



Unleashing the economic power of young adults

## A NETWORK OF YOUTH OPPORTUNITY CENTERS

(Across all five Boroughs)

### Background

Approximately one-third of the young adults who live in New York City's predominantly low-income communities, like Mott Haven and Ocean-Hill Brownsville, are out of school and out of work (172,000), or stuck in low wage jobs. Many more hold low-wage jobs with little opportunity for advancement to living wage employment (133,000). Together they constitute 35 Percent or 305,000 of the city's young adults aged 18 to 24.<sup>1</sup>

Those in the 18 communities with the highest numbers of OSOW youth face major obstacles to securing work that pays a living wage. Fewer than half have a high school diploma, and less than one-tenth of graduates are "college and career-ready." Additionally, about 100,000 young adults are presently impacted by the criminal justice system; many are among the New York City young adults who have criminal records for possession of small amounts of marijuana uncovered in "stop and frisk" operations. Misdemeanor and felony convictions have lifetime consequences with the respect to employability.

These young adults need help taking the next steps toward a better life: understanding the labor market and the fields that are hiring; finding out about certificates, licenses and education credentials that may be required to qualify for the work they want; and landing and holding a job while preparing for a career.

While hundreds of community-based organizations provide important, well-needed services to young people, the fact is that their collective capacity impacts a mere fraction of those young people who need such services. Although the City operates 17 Workforce1 Centers, 20 HRA Job Centers and five DOE Referral Centers for High School Alternatives, a closer look reveals that either they are not geared to serve young people, have a limited focus, or provide little or no career development assistance. None combine the education, career readiness preparation and work supports, and other services many young adults require in order to successfully attach to and remain in the labor force.

A network of Opportunity Centers would provide comprehensive and intensive services that help the 35 Percent to gain entry, advance in jobs and build careers. Centers would continue to provide services after placement, providing a valuable resource to employers and young adults, alike.

---

<sup>1</sup>According to the 2011 American Community Survey, 19.8 percent of New Yorkers aged 18 to 24 were out of school and out of work and another 15.2 percent were working at low-wage jobs.

## Program Design

### Goals and Outcomes

**Initiative Goal:** Recruit and connect young adults to services that enable them to acquire high school credentials, post-secondary certificates or degrees; enter pathways to career employment; and access a wide array of other support services, such as housing and health/wellness, under one roof.

**Outcome:** Help 20,000 OSOW young adults obtain paid employment, internships, or apprenticeships within the first five years of implementation.

**Outcome:** Move at least one-tenth of the 35 Percent (30,500) into self-sustaining employment or higher education within five years of implementation.

**Outcome:** Re-enroll 20 percent of recent dropouts (10,000 over five years) into a high school diploma-granting program. While Opportunity Centers would be open to all the 35 Percent, a priority will be to serve young people in the 18 communities who have left high school without earning a diploma or equivalency. Centers would affirmatively reach out to these young adults by collaborating with NYC Department of Education Pathways to Graduation, District 79.

**Outcome:** Connect 1,000 young adults with criminal justice histories to work and education or vocational training. Centers would affirmatively reach out to them by collaborating with the NYC Department of Juvenile Justice.

### Program Components

The program includes:

1. **Recruitment** of young adults who are not in school or employed in jobs leading to self-sustaining employment;
2. Matching young adults to **mentor-advocates** who guide them through a continuum of educational, training and work experiences leading to permanent jobs;
3. Robust **assessment of academic proficiency and work skills** and identification of barriers to employment and education;
4. **Career interest and readiness assessment** that identifies the talents and aspirations of participants and serves as the basis for a career plan;
5. **Educational counseling and re-engagement** in settings appropriate to age and educational attainment and in furtherance of career plans;
6. **Links to employment, internships and apprenticeships** to learn the skills necessary to hold a job and to gain career exposure;
7. **Partnerships with local employers;**
8. **Health and wellness referrals;**
9. **Management of social services-related issues;**
10. **Comprehensive outcomes reporting;** and
11. **Youth development/Life skills training.**

## Staffing

A typical center would provide services to approximately 2,000 persons per year with a staff of 17, some of whom would be out-stationed by City agencies:

- Educational Assessment (2 Full Time Employee (FTE)) - NYC Department of Education
- Mentor/Advocates (6 FTE)
- Outreach Coordinators (3 FTE)
- Corporate Recruiters/Job developers (3 FTE) – NYC Department of Small Business Services
- Data and reporting manager (1 FTE)
- Health & Wellness Coordinator (1/3 FTE)
- Youth Development/Life Skills Associate (1/2 FTE)
- Center Manager (1 FTE)
- Case Manager (1 FTE) -NYC Human Resources Administration

**Educational Assessment** - Planning would begin with an assessment of academic proficiency and a review of academic records by Department of Education (DOE) staff reassigned to Opportunity Centers from DOE Referral Centers for High School Alternatives.<sup>2</sup>

**Mentor/Advocates** - Participants would receive comprehensive case management services that continue as they progress through a continuum of educational, training and work experiences into permanent jobs. Mentor/Advocates would help them set and achieve educational goals, provide career advisement and work coaching, support them after they begin working, and act as an intermediary between participants and their employers, when necessary. The mentor/advocate would assist with personal or work-related problems that might interfere with job performance. The mentor/advocates would follow each participant through one year of service.

**Outreach Coordinators** –Identify, recruit and engage young adults, particularly those who have recently left school before graduating.

**Corporate Recruiters/Job developers** – Build strong partnerships with employers that create a pipeline for young adults to successfully connect to the job market and career pathways. Outreach to employers locally, through the one stops system, and otherwise, to identify jobs, internships, job shadowing, apprenticeships and other opportunities for young adults to gain work experience. Job Developers could be reassigned/loaned from the NYC Small Business Services Workforce1 Career Centers.

**Data and Reporting Manager** – Document and report on outcomes and progress of participants

**Health & Wellness Coordinator** – Help build the physical and mental health of participants and provide health and wellness referrals.

**Youth Development/Life Skills Associate** – Provide financial counseling, income services, life skills training and referrals to housing, healthcare and child care services, as needed.

---

<sup>2</sup> The federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) (20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99) protects the privacy of student education records. Under FERPA, schools may not release any information about a student's educational record other than to a "specified [school] official for audit or evaluation purposes." Because only DOE staff can access academic records, it is therefore essential that DOE staff be posted to Opportunity Centers to ensure that proper educational plans are created. Public school officials are posted to Los Angeles YouthSource centers for this reason.

**Human Resources Administration Case Manager** – Manage issues of clients who need or receive Temporary Aid to Needy Families or other benefits.

**Center Manager** – Responsible for center management and staff facilitation.



## Location of Opportunity Centers

Opportunity Centers would ultimately be located in the 18 communities with the highest rates of out-of-school, out-of-work (OSOW) young adults, accounting for nearly 90,000 of the city's OSOW young adults and approximately 66,500 underemployed young adults. In addition to proximity to the young adults they serve, strategic location in communities of need should enable Opportunity Centers to build close relationships with neighborhood institutions such as health care facilities, day care centers, and businesses that could generate job-shadowing, internship and employment opportunities, as well as referrals.

Opportunity Centers would be phased in over five years. During the first two years of the roll-out development, nine Centers would be developed, with each center serving an area with an average population of about 20,000 OSOW young adults, as follows:

### **The Bronx (46,567 OSOW) – 2 Centers**

- South Bronx Center (24,500) – Mott Haven (CD 1), Hunts Point, Longwood (CD 2), Morrisania, Crotona (CD3), Highbridge, So. Concourse (CD 4), Fordham Univ. Heights (CD5), Belmont E. Tremont (CD6);
- North and East Bronx Center (22,000) – Kingsbridge Heights, Bedford (CD 7), Riverdale, Fieldston, (CD 8), Parkchester/ Soundview (9), Throgs Neck/ Co-op City (10), Morris Park/ Bronxdale (CD 11), Williamsburg/Baychester (12);

### **Brooklyn (62,000 OSOW) – 3 Centers**

- North Brooklyn Center (22,200) – Greenpoint, Williamsburg (CD 1), Brooklyn Heights, Boerum Hill, Fort Greene, Clinton Hill (CD 2), Bedford-Stuyvesant (CD 3), Bushwick (CD4), Carroll Gardens, Cobble Hill, Gowanus, Gowanus, Park Slope (CD 6), Prospect Heights, Crown Heights, Prospect-Lefferts Gardens (CD 8);
- South Brooklyn Center (20,700) – Sunset Park, Windsor Terrace (CD7), Bay Ridge(CD10 ), Bensonhurst (CD 11), Borough Park, Kensington, Ocean Parkway (CD 12), Coney Island, Brighton Beach (CD 13), Ditmas Park, Flatbush, Midwood (CD 14), Gravesend, Sheepshead Bay (CD 15);
- East Brooklyn (18,000) – Cypress Hills, East New York, Starrett City (CD 5), Ocean Hill, Brownsville (CD 16), E. Flatbush (CD 17), Flatlands, Canarsie (CD 18);

### **Manhattan (26,000 OSOW) – 1 Center**

- Young adults would be served by one center located in the northern part of the borough where most OSOW young adults are concentrated.

### **Queens (37,300 OSOW) – 2 Centers**

- Northern Queens Center (21,000) – Astoria (CD1), Long Island City, Woodside (CD 2), Jackson Heights, E. Elmhurst (CD 3), Elmhurst, Corona (CD 4), Ridgewood, Middle Village (CD 5), Rego Park, Forest Hills (CD 6), Flushing, Whitestone (CD 7), Kew Gardens, Fresh Meadows (CD 8), Bayside, Little Neck (CD11);
- Southern Queens Center (16,300) – Kew Gardens, Woodhaven (CD 9), Ozone Park, Howard Beach (CD 10), Jamaica, St. Albans (CD 12), Bellerose, Rosedale (CD 13), Rockaways (CD 14);

### **Staten Island (8,908 OSOW) -1 Center**

- Young adults would be served by one center located in the northern part of the borough where OSOW young adults are substantially concentrated.

## **Proposed location within existing City facilities**

Building on existing resources can minimize the “bricks and mortar” cost of this major new initiative, as well as better targeting existing resources to serve young adults. For this reason, JobsFirstNYC recommends locating Youth Opportunity Centers, where possible in existing locations under the auspices of the Department of Education, HRA, and Department of Small Business Services.

Five of the Youth Opportunity Centers could be placed in existing Department of Education Referral Centers for High School Alternatives facilities. These generously-sized Referral Centers located in each borough are staffed with guidance counselors and social workers that provide related services. They would be expanded into full service YOCs serving young adults up to age 24 by pooling resources from SBS, HRA, and through services delivered by CBO partners. In preliminary meetings, District 79 leadership indicated interest in expanding the services offered by Referral Centers and serve youth up to age 24, instead of up to age 21.

Additional centers could be located in re-purposed HRA Job Centers or Workforce1 Career Centers. Jobs Centers were developed when the City’s public assistance rolls were much higher and are likely to now have surplus space. And, as about one-quarter of the individuals served Workforce1 Career Centers are between the ages of 18 to 24, their diversion to specialized centers would not reduce the capacity of remaining centers to serve the 25 and over adult population.

### **Other potential sites**

YMCAs, settlement houses, public library branches and partnerships of other training providers that already provide young adults with adult literacy, computer literacy, HSE preparation, resume-writing and job interviewing services could also serve as sites for Opportunity Centers. Libraries might make particular sense for co-location: many branches already offer some of the services that Opportunity Centers would provide or to which they would refer young adults, including classes in adult literacy, computer literacy, HSE preparation, English, informal workshops on resume-writing and job interviewing.

## What Opportunity Centers look like

Opportunity Centers would comprise 2,000 to 3,000 square foot divided among a large meeting room, an open area with a bank of computers, a classroom, and a number of small private offices for private consultations.

## Management and Administration

The network of Youth Opportunity centers would be overseen by the Mayor's Office of Workforce Development, which would coordinate the involvement of agency partners such as the Human Resources Administration and Departments of Education, Small Business Services, Youth and Community Development, Juvenile Justice and Probation. All agencies it now closely works with to manage the city's almost \$486 million in public or publicly managed workforce funds. This office would also provide the necessary oversight, expertise and on-going support to build out of these centers. Potential models for the management and operations of individual Youth Opportunity Centers would depend in some part on whether they are sited within existing public facilities or within private space:

### In existing City facilities

If a Youth Opportunity Center is sited within a DOE, HRA or SBS facility, that agency would act as the lead and coordinate the provision of services to the target population by partnering either with an individual community-based organization, or with a partnership of organizations, drawing on their combined assets and employer connections. Contractors would be selected based on their records of success engaging young adults.

### In privately-owned space

If publicly-operated space is not available within a targeted community, then the City of New York would contract for the management and operation of Opportunity Centers by community-based organizations with records of success engaging young adults, in much the same way that Workforce1 Career Centers are run by providers with proven strength in connecting adults to employment. Property leasing costs would be reflected in the provider contract.

**Non-governmental Support and oversight for the Centers** – Support can also be secured from philanthropy for an experienced, non-governmental entity to provide continuing technical assistance, training, and other supportive knowledge to ensure the successful implementation of the center model.

Opportunity Centers would operate under a uniform set of guidelines under which all staff would be trained. All staff would be required to go through training to ensure that program implementation conforms to the model.

## Budget

A typical center serving a target area with a population of 20,000 OSOW young adults, as described above, will have a one-year budget of approximately \$1.2 million (see below). A one-year operating budget for nine centers is estimated at about \$11 million. As six or more staff members would be City agency employees, and many of the facilities would be located within existing City facilities, approximately one-third of the operating budget would be covered from existing appropriations and therefore not represent "new money."

A start-up budget to launch the initiative is estimated at \$700,000, reflecting program design, hiring and training of staff, furnishing of centers, and promotion and advertising expenses.

[See proposed budget on next page.](#)

## Potential Funding Sources

Potential funding for Youth Opportunity Centers may come from federal adult and youth Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act funding, Temporary Aid to Needy Families, Community Services Block Grant funding and program funding from the New York City Departments of Education and Probation.