

# PREPARATION MEETS OPPORTUNITY

## Helping 16- to 24-year-olds navigate a post-COVID economy: Promising practices from a CBO-Community College workforce partnership

Comprehensive Youth Development (CYD) convened a panel of experts to examine promising practices derived from six years of experience from CYD's Career Academy, with the object of meeting the needs of young adults by replicating, scaling up, or expanding this youth workforce model.

Comprehensive Youth Development's Career Academy offers healthcare job training and certification for high school graduates aged 18 to 24 years old. The CYD Career Academy model was developed in partnership with JobsFirstNYC, New York Alliance for Careers in Healthcare (NYACH), healthcare-sector employers, and Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC).

The idea that youth workforce programs can be improved by aligning the work of community-based organizations (CBOs), community colleges and employers is not new. But, turning the idea into reality is more challenging. With the economic crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic, never has there been a more important time for an employer-aligned model that connects young people to changing employer needs. And never has there been a greater need to address the structural inequities seen in the lack of skills, market-demand training certificates, and links to real employment opportunities that keep young people of color from entering into and moving up within the labor market. Students who struggle often need help staying in school, and there is a need for CBOs experienced in youth development to work with community colleges to provide the academic instruction, technical training, and social support services that help ensure student retention and completion.

The panel discussion took place in a webinar hosted by CYD on Dec. 16, 2020, and moderated by Sheila Maguire. Panelists offered a number of recommendations for policymakers, practitioners, and funders and responded to questions from the audience.



### MODERATOR

**Sheila Maguire,**

Senior Fellow at the Aspen Institute  
Economic Opportunities Program

### PANELISTS

**Deidre J. Duke, RN, MSN, JD,**

Corporate Director,  
HR Programs, Northwell Health

**Sunil B. Gupta,**

Dean of the Center for Continuing  
Education and Workforce  
Development, Borough of Manhattan  
Community College

**Marjorie Parker,**

President and CEO, JobsFirstNYC

**Michael A. Roberts, MSW,**

Executive Director,

Comprehensive Youth Development

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## Impact of COVID-19 on youth employment and workforce development

*“It’s going to be harder for young people to get jobs in the post COVID-19 economy. Our work as CBOs is to educate our young people on this new economy and on why they should use this time to prepare and invest in their skills development to enter the workforce.”*

– Michael Roberts

The labor market is in flux after the disruptions of 2020, with disproportionate impact on young people, particularly those of color and those living in marginalized communities. JobsFirstNYC recently posted in a blog that between 259,000 and 324,000 young adults aged 16 to 24 are now out of school and out of work, based on research by the Aspen Institute Opportunity Youth Forum.<sup>1</sup> Public-sector funding programs such as Learning to Work, a New York City Department of Education program offering paid internships for youth at risk of becoming out of school and out of work, have been reduced as part of citywide budget cuts.

For youth seeking jobs, there is peril in that the economy will be slow to recover. Young people are often the last to be hired in a recession, and some of the sectors most affected by the pandemic – such as retail and restaurants – were precisely those sectors in which young people without a college degree or training were employed. Workforce leaders in NYC and employers are seeking solutions to address these early trends and how best to prepare young adults in navigating connections to employment in the context of the COVID-19 economy.

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## CYD’s Career Academy: A CBO-Community College Partnership

*“Together, colleges and CBOs can provide more effective, inclusive, complex services to young people and address the many needs that students enter our colleges with. Not one institution or one CBO can be all things to all our students, so it is important to have expert partners who are working together to educate and prepare young people for today’s workforce.”*

– Sunil B. Gupta

CYD’s Career Academy provides technical training, certification, and educational support to 18- to 24-year-olds to assist them in finding entry-level positions in healthcare that can lead to jobs and careers in the field. It currently offers certifications for Medical Assistants and in Billing and Coding, and has also offered EMT certification. After a year of planning, CYD’s Career Academy opened its doors in 2015; to date, 285 young people have taken part in the program.

CYD’s Career Academy was developed through JobsFirstNYC’s Young Adult Sectoral Employment Project (YASEP) in 2013-14 to address the issue of youth and young adults who were out of school and out of work. Those served by CYD’s Career Academy are among New York City’s most vulnerable youth: from poor, marginalized and immigrant communities; disproportionately Black and Brown; at risk of disconnection after high school. Now, as young adults, many of them face housing, childcare, and job concerns.

<sup>1</sup> JobsfirstNYC, “With an estimated 27 to 34 percent of NYC young adults out of school and out of work, what’s the city’s plan?” Sept. 3, 2020.

***“We think the ‘secret sauce’ was the year-long planning together with CBOs, colleges, and employers. The commitment that they recognized they had to make was that if they wanted different outcomes to meet their needs, then they needed to participate in building the program.***

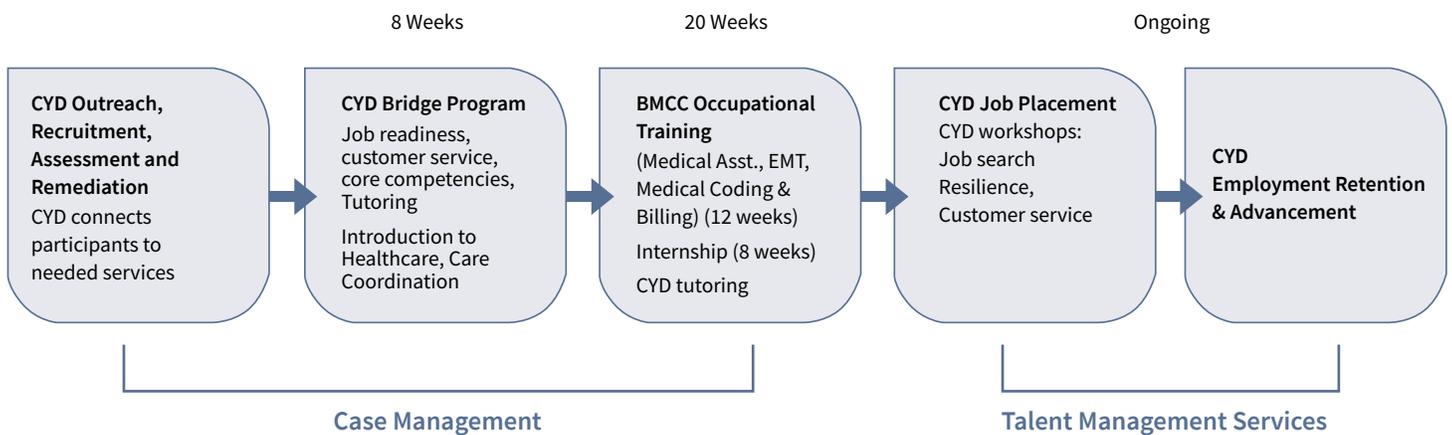
***“\$8,000 to 10,000 per student may sound like a lot but it’s not. The emphasis is not a rapid attachment program, but a career pathways program. It involves far more input to make it work that needs to be paid for.”***

***– Marjorie Parker***

This partnership between CYD, BMCC, Northwell Health, and other employers and stakeholders has resulted in strong outcomes not only for young people as they begin to engage with meaningful work that supports a living wage, but also for employers, because it is aligned with employer needs for a skilled workforce in certain job sectors. 78% of those who completed all program components have been placed in employment.

CYD reports that the per-student cost of attending its Career Academy is \$8,000 to \$10,000. Current staffing at CYD’s Career Academy includes three full-time and two part-time staff members, and tutors. Thanks to a combination of public and private funding, the program is offered at no cost to the student.

### CYD’s Career Academy Program Model



## PROMISING PRACTICES

The common goal and commitment of partners in CYD's Career Academy is to enroll and retain students in the program and connect them to employment; ideally, to retain employment for at least a year.

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*“These partnerships are challenging and I think they are challenging for a number of reasons. When very different types of institutions have to collaborate together, there are different funding policies, different staffing patterns, different organizational structures, different outcomes. All these differences between the institutions that are collaborating have to be overcome.”*

– Sheila Maguire

- 1) Partnership.** Ongoing coordination and collaboration between CYD and BMCC leadership has been key to the success of the model.
- 2) The CBO is integrated on campus.** The CYD Career Academy and staff are on the campus of BMCC, which gives students exposure to an adult, college environment. Students are served by both the CBO and community college in a holistic way at each stage of the program.
- 3) Cohort model.** Students move together as a cohort through the entire program, which allows for a shared experience, and builds prosocial peer support toward completing the program.
- 4) Flexibility in recruitment.** A majority of CUNY certificate programs utilize the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) as a definitive measure for admission. Many disconnected students fail the test. Based on its long-term work with high schools, CYD realized early on that with remediation, a majority of the students could pass the TABE. CYD and BMCC leadership agreed to use students' initial TABE scores as a baseline. CYD then provides remediation services during the Bridge, after which students retake the TABE for admission. Due to that change, 90% of enrolled students to date have passed the TABE and have been able to enter the occupational track.
- 5) Early intervention and case management.** Most certificate programs at CUNY conduct participant barriers assessments but do not have staff resources to provide in-depth services and follow-up. In this partnership, CYD conducts the barriers assessment during the recruitment stage, and provides ongoing follow-up and resources throughout the entire program, including connecting students to academic tutoring, financial assistance, English-language learning supports, childcare, and other services that boost retention and completion.

**78% of students at CYD's Career Academy who completed all program components have been placed in employment.**

**6) In-depth, rigorous Bridge component.** Employers' input at the Academy's planning stage indicated that to be employable, young adults need intensive job readiness skills in addition to a certification. BMCC felt it was important that students have a clear understanding of the career track and the requirements to succeed in and complete the occupational component. CYD created an eight-week, full-day program to address these two areas. Work readiness includes workplace skills, customer service, leadership development, public speaking, basic office technology, and productive teamwork. Primary Care Development Corporation provides an introduction to healthcare and care coordination. BMCC staff provides workshops on specific certification tracks.

**7) Occupational training support.** Certificate programs have intensive educational requirements and a fast pace of learning. During the pilot cohort, CYD learned it is key to support students academically throughout the entire program. CYD added staff to provide study skills and in-person and online tutoring, created peer study groups, and extended case management support during the occupational training portion.

**8) Hands-on practical application of the learning.** At the Career Academy, students attend NYU Langone's Simulation Lab through New York University's partnership with BMCC and CUNY. The Sim Lab is a hands-on opportunity for students to apply learning and receive feedback. BMCC's occupational training program includes 180 hours of clinical internships at doctors' offices, urgent care facilities, and hospitals. Internships are key to helping students gain experience and enter the job market, and a significant number of Career Academy students receive their first employment opportunity from their internship sites.

**9) Employment search resilience.** Finding full-time employment is always challenging for 18- to 24-year-olds, and even for college graduates it can take up to a year or more. With the impact of COVID-19 on the job market, this will become an even greater challenge. From the beginning, CYD recognized the need to provide additional employment support to help students with the job search. CYD received private funding to hire expert staff who know the job market, can build relationships with local employers, and provide ongoing workshops and skills development to build students' resilience. As a result, 78% of those who completed all program components have been placed in employment.

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***"In order to design an effective workforce development program, you have to start at the end and design it backwards. And you have to include all the stakeholders so that everybody has the same information, and the program can be designed to be successful. And to me, success is gainful employment."***

**– Deirdre Duke**

## PANEL RECOMMENDATIONS

The panelists agreed that the CYD Career Academy model offers promising practices that can help other partnerships to better prepare young people for workforce certifications. It is important for community colleges, CBOs, and employers jointly to communicate the importance of skills development for 18- to 24-year-olds, to work in collaboration to address barriers to retention and completion, and to provide robust programming that supports the development, training, and employment of young people in a post-COVID-19 economy. The panel made the following recommendations:



- 1) Serve more young people at the Career Academy.** CYD's Career Academy should be scaled up and expanded to serve more young people.
- 2) Replicate the model.** CYD's Career Academy could serve as the basis for technical assistance to other workforce programs for young people who are preparing to enter the job market now and post-COVID-19.
- 3) Collaborate more effectively.** All stakeholders in youth workforce development, including public and private funders, must align in terms of their mission and values, and together must develop goals that prepare young people for workforce and career pathways.
- 4) Engage stronger employer participation.** In a changing economy, workforce development partners must engage with local employers to respond to shifts in industry focus and employment needs. Employers must be made aware of the bottom-line benefits of engaging with CBOs and youth workforce development models. Partners can create forums and opportunities to raise employer awareness and build such relationships.
- 5) Expand internship opportunities.** Employers could support educational programming by providing internships that allow young people to build skills and competencies needed to enter the workforce.
- 6) Fund employment resilience and job attachment support as part of youth workforce programming.** Funders of young adult training programs should consider increased funding to support staff skilled in addressing employment issues. Having staff dedicated to helping program graduates find jobs and building their job search resilience is essential, especially in a post-COVID-19 economy.

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*“We began this discussion with the question of how we can be more employer aligned, but I believe the lessons go beyond that. We are facing some very difficult times coming up when supporting job search resiliency is going to be so necessary for workers and young workers. I look forward to ways in which we can grow this model.”*

– Sheila Maguire

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The Pinkerton Foundation  
Robin Hood Foundation  
Tiger Foundation

NYC Department of Youth & Community Development - Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act

- 7) **Start certification programming earlier, at the high school level.** New York City’s Department of Education should introduce skills-based and vocational training with exposure to career programming and certification in high schools, thus mitigating the risk of disconnection from education and work after graduation.
- 8) **Build digital literacy early.** Digital literacy, including Microsoft Office Suite, and the use of computer technology are essential in today’s economy and open young people to a range of job and career opportunities; these skills can be taught beginning in high school.
- 9) **Revisit income eligibility requirements.** Government funding requirements for workforce programs historically tie eligibility to federal poverty levels, which excludes many working-poor youth and families in NYC. The panel recommended that there be advocacy from partners asking federal and city governments to review out-of-date eligibility policies.
- 10) **Advocate to city, state, and federal government leaders to develop youth workforce funding.** Partners in youth workforce programs must continue to work together and develop a mutual agenda to advocate for additional resources at the federal, state, and city levels.
- 11) **Increase public and private funding.** Because of the variety of need, it is imperative to have more public and private funding that allows for the most flexibility to respond to the diverse needs of young adults and a changing economy. Government provides long-term, significant support, but has restrictions that do not always allow for a nimble response to emerging issues or creativity when addressing barriers for students. Private philanthropy, on the other hand, is far more flexible. Program funding gives CBOs the ability to pilot programs as well as to respond to emerging or additional needs not covered by government contract requirements and exclusions.

## PANEL



**Sheila Maguire, Moderator**, is a Senior Fellow at the Aspen Institute Economic Opportunities Program focusing on leadership and talent development in the workforce field. Sheila designed and served as lead faculty for the Aspen Institute's National Sector Skills Academy and has developed and lead local leadership academies in Seattle, Baltimore, and New York City. She has authored or coauthored publications including *Optimizing Talent: The Promise and Perils of Adapting Sector Strategies for Young Adults*, 2016.



**Deidre J. Duke, RN, MSN, JD**, is Corporate Director, HR Programs, Northwell Health. With 25 years of experience in Human Resources, Deidre has held key leadership positions in two metropolitan health systems, driving business objectives, vision and values forward from a human capital perspective.



**Sunil B. Gupta** is BMCC's Dean of the Center for Continuing Education and Workforce Development. He is responsible for adult students in professional programs in Business, Education, Technology, Allied Health, Security Management and Construction and Certification based programs, as well as traditional continuing education activities. BMCC has partnered with CYD at the Career Academy since 2014.



**Marjorie Parker** is JobsFirstNYC's president and CEO. She has more than 20 years of experience overseeing adult and youth services initiatives and consulting for non-profit organizations. Marjorie has held positions at Opportunities for a Better Tomorrow, CUNY Research Foundation, and New York City Department of Youth and Community Development.



**Michael A. Roberts, MSW**, is Executive Director, Comprehensive Youth Development. Michael has worked at the federal, state and local levels to develop strategies, programs and outcomes to help young people to become successful leaders in their homes, schools, and communities while developing the skills needed to compete and succeed in the 21st century.