

FROM SURVIVING TO **THRIVING**

SUPPORTING TRANSFORMATION, REENTRY AND
CONNECTIONS TO EMPLOYMENT FOR YOUNG ADULTS



CLASP

Policy solutions that work for low-income people

fhi360

THE SCIENCE OF IMPROVING LIVES

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ABOUT FHI 360

FHI 360 is a nonprofit human development organization dedicated to improving lives in lasting ways by advancing integrated, locally driven solutions. Our staff includes experts in health, education, nutrition, environment, economic development, civil society, gender, youth, research, technology, communication and social marketing — creating a unique mix of capabilities to address today’s interrelated development challenges. FHI 360 serves more than 70 countries and all U.S. states and territories.

ABOUT CLASP

CLASP is a national, nonpartisan, anti-poverty nonprofit advancing policy solutions for low-income people. We develop practical yet visionary strategies for reducing poverty, promoting economic opportunity, and advancing racial equity. CLASP would like to thank the Andrus Family Fund, the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, and JP Morgan Chase and Co. for their support of CLASP’s youth policy and workforce portfolio.

ABOUT COMPASS ROSE COLLABORATIVE (CRC)

Launched in 2017, the CRC began as a three-year program funded by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). The CRC connects young adults ages 18-24 who have had contact with the juvenile justice or criminal justice system to employment, education pathways, and supportive services across nine communities. FHI 360 serves as the intermediary for the CRC.



INTRODUCTION

“Compass Rose is about evolution and helping young people to move from surviving to thriving.”

- CRC PROGRAM LEADER, HARTFORD

Far too many people — especially youth and young adults of color — cycle in and out of prison, jails, and detention centers and face probation and parole conditions that keep them locked out of opportunity. These interactions with the criminal justice system demand the need for both equitable practices and programs that support second chances and large-scale investments in decarceration. They also require a critical analysis of historical policies to address the systems of power¹ that manifest in an unequal and unjust criminal justice system.

Incarceration has devastating and life-long consequences on the employment, education, health, and well-being of formerly incarcerated individuals and their communities. Individuals who have had contact with the criminal justice system or have been incarcerated often face seemingly insurmountable discriminatory barriers to employment. Research indicates that 60-75 percent of people who have been incarcerated face persistent unemployment up to a year after their release.² From gaps in work history to licensing bans, a criminal record leaves too many on the wrong side of opportunity. These barriers to employment are structural and arise from systems and policies, not individual choices.



6.7M

Approximately 6.7 million people live under the control of the criminal justice system.³

12M

people are booked in county jails each year. Most people who cycle in and out of local jails are arrested for minor offenses and are **unable to afford bail**.⁴



21%

While young people ages 18-24 make up 10 percent of the U.S. population, they comprise **21 percent of people admitted into adult prison** every year.⁵



Young people of color are **more likely to face this cycle of incarceration and detention**.⁶

The purpose of this paper is to offer practical programmatic solutions that support second chances for young people and raise policy and systems considerations to address equity, collateral consequences, and opportunity.

The Compass Rose Collaborative (CRC) began as a three-year program funded by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL).⁷ The CRC addresses one of the most pressing consequences of our nation's incarceration problem: the unemployment challenges and economic instability young people encounter as a result of interaction with the criminal justice system. These challenges persist whether young people are returning from incarceration or detention or are on probation or parole. The CRC connects young adults (primarily young people of color) ages 18-24 with employment and education pathways. The CRC provides critical resources and safe spaces, mentors and staff, and supports young people on their transformation journey by helping them to navigate systemic barriers and aiding communities in creating lasting partnerships for systemic change. Launched in 2017, the CRC includes one intermediary organization, FHI 360, and nine grantees across the country:

- City of Albany Department of Youth and Workforce Services, Albany, New York
- City of Los Angeles Economic and Workforce Development Department, Los Angeles, California
- CommunityWorks, Inc., Denver, Colorado
- Greater Louisville Workforce Development Board, Inc., Louisville, Kentucky
- Mayor's Office of Employment Development, Baltimore, Maryland
- Office of Workforce Development's Youth Options Unlimited (YOU) Division, Boston, Massachusetts
- Our Piece of the Pie®, Inc., Hartford, Connecticut
- Phoenix Youth and Family Services, Inc., southeast Arkansas
- St. Louis Agency on Training and Employment, St. Louis, Missouri

FHI 360's National Institute for Work and Learning leads the CRC and provides training, technical assistance, cross-site learning exchanges, and program management to the nine organizations within the collaborative. FHI 360 provides the CRC with:

- A common evidence-based program model
- Peer learning and exchange opportunities with other communities, as well as an inventory of assets
- Best practices and lessons learned on working with young people impacted by the justice system
- Shared resources, training opportunities, and meeting facilitation
- A common data tool
- An ethical and strong financial structure

FHI 360 promotes a data culture, relying on data-driven solutions. FHI 360 provides an innovative intermediary model for the CRC that fosters a sense of collaboration and replicates best practices across the participating communities and uses a common data management system to track program outcomes and long-term impact of the Compass Rose Collaborative. This allows FHI 360 to effectively tell the story of CRC’s measurable impact within the communities and the collective impact the project is having on the beneficiaries, stakeholders, and the overall community.

“Highlighting partnerships and strategies that work for returning citizens is our collective duty to ensure smooth transitions home for our young people while strengthening unity and health of communities.”

- LISA JOHNSON, DIRECTOR, FHI 360'S NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR WORK AND LEARNING

Goals of the CRC:⁸

- Increase equity and access to education and employment for people impacted by the criminal justice system
- Engage over 1,100 young adults who are currently in or have a history with the criminal justice system from neighborhoods with high crime and poverty rates
- Place at least 70 percent of young people into an educational program, apprenticeship program, or employment while implementing strategies to mitigate and remove barriers and provide support to young people
- Strengthen communities while reducing recidivism and crime, with the recidivism rate being reduced to less than 20 percent
- Increase community partnerships, including with employers and service providers and by securing additional resources to serve young people (including in-kind space and financial incentives for young people)

PARTICIPANT OUTCOMES

70% participants will be placed in an education program, apprenticeship or employment

20% ↓ reduction in recidivism

SYSTEM OUTCOMES



EMPLOYER PARTNERS
committed to support the local **young-adult** serving organizations within the communities of the collaborative



NEW RESOURCES
added to Department of Labor’s Workforce GPS, an interactive platform for storing resources



The Communities Collaborating to Reconnect Youth network **will adopt the collaborative’s best practices** and replicate them



Development of an innovative Youth Development Practitioner Apprenticeship curriculum and partnerships to support **new employment opportunities** for young adults

METHODOLOGY

The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) conducted nine in-depth interviews with lead CRC staff in each community, interviewed members of FHI 360's CRC leadership team, and reviewed FHI 360's site visit notes and summaries. CLASP also reviewed best practice literature and research on reentry and workforce development. This brief provides a comprehensive analysis from the perspectives of people who are responsible for the full implementation of the CRC program and offers insights into best practices, lessons learned, systemic barriers, and essential supportive services. The perspectives reflected within this brief are not the view of any particular organization or agency and highlight practices for other implementers to consider when addressing the challenges young people face upon exiting incarceration and/or detention. For this brief, we did not interview young people and other partners involved with the program, which a full analysis would incorporate.

Policymakers and practitioners can use this research to increase equity and access to jobs and education for young people in need of another chance and in navigating the converging fields of workforce development, education, and criminal justice. Ultimately, the lessons shared here can offer a variety of stakeholders, including public agencies and employers, a roadmap to better understand strategies to support dismantling structural barriers and implementing strategies that support young adults on a journey of transformation and connectedness.





BEST PRACTICES

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT, WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT, AND JUSTICE REENTRY

“The American prison system is bursting at the seams with people who have been shut out of the economy and who had neither a quality education nor access to good jobs.”

- PRISON POLICY INSTITUTE

Promising studies suggest that connecting returning community members to work, education, and training pathways can break the cycle of recidivism. Roughly two-thirds of the 650,000 individuals who are released from the criminal justice system every year are rearrested within three years.⁹ In addition, employment is an important part of youth development and successful transition into adulthood. Youth benefit from work experience because it allows them to make gains in social interactions, communication, problem solving, critical thinking, and decision making. Many young people who have been affected by the criminal justice system are denied access to work experiences and paid employment opportunities, and formerly incarcerated young adults often do not have a high school diploma or secondary credential, needed to gain a foothold and advance in the labor market.

We identified 10 categories of best practices across three domains. Programs should:

- Prioritize youth transformation and goals
- Maintain organizational partnerships
- Work to remove systemic obstacles and barriers to youth success

The best practices categorized below are intersectional and influence one another.

PRIORITIZE YOUTH TRANSFORMATION AND GOALS

- 1. Youth engagement:** Programs must view young people as assets rather than individuals who need to be fixed. Young people must define their own goals, co-design their journey and program services, provide regular feedback for continuous improvement, and ultimately become informed advocates for themselves and others. While strategies varied across the CRC communities, youth engagement was noted as a primary best practice.

The CRC has created a menu of strategies for the follow-up phase, or phase where staff are monitoring the retention and quality of the long-term education or employment placement of young people. The follow-up strategies were developed collaboratively by members of leadership of the CRC, staff, and the young adult participants. These strategies shift this phase from being a regular check-in where participants provide staff with a paycheck stub or proof of employment, to a phase that strategically engages young people and their family or support systems in meaningful networking, professional development, and engagement opportunities.

The strategies used by the CRC for effective follow-up and retention engage young people through alumni and peer support groups, guest speakers, financial empowerment, job maintenance and retention clubs, team-building activities, social responsibility engagements, storytelling, music therapy, workplace counseling, wellness activities, and social media engagement, to name a few.

- 2. Youth-driven goals development:** Youth-driven workforce and education goals development ensure the programs are designed to accelerate young people in the direction they want to go while setting clear and upfront expectations. Program leaders and administrators can accomplish this by using positive youth development strategies¹⁰ when developing individual success plans, setting goals, and conducting intake assessments with young people — all of which are reviewed to measure progress and keep goals and objectives current, aligned, and relevant.
- 3. Connection to supportive services for youth development:** Young adulthood is a pivotal developmental period. The CRC promotes leadership development by providing a variety of engagement and peer-support opportunities to young people. Topics are youth-centric and may include healthy relationships, violence prevention, conflict resolution, mental and physical resilience, nutrition, financial empowerment, and self-advocacy. The CRC communities also provide other supportive services including transportation, housing, child care, parenting sessions, and wellness support, like music therapy, as needed.
- 4. Staff and mentors:** Programs should use a relationship-centered approach and match young people with staff who help them navigate everyday issues and pay attention to their social and emotional needs. This offers young people a sense of connectedness and safety that

many have not been regularly afforded in their communities, especially for individuals coming from incarceration or detention. Mentors can include industry professionals and others who have overcome similar barriers. All the CRC communities report having program staff from the communities and who represent the cultural and ethnic background of the young people served.

Having mentors and staff from the community is a strength across several of the CRC communities. In Baltimore, the CRC is operated out of YO! Baltimore. The program staff, who are referred to as Program Advocates, have built a strong rapport with the young people, who are referred to as members. Referring to young people as members encourages a sense of belonging and ownership of the program. Members receive a program ID card and track their own success completing required components of the program. Staff at YO! reflect the population of youth served and allow them to authentically express themselves. YO! has been particularly effective in engaging with members through music using an onsite recording studio.

“***It [Compass Rose Collaborative] helps me to stay positive and this program can help other people to get their second chance like we did.***”

- CRC PROGRAM PARTICIPANT, SOUTHEAST ARKANSAS

MAINTAIN A WIDE RANGE OF ORGANIZATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

- 5. Pre-release services and relationship building:** Engaging young adults prior to their release from an institution into the community and connecting them with a caring adult helps them find a safe place for encouragement and assistance to report to the day of their release. Established relationships with corrections staff can help program staff with collecting needed enrollment paperwork, documentation, and a state-issued identification card prior to the young person's release to ensure a seamless transition.
- 6. Legal aid and advocacy services:** Programs serving young people impacted by the justice system should not underestimate the value of legal services for expungement and record sealing as well as guidance on legal rights in school, at work, and when interacting with police. The organizations that comprise the CRC have intentional relationships with attorneys, legal aid organizations, diversionary programs, and other community programs that provide training, consultation, and services to young people.
- 7. Mental health and well-being:** A focus on mental health and well-being is critical to supporting young people in healing and addressing past and ongoing trauma. Some CRC communities provide counseling services through university and agency partnerships, as well as training, for

employers on how to effectively hire and manage young people who have experienced trauma.

REMOVE SYSTEMIC OBSTACLES THAT POSE BARRIERS TO YOUTH SUCCESS

8. Education, training, and work experience: The staff within the CRC program must meet young people where they are and provide educational services and opportunities to gain employability skills, earn credentials, and plan for the future. The CRC communities approach these services in a variety of ways and provide differing programs to cater to their individual communities. They all recognize the need to offer:

- Short-term credentials and instruction through partnerships with unions, employers, and community and technical colleges
- Pre-apprenticeships and apprenticeships
- General workforce preparation and employability skills training
- Paid internships and training opportunities
- Financial literacy and empowerment
- Financial resources for books, work supplies, uniforms, and other tools needed to obtain education and employment
- A variety of subsidized employment strategies that allow participants to explore skills, gain work experience, and earn wages
- Occupational skills training tailored to local labor market demands
- Secondary education or general education diploma programming with connections to postsecondary education

Occupational Skills Training

In Los Angeles, the CRC program trains and prepares city and county residents in construction and green industry pathways using a cohort model. Participants obtain a range of industry-recognized certificates in a condensed time period, are connected to unions for mentorship and employment, and receive on-the-job training and paid internships. The site works with community partners to provide CRC participants with training opportunities and the supplies and equipment they need to obtain jobs that lead to economic security. The program also has an innovative physical fitness component that trains and prepares young people for the physical demands of a job in the construction field. The site also trains employers in cognitive behavioral approaches to workforce development so that they are equipped to hire and employ young people who have been impacted by trauma.

The CRC program helps young people enter the workforce and gain experience through a range of proven strategies including subsidized and transitional employment and customized training so that employers have a skilled pipeline of workers. Keeping young people engaged is critical to positive outcomes. The southeast Arkansas CRC site, for instance, partners closely with its local community college to provide short-term credentials during the waiting period before the next semester or training start date to keep young people actively engaged in the program, all while earning stackable credentials.

Subsidized Employment

YOU Boston uses a subsidized employment strategy to seamlessly transition young people into employment. This “Transitional Employment Model”¹¹ helps young people progress from a paid intensive job readiness training to a meaningful group or work team opportunity with partners, and finally to a paid internship that will ultimately result in unsubsidized employment.

- 9. Location:** Proximity to services for youth is just as important as the services themselves. This not only means having centers in the neighborhoods where the youth live but also having co-located one-stop-shop services where young people can access training, education classes, public benefits, and other financial and community resources at one central location.

The CRC communities of Albany and Louisville have youth centers designated for young people ages 14-24. These spaces are physically co-designed with youth and with the needs of youth in mind. They are purposely not co-located with larger corporate office settings and can include some of the following elements: youth art, food and clothing pantries, and staff trained in positive youth development. The youth centers are located within the communities that they serve and are easily accessible to young people.

- 10. Addressing quality-of-life issues and basic needs:** Young people who are living in poverty, returning from incarceration, and/or have had barriers to employment need resources for housing, food, health, nutrition, and hygiene to become economically stable. Programs report that prioritizing young people's basic needs is critical to engaging youth in goal setting, education, and workforce training. This includes helping them navigate public benefits access and eligibility processes, identifying housing assistance and shelters, operating onsite food pantries, and providing emergency financial assistance.

At CommunityWorks in Denver, CRC participants complete a Barriers to Employment Success Inventory assessment to help staff identify, mitigate, and remove barriers to employment. In Albany, the CRC addresses basic needs by integrating mental health screenings into the intake process and working with young people to complete comprehensive career, academic, and employment inventories.

“I literally had a young man who said, ‘I slept on a train last night’ before he came to our program. He had no housing.”

- CRC PROGRAM LEADER, BALTIMORE



ESSENTIAL PARTNERS

To effectively implement best practices, CRC communities actively engage a variety of essential partners.



Young people themselves, who need to be engaged fully as partners



A range of small and large employers, labor unions, and established relationships with hiring managers



K-12 school districts, community and technical colleges, four-year universities, unions, and other training partners



Law enforcement agencies and personnel such as police officers, adult and juvenile courts, drug courts, judges, probation and parole systems leaders and officers, department of corrections, diversion programs, and the department of juvenile justice



Child support agencies



Housing agencies



Transportation infrastructure



Mental health agencies and professionals



Legal aid and advocacy agencies



Community partners that offer supportive services and can meet immediate needs



Banking and financial institutions



Child care organizations



Policymakers and elected officials across a range of systems



YOUTH VOICE AND INCLUSION IN FOCUS

Our Piece of the Pie (OPP) in Hartford has been intentionally focused on youth voice and inclusion. Some of its strategies include regular feedback loops to ensure satisfaction, garnering input and suggestions on service delivery and activities, and measuring impact. OPP engages young people by:

- Conducting focus groups and/or listening sessions
- Using suggestion and satisfaction surveys to drive partnership development and service improvements

- Planning and hosting a youth summit or conference that convenes young people, local leaders, community partners and members to discuss local justice issues and how to remove systemic barriers to work and employment
- Hiring youth ambassadors to consistently incorporate a youth voice and to solicit ongoing feedback and engagement from their peers
- Celebrating quarterly milestones to highlight and showcase youth successes

OPP has hired four youth alumni as ambassadors to participate in the CRC retention and follow-up phase activities. The ambassadors will attend strategy meetings and learn the functions of the Youth Development Specialist positions, or staff positions that they work directly with at OPP, with the potential of these young people being hired in this role at OPP or another youth-serving organization in the future.



EMPLOYER PARTNERSHIP AND ENGAGEMENT IN FOCUS

Lasting relationships with employers are also essential for effectiveness. The CRC communities are using a variety of strategies to engage employers. These include:

- Hosting employer focus groups
- Weekly meetings and consistent communication with employers to better understand workforce trends and employment needs
- Having employers serve as guest speakers in the program and participate in mock interviews
- Partnering with hiring managers to develop training curriculum
- Recognizing employers for operating youth and reentry-friendly workplaces

The CRC communities also have staff that work as job developers or liaisons to business and industry and focus on building relationships. For example, two CRC communities, Louisville and St. Louis, operate their program out of the city's local workforce development

BARBERS AS PARTNERS

The Denver CRC program is intentionally co-located with a barbershop and fosters a partnership where barbers provide mentorship, free haircuts, and a venue for Cipher Saturdays, an event where young people can highlight their musical talents through freestyling and other methods of musical artistry. Barbershops have historically been hailed as sacred and safe spaces for young men and women within the types of communities that the CRC serves, and the barbershops provide the community members with a place to meet and collectively nurture solidarity and culture.

board and report leveraging existing relationships with businesses and industries across several workforce investments — including through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) federal programs — to unlock education and employment options for young adults served by the CRC. Others, including Albany, Boston, and Denver, shared that their track record of placing quality employees is a plus in creating long-term partnerships with employers. The CRC program can also train employers on how to effectively hire, train, and support young people in the workforce who have experienced trauma.

The CRC communities stress the importance of not stigmatizing young people and labeling them as coming from a reentry program. They provide hiring managers and supervisors with upfront information about the challenges the young people have had and how they have overcome them. The CRC program leaders report this eases the hiring process and supports job retention. The CRC communities in Albany, Hartford, and St. Louis use job fairs to connect employers with young people who can apply and interview for open positions onsite. The now-popular Workforce Wednesdays in St. Louis and Hartford provide weekly access to same-day hiring and direct engagement with local employers.

In addition, union and building trades have been especially welcoming and flexible partners in many of the CRC communities. For example, the CRC staff in Los Angeles built relationships with many trade unions. Staff are also working with contractors and developers on large-scale projects in the community through project-labor agreements and local hire policies to provide additional employment opportunities.

After completing his safety pre-apprenticeship training, Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) 30, Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), and forklift certifications, CRC Los Angeles participant, Raymond, got hired a month later as a construction laborer. Raymond stated, "I'm really grateful for this opportunity and completing the CRC training cohort. My goal is to get into the electrical union next year."

Testimony adapted from the City of Los Angeles Economic and Workforce Development Department- Compass Rose Collaborative



Picture depicted is not CRC participant

ENHANCEMENTS TO PARTNERSHIPS MOVING FORWARD

Although the CRC has been successful in creating these partnerships, the communities need more private sector employers and additional partners across a variety of industry sectors. Unfortunately, legal and licensing restrictions in many industries prohibit young people with a criminal history from getting hired. CRC communities report warehousing, manufacturing, construction, hospitality and food service, and customer service are reentry friendly. In Louisville, the CRC also offers training opportunities in information technology, youth development, and

social services. These sectors can provide young people who have appropriate credentials and skills with livable wages, but the types of employment experiences young people may want and need for advancement potential in these fields can be limited.

The CRC communities have identified the partnerships needed to provide effective services and meet the needs of young people and employers. The goal is to use this information to influence a coordinated system of community care that will address the needs of young people in a comprehensive way across all partners and systems.

CAREER SUCCESS IN MANUFACTURING

Kenesha, a program participant in Louisville with a promising future, was referred to the CRC program by the court system. Kenesha, with the support of the Louisville CRC staff, was able to identify her strengths and career interests. With a newly found interest in manufacturing Kenesha enrolled into the Kentucky Manufacturing Career Center and began intensive training, where she earned certifications in forklift, Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) 10, and gained career readiness skills. Through her own hard work and diligence, the support of her mother, and the supportive services provided to remove barriers to her success in the manufacturing program, Kenesha graduated from the training program and is now employed full-time in the manufacturing sector.



When asked how the CRC program best supported her success, Kenesha complimented the coaching tactics of the CRC staff in Louisville and mentioned how critical the transportation stipends and paid training opportunity were in supporting her success in graduating.

“Before I found this program I wasn’t where I wanted to be...it was rough. Now I’m confident about my future and that’s a great feeling.”

- KENESHA, COMPASS ROSE COLLABORATIVE PROGRAM PARTICIPANT

Testimony adapted from the Greater Louisville Workforce Development Board, Inc. - Compass Rose Collaborative



ROADBLOCKS TO REBUILDING AND MITIGATING BARRIERS

“Our young people are living day to day, so thinking about 3 weeks, let alone 3 months, seems like forever. We asked one of our young people, ‘where do you want to be in 3 months?’ He replied ‘Alive.’”

- CRC PROGRAM LEADER, ALBANY

Despite the successes the CRC communities have in prioritizing the youth voice, developing essential partnerships, reducing recidivism, and connecting young people to employment and education pathways, these communities must still contend with pervasive and structural barriers. While the CRC communities can work to mitigate these barriers, large-scale structural investments are needed to eliminate these barriers. The barriers to program success that the CRC leaders identified correspond with national trends and research. These barriers are structural and not indicative of youth’s aptitude, intelligence, or ability to excel in education or employment as a result of incarceration’s collateral consequences¹² that create obstacles and limit people’s ability to rebuild and restore their lives. They include:

- **Trauma and mental health.** Research shows, and practitioners affirm, the critical need to focus on providing mental health services and trauma-informed approaches for low-income youth and young adults who often face unaddressed mental health challenges and the consequences of trauma.¹³ Trauma is the emotional, cognitive, physical, spiritual, and social stress that impacts an individual’s development and well-being. Trauma can be triggered by a one-time event, a prolonged event, or a series of events.¹⁴ Studies have documented that trauma is structural, pervasive, and can affect whole communities.¹⁵ Individual and collective trauma harms many low-income youth and young adults—especially those impacted by the criminal justice system—and can hinder their ability to stay on or reconnect to an educational and career pathway that leads to economic security.¹⁶

- **Substance use and abuse.** Substance use is common among young adults, but substance abuse is rare. For example, 74 percent of young adults in poverty reported having used alcohol or an illicit drug at some point within the last year as compared to less than 10 percent reporting dependency.¹⁷ In one study, young people identified substance use and abuse as prevalent in their communities and recognize the role of substance use as a coping mechanism to deal with unresolved trauma.¹⁸ Many young people who use substances are denied employment opportunities and/or can violate their parole or probation conditions without having access to appropriate support or treatment.
- **Stable housing.** Formerly incarcerated individuals face a housing crisis created by parole restrictions, felony bans on public housing and housing vouchers, and discrimination from landlords.¹⁹ As a result, youth and young adults experience homelessness at high rates. On a single night last year, 36,361 unaccompanied youth were counted as homeless across the country. Of those, 89 percent were ages 18-24. The majority are sleeping unsheltered—outside, in a car, or someplace not meant for human habitation.²⁰ National data reinforce what the CRC program leaders are seeing on the ground: lack of transitional housing and emergency shelter beds available in their communities for young adults. Housing unaffordability in many cities is also exacerbating this challenge, even those who have steady and stable employment.
- **Transportation.** Navigating transportation to education classes, workforce development training, and subsidized employment sites is a very real issue for youth participants. Inadequate public transit and/or lack of finances to own a car can make the logistics of getting to work challenging.²¹ Transportation is also a barrier to meeting other needs such as daily errands, visiting family, and attending court-mandated workshops and parole/probation appointments. Even if young people have

Addressing the Transportation Barrier

Phoenix Youth & Family Services serves a large rural area in southeast Arkansas that spans five counties and lacks public transportation infrastructure. The organization uses its own van and the area's sole Uber driver to help young people get to and from training, work sites, and probation and social services appointments.

While Albany has a bus system, many of the larger companies that employ the CRC participants are located past the end of the bus line. Albany's Department of Workforce Services is currently working on a ride-sharing solution and identifying strategies and solutions that employers can provide to their other employees as well.

Baltimore has a robust public transit system, yet the fares can be too expensive for the CRC participants. The Mayor's Office of Employment Development provides transportation vouchers and financial resources, but at times these resources are not enough to cover the full expense.

access to a vehicle, they might have difficulty restoring a driver's license that has been revoked or suspended due to fines associated with their incarceration.

- **Identification.** Young adults impacted by the criminal justice system often return home without a valid state-issued identification (ID) card, creating an ongoing cycle of barriers. In some cases, their prison-issued identification card is not accepted as an official form of identification nor is one a young person wants to share with perspective employers and others. Without an ID, young people cannot register for education and training programs, enroll in postsecondary education, nor get a job.

“An official government-issued identification card, equal in value to and as universally accepted as a driver’s license or passport, can be the key to a post-incarceration life filled with possibilities instead of roadblocks.”

- THE ATLANTIC

- **Little work experience prior to incarceration.** Work experience during the teen years is critical to establishing work history and references, which are linked to long-term employability. Many CRC communities reported that a lack of work experience is a barrier to young people who are affected by the justice system as they enter the workforce, some for the first time.
- **Child care.** Young parents returning from incarceration or who have a criminal record deal with the added pressure of having safe and affordable child care. Child care is often not available, accessible, affordable, or high-quality. They need child care not just to work and go to school, but also to become engaged in restorative justice programs to support reentry into their communities and honor appointments as part of the conditions of their supervision (e.g., completing paperwork, attending court-mandated classes, participating in recruitment workshops, running errands, and complying with probation or parole appointments).
- **Probation and parole.** In some cases probation and/or parole conditions were seen as barriers to a young person's education, training, and employment success. This could include appointments conflicting with school, training, or work schedules, not recognizing incremental progress and participant improvements, to having little coordination of staff across systems and inflexible interpretations of probation and parole conditions.

The CRC communities are addressing barriers facing young people and are navigating systems and partnerships to more effectively deliver services to program participants. Establishing strong partnerships with other community-based organizations, employers, governments, and young people offers an intersectional approach to mitigating these systemic barriers. The following strategies can mitigate barriers for young people entering education and the workforce:

- Creating partnerships with quality programs in the community to create holistic support systems and mitigate competition from other local community-based organizations
- Establishing memoranda of understanding with employer partners and unions
- Securing flexible resources for tools, uniforms, supplies, food, and as-needed support for youth
- Offering co-enrollment through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act to complement the program and provide additional support to young people
- Overcoming city procurement processes that slow down partnerships and service delivery
- Creating data sharing across workforce, corrections, and adult court systems, among others
- Establishing relationships with all levels of staff within law enforcement agencies
- Working with young people prior to their release from incarceration to secure eligibility documentation and help the young person build a rapport with staff and feel he or she has a safe space to report to upon release
- Using the intermediary approach to provide comprehensive program strategic planning and inform and replicate evidenced-based strategies across program communities





TRANSFORMATION AND REALIZING SUCCESS

“Transformation is multifaceted. It is about moving resources, changing narratives, and visibility.”

- CENTER FOR LAW AND SOCIAL POLICY

Systemic barriers and pervasive inequality have failed far too many young people in our nation. The CRC communities are working to transform those systems while supporting young people on their personal journey. Transformation encompasses supporting young people to become stable and economically secure, witnessing small victories — such as improving time and attendance for classes or training — accessing postsecondary education, and attaining short- and long-term credentials. It also means reconnection and reengagement with families, children, and community.



EVALUATING EFFECTIVENESS AND REALIZING SUCCESS

“The warm and fuzzy successes matter – we celebrate achievements big and small. When a no, becomes a yes. Passing a first test. Being on time and getting a job and enrolling in postsecondary education.”

- CRC PROGRAM LEADER, LOUISVILLE

CRC communities cited the following as indicators of success:

YOUTH INDICATORS

- Active engagement.
- Connection and reengagement with family, including children.
- Economic and social/emotional stability.
- Improved timeliness and attendance.
- Overall improved health and well-being.
- Progress toward and achieving individual youth-determined goals.
- Reduced recidivism.
- Retention in employment.
- Skills and credential attainment.
- Training and postsecondary certificate completion.

PROGRAM INDICATORS

- Active alumni engagement, mentoring, and giving back to the young men and women that are coming behind them.
- Favorable youth and employer evaluations.
- Improved staff development.
- Increased program enrollment, attendance, and completion.

The collaborative data across the CRC communities confirms that the program is working. The data for the first group of communities to receive funding and launch the CRC shows that since 2017:



CRC enrolled a total of **613 participants**, surpassing the goal of 563.



Over **70 percent of young people** in the program had earned credentials.



< **2%**

Less than **2 percent of program participants** had been convicted of new crimes since their enrollment into the CRC.



73%

73% of participants had enrolled into a long-term education placement or were employed.

This includes data reported as of September 30, 2019.

Additionally, communities are shifting mindsets and policies to welcome young people back into their community post-incarceration . Employers and educational institutions are revising their policies and procedures to eliminate locking people out of opportunities so they can advance academically and obtain a job with self-sustaining wages.

“***Compass Rose is working. It is allowing our city to have a network of people that have been ostracized to become a priority.***”

- CRC PROGRAM LEADER, ALBANY





REBUILDING AND RESTORATION: A CALL TO ACTION

“*It takes time to move the needle of systemic oppression.*”
- CRC PROGRAM LEADER, HARTFORD

The CRC best practices are a step in the larger process of reimagining the justice system. States, cities, communities, families, and individuals all experience a great human toll as a result of the structural racism and bias in the criminal justice system. Reimagining the justice system requires moving towards large-scale investments in decarceration and a focus on restorative justice in our programs and policies. CLASP and FHI 360 encourage partners—including practitioners and policymakers – to address the issues that will create positive outcomes for young people.

- **Identification is access:** Ensure individuals returning from incarceration or detention can receive state-issued identification through established memoranda of understanding with the state/local department of corrections, the bureau of prisons, state department of motor vehicles, and department of vital records prior to or immediately upon release.
- **Coordination and cross-systems approaches:** Improve coordination across systems to address a comprehensive system of care. Ensure best practices like those used by the CRC are embedded into federal and state workforce programs, including WIOA, and encourage co-enrollment and coordination of eligibility across public and privately funded programs.
- **Flexibility and resources:** Promote flexibility for programs working with individuals returning from incarceration and detention. Federal and state policies and programs should allow program providers and city agency leaders discretion on how to best use resources to support transportation, stipends, and other strategies that can help stabilize young people before entering the training program. The justice system should be flexible in allowing probation and parole appointments to be scheduled outside of work, skills training or education hours, or to

occur virtually. Absences from work, training, and academic classes can lead to credentials not being attained or delayed, missed wages, and job loss.

- **Removing employment barriers:** Expand employer policies and hiring practices to broaden the range of youth- and reentry-friendly sectors, working directly with hiring managers and human resources departments. Eliminate barriers to employment and education including banning the box²³ on job and higher education applications and reexamining state occupational licensing bans.
- **Alignment of corrections and community education:** Ensure education and workforce training opportunities provided during incarceration are available and a part of a pathway to a career that meets the local labor market needs and ensures a smooth transition to work post-release. Align training so that individuals can realistically get state certification or licensure and employment despite having a criminal background.
- **Supportive services access:** Provide access to public benefits, including Medicaid, at the point of release from incarceration to ensure individuals can maintain any medications they were prescribed while incarcerated and can access benefits upon returning to their communities. Remove housing bans on individuals with felony convictions and invest in transitional housing for young adults and those returning from incarceration.

Policymakers, systems leaders, community partners, and young people can work together to have healthy and vibrant communities by improving the outlook and outcomes of young people impacted by the justice system. This includes addressing collateral consequences and investing in large-scale policy and funding options for alternatives to incarceration; diversion strategies, mental health and well-being services and supports; and education, training, and employment pathways for young people. Stakeholders should work to build community infrastructure and networks that support young people and collaborate with organizations and intermediaries that can build the capacity of community stakeholders, secure resources to support this work, and facilitate learning and collaboration across communities.

CLASP and FHI 360 have provided this brief to share best practices with stakeholders in the youth development, education, employment, and reentry fields. Supportive policies and investments for young adults and for the communities in which they live is a matter of survival. But that is not enough. We have a collective responsibility to do more. We ask that other communities and leaders join us²⁴ in breaking down barriers and implementing effective strategies that support young people.

“It is about young people seeing life pathways well into the future and our programs being able to work with and support them along the way, however long that takes.”

- CRC PROGRAM LEADER, BALTIMORE

END NOTES

¹ *Systems of power are the beliefs, practices, and cultural norms on which individual lives and institutions are built. They are rooted in social constructions of race and gender and are embedded in history (colonization, slavery, migration, immigration, and genocide) as well as present-day policies and practice.*

² Duy Pham and Wayne Taliaferro, “Reconnecting Justice: Lessons Learned and the Agenda Ahead, Center for Law and Social Policy,” *CLASP*, April 2017, <https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/publications/2017/04/Reconnecting-Justice-Lessons-Learned-and-the-Agenda-Ahead.pdf>.

³ Alexi Jones, “Correctional Control 2018: Incarceration and supervision by state,” *Prison Policy Institute*, December 2018, <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/correctionalcontrol2018.html>.

⁴ Ram Subramanian, Ruth Delaney, and Stephen Roberts, “Incarceration’s Front Door: The Misuse of Jails in America,” *Vera Institute of Justice*, February 2015, <http://www.safetyandjusticechallenge.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/incarcerations-front-door-report.pdf>.

⁵ Alex Frank, “Why Reimagining Prison for Young Adults Matters,” *Vera Institute of Justice*, <https://www.vera.org/blog/why-reimagining-prison-for-young-adults-matters>.

⁶ The Sentencing Project, “Black Disparities in Youth Incarceration,” September 2017, <https://www.sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Black-Disparities-in-Youth-Incarceration.pdf>.

⁷ FHI 360’s Compass Rose Collaborative program is 100% funded by the U.S. Department of Labor’s Reentry Program in the amount of \$4.5 million. No other sources of funding support this program.

⁸ FHI 360 2018 annual report “8 Billion Reasons” <https://www.fhi360.org/annual-report-2018#six>.

⁹ CLASP, “Statement of Kisha Bird to the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Education and Labor hearing on “Eliminating Barriers to Employment: Opening Doors to Opportunity,” <https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/publications/2019/05/2019%2005%2021%20Statement%20of%20Kisha%20Bird%20Eliminating%20Barriers%20to%20Employment.pdf>.

¹⁰ Youth Power, Positive Youth Development (PYD) Framework, <https://www.youthpower.org/positive-youth-development-pyd-framework>.

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¹² American Bar Association, “Collateral Consequences of Criminal Convictions: Judicial Bench Book,” *National Criminal Justice Reference Service*, March 2018, <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/251583.pdf>.

¹³ Nia West-Bey and Stephanie Flores, “‘Everybody Got Their Go Throughs’ Young Adults on the Frontlines of Mental Health,” *CLASP*, June 2017, <https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/publications/2017/08/Everybody-Got-Their-Go-Throughs-Young-Adults-on-the-Frontlines-of-Mental-Health.pdf>.

¹⁴ Odelya Gertel Kraybill, “What is Trauma?,” *Psychology Today*, January 31, 2019, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/expressive-trauma-integration/201901/what-is-trauma>.

¹⁵ “Adverse Community Experience and Resilience: A Framework for Addressing and Preventing Community Trauma,” *Prevention Institute*, <https://www.preventioninstitute.org/sites/default/files/publications/Adverse%20Community%20Experiences%20and%20Resilience.pdf>.

¹⁶ Nia West Bey, “Everybody Got Their Go Throughs.”

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Nia West-Bey and Marlén Mendoza, “Behind the Asterisk: Perspectives on Young Adult Mental Health from ‘Small and Hard-to-Reach’ Communities,” *CLASP*, April 2019, <https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/publications/2019/04/2019-behindtheasterisk.pdf>.

¹⁹ Teresa Wiltz, “Where ‘Returning Citizens’ Find Housing After Prison,” The National Reentry Resource Center, April 23, 2019, <https://csgjusticecenter.org/nrrc/media-clips/where-returning-citizens-find-housing-after-prison/>

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²³ Beth Avery, “Ban the Box U.S. Cities, Counties, and States Adopt Fair-Chance Policies to Advance Employment Opportunities for People with Past Convictions,” *NELP*, July 2019, <https://www.nelp.org/publication/ban-the-box-fair-chance-hiring-state-and-local-guide/>.

²⁴ For more information about the Compass Rose Collaborative, contact Lisa Johnson, <https://www.fhi360.org/experts/lisa-johnson-mpa> or NIWL@fhi360.org.

