

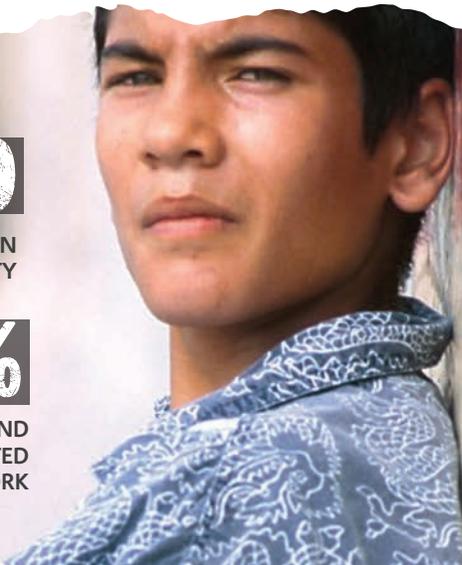
# FLIP THE SCRIPT

SAN DIEGO  
WORKFORCE  
PARTNERSHIP®

APRIL 2017

UNDERSTANDING THE STORY OF  
SAN DIEGO'S OPPORTUNITY YOUTH

# THE OPPORTUNITY



**43,210**

OPPORTUNITY YOUTH IN SAN DIEGO COUNTY

**9.7%**

OF SAN DIEGANS BETWEEN 16 AND 24 YEARS OLD ARE DISCONNECTED FROM SCHOOL AND WORK

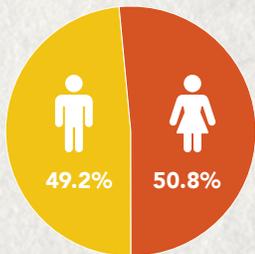
There are approximately **43,000 opportunity youth in San Diego County**. These are 16–24-year-olds who are neither in school nor employed. This study tells the story of San Diego's opportunity youth and the organizations that serve them, and presents a vision for how we might flip the script for San Diego's youth.

## OPPORTUNITY YOUTH

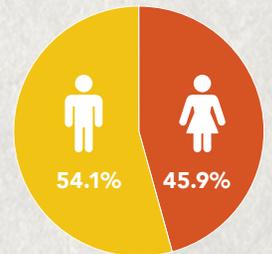
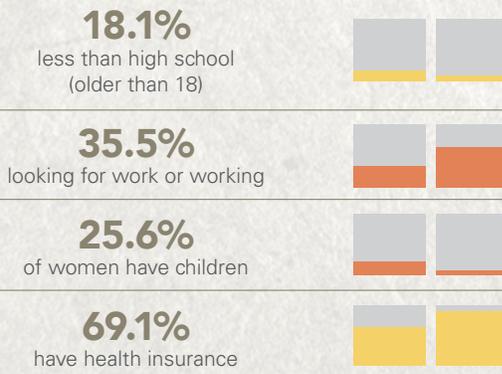
## ALL 16–24-YEAR-OLDS (SAN DIEGO COUNTY)

**43,210**

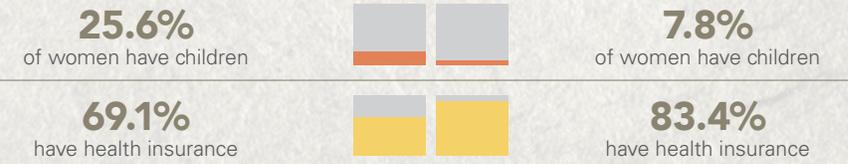
**444,132**



AVERAGE AGE: **21.3**



AVERAGE AGE: **20.1**



### DISCONNECTION RATES BY RACE/ETHNICITY



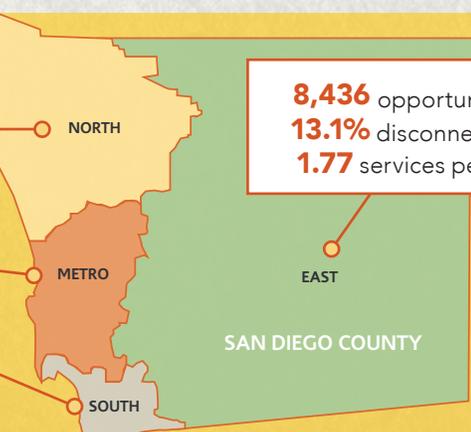
There are **1184 services** delivered through **826 unique locations** in San Diego County that support opportunity youth. These resources include employment, education, basic needs, mental health, transportation and housing.

**12,490** opportunity youth  
**7.2%** disconnection rate  
**5.03** services per 100 OY

**12,203** opportunity youth  
**10.2%** disconnection rate  
**2.33** services per 100 OY

**8,436** opportunity youth  
**13.1%** disconnection rate  
**1.77** services per 100 OY

**10,081** opportunity youth  
**11.6%** disconnection rate  
**1.22** services per 100 OY



Opportunity youth estimates were calculated using 2015 1-year estimates from the US Census Bureau's American Community Survey. Education, parenting, insurance and race/ethnicity rates are 2013–2015 3-year estimates to achieve reliable sample sizes. Services were identified using the 2-1-1 San Diego service provider database.

# THE VISION

## CUT THE RATE

**7.3% by 2020**

We must reconnect and prevent disconnection for an estimated 10,800 youth, reducing the rate by 0.5% annually.

## HALVE THE GAP

**4.4% by 2020**

By 2020, no neighborhood should be more than 4.4% above the countywide disconnection rate. This would “halve the gap” between the area with the current highest rate (18.6%) and the county average, focusing efforts and resources on underserved communities.

## WHAT'S NEXT

- Develop an action plan to “cut the rate and halve the gap.” Reconvene annually to measure progress.
- Center the action plan and its implementation on the voice and experience of the experts: San Diego’s youth and young adults.
- Work with employers to develop competency-based hiring standards in growing sectors, ensuring young people with “non-traditional” educational pathways are evaluated on what they can do, not just what they did or did not do in school.
- Support and strengthen the transition from high school to post-secondary degree and certificate programs in high-demand industries.
- Expand employer efforts to hire opportunity youth, targeting public sector hiring initiatives, the businesses leading the 100K Opportunities initiative and apprenticeship programs.
- Increase secure, proactive data sharing between education, government and service providers. Align youth service provider program goals with success measures of big public systems (e.g., K–12 education, probation, foster care, community college).
- Increase the number of youth services in the 2-1-1 San Diego information and referral network; focus on areas with fewer services and high youth disconnection rates.

For more information, view the full report at [workforce.org/reports](http://workforce.org/reports)

“

I have many goals right now. I want to get my GED, I want to go to college, I want to study and I want to be a nurse. The most important thing is language right now. And a job. Without these two things, we can't do anything.

My mother makes me strong. She tells me to study and do something good in my life. She tells me, ‘David, don't stop. Just learn and learn, and don't stop.’”

—David, 20, Refugee from Iraq, East Region





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## INTRODUCTION

**There are approximately 43,210 16- to 24-year-olds in San Diego County who are not in school and not working.** This accounts for 9.7 percent of all San Diego youth in this age range. While this rate is lower than 77 of the top 98 metro areas in the nation, San Diego is in the top 20 areas for opportunity youth in terms of sheer numbers. This report is the first in an annual series to be produced by the San Diego Workforce Partnership (SDWP). These reports will focus exclusively on the challenges, trends and experiences of San Diego’s opportunity youth and highlight community solutions to reduce the number of disconnected 16- to 24-year olds in San Diego County. Specifically, this report seeks to:

- **Build awareness** by bringing attention to the estimated 43,000 opportunity youth living in San Diego, their experiences and scalable solutions to youth disconnection
- **Dig deeper into local data** by breaking down the San Diego County and sub-regional disparities in race/ethnicity, education, language, age and other demographics
- **Amplify youth voice** by supplementing quantitative data findings with the experiences of opportunity youth who currently are or have been disconnected
- **Map resources for opportunity youth** using 2-1-1 San Diego data, and analyze the availability of services that target the unique needs of this population
- **Identify the gap** between current service availability and service needs for opportunity youth
- **Inform** a countywide goal for reducing youth disconnection by 2020
- **Recommend specific actions** that San Diego County community leaders and stakeholders can take to reduce the number of opportunity youth, by reconnecting youth and preventing disconnection before it occurs

As San Diego’s innovation economy continues to grow, businesses are increasingly reporting talent shortages. If reconnected to education and/or employment, opportunity youth and young adults can help fill this need, increasing the size, quality and diversity of San Diego’s talent pipeline.

### Purpose of this Study

The term, “opportunity youth,” refers to the missed social and economic opportunity in developing these individuals to become thriving members of society.<sup>1</sup> Failure to improve outcomes for opportunity youth leads to a significant loss in economic opportunity through unrealized lifetime earnings and a high dependence on government and social service programs. Also referred to as “disconnected youth,” opportunity youth are disconnected from employment and education. Long-term disconnection among opportunity youth results in pay handicaps of 2-3 percent less in earnings for every year missed of work and higher rates of adult unemployment and poverty later in life.<sup>2</sup> Opportunity youth create high taxpayer and social costs in the form of lower economic growth and higher government spending on crime, public assistance and health care. The average opportunity youth costs \$14,937.53 in annual taxpayer burden, \$183,484.45 in lifetime taxpayer burden and \$568,518.10 in lifetime social burden.<sup>3</sup> This means that in San Diego, opportunity youth cost taxpayers \$836.50 million a year and \$10.32 billion across their lifetimes.<sup>4</sup> In addition, this disconnection contributes to negative health and psychological outcomes, family strain,

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<sup>1</sup> John M. Bridgeland and Jessica A. Milano, “Opportunity Road: The Promise and Challenge of America’s Forgotten Youth,” Civic Enterprises, January 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Bridgeland and Milano, “Opportunity Road.”

<sup>3</sup> In 2016 dollars. Clive R. Bedfield, Henry M. Levin, Rachel Rosen, “The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth,” Civic Enterprises, January 2012.

<sup>4</sup> In 2016 dollars. Bedfield, Levin, & Rosen, “The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth.”

community instability and intergenerational poverty.<sup>5</sup>

According to Measure of America, there are approximately 4.9 million opportunity youth in the U.S.<sup>6</sup> Nationally, a disproportionate number of these youth come from minority and low-income populations and are more likely to be involved with the criminal justice, foster and welfare systems. Other subpopulations include returning veterans, young parents, individuals with mental or physical disabilities, immigrants, undocumented residents and homeless youth.<sup>7</sup> Their disconnection stems from a competitive labor market, lack of access to training programs and high poverty rates.<sup>8</sup> Inadequate investment in and engagement of opportunity youth will continue to marginalize these individuals from meaningful educational and work opportunities.

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) is a major source of funding for programs to support opportunity youth. As the regional workforce development board for the City and County of San Diego, SDWP distributes WIOA funds to local organizations to provide opportunity youth with targeted workforce training and career placement. In 2015, SDWP, through its partners and providers, administered \$8.3 million in WIOA grants to serve 4,255 opportunity youth; however, there remains more than 40,000 opportunity youth to be served. While SDWP is a significant financial contributor to opportunity youth programs, this level of investment is not enough to close the gap. To make informed decisions about where to focus local resources, the community must first know more about local opportunity youth—where they are, what they need and how they would like to be helped. This report builds on the rich body of national research and examines how these challenges play out in San Diego County. With this knowledge, community organizations and government agencies can craft interventions for the most challenging barriers in the region, while targeting resources on the neighborhoods that need the most support.

This study was produced by the San Diego Workforce Partnership (SDWP) in partnership with the University of San Diego School of Leadership and Education Sciences (USD), University of Southern California Price School of Public Policy (USC), Measure of America (MoA), 2-1-1 San Diego, San Diego Youth Development Office, UC San Diego Extension and the Jacobs Center for Neighborhood Innovation.

## Methodology

Coordinated by SDWP, researchers from the USC, MoA, USD and 2-1-1 San Diego provided research and analysis for this report. The research teams used the following data to perform the analysis and develop the recommendations found in this report:

- U.S. Census Bureau one-year American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Sample (ACS PUMS) for San Diego County
- Qualitative interviews with former and current opportunity youth and service providers currently working with opportunity youth
- 2-1-1 San Diego's service provider database

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<sup>5</sup> Bedfield, Levin, & Rosen, "The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth."

<sup>6</sup> Sarah Burd-Sharps and Kristen Lewis, "Promising Gains, Persistent Gaps: Youth Disconnection in America," Measure of America, Social Science Research Council, March 2017.

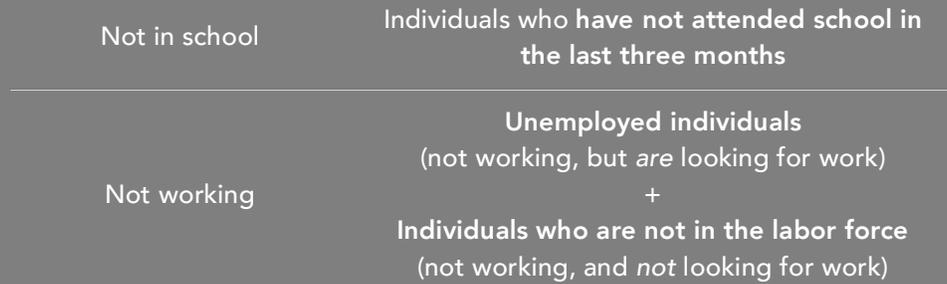
<sup>7</sup> M. Corcoran, F. Hanleybrown, A. Steinberg, & K. Tallant, "Collective Impact for Opportunity Youth," FSG, 2012.

<sup>8</sup> Corcoran, Hanleybrown, Steinberg, & Tallant, "Collective Impact for Opportunity Youth."

When sample sizes allowed for reliable demographic estimates, 2015 one-year data were used. When 2015 sample sizes were too small for sub-population estimates, data were aggregated from a three-year period (2013-2015).<sup>9</sup>

### Defining Opportunity Youth in the Data

Opportunity youth are individuals between the ages 16 and 24 who are not in school and not working. More precisely, the variables in the census data are defined as follows:

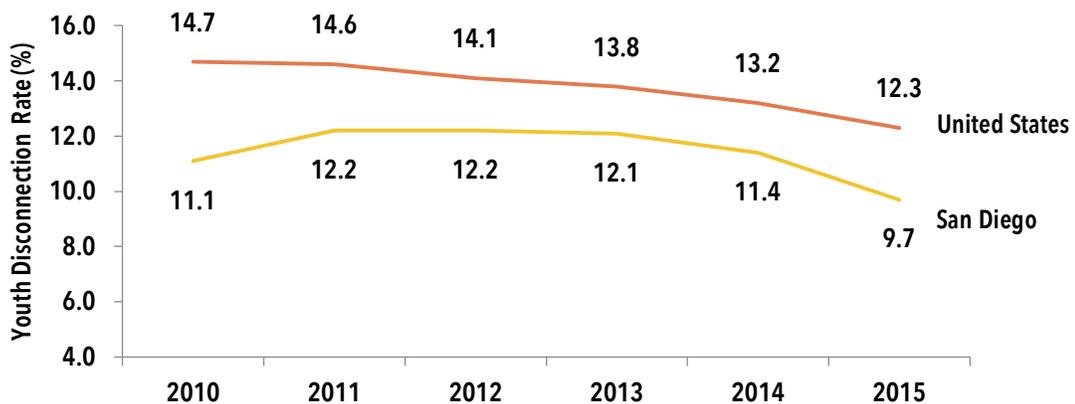


Labor force participation rates account for opportunity youth who have not given up on employment. Rather, they are experiencing barriers that are keeping them from securing a job.

## UNDERSTANDING OPPORTUNITY YOUTH IN SAN DIEGO

The national youth disconnection rate has been declining since the Great Recession. The United States rate of disconnected youth fell from 14.7 percent in 2010 to 12.3 percent in 2015. Similarly, since its peak of 12.2 percent in 2011, San Diego County's youth disconnection rate fell to 9.7 percent in 2015 (Figure 1).<sup>10</sup> This rate is lower than the 2015 California rate of 12.2 percent.

Figure 1: Youth Disconnection Rate, 2010-2015



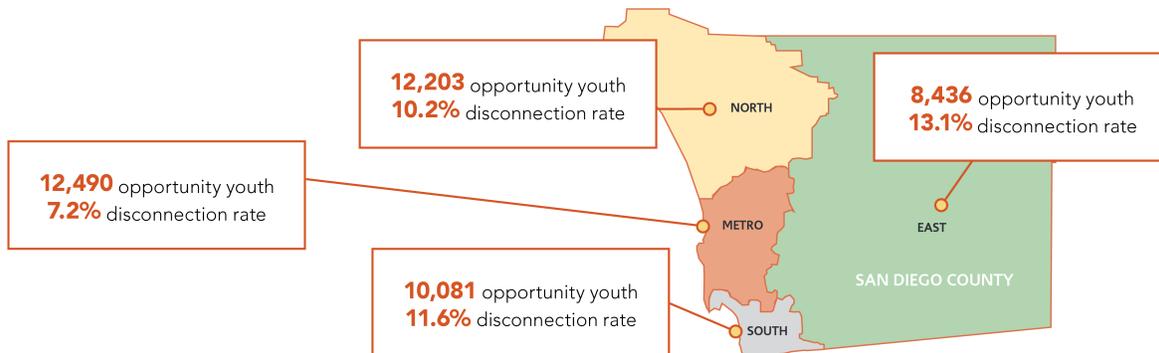
<sup>9</sup> See Appendix A for detailed methodology.

<sup>10</sup> Measure of America calculations using U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, one-year estimates 2010 through 2015.

## Geography of Youth Disconnection

SDWP breaks San Diego County into four regions for planning and administration purposes: East, Metro, North and South.<sup>11</sup> Youth disconnection rates vary by region (Figure 2).<sup>12</sup> While the East region has the fewest opportunity youth, it also has the highest disconnection rate (13.1 percent), meaning that a young adult is more likely to be disconnected in this region. Conversely, the Metro region, with the highest number of opportunity youth, has the lowest disconnection rate (7.2 percent).

**Figure 2: Regional Youth Disconnection Rates in San Diego County**



### How many opportunity youth are there in San Diego County?

The estimate varies between 43,000 and 53,000, depending on how many years' worth of data are included in the calculation. The U.S. Census Bureau releases data annually, and the most recent data available is from 2015. Here is a sample of available estimates for the region:

|                             |        |
|-----------------------------|--------|
| 1-year estimate (2015)      | 43,210 |
| 3-year estimate (2013-2015) | 49,421 |
| 5-year estimate (2010-2014) | 53,000 |

### Which estimate is better?

Each estimation method has benefits. By combining data from multiple years, researchers can work with a larger sample size, making it possible to make accurate estimates for otherwise small regions. However, the farther back the data comes from, the less aligned the number may be with the current economic climate. For example, the five-year average above includes opportunity youth estimates at the height of unemployment during the Great Recession (2010). The number has declined every year since then; therefore, 53,000 may be overestimated. San Diego has the benefit of being a large metro area, so the sample size for one year is sufficient to make an accurate, current estimate. For this reason, this report focuses on the current one-year estimate of 43,210. Three-year estimates are used for some demographic breakdowns to maintain reliable sample sizes. The years used for each estimate—2015 or 2013-2015—are indicated in parentheses in each figure.

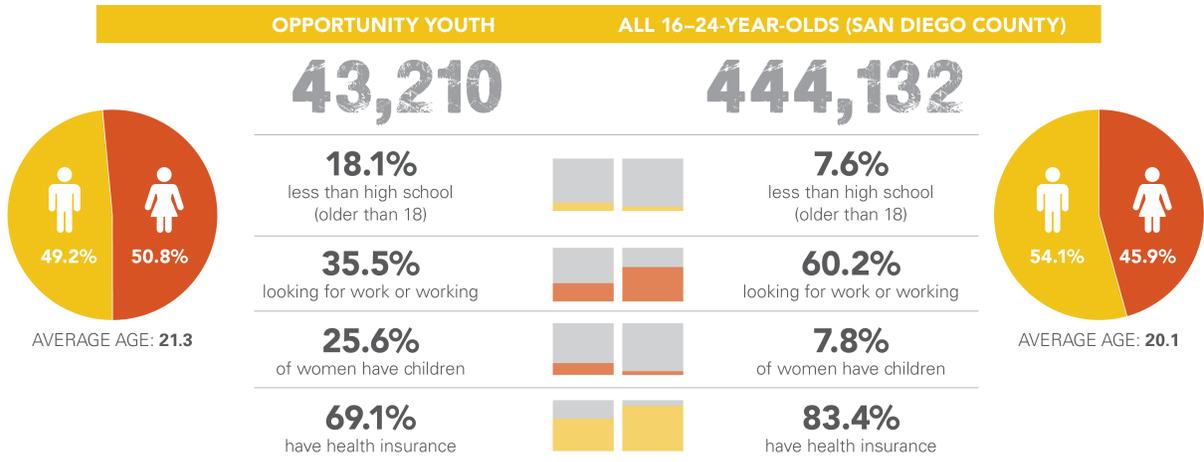
<sup>11</sup> [workforce.org/annual-report-FY16](http://workforce.org/annual-report-FY16)

<sup>12</sup> Measure of America calculations using U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2015.

## Demographics of Disconnection

Figure 3 shows some key metrics where opportunity youth are disproportionately represented when compared to the overall population of 16-24-year-olds in San Diego.<sup>16</sup> On average, opportunity youth are more likely to be older, be female, have less than a high school diploma or equivalent and have children (for women). They are less likely to have health insurance, and less likely to be looking for work or working. Further, 57 percent (24,525 opportunity youth) are living below 200 percent of the federal poverty line.<sup>17</sup>

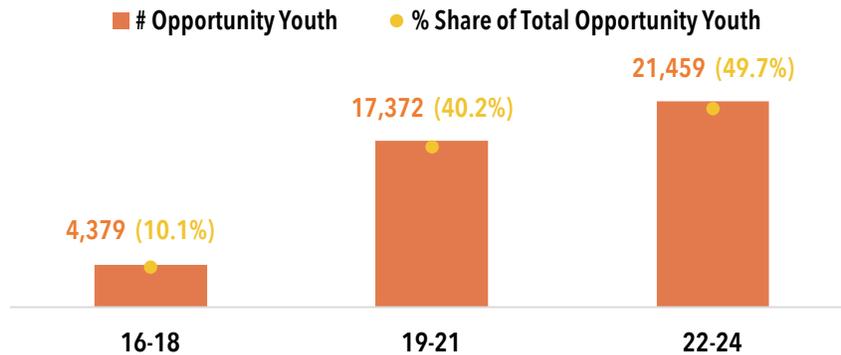
**Figure 3: Opportunity Youth vs. 16-24-Year-Olds in San Diego County**



### Age

As noted in Figure 3, the average opportunity youth in San Diego County is 21.3 years old. Figure 4 shows how youth are distributed across age groups. Half of all opportunity youth are between the ages of 22 and 24, while 40 percent are 19-21. Relatively few opportunity youth are between 16 and 18, accounting for only 10 percent of disconnected youth.

**Figure 4: Distribution of Opportunity Youth by Age (2015)**



<sup>16</sup> Opportunity youth estimates, gender, average age and labor force participation are Measure of America calculations using U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey, 2015. Education, parenting and insurance rates use 2013–2015.

<sup>17</sup> Measure of America calculations using U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2015.

### Race/Ethnicity

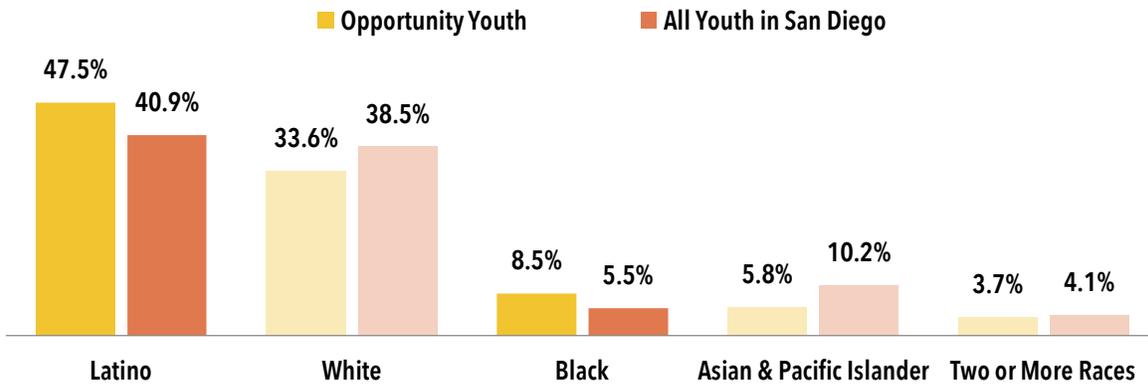
Following national trends, youth disconnection in San Diego County is higher for black and Latino youth than it is for white and Asian/Pacific Islander youth. As shown in Figure 5, 17.1 percent of black youth and 12.9 percent of Latino youth are disconnected, compared to 8.9 percent of white (non-Hispanic) youth and 6.3 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander youth. Further, youth of two or more races are disconnected at a rate of 10.0 percent.

**Figure 5: Disconnection Rates by Race/Ethnicity (2013-2015)**



Not only are disconnection rates higher for blacks and Latinos, but these two groups are also disproportionately represented among disconnected youth. Black youth account for 5.5 percent of San Diego’s total youth population, but represent 8.5 percent of opportunity youth. For Latino youth, the disparity is even greater: Latinos account for 40.9 percent of the youth population, but comprise 47.5 percent of opportunity youth (Figure 6).

**Figure 6: Share of Opportunity Youth vs. All Youth by Race/Ethnicity (2013-2015)\***



\*Total may not add up to 100% due to rounding and insufficient data for individuals in other race/ethnic groups

Native American opportunity youth could not be quantified for this report. While San Diego is home to approximately 2,000 16- to 24-year-olds of Native American heritage, the ACS sample size was too small to accurately estimate the number of opportunity youth in this group.<sup>18</sup> Nationally, Native American young adults experience the highest rate of disconnection (25.4 percent), a trend that may very well be reflected at the local level.<sup>19</sup>

### Language and Citizenship

Forty-five percent of opportunity youth in the region (approximately 22,000) speak a language other than English at home; over three-quarters of non-English households speak Spanish (Figure 7). Further, 38

<sup>18</sup> Measure of America calculations using U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2013-2015.

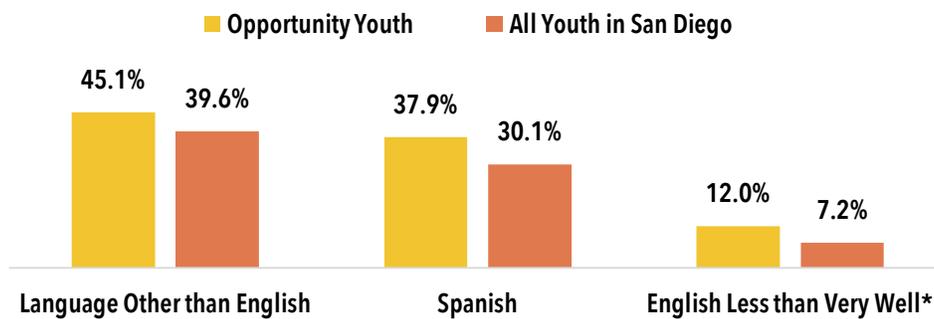
<sup>19</sup> Burd-Sharps and Lewis, “Promising Gains, Persistent Gaps.”

percent of opportunity youth speak Spanish at home, compared to 30 percent of all San Diego County youth.

The U.S. Census Bureau also collects self-reported data on language proficiency. Twelve percent (5,929) of the youth who speak a language other than English at home rate themselves as speaking English “less than very well” (Figure 7). Interestingly, this number aligns closely with citizenship rates of disconnected youth; 11.8 percent of opportunity youth (5,820) are not American citizens.<sup>20</sup> A lack of citizenship status limits a job seeker’s pool of options, while language barriers pose a significant challenge to participation in both employment and education.

38% of opportunity youth speak Spanish at home, compared to 30% of all San Diego County youth.

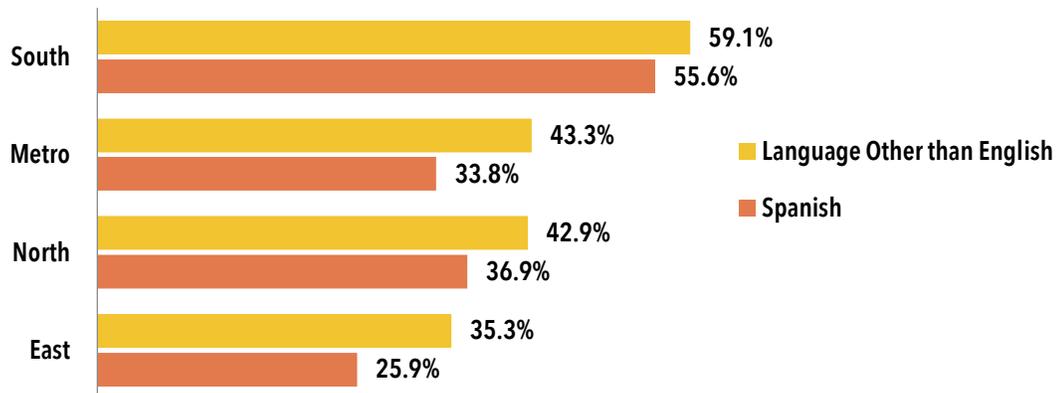
**Figure 7: Language Spoken at Home by Opportunity Youth (2013-2015)**



\*Only asked of people who speak a language other than English at home

There are also some notable regional variations when looking at languages spoken at home. Figure 8 shows that the South region is home to the highest proportion of opportunity youth who speak a language other than English at home—15.8 percent above the next closest region. Similarly, South County leads in percentage of youth who speak Spanish at home. This is not surprising given the region’s location on the Mexican border, but it is a good reminder of where efforts should be focused to provide language services. Metro and East have the largest portions of opportunity youth who speak a language other than Spanish at home, each showing about 10 percent.

**Figure 8: OY Who Speak a Language Other than English at Home by Region (2013-2015)**



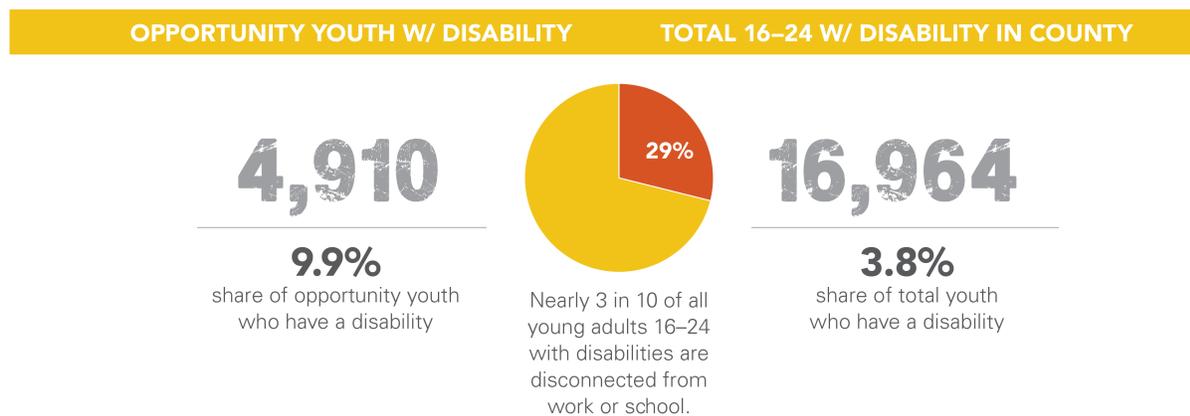
<sup>20</sup> Measure of America calculations using U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2013-2015.

### Individuals with Disabilities

Twenty-nine percent of all 16- to 24-year olds with a disability are disconnected from school and work. Individuals with a disability are also disproportionately represented among opportunity youth, making up 9.9 percent of opportunity youth, compared with 3.8 percent of all 16- to 24-year olds (Figure 9).

Disability status in this case refers to any enduring emotional, physical or mental condition that makes everyday activities like walking, dressing or remembering things difficult and restricts an individuals' ability to work or to perform basic required tasks without assistance. This is self-reported; individuals who report having such a condition in the ACS are counted as having a disability.

**Figure 9: Opportunity Youth with a Disability in San Diego County (2013-2015)**



### Educational Attainment

In San Diego County, roughly 86 percent of occupations require at least a high school diploma for entry.<sup>21</sup> While most opportunity youth (80 percent) have attained at least this baseline, 51 percent only have a high school diploma or equivalent (i.e., GED) with no further schooling (Figure 10). To secure better-paying jobs with promising career pathways, these individuals must connect with additional training, even if it does not take the form of a four-year degree. Openings for middle-skill jobs – highly-skilled positions that require more than a high school diploma but less than a four-year degree – are growing in San Diego County, with a projected 20,000 openings annually through 2019.<sup>22</sup> Nearly 20 percent or 9,788 opportunity youth do not have a high school diploma or equivalent, but this number is more meaningful when broken down by age groups.

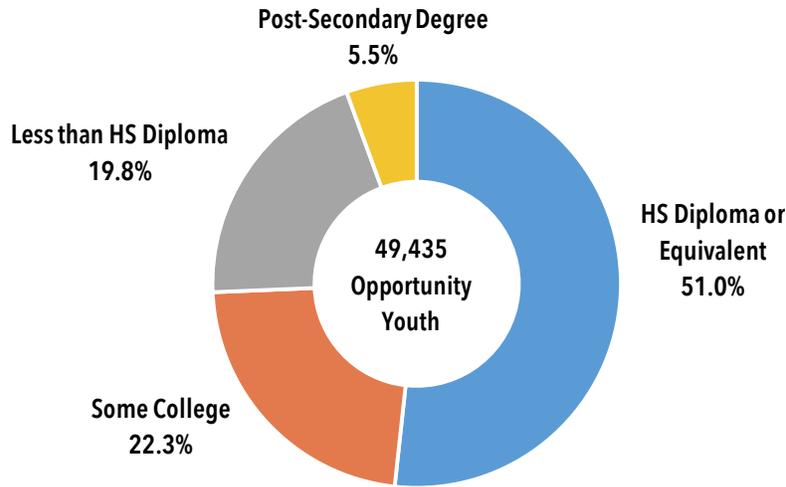
“During my middle school and high school years, my family moved around a lot. It was difficult because I never stayed at one school for too long. It messed up my school credits. My school wasn’t able to get the transcripts from the other schools I attended. On top of me hanging out with friends a lot and being a class clown, it meant that at the age of eighteen I couldn’t finish high school on time. I didn’t get much help from staff or counselors and had to figure out the next step to getting my diploma on my own. I just didn’t realize I was too far behind until it was too late. I knew I needed to continue school and get my diploma, but I also needed money and wanted to find a job.”

– Naomi, 20, Metro Region  
See Appendix B for Naomi’s story

<sup>21</sup> Economic Modeling Specialists, Int’l (EMSI). Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) and Non-QCEW datasets, accessed April 2017.

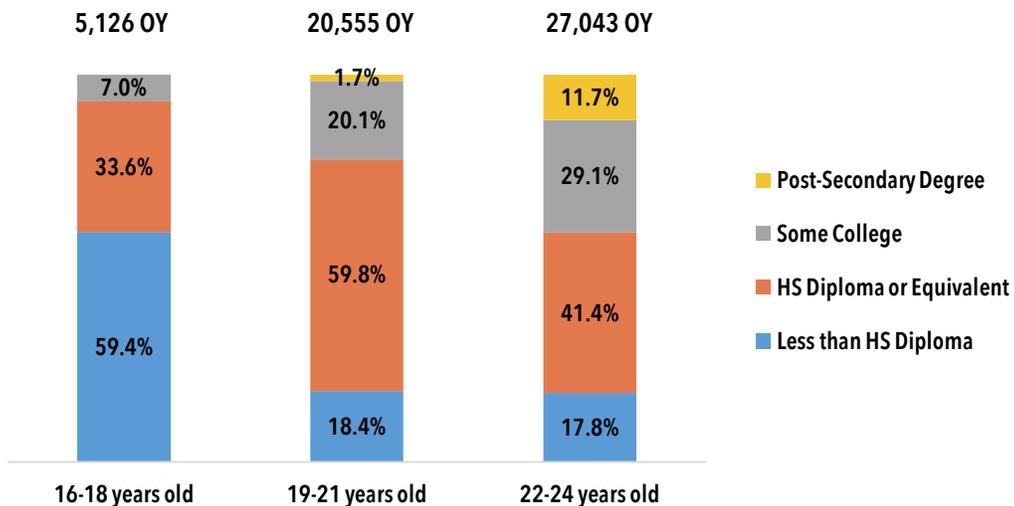
<sup>22</sup> SDWP. Middle-skill Jobs. 2015.

Figure 10: Opportunity Youth by Educational Level (2013-2015)<sup>24</sup>



While it is reasonable for 59 percent of 16- to 18-year olds to not yet have graduated, about 18 percent of opportunity youth in each of the older age groups (19-21 and 22-24) still have less than a high school diploma (Figure 11). The static nature of this figure suggests that after a certain age it becomes more difficult to overcome that initial hurdle. By the 22-24 range, the number of high school diplomas shrinks, and the number of people with some college and post-secondary degrees increases, but 41 percent of young adults still have not progressed beyond high school.

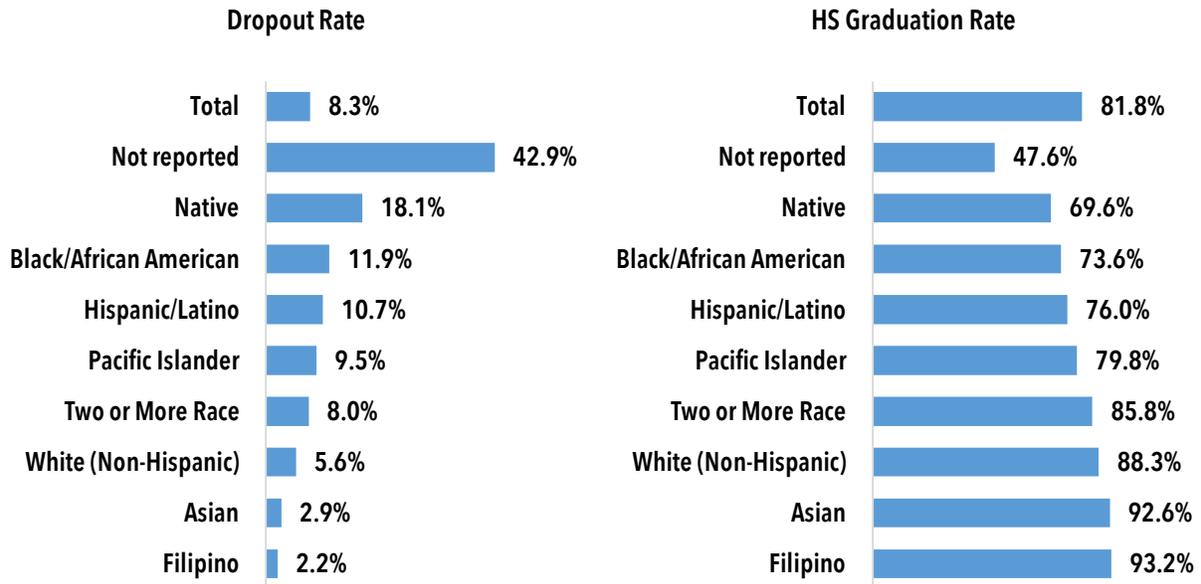
Figure 11: Opportunity Youth Educational Attainment by Age (2013-2015)



<sup>24</sup> The educational category "Some College" does include youth with an Associate Degree.

Within the high school diploma attainment metric, graduation and dropout rates differ by race and ethnicity (Figure 12). Asian American students are the least likely to drop out (2.9 percent), while Native Americans (18.1 percent), Black/African Americans (11.9 percent), and Hispanic/Latino students (10.7 percent) are more likely to drop out than the county average (8.3 percent).<sup>25</sup>

**Figure 12: San Diego County Graduation and Dropout Rates by Race/Ethnicity, 2014-2015**



\*Percentages do not add up to 100% because “GED completion rate” and “still enrolled rate” (rate of students that remain enrolled in the 9-12 instructional system without a high school diploma after the end of the 4th year of high school) are not included.

### Labor Force Participation

Once opportunity youth transition back into the labor market, there are still barriers facing them in the workforce. SDWP released a report in 2016 that highlighted San Diego employers’ concerns about young job seekers (ages 16 to 21), specifically their lack of experience, maturity levels and generational stigmas related to social media usage and behaviors.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, the report noted that in-demand occupations such as engineering require substantial investment in post-secondary educational attainment and work experience, which are often out-of-reach for opportunity youth. As the labor market for low-skilled positions declines due to automation and job specialization, opportunity youth will continue to fall behind, even in years of economic recovery.

An individual is a participating member of the labor force if he or she is either a) employed or b) actively looking for work. In San Diego County, only 35.5 percent of opportunity youth are participating in the labor force (Figure 3). In other words, more than 15,000 opportunity youth are actively looking for work but are not getting hired. These young people are submitting applications, attending job fairs, doing internet searches and participating in other job search activities, but have not been hired. This is not due to a lack of job opportunities; in 2015, there were more

**15,000+ opportunity youth are actively looking for work**

<sup>25</sup> California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS), 2014-2015.

<sup>27</sup> “In-Demand Jobs,” San Diego Workforce Partnership, 2016.

than 300,000 online job postings in the county, over 40,000 of which required only a high school diploma or associate degree.<sup>30</sup>

This means that the rest—about 28,000 16-24 year olds who are not in school—are not actively looking for work either. They may have chosen not to work, have given up actively looking for work (discouraged workers) or are unable to work because of disability, incarceration or other reason. Significant work must be done to address their barriers and transition these young adults back into the labor market.

Only **35.5 percent** of opportunity youth are **participating in the labor force**. This means that the rest—about **28,000** 16-24 year olds who are not in school—are **not actively looking for work either**.

## AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES FOR OPPORTUNITY YOUTH

To adequately address any gaps in services, the San Diego region must first identify where and what resources are currently available to serve opportunity youth. SDWP worked with 2-1-1 San Diego to identify programs located in San Diego County that serve opportunity youth. Using 2-1-1 San Diego’s information and referral database of over 1,500 agencies, the research team queried a list of relevant search terms and taxonomies to identify services that may help prevent disconnection and/or support reengagement activities.<sup>33</sup> This database represents an ecosystem of community-based organizations, government agencies, publicly-funded services, volunteer services, schools and educational programs.

### Defining Opportunity Youth Assets

For the purpose of this report, an “opportunity youth asset” is an agency or service in San Diego County that a) serves youth and young adults (both exclusively and as part of the general population) and b) offers services related to preventing youth disconnection and/or supporting reconnection efforts, directly and indirectly. The following table describes how these assets were counted.

| Asset type | Description  |
|------------|--|
| Agency     | <b>unique agency + unique address</b><br>one agency with multiple physical locations would be counted once for each location                                       |
| Service    | <b>unique agency + unique address + unique service</b><br>an agency may have multiple supportive services per address, and each of those services are counted once |

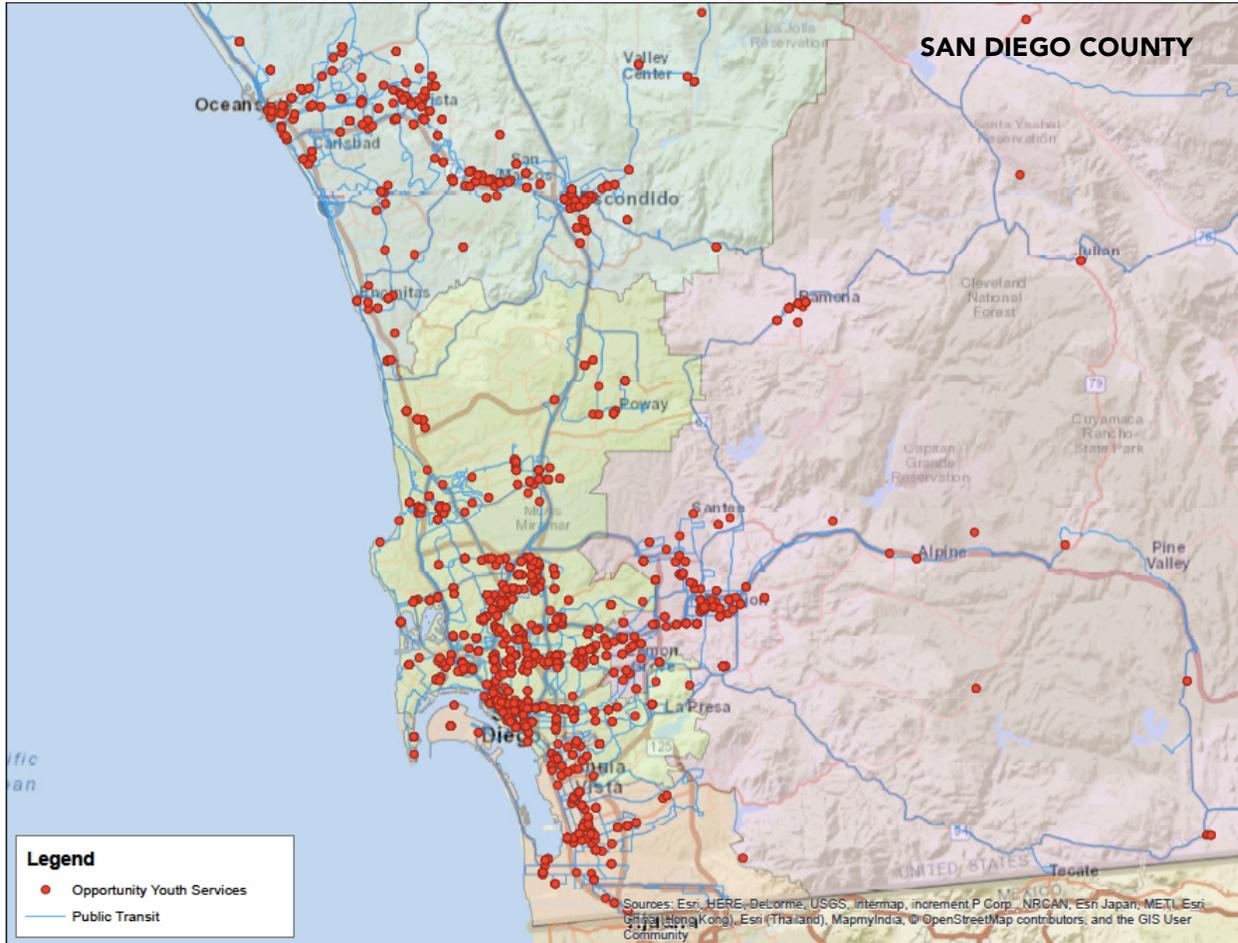
This analysis may not include every organization in San Diego County serving 16-24 year olds, but it is based on all the information currently available in the 2-1-1 database. It is also worth noting that the full depth and quality of services cannot be assessed using this data. However, the count and location of various types of resources can give us a first idea of the availability of services.

<sup>30</sup> Data retrieved from Labor Insight, a Burning-Glass Technologies product.

<sup>33</sup> See Appendix A for more information on how the data was queried.

Across **826 agency locations** in San Diego County, there are an estimated **1,184 services** that help opportunity youth to meet their basic needs, reengage with education or employment, or help prevent youth disconnection (Figure 14). Services physically located near the homes of opportunity youth are powerful tools in eliminating transportation barriers, and facilitating frequent in-person contact to help youth reconnect more quickly.<sup>35</sup>

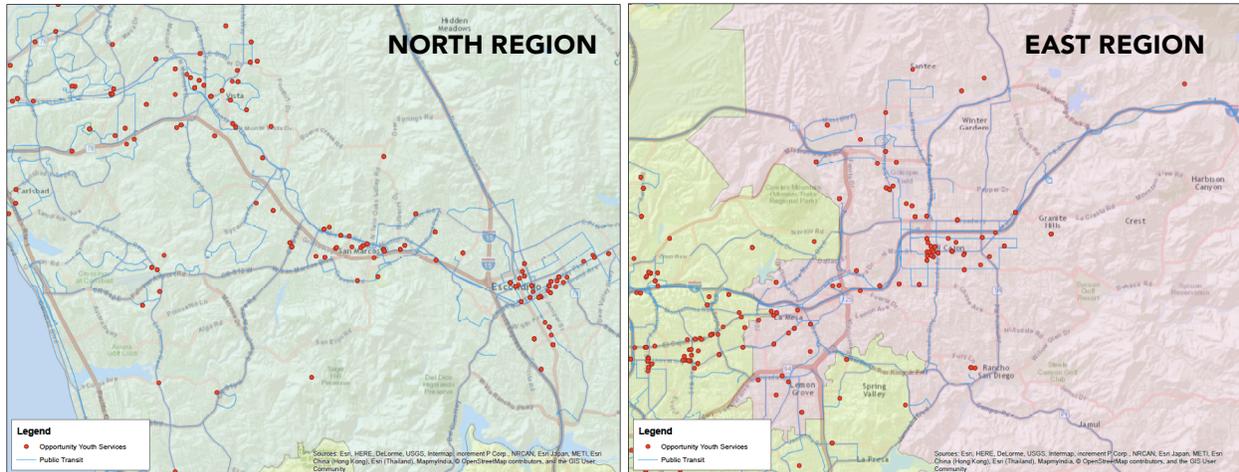
**Figure 14: Opportunity Youth Assets in San Diego County**



“While I was living in Tijuana my mom enrolled me in school, but when I was 12 years old I told her I wanted to come back to the States to go to school, and she said yes. I did not have a place to go, so she told me to find a youth shelter and that they would help me. There are no youth shelters though. They just place everyone together and only separate males and females. I saw some crazy stuff—a lot of ladies on drugs—but some older ladies took me under their wings and took care of me.”

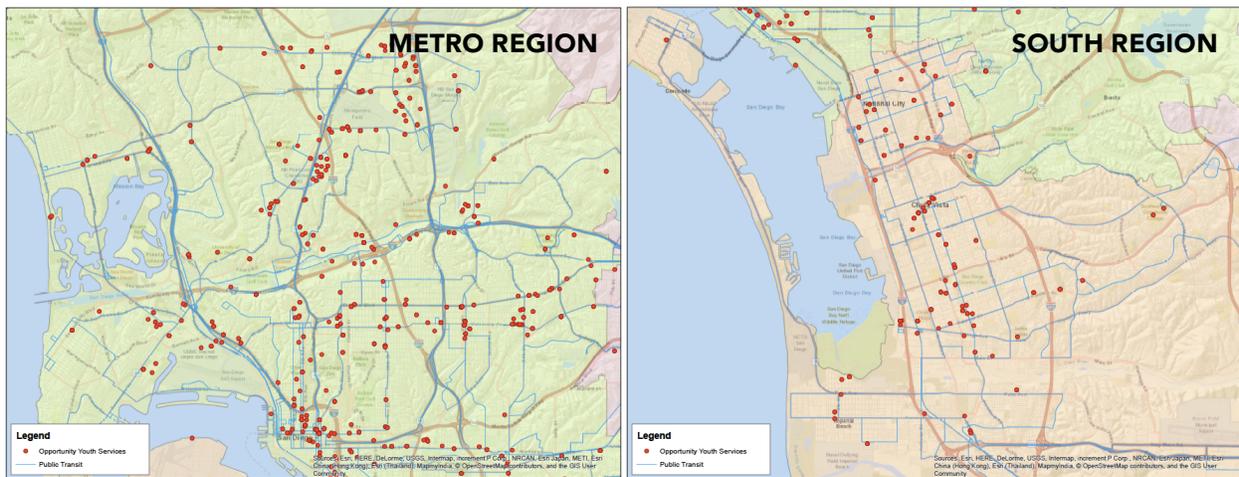
– *Sindy, 18, South Region*  
See Appendix B for Sindy’s story

<sup>35</sup> 2-1-1 also has records for 160 organizations that may not have physical service locations in San Diego County, but otherwise met the search criteria for this process. Some of these are in neighboring Riverside and Imperial Counties, but many are headquartered in other parts of the country or offer only phone- or web-based services. Such services are excluded from this analysis.



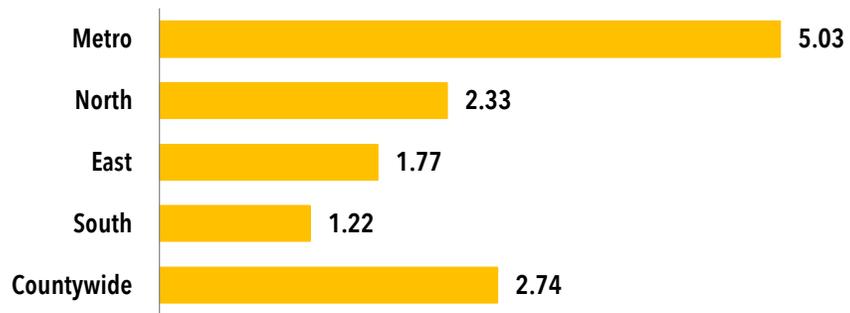
Services are clustered around public transportation routes, major highways and population centers. The densest cluster of agencies is in the City of San Diego (Metro Region), while other clusters occur in the larger cities of each region. These cities include:

- Escondido, San Marcos, Vista and Carlsbad in the North
- Chula Vista and National City in the South
- El Cajon and La Mesa in the East



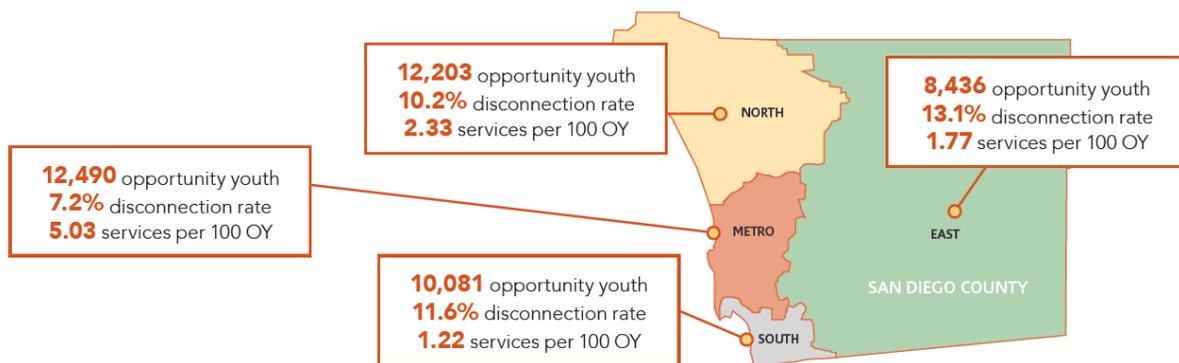
While these resource clusters are focused in population centers, their density may not be high enough to serve the youth in each region. Figure 15 shows the differences in the number of services available per 100 opportunity youth living in each region. The South region has the lowest number of services per 100 opportunity youth (1.22), while the Metro region has the highest (5.03 per 100 opportunity youth).

**Figure 15: Services per 100 Opportunity Youth by Region**



However, as demonstrated in Figure 16, the two regions with the lowest number of services per 100 opportunity youth have the highest disconnection rates. The East region has a ratio of 1.77 with 13.1 percent disconnection, while the South region has a 1.22 ratio with 11.6 percent disconnection. While it is important to establish services where they can reach the most people, these ratios suggest that this strategy may be over-emphasized.

**Figure 16: Regional Youth Disconnection Rates in San Diego County (2015)**



This analysis is far from perfect—many of these services are not exclusive to opportunity youth, and data is lacking on the capacity of each organization—so further research is needed to fully understand the relationship between youth disconnection and the volume, quality and capacity of services in a region.

### Housing, Behavioral Health Support and Transportation

Through interviews with opportunity youth service providers in San Diego, three main needs emerged as services that are lacking or challenging to provide for opportunity youth: housing, behavioral health support and transportation. The following section provides insights from these interviews, paired with maps of services from the 2-1-1 San Diego database. These maps show education and employment services (crucial for reconnecting opportunity youth to school and work) alongside the services for these three specific needs.

### Classifying Opportunity Youth Assets

The 2-1-1 network uses an extensive six-layer taxonomy to categorize the services in their databases. A **taxonomy** is a classification system that distinguishes concepts, names those concepts, and then places those concepts into a hierarchical order. The first level is the broadest, which is broken down layer-by-layer to increase specificity. For example, one service might be classified as follows:

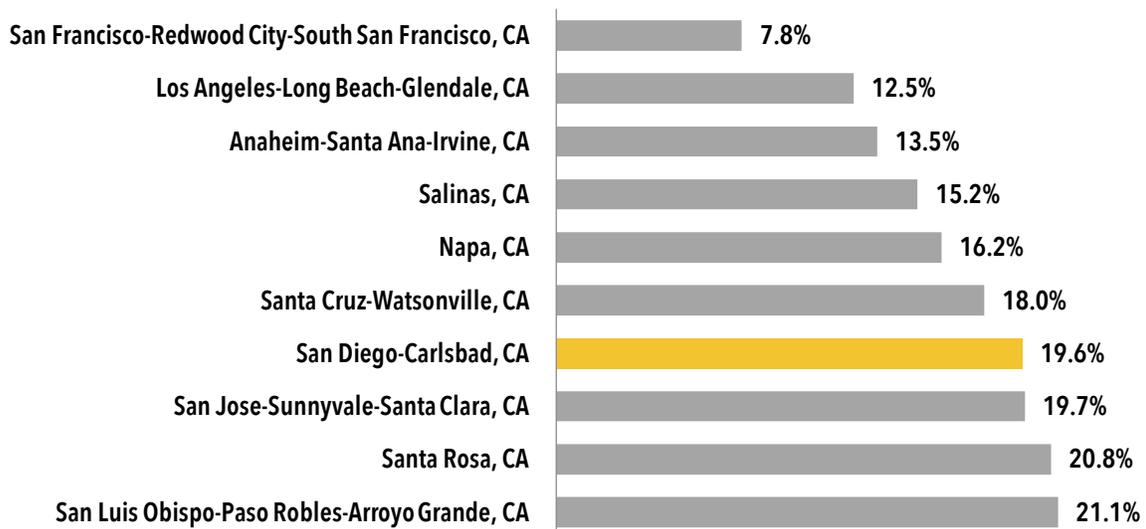
- Level 1: Basic Needs
- Level 2: Housing/Shelter
- Level 3: At Risk/Homeless Housing Related Assistance Programs

Some services are multi-faceted, and are thus tagged with multiple taxonomies at a single level. For example, a service could be tagged as both “housing/shelter” and “money management” at level 2. For this reason, the same service may show up on maps with different focuses.

### Housing

In California, 65 percent of foster youth lack access to safe and affordable housing after emancipation and more than 20 percent end up homeless.<sup>38</sup> In addition, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) youth experience a higher incidence of homelessness than their non-LGBT peers.<sup>39</sup> Homelessness is a significant barrier for disconnected youth, yet San Diego continues to have an affordable housing crisis. According to recent data from the National Association of Home Builders, only 19.6 percent of the region’s households with median income earnings can afford a median-priced home. San Diego’s housing affordability rate is the seventh worst in the nation (Figure 17).<sup>40</sup>

**Figure 17: Top 10 Least Affordable U.S. Metro Areas  
(Percent of Homes that are Affordable for Area’s Median Income)**



<sup>38</sup> “My So-Called Emancipation: From Foster Care to Homelessness for California Youth,” Human Rights Watch, 2010.

<sup>39</sup> “My So-Called Emancipation,” Human Rights Watch.

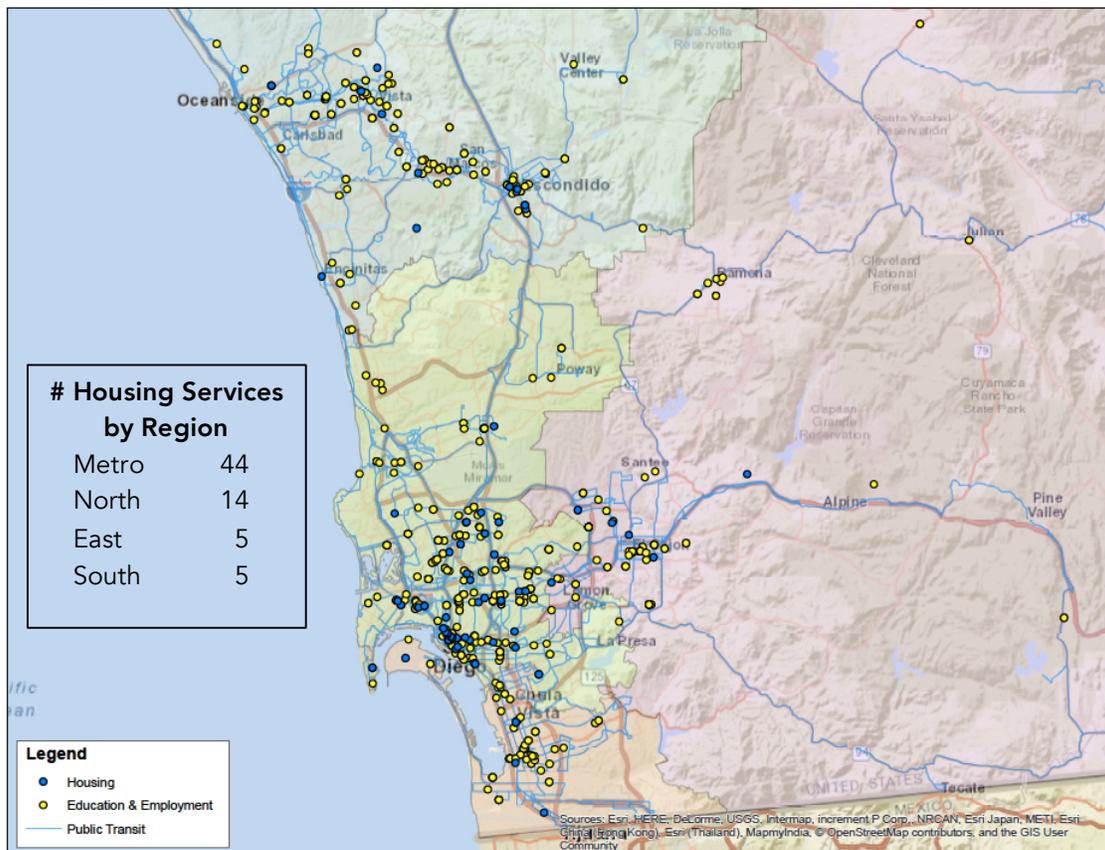
<sup>40</sup> The NAHBB/Wells Fargo Housing Opportunity Index: Complete Listing by Affordability Rank, 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter 2016. Retrieved from [nahb.org/en/research/housing-economics/housing-indexes/housing-opportunity-index.aspx](http://nahb.org/en/research/housing-economics/housing-indexes/housing-opportunity-index.aspx).

According to the San Diego Regional Task Force on Homelessness’s 2016 report, there were 830 unaccompanied 18-24 year olds in San Diego County and 545 homeless families with an uncounted number of youth and children of multiple ages.<sup>43</sup> The 2016 San Diego Point-In-Time Count study does not account for the youth who are transitioning frequently among various temporary arrangements, but provides a snapshot for the region. For opportunity youth, meeting basic needs such as housing is a crucial first step towards reconnection. In interviews, opportunity youth service providers reiterated this issue and shared insight on additional barriers in securing housing for this population:

- Because of the tight housing market, access to affordable housing is highly prioritized by need: “Youth are not able to receive housing unless they are pregnant, parenting or are experiencing domestic abuse.”
- In some cases, other populations are prioritized over youth: “San Diego County veterans and mental health housing often take precedence over youth housing.”
- Because property owners have access to a large number of renters, they may not be open to working with people using government assistance: “It sometimes is not necessarily the lack of housing, but landlords not willing to work with vouchers.”

Following the trend of overall resources, housing services are mostly clustered downtown, with 65 percent in the Metro region (Figure 18).

**Figure 18: Housing and Education/Employment Resources in San Diego County**



<sup>43</sup> “WeALLCount: Point-In-Time Count, San Diego County,” San Diego County Regional Task Force on the Homeless, June 2016.

### Challenges with Self-Doubt

“When things are going well for them, they show up, but when things aren’t going well, they retreat. One student in the cohort is 24 and has never worked. He is only interested in working for video game and music companies, so we got him an interview with someone starting his own video game company. On the day of the interview he didn’t show up. When I asked him why, he said, ‘Sometimes I just feel bad about myself, and it was easier for me to cancel.’”

- Staff member of the Introductory Life Science Experience program, operated by Biocom

Some youth providers already have relationships with housing programs; others aspire to build tighter connections. Even if programs can successfully connect youth to government housing assistance, the wait for Section 8<sup>44</sup> housing in San Diego is eight to ten years long, with 50,000 people on the list.

### What is Being Done?

The Community Housing Works partners with the YMCA and San Diego Housing Commission to share housing resources. With this collaboration, this association offers in-house transitional housing programs and the ability to collaborate with other housing service providers such as Take Wing, San Diego Youth Services and Turning Point to provide youth housing arrangements.

However, housing continues to be a significant challenge in San Diego County. Even with organizations collaborating and sharing their housing resources, San Diego County’s lack of affordable housing supply limits how many and which youth receive these services. To help more youth into long-term housing it is important to acknowledge that service programs might not be able to solve the issue alone, but rather the issue needs to be addressed at the policy level.

### Behavioral Health Support

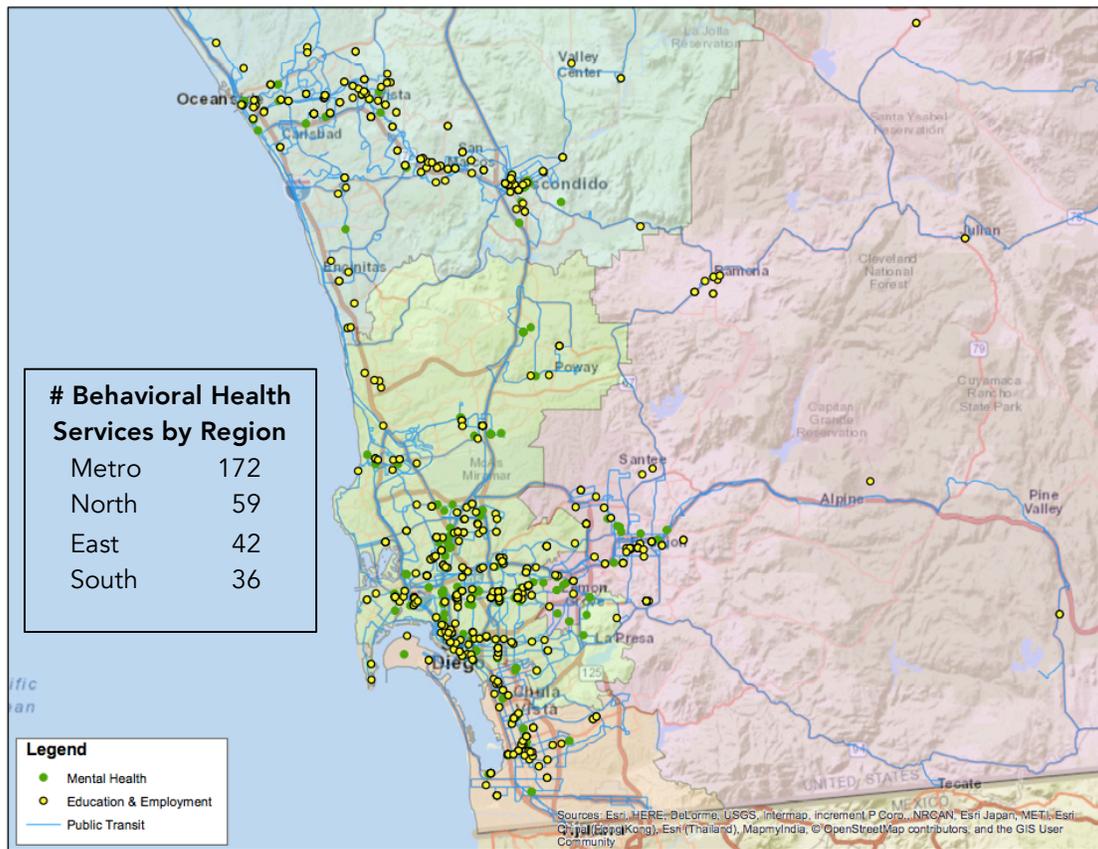
Many low-income, homeless, foster and/or justice-involved youth experience serious trauma, often repeating childhood experiences as a result of their living conditions and social environments. Working with youth to transition into adulthood and emancipate from foster care, juvenile justice or homelessness requires a trauma-informed strategy that couples access to mental health services with workforce development opportunities.<sup>46</sup>

Some of the most challenging services for providers to offer are mental health and substance abuse support. Because opportunity youth frequently experience social and emotional disabilities, providers focus on empowering youth to navigate feelings of anxiety and self-doubt. However, they find it challenging to meet the needs of youth who would benefit from more extensive services, such as regular one-on-one counseling or extensive inpatient care. Figure 19 shows the locations of behavioral health services that support this age group. The fewest services are again in South and East county, where the highest proportion of youth are disconnected.

<sup>44</sup> “Section 8” is a common name for the Housing Choice Voucher Program, funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

<sup>46</sup> Lindsey Woolsey and Judith Katz-Leavy, “Transitioning Youth With Mental Health Needs to Meaningful Employment & Independent Living,” National Collaborative on Workforce & Disability for Youth, Institute for Educational Leadership, April 2008.

Figure 19: Behavioral Health and Education/Employment Resources in San Diego County



Youth programs may offer behavioral health services through partnerships with other nonprofits and/or through the County Health and Human Services Agency, but need more of these types of collaborations. Ideally, they would be able to offer on-site services for the youth to provide a one-stop solution. They also note the need for more substance abuse programs, particularly for youth under 21 years old.

### What is Being Done?

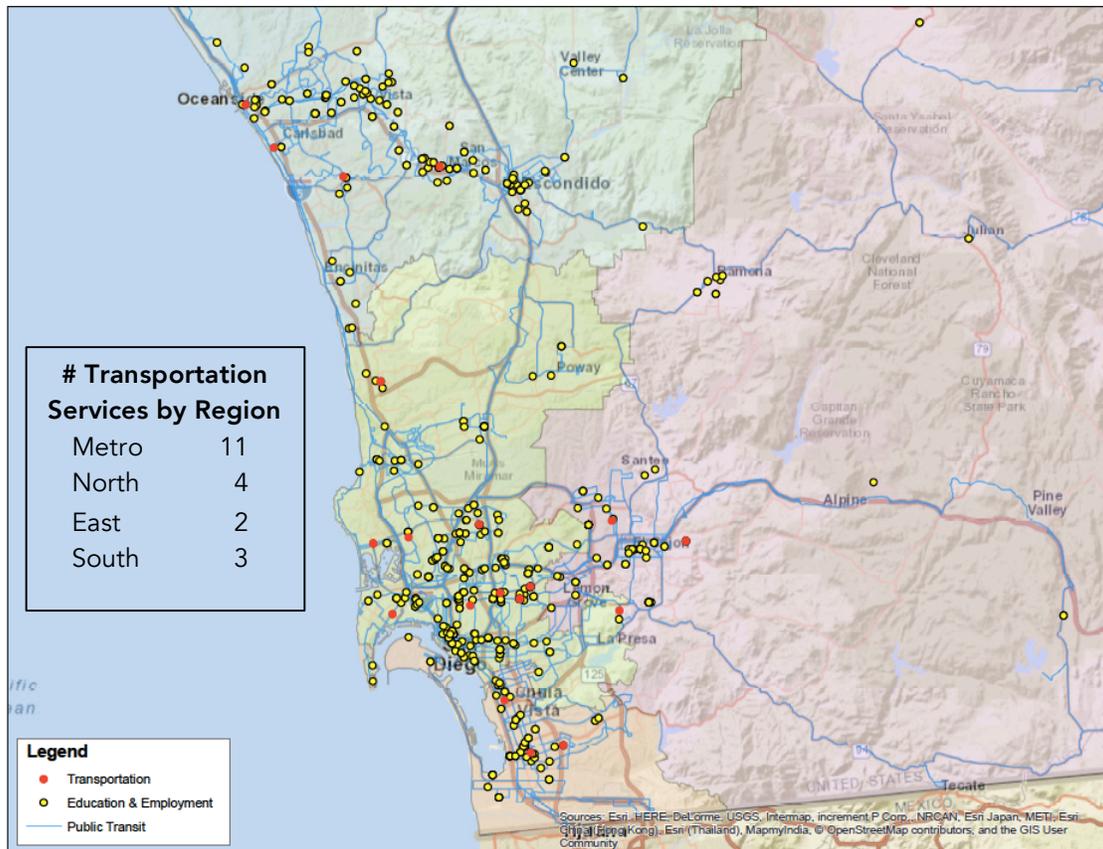
More community organizations are addressing behavioral health needs by requiring staff members to be better trained. For example, WIOA case managers are required to take mental and behavioral health or trauma-informed care training (e.g., Mental Health First Aid). These trainings give case managers the tools to respond to psychiatric emergencies and to improve their mental health literacy so they can better help the youth populations they serve.

Other local organizations such as the YMCA’s Youth and Family Services offer in-house mental health trainings for staff. Staff in the Transitional Housing and Youth Development departments are expected to complete a comprehensive training plan to have the tools to provide support regarding mental and behavioral health issues.<sup>1</sup> With a comprehensive training plan, YMCA staff are prepared to respond to any in-house mental & behavioral health issues that come up. YMCA Youth and Family Services also assesses participants to determine their potential for high risk activities, emotion regulation, positive relationships and resiliency scale.

### Transportation

Transportation is recognized by providers as a significant barrier to success, particularly due to the size of the county. Organizations that offer transportation assistance as a primary service are uncommonly identified in the 2-1-1 database. Figure 20 shows that records for these services are scattered and limited in every region. However, there are likely several programs that offer transportation support (e.g., bus passes) as a secondary service without being identified in the database.

**Figure 20: Transportation and Education/Employment Resources in San Diego County**



Providers that effectively address this barrier see it as one of the most successful strategies for supporting reconnection. The lack of transportation often leads to spotty program attendance and engagement, or an inability to access supportive services at all. Further, many job opportunities in San Diego are in places that are nearly impossible to reach without having a car. Based on data from the 3,293 16-24 year olds who participated in SDWP’s CONNECT2Career portal in 2016, about half (1,546) reported a “transportation barrier” to finding a job. This was by far the largest barrier to employment reported. Support for public transportation does not always solve this challenge. According to one service provider, “They [opportunity youth] don’t own vehicles, and even bus transportation is not enough sometimes. Especially in biotech, many internship opportunities are in the Sorrento Valley area, and a two-hour bus ride from North or South County is unreasonable.” One program provides driving classes for low-income youth, and even pays for the license fee, but it is still to gain access to a reliable vehicle. Depending on required work hours, some youth reported that if one bus is late and a

connection is missed, it can be perceived by an employer as lack of commitment or reliability, potentially leading to termination.

### What is Being Done?

The Introductory Life Sciences Experience (ILSE) is a program run by Biocom Institute and provides guided pathways into a STEM career in life sciences through college level course training and internship in a life science laboratory. The program focuses on young adults (ages 18-24) with substantial barriers to career readiness. One of the most common barriers for applicants is transportation. ILSE tackles transportation issues by using Uber or Lyft to get interns from their homes to their training in Miramar College and back. Depending on where each intern lives, coordinators schedule Ubers to pick up four to five interns from a designated location. The Uber will transport them to Miramar College and drop them off at their pick-up location at the end of their day. Without this service, it would take interns 1-2 hours to get to Miramar College. With this system, interns have reliable transportation that cuts down travel time, leaving more time to prepare for their training or take care of home duties.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROMISING PRACTICES

To improve outcomes for opportunity youth, the San Diego region must focus on interventions that address their specific needs. SDWP compiled the following recommendations from interviews and analyses of successful approaches in supporting opportunity youth.

### Set Goals and Work Toward Them Together

Measure of America's 2015 report on youth disconnection, *Zeroing in on Place and Race*, recommends that local areas "set goals and work toward them together."<sup>59</sup> Taking this recommendation to heart, SDWP and this study's advisory committee worked with Measure of America to develop specific, aggressive and time-bound goals based on San Diego County's current progress and efforts to reduce youth disconnection.

Each year between now and 2021, SDWP will dedicate the required resources to conduct annual opportunity youth research reports and to convene an annual summit to measure and assess progress against these goals.

"Meaningful progress requires that organizations and individuals active in this area join together to establish measurable, time-bound targets for reducing youth disconnection."

- Measure of America 2015

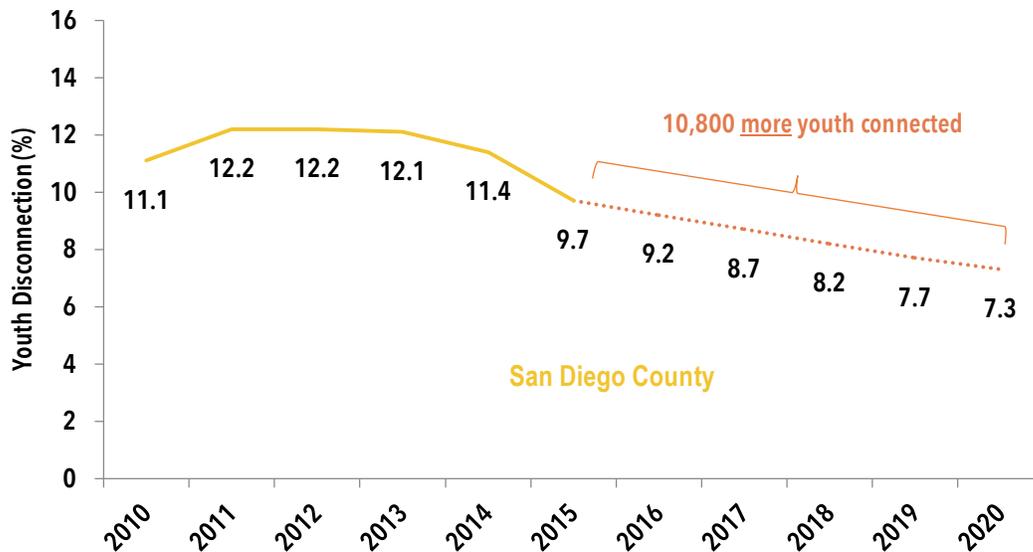
### Goal 1: 7.3 Percent by 2020

The first goal aims to decrease the San Diego County youth disconnection rate from 9.7 percent to 7.3 percent by 2020 (Figure 21). In 2015, the metro area with the lowest youth disconnection rate was Boston, with a rate of 7.3 percent. This is the target rate for San Diego to achieve by 2020. Given the

<sup>59</sup> Kristen Lewis and Sarah Burd-Sharps, "Zeroing in on Place and Race: Youth Disconnection in America's Cities," Measure of America, Social Science Research Council, June 10, 2015.

size of San Diego’s youth population today, a rate of 7.3 percent corresponds to 32,400 disconnected youth, a decrease of 10,800 from the 2015 level of 43,200.

**Figure 21: Goal 1: “Cut the Rate” to 7.3% by 2020**



**Goal 2: Halve the Gap**

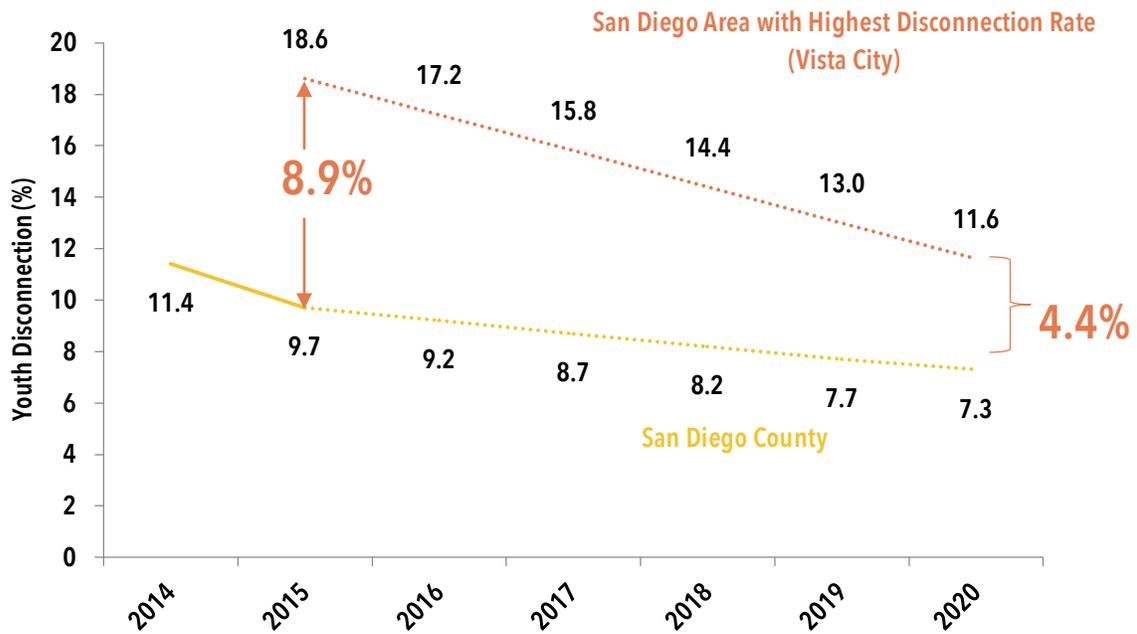
The second goal is to shrink the gap between the area with the highest disconnection rate and San Diego County as a whole. The difference between the countywide youth disconnection rate (9.7 percent) and the Public Use Microdata Area (PUMA)<sup>60</sup> with the highest rate, Vista City (18.6 percent), is 8.9 percentage points. (Figure 22).

A youth’s education and employment prospects should not be determined by his or her zip code. This place-based gap must be closed. To halve that gap would mean that there would be no more than 4.4 percentage points separating the county rate and the highest PUMA rate. In conjunction with Goal 1, this would mean that the overall county rate would be 7.3 percent and that no PUMA would have a rate above 11.7 percent. In practice this means focusing efforts on reconnecting youth in the areas with the highest rates of disconnection. If every PUMA in the county reduced its youth disconnection rate by 0.5 percent per year (the county-wide goal), six would still be over 11.7 percent in 2020.<sup>61</sup> This goal will encourage greater focus on these highest-need areas; they will require particular attention in order to halve the gap between the county rate and the highest PUMA rate.

<sup>60</sup> See Appendix A for more information on PUMAs.

<sup>61</sup> These PUMAs include: Fallbrook, Alpine & Valley Center; Vista City; Escondido City; El Cajon & Santee Cities; San Diego City (Southeast/Encanto & Skyline); and Lemon Grove City, La Presa & Spring Valley.

Figure 22: Goal 2: “Halve the Gap” by 4.4% by 2020



### Develop an Action Plan to “Cut the Rate and Halve the Gap”

Reducing San Diego’s 9.7 percent youth disconnection rate will be a significant task. Parents, opportunity youth, system leaders, businesses educators, nonprofits, funders, elected officials and other stakeholders must collaborate and focus on fundamental challenges. To cut the rate and halve the gap, there are three key indicators or metrics that the region can reconvene and review annually to measure our progress.

#### Educational Attainment

This metric measures the number of youth who receive a high school diploma (or equivalent) and advance to post-secondary education. As previously mentioned, only 5.5 percent of opportunity youth have a post-secondary degree and 19.8 percent have less than a high school diploma. The highest level of educational attainment among most opportunity youth is a high school diploma. Increasing the percent of opportunity youth who attain more than a high school diploma will be a key indicator of success for this metric.

#### Labor Force Participation Rate

Since opportunity youth are unemployed by definition, this metric measures the percent of youth who are actively looking for work, but are not getting hired. Currently, only 35.5 percent of opportunity youth participate in the labor force, compared to 60.2 percent of all youth in San Diego County. Opportunity youth cannot participate in the labor market if they lack access to affordable child care, transportation or support for their life situation in general. While the ultimate goal is employment, increasing labor market participation rates among opportunity youth will indicate fewer discouraged workers and better access to supportive resources, which is a step in the right direction.

## Youth Employment

This metric measures the number of 16-24 year olds who have successfully secured jobs, and are thus not disconnected. Increasing the number of youth who gain meaningful employment will be a key indicator of success for this metric.

## Harness the Youth Voice

The development and implementation of an action plan must be centered on the voice and experience of the experts: San Diego's youth and young adults.

Many organizations have successfully found ways to harness the tremendous power of peer influence to reach opportunity youth; information from peers feels more relevant and engaging. Providers encourage word-of-mouth referrals from present or past program participants, and some have created structured ways for participants to share their success stories with their peers. Some even require peer outreach as a prerequisite for receiving certain benefits.

Organizations also encourage peer-to-peer mentoring between current and former program participants as an additional support.

"I tried doing the GED thing. I hated it. I hated using the computer because it's so boring and I just dropped it. That was around the time someone told me about how my cousin became a receptionist for Graybill Medical Group. The COMPACT program helped her get her typing certificate and now she works as a receptionist. The program even helped my cousin get her current position. I thought to myself, 'I could do that.'"

– Matthew, 20, North Region

See Appendix B for Matthew's story

## Expand Employer Efforts to Hire Opportunity Youth

During youth interviews, many youth reported getting discouraged and giving up their job search because of constant rejection. To re-engage opportunity youth in the labor force, the number of business-driven employment programs targeting discouraged youth must increase. To start, San Diego can tap business leaders from the *100,000 Opportunities* pledge challenge. Led by Starbucks, *100,000 Opportunities* companies have led large hiring events in large US cities, including Chicago, Phoenix and Seattle. A similar event, focused specifically on opportunity youth could start the momentum and lead to genuine engagement from many more companies.

Additionally, the public sector can take the lead on hiring opportunity youth through programs like the Live Well San Diego Internship program. Between September and November of 2016, the County of San Diego hired, paid and provided mentorships for 50 youth, with a focus on opportunity youth. Thirty-nine youth completed an eight-week internship program, and the county plans to expand the program to 100 opportunity youth in 2017.

## Work with Businesses to Shift Hiring Practices Toward "Competency-Based" Models

Opportunity youth may struggle to get through employer screening processes because their resumes often show interrupted periods in education and employment history. By hiring based on competencies rather than resumes and relationships, employers better can identify talent in opportunity youth. In short, such practices ensure that hiring decisions depend on what the young person can do, not who the young person knows or what he or she did or did not do in school.

“After two years at community college, I decided to take a semester off. I’ve been working really hard academically and felt myself almost burning out. It was really important for me to get myself back up and enjoy learning rather than seeing it as a job and finding my passion for my education. My family has also been going through some hard times, financially speaking. My father got injured, and he was the breadwinner in our home. Right now, my focus has been on finding a job to help my family. In this political climate though, it has been hard finding a position, especially since I can only provide my DACA [Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals]. Even though I have documentation to work, they don’t understand what it is and it’s like they get nervous about wanting to hire me. It’s a barrier.”

– Anna, 20, Metro Region  
See Appendix B for Anna’s story

### Support Foundational Skill Development

Employers continually cite lack of essential skills (soft skills) as key reasons for rejecting job candidates. Programs across San Diego are increasingly including an essentials skills component to their services. While it is necessary to have the “hard” skills for a job, youth also need to work interpersonally and present themselves appropriately to potential employers. More programs such as Future Leaders from Second Chance would help develop these foundational skills in opportunity youth. Future Leaders is a job readiness training specifically designed for youth who have been disconnected. It addresses life skills, professional development and civic engagement, and provides an opportunity to participate in community projects. Similarly, the YMCA uses the CAVE model (Compassion, Awareness, Validation and Empowerment) model to engage youth and build networking skills. Programs also cover resume writing, interview preparation and job application assistance.

### Increase Secure, Proactive Data Sharing Between Agencies

This study is a product of shared data between agencies with aligned goals. Due to this collaboration, a better understanding of opportunity youth could be shared with the community. In the future, data from systems such as K-12 education, probation, foster care, community colleges, neighborhood-based organizations, faith-based groups and other organizations that serve opportunity youth could paint a much more detailed picture of opportunity youth in San Diego.

### Focus on Areas with Fewer Services and High Youth Disconnection Rates

Based on the data from 2-1-1 San Diego information and referral network, youth services in areas with high disconnection rates will need to increase to provide enough support for opportunity youth. Transportation will remain a key issue, as it will not get any cheaper to live near work. When free bus passes are not enough to reliably connect youth to their places of work in a reasonable amount of time, businesses, funders, transit planners, ride-sharing services and other partners can step in to help youth get discounted or free ride-sharing services for interviews and jobs.

## Facilitate Positive Relationships with Adults

Several organizations noted the importance of connecting with adult champions in the form of mentors and program staff. These mentors invest significant time into building trusting relationships with youth, and the more contact they have, the better the outcomes seem to be. They may visit the young person's home, follow up after important events and deadlines or even provide transportation to interviews. They play a motivating role by celebrating each small success and encouraging youth to take on new opportunities.

Some providers noted the added benefits of having staff who are dynamic, come from similar backgrounds to the youth and who have experience providing trauma-informed care. Overall, any adult who can build a genuine, caring relationship will have a positive impact on opportunity youth.

"I reached out and met with Jeffrey every Sunday in Ocean Beach. We talked about life and ways to stay on the right path. We'd do things like play piano and art, and get services like haircuts."

– Jacinto, 24, North Region

See Appendix B for Jacinto's story

## Implement Individualized Planning

Opportunity youth thrive in environments where they feel supported and celebrated for their individual differences and aspirations. Further, they are successful when they set personal, achievable goals that address ways to overcome their specific barriers. Organizations use various assessments and one-on-one conversations to document individuals' interests and goals, and outline steps to achieve them. Since opportunity youth often take nontraditional paths in school and work, providers need to be able to share schooling and employment options that are new to youth.

"Because of my experiences growing up witnessing domestic violence and not having anyone to go to for help, trauma informed care is very important to me. I've witnessed what my friends have been through and I know how much those events caused pain and why they make the life choices they do. I want kids to receive genuine help from caring adults. I want to go into law enforcement and criminal justice to become a probation officer. I know having a probation officer who cares and guides youths on the right path can make a difference. I don't have anyone to help me with school or financial aid, so I'm doing it on my own. To become a probation officer, I need to go through school. I use this as motivation to keep going forward so I can go to college and achieve what I want to do. I'm really excited about my future."

– Jessica, 17, Metro Region

See Appendix B for Jessica's story

Programs also take a holistic approach to understanding each individual, taking time to learn about their lives, becoming familiar with other people in the youth's support system or providing services like childcare for parenting youth. They may also encourage a culturally-sensitive environment and employ multi-lingual staff members to address communication barriers.

## Support and strengthen the transition from high school to post-secondary degree and certificate programs in high-demand industries.

Ensure high school and post-secondary education institutions are focusing on high-growth, high-demand pathways, increasing the likelihood youth and young adults will leave their institutions with the awareness and technical competencies to compete for the region's in-demand jobs.

"I worry about the cost of education and managing the balance between school and work. It's difficult working full-time to pay for a room and going to school."

– Mia, 22, South Region

See Appendix B for Mia's story

## CONCLUSION AND A LOOK FORWARD

The goal of this report was to tell the story of San Diego's opportunity youth, amplify youth voice and outline a forward-looking vision to reduce youth disconnection, create opportunity and build a stronger, more diverse workforce in San Diego County. SDWP is committed to producing a report each year to track progress against the goals outlined in this study, and to convening an annual youth summit to facilitate conversations around the community's progress in reducing youth disconnection.

Every facet of this complex challenge cannot be explored in a single report. There are several avenues for further research that would bring more clarity to San Diego's efforts to "cut the rate and halve the gap." Some of these paths include:

- Developing a regional cost-benefit analysis that determines the societal benefits of investing in opportunity youth
- Dedicating resources to tell the stories of specific sub-populations of opportunity youth such as justice-involved youth, foster youth, immigrant youth and youth with disabilities.
- Conducting a more detailed geographic analysis of neighborhood-level services by dissecting deeper levels of the 2-1-1 taxonomy

This community-wide challenge requires leaders across sectors to listen to parents and youth, align systems, allocate funding, address policy issues, make new partnerships, change hiring norms and have tough conversations about the way race, ethnicity, age, gender and geography play a role in how youth and young adults experience San Diego systems and institutions.

This challenge is bigger than any one leader or organization. Step one is understanding the story of San Diego's youth and young adults. Now is the time to flip the script.

## APPENDIX A – DETAILED METHODOLOGY

### Demographic Analysis

#### Who Is Considered a “Disconnected Youth”?

Youth disconnection rates in this report are calculated by Measure of America using employment and enrollment data from the 2015 American Community Survey (ACS) of the U.S. Census Bureau. Disconnected youth are people between the ages of 16 and 24 who are neither in school nor working. Young people in this age range who are working or in school part-time or who are in the military are not considered disconnected. Youth who are actively looking for work are considered disconnected. Several official data sources exist that can be used for calculating youth disconnection. As a result, researchers working with different data sets, or different definitions of what constitutes disconnection, may arrive at different numbers for this indicator. A good summary of these various definitions can be found on a Huffington Post blog piece from October of 2016 [here](#).

Measure of America uses the ACS as its source for calculating youth disconnection data for four main reasons: (1) the ACS is reliable and updated annually; (2) it allows for calculations by state and metro area as well as by race and ethnicity, gender, and more granular census-defined neighborhood clusters within these geographic areas; (3) it includes young people who are in group quarters, such as juvenile or adult correctional facilities, supervised medical facilities, and college dorms; and (4) it counts students on summer break as being enrolled in school.

#### Methods

Disconnected youth rates and numbers in this report are Measure of America and USC calculations from the U.S. Census Bureau’s annual American Community Survey. Most county-level data are from 2015. Time series data are one-year estimates from the relevant year. For this report, estimates are considered reliable if the coefficient of variation is less than 0.2. The coefficient of variation is the standard error of the estimate divided by the estimate. In cases where the population size is small, the standard error becomes too great to meet this threshold. If many estimates are unreliable, the solution is to look at a larger geography or combine years. In this case, estimates from the 2013, 2014, and 2015 PUMS files were combined for some estimates, which reduces the standard error.

The ACS is an annual survey conducted by the Census Bureau that samples a subset of the overall population. As with any data drawn from surveys, there is some degree of sampling and nonsampling error inherent in the data. Thus, comparisons between one place or group and another on any indicator should be made with caution since these differences may not be statistically significant.

In order to arrive at the youth disconnection rate, the total number of disconnected young people and the total number of young people overall are calculated for each metro area from the ACS Public Use Microdata Sample. **Not in school** means that a young person has not attended any educational institution and has also not been home schooled at any time in the three months prior to the survey date. **Not working** means that a young person is either unemployed or not in the labor force at the time they responded to the survey. Disconnected youth are young people who are simultaneously not in school and not working. This population cannot be estimated by simply adding the number of young people not enrolled in school to the number of young people not working because many students in this age range do not work and many young workers are not in school.

## Calculating Youth Disconnection for San Diego County

The employment and enrollment data needed to calculate youth disconnection for the San Diego metro area (which covers the same geographic area as San Diego County) are not available directly from the ACS. The metro area was built from the Census Bureau’s Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMAs). San Diego is divided into twenty-two of these smaller areas, and the data from these PUMAs were used to build the sample for the whole area.

### Definitions

**Disability** – Disability status in this report refers to any enduring emotional, physical, or mental condition that makes everyday activities like walking, dressing, or remembering things difficult and restricts an individual’s ability to work or to perform basic required tasks without assistance. This is self-reported; individuals who report having such a condition in the ACS are counted as having a disability. Those who do not are counted as not having a disability.

**Group Quarters** – The US Census Bureau refers to people who live in any kind of non-household living arrangement as living in “group quarters.” These can be institutional group quarters such as correctional or supervised medical facilities or noninstitutional group quarters such as college or university dormitories, military bases, or group homes. One of the primary advantages of using the ACS as the data source for this research is that the survey counts young people living in both types of group quarters.

**Metro Area** – Metro areas used in this report (San Diego and Boston) are formally known as Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs), geographic areas defined by the OMB and used by the U.S. Census Bureau and other government entities. MSAs constitute counties grouped around an urban center and include outlying suburban and exurban counties from which a substantial percentage of the population commutes to the urban center for work. In San Diego’s case, the metro area and the county cover the same geographic region.

**Racial and Ethnic Groups** – Racial and ethnic groups in this report are based on definitions established by the OMB and used by the U.S. Census Bureau and other government entities. Since 1997, the OMB has recognized five racial groups and two ethnic categories. The racial groups include African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders, and whites. The ethnic categories are Latino and not Latino. People of Latino ethnicity may be of any race. In this report, members of each of these racial groups include only non-Latino members of these groups. All references to Asians, blacks, Native Americans, and whites include only those who are non-Latino. Native Americans constitutes one of the five racial groups recognized by the OMB. Due to the very small population size of this group in San Diego, however, and the even-smaller population of those ages 16 to 24, we cannot present reliable estimates of youth disconnection for this group. This is denoted in the report body.

## Qualitative Interviews

SDWP worked with a research team from the University of San Diego to conduct in-person and phone interviews with San Diego-based youth service providers and youth themselves.

### Provider Interviews

Twelve service provider interviews were conducted between November 2016 and January 2017 with organizations that serve opportunity youth. The research team developed an interview guide with 25

open-ended questions about the interviewed organization, its funding, its work with opportunity youth and suggestions for local support systems to better address the needs of this population. All organizations interviewed were current or former recipients of federal WIA or WIOA youth funds from SDWP. Notes from these interviews were coded by the research team and analyzed for common themes.

### Youth Interviews

Eleven youth were interviewed between December 2016 and March 2017. The interview guide developed by the research team consisted of 21 open-ended questions about the interviewee’s experience with school and work, programs for support, relationships and support network and feelings about the future. Youth were referred by the SDWP youth team and organizations that participated in provider interviews. Key quotes and anecdotes from these interviews were identified by the research team for use in the report.

### Community Asset Analysis

Service sites of relevant programs were identified based on several sets of criteria, casting a wide net to capture any services that would be helpful and appropriate for opportunity youth. Keyword-based queries were run on the entire 2-1-1 database of active San Diego County resources. Specifically, the fields of ‘Taxonomy’, ‘Target Population’, and ‘Description of Service’ were searched for relevant keywords and phrases. Once pulled, the data was manually examined so that only truly relevant resources were included in the final list. The full set of queried terms are listed in the following tables:

| <b>Target Population Keywords</b> | <b>Related Sub-population Terms</b> | <b>Related Services/Opportunities Terms</b> |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| Youth                             | Returning veterans                  | Scholarship                                 |
| Young adult                       | Teen parents                        | Work-study                                  |
| Adolescent                        | Immigrant                           | Fellowship                                  |
| Juvenile                          | Undocumented                        | Training                                    |
| High school                       | Homeless                            | Apprenticeship                              |
| College                           | Incarcerated                        | Mentoring                                   |
| University                        | LGBT                                | Career planning                             |
| Student                           | Foster                              | Job placement                               |
| Entry-level                       | Probation                           | Interview                                   |
| Postsecondary                     | Physical issues                     | Resume                                      |
| Transition                        | Mental issues                       | Workshop                                    |
| Teenager                          | Pregnant                            | Career counseling                           |
| At-risk                           | Substance abuse                     | Test prep                                   |
|                                   | Mental health                       | Tutoring                                    |
|                                   | Runaway                             | Transitional housing                        |
|                                   | Abused                              | Tuition assistance                          |
|                                   | At-risk                             | Truancy counseling                          |
|                                   | disabled                            | Vocational                                  |
|                                   | disability                          | Trade School                                |
|                                   | dropout                             | College Prep                                |

**Relevant Taxonomy Names**

|   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| Adolescent/Youth Counseling                         | Runaway/Homeless Youth Counseling                  | Tuition Assistance                        |
| Benefits Assistance                                 | Runaway/Homeless Youth Helplines                   | Tutoring Registries                       |
| Career Counseling                                   | Runaway/Youth Shelters                             | Tutoring Services                         |
| College/University Entrance Examination Preparation | Scholarships                                       | Veteran Aid and Attendance Benefits       |
| College/University Entrance Examinations            | School to Adult Life Transition Services           | Veteran Benefits Assistance               |
| College/University Entrance Support                 | School to Work Programs                            | Veteran Burial Benefits                   |
| College/University Placement Test Preparation       | Service Learning Programs                          | Veteran Compensation and Pension Benefits |
| Gang Programs                                       | Special Immigrant Juvenile Petitions               | Veteran Disability Compensation Benefits  |
| General Youth Employment Programs                   | Sports Officiating Volunteer Opportunities         | Veteran Education Benefits                |
| High School Vocational Education Courses            | Sports Program Participation Expense Assistance    | Veteran Housebound Benefits               |
| Higher Education Bridge Programs                    | Student Dropout Prevention Volunteer Opportunities | Veteran Pension Program                   |
| Job Readiness                                       | Student Employment Programs                        | Vocational Assessment                     |
| Job Search Resource Centers                         | Student Financial Aid                              | Vocational Centers                        |
| Job Search Techniques                               | Student Loans                                      | Vocational Education                      |
| Job Search/Placement                                | Study Skills Assistance                            | Vocational/Trade High Schools             |
| Juvenile Delinquency Diversion Counseling           | Subject Tutoring                                   | Work Clothing                             |
| Juvenile Delinquency Prevention                     | Summer Employment                                  | Work Study Programs                       |
| Juvenile Parole                                     | Summer Food Service Programs                       | Youth Business Programs                   |
| Life Skills Education                               | Summer School Programs                             | Youth Centers                             |
| Literacy Programs                                   | Summer Youth Employment Programs                   | Youth Citizenship Programs                |
| Low Income/Subsidized Private Rental Housing        | Supervised Living for Older Youth                  | Youth Community Service Programs          |
| Low Income/Subsidized Rental Housing                | Teen Expectant/New Parent Assistance               | Youth Development                         |
| Peer Role Model Programs                            | Teen Family Planning Programs                      | Youth Employment Programs                 |
| Pre-job Guidance                                    | Teen Pregnancy Prevention                          | Youth Enrichment Programs                 |
| Resume Preparation Assistance                       | Test Preparation                                   | Youth Issues Lines                        |
| Return to Education Support                         | Transition Services for Students with Disabilities | Youth Literacy Programs                   |
| Runaway Prevention Programs                         | Truancy Counseling                                 | Youth Work Permits                        |

The following table shows the level 1 and level 2 taxonomies that were ultimately included in the analysis. It also shows the number of services tagged in each category, and provides a description for each of the level 1 categories.

| Taxonomy Name/Description  | OY Services                        |            |
|--|------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>Basic Needs</b>   | <b>Total</b>                       | <b>187</b> |
| Programs that furnish survival level resources including food, housing, material goods, transportation and utilities for individuals with low or fixed incomes, people who are homeless, older adults and/or people with disabilities who are otherwise unable to adequately provide for themselves and their families. Also included are related services that are available to the community at large.   | Food                               | 22         |
|  | Housing/Shelter                    | 83         |
|  | Material Goods                     | 54         |
|  | Transportation                     | 27         |
|  | Utilities                          | 1          |
| <b>Consumer Services</b>   | <b>Total</b>                       | <b>55</b>  |
| Programs that provide for the education and protection of individuals who buy products and services for personal use. Included are programs that establish and enforce consumer protection, fair trade and other regulatory legislation; provide information and/or counseling to help consumers manage their finances, make informed credit and purchasing decisions, and understand their tax obligations and pay their taxes; and/or ensure that consumers have access to fair hearings, mediation or binding arbitration and appropriate remedies when they have complaints.                         | Consumer Assistance and Protection | 5          |
|  | Consumer Regulation                | 6          |
|  | Money Management                   | 13         |
|  | Tax Organization and Services      | 31         |
| <b>Criminal Justice and Legal Services</b>   | <b>Total</b>                       | <b>253</b> |
| Programs that promote and preserve the conditions that enable community residents to live in a safe and peaceful environment through the enforcement of laws that protect life and property and the administration of justice according to the principles of law and equity. Included are crime prevention programs as well as programs that investigate and make arrests for criminal behavior; provide support for witnesses to and victims of crimes; and provide for the arraignment, prosecution and defense, judgment, sentencing, confinement and eventual release and resettlement of offenders. | Courts                             | 13         |
|  | Criminal Correctional Services     | 32         |
|  | Judicial Services                  | 16         |
|  | Law Enforcement Agencies           | 16         |
|  | Law Enforcement Services           | 46         |
|  | Legal Assistance Modalities        | 34         |
|  | Legal Education/Information        | 12         |
| Legal Services   | 84                                 |            |

| Taxonomy Name/Description  | OY Services                            |            |
|--|--|------------|
| <b>Education</b><br>Programs that provide opportunities for people to acquire the knowledge, skills, desirable qualities of behavior and character, wisdom and general competence that will enable them to fully participate in and enjoy the social, political, economic and intellectual life of the community.  | <b>Total</b>                           | <b>347</b> |
|  | Educational Institutions/ Schools      | 88         |
|  | Educational Programs                   | 111        |
|  | Educational Support Services           | 146        |
|  | Health Services                        | 2          |
| <b>Health Care</b><br>Programs whose primary purpose is to help individuals and families achieve and maintain physical well-being through the study, prevention, screening, evaluation and treatment of people who have illnesses, injuries or disabilities; and the provision of family planning, maternity and other services that relate to human reproduction and sexual health.   | <b>Total</b>                           | <b>463</b> |
|  | Emergency Medical Care                 | 2          |
|  | General Medical Care                   | 1          |
|  | Health Screening/Diagnostic Services   | 57         |
|  | Health Supportive Services             | 172        |
|  | Human Reproduction                     | 73         |
|  | Inpatient Health Facilities            | 4          |
|  | Outpatient Health Facilities           | 31         |
|  | Rehabilitation/Habilitation Services   | 67         |
|  | Specialized Treatment                  | 45         |
|  | Specialty Medicine                     | 11         |
| <b>Income Support and Employment</b><br>Programs that help to meet the economic needs of the community by helping residents prepare for, find and sustain gainful employment; providing public assistance and support for those who are eligible; ensuring that retirees, older adults, people with disabilities and other eligible individuals receive the social insurance benefits to which they are entitled; and offering temporary financial assistance for people who are experiencing an unexpected financial crisis in situations where support related to their specific circumstances is unavailable. | <b>Total</b>                           | <b>313</b> |
|  | Employment                             | 246        |
|  | Public Assistance Programs             | 55         |
|  | Social Insurance Programs              | 8          |
|  | Temporary Financial Assistance         | 4          |
| <b>Individual and Family Life</b><br>Programs that promote the personal, social and spiritual development of people in the community by offering services that replace or supplement the care and support that is generally available through the family unit; providing for the humane care, protection and control of the pets and other domestic animals; and offering social, religious/spiritual and leisure-time activities that are   | <b>Total</b>                           | <b>618</b> |
|  | Individual and Family Support Services | 326        |
|  | Leisure Activities/Recreation          | 124        |
|  | Mutual Support                         | 70         |
|  | Social Development and Enrichment      | 88         |
|  | Volunteer Opportunities                | 10         |

| Taxonomy Name/Description   | OY Services  |            |
|---|--|------------|
| personally satisfying and lead to optimal social functioning.   |  |            |
| <b>Mental Health and Substance Abuse</b>  | <b>Total</b>   | <b>345</b> |
| Programs that provide preventive, diagnostic and treatment services in a variety of community and hospital-based settings to help people achieve, maintain and enhance a state of emotional well-being, personal empowerment and the skills to cope with everyday demands without excessive stress or reliance on alcohol or other drugs. Treatment may include emotional support, introspection and problem-solving assistance using a variety of modalities and approaches, and medication, as needed, for individuals who have a physical and/or psychological dependency on one or a combination of addictive substances or for people who range from experiencing difficult life transitions or problems in coping with daily living to those with severe, chronic mental illnesses that seriously impact their lives. | Counseling Approaches                                      | 19         |
|   | Counseling Settings  | 28         |
|   | Mental Health Assessment and Treatment                     | 1          |
|   | Mental Health Care Facilities                              | 28         |
|   | Mental Health Evaluation and Treatment                     | 162        |
|   | Mental Health Support Services                             | 31         |
|   | Substance Abuse Services                                   | 76         |
| <b>Organizational/Community/International Services</b>  | <b>Total</b>   | <b>278</b> |
| Programs that provide any of a broad spectrum of services that benefit entire communities or which offer services that are statewide, regional, national or international in scope. Included are opportunities for individuals or groups to enjoy the artistic and cultural life of the community, participate in community improvement or service projects, engage in philanthropic endeavors, have a voice in the political process, obtain or offer assistance in times of disaster, have access to information services, and/or benefit from the availability of a variety of services for residents, community agencies, organizations, businesses and industries, and other individuals/groups.   | Community Economic Development and Finance                 | 14         |
|   | Community Facilities/Centers                               | 3          |
|   | Community Groups and Government/Administrative Offices     | 31         |
|   | Donor Services   | 7          |
|   | Information Services                                       | 153        |
|   | International Affairs                                      | 1          |
|   | Military Services  | 56         |
|   | Organizational Development and Management Delivery Methods | 1          |
|   | Organizational Development and Management Services         | 12         |

**About the 2-1-1 San Diego Information and Referral Database**

2-1-1 San Diego meets the needs of the San Diego community by maintaining a robust database of community resources. To maintain integrity, 2-1-1 San Diego employs an inclusion policy that dictates clearly outlined criteria to assess agencies and their contribution to the human service needs of all

groups in the community, including government and non-profit organizations. For-profit organizations that accept Medi-cal, offer low cost services, offer unique services, or include support groups that are not incorporated as organizations can also be included.

Agencies submit applications online at [211sandiego.org](http://211sandiego.org), and a qualified resource specialist reviews each resource to determine if it meets the inclusion criteria. Some of the inclusion criteria include:

Organization provides a health, human, consumer, educational, environmental or disaster service

Organization has existed for at least 1 year

Organization can provide proof of licensure as required by regulating agencies

Agencies may be excluded from the 2-1-1 San Diego resource database for the benefit of clients for various reasons, including:

- Misrepresentation of services
- Agency is not established
- Missing license or failure to provide proper documentation
- For-profit agencies offering services that are already provided at a low cost by local community-based organizations
- Information is not kept up-to-date in the database

## APPENDIX B – YOUTH PROFILES

Included throughout this study are quotes directly from interviews with opportunity youth. With their permission, this section provides more stories of opportunity youth who live in San Diego County.

### Jose, 19 (East Region)

I was born in the states, but the rest of my family was born in Ensenada. I lived with my family, and went to school there. Everything was fine and suddenly things were different – my dad got dementia in his fifties, and my mom needed to take care of him. I quit school to work in a factory, but the work was hard on me and I couldn't do it for long, so I decided that I had to go back to school. My parents and I moved to the US to get help for my dad, leaving my siblings behind in Ensenada.

I searched online and decided to apply for the Career Smart program at Able-Disabled because I liked that I would be able to get compensated for going to school, and I wanted to go to school and learn too so it was perfect. Aside from the program, I have Medi-Cal for support, and my dad gets disability money as well. Since my mom needs to take care of my dad full time, she gets paid by the state to care for him.

I really like the Career Smart program, and the Excel training, but I wish it were longer. It's only ten weeks and there's so much to cover in such a short time. I also go to Cesar Chavez High School, and from there take the bus to the Career Smart program. Since moving here, I haven't had a chance to make many friends and have really relied on technology like apps and the internet to improve my English. Aside from the language barrier, transportation makes it difficult too since even with a bus pass it takes so much time to travel from place to place.

Although it's been hard, my mom has been very supportive of me and I have supportive adults over at Cesar Chavez and at Able-Disabled. I'm not sure yet of what kind of jobs I'm interested in, but I'm working on overcoming the barriers in my life like learning English and continuing to get more education.

### Matthew, 20 (North Region)

I lived in Escondido and went to school there until I was sixteen. I was a good kid. I was on honor roll and I was a mascot for sports at my high school, but I made mistakes and started rebelling against my mom. I was kicked out of school because of my attendance. I moved to Iowa for a year after being kicked out and lived with my aunt. I started doing really well there. I went back to high school and became a straight A student and worked at the school as a custodian. I was studying to be a CNA, a clinical nurse assistant, but then my aunt died.

It was just something I woke up to one morning. I knew vital signs so I knew how to check to see if she was gone. And she was. Which is crazy, you know having to see my family cry and her babies cry.

After Iowa, since I was still a minor, I returned to Escondido to adult school to try and get my high school diploma. In Iowa I was a senior with a month to graduation. After moving back, I was told California requires more credits so I needed another two years to graduate.

I tried doing the GED thing. I hated it. I hated using the computer because it's so boring and I just dropped it. That was around the time someone told me about how my cousin became a receptionist for Graybill Medical Group. The COMPACT program helped her get her typing certificate and now she works as a receptionist. The program even helped my cousin get her current position. I thought to myself, "I could do that."

Even though I hated it, I pushed through and got my GED. I did this because...the reality is as we get older we have more responsibilities and bills to pay. Things like having to buy basic stuff like shampoo and soap...none of this stuff is promised. I realized all this when I was eighteen, literally sleeping in parks because my mother didn't want me in her house.

I went to COMPACT, asking them if they could help me get back on my feet, letting them know my cousin Norma had sent me. It was difficult asking for help because I was so embarrassed. I was young and thought I could do everything myself. But in reality, all people need help sometimes.

I raised myself – I taught myself to do everything. I had no support and had to build up my own independence through loneliness. I've seen so many family members doing nothing with their lives and living off of relatives, and family members working hard to buy their own shampoo and soap and supporting themselves. Seeing the hard work encourages me.

When I came back to San Diego, I had nothing to my name. COMPACT staff tutored me, listened to what I wanted and helped me get my GED. I even go to COMPACT to vent sometimes and they'll listen to me. My godparents and COMPACT staff supported me – I worry I bug them sometimes, but I know I can go to them for anything and they'll help me.

Now I have my GED and recently completed a CNA class, so now I'm working as a CNA at a retirement home in Escondido. It's going to take me a while, but I want to pursue a bachelors in nursing. I have obstacles but I know I have help in overcoming them. I'm confident in my future.

### Ana, 20 (Metro Region)

I grew up undocumented in a time before DACA [Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals]. My high school friends were getting their first jobs while I was disconnected from the workforce because I couldn't get employed legally. Since I couldn't work, a lot of my time was spent in school. It was difficult because the school system is not educated on what immigrants go through.

In my junior year of high school, I was bullied to the point that I left. I felt I couldn't reach out to anybody. There was such a disconnection between myself and the staff that I didn't feel comfortable talking about the problems I was having at school and at home. A friend told me about a smaller high school she was attending and I decided to move to a smaller high school downtown called Garfield. This school focused on young parents and people involved in foster care or the juvenile detention system. They really seemed to care about their students. I was enrolled into independent studies, but realized it wasn't for me. I ended up downstairs at the regular high school and fell in love with everything.

I had a good counselor who went out of his way to learn about the DACA and about the struggles immigrants go through and how fear prevents many from seeking help. He always kept me in line and believed in me. His belief in me strengthened my confidence in myself and enabled me to come out of my bubble. His initiative in wanting to care made me want to do the same for other people. Now I'm becoming more of an advocate for my community. I feel my passion for public policy was because of him.

Price Scholars I could definitely say was a life changer. When I joined, I was welcomed in with open arms. It was like having a home away from home. More than the monetary benefits, it was about the experiences and being able to work with the Cesar Chavez Service Clubs and learning about Connect2Careers and San Diego Workforce Partnership. I even had the opportunity to go to the White House and to talk about research and a prototype we developed about the disconnection that can happen between sixteen to twenty something year-olds and the workforce. One thing we found was the disconnection between home life and school. You can't help a student by giving them resources from the school if the problem is at home.

After two years at community college, I decided to take a semester off. I've been working really hard academically and felt myself almost burning out. It was really important for me to get myself back up and enjoy learning rather than seeing it as a job and finding my passion for my education. My family has also been going through some hard times, financially speaking. My father got injured, and he was the breadwinner in our home. Right now, my focus has been on finding a job to help my family. In this political climate though, it has been hard finding a position, especially since I can only provide my DACA. Even though I have documentation to work, they don't understand what it is and it's like they get nervous about wanting to hire me. It's a barrier.

I know I need to work on being more open, but I want to be voice of people who can't speak out from fear. I want to help out at community events. I really internalized a mentality of, 'If she can do it, I can do it'. I'm getting ready to transfer to a university. I've been looking at San Diego State because my major is urban studies with an emphasis in public policy and San Diego State has one of the best programs for it.

Now, I'm paving a good path for myself and finding what it is that I want.

## David, 20 &amp; Dina, 19 – Brother &amp; Sister (East Region)

David

I went to 11<sup>th</sup> grade in Iraq, and then we went to Turkey and I didn't finish my high school diploma. The language was different and we were working there.

We have been in San Diego for four months. The most important thing is language right now. And a job. Without these two things, we can't do anything.

My mom was studying here [International Rescue Committee] herself, and she meet Mr. Azmi. He told her, "We have this program, and maybe it's good for your children." So we came here and we met him and we started in this program.

My mother makes me strong. She tells me to study and do something good in my life. She tells me, "David, don't stop. Just learn and learn, and don't stop."

People here are from many cultures. It's interesting to communicate with them. Know what they are thinking. Are they thinking like us or not? What do they like to do...lots of things. It is important. We have to know the space between us and between them. It's very important.

America is a different country, different from other countries. Here, you have to respect all people. And you have to respect all opinions here. And respect the law. It's good.

I have many goals right now. I want to get my GED, I want to go to college, I want to study and I want to be a nurse. I am studying now for my GED, so I will see what happens.

Dina

I went to 7<sup>th</sup> grade in Iraq. In Turkey I wanted to go to school, of course, but the language was different so I stayed home with my mother.

I'm searching for jobs in a salon because I have experience from Iraq. That and cashier jobs.

It's a helpful program for people, because here we start from the beginning. If a person doesn't know anything, they can come here. It's helped me with studying, searching for a job and communication.

I like to give my little brothers confidence. I like to tell them, "You can do that!"

It's hard for me to make friends. I like to stay home or go places with my brother. I have friends who also came to America, but they are in Arizona. It's different for them, but good.

When people come here it is important to find a job. And study. And learn the language. If you want to be good here in America, you have to know English.

Science and history are my favorite subjects. I want to get my GED, I want to go to college, I want to be a dermatologist. The future is exciting because in Iraq I didn't finish in my school, and now I want to finish school...everything.

### Mia, 22 (South Region)

I had a lot of anger growing up, and was always acting out in middle school and high school. I had the capacity to learn and complete my courses, but I didn't feel motivated and didn't go to class. I didn't have support from my teachers or at home. After high school, I went to community college. I was doing pretty well. I originally wanted to be a pre-school teacher, but realized I wanted to learn more about the human body and sickness and get into medicine. However, my home life was unstable, and family issues made it difficult for me to focus on school. There was a lot of drugs and abuse, and it wasn't a healthy environment.

I left everything I had and decided to go to a shelter called Coachella Valley Rescue Mission so I didn't have to go home. Because I had to be at the shelter at certain times, I had to choose between going to school and being at my family's house, or quitting school. I stayed at the shelter and quit school. After a nine-month program at the homeless shelter, I got a seasonal job and tried going back to school. It didn't work out so well. I ended up jobless, homeless, and not in school.

In that gap between not being in school or at work, I was doing drugs to manage my emotions. Sometimes I would do drugs to stay awake and make sure no one was going through my stuff. Eventually I just didn't want to live like this anymore. I talked to someone at the shelter and she got me into rehab the next day. While I was there, I was trying to figure out what to do. Being in rehab was the best thing I could have done. I was able to start the process of working through things from my childhood, and learned how to work on the root of what I was feeling rather using drugs to deal with it.

I found out about Job Corps through a friend, and decided to apply. After only two or three months, I was able to join Job Corps. I was given the necessities like clothes and money for toiletries, and they helped me prepare to get a job. Job Corps provided stability and basic needs like safety, food and shelter. Without that, I wouldn't have been able to hold a job or go to school. In a few months, I'll be done with training and want to slowly transition to go back to school.

I worry about the cost of education and managing the balance between school and work. It's difficult working full time to pay for a room and going to school. I would rather go to school full time to get on with my education. I still have several months to save before I need to transition out of Job Corps, and have been working part time on the weekends to save money.

I'm already registered at Southwestern College because it's close to Job Corps and has an RN [registered nurse] program. At Job Corps, they have a program called U-Path which is a college readiness class. I asked questions and got more information about the RN program and decided that was what I wanted to do. I've just finished medical office training and now I'm doing CNA [certified nursing assistant] training. Once I'm done at Job Corps, I plan on finishing my college credits and becoming an RN. I'm modeling healthy habits and staying clean. I joke with my brother I'm going to be the best nurse in the world because it's a job you can't do half-way. Being dedicated, wanting to help and really caring like Florence Nightingale, the frontier pioneer nurse, is a big part of being a nurse.

**Sindy, 18 (South Region)**

My mom was deported from the US when I was young. I was the only one of my siblings born in the US, and was left in the care of one of my aunts. They didn't take good care of me. When my mom heard, she sent for me to live with her in Tijuana. While I was living in Tijuana my mom enrolled me in school, but when I was 12 years old I told her I wanted to come back to the States to go to school, and she said yes. I did not have a place to go, so she told me to find a youth shelter and that they would help me. There are no youth shelters though. They just place everyone together and only separate us by males and females.

I saw some crazy stuff—a lot of ladies on drugs—but some of the older ladies took me under their wings and took care of me. Eventually I went home and crossed the border every day to go to school until I was sixteen, when I found a room I could rent and got out of the shelter. I would have to get up at 4:30 and cross the border every morning, then take two busses to get to school, and I got there every day on time. I remember getting to school some mornings and I would always hear other people complain about going to school and getting there late. I just think that if you really want something you will make it work.

My aunt, who works at one of the local high schools, told me about the Able-Disabled program and how they would give me money and help me get my G.E.D. I also rely on Medi-Cal and food stamps for support. With Medi-Cal, I'm not afraid of getting sick and going to the doctor. With food stamps, I can get food. In Able-Disabled, I worked on the Career Smart program and did Excel training. My mom supports me and continues to push me to go to school and make something of my life. With school and work, it's difficult, but I do my best to go home to visit my family and bring back gifts for them. Aside from my family, my best friend's family has also been very supportive of me. They live in another state, but they're so encouraging of me and have been such a positive influence. I even referred my best friend and she's here now going through the program. My best friend is a really positive influence, but most kids my age aren't. They were always, like, into drugs and bad stuff.

I feel I have to work to get more experience to get a good job, but my education is important too. I've gotten experience here and there by babysitting the neighbor's kids in Tijuana, and working at Subway. I love school! Now that I've gotten my G.E.D., I want to enroll in community college. I really want to be a police officer. I have thought about going into the Army and have even met with a recruiter. I talked to this police officer too. He said that I should go for it. He said I was Latina, bilingual and female, and that would make me a good hire.

### Naomi, 20 (Metro Region)

I'm the second to the youngest of five siblings. During fourth or fifth grade, my parents separated, which made it hard for me. During my middle school and high school years, my family moved around a lot. We moved to Arizona, Louisiana, Texas and then back to California. It was difficult because I never stayed at one school for too long. It messed up my school credits. My school wasn't able to get the transcripts from the other schools I attended. On top of me hanging out with friends a lot and being a class clown, it meant that at the age of eighteen I couldn't finish high school on time. When I wasn't able to graduate, I decided to get my diploma the following year.

I didn't get much help from staff or counselors and had to figure out the next step to getting my diploma on my own. I just didn't realize I was too far behind until it was too late. I knew I needed to continue school and get my diploma, but I also needed money and wanted to find a job. While I was talking to my sister and asking for advice, she mentioned Urban Corps. My sister has always been like a second mom to me and filling the gaps my mom didn't always fill, and she made sure to let me know about her positive experiences with Urban Corps. I decided to give them a call and filled out an application. I didn't think they were really going to call me back. I was in the process of filling out job applications and always called the employers because I was so determined to find a job. I thought I needed to do that with Urban Corps too.

After putting in the application, I called a week later to check on the status of the application. They told me to give them another call back, but then called me first to tell me when orientation started. Two or three weeks after school ended for the summer, I started at Urban Corps. I was there for about eight months and ended up graduating a year later in June 2015. I was so happy – Urban Corps helped me so much. They had me go to high schools to teach them how to do resumes. In the Pathways program, they helped me with getting a bus pass. Pathways connected me to Urban League.

Originally, after I got my high school diploma, I was still worried about finding a job. The manager at Pathways liked me and gave me an extra month to stay at the program to find a job. He even mentioned I could come back and be a supervisor if I got my driver's license. They were persistent in calling me after graduation and checking in on me. They said I was considered still part of Pathways so they would ask me to go in to get a bus pass and a little money for necessities.

Even though something inside of me insisted it would be a waste of time, I ignored that voice and continued to go to meetings to look for jobs. I kept going to those meetings but I still wasn't finding a job. A little later, someone at Urban League told me she liked me and let me know an internship at Urban League was opening, and encouraged me to apply. I applied and interned for three months. Towards the end, my supervisor told me about San Diego Workforce Partnership's Job Coach program and pushed me to apply. After submitting my application, I made sure to follow up and call a point of contact my supervisor told me about.

I got an email for an interview and ended up getting the position. I keep thinking about how if I didn't persist in going to the Pathways meetings, maybe I would have missed out on this opportunity. I had to keep telling myself to be patient and keep moving forward, and now everything's worked out and falling into place. I started school at City College last year, taking it slow to get used to the school environment and taking classes and figuring out what I want to go for. Now that I have my diploma and a good job – the next step is going to school and figuring out what I want to do in my career.

### Jacinto, 24 (North Region)

I grew up next to a church, and was close to my family and friends. My parents were immigrants and hard workers, especially my dad. When I was five, ICE came to our door and deported my dad. I still had a good life growing up until I was sixteen when my mom was deported as well. Before that I was doing marijuana, drinking and cocaine, but I started doing meth after my sophomore or junior year when things weren't going well at home and we had to move from place to place.

People do all kinds of things to pay for drugs. I was with a group who looted. We were like pirates going on a hunt for money. Sometimes I felt the shame of that because I knew where I came from. Once I had the drugs in my system, it didn't matter to me. I managed going to school but I had missed two or three of the credits I needed to graduate high school. I wanted to get my diploma and was referred to a JCCS program near Old Town. At the JCCS program, they said I could link my credits to my high school credits for my diploma. On my 18th birthday, I went to my school and got my diploma, my only present.

After, my mom came back but was deported again. I would throw chemicals at my body and see how it would react. I was homeless and moved around a lot. I went into a program called TAY and started going there every day. I started turning my life around and wanted to stop doing drugs. My dad came out of prison and I met up with him. I was homeless and ended up going to where he lived in Tijuana. He taught me how to be a man, to be responsible. I went back and forth across the border every day to continue going to TAY. I stayed with him and mostly stayed clean of drugs for three to six months.

TAY gave me the opportunity to join their housing program. I decided to join and got a room downtown through TAY while working two jobs. I was struggling because my jobs were in San Ysidro. One night I got a beer and started drinking and meeting my friends again. I stopped working at my jobs and had issues with my roommate – TAY understood and moved me to El Cajon. At this point I wasn't working anymore. I would get high and use the little money I had to go to the casino.

A counselor at TAY suggested I meet someone named Jeffrey after he presented at the program. I didn't have anywhere else to go. I reached out and met with Jeffrey every Sunday in Ocean Beach, using the trolley to get there. We talked about life and ways to stay on the right path. We'd do things like play piano and art, and get services like haircuts. I participated in their outreach program to tell others about the art program they provided. Doing outreach was also one of the requirements to be qualified for their housing and training program. I really needed housing and I felt pressured because Jeffrey was making the decision soon about who to accept.

One night I started looking for trouble downtown and got into some fights. It started raining hard and I couldn't get back to my room in El Cajon. I was so messed up and tired of homelessness. I was trying to run into traffic and hurt myself, and I almost did. I stopped myself and the next day decided to talk to Jeffrey. This was a turning point for me. I made it into the program and was given a room in a house to live in while going to class at Solutions for Change. There was a schedule and I would get up early each morning to work and do chores together with my housemates. After the program, I found a place to live.

I've been clean for two years now, and I'm working at California Conservation Corps. I'm also the president of the Corps Member Advisory Board. I even got to go to the CAB conference in Auburn, California. I use music as a coping mechanism and am thinking of being a guidance counselor. It's been hard for me to figure out what I want to do, but I'm taking it day by day and task by task.

### Jessica, 17 (Metro Region)

In middle school, my home life was unstable. When my mom's boyfriend left, it broke up the family I had thought we were forming. It made me not care about being a better person. I struggled to keep my grades up in school and often ditched. I failed many classes and fell behind. At one point in high school, I was getting in trouble. I felt unsafe in my community so I picked up a knife. When it was discovered at school I was expelled for a short time, making me fall behind even more. The dean of students fought for me and I got another chance. It was difficult because many kids knew why I was expelled so they labelled me as someone dangerous. I was put on probation for six months and had to go to court.

I feel this was my turning point because my probation officer genuinely cared about me. I started focusing more on school and getting my grades up to make my mom feel proud. My sophomore year, I was also mentored by an acting detective. We formed a connection and he earned my trust. He told me I had potential and more to offer. He acted like a father figure to me. I focused on doing something positive. I ended up moving to another school because of my bad grades to get my credits faster.

It was hard to adapt to that school because I was only going twice a week. Many of the tutors and teachers are busy, so I didn't have the chance to get the help I needed. I'm currently enrolling in Access to help me, but I had to un-enroll in school to enroll in Access. I've been out of school for two months. I'm currently only involved in Youth Voice, a program that's been going on since 2008 for youth ages 11-22 who either feel passionate about speaking up about the needs of their community, or they want to be a part of something.

I hadn't had anything very consistent in my life until Youth Voices. I felt I didn't have a purpose in life and that I wasn't doing anything good, but knowing I can help and inspire the friends I used to hang out with is rewarding. Through Youth Voice, we've done a lot of presentations. The first was at San Diego Workforce Partnership advocating against human trafficking. We did work researching statistics and released papers.

When I presented, I didn't expect anything to come out of it. Only a month later, I received a call letting me know the number I provided helped a friend get out of being trafficked. Knowing I helped someone's life for the better motivated me to keep presenting. We even presented to the Gang Commission about intervention and how gangs are involved in human trafficking. We helped change policies at the Gang Commission to include human trafficking as a standing item in every meeting.

Because of my experiences growing up witnessing domestic violence and not having anyone to go to for help, trauma informed care is very important to me. I've witnessed what my friends have been through and I know how much those events caused pain and why they make the life choices they do. I want kids to receive genuine help from caring adults. I want to go into law enforcement and criminal justice to become a probation officer. I know having a probation officer who cares and guides youths on the right path can make a difference. I don't have anyone to help me with school or financial aid, so I'm doing it on my own. To become a probation officer, I need to go through school. I use this as motivation to keep going forward so I can go to college and achieve what I want to do. I'm really excited about my future.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The San Diego Workforce Partnership (SDWP) could not have produced this report without the guidance and support from community partners, collaborating researchers and leaders in the field. SDWP would like to acknowledge the following people for their support of this important work:

### Research Partners:

- Anisha Hingorani, Mingyi Li, Felix Rodriguez and Monica Santander — USC Sol Price School of Public Policy
- Maia Barber, Laura Belknap, Jennifer Carr, Christina Imada, Atlantide Mangin and Ariana Martinez — University of San Diego School of Leadership and Education Sciences (USD SOLES)
- Nicole Lasky — 2-1-1 San Diego
- Sarah Burd-Sharps and Laura Laderman — Measure of America of the Social Science Research Council

### Advisory Committee

- Heather Lattimer, Veronica Garza, Yang Jiang, Yaoran Li and Femi Vance — USD SOLES Institute for Entrepreneurship in Education
- Ian Gordon — San Diego Youth Development Office
- Omar Passons — SDWP Youth and Young Adult Committee Chair
- Josh Shapiro — UC San Diego Extension

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### Other Collaborators

- The many San Diego-based organizations and youth who participated in interviews



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