

BEYOND THE HEADLINES

At a Glance: Opportunity Youth

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FOCUS: CITY OF SEATTLE

A More Complete Understanding of Opportunity Youth in Seattle

The purpose of this Beyond the Headlines is to better understand the demographics of young people (ages 16 to 24 years old) who are not working nor attending school. This group is commonly referred to as opportunity youth or disconnected youth¹. Approximately 51% of this population reported having a high school diploma or less in 2016, whereas 49% reported having some form of post-secondary education. Opportunity youth have been shown to contribute to declining economic and community conditions due to lost productivity, lost revenue, increased demand for welfare services and crime-related expenditures. This Beyond the Headlines makes recommendations on how to further research the opportunity youth population in Seattle and design higher quality solutions.

Education and Work Status

The majority of young people between the ages of 16 and 24 who live in Seattle are either working, attending school or both. However, between 4.5% and 6.2% of the population are doing neither.

Table 1. 16- to 24-year-old Seattle population by school and work status

School and Work Status	2016 American Community Survey (1-year estimates)		2016 American Community Survey (5-year estimates)	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Working and not attending school	33,864	37.9%	27,443	32.9%
Working and attending school	17,711	19.8%	18,788	22.5%
Not working nor attending school	4,032	4.5%	5,188	6.2%
Not working but attending school	33,485	37.4%	31,771	38.1%
Armed forces and not attending school	322	0.4%	271	0.3%
Total	89,414	100%	83,461	100%

Highest Level of Education

These young people who are not working nor attending school (opportunity youth) vary in age and level of education, with 51% to 53% reporting no postsecondary education.

Table 2. Seattle opportunity youth by education level

Education Level	2016 American Community Survey (1-year estimates)		2016 American Community Survey (5-year estimates)	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Less than high school diploma	1,026	25.4%	1,005	19.4%
High school diploma/GED	1,117	27.7%	1,622	31.3%
Some college	864	21.4%	1,006	19.4%
Associate's Degree	0	0%	261	5.0%
Bachelor's Degree or higher	1,025	25.4%	1,294	24.9%
Total	4,032	100%	5,188	100%

Demographics

The poverty status is known for 95% of the opportunity youth population. The table below highlights the groups that report a higher than average rate of opportunity youth who are living below poverty.

Table 3. Seattle opportunity youth poverty rates by group

Demographic Group	2016 American Community Survey (5-year estimates)			
	Below poverty		At or above poverty	
	Count	Rate	Count	Rate
White male, U.S. citizen	554	50.5%	544	49.5%
White male, foreign-born	*	*	*	*
White female, U.S. citizen	580	52.5%	524	47.5%
White female, foreign-born	151	70.6%	63	29.4%
Person of color male, U.S. citizen	350	75.3%	115	24.7%
Person of color male, foreign-born	148	58.3%	106	41.7%
Person of color female, U.S. citizen	519	51.3%	492	48.7%
Person of color female, foreign-born	577	80.1%	143	19.9%
Total	2,947	59.7%	1,987	40.3%
Poverty status unknown	254 individuals			

*suppressed due to low, unweighted sample size

Approximately 81% of the opportunity youth population have graduated from high school and many have enrolled in some form of postsecondary education. That said, the groups highlighted below report at or above average rates of opportunity youth (ages 19 to 24) who have no postsecondary education.

Table 4. Seattle opportunity youth postsecondary enrollment rates (ages 19-24) by group

Demographic Group	2016 American Community Survey (5-year estimates)			
	No Postsecondary Education		Postsecondary Education	
	Count	Rate	Count	Rate
White male, U.S. Citizen	494	44.1%	625	55.9%
White male, foreign-born	*	*	*	*
White female, U.S. citizen	312	32.5%	648	69.1%
White female, foreign-born	12	7.5%	147	92.5%
Person of color male, U.S. citizen	419	77.9%	119	22.1%
Person of color male, foreign-born	181	91.9%	16	8.1%
Person of color female, U.S. citizen	574	57.3%	428	42.7%
Person of color female, foreign-born	149	22.7%	506	77.3%
Total	2,162	46.0%	2,536	54.0%

*suppressed due to low, unweighted sample size

There are many definitions for person of color. In this article, “person of color” is defined as an aggregate of American Community Survey respondents who identified as Black or African American, Asian, Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander, two or more races or other. On the other hand, White is defined as an aggregate of American Community Survey respondents who identified as White alone or American Indian/Alaska Native. These two groups were created to provide a large enough sample size to make estimates. However, estimates are not available for the opportunity youth population in Seattle identifying as American Indian/Alaska Native (due to low sample size). It is important during any research process to ensure representation of all races. The following tables show the opportunity youth population in Seattle by race and ethnicity:

Table 5. Seattle opportunity youth by race

Race	Count	Percent	Poverty Rate	No Postsecondary Education
White	2,579	50%	54%	36%
Black or African American	817	16%	57%	78%
Asian	677	13%	88%	39%
Native Hawaiian/OPI	53	1%	57%	17%
Other	331	6%	55%	51%
Two or more races	731	14%	56%	49%
Total	5,188	100%	60%	46%

Table 6. Seattle opportunity youth by ethnicity

Ethnicity	Count	Percent	Poverty Rate	No Postsecondary Education
Not Hispanic/Latino	4,474	86%	61%	46%
Hispanic/Latino	714	14%	53%	49%
Total	5,188	100%	60%	46%

Location

The table below shows the geographic differences between the younger and older populations of opportunity youth.

Table 7. Seattle opportunity youth by age group and neighborhood

Neighborhood	Ages 16-18 (high school)		Ages 19+ (post-high school)	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Northwest	94	19.2%	516	11.0%
Northeast	58	11.8%	1,308	27.8%
Downtown/Queen Anne/Magnolia	76	15.5%	1,053	22.4%
Southeast/Capitol Hill	120	24.5%	1,021	21.7%
West/Duwamish/Beacon Hill	142	29.0%	800	17.0%
Total	490	100%	4,698	100%

Source: 2016 U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (5-year Estimates)

Recommendations for Further Research

All too often, data analysis is performed by analyzing one demographic variable at a time rather than analyzing detailed demographics. As such, solutions designed to help improve outcomes are often based on information that is not fully representative of each target population and their experiences. Therefore, the following recommendations are made:

- Gain a better understanding of the opportunity youth populations that are in need of training and support. This is best done through qualitative and immersive research. It is likely that the training and support necessary to help these individuals become connected citizens will differ by demographic group.

Based on current data, the key opportunity youth populations to research regarding postsecondary enrollment are:

Demographic Group	No Postsecondary Education
Person of color male, U.S. citizen	78%
Person of color male, foreign-born	92%
Person of color female, U.S. citizen	57%

The key opportunity youth populations (ages 19 to 24) to research regarding opportunity are:

Demographic Group	Poverty Rate
White female, foreign-born	71%
Person of color male, U.S. citizen	75%
Person of color female, foreign-born	80%

- Employment and training providers should explore a co-design approach to program development where a representative sample of the target population assists in the design process. This approach allows the experiences and context of the target population to guide the design. A major benefit of co-design is that you have in-depth “customer insight” which is often absent during the design phase. For example, the target population may be able to provide insight about how the design is unfair to them or other individuals sharing their circumstances. A good example would be a homeless youth sharing that the proposed start times for training classes (say 9 a.m.) will make it difficult to shower (given a 2-mile hike to the shower location) and catch public transportation to the training location.
- Use location data to determine the best neighborhoods to intervene. For example, solutions designed for the high school age population may be better placed in the neighborhoods of Northwest, Southeast/Capitol Hill, and West/Duwamish/Beacon Hill whereas solutions designed for those who are 19 to 24 years old may be better placed in the neighborhoods of Northeast, Downtown/Queen Anne/Magnolia, and Southeast/Capitol Hill. This assumes that the solutions for the two groups will differ in some form.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2016 American Community Survey (1-Year and 5-Year Estimates)

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About Seattle Jobs Initiative

Seattle Jobs Initiative creates opportunities for students, workers and business to succeed by helping education and job training programs meet the demands of a new economy. We find and apply solutions for people to gain the skills they need for good jobs that create prosperity for all in today’s marketplace.

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Contact Information

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1 Disconnected youth. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disconnected_youth
Accessed February 23rd, 2018
