



YAP Work Programs: Serving Opportunity Youth

The Annie E. Casey Foundation’s recent report, *Youth and Work* highlighted the stark reality of the sharp decline in employment of youth and the social and economic challenges and importance of reconnecting youth. *Youth and Work* emphasized how critical early work experience is to long-term success, the need for a multi-faceted approach to reconnecting youth to work and/or school, the importance of self-management skills and job readiness and how youth voices can be key to driving policy.

In one way or another, YAP’s work programs reflect many of the recommended actions cited in *Youth and Work*. We address these challenges head on and purposefully plan to help a youth connect to community, work and school.

Highlighted below are four unique and innovative work programs that YAP has developed, localized to meet the needs of the communities they serve. Collectively, these programs reach over 500 opportunity youth between the ages of 14-24. Also noted is our “supported work” (subsidized work) program that is an important component to many of the wraparound advocacy programs we operate across the country for opportunity youth in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

Workforce Connections, Las Vegas, NV 109 Youth, Ages 18-21

The Workforce Connections program in Las Vegas is Workforce Investment Act Re-entry program funded by the local Workforce Investment Board. The program is designed to connect 109 system-involved young adults, ages 18-21 to work or school. The program is supported by a Program Director and two job coaches and is expected to achieve targeted outcomes of: 47% maintaining employment for three months plus one day; 47% earning a degree or certificate, and; 29% having a measurable improvement in numerical grade or literacy.

YAP Work Programs

Workforce Connections

Las Vegas, NV

MERGE

Atlantic City, NJ

YES

Orange County, NY

Goal 500

Philadelphia, PA

Supported Employment

Pennsylvania



The program design includes nine weeks of vocational training, participation in the evidence-based anger-management PATTS Program (Peaceful Alternatives to Tough Situations) and enrollment school or certificate-based training program. The program also includes some funding for supported work jobs where the young adults can earn an income while gaining job experience. To date, the program has placed participants in lifeguard training programs (up to 25) and has 20-25 people working in other placements in the community and nearly 50 young adults re-enrolled in high school or obtaining their GED.

*MERGE: Males Engaged in Reducing Recidivism through Gainful Employment, Atlantic City, NJ
100 youth per year, ages 14-24*

In Atlantic County NJ, youth and young adults are referred to YAP by the NJ Department of Youth and Family Services, Youth Services Commission and the Juvenile Justice Commission. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation funds the MERGE (Males Engaged in Reducing Violence through Gainful Employment) initiative which focuses on older participants, mostly fathers returning from prison or detention who have crippling criminal and juvenile histories that often serve as a significant barrier to employment. In the MERGE program, youth and young adults work with YAP Advocates and are provided life skills development, training and work experience that lead to a real job and a possible career.

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YAP established innovative partnerships with businesses, government agencies and service providers, like Atlantic County Community College, Harrah's Casino, Probation and health care and substance abuse providers, which contribute to the success of the initiative. The program design begins with participants attending the evidence-based PATTS Program. Upon successful completion, MERGE men are guaranteed acceptance to the Atlantic County Community College hospitality program. YAP's partnership with Harrah's Casino guarantees YAP participants who graduate from the hospitality and PATTS programs, an entry-level job at Harrah's Casino in Atlantic City. This entry-level job has great opportunity for upward mobility, job security, stable income and benefits and helps MERGE men access employment opportunities otherwise unavailable due to their records. In addition to Harrah's, YAP has partnerships with local restaurants and a landscaping business in Atlantic City. At any given time, YAP serves 25 men in its MERGE program, and places each young person in school or in work, depending on their individual interests.



*Youth Employment Services Program (YES), Orange County, NY
30-35 youth at any given time, ages 15-21*

The YES Program is a supported work program in partnership with Dave Jolly, Orange County Social Services Commissioner. The program serves between 30-35 youth at any given time in supported work positions for 700 hours / week. Most youth stay in the program from 3-9 months. The program also a coordinator to check in on job sites, do some group work with the youth and includes a VOICE¹ component. The VOICE component supplements the program by engaging the youth in outreach efforts to local businesses and to other youth to determine what the reasons are that youth are having a hard time finding work. They ask questions such as “what do you look for when you want to hire someone,” “what would make you not hire someone,” and to the youth, “what have your experiences been in looking for a job”? This component ensures that YAP's services are continually responding to the current needs of our youth, the businesses they work in, and the community at large. It also reflects YAP's commitment to not only help each youth, but to play a part in revitalizing the communities we serve.

YAP is committed to not only helping each youth, but to contributing to the revitalization of the communities we serve.

*Philly Goal 500, Philadelphia, PA
200 youth (Goal 500), ages 14-18*

Each year, YAP serves nearly 400 youth in our Philadelphia Advocacy Programs. The kids in these programs are either justice-involved or at-risk of being involved in the system. In an effort to further reduce recidivism, YAP Philadelphia instituted Philly Goal 500 to connect at least 500 youth from our Advocacy programs to jobs or school or other paths that reflect their interests. The youth in Philly Goal 500 range in age from 14-18 and must be a part of Philly Goal 500. This program is supported by one director, funded by Philadelphia Department of Human Services, Juvenile Justice Division. Philly Goal 500 was started to ensure that kids are connected and engaged in constructive plans post-discharge from YAP. To date, the program has partnerships and collaborations with over 50 businesses, schools and community organizations around Philadelphia.

Goal 500 ensures that kids are connected and engaged in constructive plans post-discharge from YAP.

¹ VOICE stands for Vocalize, Organize, Inform, Collaborate and Empower, and is an agency-wide initiative that involves youth, families and staff in contributing their experiences to systems change and leading the way to reform.



Supported Employment Waiver, Pennsylvania

No cap on enrollment, ages 21 and over

Supported Employment is a waiver service for adults with intellectual disabilities funded through Pennsylvania's Medicaid. The purpose of the program is to support individuals who, because of their disabilities, need additional support to find and maintain competitive jobs of their choice. YAP provides both direct and indirect services in a variety of community employment work sites based on the individual's strengths and interests. YAP approaches employers for minimum wage or higher job opportunities in work environments with co-workers who do not have disabilities. Job finding may include activities such as interview assistance, employer outreach and orientation, resume preparation, job searching, and preparation for job tasks. Job support may include activities such as participation in planning for employment, direct interaction with the employer, training and assistance in using transportation, and help develop the individual's talents, skills and interests.

YAP Supported Work - Nationwide

YAP operates over 100 community-based advocacy programs across the country to help system-involved youth and their families remain in their communities and intact as a family. Whenever possible, we build in "supported work" to our partnerships with government agencies. Supported work is a form of subsidized employment where YAP Advocates find the youth a job in his or her community that reflects the youth's interests. Instead of the employer paying the wages, YAP will pay the wages and our Advocates, trained in job coaching, will support the work placement, checking job sites, making sure the youth arrives on time, and properly fills out timesheets. Supported work helps youth get work experience, build a resume and earn an income that meets important economic needs. Youth can work up to 15 hours a week in a supported work placement and we have found that this component to our service delivery is very helpful to keeping youth invested in more positive outcomes for themselves and their communities.

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About YAP

Youth Advocate Programs, Inc. (YAP) is a nationally recognized nonprofit organization founded in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania in 1975. YAP has programs in over twenty counties throughout PA, and serves over 13,000 families a year in more than 100 programs across 21 states and the District of Columbia in rural, suburban and urban areas. Since our founding, 100% of our programming occurs in the home communities of the people we serve. Follow us on Twitter @YAPInc.

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