

Pathway Home Evaluation Brief: Establishing Grant Programs Inside Correctional Facilities

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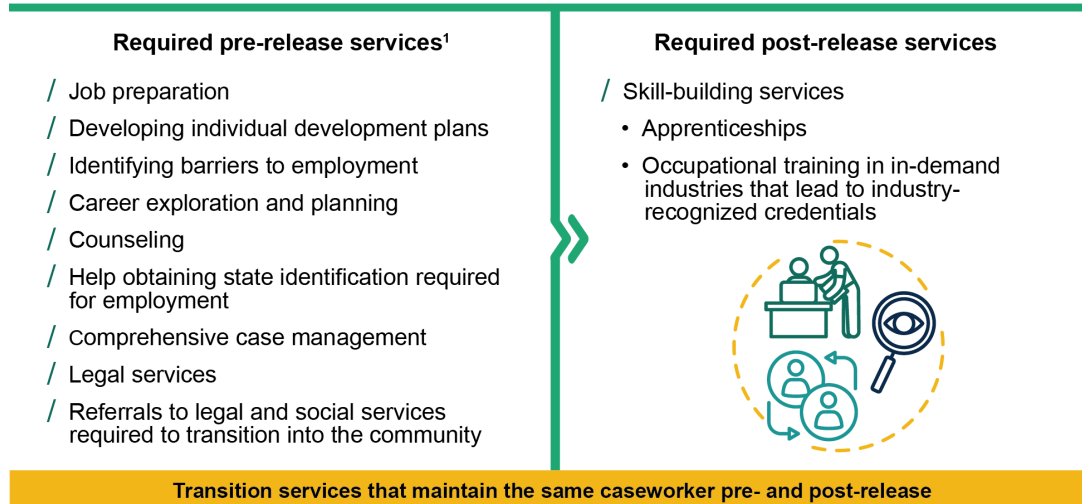
Introduction

Prior evaluations of reentry grants funded by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) highlight the many challenges community service providers faced when integrating workforce development programs inside correctional facilities. Such challenges include limited physical space, restricted staff and participant movement within the facility, the culture of corrections, recruiting and hiring qualified program staff who can pass background checks, and sharing data across partners (Bellotti et al. 2018). The COVID-19 pandemic posed additional challenges to providing in-person pre-release services given restrictions on entering facilities (Sandoval et al. 2022). This brief describes how the Pathway Home grantees awarded by DOL in 2021 established programs within correctional facilities, including the challenges they encountered and the solutions they identified to address those challenges (see Exhibit 1 for a description of the Pathway Home service model).

Study background

In 2020, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) funded Mathematica and its partner, Social Policy Research Associates, to conduct an evaluation of the Pathway Home grants.¹ This brief focuses on the 22 Pathway Home grants awarded in 2021 and describes their experiences establishing the pre-release components of their programs during their first year of implementation. DOL also funded a prior cohort of 20 grantees in 2020, which are described in a separate [brief](#). ▲

Exhibit 1. Pathway Home Service Model



Source: U.S. Department of Labor Pathway Home 2 FOA-ETA-21-02.

¹ Pre-release services such as job preparation, career exploration and planning, and other supportive services begin pre-release but may continue through post-release services.

¹ The Council of State Governments Justice Center was also part of the award and supported the design of the Pathway Home Evaluation.

This brief is part of a series describing the experiences of the 2021 Pathway Home grants, with a focus on the grantees' six-month planning period and the first year of enrollment. The brief details the experiences of the 2021 grantees as they established programs within correctional facilities. The brief also describes the challenges grantees faced and the solutions they implemented to address those challenges. Other briefs in this series provide an overview of the 2021 Pathway Home grantees and describe the grantees' experiences carrying out their programs in their communities during the first year of implementation.²

To inform this series of briefs, the study team collected data about the 22 grantees awarded grants in 2021 from five sources: (1) a review of grant applications, (2) five virtual group discussions with frontline staff and grant managers in summer 2022,ⁱ (3) a survey of grantees in fall 2022 (sample size: 32 grantees), (4) a survey of correctional facility partners (sample size: 83 facilities) in fall 2022, and (5) data from grantee quarterly performance reports (QPRs) and quarterly narrative reports (QNRs) as of December 31, 2022 (18 months into their grant period). The findings reported in this series of briefs reflect the 2021 grantees' experiences and should not be as interpreted as representative of all Pathway Home grants.

Establishing pre-release services in correctional facilities served by Pathway Home grant programs: Summary of findings

- The grantees described engaging in several activities with their partners during the planning phase such as visiting correctional facilities, meeting with facility staff, developing partnerships with facility and training provider partners, and creating informational materials to share with their facility partners. They recommended meeting with facility partners and other key partners early and frequently.
- To integrate Pathway Home programs within correctional facilities, the grantees reported having to coordinate with their facility partners to understand their facility policies and to tailor their programs to each correctional facility's preferred approach and practices.
- Grantees faced challenges—including COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns and correctional facility staff shortages—when implementing Pathway Home services within facilities. They worked to overcome challenges by improving their communication with facility partners and adapting their service delivery plans, such as by moving to virtual services.
- Despite obstacles, the majority of grantees and subgrantees reported providing case management services (82 percent), and grantees provided pre-release employment services such as developing individualized career plans and identifying employment barriers. The majority of grantees provided job and work readiness training (82 percent), and a little over half provided occupational and vocational skills training (59 percent).▲

Planning and rollout of pre-release services

The 2021 Pathway Home grants, which began on July 1, 2021, included a three- to six-month planning phase during which grantees began working with correctional facility and other partners (community-based service provider organizations, local workforce development boards, educational institutions and training providers, and employers) to establish participant recruitment and enrollment procedures and to update their plans for delivering program services (Employment and Training Administration 2021).

² Pathway Home Reentry Evaluation briefs and reports are available at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/oasp/evaluation/completedstudies/pathway-home-reentry-evaluation>.

Planning phase activities

During virtual focus group discussions, grantees described planning phase activities, including but not limited to the following:

- Formulated participant outreach strategies (five grantees)
- Visited correctional facilities and met with facility staff (four grantees)
- Developed partnerships with the facilities where program services would take place (four grantees)
- Developed education and training strategies and partnerships (three grantees)
- Created media profiles and participant documents (such as partner videos or participant workbooks) needed for service delivery (two grantees)
- Developed performance metrics and data collection tools and finalized project timeline (one grantee)
- Hired and trained staff (one grantee) ▲

During the discussion groups with the 2021 Pathway Home grantees, nine grantees reported adapting their program plans due to COVID-19 pandemic-related challenges such as lockdowns that limited access within the facilities, loss of corrections staff, and populations being transferred to other facilities to maintain the required ratio of people in custody to staff. For example, one grantee shared that it had planned to recruit from the participants already enrolled in its facility partners' culinary programs but had to adapt its enrollment strategy because the programs closed due to the pandemic. As a result, the grantee worked closely with its facility partners to identify as many eligible participants as possible.ⁱⁱ Two grantees also faced challenges accessing sufficient people in custody to recruit for their programs and reported pursuing grant modifications so they could recruit participants from additional facilities in their state to help them meet enrollment targets. To address service delivery-related challenges caused by the pandemic, three grantees switched services from group to one-on-one meetings.

Developing partnerships with correctional facilities

Developing strong and cooperative relationships with correctional partners was described as key to implementing programs operating within correctional facilities. The grantees noted that many factors contribute to how correctional facilities operate, including whether a facility is a prison, jail, or other type of correctional facility; the levels of security within each facility; the number of people within custody; the stability or instability of peoples' release dates; and how well staffed each facility is, among other variables.³ Variations in these factors have implications for how grantees coordinate across facility partners. During discussion groups, the grantees reported using several strategies to build partnerships and use their partners to help deliver services in correctional facilities.

Using existing partnerships

Prior partnerships with correctional agencies offered advantages when applying for and setting up Pathway Home programs, according to group discussion participants from four grantees. For example, staff from one grantee shared that they had provided educational services in prisons before their Pathway Home grant, and staff from another grantee reported drawing on their existing relationship with their state department of corrections to collaborate on the Pathway Home grant application. Facility staff, as documented in the facility survey, also reported having pre-existing relationships with their respective grantee partners. A little more than half (52 percent) of all facilities had worked with Pathway Home grantees in the past. The survey also suggested that correctional facility staff operating state-licensed

³See "Pathway Home Evaluation Brief: 2021 Grants at a Glance" for more information on the Pathway Home correctional partners.

halfway houses and work-release centers—which typically allow people in incarceration to be released outside of a correctional facility for a work experience—had the most experience with Pathway Home grantees (67 percent).

Working with multiple facility partners to implement Pathway Home services

In discussion groups, two grantees reported that working with multiple facility partners was a challenge. For example, a staff member for one grantee noted that each of its more than 10 facility partners has its own culture and practices, and the nature of the partnership varied by facility. To address this similar challenge, staff from another grantee noted they found it valuable to remain flexible and responsive to facility requirements to gather support for the program. The grantee also noted that sharing information about grantee progress with facility partners during regular meetings allowed them to showcase participant successes and highlight how they were addressing participant challenges.

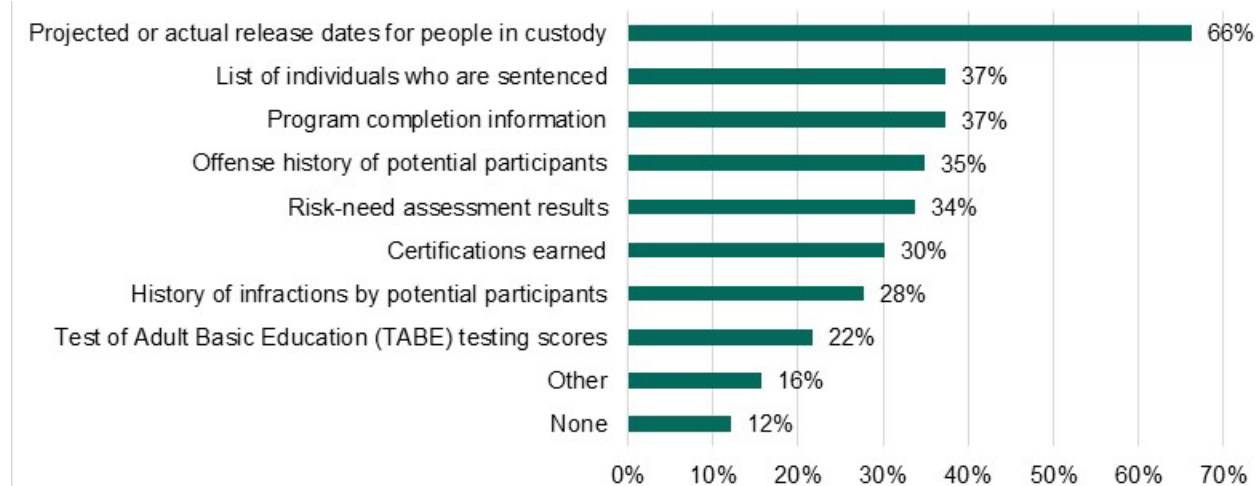
“When you get to the individual facilities, you really end up running individual programs.”

—Grantee staff reflecting on partnering with multiple correctional facilities

Working with correctional facilities to share and access information for recruitment

Correctional facilities partnered with grantees to support program implementation by providing data about people in custody. Based on responses from the facility survey, most facilities (73 out of 83 that responded to the survey) shared information and data with grantees, such as projected or actual release dates for participants, lists of people in custody who were sentenced, and program completion information. Exhibit 2 lists the information facility partners provided to grantees. These data were reported to help grantees identify and enroll participants into the Pathway Home programs as well as plan for service delivery.

Exhibit 2. Information provided by facility partners to Pathway Home grantees as reported by survey respondents, 2022



Source: Responses from all facilities in the survey administered in December 2022 to Pathway Home grantee facility partners.

Note: Potential participants are incarcerated people who fit the eligibility criteria for Pathway Home. The sample consists of 83 correctional facilities who responded to our survey. Some examples of “other” responses include parole and employment data, resident income, education and work history, social worker referrals, and urine analyses.

Reported barriers to strong partnerships with correctional facilities

Grantees reported in group discussions, QNRs, and the grantee survey three general types of challenges to building successful partnerships with facility partners. These challenges included staffing changes, program requirements, and restrictions to participants during lockdowns.

1. **Corrections staff transitions.** Facility staff turnover affected outreach, enrollment, and participant access across at least five grantees. Staff at one grantee shared in a group discussion having to reintroduce the program to correctional staff quite frequently due to correctional staff turnover. Another grantee, in its QNR, shared how ultimately its facility partner had to move program participants to other facilities because of correctional staffing issues. This reportedly impeded the grantee's ability to continue to provide program services to those participants.
2. **Correctional facility practices that were not aligned with the Pathway Home program.** Two grantees discussed this challenge in group discussions. A staff person from one grantee noted that their correctional partner found it difficult to identify people who met the Pathway Home program's eligibility criteria; this was because the criteria participants had to meet to enroll in services were more stringent than what other programs in the facility required. Another grantee noted that it had partnered with a detention center, which transfers people in custody quite frequently. This facility was challenging to work with because participants were often moved to other facilities before they were released and before the program had enough time to provide the full range of services to participants.
3. **Limited access to participants during lockdowns.** Based on the grantee survey, 75 percent of grantees identified participant access to program services during COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns as the biggest challenge they faced in running their Pathway Home programs. For example, in discussion groups, staff at one grantee shared that services at one facility were disrupted due to a lockdown, caused by a COVID-19 outbreak. During the lockdown, some participants had to quarantine and could not receive in-person services. To handle lockdowns, a different grantee shared in a QNR that it was working on establishing contingency plans, such as correspondence college courses and providing tablets to people in custody to access course curriculum.

Early provision of services within correctional facilities

During the first year of enrollment, the grantees implemented a range of services that included recruitment and enrollment (100 percent), case management (82 percent), and employment and training services such as job and work readiness training (82 percent) and occupational and vocational skills training (59 percent). The grantees shared their initial experiences implementing those services and lessons learned in discussion groups held in summer 2022. Approximately six months after the discussion groups, the grantees used the grantee survey to report on the services they were providing to their participants.

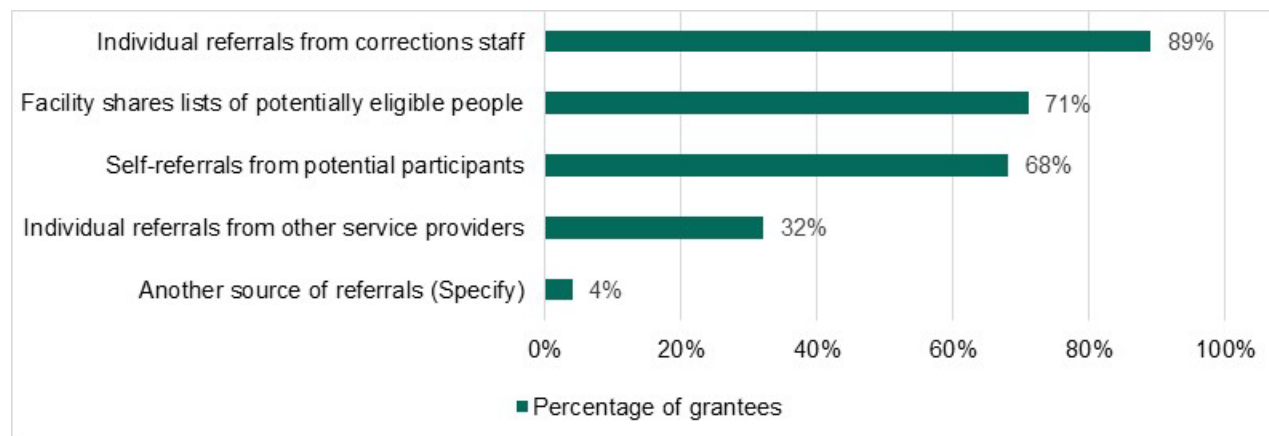
Box 1. Using the planning phase to implement services

During discussion groups, two grantees noted how some of their planning phase activities facilitated program implementation. One of the grantees mentioned creating a professional video illustrating what the partners and service providers do, which they felt helped participants navigate the system better. Another grantee created a book of different employers willing to hire people based on their skills—regardless of their justice history—which was described as a way to help participants explore their career options.

Recruitment and enrollment

According to the grantee survey, grantees used a variety of referral sources to identify and recruit participants within correctional facilities. Common referral sources included individual referrals from correctional staff, lists of potentially eligible people that were provided by facilities, and self-referrals from potential participants (Exhibit 3).

Exhibit 3. Sources of program referrals for Pathway Home grantees as reported by survey respondents, 2022 (N = 28)



Source: Responses from all grantees in the survey administered in December 2022 to Pathway Home grantees.

Note: Under “Another source of referrals (Specify)” the grantee wrote “Probation Agents.”

During discussion groups, one grantee reported coordinating with correctional facility staff to determine the best approach for identifying potential participants. The grantee stated, “We started asking our facility partners how they want to do [outreach]. Sometimes they said it’s easier if we promote the program and vet the participants before we connect them with you. It was more of a dialogue. We wanted to make sure we weren’t dictating.” Coordinating with facility staff members to develop their outreach and recruitment strategies, and involving them in recruitment, appeared to help the grantee garner facility support for its programming.

Once potential participants were identified, grantees met with and screened them for eligibility to their Pathway Home program (Box 2). As part of the screening process, grantees used risk assessment tools such as Risk Needs Responsivity, Dynamic Risk and Needs Assessment, or Integrated Risk and Employment Strategy (Exhibit 4).

Box 2. 2021 eligibility criteria for Pathway Home participants

To be eligible for Pathway Home services, people had to meet all of the following criteria:

- Be at least 18 years old
- Reside, at the time of enrollment, in a state correctional facility or local jail for adults
- Have a release date scheduled 20 to 180 days from the person’s enrollment in the program
- Upon release, be scheduled to return to reside in the area identified in the applicant’s application
- Be legally eligible to work in the United States

Source: U.S. Department of Labor Pathway Home FOA-ETA-21-02.

Exhibit 4. Risk assessment tools used for screening (N = 28)

Risk assessments	Number of grantees
Risk Needs Responsivity	13
Dynamic Risk and Needs Assessment	9
Integrated Risk and Employment Strategy	8
Resource Allocation and Service Matching	5
Other	3

Source: Responses from direct grantees and subgrantees in the survey administered in December 2022 to Pathway Home grantees.

Note: Grantee survey respondents were allowed to select multiple risk assessment tools in the survey.

According to QPR data, as of December 31, 2022, or approximately 18 months into their 42-month grant, grantees had enrolled 32 percent (or 2,166 people) of their target enrollment goal of 6,849 participants. Grantees' progress toward their enrollment goals varied, with some more successful than others: two grantees had reached less than 6 percent of their target goal, while another grantee had reached 77 percent of its goal. QNR data indicated that COVID-19 lockdowns that limited grantee staff's ability to meet with and enroll people in custody, low numbers of referrals from partners, and facility and grantee staffing shortages contributed to low enrollment. In the words of a staff member from one grantee, "Enrollment is one of our greatest challenges."

Grantees identified a number of lessons in addressing this enrollment challenge. As one discussion group respondent reflected, "We've found ourselves making it a very individualized program for each facility to make it work for them." The QNR data indicated that another grantee learned to conduct outreach to "multiple staff groups" within the correctional system including job specialists, education navigators, and substance use treatment providers to increase referrals. Lastly, two grantees noted the importance of participants seeing Pathway Home staff at the facility and hearing about the program from current Pathway Home participants. According to QNR data, a staff member from this grantee stated, "Word of mouth facilitates participant interest as does staff presence at the prison." Similarly, a staff member from another grantee noted in the QNR that "as clients participate in...courses, they return to their housing units and share the content with other residents. This has greatly increased interest in the program as participants are eager to obtain the training and support available to them."

Case management services

Despite the challenges of integrating services within correctional facilities, 82 percent of grantee survey respondents (direct grantees and subgrantees) reported providing case management services during pre-release, including grantees who did not know if they used a specific model. Exhibit 5 outlines the various case management models that respondents of the grantee survey have used.

Exhibit 5. Case management models used during pre-release by grantee survey respondents (N = 28)^a

Case management models	Number of grantees
Motivational interviewing	20
Trauma-informed care	16
Cognitive behavioral therapy and coaching such as Thinking for a Change, Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Justice Involved Individuals Seeking Employment, Moral Reconciliation Therapy, or Reason and Rehabilitation	13
Positive youth development	2
No case management model used	3

Source: Responses from direct grantees and subgrantees in the survey administered in December 2022 to Pathway Home grantees.

Note: Grantee survey respondents were allowed to select multiple case management models in the survey.

^a Fifteen percent of survey respondents did not know if they used a case management model.

Similar to their experiences with recruitment and enrollment, two grantees reported that their early experiences of implementing pre-release case management were affected by their ability to coordinate with correctional facility partners. Two grantees reported during a group discussion that they encountered “roadblocks” to getting into facilities to implement case management services and developed new strategies to be able to meet with participants. These strategies included providing services virtually and identifying additional facilities that would allow them to meet with participants.

Pre-release case management services typically lasted one to six months and took place about once a month, according to group discussion participants. Case management services were most commonly provided by grantee staff members (as all five grantees in this group noted), although the grantees reported that correctional facility staff, staff from grantees’ service provider partners, and subrecipient staff provided case management services as well.

Grantees reported two lessons learned as they began to implement case management services inside correctional facilities. For example, a grantee noted during a discussion group how important it was for its staff to be aware of other programming taking place within facilities and to ensure that case management services were streamlined. The grantee mentioned that this awareness ensured participants were not experiencing “over-programming,” or loss of interest or learning due to participation in multiple programs. Another grantee stressed the importance of ongoing and effective communication with facility staff to “make sure everyone is on the same page about the program.” Second, a grantee reported it had less access to participants than expected and noted it needed to find ways to “make sure case managers have more access to participants and are able to spend more time with them.”

Employment and training service models

Grantees offered a range of employment and training services pre-release with 24 grantees providing job readiness training (86 percent) and 17 grantees providing occupational and vocational skills training (60 percent) (Exhibit 6).

Exhibit 6. Pre-release employment and training services offered by grantees

Pre-release employment and training services (N = 28)	Number of grantees
Employment barrier identification	27
Assistance with individualized career plans or individualized development plans	26
Job readiness training	24
Occupational and vocational skills training	17

Source: Responses from direct and subgrantees in the survey administered in December 2022 to Pathway Home grantees.

COVID-19-related lockdowns (as noted earlier in the brief) and staff shortages within facilities, however, reportedly affected implementation of employment and training services. For example, a staff member from one grantee reported that “COVID issues at [the] Sheriff’s Office delayed the completion of a welding cohort by 40 days, which resulted in three participants being released before completing training.” This person also explained in the QNR how a welding class planned to begin in December 2021 within a correctional facility was delayed by about 10 months due to facility staffing issues.

In response to challenges, some grantees were able to adapt employment and training services. Staff members from two grantees indicated that they delivered some services virtually. Staff at one of these grantees reported purchasing Chromebooks so participants could access training via a platform called *Skill Up* and use virtual reality technology for career exploration activities. According to QNR data from one grantee, “Participants work at their own pace in the classroom and appreciate the opportunity to engage with the career of their choice.”

Although grantees faced some challenges during the early implementation of pre-release employment and training services, they reported perceiving these services to be helpful to participants. In the words of a staff member from one grantee, as stated in QNR data, “The practice of providing occupational skills training and essential skills training while incarcerated has proven to be a winner.”

Next steps for studying Pathway Home grant programs

This brief provided an overview of how Pathway Home grantees began implementing their programs inside correctional facilities during their planning stage and approximately one year into implementation and discussed lessons learned from those early implementation efforts. A future implementation report will document the experiences of these grantees over the full period of enrollment. An impact study will assess how services offered by a subset of Pathway Home grantees affected participant employment, recidivism, and other outcomes.

References

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Endnotes

ⁱ The study team tailored each group to focus on a different aspect of implementation, and each grantee only attended one discussion. Three to five grantees attended each of the five groups. Two grantees did not participate in any of the virtual discussions. The themes shared in this brief were synthesized from across the five different discussions, and grantees may have spoken to topics that were not the focus of their group discussion. As a result, the text provides counts where possible to reflect the number of grantees that contributed to a specific point, but those counts are not representative of all grantees’ perspectives on each topic.

ⁱⁱ To be eligible for Pathway Home services, potential participants must have a release date between 20 and 180 days of enrollment into the program, be at least 18 years old, reside in a state correctional facility or jail for adults, return to reside in a target area specified by the grantee, have a low-income designation as defined by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, and be eligible to legally work in the United States. For more information on who was eligible to receive Pathway Home services, see <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ETA/grants/pdfs/FOA-ETA-20-02-Pathway-Home.pdf>.

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