

THE PROMOTOR PATHWAY: SUPPORTING DISCONNECTED YOUTH FOR A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD



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KEY MESSAGES:

- Disconnected youth face multiple challenges preventing them from making a successful transition to adulthood. The Promotor Pathway program of Latin America Youth Center addresses these challenges through long-term, intensive, and holistic case management.
- Results from a five year evaluation suggest that the intervention has positive effects on birth rates, school enrollment, and housing stability (prevention of homelessness), among others.

Introduction

Approximately 17,400 young adults aged 18 – 24 in the Washington Metropolitan Area are considered as disconnected from work and school¹. These youth are often from low-income families. They are not in school and out of work. They typically face multiple challenges, including homelessness, issues with the courts, or substance abuse. These challenges prevent them from successfully transitioning into adulthood.

This brief discusses an approach used by the Latin American Youth Center's (LAYC) approach to address the needs of this "high risk" population. The Promotor² Pathway is a long-term, intensive, holistic case management and mentorship intervention. Data from a five year randomized controlled trial (RCT) evaluation suggest that the program has led to positive changes in school enrollment, birth rates, and homelessness.

¹ Ross, M., Prchal Svajlenka, N. (2015). *Education, employment and income for young adults in the Washington Region*.

² Promotor is a Spanish term describing a Community Organizer.

Box 1: District of Columbia Education Series Primer

Why a series of briefs on innovations in education in the District of Columbia? While much of the work of the Education Practice at the World Bank focuses on low and middle income countries, insights from innovations in OECD countries can also be highly valuable when thinking about education policy. This series focuses on innovative programs in Washington, DC.

What are the topics discussed in the series? The series looks at a number of innovative programs related among others to the curriculum, student learning, tutoring, and skills for the labor market. Private provision through charter schools is also discussed. Many of the programs have received support from the World Bank Community Connections or individual Bank staff.

What are the questions asked in this note? The question is: How does the Promotor Pathway program of LAYC work and what had been the impact of the program on beneficiaries?

How is the question answered? After a brief discussion of how the program works in order to provide services to "disconnected" youth facing multiple challenges including for schooling and work, results from a randomized impact evaluation are shared.

The Promotor Pathway in intervention is designed to address the needs of youth facing the highest risks

Services available to older, disconnected youth are often scarce and fragmented³. Fragmented and short-term services are unlikely to address the multiple needs of disconnected youth, or lead to sustainable, positive change in their life. As a response, LAYC created the Promotor Pathway, a long-term, intensive client management model designed specifically for a sub-set of youth who face the greatest life challenges, such as homelessness, trauma, substance abuse or court involvement. The goal is to help disconnected youth make a successful transition to adulthood and reconnect them to their families and their community.

Fragmented and short-term services are unlikely to address the multiple needs of “high risk” youth. The Promotor Pathway program is a long-term, intensive client management model targeting youth who face great life challenges such as homelessness, trauma, substance abuse or court involvement. Only youth with such critical risk factors are eligible to be matched with a Promotor.

The Promotor Pathway program targets youth between the ages of 16 and 24 who face the most challenging obstacles in their life or have the highest risks. Upon entry into the program, youth must not be more than 22 years old so that they can be helped for at least two years.

Youth are required to complete a risk screening assessment to determine eligibility to the program. The risk screening assessment consist of 30 yes/no questions related to education level, housing situation, substance abuse, mental health issues, and criminal justice involvement, amongst others. These questions are meant to determine a youth’s level of risk and need for services. Each question on the assessment is weighted. The scoring system allows LAYC to identify youth with the greatest needs. Those individuals are then eligible to be matched with a Promotor. Only youth with critical needs – such as those being homeless – or multiple risk factors are eligible for participation in the program.

Table 1 presents a summary of the main risk factors faced by youth who applied to the Promotor Pathway Model. Most participants are low income. Many have challenges related to a disability of a mental health diagnostic, and many have also exhibited behaviors that put them and their communities at high risk.

³ Treskon, L., (2016), *What Works for Disconnected Young People: A Scan of the Evidence*. MDRC Working Paper.

Table 1: Participant Risk Factors and Behaviors

Risk factor	Percent reporting risk factor
Receives food stamps (SNAP)	40%
Doesn't get enough to eat	21%
Doesn't regularly sleep in the same home	22%
Slept in shelter in last 6 months	14%
Has been in the foster care system	14%
Has a learning disability	24%
Has received a mental health diagnosis	21%
Has self-injured and required medical attention	15%
Arrested, ever	23%
Stopped or picked up by the police, past 12 months	20%
In a physical fight, past 12 months	16%
Carried a weapon, past 4 weeks	14%
Sold marijuana, past 12 months	6%
Sold hard drugs, past 12 months	3%
Sprayed graffiti/damaged property	4%
Stole/attempted to steal item >\$50	8%
Broke into building (or attempted to)	3%
Member of a crew or gang	6%
Binge drank, past 4 weeks	24%
Used marijuana, past 4 weeks	25%
Used other drugs, past 4 weeks	4%

Source: Theodos, B., Pergamit, M., et al. (2016).

The central component of the Promotor Pathway program is the relationship youth develop with their Promotor.

The Promotor Pathway intervention rests on the theory that a positive relationship with a caring adult is a critical factor in helping youth flourish, reach their goals, and become productive adults⁴.

Promotores act as mentors, case managers, community health workers, and advocates, connecting youth to the resources and services that will make the greatest difference in their lives. Promotores are highly trained, staff members who are required to have at least four years of experience in youth development and extensive knowledge of community resources.

The Promotor Pathway model rests on the theory that a positive relationship with a caring adult is a critical factor in helping youth flourish and become productive adults.

The specificities of the intervention are as follows:

- **Long-term:** Promotores are expected to create and maintain relationships with each youth they work with for an extended period of time, usually between two and six years.

⁴ Murphey, D., Bandy, T., Schmitz, H., Moore, K., (2013). *Caring Adults: Important for positive child well-being*. Research Brief #2013-54, Child Trends.

- **Intensive:** Promotores are expected to meet regularly with youth, at least twice a month on average, over the duration of the program. Promotores are expected to use all forms of social media to maintain contact with the youth and must be available for the youth at all times, including 24/7 cell phone access.
- **Holistic:** Promotores are expected to continually assess a youth's situation and needs, and to respond to those needs, either directly, or through connection to relevant external services.

It is the goal of the Promotor to eliminate as many barriers in a youth's life as possible, work alongside them through every services they receive, and act as a resource when the youth is experiencing a crisis. Based on a youth's needs, Promotores provide referrals to relevant services. In addition to providing referrals, Promotores help youth work toward their goals and address challenges in their lives. For example, they may help youth create a resume, complete job applications, practice interview skills, select schools to attend, or show up for court dates.

In addition to meeting with the youth, Promotores also meet with any other individuals who play a large role in the life of the youth. The Promotor may meet with the youth's parents, teachers, counselors, probation officer, significant others/partners, or anyone else involved.

The impact of the program has been assessed through a five year randomized controlled trial.

In order to isolate the effect of the program from any confounding factor, individuals eligible for the intervention were randomly assigned to one of two groups. The treatment group consisted of youth is matched with a Promotor. The control group consisted of youth not matched with a Promotor. Randomization ensured that the treatment and control groups were statistically equivalent before participation in the program. As a result, any differences observed can be presumed to be caused only by their participation in the Promotor Pathway.

For the random assignment, between April 2010 and February 2013 youth determined eligible and willing to participate in the program were randomly assigned to either the treatment group or the control group. This was typically done within one week of completing the baseline survey. Those assigned to the control group were not permitted to enroll in the Promotor Pathway, but could still access other LAYC services on their own. The fact that the demand for services exceeded the capacity of LAYC to provide services through the program to all eligible youth was utilized for designing the evaluation with random assignment.

Box 2: Data collection

To document and compare outcomes for study participants, participating youth completed a survey at baseline, with additional surveys completed after six months, 12 months, and 18 months. The survey tracked the following outcomes:

Intermediate and short-term outcomes: increased adult support, interaction with positive peers, healthy recreational activities like sports and community service, and reduced involvement in negative behaviors such as substance abuse and illegal activities.

Long-term outcomes: increased levels of employment, education, and stable housing.

Program mediators: those aspects of the Promotor Pathway that may lead to positive change, including adequate program exposure and participation in services, strong relationships with Promotores and other program staff.

Youth engaged in the Promotor Pathway program were more likely to receive additional services, and the evaluation suggests positive effects on birth rates, school enrollment, and housing stability.

One of the program main short term goal is to connect youth to relevant service providers, depending on each youth specific needs and situation. Youth enrolled in the Pathway were more likely to receive additional services such as mental health and substance use counseling, help finding housing, help with legal services, and help getting public assistance (see the data in table 2).

Table 2: Service received in 18 months (%)

	Con-trol	Treat-ment	Diff.
Received services, if needed			
Medical check-up	84.60	85.20	0.60
Medical care for illness	78.10	79.50	1.30
Reproductive health services	80.00	86.20	6.20
Dental care	75.80	73.90	-1.90
Mental health counseling	46.70	68.40	21.8***
Help getting health insurance	71.00	78.00	6.90
Substance use counseling	48.80	74.40	25.6***
Help getting public assistance	64.10	79.60	15.5**
Got driver's license, other ID	62.80	63.30	0.50
Help finding housing	38.50	56.80	18.2***
Help with legal problem	38.00	70.40	32.4***
Other program participation			
Healthy behaviors	55.80	75.80	19.9***
Education	48.90	68.20	19.3***
Workforce	58.00	70.50	12.4**
Recreation	71.90	68.90	-2.90
Any	89.20	94.70	5.5*
Number of program types	2.3	2.8	0.5***
Observations	231	132	363

Source: Theodos, B., et al. (2016).

Note: * p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01.

Results from a five year evaluation suggest that the intervention has positive effects on birth rates, school enrollment, and homelessness, among others.

Results from the randomized evaluation of the program suggest the intervention has positive effects on birth rates, school enrollment, and housing stability⁵.

- **Schooling:** At the 18-month follow-up, in-school rates for treatment youth were 14 percentage points higher than their peers in the control group. Looking at unadjusted means, 52 percent of youth the treatment group were in school at 18 months, compared with 39 percent of the control group. (At baseline, 48 percent of the treatment group and 46 percent of the control group were enrolled in school.) This means that the magnitude of this impact was such that the treatment group was in-school at rates roughly one-third higher at 18 months than the control group. The higher levels of treatment youth in school at the end of the study period may indicate that the treatment youth were more aware of services and programs that provide resources to help the youth stay in school and were also more likely to understand the importance of education for their future.
- **Birth rates:** The program had a positive impact on births during the 18-month study period for the treatment group. Overall, treatment youth were seven percentage points less likely to have a child during the last year of the study period than control youth. The magnitude of this effect is sizable. The treatment group was roughly one-third less likely to have a child than the control group (21 percent of the control group did, versus 14 percent of the treatment group).
- **Homelessness:** At the end of the 18-month study period, treatment group youth were about six percentage points less likely to have slept in a shelter during the past six months than control group youth. Roughly 14 percent of program applicants reported sleeping in a shelter at some point the six months prior to the baseline survey. At the 18 month follow-up survey, the share of control group youth reporting this stood at 10 percent, but for treatment group youth, only four percent reported sleeping in a shelter during the previous six months. This means that in terms of effect size, treatment group youth were roughly 60 percent less likely than control group youth to have slept in a shelter at some point during the six months prior to the 18 month survey.

Conclusion

Disconnected youth face multiple challenges preventing them from making a successful transition to adulthood. The Promotor Pathway program of Latin America Youth Center addresses these challenges through long-term, intensive, and holistic case management. The evaluation of the program conducted from 2010 to 2015 suggests that the intervention led to positive outcomes after 18 months in the program. The intervention has positive effects on birth rates, school enrollment, and homelessness, among others.

Starting in April 2016, LAYC will start phase II of the evaluation with the aim of leveraging the randomization that has already been implemented to survey youth from the original sample again, this time six years after their initial application to the program. This second phase will allow LAYC to identify whether or not the impacts identified in phase I are persistent, and identify whether or not the program has longer term effects on education and employment, as well as other outcomes for youth.

As a follow up to the evaluation of the program, a second phase evaluation will be conducted to assess impacts six years after the intervention. This will allow LAYC to identify whether the program has long-term impacts.

The authors are with the Latin American Youth Center. This series of briefs was launched as a collaborative effort between the Education Practice at the World Bank, the Community Outreach Program at the World Bank, and the Rotary Club of Capitol Hill. Please contact Quentin Wodon at qwodon@worldbank.org for information. The brief series is part of the SABER Equity and Inclusion program that benefitted from the support of the Global Partnership for Education. The evaluation of the Latin American Youth Center program was funded in part by a grant from the World Bank. The opinions expressed in this brief are those of the authors only. They may not represent the views of the World Bank, its Executive Directors, or the countries they represent, nor those of the Latin American Youth Center.

⁵ Results presented in this section are from: Theodos, B. et al. (2016). *Solutions for youth: an evaluation of the Latin American Youth Center's Promotor Pathway Program*. The Urban Institute.