

We Need to Change the Conversation

YOUNG ADULT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REENGAGEMENT PROGRAMMING

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A Report Prepared with support from the
Community Center for Education Results
on behalf of the Road Map Project

SkillUp Washington, a workforce funder collaborative at the Seattle Foundation, is supporting local efforts which connect young adults to good jobs and career pathways in King County. SkillUp is the local lead for the Seattle Generation Work partnership. The Annie E. Casey Foundation launched Generation Work in 2016 to explore new ways of connecting young Americans with the knowledge and experience they need to succeed in the job market. The initiative includes partnerships in Cleveland, Hartford, Indianapolis, Philadelphia and Seattle. All are dedicated to weaving together best practices from the adult education and training field. The particular focus is on demand-driven workforce development strategies which integrate and are driven by positive youth development practices, such as mentoring and work-based learning, to better prepare young people ages 18-29 for work.

SkillUp regularly convenes Seattle Generation Work partners to share what they are learning and brainstorm ways to align, coordinate and leverage resources. In support of these efforts, SkillUp engaged Business Government Community Connections (BGCC) to interview young adults served by Seattle Generation Work partners. The interviews garner young adult feedback about their experiences prior, during and after receiving services into Generation Work learning community meetings and planning. Results are shared to ensure young adult voice informs the work of all partners.

SkillUp would like to thank the young adults who shared their experiences and offered their feedback. Your valuable input will help our partnerships and programs more effectively support the career and educational goals of young people living in the King County region.

For more information about Generation Work please visit www.aecf.org/resources/generation-work

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WE NEED TO CHANGE THE CONVERSATION

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INTRODUCTION

This report, funded by the Community Center for Education Results (CCER), presents the results of interviews conducted with 127 Opportunity Youth, 18-29 years of age by Business Government Community Connections (BGCC) for SkillUp Washington. These young adults were interviewed as part of the Annie E. Casey Foundation Generation Work partnership in Seattle, Washington. SkillUp Washington is the local lead for the Seattle Generation Work partnership. The Annie E. Casey Foundation launched Generation Work in 2016 to explore new ways of connecting young Americans with the knowledge and experience they need to succeed in the job market. The particular focus is on demand-driven

WE NEED TO CHANGE THE CONVERSATION. YOUNG ADULTS, INCLUDING THOSE FROM DIFFERENT GENDERS AND ETHNIC GROUPS ARE NOT THE PROBLEMS – WE ARE THE SOLUTIONS. EMPLOYERS NEED US, AND OUR COMMUNITIES AND FAMILIES DEPEND ON US TO BE SUCCESSFUL.

workforce development strategies which integrate and are driven by positive youth development practices, such as mentoring and work-based learning, to better prepare young people for work.

A driving force of the Generation Work initiative is that young adult voice and leadership should inform the career development and reengagement work and learning underway. CCER, a Seattle-based nonprofit and Generation Work partner,

invested in the synthesis of Generation Work interviews presented in this report. CCER and all Generation Work partners share the belief that that the region's economic growth depends on erasing education inequities, and on ensuring that strong systems, policies and practices are in place to help every child and young person in the region thrive in their education and life. All partners believe the best leaders in this work are young adults. The direct quotes and advice of young adults are woven throughout this report.

REPORT METHODS

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The research methods included the following:

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

- ◆ A total of 127 young adults, ages 18 to 29 were interviewed. The interview pool included ninety-seven (97) young adults engaged in local education and employment programs and thirty (30) young adults who were interviewed at different venues, including food banks, bus stops and homeless encampments.
- ◆ Most (92%) of the interviews were conducted in person, and eight percent were conducted by phone. Interviews averaged 55 minutes, ranging from 45 to 72 minutes.
- ◆ All young adults were given gift cards to honor their role as a consultant. In addition, all received a brief description of their role as a workforce development advisor to enter on their resume. All were invited to include their work, as a consultant for BGCC, as a job reference.
- ◆ The ninety-seven (97) young adults enrolled in education and employment programs responded to a set of interview questions using a customized Employment and Resource Assessment tool to garner information about the strategies which influenced young adults' confidence, career outlook, awareness and use of skills, and progress towards achieving their career goals. Young adults also shared information about the instructional and career navigation approaches which they found helpful, as well as areas where they needed more support or resources.¹ An example of the Employment and Resource Assessment for 60 young adults is presented in Appendix A.
- ◆ Sixty (60) of the 97 young adults also responded to post interviews using the same tool. Though not a program evaluation, this report focuses on the story driving young adults' self-assessments of progress in different areas. This is in order to understand from the perspective of young adults where they have received particularly useful or promising supports, or may need other types of assistance from college or

training programs. Pre interviews were conducted in the second or third week of the program and post interviews were conducted during the last two weeks. Changes in ratings (strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, neutral, slightly agree, strongly agree) on 10 different measures were documented, and coded. In addition, all young adults assessed their resource needs in four major areas: (childcare, labor market exclusion, human capital and essential resources). Young adult efforts to address their career pathway goals were discussed to identify.

- ◆ Young adults selected for interviews were chosen because they reflected the ethnicity, age and gender of the general population of young adults served by different Generation Work partners.

DATA ANALYSIS

The interview data was entered into a qualitative data base, coded and synthesized. Whenever young people identified areas where they were encountering challenges, they were invited to suggest solutions or recommendations for change. They shared information about their assets and effective practices that supported their career progression.

¹ Hong, P.Y.P. & Choi, S. (2013). *The employment hope scale: Measuring an empowerment pathway to employment success. International Journal of Psychology Research, 8(3).*



KEY FINDINGS

DESCRIPTION OF YOUNG ADULTS

Over half (55%) of the 127 young adults who were interviewed were male and 41% female. Nine (8%) were veterans. Most lived in low income communities in King County, and 65 (51%) were residents of South King County. Sixteen percent were either homeless or vulnerably housed and living in overcrowded homes, or, as one young adult put it, “were living with a frequently changing cast of household members.” Fifteen percent lived with their parents or other family members. Young adults ranged in age from 18-29. They represented many different ethnic groups. Twenty-nine spoke more than one language. The majority were single, with only nine (7%) reporting that they had children. Several commented that they were in no hurry to start a family. Eighteen (14%) reported that they

were in foster care during their high school years. One quarter dropped out of high school before graduating, often due to family crises, incarceration of a parent, homelessness or their own behavioral problems. Some reported that math and test anxiety were the main reasons they dropped out of school and GED programs. One-fifth had been involved in the criminal justice system.

Only 36 (29%) worked at some time in the three months prior to enrolling in a Generation Work partner program. The previous jobs most held were entry level and part-time jobs in retail and food service. Some worked as security officers, warehouse workers, Uber and pizza delivery drivers. One young person worked as a bouncer, and another served meals in a convalescent home. Several worked as laborers

and one worked as a certified nursing assistant. A few had earned AA or BA degrees often reporting that jobs in the fields they were pursuing went to people with more advanced degrees. The tables below provide more detail about why young people dropped out of high school. Some of the stories underscore critical transition points in K-12, court, foster, or GED programs when young adults did not receive the type of support they needed to reengage in school or work. The tables below provide more detail on who the young people are, and the main reason they disengaged from high school.

Gender	# (%)
Male	70 (55%)
Female	52 (41%)
Other	5 (4%)
Total	127 (100%)

Age	# (%)
18-20	37 (29%)
21-23	37 (29%)
24-26	36 (28%)
27-29	17 (14%)
Total	127 (100%)



YOUNG ADULT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REENGAGEMENT PROGRAMMING

City of Residence	# (%)
Auburn	8 (7%)
Bellevue	5 (3%)
Black Diamond	2 (2%)
Burien	3 (2%)
Des Moines	8 (7%)
Everett	4 (3%)
Federal Way	4 (3%)
Kent	9 (8%)
Marysville	2 (2%)
Puyallup	2 (2%)
Renton	12 (9%)
Seattle Rainier Valley/Beacon Hill	2 (2%)
Seattle Central Area	4 (3%)
Seattle Georgetown	5 (4%)
Seattle University District	3 (2%)
Seattle South Park	2 (2%)
Sea-Tac	10 (7%)
Skyway	5 (3%)
Shoreline	3 (3%)
Tukwila	7 (6%)
White Center	7 (6%)
Homeless living in car or outside	5 (3%)
Unstable residence/couch surfing/ alternating with homelessness	15 (11%)
Total	127 (100%)

Ethnicity (self-report)	# (%)
African American	9 (7%)
Asian (Chinese)	8 (6%)
Asian (Vietnamese)	6 (5%)
Bosnian	1 (.007 %)
Burundian	1 (.007%)
Cambodian	2 (2%)
Congolese/Chokwe people	1 (.007%)
Eritrean	3 (3%)
Fijian/White	1 (.007%)
Filipino	4(4%)
Haitian/African American	1 (.007%)
Hispanic	3 (3%)
Italian/White	1 (.007%)
Iraqi	1 (.007%)
Japanese	3 (3%)
Latina	2 (3%)
Mandarin	1 (.007%)
Marshallese/White	1 (.007%)
Mexican	2 (2%)
Mixed Race (Cuban, Mexican, White)	1 (.007 %)
Mixed Race (Black, White, Japanese)	1 (.007%)
Native American (Colville Tribe)	1 (.007%)
Native American (Tlingit Tribe)	1 (.007%)
Pacific Islander/Samoan	7 (6%)
Somali	3 (3%)
Tulu	1 (.007%)
White	59 (46%)
White /Japanese	1 (.007%)
White/Russian	1 (.007%)
Total	127 (100%)

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Languages Spoken	# (%)
English only	95 (81%)
Burundi, French, English	1 (.007%)
English, Arabic and Kurdish	1 (.007%)
English, Croatian	1 (.007%)
English/Eritrean	2 (1%)
English/Ethnic Chinese	2 (1%)
English, French and Swahili	1 (.007%)
English, Haitian	1 (.007%)
English, Japanese	3 (2%)
English, Mandarin, Chinese	1 (.007%)
English/Russian	1 (.007%)
English/Spanish	5 (4%)
English/Somali/Italian	1 (.007%)
English, Tagalog	1 (.007%)
English/Tigrinya, Arabic, Italian	1 (.007%)
English, Tulu	1 (.007%)
English/Vietnamese	6 (5%)

Foster Youth	# (%)
Ten (10) of the 18 young adults who were in foster care when they were in high school dropped out of the Department of Social & Health Services Independent Living Program as soon as they turned 18.	18 (14%)

Household Type	# (%)
Single	109 (86%)
Female Head of Household	5 (4%)
Single parent with a two-year-old girl;	
Single parent with a three-year-old girl;	
Single parent with seven-year-old and four-year-old boys;	
Single parent with a nine-year-old boy; and	
Single parent with a three-year-old girl and a 2-year-old boy.	
Male with children not living in residence	2 (1%)
Both fathers are maintaining contact with children, and are responsible for, but not currently paying child support.	
Couple with children	4 (3%)
One couple with three-year-old and five-year-old boys;	
One couple with two-month-old and two-year-old girls;	
One couple with a three-month-old boy; and	
One couple with a nine-year-old sibling they were temporarily responsible for caregiving.	
Couple without children	7 (7%)
Total	127 (100%)

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Highest Level of Education	# (%)	Comments
9th Grade	3 (2%)	One (1) dropped out because her mother went to jail and she did not want to live with her aunt and babysit her aunt's children, so she ran away. All three were suspended multiple times for getting into fights, before permanently dropping out of school.
10th Grade	7 (6%)	All seven (7) experienced frequent suspensions/expulsions; most occurred during times that their family was homeless, or when a parent/caregiver was incarcerated or absent.
11th Grade	12 (10%)	One dropped out because his father went to jail and he had to get a job to support his family. Eight (8) went to juvenile facilities (ranging in stays from 2 weeks to two months) and three (3) dropped out due to parental mental health crises.
12 (dropped out)	8 (7%)	All eight dropped out due to poor grades and, in particular, problems with math and testing. Most also had family issues that resulted in their caring for younger siblings, and four (4) became homeless during their senior year and left their family because they did not want to live in a shelter or in a car.
High School Degree	42 (33%)	None of the 42 students who earned a high school degree said they received career counseling or post-secondary planning services. Most described themselves as average or below average students. One said, "The only students who got counseling were the really good students or the really bad ones."
Earned GED	12 (10%)	Two (2) earned their GED the first time they enrolled in a GED class, and ten (10) earned their GED the third time they enrolled in a GED class; trouble with math and a need to get jobs were described as the main reasons for dropping out of previous GED courses.
Attended GED courses/did not earn GED, certificates or degree	12 (10%)	<p>Three (3) took two GED classes but dropped out before earning a GED due to problems on the math and science exams;</p> <p>Nine (9) took three GED classes but dropped out/mostly due to math and attendance problems. Also, six (6) reported that because the GED was not attached to job training or any kind of income subsidy they could not afford to stay engaged.</p>

“So many things happened to my family. Homelessness. My brother was shot. I did not have much going on academically so school was not my thing. But there was nothing to hang on to at school, or with my family. People didn’t notice I was absent in body and absent in soul. Not the school, not my family.”

Highest Level of Education	# (%)	Comments
Some college/did not earn certificates or degree	13 (11%)	Four (4) had taken Certified Nursing Assistant classes and found out they disliked that line of work; two (2) had pursued AA degrees in accounting or business and did not have the money to stay in school; and seven (7) had tested low on entrance tests and been assigned to remedial courses and felt discouraged that they were spending time and money before earning any college credits.
Some college/earned certificates	12 (10%)	Twelve earned certificates while they were working in entry level jobs. All were earning college credits and were hoping to earn specialized certificates or AA degrees.
Earned AA degree	4 (3%)	Two had earned AA degrees, one in business and one in marine biology. Both reported that they had trouble finding jobs in these fields, because the jobs went to students with more advanced degrees. Two others had earned criminal justice related AA degrees and said that they had not been able to get hired because, as one said, “Those jobs go to students who have Bachelor or Master’s degrees.”
Earned BA degree	2 (1%)	One had earned a BA in Biology and was accepted to medical school, but changed her mind and decided to pursue a career in construction instead because she was accumulating a huge amount of student debt, and was not sure that she wanted to become a doctor anymore. Another earned a Chemical Engineering degree, but during his internship and summer jobs found the work in that field to be boring and repetitive with limited upward mobility unless he had a Master’s Degree or PhD, which he did not think he could ever afford.

“My school performance was always kind of – you know like marginal but nothing compared to my life. As a matter of fact, I always felt that for me just taking a test was a success compared to what it took for me to get to school, because I was always taking care of some little kids, both my moms and my sisters and missing school every time one of them was sick.”

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Engagement in Criminal Justice System	# (%)
Assigned to Drug Court	3 (2%)
On Probation	5 (3%)
Attended Short-term detention 1-30 days	3 (2%)
Attended Short-term detention 31-60 days	4 (3%)
Lived in Group Home/Residential Crisis Center	2 (1%)
Attended court recommended military academy	2 (1%)
Department of Corrections	6 (1%)
Total	25 (20%)

Participation in labor force in 3 months prior to enrolling in Generation Work program	Opportunity Youth # (%)
In the labor force	36 (29%)
Not in the labor force	91 (71%)

YOUNG ADULT COMMENTS ABOUT PROGRAM IMPACTS

The data below on program impacts are presented to capture the impact of participation in the program on young adults, as reported on pre and post assessments. Their reflections and comments shed light on effective strategies, as well as areas where the assessments and discussions with young adults may signal the need for different types of interventions.

An analysis of the pre and post young adult self-assessments revealed that:

- ◆ Almost all young adults experienced gains in self-worth and in overcoming obstacles that might get in the way of their working. Gains were often attributed to class exercises that required them to demonstrate confidence, skills and team building. These classroom strategies were highly praised, and three young people said that classroom presentations they made with other students

“I don’t like being in front of the class. But once I did this a few times I think it helped build my confidence. I also don’t really like working in a team. But that is the way manufacturing is. I feel more confident now because of the things we had to do in the program.”

were particularly useful for building their confidence. Young adults who self-reported lower pre scores and more modest gains often described themselves as being introverted or “not that social.” They tended to have the least job experience prior to entering the programs. Several reported that they found it very difficult giving class presentations, and most said that they were uncomfortable when doing mock interviewing exercises. This group of young people would likely benefit from more intensive job search experience, and/or from being assigned to a career mentor.

- ◆ Most young adults reported increases in feeling positive about how they would do in future job situations. Positive changes were attributed to classroom exercises which portrayed workplace scenarios and prepared them for the types of situations they might encounter when they enter the workforce. They also liked worksite tours, and classroom presentations by employers. Young adults who self-reported lower pre scores and more modest gains were very likely to say that they had been laid off or fired from previous jobs, and often experienced difficulty getting along with supervisors and co-workers. A few mentioned that they had matured, and learned from the past; two noted, however, that they were concerned that old habits might interfere with their progress. Four young adults said they might be interested in getting some counseling but had never talked to anyone about this need before. All had signed up for health care insurance, but did not know whether counseling might be an eligible service they could access.
- ◆ All increased their awareness of the skills they need to develop in order to be employed in a good job and to pursue their career goals. Many also reported significant increases in being able to utilize their skills to move toward career goals. Students frequently attributed the skills they honed and certifications they received to increases in their self-promotion skills and marketability. One area, however, was identified as a roadblock to returning to work by seventeen young adults. Concerns over changes in young adult benefits and eligibility for childcare, financial subsidies, and/or subsidized housing were significant, as these resources were regarded as essential to returning to work, and/

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“I purposely took this training when my daughter was in full day Head Start. But she is aging out of that childcare and I am not whether she will be able to get into ECEAP (Early Childhood Education Assistance Program) near where I will be getting a job. So I am not sure I will have access to the resources to be able to be employed in a good job.”

or to their health. Only two young adults had discussed these issues with college staff, suggesting that focusing on how to prepare for benefit changes is a critical strategy to embed in college and career planning for young adults who rely on these resources to be able to continue their education or return to work. The status of all benefits needs to be assessed at orientation or early on in the training to develop a game plan for replacing vital resources.

- ◆ The majority of young adults reported significant increases in feeling that they were on the road toward achieving their career goals. Most felt that their current path would take them where they need to be in their career. Interestingly though, 15% said, they were going to take a break after the training before beginning their job search. These were all young adults under age 21, and most were living at home. They all had very limited work histories. All had graduated from high school.

YOUNG ADULT RESOURCE AND CAREER SUPPORT NEEDS

The data below presents young adult comments about the effectiveness of different strategies used in training programs.

- ◆ Most of the young adults had career plans in place, but at least one-third did not routinely review them with their career coach, suggesting that career plans need to be more strongly prioritized and monitored.

“I can’t decide whether it makes sense. Maybe I would do better going right to work because the labor market is strong and get experience now, and when there is a slowdown I could go back to school. Or maybe my employer will pay for school. I think I need to know more about which employers do that.”

- ◆ Fourteen young adults were on the fence about whether to go to work or continue their education. Eleven reported that because they were unsure of their tuition assistance they could not really make solid plans for the future. A few questioned whether spending more time in school was the right decision or not. Two of these young adults were veterans and were experiencing delays in getting Veteran’s Administration approval of their tuition benefits.
- ◆ Young adults who report on pre-assessments the following circumstances: a lack of safe housing or affordable housing and a lack of math skills and a lack of support system, were five times more likely to not complete the training and three times more likely to have poor attendance (as defined as missing 20% of the classes) than other students who are not reporting the same combination of challenges.
- ◆ Young adults who reported on pre assessments that they had problems in previous jobs getting to work on time were four times more likely to self-report being late to school and late on assignments on the post assessment, suggesting this is an area where early intervention to discuss how to counter these negative behaviors is warranted.
- ◆ Young adults who said that they lacked a support system were the most likely to identify multiple (5 or more) barriers on the Employment and Resource Assessment, suggesting that college navigators may want to work early on with these students to connect them to a strong network of providers who can offer support and act as a proxy support system.

“It is hard to focus when you don’t have enough food. That is why a lot of young adults like me get food service jobs. I get food assistance, but I share the food I get with others because I can’t afford rent until I get a job. It goes fast. All the people in the house where I live are barely making it. Sometimes there is nothing in the refrigerator for a day or two.”

- ◆ Referrals of students for basic needs (such as work clothing and bus tickets) were usually effective. Referrals to meet housing, legal, relicensing and credit repair were often needed, but seldom made, suggesting that more training of college navigators is needed in these areas. Many young adults reported that they need information about how to access healthcare and financial education resources.
- ◆ At least 35% of young people had not enrolled for health benefits – even though many reported a need for various types of health care, and most were likely to be eligible. Some said they forgot about the healthcare

“My family is letting me stay with them until I get done training but I can’t be taking food from there – there are too many little kids that need that. I try to go without whenever I can.”

timelines and did not know much about the rules. In addition, only 64% of the young adults had a bank account. At least 10% thought (inaccurately) that they would not be allowed to open a bank account because they had previously encountered credit or banking problems.

- ◆ Forty-five (35%) of the young adults reported that access to food was a challenge. When this barrier was identified young adults were asked the following questions: (1) In the last month which response best applies: In the last month I was worried that food would run out before I got money. Was that often true, sometimes true, never true or don’t know/refused to answer: 65% reported often true, and 35% reported sometimes true. (2) In the last month which statement best applies: The food I had just didn’t last and I didn’t have money to get more. Was that often true, sometimes true, never true or don’t know/refused to answer: 83% replied often true, and 15% reported sometimes true. Given that funding for food is generally not provided to students, and food pantries are not available at all colleges, there may be a need to identify other sources of food for students, as many are going hungry. In addition, although many (72%) of the students were receiving food stamps at least one-third of these students shared these resources with other household members. Fourteen young adults contributed their food stamps in lieu of money for rent to other household members, in order to ensure that they had a place to live.

- ◆ Self-efficacy (the belief that young adults have in their ability to succeed) and self-esteem (the feeling that young adults have about their ability to overcome challenges they face in going back to work) are both important to nurture. Strategies which build both are being implemented by many of the staff and instructors and external referral providers who young adults turn to for support. Young adult comments reveal that many would also benefit by examining how their thoughts, feelings and actions influence their achievement of goals outlined in their career plans. Some associate their current challenges to old behaviors that they would like to overturn. Many young adults reported that they had trouble sticking to goals or schedules – often noting that they were “out of practice.” One young adult said,

“Instructors talk about our skills, but in my case I know I am technically skilled, just not as responsible as I need to be.”

YOUNG ADULT OBSERVATIONS ABOUT INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMS

The data below presents young adult comments about the effectiveness of different strategies used in different training programs. Ninety-seven (97) young adults shared their impressions of the training they received. Their comments revealed that:

- ◆ Students liked being able to learn math while taking other classes, rather than taking it as a prerequisite to the training.

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“I am glad that I could take math while I was taking other classes. It made me feel like I was making progress, and also made me see how learning math was relevant to my job.”

- ◆ Students also appreciated being involved in training or coursework that was well-organized and mirrored in some respects the work environment. Many welcomed the opportunity (even though it was difficult) to establish a schedule and participate in an environment where they were expected to be professional and high-performing.
- ◆ The certificates they received were particularly helpful, and increased their confidence, skills and marketability to employers.

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“You feel that you are in a work environment, and are expected to be professional. That is the way programs like this need to be, because for many students it has been a long time since they were employed, or had to be somewhere on time.”

- ◆ The ten students who were working and earning college credits and certificates at a program located near their worksite were particularly positive about their career outlook, confidence and motivation.

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One said, “I am lucky. I can work and go to school right near my workplace. This is what all people who have the motivation to advance should be able to do.” Two of these eight students had also received scholarships. A total of 35 young adults recommended that post-employment training and scholarships were very important to them, though only a handful were aware of which companies supported or offered such opportunities. One suggested, “We need a company list that says who offers training after you get hired, and what the career path would likely be for people who got different types of training.” Another said, “I want to know how you get special company-based training after you are hired. Do you ask for the opportunity or do they recommend you?”

◆ The combination of hands-on instruction on equipment used in different industries, supplemented by classroom instruction and handouts or web based resources were particularly appreciated, and appealed to the different learning styles of students. Students of all ages made this comment.

DISCRIMINATION, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Many young adults were very concerned about what one called, “The current environment of hate, fear and racism in the United States.” Some of their other concerns are presented below.

◆ Forty-one young adults highlighted the importance of diversity and inclusion in the workplace, as well as the significant distinctions between the two. One young adult who was pursuing a trades-related job said: “Employers who say they want to diversify their workforce may hire us, but whether we stay or not will depend on whether we feel included.” Many of the young adults, who identified discrimination in the workplace as a high barrier that led to labor market exclusion wanted more information about the quality of companies where they might be working, especially in regards to their diversity-related hiring history.

“I think that students should have access to quality ratings or consumer reports or something on the companies that are the main employers in this field. And the ratings should show whether they promote people from different races or women.”

◆ Thirty-eight (29%) said that they wanted to see more instructors, and company leaders who were people of color, and women. One young adult said, “When you don’t see yourself in leadership roles, you are less likely to become a leader.”

◆ Twenty-seven (21%) of the young adults were frustrated that the college and/or workforce systems seemed to offer young adults very few choices for training. One young person said, “They need to be more creative, and think of current careers that are focused on gaming, the environment, or coding or fashion.” Another said, “I think that these programs should have training in things like message therapy.” Yet another said, “In the past I got a CNA degree but that was not for me. If I could have stayed in school long enough to become a radiation therapist, which was my original goal I would have.” There was a general sense among the twenty-seven respondents that by limiting training courses the college and workforce systems were discriminating against low income persons. One young adult who spoke three languages said, “Nobody has ever suggested I be an interpreter.”

◆ A review of the top career interests of thirty young adults who were interviewed underscored a significant chasm between the careers they were interested in pursuing and what they were offered to pursue. Examples of career areas they identified included: graphic arts, webpage design, marketing, fashion design, beauty industry, tattoo/piercing artist, probation officer, concierge, dispatcher, emergency disaster preparedness and para educator.

“Low income young people are no different than other young people who have money in that we want to do something interesting and fun and want to have a chance to explore opportunities. The difference is we don’t get offered very many.”

◆ An interesting theme that emerged from the interviews was that the workforce and college systems are “geared towards an old fashioned view of who young people are”. One young adult said, “It is important that people who are designing programs for us know we are different than our parents were, and that the world has changed. And that even though we may be low income we want the same things as other wealthier young people want even though our path might be slowed down by poverty, or other problems we grew up with like bad schools, or in my case a parent who went to jail. Just like them we want to try out different careers and don’t want to be stuck in a job that we hate.”

YOUNG ADULT RECOMMENDATIONS

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Young adults shared their ideas for improving the education and workforce development systems in a variety of different areas. The most frequently mentioned suggestions they provided are presented below by topic.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO REDUCE THE NUMBER OF YOUTH WHO DROP OUT OF THE K-12 SYSTEM

- ◆ Implement stronger school-based early alert systems that identify students in crisis and provide related guidance and tutoring support and opportunities to retake tests and redo assignments are needed.
- ◆ Provide sensitivity training for all school staff, including office staff to support young adults and their families, as many are confronting difficult circumstances, and may not have the time, language capacity or knowledge to negotiate the school bureaucracy.
- ◆ Offer hands on/applied educational opportunities and career mentoring opportunities.
- ◆ Offer exit and transition planning for young adults exiting detention and treatment programs, ideally linking these efforts to mentoring support and more intensive school re-engagement strategies.
- ◆ Ensure that homeless youth and their families get help accessing transcripts, records and other supports. One young adult said that he did not get the special accommodations he needed for six months when he went to a new school because he owed library and cafeteria fines at his old school, and because of this his previous school would not send his transcripts.

“The best companies are the ones that colleges should partner with. We need something like Consumer Reports to know which companies are good to work for based on their hiring and advancement practices for both women and minorities.”

“When I returned to school from detention it was always hard. I felt a little more disconnected every time (and there were a lot). I also felt that teachers were just expecting me to be gone soon again.”

“My mother works. Does not have time to attend school meetings – she is often on call, working home care jobs, and does not really speak good English. She is not comfortable in schools and does not feel that they like her because she does not volunteer or show up.”

“I think all new kids to schools, whether they are homeless or not need some kind of kid assigned to them who is an ambassador. Maybe this could be a community service requirement.”

“I think if in the carpentry class I took if I had actually had a job or something I might have done better in school, and not quit.”

RECOMMENDATIONS TO INCREASE COLLEGE AND WORKFORCE DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

- ◆ Emphasize during classroom presentations which companies have the best record of hiring and promoting diverse populations.
- ◆ Hire diverse instructors who have worked successfully in industry and can serve as role models for young adults.
- ◆ Collect data to compare the progress of students from different ethnic groups to make changes in staffing, program design, partnerships and policies.

“It helps when you see people from different ethnic groups succeed in the occupation you are pursuing whether they are an instructor or an employer.”

- ◆ Promote advertising campaigns which show ethnically and culturally diverse people working in leadership positions in different jobs.
- ◆ Ensure that young adults from diverse groups fully understand the politics of getting ahead in college and the workforce.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COLLEGE AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEMS TO SUPPORT THE CAREER PATHWAY SUCCESS OF YOUNG ADULTS

- ◆ Work with young adults at the beginning of training programs to make sure that they have a solid career plan in place, and process for managing and monitoring progress.
- ◆ Make sure at college or training orientations that students review the syllabus so they can better decide if this course or set of courses is the best match for them. Information in most brochures is usually limited.
- ◆ Accelerate the education of young adults whenever possible. Many young adults don't have a lot of time where they can afford to go to school. Whenever possible help them get credit for prior learning.
- ◆ Make it easier for students to continue their education or transfer to other colleges for next step courses. Identify students at the beginning of a semester who likely will want to continue their education so they can start planning right away for tuition assistance.

“Maybe colleges could check to see if students from different ethnic groups are getting the same kinds of grades as white students, or are graduating the same as them, or getting internships or jobs at the same rate as other students.”

“And maybe companies could look to see if people from different ethnic groups or genders or sexual orientations get to participate in special training, or get the same kinds of raises or promotions.”

- ◆ Make sure that instructors of trades-related classes have employment-related skills and teaching skills as well as close ties to employers.
- ◆ Ensure that teachers have an aide who can tutor students who may need additional assistance with math or English.
- ◆ Connect young adults to employers for career mentoring and/or employment opportunities which include internships, on-job-training and apprenticeships.
- ◆ Make it a priority to provide young adults with opportunities to earn and learn in tandem. Many young people like combining training with work. Also, this provides young adults with job experience and income.
- ◆ Feature job postings, pictures and stories about alumni who work in high-quality companies that hire graduates in classrooms and other areas where students hang out.
- ◆ Depict in classroom conversations how occupations such as retail can take many different paths. For example, they may want to work in e-commerce, web and application development, supply/chain logistics, finance accounting or product development. Similarly, in the area of mechatronics this could include showing how these skills are used in mechanical, electrical, robotics, aerospace, farming, food processing and other industries.
- ◆ Connect young adults to career coaching and other resources such as housing, banking, healthcare and food that they need to be healthier and economically secure and stay focused on their education, training, job search and employment.

YOUNG ADULT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REENGAGEMENT PROGRAMMING

- ◆ Open a career coaching center that is open to young people after they complete training and have formally exited from college or programs. This place-based resource could be open at different times, evenings and weekends. Services would include application assistance and advice about workplace situations that may be occurring in their job. One young adult said, “This center could also include specialized training that companies report will improve the skills of their workforce.” Another young adult recommended opening a sports-health-fitness focused facility that also had a computer-career resource room for young people who are between jobs, or working and looking for next step employment.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE CHANGES WHICH SUPPORT THE CAREER PROGRESSION OF YOUNG ADULTS

Young adults reported that many different policies stood in the way of their success. Examples of the ones they identified follow:

- ◆ **The 10 hour a day maximum TANF child care rule needs to be changed.** This was particularly hard for one young adult, a single parent who managed to get her GED and a job working in telemarketing. The company employed workers four days a week for 10 hours a day, making it possible for this young woman to drive to the childcare center (which was at least 40 minutes from her site of employment). The childcare center said they would be required to report her to TANF for being late picking up her child (even though the center was still open when she arrived to pick up her daughter) making her ineligible for ongoing subsidy support. As she put it, “I did everything right. Got a good child care center. Got my GED and got a job I want. And now this. Lots of jobs require 10 hour shifts. And it takes time to travel anywhere around here. What can I do? I can’t afford to pay childcare without subsidy support.”
- ◆ **Landlords in all cities across King County (not just Seattle) should not be able to ask people about criminal justice records.** One young adult said, “When I heard that Seattle landlords were not able to exclude people with criminal records and are banned from asking about their records I was really relieved. But only for a while. Since I can’t afford housing in Seattle, I realized I needed to move south, but the city I want to live in does not have that law. I have paid my dues. I should not have to keep repaying them.”
- ◆ **Time-limited housing subsidies need to be extended for young adults who are enrolled in training programs.** Three young adults were enrolled in different time-limited subsidized housing programs. All wished that these programs allowed young adults to stay in subsidized housing programs until they finished training, got jobs and began to earn money. All three would soon

“It would be inspiring to see different images – on websites, and in curricula featuring diverse people in different roles, as supervisors, mentors, company presidents, and other leadership positions.”

be approaching the end of their eligibility to stay in the subsidized housing. Greater coordination among housing programs and workforce providers is needed. One young adult said, “Now I know I should have started job training earlier, but I was recovering from being homeless- rather than focusing on my future when I moved into housing.” Another young adult who had just turned eighteen was living with his mother and staying in an apartment funded through the rapid rehousing program. While he was not the direct recipient of this housing subsidy he said the income he expected to soon be earning as a result of the training he was taking was going to make it possible for his mother to afford non-subsidized housing someday. “I wish we could keep the housing long enough for me to get trained and a job but the rules don’t support that. Instead we could both end up homeless and staying in different places.”

- ◆ **Require that probation officers visit students at college campuses for required check in visits, if they are enrolled in school, and are homeless.** One young adult said that because he was homeless, he was not able to meet at a home-based location with his probation officer who was located in a different county. Because this young person had no other form of transportation he took a bus. He said, “It would be great if the college had a formal agreement with the Department of Corrections that would allow the college site to be regarded as my home, so my probation officer could have check-in visits there. I miss so much school to do these visits. I am missing one day a week which is kind of ironic since my probation officer wants to know that I am regularly attending school.” He also said he wasn’t sure if this was a policy or just that he had a difficult probation officer. He thought maybe the college career navigator could research this issue, as he did not want to “aggravate” the probation officer.
- ◆ **Support policies that result in young adults having access to food.** Many young adults found it difficult to afford or access food. There was a general sense that food was not a resource that their training program was allowed to provide. One young adult said, “I don’t know whether it is considered something that can’t be provided to students but it is hard to study, and go up and down ladders, and be energetic when you are hungry.”

SUMMARY

5

Young adult feedback underscores the importance of education and workforce development services which include a closely knit web of career navigation, referrals, and industry-driven instruction and employer engagement opportunities. All activities need to integrate diversity and inclusion messaging, materials, beliefs, and partners.

We can learn a lot from the previous experiences of young adults and use their feedback to design strategies which end their disconnection from school and fail to kick start their connections to employment, beginning in the K-12 system. Interestingly most did not mention academic problems as the main reason they disengaged from school. Instead, their comments revealed that they felt that their real problems, such as homelessness and family crises were invisible, and as such, were “bypassed” as one young person put it.

Young adult observations about the current approaches used by college and workforce partners are valuable. Their concerns about limiting career pathway choices are particularly noteworthy. Are we overlooking career pathway areas that could also be high demand because we lack imagination or fail to invest in strategies that last long enough to make a difference? Are we discriminating against low-income and ethnically diverse students by limiting their career pathway choices? Are we heeding the advice of one young adult to not ask them what they want to be, and instead ask them what they want to do?

Their concerns about the time it takes for training are also important to consider. Are we doing all we can to accelerate their training, save them money and support their health and economic security? Are we reducing duplicate coursework? Promoting credit for prior learning? Offering GED, math or developmental instruction and work opportunities in tandem?

Do the workforce development and college systems, as one young adult suggested, “need a reboot?” How can different systems work better together to jointly support young adult career progression? We know that in the economy right now there is not a lack of work, per se; rather, as many point out, there is a mismatch of young adult skills and the hiring needs of employers. The comments and situations of young adults suggest, however, that more than a skill mismatch is at play. The career progression efforts of some young adults are influenced by a lack of resources, confidence, self-efficacy and their own challenges introducing structure into their lives. That is not surprising as many grew up in chaotic environments, and learned how to be resilient, because they didn’t have the luxury to be strategic. Against this backdrop do we need to be more deliberate about developing career progression models that intentionally build

the self-efficacy, self-esteem and self-regulation skills of young adults into the design of high demand career pathways? Could this become a more nuanced and more deeply supported career navigation approach that is part of a young adult career development system?

The high cost of disruptions in the education and employment paths of young adults are well known. What is the catalyst required for different institutions to work better together to jointly support young adult career progression? The situations

of young adults profiled in this report underscore that there is a lack of resources and coordination among institutions at many critical thresholds, including the K-12, court, treatment, foster care and military systems, to support the continued engagement and career development of young people.

What will it take for housing, public assistance and workforce systems to coordinate their efforts more strategically? Why is something as basic a need as food discouraged under federal

workforce legislation and not funded in training programs? Concentrating on particular opportunity (now pain points) is warranted, as is a sharpened focus on supporting young adults who need more highly supported and tailored solutions to pursue training.

Using young adult feedback to design reengagement and career coaching strategies which end their disconnection from school and work is critical as their success correlates with the well-being of the whole community. Listening to what young adults say and need makes sense.

Name:

EMPLOYMENT AND RESOURCE ASSESSMENT: HOPE SCALE

	Strongly disagree		Somewhat disagree			Neutral	Slightly Agree			Strongly Agree		Pre Date	Post Date
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
Self-worth	1. Thinking about working, I feel confident about myself.												
	2. I have the strength to overcome any obstacles when it comes to working.												
Futuristic self- motivation	3. I feel positive about how I will do in my future job situation.												
	4. I will be in a better position in my future job than where I am now.												
Utilization of skills and resources	5. I am aware of what my skills are to be employed in a good job.												
	6. I am aware of what my resources are to be employed in a good job.												
	7. I am able to utilize my skills to move toward career goals.												
Goal orientation	8. I am on the road toward my career goals.												
	9. I am in the process of moving forward toward reaching my goals.												
	10. My current path will take me to where I need to be in my career.												

PERCEIVED EMPLOYMENT RESOURCE SCALE

	Not a barrier		Neutral		Barrier		Pre Date	Post Date
	1	2	3	4	5			
Child Care	1. Access to affordable child care							
Labor Market Exclusion	2. Having less than high school education.							
	3. Lack of adequate job skills.							
	4. Lack of computer/technology skills.							
	5. Lack of math skills.							
	6. Discrimination in the workplace.							
	7. Other:							
	Human Capital	8. Lack of job experience.						
9. Lack of information about jobs.								
10. Problems with getting to job on time.								
11. Lack of support system.								
12. Other:								
Essential Resources	13. Access to transportation.							
	14. Access to safe housing.							
	15. Access to affordable housing							
	16. Access to work clothing.							
	17. Other:							

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