

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Legislative Mandate

Legislation authorizing Youth Fair Chance (YFC) was enacted in Congress in 1993 and specified six broad objectives:

To saturate small neighborhood communities with services

To guarantee access to appropriate education, training, and supportive services to all youth residing in the target communities

To guarantee access to comprehensive services combined with outreach and recruitment efforts to increase participation of previously unserved or underserved youth

To integrate service delivery, including systems of common intake, assessment, and case management

To increase the rates of school completion, enrollment in advanced education and training, and employment

To determine the feasibility of offering these services nationwide

Subsequent legislative amendments expanded the upper age limit for participants from 21 years of age to 30 years of age. Included in this legislative amendment effort also was language which designated case management as the major vehicle for providing services to YFC participants. Additional DOL grant requirements ensured that YFC communities engaged in leveraging state, local and private resources to continue program services beyond the duration of the Federal grant.

In July 1994, 16 YFC sites nationwide were funded with an initial grant of approximately \$3 million for 18 months; additional funding for 5 years was called for in the original enabling legislation. In 1995, a seventeenth site was added to the YFC initiative. After a second round of funding of approximately \$1 million per site in June 1995, a change in congressional priorities eliminated continued funding for YFC. From a reasonable, though still ambitious, 5-year plan, communities were now forced to concentrate their efforts on trying to become self-sustaining in half that time.

Despite this accelerated timetable, all YFC sites accepted the challenge and initiated the system-building work with the intention of saturating each of 17 small areas with

comprehensive services that focused on education and employment serving all youth 14 to 30 years of age residing in the target district; setting up learning centers for out-of-school youth; improving teaching and learning strategies by working with local secondary schools on the school-to-work reforms; and engaging communities in program and system design and governance of the “community-wide initiative.”

This report helps tell the story of what it takes to “give youth a fair chance.”

Youth Fair Chance Design

The YFC initiative is an ambitious effort to improve the life opportunities of youth in high-poverty areas by providing a comprehensive array of youth services in a coordinated and concentrated strategy. By focusing resources on targeted, high-poverty neighborhoods; by encouraging comprehensive strategies that link education, employment, social services, juvenile justice, as well as recreation programs and other community-based activities; and by establishing new, community-based governance strategies, YFC is designed to have an impact on the community as a whole, not just a small number of participating youth.

As a national policy initiative, three elements of YFC stand out as particularly challenging and innovative. The first is the decision to pursue a *comprehensive, community-wide strategy* rather than supporting individual (and often unconnected) programs. Such a comprehensive initiative offers YFC communities an unusual opportunity to break free of the traditional categorical service delivery structure to explore new ways of organizing and delivering services in a community.

The second major innovation in YFC is the decision to pursue a *saturation strategy* in which all youth in a community are eligible for services. This is the first time that an employment and training program has had an opportunity to bypass income-eligibility requirements on a large scale in serving young people. YFC provides an opportunity for local programs to overcome many of the traditional barriers to collaboration with schools and other youth programs and develop a truly integrated approach to service. Not coincidentally, it also offers communities an opportunity to put programs into place without the stigmatization that often accompanies categorically defined services.

The third major innovation in YFC is the effort to *integrate the most recent research and policy developments on effective practice.* While the primary focus of YFC is on the effectiveness of ensuring access to comprehensive services, the initiative serves, at least in part, as a pilot effort on the implementation of policy on community-wide school-to-work transition strategies as well as a crucible for applying research lessons based on prior demonstration projects.

Technical Assistance Strategy

The first 2 years of YFC technical assistance focused on addressing three broad, but practical questions from the field:

What emerging *strategies of governance, community involvement, and management* offer the greatest opportunity for effective design and delivery of services for youth and their families?

What *programs and systems* best prepare youth to live healthy, productive lives?

How do these practices connect to the *school-to-work* system-building initiative for *all* youth?

A core technical assistance (TA) team of 12 professional staff from KRA Corporation (KRA), the prime contractor; The Center for Human Resources, Brandeis University; Abt Associates; The Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL), *and* a specially designated team of 5 from Department of Labor (DOL)/Employment and Training Administration (ETA) set out to help the sites initiate YFC and address these questions.

Our experience with YFC technical assistance reinforced the importance of on-site technical assistance providers who have *rapport* with the community and program staff, are *knowledgeable* about the factors influencing program design and operations, and are readily *accessible*. Our experience has also demonstrated the importance of involving grantees as active partners in their own capacity-building efforts. Technical assistance, then, is something done with (and not to) the recipients. Three principles guided our approach to technical assistance.

First, the basis of our work with the 17 YFC sites has been customer focused. Second, YFC has been a system-building initiative and, as such, requires ongoing contact with other public and private initiatives in each community-wide effort. Third, we gave strong emphasis to strategic planning and to establishing benchmarks in order to provide an objective feedback mechanism to ensure the sites that they were making progress.

Focus of Technical Assistance Activities

Over the past 30 months, the TA team has used a variety of delivery strategies to provide technical assistance to each site, including on-site visits, off-site communications, regional and national conferences and workshops, as well as numerous written materials and resources. In broad terms, the TA team helped sites accomplish five important milestones:

Clarify expectations and outcomes of YFC: As a guide in this undertaking, the TA team developed a conceptual framework to help each site understand how the pieces of the YFC system interrelated. The central concept of YFC revolves around (1) community-based systems-building supported by (2) community access and awareness, and (3) a serious commitment to resource development.

Work together in new ways: The TA team began the process of strategizing for community empowerment particularly in the areas of governance and accountability. Strategies to engage community leaders, residents, local institutions, multiple service providers, and employers were developed.

Define quality practice and system elements: In determining its own quality standards, YFC set for itself the dual requirements of establishing close connections with the national school-to-work initiative and serving out-of-school youth. This required extensive interface between youth serving agencies, local school systems, and the private sector.

Build staff capacity and public awareness: The scope and complexity of YFC represented a significant management challenge. The managers and project staff play a critical role in transitioning from the status quo to a new community-wide system. Released from their categorical constraints, the TA team helped address the professional development of YFC staff.

Develop key steps for building program components and progress indicators: As an aid to providing each YFC site with a framework for evaluating its own internal progress, the TA team developed a series of general benchmarks/progress indicators to help sites track their own progress in achieving both their internal objectives and the overall YFC objectives.

This report documents a clear call for technical assistance from all YFC directors, as well as a sense of value and appreciation for the array of technical assistance provided ranging from one-to-one guidance and facilitation to hands-on capacity-building to networking and executive coaching. Technical assistance as a strategy helps YFC communities help themselves to better serve the youth who live within them.

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