



**Edna McConnell Clark Foundation**

**EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT:  
A SYNTHESIS**

Susan Jekielek, Stephanie Cochran, and Elizabeth Hair

Project Director: Kristin A. Moore, Ph.D.  
Project Manager: Elizabeth C. Hair, Ph.D.

Child Trends

Washington, D.C.

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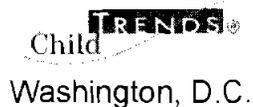
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Part I. Characteristics of Employment Programs

This synthesis places youth employment programs within the context of youth development. It focuses on ten programs that serve youth under age 18, but it also considers some programs that include older youths. The programs share the broad goal of improving the employability of young people, but some take an academic approach, while others focus on job skills training. The majority of the programs are community-based, although some are school-based and one stands out as a residential program. The effects of the programs on youth outcomes in four domains—educational and cognitive attainment, health and safety, social and emotional well-being, and self-sufficiency—have been evaluated.

### Part II. Documented Employment Program Outcomes

While educational achievement is not an employment outcome in itself, the attainment of a high school or college degree helps young people secure gainful employment, and many employment programs have educational goals. Employment programs appear to reduce school absences, but their impacts on other outcomes are mixed: They do not appear to improve high school grades, and they improve reading and math skills only while students are participating in the program. Many, but not all, evaluations link employment programs to the achievement of a high school diploma or general equivalency diploma (GED). One program links participation to college enrollment, while another does not. Thus, employment programs can be said to influence only a few educational and cognitive outcomes consistently.

Few employment programs have been evaluated for their impact on health and safety, but those that have appear to exert little influence. This is not surprising, because health and safety outcomes are not the primary target of job-training programs. Participation in employment programs does not have a significant impact on family formation behaviors or general health, but one program does increase knowledge of responsible sexual practices and the use of contraceptives. Findings are mixed regarding whether participation curbs drug and alcohol abuse.

Employment programs show potential for exposing youths to supportive relationships and for reducing criminal behavior during the time youths participate in them. Participants in one school-based initiative believe that their teachers give them personalized attention and have high expectations of them and that their peers are supportive. Two studies show that programs reduce the number of arrests in the short term, but that the impacts disappear when youths leave the programs.

Employment programs increase young people's exposure to career development and job training, but studies do not confidently support the expectation that the programs promote self-sufficiency. Evidence from three diverse programs indicates that

participation does not result in significantly higher employment in the long run. It may be that more intensive programs are needed: Participants in the primarily residential Job Corps program, for example, were slightly more likely than those in the control group to be employed when interviewed at a 30-month follow-up (63 percent compared to 59 percent). Job Corps was also the only program that increased the long-term earnings of participants as a whole, although another program did increase such earnings for some subgroups. Studies suggest that participation in employment programs can help youths secure better jobs (jobs with benefits, for example). Most program evaluations sought to determine whether participants were less likely to receive various types of welfare; only Job Corps reduced the overall percentage of program members receiving food stamps (but not other forms of assistance).

### **Part III. Characteristics Associated with Effective and Ineffective Employment Programs**

Given the mixed success of employment programs, are there any program characteristics that can be identified as more promising than others? While only a few studies examine this question, some lessons can be gleaned from nonexperimental analyses:

- Program participation may be most beneficial for younger teens and youths at high risk of poor educational or employment outcomes.
- One evaluation found that the more well-structured a program, the more effective it is for sustaining youth participation.
- Some beneficial impacts were observed in all three types of programs—residential, school-based, and community-based.
- No one type of job training stands out as more effective than others.

### **Part IV. Unanswered Questions**

This synthesis raises one main question: Why *aren't* employment programs more successful, especially with regard to employment-related outcomes? Planned variation studies would be useful to help answer another important question – What strategies are effective? A number of other questions remain unanswered:

- Are different types of job training more effective? For which groups?
- Who are the best teachers for employment programs?
- How much training in job skills is needed for successful longer-term outcomes?
- How much does skills training or education contribute to successful outcomes, compared to such services as assistance obtaining child care or searching for a job?

We conclude by suggesting that program evaluators and designers should focus on positive socio-emotional, academic, and health outcomes among youth and not just unemployment outcomes.

## INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a time when young people prepare for the family, work, and citizenship roles of adulthood (National Research Council, 1998). Success in these roles depends on developing personal competencies, such as self-reliance, as well as interpersonal and social competencies. Employment, secondary and postsecondary education, and training in job skills give adolescents tools that will enhance their ability to secure jobs and avoid relying on welfare in adulthood. Indeed, self-sufficiency in adulthood results from a successful constellation of experiences in childhood and youth. This synthesis of employment programs for adolescents places job preparation within the context of a general model of youth development and assesses its impact on young people's educational achievement, health and safety, social and emotional well-being, and self-sufficiency in adulthood.

Employment is clearly beneficial to adults in U.S. society. It is the key to staying out of poverty (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997), and research has linked good quality employment to a number of desirable psychosocial and physical outcomes, including better general health, longer life expectancy, a sense of control over the events in one's life, and mental well-being (Mirowsky & Ross, 1989). Generally speaking, society recognizes the value of work in an individual's life. This is apparent in recent legislation such as the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA), which limits the length of time for which an individual may receive federal welfare benefits and requires welfare recipients to work.

Is the United States successfully preparing its young people for self-sufficiency in adulthood? Murnane & Levy argue that "during the past 20 years, the skills required to succeed in the economy have changed radically, but the skills taught in most schools have changed very little" (1996). As a result, there is a growing mismatch between the skills required by high-wage employers and the skills learned by high school graduates. The "new basic skills" needed to secure a middle-class income include "hard skills," such as problem solving and facility in reading and math, and "soft skills," such as the ability to work in groups and make effective presentations and the ability to use personal computers. These researchers advocate integrating these skills into high school curricula, arguing that they are necessary for high school and college graduates alike.

Most adolescents in the United States work. Recent estimates indicate that 57 percent of 14-year-olds and 64 percent of 15-year-olds worked in some type of job (U.S. Department of Labor, 2000). Work experience helps young people become personally and socially mature. Parents believe that jobs will teach their adolescents to be dependable, punctual, and responsible (Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986), and working adolescents are more likely to describe themselves as possessing these qualities than nonworking adolescents (Greenberger, 1984). Employment (specifically, working during the senior year in high school) is associated with positive outcomes 6 to 9 years later, particularly for young women who work moderate hours (Ruhm, 1997). The benefits include higher annual earnings, greater likelihood of receiving fringe benefits, and higher status occupations.

Most people agree that some employment is good for young people, but there is considerable controversy over how many hours of employment are appropriate. It appears that moderate employment (fewer than 20 hours per week) is beneficial for young people in both the short and the long run (U.S. Department of Labor, 2000; National Research Council, 1998; Mortimer et al., 1996; Steinberg & Cauffman, 1995). The value of working longer hours is questionable and may vary for specific groups of young people (U.S. Department of Labor, 2000; Schoenhals, Tienda, & Schneider, 1998; Ruhm, 1997; Chaplin & Hannaway, 1996).

Working longer hours can sidetrack youths from another path to economic self-sufficiency—education. Education increases the likelihood of being employed, the kind of job a person can get, and his or her income. Research has yet to demonstrate whether the adverse effects of working long hours are caused by the characteristics of the youths who choose to work those schedules (the selection effect) or to the longer work hours themselves. Research also needs to determine whether any beneficial effects of youth employment dissipate in time.

Research on youth development poses a series of specific practical questions: What do young people need for healthy development? How can adults meet those needs? What resources are appropriate, efficient, and effective for increasing self-sufficiency? And what outcomes can society realistically expect to achieve? Figure 1 presents a model of youth development, setting forth the needs of young people, the resources provided by adults, and desired outcomes. Table 1 identifies resources that work-oriented programs provide to meet adolescents' developmental needs.

**Figure 1: Model of Youth Development**

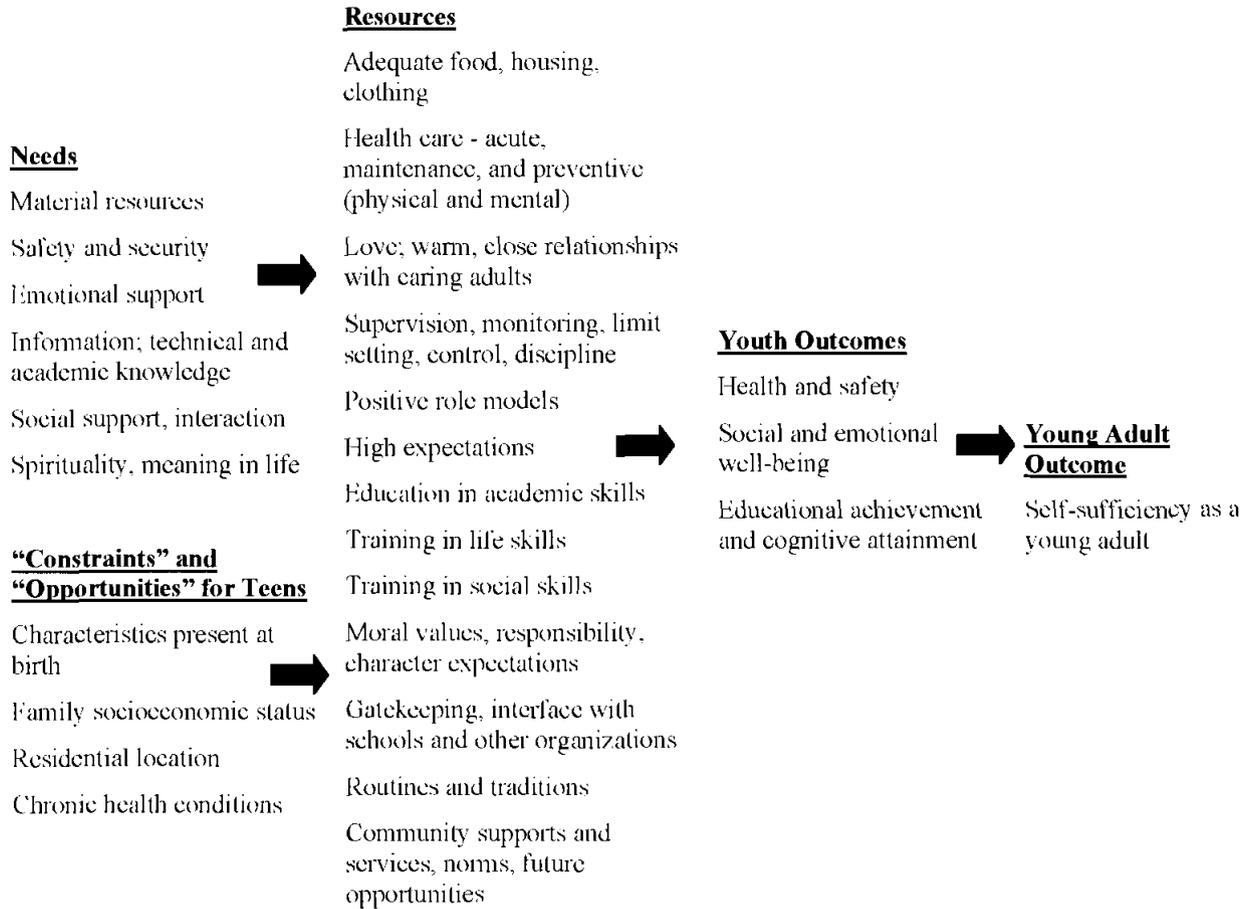


Table 1. Developmental Resources Provided by Employment Programs

<b><u>Resources, Inputs Categories</u></b>	<b><u>Resources, Inputs from Employment Programs</u></b>
Adequate food, housing clothing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Live-in residence</li> </ul>
Health care - acute and preventative (physical and mental)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Counseling, health education, medical treatment</li> </ul>
Love, warm, close relationships with caring adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced student-teacher ratio, mentors</li> </ul>
Supervision, monitoring, limit setting, control, discipline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced student-teacher ratio</li> </ul>
Positive role models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mentors</li> </ul>
High expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• n/a</li> </ul>
Education in academic skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School within a school environment, specialized academic assistance, college preparation, GED preparation</li> </ul>
Training in life skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vocational training integrated into high curriculum, work experience, exploration of careers, basic communication and computation skills, general occupational skills training, work readiness training, specialized courses in economic concepts, critical thinking and problem solving, quality of life, responsible sexual behavior workshop</li> </ul>
Training in social skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training in responsible social behavior</li> </ul>
Moral values, responsibility, character	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training in responsible social behavior, job ethics</li> </ul>
Gatekeeping, interface with schools and other organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "School within a school" environment, courses offered through schools, educational advocacy when problems arise</li> </ul>
Routines and traditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work experience, performing unpaid chores within residential component</li> </ul>
Community supports and services, norms, future opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involvement of community businesses, job placement assistance, provide transportation, provide childcare, referral to external support systems, needs-based payments, financial incentives</li> </ul>

This synthesis examines the impacts of programs designed to improve the employability of young people, thus making them more likely to be self-sufficient in adulthood. It first describes the approaches taken by employment and job skills programs, then summarizes the impacts of the programs and studies, and finally highlights elements that contribute to effective programs.

The programs reviewed here include youth under the age of 18. This distinction is pointed out because youths under 18 generally have the dual responsibilities of education and employment and are likely to be dependent on their parents for economic necessities, whereas those 18 and older are generally making the transition to self-sufficiency. This cutoff point is often blurred in real life, however. A young person who drops out of school may be thrown early into the adult roles of full-time employee or parent. Therefore, while all the programs reviewed here include youths under age 18, some also include those 18 and older.

All of the programs have been evaluated. This synthesis concentrates on evaluations that used a rigorous experimental methodology to test for the impact of a given program on youth outcomes. The experimental evaluations provide evidence of the impact of employment programs in promoting positive youth development. Our conclusions about effective program approaches, however, are generally based on quasi-experimental evaluations and nonexperimental analyses.<sup>1</sup>

Experimental evaluations were conducted on the following programs:<sup>2</sup>

- Career Academies (CA)
- Career Beginnings (CB)
- Job Corps (JC)
- JOBSTART (JS)
- Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA)
- Summer Training and Education Program (STEP)

Quasi-experimental evaluations were conducted on the following programs:

- Junior Achievement (JA)
- Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps – Career Academies (JROTC – CA)
- Youth Incentive Entitlement Pilot Projects (YIEPP)

A nonexperimental evaluation was conducted on the following program:

- Hospital Youth Mentoring Program (HYMP)

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this synthesis, applicable programs are denoted with abbreviated program names. If multiple studies are available for a single program a number, indicating the particular study that is being referenced, follows the abbreviated program name. Refer to the Program References (at the end of the document) for complete references.

<sup>2</sup> The Job Training Partnership Act and Youth Incentive Entitlement Pilot Projects are federal funding mechanisms for several distinct programs nationwide. The programs must provide specific services and meet certain standards set forth by JTPA or YIEPP. This synthesis focuses not on the funding mechanisms, but on specific programs that have been evaluated as part of an experimental impact study.

**PART I. CHARACTERISTICS OF EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS**

All of the employment programs in this synthesis are designed to help adolescents become self-sufficient adults. Some of the initiatives focus solely on improving employment outcomes, while others include employment or job skills as components of a more comprehensive program. Program characteristics are summarized in Table 2. Appendix A provides detailed descriptions of participants, program goals and components, study objectives and measures, outcomes, and study limitations, and Appendix B lists the components of each program.

It is important to note that programs with several sites may vary by site.

Table 2. Summary of Program Characteristics

		Career Academies	Career Beginnings	Hospital Youth Mentoring	Job Corps	JOBSTART	JTPA	Junior Achievement	JROTC - Career Academy	STEP	YIEPP
Goals	Improve employability	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Stay in school and/or achieve (increase educational credentials)	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
	Prepare for college	X	X	X							
	Increase earnings					X	X				X
	Reduce dependence on welfare*						X				
	Reduce anti-social behaviors				X						
	Improve quality of life							X			
Participants	Economically disadvantaged**				X	X	X				X
	At-risk	X	X	X		X			X	X	
	Middle school (6th-8th grades)			X				X			
	High school (9th-12th grade)	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
	High school dropouts					X	X				
	Out-of-school young adults				X	X	X				X
Infrastructure	Program staff	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	
	Volunteers		X					X			
Employment Activities	Job skills training classes	X			X	X			X		
	On-the-job training			X							X
	Subsidized employment			X	X					X	
	Summer employment		X							X	X
	Job search assistance, training		X	X	X	X	X				
	Training in trade skill (computer, plumbing, etc.)				X						
	Financial incentive for training					X				X	

		Career Academies	Career Beginnings	Hospital Youth Mentoring	Job Corps	JOBSTART	JTPA	Junior Achievement	JROTC - Career Academy	STEP	YIEPP
Other Activities	Academic	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Life skills training				X			X		X	
	Mentoring		X	X							
Intensity	At participants interest			X	X	X	X				
	Daily involvement	X			X			X	X		
	While in high school	X	X	X					X		X
	Summer		X							X	
	Non-summer months only	X	X						X		
Type	Residential				X						
	School-based***	X						X	X		
	Community-based		X	X	X	X	X			X	X
	Government-based initiative	X			X	X	X		X		X
Other	Details vary by site										
* This goal applies to adults only.											
** To be eligible for Job Training Partnership Act services (economically disadvantaged by JOBSTART standards) a person must be receiving public assistance; have family income at or below the poverty line or 70 percent of the lowest living standard income level; be homeless, under the definition of federal statutes; or, in some cases, be a handicapped adult whose own income fits within the guidelines but whose family income exceeds it. (from JOBSTART, p.5)											
*** Reflects services offered during normal school day. Does not reflect services that may be contracted out to local providers which may include public schools, community colleges, and proprietary schools.											

### What Goals Do the Programs Address?

All of the programs in this synthesis have a goal of improving young people's employability. Improving young people's employability is generally achieved through increased education and experience or the acquisition of technical skills. Junior Achievement sets out to "improve the quality of life" for participants, but most other programs have more narrowly defined goals. Specifically, Job Corps, JOBSTART, the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps - Career Academy (JROTC – CA), and the Youth Incentive Entitlement Pilot Projects aim to prepare participants for employment by offering vocational training and experience, helping participants identify career fields of interest, providing assistance in job placement, or any combination of these. In addition, JOBSTART, JTPA, and the Youth Incentive Entitlement Pilot Projects specify increased earnings as a goal.

At the same time, a common goal in all of the programs except Junior Achievement is to get participants to stay in school, or improve their educational credentials, or both. For instance, Career Academies, Career Beginnings, and the Hospital Youth Mentoring Program aim to prepare participants for college. Programs may include goals in the

health and safety domain that will indirectly improve employability. Job Corps strives to reduce antisocial behavior, for example, and Summer Training and Education Program aims to prevent pregnancy.

### **Who Are the Program/Study Participants?**

Most of the programs focus on adolescents who are at risk of failing in school, dropping out of school, not being able to find and maintain employment in adulthood, or both. Except for JOBSTART, which serves economically disadvantaged dropouts age 17 to 21, all of the programs include high school students. Hospital Youth Mentoring Program and Junior Achievement also offer their programs to middle-school students. Job Corps is offered to disadvantaged youths age 16 to 24, and JTPA is offered to economically disadvantaged adults and youth between the ages of 16 and 21.<sup>3</sup>

### **What Activities Are Offered?**

Employment activities within each initiative are varied. The majority of programs offer job skills training classes, job search assistance and training, or both. In addition, JOBSTART and Summer Training and Education Program offer financial incentives for job training. Some programs offer on-the-job training, (HYMP, YIEPP) while others offer guaranteed summer employment (CB, STEP, YIEPP). In some cases, employment opportunities offered by the programs are subsidized positions (JC, STEP). Job Corps offers vocational training in specific areas such as business and clerical, health, construction, culinary arts, and building and apartment maintenance.

All of the programs that strive to improve employment potential offer at least some activities aimed at improving participants' academic achievement. Some also offer life skills training (JC, JA, STEP) and mentoring (CB, HYMP). Life skills training may encompass instruction on health education, social responsibility, community involvement, decision making, and sexual behavior. While these activities are not employment-oriented, they can have an indirect effect on employability.

Most programs covered here are community-based; that is, core activities take place in a community setting. Moreover, activities generally take place outside normal school hours. Some programs work in conjunction with other organizations, such as public schools. Career Beginnings is a collaboration of local colleges or universities (program sponsors), the public schools, and the business community. Youth Incentive Entitlement Pilot Projects, though community-based, work closely with the schools, requiring participants to be enrolled and to meet attendance and performance standards.

Other programs are school-based, offering services primarily in school buildings during normal school hours. The Career Academies and Junior Achievement programs fall into this category. Job Corps is the only residential program: 80 percent of participants

<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this review, JTPA results are summarized only for the youth sample of out-of-school youths age 16 to 21, and JOB Corps results are summarized only for youths age 16 to 17 when assigned to participate in the program.

are provided meals, entertainment, sports and recreation, social skills training, and other related activities in a residential setting. Counselors and residential advisors help students plan their educational and vocational curricula and create a supportive environment.

### **What Other Characteristics Do Programs Share?**

Services are generally delivered by employed staff, though they are sometimes supplemented with volunteers (CB, JA). Employees provide career counseling and instruction. Volunteers serve as mentors in Career Beginnings, and volunteers specifically from the business community serve as instructors for Junior Achievement. Two programs, Job Corps and JOBSTART, are sponsored by JTPA.

Activities are usually offered during nonschool hours. Although details vary by site, programs generally set minimum time requirements. JOBSTART sites, for example, are required to offer at least 200 hours of basic education and 500 hours of occupational skills training per year. Summer Training and Education Program, which offers most of its services during the summer, requires 18 hours of life skills training, 90 hours of remediation, and 90 hours of part-time work over the course of two summers. Career Beginnings offers an orientation and several workshops.

Of the programs offered during school hours, two stand out as especially time-intensive: Career Academies (including JROTC – CA), which adopts a school-within-a-school approach, and Job Corps, which is a largely residential program. Junior Achievement activities are also worked into the daily school curriculum.

Several programs offer services on an open entry and exit basis, depending on the participant's interest (JC, JS, JTPA). Youth Incentive Entitlement Pilot Projects require participants to stay in school and will accept any young person who is trying to complete high school. The Career Academies and Junior Achievement are offered during the academic year. Most other programs serving high school students offer services during the school year as well as the summer months. Summer Training and Education Program takes place primarily during two consecutive summers, with relatively little support given to students during the intervening school year.

## **PART II. OUTCOMES POSITIVELY AFFECTED BY EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS**

This section describes the impact of employment programs on specific outcomes in four areas of youth development: educational achievement and cognitive attainment, health and safety, social and emotional well-being, and self-sufficiency. Tables 3a, 3b, 3c, and 3d summarize the findings of studies conducted on each of the programs in this synthesis. All of the studies except those in the “best bets” category are experimental. Each table contains:

- “Youth outcomes”—specific outcomes in each area of youth development that an employment program seeks to achieve.
- “Employment programs work”—specific evidence from experimental studies that a particular program had a significant positive effect on a particular developmental outcome.
- “Employment programs don’t work”—experimental evidence that, to date, a specific outcome has not been positively affected by an employment program. These findings should not be construed to mean that a particular employment program can never positively affect outcomes or that a program cannot be modified to positively affect outcomes.
- “Mixed reviews”—experimental evidence that an employment program has been shown to be effective in some, but not all, studies or that it has been found to be effective for some, but not all, groups of young people.
- “Best bets”—practices that have not been thoroughly tested but that may be important from a theoretical standpoint, whether on the basis of quasi-experimental studies, nonexperimental analyses of experimental data, analyses of longitudinal and survey studies, or wisdom from the field.

“Best Bet” approaches are discussed in Part III of this report.

### **Educational Achievement and Cognitive Attainment**

While educational achievement is not in itself an employment outcome, the attainment of a high school diploma or college degree helps young people secure gainful employment. In fact, it is important to monitor the impact of employment programs on educational outcomes: If the programs interfere with educational progress, they may weaken a young person’s ability to achieve self-sufficiency in adulthood. Alternatively, employment programs may motivate youths to do better in school.

Two studies indicate that employment programs reduce school absences. If programs can demonstrate the importance of regular school attendance, they may improve a youth’s chances of graduating from school and may also instill an important job skill—dependability. In experimental analyses, both an intensive school-based program and a

community-based program improved youth attendance at school (CA4, CB). The Career Academies program also decreased dropout rates among youths at high risk of dropping out.

Evidence that employment programs have a positive impact on educational achievement during high school is conditional at best. Summer Training and Education Program, for example, did not improve the high school grades of participants (STEP2). Evaluators attribute this finding to the likelihood that youths need continued support through the school year to maximize the summer program's effects. Furthermore, the program improved the reading and math skills of students in the short term, (STEP1) but this impact disappeared after participants left the program (STEP2). Participation in Career Academies does not improve standardized achievement scores in reading or math (CA4).

Employment programs may influence academic attitudes and behaviors. Students who participated in Career Academies, a more intensive program, were more likely than those in the control group to report that they were motivated to attend school and that their classmates are highly engaged in school and work with them on school projects (CA2). Students in the more intensive programs also increased substantially the number of academic courses they took (JC, CA4).

Evidence that participation in employment programs leads young people to earn a high school diploma or GED is mixed. It is important to note that some programs target youths who are in school, while others target out-of-school youths. Participants in Job Corps, which targets disadvantaged youths, and JOBSTART, which targets economically disadvantaged dropouts age 17 to 21, passed the GED exam at significantly higher rates than youths in the control group. Similarly, young women who participated in the JTPA evaluation, which is geared toward out-of-school youths, were more likely to obtain a high school diploma or GED than young women in the control group. Job Corps is primarily a residential program, whereas JOBSTART and JTPA are not, yet all were successful at improving participants' chances of obtaining a high school diploma or its equivalent. Evidence also indicates that students in Career Academies, a school within a school, had significantly higher rates of graduation from high school (CA4).

On the other hand, participation in the Summer Training and Education Program did not improve high school graduation rates. Again, this may reflect at-risk youths' need for supportive services year round, not just during summer. While the Job Corps program improved GED attainment, it actually decreased a youth's chances of receiving a high school diploma.

It is not clear whether employment programs facilitate college enrollment. High school students participating in Career Beginnings were more likely to attend college compared to a control group; (CB1) however, youths age 16 to 17 participating in Job Corps were not (JC).

***Summary: Educational Achievement and Cognitive Attainment***

**Employment programs influence only a few educational and cognitive outcomes consistently.**

- Employment programs reduce absences from school.
- Evidence that employment programs have a positive impact on educational achievement in high school is conditional at best.
- Employment programs can promote positive academic attitudes and increase the likelihood that students will take academic courses.
- Overall, evidence that employment programs lead to earning a high school diploma or GED is mixed.
- One program shows that employment programs facilitate enrollment in college, while one does not.

Table 3a. Effects of Employment Programs on Educational Achievement and Cognitive Attainment Outcomes\*

YOUTH OUTCOMES	EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS WORK	EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS DON'T WORK	MIXED REVIEWS	"BEST BETS"
<b>School Absences</b> (2 experimental studies)	Substantially improved attendance and decreased dropout rates among youth at high risk of dropping out <sup>CA4</sup>  Program youth had fewer unexcused absences compared to control group <sup>CB</sup>			Integrating vocational components into an academic curriculum enhances school attendance, even compared to youth in a highly structured JROTC program <sup>CA5</sup>  High levels of support from teachers and peers in the 9th or 10th grade reduced school dropout and chronic absenteeism, even among high-risk youth <sup>CA3</sup>
<b>High school grades</b> (1 experimental study)		<b>Programs don't work:</b> Compared to control group program youth do not have significantly higher grades <sup>STEP2</sup>		The integration of vocational components into an academic curriculum enhances grades, even compared to youth in a highly structured JROTC program <sup>CA5</sup>
<b>Reading skills</b> (2 experimental studies)			Significant improvements in reading skills after 12 months and 15 months <sup>STEP1</sup> However, impact disappears after program end <sup>STEP2</sup>  Did not improve standardized reading achievement test scores <sup>CA4</sup>	
<b>Math skills</b> (2 experimental studies)			Significant improvements in math skills after 12 months and 15 months <sup>STEP1</sup> However, impact disappears after program end <sup>STEP2</sup>  Did not improve standardized math achievement test scores <sup>CA4</sup>	

\* Program symbols: CA Career Academies JTPA Job Training Partnership Act  
 CB Career Beginnings JA Junior Achievement  
 HYMP Hospital Youth Mentoring Program CA-JROTC JROTC - Career Academies  
 JC Job Corps STEP Summer Training and Education  
 JS JOBSTART YIEPP Youth Incentive Entitlement Pilot

YOUTH OUTCOMES	EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS WORK	EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS DON'T WORK	MIXED REVIEWS	"BEST BETS"
<p><b>Participation in academic courses</b> (2 experimental studies)</p>	<p>Substantially increased academic course-taking among youth at high risk of dropping out, and also increased the likelihood of earning enough credits to graduate on-time<sup>CA4</sup></p> <p>Compared to the control group, program participation increased the percentage who ever took academic classes (youth aged 16-17 at program assignment)<sup>JC</sup></p>			<p>Students with intensive participation in School-to-Work programs took more rigorous courses, including advanced math and science courses, than those who did not participate<sup>MP1</sup></p>
<p><b>Attitudes about completing school</b> (1 experimental study)</p>	<p>Compared to control youth, program youth were more likely to report:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They were motivated to attend school<sup>CA2</sup></li> <li>• Their classmates are highly engaged in school and work with them on school projects<sup>CA2</sup></li> </ul>			
<p><b>High school credential</b> (5 experimental studies)</p>			<p><b>Programs work:</b> Compared to control group, program youth:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Passed GED at significantly higher rates (42.0 vs 28.6 percent)<sup>JS2</sup></li> <li>• 34.1 vs 17.7 during the 30 month follow-up (for those who were 16-17 at random assignment)<sup>JC</sup></li> <li>• Have an improved chance of graduating from high school<sup>CA4</sup></li> </ul> <p><b>Programs work for subgroups:</b> Female participants age 16-21 when assigned to the program:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Obtained a high school or GED degree at significantly higher rates (by 11 percentage points for those who actually enrolled in program, sample of out of school youth aged 16-21 at assignment)<sup>JTPA</sup></li> </ul> <p><b>Programs don't work:</b> In long-term, program youth not significantly different from control group<sup>STEP2</sup></p> <p>Participants age 16-17 when randomly assigned to program were less likely to</p>	

YOUTH OUTCOMES	EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS WORK	EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS DON'T WORK	MIXED REVIEWS	"BEST BETS"
			<p>graduate from high school than controls<sup>JC</sup></p> <p><b>Programs don't work for subgroups:</b>                      There were no significant impacts on GED for either male youth or male youth with an arrest record<sup>JTPA</sup></p>	
<p>College Enrollment                      (2 experimental studies)</p>			<p><b>Programs work:</b>                      Compared to control group, program youth more likely to attend college<sup>CB</sup></p> <p><b>Programs don't work:</b>                      Compared to control group:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No difference (disadvantaged youth 16-17 at program assignment)<sup>JC</sup></li> </ul>	

## Health and Safety

Employment programs exert little impact on health and safety behaviors, although few evaluations of these outcomes exist.

Participation in employment programs does not have a significant impact on outcomes in the area of family formation. Participants are not less likely than their peers in control groups to live with a partner (JC), have a child (JC), live with a child (JC), delay pregnancy (STEP2), or reduce their sexual activity (STEP1). Moreover, young women who were custodial mothers when they entered a program for school dropouts were likely to *increase* childbearing (JS2).

While employment programs do not impact premature family formation, one study shows that participants do have greater knowledge of contraceptives and responsible sexual behavior and report more frequent use of contraceptives during intercourse (STEP2). This program aimed specifically to prevent pregnancy and required youth to attend classes on life issues, such as sexual behavior.

Finally, there are mixed reviews on whether employment programs influence drug and alcohol use. The Job Corps program shows no significant impact on alcohol or drug use. JOBSTART, on the other hand, does have a significant impact on the use of drugs (4 percent of the program group compared to almost 6 percent of controls report using drugs at the time of the evaluation) (JS2).

Youth who were 16 to 17 years old at the time they were assigned to Job Corps did not have significantly better general health than the control group (JC). No other studies evaluated health.

*Summary: Health and Safety*

**Although few evaluations exist, evidence indicates that, in general, employment programs exert little impact on health and safety behaviors.**

- Employment programs do not have a significant impact on family formation, but results from one study show it can increase knowledge of responsible sexual practices and use of contraceptives.
- Employment programs do not have a significant impact on general health, but only one study examined this outcome.
- One evaluation shows that programs can reduce drug use, but another does not.

Table 3b. Effects of Employment Programs on Health and Safety\*

YOUTH OUTCOMES	EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS WORK	EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS DON'T WORK	MIXED REVIEWS	"BEST BETS"
<b>Family formation</b> (3 experimental studies)		No significant impacts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Living w/ a partner<sup>JC</sup></li> <li>• Having a child<sup>JC</sup></li> <li>• Living w/ a child<sup>JC</sup></li> <li>• Delaying pregnancy<sup>STEP2</sup></li> <li>• Reducing sexual activity<sup>STEP2</sup></li> </ul> (Job Corps impacts measured shortly after program, youth ages 16 and 17 at random assignment; STEP measured longer term)  Increased childbearing among school dropouts who were custodial mothers when they entered the program <sup>JS2</sup>		
<b>Contraceptive knowledge</b> (1 experimental study)	Program youth have greater knowledge of contraceptives and responsible sexual behavior practices <sup>STEP2</sup>  Program youth report greater use of contraceptives during intercourse <sup>STEP2</sup>			
<b>Self-perceived Health</b> (1 experimental study)		Compared to control group: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No significant differences in self-reported health (16-17 year olds at random assignment)<sup>JC</sup></li> </ul>		

\* Program symbols:

CA	Career Academies	JTPA	Job Training Partnership Act
CB	Career Beginnings	JA	Junior Achievement
HYMP	Hospital Youth Mentoring Program	CA-JROTC	JROTC - Career Academies
JC	Job Corps	STEP	Summer Training and Education
JS	JOBSTART	YIEPP	Youth Incentive Entitlement Pilot

YOUTH OUTCOMES	EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS WORK	EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS DON'T WORK	MIXED REVIEWS	"BEST BETS"
<p><b>Alcohol and drug use</b> (2 experimental studies)</p>			<p><b>Programs work:</b> Compared to control group:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program youth (school dropouts) reported significantly lower use of drugs (4.1 vs 5.8 percent)<sup>1S2</sup></li> </ul> <p><b>Programs don't work:</b> No significant differences of alcohol or illegal drug use between control group and program youth<sup>1C</sup></p>	

## Social and Emotional Well-Being

Findings regarding the impact of employment programs on supportive relationships with adults and peers are far from conclusive. However, participation in one school-based program does increase the likelihood that youths will feel that their teachers give them personalized attention and have high expectations of them and that their peers are supportive (CA2).

Employment programs reduce arrest rates for young adults, but this effect tends to disappear once youths leave the programs. Participation in JOBSTART, a community-based program targeted toward school dropouts, reduced arrest rates significantly one year after participants were assigned to the program (JS2). Job Corps also reduced arrests, convictions, and incarcerations in the first year after assignment to the program (JC). However the impacts disappeared after the first year (JC).

In the longer term, programs show no significant reduction in arrest rates; sometimes, in fact, participants experience an increase in arrest rates. For example, participants in the JTPA evaluation did not have significantly different arrest rates 21 and 36 months after being assigned at random to the program; furthermore, young men without an arrest record at the time of assignment experienced an almost 11 percentage point increase (JTPA). Job Corps and JOBSTART ceased to make a difference in arrest rates by the long-term follow-up studies(JS2).

*Summary: Social and Emotional Well-Being*

**Employment programs exhibit potential for exposing youths to supportive relationships and reducing criminal behavior as long as they participate in the program.**

- Findings regarding the impact of employment programs on supportive relationships with adults and peers are promising but far from conclusive.
- Employment programs reduce arrest rates for young adults, but impacts tend to disappear once youths leave a program.

Table 3c. Effects of Employment Programs on Socioemotional Well-being\*

YOUTH OUTCOMES	EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS WORK	EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS DON'T WORK	MIXED REVIEWS	"BEST BETS"
<b>Positive relationships with others</b> (1 experimental study)	Compared to control group: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Program youth more likely to report that teachers give them personalized attention and have high expectations of them<sup>CA2</sup></li> </ul>			A number of nonexperimental evaluations indicate that integrating a vocational component into a school curriculum exposes youth to more and positive adult relationships <sup>MP1</sup> : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The number of students that found the adults in their life helpful increased</li> <li>Relationships with adults at work gave students a network that supported learning and career development</li> <li>Youth apprentices felt that they had business contacts that will help get them jobs in the future</li> </ul>
<b>Positive peer relationships</b> (1 experimental study)	Compared to control group: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Program youth more likely to believe that their peers were supportive<sup>CA2</sup></li> </ul>			
<b>Awareness of goals and steps to achieve goals</b> (1 experimental study)	Compared to control group: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>program youth more likely to perceive a strong connection between what they learned in school and their longer-term education and career interests<sup>CA2</sup></li> </ul>			
<b>Arrest Rate, short-term</b> (2 experimental studies <sup>3</sup> )	Compared to control group: program youth had reduced arrests: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>in the first year after program assignment<sup>JC, JS2</sup></li> <li>Impacts were greatest for men without prior arrests<sup>JS2</sup></li> </ul>			

\* Program symbols:

- |      |                                  |          |                                   |
|------|----------------------------------|----------|-----------------------------------|
| CA   | Career Academies                 | JTPA     | Job Training Partnership Act      |
| CB   | Career Beginnings                | JA       | Junior Achievement                |
| HYMP | Hospital Youth Mentoring Program | CA-JROTC | JROTC - Career Academies          |
| JC   | Job Corps                        | STEP     | Summer Training and Education     |
| JS   | JOBSTART                         | YIEPP    | Youth Incentive Entitlement Pilot |

YOUTH OUTCOMES	EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS WORK	EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS DON'T WORK	MIXED REVIEWS	"BEST BETS"
<p>Arrest rate, Long-term (3 experimental studies)</p>		<p>Compared to control group:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No significant impact 21 and 36 months after assignment <sup>JTPA</sup> and 30 months after assignment <sup>JC</sup></li> <li>male youth without a prior arrest record experienced a 10.5 percentage point increase at second follow-up, which was 24-43 months after random assignment (out of school youth between the ages of 16 and 21 at assignment) <sup>JTPA</sup></li> <li>No impact found for the outcome of "ever arrested" in years 1-4 after random assignment (since there was a significant impact for year 1, this implies that the program ceased to be effective once participation ended) (sample of school dropouts) <sup>J52</sup></li> </ul>		

## Self-Sufficiency

Self-sufficiency in adulthood is arguably a primary indicator of healthy youth development. The programs in this synthesis stand out from other youth programs in that they aim not only to promote general development, but also to steer a young person toward an outcome—employment—that is shaped largely by environmental and demographic characteristics. Therefore, it is generally *not* the goal of these programs to have an immediate impact on earnings and employment status. In fact, increased earnings and employment may derail youths from completing high school. The findings from program evaluations should be considered with this caution in mind.

There is little reason to conclude that employment programs foster employment. While studies of Career Academies show that participants were more likely than youth in the control group to work during high school, studies of two other programs show that participants were significantly less likely to work in the first year after assignment to the program (JS2, JC). These short-term findings are not surprising and do not necessarily indicate failure: Youths may be trading employment hours for time invested in their education.

This raises another question: Does random assignment to a job training program improve a youth's long-term chances of being employed? Surprisingly, evidence from three diverse programs indicates that the answer is no. Youths in JOBSTART, which targets high school dropouts, did not have significantly higher employment rates at the three- and four-year follow-ups. Nor did young people in Career Beginnings have significantly higher employment rates in the year after high school, compared to a control group. Authors of the Career Beginnings evaluation attribute this finding to a greater percentage of participants trading work for higher education. Finally, Summer Training and Education Program did not result in significantly higher employment rates after high school.

Some evidence does suggest that employment programs increase employment. Job Corps participants were slightly more likely than youth in the control group to be employed at the 30-month follow-up (63 percent compared to 59 percent).

Employment programs do not increase short-term earnings. Of three experimental evaluations (including one residential program), none finds that participation in an employment program significantly increases short-term earnings (JC, JTPA, JS2). Although they show potential for increasing longer-term earnings, employment programs rarely increase longer-term earnings for the program group as a whole.

It is possible that program investments simply do not pay off immediately. Of three programs studied (including one residential program), only one significantly improved the longer-term earnings of program members as a group (JC). In the last quarter of a 30-month follow-up, Job Corps youths who were age 16 to 17 when they began the program had gained \$21 to \$26 in average weekly earnings. Similarly, those age 16 to 19 when they were assigned to JOBSTART had significantly higher earnings when

compared to 20- to 21-year-olds (JS2). While JOBSTART did not increase earnings for the entire group, it did increase the earnings of some subgroups compared to their peers in the control group—namely, young men with arrest records, young men who dropped out of school because of educational difficulties, and young women who dropped out of school and were not living with their own children (JS2). Finally, JTPA programs did not increase longer-term earnings for its targeted group: out-of-school youths age 16 to 21.

Do employment programs help participants stay independent of public assistance? Overall, they do not reduce the need for welfare assistance (JTPA, STEP2, JS2, JC). One residential program successfully decreased the percentage of program group members receiving food stamps (JC), and another program reduced receipt of Aid to Families with Dependent Children among young women who were childless when originally assigned to the program at random (JS2).

Some evidence indicates that employment programs help youths secure high-quality jobs—that is, jobs with higher pay and more fringe benefits. Youths in school-based and residential programs secured better jobs than youths who did not participate in an employment program. Job Corps youths had jobs with higher pay and slightly more fringe benefits, such as health insurance, paid sick and vacation leave, and retirement benefits, although they were not employed in significantly different occupations than youth in the control group (JC). Career Academy students were more likely than a comparison group to say that their jobs gave them opportunities to learn new things (CA3).

Across various types of initiatives and evaluations, youths randomly assigned to a program were exposed to activities that helped them develop career awareness and job skills. Career Academy participants were more likely than a control group to participate in both in-school and out-of-school career development (CA3). Job Corps youths received significantly more vocational training than a control group (JC).

*Summary: Self-Sufficiency*

**Employment programs increase youths' exposure to career development and job training, but it is uncertain whether participation promotes self-sufficiency in adulthood.**

- Surprisingly, there is little reason to conclude that employment programs foster employment.
- Employment programs do not increase short-term earnings.
- Employment programs show potential for increasing the longer-term earnings of younger participants, but they rarely result in longer-term earnings for participants as a whole.

- There is some indication that program impacts on earnings may be greater for younger participants (age 16 to 19).
- Overall, employment programs do not reduce the need for welfare assistance.
- Some evidence indicates that employment programs help youths secure better jobs.
- Employment programs expose youths to activities that help them develop career awareness and job skills.

Table 3d. Effects of Employment Programs on Self-Sufficiency\*

YOUTH OUTCOMES	EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS WORK	EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS DON'T WORK	MIXED REVIEWS	"BEST BETS"
<p><b>Short-term employment</b> (3 experimental studies)</p>			<p><b>Programs work:</b> Compared to comparison group, academy students were more likely to work in high school<sup>CA3</sup></p> <p><b>Programs don't work:</b> Compared to control group:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program group members were significantly less likely to work in the first year after assignment to the program<sup>JS2,JC</sup></li> </ul>	
<p><b>Long-term employment</b> (4 experimental studies)</p>			<p><b>Programs work:</b> Program youth age 16-17 at assignment to program were more likely to work 30 months after assignment compared to the control group (62.8 percent vs 58.9 percent)<sup>JC</sup></p> <p><b>Programs don't work:</b> Compared to control group, program youth do not work significantly more:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At 3 and 4 year follow-ups (high school dropouts)<sup>JS2</sup></li> <li>• After-high school<sup>STEP2</sup></li> <li>• During year after high school<sup>CB</sup> (attributed to greater percentage of program youth trading work for higher education)<sup>CB</sup></li> </ul>	

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