The Impacts of a Home Visitation and Life Skills Education Program for Hard-to-Employ TANF Recipients

Findings from the Rural Welfare-to-Work Evaluation

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Rural WtW Evaluation: Purpose and Background

- Build knowledge base about programs designed to address challenges in rural areas

- Evaluate programs using random assignment
  - Nebraska – home visitation & life skills education
  - Illinois – employment-focused case management
Building Nebraska Families (BNF)

- Individualized life skills education and mentoring via home visits (in addition to regular TANF program)
- Hard-to-employ TANF recipients (most disadvantaged 1/3 of nonexempt caseload)
- University extension and state welfare agency
- Masters’ level educators with very small caseloads
- 11 service areas throughout Nebraska
BNF Curriculum
“Survive, Strive, Thrive”

● **Curriculum addresses a range of topics**
  - Goal setting
  - Strong families
  - Making good decisions
  - Building healthy relationships
  - Building self-esteem
  - Money management
  - Creating a healthy home
  - Communication skills
  - Stress management
  - Time management
  - Developing good character
  - Positive parenting
  - Child development
  - Nutrition skills
  - Anger/conflict management

● **Educators work with participants to develop an individualized learning plan**
Nebraska Policy Context

- Supportive, work-oriented TANF program
- Targeted education and training
- Two-year time limit
- Various services available in target areas
Research Questions

- Program implementation?
- Effects on employment, earnings, welfare dependence, and well-being?
- Implications and lessons?
Evaluation Methods

- Experimental design (358 Ts, 242 Cs)
- 18-month follow-up telephone survey (87 percent completion rate)
- Administrative records
- Program service use and participation data
- Site visits and focus groups
Client Experiences in BNF

- Individualized education focused most on:
  - Parenting and relationships
  - Personal and family management skills
  - Goal-setting, problem-solving, decision-making

- Participation over 8 months, on average
- 19 teaching contacts, 3 service coordination contacts, 25 hours total time, on average
- About 8 in 10 clients received 5 or more contacts
Well-Implemented Program

- Strong, well-tested partnership
- Effective leadership and ongoing staff development
- Active use of performance management tools
- Improvements to curriculum and service delivery
More Program Group Members Received Skill-Building Services, Mentoring, & Advocacy


NOTE: The estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods and the data were weighted to account for survey nonresponse and to equalize the size of the program and control groups.

**/**/***Significantly different from zero at the .10/.05/.01 level, two-tailed test.
Some Evidence that BNF Improved Employment Status


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### Percentage Who Were Employed in Month

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Month</th>
<th>Control Group</th>
<th>Program Group</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>71</td>
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Some Evidence that BNF Improved Earnings

Average Earnings per Month

Program Group

Control Group

$0 $100 $200 $300 $400 $500 $600

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16*** 17*** 18


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Number of Hours Worked Explains Earnings Gains

- No significant difference in wages earned
- Program group members more likely to work in full-time jobs
No Evidence that BNF Improved Quality of Life

- BNF did not reduce welfare dependence or poverty
- Program group members more likely to experience some hardships
Impacts on Employment and Earnings
More Pronounced for Subgroups

- Sample members during BNF’s 2nd year (stronger program implementation)

- Sample members who were very disadvantaged or “very hard-to-employ”
Definition of “Very Hard-to-Employ”

- Met 2 or more of these criteria at baseline:
  - Lack of high school credential
  - Health-limiting condition (self or HH member)
  - Transportation barrier (no driver’s license or regular access to vehicle)
  - No earnings in prior year
  - Received TANF/AFDC for 2+ years in lifetime

- 43 percent were very hard-to-employ
BNF Improved Employment for the Very Hard-to-Employ

Percentage Who Were Employed in Month

Program Group

Control Group


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BNF Substantially Increased Earnings for the Very Hard-to-Employ

Average Earnings per Month

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Control Group


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BNF Reduced Welfare Dependence Among the Very Hard-to-Employ


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**Table: BNF Reduced Welfare Dependence Among the Very Hard-to-Employ**

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Program Group</th>
<th>Control Group</th>
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<tr>
<td>Received TANF at Any Time During Months 13-18</td>
<td>43***</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received Food Stamps at Any Time During Months 13-18</td>
<td>77*</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living in Poverty at 18-Month Follow-Up</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>72</td>
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What Might Explain BNF’s Short-Term Impacts?

- Fills a gap in available services
- Home visitation allows for individualized support
- Well-developed life skills curriculum
- Highly-qualified, professional staff
- Low caseloads
What Are Possible Implications?

- BNF appears most useful for the most disadvantaged TANF recipients
- BNF experiences may help inform other states’ plans for intensive services
- Not tested in urban areas, but may transfer over well
- Unclear whether impacts will persist: Stay tuned for 30-month findings (Summer 2007)
Rural Welfare-to-Work Strategies Demonstration Evaluation

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