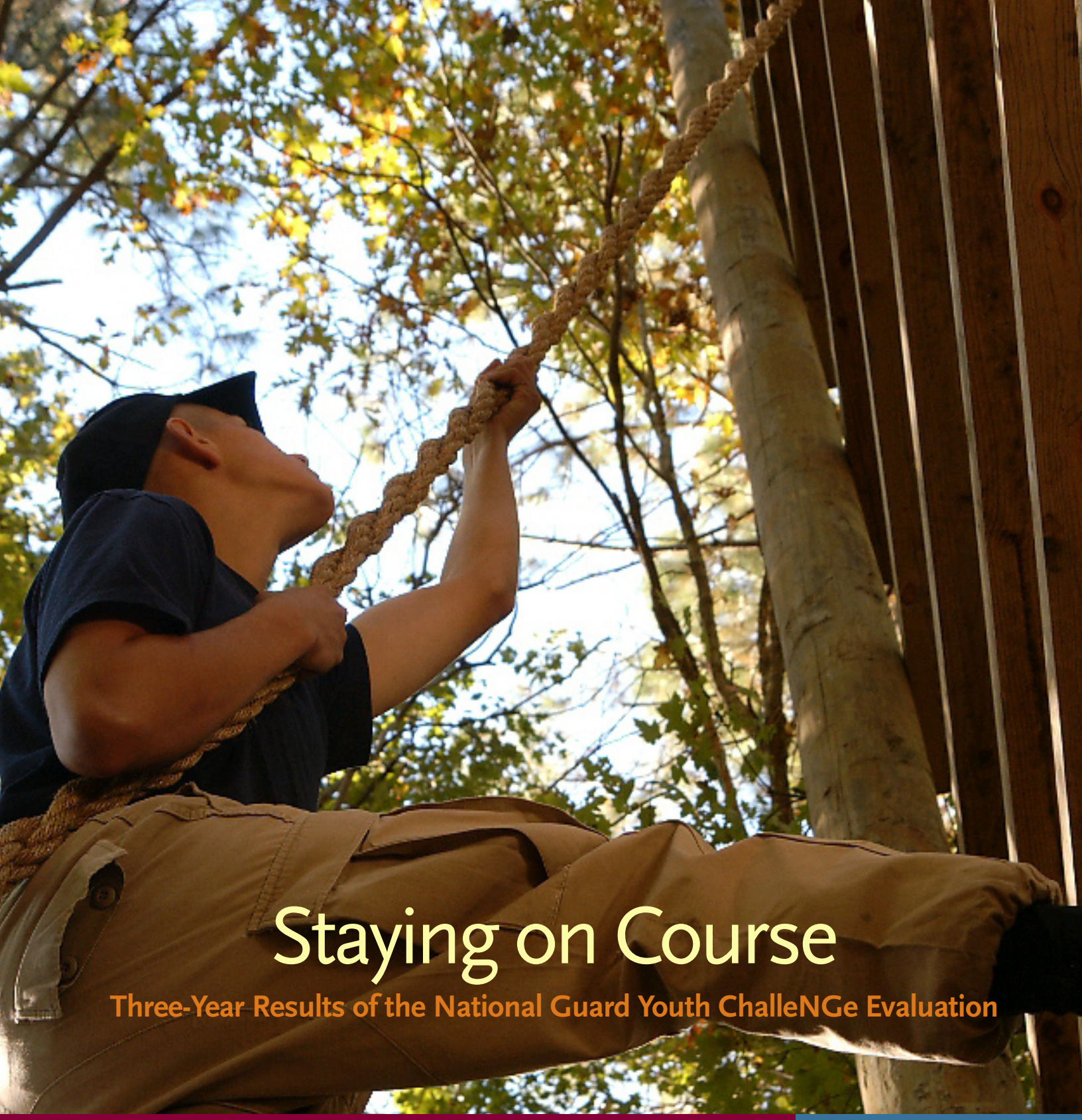

Staying on Course

Three-Year Results of the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Evaluation

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BUILDING KNOWLEDGE TO IMPROVE SOCIAL POLICY

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Funding for this evaluation was provided by the U.S. Department of Defense and Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the MCJ Foundation, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

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Overview

High school dropouts face an uphill battle in a labor market that increasingly rewards skills and postsecondary credentials: they are more likely than their peers to need public assistance, be arrested or incarcerated, and less likely to marry. This report presents results from a rigorous evaluation of the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program, an intensive residential program that aims to "reclaim the lives of at-risk youth" who have dropped out. More than 100,000 young people have completed the program since it was launched in the early 1990s. MDRC is conducting the evaluation in collaboration with the MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Transitions to Adulthood.

The 17-month ChalleNGe program is divided into three phases: Pre-ChalleNGe, a two-week orientation and assessment period; a 20-week Residential Phase; and a one-year Postresidential Phase featuring a mentoring program. During the first two phases, participants live at the program site, often on a military base. The environment is "quasi-military," though there are no requirements for military service.

The evaluation uses a random assignment design. Because there were more qualified applicants than slots, a lottery-like process was used to decide which applicants were admitted to the program. Those who were admitted (the program group) are being compared over time with those who were not admitted (the control group); any significant differences that emerge between the groups can be attributed to ChalleNGe. About 3,000 young people entered the study in 10 ChalleNGe programs in 2005-2006.

Results

A comprehensive survey was administered to about 1,200 young people in the program and control groups an average of three years after they entered the study, when they were about 20 years old, on average. Key findings from the survey include:

- **Members of the program group were much more likely than those in the control group to have obtained a General Educational Development (GED) certificate or a high school diploma and to have earned college credits.**
- **Members of the program group were more likely to be employed at the time of the survey, and they earned about 20 percent more than their control group counterparts in the year before the survey.**
- **There were few statistically significant differences between groups on measures of crime, delinquency, health, or lifestyle outcomes.**

These results are impressive; few programs for dropouts have produced sustained positive impacts. And yet, both the survey and a series of in-depth telephone interviews with ChalleNGe graduates suggest that many young people struggled to maintain momentum after leaving the residential program and returning home, where they had relatively few supports and also faced unusually challenging labor market conditions. ChalleNGe may want to experiment with ways to bolster its postresidential services to provide more support during this difficult transition.

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Preface

In the current labor market, where postsecondary education is prized, a high school diploma is a basic requirement for most employers. Across the United States, approximately a quarter of public high school students do not complete high school in four years. In urban areas, the number of students who drop out is significantly higher. While many of those who drop out eventually graduate or, more often, earn a General Educational Development certificate (GED), a long delay may place them at a serious disadvantage in competing for jobs and going on to college. In addition, a significant number of these young people become profoundly disconnected from school, work, and society.

Finding ways to reengage high school dropouts and help them move forward in education and the labor market is a pressing social issue. Over the past few decades a series of "second chance" programs, including the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe program, have targeted dropouts to help them finish high school (or get a GED) and get a foothold in the labor market. Created in the early 1990s, ChalleNGe has served more than 100,000 young people through a program model that includes an unusual and promising mix of features: an intensive Residential Phase with military-style discipline and a focus on promoting positive youth development, and a Postresidential Phase built around mentoring.

MDRC, along with scholars from the MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Transitions to Adulthood, designed and implemented a random assignment evaluation of ChalleNGe in 10 sites. This report presents data on the program's impacts, based mainly on a survey administered to the young people in the evaluation an average of three years after they entered the study. In addition, the report discusses the findings from a series of in-depth telephone interviews with ChalleNGe graduates who had recently completed the three-year survey.

The results after three years are impressive: The ChalleNGe program group was still doing better than their counterparts in the control group in educational attainment, employment, and earnings. And the ChalleNGe graduates who were interviewed reported that the program was successful in changing their attitudes and bolstering their self-confidence. However, the survey results also show that several of the program's key impacts have diminished over time, and the interviews suggest that many of the program's graduates are finding it difficult to sustain the progress they had made in meeting their education and employment goals. The next step for ChalleNGe may be to experiment with ways to enhance the Postresidential Phase of the program to offer participants continuing support when they return home to their communities and stronger connections to colleges and vocational training and jobs programs.

Gordon L. Berlin
President

Acknowledgments

The ChalleNGe evaluation has been an immensely complex undertaking, and many people have contributed to its success to date.

Officials at the U.S. Department of Defense have provided ongoing support and assistance since the study's planning phase. In the Office of Secretary of Defense, we wish to thank Deputy Assistant Secretary John Hastings, and his predecessor, Jennifer Buck, along with Ernie Gonzales. In the National Guard Bureau, thanks to Anthony Kissik, Joe Padilla, John Permaul, and James Tinkham (now at the National Guard Youth Foundation).

Space does not permit us to list all of the state-level ChalleNGe program staff who have contributed to the study, but it would have been impossible without their dedication. We are especially indebted to the 12 program directors who made the difficult decision to open their programs to rigorous scrutiny in order to build knowledge about the program's effectiveness. Special thanks to the following current and former directors and staff: Arizona: Charles McCarty and Tom Fox; California: Nancy Baird and Suzy Elwell; Florida: Danny Brabham, James Ransom, and Tammy Russell; Georgia: Frank Williams and Janet Zimmerman; Illinois: Peter Thomas, Terry Downen, and Hattie Lenoir-Price; Michigan: Roger Allen, James Luce, and Ben Wallace; Mississippi: William Crowson and Kirri Martin; New Mexico: Arthur Longoria and Terry Luginbill; North Carolina: Edward Toler, Dale Autry, and Billy King. Texas: Peggy Baldwin, Mike Weir, and Grayling Alexander. Virginia: Thomas Early and Delphoney Nash; Wisconsin: Michael MacLaren and Michael Brown.

The study could not have been completed without Conrad Mandsager, who contributed to many areas of the project. Thanks also to Jennie Wenger of the CNA Corporation who analyzed administrative military enlistment data. Pat Antosh of AOC Solutions provided guidance on the use of data from the ChalleNGe Data Management and Reporting System. Louise Hanson of Westat, Inc. ably directed the surveys. Members of the MacArthur Research Network on Transitions to Adulthood, led by Frank Furstenberg, have been partners in the study from its inception. Special thanks to Network members Colleen Dillon, Connie Flanagan, Wayne Osgood, and Jean Rhodes for their contributions to the analysis.

At MDRC, Gordon Berlin, Fred Doolittle, and Robert Ivry developed the study, and Tom Brock led its early stages. John Martinez, Vanessa Martin, Donna Wharton-Fields, and David Butler served as liaisons to the programs. Alissa Gardenhire-Crooks led the implementation research. Joel Gordon and Galina Farberova designed the random assignment system. Jo Anna Hunter led the competition to select the survey firm, and Justin Preston and Beni Price served as

the primary liaisons to Westat. Gordon Berlin, David Butler, Charles Michalopoulos, John Martinez, and Rob Ivry reviewed drafts of the reports. Johanna Walter provided technical advice on data management issues, and Ihno Lee, Jeylan Erman, and Asa Wilks assisted with programming. Margaret Bald edited the report, Stephanie Cowell prepared it for publication, and Julianna Alson provided coordination and fact-checking assistance.

Finally, thanks to all the young people who contributed to the study by answering survey questions, speaking with the research team during site visits, and participating in interviews. Their contributions to the study are invaluable.

The Authors

Executive Summary

Over the past three decades, broad economic shifts have dramatically reduced the availability of well-paying jobs for workers without postsecondary education. In this context, young people who drop out of high school face particularly long odds of success.

This report presents three-year results from a rigorous evaluation of the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program, which aims to "reclaim the lives of at-risk youth" who have dropped out of high school and give them the skills and values to succeed as adults. ChalleNGe is an intensive residential program that currently operates in more than half the states. More than 100,000 young people have completed the program since it was launched in the early 1990s. MDRC, a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization, is conducting the evaluation in collaboration with the MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Transitions to Adulthood. Several private foundations and the U.S. Department of Defense are funding the evaluation.[1] This may be the final report in the study; it is unclear whether additional follow-up data will be collected.

The ChalleNGe Program

The ChalleNGe approach grew out of a project by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in the late 1980s and early 1990s that sought to develop new approaches for out-of-school youth. Staff in the National Guard Bureau in the U.S. Department of Defense developed the specific program model. They had concluded that many existing programs for disadvantaged youth were "focused on the symptomatic behaviors without understanding and addressing the underlying causes" and "placed limited, if any, focus on the post-program phase." Thus, they designed ChalleNGe to be:

> …an intervention, rather than a remedial program. We would deal with the symptoms and underlying causes in a construct that fully embraced a "whole person" change and readied the students for the post-program environment. We would arm them with the skills and experiences necessary to succeed and we would ensure there was "a way back" to mainstream society.[2]

[1]The study is funded by Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the MCJ Foundation, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

[2]Daniel Donohue, *Designing a "ChalleNGe-like" Program for High School Dropouts and Students Who Are Drifting Through School, Disengaged, and Repeating Grades*. (Fairfax Station, VA: Donohue Associates, LLC., 2008).

In 1993, Congress funded a 10-site pilot of ChalleNGe. Funding was made permanent in 1998, and today there are 34 ChalleNGe programs in 29 states and Puerto Rico.

States operate ChalleNGe programs under a Master Cooperative Agreement with the National Guard Bureau. Most states operate a single "100-bed" ChalleNGe program, serving a total of about 200 participants per year in two class cycles. A few states operate multiple programs or larger programs. The funding level for ChalleNGe — about $14,000 per participant — has not changed since the early 1990s. The federal government currently pays up to 75 percent of the cost of the state programs, and states pay the remaining 25 percent.[3]

Although there is considerable room to tailor the program model to local conditions, the basic structure of the ChalleNGe program is the same in all states. The program is open to young people between the ages of 16 and 18 who have dropped out of (or been expelled from) school, are unemployed, drug-free, and not heavily involved with the justice system.[4] The program is open to both males and females, though about 80 percent of the participants are male. There are no income-based eligibility criteria.

The 17-month program is divided into three phases: the Pre-ChalleNGe Phase (two weeks), the Residential Phase (20 weeks), and the Postresidential Phase (one year). During the first two phases (totaling 22 weeks), the participants live at the program site, often on a military base.

The first phase, Pre-ChalleNGe, is a physically and psychologically demanding assessment and orientation period. Candidates are introduced to the program's rules and expectations; learn military bearing, discipline, and teamwork; and begin physical fitness training.

Candidates who complete Pre-ChalleNGe are formally enrolled in the program as "cadets" and move to the second phase. The curriculum for the 20-week Residential Phase is structured around eight core components that reflect current thinking about how to promote positive youth development: Leadership/Followership, Responsible Citizenship, Service to Community, Life-Coping Skills, Physical Fitness, Health and Hygiene, Job Skills, and Academic Excellence. Cadets spend the largest share of each day in the education component. During the study period, most programs helped participants prepare for the General Educational Development (GED) exam; a few of them were able to offer a high school diploma.

[3]During the study period, the federal/state funding ratio was 60/40. The ChalleNGe legislation was amended in late 2009, raising the maximum federal share of program costs to 75 percent.

[4]In order to be eligible for ChalleNGe, candidates must be 16 to 18 years of age and enter the program before their nineteenth birthday; a high school dropout/expellee; a citizen or legal resident of the United States and a resident of the state in which the program is conducted; unemployed; not currently on parole or on probation for anything other than juvenile status offenses, not serving time or awaiting sentencing, not under indictment or charged, and not convicted of a felony or a capital offense; and drug-free.

The program environment is described as "quasi-military": The cadets are divided into platoons and squads, live in barracks, have their hair cut short, wear uniforms, and are subject to military-style discipline. The daily schedule is highly structured with almost no "down time," and the cadets are closely supervised by staff at all times. While ChalleNGe uses military structure, discipline, facilities, and staff to accomplish its objectives, participation in the program is voluntary, and there are no requirements for military service during the program or afterward.

Toward the end of the Residential Phase, the cadets work with staff to arrange a post-residential "placement." Acceptable placements include employment, education, and military service. The cadets who successfully complete the Residential Phase move into the one-year Postresidential Phase, which involves a structured mentoring program. The ChalleNGe mentoring program is unusual, in that young people nominate their own mentors during the application process. ChalleNGe initiates the mentoring relationship partway through the Residential Phase, after the staff screen and train the mentors. The staff then maintain contact with both the program's graduates and their mentors at least monthly during the Postresidential Phase, working with and through mentors to help solve problems and to monitor the youths' progress.

The ChalleNGe Evaluation

The National Guard Bureau collects extensive data on program participation and participants' outcomes. However, for some time, officials in the Department of Defense and many ChalleNGe program directors have been eager to obtain more rigorous data on what difference the program makes. The National Guard Bureau's outcome data do not address this question because there is no way to know to what extent the outcomes that program participants or graduates achieve are attributable to their participation in ChalleNGe; the program serves relatively motivated young people who were determined to make a change and might make progress without ChalleNGe. Thus, in 2004, the officials and directors began working with MDRC and the MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Transitions to Adulthood to explore the possibility of conducting a random assignment evaluation of the program. Ultimately, the Department of Defense agreed to fund 20 percent of the first phase of the evaluation, and MDRC raised the remaining 80 percent from private foundations.

In 2005, 12 state ChalleNGe programs agreed to participate in the evaluation. These programs were not chosen randomly. Rather, there was an effort to identify programs that had stable staffing and that tended to receive more applicants than they could serve.

The evaluation uses a random assignment research design in which a group of young people who applied to ChalleNGe and were invited to participate (the program group) is

being compared over time with a second group (the control group) who also applied to ChalleNGe and were deemed acceptable, but were not invited to participate. Random assignment was conducted only during class cycles in which there were substantially more applicants than program slots.

Because the study's participants were assigned to the program group or the control group through a random process, one can be confident that any significant differences that emerge between the groups over time — for example, differences in educational attainment or employment rates — are caused by the ChalleNGe program. These differences are described as *impacts*.

Ultimately, random assignment was conducted for 18 class cycles across 10 programs in 2005 and 2006 (two of the sites that agreed to participate were unable to conduct random assignment because there were not substantially more qualified applicants than slots). About 3,000 young people entered the study.

In order to preserve the integrity of the random assignment design, the evaluation is following all of the young people who were assigned to the two research groups, even though some of those in the program group did not complete the ChalleNGe program. Data from the program's management information system show that about 83 percent of the program group started the program, 68 percent completed the Pre-ChalleNGe Phase and formally enrolled, and 53 percent graduated (that is, completed the Residential Phase). The graduation rate among enrollees —78 percent — is very close to the national rate for the same time period.[5]

A series of surveys has been administered to the program and control groups over time. The first survey, a very brief interview, was conducted about nine months after the young people entered the study — not long after the program group had completed the Residential Phase. The results from that survey, presented in the study's first report, were quite promising.[6] The second survey, conducted an average of 21 months after study entry, also yielded a variety of positive results.[7]

This report presents the results from the third survey, which was conducted about three years after participants entered the study, more than a year after the Postresidential Phase had ended. Just under 1,200 young people were interviewed, and the response rate was 78 percent. Most respondents were 20 years old when they were interviewed. The report also discusses the

[5]The graduation rate among enrollees is calculated by dividing the overall graduation rate for the program group (53 percent) by the proportion of the program group that enrolled (68 percent).

[6]Dan Bloom, Alissa Gardenhire-Crooks, and Conrad Mandsager, *Reengaging High School Dropouts: Early Results from the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Evaluation* (New York: MDRC, 2009.)

[7]Megan Millenky, Dan Bloom, and Colleen Dillon, Making *the Transition: Interim Results of the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Evaluation* (New York: MDRC, 2010.

findings from a series of in-depth telephone interviews with ChalleNGe graduates who had recently completed the three-year survey.

Results from the Three-Year Survey

- **The program group was much more likely than the control group to have obtained a GED and to have earned college credits.**

The top panel of Table ES.1 shows that almost 56 percent of the control group had earned a high school diploma or a GED three years after entering the study. This is broadly consistent with national data, which show that most young people who drop out of high school eventually earn a diploma or, more commonly, a GED.[8] However, the figure for the program group is almost 72 percent, indicating that ChalleNGe substantially accelerated participants' educational attainment. The asterisks show that the difference between groups — about 16 percentage points — is statistically significant, meaning that it is very unlikely to have arisen by chance. As expected given the program model, many more program group members had earned a GED than a high school diploma, and the program's impact was concentrated on GED receipt (the difference between groups in high school diploma receipt is not statistically significant). Program group members were almost twice as likely to report that they had earned at least one college credit, though relatively few people in either group reported that they were currently in college when interviewed (third panel). The impacts on educational measures have diminished somewhat since the earlier survey waves.

- **Young people in the program group were more likely to be employed at the time of the survey, and they earned about 20 percent more than their control group counterparts in the year before the survey.**

The second panel of Table ES.1 shows three measures of sample members' employment and earnings in the year before the survey, which was administered during a deep recession that disproportionately affected younger workers. Program group members earned an average of $13,515 during the period (this figure includes zeroes for sample members who did not work), about $2,267 (20 percent) more than the control group average. This earnings difference is driven, in part, by the fact that the program group worked more steadily during the period (about eight months of work versus seven months for the control group, on average). The third panel shows that program group members were also more likely to be currently employed at the time of the survey interview.

[8] David Hurst, Dana Kelly, and Daniel Princiotta, *Educational Attainment of High School Dropouts 8 Years Later* (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, 2004).

National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program

Table ES.1

Impacts on Selected Outcomes from the 3-Year Survey

Outcome	Program Group	Control Group	Impact	P-Value[a]
Educational attainment (%)				
Earned high school diploma or GED certificate[b]	71.8	55.5	16.2 ***	0.000
HS diploma	30.3	26.6	3.7	0.162
GED	56.9	34.5	22.4 ***	0.000
Earned any college credit	34.9	18.8	16.1 ***	0.000
Employment history				
In the past 12 months				
Employed (%)	88.4	84.5	3.9 *	0.051
Earnings ($)	13,515	11,248	2,266 ***	0.003
Number of months employed	8.1	7.2	0.9 ***	0.001
Current status				
Currently enrolled in (%)				
High school or GED prep classes	7.3	9.2	-1.9	0.243
College courses	11.4	7.8	3.6 **	0.042
Job training	4.6	3.1	1.6	0.180
Working (%)	57.8	50.7	7.1 **	0.015
Average weekly earnings[c] ($)	240	210	30 *	0.086
Currently enlisted in the military (%)	8.5	7.4	1.1	0.494
Involved in any productive activity[d] (%)	63.6	59.0	4.6	0.111
Has HS diploma or GED and is currently involved in any productive activity[d] (%)	49.1	37.8	11.4 ***	0.000
Crime and delinquency (%)				
Since random assignment				
Arrested	50.6	51.4	-0.8	0.777
Convicted	27.6	24.9	2.8	0.294
Sample size (total = 1,173)	722	451		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from responses to the 3-year survey.

NOTES: Estimates are regression-adjusted using ordinary least squares, controlling for sample member characteristics and weighted by site size, survey response rates, and program versus control ratios. Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

[a]Standard errors are presented for all impacts with a p-value of 0.000. Following are the standard errors for all impacts with a p-value of 0.000 (presented in the order in which they appear on the table): 2.766, 2.898, 2.625, and 2.910.

[b]Because this measure includes some respondents who indicated that they earned both a high school diploma and GED certificate, the percentages reported for the separate measures do not sum to the percentages reported for this measure.

[c]Weekly earnings averages include zeroes for respondents who were not employed.

[d]This measure includes any employment, school or GED programs, vocational training, military activities, or any residential programs (not listed separately above).

Interestingly, despite the National Guard's sponsorship of the ChalleNGe program, there was no statistically significant difference between groups in the percentage of sample members who were enlisted in the military at the time of the survey. Similarly, the two groups were about equally likely to have enlisted at any point since entering the study (not shown in Table ES.1). This result was confirmed using Department of Defense military enlistment records for active duty personnel.

Overall, program group members reported spending substantially fewer months during the follow-up period being idle, or "doing nothing" — that is, they were not working, in school, or in the military (not shown in Table ES.1).

- **There were few statistically significant differences between groups on measures of crime, delinquency, health, or lifestyle outcomes. A few of the measures showed unfavorable trends.**

The study's earlier reports found favorable impacts on several measures of criminal justice involvement and health. As shown in Table ES.1, the criminal justice impacts were no longer evident at the three-year point; about half of each group reported at least one arrest since entering the study. Similarly, about two-thirds of each group reported being in good or excellent health (not shown in the table).

Program group members were more likely to report that they were living on their own at the time of the survey (the largest share of respondents in both groups were living with their parents). This may indicate greater progress toward achieving a key adult milestone. On the other hand, other data indicate some potentially unfavorable trends. For example, program group members were more likely to report that they were not using birth control (it is possible that some of them were actively trying to have children) and that they had tried illegal drugs other than marijuana (these outcomes are not shown in Table ES.1).

Findings from the In-Depth Interviews

MDRC staff conducted in-depth telephone interviews with 24 program group members just after they completed the three-year survey. The young people who were interviewed are not representative of the full program group because the in-depth study targeted only sample members who had completed the program's Residential Phase.

The young people who were interviewed spoke fondly of the ChalleNGe program and described how their participation had resulted in profound, positive changes in their attitudes, expectations, and self-confidence. Nevertheless, many of them struggled to maintain this momentum during the years after they completed the program. Most of the young people did not have strong family support, and few spoke much about the ChalleNGe mentoring compo-

nent. Most had moved through a succession of low-wage jobs; several had started college but had difficulty gaining traction. Such experiences are not unusual for young people in their early twenties, but they point to the challenge of building on the initial success of an intensive program like ChalleNGe.

Conclusions and Next Steps

Three years after entering the study (and one and a half years after the end of the program's Postresidential Phase), young people who had access to ChalleNGe were doing better than their counterparts in the control group in several respects. They were more likely to have a GED, more likely to have at least started college, and more likely to be working. This is a notable achievement, since most rigorous evaluations of programs for disadvantaged youth have found that early impacts faded over time.[9] The lack of impacts in some other areas, such as crime and delinquency, is somewhat surprising, but since the sample members were only 20 years old, on average, when they responded to the three-year survey, it is too early to know how their transition to adulthood will progress. The advantages program group members have gained as a result of their participation in ChalleNGe may continue to erode as control group members catch up, or they could grow as program group members build on their education and work experience. It is not clear at this point whether the evaluation will be able to collect further follow-up data.

The main goals of the ChalleNGe Residential Phase are to help participants obtain a secondary school credential and develop attitudes and behavior patterns that will help them succeed in the future as students, workers, and citizens. The evaluation's qualitative and quantitative data suggest that this phase succeeds in this respect for many participants. Yet, the data also suggest that it is difficult for many young people to maintain momentum afterward in a society and labor market that offer few opportunities for young people who have limited family support and do not follow a linear pattern from high school to college. The survey data show that several of the program's key impacts have diminished in size over time, and, in the in-depth interviews, some program graduates (like many people their age) appeared to be having difficulty gaining a firm foothold in college or the labor market.

The designers of the ChalleNGe program anticipated this issue and added an innovative Postresidential Phase built around mentoring to try to ease participants' transitions back home. However, the evaluation found that the Postresidential Phase was implemented unevenly across sites. Moreover, while mentors may provide vital emotional support to young

[9]Dan Bloom and Ron Haskins, "Helping High School Dropouts Improve Their Prospects." Policy Brief, *The Future of Children* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton-Brookings, 2010.)

people, they may not have the practical expertise and connections to help them find good jobs and succeed in college.

Thus, the evaluation results to date suggest that the program may want to experiment with ways to enhance the Postresidential Phase of the program to help young people negotiate the difficult transition from the highly structured and supportive residential program. Possibilities might include:

- Stationing some postresidential staff in the areas where concentrations of former participants live, rather than at the program site;
- Using financial incentives to promote ongoing connections between former participants and the program, or to encourage success in school and/or work;
- Promoting a stronger alumni support network through a combination of social media and face-to-face activities such as "booster weekends" at the program site;
- Developing stronger connections between ChalleNGe and community colleges or other postsecondary institutions in areas where graduates live;
- Building a stronger vocational training component, either during or after the Residential Phase of the program.

Ideally, such enhancements, and others designed by program managers, would be rigorously evaluated to determine whether they increase the program's long-term impacts. ChalleNGe is an example of a public program that already achieves impressive results, but might be improved through a systematic program of innovation and experimentation aimed at securing and sustaining the gains measured through three years.

Introduction

Although there are fewer high school dropouts in this country than a decade ago, young people who drop out face long odds of success in a labor market that increasingly places a priority on education and skills.[1] Nationally, about a quarter of high school freshmen do not graduate in four years; in the 50 largest U.S. cities, the dropout rate is closer to 50 percent.[2] While many of those who drop out eventually return to school and graduate or, more often, earn a General Educational Development certificate (GED), a long delay may place them at a serious disadvantage in competing for jobs and going on to college.[3] Moreover, a significant number of young people become profoundly "disconnected" from both school and work. In 2007, before the current recession, only 60 percent of 16- to-24-year-old high school dropouts worked at all during the year. Almost one in 10 young male dropouts were incarcerated.[4]

This report presents three-year results from an evaluation of the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program. ChalleNGe is an intensive residential program designed to "reclaim the lives of at-risk youth" who have dropped out of high school and give them the skills and values to succeed as adults.[5] The program currently operates in more than half the states, and about 100,000 young people have completed the program since it was launched in the early 1990s. MDRC, a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization, conducted the evaluation in collaboration with the MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Transitions to Adulthood.[6]

Earlier Evaluations of Youth Programs and the Origins of ChalleNGe

During the last three decades, a number of rigorous evaluations have assessed programs that target disadvantaged youth. Some studies tested programs that primarily served youth who

[1]U.S. Department of Education (2010).

[2]Chapman, Laird, and KewalRamani (2010). However, Roy and Mishel (2008) argue that graduation rates may be higher than reported in many recent studies.

[3]One national study tracked students who were in the eighth grade in 1988. About 20 percent of the students dropped out of high school at least once. Among the dropouts, 63 percent earned a high school diploma (19 percent) or a GED (44 percent) by 2000, eight years after their scheduled graduation date (Hurst, Kelly, and Princiotta, 2004).

[4]Sum, Khatiwanda, and McLaughlin (2009).

[5]Adapted from the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program's mission statement.

[6]The evaluation is funded by Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, The MCJ Foundation, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and the U.S. Department of Defense.

were at risk but were still in the regular K-12 education system, while others studied "second-chance" programs for out-of-school youth, typically high school dropouts.

The overall record from the studies of second-chance programs is mixed. On the one hand, several programs significantly increased the percentage of young people who earned a GED or another credential. In addition, some of the programs — particularly those that offered participants subsidized jobs — generated significant increases in employment or earnings in the short term. Others led to decreases in arrests or in other measures of criminal justice involvement. On the other hand, however, none of the studies that followed participants for more than a couple of years found lasting improvements in economic outcomes. Some of the studies did not report or collect long-term data, while, in other cases, early gains in earnings faded over time.[7]

In response to disappointing evaluation results in the 1980s, experts argued that youth programs should not just address problems or "deficits," but rather should promote "positive youth development." Specifically, they recommended that programs should go beyond education and training to expose young people to activities, settings, and relationships that are thought to promote healthy development. ChalleNGe, along with programs such as YouthBuild, is part of this movement.[8]

The ChalleNGe model grew out of a project by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in the late 1980s and early 1990s that sought to develop new approaches for out-of-school youth. The project's final report concluded that aspects of the military structure could be beneficial for disadvantaged youth.[9] Many others have made this argument as well; for example, a report by the Brookings Institution concluded that "the United States military enjoys a well-deserved reputation for its ability to reach, teach, and develop young people who are rudderless, and for setting the pace among American institutions in advancing minorities."[10]

The CSIS report also concluded that the National Guard, with its strong community service mission, was well suited to operate a program for at-risk young people. Staff in the National Guard Bureau in the U.S. Department of Defense developed the program model for ChalleNGe. They had concluded that many existing programs for disadvantaged youth were "focused on the symptomatic behaviors without understanding and addressing the underlying causes" and "placed limited, if any, focus on the post-program phase." Thus, they designed ChalleNGe to be:

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[7]Bloom (2010).

[8]YouthBuild programs serve youth ages 16 to 24. Participants work toward their GED or high school diploma while learning skills by building affordable housing. For more information, see www.youthbuild.org.

[9]Cullinan, Eaves, McCurdy, and McCain (1992).

[10]Price (2007).

> …an intervention, rather than a remedial program. We would deal with the symptoms and underlying causes in a construct that fully embraced a "whole person" change and readied the students for the post-program environment. We would arm them with the skills and experiences necessary to succeed and we would ensure there was "a way back" to mainstream society.[11]

In 1993, Congress funded a 10-site pilot of ChalleNGe. Funding was made permanent in 1998, and today there are 34 ChalleNGe programs in 29 states and Puerto Rico.

The ChalleNGe Model

States operate ChalleNGe programs under a Master Cooperative Agreement with the National Guard Bureau. Most states operate a single "100-bed" ChalleNGe program, serving a total of about 200 participants per year in two class cycles (starting in January and July). A few states operate multiple programs or larger programs.[12] The funding level for ChalleNGe — about $14,000 per participant — has not changed since the early 1990s (in real terms, per-participant funding has fallen by about a third during that time). During the study period, the federal government paid 60 percent of the cost of the state programs and states paid the remaining 40 percent.[13]

Although there is considerable room to tailor the program model to local conditions, the basic structure of the ChalleNGe program is the same in all states. The program is open to young people between the ages of 16 and 18 who have dropped out of (or been expelled from) school, are unemployed, drug-free, and not heavily involved with the justice system.[14] The program is open to both males and females, though about 80 percent of the participants are male. There are no income-based eligibility criteria.

As shown in Figure 1, the 17-month program is divided into three phases: the Pre-ChalleNGe Phase (two weeks), the Residential Phase (20 weeks), and the Postresidential Phase (one year). During the first two phases (totaling 22 weeks), the participants live at the program site, often on a military base.

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[11]Donohue (2008).

[12]For example, during the study period, Georgia operated two 200-bed programs, Illinois operated a single 400-bed program, and Mississippi operated a single 200-bed program.

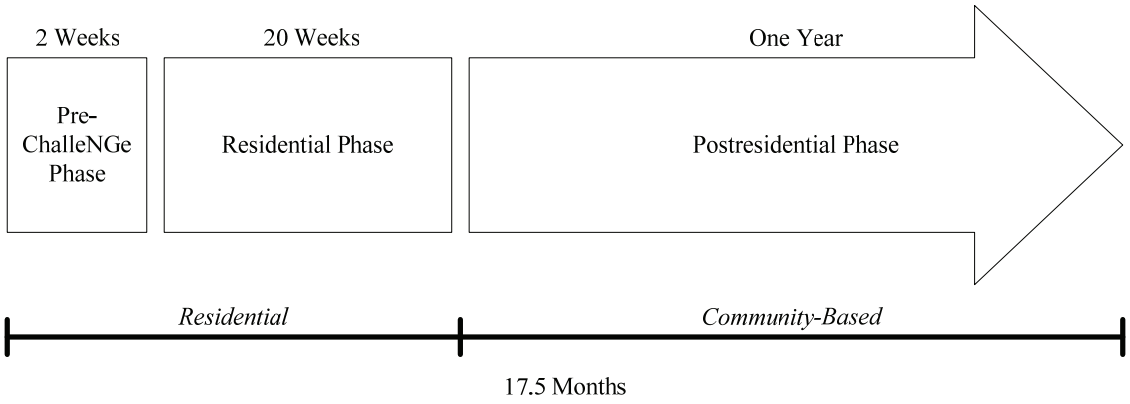
[13]The ChalleNGe legislation was amended in 2009, raising the maximum share of federal funding to 75 percent.

[14]In addition, to be eligible for ChalleNGe, an applicant must be a citizen or legal resident of the United States and a resident of the state in which the program is conducted. "Not heavily involved with the justice system" means an applicant is not currently on parole or on probation for anything other than juvenile status offenses, not serving time or awaiting sentencing, not under indictment or charged, and not convicted of a felony or a capital offense.

National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program

Figure 1

ChalleNGe Program Phases



The first phase, Pre-ChalleNGe, is a physically and psychologically demanding assessment and orientation period. Candidates are introduced to the program's rules and expectations; learn military bearing, discipline, and teamwork; and begin physical fitness training.

Candidates who complete Pre-ChalleNGe are formally enrolled in the program as "cadets" and move to the second phase. The curriculum for the 20-week Residential Phase is structured around eight core components that reflect current thinking about how to promote positive youth development: Leadership/Followership, Responsible Citizenship, Service to Community, Life-Coping Skills, Physical Fitness, Health and Hygiene, Job Skills, and Academic Excellence. Cadets spend the largest share of each day in the education component. At the time of the study, most programs helped participants prepare for the GED exam, but a few of them offered a high school diploma.

The structure of the residential part of the program is designed to minimize some of the potentially negative effects of placing many at-risk young people together in a program setting — sometimes referred to as "deviant peer influences" or "peer contagion."[15] The program environment is described as "quasi-military": The cadets are divided into platoons and squads, live in barracks, have their hair cut short, wear uniforms, and are subject to military-style discipline. The daily schedule is highly structured with almost no "down time," and the cadets are closely supervised by staff at all times. While ChalleNGe uses military structure, discipline, facilities,

[15]Dodge, Dishion, and Lansford (2007).

and staff to accomplish its objectives, participation in the program is voluntary, and there are no requirements for military service during the program or afterward.

Toward the end of the Residential Phase, the cadets work with staff to arrange a post-residential "placement." Acceptable placements include employment, education, and military service.

The cadets who successfully complete the Residential Phase move into the one-year Postresidential Phase, which involves a structured mentoring program. The ChalleNGe mentoring program is unusual, in that young people nominate their own mentors during the application process. ChalleNGe initiates the mentoring relationship partway through the Residential Phase, after the staff screen and train the mentors. The staff then maintain contact with both the program's graduates and their mentors at least monthly during the Postresidential Phase to help solve problems and to report on the youths' progress.

The structured Postresidential Phase distinguishes ChalleNGe from many residential programs for youth. The purpose of this phase is to help ChalleNGe participants with the difficult task of maintaining the new attitudes and behaviors they have learned in the Residential Phase when they return to their communities, families, and friends.

The ChalleNGe Evaluation

The ChalleNGe evaluation uses a random assignment research design in which a group of young people who applied to ChalleNGe and were invited to participate (the program group) is being compared over time with a second group (the control group) who also applied to ChalleNGe and were deemed acceptable, but were not invited to participate. Because the study's participants were assigned to one group or the other through a random process, one can be confident that any significant differences that emerge between the groups over time — for example, differences in educational attainment or employment rates — can be attributed to ChalleNGe. These differences are described as impacts.

In 2005, 12 state ChalleNGe programs (almost half the state programs in existence at the time) agreed to participate in the evaluation. These programs were not chosen randomly. Rather, there was an effort to identify programs that had stable staffing and that tended to receive more applicants than they could serve, a prerequisite for conducting a random assignment evaluation. See Table 1 for a list of the programs that agreed to join the study.

The participating ChalleNGe programs recruited and screened applicants more or less as usual and identified a pool of applicants who met all eligibility criteria and were considered

National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program

Table 1

Information on Participating Programs

State	Location	First Year of Operation	Number of Class Cycles During Which Random Assignment Was Conducted[a]
Arizona	Queen Creek	1993	0
California	Camp San Luis Obispo	1998	1
Florida	Camp Blanding	2001	2
Georgia	Fort Gordon	2000	2
Illinois	Rantoul	1993	2
Michigan	Battle Creek	1999	3
Mississippi	Camp Shelby	1994	2
New Mexico	Roswell	2001	1
North Carolina	Salemburg	1994	2
Texas	Galveston	1999	2
Virginia	Camp Pendleton	1994	0
Wisconsin	Fort McCoy	1998	1

SOURCE: National Guard Bureau (2005) and MDRC random assignment database.

NOTES: Arizona and Virginia were unable to conduct random assignment because they did not have more qualified applicants than slots during the study period.

[a]Most states serve about 100 participants during each of two cycles per year, which begin in January and July. Random assignment was conducted for a particular class cycle only if the number of acceptable applicants in the pool was at least 25 greater than the number of available program slots.

acceptable.[16] Random assignment was conducted for a particular class cycle only if the number of acceptable applicants in the pool was at least 25 greater than the number of available program slots.[17] In other words, the programs would have had to turn away some applicants for these class cycles even without the evaluation.[18] To facilitate the evaluation, states agreed to use a random process to decide which qualified applicants to accept (at least one state already used a

[16]The Department of Defense authorized a modest amount of funding to support enhanced recruitment efforts by the programs that participated in the evaluation.

[17]Although the programs often refer to the number of available "beds," in fact, the number of available slots is often determined not by physical space but by funding for staff. Typically, the programs are funded and staffed to graduate a certain number of participants per cycle (about 100 in most programs). During the study period, program managers told MDRC how many applicants they needed to accept in order to meet the graduation target, assuming normal patterns of attrition.

[18]For the ChalleNGe evaluation, MDRC worked with the Department of Defense and the participating programs to develop a random assignment process that aimed to ensure that the evaluation would not reduce the number of young people who received ChalleNGe's services. MDRC's Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved the design.

random process but most did not). Also, to preserve the integrity of the design, applicants who were assigned to the control group were not allowed to reapply for later class cycles.

Although 12 programs agreed to participate in the evaluation, there were many class cycles in which the number of applicants was too small to allow random assignment to take place. This occurred primarily because many programs tended to recruit only enough applicants to fill the available program slots.

Therefore, as shown in Table 1, random assignment was conducted across only 10 of the 12 programs. Arizona and Virginia were unable to conduct random assignment because they did not have more qualified applicants than slots during the study period. The total sample size (3,074) exceeded the original goal but was more heavily weighted toward the program group than originally intended (the sample includes 754 in the control group and 2,320 in the program group).

Data Sources

The evaluation draws data from several sources:

- **Baseline questionnaire.** Applicants completed a two-page questionnaire that was inserted into the ChalleNGe application packet in the study sites.[19] These data provide a snapshot of the study participants just before they were randomly assigned to the ChalleNGe program or to the control group.
- **Program participation data.** MDRC obtained information from the ChalleNGe Data Management and Reporting System (DMARS), the national Web-based program tracking system used by all ChalleNGe programs.
- **Site visits.** Members of the evaluation team conducted two-day visits to each of the 10 programs that conducted random assignment. Each visit included structured interviews with both program staff and participants. The study's first report provided detailed information on the program's implementation.
- **Follow-up surveys.**[20] The first survey, a short questionnaire, was administered by phone or in person an average of nine months after members of the program and control groups entered the study. A more extensive survey was administered an average of 21 months after the young people entered the study. Results from these surveys were discussed in two earlier reports. A

[19]The applicants also signed a consent form to participate in the study at this point. If they were under age 18, a parent or guardian also signed the form.

[20]MDRC conducted a competition and selected Westat, Inc., to administer three follow-up surveys for the study.

third survey wave, approximately three years after sample members entered the study, was completed in December 2009.

- **Open-ended telephone interviews.** MDRC research staff conducted interviews by telephone with a small subsample of program group members who had both graduated from ChalleNGe and were interviewed in the third survey wave.

The three-year survey, the source for results presented in this report, was administered from January to December 2009. It targeted the same 1,507 sample members as the previous survey (916 in the program group and 592 in the control group).[21] A total of 1,173 sample members (722 in the program group and 451 in the control group) completed the survey, for an overall response rate of 78 percent. The response rate was not significantly different across research groups. On average, when respondents completed the survey, they were 20 years old, and it had been 38 months since they had entered the study.[22] Overall, 88 percent of this survey's respondents had been interviewed for the previous survey as well.

A response bias analysis compared the baseline characteristics of those who completed the three-year survey with the full research sample. A separate analysis compared the fielded survey sample with those who completed the survey. Few significant differences emerged in each of these cases, and some differences are expected by chance. See Appendix A for more information on these analyses.

Unless otherwise indicated, references to study participants for the remainder of this report refer to sample members who completed this three-year survey.

Analysis Strategy

To increase precision, the analysis of the survey data presented in this report controls for a number of baseline characteristics of the survey sample, including age, gender, race, whether the sample member was interested in ChalleNGe because he or she wanted to join the military, whether he or she lived in a two-parent household, and highest grade completed. Weighting was used in the full sample and subgroups to adjust for site size (so each of the 10 sites contributes equally to the results), survey response rates, and program versus control ratios.[23]

[21]The sample was selected at differing rates across sites and random assignment status to minimize the variance of estimated impacts when sites are weighted equally in the analysis.

[22]Age of sample members at the time of survey ranged from 19 to 22. Survey completion ranged from 33 to 52 months after random assignment.

[23]Alternate weights were created for the full sample that did not incorporate response rates, but these did not produce any differences in key outcomes. Impacts were also run without weights, so that sites with a larger

Sample sizes in the individual sites are relatively small, so most of the analysis pools these weighted and regression-adjusted results from all the sites. Because study sites were not chosen randomly, technically the pooled results do not represent the overall impact of ChalleNGe nationally. However, the study sites look like other ChalleNGe sites based on national performance data.

In order to preserve the integrity of the random assignment research design, the impact analysis includes all program and control group members, including the program group members who did not participate in ChalleNGe or dropped out before completing the program. It also includes the small number of control group members who participated in ChalleNGe.[24]

Characteristics of the Study's Participants

Table 2 presents selected information from the two-page survey that sample members completed when they applied for ChalleNGe. These data provide a "snapshot" of the applicants as they entered the study. In general, the data indicate that ChalleNGe is serving a diverse group of high school dropouts.[25] In addition to the characteristics of the total sample, table columns present information on each of the research groups. The table shows a handful of statistically significant differences between the two groups, but one group does not appear more disadvantaged or "at risk" than the other. For example, on average, those in the program group were more likely than the control group to have completed eleventh grade. However, they also reported higher rates of arrests, convictions, and drug or alcohol use. As mentioned above, the analysis controls for a number of these baseline characteristics.

As shown in Table 2, most sample members were 17 years old at the point when they entered the study, and about 88 percent are male.[26] Roughly equal proportions described themselves as white (42 percent) or African-American/black (34 percent); most of the rest described

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sample size account for a larger percentage of the total sample. Those unweighted impacts can be found in Appendix C.

[24]A total of eight control group sample members enrolled in the ChalleNGe program, five of whom were in the three-year sample.

[25]Although ChalleNGe serves young people from 16 to 18 years old, the youngest applicants — those under age 16 and a half — were excluded from the evaluation; in other words, they were not subject to random assignment. Specifically, ChalleNGe applicants were excluded from random assignment if they would have been under 17 years old on the last day of the Residential Phase of the class cycle for which they applied. Owing to this rule, the characteristics of the participants in the study do not necessarily match those of all the young people who participated in the programs during the cycles when random assignment occurred.

[26]In some cycles, it was not possible to include female applicants in the random assignment pool, because the programs needed to accept all or nearly all female applicants, as female staff had already been hired to work with them. Thus, the percentage of females in the research sample is slightly lower than the percentage of females in the programs. Typically, about 20 percent of graduates nationwide are female.

National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program

Table 2

Selected Characteristics of ChalleNGe Survey Sample Members at the Time of Random Assignment

Characteristic (%)	Program Group	Control Group	Full Sample	
Gender				
Male	87.6	88.7	88.0	
Female	12.4	11.3	12.0	
Age in years				
16	37.6	35.5	36.7	
17	51.6	55.8	53.3	
18	10.9	8.8	10.0	
Race/ethnicity[a]				
Hispanic	19.1	16.6	18.1	
White	42.6	42.0	42.3	
Black	32.4	36.0	33.8	
Other	5.9	5.4	5.7	
Lives with				
Both biological parents	26.0	23.5	25.0	
Mother only	33.7	37.6	35.2	
Father only	5.4	8.2	6.5	
One parent and a stepparent	22.2	21.7	22.0	
No parental figures	11.4	7.9	10.0	
Other combination	1.3	1.1	1.2	
Anyone in household receives public assistance	24.2	29.6	26.4	**
Highest grade completed				**
8th grade or lower	12.5	17.6	14.5	
9th grade	31.0	28.3	29.9	
10th grade	36.6	39.9	37.9	
11th grade	19.0	14.0	17.0	
12th grade	0.9	0.3	0.7	
Usual grades received in school				
Mostly As and Bs	3.9	3.6	3.8	
Mostly Bs and Cs	18.9	16.3	17.8	
Mostly Cs and Ds	42.7	40.0	41.6	
Mostly Ds and Fs	46.9	46.8	46.9	
Has/had Individual Education Plan (IEP)	31.5	31.2	31.3	
Ever suspended from school	83.7	80.9	82.6	
Ever arrested	35.0	26.6	31.6	***
Ever convicted	20.2	14.7	18.0	**
Sample size	722	451	1,173	

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

Characteristic (%)	Program Group	Control Group	Full Sample	
Who first suggested you should apply for ChalleNGe?				
Yourself	24.5	22.8	23.8	
A relative	47.4	49.1	48.1	
A school official	17.1	16.3	16.8	
The justice system	7.6	7.5	7.5	
Reasons for applying to ChalleNGe?				
Want a high school diploma/GED certificate	82.2	81.9	82.1	
Want to go to college/get more training	42.1	45.8	43.6	
Want to get a job	39.0	42.1	40.2	
Want to join the military	33.1	34.5	33.6	
Want to get life on track	77.9	82.0	79.6	*
Overall health very good or excellent	67.0	65.7	66.5	
Taking any medication	24.0	21.5	23.0	
Overweight (BMI 25-29)[b]	20.7	19.8	20.3	
Obese (BMI 30+)[b]	10.9	11.4	11.1	
Ever drink alcohol or use drugs	39.7	34.3	37.5	*
Sample size	722	451	1,173	

SOURCE: MDRC calculations using Baseline Information Form (BIF) data.

NOTES: Missing values are not included in individual variable distributions.
Distributions may not add to 100 percent because of rounding or where categories are not mutually exclusive.
T-tests were used to assess differences in characteristics across research groups. Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.
[a]The race/ethnicity categories shown here are mutually exclusive. For example, those listed as Hispanic includes sample members who may have indicated that they were Hispanic *and* black or white. None of these sample members are counted as black, white, or "other" in this table.
[b]Body Mass Index (BMI) is a measure of body fat based on height and weight that applies to both adult men and women. BMI is calculated by dividing a person's weight by his or her height squared. A person is defined as overweight if his or her BMI is between 25 and 29.9. A person is defined as obese if his or her BMI is 30 or higher.

themselves as Hispanic. Almost all are U.S. citizens and were born in the United States, and only about 3 percent reported having any children of their own (not shown in the table).

A quarter of the sample members lived with both biological parents when they entered the study; another 22 percent lived with a parent and a stepparent. More than 40 percent lived in a single-parent household (most commonly with their mother), and about 11 percent lived with no parent or stepparent. Less than 25 percent of sample members reported that their household received any public assistance, indicating that the ChalleNGe population is not, in general, ex-

tremely low income (though it is possible that some sample members were not aware that their household received public assistance).

As expected, the participants in the study had not done well in school before leaving. Nearly half reported that their grades had been mostly Ds and Fs, and more than 80 percent reported that they had been suspended from school at least once. Nearly one-third reported that they currently or previously had an Individual Education Plan, which indicates special education status.

About two-thirds of the study's participants characterized their health as very good or excellent. On the other hand, about one-third were either obese or overweight. About one-third reported that they had used drugs or alcohol, though sample members may have underreported their drug use if they believed that the baseline survey was actually part of the program's application process.

Summary of Earlier Findings

The evaluation's earlier reports described the implementation of ChalleNGe in the study sites, discussed why young people had enrolled in the program, and presented results from surveys administered about nine and 21 months after sample members entered the study.[27]

Program Implementation and Participation in ChalleNGe

Field research visits to all participating programs highlighted some variation across sites in the program environment, approaches to recruitment and discipline, and other elements of the program. Nevertheless, the basic structure of the program was quite similar from site to site, all of the programs were implementing all of the core elements of the program, and the staff were generally highly committed and professional.

As shown in Table 3, about 83 percent of the young people who were assigned to the study's program group actually started the program (that is, they showed up and registered); others may have changed their mind about participating after they were invited, or showed up to the program and failed a drug screen. Nearly 70 percent of the program group completed the Pre-ChalleNGe Phase and formally enrolled, and a little over half graduated from the Residential Phase. The graduation rate among enrollees was about 78 percent, close to the national average for this time period.

An earlier report discussed potential challenges inherent in the structure of the mentoring component. Specifically, while mentoring can be critical to help ChalleNGe participants

[27]Bloom, Gardenhire-Crooks, and Mandsager (2009); Millenky, Bloom, and Dillon (2010).

National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program

Table 3

Program Participation and Completion Rates
Program Group Members, Study Sample

Outcome (%)	Full Program Group	Among Those Registered	Among Those Enrolled
Registered	82.5	100.0	100.0
Enrolled	67.9	82.3	100.0
Graduated	52.7	63.9	77.7
Sample size (total = 2,320)	2,320	1,913	1,575

SOURCE: MDRC calculations using data from the ChalleNGe Data Management and Reporting System (DMARS).

NOTES: Registered participants include those who begin the Pre-ChalleNGe program, a physically and psychologically demanding assessment and orientation period. Enrolled participants include those who completed the Pre-ChalleNGe program, are officially enrolled in ChalleNGe as "cadets," and begin a 20-week Residential Phase. Graduated participants include those who successfully completed the Residential Phase and moved on to the 1-year Postresidential Phase.

stay on track, the quality of the mentoring varied from site to site. In some cases, the cadets and families did not take the process seriously or did not have a strong pool of positive role models to choose from. All mentors were required to receive mentor training, but programs executed this training inconsistently; in some cases mentors received no more than a few hours of training over the phone. Cadets were required to have a minimum of four contacts with their mentor per month during the Postresidential Phase, and mentors were asked to send in a monthly report on these contacts. However, in some programs, few resources were dedicated to monitoring or enforcing this, resulting in varying levels of adherence to the mentoring model.

Results from the Nine-Month Survey

The nine-month survey was quite brief, but the results were fairly striking. The program group was more than four times more likely than the control group to have a high school diploma or a GED. The program group was also significantly more likely to be working and to be in college, and less likely to have been arrested since entering the study. There were also statistically significant outcomes in reducing obesity and improving overall health and self-efficacy.

Despite these positive results, the report interpreted the findings cautiously. It pointed out that the survey had been conducted very early in the follow-up period — in fact, when most program group respondents were still participating in the Postresidential Phase.

Results from the 21-Month Survey

A second report included promising results from a more comprehensive survey that was administered about 21 months after a sample member entered the study. At that time, the program group was still much more likely than the control group to have obtained a high school diploma or a GED and to have earned college credits. For example, about 61 percent of the program group had earned a diploma or a GED, compared with 36 percent of the control group. In general, program group members were somewhat more likely to be engaged in productive activities. For example, 72 percent of the program group was working, in school or training, or in the military, compared with 66 percent of the control group.

Once again, these results were presented as promising but with reason for caution. Differences in educational attainment between the two groups shrank between the nine-month and 21-month points, and many control group members were attending high school or GED prep classes at the time of the interview. In addition, it was unclear how ChalleNGe participants would use their high school or GED credentials in the future.

Roadmap

The remainder of the report is organized as follows: The second section presents the impact findings from the three-year survey. The third section discusses the themes that emerged from in-depth interviews with a sample of ChalleNGe graduates. The last section discusses some conclusions and ideas for future research.

Three-Year Survey Results

This section uses data from the three-year follow-up survey to examine the impacts of ChalleNGe on sample members' education attainment and their current activities, including work, education, training, and military enlistment. As a reminder, at the time of this survey, the average age of sample members was 20. Two of the program's key goals are to help young people further their education and get a foothold in the labor market. Beyond education and career exploration, the program was designed to foster a "whole person change" and help youth find "a way back" to society. Thus, the survey also examined a wide range of measures of health, crime and delinquency, psychosocial development, and civic engagement.

Education and Training

Overall, the survey data suggest that, as a result of their participation in ChalleNGe, the program group had better educational outcomes than the control group. Specifically, a greater proportion of the program group had earned a high school diploma or a General Educational Development certificate (GED), earned college credit, or received vocational training.

- **The program group was much more likely than the control group to have obtained a GED.**

As shown in Table 4, more than half the control group had received a high school diploma or a GED at the time of the survey. National data show that most high school dropouts eventually get a diploma or, more commonly, a GED.[28] However, ChalleNGe still had a large impact: 72 percent of the program group had earned a GED or a high school diploma, compared with 55 percent of the control group. This 16 percentage point impact was driven by significantly more program group members earning a GED.

Interestingly, about 15 percent of the program group reported having both a high school diploma and a GED certificate. This is an unusual combination, since a GED is usually seen as an alternative to a high school diploma. Further analysis showed that the program group members who reported having both a diploma and a GED are concentrated in a few ChalleNGe sites. One of those is an alternative high school, and in another, an arrangement with the state legislature allows young people who complete ChalleNGe and pass the GED exam to receive a state high school diploma.

Receipt of a high school diploma, rather than a GED certificate, may be a key distinction, since the value of a GED in the labor market is debatable. Studies find that GED holders

[28] Hurst, Kelly, and Princiotta (2004).

National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program

Table 4

Impacts on Education and Training

Outcome (%)	Program Group	Control Group	Impact	P-Value[a]
Earned high school diploma or GED certificate	71.8	55.5	16.2 ***	0.000
HS diploma	30.3	26.6	3.7	0.162
GED	56.9	34.5	22.4 ***	0.000
Both HS diploma and GED	15.2	5.5	9.7 ***	0.000
Earned any college credit	34.9	18.8	16.1 ***	0.000
Received college degree[b]	0.9	0.0	0.8 *	0.053
Ever received vocational training	40.1	33.1	7.0 **	0.016
Received trade license/training certificate	29.7	27.9	1.9	0.490
Current status				
Currently enrolled in				
High school or GED prep classes	7.3	9.2	-1.9	0.243
College courses	11.4	7.8	3.6 **	0.042
Job training	4.6	3.1	1.6	0.180
Sample size (total = 1,173)	722	451		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from responses to the 3-year survey.

NOTES: Estimates are regression-adjusted using ordinary least squares, controlling for sample member characteristics and weighted by site size, survey response rates, and program versus control ratios.
Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.
Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

[a]Standard errors are presented for all impacts with a p-value of 0.000. Following are the standard errors for all impacts with a p-value of 0.000 (presented in the order in which they appear on the table): 2.766, 2.898, 1.859, 2.625.

[b]All degrees received are associate's degrees.

earn significantly less than high school graduates. Studies have also shown that employment outcomes for those with a college degree are similar for GED holders and regular high school graduates, but that only a small minority of GED holders complete even one year of postsecondary education.[29] These data may help to explain why past evaluations of youth programs that substantially increased GED receipt did not find evidence of longer-term gains in employment or earnings.[30]

[29]Tyler (2005).

[30]Bloom, Levy Thompson, and Ivry (2010).

- **The program group was more likely than the control group to have received vocational training, earned college credit, or to be enrolled in college at the time of the survey.**

Looking beyond high school completion, the program group was more likely to have received vocational training (40 percent of the program group compared with 33 percent of the control group). Some ChalleNGe programs offered training; however, among program group members who reported receiving some training, 80 percent reported that the training was outside of ChalleNGe. Sample members received training certificates or trade licenses in a number of fields, including health care, computers, automotive, and construction. Health care and computers were the two most common areas for certification. Without further information about the level of training sample members received, it is difficult to assess how the training might affect labor market outcomes.[31] At the time of the interview, few study participants were still involved in a vocational training program.

In addition to the increased training, Table 4 shows that the program group was nearly twice as likely as the control group to have completed at least one college course for credit. While college courses are available at some ChalleNGe sites, a very small percentage of the program group (3 percent) reported attending college courses as part of ChalleNGe (not shown in table). Therefore, the difference between the groups extends beyond program group members' college course attendance at a ChalleNGe site. Overall, program group members earned more college credits than the control group (not shown in the table), and a small percentage of young people in the program group reported earning enough credits to receive an associate's degree.[32] At the time of the interview, relatively few sample members (less than a quarter) were furthering their education or taking training courses; however, a higher percentage of the program group than the control group was enrolled in a college course.

Employment and Military Enlistment

Table 5 describes sample members' employment and military enlistment since random assignment. Current employment rates — about half the sample was employed — are very similar to the previous survey. The fact that the employment rate did not increase over time, even though respondents are getting older, is not surprising given the sharp rise in unemployment

[31]The survey instrument asked one open-ended question about the type of trade license or training certificate sample members received. Responses varied considerably; thus it is difficult to understand the value and seriousness of the training based on the responses.

[32]On average, program group members reported earning 3.5 college credits, and control group members earned about 1.8 college credits. These averages include all sample members; therefore, participants who had not earned any college credit have zero college credits in the calculations.

National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program

Table 5

Impacts on Employment and Military Enlistment

Outcome	Program Group	Control Group	Impact	P-Value[a]
Employment history				
In the last 12 months				
Employed (%)	88.4	84.5	3.9 *	0.051
Earnings ($)	13,515	11,248	2,266 ***	0.003
Number of months employed	8.1	7.2	0.9 ***	0.001
Current employment				
Currently working[b] (%)	57.8	50.7	7.1 **	0.015
Current hourly wage under $6	8.2	3.1	5.1 ***	0.000
Current hourly wage between $6 and $7.99	10.3	13.6	-3.2 *	0.095
Current hourly wage between $8 and $9.99	15.2	15.2	0.0	0.984
Current hourly wage $10 or more	23.1	18.0	5.1 **	0.036
Current average weekly earnings[c] ($)	240	210	30 *	0.086
Currently working full time[d](%)	50.1	47.2	2.9	0.328
Enlistment history (%)				
Ever enlisted	18.3	17.2	1.1	0.616
Active Duty	11.9	10.9	1.0	0.573
Reserves or National Guard	6.3	6.1	0.2	0.891
Current enlistment (%)				
Currently enlisted in the military	8.5	7.4	1.1	0.494
Active Duty	4.8	4.9	-0.1	0.929
Reserves or National Guard	3.7	2.5	1.2	0.249
Current activity[e] (%)				
Involved in any productive activity	63.6	59.0	4.6	0.111
Has high school diploma or GED certificate and is currently involved in a productive activity	49.1	37.8	11.4 ***	0.000
Sample size (total = 1,173)	722	451		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from responses to the 3-year survey.

NOTES: Estimates are regression-adjusted using ordinary least squares, controlling for sample member characteristics and weighted by site size, survey response rates, and program versus control ratios. Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

[a]Standard errors are presented for all impacts with a p-value of 0.000. Following are the standard errors for all impacts with a p-value of 0.000 (presented in the order in which they appear on the table): 1.442, 2.910.

[b]Due to missing wage information for some sample members, percentages in wage categories do not sum to total percentage currently working.

[c]Weekly earnings averages include zeroes for respondents who were not employed.

[d]Working full time refers to working at least 30 hours per week.

[e]These measures include any employment, school, GED programs, or vocational training (as shown in Table 4), military activities, or any residential programs (not listed above).

nationally that has accompanied the most recent recession. In 2009, when the survey was administered, the unemployment rate for youth reached 15 percent, the second-highest rate since the government began tracking these data.[33]

- **The program group was significantly more likely to be employed and was earning more than the control group at the time of the survey**.

Even with the recession at its peak, program group members were more likely to be employed than control group members (58 percent compared with 51 percent). As the hourly wage categories in the middle of Table 5 illustrate, the program group was more likely than the control group to be in the highest *and* lowest wage categories. Eight percent of the program group and 3 percent of the control group reported wages under $6 per hour. This is often seen in programs that encourage employment, since people who might not have otherwise sought employment are joining the workforce. In addition, in this case it appears that many sample members in this wage category were employed in jobs that included tips, such as waiting tables, where the hourly wage would not necessarily reflect their total earnings.[34]

Almost one-quarter of the program group reported an hourly wage of $10 or more, while less than 20 percent of the control group was receiving a similar wage, suggesting that ChalleNGe helped some people obtain higher-paying jobs. Further reinforcing these differences in employment and wages, average weekly earnings at the time of the survey were $240 for the program group and $210 for the control group. Weekly earnings take into account employment rates, total work hours, and hourly wages.[35]

- **In the year before the survey, the program group was employed for more months and had higher earnings than the control group.**

Sample members reported on prior jobs as well, as shown in Table 5. Nearly the entire sample reported some type of employment since random assignment (not shown in the table). However, looking only at the previous 12 months, the program group showed greater employment stability than the control group. The program group was employed for an average of eight

[33]The 15 percent unemployment rate is representative of young people ages 20 to 24 in the United States in 2009. In the same year, the unemployment rate for 18- and 19-year-olds was higher at 23 percent. (U.S. Department of Labor, 2010).

[34]The federal minimum wage during the time of the interviews ranged from $6.55/hour to $7.25/hour. For employment that includes tips, such as restaurant work, the minimum wage is lower. If respondents were working in two jobs, the hourly wage data refer to the job in which they worked the most hours per week.

[35]The average weekly earnings calculation includes all current jobs reported by a sample member and includes earnings of zero dollars for those not currently working. Less than 2 percent of the entire sample reported weekly earnings of more than $1,000, and the majority of those working reported weekly earnings between $200 and $750. An analysis of reported wages was conducted, removing the questionably high wages, and results were similar to those reported in Table 5.

out of 12 months, while the control group was employed for an average of seven months in the past year.

This difference in employment stability is also reflected in the earnings of the two groups. Over the past 12 months the program group reported earnings of approximately $13,500, about $2,300 higher than the control group average of $11,250. Given the differences in hourly wages and weekly earnings discussed above, one could hypothesize that these higher earnings over the past year are a reflection of higher wages, perhaps more hours worked each week, and higher rates of employment by the program group.

- **The program and control groups had similar rates of enlistment in the military.**

In view of ChalleNGe's National Guard sponsorship and quasi-military environment, one might expect that a natural next step for many of the program's participants would be to enlist in the military. In fact, more than a third of study participants reported at baseline that they were interested in ChalleNGe in part because they wanted to join the military (see Table 2). In addition, as discussed earlier, enlistment is one of the three acceptable "placements" for cadets after they complete the ChalleNGe Residential Phase.

As shown in Table 5, however, there are no differences in military enlistment — current or past — between the program and control groups three years after random assignment.[36] Less than 20 percent of sample members reported enlisting since they entered the study, with more reporting active duty enlistment than Reserve or National Guard participation.[37] The majority of enlisted sample members, at each time point, were either in the active Army or Army National Guard (not shown). To respond to concerns that enlisted sample members may have been harder to reach for the survey and thus possibly undercounted and underrepresented in this evaluation, a separate analysis of enlistment using military administrative data was conducted.

[36]Current enlistment rates are about 10 percentage points lower than reports by survey respondents of "ever" enlisting. The current rates are also lower than at the time of the 21-month survey, where the program group was significantly more likely than the control group to report that they had enlisted in the military (11 percent versus 6 percent). There are a number of possible explanations for these differing rates — given that few enlistees would have completed their military service during this time. One reason may be participation in the Delayed Entry Program (DEP), which gives recruits up to a year prior to boot camp to change their mind about active duty military enlistment. Thus, some respondents may have reported that they enlisted when they entered the DEP, but then changed their mind and were no longer enlisted at the time of the survey. Another possible reason is that a sample member may have signed up to join the military but had not successfully completed boot camp. In these cases and others, a person may have indicated they *had* enlisted in the past but were not currently enlisted at the time of the latest survey.

[37]Overwhelmingly, sample members who reported that they were currently enlisted in the military also reported that they were currently working.

The administrative data dispelled these concerns; these data showed enlistment rates that were similar to those in the survey data.[38]

The information in Tables 4 and 5 illustrate a variety of activities that sample members may be involved in as they make the transition to adulthood and become productive members of society. The bottom of Table 5 aggregates these activities. At the time of the interview, approximately 60 percent of the sample was working, furthering their education, increasing their job skills, or enlisted in the military. While these rates were similar across groups, the difference emerges in looking at those who had already received a high school diploma or a GED certificate *and* were involved in another productive activity. ChalleNGe participants did better than the control group on this measure of progress; nearly 50 percent of the program group had a diploma or a GED *and* was either working, taking college courses, or enlisted in the military. Less than 40 percent of the control group was similarly credentialed and engaged.

Figure 2 summarizes some of the key employment and education results from the 21-month (wave 2) and the three-year (wave 3) surveys for those who completed both surveys. Figure 3 illustrates the impacts (differences between the program and control group responses) at each wave. Asterisks in this figure indicate whether the differences between the two groups are statistically significant. The figures show that, overall, the trend of ChalleNGe's impacts is similar at the two time points, though some impacts declined over time.

- **The program group reported shorter periods of inactivity since random assignment than the control group.**

In an attempt to further understand how sample members had been spending their time, the survey asked about time "basically not doing anything" since random assignment. The survey defined this inactivity (or "idleness") as time when the respondent was not working, in school, in a training program, or in the military. As shown in Table 6, across the entire sample, more than two-thirds of the sample reported that there was one or more months during which they were basically "doing nothing" since entering the study. For this age group, some downtime is unsurprising.

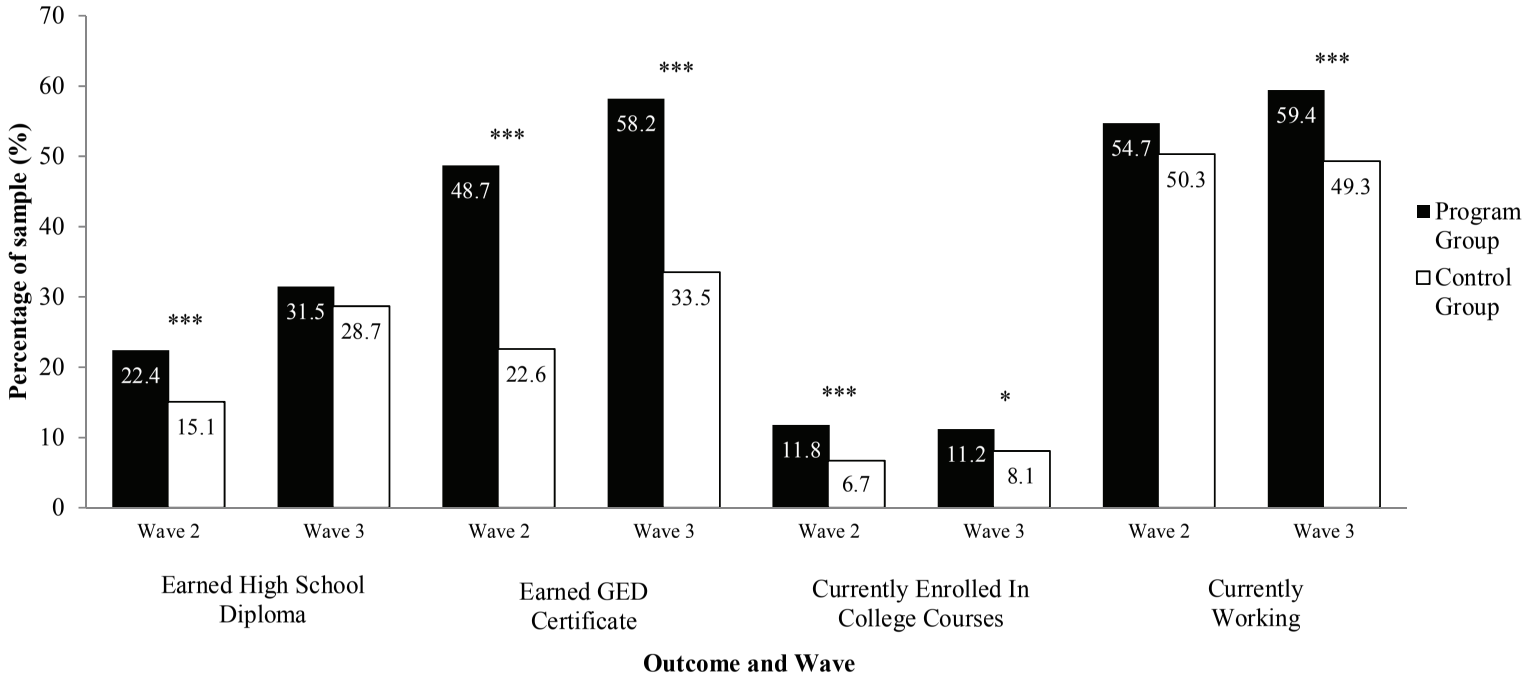
However, Table 6 shows that the control group spent significantly more months "doing nothing" during this important period of their development into young adults. Nearly 20 percent of the control group reported a year or more of inactivity, while just over 10 percent of the program group reported the same period of inactivity. These reports of idleness reinforce the finding that the program group had higher rates of participation in productive activities and educational attainment than the control group.

[38]However, the administrative data did illustrate that within the program group, those who graduated from ChalleNGe were more likely to enlist than those who did not complete the ChalleNGe program.

National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program

Figure 2

Selected Outcomes Among Respondents to Both the 21-Month (Wave 2) and the 3-Year (Wave 3) Survey



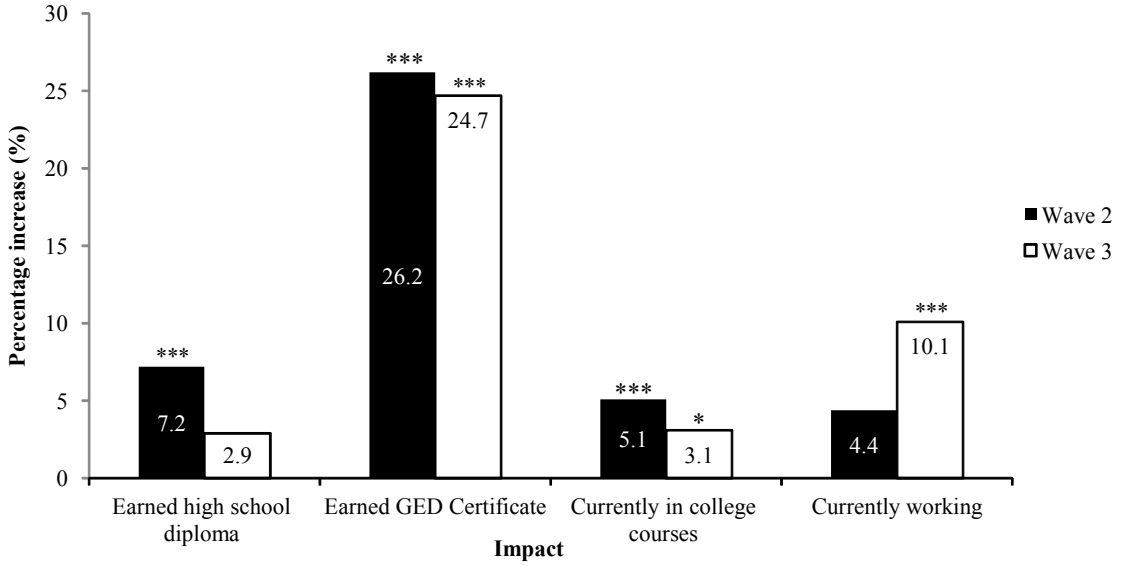
SOURCE: MDRC calculations from responses to the 21-month (wave 2) and 3-year (wave 3) surveys.

NOTES: Estimates are regression-adjusted using ordinary least squares, controlling for sample member characteristics and weighted by site size, survey response rates, and program versus control ratios.
Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program

Figure 3

Impacts on Selected Outcomes Among Respondents to Both the 21-Month (Wave 2) and the 3-Year (Wave 3) Survey



SOURCE: MDRC calculations from responses to the 21-month (wave 2) and the 3-year (wave 3) survey.

NOTES: Estimates are regression-adjusted using ordinary least squares, controlling for sample members' characteristics and weighted by site size, survey response rates, and program versus control ratios. Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

Other Outcomes

The ChalleNGe model was designed to go beyond education and employment goals to foster a "whole person change" and help youth find "a way back" to society. Thus, the survey also examined a wide range of measures of health, crime and delinquency, psychosocial development (life-coping skills), and civic engagement. Overall, there were no clear patterns of positive impacts among these measures that were attributable to participation in ChalleNGe.

- **No consistent differences emerged between the two groups on delinquency, life skills, or civic engagement outcomes.**

High school dropouts, particularly males, are at high risk of becoming involved with the criminal justice system. Moreover, about a third of study participants reported at least one arrest before they entered the study (see Table 2). By engaging young people and putting them on a more positive path, ChalleNGe hopes to reduce criminal activity in the future. The three-year survey asked sample members about arrests, convictions, sentences, and other delinquent incidents.

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Table 6

Impacts on Time Spent Idle Since Random Assignment

Outcome	Program Group	Control Group	Impact	P-Value[a]
Any time spent idle	61.9	72.7	-10.7 ***	0.000
Idle for 1-2 months	14.3	10.8	3.5 *	0.082
Idle for 3-11 months	35.5	42.4	-6.9 **	0.018
Idle for a year or more	11.7	19.2	-7.5 ***	0.000
Sample size (total = 1,172)	722	450		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from responses to the 3-year survey.

NOTES: Estimates are regression-adjusted using ordinary least squares, controlling for sample member characteristics and weighted by site size, survey response rates, and program versus control ratios. Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

[a]Standard errors are presented for all impacts with a p-value of 0.000. Following are the standard errors for all impacts with a p-value of 0.000 (presented in the order in which they appear on the table): 2.801, 2.099.

The top panel of Table 7 shows that half the sample reported at least one arrest, and a quarter reported a conviction since entering the study. Most convictions, which include all convictions since random assignment, were for public order or drug crimes. The self-reported delinquent incidents in the bottom panel of Table 7 reflect incidents in the past year and may include some incidents that are reflected in the top panel as well. The table breaks down the incidents as mainly property or violent ones. As Box 1 shows, violent incidents refer to *any* type of physical aggression; in this sample most incidents were fights that did not include weapons. Overall, no differences appeared between the two groups in the three-year survey on any of these measures.[39]

In addition to the outcomes discussed above, the survey asked a series of questions about civic engagement, leadership, and life-coping skills. Measures were intended to evaluate aspects of core program components or objectives such as responsible citizenship, service to the community, and group interaction abilities. These questions were selected or adapted from existing measures or were unique items developed and piloted by the MacArthur Research

[39]In the 21-month survey, the program group was less likely to have been convicted of a crime than the control group in *the year prior to the interview*. However, the three-year survey asks about arrests and convictions back to the time sample members entered the study. Therefore, the information collected at the two time points is not directly comparable.

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Table 7

Impacts on Delinquency and Criminal Activity

Outcome	Program Group	Control Group	Impact	P-Value
Self-reported arrests/convictions (%)				
Arrested	50.6	51.4	-0.8	0.777
Charged with any crime	37.1	33.5	3.6	0.208
Convicted of any crime[a]	27.6	24.9	2.8	0.294
Convicted of a violent crime	2.1	2.3	-0.3	0.768
Convicted of a property crime	5.4	5.6	-0.3	0.844
Convicted of a drug crime	8.1	5.9	2.2	0.155
Convicted of a public order crime	11.2	13.3	-2.0	0.296
Self-reported delinquency[b]				
Any incidents (%)	57.1	55.3	1.8	0.544
Any violent incidents (%)	48.7	44.5	4.2	0.157
Any property incidents (%)	15.8	18.1	-2.3	0.308
Number of incidents	1.5	1.5	0.0	0.813
Number of violent incidents	0.9	0.8	0.1	0.388
Number of property incidents	0.5	0.5	-0.1	0.334
Sample size (total = 1,173)	722	451		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from responses to the 3-year survey.

NOTES: Estimates are regression-adjusted using ordinary least squares, controlling for sample member characteristics and weighted by site size, survey response rates, and program versus control ratios.
Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Results for arrests and convictions cover the time since random assingment. Self-reported delinquency results cover the 12 months prior to the survey interview.

[a]Categories of conviction are based on definitions from Langan and Levin (2002). Categories may sum to more than the percentage convicted because a person may be convicted of more than one crime during the follow-up period.

[b]See full list of types of delinquency in Box 1.

Network on Transitions to Adulthood. As discussed in detail in an earlier ChalleNGe report, these measures are still in development and exhibited little variation and few impacts at the 21-month survey. Few differences were seen for the three-year survey as well. (See Appendix Tables B.1 and B.2.)

Box 1

Types of Self-Reported Delinquent and Criminal Behavior

Survey respondents were asked how often they had committed a variety of offenses in the last 12 months, with the option of answering "never," "once," "twice," "three or four times," "five or more times," "don't know," or refusing to answer. The types of self-reported offenses are listed below.

Property Incidents

- Deliberately damaged property
- Stole something worth more than $50
- Stole something worth less than $50
- Entered a house he or she was not supposed to enter in order to steal something
- Drove a car without owner's permission
- Bought, sold, or held stolen property
- Used someone else's credit card/bank card without permission
- Deliberately wrote a bad check

Violent Incidents

- Got into a serious physical fight
- Got into a fight with another group
- Hurt someone badly enough to need medical attention
- Used or threatened to use a weapon to get something

Other Incidents

- Sold marijuana or other drugs

SOURCE: Haynie (2001).

- **The program group appeared to be doing less well than the control group on some health and lifestyle outcomes.**

Table 8 shows that there are a few statistically significant differences between groups in measures of health, sexual activity, and substance abuse. These impacts, which do not necessarily reflect well on ChalleNGe, were not seen at the earlier survey wave, and there is no clear explanation for the findings.

Most respondents reported that they were in good or excellent health; however, program group members were more likely to be categorized as overweight than control group

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Table 8

Impacts on Health, Sexual Activity, and Use of Substances

Outcome	Program Group	Control Group	Impact	P-Value
Physical and mental health				
BMI Score[a]	25.0	24.7	0.3	0.227
Overweight[a] (%)	32.1	25.9	6.1 **	0.025
Obese[a] (%)	11.4	12.1	-0.7	0.726
Overall health either excellent or good (%)	69.3	65.3	4.0	0.157
Psychological distress score[b]	5.1	5.2	-0.2	0.552
Serious psychological distress[b] (%)	7.1	8.2	-1.1	0.477
Sexual activity (%)				
Sexually active	89.6	89.8	-0.3	0.884
Always uses birth control	49.8	57.8	-8.0 **	0.011
Uses birth control sometimes or most of the time	33.9	29.8	4.2	0.160
Never uses birth control	16.1	12.4	3.7 *	0.096
Drug and alcohol use (%)				
Binge drinking (5 or more drinks in a row) in the last 14 days	26.1	30.2	-4.1	0.113
Frequent marijuana use (10 or more occasions) in the last 12 months	26.0	24.4	1.6	0.540
Ever used other illegal drugs[c]	28.2	23.2	5.0 **	0.044
Frequent illegal drug use (6 or more occasions) in the last 12 months	4.7	4.2	0.5	0.705
Sample size (total = 1,173)	722	451		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from responses to the 3-year survey.

NOTES: Estimates are regression-adjusted using ordinary least squares, controlling for sample member characteristics.and weighted by site size, survey response rates, and program versus control ratios. Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

[a]Body Mass Index (BMI) is a measure of body fat that applies to both adult men and women. It is calculated by dividing a person's weight by his or her height squared. A person is defined as overweight if his or her BMI is between 25 and 29.9 and is defined as obese if his or her BMI is 30 or higher.

[b]The K6 scale is the sum of the responses to six questions asking how often a respondent experienced symptoms of psychological distress. The scale ranges from 0 to 24. A score of 13 points or more on the K6 scale is considered an indication of serious psychological distress.

[c]"Other illegal drugs" refers to drugs other than marijuana. Examples given in the survey question included: LSD or other psychedelic drugs, cocaine, crystal meth, amphetamines, barbiturates, heroin, and performance-enhancing substances like anabolic steroids.

members. Calculated using the Body Mass Index (BMI), 32 percent of the program group was overweight compared with 26 percent of the control group. No difference was seen between the two groups in those categorized as obese. Looking more closely at the BMI scores, the scores of the program group were only slightly higher than the control group and were right at the borderline between the normal and overweight categories.

Across the sample, 90 percent of respondents reported that they were sexually active. Surprisingly, the program group reported that they were less likely to use birth control than the control group. It is possible that some of these sample members, while still relatively young, may be actively trying to have children. Additional analysis of the available information on this sample could not confirm this hypothesis. Those who reported never using birth control did not match closely with those who are married or living with a partner.

As shown in the bottom panel of Table 8, the survey also asked sample members about the frequency of their alcohol and substance use. Rates of recent binge drinking (5 or more drinks in a row) and frequent use of marijuana and other illegal drugs are similar across the program and control groups. However, a higher percentage of the program group reported having *ever* tried illegal drugs other than marijuana.

- **Program group members were more likely to be living on their own at the time of the survey.**

The survey also measured rates of marriage, parenthood, and living independently, all potentially related to the transition to adulthood. As Table 9 illustrates, the program group was less likely than the control group to still be living with their parents (45 percent compared with 50 percent). This is comparable to recent national statistics that found that nearly 50 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds lived in their parents' home.[40] Twenty-five percent of the program group and 20 percent of the control group were living in their own home at the time of the survey; this difference is statistically significant. These figures are approximately 5 percentage points higher than in the 21-month survey for each group, likely illustrating further steps toward independence. A similar proportion of each group also reported being married or living with a partner, but only about half of those living on their own were also married or living with a partner (not shown in table).

Just over a quarter of sample members reported having at least one child or being pregnant at the time of the interview. Again, the research team hypothesized a link between marriage, independent living, and parenthood. However, further analysis indicated that parents or

[40]Rumbaut and Komaie (2007).

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Table 9

Impacts on Living, Marital, and Parental Status

Outcome (%)	Program Group	Control Group	Impact	P-Value
Living and marital status				
Living at parents' home	45.1	50.8	-5.7 *	0.055
Living in own home or apartment	25.0	20.0	5.1 **	0.041
Living in someone else's home	22.1	21.1	1.0	0.691
Other living arrangement[a]	7.8	8.1	-0.4	0.828
Never married and not living with partner	74.2	78.0	-3.9	0.126
Married or living with a partner	24.2	20.4	3.7	0.131
Divorced or separated	1.7	1.5	0.1	0.869
Parental status				
Has at least one child or is pregnant	28.3	25.1	3.2	0.214
Has a child	27.9	24.5	3.5	0.180
Pregnant	0.9	1.4	-0.5	0.357
Sample size (total = 1,173)	722	451		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from responses to the 3-year survey.

NOTES: Estimates are regression-adjusted using ordinary least squares, controlling for sample member characteristics and weighted by site size, survey response rates, and program versus control ratios.
Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.
Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.
[a]"Other living arrangement" includes: living in a group home or homeless shelter, not living anywhere (homeless), or any other arrangement not specifically listed.

pregnant sample members were not more likely to be living either on their own or with a spouse. Given that a majority of sample members were male, many fathers were likely not living with their children.

Results for Subgroups

Some programs are more or less effective for specific subsets of the population they serve. Data on such subgroup effects can inform decisions about how to target scarce program resources. Analyses examined whether the impacts of ChalleNGe differ for four sets of subgroups defined by characteristics measured at the point young people entered the study: age, high school academic performance, whether a family member suggested ChalleNGe participa-

tion (a possible sign of family involvement), and previous involvement with the justice system. Tables 10-13 show key outcomes for these subgroups.

During field visits, ChalleNGe staff reported that younger participants can be more difficult to work with because they are less focused and mature. Moreover, participants who are 16 or 17 years old when they finish the Residential Phase tend to have fewer options for postresidential placements. Table 10 shows selected impacts for sample members who were 16 years old at the time of enrollment and for those who were 17 and 18.[41] The last column of the table (labeled "Difference between subgroup impacts") shows whether the differences in impacts between the two subgroups are statistically significant. There is some evidence — supporting ChalleNGe staff suppositions — that the program has a more positive effect on older participants. For example, program group members in this older age group were more likely than the control group to have earned a high school diploma or a GED and to be involved in another productive activity, such as attending college, working, or serving in the military. ChalleNGe appears to have reduced high school diploma receipt among the subgroup of younger sample members; some of them probably obtained a GED through the program when they otherwise would have obtained a regular diploma.

Tables 11-13 show no clear patterns of differences in impacts for the remaining subgroups.

Site Comparisons

Questions often arise about the differences across sites in the impact analysis. As discussed above and in greater detail in earlier reports on ChalleNGe, while the core components of ChalleNGe were consistent across sites, implementation did vary based on affiliation, location, and staffing of the individual sites.[42] The implementation research did not systematically catalog the site differences, so the qualitative information needed to understand differences across sites is limited. Quantitatively, sample sizes in many of the 10 sites are too small to analyze the impacts at the site level.[43] While impacts do appear to vary slightly by site, they do not vary significantly or in a way that suggests that the impacts of one site are driving the results.

[41] As noted earlier, youth who were under 16.5 years old at the time of enrollment were not included in the study.

[42] Bloom, Gardenhire-Crooks and Mandsager (2009).

[43] See Appendix Table A.1 for sample sizes by site.

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Table 10

Selected Impacts, by Age at Random Assignment

	Age								
	Under 17				17 and Over				
Outcome (%)	Program Group	Control Group	Impact	P-Value[a]	Program Group	Control Group	Impact	P-Value[a]	Difference Between Sub-group Impacts[b]
Currently working	57.4	54.6	2.8	0.566	58.4	50.1	8.3 **	0.022	
Currently working full time	51.6	49.1	2.5	0.622	50.4	47.6	2.9	0.440	
Earned high school diploma or GED certificate[c]	68.6	62.7	6.0	0.203	73.1	51.2	21.9 ***	0.000	†††
Earned HS diploma	27.0	36.5	-9.5 **	0.033	32.0	22.2	9.9 ***	0.003	†††
Earned GED	54.6	30.1	24.6 ***	0.000	57.3	35.6	21.6 ***	0.000	
Currently enrolled in high school or GED prep classes	9.7	10.4	-0.7	0.812	5.9	8.7	-2.8	0.154	
Currently enrolled in college courses	8.9	9.6	-0.7	0.816	12.6	7.5	5.1 **	0.027	
Currently enlisted in the military	9.1	8.9	0.2	0.935	8.1	6.0	2.1	0.276	
Has HS diploma or GED and is currently engaged in a productive activity[d]	47.6	43.3	4.4	0.376	49.9	35.8	14.2 ***	0.000	
Ever arrested	57.1	50.7	6.4	0.191	46.6	50.5	-3.9	0.298	†
Convicted of any crime	26.3	24.0	2.3	0.591	28.3	24.6	3.7	0.271	
Any self-reported delinquency in the last 12 months[e]	60.0	57.5	2.5	0.605	55.3	54.3	1.1	0.778	
Sample size (total = 1,173)	272	162			450	289			

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from responses to the 3-year survey.

NOTES: Estimates are regression-adjusted using ordinary least squares, controlling for sample member characteristics and weighted by site size, survey response rates, and program versus control ratios. Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

[a]Standard errors are presented for all impacts with a p-value of 0.000. Following are the standard errors for all impacts with a p-value of 0.000 (presented in the order in which they appear on the table): "17 and Over": 3.462, 3.683, 3.639; "Under 17": 4.826.

[b]When comparing impacts between two subgroups, an H-statistic is generated. The H-statistic is used to assess whether the difference in impacts between the subgroups is statistically significant. It is interpretable in much the same way as the t-statistic and the F-statistic from analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests are interpreted.

[c]Because this measure includes some respondents who indicated that they earned both a high school diploma and GED certificate, the percentages reported for the separate measures do not sum to the percentages reported for this measure.

[d]This measure includes any employment, school or GED programs, vocational training, military activities, or any residential programs (not listed separately above).

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Table 11

Selected Impacts, by Delinquency Level at Random Assignment

	Delinquency Level								
	Ever Arrested/Convicted				Never Arrested/Convicted				
Outcome (%)	Program Group	Control Group	Impact	P-Value[a]	Program Group	Control Group	Impact	P-Value[a]	Difference Between Sub-group Impacts[b]
Currently working	55.6	46.4	9.2 *	0.076	60.4	49.3	11.0 ***	0.002	
Currently working full time	48.2	45.7	2.5	0.635	52.5	45.3	7.1 **	0.046	
Earned high school diploma or GED certificate[c]	68.3	47.9	20.4 ***	0.000	76.1	59.7	16.4 ***	0.000	
Earned HS diploma	25.1	22.2	2.9	0.517	36.0	28.8	7.1 **	0.035	
Earned GED	55.7	32.3	23.4 ***	0.000	60.2	36.8	23.4 ***	0.000	
Currently in high school or GED prep classes	8.8	13.3	-4.5	0.177	4.9	8.9	-4.0 **	0.033	
Currently enrolled in college courses	10.6	7.7	2.9	0.372	12.3	8.4	4.0 *	0.079	
Currently enlisted in the military	8.7	6.0	2.8	0.341	7.8	7.9	-0.2	0.926	
Has HS diploma or GED and is currently engaged in a productive activity[d]	47.6	30.1	17.5 ***	0.001	52.1	42.1	10.0 ***	0.005	
Ever arrested	64.4	67.7	-3.3	0.521	39.7	41.6	-1.9	0.599	
Convicted of any crime	37.9	38.8	-0.8	0.876	19.2	19.7	-0.5	0.865	
Any self-reported delinquency in the last 12 months	59.6	64.4	-4.8	0.362	54.3	49.9	4.3	0.231	
Sample size (total = 1,153)[e]	269	128			439	317			

(continued)

Table 11 (continued)

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from responses to the 3-year survey.

NOTES: Estimates are regression-adjusted using ordinary least squares, controlling for sample member characteristics and weighted by site size, survey response rates, and program versus control ratios. Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

[a]Standard errors are presented for all impacts with a p-value of 0.000. Following are the standard errors for all impacts with a p-value of 0.000 (presented in the order in which they appear on the table): "Ever Arrested/Convicted": 5.074, 5.178. "Never Arrested/Convicted": 3.295, 3.541.

[b]When comparing impacts between two subgroups, an H-statistic is generated. The H-statistic is used to assess whether the difference in impacts between the subgroups is statistically significant. It is interpretable in much the same way as the t-statistic and the F-statistic from analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests are interpreted.

[c]Because this measure includes respondents who indicated that they earned both a high school diploma and GED certificate, the percentages reported for the separate measures do not sum to the percentages reported for this measure.

[d]This measure includes any employment, school or GED programs, vocational training, military activities, or any residential programs (not listed separately above).

[e]Data on delinquency level at random assignment were missing for 20 members of the sample; outcomes for these sample members are not included in any of the measures presented in this table.

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Table 12

Selected Impacts, by Academic Performance at Random Assignment

	Academic Performance								
	Mostly Ds and Fs				Mostly Better than Ds and Fs				
Outcome (%)	Program Group	Control Group	Impact	P-Value[a]	Program Group	Control Group	Impact	P-Value[a]	Difference Between Sub-group Impacts[b]
Currently working	57.7	52.9	4.8	0.265	58.3	47.3	11.0 ***	0.008	
Currently working full time	47.8	48.8	-1.0	0.824	53.4	45.2	8.2 **	0.049	
Earned high school diploma or GED certificate[c]	70.0	51.0	19.0 ***	0.000	73.8	54.9	18.9 ***	0.000	
Earned HS diploma	24.9	24.0	0.9	0.812	36.9	25.2	11.7 ***	0.002	††
Earned GED	57.9	30.2	27.6 ***	0.000	55.6	36.0	19.6 ***	0.000	
Currently in high school or GED prep classes	9.5	9.8	-0.3	0.919	5.8	10.2	-4.4 **	0.049	
Currently enrolled in college courses	9.7	7.2	2.5	0.334	12.7	8.6	4.1	0.123	
Currently enlisted in the military	10.0	8.5	1.5	0.565	6.4	6.7	-0.2	0.905	
Has HS diploma or GED and is currently engaged in a productive activity[d]	47.8	36.7	11.1 ***	0.010	50.8	35.3	15.5 ***	0.000	
Ever arrested	48.2	46.0	2.1	0.622	52.6	55.5	-2.9	0.472	
Convicted of any crime	26.4	24.5	1.9	0.619	28.0	26.6	1.4	0.716	
Any self-reported delinquency in the last 12 months	56.2	59.2	-3.0	0.499	57.3	54.3	2.9	0.479	
Sample size (total = 1,137)[e]	329	210			369	229			

(continued)

Table 12 (continued)

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from responses to the 3-year survey.

NOTES: Estimates are regression-adjusted using ordinary least squares, controlling for sample member characteristics.and weighted by site size, survey response rates, and program versus control ratios. Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

[a]Standard errors are presented for all impacts with a p-value of 0.000. Following are the standard errors for all impacts with a p-value of 0.000 (presented in the order in which they appear on the table): "Mostly Ds and Fs": 4.064, 4.201. "Mostly Better than Ds and Fs": 3.876, 4.129, 4.097.

[b]When comparing impacts between two subgroups, an H-statistic is generated. The H-statistic is used to assess whether the difference in impacts between the subgroups is statistically significant. It is interpretable in much the same way as the t-statistic and the F-statistic from analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests are interpreted.

[c]Because this measure includes some respondents who indicated that they earned both a high school diploma and GED certificate, the percentages reported for the separate measures do not sum to the percentages reported for this measure.

[d]This measure includes any employment, school or GED programs, vocational training, military activities, or any residential programs (not listed separately above).

[e]Data on academic performance at random assignment were missing for 36 sample members; outcomes for these sample members are not included in any of the measures presented in this table.

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Table 13

Selected Impacts, by Relationship to Individual Who Suggested Youth Participate in ChalleNGe

	Individual Who Suggested Youth Participate in ChalleNGe								
	Relative				Nonrelative				
Outcome (%)	Program Group	Control Group	Impact	P-Value[a]	Program Group	Control Group	Impact	P-Value[a]	Difference Between Sub-group Impacts[b]
Currently working	57.9	45.2	12.7 ***	0.003	59.4	49.8	9.6 **	0.021	
Currently working full time	51.8	41.1	10.8 **	0.011	50.5	46.7	3.8	0.365	
Earned high school diploma or GED certificate[c]	74.2	60.3	13.9 ***	0.000	68.7	48.6	20.1 ***	0.000	
Earned HS diploma	33.0	30.2	2.8	0.483	29.9	20.9	9.0 **	0.016	
Earned GED	60.3	34.9	25.4 ***	0.000	51.8	34.8	17.1 ***	0.000	
Currently in high school or GED prep classes	6.1	8.5	-2.5	0.257	8.5	10.6	-2.2	0.380	
Currently enrolled in college courses	9.4	8.4	1.1	0.676	12.4	9.7	2.7	0.311	
Currently enlisted in the military	9.6	7.8	1.7	0.465	7.8	6.2	1.7	0.443	
Has HS diploma or GED and is currently engaged in a productive activity[d]	50.4	39.0	11.4 ***	0.006	47.7	35.7	12.0 ***	0.004	
Ever arrested	48.0	59.0	-11.1 **	0.011	51.1	48.1	3.0	0.476	††
Convicted of any crime	22.9	28.5	-5.6	0.137	29.1	21.7	7.3 **	0.048	††
Any self-reported delinquency in the last 12 months	54.4	56.0	-1.6	0.707	57.8	54.0	3.8	0.360	
Sample size (total = 1,162)[e]	343	219			372	228			

(continued)

Table 13 (continued)

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from responses to the 3-year survey.

NOTES: Estimates are regression-adjusted using ordinary least squares, controlling for sample member characteristics and weighted by site size, survey response rates, and program versus control ratios.

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

[a]Standard errors are presented for all impacts with a p-value of 0.000. Following are the standard errors for all impacts with a p-value of 0.000 (presented in the order in which they appear on the table): "Relative": 3.879, 4.143. "Nonrelative ": 3.975, 4.133.

[b]When comparing impacts between two subgroups, an H-statistic is generated. The H-statistic is used to assess whether the difference in impacts between the subgroups is statistically significant. It is interpretable in much the same way as the t-statistic and the F-statistic from analyses of variance (ANOVA) tests are interpreted.

[c]Because this measure includes some respondents who indicated that they earned both a high school diploma and GED certificate, the percentages reported for the separate measures do not sum to the percentages reported for this measure.

[d]This measure includes any employment, school or GED programs, vocational training, military activities, or any residential programs (not listed separately above).

[e]Data on the relationship of the individual who suggested the youth participate in ChalleNGe were missing for 11 sample members; outcomes for these sample members are not included in any of the measures presented in this table.

In-Depth Interviews with Challenge Graduates

Most young adults are uncertain about the future. Many, even those who go on to four-year colleges, take some time to make progress toward their long-term goals. For those who struggle through high school, though — failing classes, getting into trouble with teachers, or growing up without a supportive or resourceful network of adults — the transition to adulthood can be a particularly vulnerable time. Although each participant's story is unique, these are largely the youth for whom ChalleNGe was designed. As was shown in Table 2, nearly 80 percent of the program's participants listed "getting their life on track" as a reason for their interest in ChalleNGe. Most of the participants were receiving poor grades in high school, and a large percentage had been suspended from school or arrested. In order to better understand how well ChalleNGe succeeded in helping these young people, MDRC conducted in-depth interviews with 24 graduates of the program.

Overall, the interviews — like the program's impacts — tell a mixed story. Nearly all the interviewees described a striking transformation in their attitudes and self-confidence as a result of their participation in ChalleNGe. The program made them more aware of their own potential and cultivated a sense of worthiness and agency. High school had not been working for them, and although many did not like ChalleNGe at first, all of them expressed appreciation for the combination of the strict regimen and individualized support they experienced in the program.

However, most also said that they had struggled to maintain progress after they left ChalleNGe. While most had earned their GEDs in the program and landed a job shortly after, by the time of the interviews, few interviewees had made much educational progress, and most had had two or more low-skilled, low-wage jobs. Despite their fond memories of the program and their strengthened resolve to improve themselves, the graduates who were interviewed felt that they had lost momentum since they had graduated from the Residential Phase.

This chapter presents some of the key interview findings, as well as common themes and challenges that interviewees discussed. It is important to keep in mind that the young people who were interviewed had returned home to one of the worst labor markets in U.S history. Various studies have shown that young adults and low-skilled workers have been among the hardest hit by the economic recession. The fact that most of the ChalleNGe graduates had, at best, either a high school diploma or a GED, meant that they were at a particular disadvantage compared with those who had more employment experience or educational credentials.[44]

[44]Sum, Khatiwada, and McLoughlin (2009); Sum, Khatiwada, and Palma (2010).

Methodology

Throughout August and September 2009, two MDRC researchers conducted 24 in-depth phone interviews with ChalleNGe sample members who had been randomly assigned to the program group, graduated from the ChalleNGe program, and completed the three-year follow-up survey.

Westat, Inc., who administered each follow-up survey in this study, contacted a pool of program group graduates who had recently completed the three-year survey, and asked them if they would participate in another, less-structured interview. Westat provided MDRC with the names and contact information for 96 sample members who expressed interest in being interviewed. The MDRC researchers contacted the pool of 96 sample members, making call attempts to participants in each of the ChalleNGe program states in the evaluation. Once 24 interviews were conducted, researchers stopped seeking interviews. Since all the interviewees had previously agreed to be interviewed, all were amenable and interested when they were contacted by MDRC.

The interviews averaged 30 minutes in length and included questions about the graduates' current living, work, and school situations; their experience with the ChalleNGe program; and what their transition was like after ChalleNGe. Generally, interviewees were easy to reach. Most were contacted after one to three call attempts. Individuals who completed the interview were sent a $50 money order to compensate them for their time.

Of the 24 completed interviews, 16 were male and 8 were female. It is notable that females were overrepresented in the in-depth interviews. Graduates from 9 of the 10 ChalleNGe programs in the study were represented among the 24 completed interviews.

Interviewees entered the ChalleNGe program between the ages of 16 and 18 years old. Most of the 24 interviewees had graduated from the Residential Phase in December 2006 and had completed the one-year Postresidential Phase by the end of 2007. Interviewees were contacted approximately two years after they had completed the Postresidential Phase and were on average 20 years old at the time of the in-depth interviews.

It is important to note that the individuals who participated in the in-depth interviews were not representative of the program group as a whole but rather of a subset of the most motivated sample members. The 24 individuals who were interviewed were motivated to graduate from the ChalleNGe program. They were amenable to completing the three-year survey as well as participating in the in-depth interview and were easy for interviewers to reach. However, the interviews reveal that even this particular group of ChalleNGe graduates found it difficult to maintain momentum and find support after completing the program.

Road to the ChalleNGe Program

The 24 ChalleNGe graduates who were interviewed told of a range of experiences in their lives before and after participating in the program.

Most interviewees had first learned about the program from their parents, who themselves heard about it from a school administrator, television, or the local newspaper. Some interviewees reported having a family member or a friend who had graduated from ChalleNGe. Most said that their families were supportive and relieved that they had made the choice to participate in the program. In contrast, their friends were often unsupportive, primarily because the program would take them away from their friends and lifestyle.

The graduates described a range of reasons for being drawn to ChalleNGe: They felt disengaged from school (truancy, disruptive behavior, disrespect for teachers and authority, a sense that teachers did not care about them); they had conflicts with their parents, were in negative social environments, had a history of substance abuse, desired to have a career in the military, or wanted to get a GED or a high school diploma, even though they were behind in school. What united them was that they were having trouble in high school and the traditional high school path was not working for them.

While many interviewees reported that their transition to the residential portion of ChalleNGe was not easy, almost everyone said that they were glad they had completed the program. Some stated that they wished they could go for a second time. "I'm extremely happy I did the program," said one graduate. "When I'm in a situation now, I put myself back where I was three years ago…in ChalleNGe, and I can apply what I learned there." Another interviewee had a similar view: "I think it's the best thing my mom ever made me do. I'd go back and do it again. I learned how to value myself more…the ChalleNGe program made me a lot stronger so I was able to deal [with life] when I got back. I think [the ChalleNGe program] made me grow up."

Many of the interviewees also expressed particular appreciation for the structure and discipline of the program. While not all of them had positive feelings about it right away, many strongly emphasized that this aspect of ChalleNGe was what they ended up liking the most. "I loved it," said one graduate. "I love discipline and hard stuff. I love stuff that builds me up and makes me a man."

The majority of the 24 interviewees spoke highly about the residential portion of the ChalleNGe program. Their struggles to maintain the momentum they found while in the program varied and are discussed further in the sections that follow.

ChalleNGe Interviewees' Current Status: Employment, Education, Living Situations, and Social Lives

This section focuses on ChalleNGe interviewees' experiences with work, school, and living and social situations upon graduating from the program. Table 14, referenced throughout this chapter, summarizes interviewees' current employment and education status and where they were living at the time of the in-depth interviews. These ChalleNGe graduates encountered typical roadblocks that many young people face as they take steps toward independence and adulthood. Naturally, some of the graduates had more success than others in school and work and developing independence. While each interviewee had unique experiences, similar themes emerged as they recounted their experiences in returning home from the ChalleNGe program.

Employment

As the three-year survey results show, ChalleNGe participants were more likely to be working compared with control group members three years after the Residential Phase. The interviews with the 24 program graduates offered a fuller picture of some of the jobs participants had found after ChalleNGe.

Every interviewee had held at least one job since graduating from the program. In most cases, the graduates who were interviewed had found work quickly after graduating. Some of them had set goals for themselves to get a job within two weeks of leaving the program, often in fast food chains, retail stores, or manual labor jobs. They had varying success holding these jobs, but only a few had remained in the same position for more than six months. More often, interviewees had held a handful of positions, with short periods of no work. At the time of the interviews, several graduates had been recently laid off and identified the economic recession as a major barrier to finding new work.

The experience of finding the initial job, regardless of how long they had kept it, appeared to have had a sustained effect on graduates' desire to work. One interviewee had moved from one part-time job to another since returning from ChalleNGe. At the time of the interview, she was working part time as a waitress. This young woman was confident that she would find a "better" job soon. She had the realistic perspective that she needed a job that paid her bills, but also wanted to find one that was more permanent and career oriented. She elaborated: "You need something to fall back on, especially with this economy. I really want to be able to have options."

As noted, every interviewee had found work relatively quickly upon returning home, usually in at fast food chains or retail stores, or in manual labor. These jobs are consistent with what one would expect a 19- or 20-year-old with little work experience to find. Additionally, since ChalleNGe was not a vocational training program, graduates did not necessarily have a

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Table 14

Current Activity, Among In-Depth Interviewees

Outcome	Number of Interviewees
Employment	
Working or in the military[a]	13
Not working	11
Education	
In school	9
GED certification class	2
Community college degree or certificate program	7
Not in school	15
Living arrangement	
Living with parents or another family member	14
Living with friends or roommates	4
Living with spouse or boyfriend/girlfriend	4
Living alone	1
Living on army base	1
Sample size	24

SOURCE: MDRC in-depth interviews, 2010.

NOTE: [a]Interviewees reported working in the following fields: construction and warehouse work, food service, direct care, and daily temp work. Three interviewees were enlisted in the military.

specific trade they could apply in their job search. Many interviewees did not hold on to their jobs for long and expressed a desire to get a "better" or higher-paying job or to pursue an educational goal. Two interviewees were working and in school at the same time. This pool of program graduates was focused on earning money they could save, often for school or to move out of their current living situation.

As Table 14 shows, at the time of the interview, more than half of the interviewees were working or in the military. This does not include those interviewees who claimed to be looking for work. Those with jobs worked as cashiers in supermarkets and fast food restaurants or waited tables. Others held jobs in fields related to their career interests: teacher's aides in day-care centers or home health aides in nursing homes. Most of those who were currently without a job were optimistic that they would find work. One interviewee, who had found work right after he returned from ChalleNGe but was not employed in his desired field, was confident that he was on the right path: "Everything I do, I do as a step to get where I'm going."

Education

Impact findings also reveal positive effects on participants earning their GED certificates. As Table 4 shows, more than 70 percent of ChalleNGe participants earned a GED or a high school diploma, compared with 55 percent of the control group. This is because many graduates earned their GED certificate while they were still in the Residential Phase. Interviews with graduates offered a fuller picture of the kinds of educational programs they were interested in and how they had attempted to pursue them when they returned home.

Most interviewees had completed tenth or eleventh grade before dropping out of high school and joining ChalleNGe. Similar to the full program sample, almost all interviewees obtained their GED certificate while they were in the ChalleNGe program. Those who did not earn their GED during the program obtained it shortly after the Residential Phase.

Table 14 shows that slightly over a quarter of the interviewees were enrolled full or part time in a technical certificate program or a community college at the time of the interview. The types of programs they were enrolled in included education, criminal justice, psychology, or training programs (nursing or EMT). Two interviewees were enrolled in school and working at the same time. In many cases, those who were not in school expressed interest in obtaining trade certification in a range of fields that included mechanic, EMT, and business.

Unfortunately, many interviews with ChalleNGe graduates showed that they had made little sustained progress toward their educational goals in the three years after they had completed the program. At the same time, many interviewees identified continued schooling as a key goal and challenge for the years ahead. While those who did not complete their GED in the program successfully got their certificate after graduating from ChalleNGe, most of those interviewed had made, at best, limited progress toward a college degree or a vocational/training certificate. Several graduates mentioned that they could not pay for college classes, which resulted in a loss of momentum to carry them from one semester to the next. Others cited a change of plans that led them to abandon the educational program in which they were enrolled.

One interviewee described a pattern of starting and stopping school for a few academic semesters because he was financing his education with his own income: “Sometimes, I don’t have money [for the classes], and then, when I have money again, I go back.” Although he did plan on going back to school when he could pay for classes, he did not know what he wanted to major in.

As shown in Table 2, fewer than one-third of the sample reported that their household received any public assistance, indicating that the participants in ChalleNGe, in general, do not come from extremely low-income households. While the ChalleNGe population overall is not extremely poor, it is noteworthy that none of the interviewees indicated that they received finan-

cial assistance from their parents, although the majority were still offered the financial benefit of living at home. Many of those who were in school had to pay for their classes on their own.

Other research reveals that it is common for young people to start and stop their education due to competing demands, particularly for those who must pay for their own education. Research by MDRC and others that specifically targeted community college students suggests that many students want to earn a degree, but are hindered by the competing demands of work, family, and school. Institutional barriers, such as poorly tailored instruction, insufficient financial aid, or inadequate student services, can also impede students' academic progress.[45]

In spite of these discouraging educational outcomes, nearly every interviewee expressed a desire to enter some educational program in the years ahead and felt that it was a real possibility. Many said that they were actively saving money to do so. "I *am* going to go to school," said one participant. "There is no doubt about it. Hopefully, by the end of this year, I'll be enrolled in school." This particular participant was working full time to "save up money" so she could eventually study cosmetology. Overall, interviewees exhibited a sense of confidence that with persistence and hard work, their educational goals could be attained.

Living Situations and Social Lives

Two years after completing the Postresidential Phase of the program, interviewees were trying to figure out how they were going to approach work and school while developing their independence. Most had not saved enough money from their jobs to be able to afford living on their own. Table 14 illustrates that at the time of the interview, a little over half of the interviewees were living with their parents or another family member. Others were living with friends or a significant other. One interviewee was living on her own, and another was living on an army base. As noted earlier, most respondents were 19 or 20 years old at the time of the interviews. It is not uncommon for young people, especially those who have not moved on to traditional four-year colleges, to still live with their parents. Almost all the interviewees had moved back in with their parents when they returned from ChalleNGe. Among those who still lived with their parents, many said that they wanted to live on their own at some point in the future, but were saving money by living at home.

Most of the interviewees described having a mix of friends from before and after ChalleNGe, although the interviews revealed a certain tension between their social lives and their desire to stick to the goals they had set in the program. Many interviewees did not seem to have a supportive social circle to which they could return. While some spoke of returning to their communities as role models to their friends, for many others, adhering to their goals appeared to

[45]Brock and LeBlanc (2005); Scrivener and Weiss (2009).

demand a high level of social discipline. One graduate who was focused on finding a job described how he spent his days filling out online applications and walking around his town looking for hiring signs. After this, he said, "I just go back home, watch a movie or something, wake up, do it again."

Those who felt they had made the greatest progress after ChalleNGe repeatedly described to the interviewers how they had made a conscious effort to avoid the kinds of social interactions that had gotten them into trouble before, such as "hanging out on the street," and drinking. "After ChalleNGe, I kinda stayed away from my old friends," one graduate said. "I was afraid to get into a fight because I knew that if I did, I'd just fall right back into my old habits." Another interviewee said that he avoided his old friends altogether and maintained disciple by opting not to socialize and, instead, to look for work or stay at home, "to stay out of trouble."

Other interviewees said that they had been unsure what life would be like with their old friends after they returned home from ChalleNGe and felt they had to find out for themselves before they made the decision to remain close. One interviewee described how he went back to his old habits and group of friends, only to find that he was drinking and "causing trouble to my mom." Within a few more weeks, he "looked in the mirror, let the friends I was running around with go, and started in on my life."

Those interviewees who did associate with their old friends conveyed a sense that they were maintaining stronger boundaries in their social interactions, that they knew how to "do their own thing" and would not get pulled back into the behavior that had gotten them into trouble before. One graduate described how he was able to hang out with his old friends, while maintaining a certain degree of separation:

> I'm in a different place. Now that I've gone to ChalleNGe, I'm in a different predicament. I don't smoke weed anymore, but my friends still smoke. It's not a big deal to me anymore. When I first came home [from ChalleNGe] my friends were like: "You are different. You are always preaching now." But I try not to preach to them.

These ChalleNGe graduates described a fragile balance between maintaining old friendships while trying to develop new paths and goals for themselves. For some, reaching these goals meant that they had to cut ties with friends to avoid bad habits. Others were able to socialize without falling back into old patterns. Still others choose isolation as a way to avoid old routines.

Overall, most respondents agreed that they were not as far along as they would have liked in meeting their education and employment goals and fulfilling their desire to live on their

own. In spite of this inconsistent progress, most did not report falling back to extremes, such as drinking and doing excessive drugs, getting arrested, or hanging out with the wrong people. Box 2, Isaac's Story, on p. 48, provides an illustration of the challenges that many interviewees faced upon returning home from the program.

The next section will discuss how the ChalleNGe program affected interviewees' perceptions of themselves, their outlook on life, and their attitudes toward the people around them.

Challenge's Effects on Self-Image and Attitude

Beyond the effect that ChalleNGe had on its graduates' employment and education, it also profoundly affected their attitudes about themselves and their progress to adulthood. When asked to reflect on the program's enduring effect on their outlook, the interviewees consistently described a maturation that one would not expect in a five-month period. Of course, as has been noted, those who were interviewed are not representative of all program participants. It may not be surprising that these particular sample members would describe learning positive and enduring lessons during their time in the program. But, nonetheless, it is noteworthy that their descriptions of ChalleNGe's effect on their self-understanding and outlook tended to cluster around a small group of themes: confidence and responsibility, feeling of self-control, and sense of leadership and potential.

Even two years after completing the program's Residential Phase, the graduates who were interviewed pointed to the experience as a turning point in their understanding of what steps they would need to take to move toward their goals. In spite of the continuing difficulties many of them faced, they spoke with an understanding that they were responsible for their own progress and that they would have to take initiative to move in a positive direction.

One graduate, a young man who was training to be a firefighter, summed it up this way: "To achieve a goal, you have to put your mind to it. ChalleNGe taught me how to really do that, how to see that you really have to achieve a lot of small stuff to get to the big stuff, so that [when you get out], you can actually have a thought process about what you need to do to deal with a situation."

Another, a young woman who was preparing to start community college classes for a career in social work, said: "They prepared us to make it through the first steps and then make it on our own." While graduates faced continued difficulties meeting their goals, this sense of investment in the future may be responsible — at least in part — for the enduring impacts on idleness that are shown in Table 6.

Box 2

Isaac's Story

Isaac* graduated from the California ChalleNGe program in December 2006. He entered the program after he fell behind in credits in high school and the principal told him that he had the choice of either entering a high school continuation program or attending ChalleNGe. Although Isaac earned his General Educational Development certificate (GED) while in the program, he decided to reenroll in high school after graduating from ChalleNGe. But after struggling again, he decided he would be "better off with a good GED score than a high school diploma but a low GPA."

Isaac loved his ChalleNGe experience. "At Grizzly, there are no class clowns…it's a good educational environment," he said. "There's no way to mess around, y'know; they help you. Everybody pays attention." This was a stark contrast to his high school, where "the people that don't want to learn make it hard for everybody else."

Upon graduating from ChalleNGe, Isaac set himself the goal of earning his high school diploma and getting a job. "I gave myself two weeks [to get a job] and I beat it — I got one in a week and a half." His first job was working at a local taco restaurant, where he stayed for about 10 and a half months. When he turned 18, he quit that job and went to work at a Walgreen's distribution center, where he stayed for about two years until he was laid off in March 2009. Since then, he had done occasional work through a temp agency but could not find permanent employment, he said, "because of the economy."

At the time of his interview, Isaac was still looking for work in the same kind of warehouse distribution environment. He was also considering applying to a two-year college to improve his job opportunities and was interested in pursuing either criminal justice or mechanics. "I want to learn anything that'll help me find a job, and I already know how to do quite a bit on cars," he said. Isaac picked up his mechanical skills from his father, who used to own his own body shop.

Isaac was living at home with his mother, father, and two younger brothers (ages 13 and 16) and said he has a good relationship with his parents: "we're cool." The motivation to help the family is strong for him: His two-week job goal was motivated by the desire to not put any pressure on his parents for support, and his long-term goals included the wish "to be on my own and still be able to help my parents. That's one of the reasons I'm looking for a job — to help them out. Once I see that they're good, I'll move back out on my own." He said "back" on his own because he had lived in an apartment with a roommate for about nine months while working at Walgreen's, but moved back into the house when his parents told him they could use some help looking after Isaac's two younger brothers. Isaac's father recently lost his job at an RV dealership and at the time of the interview was collecting unemployment, putting extra strain on the family.

*This is not the participant's real name.

(continued)

Box 2 (continued)

As far as his daily schedule, Isaac said he tried to get up by 8:00 a.m. most days and spent a few hours outside looking for work. After that, around midday, he came home and tried to spend time with his family and help out around the house. During the week, he did not go out with his friends too much, since he was trying to keep himself from falling back into old habits. The friends he was seeing on the weekends were mostly people he had met since graduating from ChalleNGe, and although "obviously, we ain't doing nothing right now," he said they all shared the same goals: "We all want to go to college and do something with our lives."

Isaac said he was particularly interested in helping his younger brothers stay out of trouble. When asked what kinds of activities he would like to integrate into his life, he said he was trying to get his brothers to come work out with him or really "anything to motivate them to stay out of trouble, too." He was no longer in contact with his mentor from ChalleNGe — a middle-school teacher with whom he had developed a strong relationship in school — but he said his parents and his older sister tried to play the role a bit. His sister, 22, had just been released from prison after serving two and a half years. She's "been through a lot, but she's trying to do good. She just realized [she was on the wrong path] too late."

"Basically," Isaac said, reflecting on his current progress and goals, "I'm just trying to get independent." He said it had been tough at times since leaving ChalleNGe. "When you're there, you're in a good environment and you set goals. Then when you get out, it's hard, it's different." He has stayed out trouble since leaving, but the reasons for his participation were more academic than behavioral. And although he no longer saw any of the staff members at ChalleNGe, he was in touch with a few fellow cadets through MySpace. Like most of the other graduates who were interviewed, Isaac said: "If I could do it again, I would."

As the interviewed graduates told it, the structure of the residential period offered something of a clean slate. While many struggled to maintain the attitudes and behaviors they had learned in the program, their experience in ChalleNGe gave them an opportunity to break bad habits, understand the consequences of actions they might have taken impulsively in the past, and focus their attention on what they needed to do to succeed in the future. Several of the interviewees explicitly pointed to the heightened sense of responsibility they gained in ChalleNGe.

A young man who had gotten into trouble in high school several times for fighting described the way the program continued to influence his thinking: "When I'm in a [potentially violent] situation now, I put myself back where I was three years ago…and I can apply what I learned there. For the first time, I haven't lashed out at anyone. I've learned how to keep a clear head and mind." Another echoed his sentiment: "Going through the academy helped me under-

stand that high school is over and the real world is coming. There are going to be people you don't like, or that you want to hit, but you can't do it."

The descriptions that interviewees gave of their enhanced sense of leadership and potential are interesting. While Appendix Table B.1 showed no significant impacts on leadership and life-coping measures, the graduates who were interviewed repeatedly spoke about these themes without being prompted.

One young man put it succinctly: "I learned how not to be a follower and how to be a leader. I also learned how to focus more in class. I know I can do anything I put my mind to." Another graduate felt similarly:

> It was an experience that I needed — I needed someone to push me. ChalleNGe pushed me to my limit. I never really had anyone that said: "you can do this." That's what they did. I also got a lot of common sense out of the program. I learned how to think for myself instead of following everyone else.

Despite the lack of impacts shown in Appendix Table B.1, the program appeared to have a real effect on these graduates' belief in their own ability to succeed with enough work. It is possible that the program exposed them to a heightened sense of possibility, which could make goals such as college and skilled employment seem more real than they otherwise would have.

Maintaining Momentum

Despite the sustained effect on graduates' attitudes about themselves, for most of those interviewed, the momentum they had gained in ChalleNGe had diminished by the time of their interview. As discussed earlier in the report, the core component of the Postresidential Phase was mentoring, which was intended to reinforce and sustain lessons from the Residential Phase. At the time of the interviews, the formal mentoring component had ended. It is not surprising that few interviewees described ongoing interactions with their mentors. However, it is notable that few mentioned their mentoring relationships at all when asked to describe the entirety of their experience in the ChalleNGe program. Those who did bring up their relationship with a mentor described it as positive and supportive, but not as a formal "mentor-mentee" relationship.

As these ChalleNGe graduates described it, the program was a transformative experience in their understanding of themselves and their capabilities. However, the abrupt end of services and inconsistent mentoring left them largely reliant on the supports that already existed in their lives. For some, this meant very little support. Given their young age and the problems they had before they entered ChalleNGe, the interviewees' struggles to gain a foothold in the labor market and make strides in their education are not inconsistent with those of many of their

peers. Low-wage jobs and inconsistent engagement in postsecondary education are common experiences among young people, particularly those with fewer supports and resources.

What was most salient from the interviews were the graduates' descriptions of their attitudinal development and self-esteem. Many attributed an enhanced sense of leadership and potential to the support that they received at ChalleNGe — a novel experience for many of them. Several described the combination of structure and encouragement as integral aspects of the program. Conversely, the absence of both in the communities that many returned to surely contributed to their difficulties in sustaining the progress they had made in the Residential Phase of the program.

As one graduate put it, "Yeah, the lessons slip. If you're not in that environment and you don't have someone on your butt, it's gonna slip." It fades, he thinks, because "you gotta be your own boss." Another interviewee spoke about the contrast between her life in the ChalleNGe program and her life when she returned home: "They don't tell you what it's going to be like when you go back to the real world. In ChalleNGe, you know what you are doing every day, but when you go back out, you have to deal with money, and parents, and the drama."

Incorporating enhanced support systems into the Postresidential Phase could ease this transition and, potentially, solidify more of the impacts that came out of the Residential Phase. In the final section of this report, some suggestions are offered about ways to strengthen these components as the program's graduates adjust to life after ChalleNGe.

Conclusions and Next Steps

Three years after entering the study (and one and a half years after the end of the program's Postresidential Phase), young people who had access to ChalleNGe were doing better than their counterparts in the control group in several respects. They were more likely to have a General Educational Development certificate (GED), more likely to have at least started college, and more likely to be working. The lack of impacts in some other areas, such as crime and delinquency, is somewhat surprising. But since the sample members were only 20 years old, on average, when they responded to the three-year survey, it is too early to know how their transition to adulthood will progress. It is not clear at this point whether the evaluation will be able to collect further follow-up data.

The main goals of the ChalleNGe Residential Phase are to help participants obtain a secondary school credential and develop attitudes and behavior patterns that will help them succeed in the future as students, workers, and citizens. The evaluation's qualitative and quantitative data suggest that the Residential Phase succeeds in this respect for many participants. Yet, the data also suggest that it is difficult for many young people to maintain momentum afterward in a society and labor market that offer few opportunities for young people who have limited family support and do not follow a linear pattern from high school to college. The survey data show that several of the program's key impacts have diminished in size over time, and in the in-depth interviews, some program graduates (like many people their age) appeared to be having difficulty gaining a firm foothold in college or in the labor market.

The designers of the ChalleNGe program anticipated this problem and added an innovative Postresidential Phase built around mentoring to try to ease participants' transitions to their lives at home. However, the evaluation found that the Postresidential Phase is implemented unevenly across sites. Moreover, while mentors may provide vital emotional support to young people, they may not have the practical expertise and connections to help them find good jobs and succeed in college.

Thus, the evaluation results to date suggest that the program may want to experiment with ways to enhance the Postresidential Phase of the program. Possibilities might include:

- **Stationing some postresidential staff in the areas where concentrations of former participants live, rather than at the program site.** Staff who live and work full time in these key communities could focus on developing strong linkages with local institutions like colleges, training programs, and employers. They could also plan alumni events and have regular one-on-one meetings with program graduates (even beyond the first year after graduation) to serve as a resource and help keep the young people on track.

Realistically, these staff would only be able to work closely with a fraction of graduates, since ChalleNGe participants may come from many areas of their states.

- **Using financial incentives to promote ongoing connections between former participants and the program, or to encourage success in school and/or work.** Incentives could be designed to promote positive outcomes per se (for example, steady employment or progress in college), or they could aim to encourage graduates to stay in touch with program staff or mentors, as a means to further these outcomes. Other studies have found that carefully designed financial incentives can successfully promote a variety of positive behaviors.[46]

- **Promoting a stronger alumni support network through a combination of social media and face-to-face activities such as "booster weekends" at the program site.** Program graduates could serve as a powerful source of peer support and practical advice for one another. Graduates may have a tendency to drift apart after leaving the Residential Phase, but the program could take affirmative steps to encourage them to stay in touch with and support one another. Activities for graduates might also include their mentors.

- **Developing stronger connections between ChalleNGe and community colleges or other postsecondary institutions in areas where graduates live.** It is somewhat difficult for ChalleNGe programs to develop linkages with these educational institutions because participants come from many areas of their states. Thus, it might be necessary to hire staff in the key communities (discussed earlier) or to devote more resources to the site-based staff who work with participants to develop their postresidential placements. Stronger linkages could help participants make better, more informed choices about their postresidential activities.

- **Building a stronger vocational training component, either during or after the Residential Phase of the program.** "Job Skills" is one of eight core components of the ChalleNGe program. However, in many sites, this component is designed to promote career awareness and general employability rather than to teach specific occupational skills that might help graduates gain access to higher-paying jobs. There are several ways that the program might increase its focus on skills training: ChalleNGe might integrate occupational skills into the core academic component during the Residential Phase, it might extend

[46]Miller, Riccio, and Smith (2009).

this phase or add a second Residential Phase focused on skills-building, or it might create linkages with other youth training programs, such as Job Corps or Year Up, so that graduates could be channeled into those programs.

Ideally, such enhancements and others designed by program managers would be rigorously evaluated to determine whether they increase the program's long-term impacts. ChalleNGe is an example of a public program that already achieves impressive results, but might be improved through a systematic program of innovation and experimentation.

Appendix A

Analyses of Survey Response Bias

Appendix A assesses the reliability of impact results measured by the three-year survey. It also examines whether the impacts for the survey respondents can be generalized to the impacts for the research sample. The appendix first describes how the survey sample was selected. Then it discusses the response rates for the survey sample and for the program and control groups. Next, it examines differences between survey respondents and nonrespondents, followed by a comparison of the two research groups among the survey respondents.

This appendix concludes that the survey is reliable but cautions against generalizing results beyond the survey respondent sample. A comparison of the program and control groups among the survey respondents shows few differences in background characteristics; some differences are expected due to chance, and those were largely addressed in the analysis model. Respondents and nonrespondents differed in some measurable characteristics before random assignment.

Survey Sample Selection

The research sample includes 3,074 sample members who were randomly assigned from June 2005 through December 2006. Approximately half the full research sample, a total of 1,507 individuals, was selected to be interviewed for the 21- month and three-year survey. This sample is referred to as the "fielded sample" (see Box A.1 and Table A.1). With a planned analysis to estimate a pooled impact where each site is weighed equally, the sample was chosen to minimize the variance of estimated impacts in the model. Ideally, this means selecting an equal number of program and control group members from each site. However this was not possible with the wide variation in site size for ChalleNGe. Therefore, a balanced survey sample was chosen from each of the larger sites. In the smaller sites this was not possible; all control group members were included but more program group members were chosen.

Box A.1

Key Samples

Research Sample. All individuals in the study randomly assigned from June 2005 through December 2006.

Fielded Sample. Sample members in the research sample who were selected for the field interview.

Respondent Sample. Sample members who completed the survey.

Nonrespondent Sample. Sample members in the fielded sample who were not interviewed because they were not located, refused to be interviewed, or for other reasons.

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Appendix Table A.1

Fielded Survey Sample

State	Program Group	Control Group	Total Sample
California	94	29	123
Florida	95	62	157
Georgia	94	94	188
Illinois	95	95	190
Michigan	95	94	189
Mississippi	94	49	143
North Carolina	94	74	168
New Mexico	66	26	92
Texas	95	38	133
Wisconsin	94	30	124
Total	916	591	1,507

SOURCE: MDRC calculations.

Survey Response Rates

Sample members who were interviewed for the survey are referred to as "survey respondents," or the "respondent sample," while sample members among the fielded sample who were not interviewed are known as "nonrespondents," or the "nonrespondents sample." A total of 1,173 sample members, or 78 percent of the fielded sample, completed the survey (79 percent [total = 722] of program group members and 76 percent [total = 451] of control group members). Approximately 89 percent of survey respondents also completed the earlier 21-month survey.

Of the nonrespondent sample, 59 percent (184 out of 311) could not be located for the interview.[1] Whenever the response rate is lower than 100 percent, nonresponse bias may occur. That is, differences may exist between the respondent sample and the larger, fielded sample, owing to differences between the sample members who completed a survey and those who did not.

[1]Other respondents were not interviewed because they refused, were in jail, in the military, in rehab, or deceased.

Comparisons Between the Research Groups in the Survey Respondent Sample

Although random assignment research designs minimize the potential bias, there is the possibility that the characteristics of the research groups will differ due to the selective nature of the survey response process. If this is true, the reliability of impact estimates for the respondent sample may be affected.

Table 2 shows selected baseline characteristics of the program and control group members who responded to the three-year survey. Differences emerge among respondents for highest grade completed and prior arrest/conviction. For highest grade completed, the characteristic was included in the analysis model to control for the variation between the two groups. For prior arrest/conviction, the program group fared worse, so would likely cause the effects of the program to be underestimated, if anything. A logistic regression predicting treatment status among respondents confirmed that the control and program groups are similar; baseline characteristics cannot predict treatment status (the F-statistic testing joint significance was not significant).

Comparisons Between Respondents and Nonrespondents Within the Survey Sample

In order to examine whether there are systematic differences between those who responded to the survey and those who did not, Table A.2 presents an analysis of selected baseline characteristics of survey respondents and nonrespondents.

Some statistically significant differences emerge that limit the ability to generalize the results presented in this report beyond the respondent sample. Respondents were less likely to have been arrested prior to random assignment. During the survey fielding, the survey firm reported difficulty in interviewing sample members who were incarcerated and tried to follow up and interview them when released, if possible. The respondent group was also more likely to give education and training as a reason for applying to ChalleNGe (not shown in table). Conversely, prior to random assignment a significantly higher percentage of the respondent group was considered obese, based on their reported height and weight.

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Appendix Table A.2

Selected Baseline Characteristics of Survey Respondents and Nonrespondents

Characteristic (%)	Respondent Group	Nonrespondent Group	Total	
Male	88.0	91.5	88.8	*
Average age (years)	16.7	16.8	16.7	
Race/ethnicity[a]				
Hispanic	18.1	20.7	18.7	
White	42.3	40.3	41.9	
Black	33.8	34.1	33.9	
Other	0.6	0.2	0.5	
Highest grade completed				
8th grade or lower	14.5	13.4	14.3	
9th grade	29.9	36.6	31.5	
10th grade	37.9	33.5	36.9	
11th grade	17.0	15.9	16.7	
12th grade	0.6	0.7	0.7	
Usual grades received in school				*
Mostly As and Bs	3.8	4.7	4.0	
Mostly Bs and Cs	17.0	22.6	18.3	
Mostly Cs and Ds	38.0	34.0	37.1	
Mostly Ds and Fs	41.2	38.7	40.6	
Has/had Individual Education Plan (IEP)	31.3	31.8	31.4	
Ever suspended from school	82.6	80.2	82.0	
Ever arrested	31.6	39.3	33.3	***
Ever convicted	18.0	21.5	18.8	
Who first suggested you should apply for ChalleNGe?				**
Yourself	26.4	28.8	26.9	
A relative	51.3	43.9	49.6	
A school official	15.4	16.4	15.6	
The justice system	6.9	10.9	7.8	
Reasons for applying to ChalleNGe?				
Want a high school diploma/GED certificate	82.1	77.8	81.1	*
Want to go to college/get more training	43.5	38.6	42.5	
Want to get a job	40.2	36.1	39.3	
Want to join the military	33.6	29.5	32.7	
Want to get life on track	79.6	80.8	79.8	
Sample size	1,173	334	1,507	

(continued)

Appendix Table A.2 (continued)

Characteristic (%)	Respondent Group	Nonrespondent Group	Total	
Overall health very good or excellent	66.5	71.4	67.6	*
Taking any medication	23.0	22.1	22.8	
Overweight (BMI 25-29)[b]	20.3	22.5	20.8	
Obese (BMI 30+)[b]	11.1	7.5	10.3	*
Ever drink alcohol or use drugs	37.5	39.1	37.9	
Sample size	1,173	334	1,507	

SOURCE: MDRC calculations using Baseline Information Form (BIF) data.

NOTES: Missing values are not included in individual variable distributions.
Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.
Distributions may not add to 100 percent where categories are not mutually exclusive.
T-tests were used to assess differences in characteristics across research groups. Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.
[a]Race/ethnicity categories were constructed by counting as Hispanic those who checked both Hispanic and black or white. None of these sample members are counted as multiracial and grouped in the "other" category.
[b]Body Mass Index (BMI) is a measure of body fat that applies to both adult men and women. BMI is calculated by dividing a person's weight by his or her height squared. A person is defined as overweight if his or her BMI is between 25 and 29.9. A person is defined as obese if his or her BMI is 30 or higher.

Appendix B

Life Skills and Civic Engagement Outcomes

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Appendix Table B.1

Impacts on Leadership and Life-Coping Skills

Outcome	Program Group	Control Group	Impact	P-Value
Goals and priorities				
Important to graduate from college	3.5	3.5	0.0	0.926
Important to have a good job or career	4.0	3.9	0.0	0.176
Important to have a good marriage or long-term relationship	3.4	3.5	0.0	0.393
Important to stay out of trouble with the law	4.0	4.0	0.0	0.852
Good sense of the path I want to take in life and the steps needed	4.7	4.6	0.1	0.151
Rarely give up on something I am doing, even when things get tough	4.2	4.1	0.1	0.265
There is really no way I can solve the problems I have	1.3	1.3	0.0	0.740
Support from others				
I am able to ask for help when I need it	4.7	4.7	0.0	0.278
I seek advice and support from other people	4.4	4.4	0.0	0.588
Group processing skills[a]				
Tries to present his/her ideas without criticizing others	3.5	3.6	-0.1	0.127
Encourages different points of view without worrying about agreement	3.7	3.6	0.1	0.372
Tries to consider all points of view or possible options before forming an opinion or making a decision	4.0	4.0	0.0	0.939
Sample size (total = 1,173)	722	451		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from responses to the 3-year survey.

NOTES: Estimates are regression-adjusted using ordinary least squares, controlling for sample member characteristics and weighted by site size, survey response rates, and program versus control ratios. Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

Unless otherwise indicated, all responses are on a 1-4 scale, with 1 indicating a response of "strongly agree" and 4 indicating a response of "strongly disagree".

[a]Responses on these items are on a 1-5 scale, with 1 indicating a response of "never" and 5 indicating a response of "always."

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Appendix Table B.2

Impacts on Civic Engagement

Outcome	Average Scale Score[a] Program Group	Control Group	Impact	P-Value
Civic engagement				
Collective civic efficacy	3.31	3.23	0.07 **	0.030
Social trust	2.16	2.10	0.06	0.154
Social responsibility to be a good person	4.49	4.43	0.07	0.102
Belief in civil justice	4.20	4.24	-0.04	0.315
Sense of civic competence[b]	3.17	3.14	0.03	0.415
Past civic engagement[c]	0.44	0.43	0.01	0.637
Belief in American promise	3.32	3.28	0.04	0.568
Justice-oriented citizen[b]	3.50	3.47	0.04	0.302
Conventional citizen scale[b]	3.51	3.45	0.05 *	0.071
Sample size (total = 1,173)	722	451		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from responses to the 3-year survey.

NOTES: Estimates are regression-adjusted using ordinary least squares, controlling for sample member characteristics and weighted by site size, survey response rates, and program versus control ratios. Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

[a]Except where indicated, table shows average of item responses on a 1 (low) to 5 (high) scale

[b]Average of item responses on a 1 (low) to 4 (high) scale.

[c]Average of responses to a series of seven Yes (1) or No (0) items.

Appendix C

Unweighted Outcomes

National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program

Appendix Table C.1

Unweighted Impacts on Education and Training

Outcome (%)	Program Group	Control Group	Impact	P-Value[a]
Earned high school diploma or GED certificate	71.9	55.7	16.2 ***	0.000
HS diploma	32.1	25.7	6.4 **	0.019
GED	56.4	34.9	21.5 ***	0.000
Both HS diploma and GED	16.5	4.9	11.6 ***	0.000
Earned any college credit	35.1	19.6	15.5 ***	0.000
Received college degree[b]	0.8	0.0	0.8 *	0.056
Ever received vocational training	41.3	32.9	8.4 ***	0.004
Received trade license/training certificate	29.7	26.9	2.8	0.303
Current status				
Currently enrolled in				
High school or GED prep classes	7.5	9.0	-1.5	0.356
College courses	10.9	8.7	2.3	0.210
Job training	4.7	2.8	1.9	0.108
Sample size (total = 1,173)	722	451		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from responses to the 3-year survey.

NOTES: Estimates are regression-adjusted using ordinary least squares, controlling for sample member characteristics. Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

[a]Standard errors are presented for all impacts with a p-value of 0.000. Following are the standard errors for all impacts with a p-value of 0.000 (presented in the order in which they appear on the table): 2.775, 2.939, 1.929, 2.679.

[b]All degrees received are associate's degrees.

National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program

Appendix Table C.2

Unweighted Impacts on Employment and Enlistment

Outcome	Program Group	Control Group	Impact	P-Value[a]
Employment history				
In the last 12 months				
Employed (%)	88.5	84.0	4.6 **	0.024
Earnings ($)	13,448	11,064	2,385 ***	0.002
Number of months employed	8.1	7.2	0.9 ***	0.000
Current employment				
Currently working[b] (%)	58.2	48.3	9.9 ***	0.001
Current hourly wage under $6	8.0	4.1	3.9 ***	0.010
Current hourly wage between $6 and $7.99	10.8	12.3	-1.5	0.426
Current hourly wage between $8 and $9.99	15.7	14.1	1.6	0.473
Current hourly wage $10 or more	22.8	16.7	6.1 **	0.012
Current average weekly earnings[c] ($)	241	194	47 ***	0.007
Currently working full time[d](%)	50.7	43.6	7.0 **	0.018
Enlistment history (%)				
Ever enlisted	18.6	16.4	2.2	0.320
Active Duty	11.9	9.9	2.0	0.276
Reserves or National Guard	6.6	6.1	0.5	0.744
Current enlistment (%)				
Currently enlisted in the military	8.5	6.8	1.7	0.282
Active Duty	4.6	4.2	0.4	0.766
Reserves or National Guard	3.9	2.6	1.3	0.216
Current activity[e] (%)				
Current involved in any productive activity	64.0	56.7	7.4 **	0.011
Has high school diploma or GED certificate and is currently involved in a productive activity	49.4	36.8	12.6 ***	0.000
Sample size (total = 1,173)	722	451		

(continued)

Appendix Table C.2 (continued)

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from responses to the 3-year survey.

NOTES: Estimates are regression-adjusted using ordinary least squares, controlling for sample member characteristics. Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

[a]Standard errors are presented for all impacts with a p-value of 0.000. Following are the standard errors for all impacts with a p-value of 0.000 (presented in the order in which they appear on the table): 0.267, 2.929.

[b]Due to missing wage information for some sample members, percentages in wage categories do not sum to total percentage currently working.

[c]Weekly earnings averages include zeroes for respondents who were not employed.

[d]Working full time refers to working at least 30 hours per week.

[e]These measures include any employment, school or GED programs, vocational training, military activities, or any residential programs (not listed separately above).

National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program

Appendix Table C.3

Unweighted Impacts on Idle Time

Outcome	Program Group	Control Group	Impact	P-Value[a]
Any time spent idle	62.6	72.5	-10.0 ***	0.000
Idle for 1-2 months	14.1	11.2	3.0	0.144
Idle for 3-11 months	36.2	41.0	-4.8	0.107
Idle for a year or more	11.7	19.8	-8.1 ***	0.000
Sample size (total = 1,173)	722	451		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from responses to the 3-year survey.

NOTES: Estimates are regression-adjusted using ordinary least squares, controlling for sample member characteristics. Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

[a]Standard errors are presented for all impacts with a p-value of 0.000. Following are the standard errors for all impacts with a p-value of 0.000 (presented in the order in which they appear on the table): 2.832, 2.128.

National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program

Appendix Table C.4

Unweighted Impacts on Delinquency and Criminal Activity

Outcome	Program Group	Control Group	Impact	P-Value
Self-reported arrests/convictions (%)				
Arrested	49.8	52.7	-3.0	0.318
Charged with any crime	36.1	35.4	0.7	0.815
Convicted of any crime[a]	26.5	26.4	0.1	0.978
Convicted of a violent crime	2.1	2.8	-0.7	0.430
Convicted of a property crime	5.4	4.8	0.6	0.652
Convicted of a drug crime	7.6	6.5	1.1	0.464
Convicted of a public order crime	11.1	13.3	-2.2	0.266
Self-reported delinquency[b]				
Any incidents (%)	57.0	54.9	2.1	0.480
Any violent incidents (%)	48.4	44.3	4.1	0.176
Any property incidents (%)	15.9	18.5	-2.6	0.244
Number of incidents	1.5	1.5	0.0	0.950
Number of violent incidents	0.9	0.8	0.0	0.482
Number of property incidents	0.5	0.5	0.0	0.529
Sample size (total = 1,173)	722	451		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from responses to the 3-year survey.

NOTES: Estimates are regression-adjusted using ordinary least squares, controlling for sample member characteristics. Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Results for arrests and convictions cover the time since random assignment. Self-reported delinquency results cover the 12 months prior to the survey interview.

[a]Categories of conviction are based on definitions from Langan and Levin (2002). Categories may sum to more than the percentage convicted because a person may be convicted of more than one crime during the follow-up period.

[b]See full list of types of delinquency in Box 1.

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Appendix Table C.5

Unweighted Impacts on Health, Sexual Activity, and Use of Substances

Outcome	Program Group	Control Group	Impact	P-Value
Physical and mental health				
BMI Score[a]	25.0	24.8	0.2	0.352
Overweight[a] (%)	32.0	26.3	5.7 **	0.040
Obese[a] (%)	11.5	12.8	-1.3	0.520
Overall health either excellent or good (%)	69.6	64.9	4.7 *	0.093
Psychological distress score[b]	5.0	5.1	-0.1	0.815
Serious psychological distress[b] (%)	7.1	7.7	-0.6	0.703
Sexual activity (%)				
Sexually active	90.0	89.7	0.3	0.857
Always uses birth control	50.8	57.2	-6.4 **	0.043
Uses birth control sometimes or most of the time	33.2	30.2	2.9	0.324
Never uses birth control	15.9	12.6	3.3	0.141
Drug and alcohol use (%)				
Binge drinking (5 or more drinks in a row) in the last 14 days	25.8	29.2	-3.4	0.193
Frequent marijuana use (10 or more occasions) in the last 12 months	25.1	24.6	0.6	0.832
Ever used other illegal drugs[c]	27.4	21.6	5.8 **	0.021
Frequent illegal drug use (6 or more occasions) in the last 12 months	4.5	3.3	1.1	0.343
Sample size (total = 1,173)	722	451		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from responses to the 3-year survey.

NOTES: Estimates are regression-adjusted using ordinary least squares, controlling for sample member characteristics. Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

[a]Body Mass Index (BMI) is a measure of body fat that applies to both adult men and women. It is calculated by dividing a person's weight by his or her height squared. A person is defined as overweight if his or her BMI is between 25 and 29.9 and defined as obese if his or her BMI is 30 or higher.

[b]The K6 scale is the sum of the responses to six questions asking how often a respondent experienced symptoms of psychological distress. The scale ranges from 0 to 24. A score of 13 points or more on the K6 scale is considered an indication of serious psychological distress.

[c]"Other illegal drugs" refers to drugs other than marijuana. Examples given in the survey question included: LSD or other psychedelic drugs, cocaine, crystal meth, amphetamines, barbiturates, heroin, and performance-enhancing substances like anabolic steroids.

National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program

Appendix Table C.6

Unweighted Impacts on Living, Marital, and Parental Status

Outcome (%)	Program Group	Control Group	Impact	P-Value
Living and marital status				
Living at parents' home	44.8	49.1	-4.3	0.155
Living in own home or apartment	25.1	19.7	5.4 **	0.031
Living in someone else's home	22.3	22.6	-0.2	0.927
Other living arrangement[a]	7.7	8.7	-0.9	0.578
Never married and not living with partner	73.7	78.4	-4.7 *	0.065
Married or living with a partner	24.7	20.2	4.5 *	0.076
Divorced or separated	1.6	1.4	0.3	0.722
Parental status				
Has at least one child or is pregnant	28.0	23.9	4.2	0.108
Has a child	27.7	23.1	4.6 *	0.077
Pregnant	0.8	1.5	-0.7	0.232
Sample size (total = 1,173)	722	451		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from responses to the 3-year survey.

NOTES: Estimates are regression-adjusted using ordinary least squares, controlling for sample member characteristics. Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

[a]"Other living arrangement" includes: living in a group home or homeless shelter, not living anywhere (homeless), or any other arrangement not specifically listed.

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About MDRC

MDRC is a nonprofit, nonpartisan social and education policy research organization dedicated to learning what works to improve the well-being of low-income people. Through its research and the active communication of its findings, MDRC seeks to enhance the effectiveness of social and education policies and programs.

Founded in 1974 and located in New York City and Oakland, California, MDRC is best known for mounting rigorous, large-scale, real-world tests of new and existing policies and programs. Its projects are a mix of demonstrations (field tests of promising new program approaches) and evaluations of ongoing government and community initiatives. MDRC's staff bring an unusual combination of research and organizational experience to their work, providing expertise on the latest in qualitative and quantitative methods and on program design, development, implementation, and management. MDRC seeks to learn not just whether a program is effective but also how and why the program's effects occur. In addition, it tries to place each project's findings in the broader context of related research — in order to build knowledge about what works across the social and education policy fields. MDRC's findings, lessons, and best practices are proactively shared with a broad audience in the policy and practitioner community as well as with the general public and the media.

Over the years, MDRC has brought its unique approach to an ever-growing range of policy areas and target populations. Once known primarily for evaluations of state welfare-to-work programs, today MDRC is also studying public school reforms, employment programs for ex-offenders and people with disabilities, and programs to help low-income students succeed in college. MDRC's projects are organized into five areas:

- Promoting Family Well-Being and Children's Development
- Improving Public Education
- Raising Academic Achievement and Persistence in College
- Supporting Low-Wage Workers and Communities
- Overcoming Barriers to Employment

Working in almost every state, all of the nation's largest cities, and Canada and the United Kingdom, MDRC conducts its projects in partnership with national, state, and local governments, public school systems, community organizations, and numerous private philanthropies.