Work and Self-Sufficiency in Southern Illinois:

Impact Findings from the Rural Welfare-to-Work
Strategies Demonstration Evaluation

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National Association for Welfare Research and Statistics
August 29, 2005
Rural Context

- Fewer good jobs available
- Scarcity of essential support services
- Barriers of geography
- Compact social networks
Rural WtW Strategies
Demonstration Evaluation

- Build knowledge base about rural programs
- Evaluate promising programs in several states using random assignment methods:
  - Illinois – employment-focused case management
  - Nebraska – pre-employment education
  - Tennessee – car loans
Illinois Future Steps Program

- Individualized case management with employment assistance and supportive service payments
- Community college/welfare agency partnership
- Career specialists (one per county) with small caseloads
- Mandatory and voluntary participants (TANF and Food Stamps)
Why Test Case Management in a Rural Context?

- Not yet tested in rural areas
- Viewed as potentially effective because:
  - Scarcity of jobs and services
  - Strong staff connections
  - Small caseloads
Research Questions

- Program implementation and costs?
- Effects on employment and earnings, welfare dependence, and well-being?
- Implications and lessons?
Evaluation Methods

- Experimental design (313 Ts, 317 Cs)
- 18-month follow-up telephone survey
- Administrative records
- Program service use and participation data
- Site visits, focus groups, and expenditure records
Core Model Implemented Largely as Intended

- Participation over a 16-month period, on average, with 25 service contacts and 3 to 4 service payments
- Variation in intensity of services received
- Job search, job placement assistance, and logistical support most common
- Local connections important
- Total cost per participant = $2,901
More Program Group Members Received Employment and Training Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Program Group</th>
<th>Control Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Any Employment-Related Assistance</td>
<td>47***</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Search/Job Placement Assistance</td>
<td>38***</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Readiness Training</td>
<td>22**</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work-Related Counseling</td>
<td>11***</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any Education or Training</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Based on 18-month follow-up survey.
Note: Estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods and data were weighted to account for survey nonresponse.
**/*** Significantly different from zero at the .05/.025/.01 level, one-tailed test.
More Program Group Members Received Supportive Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Program Group</th>
<th>Control Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Help Paying for Child Care</td>
<td>33**</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help Paying for Transportation</td>
<td>30***</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help Paying for Job-Related Clothing, Tools, Supplies</td>
<td>34***</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health-Related Services</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Skills Training</td>
<td>14*</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediation</td>
<td>8***</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Based on 18-month follow-up survey.

Note: Estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods and data were weighted to account for survey nonresponse.

**/***/* Significantly different from zero at the .05/.025/.01 level, one-tailed test.
Important Implementation Weaknesses

- Operations weakened during second half of demo
- Logistical support under-utilized
- Employer-focused job training and job development did not materialize
No Evidence that Future Steps Improved Employment and Earnings

Source: Based on RWtW 18-Month Follow-up Survey.
Note: Estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods and data were weighted to account for survey nonresponse.
**/*** Significantly different from zero at the .05/.025/.01 level, one-tailed test.
No Evidence that Future Steps Reduced Welfare Dependence

Note: Estimates were adjusted using multivariate regression methods and data were weighted to account for survey nonresponse. Significantly different from zero at the .05/.025/.01 level, one tailed test.

Source: Based on RWiW 18-Month Follow-up Survey and administrative records data.

Percentage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Program Group</th>
<th>Control Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ever Received TANF</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received at 18-Month</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received Food Stamps</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received Food Stamps at 18-Month Follow-up</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Design Lessons for Rural Programs

- Basic, employment-focused case management not likely to be an adequate intervention
- Employer linkages and job development are challenging, but may take on added importance
- Improvements in service capacity may be needed
Implementation Lessons for Rural Programs

- Well-established partner organizations provide credibility, reduce stigma, and offer resources
- Staff connections and initiative are important
- Careful training, oversight, and ongoing support are essential for staff in dispersed areas
- Performance incentives may help programs stay focused on objectives over time
Addressing Constraints of Scale: Demonstration Issues

- Improve power to detect impacts by testing a single model in multiple sites
- Strengthen implementation through more frequent and intensive on-site monitoring and assistance
Rural WtW Strategies
Demonstration Evaluation

For more information

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