



CULTIVATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH TO FLOURISH IN FRANKLIN COUNTY

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INTRODUCTION

Each and every person in Franklin County contributes to the vibrancy, uniqueness, and success of our community. From partnerships between local organizations to the valuable resources and services offered, we all play a role—personally and collectively—to ensure our community continues to thrive. One of our greatest contributors, and often overlooked, are our youth. Every young person in Franklin County should be plugged into the resources that they need to flourish. We all have a role to play in making sure all youth enter adulthood prepared to pursue opportunities to live well—and it begins with treating youth as valued contributors to our community.

When our youth are valued, they are better able to pursue opportunities and are better able to engage in our community. However, at least 15,000 (9.2%) youth ages 16–24 in Franklin County are not enrolled in school or participating in the workforce; at least 3,000 youth under age 24 in Franklin County are homeless; and over 17,000 students faced barriers to reaching key educational milestones in the 2017–2018 school year.

To effectively address these issues, it is important to understand the characteristics of and barriers facing our youth, especially those who are not enrolled in school or participating in the workforce, commonly referred to as Opportunity Youth. By understanding their characteristics and the barriers they face, we can better understand their needs, the resources required to meet their needs, and how best to support their transition to adulthood.

Franklin County has a wealth of resources and caring adults to support youth as they grow. However, youth perspectives about problems they face and solutions that will help them are often missing from these conversations. Youth perspectives are shared in this report along with quantitative data. Before our community can develop solutions to help youth, we must better incorporate youth voices, particularly the voices of those who face the most barriers, into decision-making processes. In addition, strategies to create solutions must be developed recognizing youth strengths, trauma, lasting effects of discrimination, and the benefits of adolescence.



As a community, we must also recognize that opportunity gaps exist as a direct legacy of institutional and systemic racism. The definition of opportunity gaps is the ways in which race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, English proficiency, community wealth, familial situations, or other factors affect educational achievement and attainment for certain groups of youth. For the purpose of this report, the term's application is expanded to also include other factors of child well-being. For example, policies that led to segregated and restrictive housing through redlining and limited transportation access have impeded access to economic opportunities based on race, ethnicity, and other individual and community characteristics. As highlighted in the *Franklin County Rise Together Poverty Blueprint* (2019), "...racial disparity was an overarching problem raised throughout the process," and that, "...it was important to have a frank conversation about the historic and current role that racial inequalities play on poverty."¹ The unfortunate reality is that many of our youth today are paying the ultimate price through disparate treatment within our systems and social services and experiencing limited opportunity.

However, there is hope. The Franklin County community can redesign opportunities available for all our youth and re-engage our children and young adults who have been left behind. To understand and address these challenges, The Columbus Foundation partnered with the Children's Defense Fund-Ohio (CDF-Ohio) to examine the characteristics of Opportunity Youth, the pathways to becoming an Opportunity Youth, and the resources and strategies that our community can use to ensure every youth in Columbus achieves the following goals (developed by a stakeholder group of youth-serving organizations in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors and The Columbus Foundation):



Housing: Youth have equitable access to safe and decent shelter and housing



Health and Wellness: Opportunity Youth have the tools to be and stay healthy



Education: All youth are supported and prepared to engage and navigate an ever-changing world



Support Systems: Our community ensures that all youth are connected, engaged, and supported



Workforce: Opportunity Youth will have meaningful and fulfilling career opportunities



Civic Engagement: Opportunity Youth are actively engaged in our community

When our youth have access to resources that meet their basic needs—for example, safe housing or adequate nutrition—they are able to focus and excel in work, school, and other aspects of their lives. In this report, CDF-Ohio focused on Opportunity Youth and youth with unmet basic needs, regardless of their education or employment status.

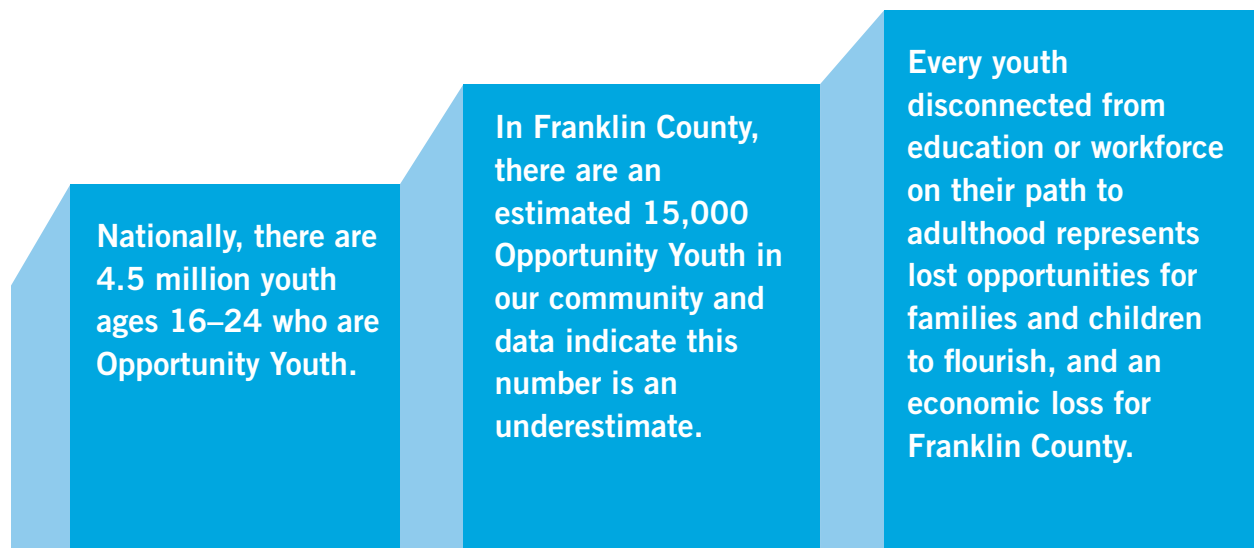
Over the past several years, Franklin County and the City of Columbus, in partnership with local and regional stakeholders, service providers, and others, released reports and analyses exploring poverty, Opportunity Youth, and homeless youth. This report builds on the foundation of those reports, takes a fresh look at the data, and incorporates the voices of our youth and youth-serving providers and program leaders who identified continuing barriers and new opportunities.

To more deeply understand the challenges and characteristics of youth, CDF-Ohio collected and analyzed demographic, economic, and education data from government and nonprofit organizations; reviewed national and local research on outcomes and factors that contribute to youth success; and hosted a series of interviews with Franklin County youth, service providers, and program leaders.

Local youth shared valuable information about their experiences and provided new and, often, innovative insights to developing solutions that help achieve their goals. With help from community partners, CDF-Ohio hosted a series of focus groups in spring of 2019 with Franklin County youth who are disconnected from school and/or work, homeless, housing insecure, new Americans, refugees, young parents, in the foster system, and/or formal court involved. They represent diverse backgrounds and experiences, but share a common characteristic: they each faced significant barriers on their pathways to opportunity. Conversations with youth focused on their strengths seeking to understand how youth define success for themselves and the resources they need to pursue their aspirations.

In the first section of this report, CDF-Ohio shares who Franklin County's Opportunity Youth are, their strengths and aspirations for the future, and elevates their voice to inform this report. In the second section, the report provides insights on key areas of youth well-being, highlighting opportunities for our community to engage with and support our Opportunity Youth now. The third section explores the need for prevention by identifying common barriers Opportunity Youth have faced from an early age and throughout their lives. The fourth section provides information about how to best develop solutions to help all youth in Franklin County flourish.

A quick look at the numbers...



Measure of America. (2019). Making the Connection: Transportation and Youth Disconnection. Retrieved from: <https://ssrc-static.s3.amazonaws.com/moa/Making%20the%20Connection.pdf>

IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org

Note about Data in this Report: The authors reference data in this report that correspond to either Franklin County or Columbus, Ohio. These designations were determined by the data source and how the data were collected. Regardless, many of our findings and recommendations are directed to the entire central Ohio community, which includes the City of Columbus and Franklin County.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Every youth in Franklin County should have the opportunities they need to flourish. The Children’s Defense Fund-Ohio (CDF-Ohio) partnered with The Columbus Foundation and the Opportunity Youth Steering Committee to examine the characteristics of our community’s youth, the challenges they face, and recommendations for our community to support youth’s transitions to adulthood.

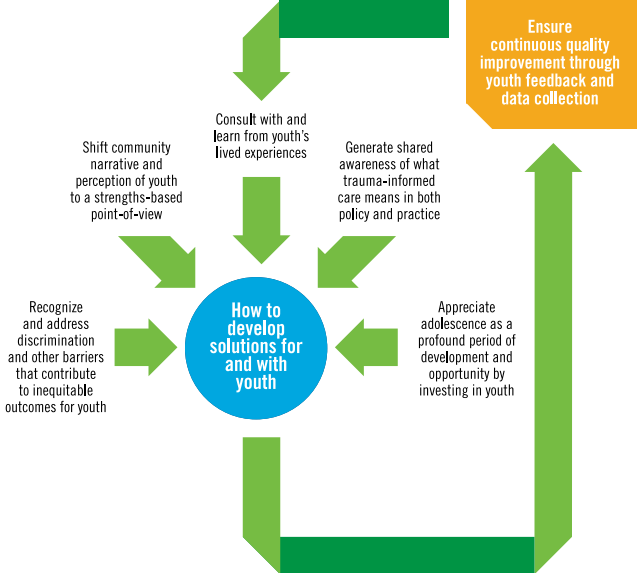
Key Takeaways

- **Adolescence is a key time for our community to invest in our youth.** Unique changes in brain structure during adolescence make it an opportune time for learning and growth.
- **Discrimination and historical legacies of institutionalized racism continue to affect the accessibility of opportunities for youth in Franklin County.** Still, the designs of policies, programs, and practices do not address the circumstances of the youth who need them most.
- **Youth need policies, programs, and practices that are responsive to their life circumstances.** Significant training and resources have been invested in to elevate our community’s awareness of trauma-informed care; however, youth report that this awareness must be translated into everyday practice.
- **Youth insights, perspectives, and lived experiences are integral to designing policies and programs aligned to their needs.** Franklin County has a rich ecosystem of programs, services, and resources and youth report the need for more integration of their perspectives and insights to improve offerings, delivery approaches, and outcomes.

This report emphasizes youth voice to fundamentally drive change and develop solutions to alter how youth are engaged and retained in services and programs. The following six steps are critical intermediate steps that must occur first in order to achieve the goals articulated from previous reports.

HOW TO DEVELOP SOLUTIONS FOR AND WITH YOUTH

1. Consult with and learn from youth’s lived experiences
2. Generate shared awareness of what trauma-informed care means in both policy and practice
3. Appreciate adolescence as a profound period of development and opportunity by investing in youth
4. Recognize and address discrimination and other barriers that contribute to inequitable outcomes for youth
5. Shift community narrative and perception of youth to a strengths-based point-of-view
6. Ensure continuous quality improvement through youth feedback and data collection



Opportunities for Intervention and Support

In previous reports and strategy documents from The Columbus Foundation and other organizations that work with Opportunity Youth, the outcomes or goals identified within the six focus areas—housing, health and wellness, education support systems, workforce, civic engagement—are valid and much needed in our community. Interventions to support our youth cannot focus on any single area of their needs in isolation. Youth voices and data demonstrate the need for support in all areas of wellbeing so that all youth can access opportunities they want for their futures.



HOUSING: Youth have equitable access to safe and decent shelter and housing

More than 3,000 Franklin County youth experience homelessness annually and an additional 1,400 youth are at imminent risk for homelessness.

“You cannot be successful if you do not know where you are going to sleep every night.”



HEALTH AND WELLNESS: Opportunity Youth have the tools to be and stay healthy

In Franklin County, 1 in 4 (24.2%) youth between the ages of 18–25 reported having mental health challenges in the past year.

“I wish caring adults knew that there are days when mental health is a struggle. I do suffer from depression, but it’s been better since I’ve come out, but there are still days when it’s hard to get out of bed, hard to have any initiative to do anything. It’s hard to even just eat.”



EDUCATION: All youth are supported and prepared to engage and navigate an ever-changing world

Between the 2010–2011 and 2016–2017 school years, 42,772 Franklin County students did not earn high school diplomas within 4 years of first entering 9th grade. These students are now likely between the ages of 18–24.

“I want to go back to school ... I want to go back to school to be a social worker, but I am scared of failure. I don’t want to feel like I wasted my time and my money.”



SUPPORT SYSTEMS: Our community ensures that all youth are connected, engaged, and supported

There are 40.3 per 1000 15–17 year-olds in Franklin County who are in foster care, which is nearly double the state rate. These youth are less likely to have support systems when they enter and navigate early adulthood.

“If you go to college and you don’t have a family, it can be difficult.”



WORKFORCE: Opportunity Youth will have meaningful and fulfilling career opportunities

In Franklin County, there are 15,000 (9.2%) youth between the ages of 16–24 not in school and not working. However, many more youth are in the workforce yet not earning living wages that meet their basic needs.

*“It’s not fair,” said one young person in Franklin County, currently experiencing homelessness.
“I make \$9 an hour, and I am still struggling.”*



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: Opportunity Youth are actively engaged in our community

Youth shared with us their future goals, including being stable, professional, safe, nurturing as parents, healthy in their relationships, community leaders, and entrepreneurial.

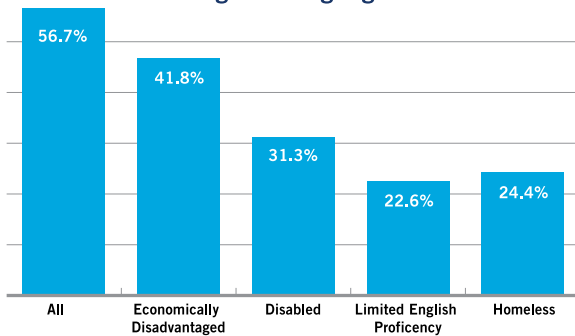
“For me, in 10 years, I would like to run a LGBTQIA+ foster home.”

Our youth encounter significant barriers to opportunities—oftentimes at no fault of their own. Our youth experience disconnection because of:

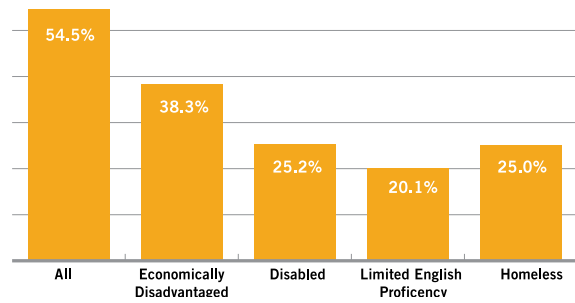
- Poverty and concentrated poverty;
- Differences in ability;
- Out-of-home placement (foster care);
- Educational system inequities;
- Formal court involvement;
- Status as immigrants and challenges as new Americans;
- Homelessness;
- Mental health challenges;
- Pregnancy or parenting; and
- Enduring impacts of historically pervasive, intentionally discriminatory policies and actions that affect many youth based upon their race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or other factors.

Overall, data show that youth from these groups face many barriers to achieving key milestones.

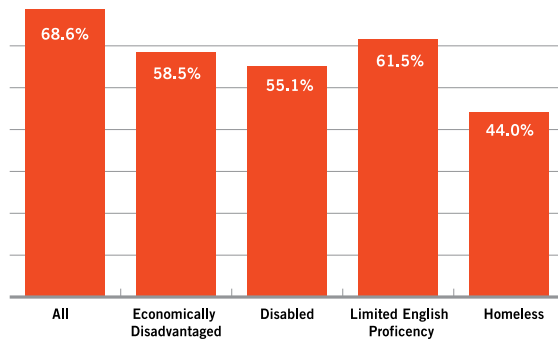
Franklin County 3rd Graders Proficient in English Language Arts



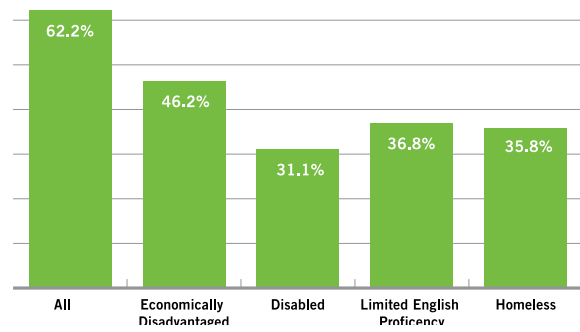
Franklin County 8th Graders Proficient in Math



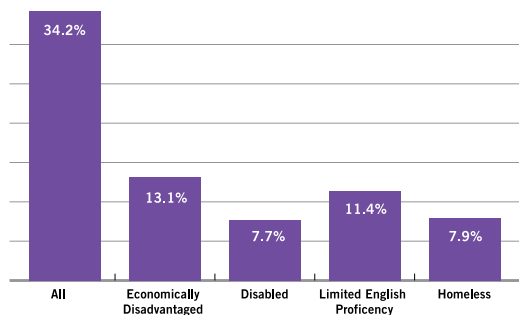
Franklin County Students Graduating from High School in 4 years



Franklin County Students Enrolling in College 2 Years Post High School Graduation



Franklin County Students Earning 2- or 4-Year Diploma 6 Years Post High School Graduation



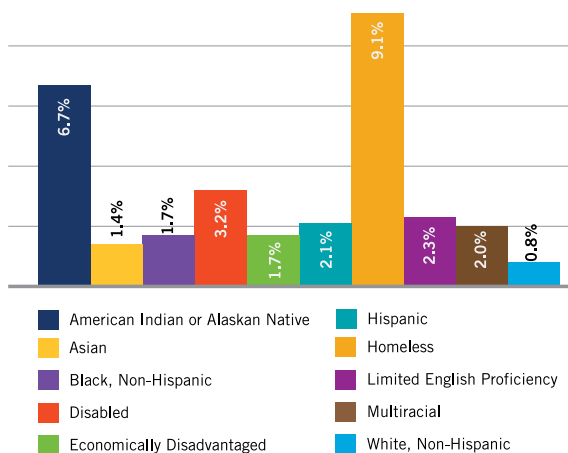
DATA NOTE: The third and eighth grade data are from the 2017—2018 academic year; the graduation data are from the 2016—2017 academic year; two years post- graduation data correspond to the 2015 graduating class; six years post-graduation data correspond to the 2011 graduating class.

Many policies, programs, and practices are not designed to respond to youth trauma and do not address lasting effects of racism and discrimination. These further distance already marginalized youth in our community from pathways to success:

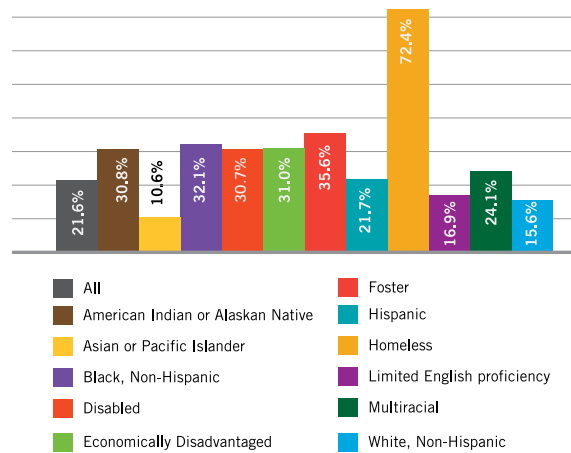
Current disciplinary policies and practices do not properly respond to behavior that arises due to youth trauma. In addition, national research suggests that youth of color face more and harsher disciplinary practices even though they do not commit more disciplinary infractions than their White peers.

Missing more than 10% of the school year, or chronic absenteeism, affects some students at higher rates than others. In 2017–2018, 72.4% of youth who were homeless were chronically absent from school compared to 21.6% of all youth in Franklin County and 16.0% of all youth in Ohio.

Students Receiving Out-of-School Suspensions in Franklin County



Students Chronically Absent from School in Franklin County



Youth insights and experiences are key to understanding how to create best practices for the future that address historical disparities and encompass the needs of all youth in our community.

Youth want to see more data that represent their lives and their needs:

CDF-Ohio asked youth what data they would like to see collected that share a fuller picture of their experiences.

- Data on how children in single-parent families take on responsibility for helping to provide for their families.
- Data that show how affordable college tuition and other costs of attending college are for economically disadvantaged students, even with Pell grants and financial aid.
- Data on children placed into the foster system because their parents are unable to support them or similar types of economic information.
- Data on access to services for youth who are a part of the LGBTQIA+ community and are differently abled.
- Data on how well employers treat their employees and prospective employees who adhere to religious and cultural beliefs (e.g., wearing a hijab, fasting, etc.).

Developing Solutions to Help All Youth Thrive

1. Elevate youth voice to inform programs, policies, and practices.

By involving youth in the planning and decision-making for the services they need to grow and develop, program design and service delivery can be improved. Involving youth will also increase the likelihood that they will participate and stay engaged. Service providers, policymakers, and employers must build trust and engagement by listening to and responding to youth. This is essential because Opportunity Youth are often their only advocate and must take on adult responsibilities earlier than other youth.

2. Break down system and program silos to better meet youth's comprehensive basic needs.

Youth seeking housing, nutrition, health, and education services must often navigate multiple organizations, processes, program rules, and eligibility criteria. Youth will benefit from funding initiatives that support and incentivize organizational collaboration that focuses on holding all entities accountable for holistic outcomes of youth.

3. Change the narrative about adolescence to ensure youth are viewed as community strengths.

Develop a shared understanding amongst stakeholders, funders, service providers, parents, and families about the profound brain development that occurs in adolescence so our community can focus on how best to support youth as they grow healthy and flourish.

4. Improve our understanding and treatment of youth mental health.

Many youth who encounter barriers to success have faced a multitude of traumatic events. The coping and survival strategies youth use to overcome traumatic situations may be inappropriate or disruptive in everyday circumstances. Every individual who makes decisions about or works directly with youth must understand these behaviors and create trauma-sensitive cultures and strategies to address them. As a result, youth will feel more welcome and engaged when seeking out and accessing programs and services, and will be better able to focus on acquiring the skills they need to flourish.

5. Ensure that programs serving youth are inclusive, individualized, and accommodate youth with different abilities.

All services and programs must accommodate differently abled youth, especially those with limited literacy or numeracy skills. Service providers and stakeholders have opportunities to redesign and rethink services and programs when taking youth voice and needs into consideration. Stronger program design with an equity lens allowing for more inclusivity will improve outcomes.

6. Help youth by helping their parents, families, and neighborhoods.

Youth live in families. Service providers and stakeholders can respond to and prevent trauma by building on the strengths of youth and their families to ensure our neighborhoods are safe, healthy, and thriving places to call home.

7. Consider and address discrimination and other disparate actions that affect youth as they transition through school and into the workforce.

Many policies in our communities were built upon legacies that disproportionately harmed groups of individuals based on race, ethnicity, economic status, religion, gender identification, sexual preference, and ability. Data on school discipline, chronic absenteeism, high school graduation, and juvenile justice involvement represent an opportunity to reconsider and redesign programs, policies, and practices with an equity lens to close opportunity gaps, support youth, and improve their life outcomes.



We all have a role to play in making sure our youth enter adulthood prepared to pursue opportunities to live well. It begins with treating youth as valued community assets.

SECTION 1

Franklin County's Opportunity Youth

All youth in our community have unique strengths and aspirations. Opportunity Youth were not born with different needs than those of other youth. The separating factor is that Opportunity Youth encounter significant barriers on their pathways towards fulfilling adulthood—oftentimes at no fault of their own.

Discrimination, as well as the lasting effects of historic and current inequitable economic opportunities and segregation, continue to affect opportunities for our youth and their families.

Many factors can produce decision-making structures that are designed to primarily serve middle-class children and families, leaving other children and their families left to navigate systems that are set up in direct contrast to their current circumstances. This can look like locating high-quality programs and services in areas that are inaccessible by public transportation, or assuming that a child can focus in school when their family does not earn a living wage and that child experiences trauma on a daily basis from hunger and housing insecurity.

The result of many of these decisions, policies, and practices is that there are groups of youth within our community who have “fallen through the cracks.” These youth have been pushed out of formal education and are not participating in the workforce. We call this group “Opportunity Youth.” The term “Opportunity Youth” is commonly used to denote the opportunity for greater economic growth and prosperity that youth disconnected from workforce and education represent. It is a term that places a spotlight on the value of youth who may otherwise remain invisible. This report seeks to highlight the inherent value of all of our young people beyond just the economic opportunity they represent, and further, create space for our community to reflect and act upon the inequities that have contributed to the marginalization of our youth.

The first section of this report aims to provide further insight into who our community's Opportunity Youth are and how supporting them to achieve their goals poses incredible promise for our entire community. As youth ages 16–24 develop throughout adolescence, they are navigating a period marked by profound opportunity for positive development. As a community, we can help our youth now, especially those facing the most barriers to success, by ensuring all youth in Franklin County have the supports and resources necessary to take full advantage of this window of opportunity.



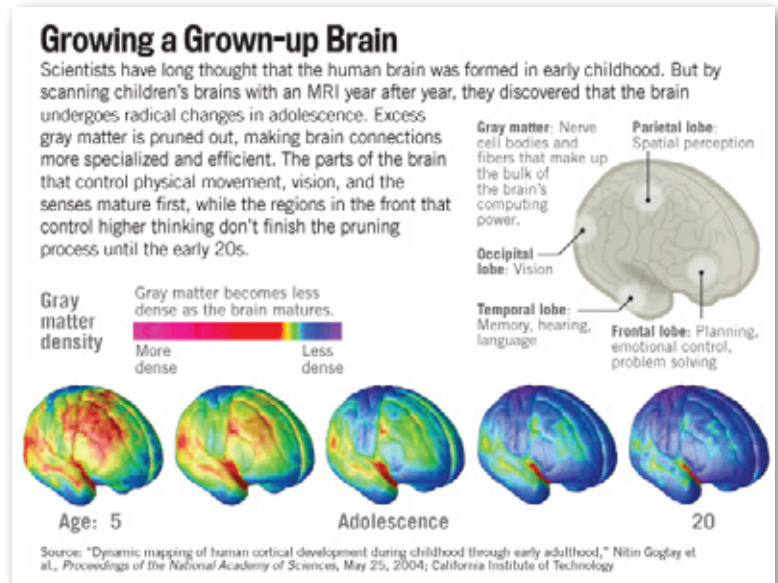
We can help our youth now. Adolescence is a key time to help youth grow.

We must take advantage of key developmental opportunities that occur during adolescence. Our youth experience significant brain development during adolescence and not just early in their lives. During the first 1,000 days of a child's life, 90% of the brain has developed, and by age 6, a child's brain is approximately 95% the size their brain will be as an adult. But the size of the brain does not correlate with full development or signify that children are equipped with the complex cognitive functions they will need as adults.

When a child reaches puberty, the brain begins to rewire itself as part of the process called myelination and synaptic pruning, making portions of the brain developed as a young child smaller to make way for higher-level cognitive, emotional and social functions, including planning and decision-making.² During adolescence, the brain also experiences increased plasticity, or the ability to be

shaped. This is a key time for our community to build upon youth strengths, address adverse childhood experiences, and ensure that environments are healthy.³ This time is especially important for youth who have not received necessary resources early on as children. As a community, we need to take maximum advantage of this critical period of development by reframing our **perception of adolescence** to focus on youth strengths—rather than defaulting to the typical perceptions of youth deficits and negative, risk-taking behaviors.

Our community must sustain investments in children and youth well after the first 1,000 days, through adolescence and into a person's mid-20s. This is how our community will realize the full potential of youth, and the social and economic returns on these early investments. Developing the whole child must be supported in order to give our youth greater opportunities to be happy, healthy, and successful as adults.



How many of our youth in Franklin County face barriers to fulfilling adulthoods?

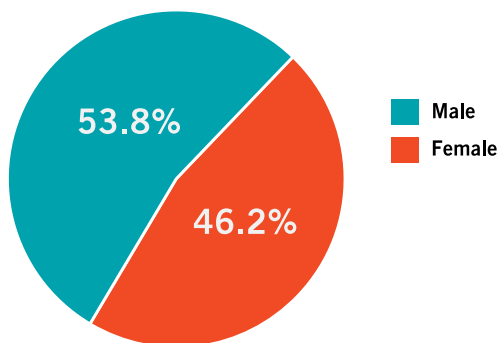
The U.S. Census estimates that 15,000 (9.2%) youth in Franklin County between the ages of 16–24 are not working and not in school.⁴ However, there are indicators that many more youth are currently on track to disengagement.

Between the 2010–2011 and 2016–2017 school years, 42,772 Franklin County students did not earn high school diplomas within four years of first entering ninth grade. These students are now all likely between the ages of 18–24.⁵ The fact remains that there are too many young people not earning their high school diplomas.

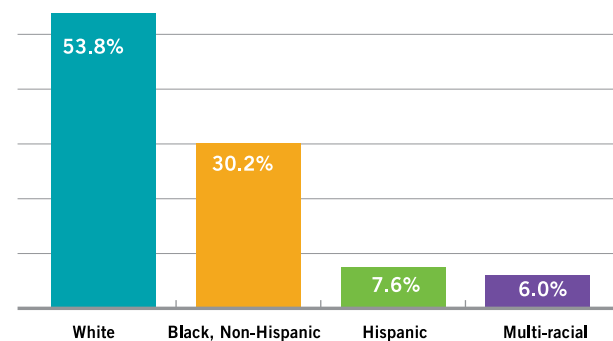
In 2016–2017, who did not earn a high school diploma in four years?

Year	Number of Students in Franklin County Who Did Not Earn High School Diplomas Within Four Years of Entering 9 th Grade in 2016–2017
2010–2011	6,436
2011–2012	6,098
2012–2013	6,015
2013–2014	6,106
2014–2015	5,996
2015–2016	6,103
2016–2017	6,018

Gender of Students Who Did Not Earn a High School Diploma in 4 Years in 2016-2017 in Franklin County



Race/Ethnicity of Students Who Did Not Earn a High School Diploma Within 4 Years in Franklin County in 2016-2017



Even if our youth in Franklin County are working or in school, it does not mean that they are thriving and successful, or that they have their basic needs met. Youth safety, access to housing, family and community context, as well as a series of other indicators must also be considered.

In addition, many of the youth facing the most barriers to success are harder to track when collecting data. Further, the quantitative data without the context of youth perspectives, goals, stories, and strengths are incomplete.

In 2018, 21% of respondents to a survey of homeless youth visiting Star House reported having a full-time position, and thus would not fall into the category of “not employed or in school” despite lacking basic needs.⁷

“It’s not fair,” said one focus group participant, currently experiencing homelessness.

“I make \$9 an hour, and I am still struggling.”

As the numbers do not capture the total youth experience, stories, goals, and strengths, CDF-Ohio partnered with stakeholders to conduct focus groups to better understand these aspects of life for youth in Franklin County.

OUR YOUTH ARE:

DETERMINED

“ I am determined. I will make anything happen for my kids.”

SELF-AWARE

“ I am aware of my emotions. Your experiences really do drive your behavior and your emotions, so if you are not aware of them, if you don't have that awareness, then you're going to be kind of on automatic.”

RESILIENT

“ The losses I have had of family members makes me want to be successful, and the people around me need someone to look up to.”

PERSEVERANT

“ I do not give up, no matter the scenario, the situation, the possible outcomes, I don't give up.”

INTELLIGENT

“ There are certain things that you can't control and that you can control, and I feel like literally once you understand that and put that in your head, you can get past so many different things and so many different obstacles.”

In focus groups, youth imagined themselves as happy adults 10 years from now and described what the future looks like for them.

I WANT TO BE STABLE. “I want to get my tattooing job back and stuff. I want some more stability in my life. I want to have my little brother live with me, and try to get him out of foster care.”

I WANT TO BE A DOCTOR. “I would be a pediatrician working at a general hospital.”

I WANT TO BE SAFE. “I’d be happy if everyone was safe...a safe world for marginalized folks—women, LGBT people, people of color, people with disabilities, things of that nature.”

I WANT TO BE A NURTURING PARENT. “Not in 10 years, but hopefully soon, I want to get my son back, and I want, like, a big house with a big yard so he can play in it. And I do want to be married with at least another kid.”

I WANT TO BE IN HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS. “I would hope to have more children by then and have a healthy relationship with a significant other.”

I WANT TO BE A TEACHER. “I will be a special education teacher. My neighborhood will be on the side of town where I grew up, over on the east side.”

I WANT TO BE A COMMUNITY LEADER. “I want to have my masters in law enforcement. I want my own security force to help people, not just provide security for them, but to help people on the streets. And my daughter would be 12 years old, so my life is going to be different.”

I WANT TO BE AN ARTIST. “I want to be an artist. I am an artist, but I want to own my own gallery.”

Youth are best supported to achieve their goals when their basic needs are met.

When youth have safe shelter and adequate nutrition, they are able to feel safe and healthy, and can focus on achieving their potential. CDF-Ohio learned through youth and data collected from other organizations that about 4,500 youth in Franklin County are lacking secure shelter, and 7,700 17 year-olds receive government support to obtain adequate nutrition.^{8,9}

In this report, basic needs refers to the elements required for survival and normal mental and physical health, such as food, water, shelter, protection from environmental threats, and love.



“You cannot be successful if you do not know where you are going to sleep every night.”

SECTION 2

Opportunities for Intervention and Support

Interventions to support our youth cannot focus on any single area of their needs in isolation. Youth voices and data demonstrate the need for support in all areas of wellbeing so that all youth can access opportunities they want for their futures.

In the sections below, CDF-Ohio explored community data and used youth voice to determine how our youth are faring right here in Franklin County. The Columbus Foundation and community stakeholders identified six areas of youth well-being to frame this conversation and understanding: Housing; Health and Wellness; Education; Support Systems; Workforce; and Civic Engagement.





HOUSING

YOUTH HAVE EQUITABLE ACCESS TO SAFE AND DECENT SHELTER AND HOUSING.

Many young adults in Franklin County do not have access to safe, decent shelter and housing.

More than 3,000 Franklin County youth experience homelessness.

“If I could tell one thing to the governor or someone higher up, take a walk in tent city. They would look at everything differently.”

“If I could tell one thing to the governor or someone higher up, take a walk in tent city. They would look at everything differently,” says one Franklin County teen. She and other youth shared that living in a tent made it difficult to securely lock away their belongings or keep unwanted assailants out.

According to a 2018 report by the Community Shelter Board on youth homelessness, at least 3,000 youth under age 24 in Franklin County experience literal homelessness annually (in shelter, transitional housing, a place not meant for human habitation, or unsafe/dangerous living situation) and an additional 1,400 youth are at imminent risk for homelessness (at risk for literal homelessness within 14 days).¹⁰ Still, it is speculated that these numbers are far larger because youth who are homeless are mobile and, in some instances, try to avoid detection, making them difficult to track.

3,000
YOUTH



UNDER AGE 24 IN FRANKLIN COUNTY EXPERIENCE LITERAL HOMELESSNESS ANNUALLY

What youth wish caring adults knew about their lives:

“I feel skimmed over with a lot of things, and I think it’s because people feel like because we’re homeless we need their sympathy. No, I don’t need your sympathy. I need you to treat me like a human being. I am not a stay-at-home potato. I am not inanimate. I have feelings, and I have a story.”



One of the most commonly reported reasons for homelessness among youth was relationship problems with their family or caregivers. In fact, 22.5% of homeless youth reported this as the main reason for their homelessness followed by unemployment (16.6%) and inability to pay rent/mortgage (14.0%).¹¹ Relationship problems can stem from abuse, neglect, rejection, and a myriad of other issues that can arise between the child, parent, or caregiver. Other relationship problems include being kicked out of home by a parent or aging out of foster care without “familial support.”

Recommended Additional Resources: In March 2019, the Community Shelter Board published the report, *A Place to Call Home for Youth: Our Coordinated Community Plan for Youth Facing Homelessness in Columbus and Franklin County*. This resource provides a more exhaustive profile of Columbus’ homeless youth population.





HEALTH AND WELLNESS

OPPORTUNITY YOUTH HAVE THE TOOLS TO BE AND STAY HEALTHY.

Nearly a quarter of our youth face mental health challenges. Providing easy access to mental health services can support healthy development.

One focus group participant described how their abusive childhood caused multiple mental health struggles and led them to the decision to run away from home without a safe place to go, “My depression, my anxiety, my PTSD [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder]. My mom used to beat me senseless, her boyfriend beat me senseless. ... When I turned 16, I left my mom’s house, and I had nowhere to go. I was sleeping on train tracks before I was sleeping in a tent.”

“My depression, my anxiety, my PTSD [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder]. My mom used to beat me senseless, her boyfriend beat me senseless... When I turned 16, I left my mom’s house, and I had nowhere to go. I was sleeping on train tracks before I was sleeping in a tent.”

In Franklin County, 24.2% of youth between the ages of 18–25 reported having mental health challenges in the past year, which is slightly higher than the rate for the rest of Ohio (23.2%).¹²

Youth with adverse childhood experiences, also known as ACEs, may be at higher risk of mental health challenges later in life.

What youth wish caring adults knew about their lives:

“I wish caring adults knew that there are days when mental health is a struggle. I do suffer from depression, but it’s been better since I’ve come out, but there are still days when it’s hard to get out of bed, hard to have any initiative to do anything. It’s hard to even just eat.”



1 in 7 children experienced 3 or more adverse childhood experiences

Ohio is one of only five states in which at least 1 in 7 children has experienced three or more adverse childhood experiences.¹³ Adverse childhood experiences, are potentially traumatic experiences, including abuse and neglect or living with an adult with a mental illness. These experiences can have life-long effects on a child’s development and outcomes later in life, including physical health, mental health, and problems maintaining employment.¹⁴



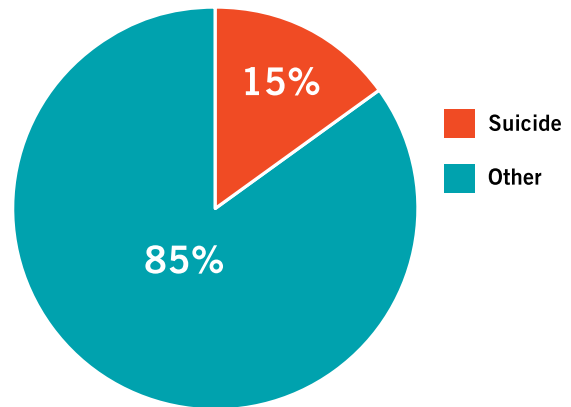
Abuse and neglect are examples of adverse childhood experiences that too many of our youth in Franklin County have endured. According to reported instances, there is a slightly higher rate of youth abuse and neglect in Franklin County, which is 12.1 out of every 1,000 children, than the state rate, which is 10.7 out of every 1,000 children.¹⁵ Survival tactics used to cope with trauma, like abuse and neglect, include aggressive behavior, emotional displays, and disassociation from people and programs. Youth who experience trauma may exhibit behaviors that are risky or unsafe.

Suicide makes up 15% of all deaths of children ages 8–17 in Franklin County.

When our youth are left with unaddressed mental health challenges, there are consequences. Between 2014–2017, on average, one child under age 18 died from suicide every 1.6 months, and suicides made up 15% of all deaths of children ages 8–17 in Franklin County between 2008–2017.¹⁶

Some youth with unaddressed mental health challenges may also struggle with addiction. Ohioans ages 20–29 years old experienced the highest years of life lost (age of death subtracted from standard life expectancy) due to overdose deaths between 2009–2018.¹⁷ This same group of Ohioans also experienced the highest number of years of life lost due to firearm deaths alone between 2009–2018.¹⁸

Deaths of All Children Ages 8-17 in Franklin County between 2008 and 2017



National research estimates that 29% of undergraduates in 2016 were low-income and had an additional risk factor for food insecurity.

One youth in college mentioned, “If you don’t have the resources, like money, then you’re not going to do well, I think. You need money to go to school, you need money to buy food. For me, when I first came here, I was like super skinny, because I wasn’t eating. But I was smart about it. I would like, drink Pediasure because it like, gets you kind of, a lot of nutrients.”

We need to make sure that all youth over age 18 who are eligible for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) have access, as well as to other programs that help youth stay healthy. In Franklin County, 7,700 (51.2%) 17 year-olds in 2016 relied on SNAP order to receive adequate food and nutrition.¹⁹ However, only 3,779 (3.0%) 18–24 year-olds in Franklin County enrolled in SNAP.²⁰

Due to restrictions, college students may be ineligible for SNAP, and not all colleges may be familiar with SNAP’s student eligibility rules.²¹ In 2016, a study by the United States Government Accountability Office (USGAO) estimated that 2 million college students who were potentially eligible for SNAP did not receive benefits, and 29% of undergraduates were both low-income and had an additional risk factor for food insecurity.²²

Recommended Additional Resources: In 2018, the City of Columbus published the *Greater Columbus Community Health Improvement Plan*. This resource provides additional information regarding public health, health equity, and social determinants of health.

ALL YOUTH ARE SUPPORTED AND PREPARED TO ENGAGE AND NAVIGATE AN EVER-CHANGING WORLD.

Our systems and programs must invest in helping all children meet and exceed expectations for key milestones. Meeting these milestones prepares our youth to continue their education beyond high school and enter adulthood prepared to engage in the world of work and civic life.

“I feel college is, in the long run, only for those who can a) afford it and b) go to good school systems where they can get good grades and get scholarships.”

One youth shared, “I feel college is, in the long run, only for those who can a) afford it and b) go to good school systems where they can get good grades and get scholarships.”

Research shows that children who are not proficient readers by third grade are four times more likely to leave high school without a diploma.^{23 24} Further, middle school academic achievement in math is the most

powerful predictor of college and career readiness by high school graduation.²⁵ However in 2017–2018, 6,658 of our third graders were not proficient in third grade English Language Arts, and 5,092 of our eighth graders were not proficient in eighth grade math.²⁶

Youth Not Achieving Academic Proficiency and High School Graduation Milestones²⁷

Milestone	Number of Our Youth in Franklin County in 2017–2018 School Year Who Did Not Achieve the Milestone
Third Grade English Language Arts	6,658 not proficient
Eighth Grade Mathematics	5,092 not proficient
Graduate from High School within 4 Years	6,018 did not graduate

In addition, too many of our young people are not earning their high school diplomas within four years of first entering ninth grade. Between the 2010–2011 and 2016–2017 school years, there have been 42,772 students who did not earn high school diplomas within four years of first entering ninth grade. These students now are likely between the ages of 18–24.²⁸

What youth wish caring adults knew about their lives:

“I want to go back to school... I want to go back to school to be a social worker, but I am scared of failure. I don’t want to feel like I wasted my time and my money.”

Year	Number of Franklin County Students Who Did Not Earn High School Diplomas Within 4 Years of First Entering 9 th Grade
2010-2011	6,436
2011-2012	6,098
2012-2013	6,015
2013-2014	6,106
2014-2015	5,996
2015-2016	6,103
2016-2017	6,018

However, these numbers do not tell the whole story.

Most importantly, youth voiced the need for inclusive school climates and cultures that are trauma-informed, and for wraparound services to address some of their basic needs. The third section of this report uses data to show opportunities for improving school climates to help make them more welcoming and accessible for all youth.

Youth mentioned additional data points not currently available about youth in Franklin County that they thought would help our community better understand their experiences in grade school and continuing their education as adults. For example, youth wanted data on bullying statistics and people afraid to go to school, the number of youth working while in school, and information on racial undertones of dress codes, and how welcoming school environments are for students. In addition, most youth emphasized the importance of seeing and having access to enrichment and learning opportunities outside of school and in their own communities.

More than half of Franklin County high school graduates enroll in college, but few complete a degree within six years.

Beyond high school, many focus group participants noted difficulties reaching their post-secondary goals. Tuition costs and unaffordable post-secondary options have placed educational opportunities out of reach for some youth and their families. One youth noted how they had to forfeit their college degree after two years of study because, “My family cannot give me \$1,000 for school.” College affordability continues to be a barrier for many students nationally and in central Ohio.

More affordable higher education options, such as community colleges like Columbus State Community College, estimate that it costs approximately \$4,738 for a student to attend full time with in-state tuition; however, this does not include costs for transportation, child care, and other expenses associated with attending class.²⁹ The federal Pell Grant program awards a maximum of \$6,195 to students who meet income eligibility criteria, which covers a significant portion of education costs at certain schools, but does not fully cover basic needs, such as housing and food. In 2017, 54% of Columbus City Schools’ students who enrolled in college or a university enrolled in a community college, while 46% enrolled in a public university or university regional campus.³⁰

Within two years of graduation, slightly more than 6 out of 10 Franklin County 2015 high school graduates enrolled in college.³¹ However, just 1 out of 3 (34.2%) 2011 high school graduates completed either a two- or four-year degree within six years.³²



6 out of 10

**FRANKLIN COUNTY
HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES
ENROLLED IN COLLEGE**



1 out of 3

**COMPLETED A 2- OR
4-YEAR DEGREE
WITHIN 6 YEARS**

Data disaggregated by race demonstrate how legacies of institutionalized racism and oppression still detrimentally impact the educational attainment rates of historically marginalized populations within our community. Youth of color face even more barriers to obtaining a degree within six years; only 15.4% of youth who are Black obtained a degree within six years.³³ In addition, only 13.1% of youth who are economically disadvantaged earn a college degree within six years.³⁴

Too many Franklin County youth in college must enroll in remedial coursework.

While there is a trend in Ohio for decreasing need for remedial coursework among youth enrolled in college,³⁵ too many youth in Franklin County who enroll in Ohio colleges must enroll in remedial coursework. More than half of graduates from Columbus City Schools who enrolled in a public two- or four-year university for the first time were in remedial courses in 2017.³⁶ In Whitehall City School District, 65% of students were enrolled in remedial courses in 2017.³⁷ According to a 2017 study by the U.S. Department of Education, the need for remedial coursework increases the likelihood that students do not complete their degrees.³⁸ Better preparation for college, the trades, apprenticeship programs, and the world of work mean high school graduates are ready for the next step in their transition to adulthood.

Percent of Students in Remedial Coursework among Graduates from Franklin County School Districts with the Largest College Enrollments³⁹

	Columbus City	Dublin City	Hilliard City	South-Western City	Worthington City
Number of First-Time College Students	832	647	578	487	332
Percent of Entering Students Enrolling in a Public University or University Regional Campus	46%	86%	69%	38%	64%
Percent of Entering Students Enrolling in a Community or College	54%	14%	31%	62%	36%
Percent of Entering Students Taking Developmental Math or English	54%	14%	23%	39%	20%
Percent of Entering Students Taking Developmental Math	47%	12%	19%	29%	18%
Percent of Entering Students Taking Developmental English	33%	5%	11%	25%	10%
Percent of Entering Students Taking Developmental Math and English	26%	3%	6%	16%	7%



SUPPORT SYSTEMS

OUR COMMUNITY ENSURES THAT ALL YOUTH ARE CONNECTED, ENGAGED, AND SUPPORTED.

Families and communities play a key role in providing many resources that help youth successfully transition to adulthood. Youth need to feel connected, engaged, and supported by the people, services, and systems they rely on in their daily lives.

The rate of youth ages 15–17 in Franklin County in foster care is 40.3 per 1,000, which is nearly double the state rate.

“If you go to a college and you don’t have a stable family, it can be difficult.”

One focus group participant who was formerly in foster care and now is enrolled in college stated, “If you go to a college and you don’t have a stable family, it can be difficult.”

Youth need a stable, caring adult to help them navigate complex systems, such as entry into the workforce and higher education. This student also noted how their post-secondary environment provided

needed support. “I came from a rough situation and I ended up homeless, and the programs here [at the college she is attending] have really helped me. That’s how I got connected to the family I am with now.”

Nearly 1,000 youth (917) ages 15–17 years-old in Franklin County were in foster care in 2018,⁴⁰ which presents unique challenges as our youth pursue their goals for the future. The rate of youth in Franklin County ages 15–17 in foster care is 40.3 per 1,000, which is nearly double the state rate of 20.8 per 1,000.⁴¹



What youth wish caring adults knew about their lives:

“I think a big way caring adults can support marginalized children and youth and adolescents could be to educate themselves about issues that might not affect them personally and to educate their peers and to talk to youth about their experiences and to ask them about how they can be supportive. If someone in my family would ask me how they could be a support, I think that would be a big shift in my life experience.”

Social connections are essential for youth to thrive, but many do not have them.

Social connections also play an important role in helping youth access opportunities in fields and careers that interest them. Many youth spoke about their talents and strengths, but noted having problems advancing their careers because they face barriers not knowing “how to really grow in those talents or [knowing] classes to take to really expand on those talents or market themselves in certain ways.” They need mentors and positive peer connections.

“I want to be an entrepreneur,” one focus group participant explained. “I am going up against people who are given more just naturally and more looked at for certain things, so it’s kind of harder to market myself. Social connections are very important, like the people you meet but for people who have only been on like two sides of the city that can make it harder for them.”

Another youth remarked how finding these connections is not always easy. “[I]t’s hard to find people who look like me in college and in school.”

Recommended Additional Resources: The Central Ohio Compact, led by Columbus State Community College, publishes an annual dashboard showing educational progress and attainment of central Ohio youth. This resource provides additional information and recommendations regarding connections between education and workforce.





WORKFORCE

OPPORTUNITY YOUTH WILL HAVE MEANINGFUL AND FULFILLING CAREER OPPORTUNITIES.

In Franklin County, the U.S. Census estimates that close to 15,000 youth (9.2%) of the close to 158,000 youth between the ages of 16–24 are neither in school nor working.⁴²

“Lots of people say that I am young, that I just want to get what I want and not work for it, but I work hard for a lot of things.”

Most youth in our focus groups wanted meaningful careers so that they could explore their interests and provide for themselves and their families.

“Lots of people say that I am young, that I just want to get what I want and not work for it, but I work hard for a lot of things,” said one focus group participant, echoing the

sentiments of other youth who shared their stories with us. “I have been working since I was 14,” he continued, “Instead of thinking we just want something or want money, we are going to work hard for what we need, too.”

Youth who are not in school and not working tend to be harder to track down and count when making estimates. The estimated rate is slightly higher in the Columbus metropolitan statistical area, which encompasses 10 counties in central Ohio; in the Columbus metropolitan statistical area, around 23,000 (just over 1 in 10) youth between the ages of 16–24 are not in school and not working.

What youth wish caring adults knew about their lives:

“A thing that I wish caring adults knew about me is just knowing that there are parts of me that I have to hide from people that I love, such as transgender identity. I’ve had to sacrifice a part of my person in order to maintain relationships or to maintain safety or access to resources, such as housing and employment.”



In Franklin County, the unemployment rate for all youth who are 16–24 is 8.0%.⁴³ Differences in employment rates based on race show how our community is falling short in addressing racial inequity, particularly in the workplace and in hiring processes. For example, youth who are Black are more likely to be not in school and not working (15.3%) compared to youth who are White (7.3%).⁴⁴ And the Ohio unemployment rate for all 20–24 year-olds is 9.3%, but is 13.6% for youth who are Black, compared to 7.7% for youth who are White.⁴⁵ Our community must understand that these data do not point to differences in work ethic, responsibility, or ambition, but rather differences in our community’s opportunity infrastructure for people of color.

For Ohio youth between the ages of 18–24, Ohio minority females (who are not Non-Hispanic White) are most likely to be in poverty (32.3%) followed by minority males (26.3%).⁴⁶ Non-Hispanic White males have the lowest poverty rates for this age group at 16.5%.⁴⁷

The effects of sex and gender also influence youth who are not in school and not working. According to a national study, youth who are female and not in education or the workforce are more likely to have family caregiver responsibilities, while youth who are male and not in school or working are more likely to be incarcerated.⁴⁸ However, the disconnection rate for females who are not parents has been on the rise.⁴⁹

Youth need access to inclusive, well-paying workplaces.

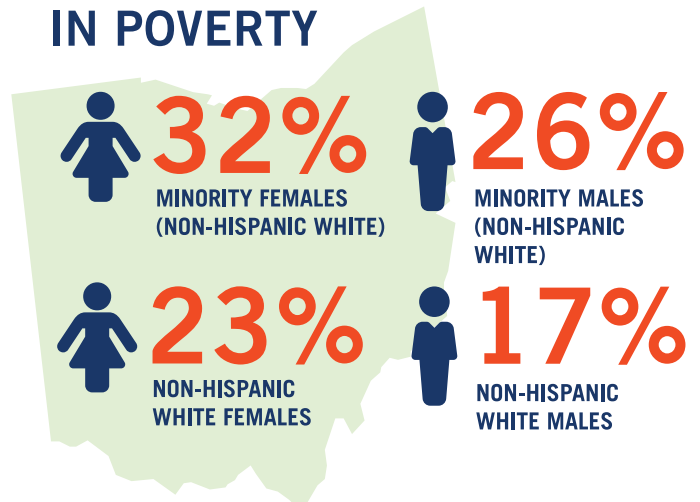
Many youth in our focus groups described feeling misunderstood and judged by adults who made negative assumptions about them and their work ethic, sometimes because they were young, but also due to their religion, race, or ethnicity.

In addition, youth often mentioned feeling unwelcome at many places of employment. Despite youth aspirations and hopes, many employers interviewed in the *Opportunity Awaits* report mentioned racial and class-based stereotypes as they voiced concerns with interviewing and hiring Opportunity Youth and youth transitioning into stable situations. For example, in the report, employers noted that many youth lack customer service skills, display poor attitudes about work, lack general work ethic, struggle to pass drug tests, and fail to disclose criminal records.⁵⁰

It must be acknowledged that it is possible youth could have a juvenile justice record through formal court involvement, could be recovering from substance abuse, and could also struggle with other challenges—yet, this is also a possibility for all youth, in school and working or not. However, Opportunity Youth are more likely to be vulnerable to the stigmatization of these challenges, increasing the chances that risky behavior or errors in judgment will have larger consequences for them specifically. For all youth who are facing these challenges, adolescence is a critical period of intervention when we can foster their emotional growth by investing in their overall well-being.

Employers should consider all the resources necessary and in place for a youth to secure part-time or full-time transitional employment allowing them to learn the soft skills needed for the world of work. A youth’s ability to secure regular employment is dependent on having stable and safe housing, securing reliable transportation, and other workforce supports, such as childcare, nutrition, appropriate clothing, and a telephone or cell phone service. These interventions and supports require time, and any disruption (e.g. health, child care vouchers, etc.) or change in their ability to earn an income could impact youth and their family.

OHIO YOUTH AGES 18-24 IN POVERTY



Though there has been steady employment growth in Columbus over the last four years, many jobs available to Opportunity Youth and others with limited education and training do not support self-sufficiency.⁵¹ Moreover, young parents and families face additional costs, especially for childcare and other costs associated with raising a child. For example, from 2015–2018, fewer than half (only 4 of 10) of Ohio’s most common jobs paid an entry wage of more than \$10.36 per hour, which was the amount needed for a single adult in Franklin County in 2016 just to survive and does not include saving for emergencies or future goals such as enrolling in vocational training or college.^{52 53}

Recommended Additional Resources: In 2019, the Franklin County Board of Commissioners published the report, *Rise Together: A Blueprint for Reducing Poverty in Franklin County*. This resource provides additional information and recommendations regarding youth and workforce preparedness.





CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

OPPORTUNITY YOUTH ARE ACTIVELY ENGAGED IN OUR COMMUNITY.

Civic engagement, or the participation of individuals to make their communities and quality of life better for everyone, is a hallmark of a flourishing society. Youth need supportive spaces to engage in their communities.

“For me, in 10 years, I would like to run a LGBTQ foster home.”

One youth said, “For me, in 10 years, I would like to run a LGBTQ foster home.”

Our community can inspire youth to pursue their passions by providing them meaningful outlets to share their voices and perspectives to improve our community. For example, many youth interviewed

exhibited significant empathy for others in their situation and are driven to improve services and programs for other youth. One particular woman, who participated in a focus group, voiced her desire to open a foster home for other youth who have had to run away from home because they identify as LGBTQIA+.

In focus groups, participants often spoke of their empathy and willingness to invest in the wellbeing of other people. Service providers, also, frequently noted conversations with young people emphasizing the need for them to stabilize themselves first before they could generously give all they could to others who were facing similar adversities. This sense of community and wanting to be a contributor to the betterment of a larger community is a strength that can be built upon and used to encourage greater levels of civic engagement among our youth.

What youth wish caring adults knew about their lives:

“I do a lot of work in the community as an activist. I find that that’s my biggest strength is my political advocacy in my community, and the relationships I am building with folks. That’s how I am trying to build the world that I want to see.”



Inclusive educational spaces can provide access to civic engagement opportunities. As one youth told us, “I joined an organization my freshman year called SHADES, which is for LGBTQ people of color.” They then said that their civic engagement made way for more opportunities to expand their support systems, “I connected with my professor through activism.”

Youth need more adults who listen.

In focus groups, youth were eager to actively share their voices with policymakers, service providers, employers, and the general public. However, youth need spaces where they feel that they are listened to and their voices are respected, which they expressed was not their experience.

For example, one youth, referencing leaders in Franklin County, said, “[t]hey’re not really genuinely listening, and it’s going in one ear and out the other.”

Youth voice, perspectives, and ideas can contribute to more fully understanding issues and challenges they face. In addition, many youth have innovative ideas for how to improve practices, programs, and policies.

We need to help our youth flourish.

Our youth are ambitious and want to meaningfully contribute to their families and communities. Our community is well-equipped to support them as they transition to adulthood.

These statements of goals and aspirations demonstrate their hopefulness and how they can envision their future. Our community is rich in resources and programs; designing approaches to connect our youth with the right services and programs that meet their needs is essential.

“In 10 years from now, I’ll be 32. I’ll be married with four kids. I’ve already got two. I want to be an LPN so hopefully that’ll be my occupation by then. I’d live in a nice, little suburban neighborhood, you know, with good schooling and have stuff for my kids to go to school. My day would be filled with planning out a lot of extracurricular activities for my children, like baseball and all the stuff like that and sports, so taking kids to school. I would be a soccer mom, with a minivan.”

“I see myself graduated from college after six years with my master’s in business. I would like to get married and have a stable family with two to three kids and own my own house, my own car. I would want to work somewhere with a very open and creative agenda. I want to work in the taxing field. I really don’t know if it will play out that way to get me where I want with what I have right now, but I definitely am starting to make it where I can achieve those standards and live like that.”

Recommended Additional Resources: In 2016, the Franklin County Board of Commissioners published the report, *Franklin County Youth Needs Assessment*. This resource provides additional information and recommendations regarding youth perceptions and needs.



SECTION 3

Opportunities for Prevention Early in Life

It is critical for service providers, policymakers, and other stakeholders to understand the barriers Opportunity Youth face and how services and programs focused on prevention and intervention can support all children and youth transitioning into adulthood.

This section focuses on key opportunities for intervention with an emphasis on prevention. In particular, this section explains how youth become Opportunity Youth and the common barriers they face, often through no fault of their own, as they work to meet key milestones throughout their childhoods. In this section, data show that even though all youth in Columbus have the same needs, our policies, programs, and practices are often aligned to meet the needs of some youth better than others. This misalignment results in disparate outcomes for children and youth of color.



In this section, national and local data are used to show that groups identified by national research as more likely to become Opportunity Youth are the same as those here in central Ohio.^{54 55} Our youth often experience disconnection due to circumstances outside of their immediate control, including:

- Poverty and concentrated poverty;
- Differences in ability;
- Out-of-Home placement (foster care);
- Educational system inequities
- Formal court involvement;
- Status as immigrants and challenges as new Americans;
- Homelessness;
- Mental health challenges;
- Pregnancy or parenting; and
- Enduring impacts of historically pervasive, intentionally discriminatory policies and actions that affect many youth based upon their race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or other factors.

This section also identifies specific data that youth would like to see collected in the future. Youth explained that these data would provide a fuller picture of their lives and experiences.

DISCONNECTED BY POVERTY

Poverty is often at the root of unmet basic needs such as housing and food security. In Franklin County, an estimated 66,000 (22.5%) children ages 0–17 years-old live in poverty.⁵⁶ Younger children, however, are more likely to be in poverty; in the city of Columbus, an estimated 30% of youth ages 0–5 live in poverty.⁵⁷

These basic, unmet needs present further barriers to youth flourishing later in life. For example, fewer than half of our children in Franklin County who are economically disadvantaged are proficient in third grade reading.⁵⁸ Even though parents who live in poverty may have fewer resources and spare time, most still make time to help their children succeed. One young person said, “I can tell my parents when I am struggling” and further that “my parents have helped me get where I am today.” These challenges are even greater for children living in single parent households, especially female-headed ones, which are more likely to experience gender discrimination and gaps in equitable pay.^{59 60 61}



Missing adequate supports, only 13.1% of students who are economically disadvantaged earn a college degree within six years of graduating from high school.⁶² With stronger support, more youth could access and succeed in higher education.

YOUTH QUOTES:

“It’s intimidating to surround yourself with people who do have stuff.”

“[I]f I didn’t have [the family that I live with who pay my bills], I wouldn’t be successful. ... I was working two jobs before, you know, going to school full time.”

“It’s always going to be a money thing; you’re always going to be judged by how much money you’ve got.”

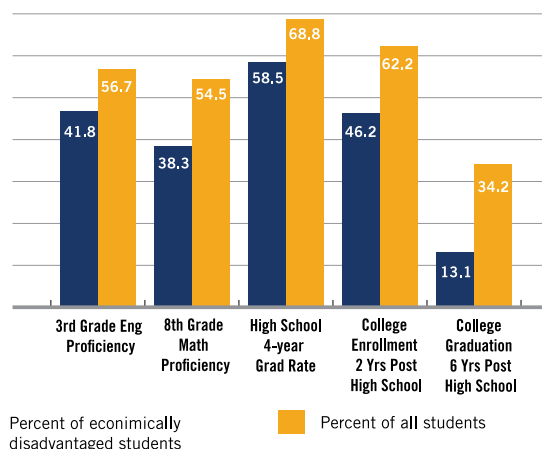
“That’s a big problem, stability...even if I have money now, I don’t have money to pay rent forever.”

DATA YOUTH WOULD LIKE TO SEE

- Data collection on difficulties faced by youth applying to college that could not be recorded on forms like the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).
- Data about children in single-parent families who take on the responsibility of helping to provide for their families.
- Data that show how affordable college tuition and other associated costs of attending college are for economically disadvantaged students, even with Pell Grants and state-based financial aid (including the Ohio College Opportunity Grant).

The data below show the educational milestones achieved by youth who lack access to resources in Franklin County.⁶³

Educational Milestones For Students Who Lack Access to Resources



DISCONNECTED BY CONCENTRATED POVERTY

To flourish, youth must live in neighborhoods that are safe, that have access to healthy food, and that allow youth to see a multitude of opportunities available to them. Youth with these resources have more stability in their lives and can focus on their goals inside and outside of school, providing them the space to thrive. However, our children have different opportunities and different life experiences depending on the neighborhood where they live.

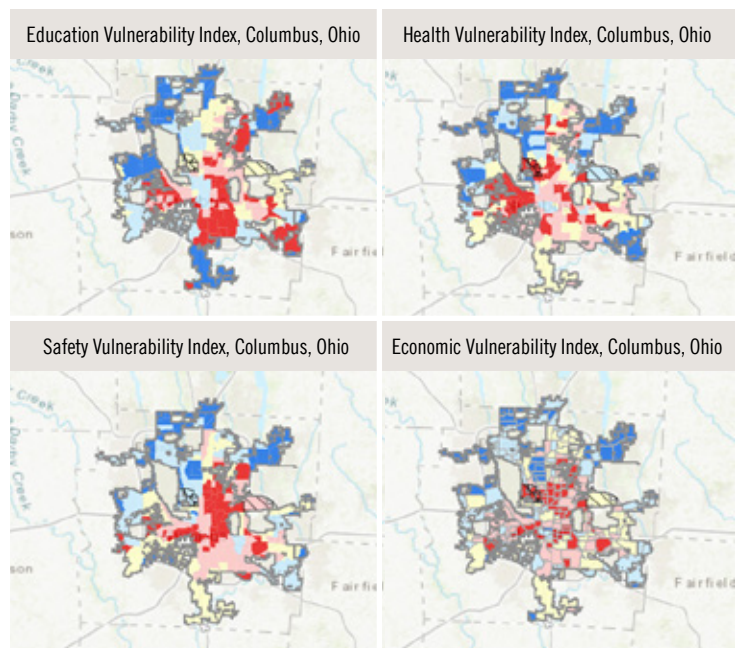
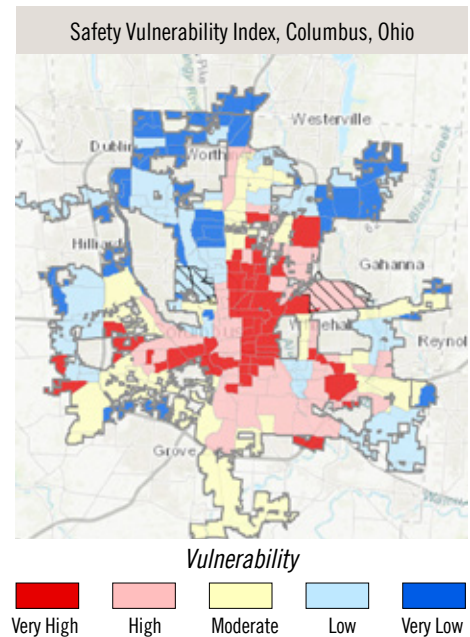
Historical and current policies, including discriminatory lending practices or transportation routes, continue to affect children differently based upon their neighborhood, race, and ethnicity. In Ohio, almost half of youth (43%) who are Black are living in concentrated poverty, compared to 28% nationally. In addition, almost 1 in 4 (23%) youth who are Hispanic are living in concentrated poverty (compared to 19% nationally) and 19% of youth who are two or more races are living in concentrated poverty (compared to 10% nationally).⁶⁴

One youth mentioned, “It definitely depends on the community that you’re from because, even out of school, the opportunities you might receive from within your own community can give you something completely different from other parts of the city or the state even, so I think that’s really important.”

For example, some children live in neighborhoods where they have to fear for their safety and where the cumulative effects of stress and trauma affect their health, educational outcomes, and economic opportunities later in adulthood. Studies show that children who are exposed to violence have lower achievement and are less engaged in school.⁶⁵ The Kirwan Institute on Race and Ethnicity at The Ohio State University used a “vulnerability index” to show how some of our children fear more for their safety than others.⁶⁶

Areas of red show neighborhoods and places of “high safety vulnerability” in Columbus based upon prison admission rates, violent crime rates, and gun violence. The map also shows that areas with a high concentration of people of who are Non-White have higher “vulnerability scores.”

Economic, education, and health vulnerability indices show that vulnerability affects many of the same neighborhoods. According to an analysis conducted by the Kirwan Institute, vulnerability is concentrated in four parts of the city: North East neighborhoods (Linden, Milo-Grogan), West neighborhoods (Hilltop), East Side neighborhoods (King-Lincoln Bronzeville, Eastgate, and South of-Main) and South Side neighborhoods (Innis Garden Village, Milbrook, and Southern Orchards).



DISCONNECTED BY DIFFERENCES IN ABILITY

YOUTH QUOTES:

A study in the state of Washington found that being differently abled was strongly associated with not being in school or working after high school (in addition to needing to receive bilingual education services).⁶⁷ Children with disabilities are nearly four times more likely to experience violence than children without disabilities. Adults with disabilities are twice as likely to be unemployed.⁶⁸

“[We need more data on] learning disabilities, and you can even do a subgroup of that with members of the LGBTQ community, who are not able to get the help they need because of who they are.”

When our community, service providers, and employers ensure that youth are given opportunities to communicate, be physically present, and welcome, they are better able to access services and thrive.

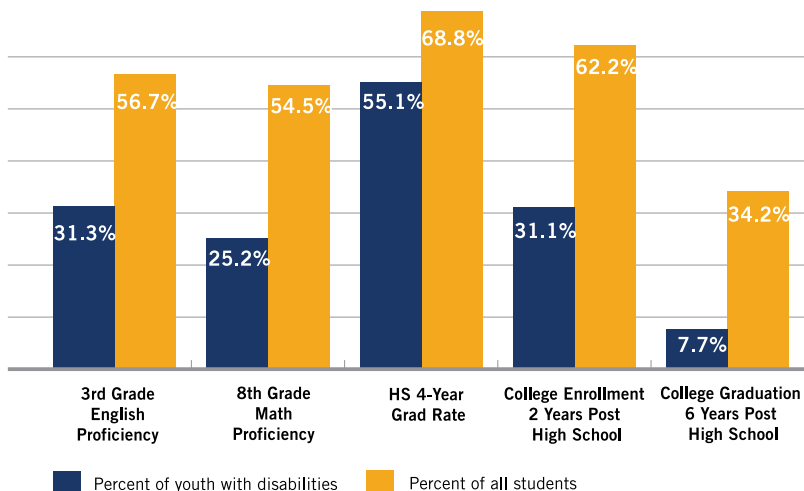
In Franklin County, 31,148 (15.3%) students enrolled in school identified as differently abled⁶⁹. The data below show that fewer than 1 in 10 (7.7%) youth with disabilities who graduate from high school in Franklin County obtain a college degree within six years of graduation.⁷⁰

In addition to facing educational barriers, youth who are differently abled face barriers to obtaining secure housing. For example, youth who needed to return to emergency shelters were 1.6 times more likely to have a disability.⁷¹



The data below show the educational milestones achieved by youth who differently abled in Franklin County.⁷²

Educational Milestones for Youth Who Are Differently Abled



DATA YOUTH WOULD LIKE TO SEE

- Data on access to services for youth who are a part of the LGBTQIA+ community and are differently abled.
- Data on the number of jobs available to individuals who are differently abled.

DISCONNECTED BY OUT-OF-HOME PLACEMENT (FOSTER CARE)

YOUTH QUOTES:

Youth in out-of-home placement, or foster care, face many barriers to becoming successful in adulthood and often do not have the same level of family support throughout their childhoods as many other youth. Moreover, youth in out-of-home placement face additional challenges as they age out of foster care. When youth are provided with consistent, supportive adult figures throughout their lives, they are better able to overcome obstacles, have more connections to opportunities, and have a better understanding of how to navigate adulthood.

In 2018, there were 4,322 children in Franklin County (14.2 per 1,000 children under age 18) living in foster care. In recent years, this number has been increasing in Franklin County, as well as all throughout Ohio; however, the opioid crisis does not appear to have affected Franklin County as hard as in other Ohio counties.⁷⁴ In addition, as mentioned earlier in this report, the number of youth who are 15–17 years old in foster care is nearly double the state rate.⁷⁵

Youth in foster care need social and emotional support to help them achieve key milestones. Data below show that only 1 in 5 (19.7%) youth in foster care attending Columbus City Schools were proficient in eighth grade math in the 2017–2018 school year.⁷⁶ In addition, fewer youth in foster care graduated from high school (71.3%) in four years compared to youth not in foster care (80.4%).⁷⁷

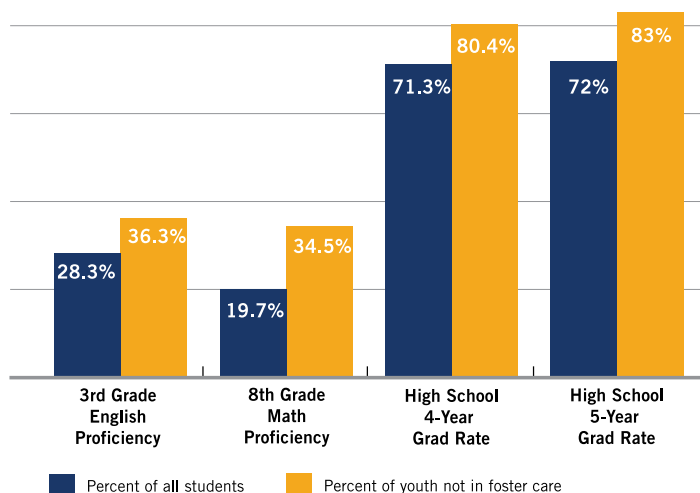
“I am a former foster youth, but I was also adopted into a not so good situation, so my family is not in my life so that can be hard for me to not have family or family privilege.”

“I do think that mentorship is really important, which has really helped me be successful, like Scholar Network ... They are strictly for former foster youth. They try to help with those things, mental health and stuff, for former foster youth.”

“I feel like there’s stereotypes of ‘this former foster youth she might act some type of way,’ I don’t know, and I think people just need to be understanding. Once they know that information, they have to try to get to know you and your situation and not just like write you off.”

The data below show the educational milestones achieved by youth who are in foster care in Columbus City Schools.⁷⁹

Educational Milestones for Youth in Foster Care in Columbus City



DATA YOUTH WOULD LIKE TO SEE

- Data on children placed into the foster system because their parents are unable to support them or similar types of economic information.
- Data on program cutoffs by age and how many youth still need services once they are “really maturing and starting to get on their feet.”

Youth in foster care also face barriers to obtaining secure and safe housing once they age out of the foster care system, and as a result, many struggle to obtain transitional services (e.g., housing, healthcare, education, etc.). Star House and Community Shelter Board estimate that “36% of youth experiencing homelessness in Franklin County have experiences with foster care” and many lack the familial and social supports to secure safe housing.⁷⁸

Star House and Community Shelter Board estimate that “36% of youth experiencing homelessness in Franklin County have experiences with foster care”

Foster youth in some other Franklin County school districts perform better than in Columbus City Schools. For example, in Southwestern City Schools, 28.6% of youth in foster care were proficient in eighth grade math compared to 19.7% of Columbus City School students who are in foster care.⁸⁰

OHIO BRIDGES

Though programs like Ohio BRIDGES represent a helpful service to many, the program requirements can make the services inaccessible to those youth who need them the most.

In February 2018, Ohio became the 28th state to extend foster care through a program called Ohio BRIDGES. This voluntary program is designed to promote permanency and self-sufficiency. BRIDGES extends funds for housing and case management for eligible young adults (18–20 years old). Young adults must be either in secondary school, enrolled in college or a post-secondary school, employed at least 80 hours a month, or have a physical or mental health impairment.

Ohio BRIDGES is administered and managed by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services with services provided by state grant recipient agency—the Child and Family Health Collaborative of Ohio.

To locate more information on the Ohio BRIDGES program, visit bridgestosuccess.jfs.ohio.gov.

In some, but not all, Franklin County school districts, the four-year graduation rate for youth in foster care was less than the rate for youth not in foster care; however, youth in foster care had better graduation rates than youth not in foster care in Bexley, Worthington, and Canal Winchester.⁸¹ The gaps in graduation rates between youth in foster care and youth not in foster care were the largest in Hamilton, Reynoldsburg, and Whitehall, with youth in foster care graduating from high school at rates 20% less than youth not in foster care.⁸²



DISCONNECTED THROUGH THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

School Discipline

Student behaviors that are disruptive and unpredictable can result in disciplinary action at school. However, research shows that these types of behaviors may be indicators of unaddressed trauma. Addressing students holistically in response to disruptive behavior and understanding the effects of trauma help to avoid re-traumatizing youth and increase the likelihood that students receive the help that they need. Today, nearly 1 in 10 (9.1%) students who were homeless in Franklin County received an out-of-school suspension.⁸³



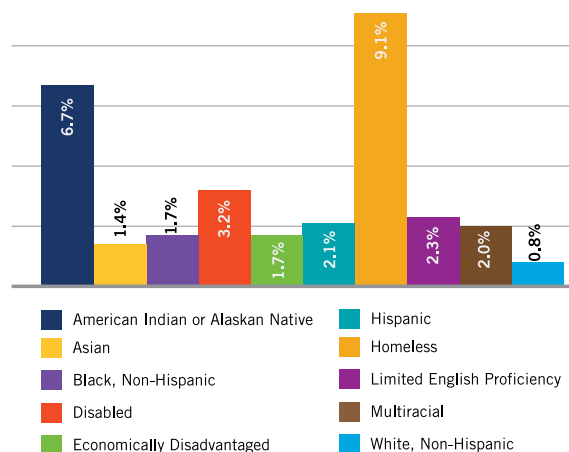
Further complicating this issue is how race and implicit bias can result in disparate treatment by those with the authority to make disciplinary decisions. When students are treated equally in the classroom and with dignity and respect, they feel more welcome and are better able to focus and learn. However, research shows biases and inequities in disciplining students, and that discrimination persists against students of color. For example, a report by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights states how educational practices can serve to “push out” students of color from school:

“Students of color as a whole, as well as by individual racial group, do not commit more disciplinable offenses than their White peers—but Black, Latinx, and Native American students in the aggregate receive substantially more school discipline than their White peers, and receive harsher and longer punishments than their White peers receive for similar offenses.”⁸⁴

In Franklin County, students who are American Indian/Alaska Native have higher rates of out-of-school suspension (6.7%) than all other racial and ethnic groups, followed by youth who are Hispanic (2.1%) and multiracial (2.0%).⁸⁵ White students were the least likely to receive out-of-school suspensions (0.8%).⁸⁶

Many groups of students experience suspensions and expulsions from school at higher rates in Franklin County than those groups do across Ohio, including all Non-White racial/ethnic groups and youth who are differently abled, English language learners, and experiencing homelessness.⁸⁷

Students Receiving Out-of-School Suspensions in Franklin County



Chronic Absenteeism

Students learn best when they are regularly attending school. However, children living in challenging circumstances, such as housing insecurity and lacking basic resources due to poverty, have higher rates of habitually missing school and being chronically absent. Students are considered chronically absent if they miss more than 10% of a 180-day school year, which equates to about two days per month for the school year. The reasons for missing school can vary depending on the individual and their circumstances—from transportation challenges, to not feeling comfortable going to school wearing dirty clothes, or taking on the responsibility to care for parents or siblings.

Similar to discipline, youth in Franklin County experience higher levels of chronic absenteeism than state averages. In 2017–2018, 21.6% of all youth in Franklin County were chronically absent from school, compared to 16.0% of all youth in the state of Ohio.⁸⁸

Youth who are more likely to be chronically absent from school are youth who are homeless (72.4%), youth who are in foster care (35.6%), youth who are economically disadvantaged (31.0%), and youth who have disabilities (30.7%).

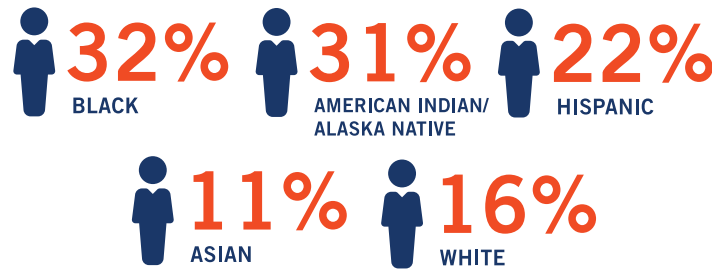
Youth who are Black are the most likely to be chronically absent in Franklin County (32.1%), followed by American Indian/Alaska Native (30.8%).⁹⁰ Youth who are Hispanic are slightly less likely to be chronically absent from school (21.7%)⁹¹. Asian or Pacific Islander (10.6%) and White students (15.6%) were the least likely to be chronically absent.⁹²

Students Who Leave High School without a Diploma

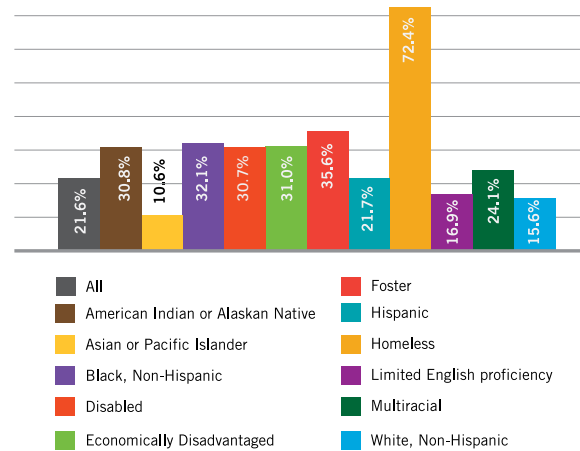
During the 2017–2018 school year, nearly 6,000 students left high school without a diploma in Franklin County.⁹³ Nearly 3 in 4 of students who left school without a diploma (77.7%) were economically disadvantaged while this group only represents 57.4% of the total student population in Franklin County.⁹⁴

By treating all students equitably, understanding trauma, and meeting their holistic needs, more students feel welcome at school and supported to learn and pursue their educational ambitions. Moreover, welcoming school environments where youth are treated fairly ensure that youth of color, especially, are disciplined less frequently, are able to attend school more often, and are better able to focus.

YOUTH WHO ARE CHRONICALLY ABSENT IN FRANKLIN COUNTY



Students Chronically Absent from School in Franklin County



Number of Students in Franklin County Who Left High School without a Diploma by Subgroup⁹⁵

Subgroup	Number of Students
Pacific Islander	10
Asian	135
White, Non-Hispanic	2,691
American Indian or Alaskan Native	13
Black, Non-Hispanic	2,134
Hispanic	541
Multiracial	401
Economic Disadvantaged	4,604
Students with Disabilities	1,199
English Learners	316
Homeless	203
Total	5,925

DISCONNECTED BY THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

YOUTH QUOTES:

There are considerable obstacles, as well as potentially life-long consequences, that result from past involvement in the justice system. National data show that formal court-involved youth are less likely to be in school or working later in life.⁹⁶ The school to prison pipeline often begins with disciplinary actions in the school. Research shows that youth of color are disciplined more harshly than White students for similar infractions, are more likely to receive out of school suspensions, and that these types of inequitable practices are related to formal court-involvement.⁹⁷

One young person in our community voiced, “When I am around a cop I get so freaking nervous, I’m shaking in my boots.” Youth also said, “they need to look into the cops that they hire.”

In Franklin County, 461 youth were adjudicated for felonies, which is a rate of 1.5 per 1,000 children (the state rate is 1.6 per 1,000 children).⁹⁸ Further, there are racial disparities in the numbers of Franklin County youth adjudicated: 72.5% are Black, 21.5% are White, and 3.9% are Hispanic/Latinx.⁹⁹ Youth who are male also make up a larger proportion of youth who are adjudicated; of the 461 youth adjudicated for felonies In Franklin County, 402 are male (87.2%) and 59 are female (10.6%).¹⁰⁰

Youth who have formal court-involvement face additional barriers later in their lives, including obtaining safe and secure housing and employment. A Star House survey estimates that 42% of youth who were homeless were previously incarcerated before age 18.¹⁰¹

There is a gap in data on formal court-involved youth. As of 2016, no state agency oversees the annual collection of data, such as prevention, diversion, status offenses, and misdemeanor offenses.¹⁰² There are also no data available on out-of-home placement for youth.¹⁰³

“The felony thing is a big one right there ... you cannot beat the system, there’s certain jobs you cannot get, you get turned down from so many houses and apartments.”

“All of the males in my family are arrested or in prison – once you get in a system then they don’t help you out at all so I always had to try to help and feed my family. I never had help at all. I had to help everybody but myself.”

DATA YOUTH WOULD LIKE TO SEE

- Data on crimes of poverty committed by desperate youth with unmet basic needs.
- Data on how felony adjudication affects housing for youth.
- Data on how formal court involvement affects employment.
- Data on the types of police officers who are hired.
- Data on how the “surroundings, how you grow up and how you live,” “your household,” and “how society is around you” play a role in successful outcomes.



DISCONNECTED DUE TO IMMIGRATION STATUS AND CHALLENGES AS NEW AMERICANS

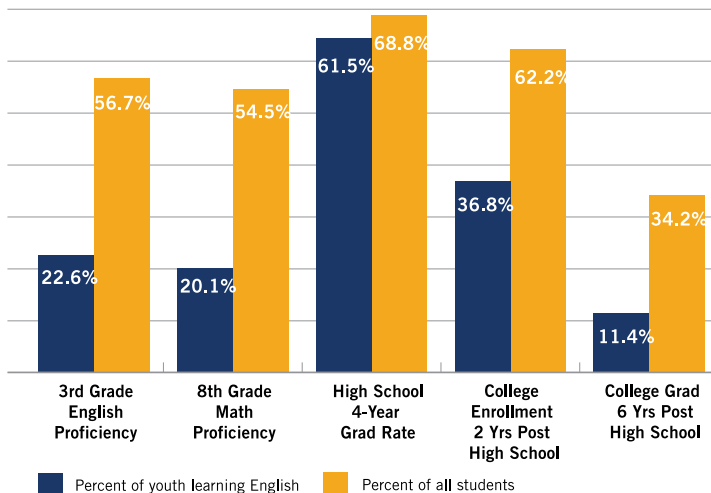
Immigrant and new American populations are mitigating population losses across the state of Ohio and fueling economic growth.^{104 105} Welcoming immigrants into our communities by helping them access employment and services and treating them with dignity also improves the quality of life and economic health in a community. However, discrimination, implicit bias, language, and cultural differences can make it difficult for parents and youth to access and navigate education, social services, and employment systems to meet their needs.¹⁰⁶

For example, 1 in 5 immigrants in Ohio with bachelor's degrees were either unemployed or working in a low-skilled job that required a high school diploma or less, which was more likely for immigrants who were Black (39%) or Hispanic (27%).¹⁰⁷ In fact, foreign-educated, immigrant women had the highest rate of skill underutilization among college-educated workers.¹⁰⁸ In addition, newly arriving immigrants, in particular, face higher poverty rates than immigrants who have been here longer.¹⁰⁹

In Franklin County, there are 17,830 students who are English language learners, which is about 8.8% of the total students in Franklin County.¹¹⁰ Data from the Ohio Department of Education show that youth who are immigrants or new to the United States face many barriers to achieving success. Only 1 in 10 (11.4%) youth who are learning English in Franklin County obtain a college degree within six years of graduating from high school.¹¹¹

The data below show the educational milestones achieved by youth who are learning English in Franklin County.¹¹²

Educational Milestones for Youth Learning English



YOUTH QUOTES:

"There are some places that won't let you wear long hijabs, just short ones, and my mom doesn't like to wear them, so it's hard for her to find a job if she wears a long one."

"It's hard to find personal connections at school, it's hard to find people who look like me in college and in school."

"A lot of the factors that impact whether you can achieve your goals can be actually life threatening, like ... being assaulted for who you are, especially if you're very visible about who you are or it's very easy to find out who you are and what advantages and disadvantages you have, like citizenship, if you're applying for a job or housing or a loan, and you're found to be undocumented."

NEARLY **1 IN 10** 
YOUTH
 LEARNING ENGLISH IN FRANKLIN COUNTY OBTAIN A COLLEGE DEGREE IN SIX YEARS

DATA YOUTH WOULD LIKE TO SEE

- Data on the number of schools for older immigrant and refugee adults that provide English instruction.
- Data on how well employers treat their employees and prospective employees who adhere to religious and cultural beliefs (e.g., wearing a hijab, fasting, etc.).

DISCONNECTED BY HOMELESSNESS

Housing is a basic need and all youth need a safe place to live, study, and rest, as well as a consistent community of support. Youth who are homeless or experience housing instability are less likely to be working or in school the following year.¹¹³ In Franklin County, there were 3,098 youth who were identified as homeless and enrolled in school during the 2017–2018 school year.¹¹⁴ Many service providers suggest that this number is much higher and even experts are often unaware of youth experiencing homelessness.

Housing insecurity and homelessness is an adverse childhood experience for children and adults. A child who does not know where they are sleeping that night or the next is not having their basic needs met, making survival the number one priority.

Data show that 72% of youth who were homeless in Franklin County were chronically absent from school, which is almost three times the rate in Ohio.¹¹⁵

Fewer than 1 in 4 (24.4%) youth who are homeless were proficient in third grade English and Language Arts in 2017–2018 and only 7.9% of youth who are homeless end up earning a college degree six years after graduating from high school.¹¹⁶

YOUTH QUOTES:

“We need to have a bigger support system, not just parents.”

“There’s no shelters for [human] trafficking, there’s no support, so what am I supposed to do to get through that?”

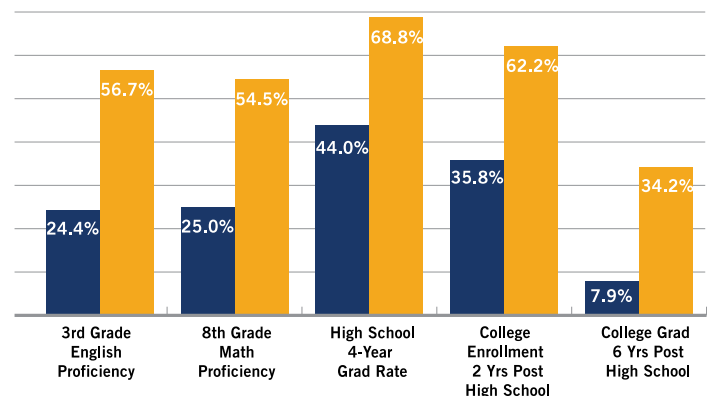
“Not having an address is a hard one.” This youth explained that not having an address is a barrier to filing paperwork they need for college admissions and enrollment.

DATA YOUTH WOULD LIKE TO SEE

- Data collected on the public safety of youth who are homeless and not in shelters.
- Data on where youth are sleeping and youth campsites in Franklin County.
- Data on youth who are homeless who identify as LGBTQIA+ and the number who have been kicked out of their homes.
- Data on the number of young adults who are able to afford their own homes.
- Data on how eligibility requirements for services that offer housing support actually make it more difficult for youth to access housing who need it.

The data below show the educational milestones achieved by youth who are homeless in Franklin County.¹¹⁷

Educational Milestones for Youth Who Are Homeless



DISCONNECTED BY MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

Youth who have mental health challenges or who have experienced trauma need access to programs and services, including high-quality health care and education, that are responsive to their needs and not re-traumatizing to youth with adverse childhood experiences.

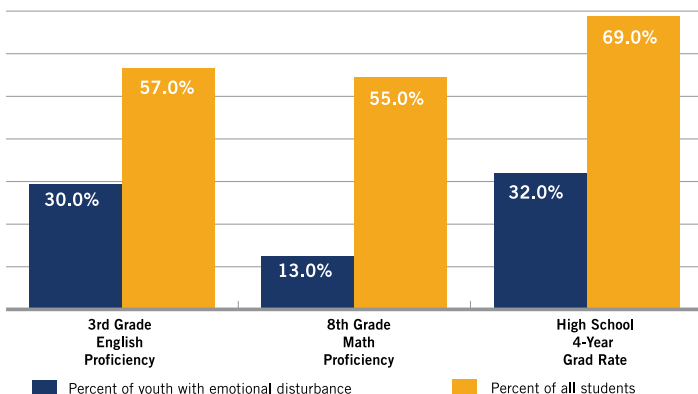
In Franklin County, 2,400 students during the 2017–2018 school year were documented as having emotional disturbance as their primary disability.¹¹⁸ However, the definition and determination of students having an emotional disturbance is vague, and these data should be interpreted with caution.¹¹⁹ In addition, youth in this category are only those considered having an emotional disturbance as their “primary disability.”

Data from the Ohio Department of Education show that youth who are considered emotionally disturbed encounter many barriers early on in their lives. Just over 1 in 10 (12.5%) youth who are considered emotionally disturbed were proficient in eighth grade math.¹²⁰

Youth who experience challenges with mental health encounter barriers that influence their housing, as well. For example, in one survey, 64% of youth who were homeless reported having a mental health diagnosis from a professional.¹²¹ And youth who needed to return to emergency shelters were more than twice as likely to have a mental health problem.¹²²

The data below show the educational milestones achieved by youth who are documented with emotional disturbance as their primary disability.¹²³

Educational Milestones for Youth with Emotional Disturbance



YOUTH QUOTES:

“They try to just put it on us, but they don’t know the story that everybody is going through and why they act like that. If you don’t look at it from why, why kids act like that...if they did people would look at it much, much differently.”

“Pronouns do matter. It hurts whenever I get mispronounced, misgendered.”

“They need hope, faith ... you have to be able to not bottle up that pain but let it out into something, whether it’s education, athletics, music, people try to bottle it up but it ends up hurting them more.”

“I was in an abusive situation with my mom so I used to stay away from females, but with my mentor, she helped me out a lot.”

DATA YOUTH WOULD LIKE TO SEE

- Data collected on the number of youth who cannot get health coverage or access to medical care.
- Data on programs and access to services for “rehabilitation for the homeless” addressing substance abuse as a means of coping, “to get through the night.”
- Data on children who suffered abuse and neglect because their parents had substance abuse issues.

DISCONNECTED THROUGH PREGNANCY OR PARENTING

Youth who are parents need access to childcare and other types of support to help them and their families. However, youth who become parents are more likely to not be in school or not working the following year.¹²⁴ In the United States in 2010, 30% of all teenage girls who drop out of school say pregnancy or parenting was the reason, and only 51% of teens who were mothers received high school diplomas by age 22 compared to 89% of teenage girls who were not mothers.^{125 126 127} In addition, for youth transitioning out of foster care, 1 in 6 not enrolled in higher education cited needing to care for a child as the reason.^{128 129} Subsequent births among mothers further decrease the likelihood of earning a general education diploma (GED) or graduating.¹³⁰

In Franklin County, almost 10,600 (6.7%) youth between the ages of 16–24 years old were estimated to be living in a household with their own child.¹³¹ In 2018, 195 babies were born to mothers in Franklin County between the ages of 15–17 years old.¹³²

Youth who are parents also face barriers to obtaining housing. Nearly 1 out of 4 youth served in Franklin County emergency shelters were also pregnant or parenting.¹³³

“I don’t trust anyone to watch my kids,” one youth said. “My kids went to two daycare centers and they’re not in daycare anymore.” Youth want quality child care they can trust, access, and afford so that they can be assured their children are safe and cared for while they are in school or at work.

YOUTH QUOTES:

“Title XX is the hardest thing to get...I’m working on that right now but it’s like I can’t work or he can’t work.”

“In White people’s areas there are good daycare centers, but they don’t accept Title XX.”

“What I don’t like about these programs is they’re asking things like ‘Is the baby’s father around?’ ‘Are you with the baby’s father?’ like all of that stuff, that’s not your business. If I need help, then I need help, it has nothing to do with what someone else is doing around me.”

NEARLY **1 IN 4** 
YOUTH
SERVED IN FRANKLIN COUNTY
EMERGENCY SHELTERS WERE
ALSO PREGNANT OR PARENTING

DATA YOUTH WOULD LIKE TO SEE

- Data on the number of parenting classes available to youth who are homeless.
- Data collection on early child care centers (child safety and security systems, teacher credentials, bilingual education available, cleanliness, and daily activities).
- Data on restrictive rules prohibiting visitors (including babies’ fathers) in housing programs.
- Data on the number of babies there are in homeless shelters in Franklin County.





Overall, data show that youth in Franklin County are facing barriers from an early age and that these problems persist into adulthood.

One distinct commonality between all of these groups is that basic needs are not met early on, from birth, and that the compounding effects continue over time and persist into adulthood. As a result, youth miss the opportunity to realize their potential and their aspirations.

SECTION 4

Developing Opportunities to Help All Youth Thrive

All youth in Franklin County should have the opportunity to realize their full potential by being able to connect to resources they need to succeed. Our community has no shortage of ideas, limitless energy, and in some cases, sufficient resources needed to support all of our youth in reaching their goals. Further, community systems and programs are working towards improving alignment to better support all of our youth in helping them meet their basic needs. However, this rich ecosystem of programs, services, resources, and caring community stakeholders has underutilized one vital community asset that could best ensure we devise effective solutions for our community's future—our youth.

The next steps articulated in this section are intended to initiate and build upon current conversations in our community so that all members can consider how they apply to their specific roles, jobs, and neighborhoods. These recommendations are informed by the data analyses, information learned from youth and service providers, and from the previous work and recommendations developed in recent community reports on the state of Columbus' and Franklin County's young people.

This report seeks to emphasize that in order to develop solutions for youth in our community, we must first listen to and involve youth in our community in the solution-making process.

In order to devise solutions that make sense—that correctly identify areas for improvement, do not have unintended consequences, and do not propagate disparate outcomes based on race, ethnicity, sexuality or gender identity—we must ensure that diverse voices are heard at the table where decisions are made. We must ensure opportunities for youth to speak toward their experiences in Franklin County because their insights are essential to devising better solutions.

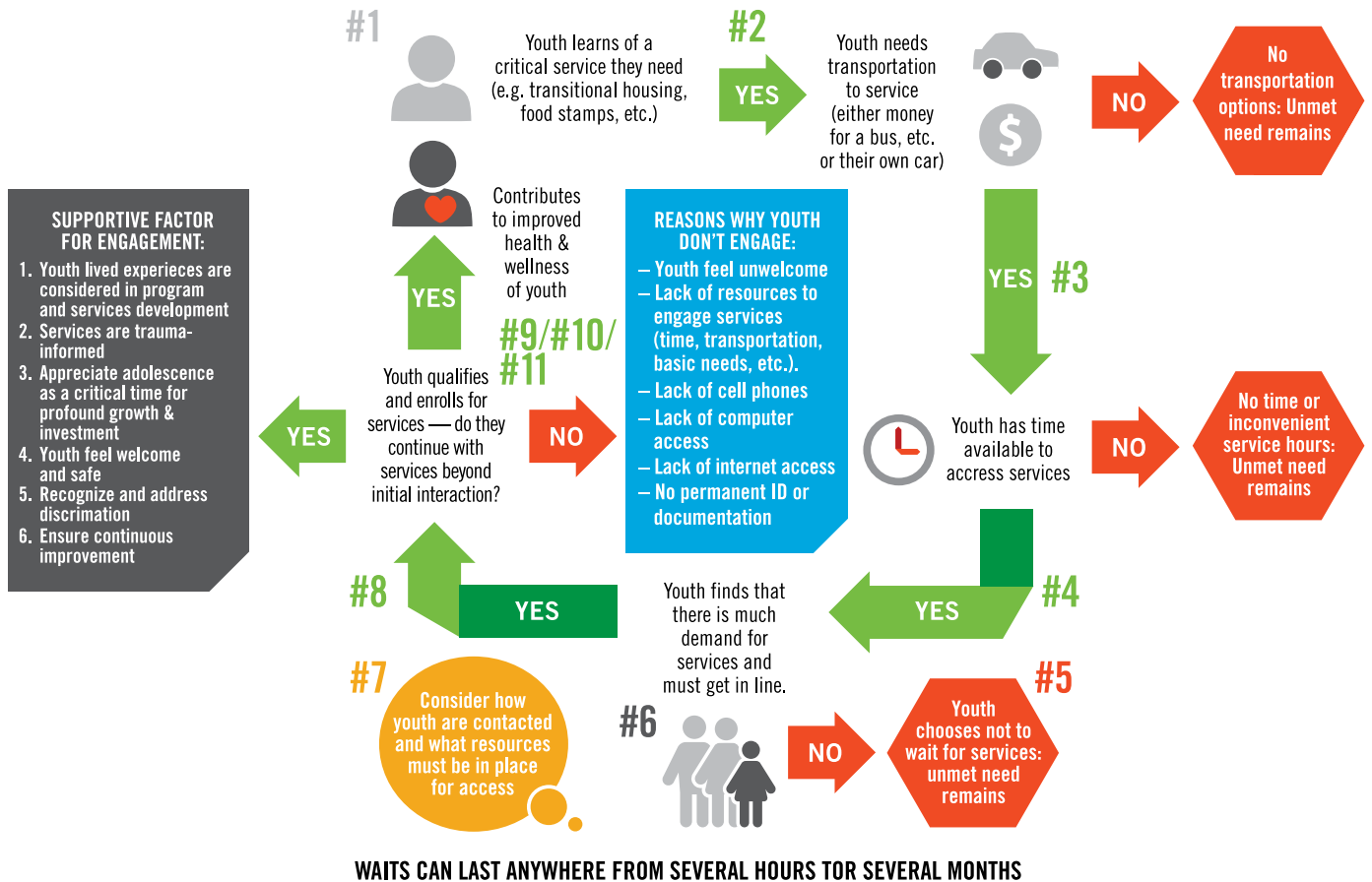
Youth shared a great deal of information in just an hour-long focus group about navigating Franklin County services and programs.

Process mapping is a tool frequently used in the context of customer service and quality assurance in order to make sure that as a customer attempts to purchase or utilize a service, they have the least difficulty possible. Below, we use this tool to take a walk in the shoes of our youth, illustrating the importance of youth voice in decisions and solutions that impact their well-being.



WALKING IN THE SHOES OF YOUTH AS THEY ATTEMPT TO NAVIGATE SERVICES THEY NEED

Youth shared the difficulties they experience attempting to navigate and access services directly tied to their overall livelihoods.



1. Youth learn of a service and decide to reach out.

"I found out about a lot of programs online," said one youth. Many youth mentioned finding programs they need either online or by word of mouth.

2. Youth need to find money or a means of transportation to the service.

"I think the problem with a lot of things, like a lot of programs, is that they want you to be ready for everything you have to do right then and there and make no consideration for the fact that I am already struggling and that I am having a hard time," said one young person.

3. Youth need to find time for travel to the service (this can take up to an hour each way if the service is on another side of town).

"It's hard to get to those classes, get to those programs because then you think, 'Wait, I don't have any transportation,'" so then what system or supports are set up for us to be able to go to these important classes, these important things that we need for housing and stuff," a youth told us.

4. Youth learn that there is a waitlist.

"I feel like we need more types of them programs," said one youth referring to transitional living programs for housing assistance.

5. Youth decide whether or not to go on the waitlist, which may be over six months. (Many youth are in survival mode and have trouble thinking past the current 24 hours. Moreover, many youth do not want to believe that they will still be in the same situation six months from now.)

“It’s a long waitlist for [housing program], the only reason I got in so fast after high school was because my counselor, she put me on the list, she knew my situation so she made sure I made the list,” reflects one young person.

6. Youth enroll on the waitlist.

“I don’t want to live like this the rest of my life,” said one youth experiencing homelessness.

7. Youth eventually move off of the waitlist, but because many of the youth lack cell phones or ways to be reached, they are unaware that they have moved off of the waitlist (and someone else can take their place).

“I don’t have a phone, I can’t call a hotline every single day and make sure I’m on this waiting lists. I’ve been on a waiting list and lost my bed twice,” shared one youth on attempting to get a spot in a shelter.

8. Youth eventually enroll in the service but, for some services, youth feel unwelcome by direct service staff based upon how they look; or youth may struggle to wait in a line for the service because of complex reactions to past trauma.

“From all of the messed up crap that most of us have been through,” one focus group participant began, “it’s hard to go to these classes and stuff like that or financial budgeting and stuff, because we can’t waste time right now.”

9. While enrolled in the service, youth feel skeptical of “another system” and do not easily trust providers.

“Some staff members will tell other people living in the program your business it caused other girls in the program to fight each other,” recalled one young person, as another said, “If I tell you something, then everyone else that you know should not know my business.”

10. The next day, youth are unable to attend a program offered by the service because the youth do not have a place to eat, or sleep, or cannot find transportation or childcare.

“It’s hard when you did not grow up in a situation where it was stable in the first place, like you grow up counting on yourself to teach yourself what stability is,” said a youth in a focus group.

11. Youth move onto another service or enroll in no service at all.

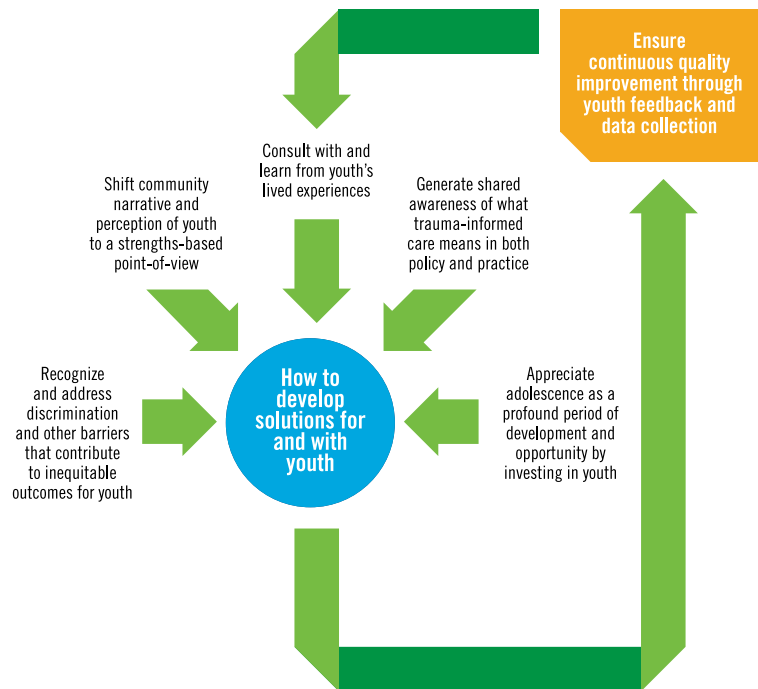
“A lot of systems, a lot of like programs, people, and practices, it’s meant to watch you fail,” said one youth when asked if systems were in place to support them getting where they want to be in 10 years.

Youth shared a great deal about how services and programs in Franklin County can be improved and how services can be better aligned to ensure that all youth receive the supports they need to gain stability.

In previous reports and strategy documents from The Columbus Foundation and other organizations that work with Opportunity Youth, the outcomes or goals identified within the six focus areas—housing, health and wellness, education, support systems, workforce, and civic engagement—are valid and much needed in our community. This report emphasizes youth voice to fundamentally drive change and develop solutions to alter how youth are engaged and retained in services and programs. The following six takeaways are critical intermediate steps towards achieving the goals articulated from previous reports. Further, they are key to effectively implementing future recommendations.

HOW TO DEVELOP SOLUTIONS FOR AND WITH YOUTH

1. Consult with and learn from youth's lived experiences
2. Generate shared awareness of what trauma-informed care means in both policy and practice
3. Appreciate adolescence as a profound period of development and opportunity by investing in youth
4. Recognize and address discrimination and other barriers that contribute to inequitable outcomes for youth
5. Shift community narrative and perception of youth to a strengths-based point of view
6. Ensure continuous quality improvement through youth feedback and data collection



Keeping these six factors in mind, CDF-Ohio suggests the following recommendations to cultivate opportunities for our youth.

Recommendation #1: Elevate youth voice to inform programs, policies, and practices.

By involving youth in the planning and decision-making for the services they need to grow and develop, program design and service delivery can be improved. Involving youth will also increase the likelihood that they will participate and stay engaged. Service providers, policymakers, and employers must build trust and engagement by listening to and responding to youth. This is essential because Opportunity Youth are often their only advocate and must take on adult responsibilities earlier than other youth.

Best practices include:

- Providing opportunities for youth to meet face-to-face with service providers and policymakers to share their opinions and experiences. These opportunities also provide information to service providers about marketing services, getting and retaining youth engagement, and improving programs and services to help youth achieve their goals.
- Obtaining regular feedback from youth through simple surveys and other types of feedback.
- Providing wraparound services to enable youth to share their voices. Arranging for transportation and childcare and meeting at places where youth frequently visit removes barriers for youth who want to share their opinions and experiences.
- Responding to youth feedback. Listening to youth helps them feel valued and empowered in their ability to contribute to their communities. It also increases their confidence in service providers' ability to support them and trust in adults. This, in turn, builds on their willingness to receive support.
- Creating organizational cultures that are responsive to youth feedback. When organizational cultures are collaborative, staff become accustomed to giving and receiving feedback from each other, and will also be more likely to give and receive feedback with youth.¹³⁴

Recommendation #2: Break down system and program silos to better meet youth's comprehensive basic needs.

Youth seeking housing, nutrition, health, and education services must often navigate multiple organizations, processes, program rules, and eligibility criteria. Youth will benefit from funding initiatives that support and incentivize organizational collaboration that focuses on holding all entities accountable for holistic outcomes of youth.

Best practices include:

- Providing more opportunities for organizations collect and share disaggregated data that keep track of which type of youth are being best served and if their needs are being met. Data can be used to help service providers and stakeholders improve services for all youth.
- Ensuring someone is accountable for youth so that they are not missing basic needs due to poor coordination and handoffs between service providers. If someone or an organization is responsible for all of youth's basic needs, then there will be more effort to make sure that they are met, including more effort to ensure that youth who must navigate multiple organizations are able to access the services that they need.
- Encourage strategic conversations for aligned funding opportunities to ensure a more holistic approach to serving youth. For example, encourage conversations between funders that support youth health and well-being and those who support employment and workforce services. Connecting multiple organizations and services can ensure a more streamlined approach for our youth to receive the services and supports they need.

Recommendation #3: Change the narrative about adolescence to ensure youth are viewed as community strengths.

Develop a shared understanding amongst stakeholders, funders, service providers, parents, and families about the profound brain development that occurs in adolescence, so our community can focus on how best to support them.

Adolescence is a significant period of cognitive development when youth develop habits, as well as social and emotional skills like self-regulation and impulse control. Investing in youth at this critical stage can ensure youth are prepared for challenging adult social situations and enhanced responsibilities of the workforce and post-secondary education. When youth display undesirable behavior, it must be recognized that they are undergoing an important stage of transformation and growth. Appropriate supports must be identified to meet their needs, increase expectations of what youth are capable of and can do, and help them to pursue opportunities to develop and reach their full potential.

Best practices include:

- Awareness building for all community members on adolescent development, adverse childhood experiences, and trauma. When youth interact with others who have high expectations for them and believe in their ability to grow and achieve their goals, they are more likely to be provided with options and opportunities.
- Developing programs that focus on youth strengths during adolescence, including their creativity and willingness to take risks. Youth will be much more confident and engaged in services and programs when they are treated as valuable contributors to their communities.

Recommendation #4: Improve our understanding and treatment of youth mental health.

Many youth who encounter barriers to success have faced a multitude of traumatic events and/or mental health challenges. The survival strategies youth use to overcome traumatic situations may be inappropriate or disruptive in everyday circumstances. Every individual who makes decisions about or works directly with youth must understand these behaviors and create trauma-sensitive cultures and strategies to address them. As a result, youth will feel more welcome and engaged in programs and services, and will be better able to focus on acquiring the skills they need to flourish.

Best practices include:

- Ensuring that services are trauma-informed. To be trauma-informed means that there is an understanding of trauma's impact physically, mentally and emotionally that influences engagement and behavior of service recipients, and a recognition that service systems have the responsibility to avoid re-traumatizing individuals.
- Asking questions about ways to improve policies and practices to better create and implement trauma-informed systems. See the survey in the Appendix of this report.
- Meeting basic needs first. When youth have their basic needs met, like food or shelter, they are able to feel safe and secure, and can focus on their long-term goals.
- Training all levels of service providers and policymakers to develop a shared baseline understanding about trauma. If policymakers, program administrators, and staff who work directly with youth understand trauma, how it affects behavior, and how to respond, organizations are better able to design policies and accountability systems that welcome youth and avoid re-traumatization. Our community should also invest resources and energy in identifying ways that we can standardize tracking and demonstrate outputs of trauma-informed care so that its successful implementation can also be recognized and replicated.
- Reacting to youth behavior with restorative justice or other responses that are sensitive to trauma. This shift will necessitate that service providers demonstrate their willingness to share power with, rather than over, youth. This shift will allow youth to feel safe, especially youth who have experienced trauma. When youth feel safe, they are able to devote their energy to acquiring skills and thriving.
- Addressing secondary trauma of service providers.
- Providing trauma-informed care and equity trainings regularly as part of ongoing professional development and as integral part of on-boarding for all new staff. However, the financial investment required to meet this recommendation is significant and most organizations lack the resources to provide training to staff. Community partners, such as businesses, philanthropic organizations, and other groups, should consider sponsoring trainings on an ongoing basis open to all direct service and youth serving organizations as in-kind support.

Recommendation #5: Ensure that programs serving youth are inclusive, individualized, and accommodate youth with different abilities.

All services and programs must be able to accommodate differently abled youth, especially those with limited literacy, communication, or numeracy skills. Service providers and stakeholders have opportunities to redesign and rethink services and programs when taking youth voice and needs into consideration. Stronger design with an equity lens allowing for more inclusivity will improve outcomes.

Best practices include:

- Speaking with youth to learn about the processes that they undertake to receive a service through process mapping from the youth perspective. These insights learned from youth on service delivery and challenges will provide critical insights as to how to better design programs and services to ensure that all youth have access, regardless of their abilities.
- Making sure all processes to receive services are accessible to all youth, regardless of their mental health or literacy or numeracy skills. By rethinking whether all organizational processes with which youth interact are accommodating to youth with disabilities, organizations are better able to identify and address barriers in their systems, and can help all youth achieve their goals.

Recommendation #6: Help youth by helping their parents, families, and neighborhoods.

Youth live in families. We cannot adequately address the needs of youth without addressing the needs of their families. Service providers and stakeholders can respond to and prevent trauma by building on the strengths of youth and their families and ensuring our neighborhoods are a safe, healthy, and thriving places to call home.

Best practices include:

- Providing real opportunities for families to earn a living wage. When families are supported by living wages, their children have safe places to live, adequate nutrition, and better opportunities to acquire the skills that they need to thrive.
- Addressing family member trauma in addition to youth trauma. When we make sure parents and other family members have access to mental health services and make them feel welcome at services, they are more likely to be supportive and engaged in their child's success.
- Enhancing the understanding of parents, caretakers, and family members about youth brain development.
- Investing in neighborhoods and building upon their assets. When neighborhoods are connected to opportunities through improved transportation and direct access to needed services, they are able to be communities in which all youth can thrive.

Recommendation #7: Consider and address discrimination and other disparate actions that affect youth as they transition through school and into the workforce.

Many policies in our communities were built upon legacies that disproportionately harmed groups of individuals based on race, ethnicity, economic status, religion, gender identification, sexual preference, and ability. Data on school discipline, chronic absenteeism, high school graduation, and formal court involvement represent an opportunity to reconsider and redesign programs, policies, and practices with an equity lens to close opportunity gaps, support youth, and improve their life outcomes.

Best practices include:

- Meeting with youth to determine which policies or actions would best help them achieve their goals and determine which programs and spaces feel most welcoming to youth and why.
- Creating youth-centered and youth-led programs and policies. Preliminary education research suggests that student-centered learning improves mathematics achievement of students who are Black.¹³⁵
- Providing more opportunities for organizations to collect and share disaggregated data that keep track of which type of youth are being best served and which youth needs are being met. Data can be used to help service providers and stakeholders improve services for all youth.

How can youth be involved in systems that support them?

“My final thought is: What now?” said one youth at the conclusion of a focus group. With a point blank stare, he continued, “Right after we leave this room, we are going right back to being homeless, right back to the tent.”

Our community has the power to make “What now?” a question that is asked with eager anticipation and optimism. Affecting structural change and dismantling discrimination and bias to improve the lives of our youth is the challenge facing our community. However, it is critical to recognize that the circumstances fueling our Opportunity Youth population were not created by a single institution or a single set of circumstances. It will require the concerted efforts of all of us to develop pathways for youth as they become adults. Despite our community’s legacy of racial and economic inequality, there is hunger and energy for change and to reimagine how programs, services, and systems can better serve our youth. Now is the time for a recommitment to the future of our community—our youth—and to partner with them for bold action in writing the next chapter of our community’s story.

APPENDICES

Appendix I. Glossary

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs): Potentially damaging childhood experiences that have been found to contribute to the development of risk factors for morbidity and mortality in adult life. (<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/about.html>)

Backwards Mapping: The process of beginning with your long-term goal and working “backwards” toward the earliest changes that need to occur.

Basic Needs: The elements required for survival and normal mental and physical health, such as food, water, shelter, protection from environmental threats, and love.

Equity Lens: A transformative quality improvement practice used to improve planning, decision-making, and resource allocation leading to more equitable policies and programs as it relates to constituents’ ability status, age, ethnic group, gender identity, languages spoken, race religion, immigration status, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status.

Formal Court Involvement: The practice of processing youth through the traditional juvenile justice system (petition filing [adult court equivalent-indictment], adjudicatory hearing [trial], delinquency determination [guilty determination], and disposition hearing [sentencing]) without consideration of alternative sanctions or diversion.

Opportunity Gap: The ways in which race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, English proficiency, community wealth, familial situations, or other factors that affect lower educational achievement and attainment for certain groups of students.

Opportunity Youth: Youth ages 16–24 who are currently out of school and do not expect to enroll in the next year, have not been employed for at least six months, do not hold a college degree, are not disabled to prevent long-term employment, are not incarcerated, and are not a stay-at-home parent with working spouse. Out of the 38.9 million Americans who fall into the 16–24 age range, about 6.7 million can be described as Opportunity Youth. (<http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/AECF-OpportunityRoad-2012.pdf>)

Outcome: A state or condition that must exist for your initiative to work that does not currently exist. An outcome may represent a change in a group of people, organization, or places. (www.theoryofchange.org)

Outcome Map (OM): A methodology for planning and assessing development programming that is oriented toward change and social transformation. An OM provides a set of tools to design and gather information on the outcomes, defined as behavioral changes, of the change process. An OM helps a project or program learn about its influences on the progression of change in their direct partners, and therefore, helps those in the assessments process think more systemically and programmatically about what they are doing and

to adaptively manage variations in strategies to bring about desired outcomes. OM puts people and learning at the center of development and accepts unanticipated changes as potential for innovation. (<https://www.outcomemapping.ca>)

Program-Rich, System-Poor Scenario: An environment in which several nonprofit organizations work to address a community's programs with little or no substantive coordination.

Self-Sufficiency Standard: A budget-based measure of the real cost-of-living and an alternative to the official poverty measure. It determines the amount of income required for working families to meet basic needs at a minimally adequate level, taking into account family composition, ages of children, and geographic differences in costs. The Central Ohio Self-Sufficiency Standard Wage (per adult).

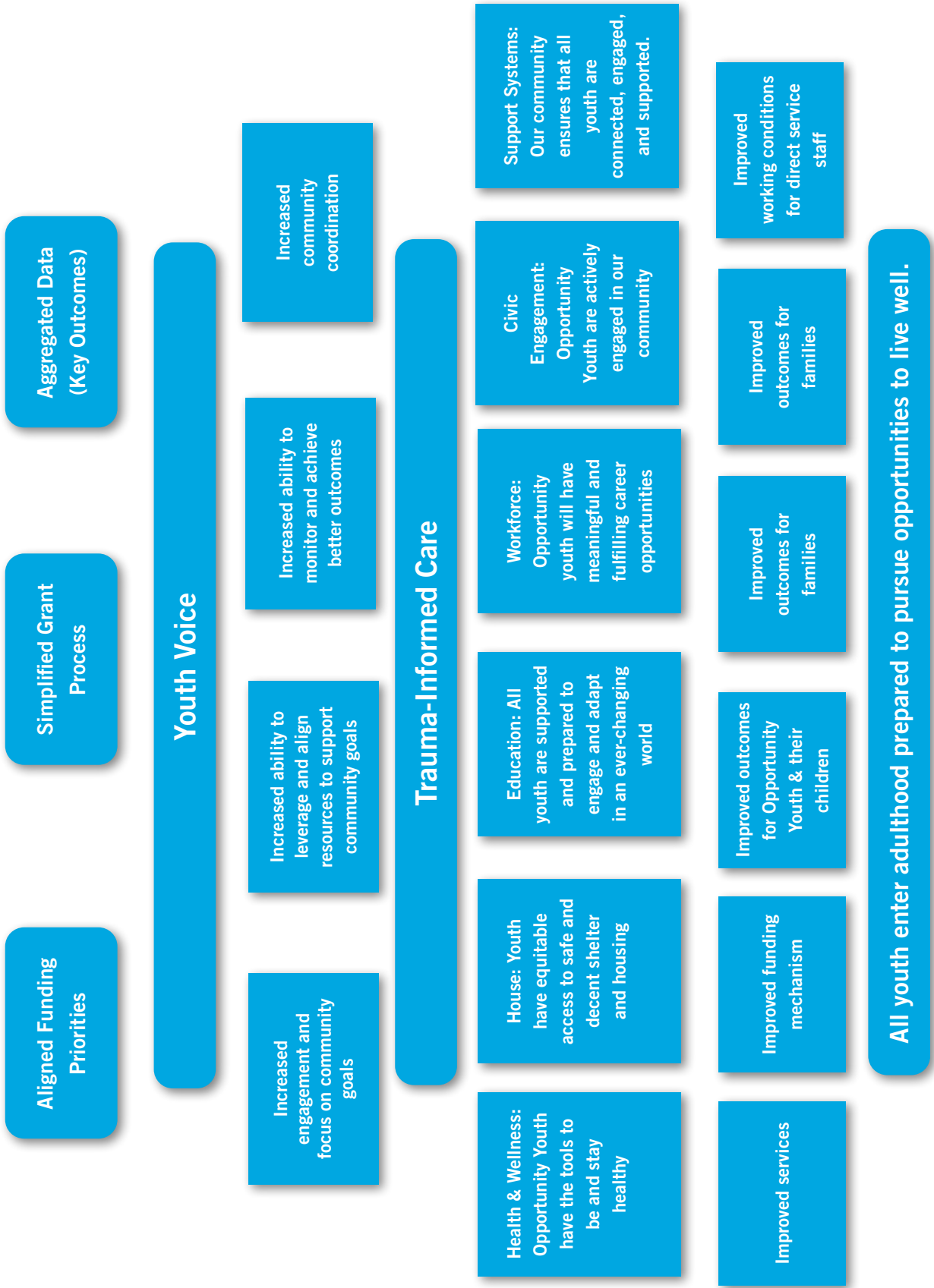
Student Mobility: In K–12 education, “student mobility,” also called “churn” or “transience,” can include any time a student changes schools for reasons other than grade promotion, but in general it refers to students changing schools during a school year. It may be voluntary, such as a student changing schools to participate in a new program, or involuntary, such as begin expelled or escaping from bullying. Student mobility is often related to residential mobility, such as when a family becomes homeless or moves due to changes in a parent's job. School mobility refers to the frequency of moves among students in a particular classroom, school, or district. High churn in schools not only can hurt the students who leave, but also those who remain enrolled. (<https://www.edweek.org/we/issues/student-mobility/index.html>)

Theoretical Framework: A structure that provides a general representation of outcome relationships that support the theory of change work.

Theory of Change: A comprehensive description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular content. It is focused on mapping out or “filling in” what has been described as the “missing middle” between what a program or change initiative does and how these lead to desired goals being achieved. The process first identifies the desired long-term goals and then works back from these to determine all the outcomes that must be in place (and how these relate to one another) for the goals to occur. (www.theoryofchange.org).

Trauma-Informed Care and Practice: A strengths-based framework that is responsive to the impact of trauma, emphasizing physical, psychological, and emotional safety for service providers and survivors, and creates opportunities for survivors to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment. (<http://www.mhcc.org.au/sector-development/recovery-and-practice-approaches/trauma-informed-care-andpractice.aspx>)

Appendix II. Opportunity Map



Appendix III. Survey for Organizations on Trauma-Informed Systems

Trauma-Informed System Survey for Organizations who Serve Youth

The purpose of this survey is to serve as a first step to help organizations ensure that they are responsive to youth trauma and that all youth feel welcome in their environments. This survey is not intended to be a checklist, but rather is open-ended to stimulate thought and conversation between youth and adults. In addition, this survey is meant to be adjusted as organizations adapt to the changing needs of their youth and seek continuous quality improvement of their services.

Youth should be consulted about answers to these questions, as well as about questions that should be added to or removed from this survey.

Establishing Physical Safety

1. How does your organization ensure that youth from diverse communities feel welcome?
 - How can your organization better welcome youth from diverse communities?
2. How does your organization ensure that youth who exhibit unconventional behaviors or appearances (e.g. those lacking basic hygiene) feel welcome?
 - How can your organization better welcome youth who exhibit unconventional behaviors or who lack basic hygiene?
3. How are staff held accountable to ensure that they are welcoming to all youth and treat all youth equally and fairly?
 - How can your organization better hold staff accountable to ensure that they treat all youth equally and fairly?
4. How does your organization provide safe, quiet spaces for youth to go if they become overwhelmed or dysregulated?
 - Are there better ways for your organization to provide safe, quiet spaces for youth to go if they become overwhelmed or dysregulated?
5. How does your organization ensure that all youth who receive services at your organization have their basic needs met (have food, housing, etc.)?
 - Are there better ways to ensure that all youth who receive services at your organization have their basic needs met?
6. How well does your organization ensure its policies and practices are in alignment with other organizations so that youth can easily navigate between services?
 - How can your organization better ensure alignment with other organizations to help youth navigate services to meet their basic needs?

Supporting Youth Emotional Safety

7. How well can staff at your organization identify potential reminders of trauma for youth?
 - How can staff at your organization better identify potential trauma reminders for youth?
8. How well can adults in your organization identify possible trauma-related responses from youth?
 - How can adults in your organization better identify possible trauma-related responses from youth?
9. How well are staff supported to ensure that secondary trauma is addressed and they are able to feel safe and recover from difficult interactions?
 - What are better ways to support staff so that they are better equipped to support youth?

Safely Setting and Maintaining Expectations of Youth

10. How are staff held accountable to make sure they are calm, responsive, and respectful with all youth?
 - What are some better ways to ensure that staff are held accountable for how they interact with all youth?
11. How does your organization ensure that expectations of youth are clear?
 - How can your organization better ensure that expectations are clear?
12. How are youth consulted when your organization creates rules and rights for youth?
 - How can your organization better consult with youth as it creates rules and rights for them?
13. How does your organization share with all youth their rules and rights? When, where, and how does this occur?
 - Are there better ways your organization can share with youth their rules and rights?
14. How does your organization ensure that expectations are enforced consistently for all youth?
 - How can your organization better ensure that expectations are enforced consistently for all youth?
15. How do your discipline policies avoid making youth feel powerless and focus on power with youth instead of power over youth?
 - What are ways in which you could improve your discipline policies to avoid creating feelings of powerlessness in youth?

Youth Voice and Empowerment

16. What are the ways in which youth are given opportunities to voice their opinions and concerns?
 - What are some better ways to give youth opportunities to voice their opinions and concerns?
17. How often are youth given opportunities to guide their own journey as they receive services?
 - What are some ways that provide youth more opportunities to guide their own journey as they receive services?
18. Have you consulted with youth about these questions and ways, in general, to make your organization feel more welcoming and responsive to trauma?
 - What are some better ways to involve youth in this process?
19. How do your organizational practices build upon youth strengths and focus on their assets rather than deficits?
 - What are better ways for your organizational practices to focus on youth strengths and assets?
20. How well are ideas and opinions from underrepresented groups welcomed in your organization policies and practices?
 - What are ways to better welcome ideas from underrepresented groups in your organizational policies and practices?

Appendix IV. Demographic Information of Youth Focus Group Participants

Group	Number	Percent
Non-Hispanic Black	18	45%
Non-Hispanic White	3	7.5%
Asian/Pacific Islander	0	0
Native American	2	5%
Latinx (any race)	0	0
Rather Not Identify	0	0
Other (not specified)	5	12.5%
Foster Care	6	15%
Juvenile Justice	5	12.5%
Any Disability	5	12.5%
Mental Health/Trauma	14	35%
Poverty	11	27.5%
English as a Second Language	6	15%
Pregnant/Parenting	11	27.5%
LGBTQIA+	5	12.5%
Total	40	

Appendix V. List of Participants

CDF-Ohio greatly appreciates the support of the following organizations that helped to facilitate the focus groups and interviews with service providers:

Achieve More & Prosper! Program (A.M.P.) with Franklin County Department of Job and Family Services	Directions for Youth and Families
Boys & Girls Clubs of Columbus	Equitas Health's Mozaic Program
Buckeye Ranch	Ethiopian Tewahedo Social Services
Center for Healthy Families	Jewish Family Services
Columbus City Schools Mentorship Program	Star House
Community for New Directions	The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at The Ohio State University
Ohio Education Research Center (OERC)	

Appendix VI. Focus Group Protocol for Youth in Franklin County

Focus Group Protocol for Opportunity Youth – May 22, 2019

Goals of Focus Group

- Empower youth
- Learn of objectives youth want to achieve as they become adults
- Find the ways that youth want to be supported as they transition to adulthood

Goal details

- We want youth to learn that their voice matters by:
 - Sharing experiences and perceptions
 - Giving context to the data through personal stories and experiences (putting a face on the data)

Focus Group Protocol

Prior to focus group, all participants will receive a welcome letter thanking them for participation. Each participants will be receive the following to review (and sign in some cases):

- Participant consent form,
- Permission for their focus group to be recorded,
- Photo release form, and an
- Outline of what they will be asked in the focus group.

Compensation for Time: All participants will receive a \$25 gift card for their time and participation.

Meal Provided: Participants will be served a meal at the beginning of the focus group.

Other Accommodations: In working with the hosting organization, all participants will receive some limited accommodations to support their involvement (e.g., COTA bus pass, childcare – if notified in advance that this is needed to accommodate request, etc.)

Pipe cleaners will be on each table that the youth can use as a fidgeting device.

Focus Group Length: 60-90 minutes

Location: Host at a service provider location/office in a space that is familiar, comfortable, and private.

Script and Questions for Focus Group

Welcome (10 minutes)

Welcome all participants!

Introduce self and thank participants for taking time to attend. Emphasize how much their input is needed and appreciated for KIDS COUNT work in Ohio.

- Introduce pipe cleaners sitting on tables for participants to use as a fidget device.
- We're going to discuss some challenging topics this evening/morning afternoon and thank you for agreeing to speak with us and share in this conversation. The purpose of our project is to better understand the needs and strengths of youth in our community and to also understand what opportunities exist to make sure that Columbus is an opportunity city to ensure all young people are successful.

- Ask participants to share their first name.
- Briefly review the project information sheet to provide project background and remind participants of the purpose of the meeting, which is to get a better idea of how systems in our city support youth in Columbus.
- Review focus group ground rules:
 - What is said here stays here so that everyone's responses are confidential
 - We will all be kind to one another; it is okay to disagree and we want this to be a place where people can feel safe being honest
- Review and ask participants to complete the consent form and ask if there are any additional questions about the purpose of the session.
- Facilitator reminds participants that their responses will be recorded:
 - "As a reminder, we will be recording. At this point everyone has consented to having this meeting recorded but if you have any objections please let us know."
 - Remind participants that their responses will be kept confidential to the best of our ability
- Note agenda verbally and write on flip chart paper prior to session, too.

Youth Strengths and Definition of Success (15 minutes)

(Facilitator gives participants an opportunity to answer the question below - what does your life look like as a happy adult 10 years from now - through writing or drawing first for 3 minutes, and then youth are given the opportunity to share their responses. The question is also posted on flip chart paper on a wall with the sample prompt questions below it).

- What does your life look like as a happy adult 10 years from now?
 - How old would you be?
 - Would you have a family?
 - What would you like to be doing every day?
 - What would a typical day be?
 - What kind of occupation would you have?
 - Who would be in your life?
 - What would your neighborhood look like?
 - What would be your favorite activities?
- Are systems in place to support your success in ten years? Why or why not?
 - If youth want examples, facilitator may mention that systems can include policies, practices, programs, and people.
- What are some of your biggest strengths that will help you get to living the life you described in 10 years?
 - If examples are needed, facilitator can say as an example: "strengths can include many things, ranging from determination to ability to stand up in front of others".

Adults, Policies, and Programs (15 minutes)

- What do you wish caring adults knew about your everyday life that they can use to help better support you?
- On your pathway to where you are now, do you feel like you had programs and adults who adequately supported you?
- What is likely to attract you to enroll in programs that help you achieve your personal and professional goals?

Structural Barriers (15 minutes)

- We know there are advantages in society to being in groups that do not face certain barriers. In your opinion, how do race, ethnicity, citizenship, gender expression, sexual orientation, religion, money, and social connections make it easier or harder for youth to achieve their goals?

Reaction to Data (10 minutes)

(Facilitator introduces worksheet – see below – with data points corresponding to six categories: education, workforce, housing, support systems, health and wellness, and civic engagement.)

- In this report, we present some data in six categories - education, workforce, civic engagement, health and wellness, support systems, and housing - listed on the worksheet in front of you. Are there aspects of your life that are not captured in this list of data, but should be and provide a fuller picture of your life?

Youth Voice in Decision-Making (10 minutes)

- What conversations among policymakers or others regarding youth success, or other important topics, do you feel left out of or a part of?
- How should policymakers best involve youth in these types of decisions?
- Are you interested in being involved in making decisions about how to improve systems and services that help youth be successful?

Final Thoughts (5 minutes)

- Do you have any final thoughts?
- As a reminder, you will have a paper survey that will provide you with another opportunity to provide us with more information that we did not address during the session.

(Facilitator distributes gift card and thanks participants. Facilitator hands participants follow-up survey).

Data Presented to Focus Group Participants

Education

- Number of youth who graduate from high school for all students and the following groups: students who are economically disadvantaged, students learning English, students in foster care, students who have been adjudicated, students who are homeless, students with disabilities, and students with “emotional disturbance”
- Number of students who are chronically absent for the groups listed above
- 3rd grade reading scores and 8th grade proficiency scores for the groups listed above
- Number of youth not in school
- Number with high-quality teachers
- Number of students who rely on family to pay college expenses
- Number of students in college who report financial difficulties for all students and LGBTQIA+ students
- Campus involvement of students from low-income families and first-generation students

Housing

- Number of homeless youth
- Number of children whose families spend more than 30% of their income on housing
- Number of youth served in homeless shelters (for all youth and for foster youth, youth with disabilities, and youth who are parents)

Civic Engagement

- Number of youth registered to vote
- Number of youth adjudicated for a felony

Workforce

- Number of youth with a full-time job
- Number of youth not working (for all youth and for youth in poverty and from single-parent families)
- Number of youth in poverty
- Number of children whose parents lack secure employment (employment that is full-time and consistent throughout the year)
- Number of students with a disability who are employed within one year of leaving high school

Support Systems

- Number of youth in single-parent families
- Number of youth who are parenting

Health and Wellness

- Number of youth with depression or mental illness
- Number of children who receive food assistance
- Number of youth who have health insurance

Outcomes of Youth who Face Barriers to Success

- Average income
- Educational attainment
- Number employed
- Number who own homes
- Number who report excellent or good health



Appendix VII. Youth Focus Group – Demographic Survey

Focus Group Demographic Survey

Individual Information

1. How do you identify yourself (select all that apply)? (Please circle your response)

- a. Non-Hispanic Black
- b. Non-Hispanic White
- c. Asian/Pacific Islander
- d. Native American
- e. Latinx (any race)
- f. I'd rather not identify
- g. Other

Please add additional comments in the space below:

2. Because we want to thoroughly explore all of the circumstances affecting youth as they transition to adulthood, we are interested in whether you identify or have had experiences with any of the following. *Only if you feel comfortable sharing*, please circle any of the following items that apply to your lived experience:

- a. Foster care
- b. Formal court involvement (juvenile justice system)
- c. Any disability
- d. Mental health struggles or trauma
- e. Poverty
- f. English as a second language
- g. Pregnant or parenting
- h. LGBTQIA+

Health & Wellness

What do Columbus youth need to be both mentally and physically healthy? Are there particular types of programs or services you recommend? (Please see next page)

Housing

What do Columbus youth need to have safe, affordable, and comfortable housing? Are there particular types of programs or services you recommend?

Education

What do Columbus youth need to engage in school or to develop skills needed for employment? Are there any types of programs or services you recommend?

Workforce

What do Columbus youth need to find and maintain well-paying, meaningful, and secure jobs? Are there any types of programs or services you recommend?

Civic Engagement

What do Columbus youth need to become more involved in their communities or to exercise their right to vote? Are there any types of programs or services you recommend?

Support Systems

What do Columbus youth need to form meaningful connections with others around them? Are there any types of programs or services you recommend?

Post Focus-Group Opportunities:

If you were compensated for your time and provided with transportation, would you be interested in sharing more of your thoughts on how to best help youth transitioning to adulthood by serving on a youth advisory board to the Mayor of Columbus?

If yes, could you provide us with an email address so that we can contact you at a later date?

Is there anything you would like to add to the focus group discussion or this survey that you did not yet get a chance to say?



Appendix VIII. Focus Group Protocol for Service Providers in Franklin County

Service Provider Protocol for Project on Youth Transitioning to Adulthood – May 23, 2019 Goals

- Learn about the untold stories and lives of youth transitioning to adulthood.
- Learn about service providers' perspectives about the youth that they work with.
- Learn service providers' perspectives about how the Columbus community can best help the youth they work with successfully transition to adulthood.

Focus Group Preparation

Prior to asking questions, we will thank the service provider for their participation. Each service provider:

- Will receive a consent form that they should sign that details that they understand what the information they provide is being used for.
- Will be verbally asked for permission to record the interview.

Focus group length will be approximately 1 hour.

Focus groups will be held via phone or an in-person visit.

Materials

- Consent form
- Recording device
- Demographic survey (do we want to provide one?)
- Facilitator debrief form

Script and Questions

About the service provider(s)' work

- How do you reach youth who are disengaged?
- How do you keep youth engaged in programs to help them transition to adulthood?

More specific questions:

- From your perspective, do you think that services targeted to helping youth transition to adulthood are culturally relevant and trauma informed?
- What practices support cooperation among agencies, organizations, educational institutions, and other providers to help youth better transition to adulthood?
- What do you think needs to change to help agencies better collaborate?
- What would an ideal program for youth facing barriers transitioning to adulthood look like?

About the youth they work with:

- What is a common misconception about "Opportunity Youth" or youth who face barriers to transitioning to adulthood?

How the Columbus community can better support youth

- Do you regularly seek feedback from youth who use your services for continuous improvement?
 - If no, would you be interested in receiving feedback from youth in order to improve your services?
- Are there rules in place that make it difficult for people who need services the most to access them?

[Theory of change] If I am hearing you right repeat how you understand their theory of change

- Their goals
- How they achieve them
- How they know they've achieved them



Appendix IX. Landscape Scan Sample of Organizations Serving Youth in Franklin County

Organizations That Serve Youth in Franklin County	Health and Wellness	Housing	Education	Workforce	Civic Engagement	Support Systems	Website
Columbus Urban League	X		X	X		X	https://www.cul.org/
Equitas Health	X						https://equitashealth.com/
OhioGuidestone	X	X		X		X	
Huckleberry House	X	X					http://huckhouse.org/
Directions for Youth and Families	X			X		X	http://dfyf.org/
Mental Health America of Franklin County	X						https://mhafc.org/
Community Development for All People	X					X	https://www.4allpeople.org/
Jewish Family Services	X			X		X	https://jfscolumbus.org/
National Youth Advocate Program	X		X				https://www.nyap.org/
Center for Healthy Families	X	X	X			X	http://centerforhealthyfamilies.org/
Alvis, Inc.	X	X	X	X		X	https://alvis180.org/
Moms2Be	X						
Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Ohio						X	https://www.bbbscentralohio.org/

Organizations That Serve Youth in Franklin County	Health and Wellness	Housing	Education	Workforce	Civic Engagement	Support Systems	Website
Kaleidoscope Youth Center	X	X				X	https://www.kycohoio.org/
Star House	X	X					https://www.starhouse.us/
Healthy Neighborhoods Healthy Families - Nationwide Children's Hospital	X	X	X	X			https://www.nationwidechildrens.org/about-us/population-health-and-wellness/healthy-neighborhoods-healthy-families
The Salvation Army of Central Ohio		X					
Catholic Social Services	X	X				X	https://www.colscss.org/
The Buckeye Ranch	X	X				X	https://www.buckeyeranch.org/
Gladden Community House	X	X	X			X	http://gladdenhouse.org/
YWCA	X	X				X	https://www.ywcacolumbus.org/
Lutheran Social Services Network of Hope	X	X					https://lssnetworkofhope.org/
Columbus City Schools School Success Mentor Initiative						X	https://www.ccssoh.us/Page/2402
City Year Columbus			X			X	https://www.cityyear.org/columbus
Volunteers of America	X	X	X	X		X	https://www.voaa.org/

Organizations That Serve Youth in Franklin County	Health and Wellness	Housing	Education	Workforce	Civic Engagement	Support Systems	Website
Friends of the Homeless	X	X				X	http://www.fohcolumbus.com/
Ethiopian and Tewahedo Social Services (ETSS)	X	X	X	X	X	X	https://www.ethiotss.org/
The Bair Foundation Child & Family Ministries	X					X	https://www.bair.org/
ALL THAT (Teens Hopeful About Tomorrow)			X	X	X	X	http://all-that.org/
St. Stephen's Community House	X	X	X	X	X	X	https://www.saintstephensch.org/
Expanding Visions Foundation				X		X	http://www.expandingvisions.net/
Columbus Literacy Council			X	X		X	https://www.clcworks.org/
Godman Guild			X	X		X	https://www.godmanguild.org/
Tech Corps			X				http://techcorps.org/
Boys and Girls Clubs of Columbus	X		X			X	http://www.bgccolumbus.org/
Goodwill Columbus		X	X	X		X	https://www.goodwillcolumbus.org/
Per Scholas			X	X			https://perscholas.org/?city=columbus

Organizations That Serve Youth in Franklin County	Health and Wellness	Housing	Education	Workforce	Civic Engagement	Support Systems	Website
ACCESS Collaborative - Ohio State University			X			X	https://odi.osu.edu/access-collaborative
Columbus Speech and Hearing Center	X			X		X	https://www.columbuspeech.org/
IMPACT Community Action			X	X		X	https://www.impactca.org/
Eckerd Workforce Development			X	X			https://eckerd.org/region/oh/
St. Vincent Family Center	X						https://www.svfc.org/
Center for Employment Opportunities		X		X		X	https://ceoworks.org/
MCS Touch		X	X	X		X	http://mcsstouch.org/
Columbus Works				X		X	http://www.columbusworks.org/
People's Justice Project					X		
Freedom A La Cart				X		X	https://freedomalacart.org/
Center for Family Safety and Healing	X						http://familysafetyandhealing.org/
The Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio		X			X		https://cohhio.org/

Organizations That Serve Youth in Franklin County	Health and Wellness	Housing	Education	Workforce	Civic Engagement	Support Systems	Website
Ohio Attorney General's Teen Ambassador Board					X		https://www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov/State-and-Local-Government/Schools/Teen-Ambassador-Board
Youth Advisory Board: Youth for Change					X		https://childrenservices.franklincountyohio.gov/programs/youth-advisory-council.cfm
Foster Action Ohio					X	X	https://fosteractionohio.org/
Community for New Directions	X					X	http://cndonline.org/
Franklin County Youth Council					X		https://liveunitedcentralohio.org/franklin-county-youth-council/
Teen and Pregnant Program – Nationwide Children's Hospital	X					X	https://www.nationwidechildrens.org/specialties/teen-and-pregnant-program
CHLOE Inc.	X					X	https://chloeinc.org/
Scholar Network – Columbus State Community College			X			X	https://connect.csc.edu/organization/columbus-state-scholar-network
WrightChoice Inc.				X		X	http://wrightchoice.org/
Youth Build Columbus Community School			X	X	X	X	https://www.ybccs.org/
Central Ohio Youth for Christ (COYFC)	X		X	X		X	https://www.coyfc.org/

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