



Department of
Youth & Community
Development

TESTIMONY

BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL

**COMMITTEE ON YOUTH SERVICES
OVERSIGHT HEARING ON**

SUMMER YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM

PRESENTED BY

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DAPHNE MONTANEZ

JANUARY 13, 2021

Good morning, Chair Rose and members of the Youth Services Committee. I am Daphne Montanez, Assistant Commissioner for Workforce Development at the Department of Youth and Community Development. I am joined by Julia Breitman, Senior Director for Youth Workforce Development.

On behalf of Commissioner Chong, thank you for the opportunity to appear today to discuss Summer Bridge, DYCD's flagship youth workforce development program in 2020. Last spring, along with our nonprofit partners, we were deeply involved with the preparation for the Summer Youth Employment Program when the coronavirus pandemic interrupted. It soon became clear that health and safety considerations would not allow for the traditional SYEP program in which youth were placed in worksites throughout the City.

With your partnership, and in close coordination with our providers, we developed SYEP Summer Bridge, an engaging virtual program that offered young people opportunities to learn new skills, explore potential careers and earn money. All program activities, including enrollment, document verification, orientation and work-themed learning experiences took place safely and remotely, while still allowing for personal and group connections.

The Summer Bridge program included 35,198 participants and 57 nonprofit provider organizations. In accordance with the equity principles of this Administration, we prioritized enrollment for youth from communities most in need. 91% of participants lived in areas identified by the Racial Inclusion and Equity Taskforce as priority neighborhoods based on health, social, and economic indicators, including the locations hardest hit by the COVID pandemic. The program was funded at \$51 million.

The program offered specialized options that mirrored the traditional SYEP program: community-based slots that were offered by lottery, the CareerReady program in partnership with select public schools, and SYEP Special Initiatives that serve vulnerable youth and residents of NYCHA developments.

SYEP Summer Bridge gave youth a unique opportunity to explore their interests and discover new ones. Career exploration allowed them to flex their research skills and discover new career possibilities, skill-building activities offered help with resumes, cover letters, and interview skills, and connections to professionals

offered youth the opportunity to build their networks through mentoring, career panels, social media workshops, and more. Youth aged 14 and 15 received a stipend of \$700 for 60 hours of participation, and those aged 16 through 24 received \$1,000 for 90 hours.

The SYEP Summer Bridge experience included three major components: the Hats & Ladders online program, Project-Based Learning and the Workplace Challenge learning opportunity for youth age 16 and up.

Hats & Ladders delivers career exploration and education through an engaging digital platform that allowed youth to complete a remote work readiness experience. The Hats & Ladders app is accessible via any internet connected mobile device or the web. Participants completed up to 30 hours of work-readiness and educational activities. The course consisted of a Participant Self-Assessment and 4 to 8 topics or instructional sequences on topics such as resume writing, financial literacy and civic engagement.

Summer Bridge offered virtual Project Based Learning (PBL) experiences to both younger youth and older youth participants. In partnership with the Youth Development Institute (YDI), DYCD developed a digital learning portfolio centered on building civic engagement and career ready resources. The project-based activities helped cultivate an ethic of service and reinforce core competencies such as interpersonal, communication, and decision-making skills. Popular PBL themes included:

- COVID-19. Youth developed an informational video on the disproportional effects on communities of color.
- Organizing for Change. Participants learned how organizing is used as a tool for local civic and democratic change.
- Environmental Justice. Youth explored their own personal impact on the environment and how to live sustainably.
- Cyberbullying. Participants in Staten Island who were part of the United Activities Unlimited program produced a podcast on cyberbullying and interviewed a psychiatrist about the long-term effects on children.

In developing Summer Bridge, DYCD worked with the workforce development organization Grant Associates to create the Workplace Challenge learning

opportunity, which allowed NYC youth to gain exposure to industries and careers while simultaneously building workplace skills in a virtual environment. A Workplace Challenge is a career preparation activity in which small groups of young people are engaged in solving a real-world problem or a challenge issued by an industry partner. We partnered with more than 1,000 organizations including prominent corporations such as Deutsche Bank, Goldman Sachs, Google, Morgan Stanley, SoundCloud, Vox Media and Warby Parker for the workplace challenge.

The SYEP Summer Bridge model included specialized options in addition to the community slots. In 2020, the CareerReady program served 3,981 participants through 60 school partnerships. The CareerReady SYEP program was created to provide enhanced opportunities for youth attending select public high schools to explore career options and develop work readiness skills. Though this model features some universal elements, it is uniquely shaped and customized by each school/SYEP provider partnership.

The MAP to Success option for NYCHA residents served 2,003 participants. In July 2014, the de Blasio Administration launched the Mayor's Action Plan for Neighborhood Safety (MAP) to reduce violence and make neighborhoods safer in and around 15 New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) developments that have some of the highest crime rates in NYC. Providers work collaboratively with the NYCHA developments, the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice (MOCJ), and MAP partner agencies to recruit and enroll program participants.

CareerFirst NYCHA was designed to expand access to career readiness as well as summer youth employment opportunities for youth residing in additional NYCHA public housing complexes. In 2020, it served 865 youth in 9 developments. Providers work collaboratively with NYCHA developments and community-based partners to recruit and enroll program participants.

Finally, the Emerging Leaders option was designed to provide SYEP opportunities to vulnerable youth who meet at least one of the following barriers: homeless or runaway youth, justice-involved youth, youth in or aging out of foster care, and youth in families who are receiving preventive services through NYC's Administration for Children's Services (ACS). This option served 1,919 youth in 2020, with priority given to the highest-needs youth.

At the end of the program, we asked participants about their experience. We were pleased that 92 percent agreed the program provided them an opportunity to learn a new skill, and it opened up new career options for them. We would like to share an example of the feedback we received from participants. Wynter shared a testimonial about her experience. She told us, “This year is definitely a year like no other. I have been faced with one of the most difficult times in my entire life. My family was sick with COVID-19. The most difficult task was having to take care of an entire household. I was left in devastation by the loss of two loved ones. I needed an outlet and a break! I was notified that I was able to be a part of SYEP Summer Bridge. Although it was challenging because I had to discipline myself to do the work virtually, I am so grateful I did it. This Summer Bridge experience has given me knowledge and the skills necessary to be successful as I prepare for college and beyond.”

The past year has been challenging but our commitment to offering positive experiences to young people remains strong. We are especially grateful to the City Council for your advocacy and support of SYEP and youth workforce development programs. I am now happy to answer your questions. Thank you.



Testimony of Lena Bilik, Policy Analyst, Children's Aid

Submitted Testimony – Youth Services Hearing 1/13/21

Summer Youth Employment Program

My name is Lena Bilik, Policy Analyst at Children's Aid. I would like to thank Chair Debi Rose and the members of the Youth Services Committee for the opportunity to submit testimony on the DYCD summer youth employment program (SYEP).

For nearly 168 years, Children's Aid has been committed to ensuring that there are no boundaries to the aspirations of young people, and no limits to their potential. We are leading a comprehensive counterattack on the obstacles that threaten kids' achievements in school and in life. We have also constructed a continuum of services, positioned every step of the way throughout childhood that builds well-being and prepares young people to succeed at every level of education and every milestone of life. Today over 2,000 full and part time staff members empower nearly 50,000 children, youth and their families through our network of 40 locations including early childhood education centers, public schools, community centers and community health clinics in four New York City neighborhoods – Harlem, Washington Heights, the South Bronx, and the north shore of Staten Island. Children's Aid is a member of the Campaign for Children, the New York State Network for Youth Success, the New York State Community Schools Network, and the New York City Coalition for Community School Excellence, and as a member of these networks and alliances we are in support of their policy agendas. Together, we are on a mission to connect children with what they need to learn, grow, and lead successful, independent lives.

As a multi-service agency, we employ a holistic strategy that serves children and their families at every stage of development—from cradle through college and career—and in every key setting—home, school, and community. We provide high-quality preschool to make sure children start kindergarten ready to learn. Our community schools focus on the needs of the “whole child” to improve student learning, strengthen families, and foster healthy communities. If family struggles become critical, our social workers bring stability. And because navigating the transition to adulthood is crucial, we are there to help teens reach college or career and, ultimately, independence. As a powerhouse of solutions, these are only a few of the many strategies Children's Aid utilizes to support our clients every step of the way on the path to overcoming poverty.



This cross-sector approach is more vital than ever, as the COVID-19 pandemic destabilizes the communities that we serve and exacerbates existing racial and socioeconomic inequity. In this critical period, young people and their families need a trusted partner like Children's Aid to provide a network of resources that they can turn to when experiencing the relentless challenges that have permeated this crisis—from food insecurity to remote learning challenges to the grief that comes with losing a loved one. Our staff has the expertise and tools to help clients overcome these struggles, keeping them on track to realizing their promise.

Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP)

Children's Aid's youth development programs build upon a foundation that supports young people becoming independent. We offer programs that provide a graduated series of experiences that help young adults cultivate their unique interests and talents, obtain leadership skills, and build resilience and self-confidence -- all skills required to succeed in adulthood. The Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) is a core part of the employment and work readiness programs that Children's Aid provides to young adults in New York City. We currently have about 250 partners citywide and our work placement capacity is about 3,000. 100 of our partners are in day camps or afterschool programs, 30 are in early childhood education, 25 in government, 40 in public non-government agencies, 20 in private business, and 35 in the nonprofit sector.

Even before the pandemic, there was immense demand for this program, which for many of our youth provides crucial supplemental income for their families or supports a young person's ability to pay for higher education expenses. NYC has been hit harder by the economic crisis that followed the pandemic than most other large cities in the U.S. And young adult workers have been hit especially hard. In June, City Comptroller Scott Stringer [released a report](#) showing that the unemployment rate among 16- to 24-year-olds had risen from 7% pre-pandemic to an alarming 35%. This has the potential to affect young adults' economic security and future plans for years to come, leading to lower wages, fewer job opportunities, financial instability, and more. A recent [Brookings Institution report](#) explained that if young workers are struggling, there are broader implications on the economy.

Young people of color have been hit especially hard in this respect. A [Brookings report](#) found that while the unemployment rates for young white workers have improved slightly since the spring, the unemployment rate for young Black workers remains particularly high, and was little changed. The report recommends that young workers receive added support from government to make sure that they are integrated into the labor force. The jobs that young workers hold, that programs like SYEP helps direct them to, [are important stepping-stones in their careers](#), improving their future employment prospects and economic prospects.



Despite all the evidence that youth employment is a crucial service that the city can help provide for both young people and the economy at large, during this past summer, advocates and providers faced an uphill battle to make this fact known; the Mayor's FY 2021 Executive Budget proposed \$175 million in cuts to youth services that include the elimination of programs that provide crucial supports to young people and their families -- including SYEP. This began with an unconscionable decision that led to contractors getting less than 24 hours' notice to wind down SYEP after the Mayor's Office of Contract Services had provided assurances that all human service contractors would be paid through the end of the fiscal year, which deeply impacted the trust between the city and providers.

The decision to cut youth programs, especially SYEP, was deeply unpopular, and a movement to #FundYouthNYC grew immediately. Low-income young people and their families rely on SYEP income in typical times, and the potential for the loss of that income in 2020 felt incredibly devastating, as many of these families live in the communities that have been the hardest-hit by the pandemic. The fact that this program was eliminated without a thought to alternative remote programming was found to be unacceptable to hundreds of providers, students, and parents. Due to a summer of outcry and advocacy, and the insistence that we could successfully provide this program remotely if needed, the SYEP cuts were reinstated, but only partially. The city budget cuts sliced the program's scale by more than half, from serving 74,000 students in 2019 to just 35,000 this year, and the program was rolled out under the name "Summer Bridge".

Summer 2020 Takeaways:

A total of 2,027 youth participated in SYEP programs with Children's Aid in summer 2020. 1,794 youth participated in traditional workforce SYEP, including 192 youth from three of our community schools. We also held our Youth Action Summer Symposium (Y.A.S.S!) program which is partially funded by SYEP dollars. This program was for a younger cohort, 14 and 15 year olds, and was a project-based experience with an end of summer showcase. We served 278 youth across five of our community schools and 2 of our community centers in this SYEP experience. For 56% of these youth, it was their first employment training experience. Based on a survey where 212 youth responded, 82% Agreed or Strongly Agreed with the statement "I feel more prepared for school in the Fall as a result of the YASS program" and 96% Agreed or Strongly Agreed with the statement "The YASS Program helped me learn a new skill". 94% of respondents Strongly Agreed or Agreed with the statement "I am able to work with a team or small group to accomplish a project."

Overall, "summer bridge" was a positive experience for young people because providers were able to step up to the plate to make that happen safely in the middle of the pandemic. But the



rollercoaster of cuts and restorations took a toll on providers. We lost two-and-a-half months of planning because of the budget dance. The last minute cuts and late-hour partial restoration also led to institutional loss at many organizations. Many CBOs had to furlough or lay off staff and then had trouble rehiring them. This led to a huge layer of administrative ramp-up, putting us behind our usual planning process. Some organizations will feel the brunt of these budget cuts into this coming summer, and are not able to hire back the staff needed to operate SYEP programs. Children's Aid as a larger organization was able to hire all core staff back but one. But because of the decrease in slots, we were only able to hire half of our seasonal staff that come back yearly. These staff are college students who are often former Children's Aid participants, who we rehire every year. Our program is two-tiered in some ways; there is SYEP, and there is making sure these college students have a job as well that offers them valuable experience and income over the summer. This was another unfortunate outcome from the reduction in SYEP slots in 2020 that impacted young adult workers.

Looking ahead to Summer 2021:

We urge the council to remember the events of summer 2020 and take all steps to avoid repeating them in 2021. SYEP must be fully funded for summer 2021 back to its original number of slots. Additionally, DYCD should start preparing in partnership with providers now for summer 2021 in case there are budget shortfalls again, so we do not have to go through the process of 2020 that took energy and resources away from providing direct service. The last minute nature of the cuts in 2020 were devastating to our communities that were living through extremely difficult times already, and corrosive to the trust between providers and DYCD. What is also important to understand about SYEP is that because it's such an intensive and short-term program, ample planning time is critical to success. Despite the major disruption of our planning process, many providers appreciated that there was a level of flexibility offered by DYCD during summer 2020 after the initial rollout; flexibility must continue to be a priority in summer 2021 given the ever-changing nature of the pandemic.

There are many lessons providers have learned from 2020 that can be drawn from to make SYEP 2021 more successful. We have become experts at virtual programming, for better or worse. One thing we learned is that with onboarding being online, most young people ended up having to apply on their cell phones because of lack of other technology, but the site was not mobile friendly. An easy and inexpensive way to make the onboarding process much more accessible to young people would be to make it mobile-friendly. Another piece that would be helpful to receive from DYCD would be more training opportunities for providers, especially around technical assistance for youth and families in completing the onboarding process. Given the best practices learned, we also can safely say that we should be able to successfully do at least a portion of the work for next summer virtually, including orientation, enrollment



processes, uploading of documents, e-signatures, work-readiness, and more. The city should be prepared to be flexible for a hybrid model just in case, and should learn from 2020 that this program can be done virtually if the public health crisis requires it. There should be no reason to cut SYEP in summer 2021 out of safety concerns, and there should be no reason not to pay providers on time and fully. The whiplash of the budget dance and the subsequent reduction in slots in 2020 left many smaller providers harmed and unsure if they will be able continue the program. Summer 2021 must keep this critical program whole.

All of this will take DYCD planning ahead and being in consistent, early, and clear communication with SYEP providers. This may even mean a conservative estimate for the safety guidelines in the coming months. The important thing is that young people can access the program no matter the status of the pandemic, and that the sustainability of the CBO infrastructure that provides the program can be maintained for years to come.

During these trying times, the city must take all steps to avoid leaving behind the low-income communities of color that have, time and time again, been shortchanged in public policy decisions while now being disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. Outside of its obvious economic benefits, SYEP has been proven to reduce summer learning-loss, increasing GPAs and retention for participants the semester following their participation. Investing in youth employment programs like SYEP can be a crucial part of this city's recovery, one that is equitable and focused on tried and true methods of positive youth development.

Conclusion

Children's Aid thanks the City Council for the opportunity to testify on the importance of youth employment and specifically of SYEP. We look forward to continue to work with the City Council and the Administration to improve apprenticeship and work readiness opportunities for young people in the City of New York and to continue the city's commitment to the next generation of leaders. Please consider us a resource and a partner.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit testimony on this important issue. Please feel free to reach out to me if you have any additional questions at lbilik@childrensaidnyc.org.



**Testimony to the Committee on Youth Services
Wildlife Conservation Society
January 13, 2021**

Oversight Hearing Topic: *The Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP)*

Recommendation: *Support SYEP as a Key Lever for the City's Recovery and Youth Reengagement*

I want to thank the New York City Council, and the Council Committee on Youth Services for the opportunity to testify in support of the New York City Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP). I will speak today about the critical importance of SYEP as a tool for the city's economic and social recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

SYEP is the largest workforce development program in the country, and the first job for many New Yorkers. In recent years, the program has reformed and improved, from a program to get young people off the streets at its inception, to a strong summer jobs program, to more recently a program that connects to youth's year-round interests through new service models within the program, most notably the school-based version of SYEP. The Wildlife Conservation Society believes that school-based SYEP is the most important entry point to the reshaping of public education to where it better prepares young people for 21st century careers, and creates the conditions for a truly inclusive New York City economy.

Connecting learning to work creates more meaningful opportunities for youth to develop and reach their potential, while also creating an equitable employment pipeline for our local businesses. When we connect school learning and workplace learning together, students are well-positioned to secure rewarding careers, employers are offered a qualified, diverse talent pipeline, and the community is better equipped to respond to today's rapidly changing labor market. Moreso, work-based learning prepares young people with the work skills they need to secure employment during times of economic strain.

Programs like the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) are often the only opportunity for low-income youth in New York to gain paid work experience and build their professional skills and expand their network. COVID-19 has caused disproportionately destructive economic impacts in some of our most vulnerable communities. **WCS urges New York City to protect and expand the Summer Youth Employment Program during our ongoing crisis and recovery.** SYEP is a vital resource to low-income communities, and any cuts to the program will have massive negative consequences on those who need help the most. After the last recession, New York City applied tens of millions of dollars of stimulus funding to SYEP--we see no reason why this year should be any different.



SYEP, aside from its programmatic benefits (see below), represents one of the most important cash transfer programs to low-income families in New York City. An overwhelming share of SYEP's standard \$165 million total budget is distributed directly to low-income young people and their families as wages. These are the same families that are seeing drastically reduced incomes and will rely on SYEP to survive.

SYEP keeps young people meaningfully engaged during otherwise unoccupied summer months, which will be crucial whether or not we need to maintain social distancing. Many young people are already becoming disconnected from our civic infrastructure as a result of not attending school in person, and SYEP, whether it is able to operate in-person or remotely, will be a key way to keep tens of thousands of young adults connected to positive, constructive activity, in what will be a crucial summer for our city. We all hope high schools return to in-person learning in the Fall, and we should view SYEP this year as the key way to begin that reconnection. With time to plan, we can create an SYEP for 2021 that high schools can use, in partnerships with the CBOs that administer the program from DYCD, that helps reconnect teenagers across the city through engaging them in paid in-person or virtual internships, and which will excite them to get back on track this Fall.

As a local cultural institution, WCS relies on the SYEP youth to contribute to the engaging experience for visitors to our five parks. From zoo camp support to administrative jobs to admissions support and other opportunities in our Business Services department, the 250 SYEP students who intern with WCS are part of the fabric of our Career Lattice. As one of the largest providers, we felt the loss of this program last year - not only in lost support and talent, but in wage replacement and a diverse talent pipeline. Of the 250 SYEP students that were with our organization in 2019, x# stayed with WCS in a part time employment capacity at the end of the SYEP program.

Above all, we all understand that these are tight times for the city budget, but they are far more difficult times for the young people and families that rely on SYEP not only for income, but for that first job experience that teaches them about the world, themselves, expands their network, and helps them begin to figure out what type of career might be for them. We must not balance the budget on the backs of our most vulnerable youth. Along with ensuring the program's funding stream, the Council should work to give providers and young people as much time to plan as possible--approving the budget for SYEP at or near the June 30 deadline for the city budget makes the program extremely complicated to administer. We urge you to work with administration to solidify funding by the start of Spring, so we can create the best program possible this year.

I again want to thank the Council for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the tens of thousands of young New Yorkers who stand to benefit greatly from the Summer Youth Employment Program.



**Testimony for the New York City Council Committee on Youth Services
Re: Oversight – Summer Youth Employment Program**

January 13, 2021

Good Afternoon members of City Council, thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Jessica Yauri, I'm from Brooklyn and currently a freshman at Baruch College. I am a part of Sisters in Strength at Girls for Gender Equity where I advocate for change of issues in my community and connect with other young women of color based on our experience of racism and gender-based violence.

As my parents struggled hard to place food on the table, they were never able to slow down, so I could continue to learn about the quintessential American Dream they hoped for our family, but it was broken before they were even born. You mark yourself with pride in doing so. When breaking a thread gives numerous opportunities to those so called a gifted one. Yet you mix up between privilege and talent in disguise.

As if Heaven had said Hispanic, Latino, and Black people were to be in underserved public schools And compete for resources. And the Caucasians and Asians were to flood the halls of the Advanced, Early and Private Schools. You pride yourself on establishing an equitable structure, yet this past summer as young people had to beg you to keep SYEP. A structure that is expected to be more diverse, but your funding says something else.

Unless you try to do something about this segregated structure,

In the wrong side of history, you will end up

Yet I'm not so afraid of it.

And we are here,

Against the public education system, the minority

We regret to tell you that we have

That we are the majority, the majority

And we're not going anywhere.



Testimony of UJA-Federation of New York

**New York City Council Committee on Youth Services
Oversight Hearing-Summer Youth Employment Program**

**Submitted by:
Faith Behum, UJA-Federation of New York**

January 13, 2021

Thank you to Chairperson Rose for the opportunity to submit testimony on the Summer Youth Employment Program. My name is Faith Behum and I am an advocacy and policy advisor at UJA-Federation of New York.

Established more than 100 years ago, UJA-Federation of New York is one of the nation's largest local philanthropies. Central to UJA's mission is to care for those in need—identifying and meeting the needs of New Yorkers of all backgrounds and Jews everywhere. UJA connects people to their communities, responds to crises in New York, Israel and around the world, and supports nearly 100 nonprofit organizations serving those that are most vulnerable and in need of programs and services.

Five of UJA's nonprofit partners oversee Summer Youth Employment Programs (SYEP). All of these providers received reduced SYEP slots due to city budget cuts in FY 2021. An additional nonprofit in UJA's network who was supposed to start a new SYEP in 2020 received zero slots. UJA recognizes the economic impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on New York City. UJA also acknowledges the role summer programs can play in progressing New York City's recovery from the pandemic. SYEP, provides income for youth that many will use to buy products from local businesses in their communities, and families of SYEP participants often rely on the income participants receive to assist with household expenses. SYEP also offers valuable workforce experience for the youth who engage in the program. Below are issues that need to be addressed in order for the SYEP to continue to have the same impact in communities in summer 2021 and beyond.

Immediately Commit to Running SYEP in Summer 2021

From the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, SYEP providers were actively re-designing all their programs to be offered in remote environments, planning to use Zoom and other virtual platforms to work with youth in summer 2020. In April 2020, Mayor de Blasio announced plans to suspend SYEP due to the health and safety concerns in-person offerings posed to participants and staff. After this announcement, SYEP providers were told they would not be compensated for work associated with their SYEP contracts. Programs attempted to

maintain their SYEP staff. Unfortunately, many programs had to lay off employees associated with their SYEP.

The City eventually decided to offer a different form of the SYEP called Summer Bridge, a remote career exploration and education program that would eventually serve 35,000 youth—a fraction of the 75,000 youth who benefitted from SYEP in summer 2020. Summer Bridge was announced in June. Providers (in many cases with reduced staff) had weeks to prepare to get the Summer Bridge program ready by July. Despite the less than ideal circumstances, SYEP providers created meaningful virtual career exploration and employment experiences for the 35,000 youth who participated in the program.

Regardless of the success of Summer Bridge, it is imperative that providers are not forced to wait until June 2021 to find out if their SYEP will be funded this year. Providers need time to plan, either virtual or in-person offerings and to engage both employers and youth who will participate in their program. They require this even more during a pandemic. **UJA urges the Administration to publicly commit to running SYEP in Summer 2021 immediately in order to give the SYEP provider community enough time to plan strengthening the program for its participants. UJA also recommends the SYEP be restored to serve 75,000 youth allowing for additional youth to benefit from the program.**

Comprehensive Background Checks

Since September 2019, the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) has required new extensive background checks for staff and volunteers in youth and early childhood education programs. The background checks are required by rules in the Federal Childcare and Community Development Block Grant that was reauthorized and revised in 2014. As the local regulator, the background check process is managed in New York City by the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH). Throughout the pandemic, DOHMH has continued to struggle to complete the background checks in a timely manner causing delays in the hiring process for staff members in afterschool, early childhood education programs, and Learning Labs. When providers send inquiries about the status of pending background checks to the DOHMH mailbox designated for receiving completed background check paperwork they often receive delayed responses with little information. Programs have reported having to wait a minimum of *two months* to get staff fully cleared. OCFS allows prospective staff to work in programs if they are supervised by fully cleared staff. However, this only works when there are enough cleared staff to oversee the prospective staff awaiting their clearances. When fully cleared staff test positive for COVID and need to quarantine, many programs are left scrambling to meet staffing quotas.

The delays in completing background checks are unacceptable at a time when parents and guardians' ability to return to work hinges on the availability of reliable childcare options. Providers will also be unable to staff summer programs like the SYEP if the background check process remains in its current state. **UJA urges DYCD to assist DOHMH in expediting the comprehensive background check process, ultimately making DOHMH commit to a two-week maximum timeframe to complete checks.** Providers support rigorous background checks for all staff and need their partners in government to process background checks quickly and efficiently so providers can operate programs in this constantly changing environment.

Access to PPE and Cleaning Supplies, COVID Testing, and COVID Vaccinations

Despite the roll-out of the COVID vaccine, it is extremely likely that if in-person SYEP employment opportunities resume this summer, programs will need access to PPE. **Individuals who provide City contracted services to youth are essential workers and require access to PPE and cleaning supplies at no additional cost to their programs. SYEP participants must also be provided PPE at no additional cost to providers.** All essential workers in human service agencies (including employees of youth programs) also need access to timely COVID testing and the COVID vaccine.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. UJA looks forward to working closely with the Council and the Administration in order to strengthen programs like the Summer Youth Employment Program that are desperately needed to jumpstart the City's economic recovery. Please contact Faith Behum behumf@ujafedny.org or 212-836-1338 with any questions.

SHELTERING ARMS

Children and Family Services

Embracing Hope and Building Futures for Generations

**Testimony delivered by Makeda Murray, Career Development Specialist
Prepared for the NY City Council
Committee on Youth Services
January 13, 2021**

Good afternoon. My name is Makeda Murray and I am the Career Development Specialist on the Foster Care & Adoption team at Sheltering Arms. Thank you Chair Rose and members of the Committee for the opportunity to testify before you today.

Sheltering Arms is one of the City's largest providers of education, youth development, and community and family well-being programs for the Bronx, Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Queens. We serve nearly 15,000 children, youth, and families each year, and employ more than 1,200 staff from across New York City.

We join UNH in urging the City to commit to expanding SYEP this summer 2021, and calling on DYCD to include providers in the planning of SYEP for this summer.

Challenges from SYEP 2020

Prior to the pandemic, the application process for SYEP was easy and all the youth needed was to complete an application and ensure they had the proper identification. The summer of 2020 was totally different—from the application to the placement. After the City reversed its decision and restored SYEP, I had only seven days to submit the applications for all of our youth. This required me to work overtime for a week straight to ensure everything was submitted on time.

For the youth who did get placed, many placements consisted of workshops and answering emails. Younger youth in these placements found it similar to their pre-COVID placements and felt that they were actually working and not just lounging around. However, the older youth who are more used to the physical aspect of work felt as if their placement wasn't challenging enough for them. These youth were able to complete their tasks ahead of time and found themselves bored. Added to this, several youth didn't get paid until several weeks into their placement, and one youth who did not receive his last payment. This has a huge impact on the youth because they feel they're being taken advantage of.

Importance of SYEP

SYEP has always been an important resource to the youth because it is the one time of the year when they are able to earn their own money without going without or waiting. Many of these youth come from low-income families or are in foster care where they are reliant on others to care for them. SYEP gives them the change to be independent and reap the benefits of their hard work. SYEP has a huge impact on the youths' already fragile mental health, and without it I worry that their mental health will be impacted.

After all of the challenges that have transpired and the unknowns in the upcoming year, many of our youth are really looking forward to SYEP 2021. I currently have youth calling me telling me to let them know when they can apply for SYEP. I do hope that we are rewarded funds for SYEP this year and that we are given ample time to fix the kinks of what last year created. The City must commit *now* to serving all interested youth through SYEP this summer, and DYCD must engage providers in the planning process.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify, and for your commitment to our youth.

For any questions, please reach out to Mikayla Terrell, Chief of Staff, at mterrell@shelteringarmsny.org or 929-359-3859.

Submitted Testimony of Good Shepherd Services
Before the New York City Council Committee on Youth Services
Oversight – Summer Youth Employment Program

Submitted by
Carolyn Blair, Fair Futures Coach Supervisor
Good Shepherd Services

January 13, 2021

Thank you, Chair Rose and the Council Members of the Committee on Youth Services, for the opportunity to submit testimony on the oversight hearing on the Summer Youth Employment Program.

My name is Carolyn Blair, and I am a Fair Futures Coach Supervisor at Good Shepherd Services where I supervise 4 coaches, with a caseload of 15 youth each, whom support youth in foster care between the ages of 11 and 21. I have been employed with Good Shepherd Services for the past 7 years, all in Family Foster Care. Before this role, I served 2 years as a Case planner and 2 and a half years as an Education Specialist for youth from birth to the 5th grade.

Guided by social and racial justice, Good Shepherd Services (GSS) partners and grows with communities so that all NYC children, youth, and families succeed and thrive. We provide quality, effective services that deepen connections between family members, within schools, and among neighbors. We work closely with community leaders to advocate, both locally and nationally, on behalf of our participants to make New York City a better place to live and work.

In February 2020, Good Shepherd Services implemented the Fair Futures model within our Family Foster Care and Therapeutic Family Foster Care programs, with 4 coaches and in our adolescent Residential Foster Care and Rapid Intervention Center with 2 coaches.

Today my testimony will emphasize on the role coaches played in supporting over 35 youth who participated in SYEP last year and worked remotely at Common Point Queens, Children's Aid, and the CUNY Research Foundation. The supports I will speak of are offered to youth in care year round by Coaches who are trained in trauma-informed and strength-based approaches and build a trusting relationship with the young person. Coaches also provide ongoing social/emotional support and work one-on-one with youth to develop goals based on their interests.

Coaches are always looking for opportunities and experiences that help youth become self-sufficient. Coaches connect young people to specialists to help them identify and apply to best-fit schools, programs, and career development experiences. In addition to the many services and

supports Coaches provide to youth, Coaches ensure young people who are aging out of care can access and maintain stable, affordable housing and build independent living skills.

In the event a youth is not successful in a school or program setting, Coaches help young people reflect on the experience, provide support, and work with them to establish new goals and transition to their next opportunity.

Coaches provide essential support to youth during their SYEP placement. Coaches connected youth to members of the community and the Career Specialist partnered with the SYEP placement to ensure youth have the needed supports to be successful. Coaches helped youth to successfully navigate and sustain their participation in their SYEP placements. Career specialist also scheduled weekly calls with SYEP placement supervisors to ensure both the supervisor and the youth's needs were being met. Coaches also scheduled frequent check-ins with youth to support them throughout the placement to discuss connectivity issues, effective communication strategies, and to monitor progress. Coaches helped prepare youth with potential challenges by hosting monthly workshops for youth around the topics of navigating the remote workplace, video fatigue and professionalism. Coaches and Career Specialists also supported youth in obtaining, collecting and submitting vital documentation online.

Some of the key takeaways youth gained from the SYEP program include: effective communication, career advancement, and navigating relationships between youth and their supervisors. Additionally, youth were connected to the Hats & Ladders career-building network. These opportunities provide youth vital support in real life experiences and developing their careers. Despite the immense difficulties presented by the ongoing COVID crisis, youth gained valuable experience and support from our Coaches and Career Specialists.

Good Shepherd stands ready to support the Council in ensuring Coaches and Career Specialists are recognized and supported for the essential work they provide youth in care across the city especially during the pandemic.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit our testimony. I am happy to answer any questions.

Testimony of the Queens Botanical Garden
Joint Hearing of the Committee on Youth
Services

January 13, 2021



My name is Eryn Hatzithomas and I'm the Coordinator of Volunteers and Special Projects at the Queens Botanical Garden, one of the 34 members of the Cultural Institutions Group (CIG). Throughout the COVID-19 crisis, CIGs have been committed to contributing to the City and to New Yorkers by supporting public life, public health, and public service. Thank you, Committee members Rose, Chin, Eugene, Louis, Perkins, and Riley for providing this opportunity to offer testimony on the impact of the Summer Youth Program at the Garden.

Queens Botanical Garden (QBG) is located on 39 acres of city-owned land in Flushing (in Councilmember Peter Koo's district.) We are the place **where people, plants, and cultures meet**. We demonstrate this through our inspiring organic gardens, innovative educational programs, and real-world applications of environmental stewardship. Public Gardens and parks are even more important now than ever, with so many places closed, and people aching to be out in the world in a safe place. Queens Botanical Garden offers that safe, beautiful and interesting place. **Nature heals.**

Prior to COVID-19, the Garden provided environmental education programming for nearly 35,000 school children and 265,000 people from Queens and beyond were served onsite or through outreach efforts annually. Starting in March, in accordance with city and state guidelines, the Garden was closed to the public for 4 months, reopening in mid-July. And even in a pandemic year, we had 165,000 people come to the Garden. The Garden was able to host weddings and birthday parties, though smaller and socially distanced, of course, in our outdoor venue. Families are happy to come to the Garden with their children and grandparents.

Heard around the Garden was:

"Life feels almost normal again," one visitor said.

An employee noted, **"I am so grateful to have something meaningful to do, to go outside, to work."**

A Public Programs volunteer expressed **"Thank YOU, for the wonderful opportunity to experience the closest thing to the "old normal" I've had in months!"**

This would not be possible without the hard work of our entire Garden staff--especially our horticulture, visitors services, public programs, education, and maintenance teams. The Garden also relies heavily on our volunteer and intern programs. Prior to COVID-19, we welcomed **2,000 community volunteers** and **young interns** annually to help keep the Garden green and growing. This includes the significant contributions of our **SYEP** interns.

Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) at QBG



QBG is proud to host up to **40 SYEP participants** alongside 20 seasonal interns and volunteers. Over the 6 week program, we strive to provide **meaningful job skills** and experience that will position the youth for success in their future careers.

Because the participants come from **diverse economic backgrounds**, we also partner with local businesses to provide resources such as **metro cards** and **hot meals**, as well as **informative workshops** such as Resume Building, Occupational Safety and Health, Financial Literacy and panels on careers in Horticulture. They must wear uniforms, clock in and out every day, follow health and safety protocols, and perform other **administrative tasks common in the workplace**.

Reaching all corners of the Garden, the interns learn alongside **Horticulture** and **Maintenance** staff to prune, weed, plant, repair pathways, mulch, deadhead, and maintain tree beds. They also help to maintain the biotope by our Visitor and Administration Building, and refresh exterior paint. Still other interns assist our **Compost, Human Resources**, and **Visitor Services** departments, as well as our **Children's Garden** camps and programs.

The Garden partners with local organizations and diversity programs to give these opportunities to the youth. Over **12 Community Partners** work with the Garden to provide these internship opportunities.

SYEP COMMUNITY PARTNERS

- Chinese Planning Council (CPC)
- Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York, Inc. (KCS)
- Commonpoint Queens (formerly the Y)
- Futures & Options
- Ladder for Leaders
- Learning to Work
- Frank Sinatra School – 993
- Lexington School for the Deaf
- Helen Keller Services for the Blind
- East-West School of International Studies
- Flushing High School
- Greater Ridgewood Youth Council

SYEP in times of COVID-19



This year, through the pandemic's many impacts, the Garden has continued to serve as a [steadfast internship resource](#) for our community's youth. Last summer, QBG hosted [35 Interns](#)- 7 interns onsite (including 3 SYEP), and 28 interns virtually.

Onsite Interns

The drop in onsite volunteer support possible was keenly felt by our teams this year. However, with a comprehensive orientation program and health and safety training, the Garden was able to safely welcome a few summer interns onsite.

- In [Horticulture](#), KCS Interns, Gunwoo and Jaden, gardened in our Four Seasons border and also got to [design their own corner of the Parking Garden](#).
- In [Visitor Services](#), CPC Intern, Benjamin, [helped in the Gift Shop](#).
- On the [Farm](#), Jim, Tania, Mary and Diana, helped to maintain, plant and harvest. Their [work supported food donations](#) we gave to local organizations to help to ease food insecurity in the city this summer.

The interns all demonstrated sincere interest in urban horticulture and environmental sustainability in our community!

Virtual Interns

In adjusting with the times, we were able to offer a number of virtual internships in support of the Garden. We sustained community partnerships with these offerings and addressed poignant cultural topics.

- 4 Futures and Options (F&O) interns met with us over 5 weeks to learn all about the non-profit industry. It culminated in a [presentation of their business plan for a new non-profit](#) that would provide COVID health resources globally.
- 22 Queens College Inclusion (QCI) program interns meet with us throughout August to [discuss the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion](#) across our organization's talent pipelines, how could we can create more opportunities for underrepresented populations in the recruitment, selection, advancement and retention process.

Feedback from virtual interns:

"I chose this non-profit industry to expand my knowledge on other ways to get involved with my community... I learned how resourceful and how culturally/socially driven non-profits are (these happen to be my interests!). I am a rising senior in high school who is passionate to study medicine in a health-related environment."

"I learned that every person has to try a lot of things in their life to figure out what they really want to do. I learned about how a nonprofit runs, and the kind of jobs that are offered in each department and the goals of different nonprofits. I hope to continue learning about nonprofit organizations and the medical field. My plan for the upcoming year is to thrive at Syracuse University."

Queens Botanical Garden Staff never stopped bringing people, plants, and cultures together this year. The contribution of our volunteers and interns helps us to remain an urban oasis for visitors to find peace, relaxation and inspiration among the wonders of nature. The SYEP program's endurance will be an important component of the ability of the Garden and our community to thrive.





**Gabriel Foreman
Co-Founder, Vice President
Duro UAS**

**Testimony Submitted to the New York City Council
Committee on Youth Services
January 13, 2021**

Oversight Hearing Topic: *The Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP)*

Recommendation: *Support SYEP to Keep STEM Companies in NYC*

I want to thank the New York City Council, and the Council Committee on Youth Services for the opportunity to testify in support of the New York City Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP). I'm writing regarding our belief in the critical importance of SYEP in generating a functioning talent pipeline, particularly in STEM skillsets, in New York City.

Duro UAS (Tough Unmanned Autonomous Systems) was established in 2015 at the City College of New York and has since moved to and expanded its operations in the South Bronx's Bruckner Building on Third Avenue. We also operate a sister company, Duro Workforce, which trains young people in hands-on STEM skills such as computer-aided design (CAD) to prepare them to work for robotics companies such as Duro UAS. For more information please see this [New York Times profile](#) on our company.

Since 2015 Duro has worked with over 200 students, a large portion of whom have been SYEP participants. Were it not for SYEP, many of these talented young students would have been unable to participate, cutting them off from the ability to learn about viable STEM career pathways as well as the opportunity to begin practicing the skills they will need to pursue them.

As an engineering company that started a second company to address the lack of students entering the STEM talent pool, we are intimately familiar with the challenges facing STEM-related industries in the NYC area.

For example, in preparation for one of our programs, we interviewed several companies including Magellan Aerospace, Rosco Vision Systems, and GAL Manufacturing to determine if and how their talent needs were being met. The companies' pain points were consistent, centering on the lack of prepared applicants needed to replace retirements or take on new, technology-focused roles such as CNC (computerized numerical control) machining.

Professionalism, including punctuality, attendance, and teamwork, and basic skills such as math were the two most common challenges associated with applicants for these positions.

Without a functioning pipeline of prepared candidates, these companies and others like them will eventually be forced to move to New Jersey, Connecticut, or the Midwest, which offer talent



in addition to lower operating costs. None of the companies we spoke with desired this outcome, but neither did they say it wouldn't happen if they couldn't fill entry level positions.

Without SYEP, the ability for students to find an entry point into this talent pipeline will be greatly harmed. The awareness of career pathways, relevant skills learned, and professionalism put into practice I fear cannot be realistically made up otherwise during the formative ages of 14-24. It would be a huge loss both for the students and the companies that want to call New York City home into the future.

Thank you for your time and consideration, please let me know if you have any questions.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gabriel Foreman".

Gabriel Foreman
Co-Founder, Vice President
Duro UAS



**Lazar Treschan
Vice President, Policy and Impact
HERE to HERE**

**Testimony Submitted to the New York City Council
Committee on Youth Services
January 13, 2021**

Oversight Hearing Topic: *The Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP)*

Recommendation: *Support SYEP as a Key Lever for the City's Recovery and Youth Reengagement*

I want to thank the New York City Council, and the Council Committee on Youth Services for the opportunity to testify in support of the New York City Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP). I will speak today about the critical importance of SYEP as a tool for the city's economic and social recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

SYEP is the largest workforce development program in the country, and the first job for many New Yorkers. In recent years, the program has reformed and improved, from a program to get young people off the streets at its inception, to a strong summer jobs program, to more recently a program that connects to youth's year-round interests through new service models within the program, most notably the school-based version of SYEP. HERE to HERE believes that school-based SYEP is the most important entry point to the reshaping of public education to where it better prepares young people for 21st century careers, and creates the conditions for a truly inclusive New York City economy.

Connecting learning to work creates more [positive outcomes for students, as well as employers and the economy](#). Making work-based learning available to all [students](#), beginning at least as early as high school, is a win-win-win that benefits students, employers, and the entire community. When we braid school learning and workplace learning together, students are well-positioned to secure rewarding careers, employers are offered a qualified, diverse talent pipeline, and the community is better equipped to respond to today's rapidly changing labor market. Moreso, work-based learning prepares young people with the work skills they need to secure employment during times of economic strain.

Programs like the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) are often the only opportunity for low-income youth in New York to gain paid work experience and build their professional skills and a [key vehicle to mitigate the effects of segregated schools](#). COVID-19 has caused destructive economic impacts, which are disproportionately being borne by those with the fewest resources. **HERE to HERE urges New York City to protect and expand the Summer Youth Employment Program during our ongoing crisis and recovery.** SYEP is a vital

resource to low-income communities, and any cuts to the program will have massive negative consequences on those who need help the most. After the last recession, New York City applied tens of millions of dollars of stimulus funding to SYEP--we see no reason why this year should be any different.

SYEP, aside from its programmatic benefits (see below), represents one of the most important cash transfer programs to low-income families in New York City. An overwhelming share of SYEP's standard \$165 million total budget is distributed directly to low-income young people and their families as wages. These are the same families that are seeing drastically reduced incomes and will rely on SYEP to survive.

SYEP keeps young people meaningfully engaged during otherwise unoccupied summer months, which will be crucial whether or not we need to maintain social distancing. Many young people are already becoming disconnected from our civic infrastructure as a result of not attending school in person, and SYEP, whether it is able to operate in-person or remotely, will be a key way to keep tens of thousands of young adults connected to positive, constructive activity, in what will be a crucial summer for our city. We all hope high schools return to in-person learning in the Fall, and we should view SYEP this year as the key way to begin that reconnection. With time to plan, we can create an SYEP for 2021 that high schools can use, in partnerships with the CBOs that administer the program from DYCD, that helps reconnect teenagers across the city through engaging them in paid in-person or virtual internships, and which will excite them to get back on track this Fall.

SYEP has shown clear educational and other benefits to participants, which we should not sacrifice, particularly following remote learning in schools. Research has found that the program increases school attendance and test scores following program participation, in addition to non-academic, statistically significant benefits including decreased mortality and incarceration. A virtual SYEP may even be able to offer young people a professional technological skill set they will need in the years to come.

On April 7, 2020 the Department of Youth and Community Services announced the temporary cancellation of SYEP, citing concerns over public health and safety and that "uncertainty over how COVID-19 will continue to affect social distancing guidelines, worksite availability, and provider and site staffing as we head into late spring and summer makes it difficult to ensure that SYEP can be operated safely and efficiently." However, providers, funders, and youth workforce advocates worked tirelessly to advocate for and design summer internship experiences that could be performed remotely, assist in recovery efforts in the aftermath of the pandemic, and build professional skills. With the support of the City Council--thank you!!!--35,000 SYEP slots were restored. This was a massive victory and a lifeline to so many youth.

HERE to HERE, in partnership with our allies at Teens Take Charge, is about to release a report that documents the work of young people in advocating for SYEP last year, in which they



describe that effort as a powerful work-based learning opportunity in its own right. At the same time, HERE to HERE will also publish research we conducted about the powerful impact of last year's virtual internships from a sample of programs in the Bronx. We will share those with the committee as soon as possible.

Above all, we all understand that these are tight times for the city budget, but they are far more difficult times for the young people and families that rely on SYEP not only for income, but for that first job experience that teaches them about the world, themselves, expands their network, and helps them begin to figure out what type of career might be for them. We must not balance the budget on the backs of our most vulnerable youth. Along with ensuring the program's funding stream, the Council should work to give providers and young people as much time to plan as possible--approving the budget for SYEP at or near the June 30 deadline for the city budget makes the program extremely complicated to administer. We urge you to work with administration to solidify funding by the start of Spring, so we can create the best program possible this year.

I again want to thank the Council for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the tens of thousands of young New Yorkers who stand to benefit greatly from the Summer Youth Employment Program.

I want to first thank you to the City council at large for championing and restoring SYEP last year. My name is Tatiana Arguello and I am the Director of Workforce Development at UAU. We are the largest SYEP in NYC traditionally serving over 5,000 young people through SYEP. Last summer we were only able to serve 2,200 due to the late decision.

It feels like just yesterday that we were fighting to restore SYEP funding. The program, along with a slew of other programming, was abruptly cut due to the city's financial deficit. Instead of accepting defeat, we quickly formed a coalition to push back against these cuts. We took a stand and said firmly that, "we will not balance the books of our city on the backs of our young people." This coalition included partners such as UNH, YES, Here to Here, ExpandedED, Teens Take Charge, CBOs across the city, our community leaders and partners, our young people and our local officials (a special shout out to our Councilmember Debi Rose for her resolute advocacy). As a result, SYEP and other critical youth service programs like Cornerstone, Beacon, COMPASS, and SONYC were "saved" and reinvisioned alongside DYCD.

For months, although we were not certain of funding, we centered our campaign around hearing what the cuts would mean for our young people and community. Focus groups were commissioned to think through what programming would look like to address the needs and safety of our participants. We presented our ideas in countless forums and fought hard. And we won because we understood that this was not the time to cut programming. We were not afraid to roll up our sleeves and face ALL of the challenges that were thrown our way. And we are stronger for it. For one, we have brought programming into the 21st century by building young people's work history, skills, and professional networks, which help to secure jobs in meaningful new ways. We saw our business partners come in and support our work (and, in most cases, even learn from our young people). We even interacted with new partners who we have never met. Zoom, Google Classroom, REMO and other online platforms allowed us to connect with high-profile companies who traditionally would not come to Staten Island or make their way to the Bronx.

The lessons we learned are now interwoven into all of the year-round programming we offer. Although we have seen pain, we have also seen resiliency, adaptability, growth, and connectedness in new ways. Throughout this year, we have seen our young people empowered and advocating for themselves and the world they want to live in in so many ways; our youth and our Workforce team were: helping to solve real world issues alongside business owners, distributing PPE, becoming Contact Tracers, getting people signed up to vote or complete the census, helping with food distributions, creating educational /advocacy campaigns, and even helping with their own family affairs. This should serve as a critical reminder to all of us that we

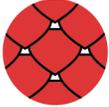
can and should demand critical services and ongoing support for our young people. This was (and still is) the time to expand and re-envision our services.

I wanted to highlight the range and scope of our efforts and of the tremendous efforts and resiliency of the youth we serve especially because it's hard to understand what power we truly hold, especially during times of crises. And it's important to put in perspective what they have truly been up against. Long before COVID-19, young adult poverty was on a rise with young people facing crippling college debt, high unemployment rates, stagnant wages, and increasingly high costs of living. It is not a secret that young people will feel the impact of the pandemic-induced recession for decades to come and will bear the brunt of its economic consequences. Young people have been disproportionately impacted, facing extremely limited opportunities for telework, as many youth traditionally work in retail and hospitality, industries severely impacted by COVID-19. Just as it was true during the 2008 Great Recession for Millennials, members of Generation-Z are experiencing elevated unemployment rates, lower earnings, reduced net worths, decreased rates of savings, high levels of student loan debts, lower rates of home ownership, loss of learning, and higher rates of co-residence with parents. I am sure economists and other experts will write about the lasting effects on these generations and their trajectory. There will be some who will never recover from these losses. In many ways, our youth are also missing out on human connection as we generally understand and seek it. And all of this is to not even touch on the troubling statistics reflecting more severely negative impacts on and a greater uphill climb for people and households of color in all aspects of this crisis: employment, income, housing security, food security, health, and mortality.

Young people are the future of America's - of New York's workforce and economy, yet relief efforts have largely overlooked them. We need to continue to fight for Youth Workforce programming including expansion of SYEP in this coming year to avoid further damage that could cripple a generation. In light of this pandemic, we cannot overlook the employment and economic conditions of young people. We need to ease the pessimism about their futures, not with false optimism or superficial sentiments, but by changing the trajectory. We need to understand that there are new opportunities on the horizon, and it is our responsibility to seize them, to bring them to light, and to prepare our young people to make the most of them.

I want to assure you that we remain committed to the good fight. This is not the time to cut funding, but rather to expand it. Now is the time to put in additional resources and safety measures for our collective well-being. We need to be a part of the conversations on how to build new businesses and support the ones that are still here. We need to support our essential workers and non profits that are doing critical work. UAU Workforce believes in the power of resiliency, adaptability, and empowerment in our communities and youth. We believe these values have been instrumental in our workforce right now, and are committed to making sure these values are in all of the work we do for our community and youth. We will continue to train a workforce that advocates for individuality, creativity, inclusivity, and respect. We will hold

ourselves accountable to these values and invite you to do the same. We need to continue, and go further, in this new direction, in order for us to move through this discomfort to a better and more just “normal.” A “normal” where we celebrate diversity, equity, and inclusion; one where we deeply understand the challenges our community faces and are willing to address them; one where we prioritize each other and understand that we all need to work together. The more time we know that funding is secured- the more time we have to plan and execute a well thought out program. We cannot wait until June 30th again.... Thank you for your time.



Jessica Johnson-Cope
President
Johnson Security Bureau, Inc.

Testimony Submitted to the New York City Council
Committee on Youth Services
January 13, 2021

Oversight Hearing Topic: *The Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP)*

Recommendation: *Support SYEP as a Key Lever for the City's Recovery and Youth Reengagement*

I want to thank the New York City Council, and the Council Committee on Youth Services for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of the New York City Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP). As a business owner, my remarks focus on the critical importance of SYEP as a tool for the city's economic and social recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

SYEP is the largest workforce development program in the country, and the first job for many New Yorkers. In recent years, the program has reformed and improved, from a program to get young people off the streets at its inception, to a strong summer jobs program, to more recently a program that connects to youth's year-round interests through new service models within the program, most notably the school-based version of SYEP. My firm, Johnson Security Bureau, Inc. has hosted SYEP students in the past because we believe in engaging our youth in the local workforce. As a member of the HERE to HERE Advisory Board, I believe that school-based SYEP is a critical entry point to the reshaping of public education to where it better prepares young people for 21st century careers, and creates the conditions for a truly inclusive New York City economy.

Connecting learning to work results in more [positive outcomes for students, as well as for employers and the economy](#). Making work-based learning available to all [students](#), beginning at least as early as high school, is a win-win-win that benefits students, employers, and the entire community. When we braid school learning and workplace learning together, students are better positioned to secure rewarding careers, employers benefit from a qualified, diverse talent pipeline, and the community is better equipped to respond to today's rapidly changing labor market. Moreso, work-based learning prepares young people with the work skills they need to secure employment during times of economic strain.

Programs like the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) are often the only opportunity for low-income youth in New York to gain paid work experience and build their professional skills and a [key vehicle to mitigate the effects of segregated schools](#). COVID-19 has caused destructive economic impacts, which are disproportionately being borne by those with the fewest resources. Many youth have shared how as a result of COVID-19, any money they can contribute to their households are even more crucial. I stand with **HERE to HERE in urging New York City to protect and expand the Summer Youth Employment Program during**



our ongoing crisis and recovery. SYEP is a vital resource to low-income communities, and any cuts to the program will have massive negative consequences on those who need help the most. After the last recession, New York City applied tens of millions of dollars of stimulus funding to SYEP--we see no reason why this year should be any different.

SYEP, aside from its programmatic benefits (see below), represents one of the most important cash transfer programs to low-income families in New York City. An overwhelming share of SYEP's standard \$165 million total budget is distributed directly to low-income young people and their families as wages. These are the same families that are seeing drastically reduced incomes and will rely on SYEP to survive.

SYEP keeps young people meaningfully engaged during otherwise unoccupied summer months, which will be crucial whether or not we need to maintain social distancing. Many young people are already becoming disconnected from our civic infrastructure as a result of not attending school in person, and SYEP, whether it is able to operate in-person or remotely, will be a key way to keep tens of thousands of young adults connected to positive, constructive activity, in what will be a crucial summer for our city. We all hope high schools return to in-person learning in the Fall, and we should view SYEP this year as the key way to begin that reconnection. With time to plan, we can create an SYEP for 2021 that high schools can use, in partnerships with the CBOs that administer the program from DYCD, that helps reconnect teenagers across the city through engaging them in paid in-person or virtual internships, and which will excite them to get back on track this Fall.

SYEP has shown clear educational and other benefits to participants, which we should not sacrifice, particularly following remote learning in schools. Research has found that the program increases school attendance and test scores following program participation, in addition to non-academic, statistically significant benefits including decreased mortality and incarceration. A virtual SYEP may even be able to offer young people a professional technological skill set they will need in the years to come.

On April 7, 2020 the Department of Youth and Community Services announced the temporary cancellation of SYEP, citing concerns over public health and safety and that "uncertainty over how COVID-19 will continue to affect social distancing guidelines, worksite availability, and provider and site staffing as we head into late spring and summer makes it difficult to ensure that SYEP can be operated safely and efficiently." However, providers, funders, and youth workforce advocates, like me, have worked tirelessly to advocate for and design summer internship experiences that could be performed remotely, assist in recovery efforts in the aftermath of the pandemic, and build professional skills, all while providing needed products and service. With the support of the City Council--thank you!!!--35,000 SYEP slots were restored. This was a massive victory and a lifeline to so many youth.

My colleagues at HERE to HERE, in partnership with our allies at Teens Take Charge, are about to release a report that documents the work of young people in advocating for SYEP last year, in which they describe that effort as a powerful work-based learning opportunity in its own right. At the same time, HERE to HERE will also publish research it conducted about the powerful impact of last year's virtual internships from a sample of programs in the Bronx. Your committee will receive the findings from that research.



As a business owner, I understand that these are tight times for the city budget, but they are far more difficult times for the young people and families that rely on SYEP not only for income, but for that first job experience that teaches them about the world, themselves, expands their network, and helps them begin to figure out what type of career might be for them. We must not balance the budget on the backs of our most vulnerable youth. Along with ensuring the program's funding stream, the Council should work to give providers and young people as much time to plan as possible--approving the budget for SYEP at or near the June 30th deadline for the city budget makes the program extremely complicated to administer. I urge you to work with administration to solidify funding by the start of Spring, so my community partners, including HERE TO HERE, can create the best program possible this year.

I again want to thank the Council for the opportunity to submit remarks on behalf of the tens of thousands of young New Yorkers who stand to benefit greatly from the Summer Youth Employment Program, as well as countless NYC businesses, large and small, that benefit from having a skilled, competitive pool of young talent.



Good afternoon, esteemed members of the City Council and staff.

My name is Danielle Brown Fuller, and I am the Director of Strong Futures at Forestdale. Forestdale helps children and families navigate their paths from trauma and crisis to stability and growth. We support them in their work to heal from abuse or neglect. Forestdale is pleased that young people in our Foster Care and other youth programs have benefitted from SYEP for many years. We know that they need the structure, income, and self-confidence they obtain from SYEP involvement. Today, I am here to add my voice, urging you to support baseline funding for SYEP 2021.

Youth aging out of foster care consistently face unbelievably grim odds:

- 20% will enter a homeless shelter within three years,
- only 22% will earn a high school degree or equivalency, and
- only 12% will enroll in college or a vocational program.

We understand that internships and other work opportunities allow our young people to beat these odds. That is why we became a founding member of the Fair Futures coalition in 2018. Fair Futures and SYEP are exceptional extensions of our youth development work. They've helped our adolescent clients exceed the dismal outcomes of many youths who've aged out of the system.

Fair Futures has brought full-service supports to young people, ages 11-21, who have been in foster care. Forestdale helps these youth chart a successful life course with coaching, intensive educational supports, career training, and more. Across NYC, Fair Futures has already served nearly 3,000 young people since December 2019¹. 99% of the participants actively engage with their coach², and the intensive academic aid has already resulted in H.S. graduation rates of 88% - much higher than what we've normally seen for

¹ <https://www.fairfuturesny.org/>, accessed Jan 12, 2021

² Ibid.

youth aging out of care.

SYEP is a vital part of the Fair Futures approach; this past summer evidenced just how crucial it is. When NYC canceled SYEP 2020 and then partially reinstated it, thousands of young people in lockdown at home for months were also stranded with nothing to do during the summer.

In March, Forestdale switched to teletherapy and video family visits in response to the COVID-19 lockdown. From March through December, we provided over \$200,000 in cash assistance to more than 500 families who had lost employment to the pandemic, ensuring that children had food and other necessities. In a similar fashion, when faced with the loss of SYEP, we designed an ad hoc, project-based, paid summer internship (STAR) program to take SYEP's place. STAR taught participants skills such as business planning, critical thinking, reasoning, creativity / creative expression, communication, cross-cultural understanding, visualization, and decision making. Thirty-three participants completed the program, which was 100% virtual. Although STAR was a great success, it covered too few youths and was funded by COVID-19 relief funds from private donors, making it unsustainable for more than six weeks. SYEP must be baselined.

Let me tell you about one young person; we'll call him Eric. Eric is 17 years old. He entered foster care five years ago because of the corporal punishment inflicted on him by his father and stepmother. Eric has come through his own experiences of trauma identifying with other young people who are violent, is not a talker, and would lash out with his fist (as he tells it). Individual therapy didn't seem to help. Eric was headed down the wrong road and didn't see a future for himself.

But then, Eric met his Forestdale Fair Futures Life Coach, Terry, and signed up for our summer program. Eric received support from his peers and

experienced mutual aid and encouragement from the group work. Through STAR, he learned that he was not alone, and that he had a safe space to talk/share with his words instead of fists. Through FF with his Life Coach, Terry, we are working to reengage Eric in school. Also, he is currently part of our Strong Futures Mentored Internship Program. It is so good to hear Eric state that he now he sees a brighter future. Peer interaction, peer support and hard work did wonders for this young man. For the first time, he tasted success. That would not have happened without the experience of his summer internship.

Crises like COVID-19 always hit hardest those already struggling. It is vital now, more than ever, to continue our support of and advocacy for these young people. Forestdale remains committed to providing material assistance and programmatic support so young people can envision a future filled with hope. We trust that the City Council shares our vision and will provide a baseline investment of \$20 million into SYEP for the FY2022 budget, supporting young people and their dreams.

In 2019, through Fair Futures, NYC became the first city in the U.S. to ensure that foster care youth & young adults receive comprehensive career and/or academic supports to effectively launch into adulthood. This is who we are as a city. The next generation of New Yorkers are counting on us. We can't let them down.

SYEP, or the Summer Youth Employment Program is the largest internship in the country. Every summer, thousands of teenagers and young adults apply to the program, with the hopes of earning a few more bucks for their family, or for themselves. As a former SYEP participant of 3 summers as well as a participant of the Work Learn Grow program, the experiences that I've been provided with have helped me learn more about what it was like to enter the workforce. In my first SYEP experience, I was placed in CPC (Chinese Planning Council) and worked as a secretary for Brian Chen, CPC's director of education and career services. As a secretary, I became familiar with creating spreadsheets, managing Chen's schedules, and completing simple office tasks. But most importantly, I was responsible for planning corporate events for CPC, which required me to actively brainstorm ideas while considering factors, such as cost and space/availability. The completion of my first SYEP job allowed me to build a set of skills that are essential to the workforce, considering that it was my first time being employed. In my second and third SYEP placements, I was able to utilize those skills as SYEP gave me these opportunities to do so. Without SYEP, my skills would not have been developed and I wouldn't have been able to put those skills into practice. Not to mention, many teenagers do not know how to apply to jobs or find out about internship/employment opportunities. However, many teenagers are aware of SYEP. In short, SYEP provides a gateway of opportunities that the youth are aware of, and allows them to develop essential workforce skills without strict requirements or restrictions. Although the lottery system is fair, more spots need to be allotted to NYC youth in order for them to reach their full potential as the next generation of leaders.

Kirsten Shyu

Summer Youth Employment Program Testimony

By: Michael Randazzo

To whomever is reading this,

Hello my name is Michael Joseph Randazzo. I'm writing to you guys at the committee because I need you guys to know how important the Summer Youth Employment Program was to my financial stability and learning the proper disciplines to work a job alongside others. I was a Camp Counselor at Public School 55 during the Summer of 2018. The job of my fellow camp counselors and I was to make sure the students were having a safe and fun experience at the Summer Camp of PS55. As I worked there under SYEP I have learned how great teamwork can increase productivity in the classroom, as well as increasing the joy and understanding of the concepts being taught. I have also made many friends at my Summer Youth Employment Job that I still talk to this day! The Summer Youth Employment Program has helped me pay for college textbooks, campus food, and going out with my friends! And lastly, SYEP has kept my brain sharp for college, as SYEP required me to work to the best of my abilities. I understand that the nation has been suffering from the COVID-19 pandemic for almost a year now, and it's important for people to not choose to or be forced to mass gather. However, without the Summer Youth Employment Program many students will be just staying home and not doing anything productive! Please allow the United Activities Unlimited to run their SYEP program with mandatory social distancing at jobs and / or offering remote jobs.

INSERT TESTIMONY BELOW

Name: Sidelmehdi (Mehdi) Mostafa

Age: 20

Borough: Queens

I am currently a student at the George Washington University. For high school, I went to the NYC iSchool from 2015 to 2018. I work part-time as a STEM teacher for middle school and high school students, and I have worked in the past as a lab research assistant. Although I have never been in SYEP, nor Ladders 4 Leaders, SYEP is an essential part of youth employment in the city. In fact, it serves as the necessary bridge for students to start and expand their future career opportunities. As someone who was never a part of SYEP, I did not obtain my first job until I was about 18 years old. I consider myself very lucky to have had the opportunity to work as a lab research assistant as my first working experience; unfortunately, many of my peers and acquaintances do not share the same opportunities and network to do the same. As part of a work-study program and because of my persistence in applying for various jobs, I was ultimately lucky, in the end of the day, to have this position. There are one too many factors and circumstances that should have deemed it impossible for me to not have found work even today, especially due to my former inexperience.

With the rise of the COVID-19 pandemic, the SYEP program has become even more essential in a variety of ways. With high school students, and, by extension, college students now living in a world where even the prospects of employment and education are in the gray, it is essential that we make our student body more versatile to these changing times. If short-term effort is not centered in launching an initiative to prepare our students for the future and contribute to society as our leaders of tomorrow, the effects will be severely consequential. We have seen in the past how far and broad the impacts are of raising a generation without the prospects of work on sight, and it is preventable through programs like SYEP. For every summer that students miss out on work experience, this further exacerbates the likelihood that they will greatly struggle in jumpstarting their career later on in life. I might have been fortunate enough to not have experienced that; however, my experience was a fortunate exception, not the relative norm. We can change that. Together.

As a New York City Youth, I ask you to expand and improve SYEP.

Best regards,

Mehdi

May 2020

A mother's biggest fear is not being able to put food on her table.

Her greatest wish is that she'll never have to ask her children to contribute financially.

Her favorite words are "It's okay, you can wait until you're older to provide for the family, right now just focus on school baby".

But this is where we bump heads,
because I want to provide now mom.

I have officially lost track of the amount of times that I've applied for Summer Youth,
not the amount of times I've participated in it
just the amount of times I haven't been chosen.

I'm not called back for jobs elsewhere, and Summer Youth won't take me, so what age will I finally get my first work experience?

My fingers were crossed that this summer would be the first time I had my own money, for once not the birthday money, not the Christmas money, or the lunch money, but *my* money.

Except now I'll be a freshman in college in five months who's never worked.

I want to surprise my hard working mom with a gift or two sometimes. My mom shouldn't have to do all of the surprising. I want to buy groceries and necessities for the house when they run out too sometimes. My mom shouldn't have to do all of the buying.

I'm a freshman in college with a mom paying Room and Board for the campus that I'll be staying on, I didn't want my first job to be the one that I work on campus. Eventhough I wasn't chosen last summer, or the summer before, or the summer before that, I had hope in the program that 2020 would be my lucky year, but it's cancellation has made it impossible for me to ever find out.

Not only did it provide for over 75,000, but it rejected a quantity that we'll never know.

"Some service options have additional eligibility requirements" -- Clearly requirements I didn't ever have.

I live within the five boroughs, and am legally allowed to work,
That's what the website said I needed so what am I missing now?

The program's binoculars don't see everyone, and there are a portion of teenagers that want the opportunity so bad but can't get it.

Officials say the absence of Summer Youth will push families to “change their summer plans” -- but you can’t just tell low-income families struggling to keep meals on their tables to change the plans they were relying on to keep their household economically stable. A paycheck for a 16-year old is a paycheck for a mother, for a sibling, for school supplies and for clothing, one check is split several ways, put to more than one thing to ensure that the whole family can take care of itself.

Giving up on this program will completely deplete the probability of some teens ever getting a job, and of some families eating.

From me, and hundreds of thousands of youth,
expand SYEP.

Sierra Fraser

I want to first thank you to the City council at large for championing and restoring SYEP last year. My name is Tatiana Arguello and I am the Director of Workforce Development at UAU. We are the largest SYEP in NYC traditionally serving over 5,000 young people through SYEP. Last summer we were only able to serve 2,200 due to the late decision.

It feels like just yesterday that we were fighting to restore SYEP funding. The program, along with a slew of other programming, was abruptly cut due to the city's financial deficit. Instead of accepting defeat, we quickly formed a coalition to push back against these cuts. We took a stand and said firmly that, "we will not balance the books of our city on the backs of our young people." This coalition included partners such as UNH, YES, Here to Here, ExpandedED, Teens Take Charge, CBOs across the city, our community leaders and partners, our young people and our local officials (a special shout out to our Councilmember Debi Rose for her resolute advocacy). As a result, SYEP and other critical youth service programs like Cornerstone, Beacon, COMPASS, and SONYC were "saved" and reinvisioned alongside DYCD.

For months, although we were not certain of funding, we centered our campaign around hearing what the cuts would mean for our young people and community. Focus groups were commissioned to think through what programming would look like to address the needs and safety of our participants. We presented our ideas in countless forums and fought hard. And we won because we understood that this was not the time to cut programming. We were not afraid to roll up our sleeves and face ALL of the challenges that were thrown our way. And we are stronger for it. For one, we have brought programming into the 21st century by building young people's work history, skills, and professional networks, which help to secure jobs in meaningful new ways. We saw our business partners come in and support our work (and, in most cases, even learn from our young people). We even interacted with new partners who we have never met. Zoom, Google Classroom, REMO and other online platforms allowed us to connect with high-profile companies who traditionally would not come to Staten Island or make their way to the Bronx.

The lessons we learned are now interwoven into all of the year-round programming we offer. Although we have seen pain, we have also seen resiliency, adaptability, growth, and connectedness in new ways. Throughout this year, we have seen our young people empowered and advocating for themselves and the world they want to live in in so many ways; our youth and our Workforce team were: helping to solve real world issues alongside business owners, distributing PPE, becoming Contact Tracers, getting people signed up to vote or complete the census, helping with food distributions, creating educational /advocacy campaigns, and even helping with their own family affairs. This should serve as a critical reminder to all of us that we

can and should demand critical services and ongoing support for our young people. This was (and still is) the time to expand and re-envision our services.

I wanted to highlight the range and scope of our efforts and of the tremendous efforts and resiliency of the youth we serve especially because it's hard to understand what power we truly hold, especially during times of crises. And it's important to put in perspective what they have truly been up against. Long before COVID-19, young adult poverty was on a rise with young people facing crippling college debt, high unemployment rates, stagnant wages, and increasingly high costs of living. It is not a secret that young people will feel the impact of the pandemic-induced recession for decades to come and will bear the brunt of its economic consequences. Young people have been disproportionately impacted, facing extremely limited opportunities for telework, as many youth traditionally work in retail and hospitality, industries severely impacted by COVID-19. Just as it was true during the 2008 Great Recession for Millennials, members of Generation-Z are experiencing elevated unemployment rates, lower earnings, reduced net worths, decreased rates of savings, high levels of student loan debts, lower rates of home ownership, loss of learning, and higher rates of co-residence with parents. I am sure economists and other experts will write about the lasting effects on these generations and their trajectory. There will be some who will never recover from these losses. In many ways, our youth are also missing out on human connection as we generally understand and seek it. And all of this is to not even touch on the troubling statistics reflecting more severely negative impacts on and a greater uphill climb for people and households of color in all aspects of this crisis: employment, income, housing security, food security, health, and mortality.

Young people are the future of America's - of New York's workforce and economy, yet relief efforts have largely overlooked them. We need to continue to fight for Youth Workforce programming including expansion of SYEP in this coming year to avoid further damage that could cripple a generation. In light of this pandemic, we cannot overlook the employment and economic conditions of young people. We need to ease the pessimism about their futures, not with false optimism or superficial sentiments, but by changing the trajectory. We need to understand that there are new opportunities on the horizon, and it is our responsibility to seize them, to bring them to light, and to prepare our young people to make the most of them.

I want to assure you that we remain committed to the good fight. This is not the time to cut funding, but rather to expand it. Now is the time to put in additional resources and safety measures for our collective well-being. We need to be a part of the conversations on how to build new businesses and support the ones that are still here. We need to support our essential workers and non profits that are doing critical work. UAU Workforce believes in the power of resiliency, adaptability, and empowerment in our communities and youth. We believe these values have been instrumental in our workforce right now, and are committed to making sure these values are in all of the work we do for our community and youth. We will continue to train a workforce that advocates for individuality, creativity, inclusivity, and respect. We will hold

ourselves accountable to these values and invite you to do the same. We need to continue, and go further, in this new direction, in order for us to move through this discomfort to a better and more just “normal.” A “normal” where we celebrate diversity, equity, and inclusion; one where we deeply understand the challenges our community faces and are willing to address them; one where we prioritize each other and understand that we all need to work together. The more time we know that funding is secured- the more time we have to plan and execute a well thought out program. We cannot wait until June 30th again.... Thank you for your time.

Good Morning, I am Adam Philogene, I am a 16 year old junior at the High School for Youth & Community Development (YCD) residing in Queens, NY. I am an organizer for TTC.

This pandemic has flipped and changed lives in ways like no other. The trauma that comes with these deaths from this virus are agonizing. Parents are struggling to provide for their young ones as well as themselves because of this virus. As a city, we must strive to get to a comfortable state where everyone feels safe in their own body and stable socially as well as financially. SYEP is the first step.

The Summer Youth Employment Program has provided for many young people in a multitude of ways. However, when this pandemic hit and everything shifted to online services, that changed. With limited seats and limited funding towards this program, it doesn't allow for the youth to garner working experience and accountability as well as financial stability. Especially with this virus still going around, despite an up and coming vaccine, the funds received from working SYEP could be used to greatly benefit and stabilize households. A program that would allow for this would include an engaging environment where challenges are provided to be overcome as well as conversations with professionals to receive the gist of the working space from someone of higher class and authority.

While I have no working experience nor SYEP experience, I still am passionate about the topic as other children and peers younger or older or even the same age as me could significantly benefit from this opportunity. This experience serves as a better source of income than other sources such as illegal activity or selling items that won't generate much profit as a result of school being out over the summer and people having nothing to do with their lives. There is no alternative to SYEP for us.

SYEP serves a major purpose and as a stepping stone to all that apply for it and all of the appliers should be granted this opportunity regardless of their situation. With that being said, the program as a whole should be and needs to be expanded to at least 150,000 members of the youth. As a New York City youth, I ask you to profoundly expand and improve SYEP.

Good Afternoon,

I am Cashay Haffoney, Coach Supervisor for Catholic Guardian Services. In comparison, I would say that Fair Futures and the Summer Youth Employment Program are like Laverne and Shirley, salt and pepper or even a pair of shoes. You really can't have one without the other if we want to ensure that young adults in foster care are successful in the workplace and prepared to thrive in adulthood. We need all hands on deck!

Our fair futures employment staff work fervently with our young adults by providing career exploration and soft skills training while also bridging them to entry level employment opportunities. 99.9% of the time, that inaugural work opportunity begins with the Summer Youth Employment Program.

Working with young adults who statistically have had the highest rate of unemployment for decades and come from the most marginalized communities in the city is no easy feat. So, if our goal is to ensure that they triumphantly transition into independence, then the interconnection between Fair Futures and SYEP are essential ingredients destined to result in a recipe for success for us all.

Thank You.

I would like to say thank you to the New York City Council and the Council Committee on Youth Services for the opportunity to testify in support of the New York City Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP). I will speak today about the importance and benefits of SYEP and highlight the reasons why this is a major program and that it should be prioritized for funding.

As a student growing up in NYC syep has played a critical roll when it comes to having a work based learning opportunity, this program helps me gain a sense of responsibility and independence but its also an opportunity to learn while I earn and the money that i do earn helps cover essential expenses, this is usually a rough patch for my dad and i so being able to make my own earnings were a big help. SYEP is the largest workforce development program in the country, this program has shaped and benefited countless generations when it comes to having access to an internship or even an opportunity to have a paid work experience. syep provides for more youth each year, Unfortunately, when the pandemic hit, many cuts had to be made and one program that took a lot of the damage was syep when it was cut completely by mayor de Blasio this was a shock to me because this program was essential to the development of my future and cutting syep would hold me back from reaching my goals of being a teacher or pediatrician because I'm missed a major opportunity meaning a year with no experience in that field while others are getting closer I'm falling behind getting into that position would be harder for me to do.

SYEP is a opportunity that low income and minority communities deserve to have access to our schools don't get nearly as much funding needed to give all students a proper breakdown and knowledge about being and maneuvering around a work environment, its hard for schools to provide these opportunities since Most schools often run into the problem of not having enough resources for students, from laptops and iPads to extra curricular activities and even classes such as music, art and sometimes important courses like biology Unlike schools of my white counterparts who get opportunities and resources handed to them we have to fight and search. Programs like syep are God sent for youth like me because its where we get the chance to notice our full potential, syep helps place you on the right path to pursuing a career that best fits you, from internships at summer camps to working in a hospital There is a broad range of fields to gain skills and experience in. Throughout the summer and other internship opportunities I have been able to gain soft and hard skills that I can apply in school or my future career i can speak for many when i say opportunities like these help shape who i am today and keeps me motivated and goal oriented, this is a feeling and a experience that not just a few youth deserve but as many as possible.

Year after year countless youth benefit from this program and this year was a year unlike any other and many youth needed syep more urgently than ever this pandemic led to the loss of family members and loosing access to resources and jobs and just like that our dear program was cut without any concerns and our families were left to deal with the negative repercussions, but as youth we came to an agreement that that wouldn't be tolerated and that the smallest of voices deserve a say and deserve to be heard especially when it come to the decisions of things that would effect us. Without the fight for youth voice and services this summer countless youth would have been out of luck and a opportunity that was possible but the easy way out which was cutting the program was the first considered. The importance of syep is often overlooked, but when taken a closer look at we notice that this program has the ability to bride the gap between education and work syep opens the doors for Career exploration, this is often something that's hard to find and most youth end up wanting to be doctors but work at McDonald's, the set up with no syep puts youth like me at a disadvantage, one example is wanting to apply for a position, job or future career but cant because it requires some type of experience so without syep countless youth are set up for a long journey to finding the experience they need but also the possibility of failure.

Youth like me need and we deserve the opportunity to succeed syep plays an important role in succeeding and after a long journey and fight for this program a fight that completely centered around youth voice and youth advocacy, that should show how important syep is for us which is why we need to make sure that more youth can get this opportunity We've had countless city officials state that there

for syep but voted against syep for Budget negotiations don't just say you are for youth voice and advocacy that's just talk but we also need action which is why we are urging the funding of syep since countless officials have agreed but made no progress yet and one way to do that is to direct more funding to syep enough funding goes to the NYPD and the funding that goes to schools are directed towards NYPD that doesn't further our knowledge it just makes us feel more like prisoners and trapped in the system each day so if you care about youth voice as much as you say you do fund syep. Thank you,