

What is the community challenge?

A large number of young people are disconnected from work and school or isolated from family. An estimated one in nine youth ages 16 to 24 are out of school and work in the US. These “opportunity youth” often face a range of complex issues, such as homelessness, chemical dependency, mental health issues, learning disabilities, and health disparities perpetrated by a range of systemic issues. Minnesota has more than 40,000 opportunity youth, and the state also bears the largest educational achievement gap in the nation for both racial and economic disparities.

What is the promising solution?

The Opportunity Reboot model supports organizations in creating a cohesive web of supports for opportunity youth that provides access to important health, education, and employment resources as well as spaces where these young adults’ strengths are seen and leveraged.

Youthprise developed a technical assistance and program enhancement model designed to leverage the existing capacity and strengths of community programs to more effectively create pathways to education, career, and life success for opportunity youth. Opportunity Reboot expands services and integrates an intentional, systemic focus on four model features that have been empirically linked to educational achievement and career development. These four core model features are: (a) positive mentoring relationships – including both relationships within and outside of community partner programs; (b) individualized goal supports; (c) coordinated career pathways supports; and, (d) impactful cross-sector partnerships.

What was the purpose of evaluation?

The evaluation of Youthprise’s Opportunity Reboot Model by Search Institute began in 2015, with the reporting finishing in 2020. Youthprise used an implementation design, a preliminary impact design, and a quasi-experimental design (QED) to assess the fidelity of the Opportunity Reboot model’s implementation by subgrantees, as well as preliminary outcomes and impact on opportunity youth. The report describes an implementation evaluation that assessed the fidelity of the overall program model as it was implemented by six sub-grantees. An additional outcome study was aimed at showing preliminary evidence of effectiveness by collecting pre-post data from participants and assessing short-term outcomes, including building youth’s positive identity and social-emotional competencies as well as their ability to navigate complex systems. Analyses included paired t-tests and multiple regression models. Youthprise also conducted a qualitative impact study targeting participant experiences with the program, as well as a QED with propensity-score matching at the participant-level to assess medium-term outcomes, such as employment and securing a living wage. Descriptive statistics (average differences) and difference-in-difference model results were reported.

What did the evaluation find?

As a grantee of CNCS’ Social Innovation Fund, Youthprise engaged an independent evaluator to evaluate the Opportunity Reboot model.

Program At-a-Glance

CNCS Program: Social Innovation Fund

Intervention: Opportunity Reboot

Subgrantees: Amherst H. Wilder; Guadalupe Alternative Programs (GAP); Initiative Foundation/ Sauk Rapids Rice School District; MIGIZI Communications; Northfield Healthy Community Initiative; SOAR Career Solutions

Intermediary: Youthprise

Focus Area: Youth Development

Focus Population(s): Youth ages 14-24

Communities Served: Sauk Rapids, MN; St. Paul, MN; Minneapolis, MN; Duluth, MN; Northfield, MN; Faribault, MN; Red Wing, MN

The implementation evaluation found that:

- All subgrantees implemented the Opportunity Reboot model with increasing fidelity over time.
- Youth reported experiencing the Opportunity Reboot model features and were generally satisfied with the program.

The preliminary impact evaluation found that:

- Youth participants experienced significant gains across a number of short-term outcomes, including positivity in the face of challenge, goal-setting skills, self-awareness, responsible decision-making, relationship skills, financial literacy, job-seeking skills, and resource identification skills.
- Strong relationships with program staff and new mentoring relationships with adults outside of the program were core to the improved positive values, self-perceptions, and skills youth experienced, and had a transformative impact on the lives of opportunity youth.

The QED impact evaluation with propensity score matching found that:

- Opportunity Reboot participants were more likely than similar peers not participating in these programs to secure full-time employment over the period of a year (showing moderate evidence), and to avoid the seasonal dip in employment often seen during Minnesota’s winter months. This was particularly true for youth of color.
- Very few opportunity youth (whether in the Opportunity Reboot or comparison groups) secured living wage employment and — although their wages did increase over time — they still fell below the state-defined threshold to support the costs of stable housing, food, and other basic necessities in the state of Minnesota.

Notes on the evaluation

Due to congressional sunseting of the Social Innovation Fund program, Youthprise was not able to sequentially conduct an implementation and an impact study, as planned. Instead, due to reduced funding and a protracted timeline, the grantee conducted both evaluations at the same time.

How is Youthprise using the evaluation findings to improve?

The Opportunity Reboot Mapping Tool, the self-report instrument originally developed to track fidelity and model alignment, will be routinely administered with future partners to promote ongoing dialogue about integration of the model into existing programming. A larger suite of mentoring-focused trainings for community partners will be developed, possibly including new trauma-informed mentoring training and tapping into the learning opportunities available through the National MENTOR network. Youthprise is also in the process of releasing an Opportunity Reboot Toolkit for use by future partners.

Evaluation At-a-Glance

Evaluation Design(s): Implementation Evaluation; Preliminary Impact Evaluation (single-group non-experimental design, and qualitative narratives); QED with Propensity Score Matching

Study Population: Program staff, Youth aged 14-24

Independent Evaluators: Search Institute: Amy K. Syvertsen, Justin Roskopf, Chen-Yu Wu, Ashley Boat, Jenna Sethi, Rachel Chamberlain

This Evaluation's Level of Evidence*: Moderate

*SIF and AmeriCorps currently use different definitions of levels of evidence.

The Social Innovation Fund (SIF), a program of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), combines public and private resources to grow the impact of innovative, community-based solutions that have compelling evidence of improving the lives of people in low-income communities throughout the U.S. The SIF invests in three priority areas: economic opportunity, healthy futures, and youth development.

The content of this brief was drawn from the full evaluation report submitted to CNCS by the grantee/subgrantee. The section of the brief that discusses evaluation use includes contribution of the grantee/subgrantee. All original content from the report is attributable to its authors.

To access the full evaluation report and learn more about CNCS, please visit nationalservice.gov/research.