

# CONNECTED BY 25: EFFECTIVE POLICY SOLUTIONS FOR VULNERABLE YOUTH

## H I G H L I G H T S

### THE ISSUE

- > 1.3 million youth between the ages of 14 and 18 are at a high risk of not successfully transitioning to independent adulthood.
- > Youth between the ages of 14 and 18 are not the only ones at risk. In 2006, 2 million young adults between the ages of 19 and 24 were disconnected. This number is expected to increase to over 2.5 million by 2030.
- > The social and economic costs of failing to address the needs of disconnected youth far outweigh the investments necessary to reduce the number of youth that become disconnected.
- > There is currently little to no cross-over between the social institutions of foster care, juvenile justice, and health care and the educational and career support services available to youth.
- > Young adults with less than a high school education, though only 13 percent of the general 18 to 24 year old population, constitute more than half (52 percent) of the prison population.

### THE BRIEF

- > A group of policy experts was brought together by the Youth Transition Funders Group (YTFG) with the intent to strengthen philanthropic investments and support effective policy solutions for older youth.
- > Recommendations are directed at changes to the way public systems—at the local, state, county, and federal levels—can work independently and collaboratively to achieve outcomes.
- > Included are descriptions of programs currently in effect that are paving the way to effective policy solutions at city, county, state, and federal levels.
- > Findings support that changes in the White House, Congress, Governors' Offices, and State Legislatures may provide opportunities to further the vulnerable youth agenda over the next two to five years.

### KEY FINDINGS

- > Policy is made in silos and will be made in silos. It is unlikely that policies for vulnerable youth will be advanced through a global approach that addresses the needs of youth served by different systems.
- > Despite the reality of how policy is made, leaders should consistently reference a common framework for supporting vulnerable youth within specific systems of care, especially bearing in mind youth impacted by multiple systems.
- > Programs and policies must be directed at seeking out the participation of youth who are harder to engage or who may fall through the cracks without cross-systems coordination.
- > Opportunities for success are greatest at the state and local levels, as most of the systems that serve vulnerable youth are primarily state or locally administered and are not overly burdened by federal restrictions.
- > Accountability and data tracking are necessary to successfully duplicate programs and to create measurable outcomes.
- > Existing policies with room for immediate support include:
  - Improved high school design under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act
  - Upgraded employment and training programming to meet 21st century standards under the Workforce Investment Act
  - High-quality state implementation of the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act
  - Restored capacity to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) under the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act.