

Year Up: Providing a pathway from poverty to a professional career for urban young adults

Gerald Chertavian

Gerald Chertavian is founder and CEO of Year Up. He delivered the annual IRP New Perspectives in Social Policy Seminar on October 3, 2012.

This article is based on the book entitled A Year Up: How a Pioneering Program Teaches Young Adults Real Skills for Real Jobs with Real Success and the 2012 to 2013 IRP New Perspectives in Social Policy Seminar. It is followed by a reaction by Carolyn Heinrich to the book, and a response to those comments by Gerald Chertavian.

*Lack of money gets less education
No jobs, and further degradation
It's getting devastatin'
And I walk both sides of the tracks
So who better to provide you the facts?*

—Bakari Barrett, *Year Up Graduate*

There are 6.7 million young adults ages 16 to 24 nationwide who are not employed or in school and who do not have more than a high school diploma. Many of these young adults face

multiple and significant challenges to entering the job market, even beyond national economic woes. They lack access to information about job openings as well as transportation and other resources that would allow them to work. Previous strategies to provide employment to this population have been largely unsuccessful; in the few cases where interventions resulted in a positive effect on employment and earnings, those gains generally disappeared over time.

There are many jobs requiring secondary education that go unfilled, while at the same time young adults with the potential to fill them lack access to the economic mainstream and to a way to obtain the needed skills. Year Up seeks to bridge this gap by providing a year of training to prepare low-income young adults for positions with good wages and career advancement opportunities in expanding fields. This is done using a high support, high expectation model that combines marketable job skills, stipends, internships, and college credits. We enhance students' professional and personal development in order to put these young adults on a viable path to economic self-sufficiency.

Skills gap

Figure 1 shows the percentage of 16- to 24 year-olds employed in the United States, from 1948 through 2011. After

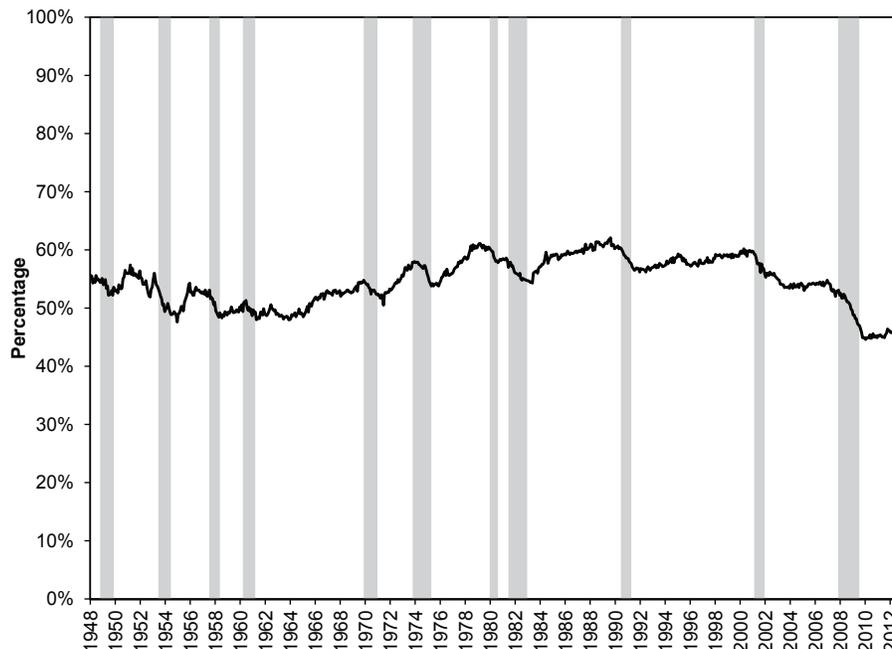


Figure 1. Percentage of 16- to 24 year-olds employed in the United States, 1948 to 2012.

Note: Grey bars reflect recessions.

Source: Seasonally adjusted employment-population ratio for 16- to 24-year-olds, Bureau of Labor Statistics. Recession periods are from the National Bureau of Economic Research.

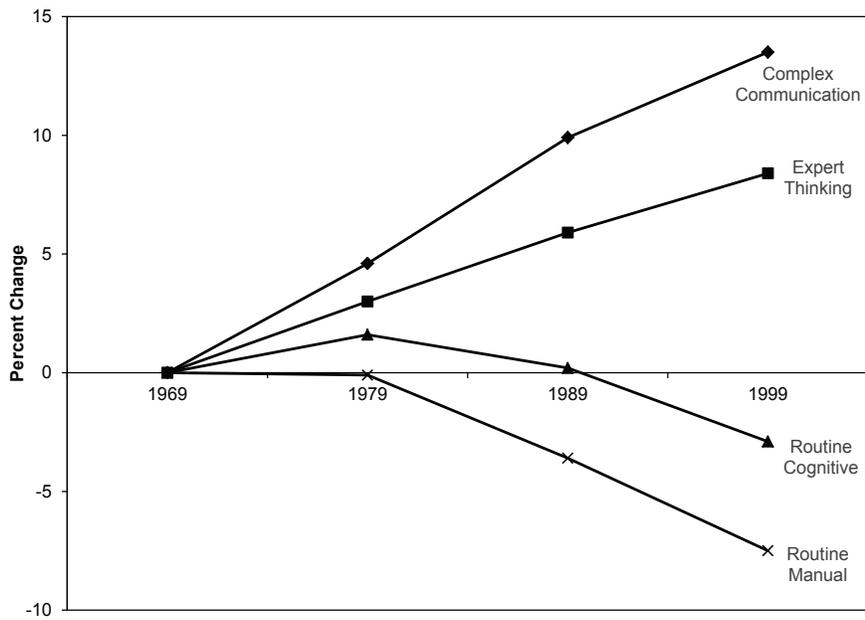


Figure 2. Changes in the tasks carried out by the American workforce, 1969 to 1999.

Source: Adapted from R. J. Murnane, “Preparing to Thrive in 21st Century America,” presentation to the Mobile Area Education Foundation, February 29, 2008.

a steep decline over the last decade, the employment rate has now leveled out at about 45 percent. Disconnected young adults, or “Opportunity Youth” as we prefer to call the population, represent untapped potential for our nation. It is estimated that the immediate taxpayer burden of all disconnected young adults in lost revenues and increased social services is \$93 billion, while the aggregate taxpayer burden of all disconnected young adults over their lives is \$1.6 trillion.¹ Despite these challenges, a majority of these young adults are optimistic that they can achieve their goals, and they accept responsibility for their own futures.²

As the United States shifts to a knowledge economy, our demand for skilled workers is growing. Figure 2 shows a divergence of tasks carried out by the U.S. workforce from 1969 to 1999. The demand for routine manual and cognitive tasks has greatly decreased, while that for complex communication and expert thinking has increased.³ This divergence will only continue, so in order to have a healthy economy, the United States must figure out how to provide workers with the needed skills.

Despite this increased demand for skilled workers, the supply is not keeping up. Even in a time of high unemployment, there are 3.7 million open job vacancies.⁴ A recent study suggests that shortages of workers with some college-level skills could increase to more than 14 million by 2020.⁵ Employers take longer to fill their job openings because applicants lack vital skills, such as communication, teamwork, professionalism, and critical thinking.

Year Up

Year Up was founded in 2001 in response to these challenges, in order to help close the gap between disconnected

young adults and open job vacancies by providing urban young adults with the skills, experience, and support that will empower them to reach their potential through professional careers and higher education. The goal is, in one year, to take an individual from poverty to a professional career.

Program model

The Year Up program model is illustrated in Figure 3. A rigorous admissions process is followed by five months of skills training. Students learn marketable skills in areas such as information technology, financial operations, and quality assurance. Training is also provided in professional skills, everything from dressing and communicating professionally to managing personal finances. Year Up partners with colleges, allowing students to earn college credit for the satisfactory completion of classes. Students spend the next six months in full-time internships, applying their new skills with Year Up’s corporate partners. Each site graduates two classes a year; when one class of students begins their internships, a new class begins the training phase.

All new students sign a performance contract agreeing to adhere to rigorous requirements including high attendance rates, punctuality, professional dress, and completion of assignments. A weekly stipend paid during both the classroom and internship phases of the program is tied to the performance contract; infractions of the contract requirements result in the loss of a portion of the week’s stipend. Students who repeatedly fail to meet expectations effectively “fire” themselves from the program.

High expectations are accompanied by an extensive support system; students are assigned staff advisors who check in as often as needed. Mentors from the business community



Figure 3. Year Up program model.

provide support, serve as role models, and provide networking opportunities. Mental health professionals are available on-site to help students cope with the persistent challenges they face in their daily lives. An essential component of this system is peer support; an orientation week is designed to create bonds that often last long after program completion, and students learn to rely on each other for support to complete the demanding program.

Year Up growth and results

In 2001, Year Up served 22 students in one site in Boston, Massachusetts. In 2013, Year Up will operate in 11 cities serving 1,900 students each year. The operating budget for 2012 was \$48 million, and we have over 250 corporate partners. Since its founding, Year Up has served over 6,000 young adults, and currently has 3,464 alumni.

Within four months of graduation, 85 percent of our alumni are employed, in school full time, or both. Those with full-time employment earn an average of \$15 per hour, or around \$30,000 per year. Ninety-five percent of Year Up interns met or exceeded corporate partner expectations. An outside evaluation of the program (described in detail in the following article) found that Year Up participants earned an average of 30 percent more than a control group, and were more likely to be employed in the professional industries targeted by the program.

What have we learned about what works?

In looking at why the Year Up model has been successful, and what we have learned about providing services to young adults, there are three lessons that stand out: have high expectations and provide high support; emphasize soft skills; and align technical training with employers' needs.

High expectations and high support

The combination of high expectations and high support guides everything we do. Participants are expected to behave as they would in corporate America, and are treated as such; the program provides a set of expectations, and the student decides whether or not they want to abide by them. If the student chooses not to do so, they fire themselves from the program because they are accountable for their own actions. We often tell students that “the most respect we can pay you is to expect a lot from you.”

Enforcing this is often extremely difficult to do. However, our staff understand the demands of the private sector and demonstrate to our students what will be expected when they enter the workforce. This professional support is augmented by social workers and clinical psychologists who provide essential assistance to students dealing with a wide range of issues including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, self-medication, and sexual abuse. Without this support in place when a crisis inevitably occurs, few students would be able to complete the program.

Emphasis on soft skills

As noted in the article by James Heckman, professional or “soft” skills are extremely important for success in the workplace. Training in these professional skills—referred to in the Year Up vernacular as *pro skills*—is integrated into both the curriculum and the program culture. For example, an instructor might interrupt a lesson to point out a student’s nonprofessional behavior during class, and use it as an opportunity to discuss what constitutes appropriate behavior. Staff members are trained in facilitation techniques, and know how to give feedback in a way that it will be heard and accepted by students. Students also receive direct instruction in a variety of professional skills including identifying and dealing with personality types and conflict behaviors, leadership, and team building. Students are taught business etiquette, including topics such as proper table manners for a business lunch, how to write thank-you notes, and appropriate body language.

Alignment with labor market

We are highly focused on providing the technical skill development that is required by businesses. We have a very close relationship with employers, surveying them twice during each internship period, and checking in with them every two weeks. We are responsive to feedback, continually adapting our curriculum to meet employer and industry needs. Ongoing communication with employers also makes us aware of specific skill gaps that corporations have identified.

There are several reasons why corporate partners agree to invest in Year Up. Foremost, we offer a “value proposition” that aligns well with the core business objectives of our corporate partners. Interns enter their workplace poised to develop the full range of skills that will ultimately make them valuable contributors and quality employees. This includes every detail of actually getting to their job on time and being prepared to work, including becoming familiar with the se-

curity procedure necessary to enter the building, and figuring out exactly how long it will take to commute to work from their home. In addition, corporate partners invest in our program because the internship is specifically structured to be low-risk and high-reward for employers; if the internship is unsuccessful, employers do not pay. Since Year Up depends on contributions from employers to operate, this provides a strong incentive to us to make sure we deliver.

As described above, a recent rigorous experimental evaluation has provided evidence that Year Up does deliver on our promises. Even James Heckman, who has argued that training programs aimed at older youth are often ineffective, and that limited resources should be invested in younger children, has noted that programs like Year Up that put an emphasis on soft skills have been finding success.⁶

How do we scale our effects?

While Year Up has certainly been effective at helping the young adults we have served find success in the workforce, we have to date been operating on a relatively small scale. The challenge and opportunity that we now face is to figure out how to expand our model to reach a greater number of people. The number of “disconnected youth” in the United States is large and growing, and our current reliance on private philanthropy restricts our growth.

In order to fully address the large and growing skills gap described above, direct service must be accompanied by systemic change. We believe that the current economic and political environments present a tremendous opportunity to effect such change, and that Year Up can make use of its increasing visibility and credibility on the national stage to assist in that effort.

Our strategy to expand and build on the success of Year Up has three parts: (1) to grow and strengthen our core model; (2) to develop a new “million person” model; and (3) to help create systems change.

Grow and strengthen the core

Although we recognize the need to develop a new model that can serve more people, we will of course continue to grow and strengthen our core model. We are adding programs in new cities, as well as expanding the program in current sites; by 2016, we expect to be serving 2,500 students each year. Growth in current sites is also helping us develop stronger ties to our local communities. We will continue to work on improving the program, and on ensuring the long-term success of our graduates. We are involved in the Innovative Strategies for Self-Sufficiency project (ISIS), a large-scale, rigorous evaluation of nine innovative career pathways programs across the country. ISIS is funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Administration for Children and Families, and led by Abt Associates, a research and program implementation firm. Through this and other long-term evaluation tools, we will continue to prove and improve our program model.

Develop a million person model

At the same time, we are in the process of designing and piloting, in partnership with community colleges, alternative program models that can ultimately serve over one hundred thousand students each year. The colleges will provide the training, while we will provide needed academic, financial, social, and emotional support services to students, as well as internship placements. Through these efforts, we hope to increase graduation rates, and create more successful transitions into the labor market. By making use of the colleges’ existing infrastructure, we are able to reduce program costs to a level where they can be covered by Pell Grants and internship fees, and thus require no philanthropy. These features make this type of model easier to scale up, so that much greater numbers of students may be served. We currently have community college partnerships in all of the cities that host Year Up sites, including transferable credits for Year Up course work.

Create systems change

We are also working to change the way people think about urban young adults and how we, as a nation, can better prepare them for the 21st century economy. Building on the credibility of our core program, our efforts focus on influencing the three key areas of perception, practices, and policies. Thus, we are working first to improve the perception of urban young adults, so that they are seen as economic assets rather than social liabilities. As an example of that effort, the nonprofit Ad Council has recently agreed to produce a series of public service announcements to promote this concept. Second is changing employer practices around finding and developing talent. This means working with employers to identify the skills they really require and the credentials that can provide them, and, for example, changing the common requirement of a four-year degree. Third and finally, we are supporting public policies that increase the number of effective pathways to work for young adults. We will continue these efforts at both the national level and in the various metropolitan areas where our sites operate. Our growing corps of alumni will be critical allies as we pursue this strategy to broaden access to meaningful career pathways to all young adults. ■

¹C. R. Belfield, H. M. Levin, and R. Rosen, *The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth*, (Washington, DC: Corporation for National and Community Service, 2012).

²J. M. Bridgeland and J. A. Milano, *Opportunity Road: The Promise and Challenge of America’s Forgotten Youth*, (Washington, DC: Civic Enterprises, January 2012).

³R. J. Murnane, “Preparing to Thrive in 21st Century America,” Presentation to the Mobile Area Education Foundation, February 29, 2008.

⁴Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Job Openings and Labor Turnover Summary*, October 2012.

⁵A. Carnevale and D. M. Desrochers, “Standards for What? The Economic Roots of K-16 Reform,” Educational Testing Service, 2003.

⁶J. Heckman, Comments at Clinton Global Initiative Plenary Session, Chicago, IL, June 29, 2011.

How does Year Up measure up?

Carolyn Heinrich

Carolyn Heinrich is Sid Richardson Professor of Public Affairs, Professor of Economics, and Director of the Center for Health and Social Policy at the University of Texas at Austin, and an IRP affiliate.

The story of *Year Up's* founding and expansion is as poignant as it is instructive in an academic sense. In his book, *A Year Up: How a Pioneering Program Teaches Young Adults Real Skills for Real Jobs with Real Success*, Gerald Chertavian describes his approach to developing the Year Up program, which was simultaneously grass-roots and high-level in its search for guidance and evidence to build an innovative and viable model for helping urban young adults gain access to the job market. In fact, if I had not read this book and had instead come across the Year Up “High Expectations” program model on my own, I would have guessed that Year Up’s founder sat down with all of the academic literature to design this program. In offering comments on *A Year Up* in this article, I bring both research and policy perspectives to bear in considering the key, inventive aspects of the program model, Year Up’s implementation and reported program results, and its limitations as well as its potential for successful replication and extension of promising features to other interventions for urban youth.

Year Up program model

The Obama administration made clear from the beginning its intent to support only programs that are evidence-based and that can demonstrate success.¹ Year Up has a “leg up” in both respects, in that it has drawn on the best current evidence for what works in connecting urban young adults to the job market, and has opened its doors to evaluators. The program combines both professional and technical skills training, recognizing the importance of developing non-cognitive as well as cognitive skills to prepare youth for the job market, such as leadership skills, decision-making strategies, team building, and business etiquette. In addition, peer support is an integral component of the comprehensive support services that aid program participants in navigating their individual barriers and challenges to success. Year Up also spends considerable time and effort on curriculum development and training to ensure that they meet the labor needs of employers and that both program participants and prospective employers see their relevance. Through its close relationships with business partners and investors, Year Up is able to provide state-of-the-art training, teaching technology skills with cutting-edge software and equipment.

The key role that peers play in supporting the development of professional skills is one of the most important and distinctive innovations of Year Up. This support comes into play in a variety of ways, including helping with assignments, correcting each other’s language, and making encouraging phone calls to keep peers engaged. Moreover, Year Up does not shy away from addressing some of the more difficult workplace issues through peer-led exercises such as “Turn Your Back,” which is used for processing hurtful stereotyping and discrimination that are experienced on the job. These features of the Year Up culture simultaneously build lifelong friendships and professional networks, while contributing to the program’s high completion rates.

Another important innovation of Year Up is the continued intensive support of young adults during their six-month internship. This support helps employers to see Year Up as a “hiring pipeline”: students are trained and integrated into companies through the internships. In turn, the students can count on ongoing peer and staff support from Year Up, as well as financial support in the form of a weekly stipend that is tied to the performance contract. Students also earn college credit for training through Year Up partner institutions.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the key role that the founder’s executive connections have played in reaching the upper echelon of private sector firms and securing from them both donations and opportunities for the young adult participants. Philanthropy has also been essential to expansion of Year Up to other cities. As Chertavian explains: “You can’t afford the people, the infrastructure, the benefits—the mission itself—without a constant, renewable source of philanthropic investment” (p. 272). However, this reliance on dedicated corporate partners could also pose a potential obstacle to implementing the program model on a much larger scale.

Year Up results

The results that Year Up reports are impressive: 70 percent of those entering the program complete it, and all *qualified* students are placed into internships. Ninety-five percent of Year Up interns meet or exceed their internship manager’s expectations, and 85 percent of program graduates are either employed or attending college full time within four months of program completion. Employed Year Up graduates earn \$15 an hour on average, or approximately \$30,000 per year. However, what these figures do not tell us is how much of these results are attributable to the program, compared to what these highly motivated young adults would have achieved on their own.

An experimental evaluation of the Year Up program is being conducted by the Economic Mobility Corporation.² Eligible

Key Findings from an Evaluation of Year Up Year Up's Initial Effects

Characteristics of study participants

Most Year Up participants are members of racial or ethnic groups that face discrimination in the labor market.

When they applied to Year Up, 81 percent of study participants lived with a parent or guardian, a higher percentage than for the overall population of young adults.

35 percent attended college at some point. Only one individual had obtained an associate's degree, and only six percent had attended college during the semester immediately prior to applying to Year Up.

In focus groups, participants who had attended college reported dropping out of college for financial reasons, or because required remedial courses prevented them from taking for-credit classes and progressing toward a degree.

Most study participants have some work experience, but fewer than half were employed at the time they applied to Year Up.

Most participants with work history had held low-wage jobs for short periods of time. The most common jobs were in food service and retail trade.

Table 1
Characteristics of Study Participants

Gender	
Male	57%
Female	43
Age	
18 to 21	72%
22 to 24	28
Race	
African American	50%
Latino	34
White	5
Asian	3
Other	7
Highest Degree	
GED	14%
High School Diploma	85
Associate's Degree	1
Work Experience	
Ever Worked for Pay	88%
Working at Time of Program Application	43%
Longest Job Less than One Year	58%
Median Hourly Wage in Longest Job	\$8.25
Other Characteristics	
English not Primary Language	15%
Not a U.S. Citizen	8
Have Child(ren)	9
Convicted of a Crime	8
Live in Public Housing	18

Year Up Participants had greater earnings in the second year after random assignment

During the first year after random assignment, while treatment group members attended the program full-time, control group members had higher average earnings. However, during the second year after random assignment, following program completion, annual earnings for those in the treatment group were on average 30 percent higher than earnings for those in the control group (\$15,082 compared to \$11,621).

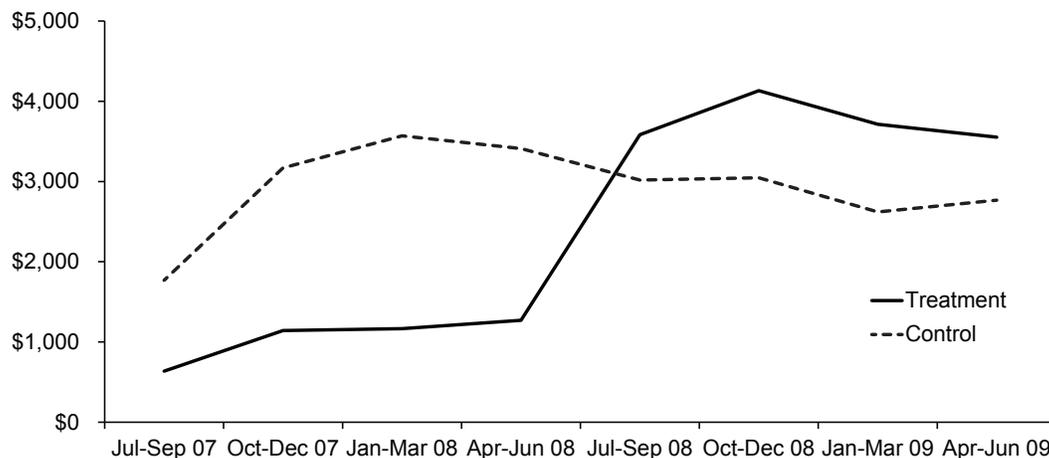


Figure 1. Total earnings during each quarter after random assignment.

Note: Differences are statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level in October to December 2008 and January to March 2008, and at the $p < .10$ level in April to June 2009.

Higher hourly wages drove the earnings difference

Both groups were equally likely to be employed during the second year, but Year Up participants tended to have higher paying jobs.

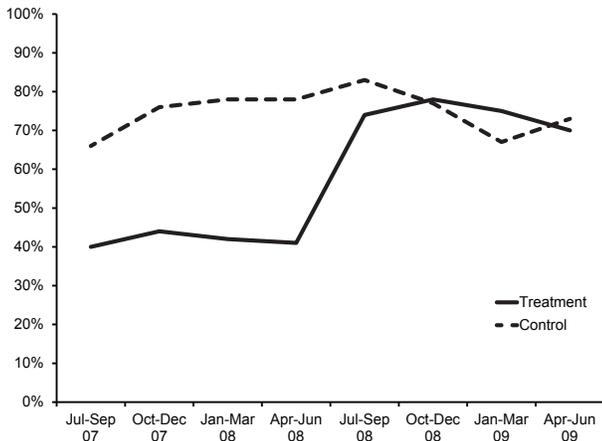


Figure 2. Percent employed at any time during each quarter after random assignment.

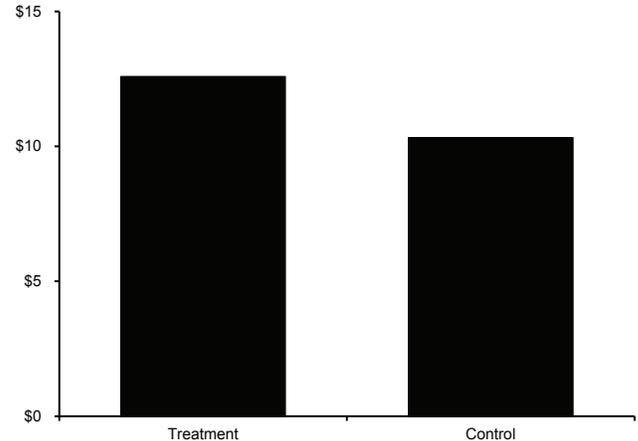


Figure 3. Average hourly wage at current or most recent job.

Year Up participants were significantly more likely than control group members to obtain jobs in the targeted fields, and were more likely to be working full time. The hourly wages of Year Up participants who worked in fields other than information technology and investment operations did not differ significantly from the wages of control group members.

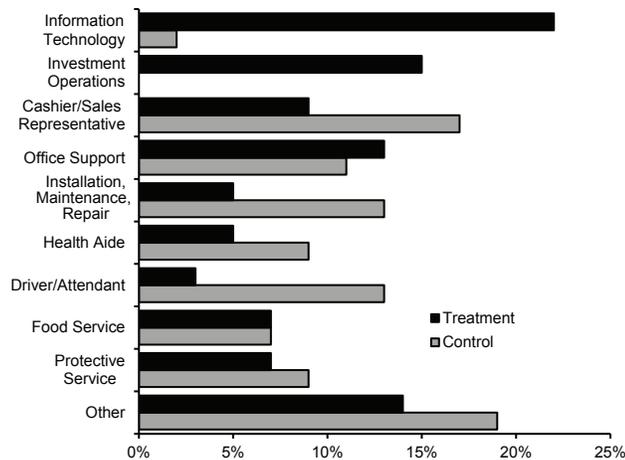


Figure 4. Type of Job held: Current or most recent job.

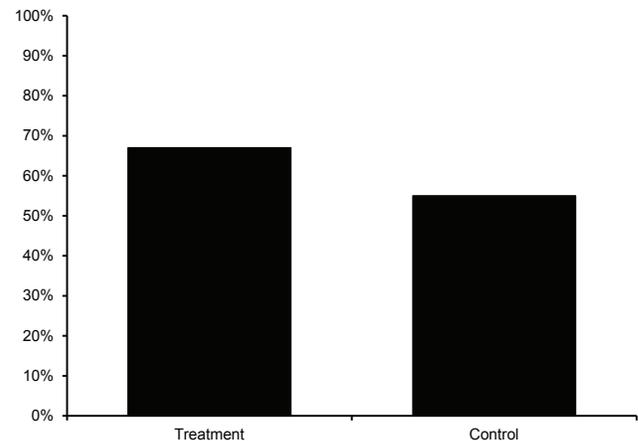


Figure 5. Current or most recent job is full-time.

Year Up participants were just as likely as those in the control group to attend college

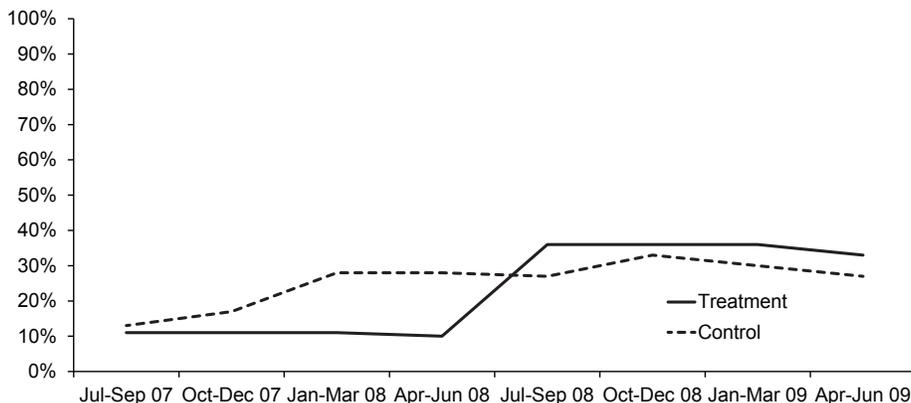


Figure 6. Percent attending college during each quarter after random assignment.

Note: Results from A. Roder and M. Elliott, *A Promising Start: Year Up's Initial Impacts on Low-Income Young Adults' Careers*, Economic Mobility Corporation, New York, NY, April 2011.

candidates in Boston, New York City, and Providence were randomly assigned to either a treatment group (who were able to participate in Year Up) or a control group (who had their names placed on a waiting list, and were told that they could reapply to Year Up after 10 months).³ The sample was tracked for between 24 and 30 months following random assignment. The resulting sample was relatively small, 120 treatment and 44 control group members. The effects estimated in this evaluation represent the average effect of the intent to treat. That is, the analysis includes all members of the treatment group, regardless of whether or not they ever attended or graduated from the program.

Study results are summarized on pages 14–15. As one might expect, the evaluation found that during the course of the program, control group members earned more on average than Year Up participants. However, in the year following program participation, annual earnings for those in the treatment group were on average 30 percent higher than earnings for those in the control group (\$15,082 compared to \$11,621). Treatment and control group members were equally likely to be employed during the second year (86 percent for treatment group members, 83 percent for those in the control group), but treatment group members had higher hourly wages (\$12.58 compared to \$10.32), and were more likely to be working full time. Both groups were equally likely to be attending college during the second year after enrollment.

One somewhat surprising result of this study was the finding of no differences in the availability of employer-provided health benefits or tuition assistance for Year Up participants compared to those in the control group. Year Up cultivates relationships with many large, well-known employers, who might be expected to be more generous than average in their employee benefit offerings. However, these are only short-term results, and studies of other employment programs have often found that program impact estimates change over time. A future report from the Economic Mobility Corporation will address whether earnings gains persist over four years and will also look at program costs and cost-effectiveness.

Comparison to other programs

If I could strike a sentence from the book, it would be one that appears on page 11, in a discussion of the challenging environment that young job seekers face: “Add it all together and you get a workforce development system that really doesn’t work.” In fact, the pattern of impacts for Year Up looks very similar to the patterns that have been found in public training programs targeted toward young, disadvantaged adults, including those in a recent evaluation of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) System that I conducted with colleagues.⁴ We found an estimated average increase in earnings of approximately \$2,400 per year, or 26 percent of average earnings, for disadvantaged women who participated in WIA; disadvantaged men had an average earnings increase of around \$1,700, or 15 percent of average earnings.

The U.S. Job Corps program, which began in 1964 and is administered by the U.S. Department of Labor, is another useful comparison to make with Year Up, because both their missions and costs are very similar. Job Corps offers free education and vocational training to disadvantaged youth ages 16 to 24, primarily in a residential setting, with the ultimate goal of placing students in jobs that are well-matched to their newly-acquired skills. A national study conducted in the 1990s found that four years after program entry, average weekly earnings for treatment group members were \$22 per week higher than that for control group members (\$1,150 annually), a 12 percent earnings gain. The study found that earnings gains persisted beyond the fourth year, in years 5 through 10, but only for those who were 20 to 24 years old at program application.⁵ Other findings of the Job Corps evaluation included increased receipt of GEDs and vocational certificates for those in the treatment group by more than 20 percentage points each, and significant reductions in criminal activity. The Job Corps evaluation raises the question of whether a broader range of potential impacts could also be measured in the Year Up evaluation.

The future of Year Up

Although Year Up’s founder loathes the assertion that the program selects the “cream” among their applicant pool to get results, applicants are required to go through a rigorous admissions process that helps Year Up to identify those who appear to have the motivation and resilience necessary to succeed. Year Up does not work with students who do not have a high school diploma or a GED; this leaves out a large fraction of disconnected youth in the targeted age group. Just 52 percent of black males earned a high school diploma in 2010, up from 47 percent in 2008.⁶ While Year Up clearly still serves a group of young people who are overcoming serious disadvantage, the evaluation results may only generalize to the more motivated group of young adults typically selected for the intervention, not to the larger population of disadvantaged youth.

This begs the question: Can we now take key innovations and insights from the successes of the Year Up program and extend them to other interventions or subgroups of youth? For example, would it be possible to intervene in similar ways earlier in the lives of those youth who drop out before completing high school? Recent research from the Harvard Center on the Developing Child suggests potential for enhancing the development of “executive function skills”—similar to Year Up “pro skills”—at younger ages.⁷

Year Up has likewise not been content in resting on its successes to date. It has revisited its own theory of change and posed the question: How can we now tackle the root causes that drive the need for Year Up? One approach that is being tried is the college-based pilot program, which attempts to move the Year Up model into community colleges. There may also be opportunity for Year Up to partner with and extend its innovative features to other organizations that serve

youth and young adults, including high school-based programs and organizations such as Jobs for Youth Chicago that share its mission and commitment to helping disadvantaged young people succeed in life. ■

¹R. Haskins and J. Baron, *Building the Connection Between Policy and Evidence* (London, UK: NESTA, 2011).

²A. Roder and M. Elliott, *A Promising Start: Year Up's Initial Impacts on Low-Income Young Adults' Careers*, Economic Mobility Corporation, New York, NY, April 2011.

³135 were placed in the treatment group, 60 in the control group. Individuals were most recently surveyed at between 24 and 30 months following random assignment. The follow-up survey response rates were 89 percent for the treatment group and 73 percent for the control group. Researchers found very few significant differences in attrition rates between the two groups and little evidence that those differences could have resulted in bias in the estimated program effects.

⁴C. J. Heinrich, P. R. Mueser, and K. R. Troske, "Workforce Investment Act Non-Experimental Net Impact Evaluation: Final Report," Report to U.S. Department of Labor, IMPAQ International, Columbia, MD, 2008.

⁵P. Z. Schochet, J. Burghardt, and S. McConnell, *National Job Corps Study and Longer-Term Follow-Up Study: Impact and Benefit-Cost Findings Using Survey and Summary Earnings Records Data*, Final Report, Mathematica Policy Research, Princeton, NJ, 2006.

⁶Schott Foundation, *The Urgency of Now: The Schott 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males 2012*, The Schott Foundation for Public Education, Cambridge, MA, 2012.

⁷Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, "Building the Brain's "Air Traffic Control" System: How Early Experiences Shape the Development of Executive Function," Working Paper No. 11, 2011. Retrieved from www.developingchild.harvard.edu.

Response from the author

Gerald Chertavian

I appreciate Carolyn Heinrich's thoughtful comments in response to *A Year Up* and welcome this opportunity to discuss the current nature and future of the program. I have broken down my responses into three categories, addressing issues of scaling, impact, and lessons learned.

Scaling

Heinrich raised a concern about whether the Year Up program model limits scalability. Our program does depend on a number of factors that limit where we are able to expand. For example, public transportation, innovative community college partners, and the depth of the local philanthropic base are factors we consider when looking to expand. However, we believe the basic components of our program model are scalable. These include high expectations and high support for our students, emphasis on both technical and professional skills, and education that is closely tied to work experience.

By 2016 we will serve 2,500 students annually in 12 cities. Even if we were to grow our program to 25 cities, we would still be serving less than one percent of "Opportunity Youth," 16- to 24-year-olds who are neither enrolled in school nor fully participating in the labor market.¹ Our direct service program is central to our enterprise and we are committed to building and strengthening Year Up as a vibrant community asset. However, in order to fully realize our mission of closing the Opportunity Divide, we are pursuing two complementary strategies.

First, we are working to eliminate the barriers that perpetuate the Opportunity Divide by changing national systems. We are engaging and partnering with corporate partners, academics, community-based organizations, and policymakers to build a climate where all young adults have access to meaningful careers and quality postsecondary education. Second, we are designing and piloting alternative program models that can grow rapidly to serve more than one hundred thousand young adults across the United States each year. These "Million Person Model" pilots are being built using the successful practices of our core program and in partnership with community colleges. Currently, we are piloting an alternative model in Baltimore with Baltimore City Community College and in Miami with Miami Dade College.

Impact

In reference to Heinrich's remarks about the experimental evaluation outcomes, it is important to remember that treatment group effects are generally only apparent following the completion of the training program, as was the case with

Heinrich's own Workforce Investment Act (WIA) research. What is particularly notable about the Year Up results is the magnitude of the observed effects and the differences in the employment sectors. We are committed to helping our students' secure professional jobs in the sectors for which they were trained while attending Year Up. Thus, although rates of employment may be only nominally higher than the control group, the 30 percent boost in annual earnings is substantial and lasting. These results are even more significant when considering that they occurred in a program serving low-income young adults, a population that has traditionally been very difficult to serve. Furthermore, these results were attained without producing any negative impacts on the treatment group's college attendance. That is, even while getting into more demanding, higher-wage jobs, students were not forced to decide between education and work.

Year Up also has a strong focus on long-term outcomes. While we report postsecondary enrollment four months after the program, we continue to support our alumni in their work towards postsecondary completion. Part-time students in our target population only graduate at a rate ranging between 12 percent and 24 percent. While we are still collecting conclusive evidence, the early reports are very promising: a survey of our alumni shows that of those who enrolled in school, 84 percent have either completed or persisted in their studies. We are confident that our alumni, anchored by career pathway jobs and a base of college credit received while at Year Up, will complete postsecondary credentials at substantially higher rates than their peers.

The workforce development system

Heinrich took exception to the sentence from *A Year Up*, "Add it all together and you get a workforce development system that really doesn't work," noting that the pattern of effects for Year Up looks very similar to those observed for disadvantaged adults in the WIA System. While we believe strongly in the value of government-supported workforce development initiatives, I would counter that alternative training programs are not producing the outcomes needed. A 2010 Department of Labor study on federally financed workforce training programs found that "ultimate gains from participation are small or nonexistent," with graduates earning no more than nonparticipants three and four years later.² While nearly half of the respondents to a recent employer survey offered workforce readiness training for their new hires, most report the programs to be only "moderately" or "somewhat" successful.³

Year Up is providing a clear, workable solution to a persistent and significant problem. The result of failing to educate and train new workers is that businesses lack the talent they need

to thrive. Out of nearly 1,200 organizations polled in a study by the American Society for Training and Development, 79 percent state that a “skills gap” exists in their organization, defined as “a significant gap between an organization’s current capabilities and the skills it needs to achieve its goals.” The top reason given for that skills gap was that the skills of the current workforce do not match changes in company strategy, goals, markets, or business models.⁴

Measuring the program

Heinrich asked whether Year Up should measure a broader range of program effects. Given our relatively brief tenure as an organization, we currently assess outcomes that the program can reasonably influence in the short-term, such as employment, salary, and school enrollment. We are strongly committed to understanding the longer term impacts of our program as we continue to engage and support our growing alumni base. In our first Long-Term Graduate Success Survey, which surveyed over 1,200 (61 percent) of our alumni in 2012, we examined factors such as homeownership and family life to gain a broader and deeper knowledge of where our alumni are now. With this information, we are in a better position to develop strategies that will ensure their success in the future. We are also participating in the Innovative Strategies for Increasing Self-Sufficiency study, a rigorous longitudinal evaluation of a variety of “career pathways” organizations being conducted by the Administration for Children and Families. The study will evaluate Year Up’s impact on a much wider range of factors, including healthy behaviors and psycho-social development.

Population served

As Heinrich noted, Year Up does not work with students who do not have a high school diploma or a GED. Through our partnership with local colleges, Year Up participants receive college credit for the classes they take while in the program. To earn these credits, our college partners require that our participants have a high school diploma or GED. Additionally, corporate partners usually require that employees have a high school diploma or GED. We do work with a number of educational and community-based organizations that assist young adults who do not have a high school diploma or GED. Many young adults express interest in our program, find out about the GED requirement, complete a GED, and then subsequently enroll in Year Up. For all enrollees through November 2012, roughly 1 in 5 did not graduate from high school and instead earned a GED.

Heinrich notes that Year Up is a selective program, and that the evaluation results can only be generalized to the more motivated group of young adults selected for the intervention. We believe that when all young adults are held to high expectations and given high support, they are able to achieve anything they set out to do. Our students, like millions of young people, do not have access to the tools and support they need to connect to a meaningful career path, but are motivated and determined. Many of our students lacked the resources, both financial and non-financial, to persist

in postsecondary education. They typically attended underperforming high schools with overburdened college and career counselors. Often they did not have a support system or role models who could help them navigate the transition from school to a long-term career.

During the admissions process, our Student Services department conducts a comprehensive “Readiness Assessment” with every student to identify challenges that could hinder his or her success in the program. We have found that over 40 percent of students have significant financial risk such as receipt of public benefits, working significant hours outside of the program, or not having health insurance. One-third of students have a family risk; they have been in foster care or group homes, are the primary caregiver for a family member, or are dealing with a significant family crisis. Fourteen percent of our students are parents, and 9 percent are homeless or transient. Our students, like many young adults in this country, face tremendous challenges to success.

Lessons learned

Heinrich wondered whether lessons from Year Up could be used to intervene earlier in the lives of at-risk youth. We strongly believe parts of our model are transferable and beneficial for younger audiences. As a member of the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, I chaired a cross-sector Task Force on Integrating College and Career Readiness, which in part sought to harness the innovations and insights from a number of successful programs, including Year Up, to serve all Massachusetts students. For instance, Year Up’s program is rooted in a “high expectations, high support” culture. We hold our students to high standards because we believe in their potential and refuse to accept anything less. We also want to prepare them for the rigor of the corporate world when they begin their internships and start their careers. To make sure that our students are set up for success, the program also provides the high level of support they need to navigate a challenging environment—these supports include a strong learning community of peers, staff advisors, volunteer mentors, tutors, and educational stipends.

In terms of extending the features of Year Up to other organizations that serve youth and young adults, we believe this squarely falls within our goal of closing the Opportunity Divide. To accomplish this, we will need deep and wide-reaching changes in our nation to provide every young person with the opportunity to succeed. Year Up offers one solution out of many, but we know we cannot realize our vision for the future on our own; we do not have all the answers. We believe sharing knowledge and information is essential to ensuring that we are all working together effectively to increase opportunities for young people. We are willing to share what we have learned with others, and are eager to incorporate new insights from our allies in the field. Through our systems change strategy, we work with others to expand meaningful career pathways for young adults and

connect employers to this underutilized pool of talent. For instance, through coalitions and strategic partnerships with like-minded organizations, we advocate for government funding that rewards program outcomes rather than efforts. We also work to engage more employers in providing career opportunities for young people through mentoring, internships, or innovative hiring practices that target Opportunity Youth. These efforts often point to Year Up as an example of “what works” in developing effective career pathways, but our goal is not to elevate Year Up, but to promote systemic changes in perception, practice, and policy that expand opportunities for all young adults.■

¹C. R. Belfield, H. M. Levin, and R. Rosen, *Economic Value of Opportunity Youth*, Civic Enterprises, Report to the Corporation for National and Community Service and the White House Council for Community Solutions, 2012, at www.civicerprises.net/MediaLibrary/Docs/econ_value_opportunity_youth.pdf.

²P. S. Goodman, “After Training, Still Scrambling for Employment,” *New York Times*, July 18, 2010.

³J. Casner-Lotto, E. Rosenblum, and M. Wright, *The Ill-Prepared U.S. Workforce: Exploring the Challenges of Employer-Provided Workforce Readiness Training*, The Conference Board, American Society for Training and Development, Society for Human Resource Management, and Corporate Voices for Working Families, Research Report, 2009.

⁴P. Galagan, *Bridging the Skills Gap: New Factors Compound the Growing Skills Shortage*, American Society for Training and Development, 2010.

Kids’ Share Project

Kids’ Share is a series of reports from the Urban Institute looking at trends in federal and state spending and tax expenditures on children.

Kids’ Share 2012: Report on Federal Expenditures on Children Through 2011

Julia Isaacs [IRP affiliate], Katherine Toran, Heather Hahn, Karina Fortuny, C. Eugene Steuerle

The most recent annual report provides a comprehensive look at trends over the past 50 years in federal spending and tax expenditures on children. Key findings suggest that the size and composition of expenditures on children have changed considerably, and that children have not been a budget priority. <http://www.urban.org/publications/412600.html>

How Targeted Are Federal Expenditures on Children? A Kids’ Share Analysis of Expenditures by Income in 2009

Tracy Vericker, Julia Isaacs [IRP affiliate], Heather Hahn, Katherine Toran, Stephanie Rennane

This report provides an analysis of how the allocation of public resources for children varies by family income. Key findings indicate that in 2009, 70 percent of all federal expenditures on children served the 42 percent of children who are living in families with incomes less than twice the federal poverty level. While low-income children received 84 percent of outlays on children, higher-income children received 82 percent of tax reductions benefiting children. <http://www.urban.org/publications/412522.html>

Kids’ Share Website: http://www.urban.org/projects/kids_share.cfm