

Building Partnerships to Improve Employment Training Programs for Young Adults in Cleveland|Cuyahoga County

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Introduction

Employment training organizations and agencies often work independently of each other, for reasons that may include interorganizational competition, limited knowledge of each other's strengths, separate funding streams, and lack of resources (both time and financial). To more effectively serve youth and young adults, many organizations could benefit from opportunities to develop collaborative approaches. For its Generation Work project (see textbox at right), the Annie E. Casey Foundation focuses on increasing organizational collaboration across the employment training system. This case study focuses on how the local partnership in Cleveland|Cuyahoga County established a coalition across two organizations to better serve youth and young adults in the region.

Before 2015, [Youth Opportunities Unlimited](#) (YOU) and [Towards Employment](#) (TE)—two well-established employment training organizations in Cleveland—had not worked formally together. YOU is known for its focus on serving disadvantaged young adults in developmentally appropriate ways across the region, whereas TE offers a comprehensive set of occupational training programs across a large network of local partners. The Cleveland Generation Work team recognized that this partnership could build on the strengths of both organizations, thereby increasing their programming possibilities and allowing them to better meet young people's myriad needs as they try to develop stable and strong careers.

About this case study

This case study describes the relational factors that helped YOU and TE jointly develop a local Young Adult Resource Center (YRC). It also highlights how the YRC implemented positive youth development (PYD) approaches to better serve youth and young adults; PYD approaches are the focus of Child Trends' involvement in Generation Work. The partnership between YOU and TE was built on the development of shared goals, joint meetings, and trainings, with a particular focus on the racial and ethnic equity and

Generation Work

Launched by the Annie E. Casey Foundation in 2015, Generation Work™ aims to connect more of America's young adults with meaningful employment by changing the way public and private systems prepare them for jobs. As part of the initiative, partners in five sites across the nation—Cleveland, Hartford, Indianapolis, Philadelphia and Seattle—are working to align various education, employment, and support services to help young people develop the skills required to succeed in the working world; link young adults with employers; and increase advancement and earning opportunities.

By combining employer-facing strategies that are aligned to labor market needs with positive youth development techniques—such as hands-on learning and mentoring—the initiative aims to blend services into more cohesive pathways that promote equitable employment opportunities for all young people.

inclusion (REEI) trainings. Through the application of PYD principles, the YRC aimed to improve how staff from both organizations support youth and young adults—especially by emphasizing the importance of positive relationships with young adults and improving service linkages and referrals aligned to young adults’ needs.

This case study is one of five that examine how local partnerships in the Generation Work initiative have scaled up and supported the use of PYD approaches in training programs for young people who seek high-quality training and employment. The case studies grew from the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s interest in learning more about how the five local Generation Work partnerships integrate PYD approaches in workforce training settings for youth in order to generate systematic knowledge about PYD that other workforce training practitioners can apply.

Key findings

Our team identified five key findings focused on how the partnership was developed and how, through that partnership, both organizations were better able to serve young adults through the implementation of PYD.

- **The two partner organizations, YOU and TE, developed a common mission by participating in joint meetings and trainings.** The meetings helped YOU and TE operate as a collective entity that more efficiently serves young people, rather than two separate entities that simply share a physical space.
- **Interorganizational relationship-building fostered common goals and a productive partnership in the YRC.** Intentional communication and a shared vision strengthened relationships throughout the initiative.
- **YRC staff who were trained around racial and ethnic equity and inclusion felt empowered to more directly address issues around racism and opportunity for the young people they served.** Both organizations built capacity for staff to have difficult conversations about systemic and historical racism. This experience, though difficult for many individuals, brought the partnership team together and built trust by helping members more clearly identify their common mission and each of their roles in effectively supporting young people at the YRC.
- **The Cleveland team—especially staff working with young adults—used the [PILOT tool](#) to ensure that the training, employment placement, and other services offered through the YRC were implemented with age-appropriate supportive strategies.** Child Trends created the PILOT tool for the Generation Work initiative to facilitate discussions about implementing PYD practices and to identify strategies for improving services when needed. Staff discussed their focus on building respectful, safe relationships with young adults and partnering with them to promote their sense of agency and individual goals in selecting their trainings and placements.
- **To improve recruitment and retention of young adults for training and employment programs, the Cleveland partnership developed linkages between the YRC, other community-serving organizations, and the residents in the broader community.** These efforts also helped link young people to services to meet their complex needs.

Background of Cleveland Partnership

The Cleveland local partnership consists of four founding organizations: [Towards Employment](#) (TE), [Youth Opportunities Unlimited](#) (YOU), [Ohio Means Jobs](#), and the Cuyahoga County Department of Job and Family Services. The [Fund for Our Economic Future](#) is a regional funding collaborative that was also an early supporter of the partnership. Additional partners joined in subsequent years. Beginning in 2010, Ohio Means Jobs ran the YRC out of its “one-stop shop” in Cleveland. By 2015, it had identified a need for organizations with comprehensive case management structures and more experience serving youth to take it over. The Fund for Our Economic Future disseminated literature and prioritized funding of REEI work.

This study focuses primarily on the YRC work conducted largely by TE, YOU, Ohio Means Jobs, and the Cuyahoga County Department of Job and Family Services.

In 2015, three important events brought these organizations together. First, Ohio Means Jobs asked YOU and TE to work together to run the YRC. Second, Generation Work provided an opportunity to fund systems-strengthening work in cities across the United States; in the Cleveland area, Ohio Means Jobs, TE, and YOU jointly applied. Third, the Comprehensive Case Management in Employment Program (CCMEP)—an Ohio workforce initiative—allowed Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funding to be pooled to better serve job applicants. This allowed the YRC to expand and develop new programming that could target the neediest individuals.

Each partnership organization brought its own strengths and contributed to meeting the diverse needs of youth and young adults. For instance, YOU has a long history of helping teens and young adults succeed by providing education and workforce opportunities, skills development courses, and access to career pathways. TE creates industry-driven pathways to successful, long-term employment opportunities by supporting workers with career coaching and comprehensive case management. Ohio Means Jobs was a one-stop operator looking for contracted partners to help realize its vision of a young adult-centered place within its organization. Each organization complemented their partners by providing support in areas with which they had experience or strengths, but that their peer organizations did not. A greater level of intentionality in their work together created a more streamlined process and set of opportunities for the populations that all organizations wanted to serve.

Once there was an opportunity to apply for a Generation Work grant in late 2015, each local partnership was tasked with developing a strategic framework to describe how its collaboration would use systems-change efforts to improve employment outcomes for young adults ages 18 to 29, especially young people of color and youth from low-income families. The Cleveland local partnership aimed to create “a coordinated and accessible workforce system that blends positive workforce development¹ with demand driven strategies to build quality career pathways for young people of all backgrounds.”ⁱⁱ The YRC was an ideal place to conduct this work. To accomplish this goal, the now jointly run YRC focused on two primary strategies: 1) Connect and align partners to offer intertwined services such as case management, adult education services, and transportation support funded by WIOA and TANF in the YRC; and 2) support staff to improve their PYD approaches at the YRC.

About the Young Adult Resource Center

[The Young Adult Resource Center](#) is a one-stop shop program model with a focus on the unique needs of youth and young adults. One-stop operators, or “one-stop shops,” have been a cornerstone of adult workforce development programs in the United States for decades. This approach has been used for adult employment and for re-engagement in academic settings for youth, but has rarely been used explicitly for youth employment efforts. The combination of employment and engagement strategies specifically targeted at youth and young adults is what makes the Cleveland|Cuyahoga County partnership’s approach new and unique. Research suggests that one-stop operators may be most effective when they invest in staff training and assistance, and in intensive services for their clients.^{ii,iii} In the case of the YRC, the one-stop shop is jointly run by TE and YOU as contracted service partners of Ohio Means Jobs.

¹ Positive workforce development is a term used by the Generation Work Initiative to describe the introduction of PYD approaches to youth and young adult workforce settings.

The three organizations are responsible for different aspects of the YRC: Ohio Means Jobs coordinates the grant and other workforce activities in Cuyahoga County, like the local workforce development board; YOU conducts outreach and recruitment in the community and supports retention efforts; and TE handles intake assessment and case management with the young people themselves.

The YRC co-locates multiple county services supported through both WIOA and TANF, allowing intakes, assessments, case management, and some training and remediation to all take place within the same physical setting.² Using these funds to improve services and build new partnerships at the YRC, the three organizations are able to meet the urgent needs of youth and young adult job seekers that sometimes prevent their success in job training programs, such as the need for food, housing, or child care.^{iv} Furthermore, while the YRC is located in the main Ohio Means Jobs building, TE and YOU have worked carefully to brand the YRC and make the center accessible for youth and young adults. The YRC has a separate elevator in the Ohio Means Jobs building, front desk staff who have been trained to identify which young adults might be best served by the YRC, and young adult participants who have decorated the center to be colorful and welcoming.

Child Trends' Generation Work Research in the Past

As a national research partner for Generation Work, Child Trends supports the Annie E. Casey Foundation in generating systematic knowledge about the use of PYD approaches in workforce training settings. For this purpose, we developed the [PILOT Assessment Tool in 2018](#), which is a self-reflection tool for workforce training staff. The five dimensions are:

- Positive Relationships
- Improved Skills
- Linkages Across School, Work, Families, and Communities
- Opportunities to Contribute and Belong
- Trustworthy and Safe Settings

These five areas, which are defined in more detail in the document linked above, were the five dimensions of PYD emphasized in the first year of Generation Work. During the development of the PILOT tool, we interviewed leadership and staff at the five local partnerships, as well as youth and young adult participants, to learn how the partnerships were integrating PYD into their work with young people. We found that each local partnership was already engaging in PYD practices that we felt would be useful for other workforce training practitioners to learn about.

To expand on what we learned previously, during the development of the PILOT tool, we decided to use case studies to examine how each local partnership built certain pieces of its PYD approach.

Conducting the Cleveland Case Study

This case study builds on research that Child Trends conducted to understand how Generation Work local partnerships are using PYD approaches (see textbox above for more information about the PILOT tool). For each case study in this series, the Child Trends study team chose a topic that the local partnership wanted to learn more about that would also have lessons for the field more broadly. This case study focuses on how the two organizations in Cleveland built working relationships with each other to run and sustain the YRC. We identified this as a useful topic through conversations with key staff members on the Cleveland|Cuyahoga team. These discussions helped us identify important lessons for how the key partners developed their partnership by building relationships and improving service delivery at the YRC; these

² Since the time of interviews for this case study, the role of the YRC has evolved. The YRC is now the hub for young adults to enter the system and then be referred to a host of providers offering industry-specific training tracks and case management.

lessons could be useful to other cities where two or more organizations decide to form a new partnership. Next, we worked with the local partnership leaders in Cleveland to identify key staff to interview during a two-day site visit in February 2019.³ Interviews with staff at the YRC happened across levels in their respective organizations: direct service staff (four total), direct service managers (three total), project management staff (two total), and leadership (six total). Each interview was conducted in a small group, with representation from TE, YOU, and Ohio Means Jobs. We also conducted a focus group with eight young adult participants to hear their perspective on the supports they received.

For these interviews, we used a common interview protocol to investigate key activities happening in the partnership. We employed a simple coding rubric that focused primarily on how the partnership to run the YRC developed and what partners focused on for staff training.

Findings

Below, we highlight five key findings from the Generation Work partnership in Cleveland|Cuyahoga County. Our findings include discussions of what helped foster the development of an effective partnership and of how the partnership employs PYD practices to better serve young people.

Joint meetings and trainings built relationships.

Shared meetings and trainings were a key component of the effort to create a common mission. They also helped develop stronger relationships among staff in the two organizations and were used intentionally to make the YRC run more efficiently. Meetings created time for staff to discuss their mission, the barriers they worked against, and how they could translate their mission into the day-to-day work of the YRC. Partners found they could be most productive and effective by centering the needs of clients and drawing on Generation Work's PYD-focused vision to support them in the best way possible.

Staff formally meet at least monthly to discuss successes and challenges faced while implementing the PYD approaches on which the Generation Work initiative focuses. A member of the leadership team said:

We have a monthly meeting where [the] two organizational leaderships come together, and we continue to talk through things that we might be facing, things that we think are important to be added, challenges that we need to work through, positives, so all of that. So, it's really grown quite a bit over the last three years.

There were clear challenges in the early stages of the initiative. Leadership convened staff from the two organizations because creating a space for staff to learn from each other and develop efficient systems was important to becoming a unified team. Staff reported that having joint meetings staff enabled them to address:

... cultural differences even within YOU and within TE. And so [those cultural differences were] something that, as we had these conversations, came to light. And so then last year we really dove into providing opportunities for staff to give feedback on different areas that they thought were working well and really just have their voices heard. And then we really just tried to be more intentional about being respectful of each other and really leaning into those difficult conversations so ... staff morale would improve because we all knew that if staff morale was low [it] was affecting our young people when they came to the door.

³ While the YRC has changed structure since our interviews, the lessons shared here about partnerships and how to work together are still essential.

These joint meetings were considered not only an administrative duty but also an opportunity to resolve any issues and differences in work styles or cultures that were affecting the work. The meetings also created systems to collaborate on reaching TE and YOU's desired outcomes. Bringing these challenges to light through open dialogue increased staff morale and improved the YRC's programming. While challenges remain—particularly around turnover and its effects on relationship-building—structures are now in place to mitigate challenges through trust.

Partners defined shared, explicit goals for their work.

The partnership was initiated by TE and YOU leadership, and by Cuyahoga County officials. The leadership team's conversations focused on jointly running the YRC and discussing which factors would allow them to better coordinate toward meeting a common goal. Partners at all levels told us that explicitly defining shared goals was (and remains) a driving force of the partnership between TE and YOU. In fact, the strategic framework prioritized shared goal-setting to streamline the partnership's efforts by offering more services, along with staff development.

Members of the leadership team also shared their long-term goal of systemic change in how young adults are served with employers and other community leaders across Cleveland and Cuyahoga County. The leadership team knew that it first needed to “build the base” at the YRC (program level) by supporting young adult participants in becoming employed and recognizing that those young adults are whole people, not just job seekers, with differing needs. The leadership team also worked to identify the comparative advantage of each partnership organization, along with the supports that each partner could provide young adult participants. Providing comprehensive services is one way the YRC can support young people. A member of the leadership team shared that “the end goal is employment, but the comprehensive case management, the recognition that there's certain obstacles, barriers, that need to be worked on. So that case management is really important for success [to meet the goal].” All levels of staff at the YRC shared the recognition that young adults must be supported as whole people as a first step in reaching the long-term goal of systemic change.

Managers and frontline staff from both organizations care deeply about their work and about the young adults in their community. Prior to the partnership, each organization's staff had their own set of approaches to serve young adults. When TE and YOU came together to work toward their common goal, senior leaders developed goals for their partnership; however, it was also important that mid-level managers and frontline staff understood each organization's roles and approaches for best serving young people. This allowed them each to buy into their new common mission while also recognizing their respective comparative advantages. Finding commonality in goals across the organizations was an important first step to creating trust. Interviewees across levels and organizations shared a common goal in their work: Both organizations place an “increased focus on youth, young adults ... and highlight[s] the question of whether or not [they are] serving young adults in the best way possible.” In order to serve young adults in the best way possible, staff at TE and YOU must work both with each other and on their own approaches.

This common vision and motivation helped staff at the YRC challenge themselves to better serve their clients, thus meeting their goals of improving services to better meet participants' needs. For example, a manager at the YRC shared that, early in the partnership and during periods of more change, the manager drew on their shared mission. Specifically, they found comfort in knowing that “... [the YRC staff are] taking the steps to get there. We know how we want to work with the youth. We know what we want the youth to ultimately do.” This sentiment was echoed by frontline staff, who responded to challenges or difficult days by reminding themselves of why they do this work—to serve the young adults. Some staff also reflected that goal-setting is one of the strategies that they use with their participants. Staff realized that by setting goals for themselves, they could model these behaviors for their participants.

Capacity-building around racial and ethnic equity and inclusion empowered YRC staff to more directly address issues around racism and opportunity.

Another way in which staff from both organizations developed trust and learned to work together more effectively was by learning more about the history of race and racism—both within their respective fields and in the greater Cleveland region. YRC staff, along with leadership from both TE and YOU, participated in “racial and ethnic equity and inclusion” (REEI) trainings. By March 2019, almost all staff—from leadership to frontline staff—from TE and YOU had attended an REEI training. One staff member said that their understanding of the complex needs of young adults of color “actually started to move throughout the system.” In other words, a common agenda was emerging around the importance of recognizing and addressing racism in the organization’s work.

Some interviewees were concerned that some of their peers knew little about the history of racism; the trainings filled a need by providing access to Cleveland-specific history and data. The trainings also created opportunities for staff to have difficult conversations—not only about the lasting legacy of racism and how it affects the lives of the young people they serve, but also about the impact of race and racism in their own lives. The trainers encouraged staff to understand the complexity and legacy of racism in their own community, and to understand how they themselves may be perpetuating inequities. One YRC manager said that the trainings resulted in staff asking questions about ongoing policies and practices: “What is my part in this? Or what is your part in this and how do we work together to overcome the day-to-day obstacles that people face?” Some staff members mentioned that they now see themselves as “gatekeepers” because they have the power to decide whether a young person stays or discontinues their programming at the YRC. Another staff member noted that understanding the role of historical racism has “opened [their] eyes” to the realities that many young people face, and has helped them reflect on the common assumptions people make about participants and their circumstances.

These trainings strengthened YRC staff members’ common understanding of the “why” (the motivation) behind their work and, as a result, created more trust and fostered progress. These tough, but necessary, conversations have not only started to effect change across the two organizations in how staff think about their work, but have also encouraged staff to rethink their practices and reflect on how they can better support each other and young people at the YRC. It is not yet known whether these conversations will lead to systemic changes in efforts to increase equitable outcomes in and across programs, organizations, and agencies. More research is also needed to understand whether and how staff trainings on racial equity and other topics lead to improved outcomes for young adults. While individual education is an important first step, it is not likely to be sufficient to change organizational policies and practices that are linked to improving racial justice and equitable outcomes.

The PILOT tool was used to introduce Positive Youth Development principles in the Young Adult Resource Center.

During our interviews, staff told us that the Cleveland initiative is committed to using PYD principles to meet the needs of young adults at the YRC. PYD approaches contrast with more punitive or rapid approaches. Specifically, staff shared that they use the PILOT tool during regular monthly staff meetings. Several people noted that, although subtle, these changes were important because the trainings had encouraged a shift in their perspectives toward being more intentional. One staff member said that the PILOT tool is “a nice structure to have because working with young adults, we can get all crazy in our environment from the day to day, so just to pull back and focus on [a PYD checklist] and say, ‘Okay this is an actual structural tool that we’re utilizing,’ has been extremely helpful.”

Staff now focus on integrating PYD approaches into their work by making small but consistent changes in practices. For example, staff began to rethink large program components, such as how their services meet the complex needs of young adults, but also smaller daily actions like their interactions with youth while checking in or doing small tasks. One staff member mentioned that identifying barriers is a key part of their role as a case manager. This staff member found opportunities to make a standard assessment more valuable to them and the young adult client:

At the beginning there is a small mental health assessment. And basically, we try not to just sit there and go just question by question, but [to have] more a dialog conversation. So, creating a safe environment for people to feel comfortable. A lot of these subjects can be sensitive to people. A lot of people don't necessarily have family support, community support, [or] valuable friendships. And so, we become, as they get engaged in the program regarding positive youth development, like their support system, their family. They look at this place as a safe place. So, people come in here who may have not had anything to eat at night. We provide food here by going to the food bank. And having that accessible for free to participants. So, meeting some of those important mental health and other needs allows us and the participant to feel comfortable like this is a safe place.

One frontline staff member said that the PYD approach at the YRC is based on a foundation of relationships and explained how their decisions affect far beyond the young adult participant:

Everything we [YRC workers] do is positive youth development because nobody here's just doing this to make a buck. Right? You have to develop a relationship with these youth coming in. You have to establish trust so you can develop a relationship where honesty's a big part of that. Right? Knowing what kind of challenges they've faced, what kind of challenges lay ahead, being part of increasing self-esteem. That self-fulfilling prophecy that "I'm not going to go anywhere," we attack. They've got to know that we're being straight with them. That we're here to support them. That we're not here to judge them. And once that is established—and you can really establish that—you can really develop even more ... [one program participant] told the story of how she's able to buy her daughter, for the first time, toys for Christmas, clothes. Being active in her church community. Having a sense of pride. She talked her mom into joining Towards Employment, and now she, her mom, is working. So, when you talk about positive youth development, it's what we all do, but—we all have our success stories, so to speak. But when you actually see how it affects them and how it affects those in their lives, it's something really special.

Using the PILOT tool has allowed frontline staff to reflect and openly communicate with each other. TE and YOU staff have been able to discuss their practices with young people and consider how their individual organizations and the YRC as a whole can better serve participants. We heard that talking more about specific PYD approaches helped some managers and frontline staff shift their perspective. Many described it as a shift in mindset that had made them more aware of “the types of things they were already doing” to create a situation where young workers could be successful—not only in their programs but in other aspects of their lives, as well. Some staff noted that, while they may think they know what is going on with a young person, the PYD-focused discussions have helped them realize that they do not always see the whole picture. For example, many staff told us that participants come to them lacking support from their families and communities, which helps staff better understand their important role in participants’ lives. One staff member said:

People feel valued when they're coming in. Maybe they weren't the smartest in class, so they have some academic issues, they have no family support and you've been hearing this all your life, "You're never going to amount to anything." I think it's very important that when people come in, they feel valued. And that's the feedback that I've gotten, someone's always here to help them and as a case manager, we talk about everything.

One member of the leadership team shared that the PILOT tool is particularly useful because it can identify areas where growth is needed across organizations:

... we used our meetings last year to bring in different people to just provide a little bit of education ... [so] there's [an] onsite disability services person here. And so, we had her come down and talk about working with people who are differently abled. We brought in someone from the YWCA, A Place 4 Me, and others to learn about the adolescent brain.

Staff are drawing from PYD principles to support young participants in two ways: 1) promoting respectful and open relationships between staff members and participants, and between participants themselves; and 2) giving program participants more choice in their trainings and placements. The relationship-building efforts infiltrate all levels of the YRC, which young people have reportedly picked up on. Some young adult participants told us in a small focus group that they feel supported by YRC staff and that they feel some control over what they do in programs. Staff told us that working with young adults—and listening to their experiences and circumstances that can act as barriers to employment—allows them to encourage young adult participants and/or help them address their challenges.

Relatedly, managers discussed the importance of reimagining retention in these programs. For example, a staff member's reaction to a participant's absence is a key opportunity to show support. By understanding young adults and their needs and being flexible to their multiple demands, managers can retain more participants instead of only maintaining the attendance numbers required for grants. Specifically, understanding why a young person might have been absent, or why they may be struggling to balance competing demands, has allowed staff to engage in this kind of flexibility and support.

The Young Adult Resource Center links young adults to outside services.

Linking participants to resources both within and outside the YRC represents an important contribution. For example, when useful, young adults can access services targeted at adults (these tend to be shorter or focused on quick placements). YRC staff noticed that young people sometimes end up in the general adult programs because there is overlap between some YRC participants and the general adult programs at Ohio Means Jobs. As mentioned previously, with the implementation of CCMEP, the YRC was able to use pooled funds to offer more services for young people in these programs. These [services](#) include assessments and trainings, wrap-around services, and work experiences. One leadership member stated:

... they all talk about the 14 services we offer. I can list them up! It might be that they might need some financial literacy just to help them even [be] comfortable with this, that they're teaching how to ... take this part to pay your rent, and ... to pay utilities, and there might be some other one. Some might want to be business owners who want to work for themselves. There's certain things that they try to have—steer them in the right direction with those 14 services that can be offered to any of these providers and outside the providers where they have a link, where they can connect, and they know where the resources are.

YRC staff have prioritized developing linkages within Ohio Means Jobs first. This resulted in the creation of a “reverse referral system” that feeds younger participants into the YRC. Staff mentioned that reverse referral has prevented the loss of young people in the system who were not ready for adult programming.

Beyond meeting young people “where they’re at”—meaning recognizing and serving them based on their readiness and other factors—the YRC staff have actively developed linkages across the community to better meet the needs of young adults in their own physical environments. For example, we heard that the YRC utilizes “community access points,” like public libraries, to host trainings and informational sessions about their programs and services; this helps them reach people who may not know about the YRC. The YRC also connects young people to other organizations to provide trainings. YRC leadership have also discussed other means of reaching out to young people—such as a traveling informational bus or working with other

organizations in the area—to reach more young people who may not be enrolled in school or currently working.

YRC staff also developed relationships with other community organizations to help their clients access needed resources. For example, when a young adult was interested in a particular type of placement for their work experience, staff made a connection with that organization. Our young adult interviewees shared that they were more committed to the program after their placement because it had helped them achieve their goals. Additionally, for youth who require more supports than are available through the program, staff rely on external referrals to other community-based organizations. In one instance, a case manager referred a young woman to a domestic violence shelter and went with her to help her feel safe and able to ask questions.

Discussion of Findings

Research into human service organization partnerships indicates that the YOU and TE partnership at the YRC can be considered both a process innovation and a content innovation.^v A process innovation is that which relates to the implementation of producing something or the implementation of a delivery method, whereas content innovations mean the introduction of new concepts or theories that lead to improved services. Examples of innovations in a workforce program may include developing intake forms for young adults to identify their barriers to participation (process innovation) or changes to case management meetings that focus on wrap-around services (content innovation). The design of the YRC as a one-stop shop for young adults creates different opportunities to make changes to both the processes and content that drive their work.

The process innovation described in this brief is the fostering of a strong relationship between TE and YOU, which sets the foundation for the Generation Work team to successfully co-run the YRC. Staff across all levels of the organization commented on how the YRC's successes are rooted in the trusting relationships that partner staff have with one another. Although organizational differences led to initial challenges, staff told us that joint participation in meetings helped them feel connected to the YRC's shared mission and vision. Outside of meetings, staff also participated in professional development trainings to support their work. Elsewhere, the REEI trainings created space for difficult conversations that ultimately brought everyone together and built trust between staff. These activities created a culture in which the partnership is central to the vision of serving young adults. The Cleveland|Cuyahoga County team not only trusts one another in their current work at the YRC, but also plans to grow the partnership as it seeks opportunities to work together on additional funding opportunities.

The content innovation highlighted in this case study is the Cleveland site's implementation of PYD. Staff told us that they use the PILOT tool in staff meetings to discuss PYD principles and reflect on their own practices. Structured discussions about PYD have shifted staff practices and perspectives on their work with young adults in the programs. Other PYD-inspired practices at the YRC include the reverse referral system from adult programs to the YRC, developing relationships with employers to find youth high-quality jobs, and recruiting from community access points to try to reach disconnected young adults. Linkages (i.e., establishing a connection with other areas of a young person's life, such as schools, families, employers, or other community-based organizations) were a particular bright spot for the Cleveland|Cuyahoga County initiative. Staff gave examples of thinking more cross-contextually when working with young adults. Young adults also told us that these connections have motivated them to stay in the program and meet their goals. The Cleveland partnership illustrates how an initiative can develop a cohesive, continuous, and developmentally appropriate workforce system that meets the needs of young adults throughout the region.

Conclusion

The lessons from this case study point to the unique opportunities that organizations may have when they partner on a one-stop shop for young adults—especially organizations that may otherwise be competitors but can bring different strengths to the work. By combining their expertise, pooling their resources, and creating opportunities for innovative work that focuses on the unique needs of young adult workers, the YRC benefitted greatly from the two organizations working together. As the Cleveland team continues to jointly run the YRC with the system-level thinking of Generation Work, its relationship-building and professional development activities are continuous and will need to expand to include employers, post-secondary institutions, and more.

Acknowledgements

First, we would like to thank the Annie E. Casey Foundation for their support of this work as part of the Generation Work Initiative, and are grateful for their trust in us as researchers. During our time in Cleveland, we spoke to 22 different staff members and Generation Work leaders. While their names and titles cannot be included here, this case study could not have been written without their insight. We thank them for their time, expertise, and willingness to share with us so that we could better capture some of the lessons learned in Cleveland.

Endnotes

ⁱ The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2018). *Generation Work, Northeast Ohio*. <https://www.aecf.org/m/blogdoc/aecf-generationworkprofile-cleveland-2018.pdf>

ⁱⁱ U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration. (2017). *One-Stop Operations Guidance for the American Job Center Network*. Available at: https://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/attach/TEGL/TEGL_16-16_Acc.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ Fortson, K., Rotz, D., Burkander, P., Mastri, A., Schochet, P., Rosenberg, L., & D'Amico, R. (2017). *Providing public workforce services to job seekers: 30-Month impact findings on the WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker programs*. Mathematica Policy Research. Available at: <https://www.mathematica.org/our-publications-and-findings/publications/providing-public-workforce-services-to-job-seekers-30-month-impact-findings-on-the-wia-adult>

^{iv} Ohio Department of Job and Family Services. *Comprehensive Case Management and Employment Program (CCMEP): Services Matrix*. <http://jfs.ohio.gov/owd/CCMEP/Services-Matrix.stm>

^v Lawson, H. A. (2004). The logic of collaboration in education and the human services. *Journal of interprofessional care*, 18(3), 225-237. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13561820410001731278>