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ISSUE BRIEF  
**OPPORTUNITY YOUTH**

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# OPPORTUNITY **YOUTH**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

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Who Are <b>Opportunity Youth</b>	4
San Antonio's <b>Approach</b>	7
Understanding The <b>Whole Person</b>	8
Characteristics of <b>NXT Level Participants</b>	10
Reasons For <b>Disconnection</b>	13
Childhood <b>Trauma</b>	14
Early Program <b>Insights</b>	16
Areas for <b>Growth</b>	18
<b>Conclusion</b>	20

## WHO ARE OPPORTUNITY YOUTH

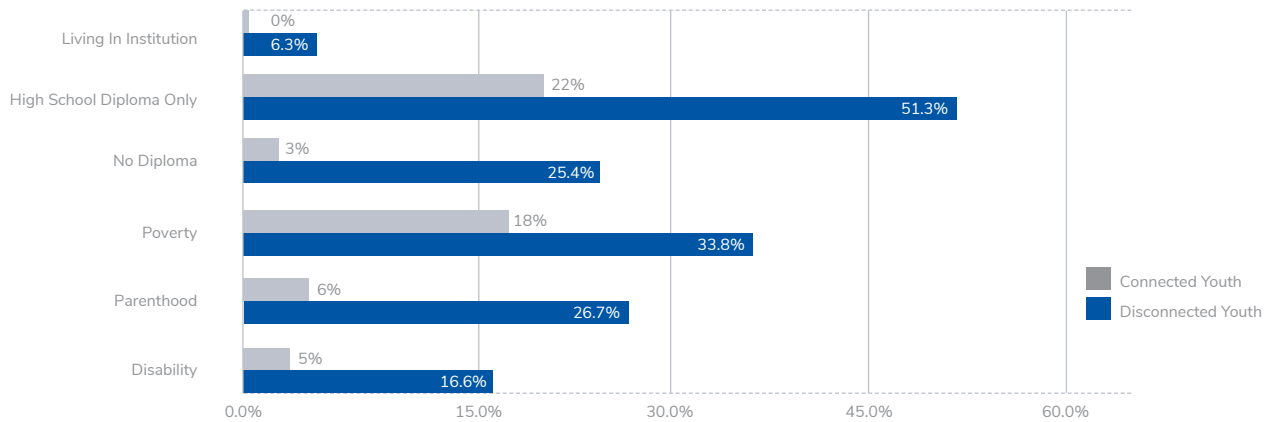
Opportunity youth are defined by the Measure of America as young men and women aged 16 to 24, who are neither working nor in school. They are also referred to as disconnected youth.<sup>1</sup>

While there is no single profile that describes all opportunity youth, opportunity youth face multiple barriers making it difficult to re-engage. Compared to youth connected to education or the workplace (connected youth), opportunity youth are twice as likely to live in poverty, three times more likely to have a disability, four times more likely to be young mothers, and 20 times more likely to be institutionalized.<sup>2</sup>

**27,000 or 13.2% of 16-24 year old San Antonio youth are not working or in school.**

*Kids Count Data Center (2008-2017 American Community Survey)*

### NATIONAL BARRIERS: DISCONNECTED VS. CONNECTED YOUTH



### SAN ANTONIO HAS 27,000 OPPORTUNITY YOUTH

Based on 2017 American Community Survey data, the Kids Count Data Center (a project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation) estimates that 13.2%<sup>3</sup> of San Antonio 16-24 year old youth are disconnected from school and work – approximately 27,000 youth. Compared to other large Texas cities, San Antonio's opportunity youth rate is higher than Austin and similar to Dallas.

San Antonio opportunity youth rates are among the highest compared to other large metro areas nationally. For 2017, Measure of America ranked San Antonio-New Braunfels 83<sup>rd</sup> out of the 98 most populous metropolitan areas in the US.<sup>4</sup>

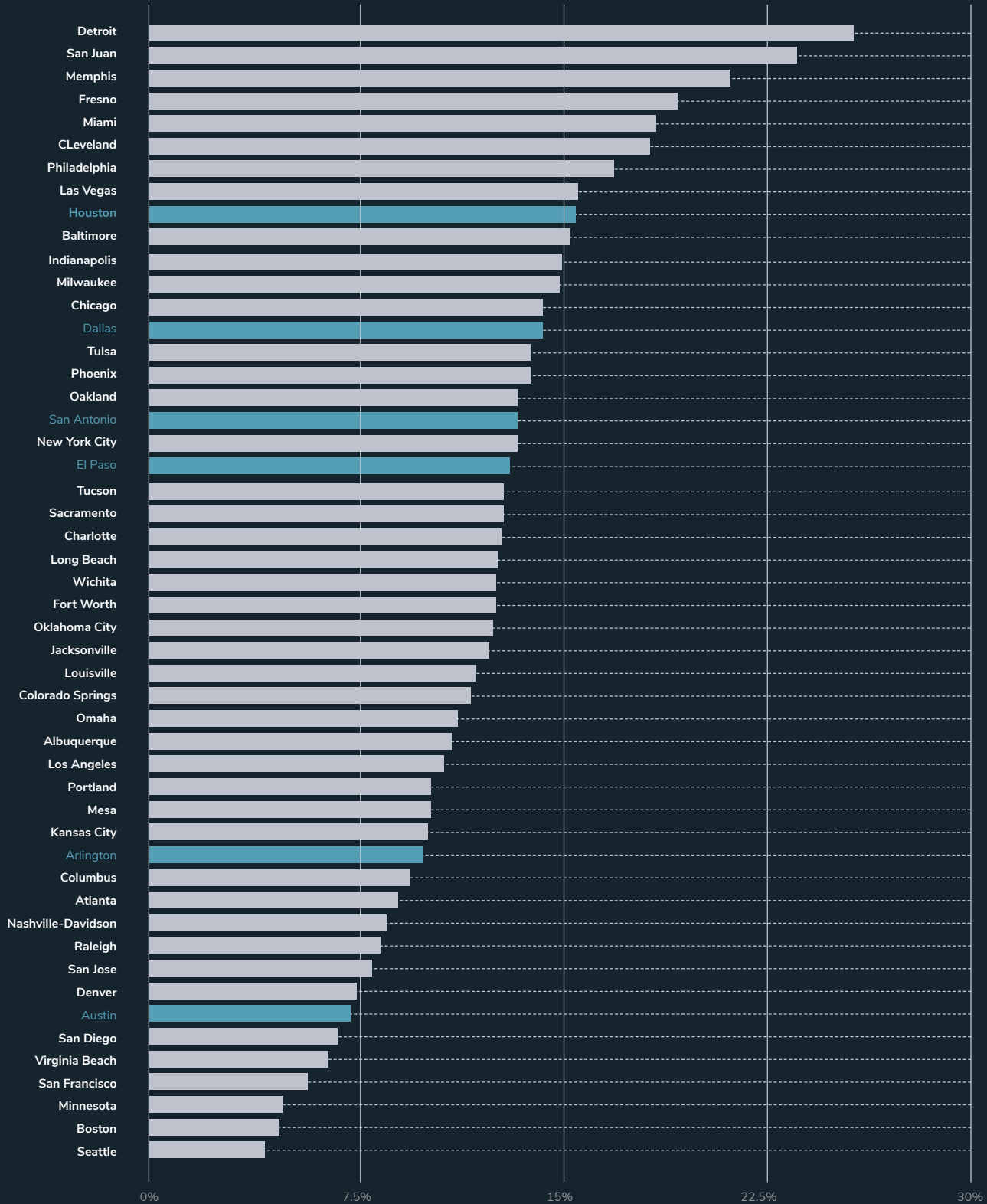
<sup>1</sup> A person is considered to be in school if he/she is either a part-time or full-time student who has attended school or college in the past three months. People considered not working include those not working full time or part time in the previous week or not looking for a job.

<sup>2</sup> Lewis, Kristen. *Making the Connection: Transportation and Youth Disconnection*. Measure of America, a Project of the Social Science Research Council, 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Margin of Error: 11.5% to 14.9% with 90% confidence interval.

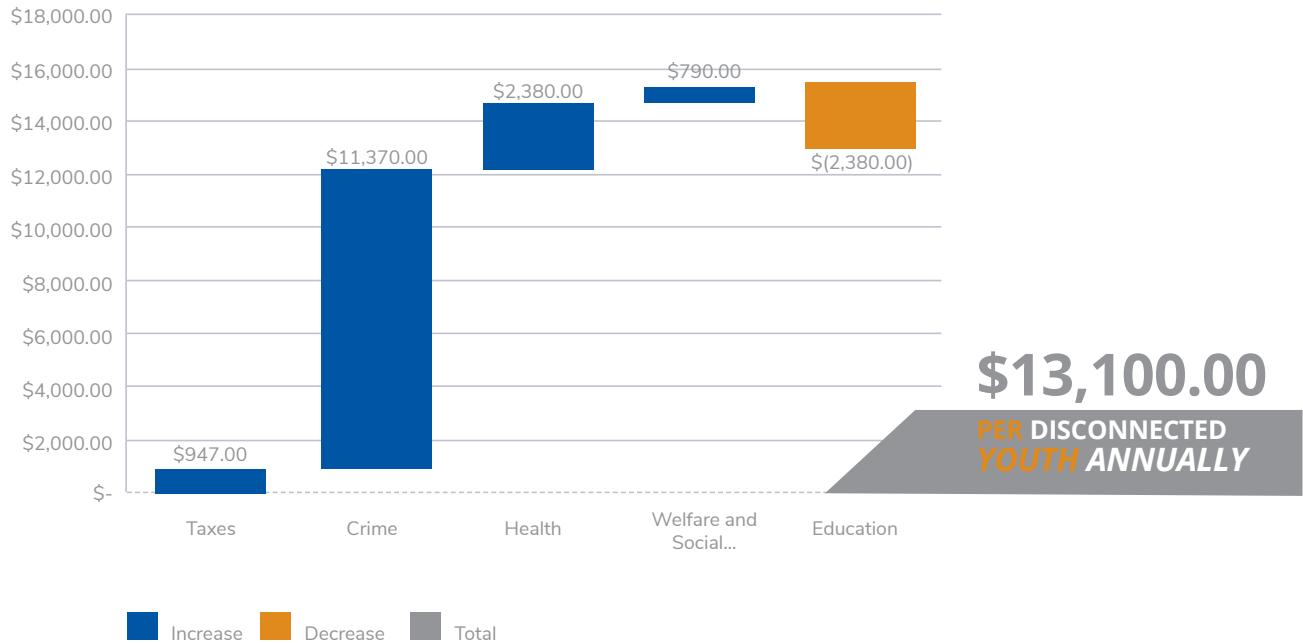
<sup>4</sup> Lewis, Kristen.

# PERCENT TEENS AND YOUNG ADULTS NOT ATTENDING SCHOOL AND NOT WORKING 2017



## RE-ENGAGING YOUTH SAVES MILLIONS OF TAX DOLLARS

For government officials interested in maximizing the impact of taxpayer dollars, there is a clear fiscal case for the reengagement of opportunity youth in school or work. Relative to connected youth, the average opportunity youth earns less income, is more frequently incarcerated, has higher subsidized health and welfare costs, and is not in a publicly funded education program. Each of these factors impacts city, state, and federal budgets. **On average, government spends an additional \$13,000/year for each disconnected youth compared to connected youth.**<sup>5</sup> For each year San Antonio's 27,000 opportunity youth remain disconnected, there is a \$350 million cost to city, state, and federal budgets.



<sup>5</sup> Belfield, Clive R., et al. *The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth*. The Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions, 2012, *The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth*.

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## SAN ANTONIO'S APPROACH: NXT LEVEL YOUTH OPPORTUNITY CENTER

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While the advantages of re-engaging opportunity youth are clear, there is still much to learn about the causes of their disconnection and how to address them. There is no formula for successful reengagement. However, case studies of successful reengagement efforts reviewed by the White House Council for Community Solutions shared four common characteristics.<sup>6</sup>

- 1.) Adequate funding
- 2.) Cross-sector community collaborations
- 3.) Data-driven decision making
- 4.) Input for people within the community including youths

Drawing on lessons learned from visiting reengagement centers across the county, San Antonio opened its first opportunity youth reengagement center, called the NXT Level Youth Opportunity Center, in February 2019. Located in a local community center on the city's West side, NXT Level provides education, career, and life coaching to 16-24 year old participants.

NXT Level is led by a partnership between Goodwill San Antonio, City of San Antonio Department of Human Services, and Communities in Schools San Antonio.

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**Before coming here,  
I didn't want to go to  
college...**

They help me see goals that I didn't even know I had. They help me make my goal have a deeper meaning – They're going to help me live the life I want.

— Ellena

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**I was so  
determined to go  
to college...**

but I doubted myself and  
took myself out.

— Brandon

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<sup>6</sup> White House Council for Community Solution's Final Report (2012)

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## UNDERSTANDING THE WHOLE PERSON

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Some Opportunity Youth may be ready to re-engage immediately, while others face multiple barriers that need to be addressed before they can be successful. NXT Level coaches guide participants through a comprehensive assessment of their needs and assets so that coaches can help participants create an individualized plan.

### COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT TOPICS

- Education history
- Reasons for disconnection
- Major barriers to reengagement
- Social services
- Employment history and prospects
- Health services
- Family/social support system
- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

### NXT LEVEL'S WRAP-AROUND COACHING MODEL

NXT Level participants work with two specialized coaches – a Communities In Schools life coach and a Goodwill career/education coach. The wrap-around approach is designed to meet the needs of opportunity youth with multiple barriers to reengagement. The life coaches support participants' social and emotional needs as well as basic needs such as food, housing, childcare, and transportation. The education/career coach helps the participant navigate education enrollment options and assists with job placement.

### NXT LEVEL PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE

After a welcome, orientation, and completing an intensive intake with a life coach, the participant completes an education/career assessment. The coaches then review the results, recommend options, and work with the participant to develop an Individualized Service Plan (ISP) together. This plan outlines the goals the participant hopes to achieve and the steps to get there. After a participant develops an ISP, he/she works directly with the coaches to complete his/her goals. In addition, the coaches regular check in on participants throughout the reengagement process to ensure that they are on track towards completing their goals and offer assistance.



**This is more than a  
job search place...**

They are friends,  
counselors.

— Jada



# NXT LEVEL YOUTH OPPORTUNITY CENTER PROGRAM MODEL

## FUNDERS

City of San Antonio  
Department of Human Resources

United Way of San Antonio and Bexar County

JP Morgan Chase

## FACILITIES

NXT Level Youth Opportunity Center located within the Frank Garrett Multi-Service Center on the city's West side

## CENTER STAFF

Goodwill Career/Education Coaches  
Communities in Schools Life Coaches

Formal referral partnership with Restore Education for High School Equivalency (HSE)

## ACTIVITIES

### Outreach

Comprehensive intake to identifying underlying barriers

Career / education assessment

### Development of goals

Ongoing coaching and follow up

Education and basic needs referrals

Job placement assistance (resume and interview help, computer access, job leads)

Data analysis and issue briefs

## OUTCOMES

Stabilization of basic needs

Employment

Enrollment in education

Stronger support system

Policy change and resource alignment based on center learning

## IMPACT

Reduce San Antonio Opportunity Youth Rate by reengaging disconnected youth



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## CHARACTERISTICS OF NXT LEVEL PARTICIPANTS

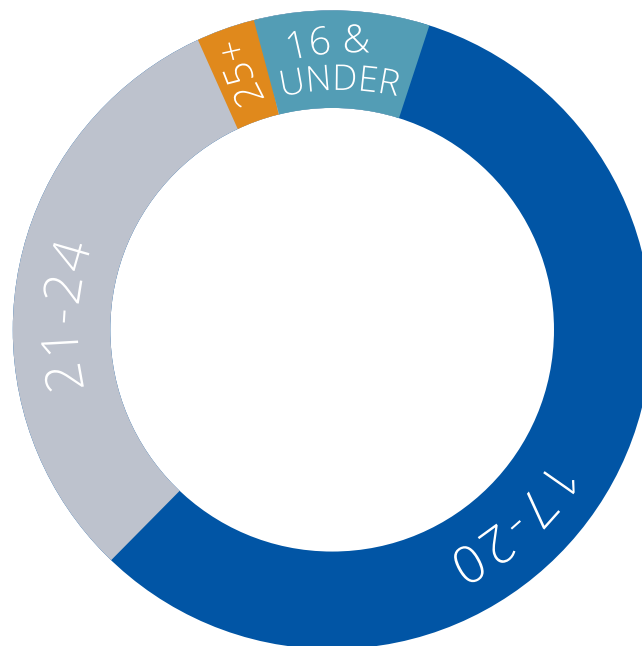
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### EXPERIENCE AND DEMOGRAPHICS

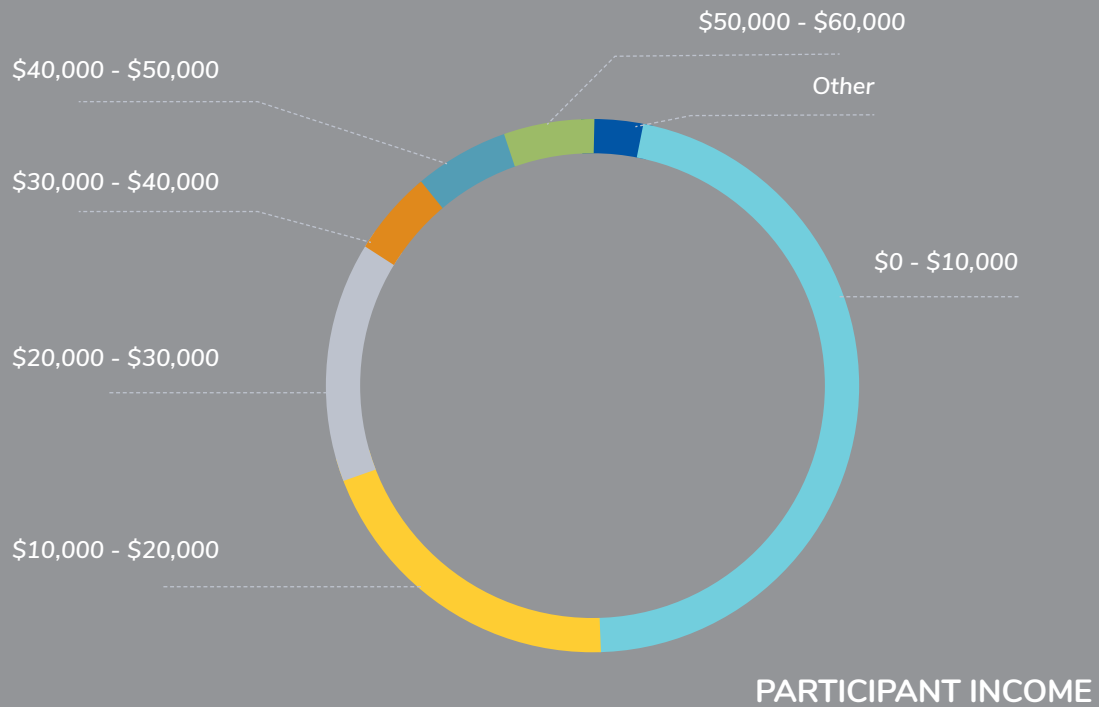
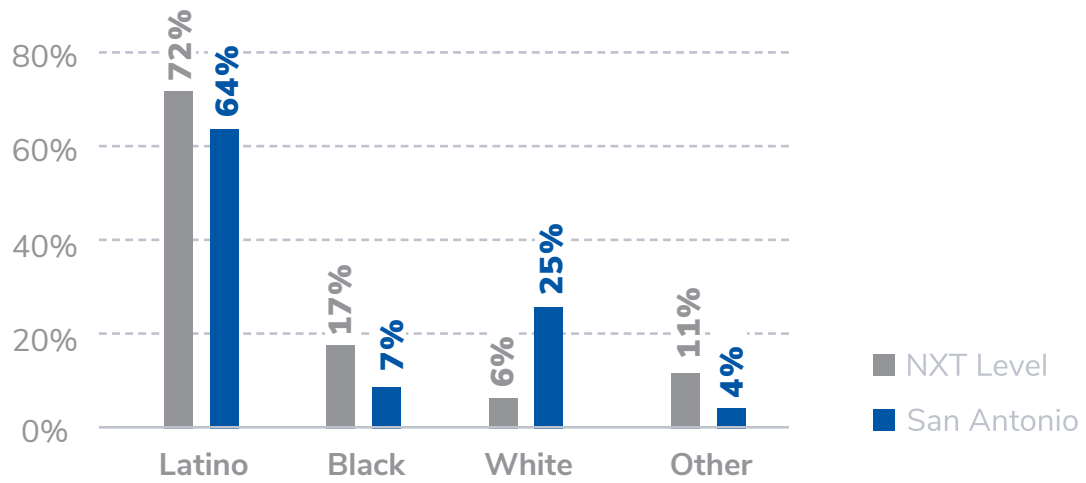
While the gender distribution of NXT Level participants is similar to San Antonio's general population, NXT Level participants are more likely to be African American or Hispanic.<sup>7</sup> The most common age of participants is 18 years old. Fifty percent of participant household incomes are below \$10,000 and 85% are below \$30,000.

### Participant Age

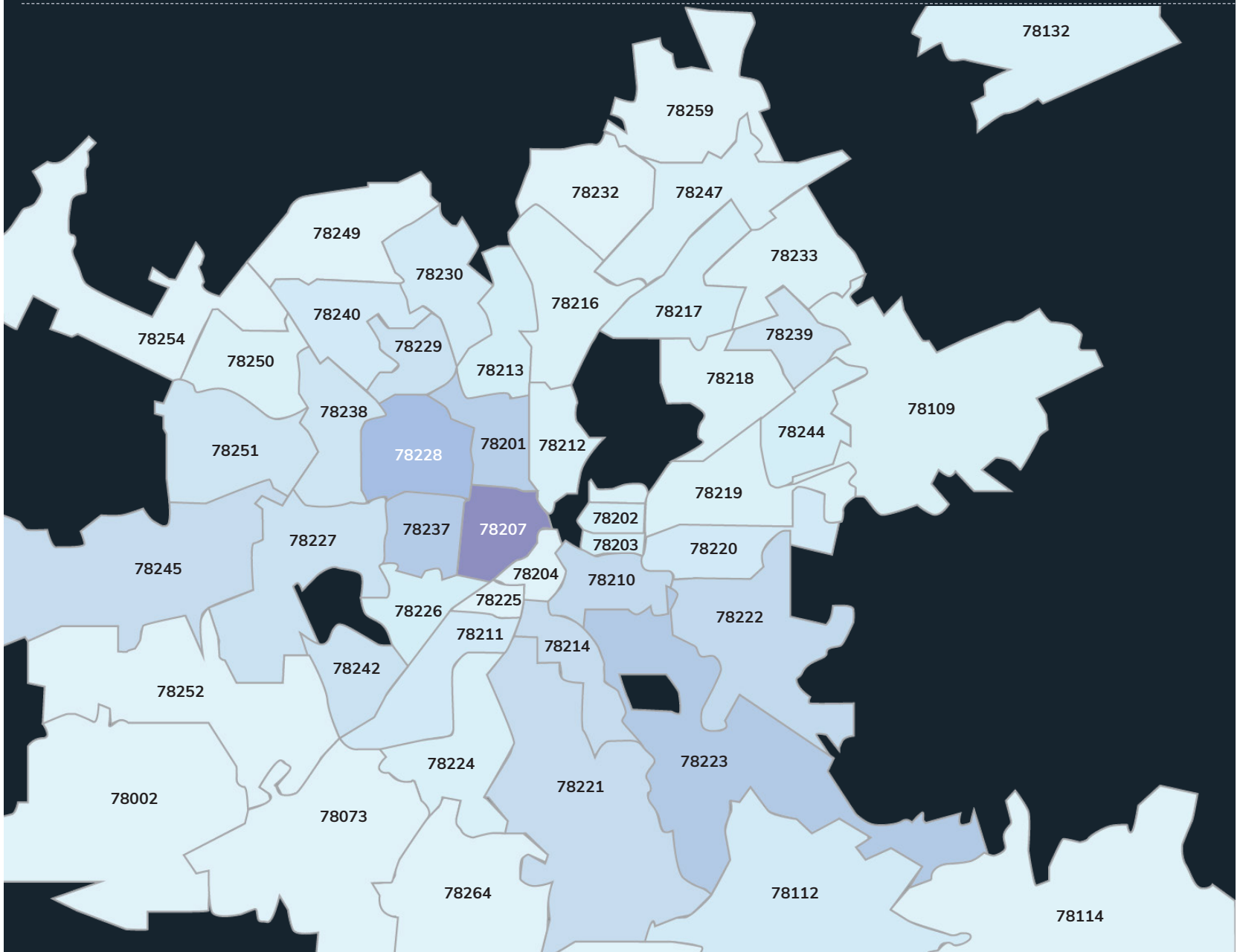
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## Participant Race and Ethnicity



# PARTICIPANTS BY ZIPCODE

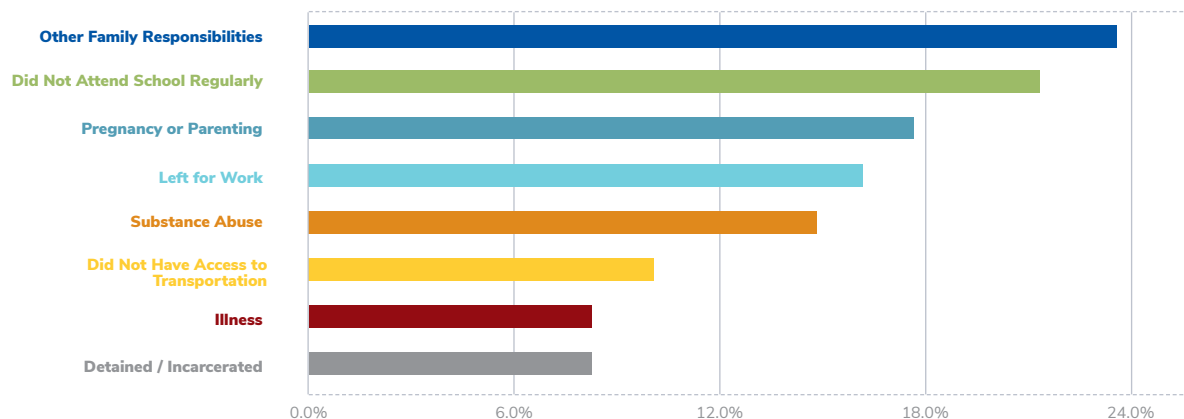


The reach of the center extends far beyond its physical location. While participants come to the center **from over 50 different zip codes**, the top participant zip codes are 78207, 78228, 78223, 78237, and 78201.

## EARLY LEARNING FROM NXT LEVEL PARTICIPANTS

### REASONS FOR DISCONNECTION

While participants often have multiple reasons that lead them to leave school or work, the most common are **family responsibilities and not attending school regularly**, followed closely by pregnancy, need to work, and substance abuse.



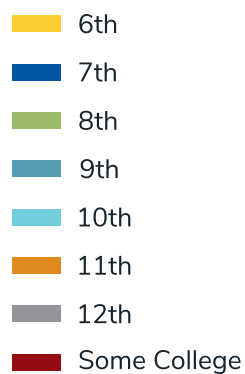
### EDUCATION

It is important to note that not all opportunity youth left school before high school graduation. **About half of participants have completed high school or some college.**

For the 12% of participants whose highest grade completed is 11th grade, graduation may be possible within one year. **One in ten participants dropped out before high school**, leaving them several years or more away from completing a high school diploma.

### HIGHEST GRADE COMPLETED

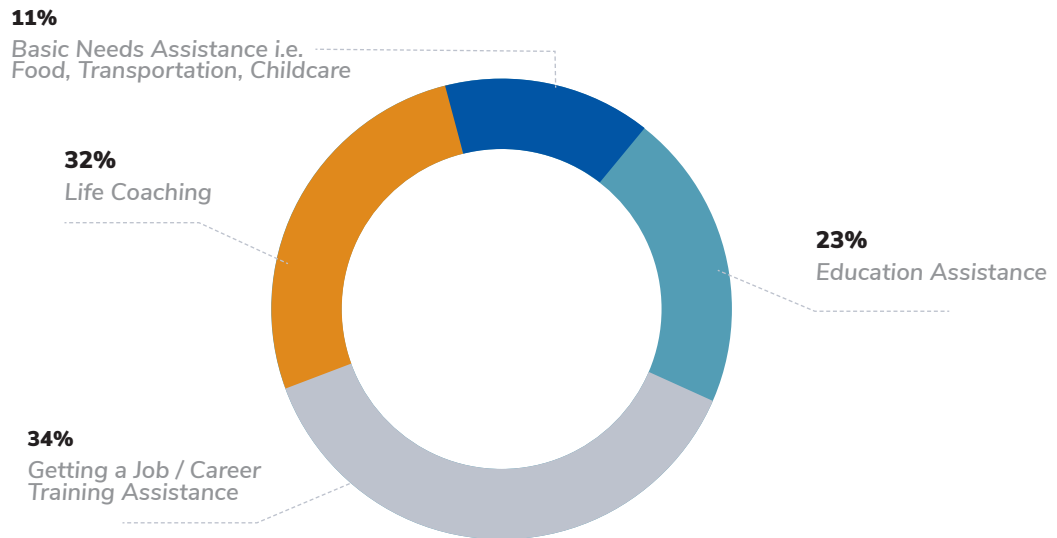
(INCLUDES CURRENTLY ENROLLED)



## WHY PARTICIPANTS COME TO NXT LEVEL

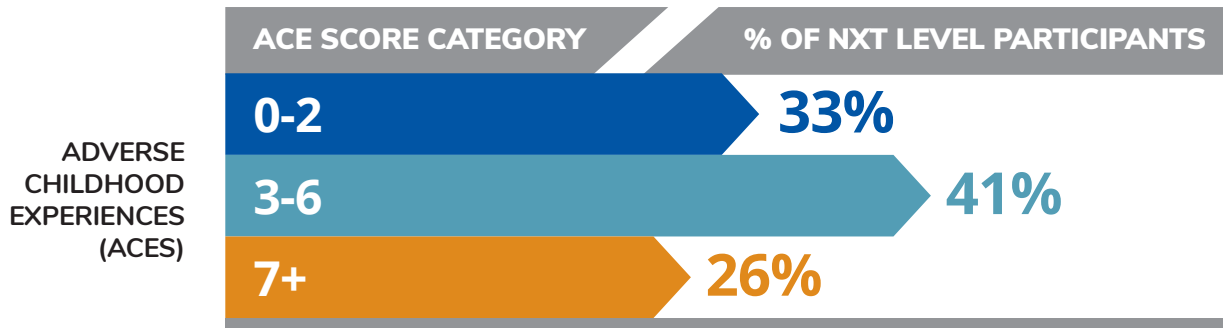
Most referrals to NXT Level come from either friends/family or the judicial system. Participants most often come for help getting a job or life coaching, followed by education assistance and basic needs assistance.

### WHAT BROUGHT YOU TO NXT LEVEL TODAY?



### ABOVE AVERAGE CHILDHOOD TRAUMA

Nationally, 1 in 10 children experience 3 or more adverse childhood experiences – a Level of trauma that puts them at risk<sup>8</sup>. At NXT Level, **7 in 10 participants experienced 3 or more adverse childhood experiences and 1 in 4 experienced seven or more**. Some of the most common experiences were death of a close relative and family substance abuse. According to a Salud America research review, as the number of adverse childhood experiences increases, so does the risk for negative outcomes like obesity, anxiety, withdrawal, aggression, substance abuse, attention problems, unintended pregnancy, diabetes, and cancer.



<sup>8</sup> [www.childtrends.org/publications/prevalence-adverse-childhood-experiences-nationally-state-race-ethnicity](http://www.childtrends.org/publications/prevalence-adverse-childhood-experiences-nationally-state-race-ethnicity)



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## OVERCOMING THE **OBSTACLES**

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*NXT Level Participant Interview*

*One participant shared that disconnection from school and work was common in her family. One of her guardians was employed, but the pay was low. The other had no formal education and had never been employed. Of her five siblings, none were working. One was incarcerated, one had no formal education, and two suffered from disabilities.*

*Growing up, she could not rely on her guardians for many of her basic needs. She went years without the proper clothes and there was little food to sustain her and her five siblings. When she came of age, she found work to help support her family. The poor living conditions she experienced resulted in severe health issues. She suffered from depression and began isolating and harming herself. At age 18, she became homeless.*

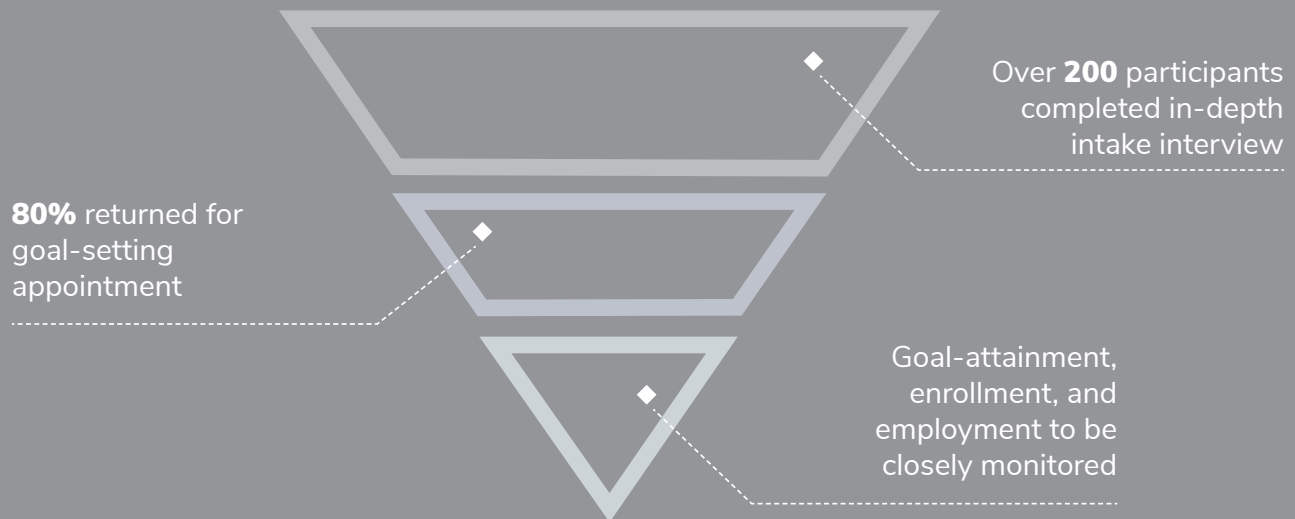
*The participant shared her hope that NXT Level will not only benefit her, but her siblings as well.*

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## EARLY PROGRAM INSIGHTS

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While it is too early to see the impact of NXT Level on employment, enrollment in education, and completion of education programs, these outcomes will be closely monitored.



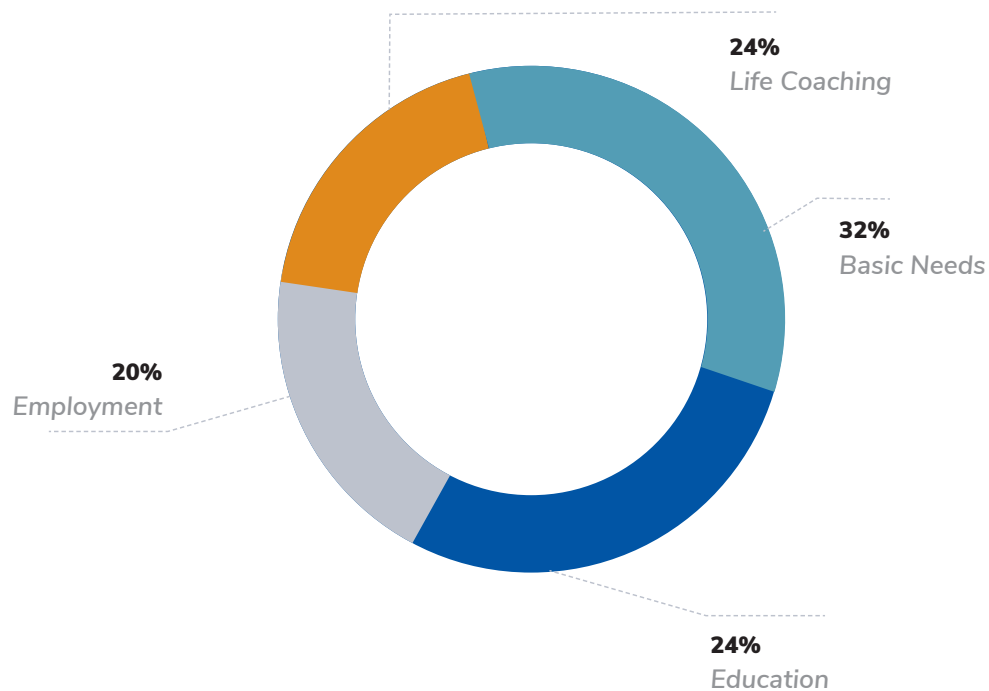
### **PARTICIPANT ENGAGEMENT** [AS OF SUMMER 2019]

Early participants remain engaged with their NXT Level coaches at a higher than expected rate. **Over 80% of participants who completed the intake process returned for a goal-setting appointment**, where NXT Level coaches presented education and career options and helped the participant make a step by step plan to reach his/her goals. After the goal-setting appointment, coaches follow up regularly with participants on the progress of their plans – **over 1300 successful follow up contacts were made.**

## PARTICIPANT GOALS

While only 11% of participants come to the center for basic needs assistance, 74% of participants have at least one basic needs related goal and 32% of all goals set by participants are for basic needs. Helping participants meet their immediate needs such as childcare, transportation, housing, food, or clothing is often the first step to addressing the barriers that prevent them from furthering their education or career.

## TYPES OF GOALS SET



## REFERRALS

NXT Level coaches refer participants to a variety of resources to meet their employment, education, and basic needs.

### COMMON TYPES OF REFERRALS FROM NXT LEVEL INCLUDE:

- Employment
- GED/HSE
- Access to health care
- Rental assistance/ Utilities
- Career training/ Certification
- Mental health

### COMMON AGENCIES INCLUDE:

- **Restore Education** (GED services)
- **Catholic Charities** (food, clothing, and legal assistance)
- **CareLink** (healthcare services)
- **The Center for Health Care Services** (mental health and substance abuse solutions)



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## AREAS FOR GROWTH

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Inspired and encouraged by the early engagement of opportunity youth, NXT Level will continue to monitor program outcomes and seek out needed supports for its participants.

### LITERACY

When referring participants to High School Equivalency (HSE), literacy was identified by center leadership and staff as a common challenge. Referral options are limited for adult literacy programming in San Antonio. More data is needed to understand the need for adult literacy supports among NXT Level participants and San Antonio residents as a whole. Goodwill San Antonio has partnered with Restore Education to provide not only HSE assistance but literacy assistance as well.

### RECRUITMENT

While the geographic reach of the center is encouraging, the center must increase recruitment over time in order to meet the scale of San Antonio's need. The recruitment process through community organizations should go beyond notifying potential candidates that the center exists, to ensuring that the participant follows through with scheduling an appointment. The NXT Level Center plans to work towards strengthening relationships with school districts to allow for greater reconnection.

### EXPANDING EDUCATION FOCUS

While NXT Level participants are working toward their immediate employment and basic needs goals, relatively few have enrolled in education programs. It may be too early to see a shift from basic needs to enrollment related goals. Because education is an important part of helping many participants escape poverty and reach their career goals, NXT Level plans to increase its education coach staffing Levels and deepen its education partnerships with organizations like Restore Education and school districts.



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#### **My daughter...**

She motivates me in every way there is possible.

— Sarafia

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#### **I just want to do better for myself**

— Thomas

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## MOVING UP THE **CHAIN**

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*NXT Level Participant Interview*

One participant is a young man living with his girlfriend and daughter on the West side of San Antonio. He shared that before NXT Level, he struggled to support his family. Despite a pool of negative influences in high school, he was able to graduate. While he was able to find a job after graduation, the pay was low, and the conditions made it difficult for him to spend time with his family.

NXT Level coaches worked directly with him to help locate jobs he was interested in, complete the application, develop his resume, and ultimately acquire a custodial job with a local school district. Like many NXT Level participants, he had limited access to resources and support before coming to NXT Level. He did not know how or where to locate jobs or make a resume. He now feels empowered to accomplish his goals. He even started to develop new ones.

*“They’re going to help me apply for financial aid—to stay with (the local school district) but also maybe take morning classes as a plumber or technician, that way I can move up in the chain.”*

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## CONCLUSION

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This first of its kind program seeks to provide San Antonio's youth with a Level playing field. Due to its roots in the community, the NXT Level Youth Opportunity Center Reengagement Program recognizes that to truly reengage disconnected youth, services need to address underlying risk factors that led to the disconnection initially. As such, the collaboration is focused on reducing disconnected youth by offering wraparound case management and supportive services to assist youth in reaching their Next Level. This program will gather much needed data on the causes for disconnection and guide future program designs as the center learns more about how to facilitate success within the opportunity youth population.

**THANK YOU**  
TO THE FOLLOWING PARTNERS  
AND FUNDERS FOR SUPPORTING  
THE **NXT LEVEL YOUTH**  
**OPPORTUNITY CENTER**

City of San Antonio Department of Human Services

United Way of San Antonio and Bexar County

JP Morgan Chase

Goodwill Industries of San Antonio

Communities In Schools San Antonio

Restore Education

Frank Garrett Multi-Service Center

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Youth Opportunity Center



For questions about issue brief content,  
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