

START EARLY, SUCCEED SOONER:

Insights from the 2023 Employment Empowerment Study

REPORT BY
THE DEBRUCE FOUNDATION

Summary of Start Early, Succeed Sooner: Insights from the 2023 Employment Empowerment Study

The DeBruce Foundation's annual study assesses employment patterns to gain insights on building empowered careers. The 2023 research of 16,000 Americans identifies Career Literacy and Network Strength as key factors.

Employment Empowerment

- Higher Income and Better Benefits
- Influence over Work Conditions
- Accumulation of Savings
- Confidence to Explore More Careers
- Lower Risk of Unemployment

Network Strength

- Strong Professional Network
- Diverse Network Ties (Industry, Education, Identity)
- Network's Reliability

Career Literacy

- Future Career Vision
- Awareness of Skills and Interests
- Ability to Communicate Value
- Job Search Skills
- Exploration of Multiple Career Pathways

FINDING #1: Working-age Americans who exhibit high Career Literacy and Network Strength have more Employment Empowerment than those with lower Career Literacy and Network Strength.

When compared to those who are employment challenged, working-age Americans who are employment empowered have more success in the economy.

35%

More jobs
outside their current
career path considered

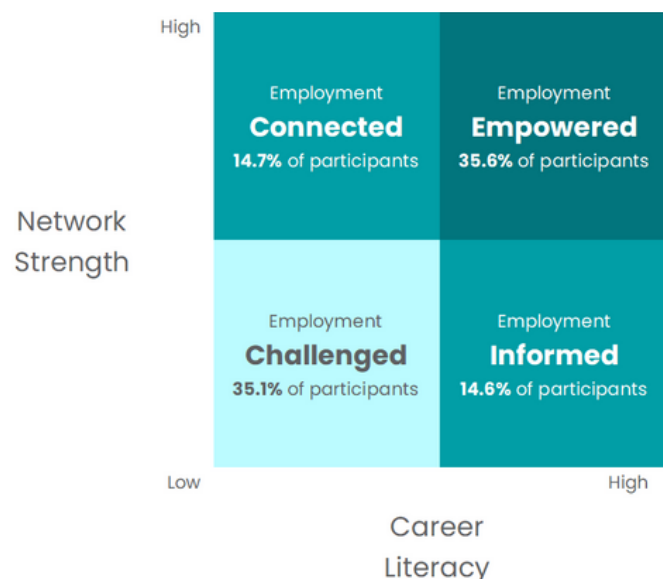
18%

More likely to be
currently employed

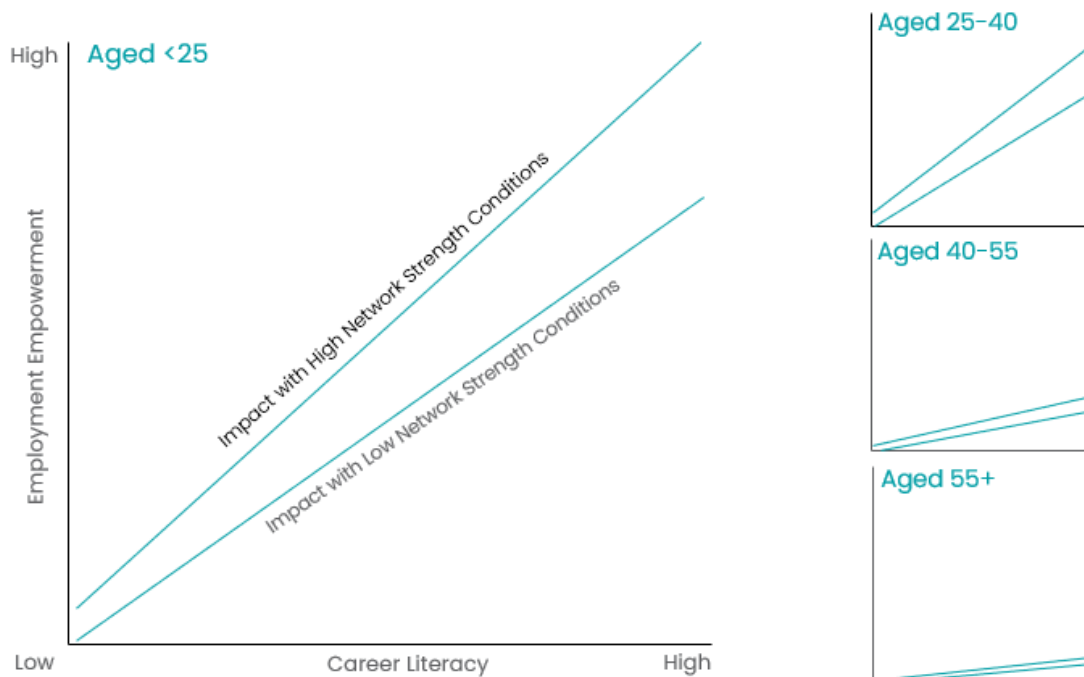
\$30,000

More in average
annual earnings

FINDING #2: Only 1 in 3 working-age Americans are employment empowered with the remaining two-thirds low in Network Strength and/or Career Literacy.



FINDING #3: The benefits of Career Literacy and Network Strength for Employment Empowerment are stronger in younger age cohorts.



SOLUTIONS FOR BUILDING EMPOWERMENT

The DeBruce Foundation focuses on building literacy by developing and providing the following tools and resources:

- **The Agile Work Profiler®:** An online self-assessment that helps individuals better understand their own strengths, skills, and interests and how to communicate their value across career paths.
- **Career Explorer Tools®:** These tools help individuals expand their awareness of careers through activities aligning users' Agilities with in-demand occupations, required skills, and education options.
- **Draw Your Future with Agilities®:** In this online interactive career-planning workshop, youth and adults can participate in creative exercises to set goals and map career paths aligning their Agilities with their aspirations.

The Foundation makes these resources available to partner organizations focused on building professional networks and connections. This strategic alignment expands The Foundation's reach and impact, as more people can obtain the career insights and networks essential for empowerment.

To learn more about our partnerships, visit www.DeBruce.org.



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Introduction: The DeBruce Foundation's Mission and Study Overview

The DeBruce Foundation is a national foundation headquartered in Kansas City, Missouri, dedicated to expanding career pathways to achieve economic growth and opportunity. The Foundation is committed to helping individuals unlock their potential and find fulfilling career pathways.

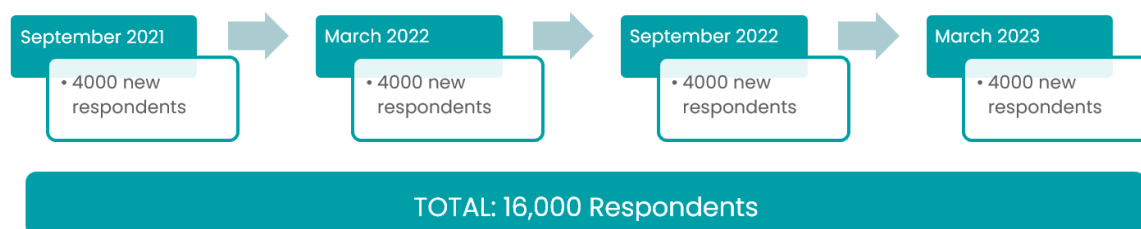
The DeBruce Foundation believes that for people to fully pursue economic opportunity, they must feel confident to craft and effectively follow their career goals. When individuals have a strong understanding of their own talents and access to strong connections, they are better equipped to navigate their professional journeys and achieve empowerment.

To gain insights on how to develop Employment Empowerment, The DeBruce Foundation both conducts and commissions original career-related research. The Foundation's annual Employment Empowerment Study is a nationally representative longitudinal trend survey assessing patterns of employment, income, and work conditions across America.

Although fielded across multiple timeframes, the survey does not follow individuals over time. Rather, it provides a moment in time snapshot of patterns in American employment conditions.

This trend study aims to shed light on key questions: What does it take to build a career with higher wages, lower risk of unemployment, improved benefits, more control over work conditions, and the ability to build savings? In other words, what does it take to build truly empowered careers?

By tracking changes over time, the Employment Empowerment study provides data-driven guidance on how to expand career empowerment on a national scale.



Empowered Employment: Career Literacy and Network Strength

Achieving economic growth in a dynamic economy requires Employment Empowerment. This is a combination of multiple factors, including influence over work conditions, stability, income, benefits, fairness in employment, and rare, short spells of unemployment.

The 2022 Employment Empowerment Report [“Working Smarter: Driving Employment Empowerment with Career Literacy + Networks”](#) indicated that there are two primary factors that enable people to build Employment Empowerment. These are Career Literacy and Network Strength.



Career Literacy, as defined by The DeBruce Foundation, is a **vision** for one's career, **self-awareness** of skills and interests, **capacity to communicate** professional value, robust job **search skills**, and the **capability to explore** multiple career pathways. Having an expansive perspective of potential career paths is a trademark of Career Literacy.

Network Strength is **reliable and supportive connections** with people spanning a **diversity of industries, education levels, and social experiences**.

Working-age Americans who exhibit high Career Literacy and Network Strength have more Employment Empowerment than those with lower Career Literacy and Network Strength. In addition, Network Strength **accelerates** the power of Career Literacy.

When compared to those who are employment challenged, working-age Americans who are employment empowered gain an average of \$30,000 more in annual earnings and 18% more of them are currently employed. They also consider 35% more jobs outside their current career path.

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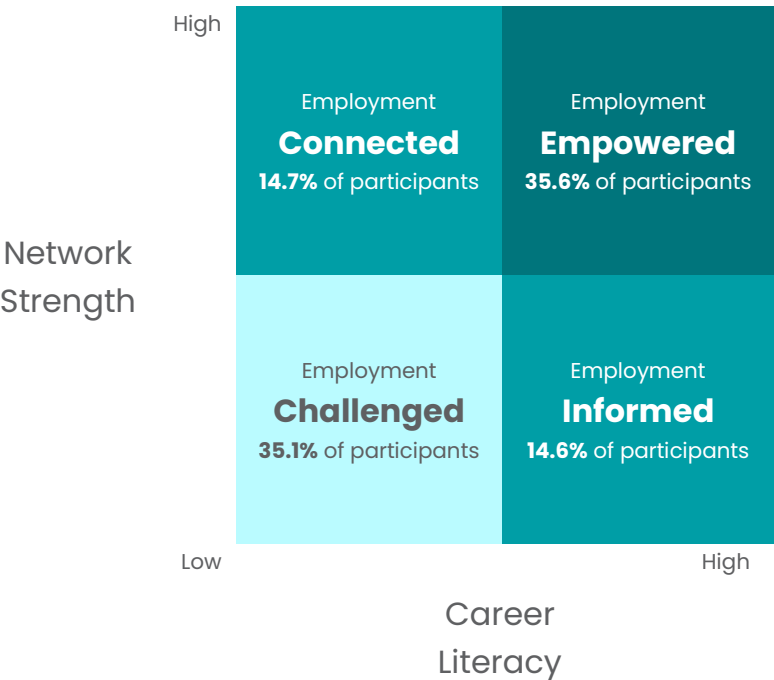
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Addressing Gaps: Career Literacy and Network Strength Deficits

Further analysis of the Employment Empowerment survey data indicate significant gaps in Career Literacy and Network Strength across different demographic groups.

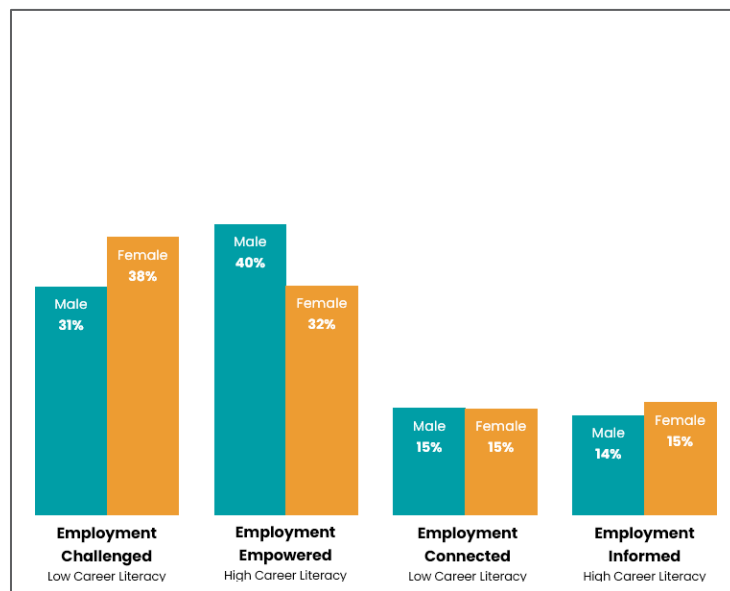
Distribution of Working-Age Americans



Only 1 in 3 working-age Americans are employment empowered with the remaining two-thirds low in Network Strength and/or Career Literacy. Across all working-age Americans, 35.1% fall into an employment challenged group with both low Network Strength and low Career Literacy. This group is significantly lower in the two key areas needed to achieve career empowerment. The two middle groups, termed employment connected and employment informed, together account for 29.3% of working-age Americans. Though stronger in one area than the other, they still face gaps.

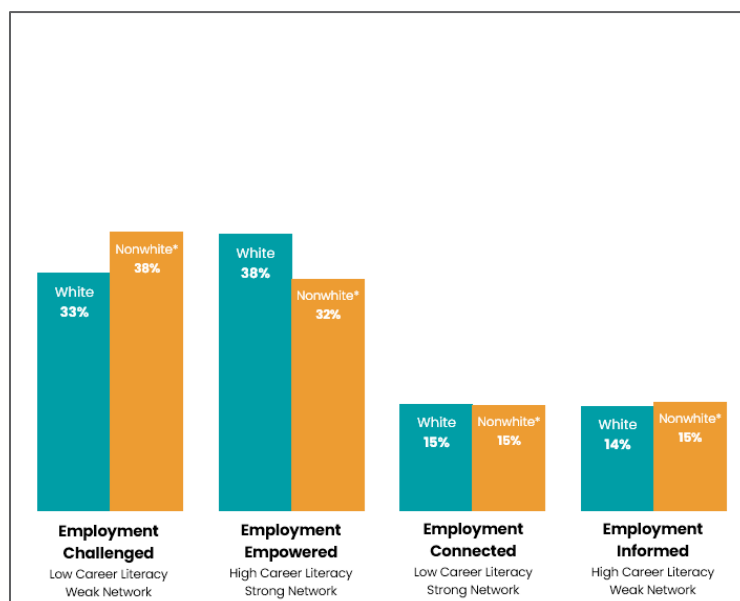
Gender Distribution

Females are more likely to be employment challenged than males, which demonstrates the compounding effect of low Career Literacy and low Network Strength.



Racial Distribution

Working-age Americans who are nonwhite* are overrepresented in the employment challenged category. Racial distribution also demonstrates the compounding effect of low Career Literacy and low Network Strength.

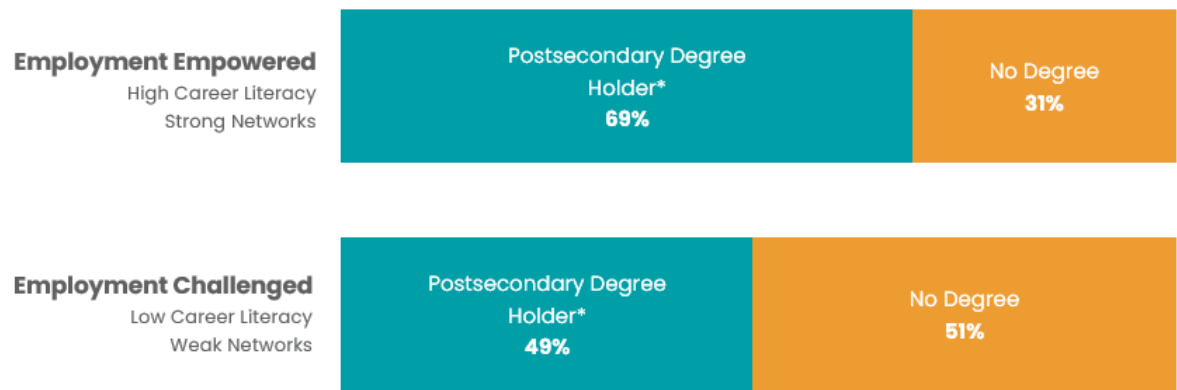


*Includes American Indian, Asian (including Pacific-Islanders and Hawaiian), Black, Latinx, and others.

Educational Attainment

Education level varied widely between people who were employment challenged and employment empowered. With 3 of 10 (69%) people who are employment empowered having a post-secondary education, there appears to be a benefit to having some type of formal education and training after high school. However, a diploma alone does not guarantee Employment Empowerment.

Notice how the employment challenged group is nearly equally split with 49% of the group holding some type of post-secondary credential compared to 51% with no degree. Developing Career Literacy and Network Strength remains essential for everyone, regardless of education level.

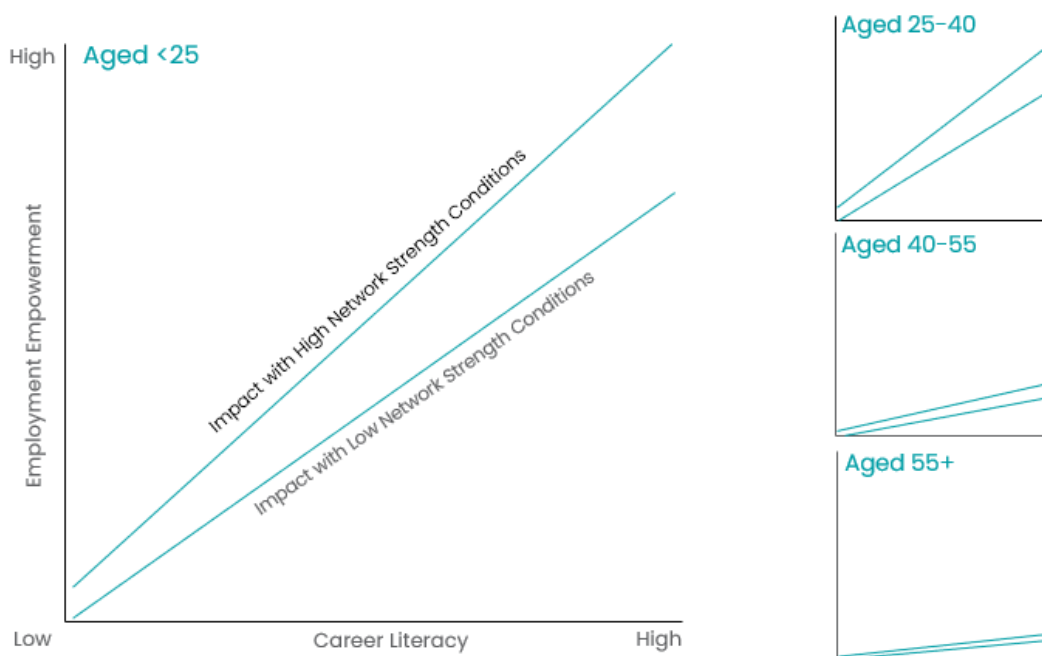


*This term includes Doctorate degrees, Professional degrees, Master’s degrees, Bachelor’s degrees, Associate’s degrees, and Technical/Vocational degrees.

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NEW FINDING: The Impact of Early Investment

Career Literacy and Network Strength are beneficial across the lifespan. **Network Strength accelerates the power of Career Literacy in achieving Employment Empowerment across all ages.** The benefits of Career Literacy and Network Strength for Employment Empowerment are stronger in younger age cohorts. Advantages are exponentially greater when development begins in childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood. Someone who focuses on building literacy and connections from an early age is far more likely to become employment empowered than someone who starts later in life. This highlights the importance of equipping youth with these skills and resources as early as possible.



SOMEONE WHO FOCUSES ON BUILDING LITERACY AND CONNECTIONS FROM AN EARLY AGE IS FAR MORE LIKELY TO BECOME EMPLOYMENT EMPOWERED THAN SOMEONE WHO STARTS LATER IN LIFE.

Solutions Building Empowerment: The DeBruce Foundation's Tools

Equipping individuals with Career Literacy is crucial for expanding empowerment and opportunity. The DeBruce Foundation focuses on building literacy by developing and providing the following tools and resources:

- **The Agile Work Profiler®:** An online self-assessment that helps individuals better understand their own strengths, skills, and interests and how to communicate your value across career paths. The AWP sets itself apart from other career matchers by empowering broad exploration across sectors and roles, rather than narrowing options to one “perfect” fit.
- **Career Explorer Tools®:** These tools help individuals expand their awareness of careers through activities aligning users' Agilities with in-demand occupations, required skills, and education options. Individuals with higher Career Literacy and stronger networks make an average of \$30,000 more than their employment challenged counterparts.
- **Draw Your Future with Agilities®:** In this online interactive career-planning workshop, youth and adults can participate in creative exercises to set goals and map career paths aligning their Agilities with their aspirations.

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These **solutions** help **build vision, self-awareness, exploration skills** and other aspects of **Career Literacy**.

Empowerment in Action: Anyshya Hemphill



Anyshya Hemphill is an ambitious first-year college student who used The DeBruce Foundation's career exploration tools, like the Agile Work Profiler®, to gain clarity and confidence as she embarked on her college journey after graduating high school. The Profiler (AWP) showed Anyshya the "employable skills and interests she already possessed," empowering her with the self-assurance she needed to pursue her dream of becoming a nurse and helping others. She is actively pursuing this

goal by studying nursing at her university. As The Foundation's research shows, Career Literacy and Network Strength are key factors for building empowered careers and unlocking economic opportunity. By using tools like the Profiler (AWP) early on, Anyshya developed critical Career Literacy skills, setting herself up for future success. Now a college freshman, Anyshya encourages others to use DeBruce's solutions to "unlock their potential" and explore career pathways, just as she did. Anyshya's story demonstrates how developing Career Literacy from a young age compounds over time, leading to more empowered employment.

Empowerment in Action: Alex and Aubrey Oleson

Alex and Aubrey Oleson exemplify how individuals can leverage Career Literacy and Network Strength from an early age to achieve Employment Empowerment. After using The Foundation's Agile Work Profiler® and other career exploration tools, the Olesons developed a strong vision for their professional paths. They then built expansive networks in Indianapolis through involvement in their church, young professionals' groups, and other community connections. This allowed them to



quickly secure improved jobs, with Alex working in economic development and Aubrey in education. Alex notes that The DeBruce Foundation tools "helped me prepare to land my job after graduation and are helping me build the career I want." As The Foundation's research shows, the Olesons' early prioritization of Career Literacy and Network Strength compounded over time, unlocking major opportunities like purchasing their first home before age 25. The Olesons represent

the impact that can be had by combining Career Literacy with strong networks.


Strategic Partnerships: Fostering Career Literacy and Network Strength

While Career Literacy tools empower individuals, connections are crucial too. The DeBruce Foundation partners strategically with organizations that provide Network Strength opportunities.

The DeBruce Foundation has developed research-based Career Literacy tools designed to help individuals identify their talents and chart career pathways aligned with their strengths and interests. These tools, including the Agile Work Profiler© assessment and Career Explorer Tools©, empower people to gain clarity and direction. Unlike other “profilers” or career assessments that match you to one specific career in which you might do well, the AWP enables you to explore a wide range of economic sectors, occupations, and jobs that value skills you possess or can grow.

The Foundation makes these resources available to partner organizations focused on building professional networks and connections. This strategic alignment expands The Foundation's reach and impact, as more people can obtain the insights and networks essential for empowerment.

Every November is Career Development Month, providing a timely opportunity for more institutions and groups to join forces in developing others and building Employment Empowerment. By fostering Career Literacy and Network Strength, especially for youth, we can dramatically expand economic opportunity.



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Partnership in Action: UMKC Career Services

The University of Missouri–Kansas City (UMKC) Career Services demonstrates the power of strategic partnerships in building Career Literacy and Network Strength. By collaborating with The DeBruce Foundation to integrate career exploration tools like



the Agile Work Profiler©, Career Explorer Tools©, and Draw Your Future with Agilities© into key student programs, UMKC helps equip individuals with the self-awareness, knowledge, and connections needed for Employment Empowerment. As UMKC's Dr. Mako Miller shared, "The program helps students create resumes, develop professional skills and build a

professional network. Students connect with community professionals doing the work they're interested in pursuing someday." For example, UMKC's Professional Career Escalators program uses The Foundation's solutions to guide students from enrollment to career success. By pairing The Foundation's Career Literacy tools with UMKC's network of faculty, mentors, and professionals, students gain the experience and confidence to pursue their goals. As UMKC's Director of Career Services, Davlon Miller explained, networking events and site visits allow students to "introduce themselves to future workspaces and potential colleagues, mentors and employers." Through this type of collaboration, we can ensure college students develop Career Literacy and relationships to unlock their full potential.

Partnership in Action: EvolveMe

The American Student Assistance's EvolveMe platform demonstrates how strategic collaboration can build Career Literacy and Network Strength for teens. This free mobile experience features career exploration activities from partners like The DeBruce Foundation to expand youth's self-awareness and knowledge before




they make post-high school decisions. By integrating The Foundation's Agile Work Profiler© into this digital ecosystem, the American Student Association ensures students can better understand their own strengths and how they relate to potential careers. As of September 2023, more than 8,000 students completed the Agile Work Profiler© through EvolveMe, exemplifying the power of pairing the Foundation's Career Literacy tools with partners offering connections.

Conclusion: Collaborative Efforts for Empowerment

The 2023 Employment Empowerment study highlights the importance of Career Literacy and Network Strength for achieving Employment Empowerment. Moreover, the data show the substantial benefits of developing literacy and connections early in life.

By providing Career Literacy tools, facilitating network building, and collaborating strategically with mission-aligned partners, The DeBruce Foundation aims to unlock the potential for people of all ages and backgrounds to chart empowered career pathways. This is a shared challenge that requires collective action.

The Foundation calls on more institutions, organizations, and concerned individuals to join forces; by working together we can ensure more youth and people across all demographics gain access to the resources needed to direct their own economic futures. Collaborative efforts to strengthen Career Literacy and Network Strength will help expand opportunities nationwide. To learn more about our partnerships, initiatives, and insights, visit www.debruce.org.



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