

The Social Security Administration's youth transition demonstration projects

Thomas Fraker^{a,*} and Anu Rangarajan^b

^a*Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., Washington, DC, USA*

^b*Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., Princeton, NJ, USA*

Received 4 February 2009

Abstract. The Social Security Administration (SSA) is funding Youth Transition Demonstration (YTD) projects in multiple sites across the country. These projects seek to improve transitions to adulthood for youth whose disabilities are so severe that they either are currently receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security disability benefits, or are at high risk of receiving them in the future. Youth participating in the projects are eligible for more generous earnings disregards and other incentives under SSA waivers of certain disability program rules. In addition, the projects provide them with individualized employment and benefits planning services. The waivers and services are designed to increase the likelihood that the YTD participants will become employed, earn enough to reduce their disability benefits, and eventually leave the disability rolls. Under contract with SSA, Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. is conducting a rigorous random assignment evaluation of six of the demonstration projects. Approximately 880 youth at each site who agree to participate in the evaluation are being randomly assigned to treatment or control groups. The treatment group members are eligible for the SSA waivers and YTD services; the control group members are eligible for neither, but they can receive standard disability program work incentives and whatever alternative services may be available in their communities. Mathematica is gathering data on the treatment and control group members for up to four years following random assignment through surveys and SSA administrative records. By comparing mean values of outcomes such as earnings and disability benefit amounts for the treatment and control groups, the evaluation will assess whether the YTD projects are successful at improving transitions to adulthood. Findings from the evaluation will be presented in site-specific interim reports in 2010–2012 and in a comprehensive final report in 2014.

Keywords: Transition, youth, disabilities, Social Security, SSA, demonstration, intervention, evaluation, random assignment, experimental

1. Introduction

The transition to adulthood for youth with disabilities can be difficult, especially if they receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security disability benefits. In addition to the host of issues facing all transition-age youth, young people with disabilities face special issues related to health, social isolation, service needs, potential loss of benefits, and lack of

access to supports. These challenges complicate their planning for future education and work and often lead to poor educational and employment outcomes, high risk of dependency on public programs, and a lifetime of poverty.

The public cost of child dependence on disability benefits is quite large. In December 2007, approximately 721,000 youth 13 to 21 years old were receiving SSI benefits totaling more than \$400 million each month [27]. A much smaller number of youth receive Social Security disability benefits.¹ Furthermore,

* Address for correspondence: Thomas Fraker, Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., 600 Maryland Avenue, S.W., Suite 550, Washington, DC 20024-2512, USA. Tel.: +1 202 484 4698; Fax: +1 202 863 1763; E-mail: tfraker@mathematica-mpr.com.

¹ Approximately 130,000 youth age 24 or younger were receiving Social Security disability benefits in December 2006 [26].

many other youth are at high risk of receiving SSI or Social Security disability benefits in the future, if they do not successfully transition to a productive adult life. This latter group includes youth whose disabilities are currently not severe but who have a prognosis for decreasing functioning over time, as well as youth who are ineligible for benefits due to deemed parental income but who might be eligible if they were to move out of their parents' households after reaching age 18.

Recognizing the importance of service intervention at this critical juncture in youths' lives, the Social Security Administration (SSA) initiated the Youth Transition Demonstration (YTD) projects. Focusing on youth of transition age, SSA is investing considerable resources in developing and rigorously evaluating promising strategies to help youth with disabilities become as economically self-sufficient as possible as they transition from school to work, making it the centerpiece for policy development with respect to transitions for youth with disabilities. In particular, the YTD initiative includes strong, policy-relevant demonstration projects that offer key transition services to large numbers of youth with disabilities to help alleviate the barriers they face in their current service environments. The YTD initiative also includes a set of SSA waivers of disability program rules that encourage youth to work by allowing them to retain more of their benefits as their earnings increase.

A hallmark feature of the YTD study is a rigorous evaluation of the projects based on an experimental design. Under this design, youth are randomly assigned to either a treatment group that is eligible for the SSA waivers of disability program rules and YTD services or to a control group that is eligible only for standard SSA program rules and whatever services may be available in their communities. Because of random assignment, two equivalent groups are created, with only one of the groups having access to the waivers and the YTD services. As a result, any observed differences in outcomes between the two groups of youth will be attributable with a known degree of confidence to the YTD interventions. The evaluation is tracking employment, earnings, and benefit receipt, among other outcomes, to assess the impacts of the YTD services and waivers on helping youth find jobs and eventually move off the disability rolls. While some youth will find jobs on their own even in the absence of YTD services and waivers, the evaluation will focus on the "impacts" that will result directly from the waivers and services. These are the differences in outcomes over and above what the youth would naturally experience in the absence of the YTD services and waivers.

This paper provides an overview of the YTD projects that are operating across the country and describes the design for their evaluation. In Section 2, it makes the case for the policy importance of the YTD initiative. In Section 3, it documents the barriers that youth with disabilities face in transitioning to adulthood and Section 4 presents the conceptual framework underlying the YTD projects' efforts to reduce these barriers. Section 5 describes the key programmatic features of the YTD initiative and Section 6 describes the six projects participating in the random assignment evaluation and the selection process. Finally Section 7 discusses the evaluation design for the YTD projects, anticipated impacts of the interventions and their measurement, and our plans for reporting the research findings.

2. The policy importance of the YTD initiative

The YTD initiative provides an extremely valuable opportunity to identify, test, and assess strategies for helping youth with disabilities make the transition from school to productive adult lives. This initiative targets youth with disabilities between the ages 14 and 25 who are either receiving SSI or Social Security disability benefits or are at high risk of receiving them in the future.² This is a critical group because these youth are in the process of making human capital investment decisions that will affect their long-term employment and program outcomes. Interventions to improve transition outcomes for this group are highly relevant and important to disability policy for four reasons.

First, the costs of unsuccessful transitions to adulthood are very high for the youth, their families, and society. These costs include the effects of long-term dependency and lifelong poverty on the quality of life for youth with disabilities. Research suggests that career preparatory activities in schools and communities can improve youths' life quality by helping them prepare

²SSA authorized the YTD projects to serve current disability beneficiaries as well as youth who are at high risk of entering the beneficiary roles in the future. Only one YTD project serves at-risk youth; the Career Transition Project, in Montgomery County, Maryland. It targets youth who have been classified by the local public school system as having severe emotional disturbances, or are known to the school system or the public mental health system to have been diagnosed with a significant mental illness. Before this project was selected into the evaluation, a disability expert affiliated with the University of Maryland reviewed the case files of a random sample of existing participants and determined that many of them were very likely to enter the SSI or Social Security disability rolls at some point in the future absent the project's services.

for careers, build self-esteem, increase self-knowledge, and reduce career indecision [10,13]. Furthermore, greater self-sufficiency among youth with disabilities could reduce the support they require from their parents and community organizations, opening up opportunities for parents to be more successful financially and for organizations to redirect their efforts to other individuals in need of assistance. Finally, unsuccessful transitions impose costs on society in the form of reduced output of goods and services, lower tax revenues, greater criminal activity, and higher rates of incarceration. An intervention like YTD therefore offers the potential to generate benefits and reduce costs for youth and their families, and for society as a whole, by improving transition outcomes for some of the nation's most vulnerable youth.

Second, among all disability beneficiaries, most of whom are adults, youth are a particularly promising target population for an initiative to reduce dependency. The adolescent years are an auspicious time to intervene – before youth become fully entrenched in dependency. For example, youth in general assign great importance to acceptance and approval by their peers. So youth with disabilities may willingly – even eagerly – consider employment options because most of their nondisabled peers are working or are preparing to work. Furthermore, the lifetime economic advantage of work over dependency tends to be high for youth because they have many years ahead of them when they potentially could work.

Third, the costs to SSA of providing benefits to youth with disabilities over their lifetimes are extremely high. For youth who begin receiving SSI benefits when they are younger than 18, the average duration of their first spell on the beneficiary roll is about 11 years, and the average total duration of all their SSI disability spells is almost 27 years [24]. At the 2009 federal monthly benefit level of \$674, the net present value in current dollars of 27 consecutive years of SSI benefits is approximately \$150,000 (using a 3 percent discount rate), and this does not include the even higher cost of concurrent participation in the Medicaid program. Thus, interventions for youth that reduce or deter their dependence on disability benefits could result in substantial savings for SSA and other government agencies.

Finally, research has shown that employment-focused interventions can be effective in improving economic outcomes for youth with disabilities. The three most notable research projects, all of which had random assignment designs, are the evaluations of the U.S. Department of Labor's Structured Training and

Employment Transitional Services (STETS) demonstration and SSA's Transitional Employment Training Demonstration (TETD) and Project Network. The STETS demonstration provided transitional employment services to youth ages 18 to 24 who had IQ scores between 40 and 80. Two years after enrollment, youth who had received STETS services were more likely to be in a competitive job (31 percent were employed, versus 19 percent of the control group) and their weekly earnings, averaged over both employed and not employed youth, were 74 percent higher than those of their control group counterparts [11]. The TETD provided transitional employment services to SSI beneficiaries ages 18 to 40 with mental retardation. The research findings from this demonstration illustrate the potential for transitional employment supports to improve long-term employment outcomes for young adults with disabilities: six years after enrollment, the TETD increased employment rates by nine percentage points and annual earnings by 72 percent [6,29]. Project Network, which provided intensive, employment focused case-management services to SSI and Social Security disability claimants and applicants, found small increases in employment through the sixth year of follow-up [23].

For all of these reasons SSA undertook the YTD initiative, which provides funding and technical support to multiple organizations across the country to develop and implement a variety of intensive interventions for youth with disabilities. While each YTD project has a distinctive design, they all have a strong focus on employment, leverage existing community services, and offer enhanced financial incentives to work through waivers of selected rules governing SSA benefit programs. In addition, each project will serve a large number of youth, approximately 400, thus providing a solid basis for statistical analysis. Through a rigorous random assignment evaluation of these projects, SSA hopes to identify program components and strategies that improve employment and earnings outcomes for youth with disabilities and reduce their dependency on disability benefits.

3. Potential barriers to successful transition

Youth with disabilities may bring to the transition process many positive skills and attributes, but they may also confront a number of barriers that could reduce the likelihood that they will successfully transition to adulthood. The YTD interventions have been designed

to leverage the existing strengths of these youth, such as the desire by many of them to achieve a level of financial independence and their varied abilities to find and maintain employment, while explicitly acknowledging and addressing six potential barriers, which are summarized below. Some of these barriers come from the specific nature of their disabilities and health conditions, while others arise because of ineffective responses of society and its institutions to the youth and their disabilities.

3.1. Low expectations about working and self-sufficiency

Social and self-perceptions of disability can lead to isolation and diminished expectations by family members, teachers, employers, and ultimately by the youth themselves. Youth whose disabilities are visible may be marginalized by peers and respond by seeking entry into communities that embrace their disabilities [31]. Parents, teachers, social workers, and other adults who are important in a youth's life often have diminished expectations for youth with disabilities, especially concerning employment [2]. Youth who internalize these expectations can be disruptive in social settings, including the classroom. This can inhibit their educational progress and even lead to school suspensions and involvement with the legal system [35], which in turn can limit employment possibilities.

3.2. Lack of access to effective employment services and work-based experiences

The service environment for youth with disabilities is notably weak with respect to assistance in obtaining work-based experiences and securing paid employment in integrated settings. This issue is especially problematic for youth with mental disorders, who make up three-fourths of SSI recipients ages 13 to 21 [27]. Wehman et al. [32] found that, despite the success of supported-employment programs in promoting employment, most youth with mental impairments remain in segregated settings; for every one working in integrated settings through supported employment, 4.5 remain in segregated settings. In addition, service providers may not understand the full range of supports that are available to youth with disabilities, which can lead to conflicting messages about the importance of work. For example, Hill [8] found that service providers often do not have a good understanding of the work incentives available to SSI beneficiaries,

and this limits their ability to coordinate the provision of employment supports to this population.

YTD-eligible youth who receive SSI benefits may also face more severe challenges in accessing services because their families have low incomes. SSI is income conditioned, and the average household income for child SSI beneficiaries, ages 14 to 23, is just above the poverty line [35]. These low incomes limit the parents' capacity to privately purchase services, such as specialized training, and make the youth dependent on publicly provided services. The parents may also have a greater need to work or may have poor communication and problem-solving skills, which may reduce their ability to effectively advocate for services [25].

3.3. Gaps in school-based services and an uncoordinated handoff to adult services

Youth with disabilities may be in school support systems that have significant gaps in services and are missing critical linkages to adult services. Many youth do not get information from their schools on how to access needed services. A recent study [30] found that a substantial number of youth and families reported problems identifying, and learning how to ask for, specific accommodations they need to succeed in school and the workplace. The problem of accessing necessary resources is compounded by a lack of coordination between school- and adult-based services as youth leave secondary school [16,30,34].

3.4. Concerns about access to health and social services

Youth who receive disability benefits have access to health insurance through Medicaid primarily and to a lesser extent through Medicare. This mitigates the health care concerns faced by some low-income youth [5]. However, their access to health care may nevertheless be problematic, posing a barrier to successful transition. For example, poor quality of care, and provider discontinuities can exacerbate the problems stemming from impairments and force youth with disabilities to spend disproportionate amounts of time getting care. They may need to divert time and resources from other activities to allow them to deal with health-related problems or overcome environmental barriers [2]. When youth with disabilities want to obtain education, training, or employment, they sometimes encounter access barriers or lack of accommodations that make it more challenging for them. In some

instances youth may not be able to get training in a form that they can absorb; in others, programs may exclude youth with certain disabilities, such as severe mental retardation.

3.5. *Disincentives to work*

Youth who receive SSI or Social Security disability benefits may avoid employment or restrict their earnings so as to not jeopardize those benefits and the accompanying health insurance coverage. Those benefits may be an important source of income not just for the youth but for their families as well, so their families may discourage them from working. Hemmeter, Kauff, and Wittenburg [9] report that only 41 percent of child SSI beneficiaries have been employed at age 16 or 17. In addition to losing eligibility for disability benefits due to substantial earnings, youth may lose their benefits as a consequence of the required redetermination of their eligibility at age 18. Approximately one-third of youth SSI beneficiaries are determined ineligible for benefits as adults [15]. Fear and misconceptions about the redetermination may discourage youth from working in advance of it. In summary, young beneficiaries' decisions regarding employment, schooling, rehabilitation, and even health care may reflect their perceptions regarding what they must do to maintain their cash benefits and health insurance. Such thinking and behavior can be major barriers to successful transitions to lives as productive and independent adults.

3.6. *Lack of knowledge about how employment may affect benefits*

SSA offers SSI beneficiaries a number of work incentives, including the earned-income exclusion, which allows the first \$65 in monthly earnings plus one-half of additional earnings to be excluded from countable income, and the student earned-income exclusion, which allows students under age 22 to exclude earnings up to \$1,550 per month and \$6,240 per year. A different set of work incentives is available for Social Security disability beneficiaries. These include a trial work period of nine months during which eligibility for benefits is unaffected by earnings, and a 36-month extended period of eligibility during which individuals who are working and no longer receiving cash benefits can resume receiving cash benefits in any month without submitting a new application if their earnings fall below a threshold level. Unfortunately, few youth beneficiaries use these incentives because they either (1)

are unaware of them or (2) fear that employment would result in their losing benefits, notwithstanding the work incentives. Loprest and Wittenburg [14] found that only one in five child beneficiaries ages 14 through 17 had heard of the SSA work incentives or had discussed them with a counselor. The existence of two distinct sets of work incentives for disability beneficiaries may further add to the confusion surrounding the incentives and contribute to their underutilization.

4. **The conceptual framework for the YTD initiative**

The design for the YTD initiative is grounded in an understanding of the barriers and the existing transition environment faced by youth with disabilities. Figure 1 presents a conceptual framework for understanding the role of the YTD projects and the various intervention components in helping youth with disabilities achieve successful transition outcomes.

The YTD intervention components are designed to address the barriers described in the previous section, complementing and enhancing the youths' own transition efforts, and thereby improving their transition outcomes in both the short-term and the long-term. The YTD projects provide these service components directly to youth, as opposed to coordinating the work of other organizations. System change is not a goal of this initiative; however the intervention is being implemented in the context of the existing service environment, and the services available in the community may influence what services are offered under YTD and how they are delivered. Furthermore, the YTD projects may break down some of the institutional barriers that youth face, thereby leading the system to function for them as if the community services were better integrated.

5. **The YTD intervention components**

For the YTD evaluation, SSA was interested in testing strong interventions grounded in best practices. By identifying the barriers that youth with disabilities face and the service environments in which the YTD projects operate, the conceptual framework for the YTD initiative established the key parameters for the service components that were appropriate for the interventions. Furthermore, the components needed to be appropriate for the target population for the interventions, youth ages 14 through 25, and consistent with the

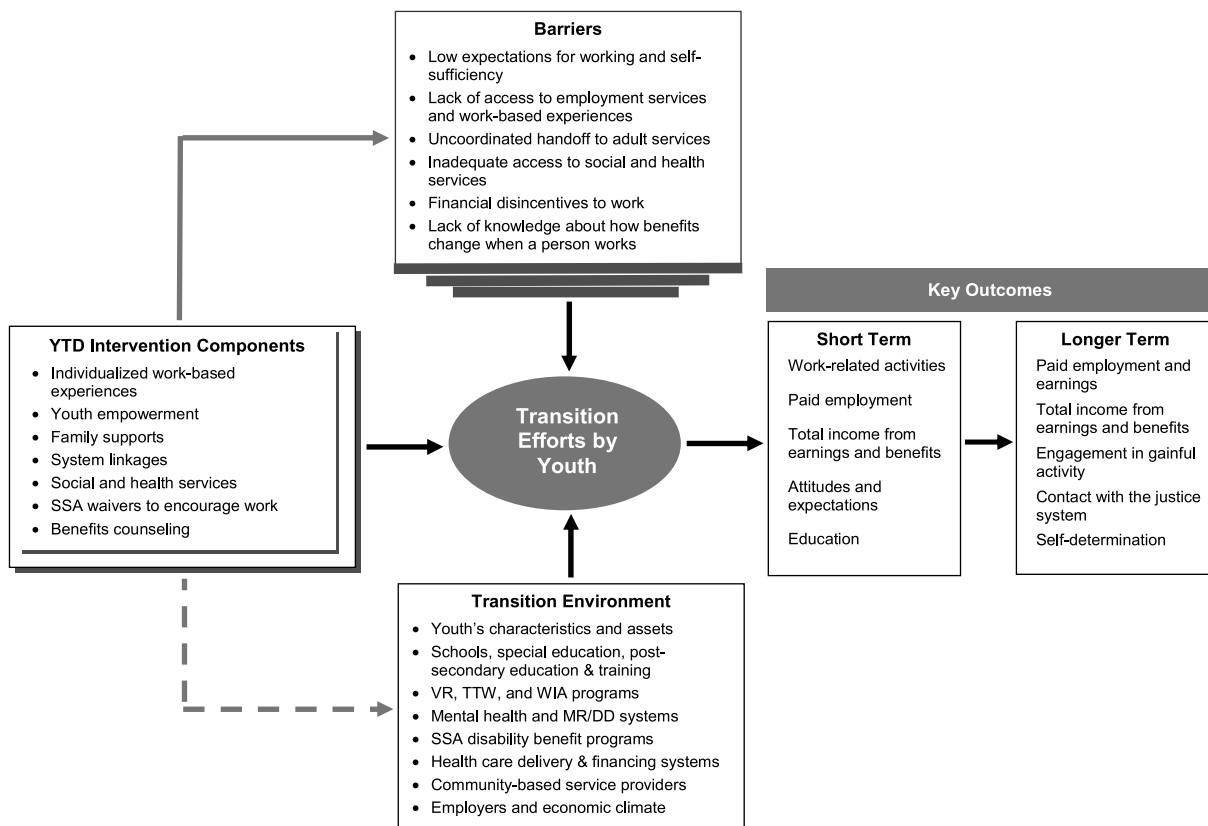


Fig. 1. Conceptual framework for SSA's youth transition demonstration projects.

relatively short four-year window that the evaluation has to observe effects on outcomes such as employment and earnings.

Keeping these parameters in mind, we drew on three sources to design the components for strong YTD interventions. First, we adopted and refined components from the standards developed by the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Y), as summarized in *Guideposts for Success* [20]. NCWD/Y developed the *Guideposts for Success* based on an extensive review of research, demonstration projects, and effective practices covering a wide range of programs and services. It represents the most comprehensive information available on “what works” in promoting successful transitions to adult life for youth with disabilities.³ Second, we incorporated SSA's waivers for YTD and the benefits counseling that youth need to understand them into our design of the intervention components. Third, we drew on lessons

from previous interventions that targeted youth, particularly youth with disabilities. From these sources we identified seven essential components of YTD interventions, which are listed in Fig. 1 and discussed below. The projects that are fully participating in the evaluation of YTD are expected to incorporate all of these components, but they may emphasize some components more than others, depending on the characteristics of the youth they are serving and on the services available in their communities. As an integral part of the evaluation, TransCen, Inc., is providing technical assistance to the YTD projects in implementing these components and integrating them into strong interventions.

5.1. Work-based experiences

Service providers and researchers have long recognized the importance of work-based experiences for transition-age youth and the contributions of these experiences to postschool employment success [1,4,17]. YTD projects can offer a range of work-based service

³For a more detailed review of intervention components for youth with disabilities, see Luecking and Wittenburg [18].

options to meet the diverse needs of their target populations, including career exploration, job shadowing, volunteer work, internships, apprenticeships, and paid employment. Experiences such as these provide youth with opportunities to learn the “soft skills” needed to succeed in the workplace, as well as specific occupational skills. They also help youth to identify their career preferences and to identify the supports and accommodations that might be essential to their long-term success in the workplace. The latter include most notably assistance in managing any social or health issues that they may have, which might affect their workplace absenteeism and performance. Of all the types of work-based experiences, the literature explicitly identifies paid work in community settings during the secondary school years as the strongest predictor of postschool employment success [20].

5.2. *Youth empowerment*

Youth empowerment refers to the acquisition of skills and knowledge by youth so that they begin to direct and advocate for their life choices. Empowerment enables youth to move from passive assent to active choice regarding education and other services based on knowledge of the benefits and disadvantages of the options available. Youth empowerment in the high school context is critical because it provides students with the opportunity to participate in, and make informed choices about, transition planning [33]. Linking the individualized education program (IEP) with youth empowerment has great potential to strengthen the impact of IEP-specified activities. Similarly, empowerment is critical in planning nonschool services, such as health care strategies and medical appointments, so that youth can make informed choices about services that may influence their employment and career directions. The YTD projects foster empowerment primarily by engaging youth in an intensive person-centered planning process. This process focuses on education, employment, health care, and independent living.

5.3. *Family supports*

The importance of family supports as a component of effective transition has gained prominence in the recent transition literature [21]. Family supports are pertinent to youth with disabilities in several contexts: (1) participation in IEP planning; (2) support for work as an intended intervention outcome; and (3) facilitation of, and participation in, ancillary social services. In

the YTD projects, family supports are especially relevant, because families necessarily play a central role in helping youth manage their disability benefits and understand the SSA work incentives and special waivers for YTD. Furthermore, because a youth's benefits may constitute a significant fraction of his or her family's income, a good understanding of the SSA work incentives and waivers is critical not just for the youth, but also for the youth's family. Rupp and Ressler [25] show that the capacity of families to support the transition efforts of their youth with disabilities varies with parental human capital. The YTD projects seek to remedy limitations in this area primarily through family-focused training activities and informational support.

5.4. *System linkages*

Research findings from earlier initiatives suggest that no one agency can “do it all;” collaborations are necessary across organizations to address the wide-ranging service needs of youth with disabilities. One type of linkage, particularly relevant to YTD, is a network of ancillary and post-secondary services closely coordinated and focused on youth with disabilities. Functional linkages among schools, adult disability services, vocational rehabilitation programs, workforce investment programs, and other human services and community agencies are necessary elements of effective transition for youth with disabilities. Effective linkages among services permit a seamless and effective transition for youth, ensuring that various supports are available and delivered without interruption.

While YTD projects are not attempting to achieve systems changes, they do need to form close relationships with relevant agencies to provide youth with appropriate transition services. For example, projects try to improve linkages through (1) the use of written and enforceable interagency agreements that structure the provision of collaborative transition services; (2) the development and delivery of interagency and cross-agency staff training opportunities; and (3) the use of interagency planning teams to facilitate and monitor capacity building efforts in transition. Because the service environment differs substantially across the communities served by the YTD projects, their potential to create these linkages varies.

5.5. *Social and health services*

Many youth with disabilities require a comprehensive array of social and health services to help them

succeed in the classroom, in the community, and on the job. The youth who are the target of the YTD interventions require employment support in the form of assistive technology devices, personal attendants, job coaches, benefits counseling, medication management, and transportation. While some of these services may be provided directly by a lead organization, often they are accessed through referrals to other organizations. All of the YTD projects have adopted a case-management approach to providing participating youth with social and health services, which facilitates coordination in a system of fragmented service providers.⁴ However, for some of the projects, the potential for this to make a meaningful difference in the services received by their participants is limited by the scarcity of local service options.

5.6. SSA waivers for YTD

A major disincentive to employment for youth with disabilities is the fear of losing cash benefits and associated medical benefits when earned income grows beyond eligibility limits. In order to mitigate this disincentive, SSA provides various types of work incentives that enable individuals to retain some of their SSI benefits while working [28]. However, recognizing that the standard work incentives may not be sufficiently attractive to encourage youth to find jobs, invest in their own human capital, and save for the future, SSA developed five waivers of program rules, which are available to a YTD participant for four years or until age 22, whichever comes later [7].⁵ Several of the waivers allow employed YTD participants to retain more of their benefits than would be possible under the standard SSI work incentives, while one waiver modifies the continuing disability review (CDR) or the age 18 medical redetermination rule, which requires that child beneficiaries have their medical eligibility for benefits redetermined at age 18. Approximately one-third of youth who have these reviews are found to be ineligible for adult benefits. Below, we describe the five SSA

wavers for YTD participants by contrasting them with the standard SSI work incentives.

- *Earned Income Exclusion (EIE)*. For SSI beneficiaries, SSA disregards \$65 of earnings per month plus half of any additional earnings when calculating countable income to determine the benefit amount.⁶ But under the EIE waiver, three-fourths of any additional earnings by YTD participants are excluded.
- *Student Earned Income Exclusion (SEIE)*. Before applying the EIE, SSA disregards a student beneficiary's earnings, subject to inflation-adjusted monthly and annual caps. Normally the SEIE applies only to students who are age 21 or younger, but for YTD participants the age limit is waived.
- *Plan for Achieving Self-Support (PASS)*. Under SSA's waivers for YTD, the allowable goals for a PASS have been expanded beyond direct employment goals to include postsecondary education and career exploration, ultimately leading to employment. Funds used to carry out a PASS are excluded from SSI countable income.
- *Individual Development Accounts (IDAs)*. Funds deposited in qualified IDAs, along with interest generated by those funds, are excluded from SSI countable income. For YTD participants, the qualification criteria have been expanded to include a wider range of savings objectives, as well as IDA's that do not receive federal matching funds.
- *Continuing Disability Review (CDR) or Age 18 Medical Redetermination*. Under existing rules for SSI and Social Security disability benefits, the effectuation of a negative CDR or age 18 medical redetermination is delayed so long as a beneficiary is participating in vocational rehabilitation or is pursuing an individualized education program (IEP) under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The SSA waivers expand the qualifying programs to include YTD, meaning that YTD participants can continue to receive SSI or Social Security benefits and Medicaid or Medicare following a negative CDR or age 18 redetermination. This is the only waiver that applies to Social Security beneficiaries as well as SSI beneficiaries.

⁴SSA's Project NetWork demonstration evaluation showed that case management can increase the earnings of SSI and Social Security disability beneficiaries, at least in short-run while services are ongoing [12].

⁵Under the experimental design for the YTD evaluation, discussed in Section 7, the SSA waivers for YTD are available only to youth who have been randomly assigned to the evaluation's treatment group and are actually participating in a YTD project. They are not available to members of the control group or to members of the treatment group who decline to participate in a YTD project.

⁶For SSI beneficiaries, the EIE is applied after the general income exclusion (GIE), which excludes the initial \$20 of monthly income from any source (earned or unearned). Thus, under standard SSI rules, a youth with no unearned income could exclude the initial \$85 of monthly earnings (\$20 under the GIE and \$65 under the EIE) plus half of any earnings in excess of \$85. Under the SSA waivers for YTD, this youth could exclude \$85 of monthly earnings plus three-fourths of earnings in excess of \$85.

5.7. *Benefits counseling*

The complexity of the work incentives under both the standard SSA program rules and the waiver provisions for YTD necessitates the provision of effective benefits counseling in order for the incentives to have their intended positive effects on the employment and earnings of youth participating in the YTD projects. Thus, benefits counseling for YTD participants and their families is a key component of the YTD intervention. The benefits counselors encourage participating youth to obtain employment and increase their earnings, to utilize all available work incentives including the SSA waivers for YTD, and to accurately report their earnings to SSA. They also coordinate with local SSA offices to make sure that the waivers are correctly applied for YTD participants.

6. **Projects participating in the evaluation**

Six promising interventions for youth with disabilities were selected in two phases to participate in the YTD random assignment evaluation. The first three projects were selected in 2006 from a group of seven YTD projects that had been initially funded by SSA in 2003. The final three projects were selected in November 2007 from among five pilot projects that had been operating for about 10 months. Despite the differences in the selection timing and process, the six random assignment YTD projects share a number of common features, including the following:

- They serve youth who are ages 14-25 years old (or a subset of this age range) at the time of enrollment and either are receiving SSI or Social Security disability benefits, or are at high risk of receiving them in the future.
- They operate at a large scale, enrolling at least 400 youth over a period of 2-1/2 years or less and serving each for a minimum of 18 months.
- They offer treatment group youth who choose to participate the full range of employment-focused intervention components described in Section 5, including the SSA waivers for YTD.
- They share the goals of improving educational outcomes, increasing employment, and reducing reliance on disability benefits.
- They directly deliver services to participating youth; coordination of services by other providers and “systems change” are secondary and tertiary concerns.

The remainder of this section describes the two-phased process by which projects were selected into the YTD random assignment evaluation and gives additional information about each of the projects.

6.1. *First-phase selection of projects*

To learn about promising approaches to increasing employment among youth with disabilities, SSA signed cooperative agreements with seven organizations in September 2003 to operate YTD projects in California, Colorado, Iowa, Maryland, Mississippi, and New York (two different projects – in the Bronx borough of New York City and in Erie County). Recognizing the importance of learning whether these projects would be successful in meeting their goals, SSA funded a study to assess the feasibility of implementing a random assignment evaluation of YTD. The study concluded that a subset of the original projects would be good prospects for a random assignment evaluation based on (1) the strengths of the interventions relative to existing services, (2) the interest of the sponsoring organization in participating in a random assignment evaluation, (3) the compatibility of the intervention designs with random assignment, and (4) the potential to enroll enough youth in the evaluation at each site for the planned statistical analyses to have sufficient power to detect reasonable-sized impacts [3]. In September 2005, SSA selected a team of contractors headed by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. to conduct the random assignment evaluation of YTD.⁷

Building on the recommendations of the feasibility study, the evaluation team visited all of the original projects to further assess which ones could be included in the random assignment study. Based on the criteria cited in the previous paragraph, the team recommended for inclusion in the random assignment evaluation the projects located in the Bronx, Colorado, and Erie County. SSA accepted these recommendations and the enrollment of youth in the evaluation commenced in August 2006 in the Bronx and in Colorado, and February 2007 in Erie County. Table 1 provides brief descriptions of these projects, focusing on the target population, key services, and sponsoring organization.

⁷MDRC, a nonprofit corporation that evaluates social welfare programs, and TransCen, Inc., a nonprofit corporation that consults on the design and implementation of transition programs for youth with disabilities, are the other members of the evaluation team.

Table 1
 Characteristics of projects participating in the YTD random assignment evaluation

Project location and name	Target population	Key project services	Lead agency
First phase projects			
Bronx Borough, NYC: <i>CUNY Youth Transition Demonstration Project</i>	SSI and Social Security disability beneficiaries ages 15–19 and their families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Person-centered planning – Benefits counseling – Vocational skills development – Recreation activities – Self-determination training – Parent-peer mentoring – Summer work experiences 	John F. Kennedy, Jr. Institute for Worker Education of the City University of New York
Colorado (4 counties): <i>Colorado Youth WINS</i>	SSI and Social Security disability beneficiaries ages 14–25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Benefits counseling – Consumer navigation – Career counseling – Individualized job development 	Colorado WIN Partners of the University of Colorado Denver
Erie Co., NY: <i>Transition WORKS</i>	SSI and Social Security disability beneficiaries ages 16–25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Self-determination training – Transition planning – Training for parents on managing paperwork – Benefits counseling – Individualized job development – Education-related services 	Erie 1 Board of Cooperative Educational Services
Second phase projects			
Miami-Dade Co., FL: <i>Broadened Horizons, Brighter Futures</i>	SSI and Social Security disability beneficiaries ages 16–22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Person-centered planning – Benefits counseling – Asset development and IDAs – Financial literacy – Life skills – Paid summer employment 	Abilities, Inc. of Florida
Montgomery Co., MD: <i>Career Transition Program</i>	Youth with severe emotional disturbances or other significant mental illnesses in their junior or senior year of high school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Self-determination training – Person-centered planning – Benefits counseling – Illness management services – Mental health linkages – Education support – Work-based experiences – Paid employment 	St. Luke's House, Inc.
West Virginia (19 counties): <i>West Virginia Youth Works</i>	SSI and Social Security disability beneficiaries ages 15–25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Person-centered planning – Benefits counseling – Work-readiness training – Work experience/job development/job placement – Family involvement – Intensive case management 	Human Resources Development Foundation, Inc.

Note: Martinez et al. [19] provide more complete descriptions of the six projects participating in the YTD random assignment evaluation.

6.2. Second-phase selection of projects

The goal of the second phase of project selection was to identify or develop three additional projects capable of providing strong services to youth with disabilities to join the evaluation, bringing the total number of projects in the evaluation up to six. We accomplished this in two steps between the fall of 2005 and the fall of 2007. The first step entailed the selection of five organizations to run YTD pilot projects. The second step was to assess the pilot operations and select three of the sponsoring organizations to fully implement their YTD interventions. To identify additional

projects, we visited many organizations and programs to (1) build a knowledge base about strong programs, (2) better understand implementation challenges, and (3) help us to identify projects for second-phase selection into the evaluation. Between December 2005 and August 2006, we identified 29 organizations that were interested in implementing transition programs to be included in the evaluation. Of these organizations, 15 submitted concept papers outlining their vision for a YTD project, including an intervention design and a plan for implementing services on a limited basis for one year. Based on the concept papers, the reputations of the sponsoring organizations, telephone interviews

with managers of the organizations, and site visits to the most promising organizations, we recommended five of these organizations to SSA to implement YTD pilot projects in 2007.

The selected projects worked closely with the evaluation team's survey group to recruit approximately 35 youth with disabilities into the pilot phase of the evaluation between April and September 2007. Approximately 25 of the recruited youth were assigned to a treatment group and 10 to a control group. Each pilot project delivered a truncated set of the YTD intervention components, not including the SSA waivers, to 20 or more of the treatment group youth between May and December 2007. TransCen, Inc., one of Mathematica's partners in the evaluation, provided the pilot projects with intensive technical assistance on the design and implementation of their interventions.

In the fall of 2007, the evaluation team conducted a thorough assessment of the pilot projects, using the following broad criteria:

- Achievement of goals for recruiting youth into the pilot study and delivering YTD services to treatment group members.
- Strong project operations, demonstrated by such factors as availability of, and ease of access to, project services and fidelity to the intervention design.
- Research-related factors such as the adequacy of the size of the target population to support the evaluation's enrollment goals and the distinctiveness of project services relative to the service environment.
- The capacity of the sponsoring organization's management to implement the intervention at the large scale required by the evaluation – serving at least 400 treatment group members over four years.

Based on the findings from that assessment, the evaluation team recommended three of the pilot projects to SSA for full implementation in January 2008 through March 2012. They are located in Miami-Dade County, Florida; Montgomery County, Maryland; and West Virginia. SSA accepted these recommendations and authorized MPR to provide funding to these projects. Table 1 provides brief descriptions of these three YTD projects, and Martinez et al. [19] provides descriptive profiles of the six YTD projects that are participating in the random assignment evaluation.

7. The YTD evaluation

SSA has contracted with Mathematica for a comprehensive evaluation of the YTD initiative, based on a rigorous experimental design. The evaluation will document the implementation of the YTD interventions and estimate their impacts on key outcome measures. Evaluation findings based on three-to-four years of follow-up data will be presented in a comprehensive final report in 2014. Findings based on data for shorter follow-up periods will be presented in a series of interim reports in 2010 through 2012. Rangarajan, Fraker et al. [7] presents the design for the YTD evaluation in detail. This section summarizes the design, focusing on the recruitment process and random assignment, sample sizes, key expected impacts, the measurement of outcomes, and analysis and reporting.

7.1. *Sample recruitment and random assignment*

Youth participating in the YTD evaluation are randomly assigned to either a treatment group, whose members are eligible for YTD services and the SSA waivers, or a control group, whose members are not eligible for either but may be eligible for other services available in their communities.⁸ Mathematica is conducting outreach to youth with disabilities with the goal of enrolling 880 of them in the evaluation in each of the six random-assignment sites. The sample frames for all of the random-assignment sites except Montgomery County, Maryland, consist of all youth who receive SSI or Social Security disability benefits. SSA limits eligibility for the evaluation to youth ages 14 through 25 at the time of their enrollment in the study, but five of the random-assignment sites have exercised their option to serve a narrow segment of this age range (see Table 1).

In the five sites where youth are recruited from SSA beneficiary lists, survey interviewers from Mathematica conduct extensive outreach to enroll youth in the study. Youth are randomly selected for recruitment from the beneficiary lists. An advance letter is sent to the selected youth, describing the intervention and inviting them to call Mathematica's toll-free number to complete a baseline interview and enroll in the evalu-

⁸In contrast to the experimental evaluations of TETD [6] and Project NetWork [12], in which some waivers of SSA program rules were available to both the treatment and control groups, the SSA waivers for YTD are available only to the treatment group. Treatment group members must actually enroll in services to qualify for the waivers.

ation. The letter may be followed by phone calls by Mathematica's survey interviewers and, infrequently, in-person visits to complete the interview and enroll the youth in the evaluation. An eligible youth is considered to be enrolled upon completing a four-step process that entails: (1) listening to a description of the random-assignment evaluation and the local YTD services, (2) completing a 35-minute baseline interview by telephone, (3) signing an informed consent form affirming the youth's decision to participate in the evaluation, and (4) returning the signed form to Mathematica.⁹ Following enrollment in the evaluation, Mathematica randomly assigns youth to treatment or control groups. Using a secure web-based management information system, Mathematica transmits baseline data and contact information on the treatment youth to the respective YTD projects so that they may contact the youth and begin serving them.

In the Montgomery County site only, eligibility for the evaluation is restricted to youth who have been classified by the Montgomery County Public School System as having severe emotional disturbances, or are known to the school system or the public mental health system to have been diagnosed with a significant mental illness. A small percentage of them receive disability benefits; the others are considered to be at high risk of receiving benefits in the future, absent effective intervention.¹⁰ Staff of the Montgomery County YTD project conduct the initial outreach to youth meeting these criteria, primarily through presentations to students in high school transition classes. Mathematica then follows up with the youth to complete the baseline interview and to randomly assign them to treatment and control groups. This site, with its unique target population, was included in the evaluation to allow a test of whether YTD services can reduce the likelihood that at-risk youth will eventually go on the disability rolls.

The enrollment periods at the evaluation sites range between 15 and 30 months. Enrollment started in the Bronx, New York, and Colorado sites in August 2006 and in the Erie County, New York, site in January 2007. It was completed in the Colorado and Erie sites in March 2008 and in September 2008 in the Bronx

site. Enrollment began in the three new evaluation sites (in Miami, West Virginia, and Montgomery County, Maryland) in March 2008 and is scheduled to be completed between April and September 2010. The YTD projects are expected to serve enrollees who have been assigned to the treatment group for at least 18 months, or until they decline further services or no longer need services.

7.2. Enrollment results for the initial random assignment sites

Enrollment in the evaluation and in YTD services and waivers has been completed at the first three random-assignment sites, so we are able to provide final statistics on the results of those efforts. In those combined sites, Mathematica randomly selected 10,994 youth from the SSI and Social Security disability rolls for outreach and recruitment into the evaluation. Twenty-four percent (2,678) of the randomly selected youth completed the four-step process described in the previous section and were formally enrolled in the evaluation. Fifty-five percent (1,478) of the enrollees were randomly assigned to a treatment group and 45 percent (1,200) to a control group. Mathematica passed contact information for the treatment group members, along with limited data on them from the baseline survey, to the three YTD projects through a secure web-based management information system.

While the overall enrollment rate in the 3 initial sites was 24 percent, the site-specific rates ranged from 19 percent in the Bronx site to 28 percent Erie site. The enrollment rate in the Colorado site was 27 percent. These enrollment rates provide us with a rough sense of what the take up rates might be if YTD-like programs were to be fully implemented in these locations, with outreach to youth conducted in a manner similar to that used in this study. They will also provide us with an opportunity to generalize the findings from our impact analysis to all YTD eligible youth in these locations. For example, if our impact analysis were to find that the Colorado YTD project increased the employment rate of evaluation enrollees by 20 percentage points, we could apply the Colorado enrollment rate of 27 percent to that impact estimate and conclude that the full roll-out of the intervention in that site would increase employment among all YTD eligible youth by 4.8 percentage points.

Once youth were enrolled into the study, the YTD projects were responsible for convincing treatment group members to participate in their interventions.

⁹ An eligible youth who is his/her own legal guardian is authorized to sign the consent form; otherwise, the youth's legal guardian is authorized to sign the form.

¹⁰ While the Montgomery County YTD project does not target SSI and Social Security disability beneficiaries, it does not exclude them. Approximately 15 percent of the first 125 youth who enrolled in the evaluation of this project were disability beneficiaries at the time of enrollment.

They conducted intensive outreach by telephone, mail, and in-person contact to provide additional information on YTD services and waivers and to obtain their signed agreement to participate in the interventions. Across the three initial random assignment projects, 83 percent (1,221) of the 1,478 treatment group members signed a participation agreement and were therefore eligible for YTD services and waivers. The treatment group members who did not sign an agreement were not eligible for YTD waivers, and did not receive any project services (similar to control group members).

This process of enrolling youth in the evaluation and in YTD services and waivers is one in which opportunities for “creaming” (choosing to enroll or serve only youth who are expected to have favorable outcomes) by the YTD projects are minimal. With the exception of the Montgomery County project, they have virtually no contact with youth prior to their enrollment in the evaluation and random assignment. Their memoranda of understanding with Mathematica require that more than 80 percent of treatment group youth actually participate in their interventions. Mathematica and SSA monitor that process closely and it is clear that the projects can attain the target enrollment rate only by aggressively pursuing virtually every treatment group member. Furthermore, even if a project did decide to expend less effort recruiting youth whom they perceive to be more challenging to serve, the evaluation design specifies that all treatment group members, even those who do not participate in the interventions and therefore receive no services or waivers, must be included in the impact analysis. This means that the limited creaming that a project might be able to engage in could not cause it to appear more effective in terms of the final impact estimates.

7.3. Characteristics of youth enrolled in the study

Not surprisingly, the characteristics of the youth enrolled in the YTD study reflect the demographic characteristics of the project sites, the characteristics of youth disability beneficiaries in general, and the specific targeting criteria of the projects. This section briefly describes the characteristics of youth who enrolled in the study in the Bronx, Colorado, and Erie sites, where enrollment has been completed.¹¹ In the Bronx site,

where the YTD project targeted younger youth, the average age of enrolled youth at the time they completed the baseline survey was about 17 years, compared with an average age of 20 to 21 years in the other two sites. More than 85 percent of the Bronx enrollees were attending school at baseline, compared with about 40 to 50 percent of enrollees in the Colorado and Erie sites. In contrast, study enrollees were more likely to have worked for pay in the year prior to the baseline survey in the Colorado and Erie sites, where the youth were older; approximately 40 to 50 percent had worked for pay in these two sites compared with about 20 percent in the Bronx site. The majority of study enrollees in all three sites were from relatively low-income families (incomes less than \$25,000 per year). Mental illness, a cognitive or developmental disability, and a learning disability or attention deficit disorder were the three most prevalent disabling conditions recorded for the study enrollees in the SSA administrative files, with approximately 80 to 90 percent of the youth across the three sites having one of these recorded as their primary disabling condition.

7.4. Anticipated impacts of the YTD initiative

The YTD initiative is designed to improve outcomes for youth with disabilities by reducing the barriers they face in transitioning from school to work. Employment-focused services and waivers of selected SSA program rules are expected to encourage youth to work, continue their educations, and improve other outcomes. The anticipated increase in employment notwithstanding, we do not expect to find reductions on the receipt of disability benefits during the evaluation's four-year follow-up data collection period. This is because the SSA waivers for the initiative, particularly the more generous work incentives and the delay in the effectuation of a negative CDR or age 18 redetermination, allow YTD participants to retain their benefits longer and at higher levels of earnings. However, we do anticipate that many participating youth will make progress toward the goal of eventually leaving the rolls through employment.

7.4.1. Short-term impacts

During the initial year that youth participate in the YTD interventions, we expect to observe beneficial impacts on a number of outcomes. These are identified in the conceptual framework for the YTD initiative (Fig. 1) and are summarized in the top half of Table 2. Given the strong employment focus of the

¹¹The statistics presented in this section are for youth who enrolled in the evaluation and were randomly assigned to either a treatment group or a control group. The statistics are for all treatment group members, without regard for whether they participated in YTD services and waivers, and all control group members, combined.

Table 2
Outcomes measures for the YTD evaluation

Short-term (1 year) outcome measures	
Work-related activities	Any employment-focused service or activity during the year following enrollment in the YTD evaluation, including help preparing a resume or finding a job, volunteer work, internships, job coaching, etc.
Paid employment	Employment in a paid job any time during the year following enrollment; percentage of months employed during the year
Total income	The youth's total income from earnings and benefits during the year following enrollment.
Attitudes and expectations	Composite measure of attitudes and expectations for future education, employment, and independent living
Education	Composite measure of perseverance in education (staying in high school) and educational attainment (high school completion)
Longer-term (3–4 years) outcome measures	
Employment and earnings	The intensity of paid employment during the preceding year, as indicated by the percentage of months employed and/or total earnings
Total income	The youth's total income from earnings and benefits during the preceding year
Gainful activity	Engagement in paid or unpaid employment or participation in an education or training program during the preceding year
Contact with the justice system	Any contact with the juvenile or criminal justice systems since enrollment in the evaluation
Self-determination	Composite measure of independence in decision making and daily activities

YTD interventions, we anticipate that that they will result in greater participation by youth with disabilities in work-related activities such as career exploration and internships. These experiences, combined with individualized job development and job placement services provided by the interventions, should result in a higher rate of paid employment during the initial year. Because the SSA waivers for YTD allow youth with earnings to retain more of their disability benefits and also allow youth with negative CDR outcomes to continue receiving benefits, we anticipate a positive impact on total income – earnings plus benefits. The youth-empowerment and family support components of the YTD interventions will engender self-confidence and positive attitudes among YTD participants, leading them to have higher expectations for education, employment, and independent living. Finally, the YTD interventions encourage and assist participants to remain in high school; consequently, we anticipate positive impacts on high school perseverance and graduation during the initial year following program entry.

7.4.2. Longer-term impacts

It may take several years or even longer for the impacts of the YTD interventions to be manifested on a number of key outcomes. This is because (a) it may take that long for participating youth to receive the full complement of intervention services, (b) some of the youth targeted by YTD are too young to exhibit certain outcomes without the passage of a significant amount of time, and (c) several critical outcome measures for the YTD evaluation naturally unfold over long time horizons. The bottom half of Table 2 summarizes the

outcomes on which the YTD interventions may have longer-term impacts which, for the purpose of this discussion we define to be three-to-four years after program entry.

In the longer-term, as in the short-term, the YTD interventions are expected to increase the rate of paid employment among youth with disabilities. The persistence of this employment differential over time would imply more accumulated work experience by YTD participants, which should eventually be manifested in higher earnings. The higher earnings, combined with the SSA waivers for YTD, would result in greater total income for YTD participants. All of the YTD interventions provide support for youth to complete high school and to participate in post-secondary education and training programs in addition to obtaining and maintaining paid employment. Consequently, we expect the YTD interventions to have positive impacts on youth engagement in gainful activity in the longer-term, with gainful activity being defined as either employment or participation in education and training programs. If the YTD interventions do result in higher incomes from earnings and benefits and greater participation in gainful activities, then we might expect them to reduce contact with the juvenile and criminal justice systems. The societal and economic implications of this are potentially large, given the high rates of contact with the justice system by youth with disabilities (Loprest and Wittenburg 2007). Finally, the youth empowerment component of the YTD interventions, combined with greater competency achieved through employment, are expected to improve youths' sense of self-determination, which we will assess using a com-

posite measure of independence in decision making and daily activities.

7.4.3. *Impacts further out on the time horizon*

Mathematica's contract with SSA for the YTD evaluation does not currently provide for the estimation of impacts beyond a four-year time horizon. However, the SSA waivers for YTD are so generous that we do not anticipate the interventions to reduce disability program participation and benefit amounts while they are in effect, which for most YTD participants will be a minimum of four years. Just one of the waivers, the expansion of the EIE from 50 cents for each dollar of earned income above the initial disregard to 75 cents could require earnings to nearly double for treatment group member before a negative impact on SSI benefits would be manifested.¹² The delay in the effectuation of negative CDR outcomes provides an even more compelling reason to expect that the YTD interventions will not reduce dependence on disability benefits during the evaluation's follow-up period. Past history suggests that approximately one-fourth of youth participating in the YTD interventions will retain their benefits until the waivers end when they otherwise would have lost eligibility for them as a consequence of a negative redetermination. Thus, even if the interventions were quite successful at increasing earnings during the four-year follow-up period, we would most likely find positive impacts on program participation and benefits during that period. However, assuming that the interventions do increase earnings, we would expect them to have negative impacts on program participation and benefits after the waivers end. In order to be able to detect those effects, the follow-up period for estimating those impacts would have to be extended, as was done for both the TETD and Project NetWork evaluations. Ten years

following random assignment should be sufficient time to allow impacts on program participation and benefits to emerge. Extended follow-up data on these outcomes, as well as annual earnings, could be obtained relatively inexpensively from SSA files.

7.5. *Measurement of outcomes*

Outcome measures for the YTD evaluation will be obtained from follow-up surveys of youth and from automated government administrative records. Mathematica will conduct two post-baseline interviews with enrolled youth, one year and three years after random assignment. These interviews will gather information that we will use to construct the key outcome measures for analyzing the short-term and longer-term impacts of the YTD interventions. They will also be the basis for a wider range of measures that we will use to supplement and extend the analysis of impacts on core outcomes, such as attitudes toward work, leisure activities, independent living, job characteristics, marital status, health status, and quality of life.

Mathematica will obtain administrative data from automated files maintained by SSA and other federal and state government agencies. We will use these data primarily to track selected outcomes for evaluation enrollees for up to 48 months after random assignment. The administrative data will also supplement the baseline survey as a source of enrollee characteristics for use as control variables in the estimation of YTD impacts. The four principal types of administrative data that we will collect are: (1) SSI and Social Security disability program records; (2) SSA earnings records; (3) student records maintained by school districts; and (4) other administrative records, such as CMS paid claims records and Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA)-911 records on participation in Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services.

We will gather data from disability program records, SSA earnings records, and Medicaid and Medicare paid claims records for YTD evaluation enrollees in all the random assignment sites. However, we will gather data from school records for only a subset of the sites, where the structure and objectives of the YTD projects are such that educational outcomes are critical. Similarly, we will gather RSA data only for evaluation enrollees in those sites where the YTD projects have close links with VR agencies or are expected to strongly influence participation in VR services.

¹²Consider a hypothetical SSI beneficiary who earns \$600 per month, has no unearned income (other than the SSI benefit), and is a YTD control group member. Applying the \$20 general income exclusion, the \$65 fixed component of the EIE, and the 50 cents per dollar variable component of the EIE, this youth has countable SSI income of \$257.50 per month: $\$600 - \$20 - \$65 - 0.5 * (\$600 - \$20 - \$65) = \$257.50$. Now consider a hypothetical YTD treatment group member who earns \$1,115 per month and has no unearned income. Applying the general income exclusion, the fixed component of the EIE, and the 75 cents per dollar variable component of the EIE under the SSA waivers, this youth also has countable SSI income of \$257.50 per month: $\$1,115 - \$20 - \$65 - .75 * (\$1,115 - \$20 - \$65) = \$257.50$. The treatment group member's earnings are 86 percent larger than those of the control group member; but, due to the EIE waiver under YTD, their countable income is identical and they qualify for the same SSI benefit.

7.6. Analysis and reporting

The analysis of impacts of the YTD interventions on outcomes measured through follow-up surveys and administrative records will be a key component of the comprehensive YTD evaluation that will also include a process analysis and a cost analysis. The impact analysis will examine the differences that the YTD projects make in such key outcomes as employment and earnings, total income, self-determination, and contact with the justice system. We anticipate that the impact analysis will be conducted primarily on data for individual YTD projects, as opposed to pooled data for multiple projects.

Our basic methodology for estimating the impact of YTD on an outcome measure will be to compare the mean value of the outcome for treatment group members with the mean value for control group members.¹³ The difference between the two means will be the estimated impact of YTD on the outcome. We will conduct a statistical test to determine whether the estimated impact (i.e., the difference in mean values) is significantly different from zero. Two features of this estimation methodology should be noted:

1. An impact estimate will capture the combined effect of YTD services and the SSA waivers. Because services and waivers are offered to treatment group members only as a combined package, there is no way within the current random assignment design for this evaluation, to confidently disentangle the effect of the services from the effect of the waivers.¹⁴
2. An impact estimate will reflect the net effect of YTD; that is, the contribution of YTD to youth

outcomes over and above what they would have been in the absence of the intervention. To illustrate, consider monthly earnings 3 years after random assignment in two hypothetical YTD sites. In Site A, the mean value of earnings is \$700 for treatment group members and \$300 for control group members. In Site B, it is \$1,200 for treatment group members and \$800 for control group members. The gross outcome for treatment group members is very different between these two sites (\$700 versus \$1,200); however, the estimated net effect of YTD is identical at \$400.

The process analysis will document the nature of each YTD project, including how services are delivered, the extent to which services and the SSA waivers are used, and the implementation challenges and successes. The cost analysis will provide a comprehensive documentation of the costs of implementing the YTD projects. The evaluation team will also fully develop a methodology for a benefit-cost analysis of the YTD projects. However, that methodology will not be applied until after the end of Mathematica's evaluation contract in 2014. SSA and the evaluation team have concluded that the benefits of the YTD projects are likely to be realized over a long time-frame; consequently, a benefit-cost analysis conducted prior to 2014 would not provide a balanced perspective on the cost-effectiveness of the interventions.

The YTD evaluation will produce many reports over the period 2009–2014 that will inform SSA and the disability research and policy communities of the design for the evaluation and the findings from its major analytic components. Here we highlight several of those reports. A 2009 report provides a comprehensive design for the YTD evaluation covering all of its major data collection activities and analytic components [22]. From 2010 through 2012, we will produce a series of six project-specific reports on the analysis of YTD impacts 12 months after random assignment, as well as findings from the process analysis of data gathered from several sources including site visits to the random assignment projects. Another series of site-specific reports in 2011 through 2013 will present estimates of YTD impacts two years after random assignment. These estimates will cover a limited set of outcomes, primarily earnings and benefits, which are captured in SSA administrative files.

The evaluation's comprehensive final report in 2014 will present findings from the major components of the evaluation for the six random assignment projects. The impact estimates in this report will be based on data

¹³In addition to estimating the impact of YTD by comparing the treatment-control difference in the simple mean value of an outcome measure, as discussed in the text, we will compare the regression-adjusted mean value for the two groups. By imbedding the impact estimate in a regression model that controls for baseline characteristics of evaluation enrollees, we can improve the statistical precision of the impact estimate, although it should be noted that both methodologies yield an unbiased estimate.

¹⁴An alternative evaluation design could, in principle, have been used to disentangle the effects of the SSA waivers from the effects of YTD services. This would have required the creation of three random assignment groups for each YTD project: (1) a treatment group that would be offered only YTD services, (2) another treatment group that would be offered YTD services and the SSA waivers, and (3) a control group that would be offered neither services nor waivers. This alternative design would have required larger numbers of evaluation enrollees in each project site and would have been significantly more challenging to implement.

from the evaluation's 36-month follow-up survey and up to 48 months of administrative data. Findings from the process analysis that will have been previously presented in project-specific interim reports will be consolidated in this report. In one stand-alone document, the comprehensive final report will describe the project interventions, the evaluation design, the key research findings, and the implications of the YTD evaluation for policies affecting youth with disabilities.

8. Summary and conclusion

Interventions designed to reduce the likelihood that youth with disabilities will experience lifetime dependence on SSI or Social Security disability benefits have the potential to yield large net benefits for the young people themselves, for SSA, and for society as a whole. Through its YTD initiative, SSA is funding and rigorously evaluating employment-focused interventions for youth in six sites across the country. The interventions consist of enhanced SSA work incentives and individualized employment services and benefits planning. The evaluation's experimental design, which entails the random assignment of approximately 880 youth in each site to treatment or control groups, will produce strong empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of the YTD interventions. Final findings from the evaluation will be presented in a comprehensive report in 2014. They will provide a solid research basis for federal policy makers, funders of transition services, advocacy groups, and other stakeholders to decide whether to broadly implement YTD-like programs for youth with disabilities.

Acknowledgements

The research described in this paper was funded by a contract from the Social Security Administration (number SS00-05-60084) with Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the Social Security Administration. Nor does the mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the Social Security Administration.

References

- [1] M. Benz, P. Yovanoff and B. Doren. School-to-Work Components That Predict Postschool Success for Students with and Without Disabilities, *Exceptional Children* **63**(2) (1997), 155–165.
- [2] C.L. Betz and G. Redcay, An Exploratory Study of Future Plans and Extracurricular Activities of Transition-Age Youth and Young Adults, *Issues in Comprehensive Pediatric Nursing* **28**(1) (2005), 33–61.
- [3] D. Butler, A. LeBlanc, J. Martinez, K. Martinson and J. Anderson, Recommendation for the National Evaluation of the Youth Transition Demonstration, in: *Improving Employment Outcomes of youth with Disabilities: Learning from the Youth Transition Demonstration Innovations*, T.M. Gallagher, ed., Final Technical Report, Disability Research Institute, College of Applied Life Studies, Champaign, IL: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2004.
- [4] D.A. Colley and D. Jamison, Post School Results for Youth with Disabilities: Key Indicators and Policy Implications. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals* **21** (1998), 145–160.
- [5] A. DeCesaro and J. Hemmeter, Unmet Health Care Needs and Medical Out-of-Pocket Expenses of SSI Children, *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation* **30**(3) (2009), 177–199.
- [6] P.T. Decker and C. Thornton, Long-Term Effects of Transitional Employment Services, *Social Security Bulletin* **58**(4) (1995), 71–81.
- [7] *Federal Register* **73**(50) (2008), 13601–13603.
- [8] M. Hill, Advancing Self-Determination and Standard of Living through Increased Self-Support, Expert Management of Resources, and Personal Financial Investment and Growth, WorkWORLD Decision Support, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2002. Available at www.bus.vcu.edu/esd/selfdetermine.html.
- [9] J. Hemmeter, J. Kauff and D. Wittenburg, Changing Circumstances: Experiences of Child SSI Recipients Before and After Their Age-18 Redetermination for Adult Benefits, *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation* **30**(3) (2009), 201–221.
- [10] K.L. Hughes and M.M. Karp, School-based Career Development: A Synthesis of the Literature, (2004). Available at http://www.tc.columbia.edu/iee/papers/Career_Development_02_04.pdf.
- [11] S. Kerachsky and C. Thornton, Findings from the STETS Transitional Employment Demonstration, *Exceptional Children* **53**(6) (1987), 515–521.
- [12] Kornfeld, Robert and K. Rupp, The Net Effects of the Project NetWork Return-to-Work Case Management Experiment on Participant Earnings, Benefit Receipt, and Other Outcomes, *Social Security Bulletin* **63**(1) (2000), 12–33.
- [13] R.T. Lapan, N.C. Gysbers and Y. Sun, The Impact of More Fully Implemented Guidance Programs on the School Experiences of High School Students: A Statewide Evaluation Study, *Journal of Counseling and Development* **75** (1997), 292–302.
- [14] P. Loprest and D. Wittenburg, Choices, Challenges, and Options: Child SSI Recipients Preparing for the Transition to Adult Life, Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2005.
- [15] P. Loprest and D. Wittenburg, Post-Transition Experiences of Former Child SSI Recipients, *Social Service Review* **4** (2007), 583–608.
- [16] R.G. Luecking and N.J. Certo, Integrating Service Systems at the Point of Transition for Youth with Significant Support Needs, *American Rehabilitation* (autumn 2003), 2–9.

- [17] R. Luecking and E. Fabian, Paid Internships and Employment Success for Youth in Transition, *Career Development for Exceptional Children* **23**(2) (2000), 205–221.
- [18] R. Luecking and D. Wittenburg, Providing Supports to Youth with Disabilities Transitioning to Adulthood: Case Descriptions from the Youth Transition Demonstration, *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation* **30**(3) (2009), 241–251.
- [19] J. Martinez, M. Scott, P. Baird, T. Fraker, T. Honeycutt, A. Mamun, B. O'Day and A. Rangarajan, The Youth Transition Demonstration Project: Profiles of the Demonstration Projects. Report prepared for the Social Security Administration. Washington, DC: Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. (December 2008). Available at: http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/publications/PDFs/SSA_YTD.pdf.
- [20] National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth. Guideposts for Success. Washington, DC: Institute on Educational Leadership, 2005.
- [21] L. Newman, Changes in Postsecondary Education Participation of Youth with Disabilities, in: *Changes Over Time in the Early Postschool Outcomes of Youth with Disabilities*, M. Wagner, L. Newman, R. Cameto and P. Levine, eds, Report prepared for the U.S. Department of Education. Menlo Park, CA: SRI International, 2005.
- [22] A. Rangarajan, T. Fraker, T. Honeycutt, A. Mamun, J. Martinez, B. O'Day and D. Wittenburg, SSA's Youth Transition Demonstration Projects: Evaluation Design Report, Report prepared for the Social Security Administration. Princeton, NJ: Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., 2009. Available at: http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/publications/PDFs/disability/SSA_YTDDesignRpt09.pdf.
- [23] K. Rupp and S.H. Bell, Provider Incentives and Access in the Ticket-to-Work Program: Implications of Simulations Based on the Project NetWork Field Experiment, in: *Paying for Results in Vocational Rehabilitation: Will Provider Incentives Work for Ticket to Work?*, K. Rupp and S.H. Bell, eds, Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press, 2003.
- [24] K. Rupp and C.G. Scott, Trends in the Characteristics of DI and SSI Disability Awardees and Duration of Program Participation, *Social Security Bulletin* **59**(1) (1996), 3–22.
- [25] K. Rupp and S. Ressler, Family Caregiving and Employment among Parents of Children with Disabilities on SSI, *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation* **30**(3) (2009), 153–175.
- [26] Social Security Administration, Annual Statistical Supplement to the Social Security Bulletin. Publication No. 13-11700. Washington, DC: SSA (2008a), tables 5.A1.2 and 5.A1.4. Available at <http://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/statcomps/supplement/2007/>.
- [27] Social Security Administration, SSI Annual Statistical Report, 2007. Publication No. 13-11827. Washington, DC: SSA (2008b), table 34. Available at http://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/statcomps/ssi_asr/2007/.
- [28] Social Security Administration, 2008 Red Book. Washington, DC: SSA (2008c). Available at <http://www.ssa.gov/redbook/>.
- [29] C. Thornton, The Adequacy of Ticket to Work Payments for Hard-to-Serve Beneficiaries: Three Additional Lessons from the Literature, in: *Paying for Results in Vocational Rehabilitation: Will Provider Incentives Work for Ticket to Work?* K. Rupp and S.H. Bell, eds, Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press, 2003.
- [30] U.S. Government Accountability Office, Summary of a GAO Conference: Helping California Youths with Disabilities Transition to Work or Postsecondary Education. Publication No. GAO-06-759SP. Washington, DC: GAO, 2006.
- [31] G. Valentine and T. Skelton, Re-defining 'Norms': D/deaf Young People's Transitions to Independence, *Sociological Review* **55**(1) (2007), 104–123.
- [32] P. Wehman, D. Mank, M. Callahan, L. Obermayer, L. Sheehan, P. Rogan, F. Dominquez, B. LeRoy, J. Luna, A. Merkle, K. McCary, M. West, J. Kregel, R. Cooper, R. Doyle, K. McGill, L. Burk, R. Clabby, C. Griffin, D. Dutton, C. Thoma and P. Bates, Employment, Productive Life Roles and Income Maintenance...Draft report, 2002.
- [33] M.L. Wehmeyer and S.B. Palmer, Adult Outcomes for Students with Cognitive Disabilities Three Years After High School: The Impact of Self-Determination, *Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities* **38** (2003), 131–144.
- [34] D. Wittenburg, T. Golden and M. Fishman, Transition Options for Youth with Disabilities: An Overview of the Programs and Policies That Affect the Transition from School, *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation* **17** (2002), 195–206.
- [35] D. Wittenburg and P. Loprest, Early Transition Experiences of Transition-Age Child SSI Recipients: New Evidence from the National Survey of Children and Families, *Journal of Disability Policy Studies* **18**(3) (2007), 176–187.