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Contact: Jim Tinkham
National Guard Youth Foundation
jtinkham@ngyf.org

YOUTH CHALLENGE PROGRAM POISED TO DRAMATICALLY IMPROVE THE LIVES OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH THROUGH INNOVATIVE, EVIDENCE-BASED PROGRAM

Findings from 3-Year MDRC Evaluation and Ongoing RAND Cost-Benefit Analysis Show Promise of Scaling Program

WASHINGTON – At a briefing today on Capitol Hill, the National Guard Youth Foundation, in conjunction with the National Guard Bureau, announced a long-term plan to scale the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program, an evidence-based program that works with adolescents who have already dropped out of high school but are eager for an opportunity to improve themselves and their prospects for the future. A comprehensive three-year evaluation completed by MDRC found the ChalleNGe program significantly improved the educational and employment outcomes for this group of young people who otherwise have very poor future prospects.

U.S. Sen. Mary Landrieu (D-La.), a long-time supporter of the program, highlighted a new strategic plan that lays out how the ChalleNGe Program seeks to serve 11,600 dropouts a year by June 2014 – an increase of over 30 percent of its current capacity– as it continues to further strengthen its retention efforts and overall quality of the program. To achieve these goals, the National Guard Bureau and the National Guard Youth Foundation are, with the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, seeking to expand and extend the network of public-private partnerships that support ChalleNGe program sites across the country.

“The National Guard is a community-based force deeply rooted in our local communities across the United States,” **said Gen. Craig McKinley, Chief, National Guard Bureau.** “Nothing is more important to those communities than our young people. We’re proud of the ChalleNGe Program’s demonstrated track record of tackling our country’s dropout crisis through a community-based approach that is established and proven.”

“There are great social and economic costs to our country if we aren’t able to find a solution to help out-of-school, young people. The ChalleNGe program is in a unique position of having the gold-standard level of evidence showing its impact, and has the strong ties to local communities that can serve as local supporters to grow the program,” **stated Woodrow “Woody” McCutchen, vice president and senior portfolio manager for the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation.** “The ChalleNGe Program’s new strategic plan provides the organization – and the country – a roadmap for how to better address the dropout crisis. The rigorous program evaluation conducted thus far suggests this sort of investment is a smart one for our nation.”

“We are extremely grateful for the support of Senator Landrieu, MDRC, RAND, EMCF and the many others who have helped us reach the point where the Youth ChalleNGe Program is poised to expand to reach more dropouts,” **said Gail Dady, President, National Guard Youth Foundation Board of Directors.** “To make this goal a reality we need to form a public-private partnership to aggregate our resources in support of the ChalleNGe program. Getting these young people back in the mainstream and helping them succeed in life is critical to the future of our country.”

Using data from MDRC’s evaluation, the RAND Corporation is currently conducting a cost-benefit analysis of the ChalleNGe Program. Results of RAND’s analysis are expected to be released in January 2012.

About the Youth ChalleNGe Program

The ChalleNGe Program is a 17-month comprehensive, voluntary intervention program that offers adolescents between the ages of 16 and 18 who have dropped out of school the opportunity to obtain their high school diploma or GED while learning the coping skills, job skills and leadership skills necessary to succeed. The National Guard Bureau currently operates 34 programs in 27 states and Puerto Rico. To date, more than 100,000 students have graduated from the ChalleNGe Program.

About the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation

The implementation of Ngyf’s business plan is being supported by a 36-month grant of up to \$4 million from The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation. The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation makes substantial multi-year investments in leading youth-serving organizations as part of its ongoing efforts to help young people from low-income families develop the skills and abilities that will enable them to make a successful transition to productive adulthood.

About The National Guard Youth Foundation

The mission of the National Guard Youth Foundation, a 501(c)(3), is to foster program awareness, advocate for the program goals and funding, and provide scholarships and facilitate internships and job opportunities for graduates of the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program. To learn more about the ChalleNGe Program and its participants, please visit www.ngyf.org.