



Youth

in action

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YouthBuild U.S.A.

by *Rudy Hernandez*

For almost 25 years, YouthBuild has harnessed the positive energy of unemployed young adults to rebuild their communities and their own lives through a commitment to work, education, responsibility, and family. At the 145 YouthBuild programs across the country, young people learn construction skills by building or renovating affordable housing in their communities. At YouthBuild alternative schools, students earn their GEDs or high school diplomas, participate in counseling, perform community service, and belong to a positive community of peers and adults who are committed to their success.

YouthBuild's History

In 1978, a group of New York City teenagers approached Dorothy Stoneman, then director of the Youth Action Program in East Harlem Block Schools, and expressed their desire to renovate abandoned buildings and

revitalize their community.

Stoneman helped them select a building, raise funds, and hire adult trainers. The teenagers' successful renovation of a Harlem tenement led the Youth Action Program to form a coalition of local not-for-profit organizations to replicate the program. When the coalition expanded nationwide in 1988, it became the YouthBuild Coalition.

The nonprofit YouthBuild U.S.A. was founded in 1990 to coordinate the expanding network of YouthBuild sites. By the early 1990s, the program had been replicated in 11 cities across the country.

Local Programs

Community-based, independent organizations operate local YouthBuild programs, which are kept small to create supportive minicommunities for the students. Each YouthBuild program procures its own funding, generally with a mix of Federal, State, and local government

support and private funds. In fiscal year (FY) 2000, Congress appropriated \$42.5 million to YouthBuild and in FY 2001, \$60 million (through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development). The yearly competitive grants fund operations in local YouthBuild chapters. In many YouthBuild programs, participants earn grants from the Corporation for National Service to help cover tuition costs for college or technical school.

Participants

Nationwide, about 6,000 young people, ages 16 to 24, participate in YouthBuild each year. Approximately 70 percent are male and 30 percent are female. They are racially diverse—55 percent African American, 20 percent Caucasian, 22 percent Latino, 1.5 percent Asian American, and 1 percent Native American. Ninety percent are from very low-income families. An average of 30 percent are adjudicated youth who have

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been referred to the program by the court system, but some programs are designed to accept 60 to 100 percent of participants through court-related referrals.

Job Training

YouthBuild prepares young people for the working world in diverse ways. At the construction sites, youth receive close supervision and training in construction skills from qualified instructors who are often union journeymen. The skills they acquire qualify them for apprenticeships or entry-level positions in construction-related jobs. In addition, weekly classes build work habits and decisionmaking skills and teach students how to manage time effectively, develop career plans, and handle job interviews.

Academic Program

YouthBuild prepares students for the GED, a high school diploma, post-secondary technical training, or college. Trainees alternate a week of on-site construction training with a week of classes. The curriculum integrates academic skills—reading, writing, and mathematics—with life skills training, social studies, leadership opportunities,

and vocational training. The classes are small, allowing instructors to provide students one-on-one attention.

Leadership Development

YouthBuild changes the way young people see themselves. By treating them consistently with respect, staff help students uncover their innate knowledge and abilities—traits that, in many cases, have gone unrecognized. Under the guidance of a nurturing staff, students learn to take on responsibility and overcome obstacles. In every YouthBuild program, students develop leadership skills by serving as key decisionmakers within their own programs and providing various forms of service to the community.

Program Success

Since 1993, YouthBuild students have built more than 7,000 low-income housing units. Finished buildings are either owned and managed by community-based organizations as permanent low-income rental housing or are sold to low-income homeowners. As a result, gutted shells and abandoned buildings become attractive homes in communities that have a critical need for housing.

For Further Information

For more information on YouthBuild U.S.A. and its programs, visit YouthBuild U.S.A.'s Web site at www.youthbuild.org or contact:

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On average, 60 percent of YouthBuild students remain until they complete the program. Of those, 85 percent go on to college or construction-related jobs with starting wages of more than \$7.35 per hour. Alumni receive postprogram counseling and have continued opportunities to play leadership roles in the local YouthBuild chapter and in the community.

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