Where am I going to sleep?
What am I going to eat?

The Lived Experiences of San Antonio-Bexar County Opportunity Youth

This report is made possible due to a partnership with UP Partnership through funding provided by the City of San Antonio’s Department of Human Services.
“Where am I going to sleep? What am I going to eat?":
The Lived Experiences of San Antonio-Bexar County Opportunity Youth

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Executive Summary

Nationally, based on data from the 2017 American Community Survey, an estimated 12.5% of young adults (16-24 year olds) are not currently enrolled in school or employed. These “opportunity youth” represent a wealth of untapped potential for the nation and there is fear that long term disconnection from work and education have adverse consequences. In this report, we present a demographic profile and voices of opportunity youth in Bexar County. Below are the key findings of the report.

I. There were 33,613 opportunity youth 16 to 24 years of age in Bexar County in 2013-2017, accounting for 13.2% of all persons in this age category. Compared to the three largest counties in Texas, Bexar County had a slightly lower percentage of opportunity youth than Dallas (14.2%) and Harris (13.4%) Counties, but a much higher percentage than Travis County (8.6%). Nationally, 12.5% of young adults were opportunity youth, with a percentage of 13.8% in Texas. We estimate that there were roughly 31,117 opportunity youth in the City of San Antonio, comprising 13.7% of all persons 16 to 24 in the city.

II. We identified certain characteristics that are associated with the prevalence of opportunity youth. Overall, we found that the likelihood of being an opportunity youth is highest for Latina/os, females, persons born outside of the U.S., individuals who have limited or no fluency in English, people with a disability, persons who are the most economically vulnerable (i.e., those who live in households that are in deep poverty, moderate poverty, or near poverty), and persons who live in certain parts of San Antonio where opportunity youth are concentrated, located in the central, southeastern, southwestern, and far south sections of San Antonio.

III. Some prominent challenges for opportunity youth (versus non-opportunity youth) include being in poverty, lacking health care insurance, having children and a family to support, having unstable living arrangements, not having digital access at home, and having a disability. We compared opportunity youth to other (non-opportunity) youth to develop an in-depth profile of opportunity youth in Bexar County. This information allows us to gain a portrait of this population and to identify some of its major needs. People who are disengaged from school and work have numerous challenges associated with limited resources that make it difficult for them to easily continue their schooling and find employment.

IV. Opportunity youth experienced a variety of academic disruptions. The youth we interviewed described negative school experiences and school mobility across the P-16 educational spectrum. In some cases, the interviewees were forced to drop out of high school because of economic hardships, while others managed to graduate, but struggled with the transition to postsecondary education. Though opportunity youth detailed negative schooling experiences, they also identified the positive influences of an educational advocate, extracurricular activities, and other school programs.

V. Opportunity youth described a complex job market and the challenges of being economically vulnerable. Interviewees described the limited availability of nearby jobs, jobs that offer flexible work schedules, and availability of long-term employment opportunities. They also indicated that some jobs have unfavorable structural characteristics, such as low wages, minimal work hours, no employee benefits, and lack of full-time positions.

VI. Opportunity youth identified that lack of reliable forms of transportation posed a key challenge in accessing opportunities. Many of the young adults we interviewed indicated that certain higher-paying jobs were typically located great distances from their residence. They relied heavily on public forms of transportation (which entailed long commutes) and undependable personal modes (such as bikes or cars requiring maintenance).
The Lived Experiences of San Antonio-Bexar County Opportunity Youth

Where am I going to sleep? What am I going to eat?:
THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF SAN ANTONIO-BEXAR COUNTY OPPORTUNITY YOUTH

Across the world, there is a disturbing trend associated with growing numbers of young people who are disconnected from work and education. Journalists, scholars, and policy makers have used a variety of terms such as "opportunity youth," "disconnected youth," persons "not in employment, education or training" (NEETs) (Bray, Depro, McMahon, Siegle, & Mobley, 2016; Bynner & Parsons, 2002; Lewis, Burd-Sharps, & Ofrane, 2018), and "nini" signifying "ni trabajando, ni estudiando" (neither working, nor studying) (Durán Romo, 2017). In the United States, the term "opportunity youth" has been used to describe these individuals, alluding to the untapped potential benefits that they represent. Over the last several years, there has been an increasing amount of research addressing opportunity youth (Belfield, Levin, & Rosen, 2012; Burd-Sharps & Lewis, 2012, 2018).

Research undertaken since the economic recession beginning in 2008 has produced knowledge concerning opportunity youth in the United States, although much of these studies are based more generally on teenagers and young adults rather than specifically on opportunity youth. We know that opportunity youth tend to be disproportionately persons of color (Burd-Sharps & Lewis, 2018; Han 2018), come from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Benner & Wang, 2014; Burd-Sharps & Lewis, 2018), are more likely to have disabilities (Artiles, 2013; Janus 2009), and to live in poor areas that are disconnected from opportunities (Burd-Sharps & Lewis, 2012). In addition, LGBTQ youngsters also have a high tendency to be opportunity youth (Poirier, Wilkie, Sepulveda, & Uruchima, 2018). Importantly, opportunity youth are more likely to have sustained negative school experiences (Waters & Harris, 2009; Welch & Payne, 2010), to have had fewer mentors (Erickson, McDonald, & Elder, 2009), to have parents who were not highly involved in their schooling (Bhargava, Bámaca-Colbert, Witherspoon, Pomerantz, & Robins, 2017), to be less civically engaged (Benenson, 2017), and to have had more contact with the criminal justice system (Carter, 2019; Hirschfield, 2009; Pettit & Lyons, 2009) compared to others.

Improving the plight of opportunity youth is of utmost importance. The period of the life course associated with opportunity youth (16 to 24 years of age) is particularly important in the development of youth as they transition from their teenage to young adult phase of their lives when they attain their educational and training resources that are needed to sustain themselves and their families in the coming decades. In an economic sense, opportunity youth represent untapped economic benefits whose engagement in education and the workforce can contribute significantly to the economic sustainability of the communities where they live. In addition, Belfield et al. (2012) have estimated that each opportunity youth represents an immediate taxpayer burden of $13,900 (in 2011 dollars) per year up to age 24 and a future taxpayer burden of $170,740 between ages 25 and 64. Moreover, opportunity youth are much more likely than other youth to face serious adverse conditions as they age including chronic criminal activities, unemployment, poverty, physical and mental health problems, and early death (Bray et al., 2016; Fernandes-Alcantara, 2015; Hair, Moore, Ling, McPhee-Baker, & Brown, 2009; Mendelson, Mmari, Blum, Catalano, & Brindis, 2018). Finally, there is also a moral imperative for improving the lives of opportunity youth. As Mendelson et al. (2018) state "Most disconnected youth grow up in impoverished households and are the victims of failed schools, failed neighborhoods, and failed child welfare systems” (p. 615).

In our own community, there has been growing worry concerning opportunity youth, the great potential that they represent, the problems and needs that they face, and what measures need to be taken to improve their lives. There is great recognition that in order to understand the plight of opportunity youth, we need data that can be used to develop a statistical profile of local opportunity youth as well as data that captures the voice of opportunity youth themselves. To this end, in this report, we present a demographic and socioeconomic profile of opportunity youth in Bexar County and the findings from interviews with opportunity youth in the county. A team of researchers at the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) with expertise in demography, public policy, and education conducted this study in two phases, guided by the following overarching research questions: 1) What are the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of opportunity youth in Bexar County? 2) How do opportunity youth in Bexar County describe their experiences pursuing their educational and occupational goals?
Methods

In conducting our research, we use the common definition of opportunity youth to identify the persons that will be part of our research. Opportunity youth are individuals between the ages of 16 and 24 who are currently not enrolled in school and who are currently not employed. Our geographic focus for our study is Bexar County (see Appendix A). Data were not available specifically for San Antonio.

There are two phases to the research that we conduct below: quantitative analysis of data from the American Community Survey (ACS) for San Antonio and qualitative analysis of data collected directly through interviews with opportunity youth living in San Antonio. The section below provides general information regarding the methods used to carry out the two phases of the research. More in-depth details regarding the methods that we used to conduct both phases of the research are available in Appendix A, while Appendix B provides definitions for all characteristics from the ACS data used in the analysis.

Quantitative Analysis of ACS Data

The first phase is based on quantitative analyses of data obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2017 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates Public Use Files representing the period between 2013 and 2017. The data were extracted online from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) located at the University of Minnesota (Ruggles et al., 2019). The data are ideal for the analysis because they are comprehensive, contain a large amount of information (e.g., demographic, socioeconomic, housing, living arrangements, disability, and other types of data), are based on a large national sample, and the data are at the individual level rather than in the aggregate.
While there has been an increasing amount of research on opportunity youth, much of this work has been primarily descriptive, providing an inventory of characteristics associated with opportunity youth. Moreover, another line of research has focused on the effectiveness of programs designed to improve the conditions of opportunity youth. As such, there is a relative absence of conceptual perspectives to obtain the big picture related to the complexity of the determinants leading to the onset and persistence of becoming an opportunity youth, the consequences associated with being in such a state of disconnection for extended periods of time, and routes for intervening in the lives of opportunity youth to prevent the onset of disconnection or promote the reengagement of opportunity youth. There is one work that provides important insights in this respect.

Just recently, working from a public health perspective, Mendelson et al. (2018) provided a comprehensive conceptual model—the conceptual model of youth connection and disconnection—that helps us understand the process associated with becoming an opportunity youth and interventions that can help prevent social disconnection and reengage opportunity youth. Their conceptual model draws from the field of epidemiology, life course development, and ecological theory (Mendelson et al., 2018).

The conceptual model of youth connection and disconnection is based on the lives of persons 16 to 24 years of age and their development stages as they move from younger to older stages of their lives, as they make the transition from teenagers to young adults (Figure 1). The conceptual model views the degree of connection as a continuum ranging from connection, to under-attachment, to disconnection. As youngsters go through the life course transitioning from teenagers to young adults, they face a variety of protective factors (that pull them toward the connection side of the continuum) and risk factors (that pull them toward the disconnection side of the continuum) with the set of protective and risk factors taking place at multiple ecological levels including the individual, family, school/friends, community, and society/policy levels.

![Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Youth Connection and Disconnection](adapted_from_Mendelson_etal_2018_p_56S)
In conducting this part of the analysis based on the ACS data, we had three objectives. First, we obtained an estimate of the number of opportunity youth in Bexar County in the 2013-2017 period as well as the percentage of all persons 16 to 24 years of age who are opportunity youth. Second, we identified the primary characteristics that were related to the prevalence of opportunity youth. Third, we provided an extensive portrait of San Antonio’s opportunity youth to describe this population and gain an understanding of its needs and challenges.

**Qualitative Analysis of Interview Data**

Through the analysis of geographic data from the ACS we identified areas in Bexar County with the highest percentages of opportunity youth. These were used as a guide in the recruitment of persons for the interviews that we conducted. Between September and October, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 16 opportunity youth from across San Antonio. The analysis of the interviews resulted in several major themes presented below.
A Portrait of Opportunity Youth in San Antonio-Bexar County

In this section of the report, we develop the demographic and socioeconomic profile of opportunity youth in Bexar County. This information will help us obtain a general portrait of the persons who are neither enrolled in school nor working during the 2013-2017 period.

Estimate of Opportunity Youth Population

Data from the ACS shows that Bexar County had an opportunity youth population of 33,613 in the 2013-2017 period, accounting for 13.2% of persons 16 to 24 years of age. By way of comparison, 12.5% of persons 16 to 24 were opportunity youth in the United States in the 2013-2017 period with the share being 13.8% in Texas (Figure 2). In comparison to the other three largest counties in Texas, Bexar County had a slightly lower percentage of its 16-24 population being opportunity youth than Dallas (14.2%) and Harris (13.4%) Counties, but Travis County had a much lower percentage (8.6%).

We roughly estimate that San Antonio had 31,117 opportunity youth 16 to 24 years of age (13.7% of all persons 16 to 24 years of age in the city) (see Appendix A for a description of procedure used to develop the estimate for the City of San Antonio).

The incidence level of being an opportunity youth has shifted over time. Overall, there has been a reduction in the prevalence of opportunity youth in Bexar County between 1980 and the 2013-2017 period (Figure 3). The percentage of persons 16 to 24 years of age who are opportunity youth fell 20% between 1980 and the 2013-2017 period, dropping from 16.5% in 1980 to 13.2% in the 2013-2017 period. However, the reduction has been driven primarily by a drop of 37% among persons 16 to 19 years of age, falling from 12.3% in 1980 to 7.7% in the 2013-2017 period. In contrast, the opportunity youth rate dropped much slower among persons 20 to 24 years of age, dipping by 14% from 20.2% in 1980 to 17.4% in the 2013-2017 period.
Figure 3. Percentage of Persons in Bexar County Who are Opportunity Youth by Age Group and Year.

As such, the age composition of the opportunity youth population has changed over the last four decades. The share of opportunity youth (ages 16 to 24) who are 16 to 19 years of age dropped from 35% in 1980 to 25% in the 2013-2017 period, while the portion that is 20 to 24 years of age rose from 65% in 1980 to 75% in the 2013-2017 period.

Characteristics Associated with the Prevalence of Being an Opportunity Youth

Overall, 13.2% of persons 16 to 24 years of age in Bexar County are opportunity youth. However, there is much variation on the likelihood of individuals being opportunity youth based on their personal characteristics. Some people with certain attributes are much more likely to be opportunity youth than their peers who have different characteristics. In the section below, the analysis focuses on identifying characteristics that enhance or decrease the likelihood of being an opportunity youth. It is important to realize that this section of the analysis examines attributes that occurred before the individual became an opportunity youth rather than the characteristics simply reflecting the status of being an opportunity youth, such as lacking health insurance or a stable place of residence, both of which likely occur merely because the person is neither in school nor working.

Demographic Characteristics. Race and ethnic membership is associated with the propensity to be an opportunity youth. In particular, among persons 16 to 24 years of age, Latinos are the most likely to be opportunity youth with 14.7% neither attending school nor employed, followed by Blacks (11.8%) and persons designated as “Other” (11.6%) (Figure 4). On the other hand, Whites (9.9%) and Asians or Pacific Islanders (10.0%) are the least likely to be opportunity youth. With only one exception (in the 16-19 age category), Latinos have the highest prevalence of being opportunity youth across age groups.

In addition, sex is also related to opportunity youth status. Females (14.2%) are somewhat more likely than males (12.8%) to be opportunity youth among persons 16 to 24 years of age (Figure 5). However, males have a higher propensity than females to be opportunity youth at younger ages (16-19), but females are the most likely to be neither in school nor working at older ages (20-24).
The combination of race/ethnic membership and gender gives a fuller portrait of specific groups that have the highest propensities for being opportunity youth. Among persons 16 to 24 years of age, Latina females are the most likely to be opportunity youth with 15.8% belonging to this group (Figure 6). Four other groups have fairly high rates of being opportunity youth: Latino males (13.7%), Other males (13.2%), Black females (13.1%), and Asian or Pacific Islander females (12.6%). Gender differences are particularly pronounced among Asian or Pacific Islanders, with females being almost twice as likely as males to be opportunity youth.

Place of birth—or nativity—is also related to the likelihood of being an opportunity youth. Overall among persons 16 to 24 years of age, approximately 19% of persons born outside of the U.S. are opportunity youth compared to 13% of those born in this country (Figure 7). Note that foreign-born persons are a broad category consisting of people you are naturalized citizens, those who are permanent residents, international students, and unauthorized individuals.
Fluency in English is associated with the prevalence of being an opportunity youth. For example, among persons 16 to 24 years of age, 30% of persons who have limited or no fluency in English (i.e., they speak a language other than English at home and speak English "not well" or "not at all") are opportunity youth compared to much lower percentages of those who speak English at home (12.1%) and bilingual speakers (14.3%) (i.e., they speak a language other than English at home and speak English "well" or "very well") (Figure 8). The gap is particularly large among persons 16 to 19 years of age, where persons with limited or no English fluency are 3.5 times more likely to be opportunity youth compared to persons who are fluent in English.

Disability Status. Disability status is strongly related to opportunity youth membership. Persons 16 to 24 years of age are about 2.5 times more likely to be opportunity youth compared to those without a disability (Figure 9). This distinction is more apparent at older ages (20-24) where nearly 42% of persons with a disability are opportunity youth compared to close to 16% of those without a disability.
Figure 8. Percentage of Persons in Bexar County Who are Opportunity Youth by Language Use and Age Group, 2013-2017

Source: 2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates Public Use Files (Ruggles et al. 2019).
Figure 9. Percentage of Persons in Bexar County Who are Opportunity Youth by Disability Status and Age Group, 2013-2017

Socioeconomic Characteristics. Socioeconomic status, as measured by the ratio of the family or household income to the threshold income based on the family size and composition, is also related to the prevalence of being an opportunity youth. Persons 16 to 24 years of age who are in deep poverty (income-to-poverty threshold level below 0.5) are the most likely to be opportunity youth with 27.4% belonging to this group, as is the case with 20.3% who are in moderate poverty (0.50 to 0.99 below the poverty level) and 17.0% of those being near-poor (income-to-poverty threshold level between 1.00 and 1.49) (Figure 10). In contrast, youth living in homes with income-to-poverty threshold ratios above 4.0 have the lowest prevalence of being opportunity youth with roughly 7.0% not working nor attending school.

Figure 10. Percentage of Persons 16 to 24 Years of Age in Bexar County Who are Opportunity Youth by Ratio of Income to Poverty Level, 2013-2017

Geographic Patterns. Geographic location is also associated with the prevalence of opportunity youth. There are 16 Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMAs) in Bexar County. PUMAs are geographic areas that contain at least 100,000 inhabitants. Four PUMAs have the highest percentages of residents 16 to 24 years of age who are opportunity youth...
exceeding 19%. As Figure 11 shows, these PUMAs are located in San Antonio’s central part (PUMA 5901, 23.9%), immediate southeastern portion (PUMA 5903, 20.8%), immediate southwestern part (PUMA 5906, 20.8%), and the vast further southern, southeastern, and southwestern sections of the city (PUMA 5907, 19.2%). The three PUMAs with the next highest percentages of opportunity youth ring around the central part of San Antonio toward the immediate north (PUMA 5904, 16.5), immediate west (PUMA 5905, 14.7%), and further eastern section (PUMA 5913, 15.3%).

**Figure 11.** Percentage of Persons 16 to 24 Years of Age in Bexar County Who are Opportunity Youth by Public Use Microdata Area (PUMA), 2013-2017

While the PUMAs are too large to discern variations in the prevalence of opportunity youth around San Antonio and Bexar County, data for solely the 16 to 19 age group are available by zip codes (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Figure 12 shows the zip codes ranked by categories for the percentage of their residents 16 to 19 years of age who are opportunity youth. With greater detail, the map demonstrates that the zip codes with the highest levels of opportunity youth are toward the central, southeastern, southwestern, and southern parts of San Antonio. The nine zip codes with percentage of opportunity youth exceeding 15% are located to the eastern (78203, 78219, and 78220), southeastern (78101 and 78263), southwestern (78073 and 78252), and southern (78221 and 78235) portions of San Antonio.
Figure 12. Percentage of Persons 16 to 19 Years of Age in Bexar County Who are Opportunity Youth by Zip Code, 2013-2017

Comparison of the Opportunity Youth Population and Non-Opportunity Youth Populations

The analysis in the previous section demonstrated that there are certain predictors of being an opportunity youth. Several predictor attributes include race/ethnic membership, gender, nativity status, level of English fluency, disability status, socioeconomic status, and geographic area of residence. The analysis conducted in this section illustrates how certain characteristics disproportionately impact opportunity youth compared to non-opportunity youth (other youth). All persons 16 to 24 years of age are the focus of this part of the analysis. The results presented below will help us better identify Bexar County’s opportunity youth and their needs.

Demographic Characteristics. Latinos have a higher prevalence of being opportunity youth compared to persons from other racial/ethnic groups. Although Latinos comprise 72% of all opportunity youth 16 to 24 years of age in Bexar County, they account for only 63% of other youth 16 to 24 years of age (Figure 13). All other racial/ethnic groups have lower representation among opportunity youth than among other youth.
Foreign-born persons and those with limited or no fluency in English tend to be more likely to be opportunity youth than their respective counterparts. These two groups tend to be overrepresented among opportunity youth compared to other youth. For example, foreign-born born account for 12.4% of opportunity youth, but only 7.9% of other youth; persons with limited or no fluency in English account for 4.9% of opportunity youth, but only 1.8% of other youths. Nonetheless, the overwhelming majority of opportunity youth are U.S.-born (87.6%) and fluent in English (95.1%).

Overall, women are disproportionately overrepresented among opportunity youth 16 to 24 years of age. Indeed, while young women make up 52.0% of opportunity youth, they constitute only 47.8% of other youth (Figure 14). In contrast, males are underrepresented in the opportunity youth category (48.0%) compared to the non-opportunity youth grouping (52.2%). Nonetheless, among persons 16 to 19 years of age, males represent the majority (53.9%) of opportunity youth compared to females (46.1%); on the other hand, among opportunity youth 20 to 24 years of age, there are more females (53.9%) than males (46.1%).

**Living Arrangements.** In general, the living arrangements of opportunity youth do not differ greatly from those of other youth. For example, approximately 58% of opportunity youth and nearly 60% of other youth 16 to 24 years of age live in the home of a parent or parent-in-law (Figure 15). In addition, 16% of opportunity youth and close to 14% of other youth are living in a home where they are the household head or spouse.

However, there are some differences in three types of living arrangements in which: 1) opportunity youth (5.7%) are somewhat less likely to be living as a partner, friend, or visitor of the household head than are other youth (7.5%); 2) opportunity youth (5.5%) are less likely to be living in other types of living arrangements with non-relatives compared to other youth (9.5%); and 3) opportunity youth (7.4%) are somewhat more likely to be living with a grandparent than are other youth (4.9%). Yet, of significance, 2.5% of opportunity youth are living as institutional inmates compared to only 0.2% of other youth.

Opportunity youth 16 to 24 years of age additionally are almost twice as likely as other youth to live as part of a subfamily in someone else’s household (26.8% versus 13.9% of other youth) and to live in a household with three or more generations of family members (24.3% versus 12.8%).

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**Figure 13.** Percentage Distribution of Persons 16 to 24 Years of Age in Bexar County by Race/Ethnic Group for Opportunity Youth and Other Youth, 2013-2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Opportunity Youth</th>
<th>Other Youth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Latina/o</td>
<td>71.9%</td>
<td>63.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Pacific Islander</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates Public Use Files (Ruggles et al., 2019).
Figure 14. Percentage Distribution of Persons 16 to 24 of Age in Bexar County by Gender for Opportunity Youth and Other Youth, 2013-2017

Source: 2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates Public Use Files (Ruggles et al., 2019).
These data suggest that opportunity youth have unstable living arrangements. Unfortunately, the data do not allow for the identification of specific opportunity youth who are homeless including “couch surfing” with friends and relatives. The ACS questionnaire merely asks respondents with whom they live, but not why they live in such living arrangements.

**Marriage and Children.** Opportunity youth also differ significantly from other youth with respect to marital status and presence of children. For example, 16.4% of opportunity youth are currently married compared to 6.1% of other youth (Figure 16). In addition, opportunity youth are also more likely to have their own children living in their household (22.5% versus 6.7% of other youth). Furthermore, among young women, opportunity youth (21.8%) are more likely to have given birth within the prior year compared to other youth (3.8%). In part, because opportunity youth are somewhat older (96% are 18 or over) than other youth (76% are 18 or over), it is expected that to some degree they would be more likely to be married and to be parents.
Nonetheless, once age is taken into account, it is evident that opportunity youth take on the spouse and parental role younger than do other youth. For example, among persons 16 to 19 years of age, opportunity youth are more likely to be married (7.1% versus 1.5% of other youth), to have their own children living in the household (9.9% versus 1.6%), and for young women to have given birth within the last year (17.8% versus 1.9%). Note that nearly one-fifth of opportunity youth young women 16 to 19 years of age had a baby within the previous year.

Older opportunity youth in the 20-24 age group are also more likely to have the status of spouse and parent than their same-age counterparts who are not opportunity youth. In this case, approximately one-fifth of opportunity youth are married, 27% have their own children living with them, and 23% of women 20-24 years of age gave birth within the previous year compared to 10%, 11%, and 5% of other youth, respectively.

However, there are major gender differences among opportunity youth with respect to being married and having children in the household. For example, among opportunity youth 20-24 years of age, 29% of young women are married compared to only 8% of young men. Similarly, 45% of young women are living with their own children compared to 6% of men. Undoubtedly, the mother role is likely to account for the increasing probability of young women becoming opportunity youth at age 20-24 compared to 16-19 (see above), exacerbated by the absence of affordable daycare and many being single parents with limited resources.

**Socioeconomic Characteristics.** Opportunity youth are consistently disadvantaged along socioeconomic lines relative to other youth. We first compare opportunity youth and other youth on educational attainment and focus exclusively on persons 20 to 24 years of age to more directly control for age differences between opportunity youth and other youth. Overall, four-fifths (80.1%) of opportunity youth are high school graduates, a higher percentage than commonly anticipated (Figure 17). Nonetheless, non-opportunity youth (93.7%) are much more likely be high school graduates compared to opportunity youth.

![Figure 17. Percentage Distribution of Persons 20 to 24 Years of Age in Bexar County by Level of Education for Opportunity Youth and Other Youth, 2013-2017](image)

Among opportunity youth 20-24, 47.0% completed a regular high school diploma, 70% earned a GED or equivalent credential, and 26.1% have at least attended college. Among non-opportunity youth, two-thirds have at a minimum attended college.

Opportunity youth by definition are not employed with 28% of those 16 to 24 years of age classified as unemployed (i.e., they are part of the civilian labor force and are actively seeking employment) while 72% are not part of the civilian labor force (i.e., they are not looking for work) (Figure 18). In contrast, non-opportunity youth 16 to 24 years of age are strongly tied to the labor force with 60% holding a job and 4% looking for one.
Furthermore, opportunity youth 16 to 24 years of age are twice as likely compared to other youth to be in poverty (38.6% versus 19.5% of other youth) and to lack health insurance (42.3% versus 20.0%) (Figure 18).

**Digital Access and Automobile Availability.** Opportunity youth are more likely than other youth to live in households that lack digital access. Approximately 35% of opportunity youth 16 to 24 years of age live in households without a computer compared to about 16% of other youth (Figure 19). Moreover, 24.4% of opportunity youth do not have internet access compared to 10.4% of other youth. In addition, 47% of opportunity youth live in households that lack high-speed broadband access compared to 30% of other youth.

Opportunity youth 16 to 24 years of age (13.5%) are also somewhat more likely than other youth (9.7%) to live in households without an automobile.

**Figure 18.** Percentage of Persons 16 to 24 Years of Age in Bexar County in Selected Socioeconomic Categories for Opportunity Youth and Other Youth, 2013-2017

![Figure 18](image)

Source: 2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates Public Use Files (Ruggles et al., 2019).

**Figure 19.** Percentage of Persons 16 to 24 Years of Age in Bexar County Living in Households Without Three Types of Digital Access for Opportunity Youth and Other Youth, 2013-2017

![Figure 19](image)

Source: 2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates Public Use Files (Ruggles et al., 2017).
**Geographic Patterns.** Finally, opportunity youth are disproportionately represented in certain parts of Bexar County based on the U.S. Census Bureau Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMAs). The analysis examines the percentage distribution of opportunity youth and other youth across the 16 PUMAs in the county. From this information, we obtain the ratio of the percentage of opportunity youth in a given PUMA relative to the percentage of other youth in a given PUMA. In four PUMAs, there are more than 1.5 opportunity youth to every one other youth based on each group's percentage distribution across the 16 PUMAs. As Figure 20 shows, these four include the 5901, 5903, 5906, and 5907 PUMAs, located in the central, southeastern, southwestern, and southern sections of San Antonio. In fact, these four PUMAs also had the highest prevalence of opportunity youth (see Figure 11). Opportunity youth are also moderately overrepresented in the 5904, 5905, and 5913 PUMAs.

**Figure 20.** Ratio of Percentage Distribution of Opportunity Youth to Other Youth 16 to 24 Years of Age in Bexar County by Public Use Microdata Area (PUMA), 2013-2017

This section of the report has provided a portrait of opportunity youth in Bexar County. The analysis allows us to develop the “big picture” of the magnitude and description of opportunity youth in the city. The ACS data, however, do not allow us to obtain granular details of opportunity youth and the lives that they lead—especially how they became disconnected from education and the workforce and their experiences living this life. Put simply, the ACS data do not allow us to hear the voices of opportunity youth in Bexar County. To this end, we interview opportunity youth to hear the details specifically from them.
In the next section we present the major themes that emerged from the interviews conducted with 16 18- to 24-year old young adults in San Antonio. All the interviews were done in San Antonio, where the highest rates of opportunity youth occurred. The majority of the opportunity youth interviewed identified as “Hispanic” or “Latino” (13 of 16 participants) and half identified as male. In line with the demographic findings from the ACS data, most of the opportunity youth interviewed completed twelfth grade (12 of 16 participants), two had completed less than 12th grade and two had some college. The findings provide a deeper understanding of opportunity youth experiences that complicate employment and/or school enrollment. The analysis will focus on barriers to school and employment and on factors that support opportunity youth.

Barriers to School and Employment

School and Academic Disruption(s). Opportunity youth experienced various academic disruptions in their secondary and postsecondary educational experiences. As expected, the interviews revealed that opportunity youth have a greater likelihood of experiencing negative school experiences (Waters & Harris, 2009; Welch & Payne, 2010). After Hector’s parents divorced during his senior year of high school, his newly divorced mother was forced to bear the weight of costs associated with sustaining a home in a rural central Texas community, the day-to-day living, and having a child in high school. After a troubling discussion between he and his mother, they decided to enroll Hector in an education and career training program where he would be able to live, eat, sleep, and learn. Though he was able to earn his General Education Development (GED) certificate, the credential did not help him gain employment:

At the time [after earning GED] I applied to a bunch of places and really nobody wanted to interview me. The ones [employers] that did talk to me, they just said that the certifications people get most companies don’t take— they sort of look down on certifications from [training program] specifically because I think they just had a bad name in general.

Carlos describes how tussles with unsupportive family, economic insecurities, and homelessness suppressed his aspirations for attending college.

I was looking to join a welding [program] soon after high school. But the situation at home made me homeless. I had to focus more on the rent, where am I going to sleep, and where am I going to eat? So that made me take a step back from going to college.

His mother “throwing him in the streets” resulted in financial instability which rendered his only mode of transportation to a bicycle and forced him to find a place to sleep at night. These circumstances placed limitations on securing stable, nearby employment, and on his aspiration to pursue trade school. When asked if he had access to support systems to assist him with his career goal, the participant responded—

Well, the more education you have, the better pay you’ll get. That’s the truth. And I was really looking to be a welder because like I said, I like hard work. I don’t mind being in the sun, and they pay good.... but to get started on those steps, how do I even start? In high school they told us, ‘Hey, go to college. This is what you got to do.’ It’s just, like I said, that being homeless, it put me in a different environment.

Carlos states— “shelter is my main concern... but my friend[s] help me out... because everybody’s going through struggle on this side of town.” Carlos currently pays $100 a week to sleep on the floor of a friend’s house with eight other individuals.
For participants who did venture to pursue a post-secondary education, some common negative higher education experiences involved the daunting task of understanding the college-going processes, the impact non-academic barriers had on academic success and retention, conflicting thoughts on the worth of a higher education credential, and enduring the burden of expenses and accumulated debt associated with earning a post-secondary credential.

Karla shared how despite familial adversities (i.e., parent divorce, single parenthood), she was admitted to universities throughout the state of Texas, including her dream school in Austin – all while she attended an early-college high school. Her pathway toward becoming a nurse became more challenging after receiving a financial aid package that did not adequately cover the costs of her dream school. Despite earning 21 hours of dual-enrollment college credit while in high school, she found a more affordable route of first attending a local community college to earn an associate’s degree before transferring to a major university to complete her nursing degree. However, that route has led to hardships that have created a negative school experience. She describes the effects of her parents’ divorce on her journey—

My dad and my mom got divorced, so my dad moved back to El Paso, and my mom raised me in Oklahoma. Then in fourth grade, we went back [to El Paso] and... I just went back and forth a lot... in seventh grade... we came over here [San Antonio].

Karla’s story details how certain life, employment, and negative higher education experiences drove her to make certain decisions that made continuing a college degree tremendously difficult.

I applied for a bunch of schools... I applied to my first choice ... and got in... they offered me like $8,500 to go, but the tuition was still really expensive; I still would have to pay them $17,000 a year. I got into [several universities]. I was going to go to [one of them], but I ended up just staying here [San Antonio] because I've already had like 21 hours. So I said 'might as well just finish off my associate's [degree], and then I'll transfer to it for a [four-] year [degree].'

After high school graduation Karla continued her pre-nursing degree at a local community college but quickly unenrolled. Out-of-pocket costs for an education, the struggle of securing a job as an 18-year-old high school graduate with no prior work experience, and having to work multiple low-wage jobs to help pay her bills and support her mother and two younger sisters ultimately made it difficult to return to school. Karla explained—

Then school started, and I wasn’t getting hours [at a downtown job]. Nobody was coming because it was downtown. So I ended up going back to [a fast food restaurant] but... I quit in January. the only reason I went [to work at a fast food restaurant] is because I couldn’t find a job anywhere else that would take me because— at some places, you needed experience. I was like, 'Well, I don’t have experience, but I need experience for job, but no one will hire me to give me experience.' That was just kind of the struggle at first. And then it was just hard finding something that I actually wanted to do.

When asked to offer insight on what is keeping her from returning to college, she replied—

I guess just money, honestly. I know what I want to do, [and] I do want to go to a four-year [university] and get my bachelor's and be a registered nurse. It's just a lot [of] money that I don't have... So it's just like I have to find a... good[-paying] job during my [school] hours that pays at least enough for my bills... without going into debt...

Sebastian’s story illustrates the complexities of financing a post-secondary education, navigating difficulties in college-going processes, experiencing the college environment alone, and perceived attitudes of indifference by higher education professionals.

I wish somebody would have helped me with [financing my education]. Maybe step by step showed me to go through that process because that shit was confusing. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to cuss. That was confusing when I went to St. Phillips and I had to do it on my own. They even have a financial-aid office, but nobody could seem to still help me... nobody's supposed to hold your hand the whole time, but I feel like sometimes you kind of
need that. Somebody to keep you engaged. I wish somebody would have, I don’t know, maybe it would have helped... because I don’t even know where I’m at. So I wish I had help.

Another participant shared similar difficulties financing his postsecondary education and the need to have someone guide him through the process:

I actually got a $500 scholarship to go to St. Phillips, but $500 is like nothing. And I didn’t really know about financial aid, and I don’t know. I feel like nobody could help me with that even though when I did go ask financial aid. So once that money ran out I just was like, ‘Yeah...’ I got what I got out of it and I never went back...

Additionally, ten of 16 opportunity youth experienced some aspect of school mobility in their K-12 schooling experience. One participant attended two public elementary schools, one private elementary school, and one middle school, and various high schools—

I went to Warren [High School], but I only completed like half of the ninth grade... I forgot I went to Positive Solutions, the charter... and then I dropped out [when I was] still in the ninth grade... and then [I went to] John Jay for high school... then finished and got my diploma at Northside Excel Academy.

When asked the reason for changing high schools, one participant shared that “… [we] moved houses and they [then separated parents] made me.” The participant further explains that the movement was largely due to moving where housing was more affordable for a single-parent mother.

Limitations to Occupational Accessibility. The participants shared their struggles and difficulties, as well as negative or unfavorable characteristics attached to their experiences trying to achieve gainful employment or pursue an educational pathway. One participant shared that at the age of 16, he began working as a busser at a local restaurant. After almost a year of commitment to the restaurant, he requested to be trained as a server. Several months after management told him to "keep doing what you’re doing," he left the busser position and committed to another company with more opportunities for higher wages and new experiences. He exclaimed, "I was just doing the same thing for a year [as a busser], and I didn’t like it.”

Lack of work experience was a salient barrier to securing stable employment for some participants, often creating a catch-22 in which opportunity youth could not gain the needed experience if they were not given the chance to gain such experience in the first place. When asked to share a bit more about his experience looking for work and any challenges he faced, he replied—

Most jobs nowadays is all about experience, experience, experience... and it happens at entry-level jobs too. You see it everywhere on these [web]sites. It says 'Entry-level position for hire — sign up immediately.' But then you scroll down [to read].... 'Requires one year experience.' But because the [application] process is online, they look at a guy with 10 years of experience and are more likely to hire them rather than one that would be perfect for the job. They don't even give the chance to interview him because of the lack of experience.

Another participant stated, "they obviously are going to want people with experience... I don't have much experience... or anything like that. So I think trying to get a job would be maybe more difficult." One participant acknowledged the difficulty with securing employment “because I don’t have any education, I don’t have my GED, and I only have one job experience... they [prospective employers] don’t like that on my resume.”

Additionally, economic vulnerability leads to additional barriers. A participant explained how the lack of economic security prevented her from achieving some of the goals she set—

I feel like money would probably be a big issue because of my lack of a job. And my family isn’t very wealthy. We’re just sort of there. I did apply for a FAFSA during my senior year [of high school], and I did get the full $6,000 [Pell Grant]. But I have to wait until I enroll to get any of it, so.

Her statement rings true of many students who come from economically vulnerable backgrounds. The participant disclosed that she was eligible to receive “the full $6,000” but has not received such funding as she did not enroll in her intended college. Another participant described how his college aspirations and educational pursuits were placed on hold so that he could help provide for his parents. He explains—
My parents say, ‘Don’t worry about it, just get your facts set. You don’t have to worry about it.’ But I mean, I still worry about it because my parents—I don’t know... They think they got everything under control, but that’s a lot of money that I know they don’t have, so it does worry me. So I’m going to try to take the cheapest route possible. If that means graduating a little late, then that’s the case.

**Geographical Limitations.** Some of the most salient barriers identified by the participants related to geographical and transportation challenges. After sharing that working with his hands is his most preferred type of work, one participant expressed a concern regarding the availability of warehouse jobs close to where they live. The participant claimed that higher-paying warehouse jobs are abundantly available in the northern side of San Antonio —

...the northside [of the city] there’s a warehouse everywhere... and they pay you over $10 an hour... and the trouble with that is that you have to be there [the warehouse] at 6:00 in the morning... but I would have to wake up at 4:00 in the morning to catch the bus and hope it gets there [the warehouse] on time.

Another participant expressed frustrations that the common restaurant jobs in the geographical area where they live did not pay as highly as restaurants downtown. They claimed, ”...restaurants around here, or just normal restaurants... are not going to pay that much.”

**Transportation.** Most participants interviewed had limited access to personal modes of transportation and utilized public transit. An instance of using an increasingly popular peer-to-peer ridesharing application proved to be too costly for regular use. When having trouble securing regular rides to his place of employment, one participant shared they used a ride sharing service but it ultimately meant they ”...wasted so much money on [ride sharing services].”

The most commonly used public transportation service in San Antonio— the VIA Metropolitan Transit bus service— also presented unique challenges. The most prominent challenges in using San Antonio’s bus service included long commute times to get to their job, their school, or to the interview site of the present study. One participant shared that the trek to arrive at our study’s interview location involved multiple bus rides, wait times at bus transfer points, and an overall hour-and-a-half commute. The disclosure of experiences with unfavorable commute time while using the public bus system could indicate that participants are having to travel unusually long distances to get where they need to go; participants are enduring exceptionally long commute times daily; and unfeasible time and distance conditions associated with using the city’s dominant public transportation system to secure and maintain meaningful employment/educational opportunities.
For participants mentioning they have or had access to a personal mode of transportation, specifically a motor vehicle, barriers regarding maintenance of the vehicle and/or other associated experiences with having a personal vehicle became challenging feats. For instance, one participant commuted daily to the city’s downtown area for a job opportunity. The participant found that ballooned fees associated with public street/garage parking became a financial hardship.

Another participant disclosed difficulties with maintaining his vehicle. He described the difficulties associated with placing his only “car in the shop” when it breaks down. One participant expressed frustration, “…especially when you don’t have transportation, well, it makes it difficult to get to your job and maintain that job.”

Another participant shared that without personal transportation, “it’s just way too far to where I’m at to go to the interview.” In this instance, the participant described having to turn down a job interview because of difficulties securing transportation. In another example, having unreliable or difficulties with personal modes of transportation prevented a participant from returning to her high school of origin after moving to another part of the city.

Domestic Responsibilities and/or Hardships. Another salient barrier involved domestic responsibilities and/or hardships in the lives of the participants. These domestic responsibilities (i.e., caring for a family member, child, or other type of family) or hardships in their home or living environment created barriers to securing meaningful work and postsecondary education opportunities.

The majority of participants experienced instances specific to divorce or separation of their parents, or complete absence of their biological parents due to various reasons (i.e., parents are deceased, participant was in foster care, etc.). A participant spent time in the state foster care system, adopted at a young age, raised by his foster parents and “left on the streets” at nineteen. The 19-year old participant describes his experience as difficult as he said—

...ever since then [9 to 10 months ago]... my challenge right now is just being able to say ‘I’m okay...’ especially when you don’t have a stable place to lay your head at night, you don’t have a place where you can shower and be clean for the next day.

For participants who experienced the divorce, separation, or absence of their biological parents, we found similar barriers. One participant shares his experiences of growing up in San Antonio's westside without a mother —

I grew up without a mom. It was mostly my dad supporting all four of my brothers... Growing up my dad was always at work... We had no supervision, so we were pretty much on the streets... doing our own thing and then come home whenever we wanted to...

Later, the participant described how this kind of experience led to his exposure to substance use or "drugs and stuff like that" which ultimately acted as a gateway to marijuana use and other unlawful experiences.

There are clear connections between enduring strained and/or non-existent parent(s)/guardian(s) relationship(s) and adulthood hardships in the lives of the participants. After describing a complicated history of his mother and family, one participant shared an experience of his first real job as a seasonal worker for a local politician's election campaign. Given the nature of this kind of temporary work, the participant opened with an honest moment describing the joy of his work, how that job positively impacted him, and sadness after being let go. However, the conversation shifts to describe how the relational dynamics between him and his mother grew rigid —

I loved my job! Every thought, I would be like, 'This guy wants to decriminalize marijuana... there are so many advantages to that.' I turned into a different man out there [as a temporary worker]. What happened when I got home [after being let go], my mom was like, ‘Wow, you’re not making no money right now — so you can’t stay here.’ I look back, [I was in a] totally different situation to where I am now...

Some participants reported a direct connection to certain domestic responsibilities and difficulties sustaining a job and/or maintaining educational pursuits. In this particular experience, the participant had the crucial responsibility of having to care for his younger brother after school hours throughout the evening due to long work shifts of his mother and grandmother —
I quit [my previous job] so I could help my mom with my brother. I have to watch my brother after he gets out of school when my mom's working 12-hour shifts. My grandma works pretty late too, and she works at a high school. So she works 6 in the morning to 9 in the evening.

A participant directly relates her urgent responsibility to care for a family member, particularly the care of her own child, to her difficulties finding and securing a job. She further describes the underlying costs of working and the endeavor of finding adequate funding for stable childcare —

I got pregnant when I was in the ninth grade... the pregnancy was great but for myself it was negative because... I dropped out as soon as I found out I was pregnant. [For five years] I was working [at a restaurant owned by the father of my child's father] and tried to go back to school... the father of my kid had dropped out also. We found this school... like a charter school that I could go to half-day and work the other half... It was just really hard for me... to focus on school. It was hard to get my kids in daycare so that's another reason I dropped out, because you have to pay — or when I wasn't working, I had to pay for daycare.

**Homelessness.** Homelessness was a prevailing trend amongst the lived experiences of young adults interviewed. Due to the prevalence of homelessness among opportunity youth interviewed, several experiences are highlighted to establish a deeper understanding of how homelessness impacts the lives of participants and how it creates an almost insurmountable barrier to securing meaningful employment and school enrollment.

Several participants described experiences of living in "doubled-up" housing arrangements where more than one family live in a house or apartment. One participant disclosed that he lived in a home with his mother, his siblings, and his grandparents. The living situations of other participants were a little more complex. For instance, one participant shared that he lives with his grandmother who is enduring chemotherapy, his siblings, his cousin, and his great-grandmother. Another participant revealed that prior to living with his current arrangement of sleeping on his friend's floor, he slept in an abandoned vehicle behind another friend's house.

In other instances, participants talked about living in shelters and/or group homes that created difficult barriers further complicating employment opportunities and pursuing an education. One participant described living in a public shelter as difficult when he states, "It's more pressure. Sometimes the shelter, they have a time limit, a time frame, [when] you feel pressured to find something [a job] you can keep. So, it's a little stressful..." He shared how these challenges become even more complex given his age and seemingly artificial life advice of those assisting him—

I was homeless before. Because of that, the job I had paid $8 an hour. The shelter [I stayed at] just told me, 'Save your money, get an apartment. You just stick with that job.' I feel like I need [something] more than that [advice]. Sometimes when you're young, you don't know what to do, and it's overwhelming. And then they just say, 'Do this. Just apply to this.' It's easier said—not as easy as it sounds.

Another young adult found living in a group home places limitations on the kind of job opportunities he can find due to mandatory house appointments and strict evening curfews. However, despite those limitations, the participant expressed sentiments of gratitude and humility as he states, "I was homeless and they helped me get a good place to go... and so they made sure I was safe and not in danger."

For participants who are not doubled-up, living in group homes, or staying in local shelters, the effects and vulnerabilities attached to their homelessness become even more pervasive as employment and educational aspirations become further out of reach.

I really don't like living in the streets. I literally take a shower with a water hose... I could get in trouble for that. People [will] call the cops real quick... I don't mind carrying a backpack around...but I'm also carrying a plastic bag. The backpack I have is just too small... I've got to go buy a better one where I can put more stuff in.

I see a lot of people--you go downtown, right by that McDonalds by Houston street. You see all these people just thrown in the street... I see them and I see myself. I am in the same position. But I don't want to end up like them, just be thrown in the street...
**Digital Connectivity.** Understanding the importance of digital resource accessibility through the experiences of the participants is of particular importance considering the significant role technology plays in every social, familial, professional, and educational landscape of the current digital age. Stories from opportunity youth add depth to our understanding of how technology and digital connectivity play in their day-to-day lives, particularly on the trek of finding meaningful employment.

Most participants disclosed having access to some type of mobile phone and using it as a primary method to find job opportunities, communicate, find resources, and in some cases engage in alternative academic or practical self-edification. Regardless of benefits associated with possessing a mobile phone, our participants shared that having such access to this kind of technology does not necessarily make gainful employment easier or manageable. A few participants found mobile phone service affordability to be a major barrier that disrupts job security. For instance, one participant states an outcome of not having mobile phone service conflicted with employer and company policy—

> ...they have a policy where we do a no call, no show, which is you don't come in, but you don't tell them why... then do that more than twice, they have to let you go. And at the time, my phone was off. And the person I was staying with promised me they’d take me to work, but they ended up not holding true to their promise.

Consequently, the participant later shared that his employment was terminated due to an emergency where his most reliable mode of transportation failed to get him to work. Needless to say, the participant did not have access to a telephone landline or other alternative digital communication resource where he was living that he needed to communicate his transportation emergency to his employer.

Another instance where digital connectivity proved to be problematic for our participants involves the job search, application, and follow-up processes. Many participants experienced instances where the idea of time and minimal human connection created were disadvantageous to their employment pursuits. For example, one participant felt that applying for a job online “takes longer than it should,” or "applying for lots of places and waiting for them to get back to you" were issues they experienced while job searching. Another participant stated, "people don’t get back to you, so you’re there waiting for weeks when you could have been applying for somewhere else."
Other participants felt that not having a face-to-face interview after submitting an online job application created barriers to their employability. For instance, a participant felt without an opportunity to share particular characteristics regarding his work ethic or capabilities during a face-to-face interview, he anticipates a continued struggle with securing employment. He states, "I need to find [an employer] who is willing to help me out, who's willing to give me a chance." Similarly, one participant’s narrative evoked an implied distaste of web-based job applications as they systematically dismiss certain personality strengths that cannot be gauged by a prospective employer without face-to-face interaction—

It kind of sets a... precedent in your [employers] mind like, 'Oh, they're homeless.' They already have an idea of how you're going to be. And because there's no face-to-face interview they never get to see how you really are... The reason why I apply online and then show up in person is so they get to put a face... to the application. They get to see, 'Oh, hey, he actually showed up. Even though he didn't have to, he showed up. This is personality. This is goals. This is what he's good at. Maybe we should probably hire him,' when they weren't considering it beforehand. You miss out on that personal interaction... to see this guy's personality is perfect for the job—they're not the most experienced but they're willing to adapt, they're willing to learn, and that's a lot of what you miss out on is that human interaction.

Exposure to Justice System. Many participants had direct or indirect encounters with the justice system that had or has some kind of influence on securing employment or following their educational aspirations. Most striking, most participants’ stories identify the salience family influence (or the absence of) has had on the occurrence and magnitude of justice system interactions.

After sharing how he was subjected to certain brushes with the justice system during adolescence, one participant disclosed how finding a job as an adult with "a record" an often complicated, daunting, and exhausting feat—

And growing up right there in my aunt’s, her sons were on drugs, were all addicted on drugs and stuff like that... [We] were 11, 12, 13 years old... seeing my aunt’s sons hooked up on drugs and seeing them shoot up and all that stuff... we just grew up around that environment. And I guess that kind of affected us. It affected us when we grew up because we started smoking marijuana, getting in trouble with the law, arrested and stuff like that.

I need somebody who's willing to try me out, give me a chance. I mean, people could judge people because, 'Oh, I'm not going to hire him because he has a background' [...] I don't want to hire somebody like that,' you know what I mean? Yeah, he did mistakes and stuff like that, but-- I need a chance. That's really what I'm asking for.

Another participant described her difficult time developing a relationship with her mother as a child and how that troubling relationship resulted in her run-ins with the justice system in her teenage and early adulthood years—

I've kind of [really?] dealt with the law since I was 12. And now since I'm 18 [and] I'm dealing with it again. Me and my mother don't have that healthy relationship that a mother and daughter should have. So that kind of gets in the way of me doing things with my life. From the age of 12 and on to 17, I was in juvie [because of] what happens between me and mom, when we get into those arguments. The longest she left me in there was for 30 days.

One participant mentioned a time being unsuccessful at securing a stable fast food job because the restaurants around him were oversaturated with employees still in high school. The only other stable job he could find near him was working in a warehouse. However, he described his concern with perceived safety at the warehouse describing that "being in that environment is that you're going to get in trouble because somebody's going to pick a fight" as there was "a bunch of people straight out of prison."

These final two perceptions describing how certain exposures to the justice system can negatively impact one's employability and school eligibility. One participant said, "Once they [participant's friends] have some type of altercation with the law or— I don't think they see that school is an option for them or anything else is an option other than maybe work a 5:00 to 9:00 job for the rest of their life." After successfully securing a job, one participant shared that her boss told her, "your background check came in and you can't work here anymore," thus terminating her employment. After prompted to reflect on that experience, she responds—
I kind of got down because most of my jobs I'm learning to do was in the medical field, and as soon as I had picked up a theft charge when I was like 18, it [my medical field career aspiration] was over. I knew I wasn't going to be able to get it [job in the medical field]... I am pretty much stuck with food service and stuff.

Factors that Support Opportunity Youth

Importantly, we also found instances where participants shared an experience, aspect, or perspective that they found to be favorable or positive in their employment and/or educational pursuits, including social capital, involvement in community service and extracurriculars, resilience and community resources.

Meaningful Forms of Social Capital. There were several instances where certain people (i.e., family, friends, educators, etc.) along the life paths of our participants had some kind of positive influence on employment and/or educational outcomes. The following excerpts capture the depth of how relationships – with parents, friends, and school staff – can create positive employment and/or educational participant experiences.

Despite having to contend with life adversities, the parent(s) of some participants offered assistance within their means. One participant says, “My mom helps me out a lot.” When asked in what ways, he replied, “...to do better, to do the right thing.” Another example of parents acting as resources within their means, yet in a more tangible manner, can be seen when a participant shared that as he continues his job search he will not have to worry whether his clothes and small belongings would be safe. He states, “right now all my clothes are in the trunk of my mom’s car.”

Friendships, as a form of social capital, also generated positive opportunities for participants. For example, a couple participants mentioned having secured a new job— “I started working at [the restaurant] because my friend got work there too as a busboy, and he got me a job there.” Another participant knew of a local landscape business owner through a friendship network who hired the participant in the past for day-labor work opportunities. One participant received assistance from a friend in the development of a resume.

Participants identified teachers, counselors, coaches, and college advisors who fostered positive relationships with participants. One excerpt describes a participant’s experiences with a history teacher and how the positive relationship inspired the participant to enjoy learning about history—

My social studies teacher, Mr. P... was a great teacher. I think that’s why I liked history for a while. He could really explain, and then when he knew that the class wasn’t understanding a part— for example, we always had to memorize our dates for history - he would really take his time to help us figure it out. So I think just seeing him really try was kind of inspiring.

The following excerpt offers insight on the influential role a college advisor played in the life of a college-bound participant while she was in high school—

My career prep teacher Mr. Salinas—Mr. Salinas was good. He always did try to help you whenever— I had him in senior year. That’s how I got into school [college] early. And he was always asking me like, ‘What do you want to do at school?’ or like, ‘What do you want to do after high school?’ and always trying to help you, I guess. He was good, to me.

The Power of Community Service and Extracurricular Activities. Some participants shared how certain programs, extracurricular activities, and/or community service opportunities were valuable resources that meaningfully impacted their lives. One participant shared how community service opportunities helped him gain knowledge in areas he was not exposed to before when he states, "doing volunteer work helps me learn different things as well." Another described how the football team at his high school had an impact on his educational success—

Joining the football team [and] being in extracurricular activities such as football because coaches always gave me good advice. It kept me away from trouble... distracted me from trouble... and [were] positive role models... we were always trying to better ourselves.

Favorable Characteristics of the Job Market. Several participants identified the lack of opportunities with flexible work schedules as a barrier to finding meaningful employment. For instance, a participant shared his difficulties
finding a night job so that he can spend the daytime caring for his ill great-grandmother. He states, "I do want a night job... because then I'll know people will be at home to take care of my great-grandma, and I can go [to work]." When asked to share any barriers of trying to get a job, another participant said frankly, "Just them working with my schedule and being flexible."

Participants described looking for job opportunities near their home and being paid a livable wage. One participant shared that he is intentionally looking for a position at a clothing store simply because it has opportunities for afternoon work shifts and is near enough to his home so that his mother and grandmother could swap shifts caring for his younger brother. Another participant, who enjoys working with his hands and has reliable means for getting around town, shared his experiences with having to leave a warehouse job near his home to begin a warehouse job that paid more in another area of the city. He relates—

All the good jobs, to be honest with you, are on the north side. And like I said, over here, there's two warehouses that'll hire you like that. On the north side, there's a warehouse everywhere. They pay good. Like I said, the warehouse right there that I could just go back to, that's $9 and hour. On the north side, they pay you more than $10 an hour.

In another experience, a participant described how on one side of the coin a higher wage of $16 an hour at a local restaurant was good, but the flip side revealed that job came with minimum hours and false hope for advancement. This participant notes—

Because a lot of people, they'll stay at [a restaurant chain] because the pay is amazing. The pay is so good. It's like $16 an hour... But you get no hours and my manager was whack so he didn't give me good hours. I was only working two days a week. And that's why people stay. They get reeled in because it's like, 'Hey, it's $16 an hour. You only get up from there.' But in reality, you're just stuck.

**Reframing Adverse Family Experiences.** We found not all barriers associated with negative family experiences can be bad. For instance, one participant described what it feels like to let go of damaging relationships with certain family members—

You can get a lot more things done without your parents over your shoulder, people telling you, 'You can't do that. No, you can't do this. You'll never be able to do something in your life,' and from my experience, I've realized since I don't have my mother or my dad or any of my family in my ears saying that I can't do it [or] I'll never succeed in life, since they are no longer around, I've actually gone further in my life and I'm going to do a lot more without them.

Another participant expresses humble gratitude in his complex relationship with his single mother as she has begun to assist him after spending the beginning of his adulthood on his own. He explains—

My mother couldn't afford to keep me in high school so she took me out and sent me [to a job program out of San Antonio]. I finished my GED there... She [mom] didn't really help me much before... because I was living in my car for a while and had a roof over my head... but as soon as I got into a homeless shelter, my mom realized, 'Oh, maybe I need to help my son more than I have been.' I do thank her for that. She's been helping me a lot more than I could ask for.

**Experiences with Community Support Systems.** Several participants found that certain community support systems and community actors helped minimize food and clothing insecurities, public transportation affordability, and mental/emotional wellness by offering participants certain common resources (i.e., public transportation passes, professional clothing for job interviews, and free to minimal costs of mental health services).

When prompted, a few participants offered several notable suggestions for what community support systems would be necessary to assist with employment and educational barriers they are facing. One participant believes the mentorships, life coaches, seminars, or other types of holistic case management and/or workshop programs would allow opportunities for individual employment and educational growth. In reference to his experiences with navigating confusing college-going processes and uncertainty regarding what procedures to follow to re-enroll in college, one participant states, "... but to get started on those steps, I'm like, 'How do I even start?'" Further, another
participant favored more availability of college access organizations around the city would benefit young adults going through similar experiences. He replied—

So when I was applying for college, it was kind of confusing and kind of difficult to find everything online and stuff. And I feel like people should be here working that understand every step and can explain it because when I was applying, it was pretty confusing. I feel like there should be more places like Cafe College to help people... I feel like Cafe College has been a really good help... So I feel like there should be more places like that, easily accessible and stuff, and not just in downtown.

Another participant elaborates how case management or workshop program models work best for him and his style of learning—

I wish they had stuff like that, that is how I always learn. It’s good when a person— I don’t know. That’s how I learn. A person that tells me, ‘This is how it is.’ Seminars and stuff like that.

Two other participants share other potential resources that would help address their immediate needs and eventually aid in securing stability in employment and education. A participant who is also a parent states, “Maybe like a daycare that would help you out with your kids while you go to school. Like you have to go to school.” Two other participants disclosed programs that offered housing opportunities that would benefit individuals enduring similar struggles. In the first example, a participant stated “more resources for a motel” could offer temporary relief of homelessness until he could get back on his feet. Another participant’s experiences with a temporary living facility offered support for such programming as he states, “I was homeless and they [a short-term living facility] helped me to get a good place to go— so they made sure I was safe and not in danger.”

Digital Resourcefulness and Aptitude. Despite these instances where technology and minimal accessibility to digital resources disrupted employment, we also found a particular sense of digital connectivity resourcefulness and digital aptitude among our participants. We found several instances where participants leveraged a unique sense of resourcefulness to reach certain employment or educational goals. For those participants without home internet access or internet service on their mobile phones, many utilized public access internet resources at nearby public facilities (i.e., Starbucks, a public library, a community center, etc.) to accomplish such employment and/or educational goals.

For participants with access to the internet and other digital resources, we note several incidences where participants’ digital aptitude proved to be a necessary asset to keep pace with the demands of a technologically dependent society. Participants use various internet-based platforms to find job opportunities that interest them. One participant reported the use of platforms like YouTube to self-educate on tips and tricks of a particular trade—

[…] I’ve been doing research on it [the job], taking notes. That’s just my way of learning. I got to take notes, look at videos on [popular video-sharing platform] to kind of get a head start. You know what I mean? That’s just my way of helping myself out to try to learn.

Other participants view technology in the new digital age as a best-fit way to further their education. A participant shared how pursuing a college education via an online degree program would best fit his aspirations for traveling the country as a truck driver and making “good money”—

I don’t plan on going to a on-campus [college]. I don’t plan on going to classes on campus. I plan on doing an online college and the biggest hurdle for me I think is... getting a trucking job but... doing college at the same time so I can knock both of them out... Cost-wise I don’t think it’s going to be much of an issue because the online course that I’m looking at it’s a fully accredited and it [online college] does not cost that much.
Implications and Recommendations

Most people believe that education is the great equalizer. Those same people often associate an education with a meaningful career that can help pave a path toward a promising future. We find that such futures may not be easily attainable for opportunity youth in Bexar County as it may be for others. Our findings offer insight of the lived realities of Bexar County’s opportunity youth, their struggles and life circumstances that prevent them from securing meaningful employment and pursuing their educational aspirations. The findings suggest that for most opportunity youth, these barriers are beyond their control. We offer preliminary recommendations that are informed by the participants of this study toward the next steps of establishing comprehensive intervention programs:

Invest in Public Transportation

Many of the youth interviewed identified challenges getting to their jobs, to job interviews, and to other opportunities across the city—in some cases noting commute times as long as an hour and a half. This gap in service is not unique to opportunity youth in San Antonio. A Kinder Institute (2016) report found similar challenges for youth in the Houston area. Without access to reliable means of transportation, opportunity youth cannot access or secure educational and occupational opportunities. Investing in public transportation so that it provides more frequent, reliable, and comprehensive routes would be a meaningful first step.

Adopt a Case Management Approach to Providing Services

Given the interrelated nature of the challenges faced by opportunity youth, a case management approach that serves as a form of "one-stop shop" with a referral system could better guide and serve these young adults. For example, issues like homelessness, difficulty navigating the postsecondary education landscape, and limited digital connectivity can be addressed through a comprehensive network of agencies housed within a single organizing entity like the NXT Level Youth Opportunity Center. The work of NXT Level Youth Opportunity Center has already been highlighted for offering comprehensive, continuous services to youth (Crockett, Perlmeter, & Doyle, 2019).

Expand Programming to Support Youth in Transitioning to Adulthood

Findings from our demographic profile and interviews with opportunity youth show that many are successfully completing high school, but having difficulty in transitioning into their postsecondary lives. Opportunity youth in our interviews indicated having trouble paying for college and navigating the financial aid and registration processes. Cafe College was identified as being one resource. Expanding Cafe College's outreach (either through added physical locations or virtual resources) could be a viable next step. Additionally, this seems like a good opportunity to collaborate with the many other local governmental and non-profit organizations that share a common mission of supporting youth.

Affordable Daycare

The demographic profile and interview clearly demonstrated the challenges that opportunity youth, particularly young women, face caring for their children. Among opportunity youth young women, close to one-fifth of those 16 to 19 years of age and nearly one-fourth of those 20 to 24 years give birth in a given year and they have children living with them. Given that most of these women are not married and have very limited resources, it is difficult to juggle a family, school, and work. The lack of affordable daycare makes it even more difficult for women to
pursue opportunities outside of the home. Recall also that young women outnumber young men as opportunity youth as they make the transition from the 16-19 to 20-24 age group. A comprehensive program that provides educational opportunities and job training alongside daycare would likely make it easier for young women as well as young men to juggle family, school, and work obligations.

Engage Local Stakeholders

Lastly, it is important to note that the findings from this report are just preliminary starting points. Meaningful solutions will stem from conversation with community members, including service providers, youth, counselors across the P-20 educational pipeline, and opportunity youth themselves. Community conversations in each city council district, and in partnership with Bexar County leadership, are key to ensuring that opportunity youth are heard and that the collective impact of the community is harnessed.

We hope that this report that developed a demographic and socioeconomic profile of opportunity youth and that captured their voices as they shared their experiences, challenges, and potential opportunities will help counselors, educators, workforce development specialists, policy makers, and business leaders develop strategies and programs for engaging opportunity youth. The San Antonio of the future that many of us envision cannot be realized when an important segment of our community members is living on the margins with little hope of upward mobility.
References


Kinder Institute for Urban Research (2016). Houston's opportunity youth: Reconnecting disengaged youth and young adults to strengthen Houston's economy. Houston, TX: Rice University.


Appendices

Appendix A: Detailed Description of Methodology

Overview of Data and Methodology for the Analysis of American Community Survey Data

We use data from the 2017 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates public use files obtained from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) at the University of Minnesota. The data are based on a 5% national sample of individuals living in the United States during the 2013 to 2017 period. These data set allow us to obtain a 5% sample of persons living in Bexar County between 2013 and 2017. The data set contains sample weights that allow researchers to use the sample data to obtain population estimates for a given area, such as Bexar County. Unfortunately, the ACS data set do not allow us to identify persons living specifically in the City of San Antonio.

The entire results of the analysis based on ACS data are based exclusively on Bexar County. Nonetheless, we did develop a rough estimate of the number of opportunity youth in the City of San Antonio by aggregating the opportunity youth in certain regions of Bexar County that approximate the boundaries of San Antonio, although there is not a direct correspondence. In particular, the ACS data divide Bexar County into 16 census Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMAs), which contain at least 100,000 inhabitants. We select 14 of these PUMAs to approximate the city of San Antonio and select respondents from the ACS living in the 14 PUMAs to represent an estimation of San Antonio residents. We estimate that the sample used to develop the rough estimate of opportunity youth in San Antonio is about 1.9% larger than the actual count of San Antonio residents as two of the 14 PUMAs contain a small number of persons living outside of San Antonio.

Participant Recruitment for the Interviews with Opportunity Youth

After identifying regions in Bexar County with high concentrations of opportunity youth, the researchers created a recruitment advertisement to be seen in the Snapchat application. Only individual Snapchat accounts with a self-reported age of 18 to 24 accessing the app in Bexar County were able to view the advertisement. The recruitment graphic was also shared via Facebook and Twitter to encourage snowball sampling. We engaged in traditional snowball sampling where recruitment for the study was shared via word of mouth and encouraging those who participated to share the study with others. To avoid the recruitment of individuals who did not meet the study criteria, we captured the demographics of each potential participant via an online Qualtrics survey immediately after each study participation inquiry. This method helped prescreen participants to ensure they met the characteristics of opportunity youth. If participants met the study criteria, they were invited to participate in a face-to-face interview or small focus group via social media platforms (e.g., direct message), phone (e.g. text message or phone call), and email at a time and place that was most convenient to the participant.

Data Collection related to Interviews with Opportunity Youth

A multiple case study methodology was appropriate for this study as it added a necessary depth and richness of understanding the lived experiences of opportunity youth within the context of the research foci (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). To gain an in-depth understanding of our quantitative analysis regarding the population of opportunity youth in San Antonio, the research team conducted a total of 16 interviews. The University of Texas at San Antonio’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) office approved the study recruitment and interview protocol. The researchers conducting the interviews practiced the use of probing techniques appropriately to elicit stronger participant elaboration when necessary. Dialogue between the participants and interviewers were
The lived experiences of San Antonio-Bexar County Opportunity Youth were captured using digital voice recorders. Once an audio file was collected, the researchers requested a transcript of the audio files from TranscribeMe (a transcription service) in preparation for qualitative analysis.

Sample of Interviews with Opportunity Youth

The sample consisted of 16 respondents, ranging from 18 to 24 years of age (M=20.63, s.d.= 2.26). Half of the interviewees identified as male, the other half identified as female. Thirteen of the 16 identified as Hispanic, two as non-Hispanic white, and one as biracial (Black/White). They came from 13 zip codes that encompassed the entire San Antonio area. The table below details the demographic characteristics (Table A) and the map illustrates the 13 zip codes from where the participants came (Figure A).

### Table A. Demographic Information for Focus Group Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Zip Code</th>
<th>Highest Educ. Attained</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>78237</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>78248</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>78204</td>
<td>some college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>78204</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>78213</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>78233</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>More 1+</td>
<td>78213</td>
<td>some college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>78221</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>78213</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>78245</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>White</td>
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<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Other</td>
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<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>M</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Native Hawaiian, PI</td>
<td>78216</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>white</td>
<td>78212</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Analysis Related to the Interviews with Opportunity Youth

The transcripts underwent rounds of deductive/inductive analyses by two researchers using the online Dedoose qualitative coding platform. During the first round of coding for each transcript, we performed a line-by-line, deductive comb through of raw transcript data using a pre-coding technique to identify a set of 7 pre-established sub-themes that were generated by identifying prominent characteristics of the Bexar County opportunity youth. The second round involved an inductive approach that resulted in the creation of emergent sub-themes (see Figure B). Additionally, during second-round coding, we found notable recurrences of excerpts that fell within the scope of particular categories (i.e., school experience, socioemotional experience, vicariously-lived experience, and job market experience) but needed child codes (i.e., positive/negative, favorable/unfavorable) to help discern and enrich contrasting characteristics of categories parent codes (Gibbs, 2007; Saldaña, 2016). The third round of coding clustered deductive/inductive sub-themes into larger salient patterns or major themes found within each of the participant narratives. The five major themes offer a broader understanding of implicit opportunity youth experiences. The graph below illustrates the codes, child codes, and definitions.
Figure 2. Codes, Child Codes, and Definitions. [This graph outlines the codes, and their definitions, used during the analysis of the interview transcripts and that led to the emergent themes of barriers impacting San Antonio’s opportunity youth.]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Themes</th>
<th>Sub-Theme (Categories or Parent Code)</th>
<th>Child Codes</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School and Academic Disruptions</td>
<td>English Fluency</td>
<td>Positive Experience</td>
<td>Refers to instances in which limited or no English fluency presented a barrier to acquiring a job or pursuing educational goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School Experience</td>
<td>Negative Experience</td>
<td>Refers to a participant’s positive and/or negative attitudes and experiences related to schools and/or teachers on their P20 education journey.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School Mobility</td>
<td></td>
<td>Refers to the frequency or instance(s) of movement between K12 schools and/or districts. Given the fact that the population under study are young adults and in some instances have unfinished P12 education experience, complete/incomplete postsecondary education experiences, or have postsecondary aspirations, we broaden the SM definition to include instances of where mobility was experienced in K12 and postsecondary education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupational Accessibility and Favourability Limitations</td>
<td>Economic Vulnerability</td>
<td>Favorable Characteristic(s)</td>
<td>Refers to any favorable characteristic relating to the job market perceived by the participant (i.e., high wages, close proximity to home, flexible work schedules, strong working relationships, employee benefits, being a business owner, etc.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Job Market</td>
<td>Unfavorable Characteristic(s)</td>
<td>Refers to any unfavorable characteristic found in the data related to minimal accessibility and/or availability of jobs in close proximity, jobs that offer inflexible work schedules, inability of long-term employment opportunities, or jobs having other unfavorable structural issues (e.g., low wages, minimal work hours, no employment benefits, lack of full-time positions, etc.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographical Limitations</td>
<td>Geography</td>
<td></td>
<td>Refers to any explicit reference of physical geography and/or distance posing as a barrier to securing employment and/or educational pursuits. Examples include: (a) an unfavorable distance between home and job, school, or other resources; (b) natural or physical barriers; (c) or barriers related to urban or rural communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Refers to any explicit reference to where transportation posed as barrier to securing employment and/or educational pursuits. Examples include: (a) unfavorable distance between home and job, school, or other resources; (b) natural or physical barriers; (c) or barriers related to urban or rural communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Responsibilities and/or Hardship</td>
<td>Divorce/Separation/ Absence</td>
<td></td>
<td>Refers to instances in which the participant disclosed information regarding lived experience(s) relating to divorce, separation, or absence by them, their parent(s)/guardian(s) and/or other caregiver(s).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family</td>
<td></td>
<td>Refers to challenges and/or supports provided by family-related structures, or as a result of existing family dynamics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pregnancy/Child Rearing</td>
<td></td>
<td>Refers to participant experiences related to pregnancy and/or rearing their child(ren) and/or those of others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjection to Forces Impacting Life, Employment &amp; Educational Well-being</td>
<td>Community Service/ Extracurriculars</td>
<td></td>
<td>Refers to instances where a participant mentioned aspects of in-school, community, or other types of community service and/or extracurricular involvement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community Supports</td>
<td></td>
<td>Refers to regular access to or minimal access to professional or organizations that specialize in career and educational advancement of young adults (i.e., college advisors, college and career specialists, career coaches, nonprofit organizations, temp agencies, etc.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Digital Connectivity</td>
<td></td>
<td>Refers to ability to access, or not, information from internet, including having the adequate hardware and wifi/internet access.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exposure to Justice System</td>
<td></td>
<td>Refers to any encounter with the criminal justice system, including juvenile system. Broadly includes encounters with police, arrest, trials, jail/prison stays, criminal activity, K12 disciplinary incidents (i.e., ISS, suspensions, expulsions, etc.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Homelessness</td>
<td></td>
<td>Refers to instances in which participant did not have a “fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence” (as defined by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act). This includes crowded living situations (i.e., doubled-up), couch-surfing, and staying in hotels and shelters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Capital</td>
<td></td>
<td>Refers to presence of or lack of caring adults, mentors, teachers, coaches, etc. - anyone who provides socio-emotional, life skills, or other meaningful forms of support.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B: Definitions of Variables Used in the Analysis

Opportunity Youth:
Persons 16 to 24 years of age who are not currently enrolled in school and not currently employed.

Non-Opportunity (Other) Youth:
Persons 16 to 24 years of age who are currently enrolled in school and/or currently employed.

Race/Hispanic Origin:
- **Latinos/Hispanics** - Persons who identify as being of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin. These include persons who identify as Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Dominican, Central American, South American, or Spaniard. Latinos/Hispanics can be of any race.
- **Whites** - Persons who are not Hispanic and who identify themselves as White.
- **Blacks** - Persons who are not Hispanic and who identify themselves as Black or African American.
- **Asian or Pacific Islanders** - Persons who are not of Hispanic and who identify as Asian or Pacific Islander.
- **Others** - Persons who are not of Hispanic origin and who are not White, Black, or Asian or Pacific Islander. The Other group includes persons who are not Hispanic and who are American Indian or Alaska Native, Multiracial.

Gender:
- **Female** - Persons whose biological sex is female.
- **Male** - Persons whose biological sex is male.

Nativity Status and Citizenship:
- **Native-born** - Persons born in the U.S. or born abroad of American parents.
- **Foreign-born** - Persons born outside of the U.S.

Language Use:
- **Speak English at home** - Persons who speak English at home.
- **Bilingual** - Persons who speak a language other than English at home and who speak English "well" or "very well".
- **Limited or no English fluency** - Persons who speak a language other than English at home and who speak English "not well" or "not at all".

Disability Status:
- **With one or more disabilities** - Persons who have at least one of these following disabilities: 1) cognitive difficulty (such as learning, remembering, concentrating, or making decisions) because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition; 2) ambulatory difficulty that substantially limits one or more basic physical activities, such as walking, climbing stairs, reaching, lifting, or carrying; 3) independent living difficulty including a physical, mental, or emotional condition lasting six months or more that makes it difficult or impossible to perform basic activities outside the home alone
The Lived Experiences of San Antonio-Bexar County Opportunity Youth

(does not include temporary health problems, such as broken bones or pregnancies); 4) self-care difficulty including any physical or mental health condition that has lasted at least 6 months and makes it difficult for them to take care of their own personal needs, such as bathing, dressing, or getting around inside the home (does not include temporary health conditions, such as broken bones or pregnancies); 5) vision or hearing difficulty representing a long-lasting condition of blindness, deafness, or a severe vision or hearing impairment; 6) vision difficulty associated with a person being blind or having serious difficulty seeing even with corrective lenses; and 7) hearing difficulty associated with a person being deaf or having serious difficulty hearing.

Ratio of Income-to-Poverty Threshold:

Deep poverty (less than 0.50): Persons living in families whose total income for the previous year as a ratio of the poverty thresholds (established by the Social Security Administration in 1964 and subsequently revised in 1980, adjusted for inflation) is less than 0.50 (below poverty level).

Moderate poverty (0.50-0.99): Persons living in families whose total income for the previous year as a ratio of the poverty thresholds (established by the Social Security Administration in 1964 and subsequently revised in 1980, adjusted for inflation) is between 0.50 and 0.99 (below poverty level).

Near poverty (1.00-1.49): Persons living in families whose total income for the previous year as a ratio of the poverty thresholds (established by the Social Security Administration in 1964 and subsequently revised in 1980, adjusted for inflation) is between 1.00 and 1.49 (above the poverty level).

1.50-1.99 above poverty level: Persons living in families whose total income for the previous year as a ratio of the poverty thresholds (established by the Social Security Administration in 1964 and subsequently revised in 1980, adjusted for inflation) is between 1.50 and 1.99 (above the poverty level).

2.00-2.99 above poverty level: Persons living in families whose total income for the previous year as a ratio of the poverty thresholds (established by the Social Security Administration in 1964 and subsequently revised in 1980, adjusted for inflation) is between 2.00 and 2.99 (above the poverty level).

3.00-3.99 above poverty level: Persons living in families whose total income for the previous year as a ratio of the poverty thresholds (established by the Social Security Administration in 1964 and subsequently revised in 1980, adjusted for inflation) is between 3.00 and 3.99 (above the poverty level).

4.00-4.99 above poverty level: Persons living in families whose total income for the previous year as a ratio of the poverty thresholds (established by the Social Security Administration in 1964 and subsequently revised in 1980, adjusted for inflation) is between 4.00 and 4.99 (above the poverty level).

5.00 and higher above poverty level: Persons living in families whose total income for the previous year as a ratio of the poverty thresholds (established by the Social Security Administration in 1964 and subsequently revised in 1980, adjusted for inflation) is 5.00 or higher (above the poverty level).

Public Use Microdata Area:

PUMA identifies the Public Use Microdata Area (PUMA) where the housing unit was located. PUMAs in the 2000 census, 2010 census, and the 2005-onward ACS/PRCS also consist of 100,000+ residents, and they do not cross state lines.

Living as Part of a Subfamily:

Subfamily indicates to which subfamily (if any) within the housing unit each person belongs. Members of the first subfamily receive a code of 1; members of the second subfamily receive a code of 2; and so on. All individuals who are not part of a subfamily, including all residents of group quarters, receive a code of 0.
Living in a Household with 3+ Generations:
The number of generations was identified by the number of persons from different generations living in the same household. For example, relationships to the householder (RELATE) were divided into the following generational categories (general codes only): (1) Parent, Parent-in-law; (2) Householder, Spouse, Sibling, Sibling-in-law; (3) Child, Child-in-law; and (4) Grandchild. In addition, the following types of living arrangements also represent 3-plus generations in the same household: (1) householder, householder's child, and householder's grandchild; (2) householder's parent, householder, and householder's child; and (3) householder’s parent-in-law, householder, and householder's child.

Living in a Household without a Computer:
Households in which the respondent or any member of their household does not own or use a desktop, laptop, netbook, or notebook computer.

Living in a Household without Internet Access:
Households in which no member of the household accesses the Internet. Here, "access" refers to whether or not someone in the household uses or connects to the Internet, regardless of whether or not they pay for the service.

Living in a Household without Broadband (High Speed) Internet Service:
Households in which the respondent or any member of their household does not subscribe to the Internet using broadband (high speed) Internet service such as cable, fiber optic, or DSL service.

Relationship to Householder:
This item describes an individual's relationship to the head of household or householder.

Age:
A person's age in years as of the last birthday.

Married:
Persons whose current marital status is married with the spouse present or absent from the household.

Employed:
Persons 16 to 24 years of age who are currently employed.

Unemployed:
Persons 16 to 24 years of age who are in the civilian labor force (currently working or actively seeking employment) but are currently not working.

Not in the Labor Force:
Persons 16 to 24 years of age who are currently not working nor actively seeking employment.
Poverty:
Persons living in families whose total income for the previous year as a ratio of the poverty thresholds (established by the Social Security Administration in 1964 and subsequently revised in 1980, adjusted for inflation) is less than 1.00 (below poverty level).

Without Health Care Insurance:
Persons who did not have any health insurance coverage at the time of interview, as measured by employer-provided insurance, privately purchased insurance, Medicare, Medicaid or other governmental insurance, TRICARE or other military care, or Veterans Administration-provided insurance.

Person Statistical Weight:
Each person in the ACS data set has a statistical weight that can be used to inflate a given person to reflect how many people he/she represents in the population from which the person was drawn to be part of the ACS sample. The person statistical weight is used to obtain population estimates for Bexar County based on the sample from the ACS.