



## **Pursuing Economic Security for Young Adults**

### **Five-Year Impacts of Pre-Employment Services in the National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies**

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## **Abstract**

Drawing from administrative records and survey data collected for the National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies (NEWWS) during the 1990s, this report extends MDRC's research on whether mandatory employment-focused and education-focused welfare-to-work programs help people find jobs, attain stable employment, and earn more over time. Here, the focus is on single parents who were aged 20 to 24 when they entered the study. Members of this subgroup — who account for nearly 20 percent of NEWWS's full sample — often lacked the educational qualifications and workplace skills needed to make a successful transition to employment. Based on NEWWS's rigorous random assignment design, the report finds that both types of programs led to higher earnings by young adults over a five-year follow-up period, compared to members of a control group who were not enrolled in these programs. Among young adults who lacked a high school diploma or General Education Development (GED) certificate at study entry, education-focused programs also led to a relatively large impact on receipt of a GED. However, some education-focused programs succeeded for young adults while others did not, and there were no observed differences in program implementation that explained this variation.



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## Introduction

This paper examines whether programs in the National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies (NEWWS) helped young adult welfare recipients find and sustain employment, increase income, and attain other positive outcomes. The paper is part of a much larger study of more than 40,000 single parents, aged 16 to 61 (hereafter referred to as the Full Impact Sample), who enrolled in welfare-to-work programs during the early- to mid-1990s. The Young Adult group, the focus of this paper, includes 7,799 single parents (primarily mothers) who were between 20 and 24 years old at program entry.<sup>1</sup>

NEWWS used a rigorous random assignment design in which a portion of the research sample was assigned to a control group that received, for a period of three to five years, no pre-employment services from the programs that were evaluated (but, as will be discussed below, many control group members participated in alternative employment preparation activities on their own initiative). The remainder of the research sample, assigned at random to one or more program groups, was eligible to receive program services and was subject to mandatory participation requirements. For each person in NEWWS, MDRC collected data on employment, earnings, welfare receipt, and other outcomes over a five-year follow-up period, starting with the month of random assignment. MDRC obtained additional information for a portion of the sample from interviews conducted at two and five years after random assignment. The evaluation compares outcomes for program group members to outcomes for control group members to calculate the effects, or impacts, of each program.

“What works best, and for whom does it work best?” were the central questions of NEWWS. In particular, the evaluation compared impacts for welfare-to-work programs that emphasized adult basic education and skills training (education-focused programs) to impacts for programs that emphasized rapid entry into the labor market (employment-focused programs). For the Full Impact Sample, the study concluded that (1) nearly all programs increased program group members’ total earnings above control group members’ total earnings during the five-year follow-up period, but (2) compared with education-focused programs, employment-focused programs led to larger and more consistent impacts.

This comparison is similarly important for the study of Young Adults in the NEWWS research sample. Effects of each type of program may have differed for Young Adults, given the group’s unique set of background characteristics and limited work experience. Also, at-risk youth must be taken into consideration: The paper contributes to research about at-risk youth by providing basic information (by program over a five-year follow-up period) on Young Adults’

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<sup>1</sup>The findings from NEWWS are summarized in Hamilton (2002) and Hamilton et al. (2001).

levels of participation in skill-building activities and in the labor market. Previous research has shown that disadvantaged young people typically have trouble finding and keeping jobs and often avoid enrolling in employment preparation programs.<sup>2</sup>

### **Key Findings**

- Although not required to participate in skill-building activities or look for work, the vast majority of Young Adult control group members participated in at least one employment-preparation activity on their own initiative. Furthermore, nearly all control group members worked for pay at some point during the follow-up. These findings for control group members are encouraging, because they demonstrate that Young Adult welfare recipients were actively seeking the means to achieve stable employment and economic security.
- Similarly, both education-focused programs and employment-focused programs engaged a large majority of Young Adults in employment-preparation activities. As expected, employment-focused programs led to high levels of participation in job clubs and other supervised job search activities, whereas education-focused programs realized high participation rates in education and training.
- Employment-focused programs achieved large two-year and five-year increases in the use of job search services, because relatively few control group members participated in these activities. In contrast, education-focused programs showed more modest impacts on participation, because a high percentage of control group members participated in skill-building activities on their own initiative.
- Over five years, among Young Adults who lacked a high school diploma or General Education Development (GED) certificate at random assignment, education-focused programs led to a relatively large impact — 22 percentage points above the control group — on receipt of these credentials. Impacts were much larger for Young Adults than for Other Adults (sample members aged 25 or older).
- Over five years, most employment-focused and education-focused programs helped Young Adults earn more on average than their counterparts in the control group (although impacts were statistically significant for only four

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<sup>2</sup>See, for example, Robert Ivry and Fred Doolittle, *Improving the Economic and Life Outcomes of At-Risk Youth* (New York: MDRC, 2002).

programs). For five programs, earnings impacts for Young Adults exceeded gains for Other Adults, while five other programs led to comparable effects on earnings for the two groups.

- The seven education-focused programs produced a wide range of earnings impacts for Young Adults. Over five years, four education-focused programs led to relatively large earnings gains (between \$600 and \$900 per year) above control group levels, whereas three programs led to little or no effect. Impacts for employment-focused programs also varied, but most programs led to at least moderate-sized gains for Young Adults.
- For the subgroup of Young Adults who entered the study without a high school diploma or GED certificate, the four most successful education-focused programs led to earnings gains at the higher end of the range (between \$700 and \$900 per year). However, the other three education-focused programs led to little or no gains for Young Adult nongraduates. Employment-focused programs resulted in consistently positive impacts on earnings for this subgroup, although differences were statistically significant for only two programs.
- There were no observed differences in program implementation that explain why some education-focused programs succeeded for Young Adults while others did not. The absence of reliable evidence to link program features to strong earnings gains makes it difficult to endorse mandatory assignment to skill-building activities as the primary pre-employment strategy for Young Adults on welfare.

## **Background**

### **Sites and Programs**

The 11 programs in NEWWS were operated in seven sites across the country: Atlanta, Georgia; Grand Rapids, Michigan; Riverside, California; Columbus, Ohio; Detroit, Michigan; Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; and Portland, Oregon. (For a list of the programs categorized by type, see Table 1.) As part of an unusual effort to determine whether the employment-focused programs or the education-focused programs work better, three sites operated both types of programs simultaneously: Atlanta, Grand Rapids, and Riverside each ran a Labor Force Attachment (LFA) program (employment-focused) and a Human Capital Development (HCD) program (education-focused). Portland operated an employment-focused program that used a mixed strategy for making initial activity assignments: Depending on caseworkers' perceptions

**National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies**

**Table 1**

**NEWWS Programs, Categorized by Approach, First Activity,  
and Enforcement Level**

Employment-focused approach		Education-focused approach	
Job search first	Varied first activity	Education or training first	
High enforcement	High enforcement	High enforcement	Low enforcement
Atlanta LFA Grand Rapids LFA Riverside LFA	Portland	Atlanta HCD Grand Rapids HCD Riverside HCD Columbus Integrated Columbus Traditional	Detroit Oklahoma City

NOTES: “LFA” denotes Labor Force Attachment program.  
“HCD” denotes Human Capital Development program.

of recipients’ skills and needs, recipients were assigned to different types of initial activities — including basic education — and encouraged to hold out for jobs that both paid more than the minimum wage and offered a good chance of stable employment.

Columbus, Detroit, and Oklahoma City operated education-focused programs. Columbus simultaneously operated two education-focused programs that took different approaches to case management. In Columbus Traditional, a program with traditional case management, welfare recipients interacted with two separate caseworkers: one who dealt with welfare eligibility and payment issues (often called income maintenance) and one who dealt with employment and training issues. In contrast, Columbus Integrated — a program with integrated case management — paired recipients with only one staff member, who handled both the income maintenance and employment and training aspects of the case.

Programs differed from one another in other ways as well. Out of 11 programs, 9 were considered high enforcement: Rather than focusing on the recipients most motivated to participate, these programs worked with a broad cross-section of applicants and recipients who were required to participate. They also involved monitoring participation closely and — especially in several of the programs — imposing frequent sanctions (by reducing welfare grant amounts) as a penalty for not fulfilling participation requirements. The other two programs were considered low enforcement. Sites (rather than programs) varied in the level of emphasis that case manag-

ers placed on helping participants find child care arrangements. Support for child care was highest in Atlanta (for both the LFA and the HCD programs), Oklahoma City, Detroit, and Portland; and lowest in Riverside (again, for both the LFA and HCD programs).

### **Research Design**

As noted above, NEWWS used a random assignment research design to estimate the effects of the studied programs. In most sites, welfare recipients were randomly assigned to a program or a control group when they showed up at a welfare-to-work office for their scheduled program orientations. Two sites (Columbus and Oklahoma City) conducted random assignment at Income Maintenance offices, either after determining that a person was required to participate in a welfare-to-work program (Columbus) or at the point of application for welfare benefits (Oklahoma City).

To determine the net effect of each program, the outcomes for each program group were compared with those for the control group in the same site. Because people were assigned to groups at random within each site, there were no systematic differences between people in the program and control groups when they entered the study. Therefore, any subsequent differences in outcomes between groups in the same site — whether between two program groups or between a program group and the control group — can be confidently attributed to a particular type of program. Throughout this document, statements concerning whether the NEWWS programs increased or decreased some outcome (earnings, for example) refer to their impacts — that is, to differences between how program and control group members fared during the five-year follow-up period — rather than to changes in any given research group's behavior over time. Unless otherwise noted, all the impacts discussed are statistically significant (they are unlikely to occur by chance).

For some analyses, impacts for Young Adults are compared with effects for sample members aged 25 or older at their time of random assignment. The paper refers to the latter group as Other Adults.

### **Interpreting the Findings: NEWWS in the Context of Research on Programs for At-Risk Youth**

The findings from this paper should be considered with the knowledge that NEWWS primarily tested the effects of different types of pre-employment services, messages, and mandates. These interventions represent only a small fraction of the available strategies for helping at-risk youth and Young Adults find jobs, advance toward stable and well-paying employment,

and avoid problem behaviors.<sup>3</sup> With few exceptions, the programs in NEWWS did not provide the Young Adults (or anyone else) with counseling and training in life management, parenting, leadership skills, or self-esteem building, all services currently offered by many programs for at-risk youth. The NEWWS programs also lacked supports that many welfare departments have recently added to their welfare-to-work initiatives, such as counseling and treatment for substance abuse, domestic violence, and mental health. Nor, for the most part, did the programs provide post-employment counseling or financial support.

Moreover, of the services, messages, and mandates received by Young Adults in NEWWS, none were specifically age-group targeted. Young Adults assigned to education and training typically attended classes in adult education schools, community colleges, or private technical schools with older welfare recipients and other low-income adults. Similarly, Young Adults assigned to job search activities attended job clubs with Other Adults in welfare department offices or community colleges. In addition, the programs in NEWWS provided Young Adults with case management (primarily to facilitate participation in pre-employment activities) and child care assistance (of varying quality), similar to what Other Adults received.

Finally, it should be remembered that the programs in NEWWS were mandatory. Young Adults, like older welfare recipients, incurred sanctions (reductions in their welfare grants) if they failed to attend pre-employment activities to which they were assigned, or to comply with other program requirements. Furthermore, several programs in the evaluation assigned program group members to pre-employment activities according to relatively rigid guidelines, based either on the welfare department's pre-employment philosophy, or, as in Atlanta, Grand Rapids, and Riverside, on the goal to maximize the treatment difference between research groups. Therefore, it is likely that many Young Adults attended pre-employment activities that they would not have chosen had they enrolled in a voluntary program.<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, pre-employment services will always constitute a central component of any strategy for assisting at-risk youth. Moreover, no consensus has yet emerged regarding whether programs for youth and young adults should emphasize skill-building, rapid connection to the workforce, or a combination of both. The findings from NEWWS for Young Adults will be useful to program administrators and policymakers, because they result from a series of rigorous and well-implemented tests that weigh several different options for service provision. In contrast to many programs for at-risk youth, most employment-focused and education-focused programs in NEWWS were adequately funded, achieved broad coverage among the population

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<sup>3</sup>See Ivry and Doolittle (2002) for a description of programs for at-risk youth.

<sup>4</sup>Immediately prior to random assignment, sample members in Atlanta, Grand Rapids, Portland, and Riverside completed a Private Opinion Survey (POS) that included questions about their preferred pre-employment activities. In all four sites, the largest percentage of sample members chose "go[ing] to school to learn a job skill." See Hamilton and Brock (1994), pp. 36-39, for further details.

eligible for services, strongly communicated a single pre-employment philosophy, and (as will be discussed below), achieved relatively high rates of participation in pre-employment activities consistent with the program philosophy.

### **The Young Adult Sample**

The Young Adult sample includes 7,799 single parent welfare applicants and recipients who were between 20 and 24 years of age at their time of random assignment. Collectively, Young Adults represent a little less than one-fifth of the Full Impact Sample,<sup>5</sup> although the proportion of Young Adults in the Full Impact Sample varied from site to site, ranging from 10 percent in Atlanta to 28 percent in Grand Rapids. Differences in participation requirements for mothers with young children explain much of this variation. Following statewide welfare regulations in effect during the months of random assignment, the programs in Detroit, Grand Rapids, Oklahoma City, and Portland mandated participation for single mothers with children aged 1 year old or older. In these sites, Young Adults made up more than 20 percent of the Full Impact Sample. In contrast, in Atlanta, Columbus, and Riverside, single parents were exempted from the program until their youngest child reached age 3. In each of these sites, Young Adults comprised less than 15 percent of the Full Impact Sample.

### **Characteristics of the Young Adult Sample**

Not surprisingly, given the age and welfare status of the typical young adult in the NEWS sample, most sample members were young women who had given birth during their teenage years, had never married, and were raising one preschool-aged child (see Table 2). Interestingly, a little more than one-fifth of Young Adult sample members reported that they strongly preferred staying at home with their children to working in a job.

A sizable portion of Young Adults faced one or more barriers to steady employment. More than 40 percent lacked a high school diploma or GED certificate at study entry; about half

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<sup>5</sup>About 5 percent of the NEWS sample was aged from 16 to 19 years at random assignment. The vast majority were randomly assigned in two sites: Grand Rapids and Oklahoma City. Results for these sample members are excluded from the analysis, and these individuals are not included in the Other Adults subgroup. See Appendix Table 3 for estimates of program impacts on earnings that include all sample members aged 16 to 24.

Riverside conducted an additional random assignment experiment for about 800 welfare recipients aged 16 to 19 (70 percent were aged 18 to 19), who had not graduated from high school. All program group members were assigned to the Human Capital Development (HCD) program and were required to continue attending high school or (if they had dropped out) to return to school, or to enroll in a GED preparation program. MDRC's research on this experiment was limited to collection of automated administrative earnings and benefit records for these sample members. MDRC found that the HCD program led to virtually no difference in total earnings over five years, compared with the control group.

**National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies**

**Table 2  
Selected Baseline Characteristics of  
Young Adults and Other Adults**

Characteristic	Young Adults	Other Adults
Average age (years)	22.3	33.3
Ethnicity (%)		
White	42.5	41.2
Hispanic	6.8	6.9
Black	47.5	48.6
Never married (%)	75.8	40.7
Average number of children	1.5	2.1
Youngest child aged 5 or under (%)	93.1	47.4
Had a child as a teenager (%)	69.0	30.6
Ever worked full time for 6 months or more for one employer (%)	50.8	69.5
Any earnings in past 12 months (%)	48.1	43.7
Received high school diploma or GED (%)	56.8	61.7
Scored low on literacy and math tests (%)	13.3	23.6
Received welfare for two years or more (%)	57.3	62.9
Raised as a child in a household receiving AFDC (%)	35.8	24.1
Moderate to high risk of depression (%)	36.9	39.8
High preference for child care over work (%)	22.4	20.2
Sample size	7,799	31,752

SOURCES: MDRC calculations from information routinely collected by welfare staff and responses to the Private Opinion Survey (POS).

NOTES: Percentages for most measures are seven-site averages, equally weighted. Percentages for measures of test scores, risk of depression, and preference to stay home to care for children are averages for Atlanta, Grand Rapids, Riverside, and Portland, equally weighted.

Distributions may not add to 100 percent because of rounding or missing values, or because not all categories were displayed.

MDRC did not perform tests of statistical significance for differences between Young Adults and Other Adults.



had no recent employment history; and more than half had already received welfare payments for two or more years. About one-third of the Young Adults were second-generation welfare recipients who spent at least part of their childhood years as a member of a parent's case. Also of concern, about 37 percent of Young Adults were found to be at moderate or high risk of depression.<sup>6</sup>

Across the seven sites, the Young Adult samples varied in important ways; the same is true for Other Adults. For instance, in Atlanta and Detroit, nearly all sample members were black, whereas in Portland and Oklahoma City, whites made up the largest portion of the sample. In the other three sites, whites comprised about half of the Young Adult sample. Riverside was the only site in which Hispanics made up a sizable portion of the sample (30 percent; see Appendix Table 1).

Young Adults also differed across sites in terms of their levels of educational attainment: Between 49 percent (in Riverside) and 64 percent (in Portland) had attained a high school diploma or GED certificate by their time of random assignment. However, there was much greater variation in terms of sample members' educational skill levels, as measured by comparisons of literacy and math scores among the four sites that administered literacy and math tests immediately preceding random assignment. In Atlanta, nearly one-third of the sample scored below minimum levels on both the literacy and math tests, compared with one-sixth of the Grand Rapids sample, and less than 5 percent in Portland and Riverside (see Appendix Table 1).<sup>7</sup>

Finally, the Young Adult samples varied by site in terms of sample members' work history prior to random assignment. About 40 percent of Young Adults in Atlanta, Detroit, Portland, and Riverside worked for pay in the year before random assignment, compared with more than 50 percent in Grand Rapids, Columbus, and Oklahoma City (see Appendix Table 1).

### Comparison to Other Adults

Young Adults differed from Other Adults in ways directly related to the age differences in these groups and also in other ways. As would be expected, Other Adults were more likely to have been married at some point in their lives, and they had larger families and older children.

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<sup>6</sup>The findings on risk of depression were calculated from responses to four questions from the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression (CES-D) scale that were included in the POS. See Michalopoulos and Schwartz (2001), pp. 23, 121, for details on construction of these measures.

<sup>7</sup>Moreover, in Atlanta, 36 percent of sample members scored below minimum levels on the literacy test, as did 27 percent of Grand Rapids sample members. In contrast, less than 5 percent of sample members in Riverside and Portland scored below minimum levels (results not shown). The relatively disadvantaged character of Atlanta's sample resulted in part from the county welfare department's practice of maintaining a waiting list for referrals to the program prior to random assignment. Many of the more job-ready welfare recipients found employment while waiting to attend a program orientation and were not included in the research.

A much smaller percentage of Other Adults gave birth as teenagers; they were also less likely than Young Adults to have received welfare on a parent's case.

It is difficult to say which group, on average, was more disadvantaged in the labor market: Young Adults or Other Adults. Compared with Other Adults, Young Adults had slightly lower rates of completing high school or receiving a GED certificate before random assignment, but were more likely to have scored higher on the literacy and math tests given (in the four sites which conducted them) at study entry. A smaller percentage of Young Adults ever experienced stable employment (that is, ever worked for pay for six consecutive months with the same employer), but a larger proportion worked for pay in the year before random assignment. About the same percentage of each age group was found to be at moderate or high risk of depression.

## **Findings on Use of Program Services and Attainment of Educational Credentials**

### **Participation in Pre-Employment Activities**

For the Full Impact Sample, the programs in NEWWS succeeded in engaging a large percentage of program group members in employment preparation activities, including adult education.<sup>8</sup> Employment-focused programs generally produced large increases (above control group levels) in job search participation, while most education-focused programs usually led to large increases in adult education participation, but smaller gains in participation in vocational training.

The overall findings were similar for Young Adults (Table 3 and Figure 1). At least three-fourths of Young Adult program group members participated in a pre-employment activity for at least one day — and usually for much longer — during the five-year follow-up period. In most programs, participation rates exceeded 80 percent. Both employment-focused and education-focused programs had high rates of participation among Young Adults, and participation levels were high among most subgroups. Interestingly, compared with participants in pre-employment activities, the nonparticipant group included higher percentages of Young Adults with serious barriers to employment (low reading and math scores, high risk of depression, and high preference for remaining home to care for children); at the same time, this subgroup also had higher percentages of the most job-ready Young Adults (short-term welfare recipients with recent work histories).

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<sup>8</sup>Information on use of program services and attainment of educational credentials was recorded from survey interviews conducted for a subsample of program and control group members at two years after random assignment in seven sites (N = 9,675) and at five years after random assignment in four sites (N = 5,408).

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**Table 3**  
**Five-Year Impacts on Participation in Program Activities**  
**for Sample Members Aged 20 to 24 Years at Random Assignment**

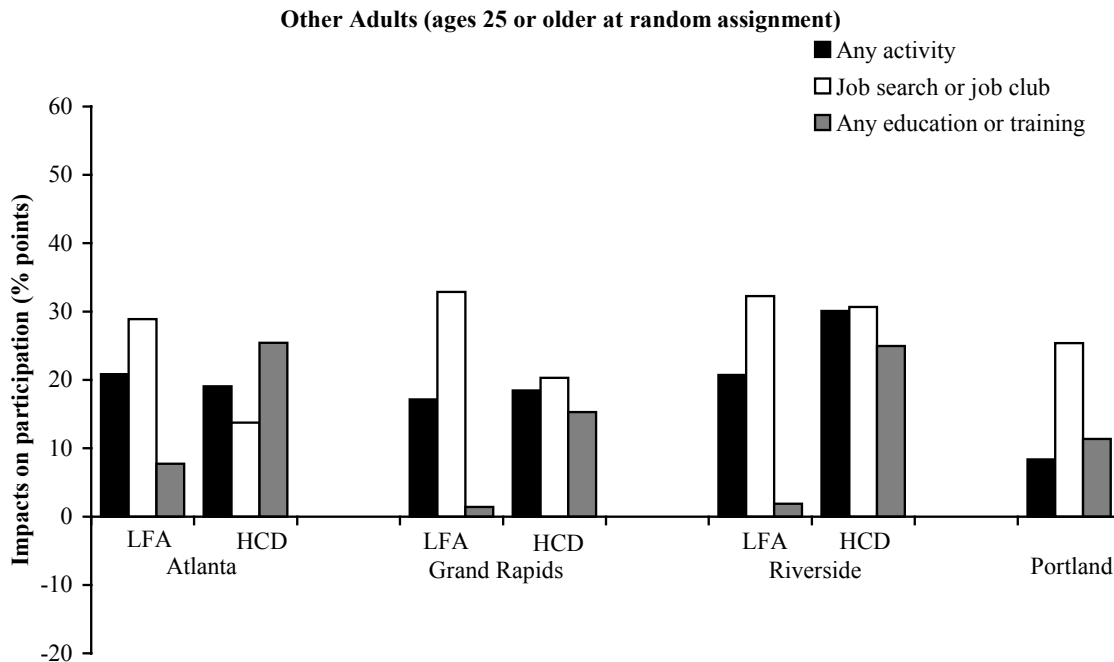
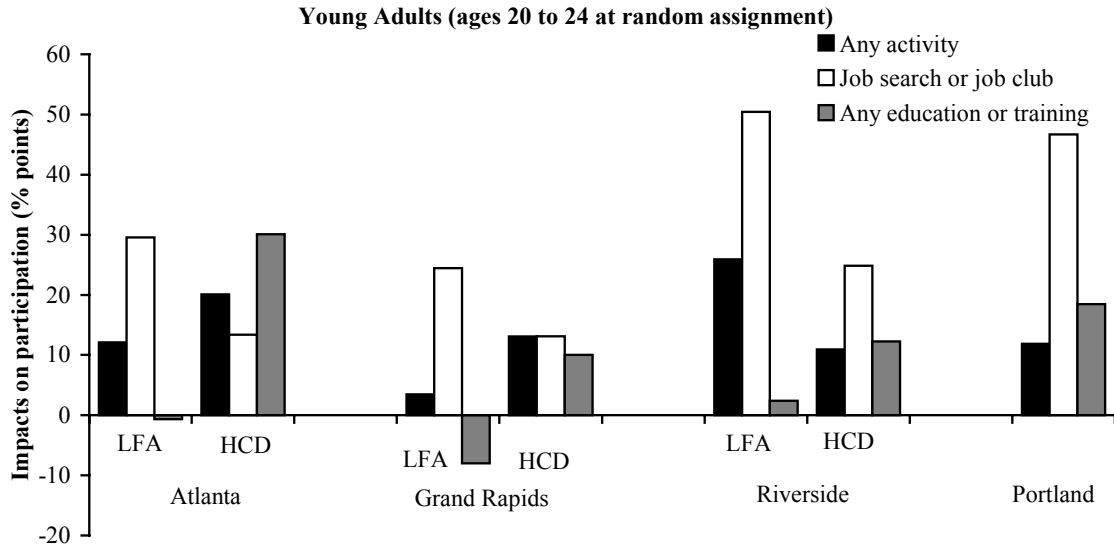
Site and Program	Sample Size	Program Group	Control Group	Difference (Impact)
<b><u>Any activity</u></b>				
<b><u>Ever participated (%)</u></b>				
Atlanta Labor Force Attachment	142	76.7	64.6	12.1 *
Atlanta Human Capital Development	171	84.7	64.6	20.1 ***
Grand Rapids Labor Force Attachment	308	77.7	74.2	3.4
Grand Rapids Human Capital Development	305	87.3	74.2	13.1 ***
Riverside Labor Force Attachment	169	96.7	70.8	25.9 ***
Lacked high school diploma or basic skills	102	94.3	74.2	20.2 ***
Riverside Human Capital Development	146	85.1	74.2	11.0 *
Portland	112	86.2	74.3	11.8
<b><u>Job search/Job club</u></b>				
<b><u>Ever participated (%)</u></b>				
Atlanta Labor Force Attachment	142	56.9	27.3	29.6 ***
Atlanta Human Capital Development	171	40.7	27.3	13.4 *
Grand Rapids Labor Force Attachment	308	42.6	18.2	24.5 ***
Grand Rapids Human Capital Development	305	31.3	18.2	13.1 **
Riverside Labor Force Attachment	169	66.6	16.2	50.4 ***
Lacked high school diploma or basic skills	102	71.9	20.6	51.3 ***
Riverside Human Capital Development	146	45.4	20.6	24.8 ***
Portland	112	72.5	25.8	46.7 ***
<b><u>Any education or training</u></b>				
<b><u>Ever participated (%)</u></b>				
Atlanta Labor Force Attachment	142	48.2	48.8	-0.7
Atlanta Human Capital Development	171	78.9	48.8	30.1 ***
Grand Rapids Labor Force Attachment	308	63.3	71.3	-8.0
Grand Rapids Human Capital Development	305	81.3	71.3	10.0 *
Riverside Labor Force Attachment	169	66.8	64.4	2.4
Lacked high school diploma or basic skills	102	66.5	64.9	1.6
Riverside Human Capital Development	146	77.1	64.9	12.2
Portland	112	77.3	58.8	18.5 *

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from the Five-Year Client Survey.

NOTE: See Appendix Section II.

National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies

**Figure 1**  
**Five-Year Impacts on Participation in Employment-Related Activities, by Age Group**



SOURCE: MDRC calculations from the Five-Year Client Survey.

NOTE: See Appendix Section II.

The following sections provide additional details on these findings and discuss impacts on participation.

### **Participation in Education and Training Activities**

As shown in Table 3 (bottom panel), the vast majority of Young Adults who were assigned to education-focused programs attended an education or training class. As expected, most program group members who lacked a high school diploma or GED certificate participated in classes in adult basic education, GED preparation, or, less often, English as a Second Language (Figure 2). In contrast, about 40 percent of high school graduates and GED certificate recipients attended vocational training or post-secondary education. Participation rates in education and training for Young Adults (graduates and nongraduates combined) exceeded levels for Other Adults by about 15 percentage points (results not shown). Notably, most Young Adults in employment-focused programs also participated in an education or training activity during the five-year follow-up period (Table 3).

It should be kept in mind that the participation rates just cited include education and training activities assigned by case managers in welfare-to-work programs, and classes that program group members attended on their own initiative — often after they left welfare.<sup>9</sup>

### **Participation in Job Search Activities**

Employment-focused programs engaged a large percentage of Young Adults in job search programs (primarily job clubs) — about 60 percent over five years (Table 3).

Interestingly, a relatively large proportion (nearly 40 percent) of education-focused program group members also participated in job search (Table 3). This finding is consistent with the pre-employment strategy for education-focused programs. If participants in education and training activities dropped out or completed their activities without finding employment, programs typically assigned them to job clubs.

### **Program Impacts on Participation**

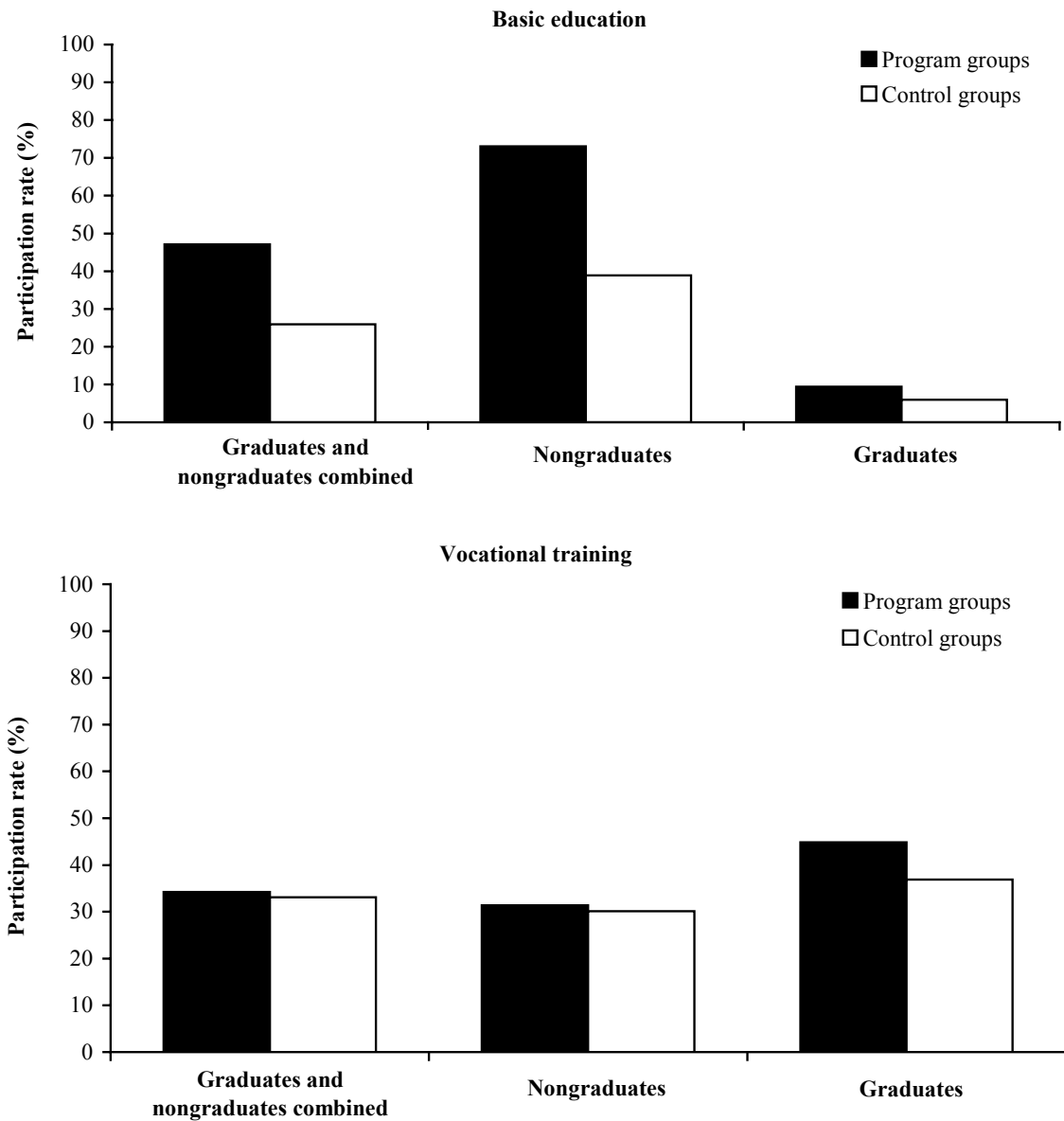
Over five years, about 65 percent to 75 percent of Young Adults in the control group sought to improve their chances of finding employment by enrolling on their own initiative in

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<sup>9</sup>Responses to the Two-Year Client Survey recorded mostly participation in program-assigned activities for all seven education-focused programs. Two-year participation levels in education and training activities ranged from about 40 percent to 70 percent (40 percent to 60 percent without Riverside HCD) for all program group members (excluding Riverside HCD; see Appendix Table 2) and from about 60 percent to 70 percent for nongraduates (results not shown).

National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies

**Figure 2**  
**Participation in Basic Education and Vocational Training Over Five Years**  
**for Sample Members Aged 20 to 24 Years at Random Assignment**



SOURCE: MDRC calculations from the Five-Year Client Survey.

NOTE: The participation rates shown are averages for the HCD and control groups in Atlanta, Grand Rapids, and Riverside. Participation rates for graduates include Atlanta and Grand Rapids only.

education and training and other activities (Table 3). Similar to program group members, participation levels for Young Adult control group members exceeded levels for Other Adults control group members (results not shown). As a result, the program-control group difference, or impact, on participation in any pre-employment activity for Young Adults was modest, averaging 12 percentage points for the four employment-focused programs and 15 percentage points for the three education-focused programs.<sup>10</sup>

As found for people of all ages in other studies of welfare-to-work programs, Young Adult control group members often enrolled in education and training activities on their own initiative, but rarely enrolled in organized job search activities. As a result, employment-focused programs led to large impacts on participation in job search (averaging nearly 40 percentage points above control group levels). These large differences in participation levels make the evaluation of the four employment-focused programs a “fair test,” meaning that any increases in employment and earnings compared with the control group can be attributed in large part to the differences in each group’s access to job search.<sup>11</sup>

In contrast, education-focused programs raised participation levels in education and training activities by 17 percentage points above the control group, a moderate amount (Table 3, Figure 1). In some circumstances, the absence of a large difference in receipt of services decreases the impact of a program on employment, earnings, and other beneficial outcomes. Furthermore, should impacts occur, it is less clear whether positive effects of these programs would result from program group members’ greater use of education and training services.<sup>12</sup>

### **Impacts on Receipt of Educational Credentials**

Among nongraduates (Young Adults and Other Adults combined), the Human Capital Development (HCD) programs in Atlanta, Grand Rapids, and Riverside led to moderate increases in attainment of a high school diploma or GED certificate. Nearly one-sixth of HCD group members received one of these credentials by the end of Year 5, compared with less than 10 percent of control group members.<sup>13</sup> Results were more positive for Young Adults than for Other Adults: Over five years, nearly one-third of HCD Young Adults attained a high school

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<sup>10</sup>In Riverside, the impact for the subgroup that lacked high school diplomas or basic skills was included in the four-site average for employment.

<sup>11</sup>Other factors include the programs’ case management services, mandatory participation requirements, and messages about work and welfare.

<sup>12</sup>Education-focused programs with small-to-moderate impacts on the incidence of participation could lead to large impacts on employment and earnings if program group members who enrolled in education and training activities averaged more hours of attendance than their counterparts in the control group. Alternatively, case managers could have enrolled program group members in higher quality programs or programs that better prepared welfare recipients for available employment opportunities. This paper does not explore these issues.

<sup>13</sup>See Hamilton (2002), Figure 3, p. 21.

diploma or GED certificate, three times the average for control group members.<sup>14</sup> Young Adult HCD group members far exceeded Other Adults in both their average levels of attainment and their increase in attainment rates compared with the control group (Figure 3).

As expected, employment-focused programs had no effect on attainment of educational credentials (results not shown).

## **Program Impacts on Employment and Earnings**

### **Control Group Outcomes**

The employment experiences of control group members represent how Young Adults would be expected to fare in the labor market without the combination of pre-employment and case management services, mandatory participation requirements, and messages about work and welfare that the programs in NEWWS provided to welfare recipients. For the Full Impact Sample, 80 percent of control group members found jobs during the five-year follow-up period. But stable employment was uncommon.

An even higher percentage of Young Adults in the control group found employment during the five-year follow-up period. In all sites except Riverside (67 percent), more than 80 percent of control group members worked for pay during at least one quarter. In five sites, employment levels reached nearly 90 percent or higher (Table 4). The typical control group member who found employment first began working during the first year of follow-up and then experienced at least one later spell of joblessness; she worked for pay during about half of the follow-up quarters (results not shown).

Averaged among all control group members (including those who never found employment), Young Adults earned from \$12,457 (in Riverside) to \$23,800 (in Columbus) over five years (Table 4). These averages resemble outcomes for the rest of the sample. However, Young Adults tended to earn less during each quarter of employment. More positively, in six of the seven sites, Young Adult control group members were more likely to experience higher earnings over time, compared with Other Adults (results not shown).<sup>15</sup>

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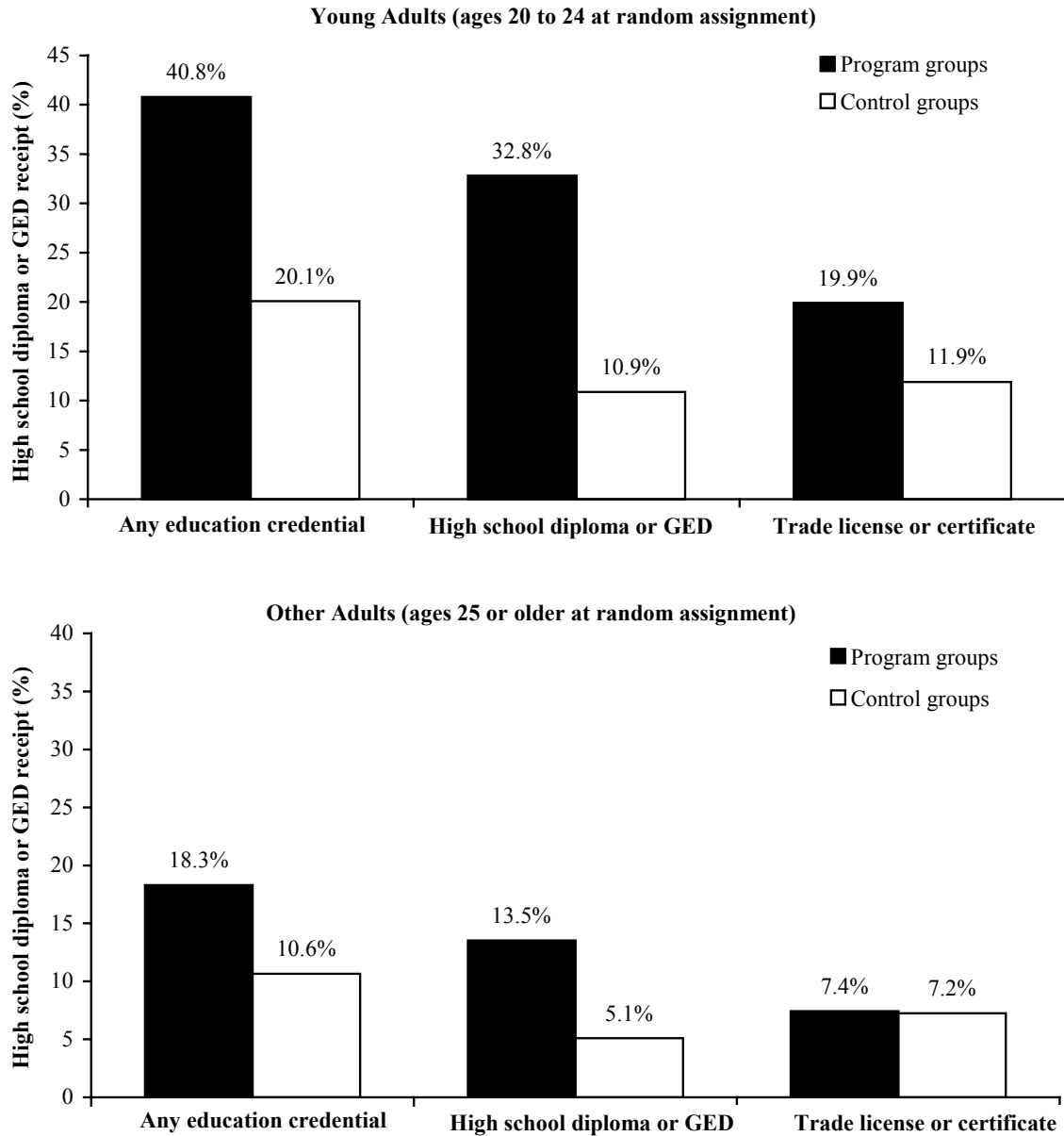
<sup>14</sup>HCD programs also led to a modest (8 percentage point) increase in the percentage of Young Adult non-graduates who received a trade license or certificate over five years. However, Atlanta HCD was the only program to increase attainment of this credential.

<sup>15</sup>The measure of earnings growth was calculated for each sample member by (1) identifying all employment spells that lasted for three or more consecutive quarters; (2) discarding all quarters that were either the first or last quarter of an employment spell (because the sample member probably worked for only a fraction of these quarters); and (3) calculating the difference in total earnings between the earliest and latest of the remaining quarters. Sample members experienced earnings growth if their quarterly earnings increased by \$100 or more between the first and last quarters included in the calculation. Sample members without a sufficient number of quarters of employment to perform the calculation were considered to have experienced no earnings growth. See Freedman (2000) for an example of this analysis.



National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies

**Figure 3**  
**Receipt of an Education Credential Over Five Years**  
**for Sample Members Without a High School Diploma or**  
**GED at Random Assignment, by Age Group**



SOURCE: MDRC calculations from the Five-Year Client Survey.

NOTE: The percentages shown are averages for sample members in the HCD and control groups in Atlanta, Grand Rapids, and Riverside who were nongraduates at study entry.

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Table 4

Impacts on Employment and Earnings in Years 1 to 5  
for Sample Members Aged 20 to 24 Years at Random Assignment

Site and Program	Sample Size	Program Group	Control Group	Difference (Impact)	Percentage Change (%)
<b>Ever employed (%)</b>					
Atlanta Labor Force Attachment	274	93.7	90.6	3.1	3.4
Atlanta Human Capital Development	298	90.5	90.6	-0.1	-0.1
Grand Rapids Labor Force Attachment	861	95.2	93.0	2.1	2.3
Grand Rapids Human Capital Development	854	92.5	93.0	-0.5	-0.5
Riverside Labor Force Attachment	977	80.3	67.1	13.2 ***	19.7
Lacked high school diploma or basic skills	478	75.8	59.3	16.4 ***	27.7
Riverside Human Capital Development	480	72.5	59.3	13.2 ***	22.2
Columbus Integrated	575	96.2	89.6	6.7 ***	7.4
Columbus Traditional	622	91.9	89.6	2.3	2.6
Detroit	1,043	91.4	89.5	1.9	2.1
Oklahoma City	1,962	81.7	82.4	-0.6	-0.7
Portland	932	89.8	88.4	1.4	1.6
<b>Average number of quarters employed</b>					
Atlanta Labor Force Attachment	274	10.9	10.2	0.7	6.5
Atlanta Human Capital Development	298	9.6	10.2	-0.6	-5.5
Grand Rapids Labor Force Attachment	861	10.3	10.0	0.3	3.1
Grand Rapids Human Capital Development	854	10.1	10.0	0.2	1.7
Riverside Labor Force Attachment	977	7.0	5.4	1.6 ***	29.9
Lacked high school diploma or basic skills	478	6.0	3.8	2.2 ***	56.3
Riverside Human Capital Development	480	5.2	3.8	1.3 ***	34.5
Columbus Integrated	575	11.4	10.2	1.2 **	11.4
Columbus Traditional	622	11.1	10.2	0.9 *	8.4
Detroit	1,043	9.3	8.8	0.5	5.7
Oklahoma City	1,962	7.0	7.2	-0.1	-2.1
Portland	932	9.7	8.1	1.6 **	19.9

(continued)

**Table 4 (continued)**

Site and Program	Sample Size	Program Group	Control Group	Difference (Impact)	Percentage Change (%)
<b>Average total earnings (\$)</b>					
Atlanta Labor Force Attachment	274	25,618	23,247	2,371	10.2
Atlanta Human Capital Development	298	21,606	23,247	-1,641	-7.1
Grand Rapids Labor Force Attachment	861	22,592	21,175	1,417	6.7
Grand Rapids Human Capital Development	854	21,904	21,175	729	3.4
Riverside Labor Force Attachment	977	16,517	12,457	4,060 ***	32.6
Lacked high school diploma or basic skills	478	12,168	7,710	4,458 ***	57.8
Riverside Human Capital Development	480	12,202	7,710	4,492 ***	58.3
Columbus Integrated	575	27,016	23,800	3,215	13.5
Columbus Traditional	622	28,179	23,800	4,378 **	18.4
Detroit	1,043	24,002	20,812	3,190 **	15.3
Oklahoma City	1,962	12,875	12,721	154	1.2
Portland	932	25,092	21,218	3,874	18.3

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from state and county administrative records.

NOTE: See Appendix Section I.

On average, control group members with a high school diploma or GED certificate at random assignment earned more than twice as much over five years compared with nongraduates — a more extreme disparity than among Other Adults (results not shown).

### **Program Impacts on Employment and Earnings**

For the Full Impact Sample, nearly all programs in NEWWS increased total quarters of employment and total earnings above control group levels during the five-year follow-up period. Employment-focused programs led to larger and more consistent impacts, compared with education-focused programs. However, Portland’s more flexible approach to operating an employment-focused program led to the largest gains above the control group of any program.

Impact results for Young Adults follow a more complex pattern. As for the Full Impact Sample, most programs in NEWWS led to gains in employment and earnings for Young Adults. Five programs increased length of employment by between two and five months (or 0.86 and 1.61 quarters) above control group levels, and four others led to smaller gains that

were not statistically significant. Similarly, program group members in nearly all sites earned more over five years than their counterparts in the control group — although increases were statistically significant for only four programs (Figure 4).<sup>16</sup>

In some ways, the comparison of employment and impacts for Young Adults mirrors the findings for the Full Impact Sample by showing greater success for employment-focused programs. For instance, in Atlanta, Grand Rapids, and Riverside — the three sites that ran LFA and HCD programs — average earnings for LFA group members either equaled earnings for HCD group members (in Riverside), or exceeded them (in Atlanta and Grand Rapids; see Table 4 and Figures 5 and 6).<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the four employment-focused programs led to more consistent effects. Three of the four employment-focused programs (but not Grand Rapids LFA) produced at least moderate-level gains in earnings — averaging more than \$300 per year — compared with four of seven education-focused programs. The other three education-focused programs (Atlanta HCD, Grand Rapids HCD, and Oklahoma City) produced only small effects that were not statistically significant.

On the other hand, the two most successful education-focused programs for Young Adults (Riverside HCD and Columbus Traditional) led to unusually large earnings impacts that averaged close to \$900 per year, per program group member. The two most successful employment-focused programs (Riverside LFA and Portland) led to comparable impacts, but the other two employment-focused programs (Atlanta LFA and Grand Rapids LFA) did not. Furthermore, the two other education-focused programs that led to positive effects (Columbus Integrated and Detroit) raised earnings by an average of more than \$600 per year over the control group. These impacts also exceeded the gains from Atlanta and Grand Rapids LFA (Table 4, Figures 5 and 6).<sup>18</sup>

### Impacts in Year 5

Young Adults were expected to make progress in the labor market as they matured and gained work experience. For instance, in six sites, about 58 percent to 78 percent of Young

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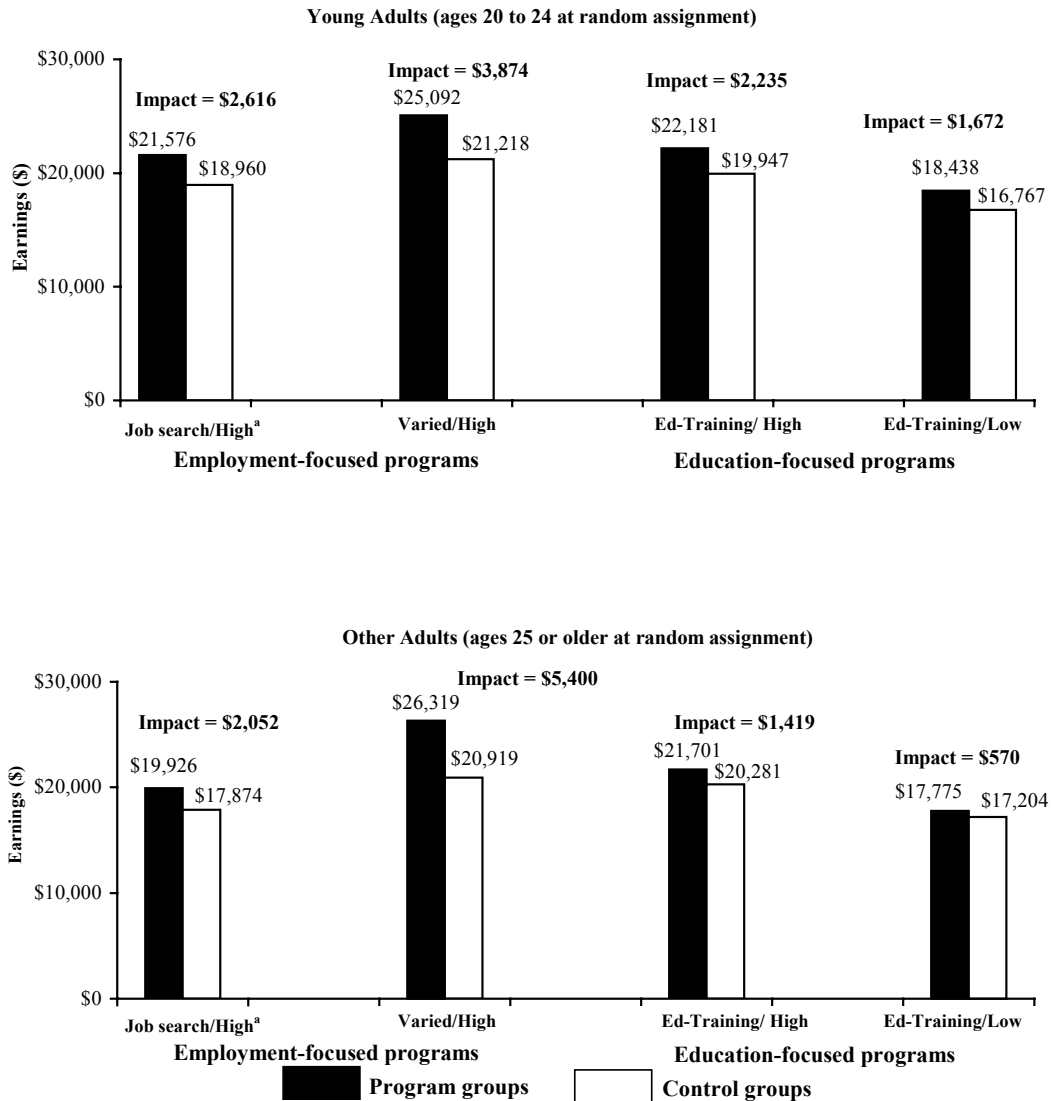
<sup>16</sup>The impact on total earnings for Columbus Integrated was barely above the 10 percent level of statistical significance (p-value = .105). The earnings impact for Portland had a p-value of .155.

<sup>17</sup>For Riverside, impacts for LFA nongraduates should be compared with impacts for HCD nongraduates. See Figure 6, top panel, for this comparison.

<sup>18</sup>As these findings suggest, in several sites, five-year earnings impacts for Young Adults differed from impacts for Other Adults (see Figure 5). For the education-focused programs in Columbus, Detroit, and Riverside, earnings gains for Young Adults exceeded impacts for Other Adults by more than \$1,000. On the other hand, in Atlanta's education-focused program, only Other Adults experienced higher earnings compared with the control group. Riverside's employment-focused program also produced the larger earnings gains for Young Adults, compared with Other Adults. Portland's program was successful for both age groups, but somewhat more so for Other Adults.

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**Figure 4**  
Earnings over Five Years, by Program Type and Age Group



SOURCE: MDRC calculations from state and county administrative records.

NOTES: See Appendix Section I.

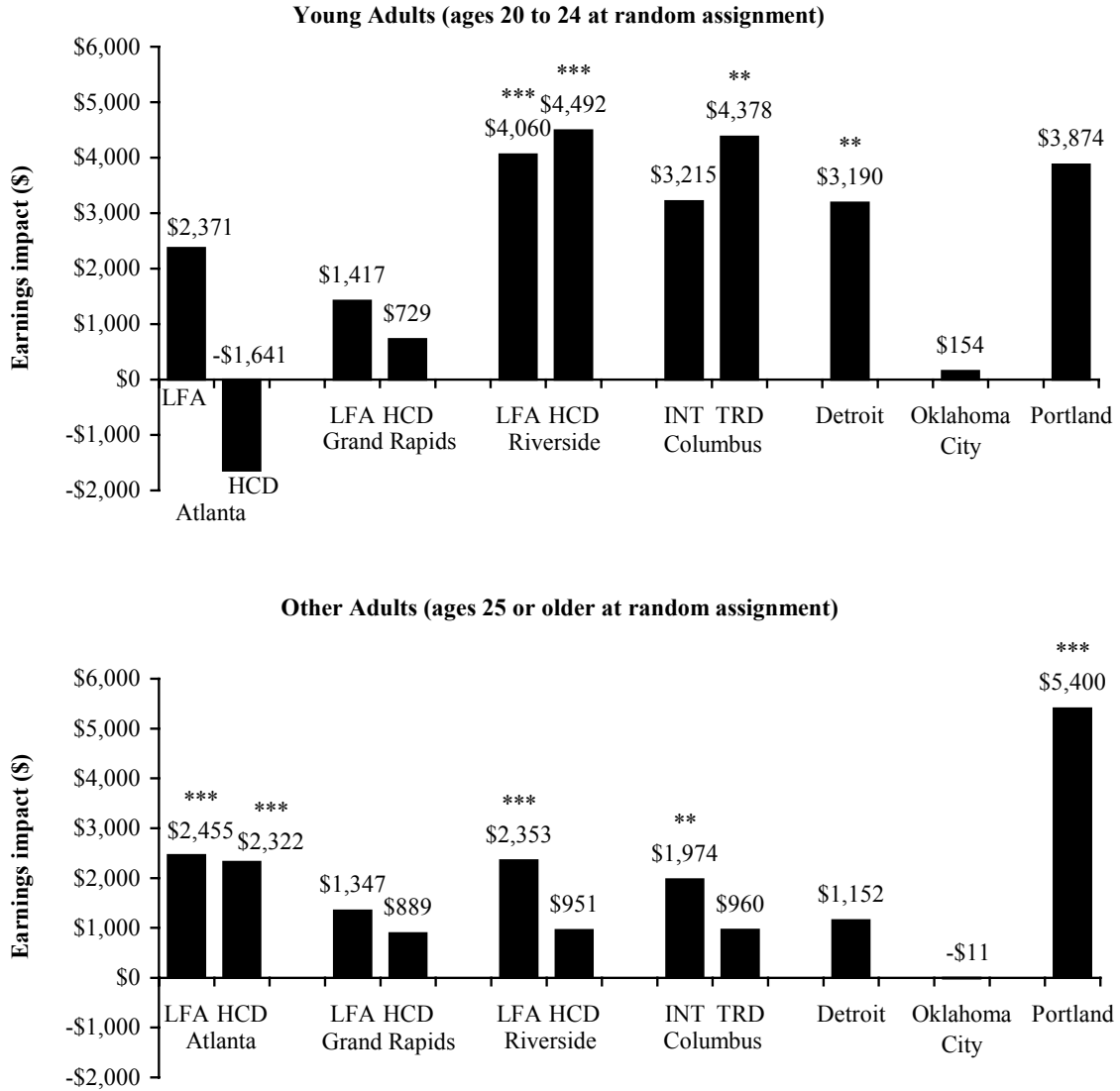
Earnings for the program and control groups were averaged across programs within each program type. The Riverside LFA program results include both graduates and nongraduates.

<sup>a</sup>Job search/High = Job search first with high enforcement; Varied/High = Varied first activity with high enforcement; Ed-Training/High = Education or training first with high enforcement; Ed-Training/Low = Education or training first with low enforcement.

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Figure 5

Program Impacts on Total Earnings in Years 1 to 5, by Age Group



SOURCE: MDRC calculations from state and county administrative records.

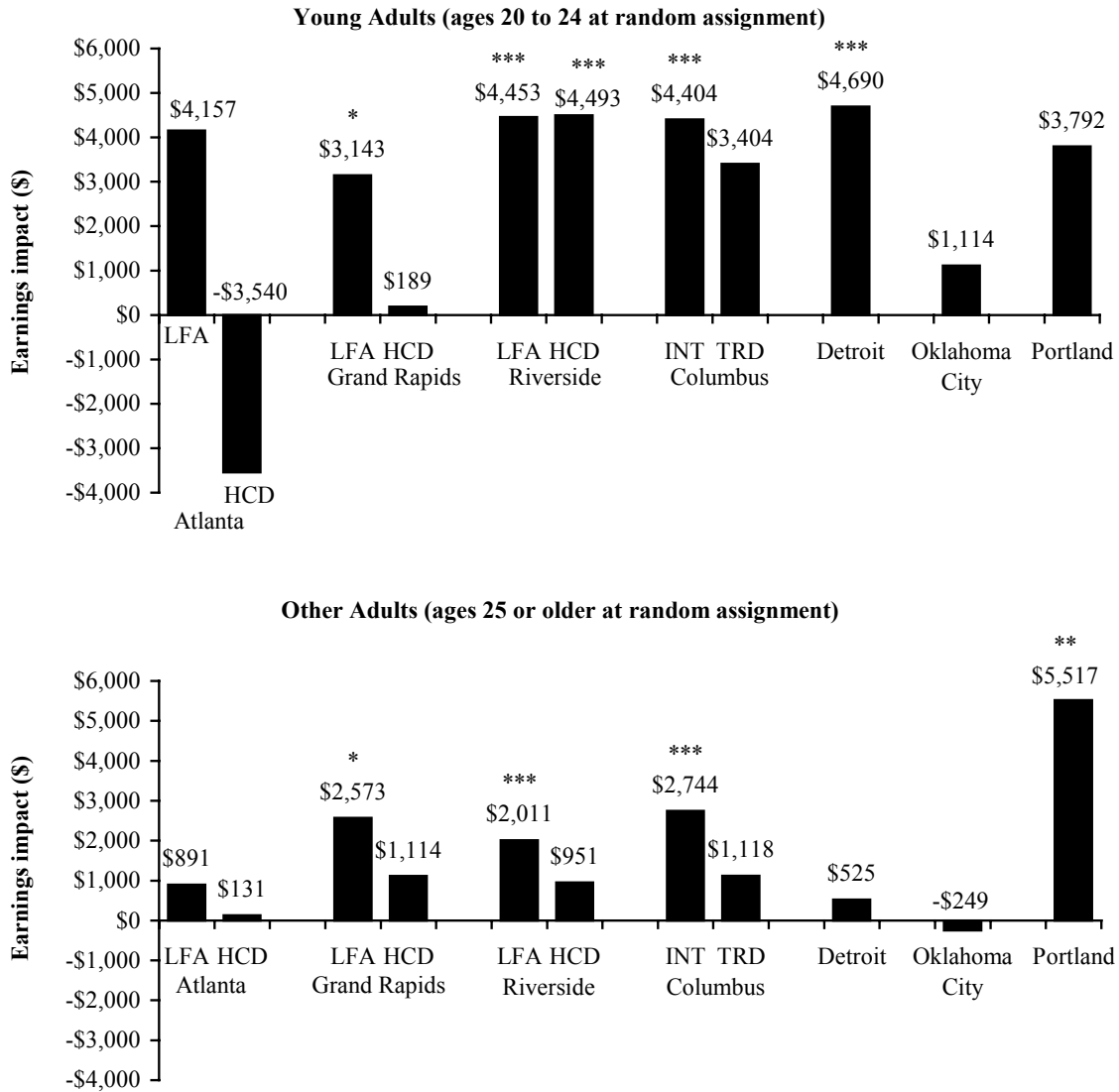
NOTES: See Appendix Section I.

The Riverside LFA program results include both graduates and nongraduates.

National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies

Figure 6

Program Impacts on Total Earnings in Years 1 to 5 for Sample Members with No High School Diploma or GED at Random Assignment, by Age Group



SOURCES: MDRC calculations from state and county administrative records.

NOTE: See Appendix Section I.

Adult control group members worked for pay during at least one quarter of Year 5 (Table 5), compared with 45 percent to 65 percent during Year 1 (results not shown). It is important to consider whether employment-focused or education-focused programs improved on this trend. These findings are of particular interest for education-focused programs, which often lead to little or no gains early in the follow-up.

Results in Year 5 were relatively disappointing for the Full Impact Sample. In nearly all sites, control group members eventually attained levels of employment and earnings that were comparable to the program group. Therefore, impacts for most programs decreased to zero dollars or close to that amount, by the end of the follow-up period.

Again, the findings for the Young Adult sample are more complex (Table 5). As with the Full Impact Sample, few programs increased employment for program group members above control group levels during Year 5. However, for the four programs that boosted employment, impacts on employment were relatively large — between 6.8 percentage points and 10.5 percentage points. Interestingly, three of these programs were education-focused, although most education-focused programs did not increase employment. A larger number of programs, both employment-focused and education-focused, led to higher total earnings compared with the control group during Year 5, although program-control group differences were statistically significant for only three programs: the employment-focused Riverside LFA program and the education-focused Riverside HCD and Columbus Integrated programs (Table 5).<sup>19</sup> Notably, the magnitude of the earnings gains for these three programs exceeds — by a wide margin — the typical impact for welfare-to-work programs during the last year of follow-up.

The education-focused programs in Columbus and Riverside also led to relatively large fifth-year impacts on an important indicator of stable employment (Table 6): They raised the percentage of Young Adults who worked for pay during all four quarters by more than 7 percentage points above control group levels. In contrast, for the Full Impact Sample, Riverside's program led to a much smaller gain — 3 percentage points — and the programs in Columbus had no effect.

Less positively, other programs led to little or no difference in stable employment. Furthermore, no program resulted in a statistically significant impact on the percentage of Young Adults who earned \$10,000 or more during Year 5 — another indicator of stable employment.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>The impact for Detroit had a p-value of 0.14.

<sup>20</sup>The impact for Columbus Integrated had a p-value of 0.18.



**National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies**

**Table 5**  
**Impacts on Employment and Earnings in Year 5**  
**for Sample Members Aged 20 to 24 Years at Random Assignment**

Site and Program	Sample Size	Program Group (%)	Control Group (%)	Difference (Impact)	Percentage Change (%)
<b><u>Employed in year 5 (%)</u></b>					
Atlanta Labor Force Attachment	274	80.5	77.8	2.8	3.6
Atlanta Human Capital Development	298	72.0	77.8	-5.8	-7.5
Grand Rapids Labor Force Attachment	861	76.0	77.5	-1.4	-1.9
Grand Rapids Human Capital Development	854	76.3	77.5	-1.2	-1.5
Riverside Labor Force Attachment	977	54.0	44.4	9.6 ***	21.7
Lacked high school diploma or basic skills	478	51.1	36.0	15.2 ***	42.2
Riverside Human Capital Development	480	44.5	36.0	8.5 *	23.7
Columbus Integrated	575	80.9	70.4	10.5 ***	14.9
Columbus Traditional	622	77.1	70.4	6.8 **	9.6
Detroit	1,043	76.7	76.5	0.1	0.2
Oklahoma City	1,962	56.4	57.8	-1.4	-2.4
Portland	932	64.0	64.5	-0.5	-0.8
<b><u>Total earnings in year 5 (\$)</u></b>					
Atlanta Labor Force Attachment	274	7,797	7,272	525	7.2
Atlanta Human Capital Development	298	6,272	7,272	-1,000	-13.7
Grand Rapids Labor Force Attachment	861	6,465	6,798	-333	-4.9
Grand Rapids Human Capital Development	854	6,620	6,798	-178	-2.6
Riverside Labor Force Attachment	977	4,657	3,674	982 **	26.7
Lacked high school diploma or basic skills	478	3,346	2,304	1,041 **	45.2
Riverside Human Capital Development	480	3,125	2,304	821 *	35.6
Columbus Integrated	575	8,439	7,151	1,288 *	18.0
Columbus Traditional	622	7,874	7,151	724	10.1
Detroit	1,043	8,089	7,284	806	11.1
Oklahoma City	1,962	3,823	3,703	120	3.2
Portland	932	6,860	6,392	468	7.3

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from state and county administrative records.

NOTE: See Appendix Section I.

**National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies**

**Table 6**

**Impacts on Employment Stability and Earning \$10,000 or More in Year 5  
for Sample Members Aged 20 to 24 Years at Random Assignment**

Site and Program	Sample Size	Program Group (%)	Control Group (%)	Difference (Impact)	Percentage Change (%)
<b><u>Employed in all four quarters of year 5 (%)</u></b>					
Atlanta Labor Force Attachment	274	48.7	48.2	0.4	0.9
Atlanta Human Capital Development	298	40.1	48.2	-8.2	-17.0
Grand Rapids Labor Force Attachment	861	37.4	42.1	-4.8	-11.3
Grand Rapids Human Capital Development	854	41.8	42.1	-0.4	-0.9
Riverside Labor Force Attachment	977	23.2	22.0	1.1	5.1
Lacked high school diploma or basic skills	478	17.5	13.7	3.8	27.9
Riverside Human Capital Development	480	21.1	13.7	7.4 **	54.1
Columbus Integrated	575	45.6	37.6	7.9 *	21.0
Columbus Traditional	622	42.2	37.6	4.5	12.0
Detroit	1,043	41.9	39.9	2.0	5.0
Oklahoma City	1,962	21.4	20.7	0.7	3.2
Portland	932	38.0	34.8	3.2	9.2
<b><u>Earned \$10,000 or more (%)</u></b>					
Atlanta Labor Force Attachment	274	37.0	33.3	3.7	11.2
Atlanta Human Capital Development	298	26.4	33.3	-6.9	-20.7
Grand Rapids Labor Force Attachment	861	23.4	27.8	-4.5	-16.1
Grand Rapids Human Capital Development	854	26.3	27.8	-1.6	-5.7
Riverside Labor Force Attachment	977	17.0	15.8	1.2	7.6
Lacked high school diploma or basic skills	478	11.6	9.4	2.2	23.6
Riverside Human Capital Development	480	11.2	9.4	1.8	19.6
Columbus Integrated	575	36.7	31.6	5.1	16.2
Columbus Traditional	622	32.7	31.6	1.1	3.5
Detroit	1,043	29.4	27.5	1.9	7.1
Oklahoma City	1,962	15.6	15.0	0.6	4.0
Portland	932	29.8	29.4	0.3	1.0

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from state and county administrative records.

NOTE: See Appendix Section I.

## **Impacts on Earnings for Nongraduates**

The Family Support Act (FSA) mandated that states and localities spend at least 60 percent of welfare-to-work program funds for services to welfare populations deemed at greatest risk of experiencing long-term welfare dependency. The FSA designated welfare recipients aged 24 or younger, who lacked a high school diploma or GED certificate, as one of the target groups with highest priority for services. More generally, many program administrators and policymakers believed that Young Adults would derive the greatest benefits from education and training. Young Adults, it was argued, could more easily adapt to returning to school. They also had nearly their entire working lives ahead of them and therefore the greatest chance of experiencing career advancement after completing longer-term education and training.

As shown in Figure 6, most programs led to five-year earnings gains for Young Adult nongraduates. Impacts were more consistent for the four employment-focused programs, ranging from an average gain of \$3,143 (in Grand Rapids) to \$4,453 (in Riverside), per program group member — although effects for two programs were not statistically significant. As for all Young Adults, effects for education-focused programs show more extreme variation. Compared with the control groups, the four programs in Columbus, Detroit, and Riverside led to relatively large increases in total earnings: from \$3,404 (Columbus Traditional) to \$4,690 (Detroit).<sup>21</sup> In contrast, the education-focused programs in Atlanta, Grand Rapids, and Oklahoma City resulted in little or no effect on earnings.

Encouragingly, most employment-focused and education-focused programs that led to five-year earnings gains in this subgroup continued to raise earnings above control group levels during Year 5 — although not all differences were statistically significant. These findings are more positive than for Other Adult nongraduates, and they support the decision to focus on providing services — any type of services — to this Young Adult subgroup (results not shown).

## **Impacts on Welfare and Food Stamp Payments**

As with other members of the Full Impact Sample, Young Adults received welfare payments for about two to three years out of the five-year follow-up (Table 7).<sup>22</sup> In all sites, the majority of Young Adults no longer received assistance at the end of the follow-up period (results not shown).

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<sup>21</sup>Impacts on total earnings for Columbus Traditional were barely above the 10 percent level of statistical significance (p-value = .101).

<sup>22</sup>Findings for Oklahoma City were excluded because, for this site, MDRC collected only three years of follow-up data.

**National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies**

**Table 7**

**Program Impacts on Welfare Receipt and Payments in Years 1 to 5  
for Sample Members Aged 20 to 24 Years at Random Assignment**

Site and Program	Sample Size	Program Group	Control Group	Difference (Impact)	Percentage Change (%)
<b><u>Average number of months of welfare receipt in years 1 to 5</u></b>					
Atlanta Labor Force Attachment	274	33.4	35.6	-2.2	-6.2
Atlanta Human Capital Development	298	36.6	35.6	1.0	2.7
Grand Rapids Labor Force Attachment	861	29.1	31.9	-2.8 **	-8.9
Grand Rapids Human Capital Development	854	30.1	31.9	-1.9	-5.8
Riverside Labor Force Attachment	977	29.3	32.7	-3.4 **	-10.3
Lacked high school diploma or basic skills	478	32.5	34.9	-2.4	-6.9
Riverside Human Capital Development	480	33.8	34.9	-1.1	-3.0
Columbus Integrated	575	25.4	28.4	-3.0 **	-10.4
Columbus Traditional	622	25.7	28.4	-2.7 *	-9.3
Detroit	1,043	39.3	40.9	-1.7	-4.0
Oklahoma City	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Portland	932	20.9	25.1	-4.2 **	-16.8
<b><u>Average total welfare payments received in years 1 to 5 (\$)</u></b>					
Atlanta Labor Force Attachment	274	8,550	9,212	-661	-7.2
Atlanta Human Capital Development	298	9,298	9,212	86	0.9
Grand Rapids Labor Force Attachment	861	11,171	13,146	-1,975 ***	-15.0
Grand Rapids Human Capital Development	854	11,861	13,146	-1,285 **	-9.8
Riverside Labor Force Attachment	977	15,681	17,992	-2,311 ***	-12.8
Lacked high school diploma or basic skills	478	17,610	19,729	-2,119 *	-10.7
Riverside Human Capital Development	480	18,168	19,729	-1,561	-7.9
Columbus Integrated	575	7,841	8,960	-1,119 **	-12.5
Columbus Traditional	622	7,922	8,960	-1,038 **	-11.6
Detroit	1,043	16,727	17,276	-550	-3.2
Oklahoma City	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Portland	932	9,566	11,650	-2,084 **	-17.9

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from state and county administrative records.

NOTE: See Appendix Section I.

Nearly all programs led to reductions below control group levels in total months of welfare receipt and in total welfare payments, although not all differences were statistically significant. Young Adults incurred somewhat smaller reductions in total welfare payments, compared with Other Adults — in part because they had smaller families and lower welfare grants to begin with. For the latter group, six programs led to decreases of more than 15 percent below control group averages, an unusually large impact (results not shown). In comparison, only two programs reduced total payments by 15 percent or more for Young Adults (Table 7).

Employment-focused programs led to larger reductions in welfare payments than education-focused programs. This result may be seen by comparing impacts for Atlanta, Grand Rapids, and Riverside, the sites which simultaneously ran employment-focused and education-focused programs. Averaged across all three sites, the LFA programs (employment-focused) reduced payments by nearly \$1,600 below control group levels, compared with about \$900 for the HCD programs (education-focused).<sup>23</sup> Moreover, Portland’s employment-focused program led to the largest decrease, in percentage terms (17.9 percent), among all programs.

Most programs also reduced food stamp receipt and total payments among Young Adults. However, decreases were smaller than for welfare payments, and impacts for most programs were not statistically significant. In general, compared with Other Adults, Young Adults incurred smaller reductions in food stamp payments over five years (results not shown).

### **Impacts on Combined Income**

For the Full Impact Sample, programs had little effect on combined income from earnings (minus estimated payroll taxes), welfare, food stamps, and estimated Earned Income Tax Credits over five years. On average, compared with control group members, program group members received more of their income from earnings. However, reductions in welfare and food stamps counterbalanced increases in earnings, leaving program group members with about the same income compared with control group members.

Results for Young Adults were somewhat more positive (Figure 7). As discussed above, program impacts on earnings tended to be larger for Young Adults (compared with Other Adults), while reductions in welfare and food stamps tended to be smaller. Seven programs (three employment-focused and four education-focused) raised total combined income for program group

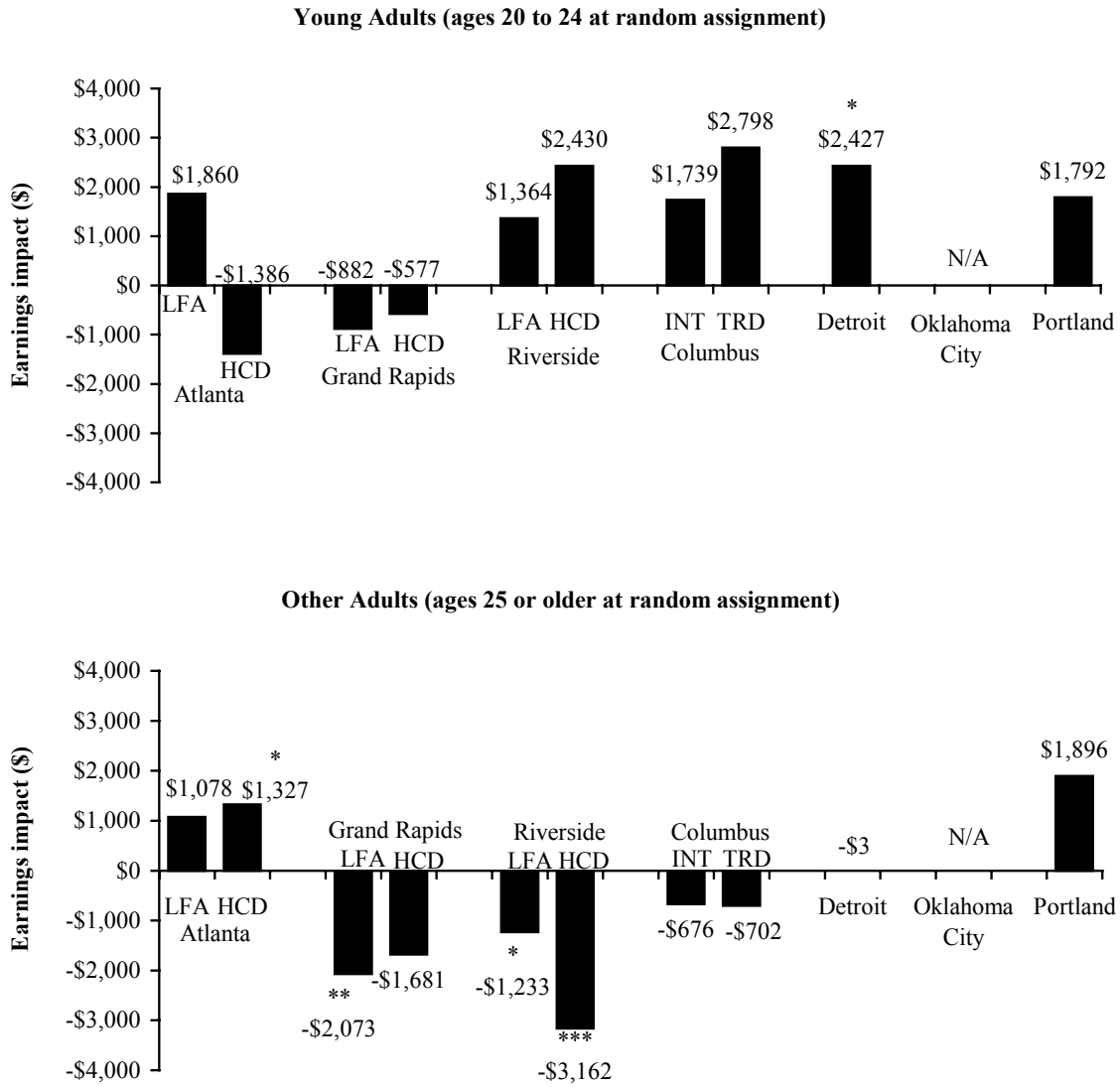
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<sup>23</sup>In Riverside, the impact for the subgroup that lacked a high school diploma or basic skills was included in the three-site average for LFA programs.

National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies

Figure 7

Program Impacts on Combined Income in Years 1 to 5, by Age Group



SOURCES: MDRC calculations from state and county administrative records.  
 NOTE: See Appendix Section I.

members by more than \$1,300 — or between 4 percent and 7 percent — above control group levels. However, only one program, Detroit, led to a statistically significant impact.<sup>24</sup>

As with impacts on earnings, results for education-focused programs showed the widest variation. Education-focused programs led to the largest increases and the largest decreases in combined income.

## Impacts on Household Composition

At five years after random assignment, survey respondents in Atlanta, Grand Rapids, and Riverside reported whether they were married and living with a spouse, cohabiting, or living without a spouse or partner. They also reported whether they had given birth to or adopted another child after random assignment. Table 8 shows the results for program and control group members pooled across the three sites. The table also displays results for Other Adults in the three sites.

As shown in Table 8, Young Adults were more likely than Other Adults to be living with a spouse or partner at five years after random assignment. About 20 percent of Young Adult control group members reported that they were married at the five-year point, 5 percentage points above the average for Other Adult control group members. Another 17 percent of Young Adults were living with a partner, compared with 10 percent of Other Adults. These results imply that Young Adults and their children had better prospects than Other Adults for receiving financial and emotional support. On the other hand, more than 60 percent of Young Adult control group members reported that they were living without a spouse or partner, and most of these Young Adults had never married.

Nearly half of Young Adult control group members reported that they had given birth to or adopted another child during the follow-up period. Not surprisingly, their rate of having additional children far exceeded the percentage for Other Adults (12.5 percent).

Young Adults from the three HCD programs reported similar rates of marriage and cohabiting, compared with the control group. In contrast, a somewhat higher percentage of LFA program group members reported that they were married and living with a spouse at five years

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<sup>24</sup>The program-control group difference for the Columbus Traditional program had a p-value of .123, or just above the 10 percent level of statistical significance. Comparable to Riverside HCD, Riverside LFA increased combined income for nongraduates by \$2,243 (not significant) above the control group level (results not shown).

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**Table 8**  
**Outcomes on Household Structure, by Age Group**

<b>Young Adults (ages 20 to 24)</b>			
<b>Outcome (%)</b>	<b>LFA</b>	<b>HCD</b>	<b>Control Group</b>
Married and living with spouse	26.3	17.5	19.9
Cohabiting	18.1	16.5	16.7
Separated, divorced, or widowed	9.6	13.0	12.6
Never married	45.6	52.6	50.5
Presence of a new baby	45.9	49.8	49.7
Neither married nor cohabiting	19.8	32.2	26.6
Sample sizes	231	301	321
<b>Other Adults (ages 25 or older)</b>			
<b>Outcome (%)</b>	<b>LFA</b>	<b>HCD</b>	<b>Control Group</b>
Married and living with spouse	15.3	15.4	15.0
Cohabiting	12.4	11.2	9.9
Separated, divorced, or widowed	40.8	41.8	44.3
Never married	30.2	30.4	30.2
Presence of a new baby	15.3	13.2	12.5
Neither married nor cohabiting	9.6	8.6	8.4
Sample sizes	1,078	1,216	1,195

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from the Five-Year Client Survey.

NOTES: See Appendix Section II.

The percentages shown are averages for sample members in the LFA, HCD, and control groups in Atlanta, Grand Rapids, and Riverside. The Riverside LFA program results include nongraduates only.



(26.3 percent, compared with 19.9 percent).<sup>25</sup> LFA group members were also slightly less likely, compared with members of the other two groups, to have added another child to their families.

## Discussion

The findings for the Full Impact Sample showed that more welfare recipients benefited from enrolling in short-term job search activities than from enrolling in mandatory large-scale basic education programs. Results for the Young Adult sample modify these findings to some extent, but do not provide a blanket endorsement for targeting skill-building activities to welfare recipients who are just starting their working lives. Instead, it was shown that some education-focused programs led to relatively large earnings impacts, whereas others did not.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to find a set of program characteristics that distinguish the most successful education-focused programs (Columbus, Detroit, and Riverside) from the education-focused programs that led to small impacts on employment and earnings (Atlanta, Grand Rapids, and Oklahoma City). For instance, both the programs in Columbus and Riverside (with impacts) and those in Atlanta and Grand Rapids (without impacts) were characterized as high enforcement. Similarly, programs in Detroit (with impacts) and Oklahoma City (without impacts) were classified as low enforcement. Furthermore programs which produced the largest gains in use of program services (see Appendix Table 2) did not always lead to the biggest earnings impacts. Finally, some programs (like Detroit) which emphasized provision of child care assistance, led to positive effects for Young Adults; others (Atlanta HCD and Oklahoma City) did not. Furthermore, Riverside HCD (low support for child care) led to relatively large impacts.

On the other hand, site differences may better explain the variation in impacts for Young Adults. For instance, both programs in Riverside led to strong earnings gains for Young Adults who lacked a high school diploma or GED certificate at random assignment. However, among this nongraduate subgroup, the LFA programs in Atlanta and Grand Rapids increased earnings above the control group, but the HCD programs did not (Figure 6).

There is some suggestion that education-focused programs did not benefit Young Adults with low levels of literacy. More specifically, Atlanta and Grand Rapids, which had education-focused programs with no impacts on earnings over five years, also had the highest percentage of sample members with low scores on literacy tests administered at random assignment. In fact, impact results for these programs look more positive (but not statistically significant) when only sample members with above-minimum reading scores are included in the cal-

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<sup>25</sup>It should be remembered that two of the three HCD programs (Atlanta and Grand Rapids) led to little or no gain in employment and earnings. While sample members from the more successful education-focused programs in Riverside were surveyed at five years, Young Adults in Columbus and Detroit were not.

culatation (results not shown). However, sample sizes for this subgroup were small, and information on literacy is limited to four sites.

Most likely, it would be useful to examine the effects of other education-focused and employment-focused welfare-to-work programs for the Young Adult subgroup, but such additional research is beyond the scope of this paper. Similarly, these results underscore the importance of focusing on the experiences of the Young Adult group when evaluating current and future programs that emphasize education and training.

## Appendix

## Appendix Section I

### Notes for Tables and Figures Displaying Impacts Calculated with Administrative Records Data

Estimates were regression-adjusted using ordinary least squares, controlling for pre-random assignment characteristics of sample members.

“Percentage change” equals 100 times “difference” divided by “control group.”

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in calculating sums and differences.

A two-tailed t-test was applied to differences between outcomes for the program and control groups. Statistical significance levels are indicated as: \* = 10 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; and \*\*\* = 1 percent.

Riverside limited enrollment in its HCD program to individuals determined by program regulations to need basic education because they lacked a high school diploma or General Education Development (GED) certificate, attained low scores on a reading or math test administered at program entry, or had limited proficiency in English. As a result, control group means differ for the Riverside LFA and HCD programs.

If outcomes are shown in italics, differences between program group members and control group members are not true experimental comparisons; statistical tests were not performed.

The quarter of random assignment refers to the calendar quarter in which random assignment occurred. Because Quarter 1, the quarter of random assignment, may contain some earnings from the period prior to random assignment, it is excluded from follow-up measures. Thus, “Year 1” is Quarters 2 through 5, “Year 2” is Quarters 6 through 9, “Year 3” is Quarters 10 through 13, “Year 4” is Quarters 14 through 17, and “Year 5” is Quarters 18 through 21.

n/a = not applicable.

## Appendix Section II

### Notes for Tables and Figures Displaying Impacts Calculated with Responses to the Two-Year Client Survey and Five-Year Client Survey

Measures for program and control group members represent weighted averages. In all sites, certain subgroups were overrepresented (for research purposes) among those chosen to be surveyed. Members of the survey samples are weighted to replicate the proportion of program and control group members in the full impact sample.

The Five-Year Client Survey sample includes 434 respondents who were not interviewed for the Two-Year Client Survey. Measures calculated from responses to both surveys exclude these sample members.

Estimates were regression-adjusted using ordinary least squares, controlling for pre-random assignment characteristics of sample members.

“Percentage change” equals 100 times “difference” divided by “control group.”

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in calculating sums and differences.

A two-tailed t-test was applied to differences between outcomes for the program and control groups. Statistical significance levels are indicated as: \* = 10 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; and \*\*\* = 1 percent.

Riverside limited enrollment in its HCD program to individuals determined by program regulations to need basic education because they lacked a high school diploma or General Education Development (GED) certificate, attained low scores on a reading or math test administered at program entry, or had limited proficiency in English. As a result, control group means differ for the Riverside LFA and HCD programs.

If outcomes are shown in italics, differences between program group members and control group members are not true experimental comparisons; statistical tests were not performed.

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Appendix Table 1

Selected Baseline Characteristics of Sample Members Aged 20 to 24 at Random Assignment

Characteristic	Grand Rapids					Oklahoma City		Portland	Total
	Atlanta	Riverside	Columbus	Detroit					
Average age (years)	22.7	21.9	22.3	22.8	22.1	22.1	22.5	22.3	
Ethnicity (%)									
White	3.1	54.4	48.4	49.3	9.0	63.5	70.1	42.5	
Hispanic	0.9	7.6	29.8	0.7	0.4	4.3	4.2	6.8	
Black	95.3	35.1	18.2	49.2	90.2	25.7	18.5	47.5	
Never married (%)	89.6	82.0	70.2	77.5	92.3	45.5	73.5	75.8	
Average number of children	1.5	1.4	1.3	1.5	1.6	1.5	1.6	1.5	
Youngest child aged 5 or younger (%)	83.1	96.2	93.2	92.5	95.2	95.3	96.4	93.1	
Had a child as a teenager (%)	85.1	62.3	75.3	74.3	66.6	63.5	55.7	69.0	
Ever worked full time for 6 months or more for one employer (%)	54.6	56.3	52.3	29.9	35.4	63.0	64.4	50.8	
Any earnings in past 12 months (%)	41.0	53.4	38.4	63.0	39.2	59.3	42.2	48.1	
Received high school diploma or GED (%)	61.1	58.9	49.3	56.6	53.1	55.3	63.5	56.8	
Scored below minimum levels on literacy and math tests (%)	31.2	16.7	3.1	n/a	n/a	n/a	2.2	13.3	
Received welfare for 2 years or more (%)	72.3	52.4	58.2	74.9	69.2	17.8	56.6	57.3	
Raised as a child in a household receiving AFDC (%)	39.8	36.3	31.3	36.6	51.5	21.8	33.3	35.8	
Moderate to high risk of depression (%)	38.7	39.3	32.7	n/a	n/a	n/a	36.9	36.9	
High preference for child care over work (%)	10.6	28.2	23.8	n/a	n/a	n/a	27.1	22.4	
Sample size	422	1,295	1,224	921	1,043	1,962	932	7,799	

SOURCES: MDRC calculations from information routinely collected by welfare staff and responses to the Private Opinion Survey (POS).  
NOTE: Distributions may not add to 100 percent because of rounding or missing values, or because not all categories were displayed.

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Appendix Table 2

Two-Year Impacts on Participation in Program Activities

Site and Program	Sample Size	Program Group	Control Group	Difference (Impact)
<b><u>Any activity</u></b>				
<b><u>Ever participated (%)</u></b>				
Atlanta Labor Force Attachment	224	44.6	30.8	13.7 **
Atlanta Human Capital Development	284	63.3	30.8	32.5 ***
Grand Rapids Labor Force Attachment	311	60.6	55.5	5.1
Grand Rapids Human Capital Development	314	67.7	55.5	12.2 **
Riverside Labor Force Attachment	195	61.2	34.6	26.6 ***
Lacked high school diploma or basic skills	127	61.2	35.8	25.4 ***
Riverside Human Capital Development	179	76.8	35.8	40.9 ***
Columbus Integrated	85	46.6	37.1	9.5
Columbus Traditional	76	51.1	37.1	14.0
Detroit	92	59.2	56.0	3.2
Oklahoma City	96	57.3	50.3	7.0
Portland	121	73.3	44.9	28.4 ***
<b><u>Job search/Job club</u></b>				
<b><u>Ever participated (%)</u></b>				
Atlanta Labor Force Attachment	224	34.6	2.9	31.7 ***
Atlanta Human Capital Development	284	13.7	2.9	10.8 ***
Grand Rapids Labor Force Attachment	311	25.8	4.7	21.0 ***
Grand Rapids Human Capital Development	314	10.3	4.7	5.6
Riverside Labor Force Attachment	195	39.9	2.4	37.4 ***
Lacked high school diploma or basic skills	127	45.5	3.0	42.6 ***
Riverside Human Capital Development	179	31.3	3.0	28.4 ***
Columbus Integrated	85	6.1	7.7	-1.6
Columbus Traditional	76	9.2	7.7	1.5
Detroit	92	17.8	3.9	13.9 *
Oklahoma City	96	11.9	3.9	8.0
Portland	121	46.0	12.1	33.9 ***

(continued)

**Appendix Table 2 (continued)**

Site and Program	Sample Size	Program Group	Control Group	Difference (Impact)
<b><u>Any education or training</u></b>				
<b><u>Ever participated (%)</u></b>				
Atlanta Labor Force Attachment	224	18.4	28.3	-9.9
Atlanta Human Capital Development	284	51.4	28.3	23.1 ***
Grand Rapids Labor Force Attachment	311	44.9	54.0	-9.1
Grand Rapids Human Capital Development	314	60.8	54.0	6.8
Riverside Labor Force Attachment	195	29.9	33.4	-3.5
Lacked high school diploma or basic skills	127	23.0	33.6	-10.6
Riverside Human Capital Development	179	70.2	33.6	36.6 ***
Columbus Integrated	85	39.2	28.8	10.4
Columbus Traditional	76	47.3	28.8	18.6
Detroit	92	57.2	53.7	3.6
Oklahoma City	96	53.1	43.8	9.3
Portland	121	50.6	34.6	16.0

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from the Two-Year Client Survey.

NOTE: See Appendix Section II.



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Appendix Table 3

Impacts on Employment and Earnings in Years 1 to 5  
for Sample Members Aged 16 to 24 Years at Random Assignment

Site and Program	Sample Size	Program Group	Control Group	Difference (Impact)	Percentage Change (%)
<b><u>Ever employed (%)</u></b>					
Atlanta Labor Force Attachment	274	93.7	90.6	3.1	3.4
Atlanta Human Capital Development	298	90.5	90.6	-0.1	-0.1
Grand Rapids Labor Force Attachment	1,195	95.8	93.6	2.3 *	2.4
Grand Rapids Human Capital Development	1,174	93.7	93.6	0.1	0.1
Riverside Labor Force Attachment	1,092	80.8	68.6	12.2 ***	17.8
Lacked high school diploma or basic skills	513	76.4	61.1	15.4 ***	25.2
Riverside Human Capital Development	531	72.7	61.1	11.6 ***	19.1
Columbus Integrated	598	95.4	89.2	6.2 ***	6.9
Columbus Traditional	641	91.9	89.2	2.7	3.0
Detroit	1,293	91.4	89.4	2.0	2.2
Oklahoma City	3,198	83.2	83.4	-0.2	-0.2
Portland	932	89.8	88.4	1.4	1.6
<b><u>Average number of quarters employed</u></b>					
Atlanta Labor Force Attachment	274	10.9	10.2	0.7	6.5
Atlanta Human Capital Development	298	9.6	10.2	-0.6	-5.5
Grand Rapids Labor Force Attachment	1,195	10.2	9.8	0.5	4.7
Grand Rapids Human Capital Development	1,174	10.1	9.8	0.4	3.6
Riverside Labor Force Attachment	1,092	7.0	5.5	1.5 ***	28.1
Lacked high school diploma or basic skills	513	5.9	3.9	2.0 ***	50.4
Riverside Human Capital Development	531	5.2	3.9	1.2 ***	30.7
Columbus Integrated	598	11.4	10.2	1.2 ***	11.6
Columbus Traditional	641	11.1	10.2	0.9 **	8.6
Detroit	1,293	9.1	8.7	0.4	4.4
Oklahoma City	3,198	7.0	6.9	0.0	0.4
Portland	932	9.7	8.1	1.6 **	19.9

(continued)

**Appendix Table 3 (continued)**

Site and Program	Sample Size	Program Group	Control Group	Difference (Impact)	Percentage Change (%)
<b><u>Average total earnings (\$)</u></b>					
Atlanta Labor Force Attachment	274	25,618	23,247	2,371	10.2
Atlanta Human Capital Development	298	21,606	23,247	-1,641	-7.1
Grand Rapids Labor Force Attachment	1,195	21,500	19,547	1,953	10.0
Grand Rapids Human Capital Development	1,174	20,474	19,547	926	4.7
Riverside Labor Force Attachment	1,092	16,339	12,610	3,729 ***	29.6
Lacked high school diploma or basic skills	513	11,848	7,843	4,005 **	51.1
Riverside Human Capital Development	531	11,785	7,843	3,942 ***	50.3
Columbus Integrated	598	26,744	23,812	2,932	12.3
Columbus Traditional	641	28,101	23,812	4,289 **	18.0
Detroit	1,293	22,451	20,012	2,438 *	12.2
Oklahoma City	3,198	11,363	11,076	287	2.6
Portland	932	25,092	21,218	3,874	18.3

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from state and county administrative records.

NOTE: See Appendix Section I.

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