

# IS ENOUGH IS BEING DONE ABOUT THE YOUTH EMPLOYMENT CRISIS?



Prepared by



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# NOT ENOUGH IS BEING DONE ABOUT THE YOUTH EMPLOYMENT CRISIS

By Edward DeJesus

“This is our moment. This is our time - to put our people back to work and open doors of opportunity for our kids...”

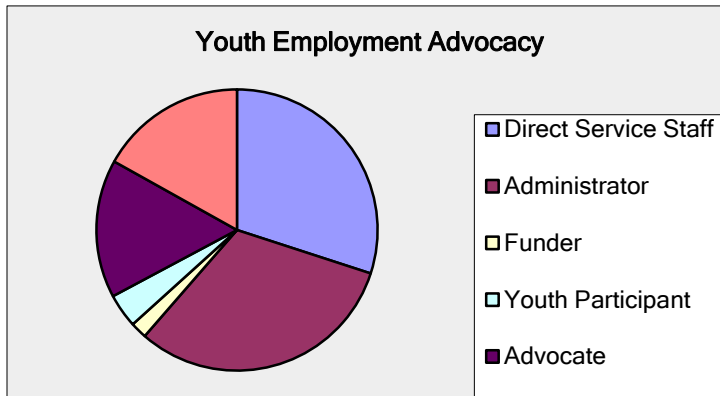
The hope and promise of President Obama’s acceptance speech on that election night resonated within each and every unemployed American. The idea of putting people back to work was exciting and sparked the attitudes and mindset of all in attendance. Unfortunately, for today’s youth, the fruition of that hope has not yet been realized. Our youth are still not at work, and their opportunities for obtaining the necessary skills to sustain themselves in the future are extremely limited. In fact, there is very little being done to eliminate or reduce the massive numbers of unemployed youth. This is particularly evident among black and Latino youth. Funding for youth workforce programs has been stagnant and nearly nonexistent for the past eight years, and providers within these programs appear to be complacent with the status quo.

Although there have been efforts to effect change in the youth unemployment epidemic through advocacy, reports, and legislative visits, it seems that these efforts are relatively failing. As we continue to strive toward the overall goal of creating more jobs for youth in the workforce, as well as provide them with the opportunities to gain the skills crucial to be successful within the workforce, it is important to gather and analyze information on the underlying issues that are preventing the youth employment community from reaching this goal. The compilation of information is a critical part of the solution, because without information, action is impossible. Once the analytical stage has been completed, youth employment advocates must create and execute a viable strategy to combat the obstacles that have been holding youth back.

The information phase of our study began with conducting an extensive survey on the attitudes and opinions about the current state of youth employment advocacy in the United States, as well as perceptions of its effectiveness and recommendations for change. The survey, conducted by Edward DeJesus Seminars and Consulting (EDSC), was started in the beginning of January 2011 and gathered responses from a multiple array of youth program staff, advocates, youth participants, direct service staff, administrators, and youth program funders.

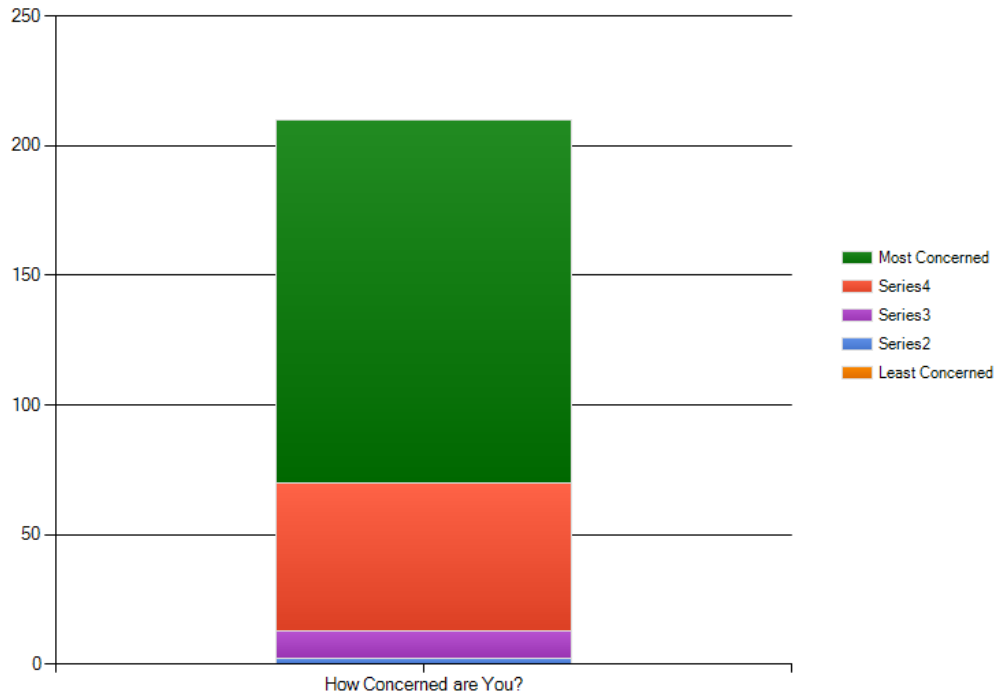
**Which best describes your position in youth services:**

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Direct Service Staff	30.0%	62
Administrator	31.4%	65
Funder	1.9%	4
Youth Participant	3.9%	8
Advocate	15.9%	33
Other (please comment)	16.9%	35
Other (please specify)		40
<i>answered question</i>		<b>207</b>
<i>skipped question</i>		<b>4</b>



The initial question of the survey was used as an assessment point. It was designed to generate a broad overview of the identity of the participants and determine how they were related to youth unemployment and potential solutions. Survey participants were asked to classify themselves as one of the following: Direct Service Staff, Administrator, Funder, Youth Participant, Advocate, or Other. Those identifying as other, were asked to specify their position in relation to youth services. Their involvement varied and included trainers, consultants, educators, volunteers, mentors, counselors, and many other very interesting fields. The largest majority of participants were those directly involved in youth services. Of the 211 surveyed, there were 65 Administrators and 62 Direct Service Staff, which equates to 31.4% and 30% respectively. On the tail end of the spectrum of participants were Funders.

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "least concerned" and 5 "most concerned," how concerned are you about the issue of youth unemployment?



## 2. How concerned are you about the issue of youth unemployment?

The second question on the survey was directed to discover the amount of concern that each of the participants had toward the problem of youth unemployment. The question used a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "least concerned" and 5 "most concerned." The results determined that 66.7% of participants were "most concerned" with the issue of youth unemployment, with 27.1% falling directly below that level. The data gleaned from this question indicates that those most concerned with the high numbers of unemployed youth, are those that work directly within youth programs. This finding not only underscores the fact that the status of unemployment in the youth demographic is of great concern, but it also highlights the fact that there is a breakdown in the system that needs to be fixed.

Current strategies to rectify and minimize the youth unemployment rate have been largely ineffective. This fact continues to be a source of frustration for both the youth involved as well as the staff and administrators in the trenches. Moreover, it greatly undermines the credibility of youth employment efforts – how seriously are young adults going to take a system where the majority graduate remain unemployed, underemployed and/or still without any career path?

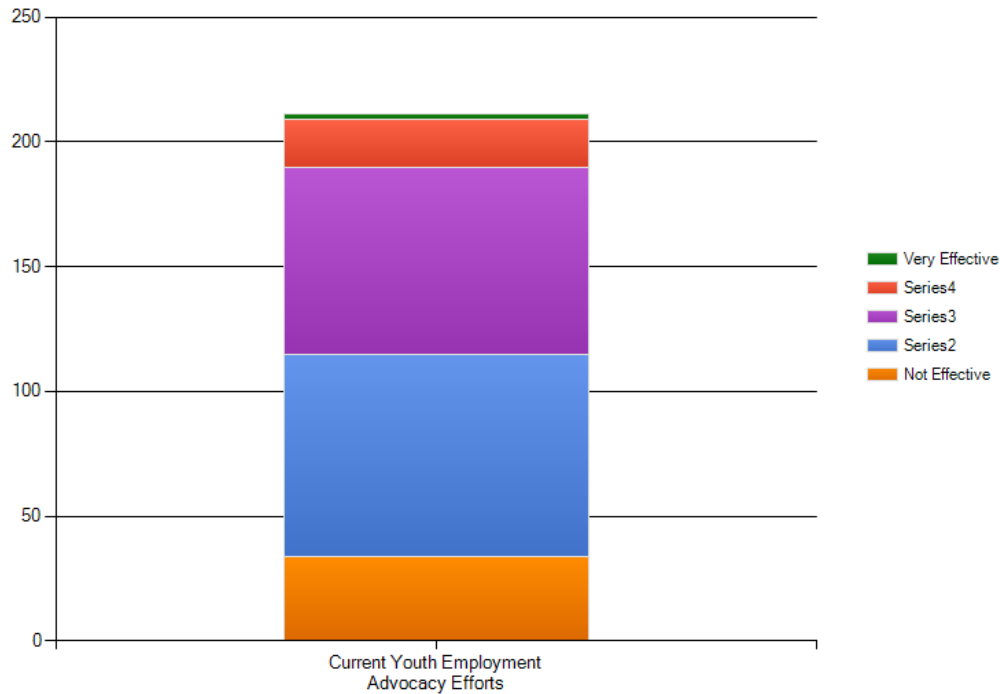
Considering the slumped economy, families across the country are dependent upon all able-bodied members to contribute to the household, making the need for youth employment that much more imperative. A glance at the July 2010 Bureau of Labor Statistics which shows that youth unemployment was at 4.4 million, basically unchanged from the previous year, places a grim spotlight on the fact that not enough is being accomplished to put our young people in jobs.

This statistic is particularly of note due to the fact that the months of April through July have been systematically the period in which youth employment increases in years previous.

At this juncture, the status of youth unemployment cries out for change. The current methodology for correcting the problem must be completely revamped if we are to reach levels that will show significant and lasting progress in getting our youth sustainably employed. Youth programs need more than just random job announcements from the local fast food establishment. Instead they need mentoring programs, entry level internships from companies who are looking to expand their base, and who are also looking to not simply create jobs, but are seeking to jumpstart careers. The public at large needs to discard the notion that youth are only capable of maintaining or only desire short-term, summer, pocket change employment, and instead should visualize them as prospective long-term, career-oriented assets. With the increasing costs of higher education, the implementation of on-the-job experience creates a tri-fold benefit. Youth are able to earn work experience in entry level positions that lead to career stability while gaining the necessary degrees that substantiate the basis for company advancement, and companies gain fresh outlooks and the chance to create a staff with continuity. In essence they are constantly growing their business, which in turn grows their community by integrating youth into the workforce on a steady and consistent basis.

Additional implementations should possibly pattern after the Works Progress Administration of the 1930s. This program, implemented by presidential executive order in 1935, was administered by Harry Hopkins and had employed 3.4 million people through its various programs by the following year. The general premise of the program was to disburse congressionally allocated funds to several programs that put people to work. Despite the fact that the expense of funding for this program was more than funding assigned to relief programs, the outcome was much more beneficial to the country as a whole. The idea that putting people to work, especially youth, will significantly decrease the necessity for government spending in the future and guarantee increased tax revenues in the present. Considering this fact, it is understandable that both youth and program staff are equally frustrated by the current lack of opportunity in the workforce.

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "not effective" and 5 being "very effective," how would you rate current youth employment advocacy efforts?



### 3. How would you rate current youth employment advocacy efforts?

After discovering the level of concern that each participant had about the issue of youth unemployment, the third question of the survey was directed to dig deeper into the issue by working to highlight how effective our current youth advocacy efforts are, utilizing the same 1 to 5 scale, with 1 being “not effective” and 5 being “very effective.” Results determined that a low .9% of participants thought that the current advocacy efforts are very effective, while more than 35% of participants rated effectiveness at either a level of 2 or 3. Sixteen percent of participants rated the level at a 1, not effective. These results are very eye opening, highlighting the necessity to make changes to youth advocacy in order to improve the level of effectiveness that it has on the employment status of our nation’s youth. **When almost 90% of people who work in or are associated with youth programs rate youth employment advocacy efforts at an effectiveness level of 3 or below, it is glaringly obvious that there needs to be some sort of change.**

After evaluating the ratings for question 3, it was important to determine the issues that participants believed held the highest impact on the lack of effectiveness of current youth employment advocacy strategies. Question 4 was formulated to rank eight of the identified negative issues impacting youth employment advocacy in order of importance from one to eight.

### 4. In your opinion, please rate in order of importance, the main issues affecting youth employment advocacy.

Of the available choices in question 4, the issues garnering the largest response were:

- Lack of Resources for Advocacy

- Lack of Public Concern
- Lack of Business Involvement

When reviewing the most chosen issues, it was interesting to note that these three issues are significantly interwoven and to a certain degree dependent upon each other. It can be concluded that Lack of Public Concern, the second-most selected response, is a catalyst for the other two popular answers. **Although the public at large is keenly aware of the unemployment crisis in our country, the focus of this is rarely on the youth demographic. With so many adults also in an unemployed status, it difficult for the public as a whole to be up in arms over youth unemployment stats. While this is an understandable point of view given the big picture, it leaves the problem unchanged and unsolved.**

Without overall public concern for the staggering numbers of unemployed youth, there is no voice of outcry that will demand the investment of resources by the government and other entities that could provide the funds necessary to jumpstart a movement that will make strides to resolve this crisis.

Despite continued news releases about the youth employment crisis, the issue seems to be a matter of the proverbial “can’t see the forest for the trees.” Unemployed adults find it difficult to advocate for youth, when so many of them have been searching for jobs for upwards of twelve months.

Given the aforementioned factors, **resources for advocacy when it comes to youth unemployment seems to be non-existent** and businesses are not inclined to increase their involvement. When they do become involved, youth often suffer from the last hired, first fired syndrome. As a group they are often overlooked, particularly if they are considered to be in the “at-risk” category, or when businesses are concentrated on increasing their productivity. The existence of these points of view make it critical that we work to change each of these co-mingled elements in order to produce a much more positive and successful outcome for our youth.

### Youth Employment Advocacy

In your opinion, please rate in order of importance, the main issues affecting youth employment advocacy.								
Rank								
Answer Options	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Response Count
Lack of Vision and Leadership	33	30	38	41	34	19	9	204
Lack of Resources for Advocacy	53	31	40	26	24	16	13	203
Fear of Advocacy/Reprisal	11	20	26	24	44	57	17	199
Competition among Youth Serving Agencies	13	19	19	44	42	49	12	198
Lack of Business Involvement	34	44	51	26	22	16	9	202
Lack of Public Concern	37	55	32	33	20	16	11	204
Other: (number and list)	15	4	5	4	3	4	21	56

	Question Totals
Other (please specify)	38
<i>answered question</i>	210
<i>skipped question</i>	2

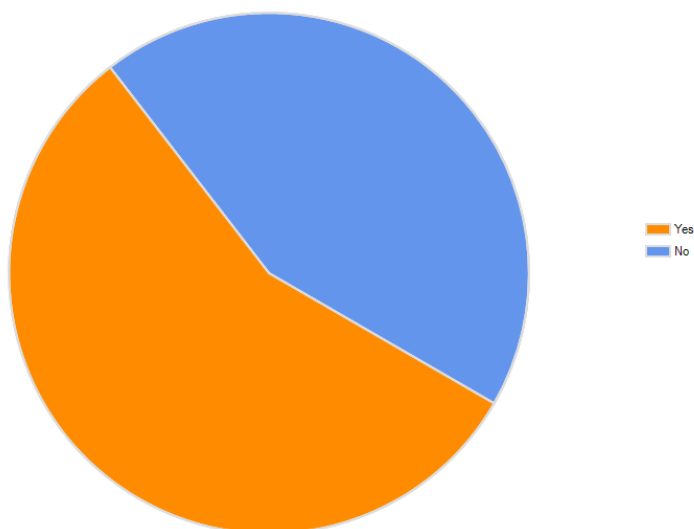
Survey participants who listed “other” for question 4 were asked to offer their insight as to issues which contributed to the current youth unemployment dilemma. Some of their responses included:

- Insensitivity toward target population
- Coordination between DOE/DOL to support work readiness skill development
- Poor Policy
- Lack of skills
- Lack of Strategy
- Not a priority for funders
- Young Persons motivation/interest
- Lack of cultural competency
- Lack of support by elected officials

Almost all of the added participant responses indicate some level of inaction, and the question is why? It is obvious from this small sampling that youth unemployment is deemed as a significant problem in this country, yet the lack of so many necessities to improve the situation is staggering. Speculating on the situation, this inaction could be due to any or all of the reasons previously mentioned.

5. Have you participated in any activities in 2010 to raise awareness about the issue of youth unemployment?

Have you participated in any activities in 2010 to raise awareness about the issue of youth unemployment?



Results from question 5 determined that 56.2% of those taking the survey had participated in activities to raise awareness about the issue of youth unemployment in 2010 and 43.8% had not. For the participants who answered yes in question 5, question 6 was designed to quantify their involvement through indications of a number range of activities they had participated in. The ranges in question 6 were 1-3, 4-6, and more than 6. Data for question 6 responses indicate that of the participants who answered yes to having been involved in awareness activities, less than twenty percent had participated in more than 3 activities during 2010.

7. Would you be willing to participate in any activities to raise awareness about the issue of youth unemployment?

This particular question was designed to gain a grasp on the willingness to participate in activities to raise awareness about youth unemployment. The findings from these responses show that an overwhelming 93.6% specified that they would be willing to actively participate in the mentioned activities.

Since almost all of the participants were willing to participate in activities to enhance awareness about the issue of unemployment, the final question of the survey reached out to determine which activities are considered most effective in the field of youth employment advocacy.

8. Please rank the following Youth Employment Advocacy activities in perceived order of effectiveness.

For question 8, participants were given 7 activities to choose from, which are listed below in the table. **The most popular activities that the participants ranked as number one was split between visiting legislators’ offices to speak with them personally or with youth and media/public education activities.**

Both of these activities provide a very hands-on approach to the problem and work to obliterate one of the previously noted obstacles in program effectiveness – Lack of Public Concern. By taking the time to meet personally with legislators, constituents give voice to the problem as well as volume, and force the hand of those officials to make the issues a priority.

On the other end of the spectrum, by engaging in youth and media/public education activities, youth are allowed to exercise their own voice and challenge public perception about work and the developmental role it plays for young adults. They are also encouraged to gather peer support, so that they create a unified front for a cause that directly affects them.

Please rank the following Youth Employment Advocacy activities in perceived order of effectiveness:									
Rank									
Answer Options	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Response Count
Writing letters and emails to legislators	17	25	26	27	28	31	23	10	187

Making phone calls to legislators	7	26	32	29	39	31	15	5	184	
Visiting legislators' offices to speak with them personally or with youth	57	33	34	29	12	11	7	9	192	
Media/Public Education Activities (Speak-Outs, Writing Articles, Success Stories)	57	47	21	31	11	8	8	10	193	
Non-Violent Direct Action (Boycotting Businesses, Public Demonstrations, Shutting Down Worksites)	17	23	26	13	32	21	32	16	180	
Research	19	14	29	24	20	44	24	7	181	
Lobbying	14	21	30	20	19	27	27	11	169	
Other	13	2	3	1	0	1	3	8	31	
									<b>Question Totals</b>	
Other (please specify)									21	
									<i>answered question</i>	<b>201</b>
									<i>skipped question</i>	<b>11</b>

In Conclusion, not enough is being done to address the issues of youth unemployment. If the adult unemployment rate was equal to the current youth unemployment rate, a national state of emergency would have been declared a long time ago.

It is time for youth employment advocates, policy makers, funders, and practitioners to exit their individual silos and come clean about the barriers keeping low-income youth from economic opportunity. Partnering with youth, hopefully youth employment advocates can come up with strategies to address this crisis, change public perception, and make sure we have a society where all young people have options beyond the streets.

-Edward DeJesus