



SOCIAL POLICY RESEARCH  
ASSOCIATES

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# Evaluation of the YouthBuild Youth Offender Grants

**Final Report**  
May 2009

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This report summarizes findings from an implementation and outcomes evaluation of the YouthBuild Youth Offender grants. The evaluation consisted of site visits to each of the 34 grantees to examine their program design and implementation, the characteristics of the participants they served, and the outcomes they obtained. Two rounds of site visits were conducted, the first in the spring and the second in the fall of 2007. These visits included interviews with program administrators, staff, academic and vocational instructors, partners, and employers that had worked with participants. Further, more than 180 of the active participants were interviewed (approximately 75 percent of all active participants), with nearly 100 of them being interviewed during both rounds of site visits, to provide the youth perspective on the operation and value of the program. Additionally, data from the management information system (MIS) used for the grants was obtained and used to summarize the characteristics of youth offender participants and analyze the factors that are associated with their outcomes. Findings in this report are divided into several key areas, including those concerning organizational characteristics of the grantees and general fidelity to the YouthBuild model, recruitment and enrollment procedures, educational and vocational services, and case management, retention, and follow-up supports. Additional chapters examine how contextual factors may influence participants' educational, workforce, and recidivism outcomes, and the developmental process participants must undertake in order to succeed in and after YouthBuild. Further, several case studies of youth experiences in the program are provided. Finally, participant outcomes are examined, and the factors that affect these outcomes are explored.

### **Overview of Grantees' Organizational Structure**

The Youth Offender grantees are very diverse, with organizational features, experience, and resources that vary widely among them. Grantees also varied in their organizational maturity—most are well established in their communities and have stable staff and leadership. Overall, grantees developed strong partnerships with juvenile justice, education, construction, and workforce development agencies, though their ability to do so depended on a variety of factors, including their program design, organizational maturity, and financial resources. Although most

grantees focused on specific types of partners, the strength and intensity of the partnerships were generally unrelated to educational, workforce, or juvenile justice outcomes achieved by youth offenders. All grantees followed the YouthBuild model to varying degrees of intensity.

## **Recruitment/Assessment/Enrollment**

Grantees rely on a wide range of methods to recruit, assess, and enroll youth. The majority of programs have developed highly selective screening procedures to ensure that they identify the most committed and dedicated youth, including drug screening, basic skills testing, staff interviews, and staff observations. Youth are also required to attend a Mental Toughness Orientation (MTO) to test their ability to thrive in a YouthBuild environment. In general, MTO lasts from less than one week to more than four weeks, though the length of MTO was unrelated to key outcomes, including retention, employment and recidivism. Many grantees modified their enrollment policy between the first and second round of visits in order to keep their programs full. During the initial visit, more than half of the grantees enrolled an entire cohort once per year so that participants could be exposed to a structured sequence of educational and construction activities. As of the second round of visits, many grantees had shifted to enrolling participants on a year-round basis to meet enrollment expectations or because of concerns about limited funding.

## **Educational Services**

Participants' main educational challenges were both logistical and personal in nature. Entering youth were typically far behind in terms of their education level and credit attainment, and often suffered from low levels of self-esteem and confidence in their ability to learn, as well as from poor motivation levels in the classroom, short attention spans, and a tendency to give up easily. While all grantees sought to strengthen the basic reading, writing and math skills of participants, the majority of grantees stressed GED attainment as the end goal. Youth Offender grantees also offered a range of postsecondary-oriented activities and supports, including college orientations, assistance with college and financial aid applications, tutoring from postsecondary institutions, special college prep and transition programs offered in conjunction with local postsecondary institutions.

The most important characteristics of successful classroom teachers were unrelated to their professional experience or background. Instead, the most successful teachers were those who had personal similarities with their participants, took time to get to know and personally engage with them, and stepped out of their "teacher role" to help youth address personal issues. Further, successful classroom instructors used a broad array of teaching methods and tools to effectively

reach and consistently engage participants. Peer teaching was held up as a model classroom practice with numerous benefits, because it built youth confidence and leadership abilities, fostered positive peer relations, and kept the more advanced participants in the class engaged. Small classes, a favorable teacher-to-student ratio, and an intense level of one-on-one attention, were seen as the most critical classroom elements. Further, making the connection between classroom instruction and real-world issues was seen as a way to better engage participants.

## **Vocational Training**

Youth Offender grantees provided a range of construction activities, focusing most heavily on building single-family homes, though many also offer participants opportunities to engage in the rehabilitation of multi-unit complexes as well. Most grantees agreed that construction of a single family home provided participants with the greatest range of opportunities to learn the trade and develop their skills, especially when grantees either owned or managed the sites at which participants worked. Combining opportunities to work on a single family home with rehabilitation work generally allowed grantees to ensure that there were always training activities and active worksites to which participants could be assigned. Most grantees strive to maintain a low participant to teacher ratio, with the average being fewer than seven participants per instructor. Grantees developed a wide range of partnerships, including those with agencies providing houses or housing sites, and those forged with employers and unions.

There is substantial variation in the quality of the training opportunities participants receive. Generally speaking, grantees that provide participants with opportunities to earn certifications in the construction industry appear to provide more consistent and high-quality training than those that do not. Nearly three-fourths of the Youth Offender grantees also link vocational instruction in some way to academic instruction, in an effort to keep participants engaged, supplement what they are learning in the classroom, and make the training more rigorous.

Finally, even for the majority of participants who report not being interested in construction as a career, there are benefits from participating in the construction work. Primary among these benefits are the job readiness skills that are imparted, such as learning the proper work ethic, the need for punctuality, and appropriate dress and behavior.

## **Case Management/Retention/Follow-Up**

Case management provides a critical source of emotional and practical support to participants. Grantees ranged in terms of the formality of their case management—the *laissez-faire* approach meant participants could access case management services from whichever staff with whom they happened to feel most comfortable, and that case management responsibilities were spread out

more equitably across program staff, while a more formal approach allowed all participants clear opportunities to voice concerns and review their personal progress. One key function of most case managers was to serve as a critical link to supportive service provision, which included services for substance abuse counseling, mental health services and housing. Their primary challenge was simply developing a close, trusting relationship with participants, many of whom were initially withdrawn or mistrustful. Case management and participants' personal level of readiness for change were cited as the primary factors affecting retention.

Grantees provide follow-up service to varying degrees of intensity. Many grantees classified follow-up services as merely a check-in with participants to obtain updates on their job/education status and determine if any additional services were needed. The effectiveness of follow-up services was challenged primarily by a highly transient youth population who often had disconnected phone numbers or simply failed to return staff calls. Grantees have developed a range of creative strategies to overcome these challenges, ranging from canvassing local neighborhoods to establishing alumni clubs.

## **Youth Leadership and Community Service**

The Youth Offender grantees provide a number of formal vehicles for participants to develop and practice youth leadership. These include the Youth Policy Council, formal roles for participants on the construction site and in the classroom, and leadership classes. The creation and promotion of formal youth leadership opportunities appeared to relate mostly to programmatic values and priorities. Despite this, grantees that provided substantial leadership opportunities were generally no better at achieving discrete outcomes, such as GED attainment, than those that provided few leadership opportunities, although grantees with active Youth Policy Councils did have better outcomes than grantees that did not. Additionally, participants of grantees with ample leadership opportunities did report positive social outcomes, such as increased confidence and enhanced communication skills.

In addition, most grantees provided opportunities for participants to contribute to the well-being of their communities by participating in community service projects. Nearly half of the grantees offered intensive community service opportunities, requiring that youth participate in community service weekly. A few grantees did not offer community service opportunities, mostly because they believed that work on low-income housing was sufficient to raise participants' awareness about the importance of service. Participants were more positive about required community service when they had a role or a "voice" in what kinds of community service activities in which to engage.

## **Characteristics of Case Study Youth/External Factors**

Although participants in this evaluation were diverse in their backgrounds and life experiences, a number of common themes and challenges among them emerged, including that the participants: are highly transient, often are dealing with difficult family issues including substance abuse or incarceration, often are parents themselves, have an offense history that limits their freedom and employment opportunities, are often affiliated with gangs, and frequently have had difficulties with their own substance abuse. These issues often combined to make it very challenging for participants to succeed in the program despite their own and the grantees' best efforts.

## **Case Study Youth Outcomes: Growth and Development in YouthBuild**

A model of growth and development was developed that assumes participants move through four distinct stages while they are in YouthBuild—from learning to trust, to learning to be productive, taking on a new identity, to finally making the transition successfully out of YouthBuild. Over the course of the evaluation, participants showed notable shifts from the first stage (learning to trust) to subsequent stages. Nearly half of case study respondents indicated that they were taking on a new identity and nearly a fourth made a successful transition out of YouthBuild.

## **Program Outcomes**

The majority of participants is male, at least age 18, and is either Black/African American or Hispanic/Latino. Although a substantial majority was at least 18 at the time of their enrollment, nearly one-third were below this age. More than one-third was in an intensive aftercare program at the time of enrollment, meaning that they were being released from a prison, jail, or juvenile detention facility. More than half (56.1 percent) had been in a juvenile detention center at some point in their lives, and 39 percent had been confined to an adult correctional facility at some point prior to their enrollment.

While nearly all participants received equal parts educational and vocational training services while in the program, more than 80 percent of participants engaged in some kind of post-program activity, the most common of which was additional skills training. Additionally, youth participated in other post-program activities, including subsidized work experience or internships, other job preparation classes or activities, and GED preparation and mentoring. More than 68 percent of participants completed the program either by graduating or through early placement. While only nine percent of youth offenders entered the program with their GED or high school diploma, more than one-third of them obtained it after entering YouthBuild. Additionally, nearly two-thirds of all participants were placed in unsubsidized employment, an

educational activity, or occupational training. Finally, nearly three-fourths of participants (74.6 percent) did not re-offend or have their probation or parole revoked after entering YouthBuild.

Descriptive statistics suggest that high performing grantees include a larger percentage that are charter schools, and tend to have a larger average budget than do medium or low performing grantees. Further, high performers have fewer students per staff member, classroom teacher, and worksite supervisor than low performing grantees. High performing grantees appear more selective, as they recruit and enroll a larger number of participants, on average, but enroll a lower number of youth offenders than medium and low performers. Similarly, greater percentages of high performers offer vocational training in both new construction and rehabilitation, have construction partners that provide worksites and own and/or manage the construction sites. All of the high performing grantees link vocational training to academic instruction and all use the National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER) or other materials leading to certification for construction curriculum, compared to smaller percentages of medium and low performers that do so.

Finally, using multivariate analyses, grantees located in urban areas, and those with lower student-to-classroom teacher ratios; that had active youth policy councils; that owned and/or managed their own worksites; and in which vocational instruction was linked to academic instruction, tended to have higher rates of employment among their participants. Grantees with lower participant-to-staff ratio had better retention rates, but grantees that tested youth for drugs prior to enrollment had lower retention. In terms of high school or GED completion, grantees that were charter schools tended to have higher rates of high school or GED completion, but grantees that were independent entities, rather than part of a larger sponsoring agency, had lower rates of high school diploma or GED attainment. Participants in sites that had lower participant-to-staff and lower participant-to-classroom teacher ratios had better educational outcomes.

Finally, participants who had ever been incarcerated at the time of enrollment were more likely to re-offend than those who had never been incarcerated. Further, participants of grantees that offer both rehabilitation of existing housing and new construction were less likely to recidivate than those in sites without this feature. It is unclear why this would be so, but is consistent with other findings in this report that grantees that offer both types of opportunities to participants tend to be able to keep them more engaged.



# I. INTRODUCTION

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In 2004, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) provided funding to YouthBuild USA so that it would provide a subset of its sites with two-year grants to provide services for adjudicated youth to enhance their educational and employment opportunities and keep them from re-offending. YouthBuild USA distributed the grant funds to 30 sites to operate youth offender programs in Program Years (PY) 2004 and 2005. Toward the conclusion of these grants, DOL provided a third year of funding for these services to be used in PY 2006, which YouthBuild USA awarded to the original 30 sites, as well as four new sites.

In the fall of 2006, DOL awarded a contract to Social Policy Research Associates (SPR) and its subcontractor, Decision Information Resources (DIR), to evaluate the YouthBuild Youth Offender grantees to examine how these programs and services were operating and whether certain programs achieved better outcomes for their youth. This Final Report summarizes the findings from this evaluation, and includes analysis of data collected during two rounds of site visits conducted to each of the 34 programs operating youth offender programs, as well as analysis of administrative data collected for the youth served by the grants. In this introductory chapter, an overview of the evaluation and of the framework that guided it are provided. Following this, the data collection efforts used in this evaluation are described, as well as the analyses that have been conducted of these data. Finally, the chapter provides an overview of the remainder of the report.

## **Overview of the Evaluation**

The evaluation is primarily an implementation study, relying heavily on qualitative data gathered through two rounds of site visits to each of the Youth Offender grantees. As such, it does not attempt to discern the impact of program services or features on youth's outcomes. Rather, it identifies trends and common themes across the 34 grantees, and summarizes what respondents believe to be key aspects of YouthBuild in serving youth offenders.

The evaluation was guided by a conceptual framework that focuses on several key aspects of the context in which grantees are operating, the specific features and services they provide youth,

and the outcomes youth obtain. Although the conceptual framework was presented in detail as part of the Design and Interim Reports for this evaluation, in this section a brief overview of it is provided to acquaint the reader with the critical components under review in this evaluation.

The primary goal for the evaluation was to understand the YouthBuild model and how it is implemented across the 34 sites receiving Youth Offender funding. Based on prior research on the program, the evaluation began with a view of the YouthBuild program as a potentially innovative model of youth and community development that trains low-income, marginalized youth in basic education and construction trade skills in a supportive and caring environment.

A central tenet of the evaluation was that the communities in which grantees operate likely strongly influence the implementation and outcomes of the YouthBuild youth offender programs. Therefore, this evaluation was designed to examine a variety of contextual factors that may facilitate, hinder, or interact with the YouthBuild program and its network of partners.

At the core of the evaluation is an examination of YouthBuild's program characteristics, including the process by which YouthBuild is designed to meet the needs of the youth offender programs. Interestingly, as noted in the Interim Report for the evaluation, few programs felt the need to alter their programs at all to serve youth offenders effectively and, in fact, many of the 34 sites had already been serving a substantial percentage of offenders prior to receiving the grant from DOL. Key design features of interest included the target area or population, the quality and tenure of organizational leadership and staff, the budget and funding of the organizations, the presence and characteristics of sponsoring agencies and partnerships, and prior experience in serving adjudicated youth.

Additionally, actual program *implementation* was a key focus of the evaluation. Among the critical features of program implementation examined were: the peer context established in the program, the specific characteristics of participants, how grantees recruit and enroll participants, the specific assessments and services provided and how they are coordinated, and the grantees' overall fidelity to the YouthBuild model.

The context in which each grantee operates, and their design and implementation, were assumed to be the primary components in producing both intermediate and longer-term outcomes. In this evaluation, intermediate outcomes of interest include those both at the program level, such as the proportion and types of youth served and who complete the program, and outcomes for youth, including the sense of safety youth feel within the program, the extent to which they develop strong relationships with staff, the level of support they feel from the program, the sense of trust, initiative, and responsibility youth develop, and their opportunities for learning, leadership, and community involvement.

To the extent the intermediate outcomes are achieved successfully, longer-term outcomes are expected to follow. At the program level, longer-term outcomes examined in this evaluation include an enhanced capacity to serve adjudicated youth, additional resources leveraged to serve them, and strong partnerships that remain after Youth Offender grant funds have ended. For youth, longer-term outcomes of interest include attaining a GED or high school diploma, developing employability or job readiness skills, finding unsubsidized employment, entering post-secondary school, and avoiding recidivism while in or shortly after leaving the program.

## **Methods of Data Collection and Analysis**

The core of the evaluation is an implementation analysis drawn from two rounds of site visits to each of the 34 grantees receiving Youth Offender funding. In addition, administrative data collected by each of the sites and reported to YouthBuild USA were examined to summarize the characteristics of and outcomes obtained by YouthBuild participants in these 34 sites. These outcomes were then combined with the characteristics of the youth, the services they receive, and program design and implementation features to identify whether certain types of services or approaches are associated with better outcomes for participants. This section provides a brief overview of the data collection methods used in this evaluation.

### **Site Visits**

The site visits were intended to provide essential information on the design and implementation of services by the Youth Offender grantees. An initial round of visits was conducted to each of the 34 grantees in the spring of 2007. A second round of visits was conducted to 32 of these sites in the fall of the same year.<sup>1</sup>

There were several areas of focus during the initial site visits, including: (1) the YouthBuild model and how it varied across the sites; (2) the programs' efforts at designing and implementing the YouthBuild program for adjudicated youth; and, (3) the barriers and facilitators to implementation that were encountered. The initial visits consisted of four days of on-site data collection.<sup>2</sup> Approximately half the time on site (i.e., 2 days) was spent interviewing program

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<sup>1</sup> Two sites, (Albany, NY and St. Louis, MO) did not receive funding for PY 2007 and, thus, opted to shut down operations. As a result, there was no program to re-visit in the fall.

<sup>2</sup> The four days of on-site data collection were almost always divided between two site visitors. Thus, the typical site visit included two days of on-site data collection, with two visitors for each visit. One of these visitors focused her/his time interviewing program staff, administrators, and partners, while the remaining visitor interviewed and conducted focus groups with youth. In two sites, these two visitors conducted data collection on different days. Finally, in only one site (Springfield, MA) did a single site visitor spend a full four days on site, collecting data both from program staff and from youth.

and partner staff, while the remaining time on site was spent interviewing youth participants in the program. Specifically, in the initial visits, approximately two days were spent conducting interviews with a wide range of staff and administrators of the program, including:

- **YouthBuild program administrators and staff**, at all levels including the program director, teachers and worksite supervisors, and counselors to obtain a good understanding of how the program was developed, and how it was being administered and managed. These interviews solicited information on organizational and governance issues, including the implementation process of the Youth Offender grant and factors influencing the design and implementation of the program.
- **Grantee partners**, such as service providers and representatives from the construction trade working with the YouthBuild program.
- **Representatives from the justice system**, such as probation and parole officers, to understand how youth are referred to YouthBuild and to learn about other services youth may have received through the justice system.
- **Employers working with YouthBuild participants**. An important goal for YouthBuild is to connect youth with employment opportunities, including work in the construction trade. As such, employers that have worked with the program and its youth were interviewed to document their perspective on the quality of youth participants and their training.

Another important goal established for this evaluation was to document and publicize youth's voices and experiences in YouthBuild. To that end, as part of the initial round of site visits, individual interviews were conducted with more than 180 youth across the 34 sites, which represented approximately 75 percent of all youth offenders that were actively enrolled in the program at that time. These youth were selected purposively by the program for interviews; thus, they were not a random sample. In many cases, however, all of the youth who were currently being served under the Youth Offender grant were interviewed. The goal of these interviews was to understand how YouthBuild influences participants, the growth process that adjudicated youth go through as they engage with the program, and what participants see as the program's strengths and weaknesses.

A second round of site visits was conducted to each of the 32 sites still in operation. These visits were half as long as the original ones, such that each lasted approximately two days. The majority of the first day on site was spent conducting follow-up interviews with several of the staff and administrators interviewed during the initial visits. The focus of these follow-up discussions was to document efforts to sustain the programs after the cessation of DOL funding, explore in-depth the lessons learned about effective practices for serving adjudicated youth, and to collect consistent data on an array of grantee-level characteristics that could be coded for use in the quantitative analysis. The remaining time on site during the second round of site visits was

spent following up with a portion of the participants interviewed during the initial visits. Specifically, while as many as six participants were interviewed in the first round of visits, during the second round only four youth were asked to complete follow-up interviews. Because these youth typically had completed the program by the time of our follow-up interviews, there was some difficulty in reaching or successfully completing interviews with all 136 potential respondents. As a result, the final sample for which there are two rounds of completed interviews includes 97 youth. The follow-up interviews gathered youth's perspectives on their program participation at a point shortly after they left the program, and documented how youth participants view influences in their community, and their family and peer contexts, and what they believe are their prospects for future success.

## **Quantitative Data**

The second primary data collection and analysis effort for this evaluation was quantitative in nature. Specifically, administrative data were obtained from YouthBuild USA that included individual records for each of the youth who participated in the Youth Offender program. Using these data, the characteristics of the youth enrolled by the YouthBuild Youth Offender grantees, the services they receive and the outcomes they achieve during and subsequent to their program participation can each be examined. An initial extract of these data was obtained in April, 2007. Although this file included most of the relevant characteristics of all youth who participated in the Youth Offender program, there was relatively little in the way of services or outcomes information, in large part because many of the youth were still actively engaged in the program at that time. As a result, a second submission was obtained in December, 2007. These data included additional characteristics (most notably age) of the youth who participated in the DOL Youth Offender program, as well as additional service information, completion status, and other outcome data. These data are summarized in Chapter XI of this report, which examines how the outcomes obtained by youth—including educational achievements and employment outcomes—vary according to their different characteristics or the different services they receive.

## **Remainder of the Report**

The remainder of this report summarizes the results of analysis of both the qualitative and quantitative data and presents the key findings from this evaluation. Chapter II provides an overview of the 34 programs that received the Youth Offender grants, including a description of the grantees in terms of their overall budgets, the quality and tenure of their organizational leadership and staffing, and the number and intensity of the partnerships they established. Additionally, this chapter describes the general YouthBuild model and categorizes the Youth Offender grantees along a continuum in terms of their fidelity to this model.

Chapter III describes the recruitment, mental toughness orientation, and enrollment strategies employed by the Youth Offender grantees. This chapter provides an update from a similar chapter in the Interim Report, and examines the extent to which varying strategies are associated with differences in retention or outcomes among youth.

Chapter IV summarizes the educational activities and services among the grantees. Included in this chapter is a description of the various challenges grantees faced in providing educational services to youth, the assessment and service planning they included as part of the educational services, the subject matter and specific course offerings, and a summary of the teachers and methods used to provide educational training, and connections with and services geared toward post-secondary schooling opportunities.

Chapter V focuses on vocational training and services, including those centering on construction and also other industries. This chapter summarizes the various mechanisms by which vocational training activities are delivered, the range in their quality among the grantees, and the key characteristics in providing high-quality vocational instruction within YouthBuild.

Chapter VI summarizes the case management styles and strategies employed by the Youth Offender grantees, including how case management serves a key function in tying all the other services together. Further, this chapter discusses the role of supportive services, transition services that are provided as youth prepare to complete YouthBuild, and follow-up services that are provided after they leave the program.

Chapter VII highlights the key leadership and community service activities that are available to youth offenders, updating a similar chapter included in the Interim Report with data from the second round of site visits. Included in this chapter is a discussion of the key structures Youth Offender grantees have put in place to ensure youth receive opportunities to be leaders, and the major avenues by which youth in the program engage in community service activities.

Chapter VIII summarizes the key characteristics of youth, including all those who participated in the Youth Offender program, and especially those who were interviewed as part of this evaluation. In addition to summarizing the demographic characteristics of these youth, this chapter highlights the key factors that, according to the youth themselves, affected their participation in and success achieved during YouthBuild.

Chapter IX focuses heavily on the youth case studies, and uses a model of growth and development to describe the process by which youth move through the program and mature in their life outlook as a result. This chapter extends work described in the Interim Report, reveals that the vast majority of youth have advanced one or more stages in this model during their

participation in YouthBuild, and identifies the key structures grantees have put in place to support this growth.

Chapter X provides several case studies of youth and the outcomes they achieved while in or shortly after leaving the YouthBuild program. The chapter makes clear that not all youth achieve the outcomes they sought, though most believe the program was extremely useful to them.

Chapter XI relies primarily on the administrative data collected for this evaluation. The chapter first summarizes the data descriptively, and then examines whether various outcomes, including educational, workforce, and recidivism outcomes are associated with differences in participant characteristics, services received, or other grantee-level or contextual factors.

Finally, Chapter XII includes a summary of the key lessons learned from this evaluation. Additionally, this chapter identifies critical challenges that remain for YouthBuild to effectively serve youth offenders.

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## II. OVERVIEW OF YOUTHBUILD GRANTEES

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In this chapter, an overview of the YouthBuild grantees that received Youth Offender funding from YouthBuild USA and a summary of the YouthBuild model is provided to establish the context for grantees' program design and approach to serving youth offenders.

### The YouthBuild Model

The YouthBuild model includes a mix of education, construction-related training, counseling, leadership development, and community service for low-income, out-of-school youth ages 16-24. Most YouthBuild participants spend between eight to 12 months full-time receiving a variety of services, including some kind of assessment, a Mental Toughness Orientation, educational activities, vocational training, leadership training, counseling, support services, job placement, and follow-up services. These services are summarized broadly below, and in greater detail in subsequent chapters of this report.

- **Assessment.** Most grantees administer basic skills tests such as the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) to determine the level of assistance that is needed for youth to attain a diploma or GED. In addition, many grantees conduct one-on-one interviews with youth to collect information on participant goals and barriers, as well as conduct criminal background checks and test youth for drugs to determine youth's supportive service needs.
- **Mental Toughness Orientation (MTO).** These orientations typically last up to four weeks and are intended to help prepare youth for the rigors of the program by facilitating group bonding, helping youth to develop trust in staff, and emphasizing goal setting and overcoming obstacles. This orientation also provides an opportunity for grantees to assess each youth's readiness to participate fully in the program.
- **Educational Activities.** Participants must be offered educational services at least 50 percent of the time that they are in the program. The educational services provided can include basic skills instruction, remedial education, bilingual education, secondary alternative education leading to a high school diploma or GED, counseling or assistance in attaining post-secondary education and financial aid, and alternative secondary school services.

- **Construction Training.** Participants generally spend most of the remaining half of their time in the program in construction training--rehabilitating or building housing for low-income or homeless people. While YouthBuild seeks to expand the supply of “permanent affordable housing” through its construction work, most grantees renovate or build only a few units per year.
- **Leadership Development and Community Service.** Every YouthBuild grantee that is part of the YouthBuild USA Affiliated Network is required to have a policy committee of youth elected to represent their peers. These youth meet regularly with the staff to discuss all aspects of the program and make recommendations for policy decisions. For leadership training, most programs operate a participant-run “advisory council” that provides youth with opportunities for leadership development. Youth also participate in community service activities through organized volunteering opportunities at local organizations and/or engage in public speaking events to advocate for YouthBuild.
- **Counseling and Other Supportive Services.** YouthBuild grantees commonly provide counseling, support services, job placement, and follow-up services. Counseling and support services—either on-site or by referral—are usually available to youth to assist them in dealing with personal problems, mental health issues, substance abuse, pregnancy, violence, STD prevention, transportation to and from the site, childcare and housing. In addition, most YouthBuild grantees provide participants with a modest stipend for work at the construction site or subsidized work experience while in the program. Finally, most grantees also offer job development and placement services, including training in resume writing and interviewing. Programs that were funded in year one are required to follow up youth for three years after they leave the program. Students enrolled in programs that were funded in year three of the DOL grant received twelve months of follow-up services.

In addition to these broader requirements, programs are expected to follow performance standards that are critical to clarifying the underlying purposes of the program and identifying the key areas in which the YouthBuild program is expected to impact participants.

Previous research suggests that fidelity to the YouthBuild model is an important aspect of the YouthBuild program.<sup>1</sup> For example, Ferguson et. al. found that grantees that consistently follow the YouthBuild model generally achieve more positive program outcomes than those that do not. This assumption was examined using the available elements of the YouthBuild model that could be measured and quantified. There are a total of 14 program elements to the YouthBuild model. These include: Service to Community, Skills Training, Education, Career Development and Postsecondary Education, Personal Counseling and Development, Leadership Development,

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<sup>1</sup> See YouthBuild in Developmental Perspective. A Formative Evaluation of the YouthBuild Demonstration Project. Ferguson, Ronald F.; Clay, Philip L.; Snipes, Jason C.; Roaf, Phoebe. September 1996.

Cultural and Recreational Activities, Wages and Incentives, Length of Program, Program Implementation, Management and Governance, Record Keeping, Community Leadership, and Collaboration with YouthBuild USA.<sup>2</sup> The site visit data available for this evaluation could only systematically document seven out of the 14 program elements. These seven elements include: skills training, education, career development and postsecondary education, personal counseling and development, leadership development, wages and incentives, and length of program. In general, the qualitative data suggests that grantees varied in their ability to remain faithful to the seven elements of the YouthBuild model that we examined. Overall, these data suggested that all grantees followed the YouthBuild model reasonably closely. Grantees' ability to adhere to the YouthBuild model consistently was influenced by a variety of factors, including their organizational capacity, (i.e. budget size/resources and the length of time that grantees had operated YouthBuild.) In general, grantees with large annual budgets of at least \$2 million appear to follow the model more consistently than those with smaller budgets because the larger grantees could readily provide an in-depth range of services with some degree of consistency and intensity. The extent to which fidelity to these program elements influences youth outcomes was also examined. Although there was little evidence available in these data to suggest that fidelity to the YouthBuild model was associated with youth outcomes, this analysis is constrained in three major ways. First, because nearly all the grantees followed the model quite closely, there was relatively little variation in their fidelity. This necessarily constrains any statistical analysis of this concept, making it less likely to find a significant relationship even if one exists. Second, data were only available for all grantees for seven of the fourteen program elements. As a result, there is substantial measurement error in these data, which also limits the ability to detect statistical relationships. Finally, the fact that only 33 grantees were included in the analysis substantially constrains the ability to detect relationships among the variables. Indeed, typically 30 cases are considered a minimum for using multivariate analysis. Given the restricted variation and the measurement error, this small number of cases makes the lack of any observed relationship between fidelity to the YouthBuild model and youth outcomes inconclusive at best.

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<sup>2</sup> In addition to these fourteen program elements, YouthBuild USA has also developed a list of sixteen program qualities that grantees should include to distinguish it from prior institutions in which YouthBuild participants have typically found little success. The qualities include respect for the intelligence of youth, power for them over their immediate environment, protection from disaster, on-going demonstration of deep caring for participants' well-being, and others. These qualities, however, are very difficult to measure consistently across grantees. As a result, we could not compare grantees on these qualities, nor examine their relationship to outcomes in any meaningful way.

## Program Budget

The grantees were classified based on the size of each organization’s overall budget and of its staff. This classification is a useful way to organize the grantees in their overall capacity to serve youth offenders and provides a frame of reference for understanding how receipt of the DOL grant may have affected this capacity. For this chapter, grantees are organized into the following categories:

- Small organizations are those with total annual budgets of \$1 million or less<sup>3</sup>. In total, 16 sites fall into this category.
- Medium-sized organizations have annual budgets of between \$1 and \$2 million. Eleven sites fall into this category.
- Large organizations have annual budgets of \$2 million or more. Six sites fall into this category.

Exhibit II-1 provides a detailed summary of grantees’ budgets in PY 2006-2007. As shown in this exhibit, Youth Offender grantees vary widely in their budget and staff sizes. In PY 2006-7, grantees’ budgets ranged from \$228,000 to \$4,160,900, with an overall average budget size of \$1,105, 254.

**Exhibit II-1:  
Grantees’ Budget and Number of Staff Members**

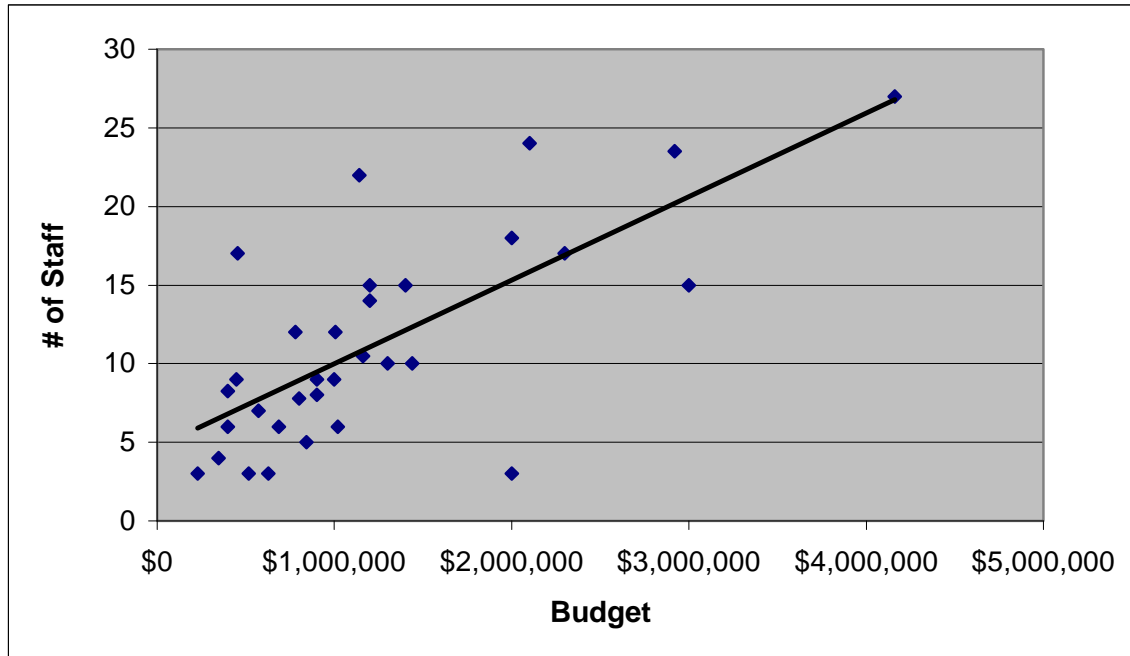
| <b>Budget</b>          | <b># of Sites</b> | <b># of Staff</b> | <b># of Sites</b> |
|------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Less than 500K         | 6 (18%)           | Less than 5       | 6 (21%)           |
| 500,000 to 999,999     | 10 (30%)          | 5-9               | 11 (33%)          |
| 1,000,000 to 1,999,999 | 11 (33%)          | 10-14             | 5 (15%)           |
| 2,000,000 and above    | 6 (18%)           | 15-19             | 6 (18%)           |
|                        |                   | 20 and above      | 4 (12%)           |

*Note: Data include 33 grantees for which budget data were available. Two sites closed during the second round of visits, but budget data were obtained for one of these two sites.*

Exhibit II-2 demonstrates that, not surprisingly, staff size tends to be fairly closely related to the size of the overall budget. Additionally, this exhibit shows that about half of the grantees had budgets ranging from \$500,000 to \$1 million and had fewer than 10 full-time staff members.

<sup>3</sup> Budget numbers reflect Program Year 2006-2007 in 33 sites for which budget data are available. Two sites closed during the second round of visits, but budget data were obtained for one of these two sites.

**Exhibit II-2:  
Grantees' PY 2006-2007 Budget and Size of Staff**



Grantees reported that the Youth Offender grant represented an important and significant portion of their overall program budget, which is given support by the data in Exhibit II-3. For approximately half the grantees, the Youth Offender grant made up between ten and thirty percent of their annual budget.

**Exhibit II-3:  
DOL Grant as a Percentage of Annual Program Budget (PY 2006)**

| <b>DOL Grant as Percent of Budget</b> | <b>Number of sites</b> | <b>Percent of Grantees</b> |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|
| 0-10%                                 | 10                     | 31.3%                      |
| 10-30%                                | 17                     | 53.1%                      |
| 30-50%                                | 4                      | 12.5%                      |
| 50-100%                               | 1                      | 3.1%                       |

Grantees noted that Youth Offender funds not only augmented their overall program budget, but also added value to their services. For instance, many programs noted that they were able to enroll more youth than usual, and in some cases hire additional staff, including case managers and instructors because of the Youth Offender funds. These funds also enabled sites to provide more intensive supportive services, including paying youth stipends, helping youth get their drivers' license, clearing their offense record, and paying for temporary housing. At LA

CAUSA (Los Angeles, CA) the Youth Offender grant enabled the program to pay for a student's motel cost for a few nights when she temporarily became homeless. In addition, a number of sites paid for youths' unpaid or outstanding parking tickets so that they could obtain their driver's licenses.

Approximately a third of the sites were able to leverage additional grants and in-kind resources as a direct result of the DOL grant. Because they had demonstrated experience serving youth offenders, sites were able to gain additional support from a diverse range of funders, such as local and state Departments of Corrections, DOL, Americorps, YouthBuild USA, and foundations, among others. Further, a number of sites were able to maintain the in-kind resources that partners contributed, including equipment and staff support, beyond the cessation of the DOL grant. For example, YouthBuild in Honolulu has a partnership with the Honolulu Public Housing Authority to provide construction worksites and staff support to oversee and instruct YouthBuild students. This partnership and the in-kind resources it includes will continue after the DOL Youth Offender funds have been exhausted.

**Exhibit II-4:  
Examples of Leveraged Funds and Support**

- **YouthBuild Fresno (Fresno, CA):** received an additional \$50,000 from DOL to provide training in cable networking and \$60,000 to start a youth offender program "inside the walls" of detention centers.
- **Portland West YouthBuild (Portland, ME):** received \$300,000 in funding from the Juvenile Division of the Maine Department of Corrections to serve youth offenders ages 16-20 under the department's supervision.
- **CCEO YouthBuild (Gardena, CA):** partnered with the South Bay Workforce Investment Board on a couple of grant opportunities, including a pilot employment and training project that is in development.
- **Pathways YouthBuild (Petersburg, VA):** received funding from the Cameron Foundation and Philip Morris to secure a new building for the YouthBuild program.

Sites also provided feedback on the adequacy of the DOL grant to effectively serve youth offenders. Nineteen sites (56%) noted that this grant was adequate because it enabled them to serve more youth, hire additional staff, and provide sufficient youth stipends. In general, the sites that felt that the DOL grant was adequate were those that were either part of a large sponsoring agency or have an annual budget of at least \$1 million.

On the contrary, 15 sites (44%) reported that the DOL grant was insufficient to effectively address the wide range of challenges that youth offenders face. Program staff noted that, because youth offenders typically face serious barriers to employment (e.g. substance abuse, basic skills deficiency, homelessness), they require intensive supportive services that are often

beyond the scope of the grant. For instance, most of the youth offenders have been arrested for drug-related charges and require ongoing substance abuse counseling “to kick the habit.” While some programs are able to successfully enroll youth in substance abuse treatment programs, others have been less successful in supporting those youth that are unable to overcome their substance abuse challenges. Further, the DOL grant requires that programs provide follow-up services. Nearly all grantees, even those that noted that the overall grant was adequate, reported that follow-up services require “extra” funding that is beyond what is available through the grant.

The grantees that relied heavily on the Youth Offender grant (i.e. those sites for which the grant represented more than a third of their budget) were struggling to develop concrete plans for sustainability. Most were dependent upon a grant renewal for the general YouthBuild program in PY 2007 to sustain their programs. When many of them did not receive this grant, (19/34 sites, or 56 percent) they had to make significant adjustments to their programs, including reducing supportive services, staff development opportunities or staff size, decreasing student enrollment, and in some cases, ceasing YouthBuild program operation. Two sites ended their operations and several others that were still in operation during the second site visit were planning to shut down after learning that they did not receive a YouthBuild grant for PY 2007 from DOL. On the other hand, roughly three-fourths of the sites that did not receive additional DOL funding managed to sustain their YouthBuild program through new or additional grants from a variety of public and private sources or leveraged funds from their sponsoring agencies to pay youth stipends and staff salaries.

## **Staffing and Leadership**

In addition to program budgets, another key characteristic in which grantees vary is the stability and quality of the staff and leadership. Dimensions of staff stability included the various programs’ leadership tenures and staff turnover. To examine the quality of staff, youth interview data were analyzed to identify the key features of staffing that they reported to be particularly effective or ineffective.

### **Leadership Tenure**

Because some programs may have multiple leaders, included in this analysis is the tenure of all core leaders, such as Executive Directors or Program Directors, who provide direct oversight of the YouthBuild program. Most of the grantee leaders have extensive experience operating YouthBuild or managing youth programs. For example, 24 sites (73 percent) have leaders who have been at YouthBuild for more than two years. Leaders within these sites, many of whom founded the program in their area, typically have established relationships with other agencies

and secured YouthBuild’s position in the community. In contrast, nine sites have leaders who have worked at YouthBuild for two years or less. While many of these leaders seem to have adequate experience managing programs and working with youth, some admitted that they are “learning the ropes” and adjusting to the requirements of the program. As one newly hired director said, “I came in cold as a manager and it was important for me to hit the ground running.”

## **Staff Turnover**

The YouthBuild programs are often challenged by high staff turnover. Twenty-one sites (62 percent) reported that staff turnover is a significant organizational challenge. There are several reasons for the high staff turnover. Chief among these reasons is unstable funding. YouthBuild programs often need to shift their staffing arrangements because of funding changes. As indicated earlier in this chapter, many sites that did not receive grants from DOL for PY 2007 cut their staffing. For example, the CCEO YouthBuild (Gardena, CA) laid off two case managers and an office manager when it did not receive additional DOL funding. As a result, the program is operating with lean staff and many staff are serving multiple functions to ensure that youth get the services they need. Since about half of the programs (54 percent) have fewer than 10 staff members to operate their programs, changes in staffing can seriously affect programming and service delivery.

## **Staff Quality**

*At YouthBuild, everybody takes the time to help us get a new perception of what we can do. The big strength is that [the staff] won’t give up on you – no matter what.*

Research shows that youths’ success in programs depends largely on their ability to connect with staff.<sup>4</sup> As indicated in the Interim Report for this evaluation, there are a number of staff qualities and program practices that facilitate positive relationships with youth. At the grantee level, programs that hire staff with backgrounds similar to youth make it easier for staff to bond with youth and secure their trust than those that do not. For this reason, a number of programs make an effort to hire former YouthBuild participants as staff members because their shared

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<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Pittman, K. J. and M. Irby, M. 1996. Preventing Problems or Promoting Development: Competing Priorities or Inseparable Goals? Available online at: (<http://www.iyfnet.org/document.cfm/22/general/51>) Gambone, M. A., and J. A. Arbreton. (1997). *Safe Havens: The Contributions of Youth Organizations to Healthy Adolescent Development*. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures/ Connell, J. P., M. A. Gambone, and T. J. Smith. 2000. “Youth Development in Community Settings: Challenges to Our Field and Our Approach.” pp. 281-300 in *Youth Development: Issues, Challenges and Directions*. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures.



backgrounds and experiences promote trust and friendship with the youth. YouthBuild programs also try to maintain low youth-to-staff ratios. In many sites, there are typically two instructors in each academic classroom to support no more than 10 to 12 youth with different learning needs. Programs also encourage staff to check in with youth frequently to identify and address potential problems that youth may be facing. Staff check in with youth if they appear sad or tired and make time to talk to them about what is bothering them. Youth overwhelmingly reported that such frequent check-ins demonstrated staffs' attentiveness to their feelings and the life challenges they face.

In addition to these specific program practices, youth reported a number of qualities within individual staff that they appreciated. For example, youth noted that staff acted like their family. Youth rely on staff for unconditional support that typically comes from a parent. Similarly, staff often go beyond the call of duty to do whatever it takes to support youth, including taking them to doctor's appointments, giving them a ride to school, accompanying them to court, and helping them get their drivers' license. Staff also typically make themselves available around the clock, giving youth their phone numbers and taking calls late at night. At Fresno YouthBuild (Fresno, CA) case managers report that they always know youths' whereabouts and life circumstances and can locate them if they do not show up for school or work. In addition, staff provide individualized attention in the classrooms, using teaching strategies that are effective for individual youth and closely monitoring their progress. Youth appreciate that staff respect them and treat them like adults by listening to them and guiding them to make the right decisions, rather than telling them what to do. Because of these staff qualities, youth reported that the staff members represent an important strength of the YouthBuild program. As one youth said,

*I have a whole different view in life. I didn't like anything, anybody. I didn't know where I was going. [The staff] helps you realize that life can be better. They mentor you on things about life. They help you try to find out what you want to do, what you like to do in the future. Being on the streets doing dumb things isn't going to get you anywhere. Now I am in school, get money, I have some decent living. This gives you a whole different view.*

While the vast majority of youth indicated that they had trusting relationships with staff, there are exceptions. Some youth felt that staff could be too intrusive ("getting into your business") at times. In some cases, youth perceived staff as lecturing to them rather than listening and respecting youths' ability to solve their own problems. At several sites, youth felt that not all youth were treated equally, but instead staff selected "favorites" who received better treatment.

Lastly, most of the staff working at YouthBuild have years of experience working with vulnerable youth. Many have worked previously at other youth programs and alternative schools

and understood the various needs of youth offenders. Across the sites, staff seemed devoted to their jobs and cared deeply about the youth at YouthBuild. As a testament to this, staff worked long hours to help youth solve their personal problems or crises. These staff characteristics proved to be important in connecting with youth and earning their trust.

## Relationship to Sponsoring Agency

The majority of grantees (21 sites or 61 percent) are part of large sponsoring agencies. As noted in the Interim Report, these grantees are able to draw on a wide range of resources and partners to enhance services for youth. Being part of a large organization can also shield programs from the uncertainties of funding streams because programs can usually draw on resources available through the sponsoring agency. For example, the San Gabriel Valley Conservation Corps has a number of funding sources available to support its academic and vocational training program. When the program did not receive DOL funding in PY 2007-2008, it was able to leverage instructors and counselors funded from its charter school to continue to provide services to youth.

Grantees that are part of a larger sponsoring organization—local and regional non-profits, city agencies, community housing development organizations, charter schools—used the resources of the broader organization in a variety of ways, including to:

- *Enrich the services provided through the DOL grant, through shared use of organizational resources*, including access to other funds or in-kind contributions. Grantees were able to access other funding sources to enhance services, including additional supportive services.
- *Recruit youth for the YouthBuild program*. Grantees that are part of sponsoring agencies can recruit youth to YouthBuild from an existing pool of applicants that are interested in receiving youth services, because many of the agencies are also multi-service agencies with access to a wide array of youth resources.
- *Train or employ YouthBuild participants*. Grantees that are part of a sponsoring agency are able to provide additional training opportunities available through the parent organization.
- *Access counseling/case management and other social services to support youth offenders with multiple barriers*. Large, multi-service sponsoring agencies often have access to internal supportive services, or can broker community resources to address their youths' employment barriers.
- *Source of administrative support—particularly for the “business functions” of the organization*. Grantees often rely on their parent organization as a source of support for payroll functions, banking and bookkeeping, cost allocation and personnel management. Although these types of services do not directly enhance

the delivery of services, they have, at least in some cases, freed up the grantee to focus more intensively on the provision of quality services.

Exhibit II-5 provides examples of how grantees leveraged resources from their sponsoring agencies to enhance services to youth.

**Exhibit II-5:  
Examples of How YouthBuild Grantees Used Resources of Sponsoring Agency**

- **YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School (Philadelphia, PA):** All the students at this charter school are YouthBuild participants. As a result, YouthBuild participants benefit from a range of services available through this charter school and through DOL funds.
- **MAAC Project YouthBuild (San Diego, CA):** MAAC, which has an annual budget of \$13-\$15 million, operates the north county's Head Start program, and owns and manages approximately 1,000 low-income housing units in San Diego County. The organization also operates a charter school that has access to a daycare center and a DUI alcohol program, which are available to YouthBuild participants. Since this grantee was not refunded in 2007-2008, MAAC has provided continued financial support to the YouthBuild program, helping to fill the gaps in grant funds and to provide upfront funding for training related supplies and materials.
- **Isles YouthBuild (Trenton, NJ):** YouthBuild participants can enroll in a variety of extra training activities through this grantee's sponsoring agency, including a course offering an industry-recognized certificate of basic computer literacy and an advertising and marketing class.
- **West Columbus YouthBuild (Columbus, OH):** Through its network of community partners, YouthBuild youth have access to mentoring services, substance abuse counseling, and referrals to housing resources.
- **CCEO YouthBuild (Gardena, CA) and North Richmond YouthBuild (Richmond, CA):** YouthBuild staff noted that they appreciate that the sponsoring agency maintains the books/finances and oversees many of the construction projects.

In a few cases, however, being part of the sponsoring agency appeared to be an impediment to service design and delivery. One grantee, for example, noted that because its parent organization is a large bureaucracy, it was sometimes difficult to launch its entrepreneurial business model.

Conversely, approximately one third (13 sites or 38 percent) of grantees are independent entities. Eleven out of thirteen of these sites have annual budgets of at least \$1 million. Thus, while many independent organizations may receive relatively small amounts of Youth Offender funding, some of them have been able to leverage additional resources to augment their services through their network of internal and community resources. For example, LA CAUSA is a well-known community-based organization that has developed a number of local partnerships that provide internships, community service activities, and supportive services. However, other small, independent organizations have not been as successful in leveraging community resources because they have not developed strong community partnerships.

## Intensity of Partnerships

In this section, the range of formal relationships that grantees have developed with several key partners is described, including those with:

- *Juvenile justice representatives*, including parole and probation officers and courts. A number of sites also partnered with other youth offender programs located inside detention centers or juvenile halls.
- *Workforce development systems*, including One-Stop centers, local Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs), and Youth Councils.
- *Supportive service providers*, including mental health providers and housing agencies.
- *Educational providers*, including traditional and alternative high schools, post-secondary institutions, and Adult Education providers.
- *Construction partners*, including local housing authorities, Habitat for Humanity, private contractors/construction firms, and community development agencies.

As indicated in the Interim Report, partnerships with these entities ranged in depth and intensity. For this analysis, the partnerships are characterized along a continuum—high, medium, and low levels of intensity—to differentiate both the quality and depth of partnerships. These levels of intensity are defined in Exhibit II-6.

### Exhibit II-6: Partnership Continuum

This scale—divided into high, medium, and low—refers to the overall intensity of the partnerships that the grantees have developed in several different areas.

- **High intensity partnership:** Partners may provide resources such as staffing, facility, or grants to YouthBuild. Partners' roles are clearly defined and they communicate with the YouthBuild grantee frequently and consistently.
- **Medium intensity partnership:** Partners have semi-formal linkages, share few or no financial resources, but *may* provide in-kind services, such as facility space and staffing. Partners typically refer youth applicants to YouthBuild.
- **Low intensity partnership:** Partnership with YouthBuild is informal. Partners generally have limited decision-making roles, engage in informal communication, have loosely defined roles and responsibilities, and typically do not share resources. YouthBuild may occasionally get client referrals from partners.

In this section, a rating for each type of partner is provided using the definitions described in Exhibit II-6. Several factors were included in rating the intensity of the partnerships, including whether the partnership was based on a contractual relationship, how long the partnership has been in place, and the extent to which partnerships continued as DOL Youth Offender funds were coming to an end. For instance, partnerships that share resources, whether through formal

contracts or informal exchanges typically received a “high” rating. Partnerships that appeared strong in the first round of visits but subsequently weakened by the second site visit likely received a “medium” or “low” rating depending on the strength of that particular partnership during the second site visit.

Across the grantees, some high intensity partnerships were developed with juvenile justice, workforce development, education, and construction partners. There is wide variation within sites, however, in the strength of their relationships with different types of partners. For instance, grantees with strong relationships with one type of partner (such as juvenile justice) do not always have equally strong relationships with other types of partners (such as education and/or construction partners). Several factors account for differences within individual grantees in the intensity across the types of partnerships. Some grantees have decided to focus on certain partners because of their organizational mission or history and program design. For example, one grantee has historically reached out to gang members and youth offenders for its YouthBuild program by working closely with a number of youth detention centers in the area. This program is very successful in working with juvenile justice partners because of these previously established relationships. This same grantee has not been successful in linking with the workforce system however, because it does not have this longstanding relationship with the local workforce system. Further, other grantees with strong education partners may not have strong construction partners, perhaps because of their focus on educational outcomes. These grantees have intentionally focused their efforts on linking with community colleges or local high schools to help youth achieve their educational goals.

**Exhibit II-7:  
Intensity of Partnerships**

|                    | <b># of Grantees<br/>(Percentage)<br/>High</b> | <b># of Grantees<br/>(Percentage)<br/>Medium</b> | <b># of Grantees<br/>(Percentage)<br/>Low</b> |
|--------------------|--|--|---|
| Juvenile Justice   | 17 (52%)                                       | 11 (33%)   | 5 (15%)                                       |
| Workforce          | 15 (47%)                                       | 11 (34%)   | 6 (19%)                                       |
| Supportive Service | 9 (28%)  | 18 (56%)   | 5 (16%)                                       |
| Education          | 20 (60%)                                       | 9 (28%)  | 4 (12%)                                       |
| Construction       | 18 (56%)                                       | 7 (22%)  | 7 (22%)                                       |

Exhibit II-7 displays the ratings of the intensity of the partnerships across different types of partners. Based on this assessment, grantees have been fairly successful in developing strong partnerships with an array of partners. These partnerships are described below.

## Juvenile Justice Partnerships

### *“High” Intensity Juvenile Justice Partnerships*

Site visit data show that approximately 53 percent of grantees developed strong partnerships with juvenile justice systems, including parole/probation officers and the court system. These partnerships typically included at least one of the following elements: well-coordinated case management procedures before and after youth are released from confinement, strong referral mechanisms, convenient access to substance abuse counselors from the juvenile justice system, and frequent communication between YouthBuild and juvenile justice representatives. For example, grantees with strong juvenile justice partnerships typically recruit youth from detention centers and, in some cases, provide case management and other pre-release services prior to enrolling them in YouthBuild. These pre-release services may include counseling and working with families to help youth transition to the community. Once youth are released, YouthBuild staff are responsible for coordinating with parole officers to monitor youths’ progress.

#### **Exhibit II-8: Examples of Strong Partnerships with Juvenile Justice System**

- At the **Mississippi Delta YouthBuild (Hollandale, MS)** program, the Youth Court Judge refers youth to YouthBuild in lieu of jail time. In turn, YouthBuild staff monitor youths’ progress and provide daily attendance updates to court staff.
- **YouthBuild Fresno (Fresno, CA)**. Case managers at YouthBuild tailor services around youths’ probation conditions. For instance, if youth need to report to court on a “work day,” staff make special arrangements to provide transportation and adjust class schedules accordingly.
- **CSC YouthBuild (Lebanon, OR)** gets frequent referrals from parole officers. YouthBuild staff are notified when a youth has been referred by the juvenile justice system. To expedite the enrollment process, justice partners conduct background checks for YouthBuild. Once youth are enrolled, YouthBuild and justice staff conduct ongoing “co-case management” or “co-problem solving.”
- **YouthBuild Delta (Tallulah, LA)**: YouthBuild developed a partnership with a local youth offender program that refers youth to YouthBuild, pays for a portion of the mental toughness training, and provides transportation for YouthBuild youth to and from their residential facilities.

Grantees that have successfully collaborated with juvenile justice systems typically have ample staff and financial resources to facilitate these partnerships. These grantees usually have pre-existing contracts with justice agencies and have developed a formal infrastructure to support these partnerships, including staffing and effective communication mechanisms, and were able to mobilize their resources quickly and efficiently to develop and manage their partnerships. For example, in Fresno, there is a separate Incarcerated Youth Program that supports youth as they transition out of correctional facilities. Through this grant, the program has hired a gang

specialist who not only works with youth offenders but also is responsible for coordinating with pre-release institutions and parole officers.

The extent to which strong partnerships with the juvenile justice system affect recidivism was examined. Although a variety of factors could affect recidivism, such as the local community and its history of youth and gang violence, as well as the individual characteristics of youth in the program, the qualitative data show that, in general, there is no relationship between the strength of the partnership and youths' recidivism outcomes. Several sites with high intensity juvenile justice partnerships have some of the highest rates of recidivism among the Youth Offender grantees. For example, several of these sites (El Monte, Bogalusa, Brownsville, St. Louis, Mississippi Delta) had recidivism rates in excess of 30 percent. Often, sites with high intensity juvenile justice partnerships serve a particularly high population of youth offenders and are required to work closely with parole or probation officers to help youth transition into the community. Based on the high recidivism data among these sites, such high intensity partnerships do not appear to reduce recidivism substantially on their own.<sup>5</sup>

#### ***“Medium” Intensity Juvenile Justice Partnerships***

The 34 percent of sites that were rated as having “medium” intensity partnerships with juvenile justice were generally effective in getting referrals from parole or probation officers but these relationships were informal and inconsistent from one staff person to the next. In general, these sites developed relationships with parole officers *after* they received the DOL grant in order to get referrals and facilitate information sharing with probation/parole officers. Staff typically visited detention centers or “camps” to introduce themselves to juvenile justice representatives and make presentations to youth prior to their release. In return, YouthBuild staff coordinate with juvenile justice agencies to provide information about youths' progress (attendance, drug test results) to ensure that they are meeting the conditions of their parole. For example, one grantee has a partnership with a program within a correctional facility that allows YouthBuild case managers to begin working with youth prior to their release. However, the staffs' relationship with parole officers has been strained because staff claim that parole officers “are always looking for ways to put youth back in jail” without giving them a chance to reform themselves. Such complications typically have created barriers to smooth-functioning partnerships in those sites described as having “medium” intensity partnership with juvenile justice agencies.

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<sup>5</sup> Note that the 30 percent recidivism rate among the YouthBuild grantees is about average compared to the national average, which ranges between 21.5 to 44.1 percent annually, depending on how recidivism is measured. See "Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 1994." (2002). Patrick Langan and David Levin. Bureau of Justice Statistics: Washington D.C.

### ***“Low” Intensity Juvenile Justice Partnerships***

Sixteen percent of the grantees received a “low” rating for their partnerships with juvenile justice agencies. Sites that received this rating have only informal and sporadic relationships with juvenile justice representatives and share limited information about youths’ progress while they are enrolled. Communication with parole officers may include brief updates on youths’ attendance and drug test results without follow-up plans to help youth achieve their educational and employment goals. As noted above, sites often partner with juvenile justice agencies to receive referrals to YouthBuild; several of the “low partnership” sites choose not to partner with juvenile justice agencies because they did not need such referrals to fill their programs. It is important to note that these sites continue to serve youth offenders even though they do not coordinate closely with juvenile justice partners.

### **Workforce Partnerships**

In the Interim Report, a preliminary analysis of grantees’ partnerships with the workforce system was discussed and revealed that a number of YouthBuild grantees were struggling to connect to the local workforce development system. Many sites indicated that the One-Stop system was unwelcoming to YouthBuild participants because services were geared towards “professional” adult customers. As a result, these YouthBuild programs relied on their own staff to provide the services that are available through the One-Stop system, including job readiness training, job placement, and career counseling. The second round of site visits allowed for deeper probing about sites’ linkages with the local Workforce Investment Board, the local Youth Council, and the local One-Stop centers. Grantee staff spoke in more detail about their relationship with specific providers within the workforce system and identified linkages that were not documented systematically in the first site visit. Thus, data collected during the second site visit revealed that many sites have indeed, developed various levels of linkages with the workforce system, and these linkages are highlighted in this section.

### ***“High” Intensity Workforce Partnerships***

Nearly half (47 percent) of the grantees received a “high” rating for their partnerships with workforce development systems. These partnerships typically included arrangements with the local One-Stop center to share resources and/or participate on the local Workforce Investment Board and local Youth Council. For example, grantees with strong linkages with the local workforce system made use of One-Stop resources to help youth find jobs, receive training in job readiness skills, receive youth referrals from One-Stop centers, and co-enroll youth in Workforce Investment Act (WIA) programs. Staff have also made use of labor market information available through the One-Stop center and received in-service training at the local One-Stop centers. One YouthBuild grantee contracted with the local One-Stop center to provide training



in work readiness, basic skills, and life skills. Exhibit II-9 provides more details about these linkages.

**Exhibit II-9:  
Examples of Strong Partnerships with Workforce Systems**

**YouthBuild Fresno (Fresno, CA)** is a large regional organization that houses a number of services, including workforce development services. Prior to enrolling in YouthBuild, youth are required to co-enroll in the sponsoring agency's One-Stop center for six weeks to prepare for employment and vocational classes. During this time, youth get help with developing their resumes, work on their interviewing skills, and learn how to conduct job searches.

**LA CAUSA YouthBuild (Los Angeles, CA)** partnered with the local One-Stop center, WorkSource Center, which co-enrolled youth in its services. This partnership was strong in the first year of the DOL grant because WorkSource had funding to out-station a staff person at LA CAUSA, who conducted weekly trainings in job readiness and job search, and followed up with participants for one year. Even though WorkSource staff are no longer out-stationed at LA CAUSA, program staff have taken youth to WorkSource to attend resume writing workshops.

**YouthBuild Boston, Inc. (YBB)** has a contract with the City of Boston to receive WIA funding for eligible youth in its programs. Several YouthBuild participants have been funded by the WIA youth program. Because of this WIA connection, YBB inputs relevant information on these WIA youth into the state's workforce development MIS. In addition, as part of the life skills class, all YouthBuild participants are required to visit the local One-Stop center to sign up with the state's electronic job matching system.

**Youth Action Program and Homes (New York, NY).** The local One-Stop center, the Upper Manhattan Workforce1 Career Center, coordinates with YouthBuild to identify and assess potential candidates for YouthBuild, refer qualified candidates for enrollment, provide access to "wrap around" supportive services, provide local labor market information to YouthBuild staff and participants, and connect qualified YouthBuild graduates to employers. YouthBuild graduates are encouraged to use the resources available through the Center, including the job search resource room, the Career Advisor, and workshops (computer literacy, resume development, networking, and job fairs).

Several factors influenced these grantees' ability to partner successfully with the local workforce system. First, if the sponsoring agency of which the grantee is a part has received WIA funding to provide youth services in-house, the grantee had much better connections to workforce systems in general. While this is not true in all sites with strong workforce partnerships, having WIA funding appeared to be an important facilitator in linking YouthBuild grantees with the local workforce system. In addition, these sites often have a history of collaboration with the workforce system and their partnership was a natural continuation of their previously established relationship. Lastly, grantees that are large, multi-service organizations have an advantage in developing strong workforce partnerships because they have ample staffing and financial resources to facilitate these partnerships.

Among sites with strong workforce partnerships, most placed at least 40 percent of their youth in unsubsidized employment, but these results are not appreciably better than those achieved by grantees with far less intensive connections to workforce agencies.

### ***“Medium” Intensity Workforce Partnerships***

Thirty-four percent of grantees received a “medium” rating for their partnerships with workforce development systems. These YouthBuild grantees link with the One-Stop system in a number of less intensive ways, including getting youth referrals from One-Stop centers, participating on the local Workforce Investment Board, making informal arrangements for youth to visit the One-Stop center, or participate in training activities available through the One-Stop center, such as resume writing workshops, computer classes, or employability workshops. Grantees are rated as having “medium” intensity partnerships because these linkages occur irregularly and inconsistently. Thus, programs often found it difficult to sustain these linkages when there is a change of staff at YouthBuild or at the local One-Stop center.

### ***“Low” Intensity Workforce Partnership***

The grantees that have fairly weak partnerships with the workforce system (19%) included those that may have developed linkages with the workforce system in the past but have chosen not to continue those relationships for various reasons. For instance, several grantees noted that it was difficult to partner with a system that seemed to prefer to work with its own network of employment and training providers. Moreover, youth who were referred to the One-Stop centers felt that they were treated poorly by One-Stop center staff because of their offender status and age. Furthermore, several YouthBuild grantees noted that their program model is not conducive to partnering with One-Stop centers. One grantee, for example, noted that the local One-Stop center has strict income eligibility requirements that make it difficult for YouthBuild youth to enroll in the WIA youth program. Further, the requirement that youth provide documentation to prove income eligibility (e.g. parents’ income or other income tax information) discourages many youth from seeking services at the local One-Stop center. Further, the YouthBuild program structure limits its ability to coordinate with the workforce system because youth are typically at a worksite four days a week. Thus, if youth need to attend workshops or training at the One-Stop center, their work schedule often will not allow for it.

Lastly, other grantees preferred not to refer youth to One-Stop centers because they felt that the youth offender population requires intensive case management that the One-Stop center would not be able to adequately provide.

## Supportive Service Partnerships

The intensity of grantees' partnerships with two types of supportive service providers, mental health/substance abuse counseling and housing assistance, was also examined. These two types of supportive services were examined because staff noted that they were the most in need among the youth offenders. Findings suggest that grantees typically have strong partnerships with either mental health/substance abuse providers *or* housing providers, but not necessarily with both. As a result, partnerships with providers of these supportive services were examined separately and rated based on their success in linking with either mental health service providers *or* housing support.

### ***“High” Intensity Supportive Service Partnerships***

Approximately one-fourth of sites (28%) developed strong partnerships with supportive service providers. Most of these grantees relied on partnerships with community agencies for both mental health and housing assistance. As a testament to this, virtually all of the grantees with strong partnerships indicated that they are familiar with community agencies to which they can refer clients for housing assistance or drug counseling, screening, and substance abuse treatment.

Grantees reported that substance abuse was a major challenge faced by the youth offenders. To identify those youth that may need substance abuse counseling, 42 percent of grantees reported that they conduct a drug test before youth are enrolled. The remaining sites either do not test youth for drugs or test them only once they are enrolled. Youth who test positive are not usually turned away from the program; they are referred for counseling either before enrollment or during enrollment, depending on the condition of their parole. While services provided by partners are generally free of charge, some grantees were required to pay a nominal fee for substance abuse counseling. Once youth are enrolled in a substance abuse program, some grantees had developed informal tracking procedures and exchange-of-information agreements with the treatment agency to stay abreast of when a client was ready to come back to YouthBuild.

Several grantees have access to staff or consultants that can provide expert counseling in-house. Several grantees secured mental health counselors from local colleges and universities to provide on-site group and individual counseling. For example, in at least two YouthBuild programs (W. Virginia and N. Richmond), staff from a community health organization visit the program once a week to provide on-site counseling. In St. Louis, the YouthBuild program partnered with the Black Alcohol/Drug Information Center to provide in-kind outpatient and 30-day drug treatment for youth who test positive.

In contrast, linkages with housing providers were difficult to achieve for most grantees because there were few affordable housing resources available to meet the needs of YouthBuild participants. Staff noted that even if these housing resources were available, they were likely to have long waiting lists, and it could take years for youth to get into affordable housing units. Despite this common challenge, several grantees were able to develop strong linkages with housing assistance providers to help youth offenders transition into the community. For example, the YouthBuild grantees in Lebanon, OR and Bogalusa, LA were able to link youth to agencies offering temporary or affordable housing. In Bogalusa, the YouthBuild grantee has a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Bogalusa Housing Authority to provide temporary, free housing for homeless youth. In Lebanon, the Housing Authority has a special, six-month assistance program that is available for free to YouthBuild participants. This program was able to leverage housing resources because the housing partner is part of the same umbrella organization in which YouthBuild operates.

### ***“Medium and Low” Intensity Supportive Service Partnerships***

Most grantees struggled to develop strong relationships with housing and substance abuse providers for a variety of reasons. Staff at many grantees reported that there are few high quality resources available in their areas. Thus, 56 percent of grantees received a “medium” intensity partnership rating and 16 percent received a “low” intensity rating. In general, partnerships in these categories included informal referrals to mental health providers with limited follow-through. Grantees noted that, because housing is a scarce commodity, it was difficult to find agencies that offer temporary or affordable housing to youth on a consistent basis.

## **Education Partnerships**

As indicated in the Interim Report, YouthBuild developed partnerships with a variety of partners to provide a range of educational services. Approximately half of the grantees (42 percent) rely on partners to provide educational services. Nine grantees (27 percent) reported that their partners provide high school diploma classes off-site; an additional five grantees (15 percent) reported that their partners provide GED prep classes off-site. There are several types of education partners that provide these services, including local public schools, alternative schools, and post-secondary institutions. The intensity of these partnerships depended on two key factors: grantees’ educational emphasis, including GED, high school diploma, or post-secondary education, and the presence of internal partners within the sponsoring agency. Grantees that provide educational services in-house tend to rely less heavily on their partners to deliver educational services. Below the variations in the partnerships that the grantees developed to provide educational services are described.

### ***“High” Intensity Educational Partnerships***

Many grantees (60%) have developed strong partnerships with various agencies to provide educational services, though these linkages have taken several different forms. For instance,

- A number of grantees have arrangements with local high schools to allow YouthBuild participants to receive credit towards their high school diploma through independent study while enrolled in YouthBuild.
- Local educational providers or sponsoring agencies provide a number of resources to help youth obtain their GED, including providing an instructor free of charge and payment towards educational testing. Additionally, several partners provide on-site GED testing to accommodate youths’ schedules.
- In a few sites, local community colleges reserve slots for YouthBuild participants after they graduate from YouthBuild. For example, in Brockton, MA, the local community college reserves several slots for YouthBuild participants who are the first individual in their family to attend college.
- At least two grantees have established arrangements with local colleges to allow YouthBuild students to receive college credit for courses taken at YouthBuild.
- Local colleges provide on-site workshops on financial aid and college enrollment and registration.
- YouthBuild participants co-enroll in a local alternative school to complete classes towards a high school diploma.

Not surprisingly, grantees with strong educational partnerships include those that also operate charter schools or are closely connected with charter schools through their sponsoring agencies. These grantees leveraged a number of valuable resources from their charter school affiliations, including the use of instructors funded by their charter school funds, guidance and counseling services, and a pre-existing educational curriculum. For example, the YouthBuild grantee in San Diego (MAAC) is able to leverage a teacher from its adult school to teach two periods of GED classes per day to YouthBuild participants. In addition, grantees that received an Americorps grant were more likely to have developed strong linkages with educational partners than those that did not receive the grant. With Americorps funding, grantees leveraged Americorps volunteers and hired staff to coordinate partnerships with post-secondary institutions.

**Exhibit II-10:  
Examples of Strong Educational Partnerships**

- **Bi-Cap YouthBuild (Bemidji, MN)** does not provide educational services in-house but has partnered with Northwest Technical College to allow YouthBuild participants to get college credit for two construction courses that students complete while in YouthBuild.
- **YouthBuild Newark (Newark, NJ)** has partnered with Essex Community College to provide on-site testing, enrollment, registration, and assistance in qualifying for financial aid. The college has also developed a special curriculum for students who need to “catch up” on their basic skills.
- **YouthBuild Fresno, (Fresno, CA)** has partnered with the school district to allow YouthBuild participants to pursue their GED and diploma through independent study. After getting their GED or diploma, youth are enrolled in an adult school for 30 hours in a pre-employment class to hone their job search and computer literacy skills.
- **LA CAUSA YouthBuild (Los Angeles, CA)** has a partnership with Los Angeles Trade Technical College, which allows YouthBuild staff to teach college-level classes at the program site. Students enrolled in selected classes at LA CAUSA receive college credit towards their AA degree.

To understand the potential impact that the depth of partnerships may have on program outcomes, youths’ GED and diploma attainment rates, as reported in the MIS, were compared across grantees with varying levels of educational partnerships. The data show that, while strong educational partnerships can yield valuable resources for the grantees (i.e. in-kind support, visibility and credibility within the community), they may not always produce equally strong educational outcomes in the short term. As such, grantees with strong partnerships reported that they invest in educational partnerships in order to provide youth with wrap-around services in the hopes that, while youth may not immediately achieve their educational goals in the short term, in the long-term, those youth will eventually achieve them.

***“Medium and Low” Intensity Educational Partnerships***

The remaining 40 percent of the grantees received either a “medium” (28 percent) or “low” (12 percent) rating for their educational partnerships. Grantees with a “medium” rating have informal arrangements with community colleges or local schools to help youth access financial aid, arrange for teachers to teach GED prep classes, or refer youth to YouthBuild. Some of these grantees may also operate a charter school on site but are unable to leverage the wide array of resources as do those in the “high” partnership category.

## **Construction Partnerships**

***“High” Intensity Construction Partnerships***

Grantees developed partnerships with a wide range of construction partners, including Habitat for Humanity, local housing authorities, community development corporations (CDCs), private

construction firms, and various non-profit or public sector entities. Depending on the depth of the partnership, the partners may provide land/construction sites and materials to YouthBuild and/or assign worksite supervisors to oversee youths' work. Similar to other types of partnerships described above, many of the grantees (56 percent) developed strong relationships with construction partners. For example, grantees worked with partners to help youth enter apprenticeship programs, coordinated with the local housing authority to obtain donated land for YouthBuild to construct new homes, and communicated with partners about the training needs of youth, including issues of safety.

**Exhibit II-11:  
Examples of Strong Construction Partnerships**

**CCEO YouthBuild (Gardena, CA).** Habitat for Humanity is one of the few partners with which the Gardena YouthBuild grantee has a formal memorandum of understanding (MOU) in place. The YouthBuild program manager has weekly meetings with Habitat, and has worked to resolve many logistical and educational issues with them (e.g., providing toilets for youth at the jobsite; ensuring that the vocational education provides basic training necessary for the job). The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) local union is another important construction partner. IBEW provides free Hazardous Materials (HazMat) and OSHA training leading to certification for YouthBuild Gardena participants. Other trade unions also sponsor job fairs that YouthBuild participants attend.

**YouthBuild Honolulu (Honolulu, HI).** The construction component of YouthBuild is provided through a MOU with Honolulu Public Housing Authority (HPHA). HPHA provides the work sites (public housing units to be rehabbed) and one or two staff to oversee and loosely instruct youth, and YouthBuild provides youth work experience through construction training. The program also has a strong relationship with the construction unions, including the Hawaii Laborers Training Program (a necessity in this strong union state), which guarantees the program four slots per month into their unpaid apprenticeship program.

**YouthBuild McLean County (Bloomington, IL).** YB Bloomington has a very strong partnership with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Mutual Self-Help Housing Loan program for rural affordable housing. USDA provides housing improvement loans for low-income families, who pledge to perform at least half of the construction labor on their homes under YB staff supervision. YB program participants provide the remainder of the construction labor with the assistance of volunteers. Although USDA is the fiscal agent, YB is in charge of most aspects of the program including selecting the families, purchasing the land to develop, and counseling families on house design.

**YouthBuild Boston (Boston, MA).** The Boston YouthBuild program has developed a partnership with the regional carpenter's union and its Apprenticeship Training Center. Union apprentices receiving training from the union's vocational training facility also work as mentors to YB youth on certain YouthBuild construction projects. This relationship has also made it much easier for YBB graduates to join the union, as time spent working on YBB construction projects is counted by the union as pre-apprenticeship hours.

In some cases, grantees with strong construction partners were able to control their own worksites because partners donated land or housing units for YouthBuild to rehabilitate. For

example, Brockton YouthBuild (Brockton, MA) partnered with the Brockton Housing Authority to obtain empty lots from the city for a nominal cost. The housing authority develops the lots and secures the necessary building permits before donating the land to YouthBuild to construct single-family homes.

### ***“Medium and Low” Intensity Construction Partnerships***

The partnerships among the “medium” and “low” intensity grantees are informal and inconsistent from site to site. While some grantees may have developed a partnership with Habitat for Humanity or a construction contractor, for example, the relationship usually involves a one-time service exchange, such as providing lead abatement training to students, or helping YouthBuild acquire a construction site. However, because these links are typically one-time only, the partnerships often are not sustainable once the specific project ends. Some of the weak partnerships also involve specific construction contracts that YouthBuild won to complete construction-related jobs, such as renovating public buildings or housing units. Since the projects are based on the needs of the contractor or the project itself, these YouthBuild grantees usually do not have a structured training curriculum to follow. Thus, youth learn what they can as they complete the specific tasks for the job.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, the Youth Offender grantees are very diverse, with organizational features, experience, and resources that vary widely among them. In many cases, grantees were able to draw on their previous experience serving youth offenders and organizational resources to enhance services, expand opportunities for youth, or provide additional administrative support to their programs. Grantees also varied in their organizational maturity—most are well established in their communities and have solid staff tenure and leadership. To some degree, these characteristics have facilitated partnership building, and grantees have involved partners to varying degrees in the design and operation of their programs. Many grantees reached out to partners to play active roles in educational, vocational and job readiness training and to provide supportive services. In some of these cases, grantees were able to build on the partnerships they had developed previously to enhance their work with youth offenders.

Many grantees received strong ratings for their partnerships with several different types of partners, such as juvenile justice, education, construction, and workforce development agencies. Grantees were less successful in linking with supportive service partners in part because many of them relied on their own network of internal resources available through their sponsoring agencies and because services were generally not plentiful. Grantees’ ability to successfully link with partners also depended on a variety of factors, including their program design,



organizational maturity, and financial resources. For example, grantees that focused on educational achievement made an effort to link with educational providers, including adult education, community colleges, and local high schools. Additionally, grantees with long histories in the community tend to have some strong partners because they have had time to nurture their relationships with select partners. Lastly, partnership development was influenced by grantees' staffing and resource structure. In general, grantees with ample staffing and resources were able to dedicate time and energy to link with partners because they had an infrastructure in place to facilitate such partnerships. Despite these strong linkages, however, the strength and intensity of the partnerships are generally unrelated to the outcomes achieved by youth participants.

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## III. RECRUITMENT, ASSESSMENT, AND ENROLLMENT

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This chapter summarizes the recruitment and enrollment procedures used by the Youth Offender grantees. Building on the findings from the Interim Report, this chapter provides details about program policies and practices that may affect enrollment and outcomes.

### Recruitment and Assessment

The Youth Offender grantees have established comprehensive strategies to recruit and assess youth to ensure that youth are a good “fit” for the YouthBuild program. As indicated in the Interim Report, most grantees do not engage in active recruitment efforts because the demand for YouthBuild is generally higher than the number of available slots. This section of the report focuses on the specific recruitment practices that may affect program retention and outcomes. After recruitment practices are summarized to provide a context for how youth enter the programs, grantees’ assessment, enrollment, and orientation procedures are summarized.

### Recruitment

As mentioned in the Interim Report, grantees used several recruitment methods to reach youth applicants. Chief among these are word of mouth referrals from former students (67 percent of grantees) and referrals from other community agencies (64 percent). Because of these strong referral mechanisms, few grantees pay for advertisements to attract youth. In fact, 88 percent of the grantees reported that they *do not* advertise their programs because they are well known in the community. The intensity of recruitment activities varies widely across grantees, depending on the demand for YouthBuild and how well established the program is in a particular community. Grantees that have been in communities for a long time typically engage in limited recruitment because they receive ample referrals for their programs. As shown in Exhibit III-1, approximately one-third of the grantees (39 percent) have been in the community for over 20 years. These grantees rely primarily on word-of-mouth referrals to fill their programs. On the other hand, grantees that are less well established, such as those that have been in the community for fewer than five years, needed to actively recruit youth offenders because they were less well known in the community than the better-established grantees.

**Exhibit III-1:  
Length of Time in Community**

|                   | <u># of Grantees</u> | <u>Percent</u> |
|-------------------|----------------------|----------------|
| Less than 5 years | 2                    | 6%             |
| 5-10 years        | 7                    | 21%            |
| 11-19 years       | 9                    | 27%            |
| 20-30 years       | 7                    | 21%            |
| Over 30 years     | 6                    | 18%            |

The extent to which recruitment practices were affected by changes in DOL funding between the first and the second round of site visits was examined. As mentioned in Chapter II, 56 percent of grantees did not receive additional DOL funding for PY 07, meaning that, by the time of the second visit, many grantees no longer were receiving any DOL funding. These grantees scaled back their recruitment activities significantly to reflect the reduced number of youth that they could accommodate. For example, the YouthBuild grantee in Lebanon, OR (Community Services Consortium, CSC) did not recruit additional youth after it learned that it did not receive additional DOL funds. Grantees that received additional YouthBuild funding (44 percent) did not appear to modify their recruitment strategies between the first and second rounds of site visits.

As a general strategy, most grantees over-recruited two to three times the number of youth that they needed to ensure that they had a strong pool of applicants from which to choose. Over-recruiting youth ensures that grantees can “weed out” youth who they feel are not committed to or would not benefit from the program.

**Exhibit III-2:  
Number of Youth Recruited and Enrolled Each Cycle**

| <u>Range of Youth Recruited Per Cycle</u> | <u>Number of Grantees</u> | <u>Range in # of Youth Enrolled per Cycle</u> | <u>Percent of Recruits Enrolled (Average)</u> | <u>Percent of Grantees</u> |
|---|---------------------------|---|---|----------------------------|
| Under 25                                  | 4                         | 13-20   |   | 12%                        |
| 25-49                                     | 11                        | 5-49  | 59%   | 33%                        |
| 50-74                                     | 6                         | 22-70   |   | 18%                        |
| 75-99                                     | 3                         | 8-35  | 56%   | 9%                         |
| 100 and above                             | 8                         | 12-188  | 29%   | 24%                        |

*Note: Data were collecting during Round 2 grantee visits. Two grantees ceased operations prior to collecting the data.*

In general, the more youth that programs recruit, the more likely that these programs will be able to select youth who best meet their enrollment criteria. Thus, having a large pool of youth from

which to choose (and long waiting lists) enables programs to be selective in whom they enroll. As shown in Exhibit III-2, on average, most grantees enroll approximately half of the youth that they recruit. Grantees that recruit 100 or more youth are extremely selective, because they enroll only about a quarter (29 percent) of the youth that they recruit. For example, the Philadelphia YouthBuild program receives approximately 900 to 1000 applications a year and staff select 600 to 700 students to interview. Roughly 300 students are then selected to attend the Mental Toughness Orientation and approximately 200 enroll in the program, meaning as little as twenty percent of youth recruited for the program are enrolled into it.

## **Assessment**

As indicated in the Interim Report, there are several ways in which grantees assess youth to determine whether they are suitable for YouthBuild. Grantees typically conduct a preliminary assessment to screen youth for key attributes that they are seeking, including maturity, commitment, and readiness for change. For this preliminary assessment, youth are required to submit an application, conduct an interview with program staff, complete a basic skills assessment, and at some grantees, take a drug test.

### ***Program Application***

As the first step in the preliminary assessment, all grantees require youth to complete a program application that asks for their education and work experience, family situation, offense history, and basic demographic information, such as age, and in some cases, supportive service needs and career goals. Based on this information, staff determine if youth will receive further assessment. Once the application is complete, youth are interviewed by staff to determine their readiness for YouthBuild. This initial interview allows staff to assess youth's communication skills, attitude, motivation, and leadership potential.

### ***Basic Skills Assessment***

The majority of grantees (88 percent) also test youth's basic skills before they are enrolled in the program. Test results are used in a variety of ways. Many grantees use the results to "screen out" youth that do not meet the minimum reading and math requirements. As mentioned in the Interim Report, a number of grantees target youth that have a minimum reading and math level ranging from the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, with the majority of grantees targeting youth who have approximately a sixth grade reading level. Grantees noted that establishing academic level targets ensures that youth can perform the basic functions required at the worksite and in the classroom. In addition, test results help staff determine the appropriate type of educational services that youth will need, including basic skills remediation or high school diploma courses.

## ***Drug Testing***

As part of the initial assessment process, nearly half of the grantees (42 percent) require youth to take a drug test before they are enrolled. There are three main reasons why grantees require youth to do this. First, program staff and probation officers feel they need to determine youth's baseline drug use so that they can monitor youth's progress in this area while they are in the program. This also allows program staff to inform probation officers whether youth's drug use has changed since enrolling in the program. Second, grantees test youth for drugs to document their supportive service needs so that staff can refer youth to substance abuse counseling either before or during enrollment. Third, a few grantees test youth for drugs to either screen out youth or postpone their enrollment until they receive treatment. This policy assures that youth that need treatment have access to the support they need before they are enrolled in the program. For example, the Mississippi Delta YouthBuild grantee in Hollandale, MS uses drug test results as one of the ways to "rate" youth's applications. In addition to their drug tests, youth are rated on other criteria, including their attitude and motivation. Applicants are given a score for each area in which they are rated, and youth with the highest scores are selected to enroll in the program.

Fifty-eight percent of the grantees test youth for drug use after they are enrolled in the program, though here, too, there are different ways in which programs conduct such tests. Some have established a designated schedule to test youth (i.e. every two weeks, once a month) to coincide with when they need to report youth's drug test results to parole or probation officers. Other grantees test youth randomly to enforce their strict, "zero tolerance" policies on drug use while youth are in the program. Grantees also vary in how they address youth's positive drug results. In general, most grantees refer youth for drug treatment and/or provide incentives for youth to address their drug problem. Below are examples of the different strategies that grantees use to address youth that have positive drug test results.

- *The YouthBuild grantee in Bogalusa, LA*, randomly tests youth for drugs after they are enrolled in the program. If a youth's drug test shows up positive, she is immediately referred for treatment, counseling, and substance abuse classes, and her stipend is held until a negative test.
- *YouthBuild YMCA, Flushing, NY*. This grantee operates a "drug free" program and drug use is not tolerated while participants are in the program. To enforce this policy, random drug testing is conducted. If a participant's test is "dirty," the student receives a warning and is tested again in 30 days, or sometimes sooner, and often without warning. If results again are positive, the youth is put on probation and required to attend an outpatient drug program. Participants can be terminated from the program if they fail to attend an outpatient drug program as required.
- *YouthBuild Brockton, Brockton, MA*. This grantee has implemented a "three strikes rule" on drug use. The first failed drug test leads to a removal from group

activities and youth are required to meet with a case manager about their drug problems. A second failed test means that youth receive a warning that they will be required to get help if they fail the test again. A third failed test means that youth are required to receive substance abuse counseling outside the program or they may be terminated from YouthBuild.

- ***Chula Vista YouthBuild, San Diego, CA.*** Youth are drug tested regularly (once every two weeks.) They get a \$20 bonus if they are drug free. Staff make an effort to work with youth on their drug issues, rather than to adopt a strict “zero tolerance” policy. Youth describe well-defined expectations/strict boundaries coupled with opportunities for a redemptive “second chance” in those cases in which youth have a setback. One student said, “This job isn’t like other jobs because they give you another chance.” However, if youth continually test positive for drugs, they can be terminated from the program if they fail to seek treatment.

In addition to these initial assessment activities, highly selective grantees conduct additional assessments to further determine if youth would be a good “fit” for YouthBuild. This assessment typically includes a second round of staff interviews and a job-related skills test. All youth are also observed during the Mental Toughness Orientation, described below.

## **Mental Toughness Orientation**

*To get into YouthBuild, you have to be mentally tough. It’s stressful. You had to watch that you weren’t slouching after sitting for a long period of time. It’s stressful, because you don’t want to be doing anything that you could get kicked out of the program for. I didn’t talk with nobody too much. My squad leader was commenting, ‘You pretty quiet.’...He told me one day, ‘You going to have participate in class or I’m going to kick you out.’*

The Mental Toughness Orientation (MTO) is a critical component of the assessment process. According to the YouthBuild model, all youth are required to attend an intensive orientation before enrollment to test their ability to thrive in the program. Thus, the purpose of the MTO is to observe and assess youth behavior, skills, teamwork, and ability to follow directions in a setting that most resembles the YouthBuild program. MTO was also established to inculcate a strong sense of discipline for youth that needed to change their behavior in order to succeed in YouthBuild. As such, 88 percent of the grantees (30 out of 34) do not officially enroll youth in YouthBuild until after they complete MTO. Because MTO is considered an “audition,” most grantees do not provide youth stipends during MTO. Five grantees are an exception to this rule, as they pay youth stipends during MTO as an incentive for youth to remain in the program. By paying youth at the outset, these five grantees felt that they could promote youth retention and attachment to the program so that they do not drop out later on.

As shown in Exhibit III-3, the duration of MTO varies significantly across grantees. In general, the duration of MTO ranges from less than one week to more than four weeks. The average duration of MTO is approximately 2.7 weeks.

**Exhibit III-3:  
Mental Toughness Duration**

|                                     | <u>Number of Grantees</u> | <u>Percent</u> |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------|
| Less than one week                  | 2                         | 6%             |
| 1 to 2 weeks                        | 13                        | 39%            |
| 3 to 4 weeks                        | 12                        | 36%            |
| More than 4 weeks                   | 2                         | 6%             |
| Missing data (i.e. duration varies) | 4                         |                |

Most frequently MTO lasts one to two weeks (39 percent) or three to four weeks (36 percent). During MTO, youth engage in a number of activities to test their ability to work in a team or structured environment. For instance, youth may engage in community building activities, such as a ropes course, as well as educational activities, construction work, and community service. Rules include the need to arrive on time, follow directions, or work effectively in a team setting. Thus, the longer youth attend MTO, the more likely it is that staff can screen them rigorously before enrollment. Those youth that make it to the end of MTO generally are enrolled because they have demonstrated a commitment to following program rules and a reasonable likelihood of succeeding in YouthBuild. Youth spoke at length about their experiences in MTO, including the grantees' strict tardy policies. For example:

*I really wanted to be accepted into the program and didn't want to be late for any of the meetings. I would always try to get here early and would run to school so I wouldn't be late. If you're late for one second, the doors would close and you're out of the program because there were so many people. When I made it, I cried.*

*Mental toughness was hard because I was afraid I wouldn't make it. For breaks I wouldn't leave the class because I was afraid I would come back late and be kicked out of the program.*

Despite the rigorous assessment process during MTO, there is no clear relationship between the duration of MTO and youth retention. The twelve grantees (36 percent) that enroll youth in



MTO for three to four weeks have retention rates ranging from 64 to 96 percent.<sup>1</sup> The grantees with both shorter *and* longer periods of MTO (less than two weeks or more than four weeks) have a similarly wide range of retention rates. For instance, grantees with MTO lasting one to two weeks have retention rates ranging from 40 to 96 percent. Thus, the relationship between the length of MTO and retention is unclear from these descriptive data. Retention data are examined using more rigorous methods as part of a multivariate analysis in Chapter XI. Additionally, Chapter VIII highlights other factors that appear to affect youth retention in the program.

**Case Study Profile**  
**Eileen: Demonstrating Commitment to YouthBuild**

Eileen found out about YouthBuild through her husband, who was supposed to be enrolled in the program. Her husband was referred to YouthBuild by the public assistance office and he asked her to apply with him. Before he started MTO, he got a job and missed a day of MTO. As a result, he didn't get accepted into the program, but Eileen did. She said she was really glad that she got into the program because it was so hard to prove to the staff that she was committed to getting her GED.

*Mental toughness is just showing how you're gonna get in there. And by that you gotta let them know how bad you want this. They have to see it physically. They have to know it. They have to see it that you are carrying it mentally and emotionally with you. That you really really want this...*

Eileen had to write a short paper on her life experience and read it to the class (a group of 100+ students) during MTO. She also had to complete a number of group projects and work with people she wouldn't normally talk to. As she said, "They worked us SO hard!"

## Enrollment

Grantees have implemented a broad range of enrollment policies to reflect their program design and model. Grantees' decisions about how frequently to enroll youth depended on several factors, including their typical dropout rate, the demand for services, and the program design. Grantees that experience a high dropout rate in the middle of a program cycle try to replace those youth mid- program cycle in order to meet their enrollment targets. Grantees with a high demand for the YouthBuild program usually enroll youth year-round because they want to maximize their ability to serve as many youth as possible. Lastly, grantees with a strong educational focus that followed the traditional school curriculum typically enrolled youth once per year so that youth have a structured sequence of learning activities that mirrors an academic

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<sup>1</sup> We calculated the youth retention rate based on the number of youth that completed the program. These percentages are from the fourth quarter of 2004 to the fourth quarter of 2007.

calendar. Exhibit III-4 summarizes the number of times per year that grantees typically enroll youth.

**Exhibit III-4:  
Enrollment Periods Per Year, as of Second Grantee Visit**

|                        | <b>Number of<br/>Grantees</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------|
| Year-Round, Open-Entry | 17                            | 52%            |
| Once per year          | 10                            | 30%            |
| Several cycles         | 6                             | 18%            |

During the first site visit, the majority of grantees (65 percent) reported enrolling youth once per year, following the traditional school calendar. This approach benefited programs because it allowed them to follow a structured schedule and curriculum to ensure that youth were learning the full range of topics. The disadvantage, however, was that youth who applied to YouthBuild after the enrollment date had to wait until the next enrollment cycle, which could be as long as nine to 10 months away. Enrolling youth once a year also made it difficult to reach youth offenders who may have been eligible for YouthBuild because of the limited window of opportunity to enroll in the program. As shown in Exhibit III-5, however, as of the second grantee visit only approximately one-third of grantees enroll youth once per year. Thus approximately half of these grantees shifted between the two rounds of grantee visits from a one-time enrollment process to a year-round, open-entry one. These grantees reported modifying their enrollment policies to be able to reach more youth and to replace youth that have dropped out of the program. This way, programs were able to meet their enrollment goals by keeping their programs full.

**Exhibit III-5:  
Example of Open Enrollment**

***Gardena YouthBuild, Gardena, CA.*** Between the two rounds of site visits, this grantee implemented a “rolling enrollment” policy to reach as many youth as possible. Participants can now enter the program at any point during the year. If youth meet the age requirements and pass a staff-screening interview, they can start in the pre-YouthBuild program and go through a two-week “probationary period.” If successful, youth can move “downstairs” to the YouthBuild program.

***Mississippi Delta YouthBuild, (Hollandale, MS)*** In PY 2007, for the first time, the grantee had begun to replace dropouts. In previous years, the grantee only admitted participants as a cohort at the beginning of the year and never replaced those who dropped out. The grantee is replacing dropouts mid-year in order to maximize the number of youth that the program could serve. The current expectation is that those youth who enter the program mid-year will be allowed to return the following year to continue where they left off. Since this is the first year using this new enrollment policy, the grantee is testing how well it will work.

It is feasible that the different enrollment policies may affect youth retention in the program. For instance, grantees that enroll once per year or in designated cycles tend to focus on developing a strong cohort of youth that work together throughout the duration of the program. Through these teams or cohorts, youth may bond with their peers and staff. In some programs, this approach promotes a positive program climate because it reduces youth conflict and creates a culture of respect and friendship. Youth from these grantees enjoy meeting and bonding with new peer groups, especially given that some of the youth may be from rival gangs or different social networks. For example, one youth said,

*I meet new friends every time [a new group] comes in. It's better for me because I'll have new friends to hang out with when I get out of here [YouthBuild], instead of going back to my old friends that are doing the illegal stuff. And I don't want to get back involved with that.*

On the other hand, grantees that enroll youth mid-program cycle noted that new youth needed time to acclimate to the YouthBuild culture and adjust to new peer groups. Grantees also needed to tailor their services to youth so that those entering late could “catch up” with others or work independently to earn their GED or high school diploma. The qualitative data concerning enrollment policies show no clear association between enrollment policies and youth retention rates, though this will be examined as part of the multivariate analysis described in Chapter XI.

## **Conclusion**

Grantees rely on a wide range of methods to recruit, assess, and enroll youth. Their approaches are influenced by a number of factors, including funding levels, the number of slots available, and the design of the program. The majority of grantees have developed highly selective screening procedures to ensure that they identify the most committed and dedicated youth. These procedures include applications, staff interviews, staff observations, basic skills testing, and in some grantees, a drug screening before youth are enrolled in the program. Youth are also required to attend a Mental Toughness Orientation (MTO) to test their ability to thrive in a YouthBuild environment. In most cases, if youth do not perform well in MTO, they will drop out or else not be enrolled. Staff noted that there are a variety of reasons why they have developed rigorous procedures to screen youth. Many grantees struggle to maintain good attendance, mitigate or control substance abuse, and address youth's personal problems that arise from non-supportive family environments. If youth miss school or do not show up at the worksite, it impedes the ability of work crews to do their job. Further, if youth do not attend school, there is no reimbursement through the educational system for those grantees that rely on funding from average daily attendance rates. For these and other reasons, grantees feel a strong need to be highly selective in whom they enroll.

Grantees' selectivity was assessed based on the duration of the MTO. Specifically it was assumed that the longer the MTO session, the more selective the program. In general, MTO lasts from less than one week to more than four weeks. The qualitative data reveal that, despite this wide variation in the duration of MTO, there is little difference in youth's retention or program outcomes. Thus, while some programs choose to enroll youth in MTO longer than others to assess their readiness for YouthBuild, there is little evidence that this practice affects retention and program outcomes in the short term.

Lastly, many grantees modified their enrollment policy between the first and the second round of visits in order to keep their programs full. During the first grantee visit, more than half of the grantees enrolled youth in cohorts once per year so that youth could be exposed to a structured sequence of educational and construction activities. Because many youth dropped out in the middle of the program year, grantees needed to replace them in order to meet their enrollment goals. Enrolling youth mid- program cycle appeared to have affected the climate at a few grantees, which noted that it was disruptive to other students and staff were required to tailor services to new youth. Because of changes in funding and a desire to achieve enrollment rate targets, by the time of the second grantee visits, many grantees had switched from a one-time enrollment policy to a year-round, open-entry policy.

## IV. EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

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*I feel 100 percent different about school. I feel so much better . . . I feel excited to be able to answer questions, it feels good. I have changed a lot. I feel better about life.*

### Introduction

YouthBuild participants must be offered educational services at least fifty percent of the time that they are enrolled in the program.<sup>1</sup> While the schedule, content, and format of these activities can vary dramatically across program grantees, certain themes recur. First, YouthBuild educational activities cover a much broader range of areas than those typically addressed by traditional high schools—in part to foster personal as well as academic development, as well as to address individual barriers that may impede success in the classroom. Second, because a great number of YouthBuild participants face significant personal and academic challenges—ranging from homelessness to dyslexia—instructors must often use a much more diverse set of teaching methods and tools to effectively reach and consistently engage youth.

In the Interim Report for this evaluation, the discussion of educational services was broadly concerned with understanding how the structure and practices of YouthBuild’s educational component are tailored to meet the needs of its participants. In particular, the chapter focused on youth’s educational backgrounds and analyzed three key education elements—basic skills attainment, postsecondary education activities, and life-skills training—with the particular goal of uncovering practices that facilitate success for YouthBuild participants. This chapter delves deeper into what constitutes education services within the YouthBuild Youth Offender grantees, and how they vary in terms of structure and methods, as well as in terms of youth perceptions. This chapter begins with a summary of key educational program characteristics across grantees and a review of the key challenges faced by participants in YouthBuild. Next, assessment and service planning are discussed, as are the specific courses offered (including life skills and postsecondary offerings), before fully analyzing the most critical education components of all—

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<sup>1</sup> According to YouthBuild Program Design and Performance Standards.

instructors and their teaching methods. The chapter ends with a discussion of the education outcomes of youth served by the Youth Offender grants and the key lessons learned with regard to delivering effective educational services at YouthBuild.

## **Educational Services at a Glance<sup>2</sup>**

Broadly speaking, YouthBuild program grantees must offer an education program that strengthens basic skills and leads to a GED, high school diploma (HSD), college or advanced technical training. The education program must also be offered in conjunction with life skills training.<sup>3</sup> Exhibit IV-1 provides a snapshot of the YouthBuild grantees' key education characteristics, and displays the various levels of emphasis that grantees place on different components. For example, nearly 82 percent of grantees offer a GED preparatory curriculum, while just over half offer high school diploma classes, and 36 percent offer both options. While *all* grantees seek to strengthen the basic reading, writing and math skills of youth, the majority of grantees stressed GED attainment as the end goal, though others—especially those grantees served by charter schools (27 percent)—emphasized a high school diploma and/or college preparation. Key reasons for stressing a GED over a HSD include a fundamental shortage of credits and time. Many youth simply have too few high school credits and too little time in the YouthBuild program—particularly if they face financial pressures and family obligations—to reasonably expect to achieve a high school diploma, though some youth see a diploma as key to their other goals. As one youth observed:

*I need that title [diploma] to be successful. . . Before YouthBuild, I didn't take school seriously. I've always been good with my hands, but employers won't give that a second look without a diploma.*

Along these lines, one grantee noted that one of their prime motivations for emphasizing a HSD over a GED was that unions were more likely to allow high school graduates.

As shown in Exhibit IV-1, three-quarters of grantees have between one and three classroom teachers. Nearly one in five grantees had only one classroom teacher,<sup>4</sup> while nearly sixty percent

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<sup>2</sup> Percentages reported in this section are calculated after excluding any missing/invalid data. The total number of grantees has been reduced to 33 (from 34) because one site closed down between site visits. A second site had also closed down before the second round of site visits, but staff from that site agreed to provide information on the program over the phone.

<sup>3</sup> The education program must also be offered in conjunction with counseling, vocational education and leadership development. These last three areas are covered in other report chapters.

<sup>4</sup> One site had no teachers at the time of our second site visit, due to an uncertain funding situation.

had two or three such teachers. Approximately one in four grantees had four or more classroom teachers.

**Exhibit IV-1:  
Education at a Glance**

|  | <b>Number</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|--|---------------|----------------|
| <b>Educational Offerings and Structure</b>                         |               |                |
| Grantees that offer a GED prep curriculum                          | 27            | 81.8           |
| Grantees that offer High School Diploma classes                    | 18            | 54.5           |
| Grantees that offer both GED and HSD classes                       | 12            | 36.4           |
| Charter school grantees <sup>5</sup>                               | 9             | 27.3           |
| Grantees that are Americorps grantees                              | 23            | 69.7           |
| <b>Teachers and Scheduling</b>                                     |               |                |
| Grantees with 1-3 classroom teachers (excluding aides)             | 25            | 75.8           |
| Grantees with 4 or more classroom teachers (excluding aides)       | 8             | 24.2           |
| Grantees with daily education time or alternating days             | 9             | 29.0           |
| Grantees with weekly education schedule (one week on/one week off) | 17            | 54.8           |
| <b>Pre-enrollment Information</b>                                  |               |                |
| Grantees that require a basic skills test before enrollment        | 29            | 87.9           |
| Mean age of youth on entry   | 19.1          | ---            |
| Students with a high school diploma at enrollment                  |               | 5.6            |
| Students with GED at enrollment                                    |               | 3.5            |
| <b>Life Skills Scheduling</b>                                      |               |                |
| Grantees that offer life skills 0-5 hours per week                 | 16            | 53.4           |
| Grantees that offer life skills 6-10 hours per week                | 7             | 23.3           |

With regard to schedule, nearly 30 percent offer education services either daily (i.e., for some portion of the day), or else for a certain number of days within a one-week period. However, more common was the one week on/off schedule of education alternating with work site activities; this arrangement was in place in just over half of the grantees (54.8 percent).

Additional site visit data (not displayed in Exhibit IV-1), reveal that only two grantees have a two week on/off rotation, and three other grantees have an alternate arrangement. (e.g., six weeks of condensed education time).

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<sup>5</sup> Charter school grantees included YouthBuild programs certified as charter schools, as well as YouthBuild programs that partnered with a charter school to provide educational services.

Exhibit IV-1 also conveys some basic pre-enrollment practices and characteristics. As mentioned in Chapter III, the great majority of grantees (87.9 percent) require youth to be assessed academically before enrollment in YouthBuild. This is most commonly accomplished by administering the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE). Youth Offender grantees overwhelmingly enroll youth who have received neither their high school diploma nor their GED. Only six percent of new enrollees had obtained their high school diploma, and an additional 4 percent had obtained their GED.

As noted above, life skills training is a required component of YouthBuild educational services. As will be discussed in depth later in this chapter, life skills provided by grantees can cover everything from personal hygiene to job interviews, and may be comprised of stand-alone classes or else integrated into larger academic and worksite training. As shown in Exhibit IV-1, slightly more than half of the Youth Offender grantees offer life skills between zero and five hours per week, while just under a quarter offer life skills between six and ten hours per week.

## Education Challenges

Before summarizing the educational services provided to youth, the key educational challenges faced by them are discussed, since these are what, in large part, drive the structure and content of the educational services.

As discussed in the Interim Report, participants have typically had relatively negative educational experiences prior to YouthBuild. A great majority have dropped out or been kicked out of high school for a variety of reasons, including but not limited to, criminal offenses, family turmoil, and personal obligations such as childcare or needing to contribute to the household's income. Learning barriers also contributed to many youth leaving school. At several YouthBuild grantees, youth described learning disabilities such as Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) or dyslexia that went undiagnosed or unassisted in traditional public school settings, thus exacerbating their overall frustration with academics. As a result of any one or a combination of the factors above, youth were typically disenchanted with education and with the traditional school setting, which they often perceived as chaotic and unsupportive of their individual needs, especially when compared to the YouthBuild environment. The following youth's views are representative of most youth interviewed:

*In public schools in the inner city... all they do is throw them in all together, mix them around, throw some English at them, throw some history, hope they can pass it. Here it's more of that one-on-one.*

*I think YouthBuild really worked because, in school, I wasn't really paying any attention to my teachers. I was always distracted by all my*



*friends in class. Here it's easier because there's not so many kids, only a few of us in there at a time, so it's a lot easier to work on your work instead of being distracted by everybody.*

*In regular school, I never paid attention. I couldn't learn, and like here they help you with your learning disability. They see to it that you're actually learning. Like here, if I need like a quiet spot to take a test or something, they'll get it for me, but in regular school they don't really do that. And they do a lot of one-on-one and my high school never helped me when I asked. They always told me to wait [until] after school or something. But here, there's always a teacher here that helps you. The teachers here, they care about your school, and they care about your life. But in regular school, they don't even care, they just try to push you through.*

From the perspective of YouthBuild staff, youth's education challenges were both logistical and personal. On the logistical side, staff reported that youth were typically far behind in terms of their education level and credit attainment. Participants entered YouthBuild with anywhere from a second to twelfth grade level in reading and math, although the reported average was most often in the fifth to sixth grade range. Participants' assessed grade levels, typically measured by the TABE, often did not correspond with where they had actually left off in school, thus further emphasizing their educational gaps. On the personal front, staff described youth who suffered from abysmal levels of self-esteem and confidence in their ability to learn, as well as poor motivation levels in the classroom, short attention spans, and a tendency to give up easily. This was often attributed to their very negative experiences in traditional school, the length of time they had been out of school, interference from ongoing personal crises, and frustrating learning disabilities. Youth also often have a difficult time understanding the value of a longer-term investment in education, particularly when they were anxious to simply secure a job and start earning money. Compounding this impatience is the fact that many youth are starting YouthBuild from such a low education level and with such a long distance to go before attaining a GED. Finally, staff indicated that, in addition to the challenges above, many youth are simply learning how to be participants and how to take advantage of the support offered:

*They haven't learned to be participants and teachers push them out. They give up on their studies and their parents give up on them. The acting out that they do is often because they are looking for guidance.*

In the following sections of this chapter, the YouthBuild staff and how they set up classrooms to address youth's educational challenges and effectively engage them in a wide range of learning experiences are discussed.

## Assessment, Service Planning and Scheduling

As can be seen in Exhibit IV-1, nearly 90 percent of grantees require youth to take a basic skills test—usually the TABE—prior to enrollment in YouthBuild. The test is often given during or immediately after the mental toughness period. For those grantees that administer such a test, it is used for multiple purposes. Several grantees use a basic skills test in order to screen out those youth they feel won't realistically succeed in the YouthBuild program. Specifically, several grantees require that youth test at a certain baseline level—usually a fifth or sixth grade level—in order to enroll in YouthBuild. Grantees that do not screen out youth—such as YouthBuild McLean County (Bloomington, IL) and YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School (Philadelphia, PA)—often have an overt or underlying mission to take on harder-to-serve youth, and may see academic *gains* and/or personal development as equally important as academic end-goals, such as GED attainment. For example, YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School (Philadelphia, PA) takes on participants who initially test at as low as the third or fourth grade level. While it may be unrealistic to expect these participants to attain a GED, the grantee works to increase their skills to at least an eighth grade level so that they may qualify for remediation services at the community college level. YouthBuild Albany (Albany, NY), which has explicitly committed to working with more challenging youth, views its emphasis not on educational attainment, but rather on lifestyle changes that will allow youth to be more successful than they would have been without YouthBuild. Likewise, Operation FreshStart YouthBuild (Madison, WI), does not see itself as an educational program, but rather as a setting for personal challenges to be addressed while in the classroom or at the worksite.

Among those grantees that decline to administer a basic skills test prior to enrollment, a predominant reason is a lack of value placed on TABE results. For example, at Portland YouthBuilders (Portland, OR), staff said that the TABE reports scores by grade level, which “doesn't tell you much.” The education director here is interested in exploring an alternative diagnostic tool, but was not sure if YouthBuild funders would be receptive. At YouthBuild Fresno (Fresno, CA), case management staff indicated that the initial TABE testing is relatively worthless because so many youth get frustrated and respond randomly to the questions. In addition, this grantee never excludes anyone based on their test results; instead, they use a take-home writing assignment to give staff a sense for whether youth can succeed at YouthBuild.

However, even for those grantees that do not screen out lower-scoring youth, a basic skills test can be used as an education service planning tool as well as a way to divide youth into appropriate classes or learning groups—especially with regard to math, in which youth often score significantly lower than reading. At Portland YouthBuilders (Portland, OR), YouthBuild Newark (Newark, NJ) and Operation FreshStart YouthBuild (Madison, WI), each participant's TABE or practice-GED results are used to assess whether a GED or HSD would be realistic,

and/or whether the participant will require intensive remedial education first. Overall, the majority of grantees reported using some form of service planning tool for education (and other purposes). Such tools usually went by the name of Individual Service Strategy (ISS), Individual Service Plan (ISP), or Individual Development Account (IDA). However, it also became clear that grantees varied in the extent to which such tools were “living documents” that teachers or other YouthBuild staff consistently used in working with youth. For example, at Portland West YouthBuild (Portland, ME), staff meet weekly with participants to review progress toward goals outlined on their ISPs. In addition, these plans are updated every 90 days.

**Exhibit IV-2:  
Examples of Individual Service Planning for Education**

At **YouthBuild Bogalusa (Bogalusa, LA)**, participants' TABE scores are used to divide them into two groups. The first group, “the TABERs,” score relatively low on the test and are in need of more intensive basic skills instruction. The second group, known as the GED group, has participants who have scored relatively higher on the TABE and are thus able to simply concentrate on those areas of the GED practice tests in which they need to improve in order to pass. The new GED instructor has devised a Pupil Progression Plan (PPP) for participants which documents and tracks each participant's test scores. If a participant fails a particular test, the instructor provides micro-lessons in this area throughout the week until the participant's test score has improved. The GED instructor has also created a “prescription plan” for participants, which is a chart that shows the areas in which each youth needs to work, and what the instructor needs to focus on while working with that youth. In the classroom, after the introduction of the skill of the week, and a lesson taught on that skill, the instructor refers to each participant's prescription plan for the specific tutorials on which each youth will work.

At **Operation FreshStart YouthBuild (Madison, WI)**, youth's educational goals, activities and outcomes are mapped onto and guided by the newly implemented Gateways system, which allows staff to monitor participants' literacy and numeracy skills (along with a range of other educational, job readiness and personal outcomes). Similar to an ISS, a Gateways plan is developed with each youth at the beginning of their time at YouthBuild. The plan is developed in conjunction with the academic teacher and other staff. The Gateways system is based on six levels. Certain goals at each level are predetermined, while others are specific to each youth. A youth cannot move to the next level until they have successfully completed all of the goals identified in the previous level. Education-specific goals vary by level, but include components such as: to increase numeracy or literacy by one grade level; pass four HSED tests (HSED is the competency-based high school diploma program offered in Wisconsin); and tour one postsecondary institution. Staff feel that the new Gateways system is effective because it provides youth with a visual representation of where they are in the program and the specific steps they need to take to achieve their outlined goals.

At YouthBuild McLean County (Bloomington, IL), youth's initial test scores during mental toughness are used to divide them into either the “Y” or “B” academic group. The “Y” group requires more pre-algebra-level remediation, while those in the “B” group have relatively

stronger math skills. Once they are placed in either the “Y” or “B” groups, participants are divided again into one of two levels in order to further delineate by math ability level. At Flushing YouthBuild (Flushing, NY), based on a predictor test as well as two weeks of observation time in the classroom, youth are divided into Group “A” or “B,” depending on their assessed readiness for taking the GED. Within the “A” and “B” groups, youth are divided again into four sub-groups based on temperament and peer relations.

In addition to basic skills assessment and individual service planning, education scheduling is another component that youth are exposed to early on at YouthBuild. A grantee’s education schedule can also be seen as somewhat of an indicator of its relative emphasis on education, and/or its underlying philosophy about how YouthBuild participants learn best. As previously discussed, some grantees prioritize academic gains (e.g., grade level, numeracy and literacy gains), personal development, and/or job readiness over academic attainment (e.g., a GED or HSD). As such, youth at some grantees may spend considerably less than half of their time engaged in academic activities. In at least one grantee the focus appeared to be on construction work. At this grantee, construction site supervisors were the only staff that youth had contact with on a daily basis, as many visited the offsite GED center very infrequently, though they are ostensibly scheduled to be there on a week on/off basis.

Again, while the week on/off education schedule was most prevalent among grantees (nearly 55 percent of grantees), an additional 30 percent had education time scheduled for either a portion of every program day, or else alternating days within a one-week period. For example, at MAAC Project YouthBuild (National City, CA), youth spend a portion of every day in the classroom. Those working on their HSD spend four hours per day in the classroom, while those working toward their GED spend at least two hours every day in the classroom. Those grantees with more concentrated education schedules (e.g., two weeks on/off, a six-week education period, or even a six-month education period) had various reasons for these set-ups, such as that it allowed participants to focus exclusively on their education, and thus to achieve some level of consistency and learning reinforcement. Another reason for concentrated education schedules was simply taking into account youth’s motivation for enrolling at YouthBuild. For example, at YouthBuild Honolulu (Honolulu, HI), the academic component lasts six months, but all of it comes after the vocational component because most youth at this grantee are motivated to join YouthBuild to get their HSD, and staff feel that most youth would not complete the vocational component (and the program) if educational training came first or simultaneously. However, on the flip side, grantees with non-concentrated schedules often felt that it was just as important to “mix it up” in terms of youth’s daily schedules and activities to ensure their continuous interest and engagement. Although there was wide variation across grantees, youth also expressed a general preference for mixing educational training with vocational training each day.

With regard to scheduling, it is clear that the business interests of a grantee may influence its education scheduling. This was the case at YouthBuild Fresno (Fresno, CA), which has an obligation to meet the deadlines of its construction clients, which include the Housing Authority and Self Help Enterprises (SHE). Staff have to be flexible and youth's schedules sometimes have to be shifted in order to meet these business deadlines. From the youth's perspective, this sometimes has led to confusion and a sense of unpredictability about their academic/construction schedule.

As described later in this chapter, there is a variety of educational schedules represented among those grantees with the highest GED and HSD attainment rates. Thus, it is unclear to what extent education scheduling alone plays a critical role in educational outcomes, though the grantees with the two highest HSD attainment rates (YouthBuild Honolulu and YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School) had concentrated education schedules.

## **Subject Matter and Courses**

While all YouthBuild grantees seek to strengthen the basic skills of youth, the specific subject matter and courses offered depend, to some extent, on whether the GED or HSD was more emphasized or popular at a particular grantee. Those seeking their GED typically concentrate on the five primary GED proficiencies: reading, writing, math, science and social studies. However, even with a GED focus, some grantees spur participants to focus on a longer-term educational trajectory. For example, at YouthBuild Newark (Newark, NJ), the core curriculum components include math, science, writing, literature and the arts, and social studies. However, the program aims to prepare participants for higher education by teaching content in line with the New Jersey Core Content Curriculum Standards required of all public schools, and by focusing on “higher-level cognitive skills” in order to equip youth for learning beyond the GED. Likewise, at YouthBuild Rockford (Rockford, IL), one of the two instructors observed that:

*The difference in my approach to teaching the GED, I think, is that I encourage participants not to think of the GED as the end-all focus . . . that's why it's so important during training that participants are able to hone their critical thinking skills. It's these skills, in addition to the basic reading, math and writing, that will prepare them for whatever choices they make regarding their future—whether it's education or vocation.*

Those working toward their HSD tended to be at charter schools or had sponsoring agencies or partners that were charter schools. In these sites, educational subjects were a bit more diverse and similar to those offered at a traditional high school. For grantees that have only recently begun offering a HSD, the transition has been both a challenging and positive one. Examples of

these transition grantees, as well as other HSD grantees and their course offerings, are provided below in Exhibit IV-3.

**Exhibit IV-3:  
Examples of Grantees with HSD Course Offerings**

At **YouthBuild McLean County (Bloomington, IL)**, which had recently been certified as a diploma-granting high school, it has been a “huge adjustment” to make the transition to a high school curriculum. Grantee staff explained that, unlike before when the English instructor only had to teach one class for the GED, now she is expected to teach five different English classes, condensing two years of material into the ten-month YouthBuild cycle. Likewise, the math teacher must now offer a variety of practical as well as more academic math courses.

At **Bi-Cap YouthBuild (Bimidji, MN)**, the grantee has recently switched education providers to Voyageurs Expeditionary High School, a charter school. As a result, there is a wider range of courses including not only typical high school fare, such as mathematics, but also electives such as German and indigenous studies, and “intensive” course offerings—which are one-week offerings on a particular subject, such as scuba diving or knitting. Youth at this grantee generally appreciated the new school structure, particularly its more traditional aspects of emphasizing “book work” and its scheduling:

*I like that better because it's easier to be focused on separate subjects and it seems simpler to have each teacher just doing one subject.*

At **North Richmond YouthBuild (Richmond, CA)**, course offerings include traditional high school subjects (English, math and civics are required); independent study options in history, science and health; as well as a number of electives.

In addition to a broader range of course offerings, not surprisingly, HSD-focused grantees also tended to be more credit-driven in their conception of participant requirements and progress. For example, Isles YouthBuild (Trenton, NJ) partners with the Daylight/Twilight Alternative School. Enrolled participants must complete 115 credits to graduate, and may accumulate up to 15 credits each trimester, with a certain amount of credits being derived from core subjects and electives.

While the courses described above were often the focus of a grantee’s education time/days, it is important to note that the majority of YouthBuild grantees also use their education time for a range of opening and engagement activities (such as a discussion of current events, a morning meeting to discuss personal issues, a Sudoku puzzle or journal-writing); project-based work (such as working on a digital portfolio); community service; tutoring/study hall periods; as well as significant blocks dedicated to life skills and job readiness. While not course offerings in and of themselves, tutoring or study hall periods—often offered before or after formal class time—were seen by many grantees as particularly critical to their participants’ educational success. These periods allowed youth to receive additional one-on-one assistance and/or to have designated times in which to complete their homework, which they might not otherwise receive.

The Flushing YouthBuild (Flushing, NY) grantee devotes one entire day of the education week to tutoring time, with no formal instruction scheduled for this day.

## **Life Skills and Job Readiness Training**

Life skills and job readiness account for some portion of grantees' overall education time. As displayed in Exhibit IV-1, about 53 percent of grantees offered between 0-5 hours of life skills instruction per week, while another 23 percent offered between 6-10 hours per week. Generally speaking, life skills instruction is designed to address those issues that might otherwise prevent participants from succeeding in their education, their jobs, and their lives. These issues are determined locally, but usually include a host of what might be categorized as personal and job readiness issues, such as those shown in Exhibit IV-4. These issues overlap, to some extent, with supportive service provision and with transitional/job placement services (both discussed in Chapter VI).

Life skills and job readiness subject areas were often covered or led by counselors and case management staff, although at least one grantee (San Gabriel Valley Conservation Corps YouthBuild, El Monte, CA) had a specially designated life skills instructor. Many grantees also made use of guest speakers from a variety of organizations for life skills instruction. Life skills and job readiness were covered by any number of formats, including direct lectures, workshops, small group discussions, and guest speaker presentations. Program grantees were more likely to use outside employees or partner staff when covering job readiness subjects in particular. For example, a dedicated employment consultant provides in-class job readiness training (as well as job placement services) at West Columbus YouthBuild (Columbus, OH). At YCC YouthBuild Waukegan (Waukegan, IL), during the last three months of the program, the life skills component concentrates on job development (e.g., resume-writing, interview skills). Job development subjects, as well as job placement, are taught by a contract employee with a curriculum designed to develop employability and job search skills.

**Exhibit IV-4:  
Range and Examples of Life Skills & Job Readiness Subjects**

- Mental health/counseling: At North Richmond YouthBuild (Richmond, CA), a community college instructor provides group counseling sessions that cover subjects such as family and violence issues. The instructor will refer participants out for more intensive counseling as needed.
- Substance abuse: Pathways YouthBuild (Petersburg, VA) holds a group drug counseling class once a week that is part of the parent organization's larger Health and Wellness division.
- Violence/conflict resolution: At YouthBuild Rockford (Rockford, IL), the peer mediation group is designed to resolve conflicts between youth and staff. The group is led by a former YouthBuild graduate.
- Anger management: At YouthBuild Alternatives (Portland, ME), life skills cover not only anger management, but how to cope with stress and communicate effectively.
- Relationships and parenting skills: At San Gabriel Valley Conservation Corps YouthBuild (El Monte, CA), youth participate in Young Men's Circle, which discusses fatherhood and respecting women.
- General/sexual health: At LA CAUSA YouthBuild, the East Los Angeles Men's Clinic provides free physicals and family planning discussions with participants.
- Financial literacy/fitness: YouthBuild Brownsville (Brownsville, TX) invites non-profits and businesses to make presentations on how to balance a checkbook, avoid credit problems, and be financially responsible.
- Tenant rights/legal problems: Fresno YouthBuild offers a street law course that introduces participants to the legal system.
- Postsecondary preparation: At West Columbus YouthBuild (Columbus, OH), a consultant works with postsecondary institutions to prepare and place participants—e.g., by filling out necessary forms.
- Job searches/resume writing/job interviews: At Bi-Cap YouthBuild (Bimidji, MN), youth receive instruction on resume-writing and interview skills at the local workforce center.
- Work culture: At North Richmond YouthBuild, one hour per week is dedicated specifically to job readiness and covers such topics as time management and dressing for work.

Other YouthBuild grantees relied on partnerships with local One-Stop centers to deliver some degree of job readiness training. For example, CCEO YouthBuild (Gardena, CA) is working with the local Workforce Investment Board to provide work readiness training to youth, given their limited YouthBuild staff capacity, while Bi-Cap YouthBuild (Bimidji, MN) sends youth to the local One-Stop center for resume-writing and job interviewing classes.

Across grantees, a major point of differentiation was the degree of formality with which life skills and job readiness subjects were covered. More specifically, grantees differed in the extent to which they reported utilizing formal curricula/instructional materials, and also the degree to which life skills and job readiness training was a distinct, formalized block of instruction or else



integrated into other types of YouthBuild instruction. With regard to curricula and instructional materials, a handful of grantees reported using a more formalized life skills curriculum.

YouthBuild Boston uses 12 specific life skills modules on topics ranging from budgeting to resume-writing, and requires participants to create a life skills portfolio. SALS YouthBuild (Kincaid, WV) requires youth to complete a PLATO unit on life skills and job readiness. At YouthBuild Mississippi Delta (Tallulah, MS), youth are taught life skills following 25-30 different skills manuals.

Grantees used very different approaches with regard to how distinct the life skills/job readiness component was from other program elements. Some grantees sought to integrate life skills/job readiness into traditional academic or vocational instruction, either formally or informally. For example, at YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School (Philadelphia, PA), the classroom teacher may use an employee handbook or job application for the purposes of a reading lesson. The same grantee often couches financial literacy lessons in its mathematics instruction. One participant described the real-world value of this practice:

*Math class was really worth it. I learned so many things about finances, housing and loans. We learned about buying houses, APRs, and not messing your credit up. I almost got a credit card and I almost financed a car. Because of math class, I didn't. My teacher stressed the issue. He said, 'Please do not buy that car!' I had gotten approved for a loan and everything. But I didn't. I probably would have been in a lot of debt by now. I feel like math class helped me out a lot.*

Exhibit IV-5 provides additional examples of grantees that have integrated life skills and job readiness instruction—with various levels of formality—into their academic and vocational instruction.

#### **Exhibit IV-5: Examples of Life Skills/Job Readiness Integration**

At **CSC YouthBuild (Lebanon, OR)**, grantee staff take a relatively informal approach to life skills, as there is no perceived division between class time, work time, and life skills. Staff see life skills more generally as teaching “problem-solving” skills. Such instruction can occur in the classroom, on the worksite, or any place and time that there is “a teachable moment” in the context of real-life situations. Such a teachable moment might occur with a youth trying to arrange child care for when he is at the work site, or resolving a conflict with a fellow participant in the classroom. Because life skills instruction at this grantee is driven by real-life circumstances rather than a formal curriculum, some weeks have a heavier focus on life skills instruction than others.

At **YouthBuild Honolulu (Honolulu, HI)**, life skills instruction is more formally integrated into the educational component. Participants’ classroom instruction is guided by five “books” or units on health, occupational knowledge, consumer economics, community resources, and government/law. Life skills are likewise couched in these five units of study. For example, within the academic unit on consumer economics, participants also cover traditional life skills topics such as financial literacy, budgeting, and balancing a checkbook. Within the academic unit on occupational knowledge, participants also cover traditional life skills/job readiness topics such as putting together an effective resume and job interview skills.

At **San Gabriel Valley Conservation Corps YouthBuild (El Monte, CA)**, while job readiness is covered during a designated time each week, it is also largely integrated into the work that participants do at the construction site. Staff explain that participants learn such things as dress code (e.g., tucking in their shirt) and professional relations (e.g., getting along with peers at work), while on the job.

Likewise, at **Bi-Cap YouthBuild**, staff indicated that many job readiness skills such as punctuality and positive peer relations, are taught through regular YouthBuild activities, including worksite activities. Youth here echoed that many job readiness skills are taught by example: “YouthBuild was my first job. It showed me what it was like to be in the workforce. It taught me to be responsible and go to work every day. I thought it would be really hard and nerve-wracking, but I saw that if someone shows me what to do, I can do it.”

### **Postsecondary Offerings & Opportunities**

YouthBuild grantees offered very little in terms of actual postsecondary *courses*. However, grantees did provide a range of postsecondary-oriented activities and supports. In terms of actual coursework, a number of grantees did facilitate participants taking postsecondary coursework either onsite or online. For example, at LA CAUSA YouthBuild (Los Angeles, CA), a new partnership with Los Angeles Trade Tech means that LA CAUSA staff can teach college-level courses onsite that can be applied toward an AA degree. For those participants who have their GED or HSD and are still enrolled, CSC YouthBuild (Lebanon, OR) encourages them to take distance learning courses from Brigham Young University or Portland State University. Participants here also benefit from guidance on the postsecondary preparation process:

*I told Tom that I was pretty much gonna do college next year. I'm probably gonna just go to Linn Benton Community College in Albany. And they're already talking to me about getting signed up for fall session right now. They're helping me get FAFSA, like financial aid and stuff.*

Other grantees make use of postsecondary instructors or more advanced YouthBuild students to work with newer YouthBuild participants. For example, at Youthbuilding Alternatives (Portland, ME), for one afternoon a week, a science professor from a local college teaches a class at YouthBuild. Thirteen volunteers from Stone Hill College serve as tutors to YouthBuild participants for three hours per week at YouthBuild Brockton (Brockton, MA). Princeton University students also serve as reading and math tutors for participants at Isles YouthBuild (Trenton, NJ). At Operation FreshStart YouthBuild (Madison, WI), enrolled participants with their GED or HSD are engaged in postsecondary work with a part-time instructor hired for this purpose.

Other grantees also attempted to bridge the divide between YouthBuild and postsecondary education either through alignment between YouthBuild and college requirements, or special college prep programs and assistance/arrangements. YouthBuild McLean County (Bloomington, IL), which emphasizes college as a realistic option for its participants, works with Hartland and Lincoln Colleges to ensure that the YouthBuild classroom curriculum covers basic requirements for entry-level college courses. YouthBuild Newark (Newark, NJ), which also stresses higher education to its participants, works with Essex Community College to administer a developmental curriculum for participants who need to catch up for college. Exhibit IV-6 provides additional examples of other grantees' college prep programs and assistance, provided either internally or through partnerships with postsecondary institutions.

A few grantees, such as Bi-Cap Youth Build (Bimidji, MN) and YouthBuild Newark (Newark, NJ) simply used a more demanding academic curriculum in the YouthBuild classroom as a way to better prepare their participants for a transition to postsecondary education. Staff at Newark specifically prepare participants by teaching content in accordance with the New Jersey Core Content Curriculum required in all public schools, and focusing on higher-level cognitive skills to equip participants for learning beyond the GED. It is worth noting, however, that not all grantees perceived youth, particularly youth offenders, as being interested or well-suited for college. As program staff of one grantee noted:

*Many of these youth are hard workers. They come from hard-working, blue collar homes. They can work in the cold and heat for eight, nine, ten hours. They will probably go to a trade school. But they can't see themselves in college. They're ready to settle down and start a family. For them, they see only working.*

The grantees profiled in Exhibit IV-6 represent a diverse group. While all but three are Americorps grantees, five offer a GED only and three offer a HSD only. Therefore, there does not appear to be one straightforward education model that predisposes a grantee to offer postsecondary programs or assistance.

**Exhibit IV-6:  
Examples of College Prep Programs, Arrangements & Assistance**

- **YouthBuild Brockton (Brockton, MA)** has a partnership with Massasoit Community College whereby the college holds a certain number of slots for YouthBuild participants in their Bridge Program, designed to support participants who are the first members of their family to attend college.
- Princeton University's Let's Get Ready program provides participants—including participants at **Isles YouthBuild (Trenton, NJ)**—with academic tutoring as well as mentoring on how to prepare for college.
- **YouthBuild Brownsville (Brownsville, TX)** has a post-GED class run by the Talent Search program at two colleges. The program prepares participants for college by mentoring them through the college application and financial aid process.
- **Bi-Cap YouthBuild (Bimidji, MN)** partners with Bemidji State University, which allows YouthBuild participants to receive credit for college courses prior to enrollment at the university.
- **Youthbuilding Alternatives (Portland, ME)** partners with the Maine Community College System through the early college program, which allows nine YouthBuild participants to receive assistance in college preparation from college counselors over the course of a year. Three youth are able to take college courses for free while at YouthBuild and a scholarship of \$2000/yr is available to those who attain their GED and enroll at the college full-time.
- **YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School (Philadelphia, PA)** assists its participants in applying for college and financial aid through a college orientation as well as a transition class. The program also offers participants a postsecondary education grant, although many participants who enroll do not complete college.
- Essex Community College provides participants at **YouthBuild Newark (Newark, NJ)** with onsite testing, enrollment, registration, and assistance in qualifying for community college financial aid. Qualified participants can attend Essex Community College for select courses for credit while still enrolled at YouthBuild.
- A major part of the academic curriculum at **Portland YouthBuilders (Portland, OR)** is to expose participants to college-level classes and expectations, through its College 101 course.

## **Academic Instructors & Methods**

The crux of YouthBuild's educational instruction is its classroom instructors and their teaching methods. As one program staff pointed out at YWCA YouthBuild Springfield (Springfield, MA), the most important thing for the classroom is simply that youth like their teachers. While an interpersonal connection is certainly important, particularly for youth who are used to

distrusting and/or disliking authority figures, YouthBuild teachers employed a wide range of more specific behaviors and teaching methods that were critical to successfully engaging youth in the classroom.

As shown earlier in Exhibit IV-1, three-quarters of grantees have between one and three classroom teachers, located either onsite or at an offsite education partner location. For example, the three classroom teachers at SALS YouthBuild (Kincaid, WV) are located at the Fayette County ABE Center (Vo-Tech). There was no predominant personal or professional background of YouthBuild classroom teachers. At YouthBuild Brockton (Brockton, MA), program staff indicated that one of the great strengths of the educational component was that the two classroom teachers did *not* have prior teaching experience (especially at a traditional high school), which made them more attractive to participants. As youth from two grantees observed:

*The teachers here make school fun. These guys are cool. I never had teachers that were this cool. If they were like regular teachers, I wouldn't be here.*

*She [Teacher] is really awesome. The fact that we had such a small classroom, she had the time to talk with all of us and make sure we all understood. [She] is a great teacher. [She] is more than just a teacher, she is a friend in the classroom.*

Participants and program staff alike also stressed the importance of teachers who could personally relate to participants based on, for example, similar personal characteristics (e.g., race, age) or similar backgrounds (e.g., being from a low-income neighborhood, time spent in the criminal justice system), or traits that are considered admirable or “cool” (e.g., teachers who have tattoos or who are athletes). Teachers at many grantees were also known to cross traditional instructor boundaries, in that they assisted participants with personal issues in the way that case managers typically did, and even handed out their home phone numbers to participants:

*. . . I had a great teacher . . . If you didn't understand you could come after school. Or you could ask right in class. He even left his number on the board throughout the year and begged people to call him if we had any trouble. I called him a lot. . . Last year at YB it was the first time I've had so many teachers' numbers and had so much support, to be able to call them when I had problems.*

*. . . That's why I like this school. The teachers, they tell me when I need help. They even give me their phone numbers. They write it on the board so I can call them whenever I need help.*

Personal similarities and connections help de-emphasize teachers' role as traditional instructors, as well as help youth personally relate to teachers before the latter even attempted classroom

instruction. As staff at YouthBuild McLean County (Bloomington, IL) noted, teachers have to get youth to believe they care before youth can “get into their learning.” A teacher from another grantee confirmed the importance of getting to know youth first and helping them address personal issues that arise in the classroom:

*We're here to help them and we're not here as their enemy. We take time to get to know the students. High school is sometimes large and overwhelming. I can tell if someone is having a bad day just by their demeanor. Then I refer them to [the case managers].*

A stronger trust and personal connection with teachers allows participants to be better set up for learning. It also paves the way for teachers to employ a range of teaching strategies or methods that are also highly distinguishable from those used in traditional high schools. While many of the courses or subjects covered may be the same, YouthBuild teachers use specific strategies to address those particular educational characteristics and challenges described earlier in this chapter, such as poor self-esteem, low educational attainment, and a tendency to get bored easily in the classroom. Because of this, YouthBuild teachers tend to use the classroom for a broader purpose. As staff at McLean County YouthBuild (Bloomington, IL) remarked, the classroom is not only a place to teach the standard educational curriculum, it is a place where needed social skills and confidence are also taught and developed. It is this difference in approach and methods they believe truly makes an impact on participant learning. As one participant simply observed:

*It's working for me. They teach us everything they teach in a regular high school, but they teach it in a different way. They teach and teach until we get it.*

The next section provides a fuller discussion of the teaching methods employed in the YouthBuild classroom.

## **A Multi-Method Approach**

A resounding theme across grantees was how critical it was to employ a multi-method approach in order to effectively engage youth in the classroom. A multi-method approach addressed a number of challenges, namely that (1) different teaching methods worked for different participants of varying skill levels; (2) youth often associated single-method approaches with traditional school environments in which they had not thrived; and (3) youth had a tendency to quickly become bored and disengaged. Generally speaking, a multi-method approach meant that, while a curriculum might center around specific GED or HSD requirements (e.g., subject areas, particular skills), the teacher(s) had the flexibility to develop an approach that would make learning consistently interesting to youth. The mix of methods used across grantees included:

traditional whole group (“chalk and talk”) instruction; independent work paired with individual tutoring; computer instruction and exercises; and a range of creative games or “gimmicks” (as one grantee described them) used to maintain youth interest.

As might be expected, given its particularly strong association with traditional schooling, “chalk and talk” (whole group instruction) was used sparingly among YouthBuild grantees. This mode of instruction also was often not feasible with a group of participants who might range anywhere from a second to eighth grade level in math or reading. More common was an introductory “chalk and talk” section, whereby a teacher might introduce a new concept or subject to the class as a whole, before moving on to work individually with each participant on that concept, and then perhaps conduct some group board work to go over areas that numerous participants were having difficulty with, or to sum up lessons at the end. Some HSD-focused grantees, such as North Richmond YouthBuild (Richmond, CA) and LA CAUSA YouthBuild (Los Angeles, CA), tended to use traditional classroom set-up and instruction more often, but with differing results. Youth at the Richmond grantee expressed boredom and talked about education in terms of “getting it out of the way,” despite the variety of classes offered. Staff here observed that classroom teachers might need to incorporate alternative teaching methods, such as increased hands-on-learning activities. Meanwhile, the Los Angeles grantee used the traditional classroom more creatively by dividing it into three stations or topic areas, with youth rotating through the first two stations/topics with two different teachers before finally working independently or with peers at the third station.

A core method used by nearly all YouthBuild grantees was independent work paired with individual tutoring. The independent work might be focused on practice problems/worksheets, workbooks, or computer exercises relevant to the day’s instructional concept or lesson. GED instruction in particular often had youth working relatively independently—e.g., on their individual GED workbooks. Teachers would often walk around the classroom, observing participants engaged in their independent work, and providing one-on-one tutoring or assistance as necessary. As one teacher observed, this role was more a “guide on the side” rather than a “sage on the stage.” This approach allowed teachers to tailor the general instructional concept or lesson at hand to the educational level and needs of each participant, as well as provide the intensive level of interpersonal assistance that participants often needed to learn and remain engaged. Youth consistently remarked on the availability of one-on-one assistance as a positive departure from traditional high school and a key to their educational success. As one youth simply observed:

*The classes were simple.. I got a lot of one-on-one help. The teachers helped me a lot. I get distracted easily so one-on-one was helpful.*

At Fresno YouthBuild (Fresno, CA), participants described the improved quality of the onsite charter school, School of Unlimited Learning (SOUL), due to its better balance of independent work with individualized instruction and assistance. As one youth described:

*Before, we used to have teachers that would just give us our packet of work and they wouldn't try to show us how to do it or nothing, you know? Sometimes I would get frustrated with the packets because they seemed hard. I would ask the teachers for help and it seemed like they didn't have time. Now those teachers are gone. Now we have two different teachers and so far they've been a lot better at helping us and stuff. These teachers offer to help, when with the other teachers you had to ask for help and they didn't seem to want to help.*

Particularly for GED-focused grantees, computer instruction and exercises were a key component of independent work. Fifty-nine percent of grantees used some type of GED instructional software, such as PLATO. Such software allowed participants to work at their own level and pace toward GED attainment. It also allowed for a break in classroom work. When a participant seems restless, YouthBuild Bogalusa (Bogalusa, LA) sends them to the computer lab for a GED tutorial to “mix things up.” The independent nature of this work was balanced by the availability of teachers to provide some level of individual assistance. For example, at Mississippi Delta YouthBuild (Hollandale, MS), GED preparation occurs at the YouthBuild computer classroom which is equipped with GED software and booklets. Math and English consultants visit three times per week to work with participants one-on-one. At SALS YouthBuild (Kincaid, WV), the ABE Center includes a classroom with 20 computers all equipped with PLATO software, which is used as the primary mode of GED instruction. Participants can access lessons on their own, 24 hours a day via the Internet, and for the most part work independently at the ABE Center. However, a tutor attends the Center every Tuesday and Thursday to provide one-on-one assistance to participants, particularly those who score below the sixth grade on their educational assessment. Center staff may also work with participants one-on-one, especially if they notice that a particular participant is not concentrating or could perhaps benefit from switching teaching methods (e.g., writing a journal response to a newspaper article). Overall, a number of grantees praised GED instructional software for the intensity of its instruction, the way in which it will not allow participants to progress to the next level without demonstrated mastery of the previous level, and the opportunity it provides youth to gain or improve basic computer skills.

While computers were used most often for the specific purpose of GED instructional software, a few grantees also used computers for other basic skills instruction. For example, Operation FreshStart YouthBuild (Madison, WI) noted that computers were useful for a number of different games youth played in order to improve basic numeracy skills. On the other hand, YouthBuild



Boston, Inc. (Roxbury, MA) dislikes computer-use as an instructional method because they found that youth were too distracted by the technology to concentrate on needed basic skills.

Non-computer games also figured into many grantees' arsenal of teaching methods. For example CCEO YouthBuild (Gardena, CA) holds Jeopardy! Style game-show competitions in class and Pathways YouthBuild (Petersburg, VA) uses Sudoku puzzles to engage youth in math class. Apart from games, grantees also had other creative teaching methods, such as: having participants improve their writing skills by creating a regular newsletter about their own accomplishments; bringing in guest speakers (e.g., a bank officer for a math lesson); taking field trips to the construction site (e.g., for a math lesson), to historical sites or to the library to improve research skills; and creating (digital) portfolios that allowed participants to showcase polished work in a variety of subject areas, as well as develop their presentation and computer skills.

Finally, YouthBuild grantees often described the need to frequently “change the subject” in addition to the (teaching) method, in order to address the challenge of short attention spans among youth. For example, at YouthBuild McLean County (Bloomington, IL), classroom teachers indicated that they “switch topics every twenty minutes.” YCC YouthBuild Waukegan (Waukegan, IL) changes its classroom focus monthly between math and literacy in order to keep participants engaged. This grantee also alternates teachers every semester to expose participants to different instructional styles.

Overall then, many grantees have found that small, interactive classes that allow participants to move fluidly between activities and teaching methods—whether they be small group discussions, computer research, or individual tutoring—are key for maintaining participant interest and ensuring effective learning.

## **Team & Peer Teaching**

With regard to teaching in the YouthBuild classroom, two common and effective practices emerged: team teaching and peer teaching. Team teaching was the process by which two or more teachers shared duties within a single classroom session. This was key to ensuring that participants received adequate individualized instruction. For example, at YouthBuild Honolulu (Honolulu, HI), there was a Lead Instructor and an Assistant Instructor. This set-up allowed the Assistant Instructor to concentrate on providing youth with one-on-one tutoring, as well as to pull disruptive participants out of class in order to problem-solve and provide counseling. In other locations, team teaching was also a way to simply share the work load. For example, at YouthBuild Rockford (Rockford, IL), there is a Lead Teacher responsible primarily for math and

science instruction, and a ABE Instructor, primarily responsible for GED training; however, the two team-teach history and constitution classes.

A more prominent and touted teaching practice among YouthBuild grantees was that of peer teaching, or teaching that occurred between youth. This practice was not so much a way to help spread out teaching responsibilities as it was a way to build youth confidence and positive peer relations. Several examples of this approach are provided in Exhibit IV-7.

**Exhibit IV-7:  
Examples of Peer Teaching & Support in the Classroom**

- At **CCEO YouthBuild (Gardena, CA)**, participants are all initially taught at an eighth grade level, so that teachers can observe who appears to be struggling and who appears to be bored. Participants are then divided into relatively higher- and lower-level achievers in order to foster a supportive learning community. The most advanced participants are informally recruited as teachers' aides to lead discussions and tutor peers.
- At **West Columbus YouthBuild (Columbus, OH)**, participants elect two participant leaders on the first day of class. These two leaders serve as liaisons between the participants and the teachers. If a participant has a challenge or question in the classroom, s/he must first approach the liaison for help before the teacher.
- At **Operation FreshStart YouthBuild (Madison, WI)**, participants are placed in small groups according to their academic ability. These small groups are the setting for peer teaching and peer tutoring, which this grantee has found critical to keeping the more advanced participants engaged in the classroom.
- At **Flushing YouthBuild (Flushing, NY)**, they first divide participants into Groups A and B, depending on how ready they are for the GED. These two groups are then further divided into four sub-groups by personality and peer relations. These groups help each other with regard to problem-solving, self-esteem, social bonds, and a comfortable learning environment. They also establish participant study groups that team-teach one another and collaborate on homework. According to staff, the learning outcomes are better and participants learn to work together, breaking down barriers and changing "street attitudes."

A number of additional grantees also cited peer teaching and study groups as a general best practice, particularly for the support and leadership opportunities that such an arrangement affords youth.

### **Adjustable & Self-Paced Instruction**

Two key challenges that many youth faced in traditional high school were: (1) the fact that they were at a very different place than their classmates in terms of academic ability and pace of learning; and (2) the instructional pace of the teacher was pre-determined by an obligation to cover a certain amount of material within a certain timeframe. In the YouthBuild classroom, these two challenges were addressed by teachers' adjustable and self-paced instructional style.

Specifically, participants enjoyed the flexibility of teachers to spend more time on certain subjects as needed. For example at West Columbus YouthBuild (Columbus, OH), the two primary instructors split each education day, but the class may spend more time on a particular subject, depending on what needs arose. Likewise, at YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School (Philadelphia, PA), teachers also described adjusting the pace of their instruction and spending more time on content that participants have not yet mastered. Teachers here also remarked that participants were more engaged because they could study at their own grade level. Self-paced instruction was the other theme that recurred across YouthBuild grantees—specifically not only did teachers have the flexibility to slow down or speed up instruction, but participants also had the flexibility to remain on their individualized learning track. Many YouthBuild staff described this as being able to “meet participants where they are.” The following quotes illustrate youth’s appreciation of this approach, particularly as compared to traditional high school:

*You work at your own pace, there ain’t no rush. It’s not like high school where you have to get it done or fail.*

*They go at your own pace. They want to help you. They care about you. It’s not like the other schools where they have too many participants and they have to just keep going. Here they’ll work with you. They’ll make sure you understand. That’s why I like it because it helps me learn more.*

The self-paced approach to learning was enabled specifically by small classroom sizes paired with copious amounts of one-on-one assistance, which are discussed further below.

### **Small Classes & One-On-One Attention**

Small classes, a favorable teacher to participant ratio, and—as a result—an intense level of one-on-one attention were the elements considered most critical by most YouthBuild grantees for satisfying youth’s need for individual acknowledgment and respect; keeping youth “on track;” and promoting effective classroom learning. They were also the main ways in which YouthBuild classrooms were held as highly distinguishable from traditional classrooms. Youth consistently talked about the benefits of small class size and a personalized environment for their learning, as the following quotes illustrate:

*When I was in regular school, I didn’t really know no math or anything like that. When I got here, they have smaller classes so they can come to every single individual and help them on that particular problem.*

*The way the education is, like you have more teacher-participant ratio; like a teacher can help you out a lot more than in high schools and stuff, cause like the teacher doesn’t have enough . . . There’s 30-40 kids in one*

*class with one teacher. They don't have enough time to meet independently with every kid. Here you ask for help, you're gonna get it.*

*They go step-by-step unlike a regular high school where they tell you to get your work out and do it . . . cause not everyone learns at the same pace. Here they understand that . . .*

While many grantees talked about the general importance of a favorable teacher to participant ratio, a number of grantees highlighted its importance for mathematics instruction in particular, given the generally lower scores in this area as opposed to reading (and thus the need for greater assistance), and also given the greater variety of foundational skills among participants, especially among grantees that do not require a minimum TABE score for enrollment. In general, mathematics instruction and learning required a greater degree of hand-holding for participants to feel comfortable, as described by the following youth:

*The thing I liked in class was [the teacher]. He teaches really good. He goes step by step with you and everything. He's the main reason why I've trained my mind to where I can do [math] problems in my head. I couldn't do that before.*

One way in which a better teacher to participant ratio was achieved for mathematics instruction was through dividing participants by ability level. For example, while English classes are taught to participants altogether at YouthBuild Boston, math is taught to sub-groups of participants divided by ability level, as initially assessed by the TABE. At YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School (Philadelphia, PA), there are never more than ten participants in any math class. Participants are divided by grade level into a number of math modules: special education/below 3<sup>rd</sup> grade; 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> grade; 5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade; algebra; extension algebra; and intermediate algebra. Participants must complete one module per trimester to graduate. Youth here consistently indicated that they liked their math class, and that they understood math for the first time:

*The teaching was so simple and it all fell together until it was easy. The teacher would do a problem on the board with us and walk us through it step by step. He would even write little notes on what goes next. Then we would work on them in groups. Then everyone had to come up to the board and do a problem—any problem you wanted to do. If someone didn't get it, [the teacher] would break it down again. He would ask if everyone was ok with it, 'can we move on?' And we would move on.*

## **Incorporating “Real World” Implications & Rewards**

Another key teaching method, or approach, was instructors incorporating “real world” implications and rewards into the classroom. Real world implications often meant incorporating current events into the classroom, and/or choosing learning topics and materials that were

relevant specifically to the population of youth in the classroom—e.g., by incorporating issues of race and class. Making the connection between classroom instruction and real-world issues was seen by many grantees as a way to better engage youth. For example, at YouthBuild McLean County (Bloomington, IL), the English teacher assigns books to read based on their alignment with youth’s own life experiences. According to staff, youth have had a very positive response to these book selections; many youth actively participate in discussion and some have even requested more book recommendations. Portland YouthBuilders (Portland, OR) recently initiated academic units that emphasize socioeconomic and political issues that participants view as important, such as homelessness and the politics of food production. One way Flushing YouthBuild (Flushing, NY) brings real life into the classroom is by using subjects such as credit card financing and automobile purchases to teach math.

Making the connection between classroom instruction and real-world issues was also seen as a way to heighten youth awareness of sociopolitical issues, and as a form of hands-on learning, in that participants could apply academic or theoretical ideas to concrete situations. The latter aim was particularly critical for grantees such as LA CAUSA YouthBuild (Los Angeles), which is explicit about the program’s social justice orientation. Here, the core of classroom time is concerned with current events and social justice issues. The subject matter is often taken directly from participants’ own lives—e.g., the state of their neighborhoods, racial profiling, community organizing, a culturally-based approach to education. Participants have taken action on these issues as well. For instance, participants have written to the Governor of California after researching the specific educational needs of East Los Angeles participants. In general, youth appreciated the way in which real-world instruction heightened their awareness of important issues, and even changed their thinking:

*The main reason why YouthBuild has changed the way I think is because it is not like a regular school. All of our assignments we receive do not always come out of a textbook. We receive a lot of assignments on what is going on outside right now, out of the newspaper or on the news. It makes me more aware of the violence and the drugs.*

*They opened up our eyes to a lot of social issues, like racial profiling. We even made a video about living in East LA. We showed some tagging, the county jail. We drove around and interviewed people. We did photoclips, and go around and talk to people about the issues in LA.*

YouthBuild grantees brought the real world into the classroom not only through subject matter, but also through its reward systems. As a way to provide participants with timely feedback on their academic performance, as well as to provide ongoing encouragement, some grantees relied on verbal cues, such as simple praise for a job well done, or encouragement to persist with a

problem. Other grantees relied on more concrete items. For example, San Gabriel Valley Conservation Corps YouthBuild (El Monte, CA) not only conducts frequent, individual check-ins with participants to see how they are doing and provide encouragement, but also gives out attendance awards to participants in front of their peers. Pathways YouthBuild (Petersburg, VA) not only takes care to consistently point out participant improvements, but also awards gift cards to participants for weeks of excellent performance. Other grantees are more systematic about intertwining participant performance and rewards, as shown in Exhibit IV-8.

**Exhibit IV-8:  
Examples of Performance-Based Rewards**

At **YouthBuild Brockton (Brockton, MA)**, education days run from 8:30-2:30pm, and are divided into four curricular/time blocks. Youth are evaluated each day based on whether they respected their peers and staff, focused on their work, and maintained a good attitude. Participants can earn a point for each of the four curricular blocks, plus an additional point if they earn points on all the curricular blocks. Youth stipends, in turn, are based on this point system. The underlying notion of this system is that your real-world earnings are directly dependent on how much you invest in your work.

At **Youthbuilding Alternatives (Portland, ME)**, there is a system of daily ratings, from 0-5, that each participant receives from his instructors. Each participant's daily rating is based on a rubric of punctuality, participation, work habits, behavior, team work, and leadership. Ratings are based on feedback from youth as well as staff.

## Teaching to the Test

In the classroom, teaching to the test was a method that meant different things for YouthBuild grantees. For some grantees, this meant simply infusing a great deal of test-taking techniques and methodology into the classroom—particularly for the GED. For example, Flushing YouthBuild (Flushing, NY) has participants take GED predictor tests every six weeks not only to measure academic progress, but also to prepare them for sitting still for long periods of time. At YouthBuild Rockford (Rockford, IL), where an ABE/GED instructor offers a daily after-school GED tutorial using PLATO, participants are coached about studying, test-taking, and anxiety-reducing techniques. Reading and writing exercises, such as journaling, are specifically aimed at improving participants' ability to pass the reading section of the GED. Plans for smaller classes are centered around the need for more individualized GED training.

Teaching to the test can also fundamentally affect grantees' course offerings and teaching philosophy and methods. Exhibit IV-9 provides two very different case studies of the extent to which grantees teach to the test.

### **Exhibit IV-9: Differences in Teaching to the Test**

**LA CAUSA YouthBuild (Los Angeles, CA)** has a much broader concept of learning and interpretation of California education standards than those of the John Muir Charter School, its education provider. According to staff, LA CAUSA also favors a progressive teaching style, rooted in team-building and social justice issues, while John Muir has more of a standardized testing focus. Because of this misalignment in philosophy, LA CAUSA wishes to become its own charter school. Although participants expressed some enthusiasm for their classes, there was also an expression of frustration about misalignment between classes and the GED. As one participant noted, “The stuff they show us didn’t come up on the GED. I studied hard, but when I took the test, I didn’t know anything . . . It was frustrating.” Another youth observed something similar: “The math class, it didn’t have anything to do with the GED test. The stuff they show us didn’t come up on the GED. I studied hard here but when I took the test, I didn’t know anything.”

The education component at **YouthBuild Honolulu (Honolulu, HI)** lasts for six months and comes after the vocational components. Participants work on five “books” or units in the classroom (health, occupational knowledge, consumer economics, community resources, and government/law). These books incorporate both academic and life skills instruction. A month is spent on each of these units. Participants have two chances to pass a test for each unit. If they still don’t pass, the instructor works with them intensively for two days and then they have a chance to re-take the test. The sixth and final month of the education component is spent studying and preparing for the CBHSDP test, which, after participants pass, means they can receive their high school diploma. It is clear that this grantee teaches to the test, but this approach seems to work for this grantee given its solid educational outcomes (e.g., all DOL youth from the 06-07 cohort graduated with a high school diploma) and the fact that youth expressed enthusiasm for what they were learning academically as well as practically. As one youth observed, “I never knew Washington DC is not a state. And balancing a checkbook, I completely didn’t know how. It’s exciting to speak about and say I know this now!”

## **Educational Outcomes**

Securing a GED or diploma was one of the main incentives for most interviewed youth to enroll in the YouthBuild program. As previously discussed, many of these youth were unsuccessful in traditional school settings, and were excited that YouthBuild offered them a second chance to complete these requirements. Most of these youth required additional academic assistance, and found YouthBuild’s education component to be conducive to their individual needs.

Although there were many different models of education across program grantees, youth’s perception of their educational progress was less variable. Most youth felt that they were making steady progress toward their high school diploma or GED, regardless of whether they were in a comprehensive charter school or were studying in an independent study setting. To a large degree, youth respondents attributed their academic progress to a smaller and more connected

learning environment, which provided them with more one-on-one contact with teachers and the opportunity to learn at their own pace.

After carefully analyzing the structure, content and methods of YouthBuild educational services in this chapter, this section provides a discussion of youth’s educational outcomes. Intertwined with this is a discussion of what staff see as some of the successful strategies and various challenges associated with achieving educational outcomes.

Exhibit IV-10 displays an overview of the key educational outcomes achieved by youth offenders, as recorded in the MIS data.<sup>6</sup>

**Exhibit IV-10:  
Key Education Outcomes & Characteristics for Youth Offenders Across Grantees**

|                                 | <u>Average</u> |
|---------------------------------|----------------|
| Number of youth offenders       | 29.44          |
| Number of teachers              | 3.27           |
| Age at YB entry                 | 19.14          |
| Age 18 or older                 | 69.2%          |
| GED attainment rate             | 23.1%          |
| HSD attainment rate             | 13.2%          |
| Entered full-time postsecondary | 10.2%          |

As shown in this exhibit, the average GED attainment rate for those youth enrolled in the Youth Offender program across all grantees was 23.1 percent. Exhibit IV-11 below displays the rates among those in the Youth Offender program for the top five grantees, which range from 44 to 58.6 percent. The grantee with the highest GED attainment rate, YouthBuild Brockton (Brockton, MA), attributed its improved attainment rate to: the fact that it hired a second FTE teacher; the fact that the instructors did not have prior high school teaching experience and were thus more attractive to youth; and the grantee’s practice of encouraging those participants who did not get their GED to return the following program year solely for GED tutoring.

Not surprisingly, four of the top five GED attainment grantees offered only a GED, although Portland YouthBuilders (Portland, OR) offered both a GED and HSD option: this grantee reported that only about one-third of its participants opt for the latter option. Three of the five provide educational training based on a one week on/off schedule, but this is a similar percentage

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<sup>6</sup> The MIS data, which are described more fully in Chapter XI, include information for all youth offender clients served (across all three years) as part of the DOL Youth Offender grant.



to that among all YouthBuild grantees in the study (54.8 percent). Three of the top five grantees also enrolled fewer youth offenders than the average (29.44) across all sites, and all but one had a lower number of classroom teachers than the overall average (3.27). Finally, there does not appear to be a predominant trend among the five grantees in terms of mean age at entry, or the percentage of participants age 18 or older. With regard to the former, three of the five grantees are above the mean age (19.14), while two are below. Similarly, two of the five grantees are below the average (69.2 percent) in the percentage of youth who were 18 or older at entry, while three are above. However, for those three grantees that are above the average, it is by a considerable amount (each is more than ten percentage points, and as much as thirty percentage points, above). Some grantees suggested that they had greater GED success with participants who were older, and who were thus more mature, ready to embrace change in their life, and focus on specific (educational) goals.

**Exhibit IV-11:  
Top Five Sites in GED Attainment Among Youth Offenders**

| <b>Site</b>                           | <b>GED attainment rate</b> | <b>GED and/or HSD</b> | <b>Education Schedule</b>    | <b>Total Number of Youth Offenders</b> | <b>Number of Classroom Teachers</b> | <b>Mean age on entry</b> | <b>Percent age 18 or older</b> |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|
| YouthBuild Brockton (Brockton, MA)    | 58.6%                      | GED only              | One week on/off              | 29                                     | 2                                   | 18.31                    | 55.2%                          |
| YouthBuild St. Louis (St. Louis, MO)  | 48.6%                      | GED only              | One week on/off              | 35                                     | 2                                   | 20.89                    | 100.0%                         |
| Portland YouthBuilders (Portland, OR) | 45.7%                      | GED and HSD           | Two weeks on/off             | 35                                     | 4                                   | 19.43                    | 82.9%                          |
| CSC YouthBuild (Lebanon, OR)          | 44.4%                      | GED only              | One week on/off              | 18                                     | 1                                   | 17.83                    | 38.9%                          |
| YWCA YouthBuild Springfield (MA)      | 44.0%                      | GED only              | Every day for variable hours | 25                                     | 2                                   | 19.60                    | 80.0%                          |

Participants' progress toward GED attainment was usually assessed periodically with GED practice tests and/or the TABE test. Many grantees claimed their participants were generally ready to take the GED within a relatively short period, anywhere from six weeks to six months. At the short end of this range was YouthBuild Columbus (Columbus, OH). This grantee stands out in that youth receive intensive academic, life skills and job readiness training within a

truncated period of six weeks prior to beginning construction education and hands-on training. According to the teachers, most youth have the ability to pass the GED tests within that time period, but for those who do not, they take part in the Schedule Tutorial Assistance (STA) program. While these youth are engaged in construction activities, they are also still required to attend class twice a week from 8:30-4:00pm and receive additional academic assistance. According to staff, the STA program has helped boost their GED attainment rate.

Grantees talked about other factors that have helped them boost their attainment rate, as well as those that have hindered it. For example, LA CAUSA YouthBuild (Los Angeles, CA) has instituted a post-YouthBuild component that is an extension of their regular program, which allows youth to complete their GED requirements. Likewise, as previously mentioned, Youth Build Brockton (Brockton, MA) has realized an improved GED attainment rate since they began encouraging youth to come back to the program solely for GED tutoring.<sup>7</sup> At YWCA YouthBuild Springfield (Springfield, MA), teachers try to identify those participants most likely to succeed on the GED and encourage them to take the test as soon as possible, in order to serve as positive peer models for the rest of the participants. (On the other hand, at Flushing YouthBuild [Flushing, NY], the policy is to disallow participants from taking the GED too soon because they are likely to drop out if they pass.) The YWCA YouthBuild Springfield grantee also attributed an improved GED attainment rate to firmly establishing as a minimum for participants to enroll a fifth grade level TABE score.

Minimum TABE scores were more likely to be mentioned in the context of challenges posed to grantees' GED attainment rates. A number of grantees, such as YouthBuild McLean County (Bloomington, IL), do not use TABE scores to screen out prospective participants. As a result, they are often working with participants who begin the program at a much lower grade level and thus have a much further distance to cover before attaining their GED. Other challenges were: participants who simply did not see the value of pursuing a GED; the difficulty of getting participants accustomed to a standardized test-taking environment (e.g., one that requires participants to sit in one place and concentrate for long periods of time); participants with learning disabilities who did not want to admit they needed special accommodations to take the GED (e.g., extra time); and poor attendance given the offsite nature of the GED education provider.

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<sup>7</sup> YouthBuild Boston Inc, Roxbury, MA has tried a similar tactic, but has found it challenging to get youth to return for GED assistance and tutoring once they leave the program, even with the added incentive of the program paying for them to take the test.

The average HSD attainment rate across all grantees for those in the Youth Offender program was 13.2 percent. Among the five grantees with the highest HSD attainment rate, the rate ranged from 50.0 to 89.7 percent, as can be seen in Exhibit IV-12. The grantee with the highest HSD attainment rate, YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School (Philadelphia, PA) is a charter school site with one of the strongest emphases on education in general, and postsecondary education in particular. As previously discussed, this grantee focuses heavily on college as a viable option for its youth, especially since many are not interested in pursuing a career in construction. With regard to HSD attainment specifically, staff highlighted various successful practices—including low participant to staff ratio (particularly for math instruction), the availability of tutoring time both before and after class, and a newly extended time period in which participants can stay to reach their academic goals. As part of this, the program now offers two graduation ceremonies. Staff feel that as long as participants are making an effort to learn, the program should be open for them to complete their graduation requirements.

Similar to the top performers in GED attainment, Exhibit IV-12 reveals that all but one of the top five grantees with regard to HSD attainment offer only a HSD option. CCEO YouthBuild (Gardena, CA) is the only exception to this among the five. Although the one week on/off education schedule is again most prevalent (three of the five grantees), the two top grantees with regard to HSD attainment have considerably more concentrated schedules (6 weeks on/off for YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School and 6 months for YouthBuild Honolulu). Although many grantees argued for the need to “mix it up” more frequently for participants in terms of education and worksite activities, some grantees with more concentrated education schedules argued that it facilitated greater participant focus and learning retention. Three of the top five grantees served fewer youth offenders than the overall grantee average (29.44), as well as employed fewer classroom teachers than the average (3.27). Finally, the top five grantees in terms of HSD attainment were split in terms of whether they fell above or below the average mean age and the average percent of participants age 18 or older.

Key challenges with regard to HSD attainment include: participants who cannot see the full value of investing in a HSD, particularly compared to a GED which they can often acquire in a shorter time frame; participants who cannot invest the necessary time required for a HSD given financial pressures and family obligations; participants who are starting out at a much lower grade- (e.g., as determined by the TABE) and credit-level and often cannot realistically hope to achieve a HSD while at YouthBuild; and the added obstacle for some sites posed by the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE), which all California public school students are required to pass to earn their HSD. With regard to the latter challenge, LA CAUSA YouthBuild (Los Angeles, CA) has found that many youth on the HSD track can not pass the CAHSEE, become discouraged, and drop out altogether.

**Exhibit IV-12:  
Top Five Sites in HSD Attainment Among Youth Offenders**

| <b>Site</b>   | <b>HSD attainment rate</b> | <b>HSD and/or GED</b> | <b>Education Schedule</b> | <b>Total Number of Youth Offenders</b> | <b>Number of Classroom Teachers</b> | <b>Mean age on entry</b> | <b>Percent age 18 or older</b> |
|---|----------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|
| YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School (Philadelphia, PA) | 89.7%                      | HSD only              | 6 weeks on/off            | 29                                     | 8                                   | 19.07                    | 100.0%                         |
| YouthBuild Honolulu (Honolulu, HI)                        | 68.8%                      | HSD only              | 6 months condensed        | 16                                     | 2                                   | 18.88                    | 43.8%                          |
| Bi-Cap YouthBuild (Bimidji, MN)                           | 61.9%                      | HSD only              | One week on/off           | 21                                     | 5                                   | 18.00                    | 57.1%                          |
| CCEO YouthBuild (Gardena, CA)                             | 55.6%                      | HSD and GED           | One week on/off           | 36                                     | 2                                   | 20.11                    | 88.9%                          |
| North Richmond YouthBuild, (Richmond, CA)                 | 50.0%                      | HSD only              | One week on/off           | 30                                     | 1                                   | 20.60                    | 96.7%                          |

To address the challenge of youth starting out with too few credits to pursue a HSD, LA CAUSA YouthBuild (Los Angeles, CA) has instituted a pre-YouthBuild summer program, which allows youth to start acquiring credits before enrollment, so they do not exceed their maximum number of credits during the program year. To address the challenge of youth who begin at much lower grade levels, the approach of YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School (Philadelphia, PA) is to modify their expectations and goals accordingly. For example, while staff may not be able to take a participant from a fourth grade level to a twelfth grade level within the program time frame, they work to get that participant to at least an eighth grade level so that they will be eligible for remediation services at the community college level. In some cases, staff here may also decide to switch focus completely—i.e., from education to employment—so that a reading instructor may couch his/her instruction in terms of job-focused activities, such as reading an employee manual or job application.

The final education outcome of interest is the percentage of participants who enter full-time postsecondary school. The average across all grantees was 10.2 percent. For the top five grantees, youth offenders' post-secondary enrollment ranged from 23.1-33.3 percent, as can be seen in Exhibit IV-13. The top grantee, North Richmond YouthBuild (Richmond, CA), has

strong linkages with local community colleges and participants are encouraged to take classes after they graduate from YouthBuild. However, this grantee had a relatively low percentage of youth entering first-time unsubsidized employment (20 percent), and thus many may have entered postsecondary education as an alternative. Additionally this grantee is in a state with very low community college costs, which likely reduces barriers to entry for some youth. The grantee with the second highest postsecondary rate (YouthBuild Mississippi Delta, Tallulah, LA) may enjoy success in this area because the Louisiana Technical College (LTC) is also the program's sponsoring agency. Participants can take classes at LTC concurrently with their GED studies, and, according to staff, the program makes every effort to encourage participants to continue their education once they graduate.

Finally, although YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School (Philadelphia, PA) was the grantee with only the third highest postsecondary rate, respondents from this grantee offered more potential explanations for its success. In keeping with its emphasis on a postsecondary trajectory, the program offers a college orientation as part of its transition class, which covers such topics as applying for college and financial aid. This grantee also offers a grant to participants who enroll in postsecondary education. Despite these postsecondary offerings and supports, the program articulated a few key challenges, including the lack of an information-sharing agreement with local colleges that would allow them to really know how many of their participants actually stay and succeed in college. Currently, the program only has a sense that many of its participants do not finish college because they still need remediation. Concrete feedback from colleges could allow the program to make necessary program changes, including to its transition services. Another challenge related to participant retention in college is that many youth simply do not have the proactive problem-solving skills necessary to succeed in college, especially when coming from the nurturing environment of the YouthBuild program. A further challenge articulated by grantees related to postsecondary education was persuading youth to really see college as a realistic and/or valuable option, especially compared to employment.

Two of the top five grantees in terms of postsecondary attendance offered a GED only, while three offered a HSD only. The five grantees were split in terms of their Americorps grantee status, which suggests that the availability of these postsecondary funds was not always a deciding factor for youth to pursue college. All but one of the grantees had served fewer youth offenders than the overall average (29.44), while three employed more classroom teachers than exceeded the average of 3.27 (with YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School having eight), as shown in Figure IV-13. Finally, interestingly, three out of the five grantees had a mean age for youth offenders below the average across all grantees (19.14), and only two of the grantees served a higher percentage of youth offenders who were 18 or older than the overall average of

69.2 percent—thus being in opposition to some grantees’ theory that older participants tended to be more focused on long-term education goals.

Three of these five grantees were also in the top five grantees with regard to HSD attainment—YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School (Philadelphia, PA); Bi-Cap YouthBuild (Bimidji, MN); and North Richmond YouthBuild (Richmond, CA), suggesting at least somewhat of a relationship between HSD attainment and postsecondary enrollment.

**Exhibit IV-13:  
Top Five Sites in Youth Offenders Entering Postsecondary Full-Time**

| Site  | Entered full-time postsecondary rate | GED and/or HSD | AmeriCorps Grantee | Total Number of Youth Offenders | Number of Classroom Teachers | Mean age on entry | Percent age 18 or older |
|---|--------------------------------------|----------------|--------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|
| North Richmond YouthBuild (Richmond, CA)                  | 33.3%                                | HSD only       | No                 | 30                              | 1                            | 20.60             | 96.7%                   |
| YouthBuild Mississippi Delta, (Tallulah, LA)              | 27.3%                                | GED only       | Yes                | 11                              | 6                            | 18.09             | 54.5%                   |
| YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School (Philadelphia, PA) | 24.1%                                | HSD only       | Yes                | 29                              | 8                            | 19.07             | 100.0%                  |
| Bi-Cap YouthBuild (Bimidji, MN)                           | 23.8%                                | HSD only       | No                 | 21                              | 5                            | 18.00             | 57.1%                   |
| YouthBuild Brownsville (Brownsville, TX)                  | 23.1%                                | GED only       | Yes                | 26                              | 0*                           | 17.54             | 42.3%                   |

\* 0 teachers as of second-round site visit.

## Conclusion

Educational services at YouthBuild cover a much broader scope of topics than those addressed in a traditional classroom. This is due to the educational backgrounds of youth, as well as to the program’s philosophy. Participants at YouthBuild often require a much broader and deeper level of educational services given their unique challenges, which may include learning disabilities, a dearth of academic credits, extremely negative attitudes about school, and interpersonal

factors—such as unstable housing and poor nutrition—which interfere with their ability to effectively engage and learn in the classroom. Local program philosophy also influences the scope of educational services offered. Some program grantees are equally or more concerned with education that is related to personal rather than academic development, and equipping youth with a certain set of lifestyle skills. This concern makes it necessary to offer educational services that incorporate a wide range of life skills and other non-traditional educational training.

This chapter reviewed the basic educational services provided by Youth Offender grantees and youth's key education-related challenges—the latter of which drive much of the specific nature of educational services offered. The bulk of this chapter was devoted to examining the building blocks of educational services: assessment and planning; subject matter and courses (including life skills and job readiness training); postsecondary opportunities; and academic instructors and their methods. In addition, the chapter explored several key educational outcomes realized across YouthBuild grantees, along with some associated challenges and best practices.

Among the key lessons and strategies learned in this chapter:

- **Youth's main educational challenges were both logistical and personal in nature.** Entering youth were typically far behind in terms of their education level and credit attainment, with anywhere from a second to twelfth grade level in reading and math—although the reported average was most often in the fifth to sixth grade range. Youth often suffered from abysmal levels of self-esteem and confidence in their ability to learn, as well as from poor motivation levels in the classroom, short attention spans, and a tendency to give up easily. This was often attributed to their very negative experiences in traditional school, the length of time they had been out of school, interference from ongoing personal crises, and frustrating learning disabilities. As a result of any one or combination of the factors above, youth were typically disenchanted with education and with the traditional school setting, which they often perceived as chaotic and/or unsupportive of their individual needs.
- **While all grantees sought to strengthen the basic reading, writing and math skills of youth, the majority of grantees stressed GED attainment as the end goal.** Other grantees—especially those grantees served by charter schools—were more likely to emphasize a high school diploma and/or college preparation. Key reasons for stressing a GED over a HSD include a fundamental shortage of credits and time. Many youth simply had too few high school credits and too little time to spend in the YouthBuild program—particularly if they faced financial pressures and family obligations—to reasonably expect to achieve a high school diploma.
- **YouthBuild grantees offered a range of postsecondary-oriented activities and supports.** Such activities and supports included college orientations, assistance with college and financial aid applications, tutoring from postsecondary institutions, and special college prep and transition programs offered in

conjunction with local postsecondary institutions. Those that offered more extensive postsecondary-oriented activities and supports represented a diverse mix of program models in terms of whether they offered a GED, HSD or both.

- **The most important characteristics of successful classroom teachers were unrelated to professional experience or background.** Instead, the most successful teachers were seen as those who had personal similarities with their participants, took time to get to know and personally engage with their youth, and stepped out of their “teacher role” to help youth address personal issues. Successful teachers had to show youth that they cared, and were worthy of their trust before youth could “get into their learning.”
- **Successful classroom instructors used a diverse set of teaching methods and tools to effectively reach and consistently engage youth.** A multi-method approach addressed a number of challenges, namely that: (1) different teaching methods worked for different participants with wide-ranging skill levels; (2) youth often associated traditional, single-method approaches with traditional school environments in which they had not thrived; and (3) youth had a tendency to quickly become bored and disengaged. Generally speaking, a multi-method approach meant that while a curriculum might center around specific GED or HSD requirements (e.g., subject areas, particular skills), the teacher(s) had the *flexibility* to develop an approach that would make learning consistently interesting to youth.
- **Whole group (“chalk and talk”) instruction was used very sparingly, and mostly as an introduction.** In addition to its particularly strong association with traditional schooling, whole group instruction was often not feasible with a group of participants who might range anywhere from a second to eighth grade level in math or reading. More common was an introductory “chalk and talk” section, whereby a teacher might introduce a new concept or subject to the class as a whole, before moving on to work individually with each participant on that concept. “Chalk and talk” might also involve some group board work used to go over areas with which numerous participants were having difficulty, or to sum up lessons at the end of class.
- **A core teaching method for nearly all grantees was independent work paired with individual tutoring.** This approach allowed teachers to tailor the general instructional concept or lesson at hand to the educational level and needs of each participant, as well as provide the intensive level of interpersonal assistance that participants often needed to learn and remain engaged. Youth consistently remarked about the availability of one-on-one assistance as a positive departure from traditional high school and a key to their educational success.
- **Peer teaching was held up as a model classroom practice with numerous benefits.** Peer teaching, or teaching that occurred between youth, was praised as a way to ensure more one-on-one attention, build youth confidence and leadership abilities, foster positive peer relations, and keep the more advanced participants in the class engaged. Examples of peer teaching included informally recruiting more



advanced participants as tutors or teacher aides, and formally designating some participants as liaisons between teachers and other participants.

- **Teachers’ adjustable and self-paced instructional style addressed two key educational challenges of youth.** Two key challenges that many youth faced in traditional high school were: (1) the fact that they were at a very different place than their classmates in terms of academic ability and pace of learning; and (2) the instructional pace of the teacher was pre-determined by an obligation to cover a certain amount of material within a certain timeframe. In the YouthBuild classroom, teachers’ adjustable and self-paced instructional style meant that not only did teachers have the flexibility to slow down or speed up instruction, but participants also had the flexibility to remain on their individualized learning track.
- **Small classes, a favorable teacher-to-participant ratio, and—as a result—an intense level of one-on-one attention, were arguably seen as the most critical classroom elements.** These elements were critical for satisfying youth’s need for individual acknowledgment and respect; keeping youth “on track;” and promoting effective classroom learning. They were also the main ways in which YouthBuild classrooms were distinguished from traditional classrooms. Youth consistently talked about the benefits of small class size and a personalized environment for their learning. These elements were seen as particularly important for math classes, in which youth tended to be at lower education levels in general, but in which there was also a greater range of skill among participants.
- **Making the connection between classroom instruction and real-world issues was seen as a way to better engage youth.** This connection was made through various methods, including choosing classroom subjects and course materials specifically relevant to the socioeconomic backgrounds of youth. Drawing the real-world into the classroom was also seen as a way to heighten participants’ socio-political awareness and even to apply their learning to concrete situations in the communities around them.
- **While 23.1 percent was the average GED attainment rate among youth offenders across all YouthBuild grantees included in this study, the five grantees with the highest GED attainment rates ranged from 44.0 to 58.6 percent.** One practice that numerous grantees mentioned as improving their GED attainment rate was to offer post-program or specialized-program support specifically for continuing to work on the GED.
- **While 13.2 percent was the average HSD attainment rate for youth offenders across all YouthBuild grantees included in this study, the five grantees with the highest HSD attainment rates ranged from 50.0 to 89.7 percent.** One key challenge mentioned by grantees was that participants started out at a much lower grade- and credit-levels, and thus cannot realistically hope to achieve a HSD while at YouthBuild. In response, one best practice mentioned by numerous grantees was to extend the time period in which participants could acquire credits before enrollment, and continue to work on their HSD post-program. The two grantees with the highest HSD attainment rates offered concentrated education

schedules, which may have facilitated greater participant focus and learning retention.

- **Across all YouthBuild grantees included in this study, the average rate of youth offenders who enter full-time postsecondary education was 10.2 percent, while among the top five grantees, this rate ranged from 23.1-33.3 percent.** Key practices with regard to a relatively high postsecondary rate may be a relationship with institutions that allow youth to take college courses while in YouthBuild and an explicit emphasis on postsecondary education that includes college orientation activities and supports. A key challenge in this area is simply persuading youth that postsecondary education is a realistic, valuable, and/or desirable option.

## **V. VOCATIONAL TRAINING SERVICES**

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In addition to the educational services described in the previous chapter, YouthBuild programs are expected to provide vocational training activities that expose youth to the world of work and ready them for the expectations of an employment setting. Traditionally, these vocational activities have been in the construction industry, with youth participating in the construction of low-income housing. As observed in the site visits, this general model is quite prevalent, with all but one of the 34 sites offering housing construction as their primary form of vocational training. Nearly half the sites, however, also offered different forms of vocational training, such as maintenance, computer technology, or even tile work. In this chapter, the range of vocational activities offered by the 34 Youth Offender grantees is described, focusing heavily on construction training and its intensity. Next, the structure of the activities is described, including principally whether the YouthBuild grantees have control over the scheduling or ownership of the worksites, which is a key to the overall quality of the training. Following this is a discussion of the level and overall quality of supervision provided to participants during their vocational work, including a description of the range in participant-to-supervisor ratios and the varying approaches to worksite supervision. Among these approaches is organizing the training using a formal curriculum that is certified and recognized within the construction industry. Thus, the subsequent section discusses participants' opportunities for earning occupational certificates or credentials because of their vocational work in the program. This section also provides an overview of the sites in which vocational training is linked to the academic instruction of the types described in the previous chapter. Finally, the linkages that programs have developed with partners, unions, and other potential employers are described.

### **Types of Vocational Activities**

As discussed in Chapter IV, most often youth alternate on a weekly basis between spending their time in educational and vocational training activities. Exactly half of the 34 grantees were on this weekly rotation. An additional seven of the grantees were using a rotational schedule, but alternated less frequently than weekly (i.e., bi-weekly, or less frequently). Under this rotational approach to training, participants are divided into two or more groups within the program. While

one group(s) receives educational training of the types described in Chapter IV, the remaining group(s) participates in vocational training, often traveling to a construction site at which youth assist in the construction or rehabilitation of a single-family home or multiple units within a larger apartment complex, though several grantees offer additional types of activities as well. In this section, the varying vocational activities that are offered by the Youth Offender grantees are summarized.

## **Construction-Related Training**

The primary form of vocational training offered to participants by the 34 Youth Offender grantees was the opportunity to participate in construction training, including either the construction of new single-family homes or the rehabilitation either of existing single-family homes or of multiple units within a single building. In total, 33 grantees offered some form of construction training to their youth. Of these, 25 offered the opportunity for youth to gain construction-related experience while working on the construction of new single-family homes. In approximately one-half (11) of these grantees, youth are exposed to nearly all phases of construction, including framing, rough and finish carpentry, flooring, drywall, aluminum, and insulation. In the remaining sites, however, youth are exposed to certain portions of these opportunities, but are limited from gaining full exposure either due to the fact the grantee does not have full control over the worksite or because there are state or local laws that restrict certain activities to those already licensed or those in unions.<sup>1</sup>

Most grantees that offer youth the opportunity to work on single-family homes do so in part because it is a stated mission of YouthBuild, but also because it offers youth the best opportunities to engage in a variety of tasks. For example, respondents in Philadelphia noted that exposing participants to a wide range of activities allows them to “get a good feel for all sides of construction” though “they are not going to be a master anything.” One goal of this program is to help youth identify “what they like” or what interests them. By providing opportunities to work on single-family homes, the youth are better able to gain exposure to the wide range of activities that are part of the construction industry. Similarly, in Bloomington (YouthBuild McClean County), the program seeks to build six single-family houses per year,

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<sup>1</sup> The primary activity participants are not allowed to participate in is electrical work. In half of these sites, plumbing is also off-limits to youth. Both electrical and plumbing work in these areas must be completed by certified and licensed contractors. In addition, in a few sites, youth are not allowed to conduct work on heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC), masonry, or activities that require them to be outdoors and higher than 1.5 stories above ground, which primarily places limits on their ability to install roofing. In at least four sites, respondents noted that the risk and requisite insurance required to complete the work is simply too much for grantees to afford.

providing its youth with opportunities for experience in virtually all aspects of construction. As one youth in this site noted, “You get to learn and get the hang of it by doing it over again...I can trim, lay tile, do rough framing, read blueprints, do sidewall, soft fascia roofing. I can do all you can do to build a house. I didn’t know any of this before YouthBuild.”

As another example, youth in Gardena (CA) learn general construction skills including hanging windows and doors, plumbing, painting, sheetrock and mudding, and sprinkler installation, and are allowed to learn roofing. Youth indicated that they are learning the “basics” of construction—they are not just learning how to *physically* do specific tasks, but they are being exposed to important knowledge such as how to plan for, budget and shop for materials to accomplish these tasks.

The advantages of providing opportunities to work on single-family housing, then, are that youth can engage in a wide variety of tasks and gain exposure to many different aspects of the construction process. Another benefit is that the finished home will remain in the area as tangible evidence of the youth’s efforts. Youth in many sites expressed great pride in their work and in being able to complete something from the ground up. As one youth expressed: “when we finish, I can look at that and say ‘I did that...I built that.’” Staff from multiple grantees shared that youth would frequently bring their families to see the house once it had been completed, and took great pride in having contributed to creating a new home in which a family could live.

Although many sites acknowledged the preference for offering youth the opportunity to construct a single-family home, not all grantees were able to accomplish this. Further, several grantees that did offer their participants this opportunity found that there were significant periods of down time in which a worksite was unavailable. As such, these sites also engaged in maintenance or clean-up work, either to fill in during down periods of construction or as a significant portion of the vocational training in which youth participate. Specifically, 18 of the 25 grantees that provided opportunities to work on single-family home construction also worked to provide opportunities for youth to participate in the rehabilitation of multi-unit apartment complexes.

Other grantees, however, do not offer youth the chance to participate in single-family housing construction but focus instead on rehabilitation projects. Seven of the Youth Offender grantees offer rehabilitation projects as their sole source of vocational training. For example, in Flushing (NY), youth work to renovate low-income rooms throughout the YMCAs across New York City. The program has contracted with the YMCA to renovate 90 such rooms over a two-year period. Typically, this involves stripping wallpaper or paint, repainting, removing carpeting or linoleum, and refurbishing plumbing or other fixtures. While the disadvantage of this type of work is that it does not expose youth to a wide range of construction activities, it does have the advantage of

allowing youth to proceed without needing complicated instructions about how to complete their work properly. Youth therefore rarely must wait to proceed with this type of work.

Unfortunately, however, many youth find this work to be of much less appeal than construction of a home. For example, one youth described:

*There are some skills that I was expecting that I definitely did not get from YouthBuild. Supposedly, we do construction. We haven't had to learn anything. But it's good because it's easy. All I have to do is clean the gym or paint. That's one thing I've learned is how to paint. I never really knew how to paint. They taught me how to use a buffer and to take the wax off a floor. I don't consider painting or buffing construction.*

As noted above, many grantees offer a combination of the construction of low-income, single-family homes with renovation and rehabilitation work. Typically, this is because these grantees have discovered that there are lulls in their ability to have a single-family home site available on which to work. Often, especially in grantees in the northern part of the country, such lulls can occur because of inclement weather. If a house has not been framed and sided, when the weather turns cold often grantees must find alternative means for providing training to youth. In other cases, such lulls occur because it takes time for arrangements to be made to purchase or lease land, or begin construction. For example, in Fresno, in addition to constructing new low-income housing in partnership with Self-Help Enterprises (SHE), a local organization in which the families that will purchase the home participate in its construction, youth also spend time refurbishing Housing Authority complexes which ensures that youth never lack a suitable work site.

Often, though, rehabilitation of multiple units means that participants must complete the same task repetitively, and as a result participants often lose interest in such work quickly. Additionally, some youth feel taken advantage of when asked to complete work of this type. This feeling is particularly pervasive among programs that advertised to youth that they would be able to work on construction of housing. In such sites, when there are programmatic or other reasons why construction work is unavailable for a period of time, youth are generally asked to work on rehabilitation projects or clean-up work. Youth in some of these sites report being resentful and feeling as though they are simply cheap labor.

It is not always the case, however, that rehabilitation work is mundane and lacks meaningful training opportunities for youth. For example, in Honolulu, although in the past youth's work in rehabilitating public housing units was fairly menial and consisted largely of cleaning up and painting rather than more technical construction work, this has not been the case with recent cohorts of youth. Specifically, with the fairly small cohort of youth that was active during the second site visit, youth working on rehabilitation of public housing authority units were engaged

in a full range of construction-related activities, including drywall, electrical work, carpentry, and plumbing. Hence, such work need not consist of menial activities and can offer youth exposure to a broad array of components of the construction industry, though it is clearly more of a challenge to do so in this area than when working on a single-family home simply because the range of tasks in rehabilitation is narrower.

There can be a clear trade-off, then, in providing opportunities for youth in the rehabilitation of multi-unit apartment complexes. While it often affords fewer opportunities to engage in construction-related tasks, it does enable sites to offer onsite vocational training opportunities during periods when there are no single-family homes on which to work, whether because of a lack of land on which to build or inclement weather that prevents it. Thus, although rehabilitation work may not offer the range of activities that single-family construction does, programs that offer both types of opportunities may be better able to fill gaps in construction schedules and ensure that youth are always actively engaged in vocational activities.

## **Other Vocational Alternatives**

Although nearly all the Youth Offender grantees offer vocational training in the construction industry, nearly half of them (16) also offer programs that are markedly different from construction or construction-related activities. For example, in Philadelphia, the grantee used a capacity-building grant received from YouthBuild USA to develop a computer technology training program. Because computer technology is a high-growth industry that has many entry-level opportunities, program staff believed this was an appealing vocational training program to offer participants. The goal of this training is not to have participants ready to work in the technology industry but to offer them a basic overview of possible careers in it. In addition, students receive the Microsoft IC 3 certification, which means that they have had exposure to desktop publishing and basic web design. Participants in this training also learn to refurbish computers and offer desktop support. Many participants express significant interest in the program because they perceive that there is a strong job market for computer technicians.

In this training, participants gain work experience on site and in the community with nonprofit partners of the YouthBuild grantee. In the morning, participants attend an IC 3 certification course. From 10 am until noon, participants work with one of three instructors to focus in on their career interests such as troubleshooting/help desk support, desktop publishing, and computer refurbishing. Then, from 1 to 3 pm, participants engage in a variety of projects for the partners, such as setting up wiring for network systems. The Director of Programming for the YouthBuild grantee noted that this particular training option requires students to develop problem solving and customer service skills as well as fill leadership roles. The students are strongly invested in the training because they can take ownership in the projects they complete.

Youth in Portland (OR) also have the opportunity to receive computer/technology training. This grantee initiated a computer technology training program in 2001 through a grant from Corporation for National and Community Service. The grant is a pilot program aimed at addressing the digital divide among low income youth. During their one year of training, Computer Tech students learn hardware and software fundamentals. According to the grantee's promotional materials, "By the end of the program [youth] can assemble and upgrade desktop computers, troubleshoot hardware malfunctions, navigate the Internet, create web sites, graphics, presentations, and print media."<sup>2</sup>

Students in this program provide free web development and desktop publishing services to non-profit organizations and schools, as well as refurbished computer equipment for low-income families. The goal of this training is to help participants make the transition to post-secondary programs or technical certification that will lead to entry-level jobs and opportunities for growth.

At least two grantees (Trenton and Youth Action Programs in New York City) offer C-Tech training as well, which provides youth with the opportunity to learn the techniques of installing fiber-optic cable. Youth who complete this training receive certification in it, which is a nationally recognized certification.

Philadelphia also offers a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) training program. AmeriCorps volunteers coordinate this program, oversee the interview process for students who would like to participate in the program, serve as the liaison between the grantee and the Red Cross, and work with students to help them prepare for the CNA state exam. The training consists of a four-week class at the Red Cross, two weeks of preparation for the state exam, and an internship at local hospitals and nursing homes. Programs in Tallulah (YouthBuild Delta) and Madison (Operation Fresh Start) also provide CNA training, and the program in Bemidji, MN was planning to as of the second site visit. Exhibit V-1 provides an example of a youth who engaged in this training.

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<sup>2</sup> [www.pybpd.org](http://www.pybpd.org)



**Exhibit V-1:  
Example of Alternative Vocational Training**

Once a high school dropout, Lenny participated in the YouthBuild program and is now working towards a career in nursing. He works full-time and earns \$13.50 an hour as a Patients' Care Assistant.

*Lenny dropped out of school in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade because of his desire to have a job and make money. "I feel like one of the reasons I dropped out is because I had a job. I wanted money so I could look good. The job was cutting into my schoolwork."*

*However, he soon realized that he needed more education. "I was doing a lot of crappy jobs, on and off. I felt like this isn't the life for me. I needed to get educated and get a career job. I wanted to go back to school and finish. I had to keep moving."*

Lenny applied to YouthBuild in 2005, but was not accepted due to the program's high enrollment. *"I was depressed from September until December."* However, he did not give up and was later accepted into the program's next cohort.

*"I was interested in construction. If that's all they offered at YouthBuild then that would be fine. But, I was more interested in the nursing program. I applied and got in."*

*"I thought we were just going to be doing blood pressure and stuff like that but I found out that we're actually going to be doing feeding and washing the patient. I almost backed out, but I didn't. I thought that I did not want to be a nurse because I thought that I did not want to wash anybody up. But as time went on...somebody told me, 'You got to put your feelings aside and just think that you're helping this person to feel better about themselves. And they need this because they can't help themselves.' Now I can wash anybody."*

*"So many people in my community, they proud of me. My neighbor seen me in my white [CNA] uniform and tell me how good I looked. He said, 'I'm happy for you.' He's a pastor, and he talks about getting involved in the community in different programs. He's been a really positive person in my life."*

Lenny recently graduated from YouthBuild with honors and now works full-time as a Patients' Care Assistant. *"I got meritorious honors...It was a really good experience because in regular high school I ain't never do this good...I didn't know that I would be this smart and like on point with the work. This is one time of my life that I will always be really, really proud of."*

In San Diego, youth can participate in one of two training options. StoneWorx is a stone making and setting organization that makes decorative tiles mostly for high-end installations.

CleanSweep is a building maintenance operation. Both of these options generate income that can be funneled back to the program, through either the sale or installation of tile or through maintenance contracts. This program, then, differs considerably from most of the other sites in this study, in that it does not offer a construction component at all. Youth at this site report that they enjoy the training options, but because they have not had the opportunity to participate in construction training, it is unclear whether they would have chosen that alternative instead had it been available.

Youth in the Trenton (NJ) YouthBuild generally participate in typical construction activities. During the summer months, however, selected youth participate in an eight week paid horticultural internship at Historic Morven of Princeton, NJ. Trainees learn landscaping, weed and flower identification, propagation methods, the purpose of public gardens, compost pile maintenance, journaling, team building and money management.

In New Waverley, TX, youth participate in one or more of ten separate “shops” for their vocational training. Based on assessments of interest and skills made at enrollment, youth participate in one of the following:

- Automotive Technology
- Building Maintenance
- Building Trades
- Culinary Arts
- Horticulture
- Bricklaying and Stone Masonry
- Mill and Cabinet Making
- Painting and Decorating
- Business Computer Information Systems
- C-Tech Cable and Technology Installation

Based on discussions between the youth and case manager, the youth will identify three shops that seem to best fit her/his interest, and will spend one day in each of these shops to assess whether it seems to be a good fit. Following this, youth select a single shop in which to participate, and are formally placed in that shop. The shop experience lasts for approximately three months, though it is open entry/open exit, so youth can choose to remain for less time if they desire. To move out of a shop, students are expected to master certain competencies, the completion of which is generally self-paced.

Youth in the Fresno program can receive training in either landscaping or recycling. Participants in LACAUSA (Los Angeles) can opt to undergo training in AutoCAD (a software program that is used in engineering tasks) or in video editing.

Finally, YouthBuild Excel (St. Louis, MO), offers a heavy highway pre-apprenticeship program to train participants to work on an expansion of I-64 that will begin in 2008 and continue for several years. The program, which is called PRIDE, is funded by the Missouri Department of Transportation, and instructs students in five trades utilizing a trade-approved curriculum and support program. The instructor is an employee of Altman Charter Construction Company, which has a partnership with the grantee. In addition, a math instructor from St. Louis University is helping students to pass the work keys program at level six in preparation for working on the highway project. To enter this program, participants must have completed six months in the YouthBuild program.

## Quality and Level of Supervision

Typically, for grantees in which participants are working within the construction trade, a team of six to eight youth is supervised by a single worksite supervisor. One key distinction among sites in the quality of supervision was the number of staff or others available to supervise and assist youth. On average, the student to supervisor ratio is 6.9 to one, but there is substantial variation among grantees. Six grantees maintain a ratio of four or fewer youth per instructor. Twenty-one of the grantees maintain a ratio of between five and nine to one. The remaining six have a ratio that exceeds ten students per instructor. Similarly, grantees ranged widely in the number of worksite staff they employed. Although on average, there were slightly less than three instructors per grantee (2.85), grantees employed as few as one and as many as seven such staff to oversee youth's vocational training.

In sites with a very high supervisor to student ratio, there was less opportunity for participants to lose focus. For example, in Brockton, although there is only one site supervisor for each crew, there are two graduate students (2<sup>nd</sup> year YouthBuild participants) who serve effectively as additional supervisors. Given there are three individuals working with each work team, there are few opportunities in which participants can lose focus or be left for extended periods with nothing to do. We found similar examples of using second-year, or graduate students (who have completed the initial YouthBuild program but have remained on staff) to assist in supervising participants in at least five sites. For example, in Rockford (IL), the program has developed an entire graduate program, which effectively is a second year of training for all those who complete their first year successfully. Graduates assist worksite supervisors in training new enrollees to the program.

No matter how many supervisors a site has, in each case, the general training is quite similar. First, the supervisor(s) explains what needs to happen to complete the activity, such as cutting a board for framing. Following this, the supervisor will demonstrate the proper technique for completing this activity to either the entire group or a subset of participants. Once the technique is demonstrated, the supervisor will ask for any questions from the participants. Often, questions will prompt an additional demonstration, or discussion of alternative ways to complete the activity, as well as a discussion of why the alternatives are less preferable.

One contrast to this was found in Portland (ME). At this grantee, whenever youth will be doing a new type of work at a construction site, the vocational instructors first provide youth with in-shop training where they demonstrate how to complete the work correctly and give youth a chance to practice it. Sometimes, youth will also watch a video about how to complete the work. The instructors used to train youth on new techniques on-site, but they found that this led to the instructors doing all the work. Now, after the techniques have been demonstrated in the

classroom, once at the worksite the youth complete the work under supervision by the instructors. Because so much time is spent on training, one of the vocational instructors estimated that the youth spend only 50% of their time actually working on-site.

One of the major challenges cited by the supervisors of this type of vocational training is the fact that a majority of the youth enter the program without any prior exposure to the work and with minimal construction skills. According to several instructors, while this creates an initial barrier to the work, the limitation can best be overcome by being very patient with youth as they are learning the skills. Additionally, most supervisors reported needing to repeat their instructions frequently. Necessarily, this slows down the construction progress, and makes it very difficult to schedule exactly when projects and houses will be completed, as this depends heavily on how quickly the youth entering the program develop their construction skills.

This fact leads to a second key distinction in the quality of supervision, which has to do with the level of control grantees have over the construction schedule and, thus, the opportunity to train youth. Grantees with the greatest control over the construction process were better able to ensure that youth received high-quality and personalized training as they built the housing, because there were few external pressures or deadlines that prevented instructors from spending the necessary time to provide this training. In some cases, YouthBuild grantees are able to control the entire schedule, because they own or manage the housing site. For example, a few grantees negotiate to buy their own land, so they can then control the production of housing. As one example, in Bloomington (IL), the grantee, and especially its Vice-President for construction and development, negotiated on behalf of the grantee for the purchase of 57 acres of land for a subdivision the program is currently developing, and individual parcels will then be resold to low-income families and others.

Similarly, Operation Fresh Start (Madison, WI) develops its own properties that can then be used to build single-family homes. As of the time of the visit, the agency had seven different properties at various stages of construction (from waiting to be developed to having completed homes that were waiting to be sold). By purchasing the land, arranging the financing, and constructing the structure from the ground up, these grantees are able to control the entire process, and avoid the conflicts that come from external pressures, such as the need to meet builders' timelines or have a house ready at a specified time.

Los Angeles (LACAUSA) has obtained funding from outside sources, such as the Pentair Foundation, which allows the grantee the ability to operate and manage its own construction sites. The construction trainer believes this has allowed youth to gain additional hands-on training, because they have the ability to participate in all phases of construction.

The Columbus grantee also manages its own construction sites, and is responsible for obtaining permits, finding lots to build low-income homes, and homes to rehabilitate. Respondents stated that they usually try to find homes in the inner city, and areas that are accessible by bus so the participants will not have any difficulty in making it to a worksite. The grantee then sells these homes to individuals meeting income requirements, and the proceeds go back to the program.

The YouthBuild grantee in Boston is attempting to develop a similar approach. Specifically, this grantee is seeking to operate the construction side of the program by a for-profit subsidiary that would hire participants to work on the projects, and could hire participants that graduated from the YouthBuild program to work full-time. By creating this subsidiary, the grantee hopes that it will earn a profit that could then be invested back into the agency and this additional money could be reinvested into the program, much as Operation Fresh Start has been able to earn income from the housing operation and can reinvest it into the program for subsequent training. However, staff in Boston reported that this approach has not really gotten “off the ground” as yet.

The senior vocational instructor in Portland (ME) made the case for being in control of the construction schedule by noting that he tries not to allow pressure to finish a project to get in the way of providing sufficient training for youth. For example, when some participants were making very slow progress completing a project to build a new staircase for a building of low income housing units, he kept to a very extensive training schedule—even taking youth off the staircase project to have them work on cable TV cabinets, which he thought was a better “learning opportunity.” However, because the YouthBuild grantee did not control the schedule for this project and had real deadlines that needed to be met, for a short time, the vocational instructors did most of the work with participants only being able to watch. A similar story was relayed by a vocational supervisor in West Virginia; because of tight deadlines, on occasion the instructors themselves must take over to complete the work. In these sites, youth generally gain exposure to a wide range of construction activities, but this must be sacrificed when external deadlines require work to be completed according to a schedule that does not allow sufficient time for training and learning opportunities.

There also was substantial variation in the level of construction experience supervisors had. At one extreme, some grantees hired former construction contractors or certified vocational instructors to oversee youth. These individuals have significant training and experience in construction and can impart wisdom on almost any task that participants will encounter. For example, in St. Louis, worksite instructors are certified Department of Education vocational teachers with extensive experience in building and rehabilitating housing. The Trenton YouthBuild grantee also employs certified vocational trainers as worksite supervisors. At the

other extreme, some grantees focus much more heavily on finding worksite supervisors who can relate to youth, often at the expense of hiring someone with substantial construction experience. For example, at Operation Fresh Start (OFS, Madison, WI), grantee staff reported that they seek worksite supervisors with a background in construction and in working with youth of the sort served by the program. Often, however, they cannot find a single person with both sets of skills. The Housing Director acknowledged that, most often, they hire individuals with experience in the latter, and hope to be able to train them in the former. One worksite supervisor, who is also a graduate of OFS, noted, “I just need to know enough to stay one step ahead of the students.”

Although grantees generally have enough work for all youth to participate, several respondents noted that keeping youth interested was a key challenge. Some participants take greater interest in the construction work and, thus, proceed quickly or are able to focus intently on their tasks. Others, however, have greater difficulty remaining focused on their work. These participants tend to wander in their attention and do not proceed as quickly or uniformly. Site supervisors described this as the greatest challenge for their everyday work, noting that it is difficult to keep six or more participants busy and engaged throughout the entire day, especially those with less overall interest in construction work. Additionally, because each step in the construction of a single-family home requires an explanation about the proper procedures for completion, participants who finish one task must await the instructor’s availability before proceeding, because they generally need to be shown how to proceed. This, too, was affected by the level of control grantees had over the construction process. For grantees with complete control over construction, supervisors had greater ability to work individually with participants, and ensure that all participants had activities to keep them busy and interested.

For example, in Columbus, respondents worried because participants will sometimes appear bored, and have a difficult time with being attentive. The grantee has addressed this challenge by allowing a site supervisor to work one-to-one with those participants that appear to be “falling off.” In addition, once a participant has mastered certain skills, the site supervisors will allow them to lead specific tasks and complete those tasks on their own. Giving the participant this type of autonomy helps them to learn the skills even better, and allows them to develop themselves as an individual and a leader. Further, it is possible to structure the worksite in this way because there are few external pressures or requirements that prevent individual instruction and exposure to all aspects of the construction process.

On rare occasions, though, participants feel as though they do not get sufficient opportunities to participate in the training, or that they are simply cheap labor rather than participants gaining exposure to real opportunities to learn the construction trade. Typically, these grantees do not control the worksites but, rather, work with unions or general contractors using participants as

additional labor. For example, at one grantee, interviewed participants felt they were not allowed to do any technical work, and it was only through repeated requests to help the union apprentices or subcontractors that a few of the participants gained meaningful experiences with these more experienced practitioners. One youth said that, after repeated requests, he was able to work for one week putting in windows and doors. This participant lamented that “it was the first and last time [he had gotten] to use any of the tools in [his] belt.”

Similarly, for grantees that did not control the construction process, there often were changes in the schedule that required substantial shifts in the typical YouthBuild schedule to meet the needs of the external agencies involved. For example, at one grantee, construction was behind in a schedule that external agencies had devised. To be able to finish up in a more timely manner, construction managers took most YouthBuild participants off the site and assigned them to classroom work, ordering supplies, while leaving the most proficient participants at the worksite to clean up while subcontractors completed most of the finishing work.

This general theme emerged from interviews with a number of participants across a minority of grantees. For instance, one participant said that he had spent six weeks continuously on construction at the expense of his academic work, and did not know why this was the case. As he noted (with interviewer prompts in brackets):

*Lately they've just had me working. [Why?] I'm not sure. I guess sometimes they don't switch you from school to work, they just have you work. They have a paper up there saying one week school and one week work, but when it comes to my turn, they don't put me in school, I just end up going to work. I end up going. [You don't really know why?] No, I don't ask. I just go to work. Then when I get home, I don't end up sticking with my [school] work. I don't know why.*

Another participant stated:

*I know that the program could be improved if, when they say they are going to do something, to be consistent and do what they say. To me, the only thing that is consistent [in this program] is inconsistency. They tell us that we're going to be in school one week and at work the next week. But, for whatever reason, because someone doesn't show up or whatever, that gets switched around. It's complete chaos...*

Thus, the distinction between grantees that control the construction process and those that do not can affect participants' perceptions of the program and the extent to which they are receiving real learning and training opportunities, rather than simply being extra hired help.

## Partnerships

Many grantees have established key partnerships that allow them to deliver vocational training to their participants. Often, these partnerships help to provide the sites at which the youth will work. Specifically, slightly more than two-thirds of the grantees established partnerships with agencies that provided the actual construction worksites. For example, several grantees partnered with the local housing authority, which provided land upon which participants could then build a single family home or housing sites that could be renovated. In Brockton (MA), the housing authority provided land, and supervised the pouring of concrete for the foundation. Once the foundation was in place, however, youth participants completed nearly all other aspects of construction of the single family homes. This partnership provides benefits to both parties, as the cost to develop the home is substantially reduced for the YouthBuild grantees (because the housing authority obtains and prepares the land), and the housing authority receives additional housing stock through the labor provided by the participants.

In several other locations, grantees partnered with Habitat for Humanity to provide labor in the construction of Habitat homes. Although many grantees reported this seemed to be a natural fit, the relationship was not always a smooth one. For example, in Gardena (CA), some respondents noted there have been challenges in working with Habitat because the older and primarily white staff at Habitat had some difficulty relating to and understanding the youth served by Gardena's YouthBuild program. Similarly, because Habitat maintains its own schedule for completing homes, the fit was not always ideal if youth were unable to keep up with the schedule or had greater training needs than would allow for them to keep pace. An additional concern was identified in Los Angeles (LACAUSA), where it was noted that partnering with Habitat sometimes limited the range of activities to which participants were exposed, because of its requirements for licensed workers in many portions of the construction. Similarly, although the grantee in Waukegan (IL) currently partners with Habitat for Humanity to rehabilitate low-income housing, grantee officials believe that this relationship has been less than satisfactory especially with respect to the quality of training offered to youth. The Program Director reported that Habitat staff see YouthBuild participants as "free labor," and there is little consistency in what youth do on the construction site from day to day. As a result, the grantee was working on a new approach to construction as of the second visit.

In addition, several grantees have partnered with employers to develop internships or modify their instruction to ensure that program training and participants are well-suited for future employment. For example, in Flushing (NY), the grantee works to provide internships to participants. Participants attend their internships on Wednesday; so on this day, there is no GED preparation class or vocational training. Of the 13 agencies and businesses that provide internships, eight are with the YMCA. According to grantee staff, youth offenders can be



difficult to place in an internship because of their criminal background. Several agencies and businesses, including the YMCA, conduct drug screening and criminal background checks. Internships with the YMCA vary, from building maintenance, to office administrative work, to childcare. The most prized internship is with Gino Green Global, a fashion agency that focuses on “hip-hop” clothing. Currently, three participants interested in working in the fashion industry have internships with this company.

In Portland (ME), if vocational instructors learn that a potential employer wants workers with particular skills, they will adjust their curriculum to include those skills. For example, after meeting with Cianbro, a large construction services company, the instructors learned that the employer wanted workers with experience working with epoxy paints. To make graduates more competitive for Cianbro jobs, the next time they needed to do painting, the vocational instructors trained youth on how to use epoxy paints.

The Philadelphia grantee offers several opportunities for youth to be employed in construction. After completing the YouthBuild program, youth may continue on to participate in a union four-year apprenticeship program, the four-year, non-union Association of Builders and Contractors (ABC) apprenticeship program, or to work directly for general contractors. There are also several non-physical construction job opportunities on the administrative side, and the grantee’s vocational education class provides workshops discussing opportunities for employment in the construction industry. However, one challenge that participants face is getting accepted into union apprenticeships. Grantee managers and staff view local unions as closed to most participants in the program. Unions have made it very difficult to join for example, by making entry exams more difficult. This is significant since, as the Construction Supervisor adds, “Philadelphia is a union town.”

According to the instructor, participants need apprenticeship programs to bridge the gap between YouthBuild training and a career in construction. Although YouthBuild provides participants with job development, safety knowledge, construction math, and certification, they still are not well-suited for entry into the union without further training. This is important because earnings in the field are quite different depending on whether the youth is seeking union or non-union job opportunities. An entry-level, unionized construction worker earns on average \$16 an hour, while a non-union, entry-level worker earns \$8- \$10 an hour. Of the approximately 40 participants interested in getting into the carpenters’ union, which is the strongest and most difficult to enter, the Vocational Education teacher estimates that only 10 students will be accepted, because most will have difficulty passing the entrance exam.

As a result, several grantees have established or attempted to establish relationships with the local trade unions, to gain access for their participants to these organizations that often dominate

employment opportunities in the construction and other trades. In Boston, for example, apprentices from the carpenters' union and their union instructors have been working alongside YouthBuild participants at the worksite since July, 2006. This partnership between the grantee and the union gives the union apprentices an opportunity to work on a real site while the union instructors help to train program participants as well as their own apprentices.

Further, Portland (OR) YouthBuild is a state certified pre-apprenticeship program and has worked hard to establish its credibility with unions. At first, this grantee sought to arrange direct entry into the apprenticeship programs. When this initially did not work, however, the construction manager decided to let the skills and work ethic of the program's graduates speak for itself. As an example, he reported that in one year, the program sent five students to be admitted to the carpenters' apprenticeship program, along with 30 other individuals seeking enrollment at the same time. Of the six people who were taken into the apprenticeship program, five were the YouthBuild graduates. As a result of such successes, Portland's program now has "direct entry" into the carpenters' apprenticeship program and "modified open entry" into the electricians' program.

In addition, both St. Louis YouthBuild programs have relationships with the carpenters', electricians', and painters' unions, and a local construction company through which they provide 30 day "trials" or internships for YouthBuild participants with a strong interest in pursuing that trade. The grantee simply calls Builders Block, the local construction company, to alert them that they have a participant who they believe is ready for a 30 day trial. Builder's Block coordinates with the union, which then issues a 30 day work permit for the participants, who then goes to work on a crew. According to staff, most participants (80 percent) who are placed in these 30 day internships are subsequently employed by Builders Block.

Exhibit V-2 provides an example of a participant who successfully used his YouthBuild experience to gain entry into the local union.

## **Exhibit V-2: Gaining Entry to a Union**

Henry benefited greatly from participating in a construction program offered by one of YouthBuild's partners. He now belongs to a local painters' union and earns \$12.25 an hour.

*"A friend of mine told me about [another youth program]...They gave out jobs ...but I wanted my GED and to pick up skills too. Other people weren't going for school; they were going for jobs. I said I want to go for the long-term...I'd rather have some back up...So, I decided to come [to YouthBuild]. I knew it would be like school but mostly construction work.*

*"It's good because I want to be a painter. Most of the time that's what I do. I paint. I'm satisfied. I got to buff the floors...That's something that I never thought I would have learned. It's good because construction is not a promise. When you're looking, you might get a maintenance job where you need to mop floors and clean bathrooms.*

*"I got more than I expected. I just thought that they were going to teach me construction and I would have to go and get a job after that. But they like, put me into [their partner's construction training] program and got me into a union. It was like way more than I bargained for.*

## **Certifications**

Participants not only develop skills through their vocational training, they also often can receive industry-recognized certificates or credentials when they complete their training. For more than 80 percent of the grantees, the construction curriculum is based on materials from the National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER), which is a not-for-profit education foundation that addresses workforce development issues in the construction industry, develops industry-driven training programs, and provides trainees with portable and recognized credentials.<sup>3</sup> Grantees did vary substantially in the extent to which this curriculum was strictly followed. Some grantees designed their entire training around this curriculum, using each chapter and module to teach a specific skill. Others were far less formal in their approach, loosely basing instruction on the NCCER curriculum but not requiring that all skills be addressed or that the modules be addressed sequentially. Although grantees using this curriculum vary in whether they set specific goals for completion, in most cases a primary objective for participants is to obtain this credential.

In Bloomington (IL), for example, the grantee has set a goal for the project to have 50 percent of youth receive NCCER certification, and thus far approximately 40 percent receive this certification in any given year. Similarly, in Los Angeles (LACAUSA), the construction trainer facilitates the NCCER training course once a week for two to three hours, during which youth learn concrete skills about home construction and rehabilitation (e.g. tool identification and usage, safety procedures, window installation, etc.). Approximately 70 to 85 percent of youth

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.nccer.org/index.asp>

become certified at this site. The Waukegan (IL) YouthBuild grantee instructors use a combination of the NCCER and the HomeBuilders Institute curricula, and participants receive certification in the NCCER curriculum.

Participants in Portland (ME) spend one morning per week learning about certain tools according to a set curriculum related to NCCER certification, and organize much of their on-site training around this certification as well. Vocational instructors expect participants to attain at least core certification by the time they graduate from the program.

Similarly, Philadelphia's training structure allows youth to connect academic learning with technical training and hands-on experience. During the six weeks that participants are focused on construction training, they spend four days on-site and one day in their vocational education class. This course is meant to prepare participants for, and compliment, their on-site construction experiences. For example, participants may make model houses in class and identify construction materials and methods. Participants also calculate areas of spaces and lengths and widths of walls, among other measurements. Participants must also complete homework and pass tests on construction math and materials. Once they complete this course, they obtain a NCCER certificate. Youth in Brownsville (TX) also follow a curriculum that, upon completion of the program, allows them to receive NCCER certification.

In addition to this widely recognized certificate, grantees often provide other certificate or credential opportunities. Approximately two-thirds of all the grantees reported offering other types of vocational or occupational certifications to youth. In Gardena (CA), participants consistently cited the benefits of "certifications" that they earn through their construction work, such as the Hazardous Materials and CalOSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) certificates. Hazardous materials training consists of 40 hours of training in handling and disposing of hazardous materials, while the CalOSHA training involves ten hours of workplace safety training. According to youth, these certifications have proven extremely valuable to past participants who have since secured good-paying jobs; adding these to their resumes was seen as a tangible program outcome for them. Participants in Portland (ME) also can receive certifications in workplace safety. These participants spend one morning each week receiving OSHA training from the senior vocational instructor, and have the opportunity to receive OSHA certification before they graduate. Participants at this grantee also can complete a computerized work readiness and assessment program developed in cooperation with the Chamber of Commerce. If they successfully complete this program, participants are awarded a work readiness certificate.

Prior to working on-site, participants in Trenton (NJ) also are required to complete ten hours of an OSHA safety training course, for which they receive an OSHA training certification, and five hours each of CardioPulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) and First Aid training.

Participants in the Springfield (MA) site can gain certification in Green Building. Through their standard construction training, this grantee includes an environmental component taught by Green Industry Career Pathway,<sup>4</sup> which awards a certificate in environmentally sustainable building to those who complete the curriculum.

Several grantees also offered certification in lead abatement. For example, through a community development agency grant, YouthBuild St. Louis helped participants obtain their lead abatement worker and supervisor certifications and licenses. This grantee established relationships with two local Lead Paint Abatement construction companies and has successfully placed many of its graduates, including two youth offender graduates with this company. According to grantee staff, lead paint abatement jobs are ideal for youth offenders because they accept certified youth who are ex-offenders. However, because this grantee was closing down operations as of the second round of site visits due to lack of funding, this opportunity likely will be lost.

## **Links to Academic Instruction**

Finally, in addition to formal certifications, which attempt to recognize the specific skills participants obtain during their training, some grantees also attempt to link their classroom training with the vocational instruction to varying degrees, or provide academic credit for the vocational work completed by participants. Indeed, more than three-fourths of the Youth Offender grantees reported linking these two types of instruction in some manner, though there was substantial variation in the intensity with which they did so. In Bloomington (IL), for example, participants spend one-half day a week on the construction site studying. During this time, instructors teach those sections of the curriculum that are closest to the skills that participants are currently using on the site.

In Bemidji (MN), participants receive high school credits for work experience in the building trades industry. At this site, a certified instructor employed by the program always supervises the crews of eight to ten participants. In addition, an Industrial Technology teacher from the local high school spends one day each week on the construction site with participants, which allows the instructor to document their progress and, hence, issue high school credits for the

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<sup>4</sup> This program's mission is to promote environmental careers for inner city youth.

activities. YouthBuild participants are paid minimum wage for 32 hours of work and training each week.

Similarly, participants in St. Louis complete a construction skills curriculum that is designed to provide them with intensive and comprehensive training in the building trades. Typically, the grantee offers vocational training on a daily basis, and the curriculum is presented in two sequential courses—Fundamental /Intermediate and Intermediate/Advanced Vocational Worksite Construction Skills, both of which integrate classroom vocational education with worksite vocational skills training. These building trades are designed to prepare participants for apprenticeships, jobs and post-secondary education. Participants on the work-site perform carpentry, drywall work, limited plumbing, finishing and herringbone brick landscaping.

## **Job Readiness Skills and Other Benefits of Training**

A substantial number of youth who enter YouthBuild are not interested in the construction trade as a long-term career. Given this, it is possible that the training offered by sites is a poor fit for these youth. Although some participants did complain about this very fact, a majority acknowledged that, even though they were unlikely to use the construction skills they obtained through the program for their future careers, there were other reasons why the skills were a valuable tool.

Specifically, participants believe they are learning valuable job readiness skills through their vocational training, including the proper work ethic, punctuality, and good communication skills, among others. In addition, participants suggested they learned about how to “behave” in the work culture. For instance, they are required to tuck in their shirts, respect others, and keep a positive attitude.

*[The teachers tell us] don't be disrespectful, to think before you talk, and think before you do something. They help you better yourself in your attitude. I had a loud mouth and blurted out a lot of stupid stuff...where's that going to get you in life, to say the wrong things? Jobwise, they talk to you about being punctual. Like, if you are on a job, what happens if you're late, it's gonna affect you. They encourage you.*

Similarly, one participant summarized the important job readiness skills being taught in the following way:

*With training, you learn how to carry yourself. With your supervisor you have to be respectful. They teach us to be responsible, to do your job, not to play around.*

The coaching that participants are getting seems to be well understood by them, many of whom said that the teachers are trying to teach them about the work world. For example, one participant said:

*We need to tuck in our t-shirts. They're getting us ready for outside jobs, and how we should be presented.*

As part of the program, participants also develop resumes, conduct mock interviews, and learn how to present themselves to supervisors/prospective employers. These skills and tools, as well, are valued by the participants in the program. One noted:

*They help me with my resume...like, I need to put all my skills on paper. They help you type it up. I didn't even know what a resume was. We all have a resume now. We learn how to write checks, how to use a check card, what insufficient funds are.*

Another participant commented on the value provided by interview training.

*They take you to interviews and train you on what you need to do when you get there. They had someone come in and act like it's a real interview. During the interview, you present yourself and practice. It's not fun, but needed, because you have to go interview to get a job. You have to learn how to properly dress, how to behave.*

In addition to the value in increasing participants' job readiness, youth identified other reasons there was value in the construction training. Although not always excited about the tasks, one participant felt that the construction training would be transferable to his interest in auto mechanics in the future. Another participant thought of the heavy grunt work such as digging trenches "as a good workout." And several commented on the value of learning the skills, if for no other reason than to use it on their own house. As one participant put it:

*If you're in your home and you need to repair something, they help you learn how to become handy with tools, so you don't have to depend on someone else. I think it will be useful even though I'm not going to go into construction. Just in case I might need to fix something in my house.*

Another indicated that he wanted to have construction as a back-up plan in case his first career choice falls through.

*Plus, you know, whatever I'm doing when I'm 40 years old, if I lose my job somehow or something happens,...you never know what could happen, so maybe I could do that. I could go, like, when I was younger, I used to do construction and I used to love that and maybe I can do that now."*

## Conclusion

This chapter provides a broad overview of the range of activities that vocational training participants in the 34 YouthBuild grantees in this study receive. Although all but one of the Youth Offender grantees provide youth with the opportunity to participate in construction training, approximately one-fourth of them do so by allowing them only to participate in constructing a single family home. An additional one-fourth provide opportunities only to work on the rehabilitation of existing multi-unit housing. The remaining half of these grantees provide participants with the opportunity to engage in both activities, which tends to ensure that they remain engaged in the program and always have training opportunities in which to participate. Nearly half of the grantees also offer a range of other vocational activities, including training in computer technology and maintenance.

There is substantial variation in the level and quality of supervision. Although most sites ensure a low student to teacher ratio (the average is 6.9 students per instructor), grantees ranged widely in this area. Nearly 20 percent of all grantees maintained a student to instructor ratio of less than four to one. An additional two-thirds of the grantees maintained ratios of between five and nine to one. The remaining grantees had higher ratios of ten to one or worse.

One of the most critical distinctions observed is that grantees with greater control over the worksite are better able to manage the schedule for the training and consistently provide more meaningful training opportunities to participants. Exactly half the grantees owned and managed their own worksites, which gives them a tremendous advantage in providing training opportunities to their participants (as will be seen in chapter XI, this characteristic is associated with better employment outcomes as well as better training opportunities). An additional three grantees managed their worksites, though they did not own them. The remaining grantees neither owned nor managed their sites, though there were certainly grantees in this category that were able to provide meaningful training opportunities to their participants through strong partnerships with flexible and understanding external organizations.

Grantees have established a range of partnerships, including those with agencies providing houses or housing sites, such as local housing authorities or Habitat for Humanity, and those forged with employers and unions. Although some grantees have found it difficult to develop partnerships with unions, those that have report great benefit in having done so.

Additionally, there is wide variation in the types of certifications grantees or their partners can award to participants. More than 80 percent of the grantees offer training based on the NCCER curriculum. Recipients of this training can obtain certification in it, which is a widely recognized credential in the industry. Approximately two-thirds of the grantees also offer other vocational



or occupational certifications, including in hazardous materials, lead abatement, workplace safety (OSHA), or even environmentally sustainable building.

Finally, the vocational training offered by the Youth Offender grantees can have significant benefit even for the sizable percentage (50 percent or more) of participants who report not being interested in construction as a career. Many of these participants acknowledged that they did not want to pursue a career in construction, but noted that there are benefits from participating in the construction work. Foremost among these are the job readiness skills that are imparted, including learning the proper work ethic, the need for punctuality, and appropriate dress and behavior.

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## VI. CASE MANAGEMENT, RETENTION & FOLLOW-UP SERVICES

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*Case management is the best thing a school could ever have, ever . . . We can go to case management any day. If you have trouble paying your bills or you need child care, any problem you have you can go to them and talk about it.*

So far in this report, some of the major building blocks of YouthBuild programming have been studied, such as educational services and vocational training. In this chapter, the focus is on what keeps those building blocks together both during and after enrollment—case management and transitional/follow-up services. Case management in particular can be thought of as the glue of YouthBuild services. Case managers not only act as fundamental human supports, but also serve as core coordinators of the various services that youth need to succeed at YouthBuild. These often include supportive services, ranging from housing to child care. Because of their critical role on both an interpersonal and logistical level, case managers are often cited as a key factor in the retention of participants at YouthBuild. Thus, the discussion of case management here will include not only an examination of its basic structure and service delivery, but also its provision of supportive services, as well as key case management challenges and effective practices. Because of case management’s pivotal role in retaining participants, the subsequent section provides a fuller discussion of the various factors that positively or negatively affect participant retention.

This chapter then proceeds to a discussion of transitional and follow-up services. These services address that critical period after formal program enrollment, when it remains to be seen whether participants will “keep together” what they have accomplished in terms of education, careers, and/or personal development. Transitional services are primarily concerned with job search and job placement services, as well as with some degree of emotional support for participants’ impending departure from YouthBuild. Follow-up services may vary in terms of frequency and format, but are basically designed to maintain ongoing contact with participants and provide needed services after they have exited the program. Follow-up services are deemed most critical immediately after participants leave YouthBuild, when they are most likely to return to old

environments and negative behaviors. The discussion of transitional and follow-up services will reveal their structure and methods, variations in quality, and the associated challenges and successful strategies in providing them.

## **Case Management Services**

There is no clear pattern among the Youth Offender grantees with regard to the number of case management staff, average caseload, or frequency of meetings. These grantees ranged from having no formal case managers, to having as many as seven worksite supervisors who *act* as case managers. Many grantees had staff who served both as case managers as well as in other professional roles (e.g., as program managers, teachers, job developers, intake coordinators). A few grantees, such as LA CAUSA YouthBuild (Los Angeles, CA) and CCEO YouthBuild (Gardena, CA) also relied on interns or local graduate students to help fulfill case management duties. One grantee (Mississippi Delta YouthBuild, Tallulah, MS) outsourced case management altogether to staff at Turning Point, a local youth offender program. Although the specific size of the caseload was not reported for every grantee, for those that did, the caseload often included a significant number of active participants as well as those in follow-up status. For example, the single case manager at CSC YouthBuild (Lebanon, OR), reported a caseload of 34 youth, half of whom were in follow-up status. The frequency of case manager-youth meetings ranged from daily to only on an as-needed basis, and often depended on the grantee's underlying philosophy about case management—specifically whether it adopted more of a formal or laissez-faire approach.

Grantees characterized by a more formal case management approach generally had regularly scheduled meetings between case managers and youth, and/or followed a particular case management system. For example, at YouthBuild McLean County (Bloomington, IL), case management is guided by the three-tiered process, with each tier involving a different level of intensity to address the different needs of youth. The first tier includes advising students on how to access various services (e.g., social services) with staff checking in to ensure that youth followed through. The second tier involves staff accompanying youth and serving as advocates if necessary, while the third, most intensive, tier involves staff contacting service providers on behalf of youth and taking them to their appointments. Exhibit VI-1 provides examples of the two ends of the spectrum—informal versus formalized approaches to case management—as well as one site that falls somewhere in the middle.

**Exhibit VI-1:  
Informal vs. Formalized Case Management Approaches**

At **Flushing YouthBuild (Flushing, NY)**, a grantee with relatively informal case management, one counselor and one job developer share case management responsibilities. Though there is no fixed schedule for individual case management appointments, they try to meet with youth at least every two weeks and on an as-needed basis. Staff will often pull youth aside when there are noticeable, negative changes in attitude and/or behavior.

At **YouthBuilding Alternatives (Portland, ME)**, a grantee with relatively formal case management, a recently hired case manager/counselor has implemented a number of standardized measurement tools, including an ISP, which identifies short- and long-term individual goals, a statement of need, and barriers. The ISP is updated every 90 days. The case manager has also implemented a new student progress/notes system that he uses after a weekly meeting with each student. The case manager has also created a daily calendar system that tracks student attendance and accountability, as well as tracks all appointments including those that are court-related and are with outside agencies. The case manager has specific times during the week that are designated for coordinating with other case managers at outside agencies with whom the youth are also working. One of the all-staff meetings that occurs each week is specifically focused on case management, where staff review student performance and strategize on how to address any challenges

The case management approach at **YouthBuild Boston, Inc. (Roxbury, MA)** falls somewhere between the relative informality of Flushing and the formality of Portland. Here case managers try to set regular appointment times for at least every other week, but youth are invited to stop by at any time. Youth may also be sent in for any discipline problems that arise. A form called the 3-month life management plan is used during case management sessions. The form has space to identify three-month goals, three objectives, three barriers and methods for addressing them, as well as space to assess progress. Despite this form and some degree of regular appointment times, some feel the grantee has more of a laissez faire approach to case management, especially given that the onus is largely on youth to approach case managers for assistance. According to staff, this has contributed to challenges with programmatic retention and attendance outcomes, so efforts are underway to make management more proactive in nature.

As indicated by the examples in Exhibit VI-1, some side effects of a more laissez faire case management approach are that youth who are less verbal and/or less comfortable approaching staff may not receive the same level of attention to their service needs. In addition, without more formalized case management appointments and procedures in place, youth do not necessarily have a guaranteed opportunity to set individual goals and review their progress systematically. Such side effects were less apparent with more formalized case management. Some of the more formalized case management sites tend to revisit these goals and progress using an ISP or ISS as a focal point. Besides Youthbuilding Alternatives (Portland ME) and YouthBuild Boston, Inc. (Boston, MA), described above, several other grantees use an ISP in this fashion. For example, at Pathways YouthBuild (Petersburg, VA), staff use the ISP to monitor participants' progress toward acquiring their competencies, and resolving their personal and practical issues. At YouthBuild Mississippi Delta (Tallulah, MS), case management staff from Turning Point (an

external youth offender program) meet once a month with youth to review progress in areas identified in the ISP, and the ISPs are updated after each meeting. At LA CAUSA YouthBuild (Los Angeles, CA), a self-assessment tool is used to identify each youth's challenge areas as well as an action plan based on stated barriers and goals. At the end of each case management session, staff and youth jointly determine what each party is going to work on, based on their session. According to staff, this practice identifies a clear reason to meet again next time.

Other aspects of the formality-informality spectrum include the *setting* for case management services, as well as the providers. A few grantees emphasized that case management does not just occur in an office at a designated appointment time, but rather at a range of program settings, in a variety of situations. As one case manager noted:

*Case management occurs not just in a cubicle . . . With everything we do, we're looking for a window of opportunity for a teachable moment.*

With case management occurring in multiple settings, the door is opened for multiple staff to provide case management services. For grantees such as Operation FreshStart YouthBuild (Madison, WI), and SALS YouthBuild (Kincaid, WV), in which participants interact primarily or solely with worksite supervisors, it is natural that these supervisors act as case managers also. For example, at the latter site, one of the particularly popular site supervisors has supported participants by talking them through personal and programmatic challenges, ranging from alcohol abuse to late paychecks. He has also served as a personal support outside of the program in a way that traditional case managers often do. For example, he once drove to a neighboring town at 11:00 pm to pick up a participant at a detox center. At YouthBuild Honolulu (Honolulu, HI), the two classroom instructors double as case managers—an arrangement they feel has worked out well, given that they tend to have a strong sense of how participants are doing on a daily basis. Thus, at one grantee, case management services are typically provided in a classroom setting.

Nearly all grantees allow case management services to be provided by staff who are not formally case managers, which means that youth can access such services from whichever staff with whom they personally bond.<sup>1</sup> Enabling youth to find the best fit among multiple staff members is often one of the reasons why some grantees spread out case management responsibilities among all staff, and/or hold case management-focused meetings that all staff attend. Bi-Cap YouthBuild (Bimidji, MN) calls this the “family model” of case management. Instead of splitting youth up into various case loads with assigned case managers, each onsite staff person

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<sup>1</sup> None of the grantees employed a model with formal case managers, whose role was solely to monitor their precisely defined case loads. Rather case managers played multiple roles and rarely had assigned caseloads.

interacts with youth via a specific role (e.g., as teacher, placement specialist) and thus case management and counseling occur at different levels and are based on participants' comfort level with various staff. Such an arrangement is possible in part because of the grantee's small size, which allows each staff to interact with each youth at least once or twice per day, and its physical environment, which is a small house that also fosters a sense of family environment.

Likewise, CSC YouthBuild (Lebanon, OR) indicated that there is no "ownership" of case management responsibilities in its program. Youth can be provided case management and counseling services by any staff person with whom they happen to bond, particularly since all staff are seen as leaders and potential mentors for youth. At Pathways YouthBuild (Petersburg, VA), the prevailing philosophy is also that "everybody acts as a case manager," although critical information is ultimately "funneled" to the three staff who *formally* act as case managers. At YouthBuild Newark (Newark, NJ), all front-line staff members have case management responsibilities and are assigned particular youth depending on their compatibility and the relationships developed during mental toughness orientation. And at YouthBuild McLean County (Bloomington, IL), where there are no full-time case managers, the entire front-line team meets monthly to discuss student issues and progress through their case management system. Although case management duties are ostensibly divided among numerous staff, students have naturally gravitated to a select two or three who ultimately serve all youth. A couple of sites, including North Richmond YouthBuild (Richmond, CA) and CSC YouthBuild (Lebanon, OR) have divided case management responsibilities among staff as a *temporary* arrangement—e.g., due to vacant case manager positions—but have found it a favorable practice, given that youth can essentially choose who they entrust with case management service provision.

For these grantees, as well as others, it was common for staff who shared case management responsibilities to have regular meetings focused on this aspect of service. Such meetings allowed staff to share vital information about youth challenges and progress that might in turn affect overall service provision. For example, staff might learn that a particular youth is experiencing a substance abuse relapse, or a bout of depression due to domestic issues. In this way, staff are prepared for these issues to arise in the classroom or on the worksite, and may also use the meeting as a way to brainstorm response strategies. For example, at MAAC Project YouthBuild (National City, CA), staff meet on a weekly basis as part of the student support team. At these meetings, staff discuss issues that particular youth are facing, as well as brainstorm prevention and intervention alternatives.

While the focus of *staff* case management meetings may be information-sharing and strategizing, the focus of *individual* case management sessions (between youth and staff) varied considerably. For some, it was used merely as an opportunity to check in or touch base with youth, and get a

quick sense for how they are faring in the program. Youth also have an opportunity to express frustrations with programmatic or personal issues. One grantee referred to its 30-minute case management appointments as “rap sessions.” To some degree, case management appointments are seen as personal counseling sessions, regardless of whether the case manager is formally designated as a counselor or not. Other grantees use the sessions to review progress against formally identified goals and barriers (e.g., in ISPs). A great majority of grantees see case management sessions as the time to problem-solve and coordinate needed services. These services may or may not be within the scope of the YouthBuild program. Therefore, a critical function of the case manager is as hub or liaison to external resources and services that will in turn help youth to succeed at YouthBuild—though some grantees explicitly recognized that addressing certain, entrenched supportive service needs would not be realistic within the YouthBuild timeframe. Such resources and services might include securing child care, finding housing, and accessing mental health care. Sometimes case managers, such as those at Fresno YouthBuild (Fresno, CA), also spend time coordinating with parole officers on the provision of supportive services to avoid duplication. YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School (Philadelphia, PA) summarized the purpose of their case management sessions as: providing basic counseling and crisis-management services, and affording a chance for joint problem-solving and service referrals.

## **Supportive Services**

To the extent that YouthBuild grantees can provide needed supportive services on site (including those delivered via life skills classes), there is an overlap—or at least an inextricable tie—between case management and supportive services. For example, some grantees offer on-site substance abuse or mental health counseling services. CCEO YouthBuild (Gardena, CA) has found it critical for case managers to be licensed therapists in order to offer youth immediate and full counseling services. This becomes especially important when opportunities to access public mental health services are severely limited. However, for most grantees, the key to effective supportive service provision is case managers who recognize they are the links rather than the experts, and have developed effective partnerships with outside agencies. For example, many grantees talked about their ability to provide some minimum level of individual and group counseling, but that participant needs in this area often outstripped their capacity or qualifications. In these cases, youth would be referred to public or private mental health providers. In most cases, these providers were at outside locations, but a few grantees were fortunate to have them stationed at least part-time at the YouthBuild site. For example, at CSC YouthBuild (Lebanon, OR), a representative from Linn County Mental Health serves youth with more intensive counseling needs and is stationed at YouthBuild one day per week. At Fresno YouthBuild (Fresno, CA), a licensed therapist from California Parole and Community



Corrections is onsite regularly to provide mental health services to those on juvenile parole. Youth at MAAC Project YouthBuild (National City, CA) are served by an onsite Marriage and Family Therapist (MFT) counselor as well as by four post-graduate counseling students, which the grantee feels is critical given that youth already have a level of trust established with these staff as opposed to an outside provider. Drug and alcohol treatment is another area in which a number of grantees offered a measure of onsite services, but relied on outside partners for more serious cases and/or residential treatment.

In general then, case managers relied on a range of external partners—and/or the partners within their larger parent organization—to address youth’s supportive service needs. (These partnerships were covered in detail in Chapter II.) However, there were a few grantees that had no or very few social service partnerships developed. Reasons for this included a philosophy that participants should be responsible for seeking out their own social services, and/or a dependence on other agencies to coordinate social services. For example, one grantee relies on parole officers/courts to coordinate or provide social services, and has no formal social service partners of its own.

Case managers most often cited supportive service needs around substance abuse, mental health, and housing. One frequent challenge related to substance abuse services—particularly for those grantees that did not offer such services onsite—was that they are often extremely limited due to public funding cuts and the high cost of treatment. Furthermore, youth can feel stigmatized by their drug status. Because of this challenge, LA CAUSA YouthBuild (Los Angeles, CA) implemented drug counseling and education for *all* youth, so it is no longer seen as a negative service or punishment. Portland YouthBuilders (Portland, OR) is also concerned with participants being more comfortable about receiving substance abuse services. This grantee is hoping to identify or implement a *peer* recovery treatment option, as the traditional substance abuse recovery population is older and more difficult for youth to relate to.

Similar to substance abuse, mental health service provision (beyond what may be offered onsite) is also challenged by a shortage of treatment sites (especially for rural grantees), overburdened public mental health providers, and limited affordability among private providers. In contrast, Pathways YouthBuild (Petersburg, VA) is an example of a grantee that was able to rely on both public and private providers in this area. While the program addresses many mental health issues, such as depression and anger management, through one-on-one interaction, for more intensive needs staff may refer participants either to county health providers or specific private doctors who accept Medicaid or provide services on a sliding scale.

Case managers at many grantees, especially rural ones, reported challenges with regard to securing housing for youth. The most fundamental challenge was a severe shortage of affordable housing, and/or emergency housing options for those who were *not* women with children, since more options exist for this group. This was an issue not just when youth were enrolled in YouthBuild, but also during their transition and follow-up periods. Another, related challenge was the fact that youth did not always qualify for housing because they did not meet the *formal* definition of homeless. Nevertheless, some grantees did enjoy particularly close relationships with housing programs, especially if such programs were part of the same parent agency. This was the case at Bi-Cap YouthBuild (Bimidji, MN), since Bi-Cap is a local housing agency. Flushing YouthBuild (Flushing, NY) can also provide housing to its participants through the resources of its parent agency, the YMCA, which has 60 single, low-income rooms available. This site and McLean County YouthBuild (Bloomington, IL), have a unique arrangement that affords participants not only housing, but also a savings plan. In Flushing, any rent that youth pay for their YMCA rooms goes into a savings account set up for them. In Bloomington, the YouthBuild program offers transitional housing for participants and uses part of the rent as a savings plan for them—to pay off debt and court fines, and to set up a nest egg for graduation. New Waverly YouthBuild (New Waverly, TX) also offers a unique housing support for participants. Once youth leave YouthBuild (a residential facility), they often do not have a positive home environment to which they can return. For those youth who secure a job in the Houston area, case managers will help them find an apartment, and arrange to pay for the first month's rent, and part of the second and third month's rent, as well as utilities and other start-up costs.

While substance abuse, mental health and housing were the most critical supportive service areas according to most case managers, they also worked to coordinate supportive services in the areas of transportation (which was particularly challenging in rural areas with no reliable public transportation systems) and health care (which was inaccessible to many youth who didn't qualify for publicly-funded health care). Case managers used gas vouchers, bus passes, and personal rides to support participants' transportation needs. Case managers also worked to have pro bono services provided by individual doctors and dentists, or to strike partnerships with community health clinics.

## **Case Management Challenges & Strategies**

In their intensive, multi-faceted role as friend, counselor, coordinator and advocate, case managers must utilize a range of tactics to gain participants' trust, develop a solid interpersonal relationship, and serve them in a professional capacity. A case manager's main challenges are most often related to relationship development with participants who may be withdrawn or

mistrustful, particularly of adult figures. Case managers discussed how different methods might be needed to get participants to open up, such as kidding around, sharing their own personal stories—which might be very similar to the participant’s, and showing participants they are cared for in the same way case managers might care for their own children. One site referred to this as “spoiling” the participants with affection and respect. Others talked about the need to simply notice and acknowledge youth as individuals:

*It’s important that they recognize you notice them. This helps build relationships because it shows the youth that you care enough to ask about their life.*

*We have to be really creative and it’s hard to build relationships. Some have spoken to so many counselors and to so many people before they got here, so I try to use as many tools as I can and try to tap into as many things that are important to them. And I try to notice, like I ask them about their family, their kids.*

Another main challenge case managers face is the expectation—by participants and sometimes by other staff—that they will be able to solve all of the participants’ problems given their role as both counselor and service coordinator. Case managers also specifically mentioned their frustration with being expected to act as disciplinarian to participants, which poses obstacles to relationship-building. As one case manager observed:

*We’re expected to be the policy enforcers. It’s easy for other staff to send students to us, but they can enforce rules too. Like if someone is late, they send the kids to us, then we are supposed to send them home. Why can’t the teachers do this? We are then enforcers of attendance policy. This is hard when we’re trying to build relationships and when we have to be hard-ass. It slows up our ability to build relationships with the youth.*

Case managers expressed more satisfaction with team arrangements that allowed other staff to share problem-solving responsibilities and to assume disciplinary duties. Finally, case managers also discussed challenges related to time constraints. Especially for case managers who wear multiple hats within the program or larger organization (e.g., life skills instructors as well as case managers), there is a sense of being pulled in multiple directions, and thus not having enough time to devote to addressing the intensive needs of individual participants.

From the perspective of participants, the case managers to which they positively responded were the ones who not only showed they cared by being accessible, and taking the time to listen, but did so in a way that resembled family. Often this family-style care meant a combination of tough love to keep participants on track (e.g., calling youth at home when they were absent), as well as a willingness to go above and beyond the call of duty for participants’ sake (e.g., taking calls

from youth at home, after hours, to talk them through personal crises). The following participant quotes give insight into this family-like bond, sometimes by explicitly comparing case managers to family members:

*Me and the YB case managers, we talk a lot. I mean, I don't have a mom. So they kind of replaced my mom. When I miss a day, they'll call and say, 'Where you at? You should be here.' They're cool. I like those two a lot. They helped me a lot, a lot. If they had given up on me already, I think I would be out on the street already.*

*He's like a father to me, 'cause he tells me a lot of things, because he teaches me. Well, he's a father to all of us. He keeps it real with us. Anything you need, we can get. They provide stuff to us, like things we need. If you don't have nothing at home, like no washer powder, they'll give it to us. No food? They give it to us.*

When speaking positively about their case managers, participants cited extensive examples of how *helpful* case managers were with various emotional and practical matters—ranging from providing a sympathetic ear, to paying for their driver's license test. Participants generally felt that they could approach their case managers for assistance in any area of their life and that, more importantly, case managers would follow through with whatever they said they intended to do, and even proactively offer assistance. The quotes below illustrate the type of assistance and attention youth enjoyed from their case managers:

*. . . The fact that they help you out a lot, that's probably one of the greatest strengths is that they're willing to help you out with things. If you're on the streets and you have no food. If you come and you get hired, they'll help you pay your rent. They'll help you with food. All you have to do is go in and talk to someone and say, 'Hey, I'm kinda hurting in this area' and they'll help you with that.*

*Sometimes I don't like to share family issues, but sometimes I share it with the counselor if I really need to get it off my chest. That's the only time I really talk about things. Usually I don't feel comfortable with sharing my family issues and my issues with people I don't know, but she just has the vibe where you can talk to her.*

*My YouthBuild case worker is a very talented lady, always on top of things. She has things done ahead of time. When she tells you she's going to do something, she's going to get it done. She always makes sure that we are where we need to be.*

Because of the wide-ranging types of assistance and support that participants receive from case managers, it is helpful to provide a richer sense of how particular youth have benefited, or not,

from case management services, both personally and programmatically. With this aim in mind, Exhibits VI-2 and VI-3 present summaries of participants, focusing on how their two very different experiences with case management services affected them.

**Exhibit VI-2:  
Jessica's Case Management Story**

Jessica's case managers gave her a continuous stream of support, from helping her get back on her feet after she had been released from a juvenile detention facility to helping her find housing after she had become homeless three months into the program. Their support and dedication kept Jessica off the streets and in the program, where she recently attained her GED. She is now working full-time as a home health aide.

*"I was born and raised here...My mom is in prison. My dad is in prison...I sold drugs with my dad, did drugs with my dad, and my mom too...I never went to high school because I was in [a juvenile detention facility]...for three years.*

*"[YB's case manager] didn't give up on me in jail. Even when I was like, 'I'm cool. I'll just go back to doing what I was doing.' She still never gave up on me. She would come and see me every week...The second day I was out, I called her. She came and got me, we went out to lunch.*

*"[YB's case managers] helped me with parole. They helped me with my fines and came to my court dates and stuff. I mean, I didn't know how to get an ID or any of that stuff. [The case manager at YB], she took me to get clothes, she helped me to get a phone. She helped with all that.*

*"Me and [the YB case managers] talk a lot. I mean, I don't have a mom. So, they kind of replace my mom. When I miss a day, they'll call and say, 'Where you at? You should be here Jessica.'*

*"On those days, when I wanted to give up or I had a bad day or I was frustrated and felt like I couldn't do it, there was a continuous, 'Yes you can, yes you can, yes you can.' There was continuous support. My case managers...everything that they say, that's what keeps you going. You don't want to disappoint them.*

*"[YB's case managers] show me so many different opportunities...They show you that there is something out there. You don't have to go to the streets when you leave here, like some people do.*

*"The best thing I get out of the program is guidance. I would say [YB's case managers] because I can talk to them about anything. I don't have to be embarrassed or ashamed...I feel better if they are with me. I don't feel like I have to do anything on my own.*

*"I learned how much better you feel when you have a job. You learn to appreciate the things that you have more. You appreciate your check more because you worked for it. When you are on the streets, you don't work for it, you just take it...I learned that from watching the people around here, watching [YB's case managers] and seeing how much that they care."*

### Exhibit VI-3: Mark's Case Management Story

Mark is an older YouthBuild participant with a wife and three children. He faced multiple challenges in his life and looked to YouthBuild for support. Before he was able to complete the program, Mark failed one of his drug tests and was incarcerated for six months.

*"When I got out of jail for dirty urine...I did not want to go back to the living arrangements that I had before, because of bad environments, and there was a lot of drama going on. So I asked [YouthBuild] if there was anything you all can do to help me find housing, a motel room, a shack, or a tent on the job site...but they didn't try, I never got no answers. I left several messages, and nobody never told me nothing. So I ended up having to go back to my old living arrangements, and I didn't need it at that time, because I was trying to get away from a lot of the problems that got me in trouble.*

*"I have three kids and a family, and all my bills to pay. At \$5.15 an hour, and these three-week pay periods, I'm living foot to mouth. By the time payday comes, I don't get no payday, because it all goes to bills I owe, or people I had to borrow the money off to pay my bills with.*

*"I got shorted on my check, and I kept asking and asking [about the money] after I turned in a pay advance form, and then I came and found out that the forms were just sitting down there on someone's desk...I had to go down there to threaten to quit to get my money...When you need answers you can't get them. Nobody knows what they're doing or what's going on. I had to ask ten different people about these advances, and I never got the right answer, so when I went down to the tech to talk to [my supervisor] about it, it felt [like] they were just pushing me off. So I said, 'The hell with it I'm quitting.'*

*"At 17, this program would have been great for me. I didn't have no certifications then when I quit school, and then I could have got my GED and all that. But at 23 it's a dead-end job. I'm not going to go anywhere. I can work here a year, then I was told I can get my contractor's license after nine months. But if the pay keeps going the way it is, then I'm going to have to find another job...Unless I see something within the next few weeks or months, I don't see myself being with YouthBuild very much longer."*

As noted by staff and youth alike, effective, stable case managers are often critical to student retention. They provide the web of human support and practical services that make it possible for youth to stay and focus on their educational and career goals. The following section provides a fuller discussion of the various factors that affect and promote youth retention in YouthBuild.

## Retention in YouthBuild

According to the YouthBuild Program Design and Performance Standards, YouthBuild focuses on the percentage of participants who complete the entire program as the critical indicator of retention. As of the fourth quarter of 2007, across all Youth Offender grantees included in this study, the retention rate among youth offenders (funded by the DOL grants) was 72.4 percent. The individual retention rates among YouthBuild grantees ranged from 12.5 percent to 96.2

percent.<sup>2</sup> The five individual grantees with the highest retention rates among youth offenders are shown in Exhibit VI-4.

**Exhibit VI-4:  
Highest Retention Rates for Youth Offenders among YouthBuild Sites**

| Site   | Retention Rate | Total Number Served* |
|--|----------------|----------------------|
| YouthBuild McLean County, Bloomington IL                 | 96.2%          | 26                   |
| YouthBuild Brockton, Brockton MA                         | 96.2%          | 26                   |
| Operation FreshStart YouthBuild, Madison WI              | 93.8%          | 16                   |
| West Columbus YouthBuild, Columbus OH                    | 93.3%          | 30                   |
| YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School, Philadelphia, PA | 89.3%          | 28                   |

\* Excluding still-active and deceased students

While grantees named myriad factors affecting retention—ranging from the lack of on-site child care to the availability of an on-site therapist—there was notable consistency across grantees in terms of what were perceived as the *key* factors affecting retention. The key *negative* factors included:

- Persistent substance abuse issues
- Strong gang ties and/or recidivism
- Ongoing mental health challenges
- Pregnancy/child care responsibilities
- Income pressures/desires
- Inadequate commitment/motivation levels

In essence, participants who did not stay at YouthBuild were often overwhelmed by personal circumstances and crises (such as pregnancy or depression). Staff of one grantee observed that this “crisis mentality is a hindrance to stability”—i.e., the type of baseline stability that is critical for pursuing personal, educational and career goals at YouthBuild. Staff also stressed that participants who left YouthBuild were often not yet at a point of personal readiness for change and commitment to the program. That is, while these youth might desire change, they did not necessarily desire it *enough* to persist with the program, or to give up negative behaviors, such as

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<sup>2</sup> This calculation excludes those participants who were deceased or were still active in the program. As of the fourth quarter of 2007, only 22 youth were categorized as still active across all YouthBuild grantees. These youth were not figured into the retention calculations.

drug use, gang activities, or late-night partying, which would challenge their ability to get up early every morning. For some participants, these negative behaviors and associations are a form of security, as they are part of a world they know and are not quite ready to leave, especially if they are facing additional pressure from peers or significant others. In contrast, at New Waverly YouthBuild (New Waverly TX), a residential facility that helped to significantly reduce these negative associations and pressures, the retention rate was 80.3 percent (which is substantially higher than the average of all grantees). One program staff from Flushing YouthBuild (Flushing, NY) shared these insights about youth pressures and personal readiness for change:

*A lot of them are still in gangs and sometimes gangs are for life. So getting out of it is not as easy as we would want it to be . . . it also sends resentment to your set, your group, that you're trying to excel and leaving the neighborhood behind. I think that is one of the things that young people think, you know, I don't know if I'm ready for all of this. It just makes them think they want to go back because that's the only brotherhood that they know. Also young people who are in serious relationships and have a boyfriend or girlfriend who is extremely jealous and not happy of the person's success and do not want to go a certain route because it might require full-time work, and then if they are thinking about going to college, that might just be too much, they won't have any time to be with their girlfriend or boyfriend. . . You have a lot of controlling boyfriends and girlfriends. It's so sad, but you see that all the time.*

Some participants also did not have the patience for a long-term commitment at YouthBuild; they preferred to get a job and start making money immediately, sometimes because of household pressures.

For participants who did choose to leave YouthBuild, the most likely time was early on, before formal enrollment had even taken place. As such, these youth were not dropouts per se. Orientation and mental toughness periods were effective at identifying those youth who were not ready to fully commit to YouthBuild and/or make positive changes in their lives. Other grantees mentioned that youth were more likely to drop out after an initial “honeymoon period,” when the hard work of the YouthBuild program began. This was especially likely if youth were simultaneously trying to deal with unstable housing or unreliable transportation. San Gabriel Valley Conservation Corps YouthBuild (El Monte, CA) stated that dropouts occurred most often during the third week of mental toughness orientation because this was when participants started working and interacting with one another in earnest, and latent gang conflicts emerged. During this time, youth also tended to drop out if worksites were located in rival gang areas. These youth would not formally be considered dropouts, since most grantees did not enroll youth until after the completion of MTO, but they are youth who began in the program and did not continue to formal enrollment and completion. Other key dropout periods were immediately after the



holiday season and toward the end of the program year, when fear of the unknown may strike youth. To address these vulnerable time periods, LA CAUSA YouthBuild (Los Angeles, CA) and McLean County YouthBuild (Bloomington, IL) scheduled special retreats. Immediately following the holiday season in January, LA CAUSA YouthBuild schedules a two-day retreat to Big Bear, where youth are asked to reflect upon their progress and goals for the rest of the year. McLean County YouthBuild recently scheduled its first Fear Retreat to address participants' concerns about leaving YouthBuild. The retreat is designed to remind participants of their ability to "make it in the real world" and to work on their future career and education plans. While the very beginning and the very end of the program year were the most common dropout times, YouthBuild Mississippi Delta (Tallulah, MS) also remarked on the vulnerability of the mid-point of the program year, as participants become frustrated by their lack of progress:

*They're not progressing at the rate that they expected . . . And they know that the time is sort of coming to an end, then less efforts [are] put out . . . They get to the point, you know . . . they're ready to give up.*

The key factors positively affecting retention were as follows:

- Strong personal readiness for change
- Strong participants-staff relationships
- Stability of program staff
- Stipend/bonus incentives
- Individually-tailored arrangements for participants

When describing the characteristics of those participants who were most likely to stay and graduate from YouthBuild, staff emphasized their maturity level and personal readiness for change. Those who were truly ready to make dramatic changes in their lives tended to be more committed to the program, and thus more motivated to work toward their goals and overcome obstacles. As staff of one grantee put it, these participants were willing "to take three buses at 4 am" just to get to YouthBuild on time, put aside their gang ties, and look "uncool" by asking for help. In many cases, these participants tended to be older, or have been out of school for a longer period of time and thus have had a greater amount of time to reflect on what they do and do not want in their lives.

The second most emphasized positive factor with regard to retention was simply the relationships participants develop with staff, often the case managers. Having an intensive source of emotional and practical support allowed participants to weather various life obstacles and stay in the YouthBuild program. Moreover, because many participants have never experienced positive, caring relationships with adults, the relationships in and of themselves

become a draw and retention factor for youth. “They get attached to us,” as one case manager put it. At YouthBuild McLean County (Bloomington, IL), which has the highest youth offender retention rate among grantees studied, participant-staff relationships are augmented further by the practice of assigning staff different participants to mentor, who are called their “bonds.” While this intensive practice was effective, program managers also felt that it contributed to staff burnout and is not as feasible as the size of the program gets larger.

Youth Offender grantees also stressed the importance of *stable* staffing as key to participant retention. For example, there was a fair degree of turnover at LA CAUSA YouthBuild (Los Angeles, CA) due to the personal circumstances and challenges of staff members. As a result, participant-staff relationships were disrupted; one participant had three different case managers in a single year. This type of volatility led some participants to disengage and drop out. Dropouts can, in turn, have a snowball effect. As noted by YouthBuild Brownsville (Brownsville, TX), *peer* stability is also key to retention, so as some participants drop out, it can spur others to do so as well. West Columbus YouthBuild (Columbus, OH) is trying to provide a measure of peer stability and support by instituting the Alumni Board, which will pair YouthBuild graduates from the 1990s as mentors to current participants.

Regular stipends and bonus incentives were other critical retention factors. Many participants realized that the YouthBuild program was one of the few, if not the only, option for them to be able to earn money while in school. The stipend pay became a critical support not just for the participants, but in many cases, for their children and larger families as well. A number of sites implemented additional pay incentives specifically designed to improve retention. For example, YouthBuild Boston Inc. (Boston, MA) instituted attendance stipends in an effort to be more proactive about addressing participants at risk of dropping out. Participants can earn a bonus of \$50 in any month where they have perfect attendance. In addition, if their attendance improves for three straight months, their base stipend increases by \$50.

Finally, grantees talked about the need for individually-tailored arrangements to facilitate retention. Most often, this involved working with each participant to make sure that their YouthBuild schedule and arrangements worked for their particular life situation and preferences. For example, at YouthBuild Fresno (Fresno, CA), one participant bonded particularly well with one of the crew supervisors. Program staff arranged for this participant to work exclusively with this crew supervisor as an incentive for retention. At YouthBuild Brockton (Brockton, MA), staff worked intensively with one participant who was a victim of a sexual assault. They offered her emotional support, allowed her to recover at her own pace, and invited her back on a modified schedule that would work for her as an individual. For both YouthBuild Brockton (Brockton, MA) and Operation FreshStart YouthBuild (Madison, WI), the prevalence of

individually-tailored arrangements also meant that they rarely terminated participants for any reason. Both of these grantees—which are in the top three grantees for retention performance listed in Exhibit VI-4—attribute their success partly to the fact that participants are almost never asked to leave. Instead these grantees work hard to give participants multiple chances to succeed. Even participants who have exceedingly poor attendance, or have a physical outburst or altercation, will most likely just be asked to take a few days away from YouthBuild as part of a “cooling off” period, or will be put on a probationary status, but are eventually welcomed back. Participants in turn tended to notice and appreciate staff’s dedication to their success, which fostered higher rates of retention.

## **Transitional & Follow-Up Services**

Once participants are getting ready to leave, or have left YouthBuild, they may receive any number of transitional and follow-up services. The transitional services primarily focus on preparing participants for employment after YouthBuild, while follow-up services are focused on periodically checking in with participants to determine what additional employment or supportive services might be necessary. The required follow-up period is normally one year, but for participants supported by the DOL Youth Offender grants, it is five years in length.

### **Transitional Services**

In this discussion transitional services means primarily job search and job placement services. Transitional services also involve a degree of emotional support; as previously mentioned, many participants experience fear of their impending transition from YouthBuild to “the real world.” As one case manager described it: “We have to give them a lot of [transitional] support because they never had that family support, so they get attached to us and they are still scared.” Case managers have eased the transition with such support as helping participants buy new outfits for their first job, and accompanying participants to register for college courses. According to staff of one grantee, if there is not a concrete transition plan in place, participants are at a much higher risk of returning to negative, pre-YouthBuild activities and associations during what these staff called the first three “critical” months after graduation.

Some of the major differences across grantees to emerge with regard to transitional services were whether a grantee had dedicated, full-time job developers; the extent to which the local One-Stop system was a strong and effective partner; and the extent to which grantees adopted more of a “hand-holding” or independent approach to participants’ job search and job placement efforts. While some grantees had full-time job developers, it was more common for them to spread out job developer responsibilities among multiple staff. For example, at CCEO YouthBuild

(Gardena, CA), it is a responsibility split among program staff and case managers. In some cases, the presence of a job developer (or similar position) was part of an effort to re-think job placement, or to integrate job placement more fully into the YouthBuild experience. At YouthBuild Brockton (Brockton, MA), the hiring of a full-time job developer is part of the program's renewed focus on developing employer relationships and placing participants in more career-focused jobs. At West Columbus YouthBuild (Columbus, OH), the employment consultant works with employers and postsecondary institutions to place participants, but is also integrated into the classroom with regularly scheduled job readiness instruction.

A prominent theme among all grantees was the extent to which they utilized, or did not utilize, the local One-Stop system as a partner in job search and job placement for participants. Although a number of grantees had developed strong, effective partnerships with One-Stop centers as described in Chapter II, several grantees had not done so. While these grantees recognized that One-Stop centers had various resources and services to offer, there was also a strong sense that the One-Stop atmosphere was intimidating, not youth-friendly and/or could not provide the type of intensive, individualized wrap-around support that YouthBuild participants needed, particularly youth offenders. As one job placement staff noted, "When I refer my clients to the One-Stop, they don't get the one-on-one they need, and they end up leaving." Furthermore, grantees noted that One-Stop Center business hours were not always conducive to participants' work/education schedules.

Many of program staff's concerns about the One-Stop system were related to its self-service orientation, which was not necessarily seen as conducive to the needs of YouthBuild participants. Although grantees differed considerably in terms of how much "handholding" they were willing to offer participants as they looked for jobs, many were much more likely to provide step-by-step assistance during the job search process. For example, at Pathways YouthBuild (Petersburg, VA), the lead job placement staff conducts the cold-calling of employers, and considers it one of his responsibilities to "sell the students." He also spends considerable time "loading kids up in the van," and driving them around to various potential employers to inquire about jobs and fill out applications. New Waverly YouthBuild (New Waverly, TX) provides even more intensive assistance. The job developer and youth work together to identify job openings via the Internet as well as other sources. They both then visit the business in question, but often the job developer will intervene and talk on the participant's behalf. In contrast, participants in some sites are largely responsible for finding their own job after a basic orientation to the One-Stop center and other local resources. At Operation FreshStart YouthBuild (Madison, WI), career and placement work is participant-driven. Participants conduct employment research and are asked to cold-call various employers. The local One-Stop center is routinely used for job search purposes.

Nevertheless, a number of grantees did make it a practice to accompany and acclimate participants to the local One-Stop as part of their transition out of YouthBuild and out of “spoon feeding,” while others have worked to get One-Stop staff and One-Stop registration located at the YouthBuild site, all in an effort to facilitate participant comfort in using these resources. Further, a handful of grantees indicated that they relied primarily on the local One-Stop for job search and job placement services. For example, at Mississippi Delta YouthBuild (Tallulah, MS), the local One-Stop system was described as “very active” in assisting YouthBuild participants to find jobs—e.g., by regularly sending out invitations and updates on jobs for youth. Exhibit VI-5 provides an example of a site that integrates One-Stop resources into its own services beginning early on in youth’s participation in the program.

**Exhibit VI-5:  
Example of One-Stop Integration**

The goal at **Youthbuilding Alternatives (Portland, ME)** is to have the local One-Stop center provide most career preparation services to participants, such as resume-writing, job searching, and interviewing skills. WIA staff come to the YouthBuild site early in each cohort’s time in the program to conduct interest inventories, provide labor market information on high-growth careers, and conduct core services and job readiness workshops. YouthBuild participants are required to register at the One-Stop center. Exposing them early to One-Stop center services and staff helps them start thinking about their career goals earlier, and helps ensure that they will feel comfortable accessing One-Stop services on their own later.

Finally, grantees ranged widely in terms of how well transitional services were integrated into the overall YouthBuild program, particularly from an early time period. Such integration not only meant that transitional services were part of other YouthBuild components, such as academic instruction, but also that job search and placement processes were integrated with early emphasis on career exploration and job readiness skills. This latter type of integration was one that a few grantees noted as an area for improvement. Exhibit VI-6 profiles two grantees that exemplify strong integration of transitional services into the overall YouthBuild program.

**Exhibit VI-6:  
Examples of Transitional Services Integration**

**Portland YouthBuilders (Portland, OR)** has been nationally recognized by YouthBuild USA for the comprehensiveness and quality of its transition services. Transition services begin with participants working with their assigned advocates to identify career goals and map realistic paths to those career goals. Youth also benefit from the Career Development Team, which is comprised of their advocate, the job placement specialist, supportive service manager and construction staff—all of whom provide support as participants transition from YouthBuild to jobs, extended training, or education. Construction students meet weekly in job readiness class with the job placement specialist. The job placement specialist also categorizes participants into tiers of competency levels, in order to facilitate eventual job placement. Participants must sign a contract that requires them to meet one-on-one with their advocate on a monthly basis in the post-graduation phase, as well as meet with their advocate in two other settings (e.g., group meetings) monthly. Advocates serve as participants' liaisons to employers, education/training providers, and community agencies and social services.

Staff at **YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School (Philadelphia, PA)** begin talking with participants about the transition period from the very beginning of their participation in the program. Beyond the program's year-round informal talks about the transition period, there is a formal transition class during the last trimester of the program, and dedicated transition staff—a Director of Transitions Services, as well as two transition service coordinators. The transitions class prepares participants for life after YouthBuild. While the class focuses on continuing education or training, subjects range from how to complete college applications to resumes, interviewing, searching for jobs, and creating a concrete plan for achieving academic or work goals. The Director of Transition Services has also established a relationship with the Career Link system (the local One-Stop Centers), so that the One-Stop Center staff can supplement the work of the transition coordinators by providing various job development services. Finally, there are various career and education groups that meet as part of transition services—e.g., a pre-college group that meets weekly for various activities, such as SAT preparation. Transition services staff are also responsible for following up with graduates. Given their relatively higher risk, staff have been heavily focused on checking in with DOL/youth offender graduates. Within the critical three-month period after graduation, transition services staff contact youth offender graduates once a week.

Grantees use a variety of sources and methods to actually find jobs. While many grantees make at least partial use of One-Stop center job listings, this was by no means the only source, or even the primary source. Others included cold-calls and visits, (youth-focused) job fairs, and traditional newspaper ads. Personal connections and word-of-mouth were mentioned numerous times as key to finding participants jobs. As job placement staff of one grantee stated, “We preach networking as a way of job placement.” Job development staff often maintain contacts with many known and potential employers, such as sub-contractors who worked on YouthBuild construction sites. At YouthBuild Boston (Boston, MA), the grantee chooses subcontractors based on their assessed likelihood of hiring participants once they graduate. Three placement staff focus on reaching out more to union employers in the construction field, inviting them to the worksite to see participants in action. At Bi-Cap YouthBuild (Bimidji, MN), job referrals

have traditionally been through grantee staff's personal relationships with employers. However, because of relatively poor job placement outcomes, a placement specialist was added to the staff who is focusing more on developing strategic, formalized relationships with potential employers.

In addition to employer connections, peer connections and networking were also seen as a job search tool. Some grantees established or facilitated regular meetings among participants and other job seekers. At West Columbus YouthBuild (Columbus, OH), the employment consultant founded a group called EARN, which meets at the One-Stop on a monthly basis to network, search for jobs, and provide mutual support. At these meetings, group members also have access to a consolidated list of resources that the employment consultant has put together in a database, including employers and various social services. According to staff, this arrangement is beneficial to participants because they are able to access considerable information and support from one place, with little effort on their part. At CSC YouthBuild (Lebanon, OR), participants are encouraged to join a weekly job search/networking meeting at the local One-Stop center. While a good number of the non-YouthBuild group members are adults, in the past this has proven helpful as adults occasionally pass on to participants job leads that are too entry-level for them. The One-Stop center also maintains a felony-friendly list of employers that participants can access. Participants who do not have a job after three months are automatic members of the job club, which meets regularly and concentrates on perfecting their resumes.

Another job placement method utilized by a few grantees was employment with temporary placement (temp) agencies. Temporary employment agencies were seen as useful for building participants' work history and establishing a bridge to permanent employment, either at the temp agency or elsewhere. At MAAC Project YouthBuild (National City, CA), the organization's own internal Stone Worx program, where many YouthBuild graduates are placed, serves the same transitional employment purpose as a temp agency. Employment/placement agencies were also useful partners at a handful of grantees. At Operation Excel YouthBuild (St. Louis, MO), grantee staff have established a new partnership with an agency that specializes in offender placement. At CCEO YouthBuild (Gardena, CA), the program has a relationship with IQ Personnel, an agency which specializes in placing youth in jobs requiring HAZMAT certification.

Overall, the rate at which YouthBuild grantees included in this study placed youth offenders in first-time, unsubsidized employment was 52.4 percent.<sup>3</sup> The individual placement rates of

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<sup>3</sup> In addition to unsubsidized employment, participants realized other types of placements. The overall percentage of participants that entered the military was just 0.6%, and the percentage that entered long-term occupational training was 6.2%. Just under 3% of participants completed long-term occupational training, and the mean number of quarters in which participants were engaged in employment/military/school outcomes was 2.57.

grantees ranged from a high of 89.5 percent to a low of 17.2 percent. The five grantees with the highest unsubsidized employment placement rates are shown in Exhibit VI-7.

### Exhibit VI-7: Top Five Grantees in Job Placement for Youth Offenders

| Site                                     | Placement Rate* |
|--|-----------------|
| New Waverly YouthBuild, New Waverly TX   | 89.5%           |
| YouthBuild Honolulu, Honolulu HI         | 87.5%           |
| Youthbuilding Alternatives, Portland ME  | 85.7%           |
| CSC YouthBuild, Lebanon OR               | 83.3%           |
| Operation Excel YouthBuild, St. Louis MO | 78.3%           |

*\* Placement rate is calculated as the percent of students ever placed in first-time, unsubsidized employment.*

While the placement rates above reveal what percent of participants were ever placed in first-time, unsubsidized employment, they do not identify what percent of participants maintained their jobs over a specific time period. Maintaining jobs was considered by some grantees as a distinct challenge, meriting separate and additional attention. New Waverly YouthBuild (New Waverly, TX) observed that it was difficult to keep participants “on task” and in their jobs once they left the YouthBuild campus. Pathways YouthBuild (Petersburg, VA) echoed this sentiment and further observed that “it often takes youth a while to settle down,” and thus they may jump between a number of jobs (and periods of unemployment) within a short period of time before maintaining one for any length of time.

### Follow-Up Services

Follow-up services—specifically, staff’s efforts to maintain contact with participants after graduation or after dropping out, to check their education, employment, and personal status, and provide them with any needed employment, education or supportive services—were conducted with varying degrees of formality and effectiveness. Grantees generally reported their obligated follow-up period as one year for all YouthBuild graduates, and five years for DOL (i.e. Youth Offender) graduates. Grantees attempted contact with their graduates anywhere from once a week to once a quarter, though some grantees did not have any type of schedule or did not make any attempts at all, due to severely limited staff capacity and an inability to even provide case management services to *current* participants. Others took a more staggered or selective follow-up approach—e.g., once a month during the first year, then a minimum of two contacts during the second year; or else targeting a select few graduates for follow-up contacts based on, for example, perceived level of risk and needed assistance. Follow-up contact was the responsibility of various staff, including YouthBuild secretaries, intake staff, and placement specialists. For some grantees, follow-up was not initiated by staff, but rather by the youth. For instance, SALS



YouthBuild (Kincaid, WV) counted on graduates to contact them whenever they needed help; this point of contact served as an informal follow-up opportunity. In locations like Tallulah, MS and Bimidji, MN, YouthBuild staff could also rely on small-town atmospheres and networks in order to informally keep track of their graduates.

Grantees were consistent in their articulation of the key challenges to effective follow-up. Foremost among these was the often transient nature of the youth population. Contact numbers were often disconnected or staff phone calls went unreturned. It was sometimes even more difficult to get youth to physically return to the YouthBuild site for follow-up services, though this seemed to depend somewhat on the strength of the participant-staff relationships, the extent to which youth were really in need of support and services, and how easy it was for youth to get to the YouthBuild office. For example, at YouthBuild Honolulu (Honolulu, HI), participants are dispersed throughout the island of Oahu, and have little incentive to make the hour or longer trip to the YouthBuild office once they have graduated and are no longer receiving a stipend. As one staff bluntly pointed out, youth are harder to contact “the less they need us.” Thus, the majority of follow-up services is conducted solely by telephone. North Richmond YouthBuild (Richmond, CA) also finds it more difficult to physically draw youth back for follow-up services; one staff person at this site estimated that out of the 40-50 youth with whom he attempted follow-up contact, he was able to reach approximately 20, with only 4-5 coming in for additional follow-up services.

In order to address these challenges, as well as to facilitate stronger follow-up connections, grantees have adopted a range of techniques and creative strategies, several of which are profiled in Exhibit VI-8.

Participants generally appreciate the ongoing contact and supports provided by follow-up services, particularly since it reinforces the fact that staff are people they can continue to rely on for emotional and practical support. For example, participants reported that:

*They always call me, they're always on me. They ask, 'Hey, what you doing? You need a job?' They're always offering things to me. It feels good to be asked for help. After you graduate, they still check up on you. It's good.*

*I will keep in touch with staff because they've been helping, and they are like people I can depend on. I call them up like everyday saying I need help with this or with that, and they give me feedback. They are people I can talk to. And with my situation I'm in right now, for the first time I've been here, they've been there to support me and help me, and there's very little I got right now, so I have to take their support and run with it. I can't just say, 'forget them, I don't care,' because these [are] people that care.*

## Exhibit VI-8: Successful Follow-Up Strategies

- **Requiring secondary and tertiary contact information.** Given that one of the prime follow-up challenges is disconnected or outdated phone numbers, some grantees require graduates to provide secondary and even tertiary contact information, which may be through family or friends. At least one grantee (Flushing YouthBuild, Flushing, NY) also maintained contact with participants' employers as part of follow-up—not only to keep up with former participants, but also to secure feedback on job performance.
- **Making home or community visits.** Especially when attempts at phone contact have failed, staff have often made home visits—either to a former participant's last known address or to other family members—in order to determine youth's whereabouts and status. Program staff have also been known to canvass neighbors and the local community in their follow-up efforts.
- **Using the Internet.** At LA CAUSA YouthBuild (Los Angeles, CA), staff have been successful in maintaining contact with former participants by creating a My Space website to which youth can contribute.
- **Alumni clubs and social opportunities.** Many sites have organized alumni clubs and networking opportunities. Some of these revolve around practical matters such as career exploration and looking for jobs, while others center on social opportunities, such as alumni basketball leagues. Other grantees have started alumni newsletters to facilitate ongoing peer support and connection to the program.
- **Providing financial incentives.** A handful of grantees rely on financial incentives to improve follow-up connections. For example, McLean County YouthBuild (Bloomington, IL) provides an incentive for former participants to check in by conducting a monthly gift card drawing in which eligibility is among those who do check in.
- **Observing social occasions and milestones.** One way to encourage participants to maintain contact is for staff to maintain interest in youth's lives—for example, by sending birthday cards or attending special events, such as weddings or baby showers.
- **Requiring follow-up as part of program participation terms.** A few grantees have taken a stricter approach by requiring follow-up contact as part of their program participation terms. For instance, at Portland YouthBuilders (Portland, OR), participants must sign a contract that requires them to meet with their assigned advocate one-on-one on a monthly basis in the post-graduate phase. Youth are also required to meet with their advocates on at least two other occasions per month (e.g., as part of group functions). At YouthBuild Rockford (Rockford, IL), youth must participate in a 12-month graduate/follow-up period, through regular meetings and special outings designed to provide ongoing opportunities to grow, learn, stay employed, pursue goals and enjoy peer relationships. After the 12-month graduate/follow-up period, participants can become members of the alumni club. Led by a graduate, the club determines its own activities, raises most of its own funding, and represents YouthBuild to the community. One program staff had this to say about YouthBuild Rockford's overall follow-up approach:  
*“We just couldn't continue to depend on the youth to make sure we had good contact information or family and friends to be of assistance. The intent of the outings and trainings is to keep the grads connected by building a social support system. This way not only are we staying with our grads, they are better able to support each other by staying in contact socially.”*

*They make you feel like you are somebody, and it is not just some program. They are really trying to figure out how they can help the young people. They want to help you in any way they can in the program, and they want to help you when you are out of the program. When you are out of the program, they even call you to see if you need any additional help. You don't even have to be in the program to get tutoring.*

## **Conclusion**

This chapter provided a summary of the ways in which case management and follow-up services have been critical to the retention and ongoing success of participants. Case management in particular can be thought of as the glue that holds together all of YouthBuild's components, and provides a critical source of emotional and practical support to youth. Grantees ranged in terms of the formality of their approach—with subsequent implications for the frequency, setting, and providers of case management. Two key advantages of a more laissez-faire approach were that participants were able to access case management services from whichever staff with whom they happened to feel most comfortable, and case management responsibilities—which were often quite intensive—were spread out more equitably across program staff. One key advantage of a more formal approach was that all participants (not just the more vocal ones) had designated opportunities to voice concerns and review their personal progress.

One key function of most case managers was to serve as a critical link to supportive service provision. Toward this end, case managers often relied on a range of partners in their parent agency and/or in their local communities. The most critical supportive service needs were substance abuse counseling, mental health services and housing. While some grantees had basic on-site services to offer, many were challenged by the limited supply and/or prohibitive expense of securing services in their areas.

The primary challenge facing case managers was simply developing a close, trusting relationship with participants, many of whom were initially withdrawn or mistrustful. Developing effective relationships often meant case managers showing participants that they truly cared about their well-being in the way that a family member might—i.e., through a mixture of tough love and unconditional support. In general, participants greatly valued this family approach to case management, as it provided a caring adult relationship, as well as all types of logistical support necessary for them to succeed in the program.

While effective case management was cited as a primary factor affecting participant retention, another was simply participants' personal level of readiness for change in their lives. Participants who did not stay at YouthBuild were often either overwhelmed by personal

circumstances, such as ongoing mental health issues, or else were simply not quite ready to leave behind negative behaviors and associations. Those who left YouthBuild were most likely to do so during orientation or mental toughness, but the end of the program year was also cited as a vulnerable time for participants as they looked ahead with trepidation to leaving YouthBuild for “the real world.” Overall, the retention rate for youth offenders across the grantees included in this study was 72.4 percent, though it was as high as 96.2 percent for some grantees. One of the prime reasons some grantees had relatively high retention rates was simply that participants there were very rarely asked to leave; instead they were asked to take “cooling off” periods before being allowed back and given the opportunity to succeed.

Finally, some of the major findings to emerge with regard to transitional services were that: job developer duties were often dispersed among various staff; the local One-Stop system was an underutilized partner for some grantees due to an intimidating, self-service atmosphere considered not conducive to supporting youth; and grantees differed greatly in terms of whether they adopted more of a “hand-holding” or independent approach to participants’ job search and job placement processes. While grantees relied on a number of different sources for job openings, word-of-mouth and personal connections were considered paramount in the job search process. Grantees also ranged widely in terms of how well transitional services were integrated into the YouthBuild program—i.e., into other YouthBuild service components and into early career planning and exploration discussions.

Across YouthBuild grantees included in this study, the rate of youth offender placement in first-time, unsubsidized employment was 52.4 percent. While a fair number of grantees had great success in this area, one of the main, related challenges was helping participants maintain their jobs. This was one of the aims of follow-up services staff who contact youth with varying degrees of frequency to check on their job/education status and determine if any additional services were needed. The effectiveness of follow-up services was challenged primarily by a highly transient youth population that often had disconnected phone numbers or simply failed to return staff calls. Grantees have crafted a range of creative strategies to overcome these challenges, ranging from canvassing local neighborhoods to establishing alumni clubs.

## VII. YOUTH LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNITY SERVICE

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Leadership within the YouthBuild program includes formal support for organizational and community leadership, while at the same time promoting a consistent message that leadership is about young people making “things go right” in their own lives, in their families, and in their communities.<sup>1</sup> Although this chapter focuses primarily on the formal structures that YouthBuild programs use to support organizational and community leadership for participants, a lot of leadership development within YouthBuild occurs in non-formal settings, as staff help participants to make practical and well-reasoned decisions that affect their families, their friends, and their futures.

This chapter focuses primarily on formal youth and community leadership because the presence of such activities is the best indicator of a sustained and program-wide value placed on participant decision-making. When leadership development or community service is a formal part of the organizational culture, it is more likely to persist when the program faces turnover in staffing or loss of funding. In the Interim Evaluation Report, a framework was developed to describe the varied leadership opportunities across the Youth Offender grantees. In this chapter, that framework is extended, providing more detail about the breadth and intensity of varied leadership development and community service activities.

### **Structures to Support Youth Leadership**

As described in the Interim Report, YouthBuild grantees use a variety of structures to support youth leadership, including the Youth Policy Council (YPC), roles for youth in the classroom and on the worksite, leadership training, and community leadership opportunities. Although all Youth Offender grantees value youth leadership, and even identify youth leadership as a core part of the curriculum, they vary significantly in both the breadth and intensity of leadership opportunities they offer.

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<sup>1</sup> YouthBuild Program Design and Performance Standards, YouthBuild USA Affiliated Network, July 2005, p. 20.

In order to evaluate what constitutes a “high leadership” or “low leadership” program, this chapter uses a system of “leadership points” to assign a value to varied leadership activities. Higher values are assigned to activities that occur more frequently and/or reach a higher percentage of program participants. The point system provides a medium by which to assess the overall level of youth leadership across programs, with “high” leadership programs being those in which roles for participants are numerous, varied and relatively intensive.

This section presents information on each core youth leadership strategy adopted by grantees, with an analysis of the relative breadth and intensity of each. The exhibit within each section summarizes the varied level of intensity with which grantees adopt each strategy and the “leadership” points assigned to each. Final point totals and their implications for what types of organizations support leadership are discussed in the final section.

## **Youth Policy Council**

*Being on Youth Policy Council, I know I can make lots of changes for this place as far as the vision, activities, classes, the bottom up.*

The Youth Policy Council (YPC) is an important vehicle for supporting youth participation and “voice” in organizational governance. As a youth governing body for YouthBuild, YPC members provide input to program leaders on various program issues, such as fundraising, social gatherings, the dress code, discipline policies, staff hires, and program design issues. Although YouthBuild USA requires that YouthBuild sites have a YPC, there is great variability among grantees both in the frequency of YPC meetings and in the types of decision-making power that YPC members have within the program. Exhibit VII-1 describes the intensity level of the YPC across the grantees included in this evaluation and the points assigned to each activity.

As highlighted in the table, the YPC was “inactive” at ten, or roughly one-third, of the 31 sites included in this analysis. Four of the ten sites with inactive YPCs indicated that they did not have enough participants for an elected leadership board.<sup>2</sup> Another reason for not having a YPC was a high degree of staff turnover. Leaders at one program said they did not think participants were mature enough to take on leadership roles. Organizations with an inactive YPC were not consistently different from those with an active YPC when it came to their staff size or budget (i.e. some of the sites with the largest staff size and budget did not have an active YPC).

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<sup>2</sup> Two of these sites used strategies to solicit organizational and program feedback from all YouthBuild members.

**Exhibit VII-1:  
Youth Policy Council**

| Description   | Level of Intensity <sup>34</sup>   | Points |
|---|--|--------|
| <p>Youth can participate in a youth advisory board, or a youth policy council where they can have input on organizational decisions, such as discipline, the dress code, staff hires, program design issues, etc. By participating in this capacity, youth have a voice in the program's governance structure and directly provide input and advice to staff about issues that matter most to youth.</p> <p>Youth are generally elected to this governing body, but programs typically require that youth have strong attendance in order to serve.</p> | <p><b>Inactive YPC (No meetings or ad hoc meetings):</b><br/>10 grantees</p> | 0      |
|   | <p><b>Somewhat-active YPC (Monthly meetings):</b><br/>5 grantees</p>         | 1      |
|   | <p><b>Active YPC (Bi-monthly meetings):</b><br/>5 grantees</p>               | 2      |
|   | <p><b>Very Active YPC (Once a week):</b><br/>11 grantees</p>                 | 3      |

Twenty-one of the grantees had at least somewhat active YPCs, though the frequency of YPC meetings, and their decision-making power, varied significantly within this group. Programs that held monthly YPC meetings often faced the same challenges as sites with inactive policy boards. That is, they had difficulty recruiting youth or staff to serve on the YPC. Some youth who served on such committees complained that the committee had no real authority and that staff did not take youth recommendations seriously. As two separate participants noted:

*[YPC] didn't do what it was supposed to do. We made a lot of suggestions and nothing ever came of it. It wasn't interesting. You would sit there and come up with ideas but nothing would come of it and I think we knew that [nothing would come of it] so we didn't feel like participating.*

*I thought that our input and what we said would have more impact than it did. We'd make suggestions, but the instructors and the directors would listen but not act.*

As suggested by the above quotes, weak YPC sites solicited participant input, but then did not implement their recommendations or give them the authority to move forward on their own. Understandably, participants at these sites did not want to join the committee, because they felt that it was a waste of their time. In fact, sites that solicited youth input but did not act on it were often perceived more negatively by participants than those sites whose council was inactive.

<sup>3</sup> Information was not available for all sites. Only sites with complete information are included in this analysis.

<sup>4</sup> We assess the intensity of YPC opportunities at each site through the *frequency* of YPC meetings rather assessing decision-making power because it is the most consistent measure of the amount of leadership training and support that youth are receiving through YPC at each site.

YPC committees that met infrequently (i.e. monthly), however, were not all “weak.” There were grantees that convened the YPC monthly to discuss well-defined policy issues. Key decision-points were put on the table for participants to consider and their input was acted upon. For instance, one grantee convened the YPC to consider a merit-based system for stipend increase. What made such policy committees strong is that program staff solicited participant feedback only on those issues upon which they were ready to act. Participants at these grantees felt respected and that serving on the committee was a productive use of their time.

Similarly, grantees that held regular YPC meetings, and that participants perceived as being responsive to YPC recommendations, received considerable praise from youth respondents.<sup>5</sup> Participants praised the programs for “giving everybody a chance to speak about what’s important.” Participants at these grantees felt that their input was a valued part of the program, even if they were not serving on the committee themselves. One such youth said:

*People listen in here. When I have ideas and stuff, they don't just throw them aside. There are YPC members, where kids can...be the voice for the school. You talk to[YPC members], and when they have a meeting they'll bring up what you want to change.*

Seats on the YPC were competitively awarded in those grantees at which the committee had real decision-making power. Committee members at these grantees said that they felt “honored” to be elected by their peers. Those that served on active policy councils spoke of it building confidence, providing experience with public speaking, helping them to better assert themselves, and teaching them about how to balance competing interests. As one youth explained:

*I learned to distinguish between things where there were fine shades of difference. I learned about the difference between good, better, and best where sometimes you have to make compromises with other people or even your own ideas to do the right thing. I also learned about distinguishing between reasonable and unreasonable suggestions from other people.... Perhaps most important, I learned how to agree or not agree without getting into a bitter argument.*

## **Classroom and Construction Site Leaders**

*If you got one good worker that tries the hardest, he can be what we call a crew leader. [The crew leader] tells everybody what needs to be done, and gets everybody going...he keeps you motivated.*

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<sup>5</sup> There was one exception to this. One program that held weekly YPC meetings was uniformly criticized by youth respondents as a “joke.” In this case it seems that the meetings were poorly facilitated.



In addition to the youth policy council, roughly half of the grantees provide participants with leadership responsibilities in the classroom and/or at the worksite. In these roles, participants regularly supervise small teams on the construction site, facilitate group meetings, lead morning circles, or “ice-breaker” exercises, initiate community service projects, and mentor younger participants in the program. Some grantees provided such roles for only a few participants, while others required that most participants rotate through leadership roles. Exhibit VII-2 summarizes the frequency of different types of classroom and construction leadership opportunities across the grantees.

**Exhibit VII-2:  
Roles for Youth in the Classroom or the Construction Site**

| Description  | Level of Intensity  | Points |
|--|---|--------|
| Participants can have leadership roles in the classroom and/or at the worksite, where they can mentor other youth and/or participate in a variety of community service projects. For example, participants can serve as crew leaders, crew chiefs, safety supervisors, etc. Participants can also facilitate meetings, lead “morning circles,” and initiate community service projects. Participants in these roles get the opportunity to master skills at a higher level, because they are teaching their peers, and all participants get the chance to see each other as resources. | <b>No classroom or construction site leadership roles for participants:</b> 16 grantees | 0      |
|  | <b>Classroom leadership roles for a few (1-5) participants:</b> 8 grantees              | 1      |
|  | <b>Classroom leadership roles for most participants:</b> 3 grantees                     | 3      |
|  | <b>Construction leadership roles for a few (1-5) participants:</b> 4 grantees           | 1      |
|  | <b>Construction leadership roles for most participants:</b> 9 grantees                  | 3      |

As described in the exhibit, eight grantees provided limited leadership opportunities in the classroom, while four provided limited roles for youth on the construction site. Some grantees solicit youth volunteers to lead activities, such as running morning meetings, helping their peers with assignments, or leading a weekly discussion on a news topic of their choice. These opportunities are available to all participants, but only a select few take advantage of them. In contrast, other grantees hire graduating youth to serve in leadership positions. Although these positions are not broadly available to current participants, they were perceived by program stakeholders as important opportunities for graduates to serve as role models and guides for their peers.

Grantees with more intensive leadership opportunities required that most participants take on varied leadership roles. At one such grantee, classroom youth leaders take attendance, clean the classrooms, assign break times, and rate the performance of their peers. Participants at this site can also serve as senior leaders and crew leaders at the construction site. Each week the

supervisor appoints a senior leader who oversees the work of all participants. The senior leader then picks crew leaders who lead teams of participants on construction projects. Participants, including the following, spoke with pride about taking on these roles, describing it as a valuable learning experience that would help them in future work.

*I'm a senior crew leader right now at the job site. So I oversee like three different crew leaders who have crews, and make sure they all have a job on the job site. I tell them when to come back from lunch and when to go to lunch. So I'm basically in charge of everything.*

In addition to work experience, participants indicated that taking on leadership in the classroom or worksite “pushes” them to “learn” because they have to “teach it and help others.” They also indicated that it helped them to develop communication, as well as motivational and conflict management skills. One crew leader described, “In situations on the work site, people will be slacking, and now I know how to encourage them...I tell them with respect, they recognize that, and after awhile they come along.” Grantees that create these types of roles for participants are creating a space in which youth “take responsibility for helping” and are accountable to each other, rather than just to the adults who run the programs.

## Leadership Classes

Roughly one quarter of programs required that youth participate in leadership classes. Leadership classes were offered by all types of organizations, from charter schools to stand-alone community based organizations. The classes were more well developed, however, when they were explicitly linked to community leadership activities, which are described further in the next section. Exhibit VII-3 highlights the facets of leadership training that were included in the rating of grantees.

**Exhibit VII-3:  
Leadership Classes for Youth**

| Description   | Level of Intensity                               | points |
|---|--|--------|
| A number of grantees offer formal leadership training classes that address the core elements of leadership. These elements include learning about cooperative work and reliability, resolving conflicts, public speaking, good parenting, and financial literacy through life skills training. Through leadership training, grantees seek to empower participants to take leadership on issues in their lives, emphasizing their role as grassroots leaders in their communities. | <b>No leadership classes:</b><br>24 grantees     | 0      |
|   | <b>Require leadership classes:</b><br>9 grantees | 1      |

Leadership classes generally focus on political education, though they also often include an emphasis on general life skills such as financial planning and character building. Several grantees use YouthBuild USA’s “Blueprint for Democracy” curriculum to teach about voting rights, with a special focus on engaging low-income minority youth. Participants practice public speaking skills through discussions about current events and social issues. Participants at these grantees asserted, “They opened our eyes to a lot of social issues, like racial profiling,” and “they try to make us talk a lot...to build up your speech, how you communicate with other people, [so you will] not be afraid.” In one site, all participants attend a city council meeting and learn about various city departments and resources. As one participant said, “They teach me a lot of things about the community that I should have known, but I didn’t.”

## Breadth and Intensity of Youth Leadership

This section assesses the breadth and intensity of leadership across the varied strategies highlighted above, and focuses on formal (and therefore more easily replicable) structures for leadership.

- **6-10 points: High Youth Leadership.** Six Youth Offender grantees fall into the category of “High Youth Leadership.”<sup>6</sup> These grantees include a range of different leadership opportunities, and make those opportunities available to a high percentage of program participants. Participants have significant formal leadership responsibility in organizational governance and in supervisory roles. Two of these grantees were relatively small organizations with staff sizes of 7-10, while the other four were sizable programs with over 15 staff members and budgets of well over \$1,000,000.
- **2-5 points: Moderate Youth Leadership.** Eighteen grantees moderately promote youth leadership. Some of the grantees that fall into this category have areas of strength, but do not offer a breadth of different kinds of leadership opportunities to participants. For instance, five of these grantees have a very active youth policy council, but do not provide any roles for participants on the worksite or in the classroom. Inversely, two grantees offer rich and varied opportunities for participants to take on leadership on the worksite or in the classroom but have an “inactive” policy council. Eleven of the grantees in this category offer a range of different leadership activities but they offer them infrequently or only to a small number of participants. For instance, they may have a YPC that meets less than once a month but hire former graduates to work on the construction site.

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<sup>6</sup> High leadership sites and their point totals: Portland West YouthBuild, Portland, Maine (10 pts); YouthBuild Rockford, Rockford, Maryland (10pts); YouthBuild Newark, Newark New Jersey (7 pts); LA CAUSA YouthBuild, Los Angeles, CA (6 pts); YouthBuild Charter School, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (6 pts); Bi-Cap YouthBuild, Bemidji, Minnesota (6 pts).

- **0-1 points: Low Youth Leadership.** Eight grantees offered few structured leadership opportunities for participants. A few grantees in this category had a very small staff (4 or less), and therefore may have lacked the capacity to offer substantive leadership roles for participants. This, however, was not universally true, as within this category are five grantees with fifteen or more staff members. These grantees did provide informal opportunities for youth to give input on organizational decisions through occasional check-ins.

One core lesson, when looking across these different categories, is that factors such as the size of the organization (i.e. budget, staff size), the age of the organization, or the mean age of participants are not sufficient to explain the different levels of youth leadership opportunities offered across these programs. Although Americorps grants provide targeted funding to support youth leadership and community engagement, two of the sites with the most leadership opportunities (YouthBuild West Portland, Portland Maine and Bi-Cap YouthBuild, Bemidji Minnesota) were not Americorps grantees.<sup>7</sup> This analysis suggests that, once grantees meet a basic level of capacity (staff of more than 4-5), support for youth leadership stems more from organizational *values* than from contextual factors such as funding or organizational capacity.

There was little qualitative evidence that high leadership organizations are better than low leadership organizations at achieving key outcomes, such as GED attainment or placement into unsubsidized employment.<sup>8</sup> As reported throughout this chapter, however, participants report that leadership opportunities lead to a host of social outcomes that cannot be measured in this report, such as increased confidence and communication skills.

## Community Service and Community Leadership

*We do community service. We go help out the hungry, go to churches, and help serve dinners. A part of the construction site is also community service. We do [community service] on our own or as part of the program.*

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<sup>7</sup> Twenty-two Youth Offender grantees were Americorps grantees, while 10 were not. Fourteen Youth Offender grantees have received funds under this Americorps grant through YouthBuild USA. Eight other Youth Offender grantees offer participants access to AmeriCorps education awards toward college tuition if youth complete certain requirements. More detail on the Americorps program is included in the Interim Evaluation Report and in Chapter V of this report.

<sup>8</sup> As will be discussed in Chapter XI, an outcomes analysis found that higher performing sites were *more likely* to have an active YPC than were lower performing sites. This may at first seem contradictory, but can be explained in at least two ways. First, qualitative analysis is generally less powerful in identifying what may be subtle differences between grantees. Secondly, it is quite plausible that grantees struggling to achieve satisfactory levels of performance may be unable to support an active YPC. This would explain the quantitative relationship observed in Chapter XI, but would be unlikely to be evident in the qualitative data in this chapter because the driving factor – struggling grantees – is not the focus of this chapter.

Another fundamental tenet of the YouthBuild program is its commitment to community action and community service. YouthBuild’s program standards state that participants are expected to actively participate in collective action in the community to benefit both the program and people other than themselves. Through this service, according to YouthBuild’s program standards, participants will feel empowered to instigate positive community change and strengthen their ability to navigate and negotiate the challenges they face. As one grantee staff noted, the purpose of community service is to reconnect participants to their communities so that they feel like important members of society.

As is true of formal leadership activities, Youth Offender grantees vary significantly in how much they require participants to engage with the community. Some require that all their youth participate in community service, some make community service optional, and others offer few, if any, opportunities for community service beyond construction work on low-income housing. Similarly, the frequency of community service and community leadership opportunities varies across grantees. Sixteen grantees (nearly half) offer weekly community service opportunities, while ten engage participants in community service less than once a month.

Exhibit VII-4 summarizes the different kinds of approaches used by the Youth Offender grantees.

**Exhibit VII-4:  
Community Service and Community Leadership Opportunities**

| Description   | Level of Intensity   |
|---|--|
| <p>YouthBuild provides a number of opportunities for participants to engage with their community through service. Participants help with neighborhood restoration, planting community gardens, volunteering with the elderly, with the homeless, or in food banks.</p> <p>Some grantees offer youth a chance to participate in public speaking events to advocate for YouthBuild or to participate in coalitions to attempt to influence local policies in ways that benefit the community. Also, some grantees offer participants opportunities to mentor other local youth or provide presentations on issues relevant to youth in the community.</p> | <p><b>Community service not mandatory:</b><br/>6 grantees</p>  |
|   | <p><b>Community service mandatory:</b> 26 grantees</p>         |
|   | <p><b>Community service less than monthly:</b> 10 grantees</p> |
|   | <p><b>Community service monthly:</b><br/>7 grantees</p>        |
|   | <p><b>Community service weekly:</b><br/>16 grantees</p>        |
|   | <p><b>Community leadership opportunities:</b> 12 grantees</p>  |

As is illustrated in the exhibit, nearly half of the grantees (16) required that youth participate in weekly community service. These “intensive” community service grantees took a more sustained and consistent approach to engaging participants in the community than those that

made community service optional or offered infrequent opportunities for youth to participate. Although most intensive community service grantees were Americorps grantees, two were not. The two organizations that provided intensive service opportunities without an Americorps grant drew on strong partnerships with service-oriented community groups, such as the YMCA. Intensive community service programs shared a common value for service and the notion that youth should “give back” to community.

Fifteen grantees fall into the category of “moderate” community engagement. Some of these grantees offer frequent community service opportunities but do not mandate that youth participate. Inversely, some “moderate” community service organizations require that youth participate in community service but offer only infrequent opportunities for service (i.e. monthly or less than monthly.) For instance, several of these grantees offer monthly “service Saturdays” in which youth either participate in a common service event or commit to doing community service at an organization of their choosing. Two of the grantees offered few to no community service opportunities beyond construction work on low-income housing. In each of these grantees, program directors felt that work on low-income housing was “community service in action” and there was no need to expose participants to additional service opportunities.

The activities in which participants engage, and their attitudes about this service, differ significantly by grantee. Participants were most positive about community service activities when they had a role in deciding where they would volunteer. At a few grantees, participants choose an organization to do their weekly community service time. Other grantees have a community leadership group that helps to identify community action projects on which youth can work. In yet other grantees, service opportunities were linked to the political education to which participants were exposed in their leadership classes, so youth could work to address some of the social issues that they discussed in class.

Participants in intensive community leadership organizations had an opportunity to work with the homeless, work in food banks, plant trees, paint community murals, and help the elderly. Many youth said they were motivated to participate in service because of the feedback they received from community members. For instance, one participant said, “You see that you make people happy and that makes you feel good and you don't mind doing it again.” They also appreciated the sense of pride that they experienced, because it helped them to “make-up” for the destructive acts in which they had previously engaged.

*It gives you a sense of doing good. It helps you to stop feeling guilty all the time for what you've done, that guilty chip on your shoulder. It helps with getting over that. Like when you go to court and you feel like you're not a human being, you're a 'bad' guy.' It helps to feel better about that.*

Another participant said of his work in the community, “I took great pride in my work for the first time in my life. There isn't much pride in selling drugs. Anyone who takes pride in that is a fool.”

On the other hand, participants could be quite negative about mandated community service when they felt like they did not have a voice in deciding what activities to engage in or they felt that they were being used primarily as laborers. Neighborhood clean-up efforts, including litter or graffiti removal, were particularly unpopular, with some respondents saying things such as “I felt like a slave,” “I don’t like picking up garbage,” or “it made me feel like I was on parole.” Although participants did not tend to enjoy community clean-up efforts, some did acknowledge that it had value. One youth said, “In the process of doing it, you're like, ‘Man, this is corny.’ But...I look back and it was a good experience.” Other participants said that they were less likely to litter after having participated in neighborhood clean-up efforts.

In addition to service activities, roughly one-third of grantees (12) promoted youth leadership within their community by encouraging participants to give public presentations, serve on community-wide committees, meet with public officials, or volunteer to educate or mentor local youth. Participants of some grantees engage in community leadership by speaking to public officials to advocate on behalf of YouthBuild or address policy issues that directly affect their communities. In Portland Maine, for instance, YouthBuild participants went to the state legislature to testify about a parenting bill. In Albany (New York), Newark (New Jersey), and Waukegan (Illinois) YouthBuild, participants serve as representatives on city or state-level youth policy committees. Two organizations encouraged participants to “give back” monetarily to community organizations. Participants are often encouraged to see themselves as philanthropists. For instance, when participants from Bemidji, MN fundraise for field trips and other events they are required to anonymously donate 10% of the money they raise to a charity of their choice. Similarly, in Portland, Oregon, participants act as grantmakers by distributing \$5,000 to local community organizations of their choosing.

The following case study profile illustrates how one participant took advantage of multiple leadership and community service opportunities at YouthBuild in order to advance his skills.

## Case Study Profile

### Kevin: An Emerging Community Leader

When Kevin came to YouthBuild, he was shy, lacked communication skills, and did not know how to get along with people that were different from himself. YouthBuild's leadership opportunities enabled Kevin to develop into a confident young leader for his community. At YouthBuild, Kevin served on the youth policy committee, as a crew leader on the construction site, participated in community service, and educated groups about the YouthBuild program. These experiences helped Kevin to "find" and "develop" his own natural leadership skills. In his words:

*"I was pretty shy when I came [to YouthBuild]... Before I came to [YouthBuild] I was a very isolated person...I didn't know how to communicate properly with other people.*

*"At YouthBuild I learned how to work with all kinds of people...As the foreman [on the construction site] I had to learn how to get people to work well together.*

*"Getting involved...with community service showed me that I was interested in helping other people. We worked at the pantry and at the homeless shelter. That gave me a chance to open up to show who I really was. YouthBuild has helped me to see myself in a different light – as a positive role model. I never in my life [thought] that I would get up in front of 200-500 people to let them know what I've done, where I am because of [YouthBuild]...Right now I see myself as an example. I can honestly tell someone this is where I used to be and this is where I am now. This is my experience and, as a leader, I think it is my strength."*

Although Kevin did not complete his GED at YouthBuild, he graduated in August 2007, and is working for a non-profit dedicated to providing character education to young teenagers. He was inspired to pursue this career because of his experience at YouthBuild. Kevin's story is highlighted further in the chapter on "outcome stories."

## Conclusion

The Youth Offender grantees provide a number of formal vehicles for participants to develop and practice youth leadership. These vehicles include the Youth Policy Council, formal roles for participants on the construction site and in the classroom, as well as leadership classes. Youth Offender grantees adopted these vehicles to varied degrees. Limited organizational capacity does not fully explain variations across grantees in adoption of and intensity of youth leadership strategies. Some large and well-established organizations did not provide such opportunities, while other smaller organizations provided plentiful leadership opportunities. The creation and promotion of formal youth leadership opportunities appeared to relate mostly to programmatic values and priorities. Although there was no clear pattern that high leadership grantees fared better than low leadership grantees in achieving discrete outcomes, such as GED attainment, youth in such sites did report social outcomes such as increased confidence and enhanced communication skills.



In addition, most grantees provided opportunities for participants to contribute to the well-being of their communities by participating in community service projects. Nearly half of the grantees offered intensive community service opportunities, requiring that youth participate in community service weekly. A few grantees did not offer community service opportunities, mostly because they believed that work on low-income housing was sufficient to raise participants' awareness about the importance of service. Participants were more positive about required community service when they had a role or a "voice" in what kinds of community service activities to engage in.

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## VIII. CHARACTERISTICS OF AND EXTERNAL FACTORS AFFECTING CASE STUDY YOUTH

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The youth experiences section in this report draws on in-depth youth case study data collected during the two rounds of site visits. Round two case study interviews occurred between September 2007 and December 2007,<sup>1</sup> and focused particularly on participants' assessment of the YouthBuild program, as well as on individual-level social, educational, and workforce outcomes. However, case study respondents also provided information regarding external factors that negatively affected their ability to obtain positive outcomes, as well as strategies YouthBuild grantees used to address their specific needs.

This chapter therefore provides an overview of the characteristics and external factors that affected the lives of case study respondents. External factors are discussed extensively throughout this chapter, because they highlight the vulnerable population YouthBuild serves, as well as provide a possible context for why not all youth may achieve successful outcomes during or just after their participation in YouthBuild. In presenting the data, the information collected during both rounds are compared, as are data from the MIS, which were collected on all participants served by the Youth Offender grant. The intention was to follow up with 134 of the original 184<sup>2</sup> case study respondents (four youth per site) during the second round. However, because several of the youth could not be located, and others either refused an interview request or did not show up for a scheduled appointment, only 97 youth were interviewed a second time.

Throughout this chapter, those youth interviewed in the first and/or second round of site visits are referred to as the Overall Case Study Group. This includes 192 youth, 180 youth who were interviewed in the first round, and an additional 12 youth interviewed for the first time in the second round. The 97 youth who were interviewed in both the first and the second round of site visits are referred to as the Follow-Up Case Study Group. Youth who are included in the

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<sup>1</sup> The first round of interviews was conducted in the Spring of 2007.

<sup>2</sup> The analysis in this final report is based on 180 case studies, as data for four of the case studies were incomplete.

quantitative data collected through the YouthBuild USA MIS data are referred to as the Youth Offender Population.

## **Demographic Characteristics**

Both the Overall Case Study Group and the Follow-Up Case Study Group are very similar to the Youth Offender population (i.e., all those youth served by the Youth Offender grants), with only slight variations in each demographic category. One notable difference is that the Follow-up Case Study Group is, on average, older than the Overall Case Study group, with a smaller percentage of 16-17 year olds and a higher percentage of youth who are 22 and over, though in part this is attributable to the fact that follow-up interviews occurred as much as one year after youth's entry into the program. Exhibit VIII-1 provides an overview of the demographic characteristics of both case study groups, as well as of the Youth Offender Population.

## **Housing and Transience**

Transience and access to affordable housing are issues that affected the participation of many case study respondents. As mentioned in the Interim Report, many youth moved a number of times to avoid negative neighborhood influences, become more independent, and/or because of financial factors or as a condition of their parole. Whatever the reason, obtaining stable housing is fundamental to the continued engagement of many participants in the YouthBuild program, because it eliminates some of these negative external factors that affect their ability to achieve successful outcomes.

While there was not a significant change in the living arrangements among the Follow-Up Case Study Group between the first and second round, a somewhat higher percentage of youth reported living with extended family members or friends in the second round. Specifically, during the first round, 10 percent of the Follow-Up Case Study Group reported living with extended family members or friends, compared to 21 percent during the second round. As the data suggest, transience is common among many case study respondents; 29 percent of the Follow-Up Case Study Group reported moving at least once within the past year, and 10 percent reported moving at least twice.

**Exhibit VIII-1:  
Demographic Characteristics of the Youth Offender Population and the Overall and  
Follow-Up Case Study Groups**

|  | <b>Youth Offender<br/>Population<br/>MIS Data (N=1,001)</b> | <b>Overall Case Study<br/>Group<br/>Self-Reported (N=192)</b> | <b>Follow-Up Case Study<br/>Group<br/>Self-Reported (N=97)</b> |
|--|---|---|--|
| <b>Gender</b>                                |   |   |  |
| Male   | 84%   | 81%   | 85%  |
| Female                                       | 16%   | 19%   | 15%  |
| <b>Race</b>                                  |   |   |  |
| Asian  | 3%  | 1%  | 2%   |
| Black  | 53%   | 52%   | 50%  |
| White  | 17%   | 18%   | 23%  |
| Hispanic                                     | 23%   | 20%   | 19%  |
| Multi-Racial                                 | 1%  | 5%  | 3%   |
| Native American                              | 2%  | 3%  | 3%   |
| Other  | 1%  | 1%  | 0%   |
| <b>Age</b>                                   |   |   |  |
| 16-17  | 30%   | 21%   | 17%  |
| 18-21  | 50%   | 52%   | 54%  |
| 22-24  | 19%   | 24%   | 25%  |
| 25 and older                                 | 1%  | 3%  | 4%   |
| <b>Education</b>                             |   |   |  |
| High School Diploma<br>at time of enrollment | 6%  | 5%  | 8%   |
| GED at time of<br>enrollment                 | 4%  | 6%  | 7%   |

Many participants reported that they moved because of chaotic home environments, such as verbal and physical fights, and substance-addicted family members. One participant who moved twice within the past year explained, “My mother’s husband and I weren’t getting along so I had to get out of there...I moved in with my aunt a couple of months ago.” Another participant who recently had a fistfight with his dad explained that his dad was “beating up” his younger brother, so he physically intervened. As a result, this participant moved out of his parents’ home and in with his girlfriend and newborn baby. Chaotic home environments therefore forced many of the case study youth to move out on their own.

At the time of the round two site visits, 26 percent of the Follow-Up Case Study Group reported living on their own. Although many participants expressed that living on their own has allowed

them to feel more independent, several YouthBuild staff members expressed that, for some youth, living on their own has affected their attendance and participation in the YouthBuild program. For instance, the program director of one YouthBuild grantee described the home environment of one youth respondent (who moved out of his mother's house and in with a friend), as "a non-stop party-like environment, with lots of guests and activity that stretches into the night." The program director explained that, since moving, this participant's attendance has become more erratic (i.e. he calls in sick more often), and he has not made significant progress toward achieving his GED. In addition, this participant has also received multiple deductions in his paycheck for being tardy and absent from the YouthBuild program. This has created some challenges for the participant, because he relies heavily on the YouthBuild stipend.

Some participants reported receiving housing assistance through YouthBuild. For instance, one participant mentioned that upon being released from jail she did not have any place to go or live. Her mother was supposed to pick her up from jail, but did not. She called her grandmother and asked her if she could stay with her, however, her grandmother only let her stay for a short while:

*I was [with my grandma] for six days...Then I moved out and got my own place...One of my good friends who is clean and sober was looking for a roommate. I took a chance of living with her. That didn't work out because for me, like living with someone else is not ok.*

At this point, YouthBuild stepped in and provided her with housing assistance. She stated:

*I was living on the streets... I got kicked out [of my apartment], and [the YouthBuild case manager] came and got me and took me to [YouthBuild's Transitional Living Facility]. They put me in a hotel for eight days. Then they gave me a place to live right there...I don't pay rent there. I live there for free."*

Moving into this facility has been a big help for this participant. She has her own bedroom, and pays \$156 a month, which goes into a savings account that she will be able to access when she moves out of the facility. This was a very important dimension of support for this participant, because without it she would have likely had to drop out of the program. Unfortunately, most of the Youth Offender grantees did not have access to this type of intensive housing support. As a result, participants who face homelessness and unstable home environments may lose focus of their goals and often have to drop out.

## **Family Structure and Financial Context**

Case study interviews from the first round of site visits revealed that family composition, parenthood, and the amount of support received from family members had a significant effect on the YouthBuild experience for many case study respondents. During the second round of site

visits, these factors continued to affect the lives of many participants, with a number of them explaining that their family and financial situations were causing them a great deal of stress. This section discusses several key family and financial factors that impeded case study respondents' ability to achieve successful outcomes.

## **Compelling Family Incidents**

As mentioned in the Interim Report, many participants lacked support from their family throughout their participation in YouthBuild due to issues relating to substance abuse, incarceration, and employment. These issues forced many participants to assume leadership roles in their family, as well as to work multiple jobs to contribute financially to the household. In addition, a number of participants from the Follow-Up Case Study Group also reported experiencing one or more compelling family incidents during their participation in YouthBuild, which substantially increased their responsibilities in the home.

Some participants reported that family members experienced a range of challenges, such as health related issues, death, drug relapses, and incarceration throughout their participation in the YouthBuild program. These participants expressed that they were forced to or felt it was their responsibility to assist their family during their time of need. One participant shared that the passing of his grandmother was a pivotal incident that affected the stability of his family. He explained that since his mother has always worked long hours to support the family, his grandmother was the primary caretaker for his younger siblings and him.

As the oldest child, with his grandmother no longer around he was now responsible for caring for his younger siblings. He stated:

*My mother is steady working so I got to see over my brother and sister. That's crazy in my house. There is just constantly a lot of work for me. The only thing is that I have to make sure that they have done what they need to do. They have to do their homework. If they're hungry, I fix food. My sister is starting to learn how to cook, so that takes a little off of me. I don't have to do everything but she's real lazy. And she's not really going to school and doing what she has to do. I tell her to learn from my mistakes, but I can't force her to do anything. Things are harder than before.*

This participant further expressed a genuine concern for his younger siblings, and stated that this new responsibility was causing him a great deal of stress and worry. The change in responsibilities had also made it difficult for him to work at his part-time job on the weekends. While this incident did not cause him to drop out of the YouthBuild program, it had left him with very little time to capitalize fully on his YouthBuild opportunities and to find a permanent job.

Other participants also found it difficult to balance YouthBuild and family issues. For instance, one participant mentioned that her brother had recently been incarcerated for a serious crime, for which he was sentenced to almost sixteen years in prison. In addition to this, this participant also experienced a number of other incidents that negatively affected her participation and success in the YouthBuild program. She explained:

*My brother got sentenced like fifteen years and eight months [in jail]. I kind of took it hard and then I started missing work. Well first I started calling in, and then I stopped calling in, and then I started missing days. Then I started just not doing regular stuff I was doing, like missing treatment [individual and group substance abuse counseling], and being here [attending YouthBuild]. Then my auntie found out she had breast cancer, and one of my friends went to jail and I took custody of her son. And it was just a lot of going on so I pretty much just gave up on a lot of stuff. It just all hit me at one time.*

Prior to these incidents, this participant's attendance rating had been 94 percent, and she had been only days away from obtaining a 100 percent rating. Following these incidents, she was absent for a total of 45 days and was placed "on hold"<sup>3</sup> from the YouthBuild program, and was terminated from the substance abuse program.

To assist these participants in coping with such family stresses, many YouthBuild programs provide them with extended support services (e.g., financial resources, transportation, etc.). For instance, one participant was absent for a total of 143 days because his father was struggling with alcoholism. This participant explained that he needed to drop out of YouthBuild to care for his father and to ensure that his father did not sell things in the house to support his habit. Since he was not participating in the YouthBuild program, he was unable to contribute to the family income, which furthered strained the family financially. The participant contacted the YouthBuild program and explained his family situation. The program excused his absences, and developed a contract with him so he could make up his service hours, complete his classes, and obtain his GED requirements.

As previously mentioned, some YouthBuild programs utilize the hold system to allow participants who have temporarily dropped out of the program to attend to family issues. This system has been effective in allowing many participants to focus on their personal and family responsibilities, and then re-enroll in YouthBuild once their participation is not significantly affected. The thought behind this system is that participants can achieve better outcomes when

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<sup>3</sup> The "hold" system secures a youth's spot in the program (while they are temporarily inactive) until particular issues have been resolved.



they are not distracted by external factors. However, not all programs have the capacity or the resources to allow participants to be placed on hold to address their family and personal issues. Such incidents have therefore affected the success and development of many participants in the YouthBuild program.

## Parenthood

Teen parenthood is another factor that has affected the lives of many participants we interviewed. One-third of the Follow-Up Case Study Group reported being a parent, which is very similar to the rate among the Overall Case Study Group (34 percent). During the first round of interviews, many youth reported that being a parent helped them to “grow up” more quickly and avoid negative peer and community influences. They also reported that they were positively influenced by their desire to be a positive role model and provider for their children.

However, during follow-up interviews, several respondents expressed that having children is a financial stress. One youth who is married and the sole provider for three children explained:

*We got behind on bills. Our [gas] bill, we were four months behind, our cell phone bill too. I bought this \$700 watch, because I got no credit at all and this will help me build up my credit. I put \$50 on it, I've been paying it down, but I still owe \$150 on it. I'll pay it this Friday, but my creditors are getting rough on me. My rent is late. I'm a whole month behind right now. It will all work out, though, if I just stay at work. I tried to keep up but it just started slowly breaking apart...It's rough but it will work out.*

While this participant remained optimistic about his ability to meet his financial obligations, the reality is that he is seriously struggling. Prior to the second interview, he dropped out of the YouthBuild program for two weeks due to “family problems,” and shared that he had been having marital problems as well. In addition, his wife was a few months pregnant with their fourth child. Parenthood has increased his financial responsibilities, and has affected his ability to remain financially stable and active within YouthBuild.

While this youth has stayed “clean,” he feels the pull to support his family, and the minimum wage that he earns at YouthBuild is not enough. He further stated:

*I don't know right from wrong sometimes. I could be doing better as a father and as a husband. But, there are things in the way... I see everyone around me, and as far as I can tell, money is everything, and you are forced to go out there and get it.*

As mentioned in the Interim Report, making money to provide for their family is a driving force for many youth we interviewed. Roughly 40 percent of the Overall Case Study Group reported working two jobs. Many of these youth were often tardy or absent from YouthBuild due to

conflicting schedules or oversleeping that they insist was due to fatigue from their work schedules. In addition, a number of respondents explained that they were the sole provider for their family, and as one participant put it, “our money is spent long before we get it.” Losing a job is a major concern for many of the participants, because it puts them at risk of becoming homeless and engaging in negative activities. As mentioned in the Interim Report, a number of participants reported engaging in illegal and criminal activity in order to provide financially for their family. Such activities continue to put these youth at risk of recidivating.

In addition to being at risk of recidivating, the financial stress parenthood has placed on many youth respondents has also exacerbated concerns about housing. For instance, one youth who received her GED and graduated from the YouthBuild program prior to the second interview had experienced multiple evictions in the past few years. Since her husband recently re-enrolled in the YouthBuild program, his time away from home during the week has forced her to stay home to care for their three children. The conditions of her husband’s probation also require him to be incarcerated on the weekend, which makes it impossible for her to hold a job during the week or on the weekend.

This youth is supportive of her husband’s participation in the program, however, his schedule and the limited funds he receives from YouthBuild (\$400 every two weeks, if there are no deductions for absences) puts the family under great financial strain. In addition, at the time of the second site visit, this youth was in the process of being evicted and moving herself and her three children to her mother’s home, while her husband moved in with his mother. This youth explained that, without her YouthBuild stipend, they have not had enough money to cover rent.

Since the YouthBuild program was unable to provide her or her husband with the necessary resources to meet their needs, she relied heavily on public aid. She stated, “I get all I need from the Public Aid Office. Every six months I need to re-certify.” Yet, while this youth has been receiving additional outside support, she has been unable to afford her rent or childcare. Her educational goals of attending college have therefore been put on hold, because she is the primary caretaker for her three children.

This story is similar to those of many other respondents, in that some youth were unable to complete the YouthBuild program because they could not successfully balance work, school, and parenthood. While some were overwhelmed by the financial pressure placed on them, a number of youth often expressed experiencing emotional stress as well. One youth explained:

*[I haven’t taken any steps toward attending any GED classes, because] I just got enough on my mind right now. With my family, I won’t be able to really be focused for a while. It will probably be at least another month before I can focus. There’s been a couple of complications with the kids,*

*and it's been brain wrecking, and I don't want to go in [to the GED exam] thinking about all that. It's just emotional warfare.”*

Thus, although many participants during their initial interviews experienced parenthood as a protective factor, responses from follow-up interviews revealed that parenthood also can be a substantial risk factor. As a result, of the 39 respondents that reported dropping out of YouthBuild, roughly one-third specified that they dropped out because of family and childcare issues.

## **Youth Offender Recidivism**

Throughout the case study interviews, participants identified a range of offenses they were convicted of prior to and during their participation in YouthBuild. The most common offenses reported were drug-related (45 percent), followed by theft (30 percent), and assault (21 percent). While YouthBuild hopes to prevent these participants from committing new crimes, a number of youth had re-offended and/or recidivated after entering YouthBuild. According to MIS data, 14 percent of participants served by the Youth Offender grant were convicted of a crime and incarcerated after entering YouthBuild. While recidivism in the case study sample was considerably lower than this overall figure, the cases do provide a window into the circumstances that led youth to re-offend and recidivate.

Many participants explained they had recidivated and/or been in contact with the police within the past year due to poor decision-making and negative community and peer influences (e.g. sale and use of drugs, gang involvement, racial profiling). For instance, one participant stated that a couple of weeks prior to his follow-up interview, the police broke into his apartment because they thought one of his friends had shot someone. He said, “My friend had a gun and we had been shooting, but in the end the [police] realized it wasn't my friend, he wasn't who they were looking for, and they just gave him a citation.”

Another participant was re-arrested for fighting, and the police pressed seven charges against him, five of which subsequently were dropped. Although this participant had said in interviews that YouthBuild helped him to control his anger and walk away from conflict, he felt that he could not walk away from this fight because he was defending a younger friend. He stated, “I couldn't walk away. That's my little homie. If that were my brother, I wouldn't let nobody touch him. He can call me for anything.” Poor decision making and community and peer influences thus affect how often youth encounter the police, as well as recidivate. These influences are discussed further in the *Community and Peer Influences* section later in this chapter.

While community and peer influences have contributed to recidivism and interaction with the police, offense history sometimes has a considerable effect on a participants' ability to smoothly and successfully transition out of the YouthBuild program. For instance, roughly 32 percent of case study respondents reported their offense history as being one barrier to them obtaining employment. One participant explained:

*[I feel that my criminal] background will [prevent me from getting a job], because I got in here for first degree reckless endangerment, and that's battery or something. Like I went to Macy's and I was looking real nice and stuff, and they asked me about my [criminal background] and I told them, and their jaws like dropped. I feel certain jobs that seem, like more professional type stuck-up jobs, they are not going to hire me.*

While many participants expressed feeling prepared when applying to jobs and attending interviews (e.g. resume, cover letter, interviewing skills) they felt that employers judged and discounted them because of their criminal background. Many participants therefore expressed that they often felt limited to low wage jobs and those in specific industries (e.g. construction, service sector). In addition, several participants felt that certain careers of interest, such as paramedic, police, or firefighter, were off limits to them because of their criminal history.

As discussed above, having a suitable and consistent source of income was an overriding concern of many case study youth. One reason for this is that, in addition to paying personal and household expenses, many participants were required to pay restitution fees and fines for their prior offenses. For instance, one participant explained that every month he pays \$390 in rent, a \$20 phone bill, \$30 utility bill, and \$300 in restitution fines to his victims, in addition to food and other personal expenses. He also provides his mother with financial support. As a result, with a monthly income of \$1100, he barely breaks even. This participant therefore expressed that his restitution fines are a challenge and mentioned, "I have enough to pay my bills, even a little extra, but I have to be careful. I can't just spend money."

As described above, many youth respondents reported being under a considerable amount of financial stress while participating in the YouthBuild program, and often viewed engaging in illegal or negative activities (e.g. selling drugs) as a potential alternative source of income. Yet, the financial incentives and bonuses some YouthBuild programs offer (e.g. stipend, contract signing bonuses, outstanding attendance incentive, etc.) have assisted many participants in avoiding these negative influences, as well as meeting their financial obligations. One participant stated, "The most critical thing for me is the stipend. I don't know if I could be here without it. Don't get me wrong, the education is key, but I don't think I could have been here without [the stipend]."

While the percentage of case study youth who dropped out of YouthBuild due to offense-related reasons is considerably lower than the rate among the overall Youth Offender Population (15 percent), a number of respondents mentioned that the YouthBuild staff has also assisted them in avoiding or getting out of trouble with the law. One participant stated:

*YouthBuild did me a good favor. Without YouthBuild, I would have probably been in a bad situation...I had a court date and my mom was in the hospital at the time. [Some YouthBuild staff members] talked on my behalf and asked the judge to give me another chance, because I really was a good person and that they felt I should be given a second chance. Non-adjudicated sentence was the ruling.*

Respondents expressed a sense of appreciation towards staff members when they assisted them with court related issues. They felt pressured to avoid negative influences and activities because of this support they received. For instance, one participant explained, “Right now, I do not want to be around any problems. I just want to be by myself. I am focused on my education and passing my GED test.” Given that community and peer influences are factors that contribute to many youth re-offending, having support from YouthBuild has been a major factor in helping some participants to avoid these negative influences and activities that lead to recidivism, and has altered their perception of committing crimes.

## **Community and Peer Influences**

*I want out [of the neighborhood], definitely. That’s why I’m doin’ what I’m doin’. I want out. [What is going on in the neighborhood that makes you want to leave?] It’s just a lot of negative out there. People not happy and they don’t want to see you happy. Then it’s police, and the drug situation and shootings, stuff like that. I don’t want to be around that stuff.*

The above statement captures the sentiment and perspective of the many participants who are continuously affected by negative community and peer influences. As mentioned in the Interim Report, poverty, gangs, and drugs are some of the factors that affect the experience of participants in the YouthBuild program. Consequently, these factors have also contributed to some case study respondents recidivating, struggling with substance abuse, and dropping out or being terminated from the YouthBuild program. Following is a discussion of the primary community and peer influences that participants mentioned as hindrances to them achieving successful outcomes within the program.

## **Gangs and Neighborhood Violence**

During the initial site visit, many participants reported living in neighborhoods where gangs and violence are very prevalent. The presence of gangs has restricted some participants’ movement

within their communities and acts of violence threatened the safety of many. A number of participants mentioned knowing gang-affiliated family members and peers, which can increase the risk for recidivism.

Seventeen of 97 follow-up respondents indicated that they had been involved in a gang, though some youth appeared to be uncomfortable in disclosing their involvement with gang information, so this number is likely an underestimate. In addition, many participants who denied having any involvement in a gang mentioned that they often spent a lot of time with family members and peers that are a part of a gang, and/or have a “crew” or “clique” of friends with which they regularly spend time. As one participant put it, “I’m not in a gang, but in a clique that was going to be a gang. There is a gang and a clique that goes with it. When you do certain things, you’re in a gang. You have to put in work, and be there kicking it.” Even though this participant did not report being a part of an organized gang, the negative activities her “clique” was involved in put her at great risk of recidivating. She explained,

*I would come from school, change clothes and go outside ‘til three in the morning. [I would] go to ‘missions’ with them...go in their car...to look for other gangs. My gang always had guns. When cops stopped us, they would always say, ‘I’m taking my little sister home,’ and get away with it.*

Other participants also mentioned that their affiliation with a gang, or a “crew” or “clique” contributed to them getting into fights, using and selling drugs, and interacting with the police. For instance, a few participants expressed that it was challenging for them to avoid interacting with these negative groups because they are so enmeshed in their neighborhood and social network. However, some participants feel that their peers respect them for the life changes they are making through participating in YouthBuild. One participant explained, “That’s the neighborhood, man. You just can’t go somewhere else that easily. I’m chillin’, though. They know me, they know what I’m tryin’ to do and they respect me.”

As will be discussed in Chapter X, a number of case study respondents mentioned that they had to completely separate themselves from their negative peers in order to be successful in the YouthBuild program. One participant stated:

*I was talking to my friends from YouthBuild just last week. I was saying that we need to stay in contact because I need positive people in my life. That’s why I’m by myself on my days off. I don’t really want to be around my old negative friends...I say hello when I see them. It’s hard. That’s one of the reasons I came to YouthBuild; to get away from that.*

A number of youth explained that participating in YouthBuild has allowed them to create new positive peer relationships, along with receiving advice and support from the YouthBuild staff. One participant explained:

*[The director of the program] told me in this one situation that was happening, that 'this person is a bad person. They don't have your back.' She was right. They didn't have my back... [And I realized] I can't afford to jeopardize my job for something foolish.*

YouthBuild has thus been a source of positive support and has served as a safe space for many participants. As previously stated, a number of participants now have future goals and aspirations that they are striving to achieve, and have realized that their affiliation and interaction with gangs and negative peers can prevent them from successfully completing their goals. However, while YouthBuild programs continue to provide these participants with extended support and advice in avoiding negative community and peer influences, the prevalence of gangs and negative peer groups in their communities increases their risk of being victims and suspects of crime.

## **Law Enforcement Climate**

The law enforcement climate is another factor that has an affect on some participants' ability to achieve positive outcomes. Forty-one percent of the Follow-Up Case Study respondents reported having some contact with the police within the last year. Some participants expressed that they felt harassed by the police due to racial profiling, suspected gang affiliation, and/or involvement in drug-related activities. These incidents contributed to many youth feeling antagonized by the police. One participant stated, "I don't like [the police]... They don't have probable cause for stopping you, they stop you based on suspicion, like how you dress or talk."

Respondents living in communities in which violence, gang, and drug activity were more prevalent often reported being stopped disproportionately by police. For instance, during a follow-up interview, one participant stated that he had been stopped by the police three times in one month. For this youth, these incidents typically occurred at night when he was walking home from the store or a friend's house. To avoid these interactions, this participant decided to stay home more often, and away from old friends. Similarly, other participants have tried to limit their interactions with the police by spending more time at YouthBuild and with their peers from YouthBuild.

In some cases, participants mentioned that they were so well known by the police in their communities that they decided to move. One participant stated: "My girlfriend and new neighborhood helps me stay out of trouble... We don't live in [my old neighborhood anymore, and] there's nothing going on [where I live now.]" While a change in environment helped this participant to avoid interactions with the police, some youth do not have the resources to do this. In these cases, neighborhood context continues to be an ongoing challenge. As one participant put it, "I'm from lower society, you know what I mean? I'm from the ghetto and gangbanging.

That's where I'm from. I still live in it until this day. I'm trying to get out of that, but I still live in it until this day. It's a struggle."

## **Drugs**

As stated in the Interim Report, a number of the case study respondents reported being exposed to drug use and drug trafficking at a very young age. Further, 45 percent of the case study respondents reported being convicted of a drug-related offense. According to respondents, a lack of positive and extracurricular activities, as well as viable job opportunities, contributed to the use and sale of drugs among many participants.

Several respondents admitted in their follow-up interviews that they continued to smoke marijuana and drink alcohol socially and with their peers. A few explained that they continue to use these substances because they do not feel that they are harmful or an impediment to their success in the YouthBuild program. One participant admitted to getting in trouble with the police for having a party at his apartment that included underage drinking. He said that it is hard to avoid getting in trouble for this kind of offense because, "those are things I like to do—drink and have people over, because that's what you do in America. I understand the problem of underage drinking, but I don't think it's a serious crime." For youth offenders, however, such substance use can have significant consequences, such as parole violation, termination from YouthBuild, or ineligibility for employment due to a failed drug test.

In addition, a number of participants also reported living in poor communities in which economic opportunities are scarce, and selling drugs is a common source of income. One youth explained, "The environment is depressing because the neighborhood is poor and drug use and violence are common. There is nothing to do but play basketball at the park [and] the job market sucks." This participant stated he has applied to several jobs, but that the economic conditions and his offense history have been barriers to him obtaining a high wage job. These factors have resulted in a few youth selling drugs in order to remain financially stable. As one participant put it, "People hustle, they try to make money selling drugs." The YouthBuild stipend has provided financial support to many participants, however, a few respondents expressed that it is difficult to completely avoid involvement in the street market, because, "a little extra money comes in handy."

YouthBuild has played a major role in helping some participants who are substance abusers by providing them with drug treatment support and resources. Many respondents acknowledged that the encouragement, transportation, counseling, and random drug testing YouthBuild provided played a significant role in them becoming and remaining clean from substance abuse. One participant stated that participating in YouthBuild showed him that he would "not really



succeed in life” or better himself if he was using drugs. He added, “The drug testing helped a lot.” Another youth explained:

*I think it’s wonderful [that they randomly test us for drugs]. They would be cheating us if they didn’t do it. They’re getting us ready for the real world, because any good job has random UA’s [drug tests]. It would have been a challenge for me early on, but I stopped using marijuana the day before I came here.”*

Thus, the use and sale of drugs has had a considerable effect on how successful participants are in the YouthBuild program, but some YouthBuild grantees have supported participants in this area by requiring them to be randomly tested for drugs, finding and transporting them to drug treatment programs, and providing individual and group counseling. However, while some grantees address these issues directly, other grantees lack the resources to provide the extended support needed, and/or rely on probation officers to address these issues.

## **Goals and Plans for Future**

*“Before coming to YouthBuild, I was running the streets, hanging out on the block, just chillin’. Now, I’m a better person, and I have goals.”*

Prior to enrolling in YouthBuild, many case study respondents were involved in illegal and negative activities that eventually led to them being incarcerated and/or in contact with the police. A number of participants’ goals focused primarily on material possessions and wealth, but their method of achieving those goals were often either unrealistic or illegal. Yet, over the course of their participation in the YouthBuild program, many respondents developed specific educational, workforce, and personal goals they wanted to achieve while participating in and after exiting YouthBuild. In many cases, respondents had altered and/or added additional goals in between their first and second interviews.

A number of the participants mentioned that their immediate short-term educational goals were to obtain their high school diploma or GED, even if they had already exited the YouthBuild program. In addition, many participants’ long-term goals focused on attending some type of post-secondary or apprenticeship program, with aspirations of obtaining an advanced degree or certification in a specific trade. At the time of their follow-up interviews, a number of participants had achieved and/or begun to make progress on most of their short and long-term goals, and were currently or had already taken courses at a community and/or four-year college. One participant stated:

*I thought I would never go to college and never get my high school diploma, but I got it early. [One of the YouthBuild staff members] really pushed me to go to college and it’s probably going to be good.*

Like this participant, many other respondents did not envision a positive future for themselves prior to enrolling in YouthBuild. They viewed their past mistakes and offense history as barriers to achieving many of their goals, and saw YouthBuild as the last opportunity to turn their life around. The encouragement and support they received from YouthBuild staff members and peers helped them to see themselves differently as students, which helped them to attain many of their educational goals.

Over half (56 percent) the respondents from the Follow Up Case Study Group reported they were interested in pursuing a career in a construction-related trade.<sup>4</sup> Finding employment in the field of construction is therefore a fairly widespread workforce goal among many case study respondents. Indeed, 30 percent of the Follow-Up Case Study Group specified carpentry as their specific trade of interest. In addition, a number of youth specified an interest in general contracting (19 percent), electrical work (11 percent), as well as smaller numbers identifying heating and air conditioning, roofing, welding, and painting.

Many participants were inspired to pursue construction after participating in YouthBuild, while others saw construction as being their only viable career option. For instance, many participants initially had an interest in pursuing a career in social service (e.g. parole officer, social worker), or in mechanical and technical fields. Many of these participants, however, felt that their criminal records were a barrier to them achieving those goals. One stated, “The jobs that I want, they pretty much say that you can’t have no felony or anything like that.” These feelings thus discouraged some participants from pursuing their true aspirations, contributing to them feeling limited in what they could achieve.

In addition to their offense history, many youth also experienced events while participating in YouthBuild that negatively affected their ability to achieve certain goals. For instance, during the first round of site visits one participant stated that her career goal was to become a nurse, so she could assist with delivering and caring for newborn babies. With the assistance of the YouthBuild grantee, she received her Certified Nursing Assistant certificate, and planned to continue her education at a local state university. However, in between the first and second site visit, this participant was involved in a car accident that left her paralyzed from the waist down. Consequently, she was confined to a wheelchair, and was forced to alter her career plans. She

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<sup>4</sup> In the Interim Report, only one-third of respondents reported an interest in construction. Several factors contributed to an increase in the percentage of youth interested in construction. (1) Some youth shifted their goals towards construction related careers after participating in YouthBuild, (2) the follow-up group was somewhat more focused in a construction-related trade than the full set of youth interviewed in the first round, (3) site visitors were not systematic and uniform in their approach to asking this question during the first round; follow-up interview data were therefore more detailed on this issue.

expressed that a career in business was now more feasible for her, because she did not think that she could fulfill the duties of nurse while being confined to a wheelchair. Similarly, the goals of many of the interviewed youth were delayed, altered, or forgotten about, due to personal and family illnesses, substance abuse, and a lack of childcare.

Despite these various factors that hindered some participants from achieving their short and long-term goals, many respondents explained that the support, encouragement, and training they received from YouthBuild played a major role in changing their attitudes about their goals and future. One participant stated, “My goals are so high. I want to be somebody...I see myself as an executive, working in an executive office.” In addition, when participants were faced with various barriers that posed a threat to them achieving their goals, the YouthBuild grantees often provide extended support, such as tutoring, transportation, financial incentives, and childcare, which contributed to the education and workforce outcomes many participants achieved.

**Exhibit VIII-2:  
YouthBuild Efforts to Help Youth Achieve Goals**

James (mentioned earlier in this chapter) dropped out of the YouthBuild program due to family problems. He explained that his father was an alcoholic, and that he stayed home to ensure that his father did not drink or sell things in the home to buy alcohol. As a result, James was absent from the YouthBuild program for 143 days

While participating in the YouthBuild program, he stated, *“I want to be a truck driver. Ever since I got that in my head, there’s nothing else. I always loved driving.”* However, due to his family circumstances, he was unable to pursue his goals. The YouthBuild program in which he is participant made an arrangement with him that will enable him to go to truck driving school for very little tuition. According to the program staff, it cost \$1,300 for James to attend the truck-driving program. The YouthBuild program agreed to pay the initial \$300 enrollment fee if James agreed to take the second TABE test, complete twenty hours of service, and complete his GED requirements.

Upon completing these requirements, the YouthBuild program would provide another \$700 towards James’s tuition. As a result, James would only be required to contribute \$300. If James drops out of the truck-driving program, he would be required to repay the YouthBuild program. However, James seemed excited about the prospect of moving forward with his career goals, and stated, *“They’re going to help me pay off the school, and I have to tell the how I’m doing. They’ll keep in contact with me to see how I’m doing.”*

In addition to education and workforce goals, a number of case study respondents set various personal goals they wanted to achieve, such as moving out on their own, obtaining their driver’s license, buying a car, getting off probation, and paying off their court and restitution fees. A few YouthBuild grantees had implemented various supports, such as Individual Development

Accounts<sup>5</sup>, that allowed youth respondents to focus on and achieve these goals. One participant stated, “In YouthBuild, we set short-term and long-term goals. My short-term goal is to get my license back. I have fines to pay off...My long term goal is to go to school and get my degree.” With YouthBuild’s support, she enrolled in an IDA program so she could begin saving money to pay off her fines. This participant stated, “As [YouthBuild] helped me with the court [fines], I saw that each paycheck does make a difference and it’s not so bad putting aside \$40 each paycheck.”

The support provided from YouthBuild not only helped participants to accomplish their goals, it also showed them how to create realistic goals, and develop a systematic plan for how to achieve them. Additionally, setting attainable short and long-term goals also affected the various outcomes participants achieved, because accomplishing one goal made them more determined to achieve even more. Most of the case study youth were primarily interested in becoming financially stable and independent, and as one participant put it, “I just don’t want to struggle like my parents did, living paycheck to paycheck...I don’t want to live that life. I want to own property ...Living in a good neighborhood, better than where I grew up, to raise my kids.”

## **Conclusion**

This chapter provided an overview of the characteristics of the Overall and Follow-Up Case Study Groups, while also contextualizing the external factors that continue to affect the success of many case study respondents. Despite multiple challenges, some participants were able to achieve successful outcomes, yet many others continued to struggle, and relied heavily on the support provided by YouthBuild. The next chapter provides an analysis of the development of case study respondents throughout the evaluation, as well as an overview of their outcomes.

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<sup>5</sup> Individual Development Accounts (IDAs) are matched savings accounts that enable recipients to save, build assets, and enter the financial mainstream.

## **IX. CASE STUDY OUTCOMES: GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT IN YOUTHBUILD**

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As discussed in the previous chapter, most participants who were interviewed for this study faced challenges at multiple levels, some of which seem insurmountable to them. Despite negative prior experiences with schools and other institutions, most case study respondents actively sought out the structured environment of YouthBuild so they could earn their GED or diploma, gain construction skills, and improve their access to higher wage jobs. Many said that they viewed the program as their “last chance” and as an opportunity to “prove people are wrong when they say I won’t amount to nothing.”

Given their prior experiences, it is not surprising that, once enrolled in YouthBuild, many participants had a lot of work to do before they could achieve their educational and employment goals. They had to make up for sizable deficits in academic units and skills, learn how to cooperate effectively with others, and to “unlearn” many social behaviors that had served them well on the street. YouthBuild program stakeholders often talk about the change process that youth need to go through to achieve successful outcomes as a developmental progression. This chapter uses the model of growth and development presented in the Interim Report to guide an analysis of social, educational, and employment outcomes for the Follow-up Case Study Group.

### **Model of Growth and Development in YouthBuild**

In the Interim Report, SPR presented an initial model of growth and development in YouthBuild, a condensed version of the model developed by Ronald Ferguson in his landmark study of YouthBuild (Ferguson et. al, 1996).<sup>1</sup> In this Final Report, this model has been extended to include a post-program stage. This new stage—successful transition—describes

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<sup>1</sup> See the Interim Report for a full discussion of how this model has been condensed and adapted from a model presented by Ferguson and colleagues in “YouthBuild in Developmental Perspective: A Formative Evaluation of the YouthBuild Demonstration Project” (1996). Ronald Ferguson, Philip Clay, Jason Snipes, and Phoebe Roaf. Harvard University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Public/Private Ventures

what is necessary for participants to move out of the program successfully and into either the workforce or full-time schooling.

Exhibit IX-1 presents a detailed summary of the model and the practices that YouthBuild grantees use to support outcomes at each level. The stages represent the process of individual transformation and development that participants undergo as they progress successfully through the program.

### **Exhibit IX-1: Model of Youth Transformation**

| <b>SPR Model</b>          | <b>Description of Phase</b>   | <b>Developmental YouthBuild Practices</b>  |
|---------------------------|---|--|
| Learning to Trust         | Youth offenders must learn to trust in the caring, competence, resourcefulness and fairness of YouthBuild staff and in the physical and emotional safety of the program environment. They must learn to negotiate an acceptable range of autonomy in behavior and decision-making, by respecting the program’s rules and guiding assumptions. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Case management</li> <li>• Small teacher/participant ratio</li> <li>• Team-building activities</li> <li>• Clear program rules</li> </ul>  |
| Learning to be Productive | YouthBuild participants must initiate an honest attempt to collaborate with staff and peers towards self-development. YB participants must commit to learning new strategies for living and new skills, including skills for employability (i.e. GED/diploma and work skills).  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Priority on work-readiness skills such as proper attire, punctuality, attendance, and language</li> <li>• Focus on communication skills and conflict management</li> <li>• One-on-one instruction; self-paced learning</li> <li>• Stipends and practical support</li> </ul> |
| Taking on a New Identity  | YouthBuild participants must take on a new focused and positive identity that leads to positive life choices and expectations about the future.   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awards, certificates, formal recognition</li> <li>• Leadership opportunities</li> <li>• Career planning</li> <li>• Financial and life skills planning</li> </ul>  |
| Successful Transition     | YouthBuild participants need to carry their developmental gains from the positive and sheltered reality of the program into the “real world.” They need to be able to apply the lessons they have learned from YouthBuild to new contexts.  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job placement and transition support-services</li> <li>• Follow-up Services</li> </ul>  |

As described in the Interim Report, the model assumes that movement of participants from one stage to the next depends on two contextual factors. First, the staff and counselors at the YouthBuild Program must demonstrate effective traits in working with participants so that the program creates a sense of safety. In this way, the quality of the program is an important factor

in how successful participants are at progressing through the stages. Second, in order to engage satisfactorily with the program, the youth offender must demonstrate a certain degree of readiness and willingness to change. As described in Chapter III, mental toughness training is a key strategy that YouthBuild grantees use to assess potential participants' readiness.

The far right hand column of Exhibit IX-1 highlights practices that YouthBuild grantees use to support participants' progression from one developmental stage to the next. For example, YouthBuild grantees can build trust through varied community building strategies. Similarly, the program can promote productivity through a strategic focus on work-readiness skills and individualized academic support. Further, grantees can support a new identity by celebrating the accomplishments of participants and helping them to plan for the future. Finally, YouthBuild can support successful transition by making sure that participants are connected to resources and job or educational placements before they leave the program. More detail on the specific practices and services highlighted in the table can be found in Chapters III-VII of this report.

## **Developmental Shifts in Case Study Youth**

This model of growth and development within YouthBuild is used as a framework to track progress and outcomes among the case study respondents. A trained reviewer read detailed write-ups of the first and second round interviews, classifying all respondents into a developmental "stage," as defined by the model. The reviewer classified first and second round interviews independently and at different points in time, entering classifications into a database.<sup>2</sup> Through this process, the developmental progression of the 97 Follow-up Case Study youth can be tracked during the roughly nine months between their interviews. This section presents a summary of the case study youth's developmental shifts, while the next section includes a detailed discussion of the outcomes that participants achieved as they moved from one stage to the next.

Exhibit IX-2 presents a summary of stage-assignments for the same group of youth at two different points in time. Interviews occurred approximately 6-9 months apart.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Although all round one and round two interviews were categorized, this chapter only includes information on the 97 follow-up case study youth who were interviewed in both rounds of site visits.

<sup>3</sup> Youth were first interviewed between January and April 2007. The same group of youth were then interviewed again between September and November 2007.

**Exhibit IX-2:  
Stage distribution of Follow-up Case Study Group  
(Same group of 97 youth interviewed 6-9 months apart)**

| <b>Stage</b>                     | <b>Round 1<br/>Frequency (%)</b> | <b>Round 2<br/>Frequencies (%)</b> | <b>% change<sup>4</sup></b> |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <b>Learning to Trust</b>         | 8<br>(8%)                        | 4<br>(4%)                          | -4%                         |
| <b>Learning to be Productive</b> | 54<br>(56%)                      | 23<br>(24%)                        | -32%                        |
| <b>Taking on a New Identity</b>  | 34<br>(35%)                      | 47<br>(49%)                        | +13%                        |
| <b>Successful Transition</b>     | 1<br>(1%)                        | 23<br>(24%)                        | +23%                        |

As this exhibit illustrates, at the point of the first interview, most participants had already progressed out of the “learning to trust” stage and were at the stage of learning to be productive (56 percent). At that point, only a little more than one-third (35 percent) of respondents were expressing signs that they had taken on a new identity and only one appeared to have already made a successful transition out of the program. In contrast, youth during their second interviews show a notable shift in distribution, with nearly half of them indicating that they were taking on a new identity (49 percent) and nearly a fourth having made a successful transition out of the program (24 percent).

Exhibit IX-3 describes the frequency of “stage shifts” among the 97 Follow-up Case Study respondents. The model assumes that over time respondents can shift to the next stage (+1) or through multiple stages (+2 or more). Respondents also can potentially regress one or more stages (i.e., -1 or -2). By categorizing respondents at two points in time, we can identify those who progressed or regressed between interviews. The far right-hand column of Exhibit IX-3 includes a detailed example of a case study respondent who falls into each category.

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<sup>4</sup> Note that “negative” percentage in the first two stages of development actually represents *positive* change, in that it shows that most of the youth that were interviewed twice moved to *higher* stages of development over the course of the evaluation.



**Exhibit IX-3:  
Stage Shifts: Follow-up Case Study Group**

| Stage Shift | Freq. (%)   | Example of Case Study Youth in this Category   |
|-------------|-------------|--|
| +2          | 10<br>(10%) | <p>“Sarah” was initially categorized as ‘learning to be productive’ but was recategorized as ‘successful transition’ as of the second interview. During the first interview, Sarah stared at the ceiling for a great deal of the interview and had difficulty responding to questions. She said of herself, <i>“I don’t interact with people that well.”</i> She had completed very few academic units, but had formed good caring relationships with YouthBuild staff and demonstrated very regular attendance.</p> <p>‘Sarah’ seemed like a completely different person in her second interview. She was confident during the interview, making consistent eye contact and providing detailed answers to questions. She said, <i>“‘Actually, I’ve changed a lot since coming to [YouthBuild]. I used to be really shy. I wouldn’t talk with no one. Now, I kind of came out of my nutshell... [YouthBuild] helped me become the person I want to be.”</i> She had earned her GED, graduated from YouthBuild, taken on full-time employment as a home health aide, enrolled at the community college, and was moving into her own apartment.</p>  |
| +1          | 47<br>(49%) | <p>At the time of ‘Stephen’s’ first interview he had only been in the YouthBuild program for two weeks. He was skeptical about the strict program rules and about program staff, whom he saw as naïve and not “street-smart.” He said of staff, <i>“I already know that I know more than them. I know everything I need to know.”</i> He was therefore categorized in the initial phase of the model—learning to trust.</p> <p>Stephen was at a very different place by his second interview. He showed humility and was eager to learn. He was steadily earning credits towards his high school diploma and had the highest GPA of any student in his YouthBuild program. He was also taking two night courses at the community college. He communicated classic outcomes associated with the “learning to be productive” stage. He said that he enjoyed being “busy” and doing his “best work.” He had started to form new goals and had shifted his views about the value of education. He said, <i>“Before, I thought life was a breeze, you get a job or any job. Now, I realize its not enough to get by. You need your education if you’re going to be well off so you can get a decent job.”</i></p> |
| 0           | 36<br>(37%) | <p>“Pete” was “learning to be productive” in both round 1 and round 2. His home and peer environment made it challenging for him to focus fully on succeeding at YouthBuild and to achieve his goals. Though he was making slow progress towards his GED, having passed two out of the five exams necessary to earn his certificate, he was often frustrated that things weren’t moving faster. His attendance and focus on studying were variable. Of this he said, <i>“I’ll come, then I won’t come. I get bitter, then I get focused....I just want this to be over with!”</i> He admitted, <i>“I’m still trying to get my priorities together. I’m still trying to figure out what I should be doing, what I need to be doing. I still wait for things to fall into my lap.”</i></p>   |
| -1          | 2<br>(2%)   | <p>“Sedrick” was originally categorized as “taking on a new identity,” but seemed to have regressed to “learning to be productive” in the second round. “Sedrick” was raised in a gang-involved family, began carrying a gun and using drugs when he was in his early teens, and spent several years in juvenile facilities. At the time of his first interview, he was determined to change, and had a well-articulated sense of his new identity. He said, <i>“I was a very rebellious and violent person, in my younger days. I have different intentions now about how I’m going to go about my life.”</i></p> <p>By our second interview, “Sedrick” had run into a number of challenges. He had dropped out of the program several times, and had shown inconsistent attendance. He was facing financial problems at home and had made some poor financial decisions. He was, however, trying to pull himself back together and get back on track. He said, <i>“I don’t give up because I know there are people out there that care.”</i></p>   |

| Stage Shift | Freq. (%) | Example of Case Study Youth in this Category   |
|-------------|-----------|--|
| -2          | 2 (2%)    | <p>'Joe' was initially categorized as "taking on a new identity" but was re-classified as "learning to trust" after his second interview. At the time of the first visit, 'Joe' was on parole, had been off drugs for 11 months, and was taking medications for bipolar disorder to manage his unpredictable moods. He was making good progress in school and felt very positive about his worksite role and responsibilities. He said, <i>"I'm off home supervision and I've been off drugs for 11 months. I'm doing much better....I'm just a much better person than I was before."</i></p> <p>Shortly after this interview, however, 'Joe' began taking drugs again and stopped taking his medications. His attention and punctuality at YouthBuild began to suffer, and he had several explosive arguments with peers and staff. In September 2007, he was kicked out of the program for having a screaming fight with a teacher. During his second interview, Joe was working to get readmitted to YouthBuild and continued to praise the program as a place where staff have <i>"a heart of gold"</i> and where the teachers <i>"are more friends than bosses."</i></p> |

As highlighted in Exhibit IX-3, positive shifts in development were documented in well over half (57) of the respondents, with 10 youth advancing two developmental levels. As discussed further below, each developmental step represents the acquisition of a distinct set of positive outcomes. Like "Sarah" and "Stephen," whose stories are described in the exhibit, participants who advanced one or two developmental stages displayed improved social skills and a marked increase in optimism about their future. Although not all participants who advanced stages reached their goals of a GED or diploma, they gained confidence in their ability to work towards and accomplish those goals.

A little more one-third of Follow-up Case Study youth (37 percent) were categorized as remaining at the same developmental level between interviews. Like "Pete," respondents who stayed at the same developmental level generally struggled with motivation and focus. They often faced challenges, like those described in Chapter VIII, which stalled their progress. As illustrated in the exhibit, four respondents were at a *lower* stage in their second round interview than they were in the first, indicating that they had lost some developmental ground. Like "Sedrick" and "Joe," these respondents faced challenges, such as mental illness or financial stresses, which contributed to a loss of confidence in their own growth process and subsequent drug use, inconsistent attendance, or withdrawal from the program.

Given the developmental nature of the model, it is expected that the mean age of Follow-up Case Study respondents would increase with each subsequent stage. This proved to be an accurate assumption, as the mean age of those at the "learning to trust" stage is 18, the mean age of those who are at the stage of "learning to be productive" and "taking on a new identity" is 20, and the

mean age of those who had made a successful transition is 22.<sup>5</sup> Participants who shifted successfully from one stage to the next were also older, on average, than those who did not. This suggests that older participants are, on average, more “ready” to take advantage of what the program has to offer than younger ones.

## Case Study Outcomes

In this section, the outcomes of the youth interviewed during this evaluation are summarized. These outcomes are taken from the qualitative data collected during interviews with the Follow-up Case Study Group, which includes only those participants who were interviewed two times over the course of the study.<sup>6</sup> The second round case study interviews focused heavily on educational, workforce, and social outcomes—and each of these types of outcomes is discussed in this chapter. The analysis also includes, to the extent possible, outcomes data collected from case files and interviews with case managers about each of the case study respondents.<sup>7</sup>

Before presenting the analysis, it is important to point out that the Follow-up Case Study Group does not represent a random sample, and that the outcomes presented here are likely more positive than those for all youth offenders served by this grant. A positive bias is clearly evident in the educational outcomes, which are more positive among respondents than those for all youth offenders (33 percent GED attainment for Follow-up Case Study youth compared to 23 percent for youth offenders overall). One reason for the bias is that program staff selected the youth to be interviewed and, although the case study group is demographically almost identical to all youth offenders served under this grant, it is likely that program staff initially selected participants who had higher levels of motivation and engagement.<sup>8</sup> It is also notable that the Follow-up Case Study Group is, on average, older than the overall youth offender population served by the DOL grant and this may contribute to better overall outcomes. A second reason for the positive bias is that the Follow-up Case Study Group includes only participants who were interviewed a second time (i.e. those who remained *in contact* with the YouthBuild program), and it is safe to presume that this group is inherently more likely to hold a positive view of the program than those who did not have continued contact with the program.

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<sup>5</sup> The mean age for all respondents was 20.

<sup>6</sup> Although combining quantitative data from the MIS for these participants would have provided additional outcome measures, this was not possible for this evaluation because the MIS data provided no identifiers. As such, specific individuals (and, hence, their outcomes) could not be identified in these data.

<sup>7</sup> Not all sites or case managers would allow access to the case files.

<sup>8</sup> Staff were asked to select a representative sample, but there were no controls to ensure such representativeness.

## Social Outcomes

Below, we discuss the social and attitudinal outcomes that are associated with each developmental stage, creating a fuller and more detailed picture of what participants achieve as they progress from one stage to the next.

### **Learning to Trust**

*“YouthBuild gives me the attitude that... there are struggles in life, everybody’s got them, [and] you are not alone when you are here.”*

Many youth offenders interviewed during this evaluation had previously had negative experiences with adults or peers in public schools and other institutional settings. In order to succeed in the YouthBuild program, participants have to first “learn to trust” that staff are authentically trying to help them, and must come to understand that working hard in the program will pay off in tangible rewards. If they do not “learn to trust,” then they are likely to drop out or fail to thrive in the program. Although very few participants that were interviewed were categorized as Learning to Trust (8 in round one; 4 in round two), many spoke retrospectively about the process of trust building that occurred when they first came to the program. The following core outcomes are associated with this stage:

- **Learning to ask for help.** Many participants said that, in the past, fear of ridicule, from peers or from the teacher, often inhibited them from seeking the academic and practical help that they needed. In one participant’s words, “Back in [public] school, I would’ve been too proud to say I don’t know how to write an essay. But [at YouthBuild], they made it more comfortable.” Not only did participants learn that it was appropriate to ask for help, they were intentionally and actively encouraged to do so. For instance, one participant said, “Here, they taught me that you can’t do everything on your own. You need resources.” Another said, “They taught me that a closed mouth does not get fed.”
- **Abiding by program rules.** YouthBuild programs often have strict rules about attendance, punctuality, attire, and behavior. Many of the case study respondents said that, at first, they were intimidated by the extensiveness of the rules at YouthBuild. Mental toughness training, in particular, is a time when youth’s commitment to the program, and willingness to abide by program rules, is tested. As participants start to believe in the program model, their attitudes about the program become more positive. They begin to see the rules as essential for promoting a sense of safety. They also begin to speak with pride about their ability to follow program rules and to live up to the high standards set by the program. In one participant’s words, “I didn’t expect [the program] to be so controlled...by controlled I mean disciplined.... It helped me stay on track to being a better citizen by living by other standards.”
- **Forming positive relationships with staff and other participants.** As was highlighted in the chapters on educational training, vocational training, and case management, positive relationships with staff are fundamental to participants’

sense of trust in the program. Participants develop trust in staff when they perceive them to be caring, as providing practical support, and as ensuring their confidentiality. Relationships with peers are another dimension of trust, and in this respect, participants appreciate that their fellow YouthBuild students share similar backgrounds and experiences. In one participant's words: "It has made me feel good about myself, knowing that I got into a program full of people that care about me and want me to be successful."

Once participants learn to trust, they can then move on to the next stage, in which they learn to be productive and to take responsibility for their own learning.

### **Learning to be Productive**

*"YouthBuild made me realize you will have to work in order to get where you want to be in life. My goals about work changed because at first, I was not taking work that seriously. YouthBuild made me realize that you have to work to be successful."*

Learning to be productive in YouthBuild means that participants have to commit to being consistent with their schedule and their attendance, to resolving conflict without violence, and to applying themselves to their studies. Most of the participants interviewed in the first round (63 percent) were in this stage of development, trying to achieve work-readiness outcomes such as teamwork, communication, punctuality, and reliability. Many also were working to replace negative preconceptions about their own ability with a growing sense of confidence in what they can accomplish if they apply themselves. By the time of the second interviews, only a quarter of respondents (25 percent) remained in this stage. The following outcomes are associated with this stage.

- **Learning teamwork and effective communication skills.** Communication skills and a value for teamwork were two of the most frequently cited case study outcomes. Participants frequently describe that prior to YouthBuild they were "antisocial," unable to get along with people who were different, and easily antagonized. Working in diverse teams on the jobsite helped participants to develop a greater tolerance for differences and learn strategies for coping with interpersonal frustration. For instance, one participant said, "YouthBuild taught me how to get along with others while on the job...[and] how to talk to people in a respectful way, so that that they will respect you." Another described, "Before YouthBuild, I didn't care what other people thought... You have to be that way on the street, tough and aggressive. Now, I listen and I stopped being so aggressive. I can now talk to people without trying to offend them or put them on edge." Participants appreciated their enhanced skills in this area because they recognized that communication and teamwork are crucial job skills.
- **Attention to punctuality and attendance.** Once participants entered the "learning to be productive" stage, they started taking pride in their dedication to the program. Attendance and punctuality was one measure they used to talk about their changed sense of values. For instance, one participant said, "[The program]

taught me to be reliable. I didn't know what reliable was. I would say, 'yes, I'm reliable,' and then I wouldn't come...Now, I just do what I'm supposed to do." Another described the shift in her behavior the following way: "I've changed the way I am, what I want to be. I come on time. I come everyday, have my lunch prepared for work and am ready for work. Before I would wake up late, not go to school, had no responsibilities."

- **Growing confidence in ability to succeed at academics and/or a worksite.** Once participants apply themselves, they begin to gain confidence in their own abilities. Youth communicate a growing appreciation for what they can do if they work hard at a task, and often brag about how much they study or how attentive they are on the job site. Case study respondents at this stage said things such as, "I'm always studying now" and "I know now that if someone shows me what to do, I can do it."

Participants can persist in the "learning to be productive" stage for some time, particularly if they face educational barriers or are far behind in earning educational units. Participants under the age of 18 are more likely to linger in this stage or fail to pass out of it, because they are not prepared for full-time work. However, even if participants fail to achieve other outcomes during their time at YouthBuild, such as their GED or high school diploma, they can learn many skills in this phase that may help them to reach those goals after leaving the program.

### ***Taking on a New Identity***

*"Before I came here, I didn't care, I didn't want to do anything with my life...Now I actually have plans to go to college, and get a decent job that I can have fun with and make money and actually have a successful living."*

Many interviewed participants said that the YouthBuild program changed how they see themselves. Quotes from participants in this stage often have the same parallel construction, saying essentially, "I was one type of person, but now I'm someone else." This new identity often involves a shift in who participants associate with, how they relate to and make sense of risky behaviors (drug or alcohol use and illegal activity), and what plans they make for their future. The academic and workplace confidence they acquired in the "learning to be productive" stage becomes broader and more substantial, extending to other domains in their lives.

In the first round of interviews, approximately one-third of respondents were at the stage of taking on a new identity, while nearly half (44 percent) of the round-two interviewees were at this stage. These respondents often had achieved or were about to achieve concrete outcomes, such as obtaining their GED or their high school diploma. These achievements helped to contribute to shifts in how participants see themselves. The following are social and attitudinal outcomes communicated by participants who were at this stage.

- **Clear plans for the future.** Several respondents indicated that, when living their “street life,” they avoided planning or even thinking about the future because they believed that they were destined to die young. As one participant said, “I was always thinking about the moment... It was always, ‘live for the day, live for the day.’” For many respondents, part of turning the corner to a new identity is imagining a different life and developing a plan for how that vision can become a reality. Life planning begins at this stage because participants feel increasingly confident that they *will* have a future. In one participant’s words, “They taught me that ... I guess I have something to look forward to later in life, that it’s not all bad. Being something, yeah....yeah, that I have the potential to be something.”
- **Shifts in attitudes about drug use and the illegal economy.** As described in Chapter VIII, many respondents struggled with drug addiction or sold drugs to support themselves. This stage often marks a more fundamental disassociation from past behaviors and more well-developed disavowal of “street life.” In one participant’s words, “My life has changed. I used to be a pothead, I used to drink, I used to do drugs...I used to do crimes. I used to hurt people....Now, my whole life has changed. I don't smoke weed, I don't drink... [At YouthBuild] they don't tolerate any drugs or crime or stuff, so I just stopped everything. Now that I’m clean, I can think.”
- **Shift in friendship group.** Many respondents indicated that one reason that they got in trouble with the police was that they were with the “wrong crowd” and wanted to impress their friends. As one participant said, “Friends, they always get you in trouble.” Participants who were taking on a new identity had a well-developed rationale for shifting their peer group. They purposely avoided areas where their old peer group might congregate, and turned down invitations from friends. “Before, I used to hang out with anybody, people that do drugs and stuff. Now, I think, if I hang out with [the wrong person], then he could take me down a path that I don’t want to go....I could jeopardize all that [I worked for], you know? I could end up locked up again. After [I realized] that, I started looking for new friends.”
- **Increased self-confidence.** Participants who are in this stage of development communicate a strong sense of confidence in their ability to make smart decisions and to take on new challenges. The feeling of accomplishment that they achieved at YouthBuild, and the feedback they received from staff, helped them to feel good about themselves, sometimes for the first time. The following quote captures this outcome well: “I feel more confident. One day, [the YouthBuild case manager] told me, ‘You’re a superstar.’ No one ever told me anything like that. I said, ‘ok, I like that.’ I thought about it, and [realized that] my mom never told me anything like that and my dad never told me anything like that. I looked in the mirror and I was like, ‘Yeah, you’re a superstar.’”

### **Successful Transition**

*“[YouthBuild] gives you a broad view of what life has to offer. It’s hard, but you still have a lot of opportunities.”*

Most respondents face a mix of excitement and trepidation as they prepare to transition out of YouthBuild. They recognize that the program provides considerable social, emotional, and practical support that is not likely to be as available in other educational or employment contexts. Participants who are nearing graduation often contrast YouthBuild to the less tolerant and supportive context of a “real job.” For instance, one participant said, “When we go out there to get a real job, it’s a lot different” because employers are not going to “walk with you hand in hand.” Some YouthBuild staff said that this fear of change could lead participants to sabotage themselves just as they are nearing graduation. Staff described that some participants will take months to complete their last two to five units of academic work because they do not want to leave the safety and security of the program. This fear of transition is perhaps one reason why over one-tenth of the Follow-up Case Study Group continued to work at YouthBuild after having officially graduated.

The framework used in this chapter assumes that, in order for a participant to successfully transition out of YouthBuild, he or she must be engaged in full-time employment or full-time schooling, or some combination thereof. Participants in this stage are also relatively self-sufficient, are able to manage their own finances, and, when necessary, care for children or other family members. Twenty-two respondents (34 percent of program graduates) were in this stage of development at the time of their second interview. Although almost all were still experimenting with different types of jobs and prospective career paths, those in the “successful transition” stage were working towards well-defined career goals. They had a number of things in common. First, they almost all had a job or school placement before leaving YouthBuild. Second, they felt confident navigating public resources, such as the One-Stop center, and managing their own finances. Third, they continued to stay busy and found constructive ways to structure their time.

It is important to acknowledge that the majority of the Follow-up Case Study youth (66 percent of program graduates) were not in this stage of development when they left the program. Some had learned a considerable amount about how to be productive, but had not earned their GED or diploma and were looking for a setting in which they could achieve that goal. Others left the program with an invigorated sense of confidence and identity but without a job or a clear plan for how they were going to achieve their goals. As described in Chapter VIII, most Follow-up Case Study youth faced the same contextual family, neighborhood, and financial challenges that they faced prior to their participation in YouthBuild, thus putting them at continued risk for substance abuse or recidivism. Participants who leave the program without employment, school, or some other structured activity with which to engage, seemed particularly vulnerable to falling back into negative patterns. Thus, it is important that YouthBuild grantees be able to link such



participants to programs, activities, resources, and supports that will help them to keep moving in a positive direction.

## Educational Outcomes

*“Without education, I couldn't achieve what I want in life. I needed that title to be successful... Before YouthBuild, I didn't take school seriously. I've always been good with my hands, but employers wouldn't give me a second look without a diploma.”*

As articulated in the Interim Report, the majority of the participants came to YouthBuild in pursuit of a GED or high school diploma because they found it difficult to pursue their work or educational goals without this “certification.” The outcomes analysis for the Follow-up Case Study Group indicates that, in general, the interviewed youth were academically successful, and this is particularly true when considering the many educational challenges that they faced. Almost all the Follow-up Case Study youth who had left the YouthBuild program by the time of their second interview graduated (65 of 69 non-active youth). In fact, only four of the Follow-up Case Study youth officially “dropped out” of the program, though others were “graduated” rather quickly because they found employment elsewhere or were otherwise ready to leave the program. Of program graduates, 30 (46 percent of graduates) earned their GED and 17 (26 percent of graduates) earned their high school diploma in the program.<sup>9</sup> Although 35 respondents (36 percent) had not yet earned their GED or high school diploma at the time of the second interview, most of these were still enrolled in YouthBuild and were continuing to work towards that goal. Several respondents who left YouthBuild without a diploma or GED were pursuing their degrees elsewhere.

A number of the Follow-up Case Study youth were attending college classes. Thirty-one (32 percent) indicated that they were taking community college classes after graduating from YouthBuild. Nearly half of these respondents began community college classes while still enrolled in the YouthBuild program. Many of these youth were attending 14 month to two-year long trade programs. Common programs included Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC), mechanics or diesel mechanics, and electrical trade programs. Youth offenders viewed these programs as a practical route to a good paying job. One said, “I signed up for HVAC so I can get that trade under my belt....People always need heat in the fall and winter and you always need air conditioning in the summer. So, that's year round work.” Alternatively, some respondents were taking general education units, on their way to pursuing degrees in business or nursing. A few were working towards a bachelor's degree and were enjoying the sense of

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<sup>9</sup> 15 (15 percent) of the 97 Follow-up Youth had received their GED or HS diploma before coming to YouthBuild.

exploration they were experiencing in college. One young woman said, “I like college...I like the environment... It's like you're getting closer to your future.”

As described in Chapter IV of this report, many of the participants had not experienced academic success until they attended YouthBuild. For some, it was a powerful experience that opened up the possibility of a new “academic life,” while for others, academic work remained an unpleasant, yet essential, stepping stone to their real goal—a good paying job.

## **Workforce Outcomes**

*"I've learned the most important thing on the job is people skills and how you present yourself. The program has taught me not only how to survive on a job, but how to keep a job."*

The above quote acknowledges that almost everything that is taught at YouthBuild is taught with work readiness in mind. “Soft-skills” job training, particularly the focus on work behaviors and attitudes, permeates all parts of the program. As is captured in the section on social outcomes, work readiness values such as punctuality, reliability, and teamwork are often a central part of how YouthBuild participants talk about the value of the program.

The job prospects of case study youth varied significantly, depending on their personal circumstances, their professional goals, the skills that they acquired in the YouthBuild program, and the local job market. At the time of the second interview, approximately two-thirds (63 percent) of Follow-up Case Study youth were employed. The wage of employed youth ranged from less than six to over thirty dollars per hour, with an average of ten and a median of eight dollars and fifty cents per hour. Five graduates, representing almost nine percent of employed respondents, were working full-time at union jobs for relatively high wages. One such respondent said:

*The union has a lot of good benefits. They have pension and retirement. They have 401k. I've been wanting to get a union construction job for a long time. That's why it's good to go through a program like [YouthBuild] to get into a union."*

Another eight respondents were able to get relatively high-paying work in construction-related fields, such as painting, laying concrete, asbestos removal, or building maintenance. At least ten respondents were working as site or crew managers at YouthBuild for \$7 to \$11 per hour, helping to supervise YouthBuild participants. Most others were working in service jobs that were unrelated to the construction training they received at YouthBuild. At least nine respondents worked in fast food establishments, such as Burger King or Kentucky Fried Chicken, while others worked in various retail, customer service, or labor oriented jobs.

Although the development of work readiness is clearly an important aspect of the YouthBuild program, it is the construction-trade experience that appears to have the most immediate influence on post-program wages. Case study youth who moved into construction-related careers after graduating YouthBuild generally had higher post-program wages than those that did not. Similarly, case study youth that graduated from grantees that provided high-quality NCCER certified training or that were well connected with unions tended to earn more than their counterparts in grantees without these features.<sup>10</sup>

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter the educational, workforce, and social outcomes achieved by the 97 case study youth who were interviewed two times over the course of this study were highlighted. This chapter also documented the developmental shifts that occur as participants progress through the program, as well as what constitutes a successful transition out of the program. The next chapter expands on the themes introduced in this chapter by highlighting “outcome stories” of individual participants who have been impacted by the program.

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<sup>10</sup> As discussed in Chapter VIII, nearly half of follow-up case study youth were not interested in pursuing construction as a career. These youth, therefore, presumably are not looking for jobs in construction.

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## X. OUTCOME STORIES

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The previous two chapters provided an analysis of the factors that affected the success and development of case study respondents, as well as an overview of the outcomes they achieved. This chapter provides an in-depth narrative of the experiences, development, and outcomes of seven selected YouthBuild graduates. Considerations in selecting youth stories to include in this chapter included the demographic characteristics and geographic locations of each respondent that completed a follow-up interview. In addition, consideration was given to the unique background and YouthBuild experience of each respondent and their achievements and developmental progress throughout the evaluation. While over half of the Follow-Up Case Study Group made developmental strides, and given that each youth's story is compelling, the selected stories represent only a portion of the diverse experiences, characteristics, and achievements of the Overall Case Study Group.

As is captured in the titles to their stories, each youth is still in the process of achieving their goals.<sup>1</sup> The following is a brief synopsis of each outcome story included in this chapter:

- ***Jessica: Learning the Value of Work.*** This outcome story profiles a 19-year-old white female whose life choices were negatively influenced by gang involvement and drug use. Obtaining her GED and working a legal nine-to-five job were of no interest to her. However, after participating in YouthBuild, she gained an appreciation for the value of paid work.
- ***Luis: Envisioning a Future.*** Having no high school diploma, and growing up in a disadvantaged community entrenched with gangs, drugs, and violence, this 18-year-old Latino male envisioned no future for himself. Participating in YouthBuild helped him create a path towards success.
- ***Janel: Striving to Balance Family and Personal Goals.*** A wife and mother of three, this 21-year-old African American female faced many challenges to completing her academic goals. Throughout her participation in YouthBuild, she remained determined and received an immense amount of support from the

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<sup>1</sup> As is true throughout this report, all youth names are pseudonyms.

program and public agencies. However, her inability to obtain reliable and affordable childcare continues to be a constant struggle.

- **Wesley: *Dreaming Big Despite a Criminal Record.*** As this 24-year-old African American male set goals for the future, he began to realize the impact his criminal history had on his choices and options. Despite the many obstacles he faced and continues to experience, he has not lost hope, and is determined to succeed.
- **Philip: *Learning a Trade.*** Unable to make a decent wage working various part-time jobs, this 19-year-old African American male participated in illegal drug-related activities. He was arrested and incarcerated, but was still determined to pursue a career in the construction industry. Participating in YouthBuild helped him gain the advanced skills and certificates needed for employment in a construction-related trade.
- **Lourdes: *Working to Overcome Health Challenges.*** This 19-year-old Latina female has battled a serious health condition for most of her life. While her health condition limited her ability to succeed in the YouthBuild program, the extended support she received from her family and the program assisted her in making progress towards her goals.
- **Kevin: *Becoming a Positive Role Model.*** Exposed by family members to drug use at an early age, this 20-year-old white male faced many life challenges growing up. Participating in YouthBuild helped him surmount these obstacles and transform his life. He now uses his own life experiences to show others that *“if you fail, you can get back up.”*

Below, the story of each of these participants is highlighted in-depth, with a particular focus on the outcomes they achieved and the role that the YouthBuild program played in helping them to achieve those outcomes.

## “Jessica”: Learning the Value of Work

Jessica, a 19-year-old white female who lives in a city known for its gang violence, grew up with a disdain for people who worked nine to five jobs and who put effort into school. Her father was a member of a notorious street gang in her community and, as a result, drugs and criminal activity were commonplace in her household. She described, *“I sold drugs with my dad, did drugs with my dad and my mom too.”* At the time of her first interview, both of Jessica’s parents and her younger brother were in jail, while two of her sisters were heavily entrenched in gang activity. She had, since the age of 13, spent over three years in juvenile facilities for charges such as auto theft, home invasion, assault, and possession and sale of methamphetamine. In her view, drugs are to blame for her family’s gang and criminal involvement: *“The drugs is what keeps them in...If you can’t get away from drugs then you can’t get away from gangs.”*

Jessica learned about the YouthBuild program while still in jail. At the time, she was skeptical about the program, and believed that she would return to her life of hustling on the street. Jessica had never attended regular high school or held a legal job, and she did not immediately see the value of pursuing her GED or gaining work experience. She said, “*Before coming to YouthBuild, I didn’t worry about my GED. I didn’t need my GED on the streets. If I was worried about a job, then I would need a GED, but I wasn’t worried about getting a job when I came here.*” Further, she said that in her peer group, it was “embarrassing” to say that you were attending school.

The YouthBuild case manager repeatedly visited Jessica in the youth authority and worked hard to establish trust. Jessica was receptive to the case manager’s support, partially because she had so little support from family. She says of the case manager:

*She never gave up on me. She would come and see me every week....The second day I was out, I called her. She came and got me, we went out to lunch. She went and got me clothes, all kinds of stuff. She brought me over to the [YouthBuild] orientation.*

As suggested by this quote, Jessica’s involvement in YouthBuild arose from the caring relationships that she formed with this case manager. Further, she was able to stay involved in YouthBuild because of the network of supportive services provided by the program. Because Jessica was co-enrolled in several other programs, case-managers were able to link Jessica to assistance with clothing, food, phone bills, parole-related fines, and other expenses. In Jessica’s words: “*The best thing I get out of the program is guidance....I don’t feel like I have to do anything on my own.*”

Jessica faced several different crises during her time at YouthBuild. The first occurred two months into the program when she became homeless. As described in previous chapters, Jessica’s case manager immediately placed her into temporary housing. Without this support, she would not have been able to stay in the program. The second crisis occurred after Jessica’s first interview, when Jessica’s mother was released from prison and then immediately rearrested. Jessica fell into a depression and then had a drug relapse. Jessica drew on YouthBuild staff and drug counseling to help her quickly get back on her feet. She also drew on her peers in YouthBuild, who were supportive of her recovery. She said of them, “*We’re there for each other. When one of us wants to use [drugs], we coach each other and get them to look at what they have.*”

While at YouthBuild, Jessica focused on achieving her GED and gaining work experience, while also serving on the program’s youth leadership council. Although she does not want to pursue a construction-related career, she gained satisfaction from her experience laying concrete on the

worksite. She also appreciated community service opportunities, because she likes “*being busy and meeting people.*”

## **Outcomes**

At the time of her second interview, Jessica was doing well. She had graduated from YouthBuild, was off parole, and had no outstanding fines. She earned her GED and an \$1,800 AmeriCorps scholarship from YouthBuild. She also gained practical supports, such as her driver’s license and training in financial literacy, to help her get and keep a job. She reported a range of social outcomes, such as new friends, work-readiness skills, and an appreciation for the value of education and work.

When it came time for Jessica to transition out of YouthBuild, the YouthBuild case manager walked Jessica to the local One-Stop center, made sure that she filed the paperwork she needed to qualify for intensive services, and also met with her One-Stop job specialist to ensure that the transition was smooth. Jessica describes: “*I met with [the job specialist] four or five times... She tried to get me into classes, she helped me do my resume, dressing, the clothes, the bus passes, the tokens.*” The job specialist at the One-Stop helped to place her into a job as a home-health aide, earning \$8.50 an hour. Although she still had this position at the time of her second interview, her work schedule was inconsistent, and she was in the process of applying for a full-time job doing auto-parts delivery for \$9 an hour.

Although Jessica still faces a number of challenges, she has—for the time being—broken the cycle of drugs and crime that engulfed her family. She keeps herself busy by continuing to volunteer for community groups on nights and weekends. Most importantly, she has gained an appreciation for the value of paid work.

*I make more money now than I ever did on the streets. When you are out there hustling, you take risks everyday. Now, when I’m sitting at a bus stop and the cops come by I don’t have to worry because I ain’t done nothing. When you get your check, you know you worked for it, you didn’t take it from nobody, so you appreciate your money more. You have more pride in it.*

## **“Luis”: Envisioning a Future**

Luis is an 18-year-old Latino male who grew up in the Southwest. His parents immigrated to the United States and worked as farm laborers during his youth to support their four children. Living in small towns and low-income communities, Luis grew up amidst an environment of drugs, violence, and gangs. He described:



*You hear shots at least once a week or more. It's like a ghetto.... There's drugs, there's also gangs....The kids I know, my little sister's friends are all shooting up [drugs] or smoking. If you go to [one of my old neighborhoods], you can see the packs of coke. There's a lot of drug use over there. There are 14-20 year olds drug users. It's everywhere.*

Luis attended several high schools, but never finished. He had conflicts with other students that led to fights and made it difficult for him to fit in and get along. Eventually, he decided to drop out and find a job. He worked at Kentucky Fried Chicken, Popeye's, and Subway before running into trouble with the police for taking part in a shootout between rival gangs. As a result of his involvement, he was arrested and sentenced to five years probation and six years house arrest.

Luis learned about YouthBuild from a cousin who had recently graduated from the program. He was not very interested at first because he wanted to pursue a career in boxing. However, the program's GED preparation, construction training, and legal assistance services soon persuaded him to apply and enroll.

Luis entered YouthBuild with little hope and no plans. When asked about his long-term goals and where he would be in five years, Luis replied, *"I don't see myself in five years."* He faced a number of challenges in his community that endangered his safety and physical well-being. A few months into the program, he was shot by someone who sought retaliation for a prior conflict. Although Luis was able to quickly recover from his wound, his assailant made leaving home a constant challenge. Luis described, *"The guy that shot me lives around me....It's hard not [to keep] bumping into him. Every time I go out, I see him on every corner. I lay low and keep going."*

Although a number of YouthBuild participants were involved in rival gangs, Luis felt safe interacting with his peers. The program taught him how to deal with conflict and get along with others. Describing his experience, Luis said:

*There's always different people from different gangs, different sides of [the neighborhood]. But when they are in here they get united. They talk to each other....Now they are getting along, but at the beginning, they weren't. The staff deals with it. They got us together and introduced us to get to know one another.*

Luis's counselor encouraged him to participate in one-on-one counseling sessions, peer meetings, and journal reflections to help him release some of his pent-up emotions. This helped him learn to control his temper. Luis said, *"I talk to [my counselor] a lot. She's cool 'cause she tells you the truth....She always talks to me about the fights or not to pay attention to them."*

Through his participation in YouthBuild, Luis prepared for the GED, gained experience in construction, and developed leadership skills. He began to set goals for himself and saw his participation in the program as an investment in his future. He said, *“If they didn’t pay me, I wouldn’t care ‘cause they help me with my future.”* Despite being confined to his immediate neighborhood by his house arrest status, Luis was determined to attend college and find a job.

## **Outcomes**

At the time of the second interview, Luis had graduated from the program and attained his GED. He had also earned scholarships from AmeriCorps and WIA and was enrolled full-time at a local state university. YouthBuild helped him apply to college and gave him tips on how to succeed, from joining study groups to applying for special programs and scholarships. Luis’s experience taught him the importance of education and he is now on track to becoming the first person from his family to graduate from college. He said, *“Before coming to YouthBuild, I was roaming the streets and doing bad things. Not anymore. They influenced me to go a different path. It’s better. I’m being more responsible.”*

YouthBuild also helped Luis transition into several part-time jobs after he graduated. He found employment at a local zoo and at several fast food restaurants. He also applied for a position as a Border Patrol agent. YouthBuild’s rigorous attendance policy and construction training program helped Luis understand the importance of punctuality, dependability, and hard work. After he finishes college, he hopes to work in the construction industry as a contractor.

As a full-time student and worker, Luis rarely has any free time. This has helped him avoid trouble in his community. However, he still faces challenges from his cousins and friends who are on the streets and involved in illegal activity. While he is unable to stop many of them from going down the wrong path, he has begun to give some of them advice. Luis said, *“Before YouthBuild, I never gave advice. I would keep quiet, especially with friends when I would see them doing something wrong. Now, I tell them it’s not good. They stay quiet. They keep on doing it but I know some day they will think of the words I told them.”*

YouthBuild helped Luis gain confidence in himself and his abilities. He now sees a bright future ahead of him: *“Now, I see a future. When I first came in, they asked me, ‘Where do you see yourself in five years?’ I answered ‘I don’t see myself in five years’. Now I do. I want to finish college, end probation, and travel the world.”*

## **“Janel”: Striving to Balance Family and Personal Goals**

Janel is a 21-year-old African American female, who is warm, mature, and friendly. She was raised in a single parent home, in which her mother was the sole provider for her and her four siblings. During her first interview, she mentioned that she was a wife and mother of three. She expressed being exhausted and stressed most of the time, because she couldn't depend on her husband for any help. Her husband hadn't had a job in the past seven months, and had only kept his last job for two months. As the sole provider and caretaker for her three children, Janel worked multiple jobs to provide for her family; yet, she found it difficult to remain employed because she did not have reliable or affordable childcare.

After dropping out of high school and not completing her GED in an alternative education program, Janel wanted to find work and an education program that would fit into her schedule. She first learned of the YouthBuild program by picking up a pamphlet at the public aid office where she was applying for additional financial support. She was drawn to the program because it allowed her to go to school and get paid at the same time. Since Janel had already taken the GED and passed all but the math portion, YouthBuild seemed the perfect opportunity for her.

Once accepted into YouthBuild, Janel's husband and mother assisted her by caring for her children while she attended the program. Janel served on the Youth Policy Committee, and participated in the education and construction components. Although math was her most challenging subject, she remained focused and motivated in the classroom. She stated, *“I ain't never been so focused a day in my life the way I have been [here].”* She always knew that education was important, and expressed that she had aspirations of attending college despite being a mother of three. She stated:

*When you sit around and have babies, your life is wasting away. I'm the only one of my friends who has kids and is married. I have good friends who are getting their bachelor's degree...I can't just sit at home with three kids all day.*

To ensure that she would achieve her goal of attending college, Janel opened an Individualized Development Account with assistance from YouthBuild, and deposited a financial incentive award she received. After leaving that money in this account for six months, Janel will qualify for a \$4,000 scholarship that she can apply towards a post-secondary education program.

Janel also received a bi-weekly stipend while participating in YouthBuild. The stipend was a major support to her because she found it difficult to care for her three children, work a part-time job, and attend YouthBuild at the same time. She also maximized the support from many public aid agencies that assisted her with food stamps, health coverage, and utility bills. She stated, *“I*

*get all I need from the Public Aid Office. Every six months I need to re-certify.”* Yet, while Janel was receiving a significant amount of support, she was still unable to meet all of her financial obligations. As a result, she was in the process of being evicted from her apartment at the time of her second interview.

## **Outcomes**

Despite these challenges, Janel still graduated from the YouthBuild program and received her GED, NCCER, OSHA, First Aid and CPR certifications. She also received a \$1,000 AmeriCorps educational award, which she plans to use to finance part of her college education. In addition, Janel explained that YouthBuild has changed her outlook on education and has motivated her to pursue higher education. She stated, *“Before YouthBuild, I was never at school. Now, I got goals to go to college.”*

While she intended to enroll in a community college within two months of her second interview, her family responsibilities got in the way of her completing the necessary paperwork. She stated, *“I usually put my family first, although it puts me down sometimes.”* Janel is currently working ten hours per week as a children’s supervisor at an elementary school, because she no longer has reliable or affordable childcare. Although Janel struggles to balance her family responsibilities and personal goals, she mentioned that participating in YouthBuild has taught her how to make goals and push herself to achieve them. She stated, *“My goals are so high. I want to be someone...I see myself as an executive, working in an executive office.”*

## **“Wesley”: Continuing to Dream Big**

Wesley is a 24-year-old African American male, who was raised in a home with two drug-addicted parents. At the age of seven, his father abandoned the family, leaving his mother as the primary caretaker for him and his older brother. His mother’s addiction to crack cocaine resulted in the loss of the family’s home and left the entire family homeless. Wesley explained, *“Our house got turned into a dope spot, got raided, and we lost our house...I didn’t have anywhere to go, my mom was out there doing her thing, and I was living on the street pretty much couch surfing.”* With no family structure or a consistent living arrangement, he eventually dropped out of junior high school.

At the time of Wesley’s first interview, his mother had recovered from her drug addiction, and he had re-established contact with his father. With both of his parents now actively involved in his life, he wanted to create a stable family with his girlfriend and five-year-old daughter. He therefore applied to the YouthBuild program, which he first learned about from his mother, who

had seen an ad in the paper. He explained, “*She called me crying telling me about YouthBuild and wanting me to do something with my life.*”

Upon enrolling in YouthBuild, Wesley began developing a number of short and long-term goals. He expressed that his dream was to have a career as a firefighter, because he had been interested in firefighting for a long time. He stated, “*I’m really interested in the firefighting thing. I think it can be achievable.*” He admitted that being a firefighter was a lot tougher than it looked, and would require a lot of work on his part.

However, between the ages of 13 and 17, Wesley had multiple encounters with the law. He was arrested when he was 16 for robbing a local convenience store, and received a felony conviction for his actions. After enrolling in YouthBuild, he realized the extent to which his offense history had affected his future goals. He stated:

*I didn’t know it was going to have such a deep impact on my future...It’s deterred me away from careers that I think I could be successful in, like parole officer, police officer, and firefighter...I don’t feel that a person should be penalized for the rest of their life for something stupid that they did as a juvenile.*

Wesley added that the fire department in his city looks at criminal convictions on a case-by-case basis, which had encouraged him to seek ways to get his criminal record expunged. He therefore met with a lawyer (while enrolled in the YouthBuild program) who was not very encouraging about the prospect of having his record expunged. He also placed himself on the waiting list for a program that assists ex-offenders in getting their convictions set aside or expunged. As yet, Wesley has not been successful in clearing his record.

Despite these obstacles, Wesley spent his first two months in YouthBuild concentrating on passing the GED so he could enroll in a post-secondary program that would prepare him to become a firefighter. He also spoke to various community groups about his life and experience in YouthBuild, and was selected to serve as president of the Youth Policy Committee. Wesley expressed that these roles showed him the importance of giving back and gave him the confidence to speak up for himself and others. He stated:

*My thing is this. These people [at YouthBuild] are here to help us. They want us to succeed. So we should give back everything that we have in a positive energy and effort, you know...I can [also] speak to somebody like a student or well-educated staff member. I can speak to all kinds.*

## **Outcomes**

At the time of Wesley’s second interview, he had graduated from the YouthBuild program and received his GED. He also received a \$2,300 AmeriCorps award, matching funds from a

“savings account opportunity plan” and a First Aid and CPR certification. He acknowledged that his outlook on academics had changed, because before participating in YouthBuild he didn’t have any goals, and “*didn’t care for it.*”

While Wesley’s dream is to become a firefighter, he is afraid his criminal record will hinder him from obtaining that goal. Nevertheless, he is currently enrolled in a firefighter-training program at a local community college, and works part-time as a bouncer at a dance club on the weekends. He stated that YouthBuild “*definitely*” prepared him for getting a job by assisting him with preparing a resume and teaching him interviewing skills. He also stated that he “*has learned a lot about working with other people and leadership.*”

Moreover, Wesley expressed that he is “*planning for the future—not just looking for a job, but a career.*” Therefore, if he is unable to become a firefighter (because of his criminal record), he is prepared to become a heavy equipment operator or a cement paver. The Forklift Operator certification Wesley has, in addition to the construction training he received in the YouthBuild program, will enable him to pursue this alternative career.

## **“Philip”: Learning a Trade**

Philip is a 19-year-old African American male from a large city in the Northeast. He spent most of his life living in a mixed-income housing complex with seven brothers and sisters in the city until his parents decided to move to the suburbs. Except for his 16-year-old sister, Philip is the youngest in his family. His other siblings have moved out of the house and started lives of their own. Growing up, Philip was raised in a community known for its high level of crime and violence.

During his early teenage years, Philip worked various part-time jobs and attended a local vocational training school. He transferred to a traditional high school for his junior year, but did not make it much further. Involved in selling drugs and other illegal activities, Philip was caught by the police and sent to jail for eight months. Describing this experience, he said:

*I was locked up for eight months....I would come out only two hours in the morning and two hours in the afternoon. That seemed like years of doing lock up for me. When I went to lock up, I was actually in my junior year of high school. I went to the caseworker on the unit and talked with him [to see] if there was any way I could go to school. He said no, because I wasn’t sentenced. I was in pre-trial.*

To pass the time, Philip studied academic workbooks and GED preparation materials. Six days before he was released from incarceration, he took the GED test and passed.

After being released, Philip found several part-time jobs, but was unable to make a decent wage. He wanted to join a construction union but lacked adequate experience and training. After working for some time, Philip learned about YouthBuild from a cousin who had recently completed the program and gained entry into the painters' union. He saw YouthBuild as a great opportunity to start his career and decided to enroll. He said:

*When [my cousin] told me about the program and how I could get into the union, I decided that it was time for me to do something so I could have a career instead of working part-time jobs. While I'm still young I can get in the field [and] get the training I need so that when I'm older I can be making the kind of money I want to make.*

Since Philip had already obtained his GED, he decided to focus on developing construction skills and earning certifications. His first few weeks in the program were tough. He had problems adhering to the rules and would often arrive late. To remedy this, program staff made Philip sign a contract. If he failed to arrive on time, they would suspend him without pay. After agreeing to this contract, Philip started arriving to the program fifteen minutes early everyday. This experience helped Philip understand the values of punctuality and dependability. Describing how YouthBuild's rules helped him prepare for a job in the unions, Philip said, *"It gives you a feel for what it's like in the union. If you fail a drug test, I'm sure you would get automatically kicked out, which could mess up your benefits. YouthBuild doesn't have that, but it gives you a feel for it."*

YouthBuild's construction training also helped Philip get ready for work in the unions. He learned different construction trades from union workers who were brought in by the program. Describing how they helped him improve his construction skills, Philip said, *"I worked with the electricians, the plumbers, the painters to kind of get a feel for all that construction kind of stuff...It's gets you a feel for what a real work day is like, how it goes. It kind of makes you feel like you're in the union working. It's a good feeling."* YouthBuild also helped Philip learn new concepts and techniques. He said:

*I learned a lot here. Before coming here, I knew some basic stuff. I know how to screw. I didn't know how to read a level. I found out techniques for cutting sheetrock. I found out about safety. I got my OSHA 10 card here. You need the OSHA card if you want to go onto construction sites...There was [also] a lot of stuff I knew how to do... but I didn't know why they was doing it. So I learned why. Like I knew how to insulate, but I didn't know why...I learned that you insulate so that the energy stays, so that the house can stay heated longer.*

## Outcomes

Since exiting the program, Philip has gained an increased sense of confidence about his direction in life. He has achieved his goal of gaining entry into a construction union, and has been working part-time for the time being at two non-union construction agencies to gain more experience. Philip plans to save his money for further training in heating and air conditioning and to apply the \$4,000 AmeriCorps scholarship he earned in YouthBuild towards a degree in business management.

During the second interview, Philip talked about how YouthBuild helped him get his life back on track. He said:

*If it wasn't for YouthBuild I would [have] got out of jail and be doing the same things I was doing before—smoking. You know, this [construction] is a career I always wanted to fulfill. I like hands on work. I can't see me behind a desk all day. It would get boring to me. YouthBuild was like a construction company where they paid you to go to school. That opened my eyes a lot because I was happy to hear that I would be going to school. It was a good experience. They put you on real sites during the school time.*

Philip now understands the value of earning money legitimately. His two jobs have helped him avoid his old, negative behaviors, and he can no longer see himself risking all that he has gained. Describing his transformation, Philip said, *“I actually did a full 360. I was getting illegal money. I don't do none of that no more. I get straight legal money...Nothing will get me to go back to drugs. I don't miss it.”*

## “**Lourdes**”: Working to Overcome Health Challenges

Lourdes, a 19-year-old Latina female, is a charismatic and outgoing young woman. She is the oldest of four children, and comes from a poor family that has lived the majority of their lives in a gang-entrenched housing project. At a young age, she was diagnosed with a serious health condition that negatively affected her ability to succeed at school.

As a teenager, Lourdes began losing her vision and was sometimes physically unable to get out of bed. She therefore relied heavily on the support of her mother. She stated, *“My mother takes me to the doctor. She goes on the bus with me, even if its far away. She knows that I get sick and is always looking out for me.”* Her condition severely limited her ability to attend school regularly. As a result, she dropped out of high school in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade because she was unable to keep up in most of her classes.



After dropping out of school, Lourdes was not doing much with her life, and got in trouble frequently with the law. She admitted that she has never been a strong student, by stating, “*All my life all I got was Ds and Fs,*” yet she valued education tremendously. She was therefore excited when she received a flyer about the YouthBuild program, because, “*They tell us that they’re going to help us get our GED or diploma, and I was happy about that because I have another chance to do something with myself.*”

Despite her health challenges, Lourdes worked hard to be accepted into the YouthBuild program. She stated, “*I really wanted to be accepted into the program, and didn’t want to be late for any meetings. I would always try to get here [to YouthBuild] early and would run to school so I wouldn’t be late.*” Once she made it into YouthBuild she was very proud, and had confidence in her ability to obtain her GED and graduate from the program.

Receiving a GED was important to Lourdes and her family, because she would be one of the first in her family to finish school. She stated, “*If I do graduate, me and my sister will be the first ones in our family to graduate from high school.*” At the time of Lourdes’s first interview, she had passed the writing test of the GED exam, but had failed the math and science tests. She was very discouraged after failing these tests, but was comforted when YouthBuild provided her with additional support. Lourdes stated, “*When they told me that they were getting a tutor for me that told me that they cared.*”

In addition to GED support, Lourdes benefited from the extended support the YouthBuild staff members provided her. She stated, “*Sometimes when I am going through things I don’t want to talk to nobody. I don’t want nobody to bother me... [and the staff asks] ‘What’s wrong? Then I start crying and they listen.’*” Lourdes also recalled an incident when she was sick at YouthBuild, and needed to go to the emergency room. She explained that a YouthBuild staff member drove her to the hospital across town, so she could avoid a long trip by bus.

*One time they took me to the Children’s Hospital because I couldn’t move. I felt light-headed. I was going to take the bus, but they said, let me give you a ride. That was a good thing. I would have had to take three buses to get there.*

## **Outcomes**

While Lourdes had not obtained her GED at the time of her second interview, she had passed the reading portion of the exam, and her scores on the math and science test had improved. In addition, she graduated from the YouthBuild program and received an award for her participation.

Given her health problems and her track record of poor attendance at school, graduating from YouthBuild was a remarkable achievement for Lourdes. She expressed some disappointment in not obtaining her GED, but acknowledged the number of accomplishments she achieved with the support of YouthBuild. She stated:

*I feel a little sad because I wanted to have something. I wanted to have it [GED] before my younger sister got her diploma. I didn't want to come to the graduation because I wasn't going to get nothing, but I came because I went through a lot like MTO [Mental Toughness], for being here, not being late. I survived the program. I live so far and I woke up at five to get here everyday. I felt sad, but I felt good because I went through it.*

While Lourdes hasn't worked since graduating from the YouthBuild program, she mentioned that she has learned some "soft" skills, such as how to write a resume, how to get along with other students, and how to communicate effectively with others. Additionally, the program has helped her gain confidence in herself and her abilities. She stated:

*People that are sick like me can't do a lot of stuff because they're sick. This is my first year in school after four years. I feel like I could do things. I am capable of writing. I never thought I could write.*

Since completing the program, the YouthBuild case managers have talked to Lourdes frequently, encouraging her to attend summer school for extra tutoring. Because Lourdes is interested in becoming a nurse, the case managers also offered to take her to a local community college so she could learn about their nursing program.

## **“Kevin”: Becoming a Positive Role Model**

Kevin is a 20-year-old white male who grew up in the Midwest. Despite having two older brothers to guide him, Kevin struggled to maintain good communication with his family. His parents were involved with drugs and alcohol during his youth and, consequently, he began using drugs at an early age. He described:

*My dad's rules were 'do your own thing just don't go to jail,' so I did my own thing. I got involved in a lot of drug activity, just trying to get along. I actually found out about the drug scene when I was about 11 years old. I went along with it because my dad was my idol at the time and I got into it. Nothing mattered anymore, just most of the time I wanted to get high, so I just got high.*

Kevin's drug use continued into high school and eventually forced him to drop out. He attended two other schools before finally deciding to drop out for the second time during his senior year. Emotionally unstable and volatile at the time, Kevin attempted suicide on two different occasions. The second time he was sent to the hospital and committed to a psychiatric ward.

Despite these personal issues, Kevin was able to find full-time employment at a local construction company doing rehabbing, painting, and minor repairs.

However, Kevin soon ran into trouble with the law. He was arrested for armed robbery and received a \$13,000 fine, five years probation, 30 days in jail, and 90 days in a local drug treatment facility. Kevin's experience at the treatment facility helped him reevaluate his trajectory in life. He said:

*I know if I wouldn't have gotten into [that drug treatment facility] after jail I would still be in the same state of mind that I was when I entered jail, because it didn't scare me enough. But, when I got into [the facility] I really found out what was going on with me....It really helped me out a lot....From then on I've been in the recovery scene.*

Looking to continue his recovery, Kevin decided to enroll in YouthBuild. He had learned about the program from a friend when he was younger, but did not follow through because he could not pass an initial drug test. A staff member at the drug treatment facility reminded Kevin of YouthBuild and encouraged him to enroll. Seeing the program as an opportunity to move forward and obtain a career, Kevin re-applied. Although the recruitment process was "nerve wracking," he soon received a letter in the mail saying that he had been accepted.

Kevin entered YouthBuild determined to turn his life around. He wanted to earn his GED, complete YouthBuild, enter the painter's union, and save money for a college education. Formerly a shy and reserved student, Kevin benefited greatly from the program's one-on-one training and instruction. He said, "The one-on-one training helped me....They go at your own pace. They want to help you. They care about you. It's not like other schools where they have too many students and they have to just keep going....They'll make sure you understand."

Kevin also enjoyed YouthBuild's training in construction. He worked his way up to the foreman position on the construction site and began to delegate tasks and assignments to his peers. In this way, YouthBuild helped Kevin realize his leadership potential. He also served on the Youth Policy Committee and volunteered for several local community service projects. Describing how community service helped him open up to others, Kevin said:

*I've been doing community service for a while since I've been here. I want to do more now that I've got a taste of it....Getting involved in the community with community service showed me that I was interested in helping other people. We worked at [a local museum], the pantry and the homeless shelter, and that gave me a chance to open up to show who I really was. I didn't really know who I was. Before I came to [YouthBuild] I was a very isolated person...I didn't know how to communicate properly with other people. It helped me open up and helped me focus more on myself.*

## Outcomes

Although Kevin failed to complete his GED by the time of the second interview, he had graduated from the YouthBuild program and found employment. After graduating from the program, Kevin found a position in the local painter's union. However, after a few weeks, he decided to change careers. He recounted, *"I had a change of heart. I know I had the skills, but I really wanted to make a difference in someone's life."* YouthBuild transition services stepped in and referred him to a nonprofit dedicated to providing character education to young teenagers. He now works there full-time. His current goals are to attain his GED, go to college, and enter a career in criminal justice counseling. He strives to be an example for other youth and hopes to help change lives in the way that YouthBuild changed him.

Since graduating, Kevin has also made a number of presentations about his experience in YouthBuild at local community colleges, fundraisers, and non-profit meetings. Describing this experience, he said, *"I never in my life [thought] that I would get up in front of 200-500 people to let them know what I've done, where I am, because of [YouthBuild]."* Kevin gained confidence in himself and his abilities. He has grown closer to his family and no longer hangs out with his old friends. He said, *"It is heartwarming for me to see how my parents see me now. They know that I'm on track with school, work, no jail and no drugs."*

Kevin's positive outcomes demonstrate that he is on his way to overcoming his earlier challenges in life. He attributes his positive transformation to his time at YouthBuild: *"YouthBuild has helped me see myself in a different light – as a positive role model....[It] gives me the attitude that if you fail you can get back up....I can honestly tell someone this is where I used to be and this is where I am now."*

## Conclusion

The participants whose stories are presented in this chapter were all positively affected by their participation in and graduation from the YouthBuild program. Although not all the youth highlighted in this chapter achieved their ultimate goal of a GED or a high paying job, all achieved developmental milestones that they believe will help prepare them for future success.

## **XI. PARTICIPANT OUTCOMES**

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This chapter provides a summary of quantitative information captured in YouthBuild’s management information systems (MIS) for all participants who have taken part in the DOL YouthBuild Youth Offender grant from year one. Initially, the data and their collection are described. Following this, the demographics of the youth offenders are summarized, as are the specific program services and activities they received. Next, a descriptive overview of the outcomes achieved by these youth is presented. Then, several grantee-level characteristics are summarized. Finally, the chapter concludes with a series of multivariate analyses, identifying the relationships among the variables collected for this evaluation.

### **Data**

From the start of the DOL grant in 2004 through June 2007, the 34 participating grantees enrolled a total of 1,001 youth offenders, or an average of 29.4 per site. At the time of enrollment, demographic data about youth offender participants were collected and entered into the MIS established for the grant. In addition to the demographic characteristics and background information of youth offenders, grantees collected and reported quarterly data on participants’ activities and outcomes while they were enrolled in YouthBuild and after they exited. These data were obtained from YouthBuild USA at two separate points during the evaluation. An initial extract of these data was obtained in April 2007. This extract contained several of the participant characteristics, three variables identifying different services the youth received, and some preliminary outcomes for a portion of the youth in the file. A second extract was obtained from YouthBuild USA in December 2007. This file contained the identical 1,001 records, but added two critical participant characteristics variables – the individual’s age and status in the program (i.e., completed vs. did not complete) – as well as additional service variables, and more complete outcome information. The data in the second extract were complete through the end of September 2007.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> One exception to this was participants’ status in the program, which was further updated in the fourth quarter of 2007.

In addition to the MIS data, grantee-level information was collected for each YouthBuild grantee during the course of the second site visit to each location.<sup>2</sup> These data were gathered from checklists that site visitors completed for each grantee visited, based on the information obtained either in interviews completed or in hard-copy documentation obtained while on site. These data are used to profile grantees in terms of their key organizational structures, as well as several critical aspects of their recruitment and enrollment procedures, and educational, community service, leadership, and vocational training activities. Each of these is also used in multivariate analyses to examine its association with key outcomes. These analyses are presented later in this chapter.

Finally, data also were gathered on the unemployment rates for the counties within which each YouthBuild grantee is located, and the extent to which each grantee is in an urban or rural setting. The unemployment data were compiled for each month for the period July 2006 through June 2007 using the Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS). The data were then aggregated across the 12 months to create an average unemployment rate for each county for this period. Data on whether the site was in an urban or rural setting were compiled from site visitors' coding of this information based on their visit. These aggregate-level data will contextualize the communities in which YouthBuild grantees are operating and, along with individual participants' characteristics, can be used to control for variables that could be considered exogenous to the grantees in the multivariate analysis.<sup>3</sup>

## Youth Offender Demographics

Demographic descriptions of participants are shown in Exhibit XI-1. The majority of youth offender participants is male (83.9 percent), at least age 18 (69.3 percent), and is either Black/African American or Hispanic/Latino (76.4 percent combined). Although a substantial majority was at least 18 at the time of their enrollment, nearly one-third were below this age. This is important to understand, given that these younger youth may have very different motivations for participating in the program, and that they may face greater hurdles to finding employment than will older youth.

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<sup>2</sup> Because this information was collected during the second round of visits, data for the one site that had discontinued YouthBuild operations by this time were not collected.

<sup>3</sup> Exogenous variables are those considered outside the control of the grantees. In other words, one would expect a grantee in an area with high unemployment to have a more difficult time finding employment opportunities for its participants than would a grantee operating in an area with low unemployment. In this example, the unemployment rate is an exogenous variable in a multivariate model because it is outside the control of YouthBuild grantees.

**Exhibit XI-1:  
Demographic Characteristics of Youth Offender Participants**

| <b>Characteristics</b>                                       | <b>Percent</b> |
|--|----------------|
| <b>Age upon Entry to Program</b>                             |                |
| Under 16   | 0.6            |
| 16 to 17   | 30.2           |
| 18 to 21   | 49.4           |
| 22 to 24   | 19.4           |
| 25 and older   | 0.5            |
| <b>Gender</b>  |                |
| Female   | 16.1           |
| Male   | 83.9           |
| <b>Race and ethnicity</b>                                    |                |
| Asian American / Pacific Islander                            | 2.8            |
| Black / African American                                     | 53.0           |
| Caucasian American   | 17.4           |
| Hispanic / Latin American                                    | 23.4           |
| Native American  | 2.0            |
| Other  | 0.7            |
| <b>Housing Type at Enrollment</b>                            |                |
| Group Home   | 1.6            |
| Halfway House  | 1.7            |
| Homeless   | 1.0            |
| Homeless Shelter   | 0.8            |
| House / Apartment  | 73.4           |
| Public Housing   | 11.1           |
| Work Release Program   | 0.7            |
| Other  | 9.7            |
| Lives by him/her self at enrollment                          | 8.4            |
| Lives with parents or other relatives at enrollment          | 69.2           |
| On public assistance at enrollment                           | 22.6           |
| Someone in household on public assistance at enrollment      | 34.3           |
| In foster care at enrollment                                 | 3.2            |
| In intensive aftercare at enrollment                         | 36.1           |
| Ever been in juvenile detention as of enrollment             | 56.1           |
| Ever been in an adult correctional facility as of enrollment | 39.1           |
| Incarcerated at enrollment                                   | 2.8            |
| High school diploma at enrollment                            | 5.6            |
| GED at enrollment  | 3.5            |

Most participants live in a house or apartment (73.4 percent), and lived with their parents or other relatives at enrollment (69.2 percent). Fewer than a quarter (22.6 percent) of youth offender participants were receiving public assistance at the time of enrollment, though 34 percent lived in a household in which someone was on public assistance. More than one-third (36.1 percent) were in an intensive aftercare program at the time of enrollment, meaning that they were being released from a prison, jail, or juvenile detention facility. More than half (56.1 percent) had been in a juvenile detention center at some point in their lives, and 39 percent had been confined to an adult correctional facility at some point prior to their enrollment. Despite this, only three percent were actually incarcerated at enrollment. Given the nature of the YouthBuild program, not surprisingly very few participants (9.1 percent) had their GED or high school diploma at enrollment.

## Program and Post-Program Activities and Services

The quarterly reporting system for YouthBuild’s MIS data only allows grantees to enter one predominant activity per participant per month. However, most YouthBuild participants participate in equal parts vocational skills training and educational activities while in the program. YouthBuild opted to have grantees leave this monthly field blank while youth were in the program to indicate that the individual was receiving an equal mix of educational and vocational training services. Hence, the vast majority of these fields are blank for youth while they are actively in YouthBuild. As a result, the predominant in-program activities for participants were not captured explicitly in the MIS data.

**Exhibit XI-2:  
Services Received by Youth Offender Participants**

|  |                |
|--|----------------|
| <b>Number of Youth Offenders</b>                       | 1,001          |
| <br>   |                |
| <b>In-Program Services Received by Youth Offenders</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
| <b>Intensive Aftercare Services</b>                    | 44.9           |
| <b>Health Services</b>                                 | 65.3           |
| <b>Miscellaneous Services</b>                          | 80.1           |

Despite this, as part of the reporting system, there are three additional service variable fields that are collected for participants while they are in the program. These include whether the participant received aftercare services, health services, and miscellaneous services. As shown in Exhibit XI-2, a majority of participants received one or more of these services through YouthBuild. Nearly two-thirds of participants received health services, which include physical or dental exams, hygiene training, and training in CPR, among others. In addition, 45 percent of



youth offender participants received intensive aftercare services in YouthBuild, presumably as part of a court-ordered parole for these youth.

In addition to the activity information collected while youth are in the program, if participants participated in additional activities after they exited the program (when they were no longer assumed to be receiving an equal mix of educational and vocational services), these activities were recorded in the MIS. As shown in Exhibit XI-3, 83 percent of participants engaged in some kind of post-program activity, the most common of which was skills training (42.2 percent). Additionally, participants utilized other employment activities such as subsidized work experience or internships (24.7 percent) or other job preparation classes or activities (39.6 percent). After program exit, many youth offenders also continued to utilize GED preparation (22.9 percent) and mentoring (20.5 percent).

**Exhibit XI-3:  
Post-Program Activities Participated in by Youth Offender Participants**

| Post-Program Activities                  | Percent |
|--|---------|
| <b>Any Post-Program Activities</b>       | 83.3    |
| Skills Training                          | 42.2    |
| Other Job Preparation Class / Activity   | 39.6    |
| Subsidized Work Experience / Internships | 24.8    |
| GED Preparation                          | 22.9    |
| Mentoring                                | 20.5    |
| Community Service                        | 8.9     |
| Basic and Remedial Education             | 8.8     |
| Substance Abuse Services                 | 5.1     |

## Descriptive Outcomes

This section discusses the outcomes of youth offender participants for all YouthBuild grantees combined, and then highlights the variation in outcomes across the different grantees. Where applicable, the outcomes of youth offender participants are compared to the YouthBuild USA performance standards by which all YouthBuild programs that are part of this network measure their success. While data are not available to compare grantees to all the performance measures laid out by YouthBuild USA, sufficient data are available to compare grantees' youth offender retention and placement to the national standards of YouthBuild USA.

While data on other outcomes were only available through the third quarter of 2007, MIS data for the participant status of youth offender enrollees were available through the fourth quarter of 2007, as shown in Exhibit XI-4. Participants are considered to have completed the program if

they either graduated from the program or were placed during the program in a job, post-secondary school or residential treatment program and deliberately opted to leave the program as a result. As can be seen in Exhibit XI-4, more than 68 percent of participants completed the program either by graduating or through early placement, while an additional four percent were still active as of the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2007.<sup>4</sup> Non-completers represent a combination of participants of four types, including those who: were early dropouts, took a leave of absence and did not return, were terminated by the program, or terminated their own participation in the program. Across all 34 grantees included in this evaluation, nearly 27 percent of participants did not complete the program.

**Exhibit XI-4:  
Retention of Youth Offender Participants**

| <b>Number of Youth Offenders</b>  | 1,001   |                                  |         |   |  |        |     |                             |     |                      |      |               |      |          |     |
|---|---------|----------------------------------|---------|---|--|--------|-----|-----------------------------|-----|----------------------|------|---------------|------|----------|-----|
| <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="width: 70%; text-align: center; border-bottom: 1px solid black;">Retention of All Youth Offenders</th> <th style="width: 30%; text-align: center; border-bottom: 1px solid black;">Percent</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="border-bottom: 1px solid black;"><b>Participant Status (as of 4<sup>th</sup> quarter 2007)</b></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border-bottom: 1px solid black;">Active</td> <td style="text-align: right; border-bottom: 1px solid black;">4.2</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border-bottom: 1px solid black;">Completer – Early placement</td> <td style="text-align: right; border-bottom: 1px solid black;">9.9</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border-bottom: 1px solid black;">Completer – Graduate</td> <td style="text-align: right; border-bottom: 1px solid black;">58.6</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border-bottom: 1px solid black;">Non-Completer</td> <td style="text-align: right; border-bottom: 1px solid black;">26.6</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border-bottom: 1px solid black;">Deceased</td> <td style="text-align: right; border-bottom: 1px solid black;">0.7</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> |         | Retention of All Youth Offenders | Percent | <b>Participant Status (as of 4<sup>th</sup> quarter 2007)</b> |  | Active | 4.2 | Completer – Early placement | 9.9 | Completer – Graduate | 58.6 | Non-Completer | 26.6 | Deceased | 0.7 |
| Retention of All Youth Offenders  | Percent |                                  |         |   |  |        |     |                             |     |                      |      |               |      |          |     |
| <b>Participant Status (as of 4<sup>th</sup> quarter 2007)</b>   |         |                                  |         |   |  |        |     |                             |     |                      |      |               |      |          |     |
| Active  | 4.2     |                                  |         |   |  |        |     |                             |     |                      |      |               |      |          |     |
| Completer – Early placement   | 9.9     |                                  |         |   |  |        |     |                             |     |                      |      |               |      |          |     |
| Completer – Graduate  | 58.6    |                                  |         |   |  |        |     |                             |     |                      |      |               |      |          |     |
| Non-Completer   | 26.6    |                                  |         |   |  |        |     |                             |     |                      |      |               |      |          |     |
| Deceased  | 0.7     |                                  |         |   |  |        |     |                             |     |                      |      |               |      |          |     |

Thirteen of the 34 grantees had 80 percent or more of their participants complete the program, including both YouthBuild McLean County (IL) and YouthBuild Brockton (MA), each of which had over 95 percent of its participants complete the program. In total, 26 sites met the “Satisfactory” level of retention (defined as a 70% completion rate or better) as described in the YouthBuild USA Program Design and Performance Standards. However, 12 grantees had more than one-third of their participants fail to complete the program, including five grantees that had more than 50 percent of their participants fail to complete the program. These five sites would be given an “Unacceptable” rating, based on the recommendations in YouthBuild USA’s performance standards.

Of course, completing the program is not the only goal for most participants. In addition, many of them seek to obtain their GED or high school diploma, and/or find employment. Educational

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that these data are for participants only. As noted in Chapter III, a substantial portion of youth who express interest in YouthBuild and even participate in all or part of MTO are not enrolled in the program. Thus, the percentage of completers would be significantly lower if the number of youth who began participating in MTO was used as the base for this calculation.

and employment outcomes for participants are shown in Exhibit XI-5. As can be seen in this exhibit, while only nine percent of participants entered the program with their GED or high school diploma, more than one-third (36.3 percent) of them obtained it after entering YouthBuild. In addition, 54 percent of participants obtained at least one certification after enrolling in the program (which could include the GED or high school diploma), with participants earning a mean of 1.56 certifications.

**Exhibit XI-5:  
Educational and Employment Outcomes**

|   |       |
|---|-------|
| <b>Number of Youth Offenders</b>  | 1,001 |
| <b>Outcomes of All Youth Offenders (as of 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter 2007)</b>                        |       |
| <b>GED / High School Diploma Status</b>   |       |
| Entered Program with GED / High School Diploma  | 9.1   |
| Got GED / High School Diploma after Entering Program  | 36.3  |
| Did not earn GED / High School Diploma  | 54.6  |
| <b>Got Certification(s) after Entering Program</b>  |       |
|   | 54.2  |
| <b>Mean Number of Certifications Earned</b>   |       |
|   | 1.56  |
| <b>Overall Placement (including employment, educational activities, or occupational training)</b> |       |
|   | 65.5  |
| <b>Got First Time Unsubsidized Employment</b>   |       |
|   | 52.4  |
| <b>Entered the Military</b>   |       |
|   | 0.6   |
| <b>Entered Occupational Training</b>  |       |
|   | 6.2   |
| <b>Entered Full-Time Post-Secondary School</b>  |       |
|   | 10.2  |

Additionally, nearly two-thirds of all participants were placed in unsubsidized employment, an educational activity, or occupational training by the third quarter of 2007. Slightly more than half of all participants obtained unsubsidized employment after enrolling in YouthBuild. More than 10 percent of these participants entered full-time post-secondary school. An additional six percent entered long-term occupational training, and nearly one percent entered the military.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Note that these totals do not sum to the overall percentage placed because an individual could obtain more than one type of placement.

Five of the grantees had at least 60 percent of their participants who entered without a GED or High School diploma obtain their degree after starting the program. YouthBuild Philadelphia had nearly 90 percent of participants who entered without a degree get their GED or high school diploma after entering the program. Thirteen sites, however, had fewer than one-third of participants who entered without a degree obtain one after starting the program, and three sites had fewer than 10 percent of such participants obtain their degree.

Twelve of the grantees placed 80 percent or more of their participants in employment, post-secondary school, or occupational training. New Waverly YouthBuild (TX) had more than 90 percent of its participants placed in a job or school. In contrast, eight of the grantees placed 50 percent or fewer of their participants.

Seven sites placed more than two-thirds of their participants in unsubsidized employment, while eight of them placed less than one-third of participants. New Waverly YouthBuild, YouthBuild Honolulu, and YouthBuilding Alternatives all placed more than 85 percent of their participants in unsubsidized employment.

Eight of the 34 grantees had at least 20 percent of their participants enter full-time post-secondary school, though often this figure is based on very small numbers of participants, and eight sites had at least 10 percent of participants enter occupational training.

Finally, at least two-thirds of participants in 15 of the grantee sites earned at least one certification in the program. Bi-Cap YouthBuild had 100 percent of participants earn some sort of certification after entering the program, and San Gabriel Valley Conservation Corps YouthBuild, and sites in Philadelphia, Flushing, and Honolulu each had more than 80 percent of its participants earn certifications. In contrast, six sites had more than 70 percent of participants who did not earn any certifications.

In order to examine the timeliness with which participants were placed in a job or school, an analysis was conducted that was limited to participants who successfully completed the program by the second quarter of 2007, which ensures that all included youth had at least one quarter after completing the program to be placed.<sup>6</sup> These results are shown in Exhibit XI-6. As seen in this exhibit, of the 628 participants who had completed the program by the second quarter of 2007, two-thirds (66.6 percent) were placed in a job or school within one quarter of exiting the program. An additional 15 percent of youth were placed in the second quarter after

exit or later. Nineteen percent of all completers were not placed in employment or school at any point.

**Exhibit XI-6:  
Placement of Program Completers**

**Number of Youth Offenders who Completed the Program (as of 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter 2007)** 628

| <b>Placement in Employment or Educational Activities</b>    | <b>Percent</b> |
|---|----------------|
| <b>Placement Status (as of 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter 2007)</b> |                |
| Placed within one quarter of exit                           | 66.6           |
| Placed but after one quarter                                | 14.3           |

Eighteen grantees had at least two-thirds of their participants who finished the program by the second quarter of 2007 placed in a job or school within one quarter of program exit. Eight sites met the “Satisfactory” measure described in YouthBuild USA’s performance measures, which requires a placement rate of 85 percent or better. Operation Fresh Start YouthBuild placed 100 percent of its program completers within one quarter of exit, and Portland YouthBuilders and YouthBuild Albany placed over 95 percent of their completers within one quarter of exit. The 13 grantees that were below 79 percent placement would garner a “Needing Attention” or an “Unacceptable” rating, including eight grantees that had less than 50 percent of program finishers placed within one quarter of exit.

As shown in Exhibit XI-7, the majority of participants (74.6 percent) had a positive justice outcome, meaning that they did not re-offend or have their probation or parole revoked after entering YouthBuild. The remaining 25 percent had negative justice outcomes after enrolling, with 11 percent convicted of a crime, six percent having their probation or parole revoked, and eight percent being convicted of a crime *and* having their probation or parole revoked.

Across grantees, 11 sites had 80 percent or more of participants who did not re-offend or have their parole or probation revoked. YouthBuild Albany had fewer than 5 percent of its participants re-offend, and YouthBuild Brockton and Portland YouthBuilders each had fewer than 10 percent of their participants re-offend. In contrast, eight of the 34 sites had more than one-third of participants re-offend and two sites of those sites had more than 50 percent of participants re-offend.

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<sup>6</sup> Although the records of those who complete the program indicate a date of completion, those who do not complete the program do not have such an indicator. Hence, placement measures in this section are only calculated among completers.

**Exhibit XI-7:  
Justice Outcomes for Youth Offender Participants**

**Number of Youth Offenders** 1,001

| <b>Justice Outcomes Since Entering Program</b>          | <b>Percent</b> |
|---|----------------|
| <b>Justice Outcomes</b>                                 |                |
| No Further Conviction or Revocation of Probation/Parole | 74.6           |
| Convicted of a Crime                                    | 11.3           |
| Probation / Parole Revoked                              | 6.3            |
| Convicted of a Crime and Probation / Parole Revoked     | 7.8            |

## **Grantee Characteristics**

As described above, grantee-level characteristics were collected and coded as part of the second round of site visits to each grantee. Each site visitor was provided with a checklist for each program. This checklist consisted primarily of yes-no questions, and was to be completed either through the interviews or through hard-copy documentation collected while on site. The checklist contained questions in the areas of organizational structure, budget and funding, recruitment and enrollment, youth leadership and community service, educational services, and vocational training. None of the questions required subjective ratings; rather, they each asked for factual information that could then be coded for inclusion in the quantitative analysis. This section examines whether these grantee-level characteristics are associated with differences in overall grantee performance.

To conduct this analysis, grantees were classified into three performance categories based on an index of the outcomes of their participants.<sup>7</sup> The outcomes used to categorize grantees' performance were participant retention, placement of participants in an employment or educational setting, placement of program completers within one quarter of finishing the program, participants obtaining unsubsidized work experience, entering post-secondary school, earning certifications in the program, obtaining a GED or high school diploma, and having positive justice outcomes. The three categories they were grouped into are low performing, medium performing, and high performing grantees.

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<sup>7</sup> One grantee, which closed their program before a checklist was completed, could not be included in this analysis, therefore only 33 grantees are used.

The data from the program checklists were then cross-tabulated with the performance rating to describe how the grantees' overall performance varied across the grantee-level characteristics. These cross-tabulations are displayed in Exhibit XI-8. The data shown in this exhibit are purely descriptive, and intended only to show how performance varied across these grantee-level characteristics.<sup>8</sup>

As can be seen in this exhibit, a greater percentage of low performing grantees are located in rural settings and in areas that have a higher mean unemployment rate than medium and high performing grantees. High performers include a larger percentage of grantees that are charter schools and that are independent entities. High performers also have a larger average budget than do medium or low performing grantees, though there was no relationship between the average cost per participant and performance.

Further, high performers have fewer participants per staff member, classroom teacher, and worksite supervisor than low performing grantees. Additionally, high performers have a larger average number of worksite staff than medium or low performing grantees. These numbers suggest that grantees with greater supervision of youth might be able to provide more individual attention, resulting in their participants having more positive outcomes than those grantees with larger participant to staff ratios.

High performing grantees recruit and enroll a larger number of youth, on average, but enroll a lower number of youth offenders than medium and low performers. A larger percentage of higher performing grantees administer drug tests to youth before enrollment, but a smaller percentage tests youth on their basic skills before enrollment than medium or low performers.

While the vast majority of all three categories of grantees have a Mental Toughness Orientation (MTO) period, low performing grantees tend to have a shorter duration of MTO and none of them pay youth during MTO. In contrast, 43 percent of high performers and 15 percent of medium performers pay youth during MTO.

Low performing grantees spend more time each week, on average, providing life skills instruction than do their medium and high performing counterparts. While nearly all grantees offer GED preparation, more high performing grantees offer high school classes than medium or low performing grantees. Additionally, all high performing grantees offer their GED preparation or high school classes onsite compared to only 87 percent of medium performing grantees and 78

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<sup>8</sup> The overall measure of effectiveness was also used as a dependent measure in a multivariate regression, as part of the analyses described below. Due to the small sample size, of 33 grantees, however, there were no significant relationships among the variables. Hence, those results are not discussed in this chapter.

percent of low performers. The convenience of having instruction onsite likely helps lessen transportation issues to and from class, and ensures that youth do not “disappear” en route to their training. A greater percentage of grantees that have active Youth Policy Councils are high or medium performers than low performers, and a greater percentage of high performers are Americorps grantees than medium and low performers.

Regarding vocational training, greater percentages of high performers offer vocational training in both new construction and rehabilitation, have construction partners that provide worksites and own and/or manage the construction sites. In terms of how grantees divide their educational and worksite time, a greater percentage of low performing grantees have participants rotate educational activities with worksite activities on a daily or alternating day basis. This means that, instead of longer stretches of classroom-only time and then worksite-only time, participants rotate between the two on a more frequent basis. Most high performing grantees utilized a weekly calendar, in which participants spend one week in educational activities and the subsequent week in vocational training.

All of the high performing grantees link vocational training to academic instruction and all use NCCER or other materials leading to certification for construction curriculum, compared to smaller percentages of medium and low performers that do so. Additionally, 88 percent of high performing grantees offer other types of certification, while only 69 percent of medium and 44 percent of low performing grantees do so. As obtaining certifications is one measure of grantee performance, grantees that offer certifications will clearly have a better chance to succeed on this measure.

These cross-tabulations provide some suggestions about grantee characteristics that may be important in helping participants to achieve positive outcomes. They do not, however, allow one to conclude that differences between high, medium, and low performing grantees are caused by these characteristics, or even that the differences are meaningful.

Instead, some other factors, such as differences in the characteristics of participants, may be the underlying reason for the apparent differences in Exhibit XI-8. In an effort to examine this, a series of multivariate analyses were conducted, and are described in the next section.



**Exhibit XI-8:  
Characteristics of Grantees by Performance Rating**

| <b>Characteristic</b>                                 | <b>Percent (mean)</b> |            |              |
|---|-----------------------|------------|--------------|
|   | <b>Higher</b>         | <b>Mid</b> | <b>Lower</b> |
| Number of Grantees                                    | 8                     | 16         | 9            |
| <b>Community Context</b>                              |                       |            |              |
| <b>Exogenous Characteristics</b>                      |                       |            |              |
| Rural Site  | 12.5                  | 12.5       | 44.4         |
| Unemployment Rate                                     | (4.77)                | (4.98)     | (5.64)       |
| <b>Administrative Characteristics</b>                 |                       |            |              |
| Charter School  | 37.5                  | 31.3       | 11.1         |
| Independent Entity                                    | 62.5                  | 37.5       | 22.2         |
| 2006 Budget (mean in millions)                        | (1.94)                | (1.00)     | (0.84)       |
| Participants per YouthBuild Staff Member (mean)       | (2.47)                | (2.43)     | (4.42)       |
| <b>Recruitment Practices</b>                          |                       |            |              |
| Number of Youth Recruited each Cycle (mean)           | (90.63)               | (76.94)    | (73.50)      |
| Number of Youth Enrolled (mean)                       | (41.88)               | (20.19)    | (29.11)      |
| Number of Youth Offenders (mean)                      | (7.5)                 | (13.46)    | (15.44)      |
| Drug Test before Enrollment                           | 62.5                  | 37.5       | 33.3         |
| Basic Skills Test before Enrollment                   | 62.5                  | 100.0      | 88.9         |
| Mental Toughness Duration (in weeks)                  | (2.56)                | (3.35)     | (1.80)       |
| Mental Toughness Paid                                 | 42.9                  | 15.4       | 0.0          |
| <b>Educational Practices</b>                          |                       |            |              |
| Number of Hours Life Skills Offered per week (mean)   | (5.20)                | (5.56)     | (8.94)       |
| GED Prep Offered                                      | 75.0                  | 87.5       | 77.5         |
| High School Classes Offered                           | 87.5                  | 43.8       | 44.4         |
| GED Prep / HS Classes offered Onsite                  | 100.0                 | 86.6       | 77.8         |
| Number of Participants per Classroom Teacher (mean)   | (12.83)               | (10.15)    | (15.04)      |
| <b>Community Service Activities</b>                   |                       |            |              |
| Active Youth Policy Council                           | 75.0                  | 73.3       | 55.6         |
| Americorps Grantee                                    | 87.5                  | 62.5       | 66.7         |
| <b>Vocational Activities</b>                          |                       |            |              |
| Does Both New Construction and Rehabilitation         | 62.5                  | 60.0       | 44.4         |
| Construction Partners Provide Worksites               | 87.5                  | 66.7       | 55.6         |
| Construction Sites Owned and/or Managed by YouthBuild | 75.0                  | 73.3       | 33.3         |
| More than Two Active Worksites                        | 75.0                  | 33.3       | 55.6         |

| Characteristic   | Percent (mean) |        |        |
|--|----------------|--------|--------|
|  | Higher         | Mid    | Lower  |
| Number of Worksite Staff (mean)  | (3.63)         | (2.56) | (2.67) |
| Number of Youth per Supervisor on Worksite (mean)                                    | (6.62)         | (6.67) | (7.56) |
| Vocational Training linked to Academic Instruction                                   | 100.0          | 75.0   | 66.7   |
| Use of NCCER or other materials leading to certification for construction curriculum | 100.0          | 81.3   | 66.7   |
| Other Types of Certification   | 87.5           | 68.8   | 44.4   |
| Rotates Educational and Worksite Time Daily or Alternating                           | 12.5           | 26.7   | 50.0   |

## Multivariate Outcomes Analysis

In addition to the descriptive analyses described above, several analyses were conducted that employed multiple variables in a single model. These analyses produce results with far greater explanatory power because they can control statistically for a range of variables and isolate the unique contribution of each individual variable. In other words, these models allow one to examine the relationship between a particular variable (i.e., the gender of a participant) and an outcome of interest (i.e., whether the participant obtained employment) while holding all other variables that might affect the outcome constant. Depending on the type of outcome of interest, different statistical models provide better estimates for the relationships between variables. For example, many of the outcomes of interest in this report are binary (meaning the variable must take one of only two values; i.e., employment). The general approach to these analyses was to use logistic regression for models with a binary variable as the dependent measure, as this type of regression provides a more robust estimate when examining binary variables.<sup>9</sup> Unless otherwise noted in the text, only relationships between variables that are statistically significant are discussed in the remaining sections.

## Contextual Variables

The first step in examining the data was to employ a simple logistic regression model using several different dependent measures, with each regressed onto two primary contextual characteristics: the unemployment rate in the county in which the grantee is operating and whether the grantee is situated in an urban or rural setting. Results for these regressions are shown in Exhibit XI-9.

<sup>9</sup> Nearly all the dependent measures in this section are binary. In a few cases in which the dependent measure was continuous, such as when examining grantee-effectiveness, ordinary least squares regression was employed.

As can be seen in this exhibit, both the unemployment rate and whether a grantee was in an urban or rural setting are associated with the outcomes obtained by the participants in their programs. Specifically, grantees in areas with higher unemployment rates tended to have lower overall rates of retention in the program,<sup>10</sup> as well as placement overall, and in unsubsidized employment specifically. Additionally, participants in programs operating in areas in which there were higher unemployment rates also were less likely to earn certifications, but were more likely to re-offend (either through a new conviction or revocation of parole or probation) than those in programs with lower unemployment rates. Participants in programs in urban areas were somewhat less likely to find employment, but were more likely to complete the program and enter post-secondary schooling.

**Exhibit XI-9: Relationship between Exogenous Variables and Outcomes**

| <b>Characteristics</b> | <b>Retention</b>              | <b>Earned GED or High School Diploma</b> | <b>Overall Placement</b>      | <b>Unsubsidized Employment</b> | <b>Entered Post-Secondary School</b> | <b>Earned Certification(s)</b> | <b>Did Not Re-Offend</b>       |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|--|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Unemployment Rate      | -0.134*<br>(0.056)<br>[0.875] | -0.063<br>(0.054)<br>[0.939]             | -0.124*<br>(0.052)<br>[0.883] | -0.108*<br>(0.050)<br>[0.898]  | -0.017<br>(0.084)<br>[0.983]         | -0.158**<br>(0.051)<br>[0.854] | -0.156**<br>(0.056)<br>[0.855] |
| Urban                  | 0.454*<br>(0.182)<br>[1.575]  | 0.178<br>(0.188)<br>[1.195]              | -0.248<br>(0.182)<br>[0.781]  | -0.556**<br>(0.175)<br>[0.573] | 0.802*<br>(0.355)<br>[2.230]         | 0.201<br>(0.181)<br>[1.223]    | 0.172<br>(0.188)<br>[1.187]    |

Note: Figures are coefficients derived from logit regression on the dependent variable indicated. Figures in parentheses represent the standard errors associated with these coefficients. Figures in brackets are the odds ratios associated with these coefficients. Note that the final column, “Did Not Re-Offend,” is reverse coded in this and all subsequent exhibits so that a positive outcome is consistent with the other columns. Thus, individuals who have re-offended are coded as zero while those who have not are coded as one. \* =  $p < .05$ , \*\* =  $p < .01$ , \*\*\* =  $p < .001$

## Participant Characteristics

YouthBuild programs have little control over the unemployment rates in their area, and their urban-rural status is determined entirely by where they are located. Thus, these variables are considered exogenous. Other potentially critical variables, however, may be at least partially under their control. For example, although youth bring a broad array of characteristics with them to the program, as described in previous chapters the grantees tend to winnow a wide pool of interested applicants down to a much smaller number that are actually enrolled. While staff in most sites suggested this selectivity was based on youth’s demonstrated commitment or

<sup>10</sup> This finding is somewhat counterintuitive in that one would expect that higher rates of unemployment may lead to better retention, as the opportunity cost of remaining in the program is lower. Though it is unclear why the negative relationship exists, it is possible that youth leave the program and the area to find better employment opportunities.

readiness to change, which are both difficult to measure and quantify, it is possible that some selectivity was exercised based on more measurable characteristics. Thus, although the given characteristics of a specific youth are outside the control of grantees, the overall set of characteristics of youth offenders being served by a grantee is at least partially in its control through the selection and enrollment process. Because such characteristics are known to play some role in educational and employment outcomes, they must be included in any analysis of the factors affecting these outcomes. To examine this, a second set of models was estimated that included the contextual factors described above, and a broad array of youth characteristics. These models identify the extent to which differences in the characteristics of youth being served by the various grantees are associated with differences in their outcomes. Results for these models are shown in Exhibit XI-10.

As can be seen in this exhibit, adding participant characteristics to these models eliminates some of the associations in the first model described above. Specifically, the unemployment rate is still negatively related to retention and whether youth earned certifications, but is no longer related to participants' likelihood of being placed or their re-offense status. Similarly, after controlling for participant characteristics, youth in programs in urban areas were more likely to complete the program, and to have earned their GED or high school diploma. In both cases, participants in urban areas were approximately twice as likely to achieve these outcomes as were those in rural areas.

The participant characteristics themselves seem largely unrelated to outcomes, though there are a few exceptions. For example, younger participants are somewhat less likely to be placed, but more likely to earn a certificate through YouthBuild. Otherwise, age appears to play little role in the outcomes obtained by these youth. Similarly, gender is little related to the outcomes of interest, with the sole exception that females were less likely to re-offend than were males. Indeed, females were nearly twice as likely to avoid further trouble with the legal system as were males in this group. Further, race was unrelated to most outcomes shown in this exhibit, with notable exceptions to this being that African-American participants were less likely than whites to be placed into unsubsidized employment or to earn a certificate through their participation in YouthBuild. In each case, African-Americans were only 60 percent as likely to achieve these outcomes as their white counterparts. Similarly, Hispanic or Latino youth were less likely to earn a certificate as well.

**Exhibit XI-10: Relationship between Participant Characteristics and Outcomes**

| <b>Characteristics</b>  | <b>Retention</b>               | <b>Earned<br/>GED or<br/>High<br/>School<br/>Diploma</b> | <b>Overall<br/>Placement</b>   | <b>Unsubsidized<br/>Employment</b> | <b>Earned<br/>Certification(s)</b> | <b>Did Not<br/>Re-<br/>Offend</b> |
|---|--------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <b>Unemployment<br/>Rate</b>                                    | -0.124*<br>(0.063)<br>[0.883]  | -0.030<br>(0.062)<br>[0.970]                             | -0.085<br>(0.059)<br>[0.919]   | -0.060<br>(0.057)<br>[0.941]       | -0.178**<br>(0.058)<br>[0.837]     | -0.117<br>(0.062)<br>[0.890]      |
| <b>Urban</b>  | 0.690**<br>(0.251)<br>[1.994]  | 0.753**<br>(0.268)<br>[2.124]                            | 0.432<br>(0.248)<br>[1.541]    | 0.199<br>(0.243)<br>[1.220]        | -0.157<br>(0.241)<br>[0.855]       | 0.488<br>(0.258)<br>[1.628]       |
| <b>Age upon<br/>Entry</b>                                       | -0.016<br>(0.041)<br>[0.984]   | -0.039<br>(0.039)<br>[0.961]                             | -0.078*<br>(0.038)<br>[0.925]  | -0.025<br>(0.036)<br>[0.975]       | 0.075*<br>(0.037)<br>[1.078]       | -0.009<br>(0.041)<br>[0.991]      |
| <b>Gender</b>   |                                |  |                                |                                    |                                    |                                   |
| Female  | -0.136<br>(0.207)<br>[0.873]   | 0.090<br>(0.195)<br>[1.094]                              | 0.047<br>(0.197)<br>[1.048]    | -0.240<br>(0.188)<br>[0.787]       | 0.173<br>(0.189)<br>[1.189]        | 0.687**<br>(0.248)<br>[1.988]     |
| <b>Race and<br/>ethnicity</b>                                   |                                |  |                                |                                    |                                    |                                   |
| Black /<br>African<br>American                                  | -0.041<br>(0.228)<br>[0.960]   | -0.361<br>(0.212)<br>[0.697]                             | -0.293<br>(0.221)<br>[0.746]   | -0.449*<br>(0.208)<br>[0.638]      | -0.490*<br>(0.205)<br>[0.612]      | -0.106<br>(0.236)<br>[0.899]      |
| Hispanic /<br>Latin<br>American                                 | -0.044<br>(0.254)<br>[0.957]   | -0.541<br>(0.231)<br>[0.582]                             | -0.273<br>(0.249)<br>[0.761]   | -0.4112<br>(0.236)<br>[0.663]      | -0.597**<br>(0.229)<br>[0.551]     | -0.338<br>(0.259)<br>[0.713]      |
| Other   | -0.392<br>(0.341)<br>[0.675]   | -0.380<br>(0.336)<br>[0.684]                             | -0.398<br>(0.331)<br>[0.672]   | -0.319<br>(0.319)<br>[0.727]       | 0.170<br>(0.334)<br>[1.185]        | -0.144<br>(0.366)<br>[0.866]      |
| <b>Had GED or<br/>High School<br/>Diploma at<br/>Enrollment</b> | 0.097<br>(0.281)<br>[1.102]    | n/a  | -0.099<br>(0.254)<br>[0.906]   | -0.236<br>(0.242)<br>[0.790]       | 0.119<br>(0.246)<br>[1.126]        | -0.328<br>(0.256)<br>[0.720]      |
| <b>Has Drivers<br/>License</b>                                  | 0.867***<br>(0.164)<br>[2.379] | 0.918***<br>(0.159)<br>[2.505]                           | 1.044***<br>(0.152)<br>[2.841] | 0.982***<br>(0.150)<br>[2.671]     | 0.257<br>(0.148)<br>[1.434]        | 0.188<br>(0.169)<br>[1.206]       |
| <b>On Public<br/>Assistance</b>                                 | 0.079<br>(0.159)<br>[1.082]    | -0.132<br>(0.149)<br>[0.876]                             | 0.124<br>(0.150)<br>[1.131]    | -0.050<br>(0.143)<br>[0.951]       | -0.520***<br>(0.143)<br>[0.594]    | 0.002<br>(0.161)<br>[1.002]       |
| <b>In Foster Care<br/>at Enrollment</b>                         | -0.194<br>(0.420)<br>[0.824]   | -0.482<br>(0.427)<br>[0.618]                             | -0.378<br>(0.408)<br>[0.685]   | -0.593<br>(0.401)<br>[0.553]       | -0.062<br>(0.388)<br>[0.940]       | 0.143<br>(0.462)<br>[1.153]       |
| <b>Living with<br/>Parents at<br/>Enrollment</b>                | 0.054<br>(0.234)<br>[1.055]    | -0.098<br>(0.221)<br>[0.907]                             | -0.442*<br>(0.223)<br>[0.643]  | -0.354<br>(0.208)<br>[0.702]       | 0.045<br>(0.27)<br>[1.046]         | -0.215<br>(0.238)<br>[0.806]      |

| <b>Characteristics</b>   | <b>Retention</b>             | <b>Earned<br/>GED or<br/>High<br/>School<br/>Diploma</b> | <b>Overall<br/>Placement</b> | <b>Unsubsidized<br/>Employment</b> | <b>Earned<br/>Certification(s)</b> | <b>Did Not<br/>Re-<br/>Offend</b> |
|--|------------------------------|--|------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <b>Living by Self<br/>at Enrollment</b>                              | -0.131<br>(0.311)<br>[0.877] | 0.300<br>(0.316)<br>[1.350]                              | -0.296<br>(0.304)<br>[0.744] | -0.399<br>(0.286)<br>[0.671]       | 0.360<br>(0.294)<br>[1.434]        | -0.116<br>(0.329)<br>[0.891]      |
| <b>Housing Type<br/>at Enrollment</b>                                |                              |  |                              |                                    |                                    |                                   |
| Institutional<br>Setting   | -0.171<br>(0.332)<br>[0.758] | 0.022<br>(0.338)<br>[1.038]                              | -0.364<br>(0.332)<br>[0.829] | -0.045<br>(0.322)<br>[1.437]       | 0.130<br>(0.316)<br>[0.736]        | -0.626<br>(0.356)<br>[0.674]      |
| Homeless /<br>Homeless<br>Shelter                                    | -0.460<br>(0.427)<br>[0.568] | -0.487<br>(0.459)<br>[0.624]                             | 0.365<br>(0.472)<br>[1.719]  | 0.207<br>(0.4312)<br>[1.849]       | -0.362<br>(0.427)<br>[0.450]       | 0.997<br>(0.633)<br>[3.415]       |
| Public<br>Housing  | 0.255<br>(0.252)<br>[0.568]  | 0.117<br>(0.240)<br>[1.142]                              | -0.316<br>(0.238)<br>[0.870] | -0.576*<br>(0.228)<br>[0.845]      | 0.415<br>(0.225)<br>[0.979]        | -0.099<br>(0.279)<br>[1.141]      |
| Other  | 0.268<br>(0.302)<br>[1.175]  | 0.363<br>(0.3001)<br>[1.460]                             | 0.491<br>(0.321)<br>[1.950]  | 0.822**<br>(0.308)<br>[3.420]      | -0.618*<br>(0.290)<br>[0.348]      | -0.041<br>(0.332)<br>[1.210]      |
| <b>Ever in<br/>Juvenile<br/>Detention at<br/>Enrollment</b>          | -0.161<br>(0.163)<br>[0.851] | 0.114<br>(0.153)<br>[1.121]                              | 0.012<br>(0.150)<br>[1.013]  | -0.051<br>(0.143)<br>[0.951]       | -0.176<br>(0.144)<br>[0.838]       | -0.224<br>(0.165)<br>[0.799]      |
| <b>Ever in Adult<br/>Correctional<br/>Facility at<br/>Enrollment</b> | -0.171<br>(0.187)<br>[0.843] | -0.112<br>(0.178)<br>[0.894]                             | -0.032<br>(0.171)<br>[0.968] | -0.074<br>(0.164)<br>[0.929]       | -0.315<br>(0.166)<br>[0.730]       | -0.571**<br>(0.186)<br>[0.565]    |
| <b>Incarcerated at<br/>Enrollment</b>                                | -0.218<br>(0.471)<br>[0.804] | 0.024<br>(0.456)<br>[1.024]                              | -0.720<br>(0.422)<br>[0.487] | -0.763<br>(0.443)<br>[0.466]       | -0.735<br>(0.435)<br>[0.730]       | -1.044*<br>(0.424)<br>[0.352]     |
| <b>In Intensive<br/>Aftercare at<br/>Enrollment</b>                  | 0.030<br>(0.174)<br>[1.031]  | -0.030<br>(0.162)<br>[0.971]                             | -0.069<br>(0.159)<br>[0.933] | -0.205<br>(0.153)<br>[0.815]       | -0.096<br>(0.153)<br>[0.909]       | -0.063<br>(0.174)<br>[0.939]      |

Note: Figures are coefficients derived from logit regression on the dependent variable indicated. Figures in parentheses represent the standard errors associated with these coefficients. Figures in brackets are the odds ratios associated with these coefficients. \* =  $p < .05$ , \*\* =  $p < .01$ , \*\*\* =  $p < .001$

Nearly all the remaining characteristics were unrelated to any of the outcomes of interest. One clear exception was that participants having a driver's license were between two and three times as likely to complete the program, earn their GED or high school diploma, to obtain any placement, and obtain unsubsidized employment as were those who did not have a driver's license. While this finding is a logical one, it points out that a license may have important value for participants' outcomes at this stage, though this finding may also reflect the fact that

participants who have more motivation may be both more likely to obtain their license and to obtain positive outcomes.

Finally, participants who had ever been in an adult correctional facility prior to enrolling in YouthBuild, and those who were incarcerated at enrollment, were more likely to re-offend as were those without these characteristics. While the underlying reasons for this are unclear, it does suggest that spending time in such facilities does not serve as a deterrent to future legal involvement, at least among the young offenders served by the DOL grant.

### **Services Received During Program Participation**

The one aspect of the program that is undoubtedly within the control of grantees, however, is the specific set of services that are provided to participants. To examine whether these services are related to the outcomes of interest, another set of models was estimated. For these estimations, the contextual and participant characteristics variables described above were used as control variables, such that they were held constant while estimating the independent contribution of each service variable. Ideally, each type of service, including educational, vocational, community service, leadership opportunities, life skills training, health, mental health, substance abuse, counseling, and others would be included in these models, as would the total number of hours or hours spent in each service. Doing so would provide an estimate of whether each specific type of service was related to the outcomes of interest. Unfortunately, as described above, such specificity is impossible within the administrative data available for this evaluation, because they are not recorded or reported at this level of detail. As a result, there are far fewer service-level variables that can be included in regression models. The two primary service variables that are available are whether the participant received aftercare services and health services. In addition, indicators were used to identify whether the participant had a GED or high school diploma by the time s/he left the program and whether the participant received any certifications while in the program. Results for the models that include these variables are displayed in Exhibit XI-11.

As can be seen in this exhibit, having a GED or high school diploma by the time one completes the program is positively related to several of the outcomes of interest. Specifically, participants who had earned their GED or high school diploma were more than four times as likely to complete the program, and were two and a half times as likely to be placed as those who had not

earned this important document. Similarly, those who earned certifications were more likely to complete the program and obtain a placement than were those who did not earn a certification.<sup>11</sup>

**Exhibit XI-11: Relationship between Services and Outcomes**

| <b>Characteristics</b>                                     | <b>Retention</b>               | <b>Earned GED or High School Diploma</b> | <b>Earned Certification(s)</b> | <b>Overall Placement</b>       | <b>Unsubsidized Employment</b> | <b>Did Not Re-Offend</b>        |
|--|--------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <b>Entered with or earned a GED or High School Diploma</b> | 1.438***<br>(0.193)<br>[4.212] | n/a                                      | n/a                            | 0.914***<br>(0.161)<br>[2.493] | 0.282<br>(0.148)<br>[1.326]    | -0.241<br>(0.168)<br>[0.786]    |
| <b>Received Certification(s)</b>                           | 1.085***<br>(0.179)<br>[2.959] | n/a                                      | n/a                            | 0.359*<br>(0.159)<br>[1.432]   | 0.177<br>(0.150)<br>[1.194]    | 0.227<br>(0.170)<br>[1.255]     |
| <b>Received Aftercare Services</b>                         | 0.084<br>(0.198)<br>[1.088]    | 0.246<br>(0.1810)<br>[1.279]             | -0.428*<br>(0.181)<br>[0.652]  | 0.275<br>(0.172)<br>[1.316]    | 0.095<br>(0.159)<br>[1.194]    | -0.721***<br>(0.183)<br>[0.486] |
| <b>Received Health Services</b>                            | 0.154<br>(0.187)<br>[1.166]    | 0.013<br>(0.172)<br>[1.013]              | 0.691***<br>(0.171)<br>[1.995] | -0.049<br>(0.164)<br>[0.952]   | 0.050<br>(0.153)<br>[1.051]    | 0.231<br>(0.175)<br>[1.260]     |

Note: Figures are coefficients derived from logit regression on the dependent variable indicated. Figures in parentheses represent the standard errors associated with these coefficients. Figures in brackets are the odds ratios associated with these coefficients. \* =  $p < .05$ , \*\* =  $p < .01$ , \*\*\* =  $p < .001$ . n/a = Not applicable

The receipt of aftercare services was negatively related to two of the outcomes in these analyses. For example, participants who received aftercare services were less likely to earn a certificate while in YouthBuild. These participants also were more likely to re-offend than those who did not receive aftercare services. While this latter result may seem counterintuitive, it is quite plausible that participants who were formally receiving aftercare services had committed more serious offenses prior to enrolling in YouthBuild (hence, they were required to receive aftercare services, which follow a period of incarceration). If this is true, then it is far less surprising that these youth would be more likely to re-offend subsequent to their YouthBuild enrollment. Alternatively, those receiving aftercare services are generally more closely monitored than those who do not receive such services. Heightened monitoring may well lead to a higher percentage of

<sup>11</sup> Although “certifications” are generally unspecified, it seems apparent that some grantees record an individual who obtains her GED or high school diploma as both achieving this specific document as well as earning a certification. Given this overlap, neither of the two variables were included in the models using certification or GED/diploma as dependent measures.



participants receiving aftercare services being caught in technical violation of their parole, which would be included as a negative outcome. Hence, the full meaning of this finding is uncertain.

Finally, the receipt of health services was positively related to a single outcome – whether one received a certification. The exact reason for this result cannot be determined from the data, because the type of certification is unspecified. However, based on data collected through the site visits, some programs offer CPR certification to their participants, and classify this as a health service. Hence, it is likely that many of those participants receiving a health service did so by undergoing training in CPR techniques. Once this training was successfully completed, these participants would have received their certification.

### **Services Received Following Program Completion**

In addition to services provided while youth are formally enrolled in the program, many youth receive services from the grantees after they graduate from or otherwise leave YouthBuild. After leaving the program, the services youth received are specified more precisely such that a model could be estimated that identifies how a broad range of specific services are related to each outcome of interest. These models include the range of other variables described above, such that the results identify the unique relationship between youth receiving the specified service and obtaining the particular outcome, after controlling for the contextual variables and participant characteristics. Because these analyses are restricted to youth who have exited the program, no model was estimated using retention as a dependent measure. These results are displayed in Exhibit XI-12.

Despite the fact that relatively few youth received any of these specific services, so the statistical power of the estimates is restricted, several of these services do appear to be related to key outcomes. For example, participating in community service activities after completing the program is associated with higher likelihood of obtaining one's GED or high school diploma, perhaps because those who achieved this successful outcome are more attached to the program and, hence, return to participate in activities after leaving it. In contrast, participating in community service activities is associated with a greater likelihood of re-offending. This seemingly puzzling result is likely explained by the fact that many youth who re-offend are then sentenced to participate in community service activities. Thus, participation in community service activities is likely not the cause, but rather a result of re-offending. Similar reasoning likely explains the negative relationship between receiving substance abuse services and re-offending: those who test positive for drugs are at once more likely to violate their parole (i.e., re-offend) and be asked to participate in substance abuse services.

### Exhibit XI-12: Relationship between Post-Program Service Receipt and Outcomes

| <b>Characteristics</b>                            | <b>Earned GED<br/>or High<br/>School<br/>Diploma</b> | <b>Earned<br/>Certifications</b> | <b>Overall<br/>Placement</b>   | <b>Unsubsidized<br/>Employment</b> | <b>Did Not<br/>Re-Offend</b>    |
|---|--|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <b>Basic and Remedial Education</b>               | -0.236<br>(0.261)<br>[0.790]                         | 0.300<br>(0.251)<br>[1.350]      | 0.066<br>(0.278)<br>[1.068]    | 0.048<br>(0.254)<br>[1.049]        | -0.326<br>(0.274)<br>[0.722]    |
| <b>Community Service</b>                          | 0.641*<br>(0.274)<br>[1.898]                         | 0.366<br>(0.251)<br>[1.443]      | 0.420<br>(0.315)<br>[1.522]    | -0.060<br>(0.261)<br>[0.942]       | -0.758**<br>(0.257)<br>[0.469]  |
| <b>GED Preparation</b>                            | -1.085***<br>(0.192)<br>[0.338]                      | -0.529**<br>(0.169)<br>[0.590]   | 0.539**<br>(0.193)<br>[1.715]  | 0.616***<br>(0.179)<br>[1.851]     | -0.235<br>(0.192)<br>[0.791]    |
| <b>Mentoring</b>                                  | -0.177<br>(0.191)<br>[0.837]                         | 0.321<br>(0.178)<br>[1.378]      | 1.483***<br>(0.232)<br>[4.406] | 1.286***<br>(0.196)<br>[3.618]     | 0.143<br>(0.205)<br>[1.154]     |
| <b>Substance Abuse Services</b>                   | -0.711<br>(0.396)<br>[0.491]                         | -0.273<br>(0.319)<br>[0.761]     | 0.041<br>(0.346)<br>[1.042]    | 0.136<br>(0.327)<br>[1.146]        | -1.440***<br>(0.324)<br>[0.237] |
| <b>Skills Training</b>                            | 0.148<br>(0.160)<br>[1.159]                          | -0.000<br>(0.149)<br>[1.000]     | 0.700***<br>(0.168)<br>[2.014] | 0.468**<br>(0.152)<br>[1.597]      | 0.109<br>(0.171)<br>[1.115]     |
| <b>Subsidized Work Experience / Internship</b>    | 0.476**<br>(0.174)<br>[1.609]                        | 0.299<br>(0.168)<br>[1.348]      | 0.461*<br>(0.199)<br>[1.586]   | 0.165<br>(0.174)<br>[1.179]        | 0.067<br>(0.193)<br>[1.070]     |
| <b>Other Job Preparation Classes / Activities</b> | 0.383*<br>(0.155)<br>[1.467]                         | 0.274<br>(0.146)<br>[1.315]      | 0.712***<br>(0.168)<br>[2.038] | 0.480**<br>(0.150)<br>[1.617]      | -0.251<br>(0.164)<br>[0.778]    |

Note: Figures are coefficients derived from logit regression on the dependent variable indicated. Figures in parentheses represent the standard errors associated with these coefficients. Figures in brackets are the odds ratios associated with these coefficients. \* =  $p < .05$ , \*\* =  $p < .01$ , \*\*\* =  $p < .001$ .

Receiving GED preparatory training following completion of the program is negatively associated with having obtained a GED and with obtaining a certification. This relationship is straightforward; those who obtain their GED (which often may also be counted as a certification, as described above) would not need to continue receiving preparatory services for this certificate after completing the program. Thus, only those who are without a GED would continue to participate in these services. Interestingly, participating in GED training after completion of the program is associated with better placement outcomes overall, as well as better placement into unsubsidized employment. While the exact explanation for this is unclear, it is feasible that attachment to the program post-completion, and striving to achieve important outcomes, is an important predictor of obtaining placements.

Three other variables are associated with better placement outcomes. Two of these – participating in skills training and other job preparation activities – are straightforward. In addition to these, however, receiving mentoring after completing the program is associated with better placement outcomes. This intriguing result suggests that programs that can provide such opportunities may improve their participants' chances for obtaining placements (though, of course, having a placement may increase one's attachment to the program and, hence, the likelihood of receiving mentoring).

## **Grantee Characteristics**

The final models examined the relationships between an array of grantee characteristics that were captured and coded as part of the site visits. These characteristics were described above, and include aspects such as the type of organization and structure of the grantee, staff size, budget, recruitment and enrollment characteristics, youth leadership and community service, and vocational training characteristics. Primarily, the information to create these variables was collected during the site visits, and each relies on factual information obtained from respondents, such as whether the site has an active Youth Policy Council. Capturing this information and coding it for quantitative analysis provides a means for including potentially critical grantee-level information that is not captured as part of the MIS to be included in the analysis of outcomes, yielding a much richer understanding of what variations in grantee characteristics are associated with better or worse youth outcomes.

The models described in this section include an array of these grantee-level characteristics, in addition to the key contextual variables and participant characteristics discussed above. Not all of the models include each of the grantee-level characteristics, primarily because including all of these as variables would have yielded a model that had very few degrees of freedom and, thus, was an unstable estimation. Instead of including all variables in each model, then, variables were included based on two factors. First, variables that were seemingly associated with a given outcome, based on the qualitative information, were included in the model for that outcome. Second, initial logit analyses that included groupings of variables as independent measures suggested that certain variables were more likely to be associated with the outcome of interest. From these two criteria, final models were estimated with the intent of including only approximately ten variables in each model. Results for these analyses are displayed in Exhibit XI-13.

As can be seen in this exhibit, after controlling for the local unemployment rate, whether a grantee was urban or rural, and several participant characteristics, most of the grantee-level characteristics do not appear to be related to the key outcomes achieved by participants. This

is perhaps unsurprising, given that only 33 grantees were included in the analysis. Hence, although there are more than 1,000 participants in the analyses, there are only 33 values for the grantee-level characteristics, which necessarily limits the variation within the data. Despite this limitation, however, there are some characteristics that are associated with specific outcomes.

For example, grantees located in urban areas had higher rates of placement into unsubsidized employment than did those in rural areas. Additionally, grantees with lower participant-to-classroom teacher ratios had higher rates of employment. Further, those grantees that had active Youth Policy Councils tended to have higher rates of employment among their participants. Youth in these grantees were more than three times as likely to obtain employment as were participants from grantees that did not have an active Youth Policy Council. It is quite plausible that this reflects a general difference in quality between programs – higher quality programs with active youth involvement tended to have active Youth Policy Councils, while those without such councils tended to inspire less loyalty and commitment from enrolled youth.

Finally, two characteristics of vocational training were related to the likelihood of participants obtaining employment. First, participants of grantees that owned and/or managed their own worksites were more likely to find employment than their counterparts in programs that did not have this structure. As discussed in Chapter V, this aspect of YouthBuild programs seems a critical one, and the relationship between it and employment outcomes underscores the importance of owning or at least managing the worksites at which participants receive their training.

Similarly, participants in sites in which the vocational instruction was linked in some way to the academic instruction they received tended to have higher rates of employment. This issue, too, was highlighted in Chapter V, as participants tended to be more engaged and interested in their training when vocational and academic training overlapped in some way. This result suggests that potential benefits of this approach extend beyond keeping participants interested while in the program; they also may improve participants' chances of obtaining employment.

Nearly all the same variables were also related to whether one obtained either an educational or employment placement. For this variable, too, lower participant-to-classroom teacher ratios, having an active Youth Policy Council, owning or managing the worksites at which participants receive instruction, and linking vocational and academic instruction were each associated with higher rates of placement among participants.

**Exhibit XI-13: Relationship between Grantee Characteristics and Outcomes**

| <b>Characteristics</b>                | <b>Retention</b>               | <b>Earned HS/GED</b>           | <b>Placement</b>             | <b>Unsubsidized Employment</b> | <b>Did not Re-Offend</b>       |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Unemployment Rate</b>              | 0.211<br>(0.200)<br>[1.235]    | 0.007<br>(0.314)<br>[1.007]    | 0.099<br>(0.260)<br>[1.104]  | .227<br>(0.257)<br>[1.255]     | 0.004<br>(0.102)<br>[1.004]    |
| <b>Urban</b>                          | 1.025<br>(0.825)<br>[2.788]    | -0.277<br>(1.157)<br>[0.758]   | 1.894<br>(1.082)<br>[6.647]  | 2.203*<br>(1.005)<br>[9.056]   | 0.432<br>(0.311)<br>[1.540]    |
| <b>Participant Characteristics</b>    |                                |                                |                              |                                |                                |
| Age                                   | -0.014<br>(0.047)<br>[0.986]   | 0.029<br>(0.051)<br>[1.029]    | -0.077<br>(0.048)<br>[0.926] | -0.047<br>(0.046)<br>[0.954]   | 0.024<br>(0.049)<br>[1.024]    |
| Female                                | 0.258<br>(0.270)<br>[1.294]    | 0.192<br>(0.287)<br>[1.211]    | -0.074<br>(0.279)<br>[0.929] | -0.333<br>(0.267)<br>[0.717]   | 0.423<br>(0.289)<br>[1.526]    |
| Black                                 | 0.138<br>(0.297)<br>[1.148]    | 0.431<br>(0.407)<br>[1.539]    | -0.276<br>(0.306)<br>[0.759] | -0.587*<br>(0.287)<br>[0.556]  | 0.132<br>(0.269)<br>[1.141]    |
| Latino                                | 0.016<br>(0.338)<br>[1.016]    | 0.061<br>(0.487)<br>[1.063]    | -0.393<br>(0.367)<br>[0.675] | -0.324<br>(0.342)<br>[0.723]   | 0.111<br>(0.293)<br>[1.117]    |
| Ever in Detention Facility            | n/a                            | n/a                            | n/a                          | n/a                            | -0.659**<br>(0.237)<br>[0.517] |
| <b>Organizational Characteristics</b> |                                |                                |                              |                                |                                |
| Charter School                        | n/a                            | 0.571**<br>(0.212)<br>[1.771]  | n/a                          | n/a                            | n/a                            |
| Independent Entity                    | n/a                            | -0.711**<br>(0.232)<br>[0.491] | n/a                          | n/a                            | n/a                            |
| Participant to Staff Member Ratio     | -0.320*<br>(0.160)<br>[0.726]  | -0.088*<br>(0.182)<br>[0.916]  | 0.207<br>(0.189)<br>[1.230]  | -0.015<br>(0.179)<br>[0.985]   | 0.012<br>(0.094)<br>[1.012]    |
| <b>Recruitment/Enrollment</b>         |                                |                                |                              |                                |                                |
| Number Enrolled                       | 0.002<br>(0.010)<br>[1.002]    | n/a                            | n/a                          | n/a                            | -0.014<br>(0.015)<br>[0.986]   |
| Drug Test Before Enrollment           | -1.041**<br>(0.356)<br>[0.353] | n/a                            | 0.651<br>(0.439)<br>[1.917]  | 0.251<br>(0.421)<br>[1.285]    | -0.088<br>(0.228)<br>[0.916]   |
| Basic Skills Test before Enrollment   | -1.293<br>(0.765)<br>[0.274]   | 0.423<br>(0.938)<br>[1.526]    | n/a                          | n/a                            | n/a                            |
| MTO Duration                          | 0.196<br>(0.158)<br>[1.217]    | n/a                            | n/a                          | n/a                            | n/a                            |

| <b>Characteristics</b>                                    | <b>Retention</b>             | <b>Earned HS/GED</b>          | <b>Placement</b>              | <b>Unsubsidized Employment</b> | <b>Did not Re-Offend</b>      |
|---|------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| MTO Paid  | n/a                          | n/a                           | -1.068<br>(0.744)<br>[0.344]  | n/a                            | n/a                           |
| <b>Educational Service Characteristics</b>                |                              |                               |                               |                                |                               |
| GED Curriculum Offered                                    | n/a                          | -0.583<br>(2.041)<br>[0.558]  | n/a                           | n/a                            | n/a                           |
| High School Diploma Class Offered                         | n/a                          | 0.148<br>(0.230)<br>[1.159]   | n/a                           | n/a                            | n/a                           |
| GED or Diploma Instruction Onsite                         | n/a                          | 0.872<br>(1.407)<br>[2.391]   | n/a                           | n/a                            | n/a                           |
| Participant to Teacher Ratio                              | 0.018<br>(0.015)<br>[1.018]  | -0.028*<br>(0.014)<br>[0.972] | -0.011<br>(0.065)<br>[0.989]  | -0.027*<br>(0.013)<br>[0.973]  | -0.017<br>(0.015)<br>[0.983]  |
| <b>Youth Leadership/Community Service Characteristics</b> |                              |                               |                               |                                |                               |
| Active Youth Policy Council                               | -0.276<br>(0.550)<br>[0.759] | n/a                           | 1.663**<br>(0.547)<br>[5.274] | 1.166*<br>(0.501)<br>[3.210]   | n/a                           |
| <b>Vocational Training Characteristics</b>                |                              |                               |                               |                                |                               |
| Offers Rehabilitation and New Construction                | n/a                          | n/a                           | n/a                           | n/a                            | 0.764**<br>(0.289)<br>[2.146] |
| YouthBuild Own and/or Manage Sites                        | -0.260<br>(0.328)<br>[0.771] | n/a                           | 1.848**<br>(0.715)<br>[6.346] | 0.785**<br>(0.242)<br>[2.193]  | n/a                           |
| Vocational Training Linked to Academic Instruction        | -0.165<br>(0.278)<br>[0.845] | -0.318<br>(0.290)<br>[0.898]  | 0.568*<br>(0.603)<br>[1.765]  | 1.379*<br>(0.578)<br>[3.969]   | 0.534<br>(0.332)<br>[1.705]   |
| Participants per Worksite Supervisor                      | 0.006<br>(0.033)<br>[1.006]  | n/a                           | n/a                           | -0.063<br>(0.042)<br>[0.939]   | n/a                           |

Note: Figures are coefficients derived from logit regression on the dependent variable indicated. Figures in parentheses represent the standard errors associated with these coefficients. Figures in brackets are the odds ratios associated with these coefficients. \* =  $p < .05$ , \*\* =  $p < .01$ , \*\*\* =  $p < .001$ . "N/A" indicates the variable was not included in the given model.

Fewer grantee-level characteristics were associated with retention, though for this outcome, a lower participant-to-staff ratio was clearly associated with better outcomes. Interestingly, testing youth for drugs prior to enrollment was associated with lower retention. This is likely due to the fact that grantees that do not test for drugs prior to enrollment tend also to have more lenient

policies about drug use while youth are enrolled, as described in Chapter VI. Specifically, in many such sites, if participants test positive for drugs, they are referred to substance abuse counseling, but are not expelled from the program. Hence, this result may suggest that sites with more flexible policies about whether participants who test positive for drugs are punished tend to have better retention rates among their youth offenders.<sup>12</sup>

In terms of high school or GED completion, a few key grantee characteristics are associated with better outcomes. For example, grantees that were charter schools tended to have higher rates of high school or GED completion. Interestingly, participants in sites that were independent entities, rather than part of a larger sponsoring agency, were less likely to obtain their high school diploma or GED. As noted in chapter II, these two variables overlap substantially, in that grantees that are charter schools tend to be part of a larger organization, which may help them to meet the array of participant educational needs.

As with the results of each of the other outcomes discussed in this section, participants in sites that had lower participant-to-staff ratios had better educational outcomes. Similarly, participants in sites with lower participant-to-classroom teacher ratios were also more likely to obtain their GED or high school diploma than those in sites with more participants per teacher.

Finally, the likelihood of participants recidivating also is related only to two grantee-level characteristics. First, and not surprising, is that participants who had ever been incarcerated at the time of enrollment are more likely to re-offend than those who have never been incarcerated. The second grantee-level variable associated with recidivism, however, is less clear. Participants of grantees that offer both rehabilitation of existing housing and new construction are less likely to recidivate than those in sites without this feature. It is unclear why this would be so, but is consistent with the finding in Chapter V that grantees that offer both types of opportunities to youth tend to be able to keep participants more engaged. Though this variable was unrelated to retention in initial estimations, the fact it is associated with lower recidivism suggests there may be some real benefit to offering both types of opportunities to youth offenders.

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<sup>12</sup> This finding is somewhat in contrast to results displayed in Exhibit XI-8, which show that nearly two-thirds of high performing grantees *do* drug test youth before enrolling them. This apparent discrepancy is due to the fact that grantees are characterized in Exhibit XI-8 as “high” performers based on a combination of all outcomes of interest. Hence, grantees that drug test before enrollment may generally observe somewhat better placement or recidivism outcomes (thereby causing them to be considered “high” performers in Exhibit XI-8) but have lower retention, as shown in the current exhibit.

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## **XII. CONCLUSION**

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This report provided a summary of the implementation and operation of the YouthBuild Youth Offender grants, and of the outcomes obtained by them and their participants. The report began with a description of the grantees' organizational characteristics, including their budget and staff sizes, organizational maturity, the intensity of the partnerships that they formed to enhance their work with youth offenders, and their fidelity to the YouthBuild model. Subsequent chapters examined grantees' recruitment and enrollment procedures, educational and vocational services, and case management, retention, and follow-up supports. The report also summarized participants' and program outcomes to examine how the youth offender grant may influence participants' educational, workforce, and recidivism outcomes. This final chapter summarizes the key findings from each of the preceding chapters, identifies the most difficult challenges faced by grantees, and discusses the lessons grantees learned in implementing the Youth Offender grant.

### **Overview of Grantees' Organizational Structure**

The Youth Offender grantees are very diverse, with organizational features, experience, and resources that vary widely among them. In many cases, grantees were able to draw on their previous experience serving youth offenders and organizational resources to enhance services, expand opportunities for youth, or provide additional administrative support to their programs. Grantees also varied in their organizational maturity—most are well established in their communities and have stable staff and leadership. Many grantees reached out to partners to play active roles in educational, vocational and job readiness training and to provide supportive services. Overall, grantees developed strong partnerships with juvenile justice, education, construction, and workforce development agencies. Grantees' ability to successfully link with partners depended on a variety of factors, including their program design, organizational maturity, and financial resources. In general, grantees with ample staffing and resources were able to dedicate time and energy to link with a range of partners because they had an infrastructure in place to facilitate such partnerships. As a strategy, most grantees focused on specific types of partners, rather than partners across a wide range of areas so that they could use

their resources wisely. Despite this, the strength and intensity of the partnerships were generally unrelated to educational, workforce, or juvenile justice outcomes achieved by youth offenders.

All grantees followed the YouthBuild model to varying degrees of intensity. This model provides a mix of education, construction-related training, counseling, leadership development, and community service to low-income, out-of-school youth ages 16-24. A central part of the model is that youth participate in construction training to renovate or construct housing for low-income or homeless individuals. While most grantees strive to provide these services consistently within their programs, some are unable to provide them at the same level of depth and intensity as others.

## **Recruitment/Assessment/Enrollment**

Grantees rely on a wide range of methods to recruit, assess, and enroll youth. Their approaches are influenced by a number of factors, including funding levels, the number of slots available, and the design of the program. The majority of programs have developed highly selective screening procedures to ensure that they identify the most committed and dedicated youth. These procedures include drug screening, basic skills testing, staff interviews, staff observations, and in some sites, a skills proficiency test (reading, writing, safety procedures) before youth are enrolled in the program. Youth are also required to attend a Mental Toughness Orientation (MTO) to test their ability to thrive in a YouthBuild environment. In most cases, if youth do not perform well in MTO, they will drop out or else not be enrolled in the program. Staff noted that there are variety of reasons why they have developed rigorous procedures to screen youth, including the struggle to ensure good attendance, mitigate or control substance abuse, and address youth's personal problems that arise from non-supportive family environments. If youth miss school or do not show up at the worksite, it impedes the ability of work crews to do their job. Further, if youth do not attend school, there is no reimbursement through the educational system for those grantees that rely on funding from average daily attendance rates. For these and other reasons, grantees feel a strong need to be highly selective in whom they enroll.

Programs also assess youth while they are enrolled in the Mental Toughness Orientation (MTO). In general, MTO lasts from less than one week to more than four weeks. The average length of MTO is 2.7 weeks. The qualitative data show that despite this wide variation in the duration of MTO, there is little correlation with retention or program outcomes.

Lastly, many grantees modified their enrollment policy between the first and second round of visits in order to keep their programs full. During the first site visit, more than half of the programs enrolled youth once per year, in cohorts, so that youth could be exposed to a structured sequence of educational and construction activities. Because many participants dropped out in

the middle of the program year, grantees needed to replace them in order to meet their enrollment goals. Enrolling youth mid-program cycle appeared to have affected program climate in a few grantees, which noted that it was disruptive to other participants and that staff were required to tailor services to new youth.

## **Educational Services**

Participants' main educational challenges were both logistical and personal in nature. Entering participants were typically far behind in terms of their education level and credit attainment, and often suffered from low levels of self-esteem and confidence in their ability to learn, as well as from poor motivation levels in the classroom, short attention spans, and a tendency to give up easily. While all sites sought to strengthen the basic reading, writing and math skills of participants, the majority of sites stressed GED attainment as the end goal. Other sites—especially those sites served by charter schools—were more likely to emphasize a high school diploma and/or college preparation. Key reasons for stressing a GED over a HSD include a fundamental shortage of credits and time, as many participants simply had too few high school credits and too little time to spend in the YouthBuild program to reasonably expect to achieve a high school diploma.

YouthBuild sites also offered a range of postsecondary-oriented activities and supports, including college orientations, assistance with college and financial aid applications, tutoring from postsecondary institutions, special college prep and transition programs offered in conjunction with local postsecondary institutions. Those that offered more extensive postsecondary-oriented activities and supports represented a diverse mix of program models in terms of whether they offered a GED, HSD or both.

Interestingly, the most important characteristics of successful classroom teachers were unrelated to their professional experience or background. Instead, the most successful teachers were seen as those who had personal similarities with their students, took time to get to know and personally engage with participants, and stepped out of their “teacher role” to help participants address personal issues. Successful teachers had to show participants that they cared, and were worthy of their trust before youth could “get into their learning.”

Further, successful classroom instructors used a broad array of teaching methods and tools to effectively reach and consistently engage participants. Whole group/ “chalk and talk” instruction was used very sparingly, and mostly as an introduction. In addition to its particularly strong association with traditional schooling, whole group instruction was often not feasible with a group of students who might range anywhere from a second to eighth grade level in math or reading. A core teaching method at nearly all sites was independent work paired with individual

tutoring, which allowed teachers to tailor the general instructional concept or lesson at hand to the educational level and needs of each student. Additionally, peer teaching was held up as a model classroom practice with numerous benefits, because it ensured more one-on-one attention, built participants' confidence and leadership abilities, fostered positive peer relations, and kept the more advanced students in the class engaged.

Small classes, a favorable teacher-to-student ratio, and—as a result—an intense level of one-on-one attention, were arguably seen as the most critical classroom elements. These elements were essential for satisfying participants' need for individual acknowledgment and respect, keeping participants “on track,” and promoting effective classroom learning. Further, making the connection between classroom instruction and real-world issues was seen as a way to better engage participants. This connection was made through various methods, including choosing classroom subjects and course materials specifically relevant to the socioeconomic backgrounds of participants.

## **Vocational Training**

Youth Offender grantees provided a range of construction activities, focusing most heavily on building single-family homes, though many also offer participants opportunities to engage in the rehabilitation of multi-unit complexes as well. Nearly half the grantees also offer a range of other vocational activities, including computer technology and maintenance.

The opportunity to work on constructing a single family home was deeply valued by many participants. Uniformly, grantees agreed that construction of a single family home provided participants with the greatest range of opportunities to learn the trade and develop their skills, though even in instances in which participants were working on a single family home there were activities in which they could not engage, including most often electrical work, plumbing, and roofing. The advantages of working on a single family home were multiplied when grantees either owned or managed the sites on which participants worked. This allowed grantees better control of the sites, which enabled them to tailor vocational instruction and provide more detailed learning opportunities to participants, without the burden of needing to meet an external timeline for completion of the house or tasks on it. Fully half of all grantees both owned and managed the worksites at which their participants received training, and an additional ten percent at least managed the site, thereby providing better control of scheduling.

Combining opportunities to work on a single family home with rehabilitation work generally allowed grantees to ensure that there were always training activities and active worksites to which participants could be assigned. Having consistent opportunities tended to engage participants more, and prevented periods of slack time which both alienated participants and

caused consternation for instructors who needed to scramble to fill the down time. More than half of all the Youth Offender grantees offered participants both types of training. Additionally, while fewer than one in five grantees had only one available worksite at a time, nearly one-third offered two worksites at any given time, and nearly half had more than two sites active, which better allowed participants to remain on site and receive training.

Most grantees strive to maintain a low participant to teacher ratio, and there was an average of nearly three vocational instructors per grantee. The average participant to supervisor ratio across all grantees was 6.9 to 1, and nearly 20 percent of all grantees maintained a participant to instructor ratio of 4 to 1 or less. In some cases, grantees with higher ratios will use graduate students or other youth leaders in order to provide some additional supervision.

Grantees developed a wide range of partnerships, including those with agencies providing houses or housing sites, such as local Housing Authorities or Habitat for Humanity, and those forged with employers and unions. Approximately two-thirds of the Youth Offender grantees developed partnerships with agencies that provided worksites for participant training. Although some sites have found it difficult to develop partnerships with unions, those that have done so report great benefit in having done so.

There is substantial variation in the quality of the training opportunities participants receive. Generally speaking, grantees that provide participants with opportunities to earn certifications in the construction industry appear to provide more consistent and high-quality training than those that do not. Slightly more than 80 percent of the grantees offer training that is based on the NCCER or other types of certification, though only approximately half of these grantees do so in a very formalized way. In addition to NCCER certification, nearly two-thirds of all grantees offer other types of certification, including in hazardous materials, workplace safety (OSHA), or in non-construction industries such as computer technology.

Nearly three-fourths of the Youth Offender grantees also link vocational instruction in some way to academic instruction, in an effort to keep participants engaged, supplement what they are learning in the classroom, and make the training more rigorous. There is variation in how formal this linkage is, however. A number of these grantees make the link only in a very informal way, by sometimes referring to what participants are learning in the classroom while explaining a vocational training activity (such as the use of fractions in measurement). Others are much more rigorous, and attempt to team-teach academic and vocational skills simultaneously to reinforce participants' learning and support both types of instruction.

Finally, even for the majority of participants who report not being interested in construction as a career, there are benefits from participating in the construction work. Primary among these

benefits are the job readiness skills that are imparted, such as learning the proper work ethic, the need for punctuality, and appropriate dress and behavior.

## **Case Management/Retention/Follow-Up**

Case management was seen as the glue that holds together all of YouthBuild’s components, and provides a critical source of emotional and practical support to participants. Grantees ranged in terms of the formality of their approach—with subsequent implications for the frequency, setting, and providers of case management. Two key advantages of a more laissez-faire approach were that participants were able to access case management services from whichever staff with whom they happened to feel most comfortable, and case management responsibilities—which were often quite intensive—were spread out more equitably across program staff. One key advantage of a more formal approach was that all participants (not just the more vocal ones) had designated opportunities to voice concerns and review their personal progress.

One key function of most case managers was to serve as a critical link to supportive service provision. Toward this end, case managers often relied on a range of partners in their parent agency and/or in their local communities. The most critical supportive service needs were substance abuse counseling, mental health services and housing. While some sites had basic on-site services to offer, many were challenged by the limited supply and/or prohibitive expense of securing services in these areas.

The primary challenge facing case managers was simply developing a close, trusting relationship with participants, many of whom were initially withdrawn or mistrustful. Developing effective relationships often meant case managers showing participants that they truly cared about their well-being in the way that a family member might—i.e., through a mixture of tough love and unconditional support. In general, participants greatly valued this family approach to case management, as it provided a caring adult relationship, as well as all types of logistical support necessary for them to succeed in the program.

While effective case management was cited as a primary factor affecting participant retention, another was simply participants’ personal level of readiness for change in their lives. Participants who did not stay at YouthBuild were often either overwhelmed by personal circumstances, such as ongoing mental health issues, or else were simply not quite ready to leave behind negative behaviors and associations. Participants who left YouthBuild were most likely to do so during orientation or mental toughness, but the end of the program year was also cited as a vulnerable time for participants as they looked ahead with trepidation to leaving YouthBuild for “the real world.” Overall, the retention rate for youth offenders across the sites included in

this study was 72.4 percent, though it was as high as 96.2 percent in some cases. One of the prime reasons some sites had relatively high retention rates was simply that participants there were very rarely asked to leave; instead they were asked to take “cooling off” periods before being welcomed back.

Grantees provide follow-up service to varying degrees of intensity. Many grantees classified follow-up services as merely a check-in with participants to obtain updates on their job/education status and determine if any additional services were needed. The effectiveness of follow-up services was challenged primarily by a highly transient youth population who often had disconnected phone numbers or simply failed to return staff calls. Grantees have developed a range of creative strategies to overcome these challenges, ranging from canvassing local neighborhoods to establishing alumni clubs.

## **Youth Leadership and Community Service**

The Youth Offender grantees provide a number of formal vehicles for participants to develop and practice youth leadership. These include the Youth Policy Council (YPC), formal roles for participants at the construction site and in the classroom, as well as leadership classes. Youth Offender grantees adopted these vehicles to varied degrees. The creation and promotion of formal youth leadership opportunities appeared to relate mostly to programmatic values and priorities. Despite this, grantees that provided substantial leadership opportunities were no better at achieving discrete outcomes, such as GED attainment (though grantees with active YPCs did have somewhat better outcomes than grantees without such YPCs), than those that provided few leadership opportunities. Participants in sites with ample leadership opportunities did report positive social outcomes such as increased confidence and enhanced communication skills.

In addition, most sites provided opportunities for participants to contribute to the well-being of their communities by participating in community service projects. Nearly half of sites offered intensive community service opportunities, requiring that youth participate in community service weekly. A few sites did not offer community service opportunities, mostly because they believed that work on low-income housing was sufficient to raise participants’ awareness about the importance of service. Participants were more positive about required community service when they had a role or a “voice” in what kinds of community service activities in which to engage.

## Characteristics of and External Factors Affecting Case Study Youth

Although youth offenders in this evaluation were diverse in their backgrounds and life experiences, a number of common themes and challenges among them emerged, including:

- **High transience.** Transience is common among the interviewed youth; 29 percent of these youth reported moving at least once within the past year, and 10 percent reported moving at least twice.
- **Compelling family incidents.** Many respondents lacked support from their family throughout their participation in YouthBuild due to issues relating to substance abuse, incarceration, and employment. Participants reported that family members experienced a range of challenges, such as health related issues, death, drug relapses, and incarceration.
- **Parenthood.** One-third of the case study youth reported being a parent and thus, making money to provide for their family is a driving force for many of them. Many of these participants were often tardy or absent from YouthBuild due to conflicting schedules or oversleeping due to fatigue from their work schedules.
- **Offense history.** Approximately 32 percent of case study respondents reported their offense history as being one barrier to obtaining employment. While many participants expressed feeling prepared when applying to jobs and attending interviews (e.g. resume, cover letter, interviewing skills) they felt that employers judged and discounted them because of their criminal background.
- **Gang affiliation.** Many participants enrolled in the Youth Offender grant are affiliated with gangs. Seventeen percent of case study youth reported they had been involved in a gang, though this is likely an underestimate given that some respondents denied that they were in a gang despite fairly clear actions and affiliations indicating they were.
- **Law enforcement climate.** Forty-one percent of the respondents reported having some contact with the police within the last year. Some participants expressed that they felt harassed by the police due to racial profiling, suspected gang affiliation, and/or involvement in drug-related activities.
- **Drugs.** Forty-five percent of the case study respondents reported having been convicted of a drug-related offense.

## Case Study Youth Outcomes: Growth and Development in YouthBuild

A model of growth and development was developed to examine participants' developmental shifts between the first and second interviews. This model assumes that participants move through four distinct stages while they are in YouthBuild—from learning to trust, to learning to be productive, taking on a new identity, and finally making the transition successfully out of YouthBuild. A number of contextual factors can affect participants' transition from one stage to



the next, including a sense of safety that is fostered by staff and youth's personal readiness and willingness to change. Participants showed notable shifts from the first stage (learning to trust) to subsequent stages. Nearly half of the case study youth showed signs that they were taking on a new identity and nearly a quarter made a successful transition out of YouthBuild.

In addition, participants spoke about learning to ask for help, abiding by program rules, forming positive relationships with staff and peers, learning teamwork and effective communication skills, paying attention to punctuality and attendance, shifting attitudes about drug use and the illegal economy, and shifting friendship groups.

Two-thirds of the case study youth that graduated from the program were not in engaged in *full-time* employment or schooling, though a higher percentage was employed part-time or enrolled in some classes, as described below. Some had learned a considerable amount about how to be productive, but had not earned their GED or diploma and were looking for a setting in which they could achieve that goal. Others left the program with an invigorated sense of confidence and identity but without a job or a clear plan for how they were going to achieve their goals. Thus, it is important that YouthBuild programs be able to link such youth to programs, activities, resources, and supports that will help them to keep moving in a positive direction.

Thirty-two percent of the case study youth indicated that they were taking community college classes after graduating from YouthBuild. Nearly half of these youth began community college classes while still enrolled in the YouthBuild program. Common programs included Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC), mechanics or diesel mechanics, and electrical trade programs.

At the time of the second interview, approximately two-thirds (63 percent) of the interviewed youth were employed, though as described above most did not have full-time employment. The wage of employed respondents ranged from less than \$6 to \$30 per hour, with an average of \$10 and a median of \$8.50 per hour. Respondents were working in various trades, including union jobs and other construction-related jobs, retail, customer service, and labor oriented jobs. At least ten graduates were working as construction crew leaders at YouthBuild.

Finally, construction-trade experience appears to have the most immediate influence on post-program wages. Case study youth who moved into construction related careers after graduating YouthBuild generally had higher post-program wages than those that did not. Similarly, case study youth that graduated from grantees that provided high-quality NCCER certified training or that were well connected with unions tended to earn more than their counterparts in grantees without these features.

## Program Outcomes

Quantitative data were obtained from the management information systems (MIS) used by Youth Offender grantees. These data included information on participant characteristics, services received, and outcomes, including educational, employment, and recidivism measures. Additionally, grantee-level data were collected as part of the site visits and were coded to be included in the quantitative analysis. These data included information on the size and organization of each grantee, recruitment and enrollment procedures, and educational, community service, leadership and vocational training activities. The quantitative data were summarized descriptively and included in multivariate analysis to examine how the various characteristics and services were related with key outcomes of interest.

The majority of youth offender participants is male (83.9 percent), at least age 18 (69.3 percent), and is either Black/African American or Hispanic/Latino (76.4 percent combined). Although a substantial majority was at least 18 at the time of their enrollment, nearly one-third were below this age. Fewer than a quarter (22.6 percent) of youth offender participants were receiving public assistance at the time of enrollment, though 34 percent lived in a household in which someone was on public assistance. More than one-third (36.1 percent) were in an intensive aftercare program at the time of enrollment, meaning that they were being released from a prison, jail, or juvenile detention facility. More than half (56.1 percent) had been in a juvenile detention center at some point in their lives, and 39 percent had been confined to an adult correctional facility at some point prior to their enrollment. Despite this, only three percent were actually incarcerated at enrollment.

Although data on the services provided to youth while in the program are not captured in a way that is readily amenable for use in quantitative analysis, some data are available. Nearly two-thirds of participants received health services, which include physical or dental exams, hygiene training, and training in CPR, among others. In addition, 45 percent of youth offender participants received intensive aftercare services in YouthBuild, presumably as part of a court-ordered parole for these youth. In addition to the activity information collected while participants are in the program, activities they participated in after exiting the program were recorded in the MIS. More than 80 percent of participants engaged in some kind of post-program activity, the most common of which was skills training (42.2 percent). Additionally, participants utilized other employment activities such as subsidized work experience or internships (24.7 percent) or other job preparation classes or activities (39.6 percent). After program exit, many youth offenders also continued to utilize GED preparation (22.9 percent) and mentoring (20.5 percent).

More than 68 percent of youth offender participants completed the program either by graduating or through early placement. Non-completers include early dropouts, those taking a leave of absence and not returning, and terminations from the program. While only nine percent of youth offenders entered the program with their GED or high school diploma, more than one-third (36.3 percent) of them obtained it after entering YouthBuild. In addition, 54 percent of youth offender participants obtained at least one certification after enrolling in the program (which could include the GED or high school diploma), with enrollees earning a mean of 1.56 certifications.

Additionally, nearly two-thirds of all youth offenders were placed in unsubsidized employment, an educational activity, or occupational training. Slightly more than half of all youth offender participants obtained unsubsidized employment after enrolling in YouthBuild. More than 10 percent of the youth offenders entered full-time post-secondary school, and an additional six percent entered long-term occupational training. Finally, the majority of youth offender participants (74.6 percent) did not re-offend or have their probation or parole revoked after entering YouthBuild. The remaining 25 percent had negative justice outcomes after enrolling, with 11 percent convicted of a crime, six percent having their probation or parole revoked, and eight percent being convicted of a crime *and* having their probation or parole revoked.

An index of grantee performance was developed that included each of the key outcomes of interest, and was used to separate grantees into high, medium, and low performers. Descriptive data suggest that a greater percentage of low performing grantees are located in rural settings and in areas that have a higher mean unemployment rate than medium and high performing grantees. High performers include a larger percentage of grantees that are charter schools and that are independent entities, and tend to have a larger average budget than do medium or low performing grantees. Further, high performers have fewer participants per staff member, classroom teacher, and worksite supervisor than low performing grantees. Additionally, high performers have a larger average number of worksite staff than medium or low performing grantees. High performing grantees also appear more selective, as they recruit and enroll a larger number of youth, on average, but enroll a lower number of youth offenders than medium and low performers.

All high performing grantees offer their GED preparation or high school classes onsite compared to only 87 percent of medium performing grantees and 78 percent of low performers. Similarly, greater percentages of high performers offer vocational training in both new construction and rehabilitation, have construction partners that provide worksites and own and/or manage the construction sites. All of the high performing grantees link vocational training to academic instruction and all use NCCER or other materials leading to certification for construction curriculum, compared to smaller percentages of medium and low performers that do so.

Additionally, 88 percent of high performing grantees offer other types of certification, while only 69 percent of medium and 44 percent of low performing grantees do so.

Finally, multivariate analyses were conducted to examine how the various participant and grantee characteristics, as well as services, are related to the key outcomes of interest.

Grantees located in urban areas, and those with lower student-to-classroom teacher ratios, that had active Youth Policy Councils, that owned and/or managed their own worksites, and in which vocational instruction was linked to academic instruction, tended to have higher rates of employment among their youth offenders.

Grantees with lower student-to-staff ratio had better retention rates, but grantees that tested youth for drugs prior to enrollment had lower retention.

In terms of high school or GED completion, grantees that were charter schools tended to have higher rates of high school or GED completion, but grantees that were independent entities, rather than part of a larger sponsoring agency, had lower rates of high school diploma or GED attainment. Participants in sites that had lower student-to-staff and lower student-to-classroom teacher ratios had better educational outcomes.

Finally, participants who had ever been incarcerated at the time of enrollment are more likely to re-offend than participants who have never been incarcerated. Further, participants in sites that offer both rehabilitation of existing housing and new construction are less likely to recidivate than those in sites without this feature. It is unclear why this would be so, but is consistent with other findings in this report that grantees that offer both types of opportunities to participants tend to be able to keep youth more engaged.