



Untapped Opportunities: Registered Apprenticeships for Youth with Justice System Involvement

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Introduction

Work-based learning opportunities can provide justice-involved youth with experiences that allow them to explore potential careers, interact with employers, learn or enhance new skills, and develop behaviors such as relating to co-workers, working with supervisors, managing deadlines, showing autonomy, and navigating workplace norms. Work-based learning opportunities foster the development of these behaviors from the start and complement technical skills that are obtained as the youth grow with one employer or transition to other employment opportunities throughout adulthood. This brief provides an overview of work-based learning opportunities, including registered apprenticeships, as well as language for articulating the benefits of registered apprenticeships to justice-involved youth and managing potential resistance they may express to practitioners.

Understanding Work-Based Learning

Justice-involved youth often face several obstacles when reentering their communities including housing instability, mental health issues, or substance misuse, and many may lack the educational requirements typically required for mid–high paying employment opportunities.¹ Improving the chances of successful reentry requires collaboration between practitioners that work with justice-involved youth, community-based organizations, educational providers, and workforce development systems.

In 2020, juvenile courts in the United States handled 508,400 delinquency cases involving juveniles charged with criminal law violations.² Research indicates that youth with juvenile adjudications have worse educational outcomes and a lower full-time employment rate, even when abilities, education, and general work experience are comparable to their non-justice-involved counterparts.³ These factors disproportionately affect youth of color, who comprise two-thirds of youth in the juvenile justice system.⁴



¹ Moise, J., Simonsen, E., & Kearl, M. (2023). State Strategies to Address the Needs of Justice-Involved Youth Impacted by Collateral Consequences. National Governors Association. <https://www.nga.org/publications/state-strategies-to-address-the-needs-of-justice-involved-youth-impacted-by-collateral-consequences>

² National Center for Juvenile Justice. *OJJDP Statistical Briefing Book*. Online. Retrieved from: <https://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/court/qa06201.asp?qaDate=2020>. Released on January 10, 2023.

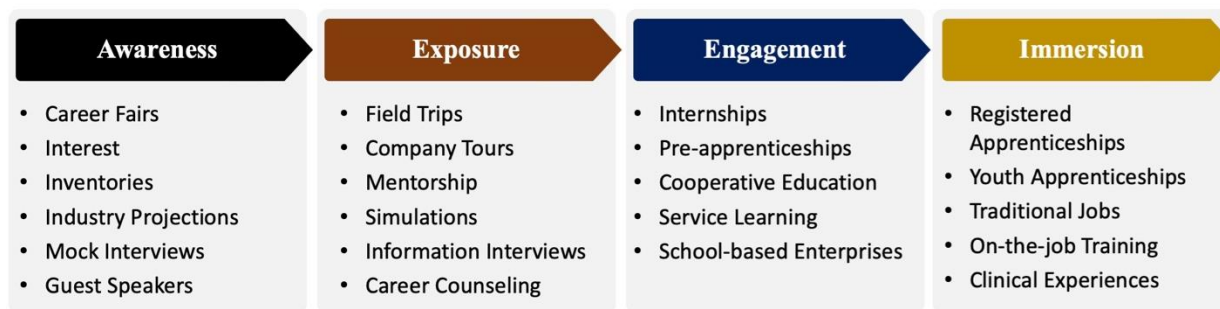
³ Golan, L., Hai, R., & Wabiszewski, H. The Impact of Juvenile Conviction on Human Capital and Labor Market Outcome. *Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis Review*, First Quarter 2022, pp. 41-69. <https://doi.org/10.20955/r.104.41-69>

⁴ The Council of State Governments Justice Center. (2015). *Locked Out: Improving Educational and Vocational Outcomes for Incarcerated Youth*. <https://csgjusticecenter.org/publications/locked-out-improving-educational-and-vocational-outcomes-for-incarcerated-youth/>



The practitioners who work with justice-involved youth often take on the role of introducing them to the world of work and the available options. Research indicates that stable employment following incarceration can substantially reduce recidivism, both among those who had stable employment prior to incarceration and those who found stable employment for the first time after incarceration.⁵ Work-based learning opportunities provide a transition to employment while equipping participants with the skills, behaviors, and confidence they need to be successful at work. To engage justice-involved youth in work-based learning, practitioners need to be able to articulate what work-based opportunities are, how justice-involved youth could benefit from the experience, and how to navigate the process.

Continuum of Work-Based Learning



Capital CoLAB. (2021). *Work-based Learning: Advancing Equitable Work-based Learning Opportunities in Digital Tech Across the Capital Region*. https://greaterwashingtonpartnership.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/CoLAB-Work-Based-Learning-Strategy_FINAL2.pdf

Work-based learning follows a continuum of four phases: *awareness*, *exposure*, *engagement*, and *immersion*. During the *awareness* phase, justice-involved youth gain access to tools and resources to learn about a chosen occupation or industry. During the *exposure* phase, justice-involved youth begin visiting and talking with employers, touring job sites, and learning about employment opportunities. Through *engagement* opportunities, justice-involved youth begin activities at a job site, with the expectation that they will gain new skills and experiences and contribute to the workplace by working on specific tasks. *Immersion* opportunities, such as registered apprenticeships, are the most rigorous forms of work-based learning in that they are longer and more intensive. At this level, supervision, mentorship, skills training and credentials, and wages are typically part of the experience.

Introducing justice-involved youth to the continuum of work-based learning allows for a gradual transition to work and career pathway planning. Justice-involved youth will gain a greater understanding of the occupation and the industry, as well as the abilities, skills, and training/credentials required by employers. The youth apply their skills and training on a job site, which allows them to test their abilities, expand upon their classroom learning, and practice workplace behaviors. Justice-involved youth receive guidance and feedback from co-workers, supervisors, and mentors, and can observe and shadow their co-workers. At the same time, justice-involved youth continue to receive support from practitioners in the community to discuss what they learned, leverage supportive services (such as case management, mental health, transportation assistance, and housing), and plan for future career pathway activities.





⁵ Kolbeck, S., Lopez, S., & Bellair, P. (2023). Does stable employment after prison reduce recidivism irrespective of prior employment and offending? *Justice Quarterly*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2023.2201330>



Exploring Registered Apprenticeship

Registered apprenticeship (RA) is an “earn-while-you-learn” model that provides a unique combination of classroom instruction and on-the-job experience. RAs enable justice-involved youth to obtain the technical skills and education required by employers while earning wages.

As defined by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), RAs have seven components:⁶

	<p>Industry Led - Programs are industry-vetted and approved to ensure alignment with industry standards and that apprentices are trained for highly skilled, high-demand occupations. This allows justice-involved youth entry into career pathways that lead to quality jobs and wages and ensures they receive training on the skills required by employers in their chosen industry.</p>
	<p>Paid Job - Apprentices earn progressive wages as their skills and productivity increase. Unpaid or unsubsidized training/work experiences are not an option for some justice-involved youth and these wages and additional subsidies can allow them to participate.</p>
	<p>Structured On-the-Job Learning/Mentorship - Programs provide structured on-the-job training to prepare for a successful career, which includes instruction from an experienced mentor. For many justice-involved youth who may not have held employment or steady employment before, this is particularly beneficial in helping navigate professional workplace behavior and career pathway planning.</p>
	<p>Supplemental Education - Apprentices are provided supplemental classroom education based on the employer’s unique training needs to ensure quality and success. This allows justice-involved youth the opportunity to obtain the technical skills necessary to succeed in the occupation and in the organization.</p>
	<p>Diversity - Programs are designed to reflect the communities in which they operate through strong non-discrimination, anti-harassment, and recruitment practices to ensure access, equity, and inclusion. This component encourages more opportunities for nontraditional apprenticeships, such as justice-involved youth.</p>
	<p>Quality & Safety - Apprentices are afforded worker protections while receiving rigorous training to equip them with the skills they need to succeed and the proper training and supervision they need to be safe. This component ensures justice-involved youth are offered a safe environment to work, learn, and begin a career pathway through apprenticeship.</p>
	<p>Credentials - Apprentices earn portable, nationally recognized credential(s) within their industry. This component ensures that the training delivered through apprenticeships provides justice-involved youth with essential skills that will be recognized by current and future employers as evidence of skill attainment in that industry.</p>

⁶ Apprenticeship USA. (2023), *Explore Registered Apprenticeship*. Retrieved from <https://www.apprenticeship.gov/sites/default/files/IndustryFS-Apprenticeship101-081623-508.pdf>



Understanding the Benefits of Registered Apprenticeships

Many justice-involved youth and their families or support systems may not be familiar with RAs, or they may share the common misconception that RAs are limited to the trades, or the false assumption that justice-involved youth are ineligible. Practitioners should develop materials and presentations that address these ideas and highlight the benefits.

- RAs are offered in a variety of industries beyond the trades, including information technology, healthcare, hospitality, education, and human services. RAs in the technology and information technology industries offer opportunities for justice-involved youth with less barriers to entry due to criminal history than other industries and opportunities for advancement in a high-growth industry.
- Justice-involved youth are eligible to enroll in RAs in a variety of industries, both in the trades and in non-traditional RA industries. While justice-involvement does not necessarily preclude involvement in RAs, certain industries such as banking, healthcare, education, and childcare require licenses that may be inaccessible to justice-involved youth.⁷ Laws protecting workers from being denied occupational licenses or employment due to criminal history vary by state.⁸
- Many justice-involved youth cannot afford the traditional model of advancing their skillset through unpaid work experience (internships) or paying for education and training without earning an income. RAs promote equity by paying justice-involved youth as they learn and work. RAs create an opportunity for justice-involved youth to enter the workforce with a good paying job and long-term career potential without a college degree. There are many industries, like Information Technology (IT) and cybersecurity, in which a college degree may not be required. This is particularly compelling when considering that less than five percent of formerly incarcerated individuals graduate from college, compared to the national average of 29 percent.⁹
- RAs have positive long-term results. The average starting salary upon apprenticeship program completion across all occupations is \$77,000. RA graduates earn more over their lifetime compared to those who do not complete an apprenticeship, with a lifetime earning advantage of \$300,000.¹⁰
- RAs allow justice-involved youth to gain industry recognized credentials and/or college credit while on the job. These credentials provide skills and wage gain and can be the start of a new career pathway with opportunities for advancement. RAs prioritize long-



\$77K

The average starting salary upon apprenticeship program completion across all occupations.

\$300K



Apprenticeship program graduates earn more over their lifetime compared to those who do not complete an apprenticeship, with a lifetime earning advantage of \$300K.

⁷ Love, M. (2022). 50-State Comparison: Limits on Use of Criminal Record in Employment, Licensing & Housing. Restoration of Rights Project. <https://ccresourcecenter.org/state-restoration-profiles/50-state-comparison-comparison-of-criminal-records-in-licensing-and-employment/>

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Couloute, L. (2018) *Getting Back on Course: Educational exclusion and attainment among formerly incarcerated people*. Prison Policy Initiative. Retrieved from: <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/education.html#table5>

¹⁰ Apprenticeship.gov. *Explore Apprenticeship*. Retrieved January 4, 2024, from <https://www.apprenticeship.gov/employers/explore-apprenticeship>



term career potential over short-term job placement.

- RAs provide justice-involved youth the opportunity to explore potential career interests and try out an occupation of interest in an actual work setting. Many justice-involved youth may not have access to caring adults that can model success at work in diverse job industries and careers.
- RAs provide a framework of mentorship and supervision that creates a culture of feedback and models appropriate workplace behaviors. Many justice-involved youth have had limited exposure or access to mentorship due to justice involvement, disconnection from schools, or limited caring and involved adults in their lives.
- Justice-involved youth develop the technical skills required for the job and learn the soft skills and workplace behaviors that are expected of all employees. For some justice-involved youth, this may be their first exposure to a workplace setting. RAs allow justice-involved youth to observe, learn, and practice these behaviors.

Addressing Questions and Concerns

Some justice-involved youth may be hesitant to pursue an RA opportunity. Below are some common questions and information to guide responses to help navigate these conversations.

Youth Concern	Helpful Information to Guide Response
<i>“What if I am not ready for the workplace?”</i>	<i>There are lots of resources to help apprentices adjust. Mentoring and supervision are part of the RA model. Plus, staff from community-based organizations, reentry programs, and mentoring programs may be able to provide supportive services, case management, and guidance in workplace adjustment.</i>
<i>“No one is going to hire me with my background”</i>	<i>Depending on the justice-involved youth’s state and the category of conviction/status they have, they may not be required to disclose your justice involvement. Different states have different protections for justice-involved youth regarding background checks, expungement of records, and hiring practices. Several industries have committed to hiring more individuals with justice involvement and may even participate in Second Chance Hiring events in their local area.</i>
<i>“Employers will think I am too young”</i>	<i>Employers need workers at all levels. This is especially true in industries where there is a high demand for new workers due to growth or an aging workforce. Many employers value the opportunity to work with younger workers so they can train them to have the technical skills the company needs and to understand the work culture of the organization. Employers are also open to hiring new workers if they can offer career</i>

Youth Concern	Helpful Information to Guide Response
	<i>pathway opportunities with the hope that it will increase retention and reduce turnover.</i>
<i>“It takes too long”</i>	<i>RAs have varying lengths— they can be as short as one year.</i>
<i>“I’m not interested in the trades”</i>	<i>RAs are not limited to construction or the trades. There are apprenticeships in almost every industry.</i>
<i>“My family wants me to go to college”</i>	<i>If college is of interest, many RAs partner with colleges so apprentices can earn college credit.</i>
<i>“I can’t afford it”</i>	<i>RAs are an earn-while-you-learn model, so you will be earning wages as you learn in the classroom and on-the-job.</i>



About ICF and the Cybersecurity Youth Apprenticeship Initiative (CYAI)

While apprenticeships were historically thought of as opportunities to advance in the trades, RAs have now been developed in a variety of industries, including healthcare, hospitality, education, manufacturing, IT, and cybersecurity.

The cybersecurity industry poses a great opportunity for justice-involved youth as the need for cybersecurity professionals increases and apprenticeship offers a pathway for youth to learn the necessary skills, gain industry recognized certifications, and find employment with businesses in need of skilled workers. Cybercrimes cost the U.S. economy more than \$10.2 billion in 2022, and only 43 percent of businesses felt financially prepared to face a cyber-attack in 2022.¹¹ At the same time, the U.S. [cybersecurity workforce](#) faces a shortage of about 600,000 workers.¹² RAs in cybersecurity have the potential to represent a shared solution for justice-involved youth, their communities, and the cybersecurity workforce.

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600K At the same time, the U.S. cybersecurity workforce faces a shortage of about 600,000 workers.

ICF administers the Cybersecurity Youth Apprenticeship Initiative (CYAI) with funding provided by the DOL’s Employment and Training Administration (ETA) Office of Apprenticeship (OA). With backgrounds ranging from data analytics, social sciences, social service programs, technology, finance, and public health, ICF’s 9000+ experts have unique skills that enable us to drive breakthrough work on the most critical economic and social issues facing households, communities, and industries.

ICF provides the following to CYAI partners:

	<p>Partnership-building – Identify and connect with apprenticeship intermediaries, workforce boards, K-12, CTE programs, community colleges, four-year universities, community-based organizations, and employers.</p>
	<p>Technical assistance (TA) - TA is defined by the partner and may include leveraging labor market analysis; enhancing outreach and marketing strategies; hosting employer convenings, apprenticeship forums; or developing resources. CYAI can assist with creating new RA programs or strengthening existing programs.</p>
	<p>Incentive funding - Upon registration of new apprentices, partners receive \$400 per apprentice to support their RA development efforts.</p>

¹¹ Federal Bureau of Investigation. (2022). *Internet Crime Report 2022*. https://www.ic3.gov/Media/PDF/AnnualReport/2022_IC3Report.pdf
 Brin, David J., (May 2, 2022). *2022 Study: 50% of SMBs Have a Cybersecurity Plan in Place*. UpCity. <https://upcity.com/experts/small-business-cybersecurity-survey/>

¹² Cyber Seek. (2024). *Cybersecurity Supply/Demand Heat Map*. Retrieved January 4, 2024, from <https://www.cyberseek.org/heatmap.html>



Resources

- Workforce GPS – Expanding Apprenticeship for Formerly Incarcerated Persons - <https://apprenticeship.workforcegps.org/resources/2017/03/10/14/07/Expanding-Apprenticeship-for-Ex-Offenders>
- Workforce GPS - Resource Compendium Expanding Apprenticeship For Justice-Involved Individuals - <https://d2leuf3vilid4d.cloudfront.net/-/media/Communities/21stcenturyapprenticeship/Files/Resource-Compendium-Expanding-Apprenticeship-for-Justice-Involved-Individuals-Updated-June-22.ashx?rev=e9d9599c140a46ba8dbe5ff3e44629c6&hash=55FF98224706DB4033120E54878E98D8>
- CYAI - <https://cyai2024.org/>
- CYAI Cybersecurity Career Guide - <https://cyai2024.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/CYAI%20Interactive%20Cybersecurity%20Career%20Guide.pdf>
- CYAI Government Support for Registered Apprenticeships - https://cyai2024.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/CYAI%20-%20Govt%20Support%20for%20Apprenticeship_March%202022%20508C.pdf
- CYAI The Journey to a Career in Cybersecurity - https://cyai2024.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/CYAI_The%20Journey%20to%20a%20Career%20in%20Cybersecurity%20508C.pdf
- Apprenticeship USA - <https://www.apprenticeship.gov/>
- Apprenticeship Job Finder - <https://www.apprenticeship.gov/apprenticeship-job-finder>

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