



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Employment of Youth remains stagnant despite strong regional economy**

*Opportunity youth in the region are more likely to have demographics similar to households that struggle the most to meet self-sufficiency in the region, including single mothers, people of color, and lower education backgrounds.*

**PORTLAND-SW WASHINGTON (April 12, 2018)** – Three regional Portland-SW Washington workforce development boards have released their 2018 Opportunity Youth Report that finds nearly 30,000 youth ages 16 to 24 are not in school or working. Despite a strong regional economy, in which nearly 71,000 jobs were added between 2014 and 2016, the share and number of opportunity youth in the region remained stagnant.

“Many young people in our region face persistent barriers to employment and it is imperative that we help them get on a pathway to a self-sustaining career,” said Worksystems Executive Director, Andrew McGough. “Our SummerWorks youth employment program and Connect2Careers jobs portal are two ways we are helping youth get the training and work experience they need.”

Opportunity youth are defined as individuals between the ages of 16 to 24, who are not working and who are not enrolled in school in the six-county area (Clackamas, Clark, Cowlitz, Multnomah, Wahkiakum and Washington).

The report found this group is becoming more diverse. In 2014, 30 percent of opportunity youth were people of color. As of 2016, that share rose to 42 percent.

The report, commissioned by the Columbia-Willamette Workforce Collaborative (comprised of Worksystems, Clackamas Workforce Partnership and Workforce Southwest Washington), identifies key demographic data and barriers faced by these young people. The information assists the organizations in designing programs and services to strategically reconnect these young people to post-secondary education and/or career-track employment.

“Knowing the barriers these young people face enables us to connect with partners to identify service gaps and resources within our community needed by these youth,” said Jeanne Bennett CEO of Workforce Southwest Washington.

“Our schools, partners and youth service providers have done great work to keep students engaged and re-engage disconnected youth,” said Bridget Dazey, Executive Director at Clackamas Workforce Partnership. “We have to keep this momentum going to affect even greater change in our community,

to not only see students graduate or re-engage them in school but to see them connect to careers in high-wage high-demand industries.”

Additional findings of the report include:

- Six in ten opportunity youth did not work at all in 2016. Eighty-three percent were employed for less than half the year or had no employment.
- Overrepresentation is most prominently seen among black youth. Despite representing just six percent of opportunity youth, 24 percent of black youth in the region are opportunity youth.
- Since 2014, the Hispanic opportunity youth population increased its share of all opportunity youth in the region by 12 percentage points, from 15 to 27 percent. Comparatively, Hispanics represent just 18 percent of the total youth population.
- About 3,700 or 24 percent of opportunity youth females lived with their own children in 2016.

A copy of the report can be found at [www.workforcesw.org](http://www.workforcesw.org), [www.clackamasworkforce.org](http://www.clackamasworkforce.org) or [www.worksystems.org](http://www.worksystems.org).

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**The Columbia-Willamette Workforce Collaborative (CWWC)** is a partnership that delivers a unified approach to serve industry, support economic development and guide public workforce investments in the Portland-Vancouver Metropolitan Area. Members are the Clackamas Workforce Partnership, Workforce Southwest Washington and Worksystems. <http://www.workforcecollaborative.org/>

**Clackamas Workforce Partnership** is a nonprofit organization which serves as an advocate for workforce development within Clackamas County and the State of Oregon. Our mission is to address critical workforce, educational, and training challenges, and develop a skilled workforce that meets the needs of businesses and strengthens the local economy of Clackamas County. Learn more at [www.clackamasworkforce.org](http://www.clackamasworkforce.org).

**Workforce Southwest Washington (WSW)**, a nonprofit organization founded in 2002, contributes to regional economic growth by providing investments and resources to improve the skills and education of the workforce in Clark, Cowlitz and Wahkiakum counties. WSW helps businesses find and hire the employees they need and provides people the skills, education and training to find work or advance in their careers. WSW partners with employers, community colleges and universities, labor groups, government and economic development agencies, high schools, community and nonprofit organizations. Learn more at [www.workforcesw.org](http://www.workforcesw.org).

**Worksystems** is the Workforce Development Board for the City of Portland, Multnomah and Washington counties. Worksystems is a non-profit agency that accelerates economic growth by pursuing and investing resources to improve the quality of the workforce. Our mission is to coordinate a regional workforce system that supports individual prosperity and business competitiveness. We design and coordinate workforce development programs and services delivered through a network of local partners to help people get the skills, training and education they need to go to work or to advance in their careers. Learn more at [www.worksystems.org](http://www.worksystems.org).