

Young Adults in the Bulls-Eye

By Phil Devol, Author, Consultant, Trainer on Poverty Issues

Employment has been an issue at the forefront of our country over the past several years, and these days all eyes seem to be on young adults. At the national level, Opportunity Nation focuses on 16-24 year olds. Governor Kasich focuses on the same age group in his statement

about how they help prepare young people for the working world. There is good reason for the attention young people are getting - they are, after all, just about to enter the workforce and everyone wants them to be successful.

The challenges that young people from unstable, under-resourced situations face are formidable. Do they have the skills and training needed by employers? Do they know the rules of work and self-governance? Do they understand the economy and world of work that they are entering? Are they prepared to take on the challenges they face?

to avoid predatory loans they may be offered. We owe young people all the support we can give them to stabilize their worlds while they spend time in the classroom. It's those who live in unstable situations who have the most trouble staying in school day after day, until they get their degrees or certifications.

The second way we can help is to prepare young people to take charge of their lives. To do this they need to investigate the world they are entering. The challenges they face in today's work world are daunting. It would be unethical to send

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~ Phil Devol, Co-Author, "Bridges Out of Poverty"

on the budget, and The Workgroup to Reduce Reliance on Public Assistance recommends initially targeting 16-24 year olds. OhioGuidestone is also doing good work with this age group, and recently testified before Representative Tim Derickson's Community and Family Advancement Committee

I believe that we can help prepare young adults at two levels. The first is the most obvious; they need skills for the jobs they seek. But in support of that, young people need to know the hidden rules of the workplace and of class. They need to know the hidden rules of language; how to code switch in the workplace and use Standard American English. They need to know how to navigate old and new relationships; to build social capital. They need to know the rules of money and how

them into it without giving them a way to analyze it. Since 1979 median family incomes have not risen. Well-paying, full-time positions have been replaced by lesser-paying, part-time and contract jobs. The downward pressure on wages is a reality they should understand.

Preparing young people to be good employees is only half of the job. Preparing young people to be contributing and engaged workers, active in their communities, and to participate in the transformation of the world is the rest of the job.

About the Author



Phil DeVol of Marengo, Ohio, has been training and consulting on poverty issues since 1997. He is co-author of several publications, including "Bridges out of Poverty" that focus on engaging people in poverty in the work of building communities where everyone can live well. DeVol works nationally and internationally with community leaders to help them move quickly from an attraction to application of Bridges concepts. In addition to writing and consulting, DeVol coordinates aha! Process's collaborations with other organizations to affect innovative, high-impact strategies for ending poverty and building sustainable communities. Learn more about Phil at www.ahaprocess.com

