

# Pursuing Their Passions: A National Program Connecting AYAs to Mentors from Their Careers of Choice

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## ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION

Founded in 2011

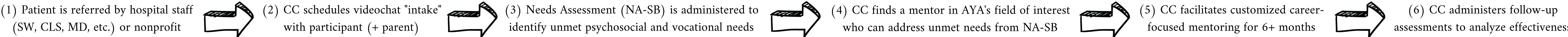
**Connecting Champions (CC) is a national nonprofit providing career-based mentorship for young people with cancer and survivors. CC gives AYAs the resources they need to explore career paths, acquire skills/knowledge, and reclaim their identity as they prepare for the first step in their career.**



Through CC's virtual and in-person programs, 3- to 26-year-olds (during treatment and survivorship) are paired with a diverse network of mentors from 100+ career paths such as NASA engineering, various trades, entrepreneurship, and even ghost hunting. Mentors are there every step of the way during the cancer journey.

### Outcome Focus Areas

- (1) Career exploration
- (2) Career/school planning & preparedness
- (3) Identity formation
- (4) Creating space for coping
- (5) Fostering joy
- (6) Enhancing care in the hospital



## BACKGROUND

The vocational and self-esteem side effects of an adolescent/young adult (AYA) cancer diagnosis can be devastating. At a time when AYAs should be building identity and pursuing passions, many resources become inaccessible: school counselors, internships, networking opportunities, etc. These challenges may persist years into survivorship. However, hospitals are often without necessary resources to address, or even identify, such needs.

The nonprofit Connecting Champions (CC) asks AYAs and kids with cancer, "What are you passionate about?" and pairs them with a mentor to help achieve a brighter future. The organization gives AYAs the resources they need to envision life beyond the disease by exploring fields they love, acquiring skills/knowledge, or simply feeling like themselves again. Since 2011, CC has received hundreds of referrals from 20 hospital systems in the U.S. and has participants from 24 states.

## OBJECTIVES

- Help AYAs explore career paths.
- Facilitate skill-building/knowledge acquisition necessary for AYAs to begin their careers.
- Empower AYAs to reclaim their identity.

## METHODS

Since 2020, 294 individuals have been referred to the program from 22 hospital systems and four nonprofits (Enrollees' mean age 16.65±5.77, 52% female). Participants received a mentor from their career(s) of choice for at least six months.

**The Needs Assessment and Service Bridge (NA-SB)** was adapted by adding items related to school and career preparedness. The assessment is 38-items and is administered upon enrollment in CC's mentoring program. A follow-up assessment is administered six months into the program.

- The current sample includes 64 AYA participants, 42% of whom are in survivorship (*Mean age 19.9±2.40, 13-32 years old, 59% female, 73% White*)

**The Mentor Processes Scale (MPS)** is administered to measure the quality of the mentoring program. It is administered three months into the program.

- The current sample includes 50 AYA participants (*Mean age 18.5±3.48, 13-27 years old, 50% female, 91% White*)

## CONCLUSIONS

The world of healthcare has expertise in many fields -- medicine, psychology, social work, etc. -- but career preparedness is vitally missing. This data shows simply asking AYAs about their career aspirations can unearth overwhelming needs. Customized career-focused mentorship can be an effective intervention and a valuable resource for hospitals. Future research will assess long-term impact of the mentoring program and how needs differ by various demographics and diagnoses.

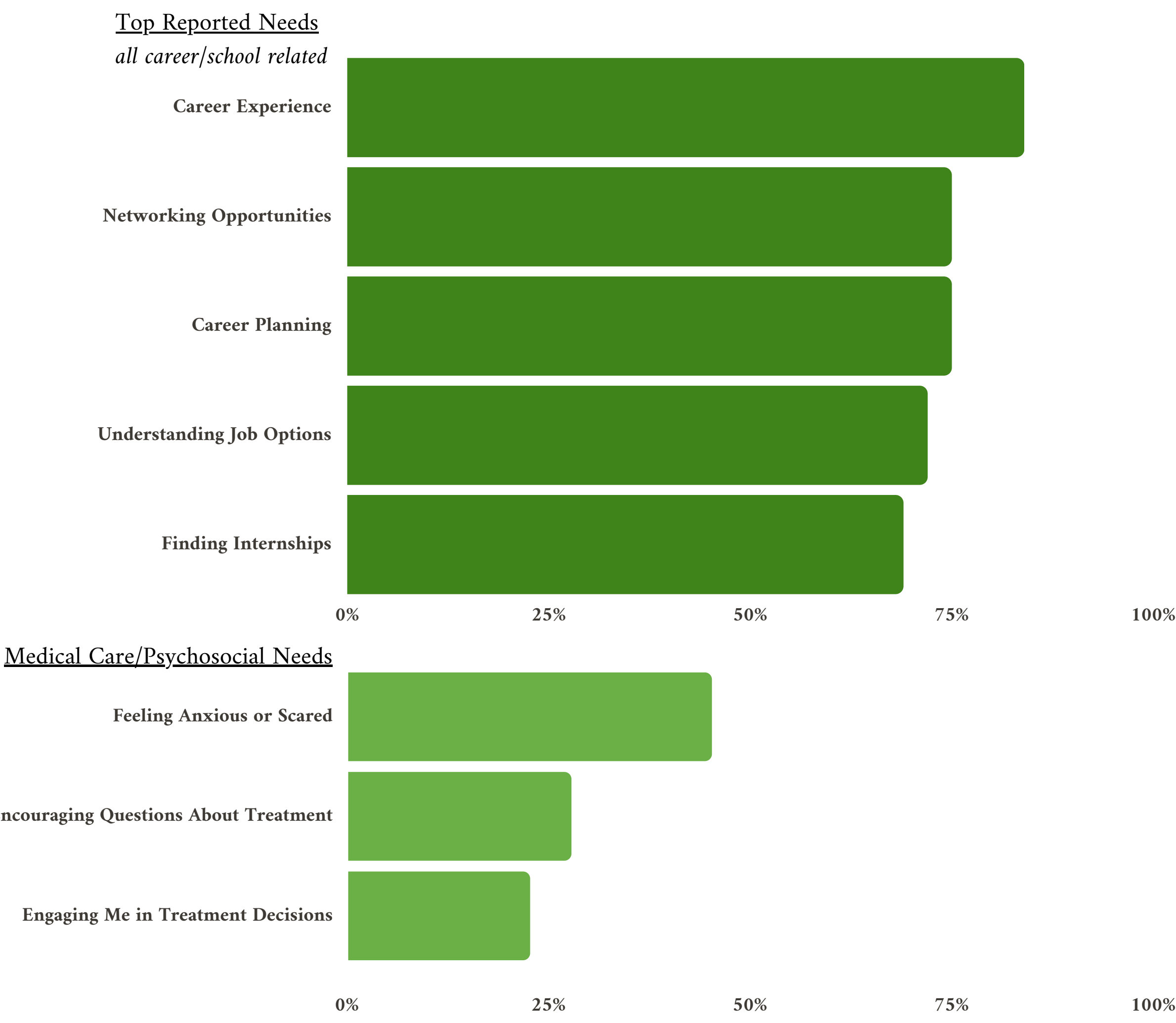
## RESULTS

### Finding I ●

**The most commonly reported needs among young people with cancer were all items related to school/career preparedness.**

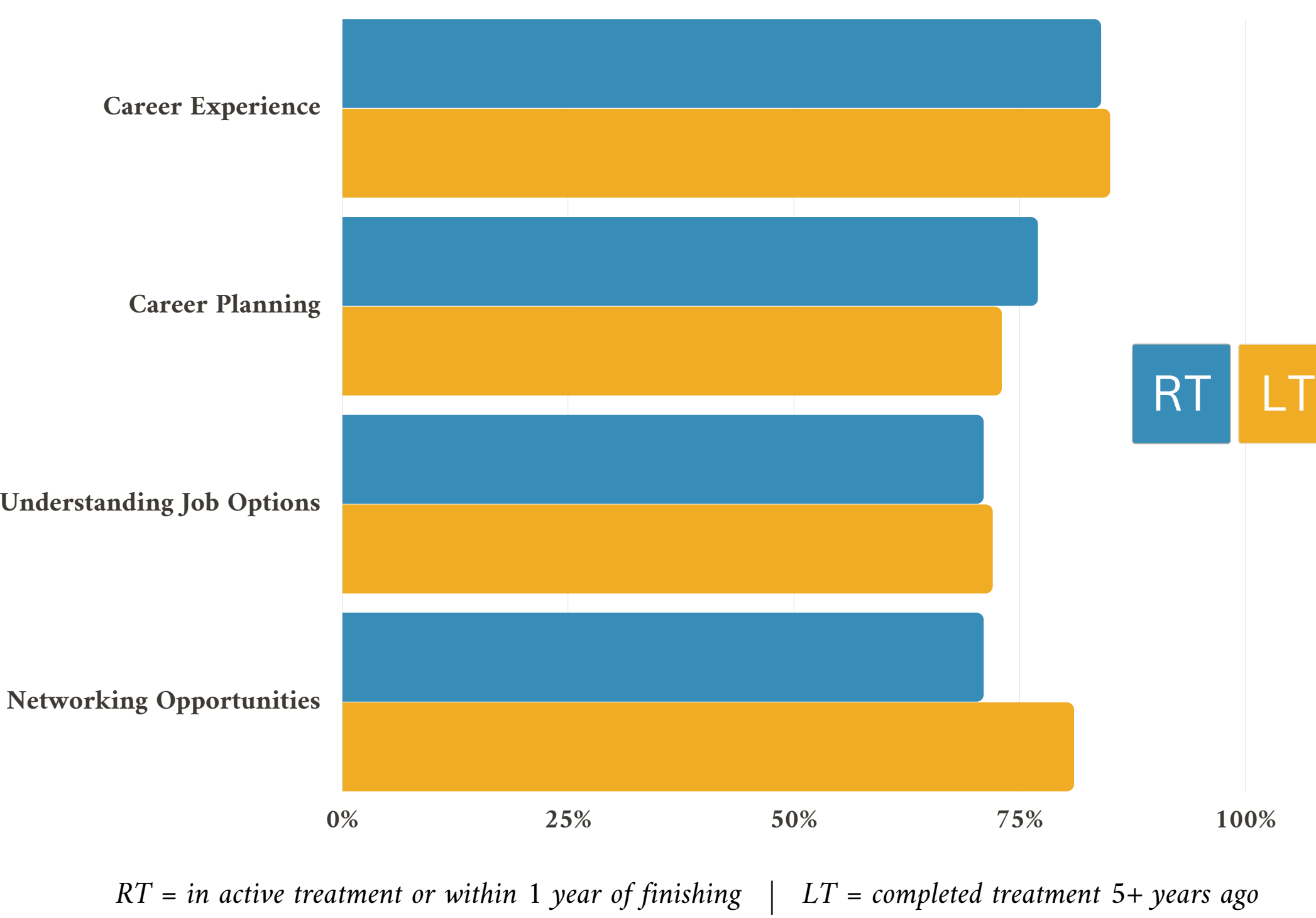
### & Finding II ●●

**Career/school preparedness statements were reported two to four times more frequently than statements related to their medical care or psychosocial health.**



### Finding III ●●

**Even 5+ years into survivorship, the most commonly reported needs were nearly identical to those reported by peers in active treatment.**



### Finding IV

**The Connecting Champions mentoring program is reported by AYAs as a high-quality program that addresses career/school preparedness needs.**

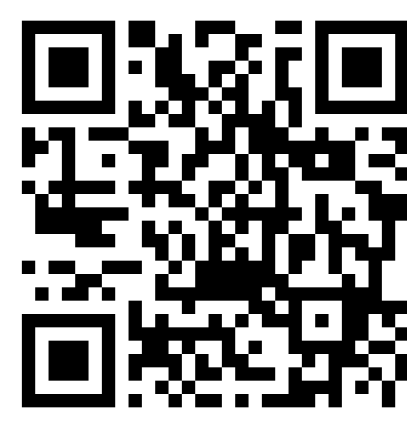
- I want to be like my mentor when I'm older (100%)
- My mentor encourages me to try new things (94%)
- My mentor teaches me how to solve problems (93%)
- My mentor teaches me new skills (91%)



**"THIS MENTORSHIP ALLOWS US TO HAVE AN ESCAPE FROM THE MEDICAL WORLD AND DIVE INTO WHAT WE LOVE DOING. MY PASSION IS SO MUCH STRONGER THAN IT EVER HAS BEEN. I FEEL LIKE I HAVE A STEP UP NOW."**

-AYA Participant & Future Fish Store Owner

Learn more about Connecting Champions or refer an AYA



Email Sidney@ConnectingChampions.org for more information