

Texas A&M University School of Law
Texas A&M Law Scholarship

Faculty Scholarship

1999

YouthBuild

Fatma Marouf

Texas A&M University School of Law, fatma.marouf@law.tamu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarship.law.tamu.edu/facscholar>



Part of the [Law Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Fatma Marouf, *YouthBuild*, 9 (1999).

Available at: <http://scholarship.law.tamu.edu/facscholar/755>

This Book Section is brought to you for free and open access by Texas A&M Law Scholarship. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Scholarship by an authorized administrator of Texas A&M Law Scholarship. For more information, please contact sphillips64@law.tamu.edu.

CHAPTER ONE

YOUTHBUILD

by Dorothy Stoneman and Fatma Marouf

1. Background Information

YouthBuild is a comprehensive youth and community development program that simultaneously addresses several core issues facing low-income communities: education, housing, jobs, and leadership development. It is based on the conviction that the energy and intelligence of young people need to be liberated and enlisted in solving the problems facing our society, and that low income young people are an untapped resource for solving the problems facing their own communities.

YouthBuild engages disconnected young men and women who have no apparent path to a productive future by teaching them basic academic, life, leadership, and employability skills through work on community housing rehabilitation projects coupled with attendance at a YouthBuild alternative high school. Emphasis is placed on belonging to a positive peer group and developing leadership attitudes and skills that will benefit the community. The opportunity to build affordable housing gives young people the chance to play a visible constructive role that wins the respect and appreciation of the community. It immediately changes their identity and begins the process of personal change.

YouthBuild programs focus on real-life productivity. While the YouthBuild curriculum prepares graduates primarily for entry-level

positions or apprenticeships in construction, alternative career paths are made available to trainees who decide not to pursue construction-related work. Program staff help trainees prepare a resume, gain job-seeking skills, think about higher education.

YouthBuild programs are typically 12 months long, engaging 30 to 50 young people in a full-time program in which they alternate weeks on the construction site with weeks in the YouthBuild alternative school. A supportive mini-community is created. Students have a personal counselor, assist in governing their own program through a youth policy council, participate in community service activities in addition to housing construction, develop a strong positive peer group through many activities designed for that purpose, and graduate to higher education or jobs paying an average of \$7.53/hour. Alumni clubs and ongoing supports of various kinds are organized by the program in partnership with the alumni.

While the day-to-day challenges of a YouthBuild program are focused on overcoming obstacles, skill gaps, and attitudes that would undermine participants ability to be productive and self-sufficient members of society, the larger and longer range goal is to produce leaders and role models who will be permanently involved in community development and civic life.

On the construction site, YouthBuild crews learn demolition, basic carpentry, masonry, Sheetrock, window framing, door framing, and painting. They work under the close supervision of qualified instructors, usually union journeymen. The supervisor: student ratio of 1:7 holds trainees to high standards of teamwork and productivity. In one year, 28 trainees can complete three to nine units of housing, depending on the units size and the degree of rehabilitation required.

Young people are paid a stipend that starts at \$5.35/hr for their construction work and \$50/week for lunch and transportation during school attendance. Students may obtain raises on a regular basis, usually \$.25 cents/hr every two months, up to about \$6.50 per hour. They also can receive a \$25 bonus for perfect attendance for each two-week pay period. Thus, typically young people can earn \$7855 in twelve months, if they have perfect attendance, while they receive education and training.

Early History of YouthBuild

The YouthBuild program was pioneered by Dorothy Stoneman and colleagues through the Youth Action Program of the East Harlem Block Schools between 1978 and 1984. The logical idea of employing teenagers to rehabilitate abandoned city-owned buildings in order to create affordable permanent housing for homeless and low-income people inspired community-based organizations (CBOs) around the city. In the mid-eighties 150 New York City CBOs joined the Youth Action Program to form the Coalition for Twenty Million Dollars, which persuaded the New York City Council to fund the Department of Employment to replicate YouthBuild in several sites. Some of these sites were extremely successful; others failed for lack of a clear prototype or technical assistance.

By June of 1988, a national coalition the YouthBuild Coalition for Two Hundred Million Dollars was organized by the Youth Action Program in partnership with ten other organizations from around the country. Its purpose was to persuade the United States government to fund the employment and training of young people to build affordable housing in their communities while returning to school to complete their own secondary education. The Youth Action Program launched the YouthBuild National Replication Project with a \$50,000 grant from the Ford Foundation and a four-year grant of \$100,000/year from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. Soon thereafter, broadening national interest in the program, coupled with the lessons learned in New York City when replication was attempted without adequate training or technical assistance, pointed to the need for a national organization to orchestrate the replication of YouthBuild programs. YouthBuild USA was incorporated in 1990 with Dorothy Stoneman, director of Youth Action Program, as founding president.

By 1993 YouthBuild USA had generated 15 YouthBuild programs in 11 states that were demonstrating the replicability and the broad appeal of this program. With funding from The Ford Foundation, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, and DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, YouthBuild USA initiated an independent evaluation of the first five replication sites. The evaluation was carried out by researchers from MIT, Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, and Public/Private

Ventures. They concluded the program was replicable and seemed to meet the needs especially well of low-income minority males. They observed that it worked best when the principles and practices promulgated by YouthBuild USA were followed, and when there was competent executive leadership who had adequate flexible funding, sufficient time for planning, a sponsoring agency with a compatible philosophy, and an appropriate housing site for construction.

The YouthBuild Act was introduced by Congressman Major Owens (D-NY) and Senator John Kerry (D-MA) in 1990 with numerous co-sponsors. It was passed as a subtitle of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1992: *Hope for Youth: YouthBuild* and signed into law by then President George Bush. In 1993 an appropriation to HUD of \$40 million launched the federal YouthBuild program.

Current Organization and Funding

YouthBuild programs are operated by autonomous local organizations or by local governments through one or another public agency. By 1996 there were 108 YouthBuild programs in 34 states; by the end of 1999, there will be 129 programs. The primary engine of growth has been the HUD funding, distributed through annual competitions. While there has been bi-partisan support for YouthBuild from the beginning, the amount of funding has fluctuated in response to political priorities, fiscal constraints, and bureaucratic delays. Funds have been available in the following amounts in successive years between 1994 and 1999: \$40M, \$68M, \$20M, \$30M, \$35M, \$42.5M. The drop in 1996 from \$68 million to \$20 million caused a setback in the development of a cohesive, expanding, national program. It also motivated local programs and YouthBuild USA to protect programs with diversified funding. YouthBuild programs have thus sought and received funding from the Corporation for National Service, the Department of Labor, local and state school systems, state and city governments, and myriad private sources. As a result program funding varies from site to site.

The cost per student averages \$20,000 for a full year in the program plus follow-up services, including stipends of between \$6500 and \$7800 per trainee. The cost of housing construction is calculated and raised separately, also from a variety of sources.

In addition to federal, state, and local public funds, YouthBuild USA and most of its affiliates receive financial support from private foundations. The Ford Foundation, The DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, The W.K. Kellogg Foundation, The Rockefeller Foundation, Lilly Endowment Inc., The James Irvine Foundation, and The Commonwealth Fund have all made significant multi-year-investments in YouthBuild through YouthBuild USA. They have supported individual sites, evaluations and other systems of accountability, technical assistance and training, alumni programs, communications, and publications.

More recently, YouthBuild USA has sought support from the corporate sector, resulting in a major grant of \$1.5 million from The Home Depot, and additional grants of \$300,000 from Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, \$100,000 from Boston Capital, \$25,000 from Citicorps, \$35,000 from the Alcoa Foundation and \$50,000 from the Fannie Mae Foundation.

Partly as a result of conversations with YouthBuild USA, Piper Jaffray Companies Foundation has committed \$2 million to local employment training programs. Rotary Club International has committed \$40 million to youth development programs, including YouthBuild. Local programs will apply for these latter opportunities directly to the source.

Some corporate relationships include partnerships with the local program and/or with YouthBuild USA. For example, The Home Depot not only provides program funding to 25 YouthBuild programs, but also participates in training, hires YouthBuild students and graduates, and seeks volunteer opportunities for their employees.

Demographics & Outcome Statistics

Over the past ten years, 108 independent YouthBuild programs have been established in 34 states, engaging over 20,000 young people. YouthBuild participants in 1997 were 75% male, 56% African American, 19% Latino, 18% White, 4.4% Native American and .5% Asian. These demographics have been roughly stable from year to year.

A typical program enrolls between 28 and 42 young people ages 16 to 24, at least 75 percent of whom have dropped out of high school and also lack a GED. While the program is ideally defined as a 12-month basic period, it remains flexible, placing some people in jobs or college prior to the end of the year and allowing others to stay in the program up to an additional six months. (Federal HUD YouthBuild funding allows two full years of training and an additional 12-month follow-up period, but funding levels tend to constrain programs to one year plus follow-up). The average length of stay in 1997 was 8.7 months and the average participant's age was 20.

YouthBuild programs are working in large urban inner cities, rural areas, tribal areas, and low income areas of smaller cities. The ethnic, racial, and geographic background of the students, as well as their gender, does not seem to affect the applicability of YouthBuild; it does require flexible adjustments to the needs of each population group.

2. Outcomes

Definition of Success

There are five distinct indicators of success within the YouthBuild movement:

- 1) Does the program produce the units of affordable housing that it has promised to produce, on time and within budget?
- 2) Do the students attain reasonable levels of success in terms of measurable outcomes such as attendance, retention, job placement, wages, GED and diploma acquisition, college entrance, and job and college retention?
- 3) Do the students fairly consistently offer passionate testimonials as to the life-changing impacts of the YouthBuild community on their own lives?
- 4) Does the local program survive, with stable funding, strong local partnerships, and minimal staff and leadership turnover, building a stronger and more contributing presence in the community?

- 5) Do the graduates of YouthBuild programs remain engaged in community life as leaders and role models?

Measurable Outcome Data

Outcome data for 1998 from affiliated sites show 60% of the incoming students graduated from the program with an average length of stay of 7.9 months. 85% of the graduates were placed in college or jobs with wages averaging \$7.53/hour. Of these incoming students, 47% were parents, 39% on public assistance at entrance, 31% were adjudicated, 18% had been convicted of a felony, 22% were living in public housing, and 79% had no diploma or GED. Data for other years has been roughly comparable, with slight variations.

Data for graduates from 33 affiliated programs in 1998 show that of 1468 students tracked for more than 6 months, the programs had current information for 82%, of which 74% were still working or in school. In 1997, of 437 students tracked for more than 6 months in 14 affiliated programs, current information was available for 98%, of which 84% were still working or in school, at an increased wage. Tracking graduates is a relatively new activity, required by membership in the YouthBuild USA Affiliated Network.

YouthBuild programs have shown steady improvement in the outcomes of their education components. In 1993, only 10% of students obtained their GED. In 1994, it had doubled to 20%. By 1997, affiliated YouthBuild programs were reporting 40% of students who needed them were obtaining their GED or high school diploma, and by 1998, the percentage had risen again to 42.5%. Average incoming reading levels remained stable during these years at about grade 7.4. During this period some YouthBuild programs became certified by local superintendent as alternative schools, and others became state charter schools, giving them access to state education funding. YouthBuild USA provides training for YouthBuild teachers and provides on-site education consulting to local sites, and is brokering relations with community colleges. YouthBuild's growing role as an alternative learning network for out-of-school youth is becoming increasingly noteworthy.

Variance Across Sites and Typical Problems

While average performance across all YouthBuild sites has held remarkably stable and continued to improve as the field has increased from 1 to 15 to 108 programs, there is always variation among the sites. There is not only variation between YouthBuild sites in their level of success in any given year, but there may also be variation within sites from year to year. At any given moment, there are always a few sites facing severe problems. One or two problem sites may be ones that were outstanding a few years earlier. Such change is almost always due either to a change in leadership, or a drastic change in funding, or both. Sometimes it is due to a build-up of internal organizational tensions that burst forth suddenly in a power struggle among adults.

The most commonly recurring organizational difficulty is when sponsoring agencies either do not have philosophical agreement with or adequate management infrastructure for the YouthBuild program. Inadequate funding is often a part of the picture when a site is faltering.

As technical assistance provider, YouthBuild USA can provide emergency assistance in a variety of ways. Advice, mediation, training, and various types of interventions can help. In four separate situations, YouthBuild USA has provided temporary, full-time leadership to carry a program through a crisis or a leadership transition. In several cases, YouthBuild USA has also had to intervene to organize the students to rebuild their morale when problems have demoralized them or angered them. In each case, with assistance, the site has recovered.

Since YouthBuild USA is neither the owner nor the manager of local programs, the local boards of directors have direct responsibility for the quality of the program. Some boards do not do enough evaluation because they are in charge of multi-service organizations and cannot focus exclusively on YouthBuild programs.

Sites that do not have a systematic mechanism for staff coordination and accountability, that lack a system of rapid intervention when weaknesses appear, or that fail to show sound fiscal management are unlikely to achieve their goals. Without a strong, committed management, a group of young people carefully selected because of their readiness for

the program, a united and competent staff, a carefully designed construction schedule, and morale-building activities, the program is likely to encounter problems that interfere with the quality of program performance. While all of these difficulties lead to discrepancies in site performance, the exemplary sites act as a quality magnet, pulling the whole field towards higher standards.

Quality Control and Data Collection

HUD carries out an annual competition for YouthBuild funding. HUD selects the sites and then through YouthBuild, USA, as its technical assistance contractor, makes sure that each site has access to information and training, and that when problems surface, help is available. If sites show persistent problems, HUD will freeze funds mid-cycle, and send a YouthBuild USA intervention team in to assess and hopefully solve the problem. If the problems cannot be solved, HUD will terminate the contract, or simply not re-fund a site. HUD receives bi-annual reports from each site that include outcome and demographic data.

Separate from HUD's procedures, the YouthBuild USA Affiliated Network acts as a vehicle for promoting and monitoring quality among its affiliated programs by providing program design and performance standards, and methods for reviewing how well sites adhere to them. YouthBuild USA's computerized student tracking system gathers monthly performance and demographic data from affiliates. It generates statistics that document impact and guide program improvement. The system enables sites to easily tabulate their outcomes, set reasonable goals for self-improvement, and measure their progress toward achieving program performance standards.

YouthBuild USA also does on-site program audits of its affiliates. These are scheduled for every two years, to formally assess whether programs are achieving program design and performance standards and to learn what factors are enabling some sites to excel. Sites with outstanding performance are invited to present their policies and practices at conferences for the benefit of other sites.

Follow-up with Graduates

The creation of an ongoing community that establishes and reinforces positive values and provides access to opportunities over a long period of time is the goal of graduate follow-up. Optimally, follow-up is active, constant, well planned, and thorough. The graduate program provides continuous information and counseling about education, careers, personal issues, leadership skills, and social life. Even when funds are not available for a full graduate program, sites usually assign a counselor to provide ongoing support for the young people, reaching out to them by regular phone calls as well as responding to their requests for help. Unfortunately, when funds are cut back, funding for follow-up is often cut first, so graduate programs remain weaker in most sites than the basic program.

Third-Party Evaluation

An independent, systematic and objective process evaluation of the replication of five early YouthBuild sites was performed between 1992 and 1996 by Ronald F. Ferguson and Jason C. Snipes from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, Philip L. Clay from the Department of Urban Studies and Planning at MIT, and Gary Walker at Public/Private Ventures. As mentioned earlier, this study concluded that YouthBuild is replicable and works best when it follows the philosophy and design put forth by YouthBuild USA. **The quality of local executive leadership and the availability of sufficient funding proved to be the most important factors in analyzing success.**

Ferguson and Snipes also presented a framework for understanding the process of transformation that young people enrolled in YouthBuild were seen to experience. Their model represents an adaptation of Erik Erikson's seminal ideas regarding the stages of the human life cycle to convey the changes that occur during the course of one program cycle.

First, the trainee must learn to trust in the caring, competence, resourcefulness and fairness of YouthBuild staff and in the physical and emotional safety of the program environment. Once trust has been established, the trainee can begin to negotiate an acceptable range of autonomy in decision-making, learning to respect the program's rules

and to value guidance. The next step involves initiating an honest attempt to collaborate with staff and peers toward self-development, learning to cope with or to overcome any pre-existing guilt and feelings of rejection or isolation from the old peer group. Young people can then begin working industriously to learn and integrate skills, steadily building belief in their capacity for mastery. Resolving inconsistencies and tensions between old and new beliefs represents the trainee's final task, and, with the support of staff, participants assimilate a positive identity that fosters a healthy life style, and a sense of positive expectancy about the future.

Ferguson and Snipes evaluation has been extremely useful for the YouthBuild movement because it documents and explains a process that staff intuitively understood.

3. Lessons Learned

Program Approach

To deal effectively with the problems faced by out-of-school youth, YouthBuild's approach is to chart a course that is directly opposite from the consistent disrespect that young people in disadvantaged communities have often experienced. YouthBuild programs must include the positive elements of respect for the intelligence of young people, and development of power for them over their immediate environment through participation in program governance. In addition, YouthBuild staff aims to offer patient caring, consistently positive values, family-like support, and a firm and supportive challenge to stop self-destructive behavior and change negative attitudes. YouthBuild remains committed to developing young people as leaders who can join in changing the conditions that have hurt them and the people they love.

In fact, leadership development is the most important element of YouthBuild programs. As much as society needs more good leaders at every level, young people need the challenge of engaging themselves in their communities by stepping into leadership roles. Real decision-making responsibility can heal low self-esteem and feelings of powerlessness and anger, counteracting some of the effects of oppression, in addition to giving young people the opportunity to experience success, and to change their identity from victim to change agent.

Leadership development is carried out in every aspect of the program. Young people learn public speaking and oral communication skills as well as general organizational skills such as how to chair meetings, facilitate discussions, set an agenda, take minutes, or draft a budget. The YouthBuild Policy Committee, a body comprised of at least one staff representative and an elected group of students who work together to make decisions about the YouthBuild program, involves trainees directly in governance by providing a forum to work through problems, compromise, and provide creative solutions that take into consideration the ideas, opinions and viewpoints of everyone.

While the scope of responsibility and authority of a YouthBuild Policy Committee varies considerably among YouthBuild programs, the Committee's role usually includes: participation in hiring staff, consultation on staff evaluations, recommending improvements in management and services, review of annual budget, planning events, and consultation on program design and policy. In addition to a Policy Committee that focuses internally, YouthBuild programs may have a community involvement committee that participates in community affairs. YouthBuild trainees and graduates can also become involved in leadership on the national level by being elected to the Alumni Council or the Young Leaders Council. The Young Leaders Council is unique in that it has a voice in policy governing the YouthBuild USA Affiliated Network equal to the role of local directors and YouthBuild USA staff.

YouthBuild gives young people direction by providing a desirable alternative to street culture. Programs set attractive and feasible goals relevant to the human drive towards achievement, influence, affiliation and security. We have learned that the qualities required in a program to win the confidence of the students, include:

- profound respect for the intelligence of young people and their leadership potential;
- staff members who have overcome similar obstacles to those faced by the young people and who have the clarity to challenge self-destructive behavior and the love to nurture people through the fears and trials they face;

- involvement in public service activity, which demonstrates the agency's concern for changing negative conditions that have affected the youth, diminishes the cynicism of youth, and provides transferable skills for civic involvement;
- cultural, recreational, and community-service activities (both during and after program hours) that are fun and create group cohesion.

The YouthBuild program's particular success in recruiting and holding minority men is the result of several specific factors:

- construction work attracts men;
- programs are often located in African-American or Latino communities;
- YouthBuild staff in black and Latino communities are predominantly black or Latino/a;
- recruitment strategies make clear that past prison records do not exclude applicants;
- school curricula give attention to the culture and history of the students attending

YouthBuild USA holds that successful programs for unemployed and undereducated young people in general are long-term, full-time interventions that involve training, education, and continuing support. They have staff who consistently communicate both competence and caring. Students want to see that staff truly cares above the call of duty, beyond what they ever received before or expected from a program. When staff offer home telephone numbers, are available around the clock, and come through in personal crises, they gain the trust and gratitude of the students. When staff additionally possess and offer skills and wisdom, the students will fully engage in changing their own lives.

Staff Selection & Training

The development of a unified staff team is crucial to the success of YouthBuild programs. Programs seek competent, caring, and committed staff who understand the young people and are sensitive to the issues they face. Flexibility, patience, a high frustration tolerance, and the ability to work well with others are necessary personal qualities.

Hiring all staff at least one month before start-up to allow time for orientation, and providing annual periods of planning and reflection, makes a difference. Use of consultants from YouthBuild USA to do initial staff training has been useful. Staff participation in national training and conferences so they can feel their own belonging to something larger than the local program strengthens each program. The staff needs to become a community of individuals who reinforce, overlap, and balance each other's work without competition and turf struggles.

Regular staff meetings and retreats are essential. It is surprising how many programs can fall into a pattern of working without regular staff meetings and expect the cohesion to persist.

Overall

Extrapolating from what has been observed in YouthBuild programs, it seems apparent that successful programs for unemployed and under-educated young people will usually include all of the following:

- opportunities to perform meaningful work in a well-supervised context that enables trainees to learn marketable skills and good work habits while producing something of value, preferably something visible and important to the community;
- warm ongoing relationships with caring adults who serve as teachers, trainers, counselors and mentors, committed to assisting each trainee achieve his or her potential and gain the skills available through the program;

- systematic and extensive attention to improving basic education skills including reading, math, writing, analytical, computer, and communication skills, toward a GED, high school diploma, and college preparation;
- development of a positive peer group with a set of positive values and a philosophy of life that can compete with the negative values encountered on the streets;
- careful linkages with the private sector and trade unions providing employment opportunities, and follow-up with both trainees and employers for an extended period after job placement, with counseling and job development support available;
- involvement in significant decision-making regarding program policies, and opportunities to play public leadership roles influencing policy that affects the community;
- participation in some form of direct human service that improves the quality of life in the community and builds an ethic of service among trainees.

4. The Aspirations of Young People

The deep-seated desire of disconnected young adults to find a path to a productive and respected life style is not widely recognized and appreciated in our society. The large numbers of youth who flock to YouthBuild programs, who beg to be admitted because they see it as their last and only chance, the passion and poetry that flows from them as they begin to find themselves underneath the fog of despair, cynicism, boredom, drug influence, and fear that have weighed on them - these things are inspiring and poignant to YouthBuild staff.

The creation of a safe community in which people can dare to dream, to work toward goals, to create new relationships based on mutual respect and caring Y this liberates an extraordinary energy among young people who are quickly eager to give back when they finally find a positive community full of caring and purpose. Learning about this energy and how to release and channel it is the most important learning going

on at YouthBuild programs. Seeing this, staff call YouthBuild a program of transformation, calling to mind the image of the irreversible changes that a caterpillar goes through to become a butterfly, never to return again to its previous form.

The young people use the image of the abandoned buildings that they are rehabilitating to describe their own changes: This building is like me - rebuilt from the inside out, completely new, and beautiful.

This is what the young people yearn for. And when they get their hopes up, if they are then disappointed by the staff or the program as a whole, the feelings of anger and hurt can be intense. We have thus come to see YouthBuild programs as having a sacred obligation to fulfill their promise. Not all of them do; but those that do, generate a kind of religious fervor in their staff and youth. It is not uncommon to hear youth say, AI want to dedicate my life to giving other people what I have gotten at YouthBuild.

Why Some Youth Fail

Youth who fail to meet program objectives stumble on many types of obstacles. These include unsupportive home and community environments, inappropriate actions by program staff, or a personal lack of resolve to change. Young people who equate taking positive initiatives with selling out and abandoning their peers or who continue to rationalize the immorality of old behaviors may have difficulty remaining in the program. Similarly, sometimes mistrustful and pessimistic youth, who firmly believe that schools and conventional settings have little to offer them, never become engaged or focused enough to move through the program's early stages. While habits of suspicion are survival skills on the streets, they may prevent young people from being sufficiently open with staff, making it impossible for the staff to help them solve problems. Furthermore, participants who have led highly unconventional life styles may resist rules from external authority figures and refuse to conform their behavior to the program's requirements. Some trainees, on the other hand, worry that the program will exploit them even if they live up to its rules. Thus, finding conventional goals that have moral legitimacy and finding moral legitimacy in conventional goals represents a major obstacle that not all trainees overcome.

Persistent use of marijuana also undermines some student's success. When the program fails to appropriately challenge and change this behavior, it is difficult to set students on a permanent path to success. Most YouthBuild programs do random drug testing to enforce a no-drug policy, and require students to pass such drug tests to remain in the program or to graduate.

A significant number of young people leave YouthBuild for reasons that are difficult to classify as successes or failures of either the program or the young people themselves. According to Ferguson's report, death, poor health, the relocation of families and other such difficulties resulted in 17% of the terminations in the first demonstration sites.

5. Qualities of an Effective National Delivery System

In our experience, delivery of an effective program in many locations depends on excellent central and local leadership, small operational units, and accountability to standards, flexibility, democratic input, and an inspirational set of basic values. Each of these factors is discussed below.

- a. **Quality of leadership:** Success is dependent on highly skilled and energetic entrepreneurial local leadership with vision and commitment. The ability to attract such leaders depends less on the level of pay and more on the vision, mission, level of flexibility, feasibility of success, and support offered by funders and system leaders. When talented people believe they can make a difference in a particular context, they will take on the challenge.
- b. **Size:** The size of the program unit should be small enough to be manageable and to build a mini-community. Trainees need to know each other and the staff; they need to be known by the staff. A large impersonal context does not foster a substitute value system and a sense that someone finally cares.
- c. **Accountability to standards:** There should be objective goals and standards regarding recruitment, attendance, retention, leadership skill attainment, and job and college placement, wage levels, and job and college retention that programs set and hold

themselves to, with flexibility to adjust to different circumstances and population groups.

- d. **Flexibility instead of bureaucracy:** While systems and standards are necessary, creative leadership needs the flexibility to move quickly and responsively to new opportunities and problems. This implies adequate flexible funding and a minimum of paper work, requirements, and approvals for deviations. This flexibility will attract higher-level entrepreneurial leadership.
- e. **Democratic input:** To obtain the best ideas and highest level of commitment, the system needs a balance of central coordination and democratic input from local leaders, staff, and youth, regarding policies and goals.
- f. **Clear values:** There is an element of soul, of faith, of humanistic passion, an understanding that love in action is what will make the difference, regardless of the religious persuasion of the adults involved, that provides a necessary underpinning to ventures that are going against the grain of society=s prejudices and injustices. Effective interventions with the population that has been marginalized by poverty, racism, and past mistakes seem to need this element of heart and soul.

Taken together, these factors characterize a decentralized, rapidly moving set of programs that multiplies local leadership, is infused with deep personal commitment, and focuses on obtaining results without fearing change.

YouthBuild USA: The Home Office

The success of the YouthBuild movement depends on having a set of program ideas that are sound and well developed through experience, and on having a national support center that can teach those ideas and attract local leadership of very high quality. Since its founding in 1990, YouthBuild USA has shepherded the national YouthBuild program into existence, and has brought it to intermediate scale as a substantial network of locally autonomous but philosophically united programs. Its functions have included:

- 1) articulating basic philosophy;
- 2) providing extensive local and national staff training and technical assistance to both new and experienced programs;
- 3) observing, writing, and disseminating best practices in handbooks and newsletters;
- 4) developing standards and systems of accountability through democratic processes and implementing them;
- 5) offering leadership opportunities at the national level to YouthBuild students, and organizing an alumni network;
- 6) advocating for public funding and organizing supportive constituencies;
- 7) offering grants and loans that can fill gaps and pioneer new developments;
- 8) leading interventions and damage control in crises at local sites;
- 9) facilitating research;
- 10) disseminating ideas and lessons learned from YouthBuild programs into other related areas;
- 11) encouraging appropriate publicity and avoiding premature publicity;
- 12) raising private funds;
- 13) building partnerships with other national organizations that can be helpful.

As mentioned earlier, YouthBuild USA serves as HUD's training and technical assistance contractor, and in this capacity, provides extensive training and on-site assistance to HUD's YouthBuild grantees. Also, under contract to HUD, YouthBuild USA has written six handbooks for

local sites, covering the overall program: the education, construction, leadership development, counseling, life skills, and graduate resources components. Under contract with the Corporation for National Service, YouthBuild assists 22 sites that are both YouthBuild and AmeriCorps programs and under contract with the Department of Labor assists 10 welfare to work YouthBuild sites.