

## Ready by 21: ready for work, for college, for life!

Traditionally, those who work with our nation's children and youth primarily have specialized, dealing only with those of a certain age, geographical location, or other specifics.

But it is becoming apparent that an increasing number of our youth are not ready for adult responsibilities by the time they are 21. In fact, research shows that only four out of ten young people are doing well by the time they reach this age of passage into adulthood.

Often America has reacted with fragmented and disjointed responses to youth problems. In addition, no real plan exists to address the promotion of youth strengths. Although no one method may be perfect to address the challenges in creating effective youth policies, some communities



are taking steps to find the best among a wide range of possible solutions to the problems that have resulted in the lack of preparedness for responsibilities by today's youth.

The Forum for Youth Investment, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, is dedicated to helping communities make sure all young people are Ready by 21™: ready for work, ready for college, ready for life. This goal requires that young people have the support, opportunities, and services needed to prosper and contribute where they live, learn, work, and play. The program is a youth-centered, research-based approach to strategic planning and policy development on behalf of youth.

The Forum for Youth Investment believes that by encouraging alignment of ideas, resources and stakeholders, America can ensure that significantly more young people are Ready by 21. The Forum calls

on funders (public and private), providers (public and private) and advocates to make fundamental changes in the way they do business in order to change the odds for young people.

In Broome County the Ready for 21 program is sponsored by the Children and Youth Services Council of Broome County. It is being supported by the Greater Binghamton Coalition, the Broome County Early Childhood Coalition, the Broome County Youth Bureau, and local political leaders. It is being financially supported by the Venture Grant program of United Way of Broome County and the Helen T. Howland Foundation.

### Working with many organizations

To make an impact on the problems affecting youth, there should be an alignment of ideas, resources, and stakeholders, as the problems affecting today's youth are not restricted to a specific age, gender, or geographic location.

All young people deserve access to early and sustained investments and opportunities for involvement throughout at least the first two decades of their lives. Because development and engagement do not stop when the school bell rings, investment and involvement are critical throughout young people's waking hours. These investments must move beyond solving problems and promoting academic achievement to support of a full range of positive outcome—helping young people grow physically, socially, emotionally, personally, ethically, civically, vocationally and intellectually. Young people should also have opportunities for involvement across this same broad range of arenas.

These investments have to be more than just programs—they have to include a full range of basic services, formal and informal supports, and challenging opportunities to engage and contribute. Learning and engagement happen in a variety of settings, so we need to be intentional about providing supports and opportunities in all the places and all the settings where young people live, learn, work, play, and make a difference. And every stakeholder must understand and respect the role and the power of families, peers, and neighborhoods in young people's lives over and above the impact of programs and institutions.

The Ready by 21 effort in Broome County is being kicked off by a day-long conference scheduled for September 19 at Traditions at the Glen.

The conference is designed to help local organizations work together to ensure that area children and youth meet the goals of the Ready by 21 program.

For further information about the conference, contact the Broome County Youth Bureau, 36-42 Main Street, Binghamton, NY 13905, or call (607) 778-2415.

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**United Way of Broome County, Inc.**

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