

A Year Up -- Connecting Underserved Young Adults to Corporate Jobs

Joseph Coyle 20 February 2018

It all started with a young boy named David who lived in one of New York City's most dangerous housing projects. Gerald Chertavian got to know David well through the Big Brothers Big Sisters organization. Over the years Gerald remained a stable mentor in David's life, when it was time for David to graduate high school, Gerald made a promise that if David maintained grades above a C then Gerald would pay his tuition. David excelled in college and now has a successful career. It struck Gerald that there were many more Americans who have the potential to succeed but lack opportunity. Gerald explains "I saw that our country had incredible young people...they're often smart, ambitious, hungry, motivated, and incredibly talented. Yet, they have absolutely no idea how to move that talent to productive capacity." Year Up was created with the idea that potential is distributed equally but opportunity is not.

Year Up's mission is to close the opportunity divide, the gap that exists between the roughly five million young adults who are out of school and out of work, with no more than a high school diploma, and the roughly 12 million unfilled entry level jobs in America.

The program model is simple and broken into two six-month sections. The first six months, called learning and development, students are in the classroom learning professional skills and technical skills. Courses are developed based on market demand. In Greater Philadelphia students can choose between Information Technology and Business Operations. The second six months, students spend in internships with major companies applying the skills they have learned during the learning and development period. At the end of one year, a student has earned up to 24 college credits, a six-month internship experience to build their resume, and incurred no student debt. While the program model is simple, the process is not easy.

Students are held to high expectations throughout the year. This starts with a contract that lays out expectations and ensures each student is held to the same level of accountability. The contract has points associated with it and each student starts the year with 150 points. Students who meet expectations can earn additional points each week, while students that earn infractions against the agreed upon contract can lose points. Students can lose points for tardiness, improper dress code, late assignments, or the like. Students that earn infractions and lose points see a reduction in their weekly stipend.

With high expectations comes high support. Staff members serve as teachers and coaches during learning and development. Prior to the start of internship, students

are matched with outside volunteer mentors, these mentors are an additional layer of support. Social workers on staff also serve as part of the support system, enabling students to address issues that may arise outside of Year Up.

Most importantly, Year Up is not a charity, it is a road map to success for our students and a business solution for our corporate partners. Through this model, Year Up provides opportunity and access to both education and a professional career. Nationally, we partner with over 250 organizations

Year Up Greater Philadelphia launched in 2013 and has grown from 12 graduates in class one to more than 180 students per year with plans to grow the market and serve 320 students per year by 2020. Year Up Greater Philadelphia is one of 17 markets across the country. Nationally, Year up will serve approximately 4,000 opportunity youth in the United States this year. On average 90 percent of our graduates are employed and/or enrolled in higher education, of the students who are employed full time the average hourly wage is \$19 an hour, and according to an external study the program boosts a young adults annual earnings by an average of 30 percent.

Year Up is more than a workforce development program, and it is more than a business solution for corporate America. It is a movement, fighting for economic justice

and equal opportunity for low-income young adults who otherwise would not have a pathway to success.