

Kentuckiana Works

The Youth Opportunities Unlimited (Y.O.U.) Center

History and Background of the Youth Opportunities Unlimited (Y.O.U.) Center

Founded in 2005, the Y.O.U. Center provides a comprehensive approach to recruiting, educating and finding jobs for 16-21 year olds who have dropped out of high school. This effort builds on national research about youth development, as well as local experience from a recently completed five year demonstration grant called the Louisville Youth Opportunity Network, or LYON. Experience and research have taught us that six core elements must be provided to attract, educate, prepare and place young people in jobs:

- Targeted, aggressive outreach to recruit young people
- Career specialists trained to work with young people
- A youth friendly environment
- Intensive educational services offered on site
- Incentives to reward incremental progress
- Job opportunities

The Y.O.U. Center provides each of these six core elements in a focused effort with four measurable goals: 1) Demonstrate measurable learning gains on the way to a GED; 2) Get a GED; 3) Get a job; and 4) Enroll in a post-secondary education or training program.

The Y.O.U. Center is managed by Jefferson County Public Schools Adult and Continuing Education, one of the nation's most innovative adult education providers. It is built on a strong foundation of career guidance, instructional support and connection to community resources. The services are absolutely free.

The Y.O.U. Center is a program of KentuckianaWorks, the region's workforce investment board, whose goals are:

1. Raise educational attainment levels across the board from GEDs to Ph.D.s;
2. Build a responsive workforce system that works for job-seekers, students and employers; and

3. Aim for and achieve the kind of “quantum change” that will improve our city’s competitive position relative to key economic development competitors.

Early Signs of Success

The Y.O.U. Center opened only thirteen short months ago. Planners were nervous that young people from around the community would not come to a central location for help with getting a job or learning more about the local labor market. They were even more worried that high school dropouts wouldn’t want to participate in a program that offered them little more than a chance to work hard in pursuit of their GED and a job.

The early response from Louisville-area young people has proven these worries to be misplaced. First year goals for the Y.O.U. Center hoped that it could attract 200 out-of-school youth to participate. Instead, we have more than doubled that number, with 512 enrolling in the program in its first year.

The Center is attracting young people from across our community. Young people from 33 different zip codes have already been enrolled in the program.

Even more impressively, the Y.O.U. Center is producing measurable results for the young people who enroll in our program.

- 69 young people have already earned their GED, and another 32 have passed the pre-test that has them certified to take and pass the formal GED test.
- 171 students have upgraded their performance level on either the math or reading section of the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE).
- 230 participants have gotten jobs at an average wage of \$7.53 per hour.
- 20 participants have enrolled in local colleges.

Funding

- \$450,000 in Workforce Investment Act Youth funds
- \$150,000 in Youth Opportunity Grant funds¹

¹ These expire on December 31, 2006

- \$250,000 in local government funding from Louisville Metro Mayor Jerry Abramson and the Metro Council
- \$45,000 from the Annie E. Casey Foundation
- \$25,000 from the Gheens Foundation²
- \$15,000 from the Housing Authority of Louisville
- \$12,500 from proceeds of recent annual dinner
- \$5,000 from General Electric

We are working to raise the additional \$47,500 to meet our \$1 million operating budget for FY 2006-07.

² A local Louisville foundation.