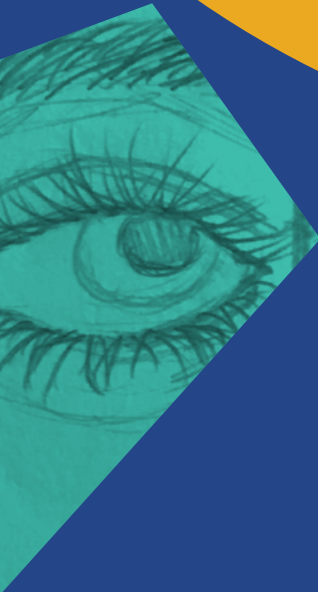# Striving to Thriving

Occupational Identity formation among Black and Hispanic young people and young people from households with lower incomes

About

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

gatesfoundation.org

Guided by the belief that every life has equal value, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation works to help all people lead healthy, productive lives. In developing countries, it focuses on improving people's health and giving them the chance to lift themselves out of hunger and extreme poverty. In the United States, it seeks to ensure that all people—especially those with the fewest resources—have access to the opportunities they need to succeed in school and life. Based in Seattle, Washington, the foundation is led by CEO Mark Suzman and Co-chair William H. Gates Sr., under the direction of Bill and Melinda Gates and Warren Buffett.

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Equitable Futures Initiative

The goal of Equitable Futures, a project of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, is to build stronger connections and alignment between K-12 schools and education, post-secondary institutions, and employers to improve labor market outcomes and promote paths to upward mobility and economic opportunity for Black, Latino, and low-income young people. A vital component of this effort is a structured research program supported by this Initiative that explores, by engaging directly with young people, how they believe their occupational identity is developed, and how that identity informs their career goals and aspirations.

Goodwin Simon Strategic Research

goodwinsimon.com
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Goodwin Simon Strategic Research (GSSR) is a public opinion research firm with special expertise in conducting research on emotionally complex, socially sensitive issues. GSSR's cutting-edge approach, called Heartwired, is built on decades of experience in polling, social and political marketing, policy analysis and communications, and rooted in the latest research on neuroscience, emotion, psychology, cognitive linguistics, and narrative theory. This unique methodology is used to unpack underlying attitudes and emotional reactions that impact behavior and decision-making.

wonder strategies for good

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Wonder Strategies for Good

Do good—and do it as quickly as possible. That is the mantra that drives Wonder. We are a network of experts in messaging, storytelling, psychology and public opinion research. We use audience insights to develop storytelling and messaging strategies that shape attitudes and influence the behavior of your target audiences. Wonder strategists have partnered with change-makers to make progress on some of the most pressing issues of the day.

Thank you.

At the core of this research are the nearly 4,000 youth who generously shared their lives, experiences, hopes, and challenges with the research team through their participation in focus groups and a national survey. We are deeply grateful for the genuine and heartfelt way these youth engaged in the research.

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Collage by Jaedyn Nguyen, age 17

Illustration by Lonnie Allen, age 17

Overview

Being young in America should be a time of exploration, hope, and possibility. Yet despite efforts to create interventions that can support young people to make and reach their life goals, not all young people—especially those with the fewest resources—have access to the opportunities that are instrumental to succeeding in school and life. But what does that success look like? What are the resources, information, and relationships that help young people along education and employment pathways? And what are the barriers they experience that divert or limit them from pathways to success?

This report in brief captures key insights and findings from qualitative and quantitative research conducted among nearly 4,000 Black and Hispanic youth from households of all income levels as well as white youth from households with lower incomes. The research was conducted in urban and rural areas across the nation. In this report this population will be referred to as "Black and Hispanic youth and young people from households with lower incomes." *Lower income* describes young people who are growing up or who have grown up in households with incomes of less than $75,000 per year. *Higher income* refers to young people who are growing up in or have grown up in households with incomes of $75,000 or more per year.

From these conversations with young people emerged a new analytical framework—*Surviving*, *Striving*, and *Thriving*. This framework contributes new insights and potentially fresh approaches to tailoring education and work pathway interventions aimed at supporting Black and Hispanic young people, and young people from households with lower incomes in their efforts to achieve their individual definitions of a *good life*[1] and the broader goals of social and economic equity.

The report is intended to support program and curricula designers, educators, researchers, technologists, and others to activate the research findings and improve Black and Hispanic young people and young people from households with lower incomes' experiences of, and outcomes related to, education and work. The report can also be a resource for those who fund education and employment pathways and others working in adjacent spaces who wish to learn more about how young people's lived experiences inform their occupational identity and future aspirations. A full report of this research is due out later this year along with tools to equip stakeholders across sectors to activate the research in their respective fields.

[1] A *good life* is explained in greater detail on page 19.

INSIGHTS AND IMPLICATIONS AT A GLANCE

This table provides a snapshot of eight key insights and implications based on the diversity and quality of experiences that **young people, who are Black, Hispanic and those from households with lower incomes** have or hope to have.

Young people* see themselves as their own best change agents

KEY TAKEAWAY

They are optimistic, capable and resourceful, valuing career exploration while parents, guardians, and family expect a linear pathway.

POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS

Leverage their feelings of personal agency to help them achieve their career and life goals.

Support adults in young people's lives to understand the value of youth career exploration; Use a combination of stories and data to show parents, guardians, and family the long-term benefit of career exploration early in life.

Young people experience work as *surviving, striving,* and *thriving*

KEY TAKEAWAY

They understand that a mix of personal and work experiences will characterize their pathways from *surviving* to *striving* to *thriving* as they pursue their idea of a *good life*.

POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS

Develop interventions that recognize and reflect a more holistic understanding of their aspirations.

Design tools and measures that support them to move from *surviving* to s*triving* as well as from *striving* to *thriving*.

Black and Hispanic young people experience identity as an asset

KEY TAKEAWAY

They believe their racial, ethnic, and cultural identities will be assets as they pursue a *good life*.

While many young people describe themselves in mostly positive terms, they struggle to connect these positive impressions to the notion of strengths.

POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS

Develop stories that shine a spotlight on Black and Hispanic young people and the strength and pride they derive from their racial and ethnic identities.

Support them to build a bridge between the positive ways that many see themselves and the skills and capabilities needed to succeed.

Young people aspire to a *good life*

KEY TAKEAWAY

They aspire to live a *good life* and believe that a *good job* is a means to that end. They are not asking themselves, "What do I want to be?" Instead they are asking, "How do I want to live?"

Young people have more negative associations with the word *job* and more positive associations with the word *career*.

POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS

Shift messaging targeted at young people to reflect their understanding that a *good life* is the desired goal and a *good job* is one critical element of reaching that goal.

Consider how the words job, work, and career—will be interpreted by young people.

* We use "young people" as shorthand to refer to the young people who are Black, Hispanic and from households with lower incomes.

Young people try on their futures

KEY TAKEAWAY

They yearn to be exposed to and explore a broad range of career and job possibilities. But young people from households with lower incomes may feel pressure from their parents, guardians, and family to make the right decision about their education and careers, and this can get in the way of their ability to fully explore a broad range of career options.

POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS

Expand opportunities for deep career exploration and experimentation in low-risk settings.

Tell stories that show the ongoing and iterative process of refining career goals, a process that involves exploring and selecting different pathways.

Young people envision pathways to *thriving*

KEY TAKEAWAY

Most young people envision themselves as *thriving* in the future but express mixed levels of confidence about setting and achieving their work and life goals.

The research identified five occupational pathways—distinct ways that youth set occupational goals and create pathways to reach them.

POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS

Leverage and build on the power and momentum of young people's optimism. Support them to develop the pragmatism they need to achieve their optimistic goals.

Explore ways to use the Five Occupational Pathways to assess young people's preparedness to reach their goals.

Young people are empowered by connections

KEY TAKEAWAY

They know they need support, but don't know where to find that support.

They are proud of their ability to find information and resources on their own and in their own communities.

POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS

Understand how and when young people move from thinking, "I know I need connections to thrive" to "I know I need connections to thrive AND I know how to get or build those connections."

Develop tools that balance their need to pursue goals independently while also working to develop relationships with adults who can broker information and support.

Young people see opportunity in conversation

KEY TAKEAWAY

Young people experienced focus groups conversations as a rare and valued opportunity to discuss their future aspirations and goals with peers and near-peers in a space free of adult judgment.

POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS

Adapt and experiment with similarly structured conversational spaces where young people feel they can express themselves without judgment and learn from—and be inspired by—their peers and near-peers.

Project Goal and Research Design

Project Goal

In partnership with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), Goodwin Simon Strategic Research (GSSR) engaged in a 16-month research project to conduct deep listening research on the impact of young people's own mindsets on the formation of their occupational identity, work, and life goals. The research explored how young people's identities, values, beliefs, lived experiences, and emotions support or interfere with their educational and career goals and success, and the challenges they face in achieving those goals.

The research sought to develop an in-depth psychological and emotional understanding about Black and Hispanic young people (ages 15-21) from households of any income and white young people from households with lower incomes as well as Black and Hispanic parents/guardians of any income, white parents/guardians with lower incomes, and other adults who influence young people.

Research Design

GSSR used their [Heartwired] approach to design and conduct the research. This deep listening approach focuses on the ways that emotion, values, beliefs, identity, and lived experiences shape people's attitudes and behaviors. The process was iterative, centering the voices and experiences of young people, including in the research analysis. The research was guided by a 12-member advisory team of subject matter experts, advocates, educators, social scientists, and program designers with decades of experience working to improve the education and work experiences of Black and Hispanic young people, and of young people from households with lower incomes. The advisory team was also racially and ethnically diverse and intentionally reflected some of the diversity found among youth research participants. The team's insights helped to refine the research approach and analyze the potential implications of the findings for the field at large.

Individual In-Depth Interviews

Seven in-depth interviews were conducted with young people ages 15 to 20 in November 2018. Three interviews in Gary, Indiana, were conducted with two Black females and one Black male, and four in Albuquerque, New Mexico, were conducted with one Hispanic female, two Hispanic males, and one white male.

Advisory Team Members

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Roz Pierson, PhD, Partner, Luminas LLC

Melissa Risteff, CEO and Co-Founder, Couragion

Ayele Shakur, CEO, BUILD

Nathaniel Smith, Founder and Chief Equity Officer, Partnership for Southern Equity

In-person Focus Groups

Fifty-seven in-person focus groups were conducted across the country from November 2018 to June 2019, which included four types of participants:

1. **Youth:** Black, Hispanic, and white youth ages 15 to 21: 42 focus groups total, with 35 among young people from households with lower incomes and seven among youth from households with higher incomes.

2. **Young adults:** Black, Hispanic, and white young adults ages 26 to 29: three focus groups among those who grew up in households with lower incomes but now identify themselves as middle or higher income.

3. **Parents/Guardians:** Black, Hispanic, and white parents/guardians of youth ages 15 to 21: seven focus groups total, with four among adults with lower incomes and three among adults with higher incomes.

4. **Adult influencers:** Black, Hispanic, and white adults who work and/or volunteer with youth ages 15 to 21: five focus groups.

Online Focus Groups

We also conducted two multi-day online focus groups in late August 2019, with one group entirely in English and the other primarily in Spanish. Both groups included participants ages 15 to 21 from households with lower incomes alongside some participants ages 26 to 29 who grew up in households with lower incomes but now identify themselves as middle or higher income.

Qualitative Analysis

To aid our in-depth analysis of the qualitative data, we video recorded and transcribed each focus group discussion, transcribed the hand-written entries from handout exercises conducted during each discussion, and produced a thematically organized 500+ page quote library of illustrative quotes from the focus group participants. We used these resources to conduct an in-depth analysis, which took place iteratively as the focus group discussions were taking place, to ensure our analysis and corresponding hypotheses evolved to reflect our latest thinking.

Online Survey

We conducted an online nationwide survey in September 2019 among 3,545 young people ages 15 to 21. This group included:

- 495 white females and 583 white males
- 486 Black females and 451 Black males
- 499 Hispanic females and 398 Hispanic males
- 158 Asian Pacific Islander females and 146 Asian Pacific Islander males
- 26 Native American females and 23 Native American males
- 109 females and 46 males who identify with two or more racial or ethnic groups

Illustration by Daniel Patrick, age 16

Introduction

Throughout history, young people have been at the forefront of social, cultural, and technological innovation—from voting rights and climate change to hip hop and social media. That is especially true when it comes to identifying the problems that most impact them and their futures.

Yet, when it comes to designing interventions to improve young people's education and life outcomes, their own ideas, experiences, perspectives, and unique intelligences are often undervalued or ignored by adults tasked with leading these efforts—even more so when the voices belong to Black and Hispanic young people, and young people from households with lower incomes. In a world where implicit biases based on age, race, and income shape how young people are seen, Black and Hispanic young people, and young people from households with lower incomes are often incorrectly perceived as being less knowledgeable and having less agency than their white and more affluent peers.

This absence of youth voices can have profound consequences. When young people's perspectives are not taken into consideration, adults are more likely to produce tools and services that inadequately support young people as they work to reach the goals they set for themselves.

So, what would it look like to change this dynamic? What might we discover if we let young people's experiences and perspectives drive the conversations about their education and work goals? Specifically, what does meaningful employment for a happy, productive life look like through the eyes of young people?

The research project sought to answer these questions directly. The project's approach flipped the sequence in which research is often conducted by starting first with a qualitative inquiry, followed by a national survey to test ideas that emerged in focus group discussions and interviews. This approach allowed young people's voices to lead the inquiry, rather than be included secondarily as color for the quantitative survey in ways that sometimes fail to capture a depth that is meaningful.

In-person focus group discussions enabled us to listen to young people as they described their emotional connections and relationships to education and career, including the different pathways they envision taking to reach their life goals. When we analyzed the diversity and quality of experiences young people have—or hope to have— as they navigate education and work pathways, eight key insights emerged.

1. Young people see themselves as their own best change agents

2. Young people experience work as *surviving, striving,* and *thriving*

3. Young people experience identity as an asset

4. Young people aspire to live a *good life*

5. Young people try on their futures

6. Young people envision pathways to *thriving*

7. Young people are empowered by connections

8. Young people see opportunity in conversation

The implications that can be drawn from these key insights are potentially broad and deep. For professionals in the field, the research may open the door to new ways of designing programs that lift the prospects of Black and Hispanic youth and youth from households with low incomes and help guide equitable philanthropic strategies that improve their educational and career outcomes. The insights can also shape the narratives we tell and share among stakeholders, including future employers, families, and certainly young people themselves, about how occupational identity is formed and influenced—and how young people define, refine, and pursue the good life they imagine for themselves over time.

The researchers and Advisory Group members invite readers to think about the ways in which these findings might inspire, enhance, or disrupt current work with young people around education and work. When and how do our own assumptions about young people conflict with, or run counter to, what we have learned young people care most about? How might our current methods and approaches pressure young people from households with lower incomes to make choices about their education and work pathways and occupational goals prematurely—without the opportunity to explore other worlds of possibility and options? What would our programs, curricula, research studies, and technologies look like if they were embedded with the lived experiences, voices, aspirations, and desires of youth themselves?

Each insight section includes a sidebar with potential implications of the research for the field. These sidebars are intended to encourage readers to consider ways in which the research might be activated in their own contexts.

1. Young people see themselves as their own best change agents

KEY TAKEAWAY:
Black and Hispanic young people and young people from households with lower incomes see themselves as the most important change agents in their own lives.

Listening to young people in the research describe themselves and their lived experiences revealed they see themselves as experts on their own lives, needs, aspirations, struggles, and worldview. Understanding the perspectives of young people directly informed the research and ensures that findings are relevant and on-target for the youth this project aims to serve.

By hearing directly from young people about their desires, fears, challenges, self-identities, and imagined futures, the research clearly shows that they aspire to live good lives. Young people are not blind to the social and economic realities of their lives, but nor are they necessarily discouraged by them. Some have more clarity than others about what living good lives means for themselves, how to get there, or when and where to find help along the way, but there is a common desire to pursue meaningful work that allows them to thrive.

Youth are optimistic, capable, and resourceful: The majority of young people who participated in the research reported feeling optimistic about their future and see themselves as capable of reaching their goals. They described steps they take to research and pursue education paths that interest them and make decisions that impact their lives and their futures every day. These decisions are informed by their life experiences, values, and beliefs, which are in turn informed by the structural, emotional, and cultural environments in which they live, study, and grow.

> *"So, the first college degree I'm going for is the HVAC program, the heating and ventilation. And then I'm going to go back and get my automotive one because I like working on cars."*
> **—YAKIMA, WA HISPANIC MALE, 16–21, LOWER INCOME**

> *"As a nurse...I'm still helping people and I can work wherever I want. I have the option to change whenever I want to. I don't have to just be in labor and delivery. I could be in oncology. I don't have to stay in one place. And that's really what appealed to me."*
> **—BALTIMORE, MD, BLACK FEMALE, 17–20, HIGHER INCOME**

POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS

Opportunity: Leverage young people's feelings of personal agency to shape interventions aimed at helping them achieve their career and life goals.

Opportunity: Support adults in young people's lives to understand the value of youth career exploration; use a combination of stories and data to show parents, guardians, and family the long term benefit of career exploration early in life.

"I feel there are a lot more opportunities for Hispanics just because we were so neglected in the past and now we are trying to fix all that stuff. We generally get more opportunities because of our Hispanic descent more than we would as white people. Say I went into a school, they are generally looking for people that are more diverse so they can relate to the diverse school culture."
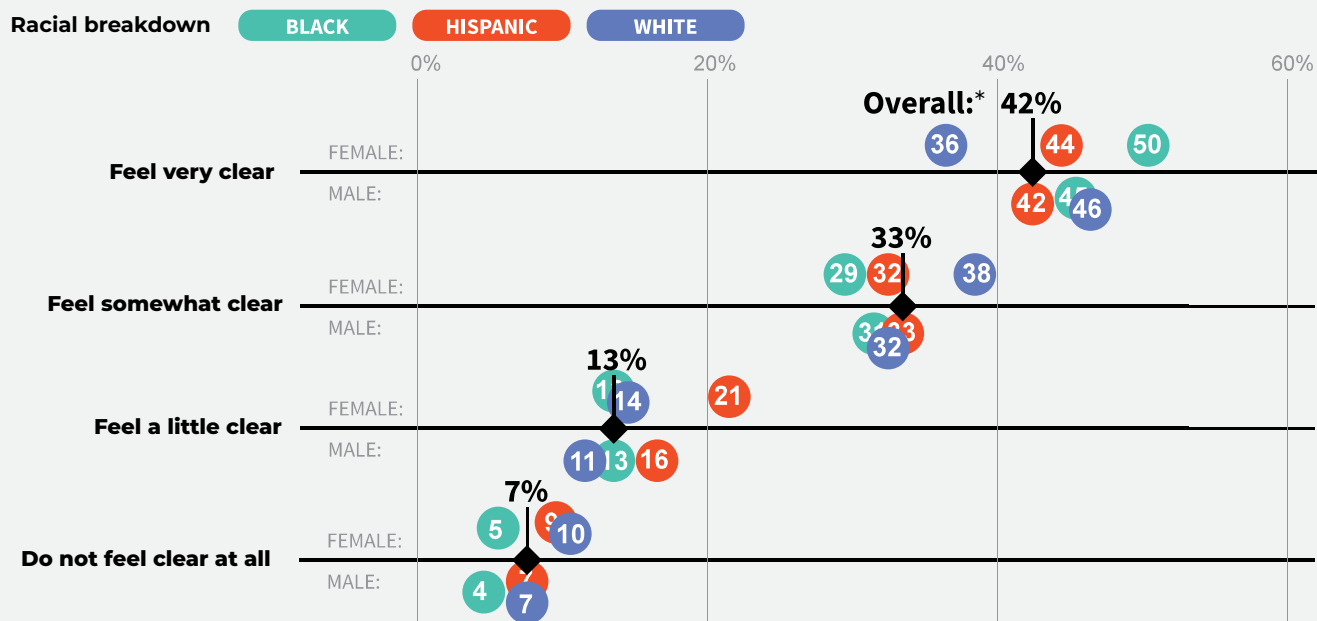—PUEBLO, CO, HISPANIC MALE, 17–21, LOWER INCOME

"Because, like, I know New Orleans got a lot of Black businesses. They got a lot of Black clothing lines. I see that motivates me... Black people starting to elevate."
—NEW ORLEANS, LA, BLACK MALE, 17–21, LOWER INCOME

FUTURE
Please think about your future and the kind of job or career you want. When you think about your goals and ideas for that job or career, how clear do those goals and ideas feel for you?

Racial breakdown: BLACK | HISPANIC | WHITE

Feel very clear
- FEMALE: WHITE 36, HISPANIC 44, BLACK 50 — Overall:* 42%
- MALE: HISPANIC 42, BLACK 45, WHITE 46

Feel somewhat clear — 33%
- FEMALE: BLACK 29, HISPANIC 32, WHITE 38
- MALE: BLACK 34, HISPANIC 33, WHITE 32

Feel a little clear — 13%
- FEMALE: BLACK 13, WHITE 14, HISPANIC 21
- MALE: WHITE 11, BLACK 13, HISPANIC 16

Do not feel clear at all — 7%
- FEMALE: BLACK 5, HISPANIC 9, WHITE 10
- MALE: BLACK 4, HISPANIC 7, WHITE 7

*All Survey Respondents

Career exploration versus rigid trajectory: Young people from all socioeconomic backgrounds value opportunities to explore career options. However, the research suggests that parents/guardians with lower incomes may be more likely to expect a linear education and career trajectory to success. These expectations can be at odds with the ways young people are thinking, planning, and acting in their own lives—including potentially pursuing more than one career before making decisions about what path(s) to take.

"I feel, yeah, it's an expectation because how they are, like, Mexican parents, they want to hear what it is. And then they want you to stick to it. Or they want to give you an insight, and then they want you to stick to it. And then when you have doubts, or you're not sure, then they don't really understand why."
—YAKIMA, WA, HISPANIC MALE, 16–21, LOWER INCOME

"I don't like the pressure. I think that is why I didn't go to college right after graduating because I had no idea what I wanted to do, and I didn't like being pressured by the school system and my parents and everyone that as soon as I graduated I have to know what I want to do the rest of my life. I have to know what school I'm going to go to. I have to have all of that planned out right when I graduate and I was like no, too much pressure. I'd rather just let some time go, figure out what I want to do, and then go into it wholeheartedly without having it shoved down my throat, 'this is what you have to do.'"
—PUEBLO, CO, WHITE FEMALE, 17–21, LOWER INCOME

2. Young people experience work as *surviving*, *striving*, and *thriving*
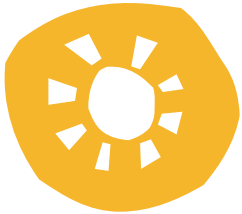
KEY TAKEAWAY:
They understand that a mix of personal and work experiences will characterize their pathways from *surviving* to *striving* to *thriving* as they pursue their idea of a *good life*.

Surviving, Striving, and Thriving is an emergent framework for understanding the emotional and aspirational states young people pass through, and expect to pass through, as they pursue their career and life goals. These states are not fixed points but rather a continuum where each state can flow into the next, as young people learn personally or indirectly about occupational options, make occupational choices, and experience progress and setbacks in their occupational journeys.

FRAMEWORK: *SURVIVING*, *STRIVING* AND *THRIVING*
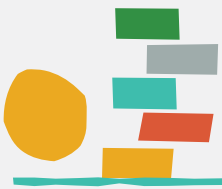
SURVIVING
They are living paycheck to paycheck—or have no job—and they feel that they are struggling to make ends meet.
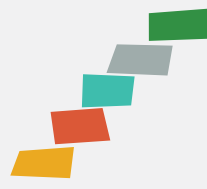
STRIVING
They feel that they have goals and are following steps that will help them advance toward *thriving*.
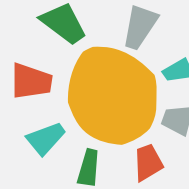
THRIVING
They feel that they have achieved their goals and attained their personal version of a *good life*.

SURVIVING

At one end of the continuum is *surviving*. This state is characterized by having a *bad job*, living paycheck to paycheck—or no job—struggling to make ends meet. None of the research participants articulated a desire to pursue a future in which they simply survive. In fact, the opposite is true: many gave specific examples of what *surviving* looks like to them, and are clear that they do not want to live that way in the present or the future.

POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS

Opportunity:
Develop interventions that recognize and reflect a more holistic understanding of young people's aspirations and better match how youth think about their futures and how they determine the best pathways to reach their goals.

Opportunity:
Design tools and measures that support young people to move from *surviving* to *striving* as well as from *striving* to *thriving*.

"I don't want to talk about my job right now. If I was an astronaut, maybe. I don't know what I would want to be, but if I was passionate about being an astronaut, I would probably want to share that with the world. But if I am working at a movie theater?"
—NEW YORK, NY, HISPANIC FEMALE, 26–29, MIXED INCOME[2]

STRIVING

This middle state of the continuum means having and being committed to goals that will lead to better lives, and working towards those goals. When *striving*, young people are following stepping stones, making decisions, and acquiring knowledge, skills, experiences, and connections that will help them advance toward *thriving*.

The research shows that most young people believe some measure of *striving* is required for *thriving*. Yet, in the focus groups, they frequently struggled to envision the steps involved in *striving*. For those who can articulate the components of *striving,* it is a combination of personal effort and specific steps toward a career goal. They recognize that some kind of effort is necessary to work towards one's career and towards having a *good life*, including showing commitment to and being focused on that career.

"[F]ind the thing...that you will like. At the end of the day, when you finish it, even though you had those problems, you know that because you did it, and now you're going to have something else better."
—NEW YORK, NY, BLACK MALE, 17–21, LOWER INCOME

"[At 25], I am planning on going to medical school, so I will probably be living wherever I can get into medical school. Maybe in an apartment with some classmates that I meet. Probably working as a tutor for undergraduate students to make some money while I am in medical school."
—PASADENA, CA, WHITE MALE, 17–20, HIGHER INCOME

THRIVING

At the other end of the continuum is the experience of *thriving*. For most young people in this research, reaching the thriving state means they have achieved their goals and attained their personal version of a *good life*. Most young people imagine futures in which they are *thriving*.

In the research, young people, regardless of race or gender, commonly articulated several attributes that they feel comprise a *good life*, including financial stability, home ownership, parenting, and having a *good job* or career that is fulfilling rather than work they do not enjoy. Other attributes mentioned include being able to give back to their communities and being well-connected and respected socially.

"My goal is to feel like I really figured out my purpose and I had a really positive impact on some people's lives, to be surrounded by my family. I think that is really all I would care about at [70] is my family is happy and with me."
—NEW YORK, NY, WHITE FEMALE, 26–29, MIXED INCOME

"At 45, I can see myself living in Alabama for sure now, working in a healthcare facility, having maybe one or two kids, a dog, a husband. I see myself...being a good parent, nice vehicle, good credit."
—GREENVILLE, MS, BLACK FEMALE, 15–18, LOWER INCOME

"Definitely go back to my old neighborhood and build stuff; build a community center over there. The people that are in need and give back to them, minister to the kids over there, so they know it is possible."
—ATLANTA, GA, BLACK MALE, 18–21, LOWER INCOME

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[2] Participants in focus groups conducted among those ages 26 to 29 reported a range (mix) of current income levels, but most began life in households with lower incomes.

3. Young people experience identity as an asset

KEY TAKEAWAY:

Black and Hispanic young people experience their racial, ethnic, and cultural identities as assets in their pursuit of a *good life*.

The research suggests that young people experience identity in three primary ways: how they experience themselves; how they are perceived by others; and how they relate to their family, community, and culture.

Self perception as asset-rich: Most Black and Hispanic young people of every socio-economic background who participated in the research broadly view the gender, racial, ethnic, and cultural aspects of their identities as positive, meaning that they believe these aspects of their personal identities are largely an asset and will benefit them as they work toward the goal of living a *good life*.

> *"I feel we are really strong people. I am very aggressive. I feel like my family—all my aunts and my mom, everybody, my cousins they are all very aggressive and very outspoken, very strong. Even the men in my family are very strong minded. They all do things...I think it is my family and that is what I grew up with. I think it is because my parents are very outspoken. The Latinos in my house are very outspoken but they are like 'now you go and get your own shit.'"*
>
> **—LOS ANGELES, CA, HISPANIC FEMALE, 17–21, LOWER INCOME**

Confidence in overcoming bias: As young people age, they accumulate lived experiences that inform their expectations of how race, culture, and gender will impact their career pathways. While most Black and Hispanic young people in the research expect to face racial bias in the workplace, and some young women believe they will face gender bias, many young people believe that they can overcome discrimination and other systemic inequalities through personal hard work and diligence—by being and doing better.

Some Hispanic and Black young people in the research expect to have to code switch, that is, to suppress or change aspects of how they talk or appear, in order to thrive in mostly white work environments. Most white youth in the research do not experience a racialized identity in relation to career and work; when discussing their education or career pathways, their own racial identity

POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS

Opportunity: Develop tools and communication materials that shine a spotlight on Black and Hispanic young people and the strength and pride they derive from their racial and ethnic identities.

Opportunity: Support young people to build a bridge between the positive ways that many see themselves and the skills and capabilities needed to succeed.

is largely absent from the discussion. Spanish-speaking and non-Spanish-speaking Hispanic young people and parents/guardians see being bilingual and bicultural as valuable in relation to work.

"I think we can get paid more by speaking Spanish."
—PUEBLO, CO, HISPANIC FEMALE, 15–18, LOWER INCOME

"Well yeah, you are almost living two lives. You've got the Mexican side, the American side. In a way that is true. You have two perspectives. The more perspectives and experience you have, the better."
—OAKLAND, CA, HISPANIC MALE, 18–21, LOWER INCOME

"...there will be, like, people that will try to hold you back. But, like, at the end of the day, you still got to put in that work. Yeah, he's white. He's probably going to get the job before you, but what are you going to do about it? Like, are you just going, okay, I'm not going to do it then? You got to work harder. I think you definitely got to work harder as a Black man or a woman or a woman in general just to like get your spot because that's just the way it is right now."
—NEW YORK, NY, BLACK MALE, 17–21, LOWER INCOME

[On code-switching] "I mean you don't have to, but, like, if you don't then there is this perception of you. It is automatically a negative."
—OAKLAND, CA, HISPANIC MALE, 15–18, LOWER INCOME

Perceptual disconnect between personal strengths and success: Young people in the research overwhelmingly describe themselves in positive terms but struggle to connect these positive characteristics to the notion of strengths or attributes that may help them succeed in life.

Despite the mostly positive language young people from households with lower incomes use to describe themselves, when asked to reflect specifically on *strengths,* or things they are good at, many young people found it difficult to come up with a list—even a very short one. For young people from households with lower incomes in particular, the notion of assessing and articulating their personal strengths may not be intuitive; they may not have as much exposure to adults who model it compared to the experiences of young people from households with higher incomes who listed their strengths much more readily.

Young people from households with higher incomes were quicker to draw connections between the ways they described themselves early in the focus group discussion and their strengths when they were asked to share them later in the discussion. Even among young people who initially described themselves neutrally or more negatively, young people from households with higher income were more likely to be able to reframe their descriptions as a potential asset when asked about strengths.

This difference between socio-economic backgrounds is notable. It is unclear if this way of speaking about oneself is the product of different educational settings, different exposures to recognizing and articulating personal strengths within their families, or other opportunities in which young people gain experience assessing and speaking about themselves in intentionally positive terms.

"My first word was procrastinator. I procrastinate a lot, like a lot. It's really bad. But that has also made me resourceful. So basically, once it's like the end, I have no other choice but to, you know, do it. Intelligent when I want to be, and seeking more...I just feel l like I want more in life. I don't want to just work and go to school and be at home with my parents. I want to, you know, just seek out what's out there for me, and what's for me will come."
—BALTIMORE, MD, BLACK FEMALE, 17–20, HIGHER INCOME

Youth see themselves as individuals first: During the focus groups, each participant was asked to write down a list of words or phrases they would use to describe themselves. Across race and income differences, Black, Hispanic, and white young people wrote down individual-level attributes and characteristics. Virtually none of the young people included race, gender, or culture in their multifaceted lists and consistently saw themselves as individuals first and members of a group or specific racial or ethnic category second. It is worth noting that these focus groups were organized along separate racial, ethnic, and gender lines; the responses may have been different if the participants had been organized in mixed groups.

Young people build their perception of what is possible and what they hope for themselves at the intersection of their identity, their life experiences, and their cultural experiences. The ways their self-identity and experiences shape their thinking about their future lives and professional pursuits are both robust and complex.

"Ambitious, creative, limitless, caring, open-minded, family oriented and shutterbug. I teach myself a lot of things. I feel I can learn new things."
—PUEBLO, CO, HISPANIC FEMALE, 15–18, LOWER INCOME

"Confident...introvert...hard-working...Sort of outgoing. Well, it's like I'm kind of—I like being around people. I like having conversation with them, but after a certain time, I kinda need to be by myself."
—BALTIMORE, MD, BLACK MALE, 17–20, LOWER INCOME

Photograph by Annabelle Armstrong-Temple, age 12

4. Young people aspire to live a *good life*

KEY TAKEAWAY:
Young people aspire to live a *good life* and believe that a *good job* is a means to that end.

The means to a good life: The research shows that young people ultimately desire to have a *good life*; they aim to thrive. The question they ask themselves is not "What do you want to be when you grow up?" but "What do you want your life to be like in the future?" *Job*, *work*, and *career* are mechanisms to achieving that goal. Young people understand a *good life* to be *thriving*. A satisfying career is part of what constitutes a *good life*, which also includes having health, wealth, stability, and control over their lives. It means being part of a family, including being a parent if they choose, socially well-connected, and engaged and giving back to their community.

Job versus work versus career: Young people bring their own understanding and meaning to the words *job, work,* and *career.* The research found that young people have more negative associations with the word *job* (something they need to do to survive) and more positive associations with the words *work* and *career* (something that is integral to their idea of *thriving* and a means to the *good life*). Importantly, many of the young people studied understand *career* as a process, something that will unfold over time. These young people allow for the possibility—and some even expect—that their career will change over time.

> *"When I think of a job, I don't think of something that is going to last long. You are still going to make money; you are still going to get no sleep because of the hours; most jobs are super long like the 9 to 5."*
> **—PUEBLO, CO, WHITE FEMALE, 17–21, LOWER INCOME**

> *"Career is your passion."*
> **—CHICAGO, IL, BLACK FEMALE, 17–21, LOWER INCOME**

POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS

Opportunity:
Shift messaging targeted at young people to reflect their understanding that a *good life* is the desired goal and a *good job* is one critical element of reaching that goal.

Opportunity:
Understand the implications of word choice—job, work, and career—and choose words that intentionally reinforce program objectives and consider how they will be interpreted by young people.

How young people define good and bad jobs

GOOD JOB | THRIVING

✓ Pays well and offers benefits

✓ Has a steady income and enables you to live debt free

✓ Matches your strengths, passion or interests

✓ Is something you enjoy

✓ Is where you have amiable coworkers

✓ Is where you have a good boss

✓ Is where you are respected

✓ Has opportunities for growth

✓ Comes with control and predictability

✓ Enables you to have space for both your work and your family

BAD JOB | SURVIVING

✗ Pays poorly; few to no benefits

✗ Is something you do to make ends meet

✗ Has poor or unsafe working conditions

✗ Demands a lot of time; long hours/ commute

✗ No opportunity for career growth

✗ Is where you have no control over your schedule

Note: Young people in the research associate good jobs with striving as well, but only in instances in which those jobs lead to thriving. They acknowledge that working bad jobs can be a necessary part of striving, but do not believe that they can have a bad job and also be thriving.

Career decisions are emotional and complex: The young people who participated in the research are not motivated by labor market statistics or salary alone. They want to have enough (income, security, control over their schedule, personal satisfaction, and more) and feel that having enough comes through having a *good job.*

Asked to select their first choice for the main type of job or career they want to do in the future, only one category—health care (12%)—was selected by more than ten percent of our survey respondents overall. While young people's career preferences are generally diverse across demographic subgroups, some key demographic differences emerged. For example:

- Female respondents, whether they were Black, Hispanic or white, were significantly more likely to choose a healthcare career (18%) compared to males (6%)

- Black males selected sales/retail and restaurant/food industry as their top choices for future jobs (7-8%) while the top choice for white males was computer/mathematics (13%)

- Hispanic females named healthcare as their top choice (15%) compared to Hispanic males who named computer/mathematics (9%).

CAREER CHOICE

Thinking about your future, which of the following do you think you are MOST likely to do...

Racial breakdown: **BLACK** · **HISPANIC** · **WHITE**

Chart (values are percentages; scale 0%–20%):

Category	Overall	Gender	Black	Hispanic	White
Healthcare	12%	FEMALE	18	18	19
		MALE	5	7	5
Computer/Mathematics	7%	FEMALE	3	2	2
		MALE	8	9	13
Restaurant/Food Industry	6%	FEMALE	7	6	3
		MALE	7	7	7
Arts, Design, Entertainment	6%	FEMALE	5	6	7
		MALE	5	4	4
Sales/Retail	5%	FEMALE	7	3	3
		MALE	7	6	5
Offices/Administration Support	5%	FEMALE	6	4	4
		MALE	6	3	6
Business/Finance	5%	FEMALE	6	4	6
		MALE	3	7	6
Manual labor	4%	FEMALE	3	4	2
		MALE	6	7	7
Architecture/Engineering	4%	FEMALE	1	2	2
		MALE	6	6	6

Overall:[*] 12%

*All Survey Respondents

Importantly, career choice is not strongly correlated with income levels. For example, 12 percent of Black youth from households with lower and middle incomes[3] selected healthcare as their first career choice, compared to nine percent among Black young people from households with higher incomes.

The research found that some young people feel called to their careers while others report that a career is something they are searching for. Many young people in the research also consider the emotional and financial investments their families have made in them and report feeling pressure to avoid disappointing their families and justify their families' investment. All of this contributes to feelings of stress and anxiety over the perceived high stakes of choosing a career.

> *"My mom is my number one support. She is always there, and I just want to make her happy. I want to give her things that she wants, like buy her a house, or a car and stuff. I want to have two to four kids...and build my dream home. Then I want to build my parents their dream home."*
> **—ATLANTA, GA BLACK FEMALE, 16–18, LOWER INCOME**

Good jobs* and *careers lead to good life: For most young people in the research, a *good job* is not about any single attribute. Rather, it is about a collection of experiences and qualities. For many younger people from households with lower incomes, economic security is paramount. Beyond being paid well, financial security means independence, enabling them to give back to their families and communities, and making them feel they are full-fledged and successful adults.

The research revealed that young people also have different visions about the permanency of a career. Some youth are more likely to feel pressure (internally and externally from parents, family, and sometimes friends) to pick a career they will have to stay with for their entire life—even if it is something they end up hating. The choice of a career is stressful because these youth feel the choice needs to enable a *good life*, make their family proud, and be permanent. Young people from households with lower incomes are more likely to express feeling these kinds of pressures around career than are young people from households with higher incomes.

Other young people in the research experience career as something that will evolve and take shape over time, which makes choosing a career a much less stressful decision. Young people from households with higher incomes are more likely to express feeling this way than are young people from households with lower incomes.

> *"...by the time you get to your career, your life should be full...So it's just a fulfillment that you can kind of say, 'I'm here. I made it. It's done, so I'm just full.'"*
> **—NEW YORK, NY, BLACK MALE, 17–21, LOWER INCOME**

> *"Financially stable. I feel like that means not only myself but giving back to my parents, having the extra money to give. You don't have to worry about bills."*
> **—BELLE GLADE, FL, HISPANIC MALE, 17–21, LOWER INCOME**

5. Young people try on their futures

KEY TAKEAWAY:

Young people yearn to be exposed to, and experiment with, different career and job possibilities. Young people from households with lower incomes who have fewer opportunities to *try on* possible futures, may feel pressured to choose career paths prematurely.

Stages of Occupational Identity Formation: The research suggests that young people move through three iterative stages as they form and refine their occupational identity. Each stage is characterized by a core activity—exposure, exploration, or selection—and young people demonstrate increasing levels of agency as they move into and out of each stage.

First, young people encounter organic exposures to career experiences and pathways through family and immediate community (Exposure); then they move toward more intentional self-directed exploration of career pathways (Exploration); and finally they determine the career pathway(s) they will pursue (Selection). Importantly, young people continue to refine their occupational identity throughout young adulthood and may return to Exploration and Selection stages several times as they learn more about themselves and gain work and life experience. This new knowledge provides a preliminary framework for understanding how young people may experience occupational identity formation.

EXPOSURE: WHO THEY KNOW, WHAT THEY SEE, AND WHAT/WHO THEY HAVE ACCESS TO

The research revealed that young people are absorbing—consciously and subconsciously—information about the types of jobs, careers, and futures available to them. Principally, this exposure takes place in the context of their home communities where they intimately observe adult or near-peer (e.g. cousins or older siblings) experiences of work and emotions related to working.

These exposures to different pathways help young people identify their likes and dislikes, interests and strengths, and experiment with different identities and ways of being. They are also learning more about how adults and the broader society value specific types of work and educational pursuits and achievements over others—and about how education and family decisions impact career pathways and momentum.

POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS

Opportunity: Expand opportunities for deep career exploration and experimentation in low-risk settings.

Opportunity: Tell stories that show the ongoing and iterative process of refining career goals, one that involves exploring and selecting different pathways.
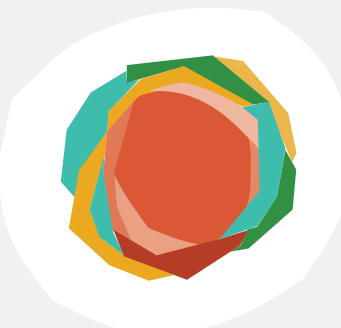
STAGES OF OCCUPATIONAL IDENTITY FORMATION

EXPOSURE

Who they know, what they see, and what/who they have access to

EXPLORATION

Trying on different aspects of career and work

SELECTION

Determining the first steps of a chosen career pathway

"My mom is a real estate agent. She has her own company; she is her own broker. Seeing her have her own business, one day I want to have my own business."

—ATLANTA, GA, BLACK MALE, 18–21, LOWER INCOME

"I have two actually—family friends that are both women—and one is like the head of marketing at (—) corporate, and then the other one is like she was the head of something at (—). And for me, I'm really interested in like fashion business, the business of fashion and stuff like that. So, to look at them and to kind of take from their experiences for me is really interesting."

—NEW YORK, NY, WHITE FEMALE, 17–21, LOWER INCOME

EXPLORATION: *TRYING ON* DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF CAREER AND WORK

The research found that when young people reject the occupations that they see around them, they move into a stage where they are open to trying on different occupations or actively seeking out experiences, information, and knowledge that will expand their universe of what jobs and careers exist and which might be a fit for them.

Exploration takes place through exposure to occupations, engagement in occupational practices, and participation in occupational communities. Through exploration, young people develop ideas about career pathways, acquire hands-on skills and knowledge relevant to specific careers and work, and potentially develop relationships with adult professionals who can provide them with support.

"Right now, I'm in a program called Girls Inc., just down the street from here. I have been in it for a really, really long time. They go through stages, and now I'm at the stage where they will set you up with internships and really work on helping you figure out what type of career you think would be best for you—even if it is not what you ultimately end up in, just, like, having an idea or at least having some type of experience. They set girls up with different internships."

—OAKLAND, CA, BLACK FEMALE, 16–18, LOWER INCOME

"They are still young. You want them to explore at this point because I think if they decide I want to do this, they may actually do it and realize I don't want to do that. I went to college, and I graduated, and I didn't want to be a social worker."

—OAKLAND, CA, BLACK PARENT/GUARDIAN, HIGHER INCOME

SELECTION: DETERMINING THE FIRST STEPS OF A CHOSEN CAREER PATHWAY

The research found that, in the Selection stage, young people are now equipped with more knowledge about themselves and specific kinds of jobs or careers, and they have a growing sense of the kind of life they want to lead. This new information and experience helps them determine short- and medium-term goals to work towards as they embark on their future pathways.

Importantly, the behaviors young people engage in during the *Selection* stage may take place at many points over their lifetime. As they acquire more work experience, they may return to a period of exploration where they will once again grapple with what job or career will most enable them to live a *good life*.

Key steps to thriving: Young people of all socioeconomic backgrounds who participated in the research reported *thriving* when they feel equipped and supported to identify, explore, and assess information and experiences related to education and career in a low-risk setting. When young people developing their occupational identities experience robust *Exposure* and *Exploration* (access to a diversity of jobs and careers), their experience of the *Selection* stage is potentially more meaningful and less fraught.

> *"I was doing a job, and I was just, like, this feels like work. I hate coming here every day. I wake up and I am miserable. I am not going to live my life like this. That is how I knew accounting wasn't for me...I tried being a teacher. I was working in a daycare. Teaching four- and five-year-olds is not for me all day...I think once I realized, I found a job. I had some internship experience. I was counseling and I was like, this doesn't feel like work. I love it. I love being here. When I get up in the morning, I am excited to see what clients they are going to have next; what is their story and to learn about it. That is how I knew that was the career for me."*
> **—NEW YORK, NY, HISPANIC FEMALE, 26–29, MIXED INCOME**

Pressure to make premature choices: The research found that young people from households with lower incomes may feel pressured or instructed to make premature occupational choices based on a narrative of scarcity and risk-aversion from parents and other adults who feel less able to absorb the perceived financial risks associated with longer periods of education and career exploration. Parents with higher incomes, some of whom feel that they themselves prematurely committed to a career pathway, are more likely to say they want their children to explore and experiment with a diversity of jobs and careers before making decisions about what they will pursue.

> *"I think sometimes people are pushed to go to school. Like, you know, if your parents push you to go to school...and then you go to school for something you don't want to do, but you went because they told you to go, so now you are in debt thousands of dollars, and it's not what you want to do. And don't you feel like sometimes, like, the parents be like—since they didn't do that, they want you to be like that. It's like they trying to live their life through you or something like that."*
> **—CHICAGO, IL, BLACK FEMALE, 17–21, LOWER INCOME**

6. Young people envision pathways to *thriving*

KEY TAKEAWAY:
Most young people envision themselves as *thriving* in the future but express mixed levels of confidence about setting and achieving their work and life goals.

Mapping the future: The research suggests that young people across race, age, and gender form their occupational identities in similar ways. The differences may more readily lie in how equipped they feel to set goals for themselves—and how confident they are in locating the information, resources, and people they need to reach those goals.

Five Occupational Pathways
In focus groups young people were asked to first discuss their goals for the future with the group and then to imagine how their life and career pathways might unfold as they pursue these goals. Using a worksheet with an image of a blank pathway, participants filled in their goals for their futures; the steps, stages, and experiences they might need to pass through or have in order to reach their goals; the supports that might help them along the way; and the challenges that might impede their progress or throw them off track.

Young people display different levels of confidence in their ability to set occupational goals and develop occupational pathways to reach those goals. These differences can be categorized in the following ways:

1. **Know** what they want to do, and **have a good idea** of the steps to take to get there

2. **Not sure** what they want to do, yet **have a good idea** of the steps to take to explore in order to get there

3. **Know** what they want to do, but are **unsure** how to get there

4. **Not sure** what they want to do and **unsure** of what steps to take to get there

5. **Know** what they want to do, **think they know** how to get there, but their imagined pathway is inaccurate and/or unrealistic

POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS

Opportunity:
Leverage and build on the power and momentum of young people's optimism, rather than try to correct it. Support young people to develop the pragmatism they need to achieve their optimistic goals.

Opportunity:
Explore ways to use the Five Occupational Pathways to assess young people's preparedness to reach their goals.

Which of the following feels closest to how you would describe your feelings about your future career?

Racial breakdown `BLACK` `HISPANIC` `WHITE`

I know what I want to do for my work or career, and I also know the specific steps I need to take to get there.
Overall:* **46%**
FEMALE: 41 44 50
MALE: 4 48 55

I know what I want to do for my work or career, but I am not sure about the specific steps I need to take to get there.
28%
FEMALE: 26 3 31
MALE: 23 1 28

I am not sure about what I want to do for my work or career, but I have a good idea about the steps I can take to explore and learn about different options that would be a good fit for me.
15%
FEMALE: 14 1 17
MALE: 11 14 17

I am not sure about what I want to do for my work or career, and I am also not sure about the steps I can take to explore and learn about different options that would be a good fit for me.
7%
FEMALE: 6 6 9
MALE: 4 6 7

*All Survey Respondents

Note: The survey does not explore young people who place themselves in the fifth pathway category because that category requires subjective and external judgments about whether someone's plans are realistic.

Young people characterize pathway progression in three distinct ways. Analysis of focus group pathways shows that young people describe the steps and stages necessary to meet their career goals in qualitatively different ways. The different approaches young people plan for and take to navigate their occupational pathways can be categorized in the following ways:

- **Instrumental**: pathway steps are academic information and certifications.

- **Emotional**: pathway progression is perceived as a series or accumulation of emotional competencies, such as developing confidence.

- **Relational**: focus their pathway progression on establishing connections and relationships with individuals and institutions. This view was more commonly expressed by young adults.

"Just practice drawing more, just sketch more stuff out. Save up—that is a big thing. My second step: be more open with people, being more confident about myself; learn the business; learn business in general."
—OAKLAND, CA, HISPANIC MALE, 15–18, LOWER INCOME

"Then, I put internship next at a hospital. And then hopefully, through that internship, I can meet a psychiatric therapist and get some connections. Therefore, at the end of this…I will be able to get my degree and become a psychiatric therapist."
—DOWNEY, CA, HISPANIC FEMALE, 16–18, LOWER INCOME

Youth perceive the biggest challenge as themselves: When probed to think about the challenges or barriers that might impede progress towards their goals, young people in the research, regardless of all ages, races, and genders, are likely to believe the biggest challenges will be their own character flaws or weaknesses. These perceived flaws run the gamut from fear of failure to procrastination and lack of focus.

> *"I think I am shy, and it gets in the way. I don't like participating in conversation. Sorry. I am not a very good leader to do that stuff, and I think that is why. Because I am not confident in what I say."*
> **—PUEBLO, CO, HISPANIC FEMALE, 15–18, LOWER INCOME**

For many, college is worth it: Many young people believe college is a worthwhile investment. More than four times as many young people surveyed (72%) believe going to college is or would be personally worth it, compared to those who do not think college is worth it (16%). However, the research also showed that many young people have doubts about the value of college when trying on their future. While these young people assume going to college will help them get a good career, many do not know how it will help them develop skills and knowledge for such a career.

> *"College is something that I feel like to get a career you have to go to college. College, you learn about something specifically for that career."*
> **—PUEBLO, CO, WHITE FEMALE, 17–21, LOWER INCOME**

> *"Finding connections on my path like we talked about internships. We said going to college is always a good idea to do internships when you can because when you graduate college sometimes that can turn into a job for you."*
> **—OAKLAND, CA, BLACK FEMALE, 16–18, LOWER INCOME**

College debt weighs on youth: Worry over incurring college debt adds to the doubt over whether college will be a worthwhile investment. The survey of young people revealed that 33 percent of young people are extremely concerned about college debt, while 22 percent are very concerned, and 20 percent are somewhat concerned. Among those who are attending college (or who have already attended college), 60 percent feel very weighed down by student debt. Many participants who did take the risk of becoming indebted to attend college say they did not know enough about how college debt would impact their future lives.

> *"It goes back to being expensive. You can't go three years into college and not know what you want to major in because it is going to be expensive in the long run."*
> **—BELLE GLADE, FL, HISPANIC FEMALE, 17–21, LOWER INCOME**

Some prioritize non-college pathways: Some young people believe that college does not provide the skills and hands-on experiences needed for their desired careers and cited trade and technical training as valuable alternate routes and spaces to learn real-world, hands-on, marketable skills.

> *"I have cousins that are my age. Or, they're two years older than me now, actually. But they went straight into a trade. And they love what they do, and they make really good money. They have a lot of money, but they came out debt free."*
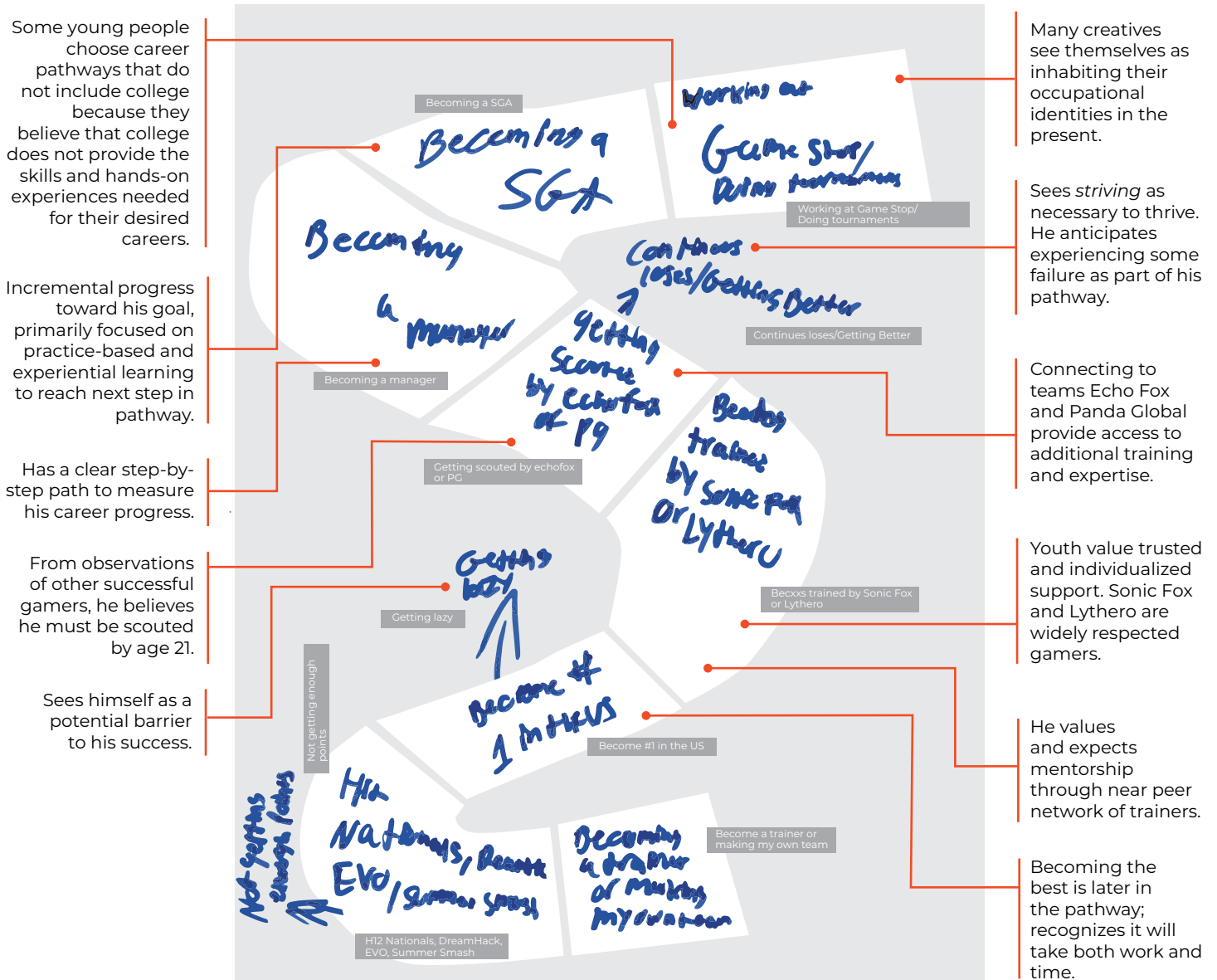> **—YAKIMA, WA, HISPANIC MALE, 16–21, LOWER INCOME**

Examples of completed pathway worksheets follow. The worksheets have been annotated with research insights and transcribed (when necessary) to enhance readability.

1

Know what they want to do, and have a good idea of the steps to take to get there

"I think the only person that inspired to like actually pursue what I wanted to do is my like my ex-roommate because I was actually really tired of living with my parents at the age of 16. I moved out. And I started living with him. And then he pushed me to like actually get better at what I was doing is gaming. He was like why don't you just turn it into your career if you love it so much?.... And he's been pushing his followers and using the clips I've had from my games and puts it on his Facebook and his YouTube and his Instagram. And now I slowly am getting like my following."

—NEW YORK, NY, BLACK MALE, AGE 18–21, LOWER INCOME

Some young people choose career pathways that do not include college because they believe that college does not provide the skills and hands-on experiences needed for their desired careers.

Incremental progress toward his goal, primarily focused on practice-based and experiential learning to reach next step in pathway.

Has a clear step-by-step path to measure his career progress.

From observations of other successful gamers, he believes he must be scouted by age 21.

Sees himself as a potential barrier to his success.

Many creatives see themselves as inhabiting their occupational identities in the present.

Sees *striving* as necessary to thrive. He anticipates experiencing some failure as part of his pathway.

Connecting to teams Echo Fox and Panda Global provide access to additional training and expertise.

Youth value trusted and individualized support. Sonic Fox and Lythero are widely respected gamers.

He values and expects mentorship through near peer network of trainers.

Becoming the best is later in the pathway; recognizes it will take both work and time.

Becoming a SGA

Working at Game Stop/ Doing tournaments

Continues loses/Getting Better

Becoming a manager

Getting scouted by echofox or PG

Getting lazy

Not getting enough points

Become #1 in the US

Becxxs trained by Sonic Fox or Lythero

Become a trainer or making my own team

H12 Nationals, DreamHack, EVO, Summer Smash

He is 19 years old and currently works as a sales associate at GameStop. He has been inspired and motivated by his roommate, an important source of social capital for him. In a few months he hopes to move up to a senior sales position and later to a manager position. While working at GameStop, he is playing local tournaments and streaming his games. He hopes that, by the time he turns 21, he will be scouted by one of the teams he respects (Echo Fox or Panda Global). Once he is working with a team, he wants to train under his role models, Sonic Fox or Lythero, while continuing to compete. With this individual training, he will begin to specialize in a specific game, and, with practice, he will become the number one player in the U.S. and compete at DreamHack, Evo or Summerslam (gaming competitions). Ultimately, he hopes to become a trainer or manage a team of his own. After he is scouted by a major team, he feels the remainder of his pathway and his career goal may take 20 years to achieve.

He knows what he wants to do, and he has put himself on a pathway that includes a series of incremental and interconnected steps that he believes will prepare him for success in his chosen profession.

2 Not sure what they want to do, yet have a good idea of the steps to take to explore in order to get there

"I'm already getting it . . . I'm networking. I'm meeting. I'm bumping elbows with the right people. You feel me? I make great rapport with people. I think everything in life is about first impressions and being able to know how to talk to people. You know what I'm saying?.... If you come to [people] in the right tone of voice, and you tell them what you're trying to do, you could probably end up with something [an investment of money] I'm just one of those people that believe, and I use my beliefs to get through life."

—CHICAGO, IL, BLACK FEMALE, 17–21, LOWER INCOME

Currently not enrolled in school.

Upon completing LPN program and passing the nursing boards, she can work as a nurse.

She knows she needs to find support but may be unrealistic about how to find sponsorship or investors.

Thriving is characterized by giving back, ownership, and travel.

In her lifetime she anticipates having and plans for two careers that fulfill two different core interests.

She has conducted research online to learn more about the certifications necessary to become an RN.

Sees the LPN program as a building block to becoming an RN and getting a bachelor's and master's degree.

She plans to save money from her first career in order to finance her second career.

Second career as an entrepreneur begins.

Handwritten journey map labels:
- Nursing LPN program — Receive my lisecensure. (Pass Nclex)
- Bridge to RN program
- Receive my BSN or Master's
- *Use $$ from career to open dance studio.
- Find sponsors/ investors for studio
- Host my 1st charity fundraising event. Open 1st stuido
- Open at least 6 studios · International travel nurse · Wound care · Nursing foundation or charity.
- Expand locations of dance studios.

She is not currently enrolled in school, but plans to pursue a Licensed Practical Nursing (LPN) program, open a chain of dance studios and eventually become a traveling nurse.

After starting the LPN program, she will work to pass the NCLEX (nursing board exams) and enroll in a Registered Nursing (RN) program, where she will first receive her bachelor's degree and then her master's degree. "I am actually aspiring to be able to open up my own dance studio. So what I want to do is use the money from nursing to be able to open my own dance studio." After completing her master's degree, she will look for investors and sponsors—"people that are interested to putting their money into me" and I also want to host my first charity fundraising event. I feel like [fundraising will] open up more doors for networking." From there, she will open up her first studio, and over time expand her studios into different locations. "At the end of my life, I shall have owned at least five studios and be an international traveling nurse." She has already begun to network in order to meet the types of people she believes will invest in her dream.
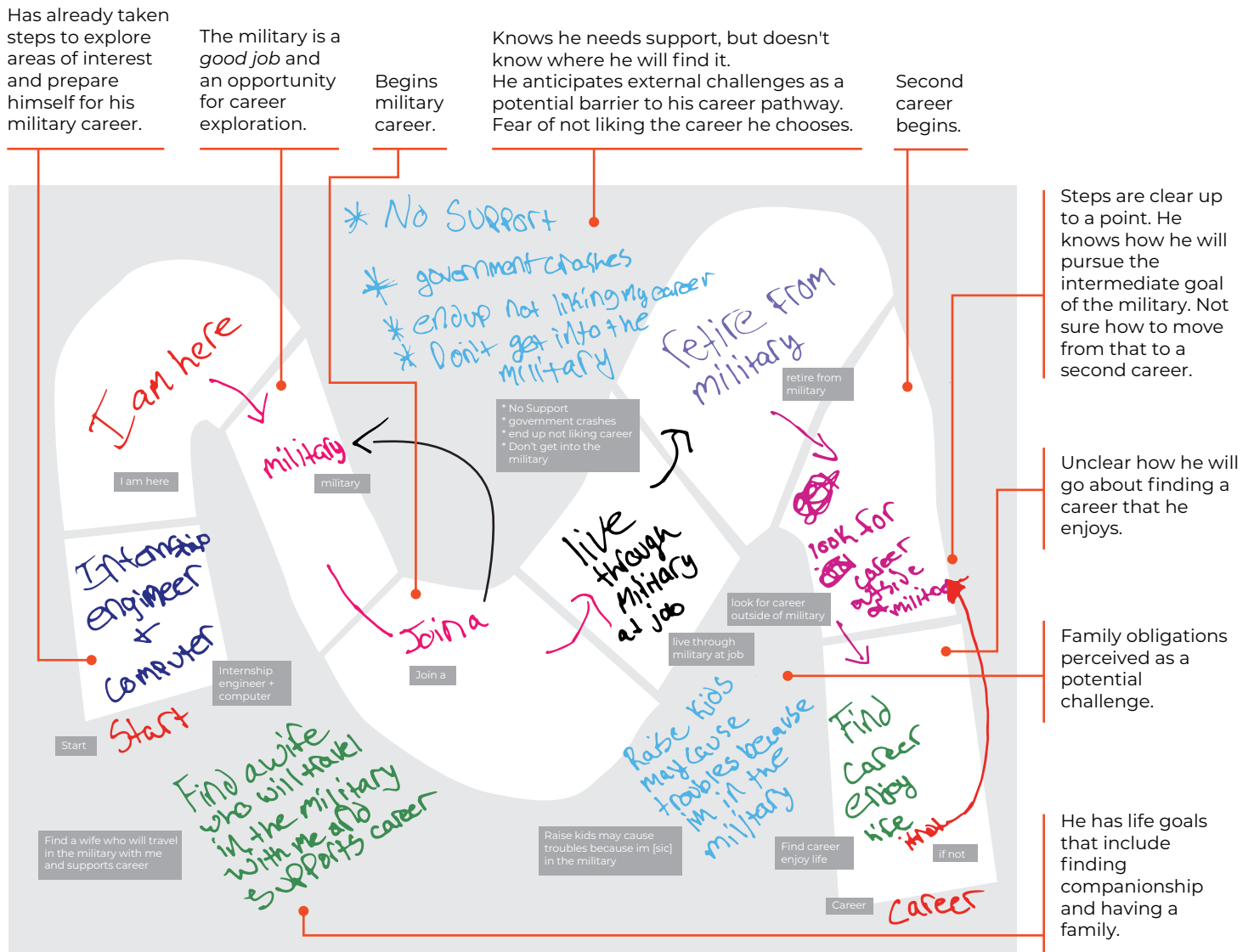
She has two career goals, the first to become a traveling nurse and the second to own a chain of dance studios. She has a clear sense of the instrumental steps she will need to take in order to reach her goal of becoming a nurse, but has a less clear sense of the steps necessary to move from nursing to becoming a traveling nurse or those that might prepare her to run her own business. Her timeline to open her first dance studio with her own savings is five years.

Know what they want to do, but are unsure how to get there

"Well, my family members, like I have three brothers that are in the military. They were all in different branches. . . . My dad did, my dad was in the Army. My mom was in the Navy. My grandpa was in the Navy. It's just kind of like a family thing. I just feel like serve a great country and enjoy doing it while doing something you love and having like a good life while doing it."

—YAKIMA, WA, WHITE MALE, 17–21, LOWER INCOME

Has already taken steps to explore areas of interest and prepare himself for his military career.

The military is a *good job* and an opportunity for career exploration.

Begins military career.

Knows he needs support, but doesn't know where he will find it.
He anticipates external challenges as a potential barrier to his career pathway. Fear of not liking the career he chooses.

Second career begins.

Steps are clear up to a point. He knows how he will pursue the intermediate goal of the military. Not sure how to move from that to a second career.

Unclear how he will go about finding a career that he enjoys.

Family obligations perceived as a potential challenge.

He has life goals that include finding companionship and having a family.

(handwritten annotations)
I am here
Internship engineer + computer
Start
military
Join a
No Support
* government crashes
* end up not liking my career
* Don't get into the military
live through military at job
retire from military
look for career outside of military
Find a wife who will travel in the military with me and supports career
Raise kids may cause troubles because im in the military
Find career enjoy life if not
Career

He has been admitted to a university in Seattle, but cannot afford the tuition. He has decided to join the military. "Well, now it's between Army and Air Force, but I'm leaning more towards Army because Army offers promotions. And with the Air Force, you, there's not really many, much promotional opportunity." He has already taken high school classes in engineering and computer science and believes the military will provide him with more opportunities to learn about his interests. He is hopeful that he will like being in the military. However, his military recruiter told him that if he does not, he can serve for four years, qualify for a free education, and leave the service (he describes this as "retiring"). If he leaves the military, he will look for a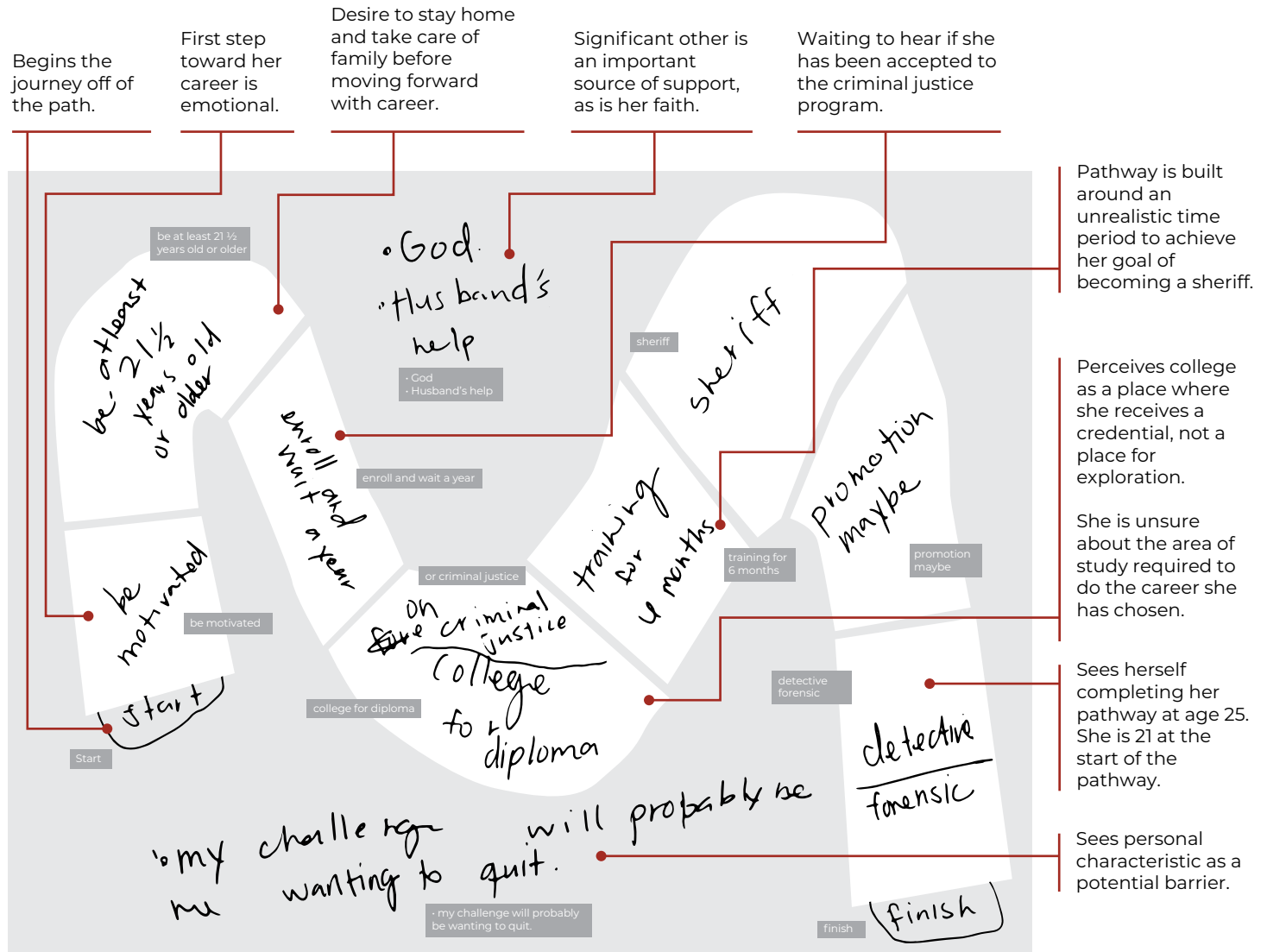 career he enjoys. He hopes to find a wife (or get married to someone) who will be willing to travel with him if he is in the military and support his career. He knows that life may not end up the way he would like it to and says not getting into the military, not liking his career, government instability, and encountering troubles with his own kids could stand in the way of him reaching his goals.

Unable to attend a university directly out of high school, the military represents his Plan B. His pathway relies almost entirely on a single experience—military participation—to direct his occupational goals. He expresses uncertainty about how he would explore careers outside of the military.

Know what they want to do, and think they know how to get there, but their imagined pathway is inaccurate and/or unrealistic

"Motivation to get out of the house, yeah. To enroll in the program you have to wait at least a year and in that year they can call you or they cannot call you. So during that year I want to go to college for criminal justice.... They pay you at least $1K or more and you don't need it but they pay you more. The training is 6 months and you have to.... maybe get the promotion to be a detective because not everyone can be a detective or forensic. It takes years sometimes being in a field just as a sheriff."

—LOS ANGELES, CA, HISPANIC FEMALE, 17–21, LOWER INCOME

Begins the journey off of the path.

First step toward her career is emotional.

Desire to stay home and take care of family before moving forward with career.

Significant other is an important source of support, as is her faith.

Waiting to hear if she has been accepted to the criminal justice program.

Pathway is built around an unrealistic time period to achieve her goal of becoming a sheriff.

Perceives college as a place where she receives a credential, not a place for exploration.

She is unsure about the area of study required to do the career she has chosen.

Sees herself completing her pathway at age 25. She is 21 at the start of the pathway.

Sees personal characteristic as a potential barrier.

Handwritten pathway map including: be at least 21 ½ years old or older · God · Husband's help · enroll and wait a year · sheriff · or criminal justice · training for 6 months · promotion maybe · be motivated · college for diploma · detective forensic · Start · my challenge will probably be wanting to quit. · finish

She is twenty-one and a mother. She graduated from high school and is currently not working and she stays home to care for her three-year old son. She wants to have a career, but worries about it taking her away from her son. She places her "START" off of the pathway and says that she first needs to be more motivated about pursuing her career and plans to enroll in college 2.5 years from now when her son is older. She hopes to apply to a specialized program for criminal justice, but while waiting to see if she has been accepted she will enroll in college. After completing college she will enter a 6-month training program at the end of which, she will be a sheriff. She anticipates she might receive a promotion and then move into a new position as a detective or forensics specialists. She believes that after completing college, it will take her 4-5 years to reach her career goals. She plans to be 25 when she is promoted to be a detective or get into forensics.

She has a clear idea of what she wants to do, but her understanding of the steps and stages necessary to reach her goals are vague and the timeline (4-5 years) is unrealistic.

Not sure what they want to do and unsure of what steps to take to get there
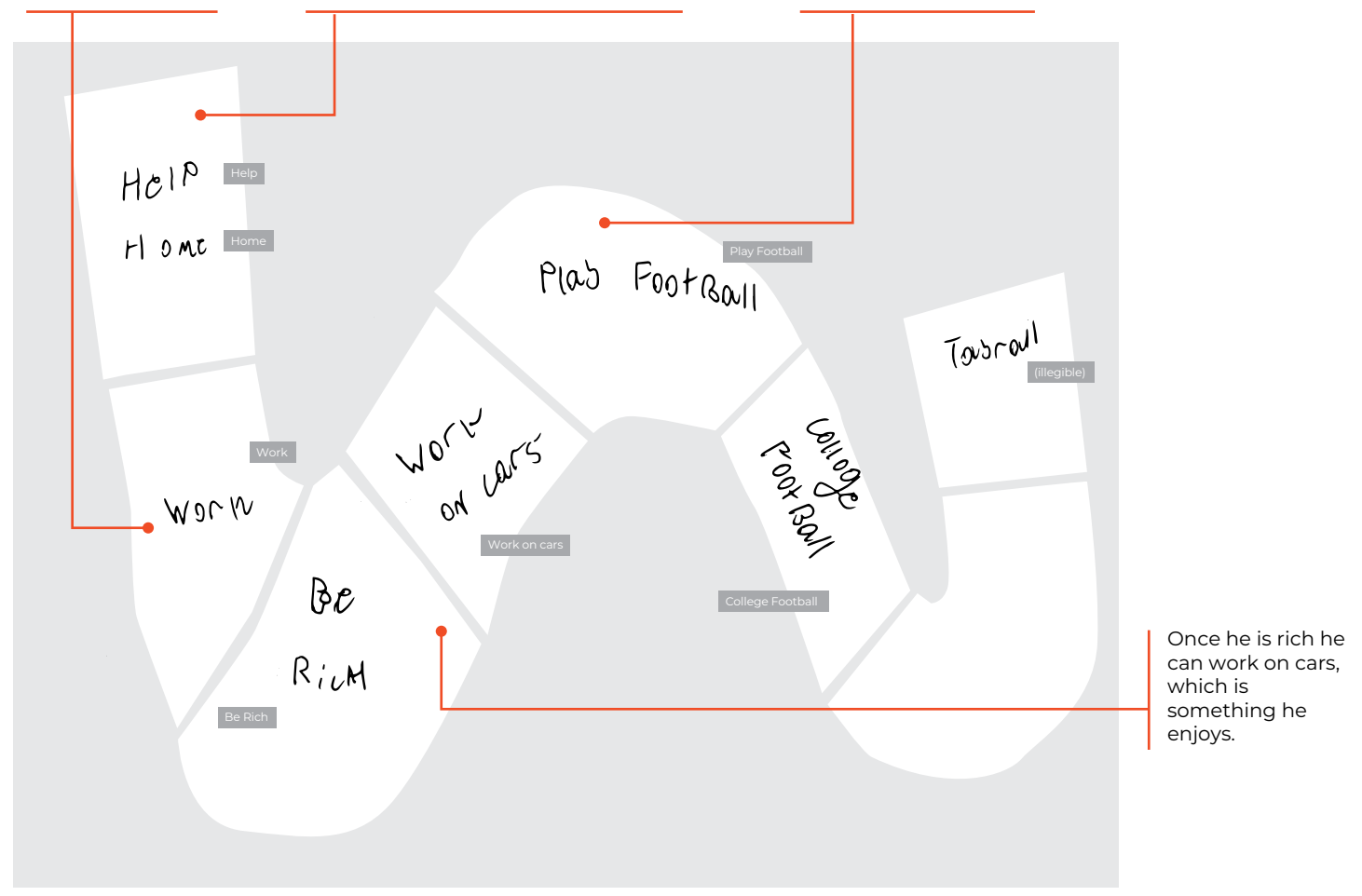
"There ain't no goal at the end...I was thinking about working, being a doctor....and help people out.... it is like there are people dying... and when I was a kid, I would see doctors help people come back to life."

—OAKLAND, CA, BLACK MALE, 16–18, LOWER INCOME

Selecting a non-college pathway and anticipates working out of high school.

Income from high school job helps to support himself and his mother.

Graduation from high school is not included on the pathway.

He struggles to describe how and if these steps build on one another.

Help Home

Help

Home

Plas Football

Work

Play Football

Tasraul

(illegible)

Worn

College Football

Work on cars

Be Rich

College Football

Be Rich

Once he is rich he can work on cars, which is something he enjoys.

He is in high school and using his high school job to help his mother out at home. "It is important to help my mom. Bills are real high and she doesn't know how to pay them.... and I try to help." After working and becoming rich, he plans to work on cars—something he enjoys. Later on, he hopes to play football. When asked to describe his pathway with the focus group, he says that he lacks a goal, then says he has been thinking about becoming a doctor so he can help people.

He is in the final category because he does not describe any steps that would enable him to think about or make progress towards his goals. For example, he says he has been thinking about becoming a doctor but he does not describe steps that would enable him to explore a career in health or medicine, to get more information about the field of medicine, or future steps or stages he may need to pass through in order to reach his goal.

7. Young people are empowered by connections

KEY TAKEAWAY:

Black and Hispanic young people understand the impact supportive adults can have in their lives but do not always know where or how to find them.

'All up to me': Young people in the research indicated that they often feel they are making choices about their lives by themselves and that their future success or failure rests on their own shoulders. For some young people this is a source of pride; for others it is a worry about being dependent or perceived as being dependent on other people. Some young people said they do not have family support, while some also expressed that their friends "tear them down" rather than provide support. These experiences contribute to them feeling they are doing this all on their own.

> *"There hasn't been anybody to help me get where I've been going. It has all been me for the last 3 years…My family hasn't been helping me really, so it has just been all me, just dedicating my time to my whole goal…just been grinding."*
> **—PUEBLO, CO, HISPANIC MALE, 17–21, LOWER INCOME**

> *"I would say family, they do nothing. They understand your goals but my family, they haven't been through what I'm having to go through and stuff like that. So, they don't really know what exactly they should be doing to help me."*
> **—BALTIMORE, MD, BLACK FEMALE, 17–20, LOWER INCOME**

While the young people often indicated they value support from others in their lives, more than half (53%) think it is ultimately going to be mostly up to them to achieve their career goals, compared to about a third (37%) who believe they will need help from other people. Differences by race, gender, and income on this question are minimal.

Support is needed but how to get it?: Most young people who participated in the research understand they will need some type of support from other people—emotional, financial, informational, tactical—and some get it. But many do not know they need it or are murky about where to find it. Among young people who do receive some support, the support may not be

POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS

Opportunity: Understand how and when young people move from thinking, "I know I need connections to thrive" to "I know I need connections to thrive AND I know how to get or build those connections."

Opportunity: Develop tools that balance young people's need to pursue goals independently while also working to develop relationships with adults who can broker information and support.

enough, or the right kind. Some young people struggle to trust adults and peers in their lives. When asked, they self-assess that this lack of trust is one barrier to accessing resources and establishing relationships that could help them succeed in school, transition to college, and later build their careers.

> *"I think networking is really important for most people's careers. I want to work in a government job or in academia, so I think for me it would be really important because I need someone to mentor me or to hire me for whatever position I get."*
> **—LOS ANGELES, CA, WHITE FEMALE, 16–18, LOWER INCOME**

> *"I'm not sure how I'm going to get from my experience to contacting people and getting into that field of work."*
> **—YAKIMA, WA, HISPANIC MALE, 16–21, LOWER INCOME**

Parents with lower incomes can feel ill-equipped: The research found that parents demonstrate various degrees of confidence in both their children's abilities to meet their goals and their own ability to support them. In particular, parents with lower incomes fear they are ill-equipped to support their children's desired educational and career pathways, which they view as aspirational yet unattainable for themselves. This tension influences the support and guidance they offer and are able to offer their children. Information gaps are also commonly observed among parents, many of whom say they do not fully understand the academic steps their children must take to reach their goals.

> *"She's got two scholarships. I don't know. I never went to college. I don't understand. I dropped out…kind of lead her and I am blind. I am reading everything, and I paid her undergraduate fee, made sure she did this. I go up and I talk to the school, but it is like they are talking gibberish at me. I can't help her with her homework."*
> **—BELLE GLADE, FL, WHITE PARENT/GUARDIAN, LOWER INCOME**

Teachers are influential—up to a point: Most high school survey respondents have had at least one positive experience with supportive teachers but only 36% saw their teachers as being influential in their career choices or in meeting their occupational goals. Black (30%) and Hispanic (35%) young people report receiving less support with their job or career compared to white young people (41%). While these results are generally consistent by race and gender, young people from households with higher incomes (75%) are significantly more likely to feel like their high school teachers have (or have had) their best interest at heart compared to 49% of young people from households with very low incomes—a gap of more than 25 percentage points.

Mutuality and transparency with adults is valued: For young people in the research the most positive relationships are those where they feel valued and where there is mutual support for one another. Tied to values of mutuality is a belief that trusted relationships—peer and adult—should be transparent. For example, when young people have a mentor or other relationship with a supportive adult outside of their families or immediate community, young people want to know what that adult's motivation is for being a mentor, coach, or volunteer.

> *"My parents come home and are tired and they don't listen…but my mentors have given me respect as a person. That makes it easier to go to them when I need something."*
> **—OAKLAND, CA, BLACK MALE, 16–18, LOWER INCOME**

> *"I really don't have any mentors, but I have family members that I can go to. I have a cousin… He has connections to people like that…just by me and him being close, I feel like he's that door to open up."*
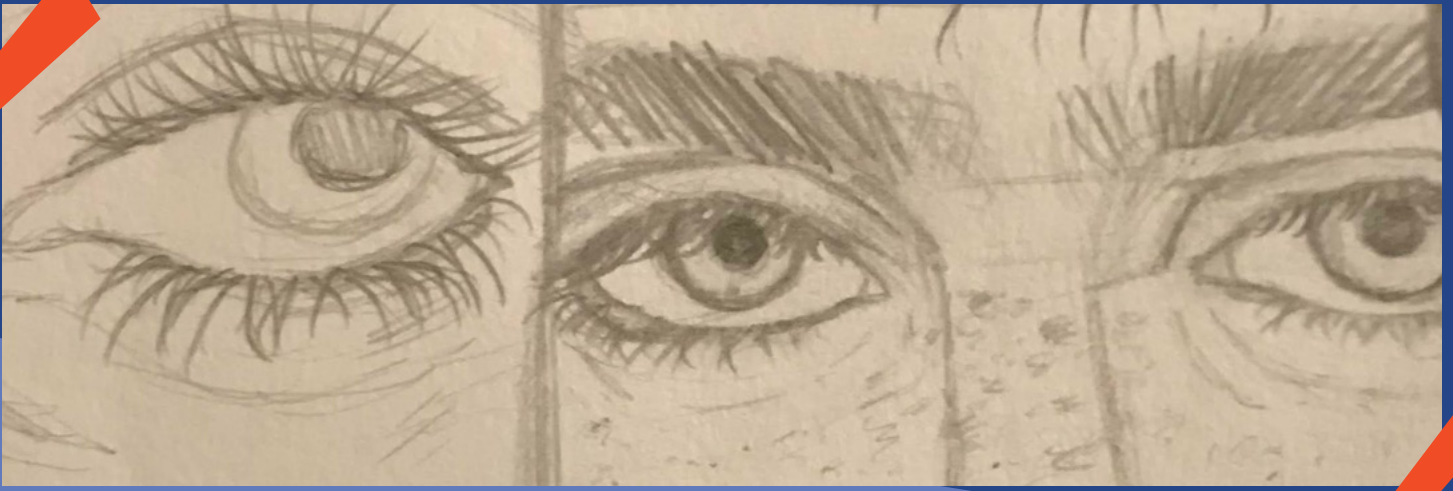> **—CHICAGO, IL, BLACK MALE, 15–18, LOWER INCOME**

Illustration by Lonnie Allen, age 17

Mentors perceived as positive and beneficial: Regardless of race, gender, or socio-economic background, young people in the research largely understand mentors to be of potential importance to them as they pursue their educational and career pathways. Young people from households with higher incomes, who are more likely to have already had a mentor, see having a mentor as important and sometimes critical to their educational and occupational pathways. Young people from households with lower incomes are more likely to report mentor relationships through occupational preparation programs, clubs, and specialized high schools that target them and/or Black and Hispanic youth.

> *"I think a big thing is just my mentors and how helpful they are. Through residencies you always have people above you that are instructing you and helping you and if those people aren't very patient or helpful then that can be a big barrier."*
> **—PASADENA, CA, WHITE MALE, 17–20, HIGHER INCOME**

Empowering effect of quality interactions: For adults and youth alike, the quality of an interaction or relationship directly impacts the way it is perceived. While those most closely involved in a young person's day-to-day life exert significant influence over their understanding of future possibilities, the type of connection with an individual is also hugely influential on what youth feel they can pursue or achieve.

> *"My friend just told me that one of my professors mentioned me in his class, she said, 'Oh yeah, he is very talented.' It makes me feel good; it makes me feel that I am recognized by somebody."*
> **—NEW YORK, NY, HISPANIC MALE, 17–20, HIGHER INCOME**

Authentic connections are valued most: When young people were asked to review a list of phrases and assess how helpful each is in terms of impacting their future career, they were more likely to value *Connections* over *Networks* and *Social Capital*. These perceptions remain largely consistent by race and gender, although age is an exception.

The research found that young people desire *real* relationships and friendships, and in that context, they feel that *connections* are more likely to be real and deep. By contrast, *networks* are perceived as superficial and transactional. Most youth participants have never heard the phrase *social capital* and, in the absence of a concrete understanding of its meaning, they fill in the gaps in ways that undermine its positive intent. Even when participants were taught the meaning of *social capital*, the term itself was not sticky. One problematic interpretation of the phrase *social capital* is that the term monetizes relationships, which implies that these relationships are *not* based on trust, mutuality, or personal affinity.

36

8. Young people see opportunity in conversation

KEY TAKEAWAY:

Young people see focus group conversations as a rare and valued opportunity to discuss their future aspirations and goals with peers and near-peers in a space free of adult judgment.

Rare and valued opportunity: The research project provided space for young people to engage each other in meaningful, in-depth conversations in real time. For many participants, these conversations were a rare and unique opportunity to dialogue openly with peers and near-peers about their lives, goals, and futures—without outside pressure or judgment.

The structure of the focus groups intentionally elevated and centered youth voices above that of the adult moderator in the room, offering young people an opportunity to imagine their future and think concretely about what their next steps could be in a low-risk setting. Absent was the stress and pressure they sometimes feel when having conversations about their futures—if they even have an opportunity to have a conversation about their future at all. Young people in these discussions placed importance on being asked what their lives will *be like* in the future, not what they want to *be* when they grow up. The diversity of lived experience in every group added to—rather than undermined—the sense of belonging that emerged.

> *"I was able to open up with you about a lot of stuff that I don't even talk to my mom or my family or friends about…I'll just be thankful that I came here and talked to you. It was nice talking to you…I feel like you were just like a mentor, let somebody ask you questions. I feel like we're on Oprah or something. Yeah, but it was nice."*
> **—GARY, IN, BLACK FEMALE, 15–18, LOWER INCOME**

> *"Everything about this conversation stood out to me. I've never sat down in a group and actually done this."*
> **—BELLE GLADE, FL, HISPANIC FEMALE, 17–21, LOWER INCOME**

Peer exchange is valuable: The young people who took part in the research benefited from sharing ideas and information about work-related life goals with each other in these peer and near-peer focus groups. There is transformational

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POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS

Opportunity: Adapt and experiment with similarly structured conversational spaces where young people feel they can express themselves without judgment and learn from—and be inspired by—their peers.

potential in hearing how youth in similar circumstances are thinking about their futures and navigating the process of determining where they want to go—and then getting there.

> *"Just everybody's different perspective, it gave me a lot of insight. And I was exposed to a lot of different, like, a lot of ways that other people think."*
> **—NEW YORK, NY, BLACK MALE, 17–21, LOWER INCOME**

> *"It actually has you think and plan out what your possible dreams are and then share that with others and see what other ideas are that may be similar, but totally different. So, then you get a feel of what other opportunities are out there that maybe you hadn't thought of."*
> **—YAKIMA, WA, WHITE MALE, 17–21, LOWER INCOME**

Opening the door to possible futures: Many focus group participants said they came out of the sessions armed with new information and new thinking about their futures—and a richer sense of the different pathways available to them. The peer-to-peer guidance and encouragement they received made them feel empowered to seek out additional sources of information and support. Participants remarked on the impact these talks had on their own sense of themselves and on their ideas, hopes, and dreams and expressed gratitude for the chance to take part in the conversations and to learn from their fellow participants.

> *"I'm going to bump into you one day, and you're going to be doing your thing, you feel me? I love stuff like that because everybody doesn't have the same path."*
> **—CHICAGO, IL, BLACK FEMALE, 17–21, LOWER INCOME**

> *"Definitely thinking about my future and wishing there was something like this in my high school, someone asking these questions."*
> **—NEW YORK, NY, HISPANIC MALE, 17–20, HIGHER INCOME**


Photograph by Ava Victoriano, age 12

Implications

The research findings detailed here and in greater depth in the full report suggest real-world opportunities for the field to influence young people's experiences and navigation of career pathways. Conceptually, these opportunities are organized around five levers of change: Core Approaches, Programs, Narrative, Research, and Philanthropy.

IMPLICATIONS: FIVE LEVERS OF CHANGE

Stakeholders can activate opportunities within each lever to more intentionally and authentically center youth voices. This body of research provides an evidence base from which to do so.
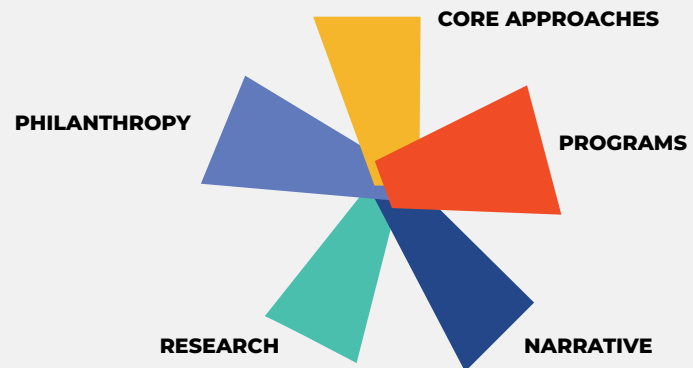
Core Approaches

Every sector has an opportunity to evolve their practice to consider core approaches that align with how young people see themselves and think about their futures. This may include:

- Creating youth-centered approaches to designing, developing, continuously improving, and evaluating programs that meet the emotional needs and aspirations of young people.

- Fostering and experimenting with conversational structures where young people feel they can express themselves without judgment and where they can learn from—and be inspired by—their peers.

- Designing solutions that target young people along a spectrum of emotional states—*surviving, striving,* and *thriving*—and developing impact measurements that leverage young people's understanding of success.

Programs

For program designers and educators, the research offers opportunities to adopt youth and learner-centered solutions such as:

- Expanding pathways programming to more explicitly integrate building of relationships and social capital both through peer-to-peer strategies and near-peer strategies, whether in person or virtually.

- Designing programs and outreach strategies that integrate opportunities for career and personal exploration that allow youth to reflect on their own sense of what a *good life* is and what their individual goals are.

- Ensuring the broadest access to young people through in-person and online tools that allow them to independently seek information about career pathways and education.

- Spotlighting multiple pathways to life and career goals including college and non-college pathways.

- Acknowledging the multiple relationships and influencers that inform young people's behaviors and decision-making, and building intentional opportunities for adults in young people's lives to work together to support young people's attainment of their goals.

- Developing programmatic tools that intentionally focus on young people's socio-emotional development and core self-identity exploration and development.

Narrative

Shifting mindsets toward new approaches will be an essential element of this work. This involves:

- Refining narratives that instill greater understanding and valuing of the roles of relationships, personal and career exploration, and multiple pathways to success among youth and the adults in their lives.

- Developing and sharing stories that name and normalize how young people, especially those from households with lower incomes, are able to explore and experiment with career pathways.

- Promoting, among professional stakeholders, narratives that prioritize young people as changemakers in their own lives and the ways they experience education and career pathways as integrated sets of steps and relationships in pursuit of a *good life*.

Research

Researchers can further validate and activate the research by:

- Conducting a cross-sectional, longitudinal study that examines how young people navigate career pathways and how ideas about *thriving* evolve over time.

- Developing a three-part *Surviving, Striving*, and *Thriving* Index, with indicators associated with each stage of youth development.

Philanthropy

For philanthropic leaders, the research offers guideposts for creating and cultivating holistic, youth-centered grantmaking strategies and adopting equity-based practices. Philanthropic leaders may consider:

- Creating youth-centered participatory grantmaking and initiating collaborative learning and practices.

- Investing in tools that will deepen the role of youth voices across key sectors of the field.

- Using institutional power/voice to help other funders understand social capital as a key missing component of the existing youth funding landscape.

- Using convening power to build and incentivize funder collaboratives that can support organizations who help young people build social capital.

- Investing in research that aims to better understand how young people's occupational identity and perceptions of a *good life* change over time.

Closing

Discrepancies often exist between the assumptions about young people's experiences, aspirations, and pathways for the future and what their actual perspectives, experiences, and goals are in reality. Checking these assumptions is difficult and can even be uncomfortable. Yet the pay-offs can be transformative— not only for Black, Hispanic, and young people from households with lower incomes themselves but for the people working to improve their life outcomes. The insights drawn from nearly 4,000 youths who informed the research project offer opportunities, challenges, and new ways of envisioning interventions meant to improve young people's experiences of education and work as they strive to thrive. The biggest opportunity—and perhaps the biggest challenge—is to listen to what young people are saying and allow their voices to inform the projects and interventions aimed to impact them.


Photograph by Ava Victoriano, age 12

Explanation of Terms

## Self-Identification: Race and Ethnicity
The terms used in this report to describe people's race and ethnicity reflect the terms young people most often use to describe themselves in the research.

Using "Hispanic." When asked to describe their race or ethnicity, most Hispanic and Latino young people said "Hispanic," which the researchers adopt as its general descriptor. Note: When the most commonly volunteered terms are removed—*Hispanic*, *Mexican*, and *Latino* or *Latina*—you can see the diversity of other words these young people use to define their ethnic or racial identity.

Here are the words young people use to describe their race and ethnicity in the survey. Results come from the quantitative survey in which 1,109 respondents identify as Hispanic, Latina, or Latino.
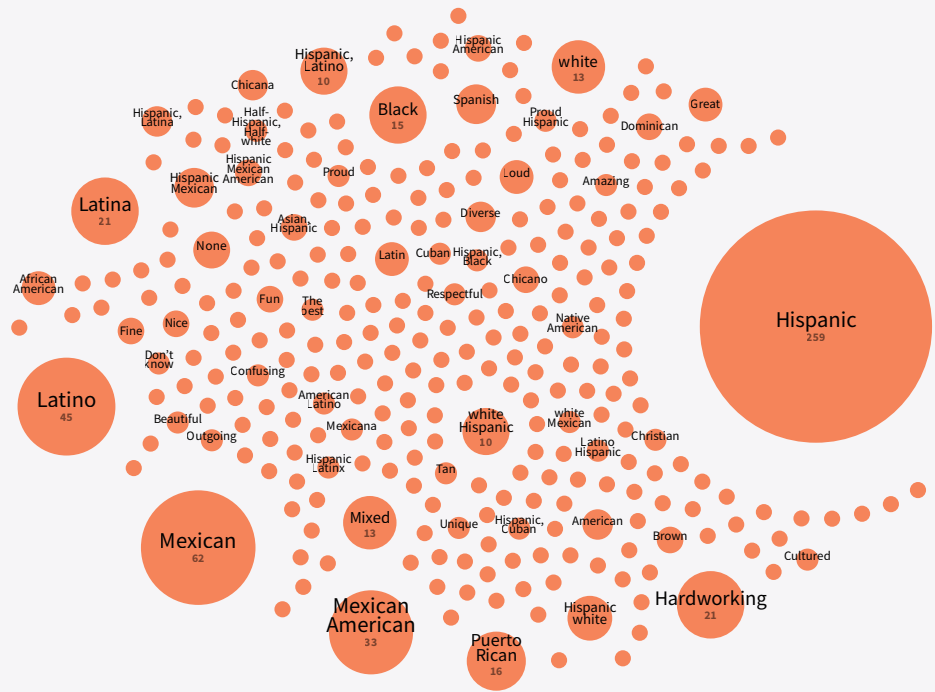
Removing the terms Hispanic, Latino and Mexican, here are the remaining other words young people use to describe their race and ethnicity in the survey. Results come from the quantitative survey in which 1,109 respondents identify as Hispanic, Latina, or Latino.
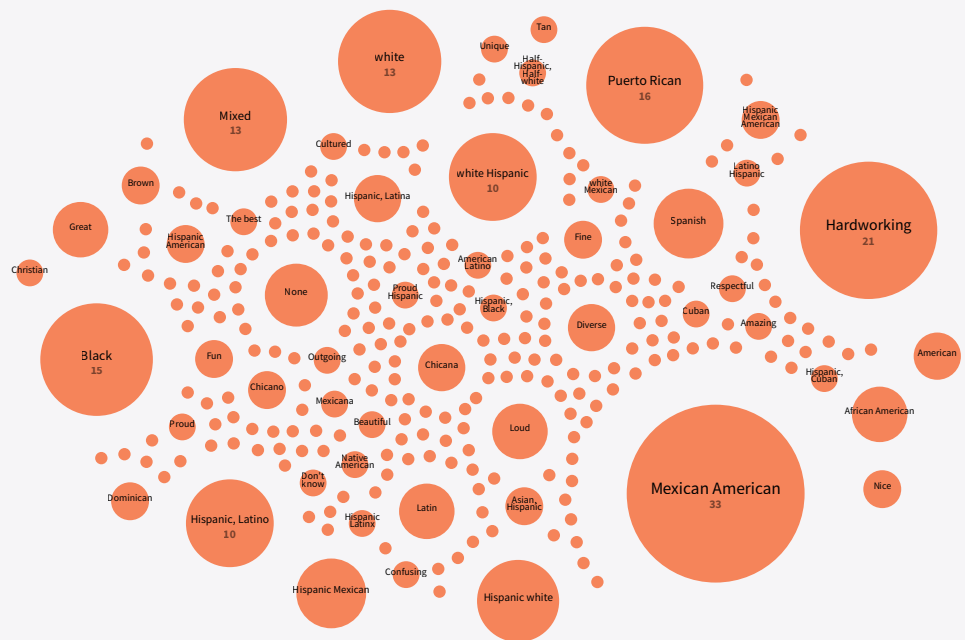
Capitalizing "B" in "Black"

The researchers choose to capitalize *Black* as a racial identity, while not doing so with *white*. The enslavement, displacement, and marginalization of Black people in the history of the United States has resulted in a group of people stripped of traditional modifiers that would otherwise identify them as descendents of a specific culture, people, or nation of origin. This is a direct and intended outcome of racism, institutionalized oppression, and privilege. The same is not true for white people, many of whom identify as European (or of European descent), mapping their family lineage beyond the boundaries of the United States and the specific ancestral history in this country. By capitalizing Black we recognize the unique experiences of Black people in this country and as a group that often has no other means to classify or categorize their experiences in writing.

Self-Identification: Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

For the purposes of this research, these individuals are included in insights and observations about the group to which they self-selected and to which they were assigned: male or female. The focus of this research was not on young people who identify as sexual or gender minorities, and therefore does not draw insights related to these aspects of their identities.

Defining "Youth"

The terms young people and youth are used interchangeably throughout the report to refer to people between the ages of 15 and 21. The researchers use the term young adult to describe people between the ages of 26 and 29, another study population in this research.

Income Level

Importantly, the target populations for this research are Black and Hispanic young people of any income, and white young people from households with lower incomes. Lower income describes young people who are growing up or who have grown up in households with incomes of less than $75,000 per year. Higher income refers to young people who are growing up in or have grown up in households with incomes of $75,000 or more per year.

Sector-Based Terminology

This report also includes words and phrases to which different sectors may bring their own, sometimes conflicting, meanings. Below are key terms the researchers of this report used and how they defined them:

- **Occupational Identity:** How young people envision their future selves in the workforce—what they like to do, what they believe they are skilled at, and where they feel they belong related to work.

- **Occupational Pathways:** Refers to the routes or paths that young people create and the choices they make as they journey from where they are now in their lives to where they want to be.

- ***Good Job, Career, Work, Job*:** Young people understand the words *job*, *career*, and *work* to mean different things. To learn more about the distinctions that youth make between these words and ideas, please see the *Young people aspire to live a good life* section.