On February 25, 2016, the Self-Sufficiency Research Clearinghouse (SSRC) hosted the Connecting Opportunity Youth to Education and Employment Webinar. This free Webinar explored research on assisting opportunity youth with obtaining the education, services, and work experience they need to become self-sufficient as they transition to adulthood. Opportunity youth are young people ages 16-24 who are disconnected from work or school. Speakers from MDRC, Georgetown University, and the Gateway to College National Network discussed research-based strategies for serving opportunity youth. Dr. Harry Holzer, Mr. Nick Mathern, and Ms. Farhana Hossain co-presented on the subject. Ms. Venessa Marks moderated the discussion.

This document is the transcript from the Webinar. View additional Webinar materials.

**WELCOME**

Announcer: Good day and welcome to the Self-Sufficiency Research Clearinghouse’s, Connecting Opportunity Youth to Education and Employment Webinar. Today’s Webinar is being recorded. At this time, I’d like to turn the conference over to Ms. Nicole Pexton, SSRC Education and Training Domain Specialist, and Associate at ICF International. Please go ahead.

Ms. Nicole Pexton: Good afternoon, and thank you for joining today’s Self-Sufficiency Research Clearinghouse Webinar: Connecting Opportunity Youth to Education and Employment. We are very happy to have a great lineup of speakers to discuss this important topic with you today. My name is Nicole Pexton and I will be facilitating today’s Webinar.

**OVERVIEW OF THE SSRC**

Ms. Pexton: The Self-Sufficiency Research Clearinghouse is a virtual portal of research and other resources related to self-sufficiency. It functions as an online community for researchers, practitioners, and other stakeholders interested in self-sufficiency, employment, and family and child well-being.

The SSRC’s purpose is to disseminate quality research. We currently have over 5,050 items in our library, and we’re constantly adding new resources. The library’s materials are organized into 12 topical areas that are listed in the drop-down on the slide. Every item included in the library is reviewed for relevancy. Users may search by key word or use filters like topic area, target population, geographic location, or research methodology to browse the collection. Every topic area page under the Browse Topics tab includes an Our Librarian Recommends box that highlights research and resources recommended by the SSRC Library Team. Each topical area page also includes relevant federal laws and regulations. On the right side of your screen, you’ll find some quick links to the SSRC. Select a title and then click the “browse to” button for those links to open in a new window.
AGENDA

Ms. Pexton: The agenda for our Webinar today includes a brief overview of opportunity youth, followed by our three speakers who will speak for 15 minutes each. At the end, we will have time for questions and answers.

SPEAKERS

Ms. Pexton: Our presenters today will highlight the current research and strategies for connecting opportunity youth to education and employment. Our speakers include: Dr. Harry Holzer of Georgetown University, Nick Mathern of Gateway to College National Network, and Farhana Hossain of MDRC (Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation).

Dr. Harry Holzer joined the Georgetown Public Policy Institute as Professor of Public Policy in the fall of 2000. He is also an Institute Fellow at the American Institutes for Research, a Senior Affiliate at the Urban Institute, a Nonresident Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution, and a Research Affiliate of the Institute for Research on Poverty at the University of Wisconsin at Madison. He has also been a faculty director of the Georgetown Center on Poverty, Inequality and Public Policy.

Nick Mathern is Associate Vice President of Policy and Partnership Development at the Gateway to College National Network. Since 2005, he has brokered agreements between colleges, school districts, and state education agencies in order to connect communities with training, professional development, and evaluation services, as well as replication and implementation of the Gateway to College program model. Nick is also responsible for developing and executing the National Network’s policy agenda, which aims to provide pathways, resources, and support services for opportunity youth to reengage with education and achieve success in post-secondary programs.

Farhana Hossain holds a dual role as associate for implementation research and external affairs at MDRC. In her research, she focuses on programs for low-income individuals who face serious barriers in the labor market, primarily disadvantaged young adults. She is an implementation lead for the evaluations of YouthBuild, PACE Center for Girls, and New York City's Summer Youth Employment Program. Before joining MDRC, she worked as a journalist for more than a decade at The Washington Post and The New York Times.

Q&A

Ms. Pexton: You may submit questions at any time during the Webinar using the Q&A pod in the Webinar platform. If we do not get to all questions during the question and answer session, we will post responses to any unanswered questions on the SSRC in the weeks following today’s presentation.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION!

Ms. Pexton: And, finally, we encourage you to join today’s conversation on Twitter using the #SSRCWebinar hashtag displayed on the screen. Tweets using this hashtag will display on the left side of the Webinar platform. With that, I will turn it over to our moderator, Venessa Marks.
WHO ARE OPPORTUNITY YOUTH

Ms. Venessa Marks: Hi, everyone. Thank you so much, Nicole, and thanks to our amazing group of panelists. I’m honored to be on this call. My name is Venessa Marks. I am a team member of the SSRC, and I’m also a Senior Manager at ICF International. And I’m going to talk to you briefly to help set the stage for our panelists to talk about who opportunity youth are and to talk about how opportunity youth become disconnected.

So there are kind of varying estimates on the numbers of youth who are out of school and out of work. And they range from, anywhere from 10% to 30% of the population. So we are going to kind of strike our balance in the middle there and share some research to suggest that 20% of 16-24 year olds are out of work and out of school in the population.

OPPORTUNITY YOUTH ARE A HETEROGENEOUS GROUP

Ms. Marks: Now, this is a heterogeneous group, right? And economists often separate this population into two big categories. A little over half, 3.4 million, are what economists consider to be chronically disconnected. And the other half, a little less than half, is 3.3 million who are considered under-attached.

UNDER-ATTACHED YOUTH

Ms. Marks: Under-attached youth are young people who may have stopped and started out of school, may have had a job and lost that job, and are seeking other employment. But, regardless of these attempts, they haven’t found secure placement or a secure attachment, either to school or to work. A lot of these young people have been disproportionately, particularly for young men of color, have been disproportionately impacted by the Great Recession. Employment of young adults ages 20-24 currently stands at its lowest levels in over 60 years. Some of that is due to the number of young people pursuing higher education and not working while they’re doing so. But a significant number are because of the limited economic prospects in their local communities.

CHRONICALLY-DISCONNECTED YOUTH

Ms. Marks: The other half of the population and the part of the population that most of the program interventions that we’re going to be talking about today are really focused on are what we consider chronically-disconnected youth. These are youth who might have a confluence of risk factors, so they’ll be more likely to have dropped out of high school to have had a child at a young age, or to be involved in the juvenile justice system or the foster care system.

HOW DO YOUTH BECOME DISCONNECTED?

Ms. Marks: And when we think about how youth become disconnected. How did a young person end up dropping out of high school or reaching into their mid-20s or 30s without ever having been employed? I think you need to talk about and think about both developmental factors as well as sociological factors that influence that young person’s trajectory. And there’s new research that’s been coming out in the fields of neuroscience and brain development that are really shining new light on how childhood experiences later impact the adults we become, both in terms of our achievements and in terms of our overall health.
1 IN 10 CHILDREN ARE POLYVICTIMS OF ABUSE AND VIOLENCE

Ms. Marks: There was a research study that came out a few years ago that was really groundbreaking that looked at the experience of violence in our communities across the Nation. And it found that one in 10 children are what are called polyvictims of abuse and violence. Now, polyvictims are individuals, young people, who have experienced multiple types of violence. So that could be a young person who lives in a community where there’s a lot of gun violence, and they also have a parent who struggles with substance abuse or intimate partner violence in that home. And children who experience multiple types of abuse are more likely to have kind of poor outcomes across a variety of measures. And one of the things that this new research on brain development is finding is that these traumatic experiences or adverse childhood experiences actually can elicit what’s called a toxic stress response.

TOXIC STRESS CAN IMPAIR THE DEVELOPMENT OF EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING SKILLS

Ms. Marks: And toxic stress, we could spend an entire Webinar just on toxic stress, certainly. But to kind of keep it focused for this presentation, toxic stress is a condition that can happen to young people, only children really – that’s why we’re focusing on the brain as particularly malleable when it’s developing. When the system is continually flooded with stress hormones, and those stress hormones can actually impair the development of the brain and can affect the developing immune system as well.

In particular, research has found that toxic stress can impair the development of executive function skills, and these executive function skills really are critical for so many of the tasks that one takes for granted in a classroom or in a workplace. And we all have different levels of executive functioning ability. Right? We all are better or worse at certain of these things. But executive function skills are typically categorized in terms of our ability to manage our emotions, manage our reactions to stimuli, control our tempers, calm ourselves down. In terms of our working memory, our ability to kind of follow instructions, to remember instructions that are told to us and be able to execute them. And our ability for long-term thinking and planning, be able to set goals and break out the tasks that are going to help us get there, and then be persistent in the pursuit of those goals. And, as you can imagine, these executive functioning skills really come into play at an early age in the classroom, and they continue to be important in the workplace.

RACIAL DISPARITIES FURTHER COMPOUND CHALLENGES FOR YOUTH OF COLOR

Ms. Marks: Now, in addition to these developmental factors for young people, the reality is that many of our young people experience discrimination and experience inequities in terms of their experience in school, with the justice system, and so on. These are some of the sociological factors I referenced earlier.

And so we see, for instance, if you look just at the use and arrest rates of marijuana for young people, as these two charts in front of you do, you see gross disparities in terms of race. We mentioned earlier the majority of opportunity youth are youth of color. And in these particular charts, you can see marijuana use accounts for about 46% of all the drug arrest rates for young people in this country. So it’s a huge gateway to the juvenile justice system. And you can see on the left-hand side that marijuana use rates among 18-25 year olds can be looked at by race, white versus black, you can see that usage is fairly similar, although the usage for whites is actually slightly higher. And then if you look to the right you can see a gross disparity in terms of arrest rates.
Connecting Opportunity Youth to Education and Employment

and how much higher it is for black individuals. So policing and justice involvement looks very different depending on race and as well in terms of socioeconomic status.

We also see a lot of racial disparities in terms of school discipline. Black students are suspended or expelled at three times the rate of white students, and that matters because students who are suspended or expelled even once have a risk of dropping out of high school more than double that of their peers.

And then, finally, we see an important and troubling impact of racial discrimination on hiring for young people as well. In a now famous study that was conducted in New York City in 2010, a group of researchers took a group of young people of similar educational and socioeconomic backgrounds, but different races, send them out with resumes and kind of back stories to apply for a job. And what they found is that the probability of getting a callback from an employer fell by nearly two-thirds if a young black man had a criminal record. So for young people who have gotten involved in the juvenile justice system at a young age who might have a criminal record that the employer can access are at a significant disadvantage. And perhaps even more concerning, young white men with criminal records received higher rates of callbacks than young black men with no records at all. So these sociological factors really have a direct impact on young people’s experience as they try to progress through school and as they attempt to move into employment.

THE SCIENCE BEHIND RESILIENCE

Ms. Marks: So, I know these are not the most uplifting statistics to share with you to start us off today. But before I hand it over to our panelists, I do want to talk about some of the science behind resilience. Why do we think programs, nonprofits or publicly-run programs, can make a difference, you know, when you’re facing these kinds of obstacles? And the reason going back to the recent research on brain development, we know that adolescents in particular, which is when this age range we’re talking about really begins, adolescence is a time of great neuroplasticity in the brain. The brain is changing and is more open to influence by its environment during the time of adolescence. And so, adolescence can be a very important time to intervene with young people to help them further develop the executive functioning skills that are going to be so important for their future success, and to help open doors that might otherwise be closed.

THE YOUNG ADULT BRAIN ISN’T BAD EITHER

Ms. Marks: The young adult brain isn’t bad as well. There’s a lot of continuing development that happens really through your 20s. So if you look at this chart that’s from the Harvard Center for the Developing Child, it shows the rate at which executive functioning skills are developing, how proficient one is in executive functioning across age. So you can see a huge jump between the ages of three and five, but there’s also an increase in your mid-20s. Unfortunately for me and for others on the call, it decreases after that. But young adulthood is a time of significant change for the brain, which leads us to believe that it is a great time for interventions as well.

So, with that, I’m going to turn it over to Dr. Harry Holzer to talk with us about connecting opportunity youth to education and employment. Thank you, Dr. Holzer.
Dr. Harry Holzer: Thank you, Venessa, and thank you for having me participate today. I want to start off by presenting a broad overview of what we know about what works and what maybe doesn’t work in terms of improving education and employment outcomes for opportunity youth. And I want to cover sort of three topics.

Firstly, I want to hone in specifically on what I think the major barriers are for opportunity youth in terms of improving their education and employment outcomes. Venessa covered a lot of this material already, but I want to focus on what I think are the three or four biggest barriers to doing better in terms of education and employment. Then I’ll briefly mention a few concepts and distinctions that help us think about this work. And then, finally, go through some evidence on policies and programs, and what we know from the evaluation research.

**BARRIERS TO EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT**

Dr. Holzer: So, first of all, when I think of what the barriers are to getting better education and employment outcomes for this group of youth, I mostly think of three things. First of all, these young people usually do bad in school in terms of educational achievement. Education performance is measured by things like grades and test scores. The low levels of achievement limit their ability to have educational attainment to finish their high school diplomas, to get some kind of postsecondary credential. But it also limits their ability to engage in serious job training or in terms of getting and keeping and performing well in a range of jobs that pay well. So that’s one set of problems.

The second problem, it’s not so much about the individual youth and their attainment. It’s about the high schools they attend. Frankly, they attend a lot of lousy high schools. Many of these high schools lack serious services and outreach to the young people. They lack high-quality career and technical education, or any other positive offerings. Some of them constitute what we call “dropout factories,” large urban or occasionally large rural high schools that offer these young people very little, and they often fall between the cracks and have very high dropout rates.

In addition to those problems, I think a lot of these young people have difficulty picking up early labor market experience. They have very weak connections to the job market, therefore they don’t develop a lot of work readiness, a lot of the basic rules about behavior on a job, showing up on time every day, and how you relate to your employer and to coworkers. They don’t develop that work readiness. Even if they do, they send bad signals to employers based on that lack of early experience, and that hinders their ability to gain jobs in the future.

So I’m going to talk about those three barriers and the sets of policies and programs that address each of them. Before going there, let me just mention a few key concepts and distinctions to keep in mind as we go through that evidence.

**KEY CONCEPTS AND DISTINCTIONS**

Dr. Holzer: First of all, there’s a lot of variation in the disconnect – and, again, Venessa hinted at that – in terms
of their levels of basic skills and their work readiness. Not all of them are hard to serve. Not all of them are hard to employ, but some of them are. Some of them are only reading at maybe the 6th grade level, which makes it very hard for them to improve their educational outcomes or to get them to better jobs. Some of them have been traumatized in the past. Some of them have criminal records. And all of these create much more serious barriers than some other individuals have. And what that means is you’re probably going to need different kinds of policies and programs for different people along that spectrum.

Secondly, it’s important to distinguish between prevention strategies for young people who are still in high school but at risk of disconnecting, versus reconnection strategies for those who have already disconnected, who have usually dropped out of high school and not connected to the job market.

Thirdly, when we talk about strategies, when we talk about what we know about programs and policies, it’s important to distinguish between the promising and the proven. What I call proven is anything that has been rigorously evaluated, and that means usually by either a random assignment experiment or another serious statistical methodology. Other programs that have good outcomes and maybe achieve some scale, those are promising but not yet proven. But even among the proven, a lot of these programs are small and they face big challenges of being replicated, of being scaled to a level that they can really make a difference and in terms of achieving funding. So we want to keep all of these criteria in mind as we look at these programs.

**PROGRAMS TO PREVENT DISCONNECTION: HIGH SCHOOL**

**Dr. Holzer:** So, first, I want to talk about a set of programs designed to prevent disconnection. This is for young people at risk but who still are in high school. And the first thing we would like to see are programs that raise their academic achievement – their reading achievement, their math achievement. There are programs that target younger people, like Success for All, that have been rigorously evaluated, that work quite well. Success for All does not go into the high school years. There are other programs that go into the high school years. I don’t know of any that have been rigorously evaluated, but if they’re out there, that would be a good first step.

Secondly, a lot of these youth need more than just academic achievement and remediation. They need a range of personal supports and social supports, mentoring services, and other kinds of intensive services at the high school level. There’s a good paper by John Tyler and Magnus Lofstrom in 2009 that reviews a range of these programs and what we know about them.

Thirdly, high-quality career and technical education can really make a difference for these young people. The one I think that has been most rigorously evaluated and that has achieved some scale is the Career Academy, which is a small school within a broader school that targets particular industries – healthcare academies, IT academies – and that has been evaluated and shows very strong effects on people’s subsequent earnings. There are other good models of high-quality career and technical education, like High Schools That Work, Linked Learning in California, they don’t yet have rigorous evidence showing that they work well.

Finally, if we look at these dropout factories, there’s been one very successful program that I know of in the City of New York to restructure them. And that program is called Small Schools of Choice, where they took a few of these big dropout factories, they broke them up into smaller schools. Each school had a special theme – career schools, arts and music schools. They let students then self-select into those different schools based on their interest, and if they got into those schools, they were much more motivated to engage in those
schools. And the evaluation of Small Schools of Choice showed very positive improvement in high school graduation and in performance. So the idea is not just to break dropout factories into – from big lousy schools to little lousy schools, but to break them up into schools that have a theme and a purpose that young people can really engage in more enthusiastically.

PROGRAMS TO REMEDY DISCONNECTION: PREPARATION FOR/ATTENDING POSTSECONDARY

Dr. Holzer: Now, what about young people that have already disconnected? We have a set of programs that either prepare them for or help them attend high school and then postsecondary credentials. Now, again, some of these programs target young people that come in with slightly better skills, and I’ll list the Gateway to College program as one of those. And Nick, one of the next speakers, will talk about those a lot more.

But what about programs that don’t target young people who have done particularly well? First, there’s a program like the National Guard ChalleNGe program. The National Guard ChalleNGe program is actually funded by the Department of Defense. It is a residential program. Young people live in dorms and they are military in style. In other words, these programs try to impose some real structure and real discipline on these young people while they try to finish high school or at least get their GEDs. And when evaluated, they had a high success rate. That structure, that military structure was a quite useful and positive experience for many of them.

Another approach for people that have already maybe finished that work, or trying to finish it, is the Bridge Program, before they actually set foot on campus. One of the most successful ones that we’ve seen so far is the LaGuardia Community College program in New York City that helped people as they were preparing for their GED tests or for remedial programs in college. LaGuardia actually embedded a lot of the information in labor market information. Labor market information about healthcare or about IT. So when they would teach concepts, they would embed that information and that often made people more interested in learning the material.

Similarly, remediation programs that are located on college campuses, one of the best known is I-BEST in the State of Washington, where instead of having standalone remediation, the remedial instructors were actually placed into the real classrooms. So every time people came across a concept that they had some trouble with, the remedial instructor would step in and teach them what they need to know. So by embedding it again people were much more interested in the material. And there’s other very promising programs like Quantway and some other reform programs for remediation.

And lastly, I’d like to mention ASAP, a program at the City University in New York (CUNY) for hard to serve young people in college. This program required them to go full time, and then provided a wide range of supports and services, and it doubled the rate at which people completed two-year college programs at CUNY. So that was a very positive result.

PROGRAMS TO PREVENT/REMEDY DISCONNECTION: EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORT SERVICES

Dr. Holzer: Now, what about programs that try to reach out to the disconnected and connect them to the job
market rather than to the world of secondary or postsecondary? Again, there's some programs that work very well for people with better skills, like the Year Up program. That requires people already to have a high school diploma or GED. But there are some programs again that target people somewhat further down the spectrum.

There's a range of positive summer youth employment programs that people are becoming aware of. Amy Schwartz has a nice review paper and a Hamilton paper from a few years ago. One of the most notable is called Becoming a Man, a Chicago program which combines some CBT, cognitive behavioral therapy, with the summer job. And they try to teach people how to avoid dangerous or violent situations, and that's had some nice strong results.

There are older programs like Job Corps, that's a residential program dating back to the original war on poverty. It's an expensive program because it's residential. The initial impacts are quite positive, though they do tend to fade out over time.

There are transitional jobs programs often for people coming out of prison or having some other major [unclear]. These programs don't necessarily improve employment rates afterwards, but they do tend to reduce recidivism rates when they are positive in nature.

There's a few other employment programs. Pre-apprenticeship programs. The Youth Opportunities program which I was involved with at the end of the Clinton Administration that targeted low-income neighborhoods, and each low-income neighborhood put a youth center which then helped to connect young people to education or employment resources.

And, of course, there's a range of policies I think that would help make these programs more effective. Modestly raising the minimum wage, extending the Earned Income Tax Credit to people without, young people without children, like non-custodial adults, etcetera.

**CONCLUSION**

**Dr. Holzer:** So just to wrap up, what have we learned from all this? The notion that nothing works at all, the stereotype that nothing works at all is very clearly wrong. Very clearly inaccurate. But what we learn from this material, I think, is that there's a range of different remedies for different populations who are at different stages of the disconnection process. One size does not fit all. You really need to target different remedies and different programs for people of different circumstances.

We've had different levels of evaluation of these programs. Some of them I think we could call proven. Others remain promising. But even among the proven programs, replication and scale is always a challenge, and funding for replicating and scaling is always a challenge. So all of those challenges are still out there. There is some good, encouraging results out there, and we just need to further move ahead on this kind of work. And I'll stop there. Thank you very much. Hello?

**Ms. Marks:** Great. Thank you so much, Harry. Now we’ll move on to Nick Mathern. Please go ahead.
GATEWAY TO COLLEGE: YOUTH REENGAGEMENT THROUGH COLLEGE-BASED HIGH SCHOOL COMPLETION

Mr. Nick Mathern: Thanks so much. And thanks, everyone, for joining. I’m going to have an opportunity to tell you a little bit about Gateway to College. You heard Harry mention our name, and I want to tell you a little bit about the way that Gateway to College does reengagement for out-of-school and off-track youth through a college-based high school completion program.

I want to briefly address answers to hopefully four questions. We’ll start out just giving a brief description of what is Gateway to College. We’ll talk about who do our programs serve. What are the essential elements for success? And how do we consider the impact our partners are having in order to assist them with continuous improvement?

A UNIQUE COLLABORATION

Mr. Mathern: So, Gateway to College is a unique collaboration between school districts and colleges. It is essentially an early college program, or a dual enrollment program, that is designed for struggling youth. And so the students in the Gateway to College program have either previously dropped out of high school or they’ve been identified by their counselors as unable to graduate in their mainstream school. So it’s turning the idea of early college for high-performing students or even the academic middle students, turning it on its head, and saying we want to make sure that we give these postsecondary pathways to our most struggling students.

And it’s also a program that takes place on a college campus. And so these are programs that tend to be at the college site and often run by the college. And it’s really a unique collaboration in that it features not only out-of-school or off-track youth being reengaged and coming back to school at the college, but also there’s revenue sharing between the college and the school district and that’s a real key. So that K-12 dollar that got turned off when a student dropped out of school is now turned back on and it is passed through or maybe a percentage of it is passed through from the district to the college to serve those students in the college environment.

Now, I say that, but not exclusively. Some of our programs are actually run by the school district. It’s really a matter of local governance questions in terms of what works best in a given community.

MEETING MULTIPLE NEEDS

Mr. Mathern: A little bit about who our students are. You’ll see here on the left, our student eligibility profile. In most states where we operate, our students need to be between the ages of 16 and 21 years old. That’s simply to have the K-12 dollars to follow them. They need to be out of school or on the verge of dropping out. And they need to be behind in credits for their age. Many of our programs are looking specifically for students with a 2.0 or lower GPA. So, again, turning that idea of dual enrollment on its head. And not all of our districts do that. There’s certainly some young people who are really good candidates who may have been strong students before they left school, but maybe a pregnancy or another health issue or some behavior referral might have meant that their mainstream high school was no longer a good fit for them.
All of that said, to Harry’s point about students being prepared, these are students who are going to ultimately be facing college courses and in most cases on short order. So most of our communities, not exclusively all of them but most of them, do also require students to have an 8th grade reading level. And so, this is one solution among many for school districts and colleges that are looking for a way to reengage out-of-school youth.

You can see on the right-hand side our student profile. Our students are about 17 years old at entry. They’ve got a 1.6 high school GPA. Just half the credits they need to graduate. Last year we enrolled 64% students of color, 77% first generation college students, and 68% are low income.

**OPPORTUNITY YOUTH DESERVE ROBUST, EQUITABLE OPTIONS**

**Mr. Mathern:** And then, quickly here, I want to talk about what is it about Gateway to College that is effective for students. And we’ve got five program essential elements. I’m only, for the interest of time, going to really give any detail to three of them. I’m going to talk to you about the significant dual credit, the sustainable partnerships, and the holistic student support. Of course, innovative teaching and learning, and intentional collaboration, are critically important. I think that they might not be as unique to our program as the first three elements.

**SIGNIFICANT DUAL CREDIT**

**Mr. Mathern:** But in terms of significant dual credit, this is really the flag that gets students’ attention and gets them excited about coming back to school. The opportunity to come to college and have that paid for, what is essentially a college scholarship, is really powerful.

When we started this work 15 years ago, our attitude was this was based on the program that started here at Portland Community College, that we wanted to see all students taking all college classes. And we were doing that here at Portland Community College, but what we found as we replicated the program – and we’ve grown this now over the past 13 years, we’re now operating programs in 20 states at 40 different colleges – we found that an all-college model really led to uneven results. And, in many communities, students were not academically able to take advantage of that opportunity. We were having very uneven results and, as a result, we’ve now really moved in the direction of a model that balances K-12 and college instruction based on really understanding student readiness and making sure that we’re putting students up to an opportunity that’s a challenge, but not too far of a challenge for them to achieve.

**SUSTAINABLE PARTNERSHIPS**

**Mr. Mathern:** In terms of sustainable partnerships, I mentioned the shared revenue and that’s really a critical piece for this. Neither institution could do this on their own. So the fact that K-12 dollars are available to support young people is really critical because the colleges, especially two-year public colleges, have very modest resources available and couldn’t provide the necessary wraparound student support needed for previously struggling students to be successful in the college environment.

The college also makes contributions to this work, and the fact that you’re in a college facility and taking advantage of the college campus and all that it has to offer is really a critical piece. I want to acknowledge that for the 40 communities that do this work, it doesn’t just happen. Getting shared priorities between school
principals and superintendents and college presidents is not an easy thing to do. Not because they don’t all have that kind of ultimate vision of serving our communities on the horizon. But they’ve got disparate accountability measures, they’ve got disparate funding structures, and it is very difficult for institutions to make compromises around what their accountability efforts look like and how they go about serving youth. But when you can have leaders who are willing to see a common vision and see a strategy to achieve that, it can be very powerful. And so the partnerships are absolutely critical.

One of our things that we always have to remember about this is that partnership is something that needs to be attended to. We have a college president in our network who has said many times, “A college don’t stay milked.” And really that’s about making sure that we are going back to our leaders and making sure that they understand the benefits that their commitment has for the young people in their communities.

**HOLISTIC STUDENT SUPPORT**

**Mr. Mathern:** And I mentioned sustainable – excuse me – I mentioned the dual credit as a critical piece for attracting students to school. It’s absolutely necessary. But the thing that keeps them there is the fact that we provide personalized relationships once they’re in the program. This is really the critical piece. Students across the country in any of our 40 programs will tell you the thing that makes the difference for them when they’re in this program, which tend to be small programs – programs on campuses doing Gateway to College tend to be from 100 to 150 students, so not a lot of students. The thing that makes the difference for them is that they feel known, they feel recognized by a caring adult on campus. And we use a model of having coaches or resource specialists who have a small caseload of students that they are attending to on a regular basis. We really want to make sure students develop a sense of belonging because they tell us that that is not something that they had in their previous sending high school where they felt like they weren’t known either by their peers or by administrators.

And, we need to acknowledge that those barriers that students faced that led them to leave school in the first place or led them to get behind, those barriers that Venessa spoke to at the beginning, don’t go away just because students start to achieve academic success. They still live in the same neighborhoods that they previously lived in. They still face the same challenges. And so, continuing to have really robust student support is absolutely critical.

**GATEWAY STUDENT EXPERIENCE**

**Ms. O’Callaghan:** I don’t know if you’ll be able to read the print on this, but ultimately what I’m just using this slide for here is to just give you a sense of the trajectory that students are on when they come to Gateway to College. They’ll be in the program from anywhere from one to three years. And the foundation experience is usually a one or two semester experience where they’re taking courses together in a learning community with other Gateway to College students learning two things. One, remediating academic skills that they may have missed from having not taken, you know, their core coursework in high school. But also learning the habits, the mind, and the student skills needed to do time management, to apply study skills, to make sure that they’re learning how to communicate with instructors so that when they matriculate into college coursework that they can be successful.

As they move on, they do matriculate into a variety of courses. They’re no longer part of a learning community,
although they may come back to Gateway office and Gateway classrooms to continue some of their K-12 instruction while they’re also co-enrolled in college courses alongside of adult learners who are paying tuition to be there.

The Gateway experience and the robust holistic support that they get continues until they’ve earned enough high school credits to complete a high school credential. That will vary. Some students might come to us with zero high school credits and they’ll be with us for three years. Others may be relatively close to graduation and able to finish up in a single year.

**DIRECT IMPACT**

**Mr. Mathern:** In terms of the impact that these programs are having, I mentioned that we’re at 40 colleges, 41 colleges in 21 states. Last year, we enrolled just under 4,500 students, and our students graduated with an average of 20 college credits. In addition to the graduates, if you look at all of our students who are enrolled, that really amounts to K-12 dollars providing the equivalent of $6.8 million in scholarships for students to be enrolled in courses. That’s in addition to their books, their transportation, and meals, and the student support being covered.

And we’re going to have a relationship in an ongoing situation with the National Student Clearinghouse. That’s not in place yet but one thing I can refer to is a 2012 study that showed that 73% of our graduates are continuing to enroll in postsecondary education after being involved with Gateway to College. So that’s a little bit about our impact.

**COMMUNITY**

**Mr. Mathern:** Now I want to talk for a moment about the ways in which we’re doing learning about the work. I mentioned that we have seen uneven results, especially as it had to do with students taking college coursework. And, you know, we’re always wondering about, you know, what is the root of that? Does it have to do with implementation? Does it have to do with the sending school districts or the communities from which students are coming?

And so, I’m just going to share with you a little bit of information about five communities from our network that are relatively successful around questions of persistence and high school completion. One of the reasons I’m going to look at this is because what we see here is that there is not necessarily a relationship between their success around completion or persistence and the demographics of the sending communities.

So, for example, in Community A, we’re looking at a community where 95% of students are in zip codes where high school diploma attainment is below the national average; and 97% of them live in a zip code where bachelor’s degree attainment is below the national average. So, you know, a community where education is really lower than average.

In Community B, we’re looking at students who are 99% students of color, and 89% of students live in a high-poverty community. So, you know, again students who may face economic barriers and barriers in terms of, you know, structural racism, etcetera, that we heard about earlier.
And then Community C. I mentioned to you at the beginning that our, on average, our students are entering with about a 1.6 GPA. We looked back over three years and it’s about 1.59 here. But in Community C, the students were entering with an average GPA of 1.14, so substantially lower than the rest of our network, and in the 7th percentile of all of our Gateway to College GPAs nationally.

So I share these three profiles to give you a sense of kind of where they are, but relative to the measurement that we do, they are having success around student completion.

THREE-YEAR COHORT GRADUATION RATE

Ms. O’Callaghan: So you can see here over five communities – and I’m sorry I haven’t had a chance to give you give profiles, but I just wanted to give you a snapshot here – but across these five communities you can see, you know, they are certainly holding their own among our other programs with regards to student completion. And some of you who might be looking for traditional K-12 education, you know, you may be wondering, you know, these might look very low for traditional high school graduation rates. But among students who previously left or who already missed the graduation window at their mainstream high school, you know, these are actually very reasonable and we were pleased to see rates like this. You can see we’ve established a benchmark for our network of a 50% completion rate of a high school credential.

AVERAGE COLLEGE CREDITS EARNED BY GRADUATES

Mr. Mathern: And then, I want to also look at the flip side of that, because I mentioned that we have seen some challenges around having an all-college environment, and as a result, some of our programs have shifted to offer a lot more K-12 instruction. Still doing so in the college environment and still doing so in a situation where there’s an expectation that students will continue to be enrolled at college. But you can see that our national average of 20 college credits, among these five programs, those programs are graduating with many fewer college credits. In one case, you see that few students graduated with more than one college class completed. And so, that does speak to the tension and I want to acknowledge that there is tension among our programs, especially, you know, when we’re looking at trying to address, you know, issues of attendance or issues of persistence for students who had previously struggled.

I don’t have it here, but one thing I’ll also mention is that with that 1.6 GPA that we see at [unclear], that does increase significantly and what we’re finding nationally is that in their first semester in the Gateway to College program, students have a 2.6 GPA. So still perhaps not all straight A’s, but a substantial increase after transitioning into this program.

WE SUPPORT A NETWORK OF PROVIDERS

Mr. Mathern: A little bit about how we work with our partners. We provide a great deal of training and technical assistance to programs, and for the purposes of the conversation we’re having here today, we do data collection and analysis, and program evaluation for the purpose of continuous improvement. And so we’re very interested in questions that you may have about the continued continuous improvement of this particular model and how this can be implemented effectively in other communities, whether it be under the name Gateway to College or simply with the concept of creating postsecondary pathways for out-of-school youth. And that’s where I land, and I will turn it over to Farhana.
Ms. Farhana Hossain: Thank you so much, Nick.

Ms. Marks: Go ahead, Farhana. Thank you.

**IMPROVING EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES FOR DISADVANTAGED YOUTH**

Ms. Hossain: Thank you. Hi, everyone. I will apologize for my voice. I’m a little under the weather, so bear with me. I’m Farhana Hossain and I’m a research associate at MDRC. We are a nonprofit, nonpartisan education and social policy research organization. And we’re focused on learning what works to improve programs and policies for low-income communities. Many of the programs and evaluation that Dr. Holzer mentioned today, including Career Academy, National Guard ChalleNGe, GED Bridge, and ASAP, were – we were involved with. And so, today I’m going to focus specifically on the employment piece.

As you know, as Venessa has mentioned, unemployment and disconnection continues to be a big challenge, especially for low-income and minority youth. And there is a concrete need for increased investment in strategies that we can take to improve the employment prospects for our young adults.

So Dr. Holzer has already walked you through the research evidence on youth programs that have proven to be successful at improving outcomes. So today, what I’m going to do is walk you through some features that are shared by successful work-oriented programs for youth. I’d like to reiterate his statement that there is no one-size-fits-all solution. This is a diverse group of 7 million young adults. And so what I’m going to do is just going to talk about some of the components that we found to be common in successful work-oriented programs for youth.

Then I’ll give you a brief overview of some promising models that are currently being tested for effectiveness. And I’ll end with some thoughts on what we’ve learned from our research about engaging employers in work initiatives for youth.

**WHAT WORKS? LESSONS FROM EVALUATIONS**

Ms. Hossain: So what works? So these are some of the five features from successful programs that we found in our synthesis of rigorous evaluations.

**PAID WORK + FINANCIAL INCENTIVES**

Ms. Hossain: While classroom training is important in building job skills, we find that work experience and a real workplace context give youth the opportunity to apply what they’ve learned and to create a network that they can then leverage for future opportunities. For example, someone that can give them a reference or lead them to other jobs. Work experience in the real world also provides an opportunity to learn the ever-important soft skills. How to dress, how to talk to coworkers, how to negotiate challenges that come up.

Stipends or other types of financial incentives are an important source of support to meet the economic challenges these young people face. Not only do they enable continuous engagement, they can be a key form of positive reinforcement to sustain motivation, especially when they are tied to milestones like acquiring
specific competencies or earning a credential.

Some recent research also suggests that the quality of the work experience may also be really important. Low wage work that is not connected to a career pathway or that young people perceive to have no value may not be as effective as work experience that gives them skills for future advancement, or the satisfaction of creating value for themselves or for the community. Recently we did a survey of about a hundred YouthBuild program directors and many of the program directors said that even if youth didn’t go into construction, they took great pride in participating in community service projects where they constructed or participated in constructing, you know, low-income housing or other types of structures in the community because it gave them a concrete sense of accomplishment.

**LINK BETWEEN TRAINING AND JOB MARKET**

**Ms. Hossain:** The next is a strong link between training and the job market. So, as Dr. Holzer mentioned, evidence from career technical education (CTE) and sector-based training programs suggests that education and training that are shaped by identifiable opportunities in the local labor market and that have employer involvement, direct employer involvement, can produce strong outcomes for youth. So CTE programs like Career Academies in high schools and sector-based programs like GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs), they design their training curricula with input from employer partners, and also get employer commitments to sponsor and provide on-the-job trainings.

These kinds of demand-driven models are, as you may know, at the center of new workforce development strategies, not just for youth, but also for adults. The current consensus is that intervention should begin with an analysis of local labor market trends and employer needs in high-growth industries. And then, we can move on to developing supply-side strategies around skill building in conjunction with employers and their organizations.

**ADDRESS DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS OF YOUTH**

**Ms. Hossain:** The next is addressing developmental needs of youth. And this was covered by Venessa and Nick. This won’t come as a surprise to most of you, but programs that work for adults don’t necessarily always work for youth. As Venessa has showed, recent research says that brain development in young people continues through their mid-20s, and that, you know, capacity for mature decision making continues to evolve well past [unclear], especially in the area of the brain that’s responsible for cognitive functioning. Things like decision making and reasoning and impulse control. So, you know, that’s why there’s a high level of risk-taking behaviors and highly emotional responses during teenage years.

Brain development can also be slowed for those exposed to trauma and stress. And practitioners and youth experts recommend that programs should not only provide participants with training or jobs, but also expose them to activities and relationships that are thought to promote healthy development across a wide range of domains. Some of the more effective programs place a lot of importance on supporting the personal and professional growth of young people through training and life skills, and workplace behavior, or opportunities for leadership development, and fostering interpersonal connections with staff and peers.

Some programs [unclear] would say that enrolling young people in a series of small cohorts as opposed to
admitting them on a rolling basis can encourage engagement by, you know, creating peer relationships and creating a sense of community.

We also hear that it’s important to hire staff who share similar backgrounds and experiences to make meaningful and lasting connections with youth. Young people with lower levels of academic and vocational skills can also become frustrated when they don’t make fast progress towards their goal of employment or higher education, and often stop engaging. And for them it’s really important to manage their expectations from program services, and set short- and long-term goals from the outset, so that young people can feel a sense of accomplishment if they’re able to achieve some of the short-term goals, and persist if they can visualize how these achievements relate to their long-term goals.

**SUPPORT SERVICES TO ADDRESS BARRIERS**

**Ms. Hossain:** Next is support services to address barriers. Nick has already gone through a lot of this, as Gateway recognizes the need to address barriers faced by its students and offers holistic support. And we find that, we found in our analysis that the successful programs provide individualized support services to address barriers of youth. The top ones we hear about are access to child care and transportation, and partnerships with other agencies and programs in the local community are key to meeting some of these needs, since no one program or funding stream can directly meet all of a young person’s needs.

Going back to the developmental and mental health needs among disadvantaged young people, case managers and youth counselors from successful programs have reported using various evidence-informed practices, like trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy or motivational interviewing, to address their mental health needs. And many programs have also established partnerships with local mental health providers for more intensive clinical therapy.

It’s also really important to set clear and consistent expectations around program rules and while allowing flexibility to address challenges. You know, these young people, there are -- these young people have various types of barriers and, you know, coming to a program every single day or meeting all of the requirements may not be always possible for them. But setting up clear expectations around those rules are still very important to make sure that there’s growth.

**POST-PROGRAM SUPPORT**

**Ms. Hossain:** The next is quite important for not only just youth programs, but also we found in workforce development programs in general. Job placement is often considered the end outcome of many of the programs, but for most disadvantaged young adults, you know, it’s only the beginning of their journey. For many youth, problems and stresses emerge after they are placed in a job and start working. For example, young women with children may discover that their child care arrangements are less reliable than they expected, or they may realize that they do not know how to handle conflict with fellow workers or managers. So young people need continued post-placement support to help them adapt to their jobs, address any personal or situational problems that could undermine steady work, and also importantly to identify opportunities to move up and to identify opportunities to pursue further education and training to progress in their careers.
UPCOMING RESEARCH ON A CONTINUUM OF WORK MODELS

Ms. Hossain: That was an overview of what we know from existing research. There’s a lot of exciting research under way by MDRC and other organizations to build and strengthen the evidence around effective strategies to improve employment outcomes for youth. There are efforts to strengthen the evidence around career pathway approaches in apprenticeships. MDRC is working on an evaluation of New York City’s Summer Youth Employment Program, which is the largest summer jobs program in the country. We’re going to be following summer youth for up to eight years to understand the impact of a summer job on their education and employment outcomes. We’re also working on an evaluation of the YouthBuild program that I mentioned that provides vocational training, educational services, leadership training, and various other supports to youth.

Lastly, we are also exploring models that combine the cognitive behavioral therapy with traditional employment approaches, like subsidized job. CBT is an evidence based technique that is used to help people identify problematic thoughts and feelings, and see how they’re connected to negative behaviors. The power of CBT, you know, stems from the idea that troubled behavior is not inherent; rather that it can be traced back to patterns of thoughts and distorted perceptions that are learned. And, you know, group-based CBT are widely used in juvenile and criminal justice systems and other contexts, and it’s been shown to have positive effects. So we’re hoping to develop some work around – work in integrating those approaches into employment programs.

ENGAGING EMPLOYERS IN YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Ms. Hossain: Last but not least, we have to have employer engagement at a large scale to be able to create training and work opportunities that are valuable for young people in the long run. You know, workforce development organizations will need to increase, you know, focus on the skills that employers are looking for, which means, you know, trying to engage them in their initiatives.

So how do we get more employers involved? So federal efforts to engage employers in workforce initiatives have generally relied on financial incentives, like wage subsidies and tax credit. And those remain important tools, especially for youth with no work history or youth with a lot of barriers. But incentives may not be the only reason why employers participate in work-related programs for youth. Different employers have different needs, and therefore, different motivations to participate in workforce activities. Some studies have pointed to a sense of social responsibility, philanthropy, public recognition as motivating factors.

In the long run, employers are more likely to engage in youth employment efforts if it’s easy for them to do so, and if they believe it is a positive opportunity for their business. We recently held a forum on youth employment with some well-known experts, including Dr. Holzer, and the consensus was that efforts to engage employers should include a marketing component to educate them about the potential of a young and diverse workforce, and to debunk myths about young workers and public or nonprofit workforce programs that may be based in stereotypes. For example, there was a recent GAO (Government Accounting Office) report that found that employers engaged in local one-stop centers only when hiring for low-skilled, low-wage jobs because they misperceived the skills of the one-stop labor pool.

Programs and providers can also work with intermediary organizations to better align their services and
training with employer needs and provide assistance to youth. They can be placed with a variety of organizations, including chambers of commerce, trade associations, labor management partnerships, community colleges, and private recruitment firms.

We also have to better understand how the changing nature of work and hiring practices affect the way young people interact with employers. You know, everything is computerized, you know, everything is on the Internet. More and more employers are turning to temporary staffing arrangements to increase their workforce flexibility. Many employers are transferring all or part of their recruitment process to external providers. And since some of these third party actors serve as, you know, the first line of contact between many employers and youth, programs should explore how they can engage these third party providers in trying to create work opportunities for youth.

Ms. Hossain: Okay, my time is up but I’m going to wrap up. Here are just some – my last thoughts around engaging employers in youth employment. As I said, putting more resources and staff into job development. But, you know, staff with some nuance understanding of the local labor market and with business or sales experience so they can speak to employers in their language.

Messaging could be key, depending on the need and the motivation of the employers. You can appeal to their bottom line, their sense of social and community responsibility, or both. Some recent research recommends that to engage employers, you know, you should tailor your communication to different staff members. For example, emphasizing efficiency to a production line manager; social mission or diversity to the HR staff; or a hybrid approach at the leadership level.

We also have to educate employers in effective youth development and supervision practices to ensure that, you know, once connected, youth are actually engaged and can retain jobs. There is some evidence that even employers who engage in the public workforce system and youth education and employment programs have limited knowledge about how these programs work and the support services that are available to young people. Also, frontline staff who manage young workers often do not receive any training or guidance in supporting the development and professional growth of youth. So programs should explore how they can engage and educate work supervisors on low-effort, strength-based ways to support young workers without focusing too much on their barriers or stigmatizing them.

So I’m going to end there. You know, come to our website if you want to find out more about the research that we’re working on pertaining to disconnected youth.

Ms. Marks: Wonderful. Thank you so much, Farhana

Q&A

Ms. Marks: So we’re going to transition now to a Q and A. So please submit your questions to Dr. Holzer, Nick, or Farhana through the question and answer feature, which is on the bottom right of the screen. And also, feel free to continue tweeting using the hashtag #SSRCWebinar. And so, we’ve gotten a number of questions already, which is great, so I’m going to start asking those. And I’ll direct them to one of you on the panel, but others feel free to chime in if you have other things to add.
So one of the first questions we received was actually around executive function skills, and it was asking if we know of any programs that are strong in teaching executive function skills, you know, acknowledging they might be calling those skills by a different name, such as socioemotional or soft skills and so on. Harry, do you have any thoughts on that?

**Dr. Holzer:** There’s a few programs that I know of. There’s been a little bit of research evidence on what works, but there’s a program in New Haven called the New Haven Moms that was studied and showed some success rate. And there’s some interesting work being done by the Crittenton Women’s Union in Boston that tries to target women, moms at different skill levels and work with them. So we’re starting to see some beginnings of some efforts in that area and some evaluation research.

**Ms. Marks:** Fantastic. Thank you, Dr. Holzer. We have another question, Nick, for you, for Gateway to College. The participant wanted to know whether Gateway to College is available in any rural areas.

**Mr. Mathern:** Right now we don’t have a lot of partnerships in rural areas. Our programs do tend to be in urban and suburban areas, although the program can be adapted for a rural area. The reality of it would be it would be a much smaller program probably and have a scaled down staff. But we’re happy to work with communities that don’t currently have this type of an option to bring a program in at a scale that works for the level of need in a community.

**Ms. Marks:** Great. Thank you. And, Nick, while you’re with us we have another question. The participant wanted to know what percentage of your students complete the program.

**Mr. Mathern:** Right now I mentioned that we have experienced a lot of growth and then saw uneven outcomes. And so you saw in a slide I showed that we’ve got a benchmark of 50%, and our objective is that we want to make sure that by 2017, all 40 of our programs are exceeding that benchmark of 50% completion. Right now it’s not there. I would say, I don’t have the number directly in front of me, but I think that if we did an aggregate, you know, there’s a range and you saw some of them were on the high end. But I think on average probably about 35% right now for a high school, excuse me, for a high school diploma. Some other number of students who ultimately will complete a GED, and we don’t have that included because our – we hadn’t previously been collecting that data. So, like I said, I think on average we’re about 35% for a high school diploma right now. Some additional amount for a GED. And, by 2017, because we’re implementing an effort to bring more balance to the K-12 and the college instruction, we’re going to bring up some of those programs that had been struggling with an all-college implementation.

**Ms. Marks:** Wonderful. Thank you. And we had a couple of questions coming in around partnerships and what role certain partners can play in helping to open up opportunities for disconnected youth. One question was around public housing, what role public housing authorities can play in helping opportunity youth. And a second one is on labor unions. What kind of partnerships could be created with the labor unions to help support opportunity youth? I’ll open this up to all three panelists. Does anyone have any examples of this or any ideas?

**Ms. Hossain:** This is Farhana. Yes, one example of a union partnership is the Center for Energy Workforce Development and the International Brotherhood of Electric Workers have – it’s the Center for Energy Workforce Development, it’s a nonprofit consortium. It’s formed by the electric, natural gas, and nuclear utilities and their trade associations. And they essentially wanted to develop solutions to the, you know,
workforce shortage in the energy industry. And their employers worked with educators and the International Brotherhood of Electric Workers to create pathways for different types of energy carriers. And, also, another one that comes to mind is in Washington State, where Boeing and the International Association of – I believe it’s the Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, but don’t hold me to it. But they operate a joint training program and, you know, that’s actually financed by setting aside some money per work hour in the union contract. So there are examples out there of collaboration between unions and workers and employer associations to, you know, create a mechanism that can pay for training to move workers up the ladder.

**Dr. Holzer:** I’ll add a few more to that list. Several construction locals run apprenticeship programs and they have pre-apprenticeship programs into which disconnected young people can enter to try to prepare them, give them the skills preparation to actually enter an apprenticeship program. There is also a union local on the East Coast – Philadelphia, New York – called 1199C that helps prepare young people for jobs in the healthcare industry and in the eldercare industry. And so those are good examples of union involvement as well.

**Ms. Marks:** Fantastic.

**Mr. Mathern:** And I’ll just pile on, if I can. Sorry, Venessa. Because Farhana is doing an evaluation of YouthBuild, I want to make sure she is aware of an important [overlapping comments] YouthBuild program has a direct entry agreement with several unions based on these pre-apprenticeships that Harry spoke to.

**Ms. Hossain:** Thanks.

**Ms. Marks:** And, Harry, do you have any thoughts around housing authorities? Relationships that programs can build with housing authorities or programs run by housing authorities?

**Dr. Holzer:** I think YouthBuild is also an example of that, because YouthBuild does focus a lot on housing rehabilitation.

**Ms. Marks:** Fantastic. Thank you. We have another question coming in. This individual would like to know more – asking how he or she can learn more about models that combine work with interventions to promote behavior change and non-cognitive skills, for instance the CBT subsidized job example that, Farhana, I think you gave. Anyplace you can direct this person to go get additional information on those kinds of models?

**Ms. Hossain:** Sure. This is definitely an emerging area of work. There isn’t a lot out, I mean that’s proven out there that’s… I mean, CBT has been proven in many, in different contexts to, for example, reduce recidivism. But in terms of promotion of employment, there is not, you know, rigorous evidence there because it’s still emerging. In 2012, I believe, the University of Chicago did a study of their summer employment program there called One Summer Plus that combined a part-time summer job with a cognitive behavioral therapy based curriculum. And that showed a reduction in violence in some of their youth outcomes, improvement in some of their youth outcomes. So that’s one example. We are currently working, I can’t speak much about it, but we are currently exploring ways to develop… CBT is an umbrella term that’s used for, as I said, kind of a way of thinking about restructuring thoughts to promote positive behavior. But there are many, there are different types of interventions that, you know, that can fit within that umbrella term. So we’re trying to assess which interventions would work well to promote employment. But that’s an area of work that’s developing.
**Ms. Marks:** Wonderful. Thank you. We have another question coming in about WIOA, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, and whether or not there’s any literature yet on engaging youth for evidence-based programs combined with WIOA. I imagine not since WIOA is so new. But any information you can provide on how programs might be starting to partner with workforce development boards in maybe new ways because of WIOA? I don’t know, Harry, is that something that you might be able to take on?

**Dr. Holzer:** I don’t know. I don’t know of any literature on that or any evaluation evidence. I know that there’s activity, important activity going on, but I haven’t seen any summaries of that activity for this population specifically.

**Ms. Marks:** Great. And, Farhana, is there any additional information you’d like to add in about WIOA for folks who might not be as familiar with it?

**Ms. Hossain:** Not in that specific. I’m not aware of – I mean this is still, as I said, this is going on on the ground but I’m not aware of partnerships that are successful.

**Ms. Marks:** Great.

**Ms. Hossain:** Yet.

**Ms. Marks:** Yes, yes, exactly. It’s very new. Fantastic. Well, for those who aren’t familiar, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act requires much more funding than ever before to be spent on out-of-school youth. And so it really is an opportunity for workforce development boards and training providers, businesses, to work together in a much more targeted and now more funded way to serve opportunity youth. So there’s soon more information hopefully to be coming, and certainly a lot more practice to be coming down the pike there. Thank you. We have another question coming in around any efforts to determine if students have learning disabilities or involvement of these special education professionals? Nick, I’m going to pass this to you since you focus more explicitly on the education side of things. Is that something that your program strives to do, to learn about individual education plans, IEPs, that students might have and so on?

**Mr. Mathern:** That’s an important part of the individualized services that our programs provide. And I’ll acknowledge that it can be a challenge to provide services to students with an IEP in a college setting because colleges, by law, are governed by a different set of rules, by ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) rather than IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) when it comes to individualized services for dealing with disabilities, etcetera. What we find is that if during the enrollment process there is explicit efforts to connect with families in a school district if a student is referred who has an IEP, most of our programs will set up an IEP meeting at that time and determine whether or not the additional services that are available on a college campus, or simply the case management services that are available via the coach or the resource specialist, meet the needs of the student’s IEP. About 10% of our students do have an IEP, so it’s not kind of out of proportion to what you might find in a mainstream high school. But what we do find is that there are students who, you know, fit there very well. And actually, that doesn’t tend to be any type of a barrier that holds those students back relative to the rest of our population.

**Ms. Marks:** Great. Thank you. And another question...Yes, go ahead.

**Ms. Hossain:** I was going to say I didn’t speak earlier about the – when the housing question, and I believe Dr.
Holzer answered about YouthBuild and he’s exactly right. But I also wanted to point that person to our website for our Jobs-Plus study. This is a study that’s not specifically for youth, but it tried to incentivize – I mean, it was very effective in increasing earnings among public housing residents and it had three components, including a, you know, obviously employment-related services like job search assistance, some rent-based incentives, and also a strategy called Community Support for Work, which consisted of efforts to involve residents in neighbor-to-neighbor information sharing about like work opportunities, you know, in the community. So I would encourage them to look at that. Even though it’s not specifically for youth, it is a public housing based initiative that has shown results.

Ms. Marks: Great. Thank you so much, Farhana. Another question has come in is regarding how to potentially pass knowledge or train workforce development providers in positive youth development. And the question, the statement from the participant was that a lot of what we’re talking about seems to be, you know, related to positive youth development regarding treating people in an individualized manner, with an individualized approach, and a positive manner. And the question is, you know, does this positive youth development approach come naturally to workforce development providers? Or is there capacity building that’s needed in that space? I don’t know, Harry, if you have any thoughts on that?

Dr. Holzer: Well, my guess is that some workforce development specialists are better at it than others. Some are more familiar with youth issues than others. So when you look around the country, for instance, there was and is a Philadelphia Youth Network that combines a lot of the youth WIA (Workforce Investment Act) funds and integrates a lot of these programs. And that’s a great mechanism for making workforce development specialists aware of youth issues and targeting better towards them. And there are other such efforts around the country. Now, of course, the budgets are very, very constrained – the WIOA budgets in this area – so it’s hard to put a lot of money into training individuals. But there are some nice efforts around the country to make people more aware and to target people more effectively. Some of the youth, the former Youth Opportunity sites that have survived over time and gotten their own funding also provide some mechanisms for doing that.

Ms. Marks: Excellent. Thank you, Dr. Holzer. And one follow-up question to you, you know, related to just some of the changes in our economy over the past decade or two, and how we can adjust to them or continue to adjust. Question on the increased automation in our industries, you know, in many of our communities. And asking what local communities or states can do to address, you know, the increasing automatization and kind of change or shift to more skilled jobs.

Dr. Holzer: Well, I think what automation has done so far – automation has really eliminated middle wage jobs that used to go to high school graduates or less. A lot of production jobs. A lot of clerical jobs. Those jobs have either disappeared or pay a lot less than they used to because of automation. What that means is that we have to now better target other kinds of jobs that pay well but that have higher skill demands in industries like healthcare, advanced manufacturing, IT, transportation and logistics, hospitality, some of the higher ends of retail trade. Of course, many community colleges are trying to do that. Farhana talked about sector-based strategies and career pathway programs that often target those sectors that continue to have good paying jobs but that now simply require more skill than they used to in the past. And efforts to get our disconnected young people into those postsecondary programs, efforts like Gateway and others to do that, I think are the best efforts we know of to try to deal with that issue.

Ms. Marks: Great. Thank you so much. Farhana, a question for you regarding trauma-informed care, and if
you’d seen any programs or any good examples of how programs that are serving this population are potentially embedding trauma-informed care principles into their work.

**Ms. Hossain:** Yes. So, as I said, most of the programs that work with youth, you know, as far as I know are adopting some form of cognitive behavioral therapy. And it’s been adapted into a variety of, you know, specified treatment models, and many of which are considered evidence-based. So, for example, Becoming a Man in Chicago, it’s a program for young men in grades 7 to 10. A researcher at the University of Chicago found that, you know, combining regular interaction with positive adult role models and a CBT approach in afterschool programming reduced, you know, violent and nonviolent arrests by nearly half. And it also seemed to boost positive schooling outcomes. So I would…It also, CBT seems to work well when you follow a really structured curriculum, and the curriculum and the level of evidence can vary. So it’s difficult for me to point to a specific curriculum and say this is going to work for everyone. I think, and we know that not everything works for everyone. For example, we tested a CBT approach at Rykers that Adolescent Behavioral Learning Experience which tested, you know, CBT to reduce recidivism, and we didn’t find any impact. Actually, the program was implemented by MDRC, but the Vera Institute of Justice did the evaluation. So there context really matters, right? So I would say that, you know, you have to look at the target population and you have to look at the context before picking the type of trauma-informed approach that you want to take. And, unfortunately, it’s not my content area of expertise so I can’t go beyond that, but that’s my take.

**Ms. Marks:** Great. Thank you. I think we had another question come in through our Twitter feed, which we certainly would love to address. And I’ll put this both to Harry and Nick. Any insight you could provide on programs that have been particularly targeting working with Latino youth or Latinas, or any differential impacts you’ve seen on the Latino community through the programs, through your program, Nick, that you work on or, Harry, the programs you’ve seen evaluations on?

**Dr. Holzer:** There’s a program in Chicago, the name of which I always have trouble remembering. It’s run by Juan Salgado. It’s a very good sector-based program both for youth and adults. That’s a very good program. And there’s an effort here in Washington, D.C., for Latino youth run by Lori Kaplan. I haven’t seen evaluation evidence on it, but it looks quite strong as well.

**Mr. Mathern:** What I could add to that, you know, I would say probably won’t be shocking to anyone here, buy kind of speaks to, you know, just the various demographics of our communities around the country. There are a number of Gateway to College programs that are in communities where there is a majority of Latino students, in some cases almost exclusively Latino students. And really, I think what is critical there in those communities is that the programs are, you know, necessarily and doing good work to do this, are making connections to the broader Latino community, and making sure that information about the program is available to community-based organizations that are providing culturally-specific services. And then the programs themselves are seeking training in order to be able to provide culturally-specific services. And so, for a few of our partner programs that are at, you know, Hispanic-serving institutions, that’s not necessarily a big challenge. It’s part of, you know, how they approach their community and how they approach their work in general. But for some of our programs it is something that they’ve needed to be deliberate about, especially in instances where we have staff members who might not reflect the ethnic or racial background of our students. We need to, you know, either have deliberate hiring or deliberate training or both to make sure that we’re being as responsive as possible. You know, I don’t know if it was implicit in the question, but one of the questions of course to be made to follow that is – to what degree is an intervention like this or other interventions we talked about appropriate for ELL (English language learner) students? And I will say that
within Gateway to College, we see that for kind of higher level ELL students, they tend to be able to matriculate directly from an ELL program to Gateway to College with relative success. But for students who are really early on and maybe lower level, level one, level two with their English language, because of the nature of Gateway being a college-based program, unfortunately it’s a longer road for them.

Ms. Hossain: The program that Dr. Holzer mentioned is in D.C. I’m actually quite excited about it. There’s an impact evaluation coming out this year. It’s at the Latin American Youth Center. It’s the Promoter Pathway program, and it’s a long-term case management program where case managers work with young people for up to four to six years. So this is – I’m excited about seeing evidence for this model.

Ms. Marks: Fantastic. So, we’ll just do – close out with one final question so we can wrap up. There’s a…There were two questions related to how do we kind of advocate for additional funding in this arena, and advocate for policy changes that might support, you know, further work with opportunity youth? And I think the question was both, you know, what can we do as practitioners or researchers, policymakers, but what also can youth do to further advocate for themselves and for these kinds of programs? Would love to hear each person’s take on this, what your thoughts are, and then we can wrap up. Harry, if you’d like to start?

Dr. Holzer: Yeah. I think a couple of things. Number one, what all of us have talked about, having evidence, having rigorous evidence of impacts is very important. I mean, it’s virtually impossible at the federal level and even at most state level programs that if you don’t have rigorous evidence, you’re not going to make a very effective case for your program. So that’s really important to have. And secondly, there’s an argument about just how costly it is not to address this problem, the costs of healthcare for this population, the costs in the criminal justice system are just massive. And, interestingly, I think on criminal justice there’s actually been a big political change. Conservatives are now really reaching the same conclusion that this is a huge waste of money, that we need to treat these young people differently and not just rely on incarceration. So I think that gives us all an opportunity. But in terms of the last part of your question, what can young people do for themselves? Sometimes there have been some very powerful stories told by young people who had a really rough start in life and who disconnected and maybe got in trouble with the law, and who managed to reconnect with the aid of one of these programs. And I found those – I find those stories just as powerful as the evidence. And a few well-placed stories like that I think can make a difference as well.

Ms. Marks: Thank you, Harry. Nick, any final thoughts to add?

Mr. Mathern: Yeah, I’ll just tag on that. I agree 100% with Harry. We were down in our state capital, Salem, earlier this week working with legislatures on a bill to have more reengagement options for out-of-school youth, and having a lobbyist – excuse me – a legislative aide there who was a former Gateway to College student was a very compelling part of that. So that’s absolutely critical. And then I’ll just say, you know, I think that the economic argument that Harry’s talking about is critical. And there’s a really crass workforce argument to be made, which is that our economy no longer has those positions that Harry was talking about for young people who don’t have a high school diploma. And so if we’ve got an expectation that everyone has a high school credential and postsecondary training, we just don’t get there if we leave 20% behind.

Ms. Marks: Thank you, Nick. Farhana?

Ms. Hossain: I’m going to obviously stress the need for adoption of interventions and programs and practices that have some rigorous evidence behind them, especially when we’re thinking about adopting them at scale.
But also, you know, isn’t there a saying called “all politics is local?” So I’d like to adopt that saying to this context to say I think there can be a lot done on a local level, as Nick was saying, reaching out to local policymakers, reaching out to local employers, reaching out to – whether it’s for, whether it’s youth, whether it’s the programs. I just think that local engagement can make a huge difference.

**Ms. Marks:** Wonderful. Thank you all so much for your time on this panel and your preparation for it. And thank you to our participants for your fantastic questions. We really appreciate it, and please fill out the survey to let us know how your experience of the panel and Webinar was. Thank you so much.

**Announcer:** That concludes today’s conference. Thank you for your participation.