

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Q: What is the “Grads of Life” campaign?

**A:** The “Grads of Life” campaign is built upon a national effort to “flip the switch” on employer demand for opportunity youth. This strategy to build private sector demand is led by Year Up and the Employment Pathways Project in collaboration with national partners. Currently, 6 million young adults are overlooked by businesses for internships, mentorships, and entry-level positions because they lack traditional qualifications.<sup>1</sup> Conversely, there are more than 4 million job vacancy opportunities across the United States.<sup>2</sup> As a result, businesses are in search of high quality candidates to fill vital roles but are struggling to do so. Through “Grads of Life,” a coalition of partners: Year Up, the Employment Pathways Project, New Options Project, MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership, Opportunity Nation, ConPRmetidos, Public Private Possibilities, and Young Invincibles – will introduce employers to the benefits of working with this pool of untapped talent.



This initiative seeks to expand economic mobility and close the opportunity divide in America. This will be accomplished by changing social norms within the employer community so that employment pathways, which include mentoring, school-to-work programs, internships, and other hiring opportunities, are widely recognized and integrated as one of several talent strategies used by competitive, best-practice employers.

### Q: What does the public service announcement (PSA) campaign consist of?

**A:** “Grads of Life” is a PSA campaign created in partnership with the Ad Council that targets employers from all industries across the United States. The campaign consists of TV, radio, print, outdoor, and digital PSAs, all of which encourage hiring decision makers to visit [GradsOfLife.org](http://GradsOfLife.org) to learn more about the benefits of working with this great pool of untapped talent.

### Q: What are common messages featured in the PSA campaign?

**A:** The campaign’s primary call to action is to “Learn how to find, cultivate, and train a great pool of untapped talent at [GradsOfLife.org](http://GradsOfLife.org).” The campaign also features various recurring headlines, including:

- “Life has taught him/her things no classroom could.” (Pronoun usage depends on photo)
- “The best candidate for the job isn’t always the typical candidate.”
- “In looking for the ideal resume, you’ve ignored the ideal candidate.”
- “To find a great candidate, give traditional hiring practices the day off.”

<sup>1</sup> Opportunity Nation, The Opportunity Index 2012 (Boston: 2013), accessed November 20, 2013, <http://opportunityindex.org/national-trends/>.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistic’s Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey (JOLTS), August 2014, <http://www.bls.gov/jlt/>.

### **Q: Who are opportunity youth?**

**A:** Opportunity youth are the millions of young people aged 16-24 who are disconnected from the education system and mainstream economy, but whose life experiences have shaped them to be resilient, motivated, loyal employees; qualities shown to be of great benefit to employers who give them an opportunity.

### **Q: Who will benefit from this campaign?**

**A:** The results of this campaign will positively impact all aspects of society – employers, individuals, families, communities, and fundamentally, the long-term success of our nation's economy. Disconnection of untapped talent costs taxpayers \$93 billion per year in lost revenues and increased social services.<sup>3</sup> Employers who have engaged with opportunity youth report significant business benefits, including increased retention, higher productivity, higher consumer confidence and stronger community impact. These companies who are seeing business benefits by working with opportunity youth, are paying these young people livable wages, who are in turn bringing their earnings home to their families, both parents and children, and to their communities. These young adults become tax-payers and active contributors to our economy.

### **Q: Why is this effort important now?**

**A:** During the next decade, the opportunity divide will continue to widen,<sup>4</sup> with businesses facing a shortage of 12 million skilled workers by 2025.<sup>5</sup> We know, the current cohort of disconnected youth will cost \$93 billion annually and \$1.6 trillion over their lifetimes in lost revenues and increased social services<sup>6</sup> -- what will this economic burden be for both disconnected young people and taxpayers by 2025? We cannot afford to wait any longer, we must close the divide, connecting talented young adults, opportunity youth, with employers in need of quality labor. By doing so, we will fuel the productivity and future of both our businesses and communities.

### **Q: Has this been done elsewhere and been successful?**

**A:** Many companies have developed best-practice employment pathways and worked with opportunity youth over the past several years, which have resulted in significant business benefits. These companies include Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG & E), Southwire's "12 for Life" program, Gap Inc.'s "This Way Ahead", and UBS, among others. Some of these company's benefits include:

#### ***Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG & E):<sup>7</sup>***

- Ten percent higher retention rate at PG & E and 98 percent retention rate among graduates of the PowerPathway™ initiative.
- Three-to-1 ROI gained by PG & E, due to accelerated time-to-productivity.

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<sup>3</sup> The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth, 2012. [http://www.serve.gov/new-images/council/pdf/econ\\_value\\_opportunity\\_youth.pdf](http://www.serve.gov/new-images/council/pdf/econ_value_opportunity_youth.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Measure of America, Halve the Gap, 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Carnevale, Anthony P., & Rose, Stephen J. (2011). [The Undereducated American](#). Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce.

<sup>6</sup> The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth, 2012. [http://www.serve.gov/new-images/council/pdf/econ\\_value\\_opportunity\\_youth.pdf](http://www.serve.gov/new-images/council/pdf/econ_value_opportunity_youth.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Corporate Voices for Working Families. Pacific Gas and Electric Company Case Study. 2012.

### **Southwire's "12 for Life" program:<sup>8</sup>**

- Currently, 667 students have received their high school diplomas. The new target is 800 graduates by the end of 2014.
- Thirty-nine percent of graduates have gone on to post-secondary education.
- Fifteen percent of graduates have been hired as full-time Southwire employees.
- Due to life skills training, all students have on-site access to file their tax returns.
- The overall graduation rate in the Carroll County Schools system, where Southwire is located, has increased by approximately 10 percent since the inception of "12 for Life." In addition, the graduation rate for economically disadvantaged students has increased over twenty-one percent.

### **Q: Why should companies hire someone without a college degree?**

**A:** Opportunity youth are resilient, motivated, hard workers who want to succeed, but who currently lack the resources to do so. These young adults may not have followed the standard education trajectory, but their life experiences have shaped them to be motivated, loyal, and of great benefit to employers when given an opportunity. Often they are well prepared for a job through training programs, but employers' assumptions about nontraditional resumes and life experiences prevent them from being considered at all.

### **Q: What kind of support is the "Grads of Life" campaign providing to employers and hiring decision makers?**

**A:** [GradsofLife.org](http://GradsofLife.org) is an online resource for employers that provides businesses of all sizes with the information, tools and resources they need to invest in and customize their own pathways to train, mentor and hire young adults. Resources featured on the website include:

- *Success Stories:* Employer success stories, highlighting the bottom-line business benefits for building employment pathways.
- *How-to-Guides:* Tips, best practices, and other useful information on the four employment pathways promoted by the platform: mentoring, school-to-work, internships, and hiring.
- *A National Partner Directory:* A vetted list of community-based partner organizations for employers to work with on building employment pathways.
- *Resources and Tools:* Events, news, research and other information for employers to learn about the campaign, opportunity youth and pathways to employment.

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<sup>8</sup> Employment Pathways Project. Southwire Company "12 for Life" Case Study. 2014.