

YouthBuild USA

Rural Initiative



YouthBuild USA Rural Initiative Facts

Fall 2006

- Purpose:** The YouthBuild Rural Initiative (YBRI) was established within YouthBuild USA in 1999 to support and strengthen the capacity of rural YouthBuild programs and to assist rural low-income youth in facing their unique challenges. The ambition of the YBRI is two-fold: to strengthen the capacity of rural communities to support and train their young people for leadership and a meaningful, productive life within their home communities; and to stand at the forefront of cutting-edge approaches to rural sustainability. Ultimately, YouthBuild USA aims to serve as a change agent seeking to strengthen community responses, expanding opportunities, and ultimately impacting rural policy by responding to the needs and dreams of low-income rural young people.
- Program:** In YouthBuild programs, unemployed and undereducated young people ages 16-24 work toward their GED or high school diploma while learning job skills by building affordable housing for homeless and low-income people. Strong emphasis is placed on leadership development, community service, and the creation of a positive mini-community of adults and youth committed to success. By the early 1990s the program model had been replicated in 11 cities nationwide and had been added as a line item in the federal budget. Throughout the last decade, the YouthBuild model expanded to rural communities throughout the country. Since its inception in 1978, tens of thousands of people have contributed to the YouthBuild movement, which has been called “a wellspring of human reclamation” by *The New York Times*.
- Size:** Currently, there are 69 rural YouthBuild programs operating throughout the United States.
- Participants:** In 2005, 72 % of rural YouthBuild students were men and 28% were women. 21% were parents. They were 16.7% African-American, 20.7% Latino, 53% White, 6.9% Native American, and 1.6% Other.
- Success Rate:** In 2005, 92% of rural YouthBuild students entered the program without their GED or diploma, 47.7% had been adjudicated, and 35.9% received public assistance prior to joining YouthBuild. In spite of these overwhelming odds, 57.2% completed the program and 69.7% of graduates went on to college or jobs averaging \$8.69/hour.
- Key Activities:** The YBRI provides individual technical assistance to local programs, supports new site development, and offers training at rural national conferences for rural youth and rural program staff. In addition, in a concerted effort to garner the largest impact possible and respond to the needs of the YouthBuild field and rural communities nationally, the Rural Initiative also initiates other projects to: a) bolster rural programs and their impact locally through networking, partnership building and regional organization; b) inform pertinent rural policy issues impacting rural areas; and, c) augment leadership development experiences of rural young people and staff.

Some specific, specialized initiatives currently underway include:

- **Transportation Strategy:** In coordination with the Low-Income Car Ownership (LICO) field, rural YouthBuild programs and governmental agencies, the YBRI is working to ensure rural YouthBuild graduates will be able to access work, higher education and/or training through car ownership opportunities.
- **Regional Strategy for Sustainability:** Working in the underserved rural regions of Appalachia, the MS Delta, and the colonias/borderlands and tribal areas, the YBRI collaborates with YouthBuild programs, young people and stakeholders to craft regional strategies to address the five-identified, most pressing policy priorities to creating sustainable communities.
- **W.K. Kellogg Rural People Rural Policy:** Nationally, YouthBuild USA has been selected by Kellogg to participate in this initiative as a member of the At-Large Network, one of five networks convened by region, to develop the knowledge, capacity, strategic direction, and action of a critical mass of organizations that seek to improve policy that affects people and places in rural America.
- **Rural Leadership Development Project:** In partnership with rural YouthBuild programs, the YBRI is developing a strategy to develop and foster an active, well-trained body of staff, students and graduates who are actively engaged in informing public policy locally, regionally and nationally.
- **USDA Community Economic Development Project:** Through the support of USDA RCDI funds, 8 select YouthBuild programs will explore new approaches for fostering community economic development, thereby creating sustainable employment opportunities for low-income young adults.

Contact: Additional information about these projects, other undertakings of the YBRI and latest news can be found on-line at www.youthbuild.org/ruralinitiative. Please contact Kim Phinney at kphinney@youthbuild.org or Rebecca Rethore at rrethore@youthbuild.org with any inquiries.