

The Significance of Youth Participation in Innovative Workforce Experiences

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics *Employment Situation- November 2015*, the unemployment rate for teenagers (16 to 19) was 15.7%, more than three times the national unemployment rate of 5.0%. In addition, the unemployment rate for those 20 to 24 years was 9.6% in November, almost twice the national rate.

<http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/empsit.pdf>

The unemployment rate for Davidson County was 6.4% in 2014. However, for people 16-19 years of age, the unemployment rate was 30.1%. For those ages 20-24, unemployment was at 16.3%, according to the 2014 American Community Survey from the U.S. Census Bureau.

Even before the Great Recession, young workers consistently experienced higher unemployment rates than any other demographic, and the recovery has not improved much of their labor market outcomes. Current labor market realities are structurally different than they were decades ago when well-paying, permanent and reliable jobs were normal. Advances in technology, globalization, service industry dominated economy, and outsourcing and temporary jobs with no benefits require a workforce development that can respond to these transformations and engage youth in innovative work experiences.

Gaining meaningful work experiences is part of a process that helps youth for transitioning to a productive adulthood. It helps them navigate the intricacies of choosing among many fields of study that are available but feel at a loss whether the opportunities represent a career path that is aligned with the direction of an evolving labor market.



There are various types of work experiences and trainings that provide wide range of youth programs that operate in schools and in many community workforce programs. Many studies point out the benefits for youth who participate in well-defined workforce experiences. Studies also reveal that participating workforce experiences may result in educational successes such as increased attendance and decreased dropouts. Another benefit associated with summer youth employment programs is decreasing the probability of incarceration and mortality.

<http://www.nber.org/papers/w20810>

One of the main reported benefits related to work experience is that it helps youth develop necessary skills needed at the work place, including both soft and hard skills. It is a known fact that employers have certain expectations when they hire new workers. Understanding and meeting those expectations would be a determining factor how an employee succeeds in the workplace. Many youth programs provide job readiness skills that address most of these expectations and help youth improve their communication skills. Youth programs also equip participants with personal accountability habits such as time management, following instructions from their superiors, and general work performance indicators.

Another potential benefit of youth training programs is providing technical skills required in a specific occupational setting. It gives participants first hand opportunity to actually manufacture and assemble some of the items produced, and understand the marketing techniques used for the sale of these products.

http://www.ncwd-youth.info/sites/default/files/PracticeBrief_2.pdf

Making informed career choices and pathways is another benefit of participating youth training programs. As mentioned above, an evolving economy with so many opportunities would present challenge to align with the future direction of the labor market. Studies show that young workers who participate in internship and summer programs are in a position to easily transition into career pathways that is rewarding. Some of these trainings also help youth develop work history and networks that can assist in future job searches.

<https://www.kansascityfed.org/~//media/files/publicat/community/workforce/transformingworkforcedevelopment/book/transformingworkforcedevelopmentpolicies.pdf>

Job Trainings That Work

A jointly produced document by United States Secretaries of Commerce, Education, Health and human Services, and Labor, *What Works in Job Training: A Synthesis of the Evidence* reviewed Federal programs in the workforce and training systems presented the following:

- Early exposure to a range of career and higher education information and opportunities is associated with better post-secondary education outcomes.
- Work experience for youth still in school, including paid summer jobs, has some important results in terms of educational outcomes, particularly if job skills and education are combined.
- Occupation- and industry-based training programs, including Career Academies, show some promising employment outcomes for youth. Work-based learning, such as paid internships, cooperative education, and some transitional jobs programs suggest that low-income, economically disadvantaged youth are successful in programs where they receive wages. Strategies that allow high school students to accelerate their transition to college or start preparing for a career early can also improve youth outcomes.
- Youth disconnected from work and schools, including those who also have serious disadvantages such as early-child bearing, homelessness, or involvement with the criminal justice system, have the most difficult challenges succeeding in adulthood, but there is some evidence that they can benefit from comprehensive and integrated models that combine education, occupational skills, and support services.

<https://www.dol.gov/asp/evaluation/jdt/jdt.pdf>

Employer-Led Complementary Solutions

Despite these promising interventions, many younger workers still seem trapped in low-paying, seasonal, part-time employment. These jobs rarely provide the opportunity to advance or lead to long-term careers and higher earnings. While these entry level jobs offer other benefits, including exploring their career interests, develop confidence, enhance their networks, and improve their job readiness skills, recent research points out that they will not lead into stable career and financial independence.

A recent report by the Metropolitan Policy Program of the Brookings Institution, *Unemployment Among Young Adults: Exploring employer-led solutions*, suggests that improving the employment status of young adults and helping employers meet workforce needs are complementary goals.

According to the report, the study focused on the Chicago, Illinois, and Louisville, Kentucky, regions and revealed the following insights:

- An increasingly diverse younger generation will make up a growing share of the workforce, and improving the educational and employment outcomes of blacks and Hispanics is critical to maintaining a skilled and competitive labor force.
- While younger workers concentrate in low-wage service industries, some industries such as manufacturing, transportation, logistics, and health care hold more promise for better career opportunities for young adults with less than a bachelor's degree.
- While many firms appreciate the flexibility, energy, and tech-savviness of younger workers, they identify academic and soft skills, dependability, and ability to fit into the workplace culture as both fundamental requirements and pervasive weaknesses among younger workers.
- Among the employers interviewed, some expressed dissatisfaction with their strategies for recruiting, they took concrete steps to better identify, train, and support workers in attaining the necessary skills and competencies.
- To improve outcomes for both young adults and businesses, a broad group of stakeholders—employers, educational institutions, government, and philanthropy—need to support and make changes on both the supply and demand sides of the labor market.

The report suggests that employers need to identify more clearly the skills necessary to meet their needs, and do a better job of recruiting, assessing, and train for those skills. Similarly, stakeholders need to support initiatives and partnerships that meet regional labor market needs. It is also imperative that educators and employers need to communicate better and increase their use of industry-recognized competency-based credentials. Finally, the report recommends that educators and employers need to work together to expand work-based learning opportunities.

<http://www.brookings.edu/research/reports/2015/07/21-unemployment-young-adults-ross-gatz-kazis-ng-svajlenka>

The new Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) was signed into law in July 2014, among other things increases the focus on serving low-income adults and youth who have limited skills, lack work experience, and face other barriers to economic success. One of the key WIOA provisions requires that at least 75 percent of available statewide funds and 75 percent of funds available to local areas be spent on workforce investment services for out-of-school youth, up from 30 percent under WIA (Workforce Investment Act). http://www.nawb.org/documents/Publications/WIOA_Overview.pdf

As states implement WIOA, which strengthens WIA, it is an excellent opportunity to make use of these innovative employer-led solutions that would remove barriers and improve connections to employment and training opportunities that would lead to better labor outcomes.