

# Opportunity Youth: Next 10 Years Vision and Goals

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*Note: These statements were collaboratively developed over the course of 2022 by a group of 40+ OY movement leaders, including many young adults, in a process facilitated by Ken Thompson, a Senior Fellow at the Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions.*

## Vision

In ten years, our society will fully embrace and value youth and young adults in every respect, including supporting all youth, particularly those most excluded from opportunities, to have equitable access to education, employment and other pursuits of their choice. Young people themselves will have power over the forces that impact them, and lead the charge in creating the future they desire.

## Specific Targets

By 2033, reduce the number of opportunity youth 50%, by reconnecting 3 million opportunity youth to jobs and education, and reduce racial and other inequities in rates of youth disconnection.

## By 2033, Our Goals Are To:

**Institutionalize the Power for Change with Young People:** Opportunity Youth (OY) should be the change and have agency over their own lives, lead and change processes, influence policy and practice, and be civic leaders in our democracy. We seek to build the next generation of leadership, and eliminate adultism within our movement, from the organization and community level to the national level.

**Increase the Social Connection, Belonging and Well-Being of OY:** Opportunity youth will feel loved and valued, cared for and healed by their communities. OY will have a web of positive, meaningful social connections, including adults who support them in attaining education, career and life goals.

**Change Society's Beliefs, Perceptions and Create a More Positive Narrative About OY:** Change the dominant narrative around OY from deficit-based to asset-based. Focus on the systems and cultures that have created the problems for young people, rather than focusing on individuals. Young people should lead the way in defining themselves.

**Increase the Focus on Equity, Particularly Racial Equity, in Both Processes and Outcomes for OY:** Processes should be transparent, equity-focused, and explicitly disaggregated by race to ensure OY of color are succeeding. Goals or targets for success should also include equity goals, including the intersection of race with gender, class and other categories. The focus will be on root causes and current/past policies and practices to understand the differential outcomes that impact OY now.

**Ensure OY's Basic Needs Are Met, and Barriers to Opportunity Removed:** Basic needs (such as safety, housing, food, mental, emotional and physical health, transportation, child care, et al) will not stand in the way of OY success in education, work, life and well-being. Supports will be known to OY and easy to access.

**Improve Access to Education Opportunities and Credential Completion:** Transform systems to ensure that young people experience success in secondary and postsecondary education, including increasing relevancy and supports during high school, stronger alignment between the K12 and postsecondary systems, and increased support and more opportunities for postsecondary completion and career transitions to an expanded range of credentials and degrees.

**Increase Economic Security and Create More Well-Paying and Meaningful Employment Opportunities and Business Opportunities that Support Wealth Building:** Create opportunities with OY that help them achieve successful economic justice, defined on their own terms. Create more collaborations and better supports for both public and private entities to attract, train and retain young adult workers. Support other modes of building overall wealth and improving financial management capabilities of young adults.

**Increase Public and Private Investment in Youth and Youth Programs:** Transform policies and funding at all levels. Increase the focus on young adults as a priority in Federal, State and Local budgets. Increase funding to scale effective and innovative education and workforce training programs and reimagine program design and delivery to be responsive to today's world of work. Investments are needed to scale proven models with evidence of success and innovative models that have the potential to significantly improve outcomes for youth and young adults at scale.