



Highlights of GAO-08-313, a report to the Chairman, Committee on Education and Labor, House of Representatives

### Why GAO Did This Study

While most young people successfully transition to adulthood, a significant number of youth are disconnected from school and employment. These youth are more likely than others to engage in crime, become incarcerated, and rely on public systems of support. Several federal agencies oversee a number of programs and grants that assist local programs in serving this population at the local level. GAO reviewed the following: (1) characteristics of locally operated programs that serve disconnected youth, (2) the key elements of locally operated programs to which directors attribute their success in reconnecting youth to education and employment, and (3) challenges involved in operating these programs and how federal agencies are helping to address these challenges. GAO interviewed officials from four federal agencies, experts, and directors of 39 local programs identified by agencies and experts as helping youth meet educational and employment goals.

### What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Department of Labor (Labor) work with states and workforce investment boards to better ensure they have the information and guidance needed to develop and implement contracts that allow local programs to serve youth who are in need of more assistance than others while still achieving performance goals. Labor agreed with our recommendation and identified several steps it plans to take to implement it.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-313](#). For more information, contact Cornelia Ashby at (202) 512-7215 or ashbyc@gao.gov.

## DISCONNECTED YOUTH

### Federal Action Could Address Some of the Challenges Faced by Local Programs That Reconnect Youth to Education and Employment

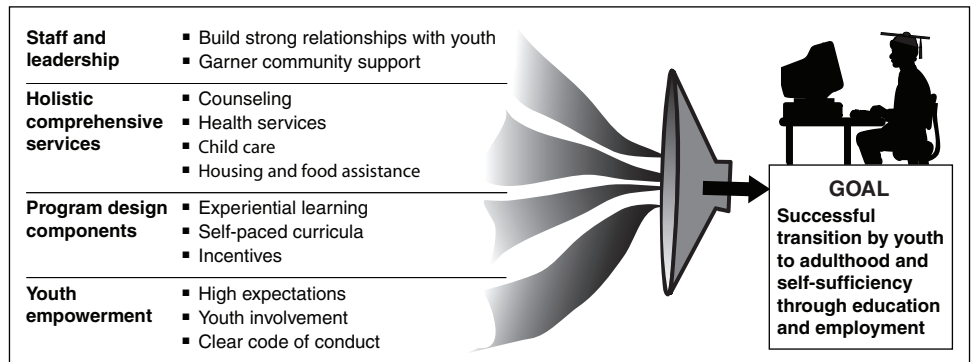
#### What GAO Found

The 39 local programs GAO reviewed differed in their funding sources and program structure, yet shared some characteristics, such as years of experience serving youth. These programs received funding from multiple sources: federal, state, local, and private, although most relied on some federal funds. They were structured differently—for example, some were community-based organizations that provided services on a daily basis, some were charter schools, and some offered residential living. Most of the programs were created to address local concerns such as youth homelessness or dropout rates, and many had at least 10 years of experience serving youth.

Program directors GAO interviewed attributed their success in reconnecting youth to education and employment to several key elements of their programs. These included effective staff and leadership; a holistic approach to serving youth that addresses the youth’s multiple needs; specific program design components, such as experiential learning opportunities and self-paced curricula; and a focus on empowering youth.

Many of the 39 local program directors reported common challenges in operating their programs—the complex circumstances of their participants, service gaps, funding constraints, and management of federal grants—that increased federal coordination efforts under way may help address. Most of the 15 directors that relied on Labor’s Workforce Investment Act Youth funds reported that meeting performance goals within 1-year time frames that workforce investment boards often write into contracts hinders their ability to serve youth with great challenges, who may need more time to obtain skills. Labor officials reported that they intend for workforce investment boards to develop longer-term contracts to help programs serve hard-to-employ youth. Labor has provided limited technical assistance and is considering issuing guidance on this issue, but has not established a time frame to do so. Federal agencies have recently intensified their coordination efforts, which may help local programs faced with challenges managing across multiple federal grants.

#### Key Elements of Local Programs Cited by 39 Program Directors in Reconnecting Youth to Education and Employment



Source: GAO analysis of information provided by 39 local program directors; Images (Art Explosion).