When YouthCorps began, 90% of members had not completed high school, 100% were unemployed, and over 30% of members had experienced homelessness within six months of participating in YouthCorps. Compared to national statistics, 25% of youth that age out of foster care do not graduate from high school, 56% are unemployed, and 25% are homeless.

After YouthCorps, 50% of active members were employed. One member expressed she obtained employment through the workforce development classes she took as part of the program. Members were encouraged to enroll in classes to complete their education. With help from their Franklin County Children Services caseworkers, 66% of active members were attending school to earn a high school diploma, an STNA certificate, or a college degree. One member attended school and found employment.

Programs like YouthCorps are necessary for the development of positive future outcomes for youth aging out of foster care. Many do not have the skills to effectively support themselves in adulthood. In offering this program we found that many members struggled with reading and writing, and all members had less than six months of work experience. The Ohio Association of Foodbanks provided members with this valuable resource.

Learning Outcomes:
- Teamwork
- Problem solving
- Interviewing techniques
- Research
- Life skills (budgeting, cooking)
- Landscaping & gardening
- Professional communication
- Food safety
- Resume and cover letter writing skills
- Office etiquette

Members spent time working with a My Budget Coach counselor to learn about managing personal finances. They used what they learned to shop for personal care items which cannot be purchased with SNAP.

The Ohio Association of Foodbanks provided members with this valuable resource.

Prior to any budget counseling members were asked how confident they were in their ability to budget.

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Program Overview:
The Ohio Association of Foodbanks operates a Work Experience Program for Able-Bodied Adults without Dependents (ABAWD) in partnership with the Franklin County Department of Job and Family Services (FCDJFS), due to a federal work requirement for SNAP recipients. In addition YouthCorps, a job readiness program dedicated to building opportunities for ABAWDs aging out of foster care, was offered in collaboration with FCDJFS and Franklin County Children Services. YouthCorps is designed to create a path to higher education or gainful employment, while teaching career development techniques and necessary life skills.

YouthCorps began on July 7, 2014 with 10 members ages 18-21. All members were subject to a strict 24 hour required monthly attendance quota. Failing to meet the requirement without a good cause exemption removes members from the program. Within the first month, three members were unable to complete the program due to poor attendance and one was removed for violating program policy. Members were considered compliant if they were unable to attend due to paid employment or enrollment in school. YouthCorps ended on September 30, 2014 with two active members coming to weekly classes and four members engaged in other qualified activities.

Education:
Before implementing any workforce development classes, members were given a survey to determine their confidence in creating job opportunities for themselves. Over 80% of members reported they were very or extremely confident filling out job applications and applying for jobs, but they did not display that confidence in real life applications. Only 33% were confident in their abilities to write an effective resume, and 33% were not confident in their ability to create a cover letter. Most members needed more intense individual attention to develop these documents and increase interviewing skills.

Life Skills:
As part of the YouthCorps life-skills curriculum, members learned to create meals from basic ingredients with Pantry Panic!, a nutrition education program sponsored by Mid-Ohio Foodbank. This course was designed to teach food insecure individuals how to stretch their SNAP benefits.

Members learned to cook creative healthy meals with items typically found at a food pantry. Most members were more willing to try new foods after completing this course. This skills-based cooking class builds self-efficacy through hands-on experience.

Volunteer Service:
YouthCorps was held two days a week. One day involved classroom instruction and the other day was dedicated to community service. Members served a combined total of 216 hours volunteering and 250 collective hours of learning throughout the course of the program.

Each week YouthCorps members volunteered at the E.L. Hardy Center, a safe place for kids to learn and grow. Members mulched the community garden, pulled weeds, leveled the playground, organized the warehouse, and created banners with positive messages for kids. They also cleaned the gym and cafeteria after the summer food program ended. Members learned to work as a team and gained landscaping skills as a result of their work at the E.L. Hardy Center.

Some members also volunteered at Franklinton Gardens, an urban farm in one of Columbus’ poorest neighborhoods, dedicated to growing and offering fresh produce to the community. They harvested produce to donate to a local soup kitchen. Members learned the value of community development through volunteer service.

In an effort to increase critical thinking and confidence learning a new skill, members were given a project to push them to higher levels of achievement. They were tasked with finding a community need, which they would use to create a mock business plan for a social enterprise to provide a solution to that issue. With the level of unemployment amongst their peers and neighbors, they decided to develop a business plan for a career counseling service based on the principles they learned as part of the YouthCorps curriculum. Members learned about the basics of business, entrepreneurship, and development of a nonprofit organization.

Prior to any instruction, members were asked how confident they were in writing a business plan.