Employment Programs for Young People with Histories of Foster Care

Creating a Typology, Comparative Snapshots, and Considerations for the Field
OPRE Report #2022-81

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May 2022

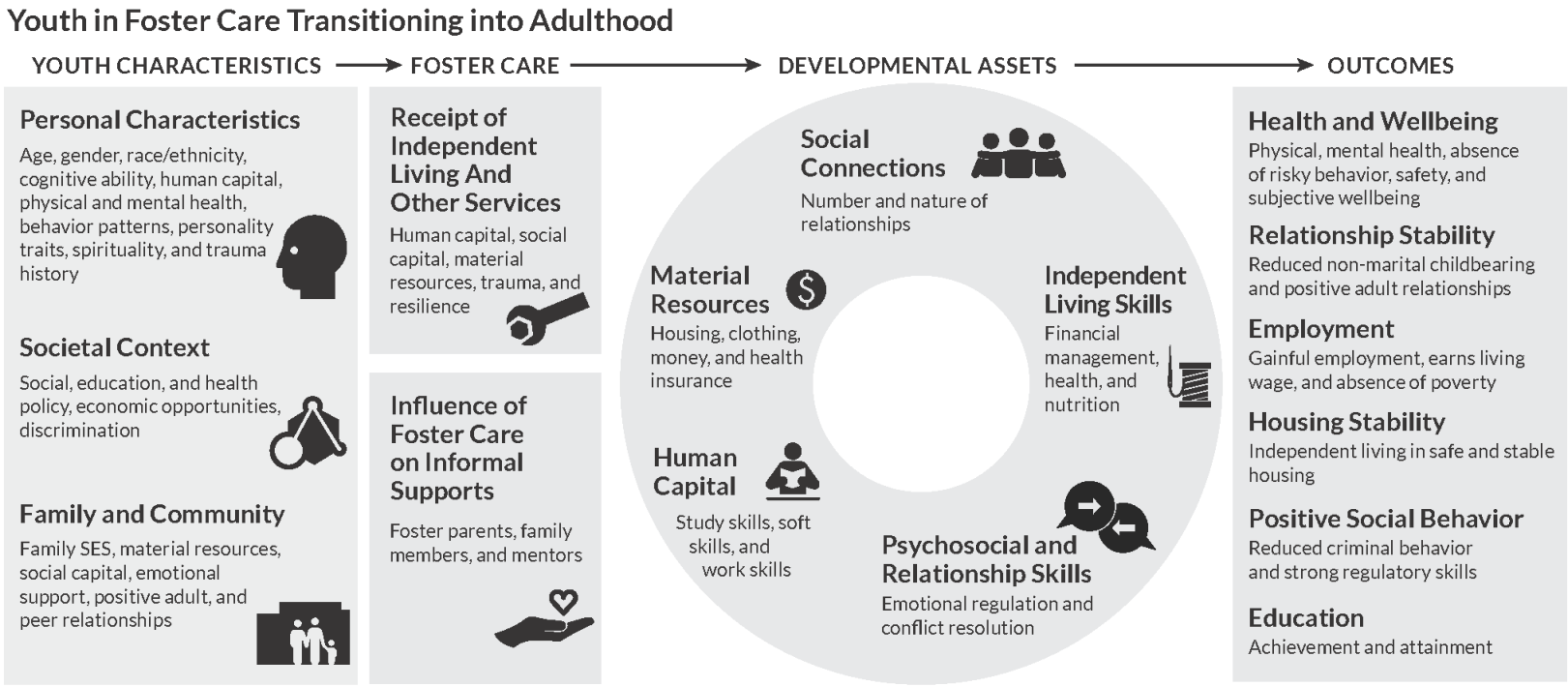
Transitioning to adulthood involves navigating a range of experiences throughout one's late teens and twenties that can, under the best circumstances, promote increasing independence and stability. A sense of independence comes from having the financial means to live a healthy life as well as relational affiliations created through intimate partners, a supportive peer group, family formation, and other communities a young person might belong to. In many cases, family circumstances provide some degrees of support in emotional and material ways; if not money, then resourcefulness in meeting material needs. For other young people, their family circumstances cannot provide concrete or emotional supports, or the circumstances create trauma that compromises their chances of reaching financial and relational stability or satisfaction in adulthood.

Regardless of their circumstances, all young people bring their own skills, interests, motivations, and challenges to the transition to adulthood. Young people with histories of child welfare involvement experience the same variation in developmental contexts as their peers without child welfare system experience, although the majority reach an immediate need for financial independence early in the transition to adulthood (Berzin et. al 2011; Dworsky et al. 2013; Dworsky and Gitlow 2017; Havlicek et al. 2013; Keller et al. 2010; Pecora et al. 2006) while also having experienced trauma (Havlicek et al. 2013; Keller et al. 2010; Pecora et al. 2006). Figure 1 highlights how young people's characteristics and social contexts (including child welfare system experience) can influence the developmental assets central to transitioning to a stable and satisfying adult life (McDaniel et al. 2014).

Paid employment is a common experience in the transition to adulthood. It is also a key path for developing financial and relational independence. Wages and other material resources are the result of paid work, and paid work environments are contexts in which young people can build on developmental assets.

FIGURE 1

The Role of Developmental Assets in the Transition to Adulthood for Young People with Histories of Foster Care



Source: Marla McDaniel, Mark E. Courtney, Michael R. Pergamit, and Christopher Lowenstein, *Preparing for a "Next Generation" Evaluation of Independent Living Programs for Youth in Foster Care: Project Overview* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2014), https://www.urban.org/research/publication/preparing-next-generation-evaluation-independent-living-programs-youth-foster-care.

Note: Family SES = family socioeconomic status.

Employment provides the worker with human capital, which serves as a foundation for accessing other employment that requires prior employment experience or hard skills (e.g., computer skills) and soft skills (e.g., punctuality and reliability) developed through employment. The people in the work context also offer increased social connections and the possibility for developing deeper relationships that not only allow a young person to develop stronger psychosocial and relational skills, but also serve as informal sources of information about important independent living skills (e.g., how to open a bank account). These developmental assets, which are built and strengthened in an employment setting, in theory, can not only improve adult employment outcomes for young people, but also increase the practice of health and wellness, positive social behaviors, relationship stability, housing stability, and educational outcomes.

At the same time, research shows that young people with histories of child welfare involvement work less often and earn lower wages during the transition to adulthood than their peers without this experience (Courtney et al. 2001; Dworsky 2005; Goerge et al. 2002; Hook and Courtney 2011). However, little is known about whether programs that aim to improve employment outcomes for young people with histories of child welfare system involvement are actually improving employment outcomes. A key finding from the Multi-Site Evaluation of Foster Youth Programs is that many programs serving Chafee-eligible young people[1] are not ready for rigorous evaluation because they lack a clearly articulated logic model or are not implemented as intended (Courtney et al. 2011).[2] To address some challenges to rigorous impact evaluations of programs, we conducted formative evaluations for two employment programs—MY TIME in Chicago, Illinois, and iFoster Jobs in Los Angeles, California. Each program had a model of potential national interest and served enough young people so they might be well-suited for future rigorous impact studies. Although neither program was determined ready for rigorous impact evaluation in its current state, findings highlighted that each program played a different role in the employment program landscape. These programs differed in their employment-related goals and the young people they served, and thus served different roles in their participants' development (Lansing et al. 2021). Together, these formative evaluations highlight the importance of building a better understanding of the variations in programs serving young people with histories of child welfare system involvement. This study aims to expand our understanding of what these variations in employment programs are and how they bolster different developmental assets for young people.

This study is not meant to represent the full range of employment programs. Rather it points to key considerations for future research, development, and implementation of employment programs,

[1] In 1999, the Foster Care Independence Act amended Title IV-E of the Social Security Act to create the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (the Chafee program), the primary source of federal funding for services to support young people in foster care during their transition to adulthood. The Family First Prevention Services Act renamed the program in 2018; it is now the Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood. In 2008, a provision in the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act gave states an option to extend eligibility for Title IV-E foster care for young people ages 18 to 21. In states that chose to extend care to age 21, employment is one of the eligibility criteria for young people to remain in care after age 18: by working at least 80 hours a month or participating in a program that prepares them for employment. Other criteria to remain in care after age 18 include working toward a secondary degree or the equivalent, being enrolled in a postsecondary institution or vocational education program, participating in a program or activity designed to promote or remove barriers to employment, or being incapable of fulfilling any of the criteria because of a medical condition.

[2] The Multi-Site Evaluation of Foster Youth Programs included rigorous impact of evaluations of four programs serving young people transitioning out of foster care.

addressing a gap in understanding about the variation in employment programs and highlighting some important policy and practice implications about these programs. This brief describes three employment programs' key components and strategies and presents visualized snapshots that distill the components and strategies into a developmental asset framework.[3] These high-level program snapshots show not only how their components and strategies relate to different developmental assets, but also highlight how they relate to program goals considering the population served, program funding, and location.

In the following sections, we explain our approach and show the typology we developed. We then describe each of the three selected employment programs and present visualized snapshots of each program's components and strategies within the developmental asset framework. We then classify each of these programs using our typology and end with considerations for the fields of research, policy, program development, and implementation.

Approach

We started with a national scan[4] of programs that aimed to help young people with histories of child welfare involvement prepare for, connect to, and succeed in employment, which yielded 39 programs. As we systemically categorized this information into program size, setting, components, goals, and criteria for participation, we identified the key defining characteristic for each program and developed definitions for those characteristics (appendix A). We made initial outreach calls to 16 programs to gather additional information and gauge each program's desire to participate in the research, which would involve connecting researchers to their staff, partners, participants, and alumni.

Based on the program scan and follow-up phone discussions, we developed an initial typology of employment programs serving young people with child welfare involvement. We then developed criteria for selecting programs for in-depth investigation that leveraged the variation across program types, a central tenet for comparative qualitative inquiry (Miles and Huberman 1994). We purposefully selected three programs to participate in virtual site visits because they offered variation across the dimensions we identified: they had different key defining characteristics, served different populations, had different funding mechanisms, and varied based on geographic location.

In what follows, we present our typology for employment programs serving young people with foster care experience. We then provide snapshots of the three programs. However, our analysis of these three programs is not designed to represent all components and strategies used by employment programs, nor is it an evaluation or implementation study of each program. It also does not include rich descriptions of the programs or directly include the voices of those we talked with. That work is left to the future.

[3] In this study, we used the developmental assets from McDaniels and colleagues (2014). Additional research exploring these and more developmental assets is warranted.

[4] We searched and reviewed publicly available program information from the internet, prior research, and professional colleagues.

Creating a Typology

This study was grounded in the idea that to help employment programs and the young people they serve succeed in reaching their goals, it is important to understand better how these programs differ based on who they serve, their service delivery methods, and goals by which they assess success (Lansing et al. 2021). The employment programs in our national scan all included (1) trainings that prepare young people to connect to and succeed in employment and (2) strategies for supporting young people in connecting to employment opportunities. However, the content, structure, and depth of training varies, as do strategies for engaging young people in training and other program components.

Our approach to site visits, coding, analysis, and interpretation was grounded in themes related to program components, strategies, goals, population served, funding mechanisms, and setting. We also identified whether and how program components and strategies related to each developmental asset. Before finalizing program snapshots, we shared them with programs and incorporated their feedback. More details about our methods can be found in appendix C. Appendix D summarizes our respondent pool. Our comparative qualitative approach to creating these snapshots allows us to identify high-level similarities and differences across how these programs operate and how those relate to different developmental assets for young people transitioning to a stable and satisfying adulthood. Insights from these three programs allowed us to refine our typology.

Through our analysis of the three programs included in our virtual site visits, as well as our prior formative evaluation work with iFoster Jobs and MY TIME, we developed a clearer understanding of the roles that a program's forms (or setting) and functions play in how employment programs serve young people at different stages in their transition to adulthood. We revisited our list of defining characteristics (appendix A) and (1) separated categories based on whether they indicated a program's form or function; then (2) more clearly articulated category definitions, creating new categories as distinctions were discovered in our comparative analyses (tables 1 and 2). Although each form and function is distinct, programs may have multiple forms and functions.

TABLE 1

Employment Program Form Categories and Definitions

Form category	Definition
Child welfare or other state or local agency	Employment programming is run through one or more departments in a child welfare agency or other local or state agency.
Community-based program	Employment programming is a standalone program in the community.
Multiservice agency	Employment programming is one of any number of other programming provided by the agency, either as a standalone program or integrated in other programming.
Residential	Employment programming takes place in the context of a youth housing program.
Social enterprise	Employment programming is centered in a social enterprise business site.
Summer jobs	Employment program offerings are exclusively short-term summer jobs.
Supportive internship site	Employment programming takes place in the context of time-limited internships with supportive supervision.

Source: Urban Institute national scan of employment programs.

TABLE 2

Employment Program Function Categories and Definitions

Function category	Definitions
Career exploration	Trainings and connections to employment opportunities are tailored to helping young people gain experience in a chosen professional field.
Early work experiences	Trainings and supporting connections are focused on exposing young people to the world of work through entry-level employment opportunities.
Gatekeeping	Trainings and connections to employment are focused on preparing young people and prioritizing their access to positions with employer partners. Gatekeeping requires up-front screening or review of qualifications before access to employer partner (like a staffing agency).
Mentoring or supportive adult connection	Trainings and connections to employment center on the development of a trusting relationship with a supportive adult who provides ongoing support and helps the young person navigate employment and life.
Training and certification in specific occupational field	Helps young people build industry-specific skills through training and/or work experience and offers entry-level certification in the field.

Source: Urban Institute national scan of employment programs.

Program Snapshots

Each program snapshot includes a brief program description and a visual representation of how its key components and related strategies are associated with different developmental assets. The program description is not exhaustive, given the limitations of our data collection and the scope of this brief.

Centered in each visual representation is the program's goals. The surrounding circles represent each developmental asset we explored. The order of the developmental assets is not meaningful for the purposes of this representation. Key program components relevant to the developmental asset are listed within the developmental asset circle. There is no meaning to the order in which these are listed. Key program strategies related to each component are represented by colored dots. We also list other key factors that influence program design and implementation, such as participant age range, number of young people served annually, local context, and funding sources at the bottom of the figure.

These snapshots are intended to allow for easy comparison across different elements of these employment programs and highlight the different ways in which these programs address developmental assets so they support overall program goals.

The Bike Union Mentorship Project (Bike Union)

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Bike Union is a café and bike shop microsocial enterprise[5] in Omaha, Nebraska. The program employs about five young people at any given time, all of whom have histories of foster care system involvement and some of whom have experienced significant trauma. The program is relationship driven and tailored to each participant. The young people learn basic barista skills, shop operations, and customer service skills

[5] We use the term microsocial enterprise to refer to a program serving very few (micro) young people in a work setting that uses profits from the business to support the program (social enterprise).

by staffing the café and bike shop for at least four shifts a week. In addition to on-site employment, the Bike Union provides one shift of paid programming each week, including mindfulness meditation, nutrition classes, and a financial literacy program, all of which can be tailored to the needs and interests of the small group of participants. Programming is provided by community partners selected for their expertise and authentic engagement styles. The program also offers academic tutoring according to young people's needs and interest in pursuing educational support. The Bike Union has private space for programming and for participants to relax and engage with each other informally. Bike Union permanent staff help participants identify and address individual needs, overcome barriers to positive development, and support participants' engagement and development in their areas of interest. The low ratio of permanent staff to participants allows young people to make relatively deep connections with staff compared with other programs, as they spend many hours a week working closely alongside permanent staff who intentionally relate to them with openness and respect. The program also emphasizes developing a sense of community among participants and permanent staff and has close ties to other service providers so they can offer warm handoffs as needed for other supports. Participants typically stay in the program for about a year, and their formal connection with the program ends when the participant has secured future employment. Transitions out of the program are often gradual and planned around individual needs. After young people separate from the program, they often maintain social ties to it.

RECRUITMENT AND ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

The Bike Union recruits young people through word of mouth, case managers from Bridge to Independence[6] and other programs, community sources, and social media when a position is available. Young people must be at least 16 years old to participate[7] and have a history of child welfare involvement. They are selected in an interview process that chooses young people seeking to improve their circumstances as well as a good personality fit with the culture of openness and program involvement in the young person's life at the Bike Union.

GOALS AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES IN ACTION

The Bike Union sees supporting participants' healthy psychological, social, and physical development as essential to their workforce development goals. Staff recognize the importance of building trusting and authentic relationships with participants through ongoing informal conversations in the workplace, being consistent and available, and sharing their own experiences. Critically, the program is flexible and allows young people to articulate their goals as they build relationships with permanent staff. Staff respond to that information by offering skill-building opportunities and connections to material resources.

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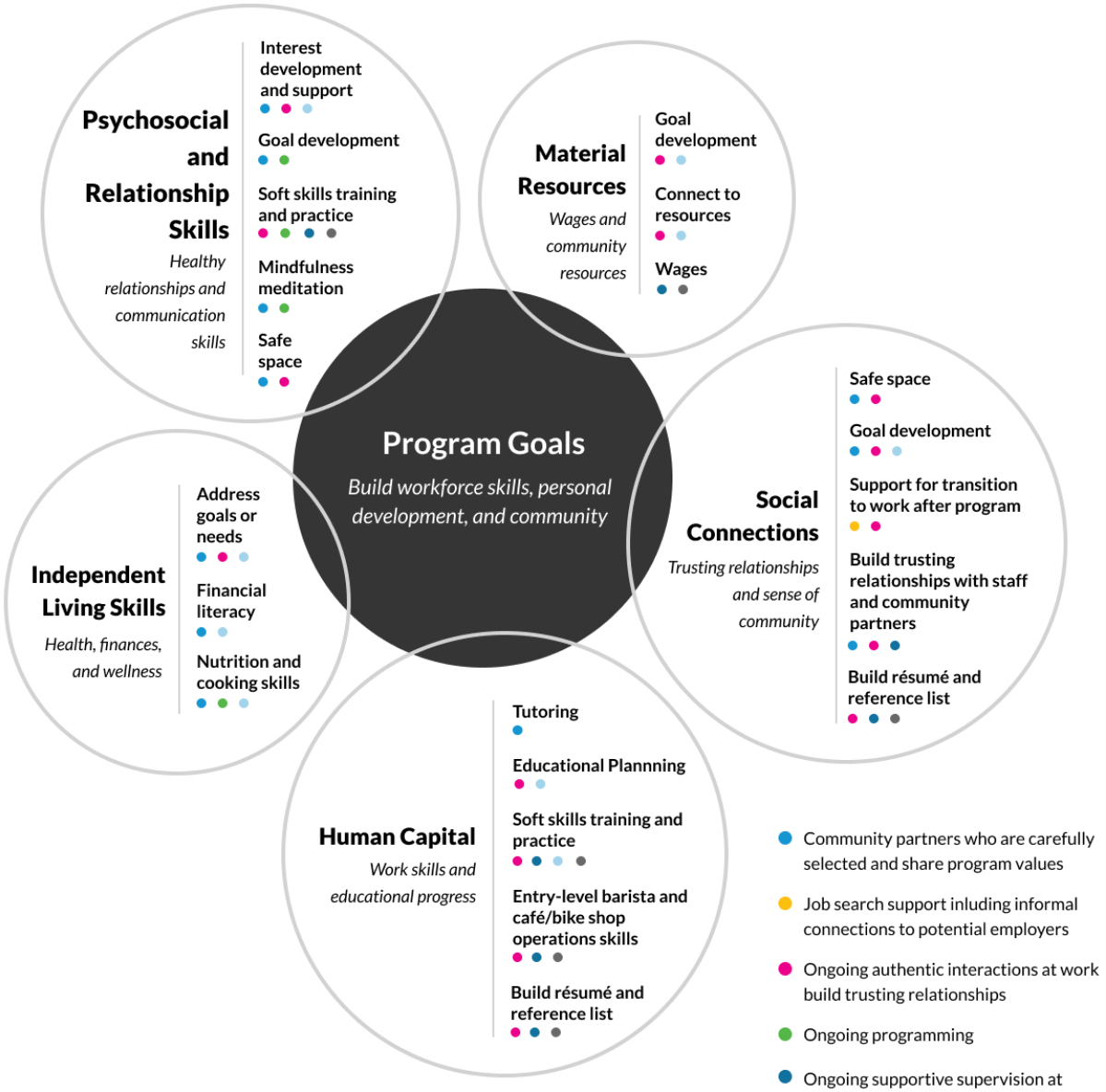
[6] During the 2013 Nebraska Legislative Session, the Young Adult Bridge to Independence Act became state law. This act created the Bridge to Independence (B2I) program, which extends services and support to young people aging out of foster care until they turn 21. This act also provides extended adoption or guardianship subsidies for young people who were adopted or entered into a guardianship at age 16 or older.

[7] The program prefers young people ages 19 and older because that is when young people age out of the foster care system and have more agency in decisionmaking. The program would still work with young people older than age 26 if they were a good fit for the program.

FIGURE 2

Bike Union Components and Strategies Associated with Development Assets



Participants: Ages 17+; histories of or current child welfare involvement

Number of young people served annually: ~5

Context: Strong community connections and organizational partnerships in Omaha, Nebraska

Funding: Social enterprise profits; philanthropy

Source: Urban Institute Bike Union virtual site visits.

Find Your Future

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Find Your Future, located in Chicago, Illinois, connects young people throughout Illinois who are currently or were formerly involved with the Illinois Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS) and who are current college students to subsidized summer internships aligned with their areas of study. DCFS contracts with Find Your Future to serve about 25 summer interns each year. The program is housed within Kaleidoscope, an organization whose mission is to help children, young people, and families build resilience, resourcefulness, and supportive relationships. Find Your Future prepares young people for their ten-week internships by orienting them to professional expectations and skills in trainings that take place during Workshop Week, a series of daylong, in-person trainings. Training activities involve learning and practicing social and dining etiquette, building financial knowledge, writing résumés, conducting mock interviews, and preparing students to engage with their future work placements in a proactive manner. The program seeks employer partners based on participants' interests and has built a robust network of employer partners who provide meaningful summer employment opportunities. Many employer partners in Chicago are organizations accustomed to providing summer internship opportunities to college students. In geographic areas or young people's areas of interest without existing employer partners, the subsidy coupled with the program staff's description of the program and the young people they serve help entice new employer partners to participate. Employer partners are expected to create compassionate environments and provide meaningful work experiences so interns get an opportunity to learn and grow in their chosen field. The program coordinator checks in regularly with young people and their supervisors throughout the summer.[8]

RECRUITMENT AND ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

DCFS provides Find Your Future with a list of young people in care who are college students or those who were in DCFS's care and are now receiving a DCFS college scholarship. Find Your Future's program coordinator also emails case managers in her professional network to identify eligible young people. Find Your Future requires a simple application and behavioral interview,[9] allowing the program to select young people with strong social and self-presentation skills and enthusiasm for a summer internship opportunity. Participants must be enrolled full time in a four-year college and have a GPA of at least 2.0. DCFS requires that 20 percent of each summer's interns be currently in care.

GOALS AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES IN ACTION

Find Your Future aims to help participants develop career goals and build their professional networks through summer internships that provide exposure to settings and work aligned with their areas of study. The program offers summer internship opportunities typical of those for other college students who may access internships through existing social and familial connections. Find Your Future helps prepare participants to succeed through training and ongoing contact with the program coordinator. The program

[8] The program coordinator conducts at least one in-person site visit to each employment site each summer. For employer partners more than two hours from Chicago, site visits are conducted virtually.

[9] Interviews are sometimes conducted by the program coordinator alone and sometimes in conjunction with the program director or community partners.

recognizes the special resilience of young people with histories of child welfare involvement and uses this in employer engagement by explaining how their participants' unique skills can benefit employers.

FIGURE 3

Find Your Future Components and Strategies Associated with Development Assets

Participants: Current child welfare system involvement or receiving college scholarship through Illinois child welfare system (20 percent of each cohort must be currently in care); full-time four-year college student (at least entering sophomore year); at least 2.0 GPA

Number of young people served annually: ~25

Context: Housed in Kaleidoscope in Chicago, Illinois; serve young people statewide

Funding: DCFS contract

Source: Urban Institute Find Your Future virtual site visits.

Works Wonders®

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Works Wonders is an employment program in East Providence, Rhode Island, for young people with histories of child welfare system involvement. The program's model and curriculum were originally developed with input from young people with system involvement through research funded by the Children's Bureau. Works Wonders is housed within the larger organization Foster Forward, which runs other youth-supporting programs and is connected to a network of statewide agencies and funding streams. Each Works Wonders participant group starts with a weeklong paid employment preparation training cofacilitated by an employment specialist and a program alum. The training focuses on developing relational competencies including conflict resolution, communication, and self-advocacy skills as well as helping participants explore what is possible in their futures. Trainings are generally offered monthly. After training, each young person works individually with an employment specialist for 12 weeks to continue building relational competencies and identify their goals and needs. The employment specialist then connects the young person to educational or employment experiences based on their goals. Employment specialists identify employer partners who are willing to provide any of the following experiences: full- and part-time employment, informational interviews, job shadowing, short- and long-term internships (subsidized and unsubsidized), or additional education or training. Foster Forward has in-house GED training and testing, facilitating success in that program. The employment specialist and participants check in during employment or educational experiences and discuss the participant's progress toward their goals. The program also has barrier assistance funds to help with transportation or other needs and a common area for young people to hang out informally and get to know other participants and staff. Young people can stay in the program for up to a year, although many disengage and reengage through that time.

RECRUITMENT AND ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Works Wonders recruits young people through Foster Forward's extensive connections with the child welfare system, the housing and homelessness system, other service providers, and through other Foster Forward programs. Works Wonders serves young people ages 14 to 26[10] with histories of child welfare system involvement. Works Wonders ensures potential participants understand what the program is and that their participation is completely voluntary.

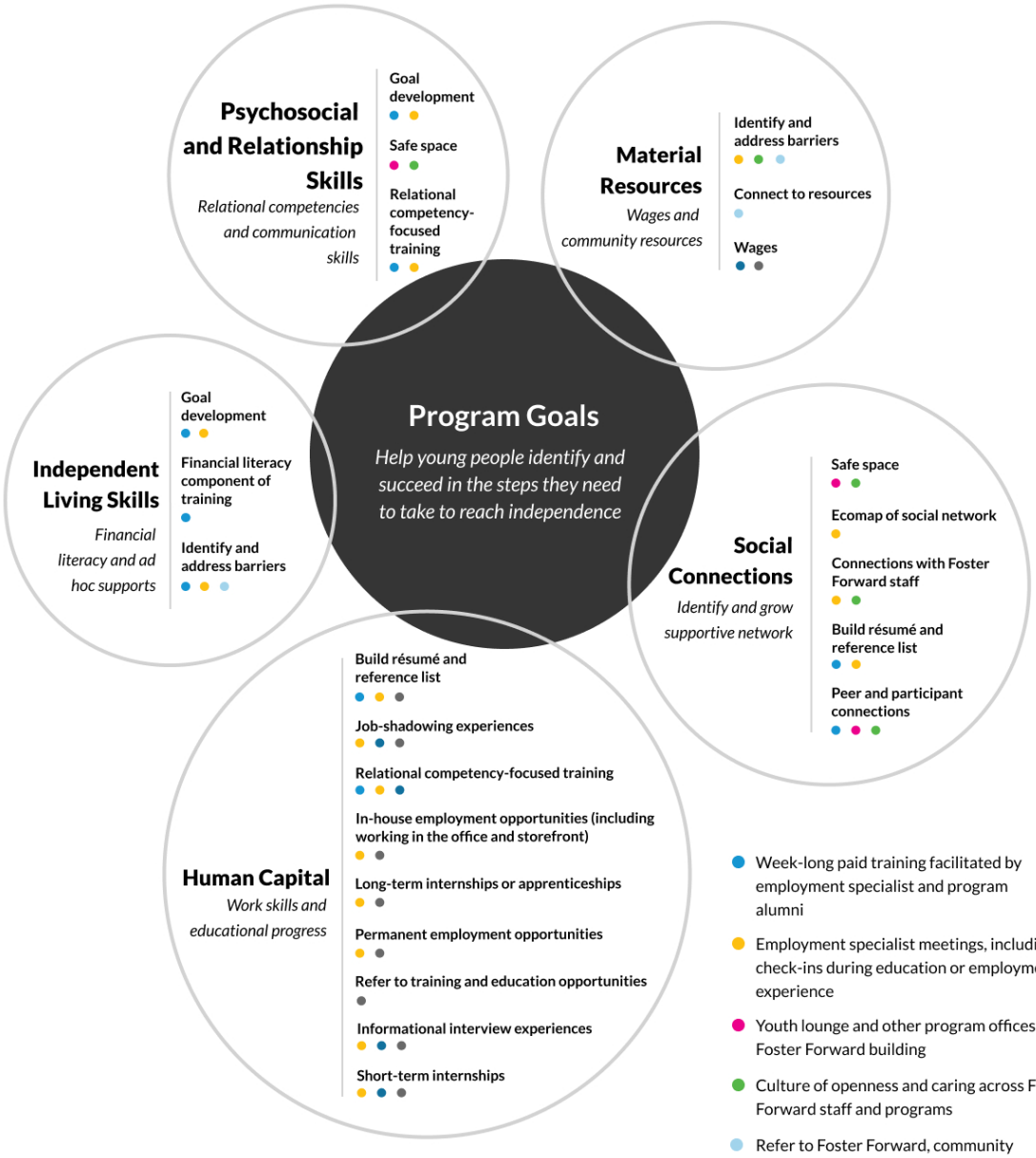
GOALS AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES IN ACTION

By helping participants develop relational competencies, Works Wonders prepares them to succeed in ongoing engagement with their employment specialist and their work or education experience. The program offers many different work experiences, allowing young people to explore various work settings and transition across different experiences as they continue developing their goals and skills. Works Wonders aims to be an open space for young people to learn about themselves, reach their goals, and build relationships with their peers and staff. The program has a culture of openness, making it easy for participants to feel comfortable going to various staff with questions and needs.

[10] Few participants are younger than age 16.

FIGURE 4

Works Wonders Components and Strategies Associated with Development Assets



Participants: Ages 14 to 26 (most 16 and older); histories of or current child welfare involvement

Number of young people served annually: ~100

Context: Housed in Foster Forward in East Providence, Rhode Island

Funding: WIOA; state workforce development funding; philanthropy; SNAP education and training

Source: Urban Institute Works Wonders virtual site visits.

Using the Typology to Classify the Programs

Organizing the three programs in our study by both the forms they take and functions they serve raises considerations about whether there are patterns in how employment programs function in different forms. As table 3 shows, the Bike Union takes a social enterprise form, which provides a community-like context in which to engage in ongoing workplace interactions and programming that allow for authentic relationships with the supportive adults running the program to develop organically. Not only does the Bike Union provide early work experiences for participants, but their size, length of programming, and staff engagement practices allow it to serve a mentoring function for participants. Summer jobs using supportive internship sites, like Find Your Future, can be a good choice for programs aiming to help young people explore what a chosen profession is like in a real setting. These programs must also serve a gatekeeping function to maintain relationships with employer partners who provide supportive internships. Multiservice agencies, like the one housing Works Wonders, provide employment programs with funding and additional programming options that allow for flexibility in serving a range of employment goals for young people at different stages of development. Supported by a range of ways to address barriers to success and access to different types of workforce development experiences, employment programs within strong multiservice agencies can take a case management approach to matching young people with education and employment opportunities aligned with their goals while tapping into agency resources and relationships that address each young person's needs.

TABLE 3

Site Visit Programs by Form and Function Type

Program	Form(s)	Function(s)
Bike Union	Social enterprise	Mentoring or supportive adult connection, early work experiences
Find Your Future	Summer jobs, supportive internship site	Gatekeeping, career exploration
Works Wonders	Multiservice agency	Early work experiences, career exploration

Source: Urban Institute virtual site visits.

Because our site visits yielded much more information about each program than we would have obtained from publicly available sources, we are confident in our classifications of these programs in our form and function typology format. Additional information would need to be obtained from the employment programs identified through our national scan to accurately represent them in any typology. Future research can build on these categorizations by examining the combinations of form and function that are most likely to yield positive results for different populations of young people, identifying components and strategies most aligned with each type, and exploring how developmental assets are addressed.

Considerations

These descriptive and visual snapshots of how key components and strategies of each featured program are associated with different development assets are by no means exhaustive. Capturing the full scope of each employment program would require more in-depth analysis and rich description that brings to life the experiences of all program stakeholders, including the young people who are participating or have participated in them. Nevertheless, this work helped refine a meaningful typology for categorizing employment programs and raises considerations for researchers and policymakers as well as program developers and implementers. Key considerations are listed below.

Considerations for Future Research

- Employment programs operate in different contexts, have different program goals, and work with young people in different circumstances. As a result, it is unlikely that an impact evaluation of a single program will generate evidence that can be widely generalized to other programs. This calls for a deliberate approach to rigorous evaluation. One approach might be to select programs of the same type with similar components to test their approach. Another might be to select programs that exhibit contrasting approaches to identify common elements of programs found to be effective at achieving their goals.
- Although this work provides a starting point for exploring associations between program components, strategies, program goals, populations served, and a developmental asset framework, additional research is needed to gain a stronger understanding of these associations. Research approaches that are qualitative in nature and involve the input of people with lived experience in their design and execution may be ideal for developing rich descriptions of programs that identify these associations.
- Developing appropriate measures of developmental assets, relevant participant characteristics, the quality of program components, and effectiveness of different strategies is also important. Case studies codesigned and implemented with program stakeholders, including participants and researchers, as well as surveys developed with input from program leadership, staff, and participants could serve as a foundation for this effort.
- Greater focus on understanding the nuances of key components and strategies in employment program contexts is needed. This includes program contexts such as funding, local partnerships, and the state or local child welfare system. Mixed-methods case studies that integrate child welfare policy with analysis of state or local child welfare data, program data, and qualitative data would be appropriate.
- It is important to keep refining a typology of employment programs as we gain new insights about program components and strategies. Surveys would be an effective way to gather and analyze information across a larger number of programs to inform this effort.

- More research is needed on the developmental aspects of the transition to adulthood and the role that employment plays in it as well as how employment relates to other life domains, such as family formation, peer and intimate relationships, and education. This study highlights the relative emphasis that different employment programs place on different developmental assets and the strategies they use to promote each. Research building on this could inform not only employment programs, but also create a roadmap for child welfare professionals, allowing them to more easily tailor services to young people's development across life domains.

Considerations for Policymakers

- One program type is not right for every young person. It is important to develop and support a range of programs to match the needs of young people with different needs and at different stages of development.
- One question to consider is whether integrating the functions of employment programs in the operations of local or state child welfare systems would create economies of scale. For this to work, the system would need to be designed to address the varied employment needs and goals of young people during the transition to adulthood. Additionally, it would not benefit young people who wish to disassociate as quickly and permanently as possible from the child welfare system. Programs that are separate from the child welfare system are needed to engage those young people.
- The child welfare system needs to consider the relevance of both broader general programming and depth of engagement as young people near transitions out of care. State child welfare systems are grappling with these challenges as they use federal Chafee funds to extend the provision of transition services to age 23 (Brewsaugh et al. 2021). Additional research can inform the development of assessments and trainings for staff so they can introduce young people to the programming that will best set them up for success after they transition out of the system.

Considerations for Program Developers

- All programs in this study include young people with lived child welfare experience in the development of programming and/or create feedback loops for input from young people they serve about their experiences and how things might be improved. This is essential to building programs that are relevant and of interest to the young people served. All program developers should consider ways to include the input of young people with child welfare experience and embed feedback mechanisms in the program's structure to ensure that the experiences of young people participating in the program include safe ways to share ideas for improvement and identify the components and strategies most relevant to their engagement and success.
- Developers should consider involving research partners in the development and early implementation of new programs (and young people with lived child welfare system experience

in the development and implementation of research). Researchers have expertise in the following:

  - Knowledge about human development and the transition to adulthood that can help a program to develop and employ strong theories of change and logic models. These help programs identify and articulate how what they are doing should influence different outcomes.
  - Research methods, data collection needs, and systems for collecting and using data. This can help programs identify what types of data will best inform what is driving program success.

- The up-front cost of working with professionals with expertise can provide cost savings and fundraising opportunities down the road when the need arises to use data to show what the program is doing and how well it is working.
- Consider what is needed to select, train, oversee, and support program staff who are often the key to youth engagement and program success. Codify the training process to drive fidelity to the program model, promote staff longevity, and lessen the negative impacts of staff turnover when it happens.
- Program size matters and bigger may not always be better. Program size can influence both components and strategies for different types of programs. Seek out funding sources that are supportive of micro-, small-, or medium-sized programs as well as large programs.
- Work with young people to determine what they believe the program goals and their employment goals are and how they might frame barriers to achieving those goals or participation in stable employment. Think through ways to frame program goals in ways that align with what the participants view as success.

Considerations for Program Implementers

- How a program implements its components can make all the difference in a program's success at engaging young people and helping them succeed. Programs should be intentional about identifying the staff characteristics and engagement strategies that work, documenting youth engagement in program components, and codifying best practices for participant engagement. This may require technical assistance from experts.
- Programs need to ensure staff have the skills and resources to successful in their efforts. Structure staff supervision so it is most beneficial to staff and program operations (group or individual), help staff identify areas for their own professional development, and offer professional development opportunities. Put appropriate resources into the selection, training, oversight, and support of program staff.
- Develop internal systems for quality improvement, including feedback loops from participants. This may require technical assistance from experts.

Final Thought

Although this study does not examine program outcomes, a highlight from all our virtual site visits was the level of caring and commitment from each program's leadership and staff and how meaningful program engagement was for all the young people participating. A note to program staff: continue caring deeply about the work you do. Even if you do not always get the gratification of seeing end results of your efforts with your participants, you make a significant difference in their transition to adulthood, and that matters.

Appendix A

TABLE A.1

List of Key Defining Characteristics for Employment Programs

Key defining characteristic	Description
Career exploration or learning about the world of work	Key component is exploration of interests and career pathways and exposure to early work experiences as a way of helping to define self-knowledge and knowledge of the world of work. May include workshops, coaching, and leadership training. Some may be "light touch" and others more intensive.
Gatekeeping	Key component is access to employer partner positions. Requires up-front screening or review of qualifications before access to employer partner (like a staffing agency). May include training and other supports.
Internship or supportive work experience	Key component is supportive work experience that may or may not be paid. May include training, job shadowing, and other supports.
Mentoring or supportive adult connection	Key component is building relationship with mentor or supportive adult to assist in goal development, job search, and support during employment. May include trainings and other supports.
Multiservice agency	Employment preparation and job search is part of a suite of programming focused on life skill development. Case management is a key component.
Residential	Employment programming is a strong focus of a residential program.
Social enterprise or youth-run business	Key component is access to specific social enterprise or youth-run work site for all participants, includes ongoing hard and soft-skill training. May include additional training, supports, and mentoring.
Summer jobs	Key component is summer employment placement. May include training, mentoring, and additional supports.
Training and certification in specific occupational field	Key component is focus on specific career field with training, work experience, and entry-level certification. May include additional training in soft skills, financial literacy, etc. May include mentoring and job shadowing.

Source: Urban Institute national scan of employment programs.

Appendix B

TABLE B.1

Programs from National Scan

Program name	Program location	Publicly available information	Exploratory interview	Prior formative evaluation	Site visits
Academy at the Door	New York, NY	X			
Added Chance	Chicago, IL		X		
All Stars Internship Program by FosterClub	Multiple cities in multiple states	X			
Bike Union Mentoring Project Apprenticeship Program	Omaha, NE				X
Carolina Youth Development Center	Charleston, SC	X			
Chelsea Foyer	New York, NY		X		
Children's Home + Aid "Adult Connections"	Chicago, IL	X			
Community Build, Inc.	CA—multiple locations	X			
Conservationcorps	Multiple cities nationwide	X			
DCF Work to Learn Program	Hartford and New Haven, CT	X			
Detroit Workforce Development, Southeast Michigan Community Alliance/Employment, and Training Designs (SEMCA Youth Program)	Detroit, MI		X		
Find Your Future	IL—statewide				X
Foster Care Summer Employment Program by Westchester-Putnam Career Center Network	Westchester-Putnam County, NY	X			
Fostering Success	KY—statewide		X		
Fresh Chef's Society Apprentice Program	Austin, TX		X		
GROW Oakland	Oakland, CA	X			
Houston Alumni and Youth (HAY) Center	Houston, TX	X			
iFoster Jobs	Los Angeles County, CA			X	
Job Training and Pet Adoptions Program by Campus Crossroads	Nashville, TN	X			
Juma	Multiple cities nationwide	X			
Keys to Success by Arizona Friends of Foster Children Foundation	Phoenix, AZ		X		

Program name	Program location	Publicly available information	Exploratory interview	Prior formative evaluation	Site visits
The Monkey and The Elephant Employment Program	Philadelphia, PA		X		
More Than Words	Boston, MA		X		
MY TIME	Chicago, IL			X	
New Beginnings Fellowship Program/Beyond Emancipation	Alameda County, CA	X			
New Door Ventures	San Francisco, CA	X			
Project Launch by Kitchen for Good	San Diego, CA	X			
Sonoma County Youth Ecology Corps	Sonoma County, CA	X			
Summer Career Exploration Program	Philadelphia, PA		X		
Supported Training and Employment Program (STEP)	San Mateo, CA		X		
Teen Force Foster Youth STEM Program	Silicon Valley, CA	X			
TeenWork Internship Program, Georgia Division of Family Services	GA—statewide	X			
Transform Milwaukee Jobs	Milwaukee, WI		X		
Up4Youth	Los Angeles, CA		X		
Wahsoe Youth Build at The Independent Living Program (ILP) by The Children's Cabinet	Reno, NV	X			
Workforce Development: Stepping Stones	San Francisco, CA	X			
Works Wonders Initiative by Foster Forward	East Providence, RI				X
Youth Opportunity Program by State of California Employment Development Office	CA—statewide	X			
YouthForce Career Internship Program (CIP) by YouthForce and TeamWork Internship Program by YouthForce	Seattle, WA		X		

Source: Urban Institute national scan of employment programs.

Appendix C. Site Visit, Coding, and Analysis Methods

We conducted interviews and focus groups across all three programs. We held one-hour interviews with program leadership, program staff, community partners, employer partners, and young people who participated in the program. We held one-and-a-half-hour focus groups with groups of three-to-five young people who were either current participants or program alumni. We were connected to everyone not on staff (i.e., community partners, employer partners, current program participants, and alumni) through program staff, who identified the appropriate people to speak with. We made four efforts to reach potential respondents and then stopped. If we needed an additional respondent from that program, we would work with program staff to find another contact.

The coding framework was formulated to capture the major aspects of programs such as program components, program employer and community partners, program goals, program values, and program context. It also was based on a developmental assets framework, which outlines youth characteristics, aspects of foster care, the developmental assets that employment opportunities can bring (social connections, materials resources, human capital, psychosocial and relationship skills, and independent living skills), and the outcomes that can be gained with employment (McDaniel et al. 2014). The coding scheme aimed to identify how programs approached the developmental assets as well as barriers young participants faced. Additional codes were added as new themes emerged in the data.

Coding was approached in an iterative fashion with each team member coding the same transcripts and meeting to compare coding so a common understanding of the coding scheme could be achieved. Coding reviews continued throughout the process with team members meeting to discuss any coding challenges or come to consensus on discrepancies.

Qualitative data analysis focused on (1) identifying and describing key program components and strategies and other essential elements, such as participant characteristics, and (2) exploring how program components and strategies related to the program goals, population served, and overall context. Through this process, the team first pulled quotations from transcripts that described program components, strategies, goals, participant characteristics, and program context. Once these elements were identified, the team mapped the components and strategies to the specific developmental assets they were addressing. The team then developed a visual representation that distilled key components and strategies within the developmental framework, highlighting similarities and differences in components and strategies as well as the differential developmental asset foci of the different programs.

Appendix D. Site Visit Respondent Pool

TABLE D.1

Site Visit Respondent Pool, by Program

Program	Respondent type	Totals
The Bike Union	Leadership	1
	Staff	2
	Partners	5
	Participants or alumni	4
Bike Union total number of respondents		12
Find Your Future	Leadership	1
	Staff	1
	DCFS monitor	1
	Community partners	2
	Employer partners	5
	Participants or alumni	5
Find Your Future total number of respondents		15
Works Wonders	Executive	3
	Staff	4
	Employment experience partners	2
	Alumni	3
Works Wonders total number of respondents		12
Total Number of Respondents		39

Source: Urban Institute virtual site visits.

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Acknowledgments

This brief was funded by Administration for Children and Families's Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation. We are grateful to them and to all our funders, who make it possible for Urban to advance its mission.

The views expressed are those of the authors and should not be attributed to the Urban Institute, its trustees, or its funders. Funders do not determine research findings or the insights and recommendations of Urban experts. Further information on the Urban Institute's funding principles is available at urban.org/fundingprinciples.

The authors also wish to thank the leadership and staff of the Bike Union, Find Your Future, and Works Wonders for facilitating our evaluation activities as well as each program's partners, participants, and alumni who took the time to share their experiences and insights through interviews and focus groups.

SUBMITTED TO

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Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation
Administration for Children and Families
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Contract Number: HHSP23320095654WC

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