

Working For Change

Advancing an Economic Mobility Agenda For Low Wage Workers in Urban America



A Word from David R. Jones, President & CEO, Community Service Society

The "Working for Change" forum on July 18 covered an important topic for those of us who are eager to see a positive impact result from programs targeting "disconnected youth." With the help of our panelists, Dan Bloom from MDRC and Wendy McClanahan from PPV, the issue of program evaluation in determining what actually works in supporting youth who are out of school and out of the labor market.

Judging from the outstanding presentations of the panelists, we have a ways to go in determining program models that can assist these young people find employment or get re-attached to an educational institution. While the record is murky, there are some lessons learned that we should pay heed if we are serious about addressing the challenges facing the population. Both panelists agreed that the data indicates some connection to a "supportive adult" increases the likelihood that a disconnected youth will end up on a path toward a more secure future. It was acknowledged that the existence of a "mentor" can be decisive in whether a young adult takes advantage of available programs and services.

What was also made apparent was that efforts to assist young Black men who are disconnected require an approach that is culturally informed and may be distinct from outreach to other youth. We know the challenges facing Black males in New York City and are sensitized to many of the barriers they face in staying in school or becoming employed. Certainly we must infuse any initiative targeting disconnected youth with an understand-

ing of the circumstances these young men face in their daily lives.

A telling point from the discussion was the fact that one promising effort, that was evaluated and shown to be successful, was the victim of changing political winds in our nation's capital. If we are to gain any traction against the tide of barriers these young people face, it will require a sustained effort to support programs that have been tested and evaluated, and proven to work. We should not sacrifice common sense for



"What Works? The Need to Evaluate Programs Targeting Out of School Youth," was the topic of the July *Working for Change* forum in Washington, D.C. Pictured above are CSS Senior Fellow Margy Waller, Director of The Mobility Agenda; presenter Wendy S. McClanahan, Vice President for Research, Public/Private Ventures (PPV); CSS partner Deborah Weinstein, Executive Director of the Coalition on Human Needs and Dan Bloom, Director, Welfare and Barriers to Employment Policy Area, MDRC.

2008 Upcoming Dates

September 26

October 17

November 14

December 12

Read:
The Urban Agenda
NY Amsterdam News

&

The New Majority
El Diario La Prensa
at:

www.cssny.org

Panelists Information

DAN BLOOM

Director
Welfare and Barriers to Employment Policy Area, MDRC
New York



There have been quite a few rigorous evaluations of programs for disadvantaged youth, including studies of programs for at-risk in-school youth, programs for out-of-school youth, and other programs with mixed target groups. Overall, the results are mixed. There have been some positive results from programs for at-risk, in-school youth, such as the recent Career Academies study, but few successes for out-of-school youth. Some programs have succeeded in increasing the number of youth who attain GEDs, but those gains have not translated into better labor market outcomes. Bloom offered a number of possible reasons why there haven't been more successes – for example, many programs have difficulty retaining youth for long enough to make a difference, and many programs focus on the GED, which offers a route to postsecondary education but may not be valued in the labor market. He added, "Not many programs are focused on what happens to young people after they leave programs." *In closing, Bloom offered this assessment: Post-secondary education is what will make a difference in long term earnings, but we still have a lot to learn about how to promote access and retention in college for disadvantaged youth.* For more information contact Dan at Dan.Bloom@mdrc.org or www.mdrc.org

Programs for Disadvantaged Youth: What We've Learned from Rigorous Evaluations

July 2008
Dan Bloom and Rob Ivry



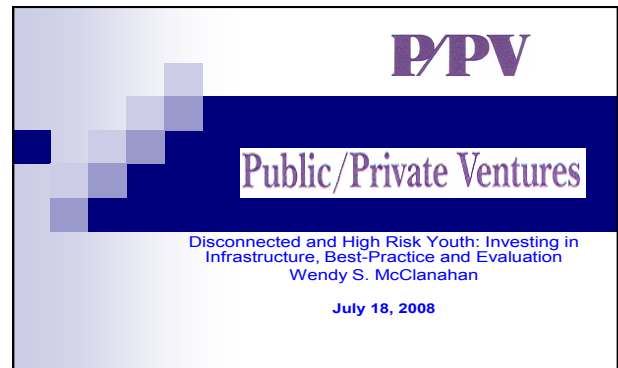
View Dan Bloom's presentation at:
http://www.cssny.org/news/misc/working_for_change/index.html#june20

WENDY S. McCLANAHAN
 Vice President for Research
 Public Private Ventures
 Philadelphia, Pa



Despite the scarcity of evaluations that have demonstrated positive program impacts on disconnected youth, research shows there are ways to enhance and develop successful programs. First, according to Ms. McClanahan, policy makers and program leaders should invest in infrastructure that supports high quality programming and strong implementation, such as program improvement data systems and staff and volunteer training. Second, programs should utilize proven strategies and best practices for this population, including a focus on supportive adults, firmly connecting education/training to employment, and attending to factors that affect learning and employment. Finally, Ms. McClanahan highlighted the importance of evaluation as a tool for program improvement, and stressed that the success of a program should only be judged using relevant indicators. *In closing, Wendy pointed out that the value of adopting these strategies is that they can maximize program quality, improve outcomes for participants, and result in cost effective spending.*

For more information contact Wendy at wmcclanahan@ppv.org or www.ppv.org



View Wendy McClanahan's presentation at:
http://www.cssny.org/news/misc/working_for_change/index.html#june20

FACTOID: "The educational pipeline reveals controversy about HS dropout rates, but rates appear to exceed 50% in big cities (though 2/3 of dropouts eventually earn a GED or diploma)." Dan Bloom



Sonja Nesbit and Sara Logan of the Committed on Ways and Means and Leonardo Lozano of Rep. Hilda Solis office listen to presentation.



Manuel Buenrostro of Harvard Kennedy School of Government makes a point.



Michele Varnhagen, Committee on Education & Labor makes a point, while Nanine Meiklejohn of AFSCME listens.



Linda Loubert of Morgan State University reviews forum materials.

For past forums, log onto to http://www.cssny.org/news/misc/working_for_change/index.html#march28