

CREATING ENTREPRENEURSHIP PATHWAYS FOR OPPORTUNITY YOUTH: LESSONS FROM DEL NORTE AND TRIBAL LANDS, CALIFORNIA

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About the Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions

The Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions promotes collaborative, community-based efforts that build the power and influence of those with the least access to opportunity, and support communities to come together to expand mobility, eliminate systemic barriers, and create their own solutions to their most pressing challenges. Launched in 2012 at the Aspen Institute, the Forum for Community Solutions envisions a future where communities create their own vibrant and lasting solutions to the social and economic problems that they face. The Forum for Community Solutions believes that if communities have more power to lead change, we will create a more just and equitable society.

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www.aspeninstitute.org/programs/business-ownership-initiative

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CREATING ENTREPRENEURSHIP PATHWAYS FOR OPPORTUNITY YOUTH: LESSONS FROM DEL NORTE AND TRIBAL LANDS, CALIFORNIA

INTRODUCTION

Opportunity youth are young people between the ages of 16 and 24 who are neither enrolled in school nor participating in the labor market. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, there were 4.5 million opportunity youth in the United States, meaning that over 11 percent of all young people in that age group were shut out of education and work opportunities.ⁱ We believe that our country cannot afford to write off such a large group of young people, particularly when disconnection from opportunity disproportionately impacts young people of color: Asian and white youth have the lowest disconnection rates (6.6 percent and 9.4 percent, respectively), while Latino (13.2 percent), Black (17.9 percent), and Native American youth (23.9 percent) experience higher rates of disconnection. In addition to racial disparities, disconnection also impacts communities differently: Rural areas experience the highest rate of youth disconnection, at over 19 percent, compared with towns (almost 15 percent) and urban areas (almost 13 percent).ⁱⁱ As communities continue to reel from the public health and economic impacts of Covid-19, we expect the number of opportunity youth to rise, and these racial disparities to persist and become more pronounced as the long-term impacts of the pandemic on the economy emerge.

Opportunity youth often experience a range of systemic barriers to success (including poverty and systems involvement). Furthermore, systems that touch opportunity youth (K-12, postsecondary, workforce, juvenile justice, child welfare, and others) lack coordination and alignment in developing policy and practice to efficiently support this population. Therefore, the successful reconnection of these young people is ultimately a systemic issue that requires communities to come together to effectively remove barriers, connect the many systems that touch these youth's lives, and develop pathways to education and family-sustaining employment.

The Opportunity Youth Forum (OYF) is an initiative of the Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions that supports a network of almost 30 urban, rural, and tribal communities seeking to scale reconnection pathways that achieve better employment and education outcomes for opportunity youth. In order to address disproportionate rates of disconnection and systems involvement experienced by young people of color, the OYF focuses on community-based, cross-system, and cross-sector collaborative solutions that are rooted in an equity frame, designed with the most vulnerable youth in mind, and seeks to disrupt the impacts of institutional racism and inequities in access to opportunity.

Another core feature of the OYF is a commitment to centering the expertise and leadership of youth in designing solutions that impact them. The OYF believes that young people have the right to represent their own interests and the expertise to play decision-making roles at collaborative tables. Authentically engaging youth and young adults in designing solutions to their challenges can lead to youth-serving systems that are better informed, more effective, and more equitable, while at the same time providing the future generation of leaders with critical opportunities to build advocacy, community organizing, and program design skills.

Communities in the OYF network are bringing together multiple stakeholders and system leaders – including those from schools, community-based programs, postsecondary institutions, employers, government agencies, and, importantly, youth themselves – to remove barriers and improve systems, practices, and policies that serve opportunity youth, with a focus on creating comprehensive pathways¹ to education, family-sustaining careers, and successful adulthood. The Aspen Forum plays an intermediary and, with key partners, a technical assistance role in the OYF, including coordinating funding, designing and leading convenings and other learning opportunities to document lessons from the OYF and improve practice, and documenting and sharing place-based learnings from the OYF.

ABOUT THE YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP FUND

In 2017, the Aspen Forum launched the Youth Entrepreneurship Fund (YEF) with support from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. The YEF responded to the interest expressed by OYF collaboratives and youth leaders in exploring entrepreneurship as a pathway to economic self-determination and wealth-building in low-income communities. The YEF supports collaborative approaches that bring entrepreneurship education and training providers together with partners that facilitate access to key elements of the entrepreneurship ecosystem in three communities: Del Norte County and Tribal Lands, California; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and San Francisco, California.

All three communities seek to promote racial and economic equity by seeking to ensure that youth who are experiencing the most significant barriers to reconnection – youth of color, Native American youth, and rural youth, as well as youth who are low income and reside in public housing – are provided with a full range of opportunities to develop an entrepreneurial mindset and skills that can help them thrive in today’s economy, as well as access to tools and resources needed by aspiring entrepreneurs.

Rather than place youth in stand-alone entrepreneurial education programs, the YEF communities implement collaborative pathways, bringing together a range of partners in line with the overall OYF frame that emphasizes collaboration. In addition to collaboration, each program was designed with an emphasis on the core OYF principles of equity and inclusion, fostering agency and self-determination, and including youth in program design. In building out these pathways, the YEF sites have drawn on existing local entrepreneurship organizations to provide participants with a range of services and supports. The Aspen Forum identified the following key components of the entrepreneurship pathway: entrepreneurial education (adapted to the needs of opportunity youth); hands-on workplace experiences such as internships or job shadowing; supports from the entrepreneurial ecosystem such as mentoring,

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¹ In the OYF approach to reconnecting opportunity youth to education and employment, a pathway is a portfolio of integrated options that provides multiple on-ramps specific to the needs of the young person, and may include opportunities to earn a high school diploma or equivalent, enroll in one of the multiple postsecondary education and training options that lead to meaningful credentials with value in the labor market, hands-on paid workforce experiences, and other components needed to advance youth to careers with family-sustaining wages. The multiple on- and off-ramps for these pathways should meet young peoples’ needs given their assets, skills, and challenges, and provide additional wraparound stabilization supports (housing, childcare, healthcare, stipends) and guidance from supportive adults.

business incubation or counseling, and access to seed capital; and wraparound case management and stabilization supports. However, the Aspen Forum is not prescriptive in how these components are prioritized, designed, and implemented locally; the goal is to support and learn from local innovation in pathways design.

Due to the unique nature of the YEF, the Aspen Forum has been intentional about documenting program design and learnings from the start of the initiative. The Aspen Forum partnered with the Business Ownership Initiative (BOI), an effort of the Institute's Economic Opportunities Program, which advances promising strategies, policies, and ideas to help low- and moderate-income Americans connect to and thrive in a changing economy, to co-lead a community of practice among the YEF grantees, and document the learnings from this work. In 2019, the programs co-released a report, *Creating Entrepreneurship Pathways for Opportunity Youth: Early Experiences From the Youth Entrepreneurship Fund Grantees*,ⁱⁱⁱ that looked at current practices in existing youth and adult entrepreneurship programs and the models and early lessons emerging from the YEF communities, and explored the potential for using entrepreneurship to engage and create pathways for opportunity youth. We recommend exploring that report for additional context about the entrepreneurship ecosystem in the US and for information on early pathway design and learnings in each of the YEF communities.

In late 2019 and early 2020, the Aspen Forum and BOI conducted site visits to each of the YEF communities, speaking to key stakeholders, including project leads, funders, implementation partners, community leaders, and youth. What follows is a case study of the entrepreneurship effort and lessons learned from Del Norte County and Tribal Lands, California, which has been informed by the site visit conducted in November 2019.

In this case study, we explore the local context and history of the opportunity youth efforts and how entrepreneurship fits into the larger body of community-building work in Del Norte. We will unpack how local collaborative leaders and stakeholders are leveraging gains made as part of the Building Healthy Communities initiative that supports a robust collaborative with a strong set of committed partners across the county and in tribal lands. To date, the collaborative has developed a shared vision to improve overall community health and a focus on locally led economic development that responds to community workforce needs, engaged young leaders and community organizers to identify and solve local challenges, and implemented the use of human-centered design principles as a strategy to bring community together around solving challenges and envisioning a better Del Norte. We will also look at how local stakeholders are responding to the unique local context and challenges stemming from historic and ongoing underinvestment in rural and tribal communities. We will then explore how entrepreneurship fits into this context and leverages existing assets; the experiences of partners and youth; and impacts, lessons, and outstanding questions and challenges that have emerged from this work to date.

DEL NORTE COUNTY AND TRIBAL LANDS: LOCAL CONTEXT AND HISTORY

Del Norte County is a vast rural region in the northwest of California, with just under 30,000 people living in the area that is the focus of the opportunity youth-related efforts, centered in Crescent City. In addition to Del Norte County, the collaborative's geography encompasses several tribal lands, including Tolowa Dee-ni' Nation, the Yurok Tribe, and the Hoopa Valley Tribe. According to the Wild Rivers Community Foundation, which serves as the hub for local collaborative efforts, the region was once home to a thriving economy, but the community is trying to rebuild after a prolonged period of decline in the resource-based industries that used to support the majority of family-sustaining jobs.

Del Norte County and Tribal Lands (DNATL) takes part in the Building Healthy Communities (BHC) initiative, a place-based effort by The California Endowment (which also funds the OYF) that supports 14

California communities most impacted by health inequities. Beginning in 2009, BHC invested over \$1 billion to “advance statewide policy, change the narrative, and transform ... communities devastated by health inequities into places where all people and neighbors thrive.”^{iv} BHC’s health equity framework starts with the assumption – borne out by research – that ZIP code constitutes one of the primary determinants of health, and that health outcomes are impacted by a range of factors, including access to housing, food security, quality education opportunities from childhood to adulthood that lead to family-sustaining jobs, neighborhood safety, and clean environment. People of color and low-income people often live in ZIP codes and neighborhoods that have long been shaped by racism, segregation, and other inequities, driving negative health outcomes. As a place-based initiative, BHC works to build the capacity and power of local communities and stakeholders – including youth – to drive systems and policy change that can unmake these harmful conditions and create healthier neighborhoods.^v

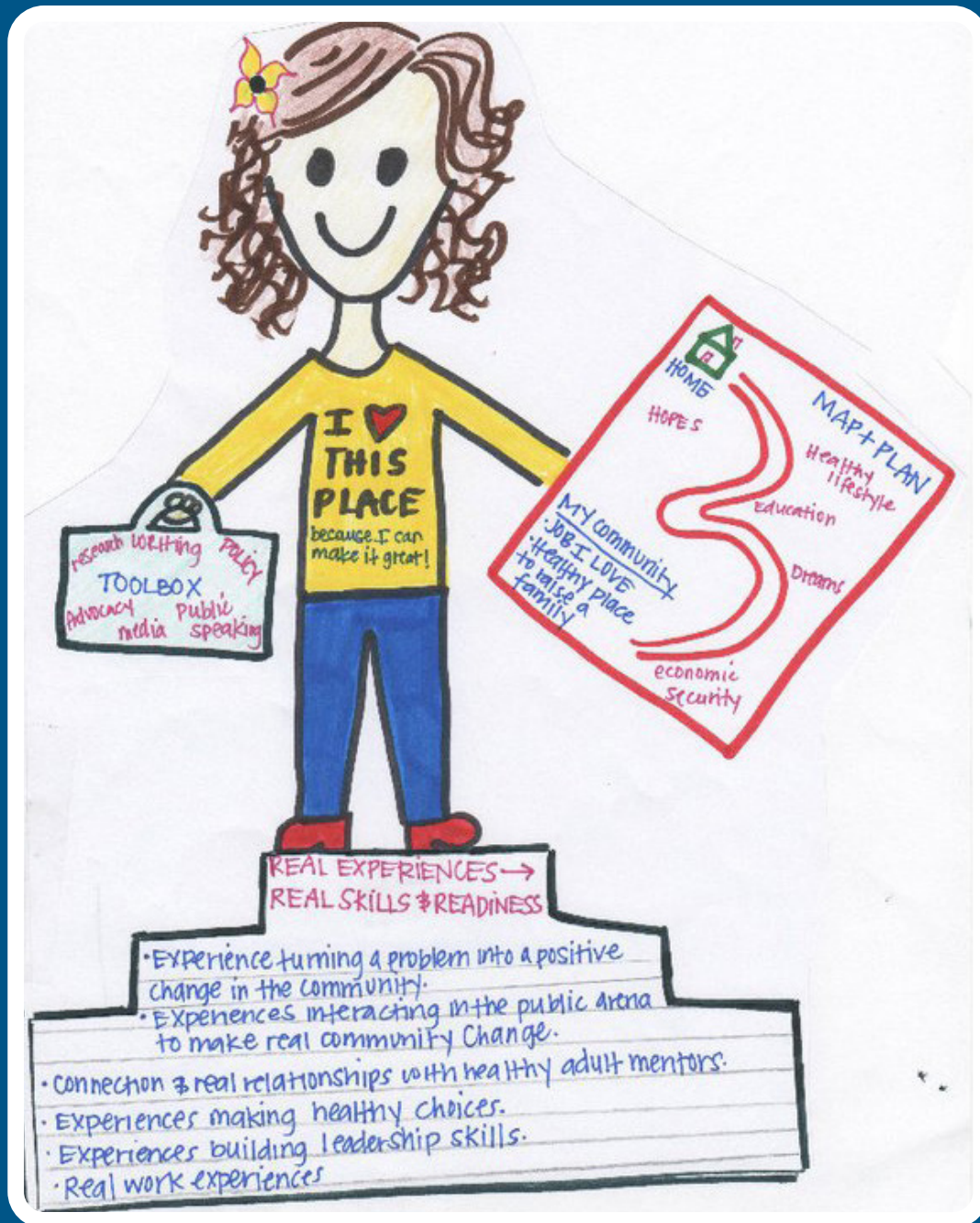
In DNATL, Wild Rivers Community Foundation has been the backbone organization supporting the BHC initiative since its inception in 2009. An affiliate of the Humboldt Area Foundation, Wild Rivers Community Foundation was founded in 2004 by a group of community members who wanted to create a way for local community leaders to give back locally in Del Norte County and Curry County. Since then, the Foundation has focused not just on grantmaking, but also on understanding community needs and working to mobilize local stakeholders to design solutions to the most pressing local challenges. The Foundation convenes the cross-sector, cross-stakeholder collaborative body known as the BHC Hub and is responsible for steering the collaborative toward a shared vision for the future of Del Norte. In 2013, with planning and implementation funding support from the Aspen Forum, the Hub launched the Del Norte Opportunity Youth Initiative, prioritizing this population in the work of BHC and bringing together additional partners from key sectors that touch opportunity youth. As of 2018, Del Norte had 700 opportunity youth, or about 26.5 percent of young adults ages 16 to 24.

THE ROLE OF HUMAN-CENTERED DESIGN

Human-centered design emerged as a cornerstone of BHC, providing a through-line across all related efforts, including entrepreneurship. Human-centered design (also known as design thinking) is an approach to identifying and solving problems that seeks to engage and develop empathy with those most impacted by the problem, reframe assumptions about the issues and solutions needed by those primarily affected, and design solutions in a people-centered way. Human-centered design typically involves a collaborative approach and a set of phases centered on building empathy, defining needs, generating ideas for creative solutions, and prototyping and testing solutions. As such, it is seen as a promising approach to solving complex problems with multiple root causes.^{vi}

During the launch of BHC, community members came together to create a logic model for the initiative and an overarching vision for Del Norte. That vision was encapsulated in a hand-drawn image. According to Geneva Wiki, program manager for DNATL BHC at The California Endowment, who was at the time leading a youth-centered, culture-driven charter school on the Yurok Reservation and later led the BHC Hub for the Wild Rivers Community Foundation, “We had a hand drawn picture of that Del Norte girl ... so she’s standing on a platform of real experience. And in one hand, she’s got this toolbox of advocacy and policy analysis and public speaking, community organizing. And then in her other hand, she’s got a map and a plan that takes her from home to do something great, and then back to a job she loves. And her T-shirt says, ‘I heart this place because I can make it great.’ And that was really radical, that you love this place.” However, at the time, the stakeholders struggled to identify a plan to get to this vision; they first had to build trust, engage youth and community members in identifying issues and designing solutions, and create programming in response to real community needs and in partnership with community stakeholders, including youth and young adults.

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The breakthrough came when, in 2015, the Hub engaged ThinkPlace, an international design thinking consultancy, to train community stakeholders in using a human-centered design processes and co-design a new collaborative structure and way of working together. Initial empathy interviews (a human-centered design technique) with children and youth uncovered that a pervasive lack of hope for their future caused young people to disconnect from school and work. With that base of knowledge, community stakeholders came together to identify existing assets and gaps, and design programming in direct response to community needs. As a result, the Hub redesigned an existing youth program, the Youth Training Academy (YTA; which has been running every summer since 2010), aligning it deeply with the needs of opportunity youth, including new outreach and engagement strategies to support this population, and adding new wraparound supports for participants. YTA was moved to the College of the Redwoods, thus creating an important connection to a postsecondary anchor institution and an introduction to further postsecondary education opportunities. Today, YTA is a six-week summer program for youth from 10th grade to age 24 that supports work skills and leadership development and provides youth with an opportunity to explore one of several pathways associated with existing workforce needs in the region: early childhood development; health; sustainable food and agriculture; media; ecotourism; and organizing and leadership. At the end of YTA, youth present what they learned during a community showcase for over 350 community members.

When the youth entrepreneurship work supported by the YEF grant began in 2017, the Hub engaged ThinkPlace to adapt and localize an existing human-centered design entrepreneurship curriculum, which was developed by educators and community partners in Australia and implemented across 14 school districts in that country. The resulting entrepreneurship curriculum, called *It's Your Move*, seeks to spark innovation and help participants develop an entrepreneurial mindset by introducing them to human-centered design principles. Entrepreneurship was also added as a seventh pathway to YTA, called "Innovation."

Then the Hub went further, engaging multiple community stakeholders and leaders in the *It's Your Move* train-the-trainer process, seeking to integrate the human-centered design principles across key systems and partners, including youth services providers, tribal government leaders, and community college leaders, with the ultimate goal of using this approach to bring stakeholders together to solve intractable local challenges. According to multiple stakeholders, the ripple effect of these trainings has been transformative. Gina Zottola, director of the Wild Rivers Community Foundation told us, "This process opened up my heart and my mind in a different way and has transformed everything that I do in my life, how I think. ... It transformed the work internally. It transformed the Board in many different ways. And this tool is transforming the hearts and minds of our community members. People feel heard. They want to participate in creating the solution. People come to the table that normally wouldn't come to the table. And when they do come to the table, their hearts and minds are open." We will discuss additional perspectives on human-centered design in the "Partner Experiences and Impact" section of this case study.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP: A STRATEGY TO ADDRESS CHALLENGES

Del Norte has several important assets, including a cross-sector collaborative of committed community stakeholders, partners, and funders; an anchor educational institution in the College of the Redwoods; engagement and leadership of youth and community stakeholders; innovative programs for youth and young adults that are achieving real impact; several successful home-grown enterprises; a natural environment of considerable beauty that can sustain jobs and businesses in ecotourism, farming, and sustainable agriculture; and wildfire and cultural burns management efforts that are a critical part of how local tribes approach land stewardship. Additionally, the Klamath River Renewal Project^{viii} that will remove several local dams is expected to open multiple opportunities in land and watershed management.

At the same time, our conversations with stakeholders uncovered several persistent community challenges, many stemming from the deep impacts of disinvestment by the public and philanthropic sectors – disinvestment that is even more acute in tribal lands. These challenges include gaps in critical infrastructure in areas including transportation,² affordable housing, and broadband/cellular coverage. Other challenges include high levels of poverty, recurring turnover in school leadership, lack of accessible education and training options, and difficulty in finding and keeping qualified staff in

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community and public organizations. Taken together, these barriers limit young people's ability to reconnect to K-12 education, postsecondary credentials, and family-sustaining jobs. This is especially true for Native American youth who live on remote reservations and are unable to commute to programs located in Crescent City or Eureka.

Given this context, many partners see the potential for entrepreneurship to drive a community-based economic development strategy that leverages local assets to create jobs and products that people want and need (rather than relying on outside investment and economic development strategies), thereby leading to a greater degree of economic self-determination and local wealth-building. Rory Johnson, campus director of the College of the Redwoods shared, "The opportunity is there because I think that people here take pride in locally produced. Now we take a lot of pride in the success of Alexander Dairy and Rumiano's. SeaQuake ... you see their beer in other places when you are out of town. And so there's a pride here about this sort of thing, so I think that if you have a product being produced here people will support it."

Several stakeholders we spoke with shared that one of the greatest challenges in Del Norte is creating local, sustainable education and career opportunities for young people to enable them to stay in the community instead of moving away for economic mobility. We were told a story of a young man who indicated on a high school aptitude test that he wanted to become an engineer, only to be told that he would have to move away or find a different career path if he wanted to stay in Del Norte. (He became an engineer, returned to Del Norte, and is now employing 10 people in his engineering firm.)

Johnson believes that entrepreneurship can hold the answer: "I've always seen it as one of the things that will drive us as an economy and the people who are here. To get an education in this community, you can go to the College of the Redwoods for a few years and get an associate degree. But to really stretch, you have to leave. So many of the options require them to leave and so often I hear time and time again, 'I don't want to leave, my family needs me here, my connections are here, the city scares me'. I think there's growth that can be had from leaving and returning, but we need to have a place where people can decide to stay and be able to still provide." Josh Norris, planner for the Yurok Tribe, agrees: "I think the biggest challenge and something that was identified as a pretty strong theme in our nation-building work, is how do we attract the young people to thrive right here in their own community? To take the opportunities that are given here in the community and not feel that they have to leave or that they can't come back, that they can change the community and they can find their own place here."

² In *Making the Connection: Transportation and Youth Disconnection*, Measure of America found a connection between transportation and the number of opportunity youth, with data indicating a strong correlation between average commute times and youth disconnection rates, as well as a correlation between the high rates of workers with exceedingly long commutes and the youth disconnection rates in neighborhoods in Washington, DC, and in Chicago. <http://measureofamerica.org/youth-disconnection-2019/>

For tribal leaders, entrepreneurship and enterprise-building are part of a larger nation-building strategy that they are implementing using human-centered design. Norris told us that by engaging in deep listening with enrolled members, Yurok leaders were able to understand that people wish to preserve Yurok traditions and culture while not forgoing economic development. For Norris, economic development must draw on opportunities that are available (or can be created locally) and are aligned with both the credentials/qualifications that young people are able to obtain and their passions and interests, such as working outside in the natural environment and preserving cultural traditions. In order to create and sustain these community-focused opportunities, the tribe is seeking to pilot a youth-led cultural heritage traditional canoe tour. The Tribe is also in the process of buying Mad River Brewery to support agricultural and hospitality jobs; the gift shop is being transformed to feature only local artisans. Also, leaders are exploring opportunities to connect youth to the emerging careers in watershed management.

In addition to interviews with adult partners and leaders, we conducted a focus group with youth to gain a deeper understanding of their interest in entrepreneurship and their experiences in YTA. Young people shared with us their desire to create their own jobs that align with their interests and passions, allow them to be their own boss, build wealth for their low-income families, and explore paths other than the traditional expectation of going to college. One YTA innovation curriculum participant said, “The freedom it gives you is one of the biggest things that’s wrapped up with the word ‘entrepreneurship’ in my mind.”

However, there is an additional challenge in Del Norte that has to do with the local entrepreneurial ecosystem. Unlike San Francisco and Philadelphia (the other YEF sites), Del Norte does not have an extensive entrepreneurial ecosystem, which presents an additional barrier to entrepreneurship development. San Francisco and Philadelphia are homes to many providers and agencies that serve entrepreneurs. The challenge in these communities is that these providers do not typically serve opportunity youth, and therefore need to adapt programs, services, and tools to the needs of this population. In Del Norte, however, this infrastructure, for the most part, does not exist. While human-centered design allows stakeholders to come together to envision and implement strategies to strengthen the community (including building out an entrepreneurship pathway), there is a need for investment in the solutions that the collaborative is designing.

For example, Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI) and small business development centers are important aspects of an entrepreneurial ecosystem, providing access to loans and business development tools. These institutions exist in the region and do serve Del Norte County; however, they are in Eureka (Humboldt County), about 85 miles away. Given the transportation challenges, these institutions are difficult to access, and although some of the services they offer can be provided virtually, not having a physical presence in Del Norte limits awareness of these services in the community. Additionally, several partners shared that emerging entrepreneurs did not have a place to gather and test ideas, and access tools and supports like they would be able to do in an urban community, where there are often makerspaces or shared work spaces that can facilitate access to these opportunities.

PROGRAM DESIGN

In addition to the *It’s Your Move* innovation curriculum offered through YTA, the collaborative partnered with several providers in order to connect youth to supports and tools and, as the program matured, to bring the curriculum to young people in “upriver” locations on the Yurok and Hoopa reservations, as these youth cannot easily get to Crescent City to take part in YTA at the College of the Redwoods. The initial design of the program is outlined in our first paper, *Creating Entrepreneurship Pathways for Opportunity Youth*. However, for the purposes of this case study, we will reiterate key partnerships and goals of the initial design.

We discerned two core goals of the entrepreneurship work in Del Norte. One was to create an entrepreneurship curriculum for opportunity youth that was based in human-centered design principles. The other was to engage the community to envision the role that home-grown entrepreneurship and small business ownership could play in creating local jobs and opportunities, building a more sustainable regional economy, and revitalizing Del Norte. This latter goal can be seen as part of the broader Building Healthy Communities project to strengthen the community and build its capacity to address intractable issues that impact the overall community health. To this end, the collaborative seeded *It's Your Move* across partner institutions (by conducting the train-the-trainer initiatives and encouraging partners to use human-centered design tools in their work, such as the nation-building project in Yurok). Additionally, DNATL YEF engaged a range of initial partners to provide *It's Your Move* instruction to and with opportunity youth, as well as connections to mentoring

and hands-on experiences such as internships. These partners included Del Norte County Schools (seeking to integrate entrepreneurship training into career pathways instruction for students); the College of the Redwoods (hosting YTA through its Adult Education Department); Workforce Center (providing private-sector engagement, mentors, and internships); and specific pathways partners, such as Food Policy Council (supporting the agriculture pathway) and Redwood Voice Youth Media Network (supporting the media production pathway).

As the program matured, additional partners came on board to replicate aspects of the program. Dream Quest Teen & Youth Center in Willow Creek, which operates a Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)-funded StepUp program that also serves youth in Hoopa and Weitchpec, has been providing *It's Your Move* instruction, workforce readiness, and placement supports to WIOA-qualified youth, a thrift store (that can sell youth-created products), and youth-designed and -led entrepreneurship activities such as the Produce & More farmers market burger stand. True North Organizing Network, which supports intergenerational community organizing around issues of social, economic, and environmental justice, has

been exploring replicating the YTA model for Hoopa Valley Tribe youth. Its ThinkVillage project seeks to use the YTA model in entrepreneurship and media pathways, while infusing Hoopa cultural values via family and intergenerational programming and using a collectivist rather than an individualistic lens. The Family Resource Center of Del Norte is transforming an empty parking lot into a Kids' Garden – a youth-conceived and designed community garden that will eventually have a greenhouse that will serve as a makerspace for youth. This youth-led initiative is supported by the former instructor of *It's Your Move*, who is also a social entrepreneur. Finally, as already mentioned, the Yurok Tribe is using human-centered design principles in its nation-building work.

Finally, a note on the *It's Your Move* curriculum. After the first iteration was delivered to youth and community members, the Hub brought a group of community members, instructors, and youth together to create a version that would better reflect community values. One of the youth participants in our focus group was part of the process (she is now using *It's Your Move* in her community organizing work and in her work with younger students). She shared that, during the redesign process, youth and community members raised the issue of colonialist language being used to describe one of the human-centered design modalities (“The Pioneer,” used to describe the stage of setting the direction and vision for the

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process). The group worked to infuse local indigenous culture and imagery and make the curriculum more inclusive. The stages of design thinking in *It's Your Move* have been renamed as follows: The Fire Starter (uncovering the context and identifying what change is needed, represented by the fire symbol); The Navigator (setting the direction and vision, represented by the salmon); The Listener (listening and building empathy, represented by deer's ears); The Architect (designing the concept, represented by the crow); The Experimenter (trying, failing, and learning, represented by the beaver); and The Maker (getting the concept out to the community, represented by the bee).

Wild Rivers Community Foundation staff noted that, without bringing youth and community members to the table, these shortcomings of the curriculum would not have been noticed. However, when we spoke with youth, only the young woman who participated in the redesign was aware of the role of youth in the creation of the curriculum. While young people believed the curriculum was valuable regardless of the extent of youth input, they also expressed that being more explicit about the role of youth in the design would increase buy-in and responsiveness from participants in the future.

PARTNER EXPERIENCES AND IMPACT

When setting out to document the lessons from the YEF, one of our goals was to explore the experiences of YEF partners and unpack the impact – if any – of a collaborative approach to teaching and supporting entrepreneurship skills in opportunity youth. One of the questions we set out to answer was whether working with multiple partners, and within the framework of a broader effort like the Opportunity Youth Forum, would result in long-term effects on practice. After almost three years of implementation, we can answer that question in the affirmative. The impacts we observed can be roughly grouped in three areas: impact on youth; impact on practice; and impact on the community. It is important to note that, because we did not conduct a formal evaluation of the YEF, we use the word “impact” to describe the self-reported effects of the program on stakeholders.

Impact on Youth

Stakeholders who worked most closely and directly with youth identified several important skills and behavioral changes they've observed in program participants. These include deeper engagement in education and programs; more secure attachment to jobs and future-planning; an increased sense of self-awareness, self-confidence, and self-efficacy; improved public speaking skills; demonstrated ability to work in diverse teams of peers; ability to conceive, brainstorm, and prototype a project; and skills developed in creating products, planning and executing events, budgeting and calculating profit and wages (for the burger stand project), gardening and soil management (Kids' Garden project), and media production.

Youth focus group participants identified similar skills: teamwork; learning how to creatively brainstorm an idea and identify the needs, assets, and sequence of activities needed to bring a project to completion; a sense of self-efficacy and self-confidence instilled in the process of bringing a project into reality and sharing work with others; feeling more prepared for life after high school; learning how to test their boundaries and work outside of their comfort zones; leadership skills; learning risk-taking that comes from being vulnerable in sharing creative ideas with peers and adults; and an increased degree of self-awareness and self-reflection. Youth noted that, in a more traditional high school environment, learning is more structured and by-the-book and focuses on a “right” and a “wrong” answer. YTA and *It's Your Move* resonated with them because it provided space to explore, dream, and be creative as they gained new skills. Having educational spaces that resonate and connect with opportunity youth is especially critical for individuals in this population, who can often feel that traditional educational environments are not welcoming and not responsive to their needs.

During the focus group, we observed young people demonstrate some of these skills, including sharing creative ideas and problem-solving with one another; one young woman shared her idea for a business, making traditional Hmong clothing. Another young man then added that he could photograph the pieces (he hopes to eventually own a media production business) and suggested that she could modernize the clothes to combine traditional Hmong patterns with more modern designs. The young woman was also able to identify skills and tools she would need to gain as she develops this idea (sewing, learning from her

mother and other Hmong elders about the cultural history and significance of traditional Hmong fabric designs, funds to purchase the difficult-to-find and expensive Hmong fabric). This was a tangible demonstration of how the program provided participants with an opportunity to integrate skills and behaviors, such as the willingness to be vulnerable in sharing their ideas and openness to potentially receiving critical feedback, which are often challenging for young adults at this stage of development.

This testimony from a participant illustrates the range of skills that she was able to gain: “I feel like what I learned in entrepreneurship, and *It’s Your Move*, [what was] most valuable was the process, like the steps that take it from a dream to reality, because I feel like people on either end of the spectrum from big picture to detail oriented can get lost or confused easily if there’s not a clear plan of what to do next. And it’s not like it has to be the next step is to have a polished final project but just to have a next step so that you’re continuing moving. And just being able to see that something that’s, like, not existent before, can come into being created just by you, following the process and that you are capable of that. And I think that does a lot for showing them they can accomplish more than they thought and make a change that will really impact other people. And that really changes the idea of what they can do and the walls they’ve set up for what they can accomplish. It really breaks those down and makes it where you have the idea that you can do anything. Like after I first learned it, I was like, ‘This is the step by step plan on how we’re going to save the world.’ Del Norte first! It’s the ability just to inspire and to just see the new horizons, was probably the biggest thing for me.”

Youth and adults also spoke about the many ways in which *It’s Your Move* participants were becoming more community minded and developing their leadership

skills. For example, participants in *It’s Your Move* listened to community members to identify the types of solutions, including social enterprises, community members wanted to see in Del Norte, and conceived projects that responded to these needs, such as a program to teach youth how to use public transportation and provide them with bus passes, an app to support pop-up social events for youth, or a project to bundle and distribute pet food to low-income community members. In Willow Creek, StepUp program participants at the Dream Quest Teen & Youth Center conceived the Produce & More farmers market burger stand in order to create opportunities for community members to come together and socialize over food. Youth realized that, because most residents grow their own produce, there was little

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need for a vegetable market, and that the primary value of the farmers market and their burger stand was to create a social community space. According to StepUp staff, many of the core group members who led the project went on to hold stable jobs or to postsecondary education but are still actively engaged in StepUp events by mentoring and supporting younger participants.

These interpersonal, leadership, and project-planning and teamwork skills not only are important for entrepreneurs to master but are also skills that are indispensable in the modern workplace. Whether or not these young people become entrepreneurs – and we certainly believe that they have the potential and the mindset to do so, given the right support and resources – the skills they are learning are also preparing them for future education and career opportunities.

Impact on Practice

Several partners shared that going through *It's Your Move* training and applying human-centered design principles to their work had a significant impact on their practice. Rory Johnson shared that, for the College of the Redwoods, engaging and listening to the needs of the community and youth has been an important benefit of participating in BHC and hosting YTA. The College learned that it had to adjust its model and service delivery in order to meet the needs of opportunity youth. Traditionally, the community college system is designed with the adult learner in mind. Although older opportunity youth sometimes overlap with the population of adult community college learners, they are by definition not engaged in education and, additionally, have unique needs and challenges that are not always well served by the adult learning model. Hosting YTA meant engaging a new audience, and Johnson noted that trying to “tweak” the model to serve the needs of opportunity youth was initially one of the biggest challenges. However, Gina Zottola stated that the college “stepped up to understand the demographics around opportunity youth and then create opportunities, and really think outside of the box to find ways and means to make it more sustainable.”

Additionally, the college is becoming more student-centered and focused on building trust with students. Johnson noted that one of the lessons of human-centered design was “starting from a place where you’re asking the student what they need ... what works best for them. That’s not traditionally how colleges work. ...That’s powerful. We are not lecturing to you; we are participating with you in your journey in your education. When the student believes that they have some power in their learning, they are more apt to participate. It just turns lights on. It creates engagement, not necessarily right away, because some people, they have to believe you first. And it can take some time for them to believe that you're being sincere. But eventually you get through. And that's the power I think, to that design.”

Youth service providers also spoke about making a shift to more participant-centered programming. In a traditional service delivery model, providers design interventions based on their assumptions of the participants’ needs; while youth can be consulted about the effectiveness of services, starting the process by engaging with youth to identify their needs and desires is much less common. Nick Wilde, StepUp program coordinator, spoke about the importance of asking community members and young people about their needs, and the shift that participating in the *It's Your Move* train-the-trainer process created in his practice: “It’s changed the way that I’m working with the youth and engaging them ... my means of interacting with them have been directly affected by the work with Building Healthy Communities.”

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Impact on Community

The decision to embed the *It's Your Move* curriculum across a range of partners has led to widespread effects in how partners engage in the community beyond their work with youth. Many of the partners and youth who went through the training are making an impact in the community in myriad ways, as this approach has built and strengthened their capacity to identify community needs and co-

design solutions that directly respond to these needs and challenges. Ultimately, the strategy in Del Norte is to strengthen the community overall, with a focus on creating opportunities for youth, including entrepreneurship.

From the nation-building work in Yurok, to the anchor institutional partners like the College of the Redwoods and the Wild Rivers Community Foundation modifying their practices to become more responsive to youth and community needs, to youth becoming more engaged in their community and more hopeful for their future, the impacts of human-centered design and *It's Your Move* seem to indicate a more interconnected, holistic approach to building a healthy, thriving Del Norte – an approach in which entrepreneurship plays a small, but important role.

Several partners noted that they are now taking a more holistic approach to their work, both in terms of geography (treating DNATL as a single intertwined region rather than a set of distinct and remote smaller communities) and in terms of creating pathways for opportunity youth that attempt to encompass education, entrepreneurship, community organizing, their cultural heritage, and other key aspects of their lives. From the nation-building work in Yurok, to the anchor institutional partners like the College of the Redwoods and the Wild Rivers Community Foundation modifying their practices to become more responsive to youth and community needs, to youth becoming more engaged in their community and more hopeful for their future, the impacts of human-centered design and *It's Your Move* seem to indicate a more interconnected, holistic approach to building a healthy, thriving Del Norte – an approach in which entrepreneurship plays a small, but important role.

We learned of several examples of this new way of working in the types of projects that the train-the-trainer participants are now implementing, most of which have

a broader goal of responding to a specific community need and building the strength and resiliency of Del Norte, while at the same time creating opportunities for young people. For example, in Willow Creek, Nick Wilde is leading a human-centered design effort in partnership with Mountain Community and Culture and hundreds of community members across generations to envision a better use for a local park. As a result of a two-year process of listening to, and co-designing with, youth and community members, the partners were able to apply for a grant funded by the Proposition 68 Restoration Grant Programs to enhance the park with improved trails and a skate park for youth.

Another example of community impact is the tiny homes project that is being spearheaded by community members in Willow Creek and on Hoopa land, with support from the Hub. The project came out of a human-centered design visioning session that the Hub led with partners and youth in Weitchpec, which generated the idea to build tiny homes to address the critical housing shortage in the region (especially on the Hoopa reservation) while at the same time teaching young people construction skills and allowing them to earn equity in the homes. Although the stakeholders are still working through the challenge of finding a suitable host site for building the homes, the range of partners that came to the table – including the Hoopa and Yurok Tribes, the College of the Redwoods, the Klamath Trinity School District, and the Humboldt County Office of Education – demonstrates the power of this approach to bring partners together to work through issues.

Finally, the impact on youth and young adults will also have reverberations throughout the community. Youth in the focus group shared that their experience in It's Your Move will have a long-term impact for them in the future. Given that the empathy interviews conducted by the Hub in 2015 revealed that youth have lost hope for their future, it was especially powerful to hear student success stories that were shared by adults, and to listen to young people talk about their hopes for their future and the future of their community. A young community organizer shared, "Community organizing in my mind is coming up with an idea as a community, and then having the relationships in place to bring that from the idea stage to a reality. And entrepreneurship is starting with an idea and bringing it through to the end creation. ... But if that product was something like a community center, then it's the same process ... but instead of reaching out to people to have them buy your product, you're reaching out to have them be involved. And so there's a lot of similarities in it that way but I also feel like the idea of yourself and that you are empowered to create. ... I created this thing, I brought it from idea to reality, doing that with a group in your community is super powerful. And so just, like, the idea of being able to dream that better thing for your community and then following through, is present in both. And once you've been empowered, and you feel what it does to you, that's what made me want to give it to others was that it made me feel so good."

LESSONS LEARNED

At the outset of the project, Wild Rivers Community Foundation expressed a belief that entrepreneurship training could help young people develop a creative entrepreneurial mindset and a range of skills critical to success in the modern workplace, increase personal efficacy and confidence, build leadership and community engagement skills, and develop a deeper attachment to education and career planning. In the course of coordinating the YEF community of practice and working closely with DNATL leaders, youth, and other stakeholders to lift up learnings from the work, we observed significant progress toward these goals. Additionally, we have identified several lessons from this effort that we believe are relevant to practitioners seeking to design pathways to entrepreneurship for opportunity youth.

LESSON 1: CURRICULUM IS KEY

Entrepreneurship education provides opportunity youth with a chance to develop important workforce skills and a more secure attachment to education. It is important to note that nationally recognized curriculum providers, such as the Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship, focus on in-school youth; experience from the YEF tells us that curricula for opportunity youth must be designed with their specific assets, challenges, and needs in mind. Additionally, we found that making a good match between the pedagogy and the instructor was important: All of the three YEF communities noted that having an instructor or a coach who was also an entrepreneur helped participants connect with the curriculum in a deeper way. This could be because instructors and coaches who come from an entrepreneurial background are more comfortable teaching entrepreneurship curricula and can model entrepreneurial skills and behaviors for participants.

Additionally, we believe that several features of the approach in DNATL make it particularly promising: (1) the human-centered design curriculum was developed with a goal of addressing specific challenges of opportunity youth (i.e. the loss of hope for the future) to include such features as ideation and prototyping to allow youth to experience success in bringing a project to completion in a supportive, caring environment; (2) the curriculum was embedded in YTA, providing opportunities for hands-on learning as well as opportunities to explore other locally viable and family-sustaining career pathways; (3) youth and community members provided input into the curriculum, making it more student-centered, inclusive, and culturally relevant; and (4) YTA is hosted by the College of the Redwoods, providing an important connection to the primary provider of postsecondary education and training in the region.

LESSON 2: ENTREPRENEURS NEED OPPORTUNITIES, TOOLS, AND SUPPORT

In working with YEF sites, we found that creating an entrepreneurship curriculum is only the first step in engaging youth, and that participants who are interested in moving forward to launch a business of their own need additional services and tools as they progress along the entrepreneurship pathway. These supports are typically provided by organizations in the entrepreneurial ecosystem; however, as we already discussed, many critical elements of this ecosystem do not exist in Del Norte.

When we asked *It's Your Move* graduates what types of tools and supports they needed as they progress on this journey, they asked for opportunities that would help them develop as entrepreneurs, as well as opportunities to explore postsecondary education and career paths more broadly. These include hands-on opportunities such as job shadowing small business owners, mentorship by entrepreneurs, more training opportunities designed specifically for youth, and more opportunities to learn about postsecondary options beyond the traditional two- and four-year degrees.

Several stakeholders we interviewed expressed a desire for a makerspace or an entrepreneurship development hub in Crescent City and in other communities in DNATL. Shared workspaces, incubators, and makerspaces are important elements of the entrepreneurial ecosystem, as they not only provide an

opportunity for entrepreneurs to come together to brainstorm ideas, but also have infrastructure, including professionalized work space, broadband and computer access, specialized tools such as 3-D printers, and access to other small business leaders who can serve as mentors, that could prove to be a game changer in rural communities. The idea of an entrepreneurship hub in Crescent City also resonated with young people.

Some of the stakeholders who wanted to see an entrepreneurship hub in Del Norte suggested that the College of the Redwoods, as an anchor institution in the community, could potentially serve as a home for such a hub. Community colleges are foundational partners in most OYF communities,

as they provide an important first introduction to postsecondary education for many opportunity youth. Additionally, many community colleges (including the College of the Redwoods) offer entrepreneurship programs and courses.³ Given the significant gaps in the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Del Norte, the College of the Redwoods might explore the potential for expanding its role in this space, but there are several important considerations to address.

Although community colleges are being increasingly asked to focus on workforce development, their primary function is that of educational institutions. The College of the Redwoods already has several business classes but has struggled to enroll students. Rory Johnson suspects that is because entrepreneurs are not interested in being on a campus full time and might be interested in taking only short-term courses to earn specific credentials or skills. The outstanding challenge is formulating how the college could modify the model to provide more intensive, targeted supports over a shorter period. The college would have to consider how to adapt an educational setting that focuses on adult learners to opportunity youth and their unique needs. It would also need to explore the type and length of courses and credentials that could be offered to aspiring entrepreneurs; what additional tools and supportive services to offer; and outreach, enrollment, and retention strategies targeted to opportunity youth.

This type of practice change can be challenging because community colleges – the College of the Redwoods included – oftentimes work with employers to create certificates that respond to the needs

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³ We explore the role of community colleges in more detail in the *Creating Entrepreneurship Pathways for Opportunity Youth* report.

of specific sectors but are not credit-bearing. While this provides flexibility to the institution and the learner (which might be particularly attractive to both emerging entrepreneurs and opportunity youth), these types of non-credit-bearing courses are not eligible for financial aid, presenting an additional barrier to participation for low-income students. The College of the Redwoods is currently exploring what entrepreneurs are most interested in, how to align training to these needs, and how to make this programming sustainable and accessible.

Finally, designing an outreach and engagement strategy specifically for opportunity youth presents an additional challenge. In the experience of the OYF network, many first-generation students, low-income students, and students of color can feel alienated and intimidated in postsecondary settings if they don't see themselves reflected in those spaces. Youth in our focus group felt that the College of the Redwoods, although a welcoming community space, could initially feel intimidating, particularly to Latinx students and others who perceive it as a predominantly white institution. Youth suggested hosting community events to welcome students and families into the space. Additionally, YTA being hosted by the college provides a unique opportunity for a "warm hand-off" to college advisers to engage participants in further education planning as a next step after completing YTA. Across the OYF, there is evidence that warm hand-offs (a personalized referral process in which a young person is introduced to service providers by a trusted adult such as a case manager) can ease the feelings of intimidation and alienation that opportunity youth might feel in educational and program settings.

LESSON 3: SUCCESS MUST BE REFRAMED

Youth-serving community-based organizations, including those that receive federal funding such as WIOA Title I youth funds, are typically evaluated across a rigid set of criteria, including the capacity to scale programs to serve more youth. In rural areas with vast distances between towns and low population density, serving large numbers of youth is challenging. Additionally, because opportunity youth experience significant systemic barriers to success, typical 12- or 18-months program length is not sufficient, even if there is a mandated period of follow-up. For Dream Quest and its StepUp program (a WIOA provider), success means engaging a realistic number of young people (which could be 6 to 10 youth) over longer periods of time and across the age continuum. Most participants start coming to Dream Quest as children and are offered a range of developmentally appropriate opportunities as they progress in the program. As a result, many maintain lifelong connections with the program and serve as role models to younger participants. Furthermore, all YEF grantees found that their models work best with more intensive supports provided to smaller cohorts of 5 to 10 youth. Therefore, it is important to reexamine what constitutes programmatic success in rural communities to shift the focus from numbers served to consider program quality and capacity to provide youth with personalized supports and with opportunities to build long-term relationships with caring staff.

YEF grantees found that their models work best with more intensive supports provided to smaller cohorts of 5 to 10 youth.

LESSON 4: COLLABORATION IS ESSENTIAL

As a place-based initiative, the OYF supports local strategies that focus on investing in the capacity and power of local communities to identify their own issues and design solutions with multiple partners, especially those who are most affected by the issue. In DNATL, the Hub trained key partners and stakeholders in *It's Your Move*, thus seeding human-centered design principles throughout local institutions, increasing partner buy-in, institutionalizing and embedding the entrepreneurship/innovation pathway in YTA and across other partners beyond the life of the YEF initiative, and sparking institutional practice change that will

ultimately lead to a better regional system of pathways and services for opportunity youth. In Del Norte, opportunities for youth are being developed in the context of this broader effort to build and strengthen the community – which means that collaboration and having a shared vision for the community and its young people are all the more essential.

LESSON 5: LONG-TERM INVESTMENT IS CRITICALLY IMPORTANT

Collaborative, ecosystem-building work requires long-term investment in the capacity of local collaborative leaders to bring partners together, create a shared vision and action plan, and nurture

Collaborative, ecosystem-building work requires long-term investment in the capacity of local collaborative leaders to bring partners together, create a shared vision and action plan, and nurture partnerships based on mutual trust and accountability.

partnerships based on mutual trust and accountability. Furthermore, sustainable, long-term investment is even more critical in rural and tribal communities, as these communities are contending with the devastating impacts of historical and ongoing systemic disinvestment by the federal government and philanthropy. Oftentimes, rural and tribal communities lack the vitally important infrastructure that urban communities take for granted (such as broadband access, running water, or public transportation); thus the work to build community capacity and power by necessity must address these underlying challenges.

DNATL BHC is in the ninth year of an initial 10-year investment from The California Endowment and the seventh year of the OYF; DNATL leaders point out that they started seeing success emerge in the fifth year of the effort. Youth disconnection is a long-term, intractable challenge that is deeply rooted in racial and other systemic injustice and thus requires an equally long-

term investment aimed at changing systems to create better conditions for the most vulnerable young people. We believe that entrepreneurship is an important part of such a portfolio of pathways, and that investing in the sustainability of this pathway – and in developing a more robust entrepreneurial ecosystem – in the long term will provide opportunity youth in Del Norte with an important opportunity to develop valuable workforce skills and contribute to the long-term economic health of the community.

WHAT'S NEXT?

In DNATL, the entrepreneurship/innovation pathway is being institutionalized and sustained in YTA and in several additional partners across the region. At the same time, the partners are still exploring important issues, such as the role of the College of the Redwoods in the entrepreneurial ecosystem; strategies for providing additional tools and supports for young entrepreneurs in an often challenging context; and economic development opportunities that respond to the workforce needs of residents and connect young people with family-sustaining career pathways (including business ownership) to enable them to remain in Del Norte. Additionally, as the overall OYF initiative matures, many communities in the network – including DNATL – are starting to explore intervention strategies that can prevent young people from becoming disconnected in the first place. More exploration is needed to understand collaborative strategies in designing entrepreneurship pathways for opportunity youth, including whether entrepreneurial education and exposure to the entrepreneurial ecosystem can serve as a protective factor against young people disconnecting from school and work.

ENDNOTES

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