



Connecting Youth to Education and Work

The Issue

Substance abuse, crime, violence, dropouts, homelessness, foster care, prostitution...these tragic conditions describe the lives of youth at-risk.

Youth at-risk can be found in every neighborhood in Colorado and they are not just someone else's problem. Youth who are at-risk cost society in the form of social services, lost productivity, rehabilitation, and crime victimization. Their march to adulthood is rife with alarming statistics:

- 21,000 youth in Colorado are not working and are not in school¹
- A high school dropout will earn 50% less income compared to a graduate and will cost society \$1.7 – \$2.3 million dollars over their lifetime²
- 33% of youth in the prison population have spent time in the foster care system³
- Children under the age of 18 account for 39% of the homeless population⁴

Youth at risk may have dropped out of school, are unemployed, in foster care, or are homeless. Without intervention, education, and alternatives, they are on a path that leads to self-destruction and are a growing burden to the community.

A Solution

These young people report that they were “unmotivated, not challenged enough, or were overwhelmed by troubles outside of school”. They are looking for “opportunities for real-world learning”.⁵

MediaBridge is a proven solution for reconnecting youth at-risk with mainstream education, work, and adult support.⁶ This program takes the cost of at-risk youth and transforms it into productive service-learning that benefits youth as well as the community. MediaBridge helps youth transition into adulthood with the employability, technology, and communication skills that will serve them for a lifetime.

MediaBridge works because it uses real-world learning developed through an outcome-based education that is supported by talented and caring adults. MediaBridge draws in youth because the program is focused on *digital media*, something they are already interested in. The program then transforms their outlook by involving them in running an authentic business.

Youth gain:

- Marketable technology skills in digital media software and design
- Motivation to meet deadlines and deliver high quality work
- The ability to collaborate and be effective team members
- An identity as an emerging professional, which results in increased self-esteem and self-confidence
- A pathway to higher education and a desire to manage their lives and career

How MediaBridge Works

MediaBridge provides the following services to community and youth outreach organizations, such as non-profits, ministries and churches:

- website design
- video production
- graphic design

Talented adult digital media designers manage MediaBridge as a business working side-by-side with the youth as apprentices.

- Each youth is provided a training course in software, design, and collaboration
- Youth move through a series of graduated responsibilities and management roles in the business
- MediaBridge staff act as instructors, art directors and counselors, building positive relationships with the youth
- The program documents learning through regular portfolio reviews
- Youth meet the challenge of creating market-ready material
- Program costs are paid in part through income generated by the services provided

Distinctive Features

- It is **entrepreneurial** – youth are more than program recipients: they have ownership in the program and help make it happen by being involved of all aspects of the business
- It is **action-learning** – MediaBridge is not talk-therapy, rather it is about joining the creativity of youth with the experience of professionals and the power of digital media to create real products
- It **links to all youth programs** – youth from other programs benefit through the design work produced by the studio and as program participants; the digital media communication skills learned in MediaBridge are applicable to any career

The Plan

Foothills Community Church has donated a commercial space for the studio to be established. Pending funding, MediaBridge will begin with a summer pilot program July, 2008 and will officially launch the year-around program September, 2008.

Call to Action

MediaBridge will impact hundreds of youth in Arvada, Westminster, Broomfield and surrounding communities, transforming their lives and putting them on the path to successfully support themselves. MediaBridge is ready to go. The foundation has been laid: the curriculum is proven, the facility is in place, and relationships with like-minded community organizations are being developed.

MediaBridge is looking for champions to establish a founders group. You can help launch the program in Denver by helping to contribute:

- \$25,000 in seed funding for the summer pilot program
- \$225,000 in seed funding for launching the year-round program
- In-kind support, such as construction, office equipment and furnishings, accounting services, mentoring, and site set-up

Will you join us as we seek to successfully transform the lives of youth at-risk in our area?

References

Annie E. Casey, F. (2006). Kids count databook 2006. *State Profiles*.
Cohen, M. A. (1998). The monetary value of saving a high-risk youth. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 14(1), 5-33.
Gewertz, C. (2006). H.S. Dropouts say lack of motivation top reason to quit. *EdWeek*, 25(26), 1,14.
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Roberts, D. (2003). *Shattered bonds: The color of child welfare*. Basic Books.

¹ (Annie E. Casey, 2006)

² (Cohen, 1998)

³ (Roberts, 2003), pg. 8

⁴ (National Coalition, 2007)

⁵ (Gewertz, 2006)

⁶ MediaBridge was created by the authors of Media WORKS Enterprise, a program piloted in Maine in which 79% of youth participants went on to fulltime work or college education.