YO! Baltimore is sponsored by the Mayor, the Baltimore City Council, and multiple workforce partners.

YO! Baltimore
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410.396.6722
www.yobaltimore.org

-changing minds
-changing lives

Baltimore’s Youth Opportunity
2000-2007
Executive Summary

YO! Baltimore was created to address a growing challenge. Thousands of Baltimore City’s young people were on the streets – young people who lacked education, skills, and credentials. Many also lacked any idea of what it takes to succeed in the labor force. Research and common sense suggested that without the opportunity to make the transition to the adult world of work, youth in these circumstances were highly susceptible to aberrant behaviors that could lead to significant negative consequences for themselves and their neighborhoods.

When a community faces this type of situation, which Baltimore did in 2000, it recognizes that what is needed goes well beyond the positive impact a single youth program might offer. Baltimore’s leaders knew that in addition to supporting school reform efforts, they needed to develop a comprehensive network of education and training programs and engage a wide variety of human service providers to work collaboratively and form an integrated system. Ideally this system would address the multiple issues facing out-of-school, unemployed youth and identify and build on their many talents and attributes. More important, this system needed to operate at a scale that could make a measurable dent in the growing at-risk youth population.

This was the challenge that confronted Baltimore when the federal government offered a limited number of cities the opportunity to participate in a Department of Labor demonstration youth program called Youth Opportunity. The overall design of the federal effort was to concentrate a significant amount of resources on the most at-risk youth between the ages of 14 and 21 who were living in the local area’s most impoverished neighborhoods. The initiative called for the creation of a comprehensive youth service system providing skills training, basic education and work experience, committed involvement of caring adults, and developmental opportunities aimed at assisting the young people in the successful transition to adulthood and responsible citizenship.

Baltimore successfully competed against hundreds of communities across the nation and was awarded a Youth Opportunity grant in March 2000. Then the hard work of making Baltimore’s vision a reality began. A committed team of representatives of youth organizations, city agencies, the public school system, post-secondary institutions and neighborhood groups began building a youth service system and by 2001 YO! Baltimore became fully operational.

Federal requirements limited YO! Baltimore to certain geographical areas designated as Baltimore’s Empowerment Zone (EZ). This area included 33 residential neighborhoods on the east, south and west sides of Baltimore. The targeted communities topped the charts in terms of people living in poverty, unemployment and crime rates, as well as a host of other negative social statistics. Collectively, more than 10,000 young people lived in the EZ and were already a part of, or at high risk of adding to, Baltimore’s significant level of unemployed or under-employed young adults.
As the Youth Opportunity grant funding expired on June 30, 2006, it is now time to look back, assess the hard work and expenditure of $38 million in federal funds and determine what has been accomplished. A comprehensive summary of YO! Baltimore’s impressive list of achievements is contained in this report, and detailed on the YO! website, www.yobaltimore.org.

The following shares some highlights of these accomplishments:

- YO! designed, renovated and equipped five new, highly automated youth “places,” creating an effective, community-based network of service centers.
- YO! engaged over 4,300 young people in a variety of programs – many of these individuals are still actively participating and are on track to enter the workforce or college in 2005 and 2006.
- YO! filled more than 2,000 jobs in Baltimore City for over 600 different employers.
- YO! helped more than 1,600 young people gain valuable educational credentials (post-secondary degree, high school diploma/GED/vocational skill credential).
- YO! participants entering the labor force earned wages at a rate 44% higher than a comparable peer group.
- YO! participants dropped out of school less often, attended class more frequently and graduated from school at a higher rate than their school peers who did not enroll in the program.
- YO! female participants had babies less frequently than non-participants and, in fact, were 25% less likely to have a child than the comparison group.
- YO! participants 18 and older showed a third fewer arrests and convictions of crimes than a comparable group. Participants were also half as likely to be arrested for a violent offense as the comparison group.

This list continues in the report, and along with the accompanying statistics, clearly proves that YO! Baltimore has had and continues to have a major impact on one of the most disadvantaged groups in our city.

While the data show that life is already improving in many ways for thousands of these young people, the true return on investment will be evident in the years to come as the YO! participants who are now on a positive trajectory attend college, start their long term careers, support their families and contribute to Baltimore’s economy.

Not to be forgotten are the lessons learned from the YO! experience. These lessons span a wide spectrum – from discovering what services worked best with disconnected, out-of-school youth, to confirm-
In 2006 with support from the City of Baltimore, YO! Baltimore opened its doors to young people living in all of the city’s neighborhoods.

YO! Baltimore: Changing Minds / Changing Lives

In 2006-2007, 175 youth improved at least one grade level in either reading or math. Forty-six (46) youth earned their GED or high school diploma. There were 10 youth enrolled in college during the year, and another 124 were taking a specific career training course.

**Summary**

Since YO! Baltimore began in 2000, month-after-month, youth with significant life challenges and substantial failures decided to enroll in the program because they wanted to belong to something positive and move their lives forward in a positive direction. YO! Baltimore continues to prove its impact on the youth it serves. Through its many partners, it is continuing to provide the vital services these previously disconnected young people need to grow into productive citizens.

Important gains are being made to help reconnect these young adults to a path filled with opportunities to improve educational, employability, and social skills – a path that leads to academic accomplishments, sustainable jobs, and positive community contributions. However, the full impact cannot yet be fully measured but will be revealed over time as these young adults – previously given little hope for the future – continue to realize their potential and apply the lessons learned through YO! Baltimore.

It is essential for the future of Baltimore and other cities to provide the guidance, job training, and sense of purpose to youth and young adults who have not met with success in traditional settings. YO! Baltimore is proving that establishing a comprehensive youth development system pays rewards not only for the participants, but also for the general community. YO! Baltimore will continue to spread its message of accomplishment as it continues to seek additional resources to meet the needs of all deserving Baltimore youth and young adults.

**YO! Baltimore is proving that establishing a comprehensive youth development system pays rewards not only for the participants, but also for the general community.**

YO! Baltimore is changing the mindset of many youth who believed they would not succeed because they were denied the chance to succeed. Through YO! thousands of youngsters have been given opportunities and provided access to the developmental tools they needed to prepare for the future. In changing minds and offering assistance, YO! changed young lives. The following sections of this report tell stories illustrative of the many of lives that YO! has influenced.

While much has been accomplished for youth living in selected neighborhoods of Baltimore, much is still needed throughout the city to address the growing numbers of disconnected and unprepared youth. A recent report by researchers from Northeastern University shares that 51% of Baltimore’s young people between the ages of 16 and 24 are out of school and out of work. This statistic is telling, and it underscores the need to sustain YO! Baltimore and continue to expand it to serve all of Baltimore’s disconnected youth. In 2006 with support from the City of Baltimore, YO! Baltimore opened its doors to young people living in all of the city’s neighborhoods. With its existing infrastructure, expertise, and proven track record, YO! Baltimore is the foundation for such a citywide YO! system.

This report continues to be a call to action. Individuals, organizations and key stakeholders in Baltimore’s future are urged to join the effort to ensure our city’s most disadvantaged and disenfranchised young people have the support they need and deserve. Please contact Mr. Ernest Dorsey at 410-396-6722 or edorsey@oedworks.com indicating your level of interest and sharing the commitment you can make to help sustain the YO! Baltimore System.

Don’t wait – Baltimore’s future is now.
YO! Baltimore: Building a “Youth System”

The Beginning

The genesis of a “youth system” in Baltimore started in the spring of 1999. A group of dedicated youth service providers came together to consider what could be done to assist disadvantaged, out of school youth in the city. Concerned about high dropout rates and an unprepared, unskilled workforce, the Mayor’s Office of Employment Development (MOED) convened this group to examine ideas and options to help young adults prepare for their transition into responsible citizens and labor force participants.

At about the same time, the United States Congress added language to the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) calling for a comprehensive youth demonstration project to be labeled the “Youth Opportunity” program or “YO.” The federal initiative was designed to be a five-year effort, which would channel significant levels of resources to selected high poverty communities throughout the nation. Baltimore competed for, and along with 35 other communities across the country was awarded a “YO” grant in March 2000.

The YO! Goals

In many ways, the YO! Baltimore plan was very straightforward. The goal was to establish a comprehensive youth services system in the target area and have this system aggressively act to provide out of school youth and those most at risk of dropping out of school who lived in the YO! area with opportunities to:

- Increase labor market skills and gain career-starting employment,
- Raise educational attainment rates,
- Fully tap their potential for becoming productive and self-supporting citizens.

Success would be measured by an increase in the employment rate, graduation rate and college enrollment of young people residing in the specific neighborhoods.

The YO! Target Area

Following federal guidelines, the target community was nearly identical to Baltimore’s Empowerment Zone (EZ). Covering 25 census tracts in 33 residential neighborhoods on the east, south and west sides of the city, it was an area of extreme poverty. The four following graphs represent the social and economic issues people in YO! Youth are expected to improve.

The top three industries in which youth were placed were:

- 32% hospitality and food services
- 8% retail trades
- 15% administrative and support services

Academic Achievement

YO! staff encourage its new participants to understand the correlation between academic credentials and one’s capacity to earn higher wages. Those with diplomas enroll into college, and youth without them are encouraged to participate in basic literacy, pre-GED, GED, or online credit-recovery classes based on their grade level assessment. Reading and math skill levels are very low for the average entering YO! participant, but all participants are expected to improve.

Employment and Earnings

The road to recovery for these disconnected youth and young adults continues to be through education and employment. During the 2006-2007 program year, more than 80% of YO! participants were either working or engaged in an education program. Of those working, 38% were also pursuing educational goals in structured programs. The hourly wages of those working was $8.41.

Participation in YO! Baltimore prepares young adults for the world of work by improving attitudes, interest and abilities to succeed on the job – attributes employers seek when hiring for entry level positions. It is a fact that youth who increase their educational attainment and build their workplace resumes are more likely to succeed on the job. YO!’s Job Readiness Training is already having an impact on earnings as completers are earning $21 more per week than those not participating in the training.

When Korinne enrolled in YO! Baltimore she was a high school dropout and a young mother of a three-month old child. She realized that it would be hard to work toward her high school diploma, find employment, and take care of her young son. But Korinne was determined to get her life back on track and focused on setting education and employment goals.

She enrolled in GED classes at the YO! center and when she couldn’t find child care, she brought her son with her. Her YO! advocate and newly found YO! friends would help look after her son, when needed, so that Korinne could focus on her studies in the GED class and her job readiness trainings.

She started working a part-time job while continuing her GED preparation. Her first attempt at the GED exam resulted in passing all but one test area. But the combination of Korinne’s determination and YO! staff’s encouragement was strong enough for Korinne to get a full-time job as a cashier at Stop Shop & Save Grocery Store, while continuing to work toward earning her high school credentials. Her YO! advocate helped to mediate an arrangement so that Korinne’s mother could provide day care for her son. This allowed Korinne to work and study for the GED at home. She used GED tutorials provided by her GED instructor, retested, and earned her diploma.

YO! Baltimore assisted Korinne with beginning nursing assistant training at Sojourner-Douglass College, which subsequently led to her enrolling at Baltimore City Community College where she is taking classes to become a nurse.
Daniel
A 17-year-old foster child living in a group home, Daniel has faced several challenges which have resulted in a lack of work experience, no high school diploma, and struggles with significant anger management issues. He enrolled in YO! Baltimore in August 2007 with the intention of becoming involved in the construction trade.
His YO! advocate told Daniel about construction training that Civic Works offers through its partnership with Youth Opportunity. However, before enrolling in that training, Daniel would first have to demonstrate a positive attitude and attendance in GED classes.
Daniel became focused on his goal, achieved 95% attendance in GED classes, and benefitted from the support he was receiving at the YO! center. His behavior improved dramatically, and he began the Civic Works construction training in December 2007. He is presently still pursuing his GED while moving closer to his dream of becoming a construction worker.
In all, five YO! sites were opened in the EZ – two main comprehensive centers and three smaller community satellites:
- The Westside Youth Opportunity Center: located in the former Lafayette Square Community Center on Lafayette and Gilmore Streets and operated by the Mayor’s Office of Employment Development;
- The Eastside Youth Opportunity Center: located at Gay and Wolfe Streets and operated by the Historic East Baltimore Community Action Coalition (HEBCAC);
- YO! At Studio 760: the Southwest satellite center, operated by the Washington Village Pigtown Neighborhood Planning Council;
- YO! at The Chance: the Eastside satellite center, operated by East Baltimore Community Corporation (EBCC);
- YO! at McKim: the Southwest satellite center, operated by McKim Community Center.
Other facts about the target community at the onset of YO! included:
- Six of every 10 children lived in extreme poverty in the YO! area,
- Less than half of the adults in the area finished high school,
- 88 percent of YO! neighborhood mothers were single parents at the time of their child’s birth.
Clearly, when the YO! program began in the spring of 2000, the majority of the more than 10,000 teens and young adults who resided in the YO! area were some of Baltimore’s most at-risk people – at risk of failing to achieve their potential and at risk of becoming additional negative statistics.
YO! Baltimore is continuing its success in reducing the number of those returning to the criminal justice system.
24% of YO! Baltimore participants who reported engagement in the criminal justice system prior to enrolling in YO! Baltimore:
- 14% (149) reported previous adult convictions at the time of their enrollment
- Another 10% (110) reported juvenile convictions
Of those convicted prior to enrolling in YO! Baltimore:
- 93.8% (243) were not convicted again, which indicates a 6.2% recidivism rate
Of those with no previous convictions:
- 10.4% (3) were convicted
These recidivism rates compare quite favorably to recidivism rates among juveniles state-wide, as the indicated in the chart to the right:
28% (90) reported staying overnight for mental health concerns at either the city’s juvenile detention center (67) and/or the hospital (29)
34% (109) exhibited depressive symptoms
47% (149) exhibited high stress symptoms
By self report at intake by the 1,091 participants:
- 25% were teen parents
- 87% were unemployed
- 24% of those registered had some engagement in the criminal justice system
- 4% were in foster care
- 6% were in an unstable housing situation
Reducing Recidivism
YO! Baltimore: Changing Minds / Changing Lives
In addition to the five YO! sites, four Baltimore City public high schools which drew the majority of students living in the EZ – Frederick Douglass, Southern, Patterson and Southwestern high schools – became components of the YO! System. YO! engaged the highly effective and well established FUTURES dropout prevention program to identify and work with those youth likely to drop out of school.

Together, the five centers and four high schools along with more than twenty youth-service providing organizations formed the YO! Baltimore System. This coalition implemented the YO! Baltimore model which included the following components:

1. **Comprehensive Education** (tutoring, literacy, high school credentialing and preparation for and linkage to post secondary education);
2. **Employment Preparation** (work ethics, understanding employer expectations, occupational skills specific training, work experience/ internships, summer jobs);
3. **Support Services** (physical and mental health, group counseling, mentoring, recreation and cultural enrichment, transportation);
4. **Leadership Development** (civic engagement, community service, youth empowerment).

Underscoring these four critical areas, was perhaps the most important element in the YO! Baltimore System – advocacy. Each YO! participant was matched with an employment advocate whose primary purpose was to help the young person navigate the myriad of services and provide the support needed to stay on track, to make progress and to succeed. A host of other caring adults, coaches and mentors filled out the staffing component of the system so that at all turns, the youth in YO! were surrounded by committed role models. Key to the effectiveness of the staff was a well-planned and challenging “youth worker” training, which was required for employment with the YO! Baltimore System. A carefully designed Youth Practitioners curriculum was developed specifically for YO! Baltimore so that each and every participant was matched with an employment advocate whose primary role was to help them learn about work ethics, understand employer expectations, obtain work experience and provide the support needed to stay on track, to make progress and to succeed.

The young people whose stories follow illustrate both the sobering hardships so many urban teens face and their remarkable ability to achieve against considerable odds when opportunity, support and caring adults converge on their lives.

**Sharonda**

A high school dropout, Sharonda was homeless and felt hopeless when she was recruited to the YO! at The Chance program in July of 2003. Sharonda was living in an abandoned house and using drugs after her family disintegrated from drug abuse. With no relatives to care for her, Sharonda had no choice but to live in a series of foster care group homes.

YO! staff worked with Sharonda to secure stable housing, access the financial support needed to survive, and enter substance abuse counseling. She was also encouraged to enroll in GED classes and participate in positive extra-curricular activities offered by YO! Baltimore. With this encouragement, Sharonda became focused, gained confidence in her own success and passed the GED exam in January of 2004.

After trying several jobs, Sharonda realized that what she wanted most was a meaningful career. The YO! staff helped her to achieve this goal by enrolling her in certified nursing assistant training. Sharonda passed the coursework and is now employed at the Manor Nursing Home in Towson, Md. But Sharonda isn’t planning to stop there. As she continues employment and gains more experience and economic stability, she is working to advance in her profession and become a licensed practical nurse or a registered nurse. After joining YO!, Sharonda is sure to succeed along this path.

**Victor**

After difficult teenage years that featured enrolling in and dropping out of school several times and facing a couple of run-ins with the law, Victor decided to start to turn his life around and enrolled in YO! Baltimore with the intention of finding stable employment.

Initially describing himself as a loner, Victor soon proved his potential as an intelligent young man with the aptitude to get along with both his peers and adults. He quickly developed a cadre of positive friends at the center and increased his sense of belonging and confidence. He became an active member of Brother to Brother, a peer support group, participated in monthly town hall meetings, and joined the chess club.

He enrolled and thrived in his GED classes that resulted in earning his Maryland State High School Diploma in April 2007. Victor then signed up for a two-phase Biotech Industry Career Training Program at Baltimore City Community College (BCCC) and has successfully completed phase one and begun phase two. He is also interning at the Biotechnical Institute Laboratory of BCCC. Victor is now confident that he can succeed in college and plans to continue his post-secondary education.

YO! participant progress continues to demonstrate the positive effect the YO! Baltimore program has on this at-risk population. As indicated below, increases in educational attainment, employment and wages, as well as reductions in recidivism remain the key impact factors that show the difference that YO! Baltimore is making.

From July 1, 2006 to June 30, 2007, YO! Baltimore had an enrollment of 1,091 out-of-school youth. Males accounted for 48% (525) and females 52% (566). The average age of participants was 19. The reading and math levels were extremely low at the time of enrollment. The average math skills were below a 6th grade (5.82) level, and the reading skills were below a 7th grade (6.91) level.

At time of enrollment, 39% of the youth had dropped out of school between the 7th and 9th grades, 39% completed grades 10 and 11, and 22% came to the program with high school diplomas.

All participants, including those with diplomas, realize that they are not equipped to take the next step toward starting their careers without extra support and skills. This sense of vulnerability is common among YO! participants and indicates the need for structure, stability, opportunity, and encouragement in order to move their lives forward in a positive direction.

In a mental health survey of 317 program participants conducted by the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health Center for Adolescent Health:

- 48% (154) reported receiving out-patient treatment or help with behavior, feelings, or drugs including alcohol from a psychologist, psychiatrist, probation or juvenile corrections officer or court counselor.
Historic East Baltimore Community Action Coalition (HEBCAC).

Expanding Options and Opportunities

The YO! Baltimore model was adjusted in 2006-07 due to the change in funding streams and participant criteria. The three smaller satellite centers closed in July 2006, and program services were consolidated at the two larger Youth Opportunity community centers. MOED continues to operate the YO! Westside Center, located at 1510 W. Lafayette Avenue, and HEBCAC continues to operate the YO! Eastside Center, located at 1212 N. Wolfe Street.

With the transition, came opportunity, and new initiatives were launched. In partnership with the Baltimore City Family League, Baltimore City Police Department, Department of Juvenile Services, and the Governor’s Office on Crime Control and Prevention, YO! Baltimore has opened the PACT (Pre-Adjudication Coordination and Training) Evening Reporting Center at the YO! Westside Center to give young men awaiting trial a productive alternative. The program goals include eliminating unnecessary and inappropriate use of secure detention of males in the juvenile detention facility, increasing the court show rate, reducing interim arrests, and developing a individualized, full-service plan that links youth to community-based services so that they will be more likely to become self-sufficient and responsible citizens.

Linking with the Baltimore City Public School System’s Alternative Options Network, YO! Baltimore has launched the Youth Opportunity Academy – an innovative, alternative high school. The YO! Academy serves youth who are in need of additional course credits to be at the appropriate grade level. Students take course work on-line and are exposed to the world of work through job shadowing, career exploration and job readiness sessions leading to internships, summer jobs, and part-time employment after school.

Thanks to a grant from the state Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation, YO! Baltimore created the Baltimore Bridge Initiative – a program that works with out-of-school youth, referred by the Baltimore staff person would be equipped with the same tools, skill sets and shared YO! philosophy.

Committed staff were poised to address the needs these young people had, at any moment, in one place. When fully equipped and completely up and running, the YO! Baltimore centers offered youth a full menu of opportunities:

- Academic support including computer based tutorials, instructor led classes, on-line pre-GED and GED courses and credit recovery,
- Life skills, job readiness, interviewing techniques and world of work seminars,
- Career planning and occupational training classes,
- Job placement and post placement retention support,
- Computer training and Internet access,
- Recreational services, including a fitness center and recording studio,
- Health suite and referrals to dental and visual health services,
- Parenting classes,
- Mental health and substance abuse treatment referrals,
- Clubs and leadership development activities,
- College tours, financial aid and application assistance.

Thoughtful planning was essential in deciding how to most wisely utilize the grant award of $38,042,328 in order to create, maintain, and continually improve such a large youth system. The following chart shows how the funds were allocated over the past five years:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Total YO! Baltimore Expenditures 2000-2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant Skills Training and Educational Services</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YO! Baltimore Centers</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YO! Baltimore Staff / Professional Development</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management Information / Case Management Technology</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Program Oversight</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Support Services</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When Ben’s mother died, he was forced to live with elderly grand-parents who depended upon public assistance for economic support. With few resources, Ben’s everyday life was difficult, often lacking enough food or basic necessities, which caused him to envoy the materials his friends had. Ben dropped out of school, cling to street life and had run-ins with the criminal justice system. He enrolled in the Historic East Baltimore Community Action Coalition (HEBCAC) Eastside YO! Center in May of 2001.

YO! program staff immediately saw Ben’s potential as a very bright young man who was simply caught up in dark circumstances. YO! staff helped Ben to re-enroll in school and offered constructive outlets for his non-school hours, which helped him to stay off the streets and out of trouble. Through YO!, Ben participated in the HEBCAC youth leadership effort, became inspired by new possibilities, and earned a high school diploma.

Then Ben requested and was awarded a one-year human services apprenticeship with YO! Baltimore, where he could help other young people triumph over their challenges. Ben participated in apprenticeship classes, learned the jargon and human services curriculum, and job shadowed YO! staff. Ben demonstrated a real knack for his work and was hired as a recruiter at the YO! McKim Center. When decreases in the YO! Grant resulted in staff reductions, Ben was able to translate his employability skills and find other employment. Today, Ben is successfully working as a mechanic-laborer at Maryland Thermoform where he repairs machinery and assists with packaging products.
Ashley

Ashley came to the YO! Westside Center as a single parent with a fourth grade reading level. Through YO!, Ashley was able to get the support she needed to care for her child and continue with her education. Ashley attended GED classes and was challenged by her teacher to write down her opinions on various topics to evaluate her reasoning skills and her belief system. As Ashley gained more confidence, she asked lots of questions, receiving clarification and gradually improving her outlook on life. Soon Ashley’s hard work paid off as she began exhibiting better writing and verbal skills, doubling her grade level skills within three months. Ashley began independent study for the GED content material a few months later and then passed the GED exam.

Still, Ashley had more goals in mind in order to improve her economic situation and better care for her child. With support from YO! Baltimore, Ashley enrolled in a career training class at Baltimore City Community College to become a certified nursing assistant (CNA).

Today, Ashley is a true success story. After graduating from the community college, she landed a job at Genesis Health Care in Towson, Maryland, as a CNA.

Building upon this success, Ashley followed her dream to obtain a driver’s license and purchase her first car so she would no longer have to rely on public transportation. Ashley’s success does not end here. She plans to enter college in the fall of 2005 to expand her nursing training.

YO! Baltimore: Changing Minds / Changing Lives

Employment and Earnings Impact

YO! Baltimore evaluated the employment and earnings impact of the program using the state’s quarterly wage records. The evaluation involved comparing YO! participants enrolled from July 2000 to March 2003 to a group of the youth who completed YO! enrollment in the same time frame but who did not actively participate in the program. The wage data were available up to the quarter ending in March 2004.

The first comparison was of the total earnings of participants and non-participants, for each year from 2000 to 2005. The following chart shows the mean earnings for each group:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Comparison Group</th>
<th>Participant Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$5,000</td>
<td>$10,792</td>
<td>$15,569</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$8,000</td>
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<td>$14,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$11,000</td>
<td>$12,000</td>
<td>$17,000</td>
</tr>
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</table>

YO! Baltimore 2000-2005: Five Years of Success

It has been five years since YO! Baltimore opened its doors. After reaching out to over 4,300 young people in some of the city’s most impoverished neighborhoods, YO! Baltimore has a great story to tell. It is a story of youth, like the ones highlighted on these pages, who are making positive changes to create a better future for themselves and their families.

It is also a story of a program’s impact on the community relative to:

- Youth employment and earnings,
- Youth pregnancy,
- Crime.

City Investment

Due to YO! Baltimore’s ability to wisely manage its federal funding over the five-year grant period, the Department of Labor allowed the program to extend one more year – through June 30, 2006 – using previously unspent funds. Baltimore City’s Mayor and City Council recognized that YO! Baltimore had become entrenched as a vital service for the city’s youth population and provided funding to sustain the program essentials. As a result YO! Baltimore expanded its enrollment catchment criteria beyond the federally-mandated Empowerment Zones to cover the entire city and shifted the age requirement to 16 to 22. YO! Baltimore became a citywide strategy designed to help at-risk out-of-school youth and young adults make healthy choices, earn academic credentials, and succeed in the workforce.

Foundation Resources

In order to continue to expand the resources and menu of services offered to YO! participants, additional funding has been sought to complement Baltimore City’s contribution. YO! Baltimore was successful in applying for and receiving a grant from the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation that allows the program to increase and expand its range of job training and literacy services. Additionally, the Annie E. Casey Foundation has provided funding support to expand staffing at the Eastside Youth Opportunity Center, operated by the


City Investment

Without reservation, successful partnerships were needed to effectively address the multiple issues that the at-risk population faced. YO! encouraged and developed many joint service partnerships. Program staff recognized two essential guidelines for fostering successful partnerships:

- All partners must understand and embrace the youth development concept.
- Communication and monitoring for contract compliance must be ongoing.

YO! Baltimore’s continued staff development put significant emphasis on promoting ongoing professional training, believing that staff would be the foundation for the program’s success. A Youth Practitioner Institute was created along with a youth practitioner’s certification process for the ongoing training of its staff. This important strategy provided YO! staff opportunities to meet their counterparts working at other YO! centers across Baltimore City. It also provided the staff with a venue to share the best practices being produced from their day-to-day work with youth. Throughout its five-year period, YO! maintained an annual and periodic schedule of staff development activities based on strategic, program-specific, staff-focused and customer-driven areas identified in the YO! youth development plan. Much of the success of YO! can be attributed to the on-going efforts made to keep its paraprofessional staff engaged and informed as to how to successfully accomplish their jobs.

• Strong and continued focus on youth goal planning and follow-through was essential for teaching youth goal-setting skills;
• A strong software system that not only effectively tracks services but also provides tools for case managers to productively manage their caseloads was essential.

Positive Trends Moving Forward

City Investment

Without reservation, successful partnerships were needed to effectively address the multiple issues that the at-risk population faced. YO! encouraged and developed many joint service partnerships. Program staff recognized two essential guidelines for fostering successful partnerships:

- All partners must understand and embrace the youth development concept.
- Communication and monitoring for contract compliance must be ongoing.

YO! Baltimore’s continued staff development put significant emphasis on promoting ongoing professional training, believing that staff would be the foundation for the program’s success. A Youth Practitioner Institute was created along with a youth practitioner’s certification process for the ongoing training of its staff. This important strategy provided YO! staff opportunities to meet their counterparts working at other YO! centers across Baltimore City. It also provided the staff with a venue to share the best practices being produced from their day-to-day work with youth. Throughout its five-year period, YO! maintained an annual and periodic schedule of staff development activities based on strategic, program-specific, staff-focused and customer-driven areas identified in the YO! youth development plan. Much of the success of YO! can be attributed to the on-going efforts made to keep its paraprofessional staff engaged and informed as to how to successfully accomplish their jobs.

• Strong and continued focus on youth goal planning and follow-through was essential for teaching youth goal-setting skills;
• A strong software system that not only effectively tracks services but also provides tools for case managers to productively manage their caseloads was essential.

Positive Trends Moving Forward

City Investment

Without reservation, successful partnerships were needed to effectively address the multiple issues that the at-risk population faced. YO! encouraged and developed many joint service partnerships. Program staff recognized two essential guidelines for fostering successful partnerships:

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An additional question asked employers if they would recommend the program to another employer, which is an appropriate way to gauge their overall satisfaction with the YO! youth work preparation efforts. As the chart indicates, Baltimore employers who hired YO! participants were very complimentary as to how these young people were prepared for the labor force and nearly 90% reported that they would recommend the program.

Lessons Learned

Much has been learned during the Baltimore YO! experience that will assist Baltimore’s leaders and stakeholders in planning for the future beyond the final year of federal funding for YO! Baltimore. A great deal more is now known about what works with out-of-school, at-risk youth. These lessons spanned diverse areas such as, effective types of services and how to effectively manage, deliver, and account for those services. While the information presented in this report provides an overview on selected topics, a more detailed description and an expanded compilation of the many strategies employed over the five-year course of the Youth Opportunity program by the YO! practitioners, administrators and partners can be found in Best Practices and Lessons Learned for Building a Comprehensive Youth System on the YO! Baltimore website, www.yobaltimore.org.

YO! was designed to offer a holistic service approach, a full range of human resource and youth development services under one umbrella program. As expected, the approach was effective as youth were able to access multiple supports to meet their varied needs in one place and at one time. Along with ratifying the holistic approach, YO! program operators were able to confirm some best practices that enhanced this design. Specifically, service strategies that youth programs should strive to incorporate include:

- Ensuring that each youth has at least one caring adult and has daily and ongoing communication with this person;
- Building supports in the learning process that apply to life skills and personal problem solving;
- Creating “safe havens” that enable youth to feel supported and nurtured;
- Fostering small learning communities where individualized learning for academic achievement is supported by a group process.

Effective case management was a critical component of the YO! effort and was often the factor that paved the way for program success. Some of the critical hallmarks that were found to be a necessary part of an effective case management process included:

- Qualified, supportive, and nurturing staff were primary keys;
- Staff experienced and trained in approaches to case management, youth development, and resource coordination for youth specialty groups (youth at-risk, disabled, sexual minority, juvenile offenders, etc.) were important ingredients to program success;
- Post-enrollment wages paid. This comparison indicated a positive outcome for active program participants. As shown on the chart, the YO! participant group had nearly $5,000 in additional earnings, which is over a 44% difference from the comparison group. On average, the participant group had a 36-month time period from their enrollment date to the end date that the data were available, as compared to the comparison group’s 34-month average. When the data were adjusted to account for this difference the active participant group continued to demonstrate a significant positive difference. They out-earned the comparison group by more than 35%.

The second point of comparison was the labor market attachment rates of the two groups. This measured the amount of time a person had available for work and how much time they actually worked over a specific period. Some experts believe that one of the best indicators of long-term labor market success is a person’s attachment level. Again, the difference between the two groups was significant. As indicated on the chart, the participant group did better than the comparison group by 17 percentage points, which equates to a 42% increase in terms of labor market attachment for the active participant group as compared to the youth in the comparison group.

When one considers that the participant group, by definition, was more active and engaged in a variety of academic and social development program activities that would have taken time away from being available for work, this difference is even more pronounced.

During the fall of 2003 Jay started to attend GED classes at YO! Studio 760. With intense focus Jay took and passed his GED examination during the summer 2004. He eagerly participated in the 2005 GED graduation ceremony at Johns Hopkins University. His next goal was to gain employment. Through YO! he signed up to do experiential training in a greening project with a YO! Baltimore partner, Civic Works. He learned about landscaping, construction, and the environmental benefits of planting trees in his southwest Baltimore neighborhood. Jay’s next step toward economic independence was to earn a driver’s license. He paid to attend driving school, but needed extra assistance with his parking skills. His YO! advocate helped him practice parking on weekends, and Jay passed his driving test on the first attempt. Jay is now working at the Baltimore City Department of Housing where he is putting his landscaping and construction skills to good use. He is able to support himself and this fall his employer is helping him to earn a license to drive trucks.
YO! Educational Impact

The YO! Baltimore program has stressed the importance for youth to have the opportunity to gain educational credentials. In order to address the impact this program focus has achieved, the educational outcomes for both in-school and out-of-school YO! participants were reviewed and compared. The results indicated a significant educational impact on the lives of youth who actively participated in the program.

As the chart shows, for the in-school youth at four city high schools, the YO! students had a significant better daily attendance, which educators believe is the foundation for school success. Simply stated, you can’t learn if you don’t show up.

Derrick

Derrick enrolled in YO! at The Chance in June of 2002 with a criminal background and without a high school diploma. With limited opportunities, Derrick’s anger and frustration manifested in extremely offensive behaviors toward YO! participants and staff.

After much persuasion from YO! staff, Derrick participated in GED classes and job readiness training. He was eager to get a job, but needed to develop work skills before he could meet local employers. YO! Baltimore arranged for Derrick to gain valuable work experience through a part-time office internship. But Derrick was fired from his internship due to his self-defeating behaviors. YO! staff continued to work with Derrick, using the negative experiences to teach him how to be more successful. In time, Derrick made a determined effort to control his rage and began to listen, taking advice and constructive criticism.

Derrick earned a GED in June of 2004. Finding solid employment was a much more difficult challenge because of his criminal background, and he attended several job fairs and interviews only to be rejected. Derrick did not despair or revert to aberrant behavior to vent his frustrations and persevered.

Derrick finally found employment at the Solo Cup Company as a packing dispatcher. In addition, YO! staff stayed in contact with Derrick, helping him perform well at his job and remain connected to the YO! Center.

Derrick has recently completed a six-week training at Decker College, a trade school in Atlanta, to become a licensed electrician. He will start his apprenticeship this fall and continue to take classes from Decker on-line.

Impact on Work Readiness

Obtaining feedback from Baltimore employers who hired YO! participants was viewed as an important indicator of how well the program was able to prepare youth for work place success. To obtain employer feedback, YO! designed a comprehensive employer satisfaction survey. Using a telephone survey approach, employers who had hired participants over the last four years were contacted. The goal was to learn the employers’ opinions as to how well the youth were prepared for work and to gain insight as to their overall satisfaction with the YO! program. As a survey framework, the worker preparedness categories that the Baltimore Workforce Investment Board identified as critical skills needed by all youth and adults were used. This included skills such as, work habits, attitudes, basic skill levels, and interpersonal skills. Over 200 employers agreed to participate in the telephone interview.

The first focus area was related to the work habits and attitudes of the YO! participant. As shown on the graph, more than two-thirds of all employers provided positive feedback, indicating that the overwhelming majority of employers were satisfied with the YO! workers’ work habits while on the job.

Related questions asked employers to rate the YO! employees:

- Ability to handle his/her personal life so it did not interfere with work,
- Basic (reading and math) skills,
- Communication and interpersonal skills.
The youth who entered the program with a prior conviction were reviewed to determine impact on recidivism. The rate for the participant group was 14 percentage points lower than the comparison group – a 60% rate for the comparison group and a 46% rate for the YO! participants. This percentage difference translates to a 23% positive difference in terms of the YO! participants recidivism rate.

Shonte

When Shonte joined YO! at the McKim Center several years ago, she was facing a formidable set of issues. Shonte was a high school dropout, a teen parent, and had a family member with a very serious illness. In addition to these personal issues, Shonte lived in a violent neighborhood. In a tragic but not uncommon incident, Shonte lost her boyfriend and the father of her child, who died as an innocent bystander in a violent episode. Shonte desperately wanted to escape and instead of drugs, she turned to YO! Baltimore. Her goal was to earn a GED and work in the nursing field. With the encouragement and support of the YO! program staff, Shonte has achieved these goals. Through YO!, Shonte earned the GED and took advantage of the skills training opportunities offered by the YO! program. She enrolled in and completed career training as a certified nurse practitioner at Baltimore City Community College, and she is now successfully employed in the nursing field at Genesis Health Care.

Renee came to the Historic East Baltimore Community Action Coalition (HEBCAC) Eastside YO! Center in November of 2001 desperate for help. With little parental support and no other relatives to turn to, Renee was unable to care for and feed her son, Larry. Consequently, she was forced to send him to his out-of-state father and his family to receive proper care. Renee originally thought the YO! Baltimore program would provide immediate financial support, but while YO! was not designed to help in this way, the program provided a multitude of services that improved Renee’s well-being and got her life back on track.

But the good news does not end with attendance. YO! youth dropped out of school at a rate that was half that of their school peers (chart on previous page). Over 470 YO! students have stayed in school and earned their high school diplomas, and 200 youth have achieved their GEDs.

The question of whether the program played a role in fostering the educational accomplishments of these out-of-school youth or whether the results would have occurred anyway might be asked. To address this issue, a comparison of high school dropout youth who were early enrollees in the program (July 2002 to March 2003) was completed. This comparison indicated that youth who were active YO! participants obtained their GEDs at a rate that was double that of the youth who did not actively participate, providing a strong indication of a direct program influence. Clearly, the program appeared to have had positive impacts in terms of school and educational attainment for both in and out-of-school youth that would not have occurred if the youth had not participated in YO!.
Impact on Youth Pregnancy

National studies indicate that teen parents face many issues and have a difficult time in successfully making the transition to the adult world-of-work. Assuming that programs, which assist young people to delay childbirths, also help these young people get a solid foundation in a career, the YO! impact on overall childbirths was explored.

With the assistance of the State Health Department, data were collected for young women who were a part of a comparison group as well as young women who were considered to be YO! active participants. The 1,509 females enrolled over the first three years of YO! were included in the study. Of that number, 960 were YO! participants and 549 young women were females who had initially applied for the program and then opted not to participate.

An overview of the findings from that data provided a strong indication that YO! participation did have a positive impact on youth birth rates. For the total of all the young women in the review, 608 birth incidents were recorded following the date reported as the first contact with the program staff. In the comparison group, there were 264 birth incidents. As illustrated by the graph, this equates to 48% of the total group giving birth during the period reviewed. In the YO! participant group, only 36% of the young women (344) had babies during the time following their enrollment.

This 12 percentage point difference between the participant and comparison groups was significant. It means that young women in the participant group, who were active YO! program participants and who benefited from the services of the program, were 25% less likely to become pregnant and give birth than the youth in the comparison group.

Impact on Crime

A critical community issue is juvenile crime and the negative impact it has on Baltimore City. It was decided to review the pre- and post-crime rates of youth who enrolled at YO! in order to determine if participation in the program had any impact on the youth’s level of criminal behavior. The review focused on youth aged 18 and older at time of enrollment because data for the youth aged 17 and younger were not available. Data from the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) was obtained for this review. Lacking a means for developing a formal control group that could be used to analyze the records of YO! youth to other similar youth in the community, a comparison group was constructed using information on youth from in-house data records.

A comparison group was created by selecting youth who were active participants in the program, who had any impact on the youth’s level of criminal behavior. The comparison group was constructed using information on youth from in-house data records.

What the data revealed was important. In terms of post-enrollment arrest and conviction, as the chart portrays, only 20% of the YO! participant group was arrested and convicted after program enrollment as opposed to 30% of the comparison group — a positive difference of over 33%.

Victoria

What happens to children of parents with substance abuse issues? Victoria was such a young person who described herself as non-communicative and unmotivated. Not taking into count the consequences of her actions, she decided to hang out with her peers instead of going to school. However, Victoria had a wakeup call when she became pregnant.

Not wanting to repeat her parents’ mistakes, she decided to work toward earning her GED and obtaining a job. Victoria joined YO! Baltimore at Studio 760, earned her GED, took job readiness classes, and completed an internship at the Bon Secours Hospital Washington Village Medical Center. At the end of her internship she completed a pharmacy technician training at CVs Pharmacy, and she is currently working there full-time. In October of 2005 Victoria will be ready to take her Pharmacy Technician certification examination. She is living independently and has received several raises.

Tylese

In an ideal world, foster care offers caring and supportive environments for children who have been abandoned by, or have lost their parents. However, sometimes foster care fails and children are shuttled from house to house or institution, never finding a lasting home and support vital for their positive development. This is Tylese’s story.

Tylese spent most of her life in foster care, encountering little support and many hardships, which led her to legally emancipate herself from the system at age 16. Even as a teen mother of two children, Tylese assumed she could fend for herself and her kids better than the foster care system. Tylese found out the world is not that easy to conquer. Then, she turned to YO! Baltimore for help.

Tylese joined YO! with two goals in mind – to earn a GED and pursue further education and to find a career, not just a job. Tylese earned a GED and was the featured YO! program speaker at the YO! Baltimore graduation ceremony in June of 2004. Through YO!, Tylese continued her education and participated in job readiness courses, skills training, and work experiences offered by the program.

Today Tylese is on a great career path. She completed certified nursing assistant skills training at Baltimore City Community College in the winter of 2004 and passed the state certification exam. This success was followed by a job offer at the Genesis Health Care Center in Towson, Md., where Tylese now earns a living to support herself and her children. But Tylese has her sights set higher – her next goal is to earn a degree in registered nursing.

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In order to provide another perspective on the crime impact, arrest information was included in the analysis of the overall YO! program impact. While some experts contend that arrest information, especially arrest information that is focused on residents of traditionally high crime neighborhoods, can be misleading, it does give a perspective on positive youth behaviors. While only a portion of arrests actually translate to a criminal conviction and record, all arrest information was included in the analysis of the overall YO! program impact, especially arrest information that is focused on residents of traditionally high crime neighborhoods, can be misleading, it does give a perspective on positive youth behaviors.

Participants Comparison Group

Recidivism

60% 46%

30% 40% 50% 60%

Arrested After Enrollment for Violent Offenses

8% 4%

0% 2% 4% 6% 8%

Comparison Participant

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Shonte is grateful that YO! was there for her, and she has decided to give back to YO! Baltimore and to the community by serving as a One-2-One Peer Mentor to a younger YO! member who shares many of the same challenges Shonte confronted and conquered.

Shonte

But the good news does not end with attendance. YO! youth dropped out of school at a rate that was half that of their school peers (chart on previous page). Over 470 YO! students have stayed in school and earned their high school diplomas, and 200 youth have achieved their GEDs. While the dropout, attendance, and graduation results are impressive, YO! participants are proving their desire to continue their education and pursue post-secondary options. Hundreds of YO! graduates have been connected to community and four-year colleges and are still in the educational pipeline and who will, before they end their program participation, add to the positive outcomes by achieving higher degrees.

The question of whether the program played a role in fostering the educational accomplishments of these out-of-school youth or whether the results would have occurred anyway might be asked. To address this issue, a comparison of high school dropout youth who were early enrollees in the program (July 2002 to March 2003) was completed. This comparison indicated that youth who were active YO! participants obtained their GEDs at a rate that was double that of the youth who did not actively participate, providing a strong indication of a direct program influence.

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Lessons Learned

Much has been learned during the Baltimore YO! experience that will assist Baltimore’s leaders and stakeholders in planning for the future beyond the final year of federal funding for YO! Baltimore. A great deal more is now known about what works with out-of-school, at-risk youth. These lessons spanned diverse areas such as, effective types of services and how to effectively manage, deliver, and account for those services. While the information presented in this report provides an overview on selected topics, a more detailed description and an expanded compilation of the many strategies employed over the five-year course of the Youth Opportunity program by the YO! practitioners, administrators and partners can be found in Best Practices and Lessons Learned for Building a Comprehensive Youth System on the YO! Baltimore website, www.yobaltimore.org.

YO! was designed to offer a holistic service approach, a full range of human resource and youth development services under one umbrella program. As expected, the approach was effective as youth were able to access multiple supports to meet their varied needs in one place and at one time. Along with ratifying the holistic approach, YO! program operators were able to confirm some best practices that enhanced this design. Specifically, service strategies that youth programs should strive to incorporate include:

- Ensuring that each youth has at least one caring adult and has daily and ongoing communication with this person;
- Building supports in the learning process that apply to life skills and personal problem solving;
- Creating “safe havens” that enable youth to feel supported and nurtured;
- Fostering small learning communities where individualized learning for academic achievement is supported by a group process.

Effective case management was a critical component of the YO! effort and was often the factor that paved the way for program success. Some of the critical hallmarks that were found to be a necessary part of an effective case management process included:

- Qualified, supportive, and nurturing staff were primary keys;
- Staff experienced and trained in approaches to case management, youth development, and resource coordination for youth specialty groups (youth at-risk, disabled, sexual minority, juvenile offenders, etc.) were important ingredients to program success;
- Post-enrollment wages paid. This comparison indicated a positive outcome for active program participants. As shown on the chart, the YO! participant group had nearly $5,000 in additional earnings, which is over a 44% difference from the comparison group. On average, the participant group had a 36-month time period from their enrollment date to the end date that the data were available, as compared to the comparison group’s 34-month average. When the data were adjusted to account for this difference the active participant group continued to demonstrate a significant positive difference. They out-earned the comparison group by more than 35%.

The second point of comparison was the labor market attachment rates of the two groups. This measured the amount of time a person had available for work and how much time they actually worked over a specific period. Some experts believe that one of the best indicators of long-term labor market success is a person’s attachment level. Again, the difference between the two groups was significant. As indicated on the chart, the participant group did better than the comparison group by 17 percentage points, which equates to a 42% increase in terms of labor market attachment for the active participant group as compared to the youth in the comparison group.

When one considers that the participant group, by definition, was more active and engaged in a variety of academic and social development program activities that would have taken time away from being available for work, this difference is even more pronounced.

Jay

When he was a student at Southwestern High School, Jay had difficulty staying motivated and interested during the 90-minute classes that he was taking. He eventually lost interest and dropped out. Jay heard about YO! as an option to pursue his education and decided to give it a try.

During the fall of 2003 Jay started to attend GED classes at YO! Studio 760. With intense focus Jay took and passed his GED examination during the summer 2004. He eagerly participated in the 2005 GED graduation ceremony at Johns Hopkins University.

His next goal was to gain employment. Through YO! he signed up to do experiential training in a greening project with a YO! Baltimore partner, Civic Works. He learned about landscaping, construction, and the environmental benefits of planting trees in his southwest Baltimore neighborhood. Jay’s next step toward economic independence was to earn a driver’s license. He paid to attend driving school, but needed extra assistance with his parking skills. His YO! advocate helped him practice parking on weekends, and Jay passed his driving test on the first attempt.

Jay is now working at the Baltimore City Department of Housing where he is putting his landscaping and construction skills to good use. He is able to support himself and this fall his employer is helping him to earn a license to drive trucks.
It has been five years since YO! Baltimore opened its doors. After reaching out to over 4,300 young people in some of the city’s most impoverished neighborhoods, YO! Baltimore has a great story to tell. It is a story of youth, like the ones highlighted on these pages, who are making positive changes to create a better future for themselves and their families.

It is also a story of a program’s impact on the community relative to:

- Youth employment and earnings,
- Youth pregnancy,
- Crime.

Employment and Earnings Impact

YO! Baltimore evaluated the employment and earnings impact of the program using the state’s quarterly wage records. The evaluation involved comparing YO! participants enrolled from July 2000 to March 2003 to a group of the youth who completed YO! enrollment in the same time frame but who did not actively participate in the program. The wage data were available up to the quarter ending in March 2004.

The first comparison was of the total youth goal-setting skills; a strong software system that not only effectively tracks services but also provides tools for case managers to productively manage their caseloads was essential.

Without reservation, successful partnerships were needed to effectively address the multiple issues that the at-risk population faced. YO! encouraged and developed many joint service partnerships. Program staff recognized two essential guidelines for fostering successful partnerships:

- All partners must understand and embrace the youth development concept.
- Communication and monitoring for contract compliance must be ongoing.

YO! Baltimore’s continued staff development put significant emphasis on promoting ongoing professional training, believing that staff would be the foundation for the program’s success. A Youth Practitioner Institute was created along with a youth practitioner’s certification process for the ongoing training of its staff. This important strategy provided YO! staff opportunities to meet their counterparts working at other YO! centers across Baltimore City. It also provided the staff with a venue to share the best practices being produced from their day-to-day work with youth.

Throughout its five-year period, YO! maintained an annual and periodic schedule of staff development activities based on strategic, program-specific, staff-focused and customer-driven areas identified in the YO! youth development plan. Much of the success of YO! can be attributed to the on-going efforts made to keep its paraprofessional staff engaged and informed as to how to successfully accomplish their jobs.

Ashley

Ashley came to the YO! Westside Center as a single parent with a fourth grade reading level. Through YO!, Ashley was able to get the support she needed to care for her child and continue with her education. Ashley attended GED classes and was challenged by her teacher to write down her opinions on various topics to evaluate her reasoning skills and her belief system. As Ashley gained more confidence, she asked lots of questions, receiving clarification and gradually improving her outlook on life. Soon Ashley’s hard work paid off as she began exhibiting better writing and verbal skills, doubling her grade level skills within three months. Ashley began independent study for the GED content material a few months later and then passed the GED exam.

Still, Ashley had more goals in mind in order to improve her economic situation and better care for her child. With support from YO! Baltimore, Ashley enrolled in a career training class at Baltimore City Community College to become a certified nursing assistant (CNA).

Today, Ashley is a true success story. After graduating from the community college, she landed a job at Genesis Health Care in Towson, Maryland, as a CNA.

Building upon this success, Ashley followed her dream to obtain a driver’s license and purchase her first car so she would have no longer have to rely on public transportation.

Ashley’s success does not end here. To keep its paraprofessional staff engaged and informed as to how to successfully accomplish their jobs.

YO! Baltimore 2005-2007:

Positive Trends Moving Forward

City Investment

Due to YO! Baltimore’s ability to wisely manage its federal funding over the five-year grant period, the Department of Labor allowed the program to extend one more year – through June 30, 2006 – using previously unspent funds. Baltimore City’s Mayor and City Council recognized that YO! Baltimore had become entrenched as a vital service for the city’s youth population and provided funding to sustain the program essentials. As a result YO! Baltimore expanded its enrollment catchment criteria beyond the federally-mandated Empowerment Zones to cover the entire city and shifted the age requirement to 16 to 22. YO! Baltimore became a citywide strategy designed to help at-risk out-of-school youth and young adults make healthy choices, earn academic credentials, and succeed in the workforce.

Foundation Resources

In order to continue to expand the resources and menu of services offered to YO! participants, additional funding has been sought to complement Baltimore City’s contribution. YO! Baltimore was successful in applying for and receiving a grant from the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation that allows the program to increase and expand its range of job training and literacy services. Additionally, the Annie E. Casey Foundation has provided funding support to expand staffing at the Eastside Youth Opportunity Center, operated by the
Historic East Baltimore Community Action Coalition (HEBCAC).

Expanding Options and Opportunities

The YO! Baltimore model was adjusted in 2006-07 due to the change in funding streams and participant criteria. The three smaller satellite centers closed in July 2006, and program services were consolidated at the two larger Youth Opportunity community centers. MOED continues to operate the YO! Westside Center, located at 1510 W. Lafayette Avenue, and HEBCAC continues to operate the YO! Eastside Center, located at 1212 W. Wolfe Street.

With the transition, came opportunity, and new initiatives were launched. In partnership with the Baltimore City Family League, Baltimore City Police Department, Department of Juvenile Services, and the Governor’s Office on Crime Control and Prevention, YO! Baltimore had opened the PACT (Pre-Adjudication Coordination and Training) Evening Reporting Center at the YO! Westside Center to give young men awaiting trial a productive alternative. The program goals include eliminating unnecessary and inappropriate use of secure detention of males in the juvenile detention program. Goals include eliminating unnecessary and inappropriate use of secure detention of males in the juvenile detention program. The three YO! Baltimore centers offered youth a full menu of opportunities:

- Clubs and leadership development activities,
- Mental health and substance abuse treatment referrals,
- Health suite and referrals to dental and visual health services,
- Recreational services, including a fitness center and recording studio,
- Health suite and referrals to dental and visual health services,
- Parenting classes,
- Mental health and substance abuse treatment referrals,
- Clubs and leadership development activities,
- College tours, financial aid and application assistance.

Linking with the Baltimore City Public School System’s Alternative Options Network, YO! Baltimore has launched the Youth Opportunity Academy – an innovative, alternative high school. The YO! Academy serves youth who are in need of additional course credits to be at the appropriate grade level. Students take course work on-line and are exposed to the world of work through job shadowing, career exploration and job readiness sessions leading to internships, summer jobs, and part-time employment after school.

Thanks to a grant from the state Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation, YO! Baltimore created the Baltimore Bridge Initiative – a program that works with out-of-school youth, referred by the Baltimore staff person would be equipped with the same tools, skill sets and shared YO! philosophy.

Committed staff were poised to address the needs these young people had, at any moment, in one place. When fully equipped and completely up and running, the YO! Baltimore centers offered youth a full menu of opportunities:

- Academic support including computer based tutorials, instructor led classes, on-line pre-GED and GED courses and credit recovery,
- Life skills, job readiness, interviewing techniques and world of work seminars,
- Career planning and occupational training classes,
- Job placement and post placement retention support,
- Computer training and Internet access,
- Recreational services, including a fitness center and recording studio,
- Health suite and referrals to dental and visual health services,
- Parenting classes,
- Mental health and substance abuse treatment referrals,
- Clubs and leadership development activities,
- College tours, financial aid and application assistance.

Thoughtful planning was essential in deciding how to most wisely utilize the grant award of $38,042,328 in order to create, maintain, and continually improve such a large youth system. The following chart shows how the funds were allocated over the past five years:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Allocation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant Skills Training and Educational Services</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YO! Baltimore Centers</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YO! Baltimore Staff / Professional Development</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management Information / Case Management Technology</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Program Oversight</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Support Services</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total YO! Baltimore Expenditures 2000-2005

When Ben’s mother died, he was forced to live with elderly grand-parents who depended upon public assistance for economic support. With few resources, Ben’s everyday life was difficult, often lacking enough food or basic necessities, which caused him to envy the materials his friends had. Ben dropped out of school, cling to street life and had run-ins with the criminal justice system. He enrolled in the Historic East Baltimore Community Action Coalition (HEBCAC) Eastside YO! Center in May of 2001.

YO! program staff immediately saw Ben’s potential as a very bright young man who was simply caught up in dark circumstances. YO! staff helped Ben to re-enroll in school and offered constructive outlets for his non-school hours, which helped him to stay off the streets and out of trouble. Through YO!, Ben participated in the HEBCAC youth leadership effort, became inspired by new possibilities, and earned a high school diploma.

Then Ben requested and was awarded a one-year human services apprenticeship with YO! Baltimore, where he could help other young people triumph over their challenges. Ben participated in apprenticeship classes, learned the jargon and human services curriculum, and job shadowed YO! staff. Ben demonstrated a real knack for his work and was hired as a recruiter at the YO! McKim Center. When decreases in the YO! Grant resulted in staff reductions, Ben was able to translate his employability skills and find other employment. Today, Ben is successfully working as a mechanic-laborer at Maryland Thermoform where he repairs machinery and assists with packaging products.
Baltimore Success Stories

Sharonda

A high school dropout, Sharonda was homeless and felt hopeless when she was recruited to the YO! at The Chance program in July of 2003. Sharonda was living in an abandoned house and using drugs after her family disintegrated from drug abuse. With no relatives to care for her, Sharonda had no choice but to live in a series of foster care group homes.

YO! staff worked with Sharonda to secure stable housing, access the financial support needed to survive, and enter substance abuse counseling. She was also encouraged to enroll in GED classes and participate in positive extra-curricular activities offered by YO! Baltimore. With this encouragement, Sharonda became focused, gained confidence in her own success and passed the GED exam in January of 2004.

After trying several jobs, Sharonda realized that what she wanted most was a meaningful career. The YO! staff helped her to achieve this goal by enrolling her in certified nursing assistant training. Sharonda passed the coursework and is now employed at the Manor Nursing Home in Towson, Md. But Sharonda isn’t planning to stop there. As she continues employment and gains more experience and economic stability, she is working to advance in her profession and become a licensed practical nurse or a registered nurse. After joining YO!, Sharonda is sure to succeed along this path.

City Of Social Services. These young people may be aging-out of foster care, involved in the criminal justice system or have parents who are incarcerated, or are from low-income families. The participants are trained for employment in the high-growth industries of health care, hospitality, and construction. Those who have not yet earned their high school diploma participate in GED classes. All participants receive an extensive orientation in their identified career area, including career tours, industry guest speakers, hands-on demonstrations, and on-line career exploration training. Following the orientation, they participate in career specific classes at Baltimore City Community College, apprenticeships or on-the-job training, and work experience.

YO! Baltimore Participant Profiles

Sharonda's story is one of many success stories at YO! Baltimore. Here are a few more:

Victor

After difficult teenage years that featured enrolling in and dropping out of school several times and facing a couple of run-ins with the law, Victor decided to start to turn his life around and enrolled in YO! Baltimore with the intention of finding stable employment.

Initially describing himself as a loner, Victor soon proved his potential as an intelligent young man with the encouragement and help of his peers. He quickly developed a cadre of positive friends at the center and increased his sense of belonging and confidence. He became an active member of Brother to Brother, a peer support group, participated in monthly town hall meetings, and joined the chess club.

Enrolled and thrived in his GED classes that resulted in earning his Maryland High School Diploma in April 2007, Victor then signed up for a two-phase Biotech Industry Career Training Program at Baltimore City Community College (BCCC) and has successfully completed phase one and begun phase two. He is also interning at the Biotechnical Institution Laboratory at BCCC.

Victor is now confident that he can succeed in college and plans to continue his post-secondary education.

YO! Baltimore: Changing Minds / Changing Lives
28% (90) reported staying overnight for mental health concerns at either the city’s juvenile detention center (67) and/or the hospital (29)
34% (109) exhibited depressive symptoms
47% (149) exhibited high stress symptoms
By self report at intake by the 1,091 participants:
25% were teen parents
87% were unemployed
24% of those registered had some engagement in the criminal justice system
4% were in foster care
6% were in an unstable housing situation

Reducing Recidivism

YO! Baltimore is continuing its success in reducing the number of those returning to the criminal justice system.
24% of YO! Baltimore participants who reported engagement in the criminal justice system prior to enrolling in YO! Baltimore:
14% (149) reported previous adult convictions at the time of their enrollment
Another 10% (110) reported juvenile convictions
93.8% (243) were not convicted again, which indicates a 6.2% recidivism rate
Of those with no previous convictions:
10.4% (3) were convicted
These recidivism rates compare quite favorably to recidivism rates among juveniles state-wide, as the indicated in the chart to the right:

Other facts about the target community at the onset of YO! included:
Six of every 10 children lived in extreme poverty in the YO! area,
Less than half of the adults in the area finished high school,
88 percent of YO! neighborhood mothers were single parents at the time of their child’s birth.

Clearly, when the YO! program began in the spring of 2000, the majority of the more than 10,000 teens and young adults who resided in the YO! area were some of Baltimore’s most at-risk people – at risk of failing to achieve their potential and at risk of becoming additional negative statistics.

YO! Philosophy, Service Model and Youth Centers

The YO! model differed in many ways from the majority of youth programs that had preceded it. Going beyond a traditional program approach of staff teaching and training youth, the YO! plan of service required that highly skilled and professional YO! staff members and administrators, along with several carefully selected YO! service providers, fully engage the youth by empowering them to take responsibility for their own lives.
YO! Baltimore was certainly about jobs and education, but it was also about youth development, good citizenship, physical and mental health, and social development. The YO! Baltimore youth centers that were anchored in the EZ neighborhoods became not only training and educational hubs, but places for social activities and for learning about life, family and cultural history.
At times, for some youth, these centers also served as sanctuaries and safe havens where troubled youth could gain a short escape from the trials and issues that confronted them on the streets and at home.
In all, five YO! sites were opened in the EZ – two main comprehensive centers and three smaller community satellites:

- The Westside Youth Opportunity Center: located in the former Lafayette Square Community Center on Lafayette and Gilmore Streets and operated by the Mayor’s Office of Employment Development;
- The Eastside Youth Opportunity Center: located at Gay and Wolfe Streets and operated by the Historic East Baltimore Community Action Coalition (HEBCAC);
- YO! At Studio 760: the Southwest satellite center, operated by the Washington Village Pigtown Neighborhood Planning Council;
- YO! At The Chance: the Eastside satellite center, operated by East Baltimore Community Corporation (EBCC);
- YO! at McKim: the Southwest satellite center, operated by McKim Community Center.
YO! Baltimore: Building a “Youth System”

The Beginning

The genesis of a “youth system” in Baltimore started in the spring of 1999. A group of dedicated youth service providers came together to consider what could be done to assist disadvantaged, out of school youth in the city. Concerned about high dropout rates and an unprepared, unskilled workforce, the Mayor’s Office of Employment Development (MOED) convened this group to examine ideas and options to help young adults prepare for their transition into responsible citizens and labor force participants.

At about the same time, the United States Congress added language to the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) calling for a comprehensive youth demonstration project to be labeled the “Youth Opportunity” program or “YO.” The federal initiative was designed to be a five-year effort, which would channel significant levels of resources to selected high poverty communities throughout the nation. Baltimore competed for, and along with 35 other communities across the country was awarded a “YO” grant in March 2000.

The YO! Goals

In many ways, the YO! Baltimore plan was very straightforward. The goal was to establish a comprehensive youth services system in the target area and have this system aggressively act to provide out of school youth and those most at risk of dropping out of school who lived in the YO! area with opportunities to:

• Increase labor market skills and gain career-starting employment,
• Raise educational attainment rates,
• Fully tap their potential for becoming productive and self-supporting citizens.

Success would be measured by an increase in the employment rate, graduation rate and college enrollment of young people residing in the specific neighborhoods.

The YO! Target Area

Following federal guidelines, the target community was nearly identical to Baltimore’s Empowerment Zone (EZ). Covering 25 census tracts in 33 residential neighborhoods on the east, south and west sides of the city, it was an area of extreme poverty. The four following graphs represent the social and economic issues people in these communities faced on a daily basis at the time the YO! Baltimore grant was developed.

Employment and Earnings

The road to recovery for these disconnected youth and young adults continues to be through education and employment. During the 2006-2007 program year, more than 80% of YO! participants were either working or engaged in an education program. Of those working, 38% were also pursuing educational goals in structured programs. The hourly wages of those working was $8.41.

Participation in YO! Baltimore prepares young adults for the world of work by improving attitudes, interest and abilities to succeed on the job – attributes employers seek when hiring for entry level positions. It is a fact that youth who increase their educational attainment and build their workplace resumes are more likely to succeed on the job. YO!’s Job Readiness Training is already having an impact on earnings as completers are earning $21 more per week than those not participating in the training.

The top three industries in which youth were placed were:

• 32% hospitality and food services
• 8% retail trades
• 15% administrative and support services

Academic Achievement

YO! staff encourage its new participants to understand the correlation between academic credentials and one’s capacity to earn higher wages. Those with diplomas enroll into college, and youth without them are encouraged to participate in basic literacy, pre-GED, GED, or on-line credit-recovery classes based on their grade level assessment. Reading and math skill levels are very low for the average entering YO! participant, but all participants are expected to improve.

Korinne

When Korinne enrolled in YO! Baltimore she was a high school dropout and a young mother of a three-month old child. She realized that it would be hard to work toward her high school diploma, find employment, and take care of her young son. But Korinne was determined to get her life back on track and focused on setting education and employment goals.

She enrolled in GED classes at the YO! center and when she couldn’t find child care, she brought her son with her. Her YO! advocate and newly found YO! friends would help look after her son, when needed, so that Korinne could focus on her studies in the TED class and her job readiness trainings.

She started working a part-time job while continuing her GED preparation. Her first attempt at the GED exam resulted in passing all but one test area. But the combination of Korinne’s determination and YO! staff’s encouragement was strong enough for Korinne to get a full-time job as a cashier at Stop Shop & Save Grocery Store, while continuing to work toward earning her high school credentials. Her YO! advocate helped to mediate an arrangement so that Korinne’s mother could provide day care for her son. This allowed Korinne to work and study for the GED at home. She used GED tutorials provided by her GED instructor, retested, and earned her diploma.

YO! Baltimore assisted Korinne with beginning nursing assistant training at Sojourner-Douglass College, which subsequently led to her enrolling at Baltimore City Community College where she is taking classes to become a nurse.
During 2006-2007, 175 youth improved at least one grade level in either reading or math. Forty-six (46) youth earned their GED or high school diploma. There were 10 youth enrolled in college during the year, and another 124 were taking a specific career training course.

Summary

Since YO! Baltimore began in 2000, month-after-month, youth with significant life challenges and substantial failures decided to enroll in the program because they wanted to belong to something positive and move their lives forward in a positive direction. YO! Baltimore continues to prove its impact on the youth it serves. Through its many partners, it is continuing to provide the vital services these previously disconnected young people need to grow into productive citizens.

Important gains are being made to help reconnect these young adults to a path filled with opportunities to improve educational, employability, and social skills – a path that leads to academic accomplishments, sustainable jobs, and positive community contributions. However, the full impact cannot yet be fully measured but will be revealed over time as these young adults – previously given little hope for the future – continue to realize their potential and apply the lessons learned through YO! Baltimore.

It is essential for the future of Baltimore and other cities to provide the guidance, job training, and sense of purpose to youth and young adults who have not met with success in traditional settings. YO! Baltimore is proving that establishing a comprehensive youth development system pays rewards not only for the participants, but also for the general community. YO! Baltimore will continue to spread its message of accomplishment as it continues to seek additional resources to meet the needs of all deserving Baltimore youth and young adults.

In 2006 with support from the City of Baltimore, YO! Baltimore opened its doors to young people living in all of the city’s neighborhoods.

YO! Baltimore is proving that establishing a comprehensive youth development system pays rewards not only for the participants, but also for the general community.
As the Youth Opportunity grant funding expired on June 30, 2006, it is now time to look back, assess the hard work and expenditure of $38 million in federal funds and determine what has been accomplished. A comprehensive summary of YO! Baltimore’s impressive list of achievements is contained in this report, and detailed on the YO! website, www.yobaltimore.org.

The following shares some highlights of these accomplishments:

• YO! designed, renovated and equipped five new, highly automated youth “places,” creating an effective, community-based network of service centers.
• YO! engaged over 4,300 young people in a variety of programs – many of these individuals are still actively participating and are on track to enter the workforce or college in 2005 and 2006.
• YO! filled more than 2,000 jobs in Baltimore City for over 600 different employers.
• YO! helped more than 1,600 young people gain valuable educational credentials (post-secondary degree, high school diploma/GED/vocational skill credential).
• YO! participants entering the labor force earned wages at a rate 44% higher than a comparable peer group.
• YO! participants dropped out of school less often, attended class more frequently and graduated from school at a higher rate than their school peers who did not enroll in the program.
• YO! female participants had babies less frequently than non-participants and, in fact, were 25% less likely to have a child than the comparison group.
• YO! participants 18 and older showed a third fewer arrests and convictions of crimes than a comparable group. Participants were also half as likely to be arrested for a violent offense as the comparison group.

This list continues in the report, and along with the accompanying statistics, clearly proves that YO! Baltimore has had and continues to have a major impact on one of the most disadvantaged groups in our city.

While the data show that life is already improving in many ways for thousands of these young people, the true return on investment will be evident in the years to come as the YO! participants who are now on a positive trajectory attend college, start their long term careers, support their families and contribute to Baltimore’s economy.

Not to be forgotten are the lessons learned from the YO! experience. These lessons span a wide spectrum – from discovering what services worked best with disconnected, out-of-school youth, to confirm...
Executive Summary

YO! Baltimore was created to address a growing challenge. Thousands of Baltimore City’s young people were on the streets – young people who lacked education, skills, and credentials. Many also lacked any idea of what it takes to succeed in the labor force. Research and common sense suggested that without the opportunity to make the transition to the adult world of work, youth in these circumstances were highly susceptible to aberrant behaviors that could lead to significant negative consequences for themselves and their neighborhoods.

When a community faces this type of situation, which Baltimore did in 2000, it recognizes that what is needed goes well beyond the positive impact a single youth program might offer. Baltimore’s leaders knew that in addition to supporting school reform efforts, they needed to develop a comprehensive network of education and training programs and engage a wide variety of human service providers to work collaboratively and form an integrated system. Ideally this system would address the multiple issues facing out-of-school, unemployed youth and identify and build on their many talents and attributes. More important, this system needed to operate at a scale that could make a measurable dent in the growing at-risk youth population.

This was the challenge that confronted Baltimore when the federal government offered a limited number of cities the opportunity to participate in a Department of Labor demonstration youth program called Youth Opportunity. The overall design of the federal effort was to concentrate a significant amount of resources on the most at-risk youth between the ages of 14 and 21 who were living in the local area’s most impoverished neighborhoods. The initiative called for the creation of a comprehensive youth service system providing skills training, basic education and work experience, committed involvement of caring adults, and developmental opportunities aimed at assisting the young people in the successful transition to adulthood and responsible citizenship.

Baltimore successfully competed against hundreds of communities across the nation and was awarded a Youth Opportunity grant in March 2000. Then the hard work of making Baltimore’s vision a reality began. A committed team of representatives of youth organizations, city agencies, the public school system, post-secondary institutions and neighborhood groups began building a youth service system and by 2001 YO! Baltimore became fully operational.

Federal requirements limited YO! Baltimore to certain geographical areas designated as Baltimore’s Empowerment Zone (EZ). This area included 33 residential neighborhoods on the east, south and west sides of Baltimore. The targeted communities topped the charts in terms of people living in poverty, unemployment and crime rates, as well as a host of other negative social statistics. Collectively, more than 10,000 young people lived in the EZ and were already a part of, or at high risk of adding to, Baltimore’s significant level of unemployed or under-employed young adults.
A Declaration of Partnership

FOUNDING YO! PARTNERS

We, the Baltimore City Youth Opportunity Partners, commit to working together to build a youth opportunity system that will promote the long term employment of the young people residing in Baltimore City's Empowerment Zone. We pledge our collective efforts in support of realizing our shared vision of ensuring all of our youth develop the skills, abilities and personal attributes necessary for the successful transition to productive adulthood. On this day, September 30, 1999, we make known our promise to uphold our partnership agreement, responsibilities and investment in our children and our future.

[Signatures]

[Institutions and Organizations]
YO! Baltimore is sponsored by the Mayor, the Baltimore City Council, and multiple workforce partners.

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