

MDRC's Current and Recent Projects for Disconnected and Disadvantaged Youth

MDRC is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization dedicated to learning what works to improve policies and programs for low-income people, including young adults. As the demand for high-skilled workers rises and the availability of well-paying jobs for young people declines, making a successful transition to adulthood has become increasingly challenging for disadvantaged youth.

MDRC develops and studies programs to help young people who face major barriers in finding a path to stable adult life. Our recent roster of youth-related projects mainly targets three groups: at-risk high school students; dropouts disconnected from school and work; and system-involved youth at risk of disconnection, including youth exiting foster care and juvenile justice facilities.

PROGRAMS FOR AT-RISK HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

- **Career Academies:** Conducted a 12-year random assignment evaluation of this popular high school reform strategy that combines small learning communities with career-oriented curricula and with work experience. The program produced sustained employment and earnings gains among participants, especially among young men. MDRC also developed and pilot-tested a new curriculum for the academies that includes a stronger work-based learning component.
- **SEED:** Evaluating the impact of public boarding schools operated by the SEED Foundation, a national nonprofit that provides innovative educational opportunities for seriously underserved middle and high school students in urban communities for whom success in a traditional public school setting is highly unlikely.
- **Communities In Schools:** Conducting a national evaluation of a program that seeks to reduce dropout rates among low-income K-12 students by improving the overall educational climate in their schools and by providing case management and high-intensity supports for the most challenged students.
- **Hillside Work Scholarship Connection:** Assessed the implementation of a program that aims to increase graduation rates by providing intensive support to high school students, including job training and employment, placements with partner employers conditioned on academic and participation requirements, tutoring, postsecondary readiness activities, and life skills development. The study also assessed the feasibility of a future random assignment evaluation.

DISCONNECTED YOUTH: TRANSITION TO POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

- **GED Bridge:** Conducting a small-scale, randomized evaluation of a program at the City University of New York's LaGuardia Community College that provides contextualized GED instruction to young adults that focuses on business and health careers, as well as transitional assistance to help students navigate postsecondary and career options. Seeking to develop a multisite demonstration of similar programs.
- **Gateway to College:** Conducting a small-scale, randomized evaluation of a national program that enables 16- to 21-year-old students who have dropped out of school, or are at risk of dropping out, to

attend classes at a community college and work simultaneously toward their high school diploma and a college degree or certificate.

DISCONNECTED YOUTH: DEVELOPMENT AND EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS

- **National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program:** Conducted a randomized evaluation of this intensive residential program for 16- to 18-year-old high school dropouts, which combines academic instruction with military-style discipline, a focus on positive youth development, and postresidential mentoring. The program had sustained positive impacts on academic and employment outcomes for its participants, when compared to their control group counterparts.
- **YouthBuild:** Leading a large-scale random assignment evaluation of this prominent “second chance” program that provides educational services, construction-related training, case management support, and leadership development opportunities to low-income, out-of-school 16- to 24-year-olds.
- **Project Rise:** Conducting an implementation study of a program that connects unemployed, out-of-school 18- to 24-year-olds to paid internships that are conditioned on participants’ consistent engagement in an appropriate educational activity. The program also provides participants with case management for a year.
- **Young Adult Internship Program (YAIP):** Working to develop a potential random assignment evaluation of a New York City program that provides short-term paid internships, counseling, and transitional assistance to 16- to 24-year-old adults who are not in school and are not working.

PROGRAMS FOR SYSTEM-INVOLVED YOUTH

- **Youth Transition Demonstration:** Partnering in a large-scale demonstration and evaluation of a program that provides employment-related services and other incentives to youth with disabilities who are receiving federal disability benefits, or who are likely to need them, in an effort to help them transition to economic self-sufficiency.
- **Youth Villages Transitional Living:** Conducting a random assignment evaluation of a program in Tennessee that provides intensive counseling and supports, as well as cognitive behavioral therapy, to youth leaving state foster care and juvenile justice systems.
- **Adolescent Behavioral Learning Experience (ABLE):** Overseeing the implementation of a cognitive behavioral therapy program for 16- to 18-year-olds detained at New York City’s Rikers Island. The project — part of the nation’s first Social Impact Bond — focuses on personal responsibility education, training, and counseling, with the goal of reducing the likelihood of reincarceration.
- **Children’s Institute, Inc.:** Conducting an implementation study of a program that offers a combination of clinical and nonclinical services to children and youth in the Los Angeles child welfare system in an effort to provide holistic support for the behavioral and emotional issues that tend to manifest in youth exposed to trauma.
- **PACE Center for Girls:** Working to develop a potential random assignment evaluation of a Florida-based program that provides education, case management, and work-readiness services to 12- to 18-year-old young women who are either involved in the juvenile justice system already, or who are at risk of becoming involved.