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YOUTHBUILD CREATES OPPORTUNITY FOR YOUTH; LEADERS FOR COMMUNITIES

New study shows that YouthBuild model excels at empowering young people to become leaders

WASHINGTON – The national [YouthBuild](#) program has built a reputation as a valuable resource and second chance for young people who have left school without a diploma. Through YouthBuild, students rebuild their lives by earning a diploma or GED, learning construction skills while building affordable housing in their communities, securing good jobs, going on to postsecondary education, and taking care of themselves and their families. But a new study demonstrates that YouthBuild is also building tomorrow's leaders.

Pathways into Leadership: A Study of YouthBuild Graduates, shows that a significant number of YouthBuild graduates go on to become leaders in their careers and communities. Many of them hold public office or are church officials. More than one-third of the participants in alumni leadership programs who were surveyed for the study have become professional educators or youth workers. The report was shared during today's White House Summit on Community Solutions for Disconnected Youth. It was conducted by Tufts University's [Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement \(CIRCLE\)](#) – the nation's leading non-partisan, research center on the political and civic participation of young Americans. It was fully funded by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. ***The full report and executive summary are available [here](#).***

Six percent of the alumni who were involved in leadership activities and who took the survey now hold public office. Nineteen percent are church leaders, including serving as pastors. Thirty-seven percent are professional youth workers, and 90 percent say they help members of their own families. Previous research has shown that 70 percent of YouthBuild graduates have registered to vote, and nearly half have voted in one or more elections.

These findings are extraordinary because these alumni, mostly young people of color from low-income households, have emerged as civic leaders despite facing severe disadvantages. Almost all the alumni interviewed for the study had left high school without a diploma, some involuntarily. Many were victims of violence. One third of the alumni were parents when they began the YouthBuild program. Others were homeless. Some had been in gangs or convicted of crimes. Almost half expected that they would be dead by early adulthood.

Instead, with the help of YouthBuild's innovative leadership-development and community-service model, these young people's life trajectories have been forever changed. "This was an ambitious and rigorous

evaluation based on a survey, in-depth interviews with a diverse sample of 54 alumni, and observations of meetings and events,” said CIRCLE Director Peter Levine, “It demonstrates conclusively that a substantial cadre of highly disadvantaged young people have moved from very poor life prospects to exemplary civic leadership because of their participation in YouthBuild’s leadership-development programs.”

Dorothy Stoneman, YouthBuild USA founder and president says leadership development is a fundamental component of the YouthBuild model.

“We have high expectations for YouthBuild students. We invite them to step into leadership roles from the moment they walk in the door,” Stoneman says. “Profound respect for their potential is critical for their educational, emotional, and psychological development. We give students a voice and the tools to develop real leadership skills that are valuable in the workplace and in the broader community. YouthBuild teaches them how to be problem-solvers and critical thinkers.” YouthBuild provides leadership development by giving participants an opportunity to have a voice in policies affecting the program and by encouraging them to serve their communities. Hands-on job- and life-skills training, including participating and voting in meetings, writing letters, and giving speeches, prepares the young people for the world at large. As a result of having meaningful work experience, the young people think more systematically about larger political and social structures, develop pride, and know that they are making a contribution.

“Through YouthBuild, I was introduced to leadership,” says Mikey Caban, just named by the Merrimac Valley Boston magazine as one of 40 outstanding “under-forty up-and-coming movers and shakers.” As a result, I haven’t just been successful in my life. I am able to give back and encourage other young people, not just in my hometown, not just in my state, but across the nation, to be successful.”

The study was conducted by surveying a diverse sample of 344 YouthBuild alumni and compiling extensive interviews with 54 graduates. It demonstrates that YouthBuild has a profound effect in developing the leadership skills and civic engagement of young people. The graduates were selected for this particular study as a result of the interest they expressed in playing leadership roles during their time as students.

Building on the local YouthBuild programs’ 9-24 month comprehensive education, job training, and leadership program, YouthBuild USA, the national support center for local programs, enlists alumni in leadership initiatives. Active leadership development is sustained for a core of graduate leaders through their participation in one of YouthBuild USA’s councils. Some examples are:

- The national Young Leaders Council (YLC) -- a group of approximately 25 younger leaders, elected by their peers at the annual YouthBuild National Conference of Young Leaders. They serve three-year terms and provide YouthBuild USA with key feedback on policy questions and represent YouthBuild at national forums.
- The VOICES Council (Views On Improving Credential & Education Success) – a council of graduates who are in college or other post-secondary education venues. These student leaders inform YouthBuild USA about the supports and resources students need to successfully transition from a YouthBuild program to postsecondary education. VOICES members provide input on three key areas: academics, financial aid, and student support services.

- The National Speakers Bureau – a network of YouthBuild graduate leaders who advocate for YouthBuild and highlight their own issues, struggles, and concerns as well as their recommendations on how others can change their own lives. They speak at conferences, appear on panels, serve on policy forums, and present workshops.

Such opportunities help the youth develop a sense of being stakeholders in their communities, Stoneman says.

“These are the young people who are becoming leaders of our workplaces, neighborhood associations, churches and government,” she says. “And they got their start at YouthBuild.”

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About YouthBuild:

In YouthBuild programs, low-income young people ages 16-24 work full-time for 6-24 months toward their GEDs or high school diplomas while learning job skills by building affordable, increasingly green housing in their communities. Emphasis is placed on leadership development, community service, and the creation of a positive mini-community of adults and youth committed to each other’s success. Students may earn AmeriCorps education awards through their homebuilding and other community service. At exit, they are placed in college, jobs, or both and offered support toward expanding leadership roles.

Local YouthBuild programs in the United States are sponsored by local community- and faith-based organizations and public entities that raise funds from a variety of sources, with the primary federal funds administered by the US Department of Labor under an authorized federal line item created in 1992 with bi-partisan support led by Senator John Kerry and continued ever since. There are now 273 YouthBuild programs in 45 states, Washington, DC, and the Virgin Islands. Since 1994, 110,000 YouthBuild students have built 21,000 units of affordable, increasingly green, housing in their neighborhoods while working to fulfill their own educational goals.

About YouthBuild USA, Inc.:

YouthBuild USA is an international non-profit organization that orchestrates advocacy for public funding, guidance and quality assurance in program implementation, leadership opportunities for youth and staff, research to understand best practices, and targeted grants to YouthBuild USA affiliates. YouthBuild USA received the international Skoll Award for social entrepreneurship and has been named as one of America’s 12 best non-profits in the book “Forces for Good.” YouthBuild USA sponsors YouthBuild International, which is working with NGO’s and governments in 14 countries that have asked for help bringing YouthBuild to their countries. To learn more, visit www.youthbuild.org.

About CIRCLE:

CIRCLE is a nonpartisan, independent, academic research center that studies young people in politics and presents detailed data on young voters in all 50 states. CIRCLE was founded in 2001 with a generous gift from the Pew Charitable Trusts and is part of the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service at Tufts University. CIRCLE’s reputation for reliable, independent, timely research has been hailed by experts in the field of civic partnership, such as Harvard University professor Robert Putnam who said CIRCLE had brought “the best and most serious research to one place.” For more information, visit www.civicyouth.org.

About the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation:

The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation supports transformational ideas that promote quality journalism, advance media innovation, engage communities and foster the arts. The foundation believes that democracy thrives when people and communities are informed and engaged. For more, visit KnightFoundation.org.