

**The Challenge Of Creating A Developmental Approach To Youth Employment**  
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Young people attempting to enter the labor market are facing greater challenges today. Unemployment is rising and labor force participation for youth is dropping. Young Americans, especially poor youth are more likely to be unemployed or discouraged workers in the current economy. First hired, first fired means that young people are usually the first to be laid off in an economic down turn. For young people without a high school diploma and no work history, the chances of finding a job, any job, are slim.

As the challenges facing young people increase, the supports and opportunities for training and remedial education are being eroded by changes in Federal priorities and state and local budget deficits. The support for funding of youth programs for all youth has been eroded by changes in political leadership, changing government priorities and evaluations of youth programs that document their limited impact. Public investments in positive developmental activities for poor youth, ages 16-24, have been reduced significantly. We have increased funding in the juvenile and criminal justice systems for detention and incarceration; we have reduced funding for youth employment programs.

Youth Employment and Training has been federally funded since the War on Poverty in 1964 when the Economic Opportunity Act authorized and funded the Job Corps and Neighborhood Youth Corps (Summer Youth Employment). For almost 40 years, youth employment programs have been funded by the federal government and managed by states and localities. Services have been targeted to poor and unemployed youth. Some states have passed youth employment legislation to support additional funding and services to unemployed youth.

In 1980, the Youth Employment Demonstration Act (YEDPA) was by far the largest investment (\$ 6 billion in work experience programs and another \$2 billion for training programs including Job Corps in 1979) in youth employment programs. Job creation was the primary focus. The election of President Reagan resulted in the end of funding for both the youth and adult job creation. This ended the largest youth employment demonstration effort and was motivated by a change in the political will fueled by the perception that job creation was a poor investment.

Looking back at the YEDPA experience, the quality of the work experience would have been improved by incorporating more education and occupational training. Youth development principles and practices were rarely incorporated in workforce programs and they would have improved the impact on youth and they would have lead to longer term more effective programs.

Robert Taggart, the Administrator of the U.S. Dept of Labor's Youth Office summed up the YEDPA experience, in "The Fisherman's Guide: An Assessment of Training and Remediation Strategies":

1. Work and work experience alone do not improve labor market success
2. Training must be long enough in duration that youth can achieve measurable and certifiable competencies.
3. An employability plan must enable and youth to participate at their own pace depending on their motivation, interests and abilities.
4. The impact of programs must be measured for long-term gains rather than immediate job placement.
5. There should be an opportunity for all youth to participate, but resources are limited and should be invested in those who put forth the effort to benefit.
6. The economy must create more jobs.

Public support evaporated for youth employment programs in 1981. CETA was labeled a four-letter word and the Reagan Administration terminated CETA to eliminate public service jobs. The Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) replaced CETA and it required employer leadership, placement in unsubsidized jobs and performance contracts that paid providers for placing adults and some youth on jobs. Initially JTPA focused services on those with some work experience, more education and some skills. Funding was cut from \$10 billion in 1980 to \$3.6 billion in 1982 in a swift change of public support. JTPA was the result of a change in political will and a mandate to reduce public expenditures. Another impact of this change in funding priorities was to reduce the capacity of the employment and training service providers, especially service provided by community based organizations.

The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA), which followed the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) and Manpower Development and Training Act (MDTA) provides federal funding to states and localities to train low-income youth and adults for jobs. The funds are authorized and appropriated by the U.S. Congress and administered by the U.S Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration.

What was new in WIA?

1. Formula Grants to States and Localities were maintained, but funding for the year-round and summer youth titles became a single grant and gave states and localities the flexibility to use the funds as they saw fit. The WIA funds are allocated by formula to each of the states and trust territories and states allocate funds within the state by formula. Localities or consortia of counties and cities can come create a formal agreement to act together to deliver employment and training services. Federal regulations govern the process but states have the responsibility for managing the statewide system and providing services in communities that are not a part of local service delivery areas. The act outlines the following required elements that are long-term and comprehensive:
  - a. Education elements such as: dropout prevention, tutoring and alternative school services
  - b. Occupational skill training
  - c. Adult mentoring

- d. Guidance and counseling
  - e. Support services
  - f. Leadership development and community service
  - g. Paid and unpaid work experience
  - h. Follow-up services for not less than twelve months
2. Required state activities – 15% reserve funds
    - a. Develop criteria for selection of local youth service providers
    - b. Capacity building and leadership to encourage best practices
    - c. Local capacity building
    - d. Planning grants for system development
    - e. Encourage local jurisdictions to serve youth in juvenile justice system foster care or welfare.
  3. Established core outcomes for youth:
    - a. Ages 14-18
      - i. Attain basic skills
      - ii. High school diploma or GED
      - iii. Work readiness skills
      - iv. Placement and retention in post-secondary education, military service, employment or an apprenticeship
    - b. Ages 19- 21
      - i. Unsubsidized employment & retention on job for 6 months
      - ii. Attain recognized credential
      - iii. Education attainment – High School Diploma or GED
  4. Youth Councils are required as a sub-group of each Workforce Investment Board. The membership of the Youth Council is broad and includes representative of youth serving agencies, juvenile justice, public housing authorities, parents, former youth program participants and other experienced individuals. The Youth Council is responsible for planning youth services, oversight, recommending service providers and coordination of programs. The Youth Councils are an opportunity to engage the broad youth development community, schools and human services agencies in the planning and delivery of comprehensive youth employment programs under WIA.
  5. WIA Federally funded programs -
    - a. Job Corps is the nation's largest residential education and training program for low-income youth. There are 119 centers in 46 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. It trains 66,000 young people every year. It is a full-time, year-round residential program that offers comprehensive training, education and supportive services, including supervised dormitory housing, meals, medical care and counseling. The program provides occupational exploration; world of work and social skills training; and competency-based vocational and basic education. Participants must be between 16 and 24 years of age; be economically disadvantaged; be high school dropouts or in need of additional education

or training; not be on probation or parole; be free of serious medical or behavioral problems, and come from disruptive environments. Major corporations operate 89 Job Corps centers under contracts with the U.S. Department of Labor. Thirty centers, known as civilian conservation centers, are located on federal lands and are operated by the Departments of Agriculture and Interior.

- b. Youth Opportunity Grants (YOG) were awarded on 2000 by the Youth Office of the Employment and Training Administration to 36 communities (Enterprise Zones and Empowerment Communities) and Indian Reservations by competitive grant process. YOGS provide comprehensive services to all disadvantaged youth in the community for five years. In addition YOGS will provide placement services and follow-up services for two years. The funding for Youth Opportunity Grants is \$ 250 million per year and individual grants are between \$ 5 and 11 Million per year.

WIA was the first federal youth employment legislation that recognized the importance of incorporating positive youth development principles and practices in services to unemployed youth. It has only been in the last decade that Youth Employment Programs have embraced the principles of youth development and it is only a small number of programs that are able to develop developmental services, methodologies and systems. Most Youth employment and training programs are have more limited job placement approaches and less effective as a result.

The language of WIA encourages a comprehensive developmental approach, but few of the service providers have provided these services in the past. Most providers employed a diagnostic and deficit reduction model. The shift in approach was the focus of Youth Opportunity Grants. Some of the YOGs, have developed effective program services, many are still trying to implement a more developmental approach with limited success. They are challenged by the lack of knowledge, inexperienced staff and the higher costs of providing comprehensive long-term services. Effective programs cost more and require more time. The consequences of this are fewer youth will be served and the cost per outcome will be greater.

YouthBuild has been serving youth, employing a youth focused developmental approach, for more than 20 years and incorporates youth development principles and practices. YouthBuild was organized in East Harlem almost 25 years ago to unleash the positive energy of unemployed young adults to rebuild their communities and their own lives with a commitment to work, education, responsibility, and family. In a YouthBuild program, Unemployed young people, ages 16 to 24, build affordable housing for homeless and low-income families in their own communities. They split their time between the construction site and the classroom, where they earn their GED or high school diploma, learn to be community leaders, and prepare for jobs or college. There were more than 200 YouthBuild programs and in 2001, YouthBuild involved 6,000 young adults, placing. Sixty percent of students who complete the program, and 86 percent of graduates go on to college or jobs.

In 1992, the Congress authorized YouthBuild in the Hope for Youth Act of 1992. Last year, The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development awarded grants to YouthBuild Programs following a competitive grant application process. YouthBuild is an example of comprehensive long-term development program that serves the most disconnected youth. YouthBuild integrates basic education, skill training, on-the-job training, community service, work experience, group support, job placement and follow-up. Youth are treated with respect, provided an opportunity to develop as leaders, held to high standards of achievement, involved in service to their community given the opportunity to pursue achievable goals that enable them to sustain themselves and their family. YouthBuild proves the value of a comprehensive developmental approach and it costs \$20,000 per youth.

PEPNet, created and managed by the National Youth Employment Coalition (NYEC), is a system for identifying and promoting effective programs and practice in youth employment and development. NYEC organized a working group of practitioners, researchers and policy makers and develop criteria for effective programs in the following areas: Purpose and Activities, Organization and Management, Youth Development, Workforce Development, and Evidence of Success. Using the Criteria, PEPNet has collected information about youth employment/development practices that produce positive outcomes for youth.

PEPNet has documented the importance of incorporating positive youth development principles in youth employment programs and has begun a catalogue of these effective practices. Capacity building efforts can utilize the methods, techniques and materials of these effective practitioners in training and technical assistance efforts. Building capacity requires clear standards of effectiveness and PEPNet is the beginning to establish standards based on the experience of practitioners.

States, local governments, community-based organizations, schools, YouthBuild, Service Corps and Jobs Corps, manage PEPNet programs. They serve youth facing a broad range of challenges and they take different approaches to youth development and workforce development. Effective policies must promote and support effective practices rather than prescribe approaches. Principles must guide the policies, but practitioners must be able to see and learn from experienced successful practitioners. Effective programs are well managed and measure their impact on the young people that they serve. These programs develop naturally, have strong independent leadership and are able to raise funds. They incorporate youth development principles as they prepare youth for the workforce. Many also recognize that work can be a positive developmental activity with program support and encouragement.

Until recently, most youth employment programs were focused on fixing the problems of youth, utilizing a medical model or diagnosis and prescription. In the last ten years, youth employment programs have begun to see appreciate the value of taking a youth development approach to preparing youth for the workforce. More Workforce Development programs have adopted an approach that builds on the strengths of youth.

Youth Development agencies, serving younger youth and work is rarely a part of their program. Many youth agencies and schools view jobs as a competitor with little developmental value.

Youth Employment agencies are just beginning to utilize developmental methods of working with youth. There are only few examples of effective workforce development practices and these methodologies are being disseminated slowly through the workforce system. To build capacity, workforce development programs need to change and that requires strong leadership, adequate secure funding and well-trained staff.

The experience with Youth Opportunity Grants suggests that staff development and new materials methods and techniques will take time. The YOG legislation and grants require comprehensive services and incorporation of developmental approaches. Some of the Youth Opportunity Grantees have planned effective approaches that are preparing youth for employment, keeping them in school and helping them continue their education. Many of the YOGs are having a difficult time finding competent service providers and staff. It is taking longer to develop coordinated comprehensive approaches necessary for effective programs. The Youth office has provided funds for a training academy and to assign experienced coaches to provide technical assistance. Even with this support, many of the YOGs are struggling to change their methods of operation. Building capacity takes time, good management and a willingness to invest in the development of staff, methods and materials.

Most of the workforce development funding has come from the federal government and has targeted poor or at-risk youth for 40 years. Today these funds are being cut drastically in the President's budget. The School-to-Work Program was the first casualty. The proposed amendments to the Workforce Investment Act will eliminate all in school programs and replace the Youth Opportunity Grant with a new federal demonstration program that will focus more on education and training.

The constant changes in policy and diminishing resources, make it difficult for even the best youth development programs to survive. Often the loss of funds closes a program before we can ascertain its impact on youth. The changing rules make it impossible to maintain services to youth and often end programs abruptly. Rather than building on the assets of effective programs, we are about to eliminate programs as we change the rules and reduce funding.

If the deficit grows, and we go to war, the cuts will be even greater. State and local governments are also facing budget deficits and cutting essential services and are unlikely to provide additional funding, even for the best programs. The challenge of sustaining the modest improvements in youth employment/youth development programs that we have seen on the last few years is immense. Somehow, we must assure that the most effective programs continue. This will allow time to agree on a set of standards of effectiveness based on their experience. We can also document the methods, techniques and approaches of these programs in preparation for the day when funding will increase and we will have to increase the number of programs rapidly.

I have just returned from two years living and working in South Africa. For my last year in South Africa, I worked for the Umsobomvu Youth Fund (UYF). I was hired because the Chief Executive Officer of UYF read the PEPNet materials and wanted to learn from the United States experience. It gave me an opportunity to share our experiences with effective youth employment programs. It also gave me a chance to look at our youth policies and programs in the context of South Africa.

South Africa is a new democracy. The election of 1994 established a democratic government with progressive values and the daunting challenge of overcoming 34% unemployment rate (62% for youth). Youth are defined as 14 –35 in South Africa. South Africa has a National Youth Policy and a National Youth Commission is responsible for seeing that the policies are implemented. The Commissioners, five youth who are paid and supported by staff are charged with reviewing the budgets of each Ministry to assure that they are implementing the National Youth Policy. Young people are politically active in South Africa and they were an important force in overcoming Apartheid. They are respected and valued by South Africa.

In brief the National Youth Policy is based on a respect for individual rights, stewardship for the environment, promotion of traditional cultural values and respect for democratic principles. It supports the rights of all youth to education, freedom of association and jobs.

Progressive, comprehensive policy doesn't guarantee effective practices. Youth unemployment is high. Many youth cannot read or write in any of the 11 official languages. Few youth have any work experience and government resources are stretched then. The capacity of the government and non-governmental organizations is limited. They are being asked to provide services that were not in existence before 1994. They know what they want to do, but they have little or no experience doing it.

The Umsobomvu Youth Fund has resources, a mandate from the President and clear goals and objective. The challenge was to develop the capacity internally to manage the program and the organizational capacity in NGOs to manage the programs the UYF was going to fund. UYF recognized the need to build capacity. Pressures for government, NGOs, unemployed youth and the public demanded that UYF move quickly to fund programs.

Lack of experience, organizationally and professionally, limits effectiveness. Funding programs does not guarantee that they will do a good job. It takes time to develop effective NGOs and their staff. If South Africa or the United States want to implement new policies and practices that reflect best practices and utilize principles of youth development, they must invest in building effective institutions with Boards of directors and staff that have competencies to implement these programs

The Umsobomvu Youth Fund has created an Academy to develop the capacity of the practitioners who will operate its programs. This is a long-term effort and is critical to the success of their investments.

For all of our experience with youth employment programs, we too lack experience. Programs lack stable funding and staff turnover is very high. The rules and approaches to service change with federal law. In short, we have not learned much from our experience and as a result, the impact of these programs has been modest.

It is no accident that the three program models that have been documented as most effective in long-term evaluations are YouthBuild, Service and Conservation Corps and Job Corps. These models are supported by national networks, have managed to create relatively secure funding bases and they have clearly articulated approaches. This has allowed them to build on experience, develop methods and materials and to create a cadre of skilled committed staff. Effective programs are intentional. They are well managed and organized and focus on the development of the youth that they are serving. Policy needs to promote and support effective practices and that is easier said than done.