



# Youth Employment Partnership

### Working for Better Futures

Lack of work skills and education presents a very real barrier to young Oakland parolees looking for a new start in life. Research has shown that when offenders are employed after release, recidivism rates are reduced<sup>1</sup>, but the majority of these young adults are not ready for work. Many did not complete high school and have few workplace skills that translate to stable, high-demand jobs. Without these critical skills, these young adults have a 76.6% chance of re-incarceration within three years<sup>2</sup>. This is where the Youth Employment Partnership steps in.

Reforming young offenders is one of the top priorities of this Oakland, California private non-profit agency. Founded in 1973, YEP has served over 20,000 teens and young adults ages 14-24 through its programs focusing on job readiness training, leadership development, violence prevention, re-entry readiness, substance abuse treatment, tutoring and GED instruction.

The YEP Career Try-Out program provides students with valuable job training and GED instruction. The program begins with three 40-hour weeks of job readiness training, and then the students select a career field to try. Options include construction, parks and recreation, human services, and office work, while some gain entrepreneurial experience working at The Training Grounds, a YEP-owned café located at the Oakland International Airport.

Students are required to attend one hour of educational instruction for each hour they work. The GED lab at YEP works with approximately 50 students per day, averaging 25 per class. Each incoming student is given the Wonderlic General Assessment of Instructional Needs (GAIN)<sup>®</sup> test, a basic skills assessment that evaluates

their English and math levels and provides detailed diagnostics to aid the teacher with creating an individual learning plan.

YEP has also incorporated the Steck-Vaughn GAIN Essentials curriculum into the GED lab. This curriculum series is matched up to the GAIN report, allowing teachers to target their instruction with laser precision.

Leighton AhPo, GED Instructor/Coordinator for Youth Employment Partnership, has found GAIN to be an invaluable tool. “We needed better and faster diagnostics to help us guide our students,” he states. “GAIN cuts down on the amount of time we spend initially with each client getting them figured out and lets us move on to teaching more quickly.”

In the past, Leighton and his colleagues would spend over two weeks putting together a strategy for each student. Now, thanks to GAIN, it takes “just a few days.”

“We’re now able to focus our efforts right where each student needs it,” he explains. **“No more trying to interpret lengthy, confusing reports. It’s really a time-saver for both the teachers and the students.”**

Another benefit Leighton is seeing is the level of enthusiasm in his students. Describing them as normally “very serious,” he is now seeing their faces light up when they see their GAIN report. “Getting their score right away helps motivate them in ways we couldn’t do before,” he says. “They see their educational levels, and they’re proud of their accomplishments. They take their report home to show their family.”

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This pride and motivation is keeping the students at Youth Employment Partnership engaged. So much so, that YEP is beginning to see their program completion and GED pass rates improve – after only six months of using GAIN.

“We’re able to get our students going immediately in specific areas,” he explains. “It affords us the opportunity to move test-ready clients through more quickly, and spend more time with those who need more help and interaction.”

Those same detailed diagnostics also guide teachers at YEP in transitioning the students they cannot help in the classroom into individual tutoring programs much earlier than they had in the past.

Leighton wants to see continued growth in completion rates for all of their clients. Success in the program means a better chance for these young adults to move on to productive, stable futures, and GAIN is playing an important role in getting them there.

“We love GAIN. It’s a very accurate measure. It’s an instantaneous measure,” Leighton says. “It’s been very beneficial for our clients and our program.”



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### Sources

1. Berkeley Center for Criminal Justice. *Reaching a Higher Ground: Increasing Employment Opportunities for People with Prior Convictions*. [Online] November 2010. [Cited: February 10, 2011.] [http://www.law.berkeley.edu/files/Final\\_EO\\_Master\\_Complete.pdf](http://www.law.berkeley.edu/files/Final_EO_Master_Complete.pdf).
2. California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. *One, Two and Three Year Follow-up Recidivism Rates*. [Online] July 2009. [Cited: February 10, 2011.] [http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/Reports\\_Research/Offender\\_Information\\_Services\\_Branch/Annual/RecidivismByCounty/RecidivismByCounty2005.pdf](http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/Reports_Research/Offender_Information_Services_Branch/Annual/RecidivismByCounty/RecidivismByCounty2005.pdf).

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