

YTD Evaluation Finds Positive Impacts on Employment in Florida and West Virginia

The Youth Transition Demonstration (YTD) Evaluation

Based on a rigorous random assignment methodology, the YTD evaluation is assessing the extent to which work-promoting services and incentives help youth with disabilities achieve economic self-sufficiency as they transition to adulthood. Under YTD, the Social Security Administration (SSA) selected six programs for the evaluation based on their adoption of promising strategies to support youth with disabilities. In each program site, approximately 880 youth ages 14 to 25 who applied to participate in the evaluation were randomly assigned to a program group or a control group. In five of the sites, participation in the evaluation was restricted to youth who were receiving SSA disability benefits.

Youth assigned to the program group could receive employment-focused YTD services and SSA waivers that made it more financially rewarding for them to work. The services varied across the programs but typically included job development (outreach by program staff to employers), person-centered planning, job placement, job coaching, and benefits counseling.

Interim findings from a Mathematica evaluation of two **Youth Transition Demonstration (YTD)** programs reveal positive impacts for youth with disabilities in Miami, Florida, and in West Virginia. Among youth who agreed to participate in the evaluation, those who were randomly assigned to a program group, and thus had the opportunity to enroll in **Broadened Horizons**, **Brighter Futures (BHBF)** in Miami or in **West Virginia Youth Works**, were more likely than youth who were randomly assigned to a control group to take advantage of career-enhancing services like job placement assistance and benefits counseling, which led to higher employment rates and greater average earnings during the year after they entered the evaluation.

Interventions like YTD which provide services such as assistance in preparing resumes, mock interviewing, and job search assistance can put youth with disabilities on more independent paths as they transition from school to work. In order to evaluate the success of these interventions, analysts focus on outcomes such as participation in services, paid employment status, and earnings.

With funding from the Social Security Administration (SSA), Mathematica and its partners MDRC and TransCen, Inc. began a multi-year evaluation of YTD in 2005. The evaluation was designed to assess the effectiveness of YTD programs in six sites across the country.

Promising Program Features

BHBF in Miami and West Virginia Youth Works had a common goal: to provide services and financial work incentives to youth with disabilities that would put them on the road to self-sufficiency and decrease the likelihood of life-long dependence on Social Security disability benefits.

BHBF provided participants with an average of 29 hours of individualized services ranging from financial literacy training to job placement. West Virginia Youth Works provided participants with an average of 34 hours of similar services. Both delivered at least some services to every member of the program group who accepted an offer to enroll in these programs. The programs also provided participants with referrals for services that they could not deliver directly.

Characteristics of Program Group Members

West Virginia Youth Works

9% were African-American
98% spoke English at home
42% were age 18-21
100% were disability beneficiaries
43% had a primary disabling condition cognitive/developmental

Broadened Horizons, Brighter Futures

51% were African-American
76% spoke English at home
68% were age 18-21
100% were disability beneficiaries
42% had a primary disabling condition cognitive/developmental

WEST VIRGINIA YOUTH WORKS and **BROADENED HORIZONS, BRIGHTER FUTURES** in Miami had significant impacts on the employment and earnings of youth with disabilities during the year after they entered in the YTD evaluation.

Key Program Impacts in Florida and West Virginia

The evaluation of BHBF and West Virginia Youth Works focused on four key outcomes: paid employment status, youth income, educational progress, and attitudes and expectations. All impacts on the outcomes cited below are statistically significant.

Paid Employment Status: BHBF and West Virginia Youth Works had positive impacts on paid employment during the year after youth entered the evaluation. In Miami, 23 percent of youth in the program group worked for pay during that year, compared with just 13 percent of control group members. In West Virginia, 43 percent of program group members worked for pay, compared with 24 percent of control group members.

Youth Income: The Miami and West Virginia YTD programs also had positive impacts on youth income. Program group members in Miami earned an average of \$895 during the year after they entered the evaluation, which was \$306 more than control group members earned, a difference of 52 percent. Youth in the West Virginia program group earned an average of \$1,559 in the year after they entered the evaluation, which was 50 percent more than the \$1,035 earned by control group members. In both sites, the average total income (earnings plus disability benefits) of program group members during the year after entering the evaluation exceeded that of control group members.

Educational Progress, and Attitudes and Expectations: The YTD programs in Miami and West Virginia had no impacts on either the educational progress of youth or on their attitudes and expectations.

Dealing with Disincentives to Work

Youth with disabilities who receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) face a number of disincentives to work due to the rules governing program eligibility and benefits. To mitigate those disincentives, SSA approved waivers that revised several of the program rules for beneficiaries who were participating in YTD programs. The waivers made it financially more rewarding for them to start working or increase their work activity. Among the revised rules was a modification to the benefit reduction rate. Instead of losing one dollar in SSI benefits for every two dollars in earnings, YTD participants lost one dollar in benefits for every four dollars in earnings.

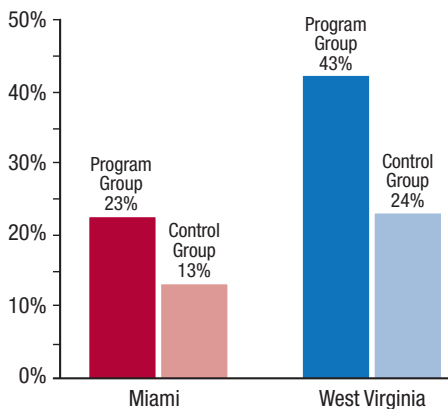
Future of the YTD Evaluation

The current picture of YTD is based on interim findings pertaining to the first year after youth entered the evaluation. During that time, more than half the youth were still in high school, so their opportunities to work and achieve other milestones on the road to independence were limited. The final evaluation findings will be based on a full three years of follow-up data. Those findings will be presented in a report that will be released to the public in the fall of 2014.

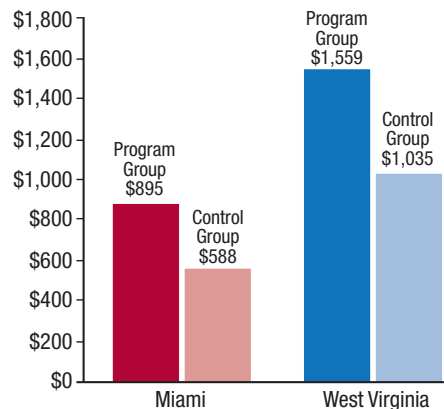
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PAID EMPLOYMENT in Year after Entering the Evaluation



ANNUAL EARNINGS in Year after Entering the Evaluation



YTD services varied across the sites but typically included job development (outreach by program staff to employers), person-centered planning, job placement, job coaching, and benefits counseling.