

Generation Work Ethnographic Interviews

During the 2016 Generation Work planning year, Business Government Community Connections interviewed 32 young adults ages 18-29 on behalf of SkillUp Washington to garner recommendations for the type of training and support needed to connect them to jobs offering a decent wage and a potential for growth. A diverse group of interviews were conducted in four different venues: (1) a college campus on ramp to manufacturing program for juvenile justice-involved youth; (2) a food bank serving primarily refugee and immigrant families; (3) an airport jobs center; and (4) two large area malls, targeting homeless young adults who congregate nearby. The full report will be available at www.skillupwa.org by March 2017. This brief paper summarizes young adult recommendations for workforce development system partners in the Seattle-King County region

The most frequently mentioned recommendations of young people (in their words) about the services and supports they most need to successfully participate in training programs and later employment are presented below along with two more detailed excerpts from interviews.

Recruitment

- Be able to say why kids like the program, how fast their lives change because of it, and how employers support it.
- Be able to communicate to young adults how much they will earn and when they can begin earning a wage.

Advocacy Strategies

- Landlord advocacy for young adults who can't qualify for apartments, due to bad credit or a criminal justice background
- Childcare advocacy to help young parents identify appropriate childcare and access available subsidies and resources, including child support
- Help arranging for dependable childcare before entering an internship or other paid work experience.
- Assistance to identify affordable childcare.
- Help expunging records and negotiating traffic tickets.
- Coordination with drug court or other types of mandatory programs to ensure training expectations are aligned with mandatory requirements

Job Search Strategies

- Resume writing assistance and help completing online job applications.

Support Service Strategies

- Bus tickets and work clothes for job search.
- Work tools, if required for trades-related jobs.
- Counseling regarding drug use and potential implications on participation in training or work.

Work Experience

- Paid work experience, preferably focusing on several different types of related occupations (such as carpentry, cement masonry, painting) so that young adults could see what areas they would be most likely to excel in.
- Give young adults opportunities to get into apprenticeships, and make sure they understand the difference between union and non-union jobs.
- Help dealing with worksite problems, and knowing how to negotiate with supervisors to address issues, such as the need to get off work to do to mandatory appointments, meet with counselors, etc.

Instruction/Training

- Instruction and job training that allows young adults time to meet with counselors, and address serious issues (treatment, drug court obligations, etc.) that would derail their efforts to get a job before they start engaging in active job search.
- Opportunities to earn short-term certificates and credentials that employers want.
- Assistance getting financial aid, free or low cost training needed to find or advance in a job.
- Tutoring assistance, especially in math.
- Varied activities and schedules so activities do not feel routine.
- Training should end up soon in paid work.
- Practical writing, math, and job search skills.
- Access to current industry equipment.
- Connect what youth are learning in class to how skills are used in real jobs.

Job Placement/Advancement

- Help understanding what employers want
- Troubleshooting advice and access to staff/counselors if “things go south “at the job site.
- Suggestions about next step skills needed to advance and resources for training support, such as tuition assistance.
- Referrals and help getting next step training
- An ability to go back and get more job search/skill building help if the job ends/young adult gets fired or decides they want to make a career change.
- Include work opportunities (e.g. internships) with employers who might want to hire youth “if you don’t screw up.”
- Community service options (especially if work internships are not available) for young adults who don’t have good attendance so they still have an opportunity to build their resume.
- Take students to work sites and have employers meet with them in class.

Social/Support Networks

- Job assistance for peers who need help finding a job “as we all help each other with rent and other things and when people start to fall apart it can be contagious because then people who are making it get pressured to step in and pick up the pieces.”
- Referrals for other family members who have problems that will cause young adults to quit their job and stay home, or take other actions that can interfere with their own career goals.

Devon

Devon (pseudonym he chose) said, "For the first time, I have learned how to write what I hear in class down, and then ask questions if I still don't understand what I hear or write." He noted that, "Before, when I was in school it seemed I never focused on anything in school or the two other summer job programs I attended, except how to avoid being noticed, or how to distract people from learning or working." Today, Devon said that he was genuinely surprised how his views about the future changed. When asked how, Devon said, "I actually want to get a high school diploma now. Getting CPR, OSHA and Forklift certificates made me realize that I could succeed, even though it took me two tries at the forklift certificate. I am glad you don't need a driver's license to get a forklift license, because it will take a time for me to afford a car."

Devon was looking forward to the internship he would soon be entering. When asked if he had any concerns he said, "Sure, I know I am not used to routines, or following instructions, and I have never had an older relative who worked too long at the same place. All the people I know work temporary jobs." Devon's advice was that some kids who were kind of "uneven" – as he put it, "Might do best if they get a lot of support at the beginning of jobs to answer questions – talk about their supervisor – that kind of thing." As Devon saw it, "The very things that a lot of kids learn helps them survive on the streets or growing up in poor families, are the things that hurt them in a job, where they just gotta *take* it, not fight it."

Devon said he had a history of getting into trouble, and he was "on hold" now, and had to "make it stick". He recalled that "Being in jail –even though it was one day –is one day too much." He also reported that he liked structure and thrived best in military environments, where he knew what was expected, and expected to do what was asked. He had a request for people who planned training programs for young adults. "Give us information about what kinds of crimes keep us out of the military and help us to see if we can be eligible for different branches of the military." He also said that programs needed to offer: (1) training that ended up soon in paid work; (2) certificates or skills that would build student resumes; (3) volunteer work experience as part of credit-earning opportunities so that students could get a recent reference on their resume while they learned; (4) practical writing, math, and job search skills; and (5) help for kids' girlfriends and roommates so that they can get help 'because we all like share everything' and no one my age can make it in this area if they don't combine incomes or live with a relative". Devon noted, "Basically people need to know that someone believes in them – like the teachers here at the college."

Jerome

Jerome (pseudonym he chose), a 20 year old man, wanted to be a welder. "I heard from my probation officer about the training. I was relieved that the training was in a college, because in my past some of the programs, including a crisis residential center he had lived at, closed down. "As he saw it - Colleges tend to stick around. And the best thing is colleges are for all people, not just people who have problems."

Jerome credited Drug Court, Acceleration Academy, his current GED teacher and a college instructor who, he said, "Finally, got me over my fear of math which has kept me down in school my whole life."

When asked what is really important for planners of training programs for young adults Jerome had a lot of ideas. (1) Make sure the program is located where there is equipment, and people you can see who use skills – that it looks like a work program; (2) Include internships that pay for kids who show up to school, but community service work for kids who don't have good attendance, but might turn their behavior around if they have a chance to do something useful; (3) Take students to worksites, and have employers meet with students in class; (4) Give kids examples – tell them how the skills they are learning are used on real jobs; (5) Have kids research their internship sites and be able to talk about who works there, what kind of products they produce, who buys these products; (6) Provide next step training support, such as tuition assistance, and other plans so that students can keep building their skills; (7) Focus on pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeships, but make sure students know the difference between union jobs and non-union jobs, "Because I heard a lot of wrong information in class from my uncle is in a union and told me about union dues, what happens when there is not work, etc. One of the kids thought you ALWAYS had a job if you were in a union"; (8) Know that math and school anxiety is real – "I don't think people get how hard it is if you always failed in school, to ever come back."; and (9) Have counselors on staff who can talk to youth who have problems getting focused, and who might be likely to run into stuff while they get internships or jobs. When thinking about the post training, post job placement experiences of students Jerome said, "Some students probably need a lot of help if they get fired, or lose jobs, or find out they hate the training. I guess we just need to figure that out, we are not babies. But I don't know."