succeed in getting a college degree.

Chart 2

Tiered Approach to Prevention, Intervention and Recovery

In an environment with limited resources, a tiered approach is necessary to ensure that lower-intensity services are provided before providing higher-intensity (and more costly) services to youth.



Source: Public Impact for the Annie E. Casey Foundation, December 2008

The low rate of access and success for these GED-equipped students speaks at one level to a lack of academic preparation, at another level to unfamiliarity with college culture, and at still another level to neglect by our society. Recovering these dropout youth will cost more than preventing their dropout in the first place, but both prevention and recovery are less expensive in the long run than neglect.

One interesting approach has been introduced by Public Impact for the Annie E. Casey Foundation—that of an interconnected, tiered system to address prevention, intervention and recovery. The First Tier targets the entire school population with inclusive reforms. The Second Tier targets youth who do not initially respond positively to the general school environment. They may require individual involvement in school- or community-based prevention programs, or more focused support. Finally, the Third Tier targets youth at risk for disconnection or who are already disconnected. These youth receive highly-focused wrap-around services, referrals to specific services, and follow-up.¹⁷

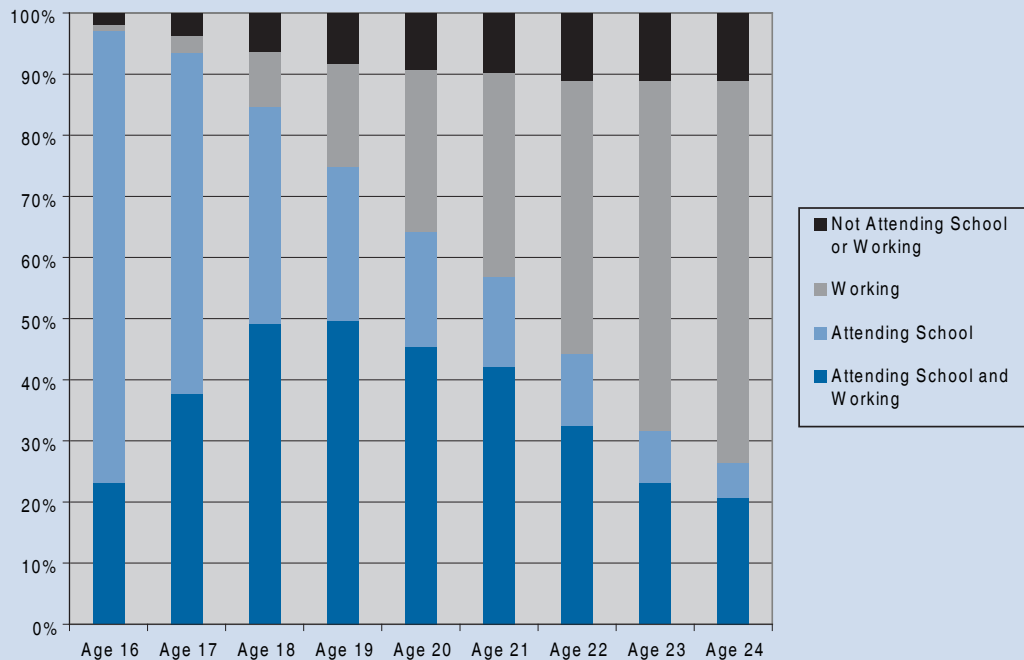
OLDER DISCONNECTED YOUTH

As teens grow out of their school-age years, work becomes an increasingly large influence. (See Chart 3.) For at-risk youth, the difficulty that most youth experience in getting and keeping jobs is compounded by lack of family and community support, as well as poor literacy and numeracy skills. As a result, youth falling into one or more of the categories described above are far more likely than other youth to miss their connection to the workforce.

SCAA identified a population of 141,000 disconnected youth, ages 20-24, about 70% of all disconnected youth and about one in ten youth in this age group. Not only do older disconnected youth have difficulty getting and keeping jobs, many lose support structures that helped them in earlier years. “There’s a lot of resources until they’re 21, and then essentially none,” says James Golden, Executive Director of the Edwin Gould Academy in New York City.¹⁸

Chart 3

Balance of School and Work, Youth Ages 16 to 24, New York State



Source: American Community Survey, Personal Use Microdata Sample, 2005-07

Rules governing needed services do not match the needs of youth clients:

- Individuals over age 21 are ineligible to obtain high school diplomas. Programs that prepare youth to take the GED test generally do not seek to reconnect youth and encourage college enrollment.
- Medicaid eligibility for youth aging out of foster care expires at age 21, and until 2008 the threshold was 18.
- Youth in the juvenile justice system age into the adult corrections system at 21, which lacks many of the supports available to juveniles.¹⁹
- Youth-oriented workforce programs generally phase out at age 21 and are replaced by adult-oriented programs that lack a youth engagement component.²⁰

The central role of the public education system recedes in the lives of older disconnected youth, replaced by a patchwork quilt of services. These services often provide valuable assistance, such as workforce training and adult literacy programs, GED prep programs,

Medicaid and WIC, home visiting, and others. But providing a single service is not the same as providing a comprehensive, integrated program. Programs assisting older disconnected youth are generally adult-oriented programs that do not provide developmentally appropriate support services. As a result, these young adults are the most likely to be lost between systems.

The consequences have been aptly summarized by researchers at the Vera Institute of Justice:²¹

- Youth are sent along “service tunnels” that determine the services they receive, regardless of their underlying problems.
- Separate agencies fail to share information that would enhance the quality of services.
- Lack of coordination diffuses responsibility, allowing agencies to disavow accountability for bad outcomes.
- Agencies may deliberately seek to shift responsibility to a different agency, thereby exacerbating the youth’s problems.

The needs of young adults are different from those of school-age youth. “Young adults need intensive, comprehensive programs that can get them skills and build their exposure and readiness for the world of work, says Lazar Treschan, Director of Youth Policy at the Community Service Society.²²

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EXISTING PROGRAMS: STUDENT RECOVERY

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New York State has a number of programs and initiatives available to help youth who are at risk of becoming disconnected. This section profiles three such programs. Two from SED seek to increase the high school graduation rate, while one from OCFS facilitates collaboration between county and local agencies that serve youth.

Alternative Education Programs/Customized Learning Experiences

A sea-change has taken place in the way educators look at youth at risk of school dropout. Where many youth lagging behind in school were once viewed negatively as slow learners or as disciplinary problems, educators are increasingly concluding that in fact they simply do not respond well to the mainstream educational model. That model may work effectively for most students, but not all.

SED is assisting local school districts in providing an alternative pathway for student success through customized learning experiences. These programs share certain hallmarks, such as:

- Emphasizing a user-friendly environment.
- Focusing on student assets instead of deficits.
- Providing curricula that stress relevance to the “real world” by packaging lessons differently, including wrap-around services that are responsive to the needs of the whole child.
- Emphasizing acceptance of students for who they are.

SED is partnered with DOL in piloting a customized learning program in Central & Western New York. The program will establish a 2009 Summer Academy for Educators, during which teams of teachers and administrators will learn the skills needed to create a learning environment that assists youth in building a plan for future success and in attaining the life/work skills necessary to engage in the global economy. The Academy will follow up by bringing participants together throughout the school year.

The goal of the program is to build a regional learning community of faculty and administrators. This learning community will serve as an incubator for the development of innovative approaches to prepare youth for 21st Century labor market challenges. SED and DOL staff anticipate that the next phase of the project will shift to the Hudson Valley and other southern parts of the state.²³

Service Learning Programs

SED’s **Liberty Partnerships Program (LPP)**, established in 1988, brings together colleges and universities, schools, parents, community organizations, and businesses to assist youth at risk of dropout. LPP utilizes systemic dropout prevention strategies, extended-day and afterschool programs, mentors, mock college experiences, and parent engagement services.²⁴

From 2002-2008, LPP allocated more than \$81 million in grants that advanced collaborations between the higher education community, schools and local stakeholders to reduce the school dropout rate among at-risk youth in grades 5-12 and prepare at-risk youth for successful transition into postsecondary education and the workforce.

Between 2000-2007, LPP graduated 11,885 youth. 91.1% of LPP students entered college or the workforce right after high school graduation. 79% of LPP’s college-bound seniors chose to continue their education in New York State. Another impressive accomplishment is that the student-school persistence rate (attendance and completion) was 98.5%.²⁵

In June 2009, LPP will launch a statewide recruitment and admissions program.

Ready by 21

OCFS received a grant two years ago from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to participate in the national Ready by 21 Quality Counts Initiative. Ready by 21 focuses on:

- Setting results-based goals.
- Assessing current resources and need.
- Strengthening community demand.
- Engaging youth and families.
- Improving the quality and coordination of both programs and systems.
- Shifting and aligning policies and resources.
- Tracking progress.²⁶

The funding allowed OCFS and its partners to work with four counties—Broome, Onondaga, Orange and Rockland—and to support broader dissemination of the Ready by 21 model.

The cornerstone of the initiative is to encourage and facilitate local partnerships between county agencies such as youth bureaus, department of social services, and mental health. This cross-systems approach allows counties to look comprehensively at their youth services programs—how well they work, what gaps may exist, and especially where services overlap. In many cases, youth involved in more than one system could benefit from a more streamlined approach, whether that means pooled funding to provide services or a standard assessment tool used by all involved agencies.

OCFS is in year two of the initiative, which has also focused on collecting data and doing internal and external assessments of youth programs. Knowing where available services are will help with planning and with building an infrastructure. Knowing whether those services are effective will allow the counties to concentrate resources on those deficiencies and improve results.

During year three of the initiative, OCFS will broaden its scope throughout OCFS, into other state agencies, and to counties that neighbor the pilot sites. There will also be particular attention given to the question of how to sustain the effort and the infrastructure without the grant support.²⁷

EXISTING PROGRAMS: RECONNECTING YOUTH

In 2005, the Institute for Youth, Education, and Families of the National League of Cities published a document entitled *Re-engaging Disconnected Youth*. The report used a framework of three broad strategic goals—Promote Educational Attainment, Develop Workforce Connections, and Support Youth in Transition—under which were listed subsidiary objectives to guide action and investment, such as “combat truancy” and “expand access to entry-level jobs.”

The programs or initiatives that we have chosen as “promising practices” fit within the three strategic goals, but we have taken the liberty of adding our own objectives. In addition, all of these programs fit within a widely accepted Youth Development Framework. The cornerstone of this framework is that “being problem-free is not being fully prepared.” Thus, youth development professionals aim to prepare youth for adulthood, not simply to solve specific problems. The Framework also states that effective programs are:

- **Youth-centered:** staff and activities engage young people’s diverse talents, skills, and interests, building on their strengths and involving them in planning and decision-making.
- **Knowledge-centered:** building a range of life skills, activities show youth that “learning” is a reason to be involved, and provide opportunities to connect with a wide array of mentors.
- **Care-centered:** provide family-like environments where youth can feel safe and build trusting relationships.²⁸

GOAL 1: PROMOTE EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Forty years ago, many youth could graduate from high school or drop out and go straight to work at a local factory. The collapse of the industrial economy has ended that era. Today, literacy and numeracy are essential prerequisites to obtaining stable employment. In addition, most youth will also need at least one year of postsecondary education or training as well

as a marketable credential to advance in their chosen career field. The changing economy of the 21st Century poses new hazards for New York's youth, but also new opportunities.

Objective 1: Develop work experience *plus* strong academic learning

Our scan found that many programs focus on getting youth into the labor market. However, the most promising appear to stress academics, as well. Basic skills are necessary for those starting out, while more advanced (and often trade- or career-specific) skills are necessary for those pursuing work in a certain field.

The **Youth Development Institute (YDI)** developed and administers the **Community Education Pathways to Success (CEPS) program**, in which eight community-based organizations (CBOs) in New York City provide services to youth ages 16–24 who have dropped out and read below the 8th grade level. YDI also assists eight new sites, including three libraries, using the same intensive support and training strategies.²⁹ CEPS programs have a strong local base and a commitment to the population; quality of implementation is crucial.

Youth who drop out of high school comprise several different subgroups, the characteristics of which need to be considered in shaping services. Among the subgroups are:

- Low-skilled students, reading below the eighth grade level and, therefore, not able to enter GED or most Workforce Investment Act (WIA) programs.
- Higher skilled.
- Special populations such as foster care youth.

CEPS targets low-skilled youth because, while these represent the majority of dropouts, there are few program models and little funding to serve them. CEPS is an effort to develop and test a model for this population.

The thrust of the CEPS work is on developing work experience *plus* strong academic learning. While other programs are more employment-based, CEPS believes that a balanced approach is more conducive to success. The point? If you can't read, you're not going to work—especially in this economic climate.

The program costs range from \$5,000 to \$8,000 per youth. Costs are low relative to WIA programs. There is little public funding beyond Adult Literacy to support this population. However, the culture of most Adult Literacy programs is geared toward an older population; they lack the supportive services needed by these young adults.

According to an independent evaluation, CEPS participants averaged literacy gains of 1.5 years and math gains of nearly one year in less than one semester of study. After one year of program experience, organizations serving these youth doubled the number of students they serve while keeping a consistent increase in literacy levels. YDI is putting together documentation to support replication and is working with several organizations to adapt the program to additional local and national sites.

CEPS guidelines include:

- **Youth development** features infused in every aspect of the program.
- **Instructional methodology and curriculum** providing explicit and detailed practices guided by an educational philosophy.
- **Strategies for individual student guidance and social supports** requiring constant attention to student's assets, obstacles and progress.
- **Career development** to explore future interests and options and provide work experiences.
- **Team approaches to services** requiring the full collaboration of supervisors, instructors and support staff so that all understand student progress and all push in the same direction.
- **Organizational commitment** from leadership for building and sustaining.³⁰

Objective 2: Individualize the educational experience

Many youth drop out of school due to sheer boredom. The educational system has failed to engage and challenge them. Our scan showed that the best programs pay attention to individual needs, as well as individual wants and desires for the future.

New York City DOE's Office of Multiple Pathways to Graduation (MPG) is a nationally-recognized model established in 2005 to serve

youth who are over-age, under-credited or far behind in their schooling and likely to drop out. The MPG offers three educational options:

- GED exam preparation programs.
- Transfer High Schools (THS).
- Young Adult Borough Centers (YABC).

The Learning to Work (LTW) program provides wrap-around services within some of these programs. While these models are relatively new, with significant upgrading through strong technical assistance, they could be developed from current school district alternative high schools and GED programs in regions outside of New York City.

Over 8,500 students have graduated from LTW schools and programs since 2005. Of the 2007-08 graduates, about one-quarter enrolled in post-secondary education in 2008-09.³¹

A number of **GED prep programs** in New York City are part of LTW, although there are many more GED programs that are not part of the initiative.³² In 2007-08, 2,663 students graduated from LTW schools and programs with a high school diploma, while an additional 446 obtained a GED. Already in 2009, 1,447 students graduated with a diploma, with another 207 receiving a GED.³³

There are currently 37 **transfer high schools** in New York City serving youth ages 16–21 who have some prior high school experience. Of these, 17 have been opened in recent years with the support of MPG in collaboration with three intermediary organizations: Good Shepherd Services (GSS), New Visions for Public Schools (NVPS), and Diploma Plus (DP). These new transfer schools work with small populations of students (none with student bodies larger than 200) who had already articulated to at least 9th grade but were not successful in high school and may have earned no credits.

Eleven of the schools—those supported by GSS and NVPS—use a model with the following features: schools are ungraded, with students assigned to courses based on ability and need, not grade level. Partially funded through LTW, these transfer schools support:

- A work element (through internships).
- A socio-emotional element (through intensive counseling support).

- An academic element (through a curriculum that prepares students to earn a high school diploma on an accelerated trimester schedule, which helps to accommodate youth who work or have family responsibilities).³⁴

These transfer high schools, which have shown increased attendance and graduation rates among their students, operate using three broad principles:

- **Individualized learning** programs that address each student's academic and socio-emotional needs and tailor course offerings to them.
- **Partnership-based**, with a principal in charge of academics and a program director leading the counseling staff, who are responsible for 20-40 students each. Based on Learning to Work's "Primary Person Model," these counselors often serve almost like family for those youth without that type of support.
- **Accelerated**, allowing students to earn 1.5 times as many credits in a year as they could in traditional high schools. Students also receive progress reports every two weeks, along with the opportunity to discuss those reports, which helps them stay focused and on track.³⁵
- **YABC's** are evening academic programs designed specifically for high school students at risk of dropping out because they are behind or because they have adult responsibilities that make attending school in the daytime difficult. There are 23 in New York City, all but two involved in the LTW initiative. Students enrolled in YABC must be at least 17.5 years old, have attended high school for four or more years, and have earned at least 17 credits. The Office of Multiple Pathways to Graduation will release its first YABC Progress Report during the 2009-10 school year.

Objective 3: Prepare and motivate

Without the proper motivation, all the education in the world will not result in long-term success. Youth need to be prepared for transitions from one service system to another, e.g., from high school to college, or juvenile detention to high school. Without support, an at-risk youth is more likely to lose motivation or make an uninformed career decision. While

each youth is responsible for his or her own decisions, individual attention and support can enable that youth to steer a course toward long-term success as an adult.

The **Pathways to Success Department at Erie Community College (ECC)** has successfully broken down silos and is now partnering with the Buffalo Public Schools Adult Education Division, Erie 1 BOCES, Kenmore-Tonawanda School District, Maryvale Community Education and Erie 2 Chautauqua-Cattaraugus BOCES on the Pathways program.

Participants must be at least 17 years old and not enrolled in high school (SUNY regulations state that students cannot be enrolled in non-credit remedial courses if they are still in the P-12 system). Pathways enrolls 2,000-3,000 such students each year.

They are immediately paired with a mentor who helps them through the GED process. Upon completion, they are paired with a case worker who assists them on a pre-collegiate track and follows their progress throughout the college experience. Both mentors and case workers are considered motivators, not educators, and motivation is seen as just as important a component to success as academic learning.

The Pathways program aims for one of three outcomes:

- Completion of a two-year degree.
- Job placement.
- Union apprenticeship.

The goal is to transfer students to a four-year college with job placement. In order to ensure that students can visualize this trajectory, case workers help them create a five-year plan. Beginning with the question “Where are you today?” the plan works backward to help youth see and understand what they need to do in Years 1-4 to achieve success by Year 5.

Pathways found that students were ill-prepared to enter college-level reading, writing, and math courses. So in 2005, it started a tuition-free college prep course offered three times a year. For 10 weeks prior to beginning classes at ECC, students in the prep course study these basic subjects. Passage of these courses prior to matriculation means that the state is not using TAP and PELL grant money to pay for non-credited courses—a win-win for the state and students.³⁶

GOAL 2: DEVELOP WORKFORCE CONNECTIONS

Youth need marketable job skills to secure employment. They also require assistance in plotting out a plan for long-term employment. Outreach to potential community employers is essential so that they can build their workforce while supporting the local economy.

Objective 1: Build a trajectory

Transitions should not come out of the blue for youth. Systems and programs must build a trajectory that prepares them for each next step and follows them through changes, adapting to their needs along the way.

Hillside Family of Agencies in Monroe County offers a number of programs for children and youth from birth to age 26 (the organization recently raised the age limit from 21 to 26 because it saw a need for continued services). One of Hillside’s programs is the Work Scholarship Connection (HWSC), which builds a trajectory that connects, educates and trains young people in middle and high school and then assists them with job placement and higher education. Research demonstrates that HWSC nearly doubles the graduation rate of at-risk urban students.

HWSC is funded through Community Optional Preventive Services (COPS) dollars, donations, foundation support, and both school district and city money. It is a voluntary program for 7th – 12th graders that is designed to increase graduation rates in urban areas. There are currently 2,870 youth enrolled (the largest group, 2,300, is in Rochester). Hillside’s ultimate goal is to enroll 7,300 youth. These youth must meet indicators that predict dropping out. Participants are 60% female/40% male, and predominantly African-American and Hispanic.

Youth advocates work in the public schools and enroll the youth in HWSC’s job training academy in 9th grade. In this academy they learn about workplace expectations and interview skills. Employment partners connect participating youth with a job once their grades are up. There are between 50–60 participating job sites. In addition, 80% of youth go on to higher education, usually community college. Higher education partners often donate tuition.

Hillside is in the process of increasing funding so it can provide youth advocate support during the first two years of college. This

A Reconnection Story

Kwamane began working for the Work Appreciation for Youth (WAY) Program while he was in residence at Baker Victory Services (BVS). He started working at Habitat for Humanity but had difficulty in the worksite and sought out support from the Worksite Coordinator. He became more involved in the WAY Program and helped recruit many youth to participate as well. Kwamane exemplified the importance of work and commitment to his peers. He was effective at making work seem “cool” to the other youth and was naturally able to inspire young people. In 2008, he was inducted as a WAY Scholar because of his motivation and ability to lead others. Kwamane was discharged to his home in

Syracuse, but he still maintains contact regularly with the WAY Program and has saved money for his scholarship account all on his own.

The WAY program works to provide experiences and training that prepare young people to understand the skills and attitudes necessary to be employed. BVS has begun to create a transition disc that students may take home with them at discharge. It includes documents that explain work experience and rates quality and growth areas.

*—Information provided by Jim Casion,
Executive Director, Baker Victory Services*

is necessary because, although the program is successful in moving youth into college, they sometimes drop out once they are there due to a lack of supports.³⁷

Objective 2: Partner with community business leaders

Our scan found that most promising programs operate at the local level. Therefore, it is critical that programs collaborate with community leaders, particularly businesses, to support youth as they head out into the world of employment.

Since 1888, the **Northeast Parent and Child Society** in Schenectady County has provided a number of services and supports, including career development, foster care, and family preservation. Northeast currently serves 29 counties and 5,000 children and family members a year throughout upstate New York.

The career development program, Youth Build Schenectady, is one of Northeast’s premier programs. There are 3,100 disconnected youth in Schenectady County alone, making this program of the utmost importance.³⁸ Youth Build Schenectady, based on the national Youth Build model, served 28 youth between the ages of 18-24 in 2009 and will serve a minimum of 36 in 2010.

Participants:

- Have no high school diploma or GED (although they may have an Independent Education Diploma (IED)).
- Have reading and math skills at a minimum 7th grade level.

- Are racially mixed.
- Are 50% female/50% male.

There are two six-month tracks—construction and emergency medical technician (EMT)—chosen because they do not require a great deal of higher education (although they do require intensive training). Youth in both tracks participate in 20 hours a week of GED classes. Those going into construction must also receive industry-recognized credentials, while those becoming EMTs must pass a four-credit college class for certification.

Following the six-month program period, Youth Build Schenectady tracks participants for more than two years. It also helps them secure internships and employment and credits its more than 40 community business partners with providing jobs and mentoring.

In the construction track alone, Youth Build Schenectady was fourth in the nation in 2008 in terms of attendance and completion. The track had an 88% GED pass rate and a 92% job placement rate.

This year, Mohawk Ambulance has promised 45 slots to participants who receive their GED and EMT certification and successfully complete their internship. All EMT candidates are paired with a mentor who helps them not only improve their skill set, but fit in to the workforce culture.

Northeast Parent and Child Society plans to replicate the career development program for its other populations, such as foster care youth. Youth Build Schenectady is entirely grant

funded and past legislative efforts to institute a stable funding stream have been unsuccessful. While bringing such an initiative to scale statewide would be daunting, it would be possible with the proper resources.³⁹

GOAL 3: SUPPORT YOUTH IN TRANSITION

It is particularly important to provide supports to youth in transition, whether they are transitioning from high school to college or work, or out of a social service system such as foster care. An important point that we heard more than once from service providers was “once in the program, always in the program.” Therefore, while transition supports are critical, it appears that being able to return to a program as an alumni, or turn to a program for assistance, is equally vital to youth. In addition, housing is imperative for this population. No one can be expected to successfully pursue education or employment without a stable, secure roof over their head.

Objective 1: Change the culture

Unless all parties involved are open to changing the way we have always done things, no real change will occur in how we address this problem. Attitude plays a very strong role in whether or not innovative ideas succeed. Leaders and providers from the top down must be engaged and welcoming to new learning processes.

New York State, as part of implementation of *The Children’s Plan*, is responding to the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s (SAMHSA’s) Healthy Transitions Initiative RFP. The grant will provide funding to seven states. New York State would target its initiative to youth in New York City ages 16–25 who are aging out of foster care and who have serious emotional disturbances or serious mental illness, but stresses that the model could be applied to any struggling youth.

If funded, the state plans to use the **Transition to Independence Process (TIP) Model** as a cornerstone of the project. TIP is recognized as an evidence-based practice that improves post-secondary outcomes in young people ages 16–21. The model is strengths-based, engaging youth through relationship development and person-centered planning. It acknowledges and sets out to develop personal choice and social

responsibility, while creating a safety net of support—family members, peers, and other caring adults—around the youth.⁴⁰

TIP was introduced in New York City during a series of single-day training sessions in 2006. The model was designed to be tailored to individual needs and “to work across all transition domains”, according to Dr. Hewitt “Rusty” Clark, the developer of the model.

Dr. Clark says that the TIP strategy is to establish “communities of learning and practice.”⁴¹ With the proper supports in place, there is hope that it could be replicated around the state.⁴²

Objective 2: Keep youth connected

Our research points to the fact that the most critical component of reconnection is strong support from family, friends, and other caring adults. Youth cannot, and should not be expected to, succeed on their own.

As noted earlier, the **Hillside Family of Agencies Work-Scholarship Connection (HWSC)** shows great promise and has provided measurable results. In addition to educating and training youth, HWSC holds transition activities, like the one in May 2009. The day included two sessions, one for youth going to college and the other for youth going to work or into the military. The session for college-bound youth included a panel of college faculty talking about on-campus resources available to navigate college and strategies for success, as well as a panel of college students discussing their successes and challenges in transitioning. The session for work-bound youth featured an employment panel with an academic/vocational mix that spotlighted not only employment but the academic pieces necessary to advance in certain fields. Employment partners talked about skill sets and were available for conversation at a job fair.

HWSC tracks alumni in college up to two years and alumni in the workforce/military up to one year. Most social services agencies track for an average of 90 days. Assistance includes career counseling, putting youth in touch with resources such as financial aid, and brainstorming about the future.

Alumni relations is relatively new to Hillside. According to Dr. Linda Evans, Alumni Services Coordinator for HWSC, “Technically, you

never leave our program.” Hillside Children’s Center also operates a drop-in center in Rochester where young people can take a shower, have a meal, and engage in conversation with adults who will assist them in connecting with services if needed.

In addition, the organization provides jail outreach so that young inmates can plan for their release, and housing for youth in need of that safety net. Finally, Hillside offers adoption services and is working on connecting older youth to families. The idea is that even if they never actually live with the adoptive family, they will have people and a place to turn. The intent of all these programs is to keep youth connected to family, whatever the definition may be, and community.⁴³

FosterClub, the National Network for Young People in Foster Care has partnered with the OCFS and **Youth in Progress (YIP)**, the New York State Foster Care Youth Leadership Team, to certify youth as facilitators to deliver permanency training. The FosterClub curriculum stresses “getting solid”, which is not only the process of identifying caring adults and establishing permanent connections with them, but also the process of becoming ready and able to participate in positive, life-long relationships and to accept support.

FosterClub uses a Permanency Pact that is essentially a pledge by an adult to provide specific supports and “life-long, kin-like connections” to youth aging out of foster care. The overall objective is to challenge traditional thoughts on permanency in regard to adolescents. As one youth put it, it is more about being connected or having “permanency in their pocket” traveling with them wherever they go. Adolescents refer to the Pact as a way to create a team of people who can support them in a variety of ways. These resources together form a “patchwork quilt” of support for each individual youth. Youth say that having connections to people they can always count on is the key to supporting their success.⁴⁴

Objective 3: Provide stable housing

Youth who are out of school and unemployed may very well not have a secure housing arrangement. Research tells us that a myriad of programs exist for youth aging-out of foster care. Homeless youth are another story.

OCFS administers the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act, providing matching funds to counties to operate services and conducting on-site inspections of residential programs. Two types of programs exist: short-term crisis and long-term transitional independent living programs.

Short-term residential crisis services are available for 30 days to youth who have left home without parental consent. Long-term transitional independent living programs serve older youth in supported and group residences and through non-residential services such as case management and the development of independent living skills. Youth may reside in long-term transitional housing for up to 18 months. If they have reached the 18-month limit but have not celebrated their 18th birthday, they may remain in the program up to an additional six months.⁴⁵

Rochester’s **Center for Youth’s Transitional Living Program (TLP)** is a 12-bed supported apartment and case management model for homeless youth ages 16–21, some of them parenting teens. Residents live in individual apartments with on-site staff. For up to 18 months, youth may receive housing and services such as counseling, mentoring on parenting skills, and assistance in preparing for and obtaining employment and/or post-secondary education.⁴⁶

Promising practices in the area of housing also include the national **Civic Justice Corps (CJC)** initiative, part of The Corps Network, which represents the country’s 136 Service and Conservation Corps. CJC works with formerly incarcerated and court-involved youth, providing intensive case management, life skills development, and education and employment preparation. It could be replicated for all at-risk or disconnected youth.

The program has impressive outcomes:

- 48.6% GED or high school diploma receipt.
- 72.9% job or education placement.
- 81.7% retention in job or education placement.
- 8.8 % recidivism.⁴⁷

One of the CJC’s initiatives is to train youth in the skills necessary to re-build and renovate local buildings, turning them into housing for themselves and their neighbors. Not only do youth learn a skill, but they are connected to

local businesses and labor unions that often provide continuing employment. Corps members develop a sense of stewardship of self, family and community while also developing skills necessary to become problem solvers and leaders in their community. They support housing (some in partnership with HUD agencies) and end up with a place to live, and a strong sense of accomplishment.

The Council on Children and Families and Fight Crime: Invest in Kids New York presented the CJC to a statewide audience in 2008 and has been encouraging adoption of the principles and practices of CJC since that time. Separate from this effort, two new CJC's (NY Justice Corps in Brooklyn and the Bronx) were established within the past year.

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RECOMMENDATIONS: OPPORTUNITIES FOR NEW INITIATIVES

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New York State's policy makers are poised to take decisive action that could dramatically improve the prospects of at-risk and disconnected youth. We urge the state's leaders to conceive of a single system that helps all youth reach their highest potential as adults. To achieve that system, policy makers should take the following steps:

- I. **Make the needs of disconnected youth a top statewide priority.** The state urgently needs to develop a comprehensive and effective response to the needs of disconnected youth.
 - a) **Adopt a formal position and articulate action steps.** The state should publicly identify the recovery and reconnection of at-risk and disconnected youth as a top priority for legislative, budget and other policy measures. The Governor and leaders of the State Legislature would then task their staff with establishing a comprehensive plan that would inform and guide these measures. The state should then follow through, not simply with additional funding, but with a commitment to innovation, integrated services and rigorous outcome measurement.

- b) **Elevate the work of the Children's Cabinet Advisory Board's Workgroup on Disconnected Youth.** The Children's Cabinet should adopt the Workgroup's recommendations and develop a plan for implementation. In addition, the Workgroup should broaden the scope of its work to include all disconnected and at-risk youth.
 - c) **Devote funding to investments in disconnected youth in a strategic, comprehensive way.** New York State is clearly in difficult financial straits. But further neglect of the state's youth will be far more expensive than providing the resources needed to improve their adult potential. Many promising programs exist, but their funding is a patchwork quilt. The state needs to both consolidate and expand the funding streams flowing to disconnected youth, especially in the areas of education, workforce training, alternatives to incarceration, affordable housing and mental health.
 - d) **Use the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) to help disconnected youth.** The stimulus bill has brought literally billions of dollars in resources to New York State. Where possible, that funding should be prioritized for disconnected youth.
 - e) **Adopt an approach dedicated to prevention, intervention and recovery.** New York State should develop a framework for addressing the needs of children and youth within the educational system. Tier I would apply to the entire school population, Tier II to at-risk youth, and Tier III to youth at high-risk of disconnecting. This approach and culture-shift might be replicated in social service agencies as well.
- II. **Direct state agencies to review regulations and policies that affect disconnected youth.** Many regulations and policies now on the books at both the state and local level may fail to take account of the needs of disconnected youth. Agencies need to reach out to providers and affected youth to identify rules that may have unintended consequences, and revise those rules.

- a) **Eliminate exclusionary rules.** State agencies should review any regulations or requirements that keep youth out of school, such as out-of-school suspension; and any rules that prevent youth from accessing services or educational support.
- b) **Adopt protocols for transitions.** Each state agency should define its protocol for transitioning youth out of or between social service systems. Intra-agency protocols should be determined by all impacted systems. Protocols should be shared between systems in the interest of transparency and collaboration.

III. Integrate and coordinate the services that assist disconnected youth. Individual agencies, no matter how well led, cannot fundamentally change the lives of disconnected youth. The state must coordinate the activities of multiple agencies providing services to the same (or overlapping) youth populations. Through integration and coordination, the state can ensure that all the service horses pull in the same direction and prevent youth from becoming disengaged when transitioning from one service to another.

- a) **Align information systems to track youth across the services that serve them.** State and local government agencies need to build the capacity to track youth across social services, workforce secondary and postsecondary systems. Especially key for helping disconnected youth would be alignment of the unique student identifier proposed for use in the K-12 educational system with child welfare, juvenile justice, and health care systems, including mental health. The identifier should be further expanded to include Pre-K.
- b) **Consider a case management system.** Philadelphia has pioneered a strategy in which case managers take responsibility for at-risk youth. New York State should consider a similar strategy, especially if information systems can be coordinated in a way that allows individual case-workers to track youth across systems.

IV. Focus on education, workforce, and housing interventions. All interventions are not created equal. The most effective strategy, particularly for young adults, is to combine intensive literacy/numeracy training with workforce skills development, and to relentlessly document the outcomes. There are many different ways to approach this model, however. The state should expand support for education/workforce interventions generally and then replicate the most cost-effective. In addition, the state should dedicate funding to help secure independent living and supportive housing arrangements with wraparound services for this population.

- a) **Leverage the successful “Multiple Pathways to Graduation” model.** A number of cities around the U.S. are implementing the Multiple Pathways to Graduation (MPG) model, and New York City has one of the most successful MPG systems. Implementation of the MPG model in other school districts around the state—with due regard for regional differences—could dramatically reduce school dropout and shrink the population of disconnected youth.
- b) **Promote transitions to postsecondary education and training.** New York State should design and implement strategies to aid disconnected youth to succeed in college. While recognizing that some youth will choose other paths, the state should make college enrollment and completion central goals of youth educational and employment initiatives.
- c) **Replicate effective education and workforce training programs.** New York State should conduct a statewide environmental scan to determine what programs with measurable outcomes exist, the population served and the funding streams that support them. Armed with this data, the state can bring promising practices to scale. Demonstrating measurable outcomes is critical, particularly those that measure literacy, numeracy and recognized occupational certifications.

Federal Action

Federal funding to assist youth is the most powerful leverage for aiding disconnected and at-risk youth. Federal youth investment is where the chronic ailments of fragmentation and disorganization begin. According to the U.S. General Accounting Office, there are at least 12 federal agencies funding over 300 programs that serve disadvantaged youth. Nonetheless, some are more important than others. The Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Justice, play lead roles. Together, these four agencies received \$3.7 billion in 2006, of which \$1.6 billion went to Labor's Job Corp program and nearly \$1 billion went to Labor's WIA Youth Activities initiatives.

Policy makers in New York need to engage energetically with their counterparts in Washington, DC to shape federal legislation that can make a difference for the youth in our state. The Workforce Investment Act and other laws up for reauthorization in the next two years should be reformed, strengthened, and where possible, integrated.

Perhaps the most important new opportunity for youth in New York arrives courtesy of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), sometimes referred to as "the stimulus bill." The ARRA provides over \$7 billion to New York State. These dollars are intended to stimulate the New York economy, both through direct injection of federal dollars, and indirectly, by relieving fiscal pressures on state and local government.

A number of funding streams can be prioritized for at-risk or disconnected youth, including new workforce funding for summer youth employment; competitive grants available to community-based organizations for YouthBuild programs; and competitive grants available to city-school partnerships for the "Investing in What Works and Innovation" fund to bring demonstration projects to scale.

New York State should take advantage of these and other federal funding opportunities to re-engage disconnected youth and prevent more youth from joining the ranks of the disconnected.

Conclusion

New York State has the tools at its disposal to improve the lives of the most disadvantaged youth in New York—the youth who could be great assets to our economy and society, or great liabilities. New York State can re-engage youth who are already struggling and help them turn their lives around, making them productive citizens and fulfilled adults. What remains to be seen is a solid commitment to change and the broad implementation of ideas that work.

Endnotes

- ¹ Interview with Elaine Spaul, Executive Director, The Center for Youth, Monroe County, personal interview, May 2009.
- ² Brett Brown, *Who Are America's Disconnected Youth*, 1996.
- ³ See Mark Levitan, *Out of School, Out of Work, Out of Luck?*, Community Service Society, 2005; and Laura Wyckoff et al, *Disconnected Young People in New York City: Crisis and Opportunity*, Public/Private Ventures, September 2008.
- ⁴ *Understanding High School Graduation Rates in New York*, Alliance for Excellent Education, undated.
- ⁵ Levitan *ibid*.
- ⁶ Lazar Treschan and Christine Molnar, *Out of Focus: A snapshot of public funding to reconnect youth to education and employment*, Community Service Society, June 2008.
- ⁷ As described in David Dodson et al, *Disconnected Youth in the Research Triangle Region*, MDC Inc., August 2008, p. 3.
- ⁸ Michael Wald and Tia Martinez, *Connected by 25: Improving the Life Chances of the Country's Most Vulnerable 14-24 Year Olds*, William and Flora Hewlett Foundation Working Paper, November 2003, p. 5. "Any period of involuntary employment is potentially problematic for young adults. Still, most youth eventually connect successfully with the labor force and most unemployed youth are not disconnected from social support systems."
- ⁹ Andrew Sum et al, *Trends in Black Male Joblessness and Year-Round Idleness: An Employment Crisis Ignored*, prepared for Alternative Schools Network, Chicago, Illinois, June 2004.
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- ¹² *The New York State Report Card: Comprehensive Information Report 2007-08*, New York State Education Department, March 10, 2009.
- ¹³ *2007 Annual Report*, New York State Office of Children and Family Services, Division of Juvenile Justice and Opportunities for Youth.
- ¹⁴ New York State Department of Health, as cited in Bridget Walsh, *Teenage Births: Outcomes for Young Parents and their Children*, Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy, December 2008.
- ¹⁵ *2007, Monitoring and Analysis Profiles With Selected Trend Data: 2003-2007*, New York State Office of Children and Family Services, p. 12.
- ¹⁶ *2007 GED Testing Program Statistical Report*, American Council on Education, July 2008, p. 70.
- ¹⁷ Dana Brinson, Bryan Hassel and Jacob Rosch, *Connecting Youth through Multiple Pathways*; Public Impact for the Annie E. Casey Foundation, December 2008.
- ¹⁸ Julie Bosman, "Too Old for Foster Care, and Facing the Recession," *New York Times*, April 8, 2009.
- ¹⁹ The New York State Department of Corrections takes education more seriously than its counterparts in other states. For example, NYSDOC provides GED classes free of charge and requires that all inmates under age 25 obtain a GED.
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- ²¹ Timothy Ross and Joel Miller, *Beyond the Tunnel Problem: Addressing Cross-Cutting Issues that Impact Vulnerable Youth*, Youth Transition Funders Group, undated.
- ²² Interview with Lazar Treschan, Director, Youth Policy, Community Service Society of New York.
- ²³ Interview with Greg Bayduss, Coordinator, Safe and Drug Free Schools, New York State Education Department.
- ²⁴ Interview with Fran Hollon, Statewide Coordinator of the NYSED Learn and Serve America Program, New York State Education Department.
- ²⁵ Information provided by Sean Brown, Program Director, NYSED Liberty Partnership Program.
- ²⁶ <http://www.forumfyi.org/readyby21>
- ²⁷ Interview with Robert Dick, Jr., Children & Family Services Specialist 2, Bureau of Planning & Intervention Design, Strategic Planning & Policy Development, New York State Office of Children and Family Services.
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- ³⁰ Interview with Peter Kleinbard, Executive Director, Youth Development Institute.
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- ³⁴ <http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/OMPG/LearningtoWork/default.htm>
- ³⁵ Interview with Michael Rothman, Transfer School Specialist, New Visions for Public Schools.
- ³⁶ Interview with Justin Kiernan, College Data Coordinator, Pathways to Success Department, Erie County Community College.
- ³⁷ Interview with Roderick Green, Assistant Director of Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection, Hillside Family of Agencies.
- ³⁸ Interview with Laura Alpert, Vice-President of Communications; Jennifer Lawrence, Director of Career Services; and Kimberly Klingbeil, Coordinator of Transition Services, Northeast Parent and Child Society.
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- ⁴¹ Interview with Dr. Hewitt B. "Rusty" Clark, Ph.D., Professor and Director, National Center on Youth Transition for Behavioral Health, Department of Child and Family Studies, Florida Mental Health Institute, University of South Florida.
- ⁴² Interviews with Shirley Berger, MA, MPH, CHES, Research and Policy Coordinator, Bureau of Child and Adolescent Services, NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene; and with Kristin Riley, Deputy Commissioner and Director, Division of Children and Family Services, NYS Office of Mental Health.
- ⁴³ Interviews with Dr. Linda Evans, Alumni Services Coordinator, Hillside Family of Agencies; and Mike Finn, Adoption Supervisor, Hillside Family of Agencies.
- ⁴⁴ Interview with Erika Leveillee, MA, Team Leader, Adolescent Services Resource Network, Youth in Progress (YIP) Statewide Youth Leadership Team, Professional Development Program, University at Albany.
- ⁴⁵ Information provided by Jacquelyn Greene, Director of Juvenile Justice Policy, New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services.
- ⁴⁶ Information provided by Elaine Spaull, Executive Director, Center for Youth.
- ⁴⁷ http://nascc.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=59&Itemid=78
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Prior Recommendations

The following recommendations were drawn from the two previous SCAA papers on disconnected youth because they are relevant to this discussion.

Prevention Strategies:

- Educate policy makers and the public about the basic science of prevention.
- Develop and adopt a prevention framework.
- Develop and implement a statewide risk and protection survey.
- Focus on public health.
- Increase family supports for the parents and caregivers of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers.
- Increase the utilization by schools and other normative settings of Child and Family Clinic Plus.
- Implement *The Children's Plan: Improving the Social and Emotional Well-Being of New York's Children and Their Families*.

Transition Strategies:

- Ensure significant support systems.
- Stress forgiveness over failure.
- Begin transition readiness earlier.
- Re-conceptualize transitions across the life span.
- Empower youth to advocate for themselves.

Education Strategies:

- Invest in mentoring programs.
- Continue investments in and increase promotion of service learning.
- Decrease truancy and deal with truants differently.
- Eliminate education neglect reports.
- Discontinue the use of out-of-school suspension as punishment for youth with behavior problems.
- Decrease the dropout rate.
- Decrease the use of GEDs.
- Support and train teachers and school personnel.

Strategies in Practice:

- Address the family as a whole, not as separate pieces.
- Examine the practice of symptom-reduction versus what is developmentally-appropriate.
- Utilize multiple points of entry.
- Create a Children's Budget.

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