

GENERATION WORK YOUNG ADULT

Interviews

DECEMBER 2016



SkillUp
WASHINGTON

SkillUp Washington, in partnership with Generation Work partners, is thankful to Annie E. Casey Foundation for the Generation Work planning grant received in December 2015. This grant has resulted in the development of on-ramps to demand-driven employment and training opportunities for young adults between the ages of 18 and 29, and include young adult development strategies which build skills and foster their success. The young adult feedback presented in the following report provides guidance to Generation Work partners as this work is implemented. Seattle is one of five cities receiving Generation Work funding. The other cities are Cleveland, Hartford, Indianapolis and Philadelphia.

SkillUp would also like to thank the young adults who shared their experiences and offered their feedback. Your valuable input will help our partnerships and programs more effectively support the career and educational goals of young people living in the King County region.

This report was supported by SkillUp Washington, the Workforce Funder Collaborative at the Seattle Foundation. For more information about SkillUp, please visit www.skillupwa.org.

Written by Business Government Community Connections
Graphic Design by Noise w/o Sound
Photography by Ryan Castoldi



Generation Work Young Adult Interviews

DECEMBER 2016



1. Research Purpose and Methods

In November 2015, SkillUp Washington, a workforce funder collaborative at the Seattle Foundation, was awarded a one-year Generation Work planning grant from the Annie E Casey Foundation. Generation Work is a multi-site, national initiative focused on connecting young adults 18-29 to good jobs and career pathways. As part of the planning grant, it was important for local partners to include youth input and feedback in their Generation Work strategy development. To initiate this practice and approach, during the 2016 planning year thirty-two young adults, ages 18-29 were interviewed by SkillUp Washington. The purpose of the interviews was to garner the recommendations of young adults for the type of training and support needed to connect them to jobs offering a decent wage and potential for growth.

Because the young adult audience spans a large age range, 18-29, and are a very diverse group the interviews were conducted in four different venues: (1) a college campus on ramp to the 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. Interviews averaged 1 hour in length. Young adults received \$25.00 gift cards for their participation, and were encouraged to include their involvement as Generation Work consultants on their resume.



2. Description of the Young Adults

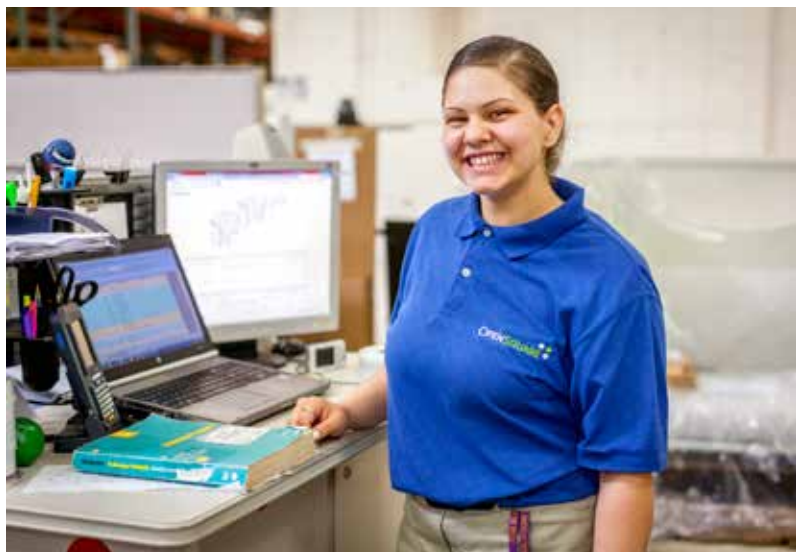
The interviewees were an interesting, dynamic and thoughtful group of young adults. Their experiences and insights made them enormously successful consultants to Generation Work. Many were experiencing problems such as affording housing, and all needed to build their skills and connections to employers in order to pursue better paying careers.

The group of interviewees was ethnically diverse. The majority lived in South King County, and 42% had dropped out of high school before graduating. Two later earned a GED and five had recently completed industry-approved certificates in forklift and CPR. Most were single and a significant number (40%) had been involved in the criminal justice system, as the data presented below shows. About a third had been enrolled in Special Education related services in the K-12 system to provide extra support for behavioral, concentration and attention deficit disorders. The majority had limited employment experience; only 47% had worked for more than three months in a job. The longest time of employment in one job was 24 months, with the average being 10 months. Two Young Adults had worked at SeaTac Airport and were earning close to \$15.00 per hour. A number of the participants were employed in the past in jobs such as pizza drivers, food service, retail and temporary seasonal jobs that paid minimum wage or slightly above. Thirty-seven percent experienced family homelessness as a child and six persons from this group were currently homeless. Many were low income with 50% using food stamps and 25% using foodbanks as their primary source for purchasing food.

Gender	#/%
Male	16 (50%)
Female	14 (44%)
Other	2 (6%)
Total	32 (100%)

Age	#/%
18-20	9 (28%)
21-23	9 (28%)
24-26	9 (28%)
27-29	5 (16%)
Total	32 (100%)

Ethnicity (as defined by young adults)	#/%
African American	4 (13%)
Asian (Chinese)	2 (6%)
Asian (Vietnamese)	2 (6%)
Eritrean	1 (3%)
Hispanic	1 (3%)
Latina	2 (6%)
Mexican	1 (3%)
Mixed Race (Cuban, Mexican, White)	1 (3%)
Mixed Race (Black, White, Japanese)	1 (3%)
Native American (Tlingit Tribe)	1 (3%)
Pacific Islander (Samoan)	3 (9%)
Somali	2 (6%)
White (Russian)	1 (3%)
White	10 (32%)
Total	32 (99%)



Foster Youth	#/%
Yes*	9 (28%)
No	23 (72%)
Total	32 (100%)

* four dropped out of the Independent Living Program as soon as they turned 18 – choosing not to continue to be affiliated with this resource



Household Type	#/%
Single	26 (81%)
Female Head of Household*	2 (6%)
Couple with children**	2 (6%)
Couple without children	2 (6%)
Total	32 (100%)

* One family = female, 2 year old boy; One family = female, 3 year old girl

** One family = couple, with 3 and 5 year old children (both boys); One family = 2 month old and 2 year old (both girls)

City of Residence	#/%
Auburn	3(9%)
Bellevue	2(6%)
Burien	3(9%)
Federal Way	4(13%)
Seattle (Rainier Valley/Beacon Hill)	2(6%)
Sea-Tac	5(16%)
Skyway	2(6%)
Tukwila	3(9%)
White Center	5(16%)
Unknown*	3(9%)
Total	32 (99%)

* homeless and don't identify with, or stay in one main locale

Highest Level of Education	#/%	Comments
9th Grade	3 (9%)	Dropped out because moved, one could not do the math work, and one got expelled
10th Grade	4 (12%)	All four experienced frequent suspensions/expulsions
11th Grade	3 (9%)	One dropped out because father went to jail and they had to get a job, and 2 went to juvenile facility
12 (dropped out)	4 (12%)	All dropped out due to poor grades, and, in particular, problems with math
High School Degree	18(56%)	None of these students received strong career counseling or post-secondary planning services
Earned GED	2 (6%)	Both young adults (one dropped out in 10th grade and one in 11th grade) earned their GED the 2nd time they enrolled in a GED class
Attended/did not complete GED	4 (12%)	1 young adult took 2 GED classes but dropped out due to problems on math and science exam 3 young adults took 3 GED classes but dropped out/mostly due to math problems
Attended College/did not earn certificates or degree	1 (3%)	Took CNA training but disliked the work in the practicum and dropped out
Some college/earned certificates and/or attended Airport University classes while working at Sea-Tac Airport	8 (25%)	Five were attending a short term grant-funded college class for youth who had been engaged in the juvenile justice system, and had earned CPR and forklift certificates, and 3 attended Airport University classes

Refugee/Immigrant Status	Yes	Length of time in United States
Refugee	1 (3%)	10 years
Immigrant	2 (6%)	<p>One young adult (refugee) had lived in the United States for 11 years</p> <p>One young adult (immigrant) had lived in the United States for 8 years</p> <p>One young adult (immigrant) had lived in the United States for 7 years</p>

Enrolled in ESL in K-12	#/%
Yes	8 (25%)
No	24 (75%)
Total	32 (100%)

Languages Spoken	#/%
English only	19 (60%)
English/Spanish	4 (13%)
English/Russian	1 (3%)
English/Samoan	2 (6%)
English/Eritrean	1 (3%)
English/Somali/Italian	1 (3%)
English/Vietnamese	2 (6%)
English/Ethnic Chinese	2 (6%)
Total	32 (100%)



Disability Status	#/%	Comments
Yes	3	1 received SSI (sight problems) 2 received SSI for other emotional and physical health issues

Individual Education Plan Status (K-12)	#/%
Yes	11(34%) Dyslexia, Hyperactivity Disorder, Behavior Issues
No	21 (66%)

LGBTQQI Status	#/%
Yes	5 (16%)
No	27 (84%)
Total	32 (100%)

Experienced Homelessness as a Child (Birth -17)/ Since Turning 18	#/%
Less than a year	5 (16%)
1-3 years	7 (22%)
(In addition, 7 of the above persons had been homeless since they turned 18, averaging 3 months to 1 year, and 6 were homeless at the time of the interview)	
Total	12 (38%)



Food Stamps	#/%
Yes	24 (75%)
No	8 (25%)
Total	32 (100%)

Engagement in Criminal Justice System	#/%
Assigned to Drug Court	3 (9%)
On Probation	3 (9%)
Attended Short-term detention 1-30 days	2 (6%)
Attended Short-term detention 31-60 days	2 (6%)
Lived in Group Home/ Residential Crisis Center	1 (3%)
Department of Corrections (armed robbery)	1 (3%)
Special military academy for behavioral issues	1 (3%)
Total	12 (38%)

Employment Status	#/%
Persons who had worked 3 or more months in the same job (Barista, food service, pizza delivery, sales clerk, retail, temporary store clerk, tax season sign-wearer, babysitter, security officer, air cargo worker, etc.)	14 (43%)
Persons who had not worked 3 or more months in the same job (Of this group, 9 had never had a paying job)	18 (56%)
Currently Employed	9 (28%)

3. Young Adult Access to Resources that Can Assist in Job Search/ Job Advancement

Resources	Yes	No
Cell Phone	30 (93%)	2 (6%)
Computer/netbook/laptop	22 (68%)	10 (31%)
Mailing Address	29 (91%)	3 (9%)
Health Insurance	21 (66%)	11 (34%)
Stable Address	22 (68%)	9 (28%) were homeless or couch surfing
Affordable Childcare (N=4)	1 (3%) one had childcare through HeadStart	3 (childcare = not affordable, wait list for subsidized care, no reliable relatives)
Bank Account	24 (75%)	8 (25%) 2 had accounts closed due to overdrafts)
Up- to- date resume	12 (37%)	20 (62%) including 15 with no resume
Work History (3 or more months volunteer or paid work)	18 (56%)	14 (44%)
People who will provide positive references	17 (53%)	15 (47%)
Stable, supportive peers	13 (40%)	19 (59%)
Relative/Family Support (housing and/or financial)	7 (22%)	25 (78%)
Working Car	9 (28%)	23 (72%)
Car Insurance	7 (28%)	25 (78%)
Access to public transportation	25 (78%)	7 (no money for bus tickets)
Already registered for selective service (requirement for men only)	9 (56%)	7 (44%)
Previous engagement in workforce development programs (Summer Youth Employment, Job Corps, and Youth Conservation Corps)	12 (37%) (1 dropped out/missed family)	20 (62%)



4. Career Goals of Young Adults

Young Adults shared their career goals. These included aspirations to be a:

- a jewelry maker
- cabinet maker
- shipbuilder or some job that uses robotics
- counselor for special education children
- employee for Immigration and Customs Enforcement
- fitness specialist
- skin and beauty consultant
- childcare worker (and then a person who owns a center)
- paratrooper
- manufacturer of airplane parts or an airplane safety inspector
- An ironworker or a fabrication specialist
- carpenter or a plasterer
- watchmaker for the old expensive antique watches
- bus driver (part-time) so can an actor too
- drug and alcohol counselor
- male model or photographer
- flight attendant
- air safety controller or pilot
- anything that pays at least \$20 an hour and is outside
- a desk type job where I can work with numbers
- a buyer for a good store
- maybe a UPS worker or something where I get to move around a lot
- air cargo supervisor or baggage handler
- something where math is “not a thing”
- don’t know (N=9)

5. Main challenges Young Adults face in their job search/career advancement efforts

The following challenges to job search and advancement were identified, in order of frequency. Common themes were coded and counted. The words of young adults were used to define challenges.

Challenge	#/%
Can't afford rent; have to move a lot, means I need to make job changes.	19 (59%)
Don't have good writing skills, on line job applications the way I do them are not competitive	15 (47%)
Don't have enough experience, never even volunteered	15 (47%)
Don't have a resume, and have trouble describing why people should hire me on paper or in person	14 (44%)
Have trouble convincing myself and others that I have skills	14 (44%)
Am out of practice/listening to authority and sticking with schedules	13 (41%)
Math skills and testing skills are not great, some jobs require those things	13 (41%)
The jobs and training people suggest are not the ones I want. Don't want what is good for me, want what I want.	10 (31%)
Have dyslexia, Hyperactivity behavior disorder/ other emotional issues.	9 (28%)
Don't have money to keep building my skills, but can't get ahead unless I do	9 (28%)
I have a criminal record, limits my choices and limits the way other people feel about me	5 (16%)
Sometimes I use drugs. If there are tests on the jobs I pick for... (then I will be out of luck).	4 (12%)
The idea of having to come up with clothes, transportation, work tools, etc. is hard for me to imagine making it all work	3 (9%)
Childcare needs to be affordable, near work and somewhere open long enough or at the right times for me to work	3 (9%)



Young adults also described their assets and why people should hire them. Many thought this question was surprising and hard to answer. One said, “I don’t think anyone has ever asked me to describe what kinds of things I have to offer or what my strengths are.” Their comments are presented below. They are not codified and counted. Rather they are presented, using the words of young adults, to give insight into how young adults define their personal as well as professional assets.

I am a:

- good parent
- caring daughter
- good friend
- reliable person (I show up at work even though I am homeless)
- good carpenter
- great video game player (and go to national conventions)
- good student as long as it is shop kind of classes, and not “desk-bound” classes

I am:

- organized
- able to listen to a lot of instructions
- interested in getting my life together
- willing to do anything but be a pizza delivery driver
- driven to change my life to get to a better place
- artistic, creative
- able to get through some really tough situations and still survive

I have a:

- good memory
- sense of pride in what I do
- lot of caring for people who are hungry, left out of the job market
- good personality, and can deal with criticism
- good sense of humor



I have earned:

- CPR certificates
- Forklift certificates
- Customer service awards
- Food Service Permit
- A GED when I was working full-time and pregnant
- Recognition for being punctual at work, and for following safety rules

My skills include knowledge of:

- Computer
- Excel
- Word
- PowerPoint

6. Young adult impressions about their likelihood to succeed in the job market

The self-assessments were generally low, suggesting strategies are needed to bolster young adult self-efficacy, self-motivation, confidence, awareness of their skills and resources, and ability convey their attributes.

Responses to these statements were frequently negative.

- I have the strength to overcome any obstacles when it comes to working.
- I am aware of what my skills are to be employed in a good job.
- I am able to utilize my resources to move toward career goals.

For example, many young adults felt their housing affordability obstacles were so daunting and they might need to move. Many others knew they had some job skills, but were not confident that the skills were sufficient to be employed. Yet others did not feel they had essential resources (resumes, skills, competitive

on line job applications) to compete for jobs. When asked how they would respond to the statement, “My current path will take me to where I need to be in my career”, most acknowledged they did not have a path, and wanted to start focusing more concertedly on such an effort, but needed guidance to do so.

7. Young Adult recommendations for workforce development system partners

The 20 most frequent recommendations made by young adults follow by strategy area. These areas were not pre-defined, but rather coded after looking at all of the responses. Young adults often recommended strategies that were not based on their own experiences, but on the experiences they witnessed in the lives of family members and peers. For example, many identified childcare as an issue even though they personally were not parents.

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 parents identify appropriate childcare and access available subsidies and resources, including child support.
- Assistance to negotiate reasonable child support payment plans.
- Help expunging records and negotiating traffic tickets.
- Job Search Strategies
- Resume writing assistance and help completing on line job applications.

Support Service Strategies

- Bus tickets and work clothes for job search.
- Work tools, if required for trades-related jobs.



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.

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 and math assistance.

Job Placement/Advancement

- Help understanding what employers want
- Troubleshooting advice if “things go south” at the job site.
- Suggestions about next step skills needed to advance
- 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.

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 are interfere with their own career goals.



8. Summary

The Young Adult feedback showcases the diverse needs of this wide-spanning age group and acts as a call to action for workforce development and employer partners to devise career-connected strategies that build the competitiveness of this large and important constituency.

In many ways, Young Adult development is an emerging field in workforce development, calling for a concerted focus on strategies which promote Young Adult skills and commitments to work and growth. This challenges workforce development staff and partners to adjust the more mainstream concepts set forth in the youth development arena to accommodate the different needs and support networks on which Young Adults rely. For example, many Young Adults rely largely on peers for their economic survival, by for example, sharing the cost of housing and food. By taking this factor into account workforce providers may want to recognize and bolster the role of peers in Young Adult career navigation efforts. Similarly, providers may want to ensure that referral strategies are equipped to meet family demands, including, but not limited to childcare access and affordability, that some Young Adults must address to successfully engage in the workforce.

Services which include a closely knit web of advocacy, referrals, and assessment-driven instruction and employer engagement opportunities would benefit many Young Adults. The Young Adults participating in the interviews demonstrated a great deal of resilience and skills. Connections to employers and other industry-driven resources will position them to pursue activities that capitalize on their too oft untapped potential.



1601 5th Avenue
Suite 1900
Seattle, WA 98101
206.388.1670

www.skillupwa.org