INSTITUTE FOR WOMEN'S POLICY RESEARCH
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Getting to the Finish Line

The Availability and Impact of Supportive Services in the Workforce Development System

JOB TRAINING SUCCESS

About This Report

This report presents an overview of findings from the Job Training Success Project at the Institute for Women's Policy Research, which investigated access to supportive services across the workforce development system and how gaps in services can be addressed. The report captures highlights from an IWPR publication series that includes a review and analysis of literature on the importance, effectiveness, and availability of supportive services for participants in job training programs in the United States; an analysis of data from online surveys of 168 administrators of job training programs and nearly 1,900 job training participants about their perspectives on supportive services; and a study profiling eight programs with innovative models for providing supportive services to job training participants. The project draws on these sources to examine the need for supportive services in workforce development programs and their role in promoting job training success. The report series was informed by an advisory committee and expert interviews and funded by the Walmart Foundation.

About the Institute for Women's Policy Research

The Institute for Women's Policy Research conducts and communicates research to inspire public dialogue, shape policy, and improve the lives and opportunities of women of diverse backgrounds, circumstances, and experiences. The Institute works with policymakers, scholars, and public interest groups to design, execute, and disseminate research and to build a diverse network of individuals and organizations that conduct and use women-oriented policy research. IWPR's work is supported by foundation grants, government grants and contracts, donations from individuals, and contributions from organizations and corporations. IWPR is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization that also works in affiliation with the women's studies and public policy and public administration programs at The George Washington University.

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Introduction

This summary outlines key findings from the Institute for Women's Policy Research's (IWPR) research series on the role of supportive services such as child care, transportation, and mental health care in the workforce development system. The report series includes a review and analysis of literature on supportive services in job training programs in the United States, a study of programs with innovative approaches to addressing participants' unmet support needs, and analysis of data from online surveys of 168 administrators of job training programs (IWPR Job Training Administrator Survey) and 1,887 program participants (IWPR Job Training Participant Survey) about the need for and availability of supportive services.

Job training provides women and men with skills needed to survive and thrive in the job market. Yet, challenges such as limited access to quality and affordable child care, a lack of transportation, mental health problems, and financial instability can create obstacles to enrolling in or completing job training and securing employment that provides income to support families. The IWPR reports indicate that supportive services help participants in workforce development programs complete their training, get a job, and earn sustainable wages.

While the research shows that supportive services are vital to participant success in job training programs, it also reveals a critical need for more services like child care and financial assistance. Lack of funding prevents many programs from being able to fully meet the support needs of their participants. Other programs, however, are finding creative ways to address unmet needs even in the context of limited resources. This report summarizes key findings from IWPR's research on the role of supportive services in promoting job training success and strategies that these organizations use to maximize their reach and impact.

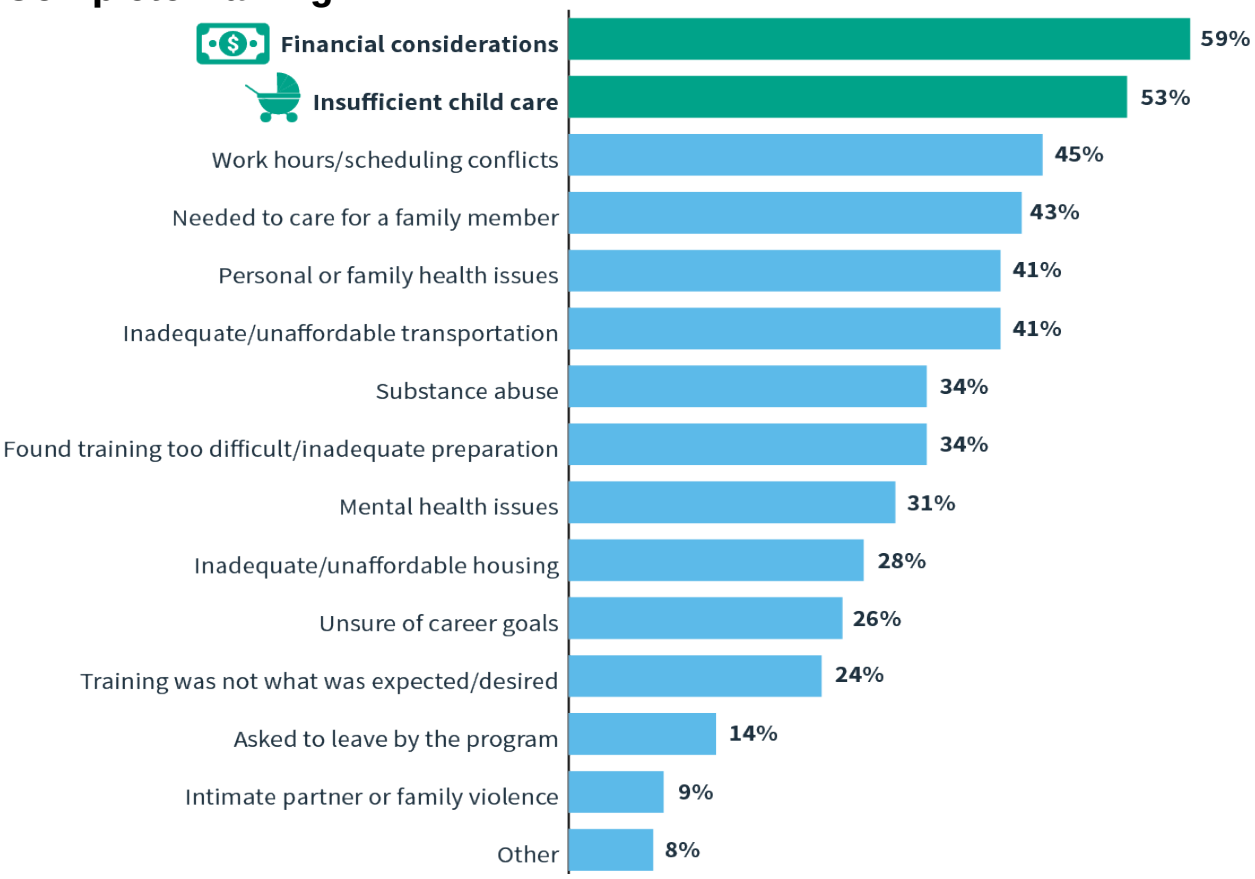
I. The Role of Supportive Services in Job Training Success

IWPR's Job Training Administrator Survey respondents see financial considerations and insufficient child care as the most common obstacles to job training success for their participants (Figure 1). In the IWPR Job Training Participant Survey, 44 percent of respondents say they faced two or more challenges during their training (such as problems with child care or transportation, or health issues); difficulty paying bills was the most common challenge (reported by 36 percent of those who faced at least one challenge).

Overall, respondents to the IWPR Participant Survey were more likely to complete their programs, or expected to complete their programs at higher rates than observed in other data on workforce development; 92 percent of survey respondents who were in training in the past had completed their program, and 89 percent of those who were currently enrolled intended to finish.[1]

[1] The completion rate among individuals in the IWPR sample is higher than the completion rates other studies have found among Job Corps participants, college students enrolled in certificate and associate's degree programs, and exiters from Workforce Investment Act-funded programs. The comparatively higher completion rate for IWPR's sample may stem partly from the survey's distribution among a number of programs that are known to be strong training programs that provide supportive services.

Figure 1. Administrator Views on Why Some Participants Do Not Complete Training



Note: Respondents could select up to five reasons. N=140
Source: IWPR Job Training Administrator Survey

Both IWPR surveys indicate that supportive services are associated with positive program outcomes.[2]

- Ninety-seven percent of the administrators surveyed said that supportive services are important for retention and completion of job training.
- When asked about 18 different supportive services, a large majority (at least 80 percent) of program participants who received each service said it was important to their ability to stay in their training program.

[2] The sample for IWPR's participant survey differs in several ways from the sample of participants in Workforce Investment Act-funded programs nationally. IWPR's sample has a larger share of women (65 percent of the sample are women), is younger, and has a smaller share of parents.

"Supportive services are critical. All of the training and job placement efforts in the world aren't going to be effective if the trainee can't get to/from work, doesn't have child care resources, or can't overcome other barriers to getting and keeping the job." – Trade association administrator

- Sixty-two percent of program administrators who say their participants' support needs were met well or very well reported completion rates of 80 percent or higher. When support service needs were not met well, only 30 percent of programs say their participant completion rates were 80 percent or higher.

- Among respondents to the participant survey who enrolled in training in the past, 85 percent who received no services completed their program. Ninety-three percent who received between one and three services completed, and 94 percent who received more than three services finished their training.

- When controlling for a range of factors—including gender, race, age, education, marital status, number of children under 18, adult dependents, immigrant status, region in which training was completed, program setting, ease or difficulty of participating in training—IWPR found that the probability that a participant would complete their training increased by 11 percentage points for each additional supportive service received that addressed a particular challenge the participant faced.

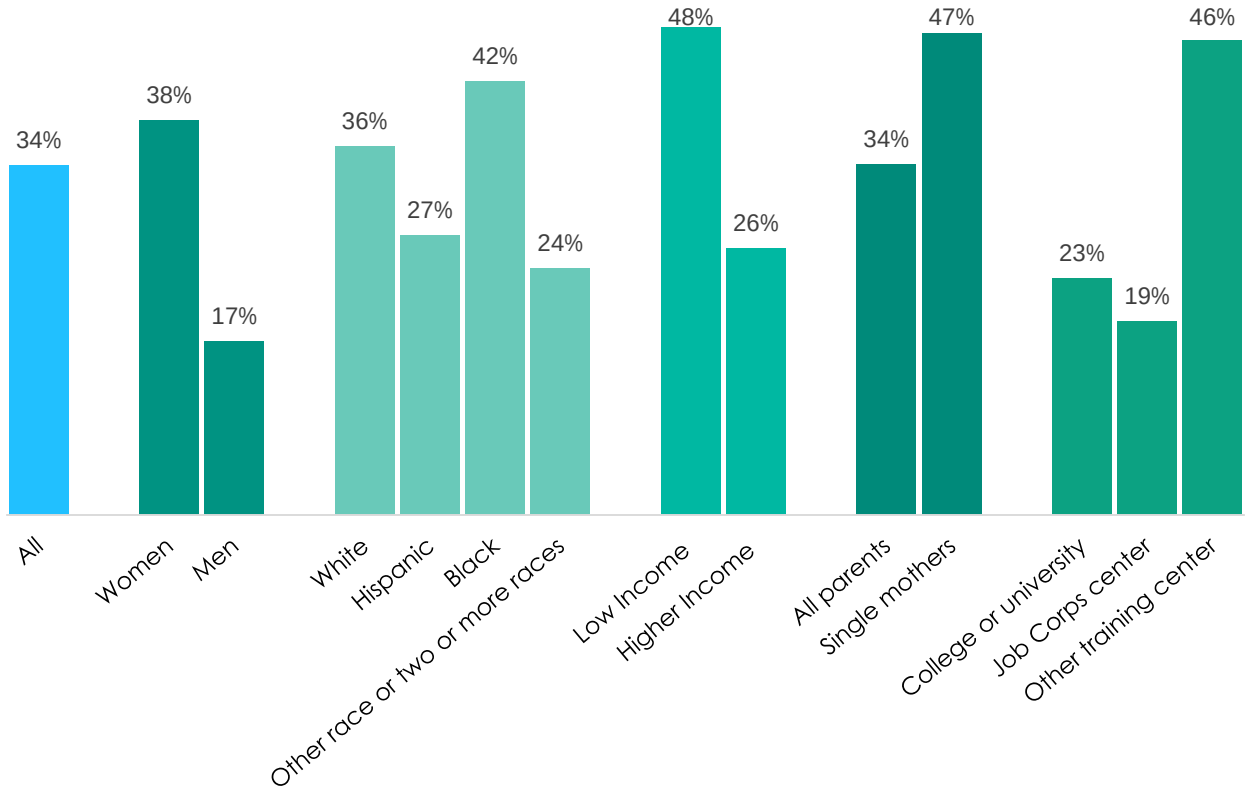
- Among respondents to the participant survey who reported facing challenges during training and said their training program helped them access services to address these challenges, 77 percent found a job after training. Only 60 percent of those who experienced challenges and did not get help from their program obtaining services found a job after training.

- When controlling for the same factors as above, the probability of finding a job after training was 26 percentage points higher among those who had a case manager who helped them access supportive services compared with otherwise similar respondents who did not have a case manager who helped them access supports.

An administrator recalled a participant who was "living out of her car with two young children [and] entered a 12-week full-time intensive program and is an apprentice earning $28 per hour. She is continuing her education and will soon have her associate's degree." – IWPR administrator survey respondent

- Child care assistance represents an especially vital support for those with young children. Thirty-four percent of participants with children aged five and under who received child care assistance say they could not have attended training without this help. Women were more than twice as likely to affirm this statement as men (Figure 2). Low-income participants, single mothers, and individuals training at a location other than a college, university, or Job Corps center are especially likely to see the child care assistance they received as critical to their ability to enroll in training.

Figure 2. Percent of Parents Who Received Child Care Assistance Who Say They Would Not Have Been Able to Attend Training without This Assistance, by Demographic and Program Characteristics



Notes: Data are for respondents who had children aged five years or younger during their training. Racial groups are non-Hispanic; "other race or two or more races" includes those who identified as Asian or Pacific Islander, American Indian or Alaska Native, or with another racial and ethnic group or two or more races. N=314 for all respondents, 247 for women, 65 for men, 117 for White, 77 for Hispanic, 78 for Black, 34 for other or two or more races, 101 for low income, 74 for higher income, 313 for all parents, 164 for single mothers, 78 for college or university, 69 for Job Corps, and 160 for other training settings. Parental status refers to the time of training. Low income refers to those with self-reported annual household income of $20,000 or less in 2015 and is for currently enrolled respondents only.
Source: IWPR Job Training Participant Survey

Participants can obtain supportive services from multiple sources, including from the organizations where they receive training (referred to as "direct services") as well as from referrals made by training providers. For many training providers, referrals are the most practical and feasible way to provide supports, yet half of the programs responding to IWPR's administrator survey say they do not track the outcomes of the referrals they make. Among respondents to the IWPR participant survey, only 32 percent say they received a referral to an outside source. Sixty-two percent of those who received a referral contacted the referral agency; 79 percent of those who reached out to the referral agency received a service as a result. Women were more likely than men to report having received a referral (37 percent compared with 23 percent), and more likely to have followed up on

a referral and received a service as a result. Seventy-one percent of women who received a referral contacted the referral agency compared with 41 percent of men; among those who followed up on a referral, 82 percent of women and 65 percent of men said they received a service.

II. The Availability of Supportive Services

For the programs in IWPR's administrator survey sample, the four most commonly provided services are financial counseling and education, case management, peer support groups, and transportation. Respondents to the IWPR participant survey say that help accessing computers or other technology, peer support, and life coaching are the services their programs most often helped them obtain.

The rates of service receipt vary across program duration, budget sizes, and hours spent in training. Longer training programs in the administrator survey provide fewer services directly, except for emergency cash assistance, peer support groups, and mental health and substance abuse counseling (though many programs that do not provide direct services offer referrals for services to other organizations). Among organizations with differing budget sizes, an even clearer pattern emerges: those with an annual budget of more than $1 million are more likely than those with smaller budgets to provide direct supports. In the participant survey, individuals participating in training at longer programs were more likely to receive most services than those at shorter programs, and those whose programs involve more hours of training (at least 40 hours per week) were more likely to receive services than whose programs involve fewer hours.[3]

The administrator survey examined differences in supportive service provision at community and technical colleges compared with programs in other settings, and found that community colleges are less likely to provide most services. Community and technical college administrators reported a lower share of participants with low-incomes compared with administrators of "other" programs.

> Workforce development programs at community colleges, on the whole, are less likely than other types of workforce development programs to provide supportive services.

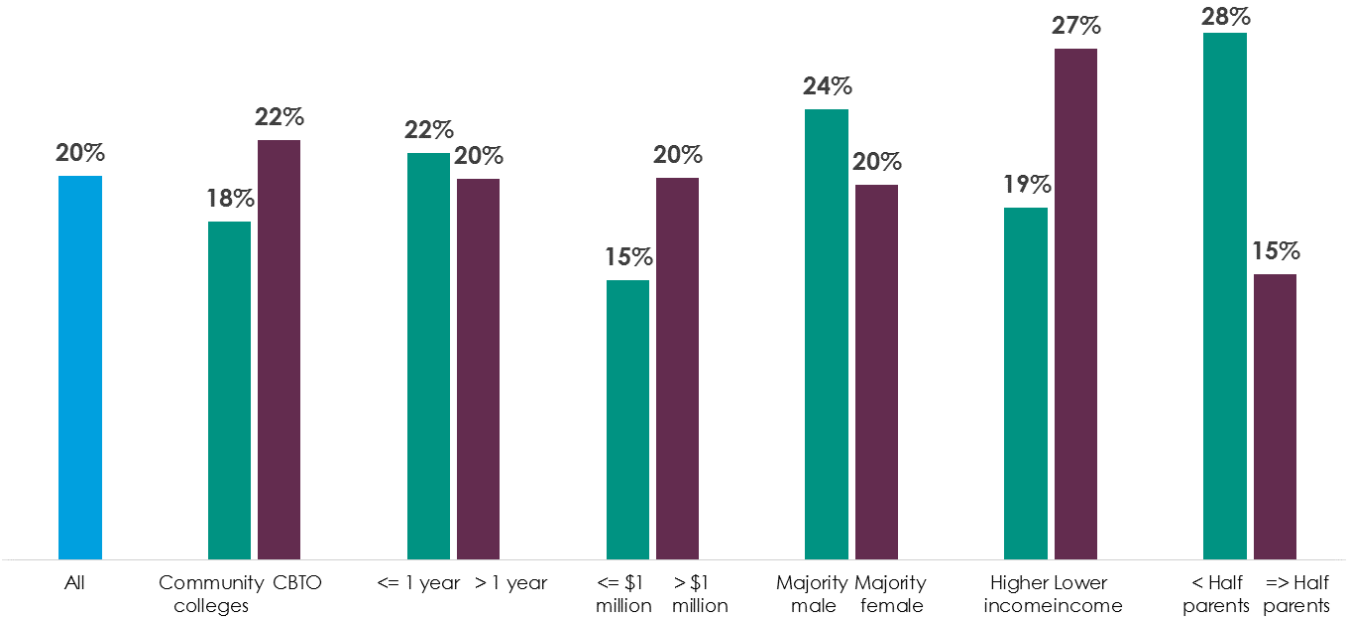
In the participant survey, which included a fairly large sample of individuals training at Job Corps centers, differences in supportive service receipt varied by program type as well. Respondents in Job Corps programs, which include supportive services by program design, are more likely to say their program helped them access most services than respondents in workforce development programs at colleges and universities and at other organizations.

[3] The participant survey did not collect data on program budgets, and the administrator survey did not collect data on hours of training. Data on services received in the participant survey include those received from any source.

III. Key Unmet Support Needs

Even when considering all sources of support – direct services, referrals, partnerships, and other community resources – many job training participants do not receive all the supportive services they need. Only 20 percent of administrators in IWPR's survey believe their clients' supportive service needs are met well (Figure 3). Programs with smaller budgets and those serving a high proportion of parents of dependent children are less likely than other programs to say their participants' needs are well met.

Figure 3. Share of Administrators Who Report Their Participants' Supportive Service Needs Are Met Well or Extremely Well, by Program Characteristics and Participant Demographics



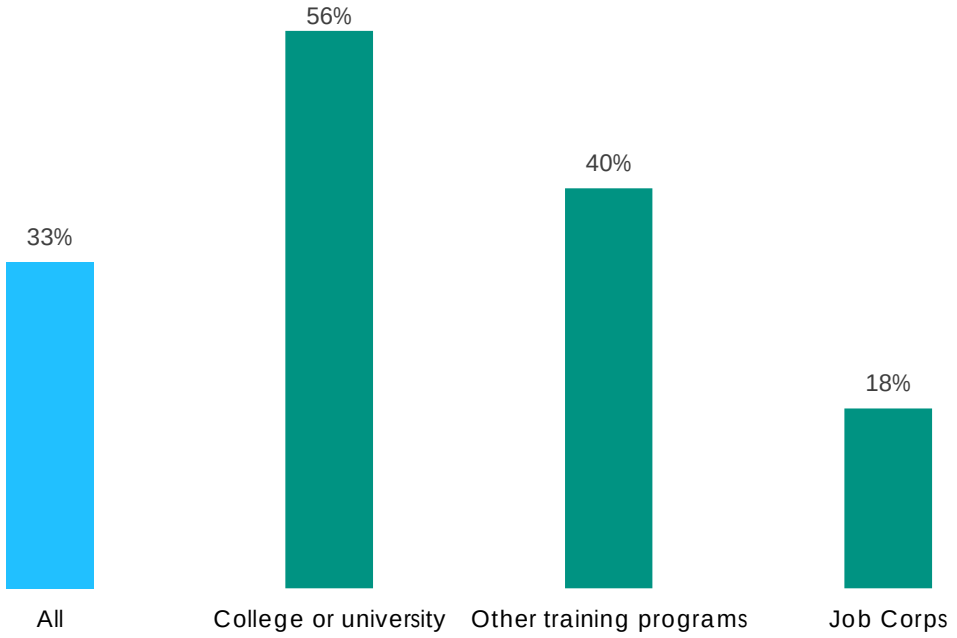
Notes: "Community colleges" includes community and technical colleges. "CBTO" refers to community-based training organizations. More or less than one million refers to the annual job training program budget. More or less than one year refers to the longest program offered by those surveyed. N=137 for all; N for other categories ranges from 46 (for at least half parents) to 76 (for community-based training organizations).
Source: IWPR Job Training Administrator Survey

Eighteen percent of respondents to the participant survey said they had a few or many unmet needs while in training. Twenty-three percent of individuals training at a college or university, 17 percent training at a Job Corps center, and 17 percent training in other settings said they had a few or many unmet needs. Women were slightly more likely than men to report having a few or many needs that were not met (19 compared with 17 percent).

In analyzing the participant survey data, IWPR examined 12 challenges respondents could face that each have a corresponding supportive service (e.g., transportation problems and transportation assistance). While not all participants may need a supportive service to address each challenge they

face—some may address challenges through other means—the survey data indicate that many find supports useful or essential to overcoming the obstacles that can hinder program completion. Eighty-four percent of respondents reported facing at least one of the 12 challenges, and of those who indicated whether they received a corresponding service, 33 percent reported that their training program did not help them access services to meet any of these needs. Fifty-six percent of those training at a college or university, 18 percent training at a Job Corps center, and 40 percent training in other settings reported that their program did not help them access any services for any of these 12 challenges they faced while in training (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Percent of Program Participants Who Say Their Program Did Not Help Them Access Services to Meet Their Challenges, by Program Type



Notes: Data show the percent of respondents who reported experiencing at least 1 of 12 challenges to completion and say their programs did not help them receive a supportive service to address the challenge(s). N = 791 for All, N=140 for college or university, 357 for Job Corps, and 284 for other training programs. Ten respondents did not know their program type or did not report whether their needs were met and are included only in the "All" category.
Source: IWPR Job Training Participant Survey

The challenges that training programs were most likely to help their participants address through services were computer problems or lack of access to technology, drugs and/or alcohol problems, and issues with physical or mental health. The challenges they were least likely to help them address were legal issues, problems finding or affording child care, and housing difficulties (Table 1).

Table 1. Percent of Respondents Who Experienced Challenges and Percent Whose Challenges Were Met with a Service, by Type of Challenge

	Percent Experiencing Challenge	Percent with Challenge Met by a Service
Computer problems or lack of access to technology	19%	73%
Drugs and/or alcohol	6%	69%
Own physical health problems	16%	68%
Own mental health problems	20%	68%
Transportation problems	34%	65%
Intimate partner or family violence	4%	56%
Difficulty getting enough food for self and/or family	18%	51%
Getting and keeping public benefits	11%	35%
Difficulty paying bills	33%	34%
Housing difficulty	15%	33%
Problems finding or affording child care	14%	32%
Legal issues	4%	26%

Note: Data show the percent of respondents who report experiencing challenges and say they have their challenges met with a service among all those who reported facing at least one of the twelve challenges shown. N=796 for percent experiencing challenge. N ranges from a low of 34 for "intimate partner or family violence" to a high of 259 for "difficulty paying bills" for percent challenge met by a service.
Source: IWPR Job Training Participant Survey

The administrator survey asked respondents what they saw as the greatest unmet needs for women and men in their programs. While many of the reported unmet needs were similar (such as emergency cash, housing, and transportation assistance; Table 2), administrators identified child care as a much greater need for women—66 percent believe it is one of the five greatest unmet needs for women compared with 21 percent who say the same for men. One-third (32 percent) say domestic violence services are one of the top unmet needs for women in their programs.

Women were much more likely than men to say they wished they had received (more) help accessing or applying for public benefits, financial education and counseling, health care services, mental health services, and child care assistance.

The participant survey asked respondents to name the services they would most like to have received or received more of; transportation assistance, housing assistance, and help getting clothing or shoes were the most common responses and cited by similar shares of women and men. Women, however, were much more likely than men to say they wished they had received (more) help accessing or applying for benefits, financial education and counseling, health care services, mental health counseling, and child care assistance. Men were more likely to say they wish they had received (more) peer support, help getting food, parenting support, and substance abuse counseling.

Table 2. Greatest Unmet Needs of Participants/Students, by Gender (Administrator Views)

Greatest Unmet Needs for Women		Greatest Unmet Needs for Men	
Child care assistance	66%	Housing assistance	50%
Emergency cash assistance	56%	Emergency cash assistance	50%
Housing assistance	48%	Mental health counseling	46%
Transportation assistance	45%	Transportation assistance	43%
Mental health counseling	42%	Substance abuse counseling	40%
Domestic violence services	32%	Health care	29%
Health care	30%	Legal services	28%
Substance abuse counseling	28%	Financial education & counseling	27%
Legal services	24%	Child care assistance	21%
Financial education & counseling	23%	Help accessing public benefits	15%

Notes: Data show the share of administrators who chose each need. Respondents could select up to five needs. N=151 for women and 146 for men.
Source: IWPR Job Training Administrator Survey

"We have multiple mothers who credit the child care offered during classes as the reason they are able to attend. Without child care they would have to stay home and take care of their children as opposed to coming in and learning new skills." – Community-based organization administrator

Program administrators report that they would like to offer more supportive services. In particular, job training programs surveyed want to offer more child care and emergency cash assistance (55 percent of organizations in the survey), transportation assistance (52 percent), housing assistance (47 percent), and mental health counseling (46 percent). Only one percent do not express a desire to provide more supportive services.

Although most job training providers want to offer more supportive services, only 36 percent say they are likely to expand their services in the near future. Lack of funding is by far the most common reason given for not providing more supportive services.

IV. Partnering to Increase the Provision of Supportive Services

Partnerships between workforce development programs and local supportive service providers are a primary strategy used to meet participants' supportive service needs in a cost-effective manner. Four in five respondents to IWPR's Job Training Administrator Survey reported that they rely on partners in their community to provide supportive services to their participants. The Administrator Survey revealed that the intensity of the partnership is important; administrators at programs that refer participants to close partners, as opposed to referring to organizations that are not close partners, were more likely to report higher completion rates. Forty-six percent of organizations that provide more than the median number of services (six services) through close partnerships have a completion rate of 80 percent or higher, compared with 31 percent of organizations that offer, through close partnerships, fewer than or the same number of services as the median.

The importance of strong organizational partnerships also emerged as a key theme during site visits IWPR conducted to eight programs that provide supportive services to address the key unmet needs of job training participants. The programs include:

- Brighton Center in Newport, KY, which offers a wide range of programs and services to job training participants (including emergency cash assistance, financial education, substance abuse counseling, and assistance obtaining public benefits, child care, housing, clothing, and transportation) through holistic case management;

- Building Futures in Providence, RI, a pre-apprenticeship program focused primarily on the construction sector that provides hands-on training in the skilled trades and supportive services such as bus passes and gas cards, food cards, emergency cash assistance, help accessing public benefits, and small, no-interest loans;

- Climb Wyoming, which provides training for single mothers in health care, truck driving, office careers, pipefitting, and HVAC repair, among other occupations, and is designed to

address the holistic needs of participants by having them work with a licensed mental health clinician individually and as a group and providing additional services and referrals;

- JVS Boston, which provides a continuum of learning that includes occupational training for certified nursing assistants and pharmacy technicians, as well as services such as financial coaching, child care, and transportation assistance to those with disabilities, veterans, refugees and asylees, and ex-offenders;

- Raise the Floor at Gateway Community and Technical College in Florence, KY, which recruits, trains, supports, and places women enrolled in manufacturing programs who are pursuing short-term certificates or associate's degrees, connects them with partner organizations to meet their comprehensive supportive service needs, and offers emergency cash assistance to meet uncovered costs during their training;

- Seattle Jobs Initiative, a workforce development intermediary that uses a career pathways model in partnering with three community-based organizations to connect participants with supportive services and occupational skills training at local colleges in four sectors (automotive, trade, and logistics; health care; office occupations; and manufacturing);

- Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement (VIDA), located in Mercedes, TX, which supports economically disadvantaged individuals who are enrolled full-time at area colleges and training in high-demand occupations by assigning each a career counselor who helps identify any academic, financial, or supportive service needs and then connects students with financial assistance, child care, and referrals for other services; and

- YWCA of Greater Cincinnati, which offers occupational skills training in hospitality and tourism and directly provides individuals with child care assistance, an onsite child care center, financial education, services for survivors of domestic violence, and transportation assistance, as well as referrals for additional services.

Partnerships have the potential to increase the provision of supportive services by improving alignment across different organizations, while avoiding the duplication of services.

These programs emphasized that partnerships have the potential to increase the provision of supportive services by improving alignment across different organizations, while avoiding the duplication of services. As one administrator described it, the goal is to involve all of the key actors in the local workforce development system, public agencies, community-based organizations, employers, and educational institutions with the goal of delivering comprehensive supports to those in job training: "We have to understand how we are aligning our strategies with supports and how we are building a system of supports so that people can go to work."

IWPR's research also points to the importance of developing partnerships to address participants' greatest unmet needs, such as domestic violence services and mental health counseling. In the Greater Cincinnati area, five community-based organizations, including Brighton Center and YWCA of Greater Cincinnati, formed a partnership to measure the prevalence of domestic violence experiences among job training participants and connect survivors with appropriate services. YWCA, the region's expert on domestic violence and a primary provider of services for survivors, provided training sessions for the partners on how to conduct trauma-informed screenings,

recognize the potential effects of violence, provide a supportive environment, handle the disclosure of domestic violence, and help survivors access needed resources.

Despite the many potential benefits of partnerships, cultivating and maintaining a mutually beneficial partnership also presents challenges, such as the difficulties involved in making time to develop organizational relationships, as well as competition for funding and recognition. Still programs interviewed emphasized that the effort of setting up partnerships is worth it. As one administrator explained, "We know what the gaps are for the [people] we serve and so [it helps to] collaborate with those partners, work with them to help identify gaps so that we're really efficient and are not trying to recreate the wheel…We can let the experts do their best work so that I don't have to try to be an expert in something that I'm not qualified to do."

V. Enhancing Funding for Supportive Services

Securing funding for supportive services is a challenge for many workforce development programs. One administrator mentioned that funders are increasingly interested in supporting partnerships and collaboratives, making partnerships a valuable strategy not only for providing supportive services, but also for increasing funding through grants. In addition, program leaders interviewed consistently emphasized that partnerships—making use of resources that are already available in the community—are the most cost-effective way to provide supportive services.

When organizations do need to provide services directly, there are additional strategies for increasing their reach, including "braiding" or combining funding from several sources. One administrator explained, "We don't pay 100 percent of anything. It's braiding the funding that they [the participants] have and that we have. It's figuring out what all is available." Another strategy for funding supportive services is taking full advantage of underutilized sources of funding, such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment & Training (SNAP E&T) funds.

Program leaders interviewed consistently emphasized that partnerships—making use of resources that are already available in the community—are the most cost-effective way to provide supportive services.

Even programs that prioritize supportive service provision and implement these strategies, however, may still struggle to fully meet participants' needs. Challenges such as restrictions on how funding can be used, the limited nature of funding overall, and, in some cases, the lack of an area partner to provide a service may leave organizations with few options for addressing some of their clients' most pressing needs. These challenges suggest that expanding access to supportive services for job training participants requires not only commitment and innovation on the part of training and social service providers, but also broader changes that increase investments in supportive services for individuals in training and education, particularly for those with high needs.

VI. Recommendations

The Job Training Success Project points to policies and practices that could improve workforce development programs' ability to provide supportive services for job training participants.

Improving Access to Supportive Services

- Job training programs can encourage staff to stay apprised of the available supportive service resources in their community and continue to build and strengthen partnerships with those organizations, particularly those that require specialized knowledge or facilities.

- Community colleges, in particular, can focus more on building partnerships with community-based social service and benefits access programs to ensure that their students receive the supports needed to sustain their educations and receive equality degrees and credentials that will lead to family economic security.

- Because parents enrolled in training or education face additional challenges, programs can consider the supportive service needs of whole families including, but not limited to, affordable, quality child care that allows parents to devote time and energy to their training and improves their chances of completion.

- Federal, state, and local governments can provide technical assistance, support, and financial incentives to help workforce development programs—especially community-based training organizations with small budgets and community and technical colleges—connect with supportive services.

- Programs and workforce development systems should strive to increase access to supports that represent clients' greatest unmet needs. For example, they can seek to establish more community partnerships to address mental health issues and domestic violence.

- Organizations and institutions that provide training can track the outcomes of referrals, where possible, and use the information to ensure that participants access supportive services in local communities.

Leveraging Existing Sources of Funding and Improving Data Collection

- State and federal policymakers can encourage the use of funds from the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment & Training for supportive services.

- Program administrators can work with funders to develop streamlined, consistent data systems that permit programs to measure successful outcomes.

- Workforce development professionals and advocates can include the experiences and viewpoints of program leaders in making the case for increased public funding for supportive services.

Increasing Awareness and Understanding of the Need for Supportive Services

- To identify participants' greatest unmet needs, programs can compile data at intake and program completion to inform decisions about strategic partnerships that could address gaps in services.
- Programs that do not have case managers should consider adding them and ensure that they have adequate time to build relationships in the community that will help increase their awareness of available resources and equip them to connect their job training participants to those resources. Researchers can evaluate specific strategies, such as organizational partnerships, that appear to improve the provision of supportive services and share lessons learned and successful models.
- Programs can maximize resources and impact by partnering with outside agencies that provide supportive services requiring specialized expertise or special facilities (child care, housing, and domestic violence services).
- Training programs can develop stronger referral partnerships for services and track the outcomes of their referrals to determine how well participants' needs are being met through outside sources.
- Community colleges can work to develop partnerships with social service and other community-based organizations to strengthen their students' access to supportive services.
- If possible, programs should increase their support for child care through referrals or other means, and pilot new models for supporting the child care needs of mothers and fathers in training.

Publications from IWPR's Job Training Success Project

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