



RELATIONSHIPS COME FIRST:

How Four Career Development and Workforce Readiness Programs Prepare Young People for Work and Life

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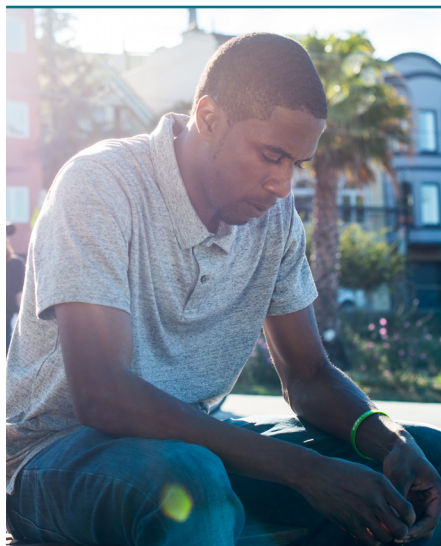
OVERVIEW

Work—one of the most consistent ways that adults participate in society—is an important milestone on young people’s path to adult success. However, 5.5 million 16- to 24-year-olds are not in school and not working.¹ Young people who do not complete high school and those who have only a high school diploma face great difficulties in obtaining employment at a livable wage.² These difficulties are magnified for young people who are described in this paper as “risk-immersed”^A—that is, those who are growing up in environments that offer more adversity than support.

Career development and workforce readiness programs for risk-immersed young people, particularly those living in low-income urban communities, have developed to help fill economic and educational gaps. Through these programs, young people can gain the education and training necessary to fill available positions that offer long-term economic and employment stability, while gaining life skills important to their long-term success. At the same time, these programs respond to growing needs for entry-level talent across a range of industries.³

This study builds on the Center for Promise’s work⁴ examining the importance of relationships for keeping young people in school and on a path to adult success. In this study, the Center’s research team explores how relationships nurture employment and economic success for the young people at four career development and workforce readiness programs across the country.

The four programs studied here are part of a group of [Youth Opportunity Fund](#) community partners supported by the Citi Foundation’s Pathways to Progress initiative, a three-year, \$50 million investment to give 100,000 low-income youth in the United States the opportunity to develop the workplace skills and leadership experience



necessary to compete in a 21st century economy. The Youth Opportunity Fund, led by the Citi Foundation and America’s Promise Alliance, provides grants to nonprofits working in innovative ways to place low-income young adults on a path toward college and career success in 10 cities across the United States. The four programs studied are [Café Momentum](#) in Dallas, [Per Scholas](#) in the Bronx, [Urban Alliance](#) in Washington, D.C., and [Year Up](#) in the Bay Area.

These programs all emphasize relationships as critical components of enrolling and engaging young people before, during, and after the core intervention. Through interviews, observations, and document review, the research team explored three specific questions:

- What role do relationships play in these programs?
- How do these programs work to foster relationships?
- What role do relationships play in promoting successful job placement?

This report provides a summary of several bodies of literature that have shaped career development interventions for young people, describes each career development and workforce readiness program in more detail, and shares findings and common

themes that emerged across program sites.

FINDING 1. Relationships come first. In addition to the elements of traditional career development and workforce readiness—job skills, career management skills, and social and life skills that are important to navigating career pathways—all four programs place relationship-building at the forefront of their model. This includes supportive relationships with program leaders, potential employers, and volunteers; as well as among program participants.

FINDING 2. Webs of support are integral to the program design. Adults in each program function as a web of support, offering different types of support to young people through multiple strategies and roles. Adults’ interactions with program participants model relationships that young people will need now and in the future.

FINDING 3. Relationships endure and extend beyond the program. Each program fosters webs of support for their participants beyond the structured intervention so that each graduate has a system of relationships in place to help them stay on a path to adult success. Further, each program offers alumni support so that relationships and webs endure beyond graduation.

FINDING 4. Relationship-building approaches differ depending on who the program serves. Each program takes a different approach, depending on the needs and strengths of the young people it serves.

Relationships Come First is the first report in a series from the Center for Promise that is focused on understanding the role of relationships in career development programs, particularly those that serve risk-immersed young people. In early 2017, the Center for Promise will publish a second report that will explore what young people enrolled in these programs say about their experiences.

A. The term risk-immersed implies that the risks are in the young person’s environment or context, as opposed to at-risk, which suggests that risk is something internal to the individual. Referring to risks as elements of an individual’s context is aligned with relational theory—indicating that how a person experiences risk will vary depending on their relationship to the risk.

WHAT IS A WEB OF SUPPORT?

Center for Promise researchers first used this term in the 2015 report *Don't Quit on Me* to describe the collection of individuals within and outside family that provides a young person with varying levels and types of support.

Supporters may be adults or peers. All are connected to the young person, and may also be connected to one another through formal or informal networks (for example, as members of a program cohort or an alumni group).

BACKGROUND

Career development is a process through which a young person develops the skills necessary to be employed and navigate career choices.⁵ The process is an iterative one—the young person continually engages in self-exploration, career planning and management, and career exploration.⁶ Career development and workforce readiness programs take on many different forms and support progress toward a range of outcomes. The most salient goal of these programs is successful placement in a job that fosters economic and employment security, which increases the potential for sustainable career success. These programs also provide participants with opportunities for continuing education and the development of skills, attitudes, and behaviors that promote employability.⁷

The National Career Development Guidelines (NCDG) have been widely used as a guide to the competencies, indicators, and strategies for implementing effective career and workforce development programming.⁸ Initially published in 1989 by the U.S. Department of Education (ED) National Occupational Information Coordinating Committee, the guidelines have been empirically tested in several U.S. states.⁹ Currently, the guidelines are updated and maintained by the ED's Office of Vocational and Adult Education.¹⁰

As a complement to these guidelines, a recent report by the United States Agency of International Development's (USAID) Office on Education reviewed the state of the field on youth career development and workforce readiness programs.¹¹ The report focused on available empirical literature in both the U.S. and developing nations published between 2001 and 2012. While differing in terminology, the NCDG framework and USAID report findings converge to suggest that existing programs have traditionally focused on training people on outcomes related to:

- personal and life skills,
- educational achievement and job skills,
- career management skills.¹²

Combining developmental theory with the practical guidelines outlined in both the USAID report and the NCDG, this study argues that a fourth domain, **building a web of support**, be added to these existing frameworks. Programs that help young people build a web of support take into account the entirety of a young person's life, realizing that learning and development take place across multiple contexts and that young people must fulfill the responsibilities associated with multiple life roles. Programs that recognize and address this complexity by helping young people create webs of support are increasingly able to support them in their career development and to be workforce ready. This expanded focus is also consistent with recent trends in the broader fields of career development and workforce readiness.

Historically, the career development field focused primarily on the career choices of relatively privileged individuals (e.g., White, college-educated males).¹³ More recently, career development researchers and theorists have included risk-immersed youth and other historically marginalized populations.¹⁴ This focus has included a greater emphasis on the contextual influences that facilitate or impede career development among risk-immersed groups,¹⁵ including differences in the life opportunities they have, and the societal and cultural constraints on their individual agency.¹⁶

Further, career development and workforce readiness research has shifted from exploring career choice to understanding how career development programs can facilitate positive developmental outcomes. As part of building this understanding, current research identifies program elements that can increase the chances of achieving positive developmental outcomes, such as structured career exploration;

providing opportunities for young people to observe the modeling of career choice strategies; helping program participants build social support for their career choices; and creating and implementing plans for young people to achieve their career goals.¹⁷

Among these elements, social support plays a critical role,¹⁸ with support networks contributing to a young person's ability to capitalize on her/his strengths and overcome barriers along a career path.¹⁹

Framing career development and workforce readiness from a positive youth development perspective underscores the urgent need for programs and practitioners to provide services that build hope, self-efficacy, and relational capital.²⁰ In addition, particularly for low-income and racial/ethnic minority youth, programs must be responsive to individual experiences of marginalization, barriers to career development and educational/vocational goals.²¹

All of us have multiple, interrelated life roles and responsibilities.²² Risk-immersed youth are no different, but their responsibilities tend to place more constraints on other aspects of their lives. Because of the adversities risk-immersed youth face, many find themselves pulled into roles as family caregivers, young parents, or household breadwinners. Historically, services offered by traditional career development programs often failed to recognize the multiple adult roles young people in these situations fulfill. Apart from offering schedule flexibility, addressing these life challenges is a relatively new phenomenon.

Successful programs serving risk-immersed youth recognize that their offerings must go beyond vocational skill training. In addition, programs must attend to the young person's context, helping remove any barriers to full participation and helping solve problems as they arise. The four program models studied here enable youth to meet the challenges associated with fulfilling multiple family and

community roles while preparing young people for participation in the workforce and the broader society. A review of these program models alongside existing research leads to one of the major conclusions of this study—that relationship-building is a prerequisite to developing the skills and knowledge offered by these programs. To best support a young person's career development, programs must take into account the relationships and social supports young people need to be successful in work and in life.

The first figure, **Figure 1**, represents the elements found traditionally in career development and workforce readiness programs. Each of these elements was present at the four programs visited as part of this research. The second figure, **Figure 2**, displays the additional element we observed in the four programs described in this report. As indicated in the figure, relationship-building and fostering the development (and sustainability) of webs of support are critical elements of these program models.

FIGURE 1: TRADITIONAL CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND WORKFORCE READINESS MODEL

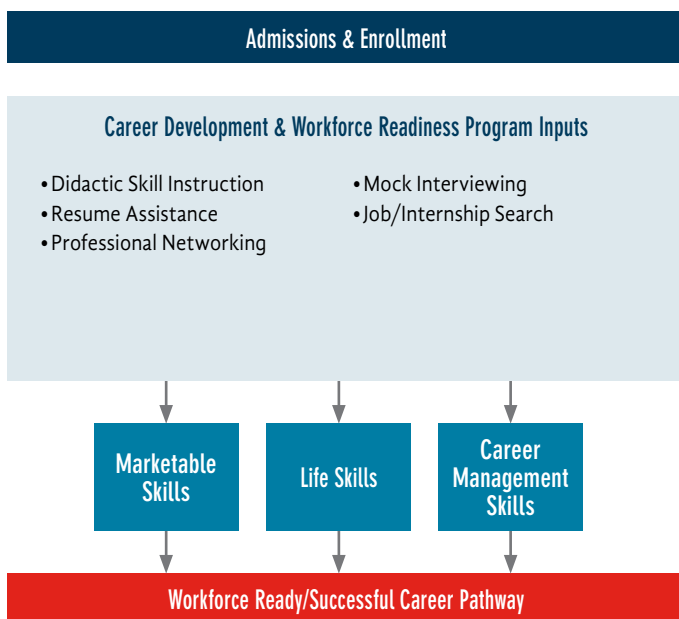
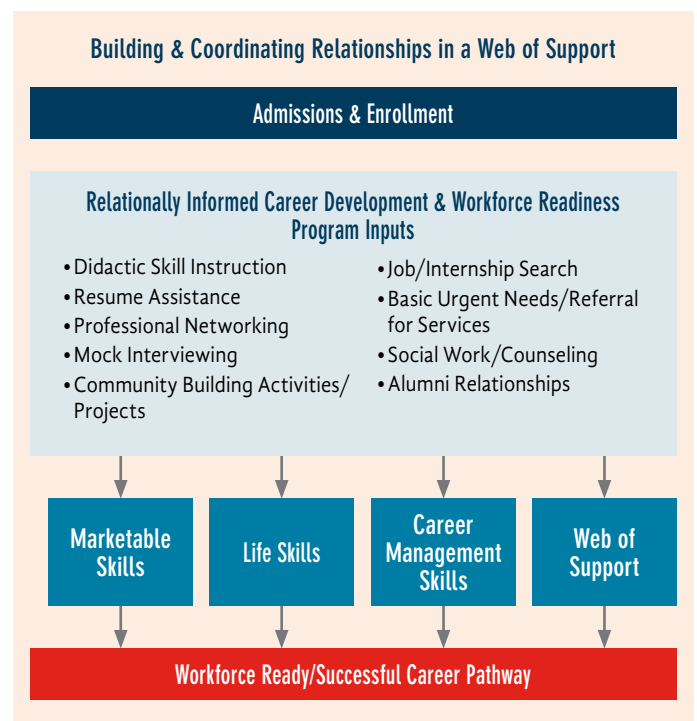


FIGURE 2: RELATIONALLY INFORMED CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND WORKFORCE READINESS PROGRAM



A YOUTH SYSTEMS PERSPECTIVE

The Center for Promise considers career development and workforce readiness within a youth systems framework,²³ meaning youth are embedded within a multi-layered ecology, from more proximal connections with peers, family, and school to more distal layers, such as major social institutions, social and cultural norms, and belief systems that shape society.

These interactions are further shaped by a young person's background, including any inequities faced in their life or the life of their community. Inequities are particularly salient for young people of color, those living in urban areas, and individuals from low-income backgrounds.²⁴

When the assets in one's ecology are aligned with the needs and strengths of the individual, youth are embedded within a *supportive youth system*.

Considering career development and workforce readiness within a youth systems framework means that work-related interventions will be more effective when they occur across multiple ecological levels (e.g., individual, family, community), pay attention to the intersection of the changing individual and contextual conditions, and aim to create enduring pathways to successful adulthood.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

From April to August 2016, three researchers from the Center for Promise observed, interviewed, and collected key documentation on three separate occasions at four career development and workforce readiness programs—*Café Momentum*, *Per Scholas*, *Urban Alliance*, and *Year Up*—in four cities.

These programs each serve young people between the ages of 16 and 24 who are from low-income, urban communities. Program participants are likely to have experienced significant adversity before enrolling: e.g., homelessness, incarceration, abuse, or other trauma. The research team interviewed adults who worked directly with young people (educators, case managers, social workers) as well as administrators of the programs (chief executive officers, directors of development, directors of programming).

More specifically, the research team identified four categories of program-supporting adults among the interviewees:

- **Vision Keepers and Sustainers.** These are the CEOs, founders, chief development officers, and other organizational leaders who set the program's vision, maintain its quality, focus on its impact, and sustain the resources for its success. They coordinate the work of others in the organization who are directly helping young people achieve the four preconditions in **Figure 2**: marketable skills, life skills, career management skills, and a web of support.
- **Direct Service Providers.** These employees focus on working directly with program participants, either one-on-one or in small groups. Their responsibilities fall along a continuum from direct, didactic training related to specific marketable skills to ensuring that young people are receiving the necessary supports in their "out of work" life. A single individual may play multiple roles.
- **Managers of External Partners.** External partners—including employers, donors, volunteers, and public-sector supporters—are essential to each program's success and influences the programs and services offered to young people. These employees recruit and manage the external partners and volunteers. They are intermediaries between the program participants and the program's individual, organizational, or corporate partners. Their role is to manage the program's relationship with the partner, and they also sometimes manage the relationship between the partner and the youth program participant.
- **External Partners.** External partners engage with these programs on both organizational and individual levels, filling a variety of roles—including offering internships, providing funding, and supporting youth in the development of work readiness skills.

Volunteers are also included in this group of external partners because their donated services fill essential needs. Volunteers come from the program's community and might serve as mentors, provide clerical and administrative support, or offer other forms of support—for example, emotional or logistical support—to the program and young people it serves.

The programs depend on volunteer time, support and generosity; young people benefit from the volunteers' engagement. By engaging members of the professional, philanthropic, political, and public systems, programs can help change the culture of the community so that program participants are able to become contributing members of society—both financially and socially—by earning a living wage.

The findings in this report are based on analysis of three different sources of data: 11 interviews with adults representing various categories of program-supporting adults described above; field notes containing observations of how young people and adults interacted; and a review of key documents such as web sites, program manuals, and student contract templates.

THE PROGRAMS

The programs studied here serve young people between the ages of 16 and 24 who are from low-income, urban communities. Program participants are likely to have experienced significant adversity before enrolling, including homelessness, incarceration, abuse, or other trauma.

The selected programs provide participants with specific vocational, career, and life training to help graduates secure a quality job opportunity, receive a living wage, and begin on a path to job security. Full program descriptions can be found in [Appendix A](#).



Successful programs serving risk-immersed youth recognize that their offerings must go beyond vocational skill training to nurture the whole person.

CAFÉ MOMENTUM

DALLAS, TEXAS

Fine cuisine, adjudicated young people, and social change. Though these might appear to be an unlikely combination, founder Chad Houser's vision for Café Momentum brings these elements together seamlessly. Café Momentum's tagline—"Eat. Drink. Change Lives."—captures the program's mission of working with formerly adjudicated young people to teach them employable skills, ultimately creating lasting change in their lives.

Young people aged 15-19 years who were released from a Dallas County Juvenile facility program within the last 12 months are eligible to apply to the program at The Café. During the one-year internship (preceded by a nine-week orientation), participants have the support of a case manager, participate in structured hands-on training, and have the opportunity to apply to a restaurant externship.

In addition to receiving training and experience in all aspects of the restaurant business, from the front of the house to the back of the house, interns also take part in the "Common Experience," the Café's life skills training.

The Café's program documentation states that this year-long internship is "designed to provide each intern a consistent, safe and supportive ecosystem that encourages them to rethink their worldview, re-experience authority figures as supports...and restore their belief in their intrinsic value."





PER SCHOLAS

BRONX, NEW YORK

Founders John Stookey and Lewis Miller conceived Per Scholas during a chance meeting, while sitting next to each other on an airplane. In 1994, they founded an organization designed to “open doors to transformative technology careers for individuals from often overlooked communities.”

Per Scholas serves individuals who may be unemployed, working only part-time, working inconsistently or in a low-wage job, or reliant on public services to provide basic needs. Eligible students must possess basic adult educational abilities and English language proficiency, a high school diploma or

equivalent, and live in or near New York City.

Students can choose from one of six training tracks, all providing employable technology skills and leading to certifications that are aligned with employer demands: e.g., IT support, network engineering, cybersecurity, CodeBridge, IT engineering, or quality assurance. The training does not require prior experience except for the network engineering, there is no cost to students, and all students receive all the necessary materials to complete the program.

Two decades after Stookey and Miller met, Per Scholas operates in six locations. Most students (85 percent) graduate from one of the programs in 18 weeks or less, and 80 percent of graduates land jobs. A typical graduate has a pre-training income of just \$7,000, and a post-training income of \$30,000 or more.





URBAN ALLIANCE

WASHINGTON, D.C.

On a visit to Anacostia Senior High School in 1996, Andrew Plepler—then an attorney for the United States Department of Justice—asked students what they needed most to succeed. One student’s answer: a “real job.” Plepler found internships for that young man and five of his friends, thus launching what would become Urban Alliance.

Urban Alliance has since grown to provide internships for over 1,000 public and charter school students in Washington DC, Northern Virginia, Baltimore, and Chicago. Eligible low-income students age 16 to 24 work part-time during their senior year of high school and full-time in the summer following their senior year.

Once accepted to the program, students undergo an intensive five-week training program for career management skill building and life skill building. At the end of the initial five weeks, each intern is placed into a company that aligns as closely as possible with the intern’s interests. Each intern is matched with a mentor from within the company who works as a coach throughout their time there.

Over the course of the year, the interns in the program also convene as a cohort each Friday to participate in ongoing professional development. Finally, Urban Alliance provides ongoing support to alumni, including resume and cover letter review, job search assistance, help navigating college financial aid systems, and formal and informal networking opportunities.

YEAR UP

BAY AREA, CALIFORNIA

Inspired by the relationship he built while working with Big Brothers, Gerald Chertavian founded Year Up in Boston more than 15 years ago to close the opportunity divide that he saw within marginalized communities. Designed to be a “hand up, not a hand out,” Year Up focuses on building the professional and technical skills that young people need to compete in the workforce.

Today, in 15 locations across the country, Year Up “empowers low-income young adults to go from poverty to professional careers in a single year.” Year Up Bay Area (YUBA) launched in 2008, the first on the West coast and the fourth site in the Year Up network.

Focused on technology training for tech-based jobs, YUBA enrolls 400 low-income 18- to 24-year-olds annually.

The program model combines high expectations with high support.

For the first five months of the program, students develop technical and professional skills in the classroom. Students then apply those skills during an internship at one of Year Up’s corporate partners. YUBA works closely with area corporations, such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Google, Symantec, Salesforce, Workday, and Twitter, to provide internship opportunities for its students once they have completed the training phase.

Students earn college credits and a weekly stipend. They are supported by staff advisors, professional mentors, dedicated social services staff, and a powerful network of community-based partners.



KEY FINDINGS

“If we didn’t have a strong, supportive community, it could feel a little bit like ‘Survivor’ and that’s not at all our goal. Our goal is for as many people to make it through as possible.”



FINDING 1. Relationships come first. In addition to the elements of traditional career development and workforce readiness programs—job skills, career management skills, and social and life skills that are important to navigating career pathways—all four programs place relationship-building at the forefront of their model.

Individuals at all four programs examined for this study indicate that their students have faced and may continue to face significant adversity. The young people have a dearth of positive relationships in their lives and often a lack of trust for adults. The programs cite issues of abandonment associated with drug use, foster care, incarceration, and death of a loved one, among other adverse experiences, as impacting the population they serve.

Program leaders state that to be most effective they must first build trust with each young person, showing the young person that adults in the program will consistently show up, and that the program will support each young person throughout his or her learning process.

Each of these programs implements a period of relationship-building prior to the onset of the workforce intervention, be it through a period of orientation or through recruitment visits at detention centers prior to enrollment.

For example, at Café Momentum, case managers visit youth on several occasions prior to their release from detention, and once enrolled they have a nine-week orientation that precedes the one-year internship.

At Urban Alliance, program leaders conduct an intensive five-week orientation with the youth during which participants begin developing relationships with the rest of their cohort and their program coordinator.

As one program leader stated,

“Relationship-building is critical to case management and all of Café Momentum. If we cannot build strong relationships with our young people, we cannot transform their lives. So it goes well beyond just teaching them a job skill. It is about, and I literally tell them this, getting into their business, getting into their life, being available for them, being ready to respond, finding resources that they need to position them to be successful.”

Vision Keeper/Sustainer, Café Momentum

FINDING 2. Webs of support are integral to the program design. Adults in each program function as a web of support, offering different types of support to young people through multiple strategies and roles. Adults’ interactions with program

Table 1: Building Relationships Across Types of Support to Enable Work- and Career-Ready Outcomes for Risk-Immersed Youth

This table describes the number of times an interviewee mentioned different types of relationship-building strategies in reference to key career development and workforce readiness outcomes.

TYPE OF SUPPORT	RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING STRATEGY/ACTIVITY	CAREER MANAGEMENT SKILLS	MARKETABLE SKILLS	SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL SKILLS	WEB OF RELATIONSHIPS
Appraisal	Assessment and/or accountability	17	8	19	14
Emotional	Building trust	7	3	10	13
	Being there	4	2	7	6
	Learning from your past	2	1	5	5
	Build up self	5	3	9	4
Informational	Career management skills training	28	12	17	19
	Life skill training and development	14	11	22	9
	Employment skills training	15	15	13	7
	Education	7	5	4	7
	Accounting for life	9	9	12	5
	Teaching to navigate resources	4	4	5	2
Instrumental	Meeting basic needs	7	8	12	10
	Combining group and individual work	3	2	5	10
	Working with the employment partner	6	3	2	4
	Public awareness, community engagement, and market-share	2	2	1	3
Process Codes	Informally and or formally building relationships	9	6	11	22
	Mentorship	7	7	7	9
	Formal and informal alumni relationships	5	2	3	4
	Relating on an experiential level	1	0	3	4
	System of communication	8	4	6	3
	Gradual and purposeful building of skills	2	1	4	2



participants model relationships that young people will need now and in the future.

Like the Center’s previous research, this study’s findings indicate that most of the supports provided by these programs are emotional, informational, and instrumental (see [Defining Social Support](#)). In addition, there are several processes that did not fit into a specific social support category, but instead described how the support was offered (e.g., through group and individual work, mentorship, fostering alumni relationships). [Table 1](#) on page 10 offers examples of relationship-building activities/strategies that are aligned with each type of support.

During the interviews with researchers, people affiliated with the programs mentioned a variety of relationship-building strategies representing all four types of support described in the box titled [Defining Social Support](#). They mentioned two relationship-building strategies frequently—building trust (among the youth, and between youth in the program and adults) and mutual accountability (both the young people and the adults in the programs are held accountable for their actions and promises).

These strategies nurture the development of the whole person and the many life roles he or she plays,

instead of putting a singular focus on the development of directly marketable skills. It seems clear that program leaders believe the skills that will bring about the greatest success for youth enrolled in their programs are those that help them manage life and career overall.

For example, one program explained the need to offer emotional support prior to being able to offer appraisal support. This quote describes an effort to facilitate life skills first (building trust) and then career management skills (learning appropriate behavior for the work place).

“They [young people] need to have a safe place and they need to know they can come in here with anything, they can have a breakdown. I’ve got to allow that to happen so that I can begin to get to the roots so that they can show up and feel like they have a family. Once you’ve got that foundation you can kind of layer it with restorative discipline.”

Vision Keeper/Sustainer, Café Momentum

Another program stressed how essential emotional support is to building relationships.

“We build caring relationships. It takes time and investment to be able to do that and we want to invest in that because we think our young adults are incredible and very full people and there needs to be people on our staff who can see them, not in a transactional way, but in a deep holistic ‘this is you as a person’ sort of way... You can only do that if you’re really investing the time in understanding the young adult.”

Vision Keeper/Sustainer, Year Up Bay Area

This analysis suggests that direct service providers should deliver services as a part of multidisciplinary teams (webs). These teams should have breadth of knowledge and access to resources in a variety of sectors such as housing, financial assistance and the judicial system. They also have an

DEFINING SOCIAL SUPPORT

Support can come from many sources, including parents, peers, adults at school and adults in the community. The Center’s 2015 report *Don’t Quit on Me* examines four types of social support. Each of these plays a specific role in a young person’s development.

- Emotional support expresses comfort, caring, and trust.
- Informational support is comprised of helpful insights or advice, such as how to re-engage in school, where to find a job, or how to apply to college.
- Appraisal support refers to positive feedback that someone can use for self-evaluation, such as affirming a young person’s competence or pointing out specific strengths that can lead to success.
- Instrumental support refers to tangible resources or services, including providing a bus pass, babysitting an infant so a parent can attend school, introducing a young person to a potential employer, or bringing a young person to visit a college campus.

Emotional and instrumental support—caring and action—appear to work in tandem to boost the likelihood that a young person will graduate.

understanding of multiple domains of youth development. In this way, career development and workforce readiness interventions can attend more holistically to the clients they serve.

This may be particularly important for young people who have experienced significant personal adversity, systemic social marginalization due to group membership (e.g., race, socioeconomic class, gender, sexuality), and historically have had fewer opportunities and less choice in educational and vocational pursuits.

FINDING 3. Relationships endure and extend beyond the program. Each program fosters webs of support for their participants beyond the structured intervention so that each graduate has a system of relationships in place to help them stay on a path to adult success.

Realizing the necessity for maintaining a web of support after training ends, all four programs offer some form of extended support beyond program completion. Each program has also incorporated alumni support and outreach either formally or informally.

A web of support can help pick up a young person when he or she stumbles at their first job. And a web of support can help young people refresh or refine their education and skills, since marketability is not a static concept.

To maintain and build young people's webs, Urban Alliance has an alumni outreach manager who organizes opportunities for professional "mixers," community service, mock interviewing, and resume building, among other services. Direct service providers at Urban Alliance mentioned meeting with the young people informally after their graduation to discuss their progress in work and life and to help them with any lasting or new challenges.

Realizing that success in life is essential to success in career, programs also put a value on just being there to support their alumni in all aspects of life. As one Vision Keeper/Sustainer said:

"We've created an ecosystem of support to help stabilize their [young peoples'] lives in these areas...Taking an approach to where every channel has a mission and has a purpose...because it's part of the ecosystem and making sure that that ecosystem is elastic so that people outside of [the organization] can own it and grow it and support it..."

Vision Keeper/Sustainer, Café Momentum

Young people need ongoing support from a wider community to sustain the success that graduating from the program represents. To this end, the same Vision Keeper/Sustainer said:

"It all starts now with building relationships. So our mission is to add relief to the plight of youthful offenders by building partnerships with key decision makers in the juvenile justice system and by providing important opportunities for a viable career path and that literally brings this merging of a partnership together."

Vision Keeper/Sustainer, Café Momentum

FINDING 4. Relationship-building approaches differ depending on who the program serves.

Each program takes a different approach to relationship-building, depending on the needs and strengths of the young people they serve.

Café Momentum serves formerly adjudicated youth with few resources and places a greater emphasis on a case management model. As one Vision Keeper/Sustainer we spoke to indicated:

"We've got them for a year and they're coming with some imminent challenges such as homelessness and despair, fatherlessness, trauma. We're working with them, the case management team in the first 90 days. We're discovering what those [challenges] are at an individual level."

Vision Keeper/Sustainer, Café Momentum

At Per Scholas, where the young people served are living at or below the poverty level but not necessarily dealing with a criminal record, program leaders try to address external challenges during the admissions and enrollment period so that the program can focus its resources on teaching the young people a year's worth of coursework in 16 weeks.

Each program works to understand the young people that they work with and how to best serve them. They do this by building relationships with the young people so that they know them not as a "population," but as individuals with challenges and assets that can be met and celebrated. In this way, programming is fluid, with every youth-serving adult working to find the surest pathway for each young person.

"[W]e are basically trying to ensure that they are developing the whole time, and then we jump in when things do get rough. Many of our interns—they're not just dealing with going to school and going to work where there are so many other things outside of that...maybe situations at home, or just simple things like getting back and forth to work as far as transportation. So as program coordinators, we are usually that person that jumps in and provides maybe a [transit pass] or just talking on the phone to advise them..."

Direct Service Provider, Urban Alliance, DC

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

This study's findings have implications for those designing and implementing programs for young people who have not yet experienced success in school or in the workforce.

Programs should set aside specific time to build relationships with the young people they serve. Optimally, this relationship-building needs to occur before a skills-focused intervention.

Having structures in place is essential to nurturing and maintaining relationships. For example, caseworkers in one program schedule weekly trips to a local coffee shop to check in on how things are going both within and outside of the program. Others make sure to send a text to check in with youth who have not been in touch recently.

Once the young people graduate, three of the four programs have alumni activities that offer opportunities to gather for dialogue about career-related and personal topics, such as resume refreshers, mock interviews, or understanding the ins and outs of financial aid. (The fourth program keeps in touch with graduates and is developing more formal alumni outreach.)

Programs should hire employees who can offer the support necessary for youth to learn how to manage their careers in the context of their lives. This often means going above and beyond a typical 9-to-5 work day and providing the necessary support to remove barriers that could impede a young person's success in the program. As an example, one program indicated that it helps connect the young person and his or her entire family with health care.

"[T]he program coordinators need to be reliable to our young people because a lot of them haven't had that, adults that stick around or that actually are good on their word, and so I think that foundation of trust is really important and so when they see, "oh you said you were going to get me this and you did," that slowly starts to build up, they realize that this is someone that they can count on."

Direct Service Provider, Urban Alliance, DC

Programs should help risk-immersed young people form webs of support and sustain them once they leave the program. Once participants graduate, they need to know how to develop similar webs that enable them to

continue on a path to economic self-sufficiency.

Programs should deliver services as part of multidisciplinary teams that represent a range of human service domains. In this way, career development and workforce readiness interventions can attend more holistically to the clients that they serve. This may be particularly important for young people who have experienced significant personal adversity and systemic social marginalization. Ensuring that career development activities are situated in broader human development interventions will support young people's success as a part of a more inclusive and diverse workforce.



APPENDIX A

DETAILED PROGRAM DESCRIPTIONS

The programs studied here serve young people between the ages of 16 and 24 who are from low-income, urban communities. Program participants are likely to have experienced significant adversity before enrolling including homelessness, incarceration, abuse, or other trauma.

The selected programs provide participants with specific vocational, career, and life training to help graduates secure a quality job opportunity, receive a living wage, and begin on a path to job security.

Italicized terms in Appendix A correspond to components of relationally informed career development and workforce readiness programs, as depicted in [Figure 2](#).

CAFÉ MOMENTUM

DALLAS TEXAS

cafemomentum.org

Fine cuisine, adjudicated young people, and social change. Though these might appear to be an unlikely combination, founder Chad Houser's vision for Café Momentum brings these elements together seamlessly. Café Momentum's tagline—"Eat. Drink. Change Lives."—captures the program's mission of working with formerly adjudicated young people to teach them employable skills, ultimately creating lasting change in their lives.

Café Momentum began in 2011 as a series of pop-up restaurants and a catering business in the Dallas, Texas area. Over time, Café Momentum expanded into a fully operational restaurant in the changing landscape of downtown Dallas. Previously desolate after business hours, Dallas's downtown area has been revitalized and now acts as a central gathering place in a city otherwise divided along socioeconomic lines. (A Pew Research Center report from 2015 ranked Dallas as one of the most racially and socioeconomically segregated cities in the country.²⁵) Still, Dallas is facing rising crime, discriminatory affordable housing practices, and rising tensions between the police and marginalized communities.

The young people Café Momentum serves often come from these marginalized communities, hailing from places such as West Dallas, Fair Park, Oak Cliff, and Pleasant Grove. Many of the young people who work at Café Momentum travel more than two hours on public transportation to reach the restaurant. Though it might be easier for The Café to be closer to young people's homes, the choice to be downtown was a conscious one. This central location helps break down barriers that typically divide the formerly detained from the rest of the community and invites participation in a larger social movement that embraces, rather than rejects, adjudicated youth.

The program addresses the unique challenges faced by adjudicated youth. While gainful employment is a vital defense against recidivism, a criminal record still poses a barrier to finding a job. Café Momentum's program builds professional and technical skills that can lead to employment, in addition to providing social and emotional support that helps to bolster young people along the way.

Young people age 15-19 who were released from a Dallas County juvenile facility program within the past 12 months are eligible to apply to the program at The Café. Members of The Café's staff begin reaching out to eligible youth when they are still in detention or in residential treatment facilities. Interest in enrollment is also generated through probation officers, the Dallas County DA's office and through the young person's peer network. While demand is high for the program, The Café has yet to turn away an interested applicant who meets the program's acceptance criteria.

Dallas County provides opportunities for adjudicated young people they select to engage in offsite training at the Café, as well as at other programs in the area, once a month. The Café sends case managers to the detention facilities to generate interest and begin to build trusting relationships with youth prior to their release.

The program at The Café begins with a nine-week intensive orientation, which is followed by a year-long internship at the restaurant (divided into four 90-day quarters). In addition to receiving training and experience in all aspects of the restaurant, from the front of the house to the back of the house (*marketable skills*), interns also take part in the "Common Experience," which is The Café's *life skills* training during the year. The Café's program documentation states that this 12-month skills training is "designed



to provide each intern a consistent, safe and supportive ecosystem that encourages them to rethink their worldview, re-experience authority figures as supports...and restore their belief in their intrinsic value.”

During the first nine weeks, newly enrolled young people go through “discovery,” a period of intense relationship-building. Case managers work with participants using an individualized system of care to stabilize the young person’s life, establish trust, and begin a personal rebuilding process. The case managers work regularly, often daily, with youth to address basic needs, as well as to ensure that their legal and other obligations are met.

Case managers at Café Momentum provide an intense level of support to the youth in the program. Case managers are there for court appearances, trips to the doctor, rides to and from work, and the occasional 3 a.m. phone call. They provide, or point youth in the direction of instrumental, informational, emotional and appraisal support. During these nine weeks, the interns are also introduced to the restaurant experience and the leaders/mentors who will be working with them there.

After this initial period of discovery, the interns are immersed in their restaurant (*marketable skills*) and “Common Experience” (*life skills*). While at Café Momentum, participants rotate through all the different positions associated with running a restaurant, enabling them to gain a breadth of skills while learning where their strengths lie. Staff members utilize a structured curriculum to work with participants on their skill development while maintaining a commitment to relationship- and community-building. On the days that the restaurant is not open for dinner service, the youth are completing high school credentials. In the summer, youth are offered outside educational activities on off-days—for example, taking courses in welding or learning about pottery from local artisans.

Toward the end of the final quarter of their internship at The Café, youth have an opportunity to “earn” an externship by applying and interviewing. It is not guaranteed. The externship allows young people to hone their skills while working to establish a *web of support*, involving family, community, and professional relationships. During their externship, interns continue to get intense support from their case managers and the staff at The Café.

Once they finish the final quarter, most of the interns will find a position in one of The Café’s partner organizations, but it is up to the youth to maintain that position. The Café tracks the interns’ wages for three years post-graduation through the Texas Workforce Commission Open Records, and tracks recidivism through MOUs with Dallas County.

Case managers currently have an informal plan for alumni outreach, but realize that as the alumni group grows so will the need for continued outreach and relationships with and among their graduates.

The Café is still young—it just had its first graduating class of interns in the spring of 2016.

PER SCHOLAS

BRONX, NEW YORK

perscholas.org

John Stookey and Lewis Miller conceived Per Scholas while sitting next to one another on an airplane. Strangers at the time, they began talking and discovered shared interests and passions for technology and philanthropy. They identified the opportunity that technology presents, but also the technological gap that exists in overlooked communities. If left unaddressed, they agreed, this gap would continue to grow—putting marginalized communities at further disadvantage in an increasingly tech-based society.

Following this serendipitous conversation, Stookey and Miller established Per Scholas in 1994. The organization's mission is to “open doors to transformative technology careers for individuals from often overlooked communities.”

Per Scholas initially gave away refurbished computers to schools and families in the South Bronx neighborhood of New York City. The program began training students to repair these computers themselves—providing skills training, employment, and technology to the area. Based on the experiences of program participants and the jobs they went on to acquire, the program's founders soon realized that IT skills training was an important aspect of closing the technology divide. They held their first formal technology training class in 1998.

Today Per Scholas enrolls nearly 1,000 students at locations in six cities across the country from technical support and software testing to cyber security and web development. These programs have helped to:

- Close the skills divide by preparing people to work in key technical roles that employers say they need.
- Build a more diverse technical workforce by creating on-ramps for women and people of color, groups staggeringly underrepresented in IT employment today.

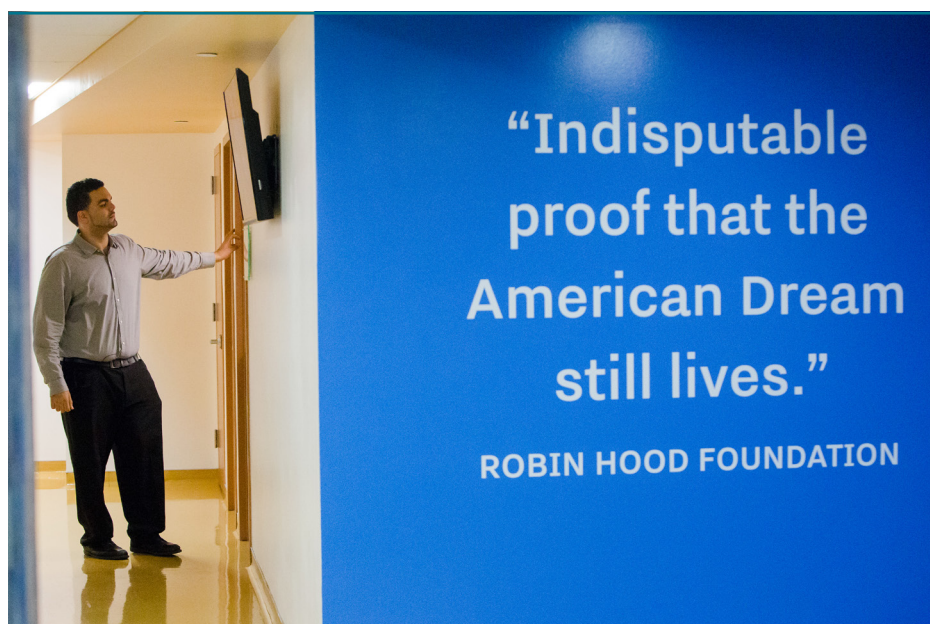
Ultimately these training classes help create opportunities for people to build better lives for themselves, their families, and their communities.

Per Scholas continues to evolve as the technology field changes. With the widespread availability of computers and smartphones, Per Scholas now focuses on industry- and job-specific training, rather than repairing and providing computers. Driven by what partnering employers say they need, Per Scholas students prepare for roles such as IT support professionals, network engineers, software testers, and web developers. Per Scholas also helps employers diversify their workforce while hiring highly trained professionals.

Per Scholas's training components are distributed across all four of the preconditions that lead to career readiness and job placement (see [Table 1](#)). The pathway that appears to be most strongly activated by Per Scholas's model is that of *marketable skills*, which is closely aligned with their 16- to 18-week training period and employment-focused mission.

Students can choose from one of six training tracks, all providing employable skills that are aligned with employer demands: IT support, network engineering, cybersecurity, CodeBridge, IT engineering, and quality assurance. The training does not require prior experience (except for the networking engineering), there is no cost to students, and all students receive all the necessary materials to complete the program.

Complementing this heavy emphasis on 21st century technical skills training is a strong activation of the *career management skills* pathway, and to a lesser extent, the professionally relevant *life skills* pathway, delivered through a highly detailed curriculum in career development and professional coaching. Curriculum for each of the six training tracks is structured so that each week's skills training is paired with a professional development focus to provide students with the career planning and management



capacities necessary to attain initial employment and promote continued advancement. Career management topics such as goal setting and career planning, professionalism, job search, resourcefulness, time management, perseverance, customer service, and workplace success form the backbone of the *career management skills* training.

To better connect students with the world of tech, build a professional network, and integrate real-world employer knowledge into curriculum, students develop concise and persuasive personal job pitches, engage in mock interviews with volunteer professionals, and have opportunities to attend corporate site visits, professional networking events, alumni gatherings, guest lectures, and panel discussions with industry experts.

A focus on building *webs of support* is a relatively new component of Per Scholas' program. Per Scholas seeks to serve individuals with an interest in tech who may be unemployed or working only part time, inconsistently, in a low-wage job, or reliant on public services to provide basic needs. Eligible students must possess basic adult educational abilities and English language proficiency, a high school diploma or equivalent, and live in or near New York City. Students must also have the resources and support to sustain their basic needs throughout the full-time 16- to 18-week training period. Per Scholas initiated a new program, TechBridge, to help many promising young people who lacked this comprehensive support, had experienced significant adversity throughout their lives, and continued to struggle in passing the requisite entrance exams (Test of Adult Basic Education, TABE). The mission of the TechBridge program is to provide a small selection of promising prospective students with an opportunity to work closely with Per Scholas staff and partner organization The Door, prepare for the TABE, and coordinate the resources necessary to participate in the broader programming.

A comprehensive look at Per Scholas's Bronx campus highlights a program with a strong commitment to providing the *marketable* and *career management skills* necessary to support the career readiness and job placement of young people in New York City. Per Scholas continues to expand their understanding of the diverse needs and barriers faced by the population they serve. New developments such as the TechBridge program are a step in the right direction toward helping students build the *webs of support* they need to thrive.

Two decades after Stookey and Miller met, Per Scholas operates in six locations. Most students (85 percent) graduate from one of the programs in 18 weeks or less, and 80 percent of graduates land jobs. A typical graduate has a pre-training income of just \$7,000, and a post-training income of \$30,000 or more.

URBAN ALLIANCE

WASHINGTON, DC

theurbanalliance.org

On a visit to Anacostia Senior High School in 1996, Andrew Plepler—then an attorney for the United States Department of Justice—asked students what they most needed to succeed. One student’s reply: a “real job.” Plepler found internships for that young man and five of his friends, launching what would become Urban Alliance.

Urban Alliance has since grown to provide internships for over 1,000 public and charter school students in Washington DC, Northern Virginia, Baltimore, and Chicago. Eligible low-income students between the ages of 16 to 24 work part-time during their senior year of high school and full-time in the summer following their senior year. During the 2015-2016 program year, Urban Alliance supported 160 young people in their senior internship program.

Once accepted to the program, students undergo an intensive five-week training program (their “professional development boot camp”) for *career management skill* building and *life skill* building. During this time, they are matched with a program coordinator. One interviewee described the role this way:

“As far as a program coordinator, I think that you wear a lot of different hats. I think at one time you are a program coordinator, at another time you’re a case manager, and at another time you’re like the firefighter putting out fires.”

Program coordinators support an intern’s success by offering advice, services, and information, as well as by acknowledging and celebrating the intern’s accomplishments. Part of ensuring the intern’s success also means that program coordinators work with the mentor at the partnering program. The goal is to ensure that the mentor benefits from the intern’s assistance; if not, program coordinators act as mediators to improve both parties’ experience.

At the end of the initial five-week training program, each intern is placed into a company that aligns as closely as possible with the intern’s interests. The intern is then matched with a mentor from within the company. Throughout the year the intern, program coordinators and mentors meet regularly both one-on-one and as a group. During these meetings, they discuss accomplishments and struggles, and work to set and refine goals.

Over the course of the year, the interns in the program also gather each Friday to participate in ongoing professional development, known as “workshop.” These sessions are organized to improve all preconditions to the goal of successful job placement (*marketable skills, career management skills, life skills, and working to build a web of support*).

Topics on these Fridays include computer skill training (for example, how to create PowerPoint presentations), resumes, college and career planning, and workplace social dynamics. They also provide an opportunity to build the young person’s web, with others at Urban Alliance, their peers, and with professionals in the community who facilitate the workshops.

Finally, Urban Alliance also provides ongoing support to alumni of their internship program, including resume and cover letter review, job search assistance, help navigating college financial aid systems, and formal and informal networking opportunities. As the executive director in Washington noted, Urban Alliance wants to be “the voice of youth employment,” and they believe it is necessary to foster both opportunities for and lasting relationships with young people in their program.

Evaluations of the program demonstrate success, with 100 percent of Urban Alliance students graduating from high school on time, and 81 percent enrolling in either a two- or four-year college. One year after completing the program, 75 percent of interns continue on a path to success, either in school or on the job.



YEAR UP

BAY AREA, CALIFORNIA

www.yearup.org

Inspired by the relationship he built while volunteering with Big Brothers, Gerald Chertavian founded Year Up in Boston more than 15 years ago to close the opportunity divide that he saw within marginalized communities. Designed to be a “hand up, not a hand out,” Year Up focuses on building the professional and technical skills that young people need to compete in the workforce.

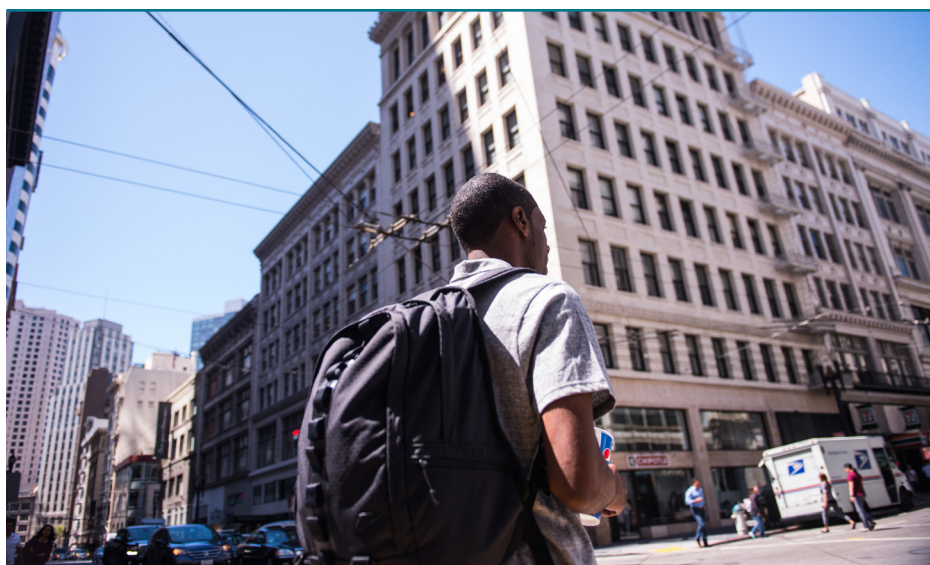
Today, in 18 locations across the country, Year Up “empowers low-income young adults to go from poverty to professional careers in a single year” by combining high expectations with high support.

For the first five months of the program, students develop technical and professional skills in the classroom. Students then apply those skills while serving in internships for six months at one of Year Up’s corporate partners, such as Salesforce, Workday, and Twitter. Students earn college credits and a weekly stipend, and are supported by staff advisors, professional mentors, dedicated social services staff, and a powerful network of community-based partners.

Year Up Bay Area (YUBA) launched in 2008, the first site on the West coast and the fourth site in the Year Up network. Focused on technology training for tech-based jobs, YUBA enrolls 400 low-income 18- to 24-year-olds annually. YUBA works closely with Bay Area corporations, such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Google, and Symantec, to provide internship opportunities for students once they have completed their training at YUBA.

Year Up students typically face at least one or more risk factors, including parenting responsibilities, unstable housing, interactions with the criminal justice system, and dysfunctional family situations. YUBA’s program and approach to working with these young people are well-distributed across the four pre-conditions for career readiness and job placement (see [Figure 2](#)).

Career management skills training begins at the very start of the program as YUBA administrators leverage the admission process as a learning experience. For example, prospective students who arrive late are provided with direct feedback and then assisted in rescheduling their interview. In this way, YUBA provides young adults with the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities to interview properly, arrive on time, and meet the high program expectations from the very beginning.



Students begin the program with a week-long orientation intensively focused on building *webs of support* within the program. The initial week is highly focused on community building, orientation, and learning the expectations students must meet throughout the program.

During this phase, students are organized into diverse learning communities consisting of 40 students and approximately 15 staff members. The learning community is a close group of peer and programmatic support that coalesces during the initial week-long orientation to help youth get to know and support one another, while sharing what is important to them, the challenges they have faced, and their perceptions of themselves in the larger community.

Following orientation, learning communities meet twice weekly to build community, discuss relevant themes for their future growth, and review each student’s progress according to a written contract. Students meet at least once a week with their staff coaches. They also provide 1:1 feedback to each other and to program administrators according to caring, respectful, challenging, and growth-centered guidelines. Through these experiences, YUBA hopes to provide a new learning environment for young people that is marked by a culture of trust, respect, relationships, and support.

In addition to the intense focus on building *webs of support*, YUBA strives to promote strong *life skill* development. YUBA has a large number of social workers and social work interns to meet young people's needs. At YUBA, social workers or social work interns are assigned to work with about 40 young people. The small social worker-to-student ratio offers opportunity for both individualized and group care and support.

YUBA works to provide students with a strong set of generalist and specialized *marketable skills*. Students take three seven-week modules of formal coursework to prepare for future internships and careers. The first two modules are organized by learning community and provide generalist tech training, communications and professional skills development, and *career management skills*. Following this generalist training, students engage in a specialized track of coursework that allows specific, focused training in the areas of quality assurance, advanced systems administration IT/network support, cyber security, project coordination, and business analytics.

After 21 weeks of training and development, Year Up matches students to internships that provide six months of work-based learning and professional experience. Students work full-time (36 hours/week). On Wednesday afternoons, students come back to YUBA to convene in their learning communities. These sessions, known as Internship Seminars, are used to check on students' social and emotional well-being, reconnect students with their *webs of support*, and provide *career management skills* training to promote professional development and help students maximize their internship experience. Students also use this time to work on resumes, attend mock interviews, learn more about college opportunities, and learn new, certifiable skills that are recognized as valuable in the tech industry.

Throughout the program, *career management skills* are assessed according to a programmatic contract. The contract articulates the standard expectations of the workplace as well as the expectations regarding professional development, curriculum, and adherence to YUBA's core values. Year Up Bay Area explains that, while accountability and performance are critical to measure skill development, students need the reinforcement of a strong community and *webs of support* to ultimately overcome barriers, meet goals, and find success.

Upon graduation from the program, students take an alumni oath, committing to work toward closing the opportunity divide as they launch careers, support each other, and support a national alumni body. YUBA hopes to create sustainable *webs of support* by checking in on graduates four months after graduation, then at the one-, two-, three- and five-year marks.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Measure of America, 2014.
- 2 Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010.
- 3 Seldon, Smith Milway, Morfit, & Bills, 2016.
- 4 Center for Promise, 2014, 2015.
- 5 vanBruinswaardt, Solberg, & Jarukitisakul, 2015.
- 6 vanBruinswaardt, Solberg, & Jarukitisakul, 2015.
- 7 Olenik & Fawcett, 2013.
- 8 National Occupational Information Coordination Committee (NOICC), 1996.
- 9 Lankard, B. A., 1991.
- 10 America's Career Resource Network, n.d.
- 11 Olenik & Fawcett, 2013.
- 12 NOICC, 1996; Olenik & Fawcett, 2013.
- 13 Blustein, 2006; Richardson, 1993; Smith, 1983; Blustein et al., 2002.
- 14 Blustein, 2006; Wilson, 1996; Constantine, Erikson, Banks, & Timberlake, 1998.
- 15 Fouad & Byars-Winston, 2005; Kenny, Blustein, Chaves, Grossman, & Gallagher, 2003; Kenny et al., 2007; Blustein, McWhirter, & Perry, 2005; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994.
- 16 Fouad & Byars-Winston, 2005; Astin, 1984; Cook, Heppner & O'Brien, 2002.
- 17 Solberg & Ali, 2017; Brown & Ryan-Krane, 2000.
- 18 Brown et al, 2003; Brown & Ryan-Krane, 2000.
- 19 Brown & Ryan-Krane, 2000.
- 20 Archer et al., 2012; Archer, Dewitt, & Wong, 2013.
- 21 Nassar-McMillan, Taylor, & Conley, 2017; Solberg & Ali, 2017.
- 22 Blustein, 2006; Richardson, 1993; Smith, 1983.; Blustein et al., 2002.
- 23 Zaff, Donlan, Pufall Jones, & Lin, 2016.
- 24 Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002; Spencer, Dupree, & Hartmann, 1997.
- 25 To access the full report from the Pew Research Center, please visit: www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/06/29/in-greater-dallas-area-segregation-by-income-and-race

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About the Center for Promise

The Center for Promise is the applied research institute for America's Promise Alliance, housed at the Boston University School of Education and dedicated to understanding what young people need to thrive and how to create the conditions of success for all young people.

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About America's Promise Alliance

America's Promise Alliance is the nation's largest network dedicated to improving the lives of children and youth. We bring together more than 400 national organizations and thousands of community leaders to focus the nation's attention on young people's lives and voices, lead bold campaigns to expand opportunity, conduct groundbreaking research on what young people need to thrive, and accelerate the adoption of strategies that help young people succeed. GradNation, our signature campaign, mobilizes Americans to increase the nation's high school graduation rate to 90 percent by 2020. In the past 12 years, an additional 2 million young people have graduated from high school.

About the Youth Opportunity Fund

The Youth Opportunity Fund, led by the Citi Foundation and America's Promise Alliance, provides grants to nonprofits working in innovative ways to place low-income young adults on a path toward college and career success in 10 cities across the United States.

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