

# COMMUNITY ROADMAP FOR OPPORTUNITY YOUTH

Opportunity Youth are young people ages 16 -24 who are not engaged in education or employment. Operation Fresh Start engaged the community in this assessment and roadmap exercise to assure opportunity for success for each older youth transitioning into adulthood. Operation Fresh Start's mission is that all youth in our community have a path to self-sufficiency through attaining a High School diploma and gaining skills necessary for successful employment.

Following a robust assessment and gaps analysis, Operation Fresh Start and community partners propose this Opportunity Roadmap for our community to ensure each of these young people has a path to self-sufficiency, self-efficacy and a sense of individual purpose.

As Dane County's only organization specifically dedicated to the Opportunity Youth, Operation Fresh Start has built nationally emulated programming including:

- **Options:** Re-engagement case management for youth that left high school without completing.
- **Legacy:** Experiential high school diploma completion program including pre-apprenticeship training, career exploration and successful transition to employment.
- **Strive:** Career Specific Training for under-employed recent high school graduates.
- **Graduate Crew:** Job experience training as a path to a construction career

With the completion of our new Education and Training Facility, funded through gifts from our community and built by Fresh Start youth, we look to engage the community in a broader conversation to determine the next level of partnerships and supports to fulfill the vision that every youth is an asset in our community.



Over the last forty-eight years, Operation Fresh Start has helped over 8,000 Dane County youth on a path to self-sufficiency.





# COMMUNITY ROADMAP FOR OPPORTUNITY YOUTH



There are more than 4,000 Dane County young people ages 16–24 who are living in poverty and are not connected to education or self-sufficient through employment. At this point in life youth have the opportunity to become successful members of society but, if left behind, often end up costing our community additional resources in housing, criminal justice, social services throughout their lifetime. It is at this transition point from child to adult that we can stop the cyclical nature of poverty in our community. This Roadmap is an opportunity not just for these youth but for the community as a whole.



## Step 1 was to explore barriers to success for Opportunity Youth in Dane County. Barriers identified include:

- **TRAUMA & HEALTH** – Trauma, fear and anxiety can build through childhood experiences including: homelessness, food insecurity and family of origin issues. These often manifest themselves in health and mental health problems which impede a young person's ability to achieve success.
- **ACCESS** – Young people repeatedly cite that not knowing where or how to access information or people to help them map out a career plan leaves them feeling "lost."
- **WORK READINESS** – Young people often lack the skills and abilities to enter the workforce and maintain employment in an environment radically different from school or youth program setting

## Step 2 was to assess what gaps in services exist for addressing the barriers to success identified through the research. Opportunity gaps included:

- **RESOURCE CONNECTIONS** – Young people exiting school and social services that provide an array of assistance with food, mental health treatment, transportation, etc. enter an adult world without the support to gain and maintain employment or navigate adult systems.
- **CAREER COUNSELING ASSESSMENTS** – There is a lack of resources designed to help older youth figure out a future career path leaving them floundering while trying to engage adult systems.
- **DRIVER'S LICENSE ATTAINMENT** – A driver's license is the second most required qualification (high school diploma is first) for Dane County employers. Driver education is not offered by most high schools leaving young adults who grew up in poverty without this qualification.
- **EXPANDED INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIPS** – Although Dane County enjoys a robust economy, there are limited training opportunities for youth from poverty in growth industries to fill specific employment needs. There is a shortage of industry-specific, short-term employment training specifically for young adults.

## Step 3 was to assess the gaps, and identify potential opportunities to design collaborative community programming to fill the gaps and address the barriers. Program concepts to be implemented in the next few years include:

- **Support** – Provide linkages for youth leaving the supports they received while they were under 18 including: basic needs, health and mental health services and referrals for housing, childcare, transportation services, counseling, etc.
- **Connect** – Connect youth with caring adults who have the ability to mentor and answer questions about career choices, employment, workplace issues, opportunities, etc.
- **DRIVE** – Although costly to provide driver education to 16-year-olds, at age 18 programming leading to a driver's license is much more cost efficient and provides the opportunity to combine this with career-oriented interest and aptitude analysis and career planning into a single program.
- **TRAIN** – Provide industry-specific workshop or seminar-based training designed for young adults for specific high-demand industries in Dane County, including both hard and soft skills, as well as internship or on-site employment support.

## METHODOLOGY

Operation Fresh Start initiated a robust outreach and research effort in 2018, funded by the Hovde Foundation and in partnership with Wood Communications Group, to develop a Community Roadmap for Opportunity Youth. The goal was to explore current barriers to service for Opportunity Youth in Dane County, examine gaps that exist in current service and explore what programmatic opportunities the community may want to consider in addressing those gaps. The community needs assessment process included data gathering and conversations with local businesses, Dane County, the City of Madison, education providers, non-profits, workforce development organizations and opportunity youth. The proposed framework represents input gathered from more than 20 community partners and dozens of youth age 16-24.



# ROAD TO SUCCESS



Operation Fresh Start is committed to continuing to provide its core programming highlighted below as we work with the community to design and integrate additional programming to meet the changing and unique needs of Opportunity Youth in Dane County.

## Current Programs

- **Legacy** provides youth who are not on a path to complete high school a vocational track for completion. The program includes classroom education, construction and conservation pre-apprenticeship work experience, attaining a Driver's License, and transition into employment in a program of personal growth.
- **Strive** provides high school graduates age 18-24 with industry-specific training and credentials in high demand employment fields through cohort based trainings. Current training is in construction and health care.
- **Options** is for youth who have left high school without completing working to re-engage them on a path to diploma. This program reaches out to each Madison youth who hasn't completed high school and works with him/her to develop and follow through on a plan to complete.
- **Grad Crew** is construction training for young adults to help them gain experience, skills and work pace to successfully transition into union construction apprenticeships.

Special thanks to our research partners:

