

# OPPORTUNITY YOUTH INITIATIVE

*Connecting disconnected youth to sustainable pathways and positive futures.*

## OVERVIEW

In the United States there are more than 6.7 million young people between the ages of 16 and 24 that are disconnected from education or work – the very systems and institutions that will help them succeed.

The White House, Aspen Institute and others refer to these young adults as Opportunity Youth (OY). The term recognizes the positive impact these young people can have on our economy and future. Though OY have become disconnected from education or work for many reasons, including a lack of education, job skills, direction, financial resources or mental health supports, they all desire a bright future. Most simply do not know how to begin working toward sustainability.

It is estimated that more than 8,000 OY are living in our community. At United Way of the Midlands, we believe in these youth and acknowledge their untapped potential. In order to help them become connected, credentialed and employed, we are proud to serve as the convener of the Opportunity Youth Alliance in the Omaha-Council Bluffs metro area.



## HOW IT WORKS

The Opportunity Youth Alliance is a collective impact group that works to connect youth to basic need services, educational opportunities and employment prospects. Created with help from the national Forum for Youth Investment, guidance from the Aspen Institute and research from the Department of Education, the Alliance has formalized our community's efforts to serve OY. Currently, the group consists of more than 40 agency partners with participation from government, non-profit and for-profit employers from across the Omaha-Council Bluffs metro area.

As part of its work to reconnect OY to education and employment, the Alliance has mapped existing services and resources that serve disconnected youth in the Omaha-Council Bluffs metro area. Through this effort, the Alliance has recognized a need to link our community's existing support systems together and help youth navigate them.

This discovery has led the Alliance to develop and implement the Opportunity Youth Hub. The Hub is housed at Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, expanding their existing work with youth aging out of foster care.

**There are approximately**  
**6.7 million**  
**Opportunity Youth in the U.S.,**  
**and there are over one million**  
**new Opportunity Youth annually.**



United Way  
of the Midlands



*"What the partnership with United Way tells me is that we've got a lot of young people out there that are under the radar, they can't find the resources to make them get up on their feet and stay there."*

*- Ronda Newman, Project Everlast Omaha Associate Vice President*

## HOW IT WORKS *(continued)*

The Hub helps program providers access community resources for their young clients and provides direct navigation services to OY. Navigation coaches assigned by the Hub support the success of OY in three ways:

- 1 Ensure Stability:** To help an OY achieve stability, a coach connects the youth to community resources such as housing supports, health services, clothing assistance, food access and more.
- 2 Re-Connect the Youth:** Once a youth has secured basic supports, the Hub coach leverages local partnerships to connect him or her to education, training and employment prospects.
- 3 Provide A Safety Net:** The young adult will face continued barriers while he or she develops the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed. Therefore, the Hub and the OY's assigned coach also act as a safety net while the youth continues down the path to stability.

## RESULTS

- The Hub pilot began serving clients on June 1, 2017 with the goal of helping 100 OY in one year. At the end of its pilot year, the Hub had served 199 OY in the Omaha-Council Bluffs metro area.

**2017**  
**GOAL:** 100  
served

**2018**  
**RESULT:** 199  
served

- Though pre-existing services target youth under the age of 18, over 88% of Hub clients were young adults ages 19 to 24.
- Independent living services and housing were among the top five needs expressed by OY served by the Hub.

## TAKING IT TO SCALE

There are thousands more OY in our community who need our help. With strong donor support, the Alliance is scaling the Hub pilot to engage approximately 400 youth across the metro area annually. Because more than 40% of the youth served through the pilot requested Hub support as they navigated education and employment opportunities, the second phase of the initiative will focus on defining clear pathways that connect these OY to education and workforce training placements. The Alliance will also continue to improve collaboration among the network of services that target OY.

## GET INVOLVED

You can help OY reach their full potential! Donate to the OY initiative through United Way of the Midlands today. Your gift will help us positively impact hundreds of OY in our community. United Way is honored to have its Women United affinity group raise funds over the next three years for the OY initiative.

For more information visit [www.unitedwaymidlands.org/OpportunityYouth](http://www.unitedwaymidlands.org/OpportunityYouth).

## Opportunity Youth Alliance:

- Avenue Scholars
- Boys Town
- Boys and Girls Clubs of the Midlands
- Boys Town of Iowa
- Carole's House of Hope
- Central Plains – PALS
- Child Saving Institute
- Children's Square USA
- Chesterman Coca-Cola
- D2 Center
- Early Childhood Services – Teen and Young Parent Program
- Empowerment Network
- Family Housing Advisory Services – Opportunity Passport
- Goodwill Industries
- Heartland Family Service – Youth Links
- Heartland Workforce Solutions
- Hope Center for Kids
- Job Corps
- Latino Center of the Midlands
- MACCH
- MCC – PROTO program
- MCC – Gateway to College
- Midlands Mentoring Partnership
- Nebraska Children and Families Foundation
- Nebraska Children's Home Society
- Nebraska Families Collaborative
- Nebraska Vocational Rehabilitation
- No More Empty Pots
- Omaha Housing Authority
- Omaha Home for Boys
- Omaha Public Schools – Multiple Pathways
- Opportunity Passport
- Operation Youth Success
- Project Everlast
- Promise Partners
- Region 6
- ResCare
- The Bike Union
- UNO Civic and Social Responsibility
- United Way of the Midlands
- Urban League of NE
- YMCA
- Youth Emergency Services
- Youth Policy Institute of Iowa
- Additional members are still being added*