

As a nation, we face a set of challenges that we can no longer ignore. The economic future of our country depends on the next generation of young Americans becoming ready for college, work, and life.

However, many of our young people are reaching young adulthood without the skills and competencies they need to succeed. Millions of youth are being left behind, disconnected from the societal and economic mainstreams, and falling into harm's way.

The Youth Unemployment Crisis:

- Youth and young adults ages 16-24 face an unemployment rate more than twice the overall unemployment rate
- Less than 20% of black teens are employed at any time
- Just over 1/5 of Latino youth worked last year
- The taxpayer and social burden of a disconnected 16-year-old young person during his or her lifetime is over \$1,014,140

Youth unemployment (ages 16-19) remains high at 19 percent. For youth and young adults ages 16-24, the unemployment rate is more than twice as high as the overall unemployment rate of 6 percent.ⁱ For youth of color, work opportunities are especially scarce; less than 20 percent of black teens are employed at any one time and barely one-fifth of Latino teens worked last year. Youth with disabilities also have an uphill climb to gain access to work. Youth with disabilities have an employment rate of just 12.9 percent, compared to 26 percent for their non-disabled peers. Young adults (ages 20 to 24) with disabilities have an employment rate of only 30.4 percent—less than 63.5 percent among those without disabilities in the same age group.ⁱⁱ

Youth and young adults in the United States face an unprecedented employment crisis. Nearly one-third of unemployed people are ages 16-24.

One in five youth will not graduate from high school four years after enrollment. Many young people lack the basic skills necessary for even minimum-wage jobs. An estimated 6.7 million young people ages 16 to 24 are unattached to school or work; of that total, 3.4 million have had no attachment to school or work since the age of 16, while about half were raised in low-income families and/or communities.ⁱⁱⁱ The taxpayer and social burden of a disconnected 16-year-old is over \$1 million during his or her lifetime.

In years past, workers could get by without a higher education because there was a high demand for unskilled labor in certain industries, such as manufacturing. But times have changed. By 2018, 60 percent of all U.S. jobs will require some level of postsecondary education. And at the current rate, employers in 2025 will need about 23 million more degree holders than our higher education system will

have produced.^{iv} Moreover, most sectors of the military no longer accept recruits without a high school diploma, meaning that another pathway is now largely closed.

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

Helping disconnected youth access postsecondary education and the workforce is the best solution to persistent poverty and income inequality. The longer youth are separated from education and work, the less likely they are to ever reconnect. It's crucial that we ensure all youth have the opportunity to succeed—both for their sake and that of the economy. As the “baby boom” generation ages and an increasingly competitive global market requires healthy workers with higher skills and education, it falls to our nation's youth to fill skilled jobs, renew civic life, keep the country safe, and drive economic growth. Only comprehensive investments—made now—will reconnect these young adults, securing their futures and those of their families, their communities, and the nation as a whole.



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

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

This is a complex problem that requires thoughtful solutions. The Campaign for Youth's national policy platform is designed to engage federal, state, and local government and multiple sectors of a given community in efforts to help youth reconnect. We advocate for:

- Making disconnected youth a priority for government and the private sector. This means cutting red tape, improving access to existing resources, and improving resources' efficiency.
- Building on existing knowledge about creating pathways for young people by integrating communities' systems and resources.
- Expanding current publicly funded and privately funded pathways with proven success in reconnecting young adults.
- Developing new, flexible funding streams that promote systems integration, fostering alternative pathways and supports for reconnecting and transitioning youth.

There are important roles for youth in the knowledge-based economy of the 21st century. Solutions are within reach but require strong public support, public and private investment, an active nonprofit sector, enabling government policies, and the collective knowledge of the youth development field. Campaign for Youth members have extensive expertise on youth policy and practice and believe we *all* share responsibility for youth's success. To that end, the Campaign makes the following recommendations:

1. **Make reconnecting our youth a national priority.** Millions of our youth need to be reconnected to education, employment, and service. Leadership within the White House, Congress, and federal agencies must continue to make struggling youth a national priority. While there are successful strategies and innovations at both the national and community levels, there is insufficient political will and investment to take the programs to scale, preventing hundreds of thousands of young people from accessing economic opportunity. At the same time, some current efforts to reach young people are insufficient or fragmented into narrow silos with disparate eligibility criteria. Consistent leadership is needed to support, advance, and connect federal interagency efforts that promote youth's healthy development.
2. **Invest in high-need communities.** High-poverty and high-crime communities have far greater concentrations of disconnected youth. The existing youth service delivery system lacks the capacity to meet the needs of such large numbers of youth. Yet there are many assets within those communities—urban and rural alike—that can be leveraged to create comprehensive, systemic solutions.
 - Support community efforts to build a robust youth service delivery infrastructure that brings together community-based organizations, the business community, private foundations, and public youth-serving systems (including education, workforce, child welfare and juvenile justice).

- Provide communities with incentives and assistance to integrate new and existing services and funding streams to support comprehensive quality youth programs, systems, and intermediaries.
- Build on research and lessons learned from comprehensive, community-wide approaches¹ to create a funding stream for high-need communities to implement innovative community-based and nationally recognized strategies and create sustainable youth service delivery systems.

3. Involve young people in finding solutions for their own generation. Young people can and should work with adults to address their communities' challenges. Incorporating the voices and experiences of young people directly impacted by federal policies is critical to establishing an effective national youth investment strategy.

- Build upon the work of Young Invincibles and the National Council of Young Leaders (the Council), which is made up of young people from across the country who have overcome disconnection and poverty. Designed to bring young people's unique perspective to bear on policy and practice, the Council is organized and sponsored by YouthBuild USA, the Corps Network, Public Allies, Jobs for the Future, the National College Advising Corps, Year Up, the National Congress of American Indians, and the Youth Leadership Institute.
- Continue to support state and local youth councils to bring their perspectives into local programming and provide input on the work of the Congressional Youth Council.
- Provide ongoing opportunities for young people served by multiple federal programs to participate in forums, advisory councils, and convenings to enhance the quality and effectiveness of those services.
- Acknowledge the value of youth leadership development opportunities as part of reconnection strategies and build them into program delivery.

4. Build capacity to utilize research-based practices and knowledge to expand high-quality programming. A growing body of evidence suggests several primary intersecting programmatic features of successful holistic interventions. These include comprehensive case management, wrap-around supports, and multiple education options (including postsecondary education, paid and unpaid work experience, and employment).^v

- Replicate research-based strategies and interventions that have demonstrated success and for which there is strong demand.
- Invest in promising innovations that may become best practices once successful outcomes are documented.
- Strengthen the youth development workforce by increasing professional development opportunities, training, and professional recognition.

5. Create pathways to financial independence and social mobility. The educational profiles of out-of-school and out-of-work youth run the gamut—from well below sixth-grade literacy to levels just short of a secondary school credential. The objective is to work with the education system, workforce system, youth practitioners, and the private sector to create pathways that will lead to secondary and

postsecondary credentials, impart skills that are marketable in the emerging economy, and provide supports that will help youth navigate a complicated labor market. This will take leadership and capacity building to construct more flexible learning environments that incorporate contextual learning, innovative instructional technologies, alternative methods of awarding credit, and alternative vehicles for financing education.

- Expand multiple pathways that support educational programming that occurs in non-traditional environments.
- Engage and incentivize business and industry to create pipelines and employment opportunities in existing and emerging areas of the economy.
- Support a career pathways approach that connects progressive levels of basic skills and postsecondary education, training, and supportive services in specific sectors or cross-sector occupations to optimize the progress and success of youth in securing marketable credentials.

6. Develop work-based learning opportunities that are relevant to careers and have real world applications.

Work-based learning opportunities include a wide array of strategies that expose youth to the world of work, including careers in high-growth, high-demand industries. This exposure—coupled with workforce preparation activities that promote the development of applied skills, including oral and written communication, teamwork, leadership, critical thinking, and a commitment to social and civic responsibility—provide youth with limited opportunities to gain work experience and an on-ramp into the labor market.

- Develop policies to support flexible, community- and work-based learning environments that incorporate applied, contextual, and competency-based learning, as well as innovative instructional strategies that lead to postsecondary skills and credentials.
- Expand funding and opportunities for job training, youth entrepreneurship, career and technical skill building, service and conservation corps, paid internships and apprenticeships, and other employment (including summer and year-round employment, national and community service, and service-learning).

7. Create a policy and research infrastructure to ensure program quality and accountability. It is important to ensure programs are of high quality. The federal government must engage practitioners, nonprofits, policymakers, and researchers in the development of an accountability, training, and technical assistance system that is aligned across government departments and agencies and that improves program quality without stifling innovation. We know what works; the National Academy of Sciences has identified the features of positive developmental settings for youth, and the National Youth Employment Coalition has identified a set of quality standards for youth programs—the Promising and Effective Practices Network (PEPNet)—rooted in research and practice.²

- The federal government should create an overarching program quality assessment for federal youth programs and nurture the professional development of the youth work field. Aligning and

² We also know how to measure what works: the High Scope Educational Research Foundation's Youth Program Quality Assessment meets rigorous scientific criteria. The U.S. Department of Labor measures demographics and outcomes in a systematic way to make informed funding decisions. Finally, we know from research that quality programming requires on high-quality youth development staff. Research by the Next Generation Youth Work Coalition found that youth workers are paid half as much as teachers—resulting in high turnover and often low quality. Increased investment is needed to diminish turnover and strengthen staff performance.

increasing federal research, data collection, training, and technical assistance efforts is essential for program improvement.

- Additionally, program measures within federal funding streams should include accountability measures to determine disconnected youth's success upon reconnection, including but not limited to: rates of reconnection; 4-year and extended cohort high school graduation rate measures; attainment of postsecondary education certificates and degrees; and employment and work-related measures. These data are critical to assessing programs' success and encouraging their continued service to disconnected youth.

Reconnecting America's Youth: What Will It Take?

Federal youth employment and training programs only serve a fraction of the young people who could benefit from them.³ Comprehensive investments must be made in the short and long term if we are to reconnect young people who have been lost. Youth and young adults face unique individual challenges and have varying education, skills, and social support needs. Accordingly, interventions range from short-term, part-time activities to strategies that engage young people full time over longer periods. Reconnecting our youth will take a concerted effort across all levels of government, in partnership with the private and non-profit sector, and youth themselves; strong policies that prioritize out-of-school youth; support for interventions that work for them; and significant funding and investment. The following chart⁴ provides a starting place for investing in federal programs that can support youth reconnection to education, training, employment, and service. At the minimum, doubling the appropriations for these key programs would provide opportunities for thousands of youth.

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

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

Federal Youth Education, Employment, Training, and Service Programs	FY 2014
US Department of Labor	Number in Thousands
Job Corps	1,683,935
WIA Title I Youth Activities	818,169
Registered Apprenticeships	30,000
Reintegration of Ex-Offenders	80,078
YouthBuild	77,534
Workforce Innovation Fund	47,174
US Department of Education	
Title I - Improving The Academic Achievement Of The Disadvantaged	3,543,625
Adult Education Basic Grants to States	563,955
Homeless Children and Youth—Grants for States and Local Activities	65,042
Title I-D Prevention and Intervention Programs for Children and Youth Who Are Neglected, Delinquent, or at Risk—Grants for States and Localities	47,614
High School Graduation Initiative	46,267
Promise Neighborhoods	56,754
IDEA – Part B Grants to States (B-611)*	11,577,855
Vocational Rehabilitation and Supported Employment	3,064,305
US Department of Health and Human Services	
Chafee Education and Training Vouchers	43,257
Community Services Block Grant	667,957
Runaway and Homeless Youth Program	97,000
Service Connection for Youth on the Streets	17,141
Substance Abuse Prevention & Treatment Block Grant	1,820,000
Corporation for National and Community Service	
AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps	30,000
AmeriCorps State/National	335,430
AmeriCorps VISTA	92,364
Social Innovation Fund	70,000
Department of Justice	
Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Title II	55,500
Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Title V Community Prevention Block Grants	15,000
Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) Program	376,000
Youth Mentoring	85,500
Department of Defense	
National Youth Challenge	133,453

*Estimate from: <http://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/budget/budget14/justifications/j-specialied.pdf>

Steering Committee

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

About the Campaign for Youth

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

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End Notes

ⁱ US Bureau of Statistics, Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey: Series title: (Unadj) Unemployment Rate - 16-19 yrs., Series Id: LNS14000012; Series title: (Unadj) Unemployment Rate - 18 years and over, Series Id: LNU04076975, accessed September 15, 2014

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

ⁱⁱⁱ Clive Belfield, Henry Levin, Rachel Rosen, The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth, Queens College, City University of New York; Teachers College, Columbia University, Civic Enterprises, 2012, http://www.civicerprises.net/MediaLibrary/Docs/econ_value_opportunity_youth.pdf

^{iv} Lumina Foundation, "A Stronger Nation Through Higher Education", March 2013 http://www.luminafoundation.org/publications/A_stronger_nation_through_higher_education.pdf