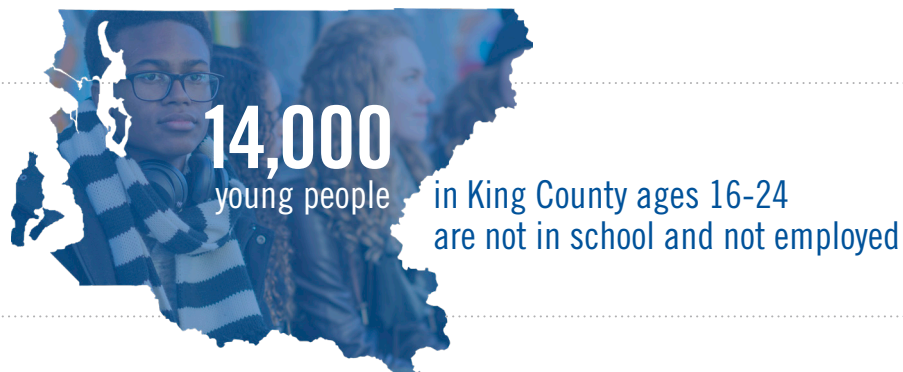


EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sustaining Reconnecting Youth Work

April 2021

Youth and young adults aren't just the future of our communities. They are already leading, continuously showing up as resilient and creative truth-tellers with a clear vision for a more equitable future. We must support and co-create that vision so that all young people can live the lives they deserve.



At any given time, an estimated 14,000 young people between the ages of 16-24 in King County are not in school and not employed. These young people are disconnected from the economic opportunities that educational and employment opportunities provide. By failing to invest in the success of all youth, we suffer the loss of enormous potential.

When we look at the data, we see that students of color are pushed or pulled out of school at higher rates than their white peers. These disparities signal both systemic and structural racism that results in these disparate outcomes. These disparities demand approaches that center racial equity in order to ensure all students truly do succeed, and to correct a long history of educational inequity that threatens to deepen.

United Way recognized an opportunity to both leverage state dollars and create a system where Open Doors reengagement programs supported youth. United Way launched an ambitious initiative called Reconnecting Youth in 2015, aimed at supporting 9,600 youth to reengage with education and 4,800 to graduate. The Reconnecting Youth initiative successfully raised \$20M between 2015 and 2019.

Since United Way's involvement began, the network has grown from three Open Doors programs to well over 20 reengagement programs in King County. Reconnecting Youth has contributed to engaging more than 17,000 young people and, as of Jan. 2021, 3,557 have achieved a credential. However, racial disparities persist, as 1,169—less than half—of those who achieved a credential were young people of color. There is still work to be done supporting youth, especially students of color.

To facilitate stewardship of the work, United Way has created this in-depth sustainability report that outlines the Reconnecting Youth work, including detailed overviews, program snapshots that include student voices, analyses, a finance study and recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Doing right by opportunity youth of color is part of a larger commitment to reparations for Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) communities who have been most harmed by education systems and policy. Recognizing that Open Doors can play a role in reducing harm and building better support for students of color, we recommend the following:

Overall Open Doors Funding Recommendations

- Create a sustainable pathway to invest Open Doors funds directly in community-based organizations.
- Create sustainable funding streams for critical social-emotional supports that enrich the learning environment.
- Change the billing structure to fund programs for 12 months of the year rather than 10..
- Allow programs to bill for activities such as outreach, helping students complete the enrollment process and supporting students even when they are not “billable.”
- Examine and alter the billing structure to eliminate the potential for creaming.
- Re-evaluate the list of Indicators of Academic Progress (IAPs).
- Change the billing structure so that smaller programs can be viable.

PROGRAMMATIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- Utilize best practices for students of color, including restorative justice, trauma-informed practices, culturally tailored curriculums and services, and positive cultural identity frameworks.
- Listen to and give leadership to young people in learning how to design and improve programs, as well as in policy advocacy efforts.
- Engage whole communities to truly create the equitable education spaces students deserve.
- Ensure programs have the capacity and resources to prioritize college/career exploration, readiness and transition support..



Students who leave school have just as much potential as those who stay, but the system fails to support them. Until classrooms can support the brilliance of all our young people, alternatives are and will remain necessary. One of those alternatives is Open Doors programs.