



Center for Research on Fathers, Children and Family Well-Being

It Takes an Island

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In our recent study, we suggest remedies to the paradoxical problems facing Bermuda's young Black males. Short-term success at entering the Island's still robust economy contributes to the long-term failure to close unemployment, earnings and college enrollment gaps between Black males and their same age White male and Black female peers.

The report was widely disseminated via public forums, presentations to nonprofits, business leaders and policy makers and was well received. Several of the Island's non-profit organizations noted the ways in which they found the report most useful and contributed to this brief. This policy brief details how policy makers and non-profits can follow up on the report, but first offers a brief synopsis of its original comprehensive assessment and policy recommendations.

The Barriers

Black Bermudan males face at least three barriers to gaining the skills necessary for good paying professional jobs in the Island's business and financial sectors.

The first barrier is common to all Bermudians. The Island has no four-year college so any Bermudian who seeks a Bachelor's degree or a higher degree has to go abroad. Although mothers, fathers, extended family members and teachers are all likely to encourage young Black men to remain in school and graduate, they generally do not offer them specific advice early enough about the mechanics of

applying for college overseas.

A second barrier is unique to Bermuda's young black men who define a good paying one in which they *can work with their hands*, have a flexible schedule and be their own boss. Whether this is their way of expressing their concerns about racism, prejudice and a glass ceiling, or their way of acknowledging that they lack soft skills, it means that their aspirations may differ from those of their same age peers.

Finally, Black males have greater access to 'short money,' meaning jobs not requiring a college education that pay more than jobs requiring a college education. They also have access to jobs that pay more than jobs their female peers can secure. As a consequence they see a comparative advantage to working right out of high school and a disadvantage to going to college for a future that might be limited by a glass ceiling. This may explain why they are the least likely of their same-age peers to invest in an education. Their lives are defined by a complex intersection of race, gender, rich short-term gains and poor motivations to invest in the long-term.

The Big Picture

To overcome those barriers and decrease gaps in earnings, employment and enrollment, Bermudians would have to increase secondary school graduation rates and increase college-going rates for Black males. Bermudians would also have to re-connect more disconnected youth who left school and the workplace, increase employment rates among the unemployed and wages among the

underemployed. Each of these goals is a task unto itself and could be addressed separately. Our study argued that the underlying forces addressed above link these problems and approaching them comprehensively would be more effective.

Not-for-profit Organizations

The following are examples of Bermudian programs that are meeting some of these needs.

1. Adult Education School helps youth who have had a history of academic and behavioral failure in school to receive a GED. They also work with imprisoned youth. This organization suggested that a new ministry or public/private body might be created to make decisions for and financially support the disconnected youth population of Bermuda (see below for more on this point).

2. Chewstick, a safe harbor program for teenage Black youth, offers workshops, lectures, movie nights and artist showcases. In the Island's high schools, Bermuda College and the Island's correctional facility they provide youth creative writing and performance programs. Chewstick aims to offer higher education scholarships in art and music and to also help disseminate knowledge about scholarships to their clients.

3. Impact Mentoring Academy works with male adolescents, ages 11-18. Its theory of change is that the mentoring and engagement skills of caring adults will increase the 'soft skills' of young Black males while increasing the chances that they will graduate high school and go on to college. It exposes students to more diverse employment options, including the financial sector.¹

These programs all emphasize 'authentic caring' and close relationships to engage adolescents in their theory of change. Study findings support this theory of change. Indeed, more guidance throughout their educational and professional lives might make young Black males aware of the opportunities and options available to them. More programs intended to reconnect disconnected youth to subsi-

dized educational, work readiness and employment opportunities would be especially beneficial.

Further, evaluations of Bermuda-based models might make the local solutions become models of excellence. We recommend that local practitioners reach out to counterparts in the U.S. who operate programs with proven evidence of success for help in identifying and adapting elements of effective practice to the Bermudian experience. Staff at key local programs working with disconnected youth, including the Adult Education School, the Chewstick Foundation and the Impact Mentoring Academy, all endorsed this principle of local leadership in replicating effective programs. The study also recommends that not-for-profits collaborate more and coordinate their services.

Public Schools

Our study recommended that guidance counselors should work with students at the earliest intervention points available to identify students' interests and allow students to begin to articulate educational and professional goals. Students who are thinking about dropping out can explore alternative pathways to an education and students who are thinking about higher education can identify the steps they need to take to achieve their goals. Guidance counselors might help students understand college requirements; the college application process and help students identify scholarships, internships and more. To date, the government of Bermuda has agreed to increase the number of guidance counselors in the public high schools.

Government programs

Our study recommended that Parliament create a new agency tasked with making 'positive' youth development policies for out of school youth between 16 and 18 years old who lack a GED certification. These youth are the most likely to be "on the wall," (e.g., not enrolled, unemployed, or employed at very low earnings) and are most likely to be involved in criminal behavior. This agency would provide funding for effective services provided by youth serving organizations on the Island

and would also support the research and development of new service models, including those that require partnerships with the business sector.

Corporate services

There has been a history of business-led internships on the island. For example, with support from the Bank of Bermuda, secondary school graduates in Bermuda were offered a financial services preparation course developed by the Financial Services Academy of Bermuda. Besides job shadowing, these students learned office etiquette, basic computer skills and soft skills, including the importance of punctuality. Those who successfully completed the course were guaranteed employment. The study recommended more programs like this.

Funding for the Long Term

Half of the Black Bermudian males who entered the public high schools in the last several years left without obtaining a certificate. The average cost per student in Bermuda is somewhere between \$16,000 and \$24,000. Assuming half that amount represents fixed costs, associated with maintaining school facilities, administering educational services and other expenditures that do not vary per student, the researchers estimate that between \$8,000 and \$12,000 is currently left behind in the Department of Education's budget and not being used on behalf of these former students.

U.S.-based programs serving disconnected youth generally have a per-participant cost of (including fixed costs) less than \$24,000. Therefore, the funds left behind in Bermuda's public schools by out of school youth could be used to fund one-third to one-half the full costs of servicing these youth more effectively. The rest of the funds might be provided by new allocations for youth services provided by government and by private and corporate donors who wish to leverage public funds for these services.

The Coordination Hurdle

Closing earnings, unemployment, and college enrollment gaps between young Black Bermudian males and their same age peers will require a coordinated effort involving business, schools, government, and youth serving organizations. Besides funding, business and government can provide job shadowing opportunities to expose young Black Bermudian males to managerial and professional career opportunities with high earnings in Bermuda. With greater support from business, government, and private philanthropy, youth serving organizations can build the capacity to develop, borrow and adapt evidence-based service models. Middle and high schools can help by integrating a more comprehensive guidance strategy that collaborates with employers and youth serving organizations. However, before such a coordinated effort can be mounted, the relevant stakeholders must overcome doubts about the willingness and capacity of their counterparts to play their respective roles. Which counterpart takes the lead in creating a new climate for collaboration and how such a new climate emerges are major questions which young Black males in Bermuda are waiting to be answered.

Summary

It takes an Island to close employment, earnings and educational gaps between young Black Bermudian males and their same-age peers. This report outlined a comprehensive strategy that works to increase college enrollment and prevent dropping-out among Black males, while creating an Island infrastructure for coordinating and implementing positive youth development, policies and practices that serve all young Bermudians whether 'on the wall' or not.

Next steps:

1. Key Bermudian non-profit organizations can offer the types of supportive relationships likely to increase graduation rates for Bermuda's young Black men while also helping parents become more educationally involved with their sons.
2. Several local organizations already incorporate the ideas and approaches that are in line with best

the ideas and approaches that are in line with best practices the youth development field identifies. These programs/services should be evaluated.

3. More programs intended to reconnect disconnected youth to subsidized educational, work readiness and employment opportunities should be implemented. Further, relevant non-profits should strengthen their relationships with the educational and job services programs that offer GED, soft skills and job shadowing programs to at-risk male youth.

4. Non-profits should increase the linkages between themselves and programs offering government or corporate scholarships and internships to disconnected youth.

5. Public middle and high schools should provide more guidance counselors.

6. Government and business stakeholders should fund the identification, adaptation, and development of locally provided services for at-risk and disconnected youth.

7. Government should create a positive youth development agency to coordinate and fund effective services for young out-of-school youth.

Endnotes

¹. CRFCFW thanks each of these organizations for their guidance in the production of this brief. Readers interested in contacting them may do so at: The Adult Education School (441.292.5809), The Chewstick Foundation (<http://chewstick.com/>), and Impact Mentoring Academy (impactmentoring@live.com).

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Opinions, conclusions, recommendations and points of view expressed in this brief represent a consensus of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the funders of the study on which the brief is based.

For a full discussion on this topic, please see chapter five of our research study which may be found at www.crfcfw.columbia.edu/pub/Bermuda_full.pdf.