

# Youth Workforce Development

*The project sought to better understand the workforce needs of 18-25-year-olds and how Goodwill Columbus might better serve them.*



# THE PROBLEM

Goodwill Industries provides workforce development assistance in Columbus, but realized that 18-25-year-olds were not taking advantage of their services like other demographic groups were. Goodwill wanted to determine what the concept of workforce development meant to young people in Columbus and what kind of workforce assistance they wanted and needed.

# THE APPROACH

We worked with Goodwill, Columbus City Schools, previous co-designers, and interviewees to identify young people who would be willing to join our design team and others who would be willing to be interviewed about their workforce experiences.

We compiled a design team that included community members Abdinasir, Alisha, Harley, Michael and Pierre; designers Tania Anaissie and Juan Carlos Rivas and Goodwill Workforce Development staff. The team was led by Heather Tsavaris and Mark Lomax from The Columbus Foundation.

We carried out a week-long design sprint during which we conducted around 15 hours of interviews with Columbus residents ranging in age from 18-26. Our team heard the kind of workforce assistance these young people desired, brainstormed ways to provide it, and co-created concepts that might better address these needs.

# INSIGHTS

**Across the interviews, the following themes emerged:**

## **YOUNG PEOPLE SEEKING MEANINGFUL, VALUES-ALIGNED WORK**

The young people we interviewed told us they were seeking meaningful jobs that aligned to their values. They wanted their work to have purpose even if they had more entry level jobs.

**“I would love to love my job... I want to contribute something... I never get asked [to contribute]. [Once I asked about ways to improve] and I was almost made to feel like you’re on the phones, why are you asking questions about anything else... I don’t want to be on the phones for the rest of my life.”** —Interviewee describing her work experience at a call center

**“At 18, just trying to provide for myself as long as I am paid well. Now, at 26, a job needs to be able to make me happy.”** —Interviewee talking about how work fits into her life now that she has gotten older

**“Last day of working at Taco Bell on the line I started crying like I was having a panic attack and I needed to get out. I felt like I wasn’t making a difference. Covid happened and I needed to go in a different direction.”** —Interviewee discussing why he walked away after eight years as a General Manager at Taco Bell

**“I sacrificed making almost six figures a year working at Chase, to do what I knew was right for me, made me borderline homeless, didn’t know if I’d see my kids. To be able to do what I truly want to do.”** —Interviewee describing her desire to do community work

## **YOUNG PEOPLE NEED WORK SKILLS FOR ENTREPRENEURIAL ENDEAVORS**

Some of the young people we spoke with had pursued more entrepreneurial work paths. They explained they did this to preserve their freedom and flexibility, which they thought was compromised in the traditional workforce. However, these young people still needed to learn workforce skills that were relevant to their goals.

**“I wanted to learn about drop shipping. I would hear it from a friend or on social media. I don’t know where to go to learn that though. I have to do it on my own. You tube has helped a lot.”** —Interviewee discussing how she tries to fill her gaps in knowledge so that she can continue to pursue her own business

**“[To do my entertainment business], I need more resources for public speaking and confidence in speaking. I also need leadership skills. I don’t know where those things are taught, but that feels like workforce development.”** —Interviewee discussing the types of workforce readiness skills that would benefit him

## **JOB EXPLORATION JOURNEYS OFTEN INDIRECT**

Many of the young people we talked with spoke about their confusion about which jobs best suited them. Most spoke about their meandering career paths. Some spoke about supportive partners or parents who allowed them the space and support to explore. However, most spoke about how financial constraints did not afford them the opportunity to explore careers that would be fulfilling and financially stable.

**“At 18 I wanted to go in for social work, but then I met some social workers and saw what they did. I don’t know if I could mentally handle that. Then I thought I did want to learn a trade, since my cousin does HVAC. I tried to get interested in that. I watched videos and did research, but it doesn’t seem like something I want to do. Now, I am thinking about criminal justice or pathology.”** —Young woman describing how she is thinking about her career path

**“I wanted to be a writer... Then I realized that would take too much school. Then I thought I would like to help sick people. So, I got my state tested nurse aide (STNA) course completed but it took way more than I could do mentally. I couldn’t work with the same client every day. Then there was the time I was working at call centers.”** —*Young woman describing her career journey thus far*

**“I needed this job and someone else wasn’t getting it. I needed this job to make my situation better.”** —*Interviewee discussing why he took a job at a fast-food restaurant, despite not feeling sure it was the right fit for him*

## **YOUNG PEOPLE DESIRE WORKFORCE SUPPORT LIKE MOM WOULD GIVE**

Finally, most of the young people we interviewed said they wanted workforce support that got to know them and then coached, pushed, and held them accountable in similar ways many described their mothers had. They were not interested in support that had low expectations for them. They were also not seeking coddling; they were seeking support that realized what they were capable of and then pushed them to realize their full potential. Additionally, they were interested in receiving support from professionals who had the jobs they dreamed of.

**“I want [support] to know me really well. I would want to get to know them. I want them to know the details of my life.... [that way they won’t] force me into a job that wouldn’t be a match.”** —*Young woman describing how she is thinking about her career path*

**“Tough love, pushing to my limits, making me better at the same time.”** —*Interviewee responding to the question which qualities would you want a job coach to have*

**“Tough love. If i am doing something stupid let me know I messed up. Hey, you messed up. Knock it over. Do it again.”** —*Interviewee describing the kind of coach that he would respond best to*

**“I believe no one wants better for me than my mom. No one wants the best for you like your mom does. That’s who’s given me the best support. That’s what I want and need now.”** —*Interviewee describing ideal workforce support*

# **PROTOTYPES**

After we conducted a first round of interviews with young people, our team thought that it would be helpful to design a way for young people to explore careers in a supported and strategic way. One idea the design team sought to explore was a planned job sampler program that encouraged short-term, planned, and paid work experiences and that would enable young people to experience different jobs for a range of 30-90 days. Young people we interviewed were particularly interested in this concept, especially if they had coaching throughout and a strategic plan for how these short-term

opportunities could both help them discover what they wanted to do longer term and ensure their financial needs were met while they were participating.

### 3X Job Sampler Program

You can try on three different jobs (like sampling recipes!) and you will be paid for your time.

How long would you want to try each job? And why?

- 30 days
- 60 days
- 90 days



To explore the kind of job support young people most wanted, we asked them to tell us the kind of personality or experience they would prefer their job coach to have. Interviewees prioritized tough love and job coaches who were “expert in the field” that the young person was seeking to enter.

### Coach Match



Finally, our team wanted to brainstorm ways to provide the kind of support we heard young people were seeking as they explored career options and paths. The young people we spoke to revealed that they not only wanted to be in conversation with their peers about their career exploration, they also wanted to be in relationship with people who had already accomplished the goals they had. During many of our interviews, the concept of “family meals” or “sharing meals” came up. One interviewee starting ideating with us sharing:

**“What about a weekly meal where we talked about our career goals? I come. People who are also in my situation come. People who have the jobs I want come. And, people who can help me get where I want come. We all eat and chat. We have open and vulnerable conversations.”**

We tested this concept as “The Human Hotline” with interviewees. Young people had considerable energy around this concept. We heard that this was a very different way for them to think about workforce development and something they would be very curious to participate in.

### The Human Hotline

You’re meeting with six people for dinner to talk about anything related to your job and career, what kind of folks would you want to invite?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.



## IMPACT

Goodwill was able to take the learnings from this project and immediately apply them to its work with young people in the 18-25 year old range. When applying for the Achieve More and Prosper Grant through Franklin County Job and Family Services and the Workforce Development Board of Central Ohio, GWC put together a proposal largely based on what they learned through this design sprint. GWC was awarded a grant that would focus on out of school youth, 18 to 25-years-old. Youth that enrolled could be facing one of many barriers including disabilities, pregnancy or parenting, aging out of the foster care system, no high school diploma or GED, or past involvement with the justice system.

GWC’s grant proposal focused heavily on providing intense coaching, building strong support systems, administering supportive services funds that would assist them with housing, transportation, food, and childcare, offering paid work experiences in a variety of occupations, and free credentialed training to help them find their first job. When supporting youth with these types of services, supports, stipends, and incentives, true change starts to occur. The youth that GWC worked with were able to shift their focus from in-the-moment or day-to-day survival, to what their future could look like if they had safe housing, food for themselves and/or their family, affordable childcare, and a job that they valued and aligned to their goals.

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