



DEPARTMENT OF
COMMUNITY &
HUMAN SERVICES



Summer Youth Employment Program

2025

Annual Report

More Than Just A Summer Job



The City of Alexandria
Workforce Development Center



LETTER FROM DIRECTOR

Dear Friends, Partners, and Supporters,

This year marked an extraordinary chapter for the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP). Through intentional planning, collaboration, and innovation, we elevated the program to new heights, revamping our training model, strengthening our curriculum, and deepening our commitment to youth voices at every level.

Our young people reminded us time and again that the most effective programs are those built with them, not just for them. Their insight, creativity, and determination shaped how we approached every element of SYEP this year, from how we prepare our Youth Advisors to how we match youth with meaningful work experiences across the city. Listening to their perspectives has not only enriched our program design, but also reinforced our mission to ensure every participant feels heard, valued, and supported.

As we look ahead to 2026, we're excited to expand partnerships with businesses across a broader range of industries, creating new pathways for youth to explore, learn, and grow. We remain committed to integrating the valuable feedback we've received from our youth, families, and employer partners to make next year's program even stronger.

We are deeply grateful to Mayor Alyia Gaskins for her steadfast support and her clear recognition of how vital programs like SYEP are to the success and empowerment of our city's youth.

To every youth who participated, every business who opened their doors, and every staff member who made this work possible, thank you. Together, we are building more than summer jobs; we are cultivating the next generation of Alexandria's workforce and amplifying the voices that will define its future.

With gratitude,
Kat Ashmore
Director, Workforce Development Center

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Summer Youth Employment Program is more than just a summer job, it is a strategic pathway to growth, exploration, and opportunity for Alexandria's young residents. Funded to serve 170 youth each year, SYEP is committed to delivering a high-quality program with lasting impact.

Through meaningful, paid work experiences, SYEP equips participants with practical job skills, professional habits, and workplace confidence essential for long-term career success. By providing career exploration, skill-building, and valuable professional connections within a supportive, environment, the program empowers youth to grow personally and professionally, transforming today's experiences into tomorrow's success.

Beyond the benefits to participants, SYEP delivers measurable value to local employers and the community. The program helps businesses cultivate a skilled, ready-to-work talent pipeline, reducing future recruitment and training costs while fostering stronger relationships between employers and emerging workers. Employers also gain fresh perspectives, expanded diversity within their teams, and opportunities to contribute directly to the city's priority of increasing, economic strength and eliminating disparities.

At a community level, SYEP strengthens Alexandria's workforce ecosystem by promoting youth engagement, supporting equitable access to career opportunities, and fostering civic pride. The program not only prepares young people for meaningful employment but also helps ensure that Alexandria's future workforce is inclusive, adaptable, and aligned with the city's evolving economic landscape.

Eligibility



To participate in the program, applicants should be between 14 and 21 years old, currently enrolled in middle or high school, live in the City of Alexandria, and be eligible to work in the U.S.



Youth should also meet income-based eligibility by either receiving benefits such as SNAP, Medicaid, TANF, or free/reduced-price school lunch, or by qualifying based on household income at or below 130% of the federal poverty line.



Students with an IEP are also eligible, even if they do not receive the listed benefits, as long as they meet the eligibility requirements listed above.



The Making of 2025 SYEP: Behind the Scenes

Delivering the Summer Youth Employment Program is a year-round, citywide effort requiring significant coordination and strategic foresight. Each year, the Workforce Development Center (WDC) onboards 170 youth as City employees, providing paid, structured work experiences that strengthen professional skills and community engagement.

The program is managed by one full-time Youth Employment and Training Specialist who oversees all youth initiatives, supported by five Summer Youth Advisors. With an average ratio of one advisor for every 34 youth, the model aims to ensure consistent mentorship and individualized support throughout the program.

SYEP planning begins each October with updates to tools, metrics, applications, and budgets. Outreach to youth and businesses occurs from December through January, followed by eligibility review and curriculum design in February and March. April and May are dedicated to extensive, in-person interviews and intentional “matchmaking” between youth and business partners, targeting each placement to align with participants career goals and interests.



The program officially launches in June, with July check-ins and an August closing ceremony that celebrates achievements. The program year wraps in September with analysis, participant and business debriefs, and planning sessions that inform future improvements.

SYEP is intentionally youth-led, driven by participant feedback that shapes programming, curriculum, and business engagement. Youth voices are integrated at every level, reinforcing the program's commitment to inclusion, responsiveness, and empowerment.

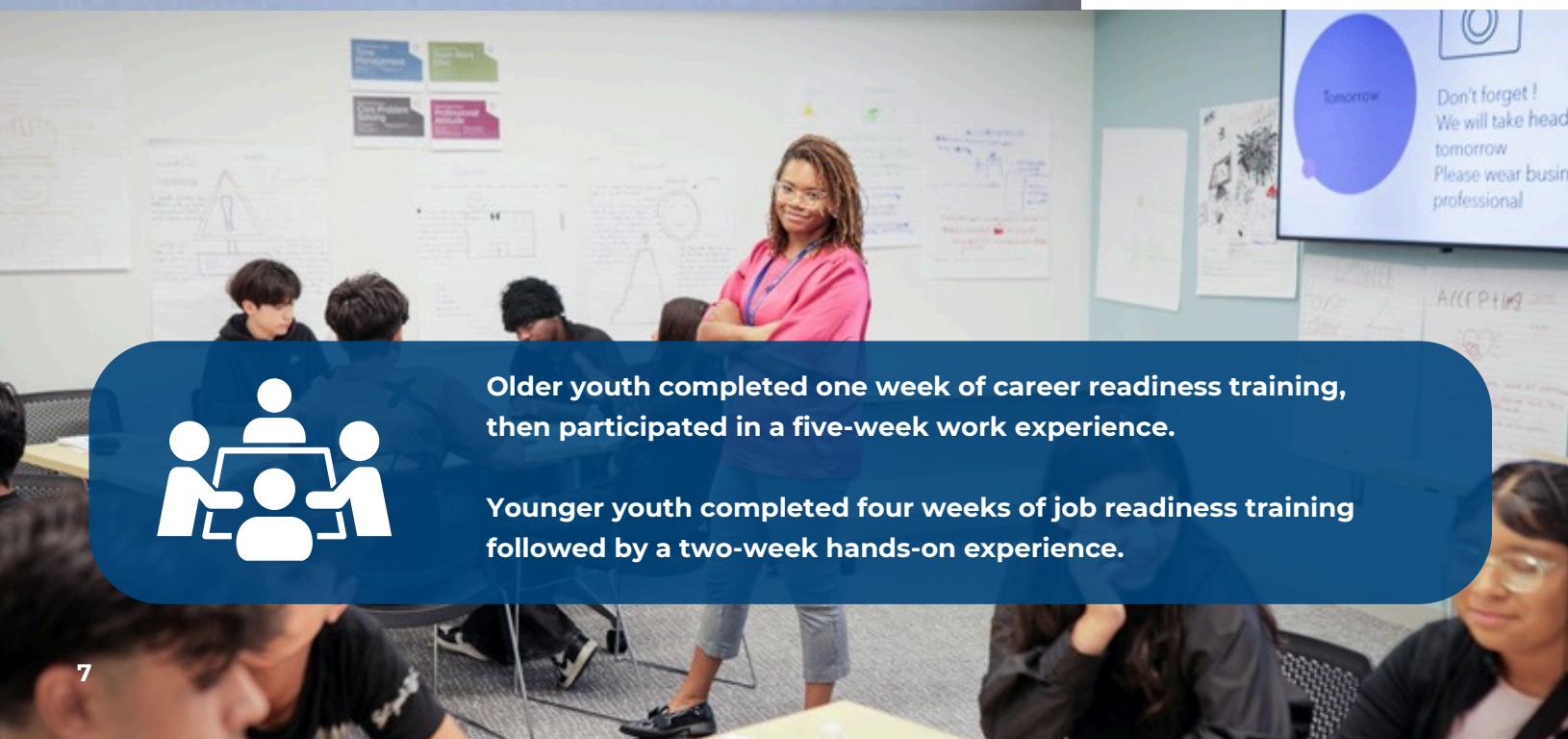
In FY25, SYEP expanded its workforce-readiness curriculum, strengthened Youth Advisor training with trauma-informed mentorship practices, and refined operations to enhance stakeholder communication and efficiency. Through careful planning, strategic partnerships, and a youth-driven approach, SYEP continues to advance economic mobility and workforce readiness for Alexandria's young people.

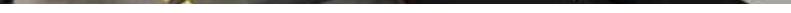
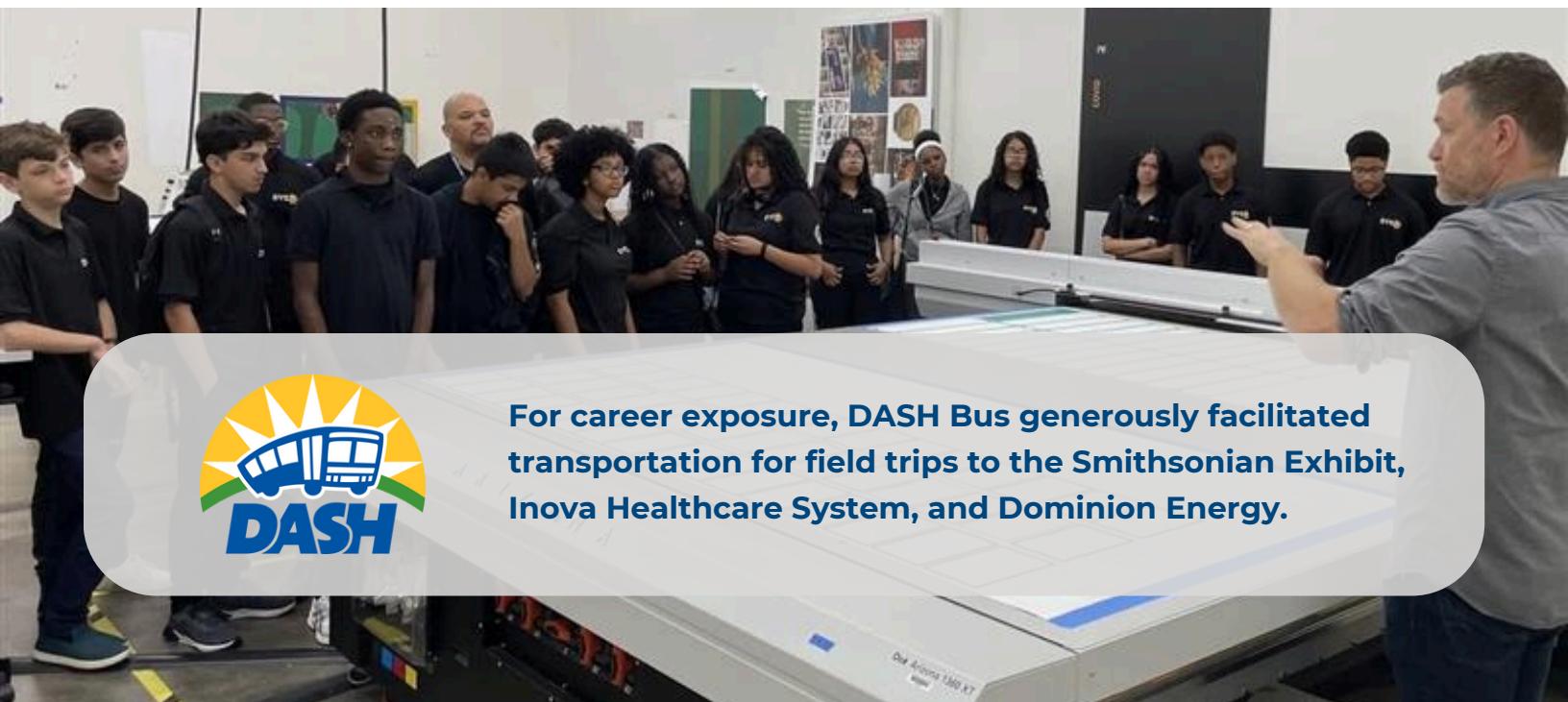
SYEP 2025 Enhancements

For 2025, the Summer Youth Employment Program introduced several strategic enhancements designed to elevate participant experiences and strengthen business engagement. The program now features a cohort age-specific structure, tailored to address varying developmental needs and improve engagement and outcomes. For the first time, SYEP is incorporating career-focused field trips, providing participants with broader exposure to industries and potential future pathways. These updates reflect SYEP's ongoing commitment to inclusivity, responsiveness, and continuous improvement.



These enhancements were informed by insights gained in 2024, through SYEP Youth and Business Roundtables. These sessions provided dedicated spaces for participants and employers to share their unique perspectives, experiences, and feedback. The SYEP team received the information and collaboratively implemented many of their suggestions for 2025.





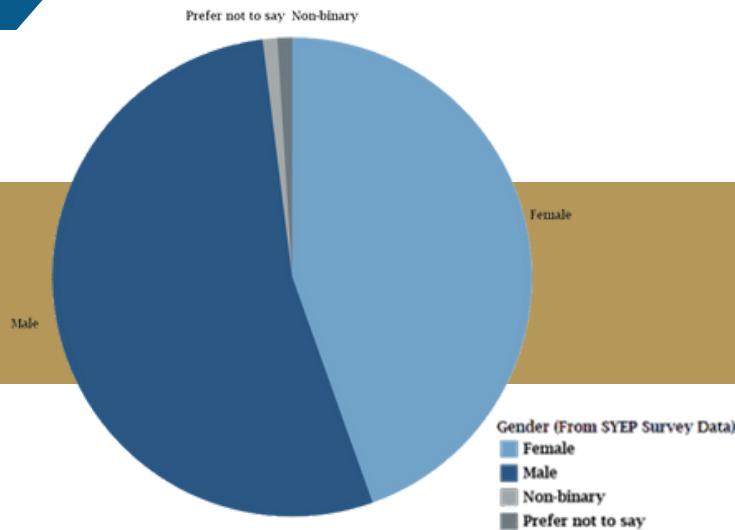
SYEP 171 YOUTH PARTICIPANTS

DEMOGRAPHICS

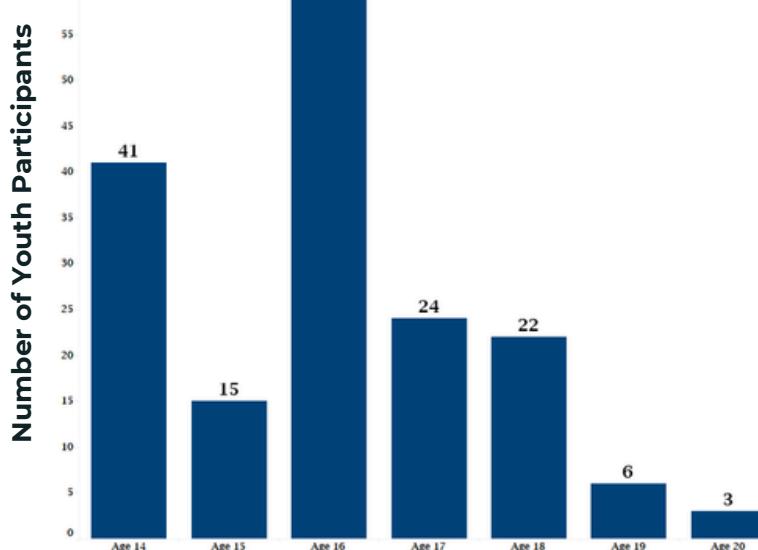
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Gender

There was a slightly higher proportion of males than females which offers a glimpse into the larger gender makeup of the 2025 program.

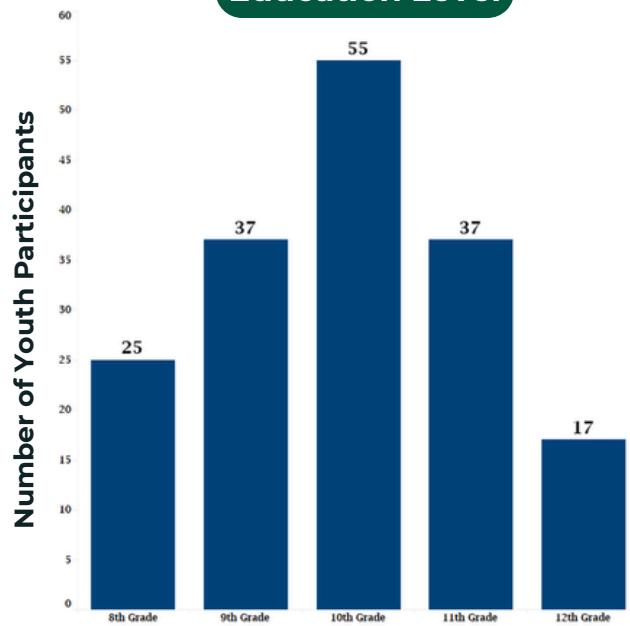


Age



Youth often begin exploring potential careers in middle school, but it is during high school, typically between ages 15 and 17, that they start taking concrete steps toward their goals. Through SYEP, participants begin transforming their interests into action and gain the confidence, knowledge, and professional skills needed to pursue future career pathways.

Education Level



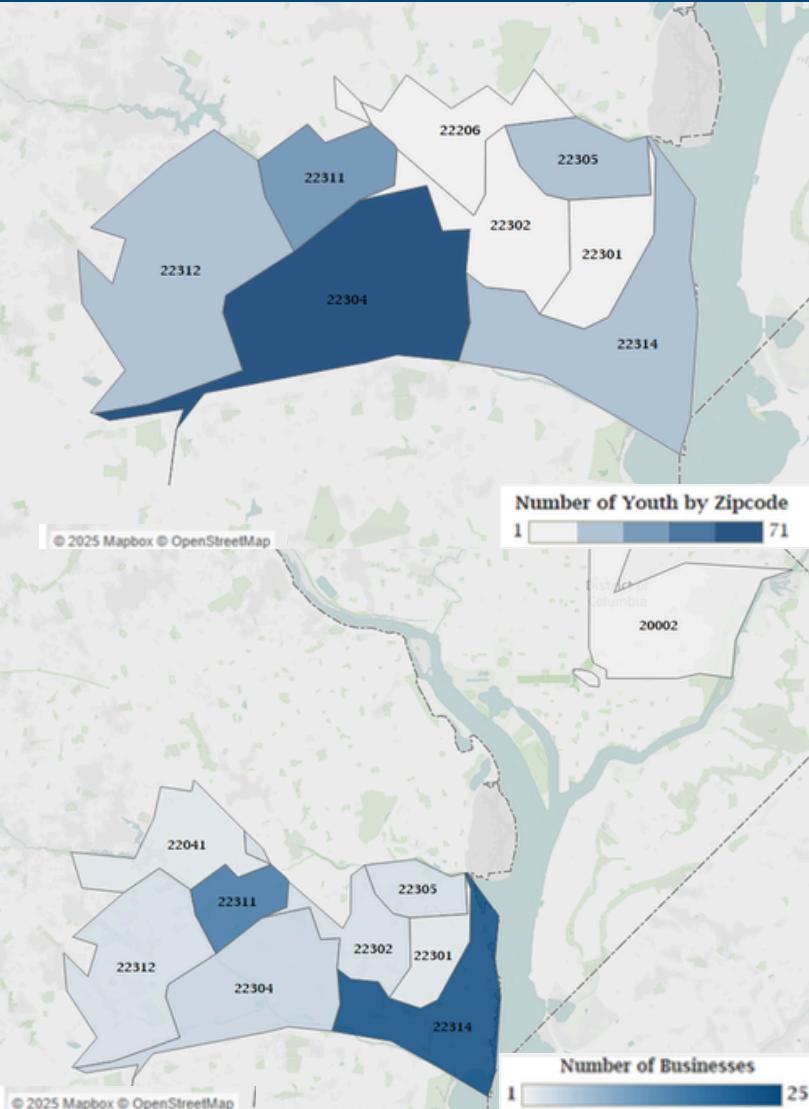
Of the 171 youth participants, nearly one-third (32%) recently completed 10th grade before joining SYEP. This suggests that many participants join the program during a formative educational stage when career exploration and skill-building can be particularly influential. This stage brings consideration for post secondary education when youth seek information for life after high school.

Map Visualization

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WHERE OUR PARTICIPATING YOUTH & BUSINESSES ARE

Advancing Equitable Access & Impacting the Economic Strength Across the City



Participating Youth

The West End is home to a large number of SYEP's participating youth. When matching youth to business worksites, the SYEP team takes several factors into consideration including transportation.

While significant progress has been made in expanding opportunities across diverse neighborhoods, gaps persist. Particularly in areas facing transportation challenges and limited business participation.

Participating Businesses

There is a large presence of participating worksites in the Old Town area.

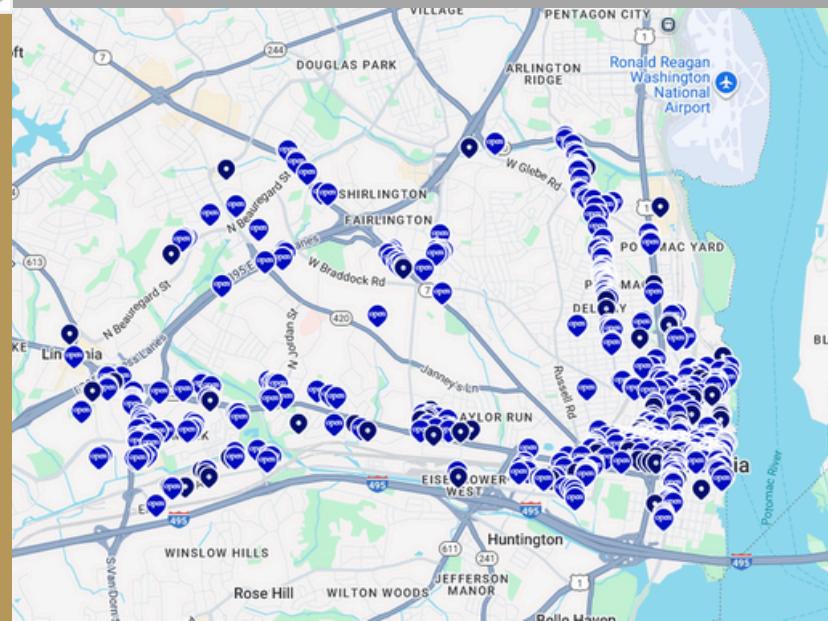
By strategically distributing worksites citywide, SYEP seeks to reduce barriers, better reflect community diversity, and ensure that more young people can engage in meaningful employment experiences.

*Map data @2025 Google via AEDP
local owned brick and mortar businesses in Alexandria

Local Business Presence Citywide

Majority of participating youth reside in the West End, while majority of businesses are located towards the Old Town area.

To further these efforts, SYEP invites additional local businesses from all neighborhoods to join as partners. By providing accessible and varied worksite opportunities, businesses play an essential role in empowering youth, strengthening the local workforce, and promoting inclusive economic growth across the city.





“In the past two years, I worked at William Ramsey and Patrick Henry recreation centers. This year was a little different—I chose to work with ALIVE! because I had volunteered there before and really liked the mission. The orientation this year stood out to me. It felt more engaging, with speakers who genuinely cared and shared advice they wished they had heard at our age. I appreciated that a lot.”

-Aziz Asetanezkai

Youth Development and Impact

Post-Program Goals

- 67%** of youth felt they discovered career pathways aligned to their goals.
- 75%** of youth completed SYEP feeling even more committed to their educational goals.

Post- Experience Job Plans

- 50%** will be looking for part-time work.
- 5%** will be working part-time.
- 17%** will not be working.
- 13%** will be looking for full-time work.
- 8%** will be working full-time.

Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities

- 74%** of youth felt that they were better at communicating my strengths to others post completion of the program.
- 82%** of youth report “This experience helped me identify and understand my skills”.
- 83%** believe they developed new skills that helped them be successful.

Youth Experience and Empowerment

- 84%** of youth said overall this experience made me more hopeful about the future.
- 84%** of youth felt valued and appreciated by others.
- 83%** of youth felt like an important part of this program community.

*Survey data collected from participating youth and businesses via the Working Impact platform.

Business Highlights

63 PARTICIPATING BUSINESSES ACROSS 14 INDUSTRIES

Accommodation and food services, administration support, agriculture entertainment and recreation, construction, economic development, education services, finance and insurance, health care and social assistance, information, manufacturing, professional scientific and technical services, public administration, real estate rental and leasing, and retail.



Business of the Year

This past summer, ALIVE! had the pleasure of hosting a group of youth participants at the two Food Hub locations through the Summer Youth Employment Program. Despite the HVAC unit going out for most of their time with us, the group remained flexible, positive, and committed, braving the hot sunny days as we distributed food outdoors.

I'll admit, I was initially hesitant to sign up again after some challenging experiences in previous years. Working with teens can take an extra level of mentorship and encouragement, and in the past, it sometimes felt like a struggle to keep them engaged. But this group completely changed my perspective. They were motivated, took initiative, and showed a true willingness to learn and help, even when the work wasn't glamorous, like managing compost or sorting through food donations.

We were so proud of their teamwork and positive attitude. Some even picked up a few Spanish phrases from our Service Navigators and the clients we serve! It was inspiring to see their growth and enthusiasm throughout their time with us.

I would absolutely recommend becoming a SYEP worksite to other organizations. Programs like this not only provide valuable opportunities during the summer months for youth but also bring new energy and perspective to our team. This was truly an outstanding group, and we hope they enjoyed their experience as much as we enjoyed having them!

Erika Gaitan
ALIVE!

Supervisory Support

91%

of youth reported that they view their supervisor as a trusted adult.

84%

of youth felt their supervisor made them feel the work completed was important.

80%

of supervisors shared feedback that strengthened youth skills.

*Survey data collected from participating youth and businesses via the Working Impact platform.

Business Feedback: Contribution From Youth

86%

Stated they would recommend the youth to a colleague for a similar position.

82%

State that the youth communicated professionally.

64%

of businesses feel that the assigned youth could identify new and effective ways to solve problems.

59%

state if they had a job opening, they would hire the youth.





Closing Ceremony: Younger Youth Sharing Their Experience in the Cohort



Closing Ceremony Venue: Virginia Tech Innovation Campus Academic One Building



Closing Ceremony: Continuing the Partnership With Comcast to Bridging the Digital Divide

Virginia Tech's Innovation Campus hosted over 300 attendees for the SYEP 2025 Closing Ceremony at Academic Building One, reflecting the program's forward-thinking approach to workforce development and its strategic alignment with cutting-edge innovation and academic excellence.

Comcast, through their initiative Project UP, donated 100 laptops to rising junior and senior SYEP participants, empowering digital access and supporting the program's strategic focus on upskilling the next generation of tech-ready professionals.

Transformative Partnerships

INVESTING IN SYEP

Increased collaboration and financial investment from businesses and community organizations are critical to broadening the program's reach and impact, ensuring that more youth have access to these transformative opportunities.

Expanding public and private partnerships is essential to the continued success and growth of the Summer Youth Employment Program. These partnerships provide the foundation for meaningful work experiences that allow youth to gain practical skills, explore career pathways, and build professional networks that prepare them for long-term success. By working together, public and private partners can create a sustainable model that benefits both youth and the community at large.

LEADING THE CHARGE



Goodwin
Living

For a consecutive program year in a row, Goodwin Living funded a youth's wage for the experience.

Goodwin Living's support extends beyond a single participant, enabling more youth to engage in the program and fostering a cycle of opportunity.

NOW IS THE TIME

As growing community needs and increasing demand for youth employment opportunities call for greater investment and collaboration.

Now is the time for more partners to invest in youth by funding opportunities and engaging in ways that expand access to meaningful experiences. Organizations can contribute by serving as a worksite host, providing real-world environments for skill development; offering field trip experiences that expose youth to various industries and career paths; and/or funding youth wages to ensure broader participation.

Each contribution, whether through time, space, or resources, makes an incredible impact. Together, these partnerships strengthen the community and build a more prepared and resilient workforce.

Community Impact and Equity Lens

Alignment with the City of Alexandria's Children & Youth Community Plan (CYCP)

The Summer Youth Employment Program advances the City's Children & Youth Community Plan (CYCP) 2025 by promoting resilience, opportunity, and equity. SYEP builds key protective factors that help youth thrive academically, socially, and emotionally while strengthening families and community connections.

Supportive Adult Relationships and Mentorship

CYCP Link: Safe, stable, and nurturing relationships.

SYEP Impact: Each youth is paired with a supervisor and supported by WDC Youth Advisors who provide mentorship, feedback, and career guidance, fostering accountability and confidence.

Result: 90% of youth reported feeling supported by an adult mentor.



Career Readiness and Economic Opportunity

CYCP Link: Youth are academically successful and career-ready.

SYEP Impact: SYEP bridges classroom learning with real-world experience, strengthening communication, teamwork, and reliability.

Result: 100% completed career readiness training; 70% reported increased confidence in pursuing career goals.



Structured and Safe Summer Experiences

CYCP Link: Youth have access to safe, enriching out-of-school environments.

SYEP Impact: Families view SYEP as a structured, supervised summer option that supports positive engagement and reduces community supervision gaps.

Result: 171 youth participated in 2025, contributing to household stability and community safety.



Resilience and Social-Emotional Development

CYCP Link: Reduce Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and increase developmental assets.

SYEP Impact: Youth gain persistence, adaptability, and conflict resolution skills, strengthening emotional intelligence and self-efficacy.

Result: Youth demonstrated greater confidence, purpose, and connection, underscoring strengthened resilience and social-emotional growth.



Equity and Community Engagement

CYCP Link: Equitable access and community collaboration.

SYEP Impact: SYEP recruits from underrepresented neighborhoods and partners with schools, nonprofits, and local employers to expand opportunity and inclusion.

Result: Over 30 partners supported youth placements across public and private sectors.



Strengthening Family and Community Stability

CYCP Link: Families are stable, connected, and supported.

SYEP Impact: Families report SYEP provides structure, peace of mind, and supplemental income, benefiting both youth and their households.

Result: Youth reported feeling valued, connected, and supported by trusted adults, reflecting the program's structured environment and its positive impact on family stability.



Looking Ahead

More Than Just a Summer Job.

Summer experiences open doors, but learning and growth shouldn't have a season.

Expanding these experiences year-round would help young people stay engaged, earn income, and contribute to their communities, while strengthening a future-ready workforce and a resilient city.

Alexandria's youth thrive when given meaningful, paid opportunities to develop skills, explore careers, and build confidence.

CALL TO ACTION!

SYEP Partnerships across a diverse range of industries is critical to connecting youth with the careers of tomorrow. We need businesses, nonprofits, and education leaders in relevant, high-demand sectors, the program to strengthen Alexandria's workforce ecosystem, fosters innovation, and equips young people to contribute meaningfully to the community's economic growth and resilience.



We thank the Mayor, Alyia Gaskins and Members of the City Council, City Manager's Office and community leaders for supporting the Summer Youth Employment Program. Your support helps to highlight the program's achievements, expand its reach, and showcase the value of meaningful youth engagement in shaping a vibrant, resilient, and thriving Alexandria.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Looking ahead, SYEP will continue to be more than just a summer job, it will serve as a strategic platform for youth growth, career exploration, and skill development. By fostering innovative approaches to workforce development and deepening partnerships with local businesses, nonprofits, and community organizations, SYEP fills a critical gap in the community by connecting young people to meaningful, paid work experiences. Through these collaborative efforts, the program will empower participants, support businesses, and advance Alexandria's economic vitality, social equity, and future leadership, ensuring that each summer contributes to lasting impact for the community.



Connect with Us

Investing in Youth. Strengthening Alexandria's Workforce.



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