

# **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

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- **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)

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- 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”**

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- **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

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

# Research Questions

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

# Evaluation Methods

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- **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

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- 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

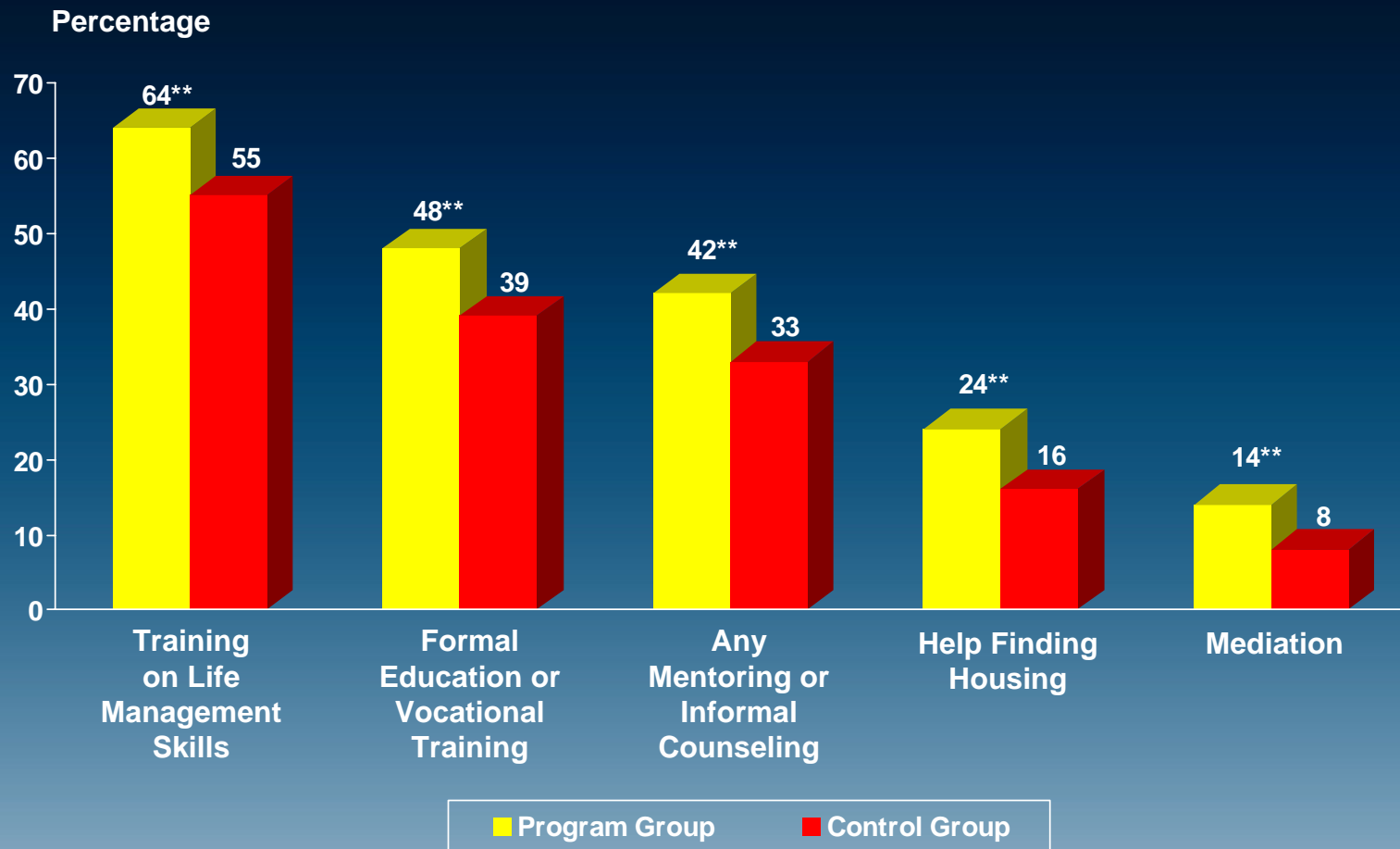


# Well-Implemented Program

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- **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



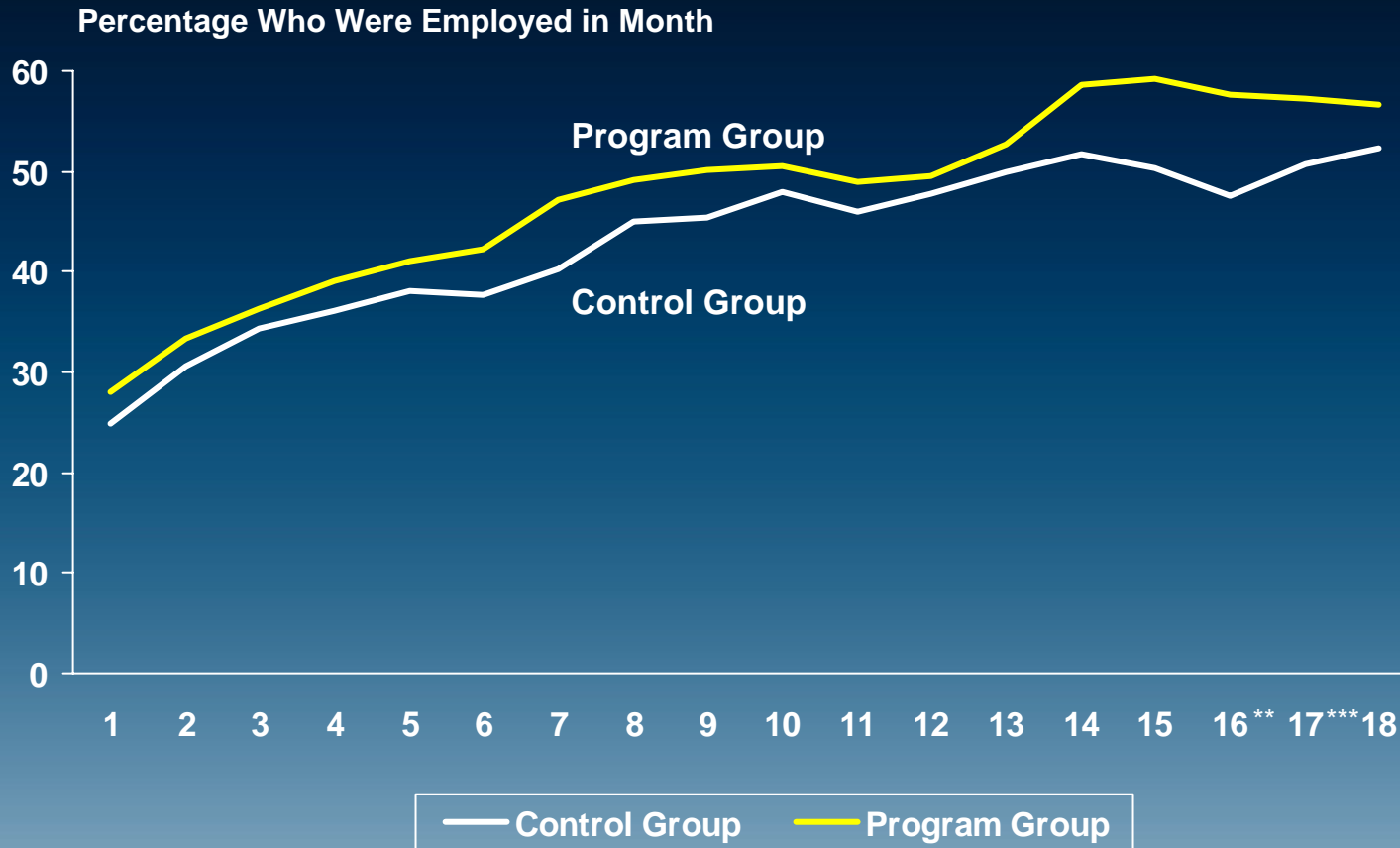
SOURCE: Rural Welfare-to-Work Evaluation's 18-Month Follow-up Survey of BNF sample members.

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.

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# Some Evidence that BNF Improved Employment Status



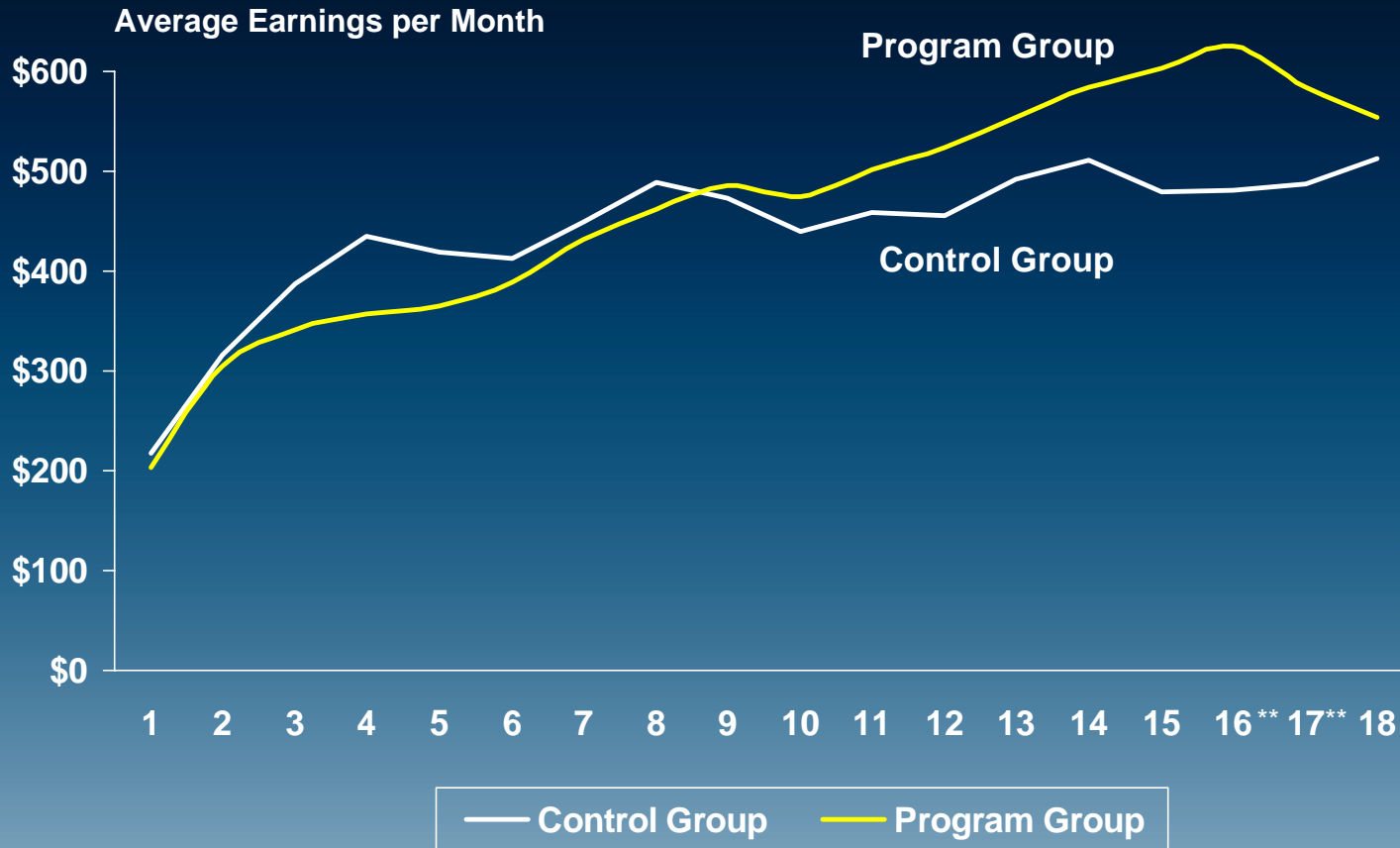
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# Some Evidence that BNF Improved Earnings



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# Number of Hours Worked Explains Earnings Gains

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- **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

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- **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

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- **Sample members during BNF's 2<sup>nd</sup> year (stronger program implementation)**
- **Sample members who were very disadvantaged or “very hard-to-employ”**

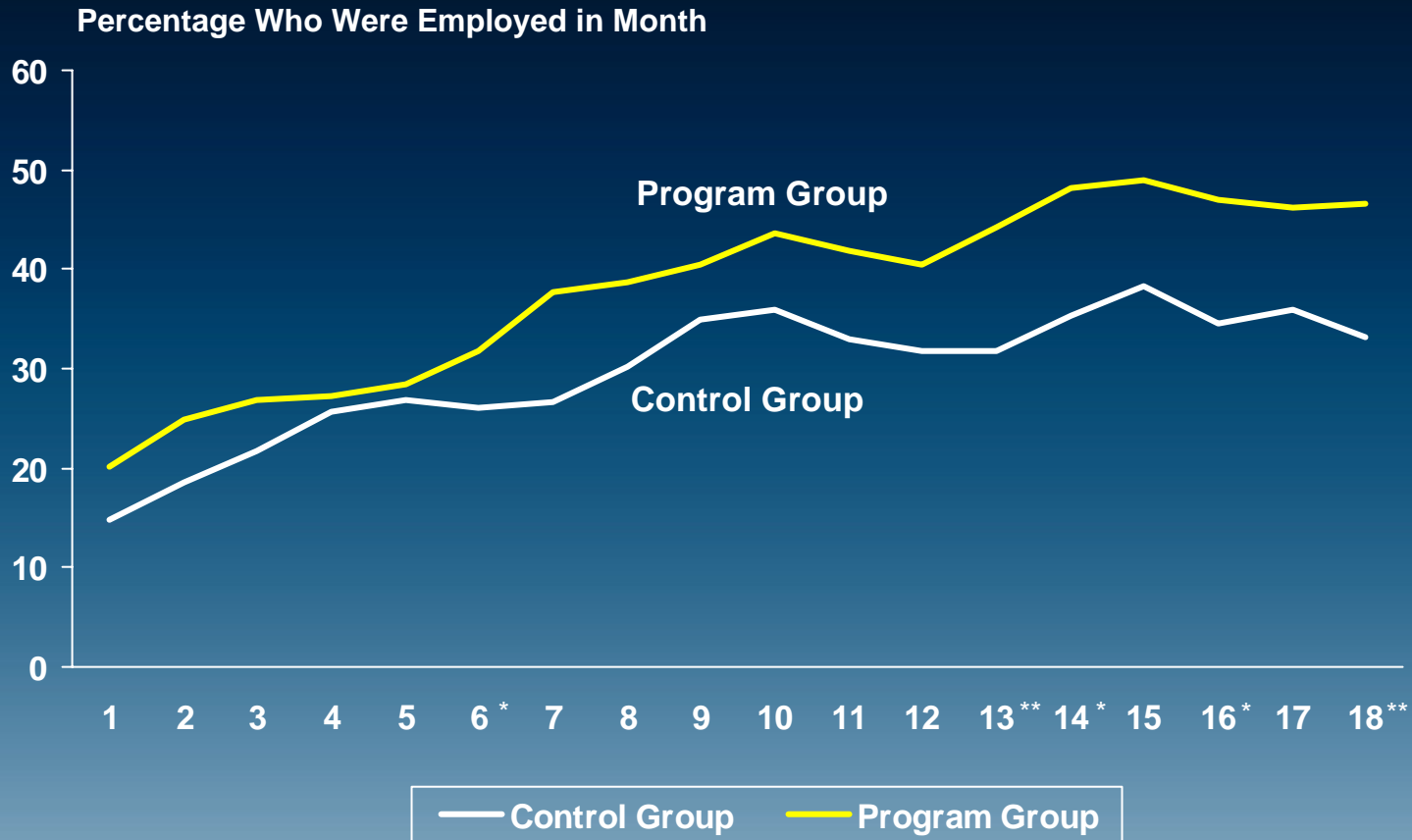
# Definition of “Very Hard-to-Employ”

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- **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



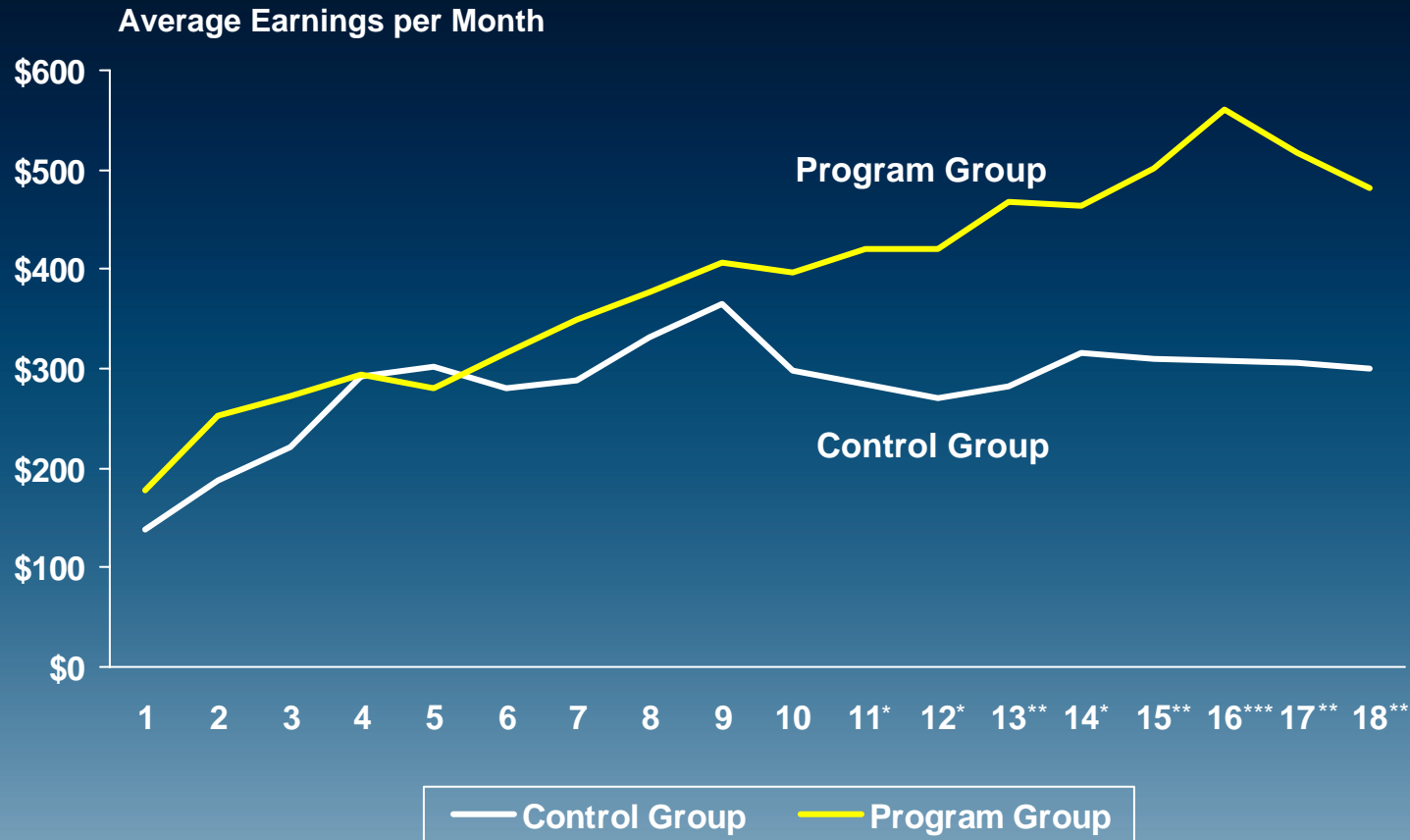
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# BNF Substantially Increased Earnings for the Very Hard-to-Employ



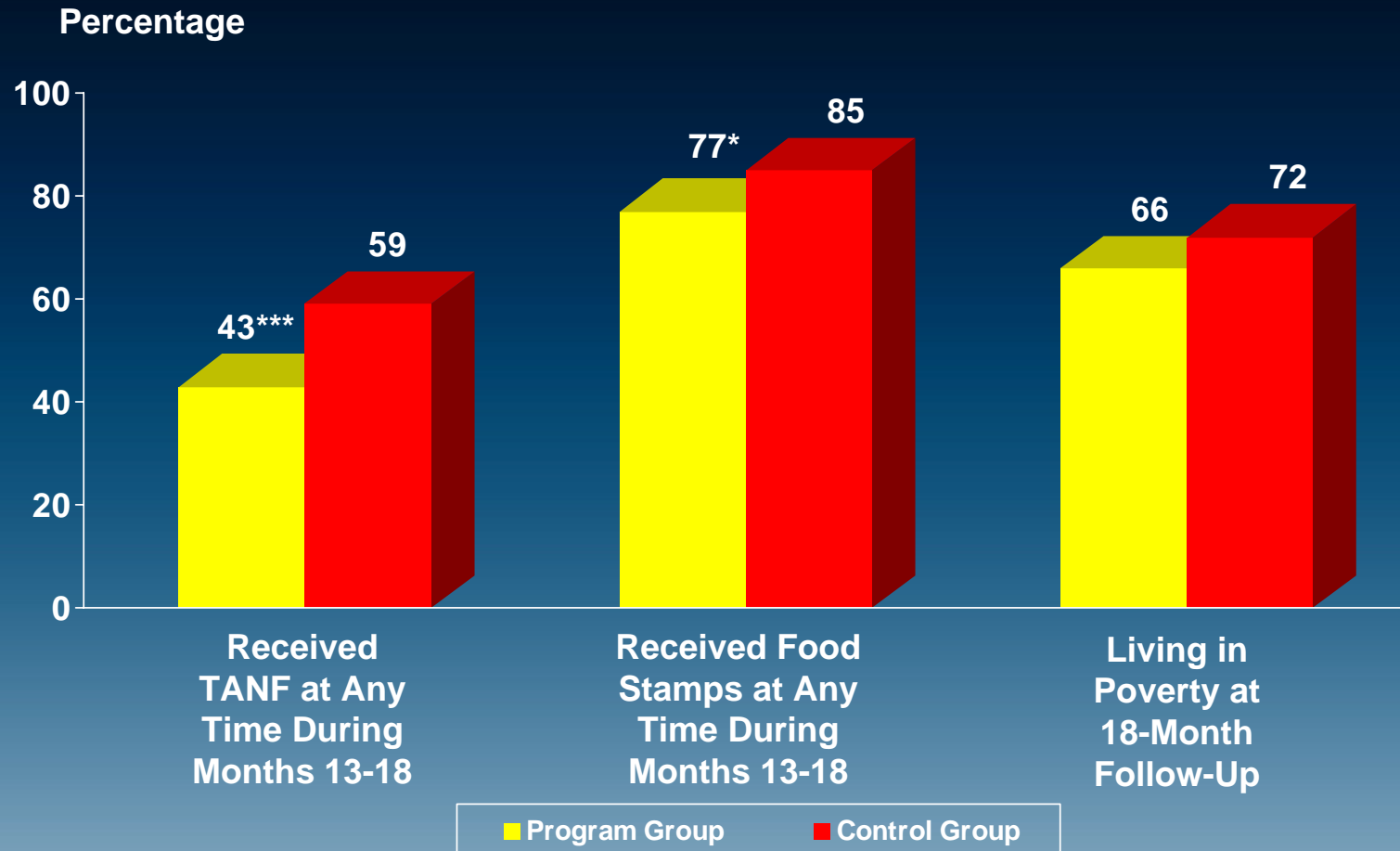
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# BNF Reduced Welfare Dependence Among the Very Hard-to-Employ



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# What Might Explain BNF's Short-Term Impacts?

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- **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?

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- **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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