

NATIONAL COUNCIL *of* YOUNG LEADERS

OPPORTUNITY YOUTH UNITED

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Recommendations to Increase Opportunity and Decrease Poverty in America

The National Council of Young Leaders is sponsored by

Jobs for the Future • National College Advising Corps
Public Allies • The Corps Network • Year Up
Youth Leadership Institute • YouthBuild USA



YOUTH LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE



National Council of Young Leaders

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The Circle of Allies and Champions will help uplift the ideas of the National Council of Young Leaders through providing avenues for them to be heard in policy discussions affecting low-income youth and their communities.

Recommendations to **Increase Opportunity** and **Decrease Poverty** **in America**



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Be The Change • Gateway to College National Network • Llano Grande Center
National Congress of American Indians • National Rural Assembly • Opportunity Youth Network • SparkAction

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Recommendations to Increase Opportunity and Decrease Poverty in America

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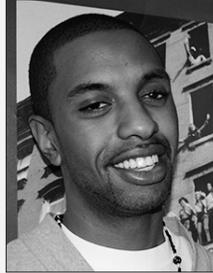
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Council Members

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Lashon
Amado



Gilbert
Bonafé Jr.



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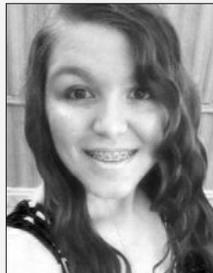
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Recommendations to Increase Opportunity and Decrease Poverty in America

Introduction

The National Council of Young Leaders was formed in July 2012 in response to a recommendation of the White House Council on Community Solutions, with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Open Society Foundations. It is now funded by the Skoll Foundation.

The council is sponsored by Jobs for the Future, National College Advising Corps, Public Allies, The Corps Network, Year Up, Youth Leadership Institute, and YouthBuild USA. It is staffed by YouthBuild USA and supported by the Be The Change, Gateway to College National Network, Llano Grande Center, the National Congress of American Indians, the National Rural Assembly, Opportunity Youth Network, and SparkAction.

We were nominated and selected by these organizations as outstanding young leaders representing diverse geographical communities and cultural groups. Each of us has overcome enormously challenging conditions to become dedicated leaders and servants of our communities and our peers.

We were offered wonderful opportunities by our sponsoring organizations to find our true hearts, our real selves, our talents, and our passion to make a difference through service to our communities. Each of us has experienced what a comprehensive program that provides education, employment, personal counseling, caring adult mentors and role models, a positive peer group, leadership opportunities, pathways to college and careers, and service to our communities can mean to a lost soul. We have experienced the amazing respect and love that come from staff in organizations that are based on a philosophy of recognizing our sacred value and seeing us as potential assets to the community rather than threats to it.

Before finding these blessed pathways, we suffered all manner of difficulties including child abuse, rapidly changing and sometimes abusive or neglectful foster care placements, homelessness, traumatic loss and suffering of family members through murder or the impact of chronic and fatal diseases, discrimination based on our race or ethnicity, gang violence, the absence of our fathers through murder or incarceration, the loss of our mothers through suicide or drug overdose, neighborhoods that were unsafe for children to even walk to school, teachers who told us we were doomed to fail, schools that kicked us out, public policies affecting Native Americans that prevented our tribes from building the infrastructure needed to support our people, police who stereotyped us and overlooked the rampant drug dealing surrounding us, and prison records that will follow us for the rest of our lives and lock many doors to us.

In a thriving society that invests in its children and youth, supports family and community life, and is structured to diminish poverty, we should never have had to face these challenges as children and youth. Nonetheless, we have found ways to forgive those who hurt us, and to recognize and appreciate the learnings and the strength we have gained from overcoming the odds. We are resilient. We are proud. We are smart. We are united. We aim to be a positive force for good in the world, motivated by love and guided by a strong moral and spiritual compass.

We recognize the need for people of all backgrounds to come together, to work together to create a society in which it is recognized that all people are created equal, where there is liberty and freedom, opportunity and responsibility, justice and love, for all. That is the America we aim to create in our lifetimes.

Our vision is rooted in the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. We continue to look to our elders and to those who hold the keys to power to support our efforts. We are looking to our peers to join forces with us as we fight for equal opportunities for all young people to experience the benefits of public and private investment in our education, employment, personal development, and opportunities to serve and give back to our communities.

Below we have stated our principles for action, our priority recommendations, and a broader agenda for change. Thank you for listening and reading. Please join us.

Principles for Action

Love. Action for change must be grounded in love, led by moral and spiritual consciousness, to transform societies and individuals.

Responsibility. We must lead by example, taking responsibility and being accountable to others and to ourselves for all of our actions, knowing that we must be role models for our peers.

Forgiveness and empathy. We must forgive others and ourselves, with empathy, understanding the full reality faced by all of us.

Community empowerment. We must empower our peers and the residents in our communities to overcome their feelings of powerlessness, apathy, and fear, to work together proactively to create stronger communities in which everyone is committed to everyone else's well being, where we take care of each other, correct each other, and love each other. We must organize, vote, become active, and take charge and responsibility for our lives and communities.

Inclusion. We must be inclusive, refusing to stereotype any group of people or any individual.

Visibility. We must make ourselves visible, tell our stories and our truth to influential people who are uninformed and insulated from the twin oppressions of poverty and racism. We believe if they truly hear us, many of them will care and join with us. We must equally become visible to other young people who need to see that it is possible to transcend the obstacles they face and to find pathways to productive citizenship.

Collaboration. We must encourage more collaboration and less competition among nonprofits that have been pressured by resource shortages to be in competition for limited funds. We need them to be in collaboration to expand the resources, and to share their knowledge and resources with each other, on our behalf.

Accountability for results. We must be willing to look critically at results, asking programs that we support to track demographics, outcomes, and return on investment.

Respect for faith. We must respect each other's sources of faith and spirituality, accepting differences and welcoming the strength that comes from different religious faiths.

Humility. We must remain humble and committed, remembering that good works are always in service to others, not to promote our own careers.

Planning. We must take seriously the responsibility to plan and move systematically toward our individual futures and the futures of our organizations and our world.

This is Our Moment

We have formed this National Council of Young Leaders at a good moment in history. There is growing momentum toward taking seriously the need to provide opportunities for low-income youth to overcome the odds and join society as contributing members.

Those of us who have spent time out-of-school and out-of-work, formerly called “at-risk” or “disconnected” youth, appreciate the new language that names us “opportunity youth.” It accurately reflects the twin facts that we are seeking opportunity and we offer a major opportunity to our nation if it will invest in us and our peers.

There is also growing willingness to listen to the voices of young people. The White House Council on Community Solutions, the GradNation Campaign, the Opportunity Nation Coalition, the Youth Leadership Institute, and the effort to create a Presidential Youth Council are among visible efforts that provide fuel and credibility to our campaign to lift up our voices for opportunity and responsibility for all.

Primary Immediate Recommendations

Our top six recommendations for immediate public action are these:

1. Expand effective comprehensive programs

The comprehensive programs that are already succeeding with opportunity youth should be expanded. These are typically full-time programs that include education, job training, counseling, personal supports and mentors, leadership development opportunities, a positive peer group, pathways to college and jobs, and service opportunities in which young people can learn that it is possible to get paid for doing something good.

Every urban and rural low-income community should have an array of these programs that should be well publicized so that young people can find them and can see alternatives to the street life that is so pervasive. Most of us have experienced AmeriCorps, Back on Track Schools, Public Allies, Service and Conservation Corps, or YouthBuild programs. Through these publicly funded programs we found inspiring pathways to responsible adulthood. These and other effective federal, state, and local programs should be expanded to the limits of their capacity.

Based on a study done by Civic Enterprises, we have learned that an annual federal investment of \$6.4 billion a year in proven existing federal programs would reconnect one million young adults per year.¹ Each 20-year-old permanently reconnected to education and/or employment will directly save the taxpayer \$236,000 and will save a total social cost of \$704,000 over his or her lifetime.² Thus, if these programs succeed with just half of their participants, the lifetime direct return on investment to the taxpayer would be over \$118 billion for each year of investment. The social benefit would be \$350 billion.

The measurable benefits to society of investing in opportunity youth are enormous. Beyond those, the powerful ripple effects of our becoming responsible role models, family members, and community leaders can never be fully measured. Increasing investment in proven program models is the first obvious step.

2. Expand national service

Increase the inclusion of low-income people of all ages in giving service to their communities through national service programs like AmeriCorps, NCCC, Senior Corps, Service Learning, Volunteer Generation, and VISTA.

¹ *Bridge to Reconnection*, Civic Enterprises, John Bridgeland, 2012.

² *The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth*, Clive Belfield et al., 2012.

The impact of giving service dramatically changes the identity of low-income service-givers, causing them to commit to long-term civic engagement. The impact is similarly powerful on the rest of the community when we experience our own neighbors and peers as service-givers, rather than being passive recipients of charity from people of different class and racial backgrounds.

3. Expand private internships

Support internships that offer paid employment experience with private corporations that provide appropriate supports to the interns and potential for long-term hiring. Establish a corporate tax credit of up to \$4,000 for each six-month paid internship offered to low-income young adults that results in employment. Some of us have experienced amazing internships in the private sector through Year Up, coupled with college prep and a supportive community.

4. Increase all forms of mentoring

Expand mentoring programs and elevate both formal and informal mentoring as a core component for all programs serving opportunity youth. Young people need caring individual mentors to give us confidence, respect, and support in planning and working toward a productive future. We need mentors both from a similar background who have overcome familiar obstacles, and mentors from different backgrounds who can open whole new horizons.

5. Protect and expand pathways to higher education

Make sure that college and registered apprenticeships are affordable and attainable for low-income students. Education awards, scholarships, low-cost community and state colleges, loans that are not predatory or excessively burdensome, and Pell Grants for nontraditional students must be protected and expanded, barriers to obtaining them reduced, and pathways to college strengthened. We understand that higher education is one key to lifelong success.

6. Reform the criminal justice system

End the pipeline to prison for children and youth, make sure punishments actually fit the crimes, eliminate disparities in sentencing that correlate with race, and end the various forms of lifetime punishments for all offenders that destroy lives, families, and communities. Expand second chance and re-entry programs for all offenders.

Core Elements of Interventions that Work for Opportunity Youth

We have experienced what works and what doesn't work for individuals like ourselves. Below we list the program elements and philosophy that provide positive pathways for opportunity youth.

All young people need the following:

- Relief from the struggle for survival that comes with homelessness, hunger, violence, drugs and alcohol, family breakup, and suicidal depression
- A safe, caring community where everyone is committed to each other's success
- Caring individual mentors who give us confidence that we have value and help us identify and achieve our goals
- A positive peer group
- Access to quality education and job-skills training to become employable
- Connection to various sources of faith and spirituality
- Opportunities to serve others, to give back, to find the joy and satisfaction of making a positive difference
- The space to redefine and believe in ourselves, to realize "this negative life is not for me," to embrace the backgrounds from which we come, to recognize our strengths, to plan for a meaningful and satisfying future
- A chance for creativity and for recreational opportunities
- Opportunities to experience new horizons
- Assurance that college is within reach if we choose that path
- People who see the good in us
- A chance to study the history of our own people and to become aware of the strengths in our cultural history
- Stipends, wages, or living allowances during training and/or service, to enable participation for young people who must earn money
- Opportunities to learn leadership skills and play leadership roles, realizing our larger value to society

Programs that combine the above elements will work for the majority of young people as long as they are well led, well planned, and well staffed. They will break the cycle of poverty, one young person at a time, profoundly benefiting society.

Broader Systems Change for a Better Nation

While we believe pathways are needed for individuals to climb out of poverty, we also think big changes in various systems are needed to transform our communities. It should not take heroic resilience and major investments for individuals to triumph over systemic barriers. We need to create safe, welcoming, opportunity-rich communities for every child born in America.

Below we outline our initial thoughts in the areas of **education, criminal justice, community development, and family.**

Education

Education is the key pathway for individuals to transcend poverty and for our nation to succeed economically and socially. We support the following as elements of a successful public system of education:

- Quality Head Start and other pre-kindergarten options
- High-quality, passionate, caring teachers who are skilled, experienced, and culturally competent to work with low-income students
- Well-managed, safe, organized schools with predictable policies and procedures
- Instruction that is relevant and rigorous, that includes high level of engagement, high standards, and prepares students for college and careers
- Increased funding—and more effective use of existing funding—that allows for:
 - Smaller classes
 - Individualized academic supports for students
 - Enough staff in the classroom to support all students and help them learn
 - Grouping by learning style
 - More technology resources like computers and internet access
 - More support for bilingual students

- Guidance counselors
- Enrichment programs such as art, music, poetry, and sports
- Internships
- Curriculum that includes the young people's cultural history in an accurate and fair manner, life skills, and information about college access
- Assessment measures that take into account different learning styles, are not too burdensome, and don't put all the attention on the tests
- Disciplinary policies that are used as learning opportunities, are more restorative than punitive, and that don't serve as a pipeline to prison through expulsion
- Greater community connection with the schools, engaging parents and family, police, and positive role models from the community
- A college-going culture that offers early exposure to college and career options, and full information about college access
- Multiple pathways to success, including college, technical trade schools, and internships. Each pathway should respect a student's skills and interests and not direct a student towards a single career pathway—college versus trade schools, for example—based on race or income level.
- Second-chance alternative or charter schools for students who left high school without a diploma
- A funding structure that does not favor wealthier communities

All of these elements should add up to schools in which every student knows that the teachers and other adults respect and care about them and are committed to their success.

Criminal justice

Too many of our peers are expected to be dead or in jail before they are 25, and many internalize this expectation for themselves. We see evidence all around us that this is what happens in our neighborhoods when young men and women fall off track. It appears that the pipeline to prison has been well laid. We need young people to have ways to break this cycle. The improvements listed above in the public schools will help break that pipeline. In addition we support the following:

- A renewed effort to build collaborative community commitment to safety and crime prevention by
 - Engaging churches and community centers in supporting children and youth
 - Providing mental health and grief counseling for children and youth who have lost friends and family members through violence
 - Highlighting positive role models in the neighborhood
 - Rebuilding relationships and communication between the police and the community so residents can trust police and work with them
 - Making sure police are actually policing the hot spots instead of ignoring them
 - Training police in community relationships, sensitivity, and not stereotyping young men of color and communities of color
 - Creating safe routes for children to get to school, and safe playgrounds
 - Bringing back activity programs like the Police Athletic League
 - Encouraging residents to take responsibility for correcting each other
 - Making sure young people and all residents are aware of the laws and the consequences of various types of action; new laws should be publicized widely

- The elimination of unfair sentencing
 - Juveniles should not be sentenced as adults.
 - Black, Hispanic, and Native American individuals should not be subject to more severe sentences than white individuals who committed a similar crime.
 - Mandatory sentences should be eliminated, “three strikes you’re out laws” reversed, and judges should have more discretion to recognize the potential of offenders to benefit from alternatives to incarceration.

- Second chances for youthful offenders to rebuild their lives
 - Create pathways other than incarceration for lesser offenses.
 - Provide high quality education and group reflection behind the walls.
 - Provide re-entry programs smoothing the path to employment, education, and community service.
 - Allow for expunging records.

- Allow ex-offenders to submit their achievements to the criminal history systems bank so that potential employers can see not only the criminal record but the subsequent positive actions.
- Do not permanently deny offenders the right to public housing, voting, scholarships, running for office, and the like.
- Stop expanding the for-profit prison system. We do not believe that some people should have a financial stake in other people being incarcerated.

Community development

We envision a community that is empowered and educated to know that every individual's actions matter—that what you do, what you buy, whether you vote, whether you help your neighbors, matters. We need role models and leaders to carry out campaigns for engagement, for building social, financial, educational, and cultural capital. We would like to see residents of all ages volunteering to benefit the community. We would also aim to break the cycle of dependence and generate opportunity for residents to take responsibility for themselves and their community.

Some specifics in our vision include:

- Access to basic services like low-cost public transportation, public health clinics, affordable housing, good public schools, weatherized homes, child care, healthy food, and neighborhood gardens
- Special attention to the needs of tribal and rural communities for low cost public transportation, broadband access, and rights to natural resources especially including water
- Voter registration, education, and engagement
- Youth forums to strengthen youth knowledge and voice
- A process of engaging youth in mapping the assets and needs of their communities and making these known to others, using a zip code search process
- Basic community organizing, knocking on every door, to engage people in community improvement projects
- A full array of positive recreational activities including football, basketball, soccer, music and art
- Support for small business and nonprofit development: training, capital, loans, fundraising assistance

- Incentives to local business owners and contractors to hire local residents and encouragement of residents to buy from local small businesses
- Police community relations strengthened to address drug use and abuse
- Comprehensive second chance programs for “opportunity youth” as described in our primary recommendations.

Family

In our experience the reality of family has changed, and so has the definition of family. Most of us do not have two parents. In our families the oldest boy is the man, siblings raise siblings, foster care or grandparent care is common. We deal with negative family influences daily, including drugs and alcohol, unemployment, dependency, and poverty. The family once influenced and defined society. Now it seems that various forces in society have broken our families.

For children and youth to overcome these negative influences, society must find ways to answer our deep need for human connection. Every child needs a father or another strong positive male influence, and we all need a mother, someone to talk to, someone to hug us, whether it’s a blood relationship or not. We need something we can call a family, where we know that people care about us. We are struggling to answer the questions “Who Am I” and “What’s my Purpose in Life?” We need people to help us answer these questions.

In a larger sense, we also need to belong to a more united society with a positive culture that does not discriminate against people based on race or culture, income level, or residential zip code, and where neighbors take an interest in each other and help each other. We understand this is a big challenge. Neighbors are more afraid of helping each other than they used to be.

Here are some specific suggestions:

- Strengthen all nonprofit community-based support organizations for children and youth, including things like Big Brothers, Big Sisters, community centers, and all forms of mentoring programs.
- Create caring and smaller school communities where teachers and counselors take a personal interest in the students.
- Reform foster care, screening foster parents much more thoroughly and making sure the motive for serving as foster parents is not money.
- Add respectful and sensitive curriculum in schools and community centers about various groups’ cultural history to help us answer the question

“Who Am I?” and to counteract the internalized negative stereotypes that we experience growing up.

- Expand the job, education, and service programs that allow us to belong to a positive peer group gaining skills, supporting each other, finding caring mentors, and giving service to our communities, so we can build a positive identity and realize that we have value and can build a responsible future. This brings us back to our top recommendations.

We believe that in the absence of a strong family it does take a village to raise a child. However, not only our families but also our villages are in disrepair. Now it will take a nation to repair the village.

We ask the leaders of our nation to please invest in the programs that have already saved our own and many other young lives, and will do the same for the young people coming behind us. These programs help repair our villages and they create surrogate families.

In closing

We believe in what Martin Luther King called the “Fierce urgency of now!” There is no time to waste. Millions of lives are at stake.

About the Members of the National Council of Young Leaders

Jamiel L. Alexander

York, Pennsylvania

Affiliated organization: YouthBuild USA



Jamiel Alexander is a graduate of the Crispus Attucks Youth-Build Charter School in York, Pennsylvania, and an Ameri-Corps alumnus. As youth and family education programs manager at Crispus Attucks, Jamiel is responsible for a wide variety of activities, including

the running of after-school programs, family education workshops, community service projects, and blood drives. He also assists with counseling, consulting, event planning, and fundraising.

Despite struggles during his youth, at which time he dropped out of high school and was at risk of incarceration, Jamiel has become a rising star in his community. Last year, York Mayor Kim Bracey nominated Jamiel to the General Authority Board, which oversees the financing of municipal projects and parking operations, saying that “I’m excited about Jamiel’s appointment because he is able to bring a community perspective to the board.”

In 2012, Jamiel’s colleagues on the YouthBuild USA National Alumni Council elected him as their president. In that role he is charged with advocating for issues of concern for graduates. A frequent speaker on panels and at conferences about issues affecting low income youth and their communities, Jamiel deeply believes in “Service Above Self.”

Lashon Amado

Brockton, Massachusetts

Affiliated organization: YouthBuild USA



Lashon Amado enrolled at the University of Massachusetts Boston for the fall 2011 semester after receiving an associate degree at Massasoit Community College (MCC) with a GPA of 3.8. Today, Lashon stands poised for a future career in criminal justice. He

also serves as a local and national student leader, participating in speaking engagements across the country. In this role, Lashon’s leadership skills, resiliency, and spirit of service have inspired hundreds of students and educators in his community of Brockton, Massachusetts, and beyond.

Lashon achieved all of this success after dropping out of Brockton High School. When Lashon enrolled in YouthBuild in 2009, he says he had never considered college or anything beyond getting a GED and a paycheck. However, the staff and other students and graduates of YouthBuild Brockton helped Lashon consider all the ways that college could fit into his life and work plans. Lashon participated in classes at MCC while he was still at YouthBuild. At the conclusion of YouthBuild, Lashon transitioned into a bridge program at MCC that helped prepare him for academic and personal success in college.

Gilbert Bonafé Jr.

The Bronx, New York

Affiliated organization: National College Advising Corps



Gilbert Bonafé Jr., 25, is currently a graduate student at the Harvard Graduate School of Education working towards a masters in higher education. A native of the Bronx, Gilbert grew up in a low-income housing district and attended Aviation High School in Long

Island City, Queens. In high school, Gilbert joined a TRIO program called Upward Bound that exposed him to the possibility of higher education. The assistant director of Upward Bound nominated him for the Posse Scholarship, a full tuition leadership scholarship, which he received. The scholarship allowed him to attend Dickinson College in Carlisle, PA, where he majored in Spanish. After Dickinson, Gilbert became a college adviser for Greencastle Antrim High School in Greencastle, PA, through the National College Advising Corps. He worked there for two years and is now at Harvard.

Gilbert hopes to someday work within higher education to promote access, improve retention and persistence, and ensure student success. He has seen many of his family members and friends struggle economically and he aspires to help the next generation break out of that using education.

“I wouldn’t have been able to make it to where I am today if it weren’t for people betting on me. By educating myself, I am getting ready to step up to the ticket window to place my bets on the next generation.”

Ramean Clowney

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Affiliated organizations: Jobs for the Future and the Philadelphia Youth Network



Ramean Clowney, 20, recently began his sophomore year at the Community College of Philadelphia. A native of Philadelphia and a product of the Pennsylvania foster-care system, Ramean overcame personal struggles—exposure to violence, drugs, and abuse—to graduate with honors from the One Bright Ray Community High School, where he was a member of the basketball team and participated on the drum line.

Ramean is currently chief youth ambassador for the Philadelphia Youth Network, one of the city’s leading youth programs. In this role, he is one of several advocates for local youth.

Ramean, who aspires to one day run for a seat on the Philadelphia City Council, intends to study political science at Howard University and eventually attend law school.

“Retrospectively (speaking), I guess you can say I was in search of me . . . now I no longer settle for mediocrity—excellence is a must.”

Ryan Dalton

New Orleans, Louisiana

Affiliated organization: Youth Leadership Institute



Ryan Dalton, 24, attends Southern University at New Orleans, where he is pursuing a business degree. He worked as a trainer and manager for Café Reconcile’s culinary training and workforce development program in his hometown of New Orleans,

Louisiana. Ryan Dalton now works for the mayor’s Office in addition to serving as a National Youth Ambassador for the Youth Leadership Institute, engaging America’s opportunity youth to raise their voices and tell their stories, to educate communities and bring allies together, to make change, and to empower and engage young people to make a difference in their own communities. The National Ambassadors program brings together youth from across the country to highlight the underlying challenges facing opportunity youth—youth between 16 and 24 who are neither enrolled in school nor participating in the labor market—supporting efforts that help communities come together to address the challenges experienced by members of our generation many times forgotten within political spaces.

Ryan also serves as an advisory board member for The John Besh & Jessica Bride Mayor “Chefs Move” Scholarship, which prepares aspiring chefs for positions in the culinary profession. In this role, Ryan is working to recruit young minority chefs from New Orleans. Additionally, Ryan is the creator and CEO of The PUSH Project, a program dedicated to helping youth develop their passions.

During his youth, Ryan faced tremendous hardships. He was a victim of violence, was shot multiple times, nearly lost his life, and experienced the murder of his oldest brother and close cousin. He and his family were displaced following Hurricane Katrina, and he had to leave high school without a diploma to help and support his family. Later, in 2007 he returned to New Orleans alone, on a mission to obtain his high school diploma. Yet, not only has Ryan attained great success in improving his own life circumstances, he has assisted many young people in doing the same. In his time of

doing this amazing work, Ryan have impacted over 2,100 youth across the New Orleans area.

Reflecting on his childhood and his ability to overcome personal challenges, Ryan says that “the solution must come from within and in order to identify the solution, you must fully understand the problem.”

Ladine Daniels Jr.

Charleston, South Carolina

Affiliated organization: The Corps Network



Ladine Daniels Jr., 32, graduated at the top of his class at the Sustainability Institute’s Pathways to a Green Economy. He is currently a crew leader and mentor for the Institute’s Energy Conservation Corps, an AmeriCorps program. He is also a 2012 Corps Network Member of the Year.

Ladine has accomplished much since he was incarcerated. A high school graduate and star quarterback, while in prison he tutored fellow inmates helping them to obtain their GEDs.

Ladine has turned his life around—and he hasn’t looked back. In addition to his work with the Sustainability Institute and The Corps Network, Ladine has immersed himself in a number of activities to advance his career and support his community. He is part owner of IMSEI Weatherization Company; manages the kitchen at the Charleston Riverdogs Baseball Team; operates his own landscaping business; and is a church usher. And he volunteers with youth, always “reminding them of the importance of getting an education and staying out of trouble.”

Cherise Flowers

Chicago, Illinois

Affiliated organization: Year Up



Cherise Flowers, 25, is currently a student pursuing a degree in computer networking.

At 17, Cherise left high school without her diploma, and while she quickly obtained her GED, she had faced a major

hurdle of having to seek employment with a record.

In 2012, Cherise graduated from Year Up. Following her one-year internship, she was able to acquire gainful employment at Responsys, where she edits, tests, and launches e-mail campaigns through interactive programs using the Responsys platform.

“Young adults where I come from face many hardships. Our challenges consist of unstable homes, inability to find employment, crime, teenage parenting, child care, transportation, and lack of mentorship and positive role models, amongst many other adversities. . . . I believe we have to find ways to motivate young adults . . . because if no one cares about their situation then why should they?”

Francisco Garcia

Los Angeles, California

Affiliated organization: Youth Leadership Institute



Francisco Garcia, 27, is a professional artist. A student at Rio Hondo College and Art Center College and Design in California, he works as a public muralist in California and Arizona. As a teen he left his hometown of Los Angeles and became involved in illegal graffiti and other activity

following his move to Phoenix, Arizona.

A life-changing event occurred in 2003, when Francisco attended a church-sponsored youth night in Mesa and found his calling as a result of a testimonial rap performance, which he says led him to evolve from illegal street artist to public muralist focused on social activism.

Since 2009, Francisco has been a mentor to emerging graffiti artists, teaching them the benefits of creating art for the community and for social change. He credits a number of programs, including AmeriCorps, Chicanos Por La Causa, Public Allies, and Youth Leadership Institute (YLI), with having a positive influence on his life. It was YLI that facilitated a trip to Washington, DC, where he was interviewed by members of Congress about youth jobs and his community art.

Of his art and mentoring he says, “I believe God blessed me with many talents, and one of those talents is being able to paint murals and work with youth at risk. . . . It brings warmth to my heart when I am a witness to youth making a difference in their own community and living their dreams.”

Megan Gregory

Anchorage, Alaska

Affiliated organization: National Congress of American Indians



Megan Gregory, 26, is originally from Keex Kwaan (Kake, AK), and is of the Ch'aak' (Eagle)/Wooshketon (Shark) clan of the Tlingit tribe and a member of the Central Council Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska (CCTHITA). Ms. Gregory currently resides in

Anchorage, and is committed to serving Indian Country and actively supports addressing the critical health needs of her people. She advocates strongly for addressing the cultural, educational, and social issues affecting Alaska Natives and American Indians, and works diligently to address the high rates of suicide across Indian country.

Megan works for Best Beginnings, an early childhood development nonprofit, as the partnerships manager, facilitating local, sustainable community empowerment to improve outcomes for young children through early childhood coalitions. Previously she worked for Southeast Alaska Regional Health Consortium's (SEARHC) Behavioral Health Division as the community project coordinator. She began her work with SEARHC as a volunteer on its 1 is 2 Many Suicide Prevention Task Force, and founded the Southeast Alaska Youth Ambassador program to bridge the gap between youth and adults and give all youth a role, and a voice, in creating

positive change in their communities. The program includes one youth leader from 16 communities in her region that work with the 1 is 2 Many Task Force. It encourages students to generate new ways to champion suicide prevention.

Megan was a Youth Board member for Sealaska Corporation and a member of the Executive Council for CCTHITA. In 2012, she was nominated by the National Congress of American Indians to serve on the National Council of Young Leaders. She was also one of three young board members named to the Center for Native American Youth Board of Directors. The Center is dedicated to improving the health, safety and overall well-being of Native American youth through communication, policy development and advocacy.

Megan also works with the Rural Alaska Community Action Programs Alaska Native Youth Success Advisory Group, which was created to identify best practices for intervention, diversion, enforcement, treatment and reentry services while providing feedback on the development of the ANYS Resource Center. She also serves on the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention—Alaska Native and American Indian Native Taskforce, a public-private partnership advancing the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention.

She received the 2011 National Indian Health Service Behavioral Health Achievement Award for outstanding leadership in suicide prevention. In 2012, she received the Aiding Women in Abuse and Rape Emergencies Woman of Distinction Award—the youngest honoree to date.

Shawnice Jackson

Baltimore, Maryland

Affiliated organization: Public Allies



Shawnice Jackson, 25, is a young professional committed to the advancement of positive youth development through mentoring and advocacy. She currently works as a project manager for the Family League of Baltimore and the

Baltimore mayor's office where she is responsible for the oversight and development of “Success

Mentors” — a new pilot attendance mentoring initiative within the Baltimore City Public Schools.

A native of East Baltimore, Shawnice graduated from Eastern Technical High School and is currently in her senior year at University of Baltimore, where she is majoring in human services administration. After graduation she plans to pursue advanced degrees in urban education leadership.

An alumna of Public Allies in Maryland, she has served as a project coordinator for Mentoring Children of Incarcerated Parents, a Baltimore Rising program, and as volunteer and provider relations coordinator at Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Greater Chesapeake. Now as a volunteer Big Sister at BBBSCG, she continues to give of her time in support of the wellbeing of young people in her community. A court-appointed special advocate for abused and neglected children with CASA Baltimore City, Shawnice hopes one day to begin her own youth development program and to become Superintendent of Baltimore City Public Schools.

Julie Jent

Berea, Kentucky

Affiliated organization: Berea College



Julie Jent, 18, is currently a student at Berea College where she enjoys cross country running and volunteering. Julie is working towards a double major in political science and peace and social justice. Julie grew up in the one-stoplight

town of Jackson County, Kentucky, where she was involved in many educational programs at her high school, such as Family And Schools Together, Upward Bound Math and Science, and Youth Working Group. Julie was the first in her family to go to college. Despite the challenge of having absent parents and being adopted by her great uncle, Julie has risen above and done more than anyone expected.

Julie received the Kennedy Lugar YES-Abroad Scholarship to Malaysia and was a youth ambassador during her senior year of high school. She grew immensely over the year and adapted well considering being out of her comfort zone on a daily basis. Julie has a passion for learning about other cultures.

Upon arriving back to the States, she received the honor of representing her TRIO program at a session—at this ‘Beating the Odds’ session, led by First Lady Michelle Obama, Julie got to tell her story and give suggestions on a personal level.

Julie is thrilled to see where she can make more differences as a new member of the National Council of Young Leaders.

Deon Jones

Washington, DC

Affiliated organization: Be The Change



Deon Jones is special project assistant to the president at Be The Change Inc., a social entrepreneurial organization that creates and manages national issue-based campaigns, such as ServiceNation, Opportunity Nation, and Got Your 6. He is

also the founder and facilitator of the Manifest Leadership Institute, an academic and leadership development program for formerly incarcerated teenage boys. Prior to joining Be The Change, Deon served as national spokesperson at the Campaign for Youth Justice, where he traveled globally speaking on the organization’s mission to end youth incarceration in the US adult criminal justice system. Previously, Deon served as a DC advisory neighborhood commissioner representing Ward 3 from 2011–13, making him the youngest elected official in Washington’s history. In 2013, the DC City Council passed the “Deon T. Jones Recognition Resolution of 2013” honoring his service to the city and commitment to empowering young people.

Deon has a BA in political science from American University and King’s College London, and was a public policy and international affairs fellow at the University of California, Berkeley. While at American University, he held fellowship and internship positions with the US Senate, the US House of Representatives, the White House, and Teach for America. He is the first African American from American University to be appointed a Harry S. Truman Scholar by former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and the Harry S. Truman Scholarship Foundation.

In addition to being a member of the National Council of Young Leaders, Deon serves on the board of directors at America's Promise Alliance and the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation's Alumni Association.

Raechal Perez

Oakland, California

Affiliated organization: National College Advising Corps



Raechal Kristyne Perez was born and raised in Los Angeles, California, and double majored in English and Urban Studies at the University of California–Berkeley. Coming from a large family with seven younger brothers, Raechal was

the first in her family to attend college. Gravitating toward educational access programs serving low-income families and students who would be first in their family to finish high school and further their education. During her undergraduate coursework, Raechal worked with AmeriCorps and after graduation served two years with the National College Advising Corp at UC Berkeley. Raechal is continuing her work with Trio Talent Search at UC Berkeley and is currently attending Cal State East Bay to acquire a masters degree in public administration with an emphasis in management and policy.

Christopher Prado

Stockton, California

Member-at-Large



Christopher Prado, 23, is a first-generation college graduate. He was the president of his student body in his senior year at California State University, East Bay. A former intercollegiate athlete, he majored in political science and spent the

fall semester of his junior year interning for a member of Congress in Washington, DC, through the current US Secretary of Defense, Leon & Sylvia Panetta's Institute for Public Policy.

Christopher witnessed the struggles that his father faced, such as leaving high school before obtaining his diploma to help support his family, a move that impeded his ability to move up the socioeco-

nomie ladder. Christopher chose a different path by investing in his education.

Concerned about the economic and social problems of his hometown of Stockton, Christopher returned to Stockton to work on a local city council campaign and as an after-school educator at Aspire Langston Hughes Academy.

Armed with a sense of urgency about the need to change conditions in his community and inspired by the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Christopher says, "We can't allow the tranquilizing drug of gradualism to stop us from efforts to make change now."

Adam Strong

Hazard, Kentucky

Affiliated organization: YouthBuild USA Rural and Tribal Initiative



Adam Strong, 22, is a student at the University of Kentucky. He is deeply interested in the medical field and is working towards his BA in medical laboratory science.

Raised by his father in an Appalachian community in

Jackson, Adam attended his local community college, working as a security guard at a local coal mine at a time when the coal industry was in decline. Soon he found himself unemployed and without options, but was able to gain entry into the YouthBuild Hazard program.

At YouthBuild, Adam took part in community service and outreach projects while receiving a stipend. The experience helped introduce him to new possibilities, opportunities, and a new perspective on life.

After gaining admission to the University of Kentucky, Adam was selected to serve as a student representative on his college's presidential search committee, and he was later elected vice president of the student government.

As a full-time AmeriCorps member, serving YouthBuild Hazard as a teacher's aide, Adam characterizes his experience this way: "It feels great to be able to give back and help youth see their potential and strengths."

Philandrian Tree

Flagstaff, Arizona

Affiliated organization: The Corps Network



Philandrian Tree, 27, born in the Edgewater Clan, is a member of the Towering House Clan of the Navajo Nation. She is currently the tribal and program liaison to the Coconino County District 4 Supervisor, tasked with, but not limited to, community relations and com-

munications between her office and tribal communities.

Philandrian served two terms as an AmeriCorps mentor and was selected as The Corps Network's 2012 Corps Member of the Year. As an AmeriCorps mentor she had a great opportunity to work in her home community on behalf of the Coconino Rural Environment Corps and secured two memoranda of understanding between Coconino County and the Navajo's Leupp and Tonalea Chapters.

This collaboration between the county and Navajo resulted in all 17 Navajo chapters receiving Coconino County weatherization retrofits; and in the process, AmeriCorps members benefitted from on-the-job training with participating local contractors in the Navajo Nation Weatherization Assistance Program.

In addition to her work with Coconino County, Philandrian serves as the chair of the Native American Parent Advisory Committee for Flagstaff Unified School District, where she works with families and the District to support and enhance the quality of education for 2,500 Native K-12 students.

Sotheara Yem

San Francisco, California

Affiliated organization: Year Up



Sotheara Yem, 26, is a special projects coordinator at Year Up, where he provides data management support in human resources, and also a community manager at Urban Pioneer, a real estate agency in San Francisco.

During his free time, Sotheara volunteers at the Vietnamese Youth Development Center and supports youth transitioning into independent living, connecting them to jobs and housing services.

In 2009, Sotheara was laid off from his sales associate job at Macy's because of downsizing. This loss of employment dramatically changed his life—he lost his possessions and soon became homeless. It was during this period that he was introduced to Year Up.

Year Up changed his life as it offered Sotheara job training, providing a stipend and important skills that prepared him for life on his own. He is grateful to the organization that supported him at a time when he felt he had nowhere to turn.

Regarding his current job and volunteer work, Sotheara says, "I enjoy helping others and I feel like I owe my success to social support organizations like Year Up, because without them I wouldn't be where I am today."

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Principles for Action

Love

Responsibility

Forgiveness and empathy

Community empowerment

Inclusion

Visibility

Collaboration

Accountability for results

Respect for faith

Humility

Planning

NATIONAL COUNCIL
of
YOUNG LEADERS
OPPORTUNITY YOUTH UNITED

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