



Executive Summary: Employment

Validating factors identified as preventing young males of color from earning a self-sufficient wage

March 2019

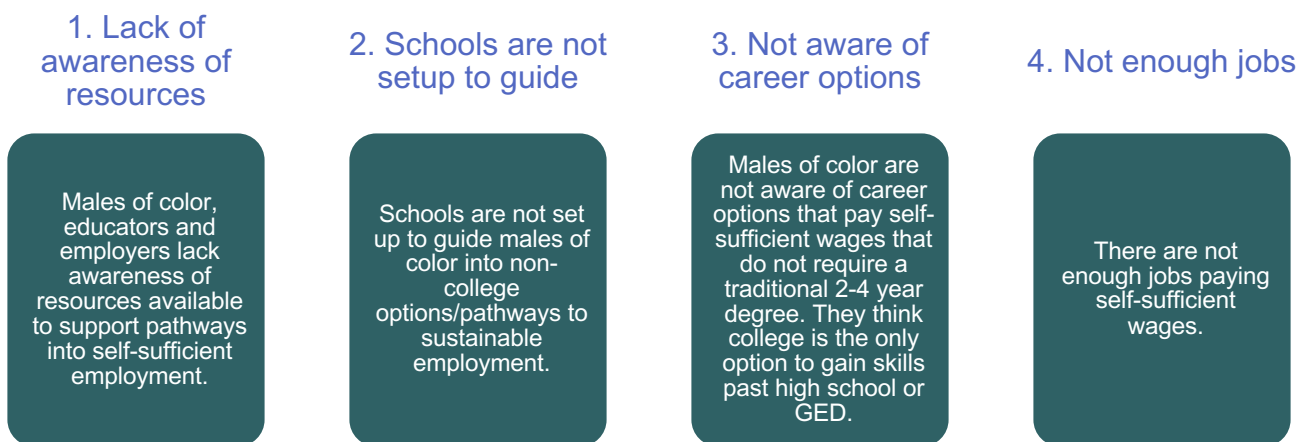
The Challenge

There are approximately 15,000 young people between the ages of 18-24 years old in Adams County who are not earning a self-sufficient wage to support themselves and their families. To date, authentic voice and perspective from those most impacted by this challenge has been missing from efforts to address the issue. To obtain this perspective, the Youth Initiative of Adams County (ACYI) and Girl Effect deployed Technology Enabled Girl Ambassadors (TEGAs) in February 2019, to help inform the work of a newly forming Youth Employment Collaborative Action Network (CAN). The Youth Employment CAN, a group of content experts in the community, utilized TEGA to hear the voice and perspective of young males of color, educators and employers, to better understand what happens after young males of color finish high school and/or receive a post-secondary credential, and what barriers they face in earning a self-sufficient wage.¹

¹ Using the estimates for CCIP, a basic estimate was used to calculate the percentage of individuals at or above the Self-Sufficiency Standard for Adams County in 2018 (\$27,684). Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates. The US Census Bureau uses estimates only and there can be a large margin of error. Use caution when interpreting these results with any detail

TEGA is a mobile-based, peer-to-peer research methodology which uses smartphone technology to empower adolescent girls to capture youth and communities' realities in real time. The partnership between ACYI, through its national network StriveTogether, and Girl Effect established a network of 12 TEGAs in Adams County. The work these girls do elevates authentic community voices and provides rich, qualitative data to inform the CAN's work. ACYI employs 12 TEGAs who received training to become qualified Market Research Society (MRS) digital interviewers. TEGA has been supporting the ACYI Partnership since April 2018.

In order to support the team on the ground in understanding which factors and root causes are contributing to the lack of youth earning a self-sufficient wage, TEGAs gathered insights about the four factors below, which were identified by the Employment CAN. TEGA was then able to validate the third and fourth factors and provide additional insight on the remaining factors



The specific objectives of this study were to:

- Gain insight into the factors/challenges to employment that young people are experiencing;
- Determine what strategies and interventions are effective in helping youth to obtain employment at a self-sufficient wage.

To navigate these insights, the research team devised a survey which asked 16 respondents – divided equally amongst young males of color (5), educators (5), and employers (6) – to speak from their experience about what the job marketplace really looks like, specifically for young males of color who are entering the Adams County workforce today.

1. Males of color, educators and employers lack awareness of resources available to support pathways into self-sufficient employment

FALSE – Males of color say they know resources exist, but lack awareness on how to access these resources; educators and employers both have good levels of awareness of resources

Youths' are only slightly aware of pathways to access self-sufficient wages. They know it exists, but without a push from others they aren't sure how to pursue it. Four out of five youth mentioned that the resources they are utilizing today, they heard about from family. However, multiple youth stated that they did not know what steps to take as they were leaving high school.

Educators on the other hand, had the most awareness of resources available to support pathways into self-sufficient employment.

“Not only college options, but apprenticeship, workforce...[and] what it takes to get in there.”

Educator, Age 42

Employers were more specific in their explanations, citing a variety of pathways within their own professional fields and within the community. They had excellent industry-specific knowledge but spoke less about resources outside of their fields.

“Central 70 has a university of sorts...they have courses that are no cost to you.”

Employer Male, Age 49

2. Schools are not set up to guide males of color into non-college options/pathways to sustainable employment

FALSE – While youth told us they did not feel like non-college options were widely discussed or provided in their schools, the majority of educators stated they do systems and services in place to support with non-college options, though it is not a consistent offering across the county

3 out of 5
youth mentioned support in their schools as lacking

Young males of color themselves didn't feel as though their schools explicitly guided them by actively pursuing conversations about non-college options. They wished their schools would have explained “the difference between a job and career.” One youth told us he wished they had taught him:

while...

4 out of 5
educators said they have resources available at their schools

“...how to manage my income, how to start a business, and overall, how to make my money work for me to support myself, not just a 9-5, but a career – to learn the different between a career and a job.”

Young Male, Age 20

While this was the perception of youth, the educators we spoke to listed numerous support systems and resources available. However, the different support systems they mentioned were not universal; there are many different best practices across the county.

As TEGAs inquired the interviewees about their perceptions of access to information for non-college options at their schools, many youth and educators said there is still a lot of pressure to push youth toward college.

10 of 16

Said the stigma still exists

Youth perceived that it was easier to push them [youth] this way, 'pushing kids out.' However, educators said further education was about 'maximizing your earning potential' by having some type of formal training, education, or post-secondary credential potential.

"I guess... [they need to] tell them [students] that there's other jobs out there like being an electrician, a plumber, and all that, instead of telling them, oh, here's college, and then that's it. 'Cause all they really do, they're, like, in one class basically senior seminar, they just teach us apply for college. They don't teach us - it kind of teaches life without college, but not enough for them to know what to actually do."

Young Male, Age 18

"I think the high schools have received a lot of influence to gear students towards college. Which I think is a great opportunity for students, but I think we also need to look at the options for certificate, apprenticeships, um, work history... And I think because someone has, um, a different path we shouldn't lower our view or expectations, or we have...those students graduate high school feeling like whatever they plan to do, it's not valued within our community."

Female Educator, Age 42

While many believe that college-focused ideals still exist, half of our respondents perceived that the stigma that you must get to 'college' in order to earn a sufficient wage has shifted in recent years and our community recognizes we need professionals who can do 'the trade.'

8 of 16

said the stigmas are changing or should change

"I think, overall society is starting to kind of lift that stigma because it's expensive and because it's not for every student. An economically disadvantaged student sometimes, it's great if they can go to college, but sometimes they can't, and it's okay to embrace the idea that if you don't want to go to college..."

Male Educator, Age 57

3. Males of color are not aware of career options that pay self-sufficient wages that do not require a traditional 2-4 year degree. Youth think college is the only option to gain skills past high school or GED

TRUE – They are not aware of career options that pay self-sufficient wages that do not require a traditional 2-4 year degree, BUT they DON'T think college is the only option

Young males of color are not aware of career options that pay a self-sufficient wage, but they do feel strongly that college is not a necessity to obtain the necessary and valuable skills:

[TEGA] Do you think that you have to go to college to gain skills?

[RESP] Absolutely not. Um, I feel that - you - I - I feel that you should, well for one, I feel that you shouldn't have, have to be \$100,000 in debt just to get some skills from college. But, I feel like, you can - nowadays, we have - we have YouTube, we have Google, we can learn all these skills on there. The only problem with that is finding the right information that works for you and finding the right information that works for whatever you are trying to do.

Young Male, Age 20

As we have heard from a few Opportunity Youth in our last Post-Secondary Success study, youth believe they can find out and learn from the internet but are uncertain about these sources. Young males of color are no different. Without any explanation at their high schools on how to achieve these jobs, they are not successful in finding these positions.

When we asked respondents what it is going to take to earn these types of jobs, experience and attitude echoed to the top from all the respondent types as the most important attributes young males of color, and all young adults, can demonstrate to obtain self-sufficient employment.

“Expose them to the workforce as early as possible.”

Employer

“Be professional and present, passionate and aggressive.”

Employer

Employers reported that youth who lack work experience or further education have to rely on their ability to demonstrate these soft skills. They also said that one of youths' strengths is technology; they are able to help innovate technological efficiencies in their day to day operations. They also mentioned technology can inhibit young people from doing their job when something has to be done manually, or it can inhibit their job applications from standing out online, stating that no one has any way to empathetically connect with them.

Educators told us they are trying to keep up in developing these traits, but as the youth and adults in our study stated, not all students are getting access to these resources. Consistently, in this study (and in many of our other studies with youth), several young males of color, employers, and educators ask for or suggest real life skills education during high school, some saying if not sooner.

Educators and employers alike identified some challenges with providing opportunities to these youth, namely their real life ‘adulting’ skills in communication and time management; such as these soft skills...

“They don't know how to speak to people. They don't know how to write a thank you letter. They don't know how to write a follow up letter. They don't know how to make phone calls...Right now, we see that it's a major issue, so as a part of that, my boss has definitely made it known that I'm the key person at this point to help students transition from wanting to get jobs into getting them. The problem is that we're only reaching students that are coming. We're not reaching all the students that maybe could use those skills. So maybe looking into the future, getting grants or providing some sort of budgetary options in order to get a teacher that is predominantly teaching life skills, and having students go through those classes... I think it is essential. And I think it needs to be a mandatory class. That's how I feel.”

Female Educator, Age 49

While attitude was seen as an important part of obtaining self-sufficient employment, the study revealed some unique dimensions of attitude, regarding males of color vs non-males of color, specifically as it relates to their exposure levels and their cultural norms.

“They might not understand some of the career pathways because they don't see that in their lives.”

Male Educator, Age 57

“Their background, their economic background, because they're gonna come in -- they may come in speaking differently than -- not to say they can't speak English, but they're -- just their mannerisms, their tone is gonna be different than somebody that's not been brought up in that environment.”

Male Employer, Age 58

Another point employers and educators emphasized was that some type of on the job experience or training is key to entry, *not* solely educational qualifications like a 4-year degree. Hence why they were driving home even further why youth should work hard to get some type of experience as soon as possible.

“Coming from the HR side and seeing it through all the different industries... there's so much more value, I think, in the actual experience.”

Female Employer, Age N/A

4. There are not enough jobs paying self-sufficient wages

TRUE – The overall perception is that there are not enough jobs paying self-sufficient wage available

Youth felt strongly that there are not enough self-sufficient jobs available and the overall perception amongst all of our respondents was low. However, some employers mentioned they are finding it difficult to recruit entry-level employees – to compete with all the noise, the many job listings posted online – and employers identified a need for connecting with youth at their schools so when they get out they ‘know who you are, what you do, and what types of job you offer.’

In addition to the community perception that there are not enough jobs that pay the self-sufficient wage (SSW), everyone in our study felt that the stated self-sufficient wage was too low to live off of (\$27,684/year). With the exception of youth, who lack work experience, all respondents estimated higher than the SSW when we asked them to guess, before the actual SSW wage was stated by the TEGA.

Beyond substantiating whether these factors were valid, the thematic analysis revealed key themes which were consistent across all of our respondent types:

- 1** **Having access to information is the greatest need young males of color have –** all the cohorts cited access as the most important measure
- 2** **All cohorts expressed the need for real life context and understanding.** Youth aren’t prepared for “real life” – budgeting, job experience, communication skills, ‘adulting’
- 3** **Technology is their greatest strength** because it allows youth to help **companies see the potential for efficiency and innovation** within the company
- 4** The **cost of living is skyrocketing** – youth mentioned **the cost of food** and adults mentioned **housing, as major implications when it comes to being self-sufficient**

Next Steps

The CAN is utilizing findings from these TEGA interviews to validate their hypotheses about the current state of employment for young adults. Next, they will map out which strategies might be most effective for reaching the SMART Target population (young males of color) and then going out again to gain perspective from our community and test the intervention ideas. TEGA will support them in this next round of research.

For more information, please contact ACYI’s Community Engagement Director: Jody Nowicki at jodynowicki@ACYI.org.

² Tech was also a perceived as hindrance to employment. Respondents cited the application process as a tech related hindrance because it strips the human-empathetic piece out, making it harder for these youth to stand out, and secondly some employers stated youth aren’t able to do manual tasks when/if technology breaks down. We also heard from School Resource Officers and Intervention Specialists in your Juvenile Justice landscape study that they believe tech is affecting youths’ sociality overall.