OFY Premise and Pandemic Recommendations

Opportunities for Youth (OFY) is the only collaborative in the Greater Phoenix Area that works with Opportunity Youth (OY); youth 16-24 years old who are neither in school nor employed. Youth disconnection hinders the economic opportunity and growth of youth, families, communities, and the state’s economy, as OY are more likely to be involved in criminal activity, experience chronic homelessness, and face social and labor exclusion.

Opportunities for Youth is an initiative of the Center for Human Capital and Youth Development at Arizona State University’s Watts College of Public Service and Community Solutions. Through the work of the collaboration, we have been able to reduce the percentage of OY population from 18.8% in 2012 to 11.9% as of December 2019. Today, there are approximately 67,100 OY in the Greater Phoenix area.

The OFY collaborative convenes more than 70 organizations which represent government and non-government social service providers, educational institutions, employers and behavioral health professional to work together to lower the OY rate. We convene these organizations on a monthly basis through our Leadership Council and four Action Teams (Reengagement Centers, Educational Momentum, Career Connections and Youth Leadership and Development).

Together, we facilitate countywide systems change, and connect youth with resources and opportunities for success. In these roles, we rely on the active participation of youth, service providers, educational partners and employers to inform and guide OFY’s ongoing efforts to develop career and educational pathways for OY as well as other cross-system solutions in existing educational and employment systems.

We anticipate that over the next year, the number of OY in the Greater Phoenix area will increase substantially due to the COVID-19 pandemic with resulting health challenges, job loss and economic insecurity of low-income youth and their families. With rising unemployment rates both locally and nationally, numbers of OY are likely to increase for the foreseeable future. Many of the OY we serve are disproportionately from low-income and racial/ethnic minority communities. OFY’s work and that of our partners is more relevant than ever to work with these young people, their families, and their communities in gaining access to secondary/postsecondary degree programs and employment opportunities to support their economic self-sufficiency.

To date, OFY has achieved success in convening cross-system community partners to discuss best practices and to adopt a common agenda using the collective impact model. OFY’s work has contributed to considerably lowering the Phoenix Metro Area’s overall OY rate and has been recognized as a national model of a cross-sectoral coalition with a collective vision and broad-based commitment to a concrete goal to reduce youth disconnection.
Based on the above information, it is essential to not only provide continued funding but to increase the monetary support so that we can conduct outreach to and connect increasing numbers of youth to an educational and/or career pathway.

By reengaging OY, these are many of the direct benefits to our communities, economy and society:

- Increased high school graduation rates
- Lower high school truancy and dropout rates
- Healthier relationships and lifestyle choices
- Higher college enrollment and completion rates and higher educational aspirations
- Enhanced self-esteem and self-confidence
- Improved behavior, both at home and at school
- Stronger relationships with parents, teachers, peers and employers
- Improved interpersonal skills
- Reduced involvement in criminal behavior
- Reduced teen pregnancy
- Reduced rates of substance use
  (MENTOR, 2009; Cavell, DuBois, Karcher, Keller, & Rhodes, 2009)
- Graduates with a high school or its equivalency “potential impact to the economy” is between $7,000 - $9,000 more annually compared to those who do not have a diploma.
  (Sheryl Hart, Deputy Associate Superintendent, Arizona Department of Education)
- Increased likelihood of employment, paying taxes, contributing to the Phoenix economy, etc.
- Reduced crime, safer communities
- Reduced use of public assistance
- Reduction in generational poverty
- Better-qualified and skilled workforce will drive revenue growth for businesses
- Annual Cost of Direct Service per Opportunity Youth – 3,112 Reengaged Phoenix Youth in 2018 x $13,000 = $40,456,000

With the current COVID-19 pandemic and the increased demands of our economy and the needs of OY, we are best positioned with our collaborative to meet the needs for the Greater Phoenix area. We are asking for your financial support to enable us to design, implement, evaluate and scale up quickly across Maricopa County the following pandemic-specific responses:

1. Organize, promote and execute virtual job/hiring fairs for companies that continue to hire (supermarkets, pharmacies, deliveries, Amazon). Once social distancing is lifted and people can return to work, OFY can pivot to support industries that will need mass numbers of workers (e.g., manufacturing, retail, construction). OFY will have developed and honed the technology to conduct remote/virtual hiring events, which can be replicated in other industries
   [Potential sponsors: Corporations, City/County/State Workforce Boards, Phoenix Chambers of Commerce, GPEC, Phoenix IDA, Maricopa County IDA, National Philanthropic Trust]

2. Connect each of our OFY provider organizations to a remote service delivery platform, training staff and connecting clients to available technology resources (cell phones, tablets).
3. Organize and provide trainings for OFY community partners in how to do tele-mental health/health services, burnout prevention for staff, and supporting our low-wage and essential OY workers as they continue to work in retail (supermarkets, delivery), sanitation and manufacturing (of masks and personal protection equipment)

4. Supporting educational institutions and students as institutions move curricula to remote formats

Please feel free to contact us with any questions.

Sincerely,

James Hoyt, Executive Director
JamesHoyt@asu.edu | 602-534-8393

Dr. Kristin-Ferguson Colvin, Director, Center for Human Capital and Youth Development
Kristin.ferguson@asu.edu | 602-496-0088