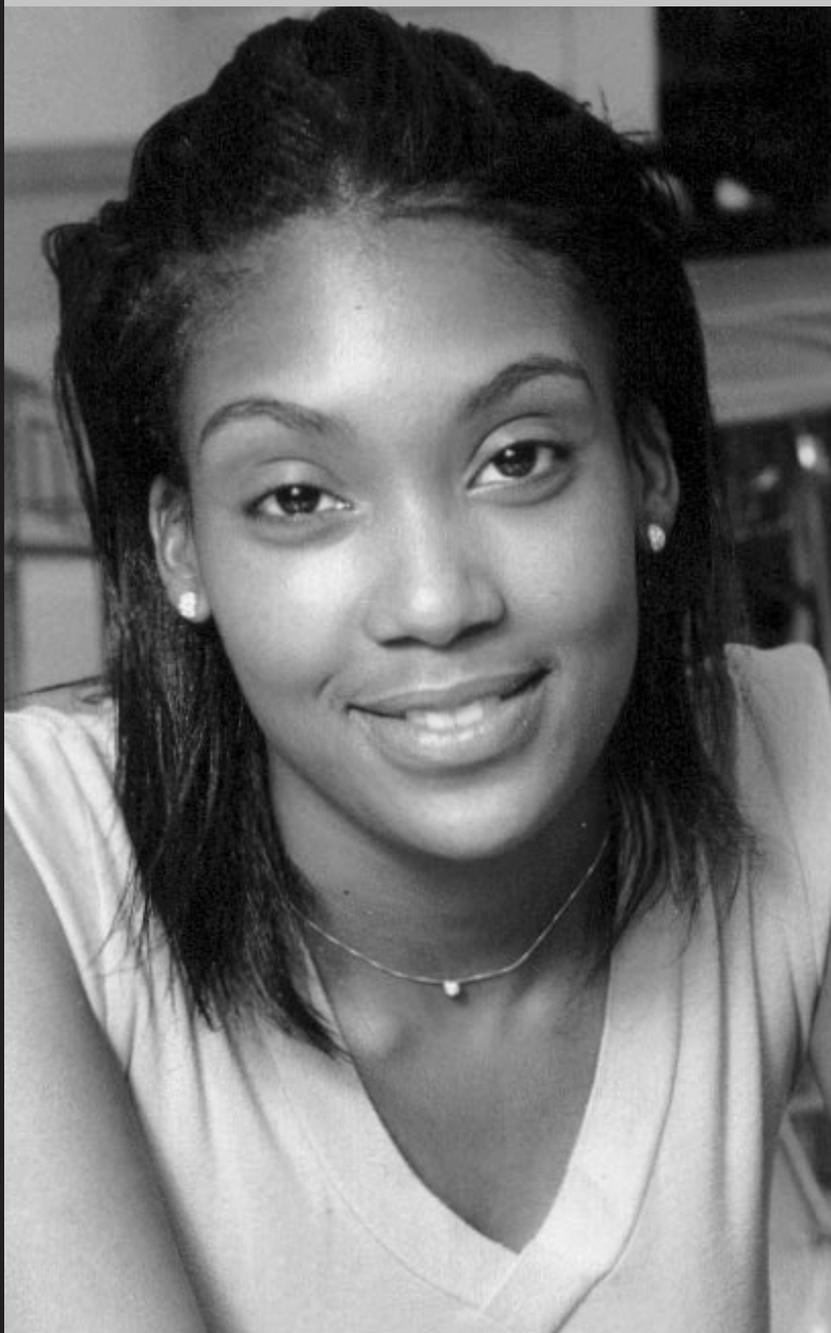


InFocus provides information to strengthen community-based youth development services. Published periodically, *InFocus* describes the practices of youth workers, teachers, programs and organizations that serve youth; policies that affect their work and young people.

New Challenges New Pathways

THE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE/FUND FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK



Introduction

Now is the time in New York City! With a burgeoning population of more than 1 million young adults between 16 and 24 years of age, government and non-profit leaders are seeking better ways and more resources to support the successful transition of these youth to self-sufficiency and active participation in their communities.

While many of these youth will transition successfully, nearly 50%, will need additional supports to complete high school, or if they are already out of school, to prepare for further education and work.

These needs should not obscure their strengths. Many are deeply interested and capable of making constructive contributions to their communities if opportunities can be created that tap these strengths through community service, work, internships and other areas. As we examine programs that help them build their academic and work skills, think of them as resources waiting to be tapped.

In this edition of *InFocus*, there is information about young adults in New York City and three extraordinary programs now underway. Please use this information to inform others.

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Young Adult Lives

Imagine Margarita. She is eighteen years old and lives in Brooklyn with her mother and three younger siblings. She has a three-year old named Alex whose twenty-three year old father, Gregory, is in jail serving a one-year sentence. Margarita was an average student who completed the tenth grade but dropped out not long after Alex was born. Gregory does not have a high school diploma either. He dropped out at 17, frustrated that he could not pass enough classes to complete ninth grade. Gregory tried to enroll in a GED program while in jail, but his sixth grade reading level was too low for the program.

Now imagine Margarita, Alex, and Gregory five years later. Margarita is twenty-five and unemployed. After a brief period of homelessness, she and Alex recently found an apartment. They receive public assistance and Margarita works for the Parks Department. Alex attends public school and is in the third grade. His teacher is concerned that he may not test high enough on the citywide reading test to be promoted next year and has referred him for extra support. Upon release from jail, Gregory visited Alex regularly—but did not pay child support because he could not find a steady job. Two years ago he was rearrested, and is currently serving an eight-year prison sentence.

Why did these three lives have to take this downward track? Margarita was on course for graduation until she became a mother. Gregory showed remarkable persistence sticking with school until the legal dropout age—despite his limited reading ability. Why didn't Margarita find childcare and stay in school, or at least return to get a diploma or a GED when Alex was old enough for preschool? How come Gregory at seventeen was still in the ninth grade and only reading at an elementary school level? Why didn't he find a job to support himself and his son? How did these youth become disconnected from employment, education, and social support systems? How can they be reconnected?

Young Adult Programs

PROMISING PATHWAYS IN NEW YORK CITY

South Brooklyn Community High School (SBCHS)

A SCHOOL-BASED PATHWAY

Did you ever sit through a class and wonder what the teacher was talking about? Did you raise your hand and ask for help? Suppose the confusion extended to several of your classes. If you attended a high school with 4,000 students—with more safety officers than guidance counselors—who would you turn to? Many young people make a simple decision. They stop going to school. Some attend sporadically, others dropout entirely. As time passes, these young people find themselves older and further behind. After a while it seems like there is no way to catch up.

Fortunately, in a small corner of Brooklyn, young people who have been chronically truant or who have dropped out can catch up. South Brooklyn Community High School (SBCHS) is a small public high school that offers the possibility of a diploma to under-credited, over-aged students who have stopped going to school. By offering a rigorous instructional program, SBCHS prepares its students for post-secondary education, meaningful employment, healthy personal and family relationships, and participation in the life of their communities. An authentic partnership between the New York City Department of Education (DOE) and Good Shepherd Services, SBCHS is the antithesis of the big anonymous high school.

SBCHS opened in September 2002, but the partnership has history. For twenty-two years, Good Shepherd had run an off-site program to re-engage and educate chronic truants from John Jay High School. With a New Century High School grant (a consortium of funds from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Open Society Institute), Good Shepherd and the Superintendent of the Brooklyn and Staten Island High Schools (B.A.S.I.S.) collaboratively designed a school that offered a larger pool of young people, up to 150 at any point in time, the chance to do what they thought they never could—obtain a high school diploma.

Since opening its doors two years ago, students living in South Brooklyn who have been absent from school for more than 35 days, have a minimum of eight credits, and read above the sixth grade

level are potentially eligible to attend SBCHS. Staff reaches out by phone and letter, to young people in the catchment's area to invite them to return to school. Those who respond meet with counselors to discuss their educational history, interests, and expectations. Some are admitted to SBCHS and others are referred to programs that are better aligned with their needs, abilities, and interests.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

At the bedrock of South Brooklyn's approach is youth development. Youth development is a fluid approach to working with young people that views youth as central actors in their own lives. Through close relationships with caring adults, high expectations, engaging activities, opportunities for participation in decision-making activities, and a continuity of support, young people build competencies that enable them to succeed as they enter adulthood.

SBCHS blends the best practices in youth development with a standards-based instructional model and a support structure that focuses on leadership development, goal setting and community building. The

needs, interests, capacities, and desires of the students are the raw material around which the school and curriculum are structured. Young people played a central role in the development of the school and continue to play a critical role in its daily operation and ongoing growth.

The school culture explicitly fosters relationships between youth, adults, and peers in a safe environment that provides multiple opportunities for participation. Positive peer support through small biweekly group meetings, and monthly community meetings create space for youth and staff to build and maintain a sense of community and mutual responsibility within the school.

A student describes the school culture: "In my old school, the teachers didn't care. Here they watch out for us and make sure everyone understands." The students at SBCHS need this support structure. By definition all of them have missed a considerable amount of school. Many are coping with a range of challenging life circumstances that further interfere with their educational success. Some are raising children or younger siblings; others are dealing with the death of a parent or other close relative. Still others are managing with little or no adult support.

To further support the needs of its students and ensure their continued attendance, Advocate Counselors provide a strong personalized support system for each student. Through regular meetings with students in school, and if need be, at home, Advocate Counselors locate needed services, including health care and day care. They help students plan for graduation including employment and post secondary education.

Consistent with the youth development approach, the instructional model is premised on the belief that every student can learn and achieve at a high level. Students are supported through a demanding standards-based instructional program that prepares them to pass the required Regents Exams. Through longer classes and more frequent meetings, students earn more credits per semester than they would at a typical high school—an attractive incentive for older students.

The curriculum focuses on the core academic subjects: math, English, science, and social studies, but includes hands-on activities that help students connect with the learning. A student says, "In science, we grow the plants instead of reading about it in a textbook." Given the poor academic track record of many SBCHS students, literacy is essential to all instruction. The entire faculty is trained in a balanced literacy approach to improve comprehension while making reading a more enjoyable activity. Similarly, writing is integrated into every subject area and students are expected to practice the skills associated with good writing in English class as well as science. Technology is also infused across content areas to ensure that students graduate with the skills to connect to today's job market and to compete in other post-secondary opportunities.

When the school was in the design phase, student team members remarked that throughout the course of their educational history, no one had ever told them what they were supposed to know at the end of each year to progress to the next grade. The SBCHS educational program responds directly to this legitimate concern. Expectations at SBCHS are high, and all students know exactly what they need to do to succeed. Each course has clear proficiency targets that are provided to the students and posted in the classroom.

Every two weeks students are assessed in each of their classes to measure their progress towards meeting the course goals. There are no surprises. When students are not meeting the goals, teachers examine their own practice to develop better strategies.

SBCHS is a partnership between a community organization and the DOE (now Region 8 since B.A.S.I.S. ceased to exist with the DOE reorganization). A principal and a Good Shepherd Division Director jointly run the school. Generally, participating as one body—regardless of which payroll a staff member is on—the staff engage in joint professional development activities, regular meetings, and ongoing assessment activities, ensuring their growth as an effective team working together to fulfill the school's mission. The principal and director meet frequently and align decisions and supervision. An advisory board comprised of members of both partner agencies guides long term planning. The school is richly staffed thanks to extensive fundraising by Good Shepherd and its designation as a federal Title I school. The Department of Education staff

"In my old school, the teachers didn't care. Here they watch out for us and make sure everyone understands."



three-quarters of the students passing the Math A and Global History Regents. Almost as impressive, nearly 7 out of 10 students passed the ELA and Living Environment exams.

These remarkable scores are even more astonishing when compared to the student's previous performance. Prior to attending SBCHS, cumulatively the students passed only one in five of the Regent exams they sat for. During their tenure at SBCHS, they were passing three out of five. Before entering SBCHS only two students had passed both the Math and English Regents. Since entering SBCHS, 63 are closer to a Regents Diploma. Credit accumulation shows the same improvements. In the year prior to enrolling in SBCHS students earned an average of 5.41 credits. In their first year at SBCHS students doubled their credits with an average of 11.34.

Graduation statistics are also impressive for such a young school. In the 2003-2004 school year, SBCHS graduated almost a third of the young people who attended over the course of that school year—57 students out of 185 young people. Most of the remaining students returned the next school year for additional credits. Most graduates move on to college or employment. One graduate currently attends Manhattanville College.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMMING FOR YOUNG ADULTS

The achievements of a school like SBCHS do not come easily. Good Shepherd and the DOE have worked together for over two decades and have

includes a principal, eleven teachers (including art and physical education), a technology specialist, a guidance counselor, and 5.5 support staff. Good Shepherd funds an additional twelve staff, including a division director, two program facilitators, six Advocate Counselors, and three additional support team members.

SUCCESSES TO DATE

In only two years, SBCHS has achieved enormous success. With a Regents pass rate surpassing most high schools in New York City, SBCHS boasts a near perfect pass rate on the US History Regents, with roughly

built a partnership based on mutual respect. While that is an enormous accomplishment, the partners still face significant obstacles to this work. There are no government guidelines describing this type of partnership leaving it up to the agencies to hash out the details. For example, currently DOE and union rules prohibit the community agency from playing a significant role in selection of the principal—despite its obvious importance to the future success of the school.

Specific structures geared towards these special relationships will benefit new and existing schools as they face the inevitable challenges

Continued on page 4

New York City Initiatives for Young Adults

Multiple Pathways/Expanded Options: The New York City Department of Education (DOE) is creating new schools and programs for young people who are under-credited and/or overage for their grades. For more information: JoEllen Lynch, Executive Director, DOE Office of Youth Development and Community Services: 212 374 6713.

The Young Adult Capacity Initiative (YACI): The Youth Development Institute/Fund for the City of New York (YDI) has brought together 13 community organizations and schools to build program capacity through training, networking for sharing and support, and to address policy issues. All of the programs described in this newsletter are part of YACI. For more information, Pardeice Powell McGoy, Director, the Young Adult Capacity Initiative, YDI, 212 925 6675.

Out of School Youth and Adult Literacy: The New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) administers the Federal WorkForce Investment Act (WIA) and the NYC Adult Literacy Initiative, both of which fund programs for young adults. Through WIA's older youth component, 16 agencies receive funds to provide comprehensive services that help young adults achieve employment; while the Adult Literacy Initiative provides literacy programs in libraries, community organizations, and the City University of New York. For more information: Michael Ognibene, Director of External Affairs, the NYCDYCD, 212 442 5989.



PROMISING PATHWAYS IN NEW YORK CITY continued from page 3

of operating a small learning community that is enhanced by external resources and support. While there has been a proliferation of small schools in the last several years, small schools cannot operate by the same rules as the old zoned high school. Budgeting, supervision, and assessment criteria need to be adapted to the different realities of operating on a smaller economy of scale.

Funding is also a serious challenge for small schools. It is expensive to operate a school that offers the kinds of supports found at SBCHS. Good Shepherd raises significant private funds each year. They raised the outside money to construct their own state-of-the-art building. Currently, roughly 52% of the SBCHS annual budget is private, with government providing the remainder. It should also be noted, that the government funding is not guaranteed, and in fact, is anticipated to decrease in the coming year. This is an enormous burden on the agency and many community organizations—particularly those without

the history and reputation of Good Shepherd. And many will not be able to sustain their contribution over time. New York City must develop a funding strategy that supports the vital contribution of Good Shepherd as well as its many other community partners over time.

YOUTHWORKS
St. Nicholas
Neighborhood
Preservation
Corporation (St.
Nicks)

A COMMUNITY-BASED PATHWAY FOR YOUNG ADULTS

According to the Program Director, Felipe Balado, the clients at St. Nick's are "like the 'forgotten people.'" Outside the usual categories of youth defined by their relation to high school and middle school, these "disconnected youth" have expanded needs. "In all honesty," reports

Balado, "prior to YouthWorks our division only looked at youth development through a school-age, middle-school, or high-school lens. We now see that there is a huge population of young people who don't fall into any of those categories but are not yet independent adults either." And, he adds, "When you see them at intake and then a year from that—it's amazing!"

YouthWorks reaches out to those young adults who are disconnected from school and work, and in need of a place to begin building their lives by: solving problems; confronting their needs; developing skills, competencies, and credentials that will enable them to become self-sufficient, active citizens.

At St. Nicks, the process begins in getting clients through the door and into educational and training programs. Educational opportunities include GED, college preparation, and for some 80% of participants, basic academic skills.

A childcare training program that offers internships placements at four St. Nick's childcare sites provides valuable links and training for jobs, right away. Some participants select YouthWorks' childcare track as a "back up career" while they figure out what they want to do. Others focus on the work experience itself rather than the ultimate career. One young man offered another benefit: "Before I was working at a restaurant, but I'm trying to learn social skills and take the lessons I learn with kids for when I have them."

Job options, expanded by client initiative, also include access to jobs in manufacturing, information technology and entrepreneurship. Occupational-skills and job-readiness classes are services that support employment tracks and career ladders. The services include for each client both a Youth Employment Specialist and partnership with a Follow-up Coordinator who keeps close tabs on the individual's progress and needs regarding employment, education, and additional social services.

Success is possible because the program is able to take clients' social and economic needs seriously as obstacles to educational and occupational progress. Those needs are extensive and, in the beginning, were almost overwhelming for the staff. "Frankly we were naive in estimating the depth of this population's issues," Balado says. "Our participants are experiencing homelessness, domestic violence, parenting prob-

In the 2003-2004 school year, SBCHS graduated almost a third of the young people who attended over the course of that school year—57 students out of 185 young people. Most of the remaining students continued in the school for the following year



lems, and they often don't have childcare.... While St. Nick's has always worked with young adults, we've never worked with an out-of-school population of this size before."

YouthWorks' quality lies in a carefully crafted approach to these young adults' very critical needs. For Balado, the direction was obvious. "These youth can't concentrate on work readiness or anything else if they're in violent situations at home." Once acknowledging the extent of need among their clients, YouthWorks staff developed multiple services to strengthen participants' ability to overcome roadblocks that bar their way to productive and healthy lives. In just two short years, 131 young adults have completed YouthWorks.

A steadfast commitment to excellence at every level is essential in YouthWorks' wrap-around approach. It starts with the program's very clear sense of identity rooted in the core belief that all youth can succeed, given the right supports. The program integrates its wide range of internal and external resources into its model so that in the end, the services equal far more than the sum of their individual parts. YouthWorks now collaborates with the Department of Education and Career Education Center that has brought two GED instructors directly on staff. And there are links to outside sources for unexpected numbers of youth who need a more intensive, basic academic component.

For the coming year Balado says, "Our goal is to transform YouthWorks into not just an effective youth employment program but an *outstanding youth development* program." He expects great strides to be gained through additional services that include Friday workshops that directly address ongoing issues of parenting; domestic violence, health

care, HIV and drug prevention. For staff development, Balado points to the "co-option" or "re-deployment" of the Division's Director of Adolescent Support Services for weekly training and supervision of staff. "His integration into the program has been a crucial factor in improving our ability and confidence in dealing with our participants in the personal arena."

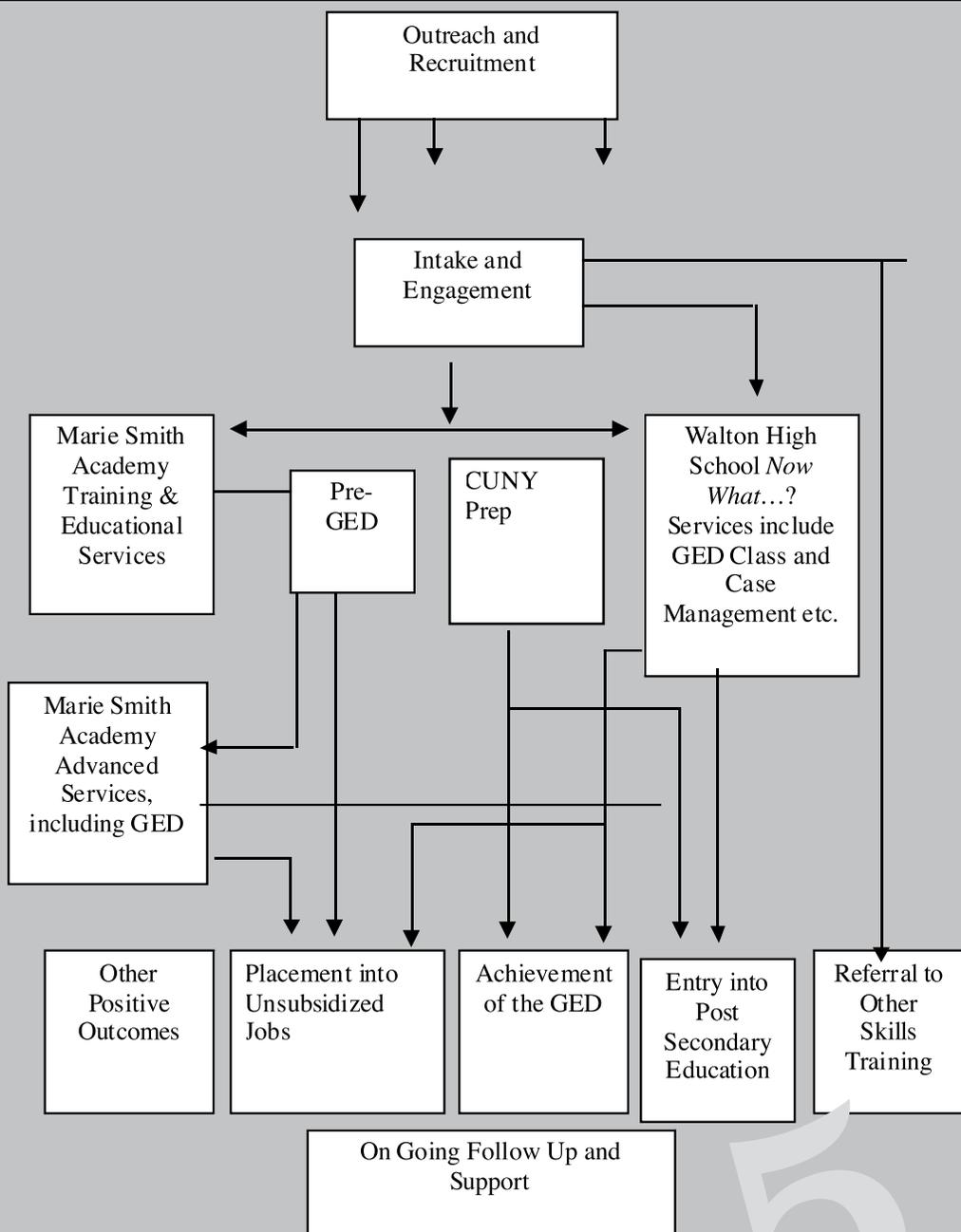
In fact, staff is at the heart of YouthWorks' quality. They bring degrees, experience, and passion with them. But a good deal of their success rests on something that can't be learned in school: the ability to seamlessly balance the roles of mentor, confidant, and advisor. What fuels their dedication is success. As one counselor put it, "Once you do it and it works—the success becomes its own motivator."

Growth at YouthWorks does not end, nor does their review of their successes, the assessment of their stepping-stones, or review of their final goals for their clients. The childcare career track is one case in point. The childcare career is a logical choice for clients, given St. Nick's existing achievements and the resources that are already in place. The training fills an employment need of their client base. "Working with kids was something I always wanted to do," Collete remarks. While she began there, the experience inspired her to enter college and become a social worker with young youth. The childcare track, at the same time, is a relatively low-paying job opportunity with few chances for significant advancement. It is still an option but new areas of career exploration are being developed.

YouthWorks has diversified its employment tracks, its services for clients, its professional development and support of staff. Given the pro-

gram's ever-persistent self-appraisal, the future is an open book. For Balado, the book is a wide one. "It takes years; I have them for the rest of their lives. I look forward to seeing YouthWorks grow."

Pius XII Services for Out of School Youth



THE NOW WHAT...? PROGRAM

Pius XII Youth and Family Services A COMMUNITY-BASED PATHWAY FOR YOUNG ADULTS

In 1998, the leadership of Pius XII Youth and Family Services, with support from the Pinkerton Foundation, initiated the *Now What...? Program* to provide opportunities for recent high school dropouts and to direct their energies and services to the problems they face. The program has grown more comprehensive over the years and today engages youth who have dropped out of high school and are unemployed.

By integrating intensive support services with existing educational and employment opportunities, *Now What...?* has proven to be effective programs and employment can be offered to 17 to 22 year olds, an age group largely left unattended to by most social services and education programs.

THE NOW WHAT...? PROGRAM continued from page 5

The services at **Now What...?** range from initial outreach to older youth, and their retrieval to:

- Academic support through pre-GED and GED preparation;
- Assistance in finding part time jobs and internship experiences in business settings;
- 12-week occupational skills training in office skills;
- Placement into full- and part-time jobs and college advisement and support.

This great range of educational and occupational services is built upon a continuum of support throughout programs and after. Intensive counselor support is at the heart of this program, with staff following-up students regularly to make sure that they remain in the program.

Five elements have been crucial to the growth of **Now What...?**:

- High involvement of the agency's leadership in designing and refining the program;
- The ability to identify and retain caring and experienced staff;
- The ability to provide access to a comprehensive and changing set of services that are needed for youth to enter and remain in an increasingly competitive workplace;
- An outcome-based system for tracking participant performance;
- The ability to acquire a diverse set of private and public funding necessary to support and sustain a comprehensive program.

Because of active leadership, caring and very experienced staff, flexibility and forward-looking programming, and strong assessment of performance, with generous foundation support, **Now What...?** is a powerful example of what older youth need to unleash their own talent and be successful in the face of difficult conditions in their communities and schools.

The history of the **Now What...?** program is one of continual expansion to fill newly identified needs. During the early days of the program, in 1998, Pius XII staff developed a working relationship with the GED program at Walton High School located in the Kingsbridge section of the Bronx. Pius XII had a vigorous outreach program to bring youth back into the school for GED classes. Despite initial worries that young people would not come back to a high school that they had left, many did return. The Pius XII staff provided counseling, removed obstacles to participation in the class through a variety of social services, and arranged for part-time and flexible employment during the program and upon graduation.

The Walton collaboration was an outgrowth of Pius XII's long relationship with the school in providing attendance improvement services for younger students. Young people knew the staff from when they had been students at Walton and many had visited the room occupied by the Pius program. As the program has increased services, Pius XII has been able to offer college placement and support; a 12-week occupational skills training program and a pre-GED program located at the organization's Marie Smith Academy. These later services were major and exciting expansions and were made possible through core funding support provided by the Pinkerton, Clark and Tiger foundations with a large Workforce Investment Act grant.

In 2004, Pius XII expanded to include a new collaboration, serving as a partner with the City University of New York (CUNY) at their new CUNY Prep Program. This program uses a similar set of strategies in reaching and supporting youth who have dropped out or are on the verge of dropping out. Utilizing intensive academic and support services, students find pathways to either return to high school or complete a GED.

Today, Pius XII serves nearly 450 students per year in three different sites. The current range and scope of education and training services of the **What Now...?** Program is displayed in the sidebar. Its success is demonstrated by the outcomes for its clients this year:

In the past year, **Now What...?** has

- Assisted 98 students in obtaining their GEDs
- Assisted 25 students in entering college and maintained a 100% freshman retention rate
- Assisted 106 students in finding employment. ■



Poems by Young People

I Am What I Am

I am what I am.

I am from African descent.

But born in the streets of New York.

My mother and father are from the South.

But I was born in the North.

I was brought up not getting what I wanted.

So later in life I decided to take it.

A young black male coming up the hard way.

Raised by my mother

because my father took the back way.

I was coming up not caring who I am.

But now I am proud of who I am,

A New York black man.

—Fleming Mathews

Life In The Ghetto

I walk the streets night and day,

Many thoughts on my mind, but nothing to say.

Feeling trapped, lonely and confused,

While my brothers and sisters are being used and abused.

Drugs are in command and so is petty crime,

Men on the streets begging for dimes.

Being poured into this world like tea in a cup,

Everyone in the ghetto acts like they're just giving up.

Anyway, many days go by, our youngsters falling like memories,

Any one of whom could have been an inventor or a star.

As in a spider's web we are trapped,

As drugs, money and crime play a role in our daily lives.

360 degrees of nothing is what we get,

Not knowing that it's time to wake the hell up!!!

—Ronald Boddie



reports

Growing Up is Harder to Do

Frank Furstenberg, Jr. Sheela Kennedy,
Vonnie C. Mclloyd, Ruben. G. Rumbaut and
Richard A. Settersten, Jr.

Contexts, Vol. 3, Issue, 3, pp. 33-41, 2004, American Sociological Association
Between Adolescence and Adulthood; Expectations about the Timing of Adulthood, Frank Furstenberg, et.al. The Network on Transition to Adulthood and Public Policy, Working Paper No. 1
www.ssc.upenn.edu/~fff/adulthood.html

According to Members of the Interdisciplinary Network on Transitions to Adulthood, funded by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, it takes much longer today to make the transition to adulthood than any time in American history. In fact, according to these researchers, adulthood no longer begins when adolescence ends, nor can Americans expect to be self-supporting before the end of their twenties, largely due to the complexity and difficulties of a highly competitive labor market.

Furstenberg, et. al. describe survey results of opinion data they have collected indicating contemporary attitudes on the nature and timing of adulthood. While many Americans believe that the transition to adulthood will begin in late teens and early 20s, demographic data indicate a very different trajectory, and one darkly different for individuals in poorer households and/or those with histories of reliance upon public programs.

The growing demands on young Americans (17-24 years old) to gain skills and credentialing for the future comes at a time of curtailed government support, placing a heavy burden on families. Those from families with means see early adulthood as a time to figure out what they want to do. They may proceed directly to college, travel or work for a few years, or do community service. Yet, even with privileged families, more than any other time in recent history, parents are stepping in to sustain young adult children. Two thirds of young adults in their twenties receive economic support from their parents.

Almost half of Americans do not have those options, making them highly vulnerable and requiring them to shuttle back and forth between work and school to gain a foothold on financial independence. The least privileged, consisting of 10 to 15 percent of young adults, may have no family support at all, may come out of the foster care system, exit special education programs or jails and prisons. These young adults most at-risk may not gain a foothold in the economy at all. This is emerging as a major public policy concern.

According to the authors, "the timetable of the 1950s is no long applicable. It is high time for policy makers and legislators to address the realities of the longer and more demanding transition to adulthood." The Network recommendations include "efforts to increase educa-

tional opportunities, establish school-to-career paths;" programs to help students who cannot access postsecondary education; expansion of military and alternative national service as bridges to the labor force, and the creation of special programs targeting those young adults coming out of public programs in mental health, education and foster care.

Out of School, Out of Work, ... Out of Luck? Disconnected Youth in New York City

Mark Levitan, the Community Service Society

A report soon to be released by the Community Service Society explores trends in school enrollment and labor force participation among New York City's 16 to 24 year-olds. Looking back to the late 1980's and comparing New York to the national scene, it finds both progress and emerging problems. For females, trends are positive; more youth are in school and a growing proportion of school youth are either working or actively seeking employment. Males, by contrast, have suffered significant setbacks since the onset of the recession in early 2001. Longer-term trends for males are also troubling. Since the mid-1990s there has been no increase in the proportion of male youth who are enrolled in school. There has been a long-term deterioration in labor force participation among males who are out of school. Rates of labor force participation and employment are particularly low for young African American males.

To obtain a copy of the report, email mlevitan@cssny.org or look for it at www.cssny.org.

Annie E. Casey Foundation KIDS COUNT DATA BOOK

June 2004
www.aecf/kidscount/databook/

The 15th annual *KIDS COUNT Data Book* released in June 2004 by the Annie E. Casey Foundation reports that national trends in child well-being are moving in a positive direction.

However, an alarming trend is emerging among American youth. Over 4 million youth face a difficult road to successful adulthood. Profiling "disconnected youth" in an extensive introductory essay - *Moving from Risk to Opportunity* - the report finds that the number of disconnected youth is roughly fifteen percent of all 18 to 24 year olds nationwide. According to the essay, "Since 2000 alone, the ranks of these young adults grew by 700,000, a nineteen percent increase over just three years." The data counts show that specific subgroups make up the most at-risk youth in this older age group. They are largely ones who have been failed by public programs. They are youth who are in the foster care and the juvenile justice systems, young parents and youth who never finished high school.

Connected by 25: Improving the Life Chances of the Country's Most Vulnerable 14-24 Year Olds

Michael Wald and Tia Martinez
Stanford University, William and Flora Hewlett
Foundation Working Paper, November 2003
www.hewlett.org

Connected by 25... identifies the most vulnerable young people between 14 and 25 years old (dropouts, youth offenders, foster youth and unmarried teenage mothers), and describes their mostly unsuccessful efforts to reach support that can connect them to a productive adult life.

According to Wald and Martinez, over the last twenty years between four and six million young adults (ages 18-24) have been out of work at any given time. However, specific cohorts of youth: dropout, youth in justice systems, foster youth and unmarried teen age mothers, have a great risk of being disconnected long term from any support that can sustain them. Alternatively, among non risk-groups, ninety percent of four million fourteen year-olds will have a minimally successful transition to adulthood buttressed by positive social support from middle school to high school, some to college, and some to employment. Those who are "disconnected," on the other hand make up the:

- Five to seven percent (200,000 to 300,000) who will reach 25 and will not have transitioned to adulthood. 60 percent will be men and 40% will be women.
- Almost 100 percent of women age 25 who have started families, but without means, education or employment enough to provide for their children.

The report offers an extensive set of recommendations for a young adult system of support (support for youth after 18 years old), beginning with basic education, changes in foster care, changes in youth criminal justice and utilization of community colleges as reconnection venues. According to the report, all resources are in need of improving their practices for this age group. The key to change is "accepting public responsibility."

The Time is Now: Building One System for New York's Emerging Workforce Developed by the Young Adult Taskforce

Available in January 2005
Available from wbloomfield@civicstrategies.org
A task force comprising representatives of government, funders and not-for-profits developed this paper about the nature of the challenge to better prepare young adults for the workforce. Sponsored by the Clark Foundation, the paper describes the opportunities provided by a consensus of leaders in New York City, the nature and scale of the population of young adults, and makes recommendations about program and systemic approaches that might be effective in helping them transition to productive adulthood.

WHO ARE THE YOUTH AT RISK OF BECOMING UNEMPLOYED YOUNG ADULTS?

Like tens of thousands of other young adults in New York City, Margarita and Gregory represent a largely ignored group of older youth. Rather than growing into self-sufficient adults—workers, entrepreneurs, community leaders, and engaged citizens—they emerge as frustrated young adults dependent upon costly state and municipal services. Their personal loss is staggering, and the fiscal and social costs to communities and the city are enormous.¹

For purposes of this newsletter *older youth* refers to 16 to 24 year olds who are at risk of dropping out of high school or who have already dropped out and are unable to find steady employment. Precise data describing the youth who meet this broad definition are difficult to find because policymakers and government agencies do not traditionally view these young adults as a discrete cohort in need of support or services. However, the contours of this population are clear, and the size and depth of their need suggest it is time to recognize these older youth as a group in need of thoughtful public investment.

There are over thirty five million 16 to 24 years olds in the United States.² New York City is home to just under a million.³

While most of these young people will grow into young adults with jobs, families, and friends, many will not make the transition easily or successfully. Most will experience obstacles along the way and rely upon the guidance and financial support of family, friends, and communities. Others will not have that assistance, and reach 25 unable to support themselves.

WHO ARE THESE YOUTH?

More than half will be men—half of whom will be incarcerated. Among the young women, many will be single mothers without steady jobs. Almost all will have grown up in poverty.⁴ The youngsters most likely to find themselves disconnected at twenty-five will have dropped out of high school, experienced arrest and incarceration, spent time in foster care, or become a teenage mother.

Across the United States, just over five million 16 to 24 year olds are out-of-school and unemployed.⁵ In 2002, roughly 3.8 million youth between 18 and 24 were considered *disconnected*—not employed, not in school, and lacking a high school diploma.⁶ The number of older youth living in New York City who are unemployed or facing lifetimes of sporadic to no employment is significant. Among the roughly half-million City residents between 16 and 19 years old, almost eleven percent, or 46,000, did not graduate high school. The vast majority is also unemployed.⁷ Among 19-24 year olds the unemployment numbers are probably even higher. One study that followed a large group of high school-aged youth from 1979 until 1992 found that “80 percent of those without a high school diploma were unemployed for at least a full year, and half were out of work for three or more years between their 18th and 25th birthdays.”⁸ These are young adults from poor families and they are not working. How will they support themselves and when the time comes their families?

The problem is particularly acute among young black men. By 2002, one of every four black men in the United States was jobless. A rate twice that of whites and Hispanics. The lack of a high school diploma reduced a black man’s chance of working even further—“44 percent of black men without a diploma were unemployed year-round versus 26 percent of those with a diploma, and 13 percent of those with a bachelor’s (or higher) degree.”⁹ In New York City, just 51% of African American men are working.

In New York City, roughly 185,000 young adults between the

ages of 18 and 24 do not have a high school diploma.¹⁰ In 2001, statewide, nine percent of teens between the ages of 16 and 19 years old had dropped out of high school, and ten percent were neither in school nor working.¹¹

Recent reforms in New York City, including the creation of numerous small high schools, are increasing retention for all students. South Brooklyn Community High School, described in this issue, as well as Diploma Plus, and the Young Adult Borough Centers are engaging many youth who have struggled in high school. These models offer small classes, intensive academics linked to youth development and hands-on experiences such as work and community service. All work through partnerships with community organizations that provide a wide range of supports to both the schools and the young people directly. All of these new programs are being expanded through the NYC Department of Education’s Multiple Pathways initiative, which will be profiled more fully in a forthcoming issue of *InFocus*. The commitment of the City’s education system to change the prospects for large numbers of these youth is unprecedented, and offers promise.

As the process of change moves forward, large high schools remain a critical problem, one of the only options for many youth who fall into this group. Success rates at these schools are significantly lower than citywide averages. Cumulatively, only half of the ninth graders who enter high school in a given September graduate with a diploma four years later. Even with additional students getting diplomas or GEDs in an additional three years, tens of thousands go out into the work world without a proper education.¹²

WHY INVEST IN OLDER YOUTH?

Young adults are the strength of tomorrow. Each is potentially a community asset: a parent, worker, employer, voter, role model, community member, or civic leader. However, when these youth reach adulthood without a high school diploma and little prospect for gainful employment, policymakers must ask themselves—how are these young adults supporting themselves?

EDUCATION TRANSLATES INTO EMPLOYMENT AND EARNINGS

There are many ingredients to becoming a successful young adult. However, none is as powerful as a basic education. Youth who drop out of high school face lifelong consequences, including long-term periods of unemployment and diminished earnings. While most high school graduates eventually find work, only more than half (fifty-eight percent) of high school dropouts were employed at the time of the last US Census report. Those with more education have a substantially greater chance of being employed. Even a GED increases opportunity.¹³ When young people without diplomas do find work, periods of unemployment are longer. Between 1997 and 2001, twenty-seven percent of those aged 16 to 24 years who had dropped out of high school were unemployed for a year or longer, compared to eleven percent of those with diplomas or a GED.¹⁴

Similarly, earnings are a consequence of education. The annual median salary for a person with a bachelor’s degree is \$47,000 compared with \$29,200 for a high school diploma (including GED) and \$22,400 for those without a diploma.¹⁵ However, a diploma is not always a guarantee of earnings mobility. Young men without a high school diploma or a GED, and those with high school diplomas but no college, experienced the largest relative decline in income in the last three decades. These young men lost roughly twenty-five percent in their real annual earnings between 1973 and 2000.¹⁶

EMPLOYMENT REDUCES THE NEED FOR MORE EXPENSIVE PUBLIC EXPENDITURES

Young people who find employment are more likely to become productive members of their communities. They are housed, vote, pay taxes, send their children to public schools, shop in neighborhood stores, and join community organizations. Those who cannot find employment are often temporarily housed and dependent upon public programs for support.¹⁷ In 2003 alone, the Federal government spent \$223.5 billion to help needy children and their families.¹⁸ An estimated 1.1 million youth are on welfare or are members of a family receiving welfare.¹⁹

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The public safety costs of high school failure are also very high. Roughly sixteen percent of all young men between 18 and 24 years old who dropped out of high school and did not obtain a GED are under criminal justice supervision at any given point in time. The effects are profound. According to the London School of Economics, having been in jail is the most important deterrent to employment, and its effect, even years later, is persistent and sustained.²⁰

JUST COMMUNITIES PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR THOSE WITH THE GREATEST NEED

Most of the youth who reach young adulthood without connecting to the labor force have had few opportunities along the way. The vast majority grew up in poverty, some were in foster care or incarcerated; most attended failing schools. Low basic literacy, a history of behavior problems, untreated mental illness, and substance abuse are common characteristics. Large numbers are male and African-American. More than ten percent of minority males are disconnected by age 25 as compared to five percent of the overall youth population.²¹ These youth did not grow up with social and financial networks capable of seeing them through the tough times of adolescence like their more advantaged peers. An opportunity for success is little to ask.

Some argue that the time to invest is when these youth are still young children. They believe that Head Start programs, child nutrition, parenting programs, and other prevention services are a more worthwhile investment. Similarly, some argue that programming for adolescents that focus on reducing school failure and delinquency should be priorities. No doubt these are critical programs that will reduce the number of disconnected youth in the long run. However, some adolescents will always slip through the cracks. Prevention programs do not reach all the children in need. Some do not produce long-term benefits—certainly not for every child who attends. Finally, no matter how seamless the net below, there will always be young people who do not get adequate support and cannot make it through school or find employment on their own. By focusing merely on prevention, and not acknowledging the need for intervention later on, this group of young adults is, for the most part, consigned to a lifetime of poverty. ■

Notes

¹ Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Moving from Risk to Opportunity*, 2004 Kids Count Data Book, Baltimore, MD., 2004, p. 1

² Sum, A., Kjatiwada, I., Pond, N., & Trub'skyy, M., with Fagg, N., Palma, S. Left Behind in the Labor Market: Labor Market Problems of the National's Out-of-School, Young Adult Populations. Boston, MA: Center for Labor Market Studies, Northeastern University, November 2002.

³ Supplementary Survey Summary Tables, US Census Bureau

⁴ M. Wald and T. Martinez. *Connected by 25: Improving the Life Chances of the Country's Most Vulnerable 14-24 Year Olds*, Stanford University, November 2003.

⁵ Sum, A., Kjatiwada, I., Pond, N., & Trub'skyy, M., with Fagg, N., Palma, S. Left Behind in the Labor Market: Labor Market Problems of the National's Out-of-School, Young Adult Populations. Boston, MA: Center for Labor Market Studies, Northeastern University, November 2002.

⁶ The Annie E. Casey Foundation. 2004 Kids Count Data Book, Baltimore MD, 2004, p. 50.

⁷ Roughly 70% or 32,173, of the youth without high school diplomas were reported as unemployed or not in the labor force in the 2000 U.S. Census.

⁸ Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Moving from Risk to Opportunity*, P. 12

⁹ Bob Herbert, *New York Times*, July 19, 2004, p. A17, quoting a study by Andrew Sum at the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University.

¹⁰ PCT033, Sex By Age By Educational Attainment For The Population 18 Years, 2001 Supplementary Survey Summary Tables, US Census Bureau

¹¹ 2004 Kids Count, p. 129

¹² The graduation rate increases to 70% after an additional three years for obtaining a diploma or a GED. Division of Assessment & Accountability, NYC Department of Education. *Flash Research Report #6, An Examination of 4-Year Cohort Graduation and Dropout Rates for the Class of 2001 and Final School Completion Outcomes for the Class of 1998 in the New York City Public Schools*, May 2, 2002.

¹³ According to the 2000 Census, 64 percent of those with a GED were working, 79 percent of high school graduates, and 93 percent of those with an associates degree or higher. Wald, p.7.

¹⁴ Wald, p. 7.

¹⁵ Occupational Outlook Handbook, Bureau of Labor Statistics, <http://www.bls.gov/oco/home.htm>

¹⁶ Andrew Sum, *Leaving Young Workers Behind*, National League of Cities Special Report, 2003

¹⁷ *2004 State of the States*, www.Stateline.org, p. 39 (Accessed November 5, 2004).

Additionally, 90,000 recently have left foster care and another half million children live in homes under state supervision. These youth fall into one of six categories: out-of-school (and no GED); parent(s) incarcerated; receiving welfare; leaving incarceration; runaway or homeless; or leaving foster care.

¹⁸ *Executive Summary of the White House Task Force for Disadvantaged Youth*: October 2003; Appendix D, www.nfcy.com/disadvantaged/index.htm (Accessed November 03, 2004)

¹⁹ Philip Kaufman, Jin Y. Kwon, and Christopher D. Chapman, *Dropout Rates in the United States: 1999*,

NCES 2001-022 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2000), 19. (Note: In some states and localities, this percentage is substantially higher.)

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Wald, p. 4.



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Young Adults in
New York City

Young Adult
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Programs and
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Research Reports

Poems by
Young People



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