



Organization Overview

UTEC is a non-profit organization based in Lowell, Massachusetts. Founded in 1999 as a response to gang violence, UTEC aims to address the needs of “proven-risk” youth by helping them achieve social and economic success.

Population Served

Lowell is the fifth largest city in Massachusetts with 109,945 (U.S. Census 2014). Lowell is located about 35 miles northwest of Boston. Approximately 50% of all Lowell’s residents are immigrants/refugees. Lowell has a significant Latino population at 15%, and the second largest Cambodian population in the U.S., estimated at more than 35,000. Young people in Lowell face a number of challenges, including:

- *Poverty*: 16.8% of Lowell’s population lives below the poverty line, almost double the state average, with youth of color disproportionately represented.
- *Cultural barriers*: In many of Lowell’s immigrant households, and particularly among Cambodian refugees’ families, barriers such as language gaps and generation differences can increase conflict between children and their parents.
- *Dropout rates*: Lowell High School is the second-largest in the state (over 3,700 students), with a 4-year graduation rate in the bottom 10% of Massachusetts districts.
- *Unemployment*: Lowell’s unemployment rate has been consistently 2-3% higher than the Massachusetts average.
- *Gang involvement*: Lowell Police estimate that 1,500-2,000 youth are involved in 25-30 active gang sets, well above average for cities of comparable size.¹

UTEC Program Model

The UTEC program model is based on a holistic approach that includes street outreach, case management, workforce development, educational resources, and civic engagement. UTEC staff work to build relationships with youth, spending a significant amount of time gaining youths’ trust before assessing and enrolling them in UTEC’s programs. Enrollees receive intensive services, including resources for obtaining and sustaining employment. Once enrolled, staff continues to monitor youths’ progress for up to 2 years after program completion. Three outcomes are listed as central goals:

- (1) Reduced recidivism and criminal activity;
- (2) Increased employability; and
- (3) Increased educational attainment.

¹ <https://www.utec-lowell.org/about/socialneeds>



Proposed Health Impact Assessments

Option 1

UTEC has achieved great success under its various programs. The organization found that of youth engaged in 2014:

- 93% were still productively engaged with UTEC, employed, and/or enrolled in higher education by the end of 2014;
- 98% had not been convicted of a new crime, and 84% had not been arrested since UTEC enrollment;
- 52% obtained external employment during the year;
- 35% who participated in educational classes obtained their high school credential during the year.²

UTEC stresses the importance of working with youth formally or currently connected to the prison system. Outreach workers partner with youth to ensure a successful transition from life behind bars to life in the community. Given the organization's programmatic success, it is now interested in expanding its outreach to the reentry population. In 2014, UTEC's aim was to have 30% of population served consist of reentry youth. By the end of the year, the population served was made up of 29% re-entry, 1% shy of UTEC's goal.

UTEC would like to conduct a HIA on their current program structure, specifically focused on their work with reentry youth. UTEC's executive team wants to understand how it can better serve this constituency, including what – if any – program changes could be made to address youth health outcomes. Some examples of things that may be considered include youth healthcare enrollment and greater social service connection, however, any program changes would be primarily informed through the HIA process.

Option 2

In addition to providing services, UTEC works with young people to identify and pursue important policy change. Youth have the opportunity to become involved in local and state level organizing, leading and sustaining grassroots campaigns. UTEC youth form part of a statewide youth led coalition, Teens Leading The Way (TLTW), which seeks to empower young people to create lasting change through policy making.

In August 2014, TLTW announced that their campaign would focus on expungement opportunities for youth with criminal records. Why is this issue important? Youth with criminal records have a difficult time getting steady employment, pursuing higher education, accessing stable living, and moving on past a stigma of being systemically labeled a criminal after the completion of their sentence.

² https://www.utec-lowell.org/uploads/uploads/utec_2014_outcomes_report.pdf



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Expungement erases a criminal record, including police reports and arrest records, making it as though it never existed. This would allow youth with criminal records to obtain a clean slate after the completion of their sentences. TLTW hopes that expungement will reduce recidivism rates, which currently show that youth with a juvenile record have roughly a 30% recidivism rate.

TLTW aims to file legislation in the coming legislative calendar year. UTEC has proposed a HIA to analyze the health impacts of expungement. This HIA could help provide support for policy change by weighing in from a health angle.

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