

First, Help Today's Struggling Youth



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[Research tells us](#) that only 2 percent of individuals who finish high school, work full time, and have stable families before having children end up poor, while 72 percent of individuals who do none of these things end up poor.

Yet every year in America [more than 1 million](#) youth [drop out of high school](#), crippling their chance at the American dream. [Nearly one in six](#) 16- to 24-year-olds is disconnected from the two structures that offer hope for their future – school and work. Promoting opportunity means [opening multiple pathways](#) for young people to connect to education, job training, employment and community service.

To do this, we should invest in successful programs like [YouthBuild](#) that currently have [long waiting lists](#) for enrollment. With a track record of success, YouthBuild offers a holistic program of education, job training, personal counseling, community service, leadership development, placement in college or jobs, and follow-up support after graduation. More than half of the unemployed and undereducated young people who enroll in YouthBuild turn their lives around and get back on track for a productive adulthood.

Drawing on the example of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Civilian Conservation Corps, we should also create a Conservation Corps to mobilize disadvantaged youth from urban areas to meet the needs of our urban national parks and waterways. National service has been shown to be a good bridge to full employment, and it comes at a low cost to government. A Conservation Corps would put youth immediately into productive work while meeting the needs of our nation to support and maintain our national heritage. The youth who participate would be eligible for an education award and service stipend. And the cost to taxpayers is much lower than the cost of social supports or incarceration when we fail to help young people stay on track.

If we care about equality of opportunity, we should invest in proven programs that keep young people in school and out of prison.