

The Bronx Opportunity Network



•E•G•S Student in Summer Program

The Bronx Opportunity Network (BON) is a collaborative effort among a group of eight CBOs serving young adults in the South Bronx, which, in partnership with Bronx and Hostos Community Colleges, has developed a borough-based initiative to increase college access—and to support post-secondary retention—among disconnected young adults. The Network's mission is to enable under-prepared Bronx students to improve their academic skills, overcome personal barriers, and enroll in and complete college. While the BON is composed

of agencies throughout the Bronx, there is a concentration of agencies located in Community Boards 1 & 2 and it is anticipated that the highest levels of disconnected youth will come from those areas.

In its first Summer Bridge Program, The BON recruited 105 young people from among its networks to participate in a summer preparatory program specifically geared towards improving results on the CUNY COMPASS placement exams. The goal is to work with a total of 120 young people in the first year. The purpose of BON is to collectively mobilize participating community-based agencies to be able to take a more active and effective role in insuring both higher remedial placement passing rates for high-need students entering community college, and improved credit achievement and retention rates for these same students in their first semesters in college.

History

The BON was established in the summer of 2008, after discussions between JobsFirstNYC and representatives of leading youth-serving organizations in the Bronx on the possibility of initiating a Bronx-based initiative focused on young adults. JobsFirstNYC agreed to support the CBOs in starting the planning process. During the initial planning, leaders of both JobsFirstNYC and the CBOs outlined a set of common needs, defined a collaborative agenda, and considered the feasibility of cross-borough implementation of their program model. CBO leaders determined that there were long-term programmatic and organizational benefits to collaborating and that a cross-borough model was possible. Early in 2009, discussions turned towards creating a program framework, an operating structure, and the borough's capacity to collaborate with City University of New York's (CUNY) two community colleges to help out-of-school and out-of-work young adults achieve their higher education and post-college career goals. In 2011, JobsFirstNYC worked with BON leadership to attract support for the first year of the project, which began formally in the spring of 2011.

Current Program

The BON model is based on the hypothesis that if organizations collaborate to support and motivate students with financial incentives, and participating colleges allow second chances to take the CUNY COMPASS admission tests, that all parties involved would—together—improve the academic standing of students registering for fall classes. Participating students are graduates of GED programs, Multiple Pathways programs and alternative schools. They receive intensive academic support in the forms of coaching, instruction, mentoring and individualized online math programming during an approximate 50-hour, 6-week program in the summer before their first college semester. Students all received cash stipends to participate in the program; resources will be used to offset school-related expenses. The BON staff continue to work with the students as they enter college to address issues as they arise. A critical policy element in the model was the concession on the part of both of the CUNY campuses to re-administer the CUNY COMPASS exams to students who had already taken it. This is the first time this has been done, and is a landmark event in this kind of work.

About JobsFirstNYC



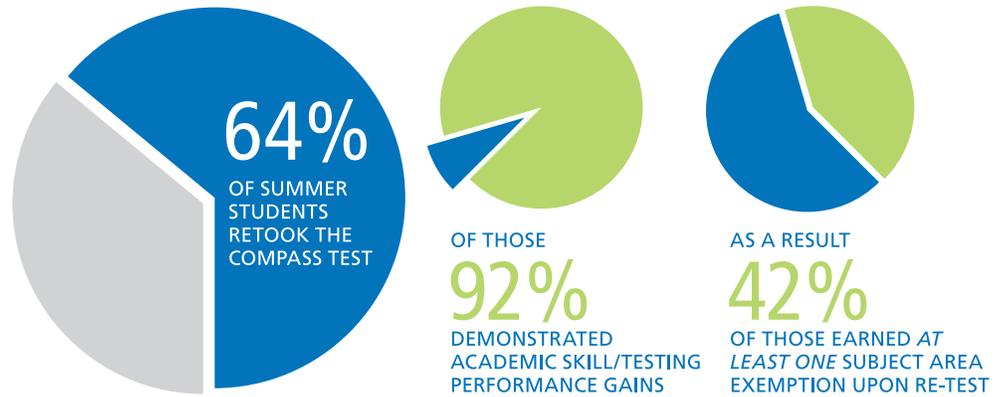
Grace Outreach BON students at BCC, Summer 2011

JobsFirstNYC, an intermediary focused on workforce needs of out-of-work and out-of-school young adults, was established in 2006 by private

funders. One of the key strategies of JobsFirstNYC is to support the design and implementation of workforce partnerships—like the BON—that will better align the needs of young people with those of employers in growth areas of the economy. JobsFirstNYC provides additional services (e.g., opportunity, expertise, advice, neutral facilitators, additional funding) for groups to rationalize their service strategies (e.g., the termination of ineffective services and the expansion of effective ones) to increase the likelihood of significantly better outcomes. Multi-agency collaborations are often difficult to put together and are typically effective only with outside, high-quality facilitation. However, in a labor market with limited job growth, this collaborative approach is the most promising strategy for improved outcomes for disconnected young adults.

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Initial results from the summer bridge program were very promising:



Based on these results and the model's initial success, colleges will likely make similar retest accommodations in the future.

The first semester results for this program were also very promising:

105  **TOTAL STUDENTS PARTICIPATED**

309  **TOTAL CREDITS WERE ACHIEVED**

AN AVERAGE OF **8.4**  **CREDITS WERE EARNED PER STUDENT WHO WERE IN CREDIT-BEARING CLASSES**

83  **STUDENTS ARE REGISTERED TO TAKE CLASSES IN THE SPRING 2012 ACADEMIC SEMESTER**

OVERALL **AVERAGE GPA** FOR ALL STUDENTS **2.86** 

AT THE PRESENT TIME **79%** 

OF THOSE THAT ENROLLED IN THE JUNE 2011 BRIDGE PROGRAM **ARE STILL ATTENDING CLASSES**



A great example of the impact that the **Bronx Opportunity Network** is having on young people is Shenett, a 19 year-old young woman who is a participant at Grace Outreach. Shenett originally took the CUNY COMPASS Test and did not pass any of the four subtest exams when she first took them in the early part of the summer of 2011. However, in the re-test she took in August, she passed three of the four, so that she was required to take only one remedial class in her first college semester in the fall of 2011. Shenett did well in her first semester, taking 4 classes, earning 9 credits, and maintaining a 3.0 GPA. Shenett is registered to continue classes this spring, and is on track to earn her associate's degree in May of 2013.

"I definitely plan on transferring to a 4 year college after finishing at Hostos, probably staying at CUNY. Lehman is my top choice, and I am thinking about business management, which is my current major at Hostos. I would eventually like to start my own business, maybe having to do with a day care or something with children, but after college I would likely go work for a larger business or corporation to learn about how things operate on that level before starting my own. I really do love kids so, I could combine this love with skills and ideas from the business world." –Shenett, Grace Outreach Participant

BON students are currently receiving ongoing social and educational supports where appropriate from the organizations that referred them to classes both through cohort and individual engagement.

The community organizations currently participating in the BON include:



On an operational level, the network operates as a best-practice work group with each agency, staffed by the Youth Development Institute, implementing common strategies, sharing both outcomes and resources, and working together to address problems. On a policy level, the executive leadership of the BON identifies both barriers and opportunities in the achievement of improved college results for these high-need students then collectively implements strategies to improve results.

Current BON Funders include:

The Clark Foundation

Ira W. DeCamp Foundation

The Stella and Charles Guttman Foundation

Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust

JP Morgan Chase Foundation

Seth Sprague Educational and Charitable Foundation

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