

Report identifies promising practices to help disconnected young adults in Houston

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Credit: Rice University

Interventions that target the educational development of the approximately 110,000 unemployed young adults between the ages 16 and 24 in Greater Houston could help them become more successful and

prosperous, according to a new report from Rice University's Kinder Institute for Urban Research and JPMorgan Chase & Co. Failing to address the needs of these individuals could cost taxpayers an estimated \$30 billion, the report finds.

Nearly 78 percent of the group known as "Opportunity Youth and Young Adults" (OYYA) have a high school education or higher but are not working. The group has a larger proportion of black and Hispanic youth compared with its peer group.

The report, "Houston's Opportunity: Reconnecting Disengaged Youth and Young Adults To Strengthen Houston's Economy," outlines the characteristics of the OYYA population, shares feedback from this group of people and ultimately highlights some suggested best practices to address the needs of these individuals.

"This report underscores how important it is to connect this group of young people to postsecondary education and training programs," said Bill Fulton, director of the Kinder Institute. "This kind of training will help them achieve long-term success in the job market."

Population overview

The population of Houston-area Opportunity Youth and Young Adults represents 14.2 percent of local young people between the ages 16 and 24. They live throughout the metro area, but the population is particularly sizable in suburban areas near Angleton, Baytown, Cloverleaf, Humble and Texas City. Within the city limits, they are found in areas that include Alief, Five Corners and the Fifth Ward. A relatively large proportion of the Houston-area OYYA are black or Hispanic (23 percent and 48 percent, respectively) relative to the overall 16- to 24-year-old population (19 percent and 43 percent, respectively). Approximately 22 percent of this population does not have a high school

credential. Compared with their peers, OYYA are more likely to live in households with an annual income below \$25,000 (55 percent compared with 32 percent).

Despite difficulties securing employment, many OYYA are positive about their economic outlook. More than 1 in 4 members of the local OYYA population rate job opportunities as "poor," yet 72 percent said they expect to be better off within three or four years, indicating the aspirations of this population to succeed.

Feedback from stakeholders and young adults

Researchers conducted interviews with both the OYYA population and organizations that serve them.

The interviewers came away with a number of key points, including:

- Both stakeholders and OYYA said they believe that disconnected youth suffer from a lack of motivation and low self-confidence that's a direct result of stressful home lives, insufficient finances, detachment from school and neighborhood challenges.
- OYYA are more likely than their peers to have a parent who has not completed high school and are more likely to have a parent who is not currently working.
- Many OYYA are charged with family responsibilities that may hinder their ability to pursue work or school.
- Stakeholders and [young adults](#) agreed that education needs to be both relevant and applicable to students' current and future lives; both expressed a belief that this is not happening today.
- There is a disconnect between young adults and training programs and vocational opportunities, and limited guidance is available as they prepare for postsecondary education.

Recommended practices

Following interviews with focus groups, the researchers identified practices that may be used by service providers across the sectors to address the needs of the OYYA population.

- Actively reaching out to young adults and building relationships with them is the key to serving this population effectively. An "opportunity assessment tool" can be used by nonprofits, service providers and others who work with disconnected young people seeking their services to facilitate dialogue.
- "Wrap-around services" that target multiple areas of need simultaneously (for example, a one-stop shop offering employment assistance, educational guidance, family support, resources, etc.) may help the OYYA population navigate a fragmented social services system and keep them engaged.
- Innovative training programs such as the "Earn and Learn" model, which provides youths with the opportunity to learn on the job, develop work-relevant and professional skills and receive compensation for their work, combined with enhanced mentoring and personalized curricula may fill a critical service gap.

"This study shines a spotlight on a group of young people with a vast amount of untapped potential," said Carolyn Watson, vice president of global philanthropy for JPMorgan Chase & Co. "With the proper support and mentoring, they can pursue job and educational opportunities to make their unique contribution to our city."

Provided by Rice University

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