

# CAPACITY TO MEET NEEDS

**Impact Statement:** Individuals and families build the capacity, skills and resiliency to meet their own needs

## Overview

Efforts to build capacity in community could encompass several different prevention strategies, however, for Airdrie FCSS this Priority Area is specifically focused on equipping people with the support and skills they need to address life events and transitions. The priority strategies in this area are limited to two critical domains – capacity building and skill-building to support **mental health** needs and **transitions to adulthood**.

While the strategies listed in this document are broadly aligned with Airdrie FCSS' prevention approach, program specifics such as implementation methods, participant risk characteristics, and program setting all impact whether an initiative falls within the FCSS mandate or not. Therefore, prospective applicants need to note that the implementation of a highlighted strategy does not guarantee funding. Conversely, a program that falls outside of the strategies outlined in this document could still be considered a strong prevention initiative which contributes to the overarching priority area and could therefore be deemed eligible for funding.

The approach for this synthesis was to bring together a selection of relevant practices from key strategy documents and practice reviews. These types of documents compile evidence-based practices and community suggestions to inform community-wide prevention strategies. It is not within the scope of this synthesis to present a comprehensive overview of the relevant literature or best practice programs in each strategic area. Rather, this synthesis focuses on presenting a suite of relevant prevention practices that have been recommended by community funders, municipalities or government bodies, and researchers. With the practical needs of program staff and service providers kept in mind, this document focuses on outlining broader types of activities and programming with the intention that it may inform agencies and service providers of the general characteristics and principles of effective prevention initiatives.

Much of the content of this document consists of direct excerpts from the source material, with occasional minor changes in language – these were made for clarity, or better communication with the audience of this synthesis and should not impact the overall intent of the original material. The content of this synthesis draws heavily on the following key documents:

- FCSS Edmonton Strategic Program Priorities 2022 Literature Review
- FCSS Calgary Research Brief 1: Positive Child and Youth Development
- Mental Health and Prevention: Taking Local Action for Better Mental Health by the Mental Health Foundation UK
- Supporting the Educational and Career Success of Out-of-School Youth under WIOA issued by the US Departments of Labour and Education
- Supporting the Educational and Career Success of In-School Youth under WIOA issued by the US Departments of Labour and Education

## **MENTAL HEALTH**

In a recently shared literature review that informs FCSS Edmonton's Strategic Program Priorities, the significance of mental health to overall social well-being is outlined as follows:

Mental health can be defined as psychological and emotional well-being. It is a necessary resource for living a healthy life and the main factor in overall health. Mental health affects how people react to life experiences and cope with adverse events; good mental health within a larger population is vital for positive social development and engagement. However, according to the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), one in five people in Canada experiences a mental health issue each year.

According to PHAC, positive mental health is the capacity of each and all of us to feel, think, and act in ways that enhance our ability to enjoy life and deal with the challenges we face. It is a positive sense of emotional and spiritual well-being that respects the importance of culture, equity, social justice, interconnections and personal dignity" (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2022).

Although all individuals may experience ups and downs in their mental health over their lifetime, Edmonton's review focuses on a set of sub-groups that have higher risk factors of developing mental health concerns. The following groups were identified as having an increased risk of experiencing mental health challenges:

- Youth (including LGBTQ2S+, Immigrant and Refugee, and Indigenous Youth)
- Older Adults
- Immigrants and Refugees
- Indigenous Adults (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2022)

This assessment is supported by the community feedback received by Airdrie FCSS, which identified youth, as well as newcomers and refugees as groups that would benefit from increased mental health support.

## **TRANSITIONS TO ADULthood**

For youth to successfully transition to adulthood they often require maturity, life skills, parental guidance and support. For vulnerable youth that lack these factors, the transition to adulthood is a time that requires additional skill-building and support to build their independence. According to the recently updated research brief published by FCSS Calgary, the following factors can contribute to social vulnerability in youth:

- Family dysfunction
- Social, emotional, and/or behavioural challenges
- Learning or cognitive difficulties
- Language or cultural barriers
- Lack of life and employment skills
- Aging out of or otherwise leaving the care of child welfare
- Homelessness
- Substance abuse issues
- Teen pregnancy or parenting
- Criminal involvement (Calgary Neighbourhoods, 2020)

# PRIORITY STRATEGIES

## Provide accessible mental health preventive supports to community members

The literature reviewed by FCSS Edmonton identifies **mental health promotion** as a pathway to building the awareness, capacity and skills for positive mental health:

“Mental health promotion addresses the strengths, capacity, and resources of individuals and communities to improve the causes and outcomes of their mental health. It takes a proactive approach using a combination of strategies that build individual skills, create supportive environments, and address community resilience. An overarching goal of mental health promotion is to attain positive mental health among individuals and communities” (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2022).

The following excerpt lays out a set of community mental health promotion and prevention approaches recommended by the Mental Health Foundation UK. The Mental Health Foundation’s report was chosen as a key source for this synthesis because it presented a diverse suite of practices meant specifically for community settings. The strategies also reflected priorities from other evidence-based reports, in particular, the World Health Organization’s earlier compilation of effective interventions for mental health prevention work (WHO, 2004).

The following recommendations were suggested with the United Kingdom in mind, but the practices included in this synthesis are either already in use or can be readily adapted to a Canadian context:

## **WHOLE POPULATION APPROACHES**

### **Improving the mental health literacy of the population**

- Ensure that social care staff, as routine, consider the impact of mental health inequalities and act to reduce them. This includes the identification of communities and individuals at greatest risk of mental health problems and an understanding of the potential impact of points of transition and adverse life experiences on mental health. Mental health improvement should be integrated into daily work and messages and strategies tailored to meet specific needs and areas of highest risk. The key elements are:
  - o Adoption of co-production approaches with communities to increase empowerment and maximize program impact.
  - o Develop local programs that promote improved mental health literacy and capacity for self-management within communities.
    - Enabling access to peer support and self-management resources within community settings such as schools.
    - Adapting strategies for groups and communities who are at higher risk of developing mental health problems such as people with long-term health conditions, refugees and people living with disabilities (Goldie et al, 2016).

### **Developing mentally healthy communities and places**

- Apply a socio-ecological approach (see Appendix B) to mental health improvement that aims to work across the multilevel of individuals, families, communities, and structures (including settings such as schools). Key elements are:

- o Adopting a universally proportionate approach that aims to address increasing levels of risk within communities and progressively applying resources where the greatest risks lie.
- o Promoting an Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach (see Appendix B) to mental health improvement enables individuals and communities to be active participants in planning, prioritizing and implementing mental health improvement actions.
- o Ensure that mental health improvement is viewed and measured as a central outcome in community investment and regeneration actions (Goldie et al, 2016).

### **Reducing stigma and discrimination**

- Develop evidence-based stigma and discrimination reduction activities that focus on sustained behaviour change. Key elements are:
  - o Combining awareness-raising and education with opportunities to reduce social distance through engagement with people with a lived experience.
  - o Targeting activities where the greatest stigma and discrimination are experienced and where outcomes need to be improved
  - o Ensuring consistency of messages and strategies to support long term discriminatory behaviour change
  - o Ensuring that messages are recovery-focused to challenge stereotypes and stigma (Goldie et al, 2016).

### **Integrated approaches to health and social care**

- Integrating health and social care services should be a central strategy for improving outcomes for people at risk and should be achieved through establishing joint approaches to planning and the development of health, mental health and social care strategies between local authorities, primary care and the voluntary and community sector. Key elements are:

- o Adopting wellness models that bring together health and mental health alongside social functioning and spirituality, including practitioner-guided support, self-management and peer support options.
- o Providing support to help vulnerable people navigate health services in recognition of the health inequalities that they encounter, such as navigator programs. (Goldie et al, 2016).

## **LIFE COURSE APPROACHES**

### **Strategies for parenting, children and young people**

#### **Parenting and protecting mental health in the early years**

- Ensuring families at greater risk can access evidence-based support. Key elements are:
  - o Provision of family-based programs that are showing promising results including Triple P and Incredible Years (see Appendix B).
  - o Parenting initiatives should not only consider the caregiving relationship between the parent and the child but also the relationship between parents taking a family systems approach (see Appendix B).

#### **Parenting and protecting the mental health of school-aged children**

- Promoting leadership and commitment to the whole school approach by ensuring that educators can access mental health literacy support and training
  - o Creating self-management opportunities and access to resources for students to protect and improve mental health.
  - o Taking a progressive approach to ‘whole school’ work to reduce stigma and promote help-seeking behaviours for children and young people in need of higher levels of support.
- Adopt a range of prevention strategies for children at risk for body image concerns. Key elements are:



- o Universal media literacy, using the media to critically look at body ideals.
- o Prevention programs aimed at children at risk using body image-focused cognitive-behavioural activities in schools.
- o Cognitive dissonance activities that engage young people in conversation on body image.

## **AGEING WELL**

### **Reducing social and emotional isolation**

- Invest in local projects that aim to improve mental health in later life through supporting emotional and social connections with family, the community and the people who are providing care and support services.
- Developing peer support programmes for older people, as these show the potential to enhance empathy among older people or across generations and provide a cost-effective tool for addressing the difficult and widespread challenge of social isolation (Goldie et al, 2016).

## Youth Skill Building and Support for Transitions:

### Provide access to youth programs that support transitions to adulthood

A recent research brief produced by FCSS Calgary states that: “The most consistent and, probably, an important finding from the research on all programming to assist at-risk youth to successfully transition to adulthood is that to be effective, programs must be very intensive, multi-faceted, and allow for repeated failure. And youth must be “ready” to participate. Youth who join programs often describe an “awakening” process that prompts them to want to change their lives. Youth have to come to a point where they want to “get their lives together” and, often, to identify a specific goal, such as a particular skill or educational achievement that is important to their future, and to be ready to accept help in achieving that goal. Even then, retaining the interest of vulnerable youth in a program can be very difficult. Youth who historically experience a lack of motivation or disillusionment resulting from previous negative exposures often need immediate engagement so that any period of initial optimism can be cultivated, and not wasted” (Calgary Neighbourhoods, 2020).

The following practices are excerpts from a series of technical papers issued by the US Departments of Labor and Education. These papers provide strategies for government and local partnerships that provide out-of-school support and those working with in-school youth.

## **IN-SCHOOL YOUTH**

### **Adult Advocates**

Assign caring, well-equipped adult advocates to provide targeted support to students at risk of dropping out. Often, at-risk students face significant personal, family, and social barriers that further challenge their chances of academic success. Establishing an ongoing relationship with a caring and specially trained adult can provide tailored support for students to address academic, personal, and emotional needs. Research has shown that students supported by these types of relationships feel a greater sense of engagement, school belonging and reduced risky behaviors and absentee rates, as well as improved grades and social skills. Most successful iterations of this intervention included frequent contact and regular intensive meetings as well as specialized training (including information about resources for the student and his/her family) and purposeful selection and pairing of the adult advocates involved (US Departments of Labour and Education, 2017).

### **Non-Academic Skill Development**

Implement special, targeted programs to improve students' classroom behavior, non-cognitive skills, and social skills. Disruptive behavior and frequent absences are correlated with dropping out. Thus, programs have sought to target the root causes of these issues by improving students' problem-solving and non-cognitive skills, working to thereby increase engagement and positive in-school behaviors. The focus of this work should be on helping students build positive relationships and developing key life skills, which affect school performance. Different models for executing this include: 1) utilizing engaged adults to establish academic and behavioral goals that include specific benchmarks jointly with students and providing guidance so that students develop relevant skills towards meeting the goals; 2) incorporating problem-solving and decision-making skills into the curricula, either whole classes or small-

group seminars for targeted students; and 3) establishing partnerships with community organizations and other agency partners to improve coordination and to facilitate students' ease of access to potential outside resources (US Departments of Labour and Education, 2017).

## **OUT OF SCHOOL SUPPORTS**

### **Provide Youth with Multiple Pathways to Success**

To meet the individual needs of vulnerable youth, programs should offer a range of customized pathways to education and employment that provide multiple entry and exit points. This includes a variety of options for recovering credits and earning a high school diploma, gaining job skills, and transitioning into postsecondary education and training. Individualized plans increase a youth's chances of skill mastery and overall chances of success. Ultimately, they take into account a youth's unique academic, career, social and emotional needs as well as their interests and guide them in re-engaging with education and career opportunities (US Departments of Labour and Education, 2017).

### **Key principles for effective service delivery to vulnerable youth**

FCSS Calgary's guidance on positive child and youth development also identifies some key principles for effective service delivery to vulnerable youth. Although these are not practices as such, they provide useful guidelines for *how* to work with vulnerable youth should be implemented:

- **Relationships:** The importance of a relationship between worker and service user(s) cannot be over-emphasized.
- **Collaboration:** Collaboration among service users, their families, other support networks and workers and other service providers, including schools

and health services, is vital to understanding and meeting the needs of young people.

- **Strengths-based:** This approach builds on young people's capacity to address risk factors while enhancing resilience. Strength-based approaches "focus on the strengths already possessed by the client and those found within their environment." Best practice evidence articulates that this approach enhances the effectiveness of initiatives at any level of intervention.
- **Participation and inclusion:** To be effective in achieving outcomes, including being effective in engaging young people in the first place, initiatives need to recognize young people's agency, choice, and self-directive capacities. To engage young people effectively at any level, there needs to be meaningful opportunities, sufficient resources, well-informed staff, friendly spaces and flexibility for young people to participate for varying lengths of time.
- **Individually responsive and flexible:** Knowledge of trajectories into homelessness highlights the fact that vulnerable young people are not a homogeneous group for whom one type of strategy will fit all. They are a diverse group with diverse needs.
- **Capacity building:** Capacity building applies not only to building resilience in young people but also to strengthening the workforce established to support young people. Building resilience is an important goal if we are to strengthen capacity and promote skills that help to reduce young people's vulnerability; develop young people's skills and knowledge to negotiate life transitions and facilitate young people to adapt successfully to change and stressful events.

- **Continuity of care:** To achieve effective transition into “independence” youth may require services into their twenties. This may require flexibility and resources to ensure that young people who need more support do not slip through the cracks (Calgary Neighbourhoods, 2020).

## REFERENCES

- Calgary Neighbourhoods. 2020. *Research Brief 1 Positive Child and Youth Development*. (Calgary, AB: Family & Community Support Services, The City of Calgary).
- Edmonton Social Planning Council. 2022. *FCSS Strategic Program Priorities 2022: Literature Review*. (Edmonton, AB: Edmonton Family and Community Support Services).
- Goldie, I., Elliott, I., Regan, M., Bernal, L., and Makurah, L. (2016) *Mental health and prevention: Taking local action*. London: Mental Health Foundation
- US Departments of Labour and Education. (2017) *Supporting the Educational and Career Success of In School Youth Under the WIOA*.
- US Departments of Labour and Education. (2017). *Supporting the Educational and Career Success of Out of School Youth Under the WIOA*.
- WHO (2004) *Promoting Mental Health: Concepts, Emerging Evidence, Practice*. Geneva, World Health Organisation.

## **APPENDIX A: SUMMARY OF STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES**

### **Priority Strategy: Provide accessible mental health preventive supports to community members**

- Improving the mental health literacy of the population
- Developing mentally healthy communities and places
- Reducing stigma and discrimination
- Integrated approaches to health and social care
- Parenting and protecting mental health in the early years
- Parenting and protecting the mental health of school-aged children
- Reducing social and emotional isolation

### **Priority Strategy: Provide access to youth programs that support transitions to adulthood**

- Adult Advocates
- Non-Academic Skill Development (behaviour and social skills)
- Provide Youth with Multiple Pathways to Success



## APPENDIX B: PROGRAMS AND APPROACHES

- **Socio-Ecological Model<sup>1</sup>** – This model reflects the interplay among factors operating across respective levels from macro/societal through micro/individual (e.g., Personal, interpersonal, organizational, and environmental factors). The model suggests that interventions across two or more levels create greater benefits than efforts focused on only one level.
- **Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)<sup>2</sup>** – Asset-Based Community Development or ABCD is an approach that looks for and starts from people's gifts and strengths (assets). These assets equip people to create local opportunities and respond to needs and challenges in their neighbourhoods. ABCD goes beyond any individual's gifts or particular group's strengths to consider how these may come together to create broader changes for the common good within a community.
- **Triple P<sup>3</sup>** – The overall Triple P program is a multi-tiered system of 5 levels of education and support for parents and caregivers of children and adolescents. As a prevention program, System Triple P helps parents learn strategies that promote social competence and self-regulation in children. Parents become better equipped to handle the stress of everyday child-rearing and children become better able to respond positively to their developmental challenges. As an early intervention, System Triple P can assist families in greater distress by working with parents of children who

<sup>1</sup> Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research. (n.d.). Promoting positive mental health through a socio-ecological approach. Promoting positive mental health through a socio-ecological approach | Here to Help. Retrieved May 12, 2022, from <https://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/infosheet/promoting-positive-mental-health-through-a-socio-ecological-approach>

<sup>2</sup> Tamarack Institute (n.d.). Guide: Asset-based Community Development at a glance. Guide | Asset-Based Community Development at a Glance. Retrieved May 12, 2022, from <https://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/library/guide-asset-based-community-development-at-a-glance>

<sup>3</sup> CEBC "Program ' Triple P Positive Parenting Program System. (n.d.). Retrieved May 12, 2022, from <https://www.cebc4cw.org/program/triple-p-positive-parenting-program-system/>

are experiencing moderate to severe behavior problems. Throughout the program, parents are encouraged to develop a parenting plan that makes use of a variety of System Triple P strategies and tools. System Triple P practitioners are trained, therefore, to work with parents' strengths and to provide a supportive, non-judgmental environment where a parent can continually improve their parenting skills.

- **Incredible Years<sup>4</sup>** – This is a set of comprehensive interventions for teachers and parents that are targeted at treating and reducing the early onset of conduct problems in young children through the promotion of child social competence, emotional regulation, positive attributions, academic readiness and problem-solving. It is also focused on improved parent-child interactions, building positive parent-child relationships and attachment, improved parental functioning, less harsh and more nurturing parenting, and increased parental social support and problem-solving.
- **Family Systems Approach<sup>5</sup>** – Bowen family systems theory is a theory of human behavior that views the family as an emotional unit and uses systems thinking to describe the unit's complex interactions. Families so profoundly affect their members' thoughts, feelings, and actions that it often seems as if people are living under the same "emotional skin." People solicit each other's attention, approval, and support, and they react to each other's needs, expectations, and upsets. This connectedness and reactivity make the functioning of family members interdependent.

<sup>4</sup> Series goals. Incredible Years. (2021, July 28). Retrieved May 12, 2022, from <https://incredibleyears.com/about/incredible-years-series/series-goals/>

<sup>5</sup> Introduction to the eight concepts. The Bowen Center for the Study of the Family. (n.d.). Retrieved May 12, 2022, from <https://www.thebowncenter.org/introduction-eight-concepts>

## APPENDIX C: PRACTICES INELIGIBLE FOR AIRDRIE FCSS FUNDING

The following practices were recommended by the source documents that are the basis for this synthesis, however, **they are not within Airdrie FCSS' mandate and are NOT eligible for funding.** They have been included in this appendix for information purposes only, and to provide a fuller picture of the range of practices in community that may create positive effects.

### Mental health preventive supports for community members (outside of FCSS mandate)

#### LIFE COURSE APPROACHES

##### Parenting and improving the mental health of school-aged children

- Developing a whole-school approach to embed mental health within all aspects of school life. Key elements are:
  - o Creating a mentally healthy school environment through providing teacher-led education; improving positive engagement with parents and families; providing opportunities for parenting education; creating meaningful opportunities for students to have a voice and share in decision-making; embedding mental health across the school curriculum; engaging students in school and community life; and coordinating work with other relevant children and young people support agencies.
  - o Implementing evidence-based bullying prevention programs in schools and other settings in which children and young people learn, live and spend their leisure time.
  - o Providing parent training at the secondary school level in the implementation of interventions to promote pro-social behaviours and the

reduction of bullying and disruptive behaviours.

- Promote and implement preschool programs to support school readiness, communication and the development of social and emotional skills.
- Target support to children who are out / or at risk of being out of school and who have greater exposure to factors that negatively impact mental health (poverty and discrimination) including children who are homeless; in the criminal justice system; part of a travelling community; or are in immigration detention centres.
- Implement whole settings-based programs within local colleges and universities informed by programs such as the World Health Organization's Health Promoting Universities Programme. (Goldie et al, 2016)

## **WORKING AGE STRATEGIES**

### **Developing mentally healthy homes**

- Developing housing, supported housing and residential services that enable older people to live independent and socially connected lives for as long as possible.
- Provide mental health literacy training to front-line housing and advice workers to help individuals and families secure and sustain appropriate accommodation, manage debt and maximize their incomes.
- Develop an integrated housing, health and social care pathway with relevant local partners that enables individuals at risk of developing mental health problems and their families to receive timely support that enables them to retain their tenancies.

### **Developing mentally healthy workplaces**

- Work in partnership with local business leaders and employers to apply a whole workplace approach to protect and improve mental health at the individual, collective and organizational levels. Orientating the workplace as a key setting in the lives of its employees and their families, and an agent of

influence in the community in which it operates. Key elements are:

- o Promoting line management training to create mentally healthy environments
- o Support local employers to engage with evidence-based supported employment programs
- o Explicitly address stigma and discrimination in workplace settings (Goldie et al, 2016)

### **Developing mentally healthy communities and places**

- Create and protect green spaces within neighbourhoods to generate better physical and mental health outcomes for individuals and communities.

## **STRATEGIES FOR AGEING WELL**

### **Preventing depression in older people and improving outcomes for people with dementia**

Provide access to evidence-based interventions to prevent depression from developing in older people. Key elements are:

- Providing Mental Health First Aid training to enable services in contact with older people to respond to distress.
- Providing brief intervention approaches for people with physical health problems who are experiencing depressive symptoms, as these are feasible, therapeutically effective and also likely to prove cost-effective.
- Creating local service pathways for older people who often encounter significant barriers in accessing help to ensure that they have timely access to supports such as CBT and psychotherapy
- Developing initiatives that aim to improve mood and social connectedness including for those with dementia (such as Participatory Arts and Peer Support Programmes).
- Promoting the development of dementia-friendly communities.

## **MENTAL HEALTH AND PHYSICAL HEALTH IN OLDER AGE**

- Adopting integrated approaches to health and mental health for older people who can experience higher rates of co-morbid mental and physical health problems. Key elements are:
  - o Developing physical activity programs for older people and ensuring that these are accessible - including through partnerships with local leisure facilities and community centres.
  - o Promoting access to liaison mental health teams for people being supported in specialist old-age acute physical health services as part of their package of care.
  - o Ensuring older people can access addiction services.

## **Youth programs that support transitions to adulthood (outside of FCSS mandate)**

### **IN-SCHOOL STRATEGIES**

#### **Academic Supports**

Provide targeted academic support and enrichment to students to improve academic performance. Because research has demonstrated that low academic performance, absenteeism, and grade retention are related to dropping out, providing additional academic support and enrichment may help to address these academic risk factors and to increase student engagement. Academic supports can be offered in a variety of formats, including through more intensive in- or out-of-school programs or homework assistance/tutoring programs. Some successful models have employed specific courses (remedial/credit recovery or enrichment) through summer school or Saturday school, as well as targeted individual or small group support. Enrichment opportunities, like leadership development, work-based learning, and special coursework,

can increase academic and student engagement, especially for students who may be bored and disengaged from school. (US Departments of Labour and Education, 2017)

### **Personalization**

Create a more personalized learning environment and instructional processes. Efforts to create a sense of community through whole school or other reforms have been shown to be associated with positive student achievement, improved school climate, and higher attendance and graduation rates. Personalizing the learning environment can help students' connectedness and engagement, and increase educators' ability to know and address specific academic or other challenges that students face; some reforms also increase opportunities for innovative and engaging teaching. Implementing this intervention can include establishing small learning communities (whole school, one grade level, cohorts, school-within-a-school), utilizing team teaching, creating smaller classes, or extending classroom time to create more time for meaningful student-teacher and student-student interaction. Encouraging and facilitating student participation in extracurricular activities can also engage at-risk students. (US Departments of Labour and Education, 2017)

### **Rigor and Relevance**

Provide rigorous, relevant instruction to prepare students for college and careers and increase student engagement. At-risk students, who may be less engaged in school, can benefit from understanding the relevance of academics to their future in college and career and from exposure to experiences and advising that expands their relevant knowledge and skills. Integrating career and technical education through multiple pathways toward college and careers has been shown to boost student engagement and achievement. Multiple pathways models consist of college preparatory academic classes, a choice

of professional/technical core classes, and field-based learning. Research also suggests that providing access to advisors to help students consider and navigate their postsecondary options may help keep them in school. Potential options to implement this practice include providing ongoing, meaningful professional development to educators, integrating career and technical education (CTE) through career academies or other multiple pathways models (school-within-a-school or occupation-related classes), career days, college visits, collaborations to bring in community members to share their professional experiences, and targeted advising and assistance for at-risk students on navigating the college application and financial aid processes.

## **OUT OF SCHOOL SUPPORTS**

### **Supply Youth with Individualized, Wraparound Supports**

To achieve their educational and career goals, youth need services that enable them to tackle the substantial barriers they face. Youth who have dropped out often face significant challenges to their educational success – homelessness, drug and alcohol abuse, teen pregnancy and parenting – that cause them to disconnect from school, feel inadequate, and struggle to return even after overcoming adversity.

To be successful, programs should address academic and skills development needs, as well as offer solutions to the socio-emotional, economic, health, and other barriers these young people continue to face. This means targeting services based on individual needs, creating supportive learning experiences and environments, and developing positive relationships with caring adults who can act as mentors. Such wraparound, individualized supports may include case management, counselors or social workers who focus on youth development, as well as community partners who can provide non-academic supportive services, such as childcare and transportation. Building a strong



relationship with a caring adult who can help youth navigate through the system can be particularly important in helping disconnected students re-engage (US Departments of Labour and Education, 2017).

### **Ensure Essential Postsecondary Education and Career Training**

High school graduates are less likely to be unemployed, live in poverty, have poor health, and engage in criminal behavior. Ultimately, supporting an eligible out-of-school Youth (OSY) in earning a high school degree is just the beginning of helping them achieve a better quality of life. However, data show that a high school diploma or equivalency is not enough. Although helping youth access employment and complete secondary education is critical, it is the starting point – not the stopping point. Occupations with higher entry-level educational requirements are projected to grow faster than those with lower levels of educational requirements over the next decade. For example, between 2014 and 2024, employment in occupations that require a bachelor's degree for entry-level positions are projected to grow by 8.9 percent compared to 3.9 percent employment growth in occupations that require a high school degree for entry-level positions. As employers increasingly expect a greater number of employees with effective communication, collaboration, and problem-solving skills, the need for additional education and training beyond high school has become a necessity. With each additional year of postsecondary education comes an increased likelihood of employment and earning family-sustaining wages. Young adults with a bachelor's degree earned more than twice as much as those without a high school credential (103 percent more), 62 percent more than young adult high school completers, and 29 percent more than associate's degree holders.

For OSY, career pathways, dual credit enrollment and community college career connection programs provide a necessary entrance into the workforce. To be most effective in terms of re-engagement, programs or re-engagement centers

should provide pathways for students to obtain college credit and career training at nearby community colleges. Other re-engagement centers employ staff members that also work for community colleges that provide scholarships to youth for completing the re-engagement programs (US Departments of Labour and Education, 2017).

### **Offer Critical Work Experience**

Youth, especially OSY, often have family and other demands that make it difficult to achieve their goals of educational advancement. Many need a paycheck to support themselves and their families. Offering employment as a key program element can be a significant incentive to re-engage youth back into education and get them onto a career pathway. Employment not only can help pay the bills, but also can provide valuable opportunities to practice what students have learned in the classroom. Furthermore, employment can build occupation-specific and employability skills, such as teamwork, time management, and problem-solving. Evidence has shown that teen employment improves employment and earnings outcomes later in life and can be a critical program element for helping youth successfully progress along their educational and career pathway. Examples include pre-apprenticeship programs, internships, job shadowing, and on-the-job training opportunities – all of which should include an academic and occupational education component (Departments of Labour and Education, 2017).