Opportunities for Youth COVID-19 Statement

May 28, 2020

Opportunities for Youth (OFY), an Arizona State University (ASU) initiative within the Center of Human Capital and Youth Development, is dedicated to advocating for Opportunity Youth (OY), an estimated 67,100 youth ages 16-24 who are neither in school nor working. These disconnected youth are more likely to have repeated and chronic unemployment over their lifespan; therefore, they are more likely to require government services. Our mission is to harness the power of cross-sector collaboration to create a comprehensive system of opportunity that reengages the valley’s disconnected youth.

We write in response to the growing outbreak of COVID-19 across the United States and the urgent needs that OY face in this pandemic. OFY is the only collaborative network of youth-serving provider organizations, higher education professionals, K-12 education professionals, government, philanthropic funders, and businesses focused on reducing the high rate of OY in Maricopa County, AZ.

To address the needs of OY during the COVID-19 pandemic, OFY has committed to having ongoing conversations with our youth-serving stakeholders, along with local, state and federal leaders. OFY has concerns around school closures and how this has amplified inequities for students, such as not having their basic needs addressed such as food and mental health. In addition, to their lack of access to internet service, some students may not even have laptops to do homework or virtually interview for a job. This digital divide has deepened and become more apparent due to COVID-19. Also, we are concerned with the financial well-being of our partners who are dedicated to OFY’s collective impact model.

Over the past five years, OFY and its 73 community partners have worked strategically to lower the rate of OY in the Greater Phoenix Metro Area from 18.8% to 11.9%. We have accomplished this by convening partners and essential constituencies, facilitating countywide systems change, and connecting youth with resources and opportunities for success.

Meaningful investment in OY on the local, state, and federal levels will ensure that youth will be served through the viability of OFY and our partners.

Sincerely,

James Hoyt, Executive Director

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