



EXPANDING OPPORTUNITY AND OUTCOMES FOR YOUNG MEN OF COLOR

“Improving life prospects and outcomes for young people, including young men of color, is the right thing to do not just for those individuals, but for our economy as a whole.”

—*My Brother’s Keeper Task Force Report to the President*

There is nothing more important for strengthening our country’s future than figuring out how to help all young people reach their full potential. While many people face barriers to advancement in our society, young men and boys of color consistently face more—and more harmful—challenges. President Obama launched the My Brother’s Keeper initiative to name these problems, which include poverty, failing schools, and lack of career options, and to tackle them head on.

Jobs for the Future has been working for over 30 years to ensure that all Americans, especially those underserved by current systems, have the education, skills, and credentials needed to succeed in our economy. We’re fueled by the conviction that it is the right thing to do for economic growth, as well as for individual success. JFF has a strong track record of creating ladders of economic opportunity for all young people who are struggling to advance, including young men of color.

With our longtime efforts to fix the “leaks” in the school-to-career pipeline, we share the priority of the My Brother’s Keeper Task Force to identify approaches that empower all of our children with the tools to succeed as they move through key life stages.

The Task Force has identified a set of initial recommendations to expand opportunity for young men of color and strengthen economic growth. The milestones from adolescence to adulthood align with JFF’s three areas of work:

- > Graduating from high school ready for college and career.
- > Earning a credential with labor market value through postsecondary education or training.
- > Successfully entering and advancing in the workforce.

Working with partners nationwide, we design and deliver innovative programs, system reforms, and policy solutions that can improve outcomes for low-income and minority youth and adults. We know that we can’t solve these problems alone. We are looking both for new ways to work with longstanding partners and for new partnerships as we consider how to do better for our nation’s young men and boys of color.



Trainees and their instructor in a GreenWays workforce partnership, Building Futures, focused on energy-efficient building in Washington, DC. Photograph ©2012 Steven Purcell

Meanwhile, here are a few highlights of our well-established initiatives and promising new approaches that align with the goals of My Brother's Keeper:

PREPARING FOR COLLEGE AND CAREER

TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION:

Every American child should have a postsecondary option.

JFF APPROACH:

We believe that acceleration is more effective than remediation in motivating young people who have struggled in school. Expanding dual enrollment access to students of color and those who would be the first in their family to attend college is one of our proven strategies.

Early College Designs, which immerse high school students in a "college for all" culture and support their progression into dual-enrollment college courses, have produced particularly dramatic results, beating typical outcomes for students of color and low-income youth (2013 data):

- > **90%** of early college students earn a high school diploma vs. national rates of **66%** of blacks, **69%** of Native Americans, and **72%** of Latinos
- > **30%** of early college students earn an Associate's degree or other postsecondary credential along with their high school diploma vs. very few students of any background nationally
- > **71%** of early college graduates enroll in college the semester following graduation vs. **67%** of black students and **67%** of Latinos nationally; and **54%** of low-income students.

Because black and Hispanic youth are more likely than others to leave high school before graduation, we know that dropout recovery is also critical to the goal of ensuring that young men of color are on a pathway to college and a career. Our evidence-based **Back on Track** initiative reengages youth and young adults who

have left school and are not employed. The combination of high-quality teaching, explicit instruction in college-going skills, and intensive first-year-of-college supports are helping thousands of young people understand the importance of higher education and start to believe they can succeed there.

Just one inspiring example: Since 2007, more than **1,000** former dropouts—almost all Latino—have graduated from the College, Career, & Technology Academy in Pharr, Texas, and earned credits at South Texas College.

EARNING POSTSECONDARY CREDENTIALS

TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION:

All Americans should receive the education and training needed for quality jobs of today and tomorrow.

JFF APPROACH:

We believe that our postsecondary systems must transform career and technical training so students can earn high-value credentials and find good jobs fast. Combining basic skills instruction with career and technical learning makes academic classes relevant and engaging. Accelerating developmental education moves students into credit-bearing courses more quickly.

For young adults without a diploma or basic reading, writing, and math skills, our **Accelerating Opportunity** initiative is helping thousands earn a GED and advance quickly toward college credentials in high-demand occupations such as health care, manufacturing, and information technology.

In just two years, 78 community colleges from seven states—Arkansas, Illinois, Georgia, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, and Mississippi—are reporting encouraging outcomes. Between 2012 and 2014, nearly **5,400** students enrolled, with the following results:

- > **6,352** credentials earned
- > **2,017** students earned 12 or more college credits
- > **1,187** job placements

ADVANCING CAREERS AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION:

Anyone who wants a job should be able to get a job that allows them to support themselves and their families.

JFF APPROACH:

We believe that forming employer and education partnerships will best serve unemployed and working adults who need higher incomes to support themselves and their families. Adults gain basic academic and job readiness skills, along with occupational skills and credentials, so they can start to advance in a chosen career. Work-based learning is an essential element.

GreenWays, a recent initiative, targets careers in the rapidly growing “green” economy. An early example of success: Using funds from the U.S. Department of Labor’s Green Jobs Innovation Fund, JFF is collaborating with workforce development projects in seven cities.

In Washington, DC, Building Futures developed a new green carpentry curriculum and enhanced its strategy for guiding students from pre-apprenticeships to registered apprenticeships. The program placed **70 percent** of black men in jobs at an average wage of **\$13.78**, almost double the national minimum wage.

Early work-based learning can also reduce the number of people who arrive in their mid-20s without usable job credentials. Middle schools and high schools in our **Pathways to Prosperity Network** show youth long before graduation what various careers have to offer through information, advising, and work experiences.



Community college student at Northwest Indian College in Washington State. This tribal college, along with five others, piloted a basic skills program related to Accelerating Opportunity. Photography courtesy Northwest Indian College

MOVING FORWARD

President Obama launched My Brother’s Keeper in February 2014 with a \$200 million private sector investment. Now the President’s taskforce is building on its initial recommendations and launching specific plans to use proven tools to “ensure that all young people who are willing to do the hard work to get ahead can reach their full potential.”

At JFF, we are proud of our work to scale up proven practices that can help improve outcomes for young men of color and all young Americans. We look forward to being part of the movement to use what works to propel all young people to college, career, and life success.

“So we all have a job to do. And we can do it together . . .”

—President Obama, announcing My Brother’s Keeper initiative

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Jobs for the Future works with our partners to design and drive the adoption of education and career pathways leading from college readiness to career advancement for those struggling to succeed in today’s economy.



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