Center for Youth and Communities
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Brandeis University

EMPLOYMENT FOR YOUTH WITH TRAUMA HISTORIES:
Lessons from Research and Experience

PRACTICAL ADVICE GUIDES AND ISSUE BRIEFS SERIES

Smart Strategies to employ, educate, and support youth in employability development programs

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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FOREWORD

The Practical Advice Guides and Issue Briefs are intended for youth practitioners, program managers, business and public sector worksite supervisors, funders, policymakers, and others interested in employing, educating, and supporting youth. We present lessons and information from research, Walmart's Summer Youth Employability Initiative (SYEI), and other experience to inform practice and policy.

This Issue Brief focuses on employment for youth with trauma histories and improving youth employment outcomes through partnerships and a youth development approach. Another addresses employment for youth with disabilities. The Practical Advice Guides offer strategies to make work more meaningful for, and improve the employability of, young people whose supports and opportunities have been few.

THE SUMMER YOUTH EMPLOYABILITY INITIATIVE
The Walmart Foundation invested $13.5 million in ten cities over three summers (2011–2013) to employ, educate, and support more than 8,500 youth. Brandeis' Center for Youth and Communities documented the 2011 SYEI experiences and managed the 2012-2014 SYEI. Walmart also funded the Center to undertake this publication series and other knowledge development and dissemination activities:

- Employer roundtables—collecting data about what entry level workers need and promoting partnerships with nonprofits and public entities.
- Management and leadership academies—capacity building for leadership teams developing results-oriented partnerships to employ, educate, and support youth (for a description of the academies see http://cyc.brandeis.edu/pdfs/CYCBrochure02.27.15.pdf)
- Profiles of select youth employability programs.

- A November 2014 national learning exchange in Washington, DC to:
  o Ignite action and urgency about the youth unemployment crisis and the value of linking real work for pay with education and support.
  o Inspire and inform interagency and cross-sector partnerships to employ, educate, and support youth.
  o Share lessons from the Brandeis partner network.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO EMPLOY, EDUCATE, AND SUPPORT YOUTH?
Programs offering real work for pay, learning, and supports can help vulnerable youth bridge the gap between preparation and employer demand, improve educational outcomes, contribute to communities and family budgets, connect with positive role models, and build work-based competencies.

Teen employment in the U.S. is at its lowest level in 60 years – about 30%. Yet employers cannot find enough workers with demonstrated work competencies to meet job demands. Declining government support for youth jobs and work readiness training has led to a broken pipeline of prepared workers.

The costs of doing nothing are high. Without support, vulnerable youth face lifetime employment struggles, poverty, dependence on public welfare, disengagement from society, encounters with the law, prison, and poor health. With inaction, society faces a generation of young adults who have never held a job, increased costs for unemployment, welfare, and incarceration, lost wages and tax revenues, violence, and a shortage of entry-level and middle-skills workers.

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WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED ABOUT EMPLOYING, EDUCATING, AND SUPPORTING YOUTH?

Although a paid job is often called "the most effective social service program," and young people want jobs,[1] vulnerable youth need support to become employable. SYEI lessons include:

- Opportunities to improve work readiness through learning, reflection with caring adults, and competency-based assessments to track progress help youth to succeed.
- Proper orientation and supervision on the job are important parts of enhancing employability.
- Meaningful work leads to more positive outcomes than busy work.
- Access to supports such as food, child care, and transportation increases young people's reliability and learning.
- Learning to articulate and demonstrate their readiness to employers helps young people with future job searches.

SYEI youth surveys confirm the return on investment in summer jobs:

- One third to one half of participants earned work readiness certificates, professional certifications, and/or academic credit during the summer.
- More than half who had not planned to finish school or go on for more training or schooling changed their minds after the summer.
- Virtually all participants reported that they gained maturity and job-related skills and are now more employable.
- At least 20% went from subsidized summer jobs to long-term unsubsidized jobs.

In addition, independent studies in two SYEI cities showed that summer jobs programs reduced violence (Chicago) and increased academic success (New York). Other SYEI cities had evidence of similar outcomes, but not through formal studies.

For the SYEI cities, partnerships equal success. They created or strengthened partnerships and leveraged more than $10 million in financial, political, and other support from government, business, foundations, nonprofits, and educational systems or institutions to provide jobs, work readiness opportunities, and services.[2] These partnerships continue to add momentum through the Walmart-Brandeis Academy. For example, in one city, employers with experience hiring youth agreed to mentor less experienced employers and to leverage new job slots among vendors and affiliates.

ENOUGH IS KNOWN FOR ACTION

We are in the midst of a perfect storm of opportunity for attaining positive outcomes for youth and communities: consider the 2014 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, the dedication of the Federal Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs, support from the White House Domestic Policy Council, growing urgency among businesses to hire a prepared workforce, a focus on impact investing and other philanthropic innovation, advances in education and youth development practice, and emerging results-oriented partnerships across the country. The time is right, and *enough is known for action*.

Leadership, innovation, and excellence are needed to take advantage of this perfect storm and encourage more communities to employ, educate, and support youth through summer and year-round work and learning programs.

One young man who had a life-changing work and learning experience declared, "These people found my inner genius." We need such geniuses. Employing, educating, and supporting young people will help us find them.

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[1] Waiting lists for summer jobs programs are 10 times larger than the available slots.

[2] These supports were especially important for the most vulnerable, such as foster care youth, youth with a history of homelessness, court-involved youth, and youth with disabilities.

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EMPLOYMENT FOR YOUTH WITH TRAUMA HISTORIES:
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OVERVIEW

Why is it important to consider trauma in operating youth workforce programs?

Traumatic experiences – increasingly recognized as both pervasive and associated with major, long-lasting barriers to success – affect a person's capacity to function, create and sustain meaningful

relationships, and feel a sense of belonging to family and community (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) 2014; Babcock 2014; Children's Law Center 2015; NCTSN, n.d.). Young people carry the burden of traumatic events with them as they navigate education and career pathways, hindering efforts to employ, educate, and support them – especially those whose supports and opportunities have been few.

www.research.chop.edu, www.jhsph.edu

At the same time, research and practice have demonstrated that individuals can recover from the legacy of trauma with appropriate supports and interventions (SAMHSA 2014; Babcock 2014; Children's Law Center 2015; YouthBuild USA 2014; NCTSN 2003b). Employability programs offer special promise for providing such supports and interventions (Winefield et al. 1991; O'Brien and Feather 1990). Real work for pay provides a sense of accomplishment and contribution that no other activity can match, and offers the opportunity to develop important skills.

This brief reviews the prevalence and effects of child and youth trauma and discusses trauma-informed supports and interventions, with an eye to applying the information to youth employability programs.

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WHAT IS TRAUMA?

Trauma is commonly defined as events experienced as physically or emotionally harmful – sometimes life threatening – and that have lasting adverse effects on functioning and on physical, mental, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being (SAMHSA 2014).

SAMHSA'S THREE "E's" DESCRIBE THE DIMENSIONS OF TRAUMA: EVENTS, EXPERIENCES OF EVENTS, AND EFFECT

- Traumatic *events* may occur only once or repeatedly over extended periods (NCTSN n.d.). Examples include physical, sexual, emotional, or psychological injury or abuse; severe accidents; community or gang-related violence; witnessing a natural disaster; terrorist attacks or wars; loss of a loved one; and neglect.

- How an individual *experiences* the traumatic event determines its effects (SAMHSA 2014). Some people regain or hold their equilibrium, while others develop long-term traumatic stress responses. Factors contributing to such disparities include developmental age and stage, cultural practices and beliefs, the presence or absence of social and support services, family and community response, and access to and quality of education and health care (NCTSN n.d.).

- Both acute and chronic trauma can have detrimental and longstanding *effects* on health and wellbeing, such as inability to cope with normal stresses of daily living, to trust or form relationships, or to regulate behaviors and emotions (SAMHSA 2014). These effects are discussed further in a later section. Indicators of acute traumatic events include overwhelming feelings of terror, horror, or helplessness. Indicators of chronic traumatic circumstances include loss of trust in others, loss of a sense of safety in the world, self-silencing, and intense feelings of fear, guilt, shame, and self-loathing (NCTSN 2003a).

PREVALENCE OF CHILD AND YOUTH TRAUMA

There is no single number gauging the prevalence of child and youth trauma – different analyses yield different estimates. The following findings from a range of studies convey the overriding message that trauma exposure is widespread:

- One out of every four children in the U.S. experiences a traumatic event before age sixteen, and many of them will develop traumatic stress (NCTSN 2003a).
- In 2012 alone the U.S. recorded an estimated 686,000 child victims of neglect and/or physical or sexual abuse or psychological maltreatment (USDHHS/ACF 2013).[1]
- In the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study, one of the largest studies of its kind, 64% of participants reported at least one type of childhood trauma (CDC 2014).

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[1] Girls accounted for more than half of victims of child abuse and neglect (USDHHS/ACF 2013). Boys experience higher rates of physical assault than girls, while girls experience higher rates of sexual abuse, although this gap may be narrowing (Gwadz et al. 2007; Acierno et al. 2002). More than a quarter of child abuse and neglect victims in 2012 were younger than three years old (USDHHS/ACF 2013).

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- More than two thirds of a sample of children ages 9-13, followed until age 16, reported experiencing at least one traumatic event (Copeland et al. 2007).
- More than half (52.5%) of children ages 2-5 in a clinical sample had already been exposed to at least one severe traumatic stressor (Egger and Angold 2004).
- Although anyone can experience trauma (SAMHSA 2014), it is disproportionately prevalent among children and youth of lower socioeconomic status (Gwadz et al. 2007), including homeless youth and those within the welfare system (SAMHSA 2014). Several studies estimate that 70% to 76% of inner city youth are exposed to violence, and as many as 46% are assault victims (Bertram and Dartt 2009).

Trauma is not only a challenge for individuals. It also affects groups, neighborhoods, service delivery systems, and whole communities by way of social stressors such as poverty, under-resourced schools and health and human service systems, food and housing insecurity, high unemployment rates, unsafe neighborhoods and schools, gang wars, natural disasters, and discrimination (Youth Violence Prevention Funder Learning Collaborative 2014; Hardy and Laszloffy 2006). These secondary effects are described further in the next section.

EFFECTS OF CHILD AND YOUTH TRAUMA

Exposure to acute or persistent trauma affects physical, cognitive, and emotional wellbeing. Its long-lasting impacts on neurodevelopment, the immune system, and cognitive, social, and emotional development may result in chronic physical and mental health problems (SAMHSA 2014). A history of traumatic experiences creates barriers to success in education, training, and employment due to problems with executive functioning, attendance, fatigue, memory, concentration, attention, managing emotions, interpersonal skills, relationships, resolving conflicts, organization, planning, problem solving, decision making, judgment, and productivity (see, for example, Babcock 2014; YouthBuild USA 2014). Estimates of the societal costs of trauma – including addressing short- and long-term needs and effects, as well as loss of productivity – range from $100 billion to $400 billion per year in the U.S. (Youth Violence Prevention Funder Learning Collaborative 2014).

The following research findings illustrate trauma's long-term adverse consequences:
- Youth exposed to trauma and violence have lower grade point averages, receive more negative remarks on their work, and have more reported absences from school than their peers (NCTSN 2014; Children's Law Center 2015).
- Experiencing traumatic or adverse events significantly influences young people's employment and financial prospects (CDC 2014).
- Traumatic stress increases the likelihood of developing chronic illnesses, such as cancer, heart disease, and autoimmune diseases, and of early death due to ill health or suicide (Dube et al. 2009; Anda et al. 2008; Brown et al. 2010).
- Adolescent sexual assault victims are three to five times more likely to suffer from PTSD, suffer recurring abuse, mistreat drugs, and commit delinquent acts than those who were not victimized (Child Welfare Information Gateway 2009).
- In 2012, 13% of child abuse and neglect victims reported having some type of disability (USDHHS/ACF 2013).
- About 14% of a sample of youth exposed to at least one traumatic event before age 16 developed post-traumatic stress (PTS) symptoms (Copeland et al. 2007).
- The brains of child victims of trauma often remain in a state of hyperarousal, which interferes with normal brain development, intelligence, and the ability to establish relationships – increasing the likelihood of low academic and work performance, unemployment or underemployment, inability to focus, increased use of health and mental health services, and involvement with the child welfare and juvenile justice systems (NIJ 2011).

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- Youth who are repeatedly exposed to violence at home, in the community, or in the juvenile system find it challenging to abstain from anger or violence at school or work and are less likely to succeed in either (NIJ 2011).

- Homeless youth who previously experienced abuse, neglect, or violence often engage in dangerous activities such as shoplifting, drug dealing, and gun violence (Gwadz et al. 2007).

Children and youth respond to traumatic stress in different ways both at the time of the event and when confronted by something that reminds them of their traumatic experiences; their psychological reactions to a traumatic event influence their ability to cope with it (NCTSN, n.d.). Age is an important factor: young children are particularly vulnerable to negative outcomes, because their developmental transitions are so frequent. And, as we saw in the previous section, a significant number of young children experience trauma.

COMMON SIGNS SHOWN BY CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN THE AFTERMATH OF TRAUMATIC EVENTS AND CIRCUMSTANCES

- Physical responses such as nausea, pounding heart, muscle tension, hot flashes, throat constriction, blurred vision, sweating or clammy hands, and feeling faint.
- Feeling fearful, helpless, hopeless, ashamed, guilty, angry, anxious, apprehensive, or unsafe – sometimes for extended periods.
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
  o Re-experiencing the traumatic event and associated distress through exposure to reminders or intrusive thoughts or dreams.
  o Trying to avoid re-experiencing the traumatic event through dissociation, substance abuse, compulsive activities, self-harm, suicide ideation, isolation, withdrawal/disengagement, and numbing.
- Perceiving themselves and the world negatively.
- Problems sustaining positive relationships and attachments, especially in the areas of trust, responding to affection, and avoiding or resolving conflicts.
- Inability to control emotions.
- Irritable, aggressive, and/or disruptive (including sexually provocative) behaviors.
- Cynical or casual responses to others' (or their own) traumatic experiences.
- Difficulty learning and engaging in school.
- Disturbed sleep or other unusual sleeping behaviors.
- Difficulties with executive function skills such as planning, problem solving, weighing consequences, and preparing for the future.
- Inability to cope with daily living stresses, especially managing transitions and changes in plans.
- Intolerance of difference.
- Depression.
- Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.
- Learning and other disabilities.
- Increases in negative health behaviors such as eating too much (or too little) or smoking.

–Youth Violence Prevention Funder Learning Collaborative 2014; Babcock 2014; NIJ 2011; Egger and Angold 2004; Biederman et al. 2013; YouthBuild USA 2010

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The following snapshots illustrate a range of the traumatic conditions that our children and youth experience.

www.legalrightsforyouth.ca

Sam suffers from maltreatment and neglect at home. He struggles to concentrate in high school and has been increasingly starting fights with fellow students, usually losing his temper quickly and lashing out violently.

Bonnie has been with her boyfriend on and off since she was thirteen. He verbally attacks her and has hit her once or twice. Bonnie often tells her friends that she can't go out with them because her boyfriend wants her to himself. She has trouble sleeping and often feels that "something bad is going to happen." She has been skipping school and was recently let go from her part-time job due to poor attendance and performance.

Louisa's parents were on the verge of losing their home. Her father could not find work locally and now works in another state. Her mother struggles with depression. Louisa helps around the house. She makes breakfast for her younger brother, packs his lunch, picks him up from school, and helps him with homework. She often does not get to sleep until after midnight and has been falling asleep in class. She doesn't want her friends to know her situation and has withdrawn from them. Louisa recently quit the track team and has given her brother several of her cherished possessions.

Since Ricky lost his brother to gun violence, he has had frequent nightmares and become increasingly anxious. After experiencing a panic attack in school, he refuses to go back to school. He worries constantly about his other brother's safety, and yesterday followed him to work and hung around outside so he could make sure he was all right.

www.chicagoistheworld.org

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TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICE: PRINCIPLES AND POTENTIAL

Despite the evidence about prevalence and long-lasting negative effects, few systems and programs are set up to respond to young people with trauma histories. A knowledgeable, kind, and supportive mental health professional who underwent training in trauma-informed practice said, "I thought I knew more about trauma than I did. I owe a lot of young people an apology for all the times I said 'oh, just buck up.'"

The encouraging news is that with effective supports and interventions, young people with trauma histories can meet their life goals:

> Clear evidence suggests that executive functioning brain wiring can continue to build… even into old age. With the right supports, even those with significant histories of stress and challenging life circumstances can develop amazing new skills (Babcock 2015, p. 12).

Trauma-informed systems integrate trauma awareness, knowledge, and skill-building into their organizational culture, practices, and policies. The goals are to facilitate the recovery and resiliency of the young people served, to reduce the negative outcomes (as described in the prior section), and to increase positive outcomes by acting with understanding and sensitivity to the vulnerabilities of trauma survivors and others affected by traumatic stress (NCTSN 2003b).

Principles

Herman (1997) describes a three-phase process to promote recovery from traumatic experiences. The first is *safety and stabilization*, including safety in and control over the body and a safe environment, including in relationships; learning to regulate emotions and nervous symptom response, including how to replace unhelpful behaviors and responses with more helpful ones; and strengthening skills for tolerating and addressing painful and distressing feelings and experiences. At the heart of the second phase is to *come to terms with traumatic memory*, not by reviewing details, but by reworking the meaning of the events or circumstances; lessening the emotional distress and nervous system arousal caused by remembering; and mourning both the negative impacts of the trauma and the positive experiences the survivor did not have. In phase three, *integration and making meaning*, survivors gradually learn to live from a more stable and healthy present, rather than from an intrusive, traumatic past. They become able to distinguish between the present experience and the original traumatic experience; distance themselves from their traumatic experiences and secondary adversities; make choices about who they are and how they want to engage; make meaning (i.e., incorporate an appraisal of the traumatic event into a renewed sense of meaning and purpose); develop supportive relationships; plan for the future and determine action steps for getting there; build skills; and gain a sense of self efficacy and belonging.

Aligning closely with this three-phase process, SAMHSA (2014) synthesized the following principles for effective trauma-informed practices:

- Create safety in physical setting and interpersonal interactions.
- Conduct programs with transparency, prioritizing trust-building.
- Make a commitment to shared decision making and reducing power differences between staff and participants.
- Encourage peer support as an important avenue for establishing safety and promoting collaboration, healing, and resiliency.
- Support staff and participant voice and choice, and enhance their strengths.
- Recognize and move beyond stereotypes and biases, and assure that policies and practices are responsive to participants' individual characteristics (racial, ethnic, religious, cultural, and geographic beliefs, traditions, and needs; disability; sexual orientation; age; and gender identity).

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Positive youth development (PYD), a strengths-based approach which focuses on protective factors for young people, is not a trauma-informed practice per se, but aligns well with both Herman's and SAMHSA's approaches. PYD principles, which include relationships with caring adults, a sense of physical and emotional safety, a sense of belonging and ownership, access to resources, youth voice and agency, and opportunities to serve others, are useful to consider for trauma-informed programs.[2]

Potential

Based on the principles discussed above, one approach that shows promise in assisting all youth – but especially those who have experienced trauma – is social-emotional learning (SEL). Young people learn most effectively after their physical, social, and emotional needs have been met (Fredericks 2003). Researchers have also learned that "emotion [drives] attention, learning, memory and other important mental or intellectual activities" (McCombs 2001, p. 24).

Employability programs that provide opportunities to build competence in SEL – i.e., for youth to learn, develop, and practice skills and increase their psychological well-being and flexibility – can maximize the positive effects of
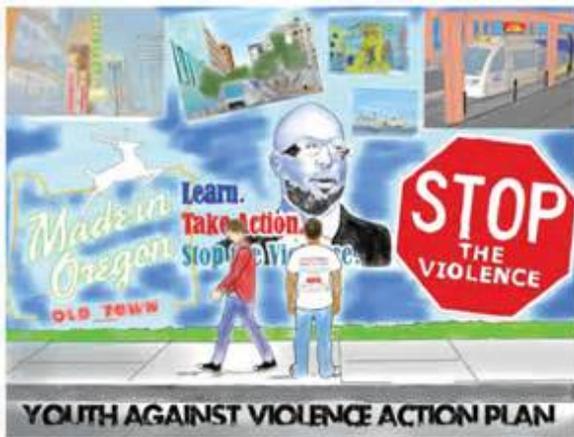
meaningful work for youth with trauma histories and reduce barriers to long-term employability. SEL competence is a vital part of being able to function effectively as a student, employee, and citizen, and includes the knowledge, skills, attitudes and beliefs that allow us to set and achieve goals, increase self- and social awareness, manage emotions and behavior, see others' perspectives and feel empathy, establish and sustain healthy relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL 2005).

Opportunities to develop and strengthen SEL skills have been shown to lead to stronger connections to the adults and settings where youth participate, increases in positive behaviors and decision-making ability, and reductions in negative, disruptive, and risky behaviors (CASEL 2005). Youth who have opportunities to build SEL skills demonstrate better academic performance, improved attitudes and behaviors, greater motivation, fewer negative behaviors (such as, disruptive classroom behavior, aggression, and disciplinary referrals), and reduced emotional distress (such as, depression, anxiety, stress, and social withdrawal) (CASEL 2005, Children's Law Center 2015). Research suggests that the benefits of efforts to improve SEL far outweigh the costs (see, for example, Belfield et al. 2015).

Other approaches that show promise for helping young people to recover from traumatic experiences include the following:

- Emphasis on sense of agency and goal-setting.
- Safe environment that promotes growth and focus.
- Professional development about trauma for program staff.
- Coaching and mentoring.
- Best practices for serving youth with disabilities – e.g., reasonable accommodations.

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[2] Many PYD resources are readily available – for example, see http://youth.gov/youth-topics/positive-youth-development, http://ncfy.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/PosYthDevel.pdf, and http://www.search-institute.org/what-we-study/developmental-assets.

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Concrete ways to integrate trauma-informed, SEL-based interventions and strategies into youth employability programs include the following:[3]

- Foster caring, task-based relationships based on trust and mutual respect.
- Create opportunities for youth to feel a part of, and build positive attachment to, the organization or program.
- Use participatory training methods that draw on youths' experience and strengths.
- Use positive discipline practice with logical, natural consequences and emotionally supportive interventions.
- Help youth recognize their feelings and the feelings of others through coaching and modeling.
- Use conflict-resolution skills promptly when disagreements and conflicts arise.

teenpregnancyprevention.net

- Create opportunities to practice and apply SEL skills.
- Provide ample time for reflection:
  - Debrief difficult moments to discuss what went wrong, how people involved were thinking and feeling, and what could be done differently.
  - Provide mentors or coaches to assist with applying and reflecting on SEL skills used on the job.
  - Engage in dialogue to help youth work through applying new skills by noticing and naming what they are learning, doing, thinking, and feeling.
- Hold team meetings where youth can practice group decision-making and apply relationship and social awareness skills.
- Teach problem solving models and facilitate their throughout the course of the work experience.
- Ensure that the work being done by youth is meaningful, linked to developing employability competencies, and age and stage appropriate.
- Promote project-based learning[4] on the job.

image.frompo.com

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[3] Adapted from CASEL, Frequently Asked Questions about SEL (http://www.casel.org/social-and-emotional-learning/frequently-asked-questions) and from field work completed as part of the Brandeis-Walmart Foundation 2013 Summer Youth Employability Initiative.
[4] Effective project-based work and learning revolves around youth-driven processes and activities, with supervisors, youth, and others working together to define and complete a learning-rich project.

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One Summer Chicago Plus

The 2015 citywide summer youth employment program One Summer Chicago (OSC) brought together government institutions, community-based organizations, and businesses to offer over 24,000 jobs and internships to teens and young adults. Within OSC, a targeted program called One Summer Chicago Plus (OSC+) focuses on reducing youth violence by providing both quality work experience and social-emotional support for court-involved youth who have experienced trauma. Growing out of the experience of and lessons learned from a similar school-based effort, OSC+ recognizes that youth experiencing trauma need additional supports in order to succeed, and builds evidence-based supports into the program.

Every OSC+ participant takes part in an SEL group-based curriculum, led by trained facilitators, many of whom have had similar experiences to those of the youth. Each group includes 8-12 young people and meets for two hours each day. The curriculum uses a cognitive behavioral therapy approach to focus on self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. There is also an emphasis on self-exploration, participant choice and reflection, character building, and learning skills through service projects. Guiding questions about self-exploration help set meaningful goals. Building trust and cohesion and encouraging mutual aid are also key program elements.

In addition, paid mentors paired with each young person are available to the young person and to act as a liaison with employers. This offers clinical support to youth as needed and support for both youth and employers when issues or challenges arise.

The University of Chicago Crime Lab has been evaluating OSC+ since 2012, using randomized controlled trials to study the program's effects. A 16-month follow-up showed 43% fewer violent crime arrests among the youth who had received the full set of services and supports (University of Chicago Crime Lab 2015).

YouthBuild USA

YouthBuild provides education, work, and service opportunities for disconnected young people – young people who are not in education, employment, or training and whose lack of opportunity to build on their strengths diminishes their prospects as well as those of their communities. YouthBuild programs "provide pathways … to productive livelihoods and community leadership … and unleash the positive energy of low-income young people to rebuild their communities and their lives, breaking the cycle of poverty with a commitment to work, education, family, and community" (https://www.youthbuild.org/about-youthbuild). YouthBuild participants typically learn construction skills through building affordable housing for low-income people and other community assets such as schools, playgrounds, and community centers. (An increasing number of YouthBuild programs provide work and service opportunities in other fields, such as health care, technology, and conservation.) Community-based organizations, educational institutions, and public agencies sponsor and manage the 260 programs in the YouthBuild USA network.

Many – perhaps most – of YouthBuild's participants are trauma survivors (YouthBuild USA 2010). The YouthBuild approach follows many of the principles recommended for trauma-informed services, such as core values that include physical and emotional safety, trustworthiness, choice and input, sharing power and decision making, and building strengths and skills (YouthBuild USA 2014). An increasing number of programs also provide in-depth staff and mentor training on trauma, screen applicants for trauma histories, and focus on collaborative decision making to empower participants to make choices about their life plans (YouthBuild USA 2014). For example, in one program, staff who underwent professional development concerning trauma have modified practices accordingly, providing even more supports for participants and better understanding their own reactions to anger or violence. During the training, several staff had to confront their own – sometimes unacknowledged – traumatic histories, and realized that dealing with their own experiences more constructively

would improve their ability to help the YouthBuild participants.

Crittenton Women's Union (CWU)
CWU's Mobility Mentoring program is a successful trauma-informed approach to assisting participants – usually disconnected young women who are trauma survivors – to set and achieve specific goals in employment and career management, family stability, personal well-being/health, education and training, and financial management. The program is based on a theory of change CWU calls the "Bridge to Self-Sufficiency." CWU engaged in a research and development process, explicitly informed by brain science, in which they focused on helping low-income participants to strengthen their executive function skills in order to improve their lives (Babcock 2014). Results have been promising: "Outcomes [such as family-sustaining employment, education, housing, and savings] from the intervention have been significantly better than community benchmarks or prior CWU outcomes" (Babcock 2014, p. 28).   Key program elements include reducing challenges to participants' ability to improve executive functioning and providing coaching/mentoring. Following are examples of strategies to achieve these goals:

- Reducing challenges
    - Make it easy for participants to enter the program and to re-join if they leave.
    - Participants are dealing with a lot of mental and emotional "noise" – to enable them to focus, create a quiet and predictable environment and use welcoming, participant-centered methods.
    - Communicate information in multiple forms and as interactively as possible so that participants understand the programs and benefits they are eligible for. Keep information simple and clear; avoid jargon and unnecessarily complex charts, blueprints, etc.
- Active coaching and mentoring
    - Engage participants, help them reflect on their experiences and reactions, and help them to develop a sense of "agency" (individual control) and resilience.
    - Help participants improve, and sustain improvements in, executive function and follow-through.
    - Help participants identify their strengths and desires and set goals; develop clear action steps to achieve these goals; and stay on track.
    - Offer rewards for achieving goals.
    - Help participants see and assess their options and adjust their goals and action steps as needed.

CLOSING THOUGHTS
Although a substantial number of young people face profound life challenges due to the effects of trauma, a growing number of programs are creating trauma-informed systems that help young people meet these challenges. As one researcher puts it, "With the right kinds of supports, even those with significant histories of stress and very challenging life circumstances can develop amazing new skills" (Babcock 2015, p. 10).

Programs that provide employment and employability training are ripe for providing the kinds of education, supports, and interventions that help youth with trauma histories. Since high-quality vocational programs and employment opportunities have been linked to improved psychological well-being, reduced depressive symptoms, higher life satisfaction, competence, and a greater sense of internal locus of control (Winefield et al. 1991; O'Brien and Feather 1990), they have considerable potential to support youth who have encountered traumatic stress. Real work for pay provides distinctive benefits such as a sense of accomplishment, being able to contribute, and an opportunity to develop work readiness skills, life and social skills, and occupational skills.

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