

Pathways to a New Future



Service as a Strategy for Re-engaging At-Risk Youth

A project by:



About ICP:

Innovations in Civic Participation (ICP) is a non-profit organization that provides expertise, ideas, information, research, and advocacy support in the United States and around the world to develop and strengthen policies and programs that promote youth civic engagement through service. ICP applies service as a strategy to address a wide range of social issues and is supported by foundations such as the Ford Foundation and W.K. Kellogg Foundation; multilateral agencies such as the Inter-American Development Bank; and host country governments such as the United Kingdom. In the US, ICP focuses its efforts on broadening and deepening support for national and community service by developing pathways and transition strategies for AmeriCorps members after service, identifying and supporting innovative state programming, and promoting discussions among policymakers, funders, and practitioners in specific issue areas such as children and youth in out-of-school time, rural development, and independent living for seniors. For more information, visit www.icicp.org.

Project Coordinator:

Brett Alessi

Design and Layout:

Mary Ellen Smith

Contributors:

Grace Hollister

Ewurama Shaw - Taylor

Susan Stroud

Data on the four service and conservation corps participating in this project was collected by ICP. Baseline data was collected in April of 2003 based on questionnaires completed by the corps leaders, data collected directly from the corps, and focus groups with corps directors. ICP collected comparable closing data in 2004.

Special thanks to the **Ford Foundation** for their generous support and to Jamie Merisotis, Tina Milano, Ann Coles, Shirley Sagawa, and Wendy Ault for their advice and guidance. This project would not have been possible without the tireless commitment of the following people: Connie Ferris Bailey, Jonathan Barry, Margarita Benitez, Harry Bruell, Kelly Causey, Tim Christensen, Gerry Fiala, Betsy Lawson, Nancy Mills, Brent Neiser, Judy Olson, Marty O'Brien, Sally Prouty, Gail Robinson, Gene Sofer, Dana Stein, Chester Steinhauser, Karen Stran, Carolyn Teich, Dianne Wheaton, and Dion Wright.

This report is a publication of Innovations in Civic Participation (ICP). Photos provided by the respective programs. All rights reserved. July 2005.

Innovations in Civic Participation
Susan Stroud, Executive Director
1776 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Suite 201
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: 202.775.0290
www.icicp.org

PATHWAYS TO A NEW FUTURE:

Service as a Strategy for Re-engaging At-Risk Youth

A Report by Innovations in Civic Participation

Table of Contents

Foreword	iii
Preface.....	5
Service and Conservation Corps.....	7
A Brief History	7
From Margins to Mainstream.....	10
The Roots of the Pathway Concept.....	12
Pathways to a New Future	16
Participating Corps	16
Corpsmembers at the Participating Sites	19
Current Practices at the Participating Corps.....	20
Problems, Prospects, and Recommendations	23
Conclusion.....	34

FOREWORD

It is estimated that there are 3.8 million youth between the ages of 18 and 24 who are neither employed nor in school — roughly 15 percent of all young adults. Altering the situation of these youth will be challenging. Innovations in Civic Participation is proud to present this report to show how youth service can be an effective strategy for transitioning society’s most vulnerable youth to adulthood.

“Pathways to a New Future” illustrates how service and conservation corps are successfully engaging at-risk youth in service projects that are addressing critical needs in the community while providing corpsmembers with education, lifeskills development, and career preparation at the same time. In addition to describing some of the lessons learned from working closely with four corps to improve post-program transition services, this report provides specific recommendations for policymakers, practitioners, and funders, including ideas for establishing intentional pathways from corps to higher education and productive careers.

While service and conservation corps are finding ways to strengthen these connections in spite of formidable challenges, more should be done. Perhaps corpsmember Jesus Santiago said it the best, “I represent thousands of corpsmembers who are doing the same things I am doing, but there are thousands more who are struggling and have no way to turn their lives around.” We hope you will seriously consider the recommendations in this report so that more young people like Jesus can make the successful transition to adulthood.

Thank you to our ICP staff and colleagues, without whom this publication would not be possible. We would also like to express our sincere appreciation of the Ford Foundation, who generously supported this project and publication. Most of all, thank you to the National Association of Service and Conservation Corps along with the four corps that participated in this project, Mile High Youth Corps, American YouthWorks, Civic Works, and Operation Fresh Start, for their tireless dedication to the improvement of the lives of at-risk young people across the country.

Susan Stroud
Executive Director

Brett Alessi
Projects Coordinator

PREFACE

Practitioners, policy makers, and researchers are heavily invested in learning about “what works” for at-risk young adults. Evidence suggests that service and conservation corps offer a proven strategy for re-engaging society’s most vulnerable youth, especially the 3.8 million 18 to 24 year-olds who do not have jobs and are not in school.¹ For the at-risk, out-of-school population, youth service represents a pathway out of poverty by offering access to education and training and the chance to secure careers with long term potential.

Many of the young people, age 16 to 25, who enroll in service and conservation corps, do so because corps offer them a second chance to succeed in life. Adult leaders, who serve as mentors and role models, guide corpsmembers as they carry out a wide range of conservation, infrastructure improvement, and human service projects. In return for their efforts, corpsmembers receive a minimum wage based stipend and an array of member development services intended to enhance their education and employability.

The available research suggests that low income, disadvantaged corpsmembers are more likely to benefit from the service and conservation corps experience and to take advantage of educational and employment opportunities subsequent to their corps experience if they receive supportive and transition services. In short, “what works” for improving their chances for long-term success, is post-program transition support.

Innovations in Civic Participation (ICP) believes that there are many ways to improve the quality of post-service transition supports. For this project, ICP sought to strengthen links between the corps experience, higher education, and employment. To do this, ICP studied post-program transition at four service and conservation corps in 2003: American Youth Works in Austin, Texas; Civic Works in Baltimore, Maryland; Mile High Youth Corps in Denver, Colorado; and Operation Fresh Start in Madison, Wisconsin. All are members of the National Association of Service and Conservation Corps (NASCC) and volunteered to participate in this project.

The results of this project suggest that post-service transition support can be improved

by allocating additional resources, providing dedicated staff, promoting knowledge development, creating partnerships, and educating policymakers about how transition supports can be primary vehicles to improve the educational and employment outcomes for at-risk youth. These findings support the lessons learned from previous multi-year, foundation funded initiatives such as NASCC’s Corps-to-Career Initiative (1998-2002) and the Welfare to Work Project operated by NASCC (1999-2003).

This report also proposes recommendations for policymakers, practitioners, and funders to improve post-service transition practices at service and conservation corps. In addition to suggesting that improving post-program transition should be the goal of the array of federal programs that serve disadvantaged youth, this report outlines ideas for establishing intentional pathways from corps to higher education and productive careers.

JESSICA MARTINEZ

NASCC 2004 NATIONAL CORPSMEMBER OF THE YEAR
LOS ANGELES CONSERVATION CORPS

“I joined the Los Angeles Conservation Corps (LACC) December 8, 2003, not knowing how much it was going to change my life. A month before I applied to LACC I was paroled out of the California Youth Authority system after serving three years and eight months. I had no work experience and an unprofessional attitude towards work and the world. At that time I didn’t realize that I had the potential to be a leader.

“In my time here at LACC, I have accomplished a lot — more than I expected. Forgiveness played a big part in accomplishing many of my short-term goals at the corps. Forgiveness was the hardest step but taking that step made the other steps a lot easier to take. Before LACC, I had a lot of trust issues and wasn’t able to forgive the mistakes of my parents. I blamed them for what happened in my life. I didn’t realize, until I came to LACC, that I have choices, which have consequences, and if I make positive choices I can make a better life for myself despite the actions of others.

“I have choices, which have consequences, and if I make positive choices I can make a better life for myself despite the actions of others.”

*-Jessica Martinez
LACC*

“I learned so much at LACC and am so appreciative of the support that I have received. I had a long bumpy road so far in my life but thanks to the strength of LACC, I am more prepared for the other obstacles that life will throw at me.”²

SERVICE AND CONSERVATION CORPS

A Brief History

Voluntary service is an American tradition. It ranges from the informal help given to neighbors in a time of need to government-run, full-time corps. Federal support for service began with President Franklin Roosevelt's Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), created to provide opportunities for six million young men whose life had been derailed by the Great Depression³. The CCC engaged young men in conservation work to improve the nation's public lands while also providing them food, shelter, education and a precious \$30-a-month stipend. The CCC was a temporary relief program and was

1933-1942	President Roosevelt establishes the Civilian Conservation Corps to provide alternative employment during the Great Depression.
1935-1943	The National Youth Administration provides work for the unemployed.
1957	The Student Conservation Association places the first college students as volunteers in national parks and forests.
1961	President Kennedy launches Peace Corps and challenges Americans to serve their country in the cause of peace by living and working in developing countries.
1970's	Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) and Young Adult Conservation Corps (YACC) renew opportunities for conservation-related service.
1976- present	States and localities create corps programs to address local needs. The California Conservation Corps is founded in 1976. The Marin County Conservation Corps, the first local corps, was established in 1982.
1985	National Association of Service and Conservation Corps (NASCC) formed to grow and strengthen the nascent corps movement and to represent it in Washington, DC.
1990	Congress passes, and President George H. W. Bush signs, the National Service Trust Act which authorizes \$25 million a year in grants to service and conservation corps.
1993	President Clinton signs the National and Community Service Trust Act, which provides Federal support to community service programs, including service and conservation corps.

disbanded in 1942. This concept of service to improve public lands and enhance the environment, however, endured and grew over time.

Modern service and conservation corps are descendants of the CCC. In 1993, Congress passed and President Clinton signed the National and Community Service Trust Act⁴ which created both AmeriCorps and the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). The statute creates a framework in which many kinds of community service programs, including service and conservation corps, compete for federal support. It also allows corpsmembers the opportunity to earn an AmeriCorps Education Award (known as the “Ed Award”). The Ed Award provides funding for post-secondary educational expenses — payment of current educational expenses, repayment of qualified student loans, and payment of these expenses while participating in a school-to-work program — at two- and four-year colleges, trade schools, and technical schools. The Ed Award may be redeemed up to seven years after completion of service.



Government funding at the local, state, and federal levels enabled service and conservation programs to multiply across the nation. From fewer than 50 corps thirty years ago, there are now more than 100 service and conservation corps throughout the country.

LIFE IN THE CORPS

Typically, during the period of service, corpsmembers work in teams of eight to twelve and engage in intensive service projects four days a week, while participating in a comprehensive education, life skills, and civic engagement program on the fifth day. Corpsmembers learn to value their personal contribution and ability to work as a member of a team, in turn, making a positive investment in their community.



In exchange for providing a combined 12.9 million hours of community service in year-round and summer programs, corpsmembers receive:

- *A minimum wage-based stipend;*
- *Classroom instruction to improve basic competencies and, if necessary, to secure a high school diploma or GED;*
- *On-the-job experiential education, typically called “work-learning”;*
- *General and technical job skills training;*
- *A wide range of support services;*
- *And in most cases, an AmeriCorps post-service Ed Award.*

From Margins to Mainstream

Young people who participate in today’s service and conservation corps face numerous barriers to success, including low levels of education, a history of poverty, and previous court involvement. Over 50 percent have no high school diploma or GED when they enroll, nearly two-thirds of the corpsmembers’ families live below the poverty line, 30 percent had previous court involvement, and one in ten corpsmembers had gone through the foster care system.

Profile of Corps 5			
Number of Corps	103	Total Number of Corpsmembers	23,423
Number of States Where Corps Operate	37	Total Number of Service Hours	12,939,146
Average Age		Gender	
Average Age	20	Male	59%
Education		Female	41%
No HS Diploma	55%	Race/Ethnicity	
HS Diploma/GED	22%	African-American	24%
Some College	17%	Asian/Pacific Islander	3%
College	6%	Caucasian	43%
Family Income Less than the Poverty Line	64%	Latino	23%
Previous Court Involvement	30%	Multi-Racial	4%
Previously in Foster Care	10%	Native American	3%

While there are many different strategies for re-engaging at-risk youth, experts recognize that service and conservation corps are one of the few national programs that have been proven to make a significant difference in the lives of such youth. In a Hewlett Foundation Working Paper, Michael Wald and Tia Martinez listed service and conservation corps as one of only four “very good programs.”⁶ Gary Walker, President

of Public/Private Ventures, called service and conservation corps a “branded strategy” with proven results.⁷ In another Hewlett Foundation paper, Robert Ivry, Vice-President of MDRC, called service and conservation corps one of three “promising and proven programs.”⁸ An evaluation by Abt Associates showed that significant employment and earnings gains accrue to young people who join service and conservation corps. The Abt study found that positive outcomes are particularly striking for young African-American men, and that rates of unplanned pregnancies drop among female corpsmembers.⁹

The service and conservation corps program is one of three “promising and proven programs.”

*-Robert Ivry
Vice President, MDRC*



Corpsmembers often acknowledge that participation in the corps was a life-changing opportunity; the experience made the difference between a life as a productive, engaged citizen and a life on the margins of society.

The Roots of the Pathway Concept: Corps-to-Career Initiative and Welfare-to-Work

Service and conservation corps help re-engage society's most vulnerable youth and provide a proven and effective pathway for transitioning this population out of poverty and into higher education and careers with long-term potential. NASCC has played a leading role in strengthening these pathways through the Corps-to-Career (CTC) Initiative and Welfare-to-Work (WtW) Project.

CTC was a multi-year collaboration between NASCC's headquarters and its member corps, aimed at: improving retention, academic achievement and the mastery of targeted workplace skills that lead to positive educational and/or employment outcomes for corpsmembers.



To do this, CTC sought to strengthen systems within the corps that specifically targeted improved career preparation for corpsmembers and the documentation of in-program and post-program progress; and obtain recognition of the service and conservation corps as skilled providers of cost-effective, thorough career preparation for disadvantaged out-of-school youth.

To achieve these goals NASCC adopted two strategies:

- 1) Build, document and assess new in-program and post-program career preparation practices and/or adapt proven approaches as quickly as possible “on the ground”.
- 2) Quickly infuse new theory and practices throughout the field so that all service and conservation corps can access the basic tools needed to re-focus their attention and practices on sustained employment and educational outcomes for their corpsmembers.

In total, 26 service and conservation corps ran CTC programs. More than 55 percent of NASCC corpsmembers received the benefits of participating in a corps that took part in the initiative. Results from CTC show that service and conservation corps improved the

Because of the Corps-to-Career program, corpsmembers earning potential rose from \$7 per hour to \$13 per hour.

post-program placement rate of corpsmembers from a baseline of 44 percent to 61 percent. Because CTC corpsmembers left the service and conservation corps with plans to enter the work force or go (back) to school, more attended four-year colleges, and their earning potential steadily increased, from \$7 per hour to \$13 per hour.¹⁰

In 1999, the Department of Labor (DOL) awarded NASCC a Round #3 Welfare-to-Work competitive grant. DOL designed its Welfare-to-Work grant program to serve individuals receiving Temporary Assistance For Needy Families (TANF) and other individuals with characteristics associated with long-term welfare dependence. Programs funded were required to use a “work-first” strategy and to engage participants in employment-based activities throughout their tenure in transitional programs.

Between 1999 and 2003, NASCC chose nine service and conservation corps to provide TANF-eligible youth with service learning experiences. These experiences were geared to help the young people transition out of poverty and into employment through WtW. Each program served economically disadvantaged youth and either expanded their services to include TANF-eligible youth or were already enrolling TANF-eligible youth. These nine corps were relatively high functioning so that they would be able to



develop targeted services quickly and thereby establish the WtW project at their sites as soon as they were awarded funding.

Ultimately, NASCC exceeded its targets, enrolling 446 TANF-eligible youths and placing 246 of them (55 percent) in unsubsidized employment. In addition, 47 percent of the corpsmembers who completed the program remained employed for six months after placement.¹¹

47 percent of the corpsmembers who completed the program remained employed for six months after placement.

-Welfare to Work project

In assessing NASCC's Welfare-to-Work project, Abt Associates identified the following promising practices in use at the NASCC WtW sites:

- Providing intensive support services;
- Helping participants to actuate their personal goals;
- Successfully partnering with outside providers;
- Using performance data to guide strategic planning and to assess staff performance;
- Maintaining an employment-focused approach in all aspects of the program;
- Marketing the program to employers and focusing on both participants' and employers' needs; and
- Targeting retention and following up with corpsmembers after placement.

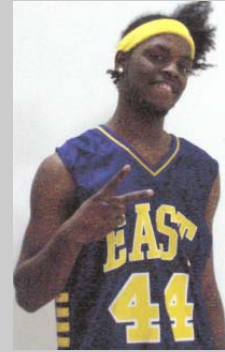
In spite of many challenges like insufficient funding, limited staff, and underutilized partnerships, service and conservation corps strive to provide critical support to their members and implement an array of post-service transition services. ***Imagine the impact they could have with additional resources and support.***

MICHAEL HARPER

2005 CORPSMEMBER

OPERATION FRESH START

Michael Harper has been able to turn his life around in a few short years. Michael came from a torrid past of violence and surviving day-by-day. He has witnessed shootings, crime, and drug addiction. He struggled as a special education student who could not be reached because of his multiple behavioral and learning difficulties. Michael's leaders at Operation Fresh Start (OFS) were afraid that these obstacles would be too great for him, but his teachers soon learned of Michael's unique empathy for others and his determination to have a better life. Since his participation at Operation Fresh Start, Michael has come to the realization that despite all odds, he deserves more and is willing to do whatever it takes to get the life he wants. This dedication grew from his desire to give back to his community.



At OFS Michael has completed over 1,000 hours of community service. He helps build affordable housing for low-income families who, without his efforts, might never have a place to live. Michael has also been diligently working towards his high school diploma, which a few years ago seemed an impossible task. The reality is that Michael cares enough about his community and understands that sometimes in the act of helping others, you can help yourself. Michael achieves his goals by keeping himself healthy and participating in community activities.

Michael was accepted on the East High School varsity basketball team this year. Even though Michael did not see much playing time, he attended practice and sat on the bench during games. Most importantly, he finished the season humbly and successfully, lettering in basketball. Michael also chose to join Boy Scouts. He wanted the opportunity to meet people and learn new things. He also wanted to be a part of this positive organization because it allowed him to take part in healthy activities and achieve new goals.

Michael is most importantly committed to himself. For instance, he wanted become a better reader, and he worked hard enough to improve his reading scores by two grade levels. Michael has also improved his self-reliance by obtaining his driver's license and starting a savings account. He has also set lofty goals for himself. Michael will be starting the Food Service program at Madison Area Technical College, which will lead him to his ultimate goal, a career in culinary arts.

Michael will succeed in life and overcome any roadblocks along the way, because he has faith in himself and faith in his ability to persevere.

PATHWAYS TO A NEW FUTURE: FROM SERVICE TO CAREERS AND EDUCATION

The Participating Corps

The purpose of this project was to strengthen links between the service and conservation corps experience, higher education, and employment. To do this, ICP studied post-program transition at four service and conservation corps that engage at-risk youth and sought to describe, analyze, and offer recommendations to strengthen their current transition strategies. The corps that participated were: Operation Fresh Start in Madison, Wisconsin; Mile High Youth Corps in Denver, Colorado; Civic Works in Baltimore, Maryland; and American YouthWorks in Austin, Texas.

Operation Fresh Start (OFS) Madison, Wisconsin

The training program for Operation Fresh Start focuses on home construction and renovation. Corpsmembers work with builders to construct single-family homes for low income and first-time homebuyers in Dane County, Wisconsin. Corpsmembers also perform activities in conservation, disaster relief work, and other special service projects. Youth work in eight-member crews with an OFS staff site supervisor leading each crew. In 2003, OFS enrolled 55 corpsmembers and in 2004, 112.



The objectives of working with these service and conservation corps were threefold:

- Identify real and current needs of the corps;
- Provide immediate support to the corps in strengthening post-program transition, specifically by facilitating an extensive network of national and site-based partnerships, leveraging additional resources for transition services, and offering technical assistance; and,
- Make concrete recommendations for strengthening and expanding transition services so that more at-risk youth can have the opportunity for a “second chance” in life.

Mile High Youth Corps (MHYC) **Metropolitan Denver, Colorado**

The training program at Mile High Youth Corps emphasizes community improvement and conservation. Corpsmembers work in groups of 8-10 members on a variety of projects including planting trees, building paths and trails, renovating houses, painting, and landscaping. The program helps urban youth make a difference in their community through meaningful service opportunities and educational experiences. Programs operate year-round. In 2003, MHYC enrolled 22 corpsmembers and in 2004, 63.



These four corps were selected because they:

- Included members that could be classified as “vulnerable youth” — characterized by low academic achievement, high unemployment, substance abuse issues, judicial involvement, foster care issues and being teen parents;
- Had AmeriCorps members that were eligible for the Education Award; and,
- Demonstrated an interest in transitioning corpsmembers into post-service opportunities.

American YouthWorks (AYW) **Austin, Texas**

American YouthWorks focuses on using one social problem to address another. AYW recruits high school dropouts to build houses and improve the environment. American Youth Works addresses three concerns: high drop-out rates, lack of affordable housing, and the need to protect the Austin environment. AYW coordinates two main corps programs: Casa Verde Builders and Environmental Corps. In Casa Verde Builders, dropouts build affordable, environmentally-sound, energy efficient homes for low-income, first time home buyers. Environmental Corps members work to eliminate environmental risks, increase neighborhood ownership and participation in parks and public lands, and educate community members about environmental issues and protection of natural resources. In 2003, AYW enrolled 122 corpsmembers and in 2004, 125.



Each of the pilot sites provides opportunities for at-risk youth to affect change in their communities through service. Among their activities, corpsmembers build affordable housing, provide after school care, and help keep neighborhoods safe by participating in

neighborhood cleanups and providing emergency preparedness information to the public. Through their service, corpsmembers develop transferable skills and competencies for future employment and education.

Civic Works

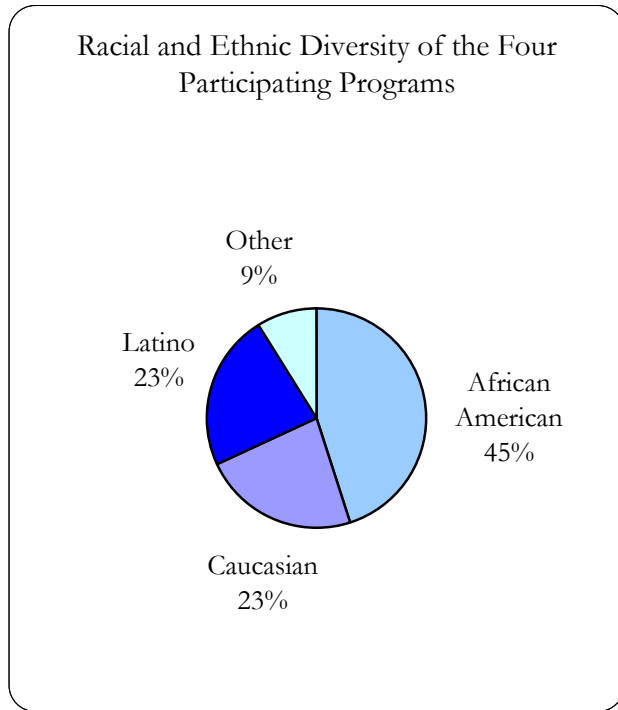
Baltimore, Maryland

The service experience at Civic Works centers on community development, education, and literacy. Corpsmembers rehabilitate homes for low-income families, conduct neighborhood clean-ups, transform vacant lots into parks and gardens, provide after school tutoring and student assistance, and provide emergency preparedness information to the public. Corpsmembers work in teams of varying numbers depending on the project, under site supervisors who provide guidance and direction. In 2003, Civic Works enrolled 202 corpsmembers and in 2004, 139.



The Corpsmembers at the Participating Sites

The youth at these four sites were racially and ethnically diverse. On average, 45 percent of members were African-American, 23 percent Caucasian, 23 percent Latino, and 9 percent were either Asian/Pacific Islander, Multi-racial, or Native American.



Like the service and conservation corps population as a whole, these corpsmembers included single parents, juvenile or adult offenders, and people with disabilities. Most of these

corpsmembers lived below the poverty line and approximately 15 percent were known to have received TANF or public assistance.

Overall Education Level of Corpsmembers from the Four Participating Programs (2004)	
Less than a high school diploma	53.5%
High school diploma or GED, no college	16.4%
Some college	23.0%
College degree	7.1%

The youth also faced hurdles in education. More than half of the corpsmembers entering one of the four participating

corps programs lacked a complete high school education. Numbers do vary widely between programs. For example, upon entry into the 2003 program, more than 75 percent of the corpsmembers at MHYC and OFS had less than a high school diploma. However, some 14 percent of the AYW corpsmembers had some college experience. At Civic Works, over two-thirds of the corpsmembers had some college experience or had even completed a college degree.

Current Practices at the Participating Corps

The four pilot corps offer a proven strategy for giving young men and women the chance to change their communities, their own lives and those of their families. The sites provide a comprehensive approach including: full-time service; minimum wage based stipend; classroom instruction to improve basic competencies and secure credentials; technical skills training; life skills development; career counseling; supportive services; and, the opportunity to earn a post-service AmeriCorps Education Award. Long-term self-sufficiency of the corpsmembers can only be ensured by strengthening the corps ability to offer comprehensive and consistent transitional support to their members.

Strategies Currently in Place at the Four Participating Programs:

- Corpsmembers at Operation Fresh Start receive classroom instruction in basic skills, GED/high school equivalency diploma (HSED) preparation or diploma completion, mental health counseling, health and nutrition programming, independent living classes, career exploration, and placement in jobs and/or post-secondary education. Through this service, corpsmembers gain a sense of leadership and responsibility and control of their own lives. OFS provides opportunities for all involved — “the kids, the houses, and the new homeowners — to get a fresh start.”¹²



- At Mile High Youth Corps, corpsmembers gain employment and educational experience. Through paid work and service to the community, corpsmembers develop technical job skills that prepare them for the workforce. MHYC integrates education into every aspect of its program. Corpsmembers engage in

learning activities throughout their time in the service and conservation corps, from structured GED preparation to college exploration to service learning projects. MHYC also uses a variety of strategies to develop life skills for the corpsmembers.¹³

- Through service projects, Civic Works fosters community engagement and provides skills that prepare corpsmembers for careers or college. Educational and enrichment activities are intended to increase the academic attainment of low-



achieving students. By “cleaning, greening and beautifying,” Civic Works strives to provide critical services to the community that would not otherwise be available as well as to improve the educational and employment prospects of its corpsmembers.¹⁴

- Corpsmembers at American YouthWorks receive hands-on training, job skills development, career experience, and the opportunity to make demonstrable improvements in the community. To better prepare at-risk youth for the real world, both Casa Verde Builders and Environmental Corps address the training needs of the youth enrolled, as well as provide skills, experience, and services to bridge the gap between community resources and needs.¹⁵

In addition to the common service and conservation corps experience, these corps provide an array of post-program transition supports. At AYW, for example, corpsmembers receive leadership training, life skills training, and help in completing college enrollment and financial aid forms. OFS collaborates with the Madison Area Technical College (MATC) to provide financial counseling and other services to corpsmembers. MHYC conducts information sessions on the Ed Award, financial aid

planning, and scholarships. They also provide corpsmembers with “job coaches” that support corpsmembers in the financial aid process. Civic Works produces a week-long “Mid Winter Check Up” of workshops and presentations in which speakers, educators, employers, and city-wide support agencies provide information about higher education and financial literacy.

Corps also have successful partnerships with employers and institutions of higher education. At AYW, corpsmembers that built houses with the Building and Construction Trade Department of Austin Community College earned 16 credit hours upon enrollment at the college. Civic Works has a relationship with two community colleges — Baltimore City and Baltimore County — and has partnered with several companies,



such as Federal Express, business organizations like the National Association of Catering Executives, and state government agencies such as the Maryland Department of Transportation, to train and hire their corpsmembers. Corpsmembers at MHYC have opportunities to work at UPS and Shea Homes, as well as to apprentice at Denver Automotive and Diesel College, Colorado Carpenters Statewide Joint Apprenticeship, and Construction Industry Trade Council of Colorado. OFS is establishing a relationship with the Carpenter’s Union that could provide pre-testing material, wage and benefit projections for union membership, and lists of prospective employers.

Problems, Prospects, and Recommendations

Through this project, ICP has had the opportunity to examine transition services at the four participating service and conservation corps. While it is clear that corps are working hard and having some success at transitioning at-risk youth from corps to college and careers, there are ways to improve post-service transition support. Below, ICP outlines six ways to improve the educational and employment outcomes for at-risk youth. In addition to calling for an increase in resources, dedicated staff, knowledge development, educational outreach, and partnership development, this section outlines ideas for establishing intentional pathways from corps to higher education to productive careers.



1. Additional Resources to Support Transition Services

Cost is one of the primary barriers to providing post-program transition services to corpsmembers. Quite simply, service and conservation corps need funding to provide the widest range and continuity of post-program supportive services. Each service and conservation corps re-iterated the need for sustainable and renewable funds with which to implement transition services, including: materials, dedicated staff, knowledge exchange, and partnership development for post-program placement.

Few federal funding sources currently require and provide appropriate funding for transition services. The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) does require tracking and follow-up but relatively few service and conservation corps receive WIA Funding. In fact, more than 70 percent of corps' funding comes from fee-for-service and state or local appropriations or grants that rarely

“More than 70% of corps’ funding comes from fee-for-service and state or local appropriations that rarely require post-program transition services.”

require this type of post-program support. Nor do federal funds from the Corporation for National and Community Service, including AmeriCorps, emphasize post-program support services. Until funders require *and* provide support to the corps to administer these services it will be a challenge for corps to raise the resources to provide them.

Recommendations:

Public and private agencies and nonprofit organizations interested in youth development, youth employment, and youth service should recognize the need for funding transition services and should invest additional resources accordingly. Federal, state, county, and municipal programs targeted at disconnected youth should include funding for post-program transition services. Foundations should ensure that post-program transition services are included in any project they support in which such services are appropriate.

2. Full-time, Dedicated Staff for Transition Services

Transition and post-program services require full-time trained and experienced staff that are knowledgeable about best practices for post-program transition support and can develop intensive relationships with corpsmembers. For example, Operation Fresh Start realized that it needed funds to create a dedicated staff position



for a placement coordinator for post-program transition. The coordinator would work one-on-one with youth and as well as collaborate with OFS's higher education partners. The placement coordinator would work intensively with corpsmembers to help them set higher occupational goals, build career directions, and pursue strategies needed to succeed in career-track training and employment. As a result of its participation this project, OFS has placed greater emphasis on planning and training of staff to adequately provide their members with post-service transition and follow-up services.

Mile High Youth Corps indicated that graduates are more likely to ask for and receive post-program support if they can work with someone who knows them from their corps experience.

Navigating the financial aid process or applying for college or an apprenticeship are daunting tasks, especially for young adults. Having someone they trust increases the likelihood that

they will persist through these processes. This insight captures not only the need for staff, but for continuity in staffing and familiarity with the corps experience.



Recommendations:

ICP encourages service and conservation corps to employ dedicated full time staff to direct their post-program transition support. Corps directors need to prioritize this position and seek funding relationships that will make a long term commitment to this important staff position. Service and conservation corps should employ individuals who are knowledgeable about best practices, are adept at networking and can forge relationships with organizations and institutions that can provide post-program educational and career opportunities for corpsmembers. Corps should look to identify crew leaders who can be trained to become de facto “case managers” and use alumni as ambassadors to reach out to corpsmembers and inspire them to use the resources at their disposal.

3. Knowledge Exchange and Training in Proven Post-Program Transition

Strategies

One way for service and conservation corps to expand their capacity for providing post-program transition, is to gather and share ideas about effective post-program transition practices. As part of the project, ICP and NASCC staff held monthly conferences calls

with the participating corps. These calls provided a regularly scheduled forum in which to reflect upon current practices and discuss issues related to post-program transition (e.g., strategies about how to further increase usage of the AmeriCorps Ed Award among exiting corpsmembers). This open dialogue enabled the service and conservation corps to learn from each other and gain a better understanding about successful post-program transition practices. The participating corps expressed appreciation of the greater contact with other programs.

Recommendations:

National organizations such as ICP and NASCC should be funded to provide appropriate training and technical assistance and should develop good practices from available materials to assist service and conservation corps with strengthening existing services and developing new transition services. In addition, ICP and NASCC should work to facilitate the sharing of information on particularly effective practices. NASCC could use its annual Corps Directors' Forum to disseminate these practices. Other dissemination mechanisms include publications, making results and best practices available on the internet, and presentations at conferences.

The most vulnerable corpsmembers sometimes are not ready for full-time employment or additional education at the conclusion of the corps program. NASCC, ICP and other national organizations should develop partnerships with second stage training providers. Placing exiting corpsmembers in Job Corps, where they can learn trades, is an example of such a partnership.



4. Policy Development and Educational Outreach

Service and conservation corps expressed a desire to more effectively disseminate their success in transitioning at-risk, out-of-school youth to educational and career opportunities. Corps also wanted to increase awareness of the value of providing post-program transition supports to increase educational attainment and secure meaningful employment in the private sector.

Recommendations:

National organizations interested in youth development and youth employment should work with service and conservation corps to focus attention on post-program transition services for disadvantaged and disconnected youth, measure progress on key indicators, and foster cross-sector participation in advancing solutions.

5. Partnership Development to Leverage Additional Resources

Not surprisingly, the service and conservation corps that have strong partners are best positioned for providing education and employment opportunities for their corpsmembers. Partnerships such as the ones developed in this project are valuable resources in facilitating post-program transition for corpsmembers. Organizations targeted in this project include: the U.S. Department of Education, the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA), the AFL-CIO's Working for America Institute, and the American Association for Community Colleges (AACC).

ICP worked with the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA) to develop a partnership with the National Endowment of Financial Education (NEFE). NEFE is a foundation that helps Americans gain the skills and information necessary to take control of their personal finances. NEFE is developing a publication on money skills for corpsmembers with a particular focus on financing non-traditional forms of higher education. NEFE worked with focus groups of

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (ED)

The ED embodies the federal government's commitment to providing educational opportunity for all Americans regardless of race, ethnic background or economic circumstance. The Department endorses the efforts of numerous kinds of programs — local, private, public, community-based, student, and individual — to improve the quality of education. TRIO programs, in particular, provide support for disadvantaged youth in high schools and colleges across the country. TRIO, a term used to describe the original three educational outreach programs administered by the Department of Education, has now grown to more than half a dozen programs aimed at assisting low-income, disabled, and first generation college students. Unfortunately, many vulnerable out-of-school youth in service and conservation corps are beyond their reach.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STUDENT FINANCIAL AID ADMINISTRATORS (NASFAA)

NASFAA members are the financial aid professionals at colleges, universities, and career schools. NASFAA primarily focuses on student legislation, regulatory analysis, and professional development for financial aid administrators. NASFAA works to improve financial aid administration and delivery of aid to students. As an organization, NASFAA has relationships with financial aid administrators at institutions of higher education across the country.

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGES (AACC)

AACC is the voice for over 1100 associate degree-granting institutions and their students. AACC supports community colleges as they provide learning opportunities to students, their communities, and the nation. AACC creates opportunities for peer networking, leadership, professional initiatives, career development, connectedness, and community-building. Community colleges have successfully worked with service and conservation corps in the past and enjoy an expansive network of campuses across the country.

AFL-CIO WORKING FOR AMERICA INSTITUTE (WAI)

The WAI is a union-sponsored organization dedicated to creating good jobs and building strong communities. WAI's goal is ensure that economic growth benefits workers, employers, and their communities. It uses innovation, quality, and skills to promote economic self-sufficiency. WAI supports opportunities for workers to obtain higher skills and better pay, for employers to become more successful, and for communities to become better places to live and work. WAI has relationships with trade unions throughout the country.

corpsmembers at Mile High Youth Corps to strengthen the publication. In addition to highlighting the uses of the Ed Award, the publication will provide real-world costs of higher education, including tuition, books, fees, transportation, plus information on banking, the use and abuse of credit cards and the dangers posed by financial predators. The publication, *Money Skills for the Real World*, is due out in the summer of 2005.

During the course of this project, corps also developed or expanded less formal relationships. For example, Civic Works in Baltimore focused on its partnership with Federal Express, Johns Hopkins Hospital, and Struever Bros., Eccles & Rouse, companies that provide their members with entry-level training and direct hires. Civic Works also strengthened ties with Morgan State University-Upward Bound. Similarly, American YouthWorks continued to partner with the Home Depot and the City of Austin Parks Department. OFS also established a relationship with a One-Stop Center, the Department of Labor funded center that provides assistance in career development and locates job openings.

Recommendations:

Service and conservation corps should continue to work with other organizations, such as the ones developed in this project that will ultimately increase post-program educational and vocational opportunities for at-risk youth. The successes of these current partnerships can be compounded by deepening their involvement and extending partnerships over the long term.

Service and conservation corps should consider collaborations with organizations, such as Jobs for the Future (JFF) that also endeavor to provide transition services. Currently under development at JFF is a “College in the Community” program that gives youth a structured “gap year” of community service and work experience in place of the traditional senior year in high school. Expansion would further enable service and conservation corps to engage in more evaluation of effective practices and spread limited funds to more corpsmembers.



6. Intentional Pathways from Corps to College to Careers

ICP and NASCC worked with the service and conservation corps to strengthen links between the corps experience, higher education, and employment. For example, ICP and NASCC connected Operation Fresh Start with the U.S. Department of Education (ED). OFS developed a proposal in collaboration with Madison Area Technical College (MATC) and University of Wisconsin, Madison's Student Support Services (SSS) to submit an application for a federal TRIO grant. SSS is a TRIO program that provides opportunities for academic development, assists students with basic college requirements, and serves to motivate students towards the successful completion of their postsecondary education. OFS sought funds for the creation of a dedicated placement coordinator.

ICP and NASCC also facilitated a partnership with Civic Works and Morgan State University Upward Bound (MSU-UB) to submit an application for GED tutorial and counseling services for corpsmembers, approximately 25 percent of whom have dropped out of school and test at or below a sixth grade reading level. TRIO's Upward Bound provides fundamental support—instruction in reading, writing, study skills, and other subjects—to prepare for college entrance. Civic Works sought funds for tutorial and counseling services to increase the skills and motivation of their corpsmembers and to help them attain their high school equivalency in order to increase enrollment in post-secondary academic and career training programs.



Recommendations:

While the Corporation for National and Community Service provides some AmeriCorps funding to many of the service and conservation corps, limited support is available for

post-program transition services. Support from other federal agencies is essential to developing effective pathways to education and employment for low-income, disconnected youth who are out-of-school and out-of-work. For example, the federal workforce system and the higher education system should work with the service and conservation corps to institutionalize effective pathways. These pathways would consist of three components:

- Identifying and enrolling low-income disconnected youth who are out-of-school and out-of-work in a “second chance program,” such as the service and conservation corps, which provides them with the skills necessary to earn a GED or graduate from high school.
- Providing assistance for entry into college and the supportive services necessary to enable them to remain in college and graduate. The efforts of both the Educational Opportunity Centers (EOC) and Talent Search within the TRIO portfolio should be expanded to support this pathway.
- Moving from post-secondary education to the job market. The Department of Labor should strive to connect corpsmembers to high growth occupations and industries.



State and community colleges can also benefit from a relationship with the corps. With a high percentage of corpsmembers eligible for AmeriCorps education grants, transition services will encourage a larger percent of corpsmembers to pursue advanced studies. Local colleges will receive more funds through the transfer of the federal AmeriCorps grants than they would have received without the transition services.

Program transition services should:

- *Better enable eligible participants to complete GED and enter post-secondary education;*
- *Expose eligible participants to college campuses;*
- *Provide all corpsmembers with life skills training, emphasizing personal responsibility;*
- *Provide career education counseling with particular emphasis on careers in high-growth occupations or industries;*
- *Facilitate the admission of eligible participants to post-secondary institutions;*
- *Facilitate the obtainment of the student financial assistance necessary for eligible participants to enter and complete college;*
- *Provide the student support services necessary for eligible participants to complete college; and,*
- *Lead to post-graduation employment.*



STEVE TAPLIN
2004 CORPSMEMBER
MILE HIGH YOUTH CORPS



Steve Taplin has been given a second chance at life. After ten years of doing drugs, stealing and hanging out with the wrong crowd, a run-in with the law led him to rehab and then to the Youthbuild program at Mile High Youth Corps. After nearly two years of staying sober and working hard, Steve is well on his way to a promising career in the construction industry.

Steve is very lucky. He started running with the wrong crowd and getting into trouble at age 11. He dropped out of school after the ninth grade and focused all his energy on partying, stealing and getting in fights. He was on a path of self-destruction. He knew his life wasn't going anywhere. He wanted to quit the drugs, but didn't know how. Fortunately, at age 23, Steve got busted for helping a buddy pawn a set of stolen golf clubs. He ended up in jail for a month and on probation for two years. It was then that Steve's mom recommended the Teen Challenge drug rehab program.

Steve knew it was time to change and he committed himself to the program. Teen Challenge is a one year drug rehab/Christian discipleship program. After Steve completed the year, he went to a halfway house in Denver where he stayed for 7 ½ months. He was working for Mile High Shipping Company when he heard about MHYC's Youthbuild program. Steve liked the idea of having a job and earning his GED and money for college at the same time.

Steve excelled in the Youthbuild program, earning many awards and honors for his attendance and solid work ethic. His faith helped him stay focused on his goals and keep a positive view of his future. He earned a GED and graduated from the program in December 2004. Steve was immediately hired by Greiner Electric, a local company that has been very supportive of MHYC's Youthbuild program. He is working full-time and participating in Greiner's Electrician Apprenticeship Program. His supervisor gives him rave reviews and has been impressed by the fact that he has never missed a day of work.

Steve is thankful that he's been given a second chance at achieving his goals. He knows that with faith, hard work and perseverance he can overcome any obstacle that comes his way.

CONCLUSION

ICP was interested in demonstrating how service affords at-risk youth a pathway from poverty to higher education and careers with long-term potential. This project focused on providing more opportunities for at-risk corpsmembers to use the skills they acquired in the service and conservation corps as well as the AmeriCorps Education Award, which they received upon completion of their service, to pursue higher education and ultimately employment in a high growth occupation or industry.

Several positive outcomes resulted from of this study:

- Service and conservation corps focused on post-program transition practices more frequently than before the project.
- Service and conservation corps cited a greater appreciation of the impact of partnerships on providing post-program education and employment opportunities for their corpsmembers. These partnerships have endured and have proved to be a valuable resource in facilitating post-program transition for corpsmembers. All four corps witnessed improvements in the educational and vocational goals of their corpsmembers.
- Corpsmembers were employed. They obtained positions in diverse industries ranging from office administration to manufacturing to hospitality. Employed corpsmembers secured jobs as a result of the skills, and supports, they acquired through the corps program. For example, corpsmembers that built houses or did construction work are employed in construction and homebuilding. Similarly, corpsmembers that provided after school tutoring have gone on to work with

“I represent thousands of corpsmembers who are doing the same things I am doing, but there are thousands more who are struggling and have no way to turn their lives around. Young people want to be successful.”

*-Jesus Santiago
Corpsmember¹⁶*

youth upon exiting the corps.

- Corpsmembers had more opportunities to use the Ed Award to pursue further education and jobs with long-term potential. At OFS a higher percentage of corpsmembers finished the program in 2004 than in 2003 (92 percent versus 86 percent) and the number of those planning to use the Education Award increased from 28 percent to 45 percent.
- At the end of their service, more corpsmembers from the 2004 program intended to go back to school or were simultaneously employed and/or pursuing further education than in 2003. These corpsmembers intended to pursue postsecondary education at more institutions of higher learning than those of the 2003 program. At American YouthWorks the percentage of those planning to use Education Award increased from 78 percent to 88 percent
- In 2004, 95 percent of corpsmembers in the four participating programs earned the Ed Award, compared to 80 percent of corpsmembers for the 2003 program year. In addition to high enrollments at community colleges, corpsmembers were also enrolled at four-year colleges, apprenticeships, graduate schools, and vocational/technical schools.

The service and conservation corps model uses a positive youth development approach to integrate service work on vital community projects with education, lifeskills development and career preparation. Corpsmembers like Jessica Martinez, Michael Harper, and Steve Taplin are proof that service and conservation corps are an effective strategy for re-engaging vulnerable, at-risk youth. The more clearly the corps-college-career pathway is delineated and the more resources are dedicated to post-program transition services, the more at-risk youth will benefit from the service and conservation corps experience, make use of their AmeriCorps Education Awards, and discover productive careers.



- ¹ An evaluation by the Anne E. Casey Foundation of the 2002 U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey. Available at <http://www.aecf.org/kidscount/databook/essay.htm>
- ² Jessica Martinez, *NASCC Corps Director's Forum, February 9, 2004, Washington, DC*
- ³ NASCC website, www.nascc.org/history.htm
- ⁴ Federal Code PL 103-82
- ⁵ 2004 Corps Profile, <http://www.nascc.org/aboutcorps.htm>
- ⁶ Michael Wald and Tia Martinez, "Counted by 25: Improving the Life Chances of the Country's Most Vulnerable 14-24 year olds," William and Flora Hewlett Foundation Working Paper, November 2003.
- ⁷ Gary Walker, Letter to the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, 2002.
- ⁸ Robert Ivry and Fred Doolittle, "Improving the Economic and Life Outcomes of At-Risk Youth," Manpower Development Resource Corporation, 2003.
- ⁹ JoAnn Jastrzab, et. al. "Youth Corps: Promising Strategies for Young People and their Communities," Studies in Workforce Development and Income Security No. 1-97, Abt Associates, pp. 19-20. February 1997.
- ¹⁰ Austin Youth Works, www.ail.org
- ¹¹ Catherine Dun Rappaport, et. al. "Promising Practices for Helping Low-Income Youth Obtain and Retain Jobs: A Guide for Practitioners," Abt Associates, September 2003.
- ¹² Operation Fresh Start, www.operationfreshstart.org/projects/projects.asp
- ¹³ Mile High, www.milehighyouthcorps.org/about.html
- ¹⁴ Baltimore Civic Works, *Civic Works at Ten Years: A Program Assessment*. Abt Associates. 2004
- ¹⁵ Austin Youth Works, www.ail.org
- ¹⁶ Jesus Santiago, February 11, 2003 to the Board of Directors, Corporation for National and Community Service, Washington, DC.



For more information, please contact Innovations in Civic Participation
202.775.0290 or info@icicp.org

INNOVATIONS IN CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Washington, DC

www.icicp.org