

Response from the author

Gerald Chertavian

I appreciate Carolyn Heinrich's thoughtful comments in response to *A Year Up* and welcome this opportunity to discuss the current nature and future of the program. I have broken down my responses into three categories, addressing issues of scaling, impact, and lessons learned.

Scaling

Heinrich raised a concern about whether the Year Up program model limits scalability. Our program does depend on a number of factors that limit where we are able to expand. For example, public transportation, innovative community college partners, and the depth of the local philanthropic base are factors we consider when looking to expand. However, we believe the basic components of our program model are scalable. These include high expectations and high support for our students, emphasis on both technical and professional skills, and education that is closely tied to work experience.

By 2016 we will serve 2,500 students annually in 12 cities. Even if we were to grow our program to 25 cities, we would still be serving less than one percent of "Opportunity Youth," 16- to 24-year-olds who are neither enrolled in school nor fully participating in the labor market.¹ Our direct service program is central to our enterprise and we are committed to building and strengthening Year Up as a vibrant community asset. However, in order to fully realize our mission of closing the Opportunity Divide, we are pursuing two complementary strategies.

First, we are working to eliminate the barriers that perpetuate the Opportunity Divide by changing national systems. We are engaging and partnering with corporate partners, academics, community-based organizations, and policymakers to build a climate where all young adults have access to meaningful careers and quality postsecondary education. Second, we are designing and piloting alternative program models that can grow rapidly to serve more than one hundred thousand young adults across the United States each year. These "Million Person Model" pilots are being built using the successful practices of our core program and in partnership with community colleges. Currently, we are piloting an alternative model in Baltimore with Baltimore City Community College and in Miami with Miami Dade College.

Impact

In reference to Heinrich's remarks about the experimental evaluation outcomes, it is important to remember that treatment group effects are generally only apparent following the completion of the training program, as was the case with

Heinrich's own Workforce Investment Act (WIA) research. What is particularly notable about the Year Up results is the magnitude of the observed effects and the differences in the employment sectors. We are committed to helping our students' secure professional jobs in the sectors for which they were trained while attending Year Up. Thus, although rates of employment may be only nominally higher than the control group, the 30 percent boost in annual earnings is substantial and lasting. These results are even more significant when considering that they occurred in a program serving low-income young adults, a population that has traditionally been very difficult to serve. Furthermore, these results were attained without producing any negative impacts on the treatment group's college attendance. That is, even while getting into more demanding, higher-wage jobs, students were not forced to decide between education and work.

Year Up also has a strong focus on long-term outcomes. While we report postsecondary enrollment four months after the program, we continue to support our alumni in their work towards postsecondary completion. Part-time students in our target population only graduate at a rate ranging between 12 percent and 24 percent. While we are still collecting conclusive evidence, the early reports are very promising: a survey of our alumni shows that of those who enrolled in school, 84 percent have either completed or persisted in their studies. We are confident that our alumni, anchored by career pathway jobs and a base of college credit received while at Year Up, will complete postsecondary credentials at substantially higher rates than their peers.

The workforce development system

Heinrich took exception to the sentence from *A Year Up*, "Add it all together and you get a workforce development system that really doesn't work," noting that the pattern of effects for Year Up looks very similar to those observed for disadvantaged adults in the WIA System. While we believe strongly in the value of government-supported workforce development initiatives, I would counter that alternative training programs are not producing the outcomes needed. A 2010 Department of Labor study on federally financed workforce training programs found that "ultimate gains from participation are small or nonexistent," with graduates earning no more than nonparticipants three and four years later.² While nearly half of the respondents to a recent employer survey offered workforce readiness training for their new hires, most report the programs to be only "moderately" or "somewhat" successful.³

Year Up is providing a clear, workable solution to a persistent and significant problem. The result of failing to educate and train new workers is that businesses lack the talent they need

to thrive. Out of nearly 1,200 organizations polled in a study by the American Society for Training and Development, 79 percent state that a “skills gap” exists in their organization, defined as “a significant gap between an organization’s current capabilities and the skills it needs to achieve its goals.” The top reason given for that skills gap was that the skills of the current workforce do not match changes in company strategy, goals, markets, or business models.⁴

Measuring the program

Heinrich asked whether Year Up should measure a broader range of program effects. Given our relatively brief tenure as an organization, we currently assess outcomes that the program can reasonably influence in the short-term, such as employment, salary, and school enrollment. We are strongly committed to understanding the longer term impacts of our program as we continue to engage and support our growing alumni base. In our first Long-Term Graduate Success Survey, which surveyed over 1,200 (61 percent) of our alumni in 2012, we examined factors such as homeownership and family life to gain a broader and deeper knowledge of where our alumni are now. With this information, we are in a better position to develop strategies that will ensure their success in the future. We are also participating in the Innovative Strategies for Increasing Self-Sufficiency study, a rigorous longitudinal evaluation of a variety of “career pathways” organizations being conducted by the Administration for Children and Families. The study will evaluate Year Up’s impact on a much wider range of factors, including healthy behaviors and psycho-social development.

Population served

As Heinrich noted, Year Up does not work with students who do not have a high school diploma or a GED. Through our partnership with local colleges, Year Up participants receive college credit for the classes they take while in the program. To earn these credits, our college partners require that our participants have a high school diploma or GED. Additionally, corporate partners usually require that employees have a high school diploma or GED. We do work with a number of educational and community-based organizations that assist young adults who do not have a high school diploma or GED. Many young adults express interest in our program, find out about the GED requirement, complete a GED, and then subsequently enroll in Year Up. For all enrollees through November 2012, roughly 1 in 5 did not graduate from high school and instead earned a GED.

Heinrich notes that Year Up is a selective program, and that the evaluation results can only be generalized to the more motivated group of young adults selected for the intervention. We believe that when all young adults are held to high expectations and given high support, they are able to achieve anything they set out to do. Our students, like millions of young people, do not have access to the tools and support they need to connect to a meaningful career path, but are motivated and determined. Many of our students lacked the resources, both financial and non-financial, to persist

in postsecondary education. They typically attended underperforming high schools with overburdened college and career counselors. Often they did not have a support system or role models who could help them navigate the transition from school to a long-term career.

During the admissions process, our Student Services department conducts a comprehensive “Readiness Assessment” with every student to identify challenges that could hinder his or her success in the program. We have found that over 40 percent of students have significant financial risk such as receipt of public benefits, working significant hours outside of the program, or not having health insurance. One-third of students have a family risk; they have been in foster care or group homes, are the primary caregiver for a family member, or are dealing with a significant family crisis. Fourteen percent of our students are parents, and 9 percent are homeless or transient. Our students, like many young adults in this country, face tremendous challenges to success.

Lessons learned

Heinrich wondered whether lessons from Year Up could be used to intervene earlier in the lives of at-risk youth. We strongly believe parts of our model are transferable and beneficial for younger audiences. As a member of the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, I chaired a cross-sector Task Force on Integrating College and Career Readiness, which in part sought to harness the innovations and insights from a number of successful programs, including Year Up, to serve all Massachusetts students. For instance, Year Up’s program is rooted in a “high expectations, high support” culture. We hold our students to high standards because we believe in their potential and refuse to accept anything less. We also want to prepare them for the rigor of the corporate world when they begin their internships and start their careers. To make sure that our students are set up for success, the program also provides the high level of support they need to navigate a challenging environment—these supports include a strong learning community of peers, staff advisors, volunteer mentors, tutors, and educational stipends.

In terms of extending the features of Year Up to other organizations that serve youth and young adults, we believe this squarely falls within our goal of closing the Opportunity Divide. To accomplish this, we will need deep and wide-reaching changes in our nation to provide every young person with the opportunity to succeed. Year Up offers one solution out of many, but we know we cannot realize our vision for the future on our own; we do not have all the answers. We believe sharing knowledge and information is essential to ensuring that we are all working together effectively to increase opportunities for young people. We are willing to share what we have learned with others, and are eager to incorporate new insights from our allies in the field. Through our systems change strategy, we work with others to expand meaningful career pathways for young adults and

connect employers to this underutilized pool of talent. For instance, through coalitions and strategic partnerships with like-minded organizations, we advocate for government funding that rewards program outcomes rather than efforts. We also work to engage more employers in providing career opportunities for young people through mentoring, internships, or innovative hiring practices that target Opportunity Youth. These efforts often point to Year Up as an example of “what works” in developing effective career pathways, but our goal is not to elevate Year Up, but to promote systemic changes in perception, practice, and policy that expand opportunities for all young adults.■

¹C. R. Belfield, H. M. Levin, and R. Rosen, *Economic Value of Opportunity Youth*, Civic Enterprises, Report to the Corporation for National and Community Service and the White House Council for Community Solutions, 2012, at www.civicerprises.net/MediaLibrary/Docs/econ_value_opportunity_youth.pdf.

²P. S. Goodman, “After Training, Still Scrambling for Employment,” *New York Times*, July 18, 2010.

³J. Casner-Lotto, E. Rosenblum, and M. Wright, *The Ill-Prepared U.S. Workforce: Exploring the Challenges of Employer-Provided Workforce Readiness Training*, The Conference Board, American Society for Training and Development, Society for Human Resource Management, and Corporate Voices for Working Families, Research Report, 2009.

⁴P. Galagan, *Bridging the Skills Gap: New Factors Compound the Growing Skills Shortage*, American Society for Training and Development, 2010.

Kids’ Share Project

Kids’ Share is a series of reports from the Urban Institute looking at trends in federal and state spending and tax expenditures on children.

Kids’ Share 2012: Report on Federal Expenditures on Children Through 2011

Julia Isaacs [IRP affiliate], Katherine Toran, Heather Hahn, Karina Fortuny, C. Eugene Steuerle

The most recent annual report provides a comprehensive look at trends over the past 50 years in federal spending and tax expenditures on children. Key findings suggest that the size and composition of expenditures on children have changed considerably, and that children have not been a budget priority. <http://www.urban.org/publications/412600.html>

How Targeted Are Federal Expenditures on Children? A Kids’ Share Analysis of Expenditures by Income in 2009

Tracy Vericker, Julia Isaacs [IRP affiliate], Heather Hahn, Katherine Toran, Stephanie Rennane

This report provides an analysis of how the allocation of public resources for children varies by family income. Key findings indicate that in 2009, 70 percent of all federal expenditures on children served the 42 percent of children who are living in families with incomes less than twice the federal poverty level. While low-income children received 84 percent of outlays on children, higher-income children received 82 percent of tax reductions benefiting children. <http://www.urban.org/publications/412522.html>

Kids’ Share Website: http://www.urban.org/projects/kids_share.cfm