

CARIBBEAN **YOUTH** EMPOWERMENT

A **YOUTH:WORK** PROJECT



SECOND CHANCES FOR YOUTH AT RISK

The Caribbean Youth Empowerment Program



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SECOND CHANCES FOR YOUTH AT RISK: THE CARIBBEAN YOUTH EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM

The International Youth Foundation (IYF) invests in the extraordinary potential of young people. Founded in 1990, IYF builds and maintains a worldwide community of businesses, governments, and civil society organizations committed to empowering youth to be healthy, productive, and engaged citizens. IYF programs are catalysts of change that help young people obtain a quality education, gain employability skills, make healthy choices, and improve their communities.

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*“I was in my cell staring at the ceiling when I heard my name being called ...
When I heard about the program, I felt this was the second chance I had
thought would never come knocking.”*

—CYEP participant, Saint Lucia

Many young people in the Caribbean confront considerable obstacles to earning a living—and earning respect. Their potential to flourish as they enter adulthood is severely threatened by low levels of education (more than half the region’s young people have only a primary education), high rates of youth illiteracy (18 percent),¹ and rising levels of poverty, social exclusion, and violence. The Caribbean’s average youth unemployment rate—26 percent for women and 16 percent for men—obscures steep variations among islands. In Saint Lucia, for example, 46 percent of women ages 15–24 and 37 percent of men in the same age bracket are unemployed.² In contrast to their low likelihood of finding work, young people have ample opportunities to participate in gang activity, violent crime, substance abuse, and other harmful behaviors that often compound their difficulties.

International Youth Foundation’s *Caribbean Youth Empowerment Program* (CYEP) brought a much-needed alternative to the region. It offered vulnerable youth ages 17 to 25 a second chance to gain the life skills and technical knowledge they needed to enter the job market. In CYEP, young men and women learned to build their resilience and bounce back from hardship by training for local jobs, starting microenterprises, and developing skills that enable them to fulfill their dreams of playing productive roles in their communities.

What is the Caribbean Youth Empowerment Program?

CYEP was a workforce development initiative for young people disadvantaged by poverty, low levels of education, the demands of teen parenting, and other significant challenges, including having a criminal record. These youth frequently lack the training, skills, and experiences desired by employers, and hence face high levels of unemployment or underemployment. CYEP offered these vulnerable young men and women an opportunity to change the course of their lives by training for a specific vocation, developing entrepreneurial skills, or receiving in-depth career guidance.

1. UNESCO, *Adult and Youth Literacy: National, Regional, and Global Trends, 1985–2015*, *UIS Information Paper*, Canada: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, June 2013.

2. Population Reference Bureau, *The World’s Youth 2013 Data Sheet*, 2013.

Youth who chose CYEP's **vocational track** trained for entry-level jobs in specific vocations, such as computer maintenance and networking, beekeeping, fiberglass (boat) repair, construction, culinary arts, and tourism. Labor market assessments ensured that young people trained for viable jobs with promising trajectories; hence, career options differed across countries. Vocational course offerings were updated throughout the program to keep apace with labor needs. CYEP vocational training provided young people with internships, enhancing their employability through on-the-job experience. Participants also received job placement services to help them locate opportunities.

Other youth explored self-employment through the **entrepreneurial track**, which equipped them with the skills to initiate and manage their own successful microenterprises. As their peers undertook internships and sought formal employment, entrepreneurial youth learned how to develop successful business plans and identify resources for financing, and they received business support to operate and grow their enterprises.

Youth in the vocational and entrepreneurial tracks received **remedial education** to ensure they possess a sufficient command of language and math to succeed in their fields. Computer use is a part of nearly every job, so CYEP youth also received **computer literacy** training, including in Microsoft Office applications. Other support services, such as assistance with child care and transportation, aimed to remove barriers to program completion.

Youth selecting **career guidance** were led to explore their interests, talents, and dreams, perhaps for the first time in their lives. They received clear information about local job markets and viable opportunities to earn their livelihoods through vocational or entrepreneurial activities. CYEP youth in this track learned how to plan for the future. They developed a career plan, including any education or training they would need to qualify for their chosen careers, and they were assisted in making their next steps.

In Saint Lucia, CYEP piloted and then expanded a vocational training program tailored to reach young men

Youth In Conflict With the Law

Young people are more likely than others to be the perpetrators and the victims of crime and violence. The world's large youth cohort, combined with increasing urbanization, youth unemployment, income inequality, social exclusion, and access to firearms, suggest that young people who have been in trouble with the law will be a challenge for many communities around the globe for years to come. Arrest—and especially incarceration—can compound disadvantages for young people who likely already face significant hurdles to productive citizenship. Detained youth may lose opportunities to complete their education, learn marketable skills, earn a living, and develop the life skills that lead to constructive relationships. After reentry into society, many must deal with the stigma of having a record.

According to the United Nations Development Programme, effective programs to help youth reenter society and lead productive lives include training tailored to the special needs of these youth and alternative routes into employment, such as apprenticeships.

In Saint Lucia, youth delinquency is not only a justice issue, it is an economic development issue. A 2010 report from the CARICOM Commission on Youth Development estimates that the direct and indirect costs of youth crime, including costs associated with conviction and incarceration, forgone earnings, and lost revenue to industries (such as tourism), amount to more than 4 percent of the country's GDP.

CYEP's vocational project in Saint Lucia offered a second chance to young men and women in conflict with the law. Programming included an integrated, comprehensive job training package in which an array of providers collaborated closely to provide technical and IT skills, internships and job placement services, as well as psychosocial, medical, and other support services.

Important lessons learned from CYEP's experience with this population is provided in the case study *Preparing Youth In Conflict with the Law for Success*.

Sources: Caribbean Human Development Report 2012: Human Development and the Shift to Better Citizen Security, New York: UNDP, 2012; Eye on the Future: Investing in Youth Now for Tomorrow's Community, Georgetown, Guyana: CARICOM Commission on Youth Development, 2010; Preparing Youth in Conflict with the Law for Success, Baltimore, MD: International Youth Foundation, 2013; United Nations Fact Sheet on Youth and Juvenile Justice, (n.d.).

and women in conflict with the law, some of whom needed to rebuild their lives following incarceration (see box).

Whether self-employed or working for others, long-term success in work environments requires mastering the skills that facilitate cooperation and goodwill. Disadvantaged youth frequently do not have access to the personal, social, and professional settings in which these skills are modeled and conveyed, so participants in all tracks received **life skills training** to help them develop their abilities to communicate, work in teams, solve problems, and accept responsibility, among others.

The number of hours youth spent in training each week and the duration of training varied. Some vocations required longer coursework, and some programs, such as the one targeting youth in conflict with the law, provided many more hours of life skills training. Youth in CYEP's career guidance track received approximately 145 hours of training, whereas entrepreneurs trained for about 110 hours, and youth in some vocational tracks trained for nearly 900 hours.

CYEP offered these three tracks through 13 projects implemented in four countries. CYEP began in 2008 as a two-year, US\$1.5 million project in Antigua and Barbuda, Grenada, and Jamaica. By 2011, it had grown into a five-year, US\$5 million project with programming expanded into Saint Lucia (see table 1).

Table 1. CYEP expansion

2008	2010	2011
two-year (2010)	Three-year (2011)	Five-year (2013)
\$1.5 million	\$2.5 million	\$5 million

Results

CYEP sought to establish programs in areas with high numbers of vulnerable youth (see table 2 for participant profile). Despite the challenges this strategy presented, IYF established the following ambitious goals:

- Train 2,200 youth for livelihoods in high-growth industries.
- Place 40 percent of those who complete training in decent jobs or in their own businesses.
- Ensure that 90 percent of employers are satisfied with new hires from the program.
- Ensure that 50 percent of participants without a high school degree at baseline are enrolled in an educational training program at follow up.

While preparing these young people for sustainable employment remained the program's primary focus, CYEP also aimed to develop the capacity of partner organizations to provide quality employability training and other services to vulnerable youth, as well as to facilitate the development of strong networks among youth-serving organizations and their public- and private-sector partners.

Table 2. Profile of CYEP participants

Descriptor	%
Early school leavers*	39
Less than secondary education**	44
Poor	68
Extremely poor	23
Not poor	9
Male	49
Female	51
Rural	59
Urban	41

**Refers to youth who had less than a secondary education and were not enrolled in school. **Refers to youth who had less than a secondary education, including those enrolled in school.*

Training. CYEP exceeded its target, providing more than 2,600 young men and women with opportunities to train for and succeed at jobs and microenterprises (see table 3). Seventy-five percent of enrolled youth graduated, thereby successfully completing training, which included an internship.

Table 3. CYEP target and actual enrollment

2008 target enrollment	2010 target	2011 target	Actual enrollment
700	1,100	1,800	2,644

Decent jobs and businesses. A follow-up study conducted six to nine months after graduation showed that, on average, 35 percent of CYEP youth were employed, with some countries showing employment rates as high as 60 percent. Among those working, 84 percent were in wage jobs and 16 percent were self-employed. Youth employed by others averaged 40 hours of work per week; 64 percent had formal contracts, and 47 percent had

benefits. The youth who were self employed at the close of the program also fared well. They worked an average of 45 hours per week, and 71 percent had profitable businesses.

Employer satisfaction. Ninety-four percent of employers reported satisfaction with their CYEP interns and entry-level hires.

Education. Nine percent of CYEP participants were enrolled in school at baseline. Following the program, enrollment rates were at 15 percent. A follow-up study showed that 24 percent of youth gained additional certification after graduating from CYEP.

Although educational results fell short, it is important to understand the results in context. CYEP launched just as the effects of the global economic crisis were beginning to be felt in the Caribbean: economies stagnated or contracted, unemployment rates soared, and youth were the first and hardest hit. By 2009, more than one in five young people in the region were not engaged in work, education, or training.³ CYEP's target population, whose economic opportunities were meager even before the crisis, then confronted still greater odds. For young people living in poverty, finding a job remained their primary concern. When employment opportunities emerged, some young people opted to leave the CYEP program to meet their immediate financial needs. CYEP staff encouraged youth to remain in training to improve their ability to get good jobs with advancement potential. But many vulnerable youth entered the program with little experience viewing education as an investment in the future. For young people at risk and their families, whose needs are urgent and longstanding, education and training is not necessarily viewed as an important investment. Given such circumstances, CYEP results were impressive.

Capacity Building. Partner organizations also benefitted through CYEP, increasing their ability to successfully deliver employability and career guidance services to a challenging population. Partners made important connections with employers and strengthened their collaboration with government entities and other stakeholders, building much-needed networks of organizations and individuals committed to addressing the needs of vulnerable youth. According to an external program evaluator, CYEP "offered an opportunity for the collaborators to lift their profile in the marketplace and are now seen by at least three of the employers interviewed as a source for training on employability skills."

In addition to the above successes, several of the materials developed to support the programs were extremely well received and remain useful beyond the end of the program. For example, CYEP's *Instructional Strategies Handbook* is a reference manual that helps instructors improve their course delivery. *Youth Entrepreneurship Quality Assurance* is an assessment tool that helps partner organizations understand how their entrepreneurship programs stack up against industry standards, and the *Employer Outreach Kit* helps partners approach employers and make the business case for working with CYEP-trained youth.

3. ECLAC/ILO, 2012. *The Unemployment Situation in Latin America and the Caribbean*. Publication 2012-808, no. 7. Paris: ILO.

Why It Worked

The following key factors contributed to the program's success.

1. A dual customer approach. CYEP sought to address the needs of two primary customers: young people who need jobs and employers who need skilled workers. CYEP prepared youth for decent entry-level jobs by working closely with employers to determine their workforce needs, assessing the capacity of the youth workforce, and then delivering training tailored to close the skills gap. CYEP kept employers and other stakeholders engaged throughout training and internships to ensure programming stayed relevant and met expectations.

2. Public–private partnerships. Working across economic sectors, CYEP was instrumental in creating the integrated conditions that promote employability, ensuring that program benefits reached not only vulnerable youth, but also businesses and society as a whole. Through CYEP, employers gained access to workers possessing the specific skills their organizations need while experiencing reduced recruitment costs, deepened community connections, and enhanced corporate citizenship. CYEP also worked with public sector staff to deliver effective employability services and scale up programming. Public sector participation brings policy and programming support to some of society's most vulnerable youth, enhancing their abilities to engage constructively as workers, business owners, and consumers. Partnership networks build confidence in employability programming and increase impact. More than 490 entities, such as Goddard Catering Group, Sandals, and LIME, have supported CYEP by offering graduates mentoring, internships, and jobs. Beyond the \$5 million awarded by USAID, CYEP leveraged more than \$3.5 million in partner contributions or in-kind donations, amounting to 71 percent of the original award.

3. A consortium model. In Saint Lucia and Antigua, IYF established formal partnerships with an implementing partner while other organizations contributed complementary services, such as life skills training or advocacy. The umbrella organization played an important role in nurturing relationships and building trust among employers, service providers, educators, and others, helping local stakeholders work effectively together on behalf of vulnerable youth. Consortium organizations refined their service delivery capacities, established new professional linkages, and gained exposure. The consortium model allowed organizations to contribute their expertise toward large, concerted efforts to improve life for vulnerable young people in the Caribbean.

4. A comprehensive and integrated approach to training. Vulnerable youth have many training needs, yet they also have assets—such as a drive to succeed—that can be nurtured through holistic employability training. CYEP took such an approach, training youth for wage employment or entrepreneurial endeavors; supplementing basic literacy, numeracy, and IT skills; and ensuring that young people graduate from the program with a solid foundation of life skills, which serve them on and off the job and throughout their lives. CYEP programming was based on methodologies and components that have been tested and proven by *entra21*, IYF's acclaimed job-training program for low-income youth implemented in 21 countries across Latin American and the Caribbean.

5. Proven and standardized life skills training. As a CYEP partner in the Goddard Catering Group said, “The right employee is not determined solely on the basis of certificate and experience.” Life skills are an essential part of an integrated approach to youth development, but quality is key. The gold standard in life skills

Investing in the Future

At a two-day conference in Saint Lucia in June 2013, IYF convened young people, youth development practitioners, and eminent leaders from international and regional entities in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. The task at hand: To disseminate knowledge, experience, and best practices in addressing the interlocking challenges facing Caribbean youth. Speakers and panelists included employers; government leaders; representatives of the World Bank, ILO, and UNDP; development experts; and youth themselves. The conference received high marks from participants and the press.

training is IYF's *Passport to Success*®, a curriculum adapted for, tested, and proved successful in the Caribbean region.

6. Enhanced local capacity to serve youth. An array of resources is needed to provide effective employability training to youth. Labor market assessment, employer relations, marketing, project management, and data analysis are just some of the behind-the-scene skills required to make youth development programs successful. CYEP strengthened the capacity of its partners to provide quality services, develop strong networks, and secure the funding that allows local entities to sustain youth programming independent of CYEP resources. CYEP partners reported that, through their involvement in the program, they improved on a range of professional skills, including budgeting, monitoring & evaluation, fundraising, and record keeping. One partner remarked, "IYF and CYEP have really brought [our organization] to a higher level."

7. Monitoring & Evaluation. CYEP programming was not only comprehensive; it was rigorous. Partners set targets for youth training and internships, job placement, and other measures; received training in the program's M&E system; and monitored progress throughout implementation. IYF regularly visited implementing organizations and supported programs through bi-weekly or monthly calls and webinars. Project staff were coached and provided with technical training on issues pertinent to each organization's individual issues and concerns. Workshops provided opportunities to address issues across organizations, such as financial and operational management.

A Model that Works

"I will take every opportunity I get to sharpen my skills in every way."

—CYEP participant, Antigua and Barbuda program

Young people want opportunities to earn a living, support their families, and make contributions to their communities. In the face of worsening poverty and violence in the Caribbean, there is an increasing need for public, private, and civil society organizations to work together to ensure that all youth have positive, healthy options to improve their lives. CYEP successfully models how to train and gainfully employ young people from communities challenged by an underskilled workforce, high unemployment, and household poverty. CYEP's approach to youth development builds local capacity to equip young men and women with skills that will help them overcome hardship, launch viable careers, and move into their futures with pride.