

# YOUNG ADULT CRITIQUES of WORKPLACE CULTURE AND PRACTICES



**GENERATION WORK IN NORTHEAST OHIO**

## PURPOSE

The Generation Work partnership in Northeast Ohio is excited to share findings from interviews conducted with 32 young adults who were engaged in workforce development services and training with Generation Work partners.

The purpose of the interviews was to learn about the employment experiences of young adults and gain insight into how they would improve workplace culture and practices. The information will be shared with employers, workforce and economic development partners and others who are striving to develop strong, equitable and inclusive talent pipelines that meet the needs of companies and build a thriving and increasingly competitive workforce in Cuyahoga County.

## APPROACH

This briefing paper presents a few highlights of the interviews. The interviews were conducted by Business Government Community Connections. Young Adults (called Youth Advisors) were compensated for sharing their experience. All received a reference to include on their resumé.



“

“This is a time when we are all thinking of workplace practices because we are seeing how employers are doing in a crisis. Some like Amazon, one of the places I have worked in the past, are thriving. Others like the fast food restaurants I have worked in are closed. Whatever side you are on – being pushed to the limit, or pushed to the side, the work of all employers is being judged more than ever before. Who is being affected by all of this? Low income people. It makes us look carefully at employers and see what they stand for and how they treat their employees.”

Young Adult Advisor

## SELECTED FINDINGS

### Equity and Opportunity

The interviews were conducted during the fall of 2020, during a time when the nation was experiencing protests, an epidemic and economic turmoil. Discussions of equity and opportunity were foremost on the minds of the racially diverse group of Young Adult Advisors who participated in interviews.

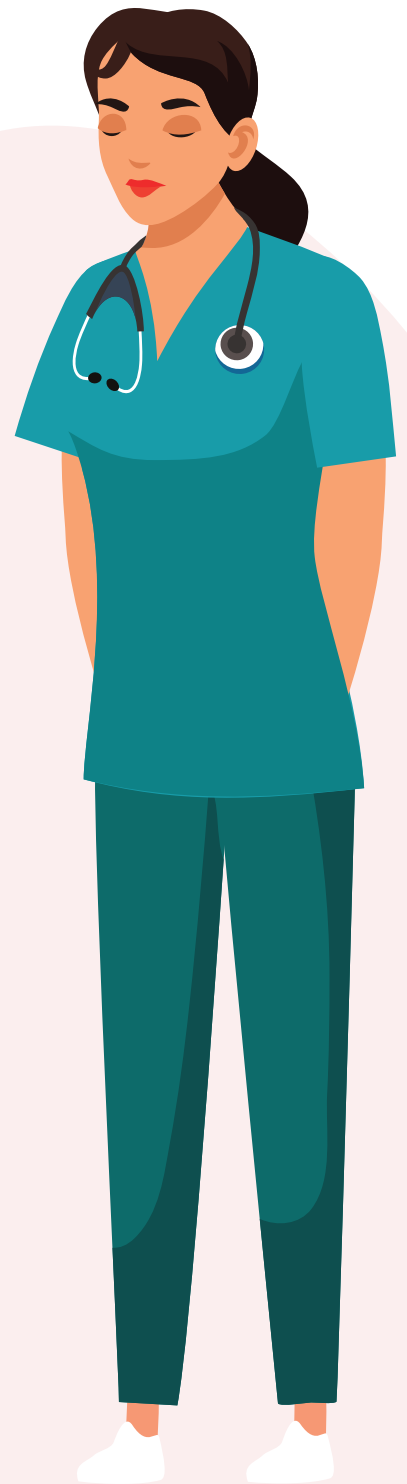
Along these lines several young adults shared that it was important to them that employers be strong neighborhood advocates, and recognized as business owners that care about their employees and have resources, like an emergency fund to help those who are facing crises. “Good employers”, one young person said, “are companies that have representatives who people invite to be speakers at local graduations and commencements. And they are businesses that contract with local minority businesses and have diverse staff that talk at job fairs and community events.”

Some shared their ideas about what an equitable work environment would look like.

One young woman, who had just welcomed her first baby said, “If employers really wanted to promote equity they would have a deep understanding of:

- › how young people conduct themselves, and knowledge that some inner-city kids may make mistakes because of traumas they have faced, but with help will be great employees;

- › the childcare and home-schooling challenges that parents of young children face because of COVID-19; and
- › the need to have practices in place to welcome women back to the workforce to their previous job after they have a baby.



Another young person said, “If employers say they really believe in equity, especially race equity they need to show it in the way they work, who they hire and who they promote. All employees have an equal right to make mistakes, learn and improve. Some of us are from different backgrounds and we might need a little more support because the culture of the company where we work is so new to us.”

A young man said, “It is not limited to who companies hire that is important. It is more important about who they make feel welcome and included and who they promote.”

A young adult who had previously worked in several different types of businesses said, “Employers need to be willing to grow, promote and support all employees. They have to show they are promoting people from different races and promoting women and men equally too. If their hiring data shows that happens that is good and workforce programs might want to recognize them as good employers.”

“

“When your supervisor comes from your neighborhood it shows that they’ve been where I’ve been and that someday I can be where they are.”

Young Adult Advisor

### Strategies Which Help Young Adults Succeed at the Workplace

Many young people wanted to work in a company where their employer is empathetic, committed to providing a healthy and safe environment, understands workers’ point of view, and is open-minded. One young woman who was pursuing a health career said, “I want to be in a company that cares about the way workers feel about working there, and protects the health of workers. Not just during COVID-19, but all the time.”

A young adult who was preparing for a career in the trades said, “I want to work at a place that makes room for workers to connect, whether through unions, employee events or just in the way they act informally. Another young person said, “I want to work where people are encouraged to learn new skills and to continually try new things – even if there

are not any real promotional opportunities at that company once I skill out – and have learned all the skills I can in their job.”

A young adult who worked in a manufacturing company said, “I am going back to the production place where I worked as soon as my baby is two months old. The reason is they understand me. They know I work hard and usually exceed our production quotas. Those days when my older daughter was waking up late in the night and I was tired at work, they just said, ‘What is the matter – do you need some time off to catch up on sleep?’ I appreciate that and it makes me want to work even harder when an employer cares about me as a person, and sees I am worth helping.”

Young Adults were more likely to succeed if they worked at a company where their supervisors:

- › have the same kind of background as the young people they supervise.
- › take time to explain things carefully
- › take young people seriously
- › are in frequent contact with employees, giving them advice about ways to improve their job performance.
- › give positive feedback when it is due
- › are comfortable working with people who are young, and people from different backgrounds



## What Are Young Adults Looking for in a Good Company?

A handful of young adults wanted to work in a job that was located near their house and childcare. They were less concerned about the type of job, if it met these criteria, and offered a comparable wage to other similar jobs and predictable work schedules. Three young people defined a good job as a job that met, as one called it, “my personal style.” One liked team work, while another liked working independently. The third liked repetitive work because “for me a job is just what I do to earn money so I can save my creativity for what I really care about – which is starting my own business as a production sound mixer.” Two young people said that workforce programs should try to engage people in training and careers that are a close match to their image of a good job, which is not necessarily a job in one of the areas being promoted, but in one that offers them a chance to do what they like to do most. One said, “Otherwise people like me might bail.” Most of the Young Adult Advisors, however, were pursuing jobs or next step education in healthcare, construction, information technology or security. Four said they hoped someday to be business owners, selling health and beauty products online, and two were starting to do this work while employed in other jobs.

The majority of young people had a list of criteria that they associated with a good company. Their examples follow, in order of frequency, from highest to lowest.

- › Dependable employment, steady schedules
- › Transparent communication from employers regarding schedules, work duties and work hours



“My dream as a parent of three is that employers would have onsite child care at hospitals (where I plan to work), and would subsidize that care – at least until someday our community or country takes that step. I don’t know how parents – especially low-income parents, really get out of poverty until the high cost of childcare is removed. My mom helps me now, but that is not the best. She gets tired and is not in her best of health. And I don’t want employers to treat me badly because I have three kids. I still want to work and I can’t help it if I live in a country that does not treat young people like they can do both. Who do they think will support them when they are old?”

Young Adult Advisor

- › Information about the whole company at orientations and tours of the whole company at that time to get an idea of where they fit in, and where they might want to be if they stay, but want a different job in the company
- › Tuition and scholarship assistance
- › Time off to take children to appointments and go to school meetings
- › Career mentoring opportunities to help me plan and build the skills needed to get promotions
- › Good pay (defined as pay that is comparable to other similar places)
- › Healthcare
- › 401k
- › Promotional opportunities
- › Paid time to go to company sponsored training
- › Clear information at orientation about work hours, paycheck amounts, length of probation, when healthcare benefits start
- › Real evidence that employers care about workers
- › Transportation assistance

## MANY THANKS

Thank you to the Young Adult Advisors for taking the time to talk during the time in our nation’s history when so much is in flux, yet you are taking charge and moving ahead on a journey that will truly benefit your community, family and the world beyond. Your voice matters. Your recommendations and observations are appreciated and will be broadly shared and used.

Prepared by:

## **BUSINESS GOVERNMENT COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS**

22 West Armour Street  
Seattle, Washington 98119  
Tel: (206) 619-0808  
Fax: (206) 453-3725  
Email: [bgcc1@comcast.net](mailto:bgcc1@comcast.net)

“Employers should ask workers once a year to weigh in on how they like their jobs, and what would make their jobs better – if I saw an employer who did that and who actually acted on some of the things workers want, I would be impressed and know that is the kind of place I want to work.”

Young Adult Advisor

*The Annie E. Casey Foundation launched Generation Work in 2016 to explore new ways of connecting young Americans with the knowledge and experience they need to succeed in the job market. The initiative, which includes partnerships in Cleveland, Hartford, Indianapolis, Philadelphia and Seattle, weaves together best practices from the adult education and training field – in particular, a focus on demand-driven workforce development strategies – with positive youth development practices, such as mentoring and work-based learning, to better prepare young people ages 18-29 for work.*

*The Generation Work partnership in Northeast Ohio provides a framework for local policymakers and providers of workforce services for young people to share new learning, strengthen referral relationships, improve data accessibility and promote racial equity efforts. The partnership's framework is designed to improve current practice, connect, and align systems actors and institutionalize change.*