

OC LEADER BOARD

Opinion, Analysis, Insight

OC CEOs Can Equip Tomorrow's Workforce Through Mentorship

One year has undone an entire decade's worth of progress for opportunity youth.

Over the past 10 years, the rate of 16 to 24-year-olds who are not in school nor working, referred to as "opportunity youth," fell steadily from a high of 14.7% to 11.2%, affecting 4.3 million youngsters, or 1 in every 9, according to a study by the **Social Science Research Council**.

Since the onset of the pandemic, that same rate may double to nearly 9 million youngsters.

These totals are the highest since the aftermath of the Great Recession and represent one-quarter of our nation's young people facing long-term effects on earnings, employment, homeownership and health.

This devastating news is more than just a concern for children, parents and youth-serving organizations. This talent crisis impacts businesses and economies across Orange County and beyond.

When opportunity youth are cut from institutions and experiences that adequately prepare them for a self-sufficient adulthood, it weakens our talent pipeline. And with the second largest workforce in California, OC has much to lose.

One of the most tangible ways to reverse the residual damage COVID-19 wrought on our next generation of talent is through mentorship and exposing youth to strong local leaders.

Now is the time to set the vision for how we can help youth emerge stronger from this crisis—and CEOs can play a major role in building the vibrant, diverse workforce of OC's future.

The Orange County and Inland Chapter of Big Brothers Big Sisters, which dates its local operations to 1958, has 71 paid staff and 3,159 volunteers who helped mentor 4,405 youngsters in the year ended June 30.

After the coronavirus struck, we immediately pivoted to a virtual model of mentoring. We trained volunteers to connect with mentees via video chat platforms like Zoom. We also launched our first e-mentoring program model that will remain virtual indefinitely. Called College Bigs, it helps high school students learn how to become the first generation in their families to attend college.

We were able to retain most of our volunteers and continue making new matches in our traditional program, but our site-based program did see about a 15% decline in youth due to school closures and challenges in reaching some of our younger mentees.

A Path Forward

The threat of disconnection casts the largest shadow over low-income youth, leaving them even further behind their peers. Due to COVID-19, children from low-income households are expected to lose 12.4 months of learning, double the loss experienced by students overall.

In OC, almost half of K-12 public school students are Hispanic. Nearly the same number are eligible for free or reduced school lunch. These individuals are poised to become our future professionals, yet they must first overcome pre-existing educational disparities exacerbated by the pandemic.

Mentoring is a proven solution that supports educational re-engagement for these vulnerable youth, clearing a pathway to high school persistence and postsecondary plans. The World Bank recognizes the one-to-one mentoring work of Big Brothers Big Sisters and socioemotional learning as the two most impactful interventions for keeping students in school. The Boston Consulting Group in 2015 estimated that for every dollar invested in mentoring by Big Brothers/Big Sisters, \$18 is returned to society.

While education creates a foundation, strategies must be layered to further reduce disconnection rates; it's not a one size fits all approach.

In OC, work-based learning and experiences can not only advance equity, but they can also strengthen a business climate



By Sloane Keane

CEO

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Orange County and the Inland Empire

are vital to the communities in which they live.

Our work in OC, for example, has focused on mentoring in thriving regional sectors such as financial services with **Pimco**, STEM fields with **Edwards Lifesciences** and hospitality with **Disneyland Resort**.

We must continue creating these mentoring matches because it's a model that works well. A social ROI study showed that 47% of youth who had a mentor reported holding senior leadership positions in their working environments, compared to 32% in a control group.

Workplace Mentoring is Good for Business

As OC strives to build a competitive innovation ecosystem, it's necessary for CEOs to invest in solutions like mentoring that can curb the long-term business impacts of youth disconnection.

We are fortunate to have executives advocating for a more equitable workforce in OC that represents different perspectives, skill sets and lived experiences. Groups like the **CEO Leadership Alliance (CLA-OC)** have actively stepped up to expand our region's future talent pool by empowering first-generation students from underserved areas.

Last November, through partnership with the CLA-OC, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Orange County and the Inland Empire launched a new workplace mentoring site at **Children's Hospital of OC (CHOC)**. Students from Anaheim, a city disproportionately impacted by the health and financial implications of the pandemic, were connected one-to-one with mentors from all professional fields at CHOC. Providing exposure to careers spanning from IT to HR to social work opens new doors of possibility in the face of disconnection.

As CEO of our local Big Brothers Big Sisters, I'm encouraged to have executives like those in the CLA-OC rise to the challenge and embrace mentorship as a solution for creating and sustaining jobs.

What if more local leaders put words into action? We'd like to invite Orange County's CEOs and their employees to become more involved with Big Brothers Big Sisters.

We receive anywhere from 500 to 600 inquiries from families during a typical year. Last year, we saw an increase in demand of around 30%.

We could expand mentoring opportunities in OC to more companies and industries in need of skilled professionals. We could not only begin to recoup the decade of losses experienced in 2020, but also chart a new course for the decade ahead that addresses this crisis of talent and disconnection head-on.

CEOs are connectors, with the power to bring together the right people, business practices and resources. CEOs are also visionaries, seeing the future of what could be and how to make the world better. If we all invest today in mentorship, we can shape tomorrow's leaders—and in 10 years, see a more diverse, equitable workforce leading our region forward.

Editor's Note: Sloane Keane is CEO of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Orange County and the Inland Empire, which is the second-largest among 250 agencies nationwide. For more information: ocbigs.org

one with corporate volunteers. This volunteerism helps close the skills gap, builds social capital and positions youth to explore industries that

ORANGE COUNTY BUSINESS JOURNAL

18500 Von Karman Ave., Suite 150, Irvine, CA 92612
(949) 833-8373 • FAX (949) 833-8751 www.ocbj.com

PUBLISHER

RICHARD REISMAN reisman@ocbj.com | ext. 219

VICE PRESIDENT, ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER

LAURA GARRETT garrett@ocbj.com | ext. 210

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

MARK MUELLER mueller@ocbj.com | ext. 226

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

PETER J. BRENNAN brennan@ocbj.com | ext. 229

EDITOR AT LARGE

RICK REIFF reiff@ocbj.com

COPY EDITOR

DANA TRUONG truong@ocbj.com | ext. 247

WEB EDITOR

JACKIE MOE moe@ocbj.com | ext. 236

REPORTERS

KEVIN COSTELLOE costelloe@ocbj.com | ext. 225

KARI HAMANAKA hamanaka@ocbj.com | ext. 271

KATIE MURAR murar@ocbj.com | ext. 216

JESSIE YOUNT yount@ocbj.com | ext. 224

RESEARCH DIRECTOR

MEGHAN KLEWER klewer@ocbj.com | ext. 231

EXECUTIVE DINING COLUMNIST

CHRISTOPHER TRELIA ctrelia@offthemenuc.com

PHILANTHROPY COLUMNIST, NONPROFITS

KIM HAMAN philanthropy@ocbj.com

PHOTOGRAPHER

LAUREL HUNGERFORD

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT

EMILY SANTIAGO-MOLINA deals@ocbj.com | ext. 208

ADVERTISING SALES MANAGER

STEVE GALL gall@ocbj.com | ext. 221

DIRECTOR OF AD OPERATIONS

SUMER BOWLES sbowles@ocbj.com | ext. 223

CUSTOM CONTENT EDITOR

JAMI DERBY derby@ocbj.com | ext. 270

SIGNATURE EVENTS DIRECTOR

TIFFANY BONANDO bonando@ocbj.com | ext. 227

SIGNATURE EVENTS MANAGER

MELANIE COLLINS collins@ocbj.com | ext. 209

MARKETING COORDINATOR

KRISTEN PORTER porter@ocbj.com | ext. 212

NATIONAL SALES MANAGER

BRENDA BALSIGER balsiger@ocbj.com | ext. 220

PHILANTHROPY PUBLICATIONS DIRECTOR

AMY SFREDDO sfreddo@ocbj.com | ext. 246

SPECIAL PUBLICATIONS DIRECTOR

SHELDON ASCHER ascher@ocbj.com | ext. 217

SENIOR ACCOUNT MANAGERS

TERI AIKIN aikin@ocbj.com | ext. 211

CORINNE DEKKER dekker@ocbj.com | ext. 228

BOBBY DORMAN dorman@ocbj.com | ext. 201

CAROL FOX fox@ocbj.com | ext. 213

KIM LOPEZ lopez@ocbj.com | ext. 263

CIRCULATION COORDINATOR/AR SPECIALIST

KELLY BOWLES bowles@ocbj.com | ext. 238

CIRCULATION SPECIALIST

ABBY MADAIN madain@ocbj.com | ext. 243

CIRCULATION MARKETING MANAGER

SOFIA RANALLI ranalli@ocbj.com | ext. 215

PRODUCTION DIRECTOR

RICH LOYD loyd@ocbj.com | ext. 245

GRAPHIC ARTISTS

ROBERT MARTIN martin@ocbj.com | ext. 240

MARTIN NILCHIAN nilchian@ocbj.com | ext. 253

DIRECTOR OF ADMINISTRATION

SARA HAMILTON hamilton@ocbj.com | ext. 203

DIRECTOR OF ACCOUNTING & FINANCIAL REPORTING

LUIS MARTINEZ martinez@ocbj.com | ext. 204

EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT TO THE PUBLISHER

CAITLIN NIENBERG nierenberg@ocbj.com | ext. 218

FRONT OFFICE MANAGER

ANKIT PATEL patel@ocbj.com | ext. 200