

# Disconnected Young Adult Study Final Report

Submitted to:

Berks County Workforce Development Board  
United Way of Berks County



United Way of Berks County



Submitted by: THOMAS P. MILLER & ASSOCIATES

## Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	4
Introduction .....	8
Purpose and Background .....	8
Previous Research.....	9
Summary of Research Methodology .....	10
Survey Analysis.....	11
Survey Response Rates and Generalizability .....	11
Demographic Profile .....	11
Causes of Disconnection .....	15
Finances .....	18
Community Services Accessed.....	20
Typical Day .....	22
Additional Services Needed .....	23
Focus Group Feedback.....	24
How Disconnected Young Adults Spend Their Time.....	24
Types of Employment .....	25
Challenges and Barriers .....	25
Needs .....	27
Service Provider Feedback.....	28
Generational Poverty   Barrier .....	28
Locating Disconnected Young Adults   Barrier.....	29
Non-Traditional Services Providers   Resource .....	29
Disconnected Young Adults Form a “Network”   Trend.....	29
Summary of Findings.....	29
Multiple Barriers .....	29
Information Disconnect between Young Adults and Providers.....	33
Consistency with National Research.....	34
Recommendations .....	35
How to Reach Disconnected Young Adults.....	35
How to Assist Disconnected Young Adults in Accessing Programs.....	37
How to Keep Disconnected Young Adults Engaged.....	38
Conclusion.....	39

Appendices..... 41

    Appendix A – Research Methodology..... 41

    Appendix B – Focus Group Facilitation Guide..... 50

    Appendix C – Young Adult Survey (English) ..... 52

    Appendix D – Young Adult Survey (Español)..... 59

    Appendix E – Friends and Family Survey (English and Spanish) ..... 66

### Executive Summary

In January 2017, the Berks County Workforce Development Board (Workforce Development Board or WDB), together with the United Way of Berks County (United Way), contracted Thomas P. Miller & Associates, LLC (the Research Team) to conduct a mixed-methods research study on the disconnected young adult population of Berks County, Pennsylvania. The primary objectives of the study were to better understand the reasons young adults are disconnected, how they pay for what they need, and to provide a context for developing strategies to engage and assist disconnected young adults.

The data gathered through this research project is intended to build a foundation for the Workforce Development Board to better market to, assist, and create programs for disconnected young adults in Berks County. The report includes data and findings from all portions of the mixed-methods research study, including the Disconnected Young Adult Survey, community focus groups, and community engagement efforts. Many local service organizations provided valuable knowledge and background information regarding the culture of Berks County and the disconnected young adult population in the area. These conversations helped to inform focus group discussion guides, outreach strategies, and survey development.

Throughout this study, the definition of a “disconnected young adult” is defined using the guidelines set forth by the WDB as an individual who resides in Berks County, PA and fits one of the following criteria at the time of the study:

1. An individual aged 16 to 24 who has neither been in school nor employed for a period of at least six (6) months at the time of the study; or
2. A young adult aged 21 to 24 who is underemployed (would like full-time work but has settled for part-time work, or is employed in a position that is inadequate with respect to their skills/training).

### Survey Analysis

In total, **145 complete and qualified respondents**<sup>1</sup> were included in final survey analysis. Of these responses, 69 were from friends and family members, and 76 were from disconnected young adults themselves. More information about survey design, distribution, qualification and response rates are available in the [full Research Methodology Section](#) (Appendix - A) of the report.

- There were more males (53.4%) than females (43.9%) in the disconnected young adult population
- More than half of the disconnected young adults were Hispanic or Latino (55.4%)
- Half of this population lives with their parents, either both parents (18.2%) or one parent (33.1%)
- Seven in ten disconnected young adults primarily speak English at home (70.9%), and one-fourth speak Spanish (23.6%)
- Young adults in Berks County have been disconnected from school on average for two and a half years, and disconnected from employment for nearly a year.

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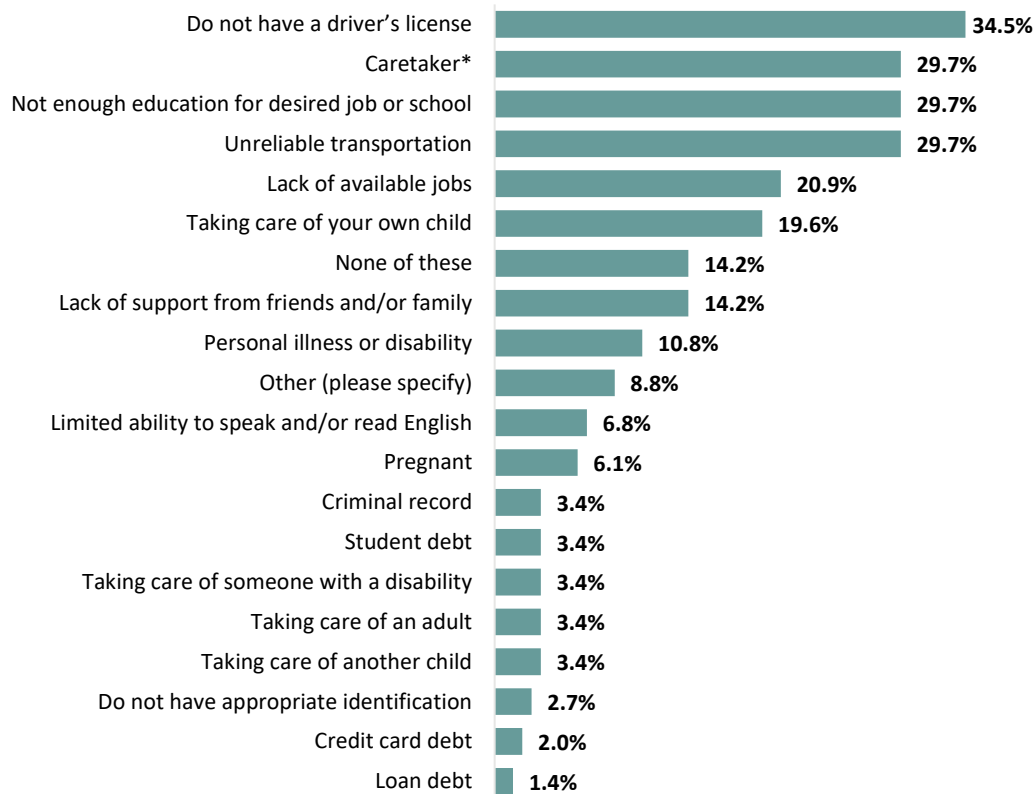
<sup>1</sup> Complete and qualified responses are those who fit the definition of disconnected young adult, or someone who identified they knew a disconnected young adult, and completely answered the survey.

Only 5.4 percent of disconnected young adults find it easy or very easy to pay for what they need each month, and these youth were more likely to report “none of these” when stating the reason for disconnection (21.4%) than young adults who said they could pay for what they need (11.5%). Parents serve as the largest source of income for one-third of disconnected young adults (35.8%), however government sources of aid are the most commonly reported source of income (54.1%). While many young adults receive benefits such as food stamps, TANF, unemployment, or Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), these supports are not their largest source of income, and likely are not enough to help the young adult have enough to pay for what they need each month.

Disconnected young adults face barriers that directly or indirectly impact their ability to be employed and/or enrolled in school. Half of disconnected young adults cited more than one reason for disconnection (52.0%) and nearly one in five report having four or more (18.9%). The top reason for disconnection for young adults in Berks County is transportation, as 34.5 percent do not have a driver’s license, and 29.7 percent reported unreliable transportation or difficulty accessing transportation.

Serving as a primary caretaker for someone else is tied for the second most common reason for disconnection in Berks County (29.7%), which is consistent with national research on this population. Also tied for second is not having enough education for work or for additional education opportunities (29.7%). More than four in five disconnected young adults have not completed education past a high school diploma or equivalent (81.8%), and half of disconnected young adults dropped out of high school (50.0%).

### Reasons for young adult disconnection.



\*Caretaker includes: taking care of your own child, taking care of someone with a disability, taking care of an adult, and taking care of another child

### Findings

The findings in this report combine data gathered through the survey, focus groups, and service provider interviews to provide a unique view of the disconnected young adult population in Berks County, PA. Three major themes emerged from the study: 1) young adults face multiple and varied barriers, 2) there is an information disconnect between young adults and service providers, and 3) the data from this study is consistent with national research.

#### Multiple Barriers

Disconnected young adults in Berks County often face one or more barriers to being employed and/or enrolled in school. In the survey, 90 percent of respondents reported experiencing life circumstances that are common barriers to employment or education, and nearly 86 percent reported at least one of these circumstances was a barrier for them. However, even when barriers are not a direct reason for being disconnected, they add to the difficulty to find employment or further a young adult's education. Additionally, life circumstances that are not barriers themselves may contribute to disconnection when paired with other life circumstances. On average, half of young adults face more than one reason for being disconnected (52.0%), and everyone's combination of life circumstances is different. Regardless of which combination of barriers a young adult faces, national literature has shown that having a greater number of barriers is related to worse outcomes over time.

The top barriers disconnected young adults in Berks County face include:

- Lack of Transportation
- Obligations for Family Care
- Immediate Needs for Making Money vs Investing in a Career
- Barriers to Pursuing Education

#### Information Disconnect between Young Adults and Providers

The methodology and findings of the project point to some areas of shared understanding and other areas in which responses from service providers and disconnected young adults differ. Although over half of young adults access at least one community service, one-third of young adults access no services (33.7%), or only access government support services (28.2%). Additionally, focus group participants state that they, and other disconnected young adults they know, are unlikely to spend time trying a service organization unless they feel confident the organization can assist them.

Service providers who contributed to the study were confident that disconnected young adults are networked with each other, and felt one disconnected young adult would be able to connect them to many more in the county. However, in focus groups and the survey, disconnected young adults reported they spend a significant amount of time at home, on social media, taking care of someone, or on the computer or playing video games. Furthermore, service providers struggled to identify where young adults spend the majority of their time, and were unsure what services in the community this population currently accessed. Young adults in focus groups indicated that they spend their time at parks, libraries, tattoo parlors, and gyms.

### Consistency with National Research

Findings from this study of disconnected young adults in Berks County mirror national findings in a variety of ways. For example, significant portions of the disconnected young adult population serve as caretakers or have a disability. Additionally, nationally and in Berks County, disconnected young adults rarely pursue education after a high school diploma or equivalent. Lastly, disconnected young adults are likely to live with one or both parents, mirroring national findings. The national research on disconnected young adults is outlined in the Previous Research section of the full report.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings in the report, the Research Team provided recommendations for community and governmental organizations that seek to serve disconnected young adults. The sections below are not comprehensive of the useful insights that the research outlined herein can provide, but rather were chosen for one of two reasons, 1) because they are widely applicable to a variety of service providers in the county, or 2) because they would require a community effort (rather than a single program) to enact.

#### How to Reach Disconnected Young Adults

In determining how to best reach disconnected young adults, the theme across all recommendations was to build trust. When building trust, it is important to provide services that clearly meet immediate needs, as pushing too hard on more in-depth time intensive services may alienate disconnected young adults. Another way to build this trust is to provide an easy-access entry point for services in Berks County that has incredibly useful basic information, then encourage young adults to take one step closer to in-depth services. Some examples of easy-access points include: (1) safe spaces, (2) online outreach, and (3) partnering with natural allies.

#### How to Assist Disconnected Young Adults in Accessing Programs

In order to increase service usage, individuals who are aware of a program being offered must not have substantial barriers to partaking in that service. Eliminating or reducing common barriers to service could provide disconnected young adults better access to services. Recommendations for improving access to services for disconnected young adults include:

- Provide transportation, child care, and/or online services
- Ensure services are available for low income families who might not be eligible for federal programs
- Support and publicize research about job skills needed in the community and how to find which companies are hiring for those skills

#### How to Keep Disconnected Young Adults Engaged

Each individual needs different supports to be successful, and some of those supports require longer-term intervention. Finding ways to keep disconnected young adults motivated and engaged for the entirety of an in-depth program, especially as the family and living situations in that individual's life change, can prove difficult for service providers. Two important ways to keep disconnected young adults engaged in services include: (1) connecting them to caring adults, and (2) providing meaningful and interesting content in a hands-on applied settings.

## Introduction

### Purpose and Background

In January 2017, the Berks County Workforce Development Board (Workforce Development Board or WDB), together with the United Way of Berks County (United Way), contracted Thomas P. Miller & Associates, LLC (the Research Team) to conduct a mixed-methods research study on the disconnected young adult population of Berks County, Pennsylvania. The primary objectives of the study were to:

- Better understand the reasons young adults are disconnected, and whether these reasons are legitimately keeping young adults from attending school or working;
- Better understand how poor, disconnected young adults are paying for everything they need each month; and
- Provide a context for the WDB concerning disconnected young adults in the development of young adult strategies.

The Workforce Development Board has responsibility for long-term strategic planning to meet Berks County's workforce development needs. This includes planning, analysis, oversight, evaluation and monitoring, and the development and cultivation of partnerships within the Berks County community and/or on a regional basis.

In the summer of 2014, Congress passed the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) to replace the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998. Included in this change, there was a shift in the focus of funds for youth activities. WIOA requires a minimum of 75 percent WIOA youth funds to be spent on out-of-school youth, an increase from the 30 percent requirement in WIA.<sup>2</sup> With this shift in funding, Workforce Development Boards were required to shift how they focused their youth activities and who they served. Out-of-school youth are often more challenging to serve because they are disconnected from school and work and are difficult to reach and retain in services. In the fall of 2015, at the recommendation from the Youth Committee, the WBD determined to devote 100 percent of WIOA youth funds to out-of-school youth. Due to this shift in funding, the Berks County Workforce Development Board issued a Request for Proposals for an independent organization to conduct a study of the disconnected young adult population in the county.

The data gathered through this research project is intended to build a foundation for the Workforce Development Board to better market to, assist, and create programs for disconnected young adults in Berks County. The report includes data and findings from all portions of the mixed-methods research study, including the Disconnected Young Adult Survey, community focus groups, and community engagement efforts.

As described in detail in the section below, estimating the number of disconnected young adults in the nation proves difficult for researchers, and is even harder for sub-national regions of analysis since the

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<sup>2</sup> United States Department of Labor. (n.d.). Fact sheet: Youth program. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. Employment and Training Administration. Retrieved from [https://www.doleta.gov/wioa/Docs/WIOA\\_YouthProgram\\_FactSheet.pdf](https://www.doleta.gov/wioa/Docs/WIOA_YouthProgram_FactSheet.pdf)



smallest geographic area typically measured is the top 100 metropolitan areas.<sup>3</sup> For this project, the Research Team analyzed the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey public use microdata to provide an estimated range of the number of disconnected young adults in Berks County. Based on the available data, there could be approximately 3,000 – 5,000 disconnected young adults in Berks County, PA, or 7-10% of 16 to 24 year olds in the county.

### Previous Research

The definition of a disconnected young adult varies among research studies nationally, and different studies use different terms such as out-of-school youth, opportunity youth, or disconnected youth to describe the population. In general, a disconnected young adult is an individual ages 16-19 or 16-24 who are neither enrolled in school nor employed. Differences in defining the term “disconnected young adult” among studies is a barrier to forming consensus about this population among researchers in the field. However, most researchers are able to estimate the size of the population using data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS) microdata, using three- or five-year estimates to compensate for small sizes in the one year estimates.

While studies using ACS microdata are able to capture the demographic and economic status of the disconnected young adult population, they are not able to examine reasons why the young adults are neither in school or employed or the effects of such disconnection.<sup>4</sup> Studies examining these reasons and effects at a national level reported the following:

More than one-third of disconnected young adults have an illness or disability that prevents them from obtaining work (34.4%), and one-fourth report being disconnected because they take care of a family member or child (26.4%). The same study found that one-third of young adults were not disabled and were not taking care of family, but disconnected simply because they could not find work.<sup>5</sup>

National research has shown that 80.8 percent of disconnected young adults nationally have not pursued education past a high school diploma or GED, yet by 2020, 65 percent of available jobs will require some sort of postsecondary education credential.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, three in five disconnected young adults live with one or both parents and 44.0 percent live in poverty.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ross, M. & Svajlenka, N. P. (2016). Employment and disconnection among teens and young adults: The roll of place, race, and education. Brookings Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/research/employment-and-disconnection-among-teens-and-young-adults-the-role-of-place-race-and-education/> and Lewis, K. Burd-Sharps, S. (2015). Zeroing in on place and race. Youth disconnection in America’s cities. Measure of America of the Social Science Research Council. Retrieved from <http://ssrc-static.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/MOA-Zeroing-In-Final.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Fernandes-Alcantara, A. L. (2015). Disconnected youth: A look at 16 to 24 year olds who are not working or in school. Congressional Research Service. Retrieved from <https://fas.org/spp/crs/misc/R40535.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Georgetown Public Policy Institute (2010). Recovery: Job Growth and Education Requirements through 2020. Retrieved from: [https://cew.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Recovery2020.ES\\_Web\\_.pdf](https://cew.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Recovery2020.ES_Web_.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

Being disconnected can have long-term negative consequences for young adults, including lower incomes, lack of health insurance, and difficulty getting or keeping a job. Additionally, these young adults are more likely to be poor, have difficulties in school, suffer from mental health problems, and be teen parents.<sup>8</sup>

Factors such as parental employment, family poverty level, and parental educational attainment are shown to increase the chance of a young adult being disconnected.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, historic rates of disconnection in neighborhoods have been shown to be highly predictive of current youth disconnection in that neighborhood.<sup>10</sup>

This study adds to the body of research by using a mixed-methods community-based approach to examine the disconnected young adult population in a smaller county-based region of analysis. Previous research has studied young adults who are disconnected at the time of the study, or who have been disconnected for a period of less than three months, which makes this study's requirement of at least six months of disconnection unique. Other factors that make this study unique include surveying friends and family members on behalf of disconnected young adults as well as the disconnected individual themselves, and focusing the research on information that can be used by community organizations in the county to provide more targeted services to this population.

### Summary of Research Methodology

The methodology for this study uses a mixed-methods approach to examine the demographics, challenges, and needs of disconnected young adults in Berks County, PA. Data collection methods for this study are bulleted below. Each of these data sources are described in greater detail in [Appendix A – Research Methodology](#).

The project began with a launch meeting with representatives of the Workforce Development Board, United Way of Berks County, and other service providers and partners in the community. Throughout the project, the Research Team had conversations with service providers regarding the culture of Berks County, and to learn more about disconnected young adults in the county. These conversations helped to inform focus group discussion guides, outreach strategies, and survey development. The survey was launched shortly following the launch meeting, and remained open for 12 weeks. Eight weeks into survey data collection, the Research Team hosted four in-person focus groups with disconnected young adults and their family members. In sum, the research presented in this report comes from three sources:

- Focus group insight from disconnected young adults and their friends and family members in the county
- Guidance from individuals who work in Berks County social service agencies
- Survey feedback from disconnected young adults and their friends and family members in the county

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<sup>8</sup> Hair, E. C., Moore, K. A., Ling, T. J., McPhee-Baker, C. & Brown, B. V. (2009). Youth who are “disconnected” and those who then reconnect: Assessing the influence of family, programs, peers, and communities. Child Trends Research Brief. Retrieved from <https://ncfy.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/docs/18790-Youth Who Are Disconnected and Those Who Then Reconnect.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Fernandes-Alcantara, A. L. (2015). Disconnected youth: A look at 16 to 24 year olds who are not working or in school. Congressional Research Service. Retrieved from <https://fas.org/spp/crs/misc/R40535.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Lewis, K. Burd-Sharps, S. (2015). Zeroing in on place and race. Youth disconnection in America's cities. Measure of America of the Social Science Research Council. Retrieved from <http://ssrc-static.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/MOA-Zeroing-In-Final.pdf>

Throughout this study, the definition of a “disconnected young adult” is defined using the guidelines set forth by the WDB as an individual who resides in Berks County, PA and fits one of the follow criteria at the time of the study:

1. An individual aged 16 to 24 who has neither been in school nor employed for a period of at least six (6) months at the time of the study; or
2. A young adult aged 21 to 24 who is underemployed (would like full-time work but has settled for part-time work, or is employed in a position that is inadequate with respect to their skills/training).

The research questions guiding this study are:

- What are the characteristics of disconnected young adults in Berks County?
- How do disconnected young adults spend their time?
- What are the sources of income for disconnected young adults?
- Why are disconnected young adults not employed and not in school?
- What services do disconnected young adults use and what services do they need?

## Survey Analysis

### Survey Response Rates and Generalizability

Based on American Community Survey microuse data, the Research Team estimates the true population of disconnected young adults to be between 3,000 and 5,000 in Berks County, PA. In total, **145 complete and qualified respondents**<sup>11</sup> were included in final survey analysis. Of these responses, 69 were from friends and family members, and 76 were from disconnected young adults themselves. More information about survey design, distribution, qualification and response rates are available in the [full Research Methodology Section](#) (Appendix - A) of the report.

Given the number of respondents observed for this survey, the Research Team is 95% confident that responses to the survey accurately reflect the attitudes and beliefs of the disconnected young adult population within an 8% margin of error. This means that, generally speaking, the data reported herein +/- 8% represent the true value in the population.

### Demographic Profile

Survey respondents were asked to identify a variety of demographic information to provide context and a basic understanding of the disconnected young adult population in Berks County. The following demographic profile shows the characteristics of survey respondents that serve as a representative sample of the disconnected young adult population in the county.

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<sup>11</sup> Complete and qualified responses are those who fit the definition of disconnected young adult, or someone who identified they knew a disconnected young adult, and completely answered the survey.

### Gender and Age

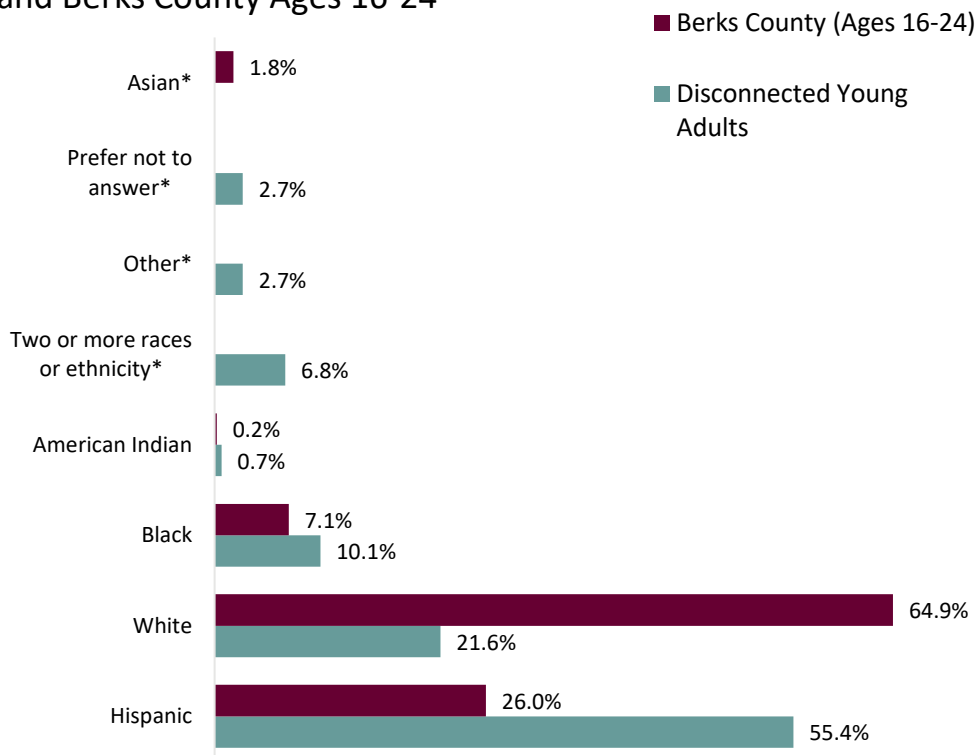
The disconnected young adult population in Berks County includes slightly more males than females, and is made up of a relatively equal percentage of younger adults (ages 16-20) and older young adults (ages 21-25).

- 53.4 percent of disconnected young adults are male, 43.9 percent female, and 1.4 percent other. An additional 1.4 percent preferred not to answer
- Half of disconnected young adults are ages 21-24 (50.0%) and 46.6 percent are 16-20. An additional 3.4 percent did not provide the month of birth to calculate age.

### Race, Ethnicity, and Language

Over half of disconnected young adults are Hispanic or Latino (55.4%), one-fifth were White (21.6%) and one-tenth were Black (10.1%). There was less than seven percent of all other races and ethnicities (Two or more races or ethnicity – 6.8%; Other – 2.7%; American Indian or Alaska Native – 0.7%; Prefer not to answer – 2.7%). Comparatively, the total Berks County population ages 16-24 is primarily White (64.9%), one-fourth Hispanic (26.0%), and less than one-tenth Black (7.1%).<sup>12</sup>

### Race and Ethnicity of Disconnected Young Adults and Berks County Ages 16-24



Berks County Source: Easy Access to Juvenile Populations

*\*Easy Access to Juvenile Populations uses different race and ethnicity categories than the study survey.*

<sup>12</sup> Puzzanchera, C., Sladky, A. & Kang, W. (2016). Easy Access to Juvenile Populations: 1990-2015. Retrieved from: <http://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/ezapop/>

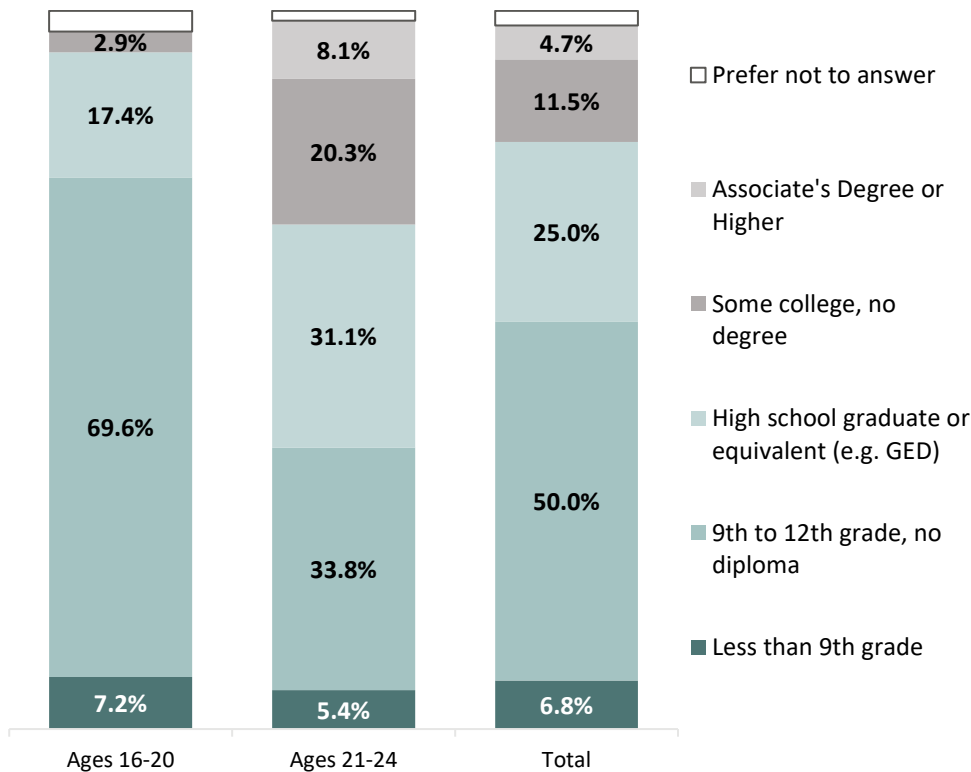
Seven in ten disconnected young adults speak primarily English at home (70.9%). While more than half of disconnected young adults are Hispanic or Latino, only one-fourth speak Spanish primarily at home (23.6%). An additional 4.7 percent report speaking both English and Spanish at home, while 0.7 percent speak a language other than English or Spanish.

## Educational Attainment

Half of disconnected young adults last attended school at Reading School District (50.0%). The next most frequently reported Berks County school district was Muhlenberg Township (5.4%); however, Other was more frequently reported (14.2%). Some respondents indicated the young adult last attended school in a different country, such as Mexico, Puerto Rico, or Dominic Republic, while some attended schools in the surrounding counties, such as Allentown Schools.

While two in five disconnected young adults have at least a high school diploma or equivalent (41.2%), most disconnected young adults do not continue education past high school. More than four out of five disconnected young adults have not continued education past high school (81.8%). Higher levels of education have been shown to protect young adults against unemployment and increase the chance for economic success. Research has shown that nationally, individuals with some college or an associate’s degree earned a median income that was more than 20 percent higher than peers with only high school diplomas.<sup>13</sup>

### Disconnected young adults rarely continue education past high school.



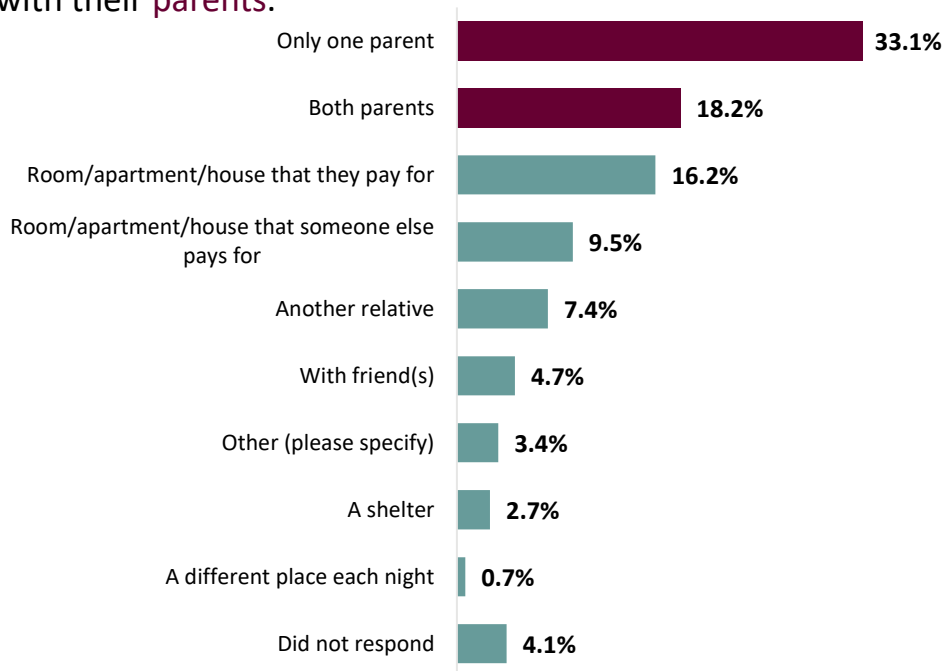
<sup>13</sup>U.S. Census Bureau. (2016). 2015 American Community Survey 5-year estimates. Retrieved from: factfinder.census.gov

Educational attainment differs by age group for Berks County disconnected young adults, as older young adults are more likely to have at least their high school diploma than their younger peers. Older disconnected young adults, those in the 21-24 year old range, are more likely to have attended college at some point without earning a degree (20.3%). An additional 8.1 percent have an associate's degree or more education. Only 2.9 percent of younger disconnected young adults, ages 16-20, have college experience, and none have a post-secondary degree.

### Living Arrangements

In the past month, disconnected young adults were most likely to live with one parent (33.8%), or both parents (18.2%). Less than one-fifth of disconnected young adults live in a room, apartment, or house that the young adult pays for (16.2%). One in five older disconnected young adults live in a room, apartment, or house that they pay for (20.3%) compared to one in ten younger disconnected young adults (10.1%). While living with one or both parents is the most common place of residence for disconnected young adults in both age groups, three in five younger adults lived with their parents in the last month (60.9%), compared to 44.6 percent of older disconnected young adults.

### Disconnected young adults are likely to be living with their **parents**.



### Time of Disconnection

Survey respondents were asked to identify the last month and year the young adult was employed, and the last month and year they were in school. For these questions, 91 respondents gave a valid response for the date of last school enrollment, and 57 gave a valid response for the date of last employment.

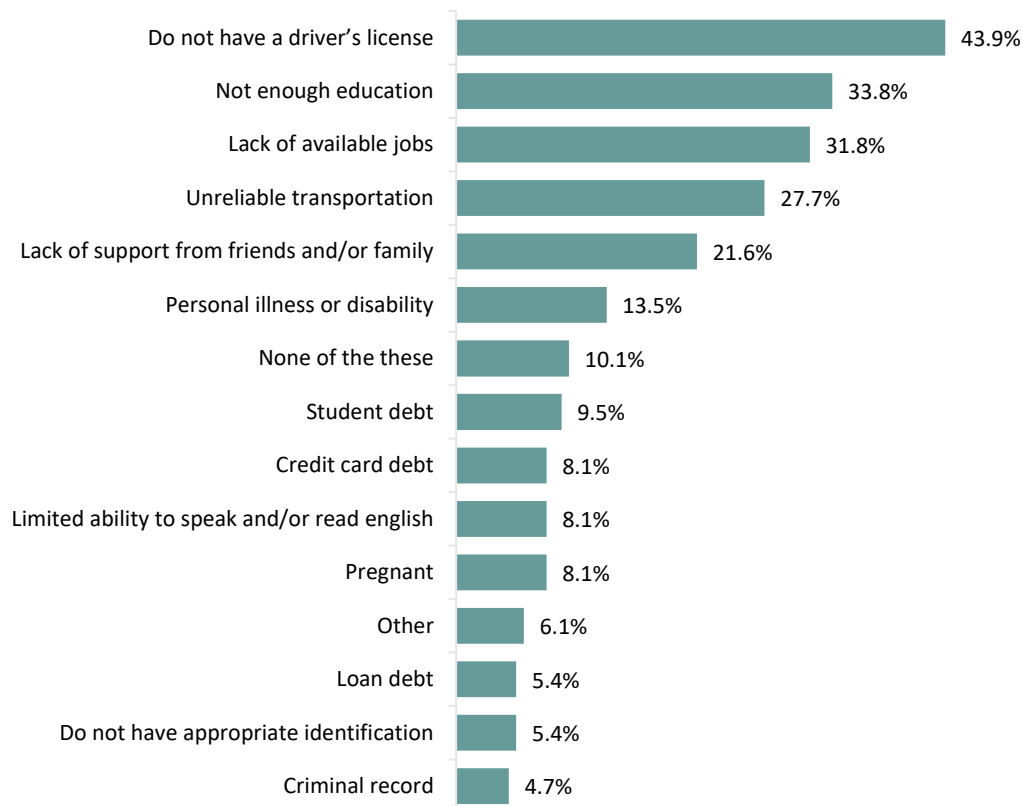
Using the data provided, on average young adults have been disconnected from school for 2.4 years, and have been disconnected from employment for 0.9 years. On average, those 16-20 have been disconnected for 1.5 years, compared to nearly three years for those ages 21-24 (2.9 years). For disconnected young

adults who did not complete high school, the average time for being disconnected from school was 2.0 years.

## Causes of Disconnection

Survey respondents were asked to indicate from a list, which items describe their current situation. The list included potential reasons for young adult disconnection based on previous research and community partner recommendations. Following this question, respondents were asked which of these options, in addition to serving as a caretaker, were *why* the young adult was currently disconnected. Half of disconnected young adults cited *more than one* reason for disconnection (52.0%) and nearly one in five report having four or more reasons for disconnection (18.9%).

### Life circumstances disconnected young adults face



## Transportation

Disconnected young adults do not have reliable, consistent means of transportation to go to work or school, as 43.9 percent do not have a driver's license, and 27.7 percent reported unreliable transportation or difficulty accessing transportation. Additionally, transportation is the most common cause of disconnection in Berks County. Not having a driver's license (34.5%) was the top reason, and unreliable transportation (29.7%) was tied for the second reason for disconnection, along with serving as a caretaker and not having enough education for their desired job or further education. Transportation is the top reason for disconnection for both younger and older disconnected young adults.

### Disability or Personal Illness

While disability or personal illness was only chosen as a life circumstance faced by 13.5 percent of young adults, earlier in the survey 23.0 percent indicated having at least one type of physical, mental or emotional condition that affected their lives, and nearly half of those young adults have more than one condition. Research has shown that nearly one-third of young adults are disconnected due to disability or illness that prevents them from continuing education or obtaining employment. Similar to the life circumstances faced by young adults, fewer young adults indicated disability as a reason for disconnection than those who indicated they had a disability.

Of those with any type of condition:

- 85.3 percent have difficulty remembering, concentrating, or making decisions because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition
- 41.2 percent have difficulty doing errands alone, such as visiting a doctor's office or shopping because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition
- 11.8 percent have difficulty walking or climbing stairs
- 8.8 percent are deaf or have serious difficulty hearing
- 5.9 percent are blind or have serious difficulty seeing
- 2.9 percent have difficulty bathing or dressing
- 14.7 percent have another chronic health condition

### Caretaking

The next most common reason for disconnection among young adults nationally is taking care of their own child, another child, or an adult. One-third of Berks County disconnected young adults serve as a caretaker, or regularly provide primary care for an adult or child (30.4%)<sup>14</sup>. The majority of young adults who are a caretaker provide primary care for their own children (71.1%). Survey respondents indicated young adults are also responsible for taking care of their parents (15.6%), siblings (13.3%), grandparents (6.7%), other family members (4.4%), someone with a disability (4.4%), or someone else (4.4%).

Taking care of their own child was reported by one-fifth of young adults to be a reason for disconnection (19.6%) and serving as a caretaker for someone, their own child or someone else, is tied for the second highest reason for disconnection in Berks County. Nearly three out of ten young adults are disconnected because they are serving as a primary caretaker (29.7%).

### Lack of Education

One in three young adults do not have enough education to obtain the employment they want, or to continue furthering their education. Not having enough education for a desired job or further education (29.7%) was also tied for the second most common reason for disconnection. Over one-third of disconnected young adults ages 21-24 cited this as a reason for disconnection (35.1%), compared to one in five disconnected young adults ages 16-20 (21.7%). As stated in the previous [Demographic Profile](#) section, more than four out of five disconnected young adults have not continued education past high school. For older young adults, those ages 21-24, only 8.1 percent have a post-secondary degree, and 20.3 percent have had some college experience.

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<sup>14</sup> 2.7 percent of respondents did not answer this question.



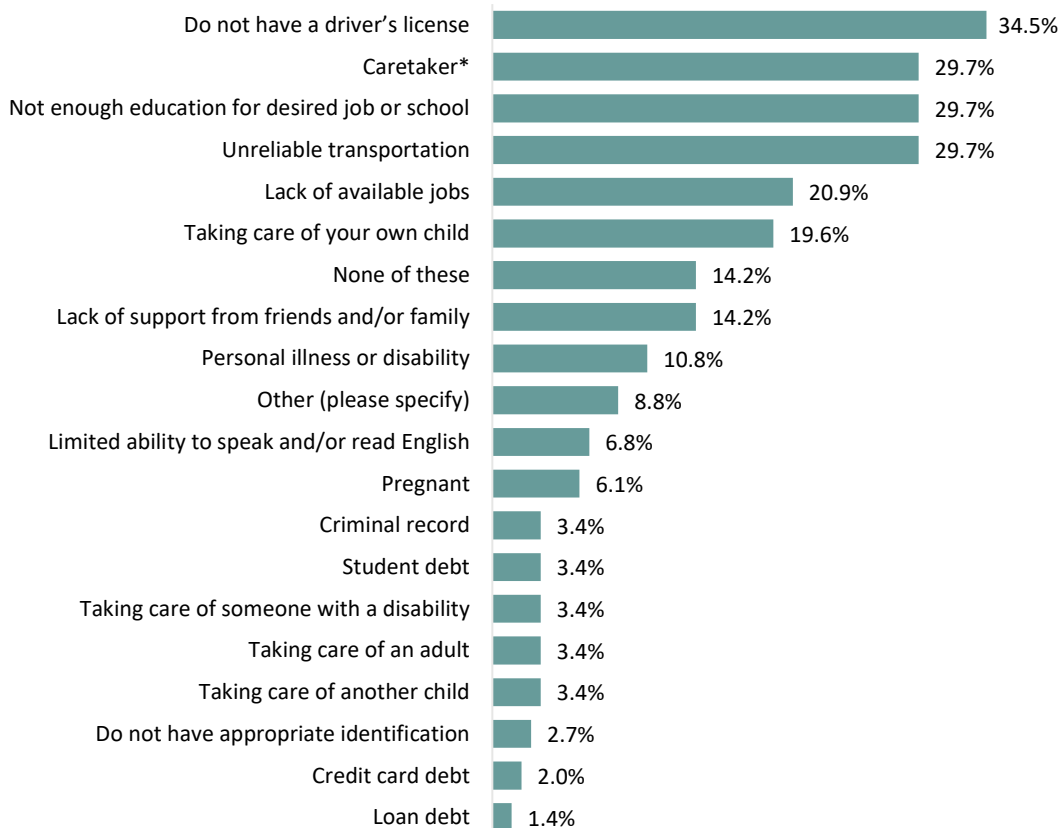
## Additional Causes of Disconnection and Life Circumstances

Disconnected young adults face a variety of reasons for disconnection, and many face more than one reason. In Berks County, some young adults have a limited ability to speak and/or read English, lack appropriate identification, have a criminal record, or are pregnant. One-fifth of disconnected young adults report not having support from friends and/or family (21.6%) and this is a reason for disconnection for one in seven disconnected young adults (14.2%).

Only one out of ten disconnected young adults explicitly stated they do not face any of the life circumstances provided in the list, and did not offer any other potential barriers to employment or education. More than one in ten respondents indicated that none of the available options were a reason why the young adult was disconnected, including the “other” option. One in five disconnected young adults ages 16-20 indicated none of the options were a reason for disconnection (20.3%), which is more than twice the rate of disconnected young adults ages 21-24 (9.5%).

For those who did indicate a different reason than those provided, these included: being unsure of how to get better work, not being able to find a job that would allow them to work with their disability, being kicked out of home or school, and a lack of motivation or work ethic.

## Reasons for young adult disconnection.

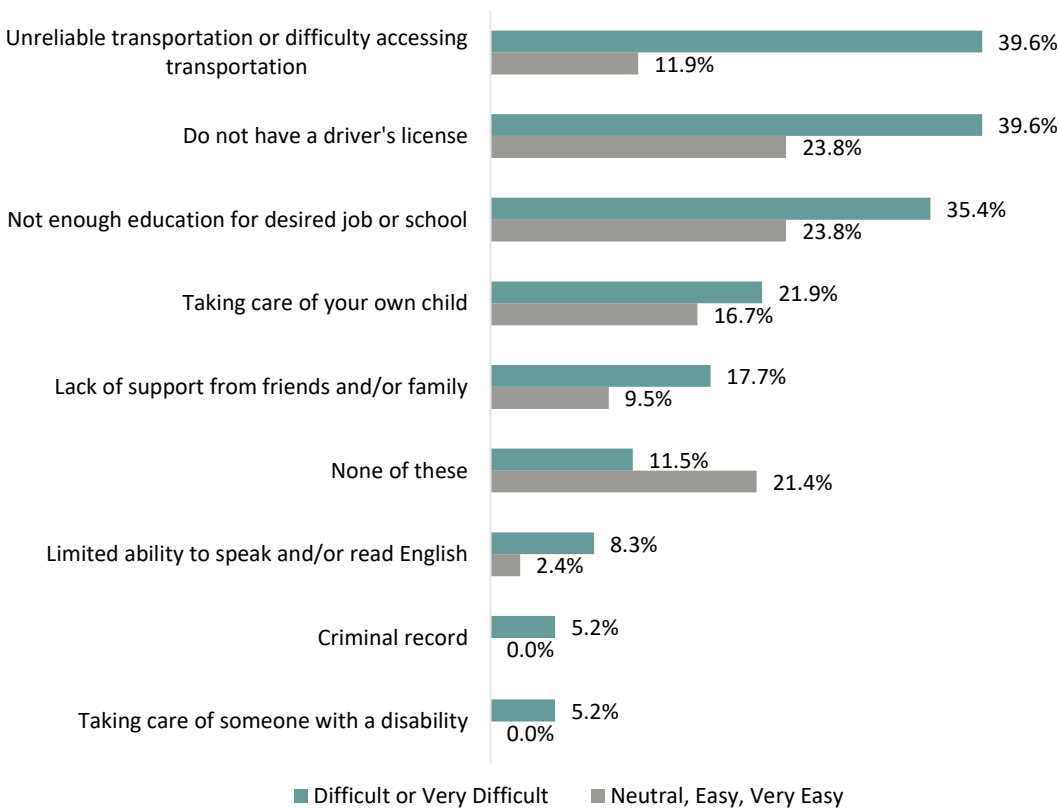


\*Caretaker includes: taking care of your own child, taking care of someone with a disability, taking care of an adult, and taking care of another child

## Finances

Paying for what they need every month is not an easy task for disconnected young adults in Berks County. Only 5.4 percent reported it was easy or very easy to pay for what they needed each month. Nearly one-fourth of respondents indicated that it was neutral, and for nearly one-third of disconnected young adults, it is difficult or very difficult. Young adults who have a neutral, easy, or very easy ability to pay for everything they need each month have different reasons for disconnection than those who find it difficult or very difficult. Those who do not find it difficult to pay for their monthly necessities were more likely to report “none of these” when stating the reason for disconnection (21.4%) compared to the other young adults (11.5%). Those who have difficulty paying for what they need are much more likely to have difficulty with transportation than those who do not find it difficult, with an over 25 percentage point difference between the groups. The graph below examines the nine reasons for disconnection that have more than a five percentage point difference between disconnected young adults who find it difficult to pay for what they need, and those who do not.

### Reasons for disconnection with more than 5 percentage points difference, by ease of paying for necessities

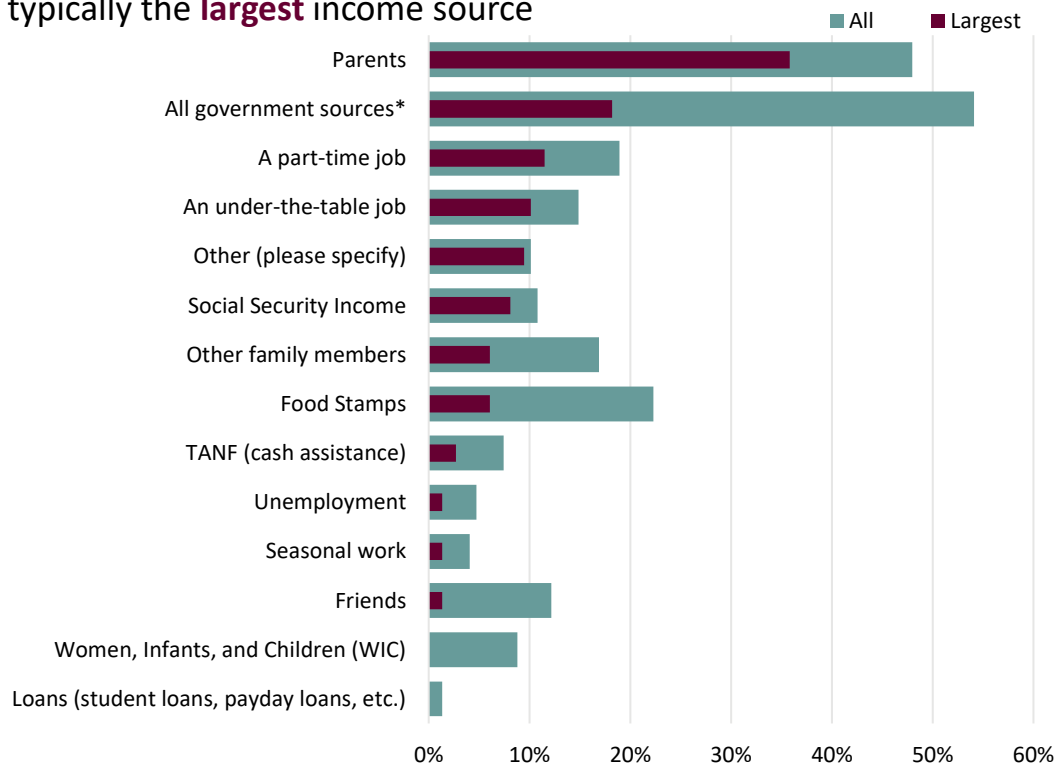


Parents were the most frequently reported source of income for disconnected young adults (48.0%). While young adults ages 16-20 (56.5%) were more likely to cite parents as a source of income than those ages 21-24 (39.2%), parents were the most frequent for both age groups as well. However, when all forms of government assistance were combined (Women, Infants and Children (WIC), TANF, Food Stamps, Social

Security Income (SSI), and Unemployment), it becomes the most frequently reported income source, with over half of disconnected young adults utilizing these services as a source of income (54.1%). Of the types of government assistance, Food Stamps are reported to be the most used, as more than one in five young adults receive this benefit (22.3%).

While food stamps are the second most common income source, when asked about disconnected young adults' largest source of income, Food Stamps fall to the fifth highest, with only 6.1 percent of survey respondents indicating this to be the primary source of income. Parents were most frequently indicated as the largest income source, with over one-third of respondents indicating this (35.8%). One out of ten report a part-time job to be a young adult's largest source of income, and one out of ten also report an under-the-table job as the largest income source. The figure below<sup>15</sup> compares the differences between the largest source of income survey respondents indicated for disconnected young adults, and the total income sources reported for this population. This graph illustrates that while many young adults receive benefits such as Food Stamps, TANF, unemployment, or Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), these supports are not their largest source of income, and likely are not enough to help the young adult have enough to pay for what they need each month.

## Government assistance is frequently utilized, but is not typically the **largest** income source



\*Includes the totals from Social Security Income, Food Stamps, TANF, Unemployment, and Women, Infants, and Children

<sup>15</sup> 6.1 percent of survey respondents did not indicate their largest income source.

### Community Services Accessed

More than half of disconnected young adults access at least one community service in Berks County (56.1%) while one-third of disconnected young adults do not access any community services (33.8%).<sup>16</sup>As highlighted in the [Additional Services Needed](#) section, young adults often do not know what services exist in Berks County or what service might be beneficial for them.

Young adults who do access services are most likely to access government services. The top three services accessed by disconnected young adults are government community services: Food Stamps (41.2%), WIC (16.2%), and SSI (12.2%). Additionally, 28.2 percent of young adults *only* access government support services (i.e., Food Stamps, TANF, SSI, WIC, and Housing/Rent assistance) and not any community-based service.

The most utilized community services, not including government support, include:

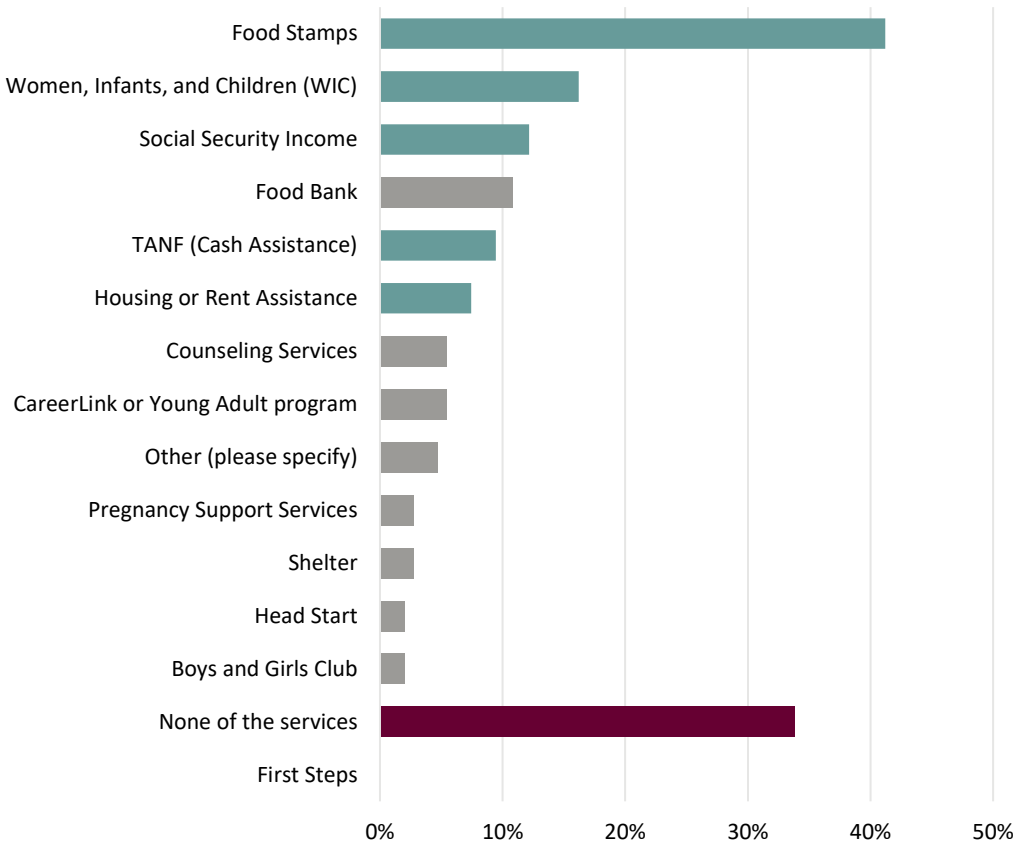
- Food banks (10.8%)
- Counseling services (5.4%)
- PA CareerLink® services, including the Young Adult program (5.4%)

Other community services young adults indicated accessing (i.e., those who gave a specific service when responding “other”) include libraries, Feet on the Street Ministries, and Services Access Management.

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<sup>16</sup> 10.1% did not respond to this question

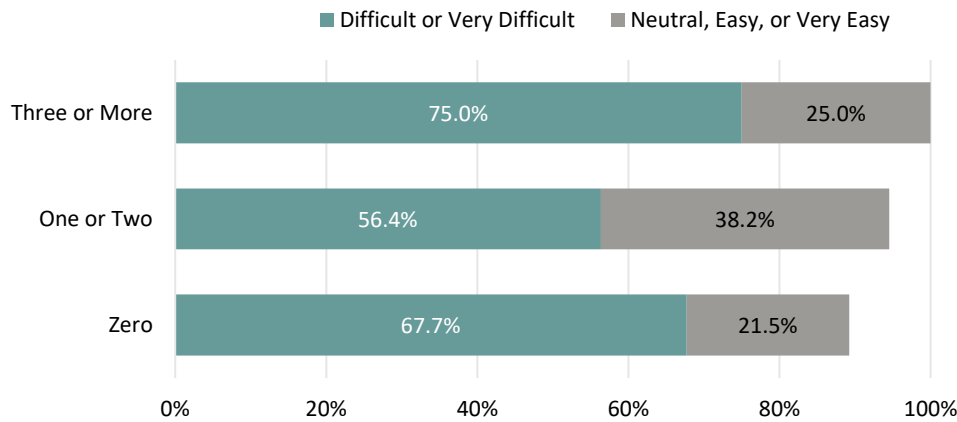
Disconnected young adults are most likely to access **government assistance** or **no community services**.



Young adults who are connected to community services do not have regular, consistent contact with service providers. On average across all services, disconnected young adults access community services once a month. Shelters and Boys and Girls clubs were accessed more often, on average, than once a month. However, only 13.3 percent of all those who accessed services accessed any service more frequently than monthly.

The number of services a young adult accesses does not have a significant impact on the ability for a young adult to pay for what they need. Three-fourths of young adults who report not accessing community services find it difficult or very difficult to pay for what they need (75.0%), compared to 67.7 percent of those who access more than three services, highlighted in the graph below.

Accessing more services does not make it easier for young adults to pay for monthly necessities.

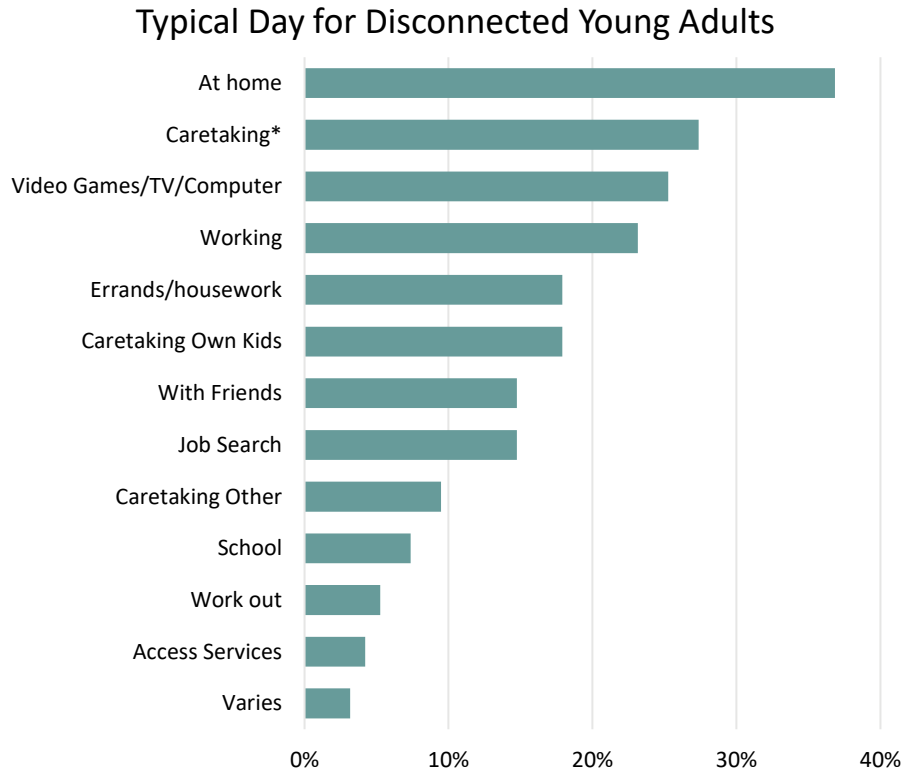


### Typical Day

Disconnected young adults most commonly spend their time at home, with 36.8 percent indicating staying at home as part of their typical day.<sup>17</sup> Nearly one-third of the young adults spend their typical day providing care for someone, either their own children (17.9%) or someone else (14.7%). A quarter of young adults spend time playing video games, watching TV, and on the computer or social media sites (25.3%). Young adults spend time working either part-time, under-the-table, or seasonal jobs (23.2%). Disconnected young adults also spend their time running errands for themselves, their families, or doing housework (17.9%). A quarter of young adults themselves report they spend time searching for jobs (23.9%), though friends and family members who completed the survey were not as likely to report job searching to be part of a young adult’s typical day (6.1%).

Young adults did not report spending their time at any particular location in the community, other than their own home or with friends. Disconnected young adults often report fulfilling family and household responsibilities, and needing to take care of their children, siblings, parents, and themselves during the day. One young adult reported that it is difficult to get much done during the day due to the lack of transportation options, thus spending the majority of his/her time “on a bus or walking.” Disconnected young adults also reported that the barriers they face, including responsibilities, disabilities, and lack of education make it difficult to find better employment or to be more productive with their time.

<sup>17</sup> 35.8% of respondents did not answer this question.



*\*Caretaking is the combination of Caretaking Own Kids and Caretaking Other*

## Additional Services Needed

Survey respondents were asked what services would be useful for disconnected young adults that are not currently available in Berks County, and 42.8 percent, or 65 respondents, provided an answer. The most common response was more jobs and/or internships for young adults (30.6%). Disconnected young adults also need financial support, including tuition and scholarships to continue education, and money to provide food for their families (17.7%). Nearly one-fifth of respondents were not sure what services would be useful to disconnected young adults (17.7%). Additional services requested include:

- Counseling
- Daycare
- Disability services, and jobs for those with a disability
- Housing Support
- LGBTQ+ services, including a shelter, and specifically services for transgender youth
- Medical help
- Mentoring
- A place to spend time
- Skills training or education programs
- Soft skills training
- Transportation

Additionally, one survey respondent felt that young adults need a guide to help them navigate all of the services that Berks County does offer so they can be aware of what services exist and how to best access these services.

### Focus Group Feedback

In order to provide context and story-telling to supplement the survey research for this study, the Research Team hosted three (3) focus groups with a total of eight (8) disconnected young adults and/or their friends and family members and one (1) in-person service provider interview. These focus groups were hosted in neutral, accessible spaces across Berks County, PA on April 20 and 21, 2017. The Research Team partnered with community organizations in the region to plan and invite participants to these group sessions. The three focus groups and one interview were held at three locations:

1. The Cabela's retail store in Hamburg, PA (interview);
2. The PA CareerLink® Berks County Offices in Reading, PA; and
3. The United Community Services YouthBuild program space in Reading, PA.

The purpose of these focus groups was to supplement information gleaned through the survey by allowing young adults to share their stories and feelings with fuller context than was available in the survey instrument. Individuals in these focus groups were asked both about their own experiences and about the experiences of their friends or siblings who also were disconnected. Therefore, responses to each question are stated in "I" responses as well as in "they" responses. Additional information about the methodology behind focus group planning and selection are available in [Appendix A – Research Methodology](#).

### How Disconnected Young Adults Spend Their Time

Focus group participants described disconnected young adults as primarily spending their time at home, playing video games or spending time with friends and family members. Across the board, participants described young adults in this population spending a significant amount of time on social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and live video game chatrooms. Some young adult focus group participants described disconnected young adults in Berks County as being "interconnected," and spending time together, while others described disconnected young adults as spending much of their time alone.

Specific locations that focus group participants described as "public hangouts" for young adults who are disconnected from school or employment include:

- City Park;
- Reading Library;
- Boxing gyms or the gym at Reading Area Community College (RACC);
- Berkshire Mall;
- Pike Park;
- The Pagoda;
- Plasma centers;
- Tattoo parlors; and
- The bowling alley.



### Types of Employment

Focus group participants described the most common types of employment held by disconnected young adults as seasonal and “under the table.” Common positions that focus group participants described themselves or their friends as holding include general labor, cleaning, landscaping, nightclub security, waitressing, fast food positions, or basic factory work. Focus group participants also described drug dealing or running as an easy source of income for disconnected young adults in Berks County.

In addition to earned income, at least one participant in each of the four focus groups said that many disconnected young adults rely on public assistance benefits (e.g. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP or Food Stamps), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Social Security Income (SSI)) as an alternative to employment. Focus group participants said that while these benefits are minimal, for many it is enough to get by; and often, they have never had an income greater than the federal requirements for receiving these benefits. Focus group participants said that some disconnected young adults receive public assistance or disability benefits for themselves, while other receive benefits on behalf of their children.

### Challenges and Barriers

While focus group participants described the challenges and barriers of disconnected young adults being truly “case by case,” the specific challenges and barriers described can be summarized in the themes below. These themes are organized from the most to the least frequently reported.

#### Unsupportive Environment

The most frequently reported barrier to education and employment among focus group participants can be generally described as a “culture of poverty.” Participants described specific pockets of Berks County as lacking a “culture to succeed.” Young adult participants described being “brought up to be factory workers,” saying that not only did they lack outright support from their friends and family members to get a job, but also that when they seek to return to school or to work, there is community pressure not to.

Young adults described often being around “people who bring them down,” saying that they feel their friends and family do not want to see them start doing better; that their friends and family members would prefer for them to spend time at home or focusing on making money in the immediate. Young adult participants said that this discouraged them from returning to school or certain forms of employment, because their community made them feel as though they would not be able to succeed or that their efforts would not matter in the end.

#### Lack of Education

Focus group participants described a lack of education as a barrier to returning to school or employment. Lacking a high school diploma and having limited English comprehension or proficiency (for both native and non-native English speakers) were described as key barriers. Focus group participants said that even people who *do* graduate high school are not necessarily properly educated. Participants described a crowded school with poor accountability that enabled students to “cut school” or be absent from the classroom. They also perceived the expectations in the high school as “low” and stated that students are just “pushed through” without teachers taking the time to assess their skill level.

### Current Obligations

Financial and familial obligations were mentioned as barriers to returning to school. Both the cost of continuing education programs and the impact of reducing the hours they are able to work are key barriers to returning to school or another educational program.

Participants also described family childcare obligations as a barrier to returning to school or work. Focus group participants said while some disconnected young adults are prevented from returning to school or employment because they are caring for their own children, the majority are caring for their younger siblings or their siblings' children. In the latter case, these young adults are often serving as the caretaker because the parent or guardian is a primary income producer for the household.

### Drug Use, Abuse, and Dealing

At least one participant in each focus group described drug use, abuse, and dealing as barriers to returning to school or employment. Some focus group participants described drugs (use, dealing, or both) as a common factor affecting the lifestyles of disconnected young adults. One young person described friends who would "sit at home all day waiting for the call [to deliver drugs]," and another said, "they stay in all day then are out at night when they can work [dealing or running drugs]."

Drug dealing was described as a demotivating factor because it is easier and faster to generate income dealing or running drugs than in a regular job, whereas addiction-related behaviors were described as making it difficult for young adults to hold down a job, or fear of drug testing preventing them from applying to certain jobs.

### Feeling Like it's "Too Late"

Young adult focus group participants in three of the four focus groups described a pervasive feeling of "missing their chance" or that school is no longer an option for them. Young adult participants said that they "feel different" reentering educational spaces and that they are not sure that they can "do it" anymore. Participants also expressed a perceived lack of educational opportunities saying, "RACC is the only one who will accept kids like us."

### Homelessness

Participants in each of the four focus groups described personally experiencing or knowing a young person that had or was currently experiencing homelessness. Participants described this as making it impossible to even begin considering reconnecting with school or employment because all of their energy was focused on meeting their basic, day-to-day needs.

### Disabilities

Participants in three of the four focus groups described knowing a young adult who was limited in their ability to secure employment because of a physical or emotional disability, though they were unable to describe specific circumstances or how this affected their ability to find or retain employment.

### Lack of Documentation

One focus group participant described lack of proper documentation as a challenge for disconnected young adults. This participant noted that it is difficult to describe just how common this barrier is because many individuals are secretive about their documentation status.

### Needs

Focus group participants were asked to describe the needs of disconnected young adults and the types of services that would be helpful in connecting young adults to educational or employment services. The needs and prospective resources described during these focus groups are grouped thematically, below.

#### Safe Space

The most commonly reported need described by focus group participants was the need for a “safe space.” Focus group participants said that young adults are not inherently trusting of adults or service providers, and that they would be more likely to accept assistance if they were able to do it on their own time. Focus group participants described wanting a place that they can “just chill,” relax, feel safe, and identify the services and next steps that make the most sense for them when they are truly ready to make a change. Focus group participants suggested a neutral location on Penn Street would be the most accessible and would capture the young adults who are most in need of a safe space to spend time.

#### Someone Who Cares

The second most frequently described need was the presence of an adult who cares. Focus group participants said that the presence of a caring and consistent adult is a “game changer” for young adults who are discouraged by friends and family members who do not think that they can succeed or that trying to make a change is worth their efforts. Focus group participants described the need for a mentor – someone who “checks up on them,” “push[es] them,” and “stay[s] involved” even if they backslide or make slow progress. Focus group participants emphasized that no change will happen quickly for a young person, and that a long-term commitment is necessary to see meaningful progress.

One participant described the difference in programs with adults who care by saying that in high school there was a class that he went to once a month because the class was so out of control he couldn’t learn anything. When he went back to clean out his locker on the last day, the teacher said, “what are you doing here?” rather than “where have you been?” or “is everything okay?” The participant mentioned that the teacher’s comment made him feel uncared for. He then contrasted this experience with his current General Education Development (GED) program saying he’s doing so well because the adults care, they ask how he’s doing, and they follow up if he doesn’t show up or isn’t doing well.

#### More GED Options

Focus group participants in each of the four focus groups described a need for more and different GED options, saying that GED programs in the high schools have similar barriers as their original high school experience. Additionally, participants mentioned that multiple locations would make GED programs more accessible for young adults across Berks County, and that more information about GED programs should be available via web or other advertising.

Participants also stated that the content of GED courses was a barrier to completing. They said that a more challenging curriculum would make young people feel like coming every day was worth their time. Multiple focus group participants said that many GED programs in Berks County are not challenging, and often, young people feel that they are not learning anything so it is not worth continuing to participate.

### Online Resources

In each of the four focus groups, participants identified the need for online resources and online advertising of resources. Focus group participants indicated that disconnected young adults spend much of their time, and find most community information, online. Participants specifically identified the need for local service providers to better advertise the resources they have available on social media platforms, as many young adults are not aware of what is available to them. Focus group participants suggested advertising resources on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, through television advertisements or call-outs, and on the Reading Eagle smartphone app. In two focus groups, participants independently offered the idea that service providers begin offering basic services online, such as intake forms and online Question and Answer (Q&A) chatrooms, so that young adults can determine if a service is right for them without the burden of identifying transportation to visit the location first.

### Soft Skills

Participants identified the need for expanded soft skills training for young people in Berks County. Participants said that many young people are “on their own by freshman year,” and that they often do not learn basic life skills, which makes it difficult for them to finish school or gain employment. Participants suggested that it is also important to provide basic job skills training for things like interviewing and creating a resume.

## Service Provider Feedback

As new community service providers joined the group of partners for this project, the Research Team conducted thirty-minute one-on-one phone interviews with each. These calls were used to gather additional contextual information about the work that service providers are conducting in Berks County, as well as their observations of the needs, challenges, and demographics of disconnected young adults in the county. These calls were also leveraged to invite community partners to support the project, and time was spent identifying partnership opportunities between the Research Team and the community partner. Of the over 100 community partners that were invited to participate in a one-on-one interview, thirty-two (32) community partners accepted the invitation. Interview participants included all levels of staff from youth-serving organizations to medical service providers, juvenile detention offices, for profit businesses, and other social service providers who do not directly focus their efforts on serving youth. Though personal observations varied dependent on the type of connection the interviewee had to the disconnected young adult population, the following themes and ideas emerged across the interviews:

### Generational Poverty | Barrier

Interviewed service providers described the specific barriers that disconnected young adults face under the overarching theme of “generational poverty.” Service providers described a lack of community motivation, saying that often parents and siblings also have not completed high school or secured meaningful employment, so there is little family motivation to seek employment or educational support services. Service providers also described many disconnected young adults as caretakers for their family – leaving school to make money or leaving work to care for younger siblings or siblings’ children. One service provider described some parents and guardians as actively discouraging their child from participating in educational or work programs and refusing to drive them to appointments. Another service provider

suggested that parents who are struggling to “make ends meet” simply do not have the time to focus on their child’s achievement, so whether or not they stay in school is not “on their radar.”

### Locating Disconnected Young Adults | Barrier

According to interview participants, the biggest single barrier to serving the disconnected young adult population in Berks County is not being able to identify challenges and barriers, or developing programming, it is simply locating these young adults to invite them to receive services. Across the board, service providers expressed that they were “at a loss,” and unsure of where and how disconnected young adults spend their time. Service providers speculated that they must be “sitting at home playing video games,” or “spending time with their friends and families”, but could not identify a clear public space where young adults could be identified or program information could be shared.

### Non-Traditional Service Providers | Resource

Service providers interviewed described non-traditional service providers as key resources for many disconnected young adults, particularly those who reside in the rural corners of the county. Specific non-traditional service providers that were described include rod and gun clubs, fire companies, churches, and high schools (in cases where the high school serves as a community hub and provides links to services for parents and caregivers of children).

### Disconnected Young Adults Form a “Network” | Trend

Consistently, service provider interviewees described disconnected young adults in Berks County as “networked,” saying that many of these young adults know each other and are either friends or family members (siblings, cousins, etc). Interview participants described situations where if they could “find one” disconnected young adult, that the young adult could successfully connect them with many others, if they chose to.

## Summary of Findings

The focus groups, survey, and service provider interviews work together to provide a unique view of the disconnected young adult population in Berks County, PA. The mixed-methods approach for this study provided opportunities for different data sources to corroborate each other, add value to each other, and in some cases even dissent from each other. This summary of findings section allows the Research Team to review major themes from the report by referring to and combining findings across data collection methods.

### Multiple Barriers

Disconnected young adults in Berks County often face one or more barriers to being employed and/or enrolled in school. However, they don’t always identify their barriers as the reason that they are disconnected. In the survey, 90 percent of respondents reported experiencing life circumstances that are common barriers to employment or education, and nearly 86 percent reported at least one of these circumstances was a barrier for them.

However, even when barriers are not a direct reason for being disconnected, they add to the difficulty to find employment or further a young adult's education. For example, while having some type of debt is only reported as being a reason for disconnection by 6.8 percent of young adults, nearly one in four have some type of debt. Young adults rely on parents and government assistance for financial support, but even with these supports, only one in 20 disconnected young adults find it easy or very easy to pay for what they need.

Additionally, life circumstances that are not barriers themselves may contribute to disconnection when paired with other life circumstances. On average, half of young adults face more than one reason for being disconnected (52.0%), and everyone's combination of life circumstances is different. Regardless of which combination of barriers a young adult faces, national literature has shown that having a greater number of barriers is related to worse outcomes over time.

For example, a study conducted in 2002 reported that TANF users were more likely to face multiple barriers to work (50.4%) than individuals who recently stopped receiving TANF support (37.5%) or did not use TANF support (37.9%). The same study suggests that no one barrier causes the most unemployment, but rather that individuals have multiple and different barriers to work and each situation is unique.<sup>18</sup> Below are the life circumstances that survey and focus group respondents commonly reported as barriers to employment and/or education.

### Lack of Transportation

Not having a driver's license is the top reason young adults in Berks County cite for being disconnected (34.5%), and unreliable transportation or difficulty accessing transportation is the second most common reason for disconnection (29.7%). For young adults who find it difficult to pay for what they need, this rate is even higher at 39.6 percent for both unreliable transportation and lack of a driver's license.

National research on barriers to employment support this finding, showing that the lack of a driver's license and lack of a car are seen by residents as primary barriers to employment.<sup>19</sup> The study indicates that the geographically speaking, the available labor market for potential workers with a car is much larger than the market for workers who were limited to the county bus lines. Even if low-income workers at one point had a license, getting that license suspended is a great obstacle. Another study showed that the most significant barriers to license reinstatement has to do with heavy fines and insurance surcharges.<sup>20</sup>

In Pennsylvania, about 93 percent<sup>21</sup> of individuals ages 15-84 have a driver's license, and the other seven percent rely largely on public transportation to get to work. In addition to giving unemployed workers a

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<sup>18</sup> Loprest, P. & Zedlewski, S. (2006). The Changing Role of Welfare in the Lives of Low-Income Families with Children. Retrieved from: [http://webarchive.urban.org/UploadedPDF/311357\\_occa73.pdf](http://webarchive.urban.org/UploadedPDF/311357_occa73.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Pawasarat, J., & Stetzer, F. (1998). Removing Transportation Barriers to Employment: Assessing Driver's License and Vehicle Ownership Patterns of Low- Income Populations. Retrieved from: [http://dc.uwm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1135&context=eti\\_pubs](http://dc.uwm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1135&context=eti_pubs)

<sup>20</sup> Zimmerman K. & Fishman N. (2001). Roadblock on the Way to Work: Driver's License Suspension in New Jersey. Retrieved from: <http://www.mobilityagenda.org/roadblocktowork.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> Pennsylvania Department of Motor Vehicles (2016). Pennsylvania Driver Statistics. Retrieved from: <http://www.dmv.pa.gov/Pages/Pennsylvania-Driver-Statistics.aspx>



greater geographic labor market, an efficient bus systems in nonurban areas allow more low-income households to save money on transportation and distribute these funds to other essential expenses.<sup>22</sup>

When asked about public transportation in Berks County, service providers reported that it can take hours to get across the county, and that the bus lines are infrequent and missing a bus can add considerable time to one's commute. Service providers also report that bus stops are more frequent in the City of Reading, but for young adults outside of the city, it is even more difficult to access transportation.

### Family Care & Immediate Employment are a High Priority

Both focus group participants and service providers described disconnected young adults living in communities that value immediate employment and family duties above education and career employment. One in five disconnected young adults lack reliable support from their friends and/or family members (21.6%), and one in seven state this as a reason why they are disconnected (14.2%).

Both national research and Berks County individuals support the idea that disconnected young adults often do not have family or social support to pursue education and career goals. Focus group participants and service providers reported that young adults are often discouraged from seeking additional education or training. Similarly, research shows that generational poverty may contribute to young adult priorities around working and career advancement. Two such studies found that “parents who were child laborers themselves are more likely to send their children out to work” rather than into education or training programs,<sup>23</sup> and that individuals who grew up in poverty often do not believe that education was meaningful for them.<sup>24</sup>

Disconnected young adults in Berks County also expressed the need to take care of their families, parents, and siblings as part of their typical day, showing that the familial responsibilities are important to these young adults. Additionally, providing care for someone is the second most common way disconnected young adults reported spending a typical day. National research shows that 17 percent of families with young children living in poverty have had childcare problems that caused someone in their family to quit, not take, or greatly change their job.<sup>25</sup>

Berks County survey responses show that one-third (30.4%) of disconnected young adults serve as a caretaker to their own children, other adults, siblings, grandparents, and others, and 17.2 percent spend the day running errands or doing housework for their family. In the focus groups and in the survey, having a need for reliable, affordable daycare or babysitting services was reported as a needed service in the community. Young adults who are providing care do not have options for alternative care and this causes them to continue to serve as the primary caretaker for their child, or for the children of the primary income source in the household.

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<sup>22</sup> Criden, M. (2008). The Stranded Poor: Recognizing the Importance of Public Transportation for Low-Income Households. Retrieved from: [http://www.nascsp.org/data/files/csb\\_g\\_publications/issue\\_briefs/issuebrief-benefitsofruralpublictransportation.pdf](http://www.nascsp.org/data/files/csb_g_publications/issue_briefs/issuebrief-benefitsofruralpublictransportation.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> Wahba, J. (2001). Child Labor and Poverty Transmission: No Room for Dreams. Retrieved from: <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/59ea/011a91a06d16901229f8b9e978d49d03e0fb.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> Beegle, D. M. 2003. Overcoming the Silence of Generational Poverty. Retrieved from: <https://secure.ncte.org/library/nctefiles/store/samplefiles/journals/tp/tp0151overcoming.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> National Survey of Children's Health (2011/12) Retrieved from: <http://childhealthdata.org/browse/survey/results?q=2262&r=1&g=458>

### Barriers to Pursuing Education

Focus group participants described feeling as though they were not sure they could succeed in school or career because they had so little success in those areas previously. Some participants said of going back to school that they are unsure if they could “do it” anymore. These individuals reported feeling as though they do not have enough education to succeed, and also believe that they do not have what it takes to complete the education or training that they need to succeed. This feeling of helplessness, mixed with the unsupportive environment mentioned above, paints a picture of a discouraged and underpowered group of disconnected young people. The survey identified that not having enough education is tied for the second most common reason young adults report they are disconnected (29.7%).

While this picture of disconnected young adults may not represent the entire population in the study, it may serve as an important contextual lens through which to view certain survey results in this study. For example, young adults reported that when they have tried to go back to obtain a GED, the classes offered were unhelpful and too easy, to the point where they were not learning – and not interested in learning – the material.

National research supports the idea that many dropouts leave school because the classes are not interesting for them (47%) rather than because they are too difficult. While some dropouts left school for academic reasons (about 35%), two-thirds believe they would have worked harder in school if more was asked of them, and 70 percent believe they could have graduated if they wanted to.<sup>26</sup>

### Making Money vs Investing in a Career

Survey respondents listed parents, government assistance, family members, and friends as different ways disconnected young adults financially provide for themselves. The fourth most common primary source of income for these young adults was an under-the-table job. When asked about what jobs were available in the county, nearly a third of survey respondents reported that there are not enough jobs in Berks County (31.8%) and a third reported they are not qualified to apply for the jobs that are available (33.8%).

Berks County jobs estimates support survey respondent’s observations that there are few jobs available for individuals without a high school degree; however, many jobs in the area are available for individuals who have finished high school or a GED, and even more are available for individuals who have a postsecondary certificate. The top ten occupations in Berks County and their educational requirements are as following:<sup>27</sup>

- Retail Salesperson -High School
- Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand – High School
- Cashiers - None
- Office Clerks, General - High School
- Registered Nurses – Bachelor’s Degree
- Secretaries and Administrative Assistants, Except Legal, Medical, and Executive – High School/Associates
- Waiters and Waitresses – High School

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<sup>26</sup> Bridgeland J. M., Dilulio J. J., Morison K. B. (2006). The Silent Epidemic Perspectives of High School Dropouts. Retrieved from: <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED513444.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> Job Numbers from Emsi Economic Modeling and educational requirements are from O\*Net Online.



- Customer Service Representatives – High School
- Janitors and Cleaners, Except Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners – High School
- Stock Clerks and Order Fillers – High School

The top ten fastest growing occupations in Berks County and their educational requirements are:

- Home Health Aides – High School
- Electrical and Electronic Equipment Assemblers – High School
- Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand – High School
- Personal Care Aides – High School
- Waiters and Waitresses – High School
- Office Clerks, General – High School
- Welders, Cutters, Solderers, and Brazers – High School/Post-Secondary Certificate
- Combined Food Preparation and Serving Workers, Including Fast Food - none
- Helpers—Production Workers – High School
- Machinists – Post-Secondary Certificate

In addition to not believing jobs exist for them in Berks County, focus group participants said that they did not know how to write a resume or search for a job, but felt pressure from friends and family to make money in the present rather than pursuing education, training, or job search programs. They also described having an expectation to not have jobs or careers that interfere with family duties.

Together, the combination of pressure to make money quickly, the expectation of being available for familial duties, the ease of access to non-career focused money making opportunities, and their lack of skills and knowledge around searching for jobs creates a significant disincentive for disconnected young adults to pursue educational, job search or career based opportunities.

### Information Disconnect between Young Adults and Providers

The intent of this study was not to examine differences in perception about disconnected young adults between service providers and the young adults themselves. However, the methodology and findings of the project do point to some areas of shared understanding between the two groups, and other areas in which responses from service providers and disconnected young adults differ. Examples of differences in perceptions among data sources include: 1) access of services; 2) being networked v. being solitary; and 3) where disconnected young adults are.

#### Access to Services

Although over half of young adults access at least one community service, one-third of survey respondents reported that young adults either access no services (33.7%), or only access government support services, such as Food Stamps and TANF (28.2%). These services do not necessarily make a young adult interact with service providers in the community, and are inherently different than other community services. Even those who reported using some sources of support reported not knowing what services were available in Berks County.

Furthermore, focus group participants stated that they, and the other disconnected young adults they know, are unlikely to spend time trying a service organization unless they feel confident the organization

can assist them. This means that even when they do find a service organization, if there is not enough information about the services provided, they are unlikely to reach out for services.

### Networked v. Solitary

Service providers who contributed to this study were confident that disconnected young adults are networked with each other, and one young adult in the population would be able to connect them to other disconnected young adults. However, in focus groups and survey responses, disconnected young adults reported they spend a significant amount of time on social media and at home, either sleeping, taking care of someone, or on the computer or playing video games. While disconnected young adults often did know other disconnected individuals, that interconnection did not necessarily denote interaction as many young adults spend much of their time alone.

Other studies about disconnected young adults also show that they are not completely socially isolated, but rather are not connected to the people who could help them access services or succeed in education, training, or career-based programs.<sup>28</sup> However, another study found that for individuals living in minority and urban areas, a majority of their employment opportunities and job market awareness comes from their social connections.<sup>29</sup>

### Where Disconnected Young Adults “Hang Out”

Service providers struggled to identify where young adults spend the majority of their time, and were unsure what services in the community this population currently accessed. Young adults in focus group reported that the “public hangouts” where disconnected young adults spend their time included parks, libraries, tattoo parlors, and gyms. Additionally, both focus group and survey respondents showed that disconnected young adults obtain a lot of their information online, and that finding information on service providers and what they offer is difficult.

National research confirms that many low-income young adults go online for information, and many of them do so via mobile phone rather than computer. Pew Research found that nationally 92% of Americans ages 18-29 own a smart phone. Of them, Latinos and low-income individuals are most likely to be smartphone dependent, meaning that they have access to the internet only through their phone and not from a home computer. Additionally, 91% of these smart phone owners use their phones for email, and a large majority also use their phones for social media of various types.<sup>30</sup>

### Consistency with National Research

Findings from this study of disconnected young adults in Berks County mirror national findings that significant portions of the disconnected young adult population serve as caretakers or have a disability. In Berks County 30.4 percent of disconnected young adults serve as a caretaker to a child or adult family member, and 1 in 4 have some sort of disability. While having a disability was not a common reason for being disconnected (10.8%), serving as a caretaker was reported to be the second most common reason for disconnection. Four out of five disconnected young adults have not pursued education after a high

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<sup>28</sup> Hudson, M., Phillips, J., Ray, K., & Barnes, H. (2007) Social Cohesion in Diverse Communities. Retrieved from: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/default/files/jrf/migrated/files/2067.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> Selod, H. & Zenou, Y. (2001). Social Interactions, Ethnic Minorities and Urban Unemployment. Retrieved from: <http://selod.ensae.net/doc/021%20Selod%20Zenou%202001b.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> Pew Research Center: Internet and Technology. (2015) U.S. Smartphone Use in 2015. Retrieved from: <http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/04/01/us-smartphone-use-in-2015/>

school diploma or GED (81.8%). Additionally, young adults are likely to live with one or both parents (52.0%). These findings are consistent with the national research outlined in the [Previous Research](#) section of this report.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings in this report, the Research Team would like to highlight the following recommendations for community and governmental organizations that seek to serve the disconnected young adult population. The sections below are not comprehensive of the useful insights that the research outlined herein can provide, but rather were chosen for one of two reasons, 1) because they are widely applicable to a variety of service providers in the county, or 2) because they would require a community effort (rather than a single program) to enact.

The most innovative ideas may come from thinking outside of traditional solutions for each issue individually and combining multiple findings and recommendations to create a new solution for the Berks County community. The recommendations below are broken into three main themes: how to reach disconnected young adults, how to assist them in being able to access your programs, and how to ensure they stay connected and engaged in your programs.

### How to Reach Disconnected Young Adults

In determining how to best reach disconnected young adults, the theme across all recommendations was to build trust. Survey and focus group findings showed that this population is largely unaware of services being offered in the community and often don't think institutions or programs offer anything for their unique set of needs. They also are not quick to trust that a program would actually help them if it doesn't fill an immediate need or if their families or friends don't support their participation.

In order to build trust among disconnected youth, it is important to meet them where they are and fulfill their immediate needs without pushing too hard to engage them in services for which they cannot see the immediate benefit. Another way to build this trust is to provide an easy-access entry point for services in Berks County that has incredibly useful basic information, then encourage young adults to take one step closer to in-depth services. Some examples of easy-access points are listed below.

**Safe Spaces** – Disconnected young adults mentioned needing a safe place to “hang out” and enjoy unstructured time. It may be beneficial for service providers to come together and provide a safe low-programming environment for young adults that incorporates easy access to information about available programs. Or, if places like this already exist (e.g., libraries), to ensure their programs are featured in those spaces.

It is important to note, however, that not enough research has been done to evaluate the effectiveness of recreation centers with varying levels of supervision.<sup>31</sup> One such study shows that unstructured

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<sup>31</sup> Dodge, K. A., Dishion T. J., & Lansford J. E. (2006). Deviant Peer Influences in Programs for Youth: Problems and Solutions. Retrieved from:

<https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=oJNNVDlpoAC&oi=fnd&pg=PA215&dq=libraries+as+youth+hangouts&ots=DOPqbOI6s0&sig=uSi3EtiuIE3e6zfJDv4zBX9afWQ#v=onepage&q=libraries%20as%20youth%20hangouts&f=false>

hangouts lead to criminal or nuisance behavior,<sup>32</sup> but other studies show that drop in centers can be good ways to get people connected with the resources they need. However, research shows that drop-in centers are most successful when they have strong adult leaders who introduce young adults to community leaders, provide tips on jobs, and provide contacts with other services.<sup>33</sup>

**Online Outreach** – Interview participants confirmed research showing that disconnected young adults like to get information online, and spend a large amount of time on social media through their mobile phones. Having an online presence - a mobile optimized compelling website as well as an interactive, conversational social media strategy - could help service providers get the word out about their programs and services.

Successful organizations make it a practice to engage their audience online through a well-designed website and appropriate social media channels. Some examples of engaging online materials include interactive resume builders, regularly updated job posting sites, fun quizzes, or websites designed with the user in mind. One example of a workforce board with an easy-to-navigate website is [CareerSource Florida](#).<sup>34</sup> Similarly, an engaging social media presence is one in which organizations (and individuals working in those organizations) are interacting with others regularly in a conversational tone. An example of an organization with an engaging [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) social media strategy is [SCPa Works](#) (formerly the South Central Workforce Investment Board).<sup>35</sup>

**Partner with Natural Allies** – Many disconnected young adults are caring for a child or adult family member who is receiving some type of service, either through Head Start or local healthcare organizations. Partnering with the agencies that serve the individuals that disconnected young adults care for, may provide access for those who would otherwise not engage in services for themselves. Cross promoting services or creating close collaborations with natural ally organizations has the potential to significantly increase awareness of an organization’s services within a target population.

For example, Indiana’s [HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing Program](#) successfully combines rental assistance, case management aid, and clinical services into one program to better reach homeless veterans. Similarly, Maine’s [Sharon Abrams Teen Parent School Program](#) takes advantage of collaboration through providing free on-campus childcare, career support resources, and healthcare counseling to all participants in their high school completion program. Lastly, Minnesota’s [Career and Education Pathways Program](#) helps adults with criminal backgrounds reenter the workforce, offering education and career training as well as secondary services including housing, transportation, and legal assistance. In each case, visibility and access to the respective organizations and their programs increased, resulting in a greater number of participants served and an increase in the number of services used.

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<sup>32</sup> Agustina J. R. & Felson M. (2016). Routine Activities, Delinquency, and Youth Convergences. Retrieved from: [http://www.lawethiopia.com/images/law\\_books/The.Handbook.of.Criminological.Theory%20\[Dr.Soc\].pdf#page=155](http://www.lawethiopia.com/images/law_books/The.Handbook.of.Criminological.Theory%20[Dr.Soc].pdf#page=155)

<sup>33</sup> McLaughlin, M. W. (2000). Community Counts: How Youth Organizations Matter for Youth Development. <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED442900.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> Website: <https://careersourceflorida.com/>

<sup>35</sup> Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/SCPa-Works-406219222908178/> - Twitter: <https://twitter.com/scpaworks> - Website: <http://scpaworks.org/>

### How to Assist Disconnected Young Adults in Accessing Programs

Only a portion of individuals reached by organizational outreach efforts will convert into in-person or more in-depth service users. In order to increase service usage, individuals who are aware of a program being offered must not have substantial barriers to partaking in that service. The recommendations below outline potential ways to reduce or eliminate the common barriers to service access identified as part of this project.

**Provide Transportation** – Many disconnected young adults have significant difficulty traveling to a location outside of their home to receive services. Transportation is a difficult barrier for just one organization to address, and in Berks County, lack of dependable public transportation causes problems both inside the city of Reading, and especially outside of the city. Dependable public transportation is a community-level asset that, when available, helps individuals not only access social programming, but also employment and other positive social opportunities. Improvements in this system should be supported (and if possible strongly advocated for) by community-based organizations across the county.

One example of a program to improve transportation for low-income people is the Bridges to Work project, a joint project of Public/Private Ventures and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in Philadelphia. This program connected low-income residents of the city to jobs in the suburbs. The success of this project influenced the National Joblinks Employment and Transportation Initiative. Research posits that the success of linking urban areas with suburban jobs could apply to suburban areas as well, though possibly on a lesser scale.<sup>36</sup>

**Provide or Plan for Child Care** – Another leading barrier to disconnected young adults leaving their homes to receive services is their child or family care responsibilities. Parents with access to affordable and dependable child care are less likely to have child care-related disruptions that affect their work attendance or schedule.<sup>37</sup> Providing child care, or collaborating with programs that can provide child care during service provision may alleviate an important barrier for individuals accessing services.

**Provide Services Online** – While in-person services are valuable for disconnected young adults, sometimes the barriers in their lives prevent them from showing up at a certain location or time. Similar to online outreach being a valuable tool for reaching potential service users, the online platform also may provide an accessible place for location constricted disconnected young adults to receive entry-level services from your organization. Some examples of entry level services that could be offered online include chatting with a service provider through a messaging tool, short informational videos, career interest tests, or job postings.

**Ensure Services are Available for Low Income Families** – Survey and Interview respondents mentioned that they are not sure what services might be able to help them because they do not meet the income eligibility for federal programs. While disconnected young adults do not have jobs themselves, many live in families that may be living just above the poverty line. Many social service programs provide easy and

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<sup>36</sup> Blumenberg, E. (2003). En-gendering Effective Planning: Spatial Mismatch, Low-Income Women, and Transportation Policy. Retrieved from: <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/20m3505v#page-6>

<sup>37</sup> CLASP. (2015). Child Care Assistance: A Vital Support for Working Families. Retrieved from <http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/>

free access to services for individuals who are eligible for federal programs, but are less clear or require more documentation for individuals who do not already meet that criteria.

Especially because many disconnected young adults live with family members, this may make them ineligible for services they otherwise would be able to receive, and may create a barrier for these young adults in knowing what services are available to them or how much those services might cost. In order for these individuals to access much-needed social services, 1) those services must not have eligibility requirements that disqualify disconnected young adults, and 2) disconnected young adults must be aware that they are eligible to receive the services.

**Guide Disconnected Young Adults to Available Jobs** – One major barrier for disconnected young adults is not knowing where to look for jobs, being unaware of what jobs are “good,” and not knowing what jobs they might be qualified for. Community organizations in Berks County may benefit from conducting a labor market analysis that predicts what industries and occupations are looking for entry and mid-level employees, and what career pathways might allow disconnected young adults to enter those jobs.

Community organizations could use the data from such a report to: 1) distribute publically and provide hope and inspiration to disconnected young adults, 2) create relationships with businesses and training providers in those industries, and 3) directly connect disconnected young adults to career pathways and jobs in those industries.

### How to Keep Disconnected Young Adults Engaged

The barriers that disconnected young adults face to enrolling in education and training programs or becoming employed are not overcome quickly. Each individual needs different supports to be successful, and some of those supports require longer-term intervention. Many service programs find it difficult to keep disconnected young adults in their programs for longer periods of time, especially as the family and living situations in that individual’s life change. The following two recommendations focus on ensuring that once an individual starts accessing services, they are motivated to remain engaged in those services.

**Connect Disconnected Young Adults to Caring Adults** – Nearly every story of success among disconnected young adults begins with a relationship between the young adult and a caring adult. This caring adult checks in when the young adult does not show up and encourages the young adult when their family and/or friends are telling them that trying to go back to school or get a better job is a waste of time. Research shows that children<sup>38</sup> and young adults<sup>39</sup> who have at least one caring adult in their lives are more likely to become productive adults themselves. Caring adults may be the child’s parents but also may be other relatives, neighbors, friends, teachers, coaches, religious leaders or mentors.

Programs looking to support disconnected young adults must be willing to dedicate time, funding, and personnel to build and maintain personal supportive relationships between adults and disconnected individuals. The most common programs that invest time and resources into caring adult relationships are

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<sup>38</sup> Child Trends. (2013). Caring Adults: Important for Positive Child Well-Being. Retrieved from <http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/2013-54CaringAdults.pdf>

<sup>39</sup> Larose S. & Boivin M. (1998). Attachment to Parents, Social Support Expectations, and Socioemotional Adjustment During the High School-College Transition. Retrieved from: [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Michel\\_Boivin4/publication/232884433\\_Attachment\\_to\\_Parents\\_Social\\_Support\\_Expectations\\_and\\_Socioemotional\\_Adjustment\\_During\\_the\\_High\\_School-College\\_Transition/links/00b7d527b7ec08ec5b000000.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Michel_Boivin4/publication/232884433_Attachment_to_Parents_Social_Support_Expectations_and_Socioemotional_Adjustment_During_the_High_School-College_Transition/links/00b7d527b7ec08ec5b000000.pdf)



mentoring programs. However, variations on mentoring programs such as drop in centers and case managers also may provide similar caring adult relationships.

**Provide Meaningful and Interesting Content** – Disconnected young adults reported that a major barrier to them completing education and training programs was that the content was too easy and not directly applicable to them. Especially because it is so difficult to attract and garner commitment for receiving services from disconnected young adults, programs serving this population must take special care to retain their participants by ensuring every moment of programming is valuable and engaging. Promising practices in creating engaging programs often include applied learning opportunities or blended education with hand-on training rather than solely classroom-based education. Some examples of these types of programs include contextualized training, apprenticeships, and project-based learning.

In addition to building off of the years of experience of individuals who run these programs, community organizations may benefit from evaluation practices built around continuous improvement, or creating organizational priorities around innovative, evidence-based program delivery and structure. Implementing evaluation and monitoring tools, and building a culture of improvement may help programs and services stay relevant to the changing needs of disconnected youth over time.

## Conclusion

Berks County service providers and community organizations are actively engaged in their missions and offer beneficial services to young adults in the county, both disconnected and connected. The shift in WIOA funding from in-school youth to out-of-school and disconnected young adults, shed a light on an at-risk population in Berks County and across the nation. As Workforce Development Boards nationwide shift their focus to serving these individuals, it has become evident that disconnected young adults are difficult to find, and difficult to retain in programming. Often the barriers these young adults face mean they may show up for just one day, or begin a program, but are unable to benefit from a complete program experience.

The focus on disconnected young adults by the Department of Labor is gaining attention across social service organizations because it is a population that historically has been difficult to serve. While other researchers have looked at demographics and circumstances around individuals becoming disconnected, having this population engage in primary research data collection has proven difficult, and is a task that faces the same barriers and challenges organizations face to engage disconnected young adults.

This study gathered feedback from and about enough disconnected young adults to represent Berks County, and key findings have mirrored national research about the population types that are disconnected and their barriers for disconnection. This corroboration lends validity to the responses and data detailed in the report.

Additionally, using a community-based mixed-methods approach provided the Research Team with information about what organizations disconnected young adults utilize and how those organizations might be able to tailor their services and approaches to better reach and retain individuals in this population. It also allowed the Research Team to determine a demographic profile for the population of disconnected young adults in the county.

Some recommendations outlined in the previous section can be relatively inexpensive for organizations to implement immediately (i.e. increased online presence), while others might require service providers to think differently about partnerships across the community, or how services are delivered. Also, some recommendations are around working to solve substantial community-level barriers that disconnected young adults face, so they may require time and activism that no one organization could accomplish on its own.

In all, Berks County shows promise in its dedication to this population. By engaging the Research Team from Thomas P. Miller and Associates to complete this study and having strong, consistent engagement from community partners, the county's commitment to serving the disconnected young adult population is clear. This project required community partnership for both the funding of the study and to successfully reach the number of young adults and family and friends of young adults to make the results representative of the population in the county. This power to take on large projects to better serve important populations within the Berks County community is unique and valuable. Through this project, the base is laid to implement significantly impactful plans to improve services and life for the disconnected young adults in Berks County through partnership and community support across the county.



# Appendices

## Appendix A – Research Methodology

The Berks County Workforce Development Board (WDB) used the guidelines set forth by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) to set the definition of a “disconnected youth or young adult” for this project. For the purposes of this study, a “disconnected young adult” is defined by an individual meeting one of the follow criteria, and is a resident of Berks County, PA at the time of the study:

1. An individual aged 16 to 24 who has neither been in school nor employed for a period of at least six (6) months at the time of the study; or
2. A young adult aged 21 to 24 who is underemployed (would like full-time work but has settled for part-time work, or is employed in a position that is inadequate with respect to their skills/training).

The methodology for this study uses a mixed-methods approach to examine the demographics, challenges, and needs of disconnected young adults in Berks County, PA. Data collection methods for this study are bulleted below. Each of these data sources are described in greater detail in the following sections.

- Guidance from individuals who work in Berks County social service agencies
- Survey feedback from disconnected young adults and their friends and family members in the county
- Focus group insight from disconnected young adults and their friends and family members in the county

The research questions guiding this study are:

- What are the characteristics of disconnected young adults in Berks County?
- How do disconnected young adults spend their time?
- What are the sources of income for disconnected young adults?
- Why are disconnected young adults not employed and not in school?
- What services do disconnected young adults use and what services do they need?

### Service Provider Guidance

As a collaboration between the Berks County WDB and United Way, this study is rooted in the social service context of the county. Because of this, the methodology for accessing disconnected young adults in the county relied heavily on connections with community partners and the individuals to whom they provide services.

The project began with a **project launch meeting** to discuss project expectations and timelines, methodology, identify key partners, gather community partners’ contextual knowledge, and engage them in the survey design process. During the launch meeting, the Research Team gathered important information about the Berks County community, including specific challenges and barriers for young adults in Berks County; provided opportunities for key stakeholders to engage in the project; and solicited feedback about where and how to distribute the Disconnected Young Adult Survey.

The Research Team continued to engage local Berks County organizations throughout the project in order to gain an understanding of the history, population, and culture of the county. The initial group of **project partners** attended the launch meeting described in the section above and remained engaged throughout the project. Additionally, two sub-committees were formed during the project to engage partners who expressed interest in assisting with specific aspects of the project. These sub-committees were the Survey Design Committee and the Media and Marketing Committee. Additionally, the Research Team conducted one-on-one informational calls with new potential community partners that were identified by current partners during the project.

### *Survey Design Committee*

The Research Team used the relationships built during the launch meeting to establish a Survey Design Committee. This committee comprised individuals with experience directly serving young adults in Berks County who provided feedback on the accessibility and rigor of the survey.

Two partners tested the survey instrument with young adults served by their organizations to ensure that the survey's content and flow were audience-appropriate. Another partner arranged for the survey to be translated into Spanish, at no cost. Overall, the members of this committee provided expert guidance as survey content was drafted, including ensuring the language of the questions would be understandable to the target audience, and helping take steps to reduce survey attrition.

### *Marketing and Social Media Committee*

In order to spread the word about survey distribution, the Research Team collaborated with a Marketing and Social Media Committee. This committee provided insight into what media and marketing avenues are most used in Berks County and helped shape the survey distribution plan for the project. Additionally, the Research Team used this committee to provide guidance to community partners on using social media to promote the survey.

### *One-on-One Information Calls*

As additional community partners were introduced to this project, the Research Team conducted thirty-minute phone interviews with each organization to explain the project and listen to their feedback and experiences with disconnected young adults in the county. Though many of these organizations specifically serve young adults, other service providers included hospitals and medical centers, libraries, the housing authority, and juvenile probation offices.

In total, the Research Team conducted 32 thirty-minute phone interviews with community organizations throughout Berks County. Themes gathered from these one-on-one conversations with service providers are described in the section [Service Provider Feedback](#).

## Disconnected Young Adult Survey

A large piece of this study included collecting information from a representative sample of disconnected young adults in Berks County, PA through a survey. Named the Berks County Disconnected Young Adult Survey, this instrument was created specifically for this project with input from community partners as described above. The following sections outline survey theory, design, distribution, incentives, and response rates.

### *Survey Theory*

National research shows that disconnected young adults are likely to have parents who receive government aid such as TANF, SNAP or Medicare. Half of disconnected young adults have a child of their own, and more than a third (35%) have some sort of disability, many of whom receive SSI or Medicare benefits because of that disability. Parents with young children and individuals with disabilities often are homebound for weeks or months at a time. Because of this, it is likely that these individuals would not be found hanging out at any given location, but their friends or family members may be receiving social services.<sup>40</sup>

While the American Community Survey states that nearly half of rural low income families in Pennsylvania lack internet service via computer in their homes, Pew Research found that nationally 92% of Americans ages 18-29 own a smart phone. Of them, Latinos and low-income individuals are most likely to be smartphone dependent, meaning that they have access to the internet only through their phone and not from a home computer. Additionally, 91% of these smart phone owners use their phones for email, and a large majority also use their phones for social media of various types.<sup>41</sup>

In order to gain a broad understanding of the disconnected young adults in Berks County, PA, the Research Team proposed a survey methodology that engaged both disconnected young adults and their friends and family members. Friends and family members were intentionally included in the target audience due to the Research Team's understanding of the barriers disconnected young adults face, and the challenges in reaching the population. This methodology allowed the team to expand the potential sample size and ensure that valuable information from all stakeholders was included in the analysis.

### *Survey Design*

As described in the [Survey Design Committee](#) section, the survey for this project was designed in collaboration with the Berks County WDB and United Way, as well as with a group of community partners. Survey questions were vetted by these partners as well as by a small group of disconnected young adults being served by one of the partners.

The survey was available both online and on paper, and was offered in both Spanish and English. Skip logic was used through a series of qualification questions to split respondents to the young adult version or to the friends and family members version of the survey. The two survey versions had the same questions in the same order, but were asked either about themselves for a disconnected young adult, or were asked about the young adult the friend and family members knew, for example:

- What is the highest level of education you have completed?
- What is the highest level of education the young adult has completed?

Those in the friends and family version were also prompted to complete the survey about the young adult they knew who fit the definition of a disconnected young adults, or to refer that young adult directly to the survey.

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<sup>40</sup> Fernandes-Alcantara, A. L. (2015). Disconnected youth: A look at 16 to 24 year olds who are not working or in school. Congressional Research Service. Retrieved from <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R40535.pdf>

<sup>41</sup> Pew Research Center: Internet and Technology. (2015) U.S. Smartphone Use in 2015. Retrieved from: <http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/04/01/us-smartphone-use-in-2015/>

The survey included targeted questions about the barriers that young adults face in gaining and retaining employment and/or remaining or returning to school, their sources of income, where they seek and receive services, and general demographic information. The survey was designed to take ten minutes or less to complete, and remained open for twelve weeks, from February 28, 2017 to May 19, 2017.

Copies of the paper and online surveys, in both English and Spanish, are included in Appendices C, D, and E of this report.

### *Survey Distribution*

The survey distribution methodology for this project combined “boots on the ground” work by community partners who have access to the study population with traditional and social media marketing strategies. These strategies were intended to serve two purposes, 1) to engage friends and family members of disconnected young adults who may be receiving services in the county, and 2) to reach out to disconnected young adults who may have been homebound during the time of survey distribution.

The majority of the survey distribution for this project was completed by the community partners involved in the project. In order to assist project partners in spreading the word about the survey, the Research Team provided partners with a marketing guide of materials and messages to promote the survey to their professional and personal networks. The packet included:

- Graphics for social media;
- A printable survey flyer;
- Stock language for letters, emails, newsletters, and social media posts; and
- A one-page overview of the study.

Additionally, personalized and custom materials were generated for partners with a specific focus or need, and for six select partners, the Research Team created a social media ad image and reimbursed the cost of boosting their post about the survey. These partners were identified by the Research Team as strong and engaged partners who were most likely to be directly connected to disconnected young adults or their families.

As mentioned in the Survey Design section, the survey itself was made available for community partners to distribute both online as well as in paper copy in both English and Spanish. Community partners undertook a variety of “boots on the ground” efforts to distribute the survey. Some examples include making the survey accessible to clients as they were waiting for services, asking AmeriCorps Vistas to aid families in navigating the survey, providing the survey to individuals as they were participating in services, posting fliers in their facilities, and handing out fliers at events.

The Research Team also produced and distributed two press releases about the project using contacts from the United Way. These releases resulted in the project being featured twice on bctv.org and once in the Reading Eagle.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> <http://www.readingeagle.com/news/article/berks-county-agencies-team-up-want-to-reconnect-young-people-to-school-work/1&template=mobileart>; [http://www.bctv.org/special\\_reports/community/help-berks-county-partners-provide-better-services-to-the-community/article\\_72f0b6a0-193e-11e7-8747-773b2db1f238.html](http://www.bctv.org/special_reports/community/help-berks-county-partners-provide-better-services-to-the-community/article_72f0b6a0-193e-11e7-8747-773b2db1f238.html); [http://www.bctv.org/special\\_reports/community/last-call-for-respondents---short-survey-will-help/article\\_4d7e00f4-34c2-11e7-a4ca-6b2c68dab586.html](http://www.bctv.org/special_reports/community/last-call-for-respondents---short-survey-will-help/article_4d7e00f4-34c2-11e7-a4ca-6b2c68dab586.html)

### *Survey Participation Incentives*

The Research Team incentivized participation in the survey by offering each survey participant the opportunity to be entered to win one of 47 gift cards, ranging from \$10 to \$50 in value to Wawa convenience stores and gas stations. Wawa was identified by local partners who serve youth to be the best and most attractive incentive for the target population.

### *Survey Response Rates and Generalizability*

A total of 381 survey responses were collected for this project. However many of which were disqualified based on an individual's responses to the survey's qualification questions. Qualification questions for the survey include:

- Are you a resident of Berks County?
- How old are you?
- Are you currently employed or have you been in the last six months?
- If yes, which statement *best* describes your employment status
- Are you currently enrolled in school, or have you been in the last six months?

If any of the respondent's answers disqualified them from being a disconnected young adult (e.g., older than 24, currently enrolled in school, not a resident of Berks County) they would receive the following qualification questions:

- Do you know a young adult between the ages of 16-24 who fits all parts of the description below?
  - Resident of Berks County
  - Currently out of school and has been for at least six months
  - Currently unemployed and has been for at least six months
- Do you know a young adult between the ages of 21-24 who fits all parts of the description below?
  - Resident of Berks County
  - Currently out of school and has been for at least six months
  - Employed part-time but would prefer full time work, or is in a job that requires less skills than they have

Respondents who answered yes to either of these questions would be taken to the version of the survey specifically for friends and family members. If they did not know a young adult who fit either definition, they exited the survey.

These questions allowed the Research Team to be sure the respondent fit all qualifications of being a disconnected young adult, or that they knew someone who fit all of the qualifications for the target population. For the online survey, using skip logic with these questions directed respondents through the survey in an efficient manner, and did not collect data from unqualified respondents.

In all, 61 web surveys and 76 hand written surveys were disqualified based on the qualifying questions. Of the 187 qualified web responses and 57 qualified hand responses, 99 were not analyzed because the respondent did not provide answers other than the basic demographic questions (e.g. race, gender, primary language spoken at home.) This means these survey respondents did not answer questions that provided data for the study's research questions, thus making that data unusable.

In total, **145 complete and qualified respondents** were included in final survey analysis. Of these responses, 69 were from friends and family members, and 76 were from disconnected young adults themselves. Additionally, 57 of the analyzed survey responses came from hard copies of the survey (40 in English and 17 in Spanish), and the remainder were collected online (87 in English and 1 in Spanish).

Based on American Community Survey microdata, the Research Team estimates the true population of disconnected young adults to be between 3,000 and 5,000 in Berks County, PA. For confidence level and margin of error calculations, the Research Team used an estimated population size of 4,000.

Given the number of respondents observed for this survey, the Research Team is 95% confident that responses to the survey accurately reflect the attitudes and beliefs of the disconnected young adult population within an 8% margin of error. This means that, generally speaking, the data reported herein +/- 8% represent the true value in the population. The following two examples provide a more clear description of margins of error and confidence levels in practice:

- If 42 percent of survey respondents reported using federally funded social services, we believe that between 34 percent and 50 percent of the actual population of disconnected young adults use federally funded social services.
- If 8 percent of survey respondents say that they access federally funded social services “more than monthly”; 95 percent of the time, between 0 percent and 16 percent of a sample of respondents from this population would answer “more than monthly” to this question.

### Focus Groups

In addition to the Disconnected Young Adult Survey, the Research Team hosted three (3) focus groups with a total of eight (8) disconnected young adults and/or their friends and family members and one (1) in-person service provider interview. These focus groups were hosted between April 20 – 21, 2017. The focus groups were used to dig deeper into the initial information gathered through the Young Adult Survey, allowing for individual storytelling and contextualizing. Each focus group was sixty minutes long and utilized a pre-defined question list to assess the views and opinions of the group. The Research team used a standard methodology for conducting focus groups and analyzing resulting data. The team wrote all protocol questions to avoid “leading” or providing any indication that we hold a certain hypothesis around anticipated responses. During all groups, the Research team took detailed notes with one note-taker and one facilitator. Immediately after the focus group, the Research Team thoroughly analyzed the focus group notes to organize all data into major groupings including themes and concepts. The facilitation guides utilized during the focus groups can be found in [Appendix - B](#).

The Research Team worked with community partners to identify neutral locations for the focus groups as well as prospective focus group attendees. Individuals who shared their contact information through the survey, or were identified by a community partner, were invited to participate in the focus groups. The focus groups were held at three locations:

1. The Cabela’s retail store in Hamburg, PA (interview);
2. The Pennsylvania CareerLink Offices in Reading, PA; and
3. The United Community Services YouthBuild program space in Reading, PA.

These locations were identified as neutral, accessible spaces by the Research Team and community partners. Two focus groups were held in Reading because this was identified as the most high-traffic area

of the county, and more than one-fourth of Berks County young adults in the target age group reside in Reading (27.8%).<sup>43</sup> The Hamburg Cabela’s location was chosen to provide an accessible location for rural Berks County residents to participate.

### *Focus Group Participation Incentives*

The Research Team incentivized participation in the focus groups by offering each participant a \$10 gift certification to Wawa convenience stores and gas stations. Wawa was identified by local partners who serve young adults to be the best and most attractive incentive for the target population.

### Project Partners

Existing WDB Connections	Project Specific Connections
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Berks Business Education Coalition (BBEC)</li> <li>• Berks Community Action Program, Inc. (BCAP)</li> <li>• Berks County Adult Probation and Parole</li> <li>• Berks County Intermediate Unit (BCIU)</li> <li>• Berks County Juvenile Probation Office</li> <li>• Berks County Latino Chamber of Commerce</li> <li>• CareerLink Berks County</li> <li>• Centro Hispano</li> <li>• Coalition to End Homelessness</li> <li>• Co-County Wellness Services</li> <li>• Communities in Schools of Lehigh Valley</li> <li>• Family Promise of Berks County</li> <li>• Fleetwood Area School District</li> <li>• Habitat for Humanity of Berks County</li> <li>• I-LEAD Charter School</li> <li>• Learning Ace</li> <li>• Olivet Boys and Girls Club</li> <li>• Pathstone Corporation</li> <li>• Penn State Health – St. Joseph’s</li> <li>• Reading Muhlenberg Career Technology Center</li> <li>• Reading School District</li> <li>• Service Access and Management, Inc.</li> <li>• Steamfitters Union Local #420</li> <li>• UGI Utilities, Inc.</li> <li>• United Community Services</li> <li>• United Way of Berks County</li> <li>• Vision Mechanical Inc.</li> <li>• YMCA of Reading &amp; Berks Co.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Abilities in Motion</li> <li>• Berks Counseling Center</li> <li>• Berks County Department of Agriculture</li> <li>• Birdsboro Community Memorial Center</li> <li>• Boyertown Area Multiservice</li> <li>• Catholic Charities</li> <li>• Children's Home</li> <li>• City Lights Ministry</li> <li>• Community Prevention Partnership of Berks County</li> <li>• Berks County Conference of Churches</li> <li>• County of Berks - Children and Youth Services</li> <li>• Custom It</li> <li>• Easter Seals</li> <li>• Friend Inc.</li> <li>• Hope Rescue Mission</li> <li>• Justice Works Family of Services</li> <li>• Mary's Shelter</li> <li>• Opportunity House</li> <li>• Police Athletic League</li> <li>• Pre-K Counts</li> <li>• Prospectus Berco</li> <li>• Reading Housing Authority</li> <li>• Reading Public Library</li> <li>• Reading Pride Celebration</li> <li>• Reading Recreation Commission</li> <li>• Recovery Coaching Services</li> <li>• ReDesign Reading</li> <li>• SafeBerks</li> <li>• Salvation Army</li> <li>• Spring Valley Church of God</li> <li>• Threshold</li> <li>• Vision Resource Center</li> <li>• YES Mentor Program</li> </ul>

<sup>43</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2015 American Community Survey, 1-year Estimates. (2016). Table B17001: Poverty status in the past 12 months by sex by age.



### Study Limitations

As with any research study, the methodology for this research report has some limitations. In this study, the most notable limitation is accessing the population being studied. The disconnected young adult population is particularly hard to reach because they, by definition, are not connected to an institution where researchers can easily contact them, such as a school, employer, or social service organization. Also, while other similar studies of this population focus on anyone who is disconnected at the time of the survey, this study required that the young adult be disconnected from school or work for six months or more. This focus increases the difficulty of finding and attaining data from these individuals, but also provides new and important insight into the population who have been disconnected for a longer period of time.

In addition to the overall difficulty of accessing the disconnected young adult population, the Research Team encountered a cultural barrier to our social media strategy for distributing the survey. While young adults in the county reported getting information from social media, the organizations in Berks County, PA did not have social media-forward marketing and engagement strategies. Additionally, the Research Team found very few widely-read social media accounts in the area. To address this barrier, the Research Team reached out to the Reading, PA High School basketball team to help spread the word through social media, and asked traditional media outlets such as bctv.org and the Reading Eagle to post about the survey using their social media accounts.

Another barrier the Research Team faced during the project was low focus group turnout. The Research Team accessed potential focus group participants in two ways, 1) asking on the survey whether the respondent would be willing to participate in a focus group, and 2) working with community partners to contact potential participants. At the time of the focus groups, only a small segment of survey responses had been submitted, so that method only provided a few potential participants. Though the Research Team was building on relationships with strong and actively engaged community organizations, the individuals who told those organizations that they would attend focus group sessions often did not attend.

Additionally, because the Research Team worked closely with community organizations to identify focus group respondents, another limitation of the study is that focus group participants were those disconnected young adults or their friends and family members who were already connected to services in some way. Those who are chronically homebound, are not affiliated with any service agency, and do not have a friend or family member receiving services, were likely unrepresented in the focus groups.

One prominent limitation of this, and any primary research study on disconnected young adults, is that this population is more likely than their peers to face barriers to providing research data such as not speaking English as a first language, having a learning or intellectual disability, having a low level of reading comprehension, or not having access to the technology necessary to complete an online survey. To help address some of these barriers, the Evaluation Team created surveys in English and in Spanish to better allow participants to participate in their first language. Additionally, all focus groups were conducted with a translator to ensure all participants could understand and engage in the conversation. The survey language was reviewed by young adults who were or previously had been disconnected in order to ensure the language was approachable for this population.

While the methodology described above makes every effort to reach disconnected young adults in a variety of living in a variety of situations, it is possible that the survey and focus groups were unable to



sample from some specific segments of the population (described below). Additionally, because the methodology used for this study relies on community partners for survey design and distribution, any biases about this population that exist among service providers may have affected the sample the Research Team was able to collect.

Given the methodology used and response rates to the survey, the Research Team posits that the following sub-populations of disconnected young adults may have been underrepresented in the survey and focus group sample: individuals in more rural areas; individuals who are homebound; individuals with physical, intellectual or cognitive disabilities; or individuals who do not have a social safety net of family or service connections.

### Appendix B – Focus Group Facilitation Guide

#### Project Overview – 5 minutes

Hello! And thank you all for being here today. Before we get started – would anyone prefer to hear this information in Spanish?

[If yes, introduce translator]

Thank you again for being here today. My name is [redacted] and this is my colleague [redacted]. [Redacted] is going to be taking notes, and may jump in here and there. We are here today because we are leading a project that is working to learn more about young people in Berks County. Specifically, we're helping the United Way and the Workforce Development better understand the reasons that young people in Berks County need to leave school or aren't able to work for a period of time and resources that might help young adults meet their needs and return to school or work if that's what they want to do.

Today we're going to ask you a series of questions about your specific experience to get a better understanding of what you, or the friend/family member you identified is experiencing and what services you think would be helpful for young people in Berks County. While we're going to ask you some specific questions, please know that everything you share here today is private. We will not repeat any personal information you share today, and we ask that you also do not repeat any personal information shared within this session. After this meeting, we're going to go back and summarize all of the information you share with us so that it's general and doesn't have your name on it. When we're done, no one will be able to see the information we provide and know it's from you. This will all go into a big report that will be shared with local service organizations to help them better serve young people.

If there are any questions that you don't feel comfortable answering, you don't have to, and if at any point you don't want to be here anymore, you're welcome to leave.

Before we get started, do you have any questions?

[Answer any questions]

Great. Okay, one last housekeeping item before we get started. The paper in front of you is a release form. This says that I explained the project to you and let you know that what you say here is confidential and that you're allowed to leave at any time. Can you all sign this for before we get started?

#### Icebreaker – 10 minutes

Let's go around the room... Can everyone answer the following questions?

1. What's your name?
2. How did you hear about the survey?

#### Research Questions – 40 minutes

1. What did you do yesterday? What does a typical day look like for you?
2. Have you ever worked for pay? (Either officially or unofficially)
  - a. Is this the kind of work you want?
  - b. Do you know what kind of job you'd like to have, ideally?
  - c. What skills/education do you need to have the kind of job you want?
  - d. Are the types of jobs you want available in Berks County?
3. Are you interested in going back to school?
  - a. What is stopping you from going back to school?
  - b. What would you need to make it possible to go back to school?
4. What would help you get a job or get reenrolled in school?
  - a. Do you know if any of the services available in Berks County could provide you those kinds of supports?
  - b. How do you hear about the services that are available in Berks County?
  - c. Where would you like the services you need to be available? (physically)
  - d. How often do you think you'd use them?

### Conclusion – 5 minutes

Thank you again for coming out today and sharing your feedback. I've enjoyed meeting you all and am glad that I was able to hear from you directly. After this, I'm going to have three more meetings like this with other young people. Then we're going to put all of that information together and share it in report for service providers throughout the county.

### Follow-up Items

1. Most of you heard about this focus group through the Youth Survey, but if anyone hasn't filled out a survey, please take a second to fill one out before you leave [have paper copies ready]
2. I'd also like to thank you for your participation with a gift card. These are worth \$10 and can be used at any Wawa location like cash.

### Appendix C – Young Adult Survey (English)

#### Informed Consent

Berks County Workforce Development Board has contracted Thomas P. Miller & Associates as an external, independent agency to conduct a study of young adults in Berks County who are not in school and are not employed. This survey is one of the ways that we are collecting information about young adult's experiences in Berks County. You are being asked to complete this survey because you are a qualifying young adult in Berks County, or you might know someone who is.

The survey contains questions about your experiences as a young adult in Berks County, services you currently access, and services you would like to access but are not currently offered. If you are not a qualifying young adult, but you know one, you will be asked about the experiences of the qualifying young adult you know. Your responses on this survey will guide the Workforce Development Board's program planning and help service providers better assist young adults in the county.

By selecting "Next," you are agreeing to complete the survey. You may stop the survey at any time, but can only take the survey once. The survey is expected to take approximately 15 minutes to complete. Your participation is completely voluntary and your responses will be kept completely anonymous.

If you have any questions about the survey or the research study, please email [redacted] at [redacted] or [redacted] at [redacted].

Thank you for your participation!

**1. Are you a resident of Berks County?**

- Yes
- No

**2. How old are you?**

- Ages 16 – 20
- Ages 21 – 24

If you are not age 16 – 24 please take this survey online at [www.surveymonkey.com/r/BerksCoYouth](http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/BerksCoYouth)

**3. Are you currently employed or have you been in the last six months?**

- Yes
- No

**4. If yes, which statement below *best* describes your employment status?**

- I am employed part-time and would not like a full-time job
- I am employed part-time but would prefer a full-time job
- I am employed in a job that requires less skills or education than I have
- I am employed full-time

**5. Are you currently enrolled in school, or have you been in the last six months? (This does not include GED programs or Adult Education.)**

- Yes
- No

**6. Date last enrolled in school (MM/YYYY): \_\_\_\_\_**

**7. Date last employed (MM/YYYY): \_\_\_\_\_**

**8. School district last attended: \_\_\_\_\_**

**9. Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_**

**10. Birth date (MM/YYYY): \_\_\_\_\_**

**11. Gender:**

- Female
- Male
- Other
- Prefer not to answer

**12. Which race/ethnicity best describes you? Select one.**

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black
- Hispanic or Latino
- Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander
- Other
- Two or more races/ethnicity
- White
- Prefer not to answer

**13. What is the primary language you speak at home?**

- English
- Spanish
- Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- Prefer not to answer

**14. What is the highest level of education you have completed?**

- Less than 9<sup>th</sup> grade
- 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade, no diploma
- High school graduate or equivalent (e.g. GED)
- Some college, no degree
- Associate's degree
- Bachelor's degree or higher
- Prefer not to answer

**15. Do you have any of the following conditions? Check all that apply.**

- Deaf or have serious difficulty hearing
- Blind or have serious difficulty seeing, even when wearing glasses
- Difficulty remembering, concentrating, or making decisions because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition
- Difficulty walking or climbing stairs
- Difficulty bathing or dressing
- Difficulty doing errands alone such as visiting a doctor's office or shopping because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition
- Other chronic health condition
- None of these
- Unsure
- Prefer not to answer

**16. Where do you usually get money/income? Check all that apply.**

- Parents
- Friends
- Other family members
- A part-time job
- An under-the-table job
- Seasonal work
- Loans (student loans, payday loans, etc.)
- TANF (Cash Assistance)
- Food Stamps
- Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)
- Social Security Income
- Unemployment
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**17. What is your largest source of money/income? Check one.**

- Parents
- Friends
- Other family members
- A part-time job
- An under-the-table job
- Seasonal work
- Loans (student loans, payday loans, etc.)
- TANF (Cash Assistance)
- Food Stamps
- Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)
- Social Security Income
- Unemployment
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**18. Please rate how easy or difficult it is for you to pay for everything you need each month.**

- 1 – Very difficult
- 2 – Difficult
- 3 – Neutral
- 4 – Easy
- 5 – Very Easy

**19. Think of the past month: where did you usually stay?**

- My own room/apartment/house that I pay for
- My own room/apartment/house that someone else pays for
- I live with both parents
- I live with only one parent
- I live with friend(s)
- I live with another relative
- A shelter
- A car
- Other indoor place (e.g. stairwell, basement)
- A different place each night
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

20. For each service you access below, please rate how often you use each using the following scale.

	Once a year	A few times a year	Monthly	Weekly	More than once a week	I don't use this service
Food Stamps						
TANF (Cash Assistance)						
Social Security Income						
Housing or Rent Assistance						
Food Bank						
Shelter						
CareerLink or Young Adult Program						
Pregnancy Support Services						
Head Start						
First Steps						
Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)						
Other (Please specify):						

21. How helpful are the services you use?

- 1 – Very unhelpful
- 2 – Unhelpful
- 3 – Neither helpful nor unhelpful
- 4 – Helpful
- 5 – Very helpful
- Unsure



**22. What services would help you that aren't available in Berks County?** (Please respond in the space below)

**23. Do you regularly provide primary care for a child or an adult?**

- Yes
- No

**24. If yes, who are you providing care for? Check all that apply**

- Parent(s)
- Sibling(s)
- Grandparent(s)
- Own children
- Other family member
- Someone with a disability
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**25. Which of these describe your current situation? Check all that apply.**

- Pregnant
- Personal illness or disability
- Lack of support from friends and/or family
- Limited ability to speak and/or read English
- Unreliable transportation or difficulty accessing transportation
- Do not have a driver's license
- Do not have appropriate identification (personal documents)
- Credit card debt
- Loan debt
- Student debt
- Not enough education for desired job or school
- Lack of available jobs
- Criminal record
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- None of the above

**26. Which of the following reasons, if any, are why you are currently unemployed, not in school, or are in a job below your skill level? Check all that apply.**

- Taking care of your own child
- Taking care of another child
- Taking care of an adult
- Taking care of someone with a disability
- Pregnant
- Personal illness or disability
- Lack of support from friends and/or family
- Limited ability to speak and/or read English
- Unreliable transportation or difficulty accessing transportation
- Do not have a driver's license
- Do not have appropriate identification (personal documents)
- Credit card debt
- Loan debt
- Student debt
- Not enough education for desired job or school
- Lack of available jobs
- Criminal record
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- None of the above

**27. In order to understand your responses better, please tell us what a typical day looks like for you. How do you usually spend your time? (Please respond in the space provided below)**

**28. Would you be willing to be part of a casual, in-person conversation about your survey responses and experiences as a young person in Berks County? Those who attend the meeting will receive a gift card and free food during the meeting.**

- Yes
- No

**29. To be entered in the gift card drawing for completing the survey, or to be contacted for the meeting above, please provide your best contact information:**

(Leave blank if you do not wish to be entered in the drawing. Your contact information will not be shared.)

- a. Name \_\_\_\_\_
- b. Email \_\_\_\_\_
- c. Phone number \_\_\_\_\_
- d. Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

### Appendix D – Young Adult Survey (Español)

#### Consentimiento de información

Berks County Workforce Development Board ha contratado a Thomas P. Miller & Associates como agencia externa e independiente para llevar a cabo un estudio de jóvenes adultos en el Condado de Berks quienes no van a la escuela y se encuentran desempleados. Esta encuesta es una de las maneras que estamos utilizando para obtener información sobre las experiencias de jóvenes adultos en el Condado de Berks. Solicitamos su asistencia que consiste en completar esta encuesta ya que Usted califica como adulto joven en el Condado de Berks, o podría Usted conocer a alguien que cumpla con esta descripción.

La encuesta contiene preguntas acerca de sus experiencias como un joven adulto en el Condado de Berks, servicios que actualmente recibe y servicios que le gustaría recibir. Si no es un joven adulto pero conoce a alguien que califique, se le pedirá información acerca de las experiencias del joven adulto en cuestión. Sus respuestas en esta encuesta guiarán a la Junta de Desarrollo de Fuerza Laboral del condado, en la planificación y creación de programas de servicios de asistencia para beneficio de nuestros jóvenes adultos en el condado.

Al seleccionar "Siguiendo", usted acepta completar la encuesta. Usted puede dejar de completar en cualquier momento la encuesta, pero tiene una sola oportunidad de tomar este cuestionario. La encuesta tomará aproximadamente 15 minutos. Su participación es completamente voluntaria y sus respuestas se mantendrán totalmente anónimas.

Si tiene alguna duda sobre el estudio de investigación, por favor comuníquese por correo electrónico, con [redacted] a [redacted] o con [redacted] a [redacted].

¡Gracias por su participación!

30. ¿Es Usted residente del Condado de Berks?

- Si
- No

31. ¿Qué edad tiene?

- Entre 16 – 20 años de edad
- Entre 21 – 24 años de edad

Si no está en edad de 16 –24 años, favor de tomar esta encuesta en línea de internet en:  
[www.surveymonkey.com/r/BerksCoYouthEsp](http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/BerksCoYouthEsp)

32. ¿Esta empleado actualmente? o ¿Ha trabajado en los últimos seis meses?

- Si
- No

33. Si su respuesta fue afirmativa, seleccione la mejor descripción de su situación de empleo.

- Soy empleado (a) de tiempo parcial y no quisiera un trabajo de tiempo completo
- Soy empleado (a) de tiempo parcial pero preferiría un trabajo de tiempo completo
- Soy empleado (a) en un trabajo que requiere menos habilidades o educación de las que yo tengo
- Soy empleado de tiempo completo

34. ¿Está actualmente inscrito(a) o ha estado en los últimos seis meses, inscrito en clases? (Esto no incluye programas de GED o educación de adultos.)

- Si
- No

35. Favor de poner la fecha de su última inscripción en la escuela (MM/AAAA): \_\_\_\_\_

36. Fecha de su último día de empleo (MM/AAAA): \_\_\_\_\_

37. Ultimo Distrito escolar al que asistió: \_\_\_\_\_

38. Código postal: \_\_\_\_\_

39. Fecha de nacimiento (MM/AAAA): \_\_\_\_\_

40. Género:

- Femenino
- Masculino
- Otro
- Prefiero no contestar

41. ¿A qué raza/origen étnico pertenece? Seleccione uno.

- Indio americano o nativo de Alaska
- Asiático
- Negro
- Hispano o Latino
- Nativo Hawaiano u otras islas del Pacífico
- Otro
- Dos o más razas / etnicidad
- Blanco
- Prefiero no contestar

**42. ¿Cuál es el idioma primario que habla en su casa?**

- Inglés
- Español
- Otro (Por Favor Especifique): \_\_\_\_\_
- Prefiero no contestar

**43. ¿Cuál es el grado de educación más alto que ha completado?**

- Menos de 9<sup>no</sup> Grado
- De 9<sup>no</sup> a 12<sup>vo</sup> Grado( Sin Diploma)
- Graduado de Escuela secundaria o Equivalente (EJ: GED)
- Universidad, Sin Graduarme
- Título de Asociado (2 años de Universidad)
- Título de Licenciatura (4 años de Universidad)
- Prefiero no contestar

**44. ¿Tiene usted alguna de las siguientes condiciones? Marque todas las que apliquen.**

- Sordera o dificultades serias para escuchar.
- Ceguera o dificultades serias para ver, aunque esté usando anteojos.
- Dificultad recordando, concentrándome o tomando decisiones debido a una condición Física, mental o emocional.
- Dificultad caminando o subiendo escaleras.
- Dificultad bañándome o vistiéndome
- Dificultad haciendo mis deberes como visitar al doctor o hacer compras debido a una condición física, mental o emocional.
- Otra condición de salud crónica
- Ninguna de estas
- No estoy seguro
- Prefiero no contestar

**45. ¿De dónde usualmente obtiene sus ingresos/dinero? Marque todas las que apliquen.**

- Sus Padres
- Amigos
- Otros miembros de la familia
- Un trabajo de medio tiempo (Part-time)
- Un trabajo por debajo de la mesa (Pago en efectivo)
- Trabajo de temporada
- Préstamos (Préstamos estudiantiles, Otros prestamos)
- Asistencia temporal para familias necesitadas (TANF/ayuda en efectivo)
- Cupones / Estampillas de comida
- Asistencia para mujeres, infantes y niños (WIC)
- Ingresos por beneficios de seguro social
- Beneficios de desempleo
- Otro: \_\_\_\_\_

46. ¿Cuál es su principal Fuente de ingreso/dinero? Marque solo una.

- Sus Padres
- Amigos
- Otros miembros de familia
- Un trabajo de medio tiempo (Part-time)
- Un trabajo por debajo de la mesa (Pago en efectivo)
- Trabajo de temporada
- Préstamos (Préstamos estudiantiles, Otros préstamos)
- Asistencia temporal para familias necesitadas (TANF/ayuda en efectivo)
- Cupones / Estampillas de comida
- Asistencia para mujeres, infantes y niños (WIC)
- Ingresos por beneficios de seguro social
- Beneficios de desempleo
- Otro: \_\_\_\_\_

47. Evalúe que tan fácil o difícil es para usted pagar por todo lo que necesita al mes.

- 1 – Muy Difícil
- 2 – Difícil
- 3 – Neutro
- 4 – Fácil
- 5 – Muy Fácil

48. Piense en el mes pasado. ¿Dónde usualmente se quedaba o alojaba?

- En mi propia casa/apartamento/cuarto que yo pago.
- En mi propia casa/apartamento/cuarto que alguien más paga.
- Vivo con ambos padres (Padre y Madre)
- Vivo con uno de mis padres ( Padre o Madre)
- Vivo con un amigo o amigos.
- Vivo con otro pariente.
- Vivo en un refugio / amparo.
- En un Carro (Vehículo u automóvil)
- Otro lugar techado ( En escaleras, subterráneo o sótano)
- Un lugar diferente todas las noches
- Otro \_\_\_\_\_

20. En la lista de servicios detallados a continuación, indique cuales servicios ha recibido y la frecuencia de uso utilizando la siguiente escala.

	Una vez al año	Un par de veces al año	Mensual	Semanal	Más de una vez por semana	No uso este servicio
Cupones de alimentos						
TANF (Asistencia en efectivo)						
Ingreso del Seguro Social						
Asistencia de vivienda						
Banco de alimentos						
Refugio						
CareerLink o Programa para jóvenes adultos						
Servicios de apoyo de embarazo						
Head Start (Inicio para infantes)						
First steps (Primeros pasos)						
Mujeres, Infantes y Niños (WIC)						
Otro (Especificar):						

21. ¿Qué tan útiles son los servicios que utiliza?

- 1 – Demasiado inútil
- 2 – Inútil
- 3 – Ni útil ni inútil
- 4 – Útil
- 5 – Muy útil
- No estoy seguro (a)

22. ¿Qué servicios le ayudarían, que aún no están disponibles en el Condado de Berks? (Favor de responder en el espacio debajo)

23. ¿Usted le provee atención primaria a algún menor de edad, o a algún adulto regularmente?

- Si
- No

24. Si su respuesta es afirmativa, favor de indicar en el espacio de abajo a quien cuida.

- Padres
- Hermanos
- Abuelo (s)
- Sus propios hijos
- Otro miembro de la familia
- Alguien con una incapacidad
- Otro \_\_\_\_\_

25. ¿Cuál de las siguientes, describe su situación actual? Marque todas las que aplican.

- Embarazo
- Enfermedad o incapacidad
- Falta de apoyo de amigos o de la familia
- Habilidad limitada para hablar y/o leer Inglés
- Dificultad para acceder transporte, o transporte poco confiable
- No tiene licencia para conducir
- No tiene identificación apropiada (documentos personales)
- Deuda de tarjetas de crédito
- Deuda de préstamos
- Deuda estudiantil
- Insuficiente educación para el trabajo deseado
- Falta de empleos disponibles
- Record criminal
- Otro: \_\_\_\_\_
- Ninguna de las anteriores



**26. ¿Por cuál de las siguientes razones, si alguna, es por la que usted no está empleado, no asiste a la escuela o actualmente está en un trabajo inferior a sus habilidades? Marque todas las que apliquen.**

- Cuidar de mi propio hijo(a)
- Cuidar otro niño(a)
- Cuidar a un adulto
- Cuidar a alguien con una incapacidad.
- Embarazo
- Enfermedad personal o incapacidad.
- Falta de apoyo de mi familia y/o amigos
- Habilidad limitada para hablar/Leer Inglés.
- Transporte no confiable o dificultad para transportarme.
- No tengo licencia de conducir
- No tengo identificación adecuada (Documentos personales)
- Deuda de tarjeta de crédito
- Deudas de préstamos.
- Deuda Estudiantil.
- Educación insuficiente para el trabajo deseado.
- Falta de trabajos disponibles
- Record criminal
- Otro \_\_\_\_\_
- Ninguna de las anteriores.

**27. Para entender mejor su respuesta, por favor explique cómo es su día normal. ¿Que usualmente hace con su tiempo? (Por favor responda en el espacio debajo)**

**28. Estaría dispuesto a conversar en persona acerca de sus respuestas de esta encuesta y experiencias como un joven adulto en el condado de Berks? Aquellos que asistan a la reunión recibirán una tarjeta de regalo y comida durante la reunión.**

- Si
- No

**29. Para entrar a un sorteo de una tarjeta de regalo por completar esta encuesta o para ser contactado para la reunión, por favor escriba su mejor información de contacto:**

(Deje en blanco si no quiere ser considerado para el sorteo. Su información no será compartida)

- e. Nombre \_\_\_\_\_
- f. Correo electrónico \_\_\_\_\_
- g. Teléfono \_\_\_\_\_
- d. Código postal \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix E – Friends and Family Survey (English and Spanish)

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