



Southeast Pennsylvania Opportunity Youth Study:

Understanding & Responding to the Impacts of the Pandemic

Submitted by The Workforce Development Boards of Berks, Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Philadelphia and Montgomery Counties

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study is commissioned by the workforce development boards of Berks, Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Philadelphia, and Montgomery counties to gather qualitative and quantitative information on Opportunity Youth or OY, youth aged 16-24 who are neither in the workforce nor pursuing education. The study will help guide county-based and regional strategies to reengage youth in educational and occupation programs.

The data collected and analyzed in this study include the demographics and attributes of disconnected youth, the COVID-19 impact on disconnected youth by county and region, secondary indicator data related to disconnected youth including mental health, and additional data derived from the research process. Stakeholders in each county, including community-based organizations (CBOs) and OY, were actively engaged in this process, including through a survey, focus groups, and one-on-one interviews. In all, over 1,000 individuals among the six counties were engaged throughout the course of this study. The report identifies regional themes and includes strategies and recommendations to address the most critical needs associated with Southeast Pennsylvania (SEPA) opportunity youth.

Major key themes and recommendations detailed in this report are summarized below.

Increase access to services throughout each county.

Lack of access to transportation – public, private, and shared – was one of the most frequent barriers discussed by most stakeholders in all six counties. Representatives from CBOs shared insight into how lack of access to transportation affects youth's ability to participate in programming and/or employment. To increase engagement among all OY within a county, workforce boards, providers and organizations should review innovative ways to offer services throughout the county. This could include implementing a hub-and-spoke model or a coordination of virtual services.

Ensure robust support for and awareness of mental health services.

The participants in this study shared frustration with the increased difficulty in accessing mental health services, citing long wait lists and low number of licensed mental health providers. Limited access to these services is especially detrimental to OY since school-aged youth frequently receive mental health services through their education provider. With OY being disengaged from school systems, they no longer have access to one of the most common methods of receiving mental health services, greatly increasing their risk of detrimental behaviors linked to mental health. Prioritizing funding for and increasing awareness of mental health services available to OY is essential to closing this access gap.

Involve opportunity youth in outreach. The youth who participated in this study expressed strong desires to help their peers, and pride when one of their friends engaged and was successful. Representatives from community-based organizations also echoed this, sharing that in their experience, “word of mouth” from engaged youth to disengaged youth is by far the most effective outreach strategy. To intentionally capitalize on the effectiveness of this outreach, it is recommended that workforce boards work with providers and organizations to find ways to motivate and reward OY who engage their disconnected peers. This could include the development of a Youth Ambassador Certification, similar in some ways to the Certified Peer Specialist.

Facilitate collaboration opportunities among providers and organizations. In every focus group with CBO representatives, no matter the county, the need for intentional time to collaborate was brought up and reinforced multiple times. Many participants shared innovative ideas and solutions to increasing engagement among OY, including hosting youth conferences with participating organizations. It is recommended that workforce boards in each county take the lead on organizing and facilitating regular meetings among these stakeholders to give them the chance to make their ideas a reality.

INTRODUCTION

The Term Opportunity Youth

Youth aged 16-24 who are neither in the workforce nor pursuing education have been identified in a variety of ways, many of which have negative connotations. Terms that have been used to talk about this population include Disconnected Youth, At-Risk Youth, Youth Disconnected, and Dropouts. This study will use the term Opportunity Youth “as a reflection of the optimism they have for finding a pathway to economic stability, and as a reminder that investing in their futures represents an immense opportunity for employers and the nation. By improving outcomes for this population, businesses and communities have the potential to increase savings for society, improve the quality of talent available to employers, and interrupt a multi-generational cycle of poverty for youth and their families.”¹

Overview of Process /Methodology

DATA SOURCES

Focus Groups

Focus groups with community-based organizations (CBOs) and opportunity youth (OY) were facilitated in Berks, Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Philadelphia, and Montgomery counties for a total of 12 focus groups. The focus groups for CBOs and OY in Philadelphia County were facilitated virtually due to COVID-19 capacity restrictions, but the other 10 focus groups were facilitated in-person within each county. Due to the low turnout of OY attending the focus groups, six one-on-one interviews were conducted with OY from each county to increase participation.

Survey

The survey was comprised of closed and open-ended questions and was shared through targeted emails and social media posts. Eligible respondents were sent a digital gift card for their completion of the survey. Potential respondents were eligible for the gift card if they met the definition of OY (16-24, were not in school and were not employed). The survey was opened on September 8, 2021, and closed October 15, 2021. There were 6,037 total responses to the survey. Filtering responses for quality responses (i.e., full, reliable, and eligible responses from OY from the region) there were 1,052 responses accepted for analysis.

Secondary Research and Document Review

To further understand demographic makeup of Southeast Pennsylvania and the impact of COVID-19 on the region, TPMA conducted secondary research through desktop and document review. TPMA utilized COVID-19 dashboards and a variety of reports on COVID-19 effects to OY and the Southeast Pennsylvania region to provide a comprehensive report and recommendations.

¹ <https://action-lab.org/opportunity-youth/video-page/>

DATA ANALYSIS

TPMA applied a mixed-methods approach, in which multiple types of qualitative and quantitative data were collected, analyzed, and synthesized to increase the rigor of research methods and enhance the validity of conclusions. To strengthen the accuracy and credibility of qualitative analysis findings, TPMA relied on triangulation and collaborative inquiry. By comparing findings based on different data sources and using approaches that incorporate both evidence and negative evidence, TPMA created a more robust and dynamic depiction of program needs.

More information on data analysis and method can be found in the [Appendix A](#). The protocols for the focus groups and survey are included in [Appendix B](#) of this report.



OPPORTUNITY YOUTH FACTS AND FIGURES

Opportunity Youth (OY) are youth between the ages of 16-24 who are not enrolled in school nor participating in the labor force. “Many of these youth have disabilities, are homeless, or involved with the juvenile justice or child welfare systems. The effects of this disconnection follow individuals for the rest of their lives, resulting in lower incomes, higher unemployment rates, and negative physical and mental health outcomes.”²

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic it was estimated that 1 in 9 youth in this age range in the United States were disconnected from school and work. The chances that a young adult will be disconnected from school and work at some point between the ages of 16 and 24 are much higher than the disconnection rate, according to Jobs for The Future: “Nearly 40 percent of our young people between the ages of 16 and 24 are weakly attached or unattached to school and work at some point during that formative stretch of their young lives.”³

While there had been strides in reducing the percent of youth who were disconnected, the COVID-19 pandemic caused youth disconnection rates to spike, and it is suggested that the gains made in the last decade to reduce the number of OY have been undone by the pandemic. Measure of America estimates, “based on currently available youth unemployment data from the Bureau for Labor Statistics, enrollment and employment data from the Census Current Population Survey, and school closure information, that in May 2020 as many as nine million young people were out of school and out of work, more than twice as many as in 2019.”⁴ They anticipate that the number for 2020 as a whole will be closer to six million.

Challenges faced by opportunity youth include those in areas of poverty, disability, parenting, limited education, living arrangements, and institutionalization.⁵ According to [A Decade Undone: Youth Disconnection in the Age of Coronavirus](#), opportunity youth are “nearly twice as likely to live in poverty as connected young people” and are more than three times as likely to have one or more disabilities, which hinders their ability to live independently. In comparison with connected youth, disconnected young women “are four times as likely to be mothers,” often due to a lack of appealing educational and career options as research suggests motherhood “may offer them a route to adult status that is both rewarding and attainable.” With this, young mothers are more likely to experience “domestic violence, poor birth outcomes, and postpartum depression, and have higher rates of high school dropout, higher rates of poverty, and lower levels of education attainment levels and incomes.” Opportunity youth are also twice as likely to be living apart from their parents, which often indicates “traumatic childhood experiences.” Other challenges commonly faced by OY include institutionalization, as “disconnected youth are more than twenty times as likely to be living in institutionalized group quarters (such as correctional facilities or residential health facilities) as their connected peers.” Limited education is also a challenge faced by disconnected youth, with this population being “nine times as likely to have dropped out of high school as connected youth. The Measure of America study points out that “the path to dropping out of high school often starts with academic difficulties and disengagement in middle school, frequently due to a lack of adequate accommodation for learning challenges of various sorts.”

² <https://www.aypf.org/youth-populations/opportunity-youth/>

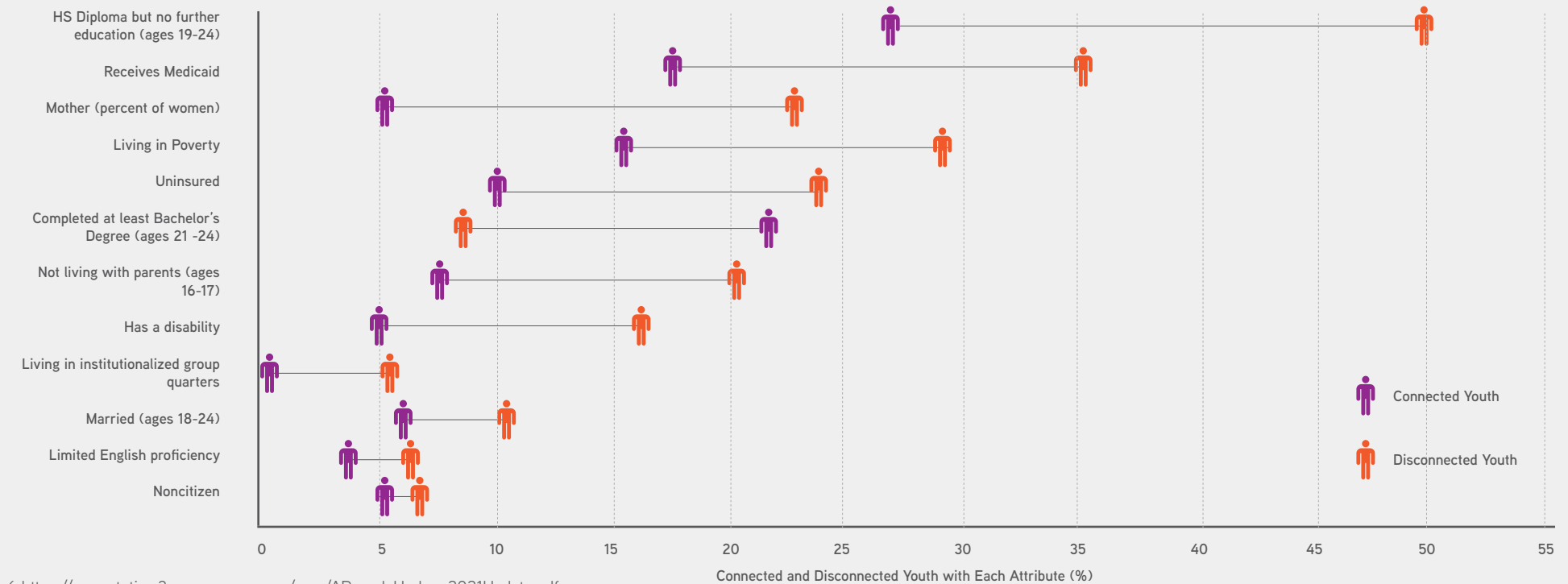
³ <https://www.aspencommunitysolutions.org/who-are-opportunity-youth/>

⁴ <http://measureofamerica.org/youth-disconnection-2021/>

⁵ <https://ssrc-static.s3.amazonaws.com/moa/ADecadeUndone.pdf>

The graphic below from Measure of America highlights the differences between disconnected and connected youth.

The youth disconnection rate varies by race and ethnicity as well as by gender. Based on 2019 American Community Survey Data, as found on Measure of America, Pennsylvania has a disconnected rate of 9.5%, ranking 15th lowest disconnection rate compared to the other States and the District of Columbia. In Pennsylvania, men have a disconnection rate of 10.3% while women have a disconnected rate of 8.7%. In Pennsylvania, 17.4% of Black youth are disconnected, 13.2% of Latino youth are disconnected, and 7.9% of White youth are disconnected.⁶



⁶ <https://src-static.s3.amazonaws.com/moa/ADecadeUndone2021Update.pdf>

Regionally

Pennsylvania is categorized in the Middle Atlantic region of the United States. This region ranks near the middle in terms of overall disconnection rate, with its overall percentage of youth disconnection at 10.6%. Of this percent, most are Black (17.6%), male (11.1%) youth. Similarly, the state of Pennsylvania ranks near the middle (24th) in relation to other states with 10.5% of disconnected youth. This equates to 156,200 disconnected youth in the state of Pennsylvania, 11.0% being men, 10.0% being women, 17.8% being Black, 15.3% being Latino, and 8.6% being White.⁷

Region	Overall (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)	White (%)	Latino (%)	Black (%)
United States	11.2	11.5	10.8	9.2	12.8	17.4
New England	8.3	9.8	6.9	7.0	13.7	11.9
West North Central	8.5	8.6	8.4	7.2	10.9	15.1
East North Central	10.3	11.2	9.4	8.3	11.5	20.5
Middle Atlantic	10.6	11.4	9.9	8.2	13.7	17.6
Pacific	10.9	11.1	10.7	9.7	12.3	17.7
Mountain	11.4	11.0	11.8	9.2	13.0	15.8
South Atlantic	11.5	12.0	11.0	9.9	11.3	16.1
West South Central	13.2	13.1	13.3	11.0	14.4	17.3
East South Central	14.4	14.0	14.8	12.4	14.6	19.5

Source: Measure of America calculations using US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2018.

Locally

COUNTY

According to Measure of America, “rural counties have a youth disconnection rate of 17.3 percent, on average, compared to 11.2 percent in urban centers and 9.9 percent in suburbs.”⁸

The Center for Rural Pennsylvania’s definition of rural and urban is based on population density wherein a county is considered rural if “the number of people per square mile within the county or school district is fewer than 291.” Counties with greater than 291 persons per square mile are considered urban. Based on this definition, most Pennsylvania’s counties are considered rural counties, however, all counties in Southeast Pennsylvania (SEPA) are considered urban counties.⁹ All of SEPA’s counties except Philadelphia County are at or below average in terms of youth disconnection rate for urban areas. Additionally, Philadelphia is part of the metropolitan area consisting of Philadelphia, PA, Camden, NJ, and Wilmington, DE, which is ranked 66th in youth disconnection for America’s most populous metro areas. This metro area has a disconnection rate of 11.8% (83,200) with 13.5% being men, 10.0% being women, 19.7% being Black, 19.3% being Latino, and 7.1% being White.¹⁰

County	Disconnected Youth (% ages 16–24)	Disconnected Youth (# ages 16–24)
Berks	11.2%	5,800
Bucks	6.9%	4,600
Chester	6.5%	4,000
Delaware	10.5%	7,500
Montgomery	7.5%	6,500
Philadelphia	15.8%	30,900

7 <https://www.aypf.org/youth-populations/opportunity-youth/>

8 <https://www.aspencommunitysolutions.org/who-are-opportunity-youth/>

9 <http://measureofamerica.org/youth-disconnection-2021/>

10 <https://ssrc-static.s3.amazonaws.com/moa/ADecadeUndone.pdf>

PUMAS

In 2019, Measure of America calculated the youth disconnection rate for all the country's public use microdata areas (PUMAs), or areas with populations of at least 100,000 people. Further, the country's 2,400 PUMAs were organized into eight community types based on their youth disconnection and population density. These eight community types include opportunity-rich urban America, opportunity-rich suburban America, well-connected rural America, moderately connected urban America, moderately connected suburban America, struggling rural America, urban opportunity deserts, and rural opportunity deserts. Measure America's eight community types are detailed below, in order of average youth disconnection rate (Opportunity-Rich Urban America having the lowest rate, and Rural Opportunity Deserts having the highest).¹¹

1. Opportunity-Rich Urban America:

Diverse communities located primarily in thriving sections of major metropolitan areas that are well served by public services.

2. Opportunity-Rich Suburban America:

Primarily White, comparatively affluent suburban communities with strong education systems

3. Well-Connected Rural America:

Primarily White rural and exurban areas; areas with the lowest rates tend to be home to colleges and universities or have thriving tourism industries. These communities are concentrated in the Midwest.

4. Moderately Connected Urban America:

Highly diverse communities in and around large and mid-sized cities, with uneven access to educational and job opportunities.

5. Moderately Connected Suburban America:

Suburbs and exurbs generally not in the immediate orbit of economic "superstar" cities and with uneven access to educational and job opportunities.

6. Struggling Rural America:

Rural areas primarily in the South and West with disconnection rates well above the national average.

7. Urban Opportunity Deserts:

Majority Black and Latino communities in and around major cities, poorly served by public services, and often clustered in peripheral or industrial areas.

8. Rural Opportunity Deserts:

Geographically isolated rural areas poorly served by public services and with limited economic activity; often, one racial or ethnic group predominates, such as Native American in the Lakota Region of South Dakota or Whites in the Big Sandy area of Kentucky.

SEPA consists of 29 total PUMAs located within Berks, Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia counties.¹² The large majority (82.8%) of SEPA's PUMAs are urban areas, with the other 17.2% (5) being suburban. Additionally, nearly half (44.8%) are considered moderately connected regions. Thus, most (37.9%) of SEPA's PUMAs are categorized as Moderately Connected Urban America, followed by Opportunity-Rich Urban America (24.1%), and Urban Opportunity Desert (20.7%). A list of SEPA's PUMAs and their community type, including their youth disconnection rates, are detailed in the table below.

¹¹ <https://ssrc-static.s3.amazonaws.com/moa/ADecadeUndone2021Update.pdf>

¹² <https://ssrc-static.s3.amazonaws.com/moa/ADecadeUndone2021Update.pdf>

County	PUMA	PUMA cont.	Area Type	Community Type	Youth Disconnection
Berks	Northwest	Wyomissing Borough	Suburban	Moderately Connected	15.5%
Berks	East		Suburban	Opportunity Rich	7.7%
Berks	Southwest	Reading City	Urban	Moderately Connected	13.0%
Bucks	Southwest		Urban	Moderately Connected	9.6%
Bucks	Southeast	Levittown	Urban	Opportunity Rich	6.0%
Chester	West Central	Coatesville City	Suburban	Moderately Connected	12.2%
Chester	North	Phoenixville Borough	Suburban	Opportunity Rich	8.6%
Chester	East Central	West Chester Borough	Urban	Opportunity Rich	4.2%
Chester	South		Suburban	Opportunity Rich	9.3%
Delaware	West		Urban	Moderately Connected	14.1%
Delaware	North	Broomall & Ardmore (West)	Urban	Opportunity Rich	3.7%
Delaware	Southeast	Chester City	Urban	Moderately Connected	15.2%
Delaware	East	Yeadon, Darby Lansdowne Boroughs & Drexel Hill	Urban	Moderately Connected	13.2%
Montgomery	Northeast	Lansdale Borough	Urban	Opportunity Rich	5.6%
Montgomery	Southeast	Willow Grove, Horsham &	Urban	Opportunity Rich	5.5%
Montgomery	Central	Norristown Borough	Urban	Moderately Connected	10.7%
Montgomery	Southwest	King of Prussia & Ardmore (East)	Urban	Moderately Connected	10.8%
Montgomery	South Central		Urban	Opportunity Rich	7.4%
Philadelphia	West		Urban	Moderately Connected	14.4%
Philadelphia	Southwest		Urban	Moderately Connected	14.6%
Philadelphia	Southeast		Urban	Moderately Connected	13.1%
Philadelphia	Center City		Urban	Opportunity Rich	7.3%
Philadelphia	Central		Urban	Opportunity Desert	18.5%
Philadelphia	Northwest		Urban	Moderately Connected	10.0%
Philadelphia	North		Urban	Opportunity Desert	18.7%
Philadelphia	Near Northeast-West		Urban	Opportunity Desert	16.5%
Philadelphia	Far Northeast		Urban	Opportunity Desert	16.5%
Philadelphia	Near Northeast-East		Urban	Opportunity Desert	20.5%
Philadelphia	East		Urban	Opportunity Desert	30.7%

All Opportunity Deserts in the SEPA region are within Philadelphia County, with most Philadelphia County's PUMAs being Opportunity Deserts (54.5%). Outside of Philadelphia County, all SEPA's PUMAs are Moderately Connected or better.

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE REGION

In the initial months of the COVID-19 pandemic, Southeast Pennsylvania began to see rapid increases in the number of COVID-19 cases. From the first outbreak in early 2020 through August 2020, the six-county region saw the diagnoses of 59,398 COVID-19 cases.¹³ In addition to active cases, the community was further impacted as unemployment rose to 13% in Pennsylvania by June of 2020. Among nonprofits, 75% of agencies had disrupted services and/or cancelled events or programs. By May 2020, 10% of nonprofits in the region anticipated having to close.

From March 6, 2020, through March 6, 2021, Philadelphia County recorded the highest number of cases in the state with 114,350 total cases.¹⁴ Including Philadelphia County, in the Southeast region, Montgomery, Bucks, Delaware, Berks, and Chester counties were in the top 10 counties with the highest number of COVID-19 cases. For all cases in Pennsylvania, the Southeast region had the highest number of cases of any region in the state, with a total of 289,586 cases between March 2020 and March 2021.¹⁵

As of December 2021, Pennsylvania saw 1,558,285 confirmed cases with an additional 336,229 probable cases.¹⁷ A total of 35,418 deaths were attributed to COVID-19. The six-county region (Berks, Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia) saw 521,593 total cases as of December 2021. In Pennsylvania, those 20–29 years old represented the age group with the most COVID-19 cases (317,415) as of December 2021.¹⁸

According to the most recent data, SEPA counties are currently experiencing their highest rates of COVID-19 cases since the beginning of the pandemic, with the most cases in Delaware County (230.3 cases per 100k), followed by Philadelphia County (187.6), Berks County (179.3), Montgomery County (177.4), Chester County (152.1), and Bucks County (147.6).¹⁹ Although cases are on the rise in SEPA, vaccination rates remain high throughout Pennsylvania, with 78.8% of residents having received at least one dose and 64.1% being fully vaccinated.²⁰

County	Daily Cases per 100K	Infection Rate	Positive Test Rate	Vaccinated	Vulnerability Level
Berks	179.3	1.28	33.1%	62%	High
Bucks	147.6	1.31	27.2%	73%	Low
Chester	152.1	1.29	24.2%	80%	Low
Delaware	230.3	1.45	31.8%	72%	Medium
Montgomery	177.4	1.38	25.4%	76%	Low
Philadelphia	187.6	1.46	33.2%	77%	Very High

Source: COVID Act Now.¹⁶

Note: Data updated 1/5/2022.

13 <https://www.impact.upenn.edu/toolkits/covid-response-dashboard/>

14 <https://haponlinecontent.azureedge.net/resourcelibrary/covid-report-research-final-6-2-2021.pdf>

15 <https://haponlinecontent.azureedge.net/resourcelibrary/covid-report-research-final-6-2-2021.pdf>

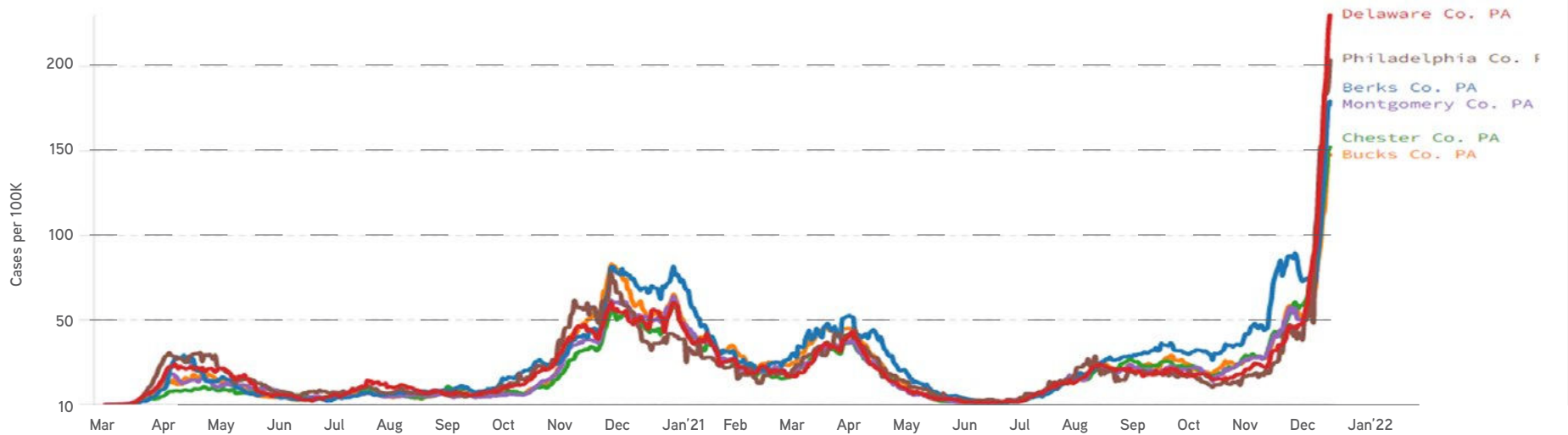
16 <https://covidactnow.org/share/55220/?redirectTo=%2Fus%2Fpennsylvania-pa%2Fcompare%2F55220&s=27751665>

17 <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/ed2def13f9b045eda9f7d22dbc9b500e>

18 <https://www.impact.upenn.edu/toolkits/covid-response-dashboard/>

19 <https://covidactnow.org/share/55218/?redirectTo=%2Fus%2Fpennsylvania-pa%2Fexplore%2F55218>

20 <https://covidactnow.org/us/pennsylvania-pa/chart/6?s=27751665>



Source: COVID Act Now²¹
 Note: Data updated 1/5/2022.

The graph above highlights the increase in cases in SEPA beginning in December 2021. The increase in cases during December 2021 and into the present has been a challenge to hospitals in the region. Hospitals being highly occupied by COVID-19 cases reduced the priority of non-COVID-19 medical needs and put strain on hospital staff.²² According to the non-profit COVID Act Now, “Pennsylvania has reported having 3,421 staffed adult ICU beds. 1,824 are filled by non-COVID-19 patients and 1,018 are filled by COVID-19 patients. Overall, 2,842 out of 3,421 (83%) are filled. This suggests hospitals may not be well positioned to absorb a wave of new COVID-19 infections without substantial surge capacity.”²³

Further, pandemic-related staff shortages in hospitals have compounded this strain. Staff shortages because of COVID-19 have been seen nationally, as well as in Pennsylvania, and are occurring in many industries in addition to healthcare. Forbes outlined the national shortages, “Industries that have been hit the hardest were transportation, manufacturing, and construction. Small employers in the “transportation, communication, and public utilities industry had the largest portion of employers with a “significant” staffing shortage (50%).” The shortages seen in these industries have a large impact in SEPA as the medical field is the largest industry in these counties in terms of number of individuals employed (372,208), and transportation (121,676), manufacturing (261,410), and construction (149,979) are also large industries in SEPA according to the US Census Bureau’s 2019 (most recent available) data.²⁴

21 <https://covidactnow.org/share/55218/?redirectTo=%2Fus%2Fpennsylvania-pa%2Fexplore%2F55218>

22 <https://www.inquirer.com/health/coronavirus/covid-hospitalizations-pennsylvania-unvaccinated-20211210.html>

23 <https://covidactnow.org/us/pennsylvania-pa/chart/2?s=27751665>

24 Industry Type in SEPA. 2019 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates-Public Use Microdata Sample. Retrieved from United States Census Bureau

IMPACT OF COVID ON YOUNG ADULTS NATIONALLY

Young adults are impacted uniquely by the COVID-19 pandemic because of the forced postpone of major life milestones. Prior to the pandemic, young adults were slower to meet various benchmarks of adulthood compared to past generations, and the pandemic has only worked to further delay these benchmarks. For example, the Population Reference Bureau explains, “Fewer young adults in their 20s and 30s are getting married, having children, living independently from their parents, buying homes, and achieving financial independence.”²³

In addition to COVID-19’s impedance on life events for young adults, it has also hindered their education. When the COVID-19 pandemic started in the spring of 2020, most school districts in the United States closed their doors and immediately switched to some form of remote learning. By May 2020, an estimated 1,727,497 Pennsylvania public school students had their education affected by the pandemic.²⁵ This interruption continued into the 2020-2021 school year with 76% (51 of 67) of middle and high schools in Pennsylvania operating fully remote learning.²⁶ Factoring in learning loss associated with remote learning, and data from school closures due to natural disasters, it is estimated that “an additional 2 to 9 percent of high-school students could drop out as a result of the coronavirus and associated school closures—232,000 ninth-to-11th graders (in the mildest scenario) to 1.1 million (in the worst one).”²⁷

25 <https://www.impact.upenn.edu/toolkits/covid-response-dashboard/>

26 <https://www.education.pa.gov/Documents/K-12/Assessment%20and%20Accountability/Assessment%20Letter%20to%20ED%202-26-2021.pdf>

27 <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/education/our-insights/covid-19-and-student-learning-in-the-united-states-the-hurt-could-last-a-lifetime>



As with education, COVID-19 has also affected employment opportunities for youth. Though it will likely be a few more years before the full impact on youth employment is known, previous national emergencies, like the Great Recession of 2007-2009, have demonstrated that young adults during these times face a more difficult time entering the job market than other age groups. Through this, researchers have found “that entering the job market during a period of economic turmoil can have long-term, negative consequences for young adults.”²⁸ The Population Reference Bureau explains, “In midlife, they earn less (while working more), are less likely to be married, are more likely to be childless, and are more likely to die prematurely compared with young adults who enter the workforce during a healthier economy. Young adults who entered the job market during the Great Recession are still feeling the impact.”²⁹

It is necessary to note that COVID-19’s impacts are magnified for Americans of color. For example, Black and Latino Americans are disproportionately affected by layoffs because of the pandemic. The Population Reference Bureau emphasizes that these increased negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Black and Latino young adults “will likely linger for years exacerbating long-standing social, economic, and health inequalities between whites and other racial/ethnic groups.”³⁰

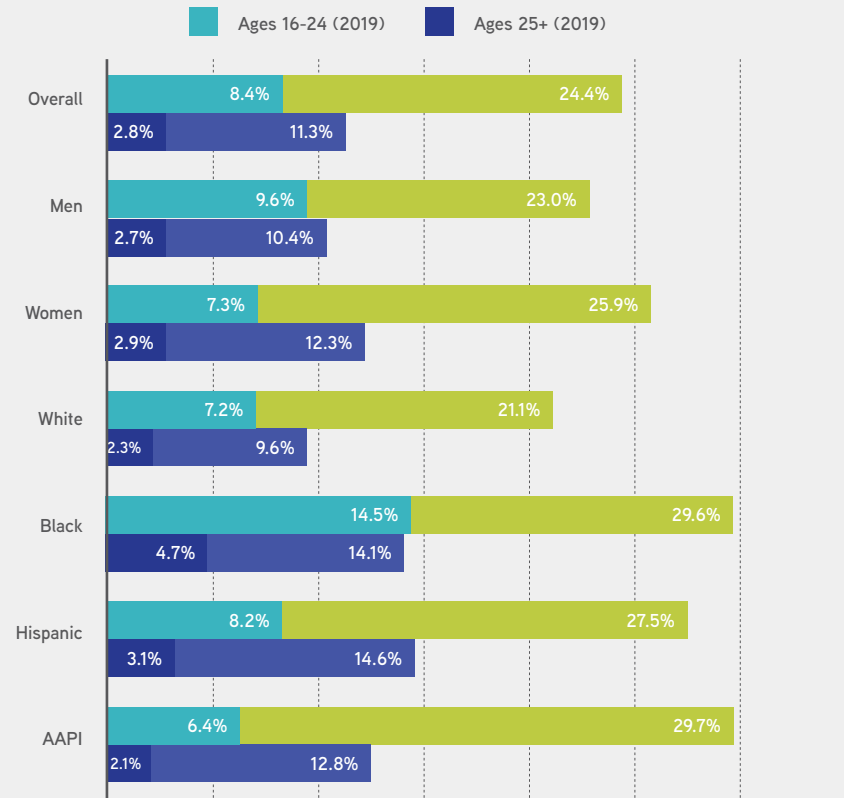
28 <https://www.prb.org/resources/life-on-hold-how-the-coronavirus-is-affecting-young-peoples-major-life-decisions/>

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

Unemployment skyrocketed for young workers in the COVID-19 labor market

Unemployment rates in the spring of 2019 and 2020, by age, gender and race/ethnicity



Notes: Unemployment rates are compared using a pooled average of April, May and June data in each year. Racial and ethnic categories are mutually exclusive. Hispanic refers to Hispanic/Latinx of any race while white, Black and AAPI refers to non-Hispanic whites, non-Hispanic Blacks and non-Hispanic Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, respectively.

Source: Economic Policy Institute Current Population Survey Extracts, Version 1.0.9 (2020)
<https://microdata.epi.org>

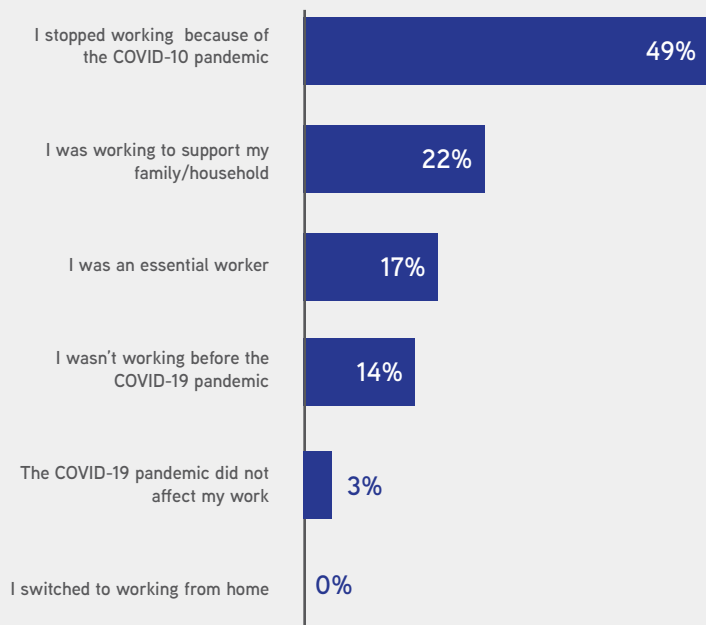
IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON OPPORTUNITY YOUTH IN SOUTHEAST PENNSYLVANIA

Prior to 2019, the youth labor market was already in crisis, with the percentage of young people employed or looking for work at historic lows. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated this crisis with unemployment among young adults rising from 8.4% to 24.4% from the spring of 2019 to the spring of 2020.³¹

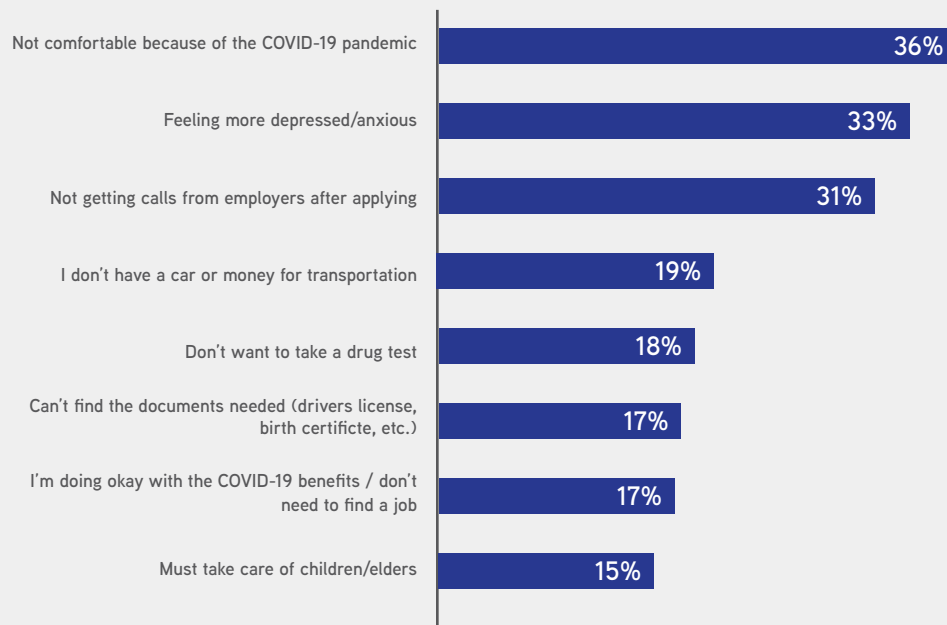
This rise in unemployment rate of Opportunity Youth (OY) was also reflected in the survey for this study. Nearly half of survey respondents (49%, 494) reported they stopped working directly from the effects of the pandemic. This was followed by over a fifth of respondents (22%, 218) reported they worked through the pandemic to help support their family/household.

OY who were not currently employed shared in the survey what makes it hard for them to now find a job. A total of 36% (365) of OY reported they were not comfortable seeking a job or working because of the pandemic. A third (33%, 338) reported they found it hard to find a job because they were feeling more depressed and/or anxious because of the pandemic.

How did the COVID-19 Pandemic Effect Your Work?



If you are not working now, what makes it hard to find a job?

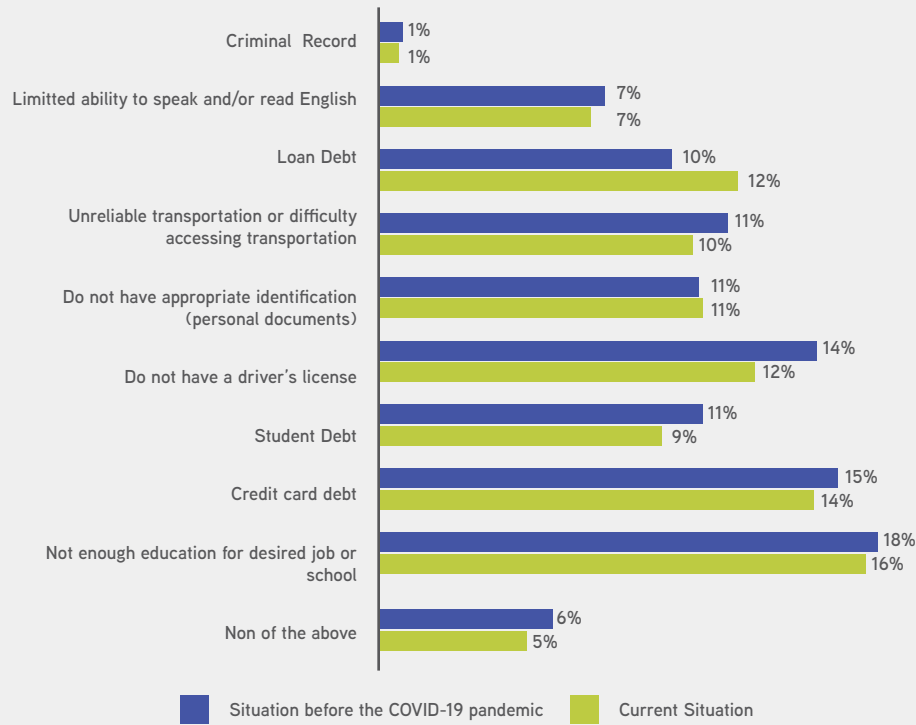


31 <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2020/12/18/making-a-promise-to-americas-young-people/>

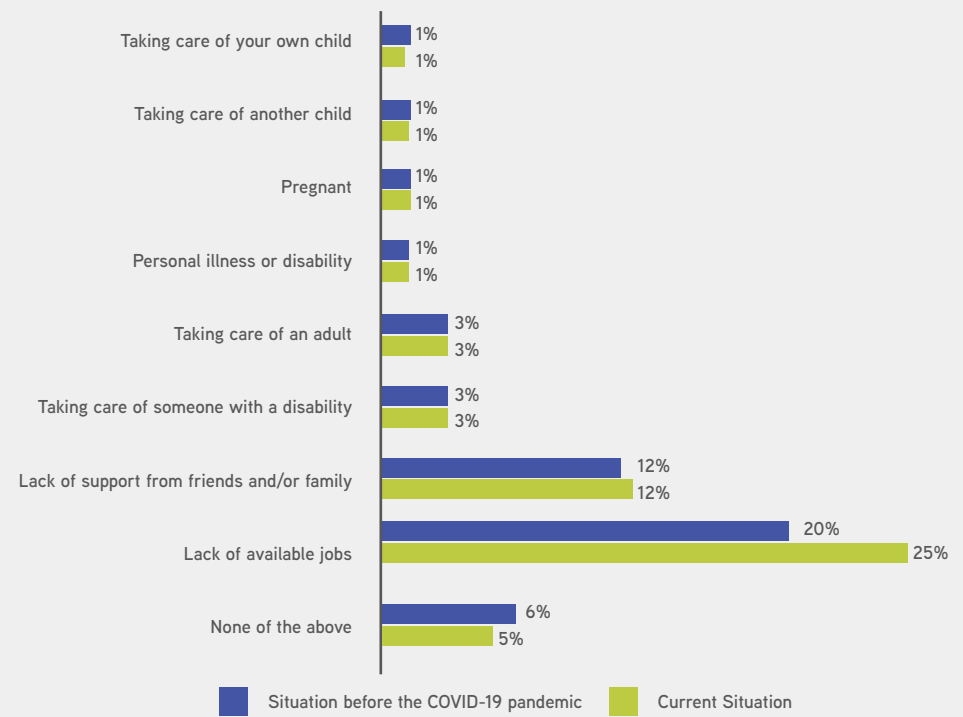
Respondents to the survey reported life situations they experienced before the pandemic and currently. Before the pandemic, OY most often reported they lacked support from their friends and family (12%, 119) and experienced a lack of available jobs (20%, 199). This was also true in OY's current situation as 12% (125) felt they still lacked support from their friends and family and 25% (257) experienced a lack of available jobs.

As a part of life situations, OY also shared barriers they experienced before the pandemic and currently. Before the pandemic, OY most tended to report they experienced not having enough education for their desired job or school (18%, 179). This was followed by 15% (153) reporting they are dealing with credit card debt. Both situations remained the most select options for OY's current situations, with 16% (163) of respondents reporting they currently were experiencing not having enough education for their desired job or school and 14% (145) having credit card debt.

OY Barriers

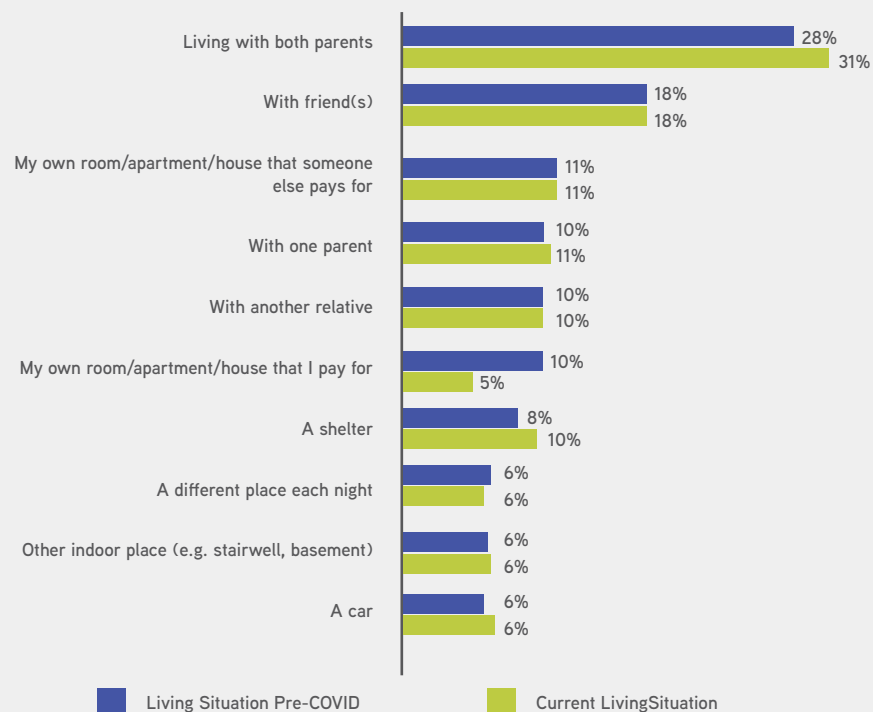


OY Situations



Pre-COVID-19, OY most often reported living with both parents (28%, 285). For the present, this number slightly increased to 31% (309). This was followed by OY reporting living with friends as 18% (177) identified this as their living situation both before COVID-19 and currently.

Living Situations



In the survey, respondents also provided open-ended comments on how the COVID-19 pandemic had affected them personally. OY who provided comments most often reported that they and/or their parents were now struggling to pay rent. Other top themes from open-ended comments included struggling with mental health due to the fear of the pandemic and its effect on their lives as well as the inability to see or be around their peers or family. One respondent noted, “It [COVID-19] affects my life, affects my work, makes me lose my job, and has a great impact on me” when sharing how the pandemic had affected them.

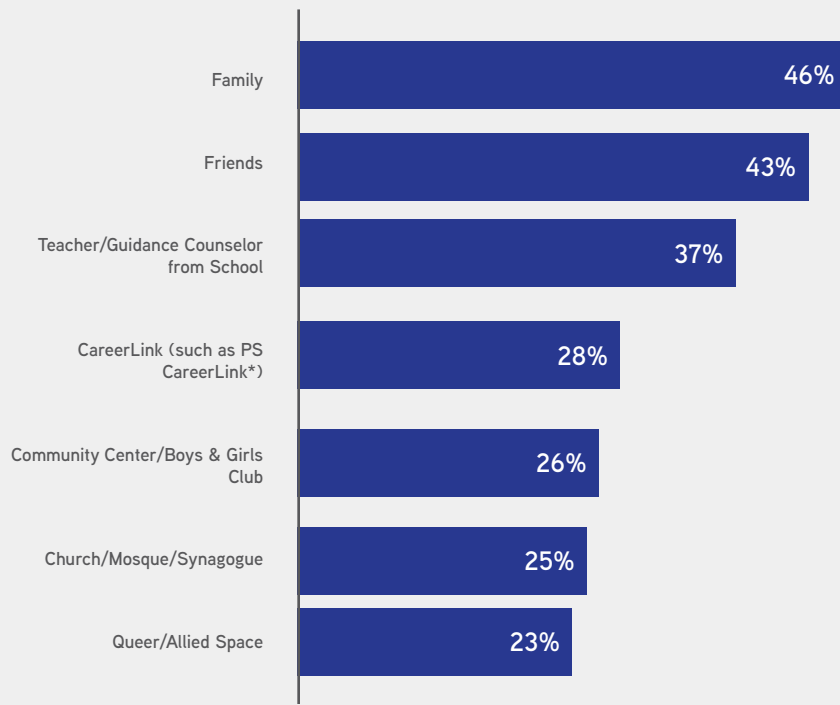
Survey respondents also shared the biggest change they have faced since the COVID-19 pandemic began. OY most often reported that they had lost their job or had their hours reduced, and now were unable to find work. A large portion of comments from OY also indicated they have experienced a decline in their mental health and access to healthcare, with one survey respondent sharing, “living conditions are not good, I can’t go out, and I am very depressed.” Many OY echoed this sentiment sharing they had become “anxious” by the situations the pandemic had left them in and their future.

Accelerators

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING AND TRUST

Among their trusted relationships, OY most often reported they believe they can go to their family (46%, 469) if they want to go back to school or get a job. This was followed by friends (43%, 437) and teachers and/or guidance counselors from school (37%, 376).

Who can help you if you want to go back to school or get a job?



During the focus groups, the representatives from community-based organizations (CBOs) discussed how vital relationships and trust are among Opportunity Youth (OY). “Trust is the biggest thing we have to work on” remarked one CBO representative. “Nothing will happen, no positive change [with OY], until we establish that trust with them.” Another representative explained how, despite all the challenges brought forth by the COVID-19 pandemic, they must continue to stay flexible. “I have to, we all have to, be willing to go out and engage with the community. Sometimes you have buy-in [from OY] and sometimes you don’t because they don’t know you. They need to know you; they need to trust you. They need to see you in their communities so they know they can trust you. You can’t earn that trust behind a computer screen.”

The Opportunity Youth focus group participants also echoed the importance of trust and relationships and how those are vital to their success. “Being able to come back [to a PA CareerLink®] has been so helpful,” one OY shared, “because the people here are always like, ‘What do you need? How can we help?’ They don’t get mad at you for anything. They just want you to keep coming back and bettering your life.” Another OY shared an insight into how this trust with community-based organizations (CBOs) is built. “Everything here is confidential. I was rampaging the other day and no one else knew because they let me have my privacy and helped me deal with my anger in private. That meant everything.” Seeing the relationships their peers have developed with CBOs is what convinced another OY to engage. “I noticed everyone was mad comfortable with each other and I was like, ‘I want that. I want that connection with everyone’.” Another OY echoed this sentiment by sharing that when they first started attending a workforce training program, they were “worried about 2nd hand embarrassment for messing up, but no one here cares. They don’t make fun of me. And that makes me want to keep coming back, keep trying.”

PAID OPPORTUNITIES

The ability to be paid while attending a workforce training and/or education program is a major draw for engaging Opportunity Youth. One successful example of this is the stipend OY receive for attending classes towards earning a high school equivalency diploma. “When you go to class for a certain number of hours,” explained one OY, “you get a stipend. Some of us are really struggling with getting a job, so those stipends are really helping us.” Another paid opportunity for OY is a paid work experience where OY can earn \$10 an hour working up to 30 hours a week with certain employers.

The importance of being paid for these opportunities was stressed by several OY participants. “I’ve got a fine I got to pay, and since no jobs are taking me right now, I can’t pay this fine, so it’s real important that I get paid for whatever I’m spending my time on” shared one OY. A young mother shared how these paid opportunities help her provide for her child. “The more I come in [to a PA CareerLink®], the more money I can spend on diapers and stuff for my daughter. There’s not a lot of other options around here. When I first had my daughter, I was looking hard to see who can help me and there wasn’t really nothing. So I got to make sure that the time I spend away from her is going to give me money to buy her the things she needs.”

ONLINE ENGAGEMENT

The COVID-19 pandemic forced agencies and community-based organizations (CBOs) to move their services and training programs online. While this came with some challenges (as noted in the next section), it also brought forth innovative opportunities to engage with OY that could not have participated in person. For example, one CBO representative shared that they are now able to offer more workforce training opportunities online, to the benefit of young parents. “We were now able to offer medical assisting online, and we had one mom who would have never been able to drive to campus for this class. But now she’s taking it, and doing very well, because she can take the classes right in her living room while still being home with her kids. It just shows how online classes can change someone’s life.” Another CBO representative stated that “We will always offer remote classes now because for some youth, it really works. They need those opportunities.”

Another CBO representative discussed how offering online high school equivalency diploma classes helps provide opportunities to OY throughout the county. “Before COVID-19, you had to drive to [the county seat] to attend G.E.D. classes in person. That was just about impossible for people in the northern part of the county, especially if they don’t drive or don’t have a dependable car. So being able to teach online has been game changing for those folks, and for all the other youth who can’t find a way to get here. I know online teaching has its problems, but the doors it is opening cannot be ignored.”

Challenges

CONNECTING SERVICES/ COORDINATING EFFORTS

When participants discussed connecting services or coordinating efforts, they discussed three main challenges: the pandemic and shutdown of services increased the lack of connection, there is a lack of awareness, and there is no one responsible for coordinating efforts.

Lack of Connection

Connecting with organizations and being able to meet OY needs while not seeing them in person has proved challenging. One representative from a community-based organization (CBO) stated they felt “COVID-19 has made us lose a lot of this sense of community” sharing they have “lost a lot of our connections.” Another focus group participant agreed, noting, “I don’t think our community orgs utilize each other as much as they could. I’d love for our community to become more connected so when we work with an [OY] we know immediately where to send them. I’d love to be able to just pick up the phone and make that connection immediately, personally. That’s just not happening right now.”

Lack of Awareness

The lack of awareness of services offered affects both OY trying to access services and organizations who are trying to connect to additional resources. A stakeholder shared “it’s hard to get the word out and let people know they [organizations] are there. It’s just hard to get the word out about what services are available.” The OY focus group participants also discussed how they were not aware of services available to them. One OY noted, “I used to live right down the street from the PA CareerLink® and had absolutely no idea what it was or why people go there. When I dropped out of school, my counselor told me to come here and sign up for G.E.D. classes. I would’ve never known about this place if it wasn’t for her.” Other OY also discussed only being aware of services because of referrals from other organizations. “When I went after my baby daddy for child support,” shared one OY, “they told me about PA CareerLink®. I only came because I didn’t know any other options, and I only knew about this because they told me.”

Lack of Coordinated Efforts

Representatives from various CBOs discussed the perception of a lack of coordinated efforts among the different organizations in their communities. “A lot of our agencies are siloed,” shared one CBO representative. Another stated that because there is no coordinated effort to connect agencies, “We spend a lot of time connecting agencies with each other. Time that could be used to better serve our youth.”

TRANSPORTATION

Lack of access to transportation was one of the most frequent barriers discussed by all focus group participants. Representatives from CBOs shared insight into how lack of access to transportation affects youth's ability to participate in programming and/or employment. One CBO representative stated that, "We have to ask participants, 'What is your transportation situation?' and that severely limits the work experience opportunities we can partner them with. They are willing, and have all the right skills, but they have absolutely no way to get there every day."

Cars are expensive to maintain, and that cost is a significant barrier to most OY. Most CBOs discussed having funds available to assist youth with some of these costs. "Transportation is something we've always had to address," shared one CBO representative. "We have funds to pay for transportation. We can give them gas cards, help with maintenance expenses, and pay for a Lyft while their car is in the shop". The OY participants also discussed this help with transportation. "When I first started here [G.E.D. classes]," shared one OY, "I didn't talk to anyone because I was shy, so I had to walk an hour home every day. I would cry because my feet hurt so badly. So I started talking to people and they figured out how to help me."

However, one of the most significant barriers to using personal transportation is in obtaining a driver's license. "If you can think about the person who helped you learn how to drive, like a parent or sibling or whatever, a lot of them don't have that. And driving classes are not affordable," shared one CBO representative. Another participant remarked that the cost of the driver's license itself is a significant barrier for some youth. "Even though the [license] fee is not huge, there are all these small fees that start adding up. A lot of youth just don't have

the option to spend that money." To expand on the "small fees" that can add up, another participant shared that, "it costs \$30 to get a copy of your birth certificate, and with how backed up the system is now because of COVID-19, it's taking months for kids to get them. Same with social security cards. Most of these kids can't just walk into a DMV on a whim and walk out with their license. It takes time, and money, and knowledge of a very complex system that's just gotten more and more complex because of the pandemic."

Public transportation options (e.g., bus routes) are also extremely limited in some counties, further complicating youth's ability to engage in education and/or the workforce. "There are no bus routes that service the outlying areas of this county," shared one CBO representative. "The youth that live out there need their own cars to get anywhere, and that's just not an option for most of them." This sentiment was echoed by several CBO representatives from multiple counties. "Public transportation? Oh, we have absolutely nothing in this county. We live in no man's land" shared one participant. In a different focus group, a participant stated "there's no public transportation here. If you don't have reliable access to a car, you can't work in this county." Another CBO representative also discussed how the lack of quality public transportation is affecting OY's ability to maintain employment. "We have plenty of employers who want to hire these youth, and they are offering sustainable wages, but the bus can only drop them off a mile and a half – sometimes more – away from the employer. They would then have to walk the rest of that way, in all kinds of weather, with no sidewalks. We can't connect these youth to those quality jobs simply because they cannot get to them."

MENTAL HEALTH

Focus group participants shared insights into how the COVID-19 pandemic has greatly affected the mental health of OY in Southeast Pennsylvania. “At the start of the pandemic, when everything shut down, these kids were stuck at home for 4-5 months,” stated one CBO representative. “They were spending all their time on social media and it has greatly exacerbated mental health issues for them – depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts. It’s all through the roof right now.” Another participant shared that, “I have one participant who absolutely refuses to interact with me because lack of social interaction during the start of the pandemic has significantly increased his anxiety. It’s now debilitating for him.”

In December 2021, the U.S. Surgeon General issued an advisory on the youth mental health crisis that has been further exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. In this press release, the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) explained that the pandemic impacted the lives of young adults as it disrupted aspects of education, social opportunities, healthcare access, as well as access to basic needs. The HHS highlighted the compounded effect of the pandemic on the lives of vulnerable populations, “The pandemic’s negative impacts most heavily affected those who were vulnerable to begin with, such as youth with disabilities, racial and ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ youth, low-income youth, youth in rural areas, youth in immigrant households, youth involved with the child welfare or juvenile justice systems, and homeless youth.”³²

While focus group participants noted that mental health difficulties among OY appear to be increasing due to the pandemic, mental health services continue to be at capacity. One CBO representative stated that, “There are not enough mental health services to support kids or their families during this pandemic. It was bad enough prior to COVID-19 and the need has just grown exponentially”. This sentiment was shared by another CBO representative who stated, “I had one youth participant who desperately needed counseling services. There are only two options available in this county, and both options have a three-month waiting list. He had to just sit there while his mental health was getting worse and worse.” Not being able to access the limited mental health services provided by schools is also greatly affecting OY who are currently parenting. “What I’m seeing more of, because their kids aren’t in school, these young parents are having to deal with the mental health issues of their children, which affects their ability to engage with HSE [high school equivalency] classes,” shared a focus group participant. “One student dropped out entirely because her daughter is having mental health issues. Her daughter isn’t in person and can’t access those school services anymore, so it now falls entirely on the mom. The students in my program are affected because of their children’s needs and mental health issues.”

32 <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2021/12/07/us-surgeon-general-issues-advisory-on-youth-mental-health-crisis-further-exposed-by-covid-19-pandemic.html>

ACCESSING SERVICES

To help support individuals affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, the budget for many organizations to provide services and aid to youth has significantly increased. “We used to have to scour the internet to find free programs and services our youth could use because we didn’t have the budget to purchase anything. Now, we are in the opposite situation. We are rolling in money to use to help people,” shared one CBO representative. However, the eligibility stipulations to access these funds are a major barrier for OY. “We understand the need for those and to capture performance,” stated one focus group participant, “but it does prevent some OY from connecting to the program. Producing a social security card or birth certificate is a huge barrier for many youth”.

While various paid opportunities have been successful in attracting OY to education and workforce training programs, the stipulations and regulations attached to this payment makes it challenging to keep OY engaged. When speaking of their experience in a paid work experience program, one OY noted, “I’m doing the same work as everyone else there, risking my life, breaking my back, and they are getting \$20 an hour and I’m stuck at \$10 because I’m in this program? No, you ain’t going to treat me like that.” Another OY shared how the 30 hours per week maximum negatively affects them. “For the paid work experience, there should be a time extension so I can increase my knowledge of this job and increase my chances of getting hired into this job when I’m done. If I’m doing good and I am a good worker, I should be able to work more, you know? I should be rewarded for being good in that job. Instead, I’m being punished because I can only work 5 hours a day.”

Several CBO representatives noted this restriction around paid work experiences has greatly affected the engagement of OY. “We’ve been affected in terms of recruiting students. A little after COVID-19 started, our training programs were seen as an opportunity for people who weren’t doing anything to get trained so it was pretty good then. Now we’re at the point where it’s the opposite. People are getting paid a lot of money at Amazon or working almost anywhere, and our programs are restricting their hours and pay. [OY] don’t need the training or work experience anymore when these companies are desperate for workers. We’ve had a lot of difficulty recruiting and making numbers to run a class because of this.”

ONLINE ENGAGEMENT

The shift from in-person services to virtual because of the COVID-19 pandemic allowed OY from all over each county to have access to services and trainings they did not have before due to transportation and childcare challenges. However, initiating and maintaining OY's engagement with virtual services and opportunities was (and still is) challenging. Several representatives from CBOs discussed how difficult it is to building and maintain relationships with OY through virtual platforms. "Building a connection with students is almost impossible virtually, shared one focus group participant. "Teachers looked at black screens for hours, every day, for months. A lot of those signs you see in the classroom of a student needing help or support, or that you pick up through random, side conversations, you missed out as a teacher because they can turn off their camera and check out. That connection was completely gone. And once it's gone, it's almost impossible to get back." Others noted the difficulty in helping students learn and grow while teaching virtually. "Remote teaching was a major challenge for all us because students can't have the full classroom experience. They can't do things hands on, it's not as easy to collaborate with others or ask questions or request extra help. You lose all the good parts of teaching when you do it over the computer."

Several OY focus group participants also lamented their experiences with online engagement. "I didn't like how we had to start doing everything on Zoom because I do much better when I'm in-person," shared on OY participant. Another agreed, stating, "Zoom classes and office hours are not really that interactive. It's just a lot of listening and it's easy to get distracted. I couldn't learn as much as I could've in person".



Opportunities

COLLABORATION ACROSS ORGANIZATIONS

There is a strongly expressed desire among community-based organizations (CBOs) to work together across a county to engage, support, and guide Opportunity Youth (OY). One CBO participant stated that “when a youth comes to us with a need, we have to be able to meet it quickly, or at least quickly show them that we are working on meeting it. That’s how you build trust and how you get them to stay. They need to see that you can help, and quickly. If I had the time or ability to build stronger connections with my peers, with other orgs doing this work, I could help that youth faster, keep them engaged.” Another participant noted that, “youth today like to feel connected to something bigger than themselves. The more people and orgs we can connect them with, the better it will speak to this desire.”

The desire for collaboration led to a unique interaction during a focus group with community-based organizations (CBOs) in Chester County. One participant mentioned how, in a perfect world, they would love to help organize and participate in an annual conference for the youth in Chester County that would include a variety of experiences and connections with different organizations in the county. This immediately sparked interest and excitement among the other participants, and when the focus group was over, the conversation around a potential “youth conference” continued among the participants. Even though this focus group was not intended to be a space for collaboration among the CBO representatives, it still happened, which possibly indicates an opportunity and need for more intentional collaborative interactions among CBOs.

INVOLVING OPPORTUNITY YOUTH

Focus group participants were unanimous that “word of mouth” among OY in the community is the most effective recruitment/engagement strategy. “I’m younger,” shared one OY, “so I know a lot of other younger people in our community. So, if I reach out to them and say, ‘Come in and just talk to the people here and see what they can do for you’, it means a lot, you know? Because they trust me; if I say it’s good, they believe me.” A CBO representative echoed this. “To hear other youth who’ve done it and done the journey speaks volumes. When you hear about someone who’s had similar barriers to you and looking at what they’ve gotten from this program speaks volumes.” Another participant shared that “having engaged youth at the center of an awareness campaign, making videos for us on social media, participating in community activities as the ‘face’ of our organization would be more effective than any other outreach campaign we’ve ever done”.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE WORKFORCE BOARDS

Increase Awareness of Opportunity Youth Services in Southeast Pennsylvania

Almost every stakeholder that participated in this engagement (representatives from community-based organizations and opportunity youth) discussed, at length, the need to increase the public's awareness of the supportive services available to opportunity youth in Southeast Pennsylvania. However, reaching this specific population of youth, opportunity youth, is often quite difficult. "It's hard to get the word out and let people know [these organizations] are there," shared one CBO representative. "It's just so hard to get the word out about what services are available for these young people." To help overcome this challenge, there are two recommended outreach strategies, both designed to increase awareness: implementing a hub-and-spoke model and creating a peer specialist/youth ambassador certification.

Implement a Hub-and-Spoke Model for Opportunity Youth Services

Because of the need to keep capacity limits small due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many organizations throughout the country have turned to a hub-and-spoke model. This model enables a centralized 'hub' for people to come together and access services, while also providing the choice to receive similar services from "spokes." These "spokes" are often physical locations (either temporary or permanent) located away from the centralized hub. This model has proven very effective for organizations who, pre-pandemic, relied heavily on foot traffic to bring people in because it allows the organizations to bring the "spokes" to the people.³³

Due to its success the hub-and-spoke model has been adopted in many industries, including retailing, education, and healthcare.^{34, 35, 36} The Willis-Knighton Health System, for example, has utilized the hub-and-spoke model within their organization for over three decades. During this time under the hub-and-spoke model, they've identified many benefits to the implementation of this model, including consistency across operations, increased efficiencies, enhanced quality, enhanced market coverage, and improved agility.³⁷ In the healthcare field, hub-and-spoke model is becoming increasingly popular due to its ability to connect with underserved communities. BMC Health Services Research explains that "Willis-Knighton Health System's own outreach initiatives into medically underserved communities have increased in depth and breadth largely due to the efficiencies and abilities of its hub-and-spoke network."³⁸ Other organizations have begun piloting a hub-and-spoke model in recent years, as seen with the Wisconsin Department of Health Services' "Hub and Spoke Health Home Pilot Program."³⁹ Further, programs focusing on substance use treatment in Washington, California, Rhode Island, and Vermont, all currently utilize a version of the hub-and-spoke model.⁴⁰

33 <https://www.forbes.com/sites/bryanrobinson/2021/06/09/hub-and-spoke-the-new-office-model-of-the-future-expert-says/?sh=5eb1946c2732>

34 Banjo S. Wal-mart: a pro in physical-store retail logistics. *Wall Street J.* 2013;19:B2.

35 Millar L. Use of hub and spoke model in nursing students' practice learning. *Nurs Stand.* 2014;28(49):37-42.

36 Scalise A, Pierangeli M, Calamita R, Tartaglione C, Bolletta E, Di Benedetto G, et al. An example of a hub and spoke network system in plastic surgery: the regional reference center for non-healing wounds in Ancona (Italy). *Ig Sanita Pubbl.* 2015;71(1):51-72.

37 Elrod, J.K., Fortenberry, J.L. The hub-and-spoke organization design: an avenue for serving patients well. *BMC Health Serv Res* 17, 457 (2017). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-017-2341-x>

38 Ibid.

39 <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/aoda/hubandspoke-sud-hh.htm>

40 <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p02302.pdf>

A report developed for the Detroit Employment Solutions Corporation – who sought to develop effective youth employment programs in Detroit – identified the hub-and-spoke model as a potential avenue for growth. The report explains, “The role of the spokes may be enhanced to include further engagement, support, and mentoring of youth and uniform relationship building with worksites.”⁴¹

With representatives from community-based organizations from all six counties citing transportation issues as the most common barrier preventing youth from accessing and even being aware of services, the implementation of a hub-and-spoke model within each county would help remove this barrier by bringing services to different parts of each county.

There are various ways to use a hub-and-spoke model, giving workforce boards the flexibility to implement this model within their staffing and funding restrictions. For example, workforce boards could coordinate with various stakeholder organizations within each community (e.g., libraries, community centers, partner organizations, etc.) to reserve a room or space for the same day and time weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly. One staff member would then work from that space on that designated time and day, therefore increasing access for the youth in that area of the county. In a review of the literature on the hub-and-spoke model, Social Care Research Associates found examples of different implementation of the hub-and-spoke model. These were found in children’s centers including overseas organizations, holistic health initiatives for young people (e.g., healthy living centers), mental health services (including early intervention and emergency services), as well as physical health services.⁴² The most important aspect of this model is to bring services and access to all areas of the county and to increase the presence of staff within different communities.

While there are challenges associated with the hub-and-spoke model (e.g., congestion at hubs, overextension of spokes, staff dissatisfaction at spokes, or transportation disruptions⁴³), the model is widely used and has demonstrated its success in multiple fields. With the number of organizations of all types implementing a hub-and-spoke model, roadmaps and best practices can be found to promote its effectiveness. For example, The Commission on Substance Abuse Treatment Delivery (CSAT) provides an outline on the questions that need to be raised prior to implementation of the model. While focusing on the general design of the hub-and-spoke system, conversations “on what should be expected of “hubs,” what should be expected of “spokes,” and how care is coordinated between the two” must be had.

41 <https://www.workforcegps.org/-/media/Global-Site/Content/Resources/Global-Content/DESC-Evaluation-Report-Draft-3-11-17.ashx>

42 https://www.alexiproject.org.uk/assets/documents/Effective-approaches-to-Hub-and-Spoke-service-provision_final-report-25-09-14.pdf

43 <https://bmchealthservres.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12913-017-2341-x>

Create a Peer Specialist/Youth Ambassador Certification Program for Opportunity Youth

Since 2004, Pennsylvania has offered Peer Specialist Services to assist individuals throughout the state with severe and persistent mental illness and co-occurring disorders to achieve personal wellness and cope with the stressors and barriers experienced while recovering from their disabilities.⁴⁴ As part of this, individuals who have used behavioral health services themselves can be trained as Certified Peer Specialists, which allows them to provide these therapeutic, peer-based services to others experiencing similar mental health issues.⁴⁵ This program has been successful because it allows for peer-to-peer interactions and it provides work-based opportunities for individuals in recovery.

Noting that peer recommendations and word-of-mouth are the most effective outreach strategies for opportunity youth, creating a “Youth Ambassador” certification program that operates like the Certified Peer Specialist certification would allow organizations to intentionally utilize these effective outreach strategies to reach more OY. The youth who participated in this study expressed strong desires to help their peers and pride when one of their friends engaged and was successful. A Youth Ambassador certification program would allow workforce boards to capitalize on this momentum and would provide the OY with the opportunity to develop their employability skills and gain valuable work-based learning experience. Providing the Youth Ambassadors with a stipend for their work would be an essential part of this program because for them to be willing to do this work, they will need to be able to earn money to support themselves.

Ensure Robust Support for and Awareness of Mental Health Services

Mental health emergencies among young people have been exacerbated by COVID-19. In 2020, alone, there was a more than 30 percent increase in emergency room visits for mental health reasons for those between 12 and 17 years old.⁴⁶ Mental health emergencies increase when access to everyday mental health services are more difficult to attain. Stakeholders in focus groups highlighted the difficulties in receiving support for mental health concerns due to those services being at capacity.

For youth dealing with mental health concerns, many access these services through their school system. The National Alliance on Mental Illness identified that “youth are almost as likely to receive mental health services in an education setting as they are to receive treatment from a specialty mental health provider.”⁴⁷ This highlights the increased difficulties that disconnected youth, specifically, face accessing mental health services. In lieu of receiving services through an education setting or through a specialty mental health provider, opportunity youth are lacking access to necessary mental health services at an even higher rate than other groups.

Ensuring that organizations that are able to reach disconnected youth have the funding and support that they need to provide these services is critical. Further, establishing awareness of these services for opportunity youth is essential due to the lack of access through education systems or specialty providers. Peer Specialists/Youth Ambassadors may be utilized for this outreach.

44 <https://www.dhs.pa.gov/Services/Mental-Health-In-PA/Pages/Peer-Support-Services.aspx>

45 <https://www.pacertboard.org/cps>

46 <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6945a3.htm>

47 <https://www.nami.org/Advocacy/Policy-Priorities/Improving-Health/Mental-Health-in-Schools>

DEVELOP PAID WORK EXPERIENCE -> FULL TIME EMPLOYMENT PATHWAYS

Paid work experiences are a major draw for opportunity youth, especially for those who have no prior employment history and/or have barriers to employment. This is even despite major restrictions in pay and hours allowed. To fully utilize the potential of this program to engage OY, clear and consistent pathways to full time employment should be established and communicated. If a student chooses to participate in a paid work experience, they need to see and/or understand exactly how successfully participating in this experience can lead to full time employment. These pathways need to be clear, specific, and easy to navigate. Avoid confusing language like “up to \$X per hour” and “similar to X job title” because these (and similar) phrases often create a false understanding of possibilities, and if an OY feels like they have been lied to or “scammed”, they will quickly disengage and will likely discourage their peers from engaging. Eligibility requirements (including certifications and degrees) need to be clearly identified and labeled so OY know what to work towards. Engaging employers in the development of these pathways and establishing protocols for hiring OY who successfully complete the paid work experience is essential, as is consistent meetings to ensure the pathways are current.

FACILITATE REGULAR MEETINGS OF YOUTH PROGRAM LEADS

The desire among the representatives from community-based organizations to collaborate was brought up by participants in each county, and inadvertently happened when the organizations in one county spontaneously started planning a youth conference during their focus group. The need and desire are there, but the challenge lies in the organization and facilitation of these meetings. With staffing shortages and budget restrictions, adding another responsibility to one of these organizations or youth program leads is not ideal.

To allow these organizations the space and time to innovate and collaborate, workforce boards should set, advertise, and facilitate consistent meetings among the youth program leads in their counties, and any other organizations who support opportunity youth. These meetings should have an agenda with clear objectives (e.g., organizing a youth conference in the summer) and be facilitated in a manner that allows for innovation and collaboration on various pressing topics regarding engaging OY. These meetings could also be great opportunities to involve these leaders in the development of the other recommendations in this report, including the creation of the Youth Ambassador Certification.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

During this project, members from the workforce development boards of Berks, Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Philadelphia, and Montgomery counties provided guidance and assistance with through recurring meetings and individual communication. These workforce development boards were also integral in scheduling and hosting the twelve focus groups facilitated by TPMA. Several organizations and individuals in Berks, Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia counties attended meetings, were interviewed, returned pertinent information, participated in one-on-one meetings, connected TPMA with other community members and recruited Opportunity Youth to participate in the survey, focus groups, and one-on-one interviews. The voices of the OY in Southeast Pennsylvania would not have been successfully captured without the hard work and social capital of these organizations and individuals.

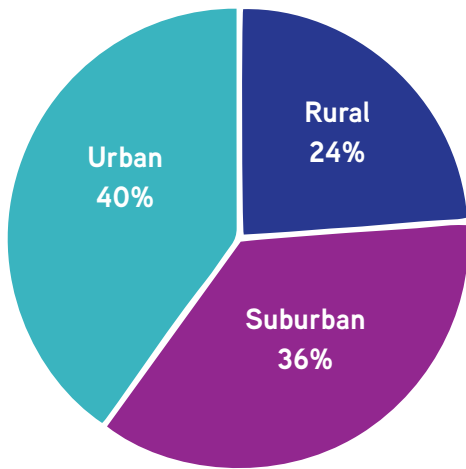
Thank you to all participants who contributed knowledge and expertise to this project.

COUNTY PROFILE HANDOUTS

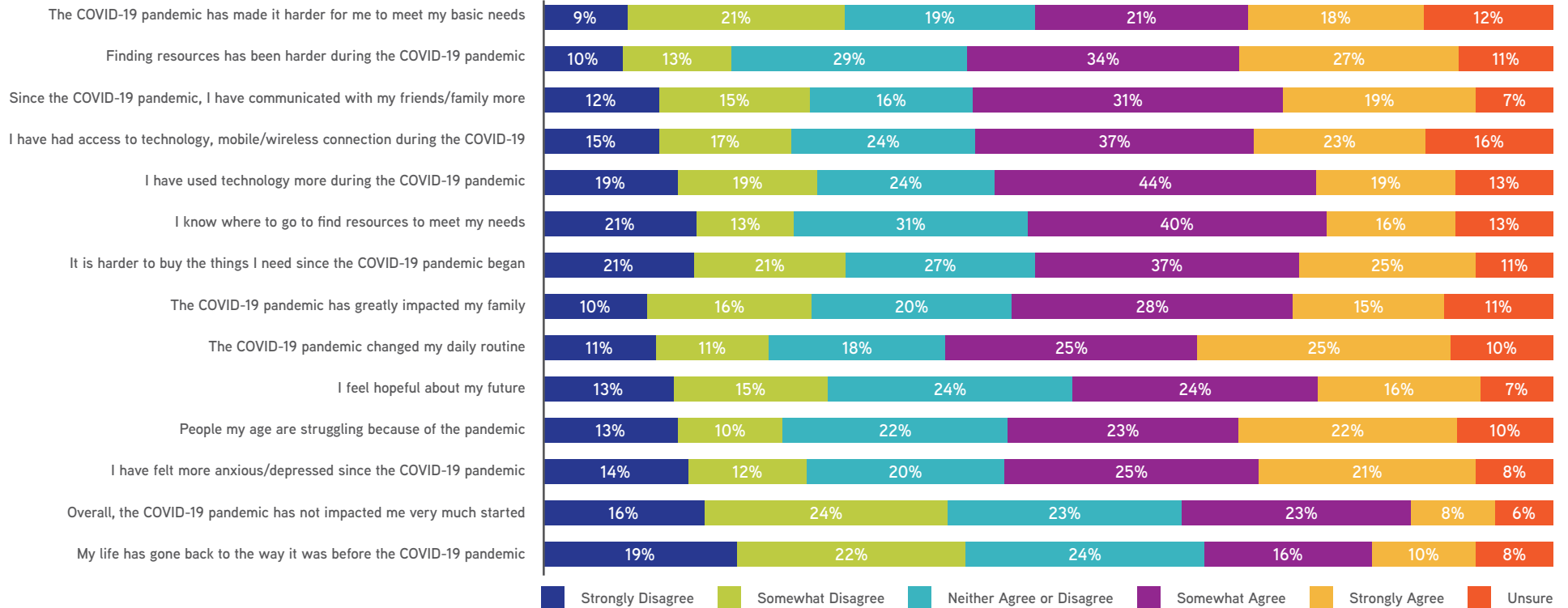
The final section of this report includes handouts with county specific information around PUMA data and responses to survey questions around the impact COVID-19 has on the opportunity youth of each county. These handouts are designed to be printed as one page, front-and-back, with the county specific data on one side and the explanation of the PUMA data on the back, to make it easier for each county to share their specific data with stakeholders.



BERKS COUNTY OPPORTUNITY YOUTH PROFILE



County	PUMA	PUMA cont.	Connection	Area Type	Youth Disconnection
Berks	Northwest	Wysomissing Borough	Moderately Connected	Suburban	15.5%
Berks	East		Opportunity Rich	Suburban	7.7%
Berks	Southwest	Reading City	Moderately Connected	Urban	13.0%



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Opportunity-Rich Suburban America

Primarily White, comparatively affluent suburban communities with strong education systems



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Primarily White rural and exurban areas; areas with the lowest rates tend to be home to colleges and universities or have thriving tourism industries. These communities are concentrated in the Midwest.



Moderately Connected Urban America

Highly diverse communities in and around large and mid-sized cities, with uneven access to educational and job opportunities.



Moderately Connected Suburban America

Suburbs and exurbs generally not in the immediate orbit of economic "superstar" cities and with uneven access to educational and job opportunities.



Struggling Rural America

Rural areas primarily in the South and West with disconnection rates well above the national average.



Urban Opportunity Deserts

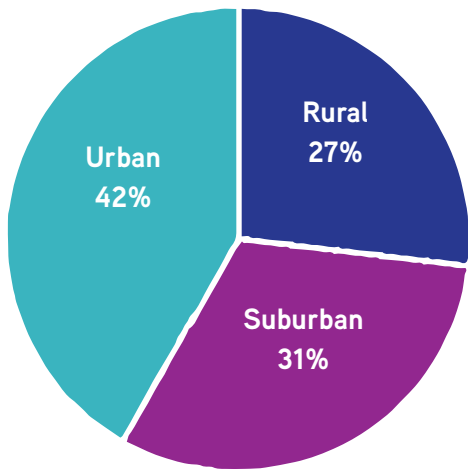
Majority Black and Latino communities in and around major cities, poorly served by public services, and often clustered in peripheral or industrial areas.



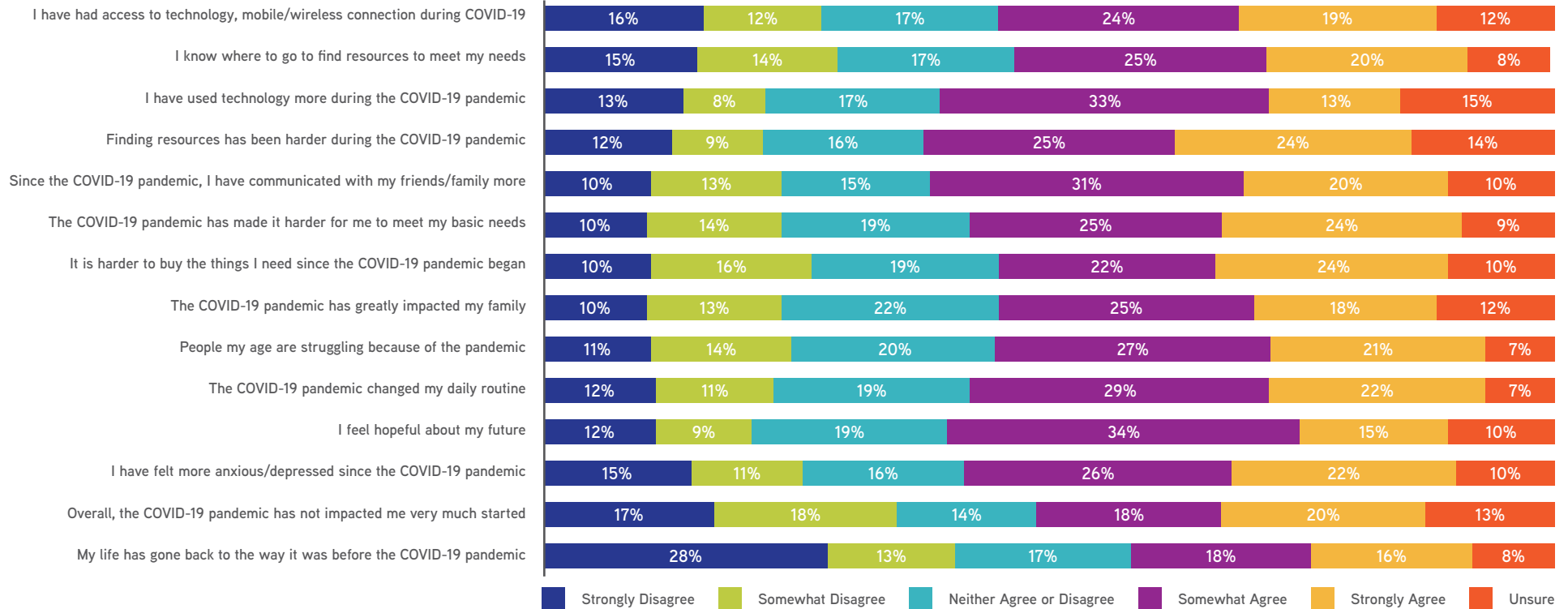
Rural Opportunity Deserts

Geographically isolated rural areas poorly served by public services and with limited economic activity; often, one racial or ethnic group predominates, such as Native American in the Lakota Region of South Dakota or Whites in the Big Sandy area of Kentucky.

BUCKS COUNTY OPPORTUNITY YOUTH PROFILE



County	PUMA	PUMA cont.	Connection	Area Type	Youth Disconnection
Bucks	Southwest		Moderately Connected	Urban	9.6%
Bucks	Southwest	Levittown	Opportunity Rich	Urban	6.0%



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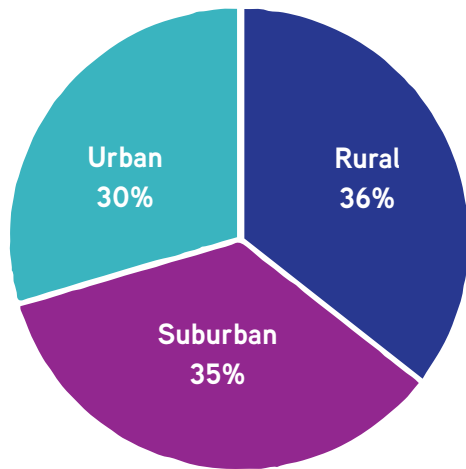
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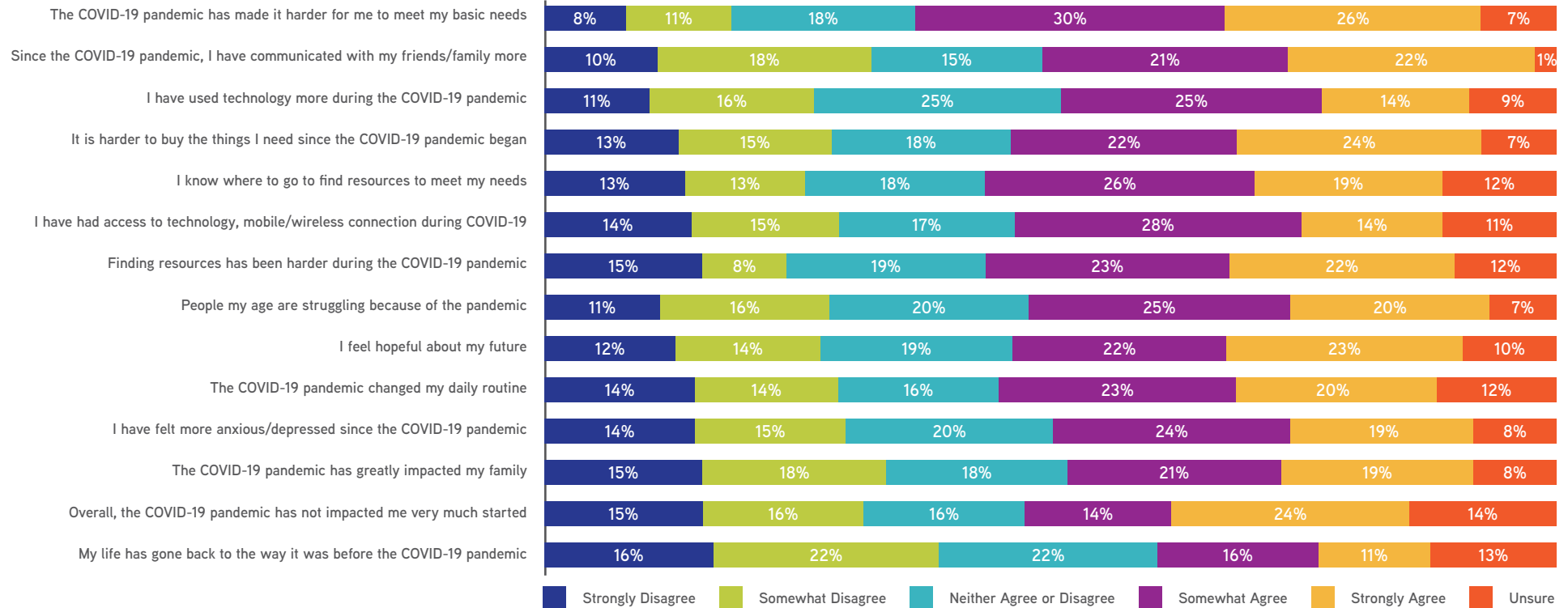
Rural Opportunity Deserts

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CHESTER COUNTY OPPORTUNITY YOUTH PROFILE



County	PUMA	PUMA cont.	Connection	Area Type	Youth Disconnection
Chester	West Central	Coatesville City	Moderately Connected	Suburban	12.2%
Chester	North	Phoenixville Borough	Opportunity Rich	Suburban	8.6%
Chester	East Central	West Chester Borough	Opportunity Rich	Urban	4.2%
Chester	South		Opportunity Rich	Suburban	9.3%



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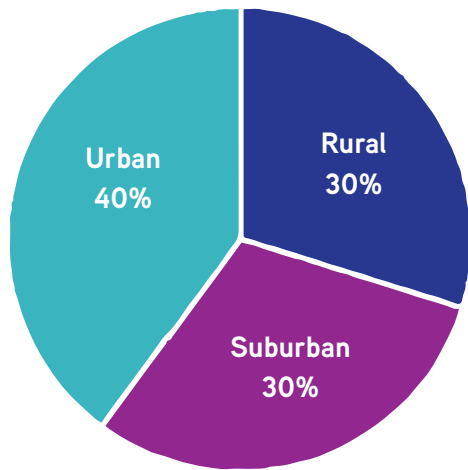
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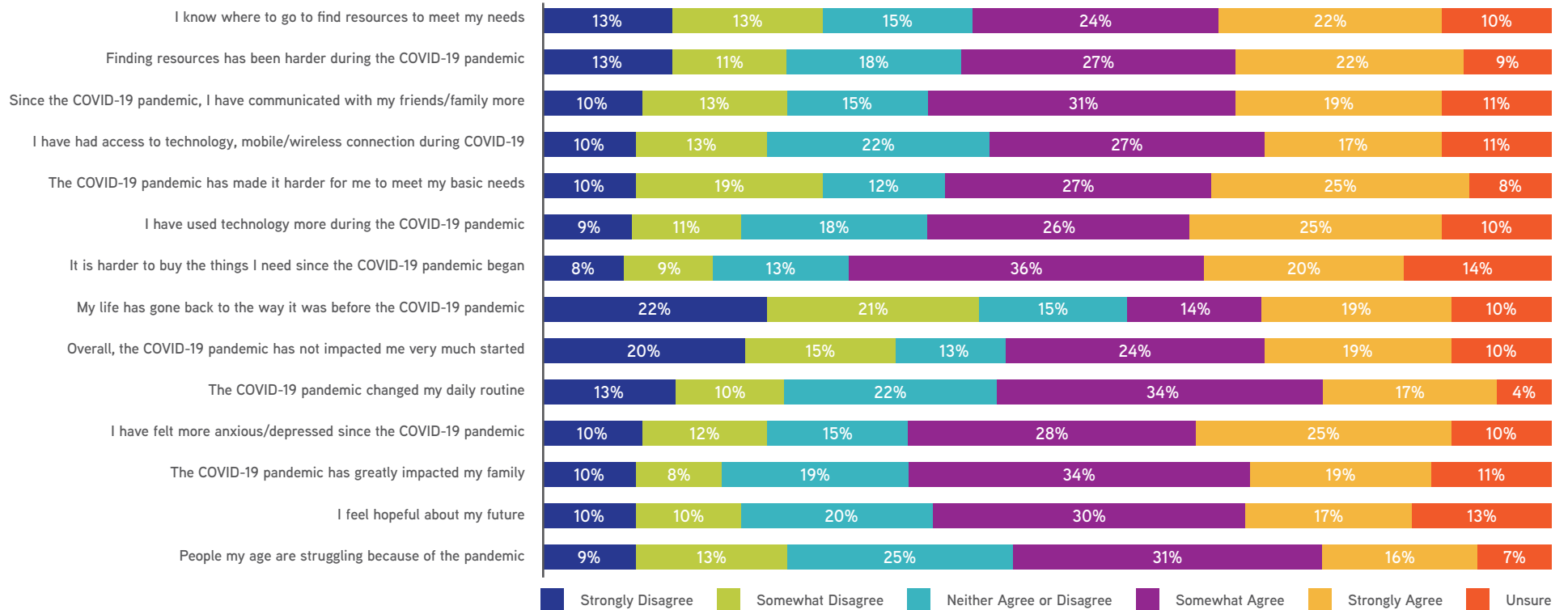
Rural Opportunity Deserts

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DELAWARE COUNTY OPPORTUNITY YOUTH PROFILE



County	PUMA	PUMA cont.	Connection	Area Type	Youth Disconnection
Delaware	West		Moderately Connected	Urban	14.1%
Delaware	North	Broomall & Ardmore (West)	Opportunity Rich	Urban	3.7%
Delaware	Southeast	Chester City	Moderately Connected	Urban	15.2%
Delaware	East	Yeadon, Darby, Landowne Boroughs & Drexel Hill	Moderately Connected	Urban	13.2%



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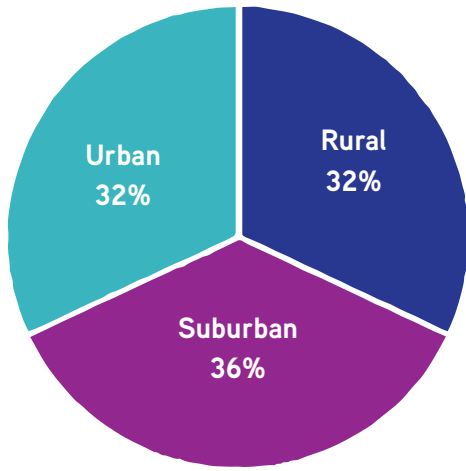
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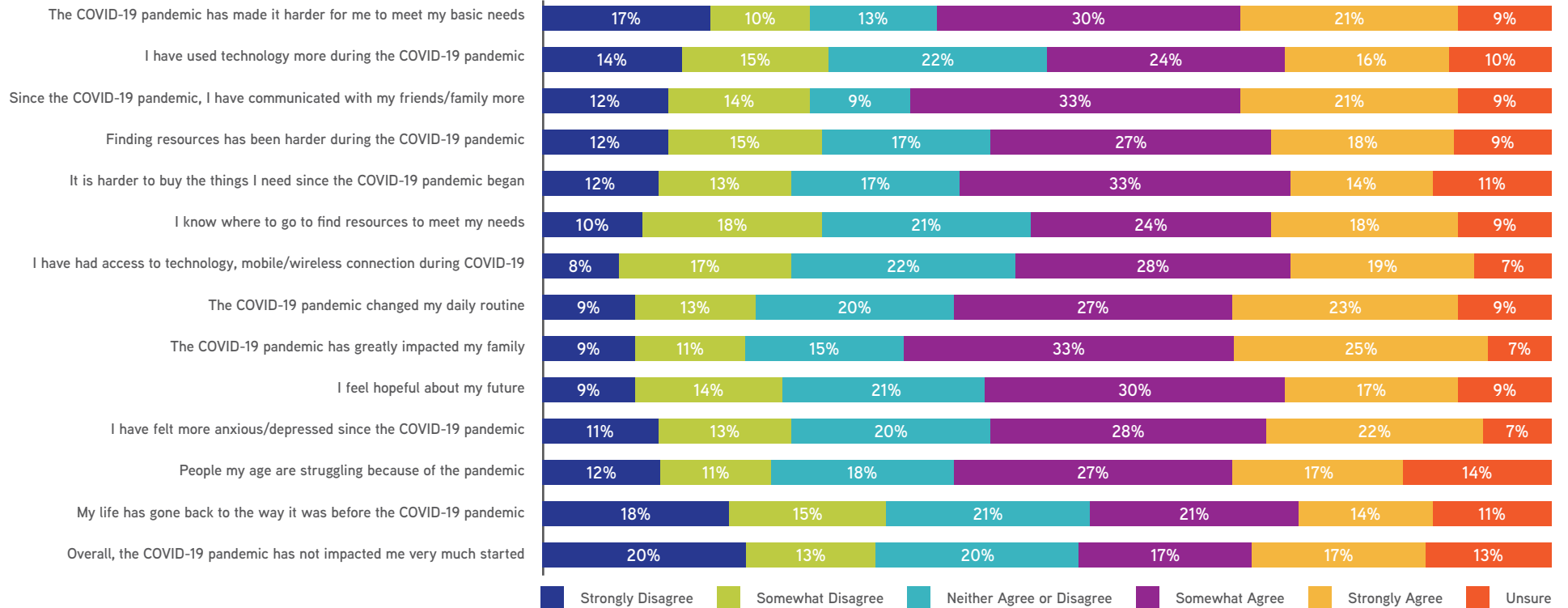
Rural Opportunity Deserts

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MONTGOMERY COUNTY OPPORTUNITY YOUTH PROFILE



County	PUMA	PUMA cont.	Connection	Area Type	Youth Disconnection
Montgomery	Northeast	Lansdale Borough	Opportunity Rich	Urban	5.6%
Montgomery	Southeast	Willow Grove, Horsham	Opportunity Rich	Urban	5.5%
Montgomery	Central	Norristown Borough	Moderately Connected	Urban	10.7%
Montgomery	Southwest	King of Prussia & Ardmore (East)	Moderately Connected	Urban	10.8%
Montgomery	South Central		Opportunity Rich	Urban	7.4%



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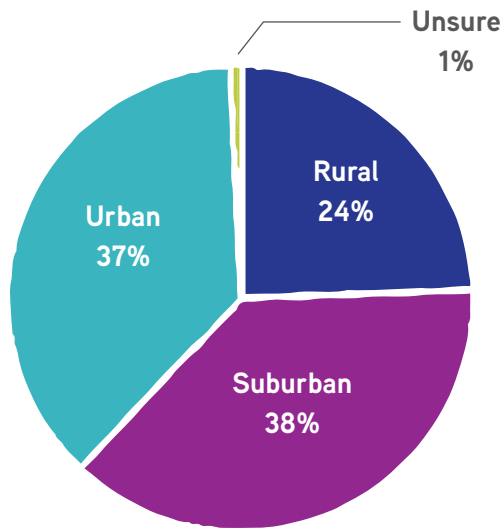
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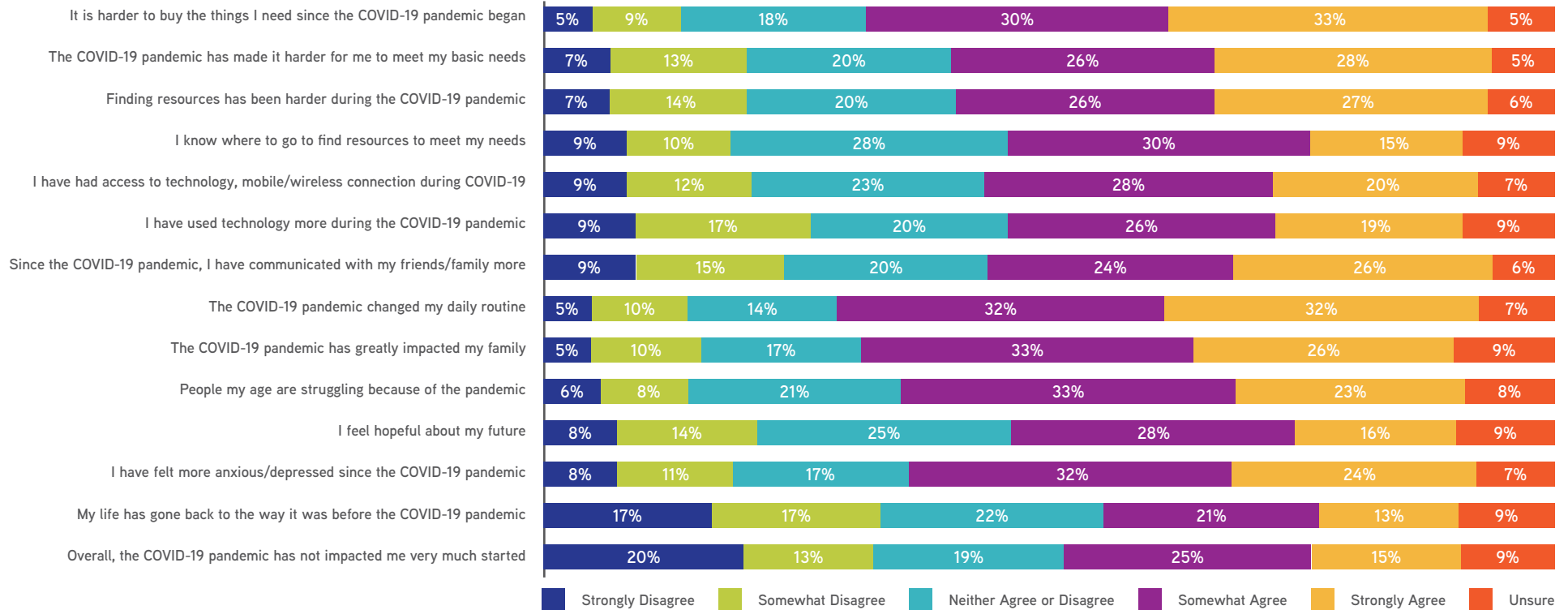
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PHILADELPHIA COUNTY OPPORTUNITY YOUTH PROFILE



County	PUMA	Connection	Area Type	Youth Disconnection
Philadelphia	West	Moderately Connected	Urban	14.4%
Philadelphia	Southwest	Moderately Connected	Urban	14.6%
Philadelphia	Southeast	Moderately Connected	Urban	13.1%
Philadelphia	Center City	Opportunity Rich	Urban	7.3%
Philadelphia	Central	Opportunity Desert	Urban	18.5%
Philadelphia	Northwest	Moderately Connected	Urban	10.0%
Philadelphia	North	Opportunity Desert	Urban	18.7%
Philadelphia	Near Northeast-West	Opportunity Desert	Urban	16.5%
Philadelphia	East	Opportunity Desert	Urban	16.5%
Philadelphia	Far Northeast-East	Opportunity Desert	Urban	20.5%
Philadelphia	East	Opportunity Desert	Urban	30.7%



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APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Data Analysis Methods

Qualitative data from focus groups, interviews, and open-ended survey questions were coded and analyzed using a general inductive thematic analysis to identify categories, subcategories, and themes.

Thematic Analysis | A general inductive thematic analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data generated from focus groups and interviews. This approach was selected because of its usefulness in drawing clear links between research questions or objectives and data collection results, and because it provides a theoretical foundation for subjective meaning to be interpreted and extrapolated from discourse. Emerging themes were developed according to the analytical framework and through a review of detailed notes taken from interviews and focus groups and TPMA's extensive experience with the body of program evaluation knowledge built through our work.

Quantitative Data Analysis Methods

Quantitative data, including closed-ended survey questions, were analyzed using descriptive methods. Survey data were exported into Excel, and Excel spreadsheets were cleaned and analyzed, while qualitative data from open-ended responses supplemented the themes identified in the qualitative analysis.

Descriptive Statistics | Descriptive analysis techniques were used to analyze closed-ended survey responses, looking for trends and patterns in the data. This included frequencies (i.e., counts of responses), percentages, and cross-tabulations to determine the relationship between two variables.

Limitations

As with any study, limitations to the chosen method are acknowledged and addressed to the extent possible within the design. The limitations to this report include the following, broken down by each analysis method:

Partial and Biased Findings | Qualitative and perceptual research methods offer valuable insights but are, by nature, partial and biased. To attempt to address this limitation, TPMA took advantage of an opportunity embedded in mixed-methods evaluations – the triangulation of data. Triangulating results from multiple sources, such as comparing findings from surveys with focus groups and interviews, creates more credible evaluation results and is considered critical to the validity and reliability of findings.

Researcher Extrapolation | Analyses conducted with an interpretive analytical framework can lead to researcher extrapolation where interpretation may go too far beyond what is present in, and supported by, data. To address this, TPMA used collaborative inquiry; through presenting findings to stakeholders for elaboration, corroboration, and modification, TPMA confirmed and updated analyses.

Missing Data | Missing data may contribute to limitations in the quantitative design (e.g., participant survey responses). In addition, if response rates for certain survey sub-groups of participants are low, survey responses may not be representative of the sub-group. Efforts were made to ensure an adequate response rate; however, survey respondents were primarily existing stakeholders, as existing CRM databases were extensively used to recruit survey participants. Less than adequate response rates, then, should be considered a limitation.

APPENDIX B: PROTOCOLS

COVID-19 Pandemic Impact on Opportunity Youth Survey

Southeastern Pennsylvania Workforce Boards (SEPA) is working with Thomas P. Miller & Associates to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected young adults in Southeastern Pennsylvania who are not in school and are not working.

Your answers will help the Workforce Development Board work with providers to support young adults in our area.

When you click “NEXT,” you are agreeing to finish the survey. Clicking “NEXT” also means that you are over the age of 18 or have parent/guardian permission to take the survey. You may stop the survey at any time but can only take the survey one time. The survey is expected to take 10-15 minutes to complete.

Your participation is voluntary, and your responses will be anonymous.

If you have any questions about the survey or the research study, please email Joely Pope at jpope@tpma-inc.com.

Thank you for your participation!



1. As a thank you for completing the survey, eligible respondents will receive a \$10 gift card. Please provide your email address below so that you can receive your gift card. By providing your email, you are confirming that you are between the ages of 16-24 and are currently not working or enrolled in school.
 - a. Email:
2. How old are you? (drop down)
3. Which county do you live in/ spend most of your time? (drop down)
4. How would you describe the area you live in/ spend most of your time?
 - Rural (open land, countryside located outside of a town or city)
 - Suburban (a smaller community near to or within commuting distance of a town/city)
 - Urban (densely populated area such as a city or larger town)
 - Unsure
5. Please respond to each statement. (Matrix: strongly agree, somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree, unsure)
 - Since the COVID-19 pandemic I have communicated with my friends and family more
 - The COVID-19 pandemic has made it harder for me to meet my basic needs (transportation, housing, food, etc.)
 - I have used technology more during the COVID-19 pandemic
 - I have had access to technology, mobile/wireless connection during the COVID-19 pandemic
 - I know where to go to find resources to meet my needs
 - Finding resources has been harder during the COVID-19 pandemic
 - It is harder to buy the things I need since the COVID-19 pandemic began
6. Please respond to each statement. (Matrix: strongly agree, somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree, unsure)
 - I feel hopeful about my future
 - I have felt more anxious/depressed since the COVID-19 pandemic started
 - Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic has not impacted me very much
 - People my age are struggling because of the pandemic
 - The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly impacted my family
 - The COVID-19 pandemic changed my daily routine
 - My life has gone back to the way it was before the COVID-19 pandemic
7. Please explain your answers from the last two questions. (write in)

8. How did the COVID-19 pandemic effect your work? (check all that apply)

- I stopped working because of the COVID-19 pandemic
- I was an essential worker
- I was working to support my family/ household
- The COVID-19 pandemic did not affect my work
- I wasn't working before the COVID-19 pandemic
- I switched to working from home
- Other (please explain):

9. Are you currently working?

- Yes, full-time
- Yes, part-time
- No
- Other (please explain):

10. If you are not working now, what makes it hard to find a job? (check all that apply)

- Not comfortable because of the COVID-19 pandemic
- Feeling more depressed/anxious
- Not getting calls from employers after applying
- Must care for children/elders
- Can't find the documents I need (drivers license, birth certificate, working papers)
- Don't want to take a drug test
- I'm doing ok with the COVID-19 pandemic benefits / don't need to work right now
- I don't have a car or money for transportation
- Other (please explain)

11. Did you go to school last school year 2020-21? (Check all that apply)

- Yes, I went to high school
- Yes, I got my GED or other similar schooling
- Yes, I went to trade school
- Yes, I went to college
- Yes, I went to cyber school (before the pandemic)
- No, I did not go to school last year
- Other (please explain)

12. Was your school online because of the COVID-19 pandemic?

- Yes
- No
- Both online and in person

13. Do you plan to continue school for the 2021-22 school year?

- a. Yes
- b. No, I stopped going during the COVID-19 pandemic
- c. No, I finished

14. Who can help you if you want to go back to school or get a job? (check all that apply)

- Family
- Friends
- Teacher/guidance counselor from school
- CareerLink – (such as PA CareerLink®)
- Church/Mosque/Synagogue
- Queer/Allied space
- Community Center/Boys & Girls Club
- Other (please specify)

15. What is the biggest change you have faced since the COVID-19 pandemic began? (write-in)

16. Before the COVID-19 pandemic where did you usually stay? (check all that apply)

- 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 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: _____

17. Think of the past month: where did you usually stay? (check all that apply)

- 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 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: _____

18. Before the COVID-19 pandemic which of these described your situation? 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

19. Which of these describe your current situation? 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

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

21. Is there anything else you would like us to know about how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted your life?

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

- Yes
- No

(If yes, your contact information will not be shared.)

Name _____

Email _____

Phone number _____

Demographic questions

We are collecting this information to better identify and understand the needs of young adults in Southeastern PA. The information will help us better understand what similarities and differences exist in the lived experience for young adults. This information will not be used to identify you. These questions are not required, but please consider filling them out to help us better understand the unique needs of young adults.

1. 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/ethnicities
- White
- Prefer not to answer

2. What language do you speak at home?

- English
- Spanish
- Other (Please explain):

- Prefer not to answer

3. What is your zip code?

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

- Less than 9th grade
- 9th grade
- 10th grade
- 11th grade
- 12th 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

5. 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

6. With which gender(s) do you most identify?
(Check all that apply)

- Female (cis-female)
- Female (trans-female)
- Male (cis-male)
- Male (trans-male)
- Non-binary
- Prefer not to answer
- None of the above

7. With which orientation do you most identify?
(Mark one answer)

- Heterosexual or straight
- Gay
- Lesbian
- Bisexual
- Pansexual
- Not listed above
- Prefer not to answer

8. If you would like to provide the name of the person/ ambassador who referred you to the survey? Please put their name below.

Thank you page



OY Focus Group Guide

SEPA OY STUDY – 2021

Hey everyone! My name is Nioka and this is Joely. We would like to talk to you today about your experiences with school and work, and how COVID-19 has affected you. We are going to write a report on all the feedback we get from you and your peers to help the organizations in Southeast Pennsylvania provide the services you need.

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 XXXX 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 group. After this meeting, we're going to go back and summarize all 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. We hope that you feel comfortable sharing with us your thoughts and experiences because it's so important that your voice is heard. 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?

At the end of our conversation, we have gift cards for each of you, so make sure you get them from us before you leave!

INTRODUCTIONS

To start off we would love to get to know everyone a little better. Please share your name and how you heard about the survey or this conversation. If you'd rather not share your name that is okay! Also just for fun please tell us your favorite fall or spooky season thing (Mine is caramel apples with peanuts and Joely is convinced that the orange October Oreos taste the best)

1. Introduce yourself (specify they don't have to share their name if they do not want)
2. How did you hear about the survey or this conversation?
3. What is your favorite fall or spooky season thing?

Thanks for sharing everyone we would not like to have a conversation about how COVID-19 has impacted you. Remember there are no right or wrong answers and we just want to understand your experiences.

DAILY LIFE

4. How has COVID-19 affected your life?
5. Of all the changes this community (and the world) have made because of COVID-19, which ones are you excited or thankful about and hope they are permanent? e.g., work from home opportunities, ability to take more classes online, etc.
6. What do you miss the most about the pre-pandemic world?

SCHOOL

7. How has COVID-19 changed your experience with school (high school, college, or both)? If you weren't in school during the pandemic, think about how it changed for anyone you knew that was in school.
8. What changes did you like (and why)?
9. What changes do you hope schools keep permanently (and why)?
10. What has been frustrating or unhelpful (and why)?
11. How did people or organizations help you with some of these challenges?
12. What supports do you wish you had during all these changes?
13. What hesitations (if any) do you have about going back to school?
14. What supports would help you feel better about going back to school? Even if they don't exist yet.

WORK

15. How has COVID-19 changed your employment?
Or how has it affected the people you know?
16. What (if any) effect has COVID-19 had on your ability to find jobs that you are interested in working?
17. How does COVID-19 make it harder for you (or people you know) to keep a job?
18. What do you wish employers knew about these experiences?
19. Who can help you find and keep a job?
20. How much do you trust those people or organizations to help you? Explain.
21. What services do you wish existed to help you with employment?

CONCLUSION

22. Is there anything you wish to share with us today that we did not ask?

Thank you again for taking the time to meet with us today. Hearing your feedback and experiences is invaluable to this study. Before you leave, please make sure you get your gift card!





