An elegant equation is the simplest path to a solution. Microsoft plus Year Up equals unlimited opportunities. Microsoft and Year Up have come together in an effort to close the digital divide.

Partnerships such as the one Microsoft shares with Year Up are made possible through Microsoft's Unlimited Potential grant. Through this grant, Microsoft and its partners provide hands-on technology skills training to people within the community. The Microsoft Unlimited Potential grant aims to deliver the benefits of relevant, accessible and affordable software to the five billion people who today are without access to technology or the opportunities it affords.

Year Up is a one-year, intensive training program that provides urban young adults, ages 18-24, with a unique combination of technical and professional skills, college credits, an educational stipend and corporate apprenticeship.

"Year Up has achieved excellent results," said Tynesia Boyea Robinson, the executive director of the Washington, DC program. "91 percent of our graduates go on to further their education or obtain well-paying jobs. "

A recent Annie E. Casey Foundation report estimates that "4.3 million youth in this country have not progressed beyond a high school diploma and are neither employed nor enrolled in postsecondary education." (KIDS COUNT Data Book, 2006) Microsoft realizes that many of America's youth are woefully unprepared for and lack the skills needed to succeed in today's workforce. They are hindered by the inequities of what Year Up calls the Opportunity Divide – where young people who are in need of higher education and career opportunities are isolated from institutions, people and opportunities that can help them make a successful transition into adulthood and economic wellbeing.

For years, Year Up has worked with Microsoft to broaden access to jobs through information technology education and training. Microsoft has provided dollars, software and training materials to support Year Up's efforts. The company's partnership with Year Up is just one avenue the company has pursued to help close the digital divide.

"Microsoft and Year Up are working to reduce the barriers in our knowledge economy," said Donna Woodall, Microsoft's director of community outreach for the Mid-Atlantic region. "Through this partnership, we are preparing the next generation for economic success through the power of technology."

Year Up participants like Jasmine Anderson are able to apply the skills they learned in the program in real-time. Anderson, a Baltimore resident, leaves home at 5:30 in the morning to arrive on time at the Brookings Institution, where she's been assigned. This early riser has found her experience as a Year Up apprentice invaluable.

"Year Up has given me a lot of job training. The program has helped me with my professionalism and has laid a foundation for the technological skills that I have now," Anderson says.

Year Up provides a high support, high expectation environment that encourages young adults to

reach their full potential. One hundred percent of students who complete the training portion of the program are placed in apprenticeships. Through Year Up's apprenticeships, young people gain real work experience at leading area companies and organizations. Microsoft is also one of over 80 corporate partners that host Year Up apprentices.

Herbert Gay, Microsoft apprentice, said, "My mother told me about the program, but seeing is believing. It wasn't until I attended a friend's Year Up graduation that I realized that I had to seize the moment and apply for the program. I'm glad I joined the next class of students. The skills I've acquired in the program have given me a head start in my career."

Perhaps the most elegant of equations is the outcome of success when preparation meets opportunity.

"With the help of companies like Microsoft, we're helping students to envision the careers they can have if they apply themselves diligently during and after our program," said Robinson, "I can think of no greater return on our investment than students leaving Year Up and realizing they are assets not just to the companies that they work for but to their communities at large."