As the world of work has shifted drastically in response to new norms incited by the pandemic, young people across Philadelphia have risen to the challenge. Once again in a primarily in-person setting, young people learned valuable skills, strove to be the change in their communities, and formed valuable relationships with peers and mentors through their WorkReady Summer experiences.

All I have to say is thanks for allowing me to put my skills to work. I had a blast working at Pennypack Park Environmental Center, and I really do wish I could work there for longer. I loved going there and being greeted by such great friends. I love the outdoors, I love wildlife, and I love to do something fun. Working at the Environmental Center was a 3-in-1 package. I will always be happy to return to the center anytime if I’m needed.

~ Kyle B., Pennypack Environmental Center WorkReady Participant

I enjoy working for WorkReady every summer and I look forward to working for you until I can’t. I have made new friends, learned new things and have been exposed to different opportunities.

~ Abdul-Samad C., WorkReady Participant

I love how WorkReady was so respectful and caring toward all my colleagues and myself. I love how we learned different types of art and just explored through new things. They are really more amazing than they take credit for.

~ Meah B., WorkReady Participant

Each summer, 75% of our staff are Deaf or Hard of Hearing adults. We believe that it is very valuable that our students’ first paid work experience be in a communicatively accessible environment in which they can receive immediate feedback regarding their performance. PYN programming has become foundational to our transition to work programming.

~ Pennsylvania School for the Deaf, WorkReady 2022 Provider

We thank our partners, providers, and funders for once again being the driving force allowing us to adapt the Summer experience to a changing world. This report will outline our realities, innovations and outcomes from WorkReady Summer 2022. We intend to leverage our lessons learned from this year to innovate for 2023 and the years to follow.
BREACHING DOWN BARRIERS

PYN continues to adjust our processes and approaches as the COVID-19 pandemic evolves. This moment in time presents a unique opportunity for PYN to assess and address general barriers to accessing the workforce and barriers within our own WorkReady system. We are devising systems and strategies to break down barriers and increase access for young people in Philadelphia.

EQUITABLE ACCESS

To create a more equitable experience and ensure more youth the opportunity to participate in WorkReady, PYN increased youth pay to $11 per hour for wage-based programs and ~$1,000 for incentive-based programs.

Additionally, to encourage early enrollment, PYN implemented an incentive program that provided $150 to the first 6,000 youth to be fully qualified for a WorkReady experience.

84% of providers felt that connected youth were additionally motivated by the $150 incentive.

As a result of these changes, nearly double the amount of total pay went directly to young people, allowing greater economic activity and financial freedom for participants.

SUPPORTING SAFE EXPERIENCE

This year, WorkReady was able to transition back to primarily in-person programming for the summer.

Nearly all available programs included at least three days per week of in-person programming, with all provider programs provided with PPE equipment to ensure the safety of youth and staff.
In response to the widened scope for WorkReady, over 7,500 young people were able to participate in WorkReady experiences - the highest number in five years!

With the return to in-person programming and changes in the climate of in-person work, WorkReady Summer was able to serve over 7,500 youth in 2022, both meeting and exceeding programmatic capacity prior to the pandemic. Between increased participation and the implementation of equitable pay initiatives, over $3 million more was distributed to young Philadelphians as compared to 2021 ($4.89 million).
ADAPTING BY ACKNOWLEDGING

There are important acknowledgements that we must make on a systemic and programmatic level in order to continue to provide accessible, equitable work experiences for youth of all backgrounds. PYN has been actively surveying young participants, program providers and worksites to gain clear insights into where WorkReady can continue to adapt to the needs of the communities we serve.

The digital application process has greatly widened the reach of WorkReady opportunities.

By adapting our WorkReady application process for an online world, we were able to reach more youth across the city than ever before and give them the opportunity to engage in programming. However, we recognize that with this change comes the added responsibility to acknowledge the needs of those with limited access and knowledge of the necessary technology.

78% of providers encountered some difficulties while assisting youth with online documentation processes.

PYN is seeking to implement new online systems to create comprehensive and simplified processes for applications and to ensure timely youth payments are made.

Additional communication measures will help connect youth with resources aiding in the application process.

Since the start of the pandemic, PYN has implemented several significant youth-focused resources to assist with the application process, including a series of how-to videos walking youth through the digital application and the WorkReady Customer Service Hotline, which allows youth to receive direct assistance from PYN staff. Many youth and families were able to access these resources in 2022 - the Customer Service Hotline answered and assisted over 7,100 callers in June through August alone.

44% of youth surveyed stated that they were unaware of the WorkReady Hotline.

PYN is revamping the communication of available resources for youth such through means such as as collaborating with community organizations, conducting outreach to educate months prior to WorkReady Summer, and increasing our presence on youth-focused social media platforms.
Major shifts in staff can create hurdles, but also introduce new potential for growth.

As the workforce is in a state of flux in the wake of the pandemic, PYN and many provider organizations are experiencing shifts in staff that have had a number of effects on WorkReady this year. These effects range from delays in reviewing youth documentation to disconnects in communication between PYN staff and providers.

1 in 5 providers experienced major changes in staff or staff shortages this summer.

However, welcoming new staff also opens doors for introducing new perspectives to the WorkReady process. PYN seeks to continue to build bridges with our WorkReady providers experiencing these changes by adapting our knowledge transfer methods to the needs of our partners and implementing provider feedback into our overall strategy.

The needs of youth in Philadelphia are changing along with new trends in the workforce.

Young people in Philadelphia have a unique perspective and unique needs in both the present and for the future. Amid health and safety concerns related to COVID-19 and gun violence in communities, safe, in-person work opportunities can help address present issues. Meanwhile, digital literacy and tech education have become increasingly vital to excel post-pandemic.

88% of worksites were able to provide youth with hands-on experience with current essential industry technologies.

PYN will continue to work to ensure the ongoing safety of worksites through its thorough approval process for the sake of now, while analyzing programming and aiming to equip providers with necessary technology and educational resources to adapt to youth needs for future success.
CONCLUSION

Two years ago, when Philadelphia entered lockdown due to the pandemic, PYN and partners managed to quickly pivot summer programming for the sake of impacting young lives through education and employment. Looking back, some of those pivots have become new norms. Our mission now is reintroducing young people to the physical world of work while embracing and innovating with the new digital elements that drive our world.

We could not hope to fulfill that mission without the ongoing dedication of our providers. As we readapt in the wake of COVID-19, we look to keep improving our services through their continued support and collaboration.

We are also thankful to public, private, philanthropic and individual donors who helped PYN meet fundraising requirements for increasing wages and providing more equitable experiences. As we seek to continue to increase the scale of WorkReady in the face of rising costs, continued support from the Philadelphia business community is crucial to the program’s success.

Looking forward, we are analyzing ways to optimize the balance of physical and digital programming and processes for the ease of youth, families, and partners.

Our world has evolved and PYN chooses to evolve in response. We will continue to innovate and create high-quality work and educational experiences for years to come.
GET INVOLVED

DONATE to our work

HIRE young people

CONTACT us to discuss alternate ways to get involved

Contact PYN to learn more.