

# Youth Employment and Workforce Development: How DYRS is helping young people get jobs, learn job-related skills, and prepare for careers

*“My mind has expanded and my brain has crafted new ideas. The people here are great. There are some things that may become a challenge, but I am willing and determined to get past those. This is what is so exciting for me – it is because every day I wake up I am more and more ecstatic about coming into work and learning new things. This is only the beginning, but as for now I do not like my job – I love my job.”*

– Keith, a young person in the juvenile justice system who is interning with the Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs.

*“My job is to help young men who may not have had a conventional work experience to have a work experience. We give them the confidence to take a risk, be a craftsman, and understand that a skill is something more than can say they have done it. It is the confidence to help them say I want to do it again, and I want to get paid.”*

– Matt Barinholtz, Career Institute Director, New Beginnings Youth Development Center.

## Youth employment and public safety

Along with schooling and having relationships with caring adults, having a job can serve as a critical protective factor that helps young people leave delinquency behind them, and can help improve the safety of the whole community.<sup>1</sup> Research in Washington, D.C. has shown that when youth unemployment rates go down so do youth referrals to the juvenile justice system.<sup>2</sup> Studies that have compared the unemployment rates of states have found that, places with more people working experience less crime than places where joblessness persists.<sup>3</sup> Youth in the juvenile justice system have significant unmet job training needs: most of the young people who end up in D.C.’s juvenile justice system are from and are returning to neighborhoods that have the highest unemployment rates in the city.

Over the last five years, the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS) has refocused its mission to help connect young people to workforce development, employment and educational opportunities, and engage them in activities for job preparedness, a job or a career, and to engage as a productive citizen in our local economy.



*From left to right: Committed youth nailing boards to build the walls of a shed, and engaged in public speaking opportunities.*

### **Workforce development connected to schooling**

In 2007, the DYRS partnered with the See Forever Foundation/Maya Angelou Academy to establish various training programs for youth incarcerated at the District's long-term facility in Laurel, Maryland (previously at the now closed Oak Hill Youth Center and subsequently at the New Beginnings Youth Development Center). These programs include carpentry, construction, horticulture, food preparation and metal working. In addition, the See Forever Maya Angelou Transition Center, which primarily helps reconnect kids to community educational programming upon their release from residential facilities, also provides workforce training for committed youth placed in the community.

### **Practical and applicable job skills**

As part of the Maya Angelou Academy, young people are trained in carpentry, construction, horticulture, food preparation and metal working. Young people also learn what they need to do to get jobs, including training on how to interview, dress, budget and most importantly, how to hold onto a job.



*A youth participating in a mock job interview.*

### **Millions of federal dollars spent in DC neighborhoods connecting young people to work and school**

In 2010, DYRS was able to secure a \$3 million grant from the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) to help establish a program that helps connect young people to work and school. As a part of this program, young people earn money by working in internships and jobs within municipal agencies and community-based organizations. These experiences, coupled with monitoring and coaching, enable young people to develop their work-readiness skills, attitudes and attributes that will prepare them to successfully secure and retain long-term employment and advance them into a career. The federal funds are also paying for staff who both connect committed youth to appropriate educational programs and schools and help them succeed once back in school so they are able to attain their high school diplomas.

**Young people working to enhance our neighborhoods**

Based on a workforce development model used during the Depression-era to build infrastructure around the country, DYRS has partnered with the local Earth Conservation Corps and the national Corps Network to establish a **Civic Justice Corps** for young people under DYRS supervision. While learning critical employment skills, young people enrolled in the Civic Justice Corps helped build the New Beginnings Youth Development Center, and have been engaged in various conservation projects throughout the District. Previous projects include, young people helping the Metropolitan Police Department move their canine unit to new grounds; were part of a mission to Mississippi to help rebuild communities devastated by Hurricane Katrina; cleaning up the Anacostia river, as well as building awareness around green conservation.



*A youth assisting elderly District residents maintain their lawns.*

**Work linked to rehabilitation, restitution and civic engagement**

In the **Guns to Roses** vocational program, young people who end up in the juvenile justice system due to gun crimes are given the opportunity to turn confiscated and decommissioned weapons to sculptures. Youth use their imaginations and are taught traditional blacksmithing, welding and cutting skills to transform weapons works of functional beauty and a symbol of change. As one staff person describes it, *“it connects young men who have been connected with gun violence, and takes the power associated with guns, and converts them into something different.”* Over 400 guns taken off the streets by the Metropolitan Police Department have been melded into sculptures and piece of art, many of which have been placed in the communities where gun violence has occurred.



*From left to right: Committed youth at New Beginnings Youth Development Center learn welding and black-smith techniques in the Guns to Roses vocational program. Final art piece is of a man running through a field of roses.*

## Juvenile justice system is connecting young people to jobs.

### Young people who have left the juvenile justice system are working in our communities

Over the course of the Department of Labor grant, 100 young people under DYRS supervision are employed in jobs or internships across the District. Several dozen young people are working with D.C. government agencies, engaged in work involving computers and technology, the arts and customer service. Young people are working with the Department of Real Estate Services, the Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs, the Commission for the Arts and Humanities, and the Office of the Chief Technology Officer. Most of the young interns are working 15 to 30 hours a week, depending on their schooling or other commitments.



*Youth interning at the Office of Chief Technology Officer present Google Apps to other youth interns.*

### After they return to the community, young people are training for the future

A key indicator the juvenile justice system tracks is, the proportion of young people being connected to work or school six months after they leave the system. Statistics show that twenty-eight percent of young people are connected to workforce development, six months after leaving the system (with 8 of 10 youth connected to school, a positive adult or workforce training, six months after being released).

### DYRS Youth are in school, working, or graduated from high school

Young people in the care of DYRS are working (in internships, paid employment or summer jobs programs), learning a skill, in school, or have graduated from high school, or are in high school or college.

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**Mission:** The mission of DYRS is to improve public safety and give court-involved youth the opportunity to become more productive citizens by building on the strengths of youth and their families in the least restrictive, most homelike environment consistent with public safety.

[1] Elliott, D. S. (1994), "Serious Violent Offenders: Onset, Developmental Course, and Termination. The American Society of Criminology 1993 Presidential Address." *Criminology*, Volume 32, Number 1.

[2] Superior Court of the District of Columbia: Family Court. *Annual Report to Congress, Family Court, 2005*. [www.dccourts.gov](http://www.dccourts.gov); Bureau of Labor Statistics, March 28, 2006. Table: *Employment status of the civilian non-institutional population in states by sex, race, Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, marital status, and detailed age*. [www.bls.gov/lau/](http://www.bls.gov/lau/)

[3] *Employment, Wages and Public Safety* (2007). Washington, DC: The Justice Policy Institute.