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*partners in community and social change*

# Opportunity Youth in Denver



## Environmental Scan

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## Executive Summary

There are more than 6.7 million young people (ages 16 to 24) in the nation that are both out of school and out of work, and, therefore, are not in positions to create self-sufficient lives and become assets to their communities (White House Council for Community Solutions, 2012). These youth, known as "Opportunity Youth" (OY), are a source of untapped potential. In order to better understand the landscape of OY in Denver, Colorado, this report was commissioned by Rose Community Foundation and the Denver Opportunity Youth Collaborative (OY Collaborative). The following is a summary of the findings included in the full-length report.

**Who: Opportunity Youth face multiple significant challenges *and* have high aspirations for overcoming them.** In Denver County, there are approximately 73,508 youth, ages 16 to 24 (U.S. Census, 2010). Applying Burd-Sharps & Lewis's estimate of a 13.4% disconnection rate, there are an estimated 9,850 OY in Denver. To supplement this profile, researchers heard directly from opportunity youth. In focus groups, it was clear that the barriers from each individual's past affected their success in education, employment stability and relationships (e.g., involvement in the criminal justice system, lack of skills, parenting responsibilities). Despite these challenges, OY expressed aspirations for completing education, attaining employment, and improving relationships with families and children. When asked what is holding them back from success, approximately 40% said parenting, 30% said criminal record and 25% said that getting help is too hard.

**Where: Denver's OY are diverse and found throughout the city.** Opportunity youth are found geographically across Denver, with discrete pockets of concentration of large numbers and/or large percentages of youth ages 16-19 in census tracts across the city. While data do not address the 20–24 year olds that are OY, they show where outreach and engagement should focus. This also highlights the difficulty of using current data for this purpose (i.e., census age brackets are not connected through age 24, and the data collected herein cannot fully determine *where exactly* OY are in Denver—this is a mobile population). In addition, particular youth "subgroups" are key for identification and outreach purposes, as they are more at risk of becoming OY (i.e., youth currently/formerly in foster care, homeless youth, immigrant youth, youth currently/formerly in the juvenile/criminal justice system, LGBT etc.).

**How: Pathways to education for Denver OY exist, but increased access and quality are needed.** The "pathways schools" at Denver Public Schools (DPS) are an alternative model for youth to attain a high school diploma or General Educational Development certificate (GED), and in some cases, begin technical career training. However, the formal K–12 education system limits access to students after age 20; as a result, OY ages 21+ pursue other options to finish their K–12 education, such as institutions (e.g., Emily Griffith Technical College, Community College of Denver), community based organizations (e.g., Mile High Youth Corps) or government agencies (e.g., Office of Economic Development).

**Why: Pathways to employment for Denver OY are limited.** Another critical stage for OY is securing stable employment. OY often face added barriers to their entry into the workforce

(e.g., education levels, lack of work experience, social/personal challenges such as learning disabilities). The pursuit of middle-skill jobs (jobs that require more than a high school diploma but not a four-year degree) with a high likelihood of job openings in the next decade (e.g., electricians, nursing assistants, licensed practical nurses, vocational nurses) is one promising pathway (National Skills Coalition, 2011). While many organizations address the employment needs of OY, the pathways linking these groups to OY are not strong enough to ensure or secure OY employment. A current gap is the lack of “formal connection” between those serving OY and employers and apprenticeship programs. This finding was also discovered by Jobs for the Future, which visited Denver in January 2014 to conduct an “asset map” for the OY Collaborative (The Aspen Institute, 2014). It is imperative that Denver providers to OY also provide wraparound services, including OY’s need for connections to caring adults (e.g., mentors, counselors) and other support services (e.g., housing, transportation, mental health care, obtaining identification).

**Future Action: Creating networks and systems for service providers promises to enhance the quality, continuity and efficacy of available supports.** The environmental scan identified more than 180 organizations that serve Denver OY through education, workforce development and/or other basic services. However, despite the fact that these organizations address the many needs of OY, no system exists to coordinate services. Therefore, there is both a significant opportunity *and* a critical need to nurture a system that fully addresses the challenges of working with this population. While many of these organizations were not created to address OY, the needs of OY are central to their work, as seen by the fact that 68.6% of surveyed organizations believe that “working with OY is a direct part of their organization’s mission and goals.” The following recommendations are based on the findings of the environmental scan and include:

- (1) Create an OY provider network that develops multiple points of entry into a single system and builds formalized linkages through interagency agreements
- (2) Develop a shared vision for the OY network of the ultimate outcomes as well as metrics and measures of success to advocate for policy measures to support OY
- (3) Connect youth to “satellite hubs” via engaged staff with an OY-centered focus
- (4) Strengthen connections for OY to the workforce
- (5) Assemble sustainable financing for the system
- (6) Build the capacity of OY-serving organizations
- (7) Establish a mechanism to collect ongoing youth input and create processes for incorporating this input into ongoing program improvement
- (8) Advocate for policy measures that support OY

Based on the research presented herein, there is strong reason to believe that creating partnerships among organizations that work with OY, and supporting connections among services through a “collective impact” approach, may best harness the exceptional existing services, while helping to ensure that more OY in Denver reach their full potential.

## Introduction and Background

*[Opportunity youth] have energy and aspirations and do not view themselves as disconnected. To the contrary, they are eager to participate in their communities, in fact, to own the development of their lives. They want to create a successful future but need the tools and opportunities to create that success. –White House Council for Community Solutions, 2012*

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Every year, there are more than one million new youth and young adults who become disconnected from education and workforce systems (Corcoran, Hanleybrown, Steinberg, & Tallant, 2012). These young people are diverse in circumstances and demographics, but they are united in their disconnection from the systems designed to help them prepare for their future. According to Schmitz (2012), "These young people come from every part of America. They are Caucasian, African American, Asian American, Latino, Native American, gay, straight, male, female, urban and rural. There is a wide range of reasons for their disconnection. Some have faced huge barriers such as child abuse and bad schools. Some have struggled with addiction and juvenile delinquency. Others have family responsibilities because of parents or siblings who have special needs or because they have children of their own. In most cases, they lack the work experience, educational background, transportation, or how-to knowledge to access educational and career opportunities." These youth are known as "Opportunity Youth" (OY) because they represent "enormous untapped potential for our society" (Powell & Powell, 2012).

The City of Denver currently has an opportunity to re-engage a large portion of these OY in order to enable them to shape better, more promising futures. Opportunity youth are defined as 16- to 24-year-olds who are disconnected from school or work (i.e., not participating in education, employment or training) and/or who are without family or support networks (Corcoran et al., 2012). Of the 73,508 individuals in Denver County who are 16 to 24 years old (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010), an estimated 9,850, or 13.4%, qualify as OY (Burd-Sharps & Lewis, 2012). Re-engaging these youth represents not only a significant social and community benefit, but it also has positive economic consequences. Belfield, Levin, & Rosen (2012) estimate that every year, each OY costs both a taxpayer burden (e.g., welfare and social service payments, lost taxes, health care paid for by taxpayers) of \$13,900 and an additional social burden (e.g., lost earnings, health expenditures, crime costs) of \$37,450. This means that collectively, OY in Denver cost an average of over \$500 million each year in combined taxpayer and social burden costs.

The Denver Opportunity Youth Collaborative (OY Collaborative) is a collective impact community collaboration strategy to build and deepen pathways that achieve better outcomes in education and employment for OY. Led by Rose Community Foundation and supported by the Forum for Community Solutions at the Aspen Institute, the OY Collaborative is a group of community leaders focused on the re-engagement of Denver OY in education and employment. To better understand and assist Denver's OY population, the OY Collaborative engaged JVA Consulting

(JVA), a Colorado-based research, planning and consulting firm, to conduct an environmental scan of the literature, the data, the services available and the youth voice.

This report provides an overview of the current landscape of OY in Denver and discusses the following topics:

- The demographic characteristics of OY in Denver
- The academic literature and research findings on OY
- The issues, challenges and opportunities facing Denver's OY
- Existing education and employment pathways that support OY
- Available support services and systems

Additionally, the report makes recommendations to strengthen the service system for OY and discusses directions for future research. It is our hope that this report will serve as a resource for informing future strategic conversations focused on: making collaborative decisions on foundational programs, developing pathways for OY, identifying priority OY populations, and accessing and leveraging state and city systems to track OY.

## Methodology

To better understand the opportunities and challenges in working with OY as well as to provide a baseline for the OY Collaborative's implementation plan and for achieving the goals outlined above, JVA researchers engaged in multiple research and data collection processes across a four-month span from December 2013 to March 2014. The multiple methods utilized by researchers included:

- Reviewing comprehensive literature on OY, both nationally and in Denver County
- Conducting site visits to five OY-serving organizations and conducting informal interviews with 38 OY at these organizations
- Administering surveys to Denver-based providers serving OY
- Conducting 21 key informant interviews with community leaders serving OY
- Facilitating two focus groups with local youth who are likely OY
- Surveying 58 youth

A steering committee of the OY Collaborative provided professional input, expertise and guidance to the project. Committee members reviewed the JVA research processes and data collection instruments, and they also provided feedback on the initial report.

## Data Collection Methods

As a part of the research process, JVA researchers both reviewed existing data (e.g., scholarly articles, practitioner reports, publically available local and national demographic data) and collected original data through multiple methods (i.e., surveys, focus groups, site visits). This



subsection outlines all processes used by researchers to review, synthesize and collect data for this report.

### **Comprehensive Literature Review**

A document and literature review was conducted to better understand the realities of OY in Denver County, and nationally, to gain deeper knowledge regarding the barriers impacting OY, and to better articulate future directions for success. A comprehensive and diverse body of literature and research from both academic and practitioner sources was reviewed, as well as data that emerged from each of these sources. Demographic data were also used, including the following variables: (1) neighborhoods more at risk for OY prevalence; (2) factors that contribute to OY status (e.g., foster youth, homeless, juvenile justice, LGBT); and (3) dropout data from Denver Public Schools (DPS).

### **Site Visits**

To better understand flagship organizations (i.e., promising organizations) that directly serve the needs of OY, JVA conducted five site visits and met with 38 OY at the following organizations:

- Center for Work Education and Employment (CWEE)
- Colorado Youth for a Change (CYC)
- Denver Inner City Parish
- Mile High Youth Corps (MHYC)
- West Career Academy

Site visits included key informant interviews with staff (described below). At each site, JVA researchers toured the organization and met with a group of OY selected by the site staff. In addition, surveys were administered to OY at each organization (described below), and researchers engaged OY in informal interviews about their experiences.

### **Provider Surveys**

JVA conducted a comprehensive online survey with organizations whose work focused either in part or entirely on services or programs related to OY. The survey was delivered via SurveyMonkey in January and February 2014, and included the following topics: (1) the extent of each organization's involvement with OY; (2) demographics of OY served by each organization; (3) the services each organization provided to OY; and (4) information regarding interagency collaboration of OY services and the types of services provided to this population.

### **Key Informant Interviews**

JVA interviewed 21 leaders from the Denver community who have deep insights into OY and the systems that serve them. Each interview lasted 45–60 minutes and included discussion of the following: (1) promising practices in serving OY; (2) policies and practices limiting or facilitating OY access to services; and (3) gaps in services for OY. These community leaders provided insight into the system that currently exists for OY in Denver and shared their best thinking for addressing issues surrounding this population.

### Youth Focus Groups

To better understand the experiences of OY directly, two 60-minute focus groups were held with groups of OY in Denver. Focus group questions were developed to: (1) examine the unique needs and desires of OY in Denver; (2) ascertain perceived gaps and opportunities for the programs and systems geared toward OY; and (3) hear OY's ideas about solutions that could assist them.

### Youth Survey

A short survey was administered to 58 youth during site visits and focus groups from December 2013 to February 2014. Survey questions focused on: (1) challenges faced by the respondents (i.e., criminal records, foster care, homelessness); (2) respondents' current school or work status; (3) barriers faced by respondents that prevented them from achieving their goals; and (4) the services and people that supported the respondents.

### Analysis

All collected data were analyzed. As applicable, data were quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed, then triangulated to find commonalities and themes. Analyses included frequencies, descriptive statistics and cross-tab analyses. Qualitative data from key informant interviews and focus groups were cleaned (including being very minimally edited for readability) and then analyzed using coding and thematic pattern matching. Evaluators synthesized results from the quantitative and qualitative data—often using themes supported by direct quotes—to tell a more complete story of OY in Denver County. The results from the data collection approaches are described by theme in the report, rather than by the individual method.

### Study Limitations

The research design used multiple data collection methods and data sources to minimize potential limitations. Despite these efforts, a few limitations are worth noting. First, the estimates and trends of OY were derived from various sources of information; no one system exists that collects data about inputs, outputs and outcomes for OY in Denver. Second, when considering the results of the provider survey, it is important to note that they are not a representation of all providers of services to OY. Rather, the results represent the unique situations and perspectives of those organizations that chose to participate in the survey. Third, the key informant interviews and focus groups—while in-depth—only represent the insights and experiences of those who were interviewed. In addition, it is important to note that all results in this report represent the unique situations and perspectives of only those individuals who participated and may not be representative of the total OY population.

### Findings

The purposes of this report are to provide an overview of the current landscape of OY in Denver, make recommendations to strengthen the service system for OY and discuss directions for future research. To accomplish these goals, all data and research were reviewed and analyzed to produce findings regarding: characteristics of local OY; issues, challenges and opportunities faced by local OY; and existing services, systems and pathways designed to support OY.

This section outlines research findings that: (1) provide an overview of definitional, demographic and other key characteristics of local and national OY, including identifying important subgroups of youth who may be at a higher risk to become OY; (2) document the specific demographic characteristics and life situations of the Denver OY who participated in data collection efforts for this report; (3) identify the promising practices of organizations currently serving OY and detail three pathways—education, employment, and basic needs/support services—for OY in Denver; and (4) describe networks and systems that could be built to better serve local OY, including documenting barriers faced by OY and OY-serving organizations.

## Profile of Opportunity Youth

Because the national OY population represents a vast and diverse spectrum of youth, it is critical to understand the definition of OY as well as the specific characteristics of OY at a local level, including how they may differ in important ways from the national population of OY. To explore these definitional, demographic and other notable characteristics, the following section depicts a profile of OY both nationally and



locally (i.e., Denver County). Data included in this section were gleaned from the document and literature review, key informant interviews, and OY and OY-provider survey data.

## Who are Opportunity Youth?

OY are defined as 16- to 24-year-olds who are disconnected from school or work, and/or who do not have a family or support network (Corcoran et al., 2012; Fernandes & Gabe, 2009). Many data sources refer to individuals in this situation as “disconnected” youth rather than OY, and terms are used interchangeably in this report.

There are some common ways of classifying OY. First, OY are commonly defined as either “*young and close*” or “*old and far*,” referring to: (1) age relative to the traditional high school population; and (2) proximity to completing a high school credential. Opportunity youth who are considered *young and close* are between 16 and 18 years old and are close to obtaining their high school diploma or GED. Those who are considered *old and far* are between 18 and 24 years old and have a high school credit deficit that will make it unlikely they will graduate before they age out of or leave a formal system of care at age 21 (Bridgeland & Milano, 2012).

A second way that OY have been classified is by the terms *chronic* or *under-attached*. *Chronic* refers to those young people who have not been engaged in work or school since age 16, and *under-attached* describes those with limited education or work experience who may be more easily engaged (Bridgeland & Milano, 2012).

Finally, at some point in their high school career (up to age 21), students can further be classified within one of four categories: *on-track*; *young and off-track*; *old and off-track*; and *significantly off-track* (Knous-Dolan, Perez-Oquendo & Sturgis, 2009). In this definition, *young*

refers to 14- to 16-year-olds and *old* refers to 17- to 20-year-olds. *Off-track* signifies that a student is behind approximately one or more grade levels, as compared with peers. Students who are *old* and *significantly off-track* may not be about to earn a traditional diploma prior to age 21, at which point they age out of the K–12 system (Knous-Dolan, et al., 2009).

### Prevalence and Demographics of OY Nationally and in Denver

This subsection explores the prevalence of OY both nationally and locally, and identifies their demographic characteristics, including: geographic location, population trends and race/ethnicity. Nationally, it is estimated that more than 6.7 million young people (ages 16 to 24) are out of school and out of work, and therefore not in positions to create self-sufficient lives and be assets in their community and workforce (White House Council for Community Solutions, 2012). In Denver County, there are approximately 73,508 youth who are 16 to 24 (U.S. Census, 2010). Applying Burd-Sharps & Lewis’s estimate of a 13.4% disconnection rate in Metro Denver, there are an estimated 9,850 OY in Denver.<sup>1</sup>

Nationally, the prevalence of disconnected youth is not evenly distributed among racial/ethnic groups, with disconnection rates of 22.5% for African Americans, 18.5% for Latinos/as, 11.7% for whites and 8.0% for Asian Americans (Burd-Sharps & Lewis, 2012). In Denver County, there was insufficient data to perform a full breakdown by race/ethnicity, but Lewis and Burd-Sharps (2013) found that Latino youth in Metro Denver were more likely to be disconnected than the national average (19.1% in Metro Denver vs. 14.7% nationally). Moreover, whites appeared to be less disconnected (10% in Metro Denver vs. 11.7% nationally). Other ethnic groups such as Asians and Native Americans had too small of a population to estimate accurately using the U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (Lewis & Burd-Sharps, 2013).

### Does Geography Matter?

Nationally, Lewis and Burd-Sharps (2013) found that high rates of poverty, high rates of adult unemployment, low levels of adult educational attainment and a high degree of residential segregation by race in communities appeared to contribute to youth disconnected rates.

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<sup>1</sup> The 13.4% estimate considered youth disconnected if they met the following two criteria: (1) youth 16 to 24 who were not in school or working; and (2) youth who were out of a job but looking for employment. Burd-Sharps and Lewis (2012) did not consider the following youth as being disconnected: (1) part-time students; (2) part-time workers; or (3) youth enrolled in a residential correctional or medical facility but enrolled in a course of study. The data to create the 13.4% estimate were derived from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS). This estimate reflects the total number of youth in *Denver County* (i.e., 73,508) multiplied by the percent of disconnected youth in the *Denver metro* area (i.e., 13.4%). However, because there is no comprehensive system that tracks OY in Denver County, it should be noted that this number is an estimate. In fact, as Burd-Sharps & Lewis (2012) noted, “One of the challenges of studying this population is that several different official data sources exist, each of which differs slightly in what data they make available and for what segments of the population. The result is that researchers working with different datasets, and often with different definitions of what constitutes disconnections, come up with different numbers for this indicator” (p. 13).

### *Where Denver's OY Live*

The phenomena that Burd-Sharps and Lewis noted nationally holds true in Denver. OY are found throughout Denver, with high concentrations (percentages) and numbers in geographically distant neighborhoods across the city as the map in Figure 1 demonstrates. Even within specific Denver neighborhoods, there may be high concentrations of OY in one census tract, and few in another.

The map depicted in Figure 1 highlights the census tracts (regions of Denver neighborhoods as divided by the Census) that have higher prevalence of disconnected youth ages 16–19. This map, created by the City of Denver, shows areas where OY (under age 20) may be more prevalent. While not fully indicative of OY through age 24, it does show the geographic diversity of OY in Denver. Jobs For the Future's Asset Map Memo mentions this map as a way to look into neighborhoods in need of a pathway development strategy (The Aspen Institute, 2014).

**DENVER**  
CHILDREN'S AFFAIRS

**Key Indicators for Youth Disconnection:**

- Adult Unemployment
- Adults with less than a Bachelors Degree
- Poverty Rate
- Youth Unemployment Rate (ages 16-24)
- Not Enrolled in School (ages 15-24)

Legend:

- Least Likely Environment for Youth Disconnection
- Most Likely Environment for Youth Disconnection
- Denver Neighborhoods
- No Data

Based on the key well-being indicators used in the Halve the Gap by 2030: Youth Disconnection in America's Cities by the Measure of America of the Social Science Research Council, 2013.

Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-Year-Estimates 2008-2012



### **Suburban Youth Likely Accessing Services in Denver**

The population of Denver County's 18- to 24-year-olds grew by only 1.6% between 2000 and 2010 (Greenberg & Gallagher, 2011), a low rate as compared with the growth rates of this population in surrounding counties (depicted in Table 1 below).

**Table 1: Growth rate of 18-to 24-year-old population in Metro Denver (2000–2010)**

County	Rate of Growth of 18 to 24 Population from 2000 to 2010
Denver	1.6%
Adams	21.2%
Arapahoe	33.5%
Douglas	151.2%
Jefferson	30.9%

Source 1: Greenberg & Gallagher, 2011

This is consistent with the new research suggesting that suburban poverty is growing nationwide and many of today's poor live in the suburbs, where affordable housing has shifted (Kneebone & Berube, 2014). JVA'S research, however, revealed an influx of youth from other communities into programs offered in Denver. At site visits and in focus groups, OY in programs in the City of Denver reported attending high schools in cities all over the metro area, from Westminster to Littleton to Aurora. This was confirmed by a service provider report that homeless OY often travel to Denver for resources. These findings indicate several important conclusions: (1) opportunity youth are dispersed within and around the Denver metro community; (2) resources to serve OY are concentrated within the city and county of Denver; and (3) there is likely need for current services to be more geographically proximate to the OY they seek to serve.

### **K–12 School Dropout Rate**

Reviewing dropout rates provides critical insight into who is most at risk of becoming an OY. As Bridgeland and Mason-Elder (2012) found, dropping out of high school is not usually a sudden choice; rather, it is often a reflection of a long-term track of being disengaged. In addition, this population represents a cohort of youth eager for re-engagement. Dropping out of high school often causes regret, as “nearly 75% of dropouts say that if they could relive the experience, they would have stayed in school” (Bridgeland & Mason-Elder, 2012). Table 2 delineates by race/ethnicity the youth who dropped out of DPS in the last school year.

Table 2: DPS dropout statistics by race/ethnicity<sup>2</sup>

	Total Number of Students Grades 9-12	Dropout Rate	Total Number of Dropouts	Percent of Total Dropouts
Native American/Alaskan Native	329	6.1%	20	1.1%
Latino	20,959	5.6%	1,174	65.1%
African American	5,899	5.1%	301	16.7%
Two or more races	1,017	3.9%	40	2.2%
White	6,673	3.5%	234	13.0%
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	85	3.5%	3	.002%
Asian	1,280	2.4%	31	1.7%

Source 2: Colorado Department of Education, 2013

Notable, is the high number of Latino students in this cohort who dropped out of school. Latino students were approximately 58% of the DPS population and represented 63% of all dropouts in 2012–2013 (Colorado Department of Education, 2013).

**Promising Practices in Dropout Prevention:** Colorado Youth for a Change (CYC), a notable organization in Denver, performs dropout recovery and prevention. CYC speaks to ninth graders at area schools to prevent future dropouts and goes out into the community to find those who have dropped out and reconnects them to education pathways. In neighboring Aurora, CYC created Aurora Futures Academy, an alternative high school that provides a flexible learning environment for OY ages 17–21 to gain a GED, an associate degree, a technical certificate from Pickens Technical College or a combination of all three.

### Youth Unemployment

The youth unemployment rate is relatively similar across race and ethnicity in Denver, with slight increases seen in the African American youth population (see Table 3).

Table 3: Denver youth unemployment rates, 2012

Age	White Alone	Black or African American Alone	Hispanic or Latino	Population Age 16 and Above
16–19	28.5%	34.0%	28.9%	31.7%
20–24	5.6%	7.7%	4.6%	5.7%
Population Age 16 and Above	5.8%	13.6%	8.7%	7.2%

Source 3: U.S. Census, American Community Survey, 2012

<sup>2</sup> From “Dropout Rates by District, Grade, Gender, and Race/Ethnicity” Colorado Department of Education, 2013. <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdereval/dropoutcurrent>. Calculations on DPS dropouts (Table 3) were made by starting with the total number of 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade students enrolled in DPS from 2012 to 2013: 36,242 students. The dropout rate for this cohort was 5% or 1,812 students.



### Identifying “Subgroups” of Denver OY

While there is certainly not one specific reason or life event that causes youth to disengage from employment and education, it is important to understand the factors that may contribute to that disengagement. This section discusses specific populations and/or characteristics of youth in Denver who may be at a higher risk of becoming OY, supplementing this information with empirical findings from the OY literature.

A thorough review of available data (see, e.g., Bridgeland & Mason-Elder, 2012; Corcoran et al., 2012; Knous-Dolan et al., 2009; Lewis & Burd-Sharps, 2013; Office of Children’s Affairs, 2013) did indicate notable subgroups of youth who may be at greater risk for becoming OY, including:

- Youth in foster care
- Youth who are homeless
- Youth who are immigrants
- Youth in the juvenile/criminal justice system
- Youth who identify as LGBT<sup>3</sup>
- Youth who are parenting

These groups are not isolated from each other; OY may be part of these groups at the same time or at different times (e.g., from foster care to homelessness). It is important to note that the subgroups of youth identified in this section (i.e., representing those who are at a greater risk of becoming OY) may *also* represent priority subgroups of OY themselves, in that they represent both high-risk populations of youth and also face additional challenges from being OY and are listed in no ranking order.

#### Youth in Foster Care

One subgroup of youth who may be at a higher risk of becoming OY is the subgroup with those who are either currently in or who were previously in foster care (including those who were in but aged-out of foster care). Like other factors, time in foster care serves as a compounding factor, as national data suggest that foster youth are more likely to be homeless, have less housing stability and rely more on public assistance compared with youth with similar risk factors (Berzin, Rhodes, & Curtis, 2011). Further complicating matters, research suggests that foster youth may be less ready for college compared with their peers (Unrau, Font, & Rawls, 2012). According to the Denver Department of Human Services (2013), an estimated 1,600 Denver youth are in foster care. While it is difficult to determine how many of these young people are OY, the provider survey asked

*“When you’re in this kind of position like foster care it makes it ten times harder to be where you want to be.”*

– Youth focus group participant

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<sup>3</sup> Although academic research is limited regarding LGBT and immigrant youth, these subgroups were included in this section based on the researchers’ interviews with providers and OY.

providers to identify youth served by identity subgroups, and foster care youth were selected by 40.9% of total providers.

Some OY in focus groups mentioned the difficulties and support they received in foster care. While a handful described feeling supported by adults in the foster system (e.g., a foster mother, a case manager), more OY respondents enumerated the reasons for why foster care created difficulties in their lives. Therefore, youth in foster care may be especially vulnerable to becoming OY and may need additional resources to prevent this outcome. Housing and overall support systems are necessary for youth aging out of foster care.

Many providers spoke about the many challenges of emancipating from foster care, as seen above, but there was not consensus as to what the best solution is for addressing these challenges. One organization that aims to ease the path of foster youth to the working or educational world is Bridging the Gap at Mile High United Way. Another mentioned in the provider survey is the Chafee Program at the Department of Human Services. In recognition of the significant and unique needs of foster youth, the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) recently created a new position of State Coordinator for Foster Care Education to help improve educational outcomes for foster youth.

*“[We need] some kind of a housing and support program for kids emancipating out of foster care, something that is beyond homeless program—before they become homeless. We spend so much money on people coming out of prison for example, why not youth housing programs organized with places that help them along as they emancipate?”*

– Key informant interviewee

### **Youth Who Are Homeless**

Another risk factor that increases the likelihood of a youth becoming OY is homelessness. Youth who are homeless face not only unstable housing and relationships, but are also at an increased risk of experiencing harmful life factors, such as abuse and dropping out of high school (Merscham, Van Leeuwen, & McGuire, 2009). In 2013, the Metro Denver Homeless Initiative (MDHI) conducted a point-in-time survey that focused on homelessness among unsheltered unaccompanied minors and youth 18 to 24 years old. The survey identified 921 homeless youth, an 18.5% increase from the 777 counted in 2012. Other findings from this report included:

- 384 (41.6%) of all homeless youth in Colorado were in Denver County
- Youth comprised 13.4% of all reported homeless persons in Denver County
- 3.2% of all metro area homeless respondents reported having been in foster care
- 10.6% of all metro area homeless respondents reported being discharged from jail, prison or a halfway house
- 43% of homeless youth in Denver County were white, 26% African American, 18% Latino, 7% mixed-race, 5% Native American and 1% Asian and/or “other”

*“There is a huge gap is housing—most of the folks that we deal with are technically homeless. These OY have very unstable or temporary housing. Lack of affordable housing is a huge issue in the lives of OY because if you get a job at minimum wage you can't get an apartment in Denver—[this is a] huge source of instability.”*

– Key informant interviewee

In one Denver study from Urban Peak (N = 182), a subgroup of homeless youth was found to have a higher incidence of mental illness, substance abuse and suicide ideation (Merscham, et al., 2009). A large portion of this sample (82.4%) reported physical abuse, sexual abuse, sexual assault or rape, death of a parent or other major life trauma. In terms of mental health, 21.4% had schizophrenia, 26.9% had bipolar mood disorder, 20.3% had depression and 8.2% had post-traumatic stress disorder. The majority of homeless youth (66.5%) reported struggling with suicide ideation currently or in the past (Merscham et al., 2009). In addition, according to DPS 2012–2013 school year data, 328 homeless youth had dropped out of school.

Their life situations are exacerbated by a lack of affordable housing in the city. A few key informants discussed how a lack of sufficient affordable housing prevented youth from connecting with viable pathways to education, employment and security. Supporting this perspective, some community leaders in interviews discussed how providing OY with stable housing may be key in helping this population complete their education or attain a job that would provide a living wage. Clearly, homeless youth in Denver appear to face a number of obstacles concurrently that may increase the likelihood that members of this group will be or are currently OY.

**Promising Practices with Homeless Youth:** Urban Peak remains the notable organization for homeless youth in Denver, providing a shelter and transitional housing. Urban Peak engages in street outreach as well as drop-in services, and it was mentioned the most times in the provider survey as a trusted partner and referral source (See Table 6).

### *Youth Who Are Immigrants*

A different subgroup of youth who may be at a higher risk of becoming OY is youth who are immigrants. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there were 97,763 immigrants in Denver County in 2012. The majority of immigrants—64% (62,568)—were from Latin America, primarily Mexico; in addition, 18% were from Asia, 9% from Europe and 7% from Africa.

In Denver, graduation rates of immigrant students are slightly lower than the total population, which is one factor leading these young people toward becoming OY. Specifically, using LEP (Limited English Proficiency) as an indicator, the graduation rate of LEP students in Denver Public Schools was 52.7%, compared with the overall graduation rate of 58.8% (Colorado Department of Education, 2012). In addition, regarding the prevalence of OY who are immigrants, over half (59.1%) of providers surveyed identified first-generation immigrant youth as the population they primarily served. Similarly, 40.9% of providers stated they work primarily with youth immigrants, 40.9% identified undocumented immigrant youth and 31.8% identified primarily working with refugee youth. Providers are clearly working with OY facing the complications that immigration can have on youth and their families.

*“Immigration status is huge—we [at DPS] serve 58% of Hispanic students and 38% are ELL. It’s a very transient population. Students being undocumented can interfere with work. [Even though] college is now an option [for all], work can be obstacle. A student that is undocumented cannot take jobs that they want.”*

— Key informant interviewee

Regarding employment, immigrants are disproportionately employed in lower paying jobs with less upward mobility and less job security. According to the Migration Policy Institute (2009), “nearly half (49.4%) of immigrants from Mexico and Central America have less than a high school education—and are disproportionately employed in low-value added jobs that are most vulnerable during recessions.” Paradoxically, at the end of 2012, nationally, 69% of foreign-born Latinos were in the workforce vs. 64% of native-born Latinos. And, the unemployment rate among foreign-born youth 16 to 24 years old was 14.3% vs. 16.4% for native-born youth (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). This suggests that more Latino immigrant youth are employed than native-born youth, but they also have fewer educational credentials and will remain in lower paying jobs with little opportunity for upward mobility. Addressing barriers that immigrant youth face in education, including postsecondary opportunities, will go a long way in improving the lives of those immigrants who may become OY.

Related to immigrant status in particular, the need for documentation is integral. However, many other OY experience the need for documentation as a barrier, though due to different circumstances. For instance, half of all participants in the Urban Peak focus group lacked ID or documentation, unrelated to immigration status. In many cases, community leaders interviewed shared how OY who lacked social security numbers had a difficult time accessing services.

Over half of the providers who responded to the online survey reported working with immigrant youth. For example, the Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition, self-identified as a resource for immigrant youth, provides mentoring, life skills and literacy training, legal and police services, as well as advocates for policy change.

*“We run into a lot of issues with documentation. [OY have] no social security numbers and don't have access to a lot of the things that people with a social security number have access to. We've run into that time and again. We've had to help them get services when they don't have that social security number.”*

– Key informant interviewee

### **Youth in the Juvenile/Criminal Justice System**

Another subgroup of youth who may be at a higher risk of becoming OY are youth who are in the criminal justice system. These youth commonly have a more difficult experience in finding employment and stability. Among adults 18 and older, the 18–24 age group comprises the largest percentage of Colorado criminal case convictions (Colorado Department of Safety, 2011). Furthermore, in Colorado, African American and Latino youth are disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system.

Consider the following findings from the Colorado Department of Safety (2011):

- African American youth represent 5% of all youth in Denver County but characterize 15% of all juvenile arrests.
- African American male youth are the least likely to receive probation at 64% (compared with an average of 73% for other racial/ethnic groups) and the most likely to be committed to the Department of Youth Corrections at 14% (compared with an average of 5% for other racial/ethnic groups).

- Latino youth make up 24% of Colorado’s population, and they comprise 38% of youth admitted to secure detention facilities and 35% of youth committed to the Colorado Department of Youth Corrections.

Considering the role of the juvenile justice system as it relates to OY, African American and Latino youth fare more poorly than white youth in incarceration and other criminal justice outcomes (e.g., probation) in Colorado. As a result, African American youth may be at greater risk of becoming OY compared with other demographic groups as a result of criminal justice engagement. Additionally, because educational services and employment directly correlated to successful outcomes for youth who were discharged from the criminal justice system—with youth who had higher educational achievement being much more likely to succeed both in the criminal justice system and after being discharged—it seems likely that educational attainment serves as a protective factor that may prevent youth in the juvenile justice system from becoming OY in Colorado.

Furthermore, of the 1,270 committed youth discharged in 2010, 40% (514) received mental health services and 6% (77) received substance abuse disorder (SUD) treatment (TriWest Group, 2011). While many of those receiving mental health services also received SUD treatment as part of that care, it is of interest to note that Colorado Client Assessment Record (CCAR) indicators of need suggest that far more committed youth need SUD treatment (63.5%) and relatively fewer need mental health treatment (22.2%). This seems to indicate that while mental health treatment is important and necessary, there is an *even greater* need for treatment for the abuse of alcohol and treatment for drug abuse among youth involved in the criminal justice system. Youth in focus groups confirmed this, often mentioning addiction, drug or alcohol use as detriments to their goals, and described needing more self-control to better their lives.

About one-third of OY at focus groups reported being on probation or having a criminal record, and they talked about their experiences in relation to their current situations. One OY at a focus group even talked about how he was participating in Mile High Youth Corps as a way to avoid jail time. In focus groups, many OY shared that they had a criminal record and that their record prevented them from being successful—for example, in getting a job.

*“If you’re on probation sometimes [employers] don’t even wanna look at you.”*

– Youth focus group participant

Denver organizations work with many OY who have been involved in the juvenile justice system. The provider survey asked respondents to identify youth served (by identity subgroups), and 43.2% selected youth with criminal records, 38.6% adjudicated youth, and related, but not mentioned in this data, 34.1% youth in gang activity. In Denver, the Community Reentry Project is working to ensure that youth with criminal records or youth that are incarcerated do not lose their chance at education and employment. Other organizations working with youth involved in the juvenile justice system are Bayaud Enterprises and Mile High Youth Corps.

### *Youth Who Identify as LGBT*

Approximately 3.2% of the Colorado population (Gallup, 2012) and 8.2% of the Denver County population (The Williams Institute, 2011) identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender (LGBT).

Youth who identify as LGBT are rarely mentioned in published research and studies regarding OY, yet were frequently cited as high risk to become OY by those interviewed for the scan. They are more likely to be homeless—approximately 40% of youth served by Urban Peak are LGBT—(Urban Peak, 2014), lack support from their families (Centers for Disease Control, 2014) and are more likely to be victims of violence and harassment at school (Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, 2012). Findings from a national study of middle and high school students found that a majority of LGBT students (63.5%) report feeling unsafe as a result of their sexual orientation (Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2011). In Colorado, more than 25% of LGBT students reported missing classes or days of school because of feeling unsafe in their school environment (Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, 2012), and 26% of LGBT youth in Denver report that they have non-accepting families (Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, 2012).

While a majority of providers surveyed (56.8%) indicated that they serve LGBT youth, there are a limited number of organizations that specifically target LGBT youth. This gap between services and need makes increasing support services for LGBT youth and LGBT homeless youth critical to better supporting OY.

**Promising Practices with LGBT Youth:** The primary organization providing services specifically to LGBT youth in Denver is the GLBT Community Center of Colorado - Rainbow Alley. Rainbow Alley provides drop-in services and referrals, as well as general mentoring and support for youth ages 6 to 21. Rainbow Alley was referred to often in provider interviews as a safe place for LGBT youth to feel secure in their identity. The GLBT Community Center also serves individuals of all ages in similar capacities and programs.

### *Teen Parents*

A subgroup of youth who may be at a higher risk of becoming OY includes teen parents, a reality that can quickly alter a youth's pathway in education and require the use of new support systems. According to data from the Colorado Department of Public Health (2011), from 2009–2011, Denver County had an average teen birthrate higher than the rate of the state. Table 4 represents the





average number of live births to youth in a particular age group for every 1,000 births in Denver County or Colorado. For instance, 33.2 of every 1,000 births in Denver County occur among youth ages 15–17. Furthermore, Denver County consistently has a higher birth rate than the state for *all* age groups. When asked in the provider survey, 52.3% work with parenting mothers, 40.9% with parenting fathers, and 43.2% with pregnant women (OY).

**Table 4: Average birthrate to teen mothers (2009–2011) by age group**

	Ages 10-14	Percent	Ages 15-19	Percent	Ages 1 5-17	Percent	Ages 18-19	Percent
Percent per 1,000 births								
<b>Colorado</b>	0.4	0.04%	32.7	3.27%	17.2	1.72%	54.8	5.48%
<b>Denver</b>	0.8	0.08%	54.6	5.46%	33.2	3.32%	81.1	8.11%

Source 4: Colorado Department of Public Health, 2011

Until recently, the general consensus was that early motherhood has a strong negative impact on both educational and employment outcomes (Corcoran, 1998). In fact, there is evidence that policymakers tend to make decisions based on this assumption (Kane, Morgan, Harris, & Guilkey, 2013). Recent studies, however, have questioned this conventional wisdom. For instance, based on a review of the literature, Kane and colleagues (2013) found that the relationship between early pregnancy and limited educational attainment is inconsistent at best. This uncertainty is consistent with prior research indicating that poor outcomes associated with teenage pregnancy are the result of the disadvantaged status of many young mothers, or alternately stated, the result of factors *preceding* the pregnancy rather than the pregnancy itself (Smith, Battle, & Leonard, 2012). Whether pregnancy and parenthood lead to one becoming an OY or are just additional factors added to many others, for Denver's OY, these subgroups need to be addressed.

According to the 2013 report *The Status of Women and Girls in Colorado* by the Women's Foundation of Colorado, families led by a single mother have the lowest median annual income of all family types (including single-father and married-couple families). With a median annual income of \$26,705, single-mother families on average fall below the self-sufficiency standard, indicating the need for public or private assistance to support a family in Colorado (Hess & Hegewisch, 2013). Therefore, being a teen mother may increase the likelihood that a young woman is at risk for becoming an OY, but it is important to consider that teen pregnancy on its own may not be the single greatest determinant, and other factors are likely to contribute to a teen parent becoming an opportunity youth.

Approximately half of participants in the Mile High Youth Corps focus group (79% male and 21% female) reported being parents. Forty percent of OY who responded to the survey reported being parents. Given that more males responded to the survey than females, a significant number of OY parents are men.

Other OY at the focus group expressed that their experiences as parents caused difficulties in their ability to achieve goals. For example, one young mother spoke about

*"Because you don't have anyone else [to motivate you], you have to put your kids ahead of yourself."*

– Youth focus group participant

how she did not attend school past ninth grade because she was pregnant with her second child and could no longer continue going to school. Many youth reported being in the MHYC program in order to be better models and provide for their children. This reality brings to light the need for a focus on a two-generation approach, which has potential to both increase return on investment in early childhood education *and* postsecondary education for parents (Ascend at the Aspen Institute, 2011). The idea of “mutual motivation,” where young parents are motivated by their children to achieve and thus become more involved in their child’s education (Ascend at the Aspen Institute, 2011), was revealed in the Denver focus groups as well.

Overall, focus group participants talked about their children being the reason for their engagement in programs and their children acting as their sole support system. Having children as a young person without a doubt increases the likelihood a youth will become an OY. However, the youth in the focus groups had struggled to reach their goals but were seeking help and opportunities in part due to the presence of their children. This suggests a relationship between OY parents and models for re-engagement.

### **Other Factors**

Overall, the seven factors listed above are notable in Denver and should be given attention when looking to ensure all OY have access to education pathways, workforce pathways and basic needs services. Youth with disabilities should also be of note, as nationally, Lewis and Burd-Sharps (2013) estimate that approximately 13% of disconnected youth may have a disability compared to 4% of youth who are connected. In fact, youth with disabilities may be twice as likely to drop out of high school when compared to their peers (Levin-Epstein, & Greenberg, 2003).

Other categories that arose in the provider survey, but were not highlighted above are: behavioral health issues, learning disabilities and substance abuse/use. In addition, as previously noted, Latino youth are more likely to be disconnected than the national average. While this factor cannot be linked to predictive factors, it does help to show where providers and OY Collaborative could focus (Lewis & Burd-Sharps, 2013).

### **Voices of Denver’s Opportunity Youth**

***"There is a way forward and the young people themselves tell us how. These young people don't want a hand-out, they want a hand-up. They seek relationships with successful peers, professors, and business mentors who can help them learn how to access education and jobs." (Schmitz, 2012).***

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While data both on and from OY, including many direct quotes from local OY, are included throughout this report, this section focuses specifically on documenting the voices and perspectives of OY who represent the Denver-area OY community. The researchers feel strongly that the inclusion of these voices represents a critical factor in both ensuring the accuracy of local data and in contextualizing data in the local realities of OY. In addition, local OY provided



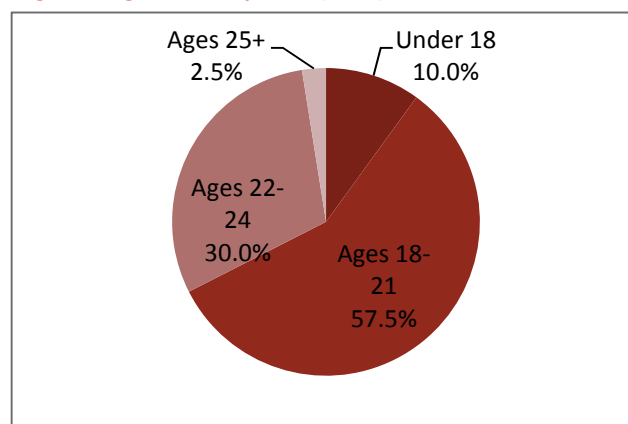
invaluable feedback that led to the development of the proposed recommendations and that helped ensure that the recommendations are relevant, feasible and have potential to make a positive impact on OY in Denver.

To collect this data from OY, JVA researchers met with youth during the site visits to programs serving OY, conducted a survey of local OY and facilitated two focus groups with OY at Denver-based organizations. This section contains a description of the demographic characteristics of those OY who participated in data collection efforts (e.g., surveys, focus groups) and describes some of the life situations they have experienced.

It is our hope that these illustrations will help paint a vivid picture of the realities of life for the diverse OY who seek services in Denver.

The survey findings reflected two distinct groups of OY: (1) those 21 and under who can still access resources through publicly funded schools; and (2) those over 21 who are no longer eligible for a free education and accompanying services. Slightly more than half of the OY at site and focus groups were ages 18 to 21, and a third were 22 to 24 (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Ages of surveyed OY (N=58)**



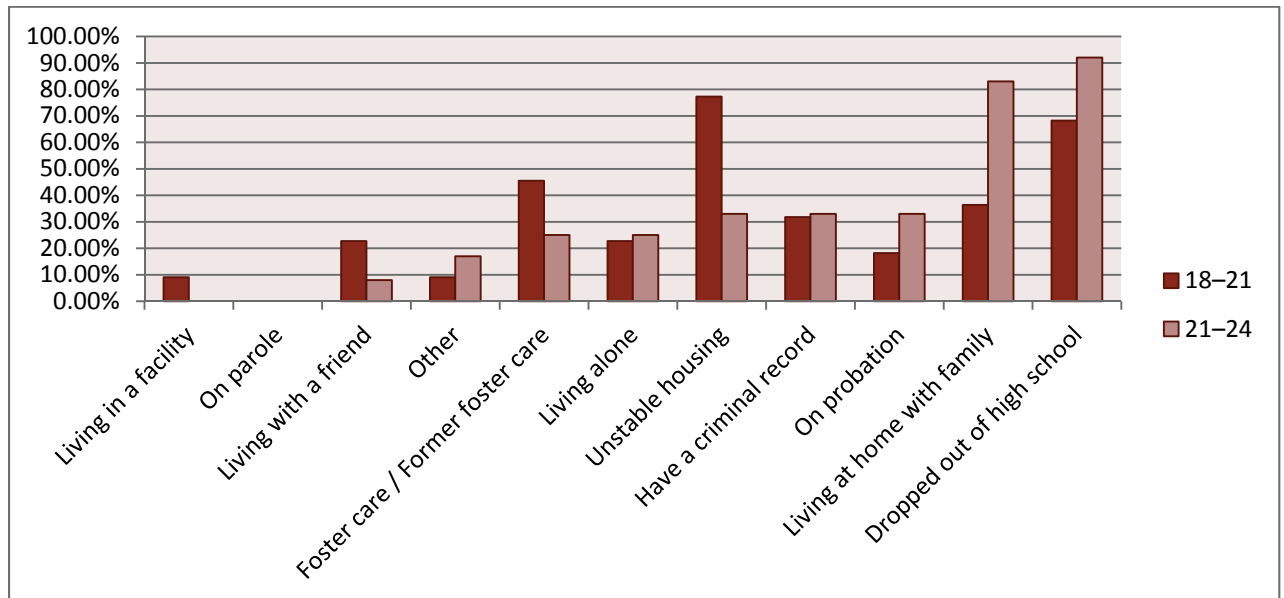
### Life Situations of Surveyed OY

The following section highlights main themes in the lives of OY. Figures 4 and 5 below show the life situations of surveyed OY, divided by OY ages 18 to 21 and OY ages 22 to 24. While both groups have common experiences, such as dropping out of school, parenting status and living in unstable housing, there are some notable distinctions.

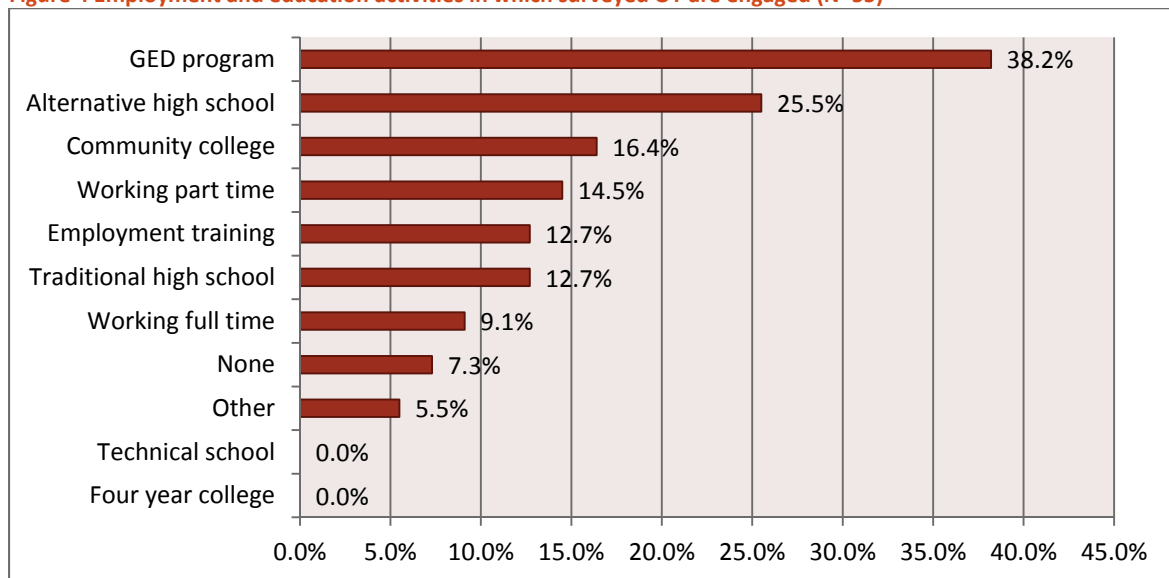
**Education.** First, the life circumstances of the older OY surveyed show they are more likely to stray from traditional educational attainment. More than 90% of OY ages 22–24 had dropped out of school at some point during their educational careers, while a slightly lower 70% of OY ages 18 to 21 had dropped out of school (see Figures 3 and 4).

**Parenting.** Older OY were also more likely to have children, with two-thirds of 22- to 24-year-olds taking the survey reporting being parents and one-third of 18- to 21-year olds reporting being parents (see Figures 3 and 4).

**Housing.** 77% of younger youth reported being in unstable housing situations (homeless, couch surfing or in a shelter), while 33% of older youth reported being in such unstable housing situations. Interestingly, more 22 to 24 year olds reported living at home with their families, which may be due to more of these OY being parents themselves and requiring additional support. Other notable categories were having a criminal record, being on probation, and being in foster care or formerly in foster care.

**Figure 3 Life situations of surveyed OY by age group (N=22 for 18–20; N=12 for 21–24)**

**Employment.** OY that took this survey at site visits and focus groups were in various stages of combined education and work (see Figure 4). Many were simultaneously engaged in education and work at the time of this survey. About 38% of surveyed youth were in GED courses, and 26% were enrolled in an alternative high school. While none of the OY surveyed reported being in a four-year college or technical school, 16% reported enrollment in community college.

**Figure 4 Employment and education activities in which surveyed OY are engaged (N=55)**

Youth focus groups delivered an invaluable perspective on OY needs and realities to the environmental scan. The following themes highlight such perspectives that were used to inform the recommendations presented in the subsequent sections.

## Goals and Needs for the Future

The OY at focus groups had a lot of thoughts on their future goals, with the strongest opinions centered on completing education, attaining employment and improving relationships. Some goals were job specific, but others were more focused on the type of people they would like to be in the future, showing that OY desire success but realize they will need assistance in achieving their aspirations.

*"I want to be a better parent in the future. I want to make sure that I'm good to my children."*

*"[My goals are] [Mile High Youth] Corps, career, and education...[and] to get out of this housing program."*

*"[I want to] build broken bridges...[and] relationships that ended badly."*

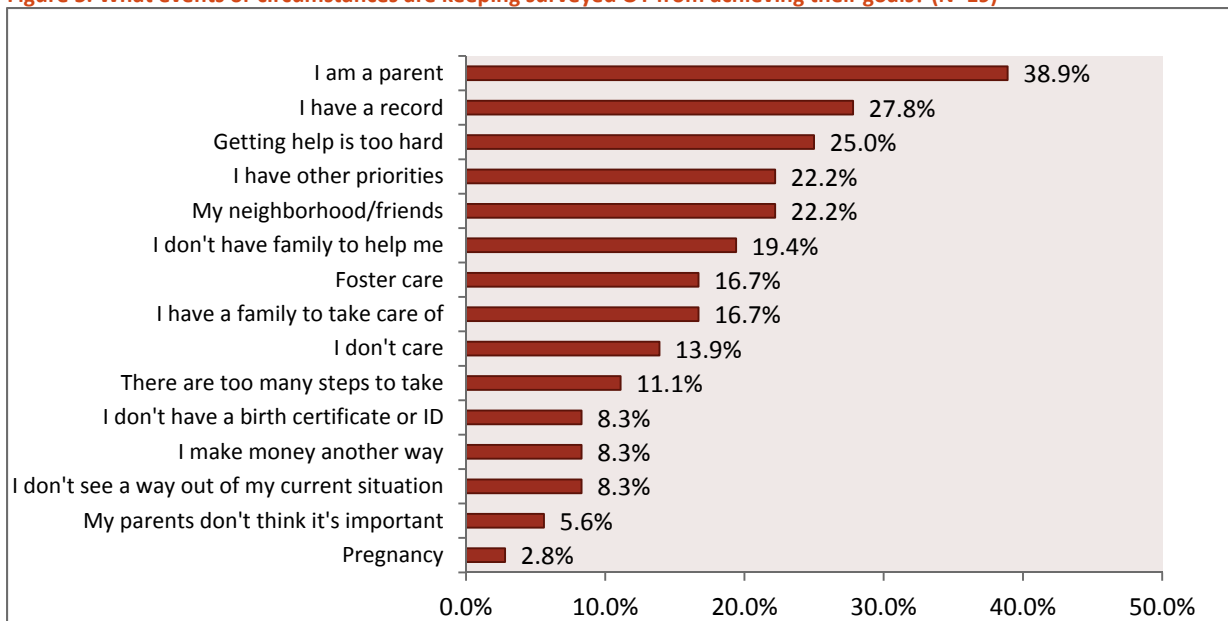
*"[I want to] work until next year and then get part time work and then get a GED and then go to Westwood apprenticeship for architecture."*

*"[I want to] obtain my associate of science degree."*

*"[I want to] start college and keep [a] job."*

**Barriers that prevent success.** The barriers to success for opportunity youth are numerous and can seem insurmountable. When OY were surveyed about the barriers that have prevented them from achieving their goals, the most frequently cited reasons were parenting/children and having a criminal record.

**Figure 5. What events or circumstances are keeping surveyed OY from achieving their goals? (N=19)**



In focus groups, youth often focused on how their life situations, past experiences and family difficulties negatively affected them and created barriers to moving forward.

*"When you're in...foster care it makes it 10 times harder to be where you want to be."*

*"My family makes me want to do drugs and alcohol. My parents just suck."*

*"I came to a point where I can't trust anyone. My parents, my family, my friends, my brother."*

*"I had serious anger issues based off of s--- that happened in the past. I don't let myself feel sad. I make myself immune to that emotion. ... I wanted that father-son relationship my whole life but he moved in when I was 13 and abused me with a belt the whole year."*

*"None of those [people] ever did anything for me. [I've been] kicked out of multiple places. Screwed by many professionals. Family loves to screw me. I came to a point where I could screw myself and not get broken up about it."*

*"My mom was a drug addict. ... [I was] adopted and then beat in the adopted home. [I was] taken away from that, sent to my bio grandma [in Denver], and got raped. So [I rely on] nobody."*

**Barriers to gaining employment.** When specifically asked about barriers to gaining employment, youth mentioned their involvement in the justice system, their lack of skills and presuppositions that potential employers might make about them.

*"I'm on diversion; if you're on probation sometimes they don't even wanna look at you."*

*"You try to get a job and they just say, 'Naw, still not good enough.' Some people are quick to judge."*

*"There are certain skills people want and you just don't have them."*

*"[You need] speed – being fast. Like working fast. A lot of jobs require you to be fast and on your feet all the time."*

Other notable barriers cited by OY survey respondents include being from certain neighborhood and a lack of family support. While not explicitly asked in the survey, during a focus group with at-risk homeless OY at Urban Peak, the issues of self-reliance and distrust of adults were a frequent theme.

*"I came to a point where I can't trust anyone. My parents, my family, my friends, my brother."*

The Urban Peak OY were outspoken in their descriptions of the events in their lives that may have caused their attitudes toward adults and authority. For example, some talked about sexual assaults, parental abuse and abandonment. In addition, the lack of stable housing and absence of social supports in the lives of these OY were also apparent. In fact, many OY became emotional when describing the ways in which they had been let down by adults in their lives.

**What they need to achieve goals.** When talking about what they need to achieve their goals, the young people talked about transportation, money, education, mental health care and personal growth. Some of the transportation needs include a bus pass or a car. A job and money

were obvious requirements for achieving any goals, along with scholarships and grants to pay for school. When it came to education, OY said they required good teachers, school supplies, books and the ability to study and learn. The more intangible needs talked about were the need to be able to get up for school on time, friends, family, a support system, room to grow and learn, and staying out of trouble. Health care and mental health treatment were also mentioned as needs to be successful.

*"It's necessary to have all of those [resources] to be successful and reach my goals."*

*"[I need] a stable environment. It's hard to [meet goals] if you don't have a stable environment. Then you have no support and you're really f-----. [I need] guidance."*

Many OY also reported that getting help is difficult, thus demonstrating that OY may have trouble accessing services.

*"It was all confusing... [You have to] fax [paperwork] in to case manager and follow up all the time. ... It would be easier to go to one place and have everything and do whatever you need"*

### Who Do Opportunity Youth Count On/What Works?

While many of the OY in focus groups were rather negative about their life situations and exuded a focus on their self-reliance, some did speak to supportive people in their lives and their more positive outlooks. Some OY cited teachers, family members and case managers as people who have helped get them the assistance they require.

*"Whenever I think about someone in my family who tried to help give me a better start, it helps me. I look at my stepdad and he tried to provide something my bio mom and dad weren't prepared to do."*

*"My mom just helped me get the financial aid I needed for college."*

*"Even though [case managers] are always pushing, they're always there."*

*"My college teacher got me a job at the school."*

*"My professionals were always trying to control me but they helped me out because they were always looking out for what would be better for me."*

**What they want from adults: respect.** Throughout the focus groups, a theme that emerged was a desire to be understood and respected by adults. These young people want to be respected and they want authority figures to earn their respect. The caseworkers need to meet them where they are and not evaluate them on a set of pre-judgments.

*"They nag at you a lot when you do something bad. They shouldn't make a big deal about it because I know I did something stupid. You don't need to listen to people telling you what you did wrong. I know I did something wrong; now how do we move forward from that?"*

*"I'm 21 [but] they tell me I can't come back drunk after the bars."*

*"The more I avoid the staff the more independent I feel."*

*"We're adults here and they treat us like we're little a-- kids."*

*"Some people who work here seem like they don't really care about you. Sometimes they don't even give you a chance."*

However, the OY not only expressed themselves as self-reliant but accountable for their actions. This reality speaks to the transitional age OY often fit into (not a young teenager, yet not an independent adult). Many youth in focus groups often challenged each other to think more about their accountability, and for those who assume responsibility for their own their lives, the feeling was quite strong.

*"Even if you have all those [resources], in the end it comes down to your choice. If you have all that support and you don't make the choice to put the effort in and accomplish your goals, you won't."*

*"Don't expect respect. Earn it."*

**Caring adults make a difference.** The youth in focus groups often had strong opinions on how the organizations they have worked with, or sought assistance from, can be improved, centering on the idea of caring staff. Primarily, having a caring person who has been in their position and can understand the struggles they go through may be the most effective way to get through to the oldest and most distrusting group of OY.

*"Hire people who know how to work with kids who have problems."*

*"There's one person who understands the youth and that's Rachel. Rachel is there for us."*

*"The night staff [at Urban Peak] is always encouraging you to see yourself better than you can see yourself at some points and see the same things they struggled with."*

The voices of the youth in Denver are an integral part of this puzzle. Overall, the views expressed in the focus groups highlight the difficulty in serving a transitional age group, as they desire respect and value self-reliance, but know they cannot do it alone.

## Pathways for OY in Denver: Education

Education increases the likelihood that youth will have jobs and be able to support themselves and their families (Knous-Dolan, et al., 2009). In addition, individuals with lower levels of education “experience the most significant declines in employment and greater wage deterioration” (Colorado Department of Higher Education, 2014). Education is a key factor in the future success of OY; however, traditional pathways often lead to dropping out, failing out, or a long process of attempting to attain education credentials through other means (GED and certifications). To ensure OY can succeed in attaining education, multiple pathways should be accessible to them, to fit their current life circumstances or realities. Ensuring that OY have these opportunities will also require the involvement of all players: schools, employers and community-based organizations. According to the Colorado Department of Higher Education (2014), there is a “leaking educational pipeline”—for every 100 students who enter a Colorado high school, only 22 graduate college. For this reason, it is of critical importance to ensure that OY in Denver County receive high school credentials, plus further training or postsecondary education.

*“These kids need to see a pathway to get from point A to point B. ... Maybe they want to be a mechanic but they don't know how to find those programs [or] connect with those programs. The biggest need is matching their interests with [the right] pathway.”*

– Key informant interviewee

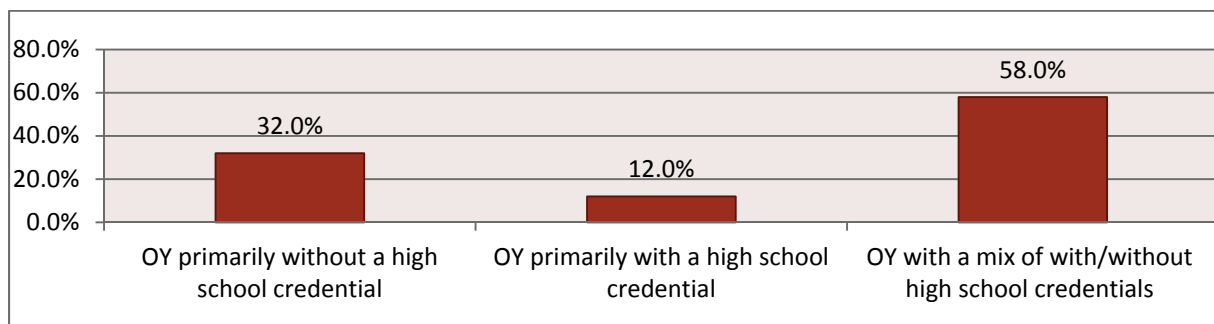
During the focus groups, a number of OY expressed that they wanted to complete high school diplomas or GEDs, and some shared that they hoped to complete associate degrees as well. This positivity is affirmed in the White House Council for Community Solutions report (2012), where 73% of surveyed youth are “very confident or hopeful about achieving their goals,” and 67% surveyed desire to finish high school or college and “know they can achieve it” (White House Council for Community Solutions, 2012).

*“I want to work until next year and then part-time work, then get a GED, and then go to Westwood apprenticeship for architecture.”*

– Youth focus group participant

Providers were asked if they primarily work with OY with a high school credential (GED or diploma) or without a high school credential. More than half (58%) of respondents work primarily with a “mix of both,” 32% primarily work with OY that do not have a high school credential, and only 12% work primarily with youth with a high school credential (see Figure 6). This shows the importance of connecting OY, no matter their age or situation, back to education.

**Figure 6: Education levels of OY clients of survey respondents (N=51)**





Borrowing from health care best practices, the idea of a “continuum of care” is vital to education outcomes among the OY population in Denver. Such services go beyond the social safety net to meet and support individuals on their level, at their pace. Figure 7 depicts the education pathways available to OY in Denver, details of which will be explained in this section.

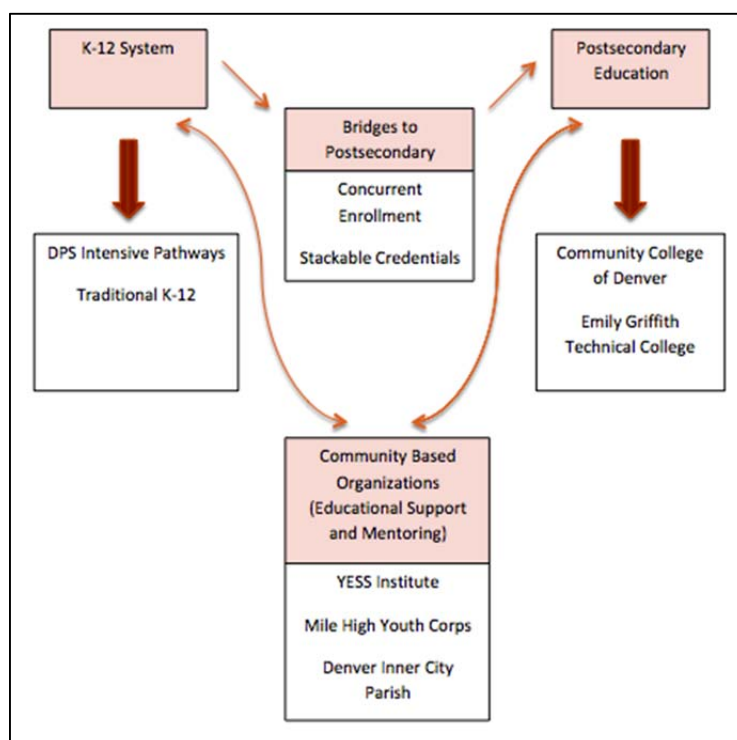
### K–12 Alternative Education

Often, a traditional education track is not feasible for OY due to out-of-school factors, including pregnancy, learning disabilities and trauma. However, up to age 20, OY can be reconnected back into K–12 education with the goal of completing their diploma or GED. An extensive alternative education system has been created in Denver to try to meet the needs of these students who cannot easily access

traditional education. This system includes the placement of students into Intensive Pathways Schools, typically based on that student’s proximity to graduation. Proximity to graduation, for youth up to age 21, breaks into four categories: *on-track*; *young and off-track*; *old and off-track*; and *significantly off-track*, with *young* referring to 14- to 16-year-olds and *old* referring to 17- to 20-year-olds. *Off-track* signifies that a student is behind one or more grade levels. Students who are *old* and *significantly off-track* may not be able to earn a traditional diploma prior to age 21 (Knous-Dolan et al., 2009). Alternately, students are considered to be on track to graduation if they have obtained credits similar to those of their peers in their typical age range.

There are approximately 76 alternative education campuses (AECs) in Colorado, 16 of which are in Denver (see the Alternative Education Map from The Piton Foundation in Appendix C)<sup>4</sup>. To be an AEC in Colorado, the student population must either be 95% *high risk* or 95% special education students. The *high-risk* group addresses the circumstances of OY in Colorado and is defined by a student who meets at least one of the following criteria: prior dropout, adjudication, expulsion, chronic suspensions, pregnant and/or parenting, drug and/or alcohol abuse, gang affiliation, adjudicated parent, domestic violence in family, victim of abuse and/or neglect, migrant, homeless, severe psychiatric or behavioral disorders, or over-aged and under-

Figure 7: Denver's education pathway



<sup>4</sup> 11 AECs are recorded on the map in Appendix C; however, as of February 2014, DPS reports now having 16 pathway schools.



credited (Donnell-Kay Foundation, 2013). In 2011, Colorado HB 11-1277 expanded eligibility criteria for AECs to students behind for their age or grade level, thus allowing more options for students who have struggled in the K–12 system. Both Jobs for the Future and the Donnell-Kay Foundation recommend Colorado refocus on academics and outcomes in AECs, particularly around the adoption of the Common Core Standards (Donnell-Kay Foundation, 2013).



In Denver, there are two primary options for those taking an alternative path to K–12 completion: (1) *intensive pathways*; and (2) *postsecondary pathways*. *Intensive pathways* schools aim to meet the needs of students who have aged-out of traditional high schools or are at risk of dropping out of

school. *Postsecondary pathways* schools have faster tracks to high school graduation, along with greater college preparation or greater career pathways preparation. A student on a postsecondary pathway can choose the Diploma Plus or GED Preparation course, and can then participate in Career Technical Education (CTE), Advanced Placement courses or concurrent enrollment in college (Denver Children’s Corridor, 2013).

A goal of AECs and the pathways schools is to minimize dropout rates in Denver and increase graduation rates. DPS reports that students who take CTE courses at DPS pathways schools complete high school at a higher rate than any comparison rate over the last eight years, and at a rate 10% higher than the district’s median extended completion rate (Saboe, 2013). In addition, DPS has shown that students who take 3+ CTE courses over four years complete high school at greater rates than comparison groups. Attendance rates, satisfaction scores from the School Satisfaction Survey, and overall higher high school completion rates are linked back to CTE courses and DPS pathways schools, emphasizing the need for more focus on these alternate pathways (Saboe, 2013). In the 2012–2013 school year, 2,451 participated in a concurrent enrollment course.<sup>5</sup>

In Denver, the pathways school with the highest completion rate<sup>6</sup> in 2012–2013, according to the Colorado Department of Education, was CEC Middle College of Denver (CEC), which attained

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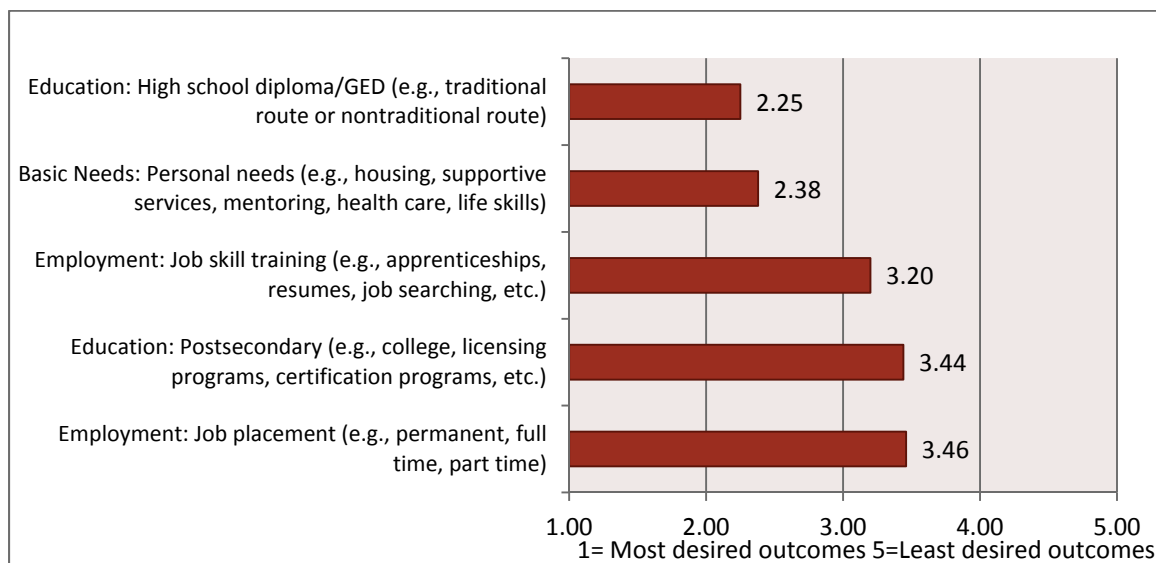
<sup>5</sup> The number of students that participated in concurrent enrollment was determined through a phone call to DPS; however, this information is not publically available. Other information regarding attendance in CTE courses is also not publically available.

<sup>6</sup> The completion rates include all students who graduate on-time with a regular diploma plus students who complete on-time with a GED or non-diploma certificate (Colorado Department of Education, 2013).

an 87% completion rate. CEC had high completion rates in 2011–2012 as well, with 89% completion rate in four years and 92% completion in five years (Colorado Department of Education, 2013). Other pathways schools with available data from 2012–2013 do not fare as well, with completion rates ranging from 16.3% to 69.2% (Colorado Department of Education, 2013). In an effort to evaluate the pathways schools at DPS, data from the Colorado Department of Education (2013) was examined. In total, the following eight pathways schools had available data for the 2012–2013 academic year: (1) CEC Middle College of Denver; (2) Contemporary Learning Academy High School; (3) Denver Center for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning at Wyman High School; (4) Denver Online High School; (5) Emily Griffith Technical School; (6) P.R.E.P. High School; (7) Summit Academy; and (8) Vista Academy High School. It should be noted that there are 17 pathways schools in DPS and that each of these pathways programs may serve a different demographic of students (e.g., teen parents, students in juvenile justice) (Colorado Department of Education, 2013). The average graduation rate for each of these eight pathways schools mentioned above was 40% (Colorado Department of Education, 2013). Unfortunately, preliminary findings are inconclusive due to a small sample size and substantial variance of graduation rates and completion rates. Further research is necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of these pathways schools, and to determine other indicators of effectiveness that DPS might employ. Although the completion rates from the most recent school year are not the only indicator of success, and understanding the limitation of the four-year completion data, this data shows a drastic difference in pathways schools that should be acknowledged. In addition, the data available through the Colorado Department of Education also does not have available data for each pathways school in DPS, making a full measure of success difficult to portray.

**Promising Practice: DPS Alternative K–12 Education:** West Career Academy aims to help students earn either a high school diploma or GED with unique classroom curriculums. Florence Crittenton High School serves girls ages 14–21 who are pregnant or parenting, and aims to ensure they graduate, learn how to be nurturing mothers or deliver their children safely, and pursue postsecondary education with marketable job skills (Florence Crittenton Services of Colorado, 2013). CEC Middle College is a technology and career-oriented pathways school in Northwest Denver. DPS students can attend CEC Middle College full time or part time, gaining postsecondary credits or an industry certificate (Career and Technical Education Certificate) while completing their high school diploma (Denver Public Schools, 2013).

The majority of surveyed providers (75%) list “education” as a primary goal for OY at their organization (organizations were asked to check all that apply). About 55% list “workforce” as a primary goal, 50% list “basic needs” as a primary goal, and 46% list “wraparound” as a primary goal for the OY in their programs. In addition, Figure 8 shows that the two most important outcomes for OY, according to surveyed organizations, are education and basic needs.

**Figure 8: Provider survey respondents' top desired outcomes for OY (N=48)**

### **Educational Needs of OY**

Education is vital to the success of OY, and therefore the education system must recognize and address the unique needs of this subpopulation. According to practitioners in the field who work directly with OY, an educational system that is flexible, personalized and better adapted to contemporary society is needed.

A number of OY discussed resources that could help them reach their goals, such as good teachers, school supplies, books, and the ability to study and learn. Other OY did not have a clear sense of what education could do for them, feeling it had not done much for them previously, or that they learned more “on the street” than in the classroom.

### **Postsecondary Education**

In Colorado, jobs require postsecondary credentials (Colorado Department of Higher Education, 2014). As such, the 2014 Legislative Report on the Skills for Jobs Act recommends that Colorado invest in K–12 *and* provide financial aid to control costs of postsecondary education (Colorado Department of Higher Education, 2014). Therefore, efforts should be made to ensure that students at risk of dropping out of high school can attain their diploma or GED, *and also* that these students attain postsecondary education or training to remain in step with opportunity.

By 2020, a projected 74% of Colorado jobs will require postsecondary training or education. College graduates working in Colorado can earn an average of \$20,000 more in their first year of employment, as compared with high school-only graduates (College Measures, 2013).

Measure of America (2013–2014) and the U.S. Census Bureau (2011) data indicate that the 16–24 youth unemployment rate is 18.8% (Lewis & Burd-Sharps, 2013), and for individuals with some college, the unemployment rate is as low as 8%, decreasing to 4.5% for those with a bachelor’s degree or higher (Colorado Department of Higher Education, 2014). The unemployment rate in Colorado is 13.5% for individuals with less than a high school education,

compared with 10.7% for individuals with a high school diploma (Colorado Department of Higher Education, 2014).

As recommended in the 2014 Legislative Report on the Skills for Jobs Act, career pathways systems in Colorado need to integrate state and local partners working for broad-based employment opportunity. As such, the U.S. Department of Adult and Vocational Education is providing technical assistance for the creation of a Colorado career pathways system, according to a 2014 report (Colorado Department of Higher Education, 2014).



### Community Colleges

Community colleges play a big role in making career pathways realistic for OY. Individuals who attain an occupational or career-oriented an associate of applied science (AAS) degree reach high labor market success overall; according to College Measures (2013), “The median first-year wages for AAS graduates from nearly every community college are *higher* than the statewide median of first-year wages of bachelor’s degree graduates” (College

Measures, 2013).

Thanks to federal student loans and Pell Grants, low-income students are more easily connected to postsecondary education. Between 2011 and 2012, over \$35 billion was granted to a total of 9.4 million U.S. students, with an average award of \$3,650. However, due to recent cuts, funding dropped to \$32.4 billion for a total of 8.9 million students in 2012–2013; the Congressional Budget Office predicts stable numbers for 2013–2014. Other programs, like the Chafee Educational and Training Voucher, help former foster youth enroll in postsecondary programs. Through this national program, approximately 16,000 former foster youth receive an average of \$3,000 (Bridgeland & Mason-Elder, 2012).

### Stackable and Portable Credentials

An innovative approach to providing flexibility for students to attain postsecondary education is the *stackable* and *portable* credentials option. Earning *stackable* credits is a way for students to earn short-term credentials that have labor market value, which can be built upon to access advanced jobs or higher wages. Students enter the job market faster, with more flexibility in career growth. *Portable* credentials are verified and accredited programs that allow for flexibility in when and how they are attained (i.e., online learning), and are customized for the individual student (Austin, Mellos, Rosin, & Seltzer, 2012).

*“Stackable certificates provide a pathway for [students] to do both work and school. We have to help them get an education so they can get a high-paying job [and] support themselves and their families.”*

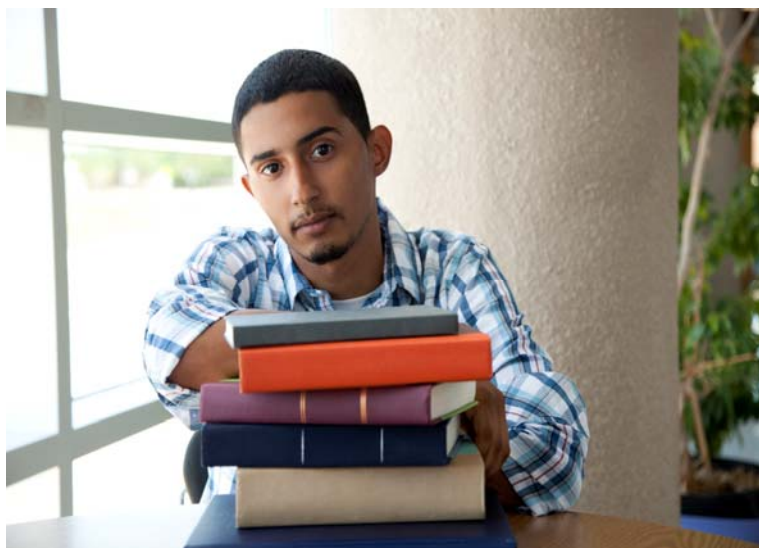
– key informant interviewee

A 2010 Jobs for the Future summary of lessons learned offers a number of programs across the nation that are enacting promising practices in relation to stackable credentials, accelerated learning and flexible accreditation programs (Uhalde & Kazis, 2010).

### **Postsecondary Remediation**

Often the path to postsecondary education is hampered by ill preparation for college by OY. National estimates state that only one-third of high school graduates are prepared for college work.

Forty percent of those enrolled in college in 2011 needed remediation courses in at least one subject, and 66% of students enrolled in two-year colleges in Colorado needed remediation (Colorado Department of Education, 2012). At the Community College of Denver (CCD), 87% of students needed remedial education (Colorado Department of Higher Education, 2013). In 2011, 90% of African Americans and 78% of Latinos/as at two-year colleges needed remediation.



Many benefits have been attributed to remedial courses, as they help all students track toward graduation and increase skill attainment. By placing students in courses with other students who are at the same skill level, teachers may be able to better tailor their teaching to students' needs (Bettinger & Long, 2009). However, there is a high degree of uncertainty regarding the effectiveness of traditional remediation and the adverse effects that it may create, such as social stigma on remedial education students. In addition, remediation leads to more requirements for graduation and longer time to attain a degree, which can increase the likelihood of dropping out (Bettinger & Long, 2009). Regardless of these possible negative effects, Martorell and McFarlin (2011) explain, "Remediated students would likely have worse outcomes than non-remediated students in the absence of the program". Essentially, remediation's effects are nuanced (Bettinger et al., 2013). Bahr (2012) suggests that another possible solution to ensure student engagement is "immediate institutional interventions, such as counseling and tutoring...to increase the rates of college-level skill attainment among those students who enter at low skill levels" (Bahr, 2012).

Some colleges are enacting flexible schedules and programs to address these obstacles (e.g., balancing school and work, taking care of a family, etc.), illustrated through more online options and industry-specific or career-oriented programs. Community colleges are employing innovative strategies to help students in need of remediation. One approach of Community College of Denver (CCD) is the FastStart program, which condenses four math courses into two to help students complete programs at higher rates (Bettinger et al., 2013). Research has shown these students are more likely to pass math courses (Brancard, Baker & Jensen, 2006). CCD's



FastStart math cohorts outperformed its remedial math student population on course progression measures in a study by Bragg, Baker and Puryear (Bragg, Baker, & Puryear, 2010).

Another innovative option is to include workforce connections and employment-related programs into community colleges, such as through the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) (Bettinger et al., 2013). Remedial education can be used as an on ramp to college and academic support, but it is most effective if additional support systems are offered beyond the remedial level.

### **Other Considerations in Postsecondary Education**

The Community College of Denver, as well as other local colleges, includes remedial courses and targeted assistance through advising, tutoring, etc., to help students with life responsibilities such as dependents or concurrent employment (Bettinger et al., 2013). For example, the Colorado Community College System has a program that provides high-risk students with navigators to help them with intensive “case management, career exploration support, and guidance through the college transition process” (Rodriguez & Colorado SUN Navigators, 2007). Research supports the notion that “enhanced” advising has great effect on course success and transfer rates for students at the lowest levels of remediation (Bahr, 2012).

Advising can also bring to light obstacles that students face, such as balancing work and school, family responsibilities, employment and child care support, which can lead to greater transportation expenses and significantly less time to study. For example, survey results show that more than half (53%) of all students ages 22–30 indicated that family commitments were a major reason why they could not complete a degree (Bettinger et al., 2013).

*“Most students come from families where higher education wasn’t on the table. ... They need a navigator: a staff [member] whose job is to walk the students through the college admissions procedure.”*

– Key informant interviewee

Education and career training are essential factors in the well-being and future success for youth. As such, it is critical to ensure that OY in Denver County earn high school credentials and have clear pathways toward further training and/or postsecondary education. The programs and services that exist to serve Denver’s OY, whether on the traditional track or part of an alternative pathway, are a vital part of a pathway to success; however, ensuring that all OY are aware of and have access to these educational opportunities requires a collaborative approach involving not only schools and service providers, but also employers and community organizations.

## Pathways for OY in Denver: Employment

A second pathway for OY in Denver is toward employment. This section discusses the current needs of industry in Colorado and documents pathways to employment for OY in Denver. Collaboration is essential for removing the barriers to education and gainful employment among Denver's OY population. OY may not follow the traditional education pathways (K–12 diploma, graduation from a four-year college), but postsecondary education and workforce entry should be attainable. The "2014 Legislative Report on The Skills for Jobs Act" outlines jobs that will likely be available in the next decade, emphasizing the need for postsecondary training to ensure employment (Colorado Department of Higher Education, 2014).

*"Building in that support...being connected to the most appropriate educational fit [and] being supported in the work setting once placed in a job [are essential for OY]."*

– Provider survey respondent



## Engaging OY in the Workforce

A focus on career is often, but not always, combined with education and emphasized at a much earlier stage in the education system (prior to OY leaving) (Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2011). This earlier emphasis is important for OY, as many disengage (or "become" OY) even after attaining a high school credential because they are unable to find meaningful employment. According to key informants, OY need to see an achievable path to success. Social scientists speak of the need for relevant goals and defined pathways. As with many in poverty, OY may often be focused on short-term needs instead of long-term goals.

While there are many organizations aiming to address the employment needs of OY, the pathway is not direct enough to ensure employment. More direct pathways and stronger employer relationships will help close the gap. Opportunity youth frequently lack access to job connections. Providing OY with a clear path to job opportunities has been shown to be critical to engagement. Linkages to job opportunities can be made through involving local businesses and colleges in initiatives to train and provide experiences to OY such as internships, apprenticeships or skill-building opportunities (Corcoran, et al. 2012).

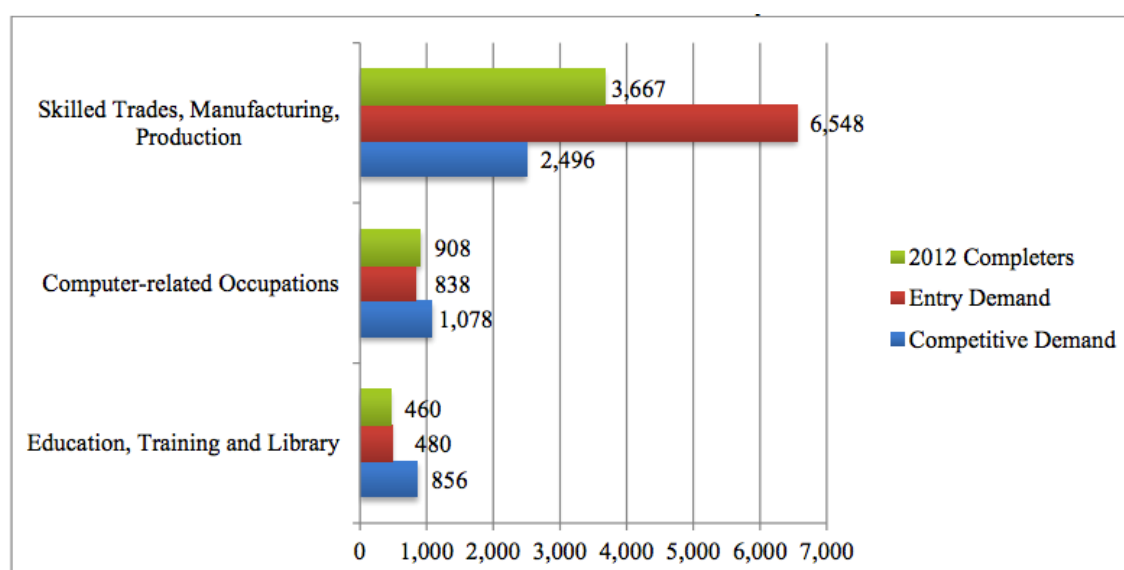
## Industry Needs

Skills2Compete Colorado is a statewide initiative aiming to close the mid-level jobs gap between availability of jobs and need for skilled workers (National Skills Coalition, 2011). Figure 9 shows the extreme disconnect between skilled trade, manufacturing and production positions available and the number of people in Colorado completing those credentials. These mid-level jobs requiring certifications, but not bachelor's degrees, may be a strong area of focus for OY training/placement.

*"[There is] an increased need on the part of employers for well-trained young people"*

– Provider survey respondent

Figure 9: 2012 credential completion rates as compared to demand for Colorado middle-skill job categories



While there are not many apprenticeship programs in Denver, there are established organizations that train workers for the future. The Construction Industry Training Council (CTIC) of Colorado has apprenticeship programs in carpentry, electrical, pipefitting, plumbing and sheet metal (CITC, 2014). Another apprenticeship organization is the Colorado Building and Construction Trades Council AFL-CIO (Colorado Building and Construction Trades Council, 2014). Private firms also offer apprenticeship opportunities. RK Mechanical, a large Denver metro construction firm, offers four-year apprenticeships in plumbing, piping, sheet metal and HVAC (RK Mechanical, 2014). Casey Industrial, as determined in a key informant interview, provides informal apprenticeships with the company as well.

*"It becomes a matter of priorities. A priority should be education, which leads you to a job. A lot of young people I support and connect with, their priorities are more around 'my family of choice', and 'friends I can count on'. They're often not interested in looking long-term."*

– Key informant interviewee

Reaching out to organizations that offer low- to middle-skill apprenticeships to create long-term partnerships will be useful in ensuring OY are trained in applicable skills that lead to stable jobs at the end of their education. From there, the integration of ongoing support services can ensure OY are employed for the long term.

### Pathways for OY in Denver: Basic Needs and Support Services

A third pathway for OY in Denver is toward addressing basic needs and providing support services including connecting OY with a caring adult and wraparound service. These services are critical, because OY have dealt with, and continue to face, myriad challenges and barriers in their personal life that impact their success in completing education and finding employment. Even after OY have found satisfying employment, ongoing support may be necessary to ensure continued success. For this reason, it is imperative that Denver providers to OY do not neglect supporting other aspects of OY and that they are capable of addressing multiple needs or

*"It's hard to [meet goals] if you don't have a stable environment. Then you have no support and you're really [in a bad situation]."*

– Youth focus group participant



being connected to organizations that can address these needs. To this end, this section discusses the need for these services and documents pathways to both supportive services (e.g., connecting with a caring adult) and wraparound services for OY in Denver.

For this reason, Denver providers must consider wraparound support to OY and be capable of addressing multiple needs, or connecting to organizations that can address those needs. In the provider survey, individuals were asked, “which OY does your organization serve most frequently?” By checking all that applied, it was clear that providers commonly work with youth with behavioral health issues (48%), learning disabilities (46%) and substance use/abuse (46%). This small subset of data, even from a limited number of service providers in Denver, shows the need for organizations to be aware of the multiple needs OY face.

In focus groups, common themes that arose were education, skills and personal motivation. Related to this topic, a handful of OY discussed how they needed a stable environment in order to be successful. The importance of these various factors are not automatically associated with education or workforce programs (although many are integrating them), yet should not be ignored when working with OY in Denver.

### Connecting with a Caring Adult

The need for strong connections with caring adults is important.

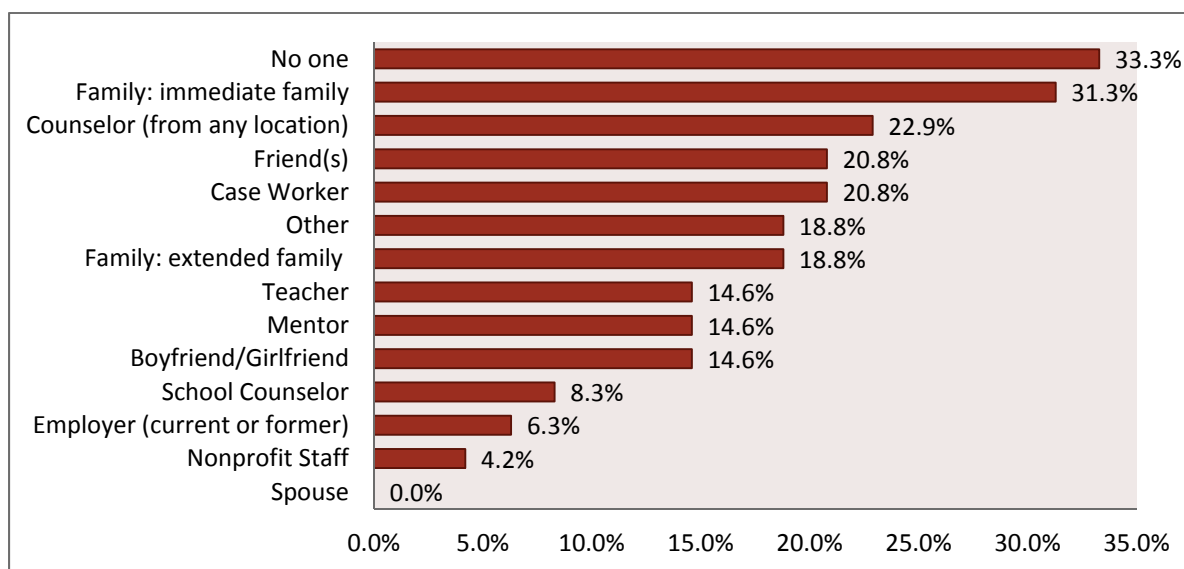
Opportunity youth were surveyed about the supportive individuals who have helped them pursue education and employment. As Figure 10, below, indicates, their most frequent answers included: no one (33%), immediate family (31.3%) and counselors (22.9%). With support systems being such an important factor for success for OY, understanding these systems and how they break down should be an area of further study.

Thus, whether mentoring comes in the form of a program, family member, caseworker or counselor, OY need greater stability.

*“Family situations result in students dropping out because they don’t have the support to continue on.”*

– Key informant interviewee

**Figure 10: Those who have helped OY pursue education and employment (N = 48)**



Supporting this perspective, many OY also described other needs (i.e., life skills), such as being able to get up for school on time; having friends, family and a support system; having room to grow and learn; staying out of trouble; and having access to health care and mental health treatment. When asked what barriers prevent them from achieving their educational goals, OY mentioned alcohol, addiction, lack of education and friends who do not help them make good decisions. Given the challenges OY may face as they pursue paths in education and employment, it is important to help OY access pathways that reflect best practices. Personalized education plans, directed at an OY's particular goals, or effective case management may help OY finish their education.

*"I came to a point where I can't trust anyone: [not] my parents, my family, my friends [or] my brother."*

– Youth focus group participant

Creating ways for OY to be receptive to the influence of a mentor is critical. When OY were asked what resources could assist with their needs, more than half (54%) reported being able to rely only on themselves. Aligned with the idea of self-reliance was the need to feel independent *and* respected by adults in charge of programs. When engaged in punitive programs, OY participants said they would walk out and not get the support they need, or not buy into it in the first place. For some OY, experiences led them to believe that they could trust no one.

Service providers said repeatedly the people working with OY were the reason their organizations were successful. Also critical to gaining the trust of OY is an ongoing relationship over a significant length of time. As a result, increasing the stability in the lives of OY through ongoing relationships could ensure their future success.

The presence of a caring adult to guide OY and connect them to relevant and useful support services emerged as a critical best practice in the OY engagement process. Mentoring programs also show positive effects on youth participants, with strongest evidence surrounding the use of mentoring as a preventive intervention for youth with challenged backgrounds including conditions of "environmental risk and disadvantage" (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002). The analysis shows a need for innovative approaches to mentoring, with mentors who have backgrounds and prior experience in such roles being the most impactful (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002).

However, more recent research shows nuanced results in the effectiveness of mentoring programs, with other programs showing "no effectiveness." When it comes to mentoring programs for OY, programs that work to establish effective, strong and long-term relationships should be identified and deployed (Rhodes 2008).

*"If they could just have someone they connect with that would stay connected with them throughout the process. ... What I've seen is once they've built a relationship with someone like a caseworker, it changes. ... Every time the stepping stone falls out, they're grappling to make a step forward."*

– Key informant interviewee

### Wraparound Services

A second important area is wraparound services: those that provide a comprehensive array of services to support youth's many and varied needs and encourage their success. In considering support and wraparound services that can be offered to OY, it is critical to link this with support

services that provide the stability OY *want*. When OY were asked about the types of services that they needed to achieve their goals, they talked about transportation, money, education, mental health care and personal growth. A job is also necessary for achieving goals, along with scholarships and grants to pay for school. Opportunity youth expressed more than once how caring adults helped them access the support services they need.

Government agencies provide necessary support services to OY, but they do not assist undocumented OY, or those without proper identification or papers. Nonprofits such as Denver Inner City Parish and Servicios de la Raza provide wraparound services. Drop-in centers, such as Rainbow Alley at The GLBT Community Center of Colorado, provide a safe place for LGBT youth.

In addition, the social-emotional needs of OY must be addressed to help them build confidence and prepare for the workforce. Many OY become discouraged after encountering complex and inadequate support systems, which often leave them feeling unwanted. Programs have achieved success by creating an environment where OY can discover their strengths and passions in an environment of supportive peers and adults (Corcoran, et al., 2012).

The combination of the key informant interviews, existing literature and the comprehensive survey shed insight into the current education and workforce pathways for OY in Denver. The main findings from the original data collected align well with the current data and best practices enumerated upon earlier. Education, workforce and basic needs are the categories addressed by service providers and government agencies in Denver.

### Networks and Systems

The previous sections described three pathways necessary for the success of OY in Denver: pathways to education, pathways to employment, and pathways to basic needs and supportive services. This section describes the potential for network or system building within and across these pathways, including documenting themes in current services provided by Denver providers and discussing systemic challenges faced by local OY and OY-serving organizations (e.g., evaluation, capacity and funding).

As was documented in the previous three sections regarding pathways for Denver OY, there are many service providers and government agencies that address needs within these three pathways. In fact, the environmental scan identified over 180 organizations that serve the needs of Denver's OY population in some way through education, workforce development and/or other basic services (e.g., housing, health care, life skills training).

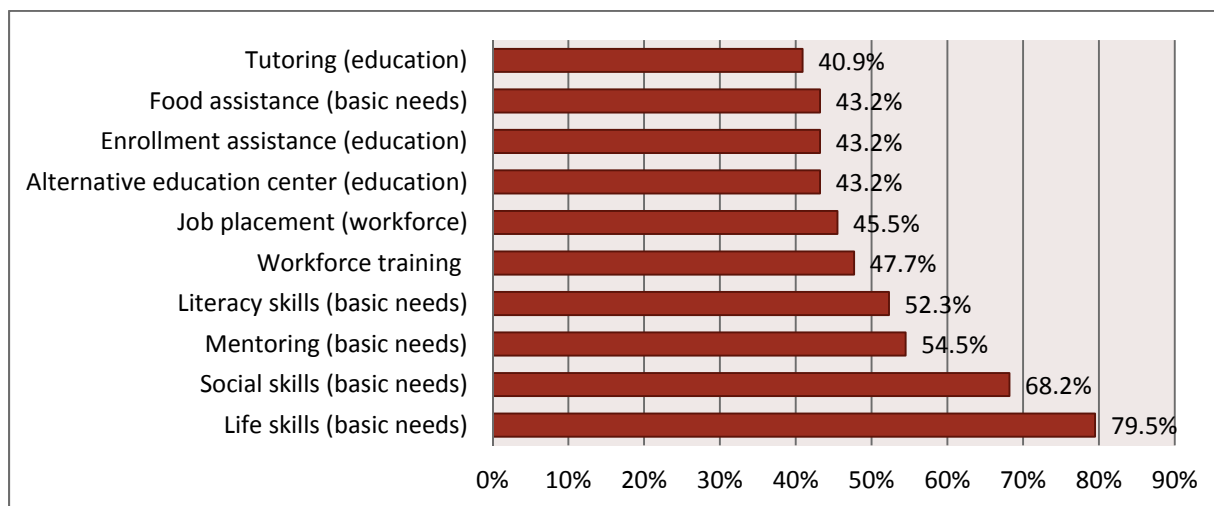
As Figure 11 illustrates, the surveyed organizations, when taken together, provide all three of these types of services, with provision of basic services (life skills, social skills, mentoring) followed by services geared to education (enrollment, alternative education, tutoring) and employment (job placement, training). However, each organization is

*"People aren't talking to each other in the way that they need to. ... I might have zero idea if a student shows up to my school if he is on probation. I won't know that unless he happens to have a probation officer that knows to outreach to me. I might have three students with three different probation officers that work in different ways. Consistency is difficult, communication barriers [exist]."*

– Key informant interviewee

typically targeting one of the services and often does so without formal coordination with other organizations that are or could be providing needed complementary services to OY.

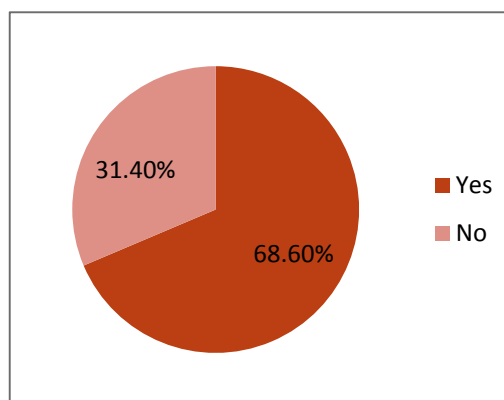
**Figure 11: Top 10 services provided to OY by surveyed organizations (N=45)**



However, despite the fact that these organizations address many challenges that OY face—including providing resources to help combat homelessness or that encourage pathways toward employment and education—these organizations can only do so much with Denver's large, mobile and ever-changing OY population. In addition, looking holistically at these three pathways—distinct, but interconnected and overlapping in many ways—and the many providers that offer diverse services, there does not appear to be a system for either connecting OY to these services and organizations, or for referring OY to other services or organizations that can best meet their needs. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, at present, no official system exists in Denver to serve OY. Given the fact that there are many organizations that work with OY in Denver, there is both a significant opportunity and a critical need to nurture a system that can address the unique challenges of working with this population.

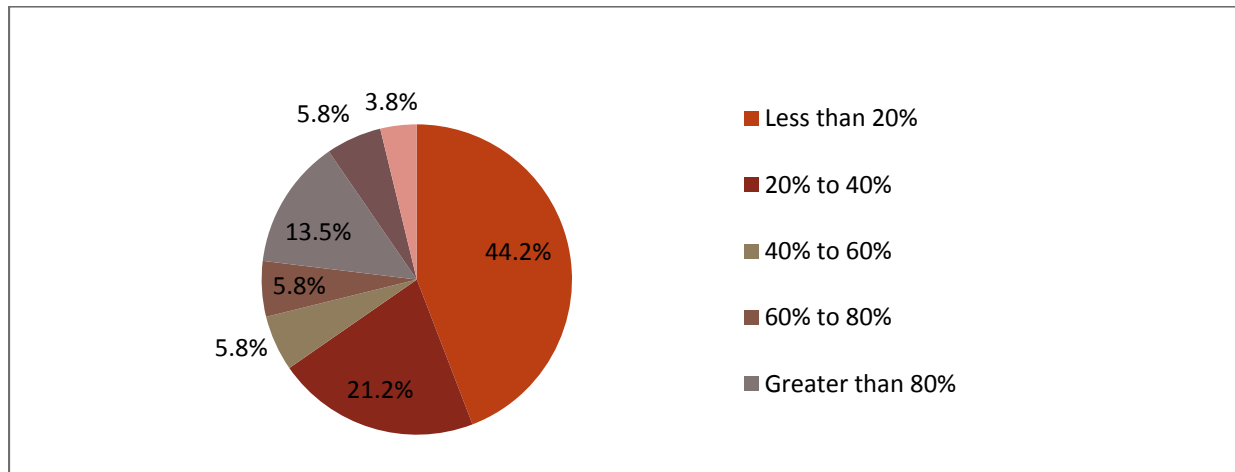
It is important to note that only a handful of organizations (e.g., Colorado Youth for a Change, Emily Griffith Technical College, Mile High Youth Corps, Urban Peak) specifically target OY. At the same time, the provider survey shows that 86.6% of the organizations that took the survey believe that working with OY is a direct part of their organization's mission (Figure 12). This shows an interesting connection between the organizations that explicitly were created to address OY (such as Colorado Youth for a Change) and the organizations that work directly with OY but, perhaps, were not created for this goal (such as Mi Casa Resource Center). As seen in Figures 12

**Figure 12: "Is working with OY a direct part of your organization's mission?" (N=51)**



and 13, there are many potential “allies” in the effort to provide OY services. While these organizations may not have been created originally or solely to serve OY, and do not serve equal numbers of OY, 68.6% of survey respondents do believe their services for OY are a direct part of their mission. Convening these allies will assist the OY Collaborative in pathways development (education and employment), and aligns with recommendations set by the Jobs for the Future Asset Mapping Memo (The Aspen Institute, 2014).

**Figure 13: Percentage of clients in surveyed organizations that are OY (estimates) (N=50)**



The crosswalk of service providers, and the OY they serve, can be used as a resource to understand which groups of OY obtain services and resources (see Appendix B). The crosswalk is informed by a survey that was sent to approximately 140 providers in Denver. The categories in the crosswalk are informed by the literature and key informant interviews. While this information may accurately reflect the full range of services and populations served, as this was self-reported and unverified, it can be useful in learning who is connected to OY in Denver, to what extent, and highlight areas where more research will need to be conducted.

### **Systemic Challenges for OY and OY-Serving Organizations**

In addition to the barriers OY face, highlighted in the previous sections, OY also are struggling to work through a series of systemic barriers such as fragmented services, inadequate programs or pathways, and lack of funding for age groups over 21 (Corcoran, et al., 2012). Youth and providers in the focus groups and interviews directly acknowledge that OY take a “pathway” that is disjointed, with points of engagement and disengagement due to colliding life circumstances that emphasize systemic barriers for Denver OY.

### **Evaluation**

It is essential that if Denver providers are seeking to work together to address the needs of OY, shared data and common tracked outcomes are necessary. While there are movements toward

greater shared data in Denver, as seen through the Colorado 9to25 collaboration<sup>7</sup> and the Mile High United Way Shared Indicators Project,<sup>8</sup> it appears that not all organizations are using data in the same way or tracking the same outcomes.

Many providers surveyed already collect data on the OY they serve. For example, 93% of surveyed providers reported collecting demographic data regarding OY participants/clients, 69% collect school history information (credits earned, GPA, etc.), 57% collect parenting status, and 48% collect income (respondents having been able to select more than one option). However, the tools used to track such data are varied, which can be referenced in Appendix H. In addition, fewer providers (40%) track OY after they leave their organization, making longitudinal data collection efforts difficult. To do this, JVA recommends that common outcomes, tracking systems and means to connect data to individual OY be agreed upon by the many agencies and organizations serving OY.

*“This piece [on measuring effectiveness] is increasingly recognized as a way to improve practice, but part of that equation needs to consider developing resources to support this effort. We already have job duties and adding another one on top of that probably won't lead to the most accurate data”*

– Provider survey respondent

For more information on how surveyed organizations are using data, see Appendix H. However, as this is just a small sample of organizations in Denver that work with OY, further research will be needed to understand how to establish common outcomes and metrics for OY success.

### Capacity

With more than 180 organizations that work with OY (at one point or another), it might be obvious that these organizations have varying capacity for service, varying budgets and varying target groups. For example, not all programs that work with OY address OY from ages 16 to 24; rather, some organizations provide services only up to age 18, or up to age 21. Regarding capacity, the provider survey shows that while many organizations work with OY in Denver, 46% serve only between one and 50 OY per month, and another 18% serve between 50 and 100 OY per month.

*“All youth-serving agencies should agree to share basic information on clients to cut down duplication of services and time for re-entering primary client information.”*

– Provider survey respondent

<sup>7</sup> Colorado 9to25 is a collaboration that via meetings and trainings and a positive youth development approach, leaders and youth will work together to increase awareness to services, promote best and promising practices, share accountability and promote policy change (Colorado 9to25, 2013 “one pager”: [www.colorado9to25.org](http://www.colorado9to25.org)).

<sup>8</sup> The Shared Indicators Project aims to “strengthen and align multiple partners with multiple goals.” The Children’s Corridor, The Piton Foundation, Mile High United Way, Mayor’s Office of Children and Education, and the Civic Canopy have been involved in this effort (<http://www.denverchildrenscorridor.org/shared-indicators>).

In addition, providers are often doubling up on unnecessary work, when already stretched for internal capacity, by serving each OY as a “new case” even when their client or participant has been involved in many other services beforehand. This siloed access to client information and lack of shared data limits the capacity of organizations to address the needs of OY.

### Funding

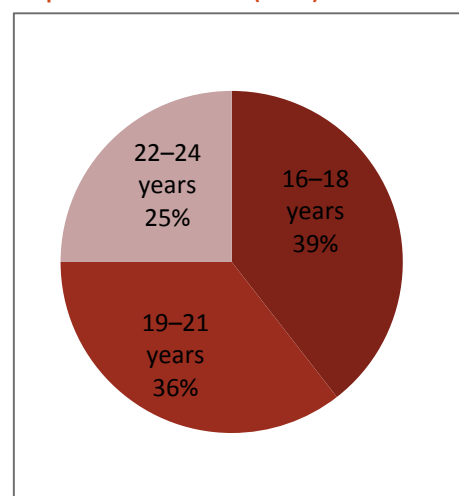
Funding sources for addressing the needs of OY are critically divided by age groups, with OY ages 21 and up often left out of youth/student funding streams, even though their needs may be similar to the younger age cohort of OY. With growing attention to the needs of OY across the U.S., it will be important to include as many service providers as possible to either apply for funding jointly or simply to increase local awareness. The Aspen Institute Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund that provides support to the Denver Opportunity Youth Collaborative which commissioned this report is an example of community projects that can be used to help youth from across the age span make connections to education and employment. Government grant programs that align well to OY efforts include Social Innovation Fund, Promise Neighborhoods and Choice Neighborhoods. The federal budget includes Performance Partnerships Pilots for Disconnected Youth that allows communities to use money from different federal funding streams to pilot new approaches. The OY Collaborative may consider these as well as other funding streams as potential sources of revenue for their work.

*“I really think that money is number one. We have to allocate the money in the right way and the organizations there to help need to not have limits on how many youth can be helped all year. ... We need to facilitate conversations with people sitting in the same room and streamline the process to have fewer steps involved but have the people involved have the knowledge to actually help.”*

– Key informant interviewee

When asked in the survey “what is the primary age group of OY you work with,” (having been allowed to submit multiple responses) led to answers of 68% serving ages 16-18, 61% serving ages 19-21, and much less (42%) serving ages 22-24 (see Figure 14). This greatly affects the funding streams used by such organizations and should be understood more in-depth to see if current funding and services fully meet the needs of Denver’s OY. Survey respondents, when asked about their funding sources for OY programming, most often stated that funding comes from federal, state and local sources. For details on funding sources of the surveyed organizations, see the crosswalk in Appendix B.

**Figure 14: Primary age groups that OY survey respondents work with (N=45)**



### Coordination of Networks

One approach to creating community alignment around the disjointed pathways of OY is to ensure that OY have greater awareness and access to information and programming that assists them at different stages.

This approach to assisting OY in Denver will maximize available resources (e.g., trained staff, programs, information), while ensuring the most promising and/or effective programs are



engaged. In addition, this approach could improve the referral of services offered throughout the city. For example, if Organization A is already trusted among teachers, caseworkers and neighbor communities in Denver, Organization B could partner with Organization A to more effectively reach more OY. When individuals access services, they most often rely on the coordinated efforts and resource sharing of multiple agencies. In addition, many agencies may have their own agendas, service orientations and funding services that may not always line up with the complex needs of the populations that they serve (Provan, Veazie, Staten, Teufel, & Shone, 2005). Therefore, strategies that can strengthen the availability of existing services are critical for OY in Denver.

Representatives of OY-serving organizations also responded to the survey. They were asked to provide lists of organizations that engage with OY in Denver, organizations from which they receive referrals and organizations that are making the greatest impact. The 49 respondents named more than 180 organizations, illuminating the vast array of services that exist (see Appendix E for a full list). However, Appendix F shows the only organizations that were named more than once by survey respondents, leading to the conclusion that while many services exist, they do not all work in tandem to provide the best services possible for OY. The organizations most frequently mentioned in the survey are Bayaud Enterprises, CCD, CYC, DPS, Emily Griffith Technical College, Goodwill, MHUW and Urban Peak. These organizations may provide a good starting point for outreach to strengthening connections and networks for OY in Denver. Furthermore, this points to the need for a virtual network for providers to OY so that duplication of services is avoided and providers can have a greater awareness of what is available.

*“Who to ask [for help]...it was all confusing... paperwork to fax it in to case manager and to follow up all the time. A one stop place would be easier.”*

– Youth focus group participant

*“[It is] really important to erase the barriers to access resources and programs that agencies and systems put in place. Every door is the right door; there's no wrong door.”*

– Key informant interviewee

In addition, youth discussed the types of services that were available to them, and some OY described how the system was broken and difficult to navigate. The theme of a broken system also emerged when discussing accessing documents and services. However, the OY in the focus group discussed systems less than other key themes.

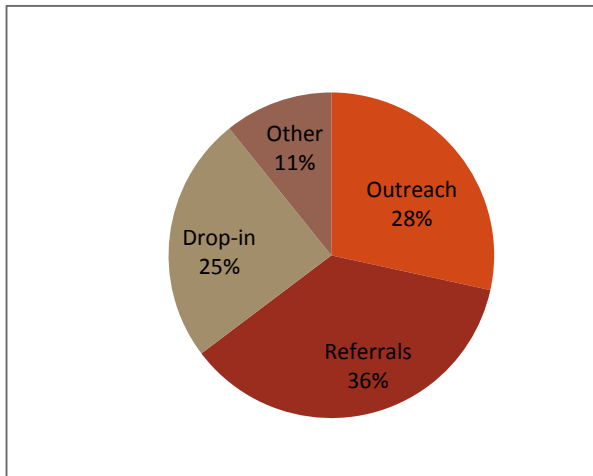
### **Gaps in Outreach**

With so many organizations that serve OY in Denver, and so few partnerships among them, understanding the outreach methods to OY (or conversely, how OY are referred to area organizations and services) is key. Figure 15, below, shows that OY become connected to surveyed organizations in multiple ways, which need to be explored further, especially through previously cited organizations that were identified as uniquely connected to the OY population.

*“Honestly...word of mouth...has been our best recruitment tool. We do very little recruitment or advertising and we end up with more kids than we know what to do with. If we get a youth in our program and they have gotten something out of it, they tell their friends. That has more weight.”*

– Key informant interviewee

**Figure 15: How OY become connected to surveyed organizations (N=44)<sup>1</sup>**



In interviews, providers outlined numerous promising practices to best reach out to and serve OY, including utilizing crossover recruiting from other programs offered at the same facility (e.g., if an OY is sentenced to a DUI class, he or she might be recruited into a GED program at the same organization), social media or word of mouth.

Other practitioners spoke about the values of going to where OY are, such as street outreach and having drop-in center hours.

Overall, effective outreach appears to involve the collaboration with OY and youth peers, whether for word-of-mouth, or knowing where to go for direct “street outreach.” If Denver organizations and agencies can work together to share their best practices, and connect and improve referral sources, more OY can be presented with opportunities for future success.

In sum, this findings section has summarized existing research and an analysis of original data collected for this report. First, the definitional, demographic and other key characteristics of OY were discussed, providing a profile of OY both nationally and in Denver. As a part of this profile, six important subgroups of youth who may be at a higher risk to become OY were identified, including youth who are or have been in foster care, are homeless, are immigrants, identity as LGBT, have been in the juvenile/criminal justice system, or are parenting. Second, this section included a subsection dedicated to describing and publishing the voices of the Denver OY who participated in data collection efforts for this report, documenting their demographic characteristics and some of the life situations they have experienced, in hopes of painting a vivid picture of the realities of life for the diverse OY who seek services in Denver. Third, this section identified the promising practices of organizations currently serving OY and detailed three pathways—education, employment, and basic needs/support services—for OY in Denver. Fourth and finally, this section described networks and systems that could be built to better serve local OY, including documenting barriers faced by OY and OY-serving organizations.

*“Trying to tap into any place that youth might want to be [is our outreach]. We have drop-in hours at Urban Peak, we go to homeless shelters and Rainbow Alley, [we do] street outreach on 16th Street Mall with Stand Up for Kids, we go to court, [and] we partner with diversion...to connect with as many kids as possible.”*

– Key informant interviewee

## Recommendations for the Future

*"[Opportunity youth] represent enormous untapped potential for our society [and] start out life with big dreams that include graduating from college. Notwithstanding challenging life circumstances, including living in poverty, they remain optimistic about their futures and believe they will achieve their goals in life. They accept responsibility for their decisions, but also yearn for support along what they hope will be a road to opportunity. Our society often treats them as problems to be addressed, but their voices show that they are potential to be fulfilled and can become key leaders in our society if given a chance." (Powell & Powell, 2012)*

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Despite the challenges that Denver OY experience on their pathways toward academic and economic success, OY—as their name suggests—embody an opportunity for successful lives. Opportunity youth represent a diverse group of young individuals who, for one reason or another, have become disconnected from education systems and the job market. Indeed, findings from this environmental scan indicate that certain communities in Denver County (e.g., Globeville, Montbello, North Capitol Hill, Westwood) may be at greater risk for OY prevalence, while specific subgroups of youth (e.g., foster youth, homeless, immigrants, LGBT) may be at increased risk for becoming OY.

As one step toward better serving this population, this section outlines *eight actionable recommendations* that were developed from a synthesis of existing data and original research collected for this project on OY in Denver County. These recommendations may help the OY Collaborative to promote promising practices and strengthen the existing systems. Each recommendation is described in more detail in this section.

### 1. Develop shared vision, metrics and measures

The environmental scan revealed a large number of organizations that are serving OY, either as a specific focused population or simply as part of their larger body of work. These organizations provide myriad services, including education, employment and support services. There is a great opportunity to leverage and align the work of the Denver-area OY-serving organizations by developing a shared vision of the ultimate outcomes of their primary activities as well as metrics and measures by which success will be measured. The OY Collaborative, composed of many critical systems and organizations serving OY, is in a key position in the short term (within a year) to convene the players to develop a shared vision of a future for OY in Denver.

Over the longer term (one to three years), the OY Collaborative should convene all connected organizations to establish agreement on metrics and measures that can be used to measure progress and success, building on the successful shared indicators work that is already being led by OY Collaborative partners such as Mile High United Way and The Piton Foundation.

## 2. Create an OY provider network

Currently in Denver, many organizations and systems provide services to OY, yet they are not formally connected to each other. The provider surveys demonstrated that despite the fact that many providers do make referrals to others, most make referrals to a fairly limited set of organizations and may be unaware of other organizations offering complementary programs and services. This lack of connection discourages coordination, which results in many OY not having access to available supports and services they might need for success.

To mediate this need, in the short term, JVA recommends that the OY Collaborative further develop the crosswalk initiated through the environmental scan to help existing OY providers understand who else is providing services, what services they are providing and how they can leverage their respective strengths. Convening the groups that responded to the survey could be an important first step. A next step could be conducting a social network analysis of organizations providing services to OY to identify existing connections, relationship strengths, and nodes or hubs of services.

In the longer term, JVA recommends establishment of an OY network, composed of the following elements:

- **Multiple points of entry into a single system** of OY support for education and employment pathways, as well as additional supportive services. This system can be connected virtually to ensure providers understand entry points and can make relevant referrals, and savvy case managers can assist youth with navigation through the system.
- **Formalized linkages through interagency agreements** of organizations, agencies and systems serving OY, paying attention to building the network so a full array of services are available to OY. Network participants would agree to:
  - **Use a common online application and client records system**, with requisite confidentiality built in, so that as youth are entered into the network system, their information and progress can be shared across all providers and systems they interact with.
  - **Adopt best and promising practices**, and participate in network-sponsored training on best practices with OY (such as trauma-informed care).
  - **Hire knowledgeable and experienced youth-friendly staff** that can successfully engage youth into education and workforce pathways and serve as caring role models, mentors and supports. The potential for former OY employment and peer mentorship can be leveraged here.
  - **Track outcomes and evaluate the longitudinal impact of programming** on OY, through common metrics and measurements, and shared data.

## 3. Connect youth to "satellite hubs" via engaged staff and an OY-centered focus

JVA recommends a series of strategies to "bridge the last mile" of OY to the coordinated network system described above. These strategies would include:

- **Linking a series of physical satellite sites to connect to the network hub.** The environmental scan showed that OY are dispersed over vast geographic areas in Denver, and that some communities have significantly higher percentages of OY than others. Satellite sites will address this geographic diversity and the desire of the youth in focus groups to connect to resources through hubs throughout the city where they could access resources, connect to supportive adults and peers, and feel safe. The idea of using the map in Figure 1 (and JVA's map in Figure 2) as a starting place for outreach is aligned with Jobs for the Future's Asset Mapping Memo (The Aspen Institute, 2014).
- **Offering holistic services able to effectively address multiple OY risk factors.** As was discovered in the environmental scan, OY are facing multiple challenges that affect their ability to enter and successfully navigate through education and workforce pathways. As such, it is suggested that the satellite sites recommended above incorporate:
  - **Wraparound resources and services** that focus on housing, job training, education, mentoring and case management. Each satellite site should be able to tap into all of the resources available through the network, and essentially function as a physical place where any OY can obtain assistance with basic support services, educational opportunities and/or career guidance.
  - **Strategic use of organizations already providing services to OY**, placed in communities with high concentrations of OY and with high numbers of risk factors for OY.
  - **Formal linkages to organizations that serve specific OY subgroups** (e.g., teen parents, youth who are homeless) to ensure that OY within these subgroups have a clear path to both the network and hub.
- **Specially train staff that can successfully outreach, engage and link to OY networks.** These staff could be located in the satellite sites, potentially shared among agencies and capable of engaging mobile technology to access network services. Staff, caseworkers, outreach workers and program managers should be trained to understand that OY are vulnerable yet fully aware of their struggles, thus staff cultural competency is key for successful engagement.
- **Focusing outreach on identified areas of high OY prevalence.** The environmental scan identified certain Denver neighborhoods and populations that have more OY prevalence (ages 16 through 19). It is recommended that this information be used to create a system for targeted outreach and to ensure that resources are located where they are needed most.
- **Formulating an OY-appealing brand identity** for the network and satellite sites. Youth expressed a high degree of distrust in traditional programs. A cohesive and identifiable identity that appeals to the target population will be integral in directed outreach in neighborhoods with high prevalence of OY and with high risk factors. To ensure that this identity appeals to OY, it is recommended that the youth are involved in the design process.

#### 4. Strengthen connections for OY to the workforce

There are projected shortages in areas that require less than a four-year degree (e.g., construction and trade professions). While apprenticeships and other programs exist to both train and employ youth in these fields, OY expressed a need to access more clear pathways to utilizing these resources and programs. Jobs for the Future also views this as an important future step, and recommends aligning resources with Skills2Compete Colorado (The Aspen Institute, 2014). Recommended steps to increase the connections into the workforce for OY include:

- **Leverage existing relationships** of the OY Collaborative with key players in the workforce arena (both public and private sector) as an immediate first step. Engage them in a conversation on how relationships can be strengthened and formalized to build pipelines of OY to fill apprenticeship, certificate and other programs leading to middle-skill jobs.
- **Better integrate workforce and career prospects into the education system** at an earlier point in the lives of OY. With more and stronger bridges between K–12 education and the workforce, as well as bridges between K–12 education and postsecondary training that is directly tied to the workforce, OY will likely view potential job prospects as more feasible and attainable.
- **Utilize well-known programs and approaches that are already in place** (e.g., CCD, OED, WIA) and expand innovative workforce-training and workforce-placement programs that are currently serving Denver’s OY. This may include ensuring that stackable credentials and flexible learning plans from high school through postsecondary are utilized.
- **Increase the number of jobs for OY that align with market demand.** To ensure OY have access to economic security and access to jobs focused on skilled trades (e.g., electricians, nursing assistants, vocational nurses), manufacturing and production should be increased. Such accessible career paths should be promoted by all OY-serving organizations and agencies. Through increased relationships with such employers, direct job placement and apprenticeships in these fields can be increased as well.

#### 5. Assemble sustainable financing for the system

To address the needs of OY ages 16 to 24, federal and private funding must be more readily and flexibly available to address the span of this age bracket. Current funding cutoffs that are related to age have the adverse effect of necessitating that youth learn new systems and programs that are geared for adults at a critical time when ongoing support and stability are what is needed most. In order to address these needs, the following are recommended:

- **In the short term, map funding available to those of all ages** for various programmatic activities, and use the OY Collaborative and its partners to direct that funding to promising approaches.
- **In the longer term:**
  - **Propose that funding follow outcomes**, thus adopting principles of social impact bonds



- **Advocate for policy changes that allow for payment by service and desired outcomes, instead of age**

## **6. Build the capacity of OY-serving organizations that wish to participate in the network**

To ensure that coordination and collaboration, including data sharing, is feasible for organizations and agencies that wish to participate, the following steps are recommended:

- **Ensure all organizations agree upon a set of consistent indicators/metrics** as well as measures and data collection techniques that are feasible for organizations to use and that are capable of tracking longitudinal progress. These may include goals or measurable indicators created by the Mile High Shared Indicators Project (e.g., rates of high school or GED completion; scores of college and career readiness; rates of postsecondary remediation, persistence and completion; and/or rates of youth employment).
- **Ensure all organizations know how to collect, share and utilize data to track and improve outcomes.** Data can only be effective if the organization staff tasked with data collection and sharing understand how to make it feasible and effective in their own organizations. In addition, organizations must be able to interpret data that are collected in a way that allows them to assess progress and explain and improve outcomes. In essence, a “data sharing culture” should be built. Ideally, this network would leverage and increase data sharing efforts that already exist at city and state levels (e.g., Colorado Department of Education, DPS) and include a plan to account for and collect hard-to-collect data (e.g., internships, employment).
- **Best-practice approaches on outreach and ways to engage and serve OY should be shared.** As in any collaboration, making use of the most effective ways to reach OY will be necessary.

## **7. Establish a mechanism to collect ongoing youth input regarding the network and the services provided, and create processes for incorporating this input into ongoing network and program improvement**

Youth need to be engaged at all steps of further OY-service collaboration and need to feel that their perspectives and voices are heard and valued. Including the unique perspectives of OY is extremely useful when creating changes in systems, connecting networks together, and ensuring effective outreach and evaluation. Jobs for the Future, in their 2014 Asset Mapping Memo, also emphasizes the importance of garnering youth voice (The Aspen Institute, 2014). Youth can be involved through the following recommendations:

- **Create opportunities for youth leadership** both on a volunteer basis and for paid work experiences, which will allow OY to gain alternate perspectives of education and employment, give them a chance to become peer leaders, link leadership directly to desired outcomes and increase work experience.
- **Form a youth council** that can inform the OY Collaborative Steering Committee. Creating such outlets provides opportunities for youth to engage in leadership. Such outlets for youth leadership can help OY reengage in the systems around them, and has the benefit of continuously improving systems using the most direct source of input.



- **Establish youth involvement in program evaluation.** Engaging youth in evaluation will ensure that what is of value to key leaders and the OY Collaborative is of value to the youth as well. Youth should be able to contribute to the following evaluation needs:
  - **Ensuring that programs are effectively engaging OY and meeting their needs.** Programs need to be relevant, compelling, culturally competent, and linked to ongoing and supportive relationships, as a means of garnering the attention of OY and ensuring that they are positively engaged. Youth should have an outlet for evaluating the organizations they work with and determining the outcomes these programs will be measured by.
  - **Communicating the outcomes OY desire to reach** and what their personal measure of success looks like in order to ensure programs are placing OY on the correct “pathway,” and to ensure the most relevant outcomes are being tracked.

#### **8. Advocate for policy measures that support the recommendations above**

Public policy begins with changing existing policies and creating policies where there are none. It should include not only legislative action, but also target policies enacted by others that impact opportunity youth. We recommend the following regarding public policy action:

- **Convene and inform policy makers regarding the results of the work of the OY Collaborative,** the JVA OY scan and the mapping conducted by Jobs for the Future. This includes a list of policy recommendations and considerations posed by those interviewed through the environmental scan.
- **Identify existing legislative policies that support opportunity youth** and those that pose obstacles to their self-sufficiency (e.g., immigration, funding, program eligibility criteria, etc.).
  - **Policies that focus on expanded funding for OY services** across education, employment and basic needs services that are integral to OY success. These funding streams should not be limited to age brackets (e.g., 16–21); rather, funding should encompass all ages of OY.
  - **Policies that ensure undocumented youth have full access to education, workforce and supportive services organizations.** Working through the limitations that undocumented OY face (whether due to immigration status or other reasons) will greatly address the needs of Denver’s OY.
- **Identify policies of major institutions such as funders, state and city agencies, nonprofit organizations,** etc. whose policies affect OY. For example, discuss with Mile High United Way how its 2-1-1 information and referral system could best pinpoint services for OY.
- **Inform and educate the community about policies that affect OY.** For example, public education funding does not exist for youth older than 20 years; encourage voters to support legislation that changes education funding.

These recommendations should be part of an overall, multi-sector public awareness ‘call to action’ campaign. We recognize that ‘opportunity youth’ is a recent addition to the public

lexicon. It is just now emerging in the health and human services and nonprofit arenas. The OYC and its partners must ensure that opportunity youth and their importance to economic well-being is as recognizable and important to the public as the campaign to eliminate homelessness, the importance of high quality early childhood education, reducing childhood obesity, and other such widely accepted social issues.

In sum, these eight recommendations encourage the development of a shared vision and a coordinated network of providers and services, aim to build the capacity of providers within the system and to stimulate the leadership of OY served, and seek to secure both financing and policy measures to support the system. In making these comprehensive recommendations, JVA seeks to provide a framework that can assist the OY Collaborative in its goal of promoting promising practices, strengthening and sustaining existing systems, and, ultimately, better serve Denver's opportunity youth.

### Closing Remarks

Given their sizeable population in Denver, OY present an enormous opportunity for positive social transformation and economic growth. To fully harness this opportunity, the Denver community must come together to create a system that maximizes OY access to the services that already exist and fills the gaps for services that are still needed. Based on the research herein, there is reason to believe that OY will respond positively to an improved system of coordinated and wraparound services and will use such a system to succeed in life. While the idea of collective impact on OY is relatively new in Denver, there is sufficient momentum both nationally and locally to make it both viable and timely.

In closing, creating partnerships among organizations that work with OY, and adding more connecting opportunities in a Collective Impact approach, may best harness the extraordinary services that already exist and help even more OY reach their potential. As such, it is our hope that this report will serve as a resource for informing future strategic conversations focused on making collaborative decisions on foundational programs, developing pathways for OY, identifying priority OY populations, and accessing and leveraging state and city systems to track OY.



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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: List of Key Informant Interviewees

Table 5: List of key informant interviews

<b>Cory Barrett</b>	Program Director, The GLBT Community Center of Colorado
<b>Kathryn Boogaard</b>	Director of Student Engagement, Denver Public Schools
<b>Kelly Causey</b>	Executive Director, Mile High Youth Corps
<b>Eliska Champagne-Veselka</b>	Senior Program Manager of YouthBuild, Mile High Youth Corps
<b>Kippi Clausen</b>	Founder, Unfolding Directions
<b>Sheree Conyers</b>	State Coordination—Foster Care Education, Colorado Department of Education
<b>Kristi Esbenshade</b>	Director of Youth Services, Goodwill Industries
<b>Laurie Harvey</b>	Executive Director, Center for Work Employment and Education
<b>Mary Hendricks</b>	Director of Career Development Services, Goodwill Industries
<b>Anne Kleinkopf</b>	Director of Community Renewal, Denver Inner City Parish
<b>Tom Lepak</b>	Senior Vice President, Casey Industrial
<b>Judith Martinez</b>	Director, Office of Dropout Prevention and Student Engagement, Colorado Department of Education
<b>Brigid McRaith</b>	Regional Director, Mile High Youth Corps
<b>Katie Neal</b>	Director of Programs, Colorado Youth for a Change
<b>Jessica Newman</b>	Principal, West Career Academy, Denver Public Schools
<b>Lynne Picard</b>	Resident & Community Services Program Manager, Denver Housing Authority
<b>Joe Saboe</b>	Post-Secondary Pathways Manager, Denver Public Schools
<b>Joy Smith</b>	Principal, Aurora Futures Academy
<b>Marilyn Smith</b>	Developmental Education Coordinator, Colorado Community College System
<b>Chris Telk</b>	Executive Director, Colorado Youth for a Change
<b>Joseph Troyer</b>	Program Manager of ACE Program, Boys & Girls Clubs of Metro Denver
<b>Mary Zanotti</b>	Associate Director, Colorado Youth for a Change

## Appendix C: Alternative Education Campuses (2011–2012)



## Appendix D: Organizations Included in Data Collection

There were five organizations that participated in site visits and 53 organizations that participated in the survey. This section gives a brief overview of the organizations that were selected for site visits and describes the OY participants at each organization.

### **Colorado Work Education and Employment (CWEE): Six OY Surveyed**

CWEE's main goal is to enable single parents on TANF to gain confidence, job skills and a career. The program offers a model for wraparound services and alternate pathways to education and the workforce, providing GED training, computer training, workforce development, and on-the-job support. The majority of OY at CWEE during JVA's site visit were parents between the ages of 22 and 24. These OY reported dropping out of school, being homeless, being on probation and formerly being in foster care. One OY asserted that affordable housing for single mothers should be a priority. Many OY shared that they work hard for themselves and their children's futures, and many expressed a strong desire to be at CWEE.

### **Colorado Youth for a Change (CYC): Five OY Surveyed**

CYC is one of the few organizations in Denver whose organizational mission specifically targets OY. CYC organization helps youth stay in school and provides dropout recovery to those who are out of school. Because student outreach occurs in schools and dropout recovery takes place in the community at large, OY do not generally visit the CYC offices in Denver. However, for the purposes of the environmental scan, five students served by CYC described their experiences with JVA researchers. As compared to OY at other organizations visited, CYC's group of OY was younger and closer to a GED or diploma. Similar to OY at other organizations, those interviewed at CYC reported being in the foster care system, having criminal records, and being homeless. All OY interviewed at CYC are now in an alternative high school and receive case management. They identified lack of transportation and financial support for transportation as a large barrier in achieving success.

### **Denver Inner City Parish: Five OY Surveyed**

Denver Inner City Parish provides individuals from every age group with wraparound services to get back on their feet and reach self-sufficiency. With a grant from WAGEES (Work and Gain Education and Employment Skills), Inner City Parish provides services to OY ages 18–24 to assist with GEDs, counseling and employment opportunities. During the site visit to Inner City Parish, JVA researchers met with five OY parents between 18–24 years of age who were taking an intensive parenting class. The OY reported challenges such as having dropped out of school, probation, having criminal records, and/or being homeless. Many of the OY at Inner City Parish expressed a desire for more fun and free things to do with their children around Denver.

### **Mile High Youth Corps (MHYC): Four OY Surveyed**

Mile High Youth Corps (MHYC) is another flagship organization targeting OY in Denver. OY apply to MHYC and are rigorously vetted before being accepted for enrollment in MHYC's intensive nine-month program where they learn job skills in construction and get paid to work toward

their GED or diploma concurrently. Although MHYC is a selective program that only serves a small group of young people, those OY who are enrolled receive extensive resources to promote successful outcomes.

During the site visit, JVA researchers met with four OY who were approximately four months into the MHYC program. These OY reported experiencing massive internal change as a result of MHYC. Indeed, these OY—somewhat older than other OY and with children—showed a determination to change their lives and achieve their goals in employment (e.g., becoming an ultrasound technician), education (e.g., graduate college), and personal lives (e.g., become mature guides for their children). Although many of MHYC’s OY described the inherent challenges of being a teen parent, having criminal records, living in difficult neighborhoods, and being a member of a minority population, those who were interviewed seemed hopeful about their futures.

### **West Career Academy: Eighteen OY Surveyed**

West Career Academy is a DPS Intensive Pathways school, located within the West High School building, which serves students who are under credit and/or at risk to drop out. West Career Academy’s tightly knit staff serves a population of approximately 90 students. The school has strong relationships with Goodwill Industries to provide job-training services and with Youth on Record for creative education. Although the students were in the younger category of OY (ages 16–18), many were working part time in addition to going to school and were receiving a range of supportive service guidance from the staff.

## Appendix E: Survey Respondents

Table 6: List of survey respondents

1. A Promising Future
2. Academy of Urban Learning
3. Asian Pacific Development Center
4. Bayaud Enterprises, Inc.
5. CDHS
6. City and County of Denver, Office of Economic Development Workforce Development Youth Services
7. Colorado Anti-Violence Program (youth project: Branching Seedz of Resistance)
8. Colorado CASA
9. Colorado Department of Education
10. Colorado Department of Human Services
11. Colorado High School Charter
12. Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition
13. Colorado Latino Leadership Advocacy and Research Organization (CLLARO)
14. Colorado UpLift
15. Colorado Youth for a Change
16. Community Building Partnership for Youth in Transition AmeriCorps
17. Community Reentry Project
18. Compassion Road Academy
19. Denver Housing Authority
20. Denver Human Services
21. Denver Indian Family Resource Center
22. Denver Indian Health and Family Services
23. Denver Inner City Parish
24. Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce
25. Denver Office of Economic Development—Youth Services
26. Denver Online High School
27. Denver's Road Home
28. Family Resource Center Association
29. Family Tree, Inc.
30. Goodwill Industries of Denver
31. GRASP
32. Interagency Prevention Systems for Children and Youth, Office of Children, Youth and Families, CDHS
33. Kappa League
34. Lutheran Family Services, Rocky Mountains
35. Mi Casa Resource Center
36. Mile High Behavioral Healthcare
37. Mile High Youth Corps
38. Project VOYCE (Voices of Youth Changing Education)
39. Project WISE
40. Save Our Youth, Inc.
41. Servicios de la Raza
42. The Gathering Place
43. The GLBT Community Center of Colorado—Rainbow Alley
44. The Legal Center for People with Disabilities and Older People
45. University of Colorado
46. Volunteers of America

47. VSA Colorado/Access Gallery
48. Warren Village
49. YESS Institute

## Appendix F: More Frequently Mentioned Organizations in Provider Survey

**Table 7: More frequently mentioned organizations by survey respondents (ranked from highest to lowest)<sup>9</sup>**

Organization Name
1. Urban Peak
2. Denver Public Schools
3. Colorado Youth for Change
4. Mile High United Way
5. Community College of Denver
6. Emily Griffith Technical College
7. Bayaud Enterprises
8. Goodwill Industries
9. Colorado Workforce Centers
10. Denver Housing Authority
11. Servicios de la Raza
12. Colorado Community College System
13. Metro State University
14. NULITES (Urban League of Metro Denver) In-House School Partner
15. Mile High Youth Corps
16. YESS Institute
17. Northwest Coalition
18. Chafee Program
19. Volunteers of America
20. Children's Hospital Colorado
21. Denver Indian Center
22. Mi Casa Resource Center
23. Vocational Rehabilitation
24. Denver Rescue Mission
25. AJUA (Asociación de Jovenes Unidos en Acción)
26. Comitis Crisis Center
27. GRASP (Gang Rescue and Support Project)
28. MCPN (Metro Community Provider Network)
29. Office of Economic Development Workforce
30. Kappa Alpha Psi

<sup>9</sup> Only organizations that were mentioned at least twice were included in this list.



31. Colorado Department of Education
32. Colorado Department of Human Services
33. Colorado Uplift
34. Denver Parks and Recreation
35. Florence Crittenton High School
36. Rocky Mountain Youth Housing
37. Warren Village
38. Community College of Aurora
39. Mental Health Center of Denver
40. Third Way Center

### Appendix G: Other Organizations that Serve Opportunity Youth Named in the Survey<sup>10</sup>

Organization Name
1. A La Source Refugee Services
2. A+ Denver
3. Access Housing
4. Adams County Youth Initiative
5. Adult Learning Source
6. Art from Ashes
7. ArtReach
8. Arts Street
9. Arrupe Jesuit High School
10. Aspen Challenge
11. Attention Homes
12. Aurora Community Connections
13. Aurora Mentoring Collaborative
14. Aurora Police Department
15. Aurora Public Schools
16. Aurora SANTOS Manzanola
17. Aurora Youth Options
18. Bessie's Hope
19. Big City Mountaineers
20. Boys and Girls Clubs of Metro Denver

<sup>10</sup> These organizations were only mentioned once when providers were asked about the most promising organizations that serve OY, most frequently utilized services, or organizations to which providers refer OY. The other organizations that were mentioned more than once are in Appendix H.

21. Bridging the Gap
22. Carbondale Compañeros Durango
23. CCN
24. ChalkBeat
25. Cherry Creek Presbyterian Church
26. City and County of Denver—Youth Opportunity Department
27. City of Denver Flagship Center College Summit
28. Colorado Building and Construction Trades Council
29. Colorado Children's Campaign
30. Colorado Coalition for the Homeless
31. Colorado Commits to Kids
32. Colorado County Departments of Human Services
33. Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition
34. Colorado Cross Disability Coalition
35. Colorado Department of Corrections
36. Colorado Health Foundation
37. Colorado High School Charter
38. Colorado Legacy Foundation
39. Colorado Legal
40. Colorado Mentoring Collaborative
41. Colorado State University-Pueblo
42. Colorado WIN Partners
43. Colorado Youth At Risk
44. Colorado Youth Matter
45. Comcast
46. Community College of Denver
47. Community Reach Center
48. Creative Strategies for Change
49. Denver County Child Welfare
50. Denver County Jail
51. Denver Crisis Center
52. Denver Downtown Detention Center
53. Denver Estrellas supported by the Rural Community Resource Center
54. Denver Indian Center Jobs
55. Denver Inner City Parish
56. Denver Kids
57. Denver Parks and Recreation
58. Denver Probation Office
59. Denver Street School
60. Denver Workforce Centers
61. Denver's Road Home
62. Division of Housing
63. Donnell Kay Foundation

64. Dress for Success
65. East Side Clinic Refugee Health Services
66. Emily Griffith Opportunity School (EGOS)
67. Escuela Tlatelolco
68. Estrellas Yuma
69. Family Crisis Center
70. First Bank
71. Flagship Help Center
72. Forward Steps
73. Foster Care Alumni
74. Friends of Man
75. Front Range School Districts
76. George Washington High School
77. Girl Scouts
78. Governors Summer Job Hunt
79. GrowHaus
80. HAP Montrose
81. Hispanic Affairs Project Montrose
82. Hunger Free CO
83. I Have a DREAM® Foundation Boulder
84. Impact Empowerment Group
85. International Peace Initiatives
86. Jack and Jill
87. Jobs for the Future
88. Juvenile Assessment Center
89. Juvenile courts
90. Latino Coalition/WAGEES
91. Lutheran Family Services Rocky Mountains
92. Maternal Health Center of Denver
93. Metro CareRing
94. Mrachek Middle school
95. National CASA Association
96. New America School (Lowry Lakewood and Denver Campuses)
97. New Genesis
98. North Littleton Promise
99. One Sight Program
100. P.U.S.H. Academy
101. PACE
102. Prax(us)
103. Project Uplift
104. Project Voice
105. Project WISE
106. Rainbow Alley

107. Regional Transportation District (RTD)
108. Resource Center Boulder
109. Rocky Mountain Children's Law Center
110. Senator Mike Johnston's Office
111. Stand for Children
112. Teach for America
113. TEENS Inc.
114. Tennyson Center
115. The Blue Bench (Formerly RAAP)
116. The Bridge Project
117. The Gathering Place
118. True Light Baptist
119. University Hospital for Medical Care
120. University of Northern Colorado
121. U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement
122. Voices of Immigrant Children for Education Equality (VOICE) Boulder
123. Warriors Organizing and Rising in Denver (WORD)
124. WestEd American Institutes of Research
125. Women's Bean Project
126. Women's Forum Foundation Educational Opportunity Center
127. Women's Independence Scholarship Program
128. Work Options for Women
129. Youth Biz
130. Youth on Record

## Appendix H: Outcome and Data-Tracking Charts from Provider Survey

Figure 16: Primary ways surveyed organizations track outcomes (N=42)

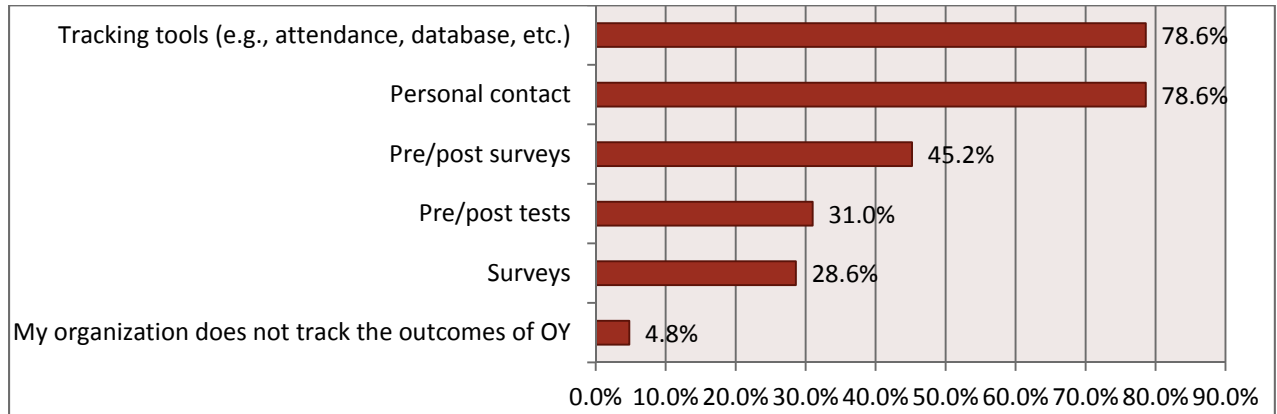


Figure 17: Outcomes tracked for OY by survey respondents (N=41)

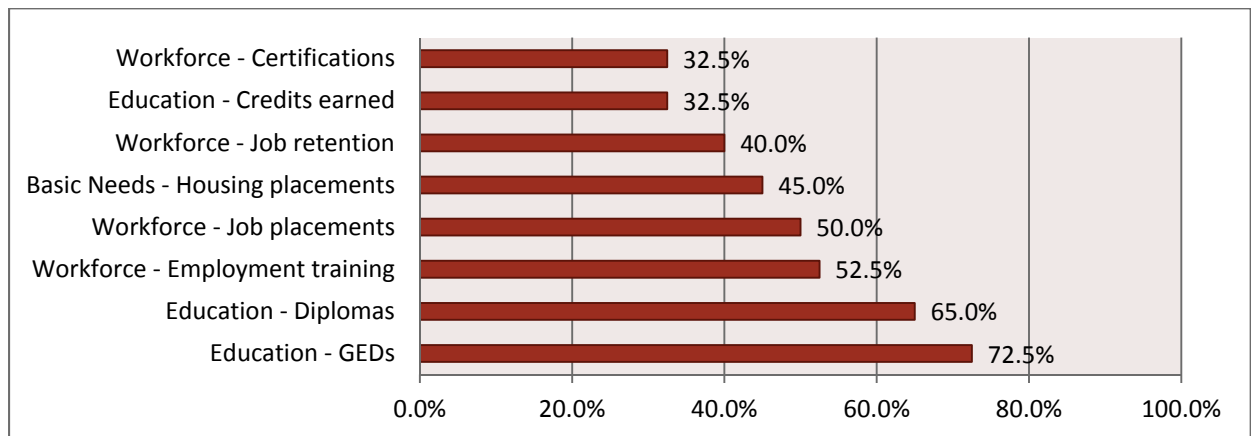
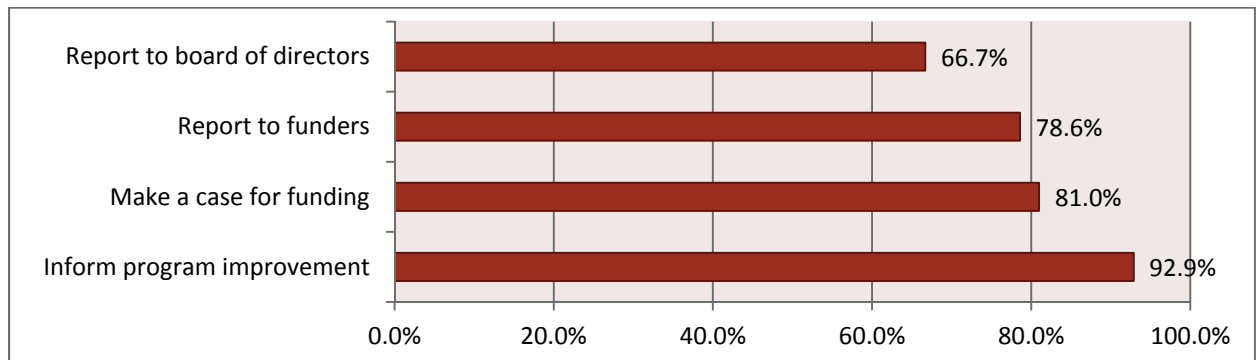


Figure 18: Primary ways surveyed organizations use their data (overall) (N=43)



## **Appendix B: Opportunity Youth Service Provider Crosswalk**



	Academy of Urban Learning	Asian Pacific Development Center	Bayaud Enterprises	City & County of Denver, Office of Economic Development/ Workforce/ Youth Services	CLLARO	Colorado Anti-Violence Program	Colorado CASA	Colorado Department of Education	Colorado Department of Human Services
<b>Ages of OY Served</b>	16-18	16-18	19-24	16-21	19-21 primarily	16-24	16-21	16-18	16-24
<b>Number of OY Served/Month</b>	101-150	51-100	51-100	101-150	0-50	0-50	Greater than 300	Greater than 300 (50k annually)	Greater than 300
<b>Geographic Location</b>	2417 West 29th Ave., Denver, Colorado 80211	1537 Alton Street, Aurora, CO 80010	333 West Bayaud Avenue, Denver, CO 80223	201 West Colfax Ave., #907, Denver, CO 80202	309 West 1st Ave., Denver, CO 80223	04 Elati Street, Denver, CO 80223	1660 South Albion Street, Suite 309, Denver, CO 80222	201 East Colfax Ave., Denver, CO 80203	4055 South Lowell Blvd., Denver, CO 80236
<b>Major Funding Sources</b>	State per pupil funding grants, contributions	No response	Community Development Block Grant, Community Development Service Grant, private donors	Federal, state and local general funds		Liberty Hill Queer Youth Fund, CDPHE, Sexual Violence Prevention, Astraea, Third Wave Foundation, individual donors	State funding, local foundations, national CASA association.	State and federal funding through Health and Human Services and Education. Funds also received through MHUW and the Morgridge Foundation.	State and federal governments
<b>Population of OY Served (Characteristics):</b>									
<b>Race:</b>									
African American	x		x	x		x	x		x
Asian American		x	x			x	x		x
Caucasian	x		x			x	x		x
Latino/a	x		x	x	x	x	x		x
Indian	x		x			x	x		x
Other						x	x		x
Pacific Islander		x	x			x	x	x	x
<b>Health Status:</b>									
Behavioral Health		x	x	x			x		x
Learning Disabled			x	x			x	x	x
Mental Health									
Physically Disabled			x				x		x
Substance Use/Abuse			x	x			x		x
<b>Gender:</b>									
A-Gender						x			
Female	x	x	x	x		x	x		x
Male	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x
Other						x	x		
Transgender						x			
<b>Sexual Orientation:</b>									
LGBQ	x			x		x	x		x
Straight	x			x		x			x
<b>Justice System:</b>									
Adjudicated Youth	x		x	x			x		x
Foster Youth	x		x	x				x	x
Gang Activity	x						x		x
Incarcerated	x						x		
Institutional Residence							x	x	x
Record	x		x	x			x		
<b>Parenting:</b>									
Father	x						x		x
Mother	x			x			x		x
Pregnant	x			x			x		x
<b>Immigration Status:</b>									
First Generation		x	x	x	x		x		x
Immigrant		x	x		x				x
Refugee		x	x						x
Undocumented		x			x				x
<b>Miscellaneous:</b>									
Family Caregiver									
Responsibilities	x						x		x
<b>Service Provided:</b>									
Mentoring		x	x	x			x		
Drop-In Center									
Training					x				
Social Training	x	x	x	x			x		x
Literacy Training	x	x	x	x			x		
Job Placement	x		x	x					x
Partnerships with Employers				x					
Job Training									
Workforce Training			x	x					x
Workforce Retention			x	x					x
Education									
Alternative Education Center	x							x	x
Remediation								x	
Enrollment Assistance				x					
Tutoring		x						x	
Health									
Behavioral Health		x	x						x
Medical Care		x	x						
Mental Health									
Substance Abuse	x								x
Government Housing	x								
Non-Government Housing									
Department of Corrections							x		
Legal		x					x		
Jail							x		
Financial Assistance									
Food Assistance	x	x	x						x
Physical Activity									
Other									
Advocacy		x	x	x	x	x	x		
Governance							x	x	x
<b>How OY most often find the organization</b>	Outreach, Referrals, Drop-in	Outreach, Referrals, Drop-in	Outreach, Referrals, Drop-in	Outreach, Referrals	Outreach			Outreach, Referrals, Schools and districts	Referrals

	Colorado Latino Leadership Advocacy and Research Organization (CLARO)	Colorado UpLift	Colorado Youth for a Change	Community Building Partnership for Youth in Transition AmeriCorps	Community Re-Entry Project (City of Denver)	Denver Charter School: Colorado High School Charter	Denver Human Services	Denver Housing Authority	Denver Indian Family Resource Center
<b>Ages of OY Served</b>	19–21		16–21	16–18	22–24	16–18	19–21	19–21	16–18
<b>Number of OY Served/Month</b>	0–50		Greater than 300	101–150	0–50	101–150	0–50	51–100	No Response
<b>Geographic Location</b>	309 West 1st Avenue, Denver, CO 80223	3914 King St, Denver, CO 80211	2931 West 25th Avenue #201, Denver, CO 80211	1200 Federal Boulevard, Denver, CO 80204	655 Broadway, Denver, CO, 80203	1175 Osage Street, Suite 100, Denver, CO 80204	1200 Federal Blvd, Denver, CO 80204 (1 of 3)	777 Grant St #4 Denver, CO	1633 Fillmore Street, GL1, Denver, CO 80206
<b>Major Funding Sources</b>	Leadership program primarily funded by NCLR leadership grants/ corporate sponsorship	Privately funded by individuals, foundations and corporations	School districts, foundations	Serve Colorado—Governor's Commission on Community Service. Community Services Block Grant, Department of Human Services	Crime Prevention and Control Commission of the City and County of Denver	State of Colorado	State and federal	Youth WIA funds, fee for service, academies, variety of grant funding	None
<b>Population of OY Served (Characteristics):</b>									
<b>Race:</b>									
African American			x	x	x			x	
Asian American			x					x	
Caucasian			x	x				x	
Latino/a	x		x	x	x	x		x	
Indian			x					x	x
Other			x						
Pacific Islander									
<b>Health Status:</b>									
Behavioral Health				x			x		
Learning Disabled						x		x	
Mental Health									
Physically Disabled									
Substance Use/Abuse					x	x	x	x	
<b>Gender:</b>									
A-Gender									
Female			x			x	x	x	
Male			x		x	x	x	x	
Other			x						
Transgender									
<b>Sexual Orientation:</b>									
LGBQ		x	x			x		x	
Straight			x			x		x	
<b>Justice System:</b>									
Adjudicated Youth				x		x		x	
Foster Youth			x	x		x	x		
Gang Activity						x	x	x	
Incarcerated					x				
Institutional Residence				x					
Record				x		x	x		
<b>Parenting:</b>									
Father			x		x	x		x	
Mother			x	x		x		x	
Pregnant			x			x		x	
<b>Immigration Status:</b>									
First Generation	x		x	x		x		x	
Immigrant	x			x					
Refugee				x			x		
Undocumented	x		x	x					
<b>Miscellaneous:</b>									
Family Caregiver									
Responsibilities			x						
<b>Service Provided:</b>									
Mentoring				x		x	x	x	
Drop-In Center				x	x			x	
Training									
Social Training				x	x	x	x	x	
Literacy Training				x	x	x	x	x	
Job Placement								x	
Partnerships with Employers				x			x	x	
Job Training									
Workforce Training				x	x		x	x	
Workforce Retention								x	
Education									
Alternative Education Center		x		x		x	x	x	
Remediation				x		x	x	x	
Enrollment Assistance			x	x	x	x	x	x	
Tutoring				x		x		x	
Health									
Behavioral Health						x	x		x
Medical Care									
Mental Health									
Substance Abuse					x		x		x
Government Housing							x		
Non-Government Housing							x		
Department of Corrections									
Legal					x				
Jail					x				
Financial Assistance									
Food Assistance					x	x	x	x	
Physical Activity				x					
Other	x								
Advocacy					x	x			
Governance									
<b>How OY most often find the organization</b>	Outreach		Outreach, Referrals	Outreach, Referrals, Drop-in	Referrals, Drop-in	Outreach, Referrals, Drop-in	Referrals, Drop-in	Outreach, Referrals, Drop-in	Drop-in

	Denver Inner City Parish	Denver Online School (@CEC, Mitchell, and Statewide)	Denver Public School Intensive Pathways: Compassion Road	Denver's Road Home	DenverWorks	Family Resource Center	Family Tree	Focus Points Family Resource Center	Goodwill Industries of Denver
<b>Ages of OY Served</b>	16–24	16–18	16–18	16–24	19–24	22–24	16–18	19–24	16–18
<b>Number of OY Served/Month</b>	51–100	0–50	51–100		0–50	0–50	0–50	0–50	Greater than 300
<b>Geographic Location</b>	1212 Mariposa Street, Denver, CO 80204	1350 East 33rd Ave., Denver, CO 80205	1000 Cherokee Street, Denver, CO 80204	1200 Federal Boulevard, Denver, CO 80204	2828 North Speer Blvd., Denver, CO 80211	1750 Humboldt Street, Suite 200, Denver, CO 80220	3805 Marshall Street, Wheat Ridge, CO 80033	2501 East 48th Ave., Denver CO 80216	6850 Federal Blvd., Denver, CO 80221
<b>Major Funding Sources</b>	U.S. Department of Labor, via Latino Coalition; private foundations; individual donors	Colorado Department of Education, Denver Public Schools	Denver Public Schools	Denver Human Services mill levy, fundraising	Latino Coalition—a grant issued to DenverWorks in 2013–2015 specific to 18–24 year olds. Has always served those 18 and older	Colorado Health Foundation CBCAP	Major sources of funding historically WERE: U.S. Health & Human Services Basic Center grant program	Federal grants through the Colorado Department of Education	Grants and self-funding
<b>Population of OY Served (Characteristics):</b>									
<b>Race:</b>									
African American	x	x	x	x	x		x		x
Asian American									
Caucasian	x	x		x	x		x	x	
Latino/a	x	x	x		x	x		x	x
Indian	x					x			
Other	x	x							
Pacific Islander									
<b>Health Status:</b>									
Behavioral Health	x	x	x				x		
Learning Disabled	x		x				x		
Mental Health									
Physically Disabled									
Substance Use/Abuse	x	x	x		x				
<b>Gender:</b>									
A-Gender									
Female	x	x		x	x	x	x		
Male	x	x		x	x		x		
Other	x	x		x					
Transgender									
<b>Sexual Orientation:</b>									
LGBQ		x	x	x			x		
Straight			x	x			x		
<b>Justice System:</b>									
Adjudicated Youth	x		x		x		x		
Foster Youth			x		x				
Gang Activity	x		x		x				
Incarcerated	x								
Institutional Residence							x		
Record	x		x		x				
<b>Parenting:</b>									
Father	x	x	x		x	x			
Mother	x	x	x		x	x			x
Pregnant	x	x	x			x			
<b>Immigration Status:</b>									
First Generation	x	x	x			x			x
Immigrant	x	x				x			
Refugee			x						x
Undocumented	x	x	x						
<b>Miscellaneous:</b>									
Family Caregiver									
Responsibilities	x				x	x			
<b>Service Provided:</b>									
Mentoring	x		x		x	x			
Drop-In Center				x	x				
Training									
Social Training	x		x		x	x	x		x
Literacy Training	x		x		x	x	x		
Job Placement	x		x	x		x	x		
Partnerships with Employers					x			x	x
Job Training									
Workforce Training	x		x		x	x			
Workforce Retention	x				x				
Education									
Alternative Education Center	x		x				x	x	x
Remediation	x				x				
Enrollment Assistance	x		x		x	x			
Tutoring	x		x					x	
Health									
Behavioral Health	x		x		x		x		
Medical Care						x	x		
Mental Health									
Substance Abuse	x		x		x				
Government Housing									
Non-Government Housing	x				x				
Department of Corrections			x		x				
Legal									
Jail					x				
Financial Assistance									
Food Assistance	x		x	x	x	x	x		
Physical Activity			x		x	x			
Other	Department of corrections	x							
Advocacy			x		x				
Governance				x					
<b>How OY most often find the organization</b>	Outreach, Referrals, Drop-in	Referrals, Drop-in, Self advocacy	Outreach, Referrals, Drop-in	Outreach, Referrals	Outreach, Referrals, Drop-in	Referrals, Drop-in	Outreach, Drop-in	Outreach, Referrals, Drop-in	Referrals

	Kappa League	Legal Center for Persons with Disabilities	Lutheran Family Services Rocky Mountains	Mi Casa Resource Center	Mile High Behavioral Healthcare	Mile High Youth Corps/Youth Build	Office of Children, Youth, and Family Services (CDHS)	Project Voyce	Project WISE
Ages of OY Served	16–18	16–18	16–24	16–18	All	16–24	16–18	16–24	19–24
Number of OY Served/Month	101–150	0–50	0–50	0–50	51–100	51–100	Greater than 300	151–200	0–50
Geographic Location	2160 Downing Street, Denver, CO 80205	455 Sherman Street, Suite 130, Denver, CO 80203	363 South Harlan Street, Suite 200, Denver, CO 80226	360 Acoma Street, Denver, CO 80223	655 Broadway, #200, Denver, CO 80203	1801 Federal Blvd., Denver, CO 80204	1575 Sherman Street, Denver, CO	2900 Downing Street, Denver, CO 80205	1301 Kalamath Street, Denver CO 80204
Major Funding Sources	The members of the Alumni Fraternity Chapter and Kappa League's nonprofit foundation	U.S. Department of Education and U. S. Department of Health and Human Services	Mile High United Way; state and federal contracts	21st Century Learning Centers, Community Development Block Grant, foundations	SAMSHA, CDC, U.S. Administration on Families and Children, City and County of Denver, SIGNAL	Government entities provide the most significant support—foundations, corporations, private individuals at a smaller fraction		Foundations, social enterprise, individual and corporate donations, and state grants.	None
Population of OY Served (Characteristics):									
Race:									
African American	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
Asian American					x	x	x		
Caucasian		x	x		x	x	x		
Latino/a		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Indian			x		x	x	x		
Other					x	x	x	x	x
Pacific Islander					x	x	x		
Health Status:									
Behavioral Health		x	x		x	x	x		x
Learning Disabled		x			x	x	x		
Mental Health									
Physically Disabled		x			x		x		
Substance Use/Abuse			x		x	x	x		
Gender:									
A-Gender									
Female			x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Male		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Other					x			x	
Transgender									
Sexual Orientation:									
LGBQ			x		x	x	x		
Straight			x			x	x		
Justice System:									
Adjudicated Youth					x	x	x		
Foster Youth						x	x		
Gang Activity					x	x	x	x	
Incarcerated					x		x		
Institutional Residence Record					x	x	x	x	x
Parenting:									
Father					x	x	x		
Mother					x	x	x		x
Pregnant					x		x		x
Immigration Status:									
First Generation			x	x	x	x	x	x	
Immigrant			x	x	x		x	x	
Refugee			x		x		x	x	
Undocumented			x		x		x	x	
Miscellaneous:									
Family Caregiver Responsibilities			x				x		
Service Provided:									
Mentoring	x				x		x	x	x
Drop-In Center					x		x		
Training									
Social Training	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Literacy Training	x		x		x	x	x	x	
Job Placement			x	x	x	x	x	x	
Partnerships with Employers				x		x			
Job Training									
Workforce Training			x	x	x	x		x	
Workforce Retention				x		x			x
Education									
Alternative Education Center	x					x	x		
Remediation							x		
Enrollment Assistance	x		x				x		
Tutoring				x		x	x	x	
Health									
Behavioral Health			x		x		x		x
Medical Care					x		x		
Mental Health									
Substance Abuse					x		x		
Government Housing							x		
Non-Government Housing					x				
Department of Corrections					x				
Legal		x					x		
Jail					x		x		
Financial Assistance									
Food Assistance					x	x	x		
Physical Activity					x		x		
Other	x					x			
Advocacy		x	x		x		x	x	
Governance							x		
How OY most often find the organization	Outreach, Referrals, Apply	Outreach, Referrals, Parent Contacts the Organization	Referrals	Outreach, Referrals, Drop-in	Outreach, Referrals, Drop-in, All 3; We administer the ACF's Street Outreach Program for Colorado	Outreach, Referrals, Drop-in. We hire them so they submit employment applications.	Child welfare, DYC, or DVP referrals	Outreach, Referrals	Outreach, Referrals

	P.U.S.H Academy	Rainbow Alley (The Center)	Save Our Youth	The Gathering Place	Volunteers of America (VOA)	VSA Colorado	YESS Institute
<b>Ages of OY Served</b>	All	12 – 21	16–24	19–24	16–24	16–24	16–18
<b>Number of OY Served/Month</b>	151–200		Greater than 300	0–50	0–50	0–50	0–50
<b>Geographic Location</b>	4501 Airport Way, Denver CO 80239	1301 East Colfax, Denver, CO	3443 West 23rd Ave., Denver, CO, 80211	1535 High Street, Denver, CO 80218	2660 Larimer Street, Denver, CO 80205	909 Santa Fe Drive, Denver, CO 80204	1029 Santa Fe Drive, Denver, CO 80204
<b>Major Funding Sources</b>	Denver Public School, Colorado Department of Education	Donors Foundation grant funding, earned income	Public and family foundations and individuals	Private donations	U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Mile High United Way	SCFD DOE CCI and various foundations	Foundations
<b>Population of OY Served (Characteristics):</b>							
<b>Race:</b>							
African American	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Asian American		x				x	x
Caucasian		x	x	x	x	x	x
Latino/a	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Indian		x				x	
Other		x					
Pacific Islander		x					
<b>Health Status:</b>							
Behavioral Health		x	x			x	
Learning Disabled			x			x	x
Mental Health							
Physically Disabled						x	
Substance Use/Abuse	x	x					x
<b>Gender:</b>							
A-Gender		x					
Female	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Male	x	x	x				x
Other		x		x			
Transgender		x					
<b>Sexual Orientation:</b>							
LGBQ	x	x	x	x		x	
Straight		x	x				
<b>Justice System:</b>							
Adjudicated Youth	x		x				x
Foster Youth	x					x	x
Gang Activity	x		x				x
Incarcerated							
Institutional Residence						x	
Record	x		x				x
<b>Parenting:</b>							
Father	x		x				x
Mother	x		x	x	x		x
Pregnant	x		x	x	x		
<b>Immigration Status:</b>							
First Generation	x		x				x
Immigrant	x		x				x
Refugee			x				
Undocumented	x		x	x		x	x
<b>Miscellaneous:</b>							
Family Caregiver Responsibilities	x		x			x	
<b>Service Provided:</b>							
Mentoring	x		x		x		x
Drop-In Center	x	x		x	x		
Training							
Social Training	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Literacy Training	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Job Placement	x		x	x		x	
Partnerships with Employers			x				
Job Training							
Workforce Training	x		x			x	
Workforce Retention							
Education							
Alternative Education Center	x			x			x
Remediation	x		x	x			
Enrollment Assistance			x	x	x		
Tutoring	x		x	x			x
Health							
Behavioral Health		x	x				x
Medical Care							
Mental Health		x					
Substance Abuse		x					
Government Housing					x		
Non-Government Housing					x		
Department of Corrections							
Legal							
Jail							
Financial Assistance							
Food Assistance			x	x	x		
Physical Activity	x						
Other							
Advocacy					x		
Governance							
<b>How OY most often find the organization</b>	Outreach, Referrals, Drop-in		Outreach, Referrals	Drop-in	No Response	Referrals	Referrals