

CROSS 20 X 20 ROADS

INCREASING YOUTH OFFENDERS WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION



City of Los Angeles
Workforce Investment Board
Youth Council



A Report of the City of Los Angeles Crossroads 2002 Symposium
University of California at Los Angeles

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September 12, 2002

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PREFACE

Crossroads 2002 was a targeted symposium of Los Angeles area experts to increase their collective understanding and develop recommendations to increase the employability of youth offenders. The symposium convened approximately 130 leading Los Angeles youth professionals, educators, academicians, juvenile justice officials, employers, parents, and youth. Its objective was to identify strategies and recommendations to improve employment opportunities for youth offenders. The symposium report represents a combination of personal insights regarding youth development issues and employment programs that have proven effective in helping former youth offenders pursue a range of employment options. Crossroads 2002 captured experiences of former youth offenders that offer sharp testimony regarding the daily challenges and successes relative to workforce participation and youth workforce skill development.

Because the symposium was reflective of the current system addressing youth offenders and workforce development, the policy recommendations which emerged can be expected to improve the system, shape responsive and effective initiatives, and ultimately increase the workforce participation of youth offenders.

Crossroads 2002 was sponsored by the City of Los Angeles Workforce Investment Board (WIB) Youth Council, the City of Los Angeles Community Development Department, the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) Office of Community Based Learning Program, UCLA Center for the Study of Urban Poverty, and UCLA Center for Government and Community Relations.

The views and recommendations contained herein are those that were expressed by the participants in the Crossroads 2002 Symposium and are not necessarily those of its sponsors.

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Executive Summary

ABSTRACT

The Crossroads 2002 Report details the proceedings of a targeted symposium of Los Angeles area experts that was designed to increase their collective understanding and develop recommendations to improve the employability of youth offenders. The symposium convened approximately 130 youth service professionals, juvenile justice experts, educators, youth employers, academicians, parents, and former youth offenders. This summary discusses the overall recommendations gleaned from the symposium and outlines the five sections contained in the report: 1) why address youth offenders' workforce participation, 2) access to, and preparation for, employment, 3) serving youth offenders: education and other supports, 4) legal and public policy issues, and 5) specific recommendations from symposium participants.

When used in this report, the descriptor "youth offenders" refers to young people that have come into negative contact with the judicial system and/or have been sentenced and have served a period of incarceration.

OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS

The overall recommendation that emerged from the Crossroads 2002 Symposium is that only a major coordinated effort to increase the scale and scope of holistic assistive strategies will improve the workforce participation of youth offenders.

More specifically, symposium participants recommended the increase of support for street-level intervention by credible trained intervention specialists with the experience to send positive messages to at-risk youth. These messages include communicating to at-risk youth – often those who will become youth offenders - the importance of personal development and of working with community based organizations to access available work training opportunities. The trained intervention specialists will seek the involvement of employment specialists available through government, community agencies, schools, and law enforcement.

In discussing legal and public policy options to improve employability, it was determined that youth offenders experience significant difficulty in obtaining employment due to their juvenile criminal record. Therefore, a second major recommendation is to support the automatic sealing of juvenile records for all misdemeanors and "wobbler" offenses.

In the area of employment, the report recommends enhancing the capacity of youth employment entities to create long-term employment and career development solutions for youth offenders. Closely related to this are recommendations to improve the educational opportunities available for youth offenders.

SECTION 1: WHY ADDRESS YOUTH OFFENDERS WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION?

Los Angeles is one of the most dynamic and competitive labor markets in the country, thus it is difficult for youth to seek employment when employers are deterred by their status as offenders. A section of the report introduces important themes through the actual statements of youth ex-offenders who attended the Symposium. According to the youth offenders that participated in the symposium, rebuilding “at-risk” youth and youth offenders, occurs in three essential areas: 1) employment, 2) family support, and 3) life skills.

SECTION 2: ACCESS TO AND PREPARATION FOR EMPLOYMENT

The first step in effectively serving this population is to understand these youth and their experiences. Understanding of this fluid population requires a concerted and coordinated effort between probation, courts, workforce development entities, education, and youth service providers. Agencies familiar with the circumstances of youth offenders can play an important role in motivating these youth to consider and participate in gainful employment. Increased resources must be directed to agencies with a proven record of success in training and placing youth offenders in gainful employment.

Youth offenders must receive the appropriate preparation with attention to skills development prior to placement into regular employment. Long-term career development solutions also include encouraging hiring incentives for youth employers, relevant unions, and appropriate trades. It is recommended that policies be developed that advocate for mandated “at-risk” youth employment in public works construction and community improvement projects. The Mayor’s Los Angeles Safe Neighborhoods Action Plan (LA SNAP) is a significant step by the City to create long term permanent job opportunities for “at-risk” youth and successfully transition them to adulthood and workforce participation.

Additionally, greater attention must be given to prepare youth offenders while in probation camp, and the California Youth Authority, for positive re-entry into their communities. While in custody, youth offenders should receive information related to pre-employment training opportunities and employment retention strategies.

SECTION 3: SERVING YOUTH OFFENDERS: EDUCATION AND OTHER SUPPORTS

Improved employability is closely related to the area of non-traditional schooling options such as alternative, continuation, and community schools that routinely absorb formerly incarcerated minors. The challenges of re-integrating a youth offender into the public school system fall into three major areas: 1) most are behind in credits and possess poor academic and study skills, 2) the process of re-entry into public education may be rough, complex, and unwelcoming, and 3) youth offenders may discover they only qualify for lower quality or stigmatized schooling and credential options. Youth offenders must have first class educational opportunities to acquire the necessary basic literacy skills for workforce participation, a high school diploma, and the opportunity for further education and training.

Community Build, Inc. is an example of a job development program where youth are not only given the skills they need to achieve in the working world, but are also given support services such as childcare, transportation, and tattoo removal to assist with the long term goal of sustained employability. A number of other promising models for serving youth offenders are also discussed. These initiatives employ a myriad of agencies, resources, and strategies, including pre-release mentoring, dropout recovery, and street intervention, in order to positively engage and develop youth offenders' employability potential and sustained workforce placement.

SECTION 4: LEGAL AND PUBLIC POLICY ISSUES TO IMPROVE EMPLOYABILITY

This section discusses a variety of legal and public policy issues relative to youth offender employment. It describes several promising types of "second chance" legal and policy strategies that can dramatically increase the employability of youth offenders including the following: 1) diversion schooling, 2) independent living assistance, 3) exoneration and dismissal, 4) informal probation, 5) deferred judgment, 6) warrant cleanup, and 7) record sealing or expungement. The report describes "system" reforms intended to promote the idea of "rehabilitation and employability" of youth offenders vis-à-vis pre-release planning, networking activities, and support for furlough programs to seek training and employment.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS FROM SYMPOSIUM PARTICIPANTS

The symposium participants developed a series of recommendations for improving the employability of youth offenders. The recommendations that follow were developed around three themes: 1) access to, and preparation for, employment, 2) serving youth offenders: education and other supports, and 3) legal and public policy recommendations to improve employability.

Access to and Preparation for Employment
<i>Create and disseminate standards for pre-employment training with input from employers.</i>
<i>Expand LA SNAP employability options to include additional City agencies and entities.</i>
<i>Increase on-the-job training opportunities for youth offenders</i>
<i>Provide individualized job development that takes into consideration the juvenile record and career interest.</i>
<i>Sponsor forums on employability and careers that engage small and medium-size businesses with youth offenders</i>
<i>Advocate for mandated at-risk youth employment components of public works, construction, and other community improvement projects.</i>
<i>Support employment retention strategies, such as tax credits, bonding, and hiring incentives for employers, unions, and trades</i>
<i>Advocate for maximizing state and federal wage subsidy programs</i>
<i>Create incentives aimed at getting at-risk youth involved in internships, work experience and civic improvement projects.</i>
<i>Support the development and use of employment intermediaries.</i>
<i>Provide training for job developers on youth offenders, occupational profiles, labor market income profiles</i>
<i>Develop a clearinghouse for exchanging information and documenting programs with positive outcomes</i>

Serving Youth Offenders: Education and Other Supports
<i>Create a system for automatic referral of youth under a school district expulsion order to workforce development entities.</i>
<i>Support educational options that combine academic skills, work experience, full school day, and concurrent community college enrollment.</i>
<i>Encourage schools to develop rigorous accountability and evaluation standards for alternative schools, continuation schools, and other community schools that serve at-risk youth.</i>
<i>Support street-level intervention by credible trained intervention specialists with the experience to send positive messages to at-risk youth. These messages include communicating to at-risk youth – often those who become youth offenders- the importance of personal development and of working with community based organizations to access available work training opportunities.</i>
<i>Remove barriers to the hiring of ex-offenders as intervention specialists if they are otherwise qualified</i>
<i>Increase post-release transitional housing options, particularly for young women.</i>

Legal and Public Policy Recommendations to Improve Employability

Undertake a major coordinated effort to increase the scale and scope of holistic assistive strategies for youth offenders. Youth offenders experience difficulty obtaining employment due to their juvenile record and gaps in coordination among various service entities. Without effective coordination, second chance strategies for youth offenders seeking employment are undermined.

Provide for automatic sealing of juvenile records at legal age of 18 years for all misdemeanors and "wobbler" offenses.

Establish a "sealment center" and conduct a public services announcement campaign through the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) and local agencies.

Consider legislation changes to the definition of "disrupting public school", which was part of the amended federal School and Safety Juvenile Reform Act of 1994. Definition should be made less inclusive.

Expand efforts to prepare youth offenders while in camp for positive re-entry to their communities. At a minimum, the efforts should address the following: (1) vocational training; (2) the initiation of driving record and warrant cleanup, and 3) payment of restitution and court fees.

Reduce the case load of Aftercare Probation Officers

SECTION 1: WHY ADDRESS YOUTH OFFENDERS WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION?

Los Angeles has a large youth population, a high and growing proportion of which are involved with the judicial system. In 1999 alone, there were over 63,000 juvenile arrests in Los Angeles County. For a variety of reasons, youth offenders face multiple obstacles to obtaining competitive employment. At the same time, employers are having difficulty finding entry level employees with the skills they need to remain economically competitive. Failure to address this issue invites adverse consequences for the growing number of unemployed youth offenders, their neighborhoods, and ultimately the prosperity of the City.

The City of Los Angeles Workforce Investment Board Youth Council is committed to helping all young people obtain the skills and knowledge they need to successfully transition to adulthood, employment, and further education and training. Reflecting on this vision, the Crossroads 2002 Symposium was organized around two questions:

- *How do we help all young people become contributing citizens relative to the local workforce?*
- *How can the Los Angeles business and workforce development communities better share resources with each other to increase the workforce participation of youth offenders?*

The Crossroads 2002 Symposium explored practical strategies to inform the Youth Council's agenda in relation to the workforce participation of youth offenders. It aimed at the identification of practical policy recommendations in three major areas: workforce preparation, education and supportive services, and legal issues. This report is organized around these three areas.

SECTION 2: ACCESS TO, AND PREPARATION FOR, EMPLOYMENT

This section focuses on employment matters. It includes overviews of capacity building strategies, employer-friendly incentives and inducements, and promising practices to increase the employability of youth offenders.

CAPACITY BUILDING STRATEGIES

LA SNAP Job Creation Initiative Aimed at Youth Offenders

The Los Angeles Safe Neighborhoods Action Plan (LA SNAP), a job creation initiative, was launched by Mayor James Hahn as the cornerstone of his anti-crime initiative. The Hahn administration has broadened the definition of public safety beyond the enforcement of the existing laws to be proactive on the issues of prevention and intervention with youth. LA SNAP recognizes that "one key need that seems to resonate with at-risk youth is real job opportunities" and that "meaningful long term permanent employment" is part of successful transition to adulthood.

In addition to the specific job creation agenda of LA SNAP, this broader approach to public safety offers a fresh opportunity for understanding and organizing a citywide response to the employability of youth offenders.

SAMPLE OF LA SNAP JOB CREATION ACTIVITIES

- Funds 1,500 summer jobs that target youth offenders and at-risk youth ages 14-21
- Places youth into entry level vacant city civil service positions for six months of job training, possibly leading to permanent employment
- Identifies employment opportunities in all city construction projects and coordinates with contractors and subcontractors
- Assigns a city Job Coordinator to establish and implement a data base to match at-risk youth with employers and positions
- Provides at-risk youth with employment, training, apprenticeships, and adventure sports career exploration opportunities in the Department of Recreation and Parks
- Collaborates with city departments and outside agencies, such as the school district, to inventory programs that target at-risk youth and improve web-based public access to the database
- Funds the city's gang intervention program, LA Bridges

- Expands, in conjunction with City Council President Alex Padilla, the successful Youth Opportunities Program to Pacoima and the Valley, thereby providing critical case management, life skills education, and job training to a larger pool of youth offenders

Source: Deputy Mayor Roberta Yang, Key Note Speech, Crossroads 2002 Symposium

Increasing Employment Opportunities Through Set-Asides: Proposition A

During the 1990's, Los Angeles County voters passed two bond measures, Proposition A-I (1992) and Proposition A-II (1996) to provide funding for Regional Parks and Open Space improvements, specifically capital improvement projects. Both measures required the hiring of at-risk youth on the resulting projects.

In carrying out the Proposition A mandate, the City of Los Angeles set its youth employment goal at 15% of labor costs, or approximately \$12 million, for the period 2000 to 2019. The youth employment component of Proposition A targets the construction industry which has demonstrated a willingness to hire felony youth offenders. Although labor codes prevent the placement of youth under age 18 in positions performing physical labor on construction sites, youth as young as 14 may be hired to do office work related to funded projects.

Through aggressive advocacy, contractors on every new project are fulfilling their hiring requirements. The City currently has 57 construction projects under Proposition A, and spent approximately \$1.4 million last year on its youth employment component.

One key to the success of the Proposition A implementation is the use of employment intermediaries who match at-risk youth to employers and provide training and related services (see below).

Project Labor Agreements

Through a ground-breaking project labor agreement (PLA), The *City of Los Angeles Board of Public Works* mandated 40% local hire rates and 10% at-risk hire rates on a \$400 million sewer construction project. Last year, the local hiring provision resulted in \$2 million being returned to the community.

Implementation has required a willingness to assist contractors to achieve compliance, while remaining firm on local hiring and at-risk employment rates. With a successful operational model in Public Works, other City Departments are now considering similar provisions.

Playa Vista, the largest in-field construction project in the nation, provides another example of successful set asides and project labor agreements. Although there is no public money involved, the developers are required by the City of Los Angeles to ensure that 10% of all construction labor will be held for at-risk youth and young adults. Estimates are that this set aside provision will involve over 10,000 positions over the life of the project (10-15 years).

Employment Intermediaries: PV JOBS

Playa Vista Job Opportunities and Business Services (PV JOBS) was created as an Employment Intermediary to fulfill the at-risk hiring requirement for Playa Vista Construction. PV JOBS acts as an intermediary for 47 organizations that prepare at-risk youth and young adults and refer job ready candidates to them for placement.

Moving beyond the construction industry, PV JOBS now advocates with other industries such as transportation and communications to include at-risk hiring clauses in project labor agreements. For example, the Los Angeles Community College District recently placed a 6% at-risk youth hiring clause in a project labor agreement. PV JOBS also offers technical assistance on Work Opportunity Tax credits and incentives that are of particular interest to employers.

Because small and medium size private companies make up approximately 97% of the Los Angeles business base, the engagement of entrepreneurial employer-owners, labor unions, and chambers of commerce is a labor intensive project. Employment Intermediaries such as PV Jobs, can play a crucial role in the effort to increase the number of employment opportunities for at-risk youth/youth offenders.

Employer-Friendly Inducements and Incentives

Employability strategies, whether incentives or inducements, are needed to motivate employers to take a second look at former youth offenders during the hiring process. In the words of one employer:

I learn not to get excited after watching someone work for the first one or two days because I know its gonna take about one or two weeks before the real person shows up. I just experienced that and so I watch...What I find is a lot of folks don't have basic life skills. I know that preparing them to get the job is important, but we need to be sure to prepare them to keep the job. And I find I become their bank. They are asking me to borrow money. In some cases their bus or taxi...they need a ride home. In a lot of cases we are sitting in my office and I'm doing a little social work. I need those tax credits, right?

Employers spend a significant amount of money searching for and training workers, even for low skill jobs. According to one employer panelist, their average search costs about \$500-\$1000 per employee and training costs an additional \$1000 (primarily, replacement costs of having another employee train the new hire). Given the high turnover in low skill and entry jobs, these costs are considerable, particularly for small and medium sized employers. To the extent that employers can find ready labor sources, such as through workforce programs, they can significantly reduce search and training costs.

I was involved in divorces, I was involved in all sort of goofy things that I had to put up with ...they weren't goofy to the employee... I had to get involved to make sure the job got done. If I knew there was an organization that provided support for these personal issues, I would consider hiring their candidate over others.

The use of state and federal bonding programs could be a significant inducement for employers, especially those seeking to fulfill at-risk youth hiring requirements. The "bond" can help insulate employers from liabilities and losses. Other efforts may include hiring incentives to employers in the form of tax breaks, funding salary enhancements, and facilitating unions and trade apprenticeships. The expansion of such incentives is needed to institutionalize youth offender employment.

PROMISING PRACTICES

Employment Preparation

A realistic understanding of the juvenile record should be included in the overall assessment of interests, talents, and industry expectations. It is important to identify an employment career and life track that will accommodate a minor with a juvenile record. If the youth committed serious gang related offenses and also possesses a trail of driving problems, employment options positions requiring a valid driver license, work with the public, or handling money may not be suitable. The employment, even its location, should help serve comprehensive rehabilitation goals.

The employment interview is a critical crossroad for the youth offender. This is where they experience the effects of bad choices, competition, and sometimes, ineffective preparation. In the words of one young person:

I've been honest everywhere I applied and with all the interviews and everything I've been through, I've got good responses. People said I did good on the interview, passed the drug test... later everyone said "no" because of my record, but I told them about the record during the interview and they said it was ok, they had no problems with it, but later on they said they couldn't give me the job because of my record. You know I'm not sure if they were just telling me that during the interview because I was in their face or they had to go to their bosses or something and their boss said they couldn't give me the job.

Recruiters agree that the most common error on the application and during the interview is mishandling questions about the criminal and juvenile record. Applicants don't understand the limitations of sealed records (e.g. vehicular violations remain) or they don't read the applications carefully. Applications vary among companies; some ask about arrests, others about convictions, and still others may request an accounting of expunged convictions. Should the job candidate answer incorrectly, and then be hired, he/she could be fired for falsification when the background check becomes available several months later, even if job performance is fine.

With electronic record keeping, a background check may collect information from a number of sources. School, law enforcement and probation records may disclose law enforcement interviews or school campus violations and suspensions. If the work position is competitive, the youth offender's file goes to the bottom of the file unless the job candidate is prepared to make a persuasive argument for employment.

Community Build's Assets Development Approach

Working exclusively with multi-barriered and hard to serve individuals, *Community Build, Inc.* applies an assets development model to promote successful workplace experiences. Community Build staff prepare clients to meet the competitive challenges of private sector employment with its desirable jobs, salaries, and benefits. In the words of one employer:

I don't really care if the young person has a criminal background. I am looking for someone eager to work, who wants to put in an honest days work and someone I can trust. And what I find is that a lot of times the agencies I try to work with send me people that are ill prepared. For example, they are sending someone to interview in the food business who has long fingernails, whose hair and dress is not appropriate, and for me, that's an immediate turn-off... if you focus, if you look at the industry that you are sending your applicants out to, make

sure they dress appropriately and are ready to interview for the particular industry.

The importance of preparation of the young person can not be underestimated and must include both personal and employability skills. Employment preparation training includes applications, resumes, interview skills, and attire. Personal skills improvement training covers punctuality, attendance, attitude adjustment, business etiquette, ethical decision making and handling constructive criticism. Preparation must cover how to answer questions regarding involvement in the legal system. The answer must be honest and clear on the employment application and during the interview process. Youth offenders must be able to convince the interviewer that they have made a change in their life, that the lesson has been learned, and above all, they can do the job and be an asset to the employer.

Work experience and work based learning agreements can be an inducement for employers to give youth the opportunity to work, explore career options, and become familiar with the world of work. Community Build pays the client's salary and the employer provides the training. Employment specialists call employers to check on the client's progress and work through any problem in the workplace (employment retention counseling). Work experience provides the youth offender with needed skills and the employer sees the young person's performance and may gain confidence in their skills and ability to do the job. Employers frequently decide to hire the client after the work experience assignment has ended.

Job development on behalf of at-risk youth requires on-going relationships between the staff and employers and a track record of positive results. It requires marketing, sales, networking, and a well-prepared client. Job development is whatever it takes to assist the youth offender enter the labor market.

At Community Build, the goal of job development is to assist the youth offender to get a job, earn money legally, and become a responsible member of the working community. Community Build becomes the youth's support team in this process along with providing childcare, transportation, tattoo removals, traffic warrant clean up, and parenting skills. Community Build staff members talk to the employer prior to sending the client to apply for the job. This prevents the experience of being turned down or embarrassed because of a legal barrier. Even employers that require background checks become more open to the possibility of hiring the youth offender once they know all the circumstances. Community Build has found that some private sector employers will hire youth offenders, although they do not advertise this willingness. Sometimes if a company recruiter has open positions, they are willing to negotiate and compromise.

Miracle House

Directed at young adult offenders, age 21-25, the *Miracle House*, helps to ease the ex-offender back into their community and society. The former offender is rarely prepared to handle conflicts without resorting to former negative patterns. This program seeks to simplify the life style of its clients and assist them in handling conflict, so they are able to take advantage of job opportunities and education.

Los Angeles Conservation Corps

Directed at youth offenders and other at-risk youth, the *Los Angeles Conservation Corps* generates fees for its services, which include planting trees, developing parks, clean up and recycling. It also acts as an Employment Intermediary for the City's Proposition A youth employment component (see earlier discussion of Proposition A). Besides work experience, the daily program also includes physical fitness, charter school classes, and tutoring. Legal services and community service are major features.

Their *Girls Today, Women Tomorrow* leadership mentoring program serves middle school and high school age girls who are striving to meet their goals. The program recognizes critical crossroad points for young women with special emphasis on the financial demands of their senior year and seeks to link high school seniors with employers who are willing to provide scholarships that reward school attendance and achievement.

Blueprint for Success

Blueprint for Success is an employment preparation certification and passport program. Youth that complete an approved South Bay Workforce Investment Board program receive a skills based certificate. Participating employers, recruited by the local chamber of commerce, display signs indicating "We hire Blueprint for Success." Ultimately, an employment passport program can be expected to help promote youth employment, reinforce quality control for job preparation training, reduce generational conflict and enhance human relations and neighborliness.

Overcoming the Disincentive of Child Support

Over 80% of ex-offenders are fathers, mostly non-custodial fathers, many of whom owe significant child support payments. This is often a disincentive to work, since a large portion of their paycheck will return to the state. Proactive case management that identifies other resources

to provide daily living costs and parenting classes to help re-establish positive relationship with children and the custodial parent, can smooth the shock and prevent quitting in the face of frustration.

SECTION 3: SERVING YOUTH OFFENDERS-EDUCATION AND OTHER SUPPORTS

Youth 2: Youth offenders that are just coming out of camp [Probation Retention Facility] jail, or whatever, need schools, computers and technology trades so they can be something in life and be ready for the world...so they won't just be depending on their parents or other people to give them money.

Agencies and individuals that serve youth offenders agree that these young people come with a web of personal difficulties that require significant time and a tremendous range of services. The problems that precipitate and reinforce youth indiscretion, alienation, and criminal activity are developmental and organic, social and environmental, and financial and economic. These are the factors that must be addressed for them to become self-sufficient and successfully transition to adulthood.

This section describes the crossroad experiences of youth offenders in their own words, their personal development, schooling environments, and some promising practices.

"CROSSROAD" EXPERIENCES FOR YOUTH OFFENDERS

There is a process to recovery and it doesn't matter if one is recovering from substance abuse, chronic dependency, violence, or gang affiliation--the recovery process involves more than completing a program. The recovery process should involve meaningful career oriented employment. Rehabilitation strategies are one way an older teen or adult can sustain continuing improvements in their lives and ultimately make positive changes. This may begin with a job, but eventually career track opportunities may present themselves. Therefore, a comprehensive program for at-risk and offender employment should promote career education.

Juvenile rehabilitation that works is much more than a decision to "do the right thing". It is a long process involving many decision points, and includes involvement with trustworthy and competent adults and appropriate support systems.

The authenticating voices of youth, help those seeking to serve youth offenders better understand these "crossroad" experiences:

YOUTH 2: I came from a good home and I started hanging out with the wrong crowds and doing bad stuff, like not doing what I was supposed to

do, ditching school, and I got caught up in the system. And then I was on probation and at counseling and all that.

YOUTH 1: Before I got involved with any of the community based programs or just any positive type of atmosphere, I had to register to myself that I wanted to change. No matter how bad things are, or no matter how hard the struggle is, if you're free, you're free, your freedom is something beautiful and you got to learn to value that....I went to the computer club 'cause I do music and they offered me free studio time and that knowledge... I found I had an interest in the computer...so I had to get deep into the technology so I could do what I love to do. And after that, it just kind of triggered something that made me want to do better in all areas. I'm talking about school, I'm talking about life, I'm talking about everyday activities. So I just started shaking all the nonsense and quit kicking it with the homies After that I started going to school like everyday 'cause I knew I had to get off probation 'cause it's like a leash around your neck, you know... one wrong step or one wrong violation and you're back in the system.

Personal Development

By the time a youth offender is "hard core" they have lived through and created many bitter experiences that have narrowed their options. Their faith and trust lies within dysfunctional peer groups, not productive adults. Hard core youth have multiple barriers to employment. These barriers are significant and may include the following: criminal record, high school dropout, substance abuse, gang involvement, very limited or absence of support from parents and extended family networks, and detachment from other positive social, economic and cultural institutions.

Experience demonstrates that overcoming negative personal histories requires significant intervention. Former gang involved adults, employers, and agencies that are empathetic to their cause must advocate for the value of the youth and offer something concrete to motivate their cooperation and participation in gainful employment. Unfortunately, efforts to assist hard core youth are difficult to sustain. The problem can be traced, in part, to routine leadership changes in law enforcement, probation, and school districts. Many times, just as youth offenders, government personnel, and local community leaders begin to learn about, understand, and trust each other, the personnel change, canceling out all the old arrangements and the work has to start anew.

Youth 1: I became involved with a community agency. There, it don't get any realer, 'cause they know. They've been there, they've done that. They've got people on their staff who ran the streets and have been through the system and know this and know that. If you can't relate to the juvenile, then honestly, he's not going to make a change. It was just a lovely atmosphere. They were willing to help you, they were very supportive, but they gave you no choice. If you were in the process, you had to take it and run with it. They coached me on how to get a job; I went to some classes. And to this day I am still connected to them (the agency) and will stay connected because they only asked me to do one thing and that was to prosper in life and come back and give to my community.

Youth 2: I think counseling really helped me. One of my counselors told me to just stay in school, keep focused on the books and just be ready for the world. And I have to just do something with my life. I can't just be on the block all day thinking about what I'm going to do next in life...it came to me, I have to accomplish all my goals.

Young people need to learn to respect themselves and to treat themselves well in their interactions with others. Some youth lack positive experiences to build on--they have not received respect and good treatment or have been subjected to extreme and prolonged stress. Ultimately, their behavior results from a series of physiological miscues. They misinterpret situations, primarily negatively, and feel threatened. They have poor problem solving skills. They rarely have an internal conversation, such as "I shouldn't be doing this. I need to control my behavior. I need to respond in a more positive and appropriate way." Emotionally healthy youth experience this internal conversation frequently.

As a result of poor problem solving instincts, minor issues have the potential of becoming major problems. Immaturity, bad habits and negative internal messages give sway to indiscretions and crimes. In short, youth offenders may be experiencing a disability, either developmental or mental, that adversely affects their behavior and personal development. Three essential components of personal development must be addressed: 1) employment, 2) family support, and 3) life skills.

Employment

Employment offers gratification and plays a critical role in validating who a person is and what they contribute to society. Employment helps young people learn to incorporate new information and new situations into their everyday lives. They learn about the work ethic and how to deal with co-workers. One young person talks about the importance of learning a trade:

They're used to doing other stuff, earning their own money, in their own ways, like dealing drugs, always ready for something to come up...but I think school should teach them technology trades. Instead of dealing drugs they can be like a pharmacist in the future, something like that. So that they know that they don't really need to be doing stuff on the street.

Family Support

Whether natural, adopted, or a substitute, family plays an important role in helping to correct individual dysfunction and promote personal improvement. Through family or its surrogate, youth learn how to interact appropriately, how to be supportive, and how to resolve conflict.

It's just my mom at home, you know. She's a single parent so I wasn't making things any easier on her and I didn't notice that until I was in camp. She let me freelance and that's why I experienced all I did... then she had to travel from LA to Tujunga just to come and see me.

Life Skills

They (other youth) need to be successful in life... and schools need to teach them banking skills and accounting skills, about checking accounts so they can know about things out there in the world and society.....

Life skills help the young person to improve self-care and how they feel about themselves. They address issues such as hygiene, money management, time management, and energy management. Life skills allow youth to become "available" emotionally, to understand and modulate their emotions and impulses, particularly in employment situations. They teach youth how to separate their future from past negative activities, habits, and, sometimes, people. They

help youth learn what enticed them into dysfunctional behavior and the rewards that attracted them so they can step away from such environments in the future.

THE "SYSTEM OF SCHOOLING" FOR YOUTH OFFENDERS

I went to alternative high school...they motivated me...they never gave up. I wasn't no angel, no saint...they got me involved with programs and conferences and once that happened it started to settle in for real: you can do it, you can put on a suit and go out there and represent in an educational and an academic way.

Whether or not a youth offender returns to school and makes progress depends on the youth, the family, successful supervision by Probation, and/or other support entities. Youth offenders who are willing to make an effort with schooling generally experience three major problems: 1) most are behind in credits and possess poor academic and study skills; 2) the process of re-entry into public education may be rough, complex, and unwelcoming; and 3) they may only be able to access lower quality or stigmatized schooling and credential options.

Where youth offenders receive their schooling and what they are taught is trapped in policy debates over zero tolerance, expulsion, opportunity transfers, and accountability. What has emerged is a sort of "system of defaults" for the hardest to serve youth. Below is summary of how a youthful offender might experience schooling in the greater Los Angeles area:

- When a youth "offends" on a Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) campus, they may receive an opportunity transfer or expulsion.
- An opportunity transfer may result in referral to an alternative school, continuation program or community-based school to prevent dropping out. On the positive side, the alternative options typically have a lower student to teacher ratio. At the same time, three concerns have been identified: 1) students have more unsupervised time because the alternative school day is usually shorter; 2) there are usually fewer support services provided than at a comprehensive high school; and 3) alternative and options programs are not included in new district reforms aimed at improving student learning and accountability. Only 1 in 6 students will transfer back to a traditional high school. Many at-risk students in alternative schools will not receive the best education the district has to offer.
- LAUSD may require an opportunity transfer even when an offence does not meet zero-tolerance criteria or yield a yearlong suspension order.

- If expelled LAUSD will no longer serve that student. The expelled student may be served by Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) or a charter school; however, no entity currently tracks expelled students.
- When a youth is in detained or incarcerated, they are served through LACOE.
- Probation officers report routine difficulty re-enrolling newly released youth in LAUSD and anecdotally report being turned away by local school administrators who override authorization obtained at district offices.
- Last year, 1,500-2,000 students re-entered LAUSD after release from probation camp or the California Youth Authority. Those students receive a bare-bones program where, if their progress is assessed as positive, they are referred back to a traditional school. Others are referred to the occupational programs.

The situation can generally be summed up as one where these youth are alienated from schools and schools are alienated from these youth. On the bright side, there are some efforts to improve the quality of education to youth offenders (see "Promising Practices" below).

Of concern is whether the scale of improvement efforts is sufficient to address the growing numbers of youth offenders in Los Angeles. School districts and other youth development entities need to deliberately engage youth offenders and not make do with default strategies. Engagement means creating a flexible and nimble system where youth are networked to community based agencies and enrolled in the types of personal development services that work specifically for them.

PROMISING PRACTICES FOR SERVING YOUTH OFFENDERS

Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) Schools

Based on the principles of rigor, high expectations, support, structure, and safety, LACOE implements standards-based instruction at 100 sites and produces about 900 graduates yearly. Because the majority of youth enrolled are academically three to five years behind their peers, the program has to make considerable progress with students in a short period of time. Students are expected to perform at the same level or higher than students at traditional schools. LACOE receives a higher per student reimbursement for this program (\$11,000 per student compared to \$8,000 to \$9,000 for a traditional school). Graduation credit requirements are the same as the conventional school districts: 220 credits to graduate and receive a diploma. The issue of stigma is real; however, with high quality education and academic achievement, existing negative images may be overcome.

The LACOE program employs the following strategies: small class size, a full day (360 minutes) of standards based academic instruction and an extended day of 120 minutes, career education and theme based programming with industry partners, such as Hollywood Entertainment Museum (costuming and video mixing), Help Line (family restoration), and Aliso Village Pico Gardens (Technology). In sum, LACOE schools offer to youth offenders a curricula of rigorous academics in a small school environment, coupled with extended hours of career education and industry support at limited sites.

Crossroads 2002 pointed out that confusion over school district policies on expulsions and the lack of tracking expelled students often result in newly released youth offenders not having a school assignment unless Probation makes an automatic referral to LACOE.

YOU Alternative School: A Dropout Recovery Program

Growing out of the dropout recovery agenda of the City of Los Angeles Community Development Department and Los Angeles Unified School District, the *Youth Opportunities Unlimited (YOU) Alternative High School* provides employment and training, educational development, and youth and family development for youth age 14-21 years. YOU serves an area in South Los Angeles characterized by extremes of poverty and crime. Enrollment at YOU is strictly voluntary. A weeklong orientation includes goal setting, skills assessment, conflict resolution training, a parent involvement session, and an invitation to enroll.

As a model drop out recovery program, YOU is organized around nine elements: structure, standards for student behavior, sense of belonging, school-based family structure, mastery of skills, responsibility for one's own learning and sense of self worth, access to learning outside the school through mentors, business partners and employment opportunities, support from caring adults, and spirituality based in humanitarianism

Community College Programs

Attending a community college while concurrently enrolled in high school is an efficient way for youth to make-up credits. For example, a 3 unit community college class equates to 10 high school credits, thus, two community college classes taken during the summer will earn a full semester of high school credit. Minors do not have to pay for classes. Moreover, the community college campus is safe, rarely is gang turf involved, and students are generally there to learn.

LA Southwest College has a pilot program for probationers, age 17-33 years. Participants can begin assessment immediately after release. Learning skills classes and GED preparation are available on an open entry/exit basis. The campus financial aid officer conducts a mini-workshop

to ensure fee waivers follow federal guidelines and eligibility. Additionally, court mandated community service may be completed on the campus

Pre-Release Mentoring: Girls and Gangs

Girls and Gangs is a pre-release mentoring program for girls, age 12-18, who are detained at probation camps and California Youth Authority facilities. With twenty mentors serving 60 girls per year, the program objectives focus on education, relationship skills development, and how to seek assistance from adults and community resources. Program workshops address issues of concern to girls including goal setting, relationship abuse, legal rights and responsibilities, anger management, pregnancy prevention, and expressive arts through dance, doll making, creative writing, and poetry. There is a major focus on job readiness, collection of work documents, economic savvy, and entrepreneurship.

After the girls are released, mentors serve as job coaches and life skills coaches and share their personal resource networks. Mentors are not therapists, case managers or probation officers; they come to the youth from a non-judgmental and non-threatening position.

A major issue identified by *Girls and Gangs* at Crossroads 2002 is the lack of transitional housing for young female offenders, many of whom are facing threatening and hostile living arrangements that contribute to negative cycles of recidivism.

Independent Living Program

Some youth offenders are eligible for the *Independent Living Program* (ILP) up until the age of 21. ILP will pay for transportation, tuition, rent, food, and any type of legitimate education objective, including vocational training. The program is a way for the court and other youth serving organizations to encourage youth who are without adult support, to move forward in their lives.

Community Self-Determination Institute's Street Intervention Program

Founded by young men and women in Watts, the *Community Self-Determination Institute* (CSDI), along with other grassroots neighborhood leaders, forged the 1992 Peace Treaty between rival street gangs, the Bloods and Crips. The primary work of CSDI is street outreach to hard core youth and forging new associations with productive adults, teaching and coaching life skills to reduce negative behavior and motivating respect for oneself and others. Besides life skills training, street interventions also focus on social wellness, dropout prevention, intense case management, and community business development.

Good community based interventions involve street intervention workers and hard core youth joining forces to accomplish civic improvement campaigns, such as voter registration, neighborhood beautification, and community economic development.

Because CSDI learned that suppression tactics do not motivate youth to improve themselves, its efforts shifted toward concrete positive economic improvements. In the past 3 years, CSDI intervention programs have consistently produced low incarceration and a recidivism rate of 15% for its participants. However, a major barrier to the expansion of CSDI is the requirement by federal government funded programs for background checks that preclude many otherwise capable individuals from being employed.

Recently, Cal State Los Angeles implemented a certificate program for hard core gang intervention workers many of whom are former gang involved youth. Regrettably, bureaucracies and institutions still balk at hiring or subcontracting with agencies that hire persons with criminal records. One recommendation of this symposium is that such policies should be revisited.

Centinela Valley Youth Diversion Project's Mediation & Restitution Program

Based on a restorative justice approach, the *Centinela Valley Youth Diversion Project* is a private mediation project focused on the youth offender and his or her victim. The goal is to facilitate a transformational experience through mediation. The young person meets with the victim, listens to effects of the crime on the victim, accepts responsibility and makes amends verbally, in writing, and through payments.

About 400 mediations are performed each year by several hundred trained volunteers each of whom commits to facilitating 12 mediations in exchange for free training. With the support of law enforcement and juvenile court, the program accepts referrals from throughout Los Angeles County for youth who have committed one or two minor non-violent crimes.

In a control group evaluation, the re-arrest rate for mediation participants was 15% compared to 31% for non-participants. Another positive finding was that participants of this program pay a higher proportion of their restitution and more voluntary community service than those exclusively going to court and probation. Youth interviewed at the end of the program realize they do not have the right to commit crimes against others; part of the process of personal development. Mediation and restitution can be an effective tool for introducing other interventions, such as mentoring, family counseling, and job development.

Community Service

One of the sometimes overlooked tools for rehabilitation and transition is the involvement of youth offenders in community service yet it is often very effective. If structured right, involvement of youth offenders in community service can increase their self-esteem and help them to develop important skills and competencies. It can sometimes provide school credit if set up appropriately. In the words of one young person:

Everyday that passes, I grow more and more like, determined to change things, thugs in the hood, people around the area, the neighborhood, cause we got to break the cycle, the statistics, you know? And I can't just sit there and let somebody else just determine my path of life or how far I'm going to go, like 'he's not going to graduate' and 'he's not going to do this, minorities don't go to college'.

I'm just working to just build up the hood and not tear it down...I always stayed with the crowd...in elementary (school) I was always getting' kicked out, you know, 'cause I always had a group, you know, I was always the leader of the pack...with the homies and all I didn't too much disconnect, but I know what I had to do so that I can come back and try to bring them with me instead of leaving them.

SECTION 4:

LEGAL AND PUBLIC POLICY ISSUES TO IMPROVE EMPLOYABILITY

This section contains discussions on legal and public policy matters relative to youth offender employment. The discussion begins with an overview of environmental aspects that affect laws and policies that influence youth offender employment. Following this are descriptions of several types of "second chance" legal and policy strategies that can assist the employability of youth offenders. The section concludes with promising practices to promote rehabilitation and employability.

YOUTH PERSPECTIVE ON "GET TOUGH" LAWS

Youth 4: I'm a victim of zero tolerance. I made a mistake about a year ago. I was drinking, not driving, but in the passenger seat. I am a minor. I was 18 years old at the time and with zero tolerance, any minor under the influence loses his license for a year. So I lost my job. I am currently unemployed. It's not only a loss of job, you settle your jail time, you have to go to court, you lose your wages for a whole year to court fines, and I can't continue with my profession (cable installation) without a valid driver's license. Eighteen year olds can sign up for war, go to another country to get their head blown off, and they are not allowed to drink a beer in their own country. I think this policy should be looked at seriously.

Juveniles are facing the same things as adults, with home arrests, gang injunctions, and the same probation. We are trying to keep a jacket on our juveniles--that's what they (youth) are saying. Whatever you do, when you're younger, is going to stick with you.

Prop 21 will do away with a lot of juvenile facilities and place juveniles with adults in correctional facilities. Juveniles attend school (while in custody) and adult facilities are just housing. I personally think jail is cruel and unusual punishment for a child as young 14...going through things in adult jail with murderers is crazy.

California has increasingly constructed an environment that is largely hostile to a compassionate view of youth offenders. Whereas adolescent development involves rebellion,

alienation, and heightened importance of the peer group, the bureaucracies and institutions that youth most intensely come in contact with once they leave home, increasingly ignore these developmental aspects in their policies and practices. This is important since the "gateway" institutions to the juvenile justice system operate with a great deal of discretion relative to who has a juvenile record and their involvement with the juvenile justice system. This section discusses some of the laws impacting juvenile offenders as well as some of the second chance legal options that currently exist.

School Safety and Juvenile Justice Reform Act

The trends of increased juvenile justice laws and increased juvenile transfers to adult courts began their ascent in the early 1990s. With the passage of the School Safety and Juvenile Justice Reform Act of 1994, schools became a significant entry point in the juvenile justice system.

The "disrupting public school (DPS)" code makes it unlawful for any person to disrupt and interfere with the operation of any public school. A violation of this Code is a "misdemeanor of a high and aggravated nature" (Code section 20-2-1181). DPS now ranks as one of the top three delinquency charges along with shoplifting and simple battery-physical harm.

Recent national research found that "high and aggravated nature" is broadly interpreted by schools to cover a range of offenses such as: students fighting with or without throwing a punch, students not leaving a classroom or school grounds when asked, and a student sitting on another's lap while on the school bus. According to one symposium panelist, students referred to juvenile court as DPS offenders nationally are overwhelmingly African American, male, high school aged, and first time offenders.

Another reason for the increase in referrals of school disciplinary problems to juvenile courts is concern about litigation; schools increasingly turn to the courts to sort out fights and harassment charges to avoid potential lawsuits.

Law Enforcement Role

In recent years, suppression campaigns in high crime neighborhoods have resulted in large numbers of youth coming into contact with the juvenile justice system. Young people are routinely and repeatedly stopped and interviewed. The documentation of these stops and interviews can result in the creation of a juvenile record which is a significant barrier to employment and college, especially in a highly competitive employment market. Another

consequence of this adversarial relationship is a respect gap between law enforcement and young people.

SECOND CHANCE LEGAL STRATEGIES

Exoneration and Dismissal

When there is no reasonable basis for believing a youth committed a crime, a petition may be submitted to the district attorney requesting dismissal. If the district attorney objects to the dismissal, it can be submitted to a judge for a finding. The judge can declare the minor innocent and every agency has to place "exonerated" on the minor's record. There are other situations when the judge may dismiss a case and terminate jurisdiction.

Informal Probation

When the juvenile offense is not serious, the probation officer may complete a background check and recommend informal probation (known as 654). The youth does not have to admit or deny the crime. At the court's discretion, the youth may be placed on six-month informal probation with conditions, such as: obey one's parents, go to school, complete community service, accept curfew, and stay away from gangs and drugs. After six months of compliance by the youth, the charges are dismissed.

Deferred Judgment

With the enactment of Prop 21, "deferred entry of judgment" operates much like informal probation with one major exception: the youth must admit to everything on the petition. There could be "junk" charges, however, there is no plea bargain. The youth is placed on 1-3 years of probation with all the usual conditions. If completed successfully, all the charges are dismissed and the record is sealed.

Many defense attorneys do not like deferred judgment because youth have trouble staying completely out of trouble for three years. If the youth violates probation, during this time period, then the judgment can be entered and sentencing, based on all the charges, could mean formal probation, group home placement, foster home placement, probation camp, or California Youth Authority.

Traffic Tickets and Warrant Cleanup

Many youth offenders have a string of old traffic infractions that have become warrants. A warrant is a separate offense and is a misdemeanor. As a serious offense it may stand between

a youth and employment. The recourse is to pay fines and/or to complete community service. Youth offenders often need assistance with removing charges from their permanent records. Youth should be trained to truthfully respond to job applications and confidently discuss the infraction during employer interviews. Job development and job search efforts should take into account blemished driving records and lack of a valid driver licenses among former youth offenders.

Sealing the Record

With 5,000 youth passing through probation camps each year their juvenile records represent a substantial barrier to obtaining competitive employment and higher education.

A youth may petition the court for an order sealing the record, including records of arrest and records pertaining to other offenses whether acquitted or dismissed. Eligibility for record sealing includes the following: under age 18 at the time of commission of the offense, misdemeanor offense, at least one year has passed since the date of the judgment, there are no new or pending charges, and the specific offense is eligible for sealing. Sealing is not automatic, a petition must be filed with the court to request sealing. The number of petitions filed is very low, only about 5-10% per year.

When the juvenile record is sealed, the youth may freely answer "no" when asked, "have you ever been convicted?" Some job applications now also ask about "arrest and convictions, including sealed records." Youth must be cautioned to read applications carefully and answer all questions truthfully.

With the implementation of Proposition 21 (March 2000), judges have less discretion in the sealing of juvenile records. Previously most records, except for violent felonies (e.g., murder, robbery, use of a gun, or rape), could be sealed. The list of offenses (called 707B offenses) that can no longer be sealed has grown substantially through legislation. Even misdemeanor violations of the vehicle code are now included.

Expungement

Expungement involves a petition to have misdemeanor or "wobbler" convictions reversed, set aside, or dismissed. A "wobbler" offence is one that may be charged as either a misdemeanor or a felony. A primary reason for expungement is to clean the record to obtain employment or pursue higher education. Some applications are now asking for disclosure of "convictions, including expunged convictions." Expungement does not mean that the record is destroyed or

doesn't exist anymore. Law enforcement and agencies that require security clearances will always be able to access the information.

PROMISING PRACTICES

Diversion Schooling

There are very few diversion schooling options, especially ones that involve vocational training. The elements of one such program, the *Academic and Work Services* (AAWS) program includes transportation, meals, a half-day of academic instruction, and a half-day of paid minimum wage employment. The money earned can be used to pay restitution, if ordered. At sentencing, judges would prefer to have more good alternatives to probation camp, allowing the offender to remain home on probation and complete a substantial vocational training program.

Parental Role

Parents should be educated to advocate for the rights and responsibilities of their children at school and provide their children with relevant information should they be approached by law enforcement agencies and school police. Parents also need to learn how to handle problems through school discipline processes rather than have incidents involving their children elevated to a misdemeanor violation.

Pre and Post Release Planning and Networking

Newly released offenders often experience transitional difficulties. On the day of release, for example, they need to figure out how to move around their neighborhood safely, how to structure their day, how to complete job applications, how to interview rather than demand employment, and how to locate schools or community organizations to help them develop literacy skills. Pre-release programs can help reduce frustrations and reduce dysfunctional behaviors and relationships.

YOUTH 2: In camp, they need computers. They shouldn't be just doing push-ups all day and playing basketball. They need to put their minds toward doing something in life, like getting out of situation like camp...they shouldn't be there thinking about fighting and who's the next dude that is going to beat me up.

Based at Probation camps, community camp liaison services begin preparing youth for their return to the home community. Youth offenders need to plan for their school enrollment, counseling services, and other youth services. Without this information, or ignoring it, youth may

inadvertently violate their probation. An assessment must be made, with youth input about the safety of receiving services at particular sites, in light of turf concerns.

To avoid having a young person fall between the cracks, the City of Los Angeles has combined Workforce Investment Act (WIA) and AB 1913 funds to employ two staff members to connect aftercare probation and community workforce development services. The new program, called *Intensive Transition*, employs web-based electronic networking to link probation, aftercare, and community based services with the youth prior to their release.

Furlough Support

The *Aftercare Probation* officer helps the youth meet the mandates of the court through County probation supervision. Approximately two weeks prior to release the aftercare officer makes a home call and preferably an actual home visit. For the most part, parents express a mix of positive reactions and serious concerns. The conditions of probation are reviewed with each youth and telephone contact numbers exchanged. An initial set of specific orders, including community service obligations and 60 day furlough process culminates in a progress hearing before a judge. The typical youth offender has a backlog of fines up to \$6,000-\$7,000. Employment related and other documents need to be obtained: California ID, voter registration, selective service registration, and driver license (if not suspended). *Aftercare Probation* works closely with *Intensive Transition* staff members to get the needed education and employment services.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS FROM SYMPOSIUM PARTICIPANTS

The symposium participants developed a series of recommendations for improving the employability of youth offenders. The recommendations that follow were developed around three themes: 1) access to, and preparation for, employment, 2) serving youth offenders: education and other supports, and 3) legal and public policy recommendations to improve employability.

ACCESS TO AND PREPARATION FOR EMPLOYMENT

- Create and disseminate standards for pre-employment training with input from employers.
- Expand LA SNAP employability options to include additional City agencies and entities.
- Increase on-the-job training opportunities for youth offenders
- Provide individualized job development that takes into consideration the juvenile record and career interest.
- Sponsor forums on employability and careers that engage small and medium-size businesses with youth offenders
- Advocate for mandated at-risk youth employment components of public works, construction, and other community improvement projects.
- Support employment retention strategies, such as tax credits, bonding, and hiring incentives for employers, unions, and trades
- Advocate for maximizing state and federal wage subsidy programs
- Create incentives aimed at getting at-risk youth involved in internships, work experience and civic improvement projects.
- Support the development and use of employment intermediaries.
- Provide training for job developers on youth offenders, occupational profiles, labor market income profiles
- Develop a clearinghouse for exchanging information and documenting programs with positive outcomes.

SERVING YOUTH OFFENDERS: EDUCATION AND OTHER SUPPORTS

- Create a system for automatic referral of youth under a school district expulsion order to workforce development entities.
- Support educational options that combine academic skills, work experience, full school day, and concurrent community college enrollment.
- Encourage schools to develop rigorous accountability and evaluation standards for alternative schools, continuation schools, and other community schools that serve at-risk youth.

- Support street-level intervention by credible trained intervention specialists with the experience to send positive messages to at-risk youth.
- Remove barriers to the hiring of ex-offenders as intervention specialists if they are otherwise qualified.
- Increase post-release transitional housing options, particularly for young women.

LEGAL AND PUBLIC POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE EMPLOYABILITY

- Undertake a major coordinated effort to increase the scale and scope of holistic assistive strategies for youth offenders. Youth offenders experience difficulty obtaining employment due to their juvenile record and gaps in coordination among various service entities. Without effective coordination, second chance strategies for youth offenders seeking employment are undermined.
- Provide for automatic sealing of juvenile records at the legal age of 18 years for all misdemeanors and “wobbler” offenses.
- Establish a "sealment center" and conduct a public services announcement campaign through the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) and local agencies.
- Consider legislation changes to the definition of "disrupting public school", which was part of the amended federal School and Safety Juvenile Reform Act of 1994. Definition should be made less inclusive.
- Expand efforts to prepare youth offenders while in camp for positive re-entry to their communities. At a minimum, the efforts should address the following: (1) vocational training, (2) the initiation of driving record and warrant cleanup, and 3) payment of restitution and court fees.
- Reduce the case load of Aftercare Probation Officers

CONCLUSION

The answer to the question, “Why address the workforce participation of youth offenders?” becomes clear when the increasing number of youth offenders in Los Angeles is coupled with the increasing demands for a skilled workforce to remain economically competitive. Failure to address this issue invites adverse consequences for the growing number of unemployed youth offenders, their neighborhoods, and ultimately, the prosperity of the City. The recommendations contained herein are distilled from a significant cross section of professional and lay persons with experience and expertise in developing the potential of youth offenders. These participants concluded that a major coordinated effort is required to address the myriad of issues faced by youth offenders.

As the words of one former youth offender who participated in the symposium illustrate, the potential impact of agencies working with youth offenders cannot be overemphasized:

They didn't give up on me. They helped me out, they called people for me and they arranged everything for me. You know, I really appreciate that because I know that if they hadn't done that that I would probably have been like before. They enrolled me in school at Los Angeles City College. They got me all the counseling I needed. Their helping me out made me feel good about myself because I had someone I can depend on, someone I can trust, someone that has my back. It wasn't like before when I didn't have anybody. So, you know, I think I am able now to do it.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Office of Mayor James K. Hahn

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