



An employment coaching program for parents of young children has limited effects in the short term: Impacts of LIFT at 9 months

Employment coaching involves trained staff working collaboratively with participants to help them set individualized goals directly or indirectly related to employment and providing motivation, support, and feedback as participants work toward those goals. Unlike most traditional case managers, coaches work in partnership with participants and do not tell the participants what goals they should pursue or what action steps to take in pursuing them. Research suggests that coaches may help participants cultivate self-regulation skills—skills such as persistence, focused attention, organization, emotional regulation, and time management—which are critical to success in employment.¹ For more information about how coaching can help participants, please see [this brief](#).

To explore the potential of employment coaching for adults with low incomes, the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation in the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, contracted with Mathematica and its partners Abt Associates, MDRC, and The Adjacent Possible to conduct an implementation and impact study of four coaching programs. This brief presents the first impact findings for LIFT, a voluntary coaching program for parents and caregivers of young children. These findings are based on comparisons of outcomes of study participants who were randomly assigned to either receive LIFT or be in a control group. Outcomes are from the first 9 months after study enrollment and collected through surveys and records from human services agencies. At the time of the survey, most people offered LIFT had received a substantial amount of coaching, and many were still receiving coaching from the program. For a more detailed presentation of these findings, please see [the impact report](#).

About LIFT

LIFT is a nonprofit organization that provides career and financial coaching to parents and caregivers of young children and expectant parents.

LIFT applicants must also demonstrate a level of stability in housing and work

or education. LIFT believes this stability is critical to being able to focus on setting goals. Coaches are unpaid graduate student interns from local universities who work part-time in placements that last an average of one academic year. LIFT operates in four cities: Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, and Washington, DC.²

LIFT uses a coaching approach to help program participants create a plan to attain short- and long-term goals related to financial security, education, and career advancement. During the first month, LIFT participants are expected to attend two coaching sessions, and coaches and participants aim to meet monthly after that for up to 2 years, with financial incentives for participants if they attend sessions regularly. About 60 percent of of LIFT group members remained engaged with the program 9 months after study enrollment.

Participation in LIFT is voluntary. More information about LIFT is available in the study's [program snapshot](#) and [report on program implementation](#).



Impacts 9 months after study enrollment

LIFT did not improve goal-setting and attainment skills. A survey asked study participants how much they agreed with eight statements about setting goals and working to meet those goals. Scores on this measure indicate an average response across the eight statements and range from 0 (“strongly disagree”) to 3 (“strongly agree”). LIFT and control group members had similar scores on goal-setting and attainment skills (2.19 and 2.15, respectively.) The difference in scores was not statistically significant, which means it would be common to find an impact estimate of this size if the program had no effect on participant outcomes.

LIFT likely had no impact on self-reported earnings. During the 9-month follow-up period, LIFT and control group members reported similar average monthly earnings (\$881 and \$860, respectively). The difference in earnings was not statistically significant. Further analysis suggests there was a 47 percent chance that the impact of LIFT on average monthly self-reported earnings was between -\$25 and \$25. Analysis also suggests that LIFT’s impacts on self-reported earnings were consistent over time.³

LIFT did not reduce economic hardship. The survey asked respondents whether they faced six specific economic hardships, such as going without medical care because of cost or not being able to afford enough food. LIFT and control group members reported similar levels of economic hardship: the average scale scores were 1.94 for the LIFT group and 2.06 for the control group, a difference that was not statistically significant. Thus, on average, in the 9 months after study enrollment, members of both groups had experienced about 2 of the 6 economic hardships included in the survey.

Summary of 9-month impact findings for LIFT

Impacts on Goal-Setting and Attainment Skills

+2%

Improved goal-setting and attainment skills by 2 percent.



It would be common to find an impact estimate of this size if the program had no effect on participant outcomes.

Impacts on Monthly Earnings

+\$21



It would be common to find an impact estimate of this size if the program had no effect on participant outcomes. The impact was likely zero.

Size of impact was similar throughout the follow-up period.

Impacts on Economic Hardship

-6%

Reduced economic hardship by 6 percent.



It would be common to find an impact estimate of this size if the program had no effect on participant outcomes.

Further results to come

Follow-up analyses 21 months and again 48 months after study enrollment will address whether the impacts of LIFT persist, grow, or decline. As more time passes, will continued engagement with LIFT lead to emerging impacts? In exploratory analyses of the 9-month follow-up period, we found that LIFT group members were more likely to have participated in education programs and to be participating in training programs at the time of the follow-up survey; will these differences lead to earnings impacts in the future? A report on the program’s impacts at 21 months after study enrollment, anticipated in 2023, will start to answer these questions.

To receive updates from the study as these and other findings become available, you can request to join the project listserv by emailing coaching@mathematica-mpr.com.

The Evaluation of Employment Coaching for TANF and Related Populations

This study is testing four employment coaching programs designed for people with low incomes. It assesses the implementation of the coaching programs and—via an experimental study—their impacts on study participants’ self-regulation skills, employment, earnings, self-sufficiency, and other measures of personal and family well-being. Publications produced as part of this study to date (available on the [project website](#)) describe the programs, document the study design and analysis plans, and provide findings on how the programs were implemented.

Endnote

¹ Locke, E., and Latham, G. (1990). *A theory of goal setting and task performance*. Prentice Hall.

² The program’s Washington, DC location was not included in the impact study.

³ The study team also collected administrative records on earnings reported to an unemployment insurance agency. However, we were not able to conduct reliable analysis using this information because collecting these records require valid Social Security numbers and too few LIFT study participants provided them at study enrollment.

Submitted to:

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U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre>

Contract Number:

HHSP233201500035I / HHSP23337018T

Mathematica Reference Number:

50327.04.600.500.000

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This brief is in the public domain. Permission to reproduce is not necessary. **Suggested citation:** Quinn Moore, Tim Kautz, Sheena McConnell, Ankita Patnaik, Owen Schochet, and April Wu (2023) “An employment coaching program for parents of young children has limited effects in the short-term: Impacts of LIFT at 9 months” OPRE Report #2023-167. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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