



Innovations in the Field



About *Innovations in the Field*

Innovations in the Field is a series examining programs supported by JobsFirstNYC that serve both employers seeking job-ready workers and young adults in New York City looking to access employment and training opportunities. These programs are innovative in two respects: how workforce providers engage as partners with employers, and how they collaborate rather than compete with one another. They illustrate best practices in young adult workforce development and address service gaps, on both the demand side and the supply side, that otherwise might deter many young adults from entering career-track work.

About JobsFirstNYC

JobsFirstNYC is a neutral intermediary and a champion for the workforce needs of out-of-school, out-of-work young adults in New York City. Our mission is to improve the system for young adults by bringing together—effectively and efficiently—all available community, corporate, private and public resources to accelerate the connection of out-of-school, out-of-work young adults with the economic life of New York City.

Introduction

Young adults in New York City are contending with unprecedented difficulties in the local labor market. Since 2000, through periods of both overall economic growth and contraction, the share of 16- to 24-year-olds who are working has steadily fallen. A recent report from the Brookings Institution found that just 54.5 percent of 20- to 24-year-olds in the New York City region were employed in 2010–11, the fourth lowest rate among the 100 largest metropolitan areas in the U.S. For 16- to 19-year-olds, the rate was 19.3 percent, fifth lowest among the 100 largest metro areas. Both figures are believed to be the lowest on record.

The long-term trend of public sector disinvestment in training and employment services, combined with employers increasingly basing their hiring decisions on demonstrable skills and previous work experience, has created an almost impossible situation for young adults without a college education who seek stable, career-track employment at a family-supporting wage. This is particularly the case in New York City, where job growth has concentrated at the extremes of the labor market: high-paying jobs, which require education and skills that young adults typically lack; and low-wage, low-skill jobs, for which young adults must compete against older jobseekers who often have the advantages of relevant work experience and strong references.

In the face of this inhospitable hiring climate for young people, workforce provider organizations that focus on serving young adults are hampered by their limited capacity to respond to employer needs. As employer demand continually evolves in response to industry conditions, providers are challenged to adjust their program models to prepare participants for real-time opportunities. Worse, within a fractured field where providers often compete for finite contacts, contracts, and resources, organizations that prove able to develop relationships and expertise are often reluctant to share them. Providers focused on young adults are increasingly seeking assistance in building their capacity to work with employers more effectively.

Since its creation in 2006 as an intermediary organization that supports the young adult workforce field in New York City, JobsFirstNYC has worked to address these structural issues while developing effective models that advance best practices. Building on its experiences supporting multi-organization partnerships through the Lower East Side Employment Network and Bronx Opportunity Network, JobsFirstNYC is now working to support advances in demand-focused workforce services for young adults through the Young Adult Sectoral Employment Project (YASEP). Featuring seven partnerships, YASEP is a new initiative that aims to serve work-ready young adults with limited educational attainment through a sector-based approach to training and placement.

JobsFirstNYC conceptualized YASEP in response to research conducted by Public/Private Ventures (PPV). In 2010, PPV published a study on the impact of sector-focused strategies, titled *Tuning In to Local Labor Markets: Findings from the Sectoral Employment Impact Study*. This study evaluated three nonprofit organizations offering sector-specific training. Though none of the organizations targeted young adults specifically, 18- to 24-year-olds made up a large share of participants in each program. The study found that young adults who had received sector-focused training earned an average of about \$5,300 more than young adults in a control group.

Intrigued by this finding, PPV researchers followed up the study by interviewing dozens of practitioners from sector-focused training programs and provider organizations serving young adults. JobsFirstNYC then built on this through the first half of 2013 by convening more than 50 practitioners, policymakers, researchers, and advocates to merge the study's findings with takeaways from the interviews, to determine how best to adapt sector-based approaches to serve young adults. The conclusion was that a new initiative specifically focused on developing sectoral strategies for young adults was urgently needed.

As the first step in this new initiative, JobsFirstNYC published a call for applications asking organizations in the field to propose workforce partnerships that use a sectoral approach to improve employment outcomes for young adults. Fifteen applications were received, and, in September 2013, with input from interested funders, JobsFirstNYC awarded planning grants of \$50,000 each to five of the proposed partnerships. As part of their YASEP membership, these partnerships were invited to participate in a “Learning Community” to further develop their project plans. Another two partnerships joined the learning community in the spring of 2014, resulting in seven partnerships now engaged in YASEP.

YASEP will serve young adults across four boroughs, with many of them coming from some of the city’s 18 neighborhoods with the highest concentrations of out-of-school, out-of-work young adults (see map on p. 4).

YASEP’s approach utilizes “longer runways and stronger pipelines”: enough time for young adults to master the skills necessary for workplace success, and employer input to ensure that program completers will contribute starting from their first day on the job.

YASEP represents a decisive break with established young adult workforce practice in three primary respects. First, the model embraces an explicit demand focus driven by labor market data and employers’ articulation of their own needs. Second, YASEP utilizes a comprehensive and collaborative approach that enables “longer runways and stronger pipelines”—in other words, enough time and preparation for young adults to master the skills and attributes necessary for success in the workplace, and sufficient employer input to ensure that participants who complete their programs are ready to contribute from their first day on the job. Third is the role of JobsFirstNYC itself: as an intermediary, it helps structure the model, facilitates collaboration across projects, and provides technical assistance and programmatic support.

Each YASEP project is set to run for two years. Stronger outcomes are expected in the second year, once initial issues have been addressed and operations have reached scale. This brief provides an overview of YASEP’s development thus far, including themes and findings that emerged during the Learning Community phase.

Learning Community Overview

The Learning Community sessions provided partnerships with the opportunity to think through their desired outcomes—for workers, employers, the participating organizations themselves, and the workforce system as a whole. While the goal of these sessions was to help the five originally selected partnerships refine their project plans, JobsFirstNYC also envisioned the sessions as helping yield larger lessons for provider organizations that serve young adults through job training and employment programs.

“My commitment is to the field broadly,” explains Sheila Maguire, principal investigator for the PPV study and primary facilitator for the YASEP Learning Community. “Field-wide investments are what count. One-by-one capacity building is important, but we need efforts that build relationships between people and institutions that will outlive specific projects.”

For their part, the participating organizations had to commit to five full-day sessions over several months between October 2013 and January 2014. Each day featured presentations by guest speakers from national providers, as well as intensive planning and discussion sessions designed for self-assessment and the clarification of roles

and expectations within the partnerships. JobsFirstNYC also provided customized technical assistance to each partnership, including detailed labor market information.

A key to the success of the Learning Community was the strong dynamic of collaboration and mutual respect among the organizations represented, enabled by JobsFirstNYC’s commitment to helping each partnership develop programs tailored to its sector. “That [pledge of support] was a significant invitation to put aside the competitive aspect,” says John Mancuso, executive director of Comprehensive Development, Inc. (CDI), a YASEP lead partner.

The Learning Community experience also helped participating organizations work through a challenge facing all of the projects: how to reconcile the demand-focused sector approach with the traditional “supply-side,” jobseeker-focused orientation of youth development and workforce programs in general. In a written reflection shared with JobsFirstNYC, staff from the Queens Community House, a YASEP lead partner, described this process as “an important mind shift . . . as we are often guided by our rich experience supporting and advocating from the ‘youth employment’ rather than the ‘labor pool’ perspective.”

Finally, the sessions allowed organizations to expand and evolve in their perspectives. CDI, for example, has a deep commitment to best practices in youth

Comprehensive Development Inc. and New York Alliance for Careers in Healthcare Partnership (Manhattan)

PARTNERS: Community Health Care Association of New York State, Primary Care Development Corporation

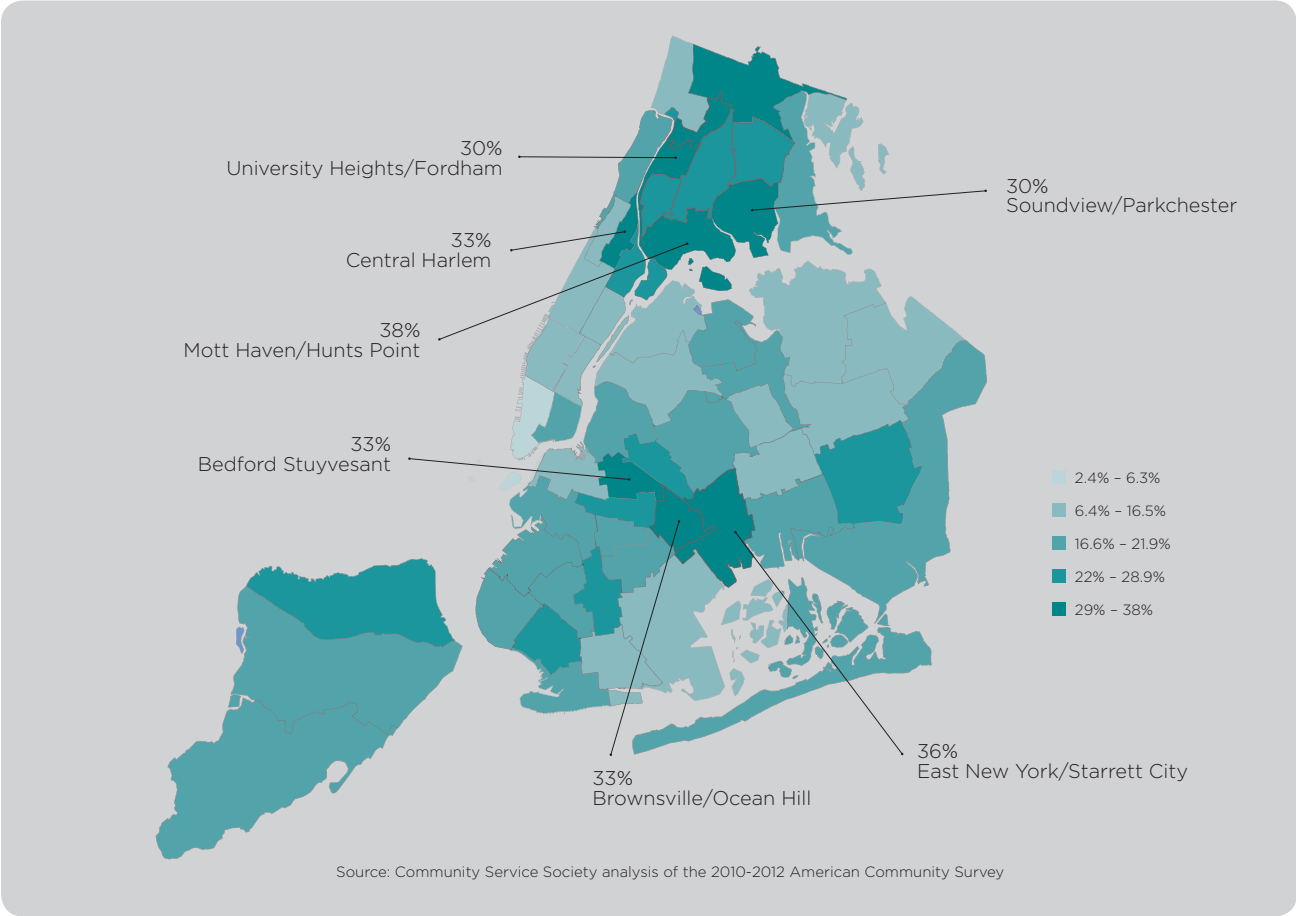
TARGETED SECTOR: Healthcare (medical assistants, patient service representatives)

KEY CHALLENGES: Creating entry paths for young adults competing against displaced healthcare workers who have been retrained

INNOVATIVE PRACTICE: To alleviate employer concerns about hiring younger workers, CDI plans to offer an Employee Assistance Program to employers that hire program participants.

development, arising from the organization’s widely lauded creation and support of two transfer high schools and a comprehensive high school in Manhattan. Even so, the Learning Community experience convinced Mancuso and his colleagues that focusing on employer needs and priorities was a must if the project was to succeed. “As we worked it through, it became clear there is no choice here. If we’re going to prepare young adults and we don’t want to set them up for another failure, we have to do it from the demand side.”

Map of NYC Community Districts by OSOW Rate



Lessons of the Learning Community

One key premise of YASEP is the notion that, given the right structures and supports, provider organizations will cooperate and collaborate rather than compete. “The way workforce has been done in the past, you hoard your employers and try to meet the needs yourself,” says Lowell Herschberger, director of career and educational programs at Cypress Hills LDC, another YASEP lead partner. Through the Learning Community, the partnerships had opportunities to jointly engage with the deeper issues of their work, identifying potential challenges and working collaboratively to develop solutions.

For facilitator Sheila Maguire, this was the key to the Learning Community. “Practitioners have few resources to innovate and few opportunities to reflect. At the grand level, there’s no investment in thinking and development and partnerships. [The Learning Community] provided them time and resources and opportunities to do that.”

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Over the course of the Learning Community sessions, two broad themes emerged. First, each partnership developed a deeper understanding of the industries it was targeting and the employers it intended to work with. Second, the partnerships—along with the various organizational roles within them—evolved in ways that sometimes surprised participants. These two phenomena ultimately led to more strongly articulated proposals by the conclusion of the planning phase.

Deeper Understanding of Industries and Employers

A near-universal finding among lead partners was that employer expectations are much higher today than they were a few years ago. “Employers are expecting people to have two years of experience for an entry-level job,” says Linda Quinones-Lopez, vice president of education and training at Per Scholas, a Bronx-based information technology training organization and lead partner for one of the YASEP projects. “Ten years ago, those jobs were filled by people coming out of training with no credentials.” CDI’s John Mancuso notes a similar dynamic in healthcare: “We have to train these young adults really well and give them some sort of competitive edge, because a lot of healthcare jobs that were formerly entry level are now filled by incumbent workers who’ve been retrained.”

Adding to the challenge is the fact that many employers have neither the time nor the interest to engage deeply with providers. “It’s hard to manage the expectations of employer partners,” says Bryan Sanchinell of Cypress Hills LDC. The YASEP project led by Cypress Hills targets paratransit companies struggling with high turnover rates among entry-level drivers. Even so, the organization has found that small- and medium-sized employers lack the time and resources to reflect in depth about how they might do things differently.

At the same time, several lead partners came to realize that they had something to offer employers, particularly smaller businesses with fewer resources. “For a lot of these community-based employers, we can function a little like an HR department,” explains Queens Community House executive director Irma Rodriguez, whose organization leads a YASEP partnership focused on food services in Queens.

Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation Partnership

(Brooklyn/Queens)

PARTNERS: Cypress Hills LDC, St. Nicks Alliance, Total Transportation Corp., Complete Management Solutions, CitiStorage

TARGETED SECTOR: Transportation/logistics

KEY CHALLENGES: High employee turnover; limited employer capacity to train and support workers; few widely recognized credentials in logistics; difficulty in accessing transportation credentials

INNOVATIVE PRACTICE: Cypress Hills and its partners are developing career lattices across transportation, warehousing, and logistics positions and will offer on-site services for participating employers.

As the partnership led by Queens Community House deepened its research over the course of the Learning Community sessions, the contours of its value proposition became clear. “We had focus groups where employers told us they wished they had opportunities to tell workforce programs what would help them retain their employees,” says Sean Reyes, director of youth employment services. “One thing that struck me was how small-business owners were surprised that large businesses had actual written training manuals. That’s something we can help them with—how to create an onboarding document that helps with the hiring process.”

Reviewing data provided by the NYC Labor Market Information Service, the Queens Community House project team identified three areas of focus within their sector: food service, manufacturing, and specialties. “One thing we found was that we might not be looking at straight career ladders, but rather lattices,” notes associate executive director Susan Matloff-Nieves. “Some of the well-compensated jobs are in catering, but the turnover is only 2 percent. Wholesaling jobs can be profitable, but they’re not accessible to entry level. We need more analysis of what the really good jobs are, but our first task is to get young people employed and start mapping out career paths with transferable skills.”

Comprehensive Development Inc. had a similar experience. At the outset of the Learning Community, the organization was planning to target the healthcare

sector because of its substantial role in the local economy and because of demographic and policy considerations that seemed to bode well for continued high demand. The organization was considering a partnership with Per Scholas that would have included a program track focused on health information technology. Data provided by the NYC Labor Market Information Service, however, completely shifted the organization’s thinking, spurring a new focus on medical assistance and patient care. In a memorandum to JobsFirstNYC submitted at the conclusion of the Learning Community sessions, the organization reported that the labor market data “helped us to answer questions we would have otherwise relied on intuition and partially informed estimations to answer. In terms of staff development, the entire team received a paradigm-shifting tutorial on labor market data and its use.”

The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS)—the only employer to lead a YASEP partnership—also developed a deeper understanding of the industry over the course of the Learning Community. WCS’s project seeks to improve the recruiting and retention of seasonal employees at the Bronx Zoo, which it operates. The human resources division at the Zoo briefly outsourced the screening process for hiring, with unfortunate results. “There were many unqualified applicants, the hiring rate was poor, and quality dropped,” says Randi Winter, director of admissions and guest relations at WCS. “One of the reasons we struggled was that people didn’t understand what the job meant and required.” WCS is working closely with two highly regarded provider organizations to communicate its needs and priorities for hiring and provide on-site training to staff and seasonal workers. Winter

hopes the collaboration will lead to worker retention across multiple seasons, leading to reduced training costs for WCS and to advancement opportunities for workers.

Evolutions in Partnerships

The second major theme had to do with the evolution of roles within the YASEP partnerships.

For Per Scholas, YASEP represented an opportunity to address two long-standing issues related to the organization's renowned information technology training program: how to assist more young adults in the program's application process, and how to raise the success rates of those who do enroll. Per Scholas initially planned to use the Learning Community sessions to learn from its partners about the nuances of serving young people, and then proceed on its own when the time came for implementation.

As the planning phase proceeded, however, team members came to realize that success would require more than simply tweaking Per Scholas's existing model. "Sometime during the process it became clear that this was not something that we should do on our own," says Linda Quinones-Lopez. "We provide excellent technical training and education, but basic skills is not our expertise. It was really clear that our partners should stay involved, and would bring a lot to the table." Per Scholas ultimately worked with its partners to create a bridge program to help more young adults access its training.

Per Scholas Partnership

(Bronx/Upper Manhattan)

PARTNERS: Per Scholas, FEGS Health & Human Services, BronxWorks, Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce, Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation

TARGETED SECTOR: Information technology

KEY CHALLENGES: Adapting a successful sector model for a young adult population

INNOVATIVE PRACTICE: Per Scholas and its partners are creating a new assessment model to identify promising young adults who might not have passed the current screening process to be enrolled into its program, and supporting a bridge program to help more young adults access Per Scholas's training.

CDI underwent a similar evolution over the course of its project planning. Originally intending to serve as the sole lead partner for its YASEP project, it restructured the project to empower the New York Alliance for Careers in Healthcare, an intermediary that convenes multiple industry associations in healthcare, to determine workforce needs and jointly develop training solutions. The association now functions as a full partner.

For Cypress Hills LDC, the Learning Community offered an opportunity to better understand the dynamics of the transportation and logistics sector. "Maggie's Paratransit [a partnering employer] had told us they wanted either Class B or C [licenses], with a slight preference for C," explains Lowell Herschberger. "At the outset, we didn't know what that meant." Working with the NYC Labor Market Information Service, Cypress Hills came to better understand the labor market value of the different license classifications. "We came up with a significant sized labor force that requires only a Class D, which is the regular driver's license. We discovered that the sector really requires a continuum, from no license to D, C and B."

With this deeper understanding came a shift in roles within the project. St. Nicks Alliance, the training partner, will offer Class B instruction, which is required for school bus or MTA bus drivers. The employer

Queens Community House Partnership (Queens)

PARTNERS: Queens Community House, Jacob Riis Settlement House, Sunnyside Community Services, Ocean Bay Community Development Corporation

TARGETED SECTOR: Food service (including manufacturing and the specialty food sector)

KEY CHALLENGES: Poor preparation and high turnover among a diffuse set of employers within the food industry

INNOVATIVE PRACTICE: This program focuses explicitly on the challenges faced by small neighborhood employers with limited training budgets, human resources capacity, or other infrastructure, with the aim of improving the retention of young workers with participating employers.

partner has agreed to cover the cost of Class C training. “St. Nicks isn’t offering Class C right now,” says Herschberger. “They were willing to develop it, but we were thrilled when we got this investment from the employer. As the project grows to include other employers, we will contract with a driving school to provide the training onsite. We just acquired new space and have a bit more capacity now than when we first started talking with St. Nicks.”

Benefits for the Organizations and for the Field

As the YASEP partnerships prepare for broader implementation in the fall of 2014, the participating organizations anticipate a bounty of useful lessons resulting from their involvement with the initiative. Importantly, most are eager to learn as much from the inevitable challenges within the projects as from their successes.

Both the Wildlife Conservation Society and its community-based organization (CBO) partners, FEGS and BronxWorks, point out with excitement that when the Bronx Zoo dismisses seasonal workers, everyone will have a better understanding of the decision. “If a seasonal employee is let go, we can tell the CBO why: ‘he or she was great at these things, but had difficulty with these other aspects of the job,’” says Liam McCarthy, assistant director of foundation relations at WCS. “Right now, the CBO just knows that the young adult employee was let go.” He adds that this feedback will work throughout the process. “If 30 of 100 applicants don’t get interviews, and BronxWorks asks why, we can say for example that they didn’t fill out the application correctly. That’s helpful to the CBO as a learning point to improve upon.”

Sandi Rosenthal of FEGS observes, “Sometimes when you send clients to an employer and they don’t make it, you have no idea why. This close relationship with the employer will give our staff insight as to why they’re not selected that will be helpful to FEGS across the board.” FEGS will also benefit from WCS’s input regarding its customer service curriculum.

Wildlife Conservation Society Partnership (Bronx)

PARTNERS: Wildlife Conservation Society, FEGS Health & Human Services, BronxWorks

TARGETED SECTOR: Hospitality (including food service and retail)

KEY CHALLENGES: Seasonal nature of jobs, disconnect between traditional training approaches and employer needs

INNOVATIVE PRACTICE: At its Bronx Zoo site, WCS will hire dedicated staff to work with project partners in supporting young adults in their job readiness, creating a pre-/during-/post-seasonal employment approach in the hospitality, food services, and retail sectors.

The relationships forged through the Learning Community also seem likely to extend through future endeavors. “Towards the end, I started thinking in terms of a network where all of us would be trying to support the young people in each of the collaborations,” says John Mancuso of CDI. “When I put that out, it wasn’t as if it was my idea; it was almost as if we’d already pretty much reached that point.”

Already, CDI has brought in Tricia Taylor, a staff trainer at WCS, to lead a workshop for students on job readiness and preparedness. CDI is also developing a memorandum of understanding with Cypress Hills LDC to create a referral relationship. “I think [cross-referrals] make a lot of sense for our two organizations, since neither of us is sector-focused the way Per Scholas is,” says Lowell Herschberger of Cypress Hills. “We really need partnerships in other sectors, because not all young people here want to go into logistics and transportation.”

The experience of participating in YASEP has prompted a larger change in how Cypress Hills approaches workforce programming. “It was not a given that we would do this,” Herschberger says. “We weren’t an agency focused on one sector. Our mission is to revitalize this neighborhood.” But the mere experience of developing the project, even before reaching

implementation, has already had an impact on the organization's thinking. "I think the values of a sectoral approach are perfectly aligned with our organization. We're all about leveraging resources within and outside of our community to benefit our residents and employers. It resonates, and for that reason we made a decision to take this step. We're excited about the outcomes we're already seeing."

CDI, too, has leveraged learning from its YASEP experience into larger practice changes within its organization and its partner schools. "The embrace of employer engagement was a huge shift that we've pushed down into the schools we work with," says Mancuso. "City-As-School wants to start a green career track. I told the principal to check with the Labor Market Information Service. This has become part of the way we think now."

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CDI's new focus on labor market outcomes has also prompted a change in how the organization thinks and talks about the young people it serves. "The other big piece is that we moved from our general educational and social work position of 'these are kids who've had a lot of obstacles put in their way, and they deserve a chance,' to 'these are fully competitive people in the marketplace,'" Mancuso adds. "I got to a point where I began to think it's actually demeaning to present the youth we serve as people who need a break."

While YASEP's participating organizations are optimistic as their projects move toward launch, team members have few illusions that most young adults served through the program will access long-term, living-wage jobs—at least to start. "A key benefit with Bronx Zoo for young people is resume building," says Rosenthal. "Although the positions aren't permanent—only a few of them wind up full-time—it's something we look at as a first career step. For many of these young adults, it's the perfect time for them to be working and it will give them some skills they need. . . . There are very few jobs out there that don't involve customer service." WCS has agreed to provide support to employees who successfully complete the season, including by writing recommendation letters and helping employees update their resumes.

The Queens Community House collaboration is similarly realistic regarding the likely outcomes of its young adult participants. "We look at this project as a way of engaging young people in serious conversations about work and careers," explains associate executive director Susan Matloff-Nieves. "The idea is to work with young people about actually planning a career and how to move through the system." At the same time, the organization will continue working with its small-employer partners to identify best practices that boost pay, improve retention, and create career pathways.

Looking Ahead

Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute Partnership (Manhattan/Bronx)

PARTNERS: Cooperative Home Care Associates, Neighborhood Trust Financial Partners, New York Alliance for Careers in Healthcare, Youth Development Institute

TARGETED SECTOR: Healthcare (home health aides)

KEY CHALLENGES: Finding better ways to serve the increasing number of young people seeking training and employment in the home healthcare industry

INNOVATIVE PRACTICE: Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute and its partners are adopting a case management system focused specifically on the needs of young adults, including customized peer support sessions and staff development training focused on young adults. The program also offers guaranteed employment for graduates and a range of retention support services.

As YASEP transitions from planning to implementation, the primary focus for the balance of 2014 and into next year will be on supporting partnerships through launch, scale-up, and adjustments. Technical assistance will include topic-specific sessions focusing on assessment, curriculum, and employer-based case management. After each session, leaders from the groups will meet to plan next steps and resultant joint work. Additionally, JobsFirstNYC will convene local employers to deepen partnerships' understanding of and comfort with employer engagement, and will bring in expert practitioners to advise each partnership.

While providing customized support to each YASEP partnership, JobsFirstNYC will continue to advance the collective goals of the Learning Community, through shared referral processes and assessment protocols for jobseekers and employer partners; the development of a shared training curriculum on high-quality customer service; and data-sharing agreements.

Furthermore, the Learning Community will expand in two phases during the remainder of 2014. First, JobsFirstNYC has invited two additional provider organizations—Phipps Neighborhoods and Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute—to join the five existing partnerships now working toward implementation. Phipps Neighborhoods has created and launched a healthcare occupation training pipeline in partnership with Hostos Community College and Montefiore Medical Center—the largest employer in the Bronx, with 1,700 projected job openings over the next two years. Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute, one of the oldest sectoral employment organizations in the country, will partner with Cooperative Home Care

Associates and other community entities to create a customized approach to connecting younger workers to home healthcare positions that offer high-quality, stable employment, as well as opportunities for advancement.

Conclusion

Phipps Neighborhoods Career Network Partnership (Bronx)

PARTNERS: Phipps Neighborhoods, Montefiore Medical Center, Hostos Community College

TARGETED SECTOR: Healthcare/allied health field (including certified nursing assistants, patient care technicians, clinical medical assistants, and EMTs)

KEY CHALLENGES: Developing healthcare career pathways for young adults who have academic skill gaps and little work experience

INNOVATIVE PRACTICE: This program will incorporate employer-driven contextualized work readiness (for example, math for a healthcare setting) and experiential hands-on instruction based on new interdisciplinary care teams with a focus on preventative medicine.

Over the course of decades, as the labor market changed in ways that made it more difficult for young adults to secure work opportunities and chart a career path, workforce provider organizations largely failed to evolve in response. Rather than working to better understand the mindset and priorities of employers and to restructure programs accordingly, many providers continued to focus their services on basic education and quick placements—even if the most likely outcome for those young adults placed was an equally quick return to joblessness, with the only lasting result another experience of failure.

Unfortunately for young people and providers alike, programs have not changed to support best practices in response to today's challenging hiring climate. These factors raise the prospect of a vicious circle of failure: as fewer dollars support outdated programs in ever-more adverse conditions, successful outcomes become increasingly rare.

YASEP pushes back against every aspect of this dynamic. Funded entirely by philanthropic dollars and operating outside the strictures of public contracts, the initiative frees its participating organizations to innovate, experiment, and even make mistakes—with the assurance that every misstep will yield lessons that improve practice in the next iteration. Everyone interviewed for this brief expressed confidence that their second year of operations would yield stronger outcomes as their programs learn, adapt, and improve.

“At JobsFirstNYC, we had an important choice to make regarding the development of new programming,” says JobsFirstNYC executive director Lou Miceli. “We elected to develop an effort that is based on evidence, builds on collaborative principles, and focuses on developing and sharing practices that will benefit the whole workforce development field.” Miceli believes that YASEP's collaborative aspect is one of its most essential elements: it pushes back against the competitive dynamic that often characterizes the field and helps organizations serve employers more effectively and at greater scale than would otherwise be possible. “By working together, better, smarter, and more efficiently, both young people and employer partners stand to benefit.”

Each YASEP project is relatively limited in scope: even if all seven exceed expectations, only a few hundred young New Yorkers will find jobs through the initiative. The true value of YASEP is the potential that it offers for large-scale change. Just as New York City has seen impressive gains in workforce outcomes for adults through greater focus on employer needs and deeper understanding of high-value industries, YASEP can help facilitate a similar shift in programs that serve young adults. With a new mayoral administration pledging a renewed focus on workforce programs as a means to improving economic mobility, New York has a golden opportunity to make this needed change.

Acknowledgements

JobsFirstNYC wants to recognize the leaders of the Young Adult Sectoral Employment Project (YASEP) for their vision, willingness to take risks, and commitment to excellence.



John Mancuso, Andrée Lockwood,
Michael Roberts, Karla Silverman,
Shawna Trager



Michelle Neugebauer, Lowell
Herschberger, Melissa Castello, Tom
Chiappone, Carolann Johns, Bryan
Sanchinell, Deirdre Walters



Jodi Sturgeon, Steven Dawson,
John Bennett, Angelina Drake, Ben
Freeman, Nicole Smith, Lamont
Spence, Shawna Trager



Angie Kamath, Sara Faramini,
Tondalaya London, Jessica Nathan,
Jeannette Nigro, Linda Quinones-
Lopez, Sandi Rosenthal, Beth Spektor



Dianne Morales, Monique De La Oz,
Jeremy Kaplan, Evelyn Fernandez-
Ketcham, Angie Mercado, Dana
Politis, Jennifer Tausig



Irma Rodriguez, Jonathan Gaffney,
Jonah Gensler, Christopher Hanway,
Susan Matloff-Nieves, Pleshette
McKnight, Dennis Redmond,
Patricia Simon



Robert Moskowitz, Liam McCarthy,
Tania Cisneros, Elisa Istueta, Sandi
Rosenthal, Tricia Taylor, Randi Winter

Sheila Maguire has played a key role in the development of the YASEP and continues to provide guidance and leadership.

Consultants Bret Halverson, Lesley Hirsch, Dee Wallace, and Christine Yu have all contributed to the development and support of the YASEP.

This case study was authored by David Fischer with input from Keri Faulhaber, Lou Miceli, and Marjorie Parker.

The publication was designed by Tracey Maurer and copy edited by Morgan Stoffregen.

The YASEP has been made possible by support from the following foundations: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, The Aronson Family Foundation, Capital One Foundation, JPMorgan Chase Foundation, The New York Community Trust, and The Pinkerton Foundation.

Additional general support for JobsFirstNYC has been provided by the following foundations: The Achelis and Bodman Foundations, The Clark Foundation, Ira W. DeCamp Foundation, Valentine Perry Snyder Fund, and Viacom International, Inc.

The support of these funders does not imply or express endorsement of the contents of this publication.

