

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**June 28, 2007**

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### **A DIFFERENT KIND OF GRADUATION: OUT-OF-SCHOOL AND FORMERLY DELINQUENT YOUTH CELEBRATE TURNING THEIR LIVES AROUND**

**Graduation ceremony celebrates the accomplishments of over 70 youth**

**PHILADELPHIA, PA, June 28, 2007** – Based on outward appearances, it was a typical graduation: young people assembled on the stage, dressed in caps and gowns, and preparing to receive recognition for their accomplishments. But in fact, this graduation ceremony was anything but typical.

In fact, this class of graduates was comprised of youth who have dropped out of school, youth returning from incarceration, and other “disconnected” youth. They are graduates many said would never make it. By any label – “at risk youth,” “delinquents,” and “drop outs,” – these youth were never supposed to succeed.

And yet, there they were.

Today at the New Freedom Theater, a group of 70 youth were recognized for:

- earning high school diplomas and GED’s;
- gaining and keeping full-time employment;
- demonstrating academic achievement; and
- performing outstanding service;

They have done all of these things at Philadelphia’s E<sup>3</sup> Power Centers, facilities committed to empowering out-of-school youth and youth returning from delinquent residential placement to make the most of their lives. E<sup>3</sup> Power Centers are an essential component of Project U-Turn, a citywide strategy to improve options and outcomes for the Philadelphia’s struggling students and out-of-school youth.

James Randolph, Deputy Commissioner for the Department of Human Services, congratulated the young graduates. “On behalf of the juvenile justice system, we are so proud of you and the successes you have achieved,” he said. “Your accomplishments speak to your talent and your commitment, and also serve as examples for young people in the E<sup>3</sup> Centers and throughout the City.”

The ceremony also featured showcases of student art from E<sup>3</sup> youth participating in Philadelphia’s Mural Arts Program, as well as music, and food. James Sharp, Chief of Juvenile Probation, also commended the graduates.

**About Philadelphia's E<sup>3</sup> Power Centers:** Philadelphia's five E<sup>3</sup> Power Centers offer skill-building experiences for out-of-school and other disconnected youth that are grounded in youth development theory and practices. E<sup>3</sup> stands for Education, Employment and Empowerment. The Centers' service delivery structure is designed to help youth achieve long-term goals in the areas of education, occupational skills, life skills and employment. The Philadelphia Youth Network contracts with youth-serving organizations to operate the centers, each of which offers a schedule of diverse activities that provide opportunities for holistic development. Visit [www.e3philly.org](http://www.e3philly.org).

**About Project U-Turn.** Project U-Turn is a citywide campaign to elevate the visibility of Philadelphia's dropout crisis and begin a drive to create more high-quality learning options that will re-engage youth who have left school or are close to doing so. Project U-Turn represents almost two years of discussion, consensus-building and coordinated planning by members of the Collaborative, which is comprised of representatives from the City's major public systems as well as youth advocacy and support organizations.

**About the Philadelphia Youth Network:** The Philadelphia Youth Network is a non-profit 501(c)3 organization founded in 1999. As a catalyst for collective action, PYN makes connections among individuals, organizations and systems. PYN increases capacity and resources in order to provide world-class preparation so our City's youth can thrive in a regional and global economy. Visit [www.pyninc.org](http://www.pyninc.org)