

PROMISING PRACTICES IN WORKING WITH  
**YOUNG ADULTS**

SECTION: POST-GRADUATION FOR COLLEGE AND CAREERS



**YDI**

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This document was developed in collaboration with organizations in New York City that provide services to youth who have dropped out or are on the margins of high school. At the request of the Youth Development Institute, representatives of these organizations met regularly during 2005 and 2006 to share their practices and identify key program principles. The organizations and their representatives are:

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These organizations work in several different New York City initiatives including: *Multiple Pathways to Graduation* (New York City Department of Education), *New Century High Schools Initiative* (New Visions for Public Schools) and the *Young Adult Capacity Initiative* (Youth Development Institute), as well as free-standing sites.

The group was facilitated by Jean Thomases, consultant. Discussions were transcribed by TJ Volonis and then condensed and formatted for review by Greg Cohen and Betty Marton. Ellen Wahl thoroughly revised all of the documents, introduced related research and addressed gaps and consistency across the collection. Betty Marton wrote the Profile on CUNY Prep and edited the entire collection. Joshua Weber wrote the section on evaluations. Production was managed by TJ Volonis, who also copy edited the document.

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# INTRODUCTION



## You Can Do This

You can do this,  
my mind tells me you can do this.

You have no choice,  
but to do this.

When will you ever make something out of your life?

You started it,  
finish what you started,  
Don't back out.

Think about it,  
think about it hard and long.  
Don't be weak  
Be strong.

Don't think negative,  
Think positive.

In the end  
you'll be the one who's sure to win.  
So keep on moving  
Don't stop

You have a destination to be reached.  
You have no choice.

You can do this.

– Corinne Dixon

## **MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN THE LIVES OF YOUNG ADULT LEARNERS**

The feelings this young woman expresses speak volumes to those of us who work with youth who have left school without graduating or who are in danger of doing so. Their determination and struggle call on us to support and strengthen their opportunities and reduce the pressures both within and outside of them that threaten their success.

Today, work with these young people is gaining increased attention and support. There is recognition that efforts to reform high schools cannot succeed when large percentages of young people do not graduate. Nor can communities prosper when so many are unable to reap the economic and personal benefits of education. Strategies and models are urgently needed.

This publication describes practices and program models gathered from leading practitioners in New York City. It is compiled from in-depth conversations, written reports, meetings, and informal observations. It seeks to capture the learning of those who have successfully supported the efforts of these young people to advance, and enable other practitioners to join in this important work.

### ***A NATIONAL CONCERN***

The strongest predictor of whether a student will drop out is poor academic performance.<sup>1</sup> Students who fall behind in acquiring credits toward graduation who are truant or over-age for their grade level are at higher risk for dropping out than those who regularly attend school and acquire credits along with their peers. Also at risk are students who have adult responsibilities—parenthood, child or elder care, family support—as well as those involved with the criminal justice system.

In New York City at any given time, about 70,000 students, fully 20 percent of the high school population, are over-age and under-credited. Another 68,000 young people between 16 and 20 years of age have already dropped out. Once students fall behind—and nearly half of all ninth graders do—it is difficult for them to get back on track within their regular schools. Indeed, today only 19 percent of students who are over-age and under-credited graduate with a high school or equivalency diploma. That is what we seek to change.

Without a high school diploma, prospects for earning a living wage are slim. Today's economy demands at least some college, and a considerable amount of technological, verbal, and numerical literacy. Young people who are unprepared to earn a reasonable wage risk facing a life of poverty and truncated potential.

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<sup>1</sup> Hess et al, 1987; Woods, 1995.

The cost of an uneducated population is measured by a sense of deep inequality in our communities, the enormous expense of welfare and other public support, and a threat to participatory democracy. We cannot afford this.

### ***SOLUTIONS AND HOPE***

With increased national attention to the issue, several cities have embarked on major efforts to reconnect this group of young people to their education and future. New York City has been a leader in these efforts. In 2005, Chancellor Joel Klein and his senior counselor for Education Policy, Michele Cahill, established the Office of Multiple Pathways to Graduation (OMPG) to analyze the characteristics of this population and to create options that prepare these young people to meet graduation standards and move on to postsecondary education and careers. With support from Mayor Michael Bloomberg and from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, OMPG has developed an expanding and differentiated portfolio of strategies calibrated to the variety of situations and needs of this population.

Three types of programs and schools are now reaching thousands of youth in New York City: full-time “transfer high schools,” part-time Young Adult Borough Centers (YABCs), and part- and full-time GED programs. Each of these strategies targets a specific segment of the population. Transfer schools are for students who are still enrolled in high school, have few credits, and can attend school full-time during regular school hours. YABCs operate in the late afternoons and evenings for 17 ½ -21-year olds with a minimum of 17 credits who attend only for the hours they need to finish their courses and exam requirements. GED programs are available during evenings at multiple locations throughout the city and confer a GED upon passage of a state exam. A cross-cutting initiative, Learning to Work (LTW), promotes student engagement and provides college and career preparation. All of these schools and programs emphasize student engagement, support services, jobs and career development, and planning for the future. Early results are promising, showing increases in attendance, graduation, and diploma acquisition rates.

### ***YOUTH DEVELOPMENT + HIGH QUALITY EDUCATION = PARTNERSHIPS FOR SUCCESS***

Young people, especially those who have disengaged, need both support and challenge to reconnect with learning and stay on a path to higher education and careers. Youth development principles that stress building on student assets and integrating family, school, and community make it possible to create features in schools that are essential to success: caring relationships, high expectations, engaging activities, experiences that build skills and knowledge, meaningful roles, and continuity in relationships.

These principles are increasingly understood to be fundamental to school success and need to be in place in any institution that serves adolescents.

Originally developed in connection with non-school programs for youth, they are becoming an increasingly integral part of high school reform efforts.

Academics have always been the cornerstone of formal schooling, but it is only recently that educators have systematically begun to understand and incorporate youth development principles into schools and GED settings. The models that provide multiple pathways to graduation underscore this integration of academics and youth development in their structure, organization, content, and process. They are operated by partnerships between the Department of Education and community-based organizations skilled in working with older youth. They respond to the particular strengths and needs of the young adult population and concentrate their resources on enabling young people to acquire the credentials, preparation, and networks that will ensure their success.

### ***PROMISING PRACTICES AND DEDICATED PRACTITIONERS***

The good news is that we know a fair amount about what works. Over the past 15 years, the fields of youth development and youth employment, truancy prevention, and academic learning and achievement have increased our understanding of what young people need to succeed and how to support vulnerable youths as they transition to adulthood.

In schools and programs across the city and country, youth workers and educators are working to help youth reclaim their futures. The briefs presented here describe practices drawn primarily from experiments in New York City, but they also reflect the national literature and research on student engagement and persistence, academic rigor and achievement, and organizational processes.

The collection begins with profiles of two successful efforts: South Brooklyn Community High School, a full-time alternative “transfer” school, and CUNY Prep Transitional High School, a GED program with college as its goal.

The briefs that follow describe key issues in reconnecting youth:

- [The Primary Person Approach](#)
- [Engaging Young Adult Learners](#)
- [Academics and Returning Youth](#)
- [Post-Graduation Planning for College and Careers](#)

They also address organizational structures and processes that facilitate implementation:

- [School and Community Partnerships](#)
- [Ensuring Program Quality](#)

Certain themes emerge repeatedly and, by nature and design, principles intersect and practices overlap. There are no easy answers. But when something clicks and young people find themselves and their way, it is important to capture what went right. As the field moves forward, it will be important to continue to document what works and evaluate its impact not just on graduation rates but on the full spectrum of developmental outcomes.

There is a lot to do. This collection also seeks to honor the caring adults who are re-engaging youth and the young people who have the courage and will to try again.

As always in describing practices, there is continuous evolution and refinement. Thus, while the guiding principles described above remain constant, the practices and program models may look different by the time you read this.

#### [References Cited](#)

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POST-GRADUATION PLANNING FOR  
COLLEGE AND CAREERS



## POST-GRADUATION PLANNING FOR COLLEGE AND CAREERS

When young people make the decision to get their diplomas, they are demonstrating a commitment to their future. It is important to help them understand that a diploma, GED, or significant advances in skills is a beginning, a foundation for more learning and more opportunities. How do you help them raise their expectations to include post-secondary education and training? What is necessary to ensure that young people have a plan for the future and a network of support to help them now, as they make the transition, and into the next phase of their lives?

This brief suggests practices that enable young people to enter college or to secure a job upon receiving their diploma. These paths are not intended to separate students into tracks, but rather to make sure that whatever their readiness level, they will be on their way to employment that offers decent pay and advancement as well as to further education that can heighten their prospects for a satisfying career and fulfilling life.<sup>1</sup>

To put college and productive jobs within young people's grasp, effective schools and programs:

- Craft a plan from the outset.
- Raise awareness of careers and college.
- Guide young people through the process of getting a job and/or getting into college.
- Provide continuing support to young people after they leave the program.

*Our goal is to have young people submit their college applications and receive responses or develop a set of skills for the workplace by the time they graduate. We offer a class called College & Careers where students learn the differences between private and public colleges and the college application process and work with guidance counselors on application essays and financial aid packages.*

*South Brooklyn Community High School*

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<sup>1</sup> Many of the skills and knowledge required for college and for employment are the same, according to a report on a study by ACT, Inc., "Skills for Work, College Readiness Are Found Comparable," *Education Week* (May 2006).

### *PLAN FROM THE START*

Start talking with young people about their future as soon as they walk in the door. Give them a dual charge:

- Accumulate the skills and credits you need to graduate or complete the GED.
- Envision what you will do after you graduate and make it happen.

Raise the issue of college and post-graduation planning during the admissions and orientation process:

- Ask young people what they hope to do. Seed the idea that completing their secondary education is a critical first step.
- Administer short intake questionnaires to inform planning and provide insight into where a young person is starting. Use the data as a baseline against which to compare changes in aspirations, plans, and attitudes.
- Talk about post-secondary education as a viable choice and let them know that even if they don't yet have the credentials to get in, the school/program is there to help prepare them.
- Describe the program activities that will support their transition planning and connections to next steps.

### *IDENTIFY INTERESTS*

Young people often don't realize that the things they like to do can translate into jobs or courses of study. Further, they may have had limited opportunities to explore what they do like.

Programs use multiple methods to encourage young people to reflect on who they are, who they want to be, and where they want to go. Some of the things they do include:

- Filling out interest inventories. These provide clues and starting points, not limits.
- Engaging in conversations about their interests and what they are good at.
- Writing about experiences they have enjoyed in the past and keeping journals of what they like and don't like during their current experiences.
- Talking with their peers, Primary Persons, and counselors about aspirations, hopes, and concerns. This can be an opportunity to examine equity in education and employment, confront gender and race stereotypes about who can do what kind of job, and identify and plan ways to surmount personal barriers to success.

## RAISE EXPECTATIONS

Shifting young people's perspectives of themselves and their futures takes constant encouragement, solid evidence, and concrete strategies. Programs that help them to take the long view:

- Lay out a variety of options that young people can consider and feel comfortable with—vocational and technical schools, jobs that include training, community colleges, local senior colleges, colleges and universities outside the city and state.
- Help young people balance the desire for an immediate job and income with longer term financial gain. Young people need to know the economic case for continuing their education, about work-study programs and part-time arrangements they can make to earn money if they pursue college or other training, and that some businesses and organizations help employees attend and pay for college.
- Introduce the idea of a career ladder. Make young people aware of opportunities where they can advance from entry to higher level positions as they build skills and experience. Plant the idea that building a career is a process of continuing exploration (most people change jobs multiple times in their lives), accumulating expertise, creating a deliberate path, and taking advantage of serendipitous opportunities.
- Use the “vocabulary of college,”<sup>2</sup> speaking of college as a realistic expectation.

*We place a huge emphasis on college starting from the very first day of orientation, even while recognizing that many students might not see college as a goal. We ask, “Why don’t you think college is for you?” “Why do kids who live in certain areas believe they should go to college and you don’t?”*

*Bushwick Community High School*

## DEVELOP A PLAN

Programs that enable young people to create a comprehensive plan:

- Provide structured information about colleges and careers in advisory sessions, workshops, and classes.
- Work one-on-one to craft individualized plans.
- Schedule periodic meetings to review and revise, on the assumption that a young person's plans may change as they make progress toward graduation.

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<sup>2</sup> The phrase comes from CUNY Prep High School, which bills itself as “a GED program with college as the goal.”

Involve young people fully in developing the plan:

- Interviews with Primary Persons elicit interests and issues, map out the forces in their lives that support or impede success, and identify areas for additional services.
- Formal meetings and informal conversations with peers create a community of support.
- A “Futures” or “College and Career Portfolio” gathers essential documents, information about future opportunities, and evidence of accomplishments.

These Futures Portfolios are personal catalogues of a young person’s life and experiences. They are useful for planning, monitoring progress, and showing evidence of achievement and creativity to potential employers and colleges. The folders include:

- Career, educational and personal goals, and the training and/or higher education they’ll need to achieve those goals.
- A summary plan and timeline with benchmarks to track progress.
- Interest and skill inventories, results, notes about what they like to do, things that get them engaged and excited.
- Information about jobs and careers.
- Information about college and the college process.
- Work, art, writing, certificates, and other evidence of positive accomplishments.

#### *RAISE AWARENESS OF CAREERS AND COLLEGE*

To make informed choices, young people need a sense of the universe of possibilities. They also need a sense of what is expected in these environments in order to be able to imagine themselves as workers and college students. As their knowledge expands, so does their sense of control over their future.

#### *EXPOSE YOUNG PEOPLE TO CAREERS AND JOBS*

Most young people, (like most people, in fact) have limited awareness of the enormous variety of jobs that are available. The process of discovery can be motivating and stimulate young people to consider possibilities that had never occurred to them.

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<sup>3</sup>Published by the U.S. Department of Labor.

- Conduct Internet searches, look through the U.S. Dictionary of Occupational Titles,<sup>3</sup> and use computer tools such as CareerZone and CareerCruising. These and other programs allow young people to profile their interests and skills, search for the kinds of jobs that match up with their interests, identify the qualifications and necessary training, and construct plans.
- Launch research projects to identify where the jobs are and where they are likely to be in the next decade, for example in information technology or health careers, and the level of education and training required.
- Organize career conferences and panels. Invite workers and professionals to talk about their work, demonstrate what they do, and meet with young people.
- Visit workplaces across sectors—retail, corporate, manufacturing, government, public, non-profit (including community and public service organizations), and cultural and educational institutions.

#### *CREATE A WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT*

Within the school, set up a culture that treats young people as adults and prospective workers.

- Share information about the organizational structure of the school and how decisions are made.
- Help young people understand reporting structures, and how information flows in a work organization.
- Put rules and policies in the context of what is required for efficient and safe operation.
- Treat young people with the same respect you want them to show fellow workers and supervisors.

In turn, expect young people to:

- Attend regularly and be on time.
- Call if they will be late or absent.
- Work hard.

#### *PROMOTE COLLEGE AS A PLACE WHERE THEY CAN FEEL COMFORTABLE*

Young people who had not expected to graduate from high school have likely given little thought to what college is like, or even that it can be a place for them. Programs need to introduce young people to the college environment, to college level work, and to others who have attended college and been successful.

- Organize visits to a variety of colleges and post-secondary programs.
- Invite representatives of colleges and training programs to make presentations, conduct discussions and conversations, and meet with and interview young people.
- Invite former students, now in college, to make presentations.
- Participate in programs like CUNY's College Now program that links the New York City Department of Education with the City University system and allows high school students to enroll in certain credit and non-credit-bearing college courses.
- Set up a regular schedule for young people to spend time at a nearby college.

*Students from P.U.L.S.E. High School in the Bronx attend courses at Bronx Community College and spend a full day each week at the college through Campus Fridays, a special program designed by the principal with the vice president of the college. Students are on their own and allowed to use all the college facilities. "There's a different kind of freedom," says the principal. "They come alive."*

- Set up overnight retreats and multi-day trips with participation in classes, social events, and discussions with college students. These experiences expose young people to the full range of benefits that college can offer and can provide the kind of real-world learning experiences that young people need to believe that college is a worthwhile and achievable ambition.

*We take both junior and senior-level students on day trips to local CUNY and SUNY campuses and organize a weekend trip to an upstate SUNY campus. In partnership with a service club at Baruch College, college-student mentors meet and discuss college choices with our students and take them on campus tours and sit in on classes.*

*Manhattan Comprehensive Night & Day School*

- Provide "social proof" of success in college. Bring back graduates who have gone on to post-secondary education to speak, set up visits and tours of their colleges, and serve as mentors through the college process.

*We found that students would put in the extra time to prepare once they had heard from their peers about the added benefits of going to college. So, we bring back former students. It took persistence from our counselors to keep them involved, but it paid off. The college staff told us that our students seemed especially together and well prepared.*

*Comprehensive Development, Inc.*

### **GIVE YOUNG PEOPLE THE TOOLS TO CROSS SOCIAL BOUNDARIES**

Fitting into a college or work environment can be challenging. Norms of behavior may be different from what young people are used to in their own neighborhoods or schools. While some institutions and settings have fairly diverse populations, others may be primarily white and middle class with only small populations of people from minority backgrounds or low-income communities. Inequity in education and unequal access to employment are enduring and systemic problems. Fortify young people while they are still in high school with strategies to ease the transition:

- Create space where young people can talk about both the larger political situation and their own concerns. Establish classes, forums, and dialogues that address issues of race, class, gender, and culture.
- Make them aware of historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), tribal colleges, and Hispanic-serving institutions as viable options to consider in higher education.
- Highlight companies that are strong on diversity policy, and identify organizations in the non-profit and government communities that are representative of a diverse population.
- Introduce young people to college offices for student life and student associations that serve and advocate for students from a range of racial and ethnic backgrounds.
- Take them to plays, dinners, concerts, and art and science museums to expose them to experiences and etiquette that will make them feel comfortable with fellow students and workers.

### **GUIDE YOUNG PEOPLE THROUGH THE PROCESS**

Activities to prepare young people for their future take place throughout their time in the program and intensify as the transition gets closer. Programs offer classes and seminars, organized work experience and internships, individualized support for the college and job application process, connections to employers and college admissions directors, and information and help for families.

**Career Development Classes and Seminars.** Programs such as the New York City Department of Education’s Learning to Work include a weekly seminar that builds workplace skills and readiness. They help young people to:

- Prepare a resume that capitalizes on their talents and assets, including their struggles to turn their lives around and reconnect to their education.
- Hone their communication and interview skills, and promote themselves and what they have been able to accomplish.
- Ask for clarification when they don’t understand a directive, and ask for help when they don’t know how to do something.
- Take time to reflect and debrief about their job search, internship experience, or college application process.

**Internship and Other Work Experiences.** Good internships give young people a real taste of what a particular job or field can be like. When youth perform well, the internship may turn into full-time paid employment.

- Schools offer paid internship opportunities through DOE’s Learning to Work program, which provides young people with 80 hours of internship experience.
- Partnerships with health and higher education institutions and art and science museums, along with participation in other organizations’ mentoring and employment programs expand the range of options.
- Programs tap into resources such as the Career Internship Network<sup>4</sup> that has more than 20 members in New York City and promotes high quality internship experiences.

**Connections to Training Opportunities.** There are numerous training programs in New York State, with many that require a GED or high school diploma but not necessarily college.

- Identify certified vocational programs in the city and state<sup>5</sup> and vet them to make sure they are high quality and match up with the student’s interests and capacities.
- Connect young people to youth employment networks and job programs, and with organizations such as VESID for persons with disabilities (Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities).

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.careerintern.org>

<sup>5</sup> Proprietary trade schools are licensed and overseen by the New York State Education Department and listed at [http://www.highered.nysed.gov/bpss/directory\\_main\\_page.htm](http://www.highered.nysed.gov/bpss/directory_main_page.htm).

**Support for Test Preparation for College Entrance and Training Exams.** Most high school students who are on a college track now take some kind of test preparation course, and recently, test prep companies have begun to work with urban and poor schools to make sure that low-income students have the same access to these test-taking strategies as their more advantaged peers. As much as possible, involve all young people in this preparation and encourage them to take college entrance exams, even if college is not an immediate next step:

- Offer tutoring with adult coaches and peer tutoring by fellow students.
- Organize study groups so students can help each other. For programs such as NYC's Young Adult Borough Centers, where students are at school for an abbreviated schedule, set up virtual support systems with phone and email and use the common time they do have—dinner, official class periods—for short meetings and time to compare notes.
- Set up mentoring and advisory relationships, and encourage attendance at weekly academic counseling sessions.
- Make SAT and ACT test preparation available. Offer courses in-house or develop relationships with test prep companies to provide subsidized courses convenient to students' homes, schools/programs, and schedules.

*We provide college workshops beginning in the spring of junior year. These range from rigorous academic preparation to more focused test prep. Students must attend to be eligible for certain scholarships. Seniors may choose either a year-long, advanced placement English class, or a condensed SAT review class conducted by Princeton Review.*

*Manhattan Comprehensive Night & Day School*

**Help Young People with Admissions and Financial Aid.** The college admissions process is difficult for anyone, and doubly so for young people who have followed unconventional paths to complete high school. Transcripts that show a low GPA can mask recent improvements and fail to convey the perseverance young people have displayed to overcome personal and institutional obstacles to success. Effective college guidance directs young people to appropriate colleges and helps them to tell the story of their academic and personal development in a compelling fashion.

**Cultivate Relationships with College Admissions, HEOP,<sup>6</sup> and Student Life Offices.** As college officers come to understand the nature of the program and trust the judgment of a school's college advisors, they read applications with more insight which increases the chances of admission. Solicit feedback on applications, interviews, and performance, and use this to improve your process and preparation.

**Help Young People Prepare College Applications.** Young people who didn't expect to go on beyond high school are likely to need close support through the college application process. Simplify the process into steps that enable students to take control:

- Familiarize young people with websites, downloading applications, filling out forms, writing essays, getting fee waivers, and securing recommendations.
- Help them compile a list of colleges they can apply to.
- Have sample application forms available for them to practice on before they have to submit. The Common Application is now accepted by nearly 300 institutions (<http://www.commonapp.org/>) and is a good place to start.

Some programs require all their participants to fill out a college application as a graduation requirement. The application is a learning tool to:

- Elicit young people's ideas about what they are interested in and might want to do, emphasizing again that they have a future and need to plan for it.
- Build literacy, writing and employability skills, especially if teachers, counselors, and primary persons give them feedback on their content, style, and grammar.

**Encourage Young People to Tell Their Stories.** Whether young people are applying for college or making a case for themselves with potential employers, encourage them to tell their stories from their hearts. Involve adults who know them well to highlight their strengths.

- Review with young people their transcripts, portfolios, and talents and skills, and make a list of their assets, progress, and achievements, as well as how to present the less than positive aspects of their prior records.
- Place special emphasis on the development of essays. Topics often include questions that these young people can really rise to: how they overcame adversity or faced a challenge; describe someone who influenced them, or a life-changing event; highlight how diversity enriches a college campus; reveal something about themselves that an admissions office wouldn't see in a dry transcript or an employer would miss in a formal resume.

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<sup>6</sup>The Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP) offices on campuses of private universities. The New York State HEOP is specifically designed to support students from low-income backgrounds with "high potential for collegiate success" but who have not attained Regents diplomas and generally rank low on traditional measures of college admission. HEOP provides pre-freshman workshops; remedial and developmental courses; tutoring; academic, personal, and career counseling; and financial aid.

- Provide recommendations. Heartfelt references are a powerful means of presenting young people's journeys. Students may need one or two recommendations for their college applications, and employers who call for a reference will welcome a written analysis as well.

*Each student needs to be individually packaged to tell his or her story in a way that is comprehensible to the colleges.*

*Comprehensive Development, Inc.*

Monitor the college submission or job application process, and help young people deal with acceptances or rejections:

- Follow the process along with each young person.
- Work with staff to design a process that can celebrate successful applications, support young people who are not admitted to the program of their choice, and continue working with young people to find a job.

Organize transitional experiences as young people make progress toward completion:

- Increase the amount of independence in study habits and assignments expected of students. Give students multiple opportunities for independent study, project-based learning, and setting up their own schedules.
- For those who will be going on to college, connect them with college bridge and prep programs, summer art and academic residencies at colleges, and academic internships that introduce young people to the academic expectations and behavioral norms of college life before they officially begin.
- Meet with young people who have lined up jobs and help them figure out what they will need to be prepared, whether it is additional skills, different clothes, getting used to a new schedule, or navigating through the city on unfamiliar transportation. Keep higher education and continued training on the agenda.
- For young people who are still looking for jobs, help them intensify their search and come up with contingency plans for spending productive time—short term courses, continued internships, trial periods—with potential employers.

*During the three months the kids wait for the results of their GED they have a career-related program. During that time we change their schedule, very closely mimicking college. For example, they move from having classes from 8:30-2:30 to actually having three days a week of intensive half-day classes and one SAT prep class. They have Fridays off for intern-*

ships or to take supervised trips to colleges. We structure the entire second year—after a student earns a GED—to support the transition to college or employment.

*CUNY Prep High School*

*We organize a college summit for those approaching graduation: an intensive four-day experience at a college campus where they write personal essays and really talk about their dreams and fears and what they're hoping to accomplish. This is a very powerful experience.*

*South Brooklyn Community High School*

### **INVOLVE FAMILIES**

Parents who did not attend college, who dropped out of high school, or who have struggled to find good jobs may need the same kind of information and case building that you are providing to their children. Even for those who had more success in their educational careers, the college process has changed significantly in the past couple of decades and the job market has also shifted—from a manufacturing to a service and information economy—with very different jobs and job requirements.

To help parents, programs:

- Conduct college information nights and career fairs.
- Arrange regular meetings with family members to ensure that they understand the post-graduation planning process and the options available for their child.
- Educate parents about vocational training programs, and the college application and financial aid process. This helps make it clear that if their child wants to go to college, it will be financially affordable.
- Report academic progress and positive achievements to parents through phone calls, letters, and informal contact, and connect those achievements to potential for success in college: “Your son has real talent with computers and might consider a career in Information Technology.” “Your daughter is earning credits at an accelerated rate, and is moving at a pace that’s more like college than high school.”

**Help Young People and Their Families Identify and Apply for Scholarships and Other Grant and Loan Opportunities.** There are excellent sources of free information on scholarships available on line, (e.g., <http://www.finaid.org>) and numerous scholarships available to support any young person who makes the

commitment to continue his or her education. For access to federal student aid—including Pell Grants, Perkins Loans, Stafford Loans, and work-study programs—young people must submit the Free Application for Financial Student Aid (FAFSA). It comes in electronic and print formats, can be filled out on-line and requires parents (or independent children) to submit information based on their current year tax forms.

The process itself is not that difficult, but it can take time. Provide families as much help as you can:

- Prepare written and in-person overviews of financial aid and the process.
- Hold a meeting and distribute forms, information, and websites.
- Set up individual meetings with families, and give them in-person help with the forms if they need it.

*Students are assigned to guidance counselors who are responsible for their financial aid forms being completed as well as their college enrollment. Students complete the financial forms at home and then bring them to school where we go over them online. We found that our first cohort of kids would show up to register at college, encounter a line around the corner at the bursar's office and say, "I'm outta here." So we also manage their enrollment so that that process doesn't intimidate them.*

*CUNY Prep High School*

### **CONTINUE THE SUPPORT**

College and training programs can be terrific environments that treat students like the adults they are. But they are also not set up to provide the kind of close attention that students have been used to in their current programs. Neither are most workplaces. To increase the chances of retention in college or on the job, programs:

- Organize small groups of classmates to meet regularly even after they have left the program. Some programs encourage their students to go to the same college, and then work with these colleges to create academic, social, and support networks that these young people can participate in together.
- Offer quiet spaces where returning students can study and use computers.
- Provide ongoing phone and in-person counseling and support sessions for program alumni whenever necessary.
- Maintain small discretionary funds that are made available to young people to purchase books, and, in some cases, to buy clothes so that they are more comfortable in a college or work setting.

- Help young people find part-time employment, connect them to paid internships, and pay them to return during summers and vacations to tutor younger students or take other program-related jobs.
- Involve alumni as mentors and guides for current students.

*It helps to get students involved in college activities. We worked with them to identify clubs and other activities that would enable them to build a social group, and we stayed close to them to help address issues as they emerged.*

*Young Adult Learning Academy*

Following young people after graduation is demanding and can extend over several years. It is a critical support that demonstrates to young people that they are worthy of sustained interest, and it can mean the difference between dropping out and successful completion.

*Our experience was that our students did not take advantage of the special supports at first. We had to stick very close to them and provide mentors from our staff: people that they already knew. We also celebrated their successes, bringing them back to school periodically for a meal or other event, or to speak to currently matriculating students at the program. It is an ongoing process and you have to stay on them.*

*South Brooklyn Community High School*

### **REALIZING THE FUTURE**

Step by step, with care and support, young people can discover new beginnings where a short time before they had faced only dead ends. The message is the same for the young people, the programs, and their schools, and the larger society: a high school diploma is the first step, and providing the necessary supports to make a successful transition to college and employment is a wise, indeed essential, investment in our collective future.