To Improve and to Prove:
Building Evidence across Generations of a Promising Youth Development Program

What We'll Cover

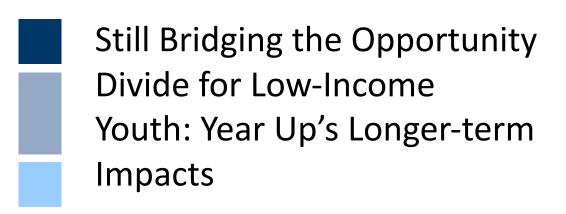**Overview of Two Generations of Year Up Programs**

Kelly Fitzsimmons
Founder & Managing Director,
Project Evident

Still Bridging the Opportunity Divide for Low-Income Youth: Year Up's Longer-term Impacts

David Fein
Principal Associate, Social & Economic Policy,
Abt Associates

PTC Programs: Early Successes & Challenges

Rebecca Maynard
Professor of Education & Social Policy Emeritus,
Graduate School of Education, University of Pennsylvania

A Practitioner's Perspective on Research across the Policy Lifecycle

Garrett Warfield
Chief Research Officer, Year Up

Discussion

Jon Baron
Vice President of Evidence-Based Policy,
Arnold Ventures

Two Generations of Programs: Year Up's Original ("Core") Program and the Professional Training Corps (PTC)

- Common to both generations

  - ✓ National multi-site programs targeting 18-24-year-olds with high school credentials

  - ✓ Screen applicants carefully for ability to benefit from YU

  - ✓ Provide 6 months of full-time training (basic, professional/soft, and occupational skills) with substantial supports and behavior contract

  - ✓ Provide 6-month internships, also with substantial supports

  - ✓ Focus on IT, financial services, and other high-demand fields

- Core program: YU staff provide all services in 9 stand-alone offices

- PTC: A next-generation adaptation for college settings designed to reduce cost and increase scalability, uses college facilities and instructors

Session Goals

- Share findings on different generations of a promising program model
- Demonstrate benefits of sustained researcher-practitioner collaboration across program generations
- Explore Year Up's "to improve and to prove" approach
- Nod at the elephant in the room (findings precede pandemic, future analysis to extend post-onset)
- Take questions, discuss suggestions from the floor

Still Bridging the Opportunity Divide for Low-Income Youth: Year Up's Longer-term Impacts

David Fein, Sam Dastrup, and Kimberly Burnett

Abt Associates Inc.
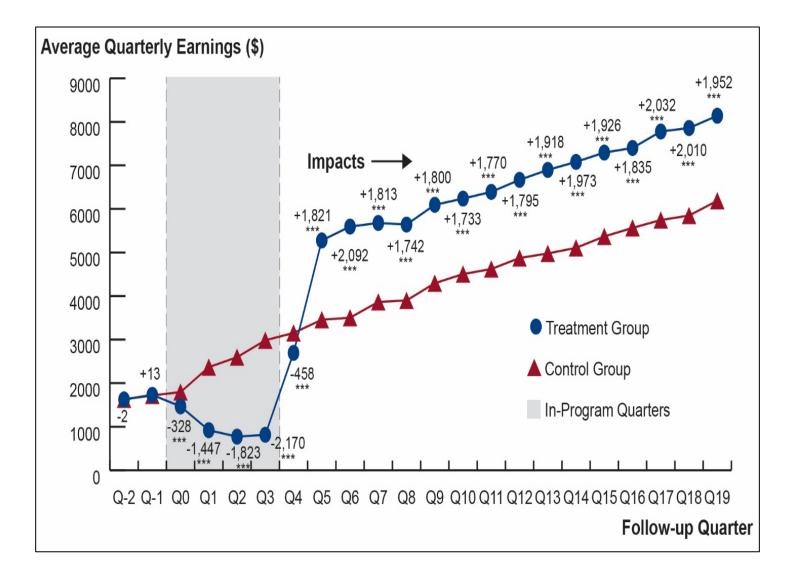
PACE
Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education

Panel on To Improve and to Prove: Building Evidence across Generations of a Promising Youth Development Program
APPAM
November 12, 2020

Introduction

- Year Up's Core Program
  - Intensive recruitment and applicant screening
  - Multi-faceted training, high support, high expectations
  - Internships → work-based training, connections with potential employers
  - Employers finance 59% of average $\$28,290$ cost per participant
- PACE Project (ACF-sponsored)
  - Year Up is 1 of 9 programs evaluated (results for all 9 summarized at earlier session today)
  - $2,544$ eligible young adults randomly assigned to treatment (YU) and control (no-YU) groups in 2013-14
  - First PACE report (Fein & Hamadyk 2018) found: 1) high-quality program implementation with many best practices, 2) large positive earnings impacts lasting at least 3 years after random assignment
  - Forthcoming report: 1) extends impacts analysis to 5 years (presented here), 2) provides cost-benefit analysis (presented tomorrow,11/13 @1:00; hint: 😉)
  - Note: 5-year impacts presented here **pre-date pandemic**

Main Finding: Large Earnings Impacts Persisted to the End of the 5-Year Period

Average Quarterly Earnings ($)

- Treatment Group
- Control Group
- In-Program Quarters

Data labels: -2, +13, -328 ***, -1,447 ***, -1,823 ***, -2,170 ***, -458 ***, Impacts →, +1,821 ***, +2,092 ***, +1,742 ***, +1,800 ***, +1,813 ***, +1,733 ***, +1,770 ***, +1,795 ***, +1,918 ***, +1,973 ***, +1,926 ***, +1,835 ***, +2,032 ***, +2,010 ***, +1,952 ***

X-axis (Follow-up Quarter): Q-2 Q-1 Q0 Q1 Q2 Q3 Q4 Q5 Q6 Q7 Q8 Q9 Q10 Q11 Q12 Q13 Q14 Q15 Q16 Q17 Q18 Q19

RELATED FINDINGS
....

Earnings gains reflect
- Increased %s in IT and financial service occupations
- Increases in hourly wages and (to lesser extent) % of employed working full-time

Subgroup analysis shows
- Substantial impacts for all subgroups
- Size nonetheless varies by educational background, race-ethnicity, office

Results for other domains
- Financial circumstances (+)
- Psycho-social outcomes (0)
- Living independently (+)

Taking Stock

- Year Up's earnings impacts are the largest to date from RCTs of workforce training

- Likely ingredients: 1) careful screening for ability to benefit, 2) exemplary skills (esp. professional/life) training + high support-high expectation components, 3) strong employment connections, 4) program intensity

- Future PACE analyses to address
  - How long do impacts on earnings last? How large do the net benefits grow? To what degree do benefits radiate to other life domains?
  - How does pandemic affect treatment and control group members?

- Findings call for development and testing of Year Up adaptations
  - Broadening the target population
  - Connecting graduates with follow-on training for career advancement
  - Reducing costs to support up-scaling
  - Some related efforts discussed in the next two presentations…

For More Information Contact

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The *Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education (PACE) Study* is supported by the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE), Administration for Children and Families (ACF), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) (Contract #: HHSP23320095624WC, Task Order HHSP23337019T). Supplemental funding for PACE from the Open Society Foundations also has helped to support the Year Up study.

The contents of this presentation do not necessarily represent the official views or policies of OPRE, ACF, HHS, or foundation sponsors.

To Improve and to Prove: A Development & Innovation Study of Year Up's Professional Training Corps

Rebecca Maynard

University of Pennsylvania

Panel on "To Improve and to Prove: Building Evidence Across Generations of a Promising Youth Development Program"
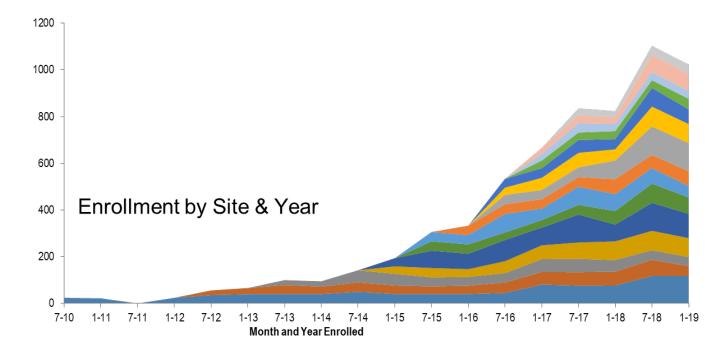
APPAM

November 11, 2020

Study Overview

An Institutes for Educational Sciences "Development & Innovation" grant with 3 major goals:

1. Assess pain points for Year Up's PTC program & conduct 3 quick turn-around studies to inform responses

2. Begin randomized controlled trial (RCT) to estimate overall program impacts

3. Document implementation fidelity at end of 5-year grant (March 2020)

Context: An ambitious, rapidly expanding program with sites at 16 colleges by early 2019

Enrollment by Site & Year
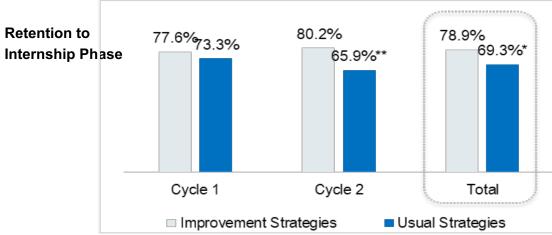
Three Improvement Studies (aka "Mini-Studies")

Engaged stakeholders in prioritizing 3 challenges for study:

1. Late identification of academic difficulties reduced PTC retention
    → Test improved coaching in small RCT

2. Inconsistent quality of internship experiences
    → Identify best practices through lit review, in-depth interviews, focus groups

3. Tension between goals of full-time employment v. staying in school post program
    →Analyze data on college persistence, explore goals and frameworks in interviews and focus groups

Key qualities:

1. Quick turn-around → timely results

2. Year up staff involvement → enthusiasm & buy-in for using evidence

Example: Mini-study #1 found positive impacts from improved coaching in test sites

Retention to Internship Phase

Cycle 1: 77.6% / 73.3%
Cycle 2: 80.2% / 65.9%**
Total: 78.9% / 69.3%*

☐ Improvement Strategies ■ Usual Strategies

→ The finding encouraged Year Up to promote adoption of tools & strategies in other sites

Key Take-Aways

For Year Up

- Final implementation assessment documented substantial progress & significant remaining challenges
- Work on challenges was underway
- Heightened interest in & capacity for institutionalizing key principals of improvement research demonstrated in this project

For Other Practitioners & Policymakers

- Demonstrated value of leveraging resources in wider systems to accelerate scaling intensive programs
- Authentic collaboration on focused improvement studies can strengthen understanding & buy-in for evidence-supported solutions

For Researchers

- Be strategic in setting the agenda
- Collaborate & be flexible, but smart, about research design
- Seek, celebrate & rely on practitioners' expertise
- Prioritize rapid & accessible feedback (e.g., PowerPoint) over lengthy written reports (but provide full reports later if possible)

For More Information

Contacts:

- Rebecca Maynard, co-Principal Investigator, University of Pennsylvania, rmaynard@upenn.edu
- David Fein, co-Principal Investigator, Abt Associates, david_fein@abtassoc.com

Final report:

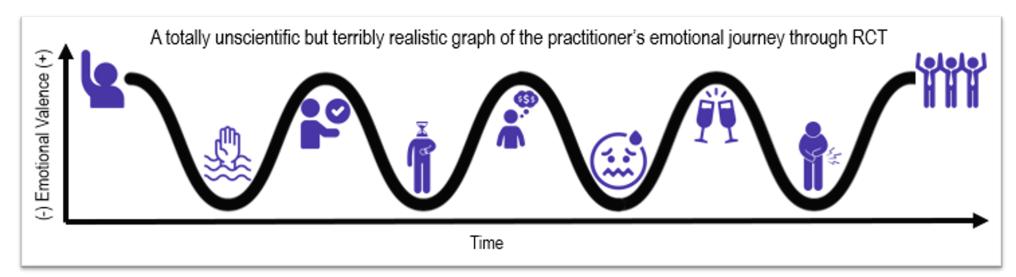https://www.abtassociates.com/insights/publications/report/to-improve-to-prove-the-year-up-ptc

**To Improve and Prove:
A Practitioner's Perspective on Research across the Policy Lifecycle**

Garrett Warfield
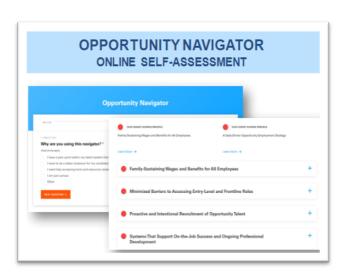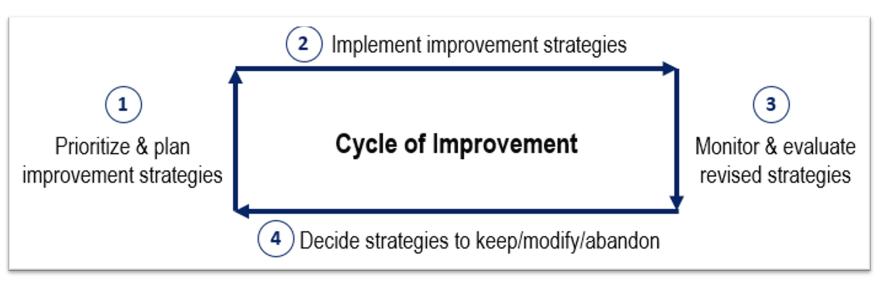Chief Research Officer, Year Up
APPAM, Fall 2020

A totally unscientific but terribly realistic graph of the practitioner's emotional journey through RCT

Practitioner's Perspective on PACE evaluation

1. Confidence in our foundational model: costly, intensive, but effective and with lasting impacts

2. Large, significant earnings gains across all demographic subgroups are encouraging and rare to find

3. Inspires important questions and new strategies
   - Will impacts persist during the pandemic?
   - How to respond to differential impacts?
     - Unemployed alum: let's bolster post-program career supports
     - Employed alum: affirms value of a "quality" or career-track job
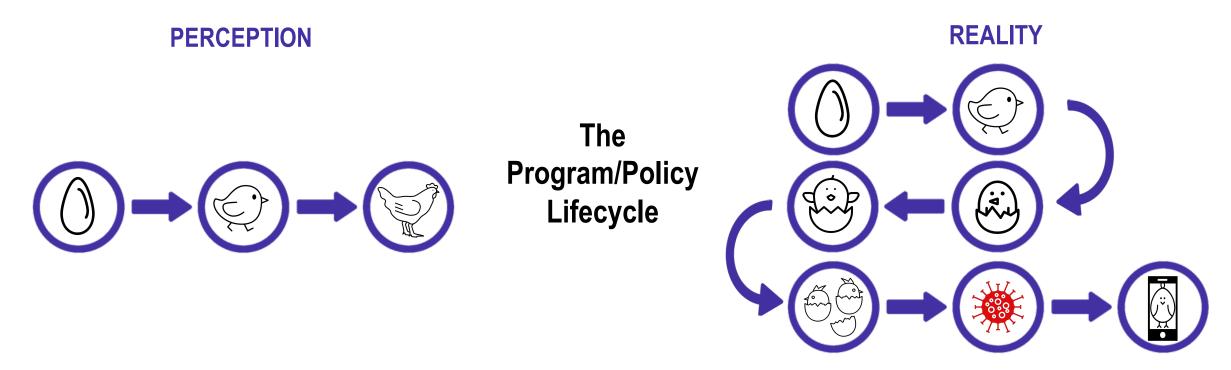   - Earning/employment disparities by race: calls for interventions with employers (www.opportunitynavigator.org)

Practitioner's Perspective on IES evaluation

1. Development & Innovation grants—test improvements before impact—are generous, valuable, rare

2. Improvements in practice persist long after the evaluation
   - Stronger academic supports in settings where we have less insight or control of the classroom
   - Better employer and intern experiences through supervisor orientation and onboarding
   - Vastly improved education outcomes tracking

3. The method of choice…
   - During periods of rapid change or in response to a crisis (e.g., COVID → 100% virtual program)
   - To boost readiness for an impact study: calibrate outputs (boost retention) and outcomes ($)

A Practitioner's Perspective: *Don't count your chickens before, which came first, a bird in the hand is worth—it's a chicken and egg metaphor, just roll with it…*

PERCEPTION

REALITY

The Program/Policy Lifecycle

- Most often funders, scholars, and policymakers lead with asking for research that *proves*: *did it work, for how long, will it work in other contexts or at scale?* These are important questions to answer.
- Yet, those answers often don't meet a program's critical need to *improve*: *how do we respond to this crisis, what matters most in our model, how could we be cheaper/faster/better for our beneficiaries*?
- **To endure the program/policy lifecycle, we must use 1) improve and 2) prove methods,** and this practitioner believes it isn't a chicken and egg debate. Improve should come first.

Feedback and Discussion