



Service Year Alliance Holds First-Ever Opportunity Youth Summit

New research released showing that service year alumni are twice as likely to complete Bachelor's degrees than their peers

Calls for 100,000 opportunity youth in national service annually by 2023

WASHINGTON, DC (December 3, 2018) – Today, Service Year Alliance convened more than one hundred policy makers, thought leaders, service year employers, and opportunity youth at Busboys and Poets in the Brookland neighborhood of Washington, DC for the first-ever Service Year + Opportunity Youth Summit.

Opportunity youth, sometimes referred to as disconnected youth, comprise nearly five million American youth aged 16 – 24 who are neither in school nor employed. The Summit highlighted the role service years play in upskilling and creating career pathways, credentials, and social capital for opportunity youth.

“A service year is a tremendous on-ramp for opportunity youth,” said Shirley Sagawa, CEO of Service Year Alliance. “At a time when unemployment rates for youth ages 16-24 are double the national average, it’s critical that we increase the overall number of quality national service positions and especially those filled by opportunity youth so that all young people — no matter their background — have the chance to serve and succeed.”

At the Summit, **Matthew Sigelman, the CEO of Burning Glass Technologies,** presented [new research](#) showing that:

- **Service year programs promote Bachelor’s degree attainment.** Those who participate in service year programs without a Bachelor’s degree are over twice as likely to go on to earn their Bachelor’s degrees compared to a peer group with the equivalent years of work experience. A quarter (24%) of service year alumni who serve without a Bachelor’s degree ultimately attain that degree while 11% of an otherwise similar peer group earn a college degree after two years of work experience.
- **Service year alumni begin their careers in higher-paying roles than their peers in a variety of career areas.** Service year alumni who begin their careers in community and social services do so in occupations which typically have higher average salaries. For example, a greater proportion of service year alumni in this field work as social services managers, one of the highest paying roles in this career area, compared to their peers.



- **Service year alumni are more likely to advertise skills related to leadership and organization**, which are commonly developed in service year programs. Research as a skill is cited on 40% of service year resumes and 25% of peer resumes; organizational skills, 40% compared to 24%; and planning, 25% compared to 23%.

Service Year Alliance also released the new research, [**“Investing in Service Years: A Strategy to Ensure the Future Success of the Nation's Opportunity Youth.”**](#) which calls for 100,000 opportunity youth in national service annually by 2023. Made possible with the support from the Schultz Family Foundation and J.P. Morgan, the paper explores how expanding service year experiences for young people who are neither in school or working can help reduce inequities and serve as an important bridge to jobs. It also spells out what policymakers, programs, employers, and communities can do to maximize the potential for service year programs.

“The Schultz Family Foundation is pleased to partner with Service Year Alliance and other national experts to make service a possibility for all young people. We believe that uniting opportunity youth across the country in common purpose has the potential to tackle pressing community challenges, and to develop and prepare each of them with skills and experiences that will lead to a well-paying job, and a career. We are all in this together,” said **Daniel Pitasky, Executive Director, Schultz Family Foundation.**

“We believe every young person deserves a pathway to economic success. That’s why we’re collaborating with Service Year Alliance to expand career-focused service year programs that lead to well-paying jobs and long-term careers,” added **Linda M. Rodriguez, Executive Director, Global Philanthropy of J.P. Morgan.**

About one third of the current 66,000 full-time service year opportunities today are targeted at opportunity youth through programs including youth corps and YouthBuild. Youth corps programs provide their participants with job training, academic programming, leadership skills and additional support. Service Year Alliance calls for expansion of the number of full-time civilian national service positions to 200,000, to equal the approximate number of Americans entering the military each year. Expanding YouthBuild and AmeriCorps, passing the 21st Century Conservation Corps legislation, and helping existing programs to engage and support opportunity youth are among the policies that could progress toward this goal.

Participants at the Summit included three former opportunity youth whose lives were transformed by a year of service. (Follow the links to see their powerful two-minute videos.)

- [**Xavier Jennings**](#) (YouthBuild): Xavier attended six different high schools in Denver before dropping out. Xavier earned his GED and learned the trade of construction through his



service year. Returning as an alumni mentor, he went on to become the Program Coordinator for Leadership Development and is currently in college.

- [Kenvin Lacayo](#) (The Literacy Lab): Unsure about his future after high school, Kenvin embarked on a leadership program working with 3-4 year olds in a classroom in Washington DC. Kenvin's service year gave him confidence, purpose — and a path to college.
- Amanda Young (AmeriCorps VISTA): After graduating from West Virginia University, Amanda faced financial struggles and uncertainty. Then she served as an AmeriCorps VISTA at an adult literacy nonprofit before founding her own program. Called *Collaborative @ WVU*, this program focuses on community development, the opioid crisis, food insecurity, disaster preparedness, and combating poverty across the state.

The **full day agenda** of the summit, with all speakers, [can be found here](#).

To interview Shirley Sagawa and other Summit participants or for more information about the new research, please contact Thorsten Ruehlemann at 202-677-1863 or truehlemann@serviceyear.org.

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About Service Year Alliance

Service Year Alliance is working to make a year of paid, full-time service — a service year — a common expectation and opportunity for all young Americans. Expanding service years, with programs like AmeriCorps, the Peace Corps, and YouthBuild, has the power to revitalize cities, uplift and educate children at risk, and empower communities struggling with poverty. Learn more at ServiceYear.org.