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Research Brief

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Supporting Reentry Employment and Success: A Summary of the Evidence for Adults and Young Adults

Employment is a potential source of stability and opportunity for Americans trying to better their lives after involvement with the criminal justice system. The path to employment can be difficult for this population, however, and the challenges differ depending on age. Adults often enter the justice system with barriers to employment and struggle to reconnect to the labor market after their release from incarceration, due to such factors as limited basic skills and soft skills, employers' reluctance to hire people with criminal records, and difficulty retaining stable employment because of unstable housing, lack of adequate transportation, or mental health problems. Young adults (ages 18 to 24) are developmentally different from adults; therefore, programs that improve outcomes for adults may need to be tailored to address the specific needs of young adults before they show similar results. Disruptions in education due to court involvement early in the lives of young adults can derail future employment opportunities, without appropriate interventions. Both populations need support in connecting to employment after justice system involvement. This issue brief maps the evidence and remaining gaps in the knowledge base on interventions for these groups ahead of a national evaluation of employment-focused reentry programs serving justice-involved adults and young adults.

Key Findings

This brief reviews research on employment, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), and case management models for justice-involved adults and young adults and finds:

- Most prior studies of adult employment reentry programs do not consistently show effects due to variation in program models, implementation quality, and study designs.
- Reentry programs specifically tailored to young adults often include job training or employment support, but evidence of employment impacts is limited.
- CBT interventions reduce recidivism for justice-involved adults, but impacts on young adults and on employment outcomes are unknown.
- The ongoing REO evaluation (2017-2022) has the potential to provide evidence on strategies to reduce recidivism and increase employment for justice-involved individuals.

Reentry Employment Opportunities Evaluation

Under contract from DOL, Mathematica Policy Research and Social Policy Research Associates (SPR) are conducting an evaluation of the REO grant program. The implementation and impact studies aim to build evidence about effective strategies to serve people with prior justice involvement and facilitate their successful reentry into the community.

Reentry Employment Opportunities grants and evaluation

For more than a decade, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) has invested in reentry services by committing substantial funding toward programs serving justice-involved young adults and adults, under a funding umbrella currently known as the Reentry Employment Opportunities (REO) program in the Employment and Training Administration. Between 2015 and 2018, DOL awarded more than $200 million in funds under three REO grant opportunities: (1) $157.4 million in Reentry Project grants, (2) $31 million in Reentry Demonstration Project grants, and (3) $21 million in Training to Work grants. This funding targets young adults (ages 18 to 24) and adults (ages 25 and over) with previous involvement in the criminal justice system. Programs funded under these grant streams serve justice-involved populations using one or more approaches for employment-focused services: registered apprenticeship, work-based learning, and career pathways. Although each of these grant programs offers different services, the overarching aim of the REO program is to improve employment outcomes and workforce readiness for the target population through employment services, case management, and other supportive services, including legal services.

REO Priority Employment Strategies

REO grantees were required to use at least one of the following employment strategies: registered apprenticeship, work-based learning, and career pathways. These strategies can be effective in helping low-income populations improve labor market outcomes, such as employment and earnings. Evidence includes quasi-experimental evaluations of registered apprenticeships, experimental evaluations of career pathways programs, and both experimental and quasi-experimental evaluations of sector strategies.[1]

About this brief

This issue brief summarizes the evidence on program models for serving justice-involved adults and young adults through connection to employment, cognitive behavioral therapy, and case management services (Figure 1). The primary evidence of the effectiveness of these models comes from a review of experimental and quasi-experimental impact evaluations. Information about factors that may contribute to the successful implementation of the models comes from a review of outcome evaluations and implementation studies. The brief closes with a summary of gaps in the knowledge base and an assessment of the potential contributions of the ongoing REO evaluation to narrowing these gaps.

Recognizing the opportunity to learn from the REO initiative investments, DOL's Chief Evaluation Office contracted with Mathematica Policy Research and Social Policy Research Associates to build evidence about what works to connect justice-involved individuals to employment in support of successful reentry. The evaluation aims to identify innovative ways to provide services that will improve labor market and criminal justice system outcomes of REO participants.

The 118 REO projects funded between 2015 and 2018 consist of 78 unique grantees; 19 were funded under more than one grant type, and 14 were funded for two projects within the same grant type. Most of these grants (88) went to community-based organizations, which are organizations with single sites or multiple sites within one state; the remaining 30 grants went to intermediary organizations, which are organizations that have an affiliate network or offices in at least three communities and across at least two states. Just over half of the grants (61) were for services

explicitly targeted to young adults aged 18–24. The grants predominately serve urban areas (105), with 1 grant serving a rural area only, and 12 grants serving a mix of urban and rural areas. Expected enrollment ranged from 72 to 705 participants, with an average enrollment expectation of 261 participants per grant across all projects. As discussed in more detail throughout the brief, many of the REO grantees plan to combine structured employment experiences—through models such as apprenticeship, work-based learning, and career pathways—with case management and supportive services to facilitate the transition to unsubsidized employment.

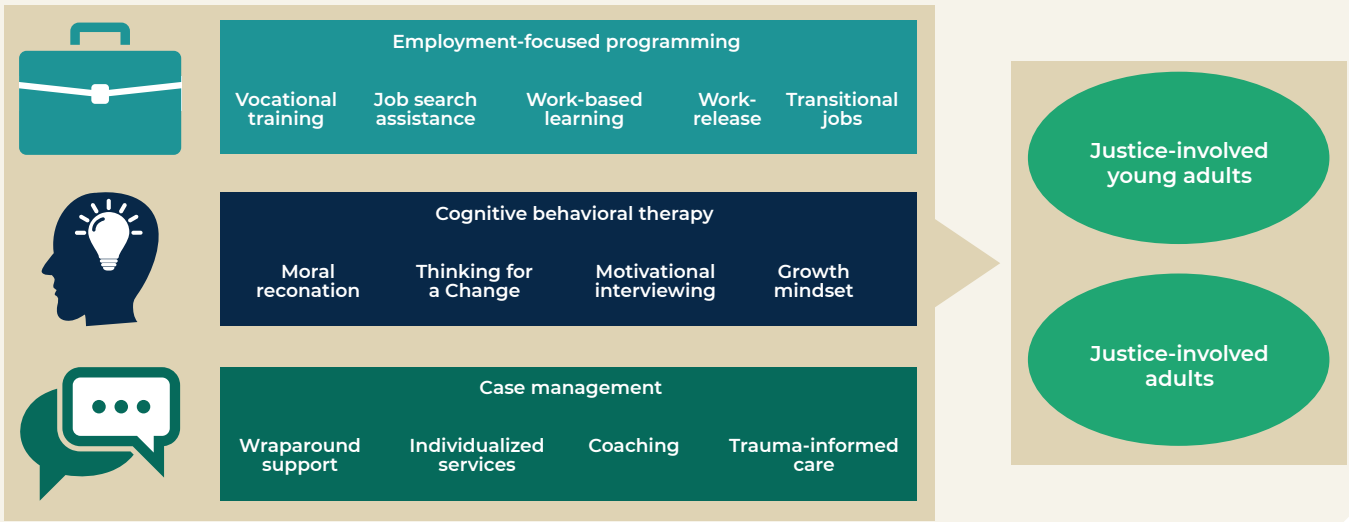
Evidence on existing program models for justice-involved adults

Employment can provide stability for people reentering society after incarceration, helping prevent criminal activity and recidivism (Crutchfield and Pitchford 1997; Uggen 1999, 2000; Laub and Sampson 2003). In the first year after release, however, just over half of people with criminal records have any reported earnings (Looney and Turner, 2018). A key goal of the REO grants is to support connection to employment for justice-involved people through evidence-based models. Most prior research on reentry employment programs focuses on models for adults, not young adults. This section reviews the evidence on the effectiveness of these employment-focused models for improving labor market outcomes and reducing recidivism among adults. It then reviews research on cognitive-behavioral therapy and wraparound services (which, although not specifically designed to improve employment outcomes, are common components of employment-focused interventions for this population).

Employment-focused programming

Employment-focused models in the existing literature include a range of interventions. Some of these approaches provide specific opportunities for employment. These approaches include **work-release**, which enables employment during incarceration, and **transitional jobs**, which provide temporary paid work experience

Figure 1: Common reentry program components for justice-involved young adults and adults



opportunities. Other approaches focus on preparing for a transition to employment. These approaches include **vocational training**, which provides training for careers in specific industries, **work readiness training**, which focuses on job search skills and appropriate behavior in the workplace, and **job search assistance**, which provides individualized support with job applications and job placement. Prior evidence exists on the effectiveness and implementation of these approaches, discussed in more detail next.

Through **work-release**, incarcerated people may work outside the facility during the day, which allows them to gain employment experience during incarceration, with the hope of easing their transition back into the community. Available evidence comes from quasi-experimental evaluations in the states where these programs have operated long enough to have stable models and enough participation for an impact evaluation: Florida (Bales et al. 2016; Berk 2007), Minnesota (Duwe 2014a, 2014b), and Washington (Drake 2003, 2007; Turner and Petersilia 1996). These studies have not included implementation evaluations; however, because these models are somewhat prescribed by federal law, the interventions under study usually shared common approaches. These approaches include targeting inmates close to release and in less restrictive prison units, housing individuals in a work release center separate from other inmates, and requiring that all nonwork hours be spent in that secure facility. To date, these quasi-experimental evaluations show improvements in post-release employment rates (when that outcome is measured) but they do not consistently point to reductions in recidivism.[2]

There is also a growing body of work on using **transitional jobs** as a post-release employment strategy (Bloom 2010; Dutta- Gupta et al. 2016), and 88 REO grantees include similar temporary, paid work experience in their program models. Implementation studies of transitional jobs reentry programs such as the **Safer Return** demonstration (Rossman and Fontaine 2015), the **Transitional Jobs Reentry Demonstration** (Redcross et al. 2010), the **Center for Employment Opportunities Transitional Jobs Program** (Broadus et al. 2016), the **Mathematica Jobs Study** (Maxwell et al. 2014), and the **Los Angeles Regional Initiative for Social Enterprise** (Geckeler et al. 2018), and the **Enhanced Transitional Jobs Demonstration** (Redcross et al. 2016) underscore the importance of effective coordination between service providers and employers, and of dedicating resources to reduce attrition and address supportive service needs. Impact studies of transitional jobs programs for reentry populations include both experimental (Barden et al. 2018; Redcross et al. 2012; Butler et al. 2012; Jacobs 2012; Cook et al. 2015; Uggen 2000) and quasi-experimental (Rotz et al. 2015; Fontaine et al. 2015) evaluations, the majority of which demonstrate fairly consistent findings. In the short term, these approaches increase employment, earnings, and well-being, and reduce recidivism.[3] In general, in most of these studies, the effects do not persist after participants complete transitional work experiences. Most recently, however, the Enhanced Transitional Jobs Demonstration (Barden et al. 2018) found increases in employment and earnings, as well as reductions in certain measures of recidivism (felony convictions, incarceration in prison, and total days of incarceration) during the final year of follow-up, and these impacts were concentrated among those at the highest risk of recidivism. Similarly, one other study found reductions in recidivism for participants over age 27 (Uggen 2000).

Vocational training allows participants to train for specific occupations and can include awarding of certificates or credentials. Meta-analyses of evaluations on these models (Davis et al. 2013; Aos et al. 2006; MacKenzie 2006) primarily focus on quasi-experimental studies of vocational training when participants are still incarcerated.[4] Some post-release models discussed in this brief (such as work readiness training and transitional jobs) also include connection to vocational training, but this usually is an optional component, and the impacts have not been studied separately from the other components of the interventions. Findings on pre-release models indicate that participating

in such programs can lead to higher rates of post-release employment (Davis et al. 2013; Lichtenberger 2007; Saylor and Gaes 1997) and lower rates of recidivism (MacKenzie 2006; Aos et al. 2006; Saylor and Gaes 1997) relative to nonparticipants, though to date, nearly all impact studies of pre-release vocational training programs have been quasi-experimental.[5] These pre-release programs, however, require significant effort to establish and maintain, including the need to adapt vocational programming to operate within the security protocols of a correctional setting and the importance of support from correctional leadership (Harer 1995).

Most of the available research on employment-focused programming is on models that offer **work readiness training** (through workshops on such topics as interview preparation, resume and cover letter creation, and appropriate workplace behavior) and/or **job search assistance** (through instruction on effective job search strategies and individualized support with job applications and job placement). Because many interventions include both approaches, these models are discussed together. Relevant research includes multisite studies of federal grant streams[6] and smaller studies of specific local programs.[7] Rigorous evidence on the impacts of these approaches focuses on interventions delivered after release (to date, pre-release interventions have only undergone implementation and outcome evaluations).[8] Implementation of these models has been well studied, with the studies noting the importance of (1) appropriate targeting of those most likely to benefit from services, using both basic skills assessments and risk assessments (Maguire et al. 2013; D'Amico et al. 2013; Holl et al. 2009); and (2) strong wraparound supports to address barriers to employment such as lack of housing, unreliable transportation, and substance use (Holl and Kolovich 2007; D'Amico et al. 2013; Lattimore et al. 2012; Leshnick et al. 2012; Leufgen et al. 2012; Lindquist et al. 2018). To date, however, impact evaluations of these types of programs have yielded inconsistent evidence on their effectiveness in improving labor market outcomes and reducing recidivism:

- Four evaluations have documented interventions that increase employment rates and/or reduce recidivism. Quasi-experimental evaluations of **Texas' Project RIO** (Finn 1998) and the **ComALERT Prisoner Reentry Program** (Jacobs and Western 2007) both found that these programs increased employment rates and reduced recidivism rates. Two other quasi-experimental evaluations, of the **Auglaize County Transition Program** (Miller and Miller 2010) and the **Preventing Parolee Crime Program** (Zhang et al. 2006), found that both models reduced recidivism rates, although neither study measured employment outcomes.
- Four evaluations have yielded inconsistent evidence on the effectiveness of such models. A random assignment evaluation of the **Employment Services for Ex-Offenders** (Milkman 1985) found that the model reduced recidivism but had no impact on employment, and a later reanalysis (Bierens and Carvalho 2011) found that even the recidivism impacts depended on site and age.[9] Similarly, an evaluation of the **Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative** (Lattimore et al. 2012), based primarily on a quasi-experimental design,[10] yielded modest reductions in recidivism but no impacts on employment for the full sample (although adult females did show increases in employment rates). An evaluation of seven **Second Chance Act** grantees found that program group members had higher earnings and rates of employment, but more arrests and convictions, than the control group (D'Amico and Kim 2018).
- Four evaluations have either found no impacts or detrimental impacts. The experimental **Comprehensive Employment and Training Act Qualified Probationer Evaluation** (Anderson and Schumacker 1986) found no impact on recidivism and did not measure employment outcomes. A quasi-experimental evaluation of **Project Greenlight** (Wilson and Davis 2006) found that the program increased recidivism rates, although the study did not measure employment

outcomes. Random assignment evaluations of the **Reintegration of Ex-Offenders** program (Wiegand and Sussell 2015) and an employment-focused reentry program in Southern California (Farabee et al. 2014) found no impacts on employment or recidivism.

Overall, then, most employment-focused approaches do not consistently demonstrate evidence of long-term effectiveness at improving employment outcomes and/or reducing justice system involvement. The exception is vocational training, which to date has primarily been evaluated as a pre-release intervention, and therefore can be challenging to implement, mostly because doing so can be difficult in a correctional setting. Training for specific occupations may be a promising post-release intervention given its effectiveness as a pre-release strategy. In addition, growing evidence indicates that low-income populations more generally can improve their employment and earnings through approaches designed to promote longer-term connection to stable employment in specific growth fields. These approaches include registered apprenticeship (Hollenbeck and Huang 2014; Reed et al. 2012), career pathways (Fein and Hamadyk 2018; Martinson et al. 2018; Peck et al. 2018), and sector strategies (Anderson et al. 2017; Betesh et al. 2017; Copson et al. 2016; Hendra et al. 2016; Maguire et al. 2010; Michaelides et al. 2015; Zeidenberg et al. 2010). Many of the REO grantees offer these types of employment services: 74 offer career pathways, 72 offer work-based learning, and 42 offer Registered Apprenticeship.

Cognitive-behavioral therapy

A broader evidence base exists on the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) in supporting successful reentry for justice-involved adults. CBT programs train participants reentering society to monitor and adapt their thinking so they can identify and correct destructive thinking and behavior, including criminal thinking (Milkman and Wanberg 2007). This approach has sometimes been implemented as a component of the employment-focused programming discussed above. For example, one study (Gosse 2013) examined the specific impact of CBT on participants in the Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative detailed earlier and found that people who received CBT training on reducing criminal attitudes had lower rates of rearrest. Otherwise, most of the employment-focused studies described earlier did not examine the impact of CBT specifically—nor did they study whether the CBT models used were implemented with the appropriate dosage and content.[11] This latter issue is important because implementation studies of CBT models underscore the importance of rigorous staff training and staff retention to ensure consistent delivery of CBT (Barnes et al. 2017; Miller et al. 2017; Miller and Miller 2016; Duwe and Clark 2015), as well as the challenges of delivering these interventions, given the importance of both structure and sequencing of these curricula to ensure fidelity of implementation.

Impact studies on CBT approaches show more consistent findings on their effectiveness at reducing recidivism than those for employment-focused interventions. Three meta-analyses on CBT approaches with justice-involved populations have found that CBT interventions reduce recidivism (Aos and Drake 2013; Lipsey et al. 2007; Landenberger and Lipsey 2006). Similarly, studies on specific CBT models find that, in general, these approaches reduce recidivism:

- The **Choosing to Think, Thinking to Choose** model, designed to complement intensive probation supervision practices for offenders identified as high risk, emphasizes anger management, responding to stressful situations, managing criminal justice interactions, and interpersonal relationships. An experimental study of the intervention found that it reduced recidivism among participants, relative to the control group receiving intensive probation supervision alone (Barnes et al. 2017).
- **Moral Reconation Therapy** is designed to reduce recidivism by increasing moral reasoning. This model has evidence of effectiveness, with a meta-analysis finding that receiving the treatment reduced recidivism overall, and that impacts were

strongest for studies with relatively short follow-up periods and for those that measured recidivism as rearrest, rather than rearrest followed by conviction or reincarceration (Ferguson and Wormith 2013; Miller and Miller 2014).

- **Thinking for a Change** focuses on social skills, cognitive self-change, and problem solving to reduce criminal thinking and behavior. Quasi-experimental evaluations of the model (Golden et al. 2006; Lowenkamp et al. 2009) have demonstrated that it is effective at lowering recidivism rates relative to comparison groups created using propensity score matching.
- **Moving On** is an intervention designed for female offenders, covering topics such as self-care, healthy relationships, coping with emotions and harmful self-talk, problem solving, and developing assertiveness. Quasi-experimental evaluations of Moving On have found that individuals who participated in the program had lower rates of recidivism than comparison groups created using propensity score matching (Duwe and Clark 2015; Gehring et al. 2010).
- The exception to this trend of effectiveness at reducing recidivism is **Motivational Interviewing,** which has been tested with justice-involved populations but was not explicitly designed for them. Motivational Interviewing is a counseling approach that tries to change behavior by helping participants explore and resolve any resistance to change. Two experimental evaluations of the application of this model to justice-involved populations show that, although it is effective in reducing substance abuse and improving attitudes, it does not reduce recidivism (Kistenmacher 2008; Woodall et al. 2007).

Case management

Case management approaches aim to reduce or eliminate barriers to employment (such as substance use, lack of transportation, and unstable housing) through individualized coaching and service planning, as well as through connections to supportive services. As noted earlier, implementation studies of employment-focused programs have emphasized both the need to connect participants to such services and the importance of strong preexisting relationships between community organizations to help with such services, because most employment programs cannot provide all these services. A recent synthesis of the evidence base on these wraparound service models shows limited effectiveness in reducing recidivism and improving employment outcomes (Doleac 2019), though this lack of impacts may be a function of underspecified or insufficiently-intensive program models (Willison 2019).

An additional area of research on individual service planning is the **Risk-Needs-Responsivity (RNR)** framework, in which programs tailor services based on assessments of an individual's level of risk for future criminal activity (Bonta and Andrews 2007). RNR—a proposed component of the service models of 33 REO grantees—has been studied widely in criminology (e.g. Latessa and Lowenkamp 2007; Lipsey and Cullen 2007). RNR has similar characteristics to employment models that aim to tailor services to individual needs and readiness for employment, and a framework now exists for merging RNR with employment-specific iterations of service tailoring (Duran et al. 2013). However, this combined approach has yet to be empirically tested. Although these approaches have been included as components of earlier-referenced employment programs, only three studies to date have isolated the impact of these services specifically. An experimental evaluation of the **HealthLink** case management program found that participation neither reduced recidivism nor increased employment rates (Burghardt and Needels 2004). The other two studies examined impacts on recidivism, but not employment. A quasi-experimental evaluation of **Oakland Unite** (Gonzalez et al. 2017) found that participating in life coaching slightly decreased the likelihood of arrest for violent offenses, but there were no differences in the likelihood of arrest for other offenses. A random assignment evaluation (Palmer et al. 2018) isolated the impact of wraparound services specifically,

finding that emergency housing assistance reduces the likelihood of rearrest for one year after assignment to treatment.

Evidence on existing program models for young adults

Arrest rates are highest between the ages of 18 and 24, after which point they decline sharply with age (Snyder, Cooper, and Mulako-Wangota 2017), highlighting the need for programming for young adults that is distinct from programming for adults. Advances in neuroscience have identified ways that young adults process information differently from youth and older adults, leading to differences in decision making, impulse control, and reasoning (Steinberg 2014). As a result, young adults are more susceptible than older adults to impulses that lead to criminal activity because their brains are still developing capacities for understanding the connections between actions and consequences (Council of State Governments Justice Center 2015). Young adults are also a distinct population from youth: they are more cognitively developed, more vulnerable to peer pressure, and more likely to engage in risky behaviors, and they often seek autonomy from their families (Council of State Governments Justice Center 2015). For these reasons, programs serving young adults often develop approaches that target this developmental stage (Stein et al. 2017).

In general, young adults are more frequently disconnected from education or employment than older adults. Further, those in contact with the justice system face even greater obstacles to connecting to school and jobs (Schuchat et al. 2014). When they leave prison, young adults have spent critical developmental time behind bars, potentially inhibiting natural, productive transitions to adulthood (Uggen and Wakefield 2005). Incarcerated young adult males are less likely than all adult males ages 18 to 24 to earn a high school diploma or GED, secure employment, and get married. In recognition of the many ways young adults are distinct, many of the approaches described for adults—connection to employment, CBT, and case management—have been adapted specifically for the justice-involved young adult population.

To date, there is less rigorous evidence of the impact of reentry interventions that target young adults, compared to the body of research on adult programs. This is in part because the number of programs tailored specifically to the needs of young adults is small, but growing. Among the existing studies, some do not examine employment outcomes in the short term because programs place young adults in vocational or postsecondary education, and not directly into jobs. Furthermore, employment impacts may be difficult to assess for young adults because their employment is more sensitive to cyclical fluctuations in the economy than adult employment (Hossain and Bloom 2015).

Employment-focused programming

Few employment and training programs have shown improvements in employment for justice-involved young adults specifically (see, for example, Schochet et al. 2006; Abrazaldo et al. 2009). Furthermore, there is little research on vocational training programs to engage and prepare young adults in the justice system for employment (Visher et al. 2005), and what does exist is primarily descriptive (Leshnick and Thomason 2015). Many of the approaches used by REO grantees were implemented in the three rigorous evaluations of interventions targeting justice-involved young adults: all three included work-based learning (one of DOL's priority approaches), one included career pathways, and none included registered apprenticeship or pre-apprenticeship. These interventions generally show improvements in recidivism, but only one of the three studies examined whether such programming leads to gains in employment and earnings.

- The **Sandhills Vocational Delivery System** offered both career pathways and work-based learning to incarcerated young adults at two youth custody centers in North Carolina. A random assignment study of the program (Lattimore et al. 1990) found that young adults who participated in the program were significantly less likely to be arrested after release than those in the control group, but the researchers did not examine impacts on employment or earnings.

- The **Avon Park Youth Academy and STREET Smart** program serves people ages 16 to 18 who are transitioning out of a secure custody residential facility in Florida, and its vocational training component includes opportunities for work-based learning through on-the-job training. A random assignment study of the program (National Council on Crime and Delinquency 2009) found that the program improved employment and earnings. Impacts on recidivism were mixed: participants had lower rates of arrest and fewer individual arrests than the control group, but they also had higher rates of subsequent entry into juvenile or adult supervision.
- The **Safe and Successful Youth Initiative** provided wraparound services to "proven risk" individuals ages 14 to 24 in 11 cities in Massachusetts and incorporated work-based learning in the form of subsidized temporary work experience.[12] A quasi-experimental evaluation of the program in nine of those cities (Campie et al. 2014) found that participants were less likely than the comparison group to be incarcerated, but the study did not examine impacts on employment or earnings.

Given the dearth of existing programming targeting justice-involved young adults, the criminal justice field can also learn from best practices of programs that improve outcomes among young adults who are disconnected from school and work, but not necessarily involved in the justice system. Some of the employment-focused approaches discussed earlier, such as vocational training, job search training, and work-based learning, have been tested with disconnected young adults, and the results of these evaluations, summarized in Figure 2, have, in general, not been found to consistently increase employment and earnings or reduce recidivism (although individual models may show some impacts in either labor market or criminal justice outcomes).

Figure 2: Evidence on Employment-Focused Interventions for Disconnected Young Adults

Intervention	Age	Overall results	Justice-involved results
Job Start			
DOL-funded demonstration for high school dropouts with poor reading skills, which connected them to vocational training, including guidance on career pathways. RCT conducted by Cave et al. (1993).	17 to 21	No statistically significant impacts on employment or earnings for the full sample. Lower arrest rates in the very short term when enrolled in the program for the full sample, but these impacts did not persist in the long term.	Young males with prior justice system involvement, representing 15 percent of the sample, showed statistically significant gains in earnings in the fourth year after random assignment. No statistically significant impacts on arrest rates in the short or long term for justice-involved males.
Job Corps			
DOL-funded program for disadvantaged youth and youth adults; includes vocational education, training, work-based learning, and wraparound services in an intensive residential program. RCT conducted by Schochet et al. (2008).	16 to 24	Job Corps reduced arrest and conviction rates and increased earnings in the third and fourth years after random assignment. Earnings gains were not sustained beyond that time, except for older youth, who were between 20 and 24 years old when they applied to participate in Job Corps.	27 percent of eligible applicants to Job Corps reported having been arrested, and 5 percent had been arrested for a serious crime. Impacts were not estimated for the subsample of justice-involved youth and young adults.

(continued)

Intervention	Age	Overall results	Justice-involved results
National Guard Youth Challenge			
Residential education and training program for high school dropouts. RCT conducted by Millenky et al. (2011).	16 to 18	Participants had higher levels of GED receipt, employment, earnings, and college enrollment than the control group at three years following random assignment. There was no difference in recidivism between the program and control groups.	Approximately one-third of the Youth ChalleNGe participants in the study sample had a previous arrest at the time of random assignment, however the study did not estimate impacts for the justice-involved subgroup.
YouthBuild			
DOL-funded program for out-of-school youth and young adults; includes work-based learning and career pathways as components of an intensive intervention to reconnect youth to education and employment. RCT conducted by Miller et al. (2018).	16 to 24	The program increased earnings and employment, as measured through surveys, through 4 years after random assignment. There were no significant differences in employment and earnings as measured through administrative data, or in recidivism, at 4 years after random assignment.	In its baseline data collection, the evaluation did not document whether participants had prior justice system involvement; however, YouthBuild program staff reported that criminal justice system involvement is a common barrier to employment for YouthBuild participants (Wiegand et al. 2015).
Los Angeles Reconnections Career Academy			
DOL Workforce Innovation Fund grantee serving young adults and including work-based learning and career pathways approaches. RCT conducted by Geckeler et al. (2017).	16 to 24	Participants had lower earnings at two years after random assignment than the control group; no statistically significant impacts on employment rates or recidivism at two years after random assignment.	Approximately one-fifth of the young adults in the program had prior justice system involvement; however, the study did not separately estimate impacts for the justice-involved subgroup.
Young Adult Internship Program (YAIP)			
New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) program provided job-readiness, case management, and subsidized employment for disconnected young adults. RCT conducted by Skemer et al. (2017).	16 to 24	Participants were more likely than the control group to be employed in the first year after random assignment, but there was no difference in employment after the YAIP-sponsored internships ended. Participants had higher earnings than the control group, a difference that persisted beyond the period of subsidized employment. No statistically significant impacts on recidivism.	The program targets young adults who are "job-ready" and not in need of extensive wrap around services. However 23 percent of the study sample had been arrested at the time of random assignment, and 8 percent had been convicted of a crime. The study did not estimate impacts for the justice-involved subgroup.

RCT = randomized control trial

Cognitive-behavioral therapy

The CBT interventions shown to be successful among adults (for example, Thinking for a Change) have yet to be tested on young adults (Council of State Governments Justice Center 2015). A recently released curriculum outlines how to provide CBT to young adults in community correctional institutions, with 10 sessions tailored to the specific skills this population needs (Baldwin et al. 2018). This curriculum has yet to be rigorously tested, however. The existing evidence of the impact of CBT on justice involvement for young adults is mixed, and these studies have not measured its impact on labor market outcomes.

- In Chicago, **a detention center-based CBT program** was administered to high-risk juvenile arrestees inside a juvenile detention center (the average age was 16). CBT sessions were given twice a day by trained detention center staff. The curriculum emphasized learning to "stop, look, and listen," identifying "hot button situations" that trigger negative thoughts, and considering what an objective observer might think about specific situations. Positive behaviors were rewarded with tokens that could be exchanged in the facility, and misbehaviors were addressed through "rational self-analysis,"—writing about the incident and brainstorming alternative responses. An RCT of the program found that participation resulted in a decline in readmission to the facility by 21 percent (Heller et al. 2017).
- A CBT class is a key element of the **RealVictory Program,** which aims to reduce recidivism among juvenile and adult offenders, and has been tested with youth and young adult populations (Bahr et al. 2016). The class has six 90-minute sessions on examining participants' beliefs and how their beliefs influence their behaviors, and the same curriculum is used for participants who are on probation or parole, or incarcerated. The program also includes goal setting with a coach and daily automated telephone calls via a cell phone participants are given for the program. A small experimental evaluation of the program among juvenile offenders between ages 13 and 18 found significant declines in rearrest rates, and increases in the days to first rearrest, for the treatment group relative to the comparison group (Burraston et al. 2012). A follow-up study using random assignment and focusing on participants ages 12 to 21 found no effect on arrests relative to standard conditions (Bahr et al. 2016).

One aspect of CBT programs is the cultivation of a **"growth mindset,"** or the belief that intelligence can change. Adopting a growth mindset may improve a person's resiliency and perseverance in dealing with obstacles. Interventions that aim to increase growth mindset attitudes have been found to be especially effective at improving academic outcomes among youth at risk of underperforming (Aronson et al. 2002; Claro et al. 2016; Paunesku et al. 2015). For example, three **YouthBuild** sites added growth mindset training to their curriculum, to help participants see the purpose of the training, establish goals, provide feedback on effort, encourage productive responses to failure, and show that intelligence can change (YouthBuild USA 2015). Although participation in YouthBuild overall has improved educational outcomes, employment, and earnings (Miller et al. 2016; Miller et al. 2018), the growth mindset components of the program have yet to be evaluated.

Case management

A few studies identify promising approaches to intensive case management specifically for young adults involved in the justice system. A review of probation and parole programs for young adults found that many programs emphasize case management and individualized services (Hayek 2016). Many young adults involved in the justice system have experienced trauma as children. Women and girls, in particular, often have histories of trauma, including physical abuse, sexual assault, exploitation, and abandonment by caregivers. Trauma can have significant negative impacts on attention, cognition, self-concept, and behavior in the short and long term. To address past trauma, many organizations serving justice-involved young adults adopt **trauma-informed approaches** to case

management. In some programs, probation officers play a case management role and receive training in topics specific to young adults, including trauma, brain development, moral decision making, and impulsivity (Hayek 2016). Two case management models for young adults in the juvenile justice system have been rigorously evaluated:

- **YVLifeSet,** previously called the Youth Villages Transitional Living program, is a residential program for young adults transitioning from the juvenile justice and/or child welfare systems. The nine-month program includes development of an individualized treatment plan, weekly meetings with a transitional living specialist, and a trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy course offered by specially trained staff. An experimental study found that participation in the YVLifeSet program resulted in modest increases in employment and earnings over the full two-year study period, but had no effects on education, social support, and criminal involvement (Skemer and Valentine 2016).
- **Multisystemic Therapy for Emerging Adults (MST-EA)** adapts the Multisystemic Therapy (MST) model for use with young adults with mental health problems and recent justice system involvement. Traditional MST has a strong focus on family support for youth involved in the juvenile justice system and has been found to effectively reduce juvenile recidivism. The MST-EA model focuses on the young adult (rather than the parent) as the "primary lever for change," expands the "family" role to include the young adult's social network, and adds a coach to role play skills and engage the social network. A study of MST-EA randomized eligible participants into one of two conditions to test approaches to vocational training. In the first condition, coaches provided participants with extended vocational support; in the other, participants were referred to state vocational rehabilitation services for vocational support, and coaches focused on standard services (Davis et al. 2015). The study found improvements in mental health symptoms and criminality, although the small sample size resulted in low ability to detect statistical significance. There were no significant differences in work outcomes between the people in the two study conditions.

Combined approaches

Two additional programs operating in Massachusetts target justice-involved young adults with a combination of employment services, CBT, and intensive case management, but they have not yet been rigorously evaluated.

- The Intervention Model developed and operated by **Roca, Inc.** is designed to help high-risk justice-involved young adults (ages 17 to 24) break cycles of poverty, violence, and incarceration. The model is based on the combined principles of cognitive re-structuring, skills development, motivational interviewing, and transitional employment. Young adults engage in two years of intensive programming and two years of follow-up, with a primary focus on employment training through work crews and connections to jobs. Roca, Inc. has been operating since 1998, and shows potentially promising outcomes (Roca, Inc. 2017); however, the first RCT estimating the impact of participating in the program is currently underway.
- The intensive service model of **UTEC** targets young adults ages 17 to 25 who are involved in the criminal justice system or have serious gang involvement. Young adults participate in UTEC-run social enterprises and workforce development activities that provide on-the-job training and links to employment. Participants can be involved in UTEC for up to five years, including a two-year post-completion follow-up period. Currently, the program is building justice system partners to pilot specialized young adult units in jails (targeting youth ages 18 to 24) to prepare them for reentry and link them to UTEC services post-release (UTEC 2017).

Implications for future research

This issue brief has summarized the existing research on interventions to improve employment outcomes and reduce recidivism for both justice-involved adults and young adults. Existing research

offers some evidence on common REO program components (employment-focused programming, CBT, and case management), but two important gaps in the literature remain.

First, based on the mixed evidence on employment-focused programming, most employment-focused approaches do not consistently lead to both improved labor market outcomes and reduced criminal justice system involvement in the long term, for either adults or young adults (although some approaches either improve one of these types of outcomes or improve both outcomes in the very short term). As noted in the "REO Priority Employment Strategies" box on page 2, however, growing evidence indicates that improving employment and earnings outcomes for disadvantaged young adults and adults—whether or not they are justice-involved—requires interventions that emphasize longer-term connection to work through training and work experience in specific industries. Therefore, testing these approaches with justice-involved individuals is an important next step, particularly with vocational training, which to date has generally been tested in pre-release settings using quasi-experimental methods.

Second, the ongoing REO evaluation holds great promise to provide information on whether interventions tested with young adults more generally, or with justice-involved adults, are also effective for young adults with justice involvement specifically. For example, CBT programs show promise with at-risk youth and for reducing recidivism for justice-involved adults, but more research is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of CBT with justice-involved young adults specifically. Similarly, more research is needed on how to apply trauma-informed approaches to address both previous trauma and trauma related to recent justice involvement among young adults, as well as how to use a RNR framework to support their connection to employment.

The REO evaluation offers an opportunity to address both of these gaps, because (1) grantees are required to implement strategies that focus on longer-term connection to employment; and (2) many grantees not only plan to serve young adults, but also propose to do so using evidence-based approaches, including CBT and trauma-informed care, as well as using a RNR framework. The REO evaluation will continue to add to the evidence base on what works for this population based on models funded through the REO grants.

Endnotes

[1] Studies examining changes in employment and earnings include quasi-experimental evaluations of registered apprenticeship (Hollenbeck and Huang 2014; Reed et al. 2012), experimental evaluations of career pathways programs (Fein and Hamadyk 2018; Martinson et al. 2018; Peck et al. 2018), and both experimental (Betesh et al, 2017; Copson et al. 2016; Hendra et al. 2016; Maguire et al. 2010) and quasi-experimental evaluations of sector strategies (Anderson et al. 2017; Michaelides et al. 2015; Zeidenberg et al. 2010).

[2] Prison labor represents another employment model during incarceration, with one study finding that participation in the Prison Industry Enhancement Certificate Program reduced recidivism and increased earnings after release (Cox 2009).

[3] Several impact evaluations of transitional jobs programs serving reentry populations are in progress. A quasi-experimental evaluation of Oakland Unite found that the program reduced recidivism in the short term (Gonzalez et al. 2017), but long-term follow-up results are not yet available. An ongoing random assignment evaluation of the Los Angeles Regional Initiative for Social Enterprise has produced an implementation study report (Geckeler et al. 2018), but impact results are not yet available.

[4] As detailed later in this issue brief, given evidence of the effectiveness of career pathways training with low-income populations more generally, adaptation of such programming for post-release vocational training is a promising area for future research, and 76 REO grantees offer some form of vocational training.

[5] These studies generally used propensity score matching to conduct quasi-experimental evaluations (Davis et al. 2013; Lichtenberger, 2007; Aos et al, 2006; MacKenzie et al., 2006). The exception is a random assignment study of the Sandhills Vocational Delivery System, which served young adults and is therefore discussed in a later section of the brief.

[6] These grant streams include DOL funding such as Ready4Work (Bauldry et al. 2009), Prisoner Reentry Initiative (Holl et al. 2009; Holl and Kolovich 2007), and Reintegration of Ex-Offenders (Wiegand and Sussell 2015; Wiegand et al. 2015; Leshnick et al. 2012). They also include Department of Justice grants, such as the Second Chance Act (D'Amico and Kim 2018; D'Amico et al. 2013, 2017; Lindquist et al. 2018) and the Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative (Lattimore et al. 2012).

[7] These programs includes Texas' Project RIO (Finn 1998), the Newark Prisoner Reentry Initiative Replication (Leufgen et al. 2012), Project Greenlight (Wilson and Davis 2006), Boston Reentry Initiative (Braga et al. 2008), Auglaize County Transition Program (Miller and Miller 2010), Preventing Parolee Crime (Zhang et al. 2006), Employment Services for Ex-Offenders (Bierens and Carvalho 2011; Milkman 1985), and a nationally recognized program in Southern California (Farabee et al. 2014).

[8] Although there are no experimental or quasi-experimental evaluations of pre-release job search training models, DOL recently concluded an implementation and outcomes evaluation of its Linking to Employment Activities Pre-Release grants, which created job centers in jails so inmates could begin to plan for their job searches when still incarcerated. The evaluation found that fewer than half of participants had been placed in either training or employment at least one quarter after release (Bellotti et al. 2018).

[9] This intervention was implemented in Boston, Chicago, and San Diego. The later study used a more sophisticated model and found that risk of recidivism was reduced only for those at least 27 years old in Chicago and San Diego, and at least 36 years old in Boston. For the other people in the treatment group, program participation increased the risk of recidivism.

[10] This evaluation used a random assignment design in 2 of its local sites, and a quasi-experimental design in the remaining 14 local sites.

[11] A forthcoming random assignment evaluation of the Cognitive-Behavioral Intervention for Justice Involved Individuals Seeking Employment (Harknett et al. 2017), a new curriculum designed to use CBT to support employment skills for justice-involved individuals, may provide needed evidence on the impact of CBT on employment in this population.

[12] "Proven risk," according to the study authors' definition, means having committed a violent crime using a gun or knife, having been victimized by violent crime, and being prone to retaliation, or being a known gang member.

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