



ENGAGING YOUNG MEN INVOLVED IN CHICAGO'S JUSTICE SYSTEM

A Feasibility Study of the
Bridges to Pathways Program

Engaging Young Men Involved in Chicago's Justice System: A Feasibility Study of the Bridges to Pathways Program

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**Authors: Kyla Wasserman, Johanna Walter, Beata Luczywek, Hannah Wagner,
and Cindy Redcross**

Submitted to:

Girley Wright, Project Officer

Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation
Administration for Children and Families
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Project Director: Dan Bloom

MDRC
200 Vesey Street
New York, NY 10281

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Overview

Introduction

This report presents findings from a feasibility evaluation of the Bridges to Pathways (Bridges) program. Bridges was a program for young men in Chicago between the ages of 17 and 21 years who were involved with the criminal or juvenile justice system and lacked a high school credential. The program offered intensive mentoring and case management, as well as the opportunity to earn a high school credential, attend social-emotional learning workshops, and participate in a subsidized internship.

The Bridges evaluation is a part of the larger Subsidized and Transitional Employment Demonstration, funded by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The Bridges program was launched in 2013, and the evaluation of this developing program builds knowledge about operating this model and its potential to achieve its intended effects: to help participants attain a high school credential, obtain unsubsidized employment, and reduce their involvement with the criminal justice system. Designed as a feasibility assessment, the evaluation includes an implementation study and a small-scale randomized controlled trial.

The Bridges evaluation enrolled 480 young people between June 2015 and July 2016. This report provides a detailed description of the Bridges model and how the program providers adapted the model. It also presents findings about whether the program improved young people's outcomes and decreased criminal activity during the first year after study enrollment. The implementation study concluded that the program succeeded in enrolling a high-risk population, and it focused its services on keeping participants engaged with the program and removing barriers to their participation. An analysis of the program's impacts indicates that the program reduced the rate of arrest for felony crimes, and that it also reduced the rate of arrest for violent crimes. However, the program had no impact on the overall rate of arrest or incarceration. It also had no impact on educational or training certification and no sustained effect on employment. Overall, the evaluation indicates that the Bridges model shows promise to help decrease violence among high-risk young men. However, more information will be needed to understand the ability of programs such as Bridges to make a difference in the lives of the young people they serve.

Purpose

Young adults are overrepresented in the criminal justice system. These individuals have a harder time exiting the criminal justice system than their older counterparts, and they face significant challenges when they do, including poorer outcomes in education and employment. Young adults involved with the criminal justice system are becoming recognized as a subset of the "transition-aged youth" population: young people between the ages of 18 and 24 years with distinctive needs stemming from their developmental stage, social interactions, and changing involvement with the justice, education, child welfare, and other systems. Policymakers, practitioners, and advocates are beginning to focus on age-appropriate interventions to help this population abstain from crime and avoid reentering the criminal justice system.

Bridges is a violence prevention program that aims to reduce the likelihood that young adults at high risk of violence will engage in criminal activity. Originally launched in 2013, Bridges closed in 2016 and was revamped in 2017. MDRC evaluated the original Bridges program to determine whether it showed promise for improving the outcomes of the young people it was intended to serve.

Research Questions and Methods

The Bridges evaluation included an implementation study to shed light on the demand for the program and how it operated. Key data sources for the implementation study were staff interviews, observations, and information about young people's participation in program services collected by the providers. The implementation analysis integrated qualitative and quantitative data from these sources to create a full picture of the implementation of the program.

The evaluation also included a small-scale random assignment study. Individuals who were eligible for and interested in Bridges were randomly assigned to either a program group, which was offered Bridges services, or to a control group, which was not offered those services. The study provides preliminary evidence about the program's potential to improve short-term outcomes on education, employment, and recidivism. Key data sources included administrative records on involvement in the criminal justice system and records on employment and earnings, as well as a follow-up survey.

The Bridges evaluation seeks to answer the following questions:

- What were the characteristics of the participants who entered Bridges?
- How did the providers implement the program and what adjustments did they make over time?
- What were the duration and intensity of the participants' engagement in the program?
- What are the preliminary impacts of Bridges on young adults?

Key Findings

- Bridges enrolled a hard-to-reach, high-risk population, made up of young men who were disconnected from education and employment and involved with the criminal justice system.
- Keeping this population engaged was a challenge for the program, which prompted the providers to emphasize services aimed at encouraging young people to persist in the program. Mentoring and case management were key tools the program used to engage participants and facilitate their participation. Ongoing challenges with attendance made it difficult to systematically implement the program's academic, social-emotional, and employment components.
- The program produced modest increases in access to education, training, and employment services. However, it had no impact on receipt of a high school credential or training certification and did not produce a sustained effect on employment.
- The program reduced the rate of arrest for felony crimes by 8 percentage points. Participants were also significantly less likely to be arrested for a violent crime. However, the program had no impacts on the overall rate of arrest or incarceration.

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The Authors

Executive Summary

Although young adults ages 18 to 24 make up just 10 percent of the U.S. population, they account for 28 percent of arrests and people in jail, 26 percent of people on probation, and 21 percent of admissions to prison.¹ These individuals have a harder time exiting the criminal justice system than their older counterparts,² and they face significant challenges when they do, including poorer outcomes in education and employment.³ Young adults involved with the criminal justice system are becoming recognized as a subset of the “transition-aged youth” population: young people between the ages of 18 and 24 years with distinctive needs stemming from their developmental stage, social interactions, and changing involvement with the justice, education, child welfare, and other systems. Policymakers, practitioners, and advocates are beginning to focus on age-appropriate interventions to help this population abstain from crime and avoid reentering the criminal justice system.

In 2013, a violence prevention program called Bridges to Pathways (Bridges) was launched that aimed to improve the outcomes of young adults at high risk of violence. The program was developed by the Chicago Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS) and operated by two community-based organizations: Central States SER and SGA Youth and Family Services. The pilot program was designed to curb youth violence and reduce recidivism among young men in Chicago who were involved in the criminal and juvenile justice systems. The six-month program had the following four components: academic enrichment, social-emotional learning, workforce readiness, and intensive mentoring and case management.

This report presents the findings from a feasibility study of Bridges that looks at the program’s design, implementation, and short-term impacts. The evaluation of this new program includes an implementation study and small-scale randomized controlled trial and is designed to provide preliminary information on the model’s promise. The Bridges evaluation is a part of the larger Subsidized and Transitional Employment Demonstration, funded by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Administration for Children and Families called the Subsidized and Transitional and Employment Demonstration (STED), which is testing various subsidized employment strategies in several cities across the country. MDRC is conducting the

¹Justice Policy Institute, *Improving Approaches to Serving Young Adults in the Justice System* (Washington, DC: Justice Policy Institute, 2016).

²Matthew R. Durose, Alexia D. Cooper, and Howard N. Snyder, *Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 30 States in 2005: Patterns from 2005 to 2010* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2014).

³Gary Sweeten, “Who Will Graduate? Disruption of High School Education by Arrest and Court Involvement,” *Justice Quarterly* 23, 4 (2006): 462-480; Devah Pager, Bruce Western, and Naomi Sugie, “Sequencing Disadvantage: Barriers to Employment Facing Young Black and White Men with Criminal Records,” *The Annals of the American Academy* 623, 1 (2009): 195-213.

STED evaluation, along with its research partners MEF Associates, Decision Information Resources, and Branch Associates.

Background

Enhancing services that use age-appropriate interventions may be a way to increase public safety. Crime rates indicate that targeting transition-aged youth makes sense: In the critical years of one's late teens, the probability of committing a crime increases, and criminal activity tends to become more serious and violent.⁴

Transition-aged youth have a number of age-specific characteristics that may increase their likelihood of engaging in criminal activity and make them distinct from younger and older subsets of the population. Criminal and juvenile justice reform advocates, policymakers, and administrators are increasingly in agreement that age-appropriate strategies for deterrence, custody, and reentry are needed for this population.⁵ However, while there is some evidence about strategies to reduce crime among younger teens and older adults, little is known about what works to support young adults as they make the transition to adulthood. The evaluation of Bridges aims to help build evidence about how to curb violence and recidivism among transition-aged youth.

The Bridges to Pathways Program

Introduced in late 2013, Bridges was designed to provide a multifaceted package of services to young men in Chicago who were involved with the criminal or juvenile justice system. Bridges' stated goals were to help participants attain a high school credential, obtain unsubsidized employment, and reduce their involvement with the criminal justice system.

As originally designed, Bridges was a three-phase program in which groups of young men (or "cohorts") participated in a sequence of academic, employment, and social-emotional well-being activities together. Over the three phases, cohorts were expected to take online courses toward either a high school diploma or a high school equivalency certificate such as a General Educational Development (GED) certificate, complete a five-week employability skills training course, work a 12-week subsidized internship, and attend cognitive-behavioral therapy workshops designed to change thought patterns believed to lead to criminal behavior. The design also featured intensive mentoring and case management services that were to be offered throughout the three phases of the program. These services were to be provided over a six-month period, followed by three months of contact with program staff for additional support. The Bridges program closed in 2016 and a revised version of the program was launched in 2017 that draws from lessons learned in its early implementation.

⁴National Institute of Justice, "From Juvenile Delinquency to Young Adult Offending" (2014), Website: www.nij.gov/topics/crime/Pages/delinquency-to-adult-offending.aspx.

⁵Justice Policy Institute (2016), 1-29.

The Bridges Evaluation

The Bridges program aimed to deliver a complex package of services to a hard-to-serve population. When Bridges launched in late 2013, many elements of the program and its services were still in development. In its first two years, the program design shifted as the providers searched for promising recruitment channels, adopted core curricula, and honed strategies to keep participants engaged in program services. After running for close to two years, the program had stabilized in significant ways, and the evaluation focuses on the program's implementation from June 2015 through July 2016. Throughout the evaluation period, the program continued to evolve as the providers learned more about the needs of their clients.

The evaluation of this developing program was designed as a feasibility study. Feasibility studies can provide information about whether a proposed intervention is possible to operate and whether it shows promise to achieve its intended effects. The feasibility study of Bridges provided the research team with a unique opportunity to gather valuable information about the model's implementation on the ground, the characteristics and engagement of participants, and the potential of the program to reduce recidivism. The Bridges evaluation included an implementation study that used mixed methods to learn about the demand for the program and its operations. In addition, the evaluation included a small-scale random assignment study to assess preliminary evidence about the program's potential to improve short-term outcomes on education, employment, and recidivism.

The Bridges evaluation addresses four primary questions:

1. What were the characteristics of the participants who entered Bridges?
2. How did the providers implement the program and what adjustments did they make over time?
3. What were the duration and intensity of the participants' engagement in the program?
4. What are the preliminary impacts of Bridges on young adults?

The Bridges evaluation enrolled 480 young people between June 2015 and July 2016, with 60 percent randomly assigned to the program group and 40 percent to the control group.

- **The program group.** The 289 individuals who were randomly assigned to this group were offered Bridges program services, including preparatory classes for earning a high school diploma or high school equivalency credential, cognitive-behavioral therapy workshops, a paid internship, and intensive case management and mentoring.
- **The control group.** The 191 individuals who were randomly assigned to this group were not offered Bridges services but were able to access other services that were available in the community, including non-Bridges services offered at the agencies operating Bridges.

By measuring outcomes for both the program and control groups over time, it is possible to assess whether Bridges services led to better outcomes for the program group than would have happened in the absence of the program, as represented by the control group. Any statistically significant differences that emerge between the two groups would be considered Bridges’ “impacts,” or effects, because, owing to the random assignment design, the research groups should be comparable on both measured and unmeasured characteristics at the time of study enrollment. However, because this feasibility study used a small sample size and therefore has limited statistical power, any impact findings should be understood as indications of promising practices that further research might explore.

The Implementation of Bridges

The assessment of Bridges’ implementation is based on data from several sources, including interviews with provider staff and participants, observations of program services, analysis of data collected from young people when they enrolled in the study, a survey of staff time, and program participation data from the Bridges management information system.

To be eligible for the Bridges program, applicants had to identify as male, be between the ages of 17 and 21 years, and lack a high school credential. Additionally, they had to report that they had been incarcerated at least once. Staff were committed to serving youth that they thought could benefit the most from the program, often young people who were not connected to school, work, or other programs. Bridges did not have any requirements related to academic ability, credit standing, or work experience.

- **Bridges succeeded in enrolling a hard-to-reach, high-risk population. The study sample comprised young men who were disconnected from education and employment and who were involved with the criminal justice system.**

At the time of study enrollment, members of the study sample were 18 years old on average. Nearly all participants were black, non-Hispanic (74 percent) or Hispanic (22 percent). Participants had been repeatedly involved with the criminal justice system. Administrative records show that nearly all sample members had been arrested (95 percent) and that the majority (73 percent) had been arrested four times or more. On average, sample members reported that they were arrested for the first time at the age of 14 and convicted for the first time at age 15. In addition, most sample members were not in school and fewer than half reported ever having worked. Table ES.1 shows selected demographic characteristics of the sample members at the time they enrolled into the study.

- **Poor attendance among participants was an ongoing challenge for the program, which prompted the providers to emphasize services aimed at reengaging the young people and encouraging them to persist in the program.**

Table ES.1

Selected Baseline Characteristics of the Bridges to Pathways Sample Members

Characteristic	Full Sample
Demographics	
Average age	18.4
Race/ethnicity (%)	
Black, non-Hispanic	74.2
Hispanic	21.6
White, non-Hispanic	0.8
Native American/Asian/multiracial/non-Hispanic	3.4
Education and employment history	
Highest grade completed in school ^a	10.0
Ever employed (%)	48.7
Criminal history	
Ever arrested (%)	95.2
Age at time of first arrest	14.2
Number of times arrested (%)	
0	4.8
1	7.5
2 or 3	14.8
4 or more	72.9
Age of first conviction (years) ^a	15.1
Sample size	480

SOURCES: MDRC calculations based on baseline survey data and arrest records from the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority.

NOTES: Sample includes individuals randomly assigned between June 2015 and July 2016.

Arrest measures come from administrative records; all other measures are self-reported.

Measures in italics are calculated among individuals who had a certain characteristic.

^aSample size varies due to missing responses. Most measures are missing less than 5 percent of the sample size with the exception of "highest grade completed in school" (missing 7 percent) and "age of first conviction" (missing 13 percent).

Table ES.2 presents data on participants' enrollment and participation in Bridges during the six months after entering the program. About two-thirds of program group members ever attended program activities. Once they entered Bridges, their attendance was often inconsistent. On average, young people who ever attended the program attended for 30 days spread out over 13 weeks, or an average of two out of every five program days available to them.

Many factors may have contributed to poor attendance, including lack of interest in the program, problems with transportation, housing instability, and other responsibilities that affected the young men's ability to participate in the program. In addition, participants faced emotional or psychological barriers to receiving services. Many participants had lost family or friends to gun violence, witnessed the shooting of others, or been shot themselves. The program staff felt that exposure to trauma could lead participants to lose hope in their ability to achieve their goals and to mistrust strangers, including program staff and other participants.

Staff members were expected to encourage attendance by addressing barriers that could prevent participants from coming to the program and by building close relationships with participants. Through close relationships, staff members sought to demonstrate their belief in participants' ability to succeed in Bridges. Mentors asserted that they needed to prove to participants that they would not give up on them by repeatedly being involved in their lives and present in their community. Helping participants overcome barriers to attendance accounted for nearly one-fourth of the program staff's time. Despite these efforts, attendance remained an ongoing challenge for the program, which changed how providers operated the program's academic, social-emotional, and employment services.

- **Participants' intermittent and unpredictable attendance made it difficult for providers to systematically implement the academic, social-emotional, and employment components.**

The academic component incorporated an online education platform through which participants could earn a high school credential at Bridges. The opportunity for participants to earn a high school diploma outside of a school setting was a key feature of the program's design; however, as an unaccredited institution, Bridges was unable to confer high school credits or credentials. Finding they could not overcome the challenge of accreditation, the providers focused on helping participants make progress toward a GED certificate. Daily social-emotional learning workshops made use of an evidenced-based cognitive behavioral therapy program for youth and adults involved with the criminal justice system. Instructors brought enthusiasm, interactive media, and relevant examples to the curriculum. However, intermittent attendance coupled with a slow pacing of lessons meant that participants were unable to complete the curriculum during the program period.

The program's employment component also suffered from problems related to poor attendance. This component featured a five-week employability skills workshop followed by a 12-week subsidized internship. Bridges offered a range of internships that focused on giving participants an

Table ES.2

**Enrollment and Participation Within Six Months of Entering
Bridges to Pathways**

Outcome	Program Group
Ever attended (%)	67.8
Among those who ever attended	
<i>Average number of weeks in the program^a</i>	13.3
<i>Average number of days attended</i>	29.5
Received a stipend (%)	55.0
Worked in an internship (%)	25.6
Sample size	289

SOURCES: MDRC calculations from Bridges participation data and stipend payment records.

NOTES: Sample includes individuals randomly assigned between June 2015 and July 2016.

Measures in italics are calculated among individuals who participated in the activity.

^aMeasure is based on the duration between the first and last dates of attendance.

opportunity to practice soft skills, such as arriving on time. However, most internships were reserved for participants who had relatively steady attendance. Only one-fourth of participants began internships and fewer completed them.

- **Staff members focused on modest short-term outcomes that could help participants achieve their goals, and they sought to connect participants to other programs.**

Program staff found the six-month program to be too short a time for most participants to obtain a high school credential or secure unsubsidized employment. They focused on helping participants make gains in their level of self-confidence, communication skills, and attendance during their time in the Bridges program. The staff hoped to prepare and connect these participants with programs where they could continue to work toward longer-term education and employment goals.

Findings from the Small-Scale Random Assignment Study

Although this report focuses mainly on the implementation of Bridges to Pathways, it also presents the survey and administrative data that the research team collected to assess the program's potential to improve participants' outcomes and reduce violence. The study's primary data source was arrest data from the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority. In addition, the research

team analyzed data from a follow-up survey fielded to study participants approximately 11 months after random assignment, as well as employment and earnings data from the National Directory of New Hires (NDNH). However, the analysis was limited since less than half of sample members responded to the survey and only about half of them provided identifying information that the team could match to the NDNH.

As explained earlier, control group members were not eligible to participate in Bridges, but they could access other services that were available in the community, including non-Bridges services offered at the agencies operating Bridges. Using survey data collected from approximately half of the sample, the research team assessed the extent to which the offer of the Bridges program increased the services received by the program group over and above what the control group received. This comparison is important because without a meaningful service differential, impacts on outcomes were unlikely.

- **The program produced modest increases in participants' access to education and training, employment services, and supportive relationships with staff members.**

Nearly 70 percent of survey respondents in the program group reported participating in either education or training activities, compared with 62 percent of respondents in the control group. The resulting 7 percentage point increase in participation in these activities for program group members is not statistically significant. Program group members were more likely to report having received employment-related assistance than control group members (82 percent and 63 percent, respectively). Program group members were also more likely to report having received advice or support from a staff member at an agency or organization compared with their control group counterparts (66 percent and 50 percent, respectively). While Bridges increased participants' access to certain services, it had no impact on receipt of educational or training certification. Among program group members, 15 percent reported that they had earned a high school diploma or equivalency certificate, compared with 18 percent among control group members.

- **Following an early increase in employment due to participation in the program's internships, there was no sustained positive effect on employment through the end of the follow-up period.**

Although program group members were employed at higher rates than control group members early in the follow-up period, once their participation in internships declined, the rate of employment was similar for the two research groups. In the third quarter after random assignment, the employment rate for both groups was approximately 27 percent. In the fourth quarter following random assignment, employment among control group members increased, reaching nearly 40 percent, but remained flat for program group members. It is unclear what accounts for the uptick in employment among control group members.

- **Bridges reduced the rates of arrest for felony crimes and for violent crimes.**

The program had no impacts on the overall rate of arrest or incarceration in the Cook County jail during the first year of follow-up. However, the program did reduce the rate of arrest for felony crimes by 8 percentage points (34 percent of the program group compared with 42 percent of the control group). Program participants were also significantly less likely to be arrested for a violent crime (21 percent of the program group compared with 28 percent of the control group).

Lessons

Bridges was designed to be an intensive program to help a vulnerable population achieve key education and employment milestones, and thereby desist from violence. The program succeeded in enrolling members of its target population but struggled to keep them engaged. As the program operated, it revised its approach to service delivery and emphasized the importance of mentorship and case management. The implementation study suggests that supporting and engaging this population may require robust supports, caring staff, and substantial time to make progress toward long-term goals. The findings from the limited impact study indicate that the program reduced the rates of arrest for violent and felony crimes among program group members. Despite some challenges, the program was able to engage a subset of young men and reduce arrest for serious crimes. Therefore, it is important to test programs that continue to refine the model that Bridges outlined in order to identify the appropriate mix of services that can make a difference in the lives of young adults involved with the justice system.

Chapter 1

Introduction to the Program, Evaluation, and Context

Although young adults ages 18 to 24 years make up just 10 percent of the U.S. population, they account for 28 percent of arrests and people in jail, 26 percent of people on probation, and 21 percent of admissions to prison.¹ These individuals have a harder time exiting the criminal justice system than their older counterparts,² and they face significant challenges when they do, including poorer outcomes in education and employment.³ Young adults involved with the criminal justice system are becoming recognized as a subset of the “transition-aged youth” population: young people between the ages of 18 and 24 years with distinctive needs stemming from their developmental stage, social interactions, and changing involvement with justice, education, child welfare, and other systems. Policymakers, practitioners, and advocates are beginning to focus on age-appropriate interventions to help this population abstain from crime and avoid reentering the criminal justice system.

In 2013, the City of Chicago started a violence prevention program called Bridges to Pathways (Bridges) that aimed to improve the outcomes of young adults at high risk of violence. Developed by the Chicago Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS), Bridges was a pilot program for young men in Chicago who were involved with the criminal or juvenile justice systems. The program model was designed to curb youth violence and reduce recidivism among young men ages 17 to 21 years, who did not have a high school credential and had been incarcerated. The six-month program had four components: academic enrichment, social-emotional learning, workforce readiness, and intensive mentoring and case management. Bridges stopped running at the end of 2016 and was rebooted in 2017 as a new program.

This report presents the final findings from a feasibility study of Bridges that looks at the program’s design, implementation in the field, and short-term impacts. The evaluation of this new and still developing program includes an implementation study and small-scale randomized controlled trial and is designed to provide preliminary information on the model’s promise. The Bridges evaluation is a part of the larger Subsidized and Transitional Employment Demonstration, funded by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Administration for Children and Families called the Subsidized and Transitional Employment Demonstration (STED), which is testing various subsidized employment strategies in several cities across the country. MDRC is conducting the STED evaluation, along with its research partners MEF Associates, Decision Information Resources, and Branch Associates.

¹Justice Policy Institute (2016).

²Durose, Cooper, and Snyder (2014).

³Sweeten (2006); Pager, Western, and Sugie (2009).

Policy Context

Across the United States, approximately 400,000 young people ages 18 to 24 years are incarcerated in jail or prison. Policymakers are increasingly focused on enhancing services for this population that can improve their outcomes and increase public safety. Crime rates indicate that targeting this age group makes sense: In the critical years of one's late teens, the probability of committing crime increases, and criminal activity tends to become more serious and violent. However, criminal activity generally drops off as people enter their early twenties.⁴ This period is also one in which young offenders in many states move from the juvenile to criminal justice system. Young people who might soon age out of criminal activity surpass the age of jurisdiction for the juvenile system, which typically offers shorter sentences, community-based alternatives to incarceration, and diversion programs to keep young people out of the justice system. This issue is particularly important for young people of color as the racial disparities already present in the criminal justice system are even wider for this age group; for instance, young black men are nine times more likely to be incarcerated than young white men.⁵

Transition-aged youth have the following age-specific characteristics that may increase their likelihood to engage in criminal activity:

- **Young adults are cognitively distinct.** Research on brain development indicates that young people comprise a unique developmental category whose cognitive capacity is distinct from younger and older individuals. While they are more cognitively developed, they are more vulnerable to peer pressure and more likely to engage in risky behavior than their younger counterparts. Unlike adults, people ages 18 to 24 years tend to be more impulsive, exhibit less control over their emotions, and have a harder time understanding the consequences of their actions.⁶
- **Young adults age out of supportive systems.** As they enter adulthood, emerging adults tend to age out of public systems, such as education and child welfare systems, that can provide important protective functions.⁷ The loss of these supports can be exacerbated for young people with criminal backgrounds, as this population faces additional barriers to accessing education and employment,⁸ factors that increase the odds that a young person will come into contact with the criminal justice system.⁹

⁴National Institute of Justice (2014).

⁵Among the adult prison population in 2012, there were six black men in prison for every incarcerated white man. This ratio increased to 9 to 1 among 18 to 19-year-olds and 7 to 1 among 20 to 24-year-olds. Justice Policy Institute (2016).

⁶Council of State Governments Justice Center (2015).

⁷Council of State Governments Justice Center (2015).

⁸Pager, Western, and Sugie (2009); Aizer and Doyle (2013).

⁹Council of State Governments Justice Center (2015).

- **Young adults have distinct mental health treatment needs.** Transition-aged youth are likely to struggle with substance abuse, which has been linked to offending among all age groups. In addition, many mental health disorders first emerge in early adulthood. A large percentage of incarcerated individuals struggle with mental health disorders (approximately 70 percent of juveniles and 50 percent of adults).¹⁰

While these factors may increase young adults' likelihood to engage in criminal behavior, they also indicate that this age group has developmental, social, and systems needs that are distinct from both younger and older parts of the population. Advocates suggest that prevention and desistance programs aimed at younger children and older adults may not address the specific needs of this age group.

In the Chicago area where the Bridges evaluation has been taking place, several reforms are already underway that address young offenders. These reforms focus on improving the treatment of young people in juvenile detention facilities, raising the age that young people stay in juvenile custody, and increasing diversion to community-based services. To increase the availability and strength of community-based services, the City of Chicago has made investments in programs it hopes will deter violence among high-risk youth. These programs have included an array of models ranging from employment-focused interventions, cognitive behavioral therapy,¹¹ trauma-informed practice,¹² and mentoring.¹³ Many of these programs double as diversion opportunities, as they accept juveniles (ages 10 to 17 years) who have been diverted through a citywide partnership between DFSS and the Chicago Police Department.

In Chicago and elsewhere, criminal and juvenile justice reform advocates, policymakers, and administrators are increasingly in agreement that age-appropriate strategies for deterrence, custody, and reentry are needed for this population.¹⁴ However, while there is some evidence about strategies to reduce crime among younger children and older adults, little is known about what works to support young adults as they make the transition to adulthood. The evaluation of Bridges aims to help build evidence about how to curb violence and recidivism among transition-aged youth.

Service Models for Young People Involved with the Justice System

This section provides an overview of the evidence on various program models and interventions that aim to improve outcomes among young adults. It begins with a review of a multicomponent

¹⁰Council of State Governments Justice Center (2015).

¹¹City of Chicago (2014).

¹²Trauma-informed practice (sometimes called trauma-informed care) refers to strategies for working with clients that acknowledge the potential that a client has experienced trauma, help mitigate the effects of trauma, and actively work to avoid re-traumatization. City of Chicago (2014).

¹³Chicago Department of Family and Support Services (2018).

¹⁴Justice Policy Institute (2016).

program that, similar to Bridges, packaged a group of services to address the needs of young adults. Next, the section provides an overview of the evidence supporting each intervention component, including cognitive behavioral therapy, education, employment, and mentoring.

Multicomponent Service Models for Young Adults at High Risk of Violence

Many community organizations, some of them in Chicago, have developed initiatives to improve outcomes for young adults from populations similar to the one that Bridges targets. These programs often offer a comprehensive package of services because young people will likely need help in more than one area before they can reconnect with school or work. Some of these multiservice interventions have been evaluated and have been shown to benefit young people involved with the justice system in outcomes such as education, employment, and recidivism. The majority of these community-based programs, however, have not been rigorously evaluated.¹⁵ Also, many of the programs that have been evaluated focus on either juvenile or adult populations. Very few evaluations have specifically evaluated the programs' impacts on the population of young adults ages 18 to 24 years involved with the criminal justice system.

The One Summer Chicago Plus program adds to the evidence about the ability of multi-component programs to improve outcomes for young adults involved with the justice system. The program provides summer jobs and social-emotional learning classes to high school students from high-poverty neighborhoods in the City of Chicago. In the summer of 2012, program participants were matched with government or nonprofit summer jobs that paid minimum wage, were paired with a job mentor, and attended social-emotional learning classes.¹⁶ About one-fifth of the participants had prior involvement in the justice system.¹⁷ A randomized controlled trial evaluation of the 2012 program did not find any significant effects on education or employment outside of the program, but it did find that the program succeeded in decreasing arrests for violent crimes by 43 percent when compared with the control group.¹⁸ One Summer Plus was, again, evaluated the next summer in 2013. The program offered participants a six-week summer job placement in the government, nonprofit, or private sectors. The population of young people served that summer was more disadvantaged and comparable to Bridges' target population in that they were more involved in the criminal justice system (about 47 percent had prior arrest records) and more disconnected from school (only 51 percent were in school at the time of program application).¹⁹ The

¹⁵Massachusetts's Safe and Successful Youth Initiative, CeaseFire in Chicago, and Roca Inc.'s model, to name a few, are programs that are currently being implemented in communities, but that have not been rigorously evaluated as of the beginning of 2019. Some of these programs may have been evaluated using nonexperimental methods.

¹⁶The 2012 study contained two treatment subgroups: 50 percent of the program group received a job and access to a job mentor but no socio-emotional learning classes, and 50 percent of the program group received a job and access to a job mentor and socio-emotional learning classes. University of Chicago Urban Labs (2017) summarizing Davis and Heller (2017).

¹⁷University of Chicago Urban Labs (2017) summarizing Davis and Heller (2017).

¹⁸Heller (2014).

¹⁹University of Chicago Urban Labs (2017) summarizing Davis and Heller (2017).

applicants were older, with an average age of 18 years, and all applicants were male.²⁰ As with the 2012 study, the evaluation did not detect impacts on education and employment outside of the program, but it found that the program, again, resulted in a 33 percent decrease in arrests for violent crimes.²¹

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Programs

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) has been shown to be effective in reducing recidivism. CBT is a type of psychological treatment that attempts to help people make better decisions by helping them to understand how they think. By drawing a connection between thought and action, the tools of CBT enable individuals to identify, understand, and change thought patterns that lead to undesirable behaviors. New or restructured thinking patterns can lead individuals to make better choices.²² A meta-analysis of 58 CBT programs that served both adult and juvenile offenders found that CBT programs can decrease the probability of recidivating by 25 percent.²³ The meta-analysis concluded that CBT programs can work well for both juvenile and adult offenders.

However, there is limited evidence that CBT programs are effective for 18- to 24-year-olds who are involved with the justice system. On the one hand, CBT has been shown to be effective with a wide range of ages, and it could equally benefit young adults. One quasi-experimental study of the Arches Transformation Mentoring Program in New York lends evidence to this idea. The program used CBT principles to facilitate intensive group mentoring meetings and additional one-on-one mentoring sessions, and reduced recidivism in young adults on probation between the ages of 16 and 24 years.²⁴ On the other hand, few programs have been rigorously tested with young adults in particular, and they may not experience the gains observed among older adults. In addition, since CBT programs have rarely been developed with young adults involved with the justice system in mind, this population may be less likely to benefit from them. Young adults are harder to engage and less likely to consistently attend sessions.²⁵

Employment and Education Programs

In theory, employment can be an important factor in preventing recidivism among individuals who are involved with the criminal justice system. However, rigorous evidence to support the idea that post-release employment programs help decrease recidivism is mixed, and there have been only a handful of experimental evaluations on the effects of these programs on recidivism. Some programs have had promising results. One evaluation of an employment

²⁰University of Chicago Urban Labs (2017) summarizing Davis and Heller (2017).

²¹This effect was only reported as the treatment on the treated, or the local average treatment effect. The intent-to-treat estimator showed a 21 percent decrease in the number of arrests for violent crimes in the appendix of Davis and Heller (2017).

²²Feucht and Holt (2016).

²³Landenberger and Lipsey (2005).

²⁴Lynch et al. (2018).

²⁵Baldwin et al. (2018).

program in New York City that serves adult offenders found that the program decreased the conviction rate and the probability of being incarcerated in jail.²⁶ However, a meta-analysis of 53 correction-based education, vocation, and work programs that served adult offenders in 33 studies of all design types determined that the evidence was insufficient to conclude that work programs can reduce recidivism.²⁷ Little is known about whether employment programs can help deter crime, specifically among the young adult population, who may need different interventions than adult offenders.

Similarly, in theory, education can be considered an important factor in preventing recidivism as well. Deficits in education are related to crime: Correlational data show that individuals who have dropped out of school are 3.5 times more likely to be involved with the justice system than their peers who have earned a high school diploma.²⁸ However, there is a lack of rigorous evaluations that quantify the impact of a General Educational Development (GED) or basic education program. This is partially because programs for young people often include multiple service components that are evaluated as a whole, making it difficult to isolate the impact of the educational component.

Mentorship Programs

One of the most influential factors in a young person's life can be a relationship with a trusted adult. A non-experimental study suggested that ex-offenders between the ages of 18 and 34 years who participated in a program that facilitated one-on-one mentor relationships with volunteer adults from the community and group mentoring sessions, in conjunction with other support services, had lower rates of recidivism.²⁹ The quasi-experimental evaluation of the Arches Transformation Mentoring Program mentioned above found that the program reduced involvements with the criminal justice system. The evaluation credits the mentoring component in which participants were paired with "credible messengers," or mentors who shared a similar background with participants.³⁰ There is growing interest in developing stronger evidence about the impact of mentorship programs on young people who are involved with the justice system and are disconnected from school and work. As with the education and employment service components, mentorship is rarely implemented without other components, so it is difficult to isolate the impact of mentorship alone for young people involved with the juvenile justice system.

It is still not clear which types of education, employment, and mentoring interventions reduce violence and involvement with the justice system in the population of young adults age 18 to 24 years who have a history of involvement with the justice system. There is a growing body of evidence supporting CBT as an effective method, but the effects of CBT are much larger when CBT is combined with other program components.³¹ Bridges' multicomponent model combines

²⁶Redcross, Millenky, Rudd, and Levshin (2012).

²⁷Wilson, Gallagher, and MacKenzie (2000).

²⁸Reimer and Smink (2005).

²⁹Bauldry and McClanahan (2008).

³⁰Lynch et al. (2018).

³¹Landenberger and Lipsey (2005).

many of the promising services that researchers and policymakers hope will support young adult offenders. Lessons from the implementation and impacts of Bridges will contribute to the existing research evidence regarding what works to reduce violence and improve education and employment outcomes among young adults.

The Bridges to Pathways Model

Introduced in 2013, Bridges was designed to provide a multifaceted package of services to young men in Chicago who were involved with the criminal or juvenile justice systems. The program served 17- to 21-year-old men, who did not have a high school credential and who had been incarcerated at least once. As designed, Bridges was a three-phase program in which groups of young men (or, cohorts) participated in a sequence of academic, employment, and social-emotional well-being activities together. Over the phases, cohorts would take online courses toward either a high school diploma or a high school equivalency certificate (GED certificate), finish a five-week employability skills training course, work a 12-week subsidized internship, and complete cognitive-behavioral therapy workshops designed to help curb criminogenic thinking, or thought patterns believed to lead to criminal behavior. Throughout the program, participants would also receive intensive mentoring and case management. These services would be provided over a six-month period, with a three-month follow-up period. Bridges' stated goals were to help participants attain a high school credential, obtain unsubsidized employment, and reduce their involvement with the criminal justice system.

The program was funded by the City of Chicago's Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services through the STED grant. The Bridges program was a part of DFSS's Youth Services portfolio, which coordinates services focused on out-of-school time and youth workforce development. DFSS provided program oversight and management throughout its implementation. Through a competitive procurement process, DFSS selected Central States SER (SER) and SGA Youth and Family Services (SGA), two well-established, Chicago-based community service organizations, to operate Bridges. Both providers had experience serving young adults from low-income, high-risk communities. Likewise, they both had experience offering elements of Bridges' service components.

Program Evolution

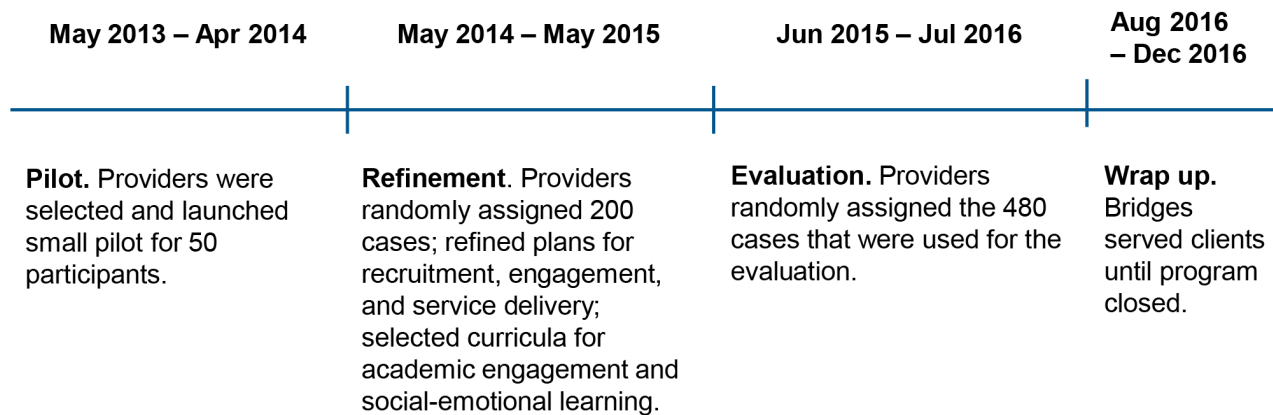
The Bridges evaluation provides a unique opportunity to learn about a program in its formative stages. When Bridges was launched in 2013, many elements of the program and its services were still in development. The program struggled to find interested candidates for the program, and many young people enrolled in it but never took up the services. The program model shifted as the providers searched for promising recruitment channels, established relationships with service partners, and honed strategies to keep participants engaged in program services. During this time, key service elements were adopted, such as core curricula for the education and social-emotional learning components.

After running for close to two years, the program had stabilized in significant ways. The implementation and random assignment studies focus on how the program was implemented from June 2015 through July 2016. During the evaluation, providers continued to innovate the program as they learned more about the needs of their clients. Throughout the program’s development and evaluation, MDRC staff provided technical assistance to the program providers to help refine plans for service delivery.

Bridges closed its doors in December 2016 when the program’s funding expired. DFSS has since launched a new version of the program that builds on lessons learned during this pilot period. This report’s conclusion provides additional details about the new version of Bridges. Figure 1.1 provides an overview of Bridges’ programmatic development.

Figure 1.1

Bridges to Pathways Timeline



Evaluation Design and Data Sources

The Bridges program brought a complex package of services to a hard-to-serve population. A developing program with a challenging objective, Bridges was not ready for a rigorous impact study at the time of this evaluation. Rigorous impact studies, such as large-scale randomized controlled trials or effectiveness tests, produce the strongest evidence that a particular intervention works to achieve a desired outcome. However, before a new program such as Bridges is ready for this kind of study, it can benefit from undergoing feasibility testing. Feasibility studies can help researchers understand if a proposed intervention is possible to operate and if it shows promise of achieving its intended effects. Feasibility assessments can help strengthen an intervention so that a stronger, more accurate test can be conducted under robust evaluation conditions.

The feasibility study of Bridges offered the research team a unique opportunity to gather valuable information about the model’s implementation in the field, the characteristics and

engagement of participants, and the potential of the program to reduce recidivism. The Bridges evaluation included an implementation study to answer questions about the demand for the program and its operations. In addition, the evaluation included a small-scale random assignment study to ascertain the promise of the program's capacity to improve short-term outcomes. The Bridges evaluation addresses the following four primary questions:

1. **What were the characteristics of the participants who entered Bridges?** Does the enrolled sample align with the program's target population? How do the backgrounds and needs of this population affect how services are delivered?
2. **How did the providers implement the program and what adjustments did they make over time?** What strategies did providers use to recruit and enroll the target population? How did they deliver core services? How did providers adjust their strategies in these areas, why were those adjustments made, and what lessons do they yield for practitioners working with this population?
3. **What were the duration and intensity of the participants' engagement in the program?** Will highly vulnerable and high-risk young adults engage in a program such as Bridges for long enough to achieve key outcomes such as attaining a diploma or an unsubsidized job? What strategies did they use to encourage participants to remain in the program? What strategies appear to be successful at encouraging persistence? What strategies are less effective?
4. **What were the preliminary impacts of Bridges on outcomes for young adults?** Does the program show promise to improve education and employment outcomes? Do the results indicate that the intervention may decrease violence and recidivism?

The Bridges evaluation enrolled 480 young people between June 2015 and July 2016. For this small-scale impact study, random assignment was stratified at the provider level and took place at two program providers across four locations. The research team randomly assigned 60 percent of the sample to the program group and 40 percent to the control group.

- **The program group.** The 289 individuals who were randomly assigned to this group were offered Bridges program services. As designed, these services included online high school diploma or GED instruction, cognitive behavioral therapy workshops, employability skills training and a subsidized internship, and intensive case management and mentoring.
- **The control group.** The 191 individuals who were randomly assigned to this group were not offered Bridges services but were able to access other services that were available in the community, including other non-Bridges services offered at the agencies operating Bridges.

By measuring outcomes for both the program and control groups over time, it is possible to assess whether Bridges services led to better outcomes for the program group than would have happened in the absence of the program, as represented by the control group. Any statistically

significant differences that emerge between the two groups would be considered Bridges' "impacts," or effects, because owing to the random assignment design, the research groups should be comparable on both measured and unmeasured characteristics at the time of study enrollment. Because this feasibility study used a small sample size and therefore has limited statistical power, any impact findings are best understood as indications of promising practices that further research might explore.

The implementation study and impact study drew from both qualitative and quantitative data sources.³² The implementation study aimed to learn more about how the program was planned, offered, and received; the characteristics of participants; and the local context and service environments in which the program operated. It also aimed to provide insights into what factors are critical to its operation, as well as whether and how the program might scale up in the future. Data sources for the implementation study included the following:

- **Baseline data.** Bridges staff collected background data on all sample members at the time of study enrollment. These data included information about age, race and ethnicity, parenting status, educational attainment, employment history, and criminal background.
- **Interviews and observations.** Between 2013 and 2015, the research team visited the Bridges locations on multiple occasions to interview key program staff, including program managers, mentors, academic instructors, and social-emotional learning instructors. Interviews were also conducted with executive staff from SGA, SER, and DFSS. During the visits, the research staff observed key program services, such as high school diploma and GED lessons, social-emotional learning workshops, and employability skills training classes. Additionally, both providers arranged for the research team to visit worksites that hosted Bridges interns. During these visits, the team interviewed employers and observed the worksite environment and operations.
- **Program participation data.** DFSS created a management information system for the Bridges program to track young people's attendance and participation in various program activities.
- **Participants' pay and stipend records.** The research team obtained administrative records from both providers about participants' earnings through stipends for attendance and subsidized wages.
- **In-depth interviews with participants and focus groups.** The research team recruited 16 young men in Bridges to participate in in-depth interviews. The purpose of the interviews was to gain a deeper understanding of the obstacles young people involved with the justice system face to engaging with school and work and avoiding criminal activities and influences. The research team

³²MDRC's Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved all project data collection plans at the start of the project and on an ongoing basis.

selected participants from each provider who volunteered to participate and spoke with them near the beginning of their time in the program. In 10 cases, the research team was able to learn about the participants' outcomes through follow-up interviews with the participants or program staff. In addition, the research team completed one focus group with participants at each provider to gain insight into participants' perspectives on Bridges and their experiences with the program.

- **Time study.** The research team conducted a survey of program staff's hours at work. Over a two-week period, the research team collected information about how the program's 15 full- and part-time staff allocated their time.
- **Documentation from the research staff who monitored program operations.** Research staff monitored program operations and provided technical assistance to the program from 2013 to 2016.

As noted above, the evaluation also included a small-scale random assignment study to see whether the intervention has promise to improve outcomes for its target population. The research team estimated the program's early impacts on key outcomes by measuring them approximately one year after participants enrolled in the study. These outcomes include employment and earnings, education and training, personal well-being, and involvement with the criminal justice system. The analysis highlights differences in service receipt between members of the program and control groups, as well as outcomes on education and employment. In addition, the random assignment study evaluated the overall impact the program had on criminal justice outcomes, such as arrests and incarceration. Data sources for the impact analysis included the following:

- **Survey data.** The survey firm Decision Information Resources administered a survey to sample members randomly assigned through June 2016. The survey was administered approximately 11 months after random assignment. The survey included questions about employment, education- and training-related service receipt and outcomes; household composition, income, and material hardship; health, well-being, and psychosocial outcomes; criminal history; and social support and networks. It was completed by 228 of the 480 sample members (137 program group members and 91 control group members), resulting in a response rate of nearly 50 percent. This response rate is considerably lower than typically achieved in MDRC studies, raising concerns about the possibility of biased results due to attrition. Nevertheless, the response rates are similar for both research groups. The attrition standard developed by the What Works Clearinghouse takes into account both the overall attrition rate and the differential between research groups. According to this standard, the overall attrition rate of 53 percent and a differential between the two groups of 0.2 percentage points are considered within the acceptable level of potential bias.³³ See

³³What Works Clearinghouse (2017).

Appendix A for more information about the survey sample results and an analysis of the extent to which results may be biased by nonresponse.

- **Employment and earnings records.** The research team used quarterly earnings data from the National Directory of New Hires (NDNH) to measure employment outcomes. Maintained by the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement, the NDNH contains data collected by state workforce agencies for jobs covered by unemployment insurance, and on federal employment reported by the federal government. These jobs include most formal employment, with the main exception of independent contract employment. NDNH data were reviewed for the 251 sample members (or approximately half the sample) who provided a Social Security Number at the time of random assignment. See Appendix A for more information about the employment and earnings results and how limited data availability affected them.
- **Criminal justice data.** The research team collected jail data from the Cook County Sheriff's Office and arrest and conviction data from the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (ICJIA). The information collected includes jail, arrest, and convictions data on study sample members before, during, and up to a year after study enrollment. Some adjudication and detention information on juveniles may not be present in these data. Depending on the crime, individuals who committed a crime before the age of 18 may have been adjudicated in the juvenile justice system. In addition to lacking information on adjudications that occurred in juvenile courts, the data from ICJIA do not capture outcomes for violations of local ordinance, and a high proportion of misdemeanor conviction records were missing. As a result, conviction rates could not be accurately measured, and are not included in this report.

Organization of This Report

The remainder of this report is divided into the following chapters. Chapter 2 presents the intended design, structure, and staffing of the Bridges program. Chapter 3 outlines recruitment and enrollment practices, as well as the characteristics of the study sample. Chapter 4 presents findings about participation in the program, as well as strategies to keep participants engaged through ongoing case management and mentoring services. Chapter 5 details the implementation of the program's other services: academic enrichment, social-emotional learning, and workforce readiness. Chapter 6 presents information on the differences in service receipt and outcomes related to support and mentorship, education, employment, and personal well-being. It also describes findings on the differences between the program and control groups on criminal justice outcomes. Finally, Chapter 7 concludes the report by considering lessons drawn from the Bridges evaluation and looking ahead to the future of the program.

Chapter 2

Background and Program Design and Structure

The City of Chicago launched the Bridges to Pathways (Bridges) program as part of its strategy to reduce violence by investing in programs for young adults. This chapter begins by providing background information about the communities targeted by Bridges. It then describes the program model's intended approach. While this chapter describes the model as it was designed, Chapters 4 and 5 provide details about how the services were implemented in practice.

Summary

- **The communities served by Bridges struggle with high rates of poverty, gang activity, and violence. In addition, residents have limited access to services, education, and employment opportunities.**
- **The Bridges program model was designed to have four components that provided education, employment, mental health, and supportive services. During the program, participants would earn either a high school diploma or equivalency credential, work in a subsidized internship, and obtain unsubsidized employment.**
- **The program model included a six-month service provision period, followed by a three-month follow-up period. As designed, participants would move through different phases of the program as cohorts.**

Background

Chicago is a highly segregated city with high rates of crime that disproportionately affect its low-income and minority communities.¹ The Bridges to Pathways program operated in some of Chicago's most disadvantaged neighborhoods. In these communities, 40 to 60 percent of residents live below the poverty line.²

- **The communities served by Bridges struggle with high rates of poverty, gang activity, and violence, as well as limited access to services, education, and employment opportunities.**

Chicago's minority youth, who primarily reside in these neighborhoods, often have poorer outcomes in education and employment. Low-income and minority students are more

¹Silver (2015).

²Dodge (2014).

likely to attend Chicago Public Schools³ — a school system that has struggled to meet national targets of success and has low graduation rates.⁴ Minority youth in Chicago face some of the highest unemployment rates. The unemployment rate in Illinois in 2015, the year the Bridges evaluation began, was 5.9 percent, but it was more than three times higher for Hispanic and African-American young men between the ages of 20 and 24 years (15.4 and 17.5 percent, respectively).⁵

Crime deeply affects the communities of the young adults targeted by the Bridges program. Violent crime in Chicago is concentrated in neighborhoods with high poverty rates. Violent crimes disproportionately affect communities of color in Chicago, and members of minority groups are more likely to be both offenders and victims of violent crimes.⁶ Gun violence and gang activity are prevalent in the neighborhoods of Bridges’ participants. Chicago is notoriously dubbed the “gang capital of the United States,” and gang activity has been a noted factor in crimes.⁷ Chicago also has a high prevalence of gun violence, and 90 percent of homicides in Chicago are committed with a firearm. In 2016, there were 27.8 homicides per 100,000 people, which is far greater than the homicide rate in New York (3.9 per 100,000 residents) and Los Angeles (7.4 per 100,000 residents). The City of Chicago saw a marked spike in the homicide rate in 2016. This spike amounted to a 58 percent increase over the prior year and was accompanied by a 43 percent rise in nonfatal shootings.⁸

The Bridges program operated in areas characterized by relatively high rates of poverty and violence. Figures 2.1 and 2.2 present maps of the program site locations in relation to rates of crime and poverty in the city. The program providers identified these locations as sites that would be easy and safe for participants to access, as they were in communities in which many potential participants lived and were accessible by public transit. The sites were located in the Roseland, Englewood, Little Village, and Healy neighborhoods. Notably, the Healy location shared a building with the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice.

Program Design

By targeting young people in the southern and western areas of Chicago, the Bridges model aimed to improve education and employment outcomes for young men in Chicago involved with the justice system through a multicomponent program offering four core services: academic enrichment, social-emotional learning, workforce-readiness training, and mentorship and case management. The program aimed to reduce recidivism, increase high school credential attainment rates, and enhance employment outcomes, as shown in Figure 2.3.

³Quick (2016).

⁴Perez (2018).

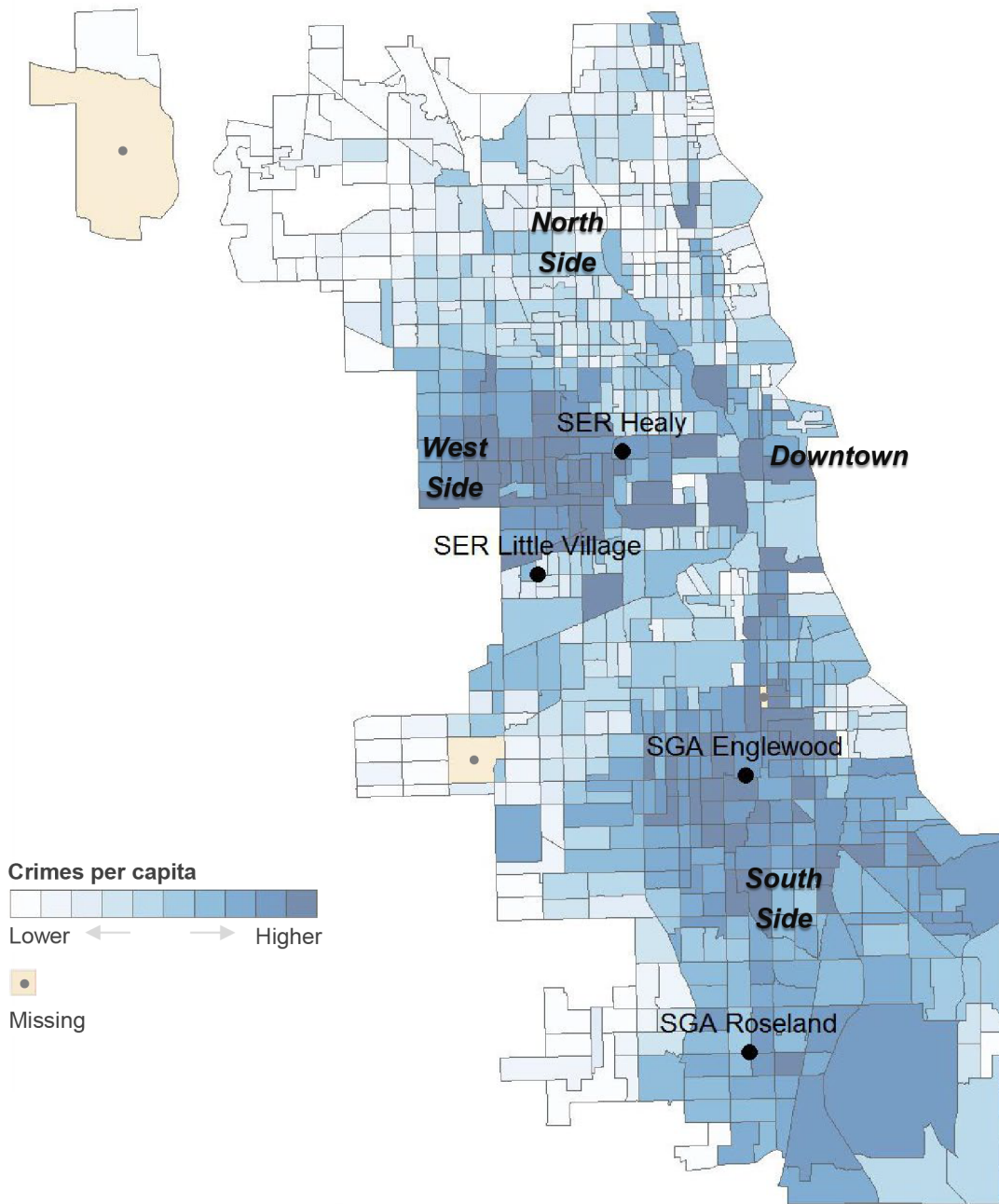
⁵U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018).

⁶City of Chicago, Mayor’s Commission for a Safer Chicago (n.d.).

⁷CBS News (2013).

⁸University of Chicago Crime Lab (2017).

Figure 2.1
Concentration of Crime in the City of Chicago



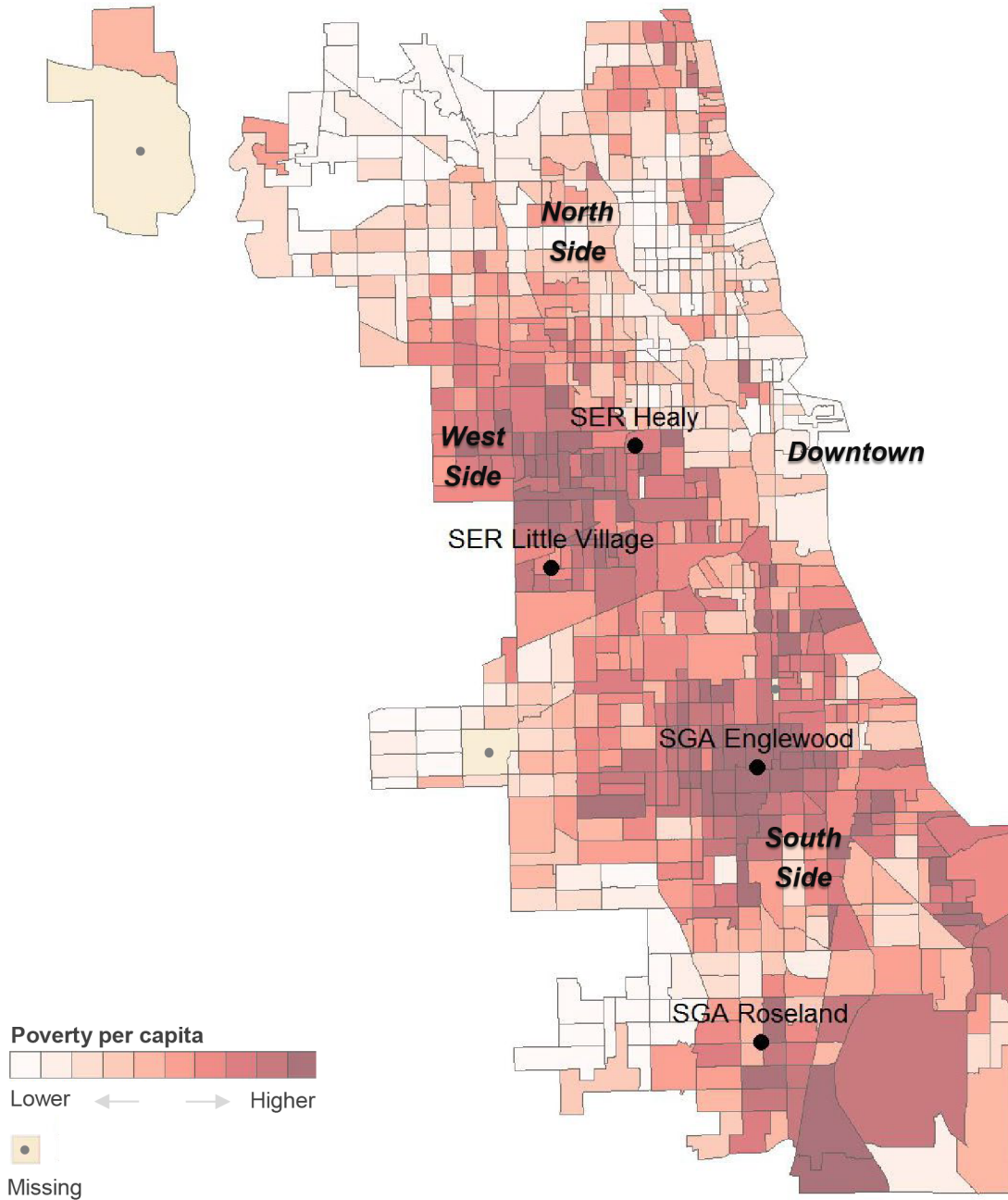
SOURCES: All crime reports filed in the city of Chicago in 2014, as reported in the City of Chicago crime portal; the annual crime per capita controlled for the number of people living in each census tract, as reported by the U.S. Census Bureau, 2010-2014 American Community Survey five-year estimates.

NOTES: The census tracts were divided into deciles. The lightest shade corresponds to the lowest decile, where there were 0 to 0.04 crimes per resident. The darkest shade corresponds to the highest decile, where there were 0.25 to 1.17 crimes per resident.

Less than 1 percent of crimes did not have a reported location and were dropped from the analysis.

Crime rates could not be calculated for the three census tracts marked as missing because they had a population of 0; these census tracts contained transportation centers such as airports.

Figure 2.2
Concentration of Poverty in the City of Chicago



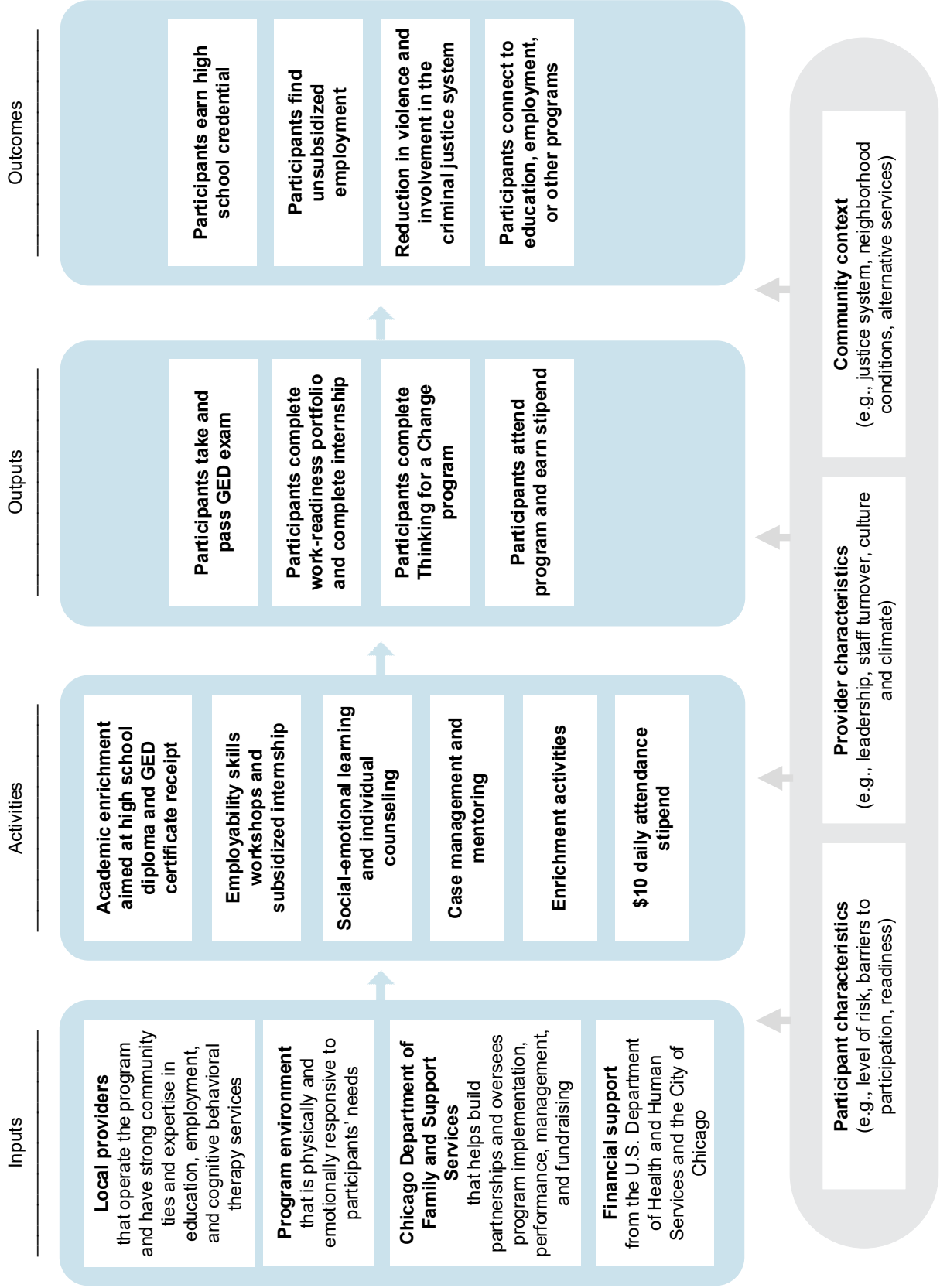
SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010-2014 American Community Survey five-year estimates.

NOTES: The census tracts were divided into deciles. The lightest shade corresponds to the lowest decile, where less than 7 percent of residents live below the poverty rate. The darkest shade corresponds to the highest decile, where more than 45 percent of residents live below the poverty rate.

Poverty rates could not be calculated for the three census tracts marked as missing because they had a population of 0; these census tracts contained transportation centers such as airports.

The poverty rate is calculated by the U.S. Census Bureau and reflects the proportion of individuals living below the poverty threshold, as defined by the Office of Management and Budget.

Figure 2.3
Bridges to Pathways Logic Model



NOTE: GED = General Educational Development.

- **The Bridges program model was designed to help participants earn a high school credential, gain work experience through a subsidized internship, and obtain unsubsidized employment.**

Academic Enrichment

The model featured academic enrichment services to help young adults earn a high school diploma or high school equivalency certificate through the General Educational Development (GED) exam. Before launching Bridges, the Chicago Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS) had learned that young people exiting juvenile detention in Chicago were highly interested in earning a high school diploma. At the time, DFSS did not offer any degree granting programs, and there were few opportunities for this population to earn a diploma outside of traditional and alternative schools. In creating Bridges, DFSS aimed to fill a gap in service offerings and respond to young people's needs.

The planned intervention used a self-paced, online education program through which participants worked toward their high school diploma or GED certificate. As designed, the academic enrichment component blended these online lessons with classroom instruction and individual tutoring. DFSS selected an education platform that was also used in the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice, a key referral partner. The intention was for participants to seamlessly continue any academic work they started in the facility.

Social Emotional Learning and Individual Counseling

The model featured social-emotional learning (SEL) workshops that aimed to increase participants' awareness of thought patterns and promote skills in anger management, conflict resolution, decision making, and other areas. The program plan made use of two cohort-based curricula designed for populations involved with the justice system.

- The program plan included a primary SEL curricula called Thinking for a Change (T4C), an evidence-based, cognitive behavioral curriculum developed by the National Institute of Corrections for individuals involved with the juvenile and criminal justice systems. The curriculum was designed to promote cognitive self-change, social skills, and problem-solving skills by equipping participants with concrete processes to promote self-reflection that can reveal antisocial thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and beliefs; processes to promote prosocial behaviors; and processes to address stressful situations in real life.⁹
- The program design also included a second SEL curriculum built around participant-led service learning projects. It aimed to help prepare participants for college, a career, and active citizenship. The curriculum promoted soft skills such as collaboration and accountability. It featured a youth-led service learning project in which group members developed a project to benefit their

⁹Bridges used the third edition of T4C; a fourth edition is now available.

community, and that simultaneously improved participants' skills and created a positive group dynamic.

The Bridges model also offered individual counseling with SEL instructors on an as-needed basis. A psychologist was on call to help counselors with challenging cases.

Workforce Readiness

The workforce-readiness component was designed to prepare young people to find and retain unsubsidized employment through employability skills training workshops and subsidized internships. Taught by mentors, employability skills training workshops aimed to give participants the soft skills they needed to succeed in their subsidized internships. In addition, the workshops were intended to help participants obtain unsubsidized jobs by developing their job search, résumé writing, and interviewing skills. The program model anticipated that participants would exit the training with an employment portfolio consisting of a résumé, an interview skills document, and a mock job application.

After completing the employability skills training, participants were expected to work in a subsidized internship. In subsidized employment and internship programs, federal, state, or other funding covers some or all of an employee's wages or training for a period of time. Subsidized employment programs give employers an incentive to take a chance on individuals who they may not otherwise hire.

The model intended for participants to secure unsubsidized employment before the end of the program with the support of program staff.

Mentorship and Case Management

The Bridges model also featured wraparound services that included case management, transportation and other supportive services, individualized service plans, and coordination with representatives from justice agencies. These services were intended to be delivered by staff members with similar backgrounds to program participants and who could serve as role models.

Program Structure

The Bridges model included daily programming (Monday through Friday) that consisted of five hours of on-site activities each day and additional time for subsidized work. Academic, SEL, and workforce services took place Mondays through Thursdays. Once per week, participants came together for enrichment activities, such as college tours, movies, or basketball tournaments. Each program location could make their own daily schedule and customize the start, end, and break times. Figure 2.4 provides an overview of a sample weekly program schedule.

- **Bridges was designed for groups of participants to move through different programmatic phases over a six-month period.**

Figure 2.4

Bridges to Pathways Weekly Program Structure

	Monday-Thursday		Friday
	Phase I	Phases II, III	Phases I, II, III
10:00-10:30am	Breakfast	Breakfast	Enrichment activities
10:30am-12:00pm	Academic enrichment	Academic enrichment	
12:00-12:30pm	Lunch	Lunch	
1:00-2:00pm	Social-emotional learning	Social-emotional learning	
2:00-3:00pm	Employability skills training	Subsidized internship	
3:00-5:00pm			

Bridges was intended to be as a six-monthlong program in which groups of participants (or cohorts) build skills together as they progressed through three different phases of academic, SEL, and workforce development activities and a follow-up period. Table 2.1 shows the program phases and activities as designed.

- Phase I:** In the first five weeks of the program, participants attend Bridges for approximately five hours per day. They earn \$10 per day for their participation. For the academic enrichment component, participants take the Test for Adult Basic Education assessment, determine whether they will work toward their high school diploma or GED certificate, and begin their academic classes. In addition, participants complete an online financial literacy program. At the same time, cohorts begin SEL workshops together and complete the first seven lessons of T4C. If needed, participants start individual counseling. Finally, participants complete career development training workshops and develop employment portfolios. In this first phase, participants spend six hours per week on academics and four hours per week in social-emotional learning, and another four hours in employability skills training. Their total time in the program per week is 25 hours, including meals and Friday enrichment activities.

Table 2.1

Bridges to Pathways Program Phases

	Phase I Weeks 1-5	Phase II Weeks 6-17	Phase III Weeks 18-25
Academic enrichment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Complete Test of Adult Basic Education - Set academic goals and select high school diploma or GED certificate pathway - Begin academic work - Complete online financial education program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continue work toward academic goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continue work towards academic goals - Ideally attain a high school diploma or GED certificate, or receive placement to continue work
Social-emotional learning and counseling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Complete lessons 1-7 of Thinking for a Change - Participate in one-on-one counseling as needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continue Thinking for a Change lessons - Begin second social-emotional learning curriculum focused on service learning - Participate in one-on-one counseling as needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participate in 1:1 counseling as needed
Workforce readiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop soft skills necessary to attain a job and to succeed in a professional environment - Complete employment portfolio: resume, interview skills document, and mock job application 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Begin 12-week internship or subsidized employment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Attain unsubsidized employment

NOTE: GED = General Educational Development.

- **Phase II:** In the sixth through seventeenth weeks, participants continue working toward their academic goals. In the SEL component, the instructors begin supplementing their primary curriculum with service learning and complete both curricula. Individual counseling remains available to participants. Rather than participate in career-readiness training workshops, young people begin their subsidized internships, which employ participants for approximately 10 to 12 hours per week for 12 weeks. Participants continue to spend six hours per week on academics and four hours per week on social-emotional learning. The total hours they are scheduled to spend in Bridges during Phase II is 33 hours per week, including meals and Friday enrichment activities.

- **Phase III:** In the final weeks — the eighteenth through twenty-fifth weeks — participants close out services at Bridges. Ideally, participants earn their high school diploma or GED, complete their individual counseling, and obtain unsubsidized employment. While they continue to participate in academic and SEL activities, these activities taper off in Phase III to give them more flexibility to meet work obligations.
- **Follow-up:** After the program, participants receive follow-up services for 13 weeks to help them address issues related to employment, education, and other needs.

Program Providers and Staffing

DFSS’s Office of Children and Youth Services provided program-wide management for Bridges. DFSS was tasked with facilitating partnerships with local justice agencies, overseeing the program’s performance by setting and monitoring progress toward benchmarks, managing the budget, and developing the program’s management information system. Through a competitive procurement process, DFSS selected the two Chicago-based social service agencies that operated Bridges: Central States SER (SER) and SGA Youth and Family Services (SGA).

SER is a workforce development and education nonprofit that has been operating in Cook County for 30 years. It offers programs for youth and adults that aim to promote the economic self-sufficiency and upward mobility of local residents through education and employment. Their youth programs include Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act and summer youth employment programs, afterschool programs, academic enrichment programs for young people involved with gangs, and mentoring programs, among others. SER is part of SERCO Inc., which offers workforce, employment, and job search services across the country.

SGA provides social services that aim to empower at-risk children, families, and communities. The 108-year-old agency provides services throughout Chicago, with a focus on Chicago’s western and southern neighborhoods. SGA offers an array of services ranging from prenatal health care to workforce programs for young adults. The integration of mental and emotional health services into their programs is a hallmark of the agency, and they routinely employ trauma-informed and strengths-based approaches.

Each program provider operated two Bridges site locations where they were responsible for service delivery, recruitment, and staffing. Program plans included staffing each site with a mentor, an academic instructor, and a SEL instructor. By design, the staff-to-participant ratio was low, so the staff would be able to provide intensive support. Figure 2.5 provides more information about staff duties as designed.

- **Program directors and coordinator:** A program director for each provider managed operations at both of their locations. Program directors split their time between Bridges and other programs. In addition to a program director,

Figure 2.5

Program Staffing Structure and Job Duties

Bridges to Pathways Program			
Department of Family and Support Services			
Juvenile justice programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide program oversight and monitoring - Develop monitoring information system - Provide fiscal management and contribute to funding 		
Central States SER		SGA Youth and Family Services	
Little Village Center	Healy	Roseland	Englewood
Cross-site staff <i>Shared across a provider's program sites</i>			
Program director	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Split time between Bridges and other programs for young people at SGA or SER - Oversee program operations, data collection, and research implementation 		
Program coordinator (SGA only)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide support to staff and mentor participants 		
Site-specific staff <i>Staffed at each location</i>			
Mentor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide mentorship and case management - Facilitate employability skills training workshops - Develop internship worksites, monitor internship performance - Track attendance for incentive and worksite payments 		
Academic instructor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Facilitate academic workshops - Provide individual instruction as needed - Plan and coordinate General Educational Development (GED) testing - Administer Test of Adult Basic Education 		
Social-emotional learning (SEL) instructor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Facilitate SEL workshops - Provide individual counseling - Create and monitor progress towards individual service plan goals 		
Shared staff responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recruit and enroll participants - Develop strong relationships with youth - Conduct home visits and other reengagement activities 		

SGA's staffing plan included a program coordinator to help oversee day-to-day operations.

- **Mentors:** All mentors worked full time in the Bridges program. In addition to providing mentorship and case management, mentors taught employability skills workshops, developed subsidized internships, monitored performance at worksites, and tracked participants' attendance. Mentors had a variety of professional backgrounds including in case management, violence prevention, and youth services. Directors were encouraged to hire mentors who shared similar backgrounds with youth including former involvement with gangs or the justice system.
- **Academic instructors:** Academic instructors were responsible for developing and teaching academic enrichment lessons and coordinating GED testing. Academic instructors were not required to be certified teachers. They worked full or part time in the Bridges program.
- **SEL instructors:** SEL instructors facilitated workshops and provided counseling to participants. All SEL instructors were required to have a master's degree in social work, counseling, or a related field, as well as experience providing counseling. All SEL instructors were hired and employed by SGA, which regularly integrates mental health into its programming and has the infrastructure to support SEL counselors, including clinical supervisors and on-call psychologists. SEL instructors worked on Bridges full or part time.

Instructors were responsible for their own program components and for developing individualized plans for participants. Generally, each provider staffed one full-time academic instructor and one full-time SEL instructor who played a leading role in developing the service component. The program intended for them to work closely with their part-time counterparts to share materials and strategies.

Chapter 3

Recruitment, Enrollment, and Study Sample Characteristics

This section describes the strategies that the Bridges to Pathways (Bridges) staff used to recruit eligible young adults and the characteristics of individuals who enrolled in the program.

Key Findings

- **Bridges aimed to minimize barriers to enrollment in order to enroll a hard-to-reach, high-risk population.**
- **Program providers used a variety of recruitment strategies and sources to locate potential participants. Despite their efforts, recruitment remained a challenge for providers.**
- **The Bridges study sample was composed of young men who were disconnected from education and employment and were heavily involved with the criminal justice system.**

Eligibility

To enter the Bridges program, potential enrollees had to consent to participate in the evaluation and random assignment. Only participants in the study who were randomly assigned to the program group were able to enroll in Bridges. Study participants had to identify as male, be between the ages of 17 and 21 years, and lack a high school credential. Additionally, they had to report that they had been incarcerated at least once.

- **Bridges aimed to minimize barriers to enrollment in order to enroll a hard-to-reach, high-risk population.**

To recruit a hard-to-reach, highly disconnected youth population, the program did not require any additional eligibility criteria or screening. Staff members were committed to serving young men that they thought could benefit from the program, often individuals who were not connected to school, work, or other programs. To reach these young people, they did not impose requirements related to academic ability, credit standing, or work experience.

Recruitment

The random assignment design of the Bridges evaluation meant that the providers had to recruit young people who would be assigned to either a program group, which was invited to participate in Bridges, or a control group, which could not participate in Bridges but was eligible for other

services available to them in the community. Upon enrollment in the study, 60 percent of young people were randomly assigned to the program group, and 40 percent were randomly assigned to the control group. Given this ratio, providers recruited and enrolled nearly double the young people who would participate in the program.

Bridges staff members continuously recruited throughout the program cycle, though they would ramp up their recruitment efforts leading up to the launch of a new cohort (approximately every two months). Recruiting potential participants near a cohort's start date minimized the wait time between when a participant enrolls in and begins the program, which staff members believed increased the likelihood that a young person would attend the program. Providers aimed to have cohorts of about 10 to 12 participants. Each program site and its respective staff members were responsible for filling the slots in their own sites' cohorts.¹ Recruiting young people to the program required an “all-hands-on-deck” approach; all program staff members supported the effort, though mentors typically played the largest role.

- **Program providers used a variety of recruitment strategies and sources to locate potential participants. Despite their efforts, recruitment remained a challenge for providers.**

The Bridges model originally intended for program providers to recruit solely through referrals from the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice. After struggling to enroll enough young people to fill the slots in their cohorts, providers reached out to other local organizations and agencies to meet their enrollment goals. Providers ultimately recruited from a variety of sources, shown in Table 3.1. Combined, adult and juvenile justice agencies, including Cook County Jail, probation offices, and reporting centers made up the largest source from which providers recruited participants (63 percent), with providers recruiting most participants from juvenile justice agencies (41 percent). Community partners, such as local community service organizations, were also a key source from which providers recruited participants (21 percent). Recruitment from other sources — such as community outreach and leveraging the personal networks of staff members and participants — also contributed to enrollment in the program (17 percent).

Recruitment methods and sources varied across sites, providers, and individual staff members. Some common strategies included making presentations in juvenile and criminal justice facilities and jails, setting up tables at community events, and reaching out to and engaging young people they encountered in parks, on street corners, and in other locations in their communities. When promoting the program, staff members emphasized their commitment to supporting participants and attempted to establish common ground with participants right away. Staff members who had been incarcerated or participated in gang activities readily shared that they had turned their lives around and could help potential participants do the same. The opportunity to

¹Program staff members would occasionally refer participants to other Bridges locations that were better suited for them. Since many young people in the target population were affiliated with gangs, internal referrals might occur if a young person felt unsafe traveling to or through the territory of a conflicting gang to reach the program site.

Table 3.1

Recruitment Sources of Bridges to Pathways

Recruitment Source (%)	Full Sample
Juvenile justice agencies	40.5
Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice	29.0
Juvenile probation	11.5
Criminal justice agencies	22.1
Illinois Department of Corrections	5.8
Adult parole	1.9
Adult probation	1.9
Cook County Jail	9.2
Adult Day Reporting Center	3.3
Other sources	37.4
Community partner	20.7
Other	16.7
Sample size	480

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on baseline survey data.

NOTES: Sample includes individuals randomly assigned between June 2015 and July 2016.

"Other" includes student referral and program outreach.

earn a high school credential was a key selling point. The program’s daily \$10 stipend and subsidized internships were also designed as incentives to participate; however, staff members reported that some potential participants were deterred by the low wages offered by the program. Chapter 5 provides more information about internship wages.

The program also received referrals from partnering organizations, many of which were justice system agencies. One partner reported that the multiservice program was an appealing place to refer young people in need of several services. They explained, “If you have a kid that needs school *and* a job ... they literally can do both at the same time [at Bridges], and they don’t have to go here for one thing and here for another thing. They can do it all at once.”

Bridges staff members uniformly relied on personal relationships to facilitate recruitment. Developing relationships with personnel at referral agencies, especially juvenile and criminal justice agencies, was key. As a condition of their parole, monitoring, or probation, young people may be mandated to participate in certain activities, such as education or work. Parole and probation personnel charged with tracking young people’s participation in these activities needed to feel confident that Bridges would hold participants accountable to their obligations and that they would be made aware if participants did not uphold them. Bridges mentors and program directors helped maintain these relationships by keeping open lines of communication with these personnel

and sending them regular attendance reports. Staff members also used their personal and professional networks and those of participants to recruit young people into the program. They reported that these word-of-mouth referrals were some of the best recruitment channels.

Though Bridges eventually established reliable recruitment partnerships, these partnerships took time to develop and strengthen. For example, providers attempted to enroll young people awaiting release from the Cook County Jail. Bridges staff members visited Cook County Jail on evenings and weekends to tell young people about the program. They found it difficult to discern who among the young people bored and anxious to go home were actually interested in participating in Bridges. They enrolled any eligible young man who provided consent. As a result, many young people at the jail enrolled in the program but did not take up services. Many provided incorrect contact information, making it impossible for Bridges staff members to engage them in the program or remove barriers to their participation.

Partners needed to learn Bridges' programmatic structure and eligibility requirements. Referrals from a Day Reporting Center provides a good example. Day Reporting Centers are one-stop centers for reentry services and resources for individuals under parole supervision; they are operated by the Illinois Department of Corrections. Early in its partnership with a local Day Reporting Center, Bridges enrolled many young people referred by the agency that had conflicting obligations that prevented them from being able to attend the program. Similar to those young people who enrolled in Bridges at the Cook County Jail, most of these young people did not take up program services. Overtime, Bridges established a stronger recruitment partnership with the Day Reporting Center. Bridges staff members continued to refine their recruitment methods throughout the program.

Despite consistently improving their recruitment practices, staff members reported that it was difficult to meet enrollment benchmarks and they often launched cohorts with unfilled slots. Waiting to fill slots meant risking losing enrollees preparing to begin the program; enrollees may join other programs or make different plans during the wait time. As a young program, Bridges was still establishing effective recruitment channels throughout its implementation.

Enrollment and Pre-Program Engagement Activities

After recruiting a young person and confirming that he met Bridges' eligibility criteria, staff members obtained informed consent, collected baseline characteristics and contact information, and completed random assignment. Whether participants were placed in the program or control group, they received a \$25 gift certificate for enrolling in the study. Program group members were considered immediately enrolled in Bridges.

Before starting Bridges, program group members attended a required group orientation session at their program site. During the orientation, staff members provided an overview of the program and gave participants a copy of their schedule and a Bridges handbook that documented the program road map, rules, and expectations. At this session, participants were introduced to their mentor and academic and social-emotional learning instructors.

While they waited for their cohort to start, participants were invited to participate in pre-program engagement activities to maintain their attachment to the program. Pre-program engagement activities included taking the Test of Adult Basic Education, meeting with program staff members, and completing online financial education training. Participants completed pre-program engagement activities, especially assessments, inconsistently.

Shortly after enrolling, mentors worked with each participant to complete a client intake form that gathered information about his employment interests, work and education history, barriers to work and employment, supportive service needs, as well as involvement with the justice system and gang activity. Staff members then worked with each participant to develop an individualized education and employment plan to help them meet their goals. These plans were designed to outline steps for concrete action that participants could take to achieve their goals and overcome any barriers standing in their way. Mentors completed client intake forms and developed individualized education and employment plans before a cohort started or during the first few days of the program.

Sample Characteristics

This section describes the Bridges study sample. Table 3.2 presents selected demographic characteristics of participants at the time they enrolled in the study.² Baseline data was supplemented by information from interviews with participants and staff members that demonstrate the characteristics of the enrolled population and the unique challenges they faced.

- **The Bridges study sample was composed of young men who were disconnected from education and employment and were heavily involved with the criminal justice system.**

Demographics

As shown in Table 3.2, sample members were about 18 years old on average. The majority were non-white (99 percent): three-fourths of the sample identified as African-American or black and about 22 percent identified as Hispanic. More than one-quarter of the sample reported that they had children.

Interviews with participants and program staff member indicate that it was common that participants struggled with housing instability, lived in transitional housing, or had tenuous rent-free arrangements with friends or family. In interviews, most participants reported living with their mothers and siblings; some young people bounced among family members. Interviews indicate that young people had varying degrees of connection to and support from their families:

²Young people reported baseline data to Bridges providers as part of their standard intake process, and providers subsequently shared these data with the research team. Administrative data on arrests and convictions supplanted self-reported information. Certain measures based on self-reported data may not be entirely reliable. In particular, measures of educational attainment showed some inconsistencies.

Table 3.2**Baseline Characteristics of Bridges to Pathways Sample Members**

Characteristic	Full Sample
Demographics	
Average age	18.4
Race/ethnicity (%)	
Black, non-Hispanic	74.2
Hispanic	21.6
White, non-Hispanic	0.8
Native American/Asian/multiracial/non-Hispanic	3.4
Has children (%)	26.2
Among those with children	
<i>Number of children</i>	1.5
Education and employment history	
Highest grade completed in school ^a	10.0
Suspended or expelled from school (%)	85.9
Ever employed (%)	48.7
Criminal history	
Ever arrested (%)	95.2
Age at time of first arrest (years)	14.2
Number of times arrested (%)	
0	4.8
1	7.5
2 or 3	14.8
4 or more	72.9
Age of first conviction (years) ^a	15.1
Sample size	480

SOURCES: MDRC calculations based on baseline survey data and arrest records from the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority.

NOTES: Sample includes individuals randomly assigned between June 2015 and July 2016.

Arrest measures come from administrative records; all other measures are self-reported.

Measures in italics are calculated among individuals who had a certain characteristic.

^aSample size varies due to missing responses. Most measures are missing less than 5 percent of the sample size with the exception of "highest grade completed in school" (missing 7 percent) and "age of first conviction" (missing 13 percent).

While many lived in their parents' home rent free, it was common that they helped their family pay bills or buy groceries. Many participants expressed a desire to get their own apartment.

Disconnection from School and Work

Information gathered about participants at baseline indicates that most sample members were disconnected from school and work. Per program eligibility requirements, young people enrolling in Bridges did not have a high school credential. Just as important, most participants had been expelled or suspended from school (86 percent), and, on average, the highest level of education achieved by the sample members was tenth grade. Most enrollees also lacked formal work experience. Though almost half (49 percent) of the sample reported that they had work experience when they started with Bridges, in-depth interviews and focus group data suggests that most of this work experience was informal such as yardwork.

The sample of young people who enrolled in Bridges is representative of the population of disconnected youth in Chicago in terms of race and neighborhood of residency. About 12 percent of the Chicago's youth population (140,000 young people) are neither working nor in school. The rates of disconnection among young people in Chicago differ by race, and African-American youth in Chicago, who comprise 75 percent of the Bridges sample, have the highest rate of disconnection of any racial group in the 10 largest U.S. cities. Moreover, disconnection is concentrated in southern and western parts of the cities where the Bridges program was located and where most participants resided.³

Interviews with program participants indicate that many participants' disconnection from school began when the young men became associated with a gang or what young people commonly refer to as "the life." They reported that the life drew them into conflicts that made it difficult to attend school and often led to their first arrests. Repeated or lengthy periods of incarceration also kept them out of school and put them behind academically. Some pathways of disconnection reported by participants included changing public or alternative schools multiple times, leaving school upon incarceration and never reenrolling, being suspended or expelled for behavioral issues, and being truant and eventually dropping out.

Involvement with Gangs

Young people involved with gangs face a myriad of social challenges, which may interfere with their priorities and ability to participate in a program such as Bridges. Gang affiliation may not only spur young people to engage in illegal activity, but moreover may present additional barriers that prevent them from achieving academic and employment goals, such as safely commuting to school or a job that requires them to travel across rival gang territories.

For many participants in Bridges, their family and social lives were highly intertwined with their gangs. Influenced by brothers, fathers, and neighborhood friends, many of the young men began participating in gang-related activities in their early teens. In many cases their gangs

³Measure of America and LeadersUp (2017).

were their primary social network, providing friendship, support, a sense of belonging, and a larger purpose outside of themselves. One participant explained that when he was young, he associated life on the streets and toting a gun with masculinity. This same young man mourned the death of both his brother and a friend to gang-related violence in the same year. Another participant explained that his younger brother positioned him to begin selling drugs, and another mentioned that his father was incarcerated. As a result, many young people in Bridges were familiar with the justice system and incarceration before entering them. Some felt their own incarceration was inevitable and staff members reported that it could be difficult for these young people to imagine a different future for themselves.

At the same time, however, many young people said that they were tired of the life and wanted to get off the streets. They were aware that they would need to disentangle themselves from their gangs if they wanted to change the trajectory of their lives. Seeing friends and family die, getting shot themselves, turning 18 years old, or having children compelled some participants to distance themselves from their former friends and activities. Some participants said Bridges came into their lives just as they were ready to leave the life.

If you do that [talk to friends involved with gangs], you still gonna go to the old environment. You gonna do the same thing you was doing before, so why don't you just leave it alone. Get on a new page. ...If I come, I'll be more focused. Leave the streets alone. Get something to do.

Streets had me doing bad, bad things. I want better; I want to be successful. Plus, I got a daughter. I told myself I wanted to do better for me my daughter and my mama.

I don't want to be 50 doing the same shit. There are people I know who is 46 and 37 still out there selling packs, broke, ain't got nothing to show for it.

Involvement with the Justice System

Bridges participants had been repeatedly involved with the criminal justice system, often starting at a young age. Administrative records show that nearly all enrolled participants had been arrested (95 percent). The majority (73 percent) had been arrested four or more times. On average, participants were arrested for the first time at the age of 14 years. Self-reported data on conviction show that participants were convicted for the first time at age 15 years on average. In interviews, staff members reported that it was common for young people to maintain connections to the justice system while participating in the program through probation, parole, or other forms of supervision, such as house arrest or electronic monitoring.

Chapter 4

Participation and Engagement

The particular circumstances of the young men enrolled in Bridges to Pathways (Bridges) often influenced their ability to engage in the program. Bridges endeavored to be responsive to participants' circumstances by creating flexibility around program attendance and individualizing their plan to progress through the program. Few participants moved through the program in a straight-forward manner, and many had lapses in attendance.

This chapter explores Bridges participants' engagement in the program. It also outlines the program's attempts to engage and reengage participants through mentorship and case management, as well as other practices. Data analyzed in this chapter come from the Bridges management information system, the follow-up survey, and interviews with participants and staff.

Key Findings

- **About two-thirds of program group members attended Bridges at least once. However, attendance among participants was not consistent. On average, participants who attended the program at least once attended two out of every five program days available to them.**
- **To encourage attendance, Bridges relied on mentors who endeavored to develop close relationships with participants and addressed barriers that could interfere with their ability to attend the program. If participants stopped attending the program, staff members attempted to reengage them repeatedly through text messages, phone calls, social media, and visits to the young peoples' homes and community.**
- **Remedying problems with attendance required a substantial investment in staff time: Mentorship and case management accounted for nearly as much time as planning and implementing all other program services combined.**

Attendance and Participation

Table 4.1 presents data on participants' enrollment and participation within six months of entering the program. About two-thirds of program group members ever attended Bridges. Once young people entered the program, their attendance was often not consecutive. On average, young people who ever attended the program attended for 30 days spread out over 13 weeks, or an average of two out of every five program days available to them. In interviews, staff members reported that participants' attendance was often unpredictable and that lengthy periods of absence were common.

Table 4.1

Participation Within Six Months of Entering Bridges to Pathways

Outcome	Program Group
Ever attended (%)	67.8
Among those who ever attended	
<i>Average number of weeks in the program^a</i>	13.3
<i>Average number of days attended</i>	29.5
<i>Distribution of days attended (%)</i>	
10 or fewer days	31.1
11-30 days	27.0
31-60 days	24.0
More than 60 days	17.9
Received a stipend (%)	55.0
Average amount received in stipends (\$)	131
Among those who received a stipend	
<i>Average amount received (\$)</i>	239
Sample size	289

SOURCES: MDRC calculations from Bridges participation data and stipend payment records.

NOTES: Sample includes individuals randomly assigned between June 2015 and July 2016.

Measures in italics are calculated among those who participated in the activity.

^aMeasure is based on the duration between the first and last dates of attendance.

- **While the majority of program group members ever attended the program, attendance among participants was not consistent.**

Bridges provided a daily attendance stipend to encourage participation in the program. Participants earned \$10 for each program day they attended Bridges during the first phase of the program. In the second phase of the program, the stipend was replaced by the wages that participants earned through their subsidized internship. However, participants could add to their internship wages by participating in enrichment activities, for which participants continued to earn the attendance stipend in the second and third phases.¹ Just over half of participants received a stipend payment. Participants may not have received a payment if they did not attend long enough to

¹Stipend payments were issued as checks. One program provider issued checks biweekly; however, the other provider issued checks more irregularly.

complete any necessary payroll paperwork or they dropped out of the program before payments were issued. Participants who ever received a stipend earned an average of \$239.

Participant Persistence

There is variation in how many days participants attended the six-month program. While the majority of participants who ever attended did so for 30 or fewer days, some participants attended for 60 or more days. Among program group members who ever attended, those who attended more days than the average participant were different from those who attended fewer days in the following ways: Participants who persisted had fewer arrests before entering the study, and they were older at the time of first arrest than those who attended fewer days (ages 15 and 14 years, respectively). In addition, those who persisted were more likely to have ever been employed before random assignment. Those who attended more than 30 days were less likely to have been referred to Bridges from the juvenile justice system, and were more likely to come to the program through community partners and other sources. These results are consistent with research showing a correlation between being arrested for the first time at a younger age and higher school dropout rates, lower rates of success in early adult outcomes, and higher rates of reoffending.²

Participant Barriers to Participation

Our goal is always to get our young people to reach their education goals, their job goals, and do the different SEL [social-emotional learning] supports that they need. But in order for us to get to those tangible goals — those goals of the program — there's all these other things that have to happen. Like getting a young man to come in here and trust our staff so they can actually get them an assignment is a huge, huge barrier ... the first barrier that we're encountering — it's not even about them being able to pass a test. ... We're coming to work with them with our curriculum ready to sit down and address the issues that they have academically, and we find ourselves coming to a point where we are dealing with so many emotional issues that you can't even dive into a curriculum.

In a perfect world, I would love for them to come to the program from 9:30 to 12:30 and then undergo their internship and receive the components of the program. That would be wonderful. ... But in our world the program just doesn't operate like that. Their [participants'] outside functions kind of outweigh what they're receiving here and weigh out the amount of hours and commitment that they have to undergo aside from what it is they are doing [at Bridges]. So what else can we do?

Quotes from staff

Bridges providers employed flexible and forgiving attendance policies. The official program policy required that young people attend the program at least two times per week to maintain their standing in the program. However, the providers rarely dropped participants for failure to attend. Instead, they left the door open for participants to return at any point. Staff members reported in

²Kirk and Sampson (2013); Merlo and Wolpin (2008).

interviews that it was not uncommon for young people to have prolonged absences of a week, a month, or longer.

Staff members reported that many factors may have contributed to low attendance and that young peoples' lives outside of the program affected their ability to participate. The young people had many barriers to participation, including limited access to transportation and housing instability. Additionally, participants balanced attending Bridges with family obligations and child care duties, financial responsibilities and other work opportunities, and ongoing legal obligations such as court appearances. For example, one participant was fighting a "heavy duty" case while enrolled in the program and was frequently absent. A staff member explained that the threat of conviction was a constant "mental distraction" for this young man, which made it hard for him to concentrate on his goals.

Current or former gang affiliation created an additional barrier for many participants. Their ongoing ties to gangs distracted participants from their goals at Bridges, drawing them into conflicts, and creating unique barriers to transportation. Staff members explained that the lifestyle and social networks of young people involved with gangs are defined by the gangs, so even if they want to change, it may be difficult for them to extract themselves from these circles. While staff members worked hard to make Bridges a safe place that was free of gang-related conflicts, they could not fully keep participants' relationships to gangs from entering the program's environment. Participants noted that they were aware of their peers' gang status and connections outside of the program. One participant explained that he stopped attending Bridges for several months when he found a member of a rival gang waiting for him outside the program site and believed that a fellow participant had tipped the rival off to his whereabouts. In addition, many young people's transportation was hindered by gang boundary lines that prohibited them from traveling to certain areas controlled by rival gangs. The young people were aware of these boundaries and prioritized their safety when traveling.

Beyond these material barriers, participants may have faced emotional or psychological barriers to service receipt. Many participants had lost family or friends to gun violence, witnessed the shooting of others, or been shot themselves. Likewise, it was common for participants to have been expelled from school, kicked out of other programs, or been otherwise let down by adults who had promised to support them. As staff members articulated, participants exposure to violence and trauma could lead to long-term barriers, such as lack hope in their ability to achieve their goals and mistrust of strangers including program staff and other participants.

In interviews, participants often noted that their life outside of Bridges — especially ties to what they called "the streets" — could have been their largest obstacle to attendance. At the same time, these young men placed the onus to attend on themselves. Several respondents felt that the only thing blocking participation was a willingness to attend.

The people that have street ties, I feel like it'll be hard for them to focus. You gotta lose the street mentality. ... This program isn't for everybody. If you're looking for the easy way out, this is not for you. To be ready, you have to have your head on straight. This is what I want to do, be goal oriented, and focused.

[Some participants] are scared to change their life. They go through a lot of things. They don't realize God gave them a second chance. Look at me, they shot me. I'm still alive. ... It's not hard [to participate]. It's just, you have to stick your mind to it. If you're gonna do it, you're gonna do it. If you're not gonna do it, you're going to be in the same spot doing the same things.

I ain't really had no roadblocks or anything stopping me. The only thing that can stop me is me.

But I told myself I wouldn't bring that [conflict] here. Do what I gotta do. I would leave the streets in the streets. Come here, I'm a whole new person. Since I have that mindset I'm getting somewhere in life.

Staff members and the young men enrolled in the study had different perceptions of the barriers they were facing. While staff members articulated an array of physical, material, and emotional barriers to the young people's success, most study enrollees perceived themselves as having very few obstacles blocking their path. In a follow-up survey, the majority of respondents reported that they did not experience common barriers, such as unstable housing, lack of work experience, or child care responsibilities. However, even when participants did report having these obstacles, they often said that the obstacle did not hinder their ability to meet their goals. (See Appendix Figure B.1.)

Strategies to Encourage Engagement

Staff members anticipated absences and expressed that they were an unavoidable aspect of serving this population. They used many strategies to encourage young people to attend the program. This section explores some ways program providers encouraged attendance such as incentives, case management, and mentorship. The section also highlights how program providers attempted to reengage young people who had disconnected from the program. Bridges relied heavily on mentors and other program staff to encourage attendance by developing close relationships with participants and addressing barriers that could interfere with their ability to attend the program.

Incentives

The program's daily \$10 attendance stipend was designed to encourage participation by offering the young people the opportunity to earn money while working toward their education and employment goals. However, as noted above, only 55 percent of enrollees ever received a stipend, which indicates that the small stipend may not have been a compelling incentive for a substantial portion of young people enrolled in the program.

The program also attempted to build camaraderie among participants and make the program fun as an incentive for them to attend. They offered enrichment and teambuilding activities that took place every Friday. Activities included basketball competitions, trips to the movies, tours of local colleges, and lectures from guest speakers such as a local man with a criminal record who launched a successful carpentry business. These activities were planned by social-emotional learning (SEL) counselors or mentors depending on the provider.

Case Management

While the program model emphasized that its policies should adapt to meet the needs and availability of its target population, staff members knew that participants needed to attend the program regularly to achieve their goals. Bridges mentors aimed to remove barriers that could prevent young people from consistently attending the program. They helped participants navigate day-to-day obstacles by helping them procure child care, locate temporary housing, or make a transportation plan.

Inadequate transportation was a key barrier that Bridges staff actively worked to remove. Mentors provided transportation cards that allowed participants to take the bus to Bridges for free. When participants felt it was unsafe to take public transportation or to walk to the program, staff frequently gave them rides to and from the program in their personal cars. Participants reported that these services made it easy for them to attend the program.

Mentors also connected participants to tattoo removal services where they could eliminate visual connections to their gangs. Removing these tattoos could increase young people's ability to travel safely by removing markers of affiliation with one group or against another. Some mentors thought that removing visible tattoos could also make it easier to find employment.

Mentorship

In addition to case management services, mentors provided non-clinical counseling and emotional support to participants. Mentors often delivered case management and mentoring services in tandem. For example, a mentor may advise a participant about how to handle a conflict with a peer while driving them home from the program. Mentors shared similar class and racial backgrounds with the young people, often grew up or lived on the South or West Side of Chicago, and generally had experience with the juvenile or criminal justice systems. Their backgrounds allowed them to serve as role models who had successfully traversed many of the challenges that the participants faced.³

Staff members encouraged persistence in the program by demonstrating their belief in participants' ability to succeed in Bridges. As noted above, staff members reported that most participants had suffered trauma that created emotional and psychological barriers that could make young people distrustful of the program and doubtful about their ability to achieve their goals. Mentors asserted that they needed to prove to participants that they would not give up on them by repeatedly being involved in their lives and present in their community. In doing so, they aimed to establish themselves as caring adults in whom participants could trust and to affirm that Bridges would continue to support them despite their shortcomings.

While each mentor had their own approach to developing relationships with participants, they used similar strategies:

³Though the formal mentor role was filled by one staff person per center, various staff members served as unofficial mentors. Some young people gravitated more towards an SEL counselor, an academic instructor, or a program director than their assigned mentor.

- **Build trust.** Mentors aimed to establish themselves as trustworthy and dependable adults from their first interactions with participants. For most mentors, this meant personally investing in participants' well-being. They spoke of the significance of showing young people affection and, in some cases, treating them as they would their own children.
- **Open communication.** Mentors tried to maintain an open line of communication. Mentors often gave young people their personal cell phone numbers so that they could be reached at any time. One mentor felt that the program's success depended on staff members making themselves available to support these young people; in doing so, he argued, mentors could begin to fill a role previously occupied by participants' gangs.
- **Be persistent.** Staff members reported visiting participants in the hospital, accompanying them to court, and tracking them down on street corners when they missed program days.

Despite these efforts, many participants stopped attending the program. When young people were absent from the program for multiple days and unresponsive to texts and calls, mentors or other staff members would attempt to locate them at home or in their community. Staff members would try to learn why a participant was not attending Bridges and find solutions that would allow him to attend, such as providing transportation vouchers or offering to give the participant rides to and from the program. Seeing a participant at home or with his peers could provide important insights into his needs. When possible, staff members delivered program services to young people at home by giving them work packets or helping them access the program's online financial education curriculum. However, staff members noted that there were limits to off-site service delivery and that home visits were not a substitute for attending the program.

- **Bridges relied heavily on mentors and other program staff to encourage attendance by developing close relationships with participants and addressing barriers that could interfere with their ability to attend the program. If participants stopped attending the program, staff attempted to reengage them repeatedly through text messages, phone calls, social media, and visits to the young peoples' homes and community.**

Home visits were challenging to conduct and required a significant effort from Bridges staff members. They reported that they would frequently show up to a participant's known address only to find that he no longer lived there. They may have to play detective, sleuthing out a participant's whereabouts through friends and relatives. Other times, staff members would drive around areas young people were known to frequent, such as parks and street corners, to try and locate them. While most staff members participated in home visits, some felt comfortable conducting them only if they were accompanied by another staff member.⁴ Staff members were aware of the fact that some participants' homes or parts of the neighborhood were "not safe spaces

⁴A small number of staff members did not participate in home visits.

for them or for us,” and they would arrange to meet young people in public places such as libraries and restaurants.

Perhaps more important than delivering case management or program services was the simple act of visiting a participant’s home. Staff members saw the process of repeatedly showing up in a young person’s life as an opportunity to demonstrate to them their commitment to helping them accomplish their academic and employment goals. Staff members expressed that the program would not function without home visits, which they saw as key to unlocking young people’s interest in the program and drawing them into services.

[The staff] does a great job really pushing the relationship right away. If the young person doesn’t come at their scheduled time, the mentor has to go out and get that young person and bring them in!

That’s [home visits] kind of what the program had to turn into in order to work. The model is great. I like the model; the model functions. But it wouldn’t function if we didn’t do the extra.

Home visits are vital. I’m not sure I can even express how vital they have shown us to be.

I honestly feel like time is against us. I’ve buried a lot of my young people where I was like if I would have just contacted my guy that week that wouldn’t have happened to him. And I share that with a lot of my staff.

Participant Perspectives on Program Staff

Similar to staff members, participants conveyed that trusting relationships were critical to the program. In focus groups and in-depth interviews, young people affirmed that they responded well to the staff members’ repeated efforts to develop trust and build a relationship with them. Many participants reported that the continuous encouragement and support that staff members provided was the most important part of their experience at Bridges and that it was the catalyst for their participation in the program. Many young people felt that Bridges staff members were “like family” and that the care staff members showed them differentiated Bridges from other programs they had attended. Echoing staff members, some participants also expressed that it took time for them to feel comfortable enough to open up to staff members about the problems in their lives.

They give you advice. They be encouraging. That’s what a lot of people need sometimes because sometimes they be down on themselves. They’ll help bring you up and give you hope. They’ll give you all the stuff you don’t get at home. You don’t have nobody talking to you at home, but you come in, and they’ll talk to you.

A lot of people say they care, but these people really do. They get you ready for life situations.

I’ve never been in no program like this...this is like a mentor program, where they try to help you. It’s your whole life.

I didn't think I'd be opening up to someone in a program ever. The way they make you feel is like therapy... I look at them like my aunties.

I was locked up, going through some things. Found this place for me. Started coming. When I first came, I wasn't feeling it. It made me feel uncomfortable. Every time I came they told me to do something, I said, 'I gotta go.' I was so stuck up on the streets, but I got comfortable...started opening up to people, to staff. Let them know what was going on. They was willing to help me.

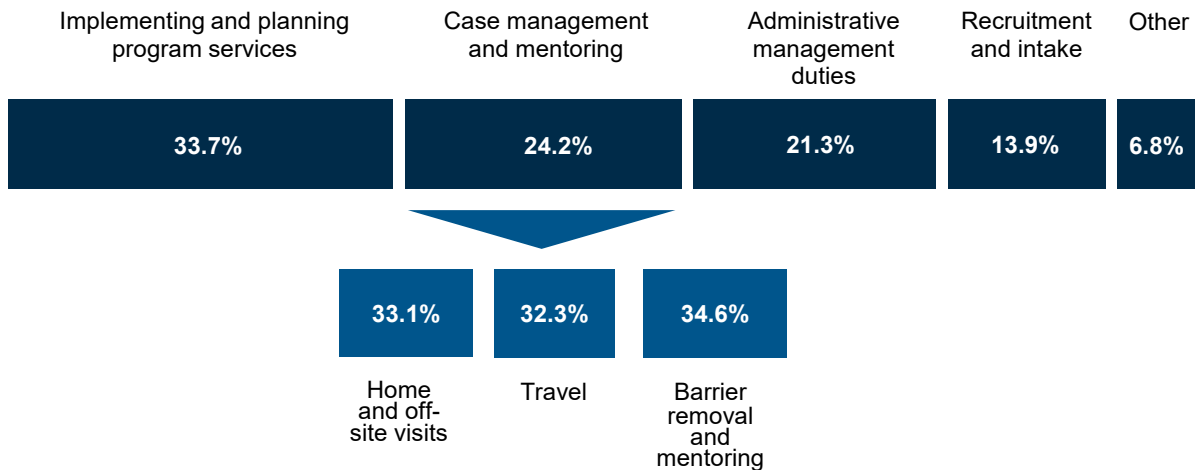
It is worth noting that those participants who said they gradually came to trust staff members may have been more engaged in the program than the average sample member. Many young people did not participate in the program despite staff members' efforts.

Time Study

To better understand of how Bridges staff members allocated their time, the research team conducted a study of staff time. Figure 4.1 shows the results of self-reported hours worked by staff members at all program locations over a three-week period. Over the period, part- and full-time staff members logged 1,300 hours of work on Bridges-related activities, including planning and implementing program services, providing mentoring and case management, completing administrative and management tasks, conducting recruitment and intake activities, and fulfilling other responsibilities.

Figure 4.1

Staff Time Spent on Program Tasks



SOURCE: MDRC analysis of self-reported staff time.

NOTE: Calculations in this figure are based on approximately 1,300 hours reported by 13 staff members during a three-week period in June 2016.

Staff members spent about a third of their time on key program services. This time included preparing and delivering academic enrichment lessons, SEL workshops, and work-readiness training classes, as well as conducting individual counseling sessions.

- **Remedying problems with attendance required a substantial investment in staff time: Mentorship and case management accounted for nearly one-quarter of staff members' time.**

Program staff members spent a little more than a third of their time planning and implementing program services for education, employment, social-emotional learning workshops, and individual counseling. Mentoring and case management duties accounted for nearly one-quarter of staff time. Within this category, staff members spent more than a third of their time conducting or attempting to conduct home visits. Time spent transporting young people to and from the program site or driving to conduct home visits took up nearly as much time. Activities aimed at removing barriers and mentoring accounted for the remaining time in this category. These services required a significant investment in staff time and energy.

The remaining portion of staff members' time was primarily allocated to administrative duties (21 percent) and recruitment and outreach activities (14 percent).

Chapter 5

Implementation of Education, Social-Emotional Learning, and Employment Service Components

As explained in Chapter 4, attendance had a large impact on the implementation of Bridges to Pathways (Bridges). To mitigate problems with engagement, the program providers shifted the focus to case management and mentoring activities. Unpredictable attendance patterns also changed how providers approached the other program components, which included academic enrichment, social-emotional learning, and workforce-readiness training. This chapter provides details about how these components were implemented. It draws on interviews with the program staff members, focus groups and interviews with participations, and the Bridges management information system.

Cross-Program Component Implementation

Key Findings

- **Implementing group-based services for participants who did not attend consistently was a challenge for program providers. This contributed to a shift toward more individualized service delivery.**
- **The academic program component suffered from a lack of standardization and management. Plans for the high school diploma track were stymied by a problem with accreditation that the providers were not able to overcome.**
- **Staff members felt that the social-emotional learning services set Bridges apart from other programs. However, staff were not trained in the intervention and the program had limited fidelity to the primary curriculum, Thinking for a Change.**
- **The program offered a range of internship opportunities that focused on giving participants an opportunity to practice soft skills such as arriving on time. Participation in internships was low.**
- **While attaining a high school credential and an unsubsidized job remained long-term goals for participants, staff members focused on short-term gains that would help participants achieve their goals in other programs in the future.**

Program Oversight

It is helpful to understand two factors that influenced how the academic, social-emotional, and employment services were implemented: (1) limited mechanisms for cross-provider program oversight and, (2) the increasing individualization of services in a group-based program. Both factors played a key role in how Bridges was implemented.

While program managers from Central States SER (SER) and SGA Youth and Family Services (SGA) oversaw the day-to-day operations of their programs, the Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS) oversaw the Bridges program in its entirety. While DFSS planned to provide direct supervision of the program, it took them several years to fill this position. SER and SGA operated the programs independently, and service delivery varied between the two providers. The program changed greatly throughout its implementation and without a dedicated staff person to oversee it, there was no one to develop a vision for the service components as they evolved from the original model. Likewise, no staff person was tasked with standardizing the services across the two providers through professional development, training, or other approaches. While staff members had flexibility to adapt services to meet individual participants' needs, their approach to serving clients was often more improvisational than systematic.

Individualized Service Delivery

Bridges began as a cohort-based program in which groups of participants would start the program at the same time and progress through the programs' three phases together. Irregular attendance meant that the participants were not likely to gain skills or meet program benchmarks at the same rate. Absences meant that participants had inconsistent exposure to academic, social-emotional, and employability skills lessons. Spotty attendance also made it hard for instructors to keep learners moving through lessons together. Lessons that spanned multiple days would likely not be heard by the same group of participants, and activities that took a week to complete would likely not be started and ended by the same young people. Moreover, it meant that instructors were never sure who would be in their classroom on a given day, and they reported having to improvise lessons in response to the learners who presented themselves in their classroom on a given day.

- **Implementing group-based services for participants who did not attend consistently was a challenge for the program providers. This contributed to a shift toward more individualized service delivery.**

Over time, the program kept the phased approach to service delivery and all but moved away from the cohort structure, allowing participants to move through the phases at their own pace. Few of the program's young men progressed out of the first phase. Participants were considered ready to move from one phase to the next based on a combination of their progress in key program components and staff members' perception of their readiness to do so. Staff members assessed readiness primarily through participants' attendance and engagement in the program. Readiness was a particularly strong factor in determining whether participants would move into Phase II and receive a subsidized internship placement. Pacing through the program phases could

be individualized to a participant's circumstances. For example, staff members might encourage a participant with strong academic skills and drive to earn a General Educational Development (GED) certificate in Phase I; in contrast, they would not ask a participant who already has a job to quit it in order to take a subsidized internship and begin Phase II. Only a handful of participants began Phase III.

Despite moving away from cohort-based services, the program continued to recruit participants as part of cohorts that started the program together. Both providers offered the program services in group settings. At times, doing so made group instruction challenging as participants had different bases of knowledge and goals. Staff members added customized lessons and one-on-one instruction to group lessons. Some participants received the bulk of their services in an individualized format.

The remaining sections of this chapter describe how the providers implemented and adapted the program model to accommodate their participants' service needs and attendance patterns. When relevant, differences between the providers' approaches are highlighted.

Academic Enrichment: High School Diploma and GED Tracks

Key Findings

- **Academic instructors had flexibility in how they chose to deliver academic services.**
- **Academic instructors did not use Bridges' primary curriculum, an online platform designed to blend learning with classroom instruction, believing it did not align with participants' learning needs. Instead, providers developed lessons from textbook-based curricula, as well as approaches developed by instructors to improve participants' English language arts skills.**
- **As an unaccredited institution, Bridges was unable to confer high school credit or degrees. Finding they could not overcome the challenge of accreditation, both providers moved away from the high school diploma track.**
- **Bridges struggled to develop a systematic approach to the GED track. GED instruction was largely improvised and varied greatly from day to day.**

Structure

Bridges' academic enrichment services were designed to help participants earn a high school credential during their tenure in the program. It featured plans that would allow participants to earn a GED certificate or high school diploma, a credential not often available to young

people disconnected from traditional education settings. Monday through Thursday, each program site began the day with one and a half to two hours of academic programming led by an academic instructor. Academic instructors had varied professional backgrounds. While they were not required to have teaching experience, most had spent some time in the classroom. Their teaching experience varied and included elementary and middle school and GED instruction.

During the first few weeks of the program (in Phase I), participants completed an online financial literacy course developed for high school students. The course covered topics such as saving, banking, credit and debit cards, and financing higher education. After completing this step, participants were expected to improve their academic skills and make progress toward earning their GED certificate or diploma. Ideally, participants would earn their credential in the third phase of the program. However, program staff members found that most participants would need more time to achieve this milestone. They aimed to help participants make as much progress as possible toward earning a credential during the program and then help them make the transition to another program where they could reach their education goals.

- **Academic instructors had flexibility in how they chose to deliver academic services.**

DFSS granted Bridges providers flexibility in implementing their educational components. At a minimum, DFSS expected that both providers would offer academic services daily through an online education tool. The structure of classroom time was largely left up to the instructor at each program site. One instructor explained that they had to develop their own approach “based on what the students needed, on capabilities, and old school good teaching.” Though academic services at Bridges varied by program site, the services within a provider tended to share common elements. Instructors at the same provider used the same curricula, shared lessons, and met regularly. In contrast, instructors said they rarely interacted with instructors from the other provider.

Choosing the High School Diploma or GED Track

When participants entered Bridges, academic instructors would develop an educational plan for each participant.¹ Educational plans outlined specific goals for each participant to accomplish during their tenure at Bridges. In addition, educational plans specified whether participants would pursue a high school diploma or a GED certificate.

Academic instructors worked with participants to select a path. Key considerations included participants’ preference, credit standing, and age. On average, study enrollees had completed school only through the tenth grade (Table 3.2), and program staff reported that participants generally had few credits toward earning their high school diploma. They noted that the time it would take to earn these credits was unappealing to many young people. Therefore, most participants selected the GED track.

¹Academic plans were distinct from the general service plan detailed in Chapter 3.

Curricula

Bridges' principal GED and high school diploma curriculum was developed from an online education platform. Unlike a classroom-based program, the online platform would allow learners to access the platform anywhere and move through lessons at their own pace. The curriculum blends the flexibility of online learning with traditional classroom methods: Instructors enhance, explain, or otherwise facilitate students' online learning. The platform was additionally appealing because it was in use at the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice (IDJJ). DFSS selected the curriculum with the goal of providing consistency in learning to young people who used the online platform while incarcerated.

- **Academic instructors did not use Bridges' primary curriculum, an online platform designed to blend learning with classroom instruction, believing it did not align with participants' learning needs.**

Despite these features, neither academic instructors nor participants liked the online platform. Two factors may have contributed to academic instructors' dissatisfaction with it. First, academic instructors received no formal training on the online curriculum or platform. Lack of familiarity with the platform may have led to misconceptions about or frustrations with it. Second, instructors did not believe that an online curriculum was appropriate for their population. Staff members felt that participants required more interactive instruction to keep them motivated and engaged. Participants concurred that it was hard for them to focus for long stretches as they were not used to doing academic work. More broadly, some staff members reported that they did not think that online learning constituted good teaching practice. One staff person explained, "I am not a person who would sit a kid in front of a computer and walk away." Participants agreed that they preferred to learn in a more interactive way, noting that they "couldn't learn from just looking" and that "it [learning] is better when you talk." Perhaps because of a lack of training or differences in pedagogy, instructors saw the online learning platform as incompatible with classroom teaching methods, and they did not express an interest in blending the online curriculum with in-person instruction.

Additionally, Bridges participants were not well positioned to take advantage of the online program's intended accessibility. During focus groups, some participants noted that they did not have computers at home on which they could access online learning. Further, in the observations of program activities, they displayed little familiarity with computer competencies, such as typing, using word processing software, and conducting online research.

Academic instructors at both providers did not wish to use Bridges' official curriculum for GED instruction. However, they disagreed on the best way to prepare participants for the GED exam and therefore took different approaches to instruction. Across the two providers, instructors used a number of name-brand, book-based curricula. They also used content they developed themselves, such as custom-made reading and writing exercises, to improve participants' reading comprehension and writing skills.

High School Diploma Track

Bridges planned to offer a high school diploma track in partnership with IDJJ. Although Bridges was not an accredited institution, an accredited institution such as IDJJ would be able to confirm academic credits completed at Bridges and grant high school diplomas when participants earned enough credits. However, the partnership between IDJJ and the Bridges program did not develop as anticipated, and the program was unable to fully implement the high school diploma pathway.

- **Finding they could not overcome the challenge of accreditation, both providers moved away from the high school diploma track.**

The program providers learned late into implementation that IDJJ would not confer credit or grant degrees to individuals who had never been in their care. The program was only able to recruit about 30 percent of study enrollees from IDJJ, which meant that the nearly three-fourths of Bridges enrollees who were not referred to the program from IDJJ were ineligible for credit. The program providers were not aware of this restriction until after six participants completed coursework for which IDJJ was unable to authorize credit. For those participants who were referred to the program from IDJJ and had completed coursework at the facility, Bridges staff members were unable to reactivate their accounts on the online learning platform or gain the login information as a result of the weak partnership between the providers and IDJJ. Without access to the accounts, staff members could not facilitate students' progress on the platform.

Over time, the problems with the high school diploma track led both providers to deemphasize or stop offering it. One provider explored several other ways to offer high school diplomas, such as using a different online curriculum and referring participants to schools and other education programs. Ultimately, Bridges was unable to confer high school credit or diplomas to any participants.

GED Track

The program providers were not able to develop a structured approach to GED instruction. Instructors' implementation of the GED component was largely improvisational: Instructors responded in the moment to the participants who attended their class on any given day, and to their educational needs and willingness to participate.

- **Program providers struggled to develop a systematic approach to the GED track. GED instruction was largely improvised and varied greatly from day to day.**

Participants entered Bridges with a range of academic abilities. Some entered the program nearly ready to take the GED exam, and others lacked essential skills in mathematics, English grammar, or reading comprehension. Whereas some participants had been away from school for less than six months and were accustomed to the classroom learning environment, others had been disconnected from school for more than two years and had trouble focusing and absorbing new information. And though most participants started Bridges having already earned a number

of academic credits, staff members said that at least one young person entered the program without ever having earned a single high school credit.

Instructors articulated that it would not be realistic for participants to master basic skills and learn the more advanced concepts covered on the GED exam before the end of the six-month program. They therefore developed service plans with different goals for their participants. At one end of the spectrum, instructors aimed to help participants who were more GED-ready prepare for and pass the exam as quickly as possible. At the other end, they aimed to build up the confidence of struggling learners, increase their sense of self-worth, and give them a taste of what they could accomplish. Instructors hoped that Bridges' academic services would motivate participants to continue their education — even if they were not able to complete the GED during the program.

Participants at each site worked in a single classroom — regardless of their academic track, service plan, or skill level. To accommodate the diverse learning needs in the classroom, academic programming included a mix of group and individual work. For group assignments, instructors would facilitate activities, provide explanation, or guide participants through worksheets. They may have also given participants individual assignments such as taking a GED practice test, completing online financial education lessons, filling out worksheets, or writing responses to questions or prompts. As participants completed their assignments, instructors would work one-on-one with them to guide them through lessons. Each instructor took their own approach to group and individual work in the classroom.

For some instructors, the single classroom format made the academic component, “sort of like a one room school house; same lesson, different strategy for each student.” Some found it challenging to teach the range of learners in their classrooms. One staff person explained, “The group learning approach doesn't really work because they are all on different levels. They have different deficiencies.”

The services that participants received depended on their grasp of academic concepts, their attendance, and their level of engagement in the classroom. For example, a participant who was further along academically was likely to receive attention to accelerate his progress toward earning a GED certificate. A participant who did not show up frequently might repeat lessons or spend time catching up on assignments. And a participant who refused to engage or seemed too tired to participate might be sent to meet with his mentor or counselor during the session. A staff member explained that the classroom could change from day to day.

The classroom takes many different shapes. [...] Sometimes it's extremely structured, and they've got the lesson plan on the board, and they go step by step. And sometimes it can be crazy, and it's because our young men come in with a whole bunch of issues. Our teachers need to be teacher and counselor.

Participant Perspectives on Academic Services

Most participants who took part in interviews and focus groups indicated that working toward earning their high school credential was challenging. They noted that it was hard for them to focus and that challenging concepts could make them get frustrated or mad. Generally, participants liked working with the academic instructors and found their explanations of concepts to be integral to their learning. They appreciated staff members' encouragement and support, and they felt their own lack of willingness to apply themselves was their biggest obstacle to earning their credential.

Social-Emotional Learning and Individual Counseling

Key Findings

- **The program offered 17 weeks of social-emotional learning (SEL) workshops over the first two phases.**
- **Problems with attendance and a slow pacing of lessons meant that participants received inconsistent doses of the primary SEL curriculum and were unable to complete it during the program.**

Structure

The goals of the SEL and individual counseling service components were to address underlying issues that affect young people personally, socially, and professionally. Through individual counseling and group-based workshops, the program aimed to increase participants' self-awareness of their thinking patterns and encourage pro-social behaviors.

Each program site employed an SEL instructor who was tasked with leading workshops and providing individual counseling. SEL workshops were held Monday through Thursday for one hour per day in Phases I and II. Counseling was available to participants on an as-needed basis during all phases of the program. SEL instructors were clinicians with master's degrees who had previous experience providing counseling.

After participants began the program, SEL instructors created individualized service plans for them that outlined goals for social-emotional development.² Instructors generally created these SEL-focused plans after they had observed and interacted with participants for a few weeks. SEL goals cut across different service components. For example, one program manager explained, "If a young person has a lot of trust issues, we can talk about that in the context of their family life in an individual session, but we can also bring some of that [into] employment/

²SEL service plans were distinct from the employment and education plans that mentors developed with young people at the start of the program (described in Chapter 3) and from the academic plans discussed in the previous section.

worksite placement issues as well.” SEL instructors used workshops and counseling to help participants achieve these goals.

Workshops

In Phase I, SEL workshops were composed of lessons from Thinking for a Change (T4C). T4C is a cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) program developed by the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) specifically for use with individuals in the juvenile and criminal justice systems. CBT aims to disrupt learned thinking patterns that can lead to thoughts and beliefs that result in criminal and anti-social behavior. By uncovering thought processes that lead to negative feelings and actions, individuals can replace them with more positive ones.

T4C is a highly structured curriculum that is made up of 25 lessons that each take one to two hours to complete. Each lesson has a set format and may include didactic instruction, role-play, and homework assignments. Lessons are designed for closed cohort groups of 8 to 12 individuals. In closed cohorts, a group of participants start and end a program together and participants are not able to join the program after it has already begun. T4C’s developers recommend that the curriculum be delivered two to three times per week for at least 16 weeks to ensure a consistent dosage. SEL instructors did not receive training on the T4C curriculum prior to implementing it.³

- **Problems with attendance and a slow pacing of lessons meant that participants received inconsistent doses of the primary SEL curriculum and were unable to complete it during the program.**

Instructors worked their way through the T4C curriculum with each new cohort that started Bridges. Instructors tackled one lesson every two to three sessions, allowing time for participants to master the concepts presented in each lesson. Moving at this pace, Bridges participants would not complete the curriculum during the 17 weeks allocated for SEL workshops. If everything went according to plan, each cohort would complete approximately 21 of 25 lessons. One provider estimated they generally got through 10 to 15 lessons with each cohort, omitting the lessons that help participants apply their learning to real-world situations.

SEL instructors ran T4C sessions with group members in attendance on any given day — including small groups that included participants who had been absent for several sessions. Participants’ fluctuating attendance could make it challenging to build the strong group dynamic that a closed cohort may facilitate. Irregular attendance also meant that participants did not receive a consistent dosage of the curriculum nor did they receive all lessons. Instructors mitigated this problem whenever possible by working one-on-one with a participant to catch him up on missed lessons or by running two (30-minute) T4C sessions per day if several participants fell behind.

All SEL instructors agreed that they could not offer T4C out of the box. They modified the curriculum to make it more engaging and relatable, integrating media (especially videos),

³At the time, NIC strongly recommended that facilitators be trained in the curriculum, but it was not required to access T4C. Today, NIC limits access to the curriculum to individuals who have completed an official training.

adapting scenarios to align with participants’ experiences, and updating lesson scripts to sound more conversational. Instructors also tailored their use of the homework activities included in the curriculum to reinforce what group members are learning. They did not think it was realistic for participants to complete additional work at home and would either omit homework assignments or have participants complete them during program hours. T4C relies on role-playing activities to get participants to articulate new narratives and to practice new skills. Instructors suggested young people may be reluctant to practice what they are learning because it makes them feel awkward or embarrassed. Staff members would model role-play activities and volunteer to partner up with participants to encourage participation. Despite the instructors’ efforts, getting young people to participate in role-playing remained an ongoing challenge. Table 5.1 compares the standard T4C curriculum with the adapted one used in Bridges.

Table 5.1

Implementation of Thinking for a Change (T4C)

	T4C Curriculum	Bridges to Pathways Adaptation
Instructor training and qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any professional background • Ideally trained by National Institute of Corrections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clinical background • No training in curriculum
Lessons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25 lessons: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Lesson 1: Overview – Lesson 2-5; 11-15: Social skills – Lessons 6-10: Cognitive self-change – Lessons 16-24: Problem-solving skills – Lesson 25: Wrap-up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Up to 21 lessons completed • Omission or adaptation of some lesson components, such as homework assignments • Supplementing lessons with media and secondary curriculum
Dosage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1-2 hours per session • 2-3 times per week minimum • 16 weeks minimum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 hour per session • 2-4 times per week • 17 weeks
Cohort size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8-12 individuals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fluctuant

In Phase II, the program model intended to divide time evenly between T4C and a second curriculum focused on community building and civic leadership skills and development. The program was designed for a group setting and emphasized building a strong group dynamic. As with the implementation of T4C, problems with attendance created barriers to nurturing a rapport among group members.

The curriculum aimed to help young people develop employment-related skills — such as collaboration, communication, and problem solving — through youth-led civic leadership projects. While one provider had difficulty getting service learning projects started due to attendance problems, the other was able to help some groups implement community projects for a homeless shelter and a donation center.

Counseling

SEL instructors provided counseling as needed on a one-on-one basis. Instructors attempted to meet weekly with participants, but more often they met with participants when they were in attendance or when young people came to them. SEL instructors may have also talked with a participant who was having a conflict at the program. They reported being the “go-to people” when a participant had a problem.

In interviews, SEL instructors noted that one-on-one counseling provided an opportunity for the program’s young men to open up away from their peers. Some meetings with participants were short, five-minute check-ins, while others were longer counseling sessions aimed at helping them set and work toward goals. For more serious cases, SEL instructors would speak with their clinical supervisor to determine if the participant should be referred for help elsewhere. For example, a provider referred a participant to off-site grief counseling after the death of his child.

Staff and Participant Reflections on SEL

Staff members expressed that SEL services set Bridges apart from other workforce development and youth programs. They noted that SEL services provided a “deep dive” capable of addressing underlying issues that can get in the way of participants’ academic or employment goals. One program director explained, “You can do résumé writing skills all day long but if you don’t deal with some of the intensive needs — like trust, distrust, confidence, violence, trauma — all those underlying individual needs... you won’t be able to help participants get and keep jobs.”

While staff members agreed on the importance of this service component, SEL instructors had mixed feelings about the component’s core curriculum. Most instructors believed T4C offered a well-structured approach to group CBT. However, a small number believed that it was not designed for youth and that it dwelled on obvious concepts.

Participants had differing opinions about SEL. Some felt the component had real-life application and valued the judgment-free space it offered to talk about their concerns and develop awareness of their feelings. Others did not connect with the content, but enjoyed attending the sessions. Even if SEL workshops were “cheesy,” they said, their instructors put in a lot of effort to make the lessons fun. Staff members and a participant expressed positive views of SEL.

That deep dive — social and emotional need — that to me is the flagship of what our workforce program is.

I love [T4C] as a foundation that you can reasonably build upon without losing the context... [It is] orderly and intentional, and the skills are very relevant.

[SEL teaches us] how to change our minds, how to be different, how to not be a criminal.

Workforce Readiness: Employability Skills Training and Subsidized Internship

Key Findings

- **Placement into internships was closely tied to attendance. Only 26 percent of participants began internships.**
- **Among participants who started an internship, participation was steady: Participants worked 112 hours and earned an average of \$923.**
- **Subsidized internships paid \$8.25 per hour — a wage below Chicago’s rising minimum wage. Staff and participants alike expressed frustration with the program’s low wages.**
- **Participants had mixed feelings about how much they were learning at their placements. Most internships were limited in scope, as employers were hesitant to assign work to participants with frequent absences.**

Structure

Bridges’ workforce-readiness services were intended to give participants the soft skills necessary to obtain a job and succeed in the workplace and a chance to gain work experience through a subsidized internship. In the long term, they hoped to increase the young men’s ability to find and keep an unsubsidized job.

Workforce-readiness services started with one-hour employability skills training workshops that took place Monday through Thursday for five weeks (Phase I). Next, participants began 12-week subsidized internships at a variety of worksites (Phase II). After the internship, participants worked toward gaining unsubsidized employment in a field of their choosing (Phase III).

Mentors were the primary instructors for employability skills training workshops, but in some cases SEL instructors taught these workshops. Mentors also developed worksite opportunities for subsidized internships and monitored participants’ on-the-job performance.

Employability Skills Training Workshops

The five-weeklong employability skills training workshop aimed to teach the young men the soft skills needed to succeed at their subsidized internships and in future unsubsidized employment. The two providers used different curricula to teach employability skills. One provider structured lessons around free tools available on the Illinois Workforce Development website. The other provider adopted a structured curriculum that was also used in its other youth workforce programs. Mentors at both providers had flexibility to adapt lessons to meet the needs of participants. They often integrated content from the web, such as online videos, worksheets, and sample résumés or cover letters.

A key area of focus was workplace norms, such as punctuality, respect for authority, and dependability. Staff members hoped that by participating in workshops and learning the importance of these skills participants would gain confidence, become more comfortable in a professional environment, and improve their performance at work. Employers noted that most of their Bridges interns still needed to develop these skills upon placement at the worksites. The workshops also helped develop job search skills such as résumé-writing and interviewing. During the workshops, participants completed an employment portfolio that included a résumé, mock job application, and an interview skills document. Staff used a combination of group and individual activities to teach concepts and help young people build a package of job application resources.

Internships

After completing the employability skills training, participants were eligible for placement in subsidized internships. Subsidized internships were meant to give participants a supportive environment to practice the employability skills they had learned. Internships could also strengthen the young men's résumés by providing them with work experience. Monday through Thursday, interns reported to their worksites after completing their academic and SEL activities during Phase II. Internships lasted 12-weeks. Participants were expected to work approximately 10 hours per week and would be compensated at \$8.25 per hour.

Internship Development

Mentors were responsible for finding worksite internship opportunities by developing and maintaining relationships with local employers; however, all staff members sought to recruit employers interested in hosting Bridges interns. Staff members drew on personal relationships to develop worksite opportunities, calling on their friends, family, and community members for support.

Developing opportunities for subsidized internships was an ongoing challenge for the program providers. Several factors may have contributed to this challenge, including limited staff time, lack of connections to local employers, and bias against hiring young men involved with the justice system.

Internship Placement

After developing the opportunities, mentors placed participants into internships. Individual mentors had the flexibility to develop their own policies regarding internship placement. While most mentors only placed participants demonstrating readiness into internships, some tried to place all young people who passed through the program and into the internship phase.

- **Consistent attendance was often a requirement for placement into an internship.**

Mentors who fell into the first category required that participants demonstrate that they were ready for employment before giving them a placement. They worried that placing an

unprepared participant in an internship was a lose-lose situation: It could erode relationships with employers and put participants in negative situations that decreased their confidence. Consistent attendance was a key indication of readiness for an internship. Several staff noted that poor attendance in the program services was likely to be repeated at the worksite.

In making placements, mentors attempted to find worksites that aligned with participants' career goals. Bridges partnered with many different employers and offered internships at a range of businesses, including a family-owned business that installs scaffolding, a local barber shop, a nonprofit that works with disconnected youth, and a church.⁴ Participants' work readiness and mastery of soft skills were also considered during placements. For example, a young person who requires a more supportive environment may be placed into a more flexible worksite with fewer responsibilities. As a final step in placement, some employers required that participants complete an interview to get the job.

Internship Duties

Internship worksites varied by type of establishment and scope of work. Generally, internship duties were designed to provide interns exposure to work but not for them to build their hard skills or contribute to production. One employer explained that Bridges interns were "extra;" in other words, they helped but were not integral to the company's operations. Participants frequently completed tasks such as sweeping, light maintenance, or shadowing employees. In some instances, participants had more robust jobs such as cutting clients' hair at a barbershop or completing landscaping tasks for a local business. Table 5.2 presents a sample of employers and internship duties.

Employers reported that program participants' performance at worksites was inconsistent. Employers explained that some Bridges interns were diligent workers, while others struggled with attendance, punctuality, and professionalism. In some cases, their performance was directly related to the kinds of duties they were assigned. One employer explained that participants had to first prove that they took the work seriously and were dependable before he gave them more important tasks.

Mentors checked in with employers to learn about how participants were doing and to keep track of the hours participants had worked. They also visited internship worksites to observe participants' on-the-job performance. If a young person was not attending their internship or taking the work seriously, mentors attempted to intervene. In some cases, they would assign a young person to a different internship if the first placement was not a good match for the employer or participant.

⁴Bridges partnered with more than 25 employers to offer subsidized internships. However, many worksites only ever hosted a single participant, and some did not host any participants.

Table 5.2

Sample of Participants' Subsidized Internship Experiences

Organization	Industry	Description of Work Activities
Auto repair shop	Installation, maintenance, and repair	Shadowing and hands-on training
Building materials supplier	Construction and extraction	Sweeping and moving equipment
Landscaper	Building and grounds cleaning and maintenance	Maintaining landscape and operating tools
Barber shop	Personal care and services	Cutting hair
Restaurant	Food preparation and service	Customer service
Electronics retailer	Sales	Shadowing sales, customer service, and technical assistance
Church	Community and social service	Sweeping, cleaning, and light maintenance
Youth auto repair program	Automotive installation, maintenance, and repair	Learning about car restoration

SOURCES: Program management information system and qualitative data.

Internship Wages

Bridges paid the internship wages, rather than the employers. Mentors worked with worksites to document how many hours participants worked before processing their payments. Participants received checks based on the hours they worked approximately every two weeks; however, payment schedules fluctuated, and one provider maintained a more consistent payment schedule than the other.

- **Staff members and participants alike expressed frustration with the program's low internship wages, which were below Chicago's rising minimum wage.**

As noted above, the Bridges internship wage was \$8.25 per hour, the minimum wage in Chicago at the time the program launched. Chicago is in the process of gradually increasing their minimum wage to \$13.00 per hour by 2019.⁵ However, programs offering government-subsidized temporary employment for youth — like Bridges — are exempt from the wage increase. Participants earned \$1.75 below the minimum wage in 2015 and \$2.25 below the minimum wage in 2016. Staff and participants expressed frustration at the low wages given that they could make

⁵City of Chicago (n.d.).

significantly more money elsewhere. Staff worried that the internship wages were not high enough to deter participants from more lucrative opportunities in the informal economy.

Participation in Internships

- **Only 26 percent of participants began internships.**

Table 5.3 provides information about participation in subsidized internships within six months of entering the program. One-fourth of participants (74 participants) began a subsidized internship within this time frame. This closely aligns with the percentage of participants who participated in the program for 31 days or more. (See Table 4.1.) While attendance may have kept many participants from entering Phase II, attendance among those in internships was steady. Participants who began internships worked an average of 112 hours of the 12-week internship and earned \$923.

Table 5.3

Participation in Internships Within Six Months of Entering Bridges to Pathways

Outcome	Full Sample
Worked in an internship (%)	25.6
Earnings from internship (\$)	236
Among those who worked in an internship	(n=74)
<i>Earnings from internship (\$)</i>	923
<i>Average number of hours worked</i>	111.9
Sample size	289

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from the program's subsidized internship payment records.

NOTE: Sample includes individuals randomly assigned between June 2015 and July 2016. Measures in italics are calculated among those who participated in the activity.

Participant Perspectives on Workforce Readiness

In focus groups and interviews, most participants noted that the employability skills training workshops helped them improve their interview skills and create polished résumés. Some participants said that even though the information was familiar, they felt the workshops still imparted good information. They liked knowing that if they had to submit a résumé it would look “decent.” Most young people reported feeling that the staff had prepared them well for interviews with subsidized employers.

- **Participants had mixed feelings about how much they were learning at their placements.**

Participants had mixed experiences in their worksites. Several participants complained that their work was not structured or “professional.” At times, they felt like they were not needed; one participant explained that he felt so unnecessary that he did not bother to show up unless his supervisor called. While all participants agreed that the work was not hard, some felt that their supervisors expected too much. One participant explained that his supervisor was a stickler for details such as showing up on time, and another complained that he had been chastised for appearing to be doing nothing when he was not given any tasks to complete. Some participants found their subsidized internship experiences meaningful. Participants who liked their internships often expressed an interest in continuing their work with the employer after the subsidized period ended. While some employers expressed a willingness to hire high-performing Bridges participants, there is no evidence that any of them ever did.

Program Exit

Key Findings

- **Few participants achieved the program’s stated goals of attaining a high school credential and obtaining unsubsidized employment.**
- **Program providers focused on helping participants make gains toward intermediate goals such as consistent attendance and improved self-confidence.**

Participant Experiences

Young people in Bridges had a variety of experiences: While some enjoyed services such as SEL workshops or internships, others had sharp criticism. Similarly, participants had different program outcomes, ranging from active, ongoing participation to program termination. Box 5.1, Box 5.2, and Box 5.3 highlight the experiences three participants based on interviews with participants and staff members.

Exiting the Bridges to Pathways Program

- **Few participants achieved the program’s stated goals of attaining a high school credential and obtaining unsubsidized employment. Program providers focused on helping participants make gains toward intermediate goals such as consistent attendance and improved self-confidence.**

A small number of participants made it through the program’s third phase and attained the program’s stated goals: earning a high school credential and attaining an unsubsidized job. Staff members came to see these goals as long-term ones and they primarily viewed Bridges as a highly supportive program that could “prepare youth for success” in the future and in other programs where they could continue to work toward longer-term goals such as earning a high school credential, finding employment, and pursuing postsecondary education. Staff members did not

think Bridges' target population was likely to reach these goals within the six-month program period. Both providers considered it a successful exit if a participant was engaged in an activity such as school, work, or another program at the end of their time in Bridges.

Box 5.1

Participant Vignette

Seventeen years old, Anthony was on home confinement and intensive probation supervision, allowed only to travel between Bridges and his home. Previously, he had spent much of his time selling drugs and smoking marijuana with friends. His first arrest happened at age 12 for aggravated discharge on a police officer. This was followed by arrest and incarceration at age 13 for violating house arrest, attempted delivery of cocaine, and possession of marijuana and another incarceration at age 14. He stopped attending school around 14 or 15.

While he enjoyed aspects of his past lifestyle, including the high earnings, he realized he did not want to continue it. "I don't want to be 50 doing the same [thing]. There are people I know who is 46 and 37 still out there selling packs, broke, ain't got nothing to show for it," he explained. Thus, when the Cook County Court referred Anthony to Bridges, he was eager to join and learn workplace etiquette, build interview skills, and find a subsidized job.

With good attendance, active participation and engagement, and a positive attitude, program staff members believed that Anthony was committed to making positive changes in his life.

At the time of the interview, Anthony had successfully completed four weeks of his 12-week internship with a Chicago-based construction company, where he hoped to be hired full time after completing Bridges. Entering Bridges with a sixth-grade reading and math level, Anthony struggled academically. The academic staff members at Bridges planned to refer him to an alternative education service where he would receive more individual attention and spend more time working toward his GED certificate.

Most significantly, Anthony made substantial progress with regard to his social-emotional skills. When he enrolled in Bridges, he set a goal to be respectful to himself, his peers, and his mother. His social-emotional learning instructor worked with him to increase his self-awareness and channel his tendencies to be the class clown into leadership. Staff members reported that Anthony made big strides in this arena. He even helped his peers reframe their outlook to make their Bridges experience more meaningful.

Box 5.2

Participant Vignette

When Gideon arrived at Bridges, he was excited about the opportunity to work, continue his education, stay out of the criminal justice system, and expand his future possibilities. At 17 years old, he had spent the past four years cycling in and out of incarceration for charges such as gun possession, fighting, and robbery. After his most recent release, he was shot. This event, together with his concern that he would be treated as an adult under the law once he turned 18, motivated him to seek out ways to turn his life around. Bridges, which he learned about through his probation officer, appeared to be a good fit for what he was after.

At the start of the program, Gideon had positive expectations for Bridges. He explained that Bridges is hard “if you make it hard,” meaning that if he pushed himself and took the program seriously, he would be able to find success. His near-term goals included obtaining his GED certificate, getting a job at a place such as Starbucks, and buying a car. He identified the social pull of the streets as the biggest threat to his success. Indeed, even before joining Bridges, he had already started making a conscious effort to spend less time with his friends, as he considered them a negative influence.

Gideon took Bridges seriously and was among the more active participants, completing Phases 1 and 2 of the program. He generally liked the staff and program, though he struggled with the academic work. He made minimal progress toward obtaining his GED certificate, finding it difficult to focus when taking the preparatory pre-tests. Gideon was placed in several internships, one of which was a construction internship that would have allowed him to earn a certification. With just three or four weeks left before completion, though, he stopped attending. Staff members reported that he was “driven back toward the streets.”

Staff members observed that, for Gideon, making money was a priority and the modest income he earned through his internship was not enough. Staff members suspected that he returned to selling drugs to make money faster. Ultimately, he was terminated from the program for making choices that staff members explained compromised safety at the program.

Box 5.3

Participant Vignette

For Jay, a 21-year-old new father with a criminal history including two convictions, the relationships he developed with the staff members at Bridges have been instrumental to his recent successes.

Jay started selling drugs during his first year of high school, after his younger brother encouraged him to “hit the block.” He was expelled in his junior year for selling drugs and briefly attended an alternative school before dropping out. At 19, he was sentenced for a drug offense to a four-month boot camp for first time offenders. Less than a year later, he was arrested, again, for gun possession and sentenced to 18 months at an Illinois state prison.

After being released, he moved in with his mother and sisters and returned to the street until his younger brother, who was enrolled in Bridges already, recommended the program to him. Wanting to contribute the financial support of his daughter and his mother, Jay was eager to pursue a GED certificate. He was introduced to a Bridges mentor who “stuck with [him] ... [and] kept checking on [him] until he showed up to the program.” He was impressed by the Bridges staff’s willingness to help. “It seemed like [the staff] really wanted to help us; that’s what kept me coming,” he said.

Despite his overall positive views of the program, Jay was frustrated by the internship and education components of Bridges. Initially, Jay enjoyed his internship at a community garden, but, over time, he began to feel underutilized and was not growing. Reflecting on his time in the internship, he said, “I dealt with it because it was an income. Like I was getting paid to do nothing. But it wasn’t really about the income, it was about me learning more.”

Jay did not find that the education he received at Bridges to sufficiently prepare him to pass the GED exam. After not passing the test on his first attempt, he enrolled in a GED preparatory course through another organization and plans to take the test again soon.

Nevertheless, Jay found great value in his relationships with Bridges staff members, and his experience with the program has helped him advance. Since joining, Jay has achieved many of his short- and long-term goals, which he attributes in large part to the support he has received from his mentor and other staff members at Bridges. He has a full-time job, he is enrolled in a GED preparatory course, he is contributing to the family bills, he has built a positive relationship with his daughter, and he has separated himself from his old social networks. Next year, he hopes to move out of his mother’s apartment, buy a car, and save money. Eventually, he would like to launch his own landscaping business. Jay said, “The only thing that can stop me is me.”

Chapter 6

Preliminary Evidence on Program Impacts

Bridges to Pathways (Bridges) was a multi-component program offering academic, employment, and social-emotional well-being activities, combined with intensive mentoring and case management supports. It aimed to help participants earn a high school credential, obtain unsubsidized employment, and reduce their involvement with the criminal justice system. While this report focuses mainly on the implementation of Bridges, it also presents preliminary findings of an assessment of survey and administrative data that were collected during the study period. Although the study's sample size was small and the available data were limited in some respects, this analysis provides a glimpse at the potential ability of the Bridges program to improve participants' outcomes in the areas of social support, education and training, employment and earnings, personal well-being, and involvement with the criminal justice system. Given the City of Chicago's interest in this model as a violence reduction program, outcomes in the criminal justice domain are of particular interest.

The evaluation's use of a randomized controlled trial allows for an analysis of the program's impacts by comparing outcomes for the program group, which had access to Bridges' services, with outcomes for the control group, which did not. Control group members were not eligible to participate in the Bridges program, but they could access other services that were available in the community, including non-Bridges services offered at the agencies operating Bridges. Thus, it is possible that they may have found services similar to those offered by Bridges. This chapter will first assess whether there were any differences in receipt of services before turning to the question of whether the program produced any differences in outcomes. This chapter presents impacts on outcomes in the year following random assignment.

Key Findings

- **The program modestly increased access to education and training, employment services, and provided supportive relationships.**
- **The program had no impacts on overall arrests or incarceration in the Cook County jail during the first year of follow-up, but it reduced the proportion of individuals arrested for a felony crime and for a violent crime.**
- **The program had no impacts on educational or training certification, and there was no sustained effect on employment through the end of the follow-up period, following an early increase in employment due to participation in the program internships.**

Differences in Service Receipt

The measures discussed in this section are based on responses to a survey administered 11 to 12 months after random assignment to individuals who entered the study through June 2016. Nearly half of the sample members (228 of 480 individuals) completed the survey. Although this response rate is considerably lower than that typically achieved in MDRC studies, the rates are similar for both research groups. The attrition standard developed by the What Works Clearinghouse accounts for both the overall attrition rate and the differential between research groups. Accordingly, the overall attrition rate of 53 percent, combined with a differential between the two groups of 0.2 percentage points, is considered within the acceptable level of potential bias.¹ Appendix A presents the results of an analysis of survey respondents compared with nonrespondents.

Table 6.1 presents the treatment contrast between survey respondents in the two research groups. (Box 6.1 explains how to read the impact tables in this chapter.) Unless otherwise indicated, all impacts discussed in this report are statistically significant at the 10 percent level or less.

- **The program modestly increased access to education and training, employment services, and provided supportive relationships.**

Education Activities

As described in Chapter 4, over two-thirds of program group members ever attended Bridges. As shown in Table 6.1, a similar proportion of survey respondents in the program group (69 percent) reported participating in any education and training activities, compared with over 60 percent among control group members. This 7 percentage point increase in participation among program group members is not statistically significant. Because program group members were more likely than control group members to have participated in both education and training activities, there are some differences between the research groups in rates of participation by type of activity. In the area of education, the largest difference between the two research groups occurred with respect to participation in Adult Basic Education (ABE) classes, with a smaller (and not statistically significant) difference in participation in General Educational Development (GED) or high school diploma classes.²

Although Bridges did not offer formal vocational training, program group members were more likely to report having participated in this activity than control group members. A review of their descriptions of these activities found that many respondents in the program group were referring to their Bridges internships, with most receiving training in auto repair, sanitation, or construction. Other respondents in both research groups participated in vocational training at a variety

¹What Works Clearinghouse (2017).

²Classes to prepare students to take the GED exam are generally offered to individuals with a ninth-grade or higher reading level. ABE courses are for students who are not yet at that level. It is not clear if this distinction was understood by the respondents; on the survey, the question about ABE, described as “classes that help with your reading or math skills,” was asked before the question about GED preparation.

Table 6.1
One-Year Differences in Service Receipt

Outcome (%)	Program Group	Control Group	Difference	90 Percent Confidence Interval
Education				
Participated in education and training	69.2	61.8	7.4	[-3.4, 18.3]
ABE, GED, or high school diploma classes	66.2	55.2	11.0	[0.0, 22.1]
GED or high school diploma classes	52.5	46.7	5.8	[-5.8, 17.3]
ABE classes	39.5	21.0	18.5 ***	[7.7, 29.4]
Vocational training	20.4	7.8	12.6 **	[4.5, 20.7]
Community, two-year, or four-year college classes	5.4	7.3	-1.9	[-7.5, 3.6]
Employment				
Received help related to finding or keeping a job	81.5	63.0	18.4 ***	[8.8, 28.1]
Job search or job readiness ^a	77.2	48.6	28.6 ***	[18.3, 38.9]
Career planning	72.9	52.9	19.9 ***	[9.5, 30.3]
Unpaid work experience or internship	19.0	21.0	-2.0	[-11.2, 7.3]
Paying for job-related transportation or equipment costs	50.2	20.6	29.6 ***	[18.8, 40.4]
Support and Mentoring				
Received advice or support from staff member at an agency or organization	65.3	49.6	15.7 **	[4.3, 27.1]
Received mentoring from staff member at an agency or organization	55.0	47.5	7.6	[-4.0, 19.2]
Received advice or support from peer at an agency or organization	88.7	85.1	3.6	[-4.1, 11.2]
Received mental health assistance	10.7	14.7	-4.0	[-11.7, 3.7]
Received substance abuse treatment or counseling	14.8	7.4	7.4 *	[0.2, 14.7]
Sample size	137	91		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on responses to the Subsidized and Transitional Employment Demonstration youth survey. The survey was administered to individuals randomly assigned between June 2015 and June 2016.

NOTES: ABE = adult basic education, GED = General Educational Development.

Results in this table are regression-adjusted, controlling for pre-random assignment characteristics.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

^aThis measure includes developing a résumé, filling out job applications, and preparing for job interviews.

Box 6.1

How to Read the Impact Tables in This Report

The tables in this chapter use the format depicted in the table excerpt below, which shows receipt of employment-related services for the program and control groups. The row of data shows that 81.5 percent of program group members and 63.0 percent of control group members reported having received help finding or keeping a job.

The “Difference” column shows the difference between the two research groups on the outcome — that is, the program’s estimated effect, or impact, on receipt of these services. For example, the estimated impact can be calculated by subtracting 63.0 from 81.5, yielding a difference of 18.4 percentage points.

Differences marked with asterisks are “statistically significant,” meaning they are larger than would generally be expected if the program had no true effect; that is, they are likely attributable to the offer of the Bridges program. The number of asterisks indicates whether the estimated impact is statistically significant at the 10 percent (one asterisk), 5 percent (two asterisks), or 1 percent (three asterisks) level. The lower the level (or the more asterisks), the less likely that an ineffective program could have generated the impact. The impact on receipt of help finding or keeping a job is statistically significant at the 1 percent level, which means that there is less than a 1 percent probability that an ineffective program would have produced an estimated impact this large.

In 90 percent of experiments of this type, the true value of the impact would fall within the range shown in the “confidence interval” column. For example, there is a 90 percent chance that the true value of this impact is between 8.8 and 28.1 percentage points.

Outcome	Program Group	Control Group	Difference (Impact)		90 Percent Confidence Interval
Received help related to finding or keeping a job	81.5	63.0	18.4	***	[8.8, 28.1]

of providers, including alternative high schools, community colleges, or community-based organizations. The training they received was in areas similar to those offered in the Bridges internships, although a few respondents also mentioned learning to operate a forklift.

Employment-Related Services

As reported in the survey, over 80 percent of program group members received help related to finding or keeping a job. (This help was mostly through job search and career planning activities, although half of program group members reported receiving help paying for job-related transportation or equipment costs.) This percentage is greater than the proportion of program group members who ever attended Bridges, so presumably respondents received some of this help elsewhere. Among program group members who reported receiving this type of help, nearly three out of four of them had participated in Bridges (not shown in table). Nearly two-thirds of control group members reported receiving this type of assistance.

Support and Mentoring

Program group members were more likely to report having received advice or support from a staff member at an agency or organization, compared with their control group counterparts (65 percent and 50 percent, respectively). Although program group members were more likely than control group members to report having a mentor, this difference is not statistically significant. High proportions of both research groups reported receiving support or advice from a peer.

Although Bridges did not provide mental health or substance abuse counseling, the program providers could have helped participants with such needs seek and receive these services. However, the survey results show that fairly small proportions of both research groups received such help. The differences between the two research groups on these measures move in opposite directions: Program group members were somewhat less likely to report having received mental health assistance (not statistically significant), but more likely to report having received treatment or counseling for substance abuse.

As described in Chapters 4 and 5, the implementation of Bridges to Pathways met with a number of challenges. As a result, program staff members were able to deliver case management and mentoring services more consistently than other program services. Nevertheless, a somewhat higher proportion of program group members reported receiving services across all domains than did control group members. Surprisingly, however, the program's impact on education outcomes appears to have occurred in relation to ABE services.

Program Impacts

Criminal Justice Outcomes

The Bridges program targeted young men who were involved in the criminal justice system, as part of the City of Chicago's youth violence prevention initiative. The program was modeled after the City of Chicago's One Summer Plus initiative, which was found to reduce the number of arrests for violent crimes among participants.

The research team estimated Bridges' impacts on involvement in the criminal justice system using administrative records data on arrests and incarceration that it collected for all 480 study participants. Although these data offer a complete record of all arrests that occurred in the State of Illinois, they provide a less complete record of incarceration; the data include only admissions and releases from the Cook County Jail, and not confinement in prison or in juvenile detention centers.³

³Information about how these arrests were resolved in the court system was likely incomplete because adjudication outcomes for juvenile arrests and for certain classes of adult arrest are not reported to the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority. Recognizing that young adults are at a different developmental stage than juveniles and adults and that incarceration with older adults may be harmful, jurisdictions have been designing initiatives to keep these young people out of the adult justice system (Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2015). Most individuals who are over the age of 18 years and all individuals over the age of 21

- **Bridges reduced arrests for felony and violent crimes, but there were no impacts on lower level offenses, the overall arrest rate, or the rate of incarceration in the Cook County Jail.**

Table 6.2 presents one-year impacts on criminal justice outcomes. Approximately 62 percent of the control group was arrested during the one-year follow-up, compared with 61 percent of the program group; the difference is not statistically significant. Importantly, although Bridges did not affect the overall arrest rate, it reduced the proportion of program group members arrested for felony and violent crimes:⁴ 42 percent of the control group was charged with a felony crime compared with 34 percent of the program group, resulting in a statistically significant impact of 8 percentage points. Program group members were also significantly less likely to be arrested for a violent crime than their control group counterparts (21 percent and 28 percent, respectively).⁵ This finding is particularly notable given the program goals as part the City of Chicago’s youth violence prevention initiative. This result is also similar to findings from an evaluation of the One Summer Plus initiative, upon which this model is based.

The table shows that there was no difference between the research groups in the average number of arrests (1.3 arrests for the program group compared with 1.4 arrests for the control group). Overall, the level of recidivism among the study sample is at about the same as the level for prisoners released in 30 states: A little over half of adult offenders who are younger than 25 years old at the time of their release are rearrested within one year.⁶

There were no differences between the program and control groups with respect to incarceration in the Cook County Jail. A little more than 40 percent of young people in both research groups were incarcerated in the Cook County Jail at some point during the follow-up period. The average number of days incarcerated in the Cook County jail was slightly more than 30 days, or about 1 month of the total 12-month follow-up period.

In summary, the Bridges program appears to have led to reductions in arrests for more serious felony and violent crimes among a population of very high-risk young men. This result is particularly noteworthy because of the recent rise in violent crimes in Chicago. Overall arrest rates were high for the study sample, which is consistent with the high-risk population targeted by the program. There was no impact on arrests for lower level offenses.

years who are arrested in Cook County are detained in Cook County Jail. In Chicago, individuals arrested as juveniles would not be held in the Cook County Jail, and individuals between the ages of 18 to 21 years might also be detained in a juvenile facility if they had previously been involved with the juvenile justice system. As a result, the jail data may not reflect all instances of incarceration during the first year after random assignment because some young people may have been diverted to the juvenile justice system.

⁴Most of the impact on violent crime arrests was driven by reductions in violent felony crimes.

⁵Violent crimes include homicide, assault, sexual assault, and robbery, among other crimes.

⁶Adult offenders are defined here as those who have been released from state prison. Durose, Cooper, and Snyder (2014).

Table 6.2
One-Year Impacts on Criminal Justice Outcomes

Outcome	Program Group	Control Group	Difference	90 Percent Confidence Interval
Arrested (%)	60.5	61.9	-1.4	[-8.4, 5.6]
Number of arrests	1.3	1.4	-0.1	[-0.4, 0.1]
Arrest class ^a (%)				
Felony	34.2	41.9	-7.7 *	[-14.8, -0.7]
Misdemeanor	38.1	36.1	2.0	[-5.3, 9.2]
Local ordinance/missing class	17.4	17.7	-0.3	[-6.0, 5.5]
Arrest charge ^a (%)				
Violent crime	20.5	27.7	-7.2 *	[-13.5, -0.8]
Drug crime	14.2	15.7	-1.6	[-7.0, 3.8]
Property crime	16.4	13.5	2.9	[-2.5, 8.4]
Public order crime	32.6	29.2	3.5	[-3.6, 10.5]
Other/missing ^b	18.1	17.0	1.1	[-4.7, 6.9]
Ever arrested for violent felony crimes (%)	9.6	15.9	-6.3 **	[-11.3, -1.4]
Incarcerated in Cook County Jail ^c (%)	41.3	43.8	-2.5	[-9.8, 4.8]
Total days incarcerated in Cook County Jail ^c	30.5	33.0	-2.5	[-13.1, 8.1]
Sample size	289	191		

SOURCES: MDRC calculations based on data from the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority and the Cook County Sheriff's Office.

NOTES: Sample includes individuals randomly assigned between June 2015 and July 2016.

Results in this table are regression-adjusted, controlling for pre-random assignment characteristics.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

^aMultiple arrest records with the same date are counted as a single event reflecting the most serious charge. The distributions of arrest types may sum to more than the overall arrest rate because participants arrested more than once could appear in more than one category.

^bThe "other" category includes arrests for warrant, probation, or local ordinance charges.

^cThe incarceration measures include individuals who were on electronic monitoring, which the county tracks as a type of custody.

Other Program Outcomes

- **The program had no impacts on educational or training certification, and there was no sustained effect on employment through the end of the follow-up period, following an early increase in employment due to participation in the program internships.**

Table 6.3 shows that, among survey respondents, there were few significant differences in outcomes across the domains of education, employment, and personal well-being. However, a few measures are suggestive of gains for program group members.

Education and Training

There are no statistically significant differences in the area of educational achievements. Among program group members, 15 percent reported that they had earned a high school diploma or equivalency certificate, compared with 18 percent among control group members. The percentage of sample members who earned a professional license was low for both research groups, but it was slightly higher for program group members. For both research groups, these licenses were mainly Occupational Safety and Health Administration certificates in construction, sanitation, or food handling.

Employment and Earnings

Based on survey responses, just over half of control group members had been employed at some point since random assignment, compared with nearly 70 percent of program group members, an impact of 18 percentage points. While some of this impact may be due to unsubsidized employment, it is likely that some of it can be attributable to participation in the Bridges internships. Around half of program group members who reported having been employed since random assignment had worked in an internship (not shown in table). The proportion of sample members who were working at the time of the survey was considerably lower, and the difference between the two groups is not significant: Around 22 percent of control group members reported that they were working at the time of the survey, compared with 28 percent of program group members. Again, just over half of program group members who reported that they were currently employed indicated that the job was an internship. Interestingly, a similar (slightly higher) proportion of control group members reported that they were working in an internship at the time of the survey, possibly through programs similar to Bridges that offer internships. Yet program group members who were working reported lower hourly wages compared with working control group members, perhaps due to the low pay provided by Bridges internships.⁷

A second data source for this domain was quarterly wage data from the National Directory of New Hires (NDNH). Unfortunately, these data were available for only half of the study sample — those individuals who provided a Social Security number at random assignment — with only some overlap with the half of the sample that responded to the survey. (Appendix A provides information on how this sample compares with the full study sample.) Moreover, the NDNH data do not include internships or any other informal employment that is not reported to

⁷The internship's wage of \$8.25 per hour matched the minimum wage at the time the Bridges to Pathways pilot launched in 2013. However, as a subsidized employment program for youth, it was not subject to the city ordinance passed in late 2014 that would raise the minimum wage over several years, starting with an increase to \$10 per hour effective July 2015.

Table 6.3
One-Year Impacts on Education, Employment, and Personal Well-Being

Outcome	Program Group	Control Group	Difference	90 Percent Confidence Interval
Education (%)				
Earned a high school diploma or equivalency certificate	15.1	17.9	-2.7	[-10.9, 5.5]
Earned professional license or certification	7.7	2.7	5.1	[-0.3, 10.5]
Employment				
Ever employed (%)	68.2	50.1	18.2 ***	[7.7, 28.6]
Currently employed (%)	27.7	22.0	5.8	[-4.0, 15.5]
Currently employed in internship (%)	15.3	17.5	-2.2	[-10.7, 6.3]
Among those currently employed ^a				
Hours worked per week	27.0	25.3	1.7	
Hourly wage (\$)	12	16	-4	
Ever employed or in school or education activity (%)	86.0	77.1	8.9 *	[0.7, 17.1]
Personal well-being (%)				
Has someone who could ask for help or advice	88.7	77.0	11.7 **	[3.3, 20.1]
Has someone who could complete a small favor	83.3	75.2	8.1	[-1.0, 17.2]
Has someone who could lend them \$250	56.7	46.2	10.5	[-0.7, 21.8]
Overall happiness				
Very happy	19.5	16.8	2.6	[-6.4, 11.7]
Pretty happy	60.7	54.8	5.9	[-5.6, 17.5]
Not too happy	19.8	28.4	-8.6	[-18.3, 1.2]
Experienced serious psychological distress in the past month ^b	10.4	5.3	5.1	[-1.4, 11.6]
Sample size	137	91		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on responses to the Subsidized and Transitional Employment Demonstration youth survey. The survey was administered to individuals randomly assigned between June 2015 and June 2016.

NOTES: Results in this table are regression-adjusted, controlling for pre-random assignment characteristics.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

^aThese measures are calculated among those employed at the time of the survey; they are therefore considered nonexperimental and are not tested for statistical significance.

^bA score of 13 or higher on the Kessler-6 Scale (K-6) is used here to define serious psychological distress. The K-6 assesses how often during the past month a respondent felt nervous, restless or fidgety, hopeless, worthless, that nothing could cheer the individual up, or that everything was an effort. As a result of minor differences between the scale used to administer the K-6 in the Subsidized and Transitional Employment Demonstration youth survey and the standard K-6, the percentages presented in this table may slightly underestimate the incidence of serious psychological distress among Bridges to Pathways sample members.

the unemployment insurance system. For this analysis, the research team supplemented the NDNH data with Bridges subsidy information to produce measures of earnings and employment that included the internships.⁸ As shown in Figure 6.1 these measures reveal that, although program group members were employed at higher rates early in the follow-up period, the rates of employment were similar for the two research groups once participation in Bridges internships declined: In the third quarter after random assignment, the employment rate for both groups was around 27 percent. In the fourth quarter following random assignment, the employment rate among control group members rose, reaching nearly 40 percent, but remained flat for program group members. Although the differences in earnings between the two groups are not statistically significant, even with the addition of the internship wages, program group members generally earned a little less than control group members through the third quarter. The difference grew after the internships ended but remained statistically not significant; the growth was likely driven by the increase in employment among control group members. It is unclear what accounts for the uptick in employment for control group members.

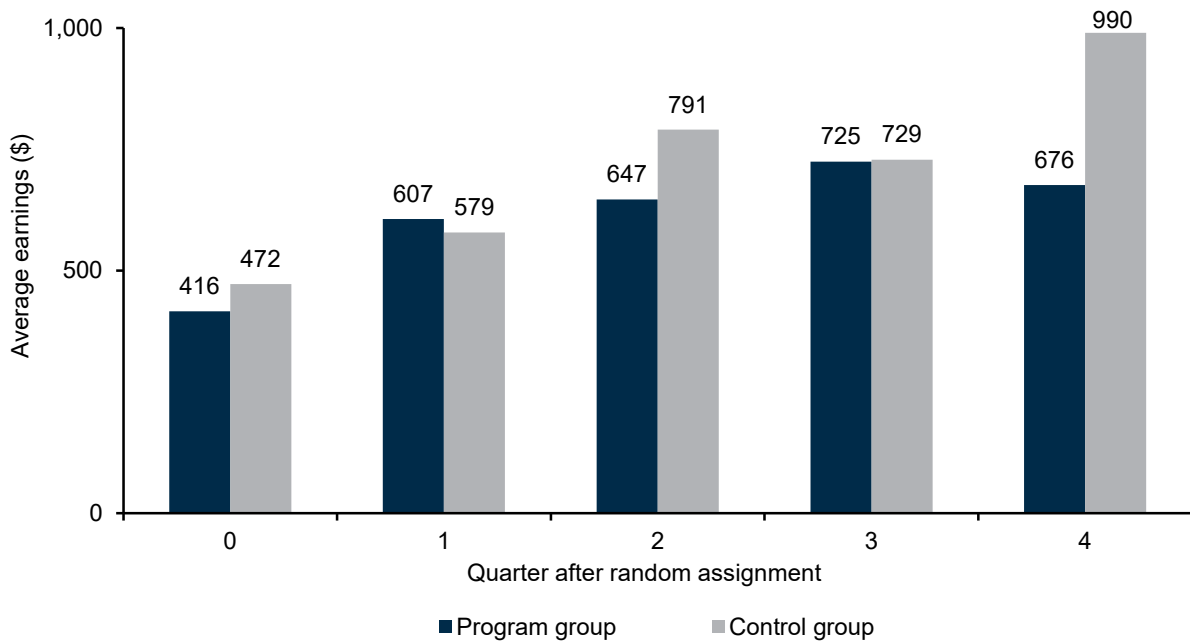
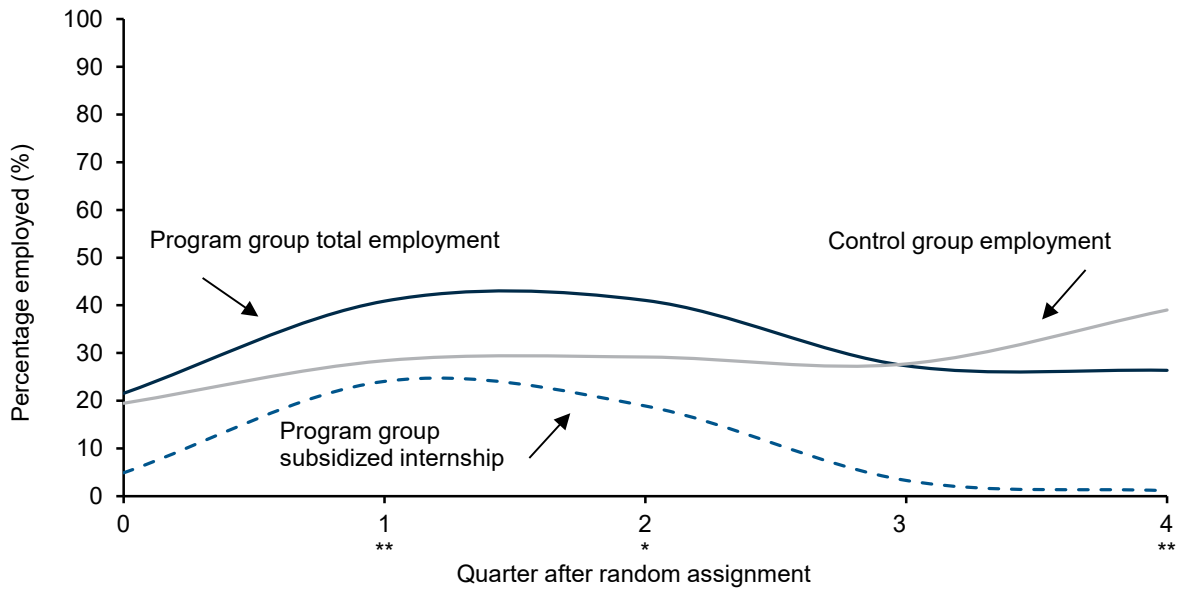
Social Supports and Personal Well-Being

Although more than three-quarters of control group members reported having someone they could ask for help or advice, nearly 9 out of 10 program group members reported the same, a difference of over 10 percentage points. In addition, program group members were more likely to report knowing someone who could complete a small favor for them or could lend them \$250, although these differences are not statistically significant. Taken together, it does not appear that the program had a strong effect on participants' personal well-being; the only measure with a significant difference was whether they had someone of whom they could ask a favor. Moreover, the other measures showed mixed results. Most young people in the program group (61 percent) and in the control group (55 percent) reported being "pretty happy" when interviewed nearly a year after entering the program. A smaller proportion of young people in the program group reported being "not too happy" compared with the control group (a difference of 9 percentage points). However, young people in the program group were more likely to report to have experienced serious psychological distress in the past month than those in the control group (a difference of 5 percentage points).

Although the data available for this analysis may have been imperfect, they shed some light on the effects of the Bridges program. They do appear to suggest that Bridges increased access to education, training, and employment services and fostered supportive relationships for participants. While a high proportion of control group members (77 percent) reported working or participating in education activities since random assignment, 86 percent of the program group members reported the same — an impact of 9 percentage points. This finding is encouraging for the young adults who entered the study largely disconnected from these activities. That said, however, this increased access did not translate into higher attainment rates of educational credentials

⁸If control group members were, in fact, participating in internships through programs similar to Bridges, those earnings are likely not reflected in the NDNH wage data.

Figure 6.1
Employment and Earnings Over Time



SOURCES: MDRC calculations based on quarterly wage data from the National Directory of New Hires and Bridges internship payment records.

NOTES: Sample includes individuals randomly assigned between June 2015 and July 2016 who provided a Social Security number (150 in the program group, 101 in the control group).

Results in this table are regression-adjusted, controlling for pre-random assignment characteristics.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

Employment rates and earnings include both subsidized internships and all other jobs covered by unemployment insurance.

or vocational certifications. Due to Bridges internships, program group members were more likely to have been employed in the year following random assignment. However, as their time in the program ended, their employment rate and earnings began to decrease at the same time when the employment rate among control group members was picking up. A longer follow-up period is needed to determine whether the program group members can ultimately rebound. A final report for the STED project will be completed in late 2019 and will include an update on the study sample's employment and earnings based on NDNH data.

Chapter 7

Lessons and a Look Ahead

This report has presented the findings from a feasibility study of the Bridges to Pathways (Bridges) program, a program designed to curb violence and improve education and employment outcomes for young men involved in the justice system in Chicago. This chapter highlights several lessons for policymakers, funders, program operators, and researchers interested in working with young adults involved with the criminal and juvenile justice systems.

Overall Lessons for Policymakers, Funders, and Practitioners

As new programs begin operating, program providers encounter obstacles, modify their plans for services, and develop new ways to support their participants. This study of a new and still developing program provides insight into how providers adapted the Bridges program model in response to the needs and characteristics of the enrolled sample and dealt with the complications that arose when launching new services. The successes and challenges of implementing Bridges provide useful lessons for others interested in improving outcomes for the young adult population involved in the justice system.

- **Young adults involved in the justice system require robust, population-specific supports to succeed.**

Bridges providers proactively addressed barriers to participants' attendance through case management and transportation services; however, despite these efforts, many participants stopped attending the program. While reducing barriers to young people's attendance is key, it may not be enough to keep them engaged in an intensive program. Many young people will need consistent support to persist in a program, including caring staff and active reengagement efforts. When young people began to disconnect from Bridges, staff members endeavored to find participants in the community and encourage them to return the program. Program staff members considered these ongoing reengagement activities an essential part of the program.

Young adults involved in the justice system have a variety of backgrounds, and local context will factor into the supports this population requires. In Chicago, many young people at high risk for violence are entangled with gangs. Providers should pay careful attention to the needs of young people involved with gangs, especially transportation needs. If participants need to pass through rival gang territory, bus passes and other standard transportation services may not be enough to get participants to and from the program site safely. Gang activity may have a bearing on the selection of program sites, recruitment zones, and transportation strategies.

- **Relatable and committed staff are key to engagement.**

The program's challenges with attendance highlight the importance of services that increase participants' trust in the program and build their self-esteem. Emotional and psychological

barriers brought about by trauma, violence, and involvement with the justice system can make this population distrustful of programs such as Bridges. Vulnerable young people may be slow to fully embrace a program and see its value, and Bridges staff members reported that it took time and effort to convince participants to attend Bridges. Staff members dedicated nearly a quarter of their time to activities related to building rapport with young people and encouraging their engagement in the program. This work is time and labor intensive and requires a significant personal investment from staff members.

Bridges benefitted from hiring mentors with similar backgrounds to participants, who were comfortable visiting young people in their communities, and who were willing to work with participants outside of typical business hours and environments. There is growing evidence that mentors can play a role in reducing recidivism among young adults involved in the justice system, particularly mentors who act as “credible messengers” in order to engage and encourage participants. Similar to Bridges mentors, credible messengers use their shared backgrounds with mentees to build relationships with them and motivate them to make positive changes in their lives.¹ Participants and staff members agreed that the Bridges’ emphasis on mentorship helped increase engagement in the program. Bridges participants reported during interviews that they found the staff relatable and that they valued the efforts of the staff to build close relationships with them.

- **Flexible service plans and policies must be balanced with standards of service.**

Between work, child care responsibilities, court appointments, and enticing offers from friends, young adults involved in the justice system face many demands on their attention. They may have periods during their time in a program where it is easier or harder for them to focus on it. The Bridges providers addressed this challenge by employing flexible attendance policies that welcomed participants back to the program after periods of absence. While this population may benefit from the second chances offered by programs with flexible attendance policies, young people needed to attend the program consistently to meet their goals.

Bridges participants had a diversity of strengths and service needs. Some young people entered the program with prior work experience and the skills to pass the General Educational Development (GED) exam, while others lacked basic reading or math skills and had few academic credits. Bridges staff members worked hard to adapt the program’s services to participants’ needs: They created individualized service plans, set goals based on participant’s abilities, and customized core services. Indeed, few young people from this population will proceed straightforwardly through a program such as Bridges, and they will require extensive support, flexible services, and customized goals to succeed.

At the same time, however, flexible services must be balanced with clear standards of service. Programs should determine what tools they can use to systematically customize services to clients. Needs and skill assessments can help programs determine what services a participant

¹Credible Messenger Justice Center (n.d.).

needs and how to sequence them. More broadly, developing programs may want to consider the extent to which they can tailor their services to participants. A program may struggle to serve some participants if it is not equipped to support every participant who walks through its doors. Programs with limited ability to serve a wide range of participants may benefit from targeting a more specific population that aligns with their service design.

In addition, programs that offer participants flexible timelines and individualized services should consider the tradeoffs between group and individualized services. Cohort and other group-based programs provide valuable opportunities for young people to support and encourage each other. However, many young adults progress through program activities at different paces, making it challenging to conduct group-based activities.

- **More time is needed for young adults involved in the justice system to meet education and employment goals.**

A six-month program may not be long enough for disconnected young adults involved in the justice system to make measurable gains in education and employment. Recognizing that many participants would not reach their employment and education goals during the six-month program, Bridges staff members often focused on helping participants gain the skills necessary to succeed in the future in another program where they could continue to work toward their goals. Longer-term programs may afford this population the time they need to gain stability and improve their ability to achieve their goals.

Because participants may progress slowly toward their education and employment goals, consideration should be given to meaningful interim performance measures. Bridges staff members expressed that what researchers and funders often think of as short-term goals, such as earning a GED certificate or finding unsubsidized work, might take the participants years to achieve. They often focused on soft markers of progress that are difficult to measure, such as young people's willingness to participate, comportsment, and ability to distance themselves from their gangs. It may be helpful for researchers and funders to explore ways to track these less-tangible benchmarks, so they may be sequenced with more traditional measures. It may also be worthwhile to consider the weight given to early benchmarks that are easier to measure, such as attendance or achievements in math assessment scores. While interim measures are important for this population, measures must also reflect substantive progress toward participants' education and employment goals.

- **In-house services require robust resources and management.**

Offering a package of services in house can make it easy for young people to access much-needed services. However, providers and funders should develop the infrastructure needed to implement quality services across all components. All program components require robust resources and oversight. This includes employing staff members with relevant expertise, such as a background in job development or teaching, and providing them with training in program curricula. In addition, programs may benefit from creating managerial roles tasked with steering and standardizing service delivery, such as a director of education or workforce services.

In particular, academic programs may be very difficult to launch. Bridges' attempt to offer a high school diploma outside of a school setting highlights the challenge that accreditation presents — even when using an online learning platform. Nonaccredited institutions may benefit from close partnership with institutions able to confer credit and diplomas. Similar to other service components, high school equivalency programs will require strong oversight, robust staffing, and a structured approach to service delivery.

Overall Lessons for Researchers

The evaluation of the Bridges program provides useful lessons for those interested in researching new programs and gathering data on the outcomes of the young adult population involved in the justice system.

- **Staged research designs allow a program evaluation to scale up as a new program matures.**

A frequent criticism of the program evaluation field is that programs are evaluated before they are ready. Then, when results are disappointing, funders lose interest before a new program has had the chance to fully mature. Drawing inspiration from a 2013 paper by Epstein and Klerman, the research team used a staged design to study Bridges.² First, the team conducted an initial study during which it made efforts to ensure that the program was meeting certain minimum benchmarks for it to be worthy of a further evaluation. During this period, the research team piloted the random assignment process to see if the program would be able to enroll young people in adequate numbers and also to understand the level of services available to the control group. Unlike traditional pilots, the study used a random assignment design because it was very hard to know where to set performance benchmarks without knowing the level of services required for the population.

Data from the initial cohort was ultimately discarded because many enrolled individuals never started services. The program refined its recruitment strategies and service delivery for the next year to address these challenges. At this point, the research team proceeded to conduct an implementation study and restarted the random assignment study in order to assess the program, but still at a relatively small scale. Based on the results presented in this report, a larger study of a refined version of this program model might be conducted by other researchers. This phased approach gives programs time to mature, pivot, and iterate and offers “offramps” in case certain minimal standards are not met; it seems advisable for programs that are promising but not quite ready for rigorous impact evaluation.

- **Criminal justice data on transition-aged youth span multiple systems, adding to the complexity in forming a complete picture of their experiences.**

²Epstein and Klerman (2013).

Although most sample members were 18 years of age or older when they enrolled in the study, the majority had first been arrested as juveniles. Depending on state policies, young adult offenders may be tried, adjudicated, and detained in juvenile or adult systems, or, in some cases, in a combination of both. While young adults are increasingly a population of interest, compiling criminal justice data on this age group to gain a fuller understanding of their experiences can be challenging. For example, separate data systems house information on juvenile arrests, court appearances, detention, and corrections activities in Illinois.

Looking Ahead

An important element of feasibility assessments is the potential to improve programs and refine the theory of change prior to more rigorous testing. Drawing on many lessons learned by operating Bridges in its first three years, the Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS) has substantially altered the program that was described in this report. In 2017, they launched a new version of the program that aims to reduce youth violence in Chicago by helping young people reconnect to school and earn their high school diploma or equivalency certificate. Notably, the new program focuses on helping young people attach to and persist in education services in their community rather than offering in-house education services, which Bridges providers found challenging to implement. Bridges staff members noted frequently that six months was not enough time to help the target population achieve their goals and disconnect from their previous lifestyle, and the new program extends services from 6 to 18 months. Finally, the program model continues to emphasize mentoring from trusted adults with relatable backgrounds, a feature Bridges staff members found to be integral to the service offerings. Mentors in the new program have small caseloads and are responsible for forming close relationships with participants, maintaining consistent contact with them, and liaising between participants and their schools, families, and communities.³ Figure 7.1 provides additional details about the former and current versions of Bridges.

Despite challenges, Bridges was able to engage a subset of young men and reduce arrests for serious crimes. Therefore, it will be important to test programs that refine the model first piloted by Bridges. Doing so can help identify the mix of services that make a difference in the lives of young adults involved in the justice system.

³City of Chicago (2013).

Figure 7.1

Features of the Past and Current Bridges Programs

	Bridges to Pathways 2013-2016	Bridges to Pathways 2017-present
Target Population		
Age	17-21 years	14-17 years 18-24 years
Eligibility	Young men involved with the justice system	Young people involved with the justice system Previously incarcerated youth Opportunity youth
Duration	6 months	18 months
Program services		
Academic	In-house high school diploma or equivalency certification program	Navigation to traditional high schools and equivalency programs
Social-emotional learning (SEL)	In-house SEL workshops	Strategy determined by provider
Employment	In-house employability skills workshops and subsidized internships	Navigation to summer youth employment or other activities
Mentorship and case management	Small caseloads, with focus on relationship building	Small caseloads, with focus on relationship building
Incentives	\$10 daily stipend	\$50 weekly stipend for participants who meet minimum attendance requirements and are enrolled in an education program

Appendix A

**Analysis of Sample Differences — Survey Respondents
and the National Directory of New Hires Sample**

Survey Response Analysis

This analysis examines the responses for the survey administered 11 to 12 months after random assignment. The survey was completed by 228 of 480 sample members (137 program group members and 91 control group members), resulting in a response rate of nearly 50 percent. Given the response rate was considerably lower than the 80 percent response rate typically achieved in MDRC studies, it is conceivable that those who participated in the survey are not representative of the full research sample. For example, it is common to see differences between respondents and nonrespondents in sociodemographic characteristics, such as age and stability. The main concern is differences between program and control group respondents: Differences between the type of program group member who respond to the survey and the type of control group member who responds to the survey can result in biased estimates of impacts based on the survey. As shown in Table A.1, respondents were different from nonrespondents on a few characteristics. In particular, respondents had fewer arrests, were more likely to have worked prior to random assignment, and had slightly more education.

Because a comparison of a series of characteristics is susceptible to false positives, a global test of the relation of these characteristics to response status was also done. This test is conducted by estimating a regression model predicting survey response, and the test statistic reported for each characteristic indicates whether that characteristic has a statistically significant association with survey response, controlling for the other characteristics. The joint test indicates whether the characteristics collectively have a statistically significant association with survey response. A few characteristics, specifically number of prior arrests and highest grade completed have significant effects. The overall joint test is also statistically significant, indicating that response status for the survey can be predicted by these characteristics. These associations may indicate some level of response bias, but this bias would primarily affect outcome estimates rather than impact estimates, as the bias affects both program and control group members.

A greater concern in an impact analysis are differences between research groups within the respondent sample. If respondents' sociodemographic characteristics vary by research group, the impact estimates may not reflect true differences between the groups. The comparison of program group and control group members among respondents presented in Table A.2 shows the two groups to be similar on most characteristics. However, among respondents, program group members were more likely to have children, but less likely to have secure housing at the time of random assignment. The joint test of the association between sociodemographic characteristics and research groups for survey respondents is not significant.

Impact Differences

Another way to assess possible bias stemming from survey response is to examine differences between the full research sample and the survey respondents on impact measures with administrative data available for both samples. If the differences between the program and control groups in the survey respondent sample are not similar to those observed for the full sample, it would indicate that the respondent sample is not representative and so impact estimates based on the survey may be biased. As shown in Table A.3, the arrest and jail incarceration rates and days spent in jail are lower for survey respondents than they are for the full research sample, but the overall pattern of impacts between the two groups are similar. When

multiple outcomes are tested, the results are susceptible to false positives, so the research team performed a joint test to assess differences in multiple outcomes simultaneously. This test found that impacts on the arrest and jail incarceration outcomes did not differ significantly between the full sample and the survey respondent sample (p -value = 0.521).

A second method to assess whether impact estimates are biased due to survey nonresponse is multiple imputation. This method uses statistical modeling to predict the responses for sample members who did not respond to the survey. Multiple predictions are generated to simulate the distribution of responses from which impact sample estimates are generated. In other words, this analysis provides an estimate of the impacts derived from survey data if all members of the research sample had responded to the survey. Table A.4 shows the regression coefficients for several program effects for survey respondents and for the research sample estimated using multiple imputation. The impact estimates are similar for all outcomes for both program groups, in both size and statistical significance, providing further evidence that there is no significant difference in program impacts between survey respondents and nonrespondents.

Analysis of Sample Members Who Provided a Social Security Number and Those Who Did Not

In order to facilitate administrative data collection, sample members were asked to provide identifying information at the time of random assignment. The young men were unlikely to have access to official documents at the time of enrollment, and similar to most young people, they may not have yet committed this information to memory. As a result, Social Security numbers (SSNs) were not collected for nearly half of the sample. Quarterly wage data from the National Directory of New Hires could not be compiled for those who did not provide an SSN, and therefore, the measures based on these data are likely not representative of the full research sample.

As one might expect, Table A.5 shows that sample members who provided an SSN are older, completed more years of school, and were more likely to have prior work experience than those that did not provide an SSN. In addition, those who provided their SSN had slightly fewer prior arrests. However, Table A.6 shows that SSN status is randomly distributed between research groups. Indeed, the comparison of criminal justice outcomes for the full sample and for those who provided an SSN presented in Table A.3 show strong similarities in both outcomes and differences.

Appendix Table A.1

Selected Baseline Characteristics of Survey Respondents and Nonrespondents

Characteristic	Respondents	Nonrespondents
Average age	18.3	18.5
Number of prior arrests	7.2	11.1 ***
Race/ethnicity (%)		
Hispanic	20.6	22.8
Black, non-Hispanic	76.8	72.4
White, non-Hispanic	0.0	1.6
Other, non-Hispanic	2.6	3.3
Ever employed (%)	56.5	41.6 ***
Has children (%)	24.2	28.1
Has secure housing (%)	82.7	78.4
Highest grade completed	10.2	9.9 ***
Has been in special education (%)	19.0	25.0
Sample size	228	252

SOURCES: MDRC calculations based on data from the baseline survey and the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority. The survey was administered to individuals randomly assigned between June 2015 and June 2016.

NOTES: Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

Appendix Table A.2

Selected Baseline Characteristics of Survey Respondents, by Research Group

Characteristic	Survey Respondents	
	Program Group	Control Group
Average age	18.4	18.2
Number of prior arrests	7.6	6.7
Race/ethnicity (%)		
Hispanic	21.2	19.8
Black, non-Hispanic	74.5	80.2
White, non-Hispanic	0.0	0.0
Other, non-Hispanic	4.4	0.0
Ever employed (%)	58.2	53.9
Has children (%)	29.9	15.7 **
Has secure housing (%)	77.7	89.9 **
Highest grade completed	10.2	10.2
Has been in special education (%)	22.3	14.0
Sample size	137	91

SOURCES: MDRC calculations based on data from the baseline survey and the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority. The survey was administered to individuals randomly assigned between June 2015 and June 2016.

NOTES: Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

Appendix Table A.3

Selected One-Year Impacts for the Full Sample, Survey Respondent Sample, and Sample That Provided a Social Security Number

Outcome	Program Group	Control Group	Difference (Impact)	90 Percent Confidence Interval
Ever arrested in Year 1 (%)				
Full sample	60.5	61.9	-1.4	[-8.4,5.6]
Survey respondent sample	53.8	53.1	0.7	[-9.9,11.3]
Provided SSN	58.3	64.0	-5.7	[-15.4,4.0]
Ever arrested for a violent felony in Year 1 (%)				
Full sample	9.6	15.9	-6.3 **	[-11.3,-1.4]
Survey respondent sample	6.9	8.3	-1.4	[-7.3,4.5]
Provided SSN	9.1	16.2	-7.1 *	[-13.8,-0.4]
Ever admitted to jail in Year 1 (%)				
Full sample	41.3	43.8	-2.5	[-9.8,4.8]
Survey respondent sample	37.3	35.1	2.2	[-8.5,12.8]
Provided SSN	42.6	43.7	-1.1	[-11.1,8.9]
Days in jail in Year 1				
Full sample	30.5	33.0	-2.5	[-13.1,8.1]
Survey respondent sample	14.0	13.6	0.5	[-9.1,10.0]
Provided SSN	28.6	32.9	-4.3	[-19.6,11.0]
Sample size				
Full sample (total = 480)	289	191		
Survey respondent sample (total = 228)	137	91		
Provided SSN (total = 251)	150	101		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on criminal justice administrative records. The survey was administered to individuals randomly assigned between June 2015 and June 2016.

NOTES: SSN = Social Security number.

Results in this table are regression-adjusted, controlling for pre-random assignment characteristics.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

Appendix Table A.4

Estimated Regression Coefficients for Selected Impacts for Survey and Full (Imputed) Samples

Outcome (%)	Program Impact
Participated in education and training	
Survey sample	7.4
Full sample (imputed)	7.1
Received help related to finding or keeping a job	
Survey sample	18.4 ***
Full sample (imputed)	18.3 ***
Ever employed in year 1 (%)	
Survey sample	18.2 ***
Full sample (imputed)	17.0 ***
Currently employed(%)	
Survey sample	5.8
Full sample (imputed)	5.9
Survey sample	228
Full sample	480

SOURCES: MDRC calculations based on data from the baseline survey and responses to the Subsidized and Transitional Employment Demonstration youth survey. The survey was administered to individuals randomly assigned between June 2015 and June 2016.

NOTE: The imputed results estimate program impacts on survey-based outcomes, including probable responses for survey nonrespondents generated via multiple imputation.

Appendix Table A.5

Selected Baseline Characteristics, by Social Security Number Status

Characteristic	Provided SSN	Did not provide SSN
Average age	18.7	18.1 ***
Number of prior arrests	8.6	10.0 **
Race/ethnicity (%)		
Hispanic	21.0	22.6
Black, non-Hispanic	76.2	72.6
White, non-Hispanic	1.2	0.4
Other, non-Hispanic	1.6	4.4
Ever employed (%)	61.0	35.7 ***
Has children (%)	27.1	25.2
Has secure housing (%)	76.8	84.4 **
Highest grade completed	10.2	9.8 ***
Has been in special education (%)	20.3	24.2
Sample size	251	229

SOURCES: MDRC calculations based on data from the baseline survey and the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority.

NOTES: SSN = Social Security number.

Sample includes individuals randomly assigned between June 2015 and July 2016.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

Appendix Table A.6

Selected Baseline Characteristics of Sample That Provided a Social Security Number, by Research Group

Characteristic	Provided SSN	
	Program Group	Control Group
Average age	18.7	18.7
Number of prior arrests	8.9	8.2
Race/ethnicity (%)		
Hispanic	20.1	22.2
Black, non-Hispanic	77.9	73.7
White, non-Hispanic	0.7	2.0
Other, non-Hispanic	1.3	2.0
Ever employed (%)	60.8	61.2
Has children (%)	30.4	22.2
Has secure housing (%)	73.2	82.1
Highest grade completed	10.2	10.3
Has been in special education (%)	22.1	17.5
Sample size	150	101

SOURCES: MDRC calculations based on data from baseline survey and the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority.

NOTES: SSN = Social Security number.

Sample includes individuals randomly assigned between June 2015 and July 2016 who provided an SSN.

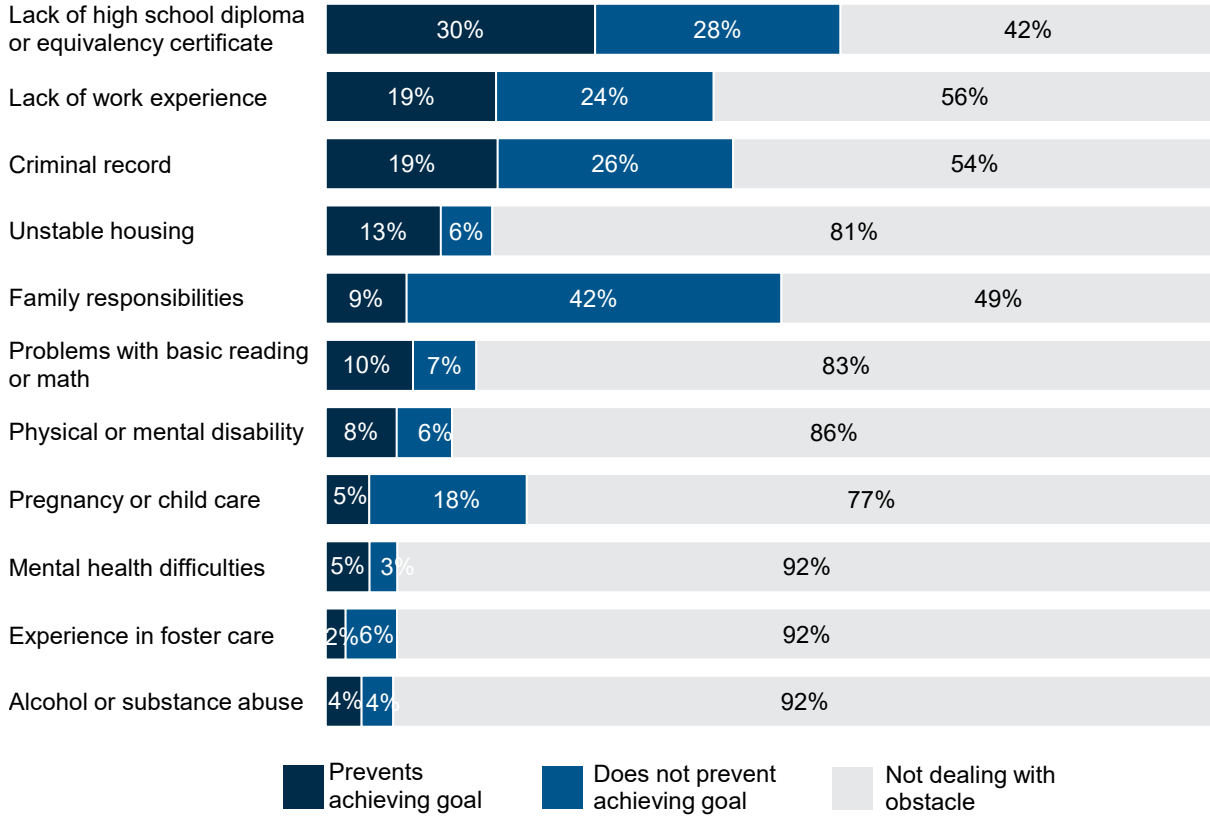
Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

Appendix B

**Sample Members' Experiences
with Obstacles and Beliefs**

Appendix Figure B.1

Sample Members' Experiences with Obstacles and Beliefs About Whether Obstacles Prevent Them from Achieving Their Goals



SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on responses to the Subsidized and Transitional Employment Demonstration youth survey.

NOTE: Sample size = 226.

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