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Training Programs for Youth Get Mixed Reviews

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Youth unemployment is one of our Nation's more urgent problems and likely will remain so in the future, despite a slowing population growth rate. Thousands of youths will continue to leave school without the skills or knowledge that can lead to successful working careers.

It is an oversimplification to suggest, however, that solution of the unemployment problem of youth entails a simple or singular approach. Instead, the problem is one of many facets, each of which requires somewhat different approaches.

Some youth are school dropouts who need at least temporary employment until they are ready to seek further education or pursue other labor market prospects. Some young people, even if high school graduates, are unprepared for career opportunities because they lack even rudimentary work skills. Many students need and would benefit from summer jobs that provide both critical work experience and income.

Any policy addressing these different problems must take into account the circumstances of the special groups in need of assistance. Programs directed toward school dropouts, for example, should emphasize intensive vocational and scholastic training as well as supportive services. Programs featuring a structured, supervised work environment contributing to maturation may be the best approach for some out-of-school youth. For those unable to obtain summer employment, programs aimed at supplying a temporary job in a positive work setting would be useful. For in-school youth, provision of occupational information and career counseling are key activities, perhaps along with work-study arrangements.

The Federal Government has attempted to develop a program mix to meet the multiple employment and train-

ing needs of American youth. Basically, all such programs combine a mix of activities including counseling, job placement assistance, vocational training, education, and subsidized limited-term employment. These programs use public funds to find jobs for the unemployed; deliver services such as classroom and on-the-job training, counseling, and job placement, designed to overcome barriers to employment; and use public funds to provide allowances for enrolled individuals. Sponsored projects are often directed to specific target populations and include a wide assortment of techniques.

The largest Federal youth programs are administered by the Labor Department's Office of Youth Programs (OYP). Two of them have roots in the economic opportunity efforts of the 1960's. The Job Corps offers a comprehensive range of human resource development services, usually in a residential setting, to the most economically disadvantaged, out-of-school young men and women. The Summer Youth Employment Program provides work experience to low-income youth through part-time summer jobs with public and private community agencies.

Four other OYP programs have been initiated under the Youth Employment and Demonstration Projects Act (YEDPA) of 1977. The act authorized new approaches toward youth unemployment problems through a variety of demonstration projects, ranging from community conservation tasks for out-of-school, jobless youth to part-time work for students during the school year. All YEDPA programs, as well as the Job Corps and Summer Youth Employment Program, are now incorporated under the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) as amended in 1978.

These programs are national in scope, serving both urban and rural youth. Unfortunately, little is known about the special needs of rural youth or how effectively these programs are reaching them. Some reports indicate that rural youth are hampered by both limited knowledge of the local employment situation and by inappropriate skills in a restricted labor market. No one has determined, however, if national employment and training programs that serve rural youth are dealing adequately with their needs. Until such evaluations are made only a descriptive focus on the rural-related aspects of the Job Corps, Summer Youth Employment Program, and YEDPA can be attempted.





Job Corps

The Job Corps provides vocational skills training, basic education, health care, work experience, and counseling services to improve future employability of the most economically disadvantaged youth, aged 16 to 21.

In Fiscal Year 1978, the Job Corps was funded for \$480 million and operated 61 residential centers. These served a total of 45,000 enrollees.

Participants typically receive room and board, clothing, books and other learning supplies, and a cash allowance part of which is paid on leaving the program after satisfactory completion. A few centers also accommodate young people who take training during the day while living at home.

Enrollees may stay in the Job Corps as long as 2 years, although the average stay is about 6 months. Upon graduation, they are helped to find a job or alternative educational opportunities.

Job Corps members receive vocational training, often under skilled union workers, in such occupations as heavy

equipment operation, auto repair, carpentry, painting, masonry, electronic assembly, nursing, and clerical work. A primary emphasis is the highly individualized education program in basic computation and communication skills that permits students to proceed at their own learning pace.

Because a great many jobs require a high school diploma or its equivalent, the Job Corps has undertaken to equip able Corps members with the general knowledge needed to pass the high school equivalency test (GED) of the American Council on Education. About a tenth of the enrollees earn their GED certificates each year. Instruction is given in general living skills, ranging from personal hygiene to getting along in a work setting.

Despite some question about long-term effectiveness, short-term results have been favorable. Of all Corps' youths available for placement in FY 1978, 68 per-



cent found employment at an average starting wage of \$3.10 an hour, 20 percent entered school or other training, and 5 percent volunteered for military service.

The Job Corps' apparent success has prompted an expansion, currently underway, of previously existing centers and services. Expansion efforts include opening almost 50 new centers to serve an additional 45,000 enrollees a year, modernizing older facilities, coordinating the Job Corps with other training programs, and experimenting with new approaches.

One innovative proposal involves creating linkages with community colleges and technical schools. Several thousand residential slots will be developed with such post-secondary institutions. They will supply technical training for academic credit to competent enrollees who have been in the Corps program at least 90 days.

Many of the new Job Corps centers will be in rural areas, continuing an existing pattern. Nearly half of the centers operating in FY 1978 were in rural areas. Most were civilian conservation centers (built on public lands) and managed by the Departments of Agriculture and Interior. Few were contract centers operated under agreements with State or local government agencies or private organizations.

A recent study discloses that a majority of Job Corps participants at both rural and urban centers are satisfied with their program experience but satisfaction is more prevalent among those at urban sites. Both groups report they are more satisfied with the job training/education aspects than with the social residential characteristics of life at the centers. Only 40 percent of former Corps members from rural training centers have made post-program contacts with a Job Corps placement agency, far fewer than among urban trainees.

Some of the new Job Corps centers in rural areas will serve groups targeted for special attention, such as Native Americans and young offenders. Plans are underway to establish programs sponsored by American Indians on reservations in the north central region. This will supplement the one Indian center now functioning in Montana. A model Job Corps facility in Vermont has been proposed to enhance the job prospects of young persons who are judged delinquent.

Efforts to enhance coordination among various programs is illustrated by a plan to unite several agencies conducting Job Corps activities in rural Maine. A CETA prime sponsor will administer training quarters for school dropouts on a college campus; agreements will be made with the Maine Job Service to render recruitment and placement assistance. Similarly, many rural Job Corps centers are implementing arrangements to offer their enrollees advanced career training in community colleges or technical schools.

Summer Youth Employment Program

Like the Job Corps, the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) dates back to the 1960's. In terms of outlays and participants, SYEP is the largest single youth employment and training program, having served a total of 8.5 million people since its inception.

In FY 1978, about one million low-income youth, age 14 through 21, were provided employment opportunities during the summer months.

SYEP enrollees receive the minimum wage while working an average of 26 hours a week for 9 to 10 weeks.

Participants must come from families with incomes no more than 70 percent of the Bureau of Labor Statistics' lower living standard (\$7,300 for a family of four in 1978). Thus, money earned by the youth can be critical to family welfare. The program is especially valuable for disadvantaged minority teenagers, both in-school and out-of-school, who have difficulty competing for scarce summer jobs.

SYEP participants work in a variety of community projects, ranging from laboratory technicians, clerk-typists, lifeguards, museum aids, and recreation leaders. The intention is to give them work experience that will prepare them for future employment while helping them meet their immediate financial needs.

Some programs offer counseling and occupational information in efforts to assist youth in vocational exploration and employment. An important goal is to make the work both structured and well-supervised so that positive work habits can be fostered. Support services often made available include remedial education to encourage drop-outs to resume their school studies. However, unlike the Job Corps, emphasis is placed primarily on the work experience itself rather than education/training.

SYEP has recently been evaluated in a comprehensive manner, with mixed conclusions. A recent General Accounting Office (GAO) report judged the program and its management to be seriously deficient. The report found that many enrollees obtain little meaningful work experience; that is, good work habits are not learned well and practical expectations in the real world of work are not fostered. Ineffective management fails to assure that only eligible youth are served, according to the GAO study.

Other studies have shown that SYEP is a reasonably well-managed program giving many trainees exposure to

realistic work situations. It has had considerable impact on unemployment of poor and minority youth, accounting for two-fifths of all summer jobs held by 14- to 19-year-old economically disadvantaged nonwhites. Data on the effectiveness of the program are encouraging: 65 percent of all participants in 1978 returned to school, 3 percent moved into other employment, and 21 percent pursued further job development training such as enrolling in other employment programs.

Expenditures for SYEP were about \$470 million in FY 1978. Twenty-seven percent of this total went to Balance-of-State CETA prime sponsors administering largely nonmetropolitan areas. CETA prime sponsors are chiefly local government units with at least 100,000 population. When an area within a State does not meet the population criterion and does not join an eligible prime sponsor, it is designated as a "Balance of State" prime sponsor. All prime sponsors operate CETA programs through contracts with the Labor Department.

In at least one respect, programs operated by the Balance-of-State sponsors fare better than those with metropolitan sponsors. According to GAO's report, only two of every five youths enrolled at urban SYEP sites are exposed to meaningful work experience, compared with four of five at rural sites.

Rural participants thus are more likely to develop good work habits while performing useful jobs. Two reasons advanced for this are: (1) rural training sites are smaller and therefore more manageable; (2) rural supervisors may have a better understanding of program objectives and a keener awareness of their responsibilities. Why rural supervisors may be more effective is not clear.

The GAO analysis also noted that some rural SYEP programs have serious shortcomings. One rural sponsor, it was found, contracted for marginally acceptable work-sites because better ones could not be developed near enrollees' homes. At another rural location, SYEP funds were allocated among counties for which inaccurate statistics were used regarding number of poor youths; as a result some counties received too little funding and others too much.

The problem of coordinating SYEP with other employment and training programs was underscored when one rural sponsor expressed the view that SYEP is primarily an income maintenance mechanism, unrelated to other programs that stress training in marketable job skills. Recruitment officials of another rural project expressed doubt as to the eligibility of out-of-school youth

and did little to encourage participation in the program from among the large number of poor Hispanics in the community. Such conclusions, both positive and negative, about the operation of rural SYEP programs are somewhat tentative because of small samples studied. A more thorough evaluation of the program's effectiveness must await further study.

YEDPA Programs

The objective of the Youth Employment and Demonstration Projects Act of 1977 was to explore new meth-

ods of dealing with youth unemployment problems. The act authorized efforts to expand the knowledge base from which existing programs such as the Job Corps and SYEP could be improved, as well as to test new and different approaches through a variety of demonstration projects. Its implementation has consisted of community experimental efforts to help disadvantaged youth enter the world of work, achieve job stability, and overcome barriers to completing high school.

YEDPA stresses the importance of research as an integral part of ongoing program operation, with evalua-



tion research designed to produce useful policy-related information. Such endeavors have been retained in legislation incorporating YEDPA into the revised Comprehensive Employment and Training Act.

YEDPA consists of four major components, each with its particular emphasis.

One, the Youth Employment and Training Program (YETP) concentrates on both in-school and out-of-school youths, age 16 to 21, in an attempt to forge better school/work relationships.

Two, Youth Community Conservation and Improvement Projects (YCCIP) aims primarily at mostly out-of-school, jobless 16- to 19-year-olds seeking work in their local communities. It employs them on supervised work projects that furnish tangible benefits to the community.

Three, Youth Incentive Entitlement Pilot Projects (YIEPP) encourages economically disadvantaged high school students to graduate and high school dropouts to return to school, by guaranteeing them a job part-time during the school year and full-time over the summer.

Four, the Young Adult Conservation Corps (YACC) is a year-round program offering unemployed 16- to 23-year olds an opportunity to work on conservation projects in public parks, forests, or recreational areas. These YEDPA programs, with funding of \$1 billion, provided openings for almost 400,000 persons in FY 1978.

Complete assessment of the four YEDPA programs remains for future analysis, but early evaluations show mixed results. Although thousands of young people have received assistance through these programs, there have been problems. Following are two examples of the variant nature of the results attributable to some rural projects.

The Gulf Coast Employment and Training Consortium in Texas has subcontracted with the Palacios School District to furnish YETP services in a largely rural area. The services are designed for economically disadvantaged, out-of-school youths to improve their job seeking skills through training sessions. A mobile van is used for recruitment and assessment activities, with instruction taking place in the classroom. Highlights of the training

sessions are a video-taped mock job interview and three actual interviews per student with local businesses. Positive results such as job placement or referral to other programs have run about 40 percent.

The Gulf Coast Consortium has reported the following difficulties related to the program's rural nature: (1) lack of community services in sparsely populated places increases the need for linkages with those social service agencies that do exist, both public and private; (2) day care, remedial education, nutrition, and consumer information are needed in poor rural areas; (3) when local job opportunities are lacking, the payment of allowances and other support services such as free transportation, are essential to recruit youths; and (4) the program's facilities should be as mobile as possible.

A YIEPP program in Mississippi also covers a large rural area—19 counties across a southern portion of the State. The Balance-of-State prime sponsor is the program manager and coordinator. The Mississippi Employment Security Commission, chief YIEPP subcontractor, is responsible for handling enrollments, developing worksites, making placements, and processing wage payments. The Commission also provides orientation, vocational exposure, and counseling to participants.

Although there were few problems assigning 4,000 youths available employment sites during the program's first summer, the transition from summer to fall presented complications. Many worksites used during the summer could not accommodate the same students in part-time work during the winter. Lack of transportation and child-care facilities severely hampered participation. Inflexible school hours prevented those who desired to work from reaching the worksites in time to complete the minimum 10 hours per week. More worksites have since been developed at hospitals, schools, small business firms, and farms but the other obstacles remain difficult to resolve.

Program Initiatives

None of the employment and training programs reviewed here focused entirely on rural youth. Each is a national program directed at enhancing the employment prospects of young people—wherever they may live. Perhaps for this reason, little systematic effort has been made to determine if SYEP, Job Corps, and YEDPA programs are adequately meeting the needs of rural youth. The evidence available, however, shows positive results are accompanied by persistent problems. Many of the lat-

ter are linked to the fundamental nature of rural life—isolation from training or work sites because of distance, lack of jobs in a smaller labor market, and absence of social services such as public transportation.

Several new program initiatives planned or now underway by the Labor Department indicate that more direct attention is being paid to rural youth needs. Knowledge acquired from these initiatives will be valuable in modifying present program activities to enhance their effectiveness in preparing rural youths for meaningful employment. The major initiatives, briefly summarized, are:

- *Rural housing improvement project.* YCCIP funds are to be used in providing wage support for youth in rehabilitating rural housing of low-income elderly who obtain home improvement loans from the Farmers Home Administration, USDA. Perceived benefits of this program are lower rehabilitation costs to the elderly and reduced job creation expenditures by YCCIP.

- *Rural aged and youth joint service project.* Rural poverty areas often contain a concentration of youths who are possible candidates for outmigration, and older workers with limited employment opportunities. This project is designed to help both groups by giving youth and older adults the chance to work together, thereby encouraging mutually supportive interaction. Mature youth as well as older workers are to serve in supervisory positions.

- *Youth service experiment in rural areas.* A national youth service project offering community service internships is being tested by YETP in an urban area. It explores the possibility of guaranteeing employment after training is completed and of developing new forms of providing government services while experimenting with career development approaches for school dropouts and “high risk” students. A similar project is planned for a rural site that will allow comparisons between urban and rural community youth service methods. The experiments will help determine whether special approaches are necessary because of differing conditions between rural and urban areas.

- *Migrant farmworker programs.* Special YEDPA grants have been made to support training and employment activities serving young people from migrant and seasonal farmworker families. For those out-of-school teenagers adjusting to a work setting, including recent graduates, there are full-time programs of work/training. Migrant youth still in school are eligible for programs affording part-time after school and summertime jobs. The intent is to promote employability of youth of migrant

families—one of the more chronically underemployed and economically disadvantaged segments of the rural population.

The new initiatives, along with older programs, must be carefully evaluated to discover which employment and training approaches are most effective. Results of such evaluations are essential in the policymaking process relative to the long-neglected effort of the Federal Government to focus on youth employment problems unique to rural areas.

Suggested Readings

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