

Review of Evidence-Based Youth and Young Adult Workforce Initiatives

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memorandum

Date February 3, 2016
To Third Sector Capital Partners, Inc.
From Abt Associates
Subject **Review of evidence-based youth and young adult workforce initiatives**

Overview of Methods

The purpose of this review is to identify workforce initiatives for youth and young adults (ages 16-25) that have shown effectiveness with the highest level of evidence. To identify programs for inclusion we conducted a multi-phase search process and consulted the following sources:

- Clearinghouses that have already reviewed the evidence on youth employment initiatives including the Administration for Children and Families’ (ACF) Employment Strategies for Young Adults project, The Institute of Education Sciences’ What Works Clearinghouse, The Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research (CLEAR), and Child Trends’ What Works database.
- Social Innovation Fund (SIF), Workforce Innovation Fund (WIF), Investing in Innovation Fund (i3), Open Science Framework (OSF), Workforce Data Quality Campaign (WDQC), Department of Labor WIA, and Employment and Training Administration’s Workforce System Strategies websites and reports for recently funded youth workforce programs.
- Google and Google Scholar to identify programs published in peer reviewed and “gray” literature (e.g. government/nonprofit reports and other non-peer reviewed sources). We utilized key search terms such as “youth workforce evaluation” and “youth employment evaluation” when conducting these searches.
- Abt workforce content experts who directed us to some of the above sources as well as summary reports of workforce programs.

Due to the large number of workforce programs revealed by our search, we have focused the majority of the findings of this review on programs we view to be replication-ready for use in a pay-for-success (PFS) context. This is defined as (1) being evaluated in a randomized control trial (RCT), (2) having positive workforce-related outcomes, (3) targeting youth or young adults, and (4) evaluated within the last twenty years. The programs that met these criteria are highlighted in Section I of this report and include the American Conservation Youth Service Corps, National Guard ChalleNge, and Year Up. Each of these programs is described in greater detail below.

We have also included a list of programs that have been rigorously evaluated but we do not feel are currently replication ready for PFS due to poor or outdated findings (Section II). Finally, we briefly describe a handful of programs that have shown promise for PFS but have not yet been rigorously evaluated (Section III). The following sections highlight each of these categories of programs in further detail below. In addition, Table 1 provides a summary of the evaluation evidence for the rigorously evaluated programs described in Sections I and II.

Section I. Youth Workforce Program Demonstrating Effectiveness with the Highest Level of Evidence

As described above, programs included in this category are considered replication ready in the context of pay for success (PFS). They have been evaluated using strict standards of evidence including the use of a counterfactual in a randomized control trial (RCT), found positive workforce related outcomes, targeted youth or young adults, and were studied within the last twenty years.

American Conservation Youth Service Corps (Youth Corps)

Program Design

Program Description: Youth Corps programs are operated on the local level by government agencies and community-based organizations. The program's goals are to improve the communities in which they operate, as well as the education and employment outcomes of participants, known as Corpsmembers. The programs studied all belonged to the Corps Network umbrella organization. The exact programming varied by location but generally included educational services, occupational training, and employment services. In addition, a stipend was provided while participants engaged in community service activities (roughly 32 hours a week).

Participation Duration: Meant to be 6-12 months, was usually 4-5 months in practice.

Setting and Timeframe: 21 sites were included in this evaluation, but the report does not indicate where they were located. The evaluation described in Price et al involves subjects who applied between June 2006 and July 2007.

Target Population: Young adults not in school. Most aged 18-25. Although populations varied across sites, about 85% of Corpsmembers were younger than 25; about 25% were African American, 30% were Hispanic, and 35% were white. Approximately 20% of Corpsmembers had education beyond high school, and about 25% came from families with incomes below the federal poverty level.

Evaluation Design

Design Summary: RCT. Subjects randomized to join immediately or wait 12 (in some cases 18) months. The full sample included 1,357 subjects in the treatment group and 686 subjects in the control group.

Data Source: One baseline and two follow up surveys of treatment and control group members. The follow up surveys occurred 18 and 30 months following randomization. Researchers intended to include Unemployment Insurance data, but this was ultimately not feasible.

Key Outcomes: Whether employed or in school; educational attainment; volunteerism in the last 12 months; annual income, arrests, and convictions.

Follow-up Length: 30 months after enrollment

Findings

At 18 months after random assignment, Corpsmembers were earning over \$1,200 per year more compared to the control group. Some of this difference may have been due to stipends received by participants, though they were instructed not to include the stipend in their reported earnings. The program did not have a statistically significant impact on most of the employment or education outcomes measured. There were no significant impacts found on participant's employment levels, school attendance, educational attainment, or volunteer frequency. Regarding criminal justice outcomes, Youth Corps participation was not found to impact levels of arrest or conviction; however, treatment group members did report using less illegal drugs than control group members.

At the 30 months follow-up period after random assignment, statistically significant differences were no longer found between the treatment and control group for any employment or education outcomes.

Cost Benefit Analysis?: A cost benefit analysis was done in a 1996 evaluation that found a \$1.60 return for \$1.00 in costs.

Citations

<http://clear.dol.gov/study/national-evaluation-youth-corps-findings-follow-price-et-al-2011>

<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/interventionreport.aspx?sid=457>

<http://www.childtrends.org/?programs=youth-corps>

<http://strategies.workforce3one.org/practices/706>

Price, C., Williams, J., Simpson, L., Jastrzab, J., & Markovitz, C. (2011). National evaluation of Youth Corps: Findings at follow-up. Cambridge, MA: Abt Associates, Inc.

http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/nat_eval_youthcorps_impactreport.pdf

Jastrzab, J., Masker, J., Bloomquist, J. and Orr, L. (1996). *Impacts of service: Final report on the evaluation of American Conservation and Youth Corps*. Cambridge, Mass.: Abt Associates, Inc.

<http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED400420.pdf>

Job Corps

Program Design

Program Description: Job Corps is an education and training program that provides academic education, vocational training, residential living, health care services, counseling, and job placement assistance to participants. The program is administered by the Department of Labor and targets economically disadvantaged young adults between ages 16 and 24 who are free of serious behavioral problems, need additional training or education, have a clean health history, and have an adequate child care plan. The Department of Labor (DOL) administers the Job Corps program through a national office and six regional offices (as of 2006). Services are delivered by Job Corps Centers, which are operated by private contractors, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, or the U.S. Department of the Interior.

The program provides educational services (basic education, driver education, GED courses, and home and family living) and vocational training in a variety of occupations (business and clerical, health, construction, culinary arts, and building/apartment maintenance). Participants often live in Job Corps housing during their participation. Participants also receive health care, health education, and other counseling services. Finally, placement contractors such as state employment offices, private contractors, or Job Corps centers offer job placement assistance including interviewing and resume writing services

As of 2006, Job Corps was being delivered at 120 centers nationwide and serving more than 60,000 new enrollees annually.

Participation Duration: Up to 2 years. 8 months on average.

Setting and Timeframe: Participants often lived in Job Corps centers. Results included data from 119 locations in the contiguous United States. This study followed subjects who enrolled in late 1994 to early 1996.

Target Population: 16-24 year olds who were considered low-income or in households that received cash assistance.

Evaluation Design

Design Summary: RCT. Subjects randomized to join immediately or ineligible for 36 months. 9,409 subjects were randomized to the treatment group, and 5,977 subjects were randomized to the control group.

Data Source Social Security Earnings Records. Also administered survey to applicants at time of application and 12, 30, and 48 months following randomization.

Key Outcomes: Enrollment in education or training program; time spent in education or training program; educational or training credential received; employment status; hourly wage; hours worked per week; receipt of public assistance; involvement in criminal justice system.

Follow-up Length: Four years

Findings

Members of the treatment group were found to be significantly more likely than members of the control group to be employed, but this difference diminished from 10 percent in year one to 1 percent in year four. Earnings for treatment group members were lower than those for the control group in the first two years of the study but were higher in the second two years once participation had ended (by \$16 a week in year four); these differences were statistically significant. Those in the treatment group were more likely than those in the control group (42% versus 27%) to have received a GED and had spent more hours in vocational training.

Cost Benefit Analysis?: Cost about \$19,500/participant. According to Child Trends, a cost-benefit analysis using adjusted survey data revealed that costs exceed benefits by \$10,200 per participant. Among participants aged 20 to 24 at baseline, the authors estimated that costs exceeded benefits by \$500.

Citations

Updates on the study of this program have been published over multiple years, particularly 2000, 2001, 2003, and 2006.

http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/intervention_reports/WWC_Jobcorps_040108.pdf

<http://www.childtrends.org/?programs=job-corps>

<http://strategies.workforce3one.org/practices/1096>

<http://clear.dol.gov/study/national-job-corps-study-findings-using-administrative-earnings-records-data-schochet-et-al>

<http://employmentstrategies.acf.hhs.gov/studydatabase/details?sid=3006>

Schochet, P. Z., Burghardt, J., & McConnell, S. (2006). *National Job Corps Study and Longer-Term Follow-Up Study: Impact and Benefit-Cost Findings Using Survey and Summary Earnings Records Data*. Princeton, NJ: Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

<http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/~media/publications/PDFs/jobcorpsadmin.pdf>

Fortson, J. , Schochet, P. Z.(2011). *Analysis of Associations between Contemporaneous Job Corps Performance Measures and Impact Estimates from the National Job Corps Study*. Princeton, NJ: Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/~media/publications/pdfs/labor/jobcorps_performance.pdf

National Guard ChalleNGe

Program Design

Program Description: The National Guard Youth ChalleNGe program began in the early 1990s and targets youth 16 to 18 years of age. The program's mission is to target at-risk youth and equip them with the skills and training to have successful adult lives. Eligible participants dropped out of or were expelled from school, are unemployed, not drug users, and not heavily involved in the criminal justice system.

Total participation lasts for 17 months and includes a residential phase in a military-like environment during the first 22 weeks. Most of that time is spent in educational activities, usually with a goal of receiving a GED. Additional programmatic activities address eight core pillars: leadership/followership, responsible citizenship, service to community, life-coping skills, physical fitness, health and hygiene, job skills, and academic excellence. Once the residential phase ends, participants are placed in a job or educational or military program and continue to receive mentorship.

Participation Duration: Two week Pre-ChalleNGE Phase, a 20-week Residential Phase, and a yearlong Postresidential Phase.

Setting and Timeframe: The residential phase generally occurred at a military base. This study covers 10 sites in ten different states across the country. Randomization occurred in 2005 and 2006.

Target Population: 16-18 year olds who have left school.

Evaluation Design

Design Summary: RCT. Among eligible participants, individuals are randomly assigned to the treatment or control group. 2,320 subjects were assigned to the treatment group and 754 to the control group. Only about half of these were selected to participate in the follow up surveys.

Data Source: Surveys of applicants at time of application (on paper), phone or in person surveys of applicants approximately 21 months and 3 years later, program participation data.

Key Outcomes: Employment status (employed full-time, part-time, not employed), wages and earnings, educational attainment, whether respondent is currently working/in school/in the military, criminal justice involvement.

Follow-up Length: Three-year follow-up period.

Findings

72% of youth admitted to the ChalleNGe program received their high school diploma or GED, compared with 56% of control youth. Evaluators also found positive, statistically significant impacts in half (five out of ten) of employment and earnings outcomes. In the year prior to the 3-year survey, treatment group members had average earnings of \$13,500 while subjects in the control group had average earnings of \$11,250. In that time, those in the treatment group had higher weekly and hourly wages and were more likely than those in the control group to be employed.

Cost Benefit Analysis?: No

Citations

<http://clear.dol.gov/study/staying-course-three-year-results-national-guard-youth-challenge-evaluation-millenko-et-al>

<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wvc/interventionreport.aspx?sid=329>

<http://www.childtrends.org/?programs=national-guard-youth-challenge-program>

Millenky, M., Bloom, D., Muller-Ravett, S., & Broadus, J. (2011). Staying on Course: Three-year results of the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe evaluation. New York, NY: MDRC.

<http://www.mdrc.org/publication/staying-course>

Year Up

Program Design

Program Description: The Year Up program targets 18 to 24 year old young adults from urban economically disadvantaged communities. It is designed to help them begin careers in information technology or financial operations. Accordingly, participants receive six months of vocational training followed by a six month internship. In addition to technical subject matter, training also includes communication skills, networking, and other skills needed to function in a work environment.

Internships take place at major corporations in the area such as Merrill Lynch, JPMorgan Chase, and CVS Caremark. Participants are offered support services, including access to social workers and a mentor outside of the program to provide professional guidance and development and to help with job searches or college applications when participants finished the program.

Participants receive stipends during both training and internship phases as well as mentorship and other social services.

Participation Duration: One year

Setting and Timeframe: The program exists in 11 sites, but the cited evaluation covered 3 sites: Boston, New York City, and Providence. The study includes subjects who were selected for the program in 2007.

Target Population: 18-24 year olds from low-income urban communities

Evaluation Design

Design Summary: RCT. Subjects randomized to group who received the program or a control group over a 10 month follow-up period. The treatment group included 135 subjects, and the control group included 60 subjects.

Data Source: Survey at baseline and in third and fourth year following random assignment.

Key Outcomes: Employment status, wages and earnings, educational attainment.

Follow-up Length: Four years.

Findings

Treatment group members earned, on average, \$19,955 in the third year following randomization compared to the \$14,922 average earnings by control group members. This impact did not extend to the fourth year after random assignment. Of those employed at the time of the final survey, treatment group members were more likely (85% versus 70%) than control group members to be in permanent positions. There were no statistically significant impacts on educational achievement. Forty nine percent of those in the treatment group were employed in the target occupations during the follow up period.

Cost Benefit analysis: No

Citations

<http://clear.dol.gov/study/sustained-gains-year-up%E2%80%99s-continued-impacts-young-adults%E2%80%99-earnings-roder-elliott-2014>

<http://strategies.workforce3one.org/practices/401>

Roder, A., & Elliott, M. (2014). Sustained gains: Year Up's continued impacts on young adults' earnings. New York: Economic Mobility Corporation.

<http://economicmobilitycorp.org/uploads/sustained-gains-economic-mobility-corp.pdf>

Section II. Other Rigorously Evaluated Youth Workforce Programs

In this section we briefly highlight programs that have been rigorously evaluated using randomized studies, but either did not find positive findings for workforce related outcomes, or are outdated. Although some of the older studies described may have reported positive findings, we did not include them in Section I as we felt they required further evaluation in today's social context before being deemed ready for PFS construction.

Career Academies

This program provides a "school within a school" environment to high school students by offering vocational training in partnership with local employers. The program was evaluated using an RCT design. Randomization occurred in 1993. Data sources included high school transcripts and self-report surveys up to 8 years following the student's high school graduation rate. Key outcomes examined included educational attainment, hours worked, and earnings. Although no significant differences in educational attainment were found, the study reported positive statistically significant differences in earnings, number of weeks per year employed and in hours worked. However, these differences were only significant for males.

Citations

<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/interventionreport.aspx?sid=70>

<http://clear.dol.gov/topic-area/career-academies>

<http://strategies.workforce3one.org/practices/110>

Kemple, J., & Willner, C. (2008). Career Academies: Long-term impacts on labor market outcomes, educational attainment, and transitions to adulthood. New York: MDRC.

http://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/full_50.pdf

Center for Employment Training (CET)

The CET program targets disadvantaged, out-of-school youth ages 16 to 21. The CET organization was founded in 1967, and its program was first implemented in San Jose, California. After observing positive impacts in San Jose, the U.S. Department of Labor initiated a replication study to discover whether the CET-San Jose model could be implemented successfully in other settings. CET programs offered training in a work-like setting and operated in collaboration with local employers. Randomization occurred between 1995 and 1999. Some positive impacts were shown in terms of the amount of training participants received but significant effects on earnings and employment were not found. This failure may have been in part due to inconsistent implementation of the CET model.

Citations

<http://employmentstrategies.acf.hhs.gov/studydatabase/details?sid=3025>

<http://employmentstrategies.acf.hhs.gov/studydatabase/details?sid=3156>

<http://clear.dol.gov/study/challenge-repeating-success-changing-world-final-report-center-employment-training-replication>

<http://strategies.workforce3one.org/practices/152>

Miller, Cynthia, Johannes M. Bos, Kristin E. Porter, Fannie M. Tseng, Fred C. Doolittle, Deana N. Tanguay, and Mary P. Vencill (2003). Working with disadvantaged youth: Thirty-month findings from the evaluation of the Center for Employment Training replication sites, Washington, DC: Employment and Training Administration, U.S. Department of Labor.

https://www.doleta.gov/reports/papers/cet_full_report.pdf

Miller, Cynthia, Johannes M. Bos, Kristin E. Porter, Fannie M. Tseng, and Yasuyo Abe (2005). The challenge of repeating success in a changing world: Final report on the Center for Employment Training replication sites. ETAOP 2006-04. Washington, DC: Employment and Training Administration, U.S. Department of Labor

<http://www.mdrc.org/publication/challenge-repeating-success-changing-world>

Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA)

The JTPA took effect in 1983 and was intended to provide training services and other related services to workers of all ages who faced barriers to employment. A 1996 study focused on its effect on 16-21 year olds using a RCT design. Randomization occurred from 1987 to 1989. Data sources included participant surveys at baseline, 18 months, and 30 months after randomization; state unemployment insurance records and public assistance records; and program data. Key outcomes examined included participation in training programs; receipt of public assistance; completion of high school diploma or GED; earnings; and arrest rates. Study findings showed that participants experienced some improvements in educational attainment (for women only) and job training relative to those in the control group but not earnings. There was a negative effect in terms of increased incarceration rates for male participants.

Citations

<http://www.childtrends.org/?programs=job-training-partnership-act>

<http://clear.dol.gov/study/benefits-and-costs-jtpa-title-ii-programs-key-findings-national-job-training-partnership-act>

Bloom, Howard S., Larry L. Orr, Stephen H. Bell, George Cave, Fred Doolittle, Winston Lin, Johannes M. Bos (1997). The benefits and costs of JTPA Title II-A programs: Key findings from the National Job Training Partnership Act Study. *The Journal of Human Resources*, 32(3), 549-546.

<http://faculty.georgetown.edu/cjh34/bloometal.pdf>

JOBSTART

A late 1980s program designed to assist high school dropouts aged 17-21 with poor reading skills. The program provided educational skills, job training, and support services. It was evaluated between 1985 and 1989 using an RCT design. Data sources included self-report surveys of participants at baseline, 12, 24, and 48 months after randomization; tests results of Adult Basic Education; and other program data. Key outcomes examined were educational attainment, employment, earnings, and receipt of welfare benefits. The evaluation found that the program significantly affected high school diploma/GED attainment with 42% of treatment group members receiving a GED or high school diploma (compared to only 29% of control group members) 4 years post-randomization. No significant overall differences in earnings, employment, or welfare receipt were found at the end of the follow up period.

Citations

<http://www.childtrends.org/?programs=jobstart>

<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/interventionreport.aspx?sid=248>

<http://clear.dol.gov/study/jobstart-final-report-program-school-dropouts-cave-1993>

Cave, G., Bos, H., Doolittle, F. & Toussaint, C. (1993). JOBSTART: Final report on a program for school dropouts. New York: MDRC

http://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/full_416.pdf

Quantum Opportunities Program

An after-school program for at-risk teenagers that provided case management, mentoring, tutoring, community service activities, and financial incentives, among other services. The program was evaluated across seven sites using a RCT design. Randomization occurred in 1995 and 1996. Data sources included participant surveys up to 6 years after high school graduation, tests of Adult Basic Education, and high school transcripts. Key outcomes included attainment of high school diploma or GED; pursuit of secondary education or vocational training; and employment and earnings. No statistically significant differences between treatment and control groups were found for any of these outcomes. Lack of statistical evidence of long term impact may have been due to small sample size and/or inconsistent implementation of the program. Overall, the evaluation found that the program did not achieve its primary nor secondary objectives.

Citations

<http://www.childtrends.org/?programs=quantum-opportunities-program-qop>

<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/interventionreport.aspx?sid=401>

<http://clear.dol.gov/study/quantum-opportunity-program-demonstration-final-impacts-schirm-et-al-2006>

Schirm, A., Stuart, E., & McKie, A. (2006). The Quantum Opportunity Program demonstration: Final impacts. Washington, DC: Mathematica Policy Research.

<http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/~media/publications/PDFs/QOPfinalimpacts.pdf>

Section III. Other Identified Programs

There are numerous youth workforce development programs currently in operation around the United States that have shown promise, but have not yet been rigorously evaluated. Reports from MDRC and CLASP (cited below) review a number of these programs, some of which have been funded through the Youth Opportunity Grant Initiative Program. We have highlighted a selection of these programs in this section. It is important to note that given the vast number of programs, this section was not meant to be a comprehensive list, but rather gives an idea of the type of promising programs currently in operation that may be considered in the future for a PFS project.

Hartford's Our Piece of the Pie

This program is particularly worth noting since it has been evaluated, albeit not using a RCT. The program has also been recognized in the AYPF article cited below as having particularly good data collection protocols.

The program assists youth ages 14-24. Participants are assigned a mentor upon enrollment and develop a plan built around stated educational and employment-related goals. It provides academic and work-oriented training and includes efforts to collect data and ensure quality. Participants spent 61 hours a year, on average, with their mentors. Those youth who participated in employment services were more likely to obtain a job than other youth in the program. Similarly, those who participated in educational programs were more likely to advance educationally. Time spent with a mentor was correlated with achieving goals.

Roca Inc.

A Massachusetts-based program featured in the MDRC report and in the American Youth Policy Forum's article. The program serves youth 14-24 with a focus on avoiding incarceration, developing life skills, and obtaining education and certifications related to employment. The program involves two years of intensive intervention followed by two years of follow up services and serves only the highest-risk young men in Chelsea, Boston, and Springfield, MA. Roca Inc. is currently the service provider for the MA Juvenile Justice Pay for Success Initiative. Promising results of the program have been found but has never been evaluated using a RCT aside from the current PFS evaluation.

Michigan's Earn and Learn Program

This program is not exclusively for young adults, although 42% of its participants are under the age of 25. This program was implemented in Detroit, Saginaw, and Flint and targeted adults with significant barriers to employment. An evaluation was conducted in 2014, but was only comprised of a post-test after services were received with no counterfactual. The evaluation findings describe the services received and outcomes demonstrated by 1300 participants in this program which offered training, job placement, and other services. The study authors found that 71% of participants engaged in work readiness training, and of these 93% completed their training. The most common training programs were in healthcare, green energy management, and trucking. Assistance with public transportation was the most common type of assistance needed by participants.

Citations

<http://www.opp.org/about/docs/reports/UConnReport.pdf>

Bloom, D., Thompson, S. L., and Ivry, R. (2010). Building a learning agenda around disconnected youth. *Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation*.

Hastings, S., Tsoi-A-Fatt, R., and Harris, L. (2010), Building a Comprehensive Youth Employment Delivery System: Examples of Effective Practice. *Center for Law and Social Policy*.

Pate, A., Lerner, J. B., & Browning, A. (2012). Beyond the Numbers: Data Use for Continuous Improvement of Programs Serving Disconnected Youth. In *American Youth Policy Forum*. American Youth Policy Forum.

http://www.issuelab.org/resource/michigan_earn_and_learn_an_outcome_and_implementation_evaluation_of_a_transitional_job_and_training_program