



**NATIONAL LEAGUE OF CITIES**  
**Institute for Youth, Education, and Families**

*Strategies that Work for Our Disconnected Youth*  
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*Moderator:* **Andrew Moore**, Senior Consultant for Disconnected Youth  
Institute for Youth, Education, and Families  
National League of Cities (NLC)

*Speakers:*

**Maggie Donahue**, director of government relations and youth policy, San Francisco, Calif.,  
Human Services Agency

**Sally Gavlik**, director of parks and recreation, Corpus Christi, Texas

**Laura Shubilla**, president, Philadelphia Youth Network, Philadelphia, Pa.

**Grace Zolnosky**, director of the Youth Service Division, Evanston, Wy.

*MOORE:* I want to welcome everybody to this call today. We'll spend the next hour or so talking about strategies that work for disconnected youth. And I'll introduce our panelists in a moment. We're striving for an interactive format.

I just wanted to say a few things up front. The National League of Cities began intensive work on this topic of disconnected youth a couple of years ago, recognizing that there are too many young people often concentrated in cities and towns who are less connected than we would like them to be with family, community, and the workplace. And we issued an action kit for municipal leaders at that time recommending a number of ways to think about this issue and preliminary strategies for dealing with these issues.

We have since that time undertaken an intensive look at what we think are excellent practices in eight cities that are using cross-system collaboration as a means to reengage and reconnect previously disconnected young people. We will be issuing a report, the findings from those case studies later this spring. I think the findings will not surprise people, but reemphasize important things to keep in mind going forward -- the critical need for mayoral leadership; that collaboration can take many forms and still be effective; that a lead city government agency or intermediary organization plays an essential part in fostering and sustaining cross-system collaboration and attention to reengagement; and finally that attention to data as well as information sharing will court collaboration and help people to understand whether their efforts to reengage youth are making a difference.

We have some resources available already -- the action kit and other resources are available at our website at [www.nlc.org/iyef](http://www.nlc.org/iyef) in the "Disconnected Youth Program" area, and we'll be adding more as time goes along.

For today's call, again, we'll be striving for an interactive format. I will pose

questions and various members of our panel will answer them. Those of you on the line around the country will also have an opportunity to submit questions by e-mail. Please submit them to my colleague, Michael Karpman at karpman@nlc.org. And Michael will forward the questions to me and we'll do our best to get to them in the course of the call. I'll repeat that call for questions at about the half-hour mark and 45-minute mark, and we'll try to make sure that we're meeting your needs. We've also tried to anticipate things that might be of interest to you.

So just to describe who we've got as resource people, I want to introduce three city employees and one person who works for a citywide intermediary organization that works very closely with a city. And they all have deep experience in efforts to reengage disconnected youth, certainly from different angles and in cities of different size and character. Joining us from Corpus Christi, Texas is Sally Gavlik, who is the Director of Parks and Recreation there. Grace Zolnosky, who is the Director of the Youth Service Division in the City of Evanston, Wyoming, is another resource person. Laura Shubilla, who is President of the Philadelphia Youth Network, an intermediary organization, is on the line, as well as Maggie Donahue, who is Director of Government Relations and Youth Policy for the City and County of San Francisco's Human Services Agency.

So those are our four panelists. We didn't plan on extensive introductions, but rather diving into the subject matter as quickly as we could. So I want to start out by asking a question about why cities regard the issue of reconnecting disconnected youth as important. And one way to come at that is to say, what data or trends drove your city to address challenges facing at risk youth, and why should a city care about this population, from your perspective? Maggie, would you like to take first crack at that one?

*DONAHUE:* Sure. And I'm going to at least initially talk specifically about foster youth and the child welfare system. We realized back in 2003, utilizing data that showed us a projection of the number of youth who were going to be emancipating. And we saw this major Bell Jar effect, with this huge increase in the number of youth over the next six years who were going to be coming out of the foster care system, and far more youth than we had ever experienced before. And this I think is pretty true nationally. And what we discovered is that we didn't have the resources available to equip these youths to be successful once they emancipated. And so using that data, we developed a youth initiative within the Human Services Agency to have all the different divisions focus on addressing specific issues that we could collaborate on to better prepare youth to emancipate.

And out of that we had a whole planning process and focus groups with youth and with child welfare workers and CPOs and management teams. And out of that, we came up with the following -- our goal has been over these last three years to put in place resources that will allow us to improve outcomes for all of our emancipating foster youth. And so every youth will have a plan for education, identify stable housing, income upon emancipation, is connected to the workforce, and that each youth has at least one significant supportive adult in their lives. So this has kind of driven a planning effort that really has come to fruition in this last year in terms of the number of resources we've been able to add to our independent living skills program here in the city to support youth and to prevent -- really, it's also a huge prevention effort because I'm sure many of your cities have experienced this. But close to 30 to 40% of single adults in our homeless shelter system have had some experience in the foster care system. And so we were looking at the next generation of homeless adults, and we decided that wasn't appropriate, it wasn't acceptable. And we wanted the youth to take their place in society and have the resources

that they need in order to be able to be successful. And so that's what's driven us.

*MOORE:* So one way to encapsulate that might be to say that the front-end data was the statistics about the number who would be emancipating, and the back-end data were these figures about the number who end up homeless or out of work or what have you. Laura, do you want to add something from your position slightly outside city government in Philadelphia, but working day to day with city government? What data or trends got Philadelphia's interest?

*SHUBILLA:* Well, I think Philadelphia kind of came at it from a couple different angles. There has been a lot of work similar to what Maggie was just talking about in the foster care system with youth aging out of foster care, looking at some of the same trends, numbers, having run some of the same data around youth ending up in the shelter system. And we came at it on the workforce side of the world. And part of what we were getting called into a lot was conversations with the juvenile justice system or with community-based organization about young people who had dropped out of school or who were disconnected, needing employment.

And working with those systems, it becomes very clear that the labor market in Philadelphia has really changed dramatically, and the types of jobs that were really being attracted to Philadelphia were jobs that required much higher skill, much higher education. And so the trend around the regional economic development and regional labor market trends, as well as the trends around the high numbers of dropouts that we were seeing leave our school system every year, created 52,000 disconnected youth in Philadelphia between the ages of 16 and 24. And those are kids who are neither employed nor in school. So I think for us, part of it was seeing where these needs were not matching the realities of what the opportunities were that were available. And the scale of the issue for us in Philly was what really compelled people to start to take a systematic look at this.

*MOORE:* Sally, would you want to add anything from your city -- you run a city government department in a medium-to-large size city in Texas. What data or trends put youth issues on the map, so to speak, in Corpus Christi?

*GAVLIK:* Well, in Corpus Christi, what we found out was that 33% of our population was in the 0 to 17 age bracket. And we had a per capita income of about \$19,000, which was \$5,000 at least below the national average. In fact, the largest percentage of our population was either under 14 or over 65. And in addition to that, we had high levels of juvenile arrest and delinquency. We had a large number of students who had dropped out of high school and high school graduation rates were declining. And there was also a public concern about the gang activity, drug use among the juveniles, and juvenile violence. And a lot of that came into play, and the elected officials actually did some of the "get tough" measures, such as the daytime curfews, zero tolerance in school districts, juvenile boot camps. But at the same time, there was another group that was looking at it and said, you know, we really need to be looking at the whole child and the whole family and develop preventive programs for these children. And that's when Youth Opportunities Unlimited (YOU) came into being. It was to begin -- instead of just looking at the child, begin looking at the entire family and all of the issues surrounding them.

*MOORE:* That's a great set of layers that you're getting at there. And we also thought it

might be useful if some of our panelists could comment on looking at this from another side, and that is if anyone on the line is in a position where they might be advising a mayor or a city council person or a department head on disconnected youth issues, what questions should municipal leaders ask when they're getting started in confronting issues around disconnected youth? Grace, is that something you could make some suggestions on?

*ZOLNOSKY:* Absolutely. You know, what drew our attention to the need to provide some kinds of programs in our community for our kids is that in a small community of 12,000, we had a period of a year where we had several teen suicides. And that really was the catalyst that got people thinking that we need to have some sort of intervention. And our mayor at the time was very concerned about that. In a small community, he received phone call after phone call asking him what was he was going to do about the problems that we were seeing in our community.

So it was really the mayor who was kind of the catalyst to get things going in our community. And that brought us together in a setting where we developed the Community Youth Coalition, bringing agencies, health care, law enforcement, the school district, behavioral health all to the table to talk about what was really happening in our community, to get a real clear picture of what our kids were going through. And not only was there this rash of teen suicides, but law enforcement informed us of the increasing numbers of substance abuse arrests and the early initiation of alcohol in our community. The school district informed us of the consistently increasing number of dropouts who then workforce would comment on -- and those kids are not going on to get jobs. These kids are not going on to get their GED. The school told us about the numbers of academic failures. So having all of those partners at the table informing our mayor and council of the real picture of what was going on in the community was what really was the catalyst to get some work done in our community.

*MOORE:* Laura, you might have some thoughts about this because you've been in a position to perhaps prime the pump at times with municipal leaders in Philadelphia. What questions have you urged them to ask?

*SHUBILLA:* I think a couple of things. I think it's always important, to piggyback on Maggie's comment about what the issues are and what's going on, and see it from the perspective of all of the different stakeholders. Because one of the things that always strikes me about being in our role as intermediaries -- we get to sit at a lot of different tables. And you hear different conversations, and those tables don't always overlap. So I think being able to hear the perspective of stakeholders.

I think the other thing that's really important is that leaders ask what has been tried, what has been done over the years to try to address the issues. Where have there been in our communities and in our city some successful attempts? And where attempts haven't been successful, why haven't they been successful? Because I think there's a certain fatigue that develops when someone precedes an issue with a brand new issue and starts as if nothing has ever been tried or discussed prior to that leader or administration coming in. So I think being able, as an intermediary -- one thing we do I feel like constantly is history lessons. And I think, "This is where there has been some movement. This is when it was working, this is why. When it stopped, this is why." So that we can build on what we've learned and not continue to kind of reinvent the wheel. So I think those are really important questions.

*MOORE:* Do you want to go on from there, Laura? Grace started us down the road, which is an important one, of saying who are the stakeholders that a mayor or another municipal leader might want to convene to get something started around disconnected youth in a city? What kind of invitation from municipal leaders results in people actually showing up to the table?

*SHUBILLA:* Well, I would talk about it probably from a slightly different perspective, because our table didn't really start from the city. The table really grew out of the Youth Council and it grew out of the Out-of-School Youth Committee of the Youth Council. And you had on that Youth Council representatives of a number of different city systems like the child welfare system and the juvenile justice system and the school district, as well as community-based organizations, youth and parents. And over the years the youth council really pushed to say the out-of-school youth issue was always the last five minutes of every agenda. So we spend most of our time talking about in-school youth and then there is this brief update on what's going out with out-of-school youth. And they pushed enough so a new committee was formed just on out-of-school youth. And that created a place where people started to talk about the issues and what was going on in the city. And that table really grew, and then Philadelphia was one of the cities selected in the Youth Transition Funders Group initiative, which infused some additional momentum and some resources into the conversation.

I think what's been the most important thing about that table has been the ability to keep municipal leaders at the table with the community organizations and the advocates, and for those groups to be looking at the same data and having enough patience and trust in the process to struggle through the muck of learning how to interpret that data, as an example, with all of its complexities. And so what we've really worked hard to do is create a base of understanding, some agreed-upon assumptions that we're making as we move forward in our work. And that's really allowed us to then plan interventions with everybody talking the same language. That takes a long time. It takes a lot of work. But I think having both diverse groups at the table, it's really important to getting a full picture of the issue.

*MOORE:* Maggie or Sally, would you want to chime in? I think each of your cities -- San Francisco and Corpus Christi -- offer rather different ranges of stakeholders who have come together and the ways they've come together. So would you want to expand on that?

*DONAHUE:* Sure. And just going back to what can draw a city government to pay attention to this population of youth. Sometimes it's a nudge from outside the city government. Three years ago, the civil grand jury delivered a blistering report about the level of truancy in our school district. And all of a sudden everybody started paying attention to the fact that we had a lot of young people who are dropping out in middle school hanging out in the streets, getting involved in the juvenile justice system, not getting their high school diplomas.

And it was like lighting a fire under city government. And the next thing, we had a whole task force put together that included everybody from the District Attorney's office to the fire department. And over these last three years, they've made a dramatic difference in improving the level of attendance in schools. And one of the biggest things they found was that there was no across-the-board uniform attendance taken in the school district -- you know, something really as basic and that.

And what's happening right now is that within each of the departments in the city and county, there is a lot of activity going on around disconnected youth, but it's not happening

at a citywide level. And so we've been pushing for the last year and a half with our youth commission to establish a task force specifically focused on cross-system collaboration and services for transitional youth. And that is actually about to take place. The task force has been selected by the mayor, and they'll be sworn in on Wednesday, March 15. But it's taken almost two years to make it happen. But I think it's like a synergy, that enough people were talking about these young people. These young people were impacting enough systems of care that everybody wanted to do something. And with the mayor's leadership, it's really able to bring foundations, business people, city department heads, and academia to the table to create this task force that will be meeting over a period of two years. So we're really excited about that. And again, a mayor's leadership can be critical, but sometimes it can take a while to get started.

**MOORE:** Sally, would you want to talk about the range of stakeholders involved in Corpus Christi?

**GAVLIK:** Well, Corpus Christi actually began quite a while ago. The city, by city ordinance, developed the Commission on Children and Youth as early as 1994. And since that time there has been a collaboration with various judges, all of the different police operations here, and all of the school districts -- there are five major school districts in the Corpus Christi area -- as well as such groups as Planned Parenthood, the Texas Agricultural Extension Service, a variety of youth groups, the Corpus Christi Housing Association, the YMCA/YWCA as well as the Naval Air Station. And so it is a long process that we went through to bring all of these groups in to develop some data collection and analysis. And this was then with Texas A&M University here in Corpus Christi.

And then in 1998, a sales tax was voted in that had a percent that went to setting up through the city structure what we call the Juvenile Assessment Center. And the Juvenile Assessment Center works with the Juvenile Court for children who are at risk. A lot of times they are truant, they have a lot of life issues, and this is the first step that we take in trying to keep them out of the main court system. But there are a lot of players in it. And right now, YOU is the agency that everybody ties into and works through. And there are actually nine major programs that are going on within the city. YOU has been able to secure about \$21 million in grants for these different agencies because they serve as the grant-writing agency. And YOU is not part of the city, but some of the functions and some of the granting agencies that they've been able to help with are through the city. And the mayor and the police chief and the county judge have been very instrumental in pulling all of this together and supporting it, as well as the citizens when they voted in the half-cent sales tax.

**MOORE:** Thanks. I wanted to go from these great examples we're starting to get, and we've continued building the record, so to speak, of examples of strategies. We're talking about more than a program, really. I think of the Juvenile Assessment Center itself as a strategy that houses a number of programs in Corpus Christi. And similarly in Evanston, a city of 12,000 residents, Grace, you've been able to not only create a division of city government, but also establish a juvenile drug court. And I wanted you to talk about that for a minute as an example of a strategy that you've employed, as well as getting to the results that tell you that that's working.

**ZOLNOSKY:** I think that the most important strategy there was -- we had talked earlier about

the series of suicides and the increasing substance abuse in our community -- came to the Mayor's attention. The community came together, we wrote a grant. We received a grant through the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA) [<http://www.samhsa.gov/>] to fund a consensus building process. Through that process we developed a prevention program. And because we spent one year in consensus building with a diverse group of stakeholders, when our funding ended, we came to the city and showed them what we had developed, and we kept them informed through this year-long process. And when we reported about the afterschool programs, the mentoring program, the prevention group, and Youth Opportunities Unlimited, that we had put together, what the Mayor said to us is, "You know, we could turn our backs on this. But they've gone through a year. They have a process. They've involved the community. And they have documentation and the instrument in front of us that tells us that this is the program that can really address the problems that our kids are seeing in this community." That's when the city decided to start the Youth Services Division and brought the prevention programs into city budget.

And after we had been able to do that, we really sat down and did some asset mapping to look at our gaps in service in the community. And the biggest gap that we saw was the intervention piece. Kids were being cited with substance abuse and alcohol offenses, being slapped on the hand, sent to jail, and they'd come back to re-offend. And it was a cycle. We didn't have a good alternative sentence for kids. And we had seen some success throughout the state of Wyoming in the adult drug court arena, and we researched that and thought, you know, what we need in our community is a juvenile drug court. But our county district and circuit courts were not willing to take that on. So we came to the city -- council and mayor once again - - and talked to them about the increased numbers of kids abusing substances and the lack of an alternative for these kids as far as therapeutic treatment. And they agreed to give us the nod to start a juvenile drug court.

So we started a municipally-based juvenile drug court that is provided through the City of Evanston Youth Services division. And through that process, the collaboration began between human services, law enforcement, the school district, and the City of Evanston. We have more programs in our community now than we ever imagined we would have through the drug court, just having kids in our drug court system. The school district now will not expel a kid for a substance abuse charge if they're involved in the drug court. We've seen dozens of kids graduate from high school who would not have been able to stay in school if not for the drug court program. Treatment money is now available through grants that we've written through the drug courts, so families and youth can go to treatment who wouldn't have been able to before. Treatment options in our community are now provided through the drug court program that we didn't have in our community before. The collaborative effort involved in just getting the drug court going and sustained is really an amazing feat in a city of 12,000 people. And the city is really the center of that collaboration. All of the services and resources -- most of them, I should say -- come from our partners in our collaborations, but are really managed by the City of Evanston's Youth Services division.

**MOORE:** Do any of the other panelists want to mention a specific strategy that's under way for older youth in your cities before we go to questions that are starting to come in from around the country?

**GAVLIK:** Well, I think it is very important that you do the intervention and that you work

with the whole family. And really the Juvenile Assessment Center in Corpus Christi, that's one of the main focuses that they have. They take the youth and they are picked up for the minor offenses -- truancy, drug charges and robbery charges. They do stay in school, but the families have to come to the sessions with them, and they really look upon the entire family. And they look for services within the community so that they can help not only the youth that are involved, but also the families, so that they can build a better relationship. And I think when you look at the whole family issue, whether it be economics or whether it be lifestyle changes and things like that, that it really helps to look at the preventive or the intervention type of programs.

*SHUBILLA:* I guess I would just add that Philadelphia has done significant amount of work in the last few years around reintegration initiatives for youth coming out of delinquent placement and returning into the communities. And it's been a strategy between us and community-based organizations, with Family Court leading the strategy along with the Department of Human Services. And one of the things that they did that was very effective in this was they hired a reintegration coordinator. And this person's job was to exist between all the partners. So they have reporting responsibility to both Family Court and to the Department of Human Services, and also works with us on the workforce side to make sure that the organizations that we contract with who are providing the step-down services to the young people are all coordinated.

And one of the things that that's done, having someone in that role, is that all of the information then gets shared very well between the partners. And that then elevates all kinds of other challenges that come up once everybody knows the same information. I think that's where it becomes really important that the partners sit at the table. Because the more you coordinate, the more you collaborate, the harder the agenda is in some cases because the more you're getting to the heart of the issues. And that's where people need to be very steadfast in the belief that that they can get through that piece of it, because I think that's when things tend to sometimes fall apart. People get overwhelmed by the challenges. But having that person was very important to the strategy that all the systems needed to work together.

*MOORE:* Good point. So we are starting to get questions via e-mail to karpman@nlc.org. And I wanted to start to address those with the panel. I want to take up one immediately. Someone has asked, "What are the websites and URLs where we can learn more about the efforts in San Francisco, Corpus Christi, Philadelphia and Evanston?" And we at the National League of Cities will post those links shortly on our website under the "Disconnected Youth" portion so that -- I won't try to read them off here while we're on the phone. But we will have that up within the next couple of days.

Corpus Christi: <http://www.ccparkandrec.com/?fuseaction=main.view&page=216>

Philadelphia: <http://www.pyninc.org/index.html>

San Francisco: [http://www.sfgov.org/site/dhs\\_page.asp?id=12828](http://www.sfgov.org/site/dhs_page.asp?id=12828)

Evanston: <http://www.evanstonwy.org/departments/youth-services.asp?id=60>

But an interesting question came in. It really goes to the theme that you were just raising, Laura, that has come up in Philadelphia and I'm sure has come up in all four of the cities on the line, of sustaining and really institutionalizing attention to disconnected youth. The question is, "How could someone outside of government, say, in a community-based non-profit organization, ask or convince a small city to include goals, objectives, and policies as it revises its comprehensive plan that will support strategies that work for disconnected youth?" Do any of the panelists want to provide an example of goals, objectives, or policies that have gotten enshrined in cities written comprehensive plans? I think that would be valuable information.

*ZOLNOSKY:* I guess I'll start. From a small city's point of view, I think the most important strategy that we used would help a community-based organization, which is very similar to what happened in Evanston. A group of parents, the school district, and law enforcement became very concerned about what was happening with kids in our community. And in order to really get the city on board and let them know what was going on, we were able to start the consensus-building process. And I really can't stress enough how important consensus building is, bringing all of the stakeholders to the table. And we spent a year spending the time doing a consensus-building process where you're looking at what's really happening with kids and having all of those stakeholders reporting on the reality of what's going on in the community. And then taking the time to look at different strategies and best practices. Look at other communities around the country similar to yours that have used strategies that have been effective and that have had good outcomes. We were able to do that.

And at the end of that year we had an instrument. We had something to take back to our city council and show them and tell them this is what's happening in our community and these are the strategies that we have developed to address what's happening. And they couldn't turn their back on it. They absolutely could not because the community had a stake in it. And when they developed the Youth Services division to take on that program, we became embedded in the City of Evanston. We are a part of the budget. We're in the strategic plan. We're embedded. And we look good. So when our council and our mayor, when they're going out to sell our community, when they're doing economic development and people are looking at the numbers in Wyoming of those kids that are abusing substances, committing suicide, academic failure, sensation seeking, and when we're trying to get people and business moving to our community, our council and our mayor can point to what we're doing within the City of Evanston, that we have prevention programs, that we have intervention programs. And it really is a tool for the council and the mayor. So we really make them shine when they're looking in those areas and we really have become embedded.

*MOORE:* Would others like to comment on how disconnected youth goals, strategies, and objectives have gotten enshrined in an actual comprehensive plan in their city?

*GAVLIK:* I think that when they're looking at a non-profit or a group like that begins working on it, it's just like what was said before. When companies are looking at coming into a city, they are looking at the school districts. They're looking at the graduation rates. They're looking at the crime rates. And if you can develop the consensus group, the collaborations and show what you are doing to make the changes as a group, you are actually looking at improving the economics of the community. And that's what a lot of businesses are looking for when

they're moving in, is what is going to be the economics? What is the school district going to be like for their children? What are going to be the recreational opportunities? Is it a safe community? And I think by doing the consensus building and going together as a group to the city council and the mayor, that is the way that you bring them into it where it's something that they can't disregard, that they've got the facts and figures to go along with it.

And that's really kind of what happened here in Corpus Christi because you had a group that had been working as different non-profits working together. And when the city said, "We need to have a commission on children and youth. We need to have a city function," then that commission has slowly expanded out to where it's inclusive and brings in a variety of other agencies. Then they have included it as part of their strategic plan. But I think it starts in almost any community with a grassroots effort with non-profit groups.

*MOORE:* Others on the comprehensive planning front?

*SHUBILLA:* I would agree with that. And I think that part of what we've done with the work is that the data has been very compelling. Youth voice has been very compelling in terms of making the case, as well as the flexibility to have both inside and outside strategies. So because we have both people at the table, sometimes one works better than others. And we talk a lot about who is in influence and who is best positioned to do what, and how we work those relationships to have these conversations. And I think part of what happened was the conversation started happening at more and more tables. And so it built momentum. And then that momentum came together in a strategy. Most recently, we were able to get the out-of-school youth issue really as part of the high school reform strategy with the school district. And that was a huge piece because we felt if we were losing 50% of our kids a year out of high schools, how could you really talk about high school reform without talking about out-of-school youth? And so working with those young people is written into the high school reform plan. And that happened because of all of the strategies I just described.

*MOORE:* If you could just get a little bit more specific, Laura, and say what does that look like when it makes its way into the high school reform plan. Is it an objective or is it a description of a new policy related to dropouts?

*SHUBILLA:* In this particular version, it's looking at -- you know, high school reform is a series of multiple pathways, and within the high school reform plan, within the providers that are selected, the type of schools that are selected, that there will be opportunities built for young people who have dropped out of school and want to come back for a high school diploma. And so what it looks like in the plan is looking at what those numbers are, what the ages are, what the credit bands are and the kinds of opportunities that we need to meet those needs, and that if we're looking at all of the options that are getting created out of high school, that those options are part of the set of options that are getting created.

*MOORE:* Thanks for that nice specific example. This set of discussions leads into another question that's come in from the field. And that is thinking about other audiences that probably need to be brought on board. So one person has asked, "How can economic development agencies and planning commissions be persuaded to support strategies that work for disconnected youth?" Does anyone want to take that question and run with it?

*GAVLIK:* When you're looking at bringing in new businesses, when you're looking at trying to improve the economics within your local community, what you're selling is the community and you're selling what your high school ratings are. You're selling your libraries. You're selling your parks and recreation. And you're selling your museums. You're selling a lot of those types of things. And you're selling an employment rate and your crime rate. And if you have a lot of juvenile crime, if you have a high dropout rate and those types of things, you're not going to have the same types of economic development that a sister city could have who is actually working with their youth, who is offering high school programs for those who have dropped out to be able to come back and get a high school degree, or to be able to learn a specific trade.

And so I think it does play a very good portion of economic development. And I think it's a matter of the same groups that are selling the mayor and city council in having it as part of the strategic plan as making sure that the economic development portion of the community and the planning departments within communities and counties are also aware of how important it is through the city or county strategic plan. And that those are focused on not only relating to disconnected youth, but how disconnected youth can also hinder or hurt the economic development within a community if the problems are not addressed.

*MOORE:* Maggie, did you have a point about persuading economic development agencies and planning commissions?

*DONAHUE:* I was just going to say that one of the things in San Francisco that I think a lot of other jurisdictions have is we have a youth council that is mandated under legislation that reports to the Workforce Investment Board. And we have used that as a platform to raise awareness around the employment needs of this particular population group, and also to really look at what's going to happen with the workforce in San Francisco, and that if we're not paying attention to the training and educational needs of our young people, we're doing ourselves a huge disservice in terms of being able to provide a trained workforce to attract the kind of industries, to keep the kind of industries that we have here in San Francisco. And one perfect example of that is biotech.

We also looked at the cost to the city and taxpayers of youth who end up either incarcerated or in psychiatric facilities vs. the cost of providing that young person with wraparound services and housing. And what it came out to is that in terms of the actual cost, you can spend \$54,000 with youth utilizing the emergency rooms vs. a wraparound model, which would cost you annually \$27,000. So there's a whole cost-benefit analysis that really does work in this case.

But I think the ultimate perk for the business community is who is going to be the workforce in the next ten years, and are we really training our kids and providing them with the skills they'll need to compete. And I think that has brought business to the table. We have a new initiative called Jobs for Youth that we had had for awhile, and then it kind of disappeared. But now there's new leadership. We have a youth council that has stipulated to the Workforce Investment Board that youth need to be a priority. So I think that has been really helpful in bringing both the labor community and the private sector into a partnership with us.

*MOORE:* Thank you. And I wanted to move to a slightly different kind of question that we

received from the field. And by the way, we're still taking questions at karpman@nlc.org. The other pending question is really about the critical need for housing for young people in transition as they emancipate from the foster care system or re-enter the community from the juvenile justice system. And the idea behind this question is the kinds of housing and the set of supports that a young person needs may be different than what someone who is older would need. And in fact, the question refers to evidence-based educational, physical, and mental health services and life skills development programming that have to be folded in beyond just an apartment.

So I think the question here is, how do you explain these housing needs to city leadership and build support for that kind of comprehensive housing programming? And how do you make sure to find the right kind of funding to support something beyond capital development costs, but actual services for the young people living in this transitional temporary housing?

*DONAHUE:* I could start by talking about a new initiative that we started three years ago here in San Francisco in partnership with the state. One of the things that we realized is that a positive outcome in terms of housing for youth emancipating out of the foster system was not emergency shelter. And yet that's what people were looking at as a positive outcome. And we wanted to change that idea. And short of being able to get a young person into college with dormitory housing, housing is the number one critical issue for youth, whether they're coming out of the foster care system, they're coming out of locked facilities or they're coming out of juvenile hall. And part and parcel of that is the economic development needs that they have as well as the maturation process, in terms of youth development.

So the state funded a program called THP-plus, which is a two-year transitional housing program that focuses specifically on youth coming out of foster care and youth coming out of the juvenile justice system. And it's wraparound services that could take a number of different forms in terms of housing models. And when we surveyed youth, the number one issue for youth was having their own privacy. And so what we've done here in San Francisco in partnership with our CBO community is we've set up a scattered site model, utilizing studio apartments and providing wraparound services that include everything from mental health and substance abuse to vocational training, getting GEDs, figuring out if a kid's going to be on a college track, support with financial assistance. But really working with that young person to achieve a level of maturity so that when they exit that program -- the program is only 24 months -- they're not going to end up back on the street, that they're going to have a source of income. They're going to have a housing plan.

So I think for youth in particular, a transitional housing model is very effective because a lot of times, especially young people coming out of a foster system, they're not ready to make the commitment to permanent housing. They don't really know what they want to do. And oftentimes they'll just return back to their family of origin and find out that nothing has changed. After six months, they get kicked out. And so transitional housing offers a safe place for a young person to be to develop some of those life skills that they didn't have the opportunity to develop while they were in the foster care system. And it's a very cost effective program. We have 31 units right now. We're adding another 12 units. And as part of the mayor's budget initiative for next year, he is also looking at making a significant general fund contribution so we can continue to expand our transitional housing program.

*MOORE:* And again, the mayor endorses that idea based on the cost-benefit analysis

largely?

*DONAHUE:* Well, I think several things -- it's universally known that housing is a huge issue. But we have too many young people ending up in the shelter system. And the mayor has had as his number one priority since he came into office addressing the issue of homelessness. And so now after two years, youth homelessness has risen to the level where there are enough people saying, okay, we're doing housing for single adults, we're doing housing for families. We need to address the housing needs of young people who don't have a family to go back to. And he has completely supported that concept and believes in the THP-plus model. And so, yeah, I think there is going to be a significant investment in this model by this mayor and by our board of supervisors.

*MOORE:* Thanks. And we can come back to that if we have time. But we have a great question coming from the field, and I think it's one that will lend itself a comment from all four of our panelists. "What are one or two of the key barriers that you have faced in your city to launching strategies that work for disconnected youth? And what have been your successful means of getting beyond those barriers?" Grace, would you want to tackle that one first?

*ZOLNOSKY:* Sure. One of the barriers, I guess, that initially I found when we started our consensus building process was that some of those old-fashioned beliefs of community members that it was parents who should take care of their children, not the community. It was their responsibility, and it wasn't any of their business to try to help to do that. And we really had to get past that in the consensus-building process. The strategy that helped to do that was bringing to the table all of the stakeholders and getting the real vision, knowing what was really happening, and then reporting that back in town hall meetings and in the newspaper and radio, local television, letting those community members know that these are serious problems happening. The challenges are different than they were years ago. A lot of these kids don't have families that are helping or able to help or willing to help the kids. And we really were able to turn around those old-fashioned beliefs and get the community really tied into wanting to make these programs happen.

And another barrier that we found initially was the school district's zero tolerance policy. Kids who were cited with substance abuse or alcohol offenses were immediately expelled from school. And as we all know, kicking these kids out of school does them no good, having them out on the street and disconnected. So through the development of the juvenile drug court, we were able to develop a partnership with the school district so that those kids who were cited could stay in school if they were participating in the juvenile drug court. And we were able to keep those kids in school. A lot of those kids were really on the verge of dropping out. And just that push, the adults and the program behind them kept them in school. And then there were those kids obviously who really weren't going to be able to be successful in school, but through the juvenile drug court program, we were able to get them into alternative school, get them their GED, get them jobs, get them vocational training of some sort. So we were able to turn around that school policy so that now we have kids that are able to be in school vs. being kicked out of school.

*MOORE:* May I turn to another panelist? Laura, would you want to point to one or two key barriers Philadelphia has faced and that you might have some ideas about getting beyond those

barriers?

*SHUBILLA:* I guess one would be a joint issue of invisibility and perception. And by that, I mean schools are paying attention to kids who are in school buildings, and the court system; really their priority is public safety. And where that ties in with perception is I think there is a perception that the kids who were out-of-school youth in the city were all going to be heavily involved in the court system and the child welfare system. And how we kind of get beyond those two issues -- we're not totally beyond them yet, but we're working to get beyond them -- one is just the numbers. We found when we did data integration across the school district and the Department of Human Services and the courts and vital statistics and about seven other data sets, that 70% of the kids who dropped out of school didn't have other agency involvement. So those kids truly were invisible because they were not kids who were interacting with these other systems. And then the perception was -- people really had to question their perception because if 70% of the kids who were dropping out aren't the kids they thought they were, then who are they?

And taking every opportunity to sort of make the invisible visible, bringing this up with city council leaders. We met with every major newspaper and press venue, and not as a "gotcha." You know, that thing you have to be careful about is everybody sort of blames each other for the problem that the kids are having. The school district becomes a target. The courts become a target. It's about getting people beyond otherness and getting people beyond "it's somebody else's fault" and it's our issue as a city to really resolve. None of the systems are perfect. None of the data is perfect. But if we can get beyond that, then we might be able to strategize on some of the outcomes.

*MOORE:* Maggie, did you want to just say something quick about barriers?

*DONAHUE:* Just that for the school district, I think the biggest barrier was not involving the family. And really as addressing the issues of truancy, not just focusing on the kids, but focusing on the community and the family. And I think that overcoming that barrier has led to much more effective strategies and keeping kids in school. And in the foster care system, when a kid is emancipated at the age of 18, the social worker just closed the case file. There wasn't an awareness or acceptance of responsibility for that youth beyond the age of 18. And so it's also overcoming that barrier and thinking about the fact that we're a department or an institution, but we're also responsible for these young people. And that also translates into us actually being parents. So really raising awareness, looking at the family, looking at the community and the critical roles they play in a young person's life. You just can't treat the young person in a vacuum.

*MOORE:* Thanks for that. And your comment, Maggie -- you picked up many of the themes that have sounded throughout today's call. And I want to once again thank our very able panelists and thank the folks on the line who have sent in these good questions and the answers got to helping meet some of your specific needs. We will continue to make additional resources available via the Disconnected Youth Program section of the YEF Institute website at [www.nlc.org/iyef](http://www.nlc.org/iyef). Later this spring, we'll be issuing the case study document on effective practices and cross-system collaboration for older disconnected youth. And of course, on a more general note, the audioconference series from the YEF Institute will continue next month, March

16, at 12:30 p.m. EST. We'll be talking about city leaders engaged in afterschool reform.

Thanks again to the panelists and thanks for everyone listening. We're looking forward to further contact with you. Please continue to send your questions or technical assistance requests in to me at [moore@nlc.org](mailto:moore@nlc.org). Good day.