“While our young need to be held accountable for their actions, as a community we cannot give up on them. Each one of us needs to reach out, to teach them, and let them know we care. If we do not, the streets will.”
When educators, human service providers and parents work together on a common goal, amazing things can happen. Since 2009 a multidisciplinary group of individuals has been working collectively on the Genesee County Out-of-School Youth Initiative. Their focus has been developing strategies to ensure that disconnected youth have the opportunity to earn a high school diploma, pursue secondary education and enter the workforce.

The Hidden Crisis report sheds light on the group of 16- to 24-year-olds in Genesee County who don’t have diplomas or jobs. While their circumstances are perhaps hidden, their impact in this community is hard felt. This research-based position paper outlines the extent of the disconnected youth challenge in Genesee County. The publication provides data and information validating its findings and conclusions, and offers recommendations for future action.

Disconnected youth reside in every school district in our county. It is not a white, black or brown problem; it is a problem that affects all of us.
Genesee County boasts an impressive network of agencies and programs serving vulnerable youth. Why then should there be a special focus on disconnected youth ages 16 through 24? Simply stated, this group of young people has a set of special needs that are not being met by existing programs.

As detailed in this report, helping disconnected young people become productive, contributing members of society will produce substantial economic and social benefits for all of Genesee County, as well as for youth themselves. The issue of “disconnected youth” must be understood as a countywide challenge that must be solved with the involvement of all stakeholders.

We must begin with acknowledging that the status quo—thousands of youth left behind—is unacceptable and that solutions must be bold, systemic, and collaborative. Every sector of Genesee County and every youth-serving system must be mobilized to be part of the solution. The challenges facing our vulnerable youth are too complex for any single organization to address in isolation. Our commitment must involve rethinking relationships, and collective responsibility. The answer is not more programs, it’s structuring systems and policies that don’t allow the holes through which vulnerable youth currently fall.

Working together strategically will produce the best outcomes and will make the most efficient use of limited resources. When individuals and organizations representing the fabric of Genesee County communities come together in collaboration they move us to greater strength.

I invite you to explore this report and learn more about the Out-of-School Youth Initiative. I also urge you to join us to help every vulnerable young person in Genesee County reach their highest potential in pursuit of education and a career.

No action is too small. In fact, it is the small steps taken together that will produce the largest change.
The state of Michigan, as clearly evidenced in Genesee County, is at a crossroads. We face a nearly unprecedented economic crisis, the result of more than a decade of job loss (more than 750,000 since 2000) and continued erosion of the state’s economy. Once one of the wealthiest states in per capita income, Michigan is projected to be among the 10 poorest in 2010 (37th in 2009) and state revenues are now below 1971 levels. There has never been a more critical time to make sure that young people get the support, education and training that they need to help drive economic recovery.

This report sheds light on the group of 16- to 24-year-olds in Genesee County who don’t have diplomas or jobs. While their circumstances are perhaps hidden, their impact in communities is hard felt. The economic, social, and fiscal consequences of dropping out of school—unemployment, poverty, substance abuse, incarceration, poor health, to name a few—are profound and unacceptable. In addition, high school dropouts face a labor market that is becoming more and more difficult to successfully navigate. As Genesee County communities know all too well, this reality translates as forgone tax revenue, as well as higher monetary and social costs. Michigan’s economy is dependent on making sure that more young people are well prepared for post-secondary work and life.

Here’s what we know:

- It is tougher to be a young person out of school and work in Michigan than in the rest of the nation. In 2006, Michigan dropouts ages 16-19 were 30 percent more likely to be unemployed than those who lacked that credential elsewhere. Frighteningly, that was before the state’s economy sunk deeper into recession and unemployment rates escalated for the entire population.

- Diplomas impact more than income. In addition to losses in earning potential, lack of a high school diploma is also associated with declines in marriage rates, and corresponding rates of non-marital births, negative health outcomes and home ownership.

While we are concerned, we don’t despair. In many ways, Michigan and Genesee County are well positioned to take on the challenge of out-of-school youth. We have better data systems in place, we know more about the causes of educational failure and high school dropout, and we better understand what keeps kids in school until graduation and brings them back to a credential after they have left. Further, the private sector is engaged, supporting research and innovation in Michigan and around the nation, and there is renewed public sector attention.

The hard work in Genesee County—to formulate and fight for best practices to better serve young people, is part of a national effort and is networked to communities around the nation through the work of Michigan’s Children and other state and national partners. This networking strengthens all of our ability to build on innovation around the state and the country, and creates mechanisms for community partners to change the systems that currently fail the young people we are talking about. Young people around the state and nation will benefit from the work of this community.
As this report shows, far too many of our young people are failing to obtain what has long been recognized as an official symbol of entry into adulthood, a high school diploma.

Genesee County boasts an impressive network of programs serving vulnerable children and adults. Why then should there be a special report focusing on disconnected youth ages 16 through 24? Simply, because we know that this is the last critical period of transition for young people.

Success or failure at this key point will more than likely determine many of the life choices these youth will make for their entire future.

These young men and women are from every corner of our community, both urban and rural, and they are joined by one simple fact, that we have failed to provide them with the support required to succeed. This support must come from the collective involvement of schools, communities and most importantly, the families of these youth.

Each student’s needs are unique. The days of a cookie cutter, one-size-fits-all approach are gone. We can no longer accept the assumption that a certain percentage of students are destined to fail regardless of our efforts.

As an active, engaged and mobilized community we must find ways to improve developmental outcomes for all of our children, youth and young adults. By integrating and improving existing systems we can form a seamless web of support at key points in the lives of our children. We must cooperate at all levels including families, neighborhoods, organizations, and community, to support the development of our young people.

Helping disconnected youth to become socially and economically connected will produce enormous social benefits for the youth themselves and for all of Genesee County.

Young adults who are out of school and out of the workforce contribute little to the economy. Rather, as a group, they impose significant social costs, including criminal activity and the use of very expensive public services. Ensuring that our youth have the skills and supports they need is not about charity; it is about investing in our community’s most precious resource—our children.
This should be one of the greatest times in history to be young. We live in a time where simply pushing one computer button can connect you with the world. We have medicines that can cure diseases that once meant certain death. Our lives have been made infinitely better by ever burgeoning technology that has pushed us into a new, exciting place in time that has no limit.

And, for the first time in history, we can now seriously say that every young person has the potential to do anything — witness the election of President Barack Obama. Unquestionably, this should be one of the greatest times to be young. However, there is a segment of our society that is, quite literally, living in peril. They are uneducated, untrained, unskilled, and ultimately poor. In Genesee County there are more than 7,400 young people between the ages of 16 and 24 who fit this description. They are living in desperate times, which sometimes force them into desperate measures, including crime and violence.

As Genesee County looks to its rebirth, it will never be able to reach its full potential until these 7,465 young people become contributing members of the community. “It’s stressful on the streets when you don’t know where your next meal will come from,” said a 17-year-old male who, along with several other Genesee County youth, was interviewed as an integral part of the Genesee County Out-of-School Youth Initiative.

“I know a lot of people that are like that. We are jobless! Young ghetto kids coming from the streets have a lot of opportunities to get in trouble. If you don’t have your head on straight, you might get killed.” When you listen to young people in Genesee County talk, violence and the possibility of dying young is a way of life. On the streets, someone who has been around a long time, an “Old Head,” is someone who reaches the age of 25. More than a few are incarcerated or dead by that time. “It’s like living in Iraq,” said an 18-year-old male. “Everybody is dying.”

Many of the interviewed youth have not finished high school, do not have jobs, have family members in the correctional system, and have been involved in the judicial system themselves. Nearly all of them have witnessed an act of violence.

In reality, some are numb to it. When asked how it felt to witness a violent act, an 18-year-old male responded. “I don’t have any feelings about it. I have no feelings.” It’s sad to think a young man would have to gird himself to the point where he becomes ambivalent to violence. The young people we spoke to have said there is really no other choice; on the street it is considered a sign of weakness to do otherwise.

“The bad stuff is the good stuff for people to do now,” explained a female, age 18. “Peer pressure is there to do drugs and to be involved with gangs. And, if you don’t join the gangs, they will beat you up.” Young girls say they feel pressure to join girl gangs, in addition to the sexual pressure they get from boy gangs.

Yet, despite the challenges they face, many of these youth remain hopeful and determined. An 18-year-old girl, who is currently living with her boyfriend and is on food stamps, eventually hopes to attend college and major in biology. Perhaps she will attain her goal, and be among the fortunate few who overcome the many obstacles that have been placed before them.

More than likely, however, when they find success, they will do so in an area outside of Genesee County. Young people do not believe their future is in Genesee County. If that attitude persists, the county could face a serious talent drain. Sadly, those who escape what is, at best, a life of despair will be a precious few. The battle will simply be too tough for most.

But these lives could be saved. Most young boys and girls are looking for a better way of life. They are thirsting for someone to lead them and show them there is an alternative to the mean streets of Flint and Genesee County.

Success depends on the degree to which every sector of the community commits to being involved in addressing this issue. We all have a stake in the success of Genesee County’s youth. They are the future of our community.
Over the past few years, our communities have endured more pain and heartache than we care to admit. Each of us, in some way, has been affected by the crime and violence that has devastated our neighborhoods and severely affected the lives of our youth.

The pain felt by the mothers, fathers, and families of each young person whose life has been cut short by senseless violence is our pain. Their loss is truly our loss.

No longer can we run or be afraid to address and respond to the issues that have corrupted so many of our most vulnerable youth. Turning a blind eye and acting as though the issues don’t exist, will only prolong the problem with devastating results.

When communities join together, neighbors watch out for one another, and individuals stand up for what is right, we function as a community bound together by our passion, concern, and belief in our youth.

Each time we truly collaborate with others, it causes us to rethink traditional roles, the invisible lines that keep us separated, and to eliminate the hidden agendas that prevent us from working together.

Now, more than ever, we must forge new relationships to form a strong force comprised of diverse partners. We are able to address the complex and urgent challenges facing our youth, which at one point seemed insurmountable, with innovation, coordination, and a hands-on approach. Together we can enhance and improve the quality of life for disadvantaged youth and families throughout our communities.

The first step of our plan is to raise our voices and generate action within our community.

Change begins with you!
Against the backdrop of economic conditions that are literally reshaping the capacity of communities to provide even the most basic public services, communities that aspire to not just survive, but thrive, must become very intentional in identifying, prioritizing and addressing their most vital needs. No matter where a community may be economically or socially, the development of a collective spirit is fundamental to positive change.

The will to work together, as epitomized by our nation’s post 9/11 spirit, can enable any community to become a community of purpose, capable of addressing any challenge or need. After participating for over a year in a very broadly based community group that has been studying a growing population of young adults in our county who are 16 to 24 years old and do not have diplomas and do not have jobs, I am convinced that Genesee County to do whatever it takes to mobilize a sustained effort in Genesee County to do whatever it takes to engage all of our citizens as individuals with the capacity to add value to our community.

This position paper reflects the collective knowledge and insight of a wide array of community members representing health and welfare services, education, philanthropy, public safety, the justice system, and most importantly, young adults who are currently “disconnected.” The purpose of the position paper is to raise Genesee County’s consciousness about this critical need, to explore some potential strategies that can change the trajectory of lives in jeopardy, and finally, to mobilize a sustained effort in Genesee County to do whatever it takes to engage with education, business, industry, and the broader community, high school graduation, access to postsecondary education, and progressively challenging employment experiences.

While most youth in Genesee County successfully transition to adulthood, many youth ages 16 to 24, who are neither in school nor the workforce, experience challenges in making this transition. Some of these youth are more likely than others to remain low-income, to lose jobs during economic downturns, to engage in criminal activities or antisocial behavior, and to become parents in their teens. These are Genesee County’s “disconnected youth.” They lack the skills, supports, knowledge, or opportunities they need to succeed.

Disconnected youth encompass a broad population that may include students that dropout, homeless and runaway youth, incarcerated youth, or youth who have aged out of the foster care system. Youth of different races and ethnicities are represented among this population. However, research studies show that African-American males constitute a disproportionate share of the population.

Many young women also become disconnected in order to assume parenting responsibilities. In addition, the risk of disconnection is particularly high among youth with emotional disturbances and learning disabilities, many of whom have not mastered basic literacy skills. These youth have higher dropout rates and poorer employment outcomes.

The time between ages 16 and 24 is developmentally important, as young people prepare to take on adult responsibilities. This is the time to lay the foundation for successful labor market participation and civic responsibility through exposure to the broader community, high school graduation, access to postsecondary education, and progressively challenging employment experiences.

Current school reform efforts, while much needed and long overdue, most likely will not touch this segment of the population who are no longer on the school rolls, are too old for traditional school settings, lack academic skills and credits, and are in need of much different kinds of support. Addressing the needs of this population will require innovation.

Public systems and youth serving agencies must engage with education, business, industry, and disconnected youth themselves to structure pathways that support the transition from the streets to the classrooms, to hands-on learning and service environments, to college campuses, to leadership opportunities, to apprenticeships and internships, and ultimately to opportunities in the workplace that lead to economic success and lifelong citizenship.

This paper—a collaborative product of the Out-of-School Youth Initiative Workgroup—examines the extent to which Genesee County is prepared to meet this challenge and offers recommendations for future action.

It also is a clarion call to all Genesee County residents to positively intervene in the lives of our disconnected youth—to “reclaim” them from anti-social pulls that have disconnected them from their families, schools, communities, and their futures.
THE INITIATIVE

The Genesee County Out-of-School Youth Initiative is part of an ongoing effort supported by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation to help all youth, including those traditionally underserved, make a successful transition to adulthood.

In 2006, the Mott Foundation initiated that effort in the Michigan counties of Genesee, Kent, and Kalamazoo, and the city of Detroit. Michigan’s Children, a statewide, independent voice for children and their families, serves as technical advisor to the Michigan project communities. The Community Foundation of Greater Flint serves as the project’s sponsor in Genesee County.

Workgroup members meet monthly to develop open communications, person-to-person links, share programming challenges or ideas, and design local strategies to support disconnected youth. The partnership is integrally tied to a process of relationship building — a community of practice— that is designed to support disconnected youth in Genesee County. The project’s sponsor in Genesee County.

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THE WORKGROUP GOAL:
Create awareness of the disconnected youths’ challenges in Genesee County and mobilize public and private support to improve educational and career opportunities for this population. The collective investment created by this cross-community collaboration provides the leverage necessary to combat the status-quo, ensure movement, and encourage innovation. By working collaboratively, participants seek to help each other overcome the social, financial, and political challenges standing in the way of meaningful reform. While recognizing the importance of interventions that target at-risk children and youth at various stages of their development, the workgroup maintains a tight focus on disconnected youth, ages 16-24. This is based on the scarcity of countywide programs and services — specifically aimed at reconnecting vulnerable youth in this age group to get them back on track to economic self-sufficiency and productive adulthood.

HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT RATE IN GENESSEE COUNTY 2000-2009

Beginning in 2007, data collection is based on a four-year cohort. Due to this change in accounting procedure, results are not directly comparable to previous years.

SURVEY

To inform its work, the Genesee County Out-of-School Youth Initiative Workgroup surveyed public and private agencies and programs in the county to assess their capacity to meet the needs of disconnected youth. Less than a third of those surveyed indicated some degree of interaction with disconnected youth, with the majority of that number indicating only marginal involvement.

KEY SURVEY FINDINGS INCLUDE:

- **There is no organized system for recovery and re-engagement of disconnected youth.** The responsibility has fallen predominately to providers who are, in most instances, underfunded, fragmented, and serve only a small portion of the need.
- **Approximately 38% of programs and agencies serving disconnected youth have a “significant” waiting list for their services.** Some disconnected youth in need of programs and services have to wait up to three months for an initial appointment.
- **The complexity of multifaceted issues experienced by disconnected youth is a common challenge faced by providers.**
- **Unpredictable year-to-year funding levels create significant challenges for respondents attempting to keep pace with demand for services and to plan for the future.**
- **The dispersed nature of programs and services poses significant barriers for young people who lack the resources and resiliency to navigate complex systems.**
- **Disconnected youth are unaware of existing programs and services.** Approximately 85% become aware through “word of mouth.”
- **There is no comprehensive direction or county-wide policy regarding budget and programmatic priorities with respect to this population.** While many city and county departments and community-based organizations provide services to this population, too often they do so in isolation from each other and without accountability to a clearly articulated set of desired results across systems and programs.
- **It is too difficult and too rare for agencies focused on this age group to share information with one another.** Agency databases rarely “talk” to each other for bureaucratic, resource, and technological reasons, as well as issues related to confidentiality. Communications and information-sharing between programs and services is a major need.
- **There is no unified outreach approach to contact and work with disconnected youth, so many fall between the cracks.** Although there are outreach and support initiatives that target youth who are at-risk, there is no countywide or system-wide outreach and referral mechanism.
Reasons Dropouts Leave School

A range of studies have found that having a parent-who is unemployed is significantly correlated with whether a youth graduates from high school, goes to college, gets a job, and how much they get paid for that job. Female and minority youth and those who have been involved with the foster care, juvenile justice, and special education systems, either recently or in the past, are at greater risk for disconnection than are other youth.

Research shows that in a recent year, under 20 percent of high school graduates in Michigan were prepared for college-level English. Others are more prepared but still need assistance making the transition to work and/or further schooling. More than 80 percent of Michigan students are graduating from high school without the skills to tackle college-level work.

In Michigan’s community colleges, it is estimated that 60 percent of first-time students need at least one remedial course. National data suggest that one in five students at four-year colleges seek remedial coursework as well. It is a costly problem; in Michigan more than $28 million is spent in remediation at the community college level alone.

Just 18 percent of last year’s high school graduates in Michigan were prepared for college-level English. Literacy is the gateway to success in any course. Low literacy levels translate into poor grades, grade repetition, and eventually disinterest in school, all of which tend to precede a student’s decision to drop out.

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Contributing factors exhibited by youth at risk of dropping out of school and/or disconnection include one or more of the following:

- Truancy, attitude, discipline problems in school
- Low self esteem
- Teen pregnancy
- Involvement in violence
- Learning disabilities and related conditions
- Lack of positive role models
- Drug or substance abuse
- Physical or mental health issues
- Detachment from positive social networks
- Conflict between home and school culture

Without intervention the number of Genesee County disconnected youth can be expected to increase annually based on the number of teenage school dropouts.

Over 13 percent of students (895 out of 6,716) who started as ninth graders in all Genesee County schools in the Fall of 2005 left school before graduating with their class in the Spring of 2009. Researchers have found that a substantial portion of students leave school for other than academic reasons, including life circumstances such as needing to work, pregnancy and parenting, or caring for other family members.

Already dim employment prospects for disconnected youths—only 9 percent of Genesee County teenagers who dropped out of school were unemployed in 2009—are exacerbated by Michigan’s and Genesee County’s turbulent economy and its projected course over the next several years. The recession has pulled many adults into the scramble for jobs typically held by teens. For lower income teens,
a summer or part-time job is often a stepping stone
to gain access to high-skill, better paying positions.

Genesee County’s unemployment rate reached
16.3 percent in March 2010, the highest among
Michigan’s metropolitan areas. The rate was 12.5
percent in January, 2011. In past decades our assembly lines and manufacturing
plants provided access to good jobs with good
wages for high school dropouts. Few such opportu-
nities exist today for anyone who is undereducated and unskilled. According to the experts, future jobs
will be found in high-skill careers. Less well-educated young people have narrow opportunities for success
in such a job market.

Michigan endured its worst year for unemployment
in more than 25 years in 2009. Not since 1982 had
the jobless rate exceeded the 2009 rate, and the
number of Michiganders reported as out of work
averaged 680,000. It is estimated that, by the time Michigan begins
to pull out of the current economic downturn, the
state will have lost nearly 1 million jobs—or about
one in every five jobs that existed in mid-2000. A prediction by the Pew Center on the States is more bleak, stating that even a full-blown economic recovery wouldn’t recapture the jobs Michigan has lost for another 15 to 20 years.

The disconnected youth challenge also has a
direct relationship to the level of violence in
Genesee County. Youth in this age range are
disproportionately the perpetrators and victims of
violence. Law enforcement agencies, which have frequent contact with disconnected youth and have the potential to be positive agents, rarely have the resources to do more than arrest and incarcerate. Adult probation clients in Genesee County include a high percentage of dropouts and an increasing number of unwed mothers. An estimated 80 percent of probationers suffer from one or more of the following issues including: alcoholism, drug abuse, mental health issues, or depression.

According to 7th District Family Court Judge Duncan
Beagle, “As Michigan communities continue to face a severe financial crisis, taxpayers will be further
burdened because many young people will go into expensive juvenile residential programs or

slip into our vast adult prison system, serving out
lengthy sentences.”

Every Genesee County resident has a stake in this struggle. When our young people lack the skills that
local industries need and are unable to support themselves, we all bear the financial costs of a
weaker economy, smaller tax base, and higher expenditures on public benefits. When youth are
not engaged in school and work, our communities
are less vibrant and more divided.

The next generation risks being permanently weakened and thereby detracting from the entire
community for decades to come. Significant concentrations of disconnected youth tarnish
the appeal of Genesee County and its communities for economic development activity.

Disconnected youth are a challenging population
to serve; however, real change is possible. Providing
disconnected youth with the support they need
to make a successful transition to adulthood will
contribute to the county’s labor force, reduce social
expenditures, enhance the quality of our neighborhoods
and improve the quality for life of all Genesee
County residents.

In addition to direct interventions for disconnected youth, we need to put in place a system that inter-
rupts the cycle of self-perpetuating dysfunctionality that continues to produce this problem. If this effort
is to succeed, the disconnected youth crisis must
overcome its current status as a hidden crisis. Only
one in 10 members of the American public believe
the disconnected youth problem is a crisis. Parents
and community members often see the disconnected
youth crisis as a reflection of the individual character
of the young person rather than a communitywide,
systemic failure.

Disconnected youth are often perceived as
unmotivated, antagonistic, or even threatening.
However, individuals who advocate for, and work
with, disconnected youth and those at-risk of
disconnection on a daily basis have many times
witnessed the transformation of attitude, identity,
skills, and aspirations for a better future that come
with the right set of opportunities and experiences.
This tremendous pool of talent and potential, if properly supported and channeled, can greatly contribute to Genesee County’s ability to fuel its economy and build its communities in the 21st century.
ACTION STEPS

The Genesee County Out-of-School Youth Initiative Workgroup has adopted the following priority action steps to both guide their ongoing work and to solicit the meaningful involvement of a broad range of stakeholders in successfully addressing the disconnected youth challenge. As more individuals who represent the diversity of Genesee County’s people and organizations join the process, they bring new ideas, skills, and resources that can provide new approaches to old problems.

- **Make disconnected youth a priority in Genesee County and mobilize the support of key stakeholders:** Build public and private sector awareness of the magnitude of the disconnected youth challenge and the understanding that the disconnected youth challenge is not an isolated issue but a much broader societal issue that affects the quality of life and economic vitality of Genesee County. Government officials should direct all relevant departments to work in tandem to support state and local efforts in bridging systems and funding streams to connect youth to educational and labor market success.

- **Loosen the regulations around the sharing of data so that schools and youth-serving agencies and organizations can identify and respond quickly to the needs of disconnected youth and those at-risk of disconnection:** Establish a countywide, or statewide, Disconnected Youth Data Collaborative comprised of public and private institutions and agencies to collect and share relevant data and information across systems.

- **Advocate for policies and practices that aid school completion and employment outcomes:** Develop a set of core policy and practice principles for disconnected youth and inform local and state policy discussions on the issues and needs of such youth.

- **View disconnected youth as resources:** A narrow focus on disconnected youth merely as problems to be fixed further erodes their self-esteem, deepens their sense of alienation, and overlooks their potential to be part of the solution to both personal and community problems.

- **Provide additional resources to schools and programs serving the hardest-to-serve students:** While the Michigan Merit Curriculum has been highly praised, educators sometimes struggle to implement the higher standards without increased funding to support students who need additional assistance in meeting the rigorous requirements. Alternative schools often attempt to serve the most hard-to-reach students with fewer resources than traditional public schools.

- **Create an online clearing house and resource center:** Develop an online clearinghouse and resource center that can a) quickly assess and direct clients to appropriate resources and b) collect information on what is already being done for disconnected youth around the country that is applicable to Genesee County and disseminate the information to local service providers.

- **Provide focused assistance to youth aging out of foster care:** Many 18-year-olds leave the foster care system without a lasting family connection and are at risk for later hardship. These vulnerable young people need comprehensive preparation for adulthood – a sustained, strategic, developmentally appropriate approach to helping them transition successfully to independence and gain the wide range of skills they need to successfully continue their education and/or make initial steps on a career path.

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**Michigan Auto Manufacturing Employment**

![Graph showing Michigan Auto Manufacturing Employment from 1997 to 2011](image)
GET INVOLVED

This report sets forth the vision and commitment of the Out-of-School Youth Initiative Workgroup, a broad range of partners who have shared their ideas and put aside their differences to address this crucial issue.

It is a call to action – to chart a new course that will allow us to save lives and build futures for disconnected youth, their families, and Genesee County. While we can never fully recover the promise and productivity of youth lost in previous years, we can commit ourselves to the creation of new and accessible pathways that will help current and future youth return to school and enter the workforce. The time has come to expand the issue of disconnected youth from a single concern about helping individual youth to a much broader societal issue. Some people will not be able to see the impact today, but it will be hard to miss in a few years.

Genesee County’s economic future hinges on the investments made with our children and youth. The research is clear: the single best predictor of economic prosperity is a community’s success in educating and preparing its workforce. Youth who are connected to our community in positive ways reap benefits for themselves and society. Those who remain disconnected will continue to drain resources for public services with little or no contribution.

As stated by Judge Duncan Beagle:

“While our young need to be held accountable for their actions, as a community we cannot give up on them. Each one of us needs to reach out, to teach them, and let them know we care. If we do not, the streets will.”


diagram

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE 16-24 YEAR-OLDS IN GENESSEE COUNTY

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