



## **National Youth Unemployment Jumps in Past Decade** ***56,000 West Virginians Ages 16 to 24 Not in School, Not Working***

**Charleston, W.Va. - December 3, 2012** - Nearly 6.5 million U.S. teens and young adults, including **56,000 in West Virginia**, are not in school and jobless, veering toward a path of chronic underemployment as adults and failing to gain the skills employers need in the 21st century, according to a new KIDS COUNT® report from the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Margie Hale, Executive Director of West Virginia KIDS COUNT, commented on the report's implications for West Virginia, "When one out of four young people is not in school and not working, the potential economic and social costs to these kids and to West Virginia are staggering. Community leaders, policymakers and advocates must work to ensure every young person in West Virginia can get meaningful work experiences and be on a solid path to graduation, post-secondary training and a good job."

Many of these young people ages 16 to 24 face numerous obstacles, according to the report, *Youth and Work: Restoring Teen and Young Adult Connections to Opportunity*. Often described as disconnected youth, they encounter greater competition from older workers for increasingly scarce entry-level jobs, especially in light of the recession, and lack the higher skill set required for the well-paying jobs that are available. They often don't graduate from high school on time or ready for college, further decreasing their employment options. And many contend with hurdles beyond their control, such as growing up in poverty, having few working adults as role models, attending low-performing schools and living with a single parent.

According to the report, youth employment is at its lowest level since World War II. Nationally, only about half of young people ages 16 to 24 held jobs in 2011 compared to 60% in 2000; **in West Virginia, only 40% of youths held a job in 2011 compared to 53% in 2000**. Entry-level jobs at fast food restaurants and clothing stores that high school dropouts once could depend on to start their careers now go to older workers with better experience and credentials. Young people are therefore missing the chance to build knowledge and the job readiness skills that come from holding part-time and starter jobs. When young people have no connection to jobs or school, government spends more to support them, and many of them already have children of their own, exacerbating the intergenerational cycle of poverty in some communities.

"All young people need opportunities to gain work experience and build the skills that are essential to being successful as an adult," said Patrick McCarthy, president and CEO of the Foundation. "Ensuring youth are prepared for the high-skilled jobs available in today's economy must be a national priority, for the sake of their future roles as citizens and parents, the future of our workforce and the strength of our nation as a whole."

The lack of education, opportunity and connection to school or work has long-term implications for disconnected youth, the report shows: They may become adults unable to achieve financial stability and without employment prospects. They also can present a significant cost to taxpayers, as government spends more to support them. In addition, the latest data from the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey shows more than 20 percent, or 1.4 million of these youths, have children of their own,

which means their inability to find work and build careers can perpetuate an intergenerational cycle of poverty.

*Youth and Work* presents state-by-state data and highlights about how these issues are exacerbated among youth from low-income families and among minority populations. Among black and Hispanic teens (ages 16 to 19), 16 percent are out of school and work, compared to the national average of 13 percent. Similarly, 29 percent of black young adults (ages 20-24) and 23 percent of their Hispanic peers are disconnected, exceeding the nation's 20 percent average. Teen employment also varies widely among states, from 18 percent in California and Florida to 46 percent in North Dakota in 2011.

The report emphasizes the need to provide multiple, flexible pathways to success for disconnected young people and find ways to reengage high school dropouts. It also advocates creating opportunities for youth in school or other public systems that allow them to gain early job experience through such avenues as community service, internships and summer and part-time work. Its major recommendations include:

- A national youth employment strategy developed by policymakers that streamlines systems and makes financial aid, funding and other support services more accessible and flexible; encourages more businesses to hire young people; and focuses on results, not process.
- Aligning resources within communities and among public and private funders to create collaborative efforts to support youth.
- Exploring new ways to create jobs through social enterprises such as Goodwill and microenterprises, with the support of public and private investors.
- Employer-sponsored earn-and-learn programs that foster the talent and skills that businesses require and develop the types of employees they need.

"No one sector or system can solve this problem alone - it demands a collective and collaborative effort," said Patrice Cromwell, director of economic development at the Casey Foundation. "Businesses, government, philanthropy and communities must work together with young people to help them develop the skills and experience they need to achieve long-term success and financial stability as adults."

*Youth and Work* includes the latest youth employment data for every state, the District of Columbia and the nation. Additional information on disconnected youth and young adults is available in the KIDS COUNT Data Center, which also contains the most recent national, state and local data on hundreds of indicators of child well-being. The Data Center allows users to create rankings, maps and graphs for use in publications and on websites, and to view real-time information on mobile devices.

*West Virginia KIDS COUNT's vision is to make West Virginia a great place to be a kid. Founded in 1990, KIDS COUNT provides the most trusted information about the well-being of children and builds alliances to advocate for what kids need. The organization's signature program is the KIDS COUNT Data Book, an annual, county-by-county report of child well-being in West Virginia.*

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