STATEMENT OF NEED: PREPARING COMPLEX NEEDS YOUTH FOR LONG-TERM LABOR MARKET PARTICIPATION AND SUCCESS

Connecting to the world of work is a challenge most youth overcome, often with just a little help. Unfortunately, 2.8 million youth in the juvenile justice, foster care and mental health systems are disconnected from the people and experiences that would otherwise help them make this important connection and develop the knowledge, skills, and abilities required for long-term labor market success.

Disconnected young people have lower rates of labor force participation and fewer opportunities to discover their own unique contribution to the world of work. YAP Advocates expose youth to specific career pathways, service opportunities and skill building opportunities. They also help youth “spark” their investments in education, skills training, and pursuing positive lifestyles by showing them how it relates to future economic self-sufficiency. Without these real-life sparks, most young people may say, “why bother.”

YAP’S WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT MODEL: DESIGNED FOR YOUNG ADULTS WITH COMPLEX NEEDS

YAP’s Workforce Development Model is developed on a Positive Youth Justice (PYJ) framework. YAPWORX combines experiential work learning experiences and service learning opportunities with cognitive-based strategies to prepare high-risk youth for successful labor market participation and growth. Through the use of the PYJ framework, YAP’s workforce model creates a rich, culturally competent workforce learning environment that intentionally connects home, community, and the labor force. It utilizes these assets to:

• Build youth and community access to labor market information and career opportunities.
• Provide authentic work-based learning opportunities to help enhance youth’s knowledge of various career pathways, behaviors, and skills needed for labor market participation and success.
• Work 1:1 with the youth and their family to remove barriers to long-term labor market participation and success.
• Foster long-term positive relationships between youth and Opportunity Advisors (de-facto career mentors) and elicits their support in helping youth learn about in-demand employment opportunities, find part-time work experiences, and engage in other developmental opportunities.
• Engage youth in meaningful service learning projects designed to spread the message about the importance of education and work.
While traditional workforce strategies focus on training, YAP’s approach focuses on helping youth become active participants in their own learning. Through a learning/doing approach, participants develop an increased sense of labor market attachment and belonging, a precursor for successful engagement and motivation, essential for workforce success.

TARGETED OUTCOMES
All workforce services are guided by the youth’s Individualized Future Economic Opportunity Plan (FEO) which measures and facilitates young people’s development in the following five FEO areas:

- Increased understanding and acquisition of growth industry-certified credentials.
- High school diploma/GED obtainment or enrollment in post-secondary education.
- Increased obtainment of work experience opportunities (part-time and full-time employment, job shadowing, internships, apprenticeships, etc.)
- Increased obtainment of work-related skills and behaviors.
- Increased connection to gainfully employed adults in industry-specific positions.

THE PLAYERS
The YAP Workforce Model consists of the following key players:

1) A trained, specialized Opportunity Advocate (paid work-readiness coach) who works with youth intensively, addressing their needs while also building their strengths, skills and positive connections to the world of work.
2) A local Opportunity Advisor (volunteer from the local labor market) who shares industry-specific labor market information with youth through the structured learning activities.
3) The YAP Advocate, a caring, culturally competent adult available 24/7, who helps youth and families meet their obligations to judges, probation officers and case managers, thus avoiding further penetration into the system.
### PROGRAM COMPONENTS

**IMMEDIATE INCOME**
YAP’s Workforce Development meets the youth needs for immediate income by engaging youth in paid service learning activities where youth explore key workforce concepts and share their findings with peers, family and community.

**REALISTIC WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PLANS**
YAP’s approach engages youth in bi-weekly “simple steps” to improve in key areas such as skills development, credential acquisitions, labor market connections, educational achievement and securing valuable work experience.

**CONNECTION TO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS AND EDUCATIONAL SUPPORTS**
Opportunity Advocates continuously assess and evaluate participants’ level of work/training readiness and facilitate referrals to appropriate developmental programs and supports including, but not limited to WIOA, One Stops, YouthBuild, National Guard Challenge Program, AmeriCorps, Conservation Corps, Year-Up, community college and/or continued educational and basic skills, pre-GED/GED supports.

**FAMILY ECONOMIC ENGAGEMENT**
The unemployment problem of youth is directly tied to the unemployment problems of adults. An economically productive family is crucial to young people’s health and well-being. YAP works with the family to identify pathways to financial stability and progress and supports them in the process.

**WORK READINESS**
YAP combines experiential work learning experiences and service learning opportunities with individualized, cognitive-based lesson plans to prepare high-risk youth for successful labor market participation and growth.

**ACCESS TO PAID DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE WORK EXPERIENCE OPPORTUNITIES**
To help youth achieve financial stability that can aid in keeping them safely away from the streets, YAP offers short-term subsidized employment opportunities to youth unable to find traditional employment on their own. These opportunities are tailored to their career interests, and YAP provides onsite support and coaching as needed.

**WORKPLACE RESOLUTION**
YAP provides support on the job when issues arise. YAP intervenes with employers and youth to resolve issues of pay, attendance, punctuality, performance and productivity. YAP works to help youth retain and advance in employment.

**DRUG USE**
YAP uses the evidence based Seven Challenges Program for young people struggling with consequences of drug and/or alcohol use. We assist the young person in looking at themselves, examining choices made, and exploring options to new ways of thinking and acting in order to meet their goals. Once such decisions are made, we provide the tools and support that ensures success.

**COURT FINES, FEES AND RESTITUTION**
Unpaid court fines and fees are a major barrier to young people’s long term future economic opportunity and a major cause of recidivism. YAP helps youth explore successful strategies used by their peers to meet financial court obligations and engages them in work-related activities to help them meet these court-assigned mandates.
A COST-EFFECTIVE ALTERNATIVE TO PLACEMENT THAT HELPS YOUTH THRIVE

According to a Justice Policy Institute report, states spent 7.1 million dollars a day to incarcerate youth in 2008 for a total of 5.7 billion annually and an average rate of $240/day or $87,600/year. This includes detention centers, state juvenile correctional facilities and private residential placements used by juvenile correction departments.

YAP operates effective, community based, family focused, intensive alternative programs to these placements at an average of $95/day, or 40% of the cost of out-of-home placement.

Atlantic City, NJ

Funded through the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the MERGE Program served 302 Atlantic County young men aged 14-24 that resided in high crime areas over a period of 3 years. The program brought community stakeholders together in a collaborative approach to meet the needs of these young men, providing access to a range of supports that they could access while in the program. The goal of the program was to improve their education and employment levels, and thus reduce substance abuse/use, gang involvement and violence.

A recent report by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation indicated that 89 of 145 youth obtained at least half-time employment; and 20 of 21 youth completed or made significant progress on their GED.

Youth Advocate Programs, Inc. (YAP) is nationally recognized nonprofit exclusively committed to the provision of community-based services as alternatives to out of home care through direct service, advocacy and policy change.

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