PREPARING OUR YOUTH FOR WORK: A COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT
Outline

- Introduction
- Research Design
- Disconnected Youth Nationally and Locally
- Best Practices
- Key Findings and Recommendations
- Discussion
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Introduction

- Purpose of study
  - Assess need for youth workforce development services in Charlotte
  - Review Youth Job Connection program
Research Design

- Profile of youth in Mecklenburg County
- Youth services catalog
- Best practices
- Talked to over 350 people (community leaders, service providers, employers, school professionals, youth, parents, and Goodwill staff)
  - Online surveys
  - Focus groups
  - Interviews
Disconnected Youth: Framing the Problem

- Some youth fail to transition from adolescents to adults with meaningful careers and disconnect from society

- Disconnection hurts individuals and communities
  - Limits earnings potential and overall future prospects of individuals
  - Undercuts communities’ abilities to furnish a competitive workforce
  - Puts increasing stress on thinly-stretched public services

- Primary risk factors:
  - Dropping out of high school
  - Teen pregnancy and parenthood
  - Prolonged involvement in the criminal justice system
  - Placement in the foster care system
Defining Disconnected Youth

- Young people between the ages of 14 and 24 that fall into one or more of the following categories:
  - Youth not in school, not employed, and lacking a high school diploma
  - Youth in alternative schools
  - Adjudicated youth
  - Pregnant or parenting teens
  - Youth in or aging out of foster care
  - Homeless youth
  - Youth struggling with substance abuse
- Overarching all of these is poverty.
At-risk and Disconnected Youth in Charlotte

- At-risk youth populations in Mecklenburg County
  - 14,000 young adults (18-24) with no high school diploma as of 2008
  - 2,000 students dropped out of CMS in 2008-09 school year
  - 750 students in alternative schools in 2008-09 school year
  - 3,200 youth (14-24) are or have been involved with criminal justice system as of December 2009
  - 1,300 young women (15-19) and 2,100 unmarried women (20-24) gave birth in 2008
  - 455 youth (13-18) in foster care and 46 youth (18+) aged out in 2008-09 fiscal year
  - 3,000 CMS students (grades K-12) were homeless as of May 2010
At-risk and Disconnected Youth in Charlotte

- Where Charlotte’s disconnected youth are concentrated
Best Practices- Community Response to Disconnected Youth

- Pillars of Youth Development
  - Passionate Champions within Local Government
  - Effective Workforce Development Board
  - Network of Youth Employment Service Providers with Strong Private and Public Partnerships
  - Education Partners with Innovative Approaches
  - Engaging Social Services and Law Enforcement
  - Personal Development and Faith-Based Initiatives for Emotional Maturity
Best Practices - Youth Workforce Development Programs

- Youth Development Approach
- Youth Leading Youth
- Employer Partners
- Strong Community Presence and Outreach
- Professional Development Opportunities for Staff
- Long-term Support and Tracking of Participants
- Personal Intake and Placement
- Programs for Parents
Systemic Findings & Recommendations

- Collective, community-wide approach to addressing disconnected youth problem is needed in Charlotte
  - No agency or organization provides this coordinating service
  - Service providers and community leaders called for this approach
  - High-level discussion about this is occurring

- Goodwill can and should be one of the leaders in developing this approach
Systemic Findings & Recommendations

- Develop a significant work experience component for youth training programs
  - Most pressing need stated by every group
  - No existing program has met it
  - Will require
    - Significant cross-sector collaboration
    - Significant resources
    - Broadly defining work experience
Systemic Findings & Recommendations

- Develop a tracking system to gauge success
  - Tracking is only way to evaluate programs’ success
  - Failure to do this was second greatest shortcoming of existing programs
    - Some agencies are trying but none are as successful as they would like
  - Goal of contacting those who complete programs for two or three years
  - Will require
    - System-wide approach
    - Significant resources
Goodwill Findings & Recommendations

- Assessment of Youth Job Connection
  - Participants
    - At-risk (not disconnected), black, 14-16, and come from northwest, north, and northeast Charlotte
    - Main barriers to work: age and lack of experience, transportation, motivation
  - Program is needed and addresses important issues
    - Primary goal of most participants is to get a job in a year
  - Staff is universally acclaimed
  - Improvement needed in classes, location, marketing
Expand services for this population through 2 programs

- Young adult workforce development program
  - Serve 18-24 population
  - Expansion of existing adult program
  - Tailored to this population
  - Emphasizing soft skills, career exploration, and work experiences

- Youth dropout prevention and workforce development program
  - Serve 14-18 population
  - Consider partnership with Communities In Schools (CIS) and CMS
  - After-school program in middle and high schools
  - Emphasizing career exploration and soft skills
Goodwill Findings & Recommendations

- Assist in developing a case management approach for youth training programs
- Campaign to enhance Goodwill’s image among young people and increase marketing/public relations - emphasizing youth and adult services
- Decentralize service delivery
Conclusion

- Addressing the disconnected youth problem is critical to Charlotte’s future
- Goodwill can influence change by expanding its youth services and becoming a leader and coordinator for the community effort
- Questions?