



**NATIONAL
COLLABORATION
FOR YOUTH**

An Affinity Group of the
National Human Services Assembly

Toward a Brighter Future:

An Essential Agenda
for America's Young People

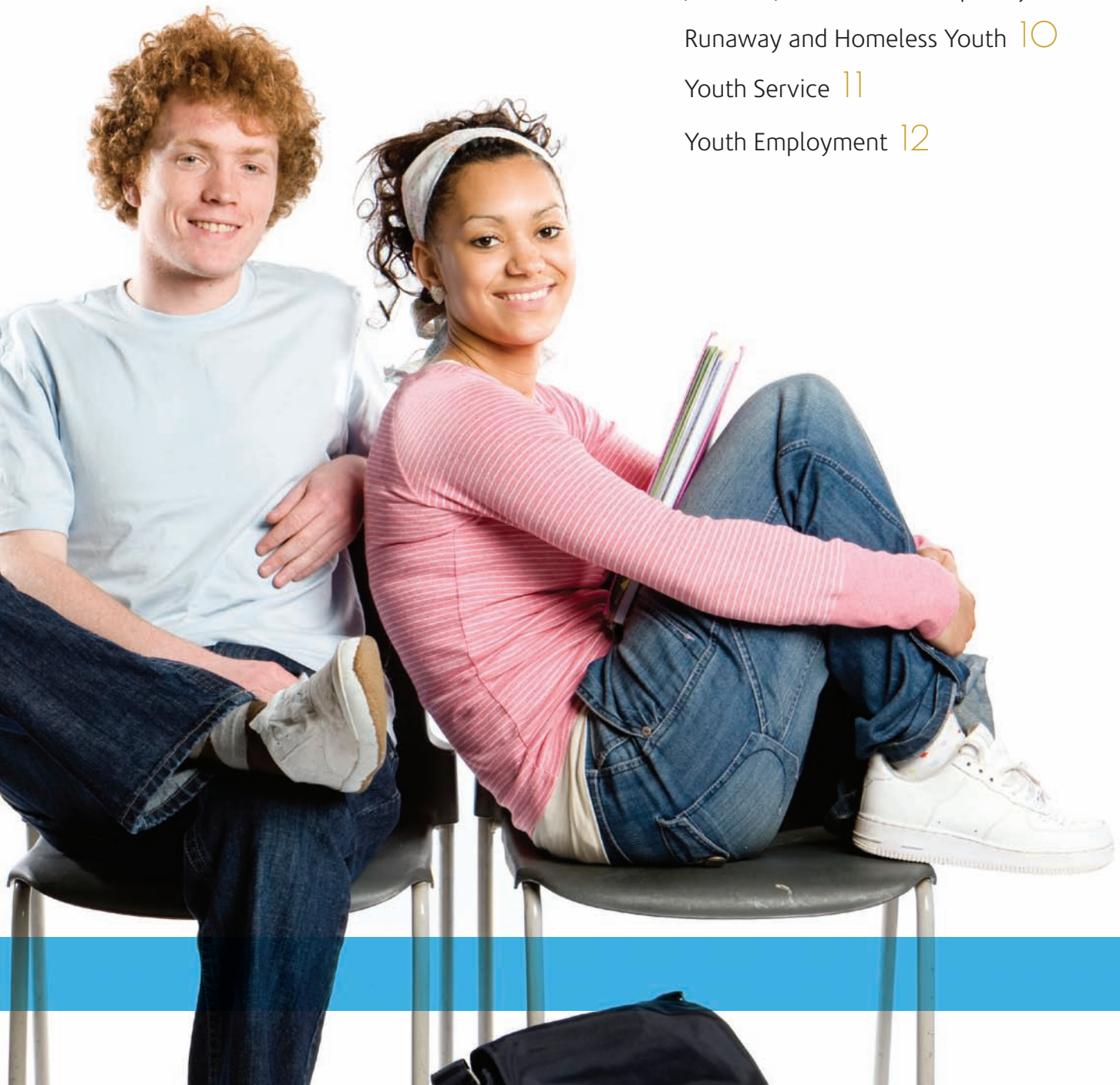
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Afterschool Alliance	Forum for Youth Investment	MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership
Alliance for Children and Families	Gay Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN)	National Healthy Start Association
American Camp Association	Generations United	National Network for Youth
American Humanics	Girl Scouts of the USA	National Urban League
America's Promise Alliance	Girls Inc.	National Youth Employment Coalition
Association of Jewish Family & Children's Agencies	Hostelling International—USA	Save the Children
Association of Junior Leagues International, Inc.	I Have A Dream Foundation	Scholarship America
A World Fit for Kids!	KaBOOM!	Search Institute
Big Brothers Big Sisters of America	Leadership and Renewal Outfitters	The Salvation Army
Boy Scouts of America	Lutheran Services in America	United Way of America
Boys & Girls Clubs of America	National 4-H Council	Volunteers of America
Camp Fire USA	National Alliance for Hispanic Health	YMCA of the USA
Child Welfare League of America	National Association for Parents of Children with Visual Impairments, Inc.	Youth Crime Watch
Coalition for Juvenile Justice	National Center for Missing and Exploited Children	Youth Service America
Communities In Schools	National Foster Care Coalition	YOUTHBUILD USA
CORE: Coalition for Residential Education	National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship	YWCA USA

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introduction

Eighteen percent of children in the U.S. are living in poverty, up from 17.4% in 2006—the highest percentage of child poverty since 1998¹. Every year over 14 million young people are left alone to care for themselves after school, while over 2 million runaways have no home to call their own. Eight million U.S. children are without health insurance. Although many young people in this country may be doing well, it's clear too many are falling behind. While most would agree that “children are our greatest asset,” the federal government's investment in children and youth is in decline. According to the *Children's Budget Book*, federal spending on children decreased by 10% in the past five years².

These policy recommendations for the 111th Congress and the incoming President will begin to help lift children out of poverty and poor health, keep them safe, elevate our educational system to equip children for the 21st century, and engage youth in the nation's communities. Making the changes proposed in this document can save money, improve health, strengthen families, produce a more educated workforce for coming decades, and lay a base for an America that will thrive into the next century.

From their experience with tens of millions of children in virtually every community in America, the members of the National Collaboration for Youth (NCY) are in a unique position to know the challenges young people face. They are the household names of youth development in America. Generations of youth have grown up with these nonprofit community-based agencies—and still do. NCY members have the history, and are in communities, experiencing and responding to the needs of our young people.

We must move this nation toward a brighter future and invest in the needs of our children and youth. Now is the time to give our young people the tools to succeed. Together, these recommendations are an important first step. Each recommendation is necessary to fully meet the needs of children and youth in 2009 and beyond.



Federal Public Policy Recommendations

Resources are vital, but dollars alone are not the solution. Fragmented policy approaches will never produce the necessary change. As a nation, we have a sense of what we wish for all children: to become good citizens, to be self-sufficient, to stay out of trouble as youth and as adults, and to make the world a better place. What is the most effective way to support and empower young people toward that wished-for future? We need a truly comprehensive, unifying strategy for how the federal government works on issues facing children and youth. This strategy must include three core elements: a focus on the whole child; a fundamental premise that all young people should be treated with dignity and equality; and an approach that builds not from the deficits in young people's lives, but from assets. This last element, positive youth development, is a framework—an approach in which children and families are viewed as the sum of their assets, not of their problems or disadvantages. A shared vision and strategy, comprehensive and integrated support, and a tested framework—together these elements will change the odds for our kids.

To move towards a unifying national strategy for our young people, Congress and the President should:

- Reauthorize the **Federal Youth Coordination Act**, which would create a White House Office of National Youth Policy to facilitate interagency collaboration, coordinate federal research, and identify and replicate model programs.
- Publish an **Annual Children's Budget** that summarizes the total federal outlays for youth and youth-related programs and that provides measurement of the relationship between the outlays and benefit or program outcomes. This would gather all the diverse sources of federal funding for children's programs into one document that communicates a comprehensive and clear picture of federal spending on children.
- Enact the **Child Protection Improvements Act of 2008** to allow youth-serving organizations access to nationwide FBI fingerprint searches in a timely and affordable manner.

In a federal government pilot program where 40,000 background checks of potential youth-serving volunteers were conducted using FBI data,

6.1%

of potential volunteers had criminal records of concern. These included very serious offenses such as rape, murder, and child sexual abuse.





As of early 2007,
an estimated
365,617
children nationwide
were on the waiting
list for subsidized
child care.

National Fact Sheet 2008,
Child Welfare League of America

Early Childhood

Affordable, accessible child care is a necessity for children of working parents, especially those who cannot afford care at market rates or for whom quality care is not available. Research shows preschool years are critical for brain development and child development overall. The foundation laid in these early years will affect children and the quality of their contributions to society for the rest of their life. As such, quality is an essential element of early child education and child care as children progress developmentally.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Early Child Care & Education

- Expand **Early Head Start**, as it currently serves less than 3 percent of the nearly 3 million eligible children under age three.
- Set the **Head Start** program on a path to serve a significantly greater percentage of eligible children than the just over 50 percent of eligible three- and four-year-olds now enrolled. Also, increase the emphasis on parent involvement, a critical factor in child development.
- Establish a universal **pre-kindergarten** program to ensure that all children 3, 4, and 5 years old have access to a high-quality full-day, full-calendar-year education.

Child Care

- Reauthorize and expand the **Child Care and Development Block Grant** so additional children and families can benefit from subsidies. Require reasonable market reimbursement rates in all states so that parents are not forced to choose less-expensive—and often lower quality, overcrowded and unsafe—care.



Education for All Children & Youth

All young people, including those with disabilities, should receive a public education that meets their needs. One critical challenge is keeping youth in school so they are well prepared for their futures. Current statistics from America's Promise Alliance indicate that more than 1.1 million American students drop out of high school every year³.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Public Education

- Reauthorize the **Elementary and Secondary Education Act** (No Child Left Behind) with these critical child and youth development considerations:
 - *Outcomes:* Social, emotional, physical and civic outcomes should be considered along with academic outcomes.
 - *Target population:* Appropriate supplemental supports should be effectively targeted to youth in disadvantaged populations.
 - *Delivery systems:* While school buildings and personnel are central to formal education, they can and should be supported by a range of community-based, faith-based and other public agency organizations.
 - *Types of services, supports and opportunities:* In addition to basic academic instruction, offer a range of complementary services and supports, such as mentoring, service learning, physical fitness, and other enrichment programs that build and enhance life skills and applied skills—all aimed at the holistic development of children.
 - *Testing, Evaluation:* Provide testing and evaluations that measure the educational progress of individual children and schools (e.g., growth models), rather than comparing all children and schools to arbitrary external standards that are unrelated to available resources or barriers.
- Reauthorize the **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act** (IDEA), and expand services and resources within, as this Act governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services to children with disabilities.

Engaging Parents & Community Partners

- Enact the **Keeping Parents and Communities Engaged Act** (which amends Title V of ESEA) and expand parent and family involvement in schools, engage community partners in meeting the comprehensive needs of students, and address high dropout rates among at-risk children.
- Enable community-based and faith-based programs with a proven track record of working with struggling students to receive Title I funds to provide **Supplemental Education Services**, award education credentials and credits, and collaborate with school districts to create alternative education and career pathways.
- Support additional resources for schools not making **Adequate Yearly Progress** to assess the potential of and possibly implement community-based, integrated student services.
- Support a **federal quality initiative** on community-based, integrated student services, including research, evaluation, training, and technical assistance.

Mentoring

- Enact the **Mentoring America's Children Act**. This bill would strengthen and reauthorize the US Department of Education's Mentoring Programs grants, which enables local mentoring organizations to provide evidence based, high quality school-based mentoring programs for children with the greatest need residing in rural areas, high-crime areas, or troubled-home environments, or who attend schools with violence problems.
- Support the **Mentoring for All Act** which seeks to strengthen and grow mentoring infrastructure across the country to ensure strong, standards-based, high-quality mentoring opportunities for youth; including increasing and improving mentor recruitment and training, background checks for volunteers, number of successful matches, and general assistance to direct-service mentoring programs.

Safe Schools

- Enact the **Safe Schools Improvement Act** or other comprehensive legislation that prohibits bullying and harassment in schools on the basis of actual or perceived race, color, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability of students; requires schools and local education authorities (LEAs) to include bullying and harassment in existing acts of violence that must be reported; and allows LEAs to utilize funding to implement policies, collaborate with community-based organizations, and train students and educators on how to address and prevent bullying and harassment within their schools.

Quality Afterschool & Summer Programs

Not only do afterschool and summer programs ensure the safety of children during unsupervised hours—preventing risky and delinquent behavior as well as harm in other forms—but research indicates that quality programs enhance the acquisition of academic, social and workforce skills students need to succeed.

Today more than
14 million
American children take care of themselves after the school day ends, including almost four million sixth to eighth graders and over 40,000 kindergartners.

America After 3 PM: A Household Survey on Afterschool in America, Afterschool Alliance.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Establish provisions in all **afterschool programs** and funding streams that promote adherence to standards of high quality and support:
 - safe, enriching settings;
 - well-trained and well-compensated staff with appropriate skills and competencies who convey care and concern for each child;
 - activities appropriate to each child's stage of growth, unique personality and interest; and
 - appropriate screening, professional development, and benefits for program staff.
- Enact legislation that supports and develops the afterschool workforce, such as the **Teaching Fellows for Expanded Learning and After-School Act**.
- Enhance **21st Century Community Learning Centers** (21st CCLC):
 - Improve sustainability of well-performing 21st CCLC programs by making grants renewable based on merit.
 - Increase Training and Technical Assistance resources.
 - Establish afterschool programs as a platform for preventive health and physical activity for children and youth.





Child Welfare

In any given year, thousands of children cycle through the nation's foster care and child welfare systems. Many live for months—even years—in foster care, group homes and institutions as a result of family problems, personal problems and other conditions.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Reauthorize the **Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA)**, the key federal legislation addressing child abuse and neglect, with particular focus on the lack of front end child abuse and neglect prevention services. Apply research and program evaluation efforts to help advance the field of prevention of child abuse and neglect towards more evidence-based programs and practices.
- Enact the **Kinship Caregivers Support Act** and related legislation for subsidized guardianship to enable children in the care of grandparents and other relatives to exit foster care into permanency; establish Kinship navigator programs to help link relative caregivers both inside and outside of the formal child welfare system to a broad range of services and supports that will help them meet the needs of the children in their care; require notice be given to adult relatives of a child if he or she is placed in foster care; and allow states the option to set separate licensing standards for relative foster parents and non-relative foster parents.
- Expand the **Child Tax Credit** and the **Earned Income Tax Credit** to reduce pressures for families under economic stress.

In 2006, an estimated
1,530
child fatalities occurred
in the United States due
to abuse and neglect.

*Child Maltreatment 2006, U.S. Department
of Health and Human Services*

Healthy Children & Youth

There are an estimated eight million U.S. children without health insurance; almost all of these children have at least one parent who works full time⁴. Health is a critical element of child and youth development, inseparable from other aspects of successful development.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Cover all children and youth as part of any **national health reform plan**.
- Reauthorize and expand the scope of the **State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP)**.
- Reauthorize the **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)**. Only 20% of children with mental disorders are identified and receive mental health services⁵. It is necessary to provide a wide range of prevention and treatment services to reach a greater percentage of children.
- Reauthorize the **Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004**. This act includes all the Federal School Breakfast and the National School Lunch Programs, the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and is critical for the healthy development of disadvantaged children.

Childhood Obesity Prevention

Among the millions of children in our communities, poor nutrition and sedentary lifestyles cause serious health problems, lead to social and psychological problems and limit academic achievement. Childhood obesity now ranks as the #1 health concern for children and young people in the United States⁶. Comprehensive legislative measures are a key part of the urgently needed solution to this potentially devastating problem.

- Expand the use of Title II funds to include **professional development for teachers** of health education and physical education and expand the **Carol M. White Physical Education Program**.
- Provide a broad range of approaches to **nutrition education** in after-school and out-of-school settings including consumer education, gardening and cooking as well as basic nutrition science.






Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention

Juvenile justice and delinquency prevention begins with effective prevention, family support and youth development, and ends with effective interventions and transitional supports for youth. Thus, opportunities for positive development must be available to America's children and families to help youth to achieve: high self-esteem; skills competence across a wide range of academic, creative and social spheres; a sense of usefulness, belonging, positive influence and personal responsibility; and meaningful connections with adults and community.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Reauthorize the **Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974** as amended, including the core requirements that will:
 - keep juveniles out of adult jails, lock-ups and other forms of inappropriate detention;
 - keep status offenders and non-offenders out of secure detention and correctional facilities;
 - ensure sight and sound separation between juveniles and adults charged with, or convicted of, criminal charges;
 - reduce the disproportionately high confinement of minority juveniles.
- Support community-based **re-entry programs** that build youth competencies, provide them with adult mentors, and prepare them for jobs, education, and citizenship.
- Enact **prevention/intervention**-focused policies and programs, e.g., the Youth Prison Reduction through Opportunities, Mentoring, Intervention, Support, and Education Act (Youth PROMISE Act), that:
 - direct resources towards communities facing an increased risk of crime and gang activity in order to enable those communities to begin to address significant unmet needs and prevent crime from occurring;
 - build upon evidence-based and promising prevention and intervention practices proven to reduce youth violence and delinquency rather than more costly and unnecessarily punitive alternatives.



Every year, an estimated
2.8 million
runaway and homeless
youth live on the streets
of America⁷.

Runaway & Homeless Youth

All young people deserve—at a minimum—a safe, secure home environment in which to live and grow. The needs of runaway and homeless youth and their families are often complex and require a range of services from a variety of organizations to help them re-form as a family unit.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Reauthorize the **Runaway and Homeless Youth Act**, which provides for temporary shelter and counseling, transitional living for older homeless youth to move successfully toward independence, and outreach that connects youth on the streets to services and prevents sexual abuse and exploitation of these youths.

Housing Policy

- Fill the homeless “service gap” by creating a **pilot program within the Department of Housing and Urban Development** to fund and support emergency shelters for youth 18–24.
- Update the **homeless management information system** to include data on homeless youth and young adults accessing the continuum of care.
- Develop legislation for better low-income **housing options** and improved access to housing programs for young adults, including Section 8 vouchers for youth receiving services or graduating from transitional living programs or aging out of the foster care system.
- Enact the **Homelessness Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act** (HEARTH) to ensure the inclusion of children, youth, and families who are verified as homeless by federal program personnel (including school district liaisons, Head Start programs, and Runaway and Homeless Youth Act programs) in the HUD definition of homelessness.
- Build the capacity in the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention to effectively monitor state compliance of the **de-institutionalization of status offenders** and to launch an initiative for community based alternatives for youth with non-criminal behaviors such as runaways and truant.

Youth Service

Research shows the critical developmental value of providing opportunities for youth to learn by contributing to their community. Young people bring new strategies, skills, and energy to solve the world's most challenging health, education, human service, and environmental issues. Through service, young people develop a sense of connection and commitment to community that will last throughout their lives.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Reauthorize the **Corporation for National and Community Service**:
 - Make **Learn and Serve America**, which currently enables over one million students throughout the United States to make meaningful contributions to their community while educating themselves, available in every school in America.
 - Expand **AmeriCorps** with a focus on increasing the proportion of diverse and low-income youth who serve.
 - Create innovative new programs like **Summer of Service** and **Semester of Service** to provide more opportunities for young people to connect their academics to their service.
 - Incorporate partnership, innovation, and flexibility in relationships with organizational grantees at all levels; and bridge programs and grantmaking mechanisms to achieve the best possible outcomes for people and communities served.
- Advance public policies that provide opportunities for **multigenerational service** activities to leverage the talent, skills and abilities of older adults in meeting critical community needs. Multigenerational and civic engagement programs benefit children and youth in schools where older adults tutor students, resulting in improved grades, increased personal and social development, and decreased absences, suspensions, and drug and alcohol abuse.



Youth Employment

The economic health of our nation depends on investments we make in young people—especially investments we make in workforce development, education and training initiatives aimed at increasing their participation in a knowledge-based economy. We must engage all of our youth, including those who are disconnected from their school and their community, in order to maintain and grow America's competitive edge in the global economy.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Reauthorize the **Workforce Investment Act** (WIA) Youth Activities. Enable WIA to enhance the ability of youth employment programs to serve youth:
 - Streamline the eligibility determination process and expanding income and group eligibility requirements so that youth who already qualify for other federal programs may also qualify for WIA.
 - Support a Performance Measurement System that takes into account the challenges associated with serving the hardest to serve populations and which allow for reporting of interim gains of both in-school and out-of-school Youth Activities participants.
 - Retain local flexibility and promote cross-sector collaboration between workforce investment boards, businesses, youth service providers, school districts, and state institutions.
 - Allow youth ages 14–24 to be eligible for WIA youth programs.
 - Maintain Youth Councils or, as an alternative, an analogous community entity focusing on youth and facilitating cross-system collaboration.
 - Establish a competitive grant program focused on areas of high youth unemployment and poverty. Use the Youth Opportunity program as a basis for the design and implementation of the program.
 - Encourage collaborations between youth employment agencies and high-growth high-demand industries.

Pathways to Education and Employment

- Strengthen **secondary education prevention and intervention programs** for children and youth who are neglected, delinquent, or at-risk in order to facilitate their transition into community-based educational or work options, and to encourage partnerships with the local workforce investment system.
- Build bridges from **youth employment programs to post-secondary programs**, ensuring that former dropouts and struggling students receive support, services, and opportunities designed to increase their postsecondary enrollment, persistence and completion.
- Incorporate **economic literacy and entrepreneurship education** at appropriate stages in the development of children and youth.
- Expand **YouthBuild**, as authorized under WIA and administered by ETA, to enable disconnected 16–24 year old youth to complete their secondary education, obtain job skills while serving their communities, and transition to post-secondary education and careers.

ENDNOTES

- 1 U.S. Census Bureau, *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2007*, August, 2008.
- 2 First Focus, *Children's Budget Book*, 2008.
- 3 America's Promise Alliance, *Cities in Crisis*, 2008.
- 4 Every Child Matters Education Fund, *Homeland Insecurity*, 2008.
- 5 U.S. Public Health Service, *Report of the surgeon general's conference on children's mental health: A national action agenda*, 2000.
- 6 University of Michigan, C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, Ann Arbor, MI, 2008.
- 7 Ringwalt, C. L., Greene, J. M., Robertson, M., & McPheeters, M. (1998). The prevalence of homelessness among adolescents in the United States [Electronic version]. *American Journal of Public Health*, 88, 1325–1329.

*“There can be no keener revelation
of a society’s soul than the way
in which it treats its children.”*

Nelson Mandela, former president of South Africa

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These public policy recommendations, and the changes they call for, would make drastic improvements in the lives of America’s young people. This effort could not have been possible without those who lent an extra hand and who, like me, see our work as not just a job but a passion:

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With much appreciation,

Natalie Thompson, Senior Program Associate
National Collaboration for Youth/ National Human Services Assembly

The National Collaboration for Youth, a 40-year old affinity group, is a coalition of National Human Services Assembly member organizations that have a significant interest in youth development. Members of NCY include more than 40 national non-profit youth development organizations. Our mission is to provide a united voice as advocates for youth to improve the conditions of young people in America, and to help young people reach their full potential. The National Collaboration for Youth brings together experts in public policy, programming and research to share knowledge and promote collective action to improve the lives of America's youth.

www.collab4youth.org

While these recommendations focus on needs of children and youth, NCY and all of its member agencies recognize that the love and support of family and the ability of family to provide for the economic well-being of children and youth are absolutely fundamental. Strengthening families raising children is a related set of challenges that many of these agencies and others are working toward as well. To learn more about strengthening families, visit the National Human Services Assembly Family Strengthening Policy Center.

www.nassembly.org/fspc

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*For more information on the National
Collaboration for Youth, visit:*

www.collab4youth.org



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