

# My Brother's Keeper Community Challenge and **Opportunity Youth**

Who Are Opportunity Youth? Opportunity youth — commonly referred to as disconnected youth are 16- to 24-year-olds who are not in school and not employed. There are 5.6 million opportunity youth in the United States. That is more than the number of all 16- to 24-year-olds living in New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, San Jose, Atlanta, San Antonio, Minneapolis, Miami and 23 other major cities combined! Imagine if not a single 16- to 24-year-old in all of those cities was in school or employed. What would that do to our economy? Our taxpayers? Our society? iv

### Young men of color are disproportionately likely to be disconnected from school and work.

Young men of color are a growing part of the American population and face increased risk of disconnection. Among 16- to 24-year-olds in 2013, 11.5 percent of white males were disconnected, compared with 14.9 percent of Latino males and 24.9 percent of African-American males. vi And while overall rates of disconnection are likely to go down as the country recovers from the economic recession, history suggests that disconnected young men of color will never fully recover.vii

The cost of inaction is high. Failing to reconnect opportunity youth imposes a significant burden on taxpayers and society. If a city were to solve the problems facing all young men of color except those who are disconnected, the remaining burden on taxpayers and society would still be large. Factoring in criminal justice system and corrections expenses, welfare and social

service payments, and taxpayer-funded health care costs, as well as lost tax revenue (which must be made up for by other taxpayers), failing to reconnect a disconnected youth adds a burden to taxpayers of \$13,890 per year, and \$235,680 over the course of the disconnected youth's lifetime. VIII But the costs to society don't end there. If you include other costs borne by citizens – such as lost gross earnings, lost productivity spillovers across the workforce and criminal justice victim costs – the true cost is \$51,340 per year and \$939,700 over the course of a lifetime. These costs are even higher for young men of color, and are borne primarily by state and local governments. As the following pages show, we know what works to reconnect opportunity youth. What's more, the return on

**Disconnected Youth** 

500 percent.xi

**Annual Cost to** 

Taxpayers per



Formerly disconnected youth can and should be part of the solution. Young people who are disconnected from education and employment, including those who have been involved in the justice and/or foster care systems, have been dubbed "opportunity youth" in recognition of their tremendous untapped potential. They have unique experiences

investment for implementing effective programs for opportunity youth is estimated to be at least

and perspectives that can provide unparalleled value to companies, to government and to nonprofits. Many formerly disconnected youth can relate to the next generation of young men of color in ways that many other adults cannot. As such, opportunity youth can not only benefit from efforts to support young men of color — they can lead them.



Rates of

Disconnection

African American Males

Latino Males

White Males

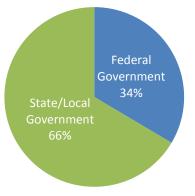
25%

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5%



# Addressing Opportunity Youth within Each of the MBK Goals

Opportunity youth are an important subpopulation of young men of color. Past practice has shown that unless their needs are considered explicitly, they will be left behind. Below are concrete recommendations to ensure they are well-integrated within each of the six goal areas of My Brother's Keeper (MBK) – a White House initiative to address persistent opportunity gaps faced by boys and young men of color and to ensure that all young people can reach their full potential.

- (1) Ensure that all children enter school cognitively, physically, socially and emotionally ready
- (2) Ensure that all children read at grade level by third grade

Twenty-one percent of opportunity youth have children under eight years old. If you add non-custodial parents, the number is even higher. A "two-generation" approach is needed to help opportunity youth and their children together.

- Measure and account for outcomes for both opportunity youth and their children, and align and link systems and funding streams, including eligibility standards, performance benchmarks and coordinated administrative structures.
- Ensure that early childhood programs also help opportunity youth reconnect to school and work. Such programs should support the parents' roles not only as mothers and fathers, but also as breadwinners. XiIII
- Ensure reengagement programs also help opportunity youth's children. Reconnecting is a daunting endeavor on its own. Trying to do so while taking care of kids can be nearly impossible. Programs cannot effectively reconnect opportunity youth without also helping them succeed as parents.
- Fund two-generation programs.xiv

### (3) Ensure that all youth graduate from high school

Research shows that young people who are not in school accept responsibility for their situation and continue to have high aspirations. But they face significant barriers in reconnecting to school, such as the need to make money to take care of their families.\*\*

- Encourage local education agencies to partner with community-based organizations to create multiple pathways to graduation, such as high-quality alternative programs or charter schools; accelerated learning models; twilight academies<sup>xvi</sup>; specialized supports for parenting students; school/work models working with workforce investment boards; GED Plus/Diploma Plus models; and career and technical education; and to find means of using average daily attendance funds to reconnect dropouts at scale.
- Create or expand reengagement centers to connect opportunity youth with credit recovery, tutoring, child care and other services that help them reenroll and graduate from high school or complete an alternative education program leading to a diploma or GED.<sup>xviii</sup>

### (4) Ensure that all youth complete post-secondary education or training

Transitioning to *and completing* post-secondary education poses unique challenges for opportunity youth. For example, many report that no one showed them how to apply to college or figure out how to pay for it. xix

- Form partnerships between high schools, employers and post-secondary institutions, such as those established by members of the Gateway to College Network, to offer high school dropouts and students on the verge of dropping out a chance to earn a high school diploma while also earning college credits.
- **Implement the Back on Track through College Model,** which guides the design of pathways to credentials for 16- to 24-year-old youth who are off-track to graduate or are disconnected from education and work.<sup>xx</sup>

### (5) Ensure that all youth out of school are employed

Even the best preparation will not be sufficient for reconnection unless it leads to a job. Engaging local employers and aligning training programs with employment opportunities is essential.

- Engage your business community to recognize the untapped talent represented by opportunity youth. Ask business leaders to avail themselves of the tools and resources for employers on <a href="http://gradsoflife.org/">http://gradsoflife.org/</a>.
- Workforce Investment Boards will be dedicating 140 million more dollars to serve out-of-school youth. Help your local
   WIB use this funding to create a system of comprehensive career pathways. The new Workforce Innovation and

Opportunity Act requires a significantly higher proportion of federal workforce funds to be spent on out-of-school youth than was required in the previous version of the law. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for local Workforce Investment Boards to develop a system of career pathways connecting disconnected youth to jobs.

- Create, preserve or expand YouthBuild programs. Cities should follow New York City's lead in supplementing the federal Department of Labor's YouthBuild grants to expand the YouthBuild sites that receive federal grants, and to preserve any existing YouthBuild sites that do not have federal funding. XXIII YouthBuild is a comprehensive program engaging disconnected youth full-time for a year, divided equally between working toward their GED or diploma and learning employment skills through a hands-on experience building affordable housing, through which they earn a stipend and internalize the ethic of service and leadership.
- **Support service and conservation corps** that provide participants with job training, academic programming, leadership skills and additional support through a strategy of service that improves communities and the environment, while the participants earn a living allowance. It is the modern version of the Civilian Conservation Corps, through which one million young men were employed annually under the New Deal while preserving America's parks. xxiv

### (6) Ensure that all youth remain safe from violent crime and receive the second chances they deserve

Not only do opportunity youth deserve a second chance but far too many never really had a first chance. Opportunity youth are frequent victims of violence. Many have been mistreated by the justice system, appallingly high numbers aged out of the foster care system and many are forced to live on the streets.

- Protect disconnected youth from violence. Young men of color are at significantly increased risk of being victims of homicide and other violent crime; young men of color who are disconnected from school and work are at even higher risk. As the National League of Cities says, "Nothing stops a bullet like a job." Effective violence prevention efforts must be implemented with a particular emphasis on helping opportunity youth reconnect to jobs and school.\*\* Cities United is leading the way, helping mayors target the highest-risk neighborhoods and engage African-American males in finding solutions to end the violence. http://citiesunited.org/
- Reconnect youth involved in the justice system. Youth returning from the justice system are much more likely than their peers to be disconnected from education and employment, which in turn leaves them at high risk of reoffending. This vicious cycle needs to be addressed head-on by helping reconnect young offenders back to school and jobs.
- Reconnect runaway and homeless youth. On any given night, more than 46,000 youth can be found living on the streets throughout the United States. Each year, nearly two million youth experience at least one night of homelessness. Many are victims of abuse, neglect, trauma, sexual exploitation and poverty. Young people who have experienced homelessness are 87 percent more likely to stop going to school. The National Network for Youth has identified nine steps cities can take to prevent and reconnect runaway and homeless youth. \*\*xxviii\*\*

# Addressing Opportunity Youth within the MBK Action Steps

It is important to address opportunity youth within of the steps outlined in the *MBK Community Challenge Playbook for Action*. Below we focus on the two steps most MBK community challenge sites are currently working on: conducting the policy review and forming recommendations for action.

### Conducting the Policy Review

There are several ways to ensure that opportunity youth are well-addressed by the working group of government policymakers that has been asked to review "existing local policies, programs and practices to introduce or expand on existing efforts" and to "assess the impact of both existing and proposed programs." xxix

- Include former opportunity youth in your stakeholder group. The National Council of Young Leaders/Opportunity Youth United has demonstrated the power of bringing formerly disconnected youth into leadership positions, helping shape efforts to reconnect their peers. Contact them for help in organizing similar youth-led efforts locally.\*\*\*
- Gather data on opportunity youth in your city.
  - The Opportunity Index measures 16 indicators, including rates of disconnected youth, in every state, Washington,
     D.C., and more than 2,600 counties. Hint: Go to the measure "young people in school or working."
     <a href="http://opportunityindex.org">http://opportunityindex.org</a>
  - Live in one of the 25 largest cities? You are in luck Measure of America has compiled rates of disconnection down to the neighborhood clusters level, including racial and ethnic breakdowns.
     http://www.measureofamerica.org
  - Check if you are in one of the 35 cities that participate in the National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership. If so, you can get access to even more data mapped down to the most granular neighborhood level.
     http://www.neighborhoodindicators.org xxxi
- Determine how much funding you have to serve opportunity youth.
  - Learn how to map your funding for children and youth in general: Adding It Up: A Guide for Mapping Public Resources for Children, Youth & Families, by the Forum for Youth Investment. http://bit.ly/1xK1KM4
  - Determine how much federal funding you have for opportunity youth based on the list of funding streams compiled by the Campaign for Youth. (See appendix A.)
  - Bridge to Reconnection: A Plan for Reconnecting One Million Opportunity Youth Each Year (by Civic Enterprises)
     provides assumptions for how much funding would need to be added to various funding streams to meet the
     reconnection goal. <a href="http://bit.ly/1CK7E2Q">http://bit.ly/1CK7E2Q</a>
  - FindYouthInfo.gov will also allow you to map the programs in your city that receive federal funding.

### Forming Recommendations for Action

There are several ways to ensure that opportunity youth are well-addressed by the working group's report on "recommendations for action, standards for tracking and sharing data across public agencies and community partners, and structural recommendations for institutionalizing the effort until goals are reached." "XXXXIII

- Review the recommendations in this document as well as additional ones put forth by thought leaders.
  - Recommendations to Increase Opportunity and Decrease Poverty in America (developed by formerly disconnected youth who are members of the National Council of Young Leaders/Opportunity Youth United). http://osf.to/1Cu117t
  - National Roadmap for Opportunity Youth (Civic Enterprises) <a href="http://bit.ly/1EanND4">http://bit.ly/1EanND4</a>
  - Bridge to Reconnection (Civic Enterprises) http://bit.ly/1CK7E2Q
  - White House Council for Community Solutions Final Report http://l.usa.gov/1t6SPHS
  - Collective Impact for Opportunity Youth (FSG) <a href="http://bit.ly/1Cu5RSO">http://bit.ly/1Cu5RSO</a>
  - Our Youth, Our Economy, Our Future: A Road Map for Investing in the Nation's Talent Pipeline (Campaign for Youth) http://bit.ly/1zDn6jQ
- Learn lessons from Youth Opportunity programs. In 2000, the Department of Labor awarded Youth Opportunity (YO) Grants totaling a little more than \$1 billion to 36 high-poverty communities. The grants funded aggressive, community-wide efforts to connect systems and resources to dramatically improve the economic and life options for young people. XXXXIII
- Ensure that there is a mechanism to align governmental efforts for opportunity youth. This can be a subtopic of a broader intergovernmental structure, such as a children's cabinet. When possible, build upon an existing coordinating structure rather than creating a new one.
- Consider applying to become a federal Performance Partnership Pilot site that will allow you flexibility in how you use your existing federal discretionary funding for disconnected youth.
- Mobilize other mayors to advocate for increased state and federal investment in proven pathways to reconnection that
  will benefit your cities. With sufficient political will, states and the federal government could expand the Department of
  Labor's YouthBuild program, the AmeriCorps program (with an emphasis on inclusion of opportunity youth as service
  givers), the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act funding for out-of-school youth, the Youth ChalleNGe program run
  by the Department of Defense, and other proven federal programs that successfully reconnect opportunity youth across
  the country.

## Connect with and Learn from Related National Initiatives

As you work on the policy review, recommendations and then implementation, there are a number of great resources available from related national initiatives that operate in the intersection between opportunity youth and young men of color.

- The Opportunity Youth Network, which brings together leading corporations, philanthropists, government officials, nonprofits and formerly disconnected youth to collectively reduce the number of disconnected youth in the country by one million over five years. <a href="http://bit.ly/1DEje00">http://bit.ly/1DEje00</a> To learn more or join, contact Yelena Nemoy at Yelena.Nemoy@aspeninstitute.org
- The Executives' Alliance to Expand Opportunities for Boys and Men of Color, a national alliance of 38 foundations, many of whom also work on issues of disconnected youth. <a href="http://bmafunders.org/alliance/">http://bmafunders.org/alliance/</a>
- **Cities United,** a national movement focused on eliminating the violence in American cities related to African-American men and boys. http://citiesunited.org
- The Aspen Institute's Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund, which supports strong, existing community
  collaboratives/backbone organizations focused on building and deepening education and employment pathways for
  opportunity youth. <a href="http://aspencommunitysolutions.org/">http://aspencommunitysolutions.org/</a>
- Campaign for Youth, an alliance of national organizations that are concerned about the persistence (yet seeming
  invisibility) of the challenges confronting young people who are disconnected from education, employment and
  opportunity. <a href="http://www.campaignforyouth.org/">http://www.campaignforyouth.org/</a>
- Communities Collaborating to Reconnect Youth Network brings together workforce and youth development
  professionals in communities across the country to improve young people's opportunities and well-being by
  establishing innovative partnerships among local youth-serving systems by creating effective cross-system
  collaborations in communities. <a href="http://www.ccrynetwork.org/">http://www.ccrynetwork.org/</a> For more information, contact Andrea Barnes at
  abarnes@clasp.org
- The Clinton Foundation's Job One, which works with U.S. employers to share best practices and generate employerdesigned commitments to create new economic opportunities for youth across the country. <a href="https://www.clintonfoundation.org/job1">https://www.clintonfoundation.org/job1</a>

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The following individuals provided significant contributions to this paper: Karen Pittman (the Forum for Youth Investment), Marc Philpart (PolicyLink), Steve Patrick (Aspen Forum for Community Solutions), Andrew Moore (National League of Cities), Dorothy Stoneman (YouthBuild USA) and Kisha Bird (Center for Law and Social Policy).

# Appendix A

# Federal Funding for Opportunity Youth, FY 2014

	<b>Dollars in Thousands</b>
Department of Labor	
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
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	47,614
Neglected, Delinquent, or at Risk – Grants for States and Localities	
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
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 and 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

Source: Campaign for Youth. (2014). *Our Youth, Our Economy, Our Future: A Road Map for Investing in the Nation's Talent Pipeline*. Washington, D.C.: Campaign for Youth.

### **Endnotes**

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> These statistics come from Measure of America, which is the go-to organization for tracking rates of disconnected youth.

ii The number is even higher if you include vulnerable youth in the criminal justice and foster care systems.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>III</sup> According to the 2010 U.S. Census, there are a total of 5,668,096 15- to 24-years-olds in the following cities combined: El Paso, Washington, Charlotte, Austin, Columbus, Jacksonville, San Jose, San Antonio, Indianapolis, Riverside, Minneapolis, Miami, Tampa, Sacramento, Phoenix, Chicago, Dallas, San Diego, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Boston, Los Angeles, New York, Atlanta, Denver, Detroit, Houston, Baltimore, Portland, Sacramento, Seattle.

The drag on the economy caused by widening inequities is documented in the PolicyLink *National Equity Atlas*: <a href="http://nationalequityatlas.org/">http://nationalequityatlas.org/</a>

The magnitude of the problem will increase as population demographics shift. The demographics of the American population are rapidly changing. By 2043, a majority of Americans will be people of color. The fastest growing segments of our labor force have some of the lowest levels of education attainment. As the predominantly white baby boomer generation retires, the share of the labor force held by minorities will increase significantly. Recognizing this demographic shift is critical to developing effective policies that concentrate resources where they are most needed and help low-income people rise out of poverty and pursue careers that pay family-sustaining wages. <a href="http://bit.ly/1EC3OdR">http://bit.ly/1EC3OdR</a>

vi These statistics come from Measure of America, which is the go-to organization for tracking rates of disconnected youth.

vii Edelman, P., Holzer, H., & Offner, P. (2006). Reconnecting Disadvantaged Young Men. Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute.

All the information in this paragraph comes from Belfield, C. & Levin, H. (2012). *The Economics of Investing in Opportunity Youth.* 

ix Ibid.

x Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>xi</sup> Ibid.

wii Mosle, A., Patel, N., & Stedron, J. (2014). *Top Ten for 2Gen: Policy Ideas & Principles to Advance Two-Generation Efforts.*Washington, D.C.: Ascend, the Aspen Institute.

xiii Ibid.

xiv Ascend at the Aspen Institute has identified promising two-generation programs you could implement in your community: <a href="http://ascend.aspeninstitute.org/programs">http://ascend.aspeninstitute.org/programs</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>xv</sup> Bridgeland, J., & Milano, J. (2012). *Opportunity Road: The Promise and Challenge of America's Forgotten Youth*. Civic Enterprises and the America's Promise Alliance.

As the Center for Promise at the America's Promise Alliance has found, "Some school districts have sought to develop programs to meet the various needs of out-of-school youth while bolstering the district's graduation rates. Students are often referred to these programs by counselors or principals at their original high school. They are typically offered in a traditional school, and may offer classes in the evening or on the weekend to meet the schedules of their students. For example, Twilight High Schools, operated by the Houston Independent School District, are open in the evening on Mondays through Thursdays. School districts may lack the capacity to provide the types of supports some young people need to persist in attaining a degree or credential, and may partner with community organizations to secure these supports for their students."

Bird, K. & Bryant, R. (2014). *Investing in Boys and Young Men of Color: The Promise and Opportunity*. Washington, D.C.: CLASP. http://bit.ly/1glgM5T

The development of a reengagement center can support a broader municipal agenda to increase high school graduation rates and ensure that every student is prepared for college and a career. National League of Cities: <a href="http://bit.ly/16QAKUr">http://bit.ly/16QAKUr</a>

\*\*\* Bridgeland, J., & Milano, J. (2012). *Opportunity Road: The Promise and Challenge of America's Forgotten Youth*. Civic Enterprises and the America's Promise Alliance.

xx This model can be used in designing or enhancing diploma-granting and GED programs, as well as redesigned first-year postsecondary programs for those that already have a GED or diploma but lack the skills to succeed.

www.backontrackdesigns.org

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>xxi</sup> The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act requires that that at least 75 percent of available state-wide funds and 75 percent of funds available to local areas be spent on workforce investment services for out-of-school youth — an increase from 30 percent under the previous Workforce Investment Act.

xxii Career pathways connect progressive levels of basic skills and postsecondary education, training, and supportive services in specific sectors or cross-sector occupations in ways that optimize the progress and success of individuals — including those with limited education, English, skills, and/or work experience in securing marketable credentials, family-supporting employment, and further education and employment opportunities.

\*\*\*\* Checklist for Funders: Investing in Youth Transitioning From Foster Care:

http://www.fostercareworkgroup.org/media/resources/Checklist\_for\_Funders.pdf

- xxvii (1) Extending care for young people beyond age 18 to at least 21 and do it right by ensuring services and supports are offered based on the unique developmental tasks of this life stage and their legal status as adults; (2) Fully promote youth engagement in case planning and decision-making for all young people in foster care age 14 and older; and (3) Provide quality oversight that ensures that developmentally appropriate supports and services lead to positive life outcomes for all young people in foster care, beginning no later than age 14 and continuing through extended voluntary care to at least age 21.
- xxviii(1) Outreach to reach and connect youth to services; (2) Drop-in centers to engage youth and link to community resources; (3) Shelter to provide an important first step off the street; (4) Youth-appropriate housing programs to build independent living skills; (5) Case management to improve wellness and decision-making; (6) Connection to education to increase future income earning capability; (7) Workforce development to enable youth to compete in the job market; (8) Services that respond to survivors of human trafficking; (9) Services that are culturally competent and responsive to LGBTQ youth. *Youth Homelessness in America: The Current Status and the Way Forward*. <a href="http://www.nn4youth.org/system/files/NN4Y%20-%20Youth%20Homelessness%20in%20America%20-%202014.pdf">http://www.nn4youth.org/system/files/NN4Y%20-%20Youth%20Homelessness%20in%20America%20-%202014.pdf</a>

xxiii National YouthBuild programs achieve a 61 percent placement rate for all enrollees. If 61 percent of all opportunity youth could be reconnected to jobs or college, it would radically change America.

xxiv Learn more at http://www.corpsnetwork.org.

Violence Prevention (www.findyouthinfo.gov), the California Cities Violence Prevention Network (http://www.ccgpn.org/), the UNITY national network (http://www.preventioninstitute.org/unity.html) and Cities United (http://www.nlc.org/find-city-solutions/institute-for-youth-education-and-families/violence-prevention/cities-united).

xxix The White House. (2014). MBK Community Challenge Playbook for Action.

For more information contact Dorothy Stoneman <u>Dstoneman@youthbuild.org</u> and Elvera Perry <u>Eperry@youthbuild.org</u>.

xxxi http://www.neighborhoodindicators.org/partners/profiles

xxxii The White House. (2014). MBK Community Challenge Playbook for Action.

Harris, L. (2006). Learning from the Youth Opportunity Experience: Building Delivery Capacity in Distressed Communities. Center for Law and Social Policy.



# OPPORTUNITY VOULTH NETWORK