



TURNING POINTS:

How Young People in Four Career Pathways Programs Describe the Relationships that Shape Their Lives

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“[The program employee] was really...a lot of different things for me...that had nothing to do with learning technology...that’s why the [program] is so magical.”

Tammy^A

OVERVIEW

Young people need support from an array of adults and peers to meet key developmental milestones and thrive as adults. Over the past three years, the Center for Promise at America’s Promise Alliance has been focused on listening deeply to what young people—particularly those growing up in adverse circumstances—have to say about what facilitates or thwarts their positive development, particularly in relationship to important milestones like high school completion and transitioning to postsecondary education or work.

Key findings from the 2014 report *Don’t Call Them Dropouts* and its 2015 successor *Don’t Quit on Me* showed that networks of caring relationships—or “webs of support”—played critical roles in helping young people stay in or return to high school. Because high school completion is necessary but not sufficient for gaining a foothold in the work world,¹ the Center for Promise has begun to examine what will help young people transition to postsecondary education or work.

Programs that provide connections to work and career opportunities can be an important bridge between young people who are not prepared for work and the jobs that are available in their communities. The four career pathways² programs studied here are Youth Opportunity Fund community partners supported by the Citi Foundation as a part of its Pathways to Progress initiative. *Pathways to Progress* launched in 2014 in the United States with a \$50 million,

three-year commitment that helped more than 100,000 young people, ages 16–24, across ten cities to become career-ready through first jobs, internships, and leadership and entrepreneurship training. In February 2017 the Citi Foundation announced a global expansion of the *Pathways to Progress* initiative with a \$100 million, three-year investment to prepare 500,000 young people for today’s competitive job market. 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 U.S. Cities.

This report is the second in a series focused on career pathways programs that serve risk-immersed³ young people. In the initial report, *Relationships Come First*, the Center for Promise team described the vision and design of four career pathways programs in which relationship-building plays a central role: *Café Momentum in Dallas, Per Scholas in the Bronx, Urban Alliance in Washington, D.C., and Year Up in the Bay Area*. *Relationships Come First* builds on previous theories of change about career pathways programs to show the central role that relationships play for risk-immersed youth. (See [Appendix A](#) for a description of the four programs, and [Appendix B](#) for the key findings from *Relationships Come First*.)

Turning Points builds on the programmatic insights in *Relationships Come First* by asking youth participants enrolled in the four career pathways programs how the relationships

that surround them influence their development. Using young people’s own words, *Turning Points* illuminates the ways that significant people in program participants’ lives helped them construct **webs of support**, or systems of relationships³ that help young people develop the capacity to navigate and negotiate their path to success.

Most previous literature about the role of relationships focuses more on the development and influence of dyadic relationships (between two people), and most literature on social networks details the structure of the network of relationships. But the way that a variety of adult and peer relationships acts as a system to provide social support for a young person is not well understood.

Through group interviews with 74 young people in four career pathways programs (see [Appendix E](#) for demographic information), plus 17 individual follow-up interviews, a Center for Promise research team investigated this question:

What do the webs of support look like for youth involved in these four career pathways programs, and how do the webs work to affect their lives?

The youth interviewed for this study represent a diverse group of low-income urban youth who have entered these career pathways programs in an effort to change their lives through skill-building and employment. Through participation in these programs, risk-immersed youth have the opportunity to strengthen their webs of support to achieve their personal and professional dreams. In *Turning Points*, the authors explore the nature of young people’s webs of support to better understand how different clusters (“cores”) of relationships, including those developed within the career pathways programs, can help. The authors also consider the relationships and events throughout young people’s lives in order to illuminate how career

A All quotes are from a young person enrolled in one of four programs: Café Momentum in Dallas, Per Scholas in the Bronx, Urban Alliance in the District of Columbia, or Year Up in the Bay Area. Young people are identified by a pseudonym, by their gender, and by their age (unless they did not report this information).

B 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.

pathways programs can capitalize on a young person's web of support and help him or her to achieve success.

Based on what young people shared, the authors offer three findings:

Finding 1. Young people's webs of support show four distinct cores of relationships: family, community, institution, and the career pathways program. Each provides important social support. The Career Pathways Core is unique among them because it offers four different types of support.

Finding 2. A young person's web of support is a dynamic system. Young people access different cores at different

times according to the individual's changing needs and the degree to which a given core is responsive to those needs.

Finding 3. The Career Pathways Core appears to be responsive and integrated into the web of support, acting as a scaffold for young people's positive development and for a wide range of supportive relationships that enable success in work and life.

Developing a greater understanding of what young people say about their webs of support can help strengthen career pathways programs as they seek to help young people build sustainable networks that enable success.

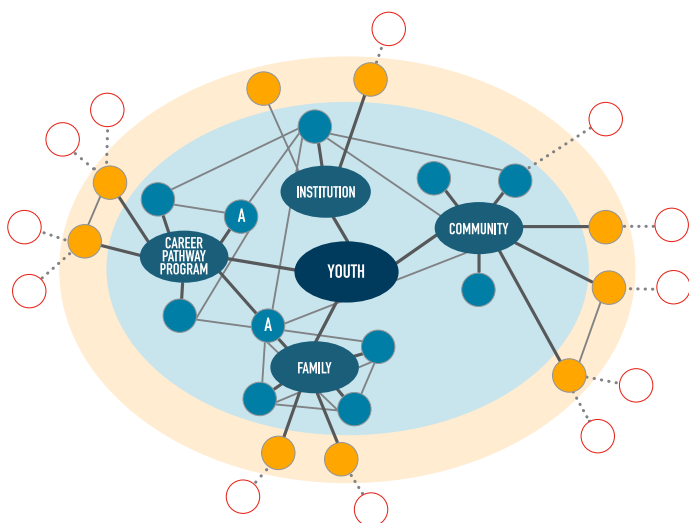
DEFINING TERMS: WEB OF SUPPORT, CORES, ANCHORS

This report uses several terms drawn from other research, including previous Center for Promise publications.⁴ When describing young people's relationship networks, and the clusters of people within them, the authors refer to:

- **Web of support**—the network of relationships a young person has with adults and peers across contexts. These relationships provide multiple types of support to the young person and are comprised of clusters of relationships ("cores"). 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).
- **Core**⁵—a cluster of relationships, usually organized within a context such as family, community, an institution like a school or church, or a program like a career pathways program.
- **Anchor**—one consistent, reliable person a young person feels that he or she can always go to for advice or to resolve problems. Each core potentially has an anchor.

For further discussion of these terms, see *Don't Quit on Me* (2015) and *Defining Webs of Support* (2017).

FIGURE 1



LITERATURE REVIEW

Programs that provide pathways to work and career development can be an important bridge between young people who are not prepared for work and the jobs that are available in their communities. These programs complement or replace traditional schooling experiences, providing young people in and out of school with educational, vocational, civic, and social opportunities that enable entry into an ever-more competitive workforce.

However, recent assessments of career pathways programs show uneven results for youth.⁶ Even successful programs typically produce modest results, with some notable exceptions.⁷ Gaps have included a lack of attentiveness to employer needs, lack of alignment across agencies and sectors (e.g., school-to-work), and failure to provide a comprehensive set of supports to young people who enter career-focused programs with multiple needs that go beyond the typical purview of school or work.

The Center for Promise has added to these analyses over the past several years, suggesting that relationships are a key leverage point for career pathways programs. Exemplary programs focus on building trusting, supportive relationships with youth participants and foster a sense of community among youth.⁸ When experiences are delivered through caring, supportive relationships, young people are better able to leverage the power of educational, workforce, and civic opportunities.

The Center for Promise takes a relational approach to understanding the conditions that are necessary for young people to thrive. From this perspective, development is driven by young people interacting with, influencing, and being influenced by multiple environments (e.g., home, school, community, and workplace).⁹

How do individuals engage and interact with multiple social environments? Through relationships¹⁰—with different

individuals in different social contexts¹¹—that promote positive youth outcomes by offering social support.¹² How do these relationships connect with one another, both within and across contexts? That is not yet well understood. Informed and inspired by listening to young people across the U.S.,¹³ the Center for Promise has continued its efforts to understand how webs of support can be built to best serve young people.

The web of support framework¹⁴ is situated in **Ecological Systems Theories**,¹⁵ which view youth as embedded in a multilayered social ecology. This ecology extends from the closest (most proximal) relationships with family, friends, and other adults to more peripheral (the most distal) factors such as public policies and social norms. With a young person at the center, the various individuals, institutions, and resources in these layers constitute a Youth System.¹⁶ A **Supportive Youth System** provides the optimal context for positive youth development and is characterized by a high degree of congruence between the needs and strengths of the young person and the supports, resources, or assets available across the ecological layers (see **Figure 2**).¹⁷ A strong web of support may include relationships with individuals who are

embedded across multiple different levels of a young person’s social ecology and who provide a variety of supports.

Practice, research, and theory are all aligned in the belief that relationships are not scattered haphazardly throughout life. Instead, relationships tend to cluster together in different contexts, such as among family, within a school, on a sports team, in an orchestra, or among friends. Relationships also occur within programs, such as career pathways programs.

Similarly, no relationship occurs in a vacuum. Instead, the bond that a young person develops in one relationship will affect the way he or she connects in another relationship. The type of support a young person draws from one relationship affects how he or she receives support in another relationship. Within this interconnected web, relationships—both positive and negative—can complement one another. Likewise, the strength of one relationship can compensate for what may be missing in another, and negative relationships can reinforce other negative relationships.¹⁸

For a deeper discussion of the web of support framework, see **Appendix C**.

METHODOLOGY

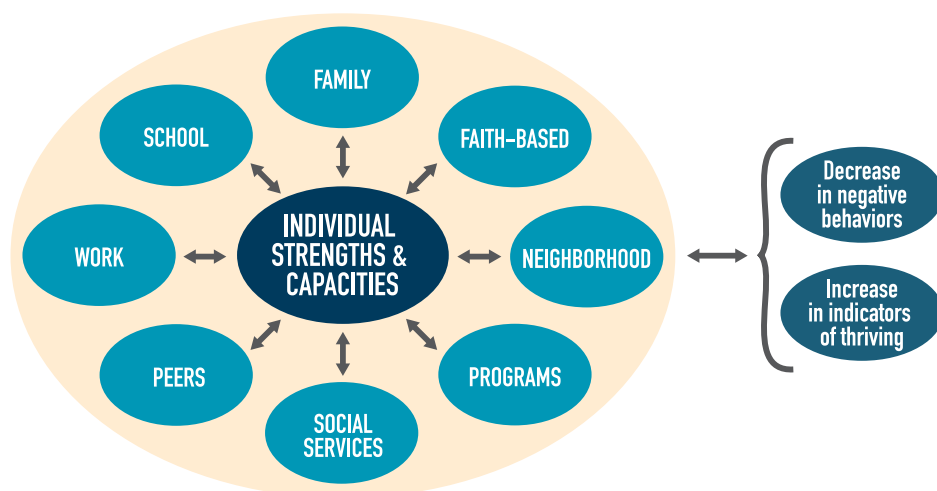
From May through August 2016, the Center for Promise team conducted 12 group interviews with 74 young people from four career pathways programs in four cities and followed up with individual interviews one month later with 17 youth. Group interviews included approximately six participants per group; facilitators conducted three groups at each program. Group and individual interviews were both audio recorded. Facilitators took notes during and after the interviews for later analysis. Individual interviews were transcribed, as was the portion of each group interview during which an individual interviewee shared their story.

The group interview method drew upon facilitation techniques developed by Teen Empowerment, an organization focused on raising the voices of youth and young adults in a community to create social change.²⁰

Once rapport was established, facilitators asked the youth to draw a web of support, using a prompt created to encourage the youth “to think about all of the individuals who have influenced their life, both positively and negatively, up until this point in time, and to depict these relationships in a model of their choosing” (see **Appendix D** for the prompt given). To provide an example, at least one of the facilitators shared their own web of support. Building from the prompt, facilitators asked the youth to share both their story and web with the group as a means for generating discussion about relationships, how the relationships developed, and how specific relationships influenced their life decisions.

Following the interviews, the research team compiled the personal stories of the 17 individual youth interviewees, including the transcripts of both their group and individual interviews. The research team took an inductive, or bottom-up, approach to analyzing these stories. The team coded the young people’s stories, marking sections related

FIGURE 2: POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT FROM A SUPPORTIVE YOUTH SYSTEM PERSPECTIVE¹⁹



to recollections of relationships the young people had over the course of their lives. The research team labeled these sections with the specific person(s) involved in the recollection, such as teacher, mother, or career pathways case manager. Where applicable, the researchers coupled this with the type of support the relationship(s) offered—appraisal, emotional, informational and instrumental (see Appendix E). The team then examined what the participants experienced to arrive at common themes and meanings.

For a more detailed description of the methodology, see Appendix F.

Three findings emerged from the analysis and are supported by the theoretical frameworks described above. Each of the findings is discussed and illustrated below.

Finding 1. Young people’s webs of support show four distinct cores of relationships: family, community, institution, and the Career Pathways Core. Each provides important social support. The career pathways program core is unique among them because it offers four different types of support.

Table 1 provides definitions for each of the cores as well as the supports that individuals within each core offered most frequently. As reported previously,²¹ youth who receive multiple types of support from a variety of people have better developmental outcomes.

Career Pathways Core. Young people’s descriptions of individuals grouped within the Career Pathways Core are distinct from the other three cores in two ways.

- First, this core appears to provide an infusion of emotional support that is coupled with relatively equal amounts of appraisal, informational, and instrumental support.
- Second, the Career Pathways Core builds on the “relationally-informed” program model, ensuring that multiple individuals intentionally provide

TABLE 1: DEFINITIONS OF CORES AND THE MOST FREQUENT TYPE OF SUPPORT PROVIDED

CORE	DEFINITION	MOST FREQUENT TYPES OF SUPPORT
Career pathways program	This core includes individuals from the career/workforce program in which the participant is currently enrolled (e.g., case manager, instructor, program manager).	Emotional, instrumental, informational, appraisal
Family	This core includes individuals related to the participant either legally, biologically, or self-chosen as family (e.g., mother, grandmother, uncle).	Instrumental, emotional
Community	This core includes individuals who have close personal relationships with the participant, but these relationships are outside the biological family (e.g., family friend, friend, friend’s family, girlfriend/boyfriend, roommate, godmother).	Emotional
Institution	This core includes individuals who are members of private or public institutions (e.g., schools, health clinics, prisons or juvenile justice systems) in the community. These relationships are not typically close personal relationships, although the possibility is there (e.g., school teacher, guidance counselor, librarian).	Informational, instrumental, emotional

multiple types of support to young people, complementing one another’s efforts in the context of the program.

Within the Career Pathways Core, those in advisory roles (e.g., advisors, case managers, and career coaches) along with the participants’ peer group in the program, were the primary providers of emotional and appraisal support. Other individuals (e.g., class instructors) provided higher amounts of informational and instrumental support.

As an example, the young woman quoted below described the support she received through her career pathways program as a “turning point.” An advisor directly provided appraisal support (“I admire you for...”), and indirectly offered emotional support by introducing her to someone she describes as her “little big brother.” The friend takes care of her, offering instrumental support, such as buying lunch when she needed food. In the young woman’s own words:

“... I’m gonna cry. But that was...a turning point ‘cause nobody has ever said that they were proud of me. And he’s like ‘I admire you for all the stuff that you’ve been through.’ And he had said...‘Some day I hope that I can grow up to have like your strength and your determination and your motivation.’ ... [T]hat really touched me, and...me and him are still friends. And he’s actually here too; he’s at [name of company] too. And then through him I met my friend... And he [the friend]’s been like my little big brother that I never got to have...he takes care of me whenever I need something...I remember I didn’t have lunch for...a whole week, and he’s like, ‘Did you eat at all?’ And I’m like, ‘no.’ And he’s like, ‘Why didn’t you tell me? Why didn’t you tell me you needed food? ...I would’ve gotten you food.’ [I said], ‘It’s okay, I’ll be fine.’ And he’s like, ‘No it’s not okay.’ And so he’s...my best friend now.”

Marnie, 22-year-old female

This example illustrates how the relationships within the Career Pathways Core can provide a range of different types of support that are connected to each other through the program and its partners, as well as to the young person.

The young people mentioned members of their **Family Core** frequently in their stories, referring to a parent or other family member. The familial relationships mentioned most frequently in interviews were with mothers, fathers, and grandmothers, in that order. The instrumental and emotional support offered through family relationships is illustrated in Brasi's story below. He describes the emotional support he received through his relationship with his mom. While he was adjudicated, Brasi's mother offered emotional support by visiting him in jail, and by being there when he was released.

"I finally got out and I started to live with my mother because I didn't have anyone. That's the only person I had left. So my mom, she came and got me from when I got out of jail. She didn't even have a car. She came and met me...on the train...She came and met me and I remember seeing her. It was like, damn. My mom picked me up from jail. And that's crazy. My mom's always there when I get out of jail, every time...she was there...She came, my mom, she was coming to see me every Sunday actually for nine and a half months."

Brasi, 19-year-old male

While Brasi also told the researchers about the difficult times that he and his mom had in their relationship, it is clear from this story that her constant presence and the emotional support she provided during his detention had an impact on him. This consistency continued through the time of his release. Brasi appreciated that even without a car, his mom came to pick him up. Later in his interview he remembered seeing her when he got out of jail as "one of the best days of my life."

The Career Pathways Core offers multiple, concurrent, intensive supports.

Brasi further described receiving instrumental and informational support from his mother, appreciating that she gave him a place to live and taught him how to get around the city:

"I was living with my mom in [name of neighborhood]...my mom was renting this room out in this house...So she was basically living in the room and really I wasn't really supposed to be in there. She was really just helping me out by letting me stay in there with her...[And] she didn't have a car, so we were riding the trains and buses. That's how I learned to use the [public] railing system [sic] so good because of my mom. She was using it before me and she taught me everything."

The **Community Core** is comprised of individuals outside the family who are part of the young person's neighborhood and community and who have a deep personal relationship with them. The young people describe the individuals within this core as people—such as friends and significant others (mentioned most frequently, in this order)—they seek out for support. This core offers them emotional support more frequently than any other form of support. One young woman's story about an exchange between her and a friend illustrates this.

"She would always say nice things. Like, 'How are you doing? How's your family?' She's super nice. She is always asking how is my day going? Am I okay? How am I feeling? So that just made me want to express more of myself to her. And open up a little bit more. And definitely there's been times that I've been going through stuff and the first person that comes to my mind is her. And then like she goes through

stuff and I'm there for her to comfort her. Her grandma died. I was definitely there for her. And yeah. So throughout the years we've been really close friends..."

Claudia, 19-year-old female

Relationships within the **Institution Core** are with representatives of the public and private institutions in the young person's community. Examples include school teachers, guidance counselors, and probation officers.

While potential exists for close relationships with individuals in the Institution Core, the support these relationships provide to young people is distinctly different from the support provided by relationships grouped in the Community Core. Young people described these individuals as providing instrumental and informational support more frequently than emotional support. Ignacio's experience with a librarian in his community offers an example.

"She spoke Spanish. She would give me books...I don't know what she was, a librarian, I don't know...So, I felt a sense of comfort... She actually—when I told her about [program name], she came too—I guess you have to bring someone to sponsor you or—I don't know. I can't remember what it's called, but they come to the second orientation with you. And even though she doesn't believe in the tech industry...she supported me to the point that she gave me over \$1,000 to just join the program. So, that was a big help for me. I thought she would give me—'cause I told her, 'I don't have any money. I'm wondering if you can help me in any way.' And I thought she would give me like \$300. She gave me over \$1,000. She told me, 'If you want more, then I can give you more.' I didn't ask for anything. I thought that was more than what I needed."

Ignacio, 21-year-old male

As Ignacio explains, this librarian provided instrumental support (books, money, and her presence at his second orientation), informational support (books and their content), and emotional support (the “sense of comfort” Ignacio mentions). The relationship provided different types of support at different points in Ignacio’s life, leading up to his enrollment in the career pathways program.

The web of support depicted by another participant, Moop, illustrates some of the unique features of each core, and helps explain what led her to enroll in a career pathways program.

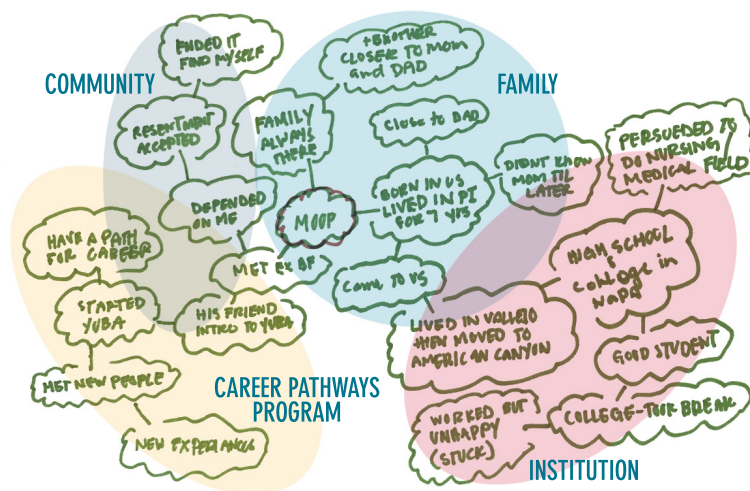
Figure 3 is Moop’s hand drawn depiction of her web of support. The shaded bubbles have been overlaid on top of the major people, places and events that contribute to each of Moop’s cores. How these circles overlap indicates the interconnection between cores. For instance, Moop indicated that the relationships in her Family Core propelled her into college (Institution Core), and that a friend of her ex-boyfriend (Community Core) introduced her to the workforce readiness program (Career Pathways Core).

Moop’s drawing indicates the types of support, or lack thereof, that each core offered at different times. For example, one bubble indicates that her Family Core offered emotional support by always being there. Another bubble in the web indicates that family members pressured her to join a nursing program against her wishes. Based on Moop’s description, the authors interpret that the Career Pathways Core (left) offered instrumental and informational support by providing Moop with new experiences, and emotional support by connecting her with new people in the program.

The Career Pathways Core plays a unique role in the webs of these young people. Young people piece together the support that they need from relationships across the cores within a web. Most cores cannot provide all of the types of support

FIGURE 3: MOOP’S DEPICTION OF HER WEB WITH AN OVERLAY OF THE CORES

Interviews provided an opportunity for young people to draw their own webs of support, two of which are included in this report.



necessary for a young person to thrive. But the Career Pathways Core represents the exception.

Finding 2. A young person’s web of support is a dynamic system. Young people access different cores at different times according to the individual’s changing needs and the degree to which a given core is responsive to those needs.

Variation within a web of support and its cores is to be expected and is a central feature of the web of supports framework. Variations can be tied to a number of different influences, including a young person’s developmental phase, changes in contextual and cultural factors (e.g., neighborhood, school, family), or a young person’s individual needs and strengths.

In this study, the authors note two sources of variation:

- differences in the frequency with which young people mentioned particular relationships, pointing to variations related to developmental phase (e.g., entering adolescence), and
- differences in how young people recalled particular relationships as **sources of support** at various points in their lives.

Taken together, these differences point to the ways that young people respond to changes in their lives by leaning on different parts of their webs. With the young person at the center, webs can adapt in response to contextual and cultural factors. This allows a young person’s web to meet changing needs and leverage existing strengths.

Adaptability Related to Developmental Phase.

Across group and individual interviews, young people, regardless of their age, mentioned family relationships far more frequently than any other types of relationship (see Figure 4).

This can be explained, in part, by movement through different phases of development. A young person initially develops cores with individuals who are most easily available to them. When children are very young, the Family Core has a deep influence on their development generally, and on their understanding of relationships more specifically. This has been documented in the literature through research exploring parental attachment²² and parenting styles.²³ As adolescence looms, the Community Core begins to play a more prominent role.²⁴ As the young person asserts his or her autonomy, the Family Core plays a quieter role while the Community Core becomes more predominant in the web.

As adolescence continues, the young person establishes and enhances relationships with a wider array of people in the community, and through a variety of public and private institutions (e.g., schools and afterschool programs). As a professional identity begins to emerge, the Institution Core expands to include relationships with individuals in the workplace.

If a young person enrolls in a career pathways program, the relationships in the intervention emerge as a separate Career Pathways Core. The participants in this study mention Community Core relationships 132 times in interviews, Institution Core relationships 138 times, and Career Pathways Core relationships 118 times. (See Figure 4.) The smaller number of mentions of these three cores compared to the Family Core (381 times) reflects the shorter developmental duration of cores outside the young people's families. This differential is evident in Moop's web (See Figure 3).

Adaptability Related to Changes in Context, Culture, Needs and Strengths. Beyond frequency, another way to examine web variation is by looking at how often supports are coupled with the mention of a relationship. In other words, is a young person describing a prominent person in his or her life and also describing the support that person offers? (See Figure 4.)

The difference between the number of times a Family Core relationship

was mentioned and how often it was mentioned in conjunction with a type of support (381, compared to 300) suggests that, across the lifespan, this core did not always offer the support the young person needed or wanted. In contrast, while there are fewer overall mentions of Career Pathways Core relationships, the number of mentions in conjunction with support is greater than relationship mentions in isolation. This suggests that relationships in the Career Pathways Core, and to a lesser extent the ones in the Institution Core, more consistently offer the support a young person needs at a particular time. (See the difference between the blue and yellow bars in Figure 4.)

...young people respond to changes in their lives by leaning on different parts of their webs.

The following examples from young people's stories illustrate how this difference among cores might be related to changes that occur in the young person's ecology.

Donald's story. One participant, Donald, said that he idolized his uncle when he was younger because his uncle did "cool things," and was there for him when his father was adjudicated. During

this period, Donald's frequency and quality of interaction with his uncle increased, because the frequency and quality of the relationship with his father decreased. While this represents a compensating change within the Family Core, this change ultimately had negative ramifications. As Donald describes,

"I used to go around my uncle. I used to look up to him too, but I see, hear about him doing bad stuff, you know... Once I look up to him I try to do the stuff he do too..."

The reason I looked up to him because the stuff he was doing—I don't know. At the age I was I just thought that it was like oh, yeah, I want to do what he doing. You know? I used to smoke and stuff like that. That's why I tried it, tried to smoke marijuana and stuff like that."

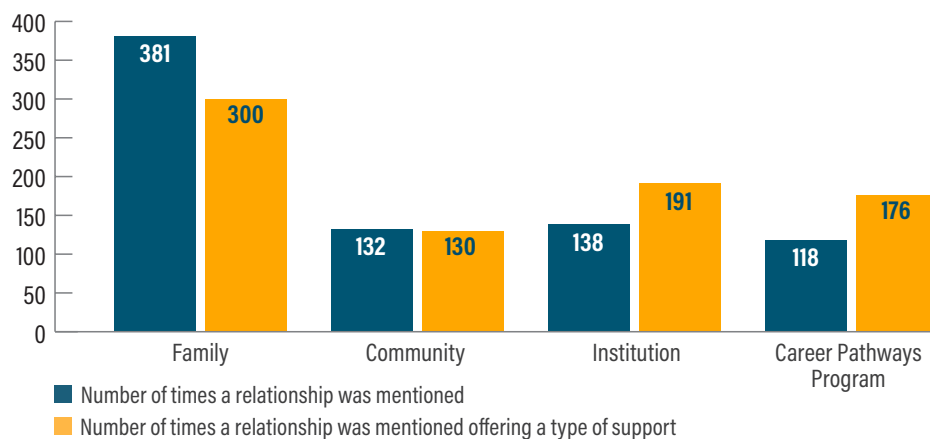
Donald, 17-year-old male

Donald also said he learned about robbing people and burglarizing homes from his uncle and became so proficient at it that he ran his own crew. Donald indicated that this familial relationship was with someone he admired, and it provided the emotional support that he needed immediately after his father was incarcerated. However, the behavior he admired led to negative outcomes. Donald's uncle was incarcerated, creating another disruption to the Family Core. Donald himself was later adjudicated.

Today, Donald is no longer in contact with his uncle. He realizes that his uncle is not a good influence. In adapting to these core disruptions, Donald has strengthened his relationship with his mother and has begun re-developing a relationship with his father, who was released a few years ago. As recommended by his probation officer, Donald has also developed relationships in other parts of his web, including the Career Pathways Core, to provide some of the supports necessary to his success.

Jenna's story. The research team also spoke with a young woman who was sexually abused by a member of her Community Core. Because of the emotional damage inflicted by this adverse life experience,

FIGURE 4: NUMBER OF TIMES A CORE RELATIONSHIP IS MENTIONED, COMPARED TO THE NUMBER OF TIMES A CORE RELATIONSHIP IS MENTIONED AS OFFERING A TYPE OF SUPPORT



the young woman suffered disruptions across her web, making it necessary for her to seek out other adults in her life.

"I withdrew from everyone...I became very depressed...I started to hate myself on the inside...Being afraid just walking down the street because of the abuse, I became scared and timid and very shy...[M]y day would be school, home, and then sleep. There was nothing in between...I became turned off from the world, closed off from to the world. And especially since it happened between someone I knew... he was my best friend's step-father. And that really hurt me...I started not trusting people that I already had known. I was just afraid...

After this happened [my cousins] became very supportive to me just being someone to talk to, a shoulder to cry on because I really didn't have that with my parents, as I said before, like my mom don't know how to talk in serious conversation...So I went to my cousins. And our relationship just grew and grew from there. And they really saw that I was hurting and they just came to me...They came and picked me up from my home and they took me out...

...[E]ven through my process of high school they was there for me. So they helped me when I was in school like when I needed help on work, they would be there for me. When I needed to know how to apply for colleges, they was there giving me advice throughout my entire process. So our relations really just developed because they saw that I wasn't getting what I needed, I guess, from my parents, and they became that advice in a sense but more of a friend-to-friend kind of way... I still struggle with it a little bit. So I still kind of get scared in certain situations when it comes to like guys, but like my cousins was really good... my godmother, she was also [a] strong role model in helping me. And then I had my mentor..."

Jenna, 18-year-old female

Jenna endured a trauma that reverberated across her web. Given the loss of trust within her Community Core, she was also unable to trust individuals within her Family and Institution Cores. She withdrew from the world. Her cousins reached out to her and, over time, she began opening up to their emotional support and seeking them out for a variety of supports (emotional, instrumental, and informational). Subsequently, Jenna began activating supports in her other cores, her godmother in her Community Core and her mentor in her Institution Core. Jenna's mentor introduced her to a career pathways program, and the relationships she built within the Career Pathways Core have helped her realize her dreams of applying to college, running a nonprofit to help teenage mothers, and traveling to Africa to teach young children.

Zora's story. A final example of a young person's web of support adapting is illustrated in Zora's depiction of her web. To develop an understanding of the variation within a young person's web of support over time, the authors examined

the timeline implicit in Zora's story from birth through her enrollment in the career pathways program.

Zora's timeline (see numbers 1-9 imposed on drawing) shows that one or more cores predominated at each point in her story, and that relationships between and among cores provided compensating support when disruptions occurred.

Zora described several disruptions in her Family Core, including being born while her mother was incarcerated. She received strong emotional and instrumental support from her grandmother, but her family life was disrupted when her mother was released from jail. Zora experienced other disruptions in both her Community Core and her Family Core, including being bullied at school (Time Point 4) and being forced to find a new place to live (Time Point 7). However, she "made 2 great friends," who "helped me to control my anger," and "pushed me." This support helped Zora persist through her senior year of high school (Time Point 8), when a school counselor (Institution Core) and her boyfriend (Community

FIGURE 5: ZORA'S DEPICTION OF HER WEB IN A TIMELINE WITH AN OVERLAY LABELING THE CORES APPARENT AT EACH TIME-POINT



Core) came in to her life—offering her the informational and emotional support that she needed at the time. Finally, at Time Point 9, Ms. R, the counselor, introduced Zora to the career pathways program where Zora met Ms. E (Career Pathways Core), whom she classified as one of the “best mentors ever.” Zora concluded by delineating the emotional, informational, and instrumental ways in which these individuals helped to position her so that she could graduate from high school and go to college.

The Career Pathways Core is a new core within the lives of the young people enrolled in the four programs the research team visited. The stories of the three young people presented above end with their experience with this core. The authors interpret this not as an end but as a new beginning, full of relationships that provide a comprehensive set of supports. These relationships encourage young people to make successful transitions to work, begin developing career-related skills, and sustain the capacity to build and rebuild the networks they need to thrive.

Finding 3. The Career Pathways Core appears to be responsive and integrated into the web of support, acting as a scaffold for young people’s positive development and for a wide range of supportive relationships that enable success in work and life.

Work becomes increasingly important as youth mature, making this particular core especially relevant to youth in middle to late adolescence.²⁵ Career pathways programs function as a core designed to intentionally and holistically prepare young people for work and life. The program provides multiple supports that address the range of needs the young person may have.

“I think a lot of our students come in not having that sense of community. [The program] is one of those first places where they can feel that. It’s really weird for some students: ‘Like

I’m supported everywhere. This isn’t how things happen.’ That was a bit of a struggle for me, having to reach out. I don’t know how. ‘Well, [the program leaders say,] we’ll teach you how to work out and we’ll help you and we’ll give you the feedback and we’ll tell you how you can do it even better. And if you don’t feel like you’re doing better we’ll give you some feedback or we’ll develop some goals to get you to your target of what you want to do.’ That culture of being able to approach anybody, changing my mindset about how we should be supporting each other and not fighting against each other or trying to steal resources or opportunity from folks, I think that’s what’s really great about this program.”

Homer, 26-year-old male

As Homer (a program participant who subsequently became a staff member) describes, career pathways programs offer young people a core of intentional, integrated support. For many young people, particularly those embedded in risk-immersed environments, the cores they are able to develop in childhood and adolescence may lack the resources needed to respond to adverse life events (such as unemployment, homelessness, or addiction); or to provide new connections that can lead to work. This new Career Pathways Core represents an important new addition to their webs of support.

The Career Pathways Core appears to serve a unique role. The programs, given their relational focus, have been designed to provide resources that other cores may lack. This core responds to unique individual and social-environmental challenges that can threaten the stability of other cores. Youth program participants describe relationships within the Career Pathways Core that play a stabilizing role, providing multiple forms of intensive supports to the individual and/or the cores within the individual’s web.

Brasi’s story

“D and C [program employees, full names removed for confidentiality], they were the only ones like, besides my mom, that came and saw me. My mom and D and C were the only people that ever I had contact with when I was in jail. It was kind of crazy because... you really see who’s real when you get locked up. People don’t answer the phone. They don’t. They really don’t.

I was homeless again but I was still going to orientation. I was still making it to the orientations. I was walking around with a backpack of my own clothes. I was still sleeping outside. I just remember I called D, I was like, ‘Man, I can’t do this anymore. I need somewhere to live. I cannot be homeless anymore. Someone has to help me...Can you guys help me?’ He said, ‘Come to [the program] and I got something for you. I’m going to help you.’ I remember that.”

Brasi, 19-year-old male

Brasi’s story shows the role that the Career Pathways Core played during a period of crisis in his life. The program provided continuous, consistent supports while he was in jail and after he was released. Most important, the program played a stabilizing role in a desperate time by helping Brasi secure housing. Without this instrumental support, a young person “sleeping outside” and “walking around with a backpack of [his] own clothes” might not be able to complete the program that serves as a step toward a better future.

Tammy’s story. Other young people, including Tammy, describe similar wrap-around support from their career pathways program:

“You have therapy right there whenever you’re ready. And she [program employee] didn’t just help me with... my divorce and stuff, but...she helped me...figure out childcare, and she helped me figure out housing. And I

mean I was already living on my own, but I was, like, 'I need to find cheaper housing...because I'm living off of the stipend and, like, working my second job. But...I'm barely making it.' So... she was really...a lot of different things for me...that had nothing to do with learning technology. So that's why [the program] is so magical. But, just finding housing, daycare, calling attorneys to help me with my divorce and to do it for free because I couldn't afford any, you know, legal fees and things like that. So I think she is really important."

Tammy, unreported age, female

Tammy described the experience of receiving ongoing emotional support from her Career Pathways Core as she endured a difficult period of transition, which was marked by disruptions in her Family Core. In addition to providing direct emotional support, the Career Pathways Core offered informational support through referrals to a number of services including legal services, childcare, and housing. In addition, Tammy explained that the Career Pathways Core offered instrumental support by calling attorneys to aid in her search for free legal representation. This young woman's story highlights the multiple, concurrent, intensive supports that her Career Pathways Core offered to help stabilize immediate threats to her well-being and promote resilience over time.

Career pathways programs also provide a critical bridging function, connecting young people with new opportunities and relationships. The programs emphasize the importance of continuing to build healthy relationships as the young people move out of the program and into new social contexts. Here's another example from Tammy's experience:

"But I think what has made me continue to grow those relationships is feeling like they care...about what I'm doing for [organization] and what I'm doing in my personal life. Like, 'What are you doing with yourself? Okay, you're a mom, and you're a woman

of God, what are you doing with your education? How can we be a support to you?' So I feel like I kill it there for them because I feel like they go hard for me. So I go hard in my work because I feel like they do so much for me.

...So when I do that work I'll be like, I should always be executing and delivering because this is the one thing they ask me to do. And they help me in all these different areas of my life, so. Yeah. I think those relationships are important... They're like, we have this amazing opportunity for you to expand your network. We're gonna go sit in front of C-level people and talk about [the program.] But it's not about [the program], it's about you. And this is how you build your brand. And I was like, 'All right I'll do it...'"

Tammy, unreported age, female

While the career pathways program seeks to place students in environments that are rich for cultivating new relationships, what is most impressive in Tammy's narrative is her own motivation to maintain and grow such relationships—fueled, in part, by a sense that the adults around her care about her future. Drawing on the resources of the Career Pathways Core, a young person is able to move from a new stable position of strength to build new relationships, explore new social contexts, and generate new core. From this new, stable position of strength, one can build new relationships, explore new social contexts, and take further steps toward success.

IN CONCLUSION

Relationships Come First focused on lessons learned from program administrators and staff at four different career pathways programs. *Turning Points* explores how risk-immersed young people enrolled in four career pathways programs describe the networks of relationships that shape their development.

Through their stories and insights, the young people participating in this study shed light on the powerful impact of webs of support. Further, systematic investigation of young people's narratives illuminated the composition, the complexity, and the changing nature of the webs that surround them.

Taken together, the stories young people shared revealed four primary cores (Family, Community, Institution, and Career Pathways Program), which varied in the type, frequency, amount, and duration of support they provided. When certain cores failed to remain viable sources of support or could not provide the specific support a young person needed, other cores and relationships within the cores seemed to adapt accordingly.

The Career Pathways Program core—the newest core to the participants' webs—provided multiple, concurrent, intentional supports that helped to meet urgent needs, encourage resilience, and create a foundation for the development of future relationships and cores. Young people's descriptions of the role of the career pathways program core suggest a deep appreciation for, if not always an awareness of, the way that supportive relationships are integrated into each program's design.

Just as young people's development is not confined to the walls of a program or institution, relationships reverberate throughout a young person's life. At their best, relationship cores and young people's wider webs of support nurture, socialize, teach, and provide positive social norms. Understanding the quality, depth, and duration of the constellation of relationships that young people have in all parts of their lives can help career pathways programs maximize the impact of interventions that help formerly disconnected young people achieve early success in the worlds of work and career.

IMPLICATIONS

Enrollment in a career pathways program does not alone guarantee engagement with case managers, education program coordinators, mentors, and others who will enhance a young person's web of supports. The appropriate interventions and programs offered at the right time, and supported by people who think holistically about young lives, can help firmly place a young person on a positive path. To optimize career pathways programs, particularly those serving risk-immersed youth, it is important to listen to young people's stories and allow those stories to inform both the delivery of interventions and services and the manner in which they are offered.

While young people's resilience and persistence are evident in their stories, the findings in this report emphasize that specific, intentional support is needed to engage these positive qualities as young people transition to the workplace. To leverage young people's strengths and maximize the effectiveness of career pathways programs for risk-immersed youth, the authors of this report offer the following recommendations.

Build multiple social supports into the design of career pathways programs. Young people describe receiving emotional support from several different cores, including the Career Pathways Core. However, only the Career Pathways Core, represented by relationally informed career pathways programs, provides all four types of social support through key

relationships. Career pathways programs should place relationship-building at the center of their models and intentionally connect young people with a variety of social supports—informational, appraisal, instrumental, emotional.

Envision career pathways programs as part of a supportive youth system. Career pathways interventions benefit from a youth systems perspective. Brasi's story sheds light on some of the tough challenges faced by formerly incarcerated youth trying to find food, clothing, and shelter while learning skills that will help them create a better future. Tammy describes the multiple needs that arise when a young person's family life is disrupted. Career pathways programs whose staff work to understand and meet young people's basic needs—food, clothing, shelter, health care, stability—increase the odds of them completing the program and getting on a path to success.

Activate and connect multiple cores in a young person's web of support. Career pathways program leaders should ask young people about the other relationships in their lives and be aware of both the potential positive and negative implications of these relationships. Developing awareness of the cores within a young person's web can allow supportive adults in the Career Pathways Core to connect with and potentially coordinate with other cores. Intentional coordination can increase the stability and sustainability of a young person's web of support, enabling it to adapt to changes and disruptions. Having a stable and

adaptable web of support that extends beyond the Career Pathways Core will set youth up for continued success beyond graduation from the program.

Keep listening to what young people say is working and not working. Future research should:

- Continue to be informed by the voices of young people in order to identify the factors (e.g., individual or interpersonal characteristics, community-level variables, events) that affect young people's decisions to engage or disengage from career pathways programs.
- Explore how young people's webs of supports and cores evolve once they complete a career pathways program and enter the workforce. For example, do the individuals who are part of the Career Pathways Program Core continue to provide program alumni with support and mentorship? Are young people better positioned to access workplace mentoring and other supports as a result of their experience in a career pathways program? And finally, how can employers create networks of support that help improve retention rates for young people who are embarking on their first employment experience?

APPENDIX A

PROGRAM DESCRIPTIONS

CAFÉ MOMENTUM

DALLAS, TEXAS

cafemomentum.org

Fine cuisine, adjudicated young people, and social change. Though this 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, 15 to 19 years of age, who have been 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

perscholas.org

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 relying 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, 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 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 his or her 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

www.yearup.org

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.

APPENDIX B

KEY FINDINGS FROM *RELATIONSHIPS COME FIRST*

Relationships Come First,²⁶ the first report in this series, offered a framework for understanding the role of relationships in four career pathways programs serving risk-immersed^C young people. Based on interviews with adults working at Café Momentum in Dallas, Per Scholas in the Bronx, Urban Alliance in Washington, D.C., and Year Up in the Bay Area, the research team found that:

- **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.
- Webs of support are **integral to each program's 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.
- 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.
- 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 it serves.

See the full report at www.americaspromise.org/resource/relationships-come-first.

C 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.

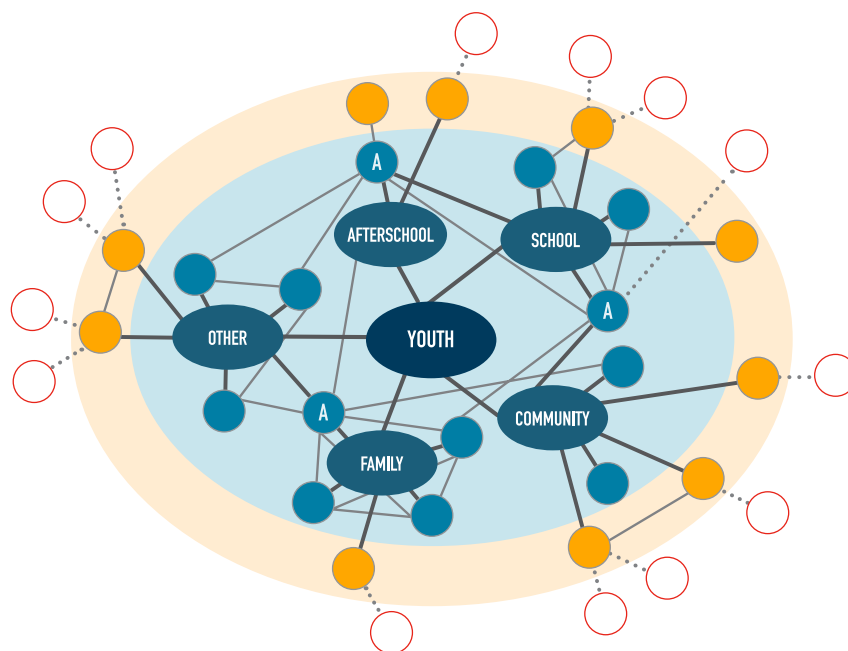
APPENDIX C

DEFINING WEBS OF SUPPORT

A companion research brief from the Center for Promise, www.americaspromise.org/resource/defining-web-support,²⁷ describes the **web of support framework** more fully. The brief highlights four constructs as essential to understanding a web of support (see **Figure 1** for a depiction of a sample web):

1. All youth have agency—they play an active role in the construction of their developmental pathways, choosing who they engage with and how along his or her course—and therefore a web is shaped by a young person’s intentional interactions with other individuals.
2. Webs consist of relationships that vary in terms of frequency of interaction, duration of the relationship, and the qualities that the relationship offers the young person.
3. The strongest relationships (those with high levels of duration, frequency and quality) cluster together, organized around contexts, to formulate cores of relationships.
4. Within a core there is the potential for a point person, or “anchor,” that the young person might rely on most for support.
5. There is variation within a web of support and its cores, where variation is dependent on the youth’s developmental phase, contextual and cultural factors, and the young person’s individual needs and strengths, among other influences.

FIGURE 1: This figure shows a young person at the center of multiple relationship “cores.” The closeness and quality of the relationships comprising the core, and the salience of the various cores, can be determined by how near or far the relationships are from the center of a core and from the young person.



Young people’s descriptions of their webs of support illustrate several aspects of this conceptual framework.

Within the web of support framework, systems of relationships present themselves in clusters or relational **cores** within each of the young person’s developmental contexts (e.g., family, community, afterschool, school and other). See **Figure 1**.²⁸ Individuals in each core interact with the young person and potentially with other members of that core. They may also interact with individuals in other cores (e.g., teachers interacting with parents or a high school coach who also lives in the young person’s neighborhood). Thus, a web of support is filled with multiple resources being provided by multiple people in multiple contexts. How a young person reacts to and interacts with his or her web changes over time as personal circumstances change (e.g., puberty, parenthood, transition from one level of school to the next) or as the social or physical environment changes (e.g., transitions in national or local government; significant social events such as 9/11).²⁹ Because of the interactions and interconnections among individuals and among cores, webs of support are able to adapt to the changes that a given young person faces.

APPENDIX D

NARRATIVE PROMPT FOR GROUP INTERVIEWS

This prompt must be said exactly to each group:

“I want you to think about how you got to this point in your life and the role that other people played at each point along your journey. I want you to tell me your story; going back to the very first experiences that you feel had the most impact on who you are, all the way up to now. And throughout your story I want you to tell me how other people influenced your life. These experiences can be positive or negative, but I want to hear all about what and who have made you who you are today. First tell me how you would describe yourself and your goals in life, not just those that are work related, and then begin your story telling me how you got here and who helped you to get to where you are.

I asked myself this same question, and to help me organize my thinking about it, I put together this picture [show web created and describe a few of the people in your web, when they happened to come in to your life, and what they contributed to your life to make you who you are today]. Take a moment to think about what I just said, creating a picture like mine to help you think about your answer to this question. Feel free to ask me questions if you don't understand something.”

The facilitator will then pause for approximately 10 minutes to let the participants compose their thoughts/create their web. After 10 minutes—or when the facilitator perceives the participants getting antsy—the facilitator will ask who would like to share first.

Before initiating their story, the facilitator will ask participants to start by saying their unique identifier (e.g., a number).

The facilitator can ask participants clarifying questions, repeat back to the participant exactly what he or she said, but the facilitator should not summarize or paraphrase anything that the participant says.

After everyone has told his/her story the facilitator will continue:

“Awesome, thank you so much for sharing! Now I want each of you to take a few minutes before you leave and see if you want to revise your picture. We've heard a lot of other people's experiences and listening to them it might make you think differently about who around you supports/supported you. If you do, take a minute to revise.”

APPENDIX E

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.

APPENDIX F

METHODOLOGY

METHOD

From May through August 2016, the Center for Promise team conducted 12 group interviews with 74 youth from four career pathways programs in four cities, and follow-up individual interviews one month later with 17 youth. Group interviews included approximately six (6) participants per group; facilitators conducted three groups at each program. Group interviews were audio recorded, and facilitators also took copious field notes during and after the group interviews for later analysis. Interviews were also audio recorded and field noted, then transcribed for analysis. The portion of the group interview where the individual interviewee shared their story was also transcribed.

The group interview method drew upon facilitation techniques developed by Teen Empowerment, an organization whose focus is on raising the voices of youth and young adults in a community in order to effect social change.³⁰ One of the individuals who ran the group interview has extensive experience and training in these techniques, as well as extensive experience working with and organizing youth from risk-immersed environments. After the participants completed the informed consent form and demographic information worksheet, facilitators started each group with a brief introduction, outlining the expectations and purpose for conducting the group interview. Along with the facilitators, participants engaged in several group exercises to engender trust, establish norms, and build connection and comfort among participants.

Once rapport was established, facilitators then asked the youth to draw their individual web of support, using a prompt created to encourage the youth to think about all of the individuals who have influenced their life, both positively and negatively, up until this point in time, and to depict these relationships in a model of their choosing (see [Appendix D](#) for the prompt given and [pages 6 and 9](#) for examples of the webs). To help facilitate the depictions at least one of the facilitators shared their own web of support. Building from the prompt, facilitators asked the youth to share both their story and web with the group as a means for generating discussion regarding relationships, how these relationships influenced their life decisions, and how the relationships developed. The researchers did not isolate the influential relationships to those made at the career pathways program, rather the prompt was meant to elicit the influential relationships that youth had across cores. Youth also chose their own “handle” or pseudonym so that we could later identify their work.

Group and individual interview participants were recruited through four career development and workforce readiness programs. (See [Appendix A](#) for descriptions of the program(s).) A total of 74 youth between the ages of 15 and 26 years ($M=19.68$, $SD=2.79$) took part in the group interviews, and 17 youth between the ages of 15 and 26 years ($M=20$, $SD=2.78$) took part in the individual interviews. Overall, there were 46 males, and youth self-reported a diverse array of racial and

TABLE 2: DEMOGRAPHICS OF YOUTH INTERVIEWED IN BOTH GROUP AND INDIVIDUAL SETTINGS

	GROUP INTERVIEWS (N=74)	INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS (N=17)
Sex		
Male	46 (62.16%)	8 (47.06%)
Female	27 (36.49%)	8 (47.06%)
Transgender	1 (1.35%)	1 (5.88%)
Race / Ethnicity		
African American	15 (20.27%)	3 (17.65%)
Asian	3 (4.05%)	0 (0%)
Black	17 (22.97%)	4 (23.53%)
Hispanic	12 (16.22%)	1 (5.88%)
Latino	3 (4.05%)	0 (0%)
Multi Ethnic	6 (8.11%)	3 (17.65%)
White	4 (5.41%)	1 (5.88%)
Other	7 (9.46%)	3 (17.65%)
Unclassifiable	5 (6.76%)	1 (5.88%)
Blank	3 (4.05%)	1 (5.88%)
Age		
15	4	0
16	3	1
17	15	2
18	7	3
19	6	2
20	6	1
21	12	3
22	7	1
23	5	1
24	3	1
25	3	0
26	1	1
Blank	2	1
Mean	19.68	20
Standard Deviation	2.79	2.78

ethnic backgrounds. Of our 17 interview participants 8 were male, and 1 identified as Transgender. Racially and ethnically they self-identified as Black (4), African-American (3), Multi Ethnic (3), Hispanic (1), 3 came from other backgrounds (i.e. backgrounds which were only reported by a single person), 1 was unclassifiable (i.e. it did not fit in a racial or ethnic category), and 1 participant left this portion of our demographic questionnaire blank.

As a part of the recruitment process with partners at each of the programs, the research team planned site visits, and asked members of the administration in each program to gather approximately 18 youth to participate in group interviews to discuss their life experiences both in and outside of the program. Although qualitative sampling methods are not designed to create a representative sample, the research team has no reason to believe that the experiences of these participants are more or less severe than others in their program. However, these young people's willingness and capacity to participate may mean that they differ from some of their peers on some individual characteristics, such as their levels of optimism, ability to cope effectively with adversity, and existing, positive adult relationships in their lives.

ANALYSIS

The authors took a phenomenological approach³¹ to the collection and analysis of the data. Phenomenology is grounded in the lived experiences of the participants, and thus highlights the individual's voice and meaning-making processes. A phenomenological approach is used when researchers want to understand a common meaning for a certain phenomenon in people's lives. In this instance the researchers wanted to build our understanding of what webs of support look like for these youth and how their life experiences might contribute to the webs' development.

To do this, the authors first compiled the stories from the youth that were interviewed individually, including the transcripts of both their group and individual interviews, regarding the "phenomenon." The research team then coded the stories, marking sections of the stories that were related to *immediate relationships* (e.g., ones that held familial and/or custodial positions), *program relationships* (e.g., individuals from the career pathways program that are particularly salient in their lives, such as case managers and classmates), and *outside relationships* (e.g., persons outside the immediate and programmatic realms that they mention as impacting their lives, such as friends, school teachers, and librarians). In addition, the researchers noted the type of support these relationships offered (*appraisal, emotional, informational and instrumental*). Next, the team examined what the participants experienced and how their relationships manifested in order to deduce common themes and meanings regarding the phenomenon. As a part of this examination multiple types of relationships experienced and the support they offered were considered; this information was used to create a structural depiction of the webs, with the research team noting the common cores among participants, the significant individuals in each core, and the types of support offered commonly within each core.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Achieve, Inc., 2015.
- 2 Kazis, 2016.
- 3 Varga & Zaff, 2017.
- 4 Center for Promise, 2014; Center for Promise, 2015; Varga & Zaff, 2017.
- 5 Wellman, 1983.
- 6 Kazis, 2016.
- 7 Miller, Millensky, Schwartz, Goble & Stein, 2016; Schochet, Burghardt, & McConnell, 2008.
- 8 Center for Promise, 2014.
- 9 Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Zaff et al., 2015.
- 10 Varga & Zaff, 2017.
- 11 Chang et al., 2010; Beam, Chen, & Greenberger, 2002; Varga & Deutsch, 2016; Center for Promise, 2014, 2015.
- 12 Chu, 2010.
- 13 Center for Promise, 2014, 2015.
- 14 Varga & Zaff, 2017.
- 15 Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006.
- 16 Zaff et al., 2015.
- 17 Zaff et al., 2016.
- 18 See Varga & Zaff, 2017, for a discussion of webs of support.
- 19 Zaff et al., 2016.
- 20 See the Teen Empowerment website for more information on the organization (<http://www.teenempowerment.org>); and the Moving Beyond Icebreakers website for more information about the facilitation techniques used (<http://www.movingbeyondicebreakers.org>).
- 21 Center for Promise, 2015.
- 22 e.g., Ainsworth & Bell, 1970; Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters & Wall, 1978; Main, 2000; Bretherton & Munholland, 2016; Fraley & Shaver, 2016; Kobak, Zajac & Madsen, 2016; Powell, Cooper, Hoffman & Marvin, 2013.
- 23 e.g., Baumrind 1971, Baumrind, 1991; Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Smetana, 1995; Spera, 2005.
- 24 Elkind, 1998.
- 25 Super, 1980.
- 26 Pufall Jones, Flanagan, Zaff, McClay, Hynes, & Cole, 2016.
- 27 Varga & Zaff, 2017.
- 28 Wellman, 1983.
- 29 Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006.
- 30 See the Teen Empowerment website for more information on the organization (www.teenempowerment.org); and the Moving Beyond Icebreakers website for more information about the facilitation techniques used (www.movingbeyondicebreakers.org).
- 31 Creswell, 2013.

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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 to college and career success in cities across the United States.

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