

Need Statement

White Writer

Our community's youth have severely suffered over the past two years. Low-income teens of color, in particular, have been navigating:

- Significant economic hardship,
- An on-the-fly, ineffective educational environment,
- The emotional and political fallout from the murder of George Floyd and other Black men and women at the hands of the police,
- The tragic and disproportionate impact of high rates of COVID-19 in their communities, and
- The anxieties and social challenges of isolation and quarantine.

Teens are in a precarious position:

- 35 percent of parents across the country are extremely concerned about their children's mental health. Among Black and Latinx parents, this increases to 42-44 percent (McKinsey & Company, July 2021).
- There has been a stark decline in academic achievement. In Minneapolis high schools, the number of no credits (an option to replace "D" and "F" grades) increased four-fold between the 2018-19 and 2020-21 school years (WCCO, August 2021). In Saint Paul, 35 percent of high school grades in the first quarter of 2021 were failing (Pioneer Press, June 2021).
- Nationally, 26 percent of low-income high school students no longer plan to enroll in postsecondary education as intended (McKinsey & Company).

If not addressed, these trends will lead to fewer good-paying career choices and a reduction in lifetime earnings for today's youth, estimated to be between \$49,000 and \$61,000 (McKinsey & Company). This generation's ability to close income and wealth gaps between families of color and white families is severely threatened.

The solutions to this problem are complex and require the development of teens' social-emotional skills, support to focus on self-exploration and planning for the future, and stabilization of family finances. This has always been the purpose of Cookie Cart's work.

Black Writer

Exposed to a region fractured by historical bias and structural racism, Cookie Cart's youth are left vulnerable to an underlying plight of poor economic conditions and outcomes. Youth of color are disproportionately overlooked and deemed underqualified for growth opportunities, hindering them from achieving economic and financial prosperity. With a tough road ahead, Cookie Cart youth continue to face ongoing societal challenges they are urged to navigate in a broken system:

- An inadequate educational system,
- Economic uncertainty and instability,
- Financial hardships and socioeconomic disparities,
- Impoverished communities,
- Racial and cultural inequities,
- Limited resources for college and career readiness,
- Opportunity gaps, and
- Unpredictable futures.

Today's youth ("Gen Z") will comprise 30% of the global workforce by 2030. As one of the country's most vulnerable populations and nearly half of the Gen Z population, youth of color are placed in a precarious position. Here in Minneapolis and St. Paul, youth have endured civil injustice and unstable learning environments, as well as the disproportionate impacts of a global pandemic on communities of color.

The adolescent years serve as a critical time for self-discovery and transition into adulthood, but equal opportunity and financial success are not promised within this transition. Moreover, as high school is deemed the final stage of universally available education, youth of color often face societal limitations after graduation that in no way reflect their capabilities and potential. Approximately 75% of youth between the ages of 15 and 24 lack critical skills needed for employment and workforce preparation (Education Commission and UNICEF Education and Adolescent Development Programme Group, 2022). This primarily impacts disadvantaged communities, where an even greater divide in opportunity exists for those yearning for livable-wage jobs and meaningful employment. This reality is perpetuated by the prevalence of low graduation and academic success rates, and the inability to access and identify skills needed to be more marketable and employable in today's evolving job market—a seemingly inevitable burden.

Their talents and potential are often dismissed, and many have limited to no work history. However, their enthusiasm, eagerness to learn, and positive perspectives create a cohesive work culture for all. As youth face these limitations and challenges, they ultimately turn to Cookie Cart to find their voice and escape the ongoing cycle of generational poverty. Little do they know; they are the solution.

Through Cookie Cart's accelerated programming structure, youth can focus on self-efficacy, self-exploration, financial responsibility, sustainable development, and career-driven aspirations. Fostering these favorable outcomes has always been a central focal point behind Cookie Cart's work and its position for seeking equitable advancement for youth. Ongoing support from the <Insert Funder Name> and collaborative community efforts will help catalyze effective, long-term change.