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## FACT SHEET: THE YOUTH OPPORTUNITY GRANT EVALUATION

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The Communities Collaborating to Reconnect Youth (CCRY) Network is comprised of workforce and youth development professionals representing 15 member communities across the country. The Network's goal is to improve young people's opportunities and well-being by establishing innovative partnerships among local youth-serving systems. CCRY Network member communities share ideas, challenges, lessons and best practices for reconnecting youth. The network also seeks to raise awareness of issues affecting disconnected youth at the local, state and federal levels and provide recommendations to policymakers for how to best serve these young people.

The CCRY Network was born out of the Youth Opportunity Movement – a grant program authorized under the Workforce Investment Act. In 2000, the U.S. Department of Labor awarded substantial Youth Opportunity (YO) grants to 36 high poverty urban, rural and Native American communities to provide programs and supports at scale to change the education and labor market outcomes for 14 to 21 year old youth. As part of the grant, communities made all resident youth eligible for the program and saturated their area with staff-intensive, comprehensive services. They established Youth Opportunity Community Centers to provide safe and accessible places where youth could increase education and employment skills as well as receive long-term supportive services, such as life skills training and mentoring, as a means for achieving employment and educational outcomes. They also built partnerships among public, private, and nonprofit organizations to leverage resources and expand outcomes. The YO grant ended in 2005, however, many grantees of the initiative wanted to continue to build upon the gains YO made possible and formed the CCRY Network.

At the end of 2008, the Department of Labor released the findings of an independent evaluation conducted by DIR, Inc. showing positive results from the YO initiative and highlighting effective practices for serving youth. During the grant period, these 36 communities enrolled 92,000 mostly minority youth – 48 percent of them out of school. The evaluation documented that for this population, grantees were able to increase educational attainment, Pell Grant receipt, labor market participation, and employment rates and earnings. The evaluation showed that when adequate resources are targeted at building community capacity to serve youth, labor force participation and education outcomes can improve. See findings below.

## **EDUCATION OUTCOMES**

*The facts below are taken from Evaluation of Youth Opportunity Grant which can be found at [http://wdr.doleta.gov/research/FullText\\_Documents/YO%20Impact%20and%20Synthesis%20Report.pdf](http://wdr.doleta.gov/research/FullText_Documents/YO%20Impact%20and%20Synthesis%20Report.pdf)*

- YO reduced the overall number of out-of-school and out-of-work (disconnected) youth. YO increased the Pell grant receipt in urban sites from 3 to 6 percent.
- YO reduced the number of high-school dropout and increased postsecondary enrollment for foreign-born youths.
- YO increased the percentage of youth overall with at least an 11th-grade education, reducing the percentage of youths not in school, and increasing the percentage in secondary school.

## **LABOR MARKET OUTCOMES**

- YO increased the labor-force participation rate overall and specifically for teens ages 16 to 19, women, native-born residents, blacks, and in-school youth.
- YO increased the employment rate among blacks, teens, out-of-school youth, and native-born youths and had a positive effect on the hourly wages of women and teens.

## **COMMUNITY OUTCOMES**

- YO successfully recruited and enrolled large numbers of youth in high-poverty areas, suggesting that a saturation approach to serving youth in these areas may work.
- YO helped to address gaps in services and supported skill development among participating youth.
- YO provided a safe space for young people; quality youth and adult relationships; enhanced training and education services; and opportunities to be productive.

## **OTHER NOTEWORTHY FINDINGS**

*The facts below are taken from Youth Opportunity Process Evaluation Final Report which can be found at [http://wdr.doleta.gov/research/FullText\\_Documents/YO%20Process%20Evaluation%20Report.pdf](http://wdr.doleta.gov/research/FullText_Documents/YO%20Process%20Evaluation%20Report.pdf)*

- YO introduced case management to in-school services and had a subsequent impact on public school programs serving at risk youths.
- YO reduced crime, juvenile delinquency, and gang activity.
- YO resulted in more churches getting involved in serving youth.
- YO increase in numbers of youth being served.

- YO made all resident youth eligible for the program (known as *saturation*). This was the easiest element of the model to implement. Outreach and recruitment are familiar services that most grantees and youth-serving organizations could perform.
- The YO Developmental Framework had a major impact on youth-serving agencies by demonstrating models for holistic programs that address multiple aspects of youthful learning by combining a variety of services.
- YO centers were a decided strength of the model, providing youth with safe, supportive havens, establishing a means for connecting with other youth, and creating community infrastructure.

*The Communities Collaborating to Reconnect Youth Network provides a voice and vehicle for exchange for communities that transform young lives through collaborative practice and innovative programming.*

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***For more information on the CCRY Network contact Sara Hastings at 202-906-8027 ♦ [shastings@clasp.org](mailto:shastings@clasp.org) or visit [www.ccrnetwork.org](http://www.ccrnetwork.org).***