Job Corps External Review:
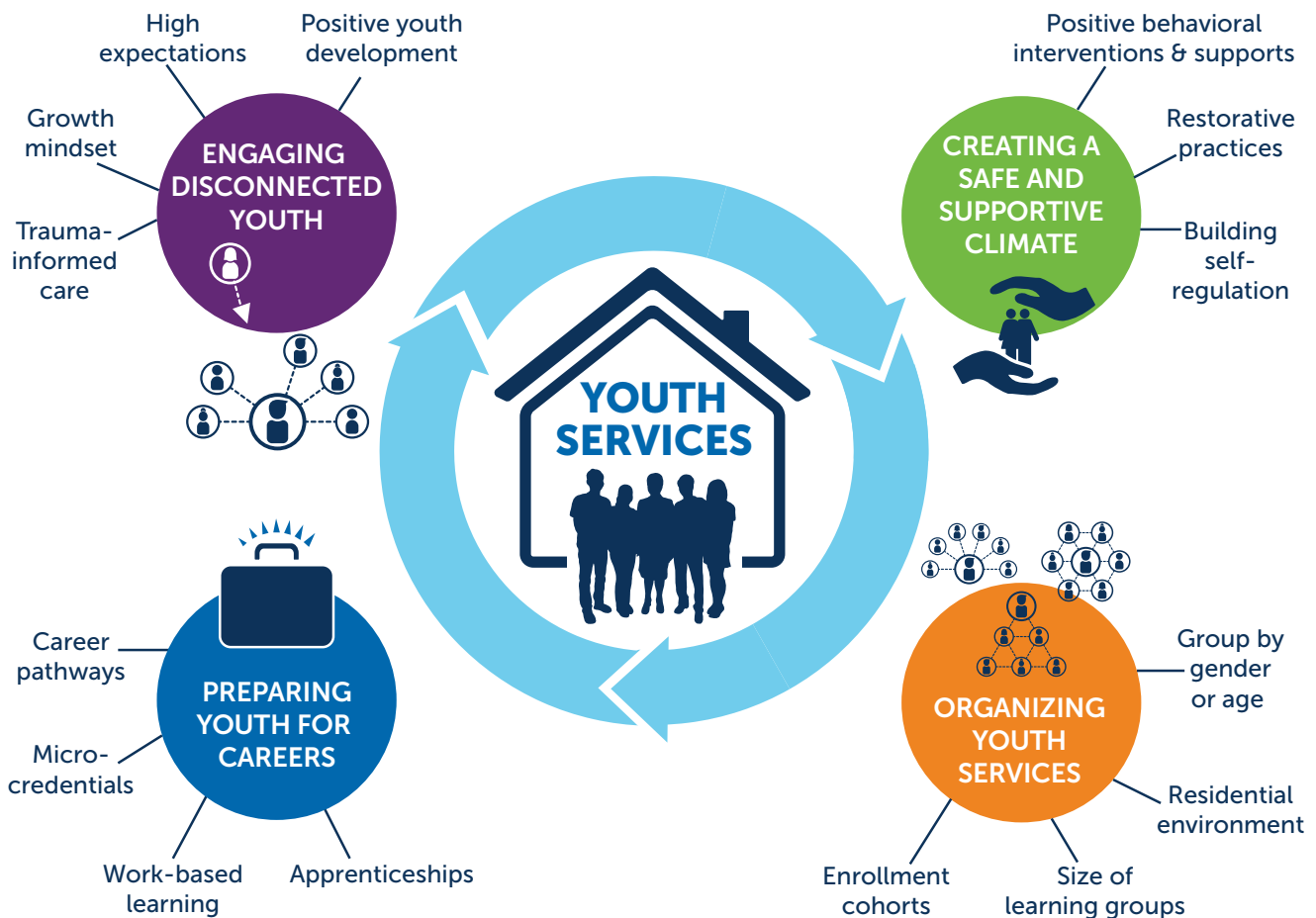
Highlights from an Evidence Scan of Promising Practices for Serving Disconnected Youth

The Job Corps External Review:

As economic conditions change and the research literature evolves, there is a need to assess current best practices for serving today's youth and consider how they could inform the Job Corps program. The Chief Evaluation Office in the Department of Labor (DOL) contracted with Mathematica Policy Research and its subcontractor, Decision Information Resources, Inc., to conduct an external review of Job Corps in order to: (1) document what is known about Job Corps and other similar programs, (2) identify promising evidence-based practices that Job Corps might consider for the future, and (3) present options for future research and evaluation.

This document highlights practices for delivering services to disconnected youth, as identified in the literature scan and described in the study's **Evidence Scan** report.

ENGAGING DISCONNECTED YOUTH
- High expectations
- Positive youth development
- Growth mindset
- Trauma-informed care

CREATING A SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE CLIMATE
- Positive behavioral interventions & supports
- Restorative practices
- Building self-regulation

YOUTH SERVICES

PREPARING YOUTH FOR CAREERS
- Career pathways
- Micro-credentials
- Work-based learning
- Apprenticeships

ORGANIZING YOUTH SERVICES
- Group by gender or age
- Residential environment
- Enrollment cohorts
- Size of learning groups

Job Corps, administered by DOL's Employment and Training Administration (ETA), provides academic instruction, vocational training, and supportive services to youth, primarily through its 125 residential centers. Each year, the program serves more than 60,000 youth ages 16 to 24. These youth are low income and are deficient in basic skills, have dropped out of school, are homeless, have children, or require education, training, or skills to obtain and retain employment. After completing the program, successful Job Corps students might enter the workforce, join the military, or continue their education.

The **Evidence Scan** reviewed current literature for evidence of concepts and activities that have relevance for the Job Corps program. Some may already be incorporated into Job Corps center operations.

Engaging Disconnected Youth

Cultivating positive youth development. Programs use various strategies, activities, and frameworks to proactively support youth development and fully prepare youth for adulthood.

Communicating high student expectations. Teachers and other staff are trained to use certain words and actions to communicate their high expectations of students.

Fostering growth mindsets. Teaching students to believe that intelligence and ability are not fixed and can be changed over time.

Creating a trauma-informed environment. Programs acknowledge the challenges and traumas that youth may have experienced and create an environment where youth are supported and not judged for their past behaviors.

Creating a Safe and Supportive Climate

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). Aiming to improve school climate, promote student safety and belonging, and reduce misbehavior, tiered PBIS programs offer activities for all students, small-group interventions, and one-on-one support based on student need.

Restorative practices. This nonpunitive approach to dispute resolution and violence prevention aims to build community, define shared values, repair harm between victims and offenders, and promote accountability and healing in the community.

Self-regulation to prevent problem behavior. Programs that strengthen self-regulation skills may help people control their actions, focus on tasks, and understand their thoughts and actions to de-escalate potentially violent situations and avoid conflict.

Preparing Youth for Careers

Career pathways programs. A career pathway is designed to respond to local economic needs through a structured sequence of education, training, supportive services, and job linkages. This can included education-based and career-focused linkages between academic instruction and vocational and career technical training.
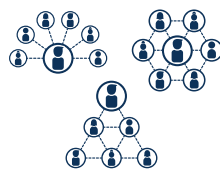
Micro-credentials. These credentials can be earned over a short period of time, provide evidence of possessing narrow, specific skills, and can be "stacked" on top of each other.

Work-based learning and experience. Training and education that occurs at the place of employment during work hours. These can be paid or unpaid.

Apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs. A combination of on-the-job training and related instruction where individuals can earn money, learn skills, and gain certifications while on the job. Pre-apprenticeship programs can prepare people for apprenticeship programs—for instance, by improving their math and literacy skills.

Organizing Youth Services

Grouping by gender or age. Programs may serve females and males together in a coeducational setting, or provide single-sex environments. Similarly, youth programs may focus on serving a narrow age range, or serving older and younger youth together or separately.

Residential environment. Participating youth may live together in a dormitory, or some or all of the youth may receive programming without living on-site.

Size of learning groups. Youth may be organized into larger or smaller learning communities.

Enrollment cohorts. Programs may allow participants to enroll at any time, at frequent but specified windows, or at only fixed times during the year.

For additional information, please see

Berk, Jillian, Linda Rosenberg, Lindsay Cattell, Johanna Lacoe, Lindsay Fox, Myley Dang, and Elizabeth Brown. "The External Review of Job Corps: An Evidence Scan Report." Report submitted to the U.S. Department of Labor. Washington, DC: Mathematica Policy Research, March 2018.

Lee, Joanne, Peter Z. Schochet, and Jillian Berk. "The External Review of Job Corps: Directions for Future Research." Report submitted to the U.S. Department of Labor. Washington, DC: Mathematica Policy Research, March 2018.

The **Evidence Scan** report and the **Direction for Future Research Report** can be found at https://www.dol.gov/asp/evaluation/CompletedStudies.htm.