

CHANGING
MINDS

CHANGING
LIVES



Baltimore's Youth Opportunity Story



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

YO! Baltimore was created to address a growing challenge. Thousands of Baltimore City's young people were on the streets – young people who lacked education, skills, and credentials. Many also lacked any idea of what it takes to succeed in the labor force. Research and common sense suggested that without the opportunity to make the transition to the adult world of work, youth in these circumstances were highly susceptible to aberrant behaviors that could lead to significant negative consequences for themselves and their neighborhoods.

When a community faces this type of situation, which Baltimore did in 2000, it recognizes that what is needed goes well beyond the positive impact a single youth program might offer. Baltimore's leaders knew that in addition to supporting school reform efforts, they needed to develop a comprehensive network of education and training programs and engage a wide variety of human service providers to work collaboratively and form an integrated system. Ideally this system would address the multiple issues facing out-of-school, unemployed youth and identify and build on their many talents and attributes. More important, this system needed to operate at a scale that could make a measurable dent in the growing at-risk youth population.

This was the challenge that confronted Baltimore when the federal government offered a limited number of cities the opportunity to participate in a Department of Labor demonstration youth program called Youth Opportunity. The overall design of the federal effort was to concentrate a significant amount of resources on the most at-risk youth between the ages of 14 and 21 who were living in the local area's most impoverished neighborhoods. The initiative called for the creation of a comprehensive youth service system providing skills training, basic education and work experience, committed involvement of caring adults, and developmental opportunities aimed at assisting the young people in the successful transition to adulthood and responsible citizenship.

Baltimore successfully competed against hundreds of communities across the nation and was awarded a Youth Opportunity grant in March 2000. Then the hard work of making Baltimore's vision a reality began. A committed team of representatives of youth organizations, city agencies, the public school system, post-

secondary institutions and neighborhood groups began building a *youth service system* and by 2001 YO! Baltimore became fully operational.

Federal requirements limited YO! Baltimore to certain geographical areas designated as Baltimore's Empowerment Zone (EZ). This area included 33 residential neighborhoods on the east, south and west sides of Baltimore. The targeted communities topped the charts in terms of people living in poverty, unemployment and crime rates, as well as a host of other negative social statistics. Collectively, more than 10,000 young people lived in the EZ and were already a part of, or at high risk of adding to, Baltimore's significant level of unemployed or under-employed young adults.



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As the Youth Opportunity grant funding will expire on June 30, 2006, it is time to look back, assess the hard work and expenditure of \$38 million in federal funds and determine what has been accomplished. A comprehensive summary of YO! Baltimore's impressive list of achievements is contained in this report, and detailed on the YO! website, www.yobaltimore.org.


The following shares some highlights of these accomplishments:

- YO! designed, renovated and equipped five new, highly automated youth "places," creating an effective, community-based network of service centers.
- YO! engaged over 4,300 young people in a variety of programs – many of these individuals are still actively participating and are on track to enter the workforce or college in 2005 and 2006.
- YO! filled more than 2,000 jobs in Baltimore City for over 600 different employers.
- YO! helped more than 1,600 young people gain valuable educational credentials (post-secondary degree, high school diploma/GED/vocational skill credential).
- YO! participants entering the labor force earned wages at a rate 44% higher than a comparable peer group.
- YO! participants dropped out of school less often, attended class more frequently and graduated from school at a higher rate than their school peers who did not enroll in the program.
- YO! female participants had babies less frequently than non-participants and, in fact, were 25% less likely to have a child than the comparison group.
- YO! participants 18 and older showed a third fewer arrests and convictions of crimes than a comparable group. Participants were also half as likely to be arrested for a violent offense as the comparison group.


This list continues in the report, and along with the accompanying statistics, clearly proves that YO! Baltimore has had a major impact on one of the most disadvantaged groups in our city. While the data show that life is already improving in many ways for thousands of these young people, the true return on investment

will be evident in the years to come as the YO! participants who are now on a positive trajectory attend college, start their long term careers, support their families and contribute to Baltimore's economy.

Not to be forgotten are the lessons learned from this five-year YO! experience. These lessons span a wide spectrum – from discovering what services worked best with disconnected, out-of-school youth, to confirming the importance of forming multiple partnerships to address the diverse needs of this target population. (An extensive compilation of the best



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Through YO! thousands of youngsters have been given opportunities and provided access to the developmental tools they needed to prepare for the future. In changing minds and offering assistance, YO! changed young lives. The following sections of this report tell stories illustrative of the many of lives that YO! has influenced.


While much has been accomplished for youth living in selected neighborhoods of Baltimore, much is still needed throughout the city to address the growing numbers of disconnected and unprepared youth. A recent report by researchers from Northeastern University shares that 51% of Baltimore's young people between the ages of 16 and 24 are out of school and out of work. This statistic is telling, and it underscores the need to not only sustain YO! Baltimore, but to expand the Youth Opportunity system beyond the Empowerment Zone communities. With its existing infrastructure, expertise, and proven track record, YO! Baltimore is the foundation for such a system.

This report is a call to action. Individuals, organizations and key stakeholders in Baltimore's future are urged to join the effort to ensure our city's most disadvantaged and disenfranchised young people have the support they need and deserve. Please contact Mr. Ernest Dorsey at 410-396-6722 or edorsey@oedworks.com indicating your level of interest and sharing the commitment you can make to help sustain the YO! Baltimore System.

Don't wait – Baltimore's future is now.

practices and effective strategies culled by the YO! practitioners and program administrators can be found on the YO website, www.yobaltimore.org.) Baltimore's youth service providers are now better prepared to have even greater success with these young people and more convinced than ever that the continuation of a comprehensive, collaborative effort to address the out-of-school youth issue in Baltimore remains vital.

In short, YO! Baltimore has changed the mindset of many youth who believed they would not succeed because they were denied the chance to succeed.



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YO! BALTIMORE: BUILDING A “YOUTH SYSTEM”

The Beginning

The genesis of a “youth system” in Baltimore started in the spring of 1999. A group of dedicated youth service providers came together to consider what could be done to assist disadvantaged, out of school youth in the city. Concerned about high dropout rates and an unprepared, unskilled workforce, the Mayor’s Office of Employment Development (MOED) convened this group to examine ideas and options to help young adults prepare for their transition into responsible citizens and labor force participants.

At about the same time, the United States Congress added language to the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) calling for a comprehensive youth demonstration project to be labeled the “Youth Opportunity” program or “YO.” The federal initiative was designed to be a five-year effort, which would channel significant levels of resources to selected high poverty communities throughout the nation. Baltimore competed for, and along with 35 other communities across the country was awarded a “YO” grant in March 2000.

The YO! Goals

In many ways, the YO! Baltimore plan was very straightforward. The goal was to establish a comprehensive youth services system in the target area and have this system aggressively act to provide out of school youth and those most at risk of dropping out of school who lived in the YO! area with opportunities to:

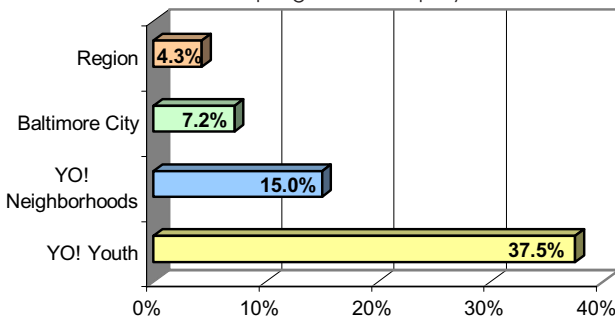
- Increase labor market skills and gain career-starting employment,
- Raise educational attainment rates,
- Fully tap their potential for becoming productive and self-supporting citizens.

Success would be measured by an increase in the employment rate, graduation rate and college enrollment of young people residing in the specific neighborhoods.

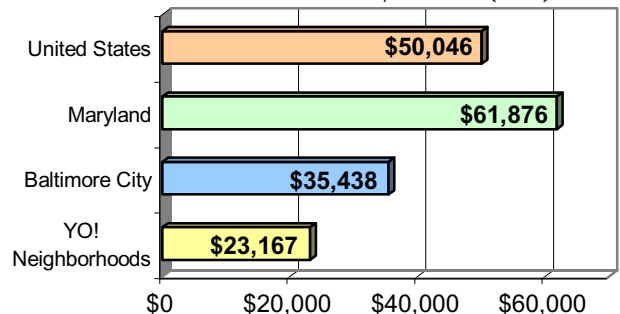
The YO! Target Area

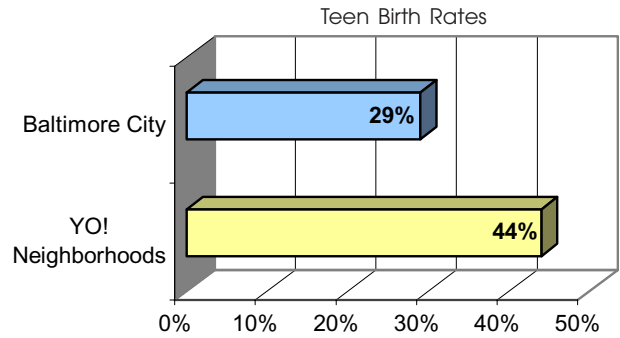
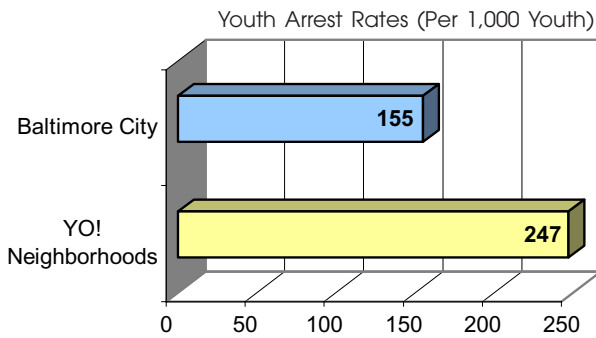
Following federal guidelines, the target community was nearly identical to Baltimore’s Empowerment Zone (EZ). Covering 25 census tracts in 33 residential neighborhoods on the east, south and west sides of the city, it was an area of extreme poverty. The four following graphs represent the social and economic issues people in these communities faced on a daily basis at the time the YO! Baltimore grant was developed.

Pre-program Unemployment Rates



Median Family Income (2000)





Other facts about the target community at the onset of YO! included:

- Six of every 10 children lived in extreme poverty in the YO! area,
- Less than half of the adults in the area finished high school,
- 88 percent of YO! neighborhood mothers were single parents at the time of their child's birth.

Clearly, when the YO! program began in the spring of 2000, the majority of the more than 10,000 teens and young adults who resided in the YO! area were some of Baltimore's most at-risk people – at risk of failing to achieve their potential and at risk of becoming additional negative statistics.

YO! Philosophy, Service Model and Youth Centers

The YO! model differed in many ways from the majority of youth programs that had preceded it. Going beyond a traditional program approach of staff teaching and training youth, the YO! plan of service required that highly skilled and professional YO! staff members and administrators, along with several carefully selected YO! service providers, fully engage the youth by empowering them to take responsibility for their own lives. YO! Baltimore was certainly about jobs and education, but it was also about youth development, good citizenship, physical and mental health, and social development. The YO! Baltimore youth centers that were anchored in the EZ neighborhoods became not only training and educational hubs, but places for social activities and for learning about life, family and cultural history. At times, for some youth, these centers also served as sanctuaries and safe havens where troubled youth could gain a short escape from the trials and issues that confronted them on the streets and at home.

In all, five YO! sites were opened in the EZ – two main comprehensive centers and three smaller community satellites:

- **The Westside Youth Opportunity Center:** located in the former Lafayette Square Community Center on Lafayette and Gilmore Streets and operated by the Mayor's Office of Employment Development;
- **The Eastside Youth Opportunity Center:** located at Gay and Wolfe Streets and operated by the Historic East Baltimore Community Action Coalition (HEBCAC);
- **YO! At Studio 760:** the Southwest satellite center, operated by the Washington Village Pigtown Neighborhood Planning Council;
- **YO! at The Chance:** the Eastside satellite center, operated by East Baltimore Community Corporation (EBCC)
- **YO! at McKim :** the Southwest satellite center, operated by McKim Community Center.



Baltimore Success Stories

The young people whose stories follow illustrate both the sobering hardships so many urban teens face and their remarkable ability to achieve against considerable odds when opportunity, support and caring adults converge on their lives.

In addition to the five YO! sites, four Baltimore City public high schools which drew the majority of students living in the EZ – Frederick Douglass, Southern, Patterson and Southwestern high schools – became components of the YO! System. YO! engaged the highly effective and well established FUTURES dropout prevention program to identify and work with those youth likely to drop out of school.

Together, the five centers and four high schools along with more than twenty youth-service providing organizations formed the YO! Baltimore System. This coalition implemented the YO! Baltimore model which included the following components: **1) comprehensive education** (tutoring, literacy, high school credentialing and preparation for and linkage to post secondary education); **2) employment preparation** (work ethics, understanding employer expectations, occupational skills specific training, work experience/ internships, summer jobs); **3) support services** (physical and mental health, group counseling, mentoring, recreation and cultural enrichment, transportation); **4) leadership development** (civic engagement, community service, youth empowerment).

Underscoring these four critical areas, was perhaps the most important element in the YO! Baltimore System – advocacy. Each YO! participant was matched with an employment advocate whose primary purpose was to help the young person navigate the myriad of services and provide the support needed to stay on track, to make progress and to succeed. A host of other caring adults, coaches and mentors filled out the staffing component of the system so that at all turns, the youngsters in YO! were surrounded by committed role models. Key to the effectiveness of the staff was a well-planned and challenging “youth worker” training, which was required for employment with the YO! Baltimore System. A carefully designed Youth Practitioners



Sharonda

A high school dropout, Sharonda was homeless and felt hopeless when she was recruited to the YO! at The Chance program in July of 2003. Sharonda was living in an abandoned house and using drugs after her family disintegrated from drug abuse. With no relatives to care for her, Sharonda had no choice but to live in a series of foster care group homes.



YO! staff worked with Sharonda to secure stable housing, access the financial support needed to survive, and enter substance abuse counseling. She was also encouraged to enroll in GED classes and participate in positive extra-curricular activities offered by YO! Baltimore. With this encouragement, Sharonda became focused, gained confidence in her own success and passed the GED exam in January of 2004.

After trying several jobs, Sharonda realized that what she wanted most was a meaningful career. The YO! staff helped her to achieve this goal by enrolling her in certified nursing assistant training. Sharonda passed the coursework and is now employed at the Manor Nursing Home in Towson, Md. But Sharonda isn't planning to stop there. As she continues employment and gains more experience and economic stability, she is working to advance in her profession and become a licensed practical nurse or a registered nurse. After joining YO!, Sharonda is sure to succeed along this path.



Ben



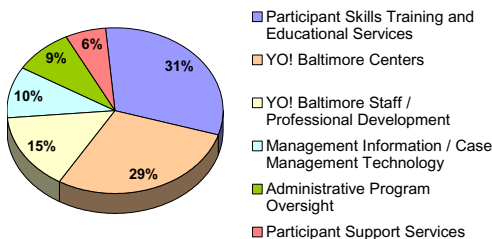
curriculum was developed specifically for YO! Baltimore so that each and every staff person would be equipped with the same tools, skill sets and shared YO! philosophy.

Committed staff were poised to address the needs these young people had, at any moment, in one place. When fully equipped and completely up and running, the YO! Baltimore centers offered youth a full menu of opportunities:

- Academic support including computer based tutorials, instructor led classes, on-line pre-GED and GED courses and credit recovery,
- Life skills, job readiness, interviewing techniques and world of work seminars,
- Career planning and occupational training classes,
- Job placement and post placement retention support,
- Computer training and Internet access,
- Recreational services, including a fitness center and recording studio,
- Health suite and referrals to dental and visual health services,
- Parenting classes,
- Mental health and substance abuse treatment referrals,
- Clubs and leadership development activities,
- College tours, financial aid and application assistance.

Thoughtful planning was essential in deciding how to most wisely utilize the grant award of \$38,042,328 in order to create, maintain, and continually improve such a large youth system. The following chart shows how the funds were allocated over the past five years:

Total YO! Baltimore Expenditures 2000-2005



When Ben’s mother died, he was forced to live with elderly grandparents who depended upon public assistance for economic support. With few resources, Ben’s everyday life was difficult, often lacking enough food or basic necessities, which caused him to envy the material things his friends had. Ben dropped out of school, clung to street life and had run-ins with the criminal justice system. He enrolled in the Historic East Baltimore Community Action Coalition (HEBCAC) Eastside YO! Center in May of 2001.

YO! program staff immediately saw Ben’s potential as a very bright young man who was simply caught up in dark circumstances. YO! staff helped Ben to re-enroll in school and offered constructive outlets for his non-school hours, which helped him to stay off the streets and out of trouble. Through YO!, Ben participated in the HEBCAC youth leadership effort, became inspired by new possibilities, and earned a high school diploma.

Then Ben requested and was awarded a one-year human services apprenticeship with YO! Baltimore, where he could help other young people triumph over their challenges. Ben participated in apprenticeship classes, learned the jargon and human services curriculum, and job shadowed YO! staff. Ben demonstrated a real knack for his work and was hired as a recruiter at the YO! McKim Center. When decreases in the YO Grant resulted in staff reductions, Ben was able to translate his employability skills and find other employment. Today, Ben is successfully working as a mechanic-laborer at Maryland Thermoform where he repairs machinery and assists with packaging products.



YO! BALTIMORE 2000-2005: FIVE YEARS OF SUCCESS

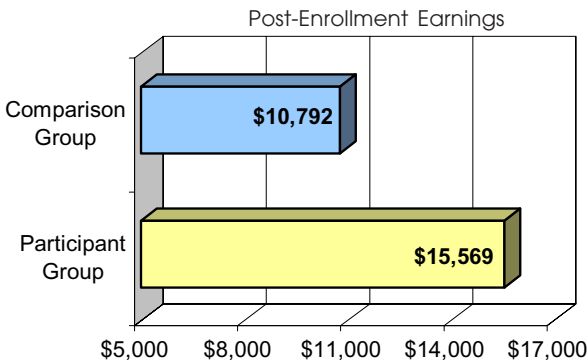
It has been five years since YO! Baltimore opened its doors. After reaching out to over 4,300 young people in some of the city's most impoverished neighborhoods, YO! Baltimore has a great story to tell. It is a story of youth, like the ones highlighted on these pages, who are making positive changes to create a better future for themselves and their families.

It is also a story of a program's impact on the community relative to:

- Youth employment and earnings,
- Youth pregnancy,
- Crime.

Employment and Earnings Impact

YO! Baltimore evaluated the employment and earnings impact of the program using the state's quarterly wage records. The evaluation involved comparing YO! participants enrolled from July 2000 to March 2003 to a group of the youth who completed YO! enrollment in the same time frame but who did not actively participate in the program. The wage data were



available up to the quarter ending in March 2004.

The first comparison was of the total post-enrollment wages paid. This comparison indicated a

Ashley

Ashley came to the YO! Westside Center as a single parent with a fourth grade reading level. Through YO!, Ashley was able to get the support she needed to care for her child and continue with her education. Ashley attended GED classes and was challenged by her teacher to write down her opinions on various topics to evaluate her reasoning skills and her belief system. As Ashley gained more confidence, she asked lots of questions, receiving clarification and gradually improving her outlook on life. Soon Ashley's hard work paid off as she began exhibiting better writing and verbal skills, doubling her grade level skills within three months. Ashley began independent study for the GED content material a few months later and then passed the GED exam.



Still, Ashley had more goals in mind in order to improve her economic situation and better care for her child. With support from YO! Baltimore, Ashley enrolled in a career training class at Baltimore City Community College to become a certified nursing assistant (CNA).

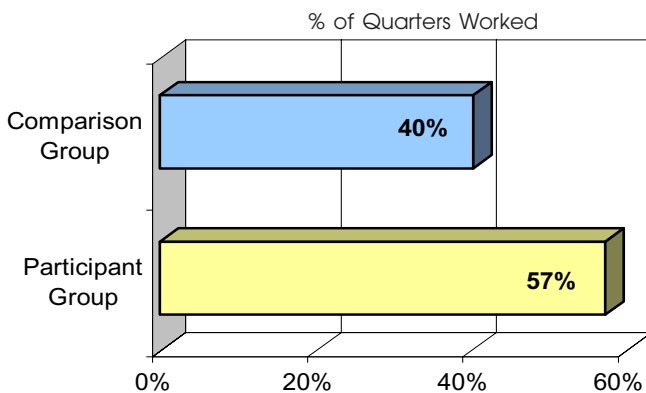
Today, Ashley is a true success story. After graduating from the community college, she landed a job at Genesis Health Care in Towson, Maryland, as a CNA.

Building upon this success, Ashley followed her dream to obtain a driver's license and purchase her first car so she would no longer have to rely on public transportation.

Ashley's success does not end here. She plans to enter college in the fall of 2005 to expand her nursing training.

positive outcome for active program participants. As shown on the chart, the YO! participant group had nearly \$5,000 in additional earnings, which is over a 44% difference from the comparison group. On average, the participant group had a 36-month time period from their enrollment date to the end date that the data were available, as compared to the comparison group's 34-month average. When the data were adjusted to account for this difference the active participant group continued to demonstrate a significant positive difference. They out-earned the comparison group by more than 35%.

The second point of comparison was the labor market attachment rates of the two groups. This measured the amount of time a person had available for work and how much time they actually worked over a specific period. Some experts believe that one of the best indicators of long-term labor market success is a person's attachment level. Again, the difference between the two groups was significant. As indicated on the chart, the participant group did better than the comparison group by 17 percentage points, which equates to a 42% increase in terms of labor market attachment for the active participant group as compared to the youth in the comparison group.



When one considers that the participant group, by definition, was more active and engaged in a variety of academic and social development program activities that would have taken time away from being available for work, this difference is even more pronounced.

Jay

When he was a student at Southwestern High School, Jay had difficulty staying motivated and interested during the 90-minute classes that he was taking. He eventually lost interest and dropped out. Jay heard about YO! as an option to pursue his education and decided to give it a try.



During the fall of 2003 Jay started to attend GED classes at YO! Studio 760. With intense focus Jay took and passed his GED examination during the summer 2004. He eagerly participated in the 2005 GED graduation ceremony at Johns Hopkins University.

His next goal was to gain employment. Through YO! he signed up to do experiential training in a *greening project* with a YO! Baltimore partner, Civic Works. He learned about landscaping, construction, and the environmental benefits of planting trees in his southwest Baltimore neighborhood. Jay's next step toward economic independence was to earn a driver's license. He paid to attend driving school, but needed extra assistance with his parking skills. His YO! advocate helped him practice parking on weekends, and Jay passed his driving test on the first attempt.

Jay is now working at the Baltimore City Department of Housing where he is putting his landscaping and construction skills to good use. He is able to support himself and this fall his employer is helping him to earn a license to drive trucks.

YO! Educational Impact

The YO! Baltimore program has stressed the importance for youth to have the opportunity to gain educational credentials. In order to address the impact this program focus has achieved, the educational outcomes for both in-school and out-of-school YO! participants were reviewed and compared. The results indicated a significant educational impact on the lives of youth who actively participated in the program.

As the chart shows, for the in-school youth at four city high schools, the YO! students had a significantly better daily attendance, which educators believe is the foundation for school success. Simply stated, you can't learn if you don't show up.

Derrick

Derrick enrolled in YO! at The Chance in June of 2002 with a criminal background and without a high school diploma. With limited opportunities, Derrick's anger and frustration manifested in extremely offensive behaviors toward YO! participants and staff.



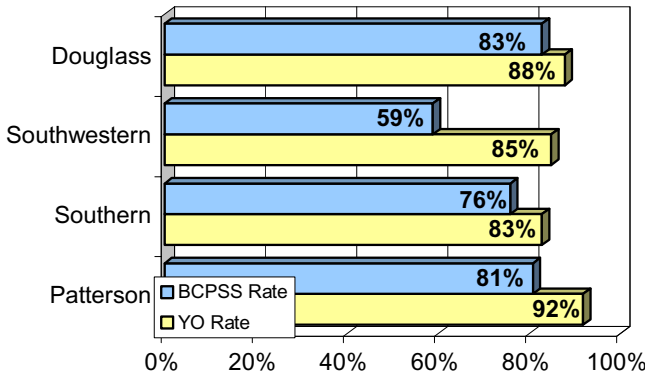
After much persuasion from YO! staff, Derrick participated in GED classes and job readiness training. He was eager to get a job, but needed to develop work skills before he could meet local employers. YO! Baltimore arranged for Derrick to gain valuable work experience through a part-time office internship. But Derrick was fired from his internship due to his self-defeating behaviors. YO! staff continued to work with Derrick, using the negative experiences to teach him how to be more successful. In time, Derrick made a determined effort to control his rage and began to listen, taking advice and constructive criticism.

Derrick earned a GED in June of 2004. Finding solid employment was a much more difficult challenge because of his criminal background, and he attended several job fairs and interviews only to be rejected. Derrick did not despair or revert to aberrant behavior to vent his frustrations and persevered.

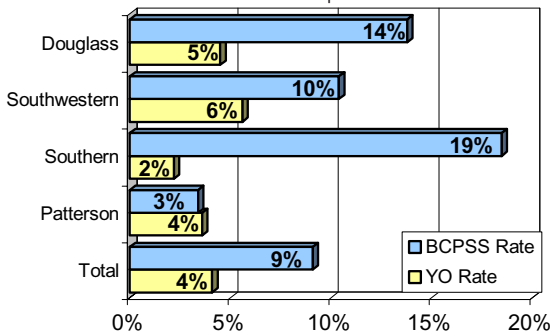
Derrick finally found employment at the Solo Cup Company as a packing dispatcher. In addition, YO! staff stayed in contact with Derrick, helping him perform well at his job and remain connected to the YO! Center.

Derrick has recently completed a six-week training at Decker College, a trade school in Atlanta, to become a licensed electrician. He will start his apprenticeship this fall and continue to take classes from Decker on-line.

2004 Attendance Comparison



2004 Dropout Rates





Renee



But the good news does not end with attendance. YO! youth dropped out of school at a rate that was half that of their school peers (*chart on previous page*). Over 470 YO! students have stayed in school and earned their high school diplomas, and 200 youth have achieved their GEDs.

While the dropout, attendance, and graduation results are impressive, YO! participants are proving their desire to continue their education and pursue post-secondary options. Hundreds of YO! graduates have been connected to community and four-year colleges and are still in the educational pipeline and who will, before they end their program participation, add to the positive outcomes by achieving higher degrees.

The question of whether the program played a role in fostering the educational accomplishments of these out-of-school youth or whether the results would have occurred anyway might be asked. To address this issue, a comparison of high school dropout youth who were early enrollees in the program (July 2002 to March 2003) was completed. This comparison indicated that youth who were active YO! participants obtained their GEDs at a rate that was double that of the youth who did not actively participate, providing a strong indication of a direct program influence.

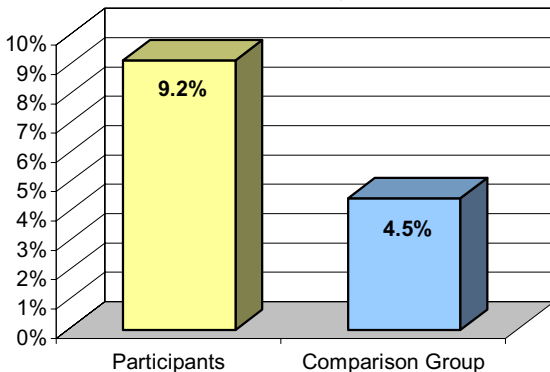
Clearly, the program appeared to have had positive impacts in terms of school and educational attainment for both in and out-of-school youth that would not have occurred if the youth had not participated in YO!

Renee came to the Historic East Baltimore Community Action Coalition (HEBCAC) Eastside YO! Center in November of 2001 desperate for help. With little parental support and no other relatives to turn to, Renee was unable to care for and feed her son, Larry. Consequently, she was forced to send him to his out-of-state father and his family to receive proper care. Renee originally thought the YO! Baltimore program would provide immediate financial support, but while YO! was not designed to help in this way, the program provided a multitude of services that improved Renee's well-being and got her life back on track.

Through YO! Baltimore, Renee enrolled in GED classes, passed the GED exam, and participated in a paid office internship. This experience helped Renee to realize that she is very good with people and is a productive team player. Following up on the internship experience, Renee and her YO! advocate arranged for career training as a health care coordinator at the Maryland Center for Arts and Technology. Additionally, Renee worked with a YO! mental health counselor and participated in support groups to help her deal with the emotional stress of temporarily giving up her child. Through YO! and College Bound, Renee also enrolled at Dundalk Community College.

Today, Renee is working as a patient care aide at the Mercy Medical Center. Renee's success exceeds her educational accomplishments and new career. Shortly after getting the full-time job, Renee was able to lease her own two-bedroom apartment and reunited with her son.

GED Accomplishments



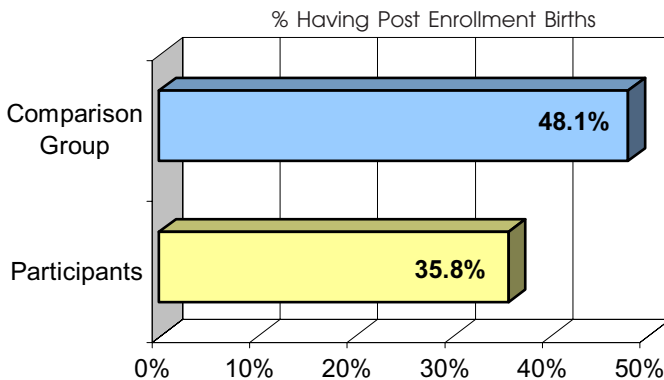


Impact on Youth Pregnancy

National studies indicate that teen parents face many issues and have a difficult time in successfully making the transition to the adult world-of-work. Assuming that programs, which assist young people to delay childbirths, also help these young people get a solid foundation in a career, the YO! impact on overall childbirths was explored.

With the assistance of the State Health Department, data were collected for young women who were a part of a comparison group as well as young women who were considered to be YO! active participants. The 1,509 females enrolled over the first three years of YO! were included in the study. Of that number, 960 were YO! participants and 549 young women were females who had initially applied for the program and then opted not to participate.

An overview of the findings from that data provided a strong indication that YO! participation did have a positive impact on youth birth rates. For the total of all the young women in the review, 608 birth incidents were recorded following the date reported as the first contact with the program staff. In the comparison group, there were 264 birth incidents. As illustrated by the graph, this equates to 48% of the total group giving birth during the period reviewed. In the YO! participant group, only 36% of the young women (344) had babies during the time following their enrollment.



Tylese

In an ideal world, foster care offers caring and supportive environments for children who have been abandoned by or have lost their parents. However, sometimes foster care fails and children are shuffled from house to house or institution, never finding a lasting home and support vital for their positive development. This is Tylese's story.

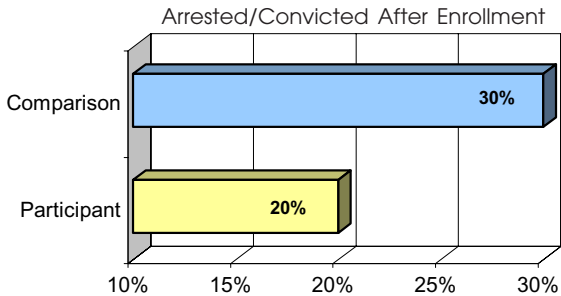


Tylese spent most of her life in foster care, encountering little support and many hardships, which led her to legally emancipate herself from the system at age 16. Even as a teen mother of two children, Tylese assumed she could fend for herself and her kids better than the foster care system. Tylese soon found out the world is not that easy to conquer. Then, she turned to YO! Baltimore for help.

Tylese joined YO! with two goals in mind – to earn a GED and pursue further education and to find a career, not just a job. Tylese earned a GED and was the featured YO! program speaker at the YO! Baltimore graduation ceremony in June of 2004. Through YO!, Tylese continued her education and participated in job readiness courses, skills training, and work experiences offered by the program.

Today Tylese is on a great career path. She completed certified nursing assistant skills training at Baltimore City Community College in the winter of 2004 and passed the state certification exam. This success was followed by a job offer at the Genesis Health Care Center in Towson, Md., where Tylese now earns a living to support herself and her children. But Tylese has her sights set higher – her next goal is to earn a degree in registered nursing.

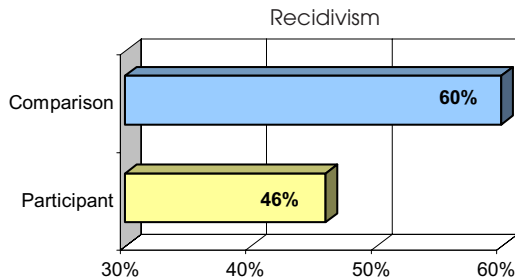
This 12 percentage point difference between the participant and comparison groups was significant. It means that young women in the participant group, the group who were active YO! program participants and who benefited from the services of the program, were 25% less likely to become pregnant and give birth than the youth in the comparison group.



Impact on Crime

A critical community issue is juvenile crime and the negative impact it has on Baltimore City. It was decided to review the pre- and post-crime rates of youth who enrolled at YO! in order to determine if participation in the program had any impact on the youth's level of criminal behavior. The review focused on youth aged 18 and older at time of enrollment because data for the youth aged 17 and younger were not available. Data from the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) was obtained for this review. Lacking a means for developing a formal control group that could be used to analyze the records of YO! youth to other similar youth in the community, a comparison group was constructed using information on youth from in-house data records.

What the data revealed was important. In terms of post-enrollment arrest and conviction, as the chart portrays, only 20% of the YO! participant group was arrested and convicted after program enrollment as opposed to 30% of the comparison group – a positive difference of over 33%.



Victoria

What happens to children of parents with substance abuse issues? Victoria was such a young person who described herself as non-communicative and unmotivated. Not taking into account the consequences of her actions, she decided to hang out with her peers instead of going to school. However, Victoria had a wakeup call when she became pregnant. Not wanting to repeat her parents' mistakes, she decided to work toward earning her GED and obtaining a job.



Victoria joined YO! Baltimore at Studio 760, earned her GED, taken job readiness classes, and completed an internship at the Bon Secours Hospital Washington Village Medical Center. At the end of her internship she completed a pharmacy technician training at CVS Pharmacy, and she is currently working there full-time. In October of 2005 Victoria will be ready to take her Pharmacy Technician certification examination. She is living independently and has received several raises.



Shonte



The youth who entered the program with a prior conviction were reviewed to determine impact on recidivism. The rate for the participant group was 14 percentage points lower than the comparison group – a 60% rate for the comparison group and a 46% rate for the YO! participants. This percentage difference translates to a 23% positive difference in terms of the YO! participants recidivism rate.

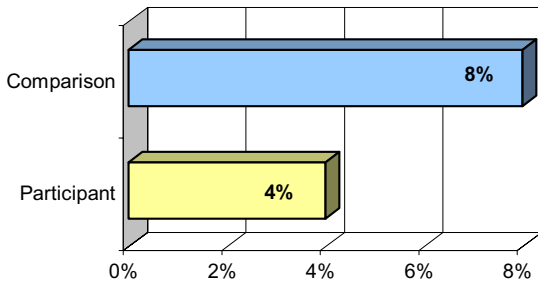
When Shonte joined YO! at the McKim Center several years ago, she was facing a formidable set of issues.

Shonte was a high school dropout, a teen parent, and she had a family member with a very serious illness. In addition to these personal issues, Shonte lived in a violent neighborhood. In a tragic but not uncommon incident, Shonte lost her boyfriend and the father of her child, who died as an innocent bystander in a violent episode.

Shonte desperately wanted to escape and instead of drugs, she turned to YO! Baltimore. Her goal was to earn a GED and work in the nursing field. With the encouragement and support of the YO! program staff, Shonte has achieved these goals. Through YO!, Shonte earned the GED and took advantage of the skills training opportunities offered by the YO! program. She enrolled in and completed career training as a certified nurse practitioner at Baltimore City Community College, and she is now successfully employed in the nursing field at Genesis Health Care.

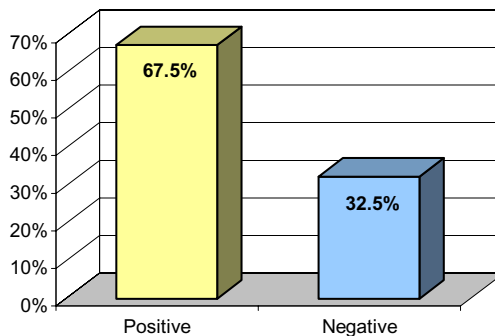
Shonte is grateful that YO! was there for her, and she has decided to give back to YO! Baltimore and to the community by serving as a One-2-One Peer Mentor to a younger YO! member who shares many of the same challenges Shonte confronted and conquered.

Arrested After Enrollment for Violent Offenses



In order to provide another perspective on the crime impact, arrest information was included in the analysis of the overall YO! program impact. While some experts contend that arrest information, especially arrest information that is focused on residents of traditionally high crime neighborhoods, can be misleading, it does give a perspective on positive youth behaviors. While only a portion of arrests actually translate to a criminal conviction and record, all arrests speak to the environment and situations in which youth choose to engage. The results indicated that after enrolling in YO!, the youth in the YO! participant group were arrested at a lower rate (35%) than the comparison group (41%). This positive difference is even more pronounced when the arrest rates for violent offenses is considered. YO! participants were arrested for violent offenses half as frequently (4%) than were youths in the comparison group (8%).

Employers' Report on Youth's Work Habits



Impact on Work Readiness

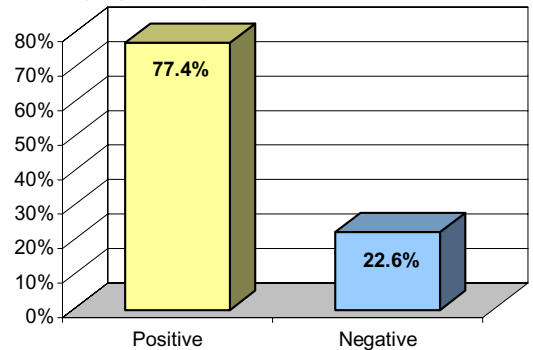
Obtaining feedback from Baltimore employers who hired YO! participants was viewed as an important indicator of how well the program was able to prepare youth for work place success. To obtain employer feedback, YO! designed a comprehensive employer satisfaction survey. Using a telephone survey approach, employers who had hired participants over the last four years were contacted. The goal was to learn the employers' opinions as to how well the youth were prepared for work and to gain insight as to their overall satisfaction with the YO! program. As a survey framework, the worker preparedness categories that the Baltimore Workforce Investment Board identified as critical skills needed by all youth and adults were used. This included skills such as: work habits, attitudes, basic skill levels, and interpersonal skills. Over 200 employers agreed to participate in the telephone interview.

The first focus area was related to the work habits and attitudes of the YO! participant. As shown on the graph, more than two-thirds of all employers provided positive feedback, indicating that the overwhelming majority of employers were satisfied with the YO! worker's work habits and attitudes while on the job.

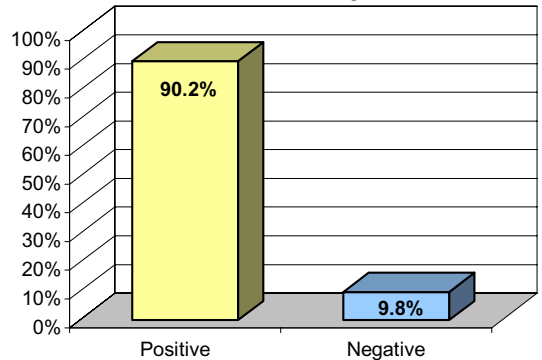
Related questions asked employers to rate the YO! employee's:

- Ability to handle his/her personal life so it did not interfere with work,
- Basic (reading and math) skills, and
- Communication and interpersonal skills.

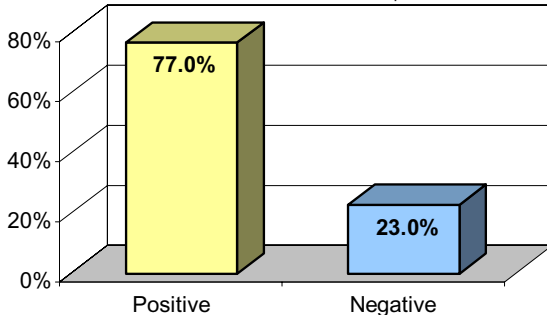
Employers' Report on Youth's Work Attitudes



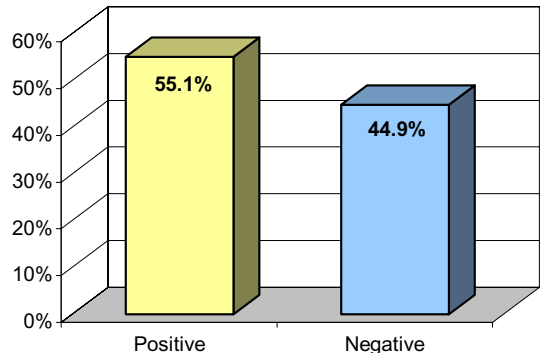
Employers' Report on Youth's Math and Reading Skills



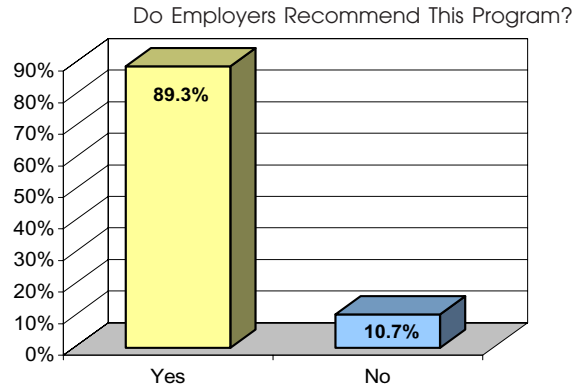
Employers' Report on Youth's Communication and Interpersonal Skills



Employer's Report on Youths' Ability to Handle Life Issues



An additional question asked employers if they would recommend the program to another employer, which is an appropriate way to gauge their overall satisfaction with the YO! youth work preparation efforts. As the chart indicates, Baltimore employers who hired YO! participants were very complimentary as to how these young people were prepared for the labor force and nearly 90 % reported that they would recommend the program.



LESSONS LEARNED

Much has been learned during the Baltimore YO! experience that will assist Baltimore's leaders and stakeholders in planning for the future beyond the final year of federal funding for YO! Baltimore. A great deal more is now known about what works with out-of-school, at-risk youth. These lessons spanned diverse areas such as, effective types of services and how to effectively manage, deliver, and account for those services. While the information presented in this report provides an overview on selected topics, a more detailed description and an expanded compilation of the many strategies employed over the five-year course of the Youth Opportunity program by the YO! practitioners, administrators and partners can be found in *Best Practices and Lessons Learned for Building a Comprehensive Youth System* on the YO! Baltimore website, www.yobaltimore.org.

YO! was designed to offer a **holistic service approach**, a full range of human resource and youth development services under one umbrella program. As expected, the approach was effective as youth were able to access multiple supports to meet their varied needs in one place and at one time. Along with ratifying the holistic approach, YO! program operators were able to confirm some best practices that enhanced this design. Specifically, service strategies that youth programs should strive to incorporate include:

- Ensuring that each youth has at least one caring adult and has daily and ongoing communication with this person;
- Building supports in the learning process that apply to life skills and personal problem solving;
- Creating "safe havens" that enable youth to feel supported and nurtured;
- Fostering small learning communities where individualized learning for academic achievement is supported by a group process.

Effective case management was a critical component of the YO! effort and was often the factor that paved the way for program success. Some of the critical hallmarks that were found to be a necessary part of an effective case management process included:

- Qualified, supportive, and nurturing staff were primary keys;
- Staff experienced and trained in approaches to case management, youth development, and resource coordination for youth specialty groups (youth at-risk, disabled, sexual minority, juvenile offenders, etc.) were important ingredients to program success;

- Strong and continued focus on youth goal planning and follow-through was essential for teaching youth goal-setting skills;
- A strong software system that not only effectively tracks services but also provides tools for case managers to productively manage their caseload was essential.

Without reservation, **successful partnerships** were needed to effectively address the multiple issues that the at-risk population faced. YO! encouraged and developed many joint service partnerships. Program staff recognized two essential guidelines for fostering successful partnerships:

- All partners must understand and embrace the youth development concept.
- Communication and monitoring for contract compliance must be ongoing.

YO! Baltimore's **continued staff development** put significant emphasis on promoting ongoing professional training, believing that staff would be the foundation for the program's success. A *Youth Practitioner Institute* was created along with a youth practitioner's certification process for the ongoing training of its staff. This important strategy provided YO! staff opportunities to meet their counterparts working at other YO! centers across Baltimore City. It also provided the staff with a venue to share the best practices being produced from their day-to-day work with youth. Throughout its five-year period, YO! maintained an annual and periodic schedule of staff development activities based on strategic, program-specific, staff-focused and customer-driven areas identified in the YO! youth development plan. Much of the success of YO! can be attributed to the on-going efforts made to keep its paraprofessional staff engaged and informed as to how to successfully accomplish their jobs.

SUSTAINING YO! BALTIMORE IN THE FUTURE

The first consideration relative to sustaining the YO! Baltimore System must be the determination that the need for this initiative still exists in Baltimore. Based on Census Bureau data and school dropout rates, it is estimated that in 2003 as many as 40,000 youth in Baltimore were at risk of not being equipped for the labor market, not being adequately prepared for responsible citizenship, and at high risk of failing to maximize their potential as parents and neighbors in Baltimore's communities. In fact, a recent analysis by several researchers (Fogg, Harrington, McCabe) of the school enrollment and employment status of youth ages 16 through 24 in the nation's largest cities showed that 51% of Baltimore teens and young adults are not enrolled in school. Of this group, 26% are not employed. In 2004, over 3,000 young people, aged 24 years and under, were released from Maryland prisons and sent home to Baltimore. During the same year, another 3,229 youth dropped out of Baltimore's high schools. The overwhelming majority of these youth lack the



STATISTICS CLEARLY POINT TO THE NEED FOR A COMPREHENSIVE, CITY-WIDE YO! EFFORT TO BOTH ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND TO PROVIDE A MORE SKILLED LABOR FORCE FOR BALTIMORE AREA EMPLOYERS.

education and skills needed for success in the labor market and the community. These statistics clearly point to the need for a comprehensive, city-wide YO! effort to both address the needs of young people and to provide a more skilled labor force for Baltimore area employers.

This report, therefore, concludes that a call to action is needed. The YO! Baltimore System has a significant, if not vital, role to play in promoting a skilled and educated future workforce.

Long-Term Sustainability

Sustainability is more than raising money. In the case of a fully developed and productive youth service system like YO! Baltimore, the sustainability process can be summarized as consisting of three interrelated parts:

Building/Maintaining Collaboration

The goal is to maintain and, if possible, build and expand the entire YO! system so it can serve youth in all parts of Baltimore City. Maintaining an effective network of service providers will require resources to ensure that participation in the network offers value for the community partners as well as accountability to ensure maximum utilization of the resources available. The specific level of resources needed for sustaining a multi-partner youth service system varies, contingent upon the service providers that are a part of it, the number of youth that it is constructed to assist, and the services offered by the partners. However, the initial need is a vision and a template for how the YO! partners' network could be maintained.

While many options are available for a new paradigm for the YO! partners network and service system, one potential template is to move the system to the next level by creating a formal confederation of partners.

The confederation of partners would work in collaboration to provide advocacy, system fundraising, staff development and training, and a central point for accountability and outcome tracking. Without relinquishing their individual organizational identity, it is suggested that by forming a confederation, the YO! partners could act with greater cohesion and both produce enhanced outcomes and use the confederation as one source of securing both in-kind and cash resources. The full outline for such a reconfigured YO! Network Confederation is provided on the YO! website, www.yobaltimore.org.



SUSTAINABILITY IS MORE THAN
RAISING MONEY.

Advocating for Support

In many ways the availability of the significant level of federal Youth Opportunity funds has hampered the advocacy efforts of the system. Absent the need to raise resources, and given the need to focus on outcomes, YO! delayed the development and implementation of a systematic advocacy plan of action. This is now changing. Accordingly, a multi-part advocacy action approach is recommended, an approach designed to:

- Publicize and recognize the existence and success of both YO! and the specific partners who are a part of the system;
- Create and formalize a new template for the YO! partners network and assist the partners to better organize as a group to advocate for youth services in Baltimore;

- Create and implement a strategic advocacy plan of action, which systematically reaches out to all segments of the community to solicit their input and support.

Developing Resources

From a global perspective, resource development can be seen as consisting of two distinct tracks – public funding and private funding. Both of these options must be accomplished to achieve YO! sustainability.

Public Funding. YO! will explore tapping into all three levels of public funding – federal, state and local/city government. As noted above, part of the advocacy effort will be to present specific resource needs to public officials and provide them with convincing proposals for using these funds in support of the YO! effort. It will be critical to explain exactly how these resources, if allocated, would be spent and what outcomes/benefits would ensue. YO! Baltimore will also pursue applying for competitive grants by responding to solicitations and requests for proposals (RFPs) that primarily come from the federal government. And, YO! will also illustrate the effectiveness or cost savings that can be derived by re-directing existing public funds in support of the YO! Baltimore System. One example of this might include demonstrating how using juvenile justice funds to underwrite YO! participants’ job skills and literacy training could lead these at-risk youth to legitimate employment and away from crime and costly incarceration.

Private Funding. YO! will pursue grants and donations from private sources such as, local businesses, civic organizations, foundations, faith-based organizations, associations, and other such groups or individuals. Private fundraising will involve a combination of interrelated activities that span annual fundraising campaigns, fundraising special events, targeted solicitation of organizations, businesses and individuals to seek their financial support, and formal requests to philanthropic foundations and organizations to gain their financial input.



A CALL TO ACTION IS NEEDED.

As with many of the topics discussed in this report, additional details and specific ideas and action steps can be found on the YO! website, www.yobaltimore.org.

The time has come to make YO! Baltimore an integral part of Baltimore City’s plan to ensure all of its children grow and prosper academically, socially, and economically. The Department of Labor wisely invested in Baltimore’s Youth Opportunity vision in 2000. It provided significant resources that enabled the city to build a network of strong youth service providers and establish a framework for successfully changing minds and changing lives of the city’s most at-risk youth. The larger opportunity now exists for this to be the foundation upon which Baltimore builds its future city-wide youth system – please listen to and respond to this call for action.

You are invited to contact Ernest Dorsey, director, Baltimore Youth Opportunity System, at 410-396-6722 or edorsey@oedworks.com and give your comments, recommendations, level of support and commitment to YO! Baltimore.

Baltimore’s future is now.

YO! SERVICE PARTNERS

Baltimore City Career Academy

Baltimore City Community College/
Adult Education Program

Baltimore City Community College/
Business Continuing Education Center

Baltimore City Community College/
Upward Bound

Baltimore City Health Department

Baltimore City Public School System

Baltimore City Recreation Department

Baltimore Mental Health Services

Baltimore Rising Violence Reduction Initiative

Center for Fathers, Families and
Workforce Development (CFWDS)

Chesapeake Center

Civic Works

College Bound Foundation

Community Law In Action

Community Mediation Program

East Baltimore Community Corporation

Family League of Baltimore City

Fellowship of Lights (FOL) & Community Services

Goodwill Industries

Historic East Baltimore Community Action
Coalition (HEBCAC)

International Medalists Association

Johns Hopkins Hospital

Johns Hopkins University,
Sar Levitan Center for Policy Studies

Living Classrooms Foundation

Maryland State Department of Juvenile Justice

Maryland State Department of Vital Records

Mayor's Office of Employment Development

Mayor's Office of Cable and
Communications

McKim Community Association

National Urban Technology

Planned Parenthood

Safe and Sound Campaign

Sinai Hospital/VSP

Suited to Succeed

Sylvan Learning

Washington Village Pigtown
EZ Career Center

Youth Build/Community Building
in Partnership

YMCA

A Declaration of Partnership



We the Baltimore City Youth Opportunity Partners commit to working together to build a youth opportunity system that will promote the long term employment of the young people residing in Baltimore City's Empowerment Zone. We pledge our collective efforts in support of realizing our shared vision of ensuring all of our youth develop the skills, abilities and personal attributes necessary for the successful transition to productive adulthood. On this day, September 30, 1999, we make known our promise to uphold our partnership agreements, responsibilities and investment in our children and our future.

Samah A. Nkhalo
Baltimore City Community College

[Signature]
Housing Authority of
Baltimore City

[Signature]
Baltimore City Department of
Social Services

[Signature]
Baltimore City Development Corp.

[Signature]
Baltimore City Police Department

[Signature]
Baltimore Mental Health Systems

Alicia J. Foster
Baltimore Workforce Investment
Board

Jacqueline S. Hlavay
Career Academy

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Center for Fathers, Families and
Workforce Development/STRIVE

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Civic Works

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Communities In Schools of
Baltimore

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Community Mediation Program

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East Baltimore Community
Corporation

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East Harbor
EZ/Village Center

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FUTURE'S Program

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Goodwill Industries

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Harbor Park
EZ/Village Center

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Historic East Baltimore
Community Action Coalition
EZ/Village Center

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Johns Hopkins Hospital

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Lafayette Square
Community Center

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Living Classrooms Foundation

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Manpower, Inc.

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Maryland New Directions

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Mayor's Office on Criminal
Justice

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Maryland Business Roundtable

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Maryland State Department of
Education

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Maryland State Department of
Human Resource

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Juvenile Justice

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Labor, Licensing & Regulation

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Maryland State Department of
Rehabilitation Services

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Safe and Sound Campaign

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Self Motivated People
EZ/Village Center

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Sinai Hospital/VSP

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Sylvan Learning
Systems, Inc.

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The Chesapeake Center for
Youth Development

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The Greater Baltimore Committee

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The Sar Levitan Center

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TransCen, Inc.

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University of Baltimore
The Jacob France Center

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Urban Bound

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Urban Computer Technology

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Washington Village
EZ/Village Center

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Woodstock Job Corps

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Youth Build

[Signature]
Youth Development
Research Fund



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YO! Baltimore is sponsored by the Mayor's Office of Employment Development, the Baltimore Workforce Investment Board - Youth Council, and multiple workforce partners.