Introduction

Opportunities for Youth (OFY) is a collaborative partnership of 73 government agencies, nonprofit organizations, community colleges and employers launched in 2015 in response to the high rate of opportunity youth (OY), or youth aged 16-24, who are not in school and not working, in the Greater Phoenix Metropolitan Area. Since 2017, OFY has been an initiative of the Center for Human Capital and Youth Development in the Arizona State University Watts College of Public Service and Community Solutions.

In light of COVID-19, the number of OY in the Greater Phoenix Metro Area has spiked dramatically over the past 6 months. To illustrate, in 2019, the rate of youth disconnection in the Greater Phoenix Metro Area was 12.3% (70,300 youth ages 16-24). This rate today is estimated to be 25%, or nearly 1 in 3 youth ages 16-24 who is not working or in school. This translates to over 144,000 youth in the Greater Phoenix Metro Area who are disconnected from work and school.

OFY is the only collaborative in the Greater Phoenix Metro Area that focuses on reengaging OY. Meaningful investment in OFY will ensure that systems-change efforts will continue to be implemented and evaluated to ensure reengagement of OY. This means OY will get access to basic needs such as food, housing, and medical and behavioral health services via tele-medicine as well as connection to educational and employment opportunities.

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

**Education**
- Lower high school truancy and dropout rates which leads to increased high school graduation rates.
- Higher college enrollment and completion rates and higher educational aspirations.

**Interpersonal Relationship Building/Misc.**
- Enhanced self-esteem and self-confidence which leads to healthier relationships and lifestyle choices.
- Improved interpersonal skills leads to stronger relationships with parents, teachers, peers and employers.
- Reduced involvement in criminal behavior, teen pregnancy and rates of substance use².

**Career and Economic Well-being**
- Graduates with a high school diploma or its equivalency have a “potential impact to the economy” between $7,000 - $9,000 more annually compared to those who do not have a diploma³.
- Better-qualified and skilled workforce will drive revenue growth for businesses leading to the increased chances of their employment and paying taxes that contributes to both their local communities and our Arizona economy.
- Reduced use of public assistance and reduction in generational poverty. As well as reduced crime will lead to safer and thriving communities.
  - Annual Cost of Direct Service per Opportunity Youth minus 3,865 Reengaged Phoenix Youth in 2019 
    x $13,000 = $50,245,000⁴

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²Dubois, David & Karcher, Michael & Keller, Thomas. (2009). Strengthening Mentoring Opportunities for At-Risk Youth.
AZ Opportunity Youth Statistics

State

Pre COVID-19

In 2018, Arizona had an Opportunity Youth (OY) rate of 13.2% or 115,300. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this number is estimated to increase.

Opportunity Youth Forum Communities

Post COVID-19

Opportunities for Youth (OFY) is one of 26 cities across the country a part of Aspen Institute's Opportunity Youth Forum. This forum is comprised of a network of over two dozen urban, rural, and tribal communities seeking to scale multiple reconnection pathways that achieve better outcomes in education and employment for opportunity youth. The forum has released estimated May 2020 OY numbers post COVID-19 for the Greater Phoenix Metro Area, the Hopi Community, and Tucson.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Pre COVID-19</th>
<th>Post COVID-19</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greater Phoenix Metro Area</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
<td>144,551</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hopi Community</td>
<td>58.5%</td>
<td>12,808</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tucson</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
<td>41,833</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

OFY's Pandemic Recommendations

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 by:

- Hiring additional Youth Outreach Specialists to identify, recruit and refer OY to our 73 community partners. The youths' case managers will provide critical assistance and resources for youth to overcome existing barriers and support them in choosing an educational and/or career pathway. The OY outreach will take place in the light rail, smoke shops, liquor stores, nail salons, parks, malls, fast food restaurants, resource fairs as well as through social media and virtual events.
- Providing professional development workshops and training to service providers for reconnecting youth with histories of foster care, justice involvement, and homelessness.
- Organizing and providing trainings for OFY community partners on 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 (masks and personal protection equipment).
- Organizing our current base of over 70 local and national employers who are part of the OFY initiative to quickly and efficiently implement virtual hiring fairs for companies that are hiring workers. 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.

Contributions to OFY will provide us the needed resources to set these young people on an educational and/or career pathway that will support their financial security and help them become contributing members to both their local communities and our Arizona economy. And doesn't everyone deserve a chance – inside and outside of a pandemic-- to overcome their current barriers? We invite you to learn more about the Opportunities for Youth fund (www.asufoundation.org/ofy). Together we can ensure these youth are connected to a pathway to a brighter future.

Data retrieved from: http://measureofamerica.org/DYinteractive/
Acknowledgements

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