

BALTIMORE YOUTH OPPORTUNITY (YO!) SYSTEM



**Promising Practices & Lessons Learned
For Building a Comprehensive Youth
System for Out-of-school and
Disconnected Youth
2000 - 2004**

A report on the Experiences, Practices, and Lessons Learned of the Baltimore City community-based operations of a U.S. Department of Labor Youth Opportunity Grant, June 2005

The Mayor's Office of Employment Development
Youth Opportunity Grant
101 W. 24th Street, Baltimore, MD 21218
410-396-6722, 410-369-7869 Fax
www.yobaltimore.org

Our YO! Baltimore Mission

The mission of the Baltimore Youth Opportunity System (BYOS) is to increase the long-term employability of young people living in the Empowerment Zone (EZ) by creating a systemic approach to youth services, by offering a broad array of coordinated resources and activities; and by helping each young person design and negotiate a career pathway to success.

The Baltimore Youth Opportunity (YO!) System.

Best Practices: Out of School and Disconnected Youth

Problem addressed:

The Baltimore Youth Opportunity System (BYOS) was created to serve out-of-school and disconnected youth identified as Baltimore City's most hard-to-serve. Considered hard-core because of drug abuse; criminal activity; sexual risk behavior, delinquency and violence, and hard-to-reach because of multiple years of school dropout and disconnect from community institutions of support, they number in the thousands. Approximately 800 out-of-school youth voluntarily enroll into YO System each year. While based on individualized goals and progress, data shows that the average length of time youth are served by BYOS is about 18 months to 2 years--until either the acquisition of an academic credential and/or placement into unsubsidized employment is met.

INTRODUCTION

The YO! Baltimore Strategy

The annual Kids Count essay and data on "disconnected youth"—young adults, age 16 to 24 years, who are unemployed, not in school, and do not have any education beyond high school, reveals that disconnected young adults have increased in number by 19 percent since 2000. These youth can have increased difficulties when trying to successfully transition to adulthood, and teen parents, incarcerated youth, those re-entering from the justice system, and youth transitioning from foster care are especially vulnerable for poor outcomes. In Baltimore City, they pose both a significant challenge and, at the same time, a great asset. The BYOS mission and purpose acknowledges and embraces an asset-based youth development philosophy, meeting youth where they are, and helping them reach their full potential.

Extreme poverty exists for 60% of youth, ages 15-24 living in Baltimore's EZ. The EZ covers 25 census tracts in 33 residential neighborhoods. Youth, ages 14-21, comprise approximately 76% of the residents of the EZ (1990 Census) population. About 78% of EZ residents are black, 20% white and 2% are other races. The youth unemployment rate is estimated as 2.5 times the adult unemployment rate at 42.5% (Empower Baltimore Management Corporation, 1999). The high school graduation rate, in the EZ, falls behind the State (71.4%) and the City (35.7%). Over 58% of out-of-school youth who enroll in BYOS test below 8th grade in reading and over 73% test below in math, yet the grade 8 equivalent serves as the measure of basic skill mastery for functional competency to enable the processing of information for work applications. Youth must test above grade 8 to begin Graduate Equivalency Diploma (GED) study.

Symbolic of the impacts of staggering and fateful circumstances impacting large populations of disconnected youth, on average, approximately 22% of the already small percentage of high school graduates go on to college, compared to the City (58%) and the State (65.9%).

A Compendium of Best Practices from the Baltimore YO! System Experience

Before YO! Baltimore, there was no systemic approach to connect young people to the various resources available to help them get back on track for future success. YO! offers a holistic approach to youth development and YO! offers a solution. As demonstrated by research-based analyses, early indicators show that the YO! program is reaching and reviving Baltimore City's most disconnected youth. Community partners and objective researchers have provided and analyzed data showing that life is improving for YO! members in many ways. The true return on investment will be evident in the years to come when 4,000 YO! members begin attending college, starting careers, successfully supporting their families and contributing to Baltimore's economy.¹

Background & History: Importance to the Community

In June of 2000, the vision began to take shape as Baltimore successfully garnered 1 of 36 national Youth Opportunity Grants (YOG) funded by the U.S. Department of Labor to increase the long-term employability of youth residents of the Empowerment Zone. Baltimore sought to implement a comprehensive youth service, yet seamless system for out-of-school and disconnected youth. To achieve this goal, key community partners set out to establish 2 centers for the East and Westside EZ and 3 satellite locations in their southern bordering neighborhoods. Thus, the BYOS was created to offer youth comprehensive, coordinated programs, which build on youths' strengths, increasing their development and competency. Four community organizations contracted with Mayor's Office of Employment Development (MOED) to operate these centers:

- The Historic East Baltimore Community Action Coalition – (HEBCAC) main/anchor Eastside center;
- The East Baltimore Community Corporation (EBCC) Southeast satellite at The Chance;
- The McKim Community Center (McKim Southeast Harbor satellite);
- The Washington Pigtown Neighborhood Planning Council (Westside Studio 760 satellite); and
- The MOED continues its operations of the main West Side Center (established in 1999 as one of nine national USDOL Kulick grant demonstration pilot sites).

Leadership and parent organization, including the role of the local public workforce system and other partners in the initiative:

The MOED serves as the fiduciary agent and grant administrator for the BYOS. Its track record in employment training, commitment to youth service development, capacity building and coordination of local government and community resources has received national recognition and replication. MOED, in partnership with the Baltimore Workforce Investment Board (BWIB) Youth Council, is responsible for the initiative's oversight and direction. MOED provides an administrative team, which administers partner contracting and interfaces its major organizational infrastructure to support the BYOS. This initiative supports the MOED mission and goals through the dynamic expansion of a network of business, employer, community-based and EZ stakeholder partnerships, providing an effective infrastructure to ensure that youth receive an enriched and productive year-round education and employment related experience.

¹ Baltimore Youth Opportunity System (BYOS) Return on Investment, Optimal Solutions Group LLC, May 2005, p.1.

Stakeholders and how the mission is communicated.

Primary stakeholders in achieving the mission include MOED, the four (4) community-based organizations that operate the BYOS centers, and other key partner agencies follow:

- The Baltimore City Community College (BCCC) provides professional and occupational skills training, and serves as a primary staff development trainer in partnership with the Johns Hopkins University's Sar Levitan Center to support staff in achieving and maintaining youth practitioner certifications.
- The Sar Levitan Center of the Johns Hopkins University, Center for Policy Studies, administered the Youth Practitioner Institute (YPI), which played a significant role in helping to train staff.
- Sylvan Learning Systems, Career Starters Program, provided literacy instruction to low-level readers (including tutorial labs).
- The Baltimore City Health Department, administers health services, including an on-site health suite at the West Side YO Center and health triage for all centers.
- The Department of Recreation and Parks, partnered to create a system-wide series of events, sports and recreation programming.

Diverse community stakeholders, including youth consumers, parents, historic providers, neighborhood associations, faith-based institutions, local schools, businesses and an extensive network of local and regional employers, assisted or contributed to the initiative. All stakeholders receive the BYOS quarterly newsletter covering success stories and news on mission outcomes. The BYOS community advisory board met monthly to evaluate and provide technical assistance for the continuous development of the initiative. Stakeholders were invited to participate in special events to promote the successes of youth. For example, 300 stakeholders, including Senator Paul Sarbanes, came to see an original multi-disciplinary performance of the BYOS arts interns and hear about YO! Baltimore's impressive list of achievements.

Target Youth

BYOS serves out-of-school and disconnected youth identified as Baltimore's most hard-to-serve. They are considered hard-core because of drug abuse; criminal activity; sexual risk behavior, delinquency and violence. Approximately 800 out-of-school youth voluntarily enroll each year. While based on individualized goals and progress, data shows that the average length of time youth are served by BYOS is about 18 months to 2 years--until either academic credentials and/or unsubsidized employment goals are met.

The daunting teen birth rate (with Baltimore leading Maryland's top 5 jurisdictions of greatest need at 83% per 1,000 births) results in early parenting and the high repeat pregnancy rates at 27% of all teen pregnancies. Without affordable childcare services and living-wage jobs, youth experience unstable housing and homelessness.

The BYOS mission and services are directly aligned to the needs of young people in the Empowerment Zone based on pre-grant focus groups and continuing feedback from youth participants. This information has proven accurate since staff at the centers can cite cases where youth openly acknowledge that if the centers were not established, they'd be either incarcerated or dead.

PROMISING PRACTICES

The promising practices for out-of-school and disconnected youth demonstrated over a five-year course of Baltimore Youth Opportunity project implementation, have been validated by project performance, youth outcomes, practitioner and community validation, as well as by a national peer review (2003), and Baltimore's annual YOG Site assessments and ongoing rankings amongst the 36 national YOG sites. This report highlights some of those promising practices prominent in the effectiveness of the YO System design and continued efforts to implement a community-based system of care for youth and young adults who find themselves, upon their transition into adulthood and self-sufficiency, disconnected from community institutions of learning and support, and with limited schooling, self-care capability, and lacking basic workplace skills, thereby less employable.

**A Compendium of Best Practices
from
the Baltimore YO! System Experience**

Area: Project Design:

BEST PRACTICE: Partner Collaboration & Leveraged Resources

Partnerships for direct and indirect services and other linkages were developed for the BYOS youth initiative, and they contribute importantly to community ownership and accomplishment of the YO mission

Over 60 community public, private and not-for-profit organizations supported the YO mission and the creation of a coordinated system of service delivery for disconnected youth - - creating a vast network of strong neighborhood associations, human service agencies and youth serving organizations, secondary and post-secondary institutions, and broad employment and training pipelines.

Partners contribute to the accomplishment of the mission through contractual agreements for services in the key program components or through leveraged resource and in-kind contributions for youth and system support. A successful example of this is the system partnership with the local community college, Baltimore City Community College (BCCC). A key partner from inception, BCCC provided expansive resources through its multiple campus facilities for BYOS meetings, annual youth conference events, technical communications supports, space for staff development, its President's Boardroom for youth leadership activities, and offered professional development courses to YO frontline staff at no cost. The kinds of resources leveraged through this partnership would normally cost tens of thousands of dollars. Another core partnership with Sylvan Learning Systems resulted in leveraged resources, including a full year of over 250 computerized assessments in response to one center's need for assistance with academic test administration at no cost, a donation of 7 laptop computers for apprentices, and donation of a RV recreational vehicle, equipped and enhanced for use as a YO community promotions and youth recruitment anchor at YO sites and within the Baltimore community.

Contributing to the YO mission to prepare youth for employment success, partners offer services and resources for a broad range of employment development programs, and increased opportunities for unsubsidized employment. For example, the Marriott Hotels sought MOED involvement in large-scale recruitment efforts for a newly opened Baltimore Waterfront hotel. MOED loaned staff and supports to recruit over 500 jobseekers for interviews. As a result, the Baltimore Marriott Waterfront and all Marriott facilities in the Baltimore area have expanded their relationship with YO System for recruitment initiatives open to youth, creating new career pathways for youth in the growing hospitality industry through the hire of out of school youth, and committing to job shadowing, customized skills training and job placement.

Partners are actively involved in learning how other agencies work so that cross-agency linkages can be facilitated over the long-term. BYOS has developed a network of contacts across agencies for accessing leveraged resources and expanded services for youth need, and to identify patterns of service gaps for quality service improvements. YO community partnerships and affiliations support a primary conduit for providing a range of supportive services for youth, including mental health, substance abuse, health services triage, health education, teen pregnancy prevention, childcare support, food pantries and emergency cash assistance.

Evidence of Success

- *Civic Works and Youth Build brought additional youth skills training slots to the table, beyond their YO contract, through non-YOG funds.*
- *HEBCAC used non-YOG funds to maintain 3 staff positions.*
- *BCCC provided finance & banking skills training slots for YO youth through a partnership with Bank One.*

Area: Project Design:

BEST PRACTICE: BYOS Central Mission, Purpose and Procedures

During its start-up year 2000, the Baltimore Youth Opportunity System (BYOS) established a citywide system of comprehensive programs for targeted in school and out-of-school youth services delivery. Operated in collaboration with five (5) historic community-based organizations and the Baltimore City Public School System, the BYOS is designed as an integrated partnership effort. While BYOS sites are operated by different organizations, the goal is to have all work as one integrated seamless service system. To facilitate this goal, the BYOS sought to create a standardized purpose and mission, and standard operating procedures and guidelines to be implemented at all YO sites to assure that youth could enroll at a YO Port of choice, and access resources, supportive services and programs geared towards quality customer service and successful navigation of their desired career pathway.

Though its centralized mission, the YO community (Ports, Members, practitioners, and management) is able to identify a citywide context for the project's work, membership, anticipated outcomes and impacts. *The mission of the Baltimore Youth Opportunity System (BYOS) is to increase the long-term employability of young people living in the Empowerment Zone (EZ) by creating a systemic approach to youth services, by offering a broad array of coordinated resources and activities; and by helping each young person design and negotiate a career pathway to success.*

The YO System addresses youth through an holistic approach to promoting full development of the total person through 1) comprehensive education (tutoring, literacy, credentialing, and connections to higher education); 2) employment preparation (occupational training, work experience, and summer jobs); 3) youth supports (needs-based services, stipends, recreation, and support groups); and 4) youth leadership (civic engagement, and youth empowerment). All youth do not engage in all activities, but may choose from a vast menu of options to suit personal needs, aptitudes and interests.

In order to assure a systemic approach to its site operations and youth development purpose, BYOS sites implement fundamental procedures for all programmatic components. The BYOS Procedures, reviewed on an annual basis for modification and revision, includes recruitment, intake & enrollment, assessment, case management, supportive services, a menu of basic and comprehensive program activities for education, workforce development, post-secondary education, client satisfaction & feedback, and performance evaluation. Standard forms are designed for use at all sites and staff and management give periodic feedback and inputs for modifications based on continuous quality improvements to operations and practices.

Evidence of Success

- *Clear and predictable philosophy on youth services established for all YO System staff, programs, and community partners.*
- *All YO System youth centers and programs maintain environments conducive to high youth cultural and youth-friendly characteristics, and the YO Mission is posted throughout centers.*
- *High youth and community ownership & buy-in to continuous quality improvements.*

Area: Project Design & Operations:

BEST PRACTICE: High Youth and Community Involvement in all Aspects of the Initiative

The Baltimore Youth Opportunity (YO!) System has focused its intent to make a lasting difference in the lives of youth faced with tremendous marks of an ever-increasing national human debt, those identified as the most at-risk. Those youth, waylaid on the outskirts of the legitimate economy, struggle with daily challenges to survive. Yet they have faces, feelings, and aspirations, and BYOS staffs have known the youth who say, “I asked God to give me one more chance.” “Nobody cares about me.” “My house is crazy and I feel there’s no hope.” These are the youth from the streets, those that have aged out of foster care systems, and those who sought a place to belong and wound up on the street corners. To make that lasting difference in their lives, the System finds an extensive, holistic, and comprehensive approach to youth development is requisite. And to assure the credibility and integrity of the programs meet the unmet needs of a disadvantaged community and its youth population, Baltimore YO took to the streets at its onset.

Architects of the YO System realized early that the acknowledgement of its target population in the planning and developmental stages of its initiative, and continuation throughout its start-up and full operations was essential. Youth focus groups from the targeted communities contributed greatly to the determinations of what components Baltimore would offer youth. In selecting personnel for its frontline and other staff, YO System recruited from the Baltimore Empowerment Zone residents, and included youth from its targeted community on its interview and selection teams. A key factor contributing to effectiveness in shaping youth centers and programs was raising the youth voice to an equitable and recognizable involvement in the entire comprehensive process.

While Baltimore’s youth helped with everything from interior design and painting of the youth centers to molding components and activities of the sports and recreation program, YO System also sought community advisors committed for the long-haul commitment of working within a diversity of public, private and not-for-profit organizations and working towards inventive and creative approaches for engaging both community and youth in a large scope and long-term project to build better futures. Baltimore formed its initial Community Advisory Board with a cross-section of leadership and community activists from east and west Baltimore. Historically known to resist working together, persons from both empowerment zone communities came together on behalf of its youth and young adults in partnership.

Evidence of success:

- *Ownership. In its second year, neighborhood and geographically bound advisories decided to join forces into one community advisory board.*
- *Youth outreach and sports and recreation programs cultivated change in youth crossing territorial boundaries to participate in system-wide youth development.*
- *YO Members began to show up at centers across town from their neighborhoods due to new friendships and membership in a central YO System that is “all of us.”*
- *#1 Customer. Input and involvements from youth became a part of the YO System fabric and interwoven through all aspects of youth development programming.*

Area: Program Design:

BEST PRACTICE: BYOS Case Management Standards and Guidelines

Documentation of services and issues builds a foundation of information that enables the staff of the BYOS to effectively address the needs of the customer. To provide a system wide structure for uniform case file documentation of all customer issues, activities, services, case follow-up and progress, the BYOS developed a case management system implemented at all BYOS youth centers and programs. This includes the BYOS Port Procedures Manual, Case Chart organization, KIDSMART 2000 ©, guidelines for record keeping, and procedures for case transfer and internal audit. All youth practitioners are trained in case management practices through the Youth Practitioners' Institute (YPI), and system technical assistance training, as required.

BYOS Procedures Manual

The BYOS has developed a centralized reference manual for youth practitioner practice and the management of case files. Personnel are trained in the use of BYOS policy, procedures and forms for case management. This includes intake, enrollment, participation, placement and retention customer flow processes.

Case File Organization

All BYOS Ports maintain a centralized and secure case file system. The BYOS customer case chart is organized in six (6) sections using pressboard files with two-pronged document cards organized and labeled, as follows:

- Enrollment
- Intake, Eligibility, MIS
- Assessment
- Program Activities & Support Services
- Placement & Follow-up Services
- Correspondence & Miscellaneous

KIDSMART 2000 ©

As an enhancement to case documentation and tracking, as well as data management and analysis, the BYOS implemented KIDSMART 2000 © in October 2002 for improved program and system performance evaluation. Continuous upgrades and staff development for the comprehensive case management system are offered periodically throughout each year. MIS technicians are assigned to each Port for monitoring and continuous quality management.

Record keeping Guidelines

Standard guidelines and exceptions for standard BYOS record keeping practice are established to ensure high quality completion and maintenance of case files.

Chart Transfers

To ensure that BYOS case management services for youth members is uninterrupted when a case chart transfer must be arranged at Ports or between Ports, case managers must document and transfer cases within a formal process (Procedure E – 005). Case chart transfers are documented and change information entered into KIDSMART 2000.

Port Management and YOG Administration Case File Review

Port management is accountable for supervision and monthly case file review to ensure the quality of port case management. Administration periodically reviews case files for continuous quality improvements analysis. A case file review log is maintained as documentation.

Evidence of Success

- *YO Baltimore moved to increased consistency and effectiveness in case documentation, and was able to turn-around YOG Site Assessment problems cited in 2003 to no incidents of case record problems within a six-month period.*
- *Port and practitioner management of cases improved and quality assurance is continuing.*

Area: Project Design:

BEST PRACTICE: Youth Practitioner's Institute (YPI)

For the Baltimore Youth Opportunity System (BYOS), all staff involvement in staff development activities is structured under the Youth Practitioner's Institute (YPI), a partnership with BCCC and the Sar Levitan Center of the Johns Hopkins University. Since the inception, YPI has played a significant part in helping to prepare staff to assume and continuously improve their work. Throughout the 3 years of YPI operation, the program has evolved to include a cadre of professional interventions and initiatives. First year programs included an in-depth orientation program featuring training, and practical experiences in youth development and service delivery covering key topics from case management to individual service strategy. Monthly follow-up workshop sessions focused on problems staff confronted in service delivery, key professional competencies and certification as youth workers in the BYOS upon completion. In 1 year, staff completed 45 initial certifications and 17 full certifications. In Year 2, the in-depth orientation training program, follow-up workshops and certification process continued resulting in 25 initial certifications and 15 full certifications.

To meet the continuing need for youth workers who are prepared and ready to assume work roles, a Youth Practitioner Apprentice (YPA) program was established as a pilot initiative. Eight (8) youth members evidencing interest and potential were placed in an on-the-job training and provided mentoring and coaching.

For Year 3, YPI adapted to the evolving needs of the centers. A truncated orientation-training program with mini-sessions is offered throughout the year to accommodate the information needs of new staff beginning their employment. Based on the results of a cross-system needs assessment, YPI has been redesigned to include individual professional development, position-based professional development (including tracks for new and for veteran staff pertinent to their work roles), and center-based professional development, supporting the improvement of center priorities through job-embedded staff development. The YPA Program continues in Year 3, with a system's level information exchange and practice-sharing targeting best practices and needs crosscutting all centers. Management training was enhanced by leadership retreats and based on individualized center audits.

All staff members are afforded advancement opportunities through the annual performance appraisal program where goals are set for the upcoming year and the previous years goals are reviewed for all positions. Advancement is open to all staff based on shared information and announcements of open positions for hire at all centers. YO Centers uphold a commitment to hire from within and staff may voluntarily apply for position transfers as available.

Evidence of Success

- *A more qualified and trained corps of youth practitioners based on the comprehensive and ongoing staff development & training activities. High quality training facilitators.*
- *Over 80% of newly hired staff certified with initial or full youth practitioner certifications.*
- *Nine (9) former YO Members and YPA graduates, hired into YO! Baltimore professional youth practitioner staff positions as recruiters, advocates, and job developers by MOED and partner community-based organizations.*
- *Youth Practitioner Apprentice (YPA) Program graduates hired into professional staff positions within local youth-serving organizations, such as the Shake and Bake Family Recreational Center, Baltimore City Health Department, and the Department of Juvenile Services.*

Area: Project Design

BEST PRACTICE: Continuous Quality Improvement

Components of the BYOS continuous quality improvement efforts exist at three levels: 1) youth service and customer satisfaction, 2) centers and community, 3) systems development, and 4) performance reporting. The continuous improvement process begins with the collection of day-to-day information for analysis and planning. Information is collected on operations, services and participants as well as data related to youth development outcomes. The second step is of the continuous improvements process involves sharing collected data and information with staff, management and stakeholders. The third step in the process includes obtaining feedback and input from the three levels, and methods for data analysis, program and systems planning, managing and monitoring, and that of shared communications and evaluation. This includes a quarterly performance reporting by site and systems comparative. All aspects contribute to and ensure a continuing focus on system and program development as aligned to the mission.

YOUTH SERVICE AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION - Structured through the KidSmart© Case Manager 2000, a computerized case management system (implemented since October 2002), staff enter daily information on youth participants for recruitment, enrollments, case planning, services, and youth development. Data is compiled into a comprehensive database where staff can query and track individual and caseload activities and information, as well as monitor youth service programs for coordination of service strategies, participation, case progress and completions. Youth complete a customer feedback form following enrollment, assessment and service strategy development. Staff and center management review feedback at staff team meetings and incorporate improvements for program and system development.

Approximately 50 newly enrolled youth per month complete a client satisfaction survey mailed to their home for review by system administration. Youth serve in partnership with adults through youth management teams established at each center. The Youth Leadership Council serves as the BYOS “youth voice”. Youth act as spokespersons, assess issues related to client satisfaction, and provide ongoing technical assistance and program evaluation. Youth address diverse concerns at weekly center youth management team meetings and at a monthly youth leadership Roundtable (a forum for youth-related issues and problem-solving). Staff and management observe an open door policy to enable youth to voice concerns and receive direct feedback.

CENTERS AND COMMUNITY INPUT - A single-structured coalition of diverse community stakeholders meets monthly. Representing youth, parents, community & faith-based organizations, and service partners, the community advisory board is actively involved in efforts to improve BYOS for outcomes aligned to the mission. The board conducts monthly partner presentations to evaluate performance and youth services outcomes.

BYOS QUARTERLY REPORT CARD – Annual system quality performance indicators and measures are set for the in-school and out-of-school programs, and monitored monthly by port management and practitioners. On a quarterly basis, a system report card is issued, based on KIDSMART 2000 data by site as well as within a comparative matrix for all like programs. Each YO program is graded based on meeting a systems baseline and evaluative grading scale. Quarterly outcomes are reviewed and discussed quarterly at All Staff meetings as an aspect of the system’s continuous quality improvements analysis. Ports develop action plans and strategize for quality indicators that result in a grade below satisfactory (Grade C).

SYSTEMS DEVELOPMENT - Staff and stakeholders are engaged in continuous improvements through monthly YOG Management Team and All Staff meetings focused on participant data analysis and systems performance, including a quarterly partners meeting. KidSmart© is utilized as a tool for data reporting, analysis, and planning & evaluation. Implementation of programmatic upgrades and systems enhancements on a continuing basis creates an environment of creative problem solving and program innovation.

Area: Program Design:

BEST PRACTICE: YO Port Management Team

The Youth Opportunity System is operated by community-based organizations (CBO) with an historical presence in the Baltimore City Empowerment Zone communities addressing community development, and human and social services needs. Each CBO is funded through the Youth Opportunity Grant (YOG) by sub-contract to establish a youth center, equipment, staffing, and implementation of sixteen YOG youth development activities for the local initiative. Baltimore YO System is unique, in that it has developed a coordinated and systemic approach to the philosophy, program protocols, and system operating procedures that all CBOs adhere to as a fundamental structure for the YO Center.

An ongoing and regular aspect of the YO System's management and leadership accountability for the shared and collaborative responsibility for Youth Opportunity Grant performance and annual application goal attainment, operational and administrative managers convene three times a month. The Tuesday morning management team meetings also include (by invitation) those community sub-contractors accountable for system-wide key program components, as well as community-based and other organizational partners for system leveraged resources.

Every second Tuesday of the month, the port management team is joined by all YO practitioners system-wide for an All Staff Meeting, where the YOG Coach, the YO System administrative team, peer staff, and local and national experts in the field of youth work cover subject-matter relevant to the ongoing successful performance of the project. Thus, equipping all system direct-service staff with critical and essential competencies and tools required for a large-scope comprehensive youth development effort.

Port management consistently contributes to the review and analysis of periodic and monthly performance indicators, decision-making relevant to modifications to system protocols and policy, as well as the monitoring accountability for ongoing practitioner development and program evaluation.

Evidence of success

- *Highly effective channels of communication amongst Port operators.*
- *Successful annual Youth Opportunity Grant (YOG) site assessment outcomes throughout the grant implementation period.*
- *Predictable and consistent program implementation & monitoring.*
- *Problem-solving and solutions-building consensus at the most immediate point of intervention, resulting in the expedition of effective project management.*
- *High regard from the U.S. Department of Labor and solicitation for periodic involvements in national project peer exchange and technical assistance efforts.*
- *Decentralized, yet coordinated interagency network of public/private partnerships.*

Area: Program Operations:

BEST PRACTICE: A Team Approach to Care Management

To foster its holistic approach to customer services delivery for out-of-school and in-school youth, YO System sought to a YO community culture of come-togetherness, safety and protection for the youth served. Open and honest communication between all those charged to safeguard and nurture the lives of empowerment zone youth became a fundamental part of the YO System infrastructure. While each YO Port had its own management and leadership group, all Port managers and YOG administration come together weekly to ensure that quality of services and consistent and predictable youth environments remain intact. Each month youth practitioners from all YO centers convene for staff development and an All Staff Meeting held at the Baltimore City Community College campuses.

At the center level, youth practitioners responsible for the four-pronged mission of accountability to assure youth education, case management and counseling, workforce and career development, and job placement in both subsidized and unsubsidized opportunities, all within a collective youth development arena, come together as Readiness, Placement, and Retention teams. The RPR team model is systemic from each youth's point of entry, throughout the course of intake, enrollment, and resource coordination, and includes collaborative supportive assistance and guidance to all YO Members for comprehensive aspects of the youth's development and maturation into a self-sufficient and productive adult.

The YO Readiness, Placement, Retention (RPR) team consists of an Employment Advocate working in concert with Job Coaches and a Job Developer. It is noted that each RPR team member may maintain customer progress information based on his/her specific function and responsibilities, however, the Employment Advocate is accountable for ensuring that a copy of all RPR progress updates and case notations are a part of the customer's central BYOS case file.

The RPR team makes an initial assessment for Risk Factors (low, moderate, high), and updates the assessment at each quarterly progress review. Youth are connected to life skills and supportive services based on an ongoing re-assessment of needs and barriers. Case management, youth counseling, and life skills coaching are routine components of the bi-level case management practice of the Employment Advocate. The Job Coach is central to job readiness training, career development, and retention strategies based on youth career assessment and ongoing re-assessment. The Job Developer works closely with the employer community to develop job opportunities for the placement of job-ready youth. The team approach assures a coordinated effort for youth.

At total completion, each youth is assigned into one of three follow-up categories based on the RPR Team's assessment of their risk level. Three levels based on critical indicators for high risk, moderate risk, and low risk needs are reviewed. A youth's stability and supportive network for stable and independent work and living are assessed and objectives for barrier removal mutually planned. Risk-assessment is a continuing component throughout the follow up period as well, with youth moving amongst the levels based on their on-going life, work, and education development and maturation.

Evidence of Success

- *Personal and individual case management for every YO Member.*
- *A coordinated service delivery for the youth based on an individual service plan, mutual goal setting and responsibilities, and progress reviews every 90 days between the team and youth.*
- *Shared information and communications for all aspects of care.*
- *Effectively run RPR teams present case reviews on a monthly schedule before all port management and practitioners for review of strategies for placement of total completers, and present center-based YO success stories. This demonstrates real life outcomes of the work.*

Area: Program Operations:

BEST PRACTICE: Employer Engagement

Employers play a full range of roles in the initiative, and the initiative ensures that knowledge and competencies learned meet employers' requirements.

The Baltimore Workforce Investment Board (WIB) and the WIB Youth Council have employer representation. Employ Baltimore (the MOED employer development unit) partners with BYOS job developers to leverage the maximum employer resources. Customized trainings are offered (leading to guaranteed employment upon completion) including, certified apprentice technician, aluminum fabrication, support medical associate, geriatric nursing assistant, patient service coordinator to name a few.

BYOS job coaches' work directly with workplace supervisors to monitor youth progress on the job. They make weekly visits to worksites to coach and evaluate job retention issues. Employers are mailed Customer Satisfaction cards monthly for feedback on youth worker competencies and satisfaction with Youth Opportunity workers. Employers participate in monthly job fairs where youth ready for hire are interviewed for local job opportunities.

TEMPORARY PART-TIME JOBS

Employer advisory and outreach is available with merchants at local malls to place youth in retail stores meeting seasonal hiring needs. Staffs continue the development of partnerships and agreements with area temporary services and contractual employers to offer short-term employment opportunities for youth with immediate cash needs. Youth are placed in temporary part-time jobs for short-term unsubsidized employment. Employ Baltimore partners offers weekly Hot Job Alerts including temporary, part-time and seasonal work opportunities such as United Parcel Services, lifeguard certification, and placement in ARAMARK stadium concession positions.

CUSTOMIZED EMPLOYER TRAINING

A strategy the YO! Baltimore used to create opportunities for youth training and hire is customized training, where local employers work to develop skills training curriculum for hard-to-hire jobs, provide employer-based skills training, then hire youth at completion of the program. Dicus Enterprises provided commercial and industrial painting training for youth. The eight-week training was a "pre-apprenticeship" program covering industry-specific technical skills in brushing, rolling, and spraying (airless, conventional, HVLP), sandblasting, lead awareness, OSHA safety procedures and most aspects of coatings. This training received strong support from a group of employers, suppliers and the local trade association. Trainees were not required to have a high school diploma/GED and other barriers were not a deterrent to employment. Successful completers obtained positions paying between \$10 and \$12 per hour. Aramark provided hospitality training at its new downtown center to 30 youth in one week of classroom trainings and four weeks of on-the-job training, waging youth at a salary of \$7.50 per hour.

Evidence of Success

- *Effective youth engagement and retention strategy. In recent YO youth focus groups, Members expressed strong agreement that YO System continue to provide immediate part-time and temporary jobs for youth requesting jobs at entry.*
- *Increased customized training opportunities, where youth are trained by employers for entry-level position leading to careers, such as the CVS partnership for customer service positions, waging youth at \$8.00 - \$9.00 per hour, with benefits.*

Area: Program Operations

BEST PRACTICE: The YO Internship Program

The Youth Opportunity Internship Program is designed to work in partnership with young customers to provide them the supports they want and need in order to become successful in the workplace. A critical part of the on-the-job training and retention skill building depends upon identifying and providing supports from employer-based training. Business and employer partners are essential to creating opportunities for a continuum of work-based internship & career pathway experiences.

The three core goals of the YO! Internship Program:

- Develop internships to provide a job readiness practicum experience for youth with no work history.
- Develop internships to provide exposure and experience in specific career pathways, and for an immediate source of legitimate income for members, resulting in high youth engagement & retention.
- Develop internships in the public/private sectors for positive community visibility of the YO! Baltimore initiative.

Job Developers identify and solicit new employer partnerships for subsidized internships where youth are trained in technical workplace skills for occupations. Interested employers and businesses are asked to complete an Internship Site Application. The Job Developer works with the business/employer to set up a framework and guidelines for the internship site. Partner expectations and responsibilities are outlined within the BYOS Subsidized Internship Agreement that is signed and dated by the authorized MOED/BYOS and Business/Employer representatives. Employers who partner with the YO System are expected to identify positions within their business or organization where youth may be hired upon completion of the internship, and an agreement must be on file before a youth is placed.

Technical and soft workplace skills targeted for mastery during the internship period are listed and monitored by the work supervisor and YO job coach closely for youth progress in SCANS-based workplace competencies. A Work-based Internship Skills/Competency Progress Report is completed prior to the end of the youth internship, and completion of each skill objective is documented on an "As Met" basis.

Evidence of Success

- *65% of workplace supervisors surveyed responded that they would like to hire interns placed in their organizations.*
- *Workplace supervisors rated over 89% of interns placed as Good to Excellent in their work performance.*
- *15% of Interns gained sufficient work experience and were hired by employers other than their worksite.*
- *All participants attended bi-weekly job retention sessions to build their soft skills, increase their financial literacy and address employment barriers for a 41% placement retention rate.*
- *YO! Baltimore has received positive press/visibility for their Internship Program and community service efforts*

In 2005, the YO Internship Program was modified to (a) use the Career Scope career assessment as a primary basis for internship career placement, (b) to pay an hourly minimum wage (\$5.15), and (c) to target employers with available career-path employment opportunities for youth hires.

Area: Youth Development

BEST PRACTICE: Youth Development Matrix

Documentation of youth development activities builds a foundation of information that enables the staff of the BYOS to effectively address personal development of youth. Furthermore, documentation of youth development activity is required to quantify the minimum level of participation necessary to constitute participation as defined under the YOG. Participation is defined when an enrollee takes part in any one of the 16 YO youth development activities and meets the minimum level of participation in a given month. The YOG defined Participation Rate goal = 80%.

The Youth Development Matrix was developed to assist youth practitioners in determining under which of the 16 YO program elements a YO! Baltimore youth development activity fit.

The BYOS Youth Development Matrix categorizes all YO System youth development activities currently implemented at YO centers. A youth development activity must fit into any one of the 16 program categories that constitutes participation hours for youth enrollees in the YO program. Practitioners use the Youth Development Matrix to determine where to fit a youth development activity in which one or more of center youth participate to compile a weekly youth development activity report.

To add new activities to the Youth Development Matrix, a center manager or site coordinator faxes a copy of the “Youth Development Activity Review Form” with his or her monthly report. Recommended additions and other changes are reviewed at the first port managers meeting of each quarter. The Youth Development Matrix may also be updated on a periodic basis and distributed to all YO centers and appropriate staff.

Evidence of success:

- *Effective identification of center-based youth development activities, under the designated 16 YOG youth development elements.*
- *Increased monthly youth participation hours based on the use of the matrix tool by practitioners to organize and record participation hours for youth development activities held at YO Ports.*
- *YOG national sites adapted the Youth Development Matrix tool for use as a standard practice, and reported at YOG Peer technical assistance conferences.*
- *Baltimore’s youth development matrix included in the USDOL YOG Technical Assistance Institute 2002 on Case Management.*
- *Baltimore’s Youth Activity Sign-in form referenced as a best practice for assuring that enrollee participation hours required by the YOG project is met. Presentation & dissemination of the BYOS procedure and matrix to all participants.*
- *Increased technical assistance calls from other YOG Sites, requesting the YD Matrix tool for reference.*

Area: Youth Development

BEST PRACTICES: Youth Leadership & Civic Engagement

The Youth Opportunity System designed its initiative to include a high volume of youth participation in youth-adult partnerships. Part of this inaugural work started at the onset of its community development efforts with youth focus groups to identify design aspects, the infusion of youth culture into center development, and youth-friendly components for program development. From its inception, the YO System has promoted youth leadership and civic engagement as an integral part of its broader youth development menu.

There are at least five ways BYOS provides opportunities for youth to exercise leadership:

1. Youth served as members of the YO community advisory boards;
2. Youth served as representatives on the Workforce Investment Board's Youth Council;
3. Youth Management Teams exist in partnership with center management at all centers;
4. Youth from across the System serve in leadership roles on the Youth Leadership Council.
5. Youth are involved in all levels of System planning, ensuring youth relevant programs.

Youth have direct access to the project director, an open door policy to staff and Port management, and an active and ongoing involvement in all aspects of the YO initiative.

As active participants in planning and continuous improvement, youth are responsible for:

- Promotions and public relations for system activities to influence peer participation.
- Youth leaders maintain commitment to achieve goals set in their personal case plan.
- Youth serve as spokespersons, give credibility to the programs and serve as outreach linkages for youth recruitment and engagement.
- Youth help plan community service activities as leaders and peer educators to yield better outcomes.
- Youth provide input and feedback on new center and system youth initiatives.
- Youth help plan and implement the annual youth leadership conference.

Youth leaders are trained in creative problem solving, negotiation, compromise, and self-determination and empowerment. This has yielded very positive results with respect to an active youth voice. For example, the YO Prom, an outcome of youth management team conversations on traditions missed when youth drop out of school. Youth campaigned to the sports and recreation liaison to establish a system Prom for members acquiring a high school credential, and/or completing a long-term education or skills training program. The proposal was favorably accepted, funded and a Prom added to the annual activity calendar. Youth have also made successful proposals for community development and services grants, such as Youth As Resources, to actively influence change in their communities.

Youth Civic Engagement (YCE) fosters youth participation in civic service by promoting equal partnership for young people on Baltimore's decision-making boards, organizations and commissions. YO! Baltimore youth (14 – 23) are directly effecting change in their community, their neighborhoods, schools and faith-based institutions by serving in a significant capacity and offering a fresh perspective. Monthly community service projects is one of the strategies that YO! Baltimore has established to promote giving back to the community.

Evidence of Success

- *As a result of its broad outreach to youth and partnership efforts with local groups working towards youth leadership in civic engagement, YO Baltimore successfully lobbied for a required seat for an Out-of-School youth on the Baltimore City Council's Youth Commission, re-established in 2004. This language is written in the local legislation approved by the Council for the City's Youth Commission, a governing body of youth leaders, in partnership with adult agency representatives.*
- *Two youth representatives, an out-of-school youth and in-school student, represent YO! Baltimore on the Baltimore City Youth Commission*

Area: Youth Development

BEST PRACTICE: Fostering the Work & Learning Connection

The BYOS initiative prepares youth academically (i.e., for high school diploma and/or post-secondary opportunities) and links them to other community-based organizations to provide this preparation.

The YO System prepares youth academically through a continuum of educational options including 1) adult basic education and literacy, 2) remedial reading and mathematics, 3) high school credentialing, 4) secondary, and 5) post-secondary educational services. Youth who do not have a high school credential at enrollment are immediately engaged in an education program to foster their educational advancement. Programs offer for remedial reading and math, intensive individual tutoring, GED instruction, Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT) Prep, credit recovery, and connection to post-secondary education.

System program and partner linkages for educational services include: (1) the Baltimore City Community College; (2) Sylvan Learning Systems; (3) a Web-based tutorial program, *My Skills Tutor*; (4) the Baltimore City Career Academy, *Diploma Plus Program*; seven (7) adult literacy instructors administer computer literacy and adult basic education curricula via the Urban Technology Center labs at all centers; and (6) the Nova Net© System offers youth integrated access to the Internet, prescriptive/ diagnostic features, self-paced learning for GED preparation and the *World of Work* competencies, and curriculum aligned with the Maryland State Department of Education learning objectives.

For youth who enroll as high school graduates, BYOS partners with the CollegeBound Foundation, a Baltimore-based non-profit organization whose mission is central to connecting poor youth to college exploration and enrollment opportunities. The College Bound Foundation advisors are on-site at YO centers to provide a comprehensive menu of services and nuts and bolts youth facilitations to connect youth to colleges.

CollegeBound Foundation has supported the enrollment, placement, successful retention and graduation of 5 YO Members from two-year and four-year colleges. One hundred sixty-eight (168) youth are engaged in some aspect of the college access process. Participants are provided workshops on completing the college enrollment process, including successful application, navigation of the national FHSA financial aid and other college-based forms, preparation for the Scholastic Aptitude Test, and writing essays for college. Connected youth also participate in college tours and an annual college fair event.

Evidence of success:

- *Increased youth focus on the acquisition of secondary education certificate or diploma, after placement unsubsidized and unsubsidized employment.*
- *Increased youth participation in college exploration and college club activities.*
- *Increased enrollments of Members into post-secondary educational programs and professional occupational training following successful attainment of diploma and GED.*
- *Establishment of a Funds Follow Students program at the West Side YO Center.*

Area: Youth Development

BEST PRACTICE: YO! Small Learning Communities

YO! Baltimore offered GED and literacy instruction in its first two years through a contractual agreement with the local community college, the Baltimore City Community College. However, one of the community-based satellite centers (WPNPC Studio 760) piloted its own small learning community because youth were reticent to travel to the larger main YO center for educational services. An analysis of the outcomes for GED achievement revealed that the small learning community achieved GED acquisitions for the year above those of the community college programs. Additionally, best practice review showed that certain factors contributed to its successful outcomes. These were:

- Comfort and proximity to home from the location of their neighborhood youth center.*
- Investment of center staff to the youth's achievement beyond classroom instructional time.*
- A personal approach to GED and literacy instruction that afforded youth the supports to approach their learning challenges openly and without shame.*
- The availability of individual tutors for youth with severe learning deficits and disabilities.*
- A community approach to educational success that involved primarily the youth, and all center management and staff as responsible for youth success.*

Starting in Year 04, the YO System terminated its written agreement with the community college and invested dollars to the creation of additional literacy/GED instructor positions at the large YO centers to promote educational success as an equal partner at a par to employment. An analysis of the first year of implementation demonstrated a 400% increase over previous year GED acquisitions by the community college program.

A monthly technical assistance Cluster meeting with YO literacy instructors ensures that a consistent BYOS philosophy, approach, and standards for GED and literacy programming is implemented. Literacy instructors convene to discuss best practices for teaching and learning, as well as to share strategies for engaging older youth as adult learners. The challenges presented by youth with years of educational deficit and failure are met with creative and collaborative learning techniques as well as holistic approaches for problem-solving and life skills counseling.

Evidence of Success:

- *An increase from 11 GED acquisitions in 2000 to a program-to-date total of over 200 GED graduates at the end of Year 05, celebrated by family & community at an annual YO Graduation event established at The Johns Hopkins University, Homewood campus.*
- *An increase from five (5) YO literacy instructors to seven (7) instructors in Year 04, along with the establishment of small alternative learning communities at each YO Port.*
- *Increased learner participation at the small YO satellites for full-day learning schedules.*
- *Higher scoring on site-based GED Practice Tests, taken as a precursor to GED Exam application and a contingency score level for receipt of a BYOS voucher for payment.*
- *All 64 GED graduates (June 2005), are currently employed or on track for post-GED employment, participating in a skills training program, or on-track for and/or already matriculating in a post-secondary two-year or four-year institution.*
- *Two (2) YO Members have graduated from four-year colleges, and three (3) from two-year colleges. One (1) four-year college graduate advanced to a Masters degree program.*

Area: Youth Development

BEST PRACTICE: Individual Focus and Age/Stage Appropriate Outlook

The Youth Opportunity initiative determines the individual needs and goals of each youth, and assures that all needs are addressed.

Each YO Member is assessed for academic competency (Test for Adult Basic Education, TABE-PC); life skill competency and mastery in six domains (Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment); screened for substance abuse and mental health needs (by a certified clinician); tested for career interest and aptitude (Career Key, Career Scope); and screened for computer literacy competencies (Urban Technology Center). Using a bi-level case management approach, results are reviewed by the youth and his/her assigned Readiness, Placement, Retention (RPR) Team, key staff assigned to coordinate program services and resources for the case plan success. This team (employment advocate, job coach, and job developer) reviews identified barriers for removal and assigns a *High, Moderate, or Low* risk level to the case determined by the intensity of the youth's stability and needs. This risk level is re-assessed at progress benchmarks, every 90 days.

The individual opportunity plan (IOP) is a cornerstone of the program and tool for mutual goal planning and working with youth to identify and build strengths and assets. Youth and employment advocates discuss personal interests, strengths and youth development activities, productively engaging the young people in the overall planning. The IOP serves as a tool for organizing a service recommendation and plan to assist participants, as well as an ongoing process, providing a framework for the program to identify, monitor and adjust the work that is being accomplished toward career objectives. The IOP provides a source of accountability for the program to measure the actual progress that is being made by the youth. Risk-assessment is a continuing component throughout the follow-up period as well, with youth moving amongst the categories based on their on-going personal growth and maturation.

Comprehensive assessment assures that the BYOS programs tailor a mix of activities to the age and youth stage of development. Staffs pay close attention to the age mix in the selection of published materials, learning supplies, and as part of the goal planning process. The case manager works with youth to define long-term goals that are sequenced for shorter-range benchmarks leading to the anticipated goal attainment. Developmentally appropriate services; resource linkages, program content and youth development activities are encouraged based on an IOP. Considered are youth motivational techniques, the readability scale of print materials, choice of video games and approaches to learning and counseling. For example, health education, teen pregnancy prevention programs, support groups and life skills assessment consider age in recommending appropriate social and peer group development.

Evidence of Success

- *Retention services begin at enrollments and intake by the removal of barriers to youth success, and re-assessing risk every 90 day ensures that any fluctuation to youth's personal life circumstance is addressed for ongoing barrier removal.*
- *Mutual goal planning is the cornerstone of YO! Baltimore case management services. Youth receive a client-focused method of short-range and long-term goal setting increasing the likelihood of incremental goal attainment.*
- *Ongoing re-assessment in all core program areas enables youth and staff to regularly measure youth development, growth and progress in a consistent manner. Goal attainment measurement is based on the evaluation of short-range goal objectives promoting full youth development.*

Area: Youth Development

BEST PRACTICE: Building Sense of Self and of Group

The BYOS initiative helps young people clarify and establish a personal identity, including a positive self-image and sense of belonging to a larger community.

While each YO Member partners with a case manager to create an Individual Opportunity Plan (IOP) that enables youth to tailor program services to their individual needs, the System also supports the holistic development of the youth. Youth personal identity and positive self-image is fostered in connecting youth to a caring adult, from enrollment through advancements to alumni and follow-up status. Examples include two shuttle vans for transportation, provision of bus tokens and weekly bus passes, housing referral, monthly childcare orientations for parenting youth, center-based community food pantries, and assistance with business and work attire.

THE STIPEND AWARD - Youth with financial need are immediately connected to the Stipend Reward Program that pays a biweekly stipend, for attendance and 80% participation, to youth in pre-placement activities. The impacts of having basic needs met effectively increases youth well being, personal motivation and improves self-image. The mission that supports youth self-empowerment, moving youth from the “moment” towards independence is evidenced through our “life skills coaching” method. The employment advocate assists youth in problem solving, coordination of youth resources and counseling follow-ups to ensure skill learning and future application to life situations.

YO MEMBERSHIP – YO membership establishes a presence and sense of connectedness and belonging for youth enrollees. A larger YO Member community reinforces that all YO centers and programs are part of a greater youth movement in the City that fosters a positive membership image, investment, and benefits. At enrollment, each youth is photographed and gets a YO membership card. The youth’s name, port, advocate and enrollment date is recorded on the card. Membership fosters a sense of belonging to a positive organization and is recognized across the city, affording youth opportunities for *member-only* events and special incentives. Intended for both positive reinforcement and program retention, YO membership also recognizes the youth’s commitment to voluntary participation towards self-sufficiency and youth empowerment.

The diversity of the BYOS youth population (including, but not limited to socioeconomic, racial, gender, cultural, ethnic, age, religion, sexual orientation, mental or physical ability, and other factors) influences the blend of services and activities offered.

While the BYOS acknowledges the diversity of its youth population, the System makes no assumptions or presumptions about need based on gender, race, ethnicity, disability, and/or sexual orientation. BYOS supports the most comprehensive range of linkages necessary to meet youth needs. Employment Advocates and other practitioners work with youth considering their diverse identities and influences as a framework for case planning, resource coordination and blend of services and activities.

Evidence of Success:

- *As a result of youth leadership training and system-wide youth development events and activities, youth from Baltimore’s ethnic neighborhoods, with historic racial divides & boundaries, are willing and able to travel across the City to any Youth Opportunity center for events & services.*
- *There is a high level of acceptance and belonging for all. All YO Centers strive to create environments of tolerance and observe teachable moments where youth are counseled about sensitivity to diversity.*
- *Practitioners and youth leaders use a variety of learning modes and work to expose youth to a variety of community linkages and presenters, with respect to race, ethnicity, and gender.*

Area: Program Operations

BEST PRACTICE: Transportation Assistance

YO System Policy on Bus Passes and Tokens

The System policy for assistance views transportation as a legitimate barrier for youth enrolled into educational and employment programs without a means to cover the costs of public transportation. Youth are not prohibited from engagement & enrollment due to lack of transportation. Each YO Center manager is accountable for verifying all circumstances and information related to the provision of transportation supports to YO! Members. Bus tokens and bus passes are made available to all Members, as needed, for the first weeks of program enrollment until a youth has received his/her first stipend or payroll check. An internal management system and mechanism for the distribution and tracking of transportation assistance is implemented at each YO center:

Center-based Guidelines

The West Side YO Center protocol provides staff (primarily Employment Advocate and Literacy Instructor) with a supply of "Vouchers" for both bus passes and tokens. When a YO Member in "good standing" (attending class or actively involved in some program activity) has a need for assistance, the practitioner issues a signed voucher, verifying that the young person is eligible to receive a bus pass/ or bus tokens. Youth redeem the voucher with the Center Manager or Assistant Manager, and reconciliation documents are prepared.

The East Side YO Center uses a Token Request form. Recently, the form was modified to include a signature line for the Member receiving tokens. Either the assistant manager or program manger issues the tokens. The center also has backup staff that receives a minimum number of tokens to issue during an absence of center management.

Studio 760 Members who are attending GED classes receive bus tokens. However, if youth miss classes, additional tokens are not given until they attend for two consecutive days. Studio 760 also assists working youth by providing bus tokens until they receive their first paycheck. Requirements include signature into a token disbursement logbook, where youth sign their name and social security number.

The McKim YO Satellite uses bus tokens for barrier removals, incentives, youth emergencies, and for supports to literacy and GED students needing support to get to and from classes. Members must have a minimum of 3 classroom hours per day to receive transportation assistance. Bus tokens also provide an incentive for Members' continued connection to the YO center. Bus tokens are also used to support Members involved in skills training programs, until the youth receives a stipend. Transportation assistance is also offered to help youth starting new jobs, until such time that they receive their first paycheck. Youth in the job development stage may request bus tokens to make interview appointments. On an individual basis, the YO center supports its members with transportation assistance to other community resources, such as social services or medical/hospital appointments. Providing bus tokens allows staff to monitor youth attendance and participation on a daily basis.

The YO Chance policy specifies that youth not receive bus tokens after receipt of their first stipend. To keep youth focused, the Site Coordinator monitors the sign-in schedules for youth in skills training. Additionally, youth must come to the YO center every three days to pick up bus tokens while participating in skills training or starting new jobs. Provision of bus tokens is discontinued to the YO Member upon receipt of a first payroll check.

Area: Program Operations

BEST PRACTICE: Transportation Assistance, continued

BEST PRACTICE: The YO Shuttle Van/s

During its first few years of operations, the YO System provided each main YO Center with budgetary means to lease a passenger van for use in shuttling Members between center locations across the city to skills trainings, Sylvan educational program locations, to sports and recreation outings and events, and for special events requiring transportation. YO satellite centers make arrangements with port management at their EZ Area main center to schedule the van for planned dates within the month for youth pick-up and delivery to events and youth development activities.

Beginning in 2002, with the establishment of a health suite for system wide Member access quality healthcare and health triage services, the YO Shuttle Van initiated pick-up and delivery of Members in groups from YO sites for medical appointments at the West Side YO Community Center (YOCC).

The shuttle van is also used by administration for intra-agency mail courier service to partner locations, headquarters and programs, as required. At times, youth development materials are shuttled for YO youth conferences, large recreational events, and for planned transportation requests by other youth services partners to transport youth.

Best Practice: Designated Van Driver

The West Side main YO Center from its inception established a part-time, then full-time van driver position to support its shuttle van services. The van driver receives annual training and certifications under the City of Baltimore transportation office to operate and maintain agency-sponsored transport vehicles. This proved to be an asset for youth programming and customer satisfaction, providing both a predictable resource and consistent operations and guidelines for youth.

While the East Side main YO center leased a van for its use, it did not designate a staff position for van driver, and relied on assignments of youth practitioners and its assistant program manager to operate the shuttle van. This practice, at times, presented inconsistent reliability of the transportation resource.

Evidence of success:

- *Customer satisfaction as a resource for newly enrolled youth and for those without a means to pay costs for public transportation, until approvals for stipend or wage.*
- *Predictable and consistent transportation of youth for YO programs and youth development activities.*
- *Reliable staff and caring adult who developed supportive relations with YO Members, often mentoring youth and offering consistent guidance and lasting positive influence.*
- *Youth participation in YO System events and activities remain high when youth transportation is provided.*
- *After Year 04, the West Side shuttle van continues as the only center-based vehicle for transporting youth, however, the managers from other Ports and the in-school programs schedule for its use by making arrangements through the Program Manager.*

Area: Youth Development

BEST PRACTICE: Peer-to-Peer Mentoring

Older out-of-school youth who have attained one or more of their goals are enthusiastic to share their personal life-transforming success with high school students at-risk for school dropout behavior. This youth leadership development program provides an opportunity for disconnected youth to give back through reaching out to in-school youth, and helping keep them on track for school completion.

The YO System **One 2 One** Peer Mentoring Program connects high school juniors & seniors with YO out-of-school achievers. It has completed a two-year track record of success. YO recruits graduates of its GED programs, those working in unsubsidized employment, or placed in skills training as prospective Mentors. YO Members enrolled and matriculating in colleges and universities are also recruited. Students of YO in-school programs located at Douglass, Patterson, and Southwestern high schools serve as prospective mentees.

The peer-mentoring program operates each school year with its October Kick-off Dinner, and runs through June. Monthly meetings held between mentors and mentees provide mentoring supports, college exploration, career networking, and cultural enrichment activities. Other One 2 One youth development and supports include guest speakers on scholarship & financial aid, information on employment and training opportunities, and activities to meet & greet a network of career professionals working in the youth's career area of interest.

Evidence of success:

- *YO out-of-school older youth are able to serve as positive role models with high school students for the entire school year.*
- *OSY Mentors and their mentees recognized & acknowledged for their successful relationship and youth leadership efforts.*
- *Monthly cultural enrichment outings and events are well attended by mentees, for example, every student wrote and performed their poems at this year's National Poetry Month celebration.*
- *FUTURES students at dropout risk are enriched through peer mentoring, and gain positive and supportive relationships with caring young adult peers.*
- *FUTURES Plus students explore career opportunities through focused learning activities that provide direct experience networking with professionals in career pathways of interest.*
- *Two out-of-school Mentors requested to mentor more than one student, as a result of their successful O2O peer mentoring experience.*

YO! Baltimore: Lessons Learned

LESSONS LEARNED

The YO! Baltimore project (administered by the Mayor's Office of Employment Development, MOED, as intermediary with multiple workforce partners and contributors) has learned much in its five-year establishment and implementation of a large-scale, federally-funded comprehensive youth development initiative for out-of-school youth. These lessons are diverse and touch upon many aspects of the project's design, planning and community operations with regards to out-of-school youth, its federal oversight, local partnering and collaborative operations, serving as lead agency for a community-based effort, and the resources leveraged for expanded capacity and success. .

AREA: Lessons from serving as Lead Agency

- The Mayor's Office of Employment Development (MOED) has learned:
 - The importance of checks and balances for program operation;
 - The value of strong case management strategies; and
 - The importance of identifying strong contract partners

AREA: Lessons learned in developing local partnerships

- It is important to have all partners develop and understand the overall grant concept of *youth development*.
- Continuing communication and monitoring for contract compliance is essential.
- Local partners can be more flexible than city government.
- Local partners can be very generous and supportive of the vision of a coordinated youth development system of care.
- Partners must have the same mission and goals.

AREA: Lessons Regarding Out-of-school Youth Recruitment

- The most effective method of engaging and enrolling members is one-to-one engagement/canvassing with an enthusiastic, hip and young recruiter training in youth culture and youth recruitment. The second most effective method is word-of-mouth, peer-to-peer recruitment. Thirdly, the use of an enrollment incentive (e.g., tickets to a hip-hop concert advertised on a major radio station in the youth market). Once enrolled, youth need to be engaged quickly.

AREA: Lessons for the case management of these youth.

Out-of-school and disconnected youth generally require:

- Qualified, supportive, and nurturing staff.
- Staff experienced and trained in approaches to case management, youth development, and resource coordination for youth specialty groups (youth at risk, disabled, sexual minority – GLBTQ youth, juvenile offenders, etc.) are important ingredients to program success.
- Therapeutic crisis management tools are essential.
- Learning challenges and disabilities have to be addressed.
- Target youth need constant and continuing positive reinforcement, praise and celebrations of all accomplishments to keep trying and to develop resiliency.
- Strong and continual focus on youth goal planning and follow-through is helpful to teaching youth goal-setting skills.
- A strong software tracking system is crucial to tracking individual, collective and program achievement.

AREA: Lessons for effective pathways for at-risk youth to succeed

- **Caring adults with continuing communication.** *Naming its case manager position “Employment Advocate” was by design and intent. YO Baltimore wanted each youth to know that this person was to serve as his/her personal advocate for all aspects of care and development, including readiness for employment.*
- **Supports in learning to build and apply life skills and personal problem solving.** *YO modeled a “life skills coaching” counseling approach, where life skills are reinforced “in the moment” when youth is experiencing a personal life management circumstance. This keeps life skills instruction reality-based in the real world experiences of the youth, and reinforces the application of life skill choices, effective problem solving, and skills for negotiation and decision-making.*
- **Identify behavioral “code switching”** so that youth can learn to succeed in a variety of environments.
- **Create “safe havens” for youth.** *YO youth sought a feeling of safety in crime ridden, violent and terrorized neighborhoods. Youth looked for warmth, stability, and predictable spaces, where they are welcomed and engaged by non-judgmental and supportive staff and resources. YO Baltimore centers worked with “youth management teams” to develop a “youth zone” within the environment where youth could claim their own space for recreation, social development and hang-in activities.*
- **Small learning communities where individualized learning for academic achievement is supported by a group process.** *To address youth literacy levels at entry (generally ranging between 2.0 and 9.0 grade equivalents in reading and math), YO*

A Compendium of Best Practices from the Baltimore YO! System Experience

hired its own literacy and GED instructors, and moved to establish small learning communities at centers in 2003, providing smaller class sizes and more intensive instruction based on individual needs. Modeled on a self-contained model, problem-based learning and learning teams were structured to incorporate peer-to-peer learning, while instructors scheduled individual teaching activities and independent work based on youth need. YO instructors developed volunteer corps for individual and group tutoring, as well as small libraries expose youth to literature, reading groups, and book clubs created to support youth grade level and personal reading development. Outcomes for goal attainment and GED acquisitions increased by 300 % in the first year, and youth participation and achievement increased significantly.

AREA: Lessons for serving youth offenders.

- Dedicate a staff member to work out of the Department of Juvenile Services office.
- Immediate engagement upon enrollment into programs and support groups.
- Strong coordination and communications with the youth's probation officer enhances the success of resource coordination and youth goal achievement.
- Hands-on skills training.

AREA: Lessons for continuing staff development.

- Youth projects for hard-to-serve youth populations must be selective in hiring qualified and trained staff at all levels, and ensure that staff development is a key element of program development and operations. Baltimore developed a Youth Practitioner Institute and certification process for the ongoing training of its system practitioners, prior to becoming aware of the USDOL leadership institute. *This important strategy provided YO staff an opportunity to meet their counterparts working at other YO centers across Baltimore City and to learn and share best practices being produced from their day-to-day working with youth, and from program innovations learned through YPI trainers. Throughout its five-year period, YO System maintained an annual and periodic schedule of staff development activities based on strategic, program-specific, staff- and customer-driven areas identified in the YOG youth development plan.*
- The YOG Leadership Institute and Peer-to-Peer Technical Assistance trainings. *The national YOG Leadership Institute gave staff the opportunity to understand the national implications for the Youth Opportunity vision. Practitioners experienced powerful peer-to-peer exchanges with national YOG Site staff that proved significant for moving innovations into our local program more effectively.*

AREA: Lessons from the MIS system

- We were crippled for two years from the original USDOL endorsed on-line data tracking and management system implemented by some national YOG Sites. In 2002, Baltimore

A Compendium of Best Practices from the Baltimore YO! System Experience

moved to improve its data-tracking, case management, and administrative reporting, requesting DOL to allow the project to move to the KIDSMART Case Manager 2000 © system. We have found KIDSMART to be highly effective as a tool for practitioner entry of real-time data, and in tracking both youth case documentation and performance.