

Collaborative Outcomes from the Youth Justice and Employment Community of Practice

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Acknowledgments

The National Youth Employment Coalition is proud to be a part of the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s ongoing efforts to improve life chances for youth involved in the nation’s juvenile justice systems. Over the last twelve months, the Foundation’s investments enabled NYEC to convene a Community of Practice (CoP) focused on Youth Justice and Employment that brought together leaders from eleven cities and counties to share ideas and frame action recommendations. We hope that the work emerging from this project can serve to strengthen local efforts on behalf of these young people.

We are grateful for the time and talents of the participating leaders who worked tirelessly in their communities before, during, and after the Youth Justice and Employment Community of Practice. In particular, we are thankful for the insights of the youth and young adult leaders who offered their experience-based recommendations on how programs can improve outcomes. We also thank Beth Oprisch and Bryan Taylor of the Pretrial Justice Institute, the expert panelists who presented during CoP workshops, and, of course, David Brown of the Annie E. Casey Foundation for his wisdom and ongoing support.

Summary

Established in mid-2021, the Youth Justice and Employment Community of Practice (CoP) is a partnership of the Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF), the National Youth Employment Coalition (NYEC), and Pretrial Justice Institute (PJI) formed to improve outcomes for youth with justice involvement by increasing collaboration among local workforce and juvenile justice systems. The CoP began during the middle of COVID-19 at a time when counterparts in each jurisdiction were seeking to reestablish pandemic-disrupted communication and collaboration. CoP participants met monthly to share knowledge and expertise on topics of importance to both systems. Based on work from the CoP, participating cities and counties produced notable improvements in building relationships, expanding partnerships, and promoting investments that benefit justice-involved young people in their communities. This report documents successes and offers recommendations for others seeking to improve outcomes for these young people.

“During the CoP, we launched a pilot program between the Juvenile Courts and Goodwill Industries. The partnership was fantastic. We co-designed the curriculum and met regularly to adjust things as needed to make the programming more robust. It was such a success that we had youth showing up to the job training an hour early. Our next goal is to recruit more youth and establish an employment and education training alumni group.”

- Marco Salas, Pierce County Juvenile Court, Pierce County, WA

Introduction and Monthly Workshops

Cities/Counties Participating in the CoP

- Camden, (Camden County) NJ
- Philadelphia, PA
- Baltimore, MD
- St. Louis City, MO
- S. Louis County, MO
- Atlanta, (Fulton County), GA
- Birmingham, (Jefferson County), AL
- Phoenix, (Maricopa County), AZ
- Seattle, (King County), WA
- Tacoma, (Pierce County), WA
- San Francisco, CA

Occupations and Roles of CoP Participants

- Probation officers
- Directors of juvenile justice departments
- Frontline workforce providers
- Directors of workforce programs
- Members of local workforce development boards
- Juvenile Court's Presiding Judge
- Youth advocates
- Youth parents
- Youth college students
- Prosecutor diversion staff

The Community of Practice (CoP) was comprised of 44 youth-serving professionals and youth who worked within the juvenile justice or workforce sectors of their cities and counties. The main professionals represented included probation officers, directors of juvenile justice departments, frontline workforce providers, and directors of workforce programs. Other participants included a Juvenile Court's Presiding Judge, District Attorney's Office, and members who were a part of a city's workforce development board.

Monthly workshops were tailored to meet the interests and focus areas of the CoP sites. Below are the top five topics that were of most interest to CoP participants:

- Enhanced Long-Term Supports for Youth with Barriers to Employment
- Job Creation and Connecting Youth to Employment
- Program Models/Designs
- Youth Voice and Engagement
- Mental Health and Trauma

Each session focused on a specific topic and frequently featured experts from the field. Emphasis was placed on peer-to-peer learning and action steps communities could take. Monthly workshop topics are listed below:

- July 2021: Orientation and Getting Started
- August 2021: Leveraging Violence Prevention Efforts for Youth Employment
- September 2021: Statewide Advocacy for Juvenile Justice and Workforce Collaboration
- October 2021: Creating Purposeful Programming in Workforce and Juvenile Justice Agencies
- November 2021: Community and Courts Partnerships
- December 2021: Addressing Transportation and Housing Needs
- January 2022: Implementing Effective Mental Health Practices in Programs
- February 2022: Strategies to Maximize Employer Connections
- March 2022: Enacting Youth Leadership
- April 2022: Seizing the Moment: Employment Opportunities and Combatting Collateral Consequences

- May 2022: Partnerships and Systems Collaboration to Achieve your Goals
- June 2022: Reflections, Wrap-Up and Moving Forward

Examples of Outcomes from CoP Cross-Systems Collaborations

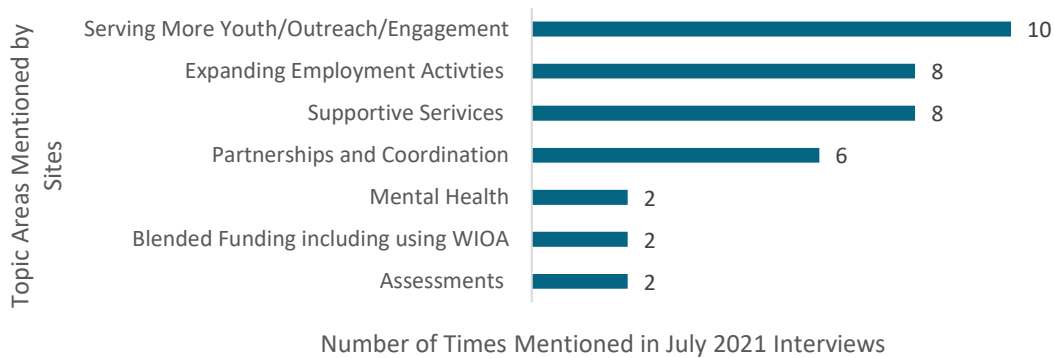
- Tacoma’s Juvenile Court and Goodwill Industries formalized a partnership in which youth on probation or under court supervision could enroll in Goodwill’s Education, Employment and Training program, and be paid for occupational certificate trainings. The court and Goodwill’s staff co-designed curriculum relocated services outside of the court to a “neutral” location, and conducted regular check-ins to adjust offerings to the youth.
- In Philadelphia, the Office of the District Attorney formalized an agreement with Philadelphia Youth Network’s WorkReady program which enables youth diverted from the justice system to earn up to \$1,000 for participation in a multi-week career readiness program.
- In Birmingham, the Court’s Family Reunification for youth in out-of-home placements now includes a team of probation officers, lawyers, mental health professionals. The team helps families conduct supervised visits with youth and also addresses transportation, mental health, and employment barriers.
- The Probation Division of Camden, New Jersey, collaborated with the local workforce development board to find new opportunities for 16 and 17-year-olds. The Camden County Youth Service Commission sponsored a job fair for the Probation Department and created a booklet for youth with justice involvement that provides resources and referrals for housing, mental health, and other useful services.

Initial Goals and Main Focus Areas of Cities/Counties in the CoP

During the first session of the CoP in July 2021, each jurisdiction developed a work plan that identified where existing efforts between workforce and juvenile justice systems were ongoing or lacking, and the future goals or outcomes they hoped to achieve. Figure 1 displays the topic areas on which cities and counties had made progress or had plans to make progress. The top three areas were serving more youth, expanding their employment activities, and accessing more supportive services.

Figure 1: Topic Areas with Past or Ongoing Collaborative Efforts

Figure 1: Areas of Focus for CoP Cities



CoP Cities/Counties Detailed their Past or Ongoing Collaborative Efforts

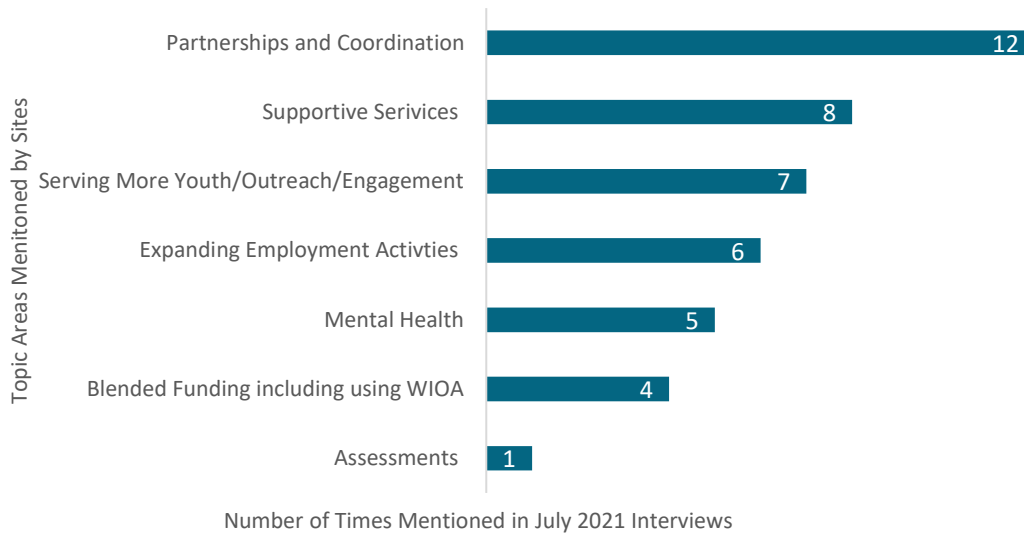
- **Serving More Youth/Outreach/Engagement**
 - **Phoenix:** Many of Phoenix’s workforce agencies were struggling with enrolling youth who have had contact with the justice system, and some of its non-profits have not served any of this population. Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, workforce agencies have worked with their juvenile justice partners to improve outreach to serve more justice-involved youth.
- **Expanding Employment Activities**
 - **Baltimore:** Current efforts are underway to expand Baltimore’s Summer Youth Employment Program to a year-round effort, including increased training leading to paid work.
 - **San Francisco:** The Office of Economic and Workforce Development is focused on connecting youth to employment and creating long-term pilot programs which will allow more time for evaluations and a sustained impact on the youth.
- **Supportive Services**
 - **Birmingham:** Birmingham’s workforce and justice systems were in the process of restoring their pre-pandemic levels of collaboration. As a result of COVID-19, Birmingham has seen an increase in homelessness and has had trouble linking existing youth with proper resources to prevent it. There is also the realization that family engagement should play a greater role in homelessness prevention.

- **San Francisco:** San Francisco’s workforce providers are engaged in conversations around shifting funding from police to community resources. Some of this money has already gone to the Human Rights Commission, Department of Children, Youth, and Families, Dream Keepers initiative, and specialized funding for the Black community.
- **Partnerships and Coordination**
 - **Phoenix:** Phoenix workforce providers want to work with justice partners to produce a resource map of services available in Phoenix and share workforce development curricula/modules with their juvenile justice counterparts.
- **Mental Health**
 - **Tacoma:** Workforce Central has partnered with FirstChoice Mental Health to provide visits with mental health professionals, go over tenant rights, etc.
 - **Seattle:** Seattle’s Juvenile Court Services in King County Superior Court is working to combat adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and ensuring that experiences with racism and immigration prejudice count towards ACEs.
- **Blended Funding including using WIOA**
 - **Tacoma:** Workforce Central is currently in the process of using American Rescue Plan dollars to expand workforce activities.
- **Assessments**
 - **Tacoma:** Tacoma’s Juvenile Justice Department does a risk assessment around the youth’s mental health needs, while Workforce Central completes an individual service strategy.



The graph below depicts areas of new collaboration sought by CoP organizations. Many of these topics are areas in which the cities and counties had made little progress or were in the nascent stage of improvement.

Figure 2: Goals for CoP Cities



CoP Cities/Counties Detailed Their Future Goals and Outcomes

- **Partnerships and Coordination**
 - **Baltimore:** There is a huge need to dismantle many of Baltimore’s siloes and become more interconnected.
 - **Camden:** Camden Probation Division’s goal is to work with the New Jersey Juvenile Justice State Advisory Group on gun violence to identify opportunities for state and local jurisdictions to collaborate.
- **Supportive Services**
 - **Atlanta:** Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO) is a new workforce agency in Atlanta and wants to support youth aging out of the system and their parents.
 - **Tacoma:** Tacoma’s workforce agencies want to identify current transportation projects and build services around transportation strategic plans. Agencies are also working to raise awareness about the need to ease documentation barriers often required before youth can receive services. Further, many young adults do not have a social security card, which prevents them from getting a job and ultimately causes them to lose hope and motivation.
- **Serving More Youth/Outreach/Engagement**
 - **Atlanta:** Atlanta’s CoP participants want to become more connected and eventually have courts, attorneys, staff, non-profits, and diversion practices under one roof.
 - **Camden:** The one-stop center in Camden needs assistance in encouraging youth to take advantage of services and resources.

- **San Francisco:** San Francisco has a goal of engaging more young people in the virtual space, making it more inviting, fun, and engaging.
- **Expanding Employment Activities**
 - **Camden:** Camden Probation Division wants to strengthen efforts to connect youth to credentials and employment to improve overall job retention. The Division also wants to have a coach or youth-peer mentor bring young people to Camden’s one-stop center for services.
 - **Seattle:** The Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King is continuously working with businesses to create a database of employers looking to hire youth.
- **Mental Health**
 - **Tacoma:** Pierce County Juvenile Court wants to ensure that case managers understand what mental health resources and wraparound services are available and incorporate this material into their curriculum.
 - **Philadelphia:** The Philadelphia Youth Network wants to increase mobile outreach by partners by modeling the street approach utilized by the Philadelphia Anti-Drug/Anti-Violence Network.
- **Blended Funding including using WIOA**
 - **Birmingham:** The Mayor’s Office Division of Youth Services has a goal of improving access and use of funds released through the Office of Peace and Policy.
- **Assessments**
 - **San Francisco:** The Juvenile Probation Department is working to improve vocational assessments and referrals.
 - **Philadelphia:** The District Attorney’s Office wants to work with the Philadelphia Youth Network to utilize assessments and youth outreach to better understand justice-involved young peoples’ interests and connect them to resources that can help them achieve their aspirations.

“For this partnership to work, our [workforce] case managers need to understand the roles that probation officers play, what referral opportunities exist, what wraparound services are needed, and what co-enrollment might look like. We also have to make sure probation officers are a part of orientation and that this is routine throughout the entire area.”

-Kari Haugen, Director of Workforce Partnerships at Tacoma Workforce Central



What We Learned

The following topics illustrate successful outcomes of the jurisdictions. Throughout the CoP, some communities changed their goals, found opportunities not previously known, and/or expanded into new areas with technical assistance from NYEC and experts.

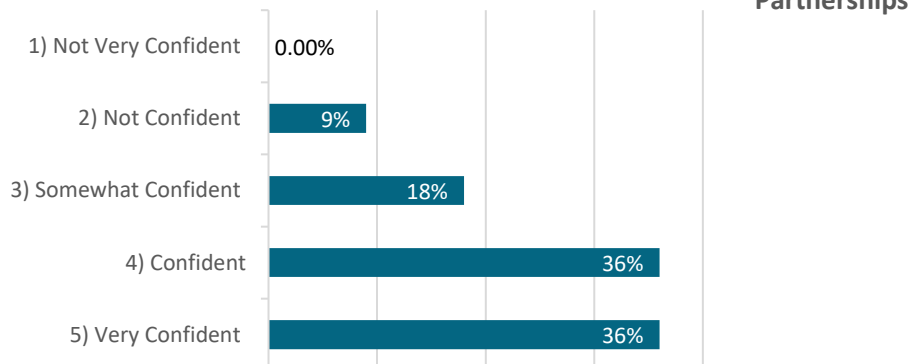
Partnerships and Coordination

Initial surveys of the CoP cities found that participants were increasingly focused on resource mapping, coordinating referrals and services, reducing duplication, and developing new partnerships to improve employment and education outcomes. [NYEC's Juvenile Justice Toolkit](#) identifies many examples of how partnerships can be developed including cultivating key players, defining goals for the partnerships, sharing cross-system data, and/or developing a Memoranda of Understanding.

In November 2021, 18% percent of CoP participants agreed that “Our current court system has formalized workforce development as an alternative to detention,” while 47% said “No” and 35% said, “I don’t know.” Although most sites did not have a formalized alternative, co-location of services was indeed happening with 65% stating that workforce partners conduct training or provide services while youth are in placement and 41% said that workforce agencies are a part of re-entry or aftercare planning.

Figure 5 shows data from April 2022, two months before the final session of the CoP, indicating that many organizations felt confident in their ability to form new partnerships. Equipped with new tools to pursue new partnerships, more than half of the participants felt “Confident” or “Very Confident” in building and cultivating new partnerships, while all felt “Very confident” in building partnerships.

Figure 5: CoP Participants' Level of Confidence in Building and Cultivating New Partnerships



Responses from CoP of their strongest partners:

“Police”

“Opportunities for Youth (workforce organization)”

“Philly Connect, Educators 4 Education, Beyond the Bars, The Niche Clinic, Philadelphia Youth Basketball, DBoys Boxing and Glam Cosmetology”

“Work Source, Work Force, State”

“Our community providers, juvenile probation department, Human Rights Commission”

Responses from CoP of partners they want to cultivate:

“Schools”

“All that are interested!”

“Justice partners”

“The Attic Youth Center, Additional Family/Guardian support groups, Credible Messenger programs”

“Truthfully- I have too many irons in the fire to start much new right now. I do have some conversation going with the Director of Workforce Development”

Success Stories

- ▶ Throughout the CoP, the Family Court of St. Louis County expanded its partnerships with Metropolitan Employment Rehabilitation Services (MERS) Goodwill. The two entities signed an MOU to expand pre-employment training for 12- and 13-year-olds, as well as job placement for the court's clients. The Family Court and MERS Goodwill also received a grant from the Missouri Division of Youth Services to expand their partnership. With the funding, MERS Goodwill plans to bolster preventive measures and reduce justice system contact with younger in-school youth who are struggling academically.
- ▶ In Baltimore, the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services (DJS) and the Mayor's Office of Employment Development (MOED) worked together to expand access to Baltimore's YouthWorks summer employment program for youth under court supervision. YouthWorks has decreased its requirements to enter the Green Cadet Program, a program that works with the Baltimore City Department of Recreation and Parks to offer job readiness training that leads to long-term employment.
- ▶ In Birmingham, the Jefferson County Family Court now collaborates with the Jefferson County Family Resources Center, which provides a one-stop shop for essential community services. For years, youth released from state supervision have had issues obtaining transportation, housing, job counseling, and more. The County is now looking for a physical space to ensure the longevity of the partnership and offer more resources to their youth and the community. The partners are made up of local judges, community stakeholders, and commissioners, that advise the court's case managers and help address the client's basic needs.
- ▶ In Philadelphia, the District Attorney's Office and Philadelphia Youth Network's WorkReady program created a formal partnership for systems-involved youth seeking job placements. Building on the past informal relationship, the new agreement includes the ability for youth with justice involvement to earn up to \$1,000 in stipends while in job training.

"Our first goal after the CoP is co-location of services at the courts. Only one service provider uses the space two days a week. We want young people to be able to walk down the hall and get services that gets them attachment to work and education. We are excited to make progress on this moving forward."

-Maritza Valenzuela, Program Director, Opportunities for Youth, Phoenix, Arizona



Supportive Services

Transportation and housing were two of the main supportive services that communities had difficulty securing for their youth. In jurisdictions with public transportation, CoP members stated that transit was often not adequate in areas in which their clients reside and/or too dangerous because of geographic gang turf issues. Youth leaders in the CoP stated that transportation was a barrier to securing employment and meeting their probation requirements. In our December 2021 survey, 40% of respondents said it was “Difficult” for their youth to access transportation, 33% said it was “Not Easy but Not Difficult,” and 26% said it was “Easy.”

Regarding housing, youth leaders stated that it was difficult to secure housing after completing out-of-home placements. Other CoP participants noted that it was difficult to get services to youth when they live outside of city limits because of increased rents and housing costs. One participant stated, “It’s becoming increasingly harder to contact and provide services to our youth because they now live in the suburbs, which do not have sufficient public transportation for them to take to come into the site.” During our December 2021 session, 82% of the participants said that it was “Difficult” obtaining housing for young people in their communities, only 11% said that it was “Not Easy but Not Difficult,” and nobody said it was “Easy.”

Success Stories

- ▶ In Seattle, through the CoP, both the Seattle Workforce Development Board and King County Juvenile Court shared best practices for supporting education success, including removing barriers for youth no longer living in Seattle, soft skills development, and addressing consistency and lack of motivation among young adults.
- ▶ In Birmingham, the Family Reunification Program was expanded via the Family Court for youth in out-of-home placements. The program provides supervised visitation and safe exchange (supervised visits in a structured and secured environment) services in a secure setting for the youth and their parents to maintain their relationships. The Family Court reached out to workforce agencies in the Community of Practice during the expansion of the program to better meet the mental health, counseling, transportation, and employment needs of the youth and their families.
- ▶ In Philadelphia, the District Attorney’s Office is amassing a network of communicative and altruistic community partners to collectively reduce barriers to youth success. This collaborative will offer assistance with restitution, record expungement, transportation assistance, and wraparound supports to address the family’s basic needs.



“Some of our biggest priorities is tackling the homelessness crisis and lack of adequate transportation in Birmingham. We believe engaging families can alleviate homelessness amongst youth released from detention and amongst our foster youth population. Lack of transportation creates barriers and increased separation when youth can’t connect with their parents.”

-Dina Dickerson, Program Director, Offender Alumni Association

Expanding Opportunities for Youth

The greatest concern that respondents had at the beginning of the CoP was expanding employment opportunities for youth with justice involvement. During our April 2022 meeting, the CoP discussed how collateral consequences continue to prevent youth with justice involvement from obtaining employment despite labor shortages that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic. CoP participants noted that they struggled to help their youth find good-paying jobs.

The CoP sites recognized that strong employer partnerships are critical to helping young people find jobs, identify career pathways, validate the credentials earned, and support job retention, while also recognizing the importance of providing support to young people while on the job.

Success Stories

- ▶ San Francisco was able to amplify the voices of its youth leaders in both the local and national conversation. The San Francisco Juvenile Probation Department engaged both of their Youth Advocates (young adults with lived experience in the juvenile justice system who advise the Department and serve as peer mentors to youth on probation), Angel Ceja and Fadi Alzaghari, to present at the NYEC 2022 All Youth Connecting Forum on best practices to improve outcomes for youth with justice involvement. Angel was also accepted into NYEC's Youth Advisory Council, where he advises NYEC's policy and programming. In July 2022 he was invited to a White House Domestic Policy Council roundtable on strategies to support youth with justice involvement.
- ▶ In Birmingham, the [Offender Alumni Association](#) has been around for the past seven years and expanded in 2022 from Alabama to Atlanta, Georgia. It now includes a credible messenger program, neighborhood clean-ups, paid work experiences, and a volunteer program to assist youth re-entering the community following detention. Due to the CoP, the Alumni program identified new employers in Birmingham who are interested in working with the justice-involved population. The program has expanded its partners in Birmingham to include the Mayor's Office and several non-profits.

Funding

Although funding was highlighted as a major area to improve upon, it emerged as a significant area of interest as jurisdictions sought to achieve their goals during the CoP. One of the biggest barriers to collaboration was the lack of funding to start new initiatives and sustain collaborative efforts. Several of the communities noted that after a grant had officially ended, the collaboration between the juvenile justice department and workforce departments ceased. Some communities combatted this by seeking joint

Responses of What Type of Employers/Industries They are Most Connected With:

Law enforcement

Health

Construction

IT

Hospitality, especially fast-food restaurants

Retail

Higher Education

Responses of What Type of Employers/Industries They Want to Connect With:

Private-sector businesses

Social Work

Green Jobs

Businesses owned by BIPOC individuals

Businesses that employ people without work authorization

funding with other organizations and systems to continue working with the youth. Many communities sought new funding streams to provide supportive services such as food, transportation, and housing that was not readily available using federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funds. During a December 2021 session, participants were asked “How accessible is flexible funding for youth in my community?” 35% said it was “Difficult,” 29% selected “Not Sure,” 23% selected “Not Easy but Not Difficult,” and 11% said it was “Easy.”

Success Stories

- ▶ In Phoenix, workforce development providers had successful in-person meetings with juvenile justice partners and toured the Phoenix Municipal Court to discuss collaboration under the leadership of the court’s new director. As a first step, service providers established a goal of co-locating some services within the court’s building.
- ▶ Seattle has noted that the King County Juvenile Court Services is typically last to receive resources, such as laptops and cellphones, and is working to address these inequities. Through the CoP, the Juvenile Court partnered with the Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County to apply for a reentry grant that will address the need for devices and other resources.
- ▶ During the CoP, Tacoma’s Juvenile Court and the local Goodwill Industries formalized their partnership. Goodwill Industries received funding through “Hire Pierce County” to serve court-involved youth in its Education, Employment, and Training Program. Goodwill was able to pay the youth \$15 per hour, which compensated them for their training and Microsoft certificate classes. Goodwill was also able to move its services from the juvenile detention center (Remann Hall) to a “neutral” location, with guidance and support from the courts to ensure a safe space for all the youth. Goodwill worked with the courts on curriculum, conducted debrief sessions with staff at the courts, and made adjustments along the way to meet the needs of youth.

“The San Francisco Department of Children, Youth and Their Families funds a lot of work in the community including funding ways for the workforce and juvenile justice agencies to work together. However, much of the collaboration ends after the grant ends. We have a lot of general funds, but very few that is specific to just workforce and juvenile justice related focus areas.”

-Joanna Rosales, Senior Program Specialist, San Francisco Department of Children, Youth and Their Families

Assessments

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted many organizations' ability to conduct proper assessments. Because of the loss of contact with many youth, many workforce partners reported declining enrollment despite having observed an increased community need for its resources. As programs gradually increased their outreach and returned to in-person programming, assessments have been crucial for ensuring that young adult participants receive support and guidance throughout their program. Assessments should be asset-based, which involves understanding the risks, needs, strengths, and interests of the youth, rather than solely focusing on risks and needs.

One of the most effective ways to reduce [recidivism is conducting a risk, needs, and assets assessment before disposition](#). Although assessments are one of the most potent tools for reducing recidivism, programs have to be prepared to link youth with the right resources to support their youth and eliminate barriers. This is critical since the Council of State Governments estimates that some states have re-arrest rates as high as [80% for youth three years after release](#).

For programs that conduct risk, needs, and assets assessments, Figure 3 shows the percentage of CoP participants whose assessments ask about different topic areas. Surprisingly, 56% of CoP participants said their current assessments don't capture the need for assistance such as housing, harm reduction, and food insecurity. In the CoP, after assessments are conducted, responses were split among processes in place to rapidly respond to a youth's immediate needs captured from assessments as shown in Figure 4. Only 19% of respondents said they had a process in place if a youth needed food, substance abuse, recovery, or mental health support.

Figure 3: Questions Typically Found on Participants' Risk and Needs Assessments

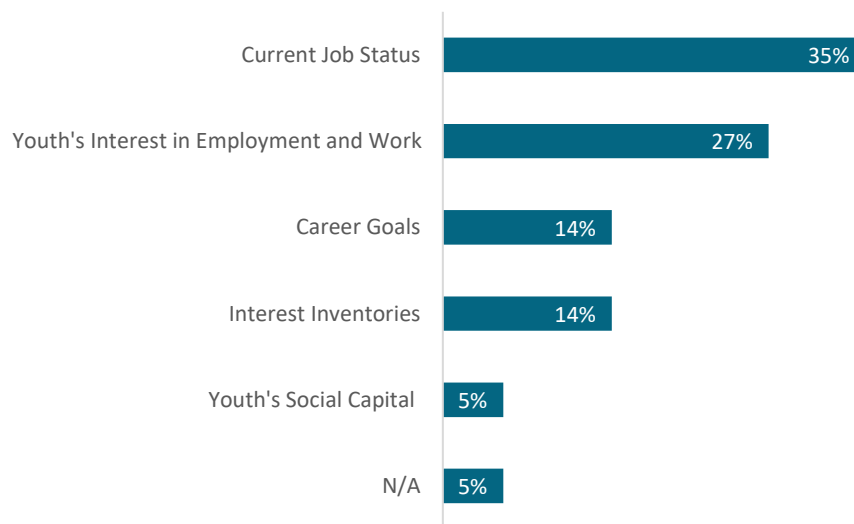
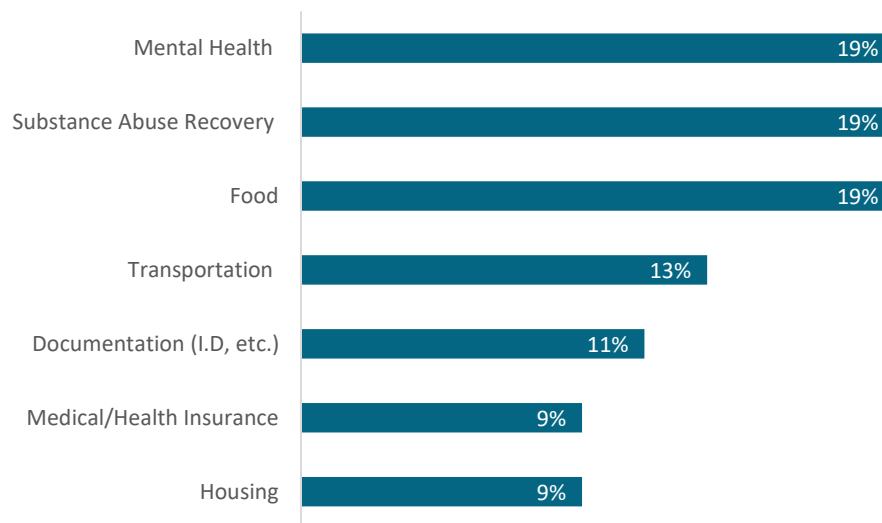


Figure 3 Interpretation: 35% of CoP participants said their assessments ask about a youth's current job status

“Our Juvenile Services Green Cadet Program partnered with the Baltimore Recreation and Parks to create a pipeline for formerly incarcerated youth to engage in city beautification with a path to becoming full-time city employees. The program runs year-round, \$15 per hour of good, and honest money. At the Department Juvenile Services, we eliminate barriers to work by transporting the youth to the worksites, providing uniforms, and ensuring they have proper documentation.”

- Robert Shipman, Resource Specialist Supervisor, Maryland Department of Juvenile Services,
Baltimore, MD

Figure 4: Percentage of Jurisdictions that Had an Established Process to Assist Youth



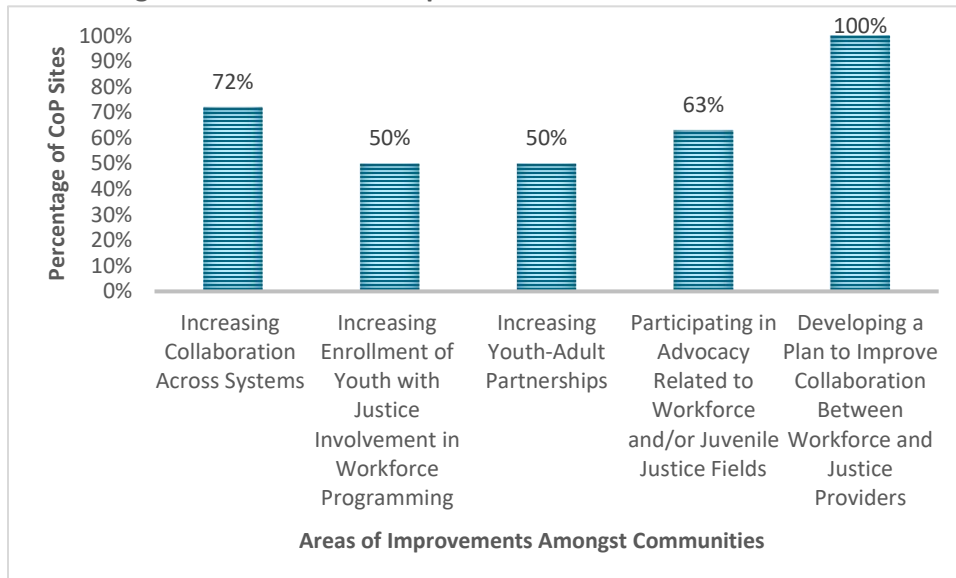
Success Stories

- ▶ In Baltimore, the Baltimore City Juvenile Justice Center and the Mayor’s Office of Employment Development are continuing to use new assessments to identify needs and create an array of services and programs for young adults.
- ▶ In Phoenix, Arizona Center for Youth Resources conducted a written assessment and a verbal interview as part of their assessment process. Their “[Education and Career Blueprint](#)” form assessed a youth’s SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound) education and career goals as well as what support services they need to achieve their goals. Additionally, participants undergo a “[Psychosocial Interview Assessment](#)” that asks about their home environment, education and employment journey, alcohol and drugs, and anxiety, among other topics.

Feedback from Communities

Benefits of the CoP Participants gained immense value from the CoP and were able to increase their collaboration with their juvenile justice and workforce counterparts. Participants were also able to engage in peer-to-peer learning and sharing through Annie E. Casey’s JDAI Connect, connect with expert leaders in the workforce and juvenile justice space, and present their ideas during NYEC convenings and events. During an April 2022 feedback survey, 87% of participants agreed that they learned valuable things that they can use in their work. 87% also said that through the CoP they were able to learn from other programs and learn new practices to apply to their work. Below are some of the ways participants improved:

Figure 6: Communities Improvements over the 12-month CoP



Policy Recommendations from Young Adults

Young leaders of the CoP worked with NYEC to craft recommendations based on their lived experiences of having contact with both the juvenile justice and workforce systems. Over a series of weeks, the young adults created tangible policy and programmatic recommendations that organizations could adopt.

- ▶ **A Better System for All:** Today’s juvenile justice and workforce systems are not typically tailored to the individualized experience of the youth adults that interact with them. Adults across both systems should work with youth so that both systems strive to foster growth and ideally provide opportunities for learning and not punishment.
- ▶ **Teaching Life Skills:** Youth-serving professionals should teach youth how to be independent following successful completion of job training or probation, including teaching them financial literacy skills (e.g., savings account, starting credit, co-signers). Fadi Alzaghari, a youth advocate from San Francisco stated, “Independence is a big key factor; most youth want to become independent and live on their own and be an adult but don’t know the steps and requirements, so we should prepare them for the life ahead because probation is a short-term solution.”
- ▶ **Preparation is Key:** Youth-serving professionals should help youth understand how and why each step in the employment process is important, including the application process, the cover letter, resume and interview prep. Adults across both systems should assist youth in finding and enrolling in programs that lead to good-paying jobs and connect them with additional training and educational opportunities.

- ▶ **Eliminate Barriers:** One of the biggest barriers that youth face is not knowing who to talk about career options, transportation, criminal history, and lack of technology. A CoP youth leader from St. Louis noted the need for bus passes, ride-share gift cards, and finding jobs that do not require background checks. Youth want and need adults who will stick with young people “all the way.”
- ▶ **Understand their Lived Experiences:** Many youth with justice involvement have parents who will take away their employment as a consequence of them “not doing well.” Also, many young adults on probation must navigate the need to charge and hide ankle monitors and are traumatized by having to wear them. A CoP youth leader from San Francisco noted how he had to hide his ankle monitor at work for fear of being fired if his employer found out.

NYEC Policy Recommendations

Cross-System Collaboration

The CoP revealed how successful outcomes for justice-involved youth can develop when both the workforce and juvenile justice systems enhance their collaboration and coordination. Juvenile justice agencies benefit when workforce providers co-locate within the courts to help connect youth to jobs. Workforce agencies can also benefit when they receive assistance from the courts in obtaining documentation (IDs, birth certificates, documents for record expungement) when they are in close contact with the juvenile justice system. These are just a few examples of the benefits of collaboration. The NYEC, “[Job Training for Youth with Justice Involvement: A Toolkit](#)” provides a much more in-depth set of steps that front-line staff, directors, political leaders, and young people can take in both systems to increase collaboration. Practitioners can take the following steps:

- As a part of a young adults’ re-entry process (which should occur before the date of release), juvenile justice officials should pair them with a workforce provider so that they have adequate career navigation
- Workforce providers should make juvenile justice officials aware of employment, training, and education resources in the local area
- Juvenile justice officials should collaborate with workforce officials to inform them of the youth’s rights including disclosure of past convictions or adjudications to employers, ankle monitoring situation, and record expungement

Local policymakers and judges can take the following steps:

- Leverage the convening power of judges to establish plans for collaboration.
- Formalize workforce development as an alternative to confinement and out-of-home placement and include workforce training in probation and aftercare plans.
- Seek to augment probation services with supportive services funded by WIOA and other workforce funding streams.
- Provide funding for joint training of staff in both systems.

Federal policymakers can take the following steps:

- Pass a WIOA reauthorization bill that mandates self-attestation for all eligibility determinations, replaces Job Corps’ zero-tolerance policy replacing it with an approach aligned with similar residential programs, and authorizes and increases funding for Reentry Employment Opportunities.
- Establish dedicated a funding stream for workforce data systems and require these systems to enter into data-sharing agreements with juvenile justice, K-12, and other relevant systems.

- Require states to ensure young people leave state custody with a form of government identification and provide access to voter registration.
- Create a formula-funded Program Access Fund to ensure young people can access federally funded services, including those authorized by WIOA, the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP), McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, and the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act.

Mental Health

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, it is estimated that between [65-70% of all children and adolescents](#) arrested in the United States have a mental health need. Decades of research and emerging findings in adolescent brain science have found that proper mental health supports and services can significantly reduce a young person's likelihood of reoffending. During the CoP, Verónica Vargas, the principal of VV Strategic Consulting, LLC presented during our October 2021 workshop. One of the key points that the participants learned is understanding how the human brain develops and that the adolescent brain is still developing and subject to reward and peer influence at an early age.

Federal policymakers can take these steps:

- Encourage mental health screenings upon intake to the workforce development and other human-services systems.
- Increase training for frontline practitioners in the workforce-development and other human-services fields, so they can identify mental health warning signs and make initial assessments.
- Increase the availability of mental health services with dedicated funding for in-house services among WIOA (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act) youth program providers.
- Lower barriers to accessing services and provide last-dollar funding for mental health services, through a Program Access Fund.
- Increase Medicaid reimbursement rates for mental health services, and pressure private insurers to do the same.

State and local policymakers can take these steps:

- Implement better assessment processes, such as the "[Wellbeing Survey for Children and Young People](#)."
- Hire case managers, mentors, and adult partners that reflect the communities served, including awareness of intergenerational trauma.
- Utilize elected officials as power brokers to encourage partnership between workforce providers and juvenile justice centers, and behavioral health treatment centers

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted much of the pre-pandemic progress that partners in the CoP had made and exacerbated existing challenges in local communities, but also sparked a new sense of collaboration and partnership necessary to improve outcomes for justice-involved youth. By learning from the challenges and successes of peer communities, CoP participants were able to launch long-awaited job training pilot programs, expand cross-system collaboration, apply for joint grants that include juvenile justice centers and workforce agencies, access federal funding to expand partnerships, and sign an official memorandum of understanding (MOU) to formalize partnerships between courts and workforce agencies, among other successes.

Workforce development must be seen as a tool for prevention, intervention and rehabilitation for young adults involved with the juvenile justice system. Using a variety of tactics, workforce and juvenile justice officials across all levels of their professions can take tangible and measurable steps to increase their collaboration. To sustain the longevity of these efforts, proper investments must be made to bolster the capacity for organizations to identify new partners and make meaningful structural changes in their systems.

Additional Resources

- [Supporting Justice-Involved Youth DOL Resource](#)
- [NLC Beyond City Limits | Cross-System Collaboration to Reengage Disconnected Youth](#)
- [Making the Juvenile Justice - Workforce Connection CLASP](#)
- [Integrated Reentry and Employment Strategies](#)
- [Opinion Article: Fear-mongering in the suburbs isn't the answer to juvenile car thefts. Here's a plan that might help](#)
- [Job Training for Youth with Justice Involvement: A Toolkit](#)
- [The Role of The Judge in Transforming Juvenile Probation: A Toolkit for Leadership - NCJFCJ](#)
- [On Track: How Well Are States Preparing Youth in the Juvenile Justice System for Employment?](#)
- [Reducing Structural Barriers to School and Work for People with Juvenile Records](#)
- [White Paper on the Science of Late Adolescence: A Guide for Judges, Attorneys, and Policy Makers](#)
- [The Color of Justice: The Landscape of Traumatic Justice—Youth of Color in Conflict with the Law](#)
- [The Future of Healing](#)
- [U.S. Surgeon General Issues Advisory on Youth Mental Health Crisis Further Exposed by COVID-19 Pandemic | HHS.gov](#)
- [About One Mind PsyberGuide | One Mind PsyberGuide](#)
- [Home | FindTreatment.gov](#)

