

Youth Opportunity Program EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OVERVIEW

The Youth Opportunity Program is an innovative, cost-effective, and replicable job training program for youth aged 17 ½ -19 leaving L.A. County's Probation system.

CHALLENGE

Issue No. 1: The average cost of youth incarceration in a L.A. County Probation camp is \$230,000 per year.

Issue No. 2: The California unemployment rate for the formerly incarcerated is 70-80%. Every year, approximately 2,200 youth are housed at L.A. County Probation camps. Over 40% of youth who exit Probation camp will be convicted of a new crime. Studies indicate that youth require immediate job training and a wide-array of supportive services upon re-entry into their communities to keep them from returning back to the juvenile justice system or entering the adult system (i.e. recidivism). The high costs of incarceration and high unemployment rate influenced several L.A. County departments to collaborate and develop the Youth Opportunity Program (YOP).

INNOVATIVE SOLUTION

In 2013, the County partnered with two community-based organizations to develop and launch the pilot YOP, which was designed as a cost-effective approach to improving the employment opportunities for high-risk youth leaving Probation camps. The program helps youth successfully transition back into their communities by providing them with case management, mental health support, job readiness training, a 1-year paid internship, and preparation to compete for a broad range of permanent entry-level positions. The YOP began with the County of Los Angeles Departments of Public Works, Probation, and Mental Health, and will soon expand to other County departments.

ORIGINALITY

The YOP is unique in terms of its administration and program design. In terms of administration, the YOP is managed and supported through a collaborative structure comprised of County and non-County organizations. Through its partnerships, the YOP leverages existing resources and

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expertise. While grant funds are utilized for the YOP, more than 70% of the program costs are funded through diverse and stable County funds. From a program structure perspective, the YOP is designed to assist youth make a seamless transition from Probation camp to a job or an education program. Its integrated program structure helps youth stay engaged and focused on career and education goals, while receiving the necessary social and mental health support.

COST EFFECTIVENESS

The direct cost of the three-year pilot phase was \$395,000, which served six youth (\$75,000 per youth). It is difficult to quantify an exact cost savings due to various unknown variables. However, with the average cost of housing youth in a L.A. County Probation camp at \$230,000 per year, and a high probability of recidivism without YOP intervention. The program has the potential of saving the County over \$150,000 per year, per youth in incarceration costs, and unknown quantities in unemployment cost avoidance.

RESULTS

The YOP has demonstrated great potential as a viable means of reducing recidivism, which ultimately reduces incarceration costs and the cost of unemployment. More importantly, the program has helped each YOP youth to achieve successful outcomes. At present, two pilot phase program graduates are enrolled in college, one youth is on course to becoming a permanent Public Works employee, and three youth are beginning their internships at Public Works. The YOP not only has the potential to serve as a model for L.A. County Probation youth, it also has the potential to be replicated in other California Counties.

PROJECT OR PROGRAM CONTACT

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OPTIONAL SUBMISSION

Attached is a testimonial from a Youth Opportunity Program participant.