

Alameda County Supervisor Keith Carson, Fifth District

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Press Release

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Supervisor Keith Carson (seventh from the left) and Jay Williams (eighth from the left) pose with young people from workforce development programs, program staff and industry leaders at Oakland's Cypress Mandela Training Center on Thursday, July 18.

Young Workers Welcome US Department of Labor "Car Czar" to Oakland

"I don't want to depend on the government. I want to depend upon myself," declared single mother Ofelia Cisneros at a round table with Obama administration official Jay Williams in West Oakland on Thursday, July 18.

Mr. Williams, executive director of the Office of Recovery for Auto Communities and Workers, came to the Bay Area to gather stories from young, middle-wage workers about the challenges they face making a living in the post-recession economy.

At the Cypress Mandela Training Center in Oakland, he heard testimony from Ms. Cisneros and seven other young people enrolled in regional workforce development and job training programs. Young people receive training, counseling and educational support to help them secure living wage jobs in construction, green technology, maintenance, trucking and digital media. Many of the young people grew up with single parents, faced substance abuse problems or encountered barriers to finishing their education.

A former struggling waitress, Ms. Cisneros graduated in October from Cypress Mandela's four-month training program in the construction trades. She now works for the center and is one of the best students in her class at the carpenters' union. "I didn't just want a job--I wanted a career and wanted to be able to provide for my daughter," she said in confident tones.

Mr. Williams was joined by local elected officials and industry leaders from Alameda and Contra Costa counties. Alameda County Supervisor Keith Carson, a host of the event, noted that "these programs not only transform the lives of the young people but also the communities they live in. At a grassroots level, the impact can be felt across the board."

Michael White, a quiet 23-year-old with glasses, was introduced to Berkeley Youth Alternatives (BYA) six years ago when his Probation Officers encouraged him to join their Steps to Success program. After completing multiple training programs, Michael has had difficulty securing a job because of his record. Now the father of a one-month-old baby girl, Michael was hired by BYA as an assistant running the garden and landscape group. "If I didn't have BYA, I don't know where I'd be," he said, choking up.

Asha Richardson started working at Youth Radio, a nationally acclaimed youth media training program based in Oakland, when she was in high school. She co-founded their Mobile Action Lab and now helps teach younger students the app

design process. Youth Radio broadened her experience and gave her the opportunity “to think about jobs and careers that we didn’t even know exist,” she said.

Dominic Delfino and Nykimbe Broussard from the environmental training program Civicorps told their stories of dropping out of high school and then finding a sense of purpose through hard work. “Through Civicorps, I met new people and some of them are like family, like this guy right here,” Nykimbe said, turning to Dominic. “It’s the best feeling in the world.”

“You can’t hear the stories of these young people and walk away saying we can’t afford these types of programs,” Mr. Williams noted after the testimonials. “You are changing the lives of young people and communities that many people write off.”

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Alameda County Supervisor Keith Carson represents the Fifth District, which includes Albany, Berkeley, Emeryville, Piedmont, and parts of Oakland (North Oakland, Rockridge, Grand Lake, Fruitvale, and Dimond District neighborhoods). For more information about District 5 and Supervisor Keith Carson, please call (510) 272-6695 or visit <http://www.acgov.org/board/district5>