



# Shaping the Narrative

Community Stories of Effective Practice and Impact  
Across the OYF Network

by Monique Miles, Yelena Nemoy, and Nancy Martin

June, 2019



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The Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions promotes collaborative, community-based efforts that build the power and influence of those with the least access to opportunity, and supports communities to come together to expand mobility, eliminate systemic barriers, and create their own solutions to their most pressing challenges. Launched in 2012 at the Aspen Institute, the Forum for Community Solutions envisions a future where communities create their own vibrant and lasting solutions to the social and economic problems that they face. The Forum for Community Solutions believes that if communities have more power to lead change, we will create a more just and equitable society.

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## About the Authors

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**Nancy Martin** draws on more than 20 years of experience in education and workforce development to help organizations document, perfect, and share their efforts to improve young people's lives. Nancy's specialties include building organizational and system capacity, facilitating learning across communities and systems for youth program quality improvement, documenting alternative pathways to high school graduation and postsecondary success, and conducting insightful and sensitive site visits. Previously, Nancy was Director of Capacity Building Initiatives at the National Youth Employment Coalition, where she oversaw NYEC's education and PEPNet quality standard initiatives to expand high-quality education and employment options for youth.

## Acknowledgements

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# Executive Summary

**T**he **Forum for Community Solutions** (FCS), a program of the Aspen Institute established in 2012, seeks to highlight and support communities successfully engaging leaders and advocates across multiple sectors —government, non-profit, business, and philanthropy— to collectively solve our society’s toughest social and economic challenges. Believing that when communities have more power to lead change we will be able to create a more just and equitable society, the FCS supports community collaboratives and backbone organizations to build the power and influence of those with the least access to opportunity using a collective impact or community collaboration approach to come together to expand mobility, eliminate systemic barriers, and create their own solutions to their most pressing challenges.

The Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solution’s Opportunity Youth Forum (OYF) is a network of more than two-dozen urban, rural, and tribal community collaboratives focused on building and deepening education and employment pathways for opportunity youth, defined as young people between the ages of 16 and 24 who are out of school and work. Using a collective impact or community collaboration approach, OYF collaboratives bring together multiple stakeholders (e.g., schools, community-based programs, postsecondary institutions, employers, youth leaders, and government agencies) to remove barriers and improve the systems that serve opportunity youth. Roughly one-quarter (about 1.2 million) of all opportunity youth in the United States reside in or near OYF communities.

Opportunity Youth Forum communities have made great strides in making systemic shifts, including organizational and public policy and practice improvements resulting in increased numbers of high-quality career pathways for opportunity youth.

In addition, OYF collaboratives have strengthened partnerships and community commitment to opportunity youth and have instigated and sustained collective action among stakeholders. A recent evaluation report documents this progress and highlights five key findings:

1. Collaboratives have developed strong partnerships, characterized by high partner engagement and shared accountability toward a common agenda.
2. The majority of collaboratives have made progress changing two narratives in their communities: 1) creating an asset-based frame of “opportunity youth” and 2) elevating recognition of the systemic, rather than individual, nature of challenges these youth face.
3. Collaborative partners have made a range of organizational policy and practice changes that demonstrate significant promise and progress in changing pathways to support opportunity youth.
4. Collaboratives are authentically engaging youth as partners in their work.
5. Although collaboratives have made headway leveraging public resources for this work, sustained funding for the collaborative infrastructure remains a challenge.

Because of the FCS’ commitment to community members leading change and in learning together across communities, we offer this paper as an opportunity to learn about these well-documented evaluation findings through glimpses of OYF network efforts. Taken as a whole, these stories demonstrate the variety of strategies being employed across the network and provide ideas for those interested in improving programs and policies to support opportunity youth in their communities.



Stories about work across the OYF network illustrate the five key findings of the Year 3 Equal Measure evaluation report:

**KEY FINDING 1: COLLABORATIVES HAVE DEVELOPED STRONG PARTNERSHIPS, CHARACTERIZED BY HIGH PARTNER ENGAGEMENT AND SHARED ACCOUNTABILITY TOWARD A COMMON AGENDA.**

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Collaboratives are developing strong partnerships, including participation of senior-level partners with the power to change policies and practices and to make financial support available for the work of the collaborative. Examples include fostering partnerships between community-based organizations, K-12 education, postsecondary education, and government agencies to develop strong education and career pathways for opportunity youth, building a comprehensive, cross-sector coalition to address the challenge of youth disconnection, and empowering communities by focusing on locally-driven reform.

**KEY FINDING 2: THE MAJORITY OF COLLABORATIVES HAVE MADE PROGRESS CHANGING TWO NARRATIVES IN THEIR COMMUNITIES: 1) CREATING AN ASSET-BASED FRAME OF “OPPORTUNITY YOUTH” AND 2) ELEVATING RECOGNITION OF THE SYSTEMIC, RATHER THAN INDIVIDUAL, NATURE OF CHALLENGES THESE YOUTH FACE.**

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OYF network members are working to change stories about the value of opportunity youth and the systemic challenges to their success. And they are seeing their efforts pay off, with most finding that their partners are focusing on opportunity youth and young adults’ contributions and addressing the systemic challenges they face. Examples include taking control of narratives by creating a new media outlet and using data to demonstrate structural barriers faced by

opportunity youth, including disparities within one community.

**KEY FINDING 3: COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS HAVE MADE A RANGE OF ORGANIZATIONAL POLICY AND PRACTICE CHANGES THAT DEMONSTRATE SIGNIFICANT PROMISE AND PROGRESS IN CHANGING PATHWAYS TO SUPPORT OPPORTUNITY YOUTH.**

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OYF collaboratives report a wide range of policy and practice changes to improve outcomes for opportunity youth in their communities. While in general less progress has been made in changing public policy through legislation, collaboratives are laying the groundwork for such changes through new relationships and focused advocacy agendas. In addition, organizational policy and practice changes, often formalized through MOUs between youth-serving organizations and agencies at the local and state levels, can have a very large impact, as several of the examples below demonstrate. Where there have been public policy changes, these changes often lead to adjustments in policy and practice at the organizational level. Examples include focusing on policies and practices of local youth-serving organizations and systems to identify and remove barriers, building on existing local efforts, including youth service providers in identifying needed changes in policy and practice, creating a framework to align services and language community wide, and demonstrating effective policy through small-scale pilots.

**KEY FINDING 4: COLLABORATIVES ARE AUTHENTICALLY ENGAGING YOUTH AS PARTNERS IN THEIR WORK.**

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Many collaboratives have deepened their youth engagement during the OYF and have seen youth play prominent roles, including informing strategy, assessing

the work of the collaboratives, and influencing policy and funding decisions in their communities. Examples include consulting youth and young adults on every decision that affects them and always moving towards deeper, more authentic engagement of opportunity youth in local efforts.

**KEY FINDING 5: FUNDRAISING, PARTICULARLY MULTI-YEAR FUNDING AND SUPPORT FOR THE BACKBONE, REMAINS A CHALLENGE, ALTHOUGH COLLABORATIVES HAVE MADE SOME HEADWAY IN LEVERAGING PUBLIC RESOURCES TO EXPAND OPPORTUNITIES AND PATHWAYS FOR YOUTH.**

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While the majority of OYF members report some financial support for opportunity youth-related work in their community, in most communities, partners are more likely to provide financial support for broader efforts than for the collaborative backbone. Sustaining the collaborative is an on-going challenge for all OYF member communities. Examples include directing existing, funded efforts to focus on opportunity youth and leveraging philanthropic support to begin or pilot efforts that ultimately might be funded publicly.

Considered together, the strategies described in this paper provide a portfolio of effective practices to improve outcomes for opportunity youth worthy of consideration as part of any local effort.



# Introduction

**T**he **Forum for Community Solutions** (FCS), a program of the Aspen Institute established in 2012, seeks to highlight and support communities successfully engaging leaders and advocates across multiple sectors —government, non-profit, business, and philanthropy— to collectively solve our society’s toughest social and economic challenges. Believing that when communities have more power to lead change we will be able to create a more just and equitable society, the FCS supports community collaboratives and backbone organizations to build the power and influence of those with the least access to opportunity using a collective impact or community collaboration approach to come together to expand mobility, eliminate systemic barriers, and create their own solutions to their most pressing challenges.

The Forum for Community Solutions works in partnership with many different communities, operating with the following set of core values informing these partnerships:

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**“While it is not possible to encapsulate the complex work in which OYF collaboratives are engaged in one story and no OYF collaborative is employing just one strategy, we hope that taken as a whole, these stories provide a sense of the variety of efforts underway across the network and perhaps some ideas for those eager to improve programs and policies to support opportunity youth in other communities.”**

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- ▶ **Community and Constituent Centered:**  
We believe in the power of community, and in the central role of community members to lead change and advance individual and community change, particularly those most impacted by issues and historically furthest from influence and decision-making.
- ▶ **Equity:**  
Equity is the just and fair inclusion in a society in which all can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential. We believe that solutions are not successful if they don’t produce greater equity for groups that have historically been excluded from opportunities.
- ▶ **Justice:**  
There is no equity without justice, and no justice without equity. We must courageously create a fair society that provides opportunity to all; to accomplish this we must shift balances of power to increase the influence of those who have traditionally been denied power.
- ▶ **Collaboration:**  
We believe we can go further together than apart. Only through genuine, trust-based collaboration can significant community and systems challenges be addressed and resolved.
- ▶ **Respect:**  
We are humbled before the strength and courage of the communities we seek to support, and do our work with the deepest respect. Only through earning their respect and building trust can we be successful in our work.

► **Love:**

We believe that long-lasting, sustained change of some of our society's most difficult problems is based in having a deeper love of humanity – a greater compassion, empathy, and understanding for all people that is bigger than any one of us.

► **Accountable Impact:**

We are results-oriented; we seek to ensure that solutions produce real, equitable results that meaningfully improve people's lives. We seek to get to impact with a deep sense of organizational responsibility, and with accountability to the communities we serve.

► **Learning Together:**

We believe in the power of learning and knowledge as an engine for change, and that learning together, with and across communities, can only happen where there is mutual respect.

The Forum for Community Solutions' **Opportunity Youth Forum** (OYF) was originally called the "Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund," a funding collaborative developed to support existing collaboratives and backbones focused on building and deepening education and employment pathways for opportunity youth, defined as young people between the ages of 16 and 24 who are out of school and work. The OYF began as a group of 21 community collaboratives and has grown to a network of more than two-dozen urban, rural, and tribal communities. Roughly one-quarter (about 1.2 million) of all opportunity youth in the United States reside in or near OYF communities.

Across the OYF network, communities are engaged in specific efforts to improve education and employment outcomes for opportunity youth, including:

- **Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund**, the original portfolio of investments that began in 2013 from AIFCS to create and/or deepen cross sector and system community collaboratives focused on opportunity youth
- **Opportunity Works**, a federally funded Social Innovation Fund initiative launched in 2014 aimed at building and fostering connections to postsecondary education with an emphasis on boys and men of color, with partner Jobs for the Future
- **100K Demonstration Cities**, an initiative launched in 2015 that leverages a national coalition of employers to connect opportunity youth to jobs while seeking to inform, improve and expand positive hiring practices and policies set forth by employers that benefit opportunity youth
- **Pathways to Career Fund**, a fund launched in 2016 bringing together local employers and community-based organizations working to train and prepare opportunity youth for careers to co-design employment opportunities tailored for the unique and comprehensive needs of opportunity youth
- **Youth Entrepreneurship Fund**, a fund launched in 2017 to support a subset of communities to build out a youth entrepreneurship curriculum, training, and pathways in partnership with youth and service providers so that young people are positioned for self-actualization and agency in their efforts to achieve their professional goals

Using a collective impact or community collaboration approach, OYF collaboratives bring together multiple stakeholders (e.g., schools, community-based programs, postsecondary institutions, employers, youth leaders, and government agencies) to remove barriers and improve the systems that serve opportunity youth.<sup>1</sup> With a focus on creating integrated education and career pathways to reconnect opportunity youth to school and employment, OYF collaboratives are making it possible for young people to get back on track to successful adulthood. In addition to removing barriers and creating pathways of reconnection, OYF collaboratives are seeking to build awareness by identifying and sharing successful strategies; mobilizing stakeholders through knowledge and network development; advocating for effective policy; and catalyzing investments by encouraging funder partnerships. The network of OYF communities seeks to support community collaboratives to design innovative approaches aimed at advancing the most effective solutions for reconnecting opportunity youth.

### Year 3 Evaluation

In May 2018 the Forum for Community Solutions' evaluation partner Equal Measure released a report on its evaluation of the third and final year of implementation of the OYF.<sup>2</sup> This portfolio-level evaluation documents progress and challenges across the original 21 OYF communities in their efforts to make systemic shifts in building and strengthening collaborative infrastructure; building diverse stakeholder commitment; and instigating and sustaining collective action among stakeholders. Key findings of the Year 3 evaluation include:

1. Collaboratives have developed strong partnerships, characterized by high partner engagement and shared accountability toward a common agenda.

2. The majority of collaboratives have made progress changing two narratives in their communities: 1) creating an asset-based frame of “opportunity youth” and 2) elevating recognition of the systemic—rather than individual—nature of challenges these youth face.
3. Collaborative partners have made a range of organizational policy and practice changes that demonstrate significant promise and progress in changing pathways to support opportunity youth.
4. Collaboratives are authentically engaging youth as partners in their work.
5. Although collaboratives have made headway leveraging public resources for this work, sustained funding for the collaborative infrastructure remains a challenge.

Because of our belief in the central role of community members leading change and in the power of learning together across communities, we offer this paper as an opportunity to learn about these well-documented evaluation findings through glimpses of OYF network efforts. These stories include examples of highly successful practice as well as trials in their beginning stages (and everything in between). While it is not possible to encapsulate the complex work in which OYF collaboratives are engaged in one story and no OYF collaborative is employing just one strategy, we hope that taken as a whole, these stories provide a sense of the variety of efforts underway across the network and perhaps some ideas for those eager to improve programs and policies to support opportunity youth in other communities. The Forum for Community Solutions will continue to be a key partner in the opportunity youth movement, in part through highlighting OYF efforts and success with an emphasis on our grantees' community-level experience.

# Chapter 1



## Stories from OYF Communities

In 2017 OYF communities made great strides in achieving systemic shifts, including organizational and public policy and practice improvements resulting in increased numbers of high-quality career pathways for opportunity youth.<sup>3</sup> In addition, OYF collaboratives strengthened partnerships and community commitment to opportunity youth. What follows are stories from many of the OYF communities illustrating the five key findings of the Year 3 evaluation report listed above. Given our emphasis on community-led change and commitment to making the voices of our grantee communities central to any learning shared with the field, we offer the following stories as “translation” of the lessons from the OYF evaluation report. It is our hope that these stories will bring to life the efforts of OYF network members and provide inspiration for those seeking to improve outcomes for opportunity youth in their communities.

### **KEY FINDING 1: COLLABORATIVES HAVE DEVELOPED STRONG PARTNERSHIPS, CHARACTERIZED BY HIGH PARTNER ENGAGEMENT AND SHARED ACCOUNTABILITY TOWARD A COMMON AGENDA.**

Across the OYF network, collaboratives are developing strong partnerships, including participation of senior-level partners with the power to change policies and practices and to make financial support available for the work of the collaborative.

### **Fostering Partnerships between Community-Based Organizations, Postsecondary Institutions, and Juvenile Justice to Create a Prison-to-College Pipeline for Opportunity Youth<sup>4</sup>**

As the backbone organization for the East Bay Consortium of Support Programs for Formerly Incarcerated College Students, the **Urban Strategies Council** is convening community-based organizations and postsecondary institutions to create well-lit pathways to and through postsecondary education for formerly incarcerated youth and young adults. Flipping the School-to-Prison Pipeline concept on its head, the Collaborative is trying to create what they are calling a “Prison-to-College Pipeline.” Vincent Garrett, Outreach and Retention Specialist with Restoring Our Communities, argues “this work is important in atoning for the injustice of mass incarceration and beginning the process of equity and healing in the communities most impacted by this cruel and unjust system.”

Thus far, the Consortium’s main focus has been on creating opportunities for young people 1) to learn about how an Associate’s Degree or certificate can prepare them for a living wage job and 2) to enroll in community college to work toward such credentials, even while still in custody. The group’s work has rapidly grown from one county to three and from partnerships solely with community colleges to now including U.C. Berkeley and Cal State East Bay. The Collaborative recently hosted a Northern California convening with about 300 formerly incarcerated college students, alumni, and representatives of their support programs to share the work they are doing on and off campus to support college success for formerly incarcerated young people.



With seven community colleges, Alameda County has a strong community college presence. At the same time, in the wake of California legislation returning many nonviolent offenders to the community, there is a large population of formerly incarcerated youth and young adults in the County. The Consortium views this as an incredible opportunity to encourage youth and young adults to increase their opportunity through education, thereby decreasing the likelihood of recidivism. Says Breeanna Decker, Program Associate for the Opportunity Youth Initiative at the Urban Strategies Council:

*There's so much potential realized by engaging this returning population of young people in ways that will help them enter the workforce and contribute to the local economy. We need to make sure these resilient youth and young adults are aware of opportunities for education so they can prepare to enter the workforce successfully.*

### **Building a Comprehensive, Cross-sector Coalition to Address an Alarming Rate of Youth Disconnection<sup>5</sup>**

In 2012 one in five young people ages 16-24 in the metro Phoenix area was disconnected from school and work, one of the highest rates in the nation.<sup>6</sup> In response, in 2015 the **Opportunities for Youth** (OFY) initiative was created to address high rates of youth disconnection, and the initiative has been housed at the Arizona State University Watts College of Public Service and Community Solutions since 2017. Understanding the importance of the initiative to the community, the Watts College of Public Service formed the Center for Human Capital and Youth Development (CHCYD), a hub through which faculty, researchers, students, community partners, youth, and policymakers collaborate on research, practice, and policy initiatives to support career and educational pathway programs for opportunity youth.

Jonathan Koppell, Dean of the Watts College of Public Service & Community Solutions, Arizona State University, argues cross-sector partnerships and collective action are key to addressing this issue:

*Universities around the country could be an integral part of the solution to addressing youth disconnection. Our college is demonstrating this by leveraging its resources to be part of a collective solution to a shared problem: the unrealized potential of thousands of young people in our community. Together, we are positively influencing the way employers and society view opportunity youth and what they could contribute to our communities, economy and society.*

The OFY partnership initiative—now with nearly 100 cross-sector community partners, employers, and youth advocates—is altering the way the Maricopa County community approaches opportunity youth by using collective action to focus on youth engagement and empowerment. With a varied and extensive group of partners, the OFY initiative is a community effort that spans many sectors and is poised to continue to garner strong public support.

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**"There's so much potential realized by engaging this returning population of young people in ways that will help them enter the workforce and contribute to the local economy. We need to make sure these resilient youth and young adults are aware of opportunities for education so they can prepare to enter the workforce successfully."**

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## **Partnership in Support of Locally-Driven Reform to Transform Health and Safety Outcomes of Disconnected Latinx Youth<sup>7</sup>**

When Bay Area Community Resources (BACR), Instituto Familiar de la Raza (IFR) and other founding organizations launched **Roadmap to Peace: A Community Initiative** (RTP) in San Francisco to transform the health and safety outcomes of the 500 most disconnected Latinx youth ages 13-25 in the city, they had a very local collective impact model. They were a group of residents, youth, parents, and youth service providers who came together to address a critical issue in their community. As they began to think about relationship building and partnerships, they kept a firm focus on remaining community-led and firmly rooted in the community's values. The collaborative's early partnerships were with local merchants, small businesses, and indigenous organizations in the community.

Over time the collaborative has developed industry, local government, and postsecondary partners and worked on systems alignment and coordination of resources, but always with an insistence on empowering local community. Explains Ruth Barajas-Cardona, Director of Workforce and Education Programs, Bay Area Community Resources:

*We are a very local collaborative under community control, and we are unapologetic in our focus on youth of color with significant barriers. We aren't just trying to prevent youth violence. We are working with and consulting those most involved in violence. Ultimately, we're challenging the notion of "deservedness." We have continued to focus on where the power lies and keeping those living the issue we are addressing at the center of our decision-making. We also now have City leaders and elected officials who are unapologetic about focusing on youth of color, especially youth of color with significant barriers. When the community is empowered, there*

*is buy-in from local leadership, and investment by elected officials, there's a trifecta. Everything is coming together to really put these young people at the center. When we talk about collective impact we also need to have system leaders and elected officials at the table, and we have that now. This has been years in the making.*

Roadmap to Peace was the first of a burgeoning group of community collaboratives focused on youth of color in San Francisco that, today, have created a coalition to represent community voice within the San Francisco My Brother's And Sister's Keeper Initiative. That coalition has set the tone that in San Francisco, community collaboratives must remain under community control, with those most affected at the center of their work.

## **Collaborating for Impact: Working with Community College Partners to Expand Access to Postsecondary Pathways<sup>8</sup>**

When the **Boston Opportunity Youth Collaborative** (BOYC) first began reviewing the data about the opportunity youth population in the city, they found the largest segment by far was young adults with a high school credential. The data convinced Collaborative stakeholders to focus their implementation and advocacy efforts on this population. Because the Pell Grant is the largest source of funding to support upskilling young adults, it made sense to create partnerships with the city's community colleges. To that end, the BOYC has worked with community college leadership to create greater access to and support within postsecondary pathways for opportunity youth. At the same time, the Collaborative's one-stop Connection Center referred opportunity youth to college bridging programs connected to the community colleges.

Community college partners joined the Collaborative in 2014, and have worked diligently to better support opportunity youth in their institutions. Bunker Hill Community College (BHCC), the city's largest community college, has committed to deepening and expanding its partnerships with GED and adult education providers to build a robust Back-on-Track model. Says BHCC President, Pam Eddinger: "Our opportunity youth can do the academic and intellectual work when we take away the barriers." Roxbury Community College has brought Year Up onto their campus to create a more comprehensive blend of postsecondary education and workforce training options. With BHCC in the lead, the ecosystem as a whole is developing strategies to minimize or eliminate the amount of time students spend in developmental education, addressing a major barrier to persistence and completion for opportunity youth. BOYC continues to seek strategies to work with the community colleges and to create more robust coordination between the K-12 system, local CBOs, and its postsecondary partners.

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**"The voice of young people is powerful and important. Never has there been a time more critical to providing space so that the positive work and voice of community can be seen and heard."**

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## **KEY FINDING 2: THE MAJORITY OF COLLABORATIVES HAVE MADE PROGRESS CHANGING TWO NARRATIVES IN THEIR COMMUNITIES: 1) CREATING AN ASSET-BASED FRAME OF "OPPORTUNITY YOUTH" AND 2) ELEVATING RECOGNITION OF THE SYSTEMIC—RATHER THAN INDIVIDUAL—NATURE OF CHALLENGES THESE YOUTH FACE.**

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OYF network members are working to change stories about the value of opportunity youth and the systemic challenges to their success. In most communities, shifting pervasive attitudes about young people who are out of school and work is critical to getting initial buy-in from key community partners. What is more, focusing on systemic challenges is key to beginning the process of addressing the specific barriers faced by this population of youth. OYF collaboratives are seeing their efforts pay off, with most finding that their partners are focusing on opportunity youth and young adults' contributions and addressing the systemic challenges they face.

### **Creating a New Media Outlet to Change the Narrative about Youth of Color<sup>9</sup>**

Mississippi Action for Community Education (MACE), a lead partner in the **Greenville Opportunity Youth Collaborative** (GO Youth), is in the beginning stages of creating a new community-based newspaper to highlight the diversity of the community. MACE is seeking to offer a news source more representative of the community and its needs and to begin to change the narrative around youth, crime, education, and funding for a rural community of color. Explains MACE CEO, Mable Starks:

*The voice of young people is powerful and important. Never has there been a time more critical to providing space so that the positive work and voice of community can be seen and heard. Greenville has young people who are actively engaged*

*in platforms to move their neighborhoods forward positively, sharing this work has the potential to ignite and build our community of color.*

Still in its early stages, the project is already attracting many partners who recognize its potential for dramatic change in the community.

### **Changing the Prevailing Narrative About a Well-off Region by Revealing a “Disconnection Gap” Between Better-served and Underserved Neighborhoods<sup>10</sup>**

When members of the **San Diego Youth Opportunity Pathways Initiative** (the Pathways Collaborative) asked who the opportunity youth were in San Diego County—some even questioning whether they truly existed in such a well-off county full of biotech and other high-skills opportunities, the Collaborative began to examine the data carefully. In 2015 they determined about 43,000 16-24 year-olds (9.7 percent of youth) in San Diego County were disconnected from work and school. This information led to a countywide goal of reducing that to 7.3 percent or lower by 2020.

But viewing these data for the county as a whole masked large disparities by neighborhood and by race. In fact, the difference between the neighborhood with the highest disconnection rate (18.6 percent) and the county average represented a gap of nearly 9 percentage points, and the disconnection rate among San Diego County African American youth was 26.4 percent, nearly three times the county average. Given these significant disparities, an additional goal was set to halve the gap by 2020 so every neighborhood would have a disconnection rate no more than 4.4 percent above the countywide rate. This has led to a targeted focus of efforts and resources on underserved communities and populations.

San Diego’s reputation as “America’s Finest City”

influenced a deeply-rooted notion among city leaders that everything was fine for everyone. This made it tough for the collaborative to gain traction initially. Shining a light on the data made it impossible to hide from the reality of gross inequality. Through the Annual Opportunity Youth Summit, now in its third year, the Pathways Partnership and the San Diego Workforce Partnership have raised awareness of these disparities by race and zip code, and this paves the way for greater acceptance of their efforts to improve outcomes for opportunity youth.

As Sean Elo, Executive Director of the San Diego Youth Development Office, puts it:

*Justice cannot be achieved until injustice is recognized. The stark and deeply troubling disparities demonstrated through the Pathways Collaborative’s work provided evidence of something many of us knew, yet was often ignored: the color of young person’s skin and neighborhood they grow up in make a huge difference in determining the opportunities they are presented with. Now that this injustice has been recognized, we are better able to do the important work of making policy changes and directing resources to achieve our goal of ensuring every young person has what they need to achieve their potential.*

Focusing on data has helped Pathways Collaborative members to understand racial inequity in a way that allows them to do better work to improve outcomes for opportunity youth in their community.

## Chapter 2



### KEY FINDING 3: COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS HAVE MADE A RANGE OF ORGANIZATIONAL POLICY AND PRACTICE CHANGES THAT DEMONSTRATE SIGNIFICANT PROMISE AND PROGRESS IN CHANGING PATHWAYS TO SUPPORT OPPORTUNITY YOUTH.

OYF collaboratives report a wide range of policy and practice changes to improve outcomes for opportunity youth in their communities. The majority strengthened relationships with public officials and implemented supports to target the needs of opportunity youth. Collaborative are laying the groundwork for changing public policy through new relationships and focused advocacy agendas. In addition, administrative and organizational policy and practice changes, often formalized through memos of understanding between youth-serving organizations and agencies at the local and state levels, can have a very large impact, as several of the examples below demonstrate. Where there have been public policy changes (as in Maine with the state's Alumni Youth Transition Grant legislation), these changes often lead to adjustments in policy and practice at the organizational level.

#### Addressing Organizational Policy and Practice Changes Needed to Serve Foster Youth<sup>11</sup>

The **Los Angeles Opportunity Youth Collaborative** (OYC) is focused on improving education and employment outcomes for transition-age foster youth in Los Angeles County. The county is currently in a crisis: one in five youth is neither in school nor employed—meaning over 150,000 young people in the City of Los Angeles are disconnected. Los Angeles County represents the largest child-welfare system in the county with over 10,000 transition-age foster youth ages 14-

24. Transition Age Youth who have lived in foster care have a greater risk of lower educational achievement, homelessness and incarceration compared with youth in the general population; yet historically, foster youth have been underrepresented in traditional workforce programs in Los Angeles County.

The OYC partners have worked to align and coordinate agencies and funding sources to better serve foster youth through improved access, outreach, and early awareness programming for foster youth, as well as increased trauma-informed trainings for workforce program staff. Notes Congresswoman Karen Bass:

*The OYC unites the many and varied voices working to support our young people transitioning from care. Their collective power to affect change cannot be underestimated.*

Indeed, the collaborative has made great strides in its efforts to improve its service to foster youth. For instance, collaborative members coordinated with the seven local workforce development boards and the Department of Children and Families Services to develop a Foster Youth Universal Referral process for Workforce Services process between the Division of Child and Family Services (DCFS). This collaboration has made it possible to ensure foster youth receive crucial workforce development services and for DCFS to follow up to confirm referrals have been made. Recently, DCFS earmarked \$1 million to provide foster youth across LA County with up to 120 hours of subsidized work experience.

In addition, the collaborative has expanded its work through a federal Performance Partnership Pilots for Disconnected Youth (P3) grant, which includes an agreement with the federal Department of Labor waiving eligibility criteria that previously prevented foster youth from accessing any programs funded by Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)

out of school youth funds. (In order to qualify for extended foster care, foster youth had to be enrolled in school or a qualified program, which prevented foster youth from accessing WIOA out of school funded support, which was intended for “out of school” youth.) As a direct result of advocacy by the OYC, LA County has determined foster youth should be counted in the out-of-school category and therefore be eligible for WIOA out-of-school funds. This was an important barrier to remove to make it possible for our partners to serve youth ages 18 to 24 with federal workforce funds.

### **Including Youth Service Providers in Practice and Policy Change<sup>12</sup>**

In initial years of the **Southern Maine Youth Transition Network** (SMYTN) partnership, many conversations and decisions about how the larger system of youth services needed to operate differently were restricted to the senior leadership level of organizations. Leadership – often informed directly by youth leaders – would discuss the missing links between services on the ground and how important it was to develop new strategies to align organizations and provide seamless connections from one service to another to improve overall outcomes for youth. In many cases, organizational leadership rearranged core youth services positions or created funding to develop positions that could operate more creatively and with more flexibility than a typical case worker.

After several years with senior leadership and youth leaders at the table, it became apparent that the SMYTN change strategy was missing a critical group: many of the people on the ground implementing new or redesigned programs. For example, with new state legislation establishing the Alumni Youth Transition Grant Program to provide financial support for postsecondary education to alumni of the state’s

foster care system, youth service providers were in the thick of implementing new programming. They were being expected to work differently without always having access to the larger picture from prior SMYTN conversations. What is more, front-line youth serving staff were well-poised to identify the kinds of things that arose as barriers to greater impact (e.g., outdated agency policies, broken communications channels, resource limitations).

To address this, the backbone staff of SMYTN worked jointly with a consultant to create a Community of Practice (COP) comprised of partner agency youth-serving staff working with older youth in navigating critical transitions in their education and career paths. In the course of the year-long COP, youth serving staff were supported to dissect real anonymized case examples of young people who were systems involved or otherwise struggling to connect with education and employment opportunity. In one case, a young person had been connected with more than half of the agencies participating in the COP and had still slipped between the cracks. In a safe and judgment-free space, youth-serving staff got to step back and discuss: Why did that happen? What could have happened differently? While such discussions involved speculations about reasons, they always came back to What can I, myself, do differently going forward? It is so easy when we are part of larger, complex systems to identify what is outside of our control. In this case, participants were supported to better understand the sphere of influence squarely within their control. Participants were also

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**“OYF collaboratives report a wide range of policy and practice changes to improve outcomes for opportunity youth in their communities.”**

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able to learn from colleagues working within similar circumstances who had been able to transcend systems barriers to support success for young people. The key to this was also translating that learning back to organizational leadership so that it was not just that some individuals were able to find work-arounds or a different approach but that lessons around effective practices could be filtered back up and incorporated into future considerations around programmatic design. At the end of the year, participants reported increased confidence that their voice would be heard in decisions about policy and practice change.

### **Removing Barriers to Postsecondary Success<sup>13</sup>**

The **Austin Opportunity Youth Collaborative** (AOYC) has developed a robust partnership with Austin Community College (ACC) through work on a series of system changes that are removing barriers to postsecondary success for opportunity youth in Greater Austin. Through this coordinated partnership, ACC and its partners now offer opportunity youth:

- Priority access to a College Prep course that helps students bypass developmental education courses and provides referrals to wrap-around supports in partner agencies;
- A Life Skills class, with instruction in financial literacy, stress management, and study habits;
- A lower enrollment age of 16 (down from 18) and a delay in the summer session start to accommodate opportunity youth referred from Austin's Youth Employment Program (YEP);
- Support to cover the costs of textbooks, school supplies, testing fees, and tuition;
- Removal of financial holds when youth seek to re-enroll at the college;
- More seamless support through data sharing between ACC and local community-based organizations that makes it possible to identify in

real-time when students drop out, transfer, move, or reenroll; and

- Support through an Emergency Aid program if they find themselves in a financial bind.

These types of administrative shifts are not easy to make in a community college system that operates within a larger ecosystem of policies and practices that have been created primarily to accommodate adult learners. Yet many have demonstrated their benefit fairly quickly. Indeed, ACC has seen a 16 percent increase in the graduation rate of students assisted by the Emergency Aid program, and the College has found removing financial holds so helpful to opportunity youth seeking to reenroll, that it is expanding this to all students. "The world view of Austin Community College has shifted due to our work with the Austin Opportunity Youth Collaborative and allowed us to work together to address systems level barriers to student success," reports ACC Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management, Melissa Curtis.

### **Using a Career Development Framework to Align Opportunities for Youth<sup>14</sup>**

While Philadelphia had numerous well-run youth programs, employers reported there was not a strong enough pipeline of prepared youth and young adults, and youth were not always building the actual skills needed to enter careers. To address this concern, in 2018 the Philadelphia Youth Network (PYN) and its **Project U-Turn** partners galvanized around a Career Development Framework as a way to align around the set of skills and experiences a young person needs to have through in and out of school curriculum and programming. Concurrently, the City of Philadelphia and its partners released Fueling Philadelphia's Talent Engine, a workforce development strategy emphasizing the need for quality career pathways for a variety

of vulnerable populations, with a high priority on opportunity youth.

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**“Many collaboratives have deepened their youth engagement during the OYF and have seen youth play prominent roles, including informing strategy, assessing the work of the collaboratives, and influencing policy and funding decisions in their communities.”**

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The new Career Development Framework is being used across the city as a way to assess resource gaps and highest need areas for investment and is paving the way for organizational policy and practice changes. City agencies are aligning requests for proposals for youth-related programming with the new Career Development Framework, and youth-serving organizations are able to use the framework to talk with employers about exactly where youth are to make sure the career-based opportunities they are offering are the ones youth need. Explains Sarah Hollister, Vice President of Youth and Gateway Programs at JEVS Human Services:

*The PYN Career Development Framework has provided a useful visual to talk about our work with both staff and the young adults we serve. The tool explains the cyclical nature of preparing young people for careers, as well as the multiple types of skills that career readiness encompasses. The framework has also been useful in mapping each of our programs to the different stages. This has helped us visualize how a young person can transition from one program to another both within our own program options and within the city of Philadelphia.*

## **Taking a Pilots to Policy Approach<sup>15</sup>**

The **Denver Opportunity Youth Initiative** (DOYI) has a clear vision of their ultimate goal: a sustainable system of effective pathways to work and education for opportunity youth that are coordinated and connected to each other, offering multiple on-ramps and long-term support. The initiative has found early success in implementing and supporting programs in the Denver metro area to help young adults complete their high school equivalency tests, take the next steps in their post-secondary education, and find and retain jobs. However, solving this challenge long term and at scale requires system-level changes.

The collaborative has supported a number of pilots in hopes of demonstrating and, eventually, institutionalizing successful practice. For example, DOYI supported two Academic Navigators to reach out to 16-24 year-old inactive students who had previously attended Metropolitan State University of Denver (MSU Denver) to encourage them to return to college and guide them through the re-admission and registration process. Those not interested in returning to postsecondary were offered a connection to the Denver Opportunity Youth career resources. Through this pilot, Navigators reached 47 students who wished to return to MSU Denver, 17 of whom were enrolled for the upcoming semester and 30 of whom re-applied and planned to return in the following semester. Having seen the return on investment, MSU Denver is now supporting the reengagement effort going forward, at four times the level of the investment in the pilot. Meanwhile, DOYI is beginning conversations with the Colorado Community College system about improving re-engagement efforts.

In another pilot, DOYI partnered with Denver Public Schools (DPS) to support a Career Navigator position at a GED Plus program in the city. The

collaborative funded this fully for the first year, after which DPS began providing support for half of the position.

Yet another pilot involved funding a navigator position at Colorado Youth for a Change (CYC) to help reengage older youth ages 21-24 in career-based opportunities. The success of this effort allowed CYC to secure a contract with the local Workforce Investment Board to support a full-time position dedicated to reengaging older youth and young adults who are out of school and work. This new contract, notes Mary Zanotti, CYC Executive Director, allows CYC to “leverage more partnerships within the community and ultimately provide more support and services for [opportunity] youth.”

Through these pilots, DOYI is able to demonstrate the value of particular programming, which is then institutionalized through organizations’ budgets. As Lorena Zimmer, DOYI Talent Pipeline Director, explains:

*We show the value, and then the larger institution takes on the investment. In this way, the programming becomes more institutionalized and part of others’ budgets, which in essence is organizational policy change, or more little “p” policy work. Big “P” policy work (such as changing legislation) might seem sexier, but it’s not always the right solution. It is very possible that our re-engagement efforts might move forward as legislation in the coming year or two; but why wait, when incremental changes can begin to provide results for these youth who need the opportunity now?*

DOYI envisions a system serving all opportunity youth (i.e., at scale), and the collaborative is currently laying the foundation for this system by bringing in multiple partners and institutions, showing on a small scale what is possible, and encouraging partners to help finance expansion of successful programming.

#### **KEY FINDING 4: COLLABORATIVES ARE AUTHENTICALLY ENGAGING YOUTH AS PARTNERS IN THEIR WORK.**

Many collaboratives have deepened their youth engagement during the OYF and have seen youth play prominent roles, including informing strategy, assessing the work of the collaboratives, and influencing policy and funding decisions in their communities.

#### **Consulting with and Listening to Youth: “Nothing About Us Without Us”<sup>16</sup>**

Hopi-Tewa youth are part of every decision-making process of the **Hopi Opportunity Youth Initiative** (HOYI). The Collaborative regularly consults the HOYI Youth Advisory Council (YAC), comprised of representatives of various youth groups on Hopi and overseen by a full-time Youth Liaison, herself a recent high school graduate. When the Collaborative was awarded a relatively open foundation grant to support their work around innovation, they engaged in a strategic planning process to inventory jobs and employers on Hopi. The YAC Youth Liaison took that inventory and surveyed high school students to learn about their interests, and this helped the Collaborative to develop a list of opportunities for a new internship program. The program was very successful from the start, attracting more than twice as many applicants as could be accommodated. Explains internship participant Hunter Tso:

*The internship allowed me to be closer to the ceremonial part of Hopi, working with the golden eagles. I felt like I was helping out the people/the community. I was learning what else I could do to help the community, even they don’t know they don’t see us out there, knowing what we’re doing.*

## Moving Towards Increasing Authentic Youth Engagement<sup>17</sup>

**Youth on the Rise** (YOTR), a change network within the Pima County Cradle to Career Partnership, has included a youth council from early on and continually seeks to increase authentic youth engagement in the work of the collaborative. United Youth Leadership Council (UYLC) members attend YOTR meetings and receive stipends, cellphones, business cards, and bus passes. In 2016, in an effort to shift its focus to greater and more authentic youth engagement in the work of the collaborative, YOTR changed the time of their meetings so young adults could regularly attend.

In 2017, YOTR hired an Americorps Vista member to build out a robust youth development component of the Council. This involved working with UYLC members to create a mission statement, logo, and set of expectations for members of the Council. With greater structure in place, the Council began generating its own ideas about improving outcomes for opportunity youth in Pima County. For example, in Fall 2018 UYLC created the Backpack Project, a public art installation and public awareness campaign that collected 21,000 backpacks to be donated to organizations serving opportunity youth in the area. In a statement about the art installation, the Backpack Project Youth Coalition wrote:

*We did not reach our goal of 21,000 backpacks, but it was never truly about the number. It is not all or nothing, but rather how far we've walked together to get here. For us, it is about the relationships we've formed, the individuals in this community who have stepped up as our allies and listened to our stories.*

Over time, YOTR has worked to increase authentic youth engagement in the change network, primarily

through removing barriers to youth involvement, and to build the capacity of the OYLC by supporting staffing to create a youth development program.

## Deepening and Improving Youth Engagement<sup>18</sup>

From its beginning, the **Employment and Mobility Pathways Linked for Opportunity Youth** (EMPLOY) Collaborative in New Orleans intended to integrate youth and young adults into the work of the collaborative. Over time, it has become clear that to do so effectively takes significant, sustained effort for all involved. The EMPLOY Collaborative has endeavored to improve and deepen youth engagement in its work by increasing the preparation, training, and on-going support it provides members of its Youth Action Team. This has meant keeping the group relatively small (10-15 members) and devoting resources to these young people through strategies such as providing one-on-one mentorship with collaborative members and developing dedicated roles for youth through the creation of several paid, part-time Program Assistant positions which it hopes to implement in the near future. As they aim to institutionalize these strategies in the Collaborative structure, the adult members of the EMPLOY Collaborative are continually seeking to improve how they engage with youth. For example, the Collaborative will be measuring its performance in this area by tracking the number of dedicated positions for young leaders in member programs, the numbers of participants who report feeling that their voice made an impact on the program and/or the collaborative, and remaining flexible to adjust and adapt the ways it engages young leaders as needed.

Being engaged in the work of the collaborative and being part of what has developed into a significant cadre of youth and young adult leaders in the city, YAT members have come to expect a high level of

authentic engagement in this work. This can lead to frustration when members of the collaborative and its partner organizations fail to address issues identified by the YAT as high priority, sometimes making it seem like the offer of engagement is an empty one. Says Ryan Dalton, Community Organizer, OYU-CAT Organizer and Founding Member:

*Young people are right to believe they can change the landscape. In New Orleans we've engaged youth in the EMPLOY collaborative and even provided them significant leadership training opportunities. But to have truly authentic engagement, we're going to have to examine where we invest resources and who we look to for expertise. So far, we haven't set Youth Action Team members up to be their own agents. For the next level of youth engagement in New Orleans, we're going to need to make sure we really listen to what youth and young adults tell us we need to put in place to improve outcomes for opportunity youth. We're also going to need to explore what it would mean to put youth and young adult leaders at the center of the decision-making process as we identify how to move toward our goals for opportunity youth in our city.*



# Chapter 3





**KEY FINDING 5: FUNDRAISING, PARTICULARLY MULTI-YEAR FUNDING AND SUPPORT FOR THE BACKBONE, REMAINS A CHALLENGE, ALTHOUGH COLLABORATIVES HAVE MADE SOME HEADWAY IN LEVERAGING PUBLIC RESOURCES TO EXPAND OPPORTUNITIES AND PATHWAYS FOR YOUTH.**

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**W**hile the majority of OYF members report some financial support for opportunity youth-related work in their community, in most communities, partners are more likely to provide financial support for broader efforts than for the collaborative backbone. Sustaining the collaborative is an on-going challenge for all OYF member communities.

**Creatively Funding the Work of a Collaborative by Focusing Existing Efforts on Opportunity Youth<sup>19</sup>**

In Del Norte, California, the **Del Norte County and Tribal Lands Opportunity Youth Initiative** has made use of existing resources to support the Initiative. Opportunity youth collaboratives often find it a major challenge to identify funding for a backbone. In Del Norte, the Wild Rivers Community Foundation already had support to serve as the backbone for a ten-year Building Healthy Communities Initiative dedicated to improving health outcomes by changing systems and policies. Early on, the collaborative made the case for seeing youth disconnection as a public health issue. They asserted that youth disconnected from education and work were often closest to the pain and working to better understand their experiences accessing or not being able to access systems of support could shed light on much needed changes that could lead to improvements for the entire community. In this way, the collaborative focused its already existing youth efforts on better understanding and lifting up the experiences and stories of opportunity

youth. If they could figure out how to improve their systems and policies to prevent and/or reconnect the most disenfranchised and unheard individuals, they argued, then they would be in a position to better serve the entire community.

In addition to this foundation support, the collaborative is reviewing existing funding sources that may be tapped and leveraged to support its opportunity youth work. When the federally-funded workforce system needed to shift to serving a greater percentage of out-of-school youth with its Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funding, the collaborative had the relationships with opportunity youth in place, so they were able to connect these young people to paid internships. College of the Redwoods has also stepped up as a large partner, utilizing federal funds to pay instructors in a partnership with local nonprofits hosting programming as part of career pathways. Youth are enrolled as college students, earn credits, and receive a stipend through grant funding. This significant contribution from the local community college systems has created a more sustainable program. The Workforce Center, Del Norte Unified School District, Building Healthy Communities, and local businesses have also teamed

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**“While the majority of OYF members report some financial support for opportunity youth-related work in their community, in most communities, partners are more likely to provide financial support for broader efforts than for the collaborative backbone. Sustaining the collaborative is an on-going challenge for all OYF member communities.”**

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up to identify creative funding sources to support a six-week youth internship program. Grant funds cover worker's compensation and other administrative costs, and the employer supports the intern's wage by donating funds to the workforce center that employs the young people.

As a rural and tribal community, Del Norte cannot afford not to collaborate. "We're working to break down silos and change the system because young people are telling us they are often turned away and told they don't qualify for services," explains Michelle Carrillo, Initiative Director, Building Healthy Communities, Del Norte and Tribal Lands, Wild Rivers Community Foundation. To improve health, education, and employment outcomes for opportunity youth, the collaborative is making due with what it has by taking inventory of existing programming and reorganizing this into career pathways. "We have to be the innovators, and California can catch up later," says Carrillo.

### **Leveraging Philanthropic Support to Obtain Sustainable Public Funding for Opportunity Youth<sup>20</sup>**

The **Road Map Project** is a collective impact initiative, begun in 2010, to improve student achievement from cradle through college and career in South King County and South Seattle. The project strives for every child, particularly those who are low-income or of color, to thrive in their education, communities, and life. Through collaboration with school districts, higher education institutions, community-based organizations, businesses, government agencies, teachers and parents, students and youth, the Road Map Project aims to increase equitable policies and practices in education systems to eliminate opportunity and achievement gaps, and

for 70 percent of youth in the region to earn a college degree or career credential by 2030.

The Road Map Project Opportunity Youth Advisory Group is a multi-sector group working to improve outcomes for 16- to 24-year-olds who have not completed a high school or college credential and are not employed. Road Map Project opportunity youth partners have skillfully utilized private philanthropy to leverage public investment in opportunity youth. Some examples include:

- South King County is one of seven Opportunity Works communities that received three years of federal Social Innovation Fund (SIF) support to reconnect underserved young people with education and employment on-ramps and pathways. Road Map Project opportunity youth partners used this funding to embed a postsecondary navigation function within their reengagement system. This function has been sustained through King County Best Starts for Kids levy funding.
- A peer outreach strategy initially supported solely by funding from United Way of King County is now being augmented by King County Best Starts for Kids funds, which support four full-time Peer Connector positions to re-enroll out-of-school youth.
- In 2017 King County was able to leverage funding from Ballmer Group to embed a team of five career navigators in the reengagement system. The seed funding allowed the County to begin drawing down public funds not previously used for youth employment training (Basic Food Education Training funds). This team of navigators is now supported through a combination of BFET and King County human service dollars.

Jennifer Hill, Youth Programs Manager for the County's Department of Community and Human Services explains:

*The ability to leverage philanthropic support to pilot programming has been incredibly helpful and has allowed the County to invest in strategies that have demonstrated the ability to make an impact. Both the Peer Connectors project and Career Launch Pad were seeded with private support, exceeded expectations for outcomes, and provided a strong case for continued support with scarce....public resources.*

By using a strategic combination of philanthropic support and public funds, the Road Map Project partners have been able to demonstrate value to public systems and increase the likelihood of sustainable, public funding for opportunity youth in South King County.

# Conclusion

The Forum for Community Solutions remains steadfastly committed to being community- and constituent-centered and to supporting continuous learning together. We have chosen to share specific stories from OYF network members to illustrate key lessons from the third year evaluation of the OYF. This is part of our continued effort to promote the voices of OYF community leaders and to support the opportunity youth field by sharing innovative approaches to designing effective solutions for improving outcomes for opportunity youth.

Across the OYF network, local collaboratives are employing a range of strategies to improve outcomes for opportunity youth. Above, we have considered the following efforts emphasized by OYF collaboratives in their work:

## **Developing strong partnerships, characterized by high partner engagement and shared accountability toward a common agenda**

Examples include fostering partnerships between community-based organizations, K-12 education, postsecondary education, and government agencies to develop strong education and career pathways for opportunity youth; building a comprehensive, cross-sector coalition to address the challenge of youth disconnection; and empowering communities by focusing on locally-driven reform.

## **Working to change two narratives 1) creating an asset-based frame of “opportunity youth” and 2) elevating recognition of the systemic—rather than individual—nature of challenges these youth face**

Examples include taking control of narratives by creating a new media outlet and using data to demonstrate structural barriers faced by opportunity youth, including disparities within one community.

## **Seeking organizational policy and practice changes that demonstrate significant promise and progress in changing pathways to support opportunity youth**

Examples include focusing on policies and practices of local youth-serving organizations and systems to identify and remove barriers, including youth service providers in identifying needed changes in policy and practice, creating a framework to align services and language community wide, and demonstrating effective policy through small-scale pilots.

## **Authentically engaging youth as partners**

Examples include consulting youth and young adults on every decision that affects them and always moving towards deeper, more authentic engagement of opportunity youth in local efforts.

## **Leveraging public resources to expand opportunities and pathways for youth**

Examples include directing existing, funded efforts to focus on opportunity youth and leveraging philanthropic support to begin or pilot efforts that ultimately might be funded publicly.

The examples of efforts across the Opportunity Youth Forum network discussed in this paper, when taken as a group, provide a portfolio of effective strategies for collective action to improve outcomes for opportunity youth that, while not exhaustive, is worthy of consideration as part of any local effort. As is clear from the stories above, many details of implementation are community-specific. Still, we hope these examples serve as inspiration to those seeking to improve outcomes for opportunity youth in their own communities.

# Endnotes

- 1 The Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions has encouraged focus on three fundamental systemic shifts to help OYF communities improve outcomes for opportunity youth and expand efforts to scale: 1) building and strengthening collaborative infrastructure; 2) building diverse stakeholder commitment; and 3) implementing and sustaining collective action among stakeholders. For further discussion of systemic shifts in the OYF, see Miles, M. and Nemoy, Y. (2017). *Shift Happens: the Aspen Institute Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund Accelerates Systems Change*. Retrieved from <https://aspencommunitysolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Shift-Happens-Full-Report.pdf>
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- 3 OYF collaboratives have worked both to improve programming for current opportunity youth and to make the systemic changes necessary to expand their efforts to scale. The Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions has focused on the following systemic shifts: 1) building and strengthening collaborative infrastructure, 2) building diverse stakeholder commitment, and 3) implementing and sustaining collective action among stakeholders. These shifts are improving the ways opportunity youth are supported to reach better outcomes in OYF communities. For a full discussion of systemic shifts in the OYF, see Miles, Monique & Nemoy, Yelena. (December 2017). *Shift Happens: The Aspen Institute Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund Accelerates Systems Change*. Retrieved from <https://aspencommunitysolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Shift-Happens-Full-Report.pdf>
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