

## Transitional Jobs for Youth

Many of today's youth are facing great obstacles to work due to their deep poverty, gang affiliations, child welfare, and juvenile justice experiences that far too often have not prepared them to succeed in the workplace. The aging workforce of today requires that we engage the potential future workforce fully – the failure to integrate our youth into the workforce will adversely impact our economic capacity and productivity.

**Many youth are not prepared to succeed in today's workplace or participate in the workforce of the future.**

- 30 percent of young people who enter public high school do not graduate four years later.<sup>1</sup>
- The graduation rate for Hispanic, African American, and Native American youth is only 50 percent.<sup>2</sup>
- Youth aging out of foster care are less likely to be employed and more likely to have greater educational and skills deficits.<sup>3</sup>
- The unemployment rate for people ages 16 to 24 is more than six times higher than for the overall market (26.0 percent versus 4.2 percent).<sup>4</sup>

Youth who are employed or involved in educational activities leading to employment, are much less likely than their unemployed peers to engage in negative behavior such as dropping out of school, becoming teen parents, or using illegal drugs. Young people, especially those exiting out of foster care and juvenile justice

systems, face barriers to employment including incomplete education, lack of work experience and references, unclear career direction, unstable housing, and often overwhelming personal and family circumstances.

**Transitional Jobs programs help connect youth to work.**

Program experience and evidence demonstrate that **Transitional Jobs** help young people make a successful transition into the world of work.

Transitional Jobs (TJ) is a practical workforce strategy that *uses time-limited, wage-paying jobs that combine real work, skill development, and supportive services*, to transition participants rapidly and successfully into the labor market. TJ programs operate in rural, urban, and suburban areas, engaging young people who have little or no formal work history yet have responsibilities for supporting themselves and their families.

Youth TJ programs mainly operate social enterprises or work crew based models under close supervision to complete needed and unaddressed community service projects such as low-income housing rehabilitation, building maintenance, or trail and park improvement. Some TJ programs serve youth in scattered site work assignments in public or nonprofit community service agencies or schools.

Youth workers **earn a wage** of between \$5.15 and \$8.00 per hour and work between

20 and 35 hours per week. TJ placements are time-limited, typically lasting two to six months, though some last as long as 12 months. These programs are often coupled with other programs providing basic education, GED or ESL classes, counseling, and peer-to-peer interactions. Following completion of the transitional job, participants receive supportive services to further schooling or to gain permanent employment.

### **TJ programs produce significant returns to youth and to communities.**

TJ programs for youth and young adults are successfully connecting youth to work and appear very promising as more programs serve this population. A 14-month study of youth community service projects found the following:<sup>5</sup>

- Every dollar invested in youth results in more than two dollars returned to the economy in the form of wages and reduced benefits.
- 80 percent of young people in youth corps and YouthBuild programs move into jobs, school, or both upon program completion.

### **How do youth benefit from Transitional Jobs?**

For youth, Transitional Jobs:

- Build a work history and develop solid work references through consistent paid employment for up to one year;
  - Offer an opportunity to complete basic education and obtain a GED or high school diploma in a flexible schedule that is built around work;
  - Provide exposure to a realistic range of occupations and training applicable to specific future jobs; and
  - Establish a successful, experiential base from which to make a successful transition into the regular workforce.
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*The following Transitional Jobs programs exclusively serve youth. Two of the largest networks of youth Transitional Jobs programs are YouthBuild and Youth Corps.*

### **YouthBuild**

#### **YouthBuild Rockford, Illinois**

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YouthBuild Rockford, operated by Comprehensive Community Solutions of Rockford, Illinois, serves 60 young people each year. The National Youth Employment Coalition granted YouthBuild Rockford its “Promising and Effective Practices Network” award in 1997 and 2002. The program specifically targets at-risk youth ages 16-24, with at least 75 percent being very low-income high school dropouts living in the 10 most economically distressed census tracts in the city. In a recent program cycle, 97 percent were high school dropouts, 20 percent were adjudicated youth, 60 percent were parents, 80 percent were racial or ethnic minorities, and the average reading level at entry was grade eight. YouthBuild Rockford provides a comprehensive and coordinated set of activities, including academic instruction, job skills training, personal counseling, positive peer support, leadership development, community service, job placement, and follow-up support. Youth participate for a 42-week (10.5 month) program cycle. Participants attend Monday through Friday, 32 hours a week, spending half their time in academic programming and the other half in experiential vocational skills training, learning skills in either construction, computer technology, or manufacturing. Participants receive a stipend for working while participating in the program.

YouthBuild Rockford reports that:

- 91 percent of program completers per cycle are placed in jobs or educational programs.

- 90 percent of the completers of the YouthBuild McLean County got jobs averaging \$9.59 per hour or were in school full time.

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## **Youth Corps**

### **Los Angeles Conservation Corps**

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The Los Angeles Conservation Corps is the largest urban corps in the United States, involving over 400 low-income young adults per year in work, education, and leadership development (and an additional 1,500 teens in similar part-time activities). Eighty-five percent of participants have had previous court involvement, 30 percent have been in the foster care system, and 40 percent received public assistance at entry. Since nearly all participants need to complete high school, participation in the corps involves alternating weeks of work and attendance at the corps-run charter school. The full program cycle involves a three-month training and orientation to environmental and recycling work and several months of work on a crew involved with recycling, tree planting, or similar projects. Upon completion, corps members may move into an Employment Development Course that includes a four-week internship and Job Club or College Club.

Program outcomes include:

- 55 percent of participants complete the program and are placed in living wage jobs—or begin a degree or certificate post-secondary programs.
- 10 percent of participants receive state-accredited high school diplomas.
- 50 percent of corps members who enter with less than a sixth grade reading level raise their level by two grades.

## **Roca, Inc.**

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The Roca, Inc. Transitional Jobs program for youth 16 to 24 years of age assists young people who are unemployed, lack a high school diploma or equivalency, have not held down a job for more than three months, have suffered from chemical dependency, are single parents, or are incarcerated individuals. The Roca, Inc. Transitional Jobs program partners with the Massachusetts Department of Youth Services, Department of Social Services, Corrections, Healthy Families Program, and Probation and Parole. The program offers real work for real pay, life skills, adult basic education, and job readiness. After successful completion of the Transitional Jobs program, candidates work with a job developer to obtain placement services. The Roca, Inc. TJ program is funded through a contract with the Department of Social Services, which allows the program to enter into contracts with the state, municipalities, and ports. Roca, Inc. is also funded through several community grants and by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation.

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## **Other Youth Transitional Jobs Initiatives:**

### **City of Oakland**

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## PAVE – New Avenues for Youth

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## GoodWORKS!

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<sup>1</sup> Center for Law and Social Policy. (n.d.). *Memo on reconnecting our youth from a coalition of voices*. Retrieved on September 20, 2006, from <http://www.clasp.org/CampaignForYouth/memo.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Center for Law and Social Policy. (n.d.). *Youth aging out of foster care: A closer look*. Retrieved on September 20, 2006, from <http://www.clasp.org/CampaignForYouth/PolicyBrief/YouthAgingOutOfFosterCareACloserLook.htm>

<sup>4</sup> Bernstein, J., & Houston, E. (2000). *Crime and work*. Economic Policy Institute. Retrieved September 20, 2006, from

[http://www.epi.org/content.cfm/books\\_crimeandwork#intro](http://www.epi.org/content.cfm/books_crimeandwork#intro)

<sup>5</sup> Jastrzab, J., Masker, J., Blomquist, J., & Orr, L. (1996). *Evaluation of national and community service programs, impact of service: Final report on the American conservation and youth service corps*. Cambridge, MA: Abt Associates, Inc.

The National Transitional Jobs Network (NTJN) is a coalition of more than 200 Transitional Jobs (TJ) programs, policy organizations, and sponsoring organizations. TJ is a workforce strategy designed to overcome employment obstacles by using time-limited, wage-paying jobs and combining real work, skill development, and supportive services to transition participants successfully into the labor market. The Network works to influence a number of audiences to ensure that policies will account for the hard-to-employ, that the public understands the need to invest in these services, that programs are able to effectively serve as many individuals as possible, and that best practices and technical assistance are widely shared and implemented throughout the network. The NTJN is made possible through the generous support of The Joyce Foundation, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, and Network members.

*The mission of the National Transitional Jobs Network is to support and expand the size, type, and number of Transitional Jobs programs nationwide and to support the quality of the service model.*

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For more information, visit [www.transitionaljobs.net](http://www.transitionaljobs.net) or contact Melissa Young.

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