



**INVESTING IN THE EVIDENCE  
ON HOW TO RE-ENGAGE  
YOUNG PEOPLE**

THE CONNECTICUT OPPORTUNITY PROJECT'S  
2023 ANNUAL REPORT



**Dalio**  
Education

# GREATNESS

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## MISSION

CTOP's mission is to invest in and help strengthen youth-serving organizations in Connecticut so they can work effectively, reliably, and sustainably with severely off-track or disconnected young people ages 14 to 26 in order to help them re-engage in and complete secondary education or a credential, then transition successfully to a post-secondary pathway leading to satisfying employment at a living wage that supports their self-sufficiency.

# LETTER FROM THE ADVISORY GROUP

The Connecticut Opportunity Project (CTOP) is dedicated to improving educational and employment outcomes for young people whom many others have given up on. New research from Dalio Education, CTOP's founding organization, reveals that the collective failure in Connecticut, as elsewhere, to re-engage young people who are disconnected from education, the workplace, and other mainstream institutions is an unspoken crisis. Youth service providers work tirelessly to support the needs of the young people they serve, yet they are typically constrained by short-term and uncertain funding that eventually undermines their ability to effectively plan, innovate, and operate as well as to support program and staff development, which in turn often compromises their efforts and robs young people of what is sometimes their last hope of getting the help they need to get back on track in the youth to adult transition.

CTOP is designed to solve for this gap by making longer-term investments in nonprofits that serve severely off-track and disconnected young people and make an organization-wide commitment to a rigorous process of improvement. CTOP's investments include general operating support and technical assistance that helps grantees to strengthen their management and administrative systems, as well as implement program design enhancements and staff training based on the best available evidence of effectiveness. Foundation and program staff embark on a long-term partnership in furtherance of positive outcomes for Connecticut's most vulnerable population.

The report *Connecticut's Unspoken Crisis* tells the story of a young woman named Cynthia, who struggled with social anxiety and chronic absenteeism in school. She was connected to Chris Arenas, a youth development professional at Domus Kids in Stamford who believed in her, advocated for her with her teachers, and never gave up on helping her to get to high school graduation. Cynthia credits Arenas and Domus for helping her to get to class on time and learn how to manage her strong emotions. Now she is a first-year college student with the goal to become a psychologist in the criminal justice system.

Cynthia's story confirms CTOP's underlying theory of change: all young people regardless of the obstacles they face can, with the right supports, reclaim a productive future and chart a successful life course. But to get there from where we are today will require Connecticut, as well as the nation more broadly, to take a longer-term view, to invest in organizational development, to hold service providers to high performance standards, and above all to believe in the power and the potential of every young person to contribute to civic, social, and economic life, at the community, state, and national level.

CTOP and the grantee partners in which it invests have embarked on a bold but vital collaboration to chart the way forward in the national imperative to prove that every young person like Cynthia can thrive when given the supports they need to overcome the barriers that prevent them from reconnecting to school and work. Connecticut has 119,000 young people who are at risk or disconnected. Their futures and our state's future will depend on CTOP's success and our willingness to make a similar set of investments in changing the odds too many of our young people face today.

*Gordon Berlin*   *Carol Thompson Cole*

*Sam Cobbs*   *Thea Montañez*

CTOP Advisory Group



# LETTER FROM OUR SENIOR PORTFOLIO DIRECTORS

In our third year of implementing CTOP's ten-year social investment strategy, our team and our grantee partners continue to evolve rapidly. We have harnessed our lessons learned and utilized our collective understanding of how we can best support young people in achieving success by driving improvements to programs and organizational resilience.

We first want to recognize that this past year has brought significant change to CTOP's internal team, with our founding Director David Hunter announcing his return to retirement, after being called away from it to craft and then lead the initial implementation years of CTOP's social investment strategy. While his daily leadership and partnership in this work will be greatly missed, his contributions to advancing it will endure in the form of the incredible foundational framework he developed for CTOP and the competencies that CTOP's Portfolio Directors have strengthened through his mentorship and coaching. Engaging in the organizational development practice we advise our grantee partners on by intentionally expanding our team capacity to support our growing portfolio of work, we also created a new role of Portfolio Associate, adding to our team two young professionals, Zari Havercome and Emily Bonzagni, who bring tremendous passion for this work along with strengths and skills that will aid CTOP in charting the course for our future growth and transformational work in this sector.


Over the past year, a major focus of our team has been the advancement of three parallel research projects. Each substantial on its own, we envision that together the resulting products will be more than the sum of their parts and meaningfully accelerate the work that CTOP, its grantee partners, and others are doing to re-engage youth who are severely off-track and disconnected. The first of these projects came to fruition with the October 2023 publication of the report *Connecticut's Unspoken Crisis*, which revealed that 63,000 young people ages 14 to 26 are not engaged in prosocial institutions and/or not on track for gainful employment, and another 17,000 are at the greatest risk for becoming so, creating urgency around the imperative for all stakeholders to do more to address the needs of this population. The two reports to be published in the year ahead will inform our understanding of what is necessary to re-engage young people, based on the national evidence base as well as the direct experiences and perspectives of young people as captured in their voices via qualitative research.

As part of the continual refinement of our strategic approach, we also identified this year a new category of investments to be made in social enterprises, making our first such investment in 2023 in Forge City Works in Hartford – with investments in this area being made with the goal of supporting such organizations in strengthening and expanding their services to prepare young people not only to secure and sustain employment but also to grow in career paths that lead to upward mobility for themselves and their families.

Meanwhile, our grantee partners continue to work tirelessly to serve their young people while also strengthening their operational capacity and strategic competency so that they never stop improving the quality of the services they provide as well as the long-term health of the organizations that make those services possible. This year, the number of active program slots our grantees delivered, and the corresponding number of youth therefore likely to achieve intended outcomes of reconnecting to school and employment, rose to 925. On behalf of our entire team, it continues to be always humbling and an immense privilege to support and celebrate the achievements of our grantee partners and the heroic work they do every day. We invite you to stay updated on our efforts in the year ahead through our website [ctopportunityproject.org](http://ctopportunityproject.org) and by following us at [@ctopportunity](https://twitter.com/ctopportunity) on Twitter.


*Adhlere Coffy & Amanda Olberg*

Senior Portfolio Directors



“ Before I joined Domus I was struggling a lot with school, and honestly I feel like if I didn’t join Domus I would’ve stayed back. I have a good relationship with all my advocates and I feel like I can talk to them about anything and that’s important because a lot of kids don’t have an adult that they trust. ”

- Domus youth



The young people who are part of CTOP's target population face structural, institutional, and other complex challenges. The conditions they experience as a function of pervasive systemic inequities can lead to the presentation of risk indicators, which CTOP uses to describe our target population and differentiate among sub-groups within it to ensure we invest in nonprofits serving the young people we intend to reach and best support our grantee partners in their work.

The target population of youth that CTOP serves is young people ages 14 to 26 who are severely off-track or disconnected based on the following risk indicators:

- **Severely off-track youth** are enrolled in high school but show one or more indicators of being at risk of dropping out, including chronic absenteeism, failure to earn credits in a timely way, and/or 2+ suspensions; and, they have been failed by the traditional high school environment to the extent that they need intensive additional supports to get back on track to graduate - whether provided within the traditional high school context or an alternative education setting - such as mentoring and comprehensive case management that incorporates trauma-informed practices.
- **Disconnected youth** do not have a high school diploma and are not enrolled in school or work; or, they do have a high school diploma but are not participating in the workforce in a sustained way. Additionally, disconnected youth have experienced one or more of the following traumatic life events: involvement with the juvenile or criminal justice system, previous involvement with the Department of Children and Families including placement in foster care, periods of homelessness, and perpetrating and/or being victimized by violence.



## Active Program Slots

**2023**  
HIGHLIGHTS



Youth in active program slots meet their program's enrollment criteria and are receiving the kinds and levels of services necessary to reconnect successfully to school or employment.

## Grantee Partners

COMPASS YOUTH collaborative®

DOMUS LOVE LIVES HERE

RYASAP catalyst for community change

CTVIP

OPP Our Piece of the Pie.

Roca

Added in 2023  
**FORGE CITY WORKS**

## Research to Inform and Support Our Work

2023

To be published in 2024

### CONNECTICUT'S UNSPOKEN CRISIS

Published by the Boston Consulting Group in October 2023, this report finds that approximately 1 in 5 young people in Connecticut between the ages of 14 and 26 are disconnected or at risk.

### AMPLIFYING YOUTH VOICE

Through a qualitative research study to be published in 2024, Community Science will expand our understanding of the lived experiences of young people who are disconnected.

### NATIONAL LANDSCAPE SCAN

This report by MDRC to be published in 2024 will review the programs, practices, and policies across the country that are facilitative of, or create barriers to, supporting our target population.

## CTOP Investments in 2023

**\$6,757,375** Over seven grantee partners

Investment Type	Percentage
In-Kind Investment	15%
Direct Investment	85%

# PERFORMANCE REPORT

The results that CTOP's grantee partners have produced for severely off-track and disconnected youth in Connecticut to date are a testament to their incredibly hard work and organizational growth. The three Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) outlined below best capture these results in the form of the social value grantees have created – toward which CTOP has contributed, and for which CTOP holds itself accountable in terms of monitoring its own performance:



## 1. The number of CTOP target population youth enrolled in core programming in active program slots.

This KPI is a critical proxy for the social value that grantees are creating in real time for CTOP's target population of young people. Program participants are only counted as occupying active program slots if they meet the program's enrollment criteria and receive the appropriate kinds and levels of services and supports needed to deliver the positive, long-term outcomes promised in the organization's theory of change. **This KPI tells us whether an organization is helping the young people it serves.**



## 2. The number of CTOP target population youth enrolled in core programming who graduate from that programming successfully.

This KPI captures individuals who have participated in the full range and duration of core programming and attained the outcomes that the program promises by graduation. Young people who leave before completing the full scope of programming and/or who fail to attain such outcomes clearly have not benefitted as intended and therefore are not included in this metric. **This KPI gives us an indication of whether a program may have in fact meaningfully helped the young people it serves.**



## 3. The number of CTOP target population youth who graduate and, for the following six months, are actively engaged in education or employment.

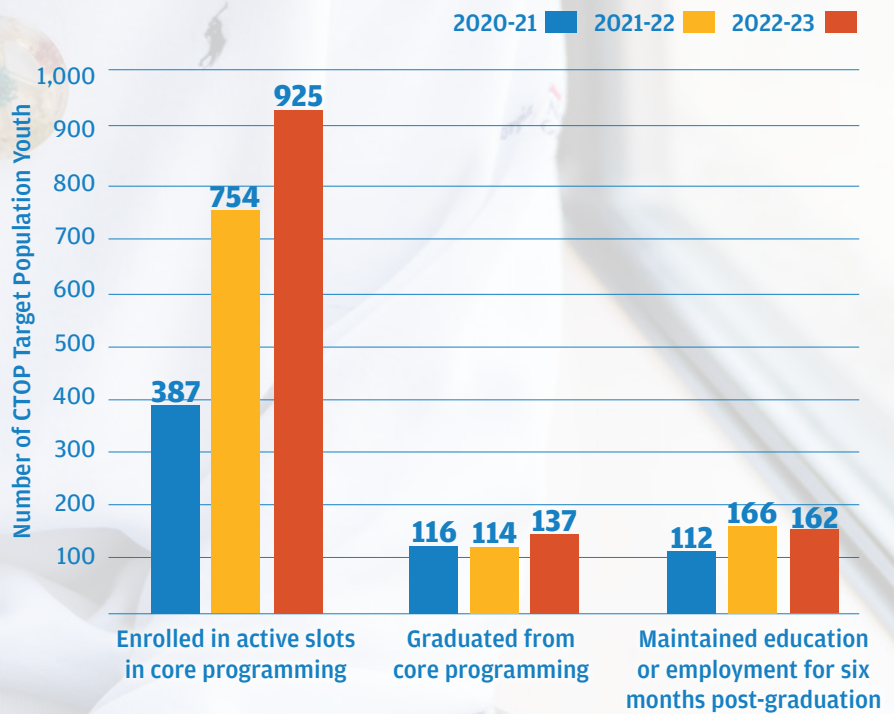
In the end, program participants who graduate from a program successfully must go on to attain the long-term outcomes it promises – or the program will not have created much, if any, meaningful social value. **This KPI, therefore, confirms whether a program actually has helped the young people it serves.**

In aggregate, our grantee partners continue to steadily grow the social value they are creating, with the number of active program slots our grantees delivered in 2023 rising to 925, even as some grantee partners have not yet reached a stage of organizational development where their program participants would count towards these outcomes. Figure 1 shows CTOP's KPI data covering July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2023, which is aggregated across all of the grantees with whom CTOP worked during this period.



**Figure 1: Building Youth Outcomes through Service Delivery**

With regard to the relatively smaller numbers for the second and third KPIs compared to the first KPI, we will note that most of our grantees' core programming is designed with the expectation that youth will participate for multiple years, which by definition means that only a fraction of youth enrolled in active program slots in any given year would be expected to have made the functional gains necessary to graduate in that year.





## 2023 IN REVIEW

At the beginning of each grant year, grantees work together with their respective CTOP Portfolio Director to set quarterly benchmarks for the year ahead in advancing capacity-building priorities in the areas of leadership, management, programming, financial health, and internal monitoring. These benchmarks are aligned to the grantee's developmental stage within CTOP's rubric for the stages of organizational development, and as a result, benchmarks for each grantee will vary significantly. Yet common across all grantees is that working toward and achieving these benchmarks is a central focus of their work through CTOP. This section reports on key areas of capacity-building progress and learning for each grantee over the course of the 2022-23 grant year.

**COMPASS Youth Collaborative interrupts violence in the City of Hartford by building transformative relationships with youth at the center of the violence. COMPASS Peacebuilders provide youth the tools to create sustained behavior change and transition successfully to adulthood.**

In 2023, COMPASS's new program model became fully implemented with the organization's launch of transitional employment. Over the course of the year, COMPASS hired two work crew supervisors and secured two external partnerships to provide work opportunities for their crews, while also developing the policies, processes, and tools necessary to support transitional employment operations. With its new data system recently launched as the year began, COMPASS made incredible progress over the year in both data entry - with 3,921 contact notes recorded in June 2023 relative to 1,838 in June 2022 - as well as data utilization to inform program delivery and management, leveraging new reports and structures that were built out over the course of the year along with growing capacity within the program team. COMPASS also significantly expanded its board capacity and strengthened its board infrastructure in 2023, recruiting and onboarding four new board members who brought additional competencies to the board, developing a formal onboarding process for new board members, and undertaking a comprehensive review and revision of its bylaws and board policies.

“**Technical assistance through CTOP to develop data capacity has afforded COMPASS the opportunity to celebrate progress as an agency and provide resources that support our team's efforts with youth.**”

- Jacquelyn Santiago Nazario,  
Chief Executive Officer



**COMPASS  
YOUTH**  
collaborative®

**Hartford, CT**





Connecticut Violence Intervention and Prevention (CTVIP) is a group of trusted, trained community members that disrupt, prevent, and stop the spread of violence which results in trauma through crisis intervention and proactive relationships with the highest-risk youths and the institutions that impact their lives in the Greater New Haven area.

“CTOP has equipped our agency with internal support that has resulted in an improvement in service quality and performance management. CTVIP is growing rapidly but intentionally, from a singular program to a fully functioning organization, in fewer than four years of operations.”

- Leonard Jahad, Executive Director

Stepping into a new year of organizational growth, CTVIP committed a great deal of time and energy to engaging their broader leadership team in advancing the strategic learning of the organization. The appointment of new officers to the Board of Directors, facilitated reflection on Board development needs, and active participation in the organizational rebranding has ignited the Board’s engagement with the goal of taking on new strategic planning activities over the coming year. Leonard Jahad, Executive Director, in collaboration with the Board, also spearheaded an internal campaign to increase the size and length of contracts that fund the organization’s service delivery to their target population.

This year also marked key learning experiences for the CTVIP team. Two learning trips to Roca Inc. sites expanded CTVIP’s understanding of critical programmatic aspects in the areas of safety and security, crisis response, and staff development. Jahad and Alivia Langley, Program Manager, have since rolled out a comprehensive risk assessment framework that they not only use internally but also have incorporated into their referral system so that their community partners can use it for assessing the level of risk a young person is exposed to as they navigate barriers. Both Jahad and Langley have a vision for ongoing refinements to the program model, service delivery, and organizational design that they will collaborate with CTOP to implement in the year ahead, driving improvements across the people, processes, and tools used to serve the young people of New Haven.

Domus builds loving relationships with young people facing adversity, empowering them to pursue their path to self-sufficiency.

“CTOP’s support, immeasurable time, and generous investment helps Domus get better every day. They have helped Domus strengthen our ability to learn and grow and because of that we are seeing tremendous progress in the entire organization.”

- Mike Duggan,  
Executive Director

Over the past year, Domus continued its strong focus on staff development, articulating six core competencies for youth-facing staff, creating competency-based performance evaluations that chart a developmental progression to achieving proficiency in these areas, and refining and expanding its staff training and coaching. As an area of prioritization, to ensure fidelity and sustainability in the implementation of its cognitive-behavioral skills curriculum, “Thoughts, Emotions, and Behaviors” (TEB), Domus certified two internal TEB coaches who trained their first cohorts of new staff; launched clinical supervision for youth-facing staff led by their internal TEB coach who is a licensed clinical social worker; and engaged an external evaluator in a rapid cycle learning project to inform the organization’s use of a TEB delivery tool. Domus also continued scaling its transitional employment programming, expanding the scope of its external contracts for operating work crews employing its young people, with state funding also secured for this programming in partnership with the city; and began implementation of its business plan in pursuit of strengthened financial sustainability and organizational growth moving forward.

As in 2022, Domus delivered active program slots to 85 percent of the young people enrolled in its core programming in 2023, and this year began to realize the long-term youth outcomes that affirm the effectiveness of its programs, with 93 percent of program graduates still enrolled in post-secondary education or employed on the path to self-sufficiency twelve months following program graduation.



Stamford, CT





**Our Piece of the Pie®, Inc. (OPP®) empowers youth with the key competencies needed to overcome barriers and succeed in education and employment.**

OPP embarked this year on making radical improvements to their internal operations, focusing on mission-critical organizational systems that have allowed them to improve service delivery, reshape their organizational culture, and engrain practices in preparation for upcoming strategic growth.

After nearly seven years without major improvements, a consultant was engaged to assess their digital infrastructure and develop a plan to redesign the system to improve current responsiveness to staff needs as well as future optionality for organizational growth. OPP also created an innovative new role on their team, redeploying a former frontline staff member in a position dedicated to performance management of service delivery. The addition of this role led to a 70% reduction in recurring data entry errors in just four months.

In the second year of implementing “OPP University,” a comprehensive staff-focused program designed to onboard and retrain staff, OPP has continued to evolve this training program into a robust human capital strategy that will be integrated into performance evaluation, staff supervision, cognitive-behavioral skills delivery, and career pathing throughout the organization and will further its development of a holistic, trauma-informed approach to organizational culture.

“ This year, the partnership between CTOP and OPP has achieved remarkable milestones. Together, we have expanded access to quality education and employment opportunities for youth experiencing disconnection. The highlights of this partnership reflect our shared commitment to transforming lives and creating lasting impact in the communities we serve. ”

- Hector Rivera  
Chief Executive Officer



**Regional Youth Adult Social Action Partnership (RYASAP) works to ensure the safe and healthy development of youth, young adults, and families by actively engaging organizations, public officials, and community leaders around issues that matter most to the community.**

RYASAP spent the past year advancing critical areas of the business plan they developed in partnership with CTOP's technical assistant consultant, Rainmaker. This work included a full back-office system migration that included transitioning productivity environments, performing several design and utilization updates to their data system, and remapping their financial management infrastructure to improve programmatic budget management as well as financial reporting to their Board. These system improvements were accompanied by expert-led trainings to support adoption and utilization of the new features made available to staff.

The StreetSafe team, RYASAP's violence intervention and prevention program, participated in the Roca Impact Institute's Rewire training to structure their thinking, approach, and monitoring of youth development through the rigorous use of cognitive-behavioral techniques. StreetSafe uses relentless outreach to connect with young people at the center of community violence, either as victims or contributors. The transformational relationships they form with young people serve as the vehicle for aiding those young people in building the skills to improve emotional regulation and re-engage in those prosocial resources that will allow them to achieve self-sufficiency and agency. As RYASAP and StreetSafe look to the future of the partnership with CTOP, they look to redesign their program with enhanced service delivery improving the outcomes they achieve with young people in Bridgeport.

“As a true partner, CTOP consistently looks for opportunities to support and improve RYASAP as an organization from operations to programming to help us maximize impact on our community. We have benefited both on the day-to-day operational improvements as well as long-term strategic thinking.”

- Marc Donald  
Executive Director





**Roca’s mission is to be a relentless force in disrupting incarceration, poverty, and racism by engaging the young adults, police, and systems at the center of urban violence in relationships to address trauma, find hope, and drive change.**

Roca celebrated two years in Hartford in October 2023. Since replicating its program and intervention model in Hartford, the team has worked tirelessly to respond to the unique needs of the young women and their children in the community. Roca Hartford serves young women, most of whom are mothers, at acute and elevated risk of gun violence. In Hartford, the team is seeing a growing frequency of women involved in, impacted by, and instigating violence; separation of children from their mothers; sex trafficking and intimate partner violence; and violence sparked by social media.

In response to these challenges, Roca Hartford is revising its safety protocols, which includes hiring additional staff; tightening collaborations with partners, including with law enforcement; and focusing on deterrence through Cognitive Behavioral Theory (CBT) skill development and wrap-around services. The team doubled the size of its staff in the past year to accommodate the growth of the program and the growing need in the community. Kat Hannah joined the team as Program Director in April, and a Program Manager, Youth Work Supervisor, and Youth Worker joined the team in the fall. In the year ahead, the team will prioritize standing up its transitional employment program as key to its work supporting young people towards the long-term behavior change necessary to transform their lives.

“Roca Hartford is grateful to the CTOP team for its partnership and support, and for providing thought leadership that elevates the challenges of disconnected and at risk young people, including the young women Roca serves.”

- Sunindiya Bhalla,  
Executive Vice President of  
Women and 2Gen

# GRANTEE CONVENING SPOTLIGHT

As part of CTOP's approach to capacity building, we leverage the expertise within the grantee cohort by convening grantee partners once a year for a full day of shared learning and development, meaningful collaboration, and relationship building. In June, we brought over 40 professionals across six grantee organizations together to explore organizational challenges and collaboratively problem-solve across organizations, roles, and teams using a Problem of Practice Consultancy Protocol. For this exercise, organizations courageously shared a current challenge with a small, diverse group of colleagues from other organizations who asked probing questions and challenged the presenter to consider different perspectives in analyzing and addressing the issue. We also welcomed Sam Cobbs, Chief Executive Officer of Tipping Point Community and member of CTOP's Advisory Group, for a conversation facilitated by COMPASS's Chief Executive Officer, Jacquelyn Santiago Nazario. Sam drew on his deep experience to offer practical guidance for taking a comprehensive approach to organizational development as well as how to integrate that work into policies and processes. The CTOP team is always inspired by time spent learning from and alongside our grantee partners, and energized to see long-term relationships deepen, and new ones spark, across organizations. We look forward to developing even more professional learning and development opportunities in the year ahead.

**86%**

of participants found all sessions valuable or highly valuable

**86%**

agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "The Convening will help my team to improve our work"



# CONNECTICUT'S UNSPOKEN CRISIS

Published in October 2023, the report *Connecticut's Unspoken Crisis* from Dalio Education finds that 63,000 young people ages 14 to 26 are not engaged in prosocial institutions and/or not on track for gainful employment, and another 17,000 are at the greatest risk for becoming so. For more, please see the full report at <https://www.ctopportunityproject.org/ctop-research-report>

## A CONTINUUM



### On Track

Young adults aged 14-26 who are engaged in prosocial institutions and on-track for gainful employment

### At Risk

High school students who are at risk of not graduating and, therefore, also at risk for eventual disconnection

- Off-track
- At risk due to other factors
- Severely off-track

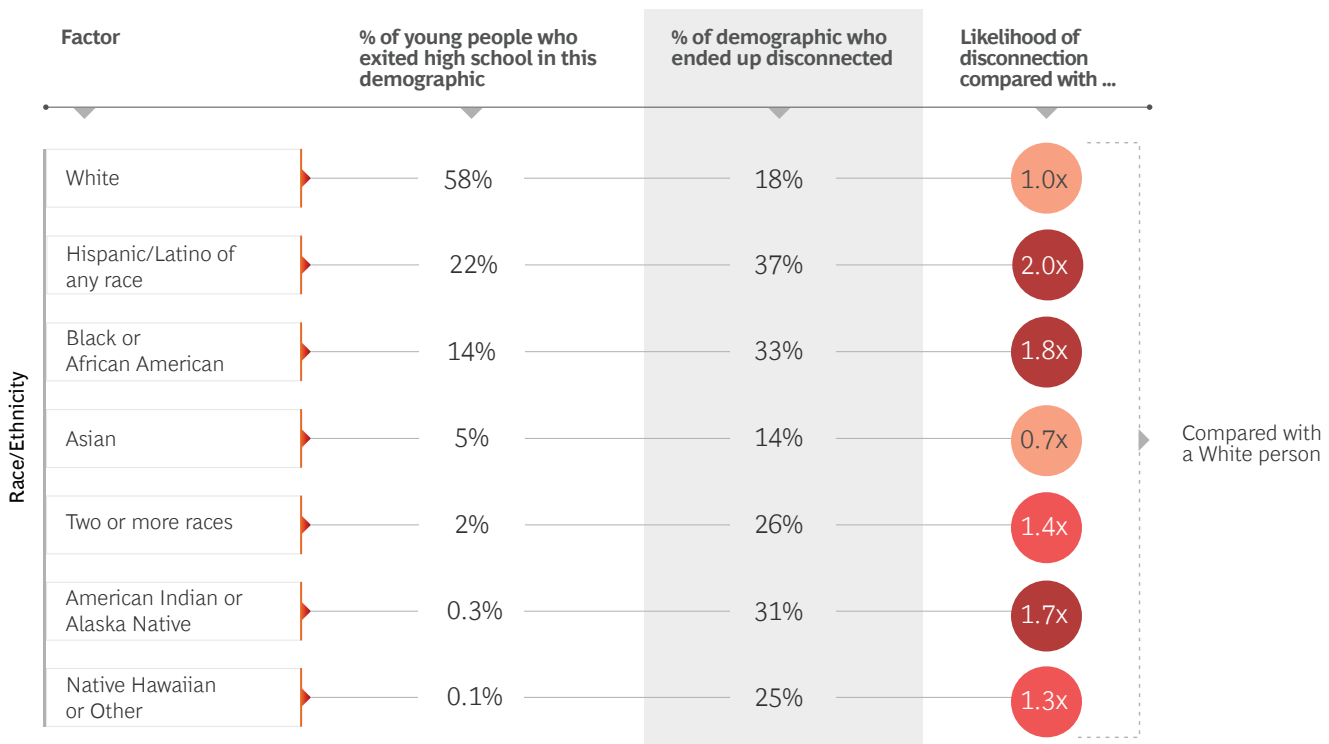
### Disconnected

Young adults aged 14-26 who are not engaged in prosocial institutions and/or not on-track for gainful employment

- Moderately disconnected
- Severely disconnected

## INEQUITABLE OUTCOMES

Young people of almost all non-White races/ethnicities are more likely to experience disconnection.





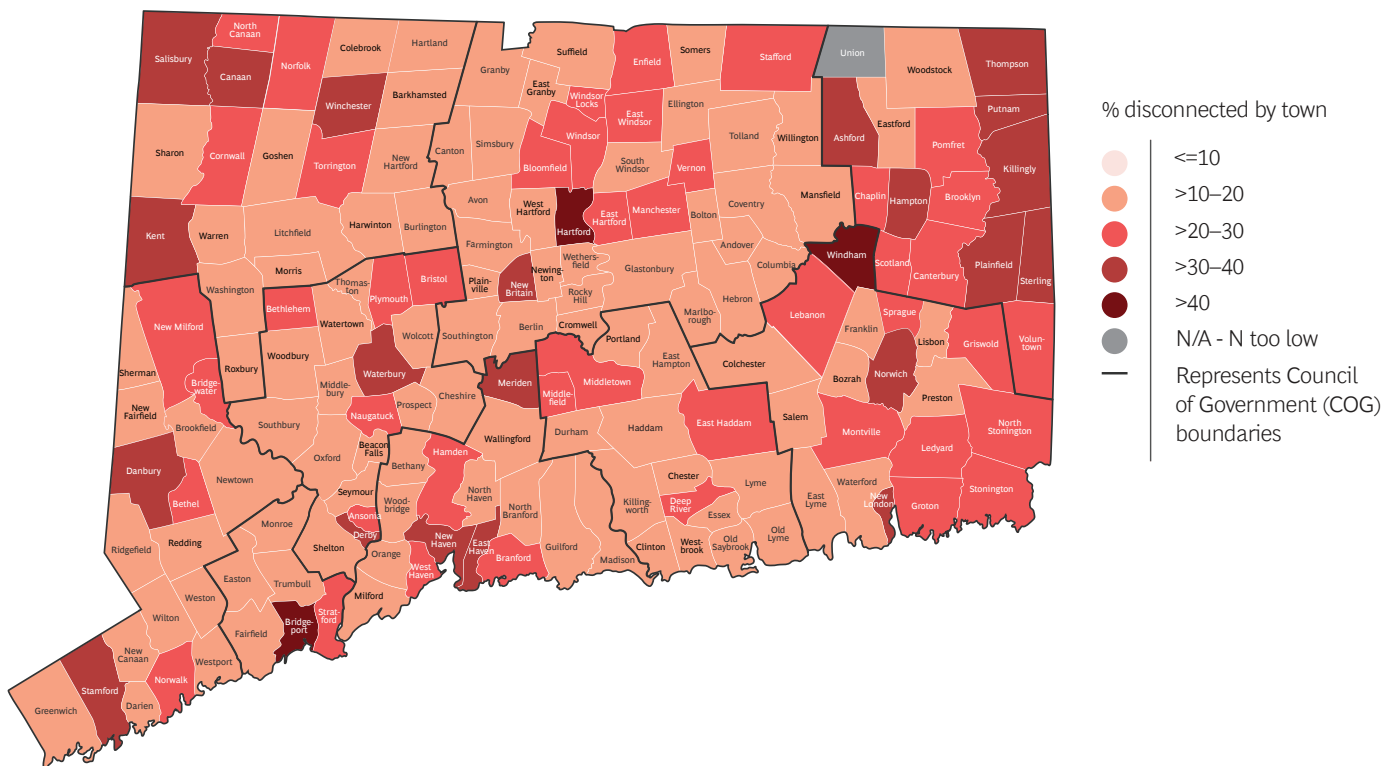
## REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

Key recommendations from the report include:

**Expand Capacity:** Increase capabilities of high-performing organizations that serve at risk and disconnected young people and significantly expand organizational capacity.

**Fund Effective Programs:** Invest in scalable, evidence-based supports and services for at risk and disconnected young people:

- Invest in expanding supports and services
- Invest in high-touch case management
- Invest in tackling chronic absenteeism
- Strengthen pathways to employment





## LOOKING AHEAD

To build on the momentum generated by Dario Education's release of *Connecticut's Unspoken Crisis* and inform our collective understanding of the supports and opportunities that are most successful in re-engaging young people who are disconnected, and how we can shape funding, programs, and advocacy efforts accordingly, we commissioned two additional research reports to be published in 2024.

CTOP will also begin its capacity-building work with its newest grantee, Forge City Works, which serves people in the Hartford community who are unemployed and face barriers to employment by providing job training in the food and hospitality industry to help them achieve sustainable careers.



## AMPLIFYING YOUTH VOICE



Through a qualitative research study, Community Science will expand our understanding of the lived experiences of young people who are not connected to education, employment, or prosocial supports, exploring young people's context and community as well as their interactions with systems: education, juvenile and criminal justice, child welfare, housing, and health. The study will offer insight on the following research questions:

- How do disconnected young people survive and thrive?
- What are the settings and contexts in which disconnected young people live, work (informally), and play?
- What is the role of different systems (past, present, and future) in the lives of disconnected young people—including the education, juvenile and criminal justice, child welfare, housing, and health systems?
- What are the goals and aspirations of young people who are not connected to school, work, or other prosocial supports?

Community Science is interviewing up to 100 young people between the ages of 14 to 26 who are not working or in school in the cities of Bridgeport, Danbury, Hartford, New Haven, Norwalk, Stamford, and Waterbury. To guide the project, CTOP and Community Science created a Community Advisory Group (CAG) comprised of young people from different backgrounds (e.g., racial/ethnic, gender) and adults who work with youth across different settings (e.g., community, philanthropy, direct services). Meeting approximately monthly over the duration of the project, the CAG deepens the research team's understanding of the lived experiences of young people to inform the design and implementation of research methods and interpretation of findings.

## NATIONAL LANDSCAPE SCAN



We also commissioned MDRC to conduct a national landscape scan exploring the programs, practices, and policies at the local, state, and federal level that are facilitative of, or create barriers to, supporting young people who are disconnected from education, employment, and prosocial supports. This study will address the following research questions:

- What are the programs working with disconnected youth and formerly incarcerated young adults? What practices do they use?
- How does local context affect the implementation of these programs and practices, including the role of local, state, and federal policies?
- What is the evidence-base of these programs and practices?

As part of its research, the MDRC team reviewed over 100 programs identified through search and literature review and conducted a qualitative analysis of the characteristics of programs serving the study's target population, including 34 programs that have been studied by an external evaluator and 34 programs that have not yet been studied. The team also completed a qualitative analysis of 25 interviews they conducted with researchers, practitioners, and advocates; policies identified through interviews and literature review; and findings in evaluation reports about the facilitators and barriers to implementation.

## BUILDING CAPACITY AT FORGE CITY WORKS

Under the umbrella of its nonprofit, Forge City Works operates a restaurant, Fire by Forge, along with a catering business as well as a grocery in development. These social enterprises provide a source of revenue while also creating the primary practice arena for trainees to cultivate the soft and hard skills needed to succeed in employment, with those skills also reinforced in a classroom and lab setting within which trainees earn key certifications. Over the course of their journey with Forge City Works, trainees work one-on-one with a case manager and job training coach who provide support in overcoming obstacles while setting and working toward goals. Following job placement, Forge City Works continues to provide ongoing job development coaching as well as additional professional development opportunities to support trainees in succeeding and growing in their careers.

# FORGE CITY WORKS

Hartford, CT



Through a series of workshops with CTOP in 2023, Forge City Works developed a theory of change that refined its mission, narrowed its target population, clarified a progressive series of outcomes, and articulated a robust multi-stage program design that will be implemented in full over the next several years. In June, CTOP made a five-year investment in Forge City Works to support its efforts to strengthen its organizational capacity and develop a greater focus on serving individuals from CTOP's target population.

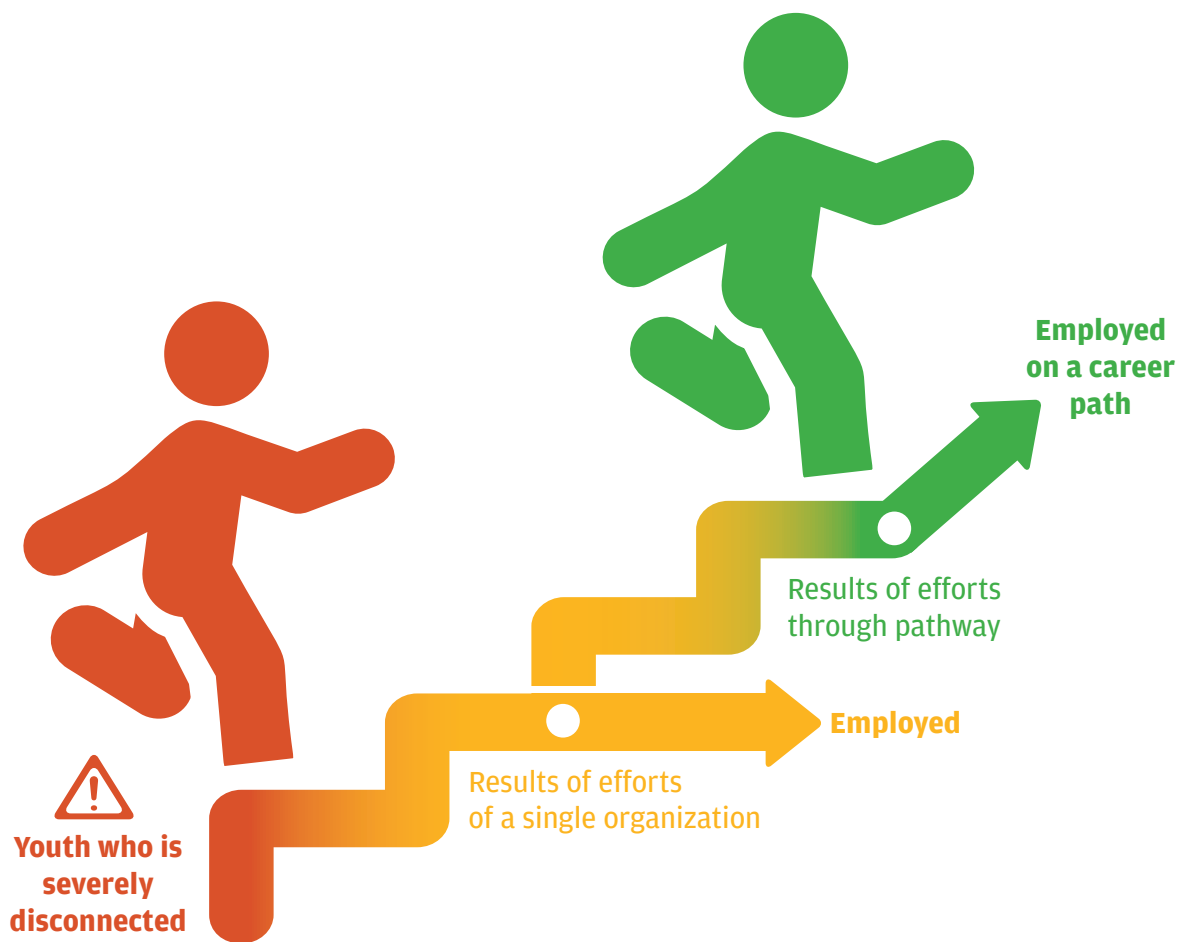
“Collaborating with CTOP is helping us make a profound impact on disconnected youth in our community. CTOP's dedication to re-engaging and empowering these young individuals, and strong focus on data-driven evaluation, has already yielded tangible results.”

- Ben Dubow, Executive Director



# CTOP'S PATHWAYS TO CAREERS STRATEGY

Expanding the potential impact of its investment in Forge City Works, CTOP has developed a new strategic approach to facilitating the development of operational alignment between two or more grantee partners, with the goal that young people who initially are severely disconnected can move in a seamless way from one to the next, with each providing the programming and services that it specializes in delivering in a high-quality way, on a pathway to ultimately securing and sustaining employment on a career path. COMPASS and Forge City Works will partner in the year ahead to co-develop a pathway design tailored to fit their young people and the operational context of their organizations, and then officially launch the first formal cohort of young people to progress through this pathway. With an initial design developed by COMPASS and Forge City Works, CTOP intends to then identify additional partners to engage in this Pathways to Careers model, within Hartford in 2023-24 as well as in additional communities in the years ahead.



# ABOUT CTOP

CTOP is founded, funded, and operated by Dalio Education. CTOP's mission is to invest in and help strengthen youth-serving organizations in Connecticut so they can work effectively, reliably, and sustainably with off-track or disconnected young people ages 14 to 26 in order to help them re-engage in and complete secondary education or a credential, then transition successfully to a post-secondary pathway leading to satisfying employment at a living wage that supports their self-sufficiency.

## CTOP PROGRAM TEAM



**Emily Bonzagni**  
Portfolio Associate



**Adhlere Coffy**  
Senior Portfolio  
Director



**Barbara Dalio**  
Co-Founder



**Carolina Deakins**  
Executive Assistant



**Andrew Ferguson**  
Co-Founder



**Zari Havercome**  
Portfolio Associate



**David Hunter**  
Senior Investment  
Advisor



**Chris Lyddy**  
Director of  
Partnerships



**Samantha Miller**  
Portfolio Director



**Amanda Olberg**  
Senior Portfolio  
Director



**Rosa Ortiz**  
Director of  
Operations

## CTOP ADVISORY BOARD



**Gordon Berlin**  
Former President,  
MDRC



**Sam Cobbs**  
CEO, Tipping Point  
Community

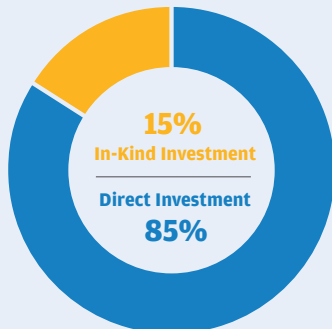


**Carol Thompson  
Cole**  
President and CEO,  
Youth Invest Partners



**Thea Montañez**  
COO,  
City of Hartford

## CTOP INVESTMENTS FOR THE 2023 FISCAL YEAR



### Cohort 1

COMPASS Youth Collaborative	\$1,000,000
Domus Kids	\$1,150,000
Our Piece of the Pie	\$1,000,000

### Cohort 2

Connecticut Violence Intervention and Prevention	\$300,000
Regional Youth Adult Social Action Partnership	\$1,000,000
Roca Hartford Young Mothers Program	\$1,000,000

### Cohort 3

Forge City Works	\$60,000
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### Matching Fund Investments

\$247,375

### In-Kind Investments

\$1,000,000+

### Total Investments

\$6,757,375+

As a social investment fund of Dalio Education, CTOP makes multi-year general operating support grants with funding level determined based on an organization's developmental stage and budget size. CTOP also provides access to additional resources for capacity building as indicated by developmental progression, including restricted grants for targeted purposes and in-kind investments in the form of consultation with CTOP's team and technical assistance from CTOP's network of vendors.





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