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## Youth Empowerment Project selected as first U.S. organization to participate in a new international peer-to-peer learning exchange in Brazil

**New Orleans, LA** – The Youth Empowerment Project (YEP) has been chosen to send a team to Brazil as part of a peer-to-peer learning exchange, making the non-profit the first U.S. organization to participate in this initiative called *(Re)Connecting Youth: Exchanging Global Lessons*.

The purpose of this peer-to-peer exchange is to allow the YEP team an opportunity to research innovative global approaches for increasing youth connection and resilience. Ultimately, the goal is for YEP to implement some of those findings in its New Orleans work and share those same findings with other U.S. practitioners, policymakers and funders.

The learning exchange will start in Belo Horizonte, Brazil and run from July 10-14, 2017. The International Youth Foundation received funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to implement this program. YEP will also work with Rede Cidadã, a Brazilian-based organization that has placed more than 60,000 youth into work across the country. YEP will then host a team from Rede Cidadã in New Orleans in August 2017.

The statistics are troubling--opportunity youth, categorized as young people who are out-of-school and/or unemployed, exceed more than 600-million worldwide. According to the Social Science Research Council, in the United States more than 5.5 million youth ages 16 to 24 are disconnected from education and employment. Tulane University's Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives estimates that there were approximately 6,820 opportunity youth in New Orleans in 2014.

YEP's Executive Director Melissa Sawyer, Deputy Director Jerome Jupiter, Director of Programs Darrin McCall and Work & Learn Center Director Brice White will be representing YEP in Brazil.

"The Youth Empowerment Project is delighted to be the first organization in the United States selected to participate in this innovative learning exchange. We look forward to acquiring new practices and approaches from Rede Cidadã and incorporating these strategies into our work in order to strengthen our organization, our young people and our city," said YEP Executive Director, Melissa Sawyer.

Members of the business community in New Orleans are also applauding YEP's involvement in this peer-to-peer learning exchange, recognizing the key role the non-profit sector plays in fostering positive economic development in our region.

"GNO, Inc. wishes YEP great success on its benchmarking mission to Brazil in July, and looks forward to helping YEP implement the strategies they learn on this mission," said Michael Hecht, President and CEO of Greater New Orleans, Inc. "Organizations like YEP have a critical positive impact on our economy by engaging underserved youth, and helping to make all of Greater New Orleans more productive."

**ABOUT YEP:** Founded in 2004, the Youth Empowerment Project (YEP) is a non-profit which engages underserved young people through community-based education, mentoring, enrichment and employment readiness programs. In 2016, YEP served 1201 young people through a total of 11 programs at six sites. You can learn more about YEP by visiting: [www.youthempowermentproject.org](http://www.youthempowermentproject.org) or follow @YEPNOLA on social media.

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