

“Grads of Life” Spokesperson Talking Points

1. Today in America, an opportunity divide exists between six million talented young adults looking for educational and employment opportunities and businesses struggling to fill over four million vacant positions.¹ This divide has serious financial implications for our young adults, employers, and our economy.
2. The new “Grads of Life” campaign, through its public service announcement and website, is designed to shift perceptions of opportunity youth, young adults aged 16-24 who are out of school and out of work, from social liabilities to essential economic assets, and change business practices so that employers of all sizes engage in creating mentoring, internship, training and hiring pathways for these young adults.

At GradsOfLife.org, employers can learn about the value opportunity youth are bringing to companies nationwide, receive tips and guidance on how to establish employment pathways such as internships or hiring practices within their companies focusing on opportunity youth, and connect with local partner organizations who can help them do so.
3. The “Grads of Life” campaign is led by a coalition of non-profit partners including Year Up, the Employment Pathways Project, ConPRmetidos, MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership, the New Options Project, Opportunity Nation, Public Private Possibilities, and Young Invincibles. The campaign serves to close the opportunity divide, ensuring our young people, businesses, and communities thrive.
4. Opportunity youth represent Americans aged 16-24 who may not have followed the standard education trajectory, but their life experiences have shaped them to be motivated, loyal, and resilient. They can become valued employees as shown by the success of corporations across industries nationwide in hiring these young adults for internships, training, mentorships, and entry-level positions.²

The campaign seeks to change employer’s perceptions of opportunity youth and evolve social norms so that proven models of “employment pathways” – mentoring, school-to-work programs, internships, and other hiring opportunities – are widely recognized and used by competitive, best-practice employers.
5. The economic impact of this untapped employee base is far-reaching. According to research, this group of untapped talent will cost \$93 billion annually and \$1.6 trillion over their lifetimes in lost revenues and increased social services.³ Furthermore, over the next decade, the opportunity divide will continue to widen, with businesses facing a shortage of 12 million skilled workers by 2025.⁴ We must take action now or America will continue to lose its global competitiveness.

The Effect on Employers:

More than half of business leaders say their companies face a very or fairly major challenge in recruiting non-managerial employees with the skills, training, and education their company needs.

The United States is the only OECD nation in which postsecondary education rates have remained static over the last 40 years. At the same time, most new jobs in the United States – an estimated 64% of all jobs by 2018 – will require at least some postsecondary education and training.⁵

¹ Opportunity Nation, The Opportunity Index 2012 (Boston: 2013), accessed November 20, 2013, <http://opportunityindex.org/national-trends/>; Young Invincibles’ analysis of “Current Population Survey,” Bureau of Labor Statistics, US Census Bureau, accessed November 8, 2013, <http://younginvincibles.org/2013/11/young-invincibles-statement-on-october-jobs-report/>.

² 2 Employment Pathways Project. Southwire Company 12 for Life Case Study. 2014; 2 Corporate Voices for Working Families. Stepping Up Case Study. 2012; 2 Corporate Voices for Working Families. Expeditors’ Opportunity Knocks Case Study. 2012.

³ The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth, 2012. http://www.serve.gov/new-images/council/pdf/econ_value_opportunity_youth.pdf

⁴ Carnevale, Anthony P., & Rose, Stephen J. (2011). The Undereducated American. Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce.

⁵ Schleicher, Andreas. Education at a Glance 2011: Country Note - United States. OECD, 2011.

The Effect on Young Adults:

While six million young adults are completely disconnected from school and work, millions more – an estimated 30% of young adults in total – lack a stable connection to either, and face similar, long-term employment challenges.⁶

Only eight percent of young adults graduate from a 4-year college by their mid-twenties and only 40 percent of Americans earn an Associate's Degree or above.⁷

6. Employers report large dissatisfaction with the skills of new employees across all education levels – reflecting the need for work experience and job training regardless of educational background. Employers who have created pathways to employment (internships, training, mentoring, or hiring practices) for opportunity youth report significant business benefits, including cost-effective talent acquisition, increased retention, higher productivity, increased diversity, enhanced employee engagement, among others.⁸

Employment pathways can be customized, company-specific programs that train candidates in the precise skills that employers require. These models are low risk-high reward initiatives for businesses as they can see if a young adult can develop and meet a position's requirements, while allowing the opportunity youth to develop specific skills, build networks, and gain on-the-job experience.

When businesses build pathways to employment, local economies are strengthened, and previously disconnected young adults are connected to living-wage jobs, becoming taxpayers, home buyers and self-sufficient community members.

7. Opportunity youth, many of whom have experienced challenging life circumstances, are hardworking, resilient, loyal and motivated candidates for the millions of unfilled jobs across the country.

Seventy-three percent are confident or hopeful about achieving their goals, and 65 percent have a goal to finish high school or college and know they can achieve it.⁹

8. With all of America's help, from business leaders to personal networks, we can change perceptions employers may have about opportunity youth, help businesses learn how to create employment pathways for these young adults, and subsequently, develop pipelines of work-ready entry-level employees who will benefit their companies.

⁶ This is based on The Bridgespan Groups' analysis of several sources.

⁷ Pathways to Prosperity Project. Pathways to Prosperity: Meeting the challenge of preparing young Americans for the 21st century. Harvard Graduate School of Education, February 2011. Pg. 6

⁸ Corporate Voices for Working Families. CVS Caremark. 2012.

⁸ Pacific Gas & Electric Company. Video: <http://vimeo.com/58225752>

⁸ Corporate Voices for Working Families. Gap Inc. 2012.

⁹ Disconnected Youth Literature Review- February 2013. Pg. 8