

2021 DATA

# CITY OF LOS ANGELES

## OPPORTUNITY YOUTH



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# OPPORTUNITY YOUTH

In 2021, the City of Los Angeles (LA) was home to approximately 3.9 million people, making it the second most populous city in the country. Given its size, it is not surprising that LA is also home to the second largest population of teens and young adults (ages 16-24) who are neither in school nor at work (i.e., disconnected). **As of 2021, over 62,000 young people were disconnected.**

Often referred to as Opportunity Youth (OY), this population represents an enormous amount of untapped potential. But without the appropriate resources, services, and support, many OY are likely to face several challenges and obstacles as they go through life. Teen and young adult disconnection from two foundational pillars – education and employment – is a serious issue that requires our immediate attention and action. The purpose of this brief paper is to summarize the most recent data on LA's OY population in 2021.

**"WITHOUT THE APPROPRIATE RESOURCES, SERVICES, AND SUPPORT, MANY OY ARE LIKELY TO FACE SEVERAL CHALLENGES AND OBSTACLES AS THEY GO THROUGH LIFE"**

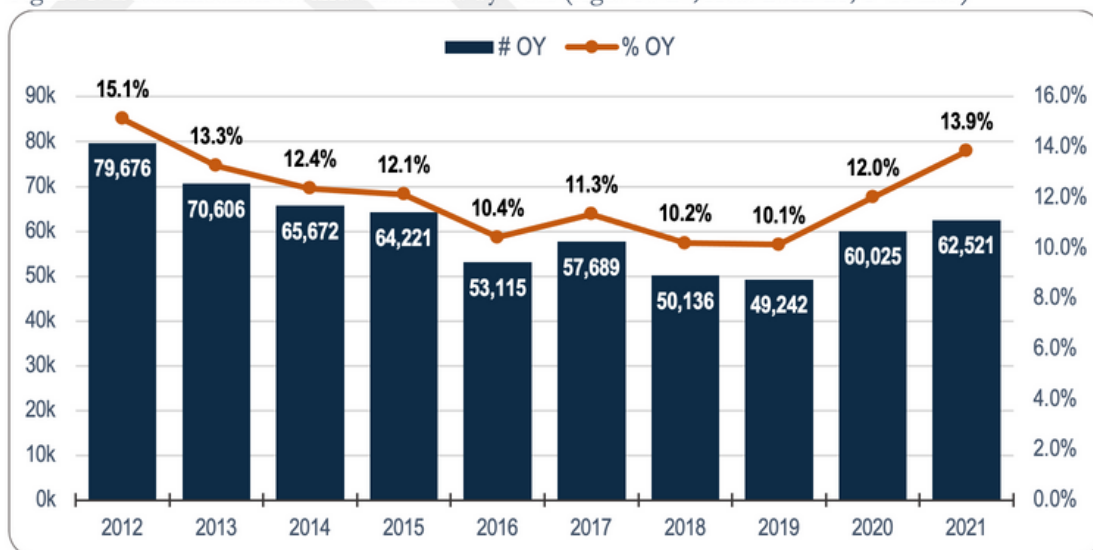
In the years following the Great Recession, a lot of work was done to connect youth to education and/or employment opportunities – and these efforts paid off. In 2010, disconnection rates began to decline and continued doing so for almost a decade. In 2019, the proportion of teens and young adults who were neither in school nor at work was lower than it had been in years. In 2012, for example, more than one in seven 16-24-year-olds (15.1%) in LA were disconnected from both school and work. Four years later, the rate dropped to a low of 10.4% and three years after that, the rate hit a new low (10.1% in 2019).

In 2020, however, COVID-19 led to a significant increase in both the rate and count of disconnected youth (12.0%; 60,025). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was substantial, but even more so on youth in underserved and under-resourced communities. Unfortunately, the pandemic also interfered with the government's ability to collect accurate information, including through the American Community Survey (ACS). According to Measure of America, 2020 data more than likely underestimated the actual number of Opportunity Youth.

# DISCONNECTION TRENDS

This upward trend in disconnection continued into 2021. According to the most recent data available from the ACS, slightly less than half-a-million teens and young adults were living in LA, and **62,521 (13.9%) were disconnected – an increase of over 13,000 (38%) since 2019.** While increases in disconnection rates were also found in LA County and the state of California, they were significantly lower than the city's.

Figure 1. Disconnection Counts and Rates by Year (Ages 16-24; ACS 2012-21, 1-Yr Est.)



# EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION DATA

Table 1 below shows employment and education data for teens and young adults (16-24) in LA. These data indicate that over half were unemployed or not in the labor force at all (57.7%; 260,239), and close to four in ten were not in school (38.5%; 173,620).

Of those who were out of school, 22,226 youth were unemployed and 40,295 were out of the labor force. Together, these 62,521 individuals comprised LA's OY population in 2021.

Disconnection may look different for teens aged 16-19 than it does for young adults aged 20-24. High school, for example, is likely to be the teens' primary activity until graduation, whereas many young adults are in a different phase of their lives and may engage in a broader array of activities. Examining disconnection for each sub-group separately may reveal important trends that would otherwise be concealed. Tables 2 and 3 show employment and education data for teens and young adults, respectively.

Table 1. Employment and Education Status of Youth (16-24; 2021, ACS 1-Yr Est.)

	Not in School	In School	Total
<b>Employed</b>	111,099	79,863	<b>190,962</b>
<b>Unemployed</b>	22,226	15,619	<b>37,845</b>
<b>Not in labor force</b>	40,295	182,099	<b>222,394</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>173,620</b>	<b>277,581</b>	<b>451,201</b>



# EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION DATA

Youth in their late teens comprised 40.1% (180,775) of all 16-24-year-olds in LA. Many of these youth were (1) enrolled in school (87.0%; 157,301), and/or (2) unemployed or not in the labor force (81.9%; 148,100). These data are consistent with what we expect: high school, rather than work, is the primary activity for teens. That said, a substantial proportion of teens were not enrolled in school (13.0%; 23,474), and close to half of those were between the ages of 16-18 (45.5%). Overall, 12,840 (7.2%) teens were disconnected from school and work, meaning that 92.8% were connected to at least one of the two foundational pillars. Approximately one in seven teens (12.3%, 22,190) were in school and had a job. Overall, the vast majority of 16-19-year-olds were in school in 2021 which explains the relatively low disconnection rate. Employment and education data for their older peers, however, tells a different story.

Table 2. Employment and Education Status of Teens (16-19; 2021, ACS 1-Yr Est.)

	Not in School	In School	Total
Employed	10,485	22,190	32,675
Unemployed	3,532	7,784	11,316
Not in labor force	9,457	127,327	136,784
Total	23,474	157,301	180,775

Young adults (i.e., 20-24) comprised over half (59.9%; 270,426) of all 16-24-year-olds in LA. Many individuals in this sub-group were enrolled in school (44.5%; 120,280), but only 58.5% (158,287) were employed. This means that a large proportion of young adults were either unemployed (9.8%; 26,529) or out of the workforce completely (31.7%; 85,610). Overall, although approximately one in five 20-24-year-olds (21.3%) were connected to school and work, far too many were disconnected from both (18.3%; 49,532).

7.2%

Disconnection rate for 16-19 year olds

18.3%

Disconnection rate for 20-24 year olds

Of the nearly half-a-million teens and young adults (16-24) in LA, 13.9% were neither in school nor at work. Proportionally, however, there were significant differences in the amounts and rates of teen, relative to young adult, disconnection. Although teens (16-19) made up 40% of the total 16-24-year-old population, they comprised only 20.8% of the total disconnected population. In contrast, young adults (20-24) accounted for 79.2% of the total disconnected population, but only 60% of the total population. Approximately 87% of teens were enrolled in school, but fewer than 60% of young adults were employed.

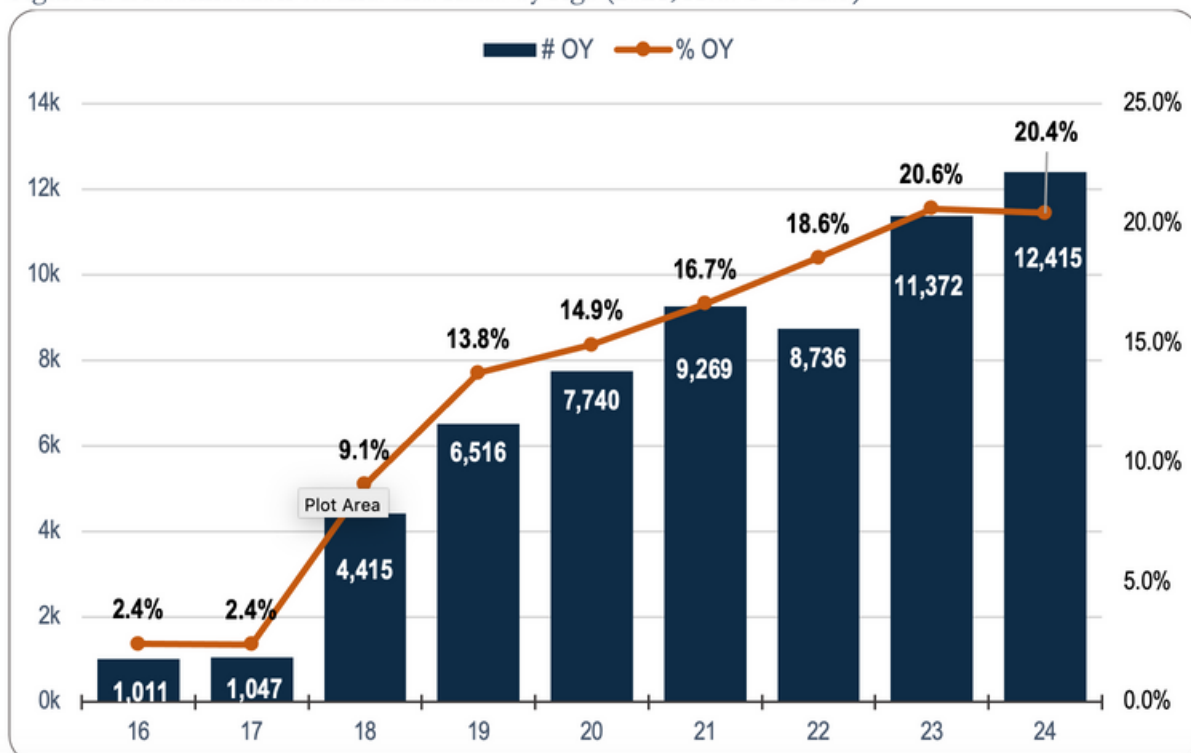
# STARK DIFFERENCES

Table 3. Employment and Education Status of Young Adults (20-24; 2021, ACS 1-Yr Est.)

	Not in School	In School	Total
<b>Employed</b>	100,614	57,673	<b>158,287</b>
<b>Unemployed</b>	18,694	7,835	<b>26,529</b>
<b>Not in labor force</b>	30,838	54,772	<b>85,610</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>150,146</b>	<b>120,280</b>	<b>270,426</b>

The data in the tables above indicate a stark difference in disconnection rates between teens (16-19) and young adults (20-24). To further examine the variations in rates by age, we plotted disconnection counts and rates for each specific age. The results, though not surprising, are dramatic nonetheless. Very few younger teens (16 and 17) were disconnected (particularly from school), but this was not the case for older teens and young adults. According to the data, the disconnection rate almost quadrupled from 17 to 18, suggesting that many teens either finish high school (or leave before earning their diploma) and do not continue their education or enter the workforce. As noted in the sub-sections above, young adults comprised a large proportion of OY, and, as shown below in Figure 2, 23- and 24-year-olds alone comprised 41.1% of all disconnected youth.

Figure 2. Disconnection Counts and Rates by Age (2021, ACS 1-Yr Est.)



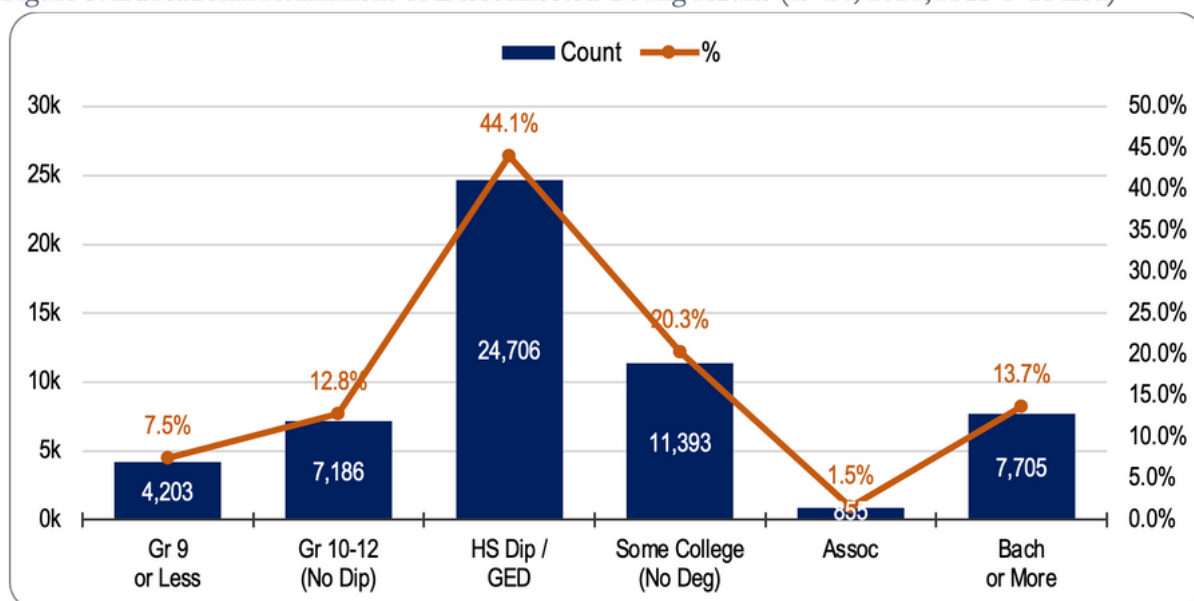
# SCHOOL & WORK: SOURCES OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

Most of the important experiences, abilities, skills, and knowledge needed to lead satisfying and productive lives are acquired through education or employment.

Teens and young adults who are in school and/or working are actively investing (money and time) in their social capital in the hopes of earning higher and better returns-on-investment over time. Disconnection from both school and work can significantly reduce not only one's social capital, but also the capacity to develop more of it throughout life.

Figures 3 and 4 provide a snapshot of the education and employment data for disconnected teens and young adults. Figure 3 shows educational attainment for disconnected young adults, ages 19-24. According to the data, 20.3% did not finish high school and 44.1% did, but stopped and did not continue their education. Overall, only 15% of 19-24-year-olds who were neither in school nor at work had a post-secondary degree.

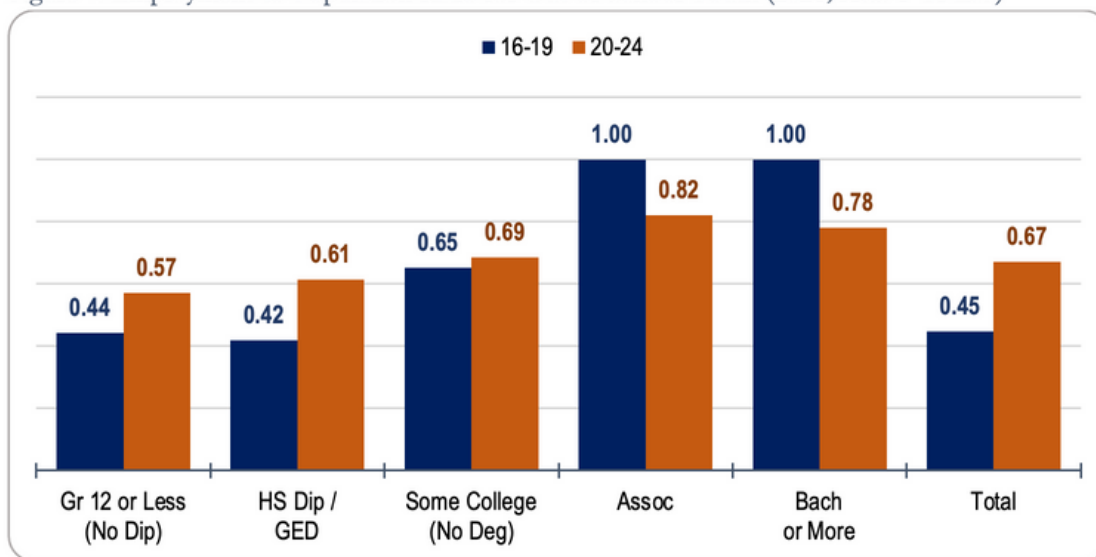
Figure 3. Educational Attainment of Disconnected Young Adults (19-24; 2021, ACS 1-Yr Est.)



The data in Figure 4 below indicate that 45% of out-of-school 16-19-year-olds and 67% of 20-24-year-olds were employed at some point in 2021.

These data also demonstrate the importance of parlaying one source of social capital (education) to increase overall gains through a second source (work). That is, educational achievement and employment are positively linked, such that as individuals attain more education, they are more likely to be employed.

Figure 4. Employment-to-Population Ratio for Out-of-School Youth (2021, ACS 1-Yr Est.)





# CHARACTERISTICS OF OPPORTUNITY YOUTH

The next two sub-sections show additional detail on LA's OY population. As shown in Table 4 below, over half of the disconnected youth lived below the poverty level and many were Hispanic. Over one in four identified as two or more races, slightly fewer identified as White alone, approximately 12% identified as Black alone, and less than 5% identified as Asian.

Table 4. Characteristics of OY Population (2021, ACS 1-Yr Est.)

Age Group	# OY	< 200% Pov	Female	Male	Hisp.	Non-Hisp.	Asian	Black	White	2+ Races	No HS Dip	HS Dip or More
16-19	12,989	7,464	4,944	8,045	8,986	4,003	620	1,552	1,781	3,316	3,678	9,311
20-24	49,532	28,670	23,996	25,536	29,798	19,734	2,439	5,857	11,761	12,964	9,996	39,536
All OY	62,521	36,134	28,940	33,581	38,784	23,737	3,059	7,409	13,542	16,280	13,674	48,847
	% of All OY	57.8%	46.3%	53.7%	62.0%	38.0%	4.9%	11.9%	21.7%	26.0%	21.9%	78.1%

Virtually any pathway to experiencing positive life outcomes can be linked to consistent school and/or workplace exposure. Young people detached from education and employment are not only less likely to experience such outcomes, they are more likely to experience a broad array of obstacles and negative outcomes. Figure 5 below compares several life circumstances between connected and disconnected youth."

As shown below, disconnected teens and young adults are significantly more likely to:

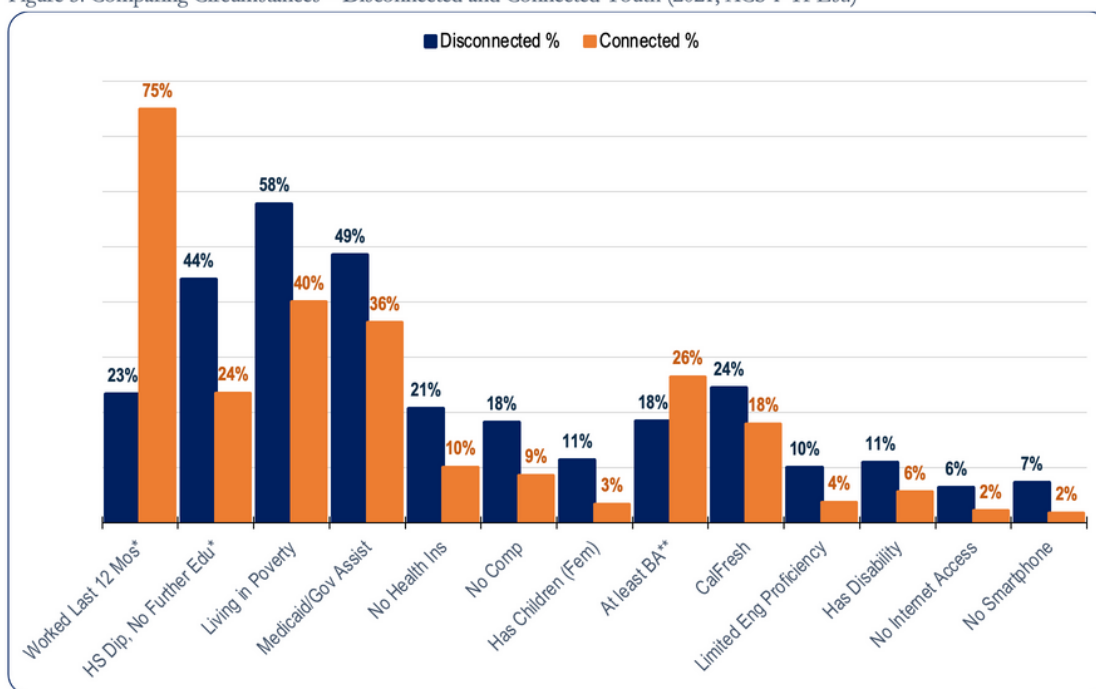
- Have only a high school diploma (or equivalent; 19-24-year-olds)
- Receive food stamps
- Receive Medicaid
- Live in poverty
- Have children of their own (females)
- Have a disability



Additionally, disconnected teens are significantly less likely to:

- Have a bachelor's degree (21-24-year-olds)
- Have health insurance
- Be proficient in English
- Have a computer
- Have access to the internet

Figure 5. Comparing Circumstances – Disconnected and Connected Youth (2021, ACS 1-Yr Est.)



\*NOTE: AGES 19-24; \*\*NOTE: AGES 21-24

Starting in 2012, the ACS collected and analyzed data at the Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMA) level. According to the US Census Bureau, PUMAs are “non-overlapping, statistical geographic areas that partition each state or equivalent entity into geographic areas containing no fewer than 100,000 people each”. In other words, PUMAs provide an additional layer of specificity that allows for a meaningful analysis of geographical distribution.

# WHERE LA'S OPPORTUNITY YOUTH LIVE

Table 5 below indicates the number of disconnected youth in each of the 24 PUMAs in LA County that are considered within the City of Los Angeles. Because city and PUMA boundaries are not perfectly aligned, however, there are areas outside of these 24 PUMAs that are within the City of LA (and vice versa). That said, the US Census Bureau published a “crosswalk” indicating the which of LA County’s 69 total PUMAs should be used when exploring City of LA data.

The data in Table 5 are sorted by the highest to lowest number of disconnected 16-24-year-olds. In large part, these data are not surprising, although the variability in disconnection counts and rates between PUMAs is high. Whereas the highest rates of disconnection are found in the south central, southern, and northern-most parts of the city, the lowest rates are in the north central and west. Furthermore, San Pedro, Boyle Heights, Westmont, and Watts are home to nearly 30% of the city’s OY population, but only 21% the city’s overall teen and young adult population. In San Pedro, close to 20 out of every 100 16-24-year-olds is neither in school nor at work while in Koreatown, only five out of every 100 is disconnected. With this data in mind, the US Census Bureau published a “crosswalk” indicating which of LA County’s 69 total PUMAs should be used when analyzing City of LA data."

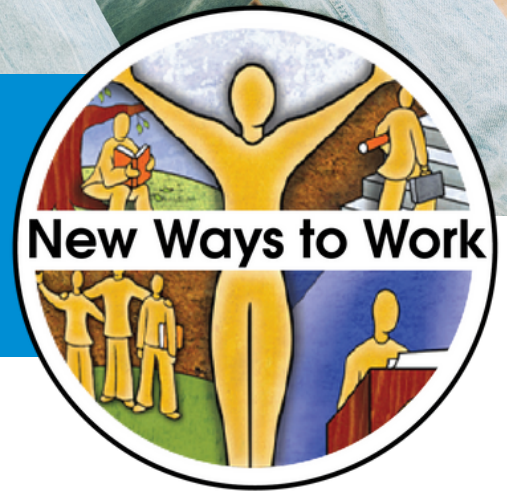
Table 5. Summary OY Data by Area (2021, ACS 1-Yr Est.)

PUMA	# of OY	Total 16-24	% OY	Share of All OY
San Pedro	4,750	24,565	19.3%	7.6%
Central City & Boyle Heights	4,585	24,735	18.5%	7.3%
Westmont	4,451	23,628	18.8%	7.1%
Watts	4,047	23,521	17.2%	6.5%
Silver Lake, Echo Park, & Westlake	4,028	22,883	17.6%	6.4%
Arleta, Pacoima, & San Fernando	3,050	18,558	16.4%	4.9%
Mission Hills & Panorama	2,914	18,873	15.4%	4.7%
E. Vernon	2,796	20,281	13.8%	4.5%
Mt. Wash., Highland Park, & Glassell Park	2,625	21,118	12.4%	4.2%
Van Nuys & N. Sherman Oaks	2,612	17,763	14.7%	4.2%
Hancock Park & Mid-Wilshire	2,438	13,312	18.3%	3.9%
Granada Hills & Sylmar	2,379	15,557	15.3%	3.8%
Chatsworth & Porter Ranch	2,248	22,499	10.0%	3.6%
Encino & Tarzana	2,184	15,626	14.0%	3.5%
W. Adams & Baldwin Hills	2,129	13,903	15.3%	3.4%
N. Hollywood & Valley Village	2,127	14,914	14.3%	3.4%
Westwood & West LA	1,960	34,341	5.7%	3.1%
USC & Expo. Park	1,875	21,717	8.6%	3.0%
Canoga Park, Winnetka, & Woodland Hills	1,871	15,853	11.8%	3.0%
Sunland, Sun Valley, & Tujunga	1,740	15,540	11.2%	2.8%
Hollywood	1,669	13,244	12.6%	2.7%
Pac. Palisades	1,655	12,381	13.4%	2.6%
Koreatown	1,637	11,193	14.6%	2.6%
Marina del Rey, Westchester, & Culver City	751	15,196	4.9%	1.2%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>62,521</b>	<b>451,201</b>	<b>13.9%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>





# CONCLUDING THOUGHTS & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



One of the most important steps in helping our city's disconnected teens and young adults is understanding who and where they are. For this reason, we provided a high-level summary of just this type of information. It is our hope that these data be used to spark discussion, initiate action, inform policy, and generally make data-driven decisions that optimize the chances of success for as many youth as possible.

We would like to thank the California Opportunity Youth Network (COYN), the Los Angeles Youth Opportunity Network, Unite LA, and our generous funders for their dedication not only to our city's Opportunity Youth population, but our larger community as well. By tirelessly working to connect and reconnect teens and young adults to the education and employment opportunities they need to flourish, they are laying the foundation for today's young Angelenos and countless more in the future.