

# neighborhood family services coalition

120 Broadway, Suite 230, New York, NY 10271 • phone: (212) 619-1661 • fax: (212) 619-1625 • [www.nfsc-nyc.org](http://www.nfsc-nyc.org)

## members

Advocates for Children of  
New York  
BELL  
Brooklyn Bureau of Community  
Service  
Citizens' Committee for Children  
of New York City  
Church Avenue Merchants Block  
Association (CAMBA)  
Community Service Society of  
New York  
Council of Family and Child Caring  
Agencies  
Cypress Hills Local Development  
Corporation  
The Door  
Episcopal Social Services  
Goddard-Riverside Community  
Center  
Good Shepherd Services  
Harlem Children's Zone  
Harlem RBI  
HeartShare Human Services  
Isaacs Center  
Little Sisters of the Assumption  
Family Health Service  
New Settlement Apartments  
Community Services  
New York Foundling Hospital  
New York Urban League  
Services to Families  
Queens Community House  
Resilience Law and Advocacy  
Project  
SCAN New York  
Seamen's Society for Children  
and Families  
St. Raymond Community Outreach  
United Neighborhood Houses

## facilitator

Jim Marley

## staff director

Michelle Yanche

## staff associates

Ashok Kamal

Gigi Li

## TESTIMONY BEFORE THE NEW YORK STATE DIVISION OF BUDGET

November 29, 2007

### **Re: State Budget for Fiscal Year 2008: Youth Services Funding**

Good afternoon. I am Michelle Yanche and I am here to testify on behalf of the Neighborhood Family Services Coalition regarding the need for sustained and increased investments for young people in the areas of youth development, youth employment, and services for disconnected youth, as well as investments in the youth services workforce.

The Neighborhood Family Services Coalition (NFSC) is a group of service providers and advocacy organizations committed to ensuring that all young people have access to safe, structured spaces in their neighborhoods where they can participate in activities that build their skills, develop their talents, and provide them with opportunities to make positive contributions in their communities. As part of this commitment, the Coalition focuses on the network of community-based organizations that provide youth services, after school programs, summer jobs and year-round employment training for youth in New York City. NFSC also is a co-coordinator with United Neighborhood Houses of the Campaign for Summer Jobs.

I want to begin by thanking the New York State Division of Budget under the leadership of Governor Eliot Spitzer for holding this important hearing and for the opportunity to testify here today.

### ***Brief summary of recommendations (please see attached for more detail):***

***Youth Development:*** Better alignment and coordination of existing programs together with new investments of at least \$30 million to expand access to high quality youth programs. Also, we urge a reinvestment in the Youth Bureau System, the State's regional structure which emphasizes local planning and design in response to identification of local needs. Through these local strategies of coordination and planning, Youth Bureaus administer, monitor and supervise youth development programs

(over)

The Youth Bureau system has evolved the initial service-coordinating role. Many have developed comprehensive infrastructures that administer programs, measure outcomes and demand enhanced accountability that exceed the responsibilities contemplated by current funding streams. The New York City Department of Youth and Community Development is an excellent example. With revitalized funding, Youth Bureaus would be able to assume even greater responsibilities - to apply monitoring skills well beyond current expectations.

**Youth Employment:** Support funding of at least \$35 million for Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP). Tremendous demand for SYEP continues – New York City’s program saw a 30 percent increase in applications to 93,000, which was a new record. In the long term, we urge that SYEP is enacted as a statutory program.

**Disconnected Youth:** We urge the Governor and the Legislature to work together to develop a statewide strategy to address the staggering needs of disconnected youth. We also urge the expansion of statewide programming for these young people. Together with the Community Service Society and United Neighborhood Houses, we have launched the Campaign for Tomorrow’s Workforce, which is a coalition of organizations and leaders committed to envisioning, championing, and building a system to solve the crisis of “disconnected” young adults aged 16 to 24 who are not in school nor engaged in work. The full vision document for this effort is attached to this testimony.

**Youth Workforce:**

Extend Cost of Living Adjustments (COLAs) to youth funding streams. We applaud the recent provision of cost of living adjustments (COLAs) for DOH, OCFS, OMH, OMRDD and OASAS for community and local government providers.

*Thank you for this opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.*

## **Goals, Vision, Principles**

The Campaign for Tomorrow's Workforce (CTW) is a coalition of organizations and leaders committed to envisioning, championing, and building a system to solve the crisis of "disconnected" young adults aged 16 to 24 who are not in school nor engaged in work.

Young people represent an important part of our City's present and future. Yet close to 1 in 5 young adults are currently out of school and out of work. These young people – notably young men of color from economically disadvantaged backgrounds – are at high risk of becoming permanently disengaged from the labor market, threatening their ability to break out of the cycle of poverty. And every New Yorker has a stake in the struggle; when our young lack the skills that local industries need and are unable to support themselves, the cost is borne by all of us.

But a great opportunity is hidden within this civic crisis. In the coming decades, the combination of industry growth and an aging workforce will produce sizeable new openings in the labor market. Young adults with the skills to compete for these jobs will be well positioned to seize this opportunity, obtain employment, and contribute to their families and the larger economy – to become "tomorrow's workforce". We cannot afford to waste their energy, talent, and potential.

For this to happen, developing a solution must be a top priority for all of us. This document represents a vision for how New York City can begin to take on this challenge.

### **Campaign Objective:**

To advance public policy, legislative, and programmatic solutions, transform existing policies, and urge for the increased investment needed to build and sustain a coordinated, high-quality, at-scale system of programs and services to prepare "disconnected" young adults ages 16-24, to succeed in the future workforce.

## **What Do We Want For Our Young People?**

In New York City approximately 170,000 to 200,000 young adults aged 16 to 24 are not in school, nor working. About half of these young people do not have a high school diploma or equivalent, and almost all of them have insufficient skills and little or no work experience. But they are not beyond hope. With the right set of supports, opportunities, and services, disconnected youth can transform their lives and reset their life trajectories. Given some help, motivation, training, and time, these young adults can complete high school or a GED, enter a training program, have an internship or stipended first job, and embark on to college or a career.

The following are important elements that favor a successful transition to adulthood:

- A high school diploma or GED
- The ability to earn a wage and support themselves and their families
- The opportunity to enroll in post-secondary education or vocational training programs
- Positive workforce experiences, with accompanying "hard" and "soft" skills developed through training and work
- Personal connections and supportive services to enable individuals to overcome the life barriers they may face.

An effective system must ensure that young people have viable opportunities to achieve all of the above.

### **The Right Service for Every Youth at the Right Time**

Young adults who have exited the education system unprepared for the workforce vary widely in their levels of work readiness and academic achievement. Some may have acquired perilously few high school credits while others may have already achieved a diploma. Young people in both groups can be equally far away from even a basic grasp of the workplace skills and norms required to hold down a job (see sidebar).

The system we need must meet the needs of each young adult at their own stage of readiness – regardless of how many years of school they have completed or how ready they are for the world of work. For some, that means reconnection to the education system, which now offers promising new opportunities through the Department of Education's Multiple Pathways to Graduation and Alternative Schools and Programs (District 79) offices, though these too must be scaled up to meet the demand for these services.

For others, particularly those young people with too few skills and too little time for high school completion, current services are scarce, thinly funded, and often disconnected in their own right. Turning this around – building the right combination of effective programs with the resources, capacity, and interconnections required to dramatically change young people's lives – is the "invention challenge" that stands before us.

We have strong examples of programs that are striving to work with young adults toward these goals, but these programs have limited capacity and are few and far between. Still, they can serve as models from which to build a system that must be solidly grounded in the best principles and practices of youth development and have the ability to embrace young people where they are and take them to where they need to go.

The system we envision must have the capacity to serve young people with a diverse set of talents, challenges, and needs. For example:

- Young adults who are not yet ready for GED/high school-level programs. Often termed "pre-GED," these young people have literacy and numeracy skills below the sixth grade level. These individuals need long-term, intensive programming to develop academic skills and rebuild their confidence and self-esteem, given the challenges and, often, failures they have already experienced.
- Young adults without a diploma nor the ability or desire to return to school, but who are ready to work towards earning a GED. This group requires supported work-based experiences in order to build competencies and make connections between skill development and employment.
- Young adults with a GED or diploma, but disproportionately low basic skills and need for assistance in bolstering these competencies. These youth may need tutoring to improve academic skills for specific jobs/careers, attainment of post-secondary credential or college degree, work-readiness/pre-employment skills including high focus on training, career awareness and preparedness, intensive skills development for specific jobs/careers.
- Young adults who have a GED or diploma and some workforce experience, but need support that is focused on employment. With these individuals, the challenge is supporting them in their current job while training the worker for his or her next job.

• The After-School Corporation • Citizens' Committee for Children of New York • The Coalition for After-School Funding • Coalition for Asian American Children & Families • The Dryfoos Group • Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies • Human Services Council of New York City • Neighborhood Family Services Coalition • The New York Immigration Coalition • New Yorkers for Parks • Partnership for After School Education • UJA-Federation of New York • United Neighborhood Houses of New York • YMCA of Greater New York

→ **YOUTH DEVELOPMENT**

*The New York City Youth Alliance supports better alignment and coordination of existing programs together with new investments to expand access to high quality youth programs:*

» **The Advantage After-School Program Increase funding by \$10 million**

Since the program's inception, the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) has received more applications for Advantage After-School programs than it can fund. For 2008, OCFS does not plan to release a new RFP for services due to a lack of funding. This increase will bring the total statewide funding for Advantage After-School programs to \$38 million and help narrow the gap between demand and supply.

» **Youth Development / Delinquency Prevention (YDDP) Increase funding by at least \$6.5 million**

The base funding for YDDP has eroded dramatically since 1990 and currently stands \$6.5 million short of the statutory per capita formula. Beyond this immediate increase, we further ask the Legislature to enact budget language to amend the per capita formula to account for inflation and other areas of cost escalation, in addition to an overall increase in the State's youth population.

» **2007 Legislative Increases to After-School - Maintain \$13.925 million for After-School.**

In 2007, due to a crisis in the loss of after-school slots the Assembly added \$13.925 million for after-school programs. Through this measure, school districts and former 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Center programs were able to keep many programs open for an additional year.

» **Extended Day / Violence Prevention Program Maintain Funding at \$30.2 million.**

An initiative managed through the State Education Department, the Extended Day/ Violence Prevention program funds academic tutoring and remediation, conflict resolution/violence prevention, recreational and other programs for nearly 30,000 young people throughout the state. The program is currently funded at \$30.2 million and we urge you to support level funding for this program.

→ **YOUTH EMPLOYMENT**

» **Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) Support funding of at least \$35 million.**

The 2007-08 Executive budget included \$35 million for SYEP utilizing TANF dollars, which was approved by the NYS legislature and included in the final 2007-08 budget. In addition, SYEP was on its own budget line, outside of the Flexible Fund for Family Services (Flex Fund). At least \$35 million is the base support that counties will need (supplemented by any local or Federal sources) to provide nearly 50,000 summer jobs again in 2008, at the State minimum wage of \$7.15. Tremendous demand for SYEP continues - NYC's program saw a 30 percent increase in applications to 93,000, which was a new record. In the long term, we urge that SYEP is enacted as a statutory program.

→ **DISCONNECTED YOUTH**

*We urge the Governor and the Legislature to work together to develop a statewide strategy to address the staggering needs of disconnected youth. We also urge the expansion of statewide programming for these young people, including the following immediate steps:*

» **Build services for disconnected youth**

There is a desperate need throughout the State for services for disconnected youth. Education, job training, workplace readiness and career development services will be tailored to each participant's unique circumstances and skill levels, and complemented by stipended and paid work experiences, wrap-around supportive services and ongoing case management. Young adults will emerge prepared to engage in New York's economic and civic life. Future investment in services must also reach those with the lowest skills, who are below a seventh grade literacy level.

» **Invest \$10 million to increase the number of Out of School Youth served by the State's Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Youth programs.**

New York State's Department of Labor is beginning to implement the Federal Common Measures that are applicable to WIA programs, and which support the expansion of programs for out-of-school youth (OSY). An investment of \$10 million in State funding will expand the number of OSY who can be served without having this expansion come at the expense of WIA in-school youth programs. Increasing the eligibility of WIA-OSY programs to age 24 will also help to increase services.

» **Runaways and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) Increase funding by \$1.5 million**

There is a significant unmet need for these services, including new demands for youth shelter services that have developed due to recent statutory changes to the JD/PINS prevention requirements and restrictions on the use of non-secure detention for runaways.

» **Special Delinquency Prevention Program (SDPP) Increase funding by \$3 million.**

SDPP supports activities such as youth worker training, teen pregnancy prevention programs, gang prevention activities, intensive family counseling, youth advocacy.

» **Attendance Improvement Dropout Prevention (AI/DP) - Add \$5 million for the CBO set-aside by.**

Authorized by Education Law Section 3602(12)(f), AI/DP provides students identified as having attendance and academic problems with a variety of services including counseling, attendance outreach, alternative learning strategies and case management. One of the major goals of the AIDP program is to engage schools in collaborative initiatives with CBOs to prevent students from dropping out of school. Funding for this program has not increased since its inception nearly 20 years ago.

→ **YOUTH WORKFORCE**

» **Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA)**

Extend COLAs to youth funding streams. The Youth Alliance applauds the recent provision of cost of living adjustments (COLAs) for DOH, OCFS, OMH, OMRDD and OASAS for community and local government providers.

## **Program and System Characteristics**

A system of programs and services that effectively meets the needs of young adults must include the following elements:

### *Use of Effective Practices*

- **High standards of quality.** All aspects of program and system design, financing, implementation and evaluation support the highest standards of quality and continuous improvement.
- **Educational and workforce services offered within a strong youth development framework.** Organizations that have the capacity to help young adults improve both their employability and their life skills are poised to have more powerful impacts on the people they serve. This includes, most importantly, a purposeful focus on the strengths and talents that each young person brings to the table.
- **Sustained, supportive one-on-one relationships between youth and adults that underpin service delivery.** Programs must offer effective programs to help young people build relationships that support them to stay on track, develop personal goals and aspirations, address barriers, and manage family responsibilities. Program environments that are small in size are more conducive to the development of supportive staff-participant relationships.

### *Capacity and Scale*

- **Sufficient resources to both expand service slots and raise the quality of staff, training, curriculum and program development, and evaluation.** The system must get both bigger and better if we are to truly address this challenge.

### *Linking to Careers*

- **Full engagement with the demand side of the workforce equation.** Both by looking to currently disconnected young adults as potential workers and by informing what services and training opportunities should be available, employers can offer tremendous value to programs and service providers. Young people need to be prepared to meet the real challenges of the future jobs they will hold.

### *Partnership and Coordination*

- **Partnerships among community organizations, business, government, schools, and colleges – and with youth participants and their families.** All parties involved must agree upon and work toward a shared set of outcomes. Strong institutional relationships can address critical capacity issues within each institution, melding educational and workforce expertise with youth development and counseling know-how. We must create a cohesive, comprehensive, and user-friendly system of services in each neighborhood.