

# YouthBuild USA Youthful Offender Project Year 1



August 2007



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# YouthBuild USA Youthful Offender Project Year 1

**By Anne Leslie**

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*The photos in this report are of YouthBuild students and program staff. Not all youth pictured are ex-offenders.*

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***Most people who have fallen off the track, suffered losses, and made mistakes can recover.***

***If given a chance, they can learn to cope with obstacles and care effectively about themselves, their families, and their communities.***

***They can gain the skills and attitudes to become strong, successful leaders who will help others.***

from the *Declaration of Inter-dependence*, a policy statement of the Alumni Council and Young Leaders Council of YouthBuild USA



# Foreword

This report on the YouthBuild USA Youthful Offender Project offers a hopeful counterpoint to the reality of incarceration experienced by hundreds of thousands of Americans ages 16–24. It provides a rich picture of possibility and promise for young people who are re-entering local communities from prison, or who are adjudicated and seeking productive pathways toward renewal, transformation, leadership, and economic independence.

The boom in the prison population—and the \$1 billion spent to keep inmates locked up—is not matched by the investment in education, job training, and counseling needed for the 100,000 young adults re-entering local communities each year. But as this report shows, the YouthBuild program model provides a workable, cost-effective, and scalable alternative to incarceration, and a viable re-entry pathway for youthful offenders seeking to transform their lives and become productive, contributing members to the economic and social vitality of their communities.

Thirty-four YouthBuild programs from urban and rural areas nationwide participated in this demonstration project, which embraced a vision common to YouthBuild and the Department of Labor: connecting adjudicated youth to quality education and livelihoods in a rapidly changing economy. This report speaks to the ingenuity, passion, and perseverance of YouthBuild program operators who have forged partnerships with the criminal justice system to better serve youthful offenders. It also underscores the efficacy of the YouthBuild tenet that young people with troubled pasts can transform themselves into productive citizens when offered a program that combines job training, education, personal support, community service, and leadership opportunities.

We expect that this report, combined with the in-depth evaluation of this project being conducted by the Department of Labor, will make an important contribution to the body of programs and policies focused on diversion and re-entry alternatives. We have witnessed that the appeal of the YouthBuild approach lies in speaking to the commonly held values and interests of young people, citizens, and leaders from the criminal justice, law enforcement, and political sectors to provide personal and career development to all citizens within safe and economically vibrant communities.

We hope you enjoy this report.





# Acknowledgements

We would like to appreciate the many people who contributed their support, expertise, time, and faith to make YouthBuild USA's Youthful Offender Project possible and successful.

First, thank you to Senator Arlen Specter, who by championing the Department of Labor's Incarcerated Youth Re-entry Program as a special line item in the federal budget, established funding in Congress for a national commitment to create positive opportunities for youthful offenders.

Thank you to the leadership at the U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration (ETA) who have guided and supported this project well: Assistant Secretary Emily DeRocco, Deputy Assistant Secretary Mason Bishop, Director of Youth Services Gregg Wertz, and Youth Development Specialist Anne Stom. Thanks to Lorenzo Harrison for his role when he was at the ETA.

Thank you to Laurence Jones, director of YouthBuild USA's Youthful Offender Project, for managing the initiative since it was launched in 2004, and for his special concern for improving education and placement outcomes for the young people in the program. Anne Leslie, who served as primary author of this report, provided comprehensive administrative support as project associate during the initiative's first grant cycle. Sarah Rocha continued this work during the second and third grant cycles.

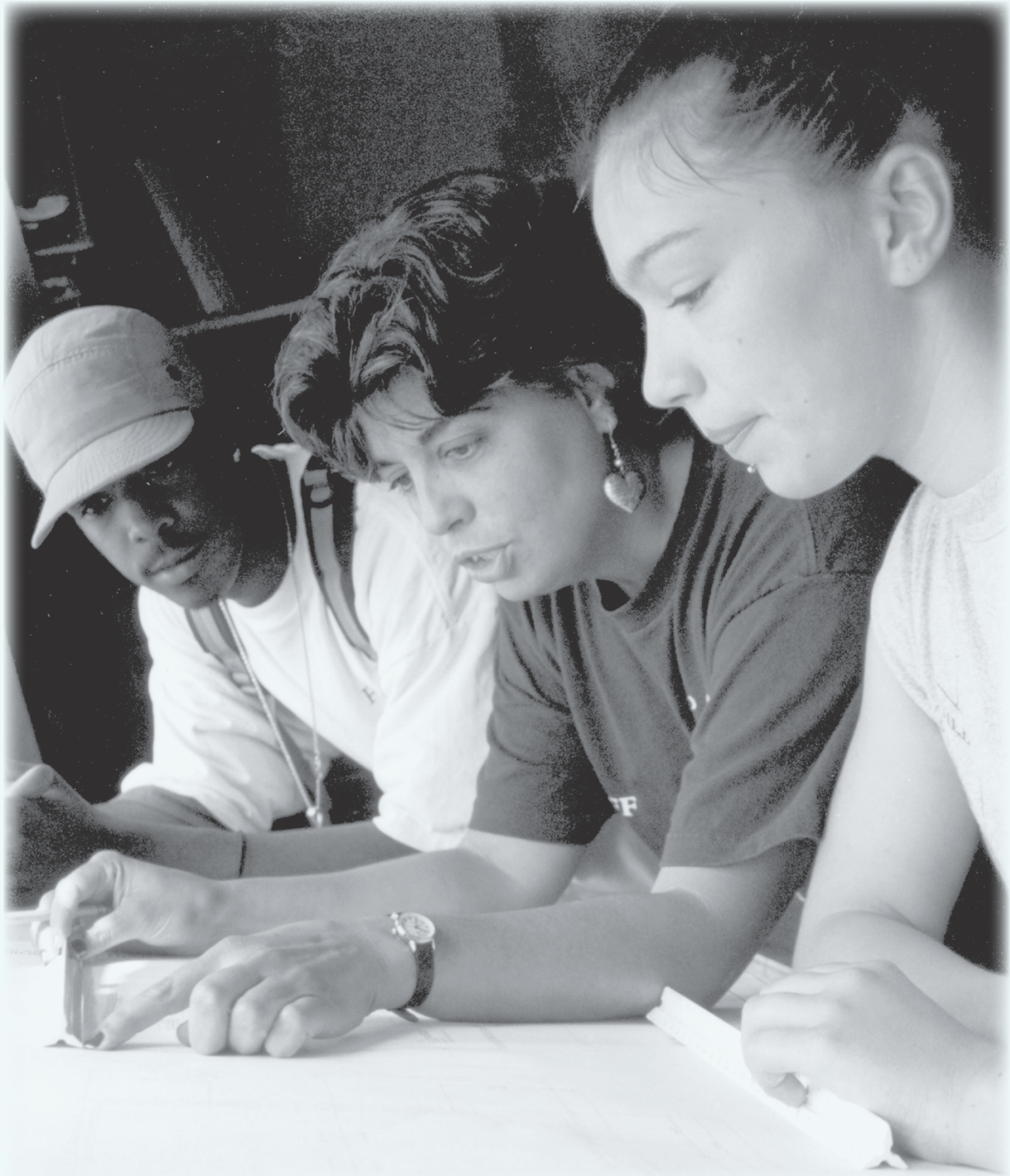
Thank you to Taylor Frome for managing the provision of technical assistance to the project's subgrantees, and to the multiple program advisors who provided on-the-ground support to various programs. YouthBuild USA's Knowledge Management Team played a critical role in collecting, analyzing, and submitting outcomes data accurately and on time; the Academy for Transformation helped to share best practices among subgrantees through effective and inspiring workshops.

The directors of all the YouthBuild subgrantees deserve overwhelming appreciation for their unwavering commitment to the success of their programs' students and graduates. Because of them, so many of our nation's youth are empowered to realize their potential.

Most important, thank you to the young people who have made a conscious decision to transform their lives, to improve their communities, and to create a better world for their children. We applaud your courage and determination and hope that we can continue to support you in your efforts.

Dorothy Stoneman  
President and Founder  
YouthBuild USA

Tim Cross  
Chief Operating Officer  
YouthBuild USA



# Executive Summary

## YouthBuild

YouthBuild is grounded in the philosophy that given the right context—an environment filled with respect, a caring community, a positive peer group, a valued role in the neighborhood, an opportunity to develop skills, high standards of self-discipline and performance, and the means to future education and employment—young adults with troubled pasts can transform themselves into productive citizens with viable futures. YouthBuild provides this opportunity through a unique combination of education, skill-building, counseling, leadership development, community service, positive values and relationships, high standards of behavior, and clear pathways to a productive future.

During the 9- to 24-month, full-time YouthBuild program, youth spend half of their time learning construction trade skills by building or rehabilitating housing for low-income people; the other half of their time is spent in a YouthBuild classroom earning a high school diploma or equivalency degree. Personal counseling and training in life skills and financial management are provided. The students are part of a mini-community of adults and youth committed to each other's success and to improving the conditions in their neighborhoods.

It is the comprehensive nature of YouthBuild that attracts youthful offenders, draws them in towards a positive lifestyle, and facilitates their successful transformation.

YouthBuild programs have always welcomed young adults who have been convicted of crimes, as long as they show a sincere desire to work hard to achieve a positive lifestyle. Historically, more than 30 percent of YouthBuild students have been court-involved; about 13 percent have been convicted of felonies.

## The YouthBuild USA Youthful Offender Project

In 2004, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) selected YouthBuild USA to participate in its Incarcerated Youth Re-entry Program. DOL granted \$12.2 million over two years to YouthBuild USA, to be re-granted to local YouthBuild programs, with the aim of engaging a total of 325 students full-time per year.

YouthBuild USA served as the overall intermediary and support center for the project, guiding local implementation through training and technical assistance, managing the grant process, and reporting to DOL. YouthBuild USA selected 30 subgrantees representing 16 states to participate in the project's pilot year.

The YouthBuild USA Youthful Offender Project was officially launched on July 1, 2004, with the first program year of the grant period ending on December 31, 2005.

Youth eligible to participate in the project fit into one or more of three categories:

- Young people who have been referred by the courts to YouthBuild as a diversion program to avoid incarceration, including those on probation; or
- Young people, having served time in prison or jail, referred by the criminal justice system to YouthBuild in a coordinated re-entry process, including those on parole; or
- Young people who find their own way to YouthBuild—having been convicted of a crime and served time in prison or jail previously—who still need education or job training opportunities.

In the project's first year, more than 85 percent of the participants were male. Nearly 55 percent were African American, 19 percent were Hispanic, and 17 percent were white. Eighty-nine percent entered without a high school diploma or GED. Forty-three percent received public assistance at enrollment.

## Youthful Offender Project Outcomes

The YouthBuild USA Youthful Offender Project completed its inaugural year by exceeding all but one of the short-term target outcomes, as outlined in the table below:

YouthBuild USA Youthful Offender Project — Year One Outcomes			
Outcome	Target	Actual	% of Target
Enrollment	325	388	119%
Completers	195	272	139%
Received GED or HSD	111	150	135%
Placement of completers	166	208	125%
Wage (per hour)	\$8.00	\$8.94	112%
Received skill certificates	n/a	509	n/a
Received driver's license	n/a	86	n/a
Recidivism of completers*	< 29 (< 15%)	67 (25%)	Did not reach target

*\*For the purposes of this demonstration project, and as agreed to with the Department of Labor, YouthBuild USA considers recidivism to have occurred when an individual who had been previously convicted of a crime is re-convicted after entering the project or is incarcerated due to a parole or probation violation. Although the low target recidivism rate of 15 percent was not reached, the 25 percent rate is very favorable considering that nationally, 67 percent of offenders who had been previously incarcerated are re-arrested within three years of their release, and 51 percent are re-incarcerated.*

In its second year, the project continues to exceed the target outcomes, including the low recidivism rate of 15 percent (these are incomplete outcomes, as 41 youth are still enrolled):

YouthBuild USA Youthful Offender Project — Year Two Outcomes			
Outcome	Target	Actual	% of Target
Enrollment	325	409	126%
Completers	195	273	140%
Received GED or HSD	111	136	123%
Placement of completers	166	188	113%
Wage (per hour)	\$8.00	\$8.78	110%
Received skill certificates	n/a	627	n/a
Received driver's license	n/a	70	n/a
Recidivism of completers*	< 29 (< 15%)	41 (15%)	Near target

*\*as of June 30, 2007*

Due to the success of the YouthBuild USA Youthful Offender Project in its pilot year, the Department of Labor awarded YouthBuild USA a \$6 million grant to extend the project for a

third year and decided to implement a thorough qualitative study of all subgrantees to understand the reasons for their success.

The accomplishments of the YouthBuild USA Youthful Offender Project reaffirm the effectiveness of YouthBuild's program design and philosophy—in particular, the value for disconnected young people of an environment that promotes respect, caring, mutual responsibility, community service, academic and job skills, meaningful work, high standards, leadership development, and a path to opportunity.

The achievements also confirmed the need for programs like YouthBuild to support youthful offenders' successful re-entry into society. The nation and the economy need youthful offenders to be productive rather than destructive, contributing rather than draining, free and paying taxes rather than locked up at public expense. Their families and communities need them to transcend their problems and become responsible for improving their own lives. Each one needs the opportunity to fulfill his or her potential and dreams, and to become a person who can make a positive difference.



# Introduction

## The reality for youthful offenders

Nearly 400,000 young adults ages 16–24 are incarcerated in the United States. Before entering prison, youth offenders have already faced many hardships. Many are poor: One-fourth of offenders under age 25 have lived in public housing, and almost half of the youths’ parents or guardians have received public assistance.<sup>1</sup>

Many also grew up in unstable or unhealthy environments. Approximately 16 percent of youthful offenders have experience with the foster care system or have lived in institutional homes. About one-third have a parent who has been incarcerated; the same number has a parent or guardian with a substance abuse history.<sup>2</sup>

The legacy of these hardships compound the obstacles that the more than 100,000 young adults who are released from prison each year confront upon re-entry into society. Sixty-five percent of youthful offenders have dropped out of high school, so they lack the educational requirements to obtain living-wage jobs. Even if they have diplomas, few employers will hire them. Candidates with criminal records are half as likely to receive job offers than applicants with no record; African American offenders are two-thirds less likely to receive offers.<sup>3</sup>

In addition, offenders often lose access to public benefits, hindering their re-entry into society. In 11 states, for example, formerly incarcerated people are not allowed to vote. According to federal law, some individuals with nonviolent drug offenses are ineligible for welfare benefits and education loans; federal law also allows public housing agencies to deny eligibility to people with criminal backgrounds. In some states, their driver’s licenses are revoked, jeopardizing their ability to work if they are able to obtain a job at all.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Christopher Uggen, Sara Wakefield, Jeremy Travis, and Christy Visher, “Weaving Young Ex-Offenders Back into the Fabric of Society” (policy brief, Network on Transitions to Adulthood, Department of Sociology, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, 2005).

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Uggen et al., “Young Ex-Offenders.”

With the loss of public supports and the lack of education and job opportunities, it is no wonder that the Bureau of Justice Statistics finds that 67 percent of offenders who had been previously incarcerated are re-arrested within three years of their release, and 51 percent are re-incarcerated.

## The need for re-entry programs

Nationwide, the numbers of individuals entering prison and re-entering local communities after incarceration continue to grow at an alarming speed, despite a drop in crime rates. As of 2005, almost one in every 136 United States residents was imprisoned in this country. Black men comprise more than 40 percent of the nation's prison population; a black male born today has a 32 percent chance of spending time in prison. This overrepresentation of people of color in prison is often attributed to their unequal targeting and treatment throughout the criminal justice process, from arrest to sentencing. For example, according to a January 2007 report from the National Council on Crime and Delinquency, African American youth are four-and-a-half times more likely than white youth to be detained for identical offenses. When charges are filed, white youth are more likely to be placed on probation while black youth are more likely to get locked up.

This boom in the prison population—and the corresponding \$1 billion price tag to keep inmates locked up in facilities—has not been matched by appropriate education, job training, and counseling measures to prepare inmates for re-entry to society. A 1997 survey found that only 13 percent of prisoners due to be released in a year were participating in any type of pre-release program.<sup>5</sup>

A recent *San Jose Mercury News* editorial summarizes the dire situation in California, where the recidivism rate is the nation's highest:

Crowded facilities, with inmates overflowing into gyms and libraries, snuff out vocational, drug counseling, and recreational programs and feed resentment. Overtime pay for guards consumes money that could have gone to rehabilitation. Prisoners with little hope and no training bounce in and out of the system.

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5. James Lynch and William Sabol, *Prisoner Reentry in Perspective* (Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute Justice Policy Center, 2001).



Without adequate rehabilitation, education, and job-training opportunities, recidivism is highly likely, with negative repercussions for society at large, and for youthful offenders specifically. Young people who are repeatedly involved with the criminal justice system are more likely to be tried and sentenced as adults, and therefore placed in adult facilities. The suicide rate for youth in adult prisons is five times the rate of the general youth population and eight times the rate of adolescents in juvenile detention facilities. Youth in adult detention centers are also more likely than the general prison population to be victims of rape and assault.<sup>6</sup>



Besides the moral imperative for re-entry programs, reducing recidivism rates makes financial sense, too. Averting incarceration generates substantial cost savings to taxpayers, as significant portions of state budgets are now invested in the criminal justice system. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, expenditures on corrections alone increased from \$9 billion in 1982 to \$62 billion in 2004. These figures do not include the cost of arrest and prosecution, nor do they take into account the cost to victims.

## **Why YouthBuild works for youthful offenders**

YouthBuild is grounded in the philosophy that given the right context—an environment filled with respect, a caring community, a positive peer group, high standards of self-discipline and performance, a valued role in the neighborhood, an opportunity to develop skills, and the means to future education and employment—young adults with troubled pasts can transform themselves into productive citizens with viable futures. YouthBuild provides this opportunity through a unique, full-time combination of education, skill-building, counseling, leadership development, community service, positive values and relationships, high standards of behavior, and clear pathways to a productive future.

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6. Community Research Center. (1990).

## About YouthBuild

In local YouthBuild programs, low-income young people ages 16-24 work toward their GED or high school diploma while learning job skills by building affordable housing for homeless and low-income people. Since 1994, more than 68,000 young people have helped rebuild their communities, transform their lives, and create more than 16,000 units of affordable housing.

Because a comprehensive approach is called for, the YouthBuild program has gradually and inevitably become a number of things at once:

**An alternative school,** in which young people attend a YouthBuild school full-time on alternate weeks, studying for their GEDs or high school diplomas. Classes are small, allowing one-on-one attention to students.

**A job training and pre-apprenticeship program,** in which young people get close supervision and training in construction skills full-time on alternate weeks from qualified instructors.

**A community service program,** in which young people build housing for homeless and other low-income people, providing a valuable and visible commodity for their hard-pressed communities.

**A leadership development and civic engagement program,** in which young people share in the governance of their own program through an elected policy committee and participate actively in community affairs, learning the values and the lifelong commitment needed to be effective and ethical community leaders.

**A youth development program,** in which young people participate in personal counseling, peer support groups, financial management training, and life planning processes that assist them in healing from past hurts, overcoming negative habits and attitudes, building assets, and pursuing achievable goals that will establish a productive life.

**A long-term mini-community,** in which young people make new friends committed to a positive lifestyle, pursue cultural and recreational activities together, and can continue to participate for years through YouthBuild USA's National Alumni Association.

**A community-development program,** in which community-based organizations obtain the resources to tackle several key community issues at once, strengthening their capacity to build and manage housing for their residents, educate and inspire their youth, create leadership for the future, and generally take responsibility for their neighborhoods.



## About YouthBuild USA

Founded in 1990, YouthBuild USA is a national non-profit organization that supports the expanding network of 226 local YouthBuild programs. In this role, YouthBuild USA orchestrates advocacy for public funding, guidance and quality assurance in program implementation, leadership opportunities for youth and staff, research to understand best practices, and grants and loans to YouthBuild affiliates. YouthBuild USA leads the national YouthBuild movement and contributes to the broader youth and community development fields in order to diminish poverty in the United States and internationally.

## **The YouthBuild program**

There are 226 local, autonomous YouthBuild programs in 42 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands, engaging approximately 8,000 young adults each year. YouthBuild USA is the national intermediary and support center for this network. In this role, YouthBuild USA orchestrates advocacy for public funding, guidance and quality assurance in program implementation, leadership opportunities for youth and staff, research to understand best practices, and grants and loans to YouthBuild affiliates.

Between 1994 and 2006, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) provided the backbone of funding for this network of local programs, resulting from the 1992 passage of federal legislation authorizing YouthBuild as a federal program. In 2006, the authorization was transferred to the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). Henceforth, local programs will apply annually to DOL for competitive grants. YouthBuild USA has been the primary contractor to the federal government since 1994 to supply training, technical assistance, and other quality assurance functions for this network, creating a strong public-private partnership.

## **The YouthBuild program design**

During the 9- to 24-month, full-time YouthBuild program, youth participants spend half of their time learning construction trade skills by building or rehabilitating housing for low-income people; the other half of their time is spent in a YouthBuild classroom earning a high school diploma or equivalency degree. Personal counseling and training in life skills and financial management are provided. The students are a part of a mini-community of adults and youth committed to each other's success and to improving the conditions in their neighborhoods.

Since 1994, more than 68,000 YouthBuild students have built or rehabilitated 16,000 units of affordable housing. Projects range from constructing new homes to restoring dilapidated multi-unit buildings to rebuilding entire neighborhoods. Some programs have built commercial facilities that enhance the social and economic viability of their local communities. A few YouthBuild programs have created construction companies that hire graduates as employees to build and rehabilitate low-income housing.

Community partnerships are integral to the execution of YouthBuild’s construction component. Local programs often collaborate with housing agencies, community development corporations, Habitat for Humanity chapters, and other organizations to carry out projects for greater efficiency and impact. Many programs partner with the National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER), the Home Building Institute, and local trade unions to provide trainings, apprenticeship opportunities, and industry-recognized certifications for YouthBuild students and graduates.

As an alternative school, YouthBuild is working on the cutting-edge of educational reform, demonstrating that small, personalized classes that offer a balance of academic rigor, relevant learning opportunities, and positive relationships can succeed in re-engaging students



who have dropped out of traditional schools. Classes are small, allowing one-on-one attention to students, and the curriculum integrates academics with life skills. YouthBuild students prepare for GEDs, postsecondary training, and college. In addition, more than 40 YouthBuild programs are authorized to grant high school diplomas, either as charter schools, alternative schools, or as part of a charter management organization. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has included YouthBuild in its Alternative High Schools Initiative, funding YouthBuild USA to enhance the quality of the diploma-granting YouthBuild schools.

Strong emphasis is placed on leadership development as a unique and core element of the YouthBuild program design. The program’s emphasis on leadership development makes it attractive to disaffected youth who want more than a low-wage job—rather, they want to make a difference, to create real change in their communities and belong to a movement for social justice to end the suffering of their families.

Leadership development is exercised in YouthBuild on local, state, and national levels. Young people share in the governance of their own program through an elected policy committee and participate actively in community affairs, learning the values and the lifelong commitment needed to be effective and ethical community leaders. Every year, more than 500 program

participants visit their statehouses and Capitol Hill to talk with their legislators about changes needed in their communities. At the national level, the Young Leaders Council and the National Alumni Council take part in setting program design and performance standards; five graduates sit on the YouthBuild USA Board of Directors; and two national youth leadership conferences are held annually.

Community service is a central component of leadership development in YouthBuild programs. In 58 programs, students are enrolled as AmeriCorps members, with the opportunity to earn partial scholarships for college in return for their service building affordable homes. Participating in the highly visible AmeriCorps program positions the students in the center of respected American society and facilitates the transformation of their identities.

No other major federal program simultaneously addresses the key issues facing low-income communities—employment, education, homelessness, physical decay, crime prevention, and leadership development—by tackling them through one solution. YouthBuild USA and its network of affiliates produce affordable housing, high school graduates, trained construction workers, ethical community leaders, and ideas that benefit the worlds of education, job training, national service, criminal justice, and youth and community development.

### **YouthBuild's track record with youthful offenders**

It is the comprehensive nature of YouthBuild that attracts youthful offenders, draws them in towards a positive lifestyle, and facilitates their successful transformation. The YouthBuild program serves as a number of things at once: an alternative school, a job training and pre-apprenticeship program, a community service program, a leadership development and civic engagement program, a youth development program, and a community development program.

YouthBuild programs have always welcomed young adults who have been convicted of crimes, as long as they show a sincere desire to work hard to achieve a positive lifestyle. Applicants are not rejected based on any specific crime committed. Historically, more than 30 percent of

YouthBuild students have been offenders; about 13 percent have been convicted of felonies. In 2006, 43 percent of YouthBuild participants were offenders.

Youthful offenders join YouthBuild for various reasons. Sometimes they are mandated to participate; sometimes their relatives insist that they do something positive. Sometimes they just want a GED or a job. What they universally find is more than they expected. Most say, “I came for a GED, but I found a family. The staff really cares about the students, so I have learned to care about myself.”



YouthBuild students get a chance to build a positive track record that can outshine their criminal history, and to develop community ties as well as the skills and values that will enable them to succeed. YouthBuild meets their needs precisely and does so in a context that is not stigmatized, in which they can work alongside other youth as heroes in their community, building an important and visible commodity for their neighbors. YouthBuild demonstrates that youthful offenders can play a positive, contributing role in their communities when they are provided access to a program tailored to meet their many and varied needs, infused with faith in the sacred value of every human being and knowledge that the power of love coupled with opportunity can overcome enormous obstacles.

Another indication of YouthBuild’s success, as well as a reason that YouthBuild has been effective in working with youthful offenders, is that the program virtually never experiences violence from or among its students. Although the program sites are located in the most crime-ridden urban and rural communities, there simply has never been any pattern of violence within or against YouthBuild programs. Even when students from rival gangs join YouthBuild, they leave their hostilities at the door. Students feel safe, valued, and cared for. There are no metal detectors, no security guards. Safety means the world to the young people; it enables them to drop their hostilities from the street and focus on their futures.

All studies to date of the recidivism rate\* for youthful offenders who complete the YouthBuild program find a rate of 5–25 percent—this is admirable considering that nationally, 67 percent of offenders who had been previously incarcerated are re-arrested within three years of their release, and 51 percent are re-incarcerated. YouthBuild students are highly motivated to overcome past mistakes; in YouthBuild, they gain the skills and supportive community to do so.

YouthBuild’s track record working in local communities with youthful offenders and producing positive outcomes, forging a diverse range of local partnerships, and generating a body of best practices has demonstrated the moral, social, spiritual, and economic advantages of effective re-entry initiatives. YouthBuild provides youthful offenders with a second chance to succeed in life.

## Project overview

### Project purpose

In 2004, the Department of Labor selected YouthBuild USA to participate in its Incarcerated Youth Re-entry Program. This program is funded as a special line item in the federal budget, championed by Senator Arlen Specter (R–Pa.), and linked with the President’s High-Growth Job Training Initiative, a strategic effort to prepare workers to take advantage of new and increasing job opportunities in high-growth, high-demand, and vital sectors of the American economy.

Employment in the construction industry is expected to increase by nearly one million jobs by 2012 and 2.4 million by 2014. However, the industry has difficulty recruiting young adults, and the youth who are interested often lack the skills employers need. A Construction Industry Institute study found that 75 percent of contractors are experiencing labor shortages. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the construction industry needs to attract 240,000 workers each year to account for job growth, retirements, and attrition.



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\* Please note that for the purposes of this report and demonstration project, and as agreed to with the Department of Labor, YouthBuild USA considers recidivism to have occurred when an individual who had been previously convicted of a crime is re-convicted after entering the project or is incarcerated due to a parole or probation violation.

In 2004, DOL granted \$12.2 million over two years to YouthBuild USA, to be re-granted to local YouthBuild programs, with the aim of engaging a total of 325 students full-time per year. The specific, immediate outcome targets were for at least 34 percent of students to obtain a GED or high school diploma; for 60 percent to complete the program; and for 85 percent of the completers to go to college or enter the workforce successfully at an average wage of above \$8 an hour. Longer-term outcome targets were for 75 percent of completers to be in college or employed at an average wage of \$10 an hour after five years, and for the recidivism rate to be less than 15 percent.

YouthBuild USA served as the overall intermediary and support center for the project, guiding local implementation through training and technical assistance, managing the grant process, and reporting to DOL.

The YouthBuild USA Youthful Offender Project was officially launched on July 1, 2004, with the first program year of the grant period ending on December 31, 2005. In 2006, DOL granted YouthBuild USA an additional \$6 million to extend the project for a third year and decided to implement a thorough qualitative study with Social Policy Research Advocates to understand the reasons for the subgrantees' success.

## Advocating for State-Level Criminal Justice Funds

With support from the JEHT Foundation, YouthBuild USA and several YouthBuild state coalitions are working to access dedicated state-level legislative or administrative criminal justice funds for YouthBuild and other comprehensive youth programs that are positioned to serve as diversion, alternative sentencing, or re-entry programs for youthful offenders. By redirecting state revenue earmarked for the criminal justice system to YouthBuild and other similar programs, YouthBuild USA and the state coalitions aim to enable youthful offenders to reclaim a productive and contributing role in society, while demonstrating a pathway for state governments to reduce recidivism and reduce the costs involved in the supervision and incarceration of youthful offenders.

The California and Illinois YouthBuild Coalitions have introduced legislation to move this initiative forward. The California YouthBuild Coalition is also applying for existing state funds to serve as a re-entry program for youthful offenders being released from the Department of Juvenile Justice.



## Selecting local program subgrantees

Programs participating in the YouthBuild USA Youthful Offender Project were selected by YouthBuild USA, with the Department of Labor having final authority, according to the following DOL-established criteria:

**Performance.** Site demonstrates successful outcomes and operates high-quality programs and services;

**Community linkages.** Site demonstrates effective partnership building, is supported within the community, and is viewed as a community resource;

**Outreach and recruitment capacity.** Site demonstrates an ability to reach the intended target population; and

**Leadership.** Site demonstrates the ability to mobilize resources and staff, and can quickly and effectively operationalize grant components.

To identify local programs that would meet these criteria, YouthBuild USA issued a request for proposal (RFP) to its Affiliated Network. Members of the Affiliated Network have committed to upholding the YouthBuild philosophy and to achieving YouthBuild USA's program design and performance standards.

The RFP asked for information related to DOL's selection criteria and to the overall initiative, including outcome data for the past five years, community partnerships, relationships with the criminal justice system, experience working with youthful offenders, staffing and funding patterns, overall indications of the program's commitment to their students' long-term success, and program design changes that might be needed to address the unique needs of youthful offenders.

In making its selections, YouthBuild USA strove to create a well-balanced group of programs that were geographically and ethnically diverse, responded to the intense need in both inner cities and rural counties, and included both established and up-and-coming sites. YouthBuild USA took into account applicants' need for funds and gave special consideration to programs that had endured the rigorous process of becoming accredited by the Affiliated Network. To build local capacity to affect state-level policy, YouthBuild USA chose programs

with a concentration in selected states, including California, Illinois, Massachusetts, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, and Wisconsin.

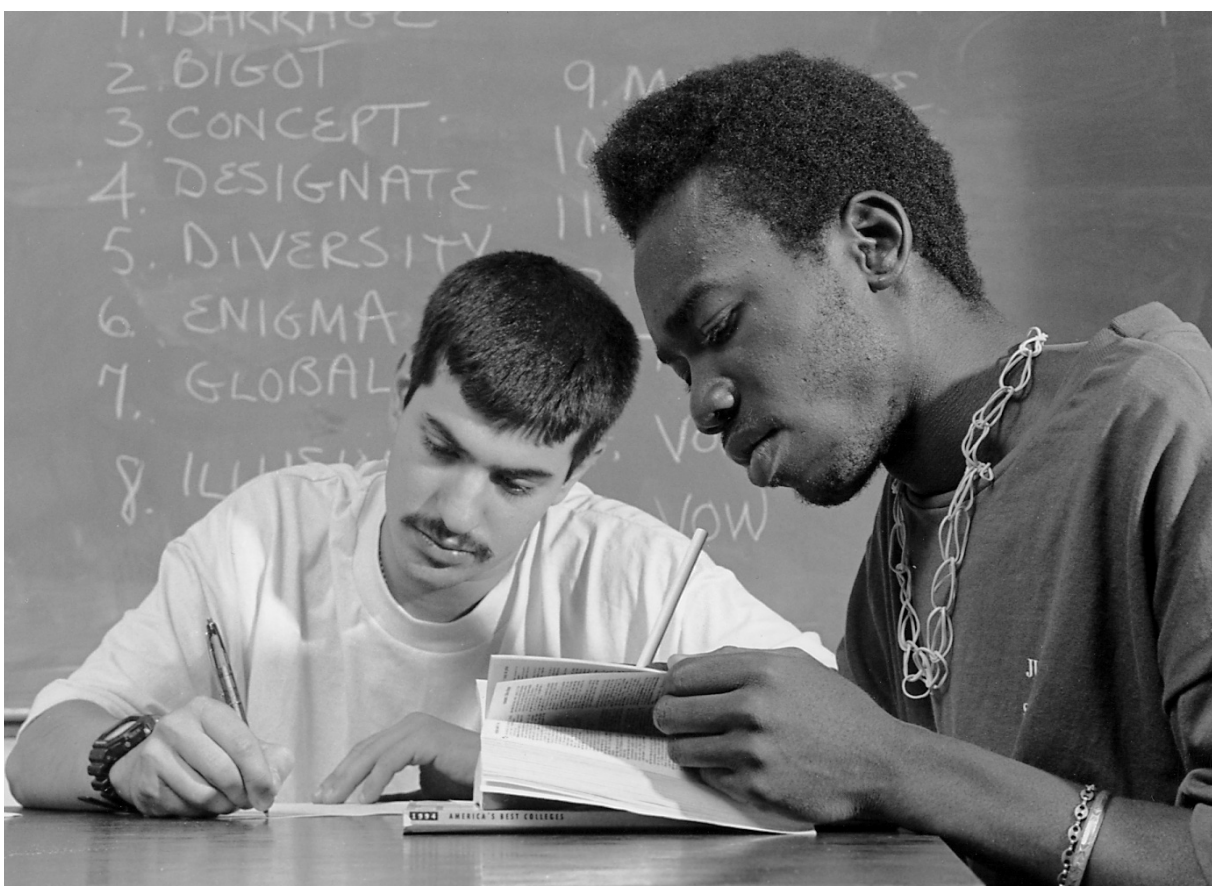
In all, YouthBuild USA received 62 proposals from the field and selected 30 programs representing 16 states to participate in the pilot year of its Youthful Offender Project. These programs are listed in the following table.

YouthBuild USA Youthful Offender Project — Year-One Subgrantees		
<p><b>YouthBuild Fresno (Calif.)</b> Fresno County Economic Opportunities Commission</p> <p><b>CCEO YouthBuild (Gardena, Calif.)</b> Century Center for Economic Opportunity</p> <p><b>LA CAUSA YouthBuild (Los Angeles, Calif.)</b> LA CAUSA Inc.</p> <p><b>MAAC Project YouthBuild (Chula Vista, Calif.)</b> Metropolitan Area Advisory Committee</p> <p><b>North Richmond YouthBuild (Calif.)</b> Community Housing Development Corp. of North Richmond</p> <p><b>YouthBuild Honolulu (Hawaii)</b> City &amp; County of Honolulu Dept. of Community Services</p> <p><b>YouthBuild McLean County (Bloomington, Ill.)</b></p> <p><b>YouthBuild Rockford (Ill.)</b> Comprehensive Community Solutions Inc.</p> <p><b>YCC YouthBuild Waukegan (Ill.)</b> Youth Conservations Corps Inc.</p>	<p><b>YouthBuild Brockton (Mass.)</b> Old Colony YMCA</p> <p><b>YouthBuild Boston Inc. (Mass.)</b></p> <p><b>YWCA YouthBuild Springfield (Mass.)</b> YWCA of Western Massachusetts</p> <p><b>Portland West YouthBuild (Maine)</b> Portland West Inc</p> <p><b>Bi-CAP YouthBuild (Bemidji, Minn.)</b> Bi-County Community Action Programs Inc.</p> <p><b>Operation Excel YouthBuild (St. Louis, Mo.)</b> Housing Authority of St. Louis County</p> <p><b>YouthBuild St. Louis (Mo.)</b> Youth, Education &amp; Health in Soulard</p> <p><b>YouthBuild Newark Inc. (N.J.)</b></p> <p><b>Isles YouthBuild (Trenton, N.J.)</b> Isles Inc.</p> <p><b>YouthBuild Albany (N.Y.)</b> City of Albany Dept. of Youth &amp; Workforce Services</p> <p><b>Flushing YouthBuild (N.Y.)</b> YMCA of Greater New York</p> <p><b>Youth Action YouthBuild (East Harlem, N.Y.)</b> Youth Action Programs and Homes Inc.</p>	<p><b>YouthBuild Columbus (Ohio)</b> Buckeye Community Hope Foundation</p> <p><b>CSC YouthBuild (Lebanon, Oregon)</b> Community Services Consortium</p> <p><b>Portland YouthBuilders (Ore.)</b></p> <p><b>YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School (Pa.)</b> Philadelphia Youth for Change Charter School Inc.</p> <p><b>YouthBuild Brownsville (Texas)</b> Community Development Corporation of Brownsville</p> <p><b>New Waverly YouthBuild (Texas)</b> Walker Montgomery Community Development Corporation</p> <p><b>Petersburg Urban Ministries YouthBuild (Va.)</b> Petersburg Urban Ministries, Inc.</p> <p><b>Operation Fresh Start YouthBuild (Madison, Wis.)</b> Operation Fresh Start Inc.</p> <p><b>SALS YouthBuild (Kincaid, W.Va.)</b> Southern Appalachian Labor School</p>

## Project components

While each participating program implements its own individualized service strategy adapted to meet local conditions, they all share the common foundation of the YouthBuild model. This foundation is defined by the *Program Design and Performance Standards*, developed democratically through the YouthBuild USA Affiliated Network with input from directors, students, graduates, and YouthBuild USA staff and board members. It is further explicated in a series of handbooks and curriculum guides that provide enormous detail regarding best practices developed since 1992.

In most cases, students participating in YouthBuild USA's Youthful Offender Project are integrated into a program in which the majority of students are not offenders. Just two programs focus solely on youthful offenders.



Youth eligible to participate in YouthBuild USA's Youthful Offender Project fit into one or more of three categories:

- Young people who have been referred by the courts to YouthBuild as a diversion program to avoid incarceration, including those on probation; or
- Young people, having served time in prison or jail, referred by the criminal justice system to YouthBuild in a coordinated re-entry process, including those on parole; or
- Young people who find their own way to YouthBuild—having been convicted of a crime and served time in prison or jail previously—who still need education or job training opportunities.

Participating YouthBuild sites are committed to establishing two new program components as part of the Youthful Offender Project. The first is a mentorship initiative in which YouthBuild students are provided with an adult mentor during the project and for at least one year after graduation.

In addition, YouthBuild programs pledge to monitor for five years the outcomes of not only graduates but also of youth who leave the program early. This five-year follow-up of noncompleters' progress related to education, employment, civic engagement, leadership roles, criminal activity, and public dependency is the first tracking of what happens to students who drop out or are terminated early from YouthBuild programs.

## **Funding and costs**

DOL's grant provides \$16,000 of funding per student per year. The average annual cost of YouthBuild is approximately \$22,000 per full year of participation, including stipends for work performed. This is less than other full-time options for unemployed young adults, such as prison, Job Corps, boot camps, the military, and many colleges. The U.S. Department of Justice estimated that the average annual operating cost per state inmate in 2001 was \$22,650, with some states spending as much as \$44,000 per inmate per year.

For YouthBuild USA's Youthful Offender Project, subgrantees are expected to allocate \$700 per participant per year to fund continued services and tracking for both graduates and noncompleters. Most programs designate these monies towards a staff person, such as an alumni coordinator, who is responsible for the project's follow-up component.

## Generic YouthBuild Program Budget for 35 Participants

Item	In-kind (\$)	Cash (\$)	Item	In-kind (\$)	Cash (\$)
<b>Salaries</b>			<b>Travel</b>		
Executive director (50% FTE)		30,000	Nonlocal (YouthBuild Conferences)		7,000
Program director		50,000	Van lease		8,000
Administrative assistant		25,000	Van expenses (maintenance, insurance, fuel)		5,000
Construction manager		50,000	Local travel		300
Construction trainer		35,000	Public transportation and bus passes	1,200	
Academic teacher		35,000	<b>Total travel</b>		<b>20,300</b>
Counselor/social worker		32,000	<b>Staff and youth development</b>		
Leadership coordinator		25,000	Staff development	10,000	4,000
Coordinator of follow-up for graduates and noncompleters		25,000	Mental Toughness orientation retreat		10,000
Data manager (part-time)		15,000	Youth conferences and cultural activities		6,000
Bookkeeper (part-time)		15,000	Leadership retreats (2 @ \$2,000)		4,000
<b>Subtotal salaries</b>		<b>337,000</b>	OSHA, first aid, health trainings	12,000	
Fringe at 26%		87,620	<b>Total staff and youth development</b>		<b>72,000</b>
<b>Total salaries</b>		<b>424,620</b>	<b>Training materials and equipment</b>		
<b>Trainee wages and raises</b>			Training equipment		7,500
Stipends (28 @ \$120 x 48 weeks)		161,280	Tools, boots, hard hats		2,500
Discount for attrition and attendance		-20,160	Classroom materials		5,000
Raises and Bonuses (28 @ \$25 x 12)		8,400	Driver's education		1,000
FICA @ .0765		8,353	<b>Total training materials and equipment</b>		<b>16,000</b>
Workers compensation @ .024		2,884	<b>Office equipment</b>		
<b>Total trainee wages and raises</b>		<b>160,757</b>		2,000	
<b>Direct assistance to youth</b>			<b>Other expenses</b>		
AmeriCorps education awards (28 @ \$2,363)	66,164		Rent (Office, classroom, workshop)		30,000
Child care (4 full-time slots)	20,160		Phone		3,500
Special needs to enable attendance		10,000	Postage		800
<b>Total direct assistance to youth</b>		<b>10,000</b>	Office supplies		2,500
<b>Contracts and technical assistance</b>			Maintenance and repairs		2,000
Development consultant	6,000		Printing and copying		3,000
Substance abuse assessment and trainings	5,000		Advertising		1,000
ESL specialist		3,000	Utilities		4,200
YouthBuild USA TA and training	15,000		<b>Total other expenses</b>		<b>47,000</b>
Psychological assessment	8,100		<b>Total program expenses (including in-kind)</b>		
Housing development consultant	5,000			<b>150,624</b>	<b>773,677</b>
Payroll service		15,000	<b>Cost per youth/year (@ 35 youths)</b>		
General liability insurance		5,000			22,105
<b>Total contracts and technical assistance</b>		<b>23,000</b>			

## Goals

Overall, the broad goals of YouthBuild USA’s Youthful Offender Project are:

- To strengthen local YouthBuild programs’ capacity to work with youthful offenders, enabling them to reconcile past failures, set a course for positive development, and take progressive steps to building themselves in ways that will secure their future well-being;
- To acquire a growing understanding and informed partnership with the criminal justice system at a progressively larger number of YouthBuild sites; and
- To develop local models of program-strengthening efforts that can be evaluated for impact, documented, and incorporated into YouthBuild USA’s national organizing, training, and technical systems to ensure that a growing number of youth, staff, and community members benefit from these local efforts.

YouthBuild USA also established specific measurable outcome targets related to program completion, educational gains, job placement, wages, and recidivism. These standards meet the Affiliated Network’s performance ratings of “satisfactory” or higher. Local programs submit data on a monthly basis through an existing Web-based system developed by YouthBuild USA in order to track ongoing progress.

YouthBuild USA Youthful Offender Project — Target Outcomes	
<b>Recruitment and enrollment</b>	325 eligible youth
<b>Attendance</b>	80% daily attendance by all enrollees
<b>Retention</b>	60% of enrollees will complete the program, meaning they will attend for the entire program cycle or, if leaving before the end of the program cycle, will be deliberately placed in a job or postsecondary education (195 youth)
<b>High school diploma or GED</b>	34% of those who need one will obtain a high school diploma or GED during the program (111)
<b>Job or college placement</b>	85% of completers will be placed in a job or college (166); 51% of enrollees will be placed (166). (Thus, if retention is lower than 60%, placement of completers must be higher than 85% in order to place 51% of enrollees.)
<b>Wages</b>	Average \$8/hour
<b>Job and college retention</b>	75% of completers after five years will be employed at an average of \$10/hour or will be in college (147)
<b>Recidivism</b>	Less than 15% of completers will be re-convicted of crimes or re-incarcerated within the five years after program completion (< 29)

### Ely Flores

**Even if Ely Flores had wanted to graduate from his high school in South Central Los Angeles, he would not have been allowed to.**

Ely was forbidden from returning for his senior year because he was blamed for starting a race war on campus.

Banned from the classroom, Ely spent his days hanging out on the street, “rolling with the gangs.” This lifestyle had already led Ely to be incarcerated in juvenile hall and committed to house arrest three times.

With a baby on the way, though, Ely knew that he needed to change his life. A friend who had participated in YouthBuild told Ely that it was different from other youth programs—he could earn money and learn construction skills. Seizing this opportunity to improve his future, Ely enrolled in LA CAUSA YouthBuild in September 2004.

For Ely, YouthBuild’s initial impact is that it “opens doors for people who get a lot of doors shut in their faces,” particularly youthful offenders. He also valued the caring approach of the YouthBuild program’s teachers. They treated him as an equal and encouraged him to learn about what interested him. LA CAUSA YouthBuild’s culturally relevant instruction provides its students with an understanding of the social and economic forces that created the conditions they currently experience, including racism, gender roles, and globalization.

These consciousness-raising lessons resonated with Ely and helped develop his passion and skills for community organizing, which he continued to cultivate after graduating from YouthBuild in May 2005 with both his high school diploma and GED.

“YouthBuild changed my whole direction and ideology,” said Ely. “If I had not gone to YouthBuild, I really think I would be locked up or dead.”

Instead, Ely is a youth coordinator for the Youth Justice Coalition, facilitating workshops for high schoolers in Los



Angeles on leadership, youth empowerment, and human rights. He completed an AmeriCorps position with Public Allies, a ten-month program of apprenticeships in non-profit organizations, weekly leadership trainings, and team service projects.

Ely stays connected to YouthBuild as a board member of LA CAUSA and as a member of YouthBuild USA’s Young Leaders Council, a peer-elected student leadership body for the YouthBuild network. In August 2006, Ely co-founded L.E.Ad. (Leadership and Empowerment for Adjudicated Youth)

with a fellow LA CAUSA graduate. L.E.Ad. is an initiative to train YouthBuild students and graduates who have been affected by the criminal justice system about community building and organizing in order to bring about positive change in their communities.

“As a community organizer, Ely educated himself and others about the injustices of California’s correctional system and advocates for its transformation,” said Alejandro Covarrubias, executive director of LA CAUSA YouthBuild. “As a board member at LA CAUSA, Ely holds us accountable to our mission of working with, as opposed to helping, young people.”

Ely plans to use his AmeriCorps education award from the Public Allies program for college, as he would like to strengthen his writing skills and develop his gift for teaching. He hopes to create his own charter school based on the lessons learned from his personal experiences.

One lesson Ely values most is to “let your actions speak for you.” After completing YouthBuild, Ely returned to his high school, bringing with him the certificates and recognitions he had earned since being kicked out. More important, Ely apologized to the dean for his past behavior and thanked the teachers who he believed had cared for him.

“I always had leadership skills, but before I used them to do bad things,” said Ely. “Now I recognize how to use my skills in a positive way. YouthBuild showed me what type of leader I want to be.”

## Outcomes

The YouthBuild USA Youthful Offender Project completed its inaugural year by exceeding all but one of the target outcomes. The outcomes are listed in the table on page 23.

In the project's first year, participating YouthBuild programs engaged 388 youth, 19 percent more than the initial target. More than 85 percent of the participants were male. Nearly 55 percent were African American, 19 percent were Hispanic, and 17 percent were white. Eighty-nine percent of all project enrollees entered without a high school diploma or GED. Forty-three percent received public assistance at enrollment.

Two hundred seventy-two (272) participants, or 70 percent, completed the program, exceeding the goal of 195 completers by 39 percent.



Of the students who participated in the first year of the Youthful Offender Project, 150 received a high school diploma or GED (of those who needed either), exceeding the target by 35 percent. Two hundred eight (208) program completers were placed in postsecondary education or employment, exceeding the target by 25 percent. (The actual percentage of completers who were placed was lower than the 85 percent target, but because of overenrollment and high reten-

tion, the number of graduates who were placed well exceeded the target number.) The average wage earned by the YouthBuild students who were placed in jobs was 12 percent higher than the \$8.00 per hour expected, at \$8.94 an hour.

In addition to these achievements, more than 595 skill certificates were obtained, including driver's licenses and OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration), CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation), first aid, and hazardous materials certificates.



The recidivism rate for graduates of the Youthful Offender Project was 25 percent within the first two years after enrollment—although higher than projected, this is still favorable considering that nationally, 67 percent of offenders who had been previously incarcerated are re-arrested within three years of their release, and 51 percent are re-incarcerated.

<b>YouthBuild USA Youthful Offender Project — Year One Outcomes</b> as of June 30, 2007			
<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Actual</b>	<b>% of Target</b>
Enrollment	325	388	119%
Completers	195	272	139%
Received GED or HSD	111	150	135%
Placement of completers	166	208	125%
Placement of all enrollees	166	230	139%
Wage (per hour)	\$8.00	\$8.94	112%
Received skill certificates	n/a	509	n/a
Received driver's license	n/a	86	n/a
Recidivism of completers	< 29 (< 15%)	67 (25%)	did not reach target

## Project learnings

### Best practices

The first-year accomplishments of the YouthBuild USA Youthful Offender Project reaffirm the effectiveness of YouthBuild's program design and philosophy—in particular, the value for disconnected young people of an environment that promotes respect, caring, mutual responsibility, community service, academic and job skills, knowledge, meaningful work, high standards, leadership development, and a path to postsecondary education and employment.

None of the subgrantees participating in the project made any major modifications to their existing program design because most continued to work with a similar number of youthful offenders as in the past. According to the director of the YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School, programming is uniform and not funder-driven, so staff do not know which grants cover which students. Ely Flores, a graduate of LA CAUSA YouthBuild whose participation

was funded by the project, agreed that he was not treated differently than other students. This perception may vary from program to program. (A brief story about Ely is on page 21.)

### Dedicated program staff

At the core of YouthBuild’s proven program design is the dedicated staff and their commitment to the success of young people. Most of them echo the sentiment that helping to transform the lives of disconnected youth is not their job; it is their mission. They make it their responsibility to know each youth as a “whole” person, including his or her aspirations, progress (or lack thereof), successes, failures, and barriers.



Operation Fresh Start YouthBuild cultivates staff-student relationships based on Travis Hirschi’s social bond theory, which associates deviant behavior with the absence or weakness of positive relationships with others, especially adults. Staff become “significant others” to the young people, providing what has been missing in their lives—approval, trust, support, and guidance. The bonds created with the students are key in encouraging them to come back to the program every day,

even more so than the promise of a GED or job. While they may not refer to the “social bond theory” specifically, staff at all successful YouthBuild programs abide by the same philosophy and practice. The founder of YouthBuild USA describes YouthBuild’s theory of change as “the power of love and opportunity combined.”

Prior research of YouthBuild programs conducted by Professor Ron Ferguson of Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government identified a correlation between individual transformation and the effectiveness of staff in demonstrating their trustworthiness and competence, both in how they relate to the students and in their ability to fulfill the promises of opportunity made to them.

## Focus on attendance

Because students must be present in order for the education and skill-building components to be effective, programs place great attention on attendance. It is not uncommon for staff to call absent students each morning and, if necessary, personally drive them to the classroom or work site. “Attendance is the best measure of program quality,” said the director of North Richmond YouthBuild.

YWCA YouthBuild Springfield uses an incentive program in which student stipends are weighted by attendance. It has been successful in reinforcing to the youth the importance of good attendance to employers. Most programs provide bonuses per pay period for perfect attendance. This practice is recommended by YouthBuild USA as a way to provide immediate reward to students who show outstanding effort.

## Pathways for careers and college

To secure employment placements for their students, many YouthBuild programs employ a job developer to identify opportunities and to assist youth in completing applications, drafting resumés, and preparing for interviews. Each New Waverly YouthBuild participant is assigned a job developer who leverages the program’s relationships with statewide employers that have been nurtured for up to 30 years.

Community partnerships are often fostered by multiple program staff who have developed valuable relationships with local One-Stop Centers, Workforce Investment Boards, unions, apprenticeship programs, and companies. The Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries has designated CSC YouthBuild an approved pre-apprentice program, meaning graduates receive special consideration when applying to several apprenticeship programs. In addition, The Home Depot offers all of CSC YouthBuild’s completers who apply an interview for employment.

Major emphasis was placed in this project on increasing access to industry-recognized certifications to help students become more employable, including OSHA, CPR, first aid, hazardous materials, and NCCER (National Center for Construction Education and Research).



YouthBuild USA trained one construction site supervisor at each subgrantee’s site to be authorized to train and award these certifications., Driver’s licenses are also typically offered. Although a driver’s license is not considered to be an industry-related certificate by DOL, the attainment of one is an important credential for employment and self-sufficiency—especially in the construction field where a driver’s license makes an employee immediately more useful.

In the same way that YouthBuild programs dedicate staff and resources to assist their students in achieving career goals, programs forge beneficial relationships with community colleges, universities, and other educational organizations to facilitate their graduates’ postsecondary success. YouthBuild Brockton students are eligible to participate in Massasoit Community College’s “Summer Bridge” program, through which they can earn two free three-credit summer classes with extensive tutoring and wraparound services.

Many YouthBuild programs are also AmeriCorps programs. YouthBuild AmeriCorps members who complete their required hours of service receive \$2,300 education awards that can be applied to postsecondary schooling. Fortunately, there is no ruling against people with criminal records joining in national service to contribute to their communities and earn education awards.

## Collaborations with the criminal justice system

YouthBuild USA's subgrantees forge a spectrum of partnerships with probation and parole officers, youth authorities, sheriffs' offices, and other local criminal justice entities to support young offenders' successful re-entry into society. Isles YouthBuild collaborates with the New Jersey Juvenile Justice Commission to integrate youthful offenders into the YouthBuild program for aftercare. The program also receives direct referrals from the Mercer County Family Court, probation departments, and the Mercer County Adult and Juvenile Drug Court.

The Cameron County Juvenile Detention Center placed a part-time probation officer at YouthBuild Brownsville to help staff work with all of the program's youthful offenders. The program also enabled probation officers to meet with their clients at the YouthBuild site.

Because youthful offenders are often hampered by unresolved, complicated legal issues, many YouthBuild staff assist their students in following up on court cases. YouthBuild Rockford counselors attended court with several students and met with public defenders and prosecutors as part of case management. Thanks to these efforts, a YouthBuild Rockford graduate was released one year early from parole due to his successful participation in the program and was subsequently inducted into the local carpenter's union.

Operation Excel YouthBuild partnered with Husch & Eppenberger LLC and the St. Louis University School of Law's legal clinic staff and students to provide YouthBuild participants with pro bono legal services for minor municipal and county level matters. Within weeks, all outstanding warrants against the YouthBuild students were recalled, and progress was made toward the settling or dropping of charges on every case.

Some of the subgrantees team up with experts in the criminal justice field to teach their students how to navigate the system. North Richmond YouthBuild staff and participants attended a conference organized by Representative Barbara Lee that discussed a variety of re-entry issues, including employment and training, housing, transportation, and criminal record sealing and expungement. Flushing YouthBuild staff invited Attorney Anthony Mayol Jr. to the program

to discuss youth rights. Attorney Mayol distributed handouts, including a booklet, *What You Should Know if You are Accused of a Crime*, and offered free legal advice to the students.

## Challenges

Despite these examples of innovative, effective collaborations, the YouthBuild USA Youthful Offender Project subgrantees are at various stages of development with their criminal justice partnerships. Many admit to the need for increased communications and teamwork with parole and probation officers and other service providers.

The YouthBuild staff also have diverse levels of knowledge of the criminal justice field. Many desire additional staff training on criminal justice issues and the specific needs of youthful offenders, including specialized counseling services.



A few of the subgrantees were successful in establishing formal mentoring initiatives during the project's pilot year. YouthBuild St. Louis implemented a program in which adult mentors committed to contacting their students weekly by telephone, e-mail, mail, or in person for six months to address specific needs that might interfere with the youth's ability to succeed in the program. Portland YouthBuilders hired a part-time mentorship coordinator and a full-time AmeriCorps member to forge yearlong relationships between graduates and professionals in the field of the youth's choice.

Most programs, however, faced challenges in implementing a formal, comprehensive mentoring initiative. While YouthBuild staff serve as informal mentors to their students, additional staff time and resources were needed to recruit, screen, train, supervise, evaluate, and sustain mentors from the community. It was also challenging to engage students after program hours.

Another program component that the subgrantees did not have sufficient resources to fully establish was the five-year follow-up of graduates and noncompleters. Tracking the activities of students after graduation is not a shift in intent, as every YouthBuild program aims to foster an active and robust alumni network. However, effectively doing so, especially for an extended period, requires additional staff and funding that is not often available. In addition, the young people's contact information changes frequently. These challenges are compounded when attempting to follow up with noncompleters.

The only targeted outcome that was not achieved or exceeded in the first year of the YouthBuild USA Youthful Offender Project was the recidivism rate for completers. The target of 15 percent was established based on documentation submitted previously by a small number of local YouthBuild programs; this demonstration project was the first comprehensive tracking of a complete set of youthful offenders across many programs. Nonetheless, the 25 percent recidivism rate achieved in year one for project graduates is favorable considering that nationally, 67 percent of offenders who had been previously incarcerated are re-arrested within three years of their release, and 51 percent are re-incarcerated.



## **Looking ahead: Years two and three**

By building on the subgrantees' successes, leveraging their best practices, and strengthening various program components (relationships with criminal justice partners, knowledge of criminal justice issues, mentoring and follow-up services) YouthBuild USA aims to help programs continue to facilitate youthful offenders' successful re-entry into society.

In year two of the Youthful Offender Project, YouthBuild USA welcomed four new subgrantees in response to specific circumstances in their communities. YouthBuild USA sought out pro-

grams in the Gulf Coast as part of the organization’s ongoing effort to help rebuild communities affected by Hurricane Katrina. Mississippi Delta YouthBuild in Hollandale; YouthBuild Delta in Tallulah, Louisiana; and YouthBuild Bogalusa in Louisiana were selected based on their location and number of eligible students. San Gabriel Valley Conservation Corps YouthBuild, located in El Monte, California, was chosen based on its population and the potential to positively address the high gang-related activity in its neighborhood.

YouthBuild USA continued to provide training and technical assistance for all 34 subgrantees of the Youthful Offender Project. In its second year, the project is meeting or exceeding all target outcomes, including the low recidivism rate of 15 percent:

<b>YouthBuild USA Youthful Offender Project — Year Two Outcomes</b> as of June 30, 2007: incomplete			
<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Actual</b>	<b>% of Target</b>
Enrollment	325	409	126%
Completers	195	273	140%
Received GED or HSD	111	136	123%
Placement of completers	166	188	113%
Wage (per hour)	\$8.00	\$8.78	110%
Received skill certificates	n/a	627	n/a
Received driver’s license	n/a	70	n/a
Recidivism of completers	< 29 (< 15%)	41 (15%)	on target

To help programs develop a formal mentoring initiative, YouthBuild USA developed a concept paper that outlines guiding principals for and sample models of an effective mentoring approach. YouthBuild USA also plans to hire a staff person to coordinate the network’s mentoring efforts at the national level, raise funds for local mentoring initiatives, convene and train program staff, build partnerships with national organizations, update the *YouthBuild Mentoring Guidebook*, create an online resource center, and analyze the impacts of mentoring relationships.



YouthBuild USA is expanding career options for students by offering training, credentialing, and other opportunities through initiatives such as C-Tech network cabling and design apprenticeship programs, the National Work Readiness Credential, and green building.

Due to the overall success of the YouthBuild USA Youthful Offender Project in its pilot year, the Department of Labor awarded YouthBuild USA a \$6 million grant to extend the project for a third year.

In addition, DOL is funding a \$1.2 million in-depth, qualitative evaluation of YouthBuild's philosophy, design, programming, and outcomes. The evaluation is being led by Social Policy Research Associates and is taking place over an 18-month period beginning in the fall of 2007, with a report to be published in February 2008. It will provide critical independent documentation of the essential elements that make YouthBuild work, identify which characteristics correlate with higher outcomes, and recommend improvements that can be made.

The researchers will twice visit all 34 of the YouthBuild USA Youthful Offender Project subgrantees, review their demographic and outcome data in depth, meet with all staff one-on-one, and interview or conduct focus groups of more than 200 participants. They will draft thorough case studies of approximately 100 youth.

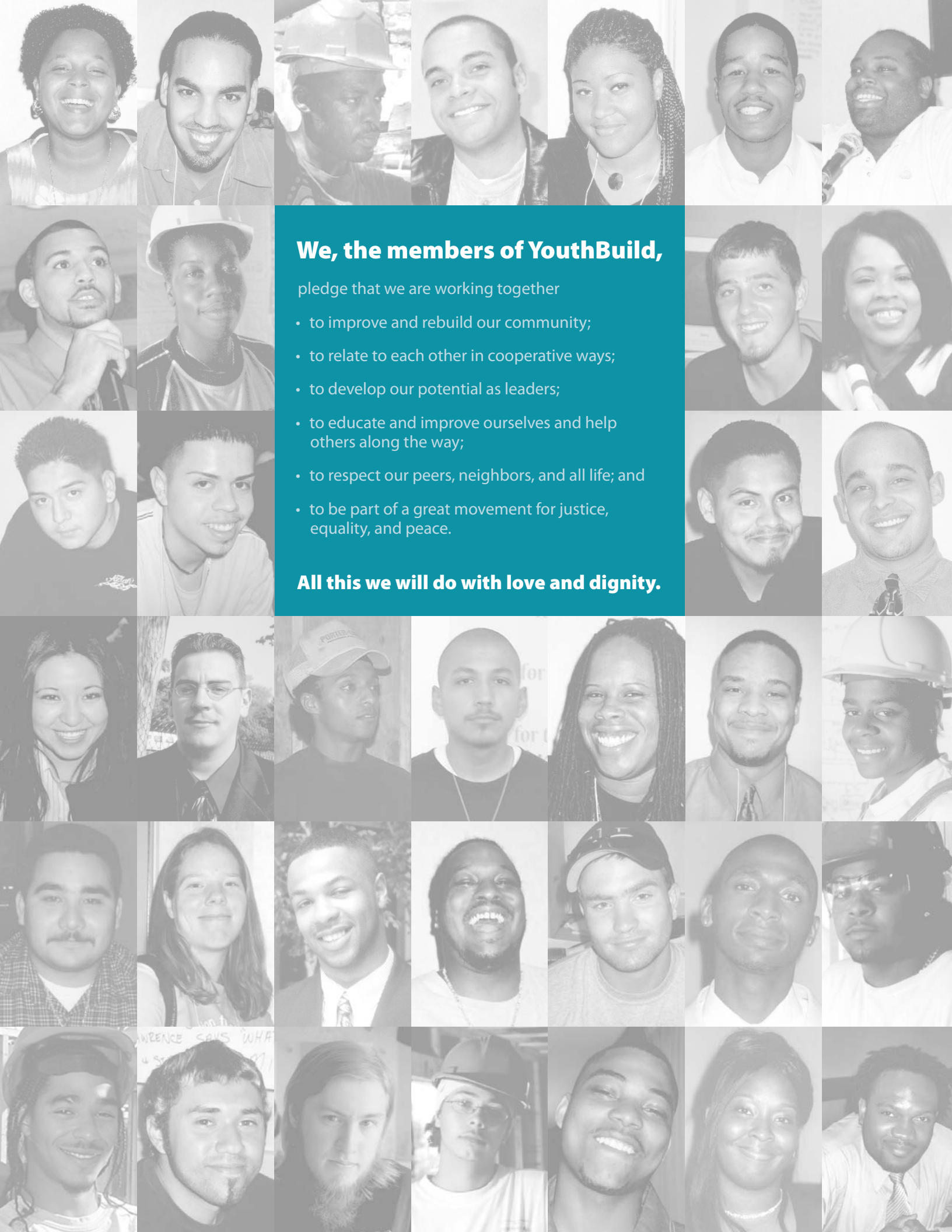
***“That building is like me: rebuilt from the inside out.”*** — Herman Blake





The researchers will assess the level of support from sponsoring agencies; the quality of program leadership and the competence and caring of staff; education, training, and leadership opportunities for youth; assistance from YouthBuild USA; influence of funding on program quality; and partnerships with the criminal justice, education, and other systems. They will also review the community and regional context in terms of employment opportunities and criminal justice policies.

We hope that the evaluation will reaffirm the need for programs like YouthBuild to support youthful offenders' successful re-entry into society. The nation and the economy need youthful offenders to be productive rather than destructive, contributing rather than draining, free and paying taxes rather than locked up at public expense. Their families and communities need them to transcend their problems and become responsible for improving their own lives. Each one needs the opportunity to fulfill his or her potential and dreams, and to become a person who can make a positive difference.



**We, the members of YouthBuild,**

pledge that we are working together

- to improve and rebuild our community;
- to relate to each other in cooperative ways;
- to develop our potential as leaders;
- to educate and improve ourselves and help others along the way;
- to respect our peers, neighbors, and all life; and
- to be part of a great movement for justice, equality, and peace.

**All this we will do with love and dignity.**

## *“From ex-con to icon.”*



*Antoine Bennett (above) was incarcerated for more than three years for a violent crime. He participated full-time in YouthBuild Sandtown (Baltimore, Maryland) for 18 months, graduated in 1996, and went to work as a program assistant at Eden Jobs, where he was steadily promoted up to executive director. He became co-chair of the homeowners association in Sandtown and serves on the board of directors of YouthBuild USA. Maryland law still prevents Antoine from voting or running for office.*



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